Art, Ritual, and Folklore: Dance and Cultural Identity among the Peoples of the Casamance

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Document généré le 26/06/2017
This paper addresses the phenomenon of folkloric festivals in contemporary rural Senegal. In 1989, just as the political movement for Casamance independence was moving into a stage of heightened tension and bloodshed, members of two communities in the northern Basse Casamance presented a festival of local traditions, focusing on dances. The festival recreated dances from the men’s initiation ceremony of the local Jola population. A few weeks later, a nearby Jola community celebrated its bukut, or initiation. Yet the “Semaine culturelle” which is the subject of this paper could not be confused with the bukut from which it derives inspiration.

Reflecting on the Semaine culturelle, I was first drawn to describe the components of this celebration. Clearly, local culture is what this celebration was about. It gradually became evident to me that in order to understand what it is that distinguishes the Semaine culturelle from the dances that serve as inspiration, I would need to develop a theoretical model to analyse and interpret folkloric presentations. Such a model would have to address issues of historicity and of the manner in which social and cultural identities are articulated and negotiated.

The model I elaborate is inspired by studies of popular arts in Africa, in particular the work of Karin Barber (1987, 1991), and by Eric Hobsbawm’s analysis of the creation of “tradition” (1983). In addition, a reading of contemporary German and Swiss “Volkskunde” suggested that

I wish to thank John Middleton for his detailed and insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Helpful suggestions were also offered by Sidney Kasfir, Christopher Steiner, and Roy Sieber. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association in Boston, 1993.

1. Jola ethnic identity is a product of the colonial period. To avoid awkward circumlocutions I shall use the term “Jola” anachronistically when referring to 19th-century ancestors of the people who today consider themselves Jola.
the study of European folklore could offer important insights for the analysis of folkloric dance in West Africa. When I speak of contemporary Volkskunde, I refer to the work of post-World War II scholars, notably Hermann Bausinger, Konrad Köstlin and Christine Burckhardt-Seebass, whose works are dramatically different from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Volkskunde theory, which was based on a traditional (folk) vs modern paradigm and followed an evolutionary model of human cultural development. Furthermore, their work avoids the totally discredited cultural chauvinism and extreme nationalism that characterised Volkskunde (and Völkerkunde, or anthropology) in Germany from 1933 to 1945.

Hermann Bausinger’s work (1990) constitutes an empirically based theoretical model of folklore and its relationship to tradition. Bausinger’s concern with the interaction of rural and urban technological society is especially pertinent to Africa. So, too is his attention to the impact of tourism and of mass communications on local culture and on the development of folkloric arts. By viewing folk culture as a dynamic entity, able to assimilate influences from modern technologies. Bausinger refutes the concept of a folk world that is essentially ahistorical, in much the same manner that Hobsbawm et al. (1983) demonstrate the dynamic quality of much European tradition.

On the other hand, Bausinger (1990: 8, 22, 24) associates the often ahistorical or frozen quality of folkloric festivals with nineteenth-century Romanticism, itself linked to the growth of urban culture, and his awareness of the dynamic nature of rural folk culture is articulated when he writes:

“Many of the images of steadfast and stubborn custom derive from an optical illusion: viewed from a larger temporal distance movement and change recede in favor of a unified, static, firmly set picture. Leopold Schmidt has indicated for the study of folk drama how the seemingly static quality of folk drama dissolves ‘more and more into a steady dynamic under the influence of history’” (ibid.: 65).

While Bausinger’s work affords a model for the general study of folklore in the twentieth century, Karin Barber’s writing (1987) focusses specifically on Africa. Her work concentrates on popular—largely urban—art forms, but much of her analysis may be extended to the discussion of folkloric culture. Of particular relevance is Barber’s analysis of the relation of urban to rural, that is, of the inter-relationship of popular to folk and to traditional culture.

A fundamental question emerged in my study of Senegalese folkloric dance. Performers and audience at the Semaine culturelle were intimately involved in the process of articulating social and cultural identity. At times, they seemed even to approach the issue of identity in a consciously reflective manner. Indeed, identity seemed to be articulated in a more overt, even blatant manner than it was at any of the men’s ini-
tiation ceremonies I have attended over the past twenty years. Yet the issue of cultural identity underlies, or even defines, the initiation. A distinctive—perhaps definitive—characteristic of the folkloric recreation of initiation dances is the manner in which cultural identity is addressed.

Karin Barber discusses the relationship of popular art to the articulation of consciousness. She convincingly demonstrates the role of art as a component in the elaboration of identity. This analysis complements Bausinger’s approach to folkloric art in Europe. Together, these writers provide theoretical models that proved crucial to my own efforts to fashion a model for interpreting Casamance folkloric dance and its role in the establishment and affirmation of local cultural identity.

The Ethnographic and Historical Background

Senegal is an ethnically and culturally diverse nation, confronted today by a regional separatist movement in the south, and Casamance is home to the Jola people, who number 250-300,000, and are primarily wet rice farmers. They constitute an ethnic and social minority in a country whose government is dominated by the Wolof.

