

# “You Have to Know How to Play, Otherwise They Will Catch You”

Young Women and the Navigation of Same-Sex  
Intimacies in Contemporary Urban Senegal



Loes Oudenhuijsen

Master thesis in African Studies (research)



Universiteit  
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Cover photo: Yacine watches her teammates as they play the last football match of  
the season in Pikine, Dakar, 11 September 2017. Photo: Loes Oudenhuijsen.

For Hawa and all those who, like her, have had the courage  
to fashion their futures against the grain.

**Femme,**  
*Être sublime, dans ce qui fascine  
Tes rimes rythment la vie  
Sois toi en poursuivant ta voie  
Ose librement, avance tranquillement  
Engage toi, n'aie pas peur de la menace  
Femme tu n'es point esclave  
Femme libère toi contre l'arbitraire  
Fonce, dénonce  
Vit, nourrit, aime, adore librement*

Alassane Ndiaye<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Poem written for author on 11 August 2017. Alassane Ndiaye is a cultural actor, social entrepreneur, chair of CNRJ Sénégal and an advocate for female leadership.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores how same-sex intimacies are navigated by young women in contemporary urban Senegal. Central to this research are various social spaces where sociality and sexuality are co-constructed among women. The analysis is based on six months of ethnographic fieldwork in urban Senegal, predominantly Dakar, with a focus on participant observation to grasp the tacit knowledge of same-sex intimacies. In particular, this thesis examines the football field, local queer organisations and a variety of other homosocial environments such as the home and queer parties. Through a careful adherence to the Senegalese value of *sutura* (discretion, modesty), by making use of play, and by displaying respectability, homosocial spaces ranging from the relatively private home to the fairly public football field allow for the occurrence of same-sex intimacies. This thesis makes use of Henrik Vigh's (2006; 2009) conceptualisation of social navigation to understand how enacting same-sex desires is a twofold process of balancing personal desires and social expectations. The social environment is an ambiguous terrain in which expectations of proper womanhood, marriage, and parenthood need to be calibrated even as such expectations may change over time due to processes of globalisation, economic recession, or governmental changes, as well as with age, as new expectations and responsibilities arise as people grow from youth into (social) adults. This thesis will demonstrate how women navigate their same-sex intimacies in different ways in various social spaces, drawing on Henri Lefebvre's (1991 [1974]) conceptual triad of social space. In these social spaces, gender is enacted relationally, and shifting notions of masculinity (*jump*) and femininity (*sexy*) attest to the ambiguity and fluidity of gender constructs. Together, these social spaces and the same-sex intimacies that they enable form a loosely connected community of practice (O'Mara 2013) that combines a specific lexicon (*jump* and *sexy*) with tacit understanding of same-sex intimacies. By examining how young women navigate existing spaces and create alternative spaces in trying to secure decent lives for themselves, this thesis shows how these different spaces form central loci of urban social reproduction. In these spaces, symbolic manifestations of gendered bodies coalesce into a network of queer women. Examining corporeal and erotic interactions between women helps theorise how these performative aspects of life contribute to the intersubjective meaning-making of sexuality and a sense of being at home in the world.

**Keywords:** Senegal; same-sex intimacies; social navigation; social spaces; gender; *sutura*; homosociality

## Résumé

Ce mémoire explore comment l'intimité entre deux personnes de même sexe est, à l'heure actuelle, pilotée par des jeunes femmes dans les villes du Sénégal. Au centre de cette recherche sont placés différents lieux où le caractère social et la sexualité sont cogérés par et pour des femmes. L'analyse est basée sur une enquête ethnographique de six mois sur le terrain, conduite dans les villes du Sénégal, principalement à Dakar, avec une recherche basée sur l'observation participante, afin de saisir au mieux la connaissance tacite de l'intimité entre deux personnes de même sexe. En particulier, ce mémoire parcourt les terrains de football, des organisations queers et une variété d'environnements où prédomine l'homosocialité, comme le domicile ou les soirées queers. A travers un respect formel du principe sénégalais *sutura* (discrétion, modestie), en utilisant le jeu (le ludisme), et en affichant la respectabilité ces espaces, où l'homosocialité est un phénomène visible, allant de la maison privée au terrain de football public, présentent l'opportunité de rencontrer de manière occurrente une intimité entre deux personnes de même sexe. Ce mémoire utilise la conception des repères sociologiques de Henrik Vigh (2006; 2009), qui permet de comprendre que l'intimité entre deux personnes de même sexe est en fait un double processus qui a pour but de trouver l'équilibre entre ses désirs personnels et les attentes de la société. L'environnement social est un terrain ambigu, sur lequel les attentes propres à la féminité, le mariage, et la parentalité ont besoin d'être calibrées même si de telles attentes peuvent changer avec le temps, à cause des processus de mondialisation, de récession économique, ou de changements gouvernementaux, autant qu'avec l'âge, les nouvelles attentes et responsabilités surviennent en même temps que les jeunes deviennent des adultes socialement définis. Ce mémoire va démontrer comment les femmes gèrent leur intimité de manières différentes suivant les lieux de rencontre, liant la triade conceptuelle d'Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]). Dans ces espaces de rencontre, le genre dépend de la relation entretenue par les concernés, et les notions équivoques de masculinité (*jump*) et de féminité (*sexy*) peuvent attester de ces ambiguïté et fluidité dans le concept du genre. Réunis, ces espaces de rencontre, et l'intimité entre deux personnes de même sexe qu'ils génèrent, forment une communauté de pratique libre et connectée (O'Mara 2013) qui combinent un lexique spécifique (*jump* et *sexy*) avec une compréhension tacite de l'intimité entre deux personnes de même sexe. En examinant la manière dont les jeunes femmes naviguent dans les espaces préexistants et créent des lieux alternatifs en essayant de sécuriser une vie décente pour elles-mêmes, ce mémoire montre comment ces différents endroits forment des lieux centraux de la reproduction sociale urbaine dans lequel des démonstrations symboliques de personnes genrées se fondent dans un réseau de femmes queers. Examiner les interactions corporelles et érotiques entre femmes aide à théoriser la façon dont ces actifs aspects de la vie contribuent à l'intersubjectivité liée à la sexualité et au sentiment d'appartenance à ce monde.

**Mots-clés:** Sénégal; intimité entre deux personnes de même sexe; navigation sociale; espaces sociaux; genre; *sutura*; homosocialité

## Abbreviations

LGBTQI	Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders, Queers, and Intersex persons
msm	Men who have sex with men
STI	Sexually transmitted infections
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ANCS	Alliance Nationale des Communautés pour la Santé

## Wolof words

Sutura	Discretion; modesty.
Toubab	White person, usually referring to a European. Origin: colonial times
Sai-sai	Rascal, little rogue, a womaniser (connotation in context)
Rafet	Beautiful, pretty
Diongué	A set of affective practices women ought to possess to win over and take care of one's husband. It relates to the domains of sexuality, cooking, and a general looking after one's dear ones - as such, it also prescribes considerate behaviour in public.
Mokk pooj	Idem.
Labaan	Ceremony organised a day after marriage, to celebrate the virginity of the bride until the point of marriage.
Marabout	Islamic religious, spiritual leader
Bin-bin	Waist beads, worn by women in various colours as sensual attire.
Thiouraye	Incense, burnt with either charcoal or in an electric incense burner. Used generally in (bed)rooms for a nice smell, it is also specifically associated with sexuality; a woman seducing her husband in the bedroom.
Faro rab	Spirit spouse (male; inhabiting women)
Koba	Homosexual. Popularly used in relation to Wally Seck's song <i>Koba yi</i> .
Tontine	Credit rotation scheme organised by women.
Mbaraan	Flirtatious and/or sexual relationships with older men who in return give them gifts or money

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**Nio far**

**On est ensemble**

**We are together**

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

*In preparation of the last football match of the season in September at the Alassane Djigo stadium in Pikine, Dakar, about half of the team gathered the night before at Augustine's place in Parcelles Assainies. She rented her own private room in an apartment that is inhabited by many other tenants, most of them young married couples with children. We were only eight this evening, including me, but this was cosy enough. Augustine had forgotten to rent a couple of extra mattresses, so we ended up sharing a double mattress, a single mattress, and a blanket. But before we went to sleep, we shared a meal that Augustine had prepared for the group. We took the food up to the rooftop, including the bissap (hibiscus juice) that she had prepared. We ate pasta with beef from a large plate. As I wanted to sit down on the mat next to Yacine, who was seated on a bench, she offered me her seat. As we ate, she placed the good chunks of meat on my side of the plate. 'Eat!' Augustine quickly handed me a bottle of bissap, so as to offer me something as well. The sounds of music and chatter from neighbouring rooftops slowly faded as the night fell. After a round of chatting about the highs and lows of the past football season, we called it a day too. It was early September, so it was still very hot day and night. I shared the double mattress with three other girls. The small fan was located at the other end of the room, the breeze barely reached us. As a result, I could not sleep. Zahia, who was lying next to me, had told me before going to sleep: 'Loes, I want you to lie facing that direction [not hers], and don't turn around until tomorrow morning.' I had not understood why she said this, and I had not given it a second thought. As the night proceeded, and Zahia and Oumy thought that everyone had fallen asleep, they started making love. Despite being very quiet, they could not hide it from me. I tried to move as far away from the lovebirds as possible. In doing so, I ended up spooning Yacine, who added intimacy to the situation by grabbing my hand. I could hardly believe that Zahia and Oumy were making love in this relatively public setting, but as an arm or leg of Zahia came my way occasionally, I knew that it was really happening. It was indeed very warm in the room, but Zahia's body temperature most certainly gave away activity. A little later I also heard them kissing. I fell asleep only about an hour before the alarm went off. I gathered the strength to get myself out of bed, while Yacine, Soukeye and Oumy had already found their headscarves and made their way up to the rooftop for morning prayers.*

The situation was somewhat overwhelming for me, awkward to say the least. However, it was more than an awkward situation, because it had occurred relatively publicly. Besides the love-making of Zahia and Oumy, I had held hands with Yacine, and she had taken care of me during dinner last night, as well as preparing my sandwich for breakfast the next morning. In the morning, no one commented on what had happened last night. I was positive that the others had noticed Zahia and Oumy's love-making, but - telling for the discretion that surrounds sexuality in Senegal - no one had commented on it. The quietness with which Zahia and Oumy had made

love was pursued further by the other girls, who refrained from articulating explicitly what had happened. Most certainly, beyond these four walls no one would come to know what had happened last night. However, absolute silence or privacy concerning this affair was unattainable for them. Sharing a bed(room) with multiple persons is not uncommon in Senegal. A lack of privacy characterises many people's housing situation, as small houses are often shared with large extended families. It requires couples to be creative as they engage in intimate practices. Couples may try to do it somewhat unnoticed, but creativity also means that other family members turn away and pretend not to remark anything: *sutura* (discretion, modesty) both ways. Zahia and Oumy had tried to postpone their love-making to the time that everyone was fast asleep, or that at least we could pretend to be sleeping. The difference with same-sex couples however, is that their love lives are not tolerated by family members, so making love in a bedroom at home with others around may be too risky. A situation such as our sleepover at Augustine's place, provided an opportunity for Zahia and Oumy to make love - an opportunity they do not have every single day and that thus had to be exploited. Here it was safe to be in love and to make love, because all the girls from the team, without exceptions, were engaged in same-sex intimacies, and they all know how housing and other constraints hinder people in practising their same-sex desires on a daily basis and in family circles.

This anecdote brings to the fore a number of aspects in the lives of young women in urban Senegal as they balance personal dreams, hopes and desires, with public responsibilities and expectations of them as women. This research attempts to shed light on the ways in which young women navigate and carve out social spaces for the enactment of same-sex desires. Before going into some of the aspects of the lives of the women hinted at in the vignette - such as their engagement in football, the subtle acts of taking care of a girl, and the discretion or unspokenness with which these intimate practices occur - I will provide a brief background of the research context, as well as of gender and sexual norms in Senegal. When I first set foot in Senegal on the 6th of August 2017, I was immediately struck by the hospitality of the Senegalese that I met. Home to over 14.5 million inhabitants, of which about a quarter lives in the capital Dakar (CIA 2018), the country is known as the land of *teraanga*, or hospitality. *Teraanga* informs interpersonal relations with strangers, in an attitude of welcoming and accommodation, as well as kin through a general openness, respect, and tolerance for others (Ross 2008). I had come to Senegal without any local contacts, so during the first couple of weeks of fieldwork, this *teraanga* was indispensable for a pleasant exploration of Dakar and to get an idea of the social and economic situation of people I met on the streets.

### **Urban Senegal: a context**

As a result of increasing external debt service and the droughts that affected much of the Sahelian region, an economic crisis hit Senegal in the 1980s (Boone 1990). The country was subsequently subjected to structural adjustment programs, as they were implemented in much of Africa throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Cooper 2002). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, economic prospects for families further declined, and economic migration of young women and men increased (Buggenhagen 2011). In 2004, it was estimated that no less than 76% of Dakarois households had at least one household member abroad (Melly 2010: 43). Reference to the economic crisis remains commonplace in contemporary urban Senegal, with youth regularly mentioning *la crise* as a continuous state of economic insecurity for urban dwellers who "seek belonging as consumer gatecrashers and zombies" (Nyamnjoh 2005: 297). It is not strange that youth continue to complain about *la crise* and their limited economic opportunities. Youth unemployment is significant and Senegal, like most other African countries, has a very young

population, with more than 60% of the population being under the age of 25 years old (CIA 2018). Even university graduates often find themselves unemployed.

As a result of the high unemployment levels also among the educated, parents have little faith that good education leads to bright prospects. As a result, they may keep their children - and more often girls - at home to do household chores or to work. Illiteracy is thus abundant in Senegal: only 57.5% of the total population can read and write, and only 46.6% of women can (CIA 2018). Despite minimal opportunities for employment, youth seek to get by with small, often temporary, jobs, not only as a means to obtain an income, but also as a sign of “not doing nothing” (Porter 2017). Porter argues that such economic practices constitute a category of socio-economic exchange that allows youth to gain respect, a sense of belonging, and a way to begin to be recognised as an adult in their family and community. With odd jobs and various other strategies to secure a small income, youth may respond to the question how they are doing with “*je me débrouille*” (I’m coping). In his study on young people in Ngaoundéré in northern Cameroon, Waage (2006) explained how youth cope with the challenges of life in the urban social environment. It highlights the importance of creativity, flexibility and resilience to cope with challenging societal demands and meagre opportunities. Similarly, in urban Senegal, youth - including the young women with whom I engaged for this research - often said “*je me débrouille*”, indicative of their constantly changing opportunities and engagements in employment and education, among other things. In a volatile economic climate, and with little access to secure employment, people rely on their social networks to secure an income to *débrouille*.

What do these families and wider social networks look like in urban Senegal? Senegalese often live in extended families, with average households of about 10 members (Ross 2008: 82). Extended family constellations derive from the practice of polygamy<sup>2</sup>, as well as from the normalcy of sharing roofs with grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews. The Wolof word *kër* signifies ‘house’ and is the root for the word ‘family’ (*wakër*) (Fal, Santos and Doneux 1990: 110), attesting to the centrality of family for people’s sense of self and place. Wherever one goes, it is important to honour the family, embedded in the Wolof values of *sañse* (honour) and *sutura* (discretion, modesty). A central element in Wolof culture, *sutura* signifies “discretion, modesty, privacy, protection, and the happiness that the previous terms are said to ensure” (Mills 2011: 2-3). It has come to be understood as a Muslim value, which makes it shared among other ethnic groups in Senegal as well (ibid.). Before I elaborate on the importance of *sutura* in the context of same-sex intimacies, let me briefly describe the role of Islam in Senegalese society, and the ensuing moral order with regards to gender and sexuality.

Islam first arrived in Senegal in the 10th and 11th centuries, but only spread largely starting from the 19th century (Seck 2007). During the colonisation of Senegal by the French, which gradually expanded throughout the 19th century and that lasted until independence in 1960, a ‘social contract’ existed between the colonial state and *marabouts* (religious, spiritual leaders) (ibid.). After independence from the French in 1960, the first government of Léopold Sédar Senghor set out on a mission to develop the modern Senegalese nation-state. Although Senegal is a secular state, the development of the nation-state was informed by Islam. It included tight control over youth activities and (sexual) behaviour (Biaya 2001). Today, 96,1% of Senegalese are Muslim, and most adhere to one of the four main Sufi brotherhoods (CIA 2018). The four Sufi brotherhoods - The Qadiryya, the Layene, the Tidjaniyya, and the Muridiyya

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<sup>2</sup> The correct term is polygyny, the practice of men being allowed to have multiple wives simultaneously. Polygamy is how this is popularly referred to however.

- are among the most influential institutions of civil society in contemporary Senegal (Ross 2008). The biggest brotherhood in Senegal today is that of the Mourides (Muridiyya), founded by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké (1853-1927), with about three million followers (ibid.). The influence of Islam in the secular state of Senegal is advanced by these brotherhoods. They advance an Islamic social code in the public and social sphere that promotes the patriarchal family, in which the place of women is found in the private sphere, although reality tells us that Senegalese women are very active in the public sphere as well. They are active in commerce, and the marketplace is women's domain (Ross 2008). Women also occupy visible and important roles in religion and popular culture, yet they are most accredited for their roles as wives and mothers. It is through marriage and parenthood that a woman attains her status as an adult socially. The division of gender roles that characterises the Islamic social code, was reinforced by the first Senegalese president after independence. In an attempt to reduce ethnic, religious, and class differences, the new post-colonial government started to draft a law that became written and enacted as the Family Law on 12 June 1972 (Camara 2007). As part of this Family Law, men are granted the possibility to marry up to four wives (Article 133); men have parental authority over children (Article 277, §2); and abortion is considered a criminal offence (Article 305) (ibid.: 789). Furthermore, in the Penal Code, introduced in 1966, homosexuality is criminalised: 'homosexual activity' is punished with imprisonment for up to five years and a fine of between 100,000 and 1,500,000 francs (Equaldex 2017). These attempts to develop the modern Senegalese nation-state, informed by Islamic thinking and including written rules about matters like marriage, pregnancy and 'appropriate' sexuality, the place of gender and sexuality in Senegalese society needs to be spelled out.

### **The Senegalese sexual imaginary**

Informed by Islam, and by local traditions, perceptions about gender and sexuality in Senegal can be understood as what Gueye termed the "Islamised gender ideology" (2011: 69). The religiously informed thinking about gender and sexuality "naturalises, sacralises and consequently institutionalises heterosexuality and its concomitant understandings of gender and gender roles as "just the way it is" (Gilbert 2017: 24). However, much like it is overly simplistic and has been decidedly harmful to speak of an 'African sexuality' (Epprecht 2008), it is too simplistic to speak of a 'Muslim sexuality' as if it were monolithically experienced by all Muslims (Beckmann 2010; Boellstorff 2007a). Similarly, Gaudio (2009) demonstrates how the linguistic and bodily performances of '*yan daudu*<sup>3</sup> in Kano, in northern Nigeria, challenge the widespread assumption held by many Westerners as well as Islamic reformists, and African nationalists, that Islam is essentially inimical to gender and sexual dissidence. Although norms about what constitutes a 'good Muslim' such premarital abstinence, heterosexual marriage and decent dress and behaviour are reiterated in discourse, people - including the women in my research - negotiate and interpret their sexual relations in ways to uphold their status as *jigéen bu baax* ('good women'). Therefore, the question is not whether women can reconcile their Islamic faith with their same-sex relationships. Rather, the question is how women navigate the religiously informed discourse on gender and sexuality - the Senegalese sexual imaginary as Gilbert (2017: 24) put it - and their personal desires and aspirations of sexuality and love, while maintaining the image of the 'good Muslim'.

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<sup>3</sup> '*yan daudu* (singular: *dan daudu*) are "men who act like women" (Gaudio 2009: 10), men who perform women's social roles, such as cooking and dancing.

The young women in my research did not unequivocally regard their same-sex intimacies as immoral in the eyes of God - at least no more than they saw other wrongdoings to be, as Hawa (30 years old, living with her mother and stepfather in Dakar) explained: "yes, homosexuality is a sin, but I have told myself that everyone has their own sins and makes mistakes. I am a lesbian, and someone else may drink alcohol, or cheat on his wife or on her husband. It is only God who judges<sup>4</sup>." Therefore, although Islam, in combination with local traditions, emphasises heteronormativity, many of my interlocutors rarely referred to Islam as the main source of restriction with regards to their same-sex intimacies. For many of them, navigating same-sex intimacies was not so much a matter of reconciling their faith and same-sex desires, as it was to reconcile societal and family expectations with their desires. Therefore, I have opted not to elaborate extensively on Islam, and instead provide brief empirical accounts where interlocutors referred to Islam as a factor in Senegalese society that guides their attitudes and behaviour.

An inevitable expectation for women in Senegal is marriage, understood to be central to women's self-realisation and social adulthood (Gilbert 2017). Marriage is the only socially accepted union from which families can be built, and cohabitation without marriage results in stigmatisation, particularly of women because of their supposed promiscuity. In fact, "unmarried women are perceived as social anomalies and as constant threats to married women" (Rosenlew 2012: 76). This should be understood in the context of polygyny, because the fear that one's husband may marry another wife causes women to constantly judge unmarried women (Gilbert 2017). In addition to the social expectation of marriage, it has important religious implications, because it is believed that only through marriage with a man that a woman can access the gate to heaven (ibid.). However, this Senegalese sexual imaginary often contradicts the realities that include teenage pregnancies, transactional sex and, as this thesis will explore, non-normative sexual practices. Moreover, as Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) argued, romantic ideals are on the rise for many young adults globally, which contradict the idea of marriage as primarily a social contract between families (Buggenhagen 2003). The adoption of a discourse of romantic love, primarily by the younger generations in Africa, can be understood as a counter-movement against certain traditions, for example that of marital arrangements (van Dijk 2015). Consequently, to embrace romance can be read as an expression of protest, because it conveys the idea that one should be able to decide for oneself whom to love or marry, and how to express affection (ibid.). The attempts of some of my interlocutors to postpone or even escape marriage, is part of this generational conflict over the importance of marriage for family honour, versus young women's aspirations to their self-realisation through an independent choice of partner (see Whyte, Alber and Van der Geest 2008; Bochow 2008; Spronk 2014a). Where my interlocutors espoused romantic same-sex relationships, this should be understood as a critique of the Senegalese sexual imaginary that demands opposite-sex marriage.

However, apart from the societal pressure exercised on unmarried women, marriage for women is also an urgent matter, as "marriage is a woman's security. No matter what her social rank [class and caste] is, or how rich she is, if she doesn't have a husband, she doesn't have security" (Dial 2008: 42-43). As unemployment rates have soared since the 1980s, economic insecurity is a reality for a large majority, and many young people delay marriage (ibid.). Melly (2011: 364) states that the economic crisis "feels both newly urgent and exasperatingly routine[...] and has generated profound social uncertainty, as adulthood, marriage, and the

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<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Hawa, 4 December 2017.

establishment of families are delayed or put on hold indefinitely, as gendered roles and normative values are questioned, and as the legitimacy of both nation and state are undermined.” A man must be financially secure to have the consent of a woman’s parents, as he is supposed to be the provider. Moreover, at the time of marriage, a dowry must be paid by the groom and his family to the bride and her family. It is thus not strange that dire economic conditions cause many people to delay marriage.

When marriage is realised, it is subsequently built around distinct roles for men and women. Men ought to be the providers and women nurturers and caretakers. This results in what in the literature on marriage is called the ‘food-sex-nexus’ (see Clark 2000 on Ghana; Sølbeck 2010 on Mali). This implies that reciprocal care between husband and wife, with the husband providing money for food and the wife subsequently preparing the food, are the activities that form the pretext for sex. Whenever a woman looks after her husband and/or guests well, in Senegal people may utter in Wolof: “*dafa diongué*” (she is courteous, attentive), demonstrating the link between food and sex also in Senegal. *Diongué* signifies a set of affective practices that women ought to possess and display in relation to care for their husband as well as guests - it refers to a general considerateness that is deemed important for women. Nevertheless, reality seems to have surpassed this discourse of men as the provider, as scarce employment opportunities have caused many women to seek ways to contribute to the household income. Many women do so through their engagements in agricultural labour as well as in the informal economy. The contradiction that arises is that although women may contribute to the household income significantly, they are still primarily valued for their domestic behaviour. Or, as Adjamagbo et al. (2004) put it, women who work in the public sphere to top up household incomes are understood to “*travailler*” (work), whereas their work in the household is understood as “*bien travailler*” (working well). This contradiction between the Senegalese sexual imaginary and economic reality paves the way for an exploration of other contradictions to this imaginary: the ways in which women can come to enact dissident desires.

### **Contradictory realities: enacting desires**

It is important to realise that the gender and sexual norms in Senegal, shaping an unmistakably patriarchal, heteronormative society, are in no way monolithic or unchangeable. Not only gender - ideas of what men ought to be and do as well as what women ought to be and do, repeated through discourse in an attempt to represent ambiguous reality in an ordered manner - but also other factors such as age, kinship and class matter in determining the room for manoeuvre for women (and men alike). The focus in this thesis will be on the ways in which women engage with this gendered social order. I will demonstrate how women challenge assumptions about appropriate feminine behaviour in various ways.

In spite of (same-sex) sexuality being a domain of control, as the criminalisation of “unnatural acts” in the Senegalese Penal Code demonstrates, a focus on laws and public discourse may obscure us from seeing how people give meaning to their own lives and bodies. In recent years, a number of anthropological enquiries into local realities of same-sex sexuality have shed light on this issue<sup>5</sup>. Notwithstanding the criminalisation of same-sex sexuality in many African states, and the absence of public visibility or an enabling public discourse surrounding same-sex sexuality, same-sex desires are fervently acted upon in informal networks (Dankwa 2009). Often, this contradiction is understood to confirm a “culture of silence” that seems to surround non-normative sexualities, or sexuality in general, in Africa (Arnfred 2004). However, this “culture of silence” carries a negative connotation of an

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Dankwa (2009; 2011) on Ghana, Gaudio (2009) on Nigeria, and Hendriks (2016) on the Democratic Republic of Congo.

oppressive silence. In the edited volume *Re-thinking sexualities in Africa*, Signe Arnfred argues that this is just one form of silence and that we should rather see how “different types of silences” co-exist (2004: 73, emphasis in original). This allows for a better understanding of the apparent contradiction between public discourse and practice. In addition to oppressive silence, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of discretion as a culturally relevant form of silence, to understand that it is too simple to suggest that there are no possibilities for the expression of (non-normative) sexualities.

Various scholars have recently pointed to this significance of discretion for understanding sexualities in Africa. In her exploration of female same-sex intimacy in Ghana, Dankwa (2009) confirms the centrality of discretion and indirection in issues surrounding sexuality. In the context of her research among the Akan, the dominant ethnic linguistic group in Ghana, sexuality is structured according to these two principles. Among themselves, “being in the know” (Dankwa 2011: 172) allows women to identify other women who are into same-sex relationships. Dankwa argues that the fact that these principles relegated (non-normative) sexuality to the unspoken domain has allowed for relatively relaxed attitudes towards same-sex practices in Ghana. In Senegal, a similar principle applies. *Sutura* signifies both an attribute you have and something you do: you can give someone else *sutura* by hiding their misbehaviour, and you can show your *sutura* by avoiding certain practices, such as discussing sexuality with elders, or discussing homosexual practices in general (Gilbert 2017). *Sutura* can thus be understood as a toolbox of attitudes, language use, and appearance, which is employed strategically in different social contexts. Among themselves, young women are fairly direct, and discretion is thus not a static cultural given of Senegalese society. Rather, it is a skill that is transmitted and continuously learned and reworked to navigate through life successfully - that is, in a respectable manner, particularly regarding sensitive topics like sexuality. It indicates an active asset, as it is something that constantly needs to be guarded and worked for in order to live a morally accepted life. It is thus also an essential part of gender and sexual normativity in Senegal, although it relates to many other aspects of social life as well. Not respecting the value of *sutura* leads to shame, for you as well as for your family.

However, according to Wolof morality, shame is declared upon public exposure, and a bad deed that is not visible to others does not lead to dishonour (Mills 2011). *Sutura* is also challenged by television broadcasts, magazines and the internet that depict love and sexuality in increasingly explicit ways (ibid.). At the same time, the proliferation of such media can stimulate people to reflect on their own intimate relationships (Spronk 2009). In her analysis of a remake of the popular Hollywood movie *Titanic* in Kano in northern Nigeria, Behrend (2011) shows how the ideal of romantic love gains ground through the consumption of Indian, Western, and lately also Hausa, films. Such stories are consequently used by women to justify their independent partner choice. The tension between a discourse of romantic love and the cultural importance of *sutura* is interesting. On the one hand, to articulate the ideal of romantic love contradicts *sutura* and the Senegalese sexual imaginary that prescribe silence and discretion with regards to non-marital love and sexuality. On the other hand, this thesis will show that for the group of young women in this research, careful adherence to the value of *sutura* is indispensable for the navigation of same-sex intimacies that become articulated as expressions of an independent, romantic choice of partner.

*Sutura* is a particularly important principle for women. As a gendered virtue, there is more at stake when *sutura* is violated by a woman, because it is regarded as the foundation of feminine honour. Dial (2008) pointed to the fact that in Senegalese society, men’s sentiments of love and their expression of it - usually through material gifts - is recognised, whereas women’s

love ought to be kept secret and unspoken about. Van Eerdewijk (2007) confirmed the cultural expectation that girls in Senegal should not talk about sex publicly, let alone practise it: unmarried women ought to be virgins. A woman's sexuality is perceived to be dangerous and expressions of love and desire are therefore forbidden (Gilbert 2017). The ideal Senegalese woman is furthermore a modest woman who dresses appropriately (i.e. properly covering the body), who avoids spending unnecessary time in public space, and who guards her chastity (ibid.). A woman who breaks with the virtue of *sutura* then breaks with legible womanhood.

Through careful adherence to the value of *sutura*, non-normative practices can be effectively masked and public shame can be prevented. Virginité at marriage is highly valued in Senegal. However, in *The ABC of Unsafe Sex*, in which Van Eerdewijk provides insight into the sexual practices of young women and men in Dakar, she shows that virginité at marriage is an illusion in most cases. Premarital sexuality does not immediately mean a breach with *sutura* or *jom* (honour) however (Buggenhagen 2011: 719). Gilbert (2017: 173-175) argued how some women seek to 'restore' their virginité through hymenoplasty, the surgical reconstruction of the hymen, or, as a much cheaper option, through the use of *serre vagin* (vagina tighteners) such as *billes de karité* (shea butter pebbles), to be inserted into the vagina, or *savons de virginité* (virginité soaps), which ostensibly tighten the vagina so that the women appear virgins. Another 'trick' to 'prove' the virginité of the bride is to slit the throat of a chicken and smear the blood on the bed sheets, as if the bride has bled as it is her first sexual intercourse. This 'trick' could be performed in relation to the *laabaan* ceremony. Although no longer common in urban Senegal, *laabaan* ceremonies to celebrate the virginité of the bride were generally organised. These ceremonies were organised among women who performed sexually loaded songs as a way of welcoming the newlywed into womanhood, as well as giving her tips about sex (Gueye 2010).

Despite the prevailing societal expectations of marriage, virginité at marriage, and reproduction, some women choose to challenge this expectation by choosing a different walk of life (Neveu Kringelbach 2016). Neveu Kringelbach argues that the answer to the question why some women make alternative marriage choices can be found in the disjuncture between the emerging ideals of companionate marriage among middle-class Senegalese women on the one hand, and the persistence of polygyny on the other. Similarly, Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) have argued that for many young adults globally, romantic relationships and intimacy are important for their self-realisation. Moreover, as a result of the persistent economic crisis, social roles are changing and women often need to work outside the domestic sphere to add to the household income. Although it is the result of a situation of constraint, it provides a legitimate argument for young women who prefer to postpone marriage and focus on personal earnings, substantiated as the wish to support their family as well. This thesis draws together the accounts of young women in urban Senegal who challenge the Senegalese sexual imaginary by engaging in same-sex intimacies. Choosing this walk of life necessarily involves the weighing of personal desires and social acceptability, as choosing to engage in same-sex relationships puts at risk family honour and may lead to social stigma (Hardon and Posel 2012).

Balancing personal desires and social acceptability gives rise to a particular experience of being-in-the-world (see Jackson 2011) for these young women. A sense of being-in-the-world comes about through intersubjectivity, referring to the fact that people's understanding of their world and of themselves is "an emergent and perpetually renegotiated outcome of social interaction, dialogue, and engagement" (Jackson 2011: xiii). In other words, people define who they are in relation to others, and satisfaction with who they are comes from "being more than merely oneself, but of being part of a greater whole" (ibid.: 161). Similarly, Csordas (1990) argues how the self comes into being through the embodiment of social context and how the body mediates culture and makes it real, emphasising the "essentially intersubjective and social nature of bodily experience" (1990: 144). What it means to be a woman intersects with other

aspects of social life, such as being young, or old; urban, or rural; Senegalese. Studying the experiences of young women and their being-in-the-world will give insight into the social dynamics of gender and sexuality in Senegal. It challenges a monolithic understanding of a fixed social and moral gender and sexual order. This research focused on corporeal experiences in a number of social spaces to analyse the dialogic relation between culture and self. Taking into account the Senegalese sexual imaginary and the heteronormative framework that it produces, this thesis explores how young women navigate this normative terrain. Through a tactical use of *sutura*, women demonstrate their ability to skillfully navigate same-sex intimacies in a quest for self-realisation. Through intersubjective experiences of intimacies and their navigation through social spaces, women construct their sense of being-in-the-world. To understand what this being-in-the-world encompasses for the young women that took part in this research, I drafted the following research question to guide this thesis:

*How do young women in urban Senegal navigate same-sex intimacies?*

Research on sexuality tends to study sex in relation to a societal problem, such as public health or homophobia. In such studies, sexuality is used instrumentally and discarded from its erotic, sensual meaning. Following Spronk (2014b: 6), this research explores corporeal and erotic interactions between women to theorise how these performative aspects of life contribute to the intersubjective meaning-making of sexuality and a sense of being-in-the-world. I studied same-sex intimacies and how they are enacted in the lives of young women. More precisely, I looked at the appropriation and creation of different social spaces and the tactics of navigation that enable same-sex intimacies to occur in such spaces. I will argue that this neither occurs at the margins of Senegalese society, nor only in secret places. Through skillful navigation in homosocial spaces, queer women can enact their same-sex desires. In fact, one can argue that there exists a certain acknowledgement in context: same-sex intimacies in homosocial circles are tacitly allowed, as long as it remains play, a temporary game, and does not threaten the social and moral order of marriage and procreation.

Same-sex intimacies are thus tacitly acknowledged parallel to a public condemnation of homosexuality. It is tempting to think that marriage and parenthood create the boundaries for enacting same-sex desires. However, learning from interlocutors that some engaged in romantic relationships with married women, women with children, or in some cases had children themselves; and following Spronk (2017) who writes about same-sex erotic experiences of people with cross-sex oriented lives, we may have to argue differently. Despite new responsibilities emerging with marriage and parenthood, events that mark social adulthood, women may continue to be engaged in same-sex intimacies throughout married life as well. The opportunities to engage in and to continue to engage in same-sex erotic practices are not uniform for all women, and they depend on more than the fact of (not) being married or having children. In addition, the space women experience to enact same-sex intimacies may also differ per person, as the engagement in same-sex erotic practices does not carry the same meaning for everyone, nor does it automatically translate in the wish for a life with a partner of the same sex. Nevertheless, most of my interlocutors did express the wish to be romantically involved with women for the rest of their lives, and most of them experienced the expectation from society and their family to marry and have children as stressful.

Historically, gender and sexual dissidence have had a place in Senegalese society through the figure of *góor-jigéen*. Although it is impossible to trace back its emergence, it has

existed at least since the late 19th century<sup>6</sup> (Broqua 2017). *Góor-jigéen* are male-bodied persons who take up women's social roles. During the 20th century, *góor-jigéen* occupied ceremonial (feminine) roles during marriages and baptisms. Their social status was comparable to that of griots (Gning 2013: 78). Today, the term is derogatorily used as a synonym for the male homosexual and its gender significance is erased (Broqua 2017). Neither historical nor contemporary accounts of gender or sexual dissidence of female-bodied persons exist for Senegal. This thesis makes a start to fill the gap in knowledge about women's accounts of sexual and gender dissidence.

### Structure of the thesis

From the description of gender and sexual normativity in Senegal, we can see how transgressions of the moral order may impact on the lives of queer persons. It is the disjuncture between societal expectations and personal aspirations, of which romantic, intimate relationships are increasingly part, that informed my curiosity to study women's navigation of same-sex intimacies. Discussions about same-sex sexuality on the level of public discourse tend to regard intimacies as a sign of sexual identity. Such discussions reveal a bias towards the visible and the debatable, but they ignore the fact that self-identified LGBTQI's in Africa are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to (same-sex) sexual practices and desires, and not just because 'coming out' is met with blatant homophobia. The LGBTQI acronym and labels such as 'homosexual' and 'lesbian' reveal a eurocentrism that often does not describe the reality of men who have sex with men (msm) or women who have sex with women (Epprecht 2008). Foucault (1990[1976]) argued that in the West, sexuality has become a prime marker of one's social identity. In other parts of the world, including in Africa, sexuality is understood as something one does, rather than what one is (Spronk 2017; see also Wekker 2006). Nevertheless, among the younger urban generation, identification with the global sexual rights discourse increases (Ekine and Abbas 2013). Internationally, the past decades have seen a growing interest in the emergence of a global gay culture (see Herdt 1997; Hoad 1998). It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss the implications of such a global gay culture. However, when we take into account the emergence of this global gay culture, vocalised by the sexual rights discourse, it is all too easy to oppose this to hostile legal and social environments - the all too well-known 'homophobic Africa' argument (Awondo, Geschiere and Reid 2013). A focus on social navigation and social space allows me to look at enactments of same-sex desires without fixing this behaviour in identity categories of the homosexual. Such an approach to social interactions reveals the ambiguity of social spaces. On the one hand, distinct social spaces may be carved out as spaces where same-sex intimacies become normalised. Particularly in urban settings, such 'gay spaces' may emerge as the urban *milieu* provides more opportunities for navigating non-normative sexualities, as a result of anonymity and distance from family and other relations in the city (see Reid 2013: 67-68 on the making of gay spaces in urban settings). On the other hand, social spaces may become appropriated by queer women in such a way that they are rendered more suitable for the enactment of same-sex desires. The objective of this thesis is to unravel the diverse tactics young women employ to enable same-sex intimacies to occur.

The aim of this research was to look beyond the public discourse of sexuality and to find out how women actually understand and express their same-sex desires. This posed an epistemological challenge revolving around the question of how to identify same-sex desires in the absence of a discursive practice of disclosing one's (same-sex) intimacies (see also Dankwa

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<sup>6</sup> Armand Corre, a marine doctor, writes about his encounter with men dressed as women in the north of Senegal in 1894.

<sup>7</sup> Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders, Queers, and Intersex persons.

2009). The Senegalese sexual imaginary prescribes discretion with regards to discussions about sexuality, particularly for unmarried women. As a result, discussions about premarital (same-sex) sexuality are not common, apart from complaints about an increasing lack of morality among youth these days as a result of urban and globalised lifestyles (van Eerdewijk 2008: 197). In the following chapter, I will explore in more detail the importance of ethnography to overcome this challenge. Understanding how women navigate their same-sex intimacies in a society that demands certain things from them as women, requires an understanding of ideas in Senegal about womanhood, and proper gendered and sexual behaviour, as briefly outlined above. The importance of understanding how young women balance personal desires and societal expectations, lies in the fact that we can only grasp the meaning of sexuality in Senegalese society by learning its meaning in personal and interpersonal life (see Jackson 1998). To come to an understanding of the various tactics that queer women employ to navigate their same-sex intimacies, I depart from a variety of social spaces and explore how they are carved out or appropriated by women to enable the enactment of same-sex desires.

