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SCHOOL  
OF DANCE





# **NDAGA**

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**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, Dance 2023, The University of the Arts**

## **Acknowledgements**

**I would first like to thank my family, Sokhna Dieng, Babacar Ndiaye, Seynabou Diouf, Kine Mbaye, Khadyd-iatou Ndiaye, Pape Alioune Ndiaye, Birame Ndiaye, Mouhamed Nianga Ndiaye, Nafisatou Ndiaye, Seynabou Ndiaye Babacar, Ndeye Sokhna Gueye, Marame Balla Gueye, Saly Mbaye, Mbasse Diouf, Pape Alione Diouf, Jaxu Ndiaye, Mbaye Babacar Ndiaye and all my griot family members from Kaolack and Medina Sabakh, Ass Seck, Moussa Sene Absa, Omar Thiam, Karima Sadio, Marie Therese, Antou Ndiaye, Aïssatou Nelly Ndiaye, Alboury Ngom, Germaine Acogny, Helmut Vogt, Gerard Chenet, Rachel Chenet, Papa Sy, Jean Tamba, Ya Awa Ndiaye, Fatoumata Sow and all the Laobe family members from Dalifor, Hady Niang, Myron M. Beasley**

**Extra special thanks to Donna Faye Burchfield for the opportunity and changing my life, for your imagination, your gentle and caring nudges of encouragement, for opening your office as a workspace, for the food and for your fierce and unrelenting care.**

**Extra special thanks to my wonderful mentor and thinking partner Thomas F. Derantz, thank you for the hard questions, the intentional dialogue, patience and guidance.**

**Extra special thanks to Benjamin Pranger, Esther Siddiquie, James McGinn, Cameron Childs, Emily Wexler, Jennifer McGinn, Mara Flamm, and the rest of the UArts Administrative team for your tireless work across the school year and during the Summer study cycles.**



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## **Introduction**

### **Relevance of Research**

My artistic practice is interdisciplinary and consists of all the aspects of Ndaga: spoken word, dance, music, and performance. The research on the practice and performance of Ndaga is relevant because it is a tradition from Senegambia that is under-represented in academia and artistic practice. Because my master's research aims to bridge the gap between artistic practice and theory, I decided to research my own practice alongside my Senegambian heritage and my relationship with Ndaga. This is not an attempt to classify Ndaga in Western frames of music, dance, or cultural conceptions, but rather an open exploration of the practice in terms of performance, ritual, improvisation, and a form of knowledge production. The cultivation of this practice has allowed Senegambian to formulate a hybridized identity and representation of themselves that derives from their own image. The question I have been asking throughout my research is what does the Black African female body look like in resistance, since I am interested in generating alternative images for the Black African woman. For this purpose, I want to use the concept of Sankofa, which means, "we must return and claim our past in order to move toward our future." It is understanding who we were that will free us to embrace who we are now. This concept will enrich the research further because it speaks not of origins (or returning to an origin) but rather to the idea of using historiography from the past in the present, taking what used to be great about the self and bringing that knowledge into the present. This concept is important because it allows for the discussion of gender politics within this thesis to be centered within an African philosophical framework. I want to focus on Ndaga and how it became a platform of visibility for Senegambian women because for most of Senegambian history, women have occupied an invisible and silent position, and in the performance of Ndaga, they are visible in every sense.



## **Fieldwork Embodied**

Ndaga has never been introduced outside these very Ndaga spaces. I feel called to do this research, and with it comes a responsibility to my grandmother and to her mother. The main part of the fieldwork for this study was carried out over 24 months between December 2021 to January 2023. I stayed mostly in Philadelphia but also took trips to Senegal and visited Kaolack City, Medina Sabakh in the Sine Saloum region, on the western coast of Africa, at the border of Gambia.

I attended an initiation ceremony for the fraternity of women that created Ndaga. My research and practice intersect directly with Ndaga, a music and dance genre created by the women of Medina Sabakh who rely fully on oral traditions. This genre created a pathway between the Senegalese and the Gambian peoples. These people were colonized differently but shared many of the same traditions (for example rituals, and family names). Ndaga becomes something that speaks for and alongside both of these peoples from Senegal and the Gambian. Ndaga helped to hold and create an archive of spiritual life and contributed to social cohesion.

My research relates directly to how Ndaga can and should be shared more broadly in an academic and aesthetic context as a way of uncovering, re-positioning, and affirming historical legacies and traditions that stand the risk of being lost forever. I believe this research is deeply situated in understanding Ndaga's importance and its relationship to the past and the future. Ndaga music and traditional dance create an opportunity for metacommunicative discord, regionalism, and transnational belonging. The important role played by the Kaolack artistic scene gives insight into the creative process involved in the local contemporary genre, and the discourse on the role of the artist in society.



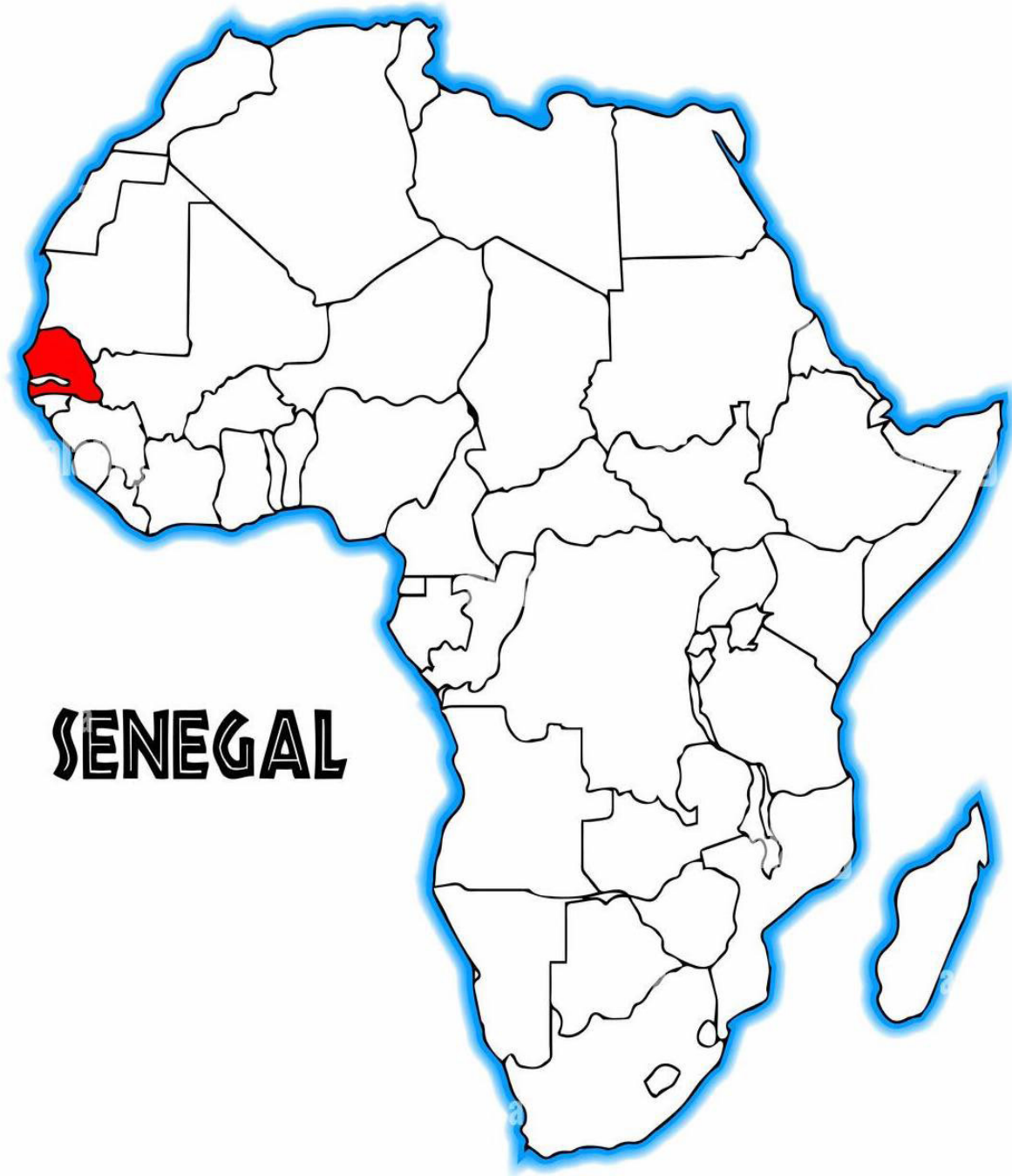


## Short History of Senegal

There are two common explanations for the origin of the name Senegal<sup>1</sup>. The first is that it comes from the term “Zenega,” referring to a Berber people who occupied the northern Senegambia region in ancient times. The second more popular explanation is that it comes from the Wolof, “Suñu gal”, which means “our pirogue,” or “our boat” in reference to the numerous fishing boats used by the Wolof people when the Europeans first encountered them. The area that today is Senegal (Fig. 1) once was part of the West African Empire of Mali, Ghana, and Tekrur. Senegal became independent in 1960 after three centuries of French colonial rule. Dakar, the capital since independence in 1960, lies on the Cap Vert peninsula, the most western point in Africa. Before independence, Dakar was the capital of French West Africa AOF, (Afrique Occidentale Française), which included nine French-speaking West African states. Although predominantly Muslim, Senegal is a tolerant secular state, whose peoples have lived together peacefully for several generations and have intermingled to some extent. Islam is a potential unifying factor. The spread of education and increased economic opportunity have modified a traditional social structure based on kinship, but the majority of the people adhere to the traditional values of Kersa (respect for others) Jom (self-esteem, honor) Muñe (resistance), and Tegin (good manners). Teranga (hospitality) is a common word used by almost all of the country’s 12 ethnic groups. Senegal covers an area of 76,000 square miles (196,781 square kilometers). It is bordered on the north by Mauritania, on the east by Mali, on the south by Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, and on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The long, narrow Republic of the Gambia is approximately 200 miles long, surrounded by Senegal’s southern region.