During the twentieth century the overwhelming majority of the northern Jola, those living north of the Casamance River, have become Muslims. While this religious change entailed the gradual loss of ritual contact with village and lineage-based shrines (called buneeti in Thionk-Essyl, sineeti or ukiin elsewhere in the region), local Jola religion never entirely disappeared, even from Muslim villages. In the past decade the impact of the drought that began in 1968, together with cultural repercussions of the Casamance independence movement, have been associated with a revival of some indigenous rituals. Throughout this history of profound change the ritual and social core of Jola cultural identity has remained the bukut. The initiation occurs only once in a generation, on a 20 to 30 year cycle. It enables each Jola community to reaffirm its distinctive cultural identity, in part through community-wide dances and masquerades. There are, of course, many other occasions when public dancing serves as an important part of local life cycle celebrations: marriages and funerals are

2. The bukut, or men's initiation, constitutes a central theme of my book (Mark 1992). On bukut, see also fn 4 below.
3. For a detailed historical study of Jola religion, including Islamisation of the northern Jola, see Mark 1985. Louis-Vincent Thomas's seminal essay (1959) remains a fundamental reference for Jola society and religion. For an important study of differential socio-economic change among several groups of northern and southern Jola, see Linares (1992).

In my work (Mark 1992), I discuss some aspects of the recrudescence of local Jola religion.
4. For a detailed description of one initiation, see Thomas 1965. On bukut, see also Thomas 1959; Mark 1985, 1992.
the most frequent. In recent years, however, new opportunities have arisen for the presentation of community-wide dances. In Casamance today, the development of folkloric dances among both men and women provides such an occasion, while at the same time offering a new forum for the enacting of Jola identity. These more recent festivities feature "traditional" dances. Most of the dances are local, but some are representative of different Jola cultural groups and a few, as will be seen, depict the dances of neighboring peoples.

The challenge of defining local culture within the broader social and cultural context of the nation-state confronts all Casamancais. One forum for addressing this issue consists of public manifestations of Jola culture. Ironically, some of these expressions, including the Semaine culturelle, occur under government sponsorship. At these presentations the public dances are informed by efforts of spectators and performers to define what is meant by Jola culture.

Map of the lower Casamance.
Two important factors play a part in the recreation of local dances as folklore. First, in the three decades since independence, dance troupes have been established among Casamance immigrants living in Dakar. Some of these groups are professional or semi-professional organizations that go on tour, staging "Jola" dances for foreign audiences. There is one such group from Thionk-Essyl; another has been formed in the community of Oussouye, south of the Casamance River.

The second historical factor that has encouraged the creation of self-consciously "traditional" dance performances is the development of the tourist industry in Casamance. The Senegalese government followed a policy of encouraging tourism and the construction of the requisite infrastructure, including hotels and a Club Méditerranée at Cap Skirring on the southern coast. In local communities, such as Thionk-Essyl, "maisons touristiques" were built. There foreign tourists could stay cheaply in houses that were often—as in Thionk—the only example of precolonial residential architecture in the entire village. These tourists were sometimes treated to "traditional" dances performed by local groups. The expansion of the tourist industry dates from the mid-1970s and continued at least until the recent spread of violence that is linked to the separatist movement in the region. Tourism was supposed to bring an infusion of foreign capital into the local economy, but most of the money goes to expatriate firms, such as the Club Méditerranée, that own the large hotels. Moreover, the construction of a Club Méditerranée has brought to Casamance numbers of Senegalese workmen, some of whom settled in the area on land ceded to them by the government after the Club was built. This caused ongoing tensions with the local people, who saw their own land being alienated. The massacre, in autumn 1992, of about forty members of one immigrant community is an outgrowth of this festering hostility. Estimates of total casualties related to the fighting between the independence movement and government troops from September 1992 to March 1993, range as high as 2,000.

A less locally destructive development related to the growth of tourism has been the establishment of local folkloric dance manifestations. These dances are intended in part to encourage tourism, but most members of the audience are local people.

Among the northern Jola, Thionk-Essyl is both the largest (pop. 7000) and the most cosmopolitan community outside of the regional administrative center of Bignona. It is also one of the most thoroughly Islamic communities in Buluf, the region west of Bignona and south of Fogny. The Semaine culturelle, which is the focus of this study, was held in Thionk and the neighboring community of Mlomp, five kilometers further north. Observation and videotaping suggest that these events provide a new forum for the expression and enactment of what are consciously perceived to be local traditions. Many participants are migrants who now live in Dakar. All these folkloric presentations are in fact performed
by Jola actors, for an audience that is virtually entirely Jola. Innovations continually creep in: the new and the old, the Jola and the non-Jola are both enacted and moderated through the medium of these self-conscious, folkloric traditions.

The interaction between dances associated with rituals, in which participants tend to be less self-consciously reflective, and recreated folklore, which is highly self-conscious, is a fertile area for investigating the ongoing process of elaboration and refinement of cultural identity.

The Dances: Method of Analysis

As a first step in investigating the interaction of established dance performances that are part of ritual ceremonies, and newly-established dances that incorporate modern instruments and innovative combinations of instruments while presenting "traditional" customs, one needs to settle on an acceptable terminology. It is important to avoid descriptive categories and vocabulary that deny the existence of continuities between older, established festivities and newer, innovating community expressions of music and dance. While recreated cultural forms are in important ways distinct from the forms that inspire them, I seek to avoid using a "traditional vs modern" paradigm for explaining West-African cultural dynamics. At the same time, however, the element of reflexivity, or self-consciously thinking about and acting out cultural traditions, that is part of the Semaine culturelle and that underlies the very existence of folkloric dance troupes, does, I believe, point to a disjunction in a people's cultural expression. The resulting recreated dances are qualitatively different from, for example, the incorporation of new materials or themes into established ritual, a process that has long characterized local masquerades and associated rituals in many West African societies.

Consequently, I use the term "folklore" to describe the more or less self-conscious recreation of ritual and masquerade. This usage has the advantage of being consistent with terminology used by many of the participant groups, such as the Ballets folkloriques de Thionk-Essyl.