The main question that I formulated (*how do young women in urban Senegal navigate same-sex intimacies?*), will be answered in the course of three empirical chapters (chapters three up to five). In chapter two, I start with an exploration of methodology and I ask the question how research on what tends to be constructed as a taboo by others can take shape. I will argue that ethnography proved absolutely essential for access to and an understanding of the unspokenness of same-sex intimacies. Moreover, I use this chapter to lay the theoretical foundation for this thesis, elaborating on the concepts of social navigation and social space. In the subsequent chapters, I move to empirical analyses of ways of social navigation in various social spaces. In chapter three, I explore what tactics of navigation young queer women employ to appropriate existing homosocial spaces to enhance the possibilities for the enactment of same-sex intimacies. A second question that is central to this chapter, is the question of how so-called public and private spaces relate to each other. In other words: how can public spaces be made more private and conceal intimacies between women, and how do supposedly more private spaces such as the home, become more public as intimacies are negotiated and alluded to? I start with a broad exploration of homosocial spaces as spaces where same-sex intimacies are relatively frequent. As some of the examples in this chapter will show, varying degrees of homoeroticism can be part of the lives of young women as they explore their own sexuality and that of others. Homoerotic practices may occur between women who would not necessarily say they are romantically interested in other women. This chapter also broadly explores how the ubiquity and normalcy of female homosocial spaces in Senegal provide space for same-sex intimacies, provided they are discreetly enacted.

In chapter four and five, I move to two distinct social spaces where same-sex intimacies are more or less the norm. In chapter four, focus is on the question how the football field that is viewed with suspicion by many who see the gender dissidence that abounds in that space, becomes a vibrant space for the negotiation and enactment of gender dissidence and same-sex intimacies. In this chapter, I explore the football field as a terrain where the distinct gendered manifestation of *jump* abounds. *Jump* can briefly be defined as female, relational masculinity that is expressed through way of dress, behaviour, and social roles in relationships. The counterpart of *jump* are *sexy*, who can briefly be described as feminine women who similarly express their femininity through ways of dress, behaviour, and distinct social roles in relationships. *Sexy* are counterparts of *jump* as relationships are usually formed between one *jump* woman and one *sexy* woman. In chapters three and four, *jump* and *sexy* will be discussed more extensively. In the environment of women's football, same-sex intimacies are part of the

lives of most women, and they are negotiated and enacted both on and off the field. They become enacted *off* the field not only literally, but also more figuratively speaking, as most women who play football do not engage in romantic relationships with other football women. As such, there are many links between the *milieu* of football women and other social spaces where queer women meet, some of which are referred to in chapter three, thus creating a community of practice (see O'Mara 2013). This chapter will uncover how the football field is simultaneously a space where masculine styles are created and tolerated, as well as remaining a space that by many seen is considered unsuitable for women.

In chapter five, the focus is on queer women's organisations and the ways in which these provide a social space for young women to navigate their same-sex intimacies. In this chapter, I look beyond the place such organisations take in the public sphere of sexual rights and health organisations, and examine their significance for young women locally as a place to meet and discuss issues pertaining to love, sex, wellbeing, education, economic opportunities, and health. This chapter discusses Nio Far (the country's only official lesbian rights association) and Yaakaare (registered as an association for sex workers, but which also focuses on lesbian women). It will become clear from this chapter that although these associations are linked to and receive funding from international human rights funds and embassies, their *modus operandi* is deeply embedded in Senegalese society, producing a group dynamics that calls for a broader understanding of the relevance of such organisations. What brings the three empirical chapters in this thesis together is their focus on homosociality. Characteristic of many social spaces in Senegal, this allows for the occurrence of same-sex intimacies, provided that they are carefully, discreetly navigated. Examining a variety of homosocial spaces helps us to understand the diversity of tactics of the social navigation of same-sex intimacies. Social space, although a concept that has been clearly defined by Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) and to which I turn in the next chapter, is ambiguous and cannot be captured in a single experience. To understand how young women navigate their same-sex intimacies in Senegal, it is therefore important to investigate the different social spaces through which these women move.

In the concluding chapter, chapter six, I subsequently combine these analyses to come to a conclusion about the diversity of tactics of navigation. I will argue what knowledge about young women's same-sex intimacies tells us about the position of youth in urban Senegal, about (changing) gender and sexual normativity, and about the complex interplay between local, religiously informed traditions and norms, and globalising discourses of modernity, including romantic love and the space to pursue personal aspirations. The interplay between local norms and globalising forces coalesces in these young women's lives and constitutes their sense of being-in-the world. Describing how women in different social spaces engage in same-sex intimacies, challenges the connection between same-sex erotic practices and somehow fixed sexual identities. In addition, a more comprehensive understanding of sexual diversity is needed in order to challenge the oversimplified idea reflected in international policies that LGBTQI visibility is the only, linear, way forward to 'free' African LGBTQIs from the closet. This policy may cause a backlash for people locally, who in their sexual behaviour or gender expression become associated with homosexuality as imposed upon Africa by the West. This thesis seeks to add to the existing and growing body of work on sexuality in African studies and anthropology. Drawing attention to quotidian sexual practices and desires will first of all help to counter simplistic ideas of an unambiguously homophobic Africa. Moreover, it will add to a more comprehensive understanding of (same-sex) sexuality in Senegal, looking beyond sexual and reproductive health issues, and offering a less problematising account of sexuality in Senegal.

**“Tu cherches quoi?”<sup>8</sup>****Navigating methodology and theory**

*My first one-on-one meeting with Fama was a slightly awkward one: she was not the girl I thought I was going to meet. About two weeks earlier, I had gone to a queer party with Bintou, who had introduced me to her girlfriend as we hung out on the beach before making our way to the party. Having only introduced her girlfriend as “ma femme” (my wife), I did not know her name. Bintou had asked for my phone to call her “femme” to see if she had already entered. As such, I had registered the phone number as “Bintou’s femme”. Although I had only exchanged a few words with her on the beach, I was eager to get to know her better, because she was a sexy, as opposed to all the jump girls I had thus far met. About a week and a half later, I called her to make an appointment to meet each other. She was available that same day, so I went to her place that afternoon. She had asked a friend to pick me up from the bus stop, and I was relieved that he mentioned her name as we walked home. Bintou’s girlfriend was called Fama! When we entered Fama’s room, I did not recognise the girl. I doubted myself however. I had only seen her briefly at the party, where it had been dark, so perhaps I had just not remembered her face well. They somehow resembled, with their short hair and flashy earrings. Thinking of ways to find out whether Fama was Bintou’s girlfriend, I asked her whether she would be going to the queer party again with Bintou coming Friday. She said that she would not be going with Bintou, but that she did expect to see Bintou and Khadija there. Aha, she was indeed not Bintou’s girlfriend, that was Khadija! The relief I felt for having resolved this matter soon turned into unease: who was this girl then, and how was I going to spend the afternoon with her? She appeared to be Khadija’s friend and she had been with her on the night of the party. Although she may have been at the party as well that night, I had not met her then. To my distress she said she hardly spoke French. Here I was in the room of a girl I did not know, and who did not speak French (nor did I speak Wolof). I slightly panicked, wondering how I was going to make it through this afternoon. I tried anyhow, and explained to her the reason why I was in Senegal, and why I had wanted to meet with Khadija. She responded with “je ne vis pas la vie lesbienne<sup>9</sup>” (“I don’t live the lesbian life”). For a moment, I was saddened by this, but I soon realised that it was interesting to discuss her relation to the milieu that I figured she had, based on her presence at the party. She continued and said she was a regular visitor of the party, but that she could not go every Friday, because - and she gestured that it costs a lot of money. “But I don’t live it, I don’t live as a lesbian. Not here in Senegal, it is too risky. Maybe if one day I leave Senegal, I could live it. But never here, never...sometimes, because of the way I dress, girls approach me and tell me that they like me. But I always tell them that I don’t live it. We can be friends, I have no problem with that. I hang out with lesbians a lot.” Later that*

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<sup>8</sup> English: “What are you looking for?”

<sup>9</sup> Conversation with Fama, 13 November 2017.

afternoon, as we sat on her bed, she walked up to her window and looked at the woman that had appeared in front of her window. "She is pretty, really pretty...dark skinned...really pretty." When I met her again a couple of weeks later, we spent an afternoon with her friend Ibrahima. As he was chatting with his boyfriend in Spain, Fama turned to me and said "kaay, foon ma" (come, kiss me). Although I knew what that meant, I pretended not to understand the Wolof, so I asked her what it meant. "I don't know how to say it in French. It means nothing, just, you know...you can lie down on the bed and..." [and she caressed her own arms]. Ibrahima decided to leave us with our apparent language barrier, and started to prepare something to eat. As he was slicing an onion, I provoked Fama: "Isn't this normally the job of a woman?" She responded saying: "yes, but we're two guys, and today it's his turn...well, in fact, he's a woman, I'm a man." "You're not a woman?" I asked her. "No, I'm a man. But next time it's you who will be cooking, because you're a woman, right?" When we met again a week later, I found Fama in bed, naked, with another girl. "It's my (girl)friend<sup>10</sup>." When her friend returned from the bathroom, she said something in Wolof to Fama. "She said that you're my girlfriend", said Fama to me. "I thought you were girlfriends?" I responded. "No, we are two jump, we cannot date...I don't feel attracted to other jump, I prefer girls who are sexy."

From this compilation of bits of fieldnotes from the time I spent with Fama (23 years old), it becomes clear how people's narratives unfold, develop, and may sometimes considerably alter, with time. Accordingly, Michael Jackson argues that "one must resist thinking that words can capture the nature of what is" (1995: 125). Similarly, Van Maanen argues that there is "no requirement" that different, co-existing narratives are "universal or even consistent with one another" (1988: 157). Had I only met Fama once, and had I limited our encounter to conducting an interview with her, I would have never found out that she does in fact engage in same-sex intimacies. What it also shows, is that I did not only need time to talk with her and learn about her relation to the *milieu* of queer women that I had initially met her in, but that I also learned from observing her behaviour in her room where I met her, her own private space where public experiences could be negotiated. Here I witnessed situations that helped me to gradually uncover different parts of her story. In fact, our first appointment came about through serendipity, an advantageous mistake from my side. This was one of my "rich points", described by Marte (2018) as "moments of dissonance and impasse through which we question our project design, our methods, our locations, and our very presence in particular "fields"". To accept such "rich points" to shape the course of our fieldwork, is to acknowledge the limited possibility of the researcher to execute a study following a clear-cut design. Reflecting on the "rich points", all the awkward and unexpected moments during my fieldwork, I realised the importance of conducting an ethnography to gather insights into same-sex intimacies in urban Senegal.

The question that lies at the heart of this chapter, is how to do research on something that remains largely unspoken in the research context? As a result of the Senegalese sexual imaginary and the cultural importance of discretion captured in the Wolof value of *sutura*, as well as the illegality of homosexuality in the country, an aura of secrecy surrounds same-sex intimacies. Consequently, research on same-sex intimacies needs to focus on the behavioural rather than the discursive level if we wish to understand the subtleties and tacit knowledge of the diversity of sexual expressions and practices (Dankwa 2009). The answer to the question how we can grasp this tacit understanding, is ethnography. I will touch upon the value of

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<sup>10</sup> She said 'copine' in French, which is used both to signify female friend, and girlfriend. I had understood it as 'girlfriend' at first, because of the way I found them naked in bed.

ethnography for sexuality research shortly. Generally speaking, in this chapter I wish to give insight into how I conducted my fieldwork, accounting for the various methodological challenges and opportunities I was confronted with. In my study of young women's sexuality in urban Senegal, methodological and ethical considerations could not be dissociated from my embodied self, being always simultaneously a researcher and a person. Fieldwork to me is the simultaneous exercise of trying to understand the lives of a somewhat demarcated group of people, in all its complexities and layeredness, and trying to understand your own position in relation to the research topic and your interlocutors. In this research, social navigation is a central concept in the investigation of how young women enact their same-sex desires, as well as proving essential for me as a researcher, moving through the research and social life in Senegal more generally. New experiences require a constant rethinking of approaches, questions and foci, all the while maintaining a certain professionalism as a researcher, a humbleness as an outsider in Senegal, and kindness and respect for interlocutors. We too, as researchers, navigate. Accordingly, the overarching theme of this chapter, and of the thesis overall, is navigation.

Before proceeding with a theoretical substantiation of social navigation, I will point out what navigation entailed methodologically. I will discuss my position in this research as a close stranger, navigating both proximity and distance; the value of ethnography in navigating research on a somewhat taboo topic and ways to collect data; and questions of language and ethics. Consequently, I will contextualise the research by elaborating on the theoretical framework I have employed to make sense of the data gathered in the field. I hope that the analyses that follow in the subsequent chapters help to understand the particularities of the way same-sex intimacies are given shape in urban Senegal, and that they enhance our understanding of the diversity of young women's same-sex intimacies more generally.

### **Navigating proximity and distance**

In the 1970s, a feminist anthropological scholarship emerged that encouraged women to study other women in order to have previously marginalised voices be heard, and to have stories about women be told by other women who were believed to be able to better represent women's stories (Lewin and Leap<sup>11</sup> 1996). Critique about the impossibility to create objective accounts with this ideologically driven research was widespread, but it was countered by a response that it is an illusion to think that objective research can be done. Based on this debate about the importance or impossibility of objective research, I will elaborate on my position in the field as a close stranger by reflecting on the dynamics of intersubjectivity between interlocutors and me. I will argue that my proximity to my interlocutors enabled this research to take shape precisely because of, and not in spite of, this proximity. I will elaborate on this point in the section about the value of doing ethnography.

One day when I met Safiétou (25 years old, football player) after having been out of Dakar for a while, she asked me: "*tu cherches quoi?*" (what are you looking for?) "I have been thinking about you", she said, and continued: "are you a writer? You are always writing in your notebook. Or perhaps you are a journalist, with all your questions? Or are you a tourist, discovering Senegal and our nice girls, *quoi?*"<sup>12</sup> I had explained to her the purpose of my visit

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<sup>11</sup> Lewin and Leap created this edited volume with reflections of gay and lesbian anthropologists in an attempt to bring to the fore questions of positionality and ethics, with particular reference to issues of (same-sex) sexuality, in ethnographic research.

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with Safiétou, 13 December 2017.

when I first met her, as I had to my other informants, but her observations about my behaviour and perhaps her ideas about white people's visits to Senegal in general<sup>13</sup>, had led her to question again the exact purpose of my stay. The fact that she asked me this question outright, gave me the opportunity to establish my position as a researcher again. I assume that other informants may have had a similar question about the purpose of my visit, or about who I was. Instead of asking me like Safiétou had done, they may have simply answered their question for themselves. I tried my best to emphasise my position as a researcher to anyone I engaged with. I did this because I felt it was my ethical duty to remind people that I might be using what they were sharing with me for my research, and also to resolve any doubts people may have had about possible directions for our unfolding relationships. I quickly came to understand however that there existed not much of a distinction between my professional and my personal being, particularly because it was not just up to me to define who I was in my encounters with others. Fieldwork appeared to be a constant game between myself as a researcher and my interlocutors. It is a constant repositioning of oneself; one's position as a researcher as well as a person.

For most, if not all, of my interlocutors, anthropological research is far removed from their own personal lives. Where people did understand and accept my presence as a researcher, they often did not really care. Many people were eager to engage with me, and the fact that I might use our conversations in a future academic text, was something that could hardly bother most of them. This was obviously quite convenient for the progress of my research and it came as a relief to me, as I had expected to encounter more difficulties when asking people to share parts of their intimate lives with me. Contrary to what many others at home feared for me before I left to the field - that such a sensitive and taboo topic would be difficult (if not impossible) to talk about - I found women to be fairly open to share details about their intimate lives with me. I felt that they did not always only do this to be helpful for my research; sometimes, some interlocutors would check my response to their flirts and try to seduce me to a romantic or sexual relationship. I can therefore only agree with Hatfield (1973) who called fieldwork "mutual exploitation". I was on a quest to obtain data, and my interlocutors, in turn, were in some cases happy to have found someone to be able to openly talk to about sexuality issues, and in many other cases, happy with a new white 'friend' and the potentiality of her becoming a girlfriend. Although I always made clear at the start what my objectives were, namely to conduct research, it was beyond my control how my interlocutors viewed our appointments. To be honest, their flirtatious behaviour allowed me to learn a lot more about same-sex intimacies and particularly the gendered aspects of (same-sex) relationships. As Ashkenazi and Markowitz (1999: 14) put it, "ethnographers ought to address the sexual issue proactively, both as an ethnographic tool and as a way of making the "participant" part of

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<sup>13</sup> Senegal and the Gambia are popular tourist destinations for Europeans. A particular form of tourism, sex tourism, is popular along the coasts of these countries, where (middle-aged) women and men seek attractive young Senegalese and Gambians for romantic and sexual relationships. Such tourists flock to the coastal towns of Saly and Mbour, close to Dakar, where they can reside in luxurious seaside hotels. The history of marriage to Europeans dates back to the 17th century, when French trade in Senegambia emerged. Young French men who were sent to the Senegambian Coast to trade slaves sometimes developed relationships with local women. This practice of "customary marriage", as it was called, was frowned upon during the colonial period, but when a growing number of French-educated Senegalese started travelling to France in the first half of the 20th century, marriage to European women became a status symbol. The reverse was not met with the same status, although when women increasingly accessed schooling and began to travel from the 1970s onwards, it became more common for Senegalese women to marry European men (Neveu Kringelbach 2016).

participant-observation operational[...] [S]exuality cannot be brushed aside as ethnographers construct their in-the-field persona and draw conclusions from their mounds of the data.” In addition, Lewin and Leap’s (1996) edited volume *Out in the Field* and Kulick and Willson’s (1995) edited volume *Taboo* have shown where sexuality and epistemology intersect. These volumes correspond with the reflexive turn anthropology took in the 1980s.

The reflexive turn in the discipline was a response to the criticism that anthropology does not provide reliable or valid data because of the whims of the anthropologist’s persona (see Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). As a result, anthropologists have turned to a reflexivity on their positionality in the field and the fundamentally intersubjective nature of the encounters between researchers and their informants. Anthropological fieldwork is “in fact improvising and exploratory[...]and where the researcher is himself the research instrument” (Ten Have quoted in Bleek 1978: 15, my translation). The centrality of the researcher in her/his research asks for a continuous reflexivity about personal feelings and responses regarding the fieldwork situation. Rather than striving for objectivity, reliable research data stem from a reflexivity about the intersubjectivity of the researcher in the field. Fieldwork is ingenuity, something that cannot be taught but that one explores while in the field. One has to be ready to continuously adopt new ideas and understandings of situations; to respond to many last-minute, unforeseen changes. This is something that requires perhaps what Van Velsen (1967) called “situational analysis”. He argued for more focus on fieldwork and less on a rigid theoretical framework. He proposed to take a social situation or event as a starting point for the study of social processes. In a similar fashion, Boellstorff (2007b) argued for the need for critical empiricism, meaning that theorisations should adequately reflect the empirical data one constructed in interactions with interlocutors.

Class, gender, age, and race are all factors that influence the research process. Sexuality as one of the factors that impacts the relationship between researcher and informants is often left out of the discussion, apart from perhaps an assertion that an ethical, professional distance will be kept and hence that sexual relationships will not be forged. There are a few exceptions of course. In *Out of the field*, edited by Lewin and Leap (1996), as well as in *Taboo*, edited by Kulick and Willson (1995), and in *Sex, sexuality, and the anthropologist*, edited by Markowitz and Ashkenazi (1999), various scholars break the silence surrounding the anthropologist’s sexuality and her/his encounters in the field. In *Out of the field*, Esther Newton calls for an acknowledgement of what she calls the “erotic equation” in fieldwork, describing how erotic attraction between her and her “best informant” (1996: 219) inspired the creative research process. As researchers, we are asked to reflect on how our subject position impacted upon the data collection process, but the emotions and bodily sensations that are undeniably part of the research are often ignored. Doing a research that is all about emotions and bodily sensations, it would be unethical to present myself as a gender-neutral and asexual researcher. In fact, “in the field, one is marked. One is perceived to be and one perceives oneself to be a gendered anthropologist – a female anthropologist or a male anthropologist” (Moreno 1995: 246). Additionally, as Markowitz points out accurately, “intimacy is what all anthropologists desire in the field and also what they fear most – that nebulous line between being “in” and going native, retaining objectivity and an autonomous sense of self versus doing and feeling as informants do and thereby losing part of the self in the process” (1999: 168).

Although I had come to Senegal for fieldwork, I cannot negate that at some points I have come to feel affection for and attraction to some of my informants, and that I was not always oblivious to my informants’ attempts at seduction as I tried to re-establish my position as a researcher. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I met Nabou via my informant Lafia. I fell in love

with her and we dated each other until after I returned from fieldwork. Although I feel that it has given me more insight into the workings of same-sex relationships between women in Senegal, I have to remind myself that I am not a Senegalese woman and that any interaction between me and a Senegalese woman is different from relationships between two Senegalese women. When discussing my intimate encounters in the field with people at home, I was often discouraged to write about them, as it could harm my credibility as a researcher. In my opinion however, negating such relationships as part of the fieldwork experience only does harm. It contributes to the pervasive stereotype of the hypersexual, exotic 'other' as it took shape in the colonial imaginary (see Said 2003; Gilbert 2017). Rather than offering the reader a juicy novella, I hope that by being open about my own gendered and sexual subjectivity in the field I can challenge the taboos surrounding the anthropologist's sexuality in the field.

It is fairly easy to point out some aspects of my background that are fairly static: I am a white, European, comparably wealthy, well-educated, unmarried woman. However, the way I and my interlocutors behaved and emphasised or downplayed some of these markers changed considerably - both consciously and unconsciously - throughout my fieldwork. As Blackwood pointed out, "the ethnographic experience is more than an identification of positionality or subjectivity; we occupy multiple positions and identities that transform over time, forcing us constantly to reconstruct who we are in relation to the people we study" (1995: 55). Before I left for the field, I had decided to buy long skirts in order to somehow adhere to feminine ideals of dress. I feared that 'showing' I am a lesbian by wearing my usual outfits could possibly endanger my interlocutors if they would be associated with me. However, once I had encountered some masculine presenting *jump* women through football, I decided to switch back to wearing shorts. I felt much more comfortable in those - the feminine ideals had gotten on my nerves already - but it was also a strategic choice to communicate non-verbally my sexuality and my belonging to "*cette vie*" (this life) of queer women. Changing and adapting my appearance had its effects and gave me many insights into the workings of *jump* and *sexy* manifestations through the way interlocutors responded to my gender expressions. I came to see that my sexuality was not the only, perhaps not even the most relevant, similarity between my informants and me.

As the coming chapters will demonstrate, gender is a key aspect in the lives of the young women that I met (and of everyone else). Their manifestations of masculinity (*jump*) and femininity (*sexy*) do not only inform their same-sex relationships, but also provide them with a sense of being-in-the-world as they position themselves in society through their engagements in various social spaces. As my first acquaintance with the world of same-sex intimacies between women in urban Senegal was on the football field, it is likely that these women that I first encountered conceived of me as a *jump* rather than a lesbian. It reminded me of the importance of seeing their local understanding of gender and sexuality, and not my own western categorisations. The tension between my position as an anthropologist and my position as a person, is that my interpretations of the topic of study based on my personal experiences with it, can interfere with the researcher's challenge to take up the interlocutors' position when trying to interpret events. Particularly when you are closer to your interlocutors because of (a) shared characteristic(s), it is tempting to think you will understand their lifeworlds easily. As argued before, sharing some important characteristics eases your entry to the field and enhances the building of trust. The challenge however, is to avoid translating this ease with which the first contacts were made into a laziness to think that you will easily understand your interlocutors' experiences. Until today, as I read the work of other scholars and rethink my own

fieldwork experiences, things keep falling into place. Things I thought to have understood way back, appear to be different than I thought they were.

This contributes to the idea that fieldwork does not stop as soon as you leave the field. The Facebook and WhatsApp conversations that I continued with interlocutors, and sometimes with new contacts too, regularly clarified my perceptions of things. Throughout this thesis, I will occasionally refer to WhatsApp or Facebook conversations that I had both during fieldwork as well as after my return to the Netherlands. These conversations do not stand alone, but are a part of the many ways in which I gathered information and acquired insights. Being a westerner, and Dutch in particular, proved very helpful at times because, in the words of my interlocutor Hawa, "*rien n'est bizarre pour toi*"<sup>14</sup> (nothing is strange for you). Whenever I was unsure how to introduce the topic of my research to some of the football women when I met with them individually after having engaged with and observed them during football practice and matches, it appeared that many of them had already figured out that I was a suitable conversation partner to discuss issues of homosexuality with.

Although in the constant negotiations and repositioning of the relationship between interlocutors and me many of them attempted to establish our relationship as a romantic one or one between friends, Bleek (1978), following Hatfield's (1973) mutual exploitation thesis, argues that it is (nearly) impossible to forge real friendships with interlocutors. The relationship between researcher and interlocutor is inherently unequal. Real friendship, he argues, means seeing each other as a full person, as an end in itself, and not as a means to an end, that is, to obtain useful information for your research. Obviously, the latter pertains to my research: I realise that I have received from people far more than I will ever return to them. Although I agree that it is misleading to label and write about your informants carelessly as friends, I do think that a contextualised understanding of the meaning of friendship, is needed. This relates to the awkwardness that I often felt between interlocutors and me. It took time to believe that women were genuinely interested in me, and I was often suspicious that they simply saw me as a walking wallet, a one-way ticket to Europe, or as a means to uplift their status. While these concerns are definitely not irrelevant, they do not account for all attempts at seduction, nor do they fully explain my awkwardness in such situations. The most obvious inequality being financial status, informants asking me to buy them something could be seen as proof of the inequality and thus instrumentality of our relationship. However, this ignores the fact that monetary exchanges between friends are very common in Senegal, contrary to the Netherlands where financial issues are very private and money is hardly lent between friends. Therefore, rather than regarding an informant's question to buy her something as proof of the non-existence of real friendship, such occasions (although they have, to my relief, not occurred very often) gave me insight into the ways in which social relations and friendships work. And, contrary to what one might expect, I was not even always on the giving end. In many instances a drink, bus ticket or gift was bought for me, regardless of the financial status of the respective woman.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I found myself in many situations where interlocutors tried to tilt our relationship towards a more personal and romantic one. The simultaneous experience of proximity (as a young, queer woman) and distance (being white, well-educated and relatively wealthy) led to awkward situations regularly. Awkwardness was recurrently felt by me at least, which was perhaps a sign of different definitions of the relationship between us that my interlocutor and I had. Set aside the ethical concerns that I was

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<sup>14</sup> WhatsApp audio message from Hawa, 4 November 2017.

confronted with whenever someone dropped that she was romantically interested in me, which made me repeat endlessly that I was here to do a research, I found many encounters with informants to be awkward. I often did not know how to respond to flirts or declarations of love. This may have had many causes, one of which was the fact that the Senegalese way of flirting and dating is so different from what I know from the Netherlands. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes demonstrates the unease.

*When you are not quite sure what to say, or when something is expected of you that your mind or body somehow resists, this can make you feel downright uncomfortable. Precisely that which causes friction between you and other(s) at a given moment can be very meaningful however. Take Rokhaya's marriage proposal. Our acquaintance had been fairly uncomfortable: she had not been very talkative. Nevertheless, when our other conversation partner Coumba was on the phone with someone else, she had - dead serious - asked me to marry her. Apart from the fact that asking someone to marry you within an hour after an initial meeting seemed somewhat strange and inappropriate to me, I could not understand how she could ask me this question when our conversation had been so awkward. Did she not feel the awkwardness? Did the silence between us, now that Coumba was temporarily unavailable to entertain us, not feel uncomfortable for her? I thought it did, because although she had told us that she rarely smoked, she had lit three cigarettes in the three hours that we spent together that evening. Then why did she ask me to marry her? This was not on the basis of which I could imagine a declaration of love: attraction, an emotional connection... I could think of reasons for her question of course. And so I did, and I put her question in perspective. The unease with which I had experienced the situation, had forced me to reflect on it. Nothing came 'natural' to me here in Dakar; my contact with Rokhaya always remained a little awkward<sup>15</sup>.*

I decided to take advantage of awkward situations and regard them as a source of information. In a similar fashion, Don Kulick writes that "erotic subjectivity in the field is a potentially useful source of insight. This is because erotic subjectivity *does* things. It performs, or, rather, can be made to perform, work. And one of the many types of work it can perform is to draw attention to the conditions of its production" (Kulick 1995: 5, emphasis in original). It took me quite a while, and a whole lot of awkward confrontations with flirtatious behaviour, before I came to understand a little of how romantic relationships in Senegal come to be, what makes a good partner, and how the manifestation of gender is crucial for this. The awkwardness that I felt in my encounters with interlocutors were insightful for my understanding of these dynamics. It was a regularly recurring dilemma: will I push myself into awkward situations, or will I stay in my comfort zone and miss a lot of insights? I usually opted for the former, which led me to think at least weekly that my fieldwork experience could best be described as a series of socially awkward situations. However, living through such situations, I always knew I had learnt something I would never have learnt by relying on asking questions.

Throughout my research, the challenge for me was not to understand categories such as 'lesbian' from my Western framework. Although my proximity to my interlocutors in terms of age, gender (expressions) and sexuality have enhanced my access to the field and have given me insights into practices that I would not have observed had I not been such a close stranger, it is also important to acknowledge possible limitations of this proximity. As much as I had easier access to my informants' romantic lives, I also came with assumptions and preconceived ideas. I

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<sup>15</sup> Fieldnotes, 12 September 2017.

naively thought that I did not only understand their same-sex attraction, but also how they made sense of this in discourse and in relation to other social arrangements. Yes, my interlocutors called themselves lesbians, but their use of the word cannot be simply equated to my use and understanding of it. Precisely because of my personal connection to the issue, it was a challenge to look beyond the term lesbian. Bleek (1978) argued that a key problem of the field researcher is that her/his participation in the daily lives of interlocutors always remains without obligations. Every day, she/he can decide to withdraw from the situation. This makes their experiences fundamentally different from those who can not escape from it. Therefore, the researcher can never represent the view of the insider<sup>16</sup>. Being an outsider certainly also has its advantages. The fact that you do not belong to a certain family or group of friends, makes that sensitive information that could become part of gossips, or that could harm others in the community, may be shared with you, when interlocutors trust that you do not take part in the gossips. My interlocutors regularly complained about Senegalese people gossiping too much and said that they found me a trustworthier person to tell their stories to. While it would be utterly arrogant to state that I have managed in this relatively short period of fieldwork (nearly six months) to fully understand and adopt my interlocutors' understanding of gender and sexuality, I hope that my analysis does justice to their understandings and experiences of reality. The fact that I have conducted an ethnography, I believe comes closer to my interlocutors' lifeworlds than any other methodology would have enabled. To substantiate this claim, I will now turn to an exploration of the role of ethnography in this research.

### **The value of an ethnography**

Defining ethnography as "holistic contextualisation", Daniel Miller argues that what ethnography contributes to the discipline of anthropology and the social sciences more general, is an appreciation that "the world is always so much more than we can envisage" (2017: 30). Indeed, if we accept "rich points" to shape the way we conduct our research, we may return from the field with insights that contribute to academic debates as fresh outlooks on the social world. The dominant rhetoric in social science research with regard to (qualitative) methodologies however is one of controlled, planned, and structured procedures of (field) research (Driessen and Jansen 2013). However, what is the value of such a research design when the whereabouts and practices of the people you are researching cannot easily be pinned down? And when straightforward inquiries after sensitive issues like same-sex intimacies are not culturally appropriate? Furthermore, socially desirable answers are likely to be given in interviews, especially when the researcher and the interviewee do not know each other very well yet (Spronk 2012). If such answers are not taken at face value but understood as a part of the unfolding of narratives, inherently part of the research process, such answers are not useless. In fact, socially desirable answers can teach us a lot about social and cultural norms and values. From the empirical material that I present in the next chapters however, it becomes clear that many insights that I obtained, I would have never acquired if I had been too preoccupied with conducting formal interviews, or with a standardised way of asking interlocutors the same, prepared, set of questions. The value of *sutura* is not simply something that constrains women to speak and act out their same-sex desires, but it informs social relations more generally and as such needs to be taken into account when conducting research

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<sup>16</sup> Bleek (1978: 12-13) illustrates this argument when he writes about communal toilets in the village where he conducted his fieldwork in Ghana. He was so disgusted by the look and smell of these toilets, that he made use of his possibility to escape and use the bathroom of the mission. More than being his individual privilege, it also resulted in missing a part of the local experience, hence the insider view into all aspects of the life of people in the village.

on something like same-sex intimacies. The following example illustrates the possible tension between queer women and international organisations that prepare formal studies with questionnaires and interviews.

In November 2017, I coincidentally met with the assistant human rights officer of the UN Office for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Dakar. She was interested in my research and immediately posed the question: “did you actually manage to talk to them?” I was surprised by her question and she, in turn, seemed surprised by my response. The OHCHR had wanted to conduct a research among LGBTQI, to find out about their needs and struggles. Women did not appear to be eager to respond to a questionnaire or interview, so the OHCHR decided to approach this group again and call for a meeting at the OHCHR office on the 13th of December 2017. I waited to be invited to this event, which in the end never took place. I can only guess why the event had been cancelled: did they again fail to find women willing to talk? Had the OHCHR priorities changed and had it become infeasible to meet with these women at short notice? It means at least that the OHCHR did not manage to talk to these women within the confines of their research project. Similarly, during the proposal writing phase at the African Studies Centre in Leiden last spring, I engaged in a discussion with the two lecturers of the proposal writing seminar on my choice for either the word (same-sex) ‘desires’ or ‘practices’. One of the lecturers argued for ‘desires’, explaining that I might be able to talk to women about their same-sex desires, but that talking about and/or seeing (hints of) same-sex practices would be impossible, since it is taboo in Senegal. Then, having written the research proposal, I applied for funding for my fieldwork at the Leiden University Fund (LUF). With the objective to encourage and support motivated students to conduct original research abroad, they invite students to submit their proposals. After having been invited for an interview based on my submitted application, I received the following explanation stating why I would not receive funding: “although the committee acknowledged the importance of the research to its fullest, they had great doubts about its practicability. These doubts informed our decision not to fund this research<sup>17</sup>”. Again, I was warned for the impossibility to conduct research on same-sex intimacies in Senegal.

To be fair, it is not a research topic that invites for difficult questions to be fired at people straight away - nor does research on income however. When after a week or three in the field I had only met people who told me homosexuals were better off dead, I wondered why I had indeed not chosen a more ‘practicable’ research that could be discussed over a coffee in a café. Yet, the importance of the research is precisely the fact that it concerns sexuality that is invisible or unrecognisable to many. The (relative) invisibility of certain forms and expressions of sexuality is carefully constructed and culturally specific. Based on his study among sorcerers of the Songhay in Niger, Paul Stoller passed on a valuable lesson that he had learnt from a *marabout*, when he found out that in the initial stage of his fieldwork when he had been interviewing, people had been systematically lying. The *marabout* then told him that “you will never learn about us if you go into people’s compounds, ask personal questions, and write down the answers. Even if you remain here one year, or two years...we would still lie to you” (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 11). Instead, he said, “you must learn to sit with people...you must learn to sit and listen” (ibid.). Similarly, Spronk (2012) points out in her research on the sexuality and self-perceptions of young middle-class professionals in Kenya that socially desirable or acceptable answers will likely be given to questions about sex and sexuality. Although she also argues that socially desirable answers are not necessarily useless because they tell a lot about social and cultural norms and values, it is important not to rely only on answers given to interview

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<sup>17</sup> E-mail correspondence, 20 June 2017.

questions. It points to the importance of the ethnographic method of participant observations. Likewise, Henrietta Moore pointed to the importance of ethnographies to understand the dynamics between individual people's gendered practices and broader social arrangements, when she writes that "ethnographic accounts often give a very vivid sense of people's perceptions of their "lived anatomies", and of how understandings of bodies, gender identities and sexual differences are given substance through involvement in repetitive daily tasks and through the concrete nature of social relationships" (Moore 1994: 25). In other words, ethnographic accounts allow us to transcend public debates and to focus instead on lived, embodied realities of same-sex intimacies. Through a presence in various (homosocial) spaces where young women gather, I have been able to come across unspoken practices. This research thus hinges on the phenomenological approach in anthropology, because of its recognition of the body and bodily experience as the "orientational locus of the self" (Csordas 1994: 340). This phenomenological and experiential approach to young women's lives will be juxtaposed with sociopolitical processes that seek to control their movements.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Having argued for ethnography to make sense of people's lived realities, what remains is to spell out what exactly its main method, participant observation, entails and what other data collection methods I have used to complement and triangulate the information. This research was conducted between August 2017 and January 2018 in a total of almost six months. I was based in Dakar, where I rented a room in the neighbourhood of Ouakam throughout the entire course of fieldwork. An important question is how to demarcate 'the field'. How did I meet people and how did I subsequently select informants? The first three to four weeks in Dakar, I wandered around, meeting new people randomly on the street. I had come to Dakar without any contacts from where to start my inquiries. During these first couple of weeks, I was sometimes too eager and naive, and I explained the topic of my research directly. I thought I was prepared for hostile reactions to my research topic, but to my own frustration I was hurt every time someone expressed her-/himself negatively. In retrospect, this brief period learned me to navigate my way through the city and to catch something of the dominant discourse on gender and sexuality that prevailed on the streets.

After a week or three, I decided to search more actively for a female homosocial space, as these roamings of the streets had yielded me mostly conversations with men. A lemon seller that I met on the street offered to take me to a place, close to where he stayed, where girls played basketball. And so the next day I found myself playing basketball. Due to a lack of experience, I had to play with the *cadettes* (youth), who were approximately between 13 and 16 years old. The older girls played at a later moment, and it was there that the coach allowed me to introduce myself and my research. I introduced my research as one on love: on personal ideas and experiences, as well as societal expectations of love, marriage, polygyny and motherhood. Many girls giggled when I said the word love and I was later told that one girl had said: "we cannot talk to her about this!" Somewhat distressed that I would not be able to talk about love with these girls, I continued - and enjoyed - playing basketball with the *cadettes*. I decided to play and observe, and not to bother the players with my research for a bit. I observed, particularly among the older girls, some flirtatious behaviour. Some girls placed their hands on each other's hips as they queued up for an exercise; others slapped each other's butts or danced suggestively. As I was playing basketball, I wondered if and where I could find girls who played football. Then one day, as I was playing basketball, I saw four girls and a (male) coach on the other side of the field playing football. The basketball coach offered to introduce me to the

football coach, whom he knew. We had a brief chat and he introduced me to the captain of the team, one of the girls who had been playing. From the way she stood there and looked at me, I knew I was in the right place, this was my entry to the field.

As my entry to the field occurred via a football team, my initial interlocutors were all football players. For various reasons, *jump* women consequently dominate in the analysis. Although subsequent snowball sampling could have brought me to *sexy* women, I remained predominantly in touch with *jump* women. In the thesis, I present empirical evidence from Khadija, Penda, Lafia and Birame, who are all *sexy*. However, their stories do not elaborate on what *sexy* entails for them the way I elaborate on *jump* in chapter four, when I discuss the football *milieu* as a space where expressions of *jump* are forged and negotiated. It is no coincidence that women playing football were my first entry point in the field. As they are all *jump*, their masculinity is remarkable and as such they are recognised as queer much quicker. They are not only more recognisable to the western researcher, but they also seem more eager to express themselves as queer. In the two queer women's organisations that I followed, *jump* women were more present than *sexy* women. The imbalance this brings to the analysis reflects much queer scholarship. A focus on *jump* women is in itself not a problem, but it is important to acknowledge that some of the personal accounts in this thesis are not representative of all queer young women in Senegal, but are particularly reflexive of the experiences of *jump* women.

