

**Are Births Just “Women’s Business?” Gift Exchange, Value, and Global Volatility in
Muslim Senegal**

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Abstract

Through global circuits of wage labor and capital, the Murid way has become an economic force in the Senegalese postcolony amid conditions of protracted global volatility. In this paper, I analyze women’s actions within these global circuits. Women create value through giving gifts during the celebration of births and marriages that are the product of, and the motivating force behind, Murid global trade. Women’s ritual activities, on which male honor rests, draws them into conflict with the Murid clergy, which views women’s actions as customary and not part of their modern, austere, and global vision of Islam in Senegal.

[Circulation, value, gender, Islam, Senegal]

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Anyone that has ever tried to drive around Senegal’s capital, Dakar, has had to contend with large tents sheltering men, women, and sound systems from the noon sun, blocking streets, and stalling traffic. Families put up these tents to celebrate a birth or marriage. Amid rented chairs and parked cars, women’s ritual associations cook massive bowls of tender roasted lamb and fragrant garlic rice. Griots praise socialites as they arrive dressed in fine cloth carrying gifts of hand loomed and manufactured fabrics. In these Dakar neighborhoods, typified by new concrete apartment buildings rising above and behind older self-built homes, people talk about their appreciation for feasting and these festivities. Over icy bottles of Fanta and Coke, men explained to me during my fieldwork that these events were “*Affaire-u-jiggen*, or women’s business.” They described them as part of their *coosan*, a Wolof word that can best be translated as custom or tradition, history, and ancestry. As much as men and women discussed the pleasures that each new celebration brought, a new baby, a new husband or wife, visits from family far away, and the esteem of close neighbors and business associates, they also emphasized the pressure to give that came with these social transformations. A daughter in the household in which I lived during my fieldwork, Jigeen, would often knit her brows and say, “every time the phone rings it is another naming ceremony and another feast, every week.”

Despite the recent construction of the *Radisson Blu* and *Terrou-bi* luxury hotels, casinos, and the *Magic Land* amusement park along Dakar’s oceanfront, people talk about the fragility of economic life in the capital. Small increases in the price for rice or baguettes lead to animated discussions about household budgets, the legitimacy of the administration of the President Abdoulaye Wade, and Senegal’s place in the world. The vulnerability of women and men to

economic strife relates to the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in Senegal since 1985, including the devaluation of the currency and the privatization of the state in the 1990s, and the liberalization of trade in 1997. However “overused and underspecified” the term neoliberal may be, and whether it “ever operated by the ideals it espoused,” the lasting negative effects of the implementation of Structural Adjustment policies by the IMF and the World Bank on life in Senegal are not in dispute (Makhulu, et al. 2010:13-14).

In the 1990s and into the 2000s, as families struggled to find jobs, to buy food, and to pull off expensive weddings and baby naming ceremonies, many turned to Muslim *shaykhs* (religious leaders) in search of moral guidance. Muslim leaders responded to the social pressures that people felt to provide a lavish outlay for these parties in tight times by pushing an Islamic family law to regulate social payments. Muslim leaders argued that women’s gift giving practices were related to *coosan* and were not required by Islam. In the print media, on the radio and television, and on the Internet a national debate has been taking place about the relationship between labor and leisure, money and family, and Islam and the secular state.

Muslim leaders advised women that their actions conflict with Muslim principles of modesty, restraint, and reform in the face of economic hardship and political mendacity. State figures and leaders of non-governmental organizations told women that they undermined national development. Women have become scapegoats for the financial difficulties that many families faced in the context of economic liberalization.

Alternatively, were there other factors at play that people were less willing to talk about? As the state divested itself of its social welfare function and the economy took a nosedive women began investing in others in earnest. Their collective efforts were made visible during these family celebrations where on the surface they appeared as conspicuous consumption. I argue that

these efforts were part of a dynamic repertoire of financial management strategies employed over the *longue durée*. Through these strategies, women maintained crucial equivalences in social life, despite periods of economic decline. Women shifted the media and modality of exchange over time to suit new situations of fiscal volatility to make “marginal gains” (Guyer 2004). These practices as repertoires signify the desire to translate money into long-term forms of value, such as investing in associational life, titles, and heirloom cloth. These actions were not *coosan*; they were the outcomes of, rather than the survivals of, processes of conversion, colonialism, capitalist accumulation, migration, wage labor, and trade.

Yet, women’s investments in others were problematic because they brought to the fore an older social order based on hierarchy and inequality. People criticized women’s spending to avoid confronting the thorny and painful issue of caste.¹ Social rank in Senegal rests on a distinction between freeborn persons and casted artisans. The artisanal castes are hereditary, endogamous, occupational orders based on a system of knowledge and power. When I asked about caste during my fieldwork many women and men contended that social rank, whether one was a drummer or a farmer, a blacksmith or a noble, had changed in the postcolonial context. Many cited postcolonial economic transformations, such as urban and transnational migration, education, and money, which had made such distinctions untenable.² In fact, politicians, professors, and other professionals often carried surnames associated with casted origins. Others pointed out that some surnames were more ambiguous allowing some to deny their origins, especially those who had migrated and intermarried. Yet, during family celebrations one could see the pervasiveness of caste and caste like relations of dependency being played out.

I analyze women’s actions in relation to *coosan*. I argue that women’s actions are not indicative of pre-Islamic survivals as the Muslim clergy and many scholars suggest. Rather, they

are contemporaneous with political and economic shifts. As such, the distinction between coosan and Islam, between women's authority and that of the Muslim clergy, can best be understood as dynamic and discursive (Asad 1986; Bowen 1993). In talking about Islam and coosan men and women made distinctions between custom and modern, local and global, historical and universal. These categories were never fixed and changed in relation to political and economic circumstances. Debates about whether women's actions were consonant with the broader scriptural tradition of Islam was itself a critical Islamic practice. Anthropologists working in Muslim societies have analyzed the processes through which men and women debate localized practices in relation to a range of authoritative sources (Bernal 1997; Bowen 2003; Cooper 1997; Ferme 1994; Launay 1992; Mahmood 2005; Masquelier 2009; Schulz 2003; Soares 2000). As elsewhere in the Muslim world, in Senegal, Muslim leaders sought to shape social and moral worlds through recourse to universal Islam. Muslim shaykhs cast doubt on women's ritual and religious practices because women's historic control over biological and social reproduction through ritual challenged their authority (Bop 2005; Sow 1985; Sow 2003).

Scholars of Islam in Africa have not fully engaged with women's ritual and religious practices because they tend to think that Muslim women are less educated, more rooted in the pre-Islamic world, and thus not reliable interlocutors about Islam. Scholars have largely focused on the normative and legalistic universe of Islam, such as shayks and their lineages (see for example Babou 2007; Cruise O'Brien 1971; Cruise O'Brien and Coulon 1988; Gamble and Ames n.d.; Hunwick 1997; Monteil 1964).³ Yet, social commentary on women's actions, especially in relation to caste, offers an opportunity to understand how men and women debate local practices in relation to the broader scriptural tradition of Islam (Soares 2000:281).

The dispute about women's gifts also raised the question of whether offerings (*addiya*) to spiritual masters, as the essential act of submission to Sufi shaykhs in Senegal, was part of Islam. I focus on one of four Sufi ways in Senegal, the Murid way for whom the *addiya* is a particularly onerous obligation. The Murids have come to stand in the literature as the example of Muslim practice in Africa defined by total submission to Sufi shaykhs (Soares 2007). Through offerings to religious guides, Murids enter into circuits of *baraka* (grace) promising salvation and worldly wealth. They also enter into the vast networks of global trade organized under the aegis of the Murid order.

