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Chapter 4

Dakar by Night: Engaging with a Cosmopolitanism by Contrast



Thomas Fouquet

4.1 Introduction

This study aims to bring to light some ways of being-in-town that organize desires for being-in-the-world. Drawing on 20 years of anthropological fieldwork in Dakar, it relies on a simple yet substantial premise: a very large number of urban Senegalese youths express a strong desire to move North, or West, while only a small minority will be able to do so. My questioning focuses on those who stay but whose modes of sticking around are deeply influenced by their longing for a larger world (Fouquet 2008). Ethnographically, and in view of contemporary expressions of “cityness” (Sassen 2010), this can be made visible by peculiar uses of the city with social and cultural mobilities tending to compensate for an unreachable geographical one. More broadly, such configurations can be understood in terms of the concrete urban cosmopolitan experiences they convey – that is, a cosmopolitanism that emerges in the wake of constant non-travelers’ paths into the city as compared to the ability of “frequent travelers” to move around the world (Calhoun 2002). This can seem counterintuitive as the individual potential for mobility has long been positioned as the most important criterion in defining (admittedly in its elitist version) the cosmopolitan condition. In my work in Dakar, mobility remains a key issue, but rather on the level of an intentionality closely mediated by a “globalization of dreams” (Geschiere and Rowlands 1996), thus introducing a discussion of the cultural and socioeconomical perimeters of cosmopolitanism itself. My ambition here is to define cosmopolitanism not so much as the convenient reflection of (privileged) social status but rather in inherently relational terms – that is, “being cosmopolitan rather than,” “citizen of the world rather than,” “member of the world society rather than,” “well aware of global cultural trends rather than,” and so on.

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Under such conditions, this contrasting understanding of cosmopolitanism can only be a constructive one, strongly rooted in an empirical framework (in this case, the urban temporalities of young Senegalese women). Indeed, my main ethnographical scene is Dakar by night, which I address both as a tangible, infrastructural entity and as a moral region where some kind of subjective external projection, cultural renegotiation and, on the whole, a change of scenery at home seem accessible or at least possible. The urban night appears as a “time of the world” (Diouf 2013), in contrast to the diurnal city which remains tinged with negative judgements of localism among interlocutors. The particular ambiance, cultural styles (music, clothing, dancing, etc.) and attitudes, as well as the fact that some nocturnal environments are highly internationalized and bring together people who do not cross paths the rest of the time, play an important role in the “cosmopolitan sense” that my interlocutors subjectively associate with the urban night. However, far beyond the potentially “objective cosmopolitan status” of the nocturnal city, what I want to suggest here is that what makes the night “cosmopolitan” is first and foremost the discontent, frustration, and sometimes despair that are contrastively associated with daytime. While the city by night is related to the idea of a widening scope of possibilities, the diurnal one is somehow a depository of popular grievances, especially that one of, to put it roughly, feeling stuck (both socially and geographically).

We find here the first indications of the (urban) night cosmopolitics that are at the core of this chapter. The alleged “openness” of nightlife often makes it suspect by association with a fear for social, cultural and moral perdition. In Dakar, evidence of this can be found in the plethora of sensationalist press articles or the offensives brought by moral entrepreneurs, especially in the religious sphere, against a number of practices that Dakar-by-night is reputed to host or promote: drinking, sexual intimacy (possibly priced), accoutrements and dances considered, if not outrageous, as “not virtuous.” This nocturnal stigma is actually very common worldwide, as the urban night is commonly considered a time-space of weakened social and moral control. However, in the Senegalese context, these denunciations may support a much broader critique addressed to foreign (not to say Western) models that are supposed to negatively impact Senegalese youth. So beyond the sociopolitical influence of “traditional” or “religious” moral ethics, Dakar-at-night also raises questions related to “postcoloniality.” Be it ways of clothing or speaking, usages of the body and sexuality, modes of behaving and performing oneself publicly, the Dakar urban night is seen as a hotspot for “imported” styles and practices that are appropriated locally and thus the target of judgments concerning cultural illegitimacy or moral danger. This nocturnal stigma applies with greater force to women, as is well shown by the popular Wolof expression *jiggeen yu gën guddi*, which can be literally translated as “girls who go out at night.” This phrase conveys a presupposition of debauchery, even working as a parabolic (d)enunciation of prostitution: seeking the “good life” in the nocturnal world can expose women frontally to “low life” judgments. More generally, the social postures adopted at night are frequently assimilated to cultural *impostures*. Following this vulgate of “the loss,” the fact of culturally “sleeping” with Western worlds raises the risk of being cutting off from a certain idea of social and cultural authenticity, with all the supposedly harmful and perverse

consequences that this conveys (Mbembe 2006). It should be added that these configurations appear exacerbated for the urban night, so the social judgments that the nocturnal city engenders reactivate and locate in a more global horizon the classical binary of “tradition versus modernity.” This is further evidence of the cosmopolitical dynamics that “inhabit,” cross or impregnate the nocturnal city.