To get back to my first encounter with a football team in Dakar, I was warmly welcomed to the team and I decided to start practising with them as well. I soon got to know the whole team, when I joined them on a two-day trip to another city for a football match. Meeting numerous players from this team meant visiting almost all the different neighbourhoods in Dakar, because although the football team had a permanent place for practice, the players came from all corners of the city to play here. Meeting other queer young women after this initial encounter with the football team was then a matter of snowball sampling. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I have spent time in various groups of queer women: in the football team, with women who went to and organised parties, and in queer organisations, as well as with women one-on-one, often meeting them at their homes where they stayed with family or (girl)friends. There appeared to be a network of queer women throughout Dakar and even beyond, loosely connected through various spaces where they meet, as well as through WhatsApp groups and the organisations of Nafissatou Cissé and Coumba Diallo. Snowball sampling, meeting new interlocutors through attending events and joining interlocutors to their friends in various social spaces, was crucial for the informal character of my research. In total, I have spoken to about 25 queer women aged between 20 and 33 years old, except for the two chairs of the queer organisations, who are older. Some of them I met regularly, and their stories form the backbone of this thesis. With others I only exchanged briefly, and again with others I did not really talk individually, but I engaged with them as we were together on the football field or at a party. The observations I made on such occasions do for an important part inform my knowledge, hence one could argue that the number of informants for this study is in fact higher.

I carried out my research informally for various reasons. First of all, I aimed to be as unobtrusive as possible. The awkwardness of the white ethnographer's presence was a disturbance of the usual dynamics in itself. Second, this approach resulted from the necessity to be discrete about the purpose of my visit to friends and particularly family of interlocutors, as too much attention on the research might possibly harm my informants. Third, and much related to the second reason, the informal character of this research is a result of the challenge to pose questions without drawing attention to our conversation amidst others. The way I had

conversations and posed interview-like questions, was a pragmatic solution to the challenge to find time alone with interlocutors.

As I argued previously, the distinction between participant observations, the informal conversations emerging out of these occasions, and interviews, is difficult, if not impossible, to make in this research. Therefore, I am reluctant to say that I conducted what may be called interviews. I definitely asked questions and as my fieldwork progressed, these questions were often based on a number of broadly defined topics determined prior to a visit to an interlocutor. I sat with my notebook and, occasionally, my phone for an audio recording. In addition to fieldnotes and conversations/interviews with queer women, I have engaged in conversations with others - such as the coach of the football team, a radio maker, employees of a number of queer/msm organisations - as well as reading newspapers and other internet documents, to get an understanding of the public debate about homosexuality in Senegal. It makes little sense to mention a number of interviews conducted, but I can say that I took out my phone to record conversations with interlocutors only about ten times.

The limited amount of conversations that I did record, I lost. Two days after my return from the field, my external hard drive crashed. On it, I had stored these audio files and their transcriptions, as well as some fieldnotes that I had more elaborately worked out on my laptop. None of the files could be recovered from the drive. Navigation thus became acutely personal. My initial response was to think that I was lost and would never be able to write a thesis. I quickly started a notebook 'Senegal in retrospect', carefully writing down everything that I still remembered from my appointments. I took my agenda, in which I had always written my daily appointments, and I noticed how much I remembered. To write in retrospect about situations you encountered months ago is tricky. You risk to interpret situations based on new insights gained at much later moments and you may even write different information than what you had written initially. However, the risk of false interpretations lurks continually and a selection of what is worthy to write down is always made. Yet, complete quotes came back to mind when I started reading literature, as I sometimes associated what I read with very specific meetings with interlocutors. With some interlocutors, like Hawa and Nabou, our conversations continued via WhatsApp audio messages after my return, and I could easily ask some questions for clarification. I have likewise stayed in touch with Nafissatou and Coumba, whom I have asked a few questions for clarification as well. I considered going back to the field for a short visit, but the longer I thought about my fieldwork experiences and went back to the fieldnotes scribbled in my notebooks, the more I realised that the bulk of the story was in my head, and the most important observations, experiences and quotes were in my notebooks. Moreover, during fieldwork I had sent extensive reports to my supervisors monthly, which were elaborations and reflections on my fieldnotes and experiences. Re-reading these reports provided an extra source of data. The centrality of the ethnographic approach with its participant observations and intersubjectivity in this research somewhat transcends the value of literal quotes. I therefore believe that I have managed to navigate around this obstacle of partial data loss.

Building on this incident of data loss, let me elaborate briefly on my data management and protection in the field. I stored the fieldnotes that I had typed out on a password-protected laptop. As I later transferred the data to my external hard drive, I stored this hard drive in my room that I locked when I was away. Upon return from the field, when I started to think about ways to safeguard the anonymity of my interlocutors, I created a file with the names of my interlocutors and their pseudonyms. I have stored this list on two separate USB sticks on which I have not stored this thesis. In case someone would get hold of this thesis via my email or my hard drive, she/he will not have access to the list with pseudonyms, and hence she/he will not

be able to track down the real names of my interlocutors. In other words, the data that I did not lose, as well as subsequent writings, have been safely stored in various locations.

Coming back to the issue of conversations/interviews with interlocutors, what characterised them was that they were often unplanned, because the opportunity to sit down with an interlocutor in privacy for an hour or so was never certain. Bleek (1978) argues that no matter how important observations are, anthropologists are unlikely to be able to complete a successful research if they do not conduct interviews as well. He argued that where observations are bound to a specific time and location, interviews “provide the opportunity to obtain information about events that do *not* take place *here* and *now*” (1978: 68, my translation, emphasis in original). I agree with Bleek that for a contextualisation of events, an interview(like) research method is needed in addition to participant observations. Nevertheless, I would like to challenge the status of formal interviews as the research method that complements participant observations in ethnographic research. The problematic position of formal interviews is at least twofold. First, an interview is a type of conversation that is little spontaneous or ‘natural’. Particularly when discussing a taboo topic such as same-sex sexuality, having a number of questions fired at you does not always encourage extensive responses. Informal conversations that emerge much more naturally from your being together with an interlocutor may in fact yield much more interesting details about someone’s love life, even without the researcher explicitly focussing on asking such questions. Second, interviews are not that easy to conduct, or to set up formally, in the context in which this research took place. Before going to the field, I had somehow imagined interviews to take place in a ‘neutral’ setting. Although I was aware that neutral settings do not exist, I thought I could and had to approach a certain neutrality. I had perhaps imagined myself sitting at a table with an interlocutor, with a voice recorder on the table in between us, and talking for an hour (or two) non-stop. Possible locations could be a café - although I realised quickly that such a public space would not allow us to talk about ‘forbidden’ issues like same-sex sexuality - or the (living) room of the interlocutors that I visited. The latter was not an option either though, as (relative) privacy to talk one-on-one with an interlocutor was more scarce than I had imagined on forehand. Moreover, many of my interlocutors tried to keep my status as a researcher low-profile for their families, and they had told them that I was a friend from football - which was not entirely untrue of course. Installing ourselves on chairs in an interview set-up would have probably instigated a lot of curiosity on the part of the many family members that were usually found in every home. Therefore, the practicality to conduct interviews often lacked.

Nevertheless, I had to ask questions to contextualise some of the participant observations that I had made, as well as to get a general idea about someone’s family and their socioeconomic situation. The context in which such questions could be asked, was often during daily activities, hanging on the bed of my informant in her room in between household chores, family visits, and cooking lunch. Sometimes, I would offer to prepare *ataya*, Senegalese tea, for the family, and my informant and I would look for a quiet place outside in the shade. We would have a short while to discuss my research before brothers, sisters, friends, neighbours, and basically anyone from the neighbourhood passing by, would join us for tea and a chit-chat. Again at other instances, the time to ask direct questions to an interlocutor was when she would accompany me to the bus stop on my way back home. There were never hours on end to talk, but I made use of the few moments of privacy that emerged. An important insight about interviews and information gathered in conversations, is that it yields information about what people *say* they do, rather than what they actually *do*. People can have many reasons why they (un)consciously present differing information. A side note must be made here though, which is

that changing narratives over time do not mean that people have been lying to you. Sexuality is an ambiguous experience fraught with contradicting experiences. Additionally, people's experiences and their reflections on these experiences change over time, and they depend on their (growing) relation with the researcher. Anyhow, the moments I could ask questions without whispering them were scarce. The research topic required *sutura* from both my interlocutors and me, as well as a flexibility and creativity in finding the space and time to engage in in-depth conversations about the research. Because of the difficulty and unsuitability of conducting interviews with interlocutors, I focussed my attention largely to the method of participant observations. As it proved to be the most important and insightful method throughout my research, I will now elaborate on its use.

### **Participant observation**

It is widely acknowledged that participant observation is key to the discipline of anthropology, if not the most valuable method for acquiring insights beyond the discursive level. However, do we always know or specify what this participant observation entails? Do we make a distinction between participation and observation, and do we equally participate and observe? What does *participant* entail? As Bleek (1978: 51) suggests, it is often a graceful yet meaningless prefix to *observation*. Yet anthropologists tend to talk about *participant observation*, not *observation*. Many researchers remain silent about their participation, apart from perhaps providing the romantic image of integration in a local family and society, participating harmoniously in quotidian and festive events. However, is this participation always so harmonious? And secondly, once you start writing, it is very tempting to present the process of participation as rosy. Partly, neglecting the participatory aspect in participant observation may result from a Western "concentration on vision as the primary mode of comprehending reality, promot[ing] what can be seen over that which is not apparent to the eye", whereas in Africa hearing and other senses play a much bigger role (Oyewùmí 1997: 15). Perhaps it is also easier to prioritise observations over participation because it raises fewer questions about ethics and your personal experience. When I had shared an anecdote from my fieldwork, describing how I had participated in a shower session with the sister of my interlocutor, I was asked by a classmate: how intimately can you engage with your interlocutors? Is this still ethically appropriate? And why do you include it in your writing? It obviously evoked more questions than a distant description of an observation would have done. I remember writing in my research proposal that participant observation stops at the bedroom door (or the bathroom door, for that matter). I was going to participate and join people in their everyday lives, but for understanding the actual same-sex erotic desires and intimacies I would rely on what people would tell me. However, both bedroom doors as well as bathroom doors were opened for me, as the vignettes about the shower session and the sleepover with the football team show. Participation in the homosocial, homoerotic practices of interlocutors appeared insightful and invaluable to understand the meaning of sociality and sexuality, and the continuum it (re)presents in the Senegalese context, for my interlocutors. Sound ethnography pushes the researcher to leave (academic, personal) preconceived understandings aside and to engage with a sense of wholeness in the process of fieldwork, being confronted with corporeal experiences. During participant observation, distance and proximity are interconnected. The close stranger that I elaborated on earlier, is an insurmountable aspect of ethnographic fieldwork and potentially very insightful. It challenges the researcher to adopt, albeit temporarily, the interlocutors' way of looking at reality. Witnessing how women engaged in same-sex intimacies during a sleepover, their flirtatious behaviour and casual touch, were all invaluable experiences for this research. It

was possible only because of my focus on ethnography, and not just by asking questions, but as a matter of “deep hanging out” (see Geertz 1998). However, an ethnographic research methodology was only possible because of my proximity (to a certain extent) to my interlocutors: I was a woman of the same age, queer, and, for the football team that I joined and that was the entry gate to the *milieu* of queer women: I was enthusiastic about sports too, and willing to play football with them.

It is not only the *participant* part of *participant observation* that is sometimes written somewhat too easily, as a box that needs to be ticked. Having explained the *participant* aspect of *participant observations*, what needs to be asked is: in what ways have I really *observed* the lives of my informants related to the research topic? With *observation*, I mean that I do not rely for information about sexuality only on answers to questions asked. I have actually witnessed some of the subtle and less subtle hints to same-sex desires in various homosocial spaces. I have seen how bystanders responded to the behaviour of some of the women I was with, and I have seen how, in behaviour and in speech, women hid their same-sex relationships, and some of the consequences this had for their wellbeing and relationships with family. Observation is more than just looking, it requires more than opening your eyes to look. We do not see everything that happens, and we may have to learn to see the value of certain gestures or acts. Lots of valuable situations escape our eyes because of a certain bias, a focus. We might get tunnel vision at a certain point during our fieldwork, as we think we are starting to know how things work in the society that we study. Sometimes, other factors obstruct us from seeing things. As an example, I can give the case of Hawa. Upon my return to the Netherlands, she sent me a vocal message via WhatsApp about her desperation: the pressure for her to get married was rising. I will not go into the details of her situation here, as this will be described in more detail in chapter three. What I do want to mention here is that she then mentioned an example of how this pressure was exerted on her: “The last time when you were here, I am sure you didn’t notice it, I didn’t talk to my mother. It has been two or three months now that I no longer talk to her. She refuses, not I. I greet her in the morning, but she doesn’t respond. She ignores me, but I am sure you didn’t notice that. Simply to exert pressure on me<sup>18</sup>.” She was absolutely right, I had not noticed the silence between Hawa and her mother. I can think of at least three reasons. First of all, in our (Western, research-based) focus on the visible and the spoken, we tend to overlook what is not being said. As the example of Hawa suggests however, that what is not being said can be much more telling. Secondly, whenever I was with Hawa and her mother in one room, there were always many more people: Hawa’s younger sister, her sister’s husband, her two younger brothers and, more often than not, a couple of boys from the local football team. We would typically be sitting around a big plate of *thiebou dieune* (rice with fish, Senegal’s national dish), and the conversations were, like the lunch, shared in the group. It was thus not difficult to overlook two people who were not on speaking terms with each other. Thirdly, and this related to the nature of the conversations as group conversations, was that they were held in Wolof, with occasional translations for me in French. As my command of Wolof only allowed me to grasp the main topic of conversations, I could not possibly understand possible tensions between people in the conversation. Unfortunately, I was either too focused on trying to grasp as much as possible what was being said, or I drifted away, daydreaming and reflecting on what I had just heard and experienced. Not having remarked the silence between Hawa and her mother can be brought forward as a general limitation to my research, as one can question the

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<sup>18</sup> WhatsApp audio message from Hawa, 19 February 2018.

extent to which I can conduct participant observations if I cannot participate in group conversations that are held in Wolof. I will elaborate on the issue of language further in the next section.

Ultimately, the aim of these various methods of data collection is to assemble biographical narratives about young women's lifeworlds. These narratives "do not in fact take us towards the Sexual Truth: towards a full, absolute, real grasping of our essential, inner sexual nature... [Instead,] *sexual stories can be seen as issues to be investigated in their own right*". (Plummer quoted in Spronk 2012: 41, emphasis in original). I do not claim to hold the truth about the ways in which same-sex intimacies are navigated by women in Senegal. Rather, I offer empirical examples of some of the ways in which some young women in urban Senegal navigate same-sex intimacies. Furthermore, I acknowledge that my writing is based on my interpretations of what I observed and what people told me, which I hope "furnishes opportunities for understanding, rather than" establishing truths (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 9).

### **Language, terminology, and ethics**

Language issues form one of the key limitations of this research. I did not speak any Wolof before I went to the field, and in the field, I did not focus on learning Wolof. Instead, I was still improving my French, which is neither my first, nor my second language. Although French is the official national language of Senegal, this research would have greatly benefited from a command of the Wolof language, for at least two reasons. First, some informants were now 'inaccessible' to me. Some girls on the football team hardly spoke French as a result of a lack of education, so I could not talk with them about my research. Second, whenever I was at people's homes, I could not grasp what people were saying to each other if they did not explicitly include me in the conversation, apart from understanding what was the main topic of discussion. Because of an initial selection of informants in the football team based on the question whether they spoke French (albeit not fluently always), I did not need or look for a research assistant. In two specific cases, the informant I took with me to an appointment, helped translate for me afterwards. One case was when Nafissatou Cissé, chair of the queer women's organisation Nio Far, took me to a visit to an elderly lady who did not speak any French. In this case, I am sure that the fact that Nafissatou turned out to be talking to this lady, rather than I (although I asked the questions, which Nafissatou then translated for the woman), led to much more interesting information. This lady trusted Nafissatou fully, as they have been longtime friends. On the contrary, it was the first time that she met me, and she had in fact asked Nafissatou: "I hope she is not a lesbian and here to talk about it?" Nafissatou had assured her that I was not here to talk about "it", but was rather interested to talk to her about women's *túr*, a rotating credit scheme often organised in combination with a social dance party, of which she had been a part of for a long time. When Nafissatou and I walked back home from our appointment with this lady, I found out that the lady had been revealing some intimate same-sex practices that had occurred between women in these *túr*. In another case, I visited Diaga and her girlfriend Adiouma with my informant Lafia. Lafia knew both of them well and was aware of some of the difficulties Diaga and Adiouma had encountered in their relationship, because of Adiouma's marriage to a man whom she wants to divorce. I had met Diaga before, but it was the first time I was meeting Adiouma. In fact, I did not even know that I was going to meet her, but when I thought I had reached Diaga's place, it appeared that she had directed me to Adiouma's place - or in fact that of Adiouma's mother, where Adiouma was staying now that she increasingly found herself in trouble with her husband. In both cases, it proved very helpful for the course of the

conversations that I was accompanied by someone who these women knew well. Not only did this allow for a depth in conversation because the conversations could now (partly) be held in Wolof, the presence of someone they trusted led to much more detailed accounts of their experiences.

Remarkable was my interlocutors' use of a mix of Wolof, English and French words to describe their experiences with and expressions of gender and same-sex intimacies. Their amalgamations of languages and terminology reflects these young women's multiple positionalities in Senegalese society, which heavily influenced by French colonial domination, and their links and aspirations to a modern cosmopolitanism. The terms *jump* and *sexy* are reflexive of this modern, cosmopolitan aspiration. Despite the fact that I communicated with my informants in French, a number of popular, widely used words referring to love and sexuality, are always expressed in Wolof. On the other hand, some words were always expressed in French, and there was no Wolof equivalent. In fact, people in Dakar and other urban areas in Senegal speak an urban, Frenchified Wolof, blending in some French words (Cruise O'Brien 1998: 38). For example, calling a girl a *garçon manqué* to refer to a girl who dresses and/or behaves in a somewhat masculine fashion - what in English is called a 'tomboy' - was always expressed in French. In Wolof, you can say *góor* (man) to a girl, to let her know that she dresses/behaves like a man, but it does not have the same connotation as *garçon manqué*, which is a more teasing way of telling her she is not behaving the way a proper girl should. However, she is also not a man/boy, but a boy lacking (*manquer*) something. Translating such concepts always carries the risk of mistranslations and misinterpretations. Translations occur at least twice in my research: my informants translate in their heads what they say to me from Wolof (or another mother tongue) to French, and in the process of writing this thesis, I translated what I heard in French to English. Throughout this thesis, I make use of their terminology as much as possible, providing English translations or approximations to keep the text readable for a wide audience. In some cases I decided to add the French or Wolof words my interlocutors expressed to my English text, either to account for the English translation made because it is not necessarily an expression or word that is common in discussions in English about the topic, or because I felt that the Wolof or French word better conveyed the meaning of what my informants said.

Another concern of language that I had to navigate, was the choice of terminology. How do I describe my interlocutors' lives in a way that stays true to their self-understandings and choice of words, while simultaneously positioning my research in the academic debate on gender and sexuality? My interlocutors all used the word lesbian to describe themselves, although this was often accompanied by "*je vis ça*" (I live that). Lesbian was used more as an adverb than as a noun, hinting at the discrepancy in understandings of sexuality between Senegal (and many other regions in the world) and the West, where sexuality is largely understood in terms of a more or less fixed identity: we can *be* lesbian, whereas many Senegalese may *act* lesbian. In the West, much scholarly work on gay and lesbian language, which developed particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, has "focused on how language conveys identity, not on how it conveys sexuality or desire" (Kulick 2000: 271-272; see also Cameron and Kulick 2003). A more recent shift in academia to queer language attempts to move away from identities to an understanding of the ways in which language can be used to create subject positions. Because of the common association of lesbian with identity in the West, I have chosen to call my interlocutors queer rather than lesbian. Although I have never heard any Senegalese use the word queer, I do believe that the term echoes the experiences of my interlocutors fairly well. Moreover, queer as a term encompasses the sheer diversity of gender and sexual

expressions and positionalities, a reality that is important to bear in mind in the context of this modest research. In a similar fashion, and following Kulick (2000) who warns for a misreading of “sexuality” as “sexual identity”, I have opted for the term intimacies instead of sexuality for two reasons. First, the concept does not carry the same ideological implications as the term lesbian or even sexuality, as terms that are particularly articulated as distinct categories or even identities. Second, the term intimacies, like queer, allows for a broader range of intimate relationships to be considered, some of which may be understood as sexual, and others not. Furthermore, throughout this thesis, I refer to my interlocutors as young women, indicative of their relative position in society. Rather than referring to a neatly delineated age category, I refer to young, or youth, as a category imbued with social meaning. As unmarried women, my interlocutors somehow remain ‘children’, and they enjoy little power or authority in the household. They often refer to themselves and their friends as *filles* (girls), whereas married women of the same age are referred to as *femmes* (women). Women may also consciously invoke the category of youth as it enables them to go out into the city, engage in leisure activities, try to find a job and fend for themselves. In chapter four, I will elaborate on the notion of youth as social shifters (Durham 2000; 2004) to understand how and why the category of youth is invoked both by young women themselves and by family members.

The choice of terminology is only one of the ethical questions I was faced with. In the section on navigating proximity and distance, I reflected on the tensions in the relationship between researcher and informants, including some of the ethical challenges this brings. I would now like to add some ethical concerns that arise when a publicly available academic text emerges out of the conversations and activities that I shared with informants over the course of my fieldwork. The researcher is confronted with ethical dilemmas at all stages of the research. During the writing phase, one of the dilemmas that may surface is the question whether or not to include certain data in the analysis. The dilemma is the degree to which intellectual sincerity, or “narrative fidelity” (Polletta 2009: 34) can be upheld, versus where the inclusion of certain data should be omitted in order to safeguard informants. Currier called this dilemma the “representational ethics” of research (2011: 464) and it involves the careful navigation of giving visibility to informants while simultaneously avoiding jeopardising their secrets and engagements, maintaining the safety of individuals, and by contextualising their narratives. In the context of this research, giving visibility to the voices of queer women is important because their voices are virtually absent in public as well as scholarly debates about sexuality. However, given the social and political vulnerability of certain expressions of dissidence, some forms of visibility might actually harm these women. Therefore, I have given pseudonyms to all my interlocutors to maintain their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they shared with me. As certain other details of their life might give away who they are as well, I have omitted mentioning the exact neighbourhoods where my interlocutors lived. Furthermore, throughout this thesis I keep referring to “the football team” that I joined in Dakar, to avoid making the information and experiences I obtained from participating in their events traceable to specific football players who are on that team. Likewise, I have chosen to refrain from mentioning the two other cities to which I expanded my fieldwork, drawing on how interlocutors informed me about the different levels of relative anonymity possible in Dakar and their cities. These cities are much smaller than Dakar, and therefore mentioning them might make my interlocutors there fairly easily traceable. I have furthermore changed the names of the two queer women’s organisations that I followed, Nio Far<sup>19</sup> and Yaakaare<sup>20</sup>. Although Nio

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<sup>19</sup> French: On est ensemble; English: We are together.

Far is the only officially registered queer women's organisation, I do not out the organisation by writing about it. The organisation can be found online, not with their own website, but as part of a larger network of West African queer organisations. The organisation also features in a radio report published by Radio France Internationale (RFI) in 2017<sup>21</sup>. Yaakaare is an organisation that is not specifically registered as a queer organisation, but it actively works with and for queer women as well.

Furthermore, being aware of the fact that I have received much more from all of my interlocutors than I will ever be able to reciprocate, I see it as my responsibility to offer my interlocutors the opportunity to see the end result of the writing based on my fieldwork with them. Consequently, I have decided to translate the abstract and conclusion of my thesis to French, and bring a printed copy of this translation in addition to the full English version to Senegal as I return to Dakar after the submission of this thesis. A number of interlocutors will not be able to read this text as they do not read French, and for others the academic text may not make too much sense. However, by presenting them the partial result, I do show them the outcome of the fieldwork, and encourage a reflection on our interactions. Moreover, it responds to the wish of the *Alliance Nationale des Communautés pour la Santé* (ANCS) to have access to my thesis.

### **Theoretical considerations**

To understand the ways in which young women in urban Senegal navigate same-sex intimacies, a number of theoretical concepts have been helpful. I use Henrik Vigh's conceptualisation of social navigation to understand how enacting same-sex intimacies is a twofold process of balancing personal desires and social expectations. As the social environment is an ambiguous terrain, I will show how women navigate their same-sex intimacies in different ways in various social spaces, drawing on Lefebvre's conceptual triad of social spaces as spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. I will look at the way gender is expressed differently in these social spaces by investigating various bodily practices, to come to a conclusion about the relationality and fluid nature of the navigation of same-sex intimacies by young women in urban Senegal.

### **Social navigation**

This research builds predominantly on the concept of social navigation. Henrik Vigh, in collaboration with colleagues, has worked out the concept of social navigation in a number of works (Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006; Vigh 2006; 2009). Ultimately, the objective of researching social navigation in the context of my research on women's same-sex intimacies is to further knowledge about the social opportunities and aspirations of women and simultaneously take into account the (changing) social, political and economic environment in which these women live. Social navigation is an interesting concept because it grants us an alternative perspective on practice and the intersection between agency, social forces and change. Because social navigation emphasises the interactivity of practice and the (social, political, economic) environment, its use enables us to see how people move and manage their affairs within an ever-changing society. In fact, we are all engaged in coping with social pressure and social change and calibrate these as we discover possibilities in the present and envision our future trajectories. It is this everydayness of social navigation that makes it an empirically

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<sup>20</sup> French: Espoir; English: Hope.

<sup>21</sup> RFI. 2017. "Etre femme et gay au Sénégal: les lesbiennes cherchent leur place." 29 June 2017.

useful concept, as well as a valid theoretical concept about the radical interactivity of practices. The radical interactivity of “motion within motion” (Vigh 2009: 425) implies a constant dialogue between agents, who assess present possibilities and imagine future opportunities, and social formations. In the context of this research, social formations include changing discourses, such as in increasingly vocal international discourse of sexual rights via NGOs and its counterpart, an increasingly conservative religious or ‘traditional cultural’ discourse of heterosexual normativity. Agents, in this research context young, unmarried women, have to adapt to such changes and navigate their aspirations in relation to societal expectations.

In Senegal, polygyny has been a resilient aspect of married life for many. Dial (2008) found that many Muslim Senegalese women expect themselves to be in a polygynous marriage at some point in their lives. Neveu Kringelbach (2016) argues that marriage and procreation indeed remain central to a woman’s status. However, with increasing globalisation, ideas about marriage may shift. Among the younger generation of women in urban Senegal, the polygynous society and the ideal of marriage as a contract between families loses popularity (Gilbert 2017). Companionate marriage, emphasising emotional proximity between two individuals, is what (urban) Senegalese women increasingly wish for (Neveu Kringelbach 2016). However, this choice is perceived as individualistic and therefore morally ambiguous, let alone the choice not to marry in case you do not want to marry a man at all. Vigh’s theorisation of social navigation builds on Michael Jackson’s (1998) concept of ‘manoeuvring’, but it looks beyond the present to include future trajectories. Navigation refers to moving “through both the socially *immediate* and the socially *imagined*” (Vigh 2009: 425, emphasis in original). We all navigate, but the necessity of having to move in relation to the movement of social forces depends on the speed and volatility of change as well as the level of exposure or shelter that our given social positions and ‘capital’ grants us (Evans and Furlong 1997).

Vigh puts forward various ways in which youth navigate, but he leaves the notion of play (ludism) as a means to navigate sensitive issues unexplored. For my interlocutors however, the ability to play was crucial for the successful social navigation of same-sex intimacies, and vice versa. The ability to play with people’s perceptions of what is friendly and what is also erotic behaviour, by blurring the boundaries between homosocial and homosexual behaviour, significantly enhances women’s space to navigate. The notion of play in culture has been worked out by Johan Huizinga (1938) in his seminal work *Homo ludens*. According to Huizinga, play refers to a voluntary action that takes place within certain boundaries of time and space. Although it is a voluntary engagement, players accept the rules of the game and they play to achieve a sense of joy and excitement, all the while accompanied by a consciousness of “being different” than “normal life” (ibid.: 56, my translation). The play-element of culture, he contends, is characterised by uncertainty and the ensuing legitimacy to improvise and innovate, encouraged by indeterminacy. Other scholars, building on Huizinga, have discussed the seriousness of play<sup>22</sup> (see Owens 2012 for the introduction to a special issue on serious play). However, much as play is lacking from Vigh’s analyses of social navigation, so do analyses of (serious) play ignore its potential for the social navigation of sensitive issues. The element of play in the lives of my interlocutors evokes an interesting tension: on the one hand, play may be understood as an aspect of youthfulness and used as a cover to ‘play around’ with young women; on the other hand, for many young women their youthful ‘playing around’ is dead

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<sup>22</sup> In 2011, the Midwest Modern Language Association organised the conference “Play...no seriously” and in 2012, and a special issue of the Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association in 2012 collected essays that critically examined the seriousness of play.

serious and is part of their shaping of their future and of building personhood. Consequently, 'serious' and 'play' cannot be dissociated from one another. Taking into account how the aspects of the uncertainty and indeterminacy of play resonate with the foundations for social navigation, I will take into account play as a disposition in the social life of my interlocutors.

Therefore, following Vigh (2006; 2009) I study young women both as social being and social becoming. In other words, I will look at the ways in which these women are positioned in society as well as how they seek to (re)position themselves. Generations are imbued with positions of power, authority and social worth, and the ways in which people invoke the concept of youth relates to an attempt to situate themselves and others in society in relation to such notions of power, authority and social social worth. Youth is not invoked as a static category, but as a dynamic and debatable idea that serves as a reminder of relations of power in society. This entails that youth can function as social shifters (Durham 2000; 2004) and young women may employ this idea of youth to negotiate their position in society. I will apply this notion of youth as social shifters further in chapter four, when I discuss manifestations of gender on the football field. In chapter three, I will touch upon the various ways in which play is drawn upon as a tactic to navigate same-sex intimacies in homosocial settings. Generally speaking, the ways in which young women navigate socially demonstrate their attempts to secure decent lives for themselves. In doing so, they create a sense of being at home in the world (see Jackson 1995).

### **Social spaces**

The social environment that Vigh discusses should not only be understood to be changing with time, but also with space. Different spaces require and enable different forms of behaviour. My informants, who live in an urban setting, engage in multiple spaces. Certain social spaces, such as queer parties and queer organisations, are actively constructed by women to enhance their space for manoeuvre. Others, such as the home, are spaces that are part of everyday social life and here, queer women seek ways to navigate their same-sex intimacies discreetly. A space such as the football field is not particularly constructed as a queer space, but attracts girls and women with masculine styles. As a result, it has become a space where gender and sexual dissidence abound. To understand the importance of these various social spaces for the navigation of same-sex intimacies, I will elaborate on Lefebvre's (1991[1974]) conceptualisation of social space.

In *The production of space*, Henri Lefebvre comes with a definition of social space as "the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object" (1991: 73). This outcome encompasses interrelationships and the (relative) order and disorder that these produce. He argued that social space is a social product. To understand what he meant with this, it is important to define 'product'. Rather than a Marxist understanding of product as things produced by labourers, Lefebvre wields a broader conceptualisation of production - and I follow this - as "a multiplicity of works and a great diversity of forms, even forms that do not bear the stamp of the producer or of the production process" (ibid.: 68). A part of this multiplicity of works is that people produce their own lifeworlds; hence this production is tied to personal and collective aspirations and imaginations of a desired world. The productive and creative process of individuals moving through space then, is characterised by a simultaneous reproduction, contestation, and negotiation of spaces and the practices they promote and inhibit. Lefebvre distinguished three dimensions of social space, which he captured in a conceptual triad. These are *spatial practice*, relating to space as perceived; the interrelations between institutional practices and everyday experiences and acts. The second is *representations of space*, which pertains to space as conceived; space as the dominant

discourses. The third is *spaces of representation*, which is the lived space, the space that people seek to create through an appropriation of their environment. This lived space is a terrain of struggle as people seek to realise themselves as persons. It is this last conceptualisation of space that is the focus of this research.

These social spaces are continuously being reproduced through the interactions that take place between the actors within these spaces, as well as in the relations to, and interactions with, the wider social world. Or, as Bourdieu put it aptly, "it is the habitus that makes the habitat" (2018: 111). Bourdieu defined habitus as "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" and as producing practice (1977: 78). Throughout this thesis, I will look at the ways in which young women relate to the various social spaces that they inhabit. I will look at the ways in which various social spaces, both the more private and the more public, contain what Lefebvre (1991) called a spatial code. The spatial code, constructed through both verbal signs (words uttered and their ascribed meanings through a signifying process) and non-verbal signs, help us to understand how social spaces are lived, understood and produced (ibid.: 47-48). Relationality is inherent to social space, as people relate to other agents within a social space as well as to people outside of this social space. I analyse social spaces as they become activated by young women, building on De Certeau's analysis of everyday "walking in the city" (1984: 91). In this thesis I will demonstrate the multiple ways in which young women navigate through existing social spaces and create new ones. In their manoeuvring through existing spaces, they may engage in what De Certeau called the 'tactical' appropriations of space, with people being "on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing"" (1984: xix). As for the creation of new spaces, it can be argued that "the city features as the quintessential setting for the making of gay spaces" (Reid 2013: 67-68). Indeed, the urban context in which I have conducted this research; mainly in Dakar, but also in two other cities, provided opportunities for the organisation of events away from the curious or suspicious gaze of family members, which a rural setting would not provide.

Lefebvre furthermore understood space as a spatio-temporal configuration and he sought to conceptualise not only the spatiality of the body, but also its temporality. He distinguished two types of temporality, of repetition: the cyclical and the linear. The cyclical, he argued, pertains to ancient societies in which social life is constructed around cycles such as seasons, generations, day and night. Linear time then, is mechanical, a constrained and colonised repetition of the space of the commodity and the state. The latter is the dominant temporality of our modern times, in which repeated acts sustain a social order. Even though linear time is the dominant temporality, the cyclical has never disappeared, because the body does not submit to either of the two analytic ideals. Lefebvre argues that people's emotions, desires and private life add the cyclical dimension to the linearity of everyday routines. Linear temporality, as a mechanised repetition of acts, is also represented in ideals of linear developments of life stages, where social adulthood is attained through marriage and parenthood. However, desires and emotions do not neatly follow this linear path, and they may interfere or creep in between linear repetitions, which "is why we - as well as the spatial body - can talk about a *temporal body* living out the different temporalities of self and society and, in this process, preserving and developing difference within repetition" (Simonsen 2005: 8, emphasis in original). As part of the tactics of navigation, several examples in this thesis show this temporality of the body, as women seek to diverge from the social order and its concomitant linear temporality.

Bourdieu's expression "it is the habitus that makes the habitat" draws the connection between social space and embodiment, something that I briefly want to explore before turning

to the empirical material that will shed light on how precisely the concepts that I have outlined matter in the lives of young women in urban Senegal as they navigate their same-sex intimacies. Lefebvre makes an important contribution to the understanding of space as generated by bodies. He argues that bodies simultaneously produce themselves in space, as well as producing this space. Seeing this generative side of bodies in relation to space allows us to see social spaces not only as “a space of ‘no’, but also a space of ‘yes’, of affirmation of life” (Simonsen 2005: 4). Popular discourse on homosexuality tends to emphasise the ‘no’, the restrictions society has put in place for sexual and gender dissidents. Without negating the stress many people do feel for not being able to choose to live their life the way they wish, this research takes a different angle, and seeks to contribute to this generative, creative capacity of bodies, of people. The centrality of the body in all three dimensions of space allows us to see the body as a mediator between these dimensions. Through its creative, generative capacities in lived space, people engage with the dominant discourses and with perceived space, sometimes breaking with or challenging everyday routines. The relevance of Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of bodies and social space then is that bodily practices generate social constructions of space and time, whereby self-understandings become embodied. Furthermore, with his theorisation on the production of space he transcends the two dominant, opposing analyses of the body as lived and generative on the one hand, and the body as acted upon and inscribed from the outside on the other hand.

It is important to consider the body when investigating social spaces, because “the body constitutes a practico-sensory realm that is performed in the spatio-temporal rhythms of everyday life” (ibid.: 11). Following Grosz (1994: 23) who stated that “the body is neither - while also being both - the private or the public, self or other, natural or cultural, psychical or social, instinctive or learned, genetically or environmentally determined”, I explore how young women conceive and use their bodies in various ways in different contexts. In fact, in all these social spaces gender is crucial for a respectable navigation of the individual in relation to the others in that space, and bodily acts, gender expressions and gender norms are interconnected as they constitute a terrain of negotiating respectability. Daily social interactions require from individuals that they control the expressions, movements and communications of their body. Hence, in (movements of) the body we see both cultural and societal expectations, as well as personal needs and desires being acted out. Rather than understanding persons as moving and manoeuvring in quite static spaces, Elizabeth Grosz pointed at the two-way process that characterises people’s engagements in space. She described the relation between bodies and cities as an interface, a “fundamentally disunified series of systems and interconnections, a series of disparate flows, energies, events or entities, and spaces, brought together or drawn apart in more or less temporary alignments (1992: 248). In other words, as people embody characteristics of their environment, so do the different spaces in cities transform with the activity of the people inhabiting that space. The duality in Lefebvre’s understanding of the relation between bodies and space - space as both producing and as a product of the body - allows us to study how the body functions as a producer of difference through the creation of new spaces and constellations derived from desire and joy.

## **Gender**

When focusing on bodies, and bodily experiences in particular, it is impossible to neglect gender. Not only is it a key organising principle in society, but the way it is expressed and experienced differently in different social spaces attests to its relationality and its role in the navigation of same-sex intimacies. Rather than seeing the young women in my research as

women simply because they have been labelled as such at birth, leading to a set of norms for social behaviour, we should investigate the various ways in which 'women' is invoked as a category, and how it is molded, contested and performed, in relation to other groups and individuals in the various social spaces that these young women frequent. We need to do so because an acknowledgement of bodily experiences as gendered enhances our understanding of young women's self-understanding. The relevance of an investigation of the body in relation to same-sex intimacies and social spaces is, beyond the fact that bodies are obviously physically involved and present in same-sex intimacies and in social space, that bodies speak and at the same time enable silence. The body, as it moves through space, communicates through ways of dress, ways of walking, and gestures. In other words, it communicates the embodied practices that constitute habitus. The body thus serves as a display of gendered self-expressions, and I will investigate the ways in which young women relate to their gendered bodies in chapters three and four, when I discuss manifestations of masculinity (*jump*) and femininity (*sexy*). Despite its visibility, the nonverbal character of bodily expressions follows the value of *sutura* and a certain unspokenness of practices. Moreover, bodily practices can serve to conceal parts of the body that are revealed in other situations, in order to maintain a sense of respectability. In chapter three, I will show how a young woman like Hawa chooses to cover her shaved head with a headscarf whenever she visits her father, out of respect for him and his ideas about appropriate behaviour for women. Gender is indispensable for understanding discourses on sexuality, because it "is an essential part of how people understand themselves, and it refers to social understandings and representations of being wo/man" (Spronk 2012: 33). Gender is constructed in hegemonic norms, structuring the ways people (ought to) behave (ibid.), but is simultaneously being challenged by manifestations of gender by *jump* and *sexy* who engage with masculinity and femininity in different ways. Being a woman or man is crucial to wellbeing and it is an uneven path during one's life course. Consequently, femininity and masculinity are relational and shift over time and with social circumstances (Spronk 2017). In as much as *jump* and *sexy* manifestations of gender are materialised through physical appearance and gait, they reflect an ideal, a "category of the imagination" (Reid 2013: 53) rather than absolute differences and divisions between masculine and feminine women in their relationships with each other.

