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'CREATE YOUR SPACE!' LOCATING CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN OUAGADOUGOU

Nadine Sieveking

SETTING THE SCENE FOR A CONTEMPORARY DANCE WORKSHOP

At nine o'clock in the morning on 27 July 2011, another day of work is starting at the École Internationale de Danse Irène Tassembedo (EDIT) in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. The school was established in 2009 as a private enterprise by the internationally renowned dancer, choreographer and polyvalent artist Irène Tassembedo. It is located in Cissin, a more affluent southern quarter not far from the prestigious large villas and multi-storey buildings of Ouaga 2000, the newly constructed part of the city planned to symbolize its modernity, wealth and power. The school is composed of various studios that according to its website are 'equipped according to international norms' for professional dance training and capacity building; choreographic research; and artistic creation and diffusion. Based on this infrastructure, Tassembedo aspires to make the school 'the focal point of a network of African dancers and choreographers, a community committed to expressing in dance the enormous artistic, economic and human potentials, the joy of life, and the pain of a continent'.[1]

At this time of day the larger studio and the hall are still lying in silence, but will later be occupied and filled with noise by a summer holiday workshop for children of the wealthy urban elite, dancing alternately to Michael Jackson tunes and live *djembe* percussion. In the meantime, in the smaller studio, a group of sixteen women, mostly between their early twenties and late thirties, have already gathered, changed clothes, and prepared to start another session of a professional 'contemporary dance' workshop. Some of the women live in Ouagadougou while others have come from Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso's second largest city. A group of four dancers have come all the way by bus from Accra, Ghana; another participant has travelled by the same means from Lomé, Togo; and, finally, there is a woman of French origin living in Niamey, Niger, who has come by plane. They all form part of this year's training programme of the project Engagement Féminin, organized by two young Burkinabé choreographers. They have rented

NADINE SIEVEKING is a post-doctoral researcher at the Centre for Area Studies of the University of Leipzig. After her dissertation on the transcultural practice of African dance in Berlin she worked at the Transnationalization and Development Research Center, Bielefeld University. Her research interests include performance, gender, development, migration, transnationalization and Muslim society. Her current project on contemporary dance and social transformation in West Africa is based on fieldwork in Burkina Faso and Senegal. Email: nadine.sieveking@uni-leipzig.de

[1] 'L'EDIT devra se positionner comme le point focal d'un réseau de la communauté de danseurs et chorégraphes africains engagés à faire danser les énormes potentialités artistique, économique et humaine, la joie de vivre et les peines d'un continent', <http://www.edit-danse.org/qui-sommes-nous/philosophie.html>, accessed 11 April 2012.

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the studio at EDIT in order to ensure an appropriate environment for a workshop where the participants are trained in a kind of performance that is, deliberately, different from what they are 'used to doing' in their everyday lives.

In contrast to the movement repertoire of the children's holiday dance course, the professional training these women are engaging in can hardly be identified with forms and styles usually associated with 'African dance'. The women's workshop at EDIT bears no resemblance to the broad field of popular 'traditional' or 'modern' performance genres that are part of rural or urban ceremonial, daily or night life. Carried out within the framework of a formalized training programme, it clearly differs from the kind of practical training provided on the spot during rehearsals of the numerous, more or less professional performance troupes that exist in the city, including the Burkinabé National Ballet. Engagement Féminin forms part of an emerging cosmopolitan professional art world that significantly deviates from locally established popular cultural practices as well as from the national performing arts institutions. The women's as well as the children's dance courses indicate deep transformations of urban society, shaped by unequal economic growth, unevenly rising levels of formal education, and ongoing translocal and transnational migration.[2]

Taking the Engagement Féminin workshop[3] as an entry point, I explore how the practice of contemporary dance in Ouagadougou contributes to the emergence of a translocal urban space embedded in a dense network of transnational relations and connected to global 'art worlds' (Becker 2008; Belting 2009). 'Contemporary dance' is a fuzzy and highly contested label, especially when it comes to the composite notions of 'African contemporary dance' or 'contemporary African dance'. In the ongoing debates about these labels, artists from Africa are not only contesting the involvement of French state agencies in the promotion of this genre and their power to define and name it; they are also questioning whether they themselves should claim a legitimate authority (and/or an obligation) to represent the continent with their art. Yet, I am not primarily interested in the representational aspects of 'Performing Africa' (Ebron 2002). My focus is rather on the coming into being of contemporary dance in Africa as a cosmopolitan cultural practice that has emerged at the interface between local and global art worlds and the sphere of development politics. I argue that this practice should not be understood as a foreign import but as a productive means to organize, creatively use and articulate translocality, thereby reconfiguring urban space. The unequal power relations characterizing the professional art world of contemporary dance reflect and at the same time contribute to the tensions and contradictions of local urban societies in the making.

[2]Migrants from Burkina Faso mostly remain within the region. Since colonial times, labour migration to Côte d'Ivoire has involved large parts of the Burkinabé population and, in spite of the civil war and the more recent crisis of 2010–11, which caused massive return migration, Côte d'Ivoire remains the most important destination for Burkinabé migrants. Burkina Faso has also continuously received migrants and hosts an increasing number of refugees from neighbouring countries.

[3]This article is based on fieldwork in Ouagadougou during the Dialogues de Corps festival in December 2010 and 2012, as well as during the third and fourth workshop programmes of Engagement Féminin in July/August 2011 and 2012.

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In contrast to the comprehensive in-depth studies analysing popular performance genres in West Africa within particular national or ethnic frameworks (Barber 2000; Klein 2007; Neveu Kringelbach 2013; Schulz 2001), the focus of this article is on a globalized 'high cultural' artistic genre that has evolved within the transnational networks of cosmopolitan urban elites. Adopting an actor-oriented approach, I examine how current processes of professionalization in the local artistic field enhance border-crossing relations that lead to the creation of urban social spaces characterized by new boundaries and gendered inequalities. These inequalities have motivated the launching of the project Engagement Féminin.

The project, mainly carried out in Ouagadougou, is introduced as an initiative embedded in a pan-African artistic movement. My analysis, in the following sections, of the Engagement Féminin project loosely follows Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's (1997: 12–13) notion of the 'internal' and 'external relations' constituting the 'performance space'. However, I distinguish between internal and external relations only in a heuristic sense, since the pedagogical process systematically incorporates elements of art worlds elsewhere, forming part of the increasingly diversified transnational networks that are constitutive of the contemporary dance field. Access to these networks is restricted and related to various modes of distinction – gendered, generational, status-related, knowledge-based, and economic. Professionalization advances a process of social differentiation that is partly contradicting the agenda of those who want to 'bring change' by making contemporary dance more socially inclusive, like the directors of the Engagement Féminin project. Hence, as I argue in the conclusion, the social space created through this practice may accommodate diversity and incite the embodiment of new forms of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (White 2002: 682), but it hardly corresponds with what Ngugi conceived of as the 'open' space of artistic performance.