I argue, that Murid men and women do not devote their wealth exclusively to their shaykhs. The mother of the household in which I lived, once said, "*Commerçants Murid amanu xeew but raay*, Murid traders have very large feasts." Men help women amass gifts of cloth to enter into circuits of *kersa* (honor) crafting their individual and collective identities in the present with reference to their past. Through their actions, women convey male honor, allowing men to behave with restraint characteristic of contemporary Islam.⁴ In assisting women in pulling off big family celebrations, men recognize women's authority in the ritual sphere.

The moral terms in which men and women apprehend economic realities has been an enduring theme in the ethnography of Africa (Apter 2005; Bastian 1996; Bohannan 1959; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Guyer 1995a; Hutchinson 1996; Piot 1999; Shipton 1989; Smith 2008; Weiss 1996). In Senegal, debates over the politics of social production, women's ritual practices, and religious authority are struggles over the nature of value. These debates have taken place in an era that has been marked by the contradictory rise (and recent fall) of the market and new modes of regulation of global Muslim networks related to the United States led global War on Terror. To understand the

fiscal and moral terms in which men and women seek to create viable futures, I untangle the multilayered discourses of conservation and change in the Senegalese postcolony by analyzing debates over women's spending and their strategies of "keeping-while-giving" (Weiner 1992). In Senegal, cloth has become a contentious object of debate because—through its use in dress, display, and bestowal—it makes women's wealth and value visible and it conveys the invisible, hidden potential of women as producers and bearers of history.

Untangling Debt

During my fieldwork in Senegal from 1999-2000, when I asked women in my host family as they donned stiffly starched *boubous* and *complets* (two piece outfits consisting of a blouse and wrapper) infused with incense where they were going each morning, they almost always replied, "*Mangi dem lijjanti xalis*, I am going to get to the bottom of my financial situation." This untangling of the relations of credit and debt created by the exchange of gifts, far from being symptomatic of conspicuous consumption in times of crisis, points to elaborate and sustained practices of financial planning and strategizing over the long term to secure social futures and fortunes. Women's efforts are often the result of larger family strategies pointing to a longer history of flexibility and financial management in the context of economic turbulence that has long characterized West African economies. To cope with currency instability men and women have employed a set of financial repertoires, including operating in the interstices of the official and unofficial economy, entering into relations of reciprocity with shaykhs, participating in NGO sponsored microfinance programs, and creating relations of credit and debt through exchange practices during birth, matrimonial, and mortuary rituals.

As the economic prospects for many families declined throughout the 1990s and 2000s an increasing number of young men and women migrated abroad in search of wage labor and

capital. By 2004 it was estimated that 76% of households in Dakar had at least one member living abroad (Melly 2010:43). Many of these migrants invested in homebuilding in Senegal (Buggenhagen 2001; Kane 2011:211). It was not just sons, who migrated abroad and invested in urban real estate at home; in the *quartier populaire* of Grand Dakar, close to fifty percent of the proprietors had migrated overseas and many of the new landlords were women (Tall 1996:2).

At home, where the authority of fathers once rested in their control of land, the provision of food, and the arranging of marriages for their children, many sat idle on ecologically devastated rural land. Men talked about their loss of importance and often blamed women, who had become money lenders and property owners (see also Perry 2005). Women's associations became important with the shift in development away from large scale infrastructure projects that were levied through the state to projects that centered upon microfinance (cf. Kane 2002:296). These projects emerged from the misplaced assumption by international donors that Africans lacked financial management strategies (Stiansen and Guyer 1999:1). This misperception derived from these organizations' focus on formal banking institutions and access to credit to which most Africans have limited access.

Women drew on funds from their rotating savings and credit associations (called *natt* in Wolof and *tontine* in French) for entrepreneurial projects. They also used these funds to accumulate cloth wealth to exchange during family ceremonies. Although women often dressed for public events in matching cloth for which they saved collectively to demonstrate their solidarity (Heath 1992), they also dressed in a manner that distinguished them from others during family ceremonies. As women moved through life celebrating marriages and births and mourning deaths they created obligations that formed the basis of social ties by parting with their most valued objects, their cloth and clothing (Mauss 1990 [1950]). In keeping some of these

valued possessions back from the pressure to give, women created sociocultural difference (Weiner 1992). Despite economic fluctuations, cloth is the idiom and principle means through which women created the bonds of kinship and affinity and created social rank.

Murid Global Circuits

To be a *Murid* (disciple) is to be part of a *tariqa* (way or path)⁵ of esoteric practice through which one seeks to achieve divine union in this life through the guidance of a spiritual master and learned scholar, who is known as a shaykh.⁶ For the five million adherents to the Murid tariqa, this Sufi⁷ way offers not only the promise of eternal prosperity, but also access to the forms of trade and production of worldly wealth. The Murid way emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, as men and women in northwestern Senegal, congregated around the scholar Amadou Bamba Mbacke (ca 1851-1927), whom they regarded as a locus of Divine grace (Robinson 1991). New disciples were seeking to evade French colonial rule, to acquire agricultural land for the production of peanuts as a cash crop, and, ultimately, to secure their salvation. Casted artisans, warriors associated with the former Wolof kingdoms, and slaves found solace in a form of Islam that proffered equality before God and the possibility of land.

In the 1970s, rural Murids turned their strategies of migrating to the city for work in the dry season into full time migration to Senegal's cities. The prices for peanuts in the world market dropped, and the peanut producing regions suffered a series of droughts, locust infestations, and famine. Eventually many migrated overseas, some as university students and others to trade African art in European and North American cities (Babou 2002; Carter 1997; Cruise O'Brien 1988; Diop 1985; Diop 1981b; Diouf 2000; Ebin 1993; Kane 2011; Salem 1981; Stoller 2002).

Murid migrants connected the teachings of their founding figure, Amadou Bamba, concerning labor, sacrifice, prosperity, and salvation, to the struggle and strife of migrant life.

They transitioned from agriculture to urban trade by forming religious associations called *dahira* (Arabic for circle) and seeking out new patrons in the Murid way (Babou 2002; Creevey 1970; Cruise O'Brien 1988; Diouf 2000; Ebin 1990; Irvine 1974; Mustafa 1998). Urban Murid traders often worked outside of the official economy, across state boundaries, and beyond the parameters of state regulation. Thus, they relied on social relations that were forged in *dahira* associations for housing and food, credit and capital, and protection from police and state officials. Murids succeeded in shifting from agriculture to trade in part by becoming “part of the informal state structure (or more accurately, of the ensemble formed by the formal state and its informal shadow) via a web of informal concessions, carefully negotiated privileges—notably including impunity for economic offenses—and personal and political relationships” (Hibou 1999:89). One might think of Murid traders’ turn to the so called informal sector as an indication of their absence from the formal sector, yet “informality uses a proficiency in emergent formal institutions to elaborate new spaces of operation” (Simone 2004:24).

Although the Murid way was initially an agricultural movement, Muslims have long been associated with trade in West Africa (see for example Amselle 1971; Cohen 1971; Curtin 1975; Hopkins 1973; Stoller 2002). For many Muslims trade has a “historical precedent and Prophetic practice; it is inherent in the words of the sacred scripture of Islam, the Qur’an, and thus has, for Muslims, the stamp of divine authority” (Hunwick 1999:72). Murid adepts talk of the economy in sacred idioms and of the sacred in economic terms. This inversion points to anxieties about value in a rapidly changing social and physical landscape and to counter-efforts by Murids to contain the movement of wealth within sacred circuits of development.

Through *dahira* associations, Murids give offerings of cash to shaykhs, called *addiya*, to signify their submission to their authority. Both men’s and women’s *dahira* associations sought

out the patronage of rural Murid shaykhs, who rarely left Tuba. Yet, only men are able to enter into direct relations with shaykhs; women's opportunities for *baraka* are limited. In contexts like these, money garners meaning through its circulation and produces long-term value (Akin and Robbins 1999). Upon receiving the offering, the shaykh utters a blessing—for prosperity, health, fertility, and salvation. The exchange of money for blessings is an example of process of authentication whereby signs accompany commodities and give them value (Irvine 1989:257).