Spronk (2014b) argues that corporeal experiences constitute people's sense of self; women's experiences in homosocial spaces pertaining to the body thus contribute to creating a sense of being-in-the-world as a woman. Experiences of being-in-the-world come about through intersubjectivity, meaning that people's understanding of their world and of themselves is "an emergent and perpetually renegotiated outcome of social interaction, dialogue, and engagement" (Jackson 2011: xiii). In other words, people define who they are in relation to others, and satisfaction with who they are comes from "being more than merely oneself, but of being part of a greater whole" (ibid.: 161). Csordas (1990) similarly argues how the self comes into being through the embodiment of social context and how the body mediates culture and makes it real, emphasising the "essentially intersubjective and social nature of bodily experience" (1990: 144). What it means to be a woman intersects with other aspects of social life, such as being young, or old; urban, or rural; Senegalese. This research will thus focus on corporeal experiences in the above-mentioned female homosocial spaces to analyse the dialogic relation between culture and self as, following Spronk (2014b), "focusing on corporeal and erotic interactions provides a productive starting point to theorise the performative aspects and intersubjective meaning-making of sexuality" (ibid.: 6).

## **Conclusion**

Through ethnography, with a strong focus on participant observation, I have attempted to unravel some of the everyday complexities of young women's same-sex intimacies in urban Senegal. Throughout the thesis, I will uncover the contradictory meanings and experiences of young women as they seek on the one hand to expand their possibilities for enjoyment and leisure time as young women, and how they on the other hand experience their dependence on family and the expectations this generates as a burden. Following from this, I will draw on notions of bodies and gender as crucial aspects of being-in-the-world, in addition to the main conceptual pillars of this thesis: social navigation and social spaces. Navigating both the existing spaces, as well as appropriating spaces in "trying to secure decent lives for themselves" (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006: 21), I will demonstrate how these different spaces join the social dynamics of a network of queer women. They form central loci of urban social reproduction, in which symbolic performances of gendered bodies and social organisation come together (Newell 2012: 100). In the next chapter, I will examine homosociality as a characteristic of many spaces. Understanding how homosociality complicates a distinction between private and public spaces furthers our understanding of the variety of tactics that young women can employ to navigate their same-sex intimacies.

## ***“On faisait tout ensemble<sup>23</sup>”*: queering homosociality**

*Mame Diarra, Nabou, Lafia and I hung in the bedroom of Mame Diarra and Lafia. Lafia asked me to rest my head on her lap. As I did, she started caressing my head. Meanwhile, Nabou and Mame Diarra were chatting on the bedside, their legs touching. When an instant later Nabou said she was tired and wanted to go home, Mame Diarra responded by saying: “you have to stay, I want you”<sup>24</sup>. She hugged Nabou, squeezed her butt and moved her hips forward, rubbing her crotch against Nabou’s, mimicking sexual intercourse. She then turned to me, hugged me and, winking, said my boobs rather than my butt lended themselves to being squeezed - and so she did. When, in a very different context, Nabou and I talked about Mame Diarra, she said that Mame Diarra sometimes kissed her, when it had been a while since she had kissed someone and she felt like doing it. Afterwards, she would say that she prefers to kiss men, while also saying that Nabou is a very good kisser.*

I was initially very surprised to hear this about Mame Diarra. I had come to know Mame Diarra as being decidedly disapproving of homosexuality. To me, this stance did not match the behaviour I witnessed and was told about by Nabou. Whenever I was with Lafia (23 years old) and Mame Diarra (26 years old), who both lived with their mother, their stepfather, and Mame Diarra’s two-year-old son, I always heard Mame Diarra talk about potential boyfriends. She is very actively engaged in the search for a boyfriend, preferably *toubab* (foreigner, white person), through social media networks and she is not reluctant to express that homosexuality is an abomination. In the possession of a healthy dose of curiosity, she has repeatedly questioned Nabou’s sexuality, asking her why she never engages in the discussions about men. In a similar fashion, her wish to diagnose the problem that she had detected with me - short hair and a masculine attitude while being in need of a (Senegalese) husband - reflects Senegalese norms of gendered and sexual behaviour. What we should understand from this apparent contradiction between her ideas about homosexuality and her habit to occasionally kiss Nabou, is first of all that discourse does not equal practice, and that her (sexual) acts do not contradict her ideas. Same-sex erotic practices that emerge out of friendships should not simply be understood as budding homosexual love, but rather as a possibility within homosocial environments. Secondly, the ubiquity of homosociality and the aforementioned intimacies led me to wonder about the possibilities of enacting same-sex desires in different homosocial spaces. Consequently, the following question guides the analysis of this chapter: how does the normalcy of homosociality

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<sup>23</sup> English: “We did everything together”.

<sup>24</sup> “Il faut rester, j’ai envie de toi.” Although conversations were usually held in Wolof, of which I only understood some words, this was said in French, I think to provoke my response.

provide room for the navigation of same-sex intimacies? The objective of this chapter is to understand the versatility of tactics of the social navigation of same-sex intimacies in various social spaces. Moreover, I will explore how so-called public and private spaces relate to each other. How do women make public spaces more private to conceal intimacies between women, and how do they turn supposedly more private spaces such as the home into more public spaces, as intimacies are negotiated and alluded to? Following De Certeau, I will look at the ways in which urban spaces are (re)produced through everyday practices of “walking in the city” (1984: 91). The various ways of reappropriating space are “ruses of other interests and desires” (ibid.: xviii) that “compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator” (ibid.: 93), yet that create networks in which the trajectories of queer women intersect. The heterogeneity of empirical examples that this chapter presents gives insight into the diverse tactics of social navigation because “[w]alking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it “speaks” (ibid.: 99). Young queer women in Senegal walk through a multiplicity of social spaces and they adapt their behaviour according to each specific context, thereby alternately affirming, trying out, respecting or transgressing societal expectations of them as women. By examining the “rhetoric of walking” (ibid.: 101), this chapter will demonstrate how young women skillfully navigate same-sex intimacies in a multiplicity of homosocial spaces.

The prevalence of homosocial spaces in Senegal is partly the result of the gendered structuring of society that classifies certain spaces as the domain of women, and others as the domain of men. In general, one can say that public spaces are the domain of men and private spaces are the domain of women. When demonstrating how women interact with each other in homosocial spaces it becomes clear that the distinction public versus private is a false one, because various tactics of navigation create bonds of secrecy between people which make public spaces more private. Similarly, the private space can become a relatively public stage when others are invited to join in a supposedly private activity, or when private spaces form the setting in which public norms are negotiated and contested. Key to the social navigation of same-sex intimacies in homosocial settings is play, as it blurs boundaries between what is friendly and what is also erotic behaviour. With jokes, hints, and unspoken allusions to sexuality, women create space to enact same-sex desires. However, navigating same-sex intimacies extends beyond play in existing homosocial (private) spaces, as women seek more space to discuss and enact same-sex desires, and because there are limits to what one can achieve with play in these spaces. New social spaces are carved out by queer women, such as queer clubbing and exclusively queer birthday parties.

Various studies on homosocial environments have shown how intimate friendships may include various degrees of erotic practices. In fact, in her study of female same-sex practices in Lesotho, Kendall concluded “that women in homosocial environments are likely to explore homosexual expression” (1998: 228). Gunkel (2009), in her article about “mummy-baby” relationships in South Africa, argues that places such as boarding schools provide spaces where homosociality, same-sex intimacies and erotic practices coalesce. Spronk similarly argues how “growing up in socially intensive and extensive relations [...] and especially homosociality play a constitutive role in the processes of becoming sexual” (2017: 13). I will start with a short reference to the importance of women’s homosocial spaces in the context of *túr*, credit rotation that was often simultaneously organised as a social dance party. However, *túr* with their social dance parties are increasingly replaced by more financially oriented *tontines*<sup>25</sup> (the general

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<sup>25</sup> Credit rotation schemes organised among women. In Senegal, they are also known as *natt*. French: *cotisation*.

name for various kinds of credit rotation schemes organised among women). The relevance of the social opportunities such *túr* offered for the exploration of female sexuality and the enactment of same-sex desires, provides a context from which to explore the importance of other homosocial spaces. For the younger generation of women that I followed in this research, other spaces have become appropriated and constructed for the navigation of same-sex intimacies.

### ***Túr*: a female homosocial space historically**

In her research about women's *tours* (*túr*<sup>26</sup>), Morales-Libove (2005) found that such organised ways of saving money that simultaneously took shape as social dance parties provided women a moment to let go of social responsibilities and gendered morality. Particularly the dance aspect of *túr* enabled women to manoeuvre within restrictive societal expectations, balancing virtuous yet sexually skillful behaviour, in order to avoid being labeled a *caga* (prostitute). Morales-Libove describes how the dances these women performed were often somewhat erotic. She describes a situation where a woman's erotic dancing, briefly uncovering her genitals, was caught on camera. The erotic dance itself was not perceived as a transgression, but the fact that it was caught on camera, which would make it visible outside the confined space of the women's *túr*, was conceived as problematic (ibid.: 189). Although Morales-Libove was a witness to the erotic dances between women, she refrained from asking questions about sexuality. She argued that the erotic dances raised questions about the effects of these dances on the sexual desires of women. However, she did not ask about them "due to the sensitivity of talking about sex in Dakar" (ibid.: 203, footnote). Although it was beyond the scope of this research to delve into women's *túr*, I will show that, contrary to what Morales-Libove argues, talking about sexuality is not at all so sensitive in homosocial spaces, because such spaces provide a sense of security to talk about otherwise sensitive topics as a result of their relative homogeneity in composition - all women, and often in the same age category.

When I was introduced to Aminata, a woman of about 80 years old, by Nafissatou, she explained to me her experiences with *túr* when she was younger<sup>27</sup>. These tours, she argued, were organised among a *masse* (age cohort) of women, the members of which were invited by cooptation. About 20 to 30 women of the same cohort, with an age difference of a maximum of ten years, gathered regularly, usually monthly. During gatherings they shared products and money and, more importantly, they got to spend time together. The proximity of the women in terms of age at a *túr* eases sexuality as a topic of discussion, a topic that is regarded taboo particularly in intergenerational discussions (Alber, Van der Geest and Whyte 2008). The rencontres usually lasted for about three to four hours, after which the women had to return to their homes to prepare dinner. Importantly, Aminata explained that within the group, pairs were formed, whereby every woman chose a best friend, a *ndeye dikké*<sup>28</sup>, with whom "a lot was shared[...]including the shaving of each other's vagina"<sup>29</sup>. This intimate practice bears resemblance to the practice of labia elongation in Uganda, described by Tamale (2008) in her study on sexual pleasure among the Baganda. The World Health Organisation (WHO) regards the practice as genital mutilation, but Tamale convincingly argues that it is the failure of the

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<sup>26</sup> The Wolof word *túr* is derived from the French word 'tour', referring to how women take turns hosting the tours as well as in obtaining the collected amount of money.

<sup>27</sup> The following information about the organisation of *túr*, is derived from my conversation with her and a reflection on this conversation with Nafissatou Cissé thereafter, 26 November 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Meaning "the mother of my choosing" or "twin" (Kane 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Conversation recounted by Nafissatou, 26 November 2017.

WHO to recognise that the practice in fact enhances women's sexual pleasure and expands their perceptions of themselves as sexual beings. In a documentary episode of "Sunny Side of Sex", Bergman (2011) shows that the cultural practice of labia elongation involves varying degrees of eroticism between women. In other words, it provides an opportunity for women to engage in same-sex intimacies without being frowned upon. Aminata argued that the social aspect of these meetings had largely disappeared from the agenda of women in Dakar, and that the focus was now largely on the financial aspect of it: *tontines* (credit rotations). She argued that the gradual disappearing of the social aspect of *túr* is the result of changing circumstances in the urban setting: women increasingly work outside the house to add to the household income, by selling food or drinks on the road for example. In this as well as subsequent chapters, I will demonstrate how young women today have carved out other homosocial spaces for the navigation of same-sex intimacies. Furthermore, I will show how in the house, the traditional domain of women and so a largely homosocial space, young women find room for same-sex intimacies.

### ***"Tu es un travesti!" Jump and sexy as ambiguous constellations of gender***

I had been put in touch with Penda by Nafissatou Cissé, the chair of Nio Far, the country's only registered organisation for queer women. Penda, who is 24 years old, does not live in Dakar, but she works with Nafissatou with the aim to coordinate and organise the work of Nio Far in the city where Penda lives. She rents a room in an apartment with a number of other tenants, and she shares a room with her girlfriend Kiné. Kiné plays in the same football team as Nabou, and therefore Nabou joined me when I visited Penda and Kiné on the 10th of January. The following vignette describes how our conversation unfolded this day.

*Contrary to what I normally wore, and how Penda had always seen me - in a simple t-shirt, loose shorts and sandals - I was wearing a long dress of a colourful wax print, custom-made for me by a Dakarois tailor. The occasion was the funeral of Nabou's grandmother the day before, an occasion that requires traditional dress; and for women that means a boubou<sup>30</sup>, dress or taille basse - a variety of styles, but all feminine and colourful. I received a lot of remarks on my dress, perhaps partly because it contrasted so starkly with my daily choice of dress. All remarks were along the lines of: "you are beautiful<sup>31"</sup> and "a real Senegalese woman now!" Penda also noticed my different style today, but remarked: "Loes, you're a transvestite...a man in women's clothes!" I was baffled. A man, me? Yes, I had been identified as a jump, that I had loosely translated to tomboy or butch, as opposed to a sexy, what in my ears sounded as femme. I was recognised as the more masculine type of lesbian, or so I thought. Now it appeared that Penda had not identified me as a woman dressing like a man, but as an actual man. However, her idea about my appearance in a dress switched completely when she found out, about an hour later, that Nabou, who had accompanied me to Penda, was now my girlfriend. Nabou is a jump and more convincingly so than I am, as appeared from the ensuing conversation. The moment Penda found out that Nabou and I were dating, she told me to change.*

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<sup>30</sup> *Boubou* are worn by both men and women, slightly differently tailored according to gender. Women's *boubou* consists of a wide tunic, open at the sides. It is worn with a loincloth, and the finishing touch is the *moussor*, a headscarf, that can be tied in different fashions.

<sup>31</sup> Wolof: "da nga rafet!"

*Penda: Loes, you have to be sexy. Look at you in this dress, you're so beautiful. You have to stop cutting your hair, stop wearing plain t-shirts. Look at your breasts, you have to show them. Wear décolletés, tight bodies. You have a great body, make use of it. And please throw out those sandals. I never want to see them on you again.*

*Loes: Why? I like my hair short, and I like to wear shorts and plain t-shirts.*

*Penda: You cannot be a man Loes, have you seen your big breasts? Now look at Nabou, she doesn't have breasts.*

*Loes: But I have seen jump with big breasts.*

*Penda: They are forced jump.*

*Loes: Forced by whom?*

*Penda: By themselves. They are not real jump.*

*[Penda then called Nafissatou<sup>32</sup>, to tell her to tell me as well that I really have to change from my jump style to a sexy style, to match better with Nabou.]*

*Loes: You seriously called Nafissatou to tell me to change looks?*

*Penda: Yes, it is important. A woman has to be a woman.*

*Loes: But Penda, I cannot even walk on high heels; I feel uncomfortable in tight, feminine clothes. If there really has to be one jump and one sexy in the relationship, why don't you ask Nabou to change?*

*Penda: You have breasts Loes, Nabou doesn't. Nabou doesn't even look like a girl. You have chosen a very beautiful man Loes, now be a woman yourself. You are a very pretty girl. I can teach you to be a good wife for Nabou. Look, before Kiné [her girlfriend] gets home from work, I'll take my bath, I'll wear my bin-bin<sup>33</sup>, my nuisette<sup>34</sup>, put some extra thiouraye<sup>35</sup>. Do you have bin-bin?*

*Loes: Yes, I do.*

*Penda: You, womaniser<sup>36</sup>! It is important Loes. Also in bed you will be the woman. You are going to be the one who moans louder.*

*Loes: You mean I have to be mokk pooj<sup>37</sup>?*

*Penda: [Laughed] Yes, very good! If you are not mokk pooj, Nabou will look for another girlfriend.*

I was surprised by Penda's sudden urge to change my gendered appearance from *jump* to *sexy*. I had visited her before, and I had been categorised by her as a *jump*. Penda's decisiveness to change my gendered appearance from *jump* to *sexy* should be understood in the context of my budding romantic relationship with Nabou. Being in a relationship now, I quite literally had to stand in proper relation to Nabou. Nabou was 25 years old at the time, and had played on the football team in her hometown as well as in the town where she now studied. As a football player, she appeared distinctly *jump*. Penda reiterated the common conception that two *jump* cannot be in a relationship with each other, and as such she deemed it necessary to convince me to appear more *sexy*. Never before had she made a comment about my breasts giving away my

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<sup>32</sup> She is the chair of *Nio Far*, the country's only known NGO for queer women.

<sup>33</sup> A string of beads worn by women around the waist; used to seduce one's husband in the bedroom.

<sup>34</sup> Sexy nightdress, often from revealing lace fabric.

<sup>35</sup> A type of incense that is burnt with either charcoal, or in electric incense burners. Used generally in (bed)rooms for a nice smell, it is also specifically associated with sexuality; a woman seducing her husband in the bedroom.

<sup>36</sup> Wolof: "yow, da nga sai-sai!"

<sup>37</sup> *Mokk pooj* and *diongué* are used interchangeably, and signify a set of (feminine) affective practices related to the domains of sexuality, cooking; general looking after one's dear ones. See Gilbert (2017) for an elaboration on *mokk pooj*.

essentially female gender. *Jump* and *sexy* seem to be clearly distinguishable categories of gender, although this vignette shows that its boundaries are permeable, and the importance of stressing their distinctive expressions is relational. Nevertheless, based on this anecdote that highlights differences in appearance and behaviour between *jump* and *sexy*, the question is what precisely distinguishes a *jump* from a *sexy*, ideally? Drawing on Penda's (and other informants') conceptualisations of what constitutes a *jump* and a *sexy*, in this section I seek to understand how these categories relate to masculinity and femininity, and how they (re)construct notions of womanhood and manhood. Moreover, I aim to uncover how a gendered sense of self relates to erotic subjectivities. Ultimately, the flexibility and ambiguity of these reconfigurations of gender normativity reveal how gender roles are an essential part in the intersubjective encounters between *jump* and *sexy*. How and when are these ambiguous and shifting notions of gender emphasised or downplayed? The relational and shifting importance of gender (distinctions) are part of the homosocial-homosexual continuum that is central to this chapter. "What is a *jump/sexy*?" is not the right question to ask, taking into account their fluid and shifting manifestations. Instead, it is more fruitful to examine moments when they (are made to) matter that together constitute experiences of *jump* and *sexy* (see Besnier 2002). Such an analysis allows for a better understanding of "the often turbulent interplay of material and symbolic forces, structure and agency, and the local and the global" (ibid.: 535). However, the emphasis that people place on different, opposing gender roles and their manifestations is relevant considering the centrality of gender to the social organisation of Senegalese society.

A quick and easy way to distinguish *jump* from *sexy* is to say that *jump* are masculine and *sexy* are feminine. Translating these categories to globalised notions of gender as found within women's same-sex circles, the labels *butch* and *femme* come to mind. In 1998, Judith Halberstam coined the term female masculinity to understand masculine or *butch* women, suggesting that "female born persons who understand themselves in masculine ways cannot be considered bad copies of physical men but engage and generate distinct modes of masculinity, on their own terms and in their own right" (Dankwa 2011: 225). Although departing from this notion of female masculinity, Dankwa (2011) argues that in the Ghanaian (Akan) context, relational masculinity is a more fitting term. She argues that the body-mind or sex-gender distinction (a female body coupled with a masculine gender identification) that this term implies, loses some of its power in the Ghanaian context that she researched. To avoid essentialising gender, she proposes instead the term relational masculinity and argues that references to being "the man" in a relationship are situational and relational, and may depend on other binaries along which women reflect on their position in a relationship, such as being rich/poor; old/young. Dankwa argues that "the imperative to cultivate a personal *life* or *style* is a must for young urbanites" (ibid.: 244, emphasis in original). In addition to appearance through dress, hairstyle, and adornment, it includes bodily manners and practices - such as ways of walking, dancing, and gesturing - that are particularly important in a context of economic poverty. *Jump* have cultivated such a style, although I would like to emphasise that it is not simply an individual, personal style, but fits the gender category of *jump*. Such cultivations of style show a resourcefulness and agency to distinguish oneself in spite of gender normativity and high levels of social control. Distinct fashioning by *jump* regularly attracts disapproval: "she is ugly, it is better that she is like this, a lesbian"<sup>38</sup>, said El Hadj, coach of the women's football team that I

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<sup>38</sup> Conversation with El Hadj, 15 September 2017. El Hadj used the word 'gouine', popularly used by francophones as a synonym for 'lesbienne'. Nevertheless, it has a homophobic connotation when uttered by someone other than lesbians themselves. I rarely heard the word 'gouine'; queer women as well as

joined, after having complained about one of the footballers having shaved her hair in a masculine fashion.

There is some truth and some fiction in the notions of *jump* and *sexy* as gendered manifestations, and that is probably for the better considering societal demands for a certain type of femininity at certain occasions. A *jump* cannot always dress and behave her *jump* way, with a masculine attitude and style. However, it is too simplistic to state that societal forces only shape the possibilities of women to behave in certain ways. Among women, gender expressions are part of an intersubjective game. On the one hand, performing *jump* or *sexy* as distinct roles, reminiscent of Newell's (2012) notion of symbolic mastery, is admired. On the other hand, flexibility to be a bit more or less *jump* or *sexy* is required, as certain occasions demand a certain type of femininity. Marriages and funerals are such occasions in which *jump* women may decide to perform more feminine than usual. In a similar fashion, both *jump* or *sexy* may choose to adapt their gendered expressions if this opens up new opportunities for relationships. My interlocutor Fama was always emphasising her gendered sense of self as *jump*, and at times referred to me as performing *jump* as well in order to create a sense of mutual understanding, I felt. At other times, she would be subtly hinting at the possibility of a romantic relationship between us however, and then she purposefully avoided mentioning *jump* or *sexy*. In fact, she once argued that "*jump* and *sexy* do not exist. It just exists because we want it to, but we are all women doing stuff together<sup>39</sup>". In a similar fashion, Penda had concluded our discussion about the importance of *jump* - *sexy* distinctions with the following words: "Once in the bedroom, undressed, there is no *jump* and no *sexy*. What counts is that she has breasts, and you too<sup>40</sup>". Despite this relativising remark, she clearly also enjoyed highlighting differences between *jump* and *sexy*, between her *jump* girlfriend Kiné and herself as a *sexy*.

Penda demonstrated symbolic mastery of the logic of *jump* and *sexy* when she called me a transvestite. I had appeared in her room wearing a dress, and she had questioned my choice to wear a dress when I was supposedly a *jump*. This did not only serve as a correction to my fashion blunder, but also as a way to show her knowledge to distinguish between proper appearances of *jump* and *sexy*. Newell defined this symbolic mastery as the simultaneous mastery of one's own distinct appearance and the ability to detect blunders in the performance of others (ibid.: 162). The relevance of such symbolic mastery is that it strengthens one's position in a social space such as the football field, which is characterised by *jump* appearances and attitudes, as a sense of fashion is deemed important for Senegalese in general, and not in the last place for youth.

The centrality of gender in the notions of *jump* and *sexy* that characterise the constitution of same-sex intimacies, allows for the strategic negotiation of social relationships. Its symbolic mastery helps to lay claim to a social position. Moreover, the centrality of gender to understandings of self, coupled with its fluid and relational status, invites for alternative constellations. These notions and their changing meanings can help us to understand how and why gender is experienced differently in various social contexts. "*Être le buzz*" (to be the buzz) in the queer *milieu* and showing a symbolic mastery of the *jump* and *sexy* lexicon while at the same time maintaining the image of a respectable young woman, requires a sensitivity to cleverly navigate these seemingly mutually exclusive experiences. Nabou showed such

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others generally used the word 'lesbienne'. El Hadj may have been aware of the more pejorative connotation of 'gouine' and therefore used it when he expressed himself negatively about the footballers.

<sup>39</sup> Conversation with Fama, 13 January 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Conversation with Penda, 30 November 2017.

sensitivity when she wore a dress at her grandmother's funeral. The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate how the notions of *jump* and *sexy* matter for the creation of a loosely connected community of practice (O'Mara 2013), with various parties among queer women serving as examples of how the mimesis of male African-American street style functions as a critique and re-imagining of gender. Rather than just imitating heterosexual couples, the complementarity of *jump* and *sexy* gender roles in same-sex relationships serves as a critique of local power and of the pervasive link drawn between biological sex and social constructions of gender.

### ***"J'aime quelqu'une qui est diongué": gendered complementarity***

To understand how queer women challenge the Senegalese sexual imaginary and the associated gender normativity, I will address two conversations with interlocutors who referred to the gender roles that *jump* and *sexy* entail in same-sex relationships. As alluded to by Penda in the previous vignette, *jump* finds its significance and validation as a manifestation of gender partly in relation to a *sexy* girlfriend. The following conversation I had with Khadija confirms the interconnectedness and relationality of *jump* and *sexy*. It spells out some of the differences in the roles in a romantic relationship between a *jump* and a *sexy*, and points at the complementarity - and if need be, flexibility - of the two.

Khadija is the girlfriend of Bintou, and I had met her because I had joined Bintou and her friends to a queer party on a Friday evening in October. Khadija, as well as some of Bintou's other friends, were the first *sexy* I consciously met. Introduced to her by Bintou as "*ma femme*" (my wife), I was curious to hear her perspective on her relationship with Bintou, as well as her ideas about *jump* and *sexy*. I met Khadija, 22 years old at the time, at a basketball court not far from where she stays. Her parents also live in Dakar, but they had not found it a problem when she told them last year that she wanted to move out and move in with a friend. She added that "my parents were ok with the fact that I was moving in with a girl, we are just friends you know. Had it been a boy, they would have never accepted. I have a lot of freedom now, my parents do not even bother to ask me who this girl is, and why I wanted to move out." She rented a room with a friend, but if she had more money, she would like to have her own room, "to have more privacy. And also, she fatigues me sometimes with her girlfriend<sup>41</sup>". We moved to a small food stall at the crossroad opposite the basketball court, where two ladies were selling sandwiches. She greeted them warmly and we shared a café *Touba*<sup>42</sup> as we exchanged smalltalk with them. When we decided it was time to talk about my research, we moved back to the basketball court, where we found a bench to sit on and talk fairly undisturbed. When I explained to her again the objective of my research, and asked her if she was willing to discuss this with me, her initial reaction was: "*tu vis ça?*" (do you live it?) When I responded positively, she asked for confirmation: "*donc tu es une lesbienne?*" (so you are a lesbian?) As I confirmed, she placed her feet on the bench, relaxed, and set off.

*Khadija: I have had boyfriends before, but when I got to be with girls, I realised that a man can never fully satisfy me. Do you understand? Have you had a boyfriend?*

*Loes: Yes, I have.*

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<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Khadija, 14 November 2017.

<sup>42</sup> A coffee blended with grains of selim (also called Guinea pepper) and sometimes cloves. Café Touba is named after the holy city of Touba, and is traditionally consumed by the Mourides since the beverage came to Senegal upon the return of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba from exile in Gabon. In recent years, the drink has become increasingly popular among Senegalese from all faiths and cities.

*Khadija: But you are jump, unlike me. I am sexy.*

*Loes: Yes, but what does that say about (former) boyfriends?*

*Khadija: Well, sexy often have boyfriends and girlfriends at the same time. But jump are 100% virgin.*

*Loes: Virgin? But they have had sex with their girlfriends, right?*

*Khadija: Yes. Bintou too, she has never slept with a man. When we have sex, I cannot do everything to her that she can do to me.*

*Loes: Like what?*

*Khadija: I cannot penetrate her with my fingers. She fingers me, but I cannot finger her.*

*Loes: Why not?*

*Khadija: Because I don't want to hurt her. She has never been penetrated.*

*Loes: And besides sex, what are the differences between you and Bintou in your relationship?*

*Khadija: When we wake up in the morning, I will make her a coffee and prepare breakfast. I am also the one cooking for us. I serve her her meals.*

*Loes: Is it never the other way around?*

*Khadija: [Chuckles] No, Bintou doesn't like to cook. Well, she prepares ataya<sup>43</sup> [Senegalese tea], but she doesn't cook.*

*Loes: And money-wise, is it the jump who is supposed to pay for most?*

*Khadija: No, that's not a rule. It depends on who has the financial means. In our case, yes, Bintou has a job, so she can often pay.*

A little later, I asked her why I always heard about relationships between a *sexy* and a *jump*. Khadija: "Two *jump* cannot date. Image, when they would be having sex, they are two men. That is like homosexuals, that's bad!" From this statement - she was not the only one to proclaim that two *jump* together would be like two homosexuals - it becomes clear that the conceptual model of *jump* and *sexy* is based on gender rather than sexual categories. Similarly, Geurts (2002) argues that the mind-body dichotomy of the West, which privileges the mind, is an ideology that does not hold in the Anlo-Ewe society of Ghana. Rather, people are concerned with what is called "seselelame", a "feeling in the body, flesh, or skin" (ibid.: 42). This resembles what my interlocutors would often tell me about "not feeling attracted to men", or "not feeling attracted to other *jump*"<sup>44</sup>. Feeling, or not feeling, attracted to a certain gender (*ressentir* was the French verb they used), puts at the forefront bodily sensations rather than an innate sexual core that is the basis of one's social identity. A focus on bodily sensations leaves room for variability in desires and intimacies, as sensations are evoked by others, sometimes unexpectedly. A fixed, rationalised idea of 'I am attracted (solely) to this gender', on the other hand, presupposes a sexual identity that leaves little room for variation. My interlocutors' emphasis on *ressentir*, and their repeated mentioning that they do not feel attracted to other *jump* calls for an investigation of ambiguous and fluid gendered, bodily acts as constitutive of what it means to be engaged in same-sex intimacies as a *jump* or a *sexy*.

Where two *jump* together was inconceivable to Khadija, she saw less problems with two *sexy* together, and acknowledged that this was more common than two *jump*. How can we make sense of this logic? Does this relate to the idea of "no *koai* [penis], no sex" (Kendall 1998: 233)

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<sup>43</sup> Senegalese tea, a bittersweet combination of Chinese green tea leaves, a lot of sugar, and *nana* (mint), or sometimes other herbs like *ngoun-ngoun* (sage). With several rounds of tea served, it is a social gathering of people discussing as the different rounds (often first, second and third) are being prepared.

<sup>44</sup> Conversation with Fama, 7 December 2017.

that was articulated by women in Lesotho who were engaged in same-sex intimacies, as a way to make sense of what they did with other women in relation to what they did or were supposed to do with men? This is in line with Greenberg (1988) who argued that the way sexual acts and the social identities that come to be attached to the people performing these acts are differently perceived in different societies. Khadija had explained to me how *jump* are almost always virgins, and thus could not be penetrated by another girl, making a relationship between two *jump* uninteresting sexually. At the same time, two *jump* together would resemble a male homosexual relationship, something she saw as undesirable. Two *sexy* on the other hand do not face these problems, so although they do not complement each other the way one *sexy* and one *jump* do, a relationship between two *sexy* is perceived as less odd. However, because *jump* and *sexy* are predominantly described in terms of gender, rather than sexuality, the complementarity that a relationship between a *sexy* and a *jump* displays, not only in terms of sexuality but also in terms of distinct ways of looking after each other, provides the main argument for such a relationship.

Khadija and Penda did not stand alone when they argued about the importance of complementarity in relationships between two women, effected when a *jump* and a *sexy* get together. In the afterword of *Bodies and Persons*, Boddy explains that the Hofriyati in northern Sudan conceive of circumcision as a way to “capacitate their bodies for procreation, producing a lack in one that only the other can meet”, hence they “create difference in order to create a relationship” (1998: 267). This reminded me of El Hadj, the football coach, as he argued why a woman and a man should be together, and not two women. He said: “a woman and a man can learn from each other, because they are different and they will both claim they are better than the other, leading to interesting discussions. But two women, or two men, are the same. What can they do together?<sup>45</sup>” He started off his argument against a relationship between two women as something of the mind, rather than the body: in thinking, two women are alike, according to him, and complementarity was more fruitful, as it generates more interesting discussions. He added that “girls are tiresome, their spirit tires you”. Although the latter comment seems to reflect his own (negative) experiences with girls rather than referring to an essential difference between the minds of men and those of women, it adds to his argument that two women are not positively contributing to a balanced relationship. El Hadj also refers to the body as a proof of the incompatibility of two women’s bodies (“what can two girls do with each other, sexually?”) and two men’s bodies (“Impossible...putting your penis in someone else’s anus, there where your poop comes from? Are you kidding me?”). He clearly, willfully ignored the fact that women do not all reason the same way. However, his expression of an ideal complementarity of partners - in his eyes only possible in relationships between a man and a woman - is shared by queer women<sup>46</sup>. When discussing preferences with Nabou, she said: “I prefer girls who are different from me<sup>47</sup>.” What this difference entails in a romantic or sexual relationship with another girl, she articulated as follows:

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<sup>45</sup> This quote, as well as the following, come from a conversation with El Hadj on 15 September 2017.

<sup>46</sup> This logic of complementarity is also found within male homosexual relationships, that are (mostly and ideally) configured between a penetrative partner (*yoos*) and a receptive partner (*ibbi*). Initially categorised on the basis of one’s sexual position, these categories then produce logical social roles, with the *ibbi* performing the feminine tasks such as cooking, whereas the *yoos* ought to provide (gifts, money) for the partner and the economic survival of the relationship (Niang et al. 2003)

<sup>47</sup> Conversation with Nabou, 27 December 2017.

*Nabou: I don't wear bin-bin or nuisettes, which is why I'd like to have a girlfriend who is more sexy than I am, because sexy can do things that jump don't do.*

*Loes: Like what?*

*Nabou: Like for example wearing nuisettes. If you ask a jump to wear it, she cannot do it for you. Or if you want your girlfriend to dance for you...those are the kind of things that jump can't do.*

*Loes: Why can't they do it? Or why can't you do it?*

*Nabou: Jump are like men, they do not like to do such things that women do. But sexy girls, ooh, they love it. Me too, I can't."*

Nabou is referring here to the alleged sexual prowess of Senegalese women, whose seductive capacities constitute an important part of the Senegalese sexual imaginary (see Gilbert 2017). In female same-sex relationships, it is believed that it is the *sexy* rather than the *jump* who takes on this seductive role in the bedroom. As Penda put it: "a *jump* may lead, but he doesn't lead in bed"<sup>48</sup>. Interestingly, Nabou stresses that many *jump*, including herself, are not able to perform the feminine art/work of seduction (ibid.) as they "are like men", although they self-identify as woman. By juxtaposing *jump*/men with *sexy*/women, she reinforces the complementarity of *jump* and *sexy*, in the way that men and women are seen as complementary. It also strengthens the argument, which is shared by Nabou, that a relationship between a *jump* and a *sexy* is more fun than one between two *jump*. A relationship between two *jump* would be uninteresting sexually, as neither would be inclined to take on the active role to seduce the other in the bedroom. Similarly to the Hofriyati of northern Sudan who practise circumcision to accentuate difference and hence complementarity between the sexes, the differences between *jump* and *sexy* women have to be stressed in discourse as well as in practice, through distinct social roles and physical appearance, although the distinctions are sometimes more discursive than based in everyday reality. The different roles that *jump* and *sexy* draw on in interpersonal relationships correspond with understandings of marital love as reciprocal care, with the idea that love is born from marriage instead of the other way around (ibid.). However, where typically the *jump* then would be the provider economically, poverty requires a flexibility of their roles in this sense. Moreover, relationships serve as sites of relational power, which further troubles a fixation of *jump* and *sexy* as clear-cut categories. Most of my interlocutors, who were young and often still studying or unemployed, had no economic power to take on a provider role in a relationship. Therefore, although most of them were *jump*, they did not take on this role in their relationships if their *sexy* girlfriends were relatively better off. The gendered complementarity between *jump* and *sexy* is presented as an ideal, but may change with each relationship as relational power shifts, and as a general flexibility with regards to masculine expressions for *jump* women is required for their navigation through various social spaces.

### **"Je vis ma vie sans traces"<sup>49</sup>: the skill of discretion**

Having explained how *jump* and *sexy* are conceived of in terms of gender expressions and complementarity in same-sex relationships, what remains to be explored is how such ideas are enacted in homosocial spaces, and how young queer women navigate their same-sex intimacies in these spaces with others such as family members. Female homosocial spaces offer women the opportunity to explore homoeroticism precisely because these homosocial relationships are not easily conceived of as being sexual. Kendall noted that women who to her Western eyes engaged

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<sup>48</sup> French: "Un *jump* peut diriger, mais il ne dirige pas au lit." Conversation with Penda, 11 December 2017.

<sup>49</sup> English: "I live my life without leaving traces". Conversation with Lafia, 8 December 2017.

in same-sex practices, did not consider their own behaviour as sexual, because it did not involve a penis: “no *koai* [penis], no sex” (1998: 233). Homosociality allows for female same-sex intimacies to occur fairly unpoliced, although it is argued that relationships such as “mummy-baby” relationships in South Africa and *supi-supi* in Ghana are increasingly understood in terms of Western conceptions of (homo)sexuality (see Gunkel 2009; Dankwa 2009) and hence are under homophobic scrutiny. Accusations of homosexuality often correspond with deviant gender expressions, such as ‘too’ feminine clothes for men, or ‘too’ masculine clothes for women. Wally Seck, one of Senegal’s most popular artists, has been accused of being homosexual, after a video clip showed him while he carried a briefcase that matched with his shoes. Such public accusations serve to recall what is appropriate dress or behaviour for men and for women, hereby reinforcing the normative gender order. Pierce, in a study on gender and identity in northern Nigeria, argued that “the interdependence of the normal and the perverse [...] can be masked by an emphasis on secrecy and modesty” (2007: 551). Constituting the “normal”, acceptable gender and sexual behaviour, requires identifying other behaviour as abnormal, as deviant. However, normative distinctions between good moral conduct and deviant behaviour are unstable and often do not hold in reality. Nevertheless, the normative distinction can be maintained by secrecy and modesty, or *sutura* in Wolof.

How does *sutura* feature in the lives of queer women? What “tactics of concealment” (Hardon and Posel 2012: S4) do queer women employ, carefully choosing when (not) to say something. And to whom and how do they (not) say things? In her study on female same-sex intimacies in Ghana, Dankwa contended that “factors that disguise and facilitate female same-sex courting [...] the casualness of physical touch within homosocial spaces enables for a continuum of social and erotic intimacy. It allows girls to explore and adult women to test the readiness of a woman to engage erotically. Moreover, bearing on the norm of discretion, the unspeakability of same-sex intimacy shields Norkor [Dankwa’s interlocutor] if the woman she desires does not approve of her” (2009: 199). Moreover, “homosocial touch, such as holding hands, sitting on each other’s laps, or touching a woman’s breasts, is not socially sanctioned or associated with sexual practices” (ibid.: 200). Secrecy with regards to same-sex intimacies does not only distinguish those who know from those who do not know, but “a secret can bind together those who share it, and it can mask immoral conduct” (Pierce 2007: 552). It creates “communities of secrecy” (Hardon and Posel 2012: S4). The challenge is knowing when and where to keep a secret. And so Mame Diarra would never get so intimate with Nabou or me in front of her stepfather, where respect and morally proper behaviour are very important. But in the context of girl friends of her own age, playful hints to sexual behaviour are met with joy and laughter.