Among the people of the northern Casamance, local rituals and art forms have never been static. The form and especially the materials in which the men's horned initiation mask is fashioned, for example, have changed dramatically over the past 150 years in response to long distance trade, conquest, and other contacts with outside cultures. In this respect, Casamance culture perfectly illustrates Barber's observation (1987: 42) that traditional cultures "were themselves characterized by fluidity and the capacity to accommodate new elements".

There is then no radical discontinuity between traditional and folkloric arts with respect to their potential for change. The relatively recent introduction of folkloric dances, at least in southern Senegal, makes it difficult to describe historical change in this art form. The historical study of folkloric dance in West Africa since the early colonial period might provide an interesting test of Bausinger's assertion of the "freezing" of folkloric traditions.6 Ironically, and contrary to the formerly widespread image of traditional society as static, a comparison of traditional dances to their folkloric counterparts shows the former to be dynamic, while the latter are often consciously or purposely retrograde.

**Volkskunde as Methodology**

The analysis of the social and political processes which engendered the creation of folkloric dances in Europe has been an important concern of the discipline of Volkskunde. The work of Hermann Bausinger provides a framework for analyzing the cultural processes which lead to the development of folklore; a model which distinguishes folklore from older cultural processes; and a method to interpret folklore as a medium for the expression of cultural and political identity. Several fundamental concepts articulated by Bausinger are directly relevant to the present study of folkloric dance in the Casamance.

Bausinger (1990), much like Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), perceives tradition to be not a discrete body of fixed practices and values, but rather a constantly changing constellation. Local culture, he writes, "existed in continuous evolution" (Bausinger 1990: 142). In similar manner, Jola culture, as I have suggested elsewhere (Mark 1992), consists not of relatively permanent traditions, but rather of ongoing process. The dynamic quality of culture—and, hence the ever-changing nature of "tradition"—becomes clear when local forms of cultural expression, whether Jola masks from Senegal or Protestant rituals from Switzerland,7 are studied in historical perspective. As Bausinger observes (1990: 142): "As long as traditions are truly alive, they keep on changing".

In contradistinction to the continually evolving nature of local culture, the establishment of "folklore" implies the existence of canonical "traditions". Once this canon has been created, the latitude for change is greatly reduced. Folkloric dances are performed "just so", to conform with a presumed, authentic "traditional" model. The codification and

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6. In the study of European local customs, a more radical model based on "the creation of tradition" has been articulated by the French historian, Jean-Claude RICHEZ (1993), who maintains that there is no such thing as authenticity with regard to traditions, since each period reinvents its own traditions.

“freezing” of culture in the form of folkloric tradition is articulated by Bausinger (ibid.: 78), who writes:

“While earlier folk traditions often merely insisted on a few elements as fixed formulas and therefore allowed for a playful rearranging of the remaining parts, now the whole form became fixed and was valued precisely because of its frozen state”,

The relatively unchanging nature of folkloric tradition in Europe is also observed by Ranger (1983: 247), who rightly contrasts fixed European traditions with flexible custom in precolonial Africa. Conceptual confusion arose, as Ranger suggests, when these two distinct categories were equated, thus creating a false image of unchanging “traditional” African culture.

Although folkloric traditions, once canonized, may become more or less fixed, the component elements of a particular folkloric presentation may derive from geographically and chronologically and even culturally discontinuous rituals. This is certainly the case in the dances presented during the Semaine culturelle.

In Senegal, the establishment of artistic groups that function specifically within the new national political sphere removes the music and dance from their intimate association both with local social and political structures and with the religious ritual that undergirded precolonial society. This is a crucial divorce, associated with a fundamental reorientation in local art (music and dance) forms. It is this rupture, more than any other fact, that engenders the transformation of masquerade from an integral part of local community and ritual to something different, something that might be termed “folklore”. In his discussion of southwest German folkloric dance, Bausinger describes a similar discontinuity between local religious rituals and the folklore that derives, in part, from them.8 If indeed the origins of the Oberstdorf Wildmen folk dances lie partly in ancient religious ceremonies, that sacred association has long since completely disappeared. The now totally secularized nature of the dance encompasses not only observers but also the participants themselves. This transformation, as Bausinger implies (1990: 143) constitutes a fundamental discontinuity that marks the transition from religious ritual to folkloric event:

“The chain of transmission does not lead to the realm of cult, but to a more or less theatrical role play... And, particularly with reference to the actors, a characteristic shift occurs over time to which the concept of continuity does not do justice”.

8. This passage details the historical development of the “Wilde-Männle” dances. The Wildmen, acrobatic dancers who cover their bodies with lichen, purportedly derive from ancient Thor-worship, BAUSINGER (1990: 142) convincingly shows, however, that the “Wilde-Männle” are a more recent phenomenon. Their origin, probably ca. 1800, may in fact owe something to the influence of early tourism.
The presentation of elements of local culture as theatre, obviously a more or less self-conscious process, is common to both peasants of Oberstdorf and the rice farmers of Casamance. In both situations the combination of secularization and reflexivity makes for a significant departure from local ritual.

Closely related to the reflexivity that characterizes folkloric dances is a self-conscious awareness among participants of the historical—or purportedly historical—roots of the tradition. Historicizing, the effort to reestablish cultural practises or rituals from an earlier time, is a significant aspect of much folklore.

Is this secularized and self-conscious recreation of local culture qualitatively different from the traditions from which it derives? I believe it is. If so, how does one distinguish between such “folklore” and the normal process by which any masquerade performance continually varies, in response to changing economic, political and social conditions? Certainly Jola ritual and masquerade have always been highly adaptable. The history of masking traditions clearly demonstrates that Jola masks, for example, have incorporated elements from the outside Muslim and European worlds for hundreds of years. So it is not the fact of change, even of pronounced or rapid change, that constitutes a radical innovation.