Addiya offerings initially contributed to the building of the impressive Murid mosque in Tuba and have since financed Tuba's expansion to a "spiritual metropolis" (Ross 1995). Murid industry links the port of Dakar to an import/export economy based in Tuba. With its colonial legacy as an independent administrative district, and thus a tax and duty free zone, Tuba has become the center of a global trade network (Cruise O'Brien 1971; Cruise O'Brien 2003:65; Gueye 2001:107). Today Tuba incorporates global locations into its center placing traders on the crossroads of heaven and earth where profits meet prophets and prayers meet prosperity. [Fig. 1 Grand Mosque, Tuba, Senegal, about here]

In addition to trade networks, Murids have invested in real estate, cement, and transport in Dakar and Tuba. As in remittance economies elsewhere, real estate speculation, and construction flourished following the decades of rural to urban migration. Real estate development was led in part by Murid successes abroad since overseas traders built new homes with cash, unwilling or unable to secure loans from banks in Senegal with their prohibitive interest rates. Overseas migrants built these structures in piecemeal fashion; with each trip home additional truckloads of sand, gravel, cement, and rebar arrived on migrants' properties (Buggenhagen 2001; Melly 2010). Many of the stories of thievery in Dakar during my fieldwork revolved around neighbors, who were purported to steal sand from another's pile, bowl by bowl,

night after night. Despite the piles of brick, rebar, and sand throughout the city, many of these homes under construction were more like castles built of sand, with their half-built structures worn down by the elements after years of inactivity. Some of these homes were like homesteads, their cement outlines on the outer reaches of Dakar and Tuba preventing the land from reverting back to the government under the National Domain Law of 1964; although these homes were often razed as soon as they were discovered by the state. In recent years, disputes over land have become so intense that some posit that the current President Abdoulaye Wade re-elected in 2007, despite declining economic conditions, because of his commitment to sorting out the land claims of Murid migrants (Dahou and Foucher 2004; Mbow 2008:162).

The call to build homes in Tuba began with the leadership of Abdou Lahat Mbacke between 1968 and 1989; he instigated the creation of subdivisions around the great mosque, which he had also expanded (Diouf 2000). By the 1990s Tuba emerged as the second largest city in Senegal and as a locus of rural-rural migration (Gueye 1999). Tuba's population doubled between 1988 and 1998 (Gueye 1999:1; Gueye 2001:107). More than 300,000 Senegalese out of a national population of 9.5 million⁸ inhabited or maintained a home in this rural region (Gueye 1999), which was plagued with the weekend traffic of urban disciples seeking respite in the country, a visit with their shaykh, or a long holiday weekend and family reunion.

Women's Wealth and Honor: The Shifting Timing, Media, and Modalities of Exchange

In 2003, a new organization, *Comité Islamique pour la Reforme du Code de la Famille au Sénégal* (Islamic Committee for the Reform of the Family Code in Senegal), proposed an Islamic Family Law in the National Assembly. This move opened debate about the 1972 *Code de la Famille au Sénégal* (Family Code of Senegal), which regulates domestic life, including limiting the transfer of wealth during family celebrations (Bop 2005; Brossier 2004; Camara

2007; Sow 2003; Villalón 2004). Muslim leaders entered into the debate about women's wealth because they resented the state's regulation of family life.

Since the colonial era, Muslim leaders had protested the intrusion of the state into family matters, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. In conjunction with the colonial authorities, they had called for limits on women's transfers of wealth during these events. For example, the Gouvernement General de L'A.O.F., in conjunction with the Grand Imanat de Dakar, attempted to abolish these payments during naming ceremonies in a document, *Réglementation Générale*,⁹ which permitted 500 F CFA to be donated to the birthmother as "*frais de soins sanitaires*" (fees for healthcare). The document limited families' celebrations to slaughtering a single sheep, preparing two large bowls each of porridge and beignets, and a pitcher of ginger beer. It also prohibited members of the *gewel* (griots, known for their praise singing) and *lawbë* castes (woodworkers, also known for their erotic dances during family celebrations), from attending baby naming celebrations and demanding payment for eulogizing families and dancing.

Muslim leaders also entered into the debate about family celebrations because the issue of caste was still a source of tension for Muslim leaders. As I mentioned, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Murid way attracted those who were low ranking, such as caste artisans and descendants of former slaves, through Islam's promise of equality before God. Despite the clergy's disavowal of social rank, people of low social rank rarely held leadership positions. Moreover, the forms of knowledge that defined each specialization were often resented by Muslim clerics, who did not acknowledge these otherworldly forms of power (Dille 2004:6). Over time the Sufi orders did little to change people's perceptions of inequality based on caste.

In the 1990s, Muslim leaders were also troubled by women's changing fashions—at Sufi pilgrimages, conferences, and at family celebrations. Women were asked to cover their heads

properly, to reduce the ample necklines of their boubous, and to refrain from erotic dancing at these events. Debates about the politics of women's dress were also about the limits of fashion and the expenditure necessary to achieve it (Grabski 2009; Heath 1992; Mustafa 2006; Scheld 2003). Yet, as I have argued, for Senegalese women, displaying and distributing cloth, as gifts and as clothing, was not a form of conspicuous consumption. Rather it was about seizing the occasion to make visible the strength of their social networks (Buggenhagen 2008; Cooper 1997; Schulz 2007). Through these social ties women made ends meet, created enduring forms of value, and engaged in critical practices in tough financial circumstances.

Muslim leaders and development specialists said that women's actions were customary and out of step with tough financial conditions that had perdured for several decades since Independence. Yet, for women, practices of ritualized exchange in the present related to a longer history of monetary management. Through complex modalities, shifting media, and contexts of exchange, women created social value in fluctuating fiscal conditions.

The spread of women's microfinance programs in the 1990s and 2000s contributed to women's financial repertoires for creating long-term value. Rotating savings and credit associations organized by NGOs complimented women's existing financial management strategies. These strategies were complex, such as the *tuur* (rotation) that unmarried women organize, the *mbotaye* ritual associations that married women form, and the *ndeye dikké*, (meaning the mother of my choosing or twin), that two women create between themselves (Kane 2002:295). There were also the practices of naming women as patrons of family celebrations such as the *ndeye*, or honorary mother, and the babies as their *turandoo*, or namesakes.

NGOs shifted to microfinance under the assumption that women had little discretion over the family budget, that they lacked access to formal banking structures, and that they were victim

to market lender's usurious practices. Yet NGOs were surprised to find that women distributed their proceeds in a manner that reinscribed their high status, which was based on inherited social rank, and thus to inscribe inequality (Ndione 1989). Women used microcredit funds to accumulate cloth wealth to exchange during family ceremonies. They purchased cloth at the market and they acquired it from casted male weavers that they patronized. As a gift, this inalienable possession tied women to their lineages and to their ancestors. Women explained to me that it tied them to, "*Sunu maam yi*, our grandparents." It represented their understanding of who they are in the present by tying them to who they were in the past.

Women's economic, political, and ritual authority in the present is tied to their role in cotton production (in cultivation and spinning), in the colonial era (Cooper 1993; Etienne 1980). Freeborn women controlled the circulation of cloth through spinning yarn and sponsoring casted male weavers in their compounds. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial Senegal, social cleavages were divided among three endogamous groups—nobility and freeborn, casted persons, and those who had descended from slaves—despite the influence of Islam and its emphasis on equality (Diop 1981a:27). These orders were first roughly divided into a binary distinction between *gээр* (high rank) and *nyenyo* (low rank) (Diop 1981a:33). Social rank reflected notions about pollution and witchcraft and differences between those who performed services and asked for gifts and those who did not (Irvine 1974:118). Marriages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century took place within occupational groupings and though men married below their rank, women did not (Irvine 1974:107).