At the same time, according to many of my interlocutors in Dakar, the attraction of nightlife is closely linked to the opportunities it provides for reaching something broader than a “here and now” very commonly experienced as social frustration and geographical blocking. In this view, Dakar by night appears as a window open to the world, especially in a context where the heightened desire for migration and mobility goes hand in hand with the difficulties or even impossibility of realizing them for those excluded from global movement.

In the cases sketched here of dangerous nights versus nocturnal opportunities and openness, the urban night is conceived as an emblematic site of circulation and domestication of globalized trends. From this point of view, the nocturnal city takes shape and meaning on a terrain of confrontation articulating different visions of the place one occupies or *should* occupy in world processes. While this tension between “cosmopolitans and locals” (Hannerz 1990) might appear trivial, it still needs to be considered empirically, in particular regarding its tangible urban translations. This chapter engages with grassroots cosmopolitical expressions that unfold in the social and temporal margins of Dakar, where indocility and critical postures are interwoven with hopes for a better future. The problem is thus how to deal with the making of a *cosmopolitanism by contrast* organized between the Here and the (imagined) Elsewhere, the Self and the Other, the actual and the potential. My broader concern is to show that night cosmopolitics and its very concrete urban translations are not isolated phenomena but echo some major aspects of the politics of Dakar’s residents.

4.2 The “Night Adventurers” in Dakar: Toward a Nocturnal Change of Scenery at Home

The main empirical evidence used in this study derives from my long-lasting ethnography among young Senegalese women who frequent nocturnal Dakar, “the night adventurers” as I have called them. I need to briefly explain how I came to deal with such questions, and more broadly with nocturnal issues.

I started fieldwork in Yeumbeul, a very popular neighborhood in the suburbs of Dakar, in 2000. The research agenda initially concerned unemployed young men. I was interested in how they elaborate their own path into the city whilst being largely politically and economically excluded from it. I observed that most of them were literally *not going anywhere*: with no financial resources to move at a larger scale in the city, they spent all day and night sticking around in their under-served neighborhood. To put it simply: these young men were caught in social and spatial stagnation. In the meantime, their conversations invariably converged to the issue of

migration: how to leave Senegal, and to go where? The important thing was to leave; departure was considered the only option. There was a heuristic tension between this strongly desired *mobility* and the forced or unwilling *immobility* these individuals found themselves in.

I was struck by another thing in these months spent living in the suburbs of Dakar. I observed that the gendered constructions of youth status were highly contrasted when it came to mobility. Young men were free to move at will, meaning that they were socially legitimate to go where they wanted to go, even if, as I just mentioned, they were generally not going anywhere. For most young suburban women, though, the legitimate perimeter of circulation was, basically, the domestic one. However, every evening, I could notice that a significant number of young suburban women, all made up and perfumed and dressed in revealing and trendy clothes, were “taking off” to downtown Dakar. The term “taking off” is intentional: all this actually looked like the departure on a trip, even if it was repeated night after night on the small scale of a journey of a few kilometers to the city center.