I have suggested that it is the quality of self-consciousness that distinguishes folkloric performance from earlier masquerade performances (what were formerly often referred to as “traditional” masquerade). Self-conscious recreation of tradition is indeed distinct from that tradition. Among the Yoruba, as Karin Barber (1991) tells us about Oriki, and as Margaret Drewal reminds us (1992: 89-104), ritual performances have been characterized by this quality of reflexivity. At the same time that Yoruba women are recounting oral poetry, or that performers are enacting ritual, they are also likely to be commenting, through their “performance”, on themselves and on the ritual. This quality of self-consciously commenting upon the very ritual that is being enacted would seem to be highly developed among the Yoruba, especially in Oriki, in Egungun performance, and in Apidan theatre.

This quality is not, however, characteristic of all public ritual performance in West Africa. In public ritual performances among the Jola, I have observed nothing approaching the self-reflexive quality described by Drewal. For the Jola, though apparently not for the Yoruba, dance that self-consciously recreates prior performance modes is characteristic of folkloric presentations, but not of actual ritual masquerades.

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9. On occasion, the Jola do use public performance to express social commentary—as when women of the “kanyalen” society mimic the activities of men. Self-reflexivity, however, is generally far less developed in Casamance rituals than in Yoruba theatre, as described by Barber (1987) or Drewal (1992).
conscious recreation does, in fact, differentiate Jola folkloric dance from local ritual dances.

In Dakar, where dance troupes were created in the 1960s, performances have served in part to establish a sense of a national culture. The question arises, however, whether the appropriation of “local traditions” for the creation and reaffirmation of national political and cultural aims is a two-edged sword. Might not local populations themselves appropriate images, music and dance to assert their cultural specificity, in other words, to reaffirm their unique cultural identity?

The Semaine Culturelle

For three days, beginning on June 30, 1989, the nearly 10,000 inhabitants of Thionk-Essyl and Mlomp, two communities in western Buluf, north of the Casamance River and west of Bignona (see map) participated in a celebration of local culture. The Semaine culturelle featured dances performed by dance troupes from throughout the Lower Casamance, and culminated in a “pirogue” race by two teams from Thionk-Essyl, on July 2.

Thionk-Essyl is the largest community in Buluf. According to census figures, there are more than 7,000 inhabitants. At any given time, however, a majority of young adults are absent from the community—most of them being either seasonal or long-term migrants to Dakar. Thionk comprises four wards (kalol, pl. ulolau) ranging from 900 to well over 2,000 inhabitants. The wards function as semi-autonomous communities in terms of internal administration (each has a chief and a council of elders). All of Thionk comes together on important ritual occasions, most notably the men’s initiation, bukut, a month-long ceremony that takes place only once in a generation. In 1990, Niaganan took the unprecedented step of holding its bukut independently of the other wards, a step which was seen by some Jola observers as the first one in the ultimate division of Thionk into two separate communities.

Islam, which was first introduced in Buluf during the 1890s, spread rapidly through the region during the 1930s and 1940s. Today, with the exception of a handful of old women who never converted, and a single Catholic sub-ward of about 100 people, Thionk-Essyl is an almost entirely Muslim community. Mlomp is quite different. The people of Mlomp are less cosmopolitan than their neighbors a bare five kilometers to the south, and urban migration, at least when I conducted my fieldwork there in 1975, was less pervasive than in Thionk. In addition, there still survived a sizeable group of people who followed the local religion, and there was a larger Catholic community than in Thionk. Thus, the religious situation in Mlomp is more complex, and ritual practises are more varied.
Public dances, including dance ceremonies that are part of life crisis rituals, are common occurrences in Buluf during the dry season, especially in January and February. Muslims and non-Muslims alike celebrate marriages with public dances, while the death of non-Muslim elders, particularly if they were wealthy, is the occasion for more dancing. Impressive masquerades featuring the anti-witchcraft masked figure, Kumpo, occur in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, as self-mocking fun-and-games during the daytime, and as more spiritually powerful cleansing rituals in the moonlight. In non-Muslim communities, traditional Jola wrestling is accompanied by elaborate dances. The end of the dry season, late June and early July, is the season for bukut. During the initiation, Jola communities are transformed by weeks of celebratory dancing, culminating in three days of public masquerade before the youths enter the sacred forest.

Dancing is the quintessential form of Jola cultural expression. Jola dancing is by definition participatory. One does not go to watch a dance; one goes to dance. Individuals may perform solos, but everybody dances. What was extraordinary about the Semaine culturelle is not that dancing took place at the end of the dry season, but rather that people paid to watch others dance. The fundamental social role of the dance was thus transformed from community-wide participatory activity to formal spectacle, with paying spectators looking on from the sidelines.

The celebrations began on the evening of the first day and were held in a large common field near the main road that runs through the center of Thionk-Essyl. At the entrance to this field an admissions booth was set up; everyone paid 100 CFA francs (at the time worth about 40 cents). A large banner beside the entrance read: “Vive le President Abdou Diouf! Pour que vive le Sénégal”. In view of the fact that in the recently contested national elections, Diouf’s opponent, Abdoulaye Wade, had garnered the support of the overwhelming majority of Casamançais, including the citizens of Thionk-Essyl, the banner was an ironical statement of official patronage. It was largely ignored, but this statement of support for the Diouf regime takes on a painful irony in light of the increasing violence of the independence movement that has convulsed the Casamance since mid-1992.