Despite the influence of Islam in the region, which emphasized patriarchy and equality before God, matrilineal descent relations shaped the social rank—as freeborn, casted, or slave—and moral qualities of offspring. Wolof families recognized double, or bilineal descent (Diop

1985:15)¹⁰ and traced genealogies through both fathers and mothers. Although social rank was ascribed, it could also be achieved as genealogies could be manipulated and one's social and moral value was shaped through everyday interactions (Irvine 1974:197). Thus social rank could be thought of as relational, not absolute (Irvine 1974). Rights and duties, even one's comportment, operated in contexts involving dyads of high to low.

Relations of high and low not only pertain to relations between casted artisans and their freeborn patrons, such inequalities continue to define every social relationship (Irvine 1974). Even among the freeborn relations of high and low come into play. Freeborn persons compete not only for dependents, but also for labor and political support among themselves (Irvine 1974:205). When the women of a family come together for family celebrations, they compete for status and attempt to make other women their dependents or to become dependents of women larger than themselves. Women do so by giving cloth to others to create their reputation and social persona, or *jikko ju baax* (character or comportment). A woman of high birth, or *rafet-u-juddo*, is expected to demonstrate *jom* (honor), *kersa* (restraint in words and actions), *muñ* (patience), and *teraanga* (hospitality). She is expected to be liberal in her gift giving. As such, she is recognized as high ranking based upon her reputation and treatment of others.

The High Price of Marriage?

“Deedet! No!” said Rama shaking her head.

Bintu asked one more time, “but please Rama, I need these glasses. I don't have any drinking glasses for guests and all the other wives do in my husband's home do.”

“You are the one who left these gifts here,” said Rama, “when you ran away from your husband right after your wedding. I am taking all of your glasses and bowls.”

For three months after Bintu's wedding, she had not been visited or spoken to by Rama, whose family had brought her to Dakar from rural Tuba Mbacke, raised her, and arranged her wedding to a successful Murid trader in Italy. Rama was angry because she had been the *ndeye*, or honorary mother at the event. As Bintu's patron, she gave large sums of money to the griots and guests who came to Bintu's wedding. Rama said that she had wasted her money on her dress and hair in addition to these gifts and payments because Bintu had run away. Bintu stayed away for a month rejecting marriage as a second wife and stating her love for another. These bowls were part of the gifts that women brought through which they constituted and made visible their social networks. Initially, Rama had intended to keep them for Bintu until she returned. But now that she had returned to her husband's home, Rama changed her mind and decided to keep them locked in her own armoire. She was angry that Bintu's running away had severed relations and brought dishonor to the family. These bowls, Rama said, compensated her for her loss.

Social criticism of weddings in Senegal touched on the inflation of bridewealth prices, the timing of the marriage process, especially its delays as women demand gifts from prospective grooms, and the shifting media of exchange as evidence of women's proclivity for conspicuous consumption. In Bintu's case, criticism surrounded her demands for more sumptuous gifts from her husband. These demands reached their highest point when she asked for a honeymoon at an expensive Dakar hotel before she would agree to return to her husband's home.

As many marriage negotiations fell apart for financial reasons, many people talked about a crisis in the family because of the high price to marry. Yet, there have been fluctuations in bridewealth prices, and other social exchanges, at least since the colonial era. Such fluctuations raise the question of what strategies people employ to control the value of bridewealth over a longer history of volatility. If the value of bridewealth payments in this region had always been

as unstable, as they had been in other regions of West and Central Africa, then how do we understand the value of bridewealth payments (cf. Guyer 1995b:114)? In Senegal, there had not been a steady rise in bridewealth prices from the pre-colonial era to the present, but rather there had been moments where such discourses arise owing to changes in the “cultural topography of wealth” (Ferguson 1992) as well as “the social geography of the channels through which money moves” (Guyer 1995b:115). For example, during the colonial period as men and women gained access to cash crops and markets a similar discourse developed. As new crops, new markets, new means of production, new currencies, and new commodities emerged so too did debates about how to secure forms of value.

As much as social commentary has focused upon the inflation of bridewealth payments in relation to the changing economic conditions wrought by overseas migration and local fiscal austerity, this discourse is above all not about prices in and of themselves, but about the changing nature of social relations (see for example Grosz-Ngaté 1988). Men say that they are struggling to meet escalating bridewealth demands from mothers, who control the reproductive potential of their daughters. They say that women’s demand for money to finance family ceremonies keeps them tied to their overseas lives and makes it difficult for them to come home if they have not succeeded financially. Consequently, many men, and some women, comment on the ways in which social reproduction has been delayed (Antoine, et al. 1995) as the tensions between men and women and the young and old mount and are no longer worked into alliances, but rather become disarticulated. Focusing, then, on the experience of the marriage process, and the media and timing of marriage payments, illuminates how women are valued, how they create social value, how these exchanges produce sociocultural difference, and how they actualize or fail to actualize potential social relations.

Debates about marriage have focused on the timing of the marriage process and when the Family Code was proposed in 1972 it initially limited this process to one year (Kane 1972:717). Delays in the marriage process are often related to disputes over social payments. For example, the groom is expected to make three payments to his prospective bride's family, including those to her father or a male relative, to her mother, and to the bride herself. The bride's mother, as the recipient of these payments, is responsible for returning a portion of the payments in the form of gifts to the groom's parents. These transfers often take the form of cloth for the in-laws and furnishings for the bride's room, but, for the most part, the prospective groom is responsible for making a series of marriage payments over the duration of the courtship from which the bride's mother purchases the trousseau (Irvine 1974:387).

Although prospective grooms largely object to the demands of the bride's mother for more gifts, they also protest the ways in which prospective brides treat these gifts (Diop 1985:100). The groom often begins courtship by offering a first gift to his prospective fiancée called *ndaq far*, meaning to chase away other suitors, usually other cousins that are also in competition for the young woman. The groom visits the young woman's uncles and aunts bearing gifts, while continuing to court his prospective fiancée with offerings. Other payments follow, many of which have largely become monetized over time. Yet, by the late 1990s young women began calling the *ndaq far* a *may bu njekk*, or the first gift, rejecting the former's emphasis on eliminating competition among male cousins for the bride, and embracing the latter's focus on possibilities for accumulation and the bride's right to reject suitors. This angered young men, who often gave many gifts to young women, but were never able to actually bring their prospective brides home.

The marriage is concluded by tying (*takk*) the marriage at the mosque. The male representatives of the two families, often the paternal uncle of the groom and the maternal uncle of the bride, exchange a small sum to signify that the marriage has been made legal according to Muslim law and to confer the rights of the patrilineage over future offspring. Muslim leaders argue that Islam only recognizes the *takk* and no other payments or exchanges, such as the *ndaq far* and the *céet*, which I will turn to now.

As men struggle to regain control over social production through recourse to Islam, women exercise control over volatile times by altering the media of marriage prestations, especially by changing what constitutes the *céet*, the entry of the bride into her husband's home followed by female kin and her trousseau (Kane 1972:719). The *céet* is an elaborate display of the strength of women's networks. Female kin and associates often arrive in large vans and buses that they commandeer for the celebration with enormous stacks of plastic washtubs, bowls, and even mattresses tied to the top. Dependents, including griots and those of former slave status (distinguished by the belts tied around the waists of their *boubous* (robes)), carry these gifts on their heads as they dance toward the new home. Drummers, singers, photographers, and videographers accompany them. To return to the dispute between Rama and Bintu, Rama took Bintu's gifts because she thought that as her *ndeye*, they signified her social networks into which she was incorporating Bintu. [Fig. 2 The *céet* wedding procession, about here]

In the late 1990s, social commentary on the marriage process often centered upon the elaboration of certain rituals, such as the *céet*, which were described as customary, not required by Islam, as going beyond mutual aid, and as evidence of women's conspicuous consumption. This discourse was due in part to the shifting media of exchange. At one time local products symbolized agricultural productivity, the fertility of the land, and control over dependents, which

was necessary for family-based agriculture. These locally produced objects included woven cloth, mats, calabashes, and pottery. In the 1990s, women preferred manufactured goods that were often bought with cash in the market or obtained abroad, including cloth, enamel bowls, plastics, glasses, and other housewares. No longer the product of their own labor in the fields or creative work (such as spinning yarn or decorating calabashes), women obtained wedding gifts through their own engagement or that of their male kin in the cash economy, overseas trade, and microfinance projects (for comparison with Niger see Cooper 1997). For this reason the provenance of many of these manufactured goods became increasingly important to their value. For example, Bintu was envious of her co-wife's sets of insulated bowls that came from Jeddah.