ENGAGEMENT FÉMININ AND THE NEW 'CHOREOGRAPHIC MOVEMENT' IN AFRICA

The directors of the Engagement Féminin project represent a young, upcoming generation of artists who form part of a 'choreographic movement' (Mensah 2005) that has gained momentum on the African continent since the turn of the millennium, capturing the attention of observers from international dance scenes all over the world. The various actors involved in this artistic current have different agendas, navigating between more 'technically' conceived standards of professionalization (Fau 2003: 64) and a more political search for social transformations in a broader sense. Because of the strong involvement of French state agencies in the field of contemporary dance in Africa, its conception as a locally grounded, genuine artistic 'movement' is contested (Neveu Kringelbach 2013: 150; Sieveking 2013: 264–5; Fau 2003: 77).

What many dance critics, cultural journalists and anthropologists in France (Mayen 2006; Amselle 2005; Mensah 2001) have celebrated as a 'choreographic revolution' (Mensah 2005: 1) on the African continent has in fact been triggered and sustained to a large extent by the French programme Afrique en Création, established under the umbrella of the Ministry of Cooperation and Development

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and later relocated under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Neveu Kringelbach 2013: 151; Despres 2011: 122–3, Fau 2003: 60). The major outcome of the programme has been the biannual international dance festival Rencontres Chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien.[4] Initiated in 1995, the event has generated a broad range of choreographic initiatives that have taken on their own dynamics, part of which is contesting the meaning of the label 'contemporary dance' in terms of Western artistic norms and conventions. Many African choreographers claim that in an African context this label has no meaning apart from designating practices of 'today' (Sanou 2008: 28). Thereby they underline the relevance of the actual social, political and cultural life on the continent for their work, while challenging the authority of Western experts who use the term 'contemporary' as a distinctive genre criterion, for example to define 'global art' (Belting 2009: 2). Nevertheless, the recent 'explosion of new choreographic talents' (Amselle 2005: 147) on the African continent has brought forward aesthetic norms and artistic principles that largely correspond to European conventions of 'high culture' (Andrieu 2012a: 192–6). Therefore, contemporary dance is often criticized as a culturally alienated genre, copying *la danse des blancs*, and appealing only to educated publics in the West or to the small fringes of expatriates and African urban intellectuals who have adopted Western tastes and habits. This critique, however, has to be nuanced and differentiated in at least two respects.

First, judgements differ according to the background of the speaker and, obviously, according to the situation. Even people who have never assisted in a contemporary dance performance associate it with an *affaire de blancs*. Casual spectators often find it too intellectual, abstract, difficult to access, or just nonsensical. Audience reactions frequently underline that while contemporary dance provokes reflection, its 'messages' can hardly be understood. But in general, more familiarized spectators tend to respond more positively to the aesthetics of contemporary dance, especially appreciating the way African performers use this genre to articulate the changing realities of 'our time' while at the same time bringing out the value of local culture and traditions.[5]

Second, aesthetic valuations are changing over time. Growing acquaintance with this new genre, the success of local artists who have adopted it, and the possibilities of international cooperation it provides have already led to a noticeable change in attitude over the last few years. Especially among young performing artists in Ouagadougou, the appreciation of contemporary dance

[4]The Rencontres Chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien, in the meantime renamed Danse l'Afrique Danse, were conceived as an itinerant contemporary dance competition, organized for the first time in 1995 in Luanda, Angola, under the direction of Alphonse Tiérou (Sanou 2008: 42–7; Mayen 2006: 130–3; Amselle 2005: 147–9). Since 2012 the competitive element has been abandoned and a new agenda adopted, which explicitly conceives of the event as a 'market' (Neveu Kringelbach 2013: 152).

[5]Audience responses have been studied through informal discussions as well as with the help of surveys carried out in small teams in cooperation with the festival organizers during the Dialogues de Corps festivals in 2010, 2011 and 2012 in Ouagadougou; in 2012 during the 'decentralized' performances in Bobo Dioulasso; and during the Kaay Fecc festival in 2011 in Dakar. On average the surveys encompassed 40 respondents, except for the 10th anniversary Dialogues de Corps festival in 2012 in Ouagadougou, where more than 200 participants responded to the questionnaire.

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as *un art qui nourrit son homme* (an art that can sustain a livelihood) has considerably increased. This includes opportunities to travel abroad as well as locally based livelihood strategies, since contemporary dance styles are used increasingly in popular video clips or integrated in large-scale public events like the opening and closing ceremonies of the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou (FESPACO).[6] In the domain of contemporary choreography 'new figures of success' (Neveu Kringelbach 2007: 88) have emerged from a generation of professional performing artists, now in their thirties or forties, who are strategically using transnational resources in their search for means to articulate, reflect and act upon the rapid social and cultural processes transforming their lifeworlds. For those who have not yet made it and are still struggling for recognition and economic success, if not 'survival',[7] in the artistic field, these transformation processes coincide with the experience of insecurity, engendering a permanent quest for balance and stability.

The first piece created in the framework of the Engagement Féminin project articulates this experience from the perspective of female dancers. The title, *Dans un s'y mettre* (literally: 'in a get going'), is hard to translate since it is a play on words, taking up the vernacular term *six mètres*, designating the intersection of a smaller street with one of the major roads in Ouagadougou, and referring at the same time to a particular dynamic of action, namely the engagement needed to realize one's aspirations as a dancer. Hence, the piece puts on stage '*cette quête quotidienne d'un choix qui répond à nos aspirations les plus profondes. Pour y arriver, il faut bien s'y mettre, c'est-à-dire s'engager dans une dynamique d'actions*' ('that everyday quest for an opportunity that complies with our deepest aspirations. To achieve this, one has to get going, that is, to commit oneself to dynamics of action').[8] The main props used for the stage setting are large straw baskets the dancers play with, throwing them towards each other or balancing them on their heads. For Sena Abigail, one of the protagonists, this pursuit of balance signifies 'the instability in life – trying to keep your decisions and go ahead so that this thing that we carry on our head will never fall!'[9]

Foregrounding the simplicity and playfulness of everyday urban life, the choreography transmits at the same time an artistic self-understanding marked by precariousness and volatility. In *Zouhan*,[10] the last piece created in the framework of Engagement Féminin, the theme of balance is also present but this time embodied by the project directors Auguste Ouédraogo and

[6]The opening and closing ceremonies of the FESPACO festival in 2011 and 2013 were directed by the two leading figures of the contemporary dance field in Ouagadougou, namely Salia Sanou and Seydou Boro.

[7]*Survivre* is the title of a piece by the female dance company Bisanwe from Ouagadougou, where the metaphor of surviving as a female artist is related to the existential topic of survival while giving birth.

[8]<http://mutualise.artishoc.com/carcol/media/5/dossier_de_pre769sentation_dans_un_sy_mettre.pdf>; <http://www.myspace.com/augustebienvenue>; accessed 23 May 2013.