As spectators arrived, the festival began with women dancers, led by the kanyalen—a sorority whose members are unable to bear healthy children. Women in kanyalen traditionally dance at public festivities,

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10. Except for a small number of Catholics, there are no non-Muslim male elders left in Thionk.
11. This “usurpation” of events sponsored in part by the government to express ideas independent of, or even contrary to official policies or aims, may be likened to Trinidadian Carnival. There, as KASINITZ observes (1992: 145): “The state [sponsors] a festival that features stinging criticism of itself”.
including both initiations and welcoming ceremonies for visiting government officials. The women make fun of men, while disporting themselves in regalia and activities that, were the dancers not members of kanyalen, would be considered blatantly and egregiously gender-inappropriate. The presence of the kanyalen here served as a link between more traditional dance roles and the ensuing cultural spectacle. Music was provided by the traditional large Jola drums, the bugurub (pl. ugur), soon joined by a young man playing a saxophone.

To this point, there had been no clear demarcation between spectators and dancers, but now the crowd pushed back to the edges of the field. Meanwhile a huge slit gong—similar to the sacred drum of some local villages—was brought to the center of the clearing, where it was joined by two drummers. The first official dance group then appeared. These were young men who danced in the regalia of an initiation dance, with anklets of palm fibers, bodies nude to the waist, and wearing feathers in their hair and hanging behind. As they began their energetic, high-stepping solo dances, the young men were joined by young women, members of a local women’s association or dance troupe. But just as the energy level began to pick up, an intense rainstorm swept across the village and everyone fled for shelter, thus bringing the festivities to a premature halt.

The next day, the festival was to have continued in the morning, up the road in Mlomp. The weather was fine. However, a death in Mlomp meant that everything had to be postponed again, until after the funeral. Not until the evening of July 1 did the Semaine culturelle really get underway.

The Second Day of the Semaine Culturelle

The second day’s festivities were held in the courtyard of the elementary school in Mlomp. This space formed a large rectangle with school buildings enclosing three sides: the fourth side was closed off that evening by cloths suspended as a backdrop. The spectators, having again paid their 100 francs, lined the porches of the buildings, with early arrivals enjoying the choice seats—the edge of the raised porches. Some local notables took elevated seats at a table on the school porch, while others reclined in lawn chairs placed conveniently on the ground. Camera crews from Senegalese national television claimed a central location. These crews, with their Super VHS equipment, have become a regular feature of public dances in Casamance. One assumes that this is part of the government’s

12. Identification of the various dance groups that participated in the Semaine culturelle is an obvious goal of future research.
efforts to validate local culture, perhaps as a means of achieving a sense of national pride in that culture.

The proliferation of video cameras has been a remarkable feature of Casamance cultural manifestations since the late 1980s. Formerly the Jola would form circle dances, with the community members surrounding the solo dancers, adding their musical accompaniment and, occasionally, joining the solo dancers in the center of the circle. Today, there is still the surrounding audience, with soloists dancing in the center and moving generally in a counterclockwise direction. But a new element has been added: in the middle of the circle there is invariably a cluster of video cameras representing the national television, tourists, sometimes the office of the local “prefet”, museum personnel and visiting ethnologists.

The effect on local performance of this additional audience, and of the knowledge that the dances are being immediately immortalized, needs to be studied. Returning to Thionk-EssyI in 1992 after a three-year absence, I was repeatedly asked whether I had seen the televised videotape of Niaganan ward’s 1990 bukut. Some Essylians now have videotape machines. When the remaining three wards held their initiation in 1994, they had access to a visual record of the 1990 bukut, a form of memory that is entirely new and that may affect the transmission of initiation ritual dances from one initiation to the next.

The appearance of modern recording technology at Casamance dances and even at some initiation rituals reflects the gradual incorporation of folk culture and even local ritual into modern mass culture. This phenomenon has also been analyzed by the new German Volkskunde.13

The presence of video recording equipment, ranging from 8 mm to Super VHS camcorders, unquestionably inspires many Jola dancers in their performances. With the spread of television and, inevitably, of VCRs throughout the Casamance—electricity was brought to Thionk-Essyl in the late 1980s—it is now possible for even formerly remote villagers to observe their own dances on television. Just as the spread of literacy and the dissemination of radio programs about local history have had a “feedback” effect on local oral traditions,14 so too in the future one may expect that videotapes will serve to provide a normative model of folkloric dance or even of religious ritual. Ultimately in Casamance, tech-

13. See, for example, KöSTLIn (1990: 43-59). His discussion is directly relevant to the issue of the incorporation of Balanta dances into the Semaine culturelle. On the impact of modern technology on folkloric presentations see, especially. BAUSINGER 1990: 23 sq.

14. On one occasion in 1975, while recording oral testimony, I remarked on an informant’s remarkable memory of events dating 70 years before. “Oh”, he replied, “I have just listened to Professor Christian Roche’s radio lecture on the same events, a few days earlier”.

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Technology will alter, though not destroy local culture. Here, too, Bausinger’s analysis of southwest German folk culture (1990: 23) is relevant to the Senegalese situation.

“This contradicts the thesis that technology has invaded and dissolved all forms of community that support folk culture [...] Occasionally even technical phenomena create or encourage new groups [...] Sometimes technical devices can contribute to the revival or the creation of ‘communal forms’ of an older type”.

Interestingly, the effects of technological innovation suggest a modification of the image which Bausinger elsewhere presents of folkloric traditions as “fixed” or “frozen”. The question therefore arises of which model—predominantly frozen or essentially dynamic—most accurately predicts the evolution of Casamance dances in the technological age that extends now even to rural Senegal.

