IDENTITY IN ITS MAKING: PLAYING THE DIFFERENCE IN THE MUSIC OF BAAY FALL

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology

Chapel Hill
2010

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ABSTRACT

Paolo Bocci: Identity in Its Making: Playing the Difference in the Music of Baay Fall

What is the role of musical expressions in the life of the Baay Fall sect? Which tensions is this music able to bring to light? Which contradictions are held together in their practices? What do those chants say that cannot be expressed in other forms, namely in the theological discourse? Baay Fall is a fundamentalist sect within the Muslim brotherhood of Mourid in Senegal. Drawing on an ethnographic field work during the last summer, I trace in my paper some of the threads that intertwine music and the social in the Baay Fall identity.

Baay Fall rarely acknowledge, and with unease, their music. During my three-month field work I was often advised to change my study interest into the "serious matter", their religious doctrine. Yet music thrives as a religious expression, political strategy, and sometime profane leisure. This contradiction is not an isolated case in describing the BF world. Music of Baay Fall does not just reflects, rather it engages in the exchanges with internal tensions and external pressures; it creates, appropriates, and reuses fragments of identity in the dialogic and contested everyday making of their social and religious belonging. Customs, doctrine, and rituals define genealogies of belonging that overlay and intersect among them. Some of these contradictions, at the core and the periphery of their being, find their eminent emergence in BF music.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ATTUNING

"White people will never be able to play xiin." This was the comment of Ibrahima, a Baay Fall friend, about the attempts of *tubaab* (white people) to learn to play the drum belonging to his religious sect. He wasn't teaching me the drum and therefore not receiving any money from me, making his remark candid and utterly honest. Nor was he speaking about me specifically. He meant instead that the differences between the two worlds, informing the Baay Fall and white approaches to the Baay Fall drum, diverge to the point of being incommensurable, and any attempt to cross the gap would be bound to fail. My intent was, not encouragingly, to cross that gulf. Being a musician, and learning to play their drum, did not happen to be a shortcut to an understanding of their group. Deeply entrenched in the religious domain, their music did not only display the distance between them and me. It also showed a shifting world of practice constantly remaking its boundaries and its sense. I use my friend's solemn observation, unexpectedly received at the very end of my field trip, as an introduction to my discussion on Baay Fall music.

Baay Fall is a sect that belongs to muridiyya, one of the two major Muslim brotherhoods in Senegal. All Senegalese Islam is Sufi, and almost all Muslims are part of one of four brotherhoods: muridiyya, tidianiyya, qadiriyya, and layen. Sufism

originated in the Arabic peninsula in the eighth century, from an extraordinary blossoming of intellectuals and interpreters of Islam proposing a new form of moral integrity detached from political influences. Sufi discipline teaches the adepts how to overcome the *naf*, the animal instincts that tie men to their temporal dimension and prevent them from enjoying the neighborhood of God. Once initiated into the *tarbiyya*, the Sufi education, the *murid*[1] learns how to gradually elevate himself, surrender to his master, and become a *wali Allah*, a friend of God.[2] Thanks to this "education of the soul," the disciple learns to empty his heart, because only once freed will it be able to open itself to God.[3] The "greatest jihad" that Sufism proposes is therefore a constant fight against one's own temptations and corruptions.

While Islam entered in the Wolof area of Senegal in the eleventh century and acquired a primal significance in the sixteenth century,[4] Wolof Sufism became predominant in the nineteenth century by the scholarship of Malik Sy and Ahmadou Bamba, the founders of the tidiyyania and muridiyya, respectively. Tidianiyya and muridiyya are the major brotherhoods in Senegal. The first claims the largest numbers of devotees; the second, founded by Ahmadou Bamba in the second half of the nineteenth century, prides itself on a deeper commitment of its member, which reverberates in its strong political and economic influence on the Senegalese society

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[1] The adept (literally 'the aspirant').

[2] Babou, 2007, p 5.

[3] *Ibid*, p 83

[4] *Ibid*, p 21

and internationally. Drawing on the Arabic tradition of Sufism, Bamba and Sy taught a control over emotions and worldly preoccupations through a holistic form of education. Disciples need mystical guidance to free themselves from the entanglements with the profane world. This guidance is found through the act of submission to a spiritual leader, the sheik or marabout.