My ambition was not to focus on urban marginality or on “deviant” behaviors such as prostitution but rather on the tension between mobility and immobility. In that respect, these “night-girls” seem emblematic. They engage nightly with nightclubs and bars through social practices in which sexuality, seduction and their economic extensions are closely linked. However, what they actually do and seek out during their night activities cannot be confined to economic-sexual issues. While the resources provided by male partners are pivotal, they are far from being exclusive. Gains in autonomy and symbolic struggles are also central (Fouquet 2014a), even if they are often forgotten or overlooked due to the “unconventional” sexual materiality of these configurations and the moralistic or miserabilist judgements they polarize. In that respect, I could discern at least three main topics crossing the practices and trajectories of these women. First, the problem is to break with some of the constraints imposed by social seniors to emancipate oneself from the status of social junior. Frequenting nightlife, the financial earnings deriving from that activity, as well as the rupture that doing so organizes towards the banality of everyday life, are means of asserting social autonomy and taking distance from the feeling of dependency and submission toward parents and relatives. Second, in a more gendered perspective, frequenting nightlife is about departing from models of femininity that my interlocutors strongly reject, the social roles of daughter and wife that are seen as synonymous with subordination and constraint. Finally, and probably most importantly, nightlife is a means of asserting oneself as a modern and cosmopolitan individual through clothing, dancing, talking and, more broadly, taking the stage. Simply put, instead of reaching the faraway places they long for (Europe and North America, basically), these young women circulate, in a “broadminded” [*esprit du large*] manner (Mbembe 2006, 2), in moral regions inside the nocturnal city. This is also one of the main reasons that led me to use the notions of adventure (*l’aventure*) and adventurers (*les aventurières*) for the interpretation of these female trajectories. Indeed, over the last few decades, the concept of adventure has been increasingly used to define and describe a particular type of migrant departing on the road to exile (Bredeloup 2014). What is at stake in my usage of adventure is to engage with

social mobilities at a local, rather than an international, scale and by women rather than men, who have up to now been the main objects of study for adventure in the context of migration.

The night adventure appears first and foremost as an intimate and transformative experience:

During the night, I see what other people will never see or even imagine... What I see is another world that's opening up. This world is real, and it doesn't exist at the same time. It is in my head [*samay xalat*, my thoughts] or in my body when I get dressed to go out, when I dance, when men look at me with desire ... It is a world of the night that disappears during the day. But here, in my head and in my body, that's where it still exists in some ways. In any case, it is this world that I prefer, because I tell myself that it is a good life that can be found here or that seems reachable. Even if, for real, it slips away from me, again and again and again ... But I keep on running after it! (25-year-old female, interview in Wolof and French, Dakar, 2016).¹

This is a good illustration of how the urban night is addressed among the night adventurers. The sexual transactions in which they are involved often mask the complexity of their trajectories. In fact, my interlocutors all evoke the urban night as the place where the tension between the feeling of insignificance and social incapacity felt by many young Senegalese and the desire to access a “good life” (Feldman 2002) inspired by a certain idea of autonomy, self-realization, and material modernity is resolved. However, this fundamental opposition follows a clear line of fracture between daytime and nighttime that these young women redraw in practices and discourses night after night. In other words, frequenting Dakar nightlife makes it possible to approach certain conceptions of a desirable existence while adopting *de facto* critical postures vis-à-vis the local living conditions. Another interlocutor put it this way:

[Going out at night] well, to me, it is not really a problem of escaping. But simply ... I prefer the nighttime. It's cooler, you know. Dakar during the day, it's a real mess: traffic jams, heat, noise ... And what is there to do during the day? Going to the market? No thank you! [...] At night, you see, everyone is well dressed, you meet people you don't know ... Nobody monitors nobody, you do what you like. You don't get bothered and you don't feel ashamed to do what you want! [...] And then, you tell your own story, that's the big time, you know... you can never predict how far it will lead you! (22-year-old female, interview in Wolof and French, Dakar, 2016)

In line with this nocturnal indeterminacy and its inner “productivity” (Cooper and Pratten 2015), frequenting the city by night also gives rise to a sensation of self-transformation or self-invention. In that respect, the uses of the body and, more broadly, of style become crucial arguments for the making of such self-narrations.

Making oneself beautiful [before going out at night] is a way to respect oneself, I think. When you go out, it's not to show your problems. You enjoy the nightlife and then you want to show something else. There are things you can do at night, I mean the way you dress, where you go ... things that make you feel like someone else. [...] When I go out at night, I

¹Quotations will be sourced by the gender and the age of the interlocutor, the type of interaction (informal discussion, ethnographic interview), the language(s) used, the place, the year.

want everyone to look at me, like: this girl, she has something, she really is someone... Not just “somebody,” I mean. (24-year-old female, interview in Wolof and French, Dakar, 2004)

This work on appearance does more than support “fictitious upward mobility” (Mitchell 1996 [1956], 18). It is also at the very basis of the making of a “stylistic space of cosmopolitanism” (Ferguson 1999, 107) where references to a transnational blackness (Fouquet 2014b) are highly pervasive:

Man, you should have seen that, I was on top, classy, really stylish! We went to *Le Dolce* [a Dakar night club], there were too many people there! Pam! I stepped in [imitating a model on a podium], there was that sound of Rihanna that I like too much ... [...] I was wearing my pink Kangol cap ... *Teu teu teu*, do you know New York?! I made it the real American way, boy! (23-year-old female, informal discussion in Wolof, Dakar, 2007)

In this context, the particular attention night adventurers pay to appearance goes beyond seduction strategies or eroticization of the body. It can be understood as a way to affirm their social (though fragile) power and, more broadly, their presence in the world: not really from “here” but not actually “elsewhere,” they are, rather, in a crafty, critical and stylized cosmopolitan “middle.” This assertion could resonate with Michel Foucault’s notion of “utopian bodies.” Following Foucault, the makeup and dress codes are “operations by which the body is torn away from its proper space and projected into another space” (2009, 16).

These feelings of being somewhere else and maybe being someone else are made possible and strengthened by participating in nightlife, not only synchronically but also diachronically, that is, when considering “night careers” (*carrières de la nuit*). I thus refer to a social and cultural (l)earning process – by definition practical – that unfolds over the long term. The social skills and savoir-faire that these young women progressively acquire whilst attending the internationalized nocturnal milieus of Dakar allow them to pursue and enforce distinctive practices. This allows the young women to distance themselves from what they label as the “real prostitute/hooker” (*caga* in Wolof). In fact, the crucial factor in determining who is the “real hooker” is primarily based on judgments of ignorance, as mentioned by this interlocutor:

Personally, if I see a real *caga* [hooker], I tell myself that it’s a girl who just knows nothing, a real ignorant! Here in Senegal, we say it goes like this: *bala ngay xam, xamadi rey la* [proverb: until you know, ignorance will kill you], it is a way to express that this thing, ignorance, is not good at all. You need to think a lot, you need to understand the situation to be very crafty, otherwise you’re going to be the loser. (25-year-old female, interview in Wolof and French, Dakar, 2004)

More broadly, the problem is to distance themselves from what they see as the typical young Senegalese “who know nothing,” are “not openminded enough” or even “under-developed” (*pas assez évolués*). These subaltern cosmopolitan experiences of the city thus appear, to borrow the terms of Deleuze and Guattari (1975), “immediately-political” (*immédiat-politique*), especially in how they display resistance or at least indocility toward local mainstreams and socially assigned positions.

4.3 Urban Night Cosmopolitanics

The social practices and self-narrations depicted above also have concrete translations in Dakar's nocturnal geography. They support a singular mode of being in town characterized mostly by movement. In fact, my interlocutors maintain that they want things to be in motion and, even more, "to go fast":

Well, to me, nightlife provides the opportunity not to be stuck in a slow life... I mean, here in Dakar things are so slowwwwwly coming! If you look at most of Dakar girls, well, they stay at their father's house quietly and shyly... After that, they stay at their husband's house... If they happen to find a guy who can marry them, indeed...

And what will they have seen in their lifetime, aside from the house of Others?!! Do they even know this town in which they are born and they grew up, except those interior domestic places I mean? You, you know Dakar far better than them! [...] And are they living their own life, or the life of somebody else?! Personally, I want things to go fast, I want things that give me the feeling of moving forward! One day, if you happen to see me walking in the streets of NYC, baby, just don't be surprised! (26-year-old female, interview in Wolof and French, Dakar, 2015)

This quotation raises several issues. First, it is significant that past, present and future biographical times are critically related to urban references – near or faraway, closed or opened, actual or potential. These patterns testify not only to the entanglement of imaginaries of time and space in the production of urbanites but allow for the urban night to be considered a "potential space" (Fouquet 2017). According to Donald W. Winnicott, this notion evokes an intermediate zone of experience situated between the inner life of the subject and the surrounding reality. This intermediate zone of experience centers on the question of creativity through which everyone interacts with their social, cultural and material environment by linking it to their intimate world. For Winnicott, creativity consists of a general posture towards existence, "a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality [...] that makes the individual feel that life is worth living." He adds: "Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance: the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation" (2005 [1971], 87). Investigating the urban night as a cosmopolitan "potential space" implies identifying some local spots that, nightly, take the shape and meaning of a "social elsewhere." The detailed and concrete observation of these very specific "heterotopias" (Foucault 2009) – both urban and nocturnal, and admitting the wide range of issues and forms they condense in various local contexts – can richly contribute to the debate on cosmopolitanism and its "empirical [urban] turn".