In the introduction, I stated how legible womanhood depends on a woman’s ability to demonstrate *sutura*, and how a breach of *sutura* damages one’s status as a good woman. For women who are engaged in same-sex intimacies, a mastery of *sutura* is indispensable. Analysing *sutura* and the various tactics of concealment that my interlocutors used tells us a lot about societal norms and the ways in which queer women navigate their same-sex intimacies within the normative context. By being discreet enough about one’s involvement in same-sex intimacies, women can uphold their status as good women. Lafia was known at home and by her friends for exclaiming “*vie privée!*” (private life!) with a big smile whenever someone asked her something about her love life. This response was always received by others with a smile and

some sign of appreciation. Not being too vocal<sup>50</sup> about your sexual life is highly valued in Senegalese society, particularly for women. Likewise, Hawa covers her head with a scarf whenever she visits her father, to conceal her shaved head. It is a clear manifestation of *jump* that she gladly displays to establish her position in the queer women's *milieu*. However, knowing that her father does not appreciate her shaved head, she covers her hair to maintain respectability as a woman.

Where parents may be aware of their daughter's same-sex relationships, this may not pose a big problem as long as *sutura* is maintained by those aware of it, avoiding to share the fact with the whole world. When I visited Penda and her girlfriend Kiné in January and as we had been discussing *jump* and *sexy* in relationships, Penda had remarked: "if I would introduce you to my mother, she would say: 'oh, you have a new girlfriend? Is it a boy or a girl?' And then she would laugh [...] She used to be a model, and she knows the clubbing *milieu* well [...] Yet, she is veiled<sup>51</sup>." Her mother is aware of her daughter's relationship with Kiné and she does not make a fuss over it. However, the rest of the family that lives with Penda's mother does not know about it, Penda said. By emphasising that her mother is veiled, Penda challenges the idea that devout Muslims are essentially homophobic. In a similar fashion, Lafia told me a couple of days later that "today, even the veiled have become lesbians<sup>52</sup>". She continued and said that "they are no longer afraid to do so", suggesting that even for veiled young women today, same-sex intimacies are reconcilable with their religious personhood as they engage with other *jump* and *sexy* in the queer *milieu*.

Although *sutura* requires people to hide other people's misbehaviour, the way Penda's mother may joke about her daughter's same-sex relationships but but avoids telling others about it, this does not always withhold people to express their suspicions, thereby breaching the *sutura* that previously surrounded someone's (intimate) practices. Especially if this other person's respectability is already somehow affected, gossip can be incredibly damaging, and the accusations will not backfire at the one uttering the gossip. On the 10th of March, I received a WhatsApp audio message from Amy with a cry for financial help. I had met Amy, 24 years old, on Facebook, where she had added me as a friend, having seen we had many queer female friends in common. Unsurprisingly, our conversation had quickly turned to (queer) love issues, as she did not wait long to declare her sincere love to me. However, on the 10th of March, her message had another tone. She sounded really distressed as she told me that she had just been kicked out of the house where she stayed with her aunt and other extended family members. The brother of her aunt's husband had lost his wallet. On the day that he had lost his wallet, he and his wife had only seen Amy enter their bedroom, who had been looking for a bottle of water. Without another suspect, Amy was subsequently accused of having stolen the wallet. She was summoned to her aunt, to whom she tried to explain that she had only been looking for water in their bedroom and that they had been in the room when she had entered, arguing that she could not even have stolen the wallet. However, she had little success. "[Vieux] he went to my aunt [...] now my aunt doesn't believe me anymore. He told me that I am a thief and, well, also that I am a lesbian. Because...one of his daughters had told him that I am a lesbian. And now my aunt has

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<sup>50</sup> Among friends of the same age and gender, explicit talk about sexual encounters and intimate relationships are common. With regards to the dating practices of queer women, Hawa explained to me that a certain directness is even desired. My personal experience with being asked out by a girl was also that they do not hesitate to tell you what they'd like to do with you sexually.

<sup>51</sup> French: "[...] Pourtant, elle est voilée." Conversation with Penda, 11 December 2017.

<sup>52</sup> French: "aujourd'hui, même les voilées sont devenues lesbiennes." Conversation with Lafia, 17 December 2017.

kicked me out of the house. She believes them. She said...looking at my style, well...it's this life [lesbian] that I live. That's the problem. She kicked me out of the house [...] She didn't even look for another place for me to stay, I swear. She threw all my stuff out of the house. Everything, everything. I am staying with a friend now"<sup>53</sup>. The accusation that Amy was not only a thief but also a lesbian, was too much. Where she might have been able to negotiate her way out of the accusation of having stolen the wallet, the addition that she is also a lesbian made of her an indecent person that is no longer welcome in the house. I asked Amy whether she thought that this daughter of Vieux might have known that she is a lesbian. Had she perhaps overheard conversations between Amy and her (girl)friends? Amy said that she does not think this girl could have known, arguing that she has always been discreet about her romantic affairs. Nevertheless, the accusation is powerful and has been successful. Her *jump* style of dress in combination with the fact that she plays football may have caused some suspicion, and at least now seems to support the accusation for Amy's aunt who, looking at her style, argued that it is indeed "*cette vie*" (this life) that she is living, with little respect for female respectability and responsibility.

Interestingly, *cette vie* is how women commonly refer to being engaged in same-sex intimacies. It somehow reflects its status as distinct from other social relations. It is regarded as a distinct life that one can enter into, or be drawn into, for various reasons - from negative experiences with men (e.g. (sexual) violence by an ex-boyfriend or male family member), to "I was born this way"<sup>54</sup>, as well as being successfully seduced by someone who was already in "this life". In a similar manner, when talking about their own or their friends' same-sex intimacies, they often refer to it as "*ça*" (that), leaving unspoken what "that" precisely entails. Although our mutual understanding of the topic does not require interlocutors to constantly verbalise their intimacies, the sometimes very abstract references to their love lives reflect that it is uncommon to nominalise same-sex intimacy (Dankwa 2009). The non-naming of same-sex intimacies is crucial for their discreet navigation, as "[i]t is only when this intimacy enters the discourse of sexuality, and hence the binary of "to know"/"to not know", that homophobia, as a way of policing female homosociality, enters the picture" (Gunkel 2009: 218).

### **Entangling the public and the private**

As briefly argued in the introduction to this chapter, a clear-cut distinction between private and public spaces does not hold when we consider how women work strategically to create a certain privacy within the public space, and at the same time negotiate public debates and visibility in the private sphere. In a way, the distinction public - private resembles the distinction made between friendly and erotic practices, which is also a blurry one. Where homosociality is a characteristic of many social spaces in Senegal, both those in the public and in the private domain, the homoerotic behaviour that it enables is something that ought to be kept secret. However, this secrecy is neither absolute nor restrictive, as pointed out in the previous section. Thus, same-sex intimacies between women in homosocial spaces add a sense of privacy to a public space. Similarly, allusions to romantic and sexual relationships in the private sphere with others around, display intimacies to a (restricted) public. The blurry boundary between friendly and erotic practices can be illustrated by Lafia's story about her first erotic experiences with a girl: "That was in 2009 [she was 15 years old at the time], with my cousin. We shared a room at that time. We did everything together, we were very close friends. So one day, she kissed me and

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<sup>53</sup> WhatsApp audio message from Amy, 11 March 2018.

<sup>54</sup> This was how Hawa and Safiétou explained their same-sex attraction to me.

started caressing me. I liked it, so then it happened that I slept with her. We were inseparable at that time<sup>55</sup>". Mentioning that they "did everything together" shows how explorations of eroticism can be a part of the wide range of activities that close friends undertake, especially when sharing a bedroom, as Lafia and her cousin did at the time. Her sexual encounters with her cousin were in no way a run-up to an exclusive romantic relationship, as they are family. It did, however, trigger Lafia's interest in same-sex intimacies: "it was then that I learnt that I liked girls. I love to play with girls".

Lafia's experience with her cousin is definitely not unique. Bedrooms in Senegal are not the ultimate private spaces the way I know them from home. Large, extended families and small housing often result in multiple family members sharing bed(room)s. Intimacy between the persons sharing the bed, is not uncommon then: "whenever I sleep with my friends, we cuddle. I like to hold their hand as we fall asleep<sup>56</sup>", declared Nabou. Sharing beds may be an unavoidable reality for many, but Nabou indicated to appreciate it: "at home, all of us [the children] sleep with our mother, unless our father is there during the weekend, then we move to the other bedroom. I like to sleep with my mum, I hold her tight and touch her breasts. I like to hold her breasts, they are so soft". Similarly, Fama accounted for her absence when I had scheduled an appointment with her on a morning late November, saying she had gone to visit some friends the day before and that "we always spend the night, or multiple nights, together. We like that here. When you wake up, you take breakfast together. We talk, we fool around...it's good"<sup>57</sup>. What "fool around" means exactly, is left unspoken. Similarly, when explaining that she shares her room with a friend, she says "she accompanies me", but because she is not there at the moment, she asks me to spend the night with her. "But you're staying here, you're staying the night, right? I am all alone in bed". Although I am doubting her exact intentions as to what a night together should look like - I have an idea, based on her demand "come, kiss me" of earlier that day - the fact that she does not like to spend the night alone, reveals the importance of being together.

At the same time, the home is the place where norms may be enforced by parents on their children, in a process of constant negotiation. Hairstyles are an extremely important part of women's appearance, and women have new hairdos regularly, choosing from a variety of braiding styles, wigs and chemically straightened hair<sup>58</sup>. Hawa definitely defied fashion and expectations by choosing to shave her head, and her father, who criticised her lack of femininity, did not appreciate this. In addition to her hairstyle, he is very critical of the fact that she wears trousers instead of skirts and dresses, and he "believes that football is for men. Women should not compete in such sports<sup>59</sup>". No matter how comfortable Hawa feels with her head shaved, whenever she visits her father, she covers her head. She remarked that she has to, because "it's an old man". Rather than referring to his real age, she seems to categorise her father as a traditionalist who has a very specific idea about femininity, which does not include shorts and short hair. Out of respect for her father, and to avoid discussion about her masculine styles, she decides to limit her *jump* appearance whenever she visits her father. In the following sections, I will explore various homosocial settings, both in the more private and the more public sphere,

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<sup>55</sup> Conversation with Lafia, 9 December 2017.

<sup>56</sup> This and the following quote come from a conversation with Nabou, 26 December 2017.

<sup>57</sup> This and the following quotes come from a conversation with Fama, 2 December 2017. I translated "fool around" from the French "conneries".

<sup>58</sup> See Biaya (1999) for an analysis of hairstyles in urban Africa.

<sup>59</sup> This and the following quote come from a conversation with Hawa, 26 October 2017.

to show how play as a tactic in homosocial spaces produces and negotiates same-sex intimacies and allusions.

*"Lave-moi mon truc<sup>60</sup>": exploring intimacy*

*I was at home with Nabou and her family. After lunch, the girls all started doing household chores. I first asked Aïcha, who was doing the dishes, if I could help her with anything. She told me to sit down and rest, "you must be tired from eating". I had not done anything yet today, apart from this barely fatiguing act of eating, and I felt rather uncomfortable with everyone around me cleaning. So I asked Mariama, who was cleaning the kitchen.*

*Loes: Mariama, can I help you with anything?*

*Mariama: What do you want to do?*

*Loes: Well, that depends on you. How can I help you?*

*Mariama: You can help me to wash myself. I am going to take a bath. [She chuckles and looks at me seductively.]*

*Loes: Ok! [And now I chuckle too, slightly embarrassed by what I have just gotten myself into.]*

*We headed to the bathroom, laughing. Mariama yelled through the house that I was going to wash her - "Loes dafa sai-sai!<sup>61</sup>". In the bathroom, she undressed herself and handed me the soap. "Go ahead", she said. With a washcloth, I started soaping her, starting with her shoulders and arms. I initially went around her breasts when I washed her face and then down to her belly, feeling embarrassed by this situation with a girl that I had only met the day before. By then her mother, Aïcha and Nabou had joined us in the bathroom, looking amused by the sight of their daughter/sister testing this white girl. When I had nearly fully washed her body she looked at me, provocatively smiling and pointing at her vagina: "You're not done yet, finish by washing my thing (mon truc)." The others were now shrieking. Nabou: "Stop it Loes, Mariama is crazy and she will drive you crazy!" I continued and the others left the bathroom, having seen with their own eyes that I was indeed crazy like Mariama.*

It surely was a crazy experience, but how should it be interpreted? I had thus far regarded the bathroom as a highly private space, perhaps the most private space there is. The bedroom, as I had found out already, was often shared with many family members and/or friends. The bathroom to me then, was the last private space remaining, only to find out that washing each other could be a shared activity that creates intimacy and that simultaneously questions its motive. It was most certainly a game, teasing the *toubab*. But was she testing my level of craziness, was it just something she likes to do with girl friends, or was she indirectly testing my readiness to involve in an intimate, somehow slightly erotic, practice with her? I derive the latter option from Dankwa's (2009) argument about testing the readiness of women to engage erotically with other women through unspoken, or indirect, acts or flirtations (see the previous section on *sutura*). Although I am certain that Mariama was not testing my readiness to engage with *her* erotically, I think she might have wanted to find out from me if I was ready for this kind of intimate behaviour in general. Later that day when we were in M'bour, on our way to Youssou Ndour's concert, she proposed to play a game of truth or dare. It was my turn first, and I chose truth. She set off directly with the question: "have you ever had a boyfriend?" I sensed that she

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<sup>60</sup> English: "Wash my thing."

<sup>61</sup> French: "Loes est une bandite/petit brigand." English: "Loes is a rascal/little rogue."

wanted to find out from me whether I was not somehow attracted to girls more than I was to boys. Through finding out if I was interested in women, she could also increase her suspicions about her older sister's inclinations, whom she could never ask directly if she is interested in women. By transforming the usually private activity of showering into a somewhat public event - she exclaimed loud enough that I was about to wash her, thereby inviting her mother and sisters to come and watch this scene - Mariama playfully tested my readiness, as well as the reactions of Nabou, Aïcha and her mother. In addition to this private sphere where same-sex intimacies can be explored and negotiated, the following section elaborates on the organisation of parties, both clubbing and private birthday parties, as the creation of a space where same-sex intimacies are at the forefront of the events.

*"Être le buzz<sup>62</sup>": queer parties*

*"Some girls just want to be..you know...the buzz...they want to be known and popular in the scene. They can even go up to Penda and give her 2.000 FCFA so she will sing for you. Just to be known. Girls can spend all their money like this, and then they have to beg the others for money to get a taxi back home at the end of the night<sup>63</sup>".*

Penda is a singer who organises a weekly *soirée* (night out) on Friday nights in a popular club in Dakar that turns into the domain of queer women and men once a week<sup>64</sup>. Penda herself is known to engage in same-sex relationships, and she is the ex of the informant with whom I first went to the *soirée*. The *soirée* in a way is not so distinct from the rest of the Dakarois party scene. I was repeatedly told about other clubs where queers gather in numbers, although at some places *jump* apparently are denied access because of their aggressive attitudes and fights between them and their girlfriends that break out during or after a night at the club. However, the exclusive presence of queer people at a club is rare in Dakar. It makes it a safer place for people: once they are in, there is no one who judges them for their deviant looks or behaviour. On the group level on the contrary, the gathering of a couple dozens of people of whom a number are recognised by the general public as queer, makes them vulnerable to threats from outside. The current location of the *soirée* is somewhere far from the common clubbing areas, where it had moved to only recently, a couple of months before I was there for the first time in October 2017. What can be seen at the *soirée* stands in stark contrast to the behaviour queer women and men display during the day and in other spaces. The *soirée* is not just a space where sexual dissidence is tolerated (by the owner of the club, bartenders, and others not "in the life" who may accompany a queer friend to the party) and celebrated. It is also a place where the night provides the space to display other behaviour that is disapproved of normally, particularly for women, such as drinking alcohol or smoking.

*Le buzz*, uttered by Fama to describe girls who want to be popular and known in the *milieu* of queer women, resembles the story of Bernice who complained about women's multiple, simultaneous relationships as a "fashion", an interlocutor in Dankwa's (2009) work on female same-sex intimacies in Ghana. The importance of being popular and known, or *le buzz*, attests to the fact that despite the fact that same-sex intimacies are navigated with discretion, there is a community of queer women that has carved out spaces such as the *soirée* where same-

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<sup>62</sup> English: "To be the buzz."

<sup>63</sup> Conversation with Fama, 13 January 2018.

<sup>64</sup> When I was there, there were many more women than men, about 40 women and 15 men.

sex intimacies are vibrantly enacted. Girls at the *soirée* who spend all their money is a form of *gâter*, and *faire le show* (Newell 2012: 106-109). Through *gâter* (to spoil) or *faire le show* (to make a show) women reinforce their community of practice and may differentiate themselves from the others as the girl who is able to spend money, thereby creating a hierarchy within the collective.

In addition to the *soirée*, birthday parties organised exclusively for queer women form a space in which women “voice and practise their passions and desires” (Dankwa 2009: 193) beyond the public eye that reject their practices or perceived sexual orientation. Birthday parties are often organised among queer friends, “so that everyone is at ease and everyone can do whatever she wants”<sup>65</sup>. When I visited my interlocutor Safiétou on the 14th of December, she took me to her friend (and ex-girlfriend) Birame’s place because she wanted to help her friend prepare her birthday party for the next Saturday. Although there was some discussion about the exact girls that should be invited - they discussed possible jealousy between exes - she expected about twenty girls to be there on Saturday. Birame invited me to come as well, assuring that “*il fera chaud là-bas!*” (it is going to be hot there!) She has rented an apartment for a day in a neighbourhood somewhat far from where she lives in Dakar, which costs her 35.000 FCFA (about 53 euros) for 24 hours. The apartment consists of a kitchen, a salon, and three other rooms. Clearly, it is not possible for everyone to celebrate their birthday in such a way. But if you have the means, renting an apartment away from suspicious glances of family members and neighbours allows people to celebrate their birthdays freely. Inviting about twenty girls of whom about half will be *jump*, would certainly raise eyebrows.

When Safiétou and I left Birame, we headed to the Colobane market, a big market with mainly new and second-hand clothing on sale, to shop for a new outfit for Safiétou for the party on Saturday. Her aunt had given her 20 euros upon her arrival from Spain, where she lives with her husband, which Safiétou had to change for West-African francs before proceeding her hunt for an outfit. It was a long journey to score an outfit, for two reasons. First, she had little to spend, only the 20 euros (that got her 12.000 FCFA on the market) that her aunt had given to her. She has no income of herself and her father “he is harsh. He doesn’t consider me at all. He doesn’t support me in any way”. She had to bargain a lot with the tradesmen to get a sweater for the price that she offered. Second, she was very critical about the style of clothes that she was looking for. The shoes had to match perfectly with the sweater, and she only wanted to buy a sweater (and thus shoes) that were a combination of white and grey or white and red. She refused to go to the party without a completely new outfit, because the party is not just a fun get-together of friends, but it is also a place where the latest fashion trends are exhibited. In addition to parading with the latest fashion items, bringing a new friend or girlfriend can show your popularity, hence her wish that I should accompany her to the party, especially as a white girl. To bring someone along with you to a party is also a possible source of jealousy, and Safiétou explained that she did not want to bring her current girlfriend to the party because this would make Birame jealous. For occasions like this party, the outfit one wears is ideally a new one. To show up in a new outfit, show the performativity of success, it makes one *le buzz*. Rather than seeing such expenditure as irrational expenses of limited sources of income, we should see them as social markers of personhood and success, which position women in the *milieu* of *jump* and *sexy* queer women. The organisation of such a party, itself a relatively expensive undertaking, is relevant for the consolidation of one’s social network, as well as for securing and

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<sup>65</sup> Conversation with Safiétou, 14 December 2017. This and subsequent quotes all come from a conversation I had with Safiétou and her friend.

strengthening one's position within the social hierarchy. We could see "the buzz" as a form of bluff (see Newell 2012), on which women depend not only for being popular and successful in the realm of romance, but also for social and financial support in case they are in need.

*"C'est ma femme": (same-sex) marriages*

*"It's my wife[...]We are soon going to marry. We are going to get engaged first, on the 23rd of November, Khadija's birthday<sup>66</sup>".*

Bintou (27 years old, football player in Dakar) introduced me to her girlfriend with these words, as we met each other at the beach at night before going to a *soirée* together. I was excited to hear about their planned marriage, it was the first time that I heard about a marriage between two women. To label what might be seen as a consolidation of their romantic relationship as a marriage raises questions about its meaning when compared to official, opposite-sex marriages. After all, where marriage normally is understood as a contract between families, a same-sex marriage will in no way be communicated to family members. On the contrary, such events take place somewhat secretly. As I was explained by multiple interlocutors<sup>67</sup>, the location of such wedding parties are kept secret and only revealed to invitees about an hour before the ceremony starts. This is usually around midnight, in order to attract the least possible attention from neighbours. For the organisation of such a party, a room or apartment may be rented away from the family of the brides, as an assembly of too many queer women at once attracts attention.

What is the significance of same-sex marriages for women like Khadija and Bintou? It serves both as an occasion of play and as an indication of the end of play. The organisation of a wedding ceremony is an enactment of an important social event that is officially only available to heterosexual couples. It is a subversive act: homosexuality is prohibited by law, and same-sex relationships are not approved of by family and wider society, but among themselves, queer women (and men) take their relationships serious to the extent that they organise their own parties and ceremonies within their inner circle. It is also an occasion that ideally stresses the *jump* and *sexy* identity of the two partners. Khadija excitedly told me that she would wear a beautiful dress, and that Bintou would dress up "like a real man<sup>68</sup>". Vows will be expressed and a ring will be exchanged. Hawa, when I discussed same-sex marriages with her, said that marriages between two men are even more ceremonial. "When two homosexuals marry, they'll even sign contracts. They love to imitate a real wedding too much. More so than two lesbians<sup>69</sup>". At the same time, a same-sex marriage can be organised to mark the end of play. When I asked Khadija why she decided she wanted to marry Bintou already after four months of dating, she responded that she wanted to check if Bintou was serious with her. She suspected that Bintou had other girlfriends besides Khadija, as she would sometimes refuse to answer her phone when Khadija called. "She would ignore my calls, and only call me back at midnight. I am sure that she is with other girls until this time, and I suspect that sometimes they are her girlfriend<sup>70</sup>". She agreed that four months was somewhat early to get married, hence she had the idea to get engaged first and to organise a party with friends around their engagement on

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<sup>66</sup> Conversation with Bintou, 22 October 2017.

<sup>67</sup> I discussed same-sex marriages with Bintou and Khadija, Hawa, and Nafissatou.

<sup>68</sup> Conversation with Khadija, 14 November 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Conversation with Hawa, 4 December 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Conversation with Khadija, 14 November 2017.

Khadija's birthday in late November. "I want to make sure that she is serious about us, before I continue with her", she stressed once again. To make this a semi-public event then, Khadija adds witnesses to Bintou's promise to be serious about their relationship. At the same time, Bintou's vows in their circle of queer friends may serve as a warning to the others that Bintou is now engaged in a serious relationship with someone.

On another level, marriage as a social and family responsibility can become imposed on women and mark the limit of play as well. The space within which same-sex desires are navigated and enacted, can be abruptly put to an end by family members who decide that it is time to get married. When I visited Hawa in October 2017, her mother had jokingly called Hawa a "*garçonette*", a self-invented word that signifies something along the lines of 'female boy'. She also frequently said that she has four sons and two daughters, although she has in fact three sons and three daughters. In addition, Hawa said that whenever her father criticises Hawa for wearing trousers, her mother would rebut that he had prayed for a son when she was pregnant of Hawa. Her attitude had completely changed by February 2018, as Hawa's behaviour was now considered to pose a threat to the need to marry at her age. This change of attitude recalls temporality as one of the key characteristics of play. It furthermore refers to the linear temporality of bodies that Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) described. At this point in life, marriage is Hawa's responsibility to fulfil in order to attain the social status of a woman. This step marks the linear temporality of bodies, which refers not only to the repetition of acts in order to sustain a moral order, but also to the linear development of different life stages, whereby marriage marks the stage of social adulthood. Whatever the threat that Hawa's mother felt was exactly, she saw the need to impose the end of Hawa's youthful and irresponsible behaviour. This irresponsible behaviour was marked by her engagements in football both as a player and as the coordinator of a young boys' *école de foot* (football school) in her neighbourhood, and by her status as a single woman at the age of 30. Her lack of interest in boys, visible for her mother by the fact that she never brings home or talks fondly about one, has not always been regarded as problematic. However, as her health deteriorates and as Hawa has reached the age of 30, worries about the next step for Hawa - who will provide for her when her mother no longer can? - have emerged.

Not very long before, her mother had sought an explanation for Hawa's lack of interest in men. She had gone to a *marabout* with the question why Hawa was unable to stay close to men. The *marabout* had explained to her that Hawa has a *faro rab*, a jealous spirit spouse inhabiting her that refrained her from becoming too close with other men<sup>71</sup>. *Rab* is a 'free' spirit, similar to the Islamic concept of *jinn*, which can attach itself to a person or a place for various reasons and that causes misfortune (Ross 2008). A *faro rab* is the specific name for a male spirit spouse that 'inhabits' a woman (vice versa that would be called a *gel*<sup>72</sup> *rab*) and that, out of alleged jealousy, causes bad luck to one's love life: a woman with a *faro rab* may not be able to maintain a relationship or a marriage successfully as the forces of the *faro rab* drive her away from a (potential) boyfriend or husband. With the intervention of a traditional healer or a *marabout*, one may rid her-/himself from such spirits. Van Eerdewijk (2007) pointed out that the *marabout* is particularly popular among young, single women who seek advice pertaining to love and sexual issues. The *marabout* may subsequently prescribe aphrodisiacs and love potions for the enhancement of people's romantic and sexual lives. The example of Hawa's mother who consulted the *marabout* to explain the absence of men in her daughter's life demonstrates that not only young women but also their families may seek explanation or advice from religious

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<sup>71</sup> Conversation with Hawa, 26 October 2017.

<sup>72</sup> After the English word 'girl'

thinking on such issues. This points to the fact that the entire family, and Hawa's social network in fact, is implicated by her intimate affairs. Thus, when Hawa's mother decided to consult the *marabout*, she did not just do this for Hawa or for herself, but for the rest of their social network as well, realising what the impact of gossips about, or disclosure of, Hawa's love life would be (see Beckmann 2010: 622). The *marabout's* explanation of the *faro rab* inhabiting Hawa satisfied both Hawa and her mother, albeit temporarily: for her mother, the importance of getting married weighs more heavily than the difficulty Hawa has with men as a result of this *faro rab*. For some women, like Hawa, the pressure to get married conflicts too much with their personal ideas of their future. The only option she sees at this moment, is to flee from what she termed her "responsibility as a woman", and to build a life (perhaps temporarily) elsewhere. In conversations with other women, a marriage option that came to the fore as more desirable for women with no romantic interest in men, was to marry a queer man. Thinking about the difficulties of leaving behind everything and everyone in Senegal, and to build a new life in a new country as a single woman with little formal education and without economic means or a safety net, I asked Hawa if this was not an option for her. She had been telling me about a good friend, a young queer man. He had been kicked out of the house by his grandfather after having been outed as gay, so marriage to a woman for him might also be a step to regain some social status. Her response was clear and unfortunate:

*"Firstly, Paul is a Catholic, and we Muslims, we don't accept that a Muslim girl marries a Catholic. I'm sure that Paul will not convert to Islam. Secondly, Paul is a kid. He's not even 25 years old yet. He doesn't have a job, he has nothing[...]. If I saw a solution close to this [marrying a queer man], I'd do it. And if I could stay here, in Senegal, I'd do it"*<sup>73</sup>.

With marrying her friend Paul not being a choice, she sees no other choice than to "run away, run away from my responsibility<sup>74</sup>". This quote reflects the fact that she knows that it is her responsibility as a woman to get married. At the same time, she said that she understands her parents' viewpoint, and she does not want to disappear from the family completely. Because she has linked (and this is a common link) marriage to financial security, she is able to negotiate for herself the need to seek financial security without marriage: she strives for economic independence: "I want to show them that I am capable by myself, without being married or without being with them [her family], to live my life [...] Married or not, I am capable. Without a husband much more in fact [...] to show them that marriage is not something compulsory [...] for me to become someone or something tomorrow<sup>75</sup>". Seeking economic independence independent from a man is rare in a culture where, as Kendall put it referring to the Lesotho context, but that can equally be argued for Senegal: "heterosexual marriage [...] is both a sexual and an economic part of the culture" (1998: 238).

For others, marriage may in fact increase their space for manoeuvre. As Lafia<sup>76</sup> and Nabou remarked in a conversation:

*Lafia: "when I'm married, I'll be completely free."*

*Nabou: "Yes, you will soon marry, to finally have your liberty."*

*Lafia: "I'll be a second wife, that gives me more freedom."*

<sup>73</sup> WhatsApp audio message from Hawa, 2 March 2018.

<sup>74</sup> WhatsApp conversation with Hawa, 15 February 2018.

<sup>75</sup> WhatsApp conversation with Hawa, 19 February 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Conversation with Lafia and Nabou, 10 December 2017.

Marriage in most cases means moving out of your family's house to live with your husband's family or, in case of more economic means, to construct your own household with your husband. In Lafia's situation, moving out of her mother's house would most probably increase her space for manoeuvre. She is currently very much policed by her mother and her stepfather, who forbid her to go out much, especially at night. She has good hopes that a family-in-law would not restrict her movement the way her mother and stepfather do. And if she gets to the point to construct her own household with her husband, she may have more space to invite girlfriends over, as her husband will not always be at home. Coupled with being a second (or even third or fourth) wife, she may have a few nights a week in which she could go out to see a girlfriend, or invite a girlfriend over at her place.

In other words, marriage can be understood as simultaneously marking the end of play, as play itself, and as providing new opportunities for play. Married girls are seen as more serious partners to other girls, as they "are more loyal, they don't even have the time to play around<sup>77</sup>". At the same time, family pressure to marry can be experienced as highly constraining for those who have no romantic interest in men and who do not wish to be economically dependent on one either, as Hawa shows with her plan to flee from the country to escape a marriage to a man that her parents recently introduced to her via telephone.

## **Conclusion**

Drawing on the examples in this chapter, how should we understand the tactical navigation of same-sex intimacies in various homosocial contexts? By employing an array of tactics, my interlocutors simultaneously navigate same-sex intimacies in existing homosocial spaces, as well as carve out new spaces for enacting same-sex intimacies through the organisation of Friday-evening clubbing for queer women and men, and through the celebration of same-sex marriages. Moreover, the (cross-sex oriented) sisters of some of my interlocutors have shown with their playful, sexual advances to simultaneously satisfy their personal erotic desires as well as indirectly testing or figuring out others' (same-sex) erotic interests. The fact that the acts of Mariama (inviting me to wash her) and Mame Diarra (kissing Nabou and making remarks about her sexual interests in her) were presented as play, makes definite conclusions about the intentions of their acts impossible. Perhaps the ambiguity of their acts reinforces the idea that sexuality itself is an ambiguous terrain (Spronk 2012), with reality more often than not diverging from norms. Acknowledging play as part of the social navigation of (same-sex) intimacies can help us to rethink the place and space for same-sex intimacies in society. By showing how women allude to and experience (same-sex) sexuality in various ways, this chapter has demonstrated how homosociality blurs the boundaries between friendly and erotic behaviour. Understanding how homosociality, in various constellations, enables the tactical navigation of same-sex intimacies helps us to understand how women's football emerged as a space for gender and sexual dissidence. In the next chapter, I will explore how young women have appropriated the football field as a homosocial space where gender dissidence and same-sex intimacies abound.

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<sup>77</sup> Conversation with Hawa, 26 October 2017.

***“C’est la carte d’identité des footballeuses<sup>78</sup>”:***  
**jump and same-sex intimacies on the football field**

*I hung out with Zahia on the rooftop of the apartment where she rented a room with her ex-girlfriend. She rolled out a reed mat for us. Beneath the laundry lay a man on a mattress. “Don’t worry, he’s asleep. He won’t hear us.” We were in a quiet neighbourhood, and the night added to a feeling of security. We had met each other a couple of weeks earlier at football practice. Even when not wearing her football jersey, she had that steadfastness in her attitude. We started talking about the football team. When she had come to Senegal about six years ago, to pursue her studies at the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, she had joined a boy’s football team at university. Coming from the Comorian Islands on her own, she was happy to have found a community of Comorian students with whom she could share study as well as leisure time. “But after three years I thought: if there are women’s football teams, why am I not playing with them?” And so she decided to join one of the women’s teams. However, after the first practice she stayed away from the team for a couple of months before actually joining them and playing with them in the first (highest) division of women’s football in Senegal. “At the end of that first practice, this girl asked me if I wanted to go out with her. I was not sure how she meant that, so I decided to ignore her. As we were walking to catch our bus to go home, she asked me if I had not heard her question. She wanted to date me. That was when I understood. I could not go out with her at this point, I was too much in shock. I didn’t even dare to come back to the team for practice.” She continued playing with the Comorian guys for a while, before deciding that women’s football had more to offer her. It was then that she met her now ex-girlfriend, and they started dating. “I was not aware of this life in the football environment, and I had never expected myself to be engaged in it one day. When this first happened to me, I turned to the Quran. I prayed a lot, and I hoped to find answers in the Quran to explain my feelings for girls. I didn’t learn much, except that God doesn’t like homosexuality, and that I will have to quit this life one day. Neither God, nor my dad will accept if I do not get married.” At this point, her current girlfriend had joined us on the rooftop. She added: “It is God who decides if we will change paths, and if so, when.” We were still alone on the rooftop, except for the clearly sleeping - because snoring - man. Zahia and Oumy, not having greeted each other properly yet, excused themselves for a moment, and walked hand in hand to another corner of the rooftop. I looked at their silhouettes as they kissed.*

Concurrent with her introduction to women’s football in Senegal, Zahia was introduced to the environment of same-sex intimacies. She explained that she had not been aware of “this life” before joining, but she was quickly introduced through a fairly straightforward proposition by another football player to date her. This seems to somehow contradict the silence that surrounds talk about dissident sexualities, much promoted by the value of *sutura* in Senegal.

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<sup>78</sup> English: “It’s the identity card of women who play football.”

However, as this chapter will show, the football field provides a distinct social space for young women where gender dissidence and same-sex intimacies abound.

Besnier and Brownell argue that the Western-dominated sports system is shaped by its “hypermasculinity spectacle for global consumption” (2012: 449). This, they argue, makes most sports muffle sexual and gender dissidence and create hostile environments for lesbians and gays (see also Anderson 2005). However, what if a specific sports arena is appropriated by people to enable a space for the (tacit) expression of gender and sexual difference, as is the case in Senegal? Following Besnier and Brownell (2012) who argued that sports is ritual, symbol, and play, designed to create liminal spaces in which inequality and power are at least temporarily sidelined, this chapter seeks to explore how the football arena is appropriated as a (social) space for young women to simultaneously compete with each other in the national football competition, as well as challenging Senegalese gender norms, resulting in people’s disapproval of women’s football and the associated masculine styles. Football forms a relevant field of inquiry because sports assembles bodies as they combine aspects of performance, play, liminality, and storytelling (Besnier and Brownell 2012). Understanding football, and sport in general, as a “body culture”, defined by Brownell as “everything that people do with their bodies [...], together with the cultural context that shapes the nature of their actions and gives them meaning” (Brownell 1995: 17-21), helps us to make sense of the motivations of young women to engage in football. Moreover, we can explore how they use and shape the field and the networks as they extend beyond the football arena, as a social space where they negotiate and perform gender and sexuality.

Although a fair amount of studies on sporting women have appeared, most of these were conducted in the West. Moreover, when discussing issues of gender and sexuality, they tend to focus on the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1990), i.e. the way in which heterosexual normativity shapes the way women in sports behave, emphasising their femininity. Although this chapter starts with some context about the place of women’s football in Senegal, the aim is ultimately to look beyond societal constraints women face when choosing to play football. Rather, in this chapter I explore how women mold the football field as a distinctive social space (from) where they engage in various bodily practices including same-sex intimacies. This chapter will demonstrate that the importance of football reaches far beyond the game itself. The social network that emerges from the football field reveals that play forms an integral part of how young women navigate their same-sex intimacies on and off the football terrain.

### **The place of women’s football in Senegal**

Eliot Khouma, a Senegalese former track athlete who ran a boys’ football school in Dakar in the 1970s, started to train with girls informally before forming the first women’s football team, Gazelles, in preparation of a match between a women’s team from Milan that was brought to Dakar by a friend of Khouma (Savendraa 2004). The match between the Milano team and Gazelles took place in 1974 and marked the start of organised women’s football in Senegal. After a tour through Senegal to compete with boys’ teams, the Gazelles inspired other girls’ teams to be formed. In 2000, the Senegalese Football Federation increased its commitment to the women’s game by organising a national league with twelve teams (ibid.); in 2001-2002 a national women’s team was established. This was encouraged by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), who had expressed their wish to see a women’s team in every country that had a men’s team (Rostac 2014). Women’s football in Senegal remains marginal in Senegal compared to men’s football however. Besides registered football clubs, popular in Senegal are also the organisation of *nawetaan* competitions organised between neighbourhood

teams. The term *nawetaan* was first used in the early 20th century for seasonal migrant labourers who harvested peanuts during the rainy season (Ross 2008). For leisure, these labourers organised football matches. In the 1960s, such *nawetaan* football clubs emerged in Dakar and other urban centres due to rural to urban migration. The *nawetaan* are organised by local associations, of which over 2.000 now exist in Senegal (ibid.). It accounts for an important part of Senegalese street culture, as matches are mainly played at sandy pitches in popular neighbourhoods. This competition focuses on boys' football<sup>79</sup>.

The women's football commission of the Senegalese football federation (*la fédération sénégalais de football*) has been directed by Seyni Ndir Seck since her election on 8 July 2017 (Agence de Presse Sénégalaise 2017). Ndir Seck had previously established the association Ladies' Turn in 2009, in collaboration with Jennifer Browning and Gaelle Yomi, at the time when Ndir Seck was the captain of the Senegalese national women's team. Ladies' Turn was established with the aim of promoting women's football in Senegal through the organisation of a biannual football tournament for women in various neighbourhoods (Ladies' Turn 2018). Hélène Harder is the producer of the eponymous documentary film that describes the struggles of organising women's football in Senegal, where many people condemn women who practise football. The biannual tournament is organised at various football pitches that can be found in every neighbourhood. These *terrains de quartier* are sandy pitches, sometimes accommodated with goalposts, which by their conditions look deserted but are extremely popular particularly in the late afternoons, when various neighbourhood teams come out to play. Girls are rarely seen on these pitches; it was only on one pitch that I occasionally saw some girls play.

The marginality of women's football in Senegal is further confirmed by their limited access to the available football stadiums in Dakar. The finals of the first and second division of the women's league were scheduled for the 21st of October at 16:00 to take place at the Alassane Djigo stadium in Dakar. Upon our arrival at the stadium, a little before 16:00, Astou (23 years old, playing on the Dakarois team that I had joined) and I found only a lot of men and boys gathered in and around the stadium, indicative of a men's rather than a women's game going on. We quickly found out that in the last hours before the scheduled match, the *nawetaan* neighbourhood competition final had received priority over the women's national final. The latter had been relocated to the Jules Bocandé stadium in Toubab Dialaw. Those who had been reachable by phone by the various team captains of women's teams had been notified of this last-minute change. The football federation had arranged free transport to the stadium per *Ndiaga Ndiaye*<sup>80</sup> (mini-bus) from the bus stop at Patte d'Oie in Dakar to Toubab Dialaw, about an hour's drive away. Astou and I had not received the update, and we found out about the new location when we called the captain of Astou's football team. We arrived late, around 18:00, but the last-minute change had also been unexpected for the competing teams. As a result, the first

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<sup>79</sup> In the context of football, *nawetaan* now signifies 'winter championship'. Conversation with Hawa, 26 October 2017.