Portuguese navigators reached Cape Verde in about 1444; the Portuguese established a profitable trade in slaves and gold along the coast of Senegal. They established trading factories at the mouth of Senegal, on Gorée Island, Rufisque, Casamance, Mbour Saly Portugal, and along the coast to the south. Gradually, other European merchants followed, including the French, who established their first settlements in 1638 in the Senegal River, Joal and Fadjout, on the island of Saint-Louis. Nevertheless, commercial activities brought early contact with pre-colonial states such as Cayor, Baol, Walo, Djolof, Sine, and Saloum.

Senegal was also an early point of European contact and was contested by England, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands before ultimately coming under French control in the late 19th century. It remained a colony of France until 1960. In the 17th century its power was superseded by that of the Dutch and then the French. A French factory at the mouth of the Sénégal River was rebuilt in 1659 at Ndar, an island in the river that became the town of Saint-Louis, and in 1677 France took over Gorée island from the Dutch. These two communities became bases for French trading companies that bought slaves, gold, and gum Arabic in the region and became homes for free Christian Africans and Eurafricans. After two periods of British occupation, Saint-Louis, and Gorée were returned to France in 1816. When attempts to grow cotton near Saint-Louis proved unprofitable, trade for gum in the Senegal Valley was substituted. The French presence on the western coast of Africa and commercial and military collaboration with the indigenous populations of Senegal date back to the seventeenth century.



**SENEGAL**



We already been here, we fought and we won.

The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885  
Sénégal 1- 0 France 2002 World Cup





## Short History of Kaolack City

Kaolack City, historically called Saloum by most of the Senegalese and local inhabitants of that region plays a central role in the economy and politics of Senegal. Kaolack<sup>2</sup>(Fig. 2) used to be a big hub from the Gambia, Mali, especially in the industrial time with an important export trade in peanuts (groundnuts) and salt. The city that used to be the economic center of agriculture was dominated by production and commercialization of peanuts, salt, and millet oils. Trading operations were extended abroad and all over West Africa, Senegal. In the 1960s, groundnut culture continued to develop as industrial production and export took hold, (oil and meal), with an increasing opening up of the world trade market. This culture used to be the engine of Senegal's economic development. But from 1970, and particularly since the 1990s, the groundnut market entered a deep crisis, and as result various agricultural policies have shifted. Until now, Kaolack was a commercial crossroads of Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF); it was essentially the biggest farmers market because of the Dakar-Niger-Bamako railway, the port, and the road network that served both the southern and eastern parts of Senegal. The city attracted trades people and was obligatory transit for truck drivers and transporters traveling from Conakry Guinea, Bissau Guinea, Casamance, Tambacounda, and the Gambia Republic. Kaolack was the city of the myth that the spirit *Mbosse Coumba Jiguene* enchants foreigners to stay and never leave because of the quality of life and people's kindness, generosity, and hospitality. One of the specific identifications of people from Kaolack is their teeth. Kaolack water is naturally contaminated with arsenic, salts, fluoride and its drinking water comes along with permanent fluoride intoxication. This intoxication causes, amongst other damages, dental fluorosis--irreversible damage to the structure of teeth that changes their appearance. It has become a point of pride to self identify as being from Kaolack and a way to share community.

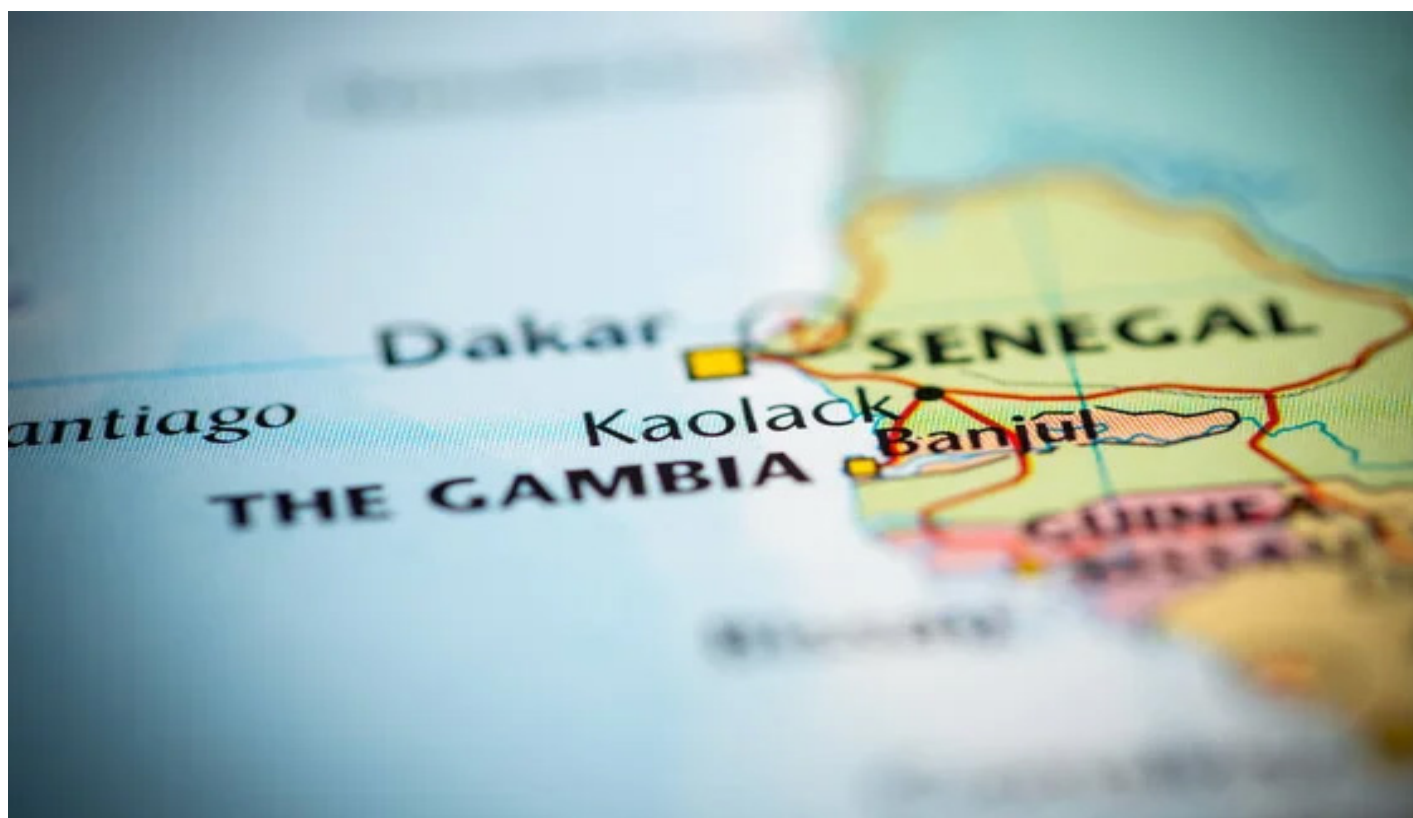
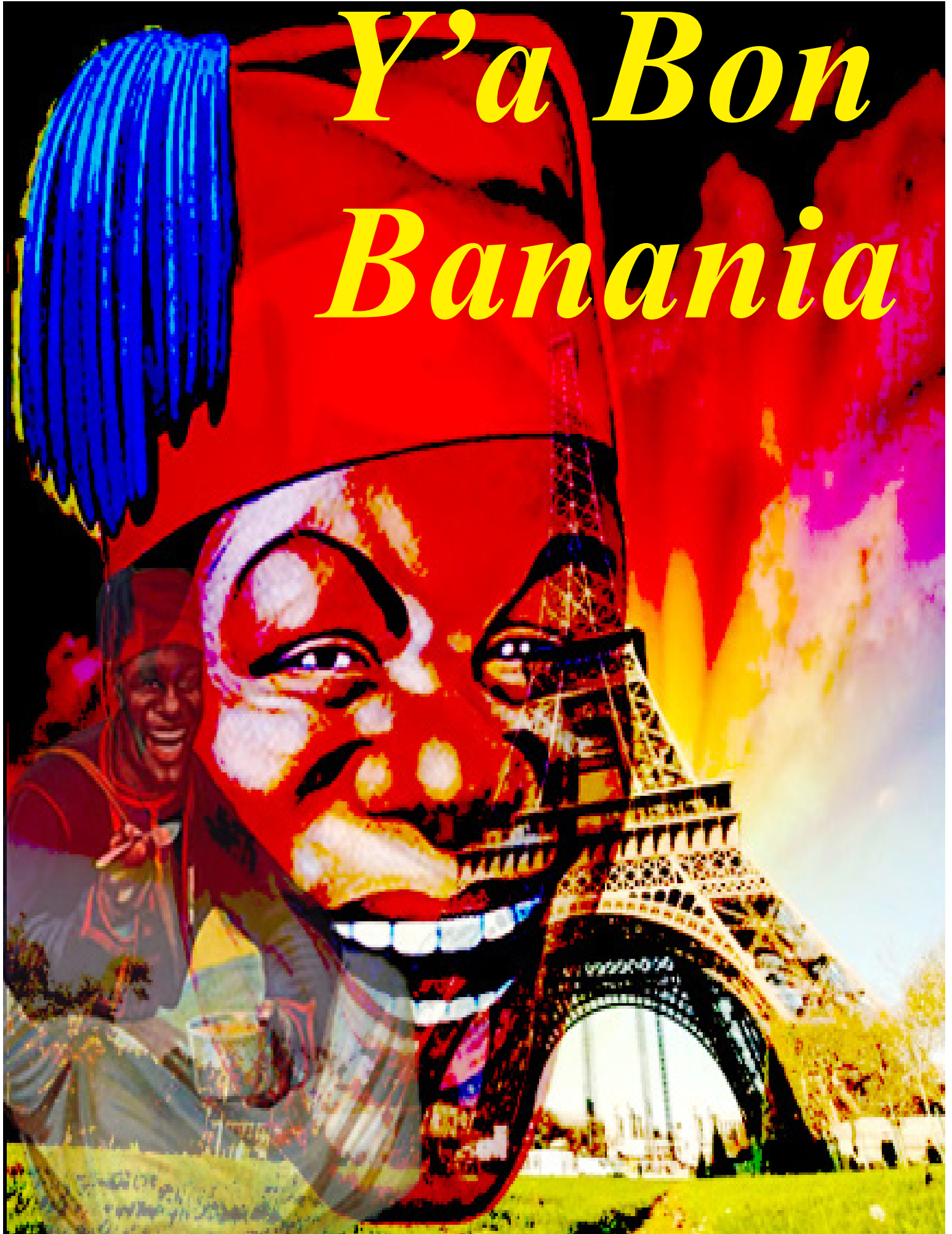