At the beginning of the second day’s performance, the dancers and musicians were clearly separated from the audience in the center of the school courtyard. The evening’s entertainment consisted of several groups of performers who followed each other, one at a time. At Jola initiation ceremonies, there is a tendency for many small groups to dance at the same time. This gives a highly individualistic and vaguely chaotic sense to the bukut, somewhat like a three ring circus. In Mlomp, simultaneity was replaced by a linear temporal and spatial arrangement of the dances. Thus, the events assumed an ordered sequence and a more narrative structure.

The performers included organized groups of both men and women from Thionk-Essyl, a dance troupe from Oussouye south of the Casamance River, and a group who presented a Balante funeral dance. The first group was from Thionk. Their dance had a choreographed start, everyone carefully beginning with the first drum rhythms. In all the Jola funerals, weddings, and initiations I have attended since 1974, I had never seen such a formal, choreographed beginning.

The dress, too, showed uniformity. The women wore identical skirts and the men, bare to the waist, wore ankle-length clothing of varied colors. These dancers, like the groups that followed, often moved in clearly choreographed step with one another. Here, I believe, one sees the effect of performing on stage before an audience, something which is done in Dakar. Indeed, the Ballets folkloriques de Thionk-Essyl have also performed on tour overseas.

Even with the loss of spontaneity that resulted from their choreographed steps, the performers were spectacular. Dance is one of the Jola’s preferred forms of athletic, as well as artistic expression. Solo competition in which the most outstanding dancers match skills provides the highlight of weddings and initiation dances; here, too, that competitive flair was expressed in breath-taking feats of suppleness and coordina-
At Mlomp the relationship between soloists and group was made regular, more linear, in keeping with the choreographed quality of each presentation.

As members of this troupe added their fast individual steps, one woman from the audience took up their challenge; running to the center of the courtyard, she added her solo expertise. For only a moment, the barrier between performers and audience had disappeared.

Then the group whose performance had been interrupted by rain the previous night returned to the “center stage”, minus the slit gong. About eighteen dancers moved in a circle around three drummers. The young men danced powerfully and energetically, their feathered headdresses waving impressively. Their costumes and dance steps were those of the **bukut**; rattles attached to their ankles added to the rhythmic pulses of the drums and of women in the audience who clapped pieces of metal and wood, just as they would in real initiations.

What followed was quite distinct from the preceding dances. A group of dancers wearing Balanta initiation headdresses topped with wooden horns, entered the “stage” and danced a pantomime in which they enacted what appeared to be a combination of initiation and funeral rite. In addition to the stubby wooden horns, each of the dancers wore a green palm frond attached to his bare back.

The Balanta inhabit northern Guinea-Bissau. A small number of them also live in the southern Casamance, south of the Casamance River and east of Ziguinchor; their ancestors moved north from Guinea-Bissau, displacing the autoethnous Bagnun peoples about 1830. These dancers represented another cultural or ethno-linguistic group. At first appearance, the Semaine culturelle was presenting not only Jola dancers, but also groups from neighboring cultures, as a kind of Semaine culturelle casamançaise. There was, however, one difference between the Jola dances and the Balanta dance; where the former simply recreated local dances—with a degree of artistic liberty—the latter enacted a skit. In this skit, one of the dancers feigned dying and the others mourned him with a bit of buffoonery, and then carried off his body. The skit entailed a degree of artifice not evident in the Jola dances. Unlike the other presentations, the Balanta dance told a story, and the dancers, like actors,

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15. I lack the vocabulary to describe the distinctive Jola dance, feet striking flat on the soil and first one leg, then the other raised, with bent knee, nearly to the level of the head.

16. These headdresses and costumes approximate but do not replicate the form of the horned masquerades of the Balanta “Fanada” initiation. The Fanada headdress, characterized by either cattle horns or carved wooden horns, is generally large and heavy. **HANDEM** (1986: 206) writes that these masquerades “personify power and chase the evil spirits (sic)”. Like the Jola, the Balanta belong to the West-Atlantic linguistic family and, like the Jola, cattle horns play a central role in the ritual symbolism of their men’s initiation.
spoke during their skit. Of course, the ritual was unfamiliar to the audience. Thus, for the viewers to be able to follow the events, the narrative presentation was necessary. The Jola dances, by contrast, were familiar; neither explanation nor narrative was required. Later, when I sought to interview the Balanta performers, it turned out that they were not Balanta at all, but rather Jola playing the role of Balanta initiates.

The Jola and the Balanta do not have a history of particularly cordial relations. Indeed, the Balanta have a rather unsavory reputation (well-earned, in the nineteenth century) as bellicose warriors and cattle thieves. Perhaps this helps explain why the Balanta skit, unlike the Jola performances, was punctuated by irreverant laughter from the audience. And yet, the question remains: why, at this Jola celebration of culture, was one non-Jola dance included? What specific role, if any, did a Balanta dance play in a public presentation of ritual dances of the Jola? Was there an intentional decision to portray the culture of another people and, if so, why?

A clue to the answer is found in the choice of foreign cultural forms presented. Although the Bagnun peoples are much closer neighbors to the Jola, both geographically and historically, than the Balanta, the dancers pointedly did not decide to present Bagnun dances. There is a Bagnun community in Niomoune, barely 15 miles away on the southern edge of Buluf. Indeed, as Jola oral traditions clearly state, the Bagnun were the first recorded inhabitants of western Buluf; they were displaced by immigrants, probably Jola-speakers, during the seventeenth century. In fact, many of the dancers and members of the audience undoubtedly have Bagnun ancestors. To be a Jola in Mlomp or Thionk is, for many people, to be also a Bagnun. Yet this is not an aspect of local heritage that is openly discussed, for to do so might call into question Jola claims to being the rightful owners of the land. To be Jola is, in part, to be also Bagnun, but to hide that identity. It would be a bit uncomfortable for people to think publicly about Bagnun culture, for the Bagnun, as first inhabitants, have a prior claim to the land. In addition, the Bagnun are not sufficiently culturally distinct from the Jola to be of much help in the process of defining Jola identity.