<sup>80</sup> *Ndiaga Ndiaye* are one of the most popular forms of public transport. Manufactured in the early 1980s in Germany, the buses found their way to Senegal in 1983 and have ever since been used for public transport. The buses derive their name from Mr. Ndiaga Ndiaye, the man who transformed the functional vehicles into buses for the public transport of people and their luggage. He was awarded a medal of honour by then President Abdou Diouf in 1985 for his ingenuity, contributing to public transport in Senegal. (Source: Seneweb. 2015. "L'histoire jamais racontée de Ndiaga Ndiaye". 20 February 2015.)

They can be rented including the driver, and this is common for football teams who have to travel to other cities for a match. When I joined the team from Dakar to another city, a *Ndiaga Ndiaye* was rented for two days.

match had commenced with a considerable delay. Throughout the evening, I heard many girls complain about the carelessness with which they had, quite literally, been pushed to the margins of the football *milieu*. This space is sometimes contested by family and wider society as a space that is unsuitable for women. First, as argued by Lafia's mother, women should not compete in sports, particularly not in tough sports like football, because they will lose their feminine forms through it. However, when a woman's engagement in football goes from a leisure activity to an economic one, as Hawa argued when she tried to convince her father to postpone her marriage until the end of the football season, it becomes less problematic. Secondly, women's football is not considered the real game by many, reflected in the fact that women's football in Senegal remains at the amateur level, whereas their male counterparts have attained a professional status. At the same time, female football is gaining ground, as shown by the sizable amount of male supporters present at both the under 20 world cup qualification match Senegal - Morocco in October in Pikine, and the women's first and second division finals in Toubab Dialaw.

Different factors have limited the opportunities for girls and women to engage in football without receiving negative attention. Roberts (1992) argued that the burden that is placed on women to perform household chores has limited South African women's access to sports. In Senegal too, women are often expected to be at home in the early evening to prepare the evening meal. El Hadj, a young man and a player on the men's football team in his neighbourhood, volunteered to coach the women's football team, that I joined in Dakar, when their coach had to travel to Ziguinchor in the southern Casamance region of the country to care for his sick mother. With his passion for football, he was motivated to practise intensively with the women's team to better their performances in the national competition. At the same time, he told me that he had purposely reduced the number of practices for the team to four a week, compared to five or six for the men, knowing that they would be expected to be at home to perform chores; hence many would not show up five or six days a week<sup>81</sup>. In addition to their limited access to football and other leisurely activities as a result of their work in the household, their engagement in sports - most notably football and other sports, like rugby, that are understood as being essentially masculine - is often met with disapproval from family members and strangers alike. Women's football is associated with gender and sexual dissidence and hence challenges societal norms of femininity as belonging to women, and masculinity as belonging to men only.

Various studies have shown that sportswomen who do not conform to a feminine ideal are quickly labeled as lesbians and subsequently receive negative attention (see for example Hall 1996; Lesnkyj 1990). When searching for articles about women's football in Senegal, I came across the article "lesbians abound in the football environment" (*les lesbiennes pullulent dans le milieu*), as well as an article about the Nigerian women's football team, the Super Falcons, that supposedly ruined the sport because they were "synonymous with lesbianism", hence sponsors were reluctant to invest in the sport (Guilbert 2016). These remarks were made in 2011 by the then coach of the Nigerian women's national team, Eucharia Uche, who subsequently attempted to ban alleged lesbians from playing on the team. This then led to a conflict with FIFA, who have listed as one of their principles the non-discrimination of players based on gender and sexual orientation. The chair was reprimanded for her remarks, but her follower reiterated the concerns. In 2016, a similar incident occurred, when the vice-president of the Nigerian Football Federation, Seyi Akinwunmi, blamed women's same-sex orientations for the decline of women's

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<sup>81</sup> Conversation with El Hadj, 25 September 2017.

football success, saying that “lesbianism kills teams” (ibid.). The Super Falcons had indeed failed to qualify for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, but this does not make for a good argument about their lack of success, as the Super Falcons are the most successful African women’s team.

These occasional ‘alarms’ in the media about the prevalence of lesbians in women’s football go hand in hand with a much more tacit knowledge about the existence of same-sex intimacies in women’s football teams. My interlocutor Astou told me that although her only regular commitment is football, she often hides from people that she plays it, as the question “do you play football?” according to her can be synonymous with “are you a lesbian?<sup>82</sup>”. Dankwa wrote that, particularly in West Africa, “the female football arena amounts to a homosocial public space, a site for gender variance where young women’s masculine styles and same-sex intimacies are tacitly tolerated” (2011: 236-237). The media reports put aside, it can be argued that there is a silent awareness of same-sex intimacies in the female football *milieu* in Senegal, like in Ghana and Nigeria and possibly other female football contexts as well. Indeed, El Hadj, coach of the football team, has decided not to mingle in their affairs: “I wonder every day why the girls are like this. I don’t understand it at all [...] but I don’t get to ask them why, there’s not really a chance to. And besides, it’s none of my business<sup>83</sup>”. With “like this” he means their masculine appearance and behaviour, having commented extensively on the inappropriate hairstyles of some of the players (shaved heads, short hairstyles), the way they walk (he imitated their fast pace and movement of the shoulders rather than hips) and their way of dress.

In Senegal, several associations are currently actively promoting women’s football as a game to be taken seriously, responding to the stigmatisation that women encounter when pursuing football careers. The efforts of associations such as Ladies’ Turn and the promotional efforts of some footballers with their slogan ‘*Je suis football féminin*’ serve to challenge the common assumption that football is not for women. Their efforts can be seen as reflecting the political potential of sport (Young and White 1995), when societal (gender) norms are transgressed in and through sport. Yet, a focus on the transgressive aspects of women’s football alone risks to ignore the creative elements and productive capacity of women’s football as a space where same-sex intimacies are in itself enacted and negotiated. The field should not only be seen as a response to hegemonic femininity, a battle against sexism, but also as a space in itself where gender norms are negotiated and where same-sex relationships feature as a part of the lifeworlds of these young women. Therefore, I will now extend the analysis of the football field as a place where football games are played, to include an understanding of the *milieu* as a social space where play features as a productive force in the lives of women.

### ***Garçons manqués* and jump: social shifters and gendered (self-)understanding**

Before proceeding with an analysis of how the football *milieu* as a social space serves for the negotiation and enactment of same-sex intimacies, I will first explore how the football *milieu* is constructed as a space where *jump* appearances and behaviour are performed.

*I left with the football team to another city, where they were to play a match the next morning. The team had hired a minibus to drive there. We picked up players at various crossroads in Dakar. When Oumy entered the bus, Zahia greeted her with a kiss in her neck. Zahia sat next to Boury, who posed her head on Zahia’s lap. She seemed angry, and Zahia asked her: “why are you mad, my*

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<sup>82</sup> Conversation with Astou, 20 September 2017.

<sup>83</sup> Conversation with El Hadj, 15 September 2017.

*baby?" The girls in the bus stood in such a stark contrast to the women I saw on the street, most of whom were elegantly dressed in skirts and dresses. This football team was really a meeting of girls with masculine clothing styles: caps, baggy shorts or jeans, some with short hair - without exception [...] Zahia took off her shirt and sat in her sports bra for quite some time. When we made yet another stop at Mbao to pick up two players, Soukeye hopped off the bus to call someone. El Hadj said to me: "Soukeye is calling her boyfriend." Meanwhile, I observed all kinds of hints to same-sex desire. The playful kisses of Zahia in the bus were just one example. When we went to bed around midnight, half of the girls slept inside the extremely hot building; I joined the other half on mattresses outside. Zahia had put her bag on the mattress next to mine, but Safiétou said she would "accompany me to sleep" and lay down on Zahia's mattress. In an effort to reclaim her mattress, Zahia jumped on top of Safiétou, they frolicked a little, and then Safiétou said to Zahia: "ah, you need to kiss the girls, don't you?" Zahia laughed in response<sup>84</sup>.*

These fieldnotes were taken during a two-day trip with the football team. It was my first acquaintance with most of the players of the team, and I was absolutely surprised by the unequivocal masculine styles and hints to same-sex desire. I was also surprised that the only thing El Hadj remarked to me about the girls was that Soukeye was calling her boyfriend. Did he not observe these hints to same-sex desire? Did he choose to ignore them? Was Soukeye's boyfriend really a boyfriend, and if it was in fact a girlfriend, did El Hadj not know this, or did he choose to keep calling her Soukeye's boyfriend? All these questions were to be slowly answered through my various meet-ups with (some of the girls on) the team.

The remarks of Lafia's mother about her daughter's football engagements, as well as those of my classmate in the French course, suggest a certain awareness of the masculine styles and same-sex intimacies that abound in the women's football *milieu*. Lafia's mother repeatedly mentioned how Lafia is not a real football player, referring to a match that was played by her football team in which Lafia did not participate, although she went all dressed up. Her mother seemed happy with her daughter's limited participation, saying that "women lose their female forms as a result of football<sup>85</sup>", meanwhile slapping Nabou's muscular legs, so as to demonstrate what happens when a girl plays too much football. And when I mentioned to a fellow student in the French course I took, a Malian woman of around 35 years old, that I was meeting with a girl from the football team later that evening, she warned me to watch out for football women, as they would all hit on me according to her. Staying in this football environment for too long may cause me to slip into a lesbian love affair, she feared. And that, she said, was problematic, as it was of utmost importance for women to have children. A mother of two young children herself, she gave me the well-meant advice to start a family, as a life without children would in the end make you suicidal - what else to live for, than for your children, she argued. Interestingly, this advice made me realise that her warning to stay away from women's football was meant more as a protection from me losing the possibility to become a successful, real woman (with a husband and children), than as an attack on same-sex intimacy per se. The strong ideas many people I spoke with had about women playing football, led me to question how this football field becomes constructed as well as analysed (and criticised) as a social space where masculine styles and same-sex intimacies feature. The concept of 'social shifters' helped me to understand why football women are sometimes called *garçons manqués* and why they refer to themselves and their fellow footballers as *jump*.

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<sup>84</sup> Participant observation, 5 september 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Participant observation, 16 December 2017.

In her research on “disappearing youth” in Botswana, Deborah Durham (2004) calls for an understanding of youth as a social shifter – a combination of the idea that youth is relational and that invoking youth as a category is a political or pragmatic act. ‘Shifter’ is a term that comes from linguistics, denoting something that has both a referential and an indexical (or deictic) function (Durham 2004: 592). Referential, like reference point, points to something that exists independent of a particular use. As indexical, a shifter refers to the context of its use. Applying shifters to sociality helps us to understand how “discourses [are] relational, pragmatic, and part of a shifting and contested historical and social arena” (ibid.: 593). In other words, to label someone youth (in the case of Durham’s research), is to position her/him in society and to ascribe her/him with rights, obligations, knowledge and authority. To call someone youth (or another social category relating to gender, race, ethnicity or class for that matter), is to ascribe relationships between people, as well as to articulate a set of ideas about what constitutes this category. Rather than seeing youth as having *a priori* meaning, it should be understood as acquiring meaning in relation to social processes, cultural understandings and historical influences (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; Mannheim 1952). It follows from this that “youth is differently constituted and configured in different times and places” (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006: 10).

Moreover, in the introduction to a special issue on youth in Africa, van Dijk et al. (2011) argue for an understanding of youth as an ideology. They call for an exploration of how the pursuit of a youth identity has become an ideology with norms regarding behaviour, expression and desires (ibid.: 6). They argue that such ideological positioning of youth has occurred in the context of state policies and civil society organisations that seek to manage the arena of interests and scarce resources, while at the same time youth has become an active ideology for people themselves as they pursue personal aspirations. It is with this latter interpretation of youth as ideology that we can understand young women’s emphasis on their youthfulness: to be a youth enables, among other things, one’s engagement in football and the postponement of marriage. What furthermore follows from this dual usage of the notion of youth, is that people can label themselves youth, in addition to being labeled as youth by others. It is here that a distinction between *garçon manqué* and *jump* can be made, the former being a joking and sometimes somewhat pejorative name for girls and young women who play football (mostly, but it may also be uttered to girls who play basketball or rugby – basically any girl who engages in what are deemed boys’ activities); whereas the latter is a matter of self-understanding of girls and young women who embody a certain (relational) masculinity.

The utterances of the two categories, although referring to a somewhat similar experience of masculine-looking and –behaving girls and young women, produce a different set of relations and attributes to wider society. *Garçons manqués* are tomboys, somehow masculine girls and women, and they stand in stark contrast to normative femininity in society. The markers of a *garçon manqué* are partly similar to that of a jump, a girl’s way of dress and her involvement in masculine activities such as playing football. In September, I visited Rokhaya, whom I had met via Coumba Diallo of the organisation Yaakaare. Rokhaya was engaged both with Yaakaare and with Nio Far, in addition to being a passionate football player. She was 27 years old when I met her, and she and her eleven-year-old daughter stay with Rokhaya’s family at the outskirts of Dakar. When I visited her there, her cousin walked into the room and asked me directly: “is it your friend, that boy over there?” When I expressed my surprise about this question to Selly, a sociologist I had met in our preparation of a *rencontre* around radicalisation in Dakar in November, she assured that this was a way of this woman to ask if I was like Rokhaya, engaged in football and sharing her masculine style of dress. Selly remarked: “those

who resemble, assemble” and Rokhaya’s cousin had wanted to categorise me as belonging to this same category of women.

In a similar fashion, Lafia’s mother had remarked, when Nabou, Lafia and I left for an amical match of Lafia’s football team as a competition between *les anciennes* (the veterans) and *les jeunes* (the youth): “ah, the tomboys are leaving”, with a smile on her face as if teasing us with our not-so femininity particularly in this instance of enjoying a football match on a Saturday afternoon. It had been a point of discussion between Lafia, her mother, and her sister Mame Diarra as to whether Lafia was actually allowed to go and play. Mame Diarra and Lafia are alternately responsible for preparing the meals at home, and this day it was Lafia’s turn. Her request to change days with Mame Diarra to be able to play this game of football, was not met with much appreciation by her mother, as she would exchange her household responsibilities for a boy’s game. It was when Lafia promised to prepare part of the evening meal already in the afternoon, and to quickly return home as soon as the match had finished, that she was allowed to go. By calling us *garçons manqués* as we left the house, Lafia’s mother ascribed us with a sense of otherness, of lacking femininity and evading responsibility. She said it with a smile on her face, and I do not think that she wanted to make us feel bad about our activity that Saturday afternoon, but she did remind us of being playful girls as opposed to being responsible women.

Perhaps it can be argued that *garçon manqué*, when uttered by someone about a masculine looking and/or -behaving girl or woman, is a reference to this person’s playful disposition. To be playful here is opposed to being responsible, as Lafia exchanged her household duties for a game of football, and at the same time it connotes the subversion of the feminine ideal, albeit only temporarily and in a demarcated area of social life, the football arena. *Garçon manqué* as a category of young women can thus be exclaimed by people to shift a person from the category of girls, with its attributions and expectations, to that of boys. However, it is not only gender that is referred to in the utterance of *garçon manqué*. *Garçon* (boy) as opposed to *homme* (man) refers to a certain childishness that the attitude of these young women is associated with. Regarded as a leisure activity for boys, women who play football are not only viewed as transgressing gender norms, but also as refusing to grow up and shift to an adult stage in life. Age status (i.e. child, adult) is not conceived of in chronology but depends on markers such as marriage and parenthood (Neveu Kringelbach 2016; Spronk 2017), and at a certain chronological age the pressure from family to move from one age status to the next can become quite serious. One’s status as *garçon manqué*, as youth, with its leisure activities such as football, is liminal. For a woman like Hawa (aged 30), the pressure her family exerts on her to marry a man so as to end her dependence on her father and mother for food and shelter, has become a serious issue of conflict between her parents and her.

*Jump*, on the contrary, is a matter of self-understanding of girls who dress and behave in masculine ways, but not in relation to society’s ideal of femininity in women, but more importantly, as we have seen in chapter three, in relation to their feminine counterparts: *sexy* girls. *Jump* are not exclusively present in the football *milieu*, but this is the space where they are most numerous. In fact, I have not come across a single female football player who was not *jump*. The elements of measuring bodily strength in a football game and wearing shorts instead of skirts for practicality correspond with the *jump* way of dress and their steadfast attitude. Football as a measurement of strength and a game of physical prowess is related to the social life outside the football field in interesting ways. Sports such as football, that require of its players considerable physical strength, are socially constructed as masculine activities (Young 1997). On the one hand, muscle and a certain sturdiness, indispensable on the football field, are not so much appreciated outside the field. A woman needs to be feminine, and these traits do

not correspond to the feminine ideal. Gilbert (2017) argued that in Senegal appearances and the art of dressing well, *sañse*, is an important way to show your respect to the people you visit and encounter. For women, *sañse* includes applying makeup and wearing jewellery. With regards to her own downplaying of her femininity in not trying to attract unwanted attention, she was, according to her host, “giving the impression that I did not care about myself - nor, as a consequence, about them” (Gilbert 2017: 65). The importance of appearance, and of a feminine appearance for women begs the question: how can women carefully stylise a masculine way of dress if a feminine look is so much emphasised? If your looks are what attract people’s attention, we can only conclude that *jump* are not downplaying this ‘masculine’ part of themselves. Although I agree with Gilbert’s argument that appearances are important in Senegal, I would like to challenge the notion that not to stand out or appear too feminine gives the impression that one does not care about oneself. Rather, as *jump* women demonstrate, an un-feminine appearance can be a very carefully stylised fashion that challenges the pervasive link between biological sex and social constructions of gender.

Resulting from cultural conceptions of appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour, Senegalese women are repeatedly told to stay away from activities like football that are deemed masculine. Although people may make a fuss about women who play football, this does not withhold women from playing football anyway. McDermott (1996) refers to the concept physicality as it was understood in the sociological literature on sport of that time as relating to the physicalness of activities. Physicality was associated with power, in particular, with male power and masculinity. The physicalness that is required of footballers is what makes many people argue that football is an inappropriate sport for women. Stories about losing your fertility, or feminine forms and qualities more generally, are rampant. As Bordo (1993) argued, “excessive” musculature for women symbolises a masculine strength and is thus considered not feminine; women with muscles can count on societal disapproval. El Hadj repeatedly expressed his doubts about the abilities of the football players to fulfil their responsibilities as women. Complaining about the masculinity of Zahia, he jokingly said: “Imagine if Zahia and I were together, and we’d have sex. I would be the one who’d become pregnant, Zahia is too masculine to carry a baby<sup>86</sup>”. He appears sincerely confused by the masculine appearance of some of the girls: “Have you ever seen a couple whereby the woman looked more masculine than the man? No, that’s impossible, right? [...] How are the [football] girls going to do this, when they marry a man and start a family? Will they still look and behave like a boy?<sup>87</sup>” However, the physicality is also what distinguishes *jump* from *sexy*, and is thus an important element of the gender expression of women who play football. Zahia usually took off her t-shirt at some point during football practice to show off her abs. She would teasingly punch some other players in the stomach to check if they had abs like her, and seemed happy to conclude that she was more muscular than most others.

There is, however, a fine line between being physically fit, slightly muscular, and hence a good *jump*, and being called *góor* (man). During the final of the first division of the women’s league on the 21st of October, every time that one specific player received or intercepted the ball, the crowd - instigated by men and boys - laughed and bawled *góor* (and other things in Wolof, which I did not grasp) at her. She played amazingly well, almost always outplaying her opponents and blocking attacks on the goal. Her play was quite physical, and more than once did her direct opponent fall down. When I asked Astou why she too bawled *góor* at this player

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<sup>86</sup> Conversation with El Hadj, 25 September 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Conversation with El Hadj, 15 September 2017.

she responded, while laughing: “because she behaves a lot like a boy, it’s bad<sup>88</sup>.” I was puzzled: didn’t all women who play football behave a bit like boys? Not only were they called *garçons manqués* (tomboys) by others, many had also expressed to me that they felt more like a boy than a girl, and they referred to themselves and were referred to by others in “this life” as the boyfriends or husbands of their *sexy* girlfriends. However, it seemed now that there is a distinction between being a *jump*, and appearing so masculine that people start calling you *góor* and actually start questioning your sex. Astou further justified calling the player *góor* by saying: “have you seen that she doesn’t have breasts at all, nor a butt. At least I have breasts. She really is a boy. She is so physical. She runs too fast; she is too physical in her duels with other players. If you play against her, you will always end up on the ground.” She nodded her head a few times and then added: “I have never seen this, a girl this physical. It is not a girl.” She explained that the other spectators had also yelled that she should “take a penis”, and she admitted that she had in fact questioned whether the player has “*deux sexes*” (two sets of genitals). Understanding the fine line between *jump* and *góor* brings us back to Dankwa’s (2011) concept of relational masculinity. *Jump* perform a certain type of masculinity in relation to their *sexy* girlfriends and on the football field where they compete with each other for athletic prowess. However, they are not men and remain identifiable in some ways as women, something that is not irrelevant given the fact that certain contexts demand of women to downplay some of their masculine appearances and to perform feminine tasks. This football player had somehow transcended this relational masculinity by failing to provide any indication that she is a girl, apart from the fact that she plays in a women’s team.

Although the origins of the category *jump* remain unknown to me, we know now that it gradually spread from the football scene to queer women in different *milieus*. The English term reveals its appeal to a modern, globalised identification of youth, much like the way Ivorian *bluffeurs* express modernity and urbanity through their ways of dress that are in line with global representations of hip-hop culture (Newell 2012: 11). In a similar fashion, the adoption of the term ‘gay’ demonstrates a knowledge of the global queer community (Reid 2013). Hendriks (2016), drawing among others on Newell (2012), furthermore argues that cosmopolitan aspirations are reproduced through gender and sexual dissidence. The fact that there is no Wolof equivalent for the term *jump* suggests that the category emerged fairly recently. Hawa said that when presenting a single girl to her *sexy* queer friends, the first question that her friends would ask is: “*jump* la?” pointing not only to the fact that relationships are ideally forged between one *sexy* and one *jump*, but also that *jump* is the word that is used to describe masculine presenting girls, also when the rest of the conversation is in Wolof. For men, there is the Wolof word *góor-jigéen* (literally: man-woman) mainly connoting ‘homosexual’ these days. It is pejoratively used, and most homosexual men prefer to use the French *homosexuel* (Broqua 2017). For women, on the other hand, there is no Wolof equivalent. When Hawa started playing football in 2005, “it was rare to see girls dressed like boys<sup>89</sup>” and whenever you did, “you knew it was a footballer”. In fact, “it’s the identity card of footballers”. She argued that the abundance of *jump* in the women’s football environment is not a matter of expressing ‘true selves’ or whatsoever, but rather “a way to show other hidden lesbians, that there is another one here...one who plays football...it’s a way to show girls, big ladies (*grandes dames*), others.” Communicating your same-sex desires to other women through clothing, without explicitly saying it, adheres neatly to the value of *sutura*.

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<sup>88</sup> Conversation with Astou, 21 October 2017.

<sup>89</sup> WhatsApp audio message from Hawa, 12 April 2018.

Therefore, although the football arena is definitely not the only space where *jump* expressions are performed and where same-sex intimacies are subsequently negotiated and enacted, the football environment is the place where *jump* first emerged. The reason why *jump* as a manifestation of gender became so important in the football *milieu* is difficult to say if the origins of *jump* remain unknown, but it does not seem illogical to reason that it first emerged and developed in a space where masculinity was a key element both of criticism addressed at women's football by society, and of the stylised manifestations of women who play football themselves. The football field provides a space where girls compete over more fashionable, 'successful' *jump* expressions of identity. In fact, the football field is a space where gender, sexuality and modernity coalesce. Women who play football simultaneously break with and challenge gender stereotypes as they engage in a modern leisure activity - that is not always attainable to girls and women because of the load of their domestic work - in which same-sex intimacies are part of the lives of most players and are being tacitly acknowledged by outsiders. Moreover, the football field is where *jump* bodies are forged through the physical activity of playing football. In fact, the older generation of women footballers assured Hawa that "*jump* are men, and *sexy* are women [...] Before, until in 2011 I believe, only footballers dressed themselves like this. Around 2011, women's football became more exposed in society. But around 2005, I only saw footballers dressed as boys. It was rare, very rare. It was not at all like now, when the women who do not play football are also *jump*." However, it definitely entails more than simply a way of communicating same-sex desires to other women. *Jump* appearances represent both gender dissidence and appeals to modernity through fashion. The two registers that *jump* tap into are both relevant and more or less important at different times. However, the hip-hop style clothing among women is always also an act of gender dissidence, as other modern women present themselves in feminine ways, and identify as *disquettes* (Nyamnjoh 2005) or *sexy* (this thesis).

Manifestations of *jump* enable multiple interpretations of gender and its relational status invites for play. The power of such manifestations of gender is, in the words of Newell, "to make real through appearance, if only temporarily, what was otherwise merely the reverie of desire" (2012: 139). In other words, expressions of gender are a potentially transformative act: one transforms, or challenges, albeit unconsciously, relations of power and gender. Similarly, Newell defines the modernity bluff as "the ability to produce the real through manipulation of the imaginary" (ibid.: 261). He discusses this performativity in the context of *bluffeurs* in Côte d'Ivoire, but it can equally be applied to the discussion on same-sex intimacies. But what does the gender expression of *jump* "make real"? Within same-sex romantic relationships, it makes real social roles. The masculine role that a *jump* consolidates through her gender expressions legitimises her muscular body, her engagement in sport, her rejection of feminine aesthetics and of domestic roles - cooking is done by the *sexy* in a relationship. Newell further writes that "the mimesis of African-American street style... [serves as] a critique of local power and a claim to superiority, utilising the semiotic force of alterity" (ibid.: 140). Similarly, Scheld writes about youth in Dakar who put up with false representations of the self, which are sometimes jokingly revealed by peers who then say "*yo ndoogan nga*" (You're a fake; you're not 'cutting it') (2007: 239). However, where Scheld leaves it at fake, manipulated appearances "that are inconsistent with one's true inner self" (ibid.), Newell argues that such performances of bluff have the power to create the real and transform selves. What do *jump* show when they dress not only in a masculine fashion, but also according to African-American hip-hop fashion? By wearing large t-shirts of popular brands, baseball hats, shorts or jeans, and big silver or golden necklaces, *jump* tap into (re-)imaginings of gender, as well as of modernity.

There is no literature on *jump*, but I found a resemblance in Havard's (2001) description of *Bul Faale* in Senegal<sup>90</sup>. In his study on *Bul Faale* as an urban youth movement, Havard argues that the primary objective of *Bul Faale* is to seek emancipation based on processes of individualisation in urban spheres, as well as creating new "symbolic families" in *dahira* (urban centers for religious study centered around a *marabout* and frequented by his followers, called *talibé*), rap groups and sports and cultural associations (*ASC - association sportive et culturelle*) (2001: 73). In urban Wolof, *Bul Faale* signifies 'don't worry about it' or 'who dares?' (Neveu Kringsbach 2013: 107). The term was popularised by the 1994 recording *Boul Fale* of the Dakarois rap group Positive Black Soul. The lyrics of this song conveyed the obstacles that young men face to attain social adulthood in a situation of limited economic opportunities (ibid.). In other words, *Bul Faale* work to establish a position in urban spheres through the appropriation and creation of new spaces of *rencontre* and identification, such as the football field. Havard mentions a number of characteristics of *Bul Faale*, among which its emphasis on corporeality. Those who have worked the most to attain a slender, muscular body, receive most status. Furthermore, language is a means by which *Bul Faale* show their place in global modernity. Youth increasingly mix Wolof with French and English words. Many of my interlocutors would respond to Wolof greetings such as "*si lo nek*" (what's up?) with "*nice*" or "*ça va, nice/cool ni*". Similarly, Weiss (2005) argues, based on his study of global hip-hop and barbershops in Arusha, Tanzania, that through an identification with hip-hop's messages of pain and suffering, youth imagine their membership of a global community. For many youth, an adoption of the *Baye Fall*<sup>91</sup> way of life is characterised by fewer constraints. Presenting oneself as a *Baye Fall* allows for a more lenient approach to religious practice, and the smoking of *gandja* (marijuana) and sometimes the consumption of alcohol are tolerated. Moreover, because of the association of *Baye Fall* with hard work, they are widely appreciated by wider society. For some youth, the *Baye Fall* way of life can be a way to live their marginality without fearing outright rejection from society (ibid.).

In addition to *jump* as a manifestation of gender, there are other ways of presenting oneself that play with people's perceptions as they enable the conflation of multiple appearances. My interlocutor Nabou identified, in addition to *jump*, as *Yaye Fall*. A religious subgrouping within the Mouride brotherhood, *Baye Fall* are known for their simple way of life that is propagated by their way of dress. Nabou's *njeñ* (dreadlocks) evoke admiration, not only from fellow *Baye Fall*. It is the most visible sign of her *Yaye Fall* identity (although not all *Baye Fall* have dreadlocks), a movement that is known for its devotion to God through its manual labour, prayers, and their rejection of worldly luxury. This appearance as a *Yaye Fall* taps into people's imagination of her as a devout Mouride and follower of Cheikh Ibrahima Fall, as well as a "simple, plain person<sup>92</sup>" - not desiring worldly possession or luxury. This aspect of *Baye Fall*, widely respected in Senegal, explains and legitimises her choice for simple, practical clothes. I am inclined to argue that this multi-layered identification raises the question: what do people (choose to) see? Through an embodiment of both *Yaye Fall* and *jump*, Nabou conflates the

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<sup>90</sup> See also Henry (2012) for a study about the hip-hop generation of Senegal as it emerged in the 1980s, and the relevance of rap and hip-hop music and its associated fashion style in urban Senegal.

<sup>91</sup> *Baye Fall* and *Yaye Fall* constitute a movement around the following of Cheikh Ibrahima Fall, who was the most devout disciple of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of the Mouride brotherhood in Senegal. *Baye* is Wolof for father, and *Yaye* is Wolof for mother; hence men in the movement are called *Baye Fall*, where women are called *Yaye Fall*. I will use *Baye Fall* to refer to this way of life in general, and *Yaye Fall* when referring to Nabou specifically. For more information about *Baye Fall* in Senegal, see Pezeril (2008).

<sup>92</sup> Conversation with Nabou, 5 January 2018.

simplicity that characterises *Yaye Fall* in appearance and way of life with the plainness of a *jump* style of dress that lacks feminine markers and aesthetics such as skirts, heels and make-up. Although *jump* and *Yaye Fall* signify completely different positions, with *jump* connoting a modern, worldly youthful style, and *Yaye Fall* a mouride, religious adherence, by tapping into these two different registers of embodied identity, Nabou plays with people's perceptions of her plainness. People can (choose to) see a devout mouride from her dreadlocks and *jalamban*<sup>93</sup> wooden necklace around her neck, as well as a *jump* with a masculine way of dress. What *jump* and *Yaye Fall* have in common, is that they are performative acts. Although one is born into one of the four Sufi brotherhoods, one chooses to become a *Baye Fall* as a Mouride. The fact that many people express their appreciation to Nabou about her chosen lifestyle, demonstrates the relationality and relative importance of gender, as her *Yaye Fall* embodiment raises more attention.

The carefully stylised appearances of *jump*, reminiscent of *Bul Faale* and sometimes accompanied by manifestations of *Yaye Fall* and belonging to the Mouride brotherhood, beg the question how the youthfulness that is implied by *jump*, relates to the importance of social adulthood, which is attained through marriage and parenthood. It is in the interest of women with little romantic interest in men to extend their period of youthfulness, a period that is generally longer for men than for women. Youthfulness [as a specific category of (not yet socially) adults], has allowed "youngmen to create new forms of public culture and become a social category of its own" (Dankwa 2011: 234). Football is one of such spheres of culture where women have created a space where not their servility or submissiveness is measured, but their physical skill. Moreover, it provides a framework for extending the period of youthfulness, through the voicing of dreams to make it in international football. Safiétou, 25 years old, repeatedly expressed her dream to follow her older brother to play professional football in the United Kingdom. Despite her precarious financial situation, she is willing to give up anything for a football career. She used to have a job in a *boutique* selling cosmetics. However, when her employer asked her to work as a permanent employee six days a week from 09:00 until 18:00, she refused because it interfered with her football practice hours. For now, not having been scouted for international (professional, paid) football, and without a job, this means that she is dependent on willing friends and family members who occasionally give her some pocket money. She is confident that her brother, although he has not entered into the first, paid, division of football in the United Kingdom yet, will soon be able to support her financially. In the meantime, she will continue to work to enter the women's national team of Senegal, and enter a professional team internationally. Her wish to play internationally is invoked by dreams of success and wealth that are tied to professional sports careers (Besnier and Brownell 2012: 452). It takes shape in a politics of hope that is grounded in the athlete's body's physicality, the promise of material rewards, and the possibility of popular recognition of one's abilities.

To play football is to simultaneously dislocate from Senegalese society while at the same time consolidating and claiming their place in a geographical (public) space and socially. The footballers' imaginations of mobility are manifold. Socially, the footballers perform the subversive act of partaking in a sport that is considered the domain of men. Economically, women strive to professionalise women's football in Senegal so that it can become an income-generating activity, at least for those football players who currently play in the first division. Furthermore, many women dream of playing football internationally, casually inquiring with me after the opportunities to establish a link with a football team in the Netherlands for sponsoring

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<sup>93</sup> Wood from the African blackwood tree.

or for the organisation of an international tournament. This imagined mobility provides a space for the imagination both symbolically and materially. Women's engagement in football can be seen as a challenge to Senegalese gender norms or, as Kelsky put it, as "an indirect discourse of complaint" (1996: 184). Moreover, it provides meaning to the lives of women as their immersion in the football arena, with its attached styles and mannerisms, allows women to "surmount the spatial constraint of locality, [and] enter the global scene by means that deny geographic immobilities" (Schein 1999: 361).

For Safiétou, all three aspects are currently problematised or lacking in her life. Her family, and particularly her father and her aunts with whom she lives, repeatedly mentioned that she does not look marriable: "pull up your trousers, women don't show their underwear to others [...] no wonder no one has asked you yet to marry [...] you're 25, you might never find a husband anymore"<sup>94</sup>. Her *jump* style of dress, indeed with baggy trousers that regularly reveal a part of her underwear, is met with disapproval by her family that argues that she is too masculine to find a husband. Moreover, the fact that she commits herself fully to football, instead of doing (other) work or pursuing an education, is also disapproved of and taken to be a sign of a general uselessness as a woman in society. Scheld (2007) wrote about *Boul Falé* (Havard: *Bul Faale*) that it is Wolof for an individualistic, wayward individual who minds her/his own interests rather than the family's struggle to put food on the table (see Diouf 2002: 278-287 for an elaboration on *Boul Falé*). This association of individualism and youth is a common reproach directed at women who play football, such as Safiétou, as well. Safiétou's family argues that she knows nothing, is useless, and hence will never find a husband, which is proven by the fact that she has not yet been asked by someone to marry. Her argument that she is working to become a professional player abroad, is unconvincing for her family: it is not what a woman ought to do.

Expressing the dream to play football professionally, as Safiétou did, may provide for young women a valid reason to delay marriage, depending on the degree of acceptance by family members. For Hawa, the period of delay seemed to have ended. Her 30 years mark not only the need to really get married, but the hope to reach a professional status in football has also perished at this age. Nevertheless, Hawa has still resorted to her football engagements as a way to delay marriage: "I have asked them [her parents] to give me at least six months [...] in order to finish the season with the football team. I have told my mother that they've offered me a small sum, but that if I stop playing with them, they'll prosecute me, and all that. I've even told my father [...] He told me, yes, I will give you until the end of the season, which means June/July, before the World Cup<sup>95</sup>". A couple of weeks later, she told me: "I'm not really interested in the championship, Loes. It's just a cover [...] I just told my dad so that he leaves me alone, so that he leaves me and I can reflect<sup>96</sup>".

In spite of the common criticism that youth today are wayward and individualistic, many of them who moved from their birth village to Dakar or other urban centers work hard to make a living for themselves in addition to sending money home to support their family. Scheld (2007) argues that many family members of these youth who migrated to urban centers do not understand the sacrifices that youth have to make to be able to send money to the village. When I visited my interlocutor Fama on a December afternoon, she was somewhat restless. Her mother had started calling her to ask where her money was. Fama sends her mother 10.000

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<sup>94</sup> Participant observation, 14 December 2017.

<sup>95</sup> WhatsApp conversation with Hawa, 19 February 2018.

<sup>96</sup> WhatsApp conversation with Hawa, 14 March 2018.

FCFA monthly, the investment for her monthly *tontine*. Fama moved to Dakar with her two sisters a couple of years ago, "because there is nothing in the village. No work, no freedom<sup>97</sup>". Based on a study of child migrants from rural Burkina Faso, Thorsen (2006) argues that the migration of youth to towns is a way to pursue personal aspirations of earning money and being independent, while at the same time fulfilling the expectations of seniors to be responsible and contribute to the household. By taking on an adult role - by sending her mother money on a monthly basis - Fama demonstrates her responsibility towards her family, hereby accelerating the transition from childhood to adulthood, despite the fact that she remains unmarried. Fama had initially shared a small apartment with her sisters, but both of them are married by now and have moved in with their husbands' families. Hence, Fama had to look for a new, cheaper place to stay. She shares a room with her friend Maguette, and both of them raise half of the rent monthly. This is challenging enough for Fama: as we discussed about a way to collect the 10.000 FCFA to send to her mother today, her landlord knocked on the door and asked her to come outside. When Fama returned to the room, she told me: "the landlord asked me where this month's rent is. I said, I have to wait for Maguette to return. She is at her girlfriend's place for a few days, and I don't have all the money for this month's rent".

It is a recurring struggle for Fama to make a living in Dakar and simultaneously juggle the expectations of her family in the village. She has tried various jobs in the informal economy. Her latest job was to sell clothes that she bought from a tailor and subsequently resold from home, to friends and family who visited her. She would show anyone who visited her at home the clothes she had on sale and tried to sell them. This is a very common strategy that vendors employ, a strategy "that depend[s] upon social networks, reciprocity and trust for sales" (Scheld 2007: 241). In such cases, the one buying usually has not foreseen this expense, and does not carry enough cash. Clothing can consequently be sold on credit. It tests the strengths and limitations of people's ties, as it is difficult to recuperate the money, particularly when it concerns family or close friends, who may call upon the close ties to argue that they should not repay the debt. Fama had recently sold a *ndiexas*<sup>98</sup> to an acquaintance, and it is him who she tried to call to recuperate the money he owed her, so that she could send the money to her mother. When her mother called her for a third time, impatiently, Fama ensured her that she would send her the money before sunset. To me, she said that she did not know yet where she would get the money from. The man who owed her money always told her "tomorrow, *inch'Allah*<sup>99</sup>" whenever she called him. Likewise, Fama had to tell her mother "tonight, *inch'Allah*".

Selling clothes requires creativity, knowledge of Dakar and the world. In Dakar, as in other cities, youth use clothing as a way to position themselves in the urban social landscape (Scheld 2007). Showing your knowledge and possession of the latest fashion increases your status, and this is conducive to women's objective to "*être le buzz*", as Fama had explained to me in reference to the queer *soirée*. In fact, by wearing the latest fashion, young women create a sense of being at home in the world (see Jackson 1995). In doing so, they also mold the spaces they frequent, constructing the football field as an arena of *jump* fashion. The processes of individualisation that *Bul Faale*, and similarly *jump* youth, are associated with are not simply processes of a dissociation from collectivity. It leads to new socialities in distinct social spaces such as the football field, where manifestations of *jump* are emphasised and fine-tuned in

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<sup>97</sup> Conversation with Fama, 13 January 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Multicolored (patchwork) clothing worn by *Baye Fall*.