Fig.2

# *Y'a Bon Banania*



## Ndaga My Imaginary Space

It would seem that through Ndaga chant and dance, my personality split in a trance. I enter in direct contact or communication with the deities of earth, air, and fire to a cosmic ensemble. I attain a degree of spiritual power and awareness that is unexplainable in terms of modern rationality. When I dance, I bring my grandmother to life through my footwork: stepping, stomping, shuffling, sliding, jumping and pausing. Through my confidence, energy, flair, breathing, and heartbeat, I can caress and touch her with the flow of my arms: symmetrical, asymmetrical, sustaining, coordinating and in unison. Though my hips and pelvis: syncopation, undulation, isolation, oscillation, vibration, trembling, and rotation. I cross borders between temporal and non temporal, deep listening and projection, finesse and attitude, and time travel and becoming.

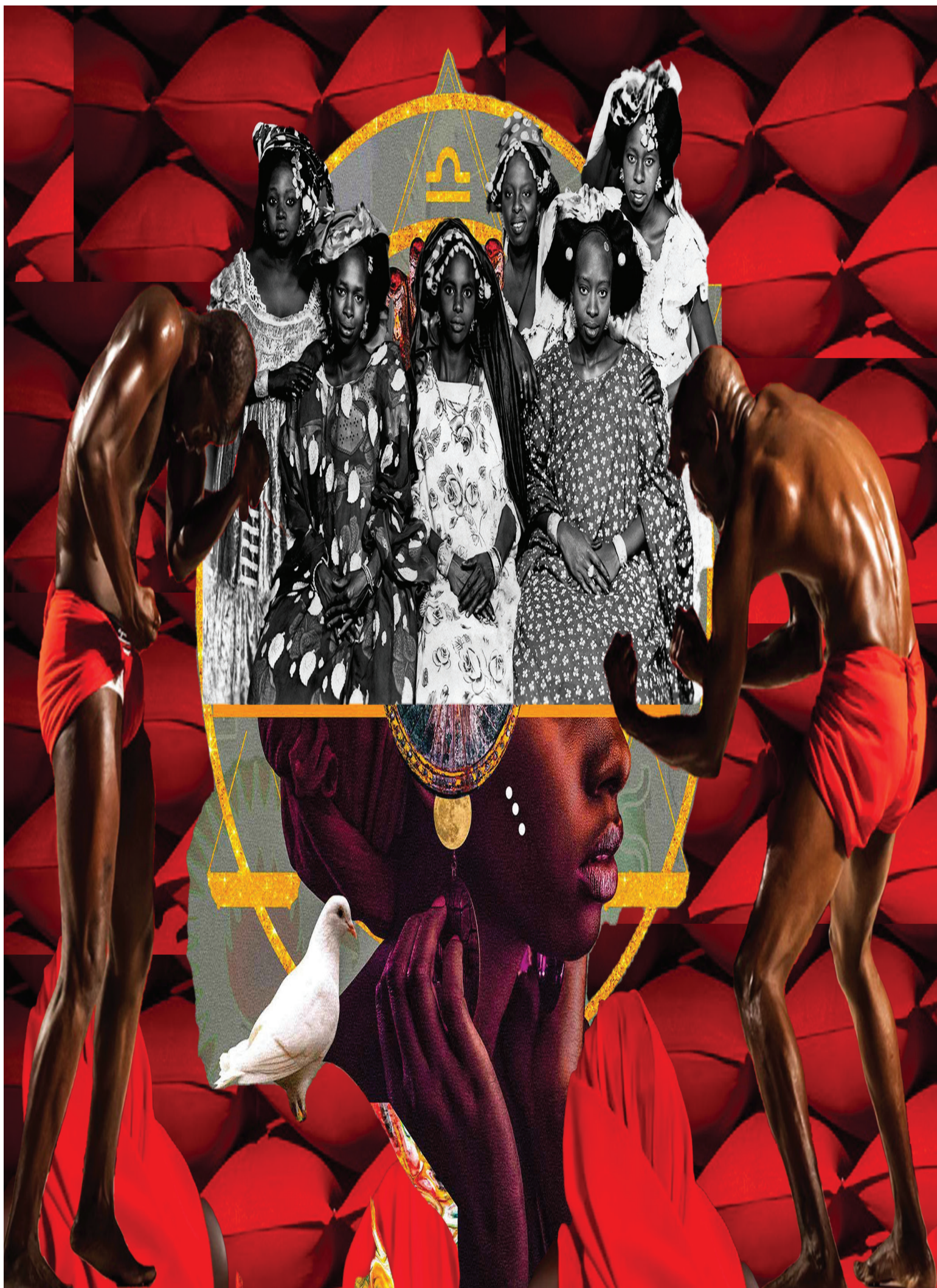
To start with, I walk in cadence, following the rhythm of the chant and drumming. Then I accelerate the movements and proceed to stamp out an intricate rhythm with my feet, creating geometric patterns and twisting the trunk of my body from the right to the left. For the second position, I turn inward, holding my arms alongside my body. My arms follow the movement of my torso. Sometimes I skip from one foot to the other with an extra beat to each foot. The dominant timing is not in the same place, sometimes it's almost off-tempo. I raise one foot to the other, strike the ground and stomp alternately on the fifth count. My arms are held forward like a wind turbine in accordance with the movement of the feet. On the sixth count, I turn the leg from the hip raised like *rond de jambe* (in classical dance) with my hands raised on the nape of the neck, or resting the arms alongside my body, the turn can be executed inward or outward, with the foot hanging loosely on the level above my ankle of the other foot, and I finish with the beat break.

Dance repertory and movements that can be used to dance Ndaga include Yaba composé, Ardin, Rambal, Gumbe, Ndawrabin, Ñaari goro, Faar wu jar, Ceebu jen, Rass, Fass, Kaolack, Ndëc, Baara Mbaye, Dagañe, Dagara wallè, Lëmbël, Taatu lawbe, Ngo maar, Yella, Ndadale, Ripo, Wango.

### *Imaginary space*



















## Short History of Medina Sabakh

The locality of Medina Sabakh<sup>3</sup> was founded by the Tourée family, who comes from Saaba which is in the territory of Gambia border. To pass by the settlers, as well as the population increase, caused the Tourée family to move to Saaba and settle in Kaataba at the Senegalese border. To resist the attacks of French colonial powers on the Senegalese side and the British on the side of Gambia (both of them imposed taxes the Tourée's refused to pay), they built a fortress called Taata; that's where the popular expression is "*Taata ba ça Kaataba*" (the fortress of *Kaataba*). After the destruction of the Taata, and the death of Nderi Kany Toureé, his brother Sett Kany Tourée found exile in Kusasa, a Fulani village. They were welcomed and given land to settle. Due to harmonious cohabitation, the Fulani chief gave his daughter as a bride to the Tourée family leader, Katim Juma Bâ (Katim the son of Juma), or Katim Jamaly Bâ. They built a mosque and a Koranic school at the family house. The main activity was agriculture. After each harvest, all habitants of the surrounding villages meet in Fokaly, in the locality of Medina Sabakh to celebrate. This is where the Ngoyaan or Ndaga was born. During their many periods of transhumance, the Tourée have always moved with their griot, members of the Dieng family. Medina Sabakh is a small village in the Kaolack region, not far from the Gambian border. The village is renowned throughout Senegal for Ngoyaan music. Medina Sabakh neighbors many small villages, like Prokhane and Kossi, which are two well-known villages because of their spiritual representation and importance for the Senegalese Sufi brotherhood, both Mouride and the Tijaniyya. The village of Prokhane is where Mame Diara Bosso's mother of the Mouride leader, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba comes from. Kossi is the village where Baye Niass was born. Baye Niass, called Cheikh Al Islam was the founder of the Niassene a Sufi fraction of the Tijaniyya of Kaolack and one of the largest brotherhoods in West Africa.