Contrary to what the Sufi ascetism may seem to suggest, the muridiyya does not exclude, but rather encourages the production of wealth among its disciples.[5] Work manifests the attachment to Ahmadou Bamba's founding principles of the brotherhood and the submission to his marabout. Such an emphasis on work in the muridiyya finds its eminent expression in the Baay Fall. While in all the Senegalese brotherhoods this act of submission is present, in the Mouridism it has a particular relevance.[6] Few scholars speculate about a first stage of Sufism,[7] where a pure mystical focus was the only aspect of the sheik-disciple relation. However, recent interpretations argue that this doctrinal element has always been fused with more temporal spiritual charisma of the sheiks.[8] This complication of retaining some of the power, of which the sheik was intended to be a pure intermediator, is especially

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[5] Such a religious blessing of secular success has made several scholars compare it with the ethic of Protestantism in the interpretation of Max Weber. However, the Mourids do not believe in the predestination theory, as aptly noted by Anta Babou. *Ibid*, p 91.

[6] For a discussion about the *Baraka*, the spiritual power that entangles with mystical skill in the Wolf Sufism, see Babou, 2007, p 8.

[7] See J.S. Trimingham *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, in *ibid.*, p 6.

[8] *Ibid.*, p 7.

relevant in the Senegalese Sufism of muridiyya. Surrendering to God, as I contend in my analysis of Baay Fall music, needs a world of profane practices.

Baay Fall is a sect in the Mourid brotherhood. Its founder, Sheikh Ibra Fall (1858 – 1930), was the adept who first recognized the exceptional value of Ahmadou Bamba and, by his exemplary submission, elevated him from a mere teacher of Quran to the level of prophet.[9] Baay Fall form a group easily recognizable from outside on a superficial level. Senegalese encounter them on the streets, during their daily quest for money or food (*madjal*). Their physical appearance also is striking: they have long hair with dread-locks (*ndjan*) and wear a very large and loose cloth (*ndjaxass*) made of many -in theory ninety-nine, as in the number of the names of Allah- pieces of rags, resulting in a colorful and characteristic patchwork. As illuminated by the life of the founder, Baay Fall claim a boundless devotion to the Mourid marabouts. Yet some of their rituals, distinctive only of their sect, are generally not accepted by the rest of the brotherhood or by the overall Muslim community. Baay Fall do not observe the daily prayers and the fasting prescribed by Islam, and they substitute constant prayers and work (*liggey*) under the direction of their chief, the marabout. In fact, for them work *is* praying, which justifies their refusal to comply with the five pillars of Islam, one of the main points of divergence from their brotherhood and other Muslims and the one that arouses intense outcry.

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[9] *Ibid*, p 65.

Baay Fall are servants of Allah through their absolute fidelity to their religious chief, the marabout, who arranges their communitarian life in the *daara*[10] and orders their works, mainly in construction and agriculture. Baay Fall firmly believe in their interpretation of Islam as being intrinsic, although in peculiar way, to their brotherhood. They propose, in a sense, their own orthodoxy, certain of the centrality of their role in the brotherhood; they are, in their way, fundamentalist Muslims.[11]

Baay Fall have a complicated position in the muridiyya brotherhood: while regarded as inferior because of the different practices that distinguish them from the rest of the brotherhood, all the Mourids unanimously attribute to the founder of Baay Fall, Cher Ibra Fall, the discovery of Ahmadou Bamba. Ibra Fall's choice of boundless submission to him has made Bamba's prophetic message apparent to the Wolof community. It has also established the rules of Baay Fall: to adore and serve the marabout, in a deferent and, if possible, *detached closeness* to him. With the death of Ibra Fall in 1930, a structured Baay Fall lineage emerged along the Fall

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[10] *Daara* is a place of religious unity, originally in the countryside but recently also in Dakar, where the disciples live together under the guidance of the marabout.

[11] My usage of the term precisely refers to its religious meaning, as "strict adherence to ancient or fundamental doctrines" (Oxford English Dictionary). Here I stress their effort to achieve a pure relationship with God. Music, along with practices of ecstasy and flagellation also present in the Baay Fallism, ventures in an unmediated intimacy with God. In deploying "fundamentalism", I adopt their point of view, in their conviction that their approach, though stigmatized and condemned by a vast segment of the Muslim community, touches on the core of Islam. As not coincidentally central to my argument, the term 'fundamentalist' alludes to the creation of a separated, yet not peripheral, *orthodoxy*, rather than lending itself to the recent sensationalist and reductionist deployment of the term in Western, especially American, literature on Islam in political science and in the mass media coverage. See, Hirschkind, 2006, p 13, 205.