[9]Comment by Abigail, 26 July 2012.

[10]*Zouhan* means the spoken word (*la parole*) in Lyélé, the language of Bienvenue Bazié's ethnic origin. Created in 2012, the piece is meant to be a *spectacle familial*, preferably performed in an open space, although it can also be played on stage' – see <http://www.myspace.com/augustebienvenue>, accessed 23 May 2013.

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Bienvenue Bazié themselves, who are combining gestures of traditional wrestling with contemporary dance movements. Other participants in the piece are a storyteller, a kora player, and a female singer and dancer who has been part of the Engagement Féminin programme. *Zouhan* stages a community get-together under the moonlight – a kind of sociality, in which old and young engage in a participatory exchange, that is about to disappear in contemporary urban settings, as the directors explain in their written presentation of the piece.

These choreographic visions stand in stark contrast to the images of urban life conveyed by a preceding generation of influential female pioneers of the genre, such as the previously mentioned polyvalent artist and entrepreneur Irène Tassembedo or her former teacher, Germaine Acogny. The latter is probably the best-known and most influential forerunner of contemporary dance in the West African region. In a statement published during her time as director of the prestigious dance academy MUDRA Afrique in Dakar (1977–1983), Germaine Acogny explains that her conception of contemporary art was inspired by the imagery of high modernist urbanity:

> The artistic movement into which I insert my own work, even though it is deeply rooted in popular traditions, is not at all a return to roots. On the contrary, we pursue a way that is altogether different and *resolutely urban*, reflecting the modern context within which so many of us, Africans of our time, must live and move and have our being. The Africa of sky-scrapers, the Africa of international alliances. (Acogny 1980: 25; emphasis added)

MUDRA Afrique, founded in 1977 by the French choreographer Maurice Béjart at the instigation of President Léopold Sédar Senghor and with the support of UNESCO, introduced a highly professional agenda with universalist claims. It played a crucial role in preparing the ground for contemporary dance in Africa by training the first generation of 'modern' African dancers according to international artistic standards. The school served as a showcase for Senegal's advanced artistic initiatives; but it proved to be a rather costly experiment in cultural modernization and had to be closed in 1983 because, after a change in government, funding dried up. In the meantime, many artists who were part of the first generation of state-supported 'cosmopolitan nationalists' (Neveu Kringelbach, this issue), including Germaine Acogny herself, have become private entrepreneurs, relying on international finance that is no longer channelled through their respective governments.

Interestingly, the new 'choreographic movement' that has grown out of transnational collaborations has become more and more male-dominated – at least when it comes to its visibility on international stages (Andrieu and Sieveking 2013; for Senegal, see Neveu Kringelbach, this issue).[11] This trend, regretfully noticed by professional observers of the scene for a couple of years, stands in contrast to the important role played by women like Irène Tassembedo

[11]Women assume important functions as directors of centres for professional training, or of the various festivals for contemporary dance that have multiplied on the African continent (Despres 2011: 137, fn 3).

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or Germaine Acogny among the avant garde of contemporary dance in West Africa. Considering the family background of these pioneers, who formed part of the social, economic and political elite during the first decades of independence, the current underrepresentation of female choreographers in the field of contemporary dance in Africa appears to be related to the simultaneous professionalizing and opening of this field towards less-privileged social spheres and groups.

The project Engagement Féminin can be seen as a self-reflexive turn of this current. Addressing female dancers from the West African region, the project was officially launched in 2009 by Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazié, the two male directors of the young independent dance company Art/Dév Auguste-Bienvenue. With this initiative the company wants 'to bring change through creations, to meet and share, to give and receive through dance. The training of young dancers is the main concern of the company.'[12] Conceived as a 'capacity-building' initiative for women only, Engagement Féminin endeavours to contribute to 'the emergence of a new generation of professional female dancers/choreographers'.[13] In a brochure ('Mapping Cultural Diversity') published by UNESCO, the project is highlighted as a 'good example', 'promoting freedom of artistic expression' and representing 'an innovative model for artistic and economic empowerment' (UNESCO 2010: 76). Engagement Féminin encompasses professional training workshops, artistic residencies and tours organized for the presentation of pieces created within this framework. With its specified target group and its long-term perspective, this training programme has been an innovative and – so far – still unique initiative in the field of contemporary dance. Nonetheless, the pedagogic principles and concept of choreography it is promoting can be seen as fairly representative of the new choreographic movement, which 'has become globalized, not as an aesthetic but rather as a mode of creation' (Neveu Kringelbach 2013: 170).

EMBODYING CONTEMPORARY CHOREOGRAPHY

On the morning of 27 July 2011, the last part of Engagement Féminin's third workshop series was about to start. The participants in the year's summer workshop had already been working for two weeks with different teachers, first with the project directors themselves, then with the dancer-choreographer Ousséni Sako who, like Auguste Ouédraogo, had just arrived from France where he is leading part of his professional life. The teacher for the last week introduced himself first in French, then in English in order to directly address and explicitly welcome the anglophone participants: 'Je m'appelle Lacina Coulibaly . . . you can call me Lasso.' Unlike the other trainers in the project, Lacina Coulibaly is fluent in English. Like an increasing number of Burkinabé artists, he has become active in the burgeoning US–African dance scene

[12] < http://cieauguste-bienvenue.blog4ever.com/blog/lire-article-171300-2207838-call_for_applications__contemporary_dance_workshop.html >, accessed 11 April 2012.
[13] *Ibid.*

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and regularly teaches African dance in theory and practice at several universities, most often at Yale. When he learned about the presence of a French and a German anthropologist as participant observers during the training programme, he immediately got interested, hoping (in vain) to get some new references for standard readings in 'African dance' that he could use in his courses.[14]

In the framework of Engagement Féminin, however, he was not supposed to teach a standardized version of 'African dance' to American students, but to give female dancers coming from various parts of the West African region the tools to engage themselves in choreography, thereby becoming artistically autonomous as creators of their own dance instead of just being interpreters of other people's ideas and visions. Explaining the specific aim of the Engagement Féminin workshop, Bienvenue Bazié underlined that 'nowadays, choreographers don't want to engage dancers who only execute movements – they want them to take part in the creation'.[15] This is why the company had conceived of this year's edition of Engagement Féminin with a focus on 'writing' (écriture) and the skills needed to develop a choreographic 'script'.

The term choreography (Greek: dance-writing)[16] usually refers to the inventing, composing and fixing of sequences of movement. This is mostly done in relation to musical elements or rhythmic patterns, but it may also be created in silence. In contemporary dance, choreography is often based, at least partly, on improvisation, providing only a guideline for invention and composition but not fixing the concrete form or sequence of movements. The idea of a choreographic 'script' transmits a set of internationally circulating artistic conventions that have become central to the transmission of contemporary choreography. But within local art scenes in West Africa, where the literacy rate is often low, especially among female dancers, the recurrent requirements of 'writing' dance in a literal sense constitute a major challenge and source of discouragement (Neveu Kringelbach 2013: 168). In a metaphorical sense, the notion of choreography can be understood as a generative pattern for creating the 'internal relations' of a performance space as conceived by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1997: 12), namely the interplay of actors on stage, including the *mise-en-sc*ène, and the audience. In the case of professional contemporary dance training workshops, the *mise-en-scène* evokes a cosmopolitan conversation with dancers from different places who become their own audience.