## Who Are the Griots

Griots are part of the ñeeño, which forms the lower social status group. But, unlike the géér<sup>4</sup>, the higher group, they are divided into castes and subcastes (Abdoulaye Bara Diop). The main tripartite division at this level is based on the difference in the nature of professional activities, and, more generally, of functions. A distinction is made between jef-lekk, sab-lekk and ñoole.

The jef-lekk are the artisans (the expression means those who live by trade). They constitute a caste that is divided into sub-castes, again according to profession: tègg (blacksmiths), uude (shoemakers), seeñ (cobblers), räbb (weavers).

The sab-lekk are the griots: géwèl (literally those who live from their songs). They are the “artisans of the word,” according to the expression of D. Zahan (S). They are artists (singers, musicians), oral historians (memorialists, genealogists), laudators. They included subgroups that were distinguished by the form of their songs or the nature of their musical instruments (junjuñkat, tamakat, lambéén, bufta), or simply by their behavior: greater or lesser freedom in buffoonish gestures and daring words (toole, kura-kura). These distinctions are secondary and are not sufficient to create sub-castes as among the jef-lekk (Abdoulaye Bara Diop)

## Where It Started

Because of its folklore and the way of life of its people, the village of Medina Sabakh is surrounded by many myths. Many appreciate its music made famous by the “Ndaga Ndiaye Ali Seynabou,” a song composed by Sacko Dieng and Birame Lobé Dieng but sung by the famous troupe of Medina Sabakh led at the time by the great singer Seynabou Dieng. Birame Lobé Dieng was my great grandfather, and Sacko Dieng was my great grandmother’s brother. Both were Xalam players and composers. Xalam is a five-stringed lute, an instrument of royalty in the history of the Wolof. Seynabou Dieng, my great grandmother, was a matriarch griot woman of the Dieng family household and the creator of the Ndaga music genre. This is the first person to interpret the musical genre. And the song reached many around the country. The mythical troupe is made up of Seynabou Dieng, Lobé Dieng, Lissa Dieng, Seyba Sy Dieng, and Saly Mbaye, as well as the talented and popular Saloum Dieng. At that time, the Xalam, a musical instrument, was played by Birame Lobé Dieng and Sacko Dieng. It should be noted that Seynabou Dieng, Sacko Dieng, and Saloum Dieng are children of Saloum Hanthia Dieng. In Ndoucoumane too, there was the great singer Marième Kéwé, who was as talented as the members of the Medina Sabakh troupe. The Senegalese always wonder what made the reputation of this village. According to Mamadou Socé, Medina Sabakh constitutes a university. To be a good singer or a good player of Xalam, you have to go through this locality. But the Ngdaga is sung in Ndoffane, Ndoucoumane, Passy, Koungeul. In these regions, there are very talented people who master this music perfectly. In all these cities, we find almost the big family of Medina Sabakh. For many Senegalese, Medina Sabakh represents a paradise on Earth. It is also said that the Ndaga is the obsession of mothers who did not want their children to be assigned to Medina Sabakh, for fear of forever losing them to this paradise.

Deborah Heath in her work, “The Politics of Appropriateness and Appropriation: Recontextualizing Women’s Dance in Urban Senegal” observes that “Rural Wolof women who belong to the artisan and praise-singer castes (ñeeño) generally dance in a style less restrained and more sexually explicit than that of upper-caste (géér) women. This is also to some degree true in cities such as Kaolack” (Irvine qtd. in Heath pg 77). The legend holds that during 1970 Kolack was a hub, an eldorado, “la ville des rêves,” the city of dreams, due to the groundnuts period and the production and commercialization of peanuts and salt. The first agricultural banks and transformation factories were created in Kaolack. The quality of life was of the best in Senegal; everything was affordable during that time. The city provided the main part of cash income in rural areas. According to legend, in this village, the civil servants would find themselves caught up in or enchanted by the beauty, kindness, and lovingness of the women of Medina Sabakh, who knew how to treat a man well and made visitors never want to leave the village.

A magic potion that is made to be absorbed by a loved one, the Niam Diodo is said to be the basis of the attachment of civil servants and other foreigners to Medina Sabakh. The same legend suggests that Keur Ndeury is populated by griots who are masters in the art of making one live a few hours of complete happiness with their inexhaustible repertoire of songs, their magical Xalam and above all their hospitality. We still tell with humor the story of the driver, who, to return the buck to a family who had honored him, emptied his pockets, sold the load of rice he was transporting, and removed the tires from the truck, before leaving. He runs away after a month, leaving behind a wreckage of a vehicle. The legend of Mamadou Bitigué is also known to the Senegalese. It tells the story of a rich and generous merchant who settled in Medina Sabakh. There, the griots did not spare him. Every day, they came in front of his shop to sing. After having offered everything to the griots, he “gave himself” to them and became bankrupt. After his bankruptcy, the singers of Ngoyaan, it is argued, interpreted in his honor this beautiful song, known to all, which is called “Mamadou Bitigué.”

The story does not end there. It is also said that a fraudster who had once spent the night in Medina Sabakh, lulled by the beautiful melodies of the griots, wanted to “sweeten” a whole well with the load of the sugar truck he was driving. Another merchant, after emptying his pockets to pamper the griots, sought to appear as bearing gifts. It is said he cut off one of his ears to offer it to those who sang his praises. It should be noted that Medina Sabakh is indeed a mythical place for the Senegalese. Myths and certain beliefs surround the village. The locality has forged, since time immemorial, a solid reputation for peace, welcome, and hospitality. Its inhabitants maintain that Teranga (which means hospitality in Wolof) is linked to the personality of the founder of the village, Ndeury Kany Tourée, who had expressed the wish to see the inhabitants always share their goods with foreigners. It is this wish granted, these lessons learned and anchored in customs, which have shaped the populations of Sabakh who always seek to please foreigners, by putting them in good conditions of living. The previously mentioned story of the driver is not true, according to some people. Indeed, according to Mamadou Socé who lived in Medina Sabakh, music and dance intertwine wonderfully, so as to make one lose their head. Our beautiful singers, with their soft voices, know how to touch the heartstrings of any music lover and get them to spend money and give whatever they have.



*Liggéeyu Ndeye*  
*Añup Dóom*







But they do it without cheating. A géér, as soon as his praises are sung, always does what is beyond his means, because it is his honor that is affected. Under the leadership of Gumbo Tourée, the village was always celebrating. Xawaare was organized there, which attracted thousands and thousands of people from various backgrounds. It is since this period that Medina Sabakh has built its reputation as a city of Teranga.

Because of the neighboring countries, we can find both English and French in some Ndaga lyrics, but it is not unusual to find griots who know both or multiple dialects, all four of the languages—Wolof, Mandingo, Serer, and Pular—or other tongues of the region. Geographically, Ndaga originated at the border between Senegal and the Gambia. If someone comes from Senegal, they have to go to Poste Kër Ayip on the Gambia border to get a taxi or moto ride that will take them to Medina Sabakh. Ndaga comes from the women from Medina Sabakh who used to actually cross the border and go to the Gambia to perform. They will go Ngoyaani (the concept of going from one place to another, singing someone's praise and genealogical tree or entertaining them in return for gifts). That is the reason we find Wolof, Malénké, Serer, Pular French, and English words in some Ndaga songs. Gambia was colonized by the British and Malénké is the lingua franca. Wolof is the lingua franca in Senegal. The women, from Medina Sabakh who go to the Gambia to perform will come back with gifts and remuneration both in CFA (Senegalese currency) and Dallasi (the Gambian currency). Both currencies can be used in Medina Sabakh.





## Seynabou Dieng

Mostly called Yaye (mother in Wolof) by everyone, Seynabou Dieng (Fig 3), my great grandmother, was a matriarch griot woman of the Dieng family household and the creator of the Ndaga music genre. Ngoyaan was a village in the canton of Medina Sabakh. But the first and true name of this village is Sanghatte. The eponymous music was created under the initiative of Goumbo Kany Tourée, head of the canton of Medina Sabakh. After his glorious return from the Second World War, Goumbo Kany Tourée called on the griots of the surrounding villages, more particularly the young Seynabou Dieng, the singer with the golden voice, and Ali Moussa Socé who was the griot of his family, to create the atmosphere in the town, especially since the region was experiencing a certain gloom. It was necessary to give life to the city. The principle was simple: in the morning everyone goes to work, and in the evening, there are nocturnal vigils. In 1962, Mamour Ousmane Bâ, a local political leader, encouraged Seynabou Dieng to put together a professional group that could represent Medina Sabakh at national events. Thus, was born the Folkloric Medina Sabakh group, featuring Seynabou Dieng and her husband Birame Lobé Dieng on Xalam, and her daughters Lissa Dieng, Sey Bassi Dieng on backing vocals, and Saly Mbaye, her daughter-in-law. The dancers were Diaga Diagne, Ndeye Diop, Nunka Ndiaye, Astou Ndiaye, Ndeye Faye. Ndaga is quintessentially a female space and genre; it came out of women's creativity, as in when the Ngoyaan women were entertaining themselves with kitchen utensils. Women are the ones who officiate over cooking and occasionally started singing and dancing during chores, and these kitchen utensils were the instruments that were available to them. There is no drum whatsoever, but they have calabashes, metallic bowls, and bracelets that give a high pitch to the sound texture of the Ndaga. Women will come from different regions to Kaolack and buy kitchen necessities from the Gambia because it was more affordable and most goods were usually cheaper compared to what the Lebanese were selling in Dakar. Sugar, fabrics, wax, and kitchen utensils were all coming from the Gambia.