Household objects remain central to women's worth and value because they stand for hosting and feeding others and producing social relations. Containers for food and drinks are among the most valuable objects because they symbolize the bowls of cooked food that the wife will send to her kin and exchange partners at future feasts and family ceremonies. They also index the depth and breath of the social networks through which women acquire these valued objects and the productive potential of young brides. For this reason they are marched into the bride's new home in an elaborate show of adulating griots. Rama's family said that they were angry with Bintu because they had sent so many bowls out, sharing the wedding feast with neighbors down the street and important associates. Because Bintu had run away, none of these bowls had come back in the return direction. Thus, often Rama's mother would often look for bowls in her armoire and curse Bintu because she had so few left.

The carrying of a bride's trousseau into her conjugal home is also part of a processes of enclosure, which is central to the production of domestic space (Masquelier 2004:245). Filling the new bride's home with valued possessions, such as cloth, cooking vessels, and other

housewares, creates a space of beauty that conveys respectability, prosperity, and future productive potential. This creation of enclosure or interiority through fashioning domestic space is essential to women's moral and sexual identities (Masquelier 2004:247). For this reason, Bintu expressed shame because she did not have glasses in which to serve drinks to her guests.

Women line their armoires, headboards, and etageres with large numbers of these wealth objects, especially bowls, along with porcelain figurines and glasses, to demonstrate their worth to their matrimonial home. The quantities of the gifts are as important as their quality. The *céet* and the creation of enclosure through housewares are an important display of women's material wealth and worth and a visible display of women's "wealth in people." This element of display of valued objects (too numerous to actually be used on a daily basis), and of people is central to women's demonstration of productivity and reproductive potential (Cooper 1997:94). Moreover, the repetition and addition of similar objects, like bowls, glasses, and porcelain figurines that are displayed in sets, speak to women's search for religious merit, which is articulated as a series of repetitive and similar acts of feeding and hospitality that accumulate in value over time.

Analyzing marriage as a process enables one to focus on moments of "disaggregation" of the payments (Comaroff 1980:7; Guyer 1995b:121). Rather than charting rising or falling bridewealth payments, I have focused on the "partial and inventive transformations" of each of the parts (Guyer 1995b:121) and the discourse surrounding the marriage process to understand the meaning and experience of these transactions. Moreover, bridewealth payments do not reflect a hierarchical structure of relations of gender, generation, and other forms of social rank; they are the very processes through which these relationships are constituted and for this reason they have become subject to social criticism (Comaroff 1980; Evans-Pritchard 1940). In bridewealth

transactions in the late 1990s the *ndaq far*, the *takk*, and the *céet* were at the crux of the debate over social production and women's emergent role in controlling marriages.

Are Births Just "Women's Business?"

As Senegalese men and women came to terms with new fiscal realities of constraint and scarcity, Muslim leaders urged women to rein in their *ndawtal* exchanges. These exchanges involved the competitive display and bestowal of cloth during baby naming ceremonies, called *ngénte*, seven days after the birth of a child. Clerics urged women to abandon their spendthrift ways and to support the *zakkat* and other funds collected by the Muslim hierarchy to support health clinics, classrooms, and the poor. On the radio, in the print media, in religious sermons, and in the offices of NGOs women were disparaged for their expenditures, which were seen as threatening the development of the nation (Ndione 1994; Patterson 2002; Perry 2002). Social commentary showed suspicion toward female circuits of exchange, which were closed and impenetrable to the male clergy and elders, government ministers, and NGOs.

Social commentary often revolved around the jokes about *drianké*. The word *drianké* denotes the woman that keeps others on a leash.¹¹ The figure of the *drianké* is an urban Wolof woman, a social doyen of beauty and largesse, her girth a sign of her wealth, who will incorporate others into the *jet-société*. T.K. Biaya describes the *drianké* as "a titillating, plump, and mature woman expert at *thiuraye* [a kind of incense]" (1999:715). Her erotic arts involve the sensual deployment of incense and *bethio* (scented waistcloths), risqué cotton underwraps that women embroider with vulgar imagery or manipulate with elaborately skilled cutwork to reveal their bare bodies. [Fig. 3 Bethio underwraps, about here]

During my fieldwork, I noted that when I pressed my male interlocutors for an explanation for attacks on women's wealth, they often responded with their hands held up in the

air, “*Affaire-u-jiggen le*, it is women’s business.” One of the sons in the family that I lived with told me, “I would never give my wife money for *ndawtal*. They have their own means of coming up with these funds unknown to me.” His statement pointed to his ignorance about his wife manages money. He was also downplaying if not outright denying his contribution. The phrase “women’s business” has often been understood to be dismissive by scholars of Senegal, or indicating that the actions in question only interested women. Yet, in the course of my fieldwork it became clear to me that men were not writing off the significance of women’s practices, and they were not suggesting that they only pertained to women. They were acknowledging their complexity and pointing out their own lack of knowledge and authority on the matter.¹²

Despite a discourse of devotion to the Murid way consisting of “boasting” of one’s *addiya* offerings to shaykhs through which one benefitted from the baraka of their masters (Buggenhagen 2008; Cruise O'Brien 1975:62 note 8), Murid men and women kept certain wealth objects back from the pressure to give to shaykhs. Men gave money and cloth to women to help them fashion their good reputation, or *sak*, (Kane 2011:195). In doing so they entered into a second circuit of exchange in which women gave *ndawtal* (gifts of cloth) to kith and kin during family ceremonies. These soft objects often circulated in relation to precious metals, coins, and other hard objects. Hard objects, like money, signify submission to shaykhs. Soft objects indicate the desire to keep something back from the pressure to give (Weiner 1989:62). Women themselves link the circulation of cloth during naming ceremonies to their respectability, reproductive power, and ritual authority. Women say that they employ strategies of display, bestowal, and concealment, which underpin the circulation of this valued possession, to control social reproduction and to produce sociocultural difference.

For women, these textiles are tactile, sensual, and visual forms of wealth that they employ to overcome experiences of loss and breaches in relations introduced by births, deaths, and marriages. They use these wrappers to swaddle newborns, to cover the lower half of their bodies, and to shroud the deceased. In so doing they bind the living and the dead (for a comparison with Madagascar see Feeley Harnick 1991). As with woven textiles elsewhere in West Africa, these wrappers are handed down from mothers to daughters to create links backwards and forwards in time (Perani and Wolff 1999:32; Renne 1996). They are a “social skin,” linking the surface of the body and forms of bodily adornment, bridging the frontier between the body and society, and the individual and the collective (Turner 1980).