The Balanta, by contrast, are geographically and historically at a greater remove from the people of Buluf than are the Bagnun. Culturally, too there is no history of assimilation between the Balanta and the northern Jola. To present Balanta traditions is, therefore, to show dance rituals that are clearly foreign. At Mlomp, the Balanta funeral ceremony was in marked contrast to the Jola dances which comprised the rest of the evening performance. Where the Jola dances were familiar, although “gussied up” as for a theatrical presentation, the Balanta dance was unfamiliar. This strangeness is reflected in the laughter which the funeral evoked among members of the audience—a response that would have
been inappropriate for the Jola dances, and which is obviously highly inappropriate to a real funeral.

The inclusion of one Balanta dance within a series of Jola dances appeared at first sight to be anomalous. Of course, the evening was primarily entertainment, yet, all of the other performances could be seen as an expression of local culture. Members of the audience identified with these largely familiar Jola dances. The Balanta funeral was foreign to their own experience and it certainly could not be interpreted as even a distant aspect of their cultural traditions. Why then, was it included at all?

In part, the Balanta funeral, as a light-hearted occasion for laughter, served as a break in the program. It may perhaps be seen as equivalent to the masked figure of Samai, whose presence adds elements of levity to the more serious dance of the Kumpo anti-witchcraft figure. But besides buffoonery, the Balanta skit played a more serious role, related to the question of cultural self-definition.

Within the context of the Semaine culturelle, the meaning of the Balanta theatrical skit lies in this complementarity between the familiar and the foreign, between the Jola and the non-Jola. Both the structure of the Balanta dance and the audience's reaction to the presentation underlined this distinction. Where the Jola performances each simply recreated a particular dance, the Balanta performance actually told a story, that explained to the onlookers what was going on. But it also served to distance the spectators from any sense of participation in the events that were being danced. The narrative aspect would have been superfluous for the Jola dances, since everybody knew the context in which they would normally take place. Without the narrative, the distance between onlookers and performers was removed, and the audience could more readily participate in the Jola dance. On several occasions, the separation between audience and dancers did, in fact, break down. Women spectators, for example, provided musical accompaniment for the Jola initiation dances, much as they do at the actual bukut, by rhythmically clapping together blocks of wood and pieces of iron. And on several occasions members of the audience simply joined in, by running into the circle and beginning to dance. Just as, in local dance rituals, the participation of the onlookers welds audience and performers into a whole that reflects the unity of the community, so too here active audience participation embodies a sense of identification between Jola dancers and audience. But this form of participatory identification did not occur during the Balanta dance.

In fact, of course, the members of the audience did not identify with the Balanta dancers. What they were observing was folkloric creation.

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17. In this respect, the Semaine culturelle differs from the cultural melange that inspired Köstlin’s caustic remarks on some German folkloric festivals (1990:
freely based on the ceremonies of a foreign culture. The distance between spectators and dancers during this sequence constituted an appropriate response to that which was foreign. In the context of this cultural festival, local identity is defined both by what is distinctly Jola and by that which is blatantly non-Jola—the unfamiliar.18

Within the structure of the evening festivities, the sequence of the dance performances underlined the role of the Balanta piece as a break or pause, and emphasized its distinctiveness from what preceded and what followed. As the evening wore on and the sky began to grow dark, the Balanta dance ended and the program’s final performance began. This was, of course, a Jola dance. A line of women wearing identical dresses fringed in red, white and blue ruffled fabric and wearing beaded head-dresses entered the stage. They were accompanied by men wearing red and white skirts and white leggings. Such fancy costumes are not found in local initiation dances.19

Around the perimeter of the courtyard, women now rhythmically clapped metal blades taken from agricultural implements, against wooden blocks. If this musical accompaniment represented the “traditional”, then the “modern” was also present, in the form of a young man from Thionk who provided the insistent musical beat with a lilting saxophone solo. This saxophonist has become a regular feature at local dances. His animated playing infuses the festivities, as it did here, with more vibrant energy than even the large Jola drums. Where he appears, everybody dances. The juxtaposition of drums, saxophone and rhythmic clapping provides a graphic illustration of the joining of the old and the new.

The women and the men took turns dancing in the center of the courtyard. Individuals presented their spectacular solo dances and then, in groups of two and three, they executed their choreographed acrobatic steps in unison. Suddenly members of the audience darted into the center and challenged the troupe members with their own fast dance steps. In a moment the entire audience seemed to be surging into the courtyard. The barrier between dancers and onlookers dissolved in a whirl of dancing energy. The response of the performers indicated that they did not view the intrusion into their space by the spectators as inappropriate. Darkness was, however, coming. Already some of the peo-

50): “When, at costume festivals, ‘indigenous’ folkloric groups appear together with groups from other regions, then it is quite apparent that the local traditions have become foreign. The degree of similarity between folkloric groups is so great that often the spectators can no longer distinguish between that which is local and that which is foreign” (translation is mine, P.M.).

18. That human beings have an apparently universal tendency to define themselves by reference to what, or whom, one is not like, is an observation so well known as to be almost trite; nevertheless, it is trite in part because true.