Fig.3. Seynabou Dieng

## Say Bassi Dieng

Following Seynabou Dieng, several other singers and groups from the Saloum region (Kaolack City) became nationally known interpreters of Ndaga. The most successful were the Medina Sabakh singers Say Bassi Dieng (Fig 4) and Saly Mbaye, and the Kaolack-based Groupe Jubbo. After Yaye's retirement, Say Bassi took over the music group. Sey Bassi Dieng took Ndaga on the road, did one of the first professional studio recordings, and commercial cassette tapes. Ndaga, as it is traditionally performed, is an intimate music, praise songs performed by a small group of female griots accompanied by a Xalam lute, calabash, and percussions.

The music is performed during Xawaare, evening gatherings in the family courtyard. The group made their way to Dakar where they recorded "Ndaga Ndiaye Ali Seynabou," a song composed by the Xalam players Sacko Dieng and Birame Lobé Dieng. From the singer to the Xalam, Sabar drummers, two Tama players, and dancers, all artists were from the Dieng family. Ndaga plays a very important role in Kaolack's region and its population. Ndaga speaks of history and sings of joy, peace, and human values such as resistance, and education. It reminds people of Saloum of their bravery, courage, history, and family genealogy. Belonging to the Ndaga strengthens social cohesion, solidarity, and mutual respect.

Say Bassi Dieng was a music icon, and even after her death, the radios continued to play the song on a loop. Ndaga popularity goes beyond Medina Sabakh. Many people love Ndaga songs, but many Senegalese artists, especially from Dakar, the capital, appropriated songs and lyrics, and never gave credit or ownership to my great grandmother or any of these women from Medina Sabakh or Kaolack City.



Fig. 4. Say Bassi Dieng



## Saly Mbaye

Saly Mbaye (Fig 5) was Seynabou Dieng's daughter in-law, and an active member of the Ngoyaan group. She had seven published recorded albums and several video clips. Saly Mbaye was one of the first Ndaga artists to be broadcasted on national television and toured internationally. She did many live performances on different well known TV Shows, and prestigious events for presidents or political leaders at the National Theatre Daniel Sorano in Dakar. Saly Mbaye is now the guardian of the Ngoyaan household and the Ndaga legacy. She continues to keep the relationship going between family members and nobles (géér) in the Gambia who appreciated the music as much as the Senegalese audience. After a fantastic breakthrough on the national music scene, the troupe of Medina Sabakh is now experiencing *the crossing of the desert* (a French phrase meaning going through difficult times or a decline). Ndaga lost a lot of her popularity, but we still remember the mythical songs like "Mamadou Bitigué," "Mbassa, Ndaga Ndiaye," and "Chérie Coco," which made the heyday of this famous group. For Mamadou Socé, guardian of the authentic tradition of the Saloum region, this situation is due to several factors. Among these, he cites the laziness of the new generation of Ndaga singers, who refuse to do the investigative work necessary for the creation of new compositions. According to him, the younger generation is obsessed with success and quick gain. They only cover the first pieces composed by the Medina Sabakh troupe, or by Saloum Dieng (Fig 10). Young people are also ashamed to return to the source, that is to say to the villages where it all began, to seek advice from the elders. No one can succeed in this Ndaga music without going back to basics. The elders hold secrets and compositions that have never been seen in the media. They are willing to give them generously to any young person who consults them. Another problem that hinders the advancement of this music is that young people are more lulled by external sounds than by those that are sung in Medina Sabakh. Another concern is that the places to play the Ndaga are becoming increasingly rare, as well as the shows worthy of the name. In Dakar, few people know where the Ndaga events are regularly held, other than in a few villages in Saloum, that are very attached to the safeguarding of their cultural heritage. The media also do not facilitate the knowledge of this music to the youngest. In Medina Sabakh, it is Jaxu Njaay, Saly Mbaye's daughter who tries hard to hold the torch.

*"Now I'm getting old, my daughter Jaxu Njaay took over the Ngoyaan's group with her brother Seybane Njaay, and Maram Gueye"-Saly Mbaye*

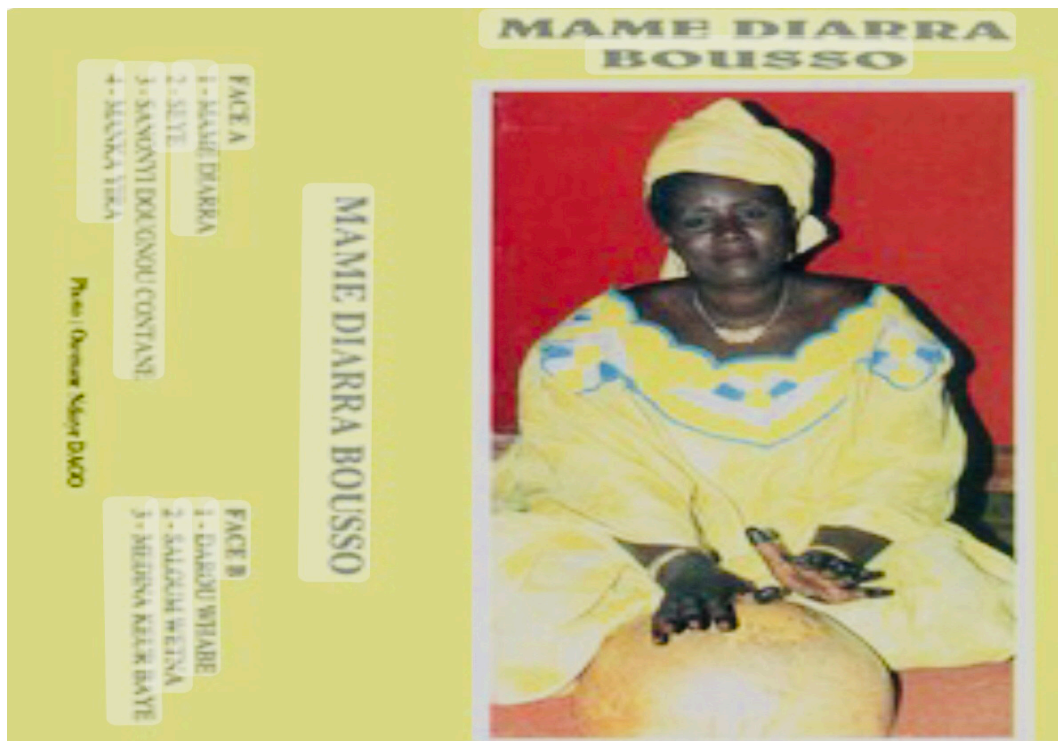


Fig. 5. Saly Mbaye



Fig. 6 Jaxu Njaay





## Jaxu Njaay

*“How does it feel to carry a legacy?”*

*“Gratitude to my mother and ancestors. It’s a chance to be born and raised in this bloodline and house of music. I’m part of the continuity of my forefather’s legacy and it’s an honor, and my mission in life is to preserve it as much as possible.” - Jaxu Njaay*

Jaxu Njaay (Fig 6) was a former Ndaga dancer in the Ngoyaan group, and progressively she started singing at political rallies and electoral campaigns, before becoming the lead vocalist of the group. Unlike her great grandmother and grandmother, Jaxu does not have any albums or title tracks, however, she continues to perform and carry the tradition. Ndaga was and still is predominantly a women’s space, and men are always at the periphery as musicians or audience members.

No men were dancing or officially performing Ndaga. But as a male dancer and contemporary performer that has been investigating and embodying Ndaga movements for many years, I always wonder or wanted to know from a different point of view and especially from a female Ndaga dancer perspective, which Sabar movements could be used or applied to construct a vocabulary and deepen an exploration towards movements that are the essence of the Senegambian dancing body, and of Black African women.

When asked how she dances Ndaga, Jaxu Njaay responded with the following:

Ndaga is a very simple rhythm but complex to dance on. It is very rare to find out of Ngoyaan, a good Sabar drummer or Xalam player who knows how to play it right because Ndaga has a dance style that you can find similarities in Ndaw Rabine. The dance of the Ndaga is very elegant and seductive, with more modesty, and restraint. I remember that before women put on several loincloths of different sizes and colors to show their beauty and femininity. You can dance Ndaga with Yaba composer but if you have a musical ear, you can incorporate several dances.(Njaay)

Some believe that incorporating modern instruments threaten the traditional Ndaga music. Jaxu Njaay believes that the young generation of Ndaga singers has to live in their time and period and adapt:

Many people think that modern instruments such as keyboards, synthesizers, and electric guitars will take away the charm of the Xalam (lute) and lekket (calabash), [and that] the keyboard is one of the instruments that kill and denaturalize the music...the marimba brings another musical tune [or texture] very different from its original. My generation is different from my mother’s one, and nowadays people love to dance to Ndaga with modern instruments, its emphasis on music, melodies, and groove.(Njaay)

Ndaga is still being performed on its classical Xawaare framework with Xalam, lekket, and Tama, depending on the promoter and demand, whereas modern instruments may be used at weddings, soirée Senegalaise (dance parties at nightclubs), after-work and lodge parties. The only difference is that the music is slower and more nostalgic in Xawaare with traditional instruments, while the concert with modern instruments makes the tempo faster and more dynamic.

## Instruments Specific to Women

Women always sing collectively, either a cappella or accompanied by hand clapping (tàccu) or by instruments specific to them. Some instruments are utensils used in domestic activities to clean rice and millet, like the mortar pestle used to pound millet, and iron or plastic basins used for washing clothes. Only one instrument is used in all circumstances: the calabash (lekket). It is played with the hands and wrist joints by striking its wall. In order to obtain high-pitched sounds, the women also use a bracelet or rings. The water drum (temb dox) which often joins the calabash, is a half calabash turned upside down that floats in another, larger calabash that is probably filled with water. Among the more recent instruments, we find the round metal bowl (ndap) (see Fig. 7). This is a significant term for container or dish. Women use this term to designate both the round metal bowl, the plastic basin, and the bowl. They are kitchen utensils diverted from their main function to become musical instruments. The iron or plastic basin (ngalandu/pan) replaces the calabash (lekket) or is added to it.