These wrappers are called *sër-u-rabbal* (woven skirts), or *sër-u-njaago*, referring to the Manjaka that weave them (the Wolof term for Manjaka *njaago*). These Manjaka use a narrow horizontal loom with a double heddle shedding mechanism (Picton and Mack 1979). Manjaka weaving is influenced by the *pano de obra* that were woven in the Cape Verde Islands during the era of Portuguese rule. Wolof women prefer the more complex weft faced motifs produced by the Manjaka looms to that of the Tukolor or Wolof (Dilley 1987). These wrappers consist of six bands of woven cotton cloth that weavers embellish with the vibrant hues of metallic synthetic yarns, such as *Lurex*, rayon, and polyester. Women take the strip woven cloth to tailors, who sew them together selvage by selvage to form a wrapper. [Fig. 4 Manjaka weavers in Dakar in 2010]

Women achieve equivalences in social life in the face of a turbulent economy through their attention to the quantity and the kind of valued objects that they exchange (Guyer 2004). Although many Dakar women today favor Manjaka weaving produced largely by migrants from war torn Guinea Bissau, in the past women accumulated cloth from across the region and as far away as India, such as the Pondicherry indigo dyed Guinée cloths. Varieties of stripweaves were

commodities in the regional trade and forms of currency in pre-colonial and colonial Senegal that tied the region into the global through their trade (Curtin 1975; Kriger 2005; Roberts 1992).

In the early colonial period women controlled the production and circulation of woven cloth through their spinning of thread for casted weavers (*ràbbkat* or *ràbb sër*), who were their dependents (for comparison with Niger and the Ivory Coast see Cooper 1993; Etienne 1980). When machine made cloth came into circulation in the colonial era affecting local cloth production in the wider Sahel region, it did not undercut the meanings associated with locally woven cloth. Women often shifted from exchanging local and regional textiles to exchanging global textiles to maintain vital equivalences and their control over the value that was produced through the distribution of cloth. [Fig. 5 *Sër-u-rabbal*, about here]

Though women no longer spin cotton into thread, and cloth is largely bought in the market and woven with industrially produced yarns, strip woven cloth continues to be prolific in ceremonial exchange. Women prefer to give and to receive strip weaves over factory printed cloth and cash because of its symbolic association with reproduction—with fertility and lineage identity—and the historical association with women's control over cloth through spinning.¹³ Freeborn women's status continues to be reflected in their role as redistributors of cloth woven by casted members of society (Irvine 1989:260), whether they buy it in the market or hire weavers to weave it for them in their compounds. Thus their choice of textiles for dress and exchange reflects the ways in which the meaning of the cloth for Wolof women derives from its role in exchange and consumption (rather than its production) (Perani and Wolff 1999:14).

Social critics of women's gift giving have focused on the volume of gifts given, especially the contemporary practice of supplementing strip woven cloth with cash and machine made cloth. Yet, how women shift the media of exchange over time to meet new fiscal demands

calls attention to the production of value over the *longue durée*. Women have also changed the media of exchange at critical moments, by introducing innovative strip weaves from the larger region and as far away as India. Women have always played with cloth's dual nature as inalienable possession and commodity "these terms are never fixed...they are always political" (Graeber 1996:12). Locally woven strip cloth in the form of cloth-money emerged in tandem with more intensive trade with European merchants on the coast where it was used as a medium of exchange and, by the seventeenth century, Senegambia was already at the core of a cloth currency area (Ames 1955:1019; Curtin 1975:237; Johnson 1974). By the nineteenth century, families used cloth in ceremonial and economic exchange; it was a form of value and a unit of account (Ames 1955:1016; Roberts 1992). As a result of its use in ceremonial exchange, cloth became a scarce currency (Ames 1955:1017-8).

Wearing and giving a range of different things, including locally produced, manufactured, and imported objects as well as cash, is not a new strategy. In fact, Phillip Curtin (1975) describes how the exchange of gifts in pre-colonial Senegal was based upon an idea of "one-of-each." The highest prestige gifts were composed of the greatest number of different goods and the multiplier of these had an important "ritual significance, since it was often divisible by either two or ten, and the value of the multiple gift has extended down to the present, where a Senegambian gift consisting of two silver coins, two robes, two kola nuts and two sarooji (cloth) will carry much more weight than the same value in cash." (288)

Today, substances of local production that are associated with the domestic sphere *and* imported prestige items, which stand as spacio-temporal condensations of global cities, are exchanged together. "One-of-each," then, suggests a synthesis within a dialectic. Imported merchant goods serve as a global map linking persons to worldwide trade networks. Locally

produced substances locate men and women, young and old, within the domestic sphere. For example, men often bring *ruy* (millet porridge), a product of local agricultural production commensurate with their role in feeding others, to naming ceremonies. Although many women strive to bestow at least one *sër-u-rabbal* wrapper, they often supplement this wrapper with several inferior machine made textiles. As I will discuss below, exchanging the inferior cloth, enables women to keep some of their heirloom wrappers out of circulation.

Muslim leaders, in the present and in the past, did not oppose baby naming ceremonies altogether; they participated in the naming of the newborn, slaughtering of animals, and the feasting that ensued. They criticized the social exchanges that women engaged in after these events had taken place. In the late afternoon women crowd around the birthmother, her mother, and her mother's sisters, and seated on mats or rented chairs proceed to give *ndawtal* gifts of cloth. The gifts are handed to a griot (*gewel*), a low ranking, endogamous, and hereditary group of verbal specialists. The griots convey the prestations to the hosts. The griot announces the quantity and quality of the gifts and eulogizes the donor by reciting her genealogy for which she receives a payment. In this manner, freeborn women invest the griot's speech with social value. The women who gives a gift is motivated to act in a manner worthy of praise singing, such giving generosity, which is central to her construction of her moral personhood and high social rank. High-ranking women compete among each other for status, which derives from genealogy (*rafet-u-juddo*), honor (*jom*), and moral comportment (*jikko*) (Irvine 1989:260). [Fig. 6 Griot holding two rolls of *sër-u-rabbal* at a baby naming ceremony, about here]

In return, the birthmother and her mother will draw upon their own stores of cloth wealth and cash, which is often concealed in a suitcase that lays at the center of the circle, and upon what they have just received to offer a return gift to the original donor. “*Chez les Wolof*,”

Jigeeen's mother's sister said, "it is honorable to return double what one receives." This return gift is called the *njukkul*. This return gift is also conveyed by a griot. Whether an *njukkul* is made at this ceremony or at the next ceremony depends upon the relationship between the host and her guest. Although all women in attendance should give *ndawtal*, not all women will receive a return gift at the same ceremony.

Whether the *ndawtal* is returned depends on how it is given. Women often combine a number of valued objects when giving gifts, including locally woven strip cloth, dyed boubous, manufactured cloth, and cash. Of these items, only the *sër-u-rabbal* conveys the heirloom qualities of inalienable possessions and thus requires future replacements. After all, cloth embodies the reproduction of the essential ties of kinship by its close association with the female body, especially when it is used as an underskirt, wedding veil, baby blanket, or funeral shroud.¹⁴ This association with fertility and reproduction makes cloth an inalienable object and, therefore, the "borrower" must return it at some point to its owner, if not the actual object, then some symbolic equivalence. Women may also substitute substantial amounts cash for cloth, which is still called *ndawtal*; in fact, early on in my research the term *ndawtal* was explained to me as cash given at a family ceremony by women and some go so far as to call an *ngente* and *ndawtal*. [Fig. 7 Birthmother and newborn swaddled in *sër-u-rabbal* at a naming ceremony, about here]

The *njukkul* involves an additional gift. Through returning the gift to the original donor with an increment, the recipient invests value in the original donor by placing her in the position of debtor. This increment compels a future replacement. At a minimum, the recipient of an *ndawtal* gift aims to double what she receives. This strategy is called *lebal-bor*, from the Wolof words *lebal* (to lend credit to someone), and *bor* (debt) (Mottin-Sylla 1987:21). Through this strategy, the recipient of the *ndawtal* gift could recover the debt from the original donor at a later

point in time. The debtor is borrowing resources from the creditor (or from her own future in fact), to be used in the present and the creditor is relinquishing those resources in the present in the hopes of a future gain, “In so doing, contracting parties conjoin their respective futures and pasts, materializing their temporal bond, as it were” (Peebles 2010:227). Women refer to this process as, *lijjanti xaalis* (to untangle or get to the bottom of a financial situation). *Lijjanti* refers to a sorting out, an untangling, or finding the underlying cause of a matter. *Xaalis* is the word for silver or money. Investing value in others is central to the processes of social production and renewal. Women demand replacements for items that they had given in the past. These replacements can be given either to the original donors or to their daughters and granddaughters in the future. [Fig. 8 *Ndawtal* taking place during a naming ceremony, about here]

The mother of the household in which I lived often said that women had to “*Réfléchir bu baax*, think very carefully” about their transactions, recalling past gifts before planning future gifts. They needed to strategize to create asymmetrical relationships. Women strategize to persuade each other to bestow first-quality cloth on them in the future, especially locally woven strip cloth. Women seek to alter others’ views of themselves and thus to extend their control beyond themselves to craft reputations (see Munn 1992:61). Women create asymmetry by returning the gifts that they receive at the same ceremony, over an interval of time, or by returning them with increment.