'It's about creating your space' – this was how Lacina Coulibaly explained his notion of choreography. 'Take your space, create your space!'[17] With these instructions he encouraged the participants not only to occupy the physical space but to create their own social space by connecting to the other participants, being

[14]As a main reference for his teaching, Lacina Coulibaly used the widely circulating works by Alphonse Tiérou, a dancer, choreographer, and researcher born in Côte d'Ivoire and based in Paris, <http://www.tierou-doople.com/Centre-Doople/Les-livres/>, accessed 23 May 2013.

[15]Discussion with Bienvenue Bazié, 12 July 2011.

[16]Castaldi (2006: 2–4) defines choreography generally as 'a form of historical writing that foregrounds the corporeal dimension of social subjects as the means and object of writing' and more specifically as 'the organizing principle of performance, while dance becomes the specific instantiation of choreographic principles'.

[17]Choreographic direction by Lacina Coulibaly, 27 July 2011.

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attentive to their bodily expressions and 'listening to another' (*être à l'écoute des autres*). The direction of 'listening to another', repeatedly given by all the teachers and extensively used throughout the workshop, functioned as a multivalent metaphor relating basic principles of contemporary choreography to more familiar settings of social interaction.

'*Être à l'écoute*' could be understood in a literal sense, because the dance students were indeed supposed to talk and listen to each other at particular moments in the workshop. Individual and group improvisations, with the remaining group observing attentively and later on commenting on what they had seen,[18] were an integral part of the training programme. This pedagogy has become a routine in workshops that propose a concept of contemporary dance as a way of 'dancing differently' in Ouagadougou (Andrieu 2012a: 192–4; Sanou 2008: 27–8). It introduces cosmopolitan 'gestures of similitude' (Gable 2002: 577) and provides a conventional form of mediating between globalized performing art forms and local aesthetics, modes of perception and reception. Feedback discussions are used to provoke interactions on a discursive level and allow for reflection and eventually revision of positions and perspectives. Moreover, through verbalization, important 'soft skills', knowledge, and linguistic competence required in interactions with programmers and varied audiences when touring abroad can be imparted (Neveu Kringelbach 2013: 166–7; Despres 2011: 133–4).

But the directive '*être à l'écoute'* is not only meant to be understood in a literal sense. The most important meaning and function is probably to help in creating a generative and generally applicable framework of reference for bodily interaction that does not rely on specific ethnically differentiated musical or rhythmical structures of local performance traditions, but rather deconstructs them. Throughout the Engagement Féminin workshop the participants were encouraged to search for bodily expressions and movements that 'you are not used to do'. Techniques used in this sense included contact improvisation, provoking physical interactions that did not correspond to the dancers' embodied habitus with regard to socially acceptable behaviour in public. Letting the participants dance without music or using electronic sounds without a consistent rhythmic structure was another way to break with locally established conventions. Elements provided by the trainers in order to be used for individual or group improvisations included sequences of dance steps that had to be deconstructed by the students in order to isolate particular movements as the basis for further explorations and variations. In this vain, traditional or neo-traditional dance repertoires can be used as creative resources for contemporary choreography. Decontextualized elements of ethnic traditions can be recontextualized as cosmopolitan gestures that are needed in order to travel and communicate

[18]On some occasions, filmed sequences of the workshop were used for this purpose. Most of the time, the audience included at least one of the workshop organizers and one or two anthropologists (including the author), who were occasionally filming. The company's administrator also frequently came to film with a camera on a tripod. Moreover, there were occasional visitors from the local performing arts scene as well as artists in residence participating from time to time in this highly self-reflexive audience of trained experts.

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through dance within border-crossing artistic projects, as Eveline,[19] coming from Togo, explained:

> *Si c'est la danse traditionnelle de chez moi, par exemple, elle ne sera pas comprise ici. Alors qu'avec la danse contemporaine tu as cette possibilité-là, de travailler la danse traditionnelle et de dire ce que tu veux. Puisque la danse traditionnelle de chez moi ne peut pas être mise dans le même contexte qu'ici, c'est différent. Les manières de bouger, les manières de voir dans ma tradition, c'est carrément différent. Et si on se résumait seulement aux danses traditionnelles, ça ne nous voyagerait pas.*
> (Take the traditional dance from my home region, for example, it will not be understood here. With contemporary dance you have this possibility to work with traditional dance and say what you want. Because traditional dance from my home region cannot be put in the same context as here [in Ouagadougou], it's different. The ways to move, the ways to look [at dance] as it is done in my tradition, it's completely different. And if we would reduce ourselves to traditional dances only, it would not allow us to travel.)

For Eveline, contemporary dance constitutes a means to 'get together several nationalities', engage in a common discussion, and establish networks for artistic collaboration and cultural exchange. She had already participated in a range of international workshops and was quite used to the kind of pedagogic directives applied in this workshop – in contrast to most of the other participants, for whom the directive to improvise movements outside habituated patterns of performative interaction caused embarrassment. The lack of a clearly fixed framework and a familiar, musically determined and rhythmically structured mode of interaction constitutes a major difficulty for many African dancers not yet acquainted with the contemporary genre. This difficulty arises not only for dancers, but equally for untrained audiences when asked to 'read' a contemporary dance piece – the 'script' of contemporary choreography is hardly understood by outsiders, who lack the necessary framework of interpretation. Contemporary choreography, as a conscious reappropriation, deconstruction and reconstruction of 'traditional' performance genres, does not refer to the 'static' mythical time of transcendent ritual performance (Barber 2000: 227). But it also departs from the idea of an actor occupying a fixed position in a narrative that follows the 'linear, forward-moving time' characteristic of 'modern' genres of theatrical performances (*ibid.*: 232). Relying on the notion of writing, it not only incorporates a central element of modernity but also appropriates it differently – emphasizing the agency of individual subjects and their capacities to create and transform space.

Artistic creation, as Lacina Coulibaly underlined throughout his teaching, involves more than the creation of movements in physical space – it requires the creation of presence in relation to the audience. 'You can be present without doing movements.' Thereby he transmitted the idea that creating and appropriating space through performing also means acting upon time and provoking moments of encounter and connectedness. 'The moment exists – we transform it.' This transformation occurs in a mode of creative interaction, since 'the moment

[19] 1 August 2012. All the first names of workshop participants who did not appear publicly are pseudonyms.