As mentioned before these utensils were used as instruments because Gambia goods were cheaper than the ones sold in Kaolack or the Senegalese territory, by the Lebanese, who were the wealthy commerce and principal distributors. The Kaolack market was well known because of smuggled products that came from the Gambia, including foodstuff, fabrics, and kitchenware. That's what explains the physical, commercial, and musical border crossing.

A long-time later, percussion like the talking drum Tama and Sabar were introduced to bring more rhythm. Ndaga has been able to follow the new trend and kept its specificity. Modern instruments do not change the musicality of Ndaga. On the contrary, it brings more flavor and openness because the world evolves, and the musical influences of foreign countries are unavoidable. The rhythm always remains the same, even if it adds guitar, keyboard, and brass, we will always manage to distinguish the sounds of Ndaga because the musical scale can absorb and contain several instruments and musical genres, keeping its background and its original form. It is one of the strengths of Ndaga and traditional music.





Fig. 7. Women playing the calabash (lekket), and the round metal bowl (ndap)



Fig. 8 Women playing the water drum (temb dox)





**Fig 9 Xalam instrument**



**Fig. 10. Antia Dieng, Saloum Dieng playing Xalam, Ndeye Mboup**

## Instruments Specific to Men

### Xalam

The Xalam (see Fig. 9) is a five-stringed lute, an instrument of royalty in the history of the Wolof; many sovereigns, kings and queens have succeeded one another over the centuries. It punctuated several moments of the day of the sovereigns: the awakening, the meal, the sleep, but was also present in other circumstances: the enthronement, the weekly outing, the war, or the festivals which took place at the court.

### The Tama

Tama (see Fig. 11) or talking drums is from Wallo and was used for chivalry and to make the horses dance. The Tama plays in a rapid, varied tempo in counterpoint to the steady rhythm maintained by the other drummers. While the other drummers remain together at one side, the player positions himself in the center, oriented toward the dancer, and continues to move throughout the performance.

### Sabar Instrument

Sabar is a specific drum set of five drums of different sizes made of dimb wood. The drums are covered with a single skin and have a cylindrical shaft. The five drums are played with one hand and a stick called galañ, made of nim wood. Each tambour has a name and a specific function within the group. The Sabar (see Fig.12) ensemble accompanies the songs of wrestling competitions, weddings, circumcision ceremonies, the game of the false lion (simb) dance. Depending on the circumstances, specific rhythms are played



Fig 11. Tama or talking drum instrument



Fig 12.Sabar ensemble : ndeer, gorong mbababas, lamb, gorong talmbat, mbën mbën

## Xawaare

In the Kaolack region, the only sung repertoire associated with a particular dance is performed during Xawaare evenings: the Ndaga, a term for which there is no translation. The Ndaga songs are performed by griot women , accompanied by the Xalam, the drum ensemble, and the Tama. Xawaare<sup>5</sup> refers to a large festival organized on various occasions, which takes place in the afternoon or evening; it is marked by songs, dances, a meal, and a vigil, during which the history of the Wolof people is commemorated. All Wolof musical instruments take part in this Xawaare, the Sabar, Tama, Xalam, and Lekket Calabash. On these occasions, the court was full of praises for the sovereigns (tànggaate buur ak lingueer), songs for the queens and kings. The classical Ndaga songs were performed there, which welcomed prestigious guests such as descendants of the royal family. The Xawaare was organized at night in a courtyard, after a hearty dinner in honor of distinguished guests. Dressed in their finery, people, nobles and griots alike, gathered in a courtyard. The griots, experts in traditional music, harmonized their songs with the beautiful melodies of the Xalam accompanied by the beats of Calabashes by the women griots from Ngoyaan. The favorite songs that the women sang during this evening were “Mariama” “Dianké,” “Taara” “Ndaga Ndiaye Aly Seynabou,” “Doubbo Sosso,” “Nianing Bagn na,” “Manka Yira,” “Mamadou Bitigué.”



**Saloum**

**Saloum**

**Saloum**

**Saloum**

**FANA**

**FANA**

**FANA**

**FANA**

**NDAGA**

**NDAGA**

**NDAGA**

**NDAGA**

**KAW**

**KAW**

**KAW**

**KAW**

YES to not assuming seamless access  
YES to forgiveness, not the act but being present with the emotion

**WAW WAW to taboo and spirituality**  
**WAW WAW to seduction, to beauty to elegance**

**WAW WAW to provocation and confrontation**  
**WAW WAW to sai no and silence**

**YES to the interdependence of music, identity, and entity**  
**YES to the refusal of permanency**

**YES to multidisciplinary and multidimensional energetics**  
**YES to freedom is not free**

*WAW WAW to Diasporic grounding*  
*YES to precision*

*WAW WAW to the now and presence*  
*WAW WAW to take your time*

**YES TO THE PERHAPS**  
**YES TO AFFIRMATIONS**

**WAW WAW to error**  
**YES to not knowing**

Ku bëgg akara, ñeme kaani.

Ku bëgg lem, ñeme yamb.

Bor du am rakk.

Àtte bor ak fey.

**YES TO ALLOWING SPACE FOR SYNCHRONICITIES**  
**YES TO EASE**

**YES to conjuring**  
**YES to doing the work**

**WAW WAW to vulnerability**  
**YES to shared practices**

YES to the ritual and spiral of shared time and space  
YES to adaptation



YES TO ALLOWING SPACE FOR SYNCHRONICITIES  
YES TO EASE

YES to affirming life

YES to spirit

*YES to answering questions with questions*  
*YES to the AND*

**YES to urgencies**

**YES to an optimistic premise in spite of marginalization**

*YES to finding play*

*YES to enacting Afrofuturist modes of possibility*

**YES to sharing out**

**Yes to border crossing**

*YES to fractured shapes*  
*WAW WAW to ancestral recognition*

**YES to multiple modalities of understanding and engagement**

**YES to Blackness**

*WAW WAW to deep listening, to each other, to those we carry with  
us, to those who reverberate within us*

**YES to taking up space**

**YES to traversing creative intersections**

YES to curiosities and the restoration of wonderment

YES to reorientation

**YES to new iterations**

**YES to uplifting light**

*YES to multiplicitous voices echoing similar wavelengths*

*YES to highlighting*

**YES to aesthetic violence and deviant gestures**

**YES to checking in**

YES to the poetics and erotics of cruising and placemaking

YES to holding each other











## Self-Praise /Tag sa Bopp

Before anything let me call on the ancestors and tell you my trajectory, my genealogy, through the practice of self-praise, and self-glorification. We can call this Bakku<sup>6</sup>, practiced by the Wolof ethnic, which actually introduces oneself to the world by talking about the people who came before them. By enumerating all these people, we are able to know who I am.

According to Yoro Dyao, historically, Bakk was, “salutes” to the princes and principal chiefs of the countries who were entitled to them. These Bakks were regular tributes that paid homage during the night of Thursday to Friday to the kings of the six Wolof-Serer countries and to the lordly princes, each in his place of residence.



## **I am the Son of Babacar Ndiaye**

Babacar Ndiaye was Ibrahima Samba Ndiaye's son, who was Samba Ndiaye and Astou Diop's son, and Samba Ndiaye was Djiogou Ndiaye and Coumba Saly Sène son. Djiougou Ndiaye was born in Gandiole 1842 from Mamadou Ndiaye, who was a navigator (similar to sailor or captain). He settled first in Joal, then in Popenguine then in Saly where he married Coumba Saly Sène. In 1872, he passed through Saloum and Kahemor before settling permanently in Koundioudou in Casamance. Babacar Ndiaye's mother was Fatou Camara, who was Merry Diagne and Alexandre Alassane Diagne daughter, and Viviane Kabo and Urbain Diagne's sister, Urbaine was a mayor of Gorre Island and chief of staff on the Dakar/Niger train.

## ***My Father's House***







## **I am the Son of Seynabou Diouf**

Seynabou Diouf is the last-born child of Adjaratou Sokhna Dieng and Elhadji Alioune Diouf (Adjaratou and Elhadji is the prefix used when someone went to Mecca for pèlerinage or pilgrimage). Adjaratou Sokhna Dieng was the daughter of Khady Ndiaye and Baba Dieng. My great-grandmother Khady Ndiaye was raised by Elhadji Abdoulaye Niass who was her Coran teacher and godfather. Khady was Seynabou Ndiaye and Abdou Ndiaye's big sister, Khady was Aissata lo's daughter, Aissata Lo was Xoudja's and Jaxere's daughter. Seynabou Diouf is Elhadji Alioune Diouf's daughter. Elhadji was born in Gorée Island, and was Ndene Fatma Diouf's son, and Ndene Fatma Diouf was Fatma Diouf's and Samba Birane Diouf's son. Alioune Diouf was the big brother of Aissatou Adjit Terése Diouf, Oulimata Terese Diouf, Mahipe Diouf, Kor Séné. Kor Séné was a "Senegalese tirailleur who died in the World War II"

## ***My Mother's House***









S<sup>ë</sup>ttu

Maam







## Sokhna Dieng my Muse

I was raised by maternal grandmother Sokhna Dieng, and I always considered her as my own mother. I called her Yaye, “mother” in Wolof. My family members would call me my grandmother’s favorite grandchild. We had a very powerful and spiritual relationship, which I cannot explain, linking me forever with her.