<sup>99</sup> An Arab expression meaning "God willing" or "if Allah wills".

competition with other *jump* who seek to “être le buzz”. The ways in which self-understanding and personhood are constructed in the football *milieu* through the fashioning of youthful *jump* appearances, contributes to young women’s quest to “être le buzz”. As argued in the previous chapter, women who seek to be popular and known in “this life” of queer women employ various tactics, one of which is to date a fair amount of women. In the next section, I will elaborate on the football *milieu* as a space where romantic relationships are mediated and forged.

### **“J’ai trouvé une jolie meuf pour toi”: dating football women**

With these words, Safiétou opened the following WhatsApp audio message that she sent me on 15 November 2017: “Loes, Loes, listen. I’ve found a pretty girl for you. But she is longer than you, *quoi*. But you, you like girls, I know, but I’ve found you a long girl who is just like a model. Do you like black girls, or what?” She had sent this *jolie meuf* (pretty girl) my pictures and had asked her if she would be interested in dating me. As this girl had said yes, Safiétou had turned to me to tell me that there was a girl waiting to be introduced to me. I had been completely unaware that this had been happening between Safiétou and Birame, who appeared to be an ex-girlfriend of Safiétou. She was single at the time and she was looking for a new girlfriend. Being a *sexy* herself, she had asked Safiétou to present to her a *jump*. I was surprised that they had been arranging for us to meet beyond my knowledge, and when I met Safiétou a few days later and she wanted to take me to Birame’s house, I refused, feeling very uncomfortable with this attempt at match making. From the way Safiétou handled it, I found out that this was not an uncommon situation.

Indeed, it is often through football that girls meet other girls to date. In the opening vignette of this chapter, I wrote how Zahia was asked out by another girl on the first day that she joined the women’s football team. Although most football players prefer not to date each other, because they are all *jump* and prefer to date a *sexy* girl, the football field is a space from where many relationships are forged. *Sexy* girls may join their *jump* friends to watch football games and meet other *jump* in the stadium, or they may ask a friend to put them in touch with another single girl, similar to the way Safiétou had arranged for me to meet her ex-girlfriend. It happens fairly often that football players are asked to present their friend another girl: “you give them some *crédit* and they’ll call someone for you. That’s how it works<sup>100</sup>.”

When, a couple of weeks later, I did indeed meet Birame - who by that time had a new girlfriend, which saved me from an awkward conversation with her - I was with Safiétou, with whom she wanted to discuss her upcoming birthday party. I have elaborated on the party as a meeting point for queer women in the previous chapter. Here I would just like to highlight the fashion aspect of such a party for a *jump* like Safiétou. When we left Birame’s house, Safiétou and I continued our journey to the market at Colobane, where she wanted to buy a new outfit for the party. The market is in Colobane, close to the port of Dakar, where new and second-hand European and American clothes and shoes are bought. Before the 1980s, parallel to the emergence of American hip-hop fashion in urban Senegal (see Henry 2012), Colobane was mainly a mango market (Scheld 2007: 240). The merchants here are well aware of the latest fashion and many display fashionable sneakers, caps, jeans and shirts. Safiétou showed me her WhatsApp status where she had published a photo of the sneakers she desired - the latest model Jordans or Nikes, I do not even remember. By publishing them on her WhatsApp to her friends, she showed the symbolic mastery (Newell 2012) of a modern *jump*. She demonstrates that she

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<sup>100</sup> Conversation with Augustine, 13 September 2017.

is aware of the latest fashion, as well as hinting at the fact that she is working to be able to purchase these shoes. The money that her aunt had given her that afternoon when we went shopping at the Colobane market did not suffice to purchase them. Instead, she bought second-hand white Nike sneakers, thoroughly cleaned by the merchant so as to make them look new. I tried something in the lines of: “isn’t white somewhat impractical for shoes? Especially in this season of *harmattan*<sup>101</sup> wind, they’ll get dirty quickly.” I was quickly reminded that practicality is not a priority in fashion. Upon my return to the Netherlands, I realised that white sneakers were the latest fashion here too. Moreover, to look fashionable at this birthday party was of the utmost importance to attract the attention of other girls. Although she did not want to make her friend too jealous by bringing her new girlfriend, she did want to show her symbolic mastery by showing up in the latest fashion and with a *toubab* by her side.

In spite of the commonality of having many girlfriends in order to be *le buzz* for girls, the unfaithfulness that this brings is something that is complained about a lot. Many people shared with me that Senegalese boys as well as girls are unfaithful. Augustine, a 26-year-old Cameroonian who moved to Senegal in 2014 after having played football internationally in Iran and Turkey, said that “it is only in Senegal that I have learned to be unfaithful. Yes, girls here are unfaithful<sup>102</sup>.” With regard to the unfaithfulness of girls, Safiétou had a couple of remarks to make. Safiétou herself has no income, nor does she receive financial support from anyone. As mentioned, she left her job at the *boutique* a while ago, when it started to interfere with her football practice. Her father does not support her financially - “*il est méchant*”, she regularly said to me - nor does she have a boyfriend whom she asks for money. She repeatedly claimed that she is different from other girls. When asking how exactly she was different, she responded: “Me, I am a real lesbian. I am not like the other girls, who also have boyfriends [...] I do not claim to be faithful to my girlfriends, but at least I do not date boys<sup>103</sup>.” Safiétou referred to the common division of gender roles in Senegal, whereby men ought to be the financial providers and women ought to be the caretakers. Her critique of girls who also date boys does not reflect a disapproval of “fake<sup>104</sup>” lesbians, or of bisexuality, but perhaps because her disappointment as it somehow undermines the collectivity of “this life”. She bemoaned the fact that she cannot trust these girls - a sense of distrust that she argues is different from her own behaviour, being unfaithful to her girlfriends. It is not about unfaithfulness in the romantic relationship per se, but rather the disloyalty to the circle of queer women that she feels girls show when they also have a boyfriend.

Similarly, in Côte d’Ivoire, the collective image is that men are suppliers of cash and women its consumers (Newell 2012: 137). For women, access to (pocket) money without a steady income is a matter of building and securing networks with men, as well as with other women in the case of same-sex relationships. Safiétou was not the only one to complain that girls only engage in (romantic) relationships with boys because of their money. In addition to forging relationships with boys for financial support, women, including queer women, employ various other strategies to access money. This can be through engaging in romantic relationships with a woman or multiple women at the same time, of whom some are able to support their lover financially. Moreover, women can engage in the practice of *mbaraan*, flirtatious and/or sexual relationships with older men who in return give them gifts or money

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<sup>101</sup> A seasonal wind in West Africa between late November and mid-March that blows from the Sahara, covering the country with unclear skies and a lot of dust.

<sup>102</sup> Conversation with Augustine, 13 September 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Conversation with Safiétou, 5 December 2017.

<sup>104</sup> French: “fausses lesbiennes”, contrasted by Safiétou to “vraies lesbiennes” (real lesbians).

(Foley and Dramé 2013), or with friends. The various forms of relationships that women form with friends and lovers reveal an urban social network form of fictive kinship, whereby these friends and lovers provide the necessary social and financial support that kin ought to provide. Safiétou called the girls who resort to a boyfriend when they are in need of money, or when family or society demand the image of their daughter and citizen as engaged in an opposite-sex relationship, 'unreal' lesbians. This frustrates women like Safiétou, because it marginalises their romantic relationships with women as unsustainable in the long run. In fact, she once sighed and asked: "why do I even like girls? They have caused me a lot of pain. They break my heart, every time I am with one.<sup>105</sup>" Moreover, it refers to the importance of social networks to get by as a young urban woman. Safiétou's critique may then reflect her jealousy of the fact that some girls seem to attract sources of income (pocket money) rather easily from a boyfriend, where Safiétou is financially and emotionally left to fend for herself, and does not have (nor want) a boyfriend to secure a source of pocket money. In any case, the urban social network through which girls like Safiétou and Birame navigate their relationships, attests to the interconnectedness of spaces such as the football field, the neighbourhood, and parties, as spaces where relationships are forged between *jump* and *sexy*.

### Conclusion

The fact that Zahia was shocked when she first joined a women's football team in Dakar and was immediately asked out by a girl says something about the distinctiveness of the football field as a social space where same-sex desires are fervently enacted. In this chapter, I have explained how the construction and maintenance of social networks are essential for women who play football to assert their position in society. Through distinct fashioning styles, *jump* women compete with each other over the symbolic mastery of their gendered expressions in relation to other *jump* and *sexy* women. With regards to wider society, female footballers continue to claim their space, and various initiatives such as Ladies' Turn and *Je suis football féminin* have worked for the recognition of women's football in Senegal over the past years. Despite the opposition that some girls and women meet from family members in pursuing a football career, they have constructed the football field as more than a sports arena. It has become an important social space where gender dissidence and same-sex intimacies are characteristics of the game. As *jump* move through other spaces, an interconnected urban social network unfolds in which relationships are forged and negotiated between *jump* and *sexy*. Knowledge of the ways in which young women appropriate a public space like the football field, helps us to understand how women construct another, somewhat public, social space: queer organisations. In the following chapter, I will expand my analysis of the tactics of navigating same-sex intimacies in social spaces to queer women's organisations. These organisations are purposely created social space where queer women gather to discuss, negotiate and question same-sex intimacies and their wellbeing, and where they lay claim to citizenship by working to create economic and educational opportunities for themselves.

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<sup>105</sup> Conversation with Safiétou, 5 December 2017.

## **“Ce n’est qu’un regroupement<sup>106</sup>”: (in)visible queer organising**

*“Ce n’est pas une association, ce n’est qu’un regroupement. On se voit que deux fois par an, tu trouves ça normal?” [It is not an association, it is merely a gathering. We only see each other twice a year, do you think that is normal?], was how Rokhaya had explained Nio Far to me. Two weeks later, I had an appointment with Nafissatou Cissé, the chair of Nio Far. When I reached her house and entered the living room, I saw that Nafissatou was not alone: she was in a meeting with Sokhna and Rokhaya, respectively the secretary and treasurer of Nio Far. Rokhaya sat slouched on the couch, her phone with WhatsApp in her hand. Sokhna had a laptop in front of her - Nafissatou and she were discussing a new research project to be conducted for Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice about the access to healthcare for ‘lesbian’ women and acceptance of family members with regards to ‘coming out’, among other things. Trained as a sociologist, Sokhna would be of valuable assistance in the execution of the project. I knew that Rokhaya was not sufficiently literate to be engaged in this research programme, but I was somewhat surprised by the disinterest she displayed. Nafissatou saw that I was looking at Rokhaya captivated by her phone, and she laughed: “Rokhaya is too busy with her trans friend”. When Sokhna and Nafissatou seem to have concluded their discussion of the research project for now, they turned to Rokhaya to discuss the organisation of a journée récréative, a social event for the young members of Nio Far. They discussed what type of event it should be, and soon came to a friendly game of football. “Football is used as an alibi to organise a causerie at the level of Nio Far. Meeting each other without pretext, would attract unwanted attention.” At the end of the afternoon, Rokhaya went home with the task to buy football shirts at the market for the two football teams. As we were about to have lunch, a shared plate of thiebou yapp (rice with meat), Nafissatou introduced me to a young man. “I know that your research revolves around women, but I just want you to meet this young gay man<sup>107</sup>, so that you see with your own eyes that Nio Far is for everyone<sup>108</sup>.”*

The two distinct projects of Nio Far that were discussed during this meeting are telling of the diversity of the work of the organisation. The project with Astraea about access to healthcare and family acceptance of homosexuality reflects internationally voiced concerns about the stigmatisation of homosexuals in many countries, including Senegal. The plans to organise a *journée récréative* with a football match for members points to the social relevance of queer organisations. In this chapter, I will explore how organisations are engaged in the creation of social spaces for queer women. Central to this chapter is the question how queer organisations

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<sup>106</sup> English: ‘It is merely a grouping, gathering’.

<sup>107</sup> In French, Nafissatou had said “ce jeune gay”.

<sup>108</sup> Fieldnotes, 3 October 2017.

relate to the creation of social space for the navigation of same-sex intimacies. The two organisations that I will discuss, Nio Far and Yaakaare, work on sexual health and sexual rights in collaboration with bigger networks of sexual health organisations in the country as well as internationally. The relevance of the research question posed in this chapter, is that their work needs to be contextualised in relation to other ways of navigating same-sex intimacies. To establish a queer movement and to register it with the government is to move into the public sphere. The existence of organisations like Nio Far and Yaakaare is interesting because of the visibility it grants sexual dissidence, which is at odds with the discreet tactics of navigation that previous chapters have clarified. However, as will come to the fore in this chapter, it is too simplistic to state that queer organisations fully comply with an international discourse of openness and visibility. In various ways that will be elaborated upon in this chapter, the queer organisations Nio Far and Yaakaare are involved in the creation and appropriation of social spaces for the navigation of same-sex intimacies. As an institutionalised actor, these organisations partake in societal and political debates on sexuality. In this chapter, I choose to focus on the social role of two queer movements however, because their creation of social space more accurately demonstrates their value for many of the organisations' members. On the local level, I will argue that a key aspect of their work is the provision of a space for queer people who do not necessarily seek to become politically involved in rights activism, but who seek a social space where they can express themselves without having to fear repercussions from those around, much like football clubs have shown to provide. Rather than looking at the formal aspect of the organisations, I aim to look at the relevance of these organisations for the - mainly young - women that regularly or occasionally join events and engage in the activities and workshops. Where Reid (2013) in his study of gay identities in South Africa showed how the language of gay rights and identity permeated the discussions of gays in South Africa, many of my interlocutors did not know what the LGBTQI acronym stands for, and most of them did not know about the existence of local activist associations like Nio Far or Yaakaare. Their self-understanding does not come from an identification with a global LGBTQI community and its concomitant sexual rights discourse. Therefore, rather than engaging in the debate whether LGBTQI organising in the global south is new northern gay imperialism (see Massad 2002), I seek to elaborate on the importance of these organisations as a space for queers to gather in various ways. Before proceeding with an analysis of the ways in which Nio Far, Yaakaare and its members provide and construct spaces to negotiate and navigate same-sex intimacies, I will briefly clarify the positions of Nio Far and Yaakaare in the public space of sexual health and -rights oriented organisations in Senegal, as well as their counterpart - the anti-gay rhetoric coming from media and (religious) associations in the country.

### **Same-sex sexuality in the public sphere**

On a global scale, the past couple of decades have seen an increasing attention for sexual rights. For a number of (Western) countries in the world, sexual rights now actually are one of the main foci of human rights work. The Dutch Embassy in Dakar is no exception. Its main focus is on economic development and trade, but they have a significant focus on human rights as well, of which sexual rights are their priority. They work together with local LGBTQI organisations, including Nio Far. They host two events annually at the residency of the Dutch ambassador, around 1 December, World Aids Day, and on the 17th of May, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). Besides these two annual events, the embassy tries to keep a low profile, knowing that their position as a Western organisation interfering in

Senegalese society is a precarious one. They know all too well the discourse that homosexuality is supposedly a Western import or imposition.

Until 2008, attitudes towards same-sex sexuality were relatively relaxed in Senegal however. February 2008 marked a turning point, when *Icône* magazine published an article about an alleged marriage between two homosexuals, which incited a virulent campaign against the supposed “degradation of morality and disrespect for religious values” (Bop quoted in M’Baye 2013). This reflects wider exacerbations of homophobia on the continent which are vocalised, among others, by religious leaders. Awondo et al. (2013) argue that this new religious homophobic discourse has had profound impact on public opinion towards homosexuality. As a result of the public prosecution of homosexuals, influential political and religious leaders have expressed their sincere concern about homosexuality being imposed upon Senegal from outside, which supposedly threatens the stability of the social order. This sentiment is perpetuated through media coverage on local television channels (Gning 2013). Vocalised as a moral panic vis-à-vis the deterioration of traditional sexual values, the state has been criticised for not taking serious measures, and has been seduced in 2008 to increase the punishments for homosexuality – to imprisonment of five to ten years and a fine of one to five million FCFA (ibid.). The Senegalese Islamic NGO Jamra, known for its active role in the combat of hiv/aids (Ba 2005), and publishing under the same name since 1978, “is concerned primarily with moral and educational issues including prostitution, alcoholism, drug problems and homosexuality” that “are interpreted as the result of secularism and decadent Western influences” (Evers et al. quoted in M’Baye 2013: 115). In 2009, the controversy rose further when several members of an organisation working for the struggle against hiv/aids were arrested (Broqua 2012). Since then, various cases of arrest have featured in Senegalese media. Although men appear to fall victim to arrests and homophobic hate crimes more often than women, women are not left unpoliced. The most well known case occurred in November 2013, when five women were arrested in a bar in Yoff district in Dakar, accused of being lesbians<sup>109</sup>. The bar, Piano Piano, was subsequently forced to close its doors by the prefect of Dakar<sup>110</sup>. Such events, resulting from an increased visibility of and attention for homosexuality in the media and in the public sphere, can be regarded as a local backlash to a global struggle for liberation.

The global attention for sexual rights casts new light on the experiences of sexual and gender dissidents and it may complicate the ways in which people previously navigated same-sex sexuality through tacit knowledge. Gaudio (2009) argues that the term ‘homosexual’ was alien to northern Nigeria in the 1990s, but as Internet quickly spread and public debates about homosexuality emerged, the term quickly emerged to identify sexual and gender dissidents who were then associated with western lifestyles. This link of homosexuality to the West does not just lead to homophobic attacks, but this western discourse on homosexuality also leads to a binary understanding of homosexuality versus heterosexuality (Awondo et al. 2013). In Senegal, homophobia is on the rise, which “involves appeals to both masculinity and morality and, as in Uganda, is used as a tool for diverting public attention from dire social and economic conditions” (M’Baye 2013: 113). This development reflects Bochow’s argument pertaining to the Ghanaian context, where the rise of neo-Pentecostal churches and their obsession with sexuality has resulted in “sexuality as a subject of public discourse, if only in its negation” (Bochow 2008: 353). In this light, it is tempting to see the work of an organisation like Nio Far as a political struggle against such homophobic attacks, and as a struggle for inclusive sexual rights. This is also the ‘visible’ work of the organisation, demonstrated by their collaboration

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<sup>109</sup> Seneweb. 2013. “Dakar: cinq femmes suspectées de lesbianisme arrêtées au bar piano”. 11 November 2013.

<sup>110</sup> Seneweb 2013. “Après l’affaire des filles présumées lesbiennes: Le bar Piano Piano fermé par le préfet de Dakar”, 15 November 2013.

with Astraea for example. However, as I will argue in this chapter, this ignores that for the majority of the members of Nio Far and Yaakaare, this is perhaps only of secondary concern.

### **Queer organisations in Senegal**

Queer organising in Senegal is relatively young, and it emerged in response to the aids epidemic. Although Senegal is regarded as a success story in the prevention of hiv, with an infection rate of less than one percent among the total population (UNAIDS 2008), the infection rate among men who have sex with men was found to be as high as 21.5% (Wade et al. 2005). As a result, the Senegalese government saw the need to tolerate the emergence of queer (often focused on msm) organisations, because many of their core objectives revolved around the prevention and treatment of hiv/aids of the *populations clés* (key populations), including msm (RFI 2017). Moreover, earlier research had shown that men who have sex with men sometimes also have sex with women, and hence the heightened hiv infection rate among msm was not only a concern of the msm minority population, but it actually posed risks to the wider population (Foreman 1999). As reported by Armisen (2016) in the *WE EXIST. Mapping LGBTQ organizing in West Africa* report, Senegal counts sixteen LGBTQI/msm organisations and one that is focused on women and led by a woman. Except for AIDES Sénégal<sup>111</sup>, an NGO that is known for its work for sexual health, and AIDS prevention and treatment particularly<sup>112</sup>, none of them can be found online. The limited existence and visibility of queer women's organisations is due to the fact that queer organisations in Senegal are in fact all organised around sexual health and particularly work for the prevention and treatment of hiv/aids. This public health concern has been a reason for the Senegalese government to be tolerant towards LGBTQI/msm organisations, but without a clear (sexual) health objective, it remains difficult to officially register an organisation. Because homosexuality, or "unnatural acts", are criminalised by law<sup>113</sup>, with an obvious focus on sexual minority rights, registering an organisation is complicated.

This notwithstanding, many organisations do also work for sexual rights, embedding this work with often implicit language in their health campaigns that are directed at the entire population (see Epprecht 2012). Queer organisations thus also navigate, by positioning themselves in the public sphere where hiv/aids prevention dominates the work of organisations, while keeping an eye on the needs and desires of the queer population, which extend beyond sexual health. The strategies of organisations that focus on hiv/aids prevention and treatment are largely organised around three *populations clés* (key populations), those groups of people who appear most vulnerable to hiv infection. These are men who have sex with men, intravenous drug users, and sex workers. Because queer women are not identified as being exposed to a greater risk of contracting hiv, their voices and needs have remained strikingly silent in these organisations. However, Coumba Diallo and Nafissatou Cissé, who are committed to the queer community with their own organisations, have warned for the danger that the silence around hiv/aids and queer women brings. When women are not aware that they too can contract hiv and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) through unsafe sexual practices, and when do not speak about this with their sexual partners or others, they will not easily seek medical care<sup>114</sup>.

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<sup>111</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/aidesenegal/>

<sup>112</sup> The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada mentions a number of LGBTQI NGOs, but a search on the internet for them reveals nothing, except for AIDES Sénégal.

<sup>113</sup> Article 319 of the Penal Code, introduced in 1966.

<sup>114</sup> Conversations with Coumba Diallo, 4 September 2017, and Nafissatou Cissé, 3 October 2017.

The organisations of Nafissatou Cissé and Coumba Diallo, Nio Far and Yaakaare respectively, inform the analysis of this chapter. Nafissatou Cissé created Nio Far in 2010 with a group of queer friends, particularly for women who identify as such and who seek a space to meet. As its targets, Nio Far has listed health and wellbeing of the queer population, human rights, and communication and visibility. The organisation was created and is governed by a number of women of Nafissatou's age, somewhere between 35 and 50 years old. The vast majority of its members, about 97% Nafissatou estimates, is under 30 years old. The daily, executive board of Nio Far consists of Nafissatou as the chair, Sokhna as the secretary, and Rokhaya as the treasurer. As described in the opening vignette of this chapter, these three regularly gather to discuss the implementation of new projects and the organisation of *causeries* (informal talks) for the membership of the organisation. Yaakaare, then, is registered as an organisation for sex workers, but works with queer women as well. In fact, within the organisation, Coumba Diallo has created space for queer women to learn about sexual health and sexual rights as well. Both Nio Far and Yaakaare offer a space for women to get together and discuss about health issues, security issues, educational and occupational progress, and, perhaps most importantly, to discuss openly about the joys and sorrows of their romantic and sexual relationships. Regarding this last point, their organisations thus acknowledge the point stressed in the African LGBTI declaration signed in 2010 in Nairobi, stating as one of its visions the commitment to "contributing to the social and political recognition that sexuality, pleasure, and the erotic are part of our common humanity" (African LGBTI declaration 2010: 182). A lot can be said about inadequate facilities and opportunities for these organisations. A lack of funding and a limited literacy of the women involved in the organisation makes much of the work a one-woman's job. Having studied and with ample experience working in civil society organisations and in collaboration with international NGOs, both Nafissatou Cissé and Coumba Diallo serve as a bridge between (inter)national LGBTQI activism and queer women in Senegal. In terms of positioning, Nio Far seems to seek to go beyond a narrow focus on women's dissident sexualities and the problems this may bring these women. The organisation's name does not immediately give away that its main concern is queers. Partly, this may be a way to avoid attracting too much attention. Partly, it is also Nafissatou's position that the association is much more than one focussed on women's sexualities, to which her introducing me to the young queer man also testifies.

Although the international vocabulary of sexual identities only partially corresponds with local experiences, appropriating this vocabulary in an organisation means creating space for certain discussions to be held and for activities to be organised. With the legitimacy of queer movements coming from their stated (partial) objectives to contribute to the public, sexual health of the population, other space is opened up for the exploration of other social developments. As such, the question is how this organised queer space is shaped, and what interactions in this space give meaning to young queer women's lives? I will explore the importance of creating economic opportunities, the choices made in navigating the (in)visibility of the organisations and its members, as well as the community dynamics captured in Nafissatou's wish to help one another (*s'entraider*). In the remainder of this chapter, I will spell out how Nafissatou Cissé and Coumba Diallo claim space for queer women both in public space - on the level of public debates and in engagement with other sexual health and sexual health NGOs - as well as claim a social space for queer women to gather. The importance of the existence of organisations like Nio Far and Yaakaare in offering a space for queer women, is that they give voice to women who remain largely ignored in other sexual rights and sexual health NGOs as these tend to focus on the struggle against hiv/aids and thus on msm. Furthermore,

they claim their space as women who are neglected by other women's rights organisations, which are often reluctant to work on queer issues.

### **Economic opportunities for queer prospects**

In *She called me woman*, an edited volume with narratives of queer Nigerian women, experiences of growing up and living a queer life in Nigeria are represented. Reflecting on the importance to have an occupation, OW (pseudonym) writes that "the moment you do something with your life, nobody cares about your sexuality" (OW 2018: 109). This resonates perfectly with what many of my informants told me, both those speaking about their engagement with Nio Far, as well as others generally speaking about their wish to "find a job, earn some money first...rent a room somewhere, and then decide if I want to get married. That is what I tell my mom. She says ok, there is no problem<sup>115</sup>". Astou stressed the need for women to leave their natal home at some point: "It's essential, *quoi*. You are becoming too expensive for your family if you stay too long<sup>116</sup>". Astou stays with her family and because she can share the bedroom with her mother (her father passed away years ago), she is not urged to move out. However, she places a burden on her two older brothers financially, who are the breadwinners for the whole family. Without a job, Astou does not contribute anything to the household income, which makes her indeed expensive for her family.

As I explained in chapter three, the necessity to leave the natal home has become a problem for Hawa now. In the absence of financial independence - something that only a very small number of Senegalese women can acquire in their lifetime - she is somewhat forced to marry a man now. With her decision to escape a future as a married woman and move to Morocco, she further stresses the link between economic and social independence. She argued that she can explain to her parents her decision to move to Morocco instead of marrying a man in Senegal as a long-held dream to move abroad in search of employment to sustain herself and to support her family. This economic aspiration is not only an argument with which Hawa can explain to her family her reason to move to Morocco, but it is simultaneously an argument her parents can use in case anyone wonders why Hawa is not married yet and has decided to move to Morocco. This demonstrates again the importance of *sutura* and its layeredness. More than just an individual affair of discretion and proper moral conduct, it is also a matter of protecting the family honour. As such, Hawa does not just need a pretext to explain to her parents why she is leaving for Morocco - her mother may in fact be aware of the actual reason for Hawa's move - but she needs to provide a reason for her parents who will need to explain to others why their daughter is unmarried and abroad.

Whether it is to accomplish complete economic independence or as a way to enhance their opportunities to move through the urban landscape, young women attempt to attain financial means in various ways. I engaged in a discussion about the meaning of 'bisexuality' with Lafia, something that I will elaborate on in the next chapter. Here it suffices to say that Lafia was not the only one to proclaim that many 'lesbians' are in fact not 'lesbians', in the sense that they may also have a boyfriend. The need to have a boyfriend may not only be a matter of taking away suspicion from your parents, as Lafia backed up her choice to have a boyfriend in addition to girlfriends. As her sister, Mame Diarra, told me: "some girls may have up to seven boyfriends at a time. One to pay for their braids, one to buy their shoes, one to buy their make-

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<sup>115</sup> Conversation with Astou, 14 September 2017.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

up, etc. A boyfriend for everything you need. Because the boy is supposed to buy you things.<sup>117</sup> The economic reality for many (young) Senegalese, makes relationships - be they erotically charged or not - important to have access to capital or pocket money. It is something that many Senegalese complain about, the fact that money plays (too big) a role in interpersonal relationships. Many people complained that it removes the basis of romantic love from a relationship. Likewise, Safiétou had drawn attention to the distinction she makes between "real lesbians" and "fake lesbians". One day, as we walked through her neighbourhood in Dakar, we ran into her girlfriend Yama, who asked Safiétou to give her the earphones she was wearing. Safiétou initially refused, after which Yama decided to simply take them from Safiétou. Safiétou did not protest, but as we continued our walk, she started complaining about Yama. "She says she loves me, but she is always after something. I know she has a boyfriend too, she is unfaithful. I know I am not faithful either, I do not make a secret out of it, but at least I am a real lesbian.<sup>118</sup>" A real lesbian? I asked. "Yes, I have never touched a guy. Sometimes I see girls kissing boys, and I am just like...no, it does not do anything to me. Why kiss a boy if you can also kiss a girl? [...] Many girls have a boyfriend because they want him to buy her things. Yama tells me that she loves girls. She loves me, she asks me to suck her thing<sup>119</sup> all the time. At the same time, I know she has a boyfriend too. She is not a real lesbian." As we continued our stroll to the mechanics area of the neighbourhood to meet up with her friend, we met another one of her friends. She briefly talked to him, and I saw that he handed her 500 FCFA (about 80 euro cents). Both boyfriends and regular friends can be asked for some pocket money, but Safiétou argued that she is a more "real" lesbian because she does not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with men. The economic precarious reality for many young women and men makes relationships of whatever nature incredibly important. Whether it is through friendships, romantic relationships, or queer organisations: young people seek to enhance their economic and social mobility.

Because of this link between economic and social independence, Nio Far and Yaakaare emphasise the importance of a basic level of education for women to create better economic opportunities. On a very practical level, Yaakaare has partnered with Médicos del Mundo, a Spanish NGO that, broadly speaking, works for the right to health, partnering with local organisations in countries all over the world (Médicos del Mundo 2018). Yaakaare is a beneficiary of Médicos del Mundo and has received funding to support three or four young women in the coming year to follow vocational training for four to six months, with the hand out of a certificate at completion of the training. Moreover, they offer a course in literacy to two women annually. One of the three to four beneficiaries for the vocational training is Sadio. She had successfully applied to receive the funding for a training in restoration. She has not yet started because of the absence of her family from Dakar, but she hopes to start this year. Sadio is twenty-nine years old and although she was born elsewhere and subsequently raised in various cities in Senegal, she now lives with her aunt in Dakar. She shares a small apartment on the third floor of a four-storey building with a cousin, and her aunt has an apartment on the first floor in the same building. Therefore, she is not constantly watched by her aunt, and she can invite (girl)friends to come over. When she met me at a nearby junction however, we took a detour to her house, "because people like to look who you bring home. I do not want them to talk about

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<sup>117</sup> Conversation with Mame Diarra, 23 December 2017.

<sup>118</sup> This, as well as the following quote, come from a conversation held with Safiétou on 5 December 2017.

<sup>119</sup> In French, she had said "sucer son truc", referring to cunnilingus.

whom I bring home, so I take detours sometimes<sup>120</sup>". In Dakar, she makes ends meet by selling *sérigraphies* (screen-printing) on order. Until a couple of years ago, she played football, and 'thus' was exposed to the *milieu* of same-sex intimacies from a young age. However, it was only a year ago (when I first met her in September 2017) that she was introduced to Coumba Diallo and her organisation Yaakaare. It was a friend who had introduced her to Coumba Diallo, indicative of the way such organisations become known to the relevant population: by word of mouth rather than through broad advertising. Since her introduction to Yaakaare, she has joined several meetings and workshops. "I have learned a lot from the organisation<sup>121</sup>", she told me. When I asked her what she had learned, she said that "many girls, including me before I had joined the organisation, do not know anything about their rights, or how to live their life as a lesbian, if they do not know the organisation". I asked her what precisely she had learned, and she continued that "[she] learned about hiv. I hardly knew anything about that. I knew it could be contracted through sexual contact, through blood contact. But I did not know that lesbians can also contract it during sex and that, if you do not know a girl's status, you should not just have unprotected sex with her [...] Before I met Coumba Diallo, I had never done a test. She took me to a clinic to do a test [...] Whenever *mère* Coumba Diallo calls for a meeting, I go." Besides offering a space to discuss matters of love and sexuality among queer women, it is also a place of learning. A lack of schooling and the taboo that rests on (premarital) sexuality cause many women to be ignorant about issues like sexual health. Associations like Yaakaare and Nio Far try to educate their members by paying attention to sexual health matters, and by encouraging women to regularly take an hiv-test.

Coming back to the vocational and literacy training that are part of the programme of Yaakaare, the necessity of offering such training became clear to me when I attended a workshop in September for organisations that work on sexual health and rights. I was struck by the difficulty the board members of these organisations had with the assignments that were given, including one to search for international funds online. I realised that these organisations were all relatively young and had relatively young and inexperienced leaders. Given the fact that sexual health and sexual rights organising has only emerged in Senegal since the 1990s, and with many of these organisations dating from after 2000, this is not strange. For the leaders of these organisations, this lack of experience and literacy causes difficulties when they seek to apply for external funding. On the community level in Senegal, and beyond the structures of the organisational boards, the low average level of literacy reduces the opportunities of work for women and hence diminishes their space for navigation. As such, Médicos del Mundo also sponsors two courses in literacy for members of Yaakaare annually. Likewise, Nio Far has listed educational support as one of its missions. The workshop in September served as a reminder for the necessity of focusing on literacy and writing skills.

The importance of employment and the emphasis on its value by queer organisations becomes clear from the following example. On the 5th of October, a *defilé et soirée gala* (fashion show and prom night) was organised in a public event hall in one of the outskirts of Dakar. The event was a celebration of the work of Youssoupha, a tailor who reopened an *atelier* (workshop) in his neighbourhood a year ago, after he had previously been arrested and imprisoned with a number of friends for alleged homosexuality. At the time of his arrest, his workshop had been demolished. When he was released from prison, he opened another workshop a couple of hundred metres away from the previous one. The evening was organised by friends of

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<sup>120</sup> Conversation with Sadio, 20 October 2017.

<sup>121</sup> Conversation with Sadio, 28 September 2017.

Youssoupha, who are all well acquainted with Nafissatou, and they greeted her warmly upon seeing her. Nafissatou and I took a seat on the front row, as a VIP seat had been reserved for Nafissatou. Many of “her girls” were there as well. Although she had initially planned for us to share taxis with these girls, in the end she decided to ask them to go ahead of us. “When we go together, they will want to sit with me in the front, disturbing the audience too much with such a big group”. When we took our seats, Nafissatou pointed out “her girls” to me. Some were elegantly dressed in long dresses, supplemented by the typical *moussor* (headdress, scarf). Other girls were dressed in ‘men’s outfits’ (trousers and shirts) and some sat with a girl on their lap. The evening revolved around a fashion show with Youssoupha’s most beautiful creations. They were auctioned this evening, and some outfits were bought at a high price. When Nafissatou was asked on stage to say a few words about the evening and Youssoupha’s work, it was no surprise that she was quick to congratulate him on the hard work he had done for “the community<sup>122</sup>”.

*Maman* Nafissatou Cissé herself was highly praised by the organising committee for her continuous support for the community, whereby they discreetly hinted at the queer community. When Nafissatou took the stage to say a few words to the committee, the audience, and Youssoupha, she addressed them in Wolof. When we took a taxi back home together, I asked her what she had been saying. She had spoken “coded language<sup>123</sup>”, something that she had to maintain as we were in the taxi. She had thanked Youssoupha’s mother for always being there for her son, also “when it had been very difficult one year ago”, referring to the arrestation of Youssoupha and a couple of his friends. She added that she was very proud of Youssoupha for “showing the right response” to the demolition of his workshop at the time of his arrest, by opening a new workshop only a few steps away from the previous one. She added that “what is important in life, is to serve the community [...] something he has shown today with his beautiful creations. We see a community that is fond of him.” It is easy to think that Youssoupha would be maligned by the neighbourhood after his arrest last year, but the celebration of his quality designs on this evening in October demonstrates that economic productivity and serving your community harvests respect. Indeed, as OW articulated in *She called me woman*, “the moment you do something with your life, nobody cares about your sexuality” (2018: 109). To become engaged in the community again after his release from prison was a sign of loyalty to the community, and it was important to re-establish his worth to the community.

Nafissatou and the organising committee of the evening spoke discreetly about the arrest of last year, about Nafissatou’s work with Nio Far, and about the links between Nio Far and Youssoupha and the organising committee. On the other hand, Youssoupha’s mother and others from the neighbourhood obviously knew of the arrest last year, and may have also remarked the somewhat feminine styles of the men on the organising committee. Moreover, the evening took place in a hall along one of the larger roads running through the neighbourhood, not exactly hidden from the larger public in that sense. However, it was not quite a public event either, as the announcement for the evening had circulated in WhatsApp groups only. At the gate, two men checked who entered the hall. The visibility of the event was thus relative, and was dealt with carefully, discreetly. At the same time, the event can be regarded as the appropriation of space by this group to enable a festive event to take place in a regular public space in a Dakarois neighbourhood. Carefully controlling the spread of the announcement and thus the audience, the event hall had become a space where the community engagements of

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<sup>122</sup> French: “la communauté”. Nafissatou, 5 October 2017.

<sup>123</sup> French: “langue codée”.

these young queer people and Nafissatou's association could be celebrated. The festivity, yet discretion with which the event was organised, serves as a bridge to the next concern in queer organisations: the question of (in)visibility.

### ***"J'aime le sutura": (in)visibility in queer organising***

Although Senegal has seen the public sphere grow over the last decades, and particularly since the turn of the century with regards to LGBTQI/msm organisations, it remains to be seen whether this leads to what Habermas (1989 [1962]) called *Öffentlichkeit* (publicness). In a political analysis of the public sphere, he came to an ideal type of publicness as a domain in our civilian life that allows for the formation of public opinions. Habermas outlined three important elements for this ideal type, namely: the existence of a public sphere; its accessibility; and as a result, a public debate between individuals and organisations, and not just between the state or big institutional actors. The first two elements are more or less accommodated in the Senegalese public sphere, but the question that remains to be answered is whether an increased presence of queer organisations in the public sphere leads to a constructive public debate. As Hardon and Posel argued in an article on secrecy as embodied practice, "there is also the risk that the prescription to be 'open' about these issues will become monochromatic, blunt and unduly coercive, based on a misreading of more nuanced ways of knowing and telling, ignoring the more complex psychology and anthropology of making and keeping secrets" (2012: S3). One can ask the question whether (sexual) wellbeing does indeed only come about, or emerge in its fullest potential, if one tells "the truth" or discloses her/his sexual intimacies. Organising around the struggle for sexual rights seems contradictory to the value of *sutura* that queer women maintain as they construct their other networks and spaces.

However, if we take a closer look at the way Nio Far and Yaakaare operate, it will become clear how *sutura* remains crucial in their approach. Following Tucker, who analysed queer visibility in Cape Town, I will look at the importance of *sutura* for creating both relative visibility and relative invisibility. Tucker studied how queer groups challenge the heteronormativity of certain urban spaces and how they perceive these forms of visibility (2009: 3). Although the situation of queer groups and visibility in Cape Town is very different from the situation in Dakar, where Pride marches and visible queer bars are out of question, I draw on his analysis to look at the ways in which women in the two different queer movements have positioned themselves in society and in relation to heteronormative structures. Where Tucker focuses on visibility as "the way individuals relate to and become publicly known to heterosexual society" (2009: 18), the way I seek to understand the question of visibility relates much more to the value of *sutura* and the fear that *jump* women are too visibly queer, although they do in no way attempt to publicly make known their same-sex intimacies. The visibility that organisations like Nio Far and Yaakaare create does not aim at visibility in the urban environment vis-à-vis wider society, but rather seeks visibility, or opportunities to meet, for queer women among themselves. Furthermore, the quest for visibility is directed at the community of organisations in Senegal that largely work around sexual health and particularly the fight against aids, which is centered around the *populations clés* (key populations), thereby largely excluding queer women from the discussions.