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belongs to nobody'.[20] As Bienvenue Bazié explained, such an approach not only complies with current international standards in contemporary dance but also corresponds to his personal conviction that a choreographer should always give the dancer the opportunity not just to exert prescribed movements, but to be creative and express her- or himself as an individual: '*Il faut laisser vivre la personne!*' (You have to let the person live!).[21]

These notions of artistic creation and individual agency, characteristic of the genre of contemporary choreography, rather contradict the working principles shared by professionals in more popular mediatized and commercialized urban performance genres, or in 'neo-traditional' troupes (Neveu Kringelbach 2013: 170). As Kadiatou underlined when describing the various activities in which she engages to secure her livelihood as a performer:

> *Si c'est SIAO ou FESPACO, on nous appelle et: brouc-brac! Dès qu'on donne un pas, il faut rentrer dedans pour être dans le temps, voilà! Il ne faut pas penser qu'ils vont prendre le temps de bien t'apprendre, non!'*
> (If it's SIAO or FESPACO, they call us and: *brouc-brac*! As soon as they give a step, you have to step in to be in time, that's how! Don't think that they will take the time to teach you well, no!) [22]

CONTEXTUALIZING CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN OUAGADOGOU

Kadiatou had come to Ouagadogou from Abidjan, where she grew up with one of her aunts. As indicated in her statement, she is not used to dancing in order to 'bring change', but rather to 'be in time' with currently dominant fashions. Like several other workshop participants whose backgrounds were shaped by labour migration and transnational family lives connecting Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, she was gaining the major part of her livelihood through dancing in video clips that display the popular Ivoirian musical and dance styles of Coupé-Décalé. While Côte d'Ivoire has a reputation for a particularly rich variety of popular 'traditional' and 'modern' urban dance styles, French promotion of contemporary choreography in Burkina Faso has made this country known as much more advanced in terms of opportunities for professional contemporary dance training. This was affirmed by all the participants in Engagement Féminin, including those coming from Ghana and Togo, who also felt that their respective countries were lagging behind the 'contemporary' movement.

Kadiatou's account of the performance practices that secure her livelihood indicates two features that distinguish contemporary dance from the popular urban dance styles in the region, including 'traditional', 'neo-traditional' and 'modern' genres.[23] First, in contrast to the former, the latter (all three genres)

[20]Comments by Lacina Coulibaly during workshop, 27 July 2011.
[21]Discussion with Bienvenue Bazié, 12 July 2011.
[22]Comment in final workshop discussion, 2 August 2011. SIAO (Salon International de l'Artisanat de Ouagadougou) is an international art and craft fair; FESPACO is the largest African film festival. Both are held biennially in Ouagadougou.
[23]In the context of West African popular performance practices, the dichotomy between 'modern' and 'traditional' often corresponds to a distinction between urban and rural practices.

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are characterized by clearly defined and internally differentiated musical or rhythmic structures as well as by differences in terms of instrumentation and language (White 2008: 32). Every dance step has to be placed within these structures in order to perform well and be 'in time'. Although innovation is appreciated and individuality, together with improvisation, has its place within most popular genres, the dance usually remains closely related to the music, rhythmic pattern and oral text, affirming the 'relationship between the aural and the kinetic' as a constitutive element of the dance (Castaldi 2006: 4). Moreover, particular dance and music styles are often restricted to specific situations and social groups. Performing a particular dance can indicate social status (Heath 1994). This goes along with a widespread social stigmatization of dancing on stage, especially when it comes to women (Neveu Kringelbach 2007: 97–8). Most conventional performance patterns of locally established cultural practices are gendered, and many songs and dances reserved for only one of the sexes exist. Even when they are appropriated by the other sex, their meaning remains gendered (Durán 2000). Contemporary dance deliberately deconstructs these semantic frameworks, transforming elements of local performance traditions into 'raw material' that can be recomposed and used as creative resources for productions that circulate in different spheres.

The second aspect that distinguishes the contemporary from traditional or modern popular dance genres in West Africa is the significance given to formal professional training. In this respect, state support, national institutions and politics promoting 'arts and culture' make a crucial difference. As compared to the ambitious artistic initiatives of poet-President Léopold Sédar Senghor and his rather elitist cultural politics in Senegal during its first two decades of independence, the case of Burkina Faso is significantly different. During the period of the 'popular revolution' under the regime of Thomas Sankara (1983–7), the vision of a state-driven reformation and active 'reconstruction of culture' came to play a major role in national politics (Andrieu 2009, 2012a: 180–2). Performing arts were promoted at all levels of state-supported educational and cultural institutions in order to modernize 'backward' local cultural practice. Nationalization and top-down popularization, however, did not automatically lead to a professionalization of the arts. Artists in Burkina Faso have achieved formal recognition of their professional status by the state only recently. National institutions that provide a formalized framework for the establishment of dance as a profession in Burkina Faso – like the national art academy or the national ballet (Akouwandambou 2011) – suffer notoriously from a lack of resources. After the revolutionary regime met a violent end, the government of Burkina Faso, like most governments in the region, has retreated from actively engaging in cultural politics and has left the development of the arts sector mainly to individual entrepreneurs who engage in international cooperation and transcultural collaborations (Klein 2007: xxiv–xxv).

This conceptual dichotomy, rooted in colonialism, has been revived through post-colonial, state-monitored cultural policies. In the case of Burkina Faso these include the prescription of concrete formal criteria applied in the context of the annual festival, Semaine Nationale de la Culture (Andrieu 2012a: 181).

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This leads us to a third distinctive aspect of the contemporary dance genre, namely the increasing engagement of international development agencies in the promotion and professional 'development' of this art form on the African continent. This aspect points to the influence that globalized artistic standards and mainstream development discourses exert in this field. Moreover, it indicates the entanglement of the new artistic movement with struggles over power and control at an international level. Although recently the European Union has come in as an important donor for cultural cooperation programmes in the West African region, the domain of contemporary dance is still clearly dominated by French agencies, which continue to invest heavily in the professionalization of this particular artistic genre. These dynamics can be illustrated through the example of the Centre de Développement Chorégraphique (CDC) – La Termitière, in Ouagadougou. This centre, officially inaugurated in 2006, was established by the co-founders and directors of the internationally acclaimed company Salia nï Seydou (Mayen 2006). It has become the most influential institution promoting contemporary dance in Burkina Faso, constituting a central node in the networks of the 'new choreographic movement' in West Africa. It hosts artists in residence and provides space, technical facilities and organizational infrastructure to hold workshops or perform on a large and well-equipped stage.