family. The formal institutionalization into a Baay Fall caliphate led to an increased differentiation of Baay Fall and the rest of the brotherhood.[12]

Baay Fall work for the marabout as farmers, construction workers, and musicians. I will discuss the production of their music as a main service that Baay Fall offer to marabouts and the Mourid brotherhood. Yet a nagging question remains: who are Baay Fall? The version that I delineate may be, after all, not more convincing than my attempts to play their drum. I trace their role and complex position in the brotherhood drawing on history and my experience in the field. Other aspects of their life may have been stressed, and other versions would have emerged. Yet uncertainties in positioning Baay Fall are not just faced by an outside observer. Rather than a marginal consequence, their precarious status emerges as a necessary trait of their world produced, as I will discuss, by their role as servants in the brotherhood. Baay Fall constantly engage in discussions about themselves, but without producing a unitary whole. They passionately embrace a history of the sect, a genealogy of marabouts, and a set of practices to prove the correctness of a self proclamation never entirely congruent with numerous others that proliferate at the same time. Discussions and contestations of who they are fill the air as much as their music does –and music, I will show, is intimately involved in the construction of this world.

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[12] Pezeril, 2008, p 110.

I use 'identity' to speak of a set of concerns that is not external to the people that I studied. While acknowledging the limitations of this term, 'identity' here refers to a production rather than an accomplished result. It does not resolve, or, conversely, elude the question of my discussion. The broad spectrum –and perhaps sometimes the vagueness— implied by this term, rather, allows me to maintain open what I want to investigate: the intrinsic ambiguity of the position of Baay Fall in the brotherhood and in the Senegalese society. I discuss in this paper how the music of Baay Fall crucially contributes to craft their space.

IDENTITY IN SOUND

A constant melodic invocation of Allah and Mame Cher Ibra Fall accompanies the quest for money and food, the long hours of work that they undertake for the marabouts, and the simple daily moments of resting.[13] Voice and vocal expressions

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[13] Their dependence on the marabout makes them hard worker: big leather belt, the *laaxasay*, an item they claim originally was used by Mame Cher to tighten his stomach in times of prolonged fasts, manifestly shows this commitment. But it also offers long periods of free time, as they wait for him while he visits other *daara* or stays in the city to redirect their works or to require their presence for religious events.

cover a wide array of Baay Fall life. This cantillation[14] is a marker of Baay Fall,
evidence of their constant remembrance of Allah, which they proudly attribute to a
deeper faith than the rest of the Mourids. Work and music interlace tightly in Baay
Fall. Their strong inclination, if not devotion, to physical labor (*tarbiya*) speaks of
the fervent submission to the marabout's will that borders on a *fou* (maddening)
compliance.[15] A continual melodic spelling of their names - Ahmadou Bamba,
Sheikh Ibra Fall, and the adept's marabout- proves attainment of the *hal*: an "*etat
d`esthase permanente*," a condition of permanent ecstasy manifesting the adept's
unmediated closeness to God. Baay Fall mysticism refers to the privileged
relationship they entertain with Allah through their marabout. Unlike the engaged
and sometime successful life of the Mourids, Baay Fall pride themselves on a strong
transcendent dimension, a path to God maintained clear by their relentless
cantillation.[16]

If their submission is ultimately addressed to Allah, the practical recipient is, in
fact, the marabout. Once a disciple performs the rite of acceptance (*njebelu*), the
marabout becomes the supreme spiritual guide, to whom a true Baay Fall offers his

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[14] "Chanting, intoning, musical recitation; *spec.* that used in Jewish synagogues," the Oxford English
Dictionary.

[15] Cfr. Pezeril, 2008, p 70, or Babou, 2007, p 65. In my conversations about Baay Fall with Mourids or
generally Muslim Senegalese, I often heard this phrase. Yet describing them as *fou* did not imply a
refusal to recognize mystical powers belonging just to them -quite the opposite.