19. I did not directly ask the dancers, but I believe the costumes were designed for a folkloric troupe.
people were beginning to walk home. After this brief flurry during which almost everyone danced, the festivities broke up and the evening entertainment ended.

This concluding segment of the festivities was most significant. Not only did the final dance return to a Jola theme, after the interlude of the culturally foreign Balanta dance, but the separation between performers and spectators, particularly marked during the Balanta dance, finally broke down.

The distinction between performers and onlookers is, I believe, a defining characteristic of Senegalese folkloric festival. Local ritual dances do not draw such a separation. Sometimes specific social groups have the exclusive right to dance, as in the bukut, where only adult males and the initiates dance. But only the folkloric dances fail to draw this distinction on the basis of gender or social status. Here, at the conclusion of the evening performance, the unusual and anomalous separation ended. The entire community came together, their union mediated by the energizing rhythms and the explosive movements of the dance.

Against the background of sharpening political conflict between people of the Casamance and the Senegalese government in Dakar, a trend that has regrettably led, in recent years, to frequent outbreaks of armed confrontation between independence fighters and government troops, the Jola have been moved to redefine who they see themselves to be, in the cultural sphere just as much as in the political realm. In this context, the folkloric expression of local dances as part of a Semaine culturelle provides an occasion for self-reflective thinking out—and dancing out—of conceptions of identity (of “self” and “other”) and of the boundaries of the local community.

Comparison of the Semaine culturelle to recent folkloric festivals elsewhere in West Africa offers illuminating points of contrast. Christopher Steiner (1992) has described three festivals sponsored by the government of Côte d’Ivoire between 1979 and 1988, which were clearly unsuccessful, from the points of view of both participants and observers. The organization of these festivals, unlike that of the Casamance celebrations, was imposed by the national government. Participants were transported long distances to the festivals, and the audiences consisted largely of foreign tourists. The government even sought to impose a particular, secularized meaning on the masquerades. In the Casamance, by contrast, organization of the Semaine culturelle was in local hands. Participants and audience consisted almost entirely of local Jola, and no outside control was exercised over either the content or the mean-
ings of the dances. Consequently, in Mlomp it was possible for the meaning to derive organically from the overall structure of the festivities and from the interaction of participants and audience.

The Semaine culturelle dances clearly demonstrate the role of folkloric arts in contemporary Casamance, as a forum for enacting and defining group identity. As Karin Barber (1987: 63) writes: “Art itself is an arena of contestation, and the sharing and contesting of social experience is nothing less than the forging of a new ideology”.

For the people of Mlomp, the festival served in three related ways to establish and reinforce a sense of group identity. First, the performance of Jola dances was a moment for self-conscious reflection on local cultural traditions. Second, the presentation, by local Jola, of ritual dances associated with a neighboring group, the Balanta, established a we/they dichotomy which reinforced the sense of Jola cultural identity. Finally, the culminating performance, again of a local dance, which finally served to break down the artificial barrier between dancers and spectators, firmly established a sense of community among everyone (virtually all of whom were Jola) attending the performance.

Public performances of folkloric dances among the Jola-Buluf present the fascinating phenomenon of the establishment of folkloric “tradition” in a society where the culture that inspired these dances is still very much alive. This situation differs markedly from the Western European example, where the establishment of folkloric traditions generally followed the loss of the local forms of cultural expression from which the folklore purportedly derived. In fact, the Jola case contradicts Hobsbawm’s assertion that “where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented”. 20

The Semaine culturelle embodies and exemplifies the process whereby particular ritual dances become part of Jola tradition. In this celebration of local culture, performers and observers—many of whom become performers by the end of the evening—participate in the creation of “tradition”. In nineteenth-century Europe, the creation of folkloric tradition followed the disappearance of most of the historical culture upon which that tradition was based. In the northern Casamance this process occurs almost side by side with the ongoing dynamic that characterizes local rituals, including dances. Casamance folkloric dance develops, through a process of selection or “editing”, from initiation dances and other performances that are still vital parts of the religious and social fabric of Jola society.

Will the dances performed at events like the Semaine culturelle

20. Hobsbawm 1983: 8. Of course, my own assertion is here predicated on the assumption that the Jola dances of the Semaine culturelle can be seen to constitute a new “tradition”.
become frozen in form, like the German folklore described by Bausinger and Köstlin? The phenomenon of unchanging, "authentic" folkloric rituals is closely associated with the weakening of the culture from which these rituals derive.21 As long as the underlying culture remains vital, folkloric dance, too, will continue to evolve. The religiously-based ritual from which much of Casamance folkloric dance derives is itself unquestionably alive and remarkably dynamic. It is highly unlikely that dances which draw their inspiration from this changing tradition and which are themselves performed in front of a local audience will become rigid or fixed in the near future.

Folkloric traditions become frozen in response to multiple factors, including the loss of the religious and social structures, and rituals upon which the folklore may be based. When folkloric rituals are resurrected long after the original underlying traditions have disappeared, then the folkloric restatement becomes historicized and fossilized. In the Casamance, however, both the folkloric dances and the essentially religious traditions that inspired the dances coexist. Both are likely to remain vital and changing, for folkloric dance and traditional dances are two complementary expressions of Jola/Casamance cultural identity among people who, increasingly, live in both the local rural culture of Casamance and the urban, multi-ethnic environment of Senegal.

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21 Bausinger (1990: 78) writes: "Obviously, such a freezing is a sign of weakness; the letter of the law must be heeded more carefully the more brittle the spirit of the law has become". Hobsbawm (1983: 3) expresses a similar view when he writes "the decline of 'custom' inevitably changes the 'tradition' to which it is habitually intertwined".
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