Working on my choreographed piece “Rogonou Maam/Grandma’s Tears” created a shift in how I saw myself as a performer and how I was being called spiritually. I was channeling, or inhabiting someone, for that particular piece. I reached for my grandma’s image and personal memory. She came and performed with me. My work was embodied by my grandma’s spirit, Mbasou, and since then she hasn’t left me. I felt compelled, as if she was speaking to me. Once I became aware, this urgency pushed me to go and look for more information. While collecting materials for my research, I found out that my mother, Seynabou Diouf, was a performer. From this moment of connection with my mom, I discovered that I could translate a lot of the movement quality of Ndaga dance into a contemporary form. Having her model how to dance this dance creates a connection between mother and son, a container and a new imaginary space and self expression for the future of Senegambian performers. At the same time, I’m discovering that my mother was a famous dancer (this discovery only happened within the last two years).

My mother never shared with me that she was a dancer, so famous that a Sabar drum player honored her with the name of Sabar beat in Kaolack. Every time she performed, she was announced by this drum beat. For a deeper understanding of what is calling me, I’m tapping into how Ndaga functions in order to traverse and dive into the Senegambian female space of Sabar and Ndaga. I want to pay tribute (homage) to those women that created this container. There are several female spaces in Senegalese traditional dance. Ndaga is exclusively performed by women, and I embody a female spirit and use Ndaga movements to open up a portal.

Dance comes from the women of my family; they inspired me to be who I am today. More importantly, it is because of my grandmother, with whom I have this really strong connection, that I pursued this dream of dance. I embody female essences to dance with my mom, dance with my grandmother, and my great-grandma Seynabou Dieng. The idea of doing the solo Rogonou Maam/Grandma’s Tears comes from the aftermath of losing my grandma Soxna Dieng. I felt compelled to do a project about this Wolof folklore.







## Rogonou Mâam/Grandma's Tears

As the title says, this piece was inspired by the image of my maternal grandmother, Sokhna Dieng, with whom I grew up until the age of eight. I have always considered her to be my natural mother, so I called her mom. In Senegal, and more particularly among the Wolof griots, it is the tradition, during the funeral of a grandparent, that the grandchildren participate in the ceremony in order to pay the last tribute to their departed elder. Elders who are considered the holders of knowledge and occupy an important place in the family and in society. Indeed, during this funeral ceremony, one of the grandchildren lends himself to a theatrical game. During a spontaneous staging, they dress up in the clothes of the deceased and imitate the gestures of the grandparent's life.

Thus, between sadness and humor, laughter and tears, the grandchildren, for a moment, make the relatives forget the disappearance of their loved one. They manage to create a warm atmosphere, with a very symbolic meaning, a way to keep the spirit and the teachings of the deceased and to remain in communication with them, even beyond death. Through the image of my grandmother, I wanted to revisit certain values of the Wolof society, which these elders have bequeathed, and honor them.

Through the image of my grandmother, I wanted to look at my past, to know where my future lies, and to share. I wanted to speak on behalf of the Wolof women. I also wanted to revisit my grandmother's legacy and pay the last tribute to her. I went to talk with Seynabou, my biological mother, to know more about this dance inheritance Ndaga. I found out that my great grandmother, Seynabou Dieng, was the Ndaga creator. I even discovered that my mother had been a famous dancer. All this brought me back to my grandmother Sokhna Dieng. She gave me the blessing to dance, even though she was from a generation that did not see any value in professional dance. Yet, she surprised me by saying, "Yes, dance, but don't dance like anyone else." At that time, I didn't understand. She was saying "Set yourself apart from other dancers." That is what is happening here to me. I have come back home to reclaim what is mine and to fulfill her prophecy.

# Tagu Mbar

*Tàgu na mbar njiaye*

*Tàgôtu ma mbar njiaye*

*Sama jeli mame fâ jigôti **guaré lô***

*For naï **lingué** foratou **lingué***

*Keumexe xamoul yoniwô **ma dàan jöule njiaye***  
***dàanatou ma** jöul ci njiaye*

*Magam jöule dou **ma dàan***

***Kouma xol de** nane yalla bu ma gadéer ci mbar njiaye*

*Bilahi sipaye lipaye Koly*

*bilakhati **sipakhati lipakhati koly***

***Koly yo Koly** koly at mbar njiaye*

*Kay foyli mbar douma foyli mbar **maguey ñibi***

*Rögo rög Rög daly séne*

*Ñibétou ma Rög*

***Rögo rög**, Rög daly séné*

*Gãÿõ gãye babou gãye*

*jöul ci **YAMA GÃYU***

*Reulo reule*

*Reul bi ci Büur **NJIAYE AK JALLY** miñasane ak*

***Büur coumba ndoféne***

***Sama yuegou nata** wéss na ma **lingué***







## Néegu Ndéye/Mother's House

One of the greatest discoveries of my MFA research was the fact that Ndaga was created by our great grandmother Seynabou Dieng, the matriarchal figure of the griot family from Medina Sabakh. My cousin Maram Balla Gu-eye, informed me that Seynabou Dieng was the pioneer of Ndaga music. Ndaga is a strictly secular activity—and, just like Sabar, it was performed by women. If a man was invited to play the stringed instrument, Xalam, he performed on the periphery, while singing and drumming were performed by the women. I made a second fascinating discovery during this research. My mother Seynabou Diouf was, in her childhood, a popular Sabar dancer. She hid that from me when I decided to become a dancer. She ordered me out of her house. She called me the shame of her life, and the shame of her family, and called me a disgrace to her, in front of my father's family. She felt cheated: she was a good wife to my father. Despite all her hard labor (Ligey yu Ndéye<sup>7</sup>). I did not have any appropriate ambition to complete university studies, get a well-paid job, and take care of the family, as all good first born sons do. After 22 years in my dance career, I discovered my own mother, with whom I was in conflict for many years because of my love for dance, had her own performer nickname and special drum beat played by Iba Samb (Sabar drummer). He plays this beat every time he wants to invite her to dance or step in the Sabar circle:

*Baba Diaw mi*  
*Baba Diaw me*  
*Nexel ne ko Deukeuk ak mom*  
*Baye si Suff ci Nane ci Ndoxe mi*  
*He Baba Diaw kay fi yu Daje*  
*Baba Diaw mi*  
*Baba Diaw me*  
*Nexel ne ko Deukeuk ak mom*  
*Baye si Suff ci Nane ci Ndoxe mi*  
*He Baba Diaw kay fi yu Daje*

Amazingly, the same Sabar drummer Iba Samb was playing the Sabar gathering where I first stepped into a Sabar circle and danced—I was eight years old.

This is my earliest memory of performing, the first time I entered the Sabar. I perfectly remember that Sunday afternoon, during the rainy season, when I fell in love with dance. On that day my mother's best friend Fatou N'diaye had organized a Tann Ber (Sabar gathering). Bright bulbs lit up the place. I wore a brand-new white kaftan. Ass Seck sang and called the name of my Aunt Maïmouna Diouf, my mother's elder sister, and she started dancing. I jumped in spontaneously. People cheered me, clapped, and screamed. My Aunt rushed in and took me into her arms, surprised, overwhelmed, proud, crying out in Wolof: "Allahu Akbar, xale bi, dinañu la cat bàyyil fécc bi!" (Oh my God, child, stop dancing, you have all eyes on you, someone will cast a spell on you!)





## Néegu Baay/Father's house

*“Pa Ndiaye góor du fecc sabar<sup>8</sup>, sama turu baay laa la dipee te bul fate ne Ndiaye nga sant, bayil yefi ñak fayda yi ngay def te jang bu baax te goor-goorlu, ëlëg dinga doon waay-jur te dina am lu la war ci sa njabot.”*

*“Pa Ndiaye, a man doesn't dance Sabar. I named you after my father, and Ndiaye is your family name. We are lions by totem. Stop dancing like a woman, and focus on your study. One day you will be in charge of the house, and take care of your brothers and sisters.”*

Babacar Ndiaye, my father, was born during the period of “Les Quatres communes.” Gorée, Dakar, Rufisque, and Saint-Louis were the only places during the African colonial period where African inhabitants were granted the same rights as the French. My father graduated from high school. He was sent as a hydraulic engineer on a water drilling project to bring clean water to Kaolack city. This was an important mission since the groundwater of the region of Kaolack is naturally contaminated with arsenic, salts, fluoride and its drinking water comes along with permanent fluoride intoxication. This intoxication causes, amongst other damages, dental fluorosis—irreversible damage to the structure of teeth that changes their appearance. Both of my parents were Senegalese nationals of the same ethnicity—Wolof—but their family backgrounds and social status were different. My father was a géér (nobles), while my mother was a géwel (griot). As such, they were forbidden to entertain any love relationship, but they got married anyway. Babacar Ndiaye was a middle-class city boy from Dakar, the capital. The family was very strict about rules. Love and joy were controlled and rationed, only so much and no more allowed. I also understood that I was a different person, depending on the space and environment that surrounded me. I was always reminded that I have brown teeth (xourè in Wolof), from Kaolack's contaminated water. For a long time, I would not smile in public spaces or on the playground just to not be bullied by my Dakar cousins and friends, where I spent my summer vacations. The Ndiaye family compound faced Ndeye Bana Mbaye house, who was Germaine Acogny<sup>9</sup> assistant in Mudra Africa<sup>10</sup>, and dancer of the National Ballet. Her son, Pape Mbaye Faye, was my best friend. I was always enchanted and impressed every time I had the chance to enter their living room. I stared at the walls decorated with pictures of Ndeye Bana Mbaye dancing. I enjoyed browsing through her photo album, capturing her performance, dressed in traditional costumes, during her tours in Europe or America. One of my strongest memories was the naming ceremony of Binnet Faye, Ndeye Bana Mbaye's daughter. Many dancers of the National Ballet were dancing Sabar, and we climbed a tree in front of the Ndiaye family house. I sat on a branch to have the best view, close to the Sabar circle and near the dancers and drummers. This was one of the strongest moments calling me to dance. But my father was always saying a man doesn't dance Sabar. Even though he himself created a festive atmosphere at home and at family gatherings, we were only allowed to dance behind closed doors. The stigma of dancing and singing, as an exclusively géwél's activity, made my father upbraid me every time someone told him that I was dancing outside the family circle. For my father's generation, Sabar was only a female activity, gathering, and space. Because of this stigma of religion and gender, my parents couldn't believe that dancers could make a living, and they believe this to be true not only for dancers, but for musicians, or any kind of artist. Only with the success of Youssou N'dour, a Senegalese songwriter, could some parents see that one can make a living from this art, but this acknowledgment came much later.





