[16] In a similar fashion, Hirschkind speaks of a "practice of audition [that] serves as a constant
reminder to monitor their [the Muslim devotee] behavior for vices and virtues." Hirschkind, 2006, p
71.

own life. While the goal is the *au-delà* life with Allah, a strong vertical relation is built among Baay Fall disciples -the *talibé-* and his marabout. As a the quintessential aspect of their mysticism, every Baay Fall struggles to entertain a personal relation to Allah. However, this individual intimacy is achieved only through submission to a marabout, who discloses, constantly advises, and discusses the path to reach God. On the other hand, every marabout's aura of sacredness relies on the disciple's recognition of his superiority. This recognition is *worked* through physical labor and music, providing the marabout with his wealth and holiness. As in the Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the disciple's work generates validation of the master, in this case the marabout's religious legitimacy. Discussing the dialectic between those two planes of sacred reference –the marabout and Allah— as well as the double edged relationship between a disciple and his marabout would go beyond the scope of the paper.[17] What is relevant here is to bring to light how music plays on the tensions between Baay Fall's submission to the marabout and its silent opposite: the marabouts' dependence on Baay Fall's creation of the sacred.

As showed by the exemplary life of their founder, Baay Fall create the sacred aura of the marabout through their labor and full submission to him. Baay Fall, I contend, evoke the space of the sacred for the marabout, and I will be focusing on the precarious creation of such an aura through Baay Fall musical ceremonies. Baay Fall are a necessary requisite for the Mourid system to be recognized in its hierarchy,

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[17] See Pezeril, 2005.

yet their indispensable role lies in an ambiguous terrain. Their labor is needed only insofar as it helps the emergence of a sacred aura detached from that work itself. Baay Fall suffer from a stigmatization that is "paradoxical," as noted by Charlotte Pezeril:[18] firstly, because it hinges upon a difference that Baay Fall themselves claim, proud of a closer relationship to the marabout than a general Mourid adept. Secondly, marabouts request Baay Fall's work precisely because of, and not despite, their different status.

The impurity of their labor not only is necessary, but, as I contend in the case of their music, it has also to be present, to appear.[19] Whether surrounding the marabout in his public sorties or playing music in his honor, he will appear only in their presence. The sacred space that Baay Fall create for the marabout is, in a way, filled by Baay Fall themselves –through their music, dances, and acts of flagellations, physical prostrations and by the tensions around him— although without overt recognition. While it is not surprising that the sacred needs impure – i.e. profane— work to maintain the fracture that distinguishes it from the the secular realm, it is interesting to note about Baay Fall and their marabout the practical

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[18] Pezeril, 2008.

[19] By 'impurity' I allude to the unwillingness to acknowledge, if not to open condemn, Baay Fall from the rest of the Mourid community. While I will be focusing on practices of music as a necessary but not entirely legitimized domain, other domains of Baay Fall have the same destiny: for instance the flagellation (Pezeril, 2008, p 201) and, the frantic and confused gathering around the marabout in his public appearances, supposedly to protect him from the crowd while in fact creating tensions around him in order to get closer.

necessity of a simultaneous co-presence of the two.[20] Thus Baay Fall and their marabout stay together, preserving the contradiction between their co-presence and their incommensurable difference as stable. Among the Mourids, it is a strict rule to lower one's eyes to the ground in the presence of the marabout, avoiding his gaze, and also to see him. The sacred aura is therefore secret and, in a way, empty. Baay Fall, similarly, are not seen when they create and occupy the space of the marabout's sacred absence.[21]

Music has a controversial status because it occurs in and makes the difference between the marabout and Baay Fall. While Baay Fall are proud of their service to the marabout –indeed they construct their identity around this submission- they also suffer from the low status of their role. Their creation of something extraordinary, the difference of the sacred, puts their work and their identity in an ambiguous terrain. Baay Fall create an absence where the marabout, who in fact cannot be seen, appears. Their identity, which revolves around this work, is marked by this subordination. Creating this difference keeps Baay Fall in a state of precariousness and displacement. The sound of Baay Fall is here analyzed as making this status. Yet

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[20] Cf. Georges Bataille and the notion of *déchirure*. Bataille, 1989.

[21] The sense of emptiness and void is archetypical in the Sufism, as a preliminary and necessary condition to harbor God in one's soul. "For the Sufis God cannot enter the heart of a human being unless the heart is emptied of all the earthy preoccupation". Babou, 2007, p 83.

Feld et al. note that "[m]usicians and listeners everywhere spend a great deal of time and productive social energy talking about music."[21] Those who listen to Baay Fall music -the Mourids of Senegal, provide an opposite example. Contradictory findings are inevitable when such trans-cultural, if not universal, claims-here strangely advanced by anthropologists- are advanced.

the space they create is not –just- theirs. Music constructs a subordinate and silent Baay Fall identity in relation to the marabout. But also it mingles with the outside world, when marabouts use it, as I will show, to deliberately reach an outside target of potential adepts. In both cases, Baay Fall music creates an identity crossed by tensions that work against any unity, and rather define it as in transition.