The issue of "slowness" in the quotation is also significant in how it refers, in a contrasting way, to the different rhythms of the city. According to most of my interlocutors, the nocturnal city is related to a certain idea of social velocity and cultural fertility. Daytime, on the other hand, is associated with collective inertia, a time of restriction. Such representations are widely shared by young people in West Africa who often contrast the rapid pace of globalization with the slowness of their own societies. If this is a common way of criticizing the alleged "backwardness" of

Africa in the world system, the problem here is not to evaluate whether this “backwardness” is valid or not but rather to understand the “politics of contrasts” that such a valuation reflects.

This clearly resonates with what I have observed in Dakar. Using a biographical approach, I have been able to gauge how much social mobility was at the core of “night careers.” From the very stigmatized small bars up to the trendiest nightclubs, this upward mobility is underpinned by the “cosmopolitan skills” the young women gradually acquire whilst frequenting the internationalized milieus of the Dakar nightscape. What is interesting here is that performing such a cosmopolitan self is, in many respects, a way to challenge social and moral mainstreams that are seen as too “local” and “outdated.” The assertion of global cultural abilities provides leverage for critical postures towards the local living conditions.

More broadly, night adventurers assert themselves as modern and cosmopolitan urban subjects by occupying unconventional places and times in the city. This is, paradoxically, how they gain the feeling of really being part of the city and of living an authentic urban experience, even if it is one *always already* linked to a desired elsewhere. For most of my interlocutors, going out nightly is a way of reaching a larger world – even by proxy. This is the case, in particular, with trendy, cosmopolitan nightclubs. As an interlocutor, Zeyna, once told me:

When I see the new nightclubs, I tell myself that Senegal is on its way to development. It is in those places that you really see the changes ... not when staying at home, I mean. You see everything that is new: the sounds, design, clothing, dance ... Everything. And then you feel that Senegal is up-to-date. It makes me proud, in a way. [...] In some places, I feel ... I don't know ... like I am a tourist visiting unknown places. [Laughter] You know, in Senegal, we have this proverb: “*Ku du toxu doo xam fu dëkk neexe*” [who never moves can't know where it's good to live] ... That means ... you must be curious in life, you must travel, whatever. (24-year-old female, interview in Wolof and French, Dakar, 2008)

All this occurs in a wider context of a large number of Senegalese youths expressing the desire to migrate. Traveling abroad is a crucial issue; migration appears as a major, if not unique, social lever of self-improvement for young Africans largely stuck in “waithood” (Honwana 2012). In this respect, we can also rely on Zygmunt Bauman's idea that “mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values – and freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern times. [...] Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation” (1998, 2). In line with this “culture of migration,” so-called “subaltern” and “ordinary cosmopolitanisms” (Zeng 2014; Lamont and Aksartova 2002) in many African contexts can be viewed as describing the condition of non-mobile individuals – that is, those (the vast majority, in fact) who are incapable of traveling abroad despite intense desires to do so.

In this respect, the usages of the nocturnal city provide an image of a cosmopolitanism that unfolds both *temporarily* and *by contrast*, that is, relating in both cases to a time marker which underlies deep urban reconfigurations. This idea is to be understood in different and yet complementary ways. One might immediately refer to the contrasting temporalities of the city (alternating day and night time). But this

somehow “natural” boundary articulates strong social, cultural and even political issues. Indeed, the urban night scenes bring together a mix of individuals from highly diverse social, economic, and geographical origins: local populations, migrants or visitors from other African countries, as well as Europeans, Asians, North-Americans and so on. In these places, moreover, gender barriers, while not disappearing, are reorganized. We can acknowledge that this temporary cosmopolitanism depends on urban nocturnal transformations and thus sets itself against the stricter social segmentation of the diurnal city. In other words, while the night lays a veil of globality and “cosmopolity” on the experiences of the city, it mirrors critical assessments toward the diurnal city and, by extension, against the local living conditions that are seen and often lived under a sensation of closure and hindrance. One thus gets a sense that the very idea of a cosmopolitanism *by contrast* is inherently political, or at least that it contains strong critical effects.