If a woman were unable to reciprocate the original gift at the next event hosted by the donor, she would be placing herself in a caste-like position of dependency. She would become the client of her host. Like a griot, she would be in a position to ask for money from her patron. For this reason, the practices of *ndeye*, or honorary mother, and *turandoo*, or namesake, became popular as less wealthy freeborn families sought to attract the patronage of wealthier families.

Women were able to maintain the system of social rank despite their inability to return double what they received. These shifting relations of patron and client enabled women to get by in tough times.

How relations of caste and caste-like dependency played out in family ceremonies was not always clear. Freeborn women had family griots to mediate gift giving. Yet, griots were not necessarily on the bottom of the economic ladder. When Jigeen was in New York she told me that griot women, who had been successful abroad, held “*Xeew bu raay*, very large feasts.” Additionally, a good number of Murid traders were of casted origins and often had the most sumptuous feasts in Dakar. Jigeen’s mother had often been chosen as the *ndeye*, or honorary mother, for many of these feasts as families sought her patronage. Yet, she often found herself indebted to other high-ranking women when she could not double their gifts. In one striking event, she found herself indebted to a casted family that has sought out her patronage.

In addition to bestowing cloth on others during family ceremonies, women also perform the work of keeping objects out of circulation and of exacting a replacement for others (Weiner 1985). Not all kinds of cloth are circulated; women often retain heirloom pieces of strip cloth that were obtained from their mothers and grandmothers since these are inalienable objects in that they represent personal histories. These are kept in locked armoires or used as bed coverings. They are often worn and have become soft with age. They may also keep some strip weaves out of circulation to use in bodily display, often wrapping up to five layers, and then sitting with their legs splayed out in front of them to make these visible.

Through their hidden stores of cloth wealth, made visible through dress and bestowal at family ceremonies, women incorporate their ancestors’ renown, authority, and rank into themselves and produce their authority. Cloth ensures a replacement that forms the basis of

future wealth and lineage continuity because of its association with women's reproductive power and lineage history (Weiner 1980). Women record these latter exchanges in ledgers because to lose in exchange cannot be understood as merely an economic loss for the individual, but as a lineage's loss of "its power to sustain itself for future generations" (Weiner 1985:212).

Despite its frequent substitution by cash, cloth remains the essential prestation for women (see also Mustafa 1998:124). Although cash contains what David Graeber calls "hidden capacities for action" (2001) and, unlike cloth, more directly conveys the potential for future exchanges since it is so easily hidden outside of ritualized exchange, cloth acts like an inalienable object. It conveys the essence of the giver and, therefore recognizes the status of the receiver. It also contrasts with the hidden power of money since, as Graeber contends, as an object of adornment and a form of display, cloth persuades others of the value of both the giver and receiver; indeed, "by covering themselves with gold, then, kings persuade others to cover them with gold as well" (1996:9). A woman gives strip cloth as prestations at family ceremonies and wears many layers of this underneath her *boubou*. By wearing strip cloth in this way she is not only like a king covering herself with gold, but she is also holding something back from the pressure to give; she is "keeping-while-giving," well aware that "the things kept allow a person to circulate other things" (Weiner 1985:222). A woman adorns herself with cloth, not as a form of conspicuous consumption, but as a strategy to encourage others to seek her out so that she will not be excluded from possessing this valuable resource. By keeping some cloth out of circulation for bodily display, she is ensuring that she will remain on the path of the circulation.

Through their bestowal and receipt of cloth wealth, women engage in practices through which they make themselves known through the responses they elicit from others (Foster 1995:10). For women exchange is not about relations between things, but rather about

constructing relations between persons. They engage in processes of social reproduction, of which naming ceremonies are central, to make visible the forms of social relationships that are vital to their definition as persons and to their social futures (cf. Foster 1995:12); the reproduction of social relations demands immense labor and resources (Weiner 1992:4).

Circulation and Value in Volatile Times

The exchange of cloth wealth is not just regarded as women's business. It is not exclusively women that appreciate the importance of cloth wealth for creating the enduring forms of value on which social reproduction is predicated. During my fieldwork, as men spoke of their offerings to their shaykhs I came to appreciate the ways in which they discreetly drew upon their social networks to acquire cloth for wives, sisters, and mothers. Men needed to negotiate the forms of value and wealth that were controlled by women to contract marriages, name their children, participate in the Hajj, and die with respect and so men distributed cloth across affinal, consanguineal, and intergenerational lines.

Women gained a measure of control over the flow of wealth and thus over persons by redistributing the gifts that they received from men. For example, grooms gave prospective brides and in-laws cloth and clothing during courtship as part of a series of marriage payments that also included cash, gold, and cattle along with modern electronics, cars, and trips to Mecca. The bride's mother redistributed these gifts, creating her status and authority, especially over the reproductive potential of their daughters, the prospective brides. Men and women were not individual agents, they achieved honor through investing in each other (Heath 1992). In distributing resources to women, men were not losing wealth; they were ensuring a replacement in the future, either to themselves, through women, or to future generations (Weiner 1980).

Gifts convey (*jottali*) the prestige and the reputation of the giver and her esteem and respect for the receiver (Curtin 1975:287-8). By lending one's presence to a family ceremony, one is participating in a virtual exchange of reputation and creditworthiness. Creditworthiness is expressed by the bodily display of wealth, including clothing, coiffure, and cosmetics. Such wealth demonstrates the depth of the social networks through which one obtains merchant goods, like manufactured cloth, and control over dependents that provide services, such as casted hair-braiders, weavers, and tailors. With respect to the figure of the *drianké*, as well as to the forms of social critique that surrounded women's dress and exchange practices, the display and bestowal of wealth at family celebrations could be dangerous, "to have wealth and to dispense it generously are important elements of high social standing. To display it too ostentatiously, however, would run counter to the Wolof notion of *kersa* [restraint] (Heath 1992:24).