The religious domain informs the playing of the *xiin*, a drum that they claim was invented by the founder of the sect, Mame Cher Ibra Fall. Not only playing, singing and dancing belong to the religious rather than the musical sphere. Such a distinction may seem odd or unnecessary. However, it is the distinction *they* make, showing a preoccupation or anxiety that goes far beyond semantic interpretations on what music is. Thus, what is the role of musical expressions in the life of Baay Fall? Which contradictions are held together in their practices? What do chants say that cannot be expressed in other ways, including theological discourse? Baay Fall rarely acknowledge their music, and, when they do it, with unease. During my fieldwork I was often advised to change my topic to a "serious matter," namely, the religious doctrine. Yet music thrives as a religious expression, political strategy, and sometime profane leisure. The music of Baay Fall engages in an exchange of internal tensions and external pressures; it appropriates and rearranges fragments of identity in the dialogic everyday making of a group at the same time necessary and praised, silenced and neglected. Studying Baay Fall music was, in hindsight, a very valuable place to intercept struggles and tensions around Baay Fall identity.

Baay Fall music, firstly, is not considered music. Baay Fall and marabouts don`t deploy the term, and they have always corrected me when I used it. Such denial certainly speaks of the preoccupation of adepts with drawing a neat line that separates the alluring secular musical scene of cities from their sacred activity. Not peculiar just to Baay Fallism, musical expressions of Muslim prayer are perceived to exist in a ambiguous relationship with an opposing set of sensous attractions. In his ethnography of practices of listening in contemporary Egypt, Charles Hirschkind writes effectively about the dangerous contiguity between an ethical progression towards Allah from recorded sermons and "non-ethical senses of pleasure" derived instead by the simple joy of listening.[22]

Sufism, in its stress on sensous involvement rather than on rational judgment to attain God, has always raised concerns among leading Muslim scholars.[23] Ammon Shiloah documents the traditional condemnation of music in the history of Islam, yet finds as well such condemnation occurred simultaneously with a constant effort to differentiate what about it was infidel and polytheist from what might consolidate the faith and purify.[24] The commercial music, despised by Baay Fall, discloses a possibility for evasion, amusement, and profane reward; Baay Fallism instead calls for a fulfillment of the deepest meaning of Muslim devotion: an individual relation

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[22] Hirschkind, 2006, p 95.

[23] *Ibid*, p 35.

[24] Shiloah, 1995, p 35. Further, Shiloah discusses the status of cantillation, the melodic invocation of the Allah and his ninety-nine names, as something that should not be called music, and which should avoid rhythm in order to remain close to the text (p 37).

with God. This fulfillment has to be, quite literally, *worked* through a full and even extreme exaltation of man's duties in his submission to God.

Everywhere in Senegal but especially in Mbacké, I received a general suggestion not to dwell too much on music; rather, people advised me, I should go directly to the core of the Baay Fall, its doctrine.[25] Thus, I should listen to marabouts, rather than to their singers, go to the holy places of Mourridsm rather than to Baay Fall concerts. In a parallel concern, interestingly, I was often diverted from Baay Fallism back to Mourid discipline.[26] A third pressure, relevant to my point here, was a ubiquitous concern with conducting me into true Baay Fallism, exposing me to true Baay Falls, and helping me avoid the inauthentic ones. Such concern is very efficaciously played with a French-Senegalese pun, whereby the distinction is manifested by calling adepts "Baay Fall" or "Baay *Faux*" (adjective plural of 'false' in French).

A relevant part of Baay Fall identity seems to rest on practices and ways of living that conflict with some doctrinal claims within the same sect. This gap can be the Baay *Faux*. Or it can be the role of music: put aside if not denied, yet intensely present. Baay Fall are in a constant dialogue with the Mourid brotherhood and the rest of the Senegalese population, strategically defining what is external and what

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[25] Mbacké is the town that has developed just outside the boundaries of Touba, the holy city of Mouridism, the second biggest in Senegal. Mbacké is the headquarter of Baay Fall. For the physical contiguity, yet separateness of the two, see below.

[26] See below, p 21.

falls within the boundaries of their group. One Mourid with whom I was speaking once defined the ritual quest for money and food, a fundamental yet controversial aspect of Baay Fall life, as "*quête d`identité*" (quest for identity), as if the constant encounter with outsiders interrogated Baay Fall about their own sense of who they are.