Because of the difficulties of organising meetings with a large group in the absence of an office, some of the younger members of Yaakaare had decided to create a WhatsApp group to enable a more continuous discussion of sexuality issues with each other. The group was called *invitée du jour* (guest of the day) and the initial idea was to ask the guest of the day questions like "why are you a lesbian?" and "what have your experiences as a lesbian woman so far

been?" I was added to the group on the day that I met Sadio, without knowing any of the other women in the group. I asked Sadio if the others would not be uncomfortable discussing such private matters with someone in the group they did not know. She assured me that they would not, because she had explained to them that I was "part of the family<sup>124</sup>", after which they had approved of my joining the group. Amongst those in the know, there is a sense of trust that others know how to navigate communication carefully. Right after I was added to the group - which had also been the very start of the WhatsApp group - the first obstacle was encountered. The first *invitée du jour* had had other guests over at her house, which had made it impossible for her to respond to the type of questions that had been asked to her. Sadio and some others were fed up with the girl for not having warned them before that she would not be able to respond to questions on that day, as they could have decided to have someone else as the first *invitée du jour*. Anyhow, they moved past this first obstacle and continued for a short while with the concept of the daily guest. Only a couple of weeks later however, I saw that Sadio had left the WhatsApp group and shortly after, several others had followed. After a week or three, about two thirds of the group had left, and the group had become very quiet. When I asked Sadio why she had left the group, she said that "the group does not make sense any more" and that "the people are too complicated for such discussions<sup>125</sup>". The want for this kind of discussions on the organisation level is there, but WhatsApp did not seem to provide the right space to organise such discussions. Although it had seemed an appropriate and discreet alternative to a physical space to meet, it turned out to be difficult to organise a serious discussion with the medium.

Complaining once more about the failed WhatsApp group, she lamented over the absence of a physical space for the organisation to meet regularly. Neither Nio Far nor Yaakaare have their own office space. Whenever they want to organise a meeting, they may rent a house from an acquaintance for a (part of the) day. Meeting with a lot of women at Nafissatou's or Coumba's house would attract unwanted attention from neighbours, so they are bound to renting an apartment from an acquaintance once in a while. Whenever a (multi-day) workshop is organised, sometimes in collaboration with other Senegalese or West African LGBTIQI organisations, they turn to a hotel or conference center outside Dakar. To meet in a crowded place in Dakar is not a good idea, as Sadio explained that "once, *mère* Coumba Diallo took us out to a restaurant and, because we were all girls dressed like boys, well, everybody looked at us...that was not pleasant<sup>126</sup>". The lack of an office space complicates the work of the associations, and Sadio expressed the wish to have a permanent space available to meet, reasoning that "then we would meet each other every Saturday or Sunday...now it's just a *regroupement*". Likewise, the development of a branch of Nio Far outside Dakar faces a similar challenge of a lack of space (and funds) to organise. Nafissatou had asked Penda to take up the responsibility of organising Nio Far in this city. The two had met each other in 2011 at a workshop of an NGO in Mbour. After this workshop, Penda had followed a number of workshops organised by the OHCHR on the topic of sexual rights. Nafissatou and Penda are regularly in touch, but it is difficult for Penda to organise meetings with members of Nio Far in her city. She explained the difficulties of organising women in her city: "I cannot just invite many people over at my place. You know how I live here, with many housemates. If we are too many in my room, people will start questioning the type of meeting we are having [...] if only we would have a place to meet and from where we could organise support for women. But we lack

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<sup>124</sup> French: "tu fais partie de la famille."

<sup>125</sup> WhatsApp conversation with Sadio, 9-10 October 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Conversation with Sadio, 20 October 2018.

funds for that<sup>127</sup>". When I asked her how she envisioned such a workspace for Nio Far, she resolutely answered "screening. Women hardly screen for hiv and other STIs, but I know that many women walk around with infections. They do not talk to anyone about this, because they hide themselves [...] In addition, I would like to have computers so that women can learn some digital skills. And I think we need to create jobs for women, by selling grains for example. If we organise this as Nio Far, we would not just have a space to meet as lesbian women, but we would also have a work project." Like many others, she stressed the importance of providing women with practical skills and job opportunities so that they have more authority over their own trajectories.

However important it is to provide women with such opportunities, Penda is talks about Nio Far discreetly to other queer women, and she carefully selects whom she invites to be a member. The first time that I visited Penda with my informant Lafia, she did not know that it was this Penda who we were about to meet. Lafia knew someone named Penda, the girlfriend of her teammate at football. However, as I had been talking about Penda in the context of her work for Nio Far, Lafia thought that this would be another Penda. When Lafia expressed her surprise to Penda for being engaged with Nio Far, Penda responded that "I do not just tell everyone what I do. I try to be discreet, just like Lafia. I did not know that she was also in the *milieu*." Concerning the discretion with which she manages her engagement with Nio Far, she said that "many girls are wayward. They do not know the value of discretion. Therefore, I do not present the organisation to just anyone. I know girls who go out where I work in town. From the way they behave, I know that they would go and tell everyone about their new organisation. They would feel that they are protected by the organisation and can simply do what they want [...] Many other girls hide however. They know that this is a small city where everyone knows one another. The risk of being recognised here is much higher than in Dakar." Thus, membership to Nio Far remains limited to those who Penda deems discreet enough. Membership of Yaakaare occurs along similar lines of discretion, as Sadio had explained that a friend who was already a member had introduced her to the organisation.

The discretion with which membership of these organisations is arranged does not explain yet why older women remain largely absent however. I decided to ask Sadio, who responded with "perhaps they hide themselves<sup>128</sup>". Nafissatou further contextualised the composition of her organisation as follows: "97% of the organisation are young women, under 30 years of age. Older women are reluctant to collaborate with young women, because they are afraid they will be outed as it were, if they become associated with these young women. Young women today are not so afraid to show who they are, and perhaps they even want to show others. Older generations are not accustomed to this visibility, this was not common back then when they were young. In addition, they have more responsibilities at home, looking after a family and such<sup>129</sup>." The limited links between the younger and the older generation of queer women can be further explained by the way *sutura* is structured in Senegalese society. *Sutura* does not only impede the public display of affection between sexual partners, but it equally prevents explicit talk about one's own or other people's sexual lives, especially if that life happens beyond marriage and reproduction. Likewise, intergenerational communication about sexual matters is considered shameful for both sides (Bochow 2008). Hawa confirmed young women's inclination to direction: "today, girls are more direct, particularly when expressing

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<sup>127</sup> Conversation with Penda, 30 November 2017.

<sup>128</sup> Conversation with Sadio, 28 September 2017.

<sup>129</sup> Conversation with Nafissatou, 3 October 2017.

their interest in other girls. It used to be normal to avoid explicitly expressing interest for a long time, but today, girls will just be like ‘hey, I like you. Do you want to date me?’ That has changed I think<sup>130</sup>.” Young women, and particularly *jump* embody modernity in their appearance as well as in their approach to dating. The fact that *jump* embody both a certain masculinity and modernity makes them attract a certain degree of attention for their deviation from various societal norms. For women from an older generation, the combination of these young women’s masculine appearances and the ostensible openness with which these women try to enhance their space for navigating same-sex intimacies may seem to challenge the notion of *sutura*. Hence, older women are generally reluctant to join a queer organisation. An example from the women’s movement in Niger sheds light on the association between different generations of women, albeit with another strategic outcome. Cooper (2001) writes that women in associations were labeled altogether (by women who were not part of the associations) as *matan zamani*, a euphemism for prostitute that literally means “modern woman”. To uphold or attain a certain status, unmarried women strategically associated themselves with married woman in the AFN (Association des Femmes du Niger), even if they did not intend to remarry. Applying this logic of strategic association to Nio Far, it makes sense that older women do not join Nio Far as they do not wish to be associated to young, unmarried *jump* girls. As Sokhna, the secretary of Nio Far, said with regard to being conceived as a lesbian if you play football: “show me your friends, and I will tell you who you are”, and “those who resemble, assemble”<sup>131</sup>.

In chapter two I argued that bodies speak and at the same time enable silence and discretion. The body communicates through ways of dress, walking, and through gestures. In other words, what people do with bodies constitute gendered expressions of self. *Jump* communicate a masculine style that is not only understood by most queer women as a sign of same-sex desires, but it is also somewhat visible to many others, causing suspicion. The way this is picked up by others and may lead to conflict becomes clear from the following example. Hawa sent me a message on 15 May saying that she was upset because of what had happened to her girlfriend a day before. Her girlfriend had set Hawa’s photo as background photo on her phone, and her older brother had seen it. He had then asked her who this girl was, and whether she dressed like a boy. He told her to stay away from such girls and, provoking a further discussion about his sister’s social life and her distractions from her final exams for secondary school this summer, he punched her in her face. Hawa was clearly upset that her appearance had led to an argument between her girlfriend and her brother, and was reluctant to meet her girlfriend’s family now, afraid of how people might react to her visit. This incident again stresses the risk (relative) visibility can bring to *jump* women and their partners.

Corresponding with this incident concerning Hawa and her girlfriend, I had a conversation with Lafia about the meaning of being a ‘lesbian’ or ‘bisexual’ in Senegal. Throughout this thesis, I have sometimes used the term lesbians when quoting my interlocutors. With one exception, they all referred to themselves as lesbians. The exception was Lafia. From the start, she had told me that she was bisexual. She was the first and only girl who told me that she was bisexual rather than lesbian. We engaged in a discussion about the meaning of bisexuality, when she asked me to be her girlfriend. I was confused about this question, because I knew that she had a boyfriend. As I expressed my confusion, she said: “but

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<sup>130</sup> Conversation with Hawa, 26 October 2017.

<sup>131</sup> In French, she had said: “montre-moi tes amis et je te dirai qui tu es” and “ceux qui se ressemblent, s’assemblent”. Conversation with Sokhna, 26 September 2017.

you know I am a bisexual<sup>132</sup>". I responded by saying that that does not mean that you have a boyfriend and a girlfriend at the same time. She rebutted: "yes it does, it means that you can date both a girl and a boy at the same time. I would never date two girls at the same time though, I could not cheat on my girlfriend like that." I was confused: to have a boyfriend at the same time as a girlfriend would not be considered cheating? "No, everyone knows that at a certain point, you just have to have a boyfriend to satisfy your parents. For me, it is just to have peace of mind. The words of my mother and Mame Diarra [her sister] give me stress. You know that at a certain point, my mother and Mame Diarra were too suspicious that I was a lesbian. I told you that my mother came up to me with a knife one day, asking me if I was a lesbian. Her friend had told her that she caught me and some friends while we were fingering each other...and stuff like that, in the bedroom. It was not true, she has never seen me do such thing. But she told my mum anyway. I was with my aunt the day she came up to me with the knife. Luckily my aunt protected me, she told my mum that I was not the type of girl to do such a thing [...] So, you know, I just had to have a boyfriend, to take away their suspicion. I cannot break up with Ousmane, my mum would be really mad at me. She was already mad when we had an argument and I refused to talk to Ousmane when he came to our house [...] So, being bisexual, the girls understand. It is a part of Senegalese culture, no, Muslim culture I should say. It is difficult Loes, to really be a lesbian here. Your life as a lesbian is not like mine. If I were in your country, I would say I am a lesbian, because I prefer girls over boys. But here, I prefer to say I am a bisexual. It is the truth. Many girls here also have a boyfriend, yet they say they are lesbians. That is just not true. I want to be honest with people."

To Lafia, her relationship with Ousmane does not interfere with the possibilities to engage in relationships with girls as well. Interestingly, her girlfriends may know that she has a boyfriend at the same time, whereas Ousmane does not know about her relationships with girls. He is suspicious however, so he may in fact be aware of her relationships with girls. Lafia told me that he does not like her to spend too much time with Nabou. He seems aware, or at least suspicious, of Nabou's same-sex inclinations. This may be derived from Nabou's *jump* appearance. Lafia used to dress in a more masculine fashion too before, but one day Ousmane asked her to change appearance. "I would even pose with my hand on my crotch for a photo, like the boys do", she said. Eventually, she listened to Ousmane and became a *sexy*. "I decided to become a *sexy*, it is easier for a girl to be *sexy* than to be *jump*. People get too suspicious when you are *jump*. My mum was also happy that I became more *sexy*." It becomes clear once more that when girls say they are lesbian or bisexual, this refers to their involvement in same-sex intimacies rather than that it excludes opposite-sex intimacies or signifies a fixed identity. Moreover, Lafia's explanation for having a boyfriend at the same time as dating girls as well as her choice to change appearance from *jump* to *sexy* points at the discretion with which she navigates her same-sex intimacies living with her mother and sister who both follow her movements with suspicion.

Such examples demonstrate once more the importance of *sutura* for the navigation of same-sex intimacies. Also in the approach of Nio Far and Yaakaare, *sutura* remains crucial. The organisations navigate through a challenging and demanding landscape. To receive funding from larger (international) organisations, and to demonstrate their accountability, a certain visibility is required from the organisations. Discretion is required in the Senegalese public sphere however, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of members, as well as to allow certain work, such as health interventions, to be done. Within the organisations, gender expressions

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<sup>132</sup> Conversation with Lafia, 16 December 2017.

and respectability are the topic of discussion, as some (potential) members are put off by the ostensible publicness with which young *jump* women communicate their same-sex desires. In a way, these queer organisations may find themselves in a conflict between an increasingly vocal and visible international network of queer organisations, and local reality in which *sutura* is of utmost importance. Although both organisations - with success - amass some of the internationally available resources, in their day-to-day work they appear to follow largely the cultural value of *sutura*. In doing so, they provide support to members in different ways. In the next and last section of this chapter, I will elaborate further on various forms of community support Nio Far and Yaakaare provide for its members.

### **Causeries and other forms of *s'entraider***

*On the last Sunday before my return to the Netherlands, I joined Nafissatou to a young man and his family in a neighbourhood at the outskirts of Dakar. The twenty-three-year-old Babacar was the breadwinner of the family. From what he earned with his work as a tailor, he was able to provide food for the whole family as well as pay for his young sister's school fees. His younger brother meanwhile studied mathematics at university. Then Babacar fell ill. With a growing tumor on his left upper leg, they soon figured out it was cancer. Coming from a poor family, there was no money to see a doctor, let alone to start anything like chemotherapy. His best friend, a member of Nio Far, contacted Nafissatou to ask for help. She reached out to several msm and hiv/aids organisations and funds for financial support. For emotional support, she had decided to visit the family several times. When Nafissatou and I reached the house, we found Babacar lying on the bed of his parents' bedroom. He was crying. His father and mother sat on the floor, their backs against the wall. His mother was crying too. Nafissatou later explained to me that they had been crying out of desperation for the future: how would the family survive without Babacar's income? A friend of Babacar sat at his bedside, and the friend who had contact Nafissatou for support arrived a little later. Nafissatou and I offered Babacar a big bag of rice and two kilos of bananas. He took our hands and, his eyes filled with tears, whispered "thank you very much". I looked at Nafissatou and saw that her eyes too were filled with tears now. Whenever Babacar wanted to move, his face contorted in pain. All we could do was say "massa<sup>133</sup>". To get home, we took a tata (minibus). Nafissatou consciously took a seat on the front row and moved her headscarf a little to cover more of her face. Throughout the ride, she looked to the ground. When we got home, she explained, with regard to the latter, that she had only taken the bus because it was a Sunday and therefore a lot less crowded in the bus. She normally only took taxis, to avoid being recognised. As soon as we reached home, she started calling people in her queer network, asking them to contribute (in multiples of) FCFA 5.000 to allow for a first blood test to be done for Babacar at a clinic<sup>134</sup>.*

The request for financial support had been declined and Nafissatou was deeply disappointed in the response she had received from the organisations. They had reasoned that they did not have any funds available now (in December 2017) because it was the end of the financial year and all funds for the year had been spent, or that they could not help in this specific case. With regard to the second reason, Nafissatou was disappointed that the fight against hiv/aids appeared to be the only valid reason for support. She said to me: "*il faut s'entraider* (we have to help each other)... if we cannot even help one another as a community, who do we expect to stand up for

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<sup>133</sup> A Wolof expression of compassion with someone suffering. It does not have a direct translation to French or English.

<sup>134</sup> Fieldnotes, 21 January 2018.

us<sup>135</sup>” With regards to activism in Senegal in general she said that “that is how activism works in Senegal: as long as everything goes well, people are willing to help you. But once there are problems, everyone folds their arms<sup>136</sup>.” *S’entraider*, and building community, is central to Nafissatou’s work with Nio Far.

Likewise, Yaakaare offers its members to see a doctor if need be. Sadio showed me a photo of a friend who had been admitted to a hospital. “If you are sick, *mère* Coumba Diallo is there to help us. If you need to go to the hospital but you do not have money, you can always call *mère* Coumba Diallo. She has a card with which you will be helped at a hospital or clinic free of charge.” Bigger NGOs like the ANCS and Enda Santé, with which Yaakaare and Nio Far collaborate, have a small budget available specifically for basic, urgent medical or legal expenditures. If someone is sick and needs to be taken to the hospital, these organisations will cover for the costs. It is in this way that Yaakaare and Nio Far seek to support their members. The fact that Sadio calls Coumba Diallo ‘*mère*’, similar to how Nafissatou Cissé was called ‘*maman*’ Cissé by Youssoupha and his friends, is striking and tells us a lot about the relationship between Coumba Diallo, Nafissatou Cissé and the young members of their respective organisations. For many young members, these organisations provide a social space where they find care and a listening ear, much more than a collective that takes to the barricades for sexual rights. The listening ear that they find with Nio Far and Yaakaare becomes clear from the following example, taken from my fieldnotes.

*Around lunch, three young men knocked the door of Nafissatou’s apartment. They greeted ‘maman’ Cissé warmly and then quickly turned to a discussion about their relationships. One of them had an argument with his boyfriend, and his friends were here to complain with him about the demands of yoos<sup>137</sup>, who often demand too much submissiveness from their ibbi partner. Nafissatou laughed about their gossips, but turned to me and said with a serious tone: “there is too much violence among same-sex couples in Senegal. They copy patriarchal societal norms, and stick rigidly with masculine and feminine roles. I don’t understand them, they are two men, or two women, in a relationship, yet they refuse to shape their relationship on equal terms. It is only here in Senegal that homosexual relationships are like this<sup>138</sup>.”*

The visit of these three young men to the house of Nafissatou was unannounced, yet not uncommon. “People of the community like to come here to meet me and each other to discuss. The door is always opened to the community”, Nafissatou explained to me. To offer the space to young queers to get together to discuss freely about personal and intimate issues, is a key asset of the organisations. Where there is not yet the space, at least not for large numbers to meet, this space may be created. In the opening vignette of this chapter, I mentioned the meeting between Nafissatou, Rokhaya and Sokhna, where they discussed the organisation of a friendly football match between members of Nio Far. They had brainstormed very briefly about an activity for that day and they quickly agreed that a football match would draw the largest numbers. A football match, Nafissatou explained to me, would serve as a good alibi to

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<sup>135</sup> Conversation with Nafissatou, 21 January 2018.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> *Yoos* and *ibbi* represent the gender roles in male homosexual relationships in Senegal, with *yoos* as the ‘top’, the inserter role, and *ibbi* as the ‘bottom’, receptive of penetration. *Yoos* and *ibbi* reflect traditional masculine and feminine social roles. See Niang et al. (2010: 505) for an elaboration on the various social and sexual roles in male homosexual relationships in Senegal.

<sup>138</sup> Fieldnotes, 23 January 2018.

organise a *causerie* (meeting, gathering) with women at the level of Nio Far, without attracting too much attention from outsiders. At the same time it would draw many women to the event, as football is the most popular sport here, definitely also among queer women. This demonstrates the necessity of carefully navigating how to organise women around Nio Far: without compromising too much what many women like to do, it is also of utmost importance to organise *causeries* discreetly.

### **Conclusion**

When Rokhaya said of Nio Far that "*ce n'est qu'un regroupement*" (it is only a grouping, gathering), she expressed her discontent with the workings of the organisation. In this chapter I have, demonstrated the value of such a *regroupement* for many members of the queer organisations Nio Far and Yaakaare however. The social space that these organisations provide for young queers, is an interesting potential for support, and an important resource to draw on in various situations. Rather than seeing local queer activism as a move towards a global gay culture and as the adoption of the globalising sexual rights discourse, it must be understood as an ambiguous realm that combines sociopolitical work on the enlargement of the space for same-sex intimacies with work from a distinctly local background whereby social events and care are organised with respect for the value of *sutura*. In their various projects and activities, Nio Far and Yaakaare offer a space where women learn and discuss ways to navigate their same-sex intimacies in everyday practices, from going to the hospital, to learning about safe sexual practices and rights - in case they should be arrested. Moreover, they find a safe space within these organisations to discuss their love lives and aspirations. Furthermore, they hope to negotiate a better future, and the organisations emphasise the need to provide vocational training and literacy courses to women to enhance their economic prospects.

## **Conclusion: “*les fréquentations des koba*<sup>139</sup>”: tactics of navigating same-sex intimacies**

*When I visited Fama one last time before returning to the Netherlands, she started about the Netherlands and Senegal in relation to “living lesbian” again. She had just concluded, to her regret, that I was inhabited by a rab, a spirit (spouse, possibly), hence her attempts to seduce me had not paid off. Nevertheless, she talked about coming to visit me in the Netherlands one day - perhaps my rab would disappear and new possibilities for a relationship between the two of us would arise in the European context - she said that she would miss Senegal considerably though. When I asked her what she would miss the most about her life in Senegal she said, decidedly, “the meetings of the koba<sup>140</sup>”.*

The “meetings of the *koba*” refers to her practically daily gathering of queer friends, who gather in her room around midnight. Although they consciously gather at such a late hour not to disturb Fama’s housemates in the apartment, and perhaps also to avoid drawing attention to the abundant conversations about their same-sex relationships, they find the time and the joy in meeting every day within the comfortable confines of Fama’s room. Taking into account the Senegalese sexual imaginary and the stress this may bring for young queers who feel constrained by the heteronormative expectations to marry, Fama’s words may sound strange. For Fama and many others, it is the extensive network of social and sexual relationships that queers maintain that precisely makes Senegal the country they love and that they would miss should they move abroad - a dream that for various reasons many people do have. Fama’s choice for the French word *fréquentations* is interesting, because it denotes both ‘meeting’ or ‘gathering’, as well as ‘dating’. Its double meaning points exactly to the ambiguity and fluidity in friendships. Friendships may include at some point erotic practices, or they may move from a friendship to a romantic relationship. Awareness of this ambiguity is largely missing from discourses on (same-sex) sexuality however, and this has its roots in western understandings and constructions of sexuality and sexual difference in Africa.

### **Studying sexuality**

Marc Epprecht (2008) convincingly argued in *Heterosexual Africa* how the idea of an exclusively heterosexual Africa was constructed and maintained in the long period from the time of missionaries and colonialism through to at least the first decade after the discovery and evolvment of the aids epidemic in Africa (in 1983-84 in Uganda). The latter led scholars to

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<sup>139</sup> English: “The meetings of the *koba* [homosexuals; queers]”.

<sup>140</sup> *Koba* is a Wolof word used to signify homosexuals, like *goor-jigéen*. The word is commonly used in reference to Wally Seck’s song *koba yi*.

focus research in the 1990s on men who have sex with men (msm), after they were found to be the so-called “vectors” of the disease. Despite a long period of ignorance concerning non-normative sexualities, and a certain continuation of the idea of the un-Africanness of homosexuality, anthropological and historical studies in Africa have brought to light a wide array of culturally specific forms of and masks for non-normative genders and sexualities. These include spirit possession such as lesbian sangomas in South Africa, woman-woman marriages in Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania, and particular women’s social roles performed by male-bodies persons such as *‘yan daudu* in Nigeria and *góor-jigéen* in Senegal, to name but a few. In Senegal, studies on same-sex intimacies have thus far only explored msm in the context of hiv/aids research and prevention and treatment strategies (see Niang et al. 2003; Teunis 1996, 2000) and with respect to the sociality of dissident sexuality, studies have explored the meaning of *góor-jigéen* (Broqua 2017; Niang et al. 2003).

Somewhat parallel to the emergence of scholarship on msm in relation to the hiv/aids epidemic, sexual rights have become the focus of public concern, and (often Western) governments and NGOs have put sexual rights on the agenda of human rights interventions. The question that is often debated is whether such efforts will ‘free’ many Africans from ‘the closet’, or whether they create a local backlash in the form of increased social and political homophobia. What this debate forecloses - because of its situation in the public sphere of governments, NGOs and other public institutions - is that gender and sexuality are part of the lived experiences of people who often have no link to the institutions that claim to work for them. Most certainly, the increasingly globalising discourses on gender and sexuality have an effect on people’s experiences and the immediate and imagined futures they foresee. The global attention for sexual rights casts new light on the experiences of gender and sexual dissidents and it may complicate the ways in which people previously navigated same-sex intimacies with tacit knowledge. A more comprehensive understanding of sexual diversity is urgently needed in order to challenge the oversimplified idea reflected in international policies that LGBTIQI visibility is the only, linear, way forward to ‘free’ African queers from the closet. Such policy may cause a backlash for people locally, who in their sexual behaviour or gender expression become associated with homosexuality as imposed upon Africa by the West. Luckily, since the turn of the century we have seen an increased engagement with the study of dissident sexualities with ethnographic approaches to people’s lived experiences, among which are the works of Serena Dankwa (2009; 2011), Rudolph Gaudio (2009), Thomas Hendriks (2016), Christophe Broqua (2009; 2010), William Banks (2013), Zethu Matebeni et al. (2013) and Graeme Reid (2013). Such works are essential to enhance our understanding of human sexuality, and they stand in contrast to the biomedical approach to sexuality that emerged after the discovery of hiv/aids in 1983/1984 in Africa. Up to now, nothing had been written about gender and sexual dissidence among women in Senegal. This research has sought to fill a gap in the knowledge production of female same-sex intimacies in Senegal. In this thesis, I have attempted to show how same-sex intimacies draw on a complex negotiation of gender and sexual normativity in Senegal, and I demonstrate how a diverse set of tactics is employed for the navigation of same-sex intimacies.

### **Tactics of navigation**

Augustine was right when she said that “you have to know how to play, otherwise they will catch you<sup>141</sup>”. It is through a skillful navigation that same-sex intimacies can thrive in urban Senegal. These tactics - including play, sutura, respectability, and the appropriation and

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<sup>141</sup> Conversation with Augustine, 13 September 2017.

construction of social spaces - are all ways to negotiate social worth, mutual support, and sexual pleasure. Above all, such tactics are the instruments as young women search for wellbeing. In this thesis, I have sought to unravel some of the complex and ingenious ways in which young queer women navigate their same-sex intimacies. In the context of a compelling Senegalese sexual imaginary, the abundance of same-sex intimacies begged the question how these can be enacted in spite of such gender and sexual normativity. The main question that guided my research was:

*How do young women in urban Senegal navigate same-sex intimacies?*

I used social navigation as an analytical tool to understand how young women in urban Senegal experience and manoeuvre same-sex intimacies in relation to societal expectations of proper womanhood, marriage, and parenthood. Crucial to successful navigation was the appropriation and construction of (homo)social spaces where same-sex intimacies can be negotiated and enacted. Lefebvre's conceptual triad of social spaces was useful to understand the diverse tactics that queer women employed to navigate through a multiplicity of spaces. The "spaces of representation", which he defined as the spaces that people seek to create through an appropriation of their environment, reflect the different spaces that my interlocutors molded or constructed. The lexicon of *jump* and *sexy* with their distinct fashion styles and gender expressions are part of the "spatial code" that emerges in this lived space. Navigating same-sex intimacies can be understood as a struggle for what Jackson (2011) termed wellbeing. He argues that wellbeing is about finding a balance between what we owe others - what our social environment expects from us - and what we owe ourselves - our own desires and hopes. He argues that "life is not a problem that can be solved but a situation with which we struggle, a mystery that cannot be fully fathomed" (ibid.: 195). This struggle of aligning hopes and desires in the social context asked for an application of the notion of social navigation.

As an analytical concept, social navigation was useful to understand how personal aspirations, both immediate and future ones, become enacted in everyday practices through constant rethinking, negotiation, and adaptation to changing circumstances. These circumstances, or this social environment, does not only change over time - as a result of processes of globalisation, economic recession, or governmental changes - nor does it only change with age - as new expectations and responsibilities arise as people grow from youth into (social) adults - but they also differ per social space. Particularly in the urban setting in which my informants live, and where engage in multiple spaces at the same time, different forms of behaviour are required and enabled in different spaces. However, where Vigh's conceptualisation of social navigation focuses on the navigation of existing - albeit changing - social spaces, I have demonstrated in this thesis that the creation of new social spaces likewise is crucial for young women's wellbeing. Young women do not only navigate through existing social spaces, but they also create new ones as they navigate their same-sex intimacies. The football field, parties and queer organisations are actively constructed social spaces whereby women enhance their space for manoeuvre and expand their period of youthfulness. Women invoke the category of youth as it enables them to go out into the city, to engage in leisure activities, and to try to find a job and fend for themselves: youth are social shifters (see Durham 2000; 2004).

In this thesis, I have uncovered the various tactics that young women in urban Senegal employ for the social navigation of same-sex intimacies. By adopting a variety of strategies and acts, my interlocutors have shown the ability to simultaneously navigate same-sex intimacies in

existing homosocial spaces and carve out new spaces for the enactment of their same-sex desires. Crucial for the ability to navigate their same-sex intimacies discreetly (with *sutura*), is the ability to display respectable behaviour, most notably in terms of gender expressions. In a heteronormative context with restrictive gender and sexual norms, and with homosexuality (“unnatural acts”) criminalised by law, a discreet navigation of dissident practices is required. Various interlocutors have shown how they adapt their gender expression according to the context. Hawa, for example, covers her head with a scarf whenever she visits her father, to hide her shaved head. And Nabou, who always wears trousers, chose to wear a dress to her grandmother’s funeral last January, a sign of respect to her late grandmother and the rest of her family. In chapter three, I explored how play appears as a valuable tool to navigate same-sex intimacies with other women, particularly in spaces such as the home, where same-sex intimacies have to be dealt with very discreetly. Ultimately, indispensable for the space to navigate same-sex intimacies in urban Senegal is the construction and appropriation of social spaces where same-sex intimacies are tacitly tolerated or even outrightly celebrated, as is the case with the Friday-evening clubbing that is organised particularly for queers, as well as through the celebration of same-sex weddings.

In chapter four, I explored how football serves as an important activity for constructing personhood for one group of young women in this research. It was their hobby, and despite the negative associations people have of women who engage in the allegedly male leisure activity of football, they choose to play anyway. The football *milieu* is also the space where their masculine styles - articulated in their way of dress, behaviour, and the social roles they take on in their relationships - are not only tacitly tolerated by wider society, but are in fact enhanced and emphasised in the *milieu* itself. Women somehow compete with each other for what a ‘good’ *jump* is: bodies (muscle), brands, and relationships are showed off on and off the football field. Through distinct fashion styles, *jump* women compete with each other over the symbolic mastery of their gendered expressions in relation to other *jump* and *sexy* women. When Hawa argued that *jump* fashioning is “the identity card of footballers”, she argued that their masculine way of dress is used as a means to communicate same-sex desire. Refraining from articulating verbally their same-sex desires, *jump* women demonstrate their ability to navigate same-sex intimacies with an adherence to the Senegalese value of *sutura*. Despite the opposition from family members that some girls and women are confronted with when they pursue a football career, they have constructed the football field as more than a sports arena. It has become an important social space where gender dissidence and same-sex intimacies are characteristics of the game. By playing football, young women simultaneously dislocate from Senegalese society, and consolidate and claim their place socially as well as in a geographical (public) space.

Chapter five expanded on the role of queer organisations for providing a social space for young queer women. I described two organisations: Nio Far, the country’s only registered queer organization, and Yaakaare, registered as an organisation for sex workers, but actively engaged with queer women too. These organisations serve as spaces where predominantly young women gather in a shared search to enhance their space for manoeuvre. This chapter has shown that these two organisations offer women a space to learn and to discuss ways to navigate their same-sex intimacies in everyday practices, from going to the hospital to learning about safe sexual practices and sexual rights in case they should be arrested. Moreover, women find in these organisations the opportunity to discuss their love lives and future aspirations, and through an engagement with the organisations, they hope to negotiate a better future. Rokhaya’s disappointment with Nio Far that in her eyes “*n’est qu’un regroupement*” (is only a grouping, gathering) should be understood in the context of her limited economic chances. For

many young women like her, the economic needs and aspirations are a more urgent concern than sexual rights. Rokhaya has been engaged with the organisation for seven years now, and she still struggles to make ends meet. She had hoped that the organisation would somehow advance her job opportunities, and she continued to express the wish that young women in the organisation are offered better economic prospects. Assembling queer women can thus also be seen as a way to organise trainings, to provide education, and to set up workshops. Therefore, rather than seeing local queer activism as a move towards global gay culture and as the adoption of a globalising sexual rights discourse, it must be understood as an ambiguous realm that combines opportunities to work on the enhancement and creation of (new) spaces for same-sex intimacies with the creation of local opportunities for education and employment.

The existing social spaces that young queer women appropriate, and the new spaces that they construct, become loci of urban social reproduction with a distinct spatial code and the associated lexicon of *jump* and *sexy*. Jointly, these social spaces and the same-sex intimacies that they enable form a loosely connected community of practice (see O'Mara 2013) that combines a specific lexicon (*jump* and *sexy*) with tacit understandings of same-sex erotic practices. These spaces can similarly be understood as producing a "web of kinship", a changeable practice that entails mutual social responsibility and the transfer of (material) resources between people who are connected by these bonds of kinship (Alber, Häberlein and Martin 2010). Perhaps the ambiguity of women's practices reinforces the idea that sexuality itself is an ambiguous terrain (Spronk 2012), with reality more often than not diverging from norms. Social navigation as an analytical concept then helps us to rethink the place and space for same-sex intimacies in society. Moreover, same-sex intimacies are part of these young women's broader sense of being-in-the-world. As such, this research acquires relevance for an overall consideration of the changing position(s) of youth and young women in urban Senegal and the wider world. My interlocutors' articulations of romantic same-sex love reveal in part the cosmopolitan aspirations that young women in urban Senegal embody.

The diverse tactics that my interlocutors have demonstrated for the navigation of their same-sex intimacies complicate the widely assumed antagonism between Senegalese conceptions of same-sex sexuality, as reflected in the Penal Code that currently criminalises "unnatural acts", and globalising discourses of sexual rights. This thesis shows the discrepancy between ideologies of the Senegalese sexual imaginary and the lived realities of my interlocutors. Instead of viewing contemporary expressions of same-sex intimacies as instigated by globalising discourses emanating from the West, and imposing a cultural convergence of Senegal to the West, I propose to take these contemporary realities of same-sex intimacies in urban Senegal seriously, and to rethink sexuality *from* Africa, as Hendriks and Spronk (2017) argue.

What these queer young women in urban Senegal show us, is that being-in-the-world as a young woman entails a wide array of tactics to navigate both existing spaces as well as creating new spaces for self-realisation. As my interlocutors have demonstrated an ability to create spaces for the enactment of their same-sex desires I am tempted to argue that, in addition to governments that administer laws about sexuality, and (international) NGOs that vocalise a globalising sexual rights discourse, we should not underestimate the creative capacity of queer youth to transform and mold social spaces in their societies. Although my interlocutors engage on different terms with the debate about gendered and sexual behaviour than do NGOs and governments - the former being discreet and the latter promoting a politics of disclosure - queer young women actively take part in negotiations on gender and sexuality in Senegalese society.

The ways in which young women navigate same-sex intimacies is illustrative of the ways in which youth globally assume a place in societal discussions about cultural change and continuity. My interlocutors do not reject their elders' authority outrightly, nor do they renounce Senegalese and Muslim norms and values. Their skillful adherence to the value of *sutura* attests to this fact. However, they do seek ways to claim a position in their society through the creation and appropriation of spaces to enact their same-sex desires. Accordingly, they embody both cultural change and continuity as it extends beyond the domain of same-sex intimacies itself to other domains of life such as in politics - by proposing youth as an ideological position, see Van Dijk et al. (2011) - and in the economy - by negotiating employment opportunities and financial independence as women.

### **Directions for future research**

What I hope this thesis has conveyed, is the value of a truly ethnographic approach to the study of sexuality. It has been only through the repeated extensive visits to interlocutors that I have been able to witness some of the tacit knowledge as well as tacit communications of desire to others - those others including those not in the know, such as sisters. It is this tacit knowledge and communication that forms an integral part of the analysis of the tactics of navigation in this thesis. Play as a tactic of navigation, for example, is not something that can be easily grasped in a formal interview. The absence of written works on female same-sex intimacies in Senegal is striking. Although there does not seem to exist a historical category like *góor-jigéen* for women in Senegal, women's same-sex relations in various social constellations have most certainly existed. The paucity of historical studies on women's same-sex intimacies in West Africa is appalling, an exception being *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives* by Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (2005), co-authored by women activists from six countries. In this thesis, I have only succeeded partially to unravel the social dynamics of female same-sex intimacies in Senegal. An understanding of the historical narratives and development of sexualities is valuable to acquire insight into the ideologies and practices of Senegalese today. Senegalese, much like people in the rest of the world, obtain information and ideas about gender and sexuality from the global sphere, through the internet, television and other (digital) media channels. Combined with local, historical norms and ideas about sexuality, young Senegalese unavoidably find themselves navigating their own position in this debate. Taking into account historical narratives and their transmission through generations, helps to understand and theorise the manifold ways in which discourses and practices of sexuality develop.

### **The scope of navigation**

As I conclude this thesis, Hawa is about to set off to Morocco. I hold my fingers crossed in the sincere hope that she manages to obtain a new passport. She declared it lost at the municipality, although "I haven't lost it. I know that my mum guards it somewhere. I asked my cousin to look for it; she said that she didn't find it. I think she may have told my dad that I am planning something<sup>142</sup>." Hawa's decision to move to Morocco in order to build a life for herself independent of a husband, escaping marriage to a man her parents had proposed to her, shows that the social navigation of same-sex intimacies extends beyond Senegal. I have focused in this thesis on the tactics of navigation in urban Senegal, but Hawa's trajectory shows that navigation is not confined to urban Senegal. Many interlocutors have demonstrated the importance of mobility for the navigation of their same-sex intimacies. Whether it is Fama who moved from

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<sup>142</sup> WhatsApp audio message from Hawa, 18 May 2018.

her natal village to Dakar; or Penda who left her family home at the age of eighteen to try her luck elsewhere, away from the controlling gaze of her family; or the football players who take the bus to football practice daily to find a space for the much desired leisure time and room for the discussion of their queer love lives: the ability to move to and through different spaces, is crucial. However, by deciding to move to Morocco, Hawa does not only challenge the spatiality of her body as supposedly bound to her family in Senegal. She furthermore challenges the temporality of her body that, understood in terms of linear repetition, should take the next step of getting married to a man. Instead, she espouses the cyclical temporality of her body, which is constituted by her desire for social and economic independence and wellbeing as a young queer woman, hereby “preserving and developing difference within repetition” (Simonsen 2008: 5).

Understanding young women’s experiences with same-sex intimacies, and how they hereby diverge spatially and temporally from the Senegalese sexual imaginary, has helped me to understand how sexuality is experienced relationally and mediated socially. My interlocutors’ accounts of their intimate lives, and the struggles and joys they found in various relationships, provide insights into the centrality of gender and sexual subjectivities for people’s self-understandings, as well as for the moral order. Navigating desires, self-understandings, and societal expectations, culminates in an oscillating quest for wellbeing that we are all on. As Vigh put it, “[w]e obviously seek to move safely along the trajectory we planned and anticipated, yet due to the movement of the social terrain we often have to reorient ourselves and redirect our course as we go” (Vigh 2006: 239). Hawa’s reorientation to Morocco reminds us that although there may be limits to play, both spatial and temporal, and however strong the forces of normativity and control from society and the family may be, humankind is ingenious, and people mostly find ways to navigate through tumultuous situations.

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