The debate between coosan and Islam brought women's actions to the center of Senegalese debate about hard times and how to surmount them and it overshadowed anxieties about caste. Although the households of urban Murid migrants appeared more prosperous than those of their rural kith and kin, networks of obligation underpinned such appearances. Many women were unable to match the inflationary sums that were set by their peers, which were triggered by the influx of remittances from overseas male kin. Consequently, they engaged in immense social labor to defer expectations of reciprocity and often became the dependents of others. Unlike the localized agricultural production and dry-season trading that characterized the early twentieth-century Murid communes in which inhabitants knew with whom they were trading, today, people work in distant locations abroad that are invisible and misunderstood by those at home. Since housekeeping money is remitted monthly from abroad families know little about the conditions through which it is earned abroad. As a consequence of the increasing

distance between sites of production and consumption, the imagined possibilities for exchange that were often discussed, rarely matched the material conditions of most families (Appadurai 1986:46). The debate about women's wealth, then, was an attempt to render relations between persons and objects visible and knowable (Foster 2006) in a time when the production of wealth abroad appeared inexplicable, if at times occult (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

As much as Murid traders have circulated cargo and currency through official and unofficial spaces of the global economy, they have also strived to circulate the media of social production at the same time. Through offerings to religious guides, Murids enter into circuits of *baraka* (grace) promising salvation and worldly wealth. Although women also give offerings as members of religious associations, as they do not have direct relations with shaykhs, they also accumulate and distribute cloth wealth among kin, affines, and associates. Through the exchange of cloth during family celebrations, women enter into circuits of *kersa* (honor) crafting their individual and collective identities. Through these carefully crafted financial strategies, women reinscribe notions of social rank. As such, women's endeavors to create lasting forms of value and secure social futures and fortunes have become the subject of criticism, especially from Muslim reformers, who seek to rein in women's expenditures in tough financial times.

Muslim families in Senegal expressed frustration with over three decades of neoliberal reform. Many men turned to their spiritual leaders in search of moral renewal. Muslim leaders responded by denouncing costly family celebrations and undermining women's ritual authority. These debates over Islam and custom were critical Muslim practices as far as they sought to reconcile textual, discursive and localized, historical practices specific to Senegal. These debates were also struggles over the nature of value. The nature of these struggles calls into question how Senegalese Muslims have created value over the *longue durée* of currency instability and global

volatility through participating in repertoires of fiscal performance, such as offerings to shaykhs, operating at the interface of regulated and unregulated economies of a global scale, partaking in microfinance projects, and bestowing cloth wealth in family ceremonies.

Given changes in the nature of work, from agriculture to overseas trade, visual objects—especially cloth and its role in documenting genealogies—have come to play a major role as social media in Muslim Senegal. Cloth expressed wholeness, becoming a placeholder for idealized complete families that, in reality, were a collection of broken bonds. Cloth is an ideal medium through which to discuss the production of social futures in Senegal. As Weiner argues for elsewhere, cloth is often a “visual substitute for history, ancestors and the immortality of human life” (Weiner 1985); it is for this reason that it has become a contentious subject of debate. The issue of visibility, unique to cloth, is also important. Not only is reciprocity as the basis for social production, for the ethnologist Marcel Mauss (1990 [1950]) analyzable as a total social fact *by the analyst*, but also, as Charles Piot points out for Kabre persons in Togo, it is through such ritualized moments that the nature of the social relationship is made *visible to others as well* (1999:77). In the context of an economy where people are abroad, visibility is itself a key unit of analysis. The debate that was occurring in the 1990s, was a dynamic one about the nature of the present: the conjuncture of neoliberal reform, Islam, and the predicaments of social production in sobering financial times. It was a debate about Islam in Senegal, and Islam elsewhere—in history, in the global sphere, in texts, and in bodily memory and practice.

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Notes

1 The use of the term caste and the portability of the term from India to West African societies were much debated in the literature throughout the 1970s. For a detailed analysis of the use of the term caste in the West African context, see Abdoulaye Bara Diop. *La société wolof*, (Paris: Karthala, 1981); Judith Irvine. *Caste and Communication in a Wolof Village*. PhD diss.

(Department of Anthropology: University of Pennsylvania); Tal Tamari. "The Development of Caste Systems in West Africa," *The Journal of African History* 32, no. 2 (1991):221-250, and D.M. Todd. "Caste in Africa?" *Africa* 47, no. 4 (1997):398-412.

For a more recent treatment of caste in relation to marriage, interpersonal relations, and self image see, Dial, Fatou Binetou

2008 Mariage et divorce a Dakar. Paris: Karthala.

and Mbow, Penda

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2 For a discussion of the significance of caste among Senegalese in the U.S. see Babou, Cheikh Anta

2008 Migration and Cultural Change: Money, Caste, Gender and Social Status among Senegalese Female Hair Braiders in the United States. *Africa Today* 55(2):3-22.

3 Amber B. Gemmeke also argues that Muslim women's practices have been overlooked by scholars in relation to her research on the esoteric practices of female shaykhs in Dakar.

Gemmeke, Amber

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Joseph Hill has written about Taalibe Baay female *muqaddams* in Dakar, Hill, Joseph

2010 'All Women are Guides': Sufi Leadership and Womanhood among Taalibe Baay in Senegal. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40:375-412.

4 With respect to women's dress specifically, see Heath, Deborah

1992 Fashion, Anti-Fashion and Heteroglossia in Urban Senegal. *American Ethnologist* 19(1):19-33.

5. In Arabic *tariqa* is synonymous with *sirat*, or path, but it has a wider meaning and can be translated as ways and means. See Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 28. Scholars have translated *tariqa* as brotherhood or *confrérie*; however, this term is misleading since the *turuq* include both male and female disciples. The *tariqa* has also been referred to in the literature as "order," but this term is also not really an accurate translation of the meaning of *tariqa*, which refers to the Sufi path or way to divine union.

6. Ninety percent of women and men in Senegal are Sunni Muslims and the majority belongs to one of four Sufi congregations—the Layanne, Tijaniyya, Qadiriyya, and Muridiyya. Villalón, Leonardo A.

2004 Senegal: Islamism in Focus. *African Studies Review* 47(2):61-71.

7. Sufism may be properly translated as Islamic mysticism, but it does not adhere to the notions of individualistic subjectivity that are prevalent in Christian mysticism (John Hunwick, personal communication, October 1997).

8. See the World Development Indicators database, April 2002.

9. 23 G/12 (17) «Nouvelles clauses de contrat matrimonial. Section I» État civil. Gouvernement General de L'AOF, Grand Imanat de Dakar, Réglementation Générale, 15 May 1946.

10 Diop noted the discrepancies among R. Rousseau, who argued that Wolof families practiced matrilineal descent prior to the spread of Islam; Fayet, who argued that patrilineal descent had been the norm prior to the introduction of Islam; the colonial Arabist Paul Marty, who argued that the Wolof practiced matrilineal descent but under Islam adopted a bilateral system of descent; the anthropologist David Ames, who suggested that Wolof families practiced double descent (with patrilineages controlling status and property and matrilineages providing advice and economic aid); and the anthropologist David Gamble who argued that Wolof families in the Gambia practiced unilineal descent with variations according to hereditary occupational groups. For the full discussion see Abdoulaye Bara Diop. *La Famille Wolof: Tradition et Changement*, (Paris: Karthala, 1985).

11 Drianke is a slang term that is taken from the Wolof radical *diri*, which means to pull a load behind one or to keep on a leash, and the Pulaar suffix *yanke* (*nke* in Soninke), which means the person who (Ndiaye 1998:274).

12. The notion of “women’s business” is not specific to Senegal. Annette Weiner noted the unwillingness of Trobriand men to discuss women’s exchange of banana leaf bundles during mortuary ceremonies. In her monograph of Trobriand exchange, *Women of Value, Men of Renown*, Weiner

recounts that she was told by a male Kiriwina interlocutor, that the exchange of cloth, here banana leaf bundles and fibrous skirts, were “women’s business.” She speculated that among her predecessors, including the founding figure of anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, wealth objects circulated by women were overlooked because they misunderstood this statement as derogatory. Weiner argues that what her interlocutor meant was that “women could tell me about their business much better than men because women were in charge of these distributions.” See Annette Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976) 12, note 4, chapter one.

13 Similarly, in Mauritania, Katherine Wiley discusses the continuing importance of hand dyed veils Wiley, Katherine

2009 Men in Abayas and Women in Dollars: The Mauritanian Veil in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. *In* Conference on Dress, Popular Culture, and Social Action in Africa. Northwestern University, March 13-14.

14. For further discussion of this see Annette Weiner’s discussion of Mauss in “Inalienable Wealth,” *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 2 (1985): 213.