vacances au Sénégal



AFRIQUE















## Music Evolution

Ndaga has always been appropriated by Senegalese males, who are not and could not be Ndaga singers. Here I would like to highlight the remixing, and sampling part by the new generation of Senegalese music makers, for example Hip-Hop artists and beat makers like Samba Peuzzi, Ludafrick, Dop Boye DMG Allemades Production, and the Mbalax artists, Abdoulaye Mboup, Orchestra Baobab, Yousou Ndour, Number one de Dakar, Boukounta Ndiaye, Baab Mall. There have been major changes from my great grandmother's creation to what Ndaga has become, out of the very rural space, from the recording quality to the major labels. Ndaga is sung by men in urban spaces and night clubs, and by Europeans in Germany, such as Mark Ernestus, a leading figure in the German techno and dub scene. From the foundation of the Hard Wax record store in Berlin to musical projects including Basic Channel, Rhythm & Sound, and recently his Ndaga Rhythm Force with an electronified idea of Senegalese mbalax. We also have Ndaga electro by the Sicilian Jah Sazzah. Jah Sazzah's signature dub productions meet head-on with Senegalese musicians and singers Abramo Laye Senè and Bara Gianie on the track "Ndaga," where Africa meets dub/house collaborations.

### *Ndaga discography*



## Ndaga Singing introduction

Degum rëew  
Degum walla rëewoo Turee  
nëen kay mayè ko  
sa waay du ñee sa wayu moroom  
su ma ñibbee ne yaqoo sa judoo  
ndanane Turee  
sa waya du ñee sa wayu morom  
Ub nga lamb ji  
Mbër dootul bëre  
sa waay du ñee sa wayu moroom  
su ma ñibbee ne yaqoo sa judoo  
sa waay du ñee sa wayu moroom  
Samba Jaly Kaabo kani ñaane bi ci ñooro  
Santama bi ci Bawol  
Gaabi mim ci Sibasoor  
Seen ñaama Njaay  
Seeno xorojo sèet  
Ballago jeegi  
Ballago ñeme Niang  
Ballago fatim kasa raykat ba  
Seen maam moo waral Tilli bo  
waccee Jaxa Manding  
Dafa xeex tilli bo xeexe buur manding  
Daqe Soose sa  
Yone ko Balant deff nga ay  
Ñu ne fass ba ray fass ba wace na  
Wone nga gàs ga Ngoyaan Samba Kanji  
Samba Kanji Katim  
Am nga gano ndax mat nga ganoo  
Ndanaan Jaw  
Sa waay du ñee sa way moroom  
Su ma ñibbee ne gawlo geeroo  
Ndanaan Jaw  
Sa waay du ñee sa way moroom  
Su ma ñibbee ne yaqo judoo





## Conclusion

As Donna Faye Burchfield said, “Pay attention to what you pay attention to.”

At the beginning, my thesis was only focused on the Ndaga because of my family legacy and because Ndaga is a way for me of being singular among Senegambian contemporary dancers, choreographers, and thinkers. Ndaga dance practice allowed me to have a voice of my own and uplift the women of my region. Ndaga is about opening the door for others without closing it behind them. I am really grateful to Donna Faye Burchfield and Thoma F. Dfrantz who have offered me intellectual tools and resources to dig deeper into my own research and expand well beyond.

The MFA program opens up for me a wide horizon of academic tools, and critical study about historical archives of what I have inherited and learned. I have considered how to think alongside and across the Western gaze and investigate Eurocentric ideas of reading the Black African female body; how to shape the evolution of animist information rooted in indigenous practices, patrimonial dance, and its connection to ancestral wisdom; and how to unfold or share my research, as well as my teaching methodology in American institutions such as universities, panels, and conference spaces.

My research explores the space of Senegambian women singing and dancing, and how to radically reimagine its future through contemporary dance. This research led me to the creation of a Youtube channel that gave access to a documentary movie *Ngoyaan et Autres chants de séduction* offered by Moussa Sène Absa. It also resulted in a Padlet digital archive of family pictures, and Ndaga discography, which catalogs the evolution of the music genre from 1962 to the present.

In his book *Contemporary African Dance Deconstructed* Patrick Acogny<sup>11</sup> argues that often the Senegalese dancers know very little about the history of their communities and have generally shown little interest in their local culture beyond the information they learned or naturally acquired through closeness to family and neighbors at public events such as births, baptisms, and weddings. At such events, dances are practiced and they become familiar through observation. By practicing them on occasion, they may be mastered to perfection.

I believe that through the richness and diversity which Ndaga dance practice offers, the Senegambian dancers will be able to reveal and unfold their own inner dance, inner landscape. Unfortunately, because of lack of financial means and local cultural institutions, most of the problems faced by Senegambian dancers from different backgrounds are quite similar. For those contemporary dancers who never had the chance to be trained in modern dance or ballet to find the tools and keys to access a common imaginary space, Ndaga offers a larger horizon of open dialogue of imaginary spaces and new ways of being creative by remodeling existing narratives. And Ndaga pushes the question of border crossing race, and gender further. We can define Ndaga as a way of understanding cultural awareness and intergenerational relationships, as a time travel spaceship, and as Sankopation tools.





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## Endnotes

- 1 Patricia Tang's "Masters of the Sabar"  
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- 2 <https://www.senegal.org/fr/senegal/regions/kaolack>
- 3 Saly Mbaye. Interview with Author, Medina Sabakh Jan 2023  
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- 4 The géér constitute the superior caste, which it is not appropriate to call either noble or free, as is often done (pg3).
- 5 La Musique des Wolof du Sénégal- Fonction de la musique dans la société P 52( Luciana Penna Diaw)
- 6 La morale de l'honneur dans les sociétés Wolof et halpulaar traditionnelle tome 1 p 192
- 7 Liggéeyu ndeye which translates as "the work of the mother is her children's food" meaning that the way children turn out in life is a direct consequence of what their mother feeds them, metaphorically and literally. As such, a person's physical and mental health, happiness, social accomplishments, and overall success are said to depend on how his or her mother has "worked." In practice, this signifies that she has to be an irreproachable, exemplary wife (Diop 1985, 23; Dial 2008, 81; Gueye 2010).
- 8 In sum, Sabar can be defined in three ways: 1) a style of music and a specific ensemble or orchestra of drums recognized as belonging to the Wolof people. Within this orchestra is a specific drum called a sabar ; 2) a style of dance that accompanies Sabar drumming. Within the Sabar dance genre are several styles, many of which have their own names, originating out of the Wolof, Lebu, and Serere societies of the Senegambia region; 3) an event much like a party or celebration that takes place in the villages and cities of Senegal as well as in Senegalese diasporic communities. At this event, much of the local community comes together and enjoys watching or doing sabar dances accompanied to live sabar music accompaniment. The event takes place either in celebration of some type of happy occasion (such as a wedding or baptism), as a social gathering to welcome visitors to the neighborhood, or when held outside the country as a venue where Senegalese nationals can meet. Angela D. Gittens: Hands, Eyes, Butts, and Thighs: Women's Labor, Sexuality, and Movement Technique from Senegal through the Diaspora p 46
- 9 The French-Senegalese choreographer Germaine Acogny is deemed to be the first to develop a dance technique that is both 'African' and 'universal.' Following her teaching certification training from 2010 to 2013, a growing body of dancers around the world practice the Germaine Acogny Technique as it is no longer only foundational at her École des Sables in Senegal but also taught overseas by certified instructors. Initiated by a confrontation with the restrictions of classical ballet and as a way to valorize and professionalize African dances, the technique may be considered a site of decolonial cultural production. Yet, it must contend with continued Euro-American economic and immaterial dominance. Based on ethnographic research at École des Sables, this paper examines antinomies inherent to the Acogny Technique. Using theories of postcolonial cultural production and consumption, I demonstrate that the technique sustains a critique of power structures embedded within Western-derived dance techniques while constituting a shared, meaningful movement vocabulary for Pan-African dancers. At the same time, it capitalizes on certain colonialist signifiers of a differentiated Africa, a tendency all but required for survival in the late capitalist global economy.
- 10 The Mudra Afrique was a contemporary dance school founded in Dakar, Senegal in 1977 by Léopold Sédar Senghor and Maurice Béjart, based on a Pan-African philosophy of uniting Africans through the commonalities
- 11 Patrick Acogny Contemporary African Dance Deconstructed p-12