The CDC has been a major driving force in professionalizing the field of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso. Creating an institutionalized framework for knowledge transmission within the restricted time-space of workshops, often with teachers coming from abroad for a short period of time, it is a platform for transnational networking and has contributed to the emergence of a cosmopolitan '*culture de la formation chorégraphique*' (Andrieu 2012a: 190). In contrast to EDIT, and like the former MUDRA Afrique in Dakar, the CDC is not a private enterprise but a public institution set up with the support of the Burkinabé government and finance secured by international donors, in this case mainly through the French embassy. Moreover, the CDC in Ouagadougou is connected to the National Dance Centre in France, a centralized structure that forms part of state-subsidized systems of artistic creation and diffusion, encompassing eight other CDCs located in major cities of France. This constellation has raised criticism from actors who considers it as just 'the ninth CDC' that happens to be located in Ouagadougou but is nevertheless part of the French cultural establishment.[24]

The efforts towards self-determination by West African performing artists who are either deliberately opposing ongoing French cultural hegemony or failing to access the respective networks are coupled with a search for alternative frameworks of artistic development, following a strategy of diversification in a double sense: broadening the range of potential donors and opening access to new economic and political resources by promoting 'cultural diversity'. Enterprises such as EDIT or the dance school École des Sables, established in 2004 in Senegal by the former director of MUDRA Afrique, Germaine Acogny, illustrate

[24]This standpoint was put forward by the Senegalese choreographer Jean Tamba (cf. Neveu Kringelbach, this issue).

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this trend of combining profit making with a cultural exchange and social development agenda. Both schools not only offer programmes for professional dance training but also try to attract dance tourists from abroad. Whereas École des Sables has become a platform for choreographers from all over the world searching for new talents and a springboard for dancers aspiring to an international career, EDIT caters more to the needs of the local urban population, including the better-off and expatriate communities who can afford, for example, to send their children to a holiday dance course.

The young generation that is currently being trained in contemporary dance in West Africa spans very mixed backgrounds that extend well beyond the affluent social strata (Despres 2011: 122). Being able to apply for funding for programmes with a cultural or social development agenda is thus important in making professional training economically sustainable. This is also confirmed by the fact that the only professional training programme offered by the CDC over a longer and continuous period (three years: 2009–12), *Je danse donc je suis*, was part of a transnational project financed by the European Commission with the aim of contributing to 'the personal fulfilment, the socio-cultural development and the social integration of "young people in difficulties"'.[25] At the same time, even if finance is organized through transnational networking, political support at a national state level is still crucial when contemporary performing artists attempt to professionalize their field of practice. The interface with the state remains important, not least regarding the formal recognition of performing arts as a profession – which has consequences in terms of economic entitlement and access to systems of social security. But it also entails struggles over symbolic capital and the legitimating authority to define who is an artist, what art is, and the position and function of an artist in society.

These struggles over recognition are, in my view, at the core of those processes that qualify the new artistic current as a movement, searching for ways towards autonomy and striving at the same time for local rootedness. Trying to articulate their own visions as well as to create sustainable livelihoods, most artists find themselves in a precarious balance between contradictory forces and claims. While experimenting with diverse artistic forms and aesthetics they all agree that professionalization is needed in order to comply with the standards of globalized art worlds. French and other European agencies have designed frames for artistic cooperation that focus on professionalization, providing a mutually beneficial exposure and exchange between technicality and African 'freshness' (Amselle 2005: 139). Artists with an international reputation assume a critical role in transforming the alleged 'fallow ground' of contemporary African art into fields of cultural practice, where the artistic 'offsprings' of 'seeds' planted by French agencies (Amselle 2005: 136) can be reappropriated and the means of production come under local ownership. With regard to the standardizing effects of

[25]The programme *Je danse donc je suis*, largely financed through the EuropeAid programme Investing in People, was conducted by Africalia, a Belgian agency for the promotion of arts and culture, in a cooperation between the CDC and the Donko Seko dance centre in Bamako, which in turn were officially partnered – for example, in the selection of the participants by locally established associations and networks for disadvantaged youth and children (<http://www.cdc-latermitiere.org>, accessed 11 April 2012).

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professionalization, the capacity to manage diversity and use it as a creative resource becomes a strategic asset.

'SHOWING IT ALL OVER THE WORLD'

'First I would like everybody to present herself. And I want you to tell me what you think improvisation is about, even if it's not true. I'm not asking you to say what is true.' This is how Lacina Coulibaly started the first session of his teaching, inciting all the workshop participants to express their ideas by insisting on the possibility of diverging standpoints and deliberately ignoring differences based on a recognized hierarchy of authoritative knowledge (Lachenmann 2004: 124–5). In trying to convey the idea that all of them could have a voice, he was well aware of the heterogeneity of the group.

From the first day of the workshop onwards it was evident that the levels of practical as well as theoretical knowledge about contemporary dance among the sixteen participants were very diverse. Moreover, not only their bodily but also their rhetorical skills and language proficiency varied a lot, indicating differences in their national as well as educational backgrounds. Some of the participants from Burkina Faso had stopped primary school education after a few years and felt uneasy when having to express themselves in French. By contrast, all the participants coming from other countries, namely Ghana, Togo and Niger, had completed advanced courses or were still studying at university. Four had a university degree from the dance department of the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon. Like the student from Lomé, who was also a member of the Togolese national ballet, one of the Ghanaian dance students was simultaneously following studies in law in order to have an alternative option for a professional career. When it came to discussing the topics they wanted to treat in their individual performances, these two students insisted on the importance of promoting women's rights and gender equality – an issue that by no means commanded consensus among the group.

The issue of gender relations was addressed very differently during the next workshop programme in 2012 when the teaching team was all female, including two outspoken feminist artists who had come from the United States. One of them was Nora Chipaumire, a performer from Zimbabwe, who had received a degree in law from Makerere University before engaging in a professional career as dancer and choreographer. Married to a choreographer from Burkina Faso, she was living and working mainly in the United States but especially appreciated the opportunity to come and work with African dancers. She often resorted to her broken French in order to express her desire to communicate directly and share experiences with her mainly francophone students:

> *Je danse parce que c'est ma conviction . . . et c'est . . . le partage avec le monde, mais spécialement, s'il y a possibilité de partager avec les africaines, moi, j'adore ça! Parce que pour moi la danse ce n'est pas seulement pour l'Occident. C'est vrai, je vis aux États-Unis et je donne beaucoup de stages là-bas, mais s'il y a possibilité de partager ici en Afrique moi, j'aime beaucoup ça* – it's like a gift.