What may be described here in general terms as “grassroots cosmopolitanism” (Fouquet 2018) raises the question of resistance and its infrapolitical lineaments. It seems quite obvious that the social trajectories of night adventurers are not, in the strictest sense, political. For sure, these young women do not seek to transform systemic local and global domination; they also do not display any kind of formal politicization. Yet this difficult question raises several issues. The first concerns the social judgments and moral denunciations that these female trajectories focus in Senegal. I would argue that these social and moral controversies have a cosmopolitical significance. The “night girls” are generally presented as emblematic of the disorders of modernity and, more precisely, embodiments of the culturally deleterious effects of globalization. The dominant social discourse in Senegal denounces these young women for being Westernized, thus suffering from some kind of inferiority complex – the “complex of the post-colonized.” They are seen as shameful and pale copies of Westerners, allegedly made visible by “*fason Toubab*” (“behaving like a European/White person”). More generally, their attitudes, their manner of dressing and talking, the places they frequent and people they meet are brought out to argue that these “night girls” lack any kind of reflexivity or critical understanding of the foreign cultural models they seem to adore. These social judgments claim that the “night girls” are caught in a cultural gap which is also a moral trap. These views rely on a certain historical understanding rooted in the colonial experience and in the nationalist meta-narratives emerging from the struggle for independence. As such, these narratives organize a prescriptive moral framework with regard to such contested terms as “Africanity” and “modernity.”

I would argue that the night adventurers in Dakar are *de facto* involved in debates on modernity and Africanity. This is not to assert an essentialized “African” or “Senegalese modernity.” Rather, I wish to emphasize the need to consider modernity, as well as cosmopolitanism, in the light of socially and materially rooted narratives. These terms should also be regarded as terrains of contestation: as repertoires through which one can take a distance from certain types of social assignments whilst asserting one’s own version of what is or should be a good life, the best way to manage one’s present and future. As it concerns my interlocutors in Dakar, the lack of power that they can rely on means that the use of their bodies, of seduction

and sexuality, as well as the ubiquitous concern with personal style, appear as conditions of possibility for repositioning themselves in power relations by mobilizing the arguments of cosmopolitanism in contrast to an allegedly “backward” local context. Once again, it is about “being cosmopolitan rather than...”.

In this manner, these concrete experiences of cosmopolitanism delimitate first and foremost a space of resistance and/or indocility. They thus cannot be confined to a simplistic diagnostic of shameful Westernization, mimicry, self-depreciation and so on. These are all clues to understanding how young women get involved in contradictory debates on modernity and Africanity and, in particular, how “style” is used far beyond the simple desire to be fashionable. This is another argument in favor of a cosmopolitical analysis of the urban night: it is constructed as a potential space, a time space where the dual register of the “real” and of the “possible” is, in some ways, redesigned. The “real,” on the one hand, refers to the finiteness of what has actually happened. In turn, the “possible” situates this reality in a much broader horizon of past, present and future potentialities. This discussion is closely linked to Arjun Appadurai’s proposition about the importance of the work of imagination: “lives today are as much acts of projection and imagination as they are enactments of known scripts or predictable outcomes” (1996, 61).

We now can get to what can be considered the main feature of the nighttime: the fact that it participates in a strengthening of the role of imagination. It is, in a way, the work of the imagination is the real “*plus*”, thus following Henri Bergson’s (1938) analysis of the relationship between the “real and the possible”.² From this point of view, the fundamental virtue of the night is to bring along a regime of indeterminacy and unpredictability. This can be understood notably from a very intimate point of view as the sensory experience of the nocturnal is characterized by deep transformations in our ways of seeing, touching, smelling, feeling, etc. In fact, the nocturnal city, along with its specific infrastructures and ambiances, reshapes our relationship to “reality.” But nighttime also carries out a kind of social, moral and political indeterminacy, as the dominant norms are altered or at least reconfigured. And, on the whole, all of this situates the nocturnal experiments within the realm of the potential, whereas daytime is seen as something basically predictable.