(I dance because it is my conviction . . . and it is . . . sharing with the world, but especially if there is a possibility to share with African women, I love it! Because

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for me dance is not only for the West. It's true, I live in the United States and I give a lot of workshops there, but if there is possibility to share here in Africa, for me, I very much like that – it's like a gift.)[26]

Nora Chipaumire had come for three weeks and left a strong impression on her students. As compared to the 'soft' pedagogy applied by the male teachers during the previous workshop, the participants generally preferred the 'hard' methods of senior female authorities, teaching them that women should 'fight' for themselves. Men would not be able to train them in this way because 'they feel compassionate towards us' (*ils ont pitié de nous*). Nora Chipaumire's teaching was particularly appreciated because she was 'working like a man' but also caring for her students, counselling and encouraging them: 'It's my real wish that you will in the next coming future, in the very near future be making your own work and showing it all over the world.'[27] She explained that a lot of the movement repertoires she used during her class formed part of the performative practices to which rural women in Zimbabwe resorted in the struggle for their rights. Her use of methods for female empowerment, effective on a physical as well as symbolical level, complemented the teaching provided by the other female choreographers, contributing to a very intensive working atmosphere that was clearly different from the previous workshop programme. For Eveline from Lomé, working among women had provided more opportunities and incentives to bring out the participants' individual creative potential because *'étant entre nous, les femmes, il y a eu cette liberté d'expression, et on appelait les choses par leurs noms et on te poussait à aller plus loin. Alors ça a été intéressant quoi!'* (being amongst ourselves, as women, there was this freedom of expression, and we called things by their names and you were pushed to go further. So, it was quite interesting!)[28] Nevertheless, Eveline, for whom Engagement Féminin added to earlier experience with a range of other international workshops, was very grateful to the male directors of the programme because they had created this opportunity to work exclusively among women. In the final discussion round at the end of her teaching part, Nora Chipaumire also underlined her gratitude to the organizers:

> Thanks to the company Auguste-Bienvenue for making that possibility, for creating a space where we can have this moment to exchange, for our paths to cross. But it's not the last time we will meet, because the world is really small and flat, so I'm sure we will see each other again, in performances, in different spheres, so, *je ne dis pas* goodbye*, je dis à bientôt!*

Asked by her students where they could meet her again and further their contemporary dance training, Nora Chipaumire mentioned the ever-expanding networks of contemporary dance 'in Nairobi, in Kinshasa, in Maputo, in Ouagadougou, Dakar … obviously overseas there are so many possibilities around, on the continent [even] a little bit more'.[29]

[26]Comment by Nora Chipaumire, 21 July 2012.
[27]*Ibid.*
[28]Comment by Eveline, 1 August 2012.
[29]Comment by Nora Chipaumire, 21 July 2012.

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In reality, however, these possibilities are restricted and the workshop participants were well aware of the fact that their chances of social and spatial mobility were unevenly distributed. Among the seven women from Bobo Dioulasso who had been part of the previous Engagement Féminin workshop, Binta was the only one who was able to make it to Ouagagoudou again in 2012 – all the others had lacked the necessary financial means. In Bobo Dioulasso, Binta performs with various theatrical troupes where she is sometimes able to make a little money, mostly in the context of educational programmes or awareness-raising campaigns that extend to the surrounding rural communities. To secure her livelihood, she runs a small 'kiosk' and is also helped by her boyfriend. In 2011, she had come to participate for the first time in the Engagement Féminin programme, together with her friend Mariam, who was also struggling to make ends meet by running a 'kiosk'. Mariam had come along in search of better livelihood opportunities as a performer in Ouagadougou, where she eventually stayed because she had found a new boyfriend there who could help.

Their first experience with Engagement Féminin had been very encouraging and inspiring for them. For Mariam, the most important aspect of the workshop had been the fact that the organizers had not 'sorted out' *(trié)* the beginners and less-skilled dancers among the applicants, as most choreographers do when recruiting performers for a new piece. Together in Bobo Dioulasso, Binta and Mariam used to create their own choreographies but, as Binta explained, they never presented them in public before asking for advice from a friend, who is a senior choreographer. If, for example, they had planned a forward step in the dance sequence, and he thought it would be better to make it backwards, they would have followed his suggestion. After the Engagement Féminin workshop, Binta believed, they would still try to get his feedback and share ideas with him but, nevertheless, continue to 'make our forward step' because 'it is our creation'. Hence, their example implicitly commented on and revised a critique formulated by Irène Tassembedo at a public discussion, where she had objected to the gendered hierarchies of Engagement Féminin's organizational structures, and suggested that instead of taking 'a step forwards' in empowering women, the male project directors had made 'a step backwards'.

Yet, Binta was less optimistic about her own artistic advancement after participating in the 2012 edition. She realized that she was still far from making artistic work that could be shown 'all over the world'. While she had been going on with her diverse activities in Bobo Dioulasso without much change, in the meantime in Ouagadougou Kadiatou and another participant in the 2011 workshop programme had been integrated in the professional training programme *Je danse donc je suis* (I dance therefore I am) offered by the CDC. This programme, free of charge because financed by the European Union, and providing training by a range of internationally renowned choreographers based in Europe, was in its last phase now. Equilibrating the gender ratio of the predominantly male group of participants, the female newcomers had joined in preparing '*la sortie*' – the release of a new generation of professionally trained dancers. Although Kadiatou and her friend from Côte d'Ivoire still performed for popular video clips in order to sustain their livelihoods, they had now taken an important step towards integrating in the professional international contemporary dance circles.

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The examples of Binta and Mariam illustrate how through participation in the Engagement Féminin project distinct local urban artistic practices have become translocally interrelated and connected to the global art world of contemporary dance. However, this might not help them in the future to make their own work and 'show it all over the world'. Not only in terms of physical training but also in formal education they are lagging far behind the level of skills acquired by the mostly younger *Je danse donc je suis* participants who will be competing with them for opportunities to work in the realm of contemporary choreography. Instead, their examples endorse the sceptical position towards the Engagement Féminin project articulated by Irène Tassembedo. She objects to the professional artistic agenda of the project, which assumes that dancing should be a full-time occupation that eventually leaves 'no scope even for a little independent trade on the side' (cf. Barber 2000: 284), making performers dependent on the (probably male) directors of artistic projects. From her own experiences in establishing a professional training programme, Irène Tassembedo knows that most of the dance students from Burkina Faso have very limited economic resources, and that many among them also lack the level of literacy needed to comply with the basic requirements of a regular professional training. Therefore, she doubts the practical usefulness of the artistic principles put forward by the trainers of Engagement Féminin, and the kind of elitist cosmopolitan pedagogy that deliberately ignores social inequalities and gendered differences – expressing an understanding of art that assumes universal validity but can hardly be appreciated without a certain educational and social background.

Moreover, Irène Tassembedo is conscious of the fact that in making a living through performing one still risks turning into a social outlaw, moving around with 'people who drum and dance while others are working' (Barber 2000: 46). To declare one's profession as a dancer provokes at best the well-intended advice to look for a job instead: '*faut chercher du boulot*' (Andrieu 2012b: 57). Being able to comply with the standards of a globalized performing art world is not enough to maintain respect in a local arena where a public display of economic achievement is needed to gain social recognition (Mayen 2006: 136). Following the strategies of many transnational migrants before them, the directors of the CDC and some of their fellows have materialized their success – for example, by investing in real estate in Ouaga 2000, not far from Irène Tassembedo's recently constructed school. Thereby they have become new 'figures of success' (Banégas and Warnier 2001), turning the field of performing arts in West Africa into a hub of hopes and expectations for a whole generation of young, ambitious urbanites. In contrast to the much more popular, but still almost exclusively male practice of football (Baller, this issue), the field of contemporary dance seems to promise possibilities of social and geographical mobility for young women too.

Concerning the access to transnational networks and resources, which have become crucial for the professional career of a contemporary dancer in Africa, gender plays an important role but probably not the decisive one. Like Germaine Acogny in Senegal, the directors of the two professional dance schools in Burkina Faso – EDIT and CDC – have remarkably privileged family backgrounds. Even before becoming internationally recognized and economically successful by 'dancing differently', they could fall back on a wealth of economic, social

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and cultural resources,[30] and profit in one way or the other from political support, even if it emanated from the government of a country other than their own. Their backgrounds thus indicate that gender cannot be mobilized as the sole or principle explanatory category accounting for the emergence of new inequalities.

CONCLUSION: STEPS TOWARDS AN OPENING?

Talking about his professional trajectory, Bienvenue Bazié indicated the relevance of various forms of knowledge acquired throughout his childhood and youth. Encouraged by his father, who was a teacher, he had become a member of theatrical troupes at school, taking part in regional and national competitions, and in summer camps – where he met Auguste Ouédraogo. By the early 1990s both were experienced in performing for large audiences, embodying an art form that was meant to integrate diverse ethnic constituencies and 'develop' the unified nation. As they went their own way, gathering experiences in the context of various independent dance groups and eventually establishing their own company, the horizon of their artistic vision shifted radically. As Bienvenue Bazié explained, around 2000, when he decided to abandon his university studies as an accountant in order to concentrate fully on contemporary dance, this field was already expanding rapidly in Burkina Faso but 'we could not imagine that English would one day be important in our lives!'[31]

In the meantime things have changed rapidly and English has certainly become important in the lives of many Burkinabé artists. Lacina Coulibaly and many of his fellow artists lead transnational professional and family lives, constantly moving not only in terms of geographical distance, but also in terms of constant border crossings between various social and cultural spaces. Their complex livelihood arrangements and their permanent transgressions of national, social and cultural boundaries can be seen as paradigmatic for the evolution of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso since the turn of the millennium. The diversification of their networks constitutes an effective strategy to subvert the hegemonic system of French cultural politics and institutions for artistic cooperation, and to create new room to manoeuvre.

Yet, the 'explosion of new choreographic talents' in Africa and the social spaces created by them hardly correspond to what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1997) conceived of as the 'open space' of artistic performance and its 'explosive' potential. In contrast to the antagonistic relations between artists and the state in early post-colonial Kenya, to which Ngugi is referring, the 'contemporary' choreographic movement has emerged in the aftermath of state withdrawal in favour of a neo-liberal world order. The new inequalities in the field of contemporary dance are

[30]The social background of the co-founders of the CDC, Salia Sanou and Seydou Boro, is described by Gérard Mayen (2006: 75–80). In his own account of his origins, Salia Sanou underlines the particular cultural knowledge, social prestige and spiritual authority of his grandfather (Sanou 2008). Similarly, Germaine Acogny (1980) lays particular emphasis on her inheritance from her grandmother, who was a Yoruba priest. See <http://www.jantbi.org/spip.php?rubrique6>, accessed 11 April 2012.

[31]Interview with Bienvenue Bazié, 26 July 2011.

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such that the current situation is characterized less by an opposition between artists and the state than by rivalry between artists of different origins and generations, competing for scarce economic and symbolic resources. The controversial debates on the meaning of 'contemporary African dance' point to struggles over claims for legitimate authority and artistic seniority, and reflect shifting notions concerning the role and position of performing artists in Africa's rapidly changing urban societies. At the same time they express the growing desire of internationally acclaimed performers for recognition by local African publics.

Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazié still occupy junior positions in the artistic field. Promoting a notion of arts as a space for exchange between different social and cultural spheres, they represent an intermediary position and assume the function of cultural brokers. Initiating the Engagement Féminin project, they have appropriated globalized artistic concepts and development discourses in order to make the practice of contemporary dance more socially inclusive. Similarly, through their artistic creations the Auguste-Bienvenue company searches for the aesthetic realization of an urban art form that integrates heterogeneity in spite of the processes of social differentiation that accompany professionalization. *Dans un s'y mettre* illustrates that taking steps towards an opening of the social space of contemporary dance entails a permanent quest for balance. *Zouhan*, moreover, integrates diverse elements of translocal cultural life that had been excluded in modernizing visions of urbanity. Its premiere in 2012, at the Dialogues de Corps festival in Ouagadougou, was staged outside the theatre building in a very cheerful atmosphere, evoking the presence of rural elements of sociality mingled in the urban environment of an international dance festival. Leaving behind earlier concepts of contemporary dance as a 'resolutely urban' art form that conjures 'the Africa of skyscrapers and international alliances', the company has taken a further step towards an opening of the performance space, allowing a rooted cosmopolitan urbanity to be embodied in new ways.

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ABSTRACT

Since the turn of the century contemporary dance has been gaining momentum as a pan-African artistic movement in which a new generation of performers is engaging. In contrast to more popular forms of 'traditional' or 'modern' performance genres, this new movement has evolved within the cosmopolitan urban elite and is driven by processes of professionalization that lead to the creation of new, border-crossing artistic spaces. These spaces are characterized by new boundaries and inequalities, related to various modes of distinction reflecting the shifting grounds of social status – gendered, generational, knowledge-based and economic. Taking an artistic 'capacity-building' project targeting female dancers in West Africa as an entry point, the article analyses how the practice of contemporary dance in Ouagadougou leads to the emergence of a translocal social space embedded in a dense network of transnational relations and connected to global art worlds. It is argued that the unequal power relations characterizing the professional art world of contemporary dance reflect the tensions and contradictions of local urban societies in the making and at the same time contribute to a reconfiguration of urban spaces where new forms of rooted cosmopolitanism can be invented.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis le tournant du siècle, la danse contemporaine connaît un véritable essor en tant que mouvement artistique panafricain auquel s'associe une

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nouvelle génération d'artistes. Contrairement aux formes d'arts « traditionnelles » ou « modernes » plus populaires, ce nouveau mouvement s'est développé au sein d'une élite urbaine cosmopolitaine et est entraîné par des processus de professionnalisation qui conduisent à la création de nouveaux espaces artistiques transfrontaliers. Ces espaces se caractérisent par de nouvelles frontières et inégalités associées à divers modes de distinction reflétant le changement des fondements du statut social, basés sur le sexe, la génération, la connaissance et l'économie. À partir d'un projet de « renforcement des capacités » artistiques de danseuses en Afrique de l'Ouest, l'article analyse comment la pratique de la danse contemporaine à Ouagadougou conduit à l'émergence d'un espace social translocal inscrit dans un réseau dense de relations transnationales et lié aux mondes de l'art à l'échelle mondiale. Il soutient que les relations inégales de pouvoir qui caractérisent le monde de l'art professionnel de la danse contemporaine reflètent les tensions et les contradictions de sociétés urbaines locales en devenir et contribuent, dans le même temps, à une reconfiguration d'espaces urbains dans lesquels il est possible d'inventer de nouvelles formes de cosmopolitanisme enraciné.

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