Moreover, according to my interlocutors in Dakar, daytime reality is assimilated to a subtraction: it refers neither to what is actually happening nor to what is probably going to happen. In fact, reality is above and before all what seems to be pre-excluded, or excluded a priori, from the realm of possibilities. In this respect, the construction of the urban night as a potential space refers to the idea of seeking an alternative mode of experimentation and personal achievement. The problem is surely not to infer an ability to totally avoid or eliminate constraints; rather, it is, in my mind, a matter of finding a way to negotiate difficulties and dealing creatively with them. In this sense, night potentialities somehow challenge what is seen as

²Bergson (1938) notably suggests that the possible is more than the real as it superimposes an act of the mind over the reality. In other words, the possible is the real “plus” an act of the mind (“une opération de la pensée”).

daytime finiteness and predictability. Participation in nightlife thus appears as a way of negotiating uncertainty by exploring its “productivity” (Cooper and Pratten 2015).

4.4 Conclusion: Cosmopolitanism as a Posture, the City as Accomplice

It seems quite obvious that participating in (and composing) a cosmopolitan lifestyle has an economic and social cost that not everyone can afford. Hence, the problem must be considered upstream, according to the meaning ascribed to the notion of cosmopolitanism itself. If we consider it primarily as a *condition*, according to some criteria viewed as representative of a kind of minimum program (global mobility, possession of certain property/wealth and access to certain social spheres), then it remains largely exclusive. Cosmopolitanism points, broadly, to a small elite, remaining inseparable from the possession of capital, not only economical but also cultural and social.

But on the other hand, if we look at cosmopolitanism as a *posture*, the question becomes at once more complex, less clear-cut, but perhaps more heuristic. By cosmopolitan as a posture, I mean a way of being in the world and in society, a way to formulate aspirations and to express commitment to certain images and ideas of the good life, success and prestige. This is a way to define the value of things and individuals, to prioritize some ways of being and behaving. In this respect, the question arises as to which “jury” evaluates one’s cosmopolitan credibility and social value. In line with some analyses presented in this chapter, it should be emphasized that the value (whether that of an object or an individual) does not exist in itself but is always negotiated in and through relationships: there are only *politics* of value (Appadurai 1986). On an ethnographic level, there is still room for studies on the tricks deployed by “subordinates” to capture “the exteriority upon which the dominant base their power” (Bayart 1999), and on the alternative ways “subordinates” assert their membership in “world society” (Ferguson 2002) as actors, rather than powerless spectators. Indeed, one can well imagine that an individual may not be socially recognized or identified as “cosmopolitan” (due to not possessing both the material and symbolical arguments that constitute such a “condition”) but still conceive him or herself as such, organizing his or her according to what is perceived as modern and cosmopolitan. The consequences induced by these self-identifications are by no means negligible, and there is no reason why we should not grant them real attention insofar as they mirror the desires of individuals and underlie specific processes of subjectivation. In any case, these cosmopolitan aspirants, or “wannabes,” can be regarded as an integral part of the current discussions on cosmopolitanism. At this point, it is of interest to remember what Georg Simmel said about the “fashionable person” and put in its place the “cosmopolitan individual”:

The *cosmopolitan individual* [fashionable person] is regarded with mingled feelings of approval and envy; we envy him as an individual but approve of him as a member of a set

or group. Yet even this envy has a peculiar coloring. There is a shade of envy which includes a species of ideal participation in the envied object itself. [...] The moment we envy an object or a person, we are no longer absolutely excluded from it. (Simmel 1989 [1904], 133)

Following this idea of envy as an ideational or embryonic expression of ownership and belonging, it can be argued that the paradigm of “lèche vitrine” – the frustrated spectator who is unable to go through the mirror or to acquire what she or he longs – supports a fundamentally simplistic interpretation of the “arts of being global” (Ong and Roy 2011) of African youth. Of course, individual expressions or postures that assert themselves as cosmopolitan are not all identical to “the” cosmopolitanism that serves as a title of nobility for transnationalized elites. This does not invalidate these individual expressions or postures but rather is an invitation to highlight the plurality and heterogeneity of cosmopolitanism as a field of study.

It seems quite clear that the alternative social trajectories led by the “night adventurers” in Dakar constitute solid examples of crafty and fundamentally vitalized cosmopolitan experiences. These young women surely demonstrate an art of being-in-town that is at the same time an art of being-in-the-world, the body, the city and the imaginary as accomplices. Moreover, they encourage us to follow the (sometimes harsh) small and winding paths paved with the fictions of the self and the multiple opportunities the city offers, rather than the comfortable ballads suggested by the meta-narratives of modernity (Englund and Leach 2000). The metropolis, and perhaps especially at night, is full of these small arteries that no map mentions.

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