The role of music and dancing has always been belittled by the marabouts with whom I conversed. In a unique exception I made to remain silent and passive before a marabout, I once dared to inquire about the circular movement during the *Sam Fall*, the ritual chant of Baay Fall.[27] I was interested in hearing an internal account of this practice and perhaps in thinking further about its similarities with the *saut*, the ritual circular turns of Muslim pilgrims around the Kaaba in Mecca, as well as with the Turkish dervish and *baru-haru* dance.[28] I could not finish my question –he could not tolerate my arrogance in asking anything, defying his authority- but I was reminded that dancing in a circle and swinging from one foot to another had simply been an expedient way to avoid sores underneath the feet and to better support hours of prayers than standing still. The same for music: it should not have any more dignifying role than to draw attention and magnify the power of prayer.

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[27] See below, p 20.

[28] Crf. Shiloah, 1995, p 149.

In Touba, much to my initial surprise, playing the *xiin* is interdicted outside official events.[29] Yet music and dance constitute a fundamental part of the Baay Fall's everyday life and have the same importance that Baay Fall (used to) have in the management of the holy city.[30] Similarly to what happens with soccer, prohibited in Touba as all sports are, young people from the holy city just move outside its boundaries to play – whether *xiin*s or sports. Not simply needed and at the same time denied, Baay Fall music has been used by the new generation of Baay Fall marabouts in order to have an impact on the youth of the expanding, and abandoned, *banlieues* of Dakar.[31] Such purpose has been taken seriously, to the point of changing the traditional day of the week for the *Sam Fall*: from Thursday to Saturday night, in order to intercept the largest volume of young people going out to dance. Baay Fall music is used to capture the urban rhythm of youth, moving from the holy eve of the week to the night of profane parties before the non-working day. Such has been the change, which shows one of the strongest virtues of Baay Fallism, and Mouridism in general: its ability to adapt to new trends while nonetheless proposing, as I have suggested, a fundamentalist approach to Islam.

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[29] Steven J. Salm and Toyin Falola, 2005, p 258.

[30] Only recently has the city of Touba, special territory since the inception of the French colonial ruling, been included in the Senegalese territory. Before that, Baay Fall were the religious police of the city. Touba still is in a regime of special autonomy and enjoys a large administrative autonomy: a tax free zone, it is still owned by the supreme chief of the Mourids, the *khalif général*, who pays the utility bills of its inhabitants and is responsible for infrastructures and urban development. See ibid., Coulon, 1981, and Cheikh Guèye, 2002.

[31] Despite the original relationship of Ahamdou Bamba (marabout) and Ibra Fall as spiritual leader and servant, marabouts can be Baay Fall too. In the daara of villages outside Touba I met several young adults coming from drug addiction problems in Dakar.

Ironically, Baay Fall music puts its doctrine into an odd contradiction: if, in a blunt fashion, Senegalese people don't like Baay Fall but do like their music, Baay Fall like and justify everything about themselves *but* their music. Not avoiding but rather bearing on these tensions, Baay Fall and outside society articulate their encounter: a "Saturday night" *Sam Fall*[32] is one example; a cried *ben-ben*, and the amplification of the voice during all ceremony, thus projecting a sound which delimits a space, are others. My entry point as a percussionist offers another angle of insight into this world.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF BEWILDERMENT

During my field work I spent a considerable amount of time learning to play the Baay Fall drum, the *xiin*. This instrument accompanies the ritual quest for food and the daily collective prayers, and for this reason it closely marks the Baay Fall identity. Although Baay Fall claim it was invented by their founder and therefore unique, the *xiin* is a drum that shares many similarities with a family of West African

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[32] The ritual chant of Baay Fall. For a more detailed description, see below.

drums. Those drums, the most famous one in Senegal being the sabar, are made of a wooden shell with a djambé-like shape but with a narrower upper part.[33] They are played with one stick, a straight piece of a branch, and one hand, the left one for right-handed players. The combination of hand and stick rearranges the set of limitations and possibilities that percussionists knowledgeable in either sticks or hand drums expect. While alternate hits with the same sound cannot occur, the left hand varies its sound depending on its position or activity (first and second tone, bass, by pressing or buffering the head). The stick offers another set of sounds, the most explosive one being the "rim shot," when the stick hits the head parallel to it at almost its full length, thus hitting the rim of the head as well. As for the sabar, seven different notes come out of this fascinating hand-stick combination.

The *xiin* is never played alone. Depending on size, from two to four lines of rhythm are played by more than one *xiin*. The fracture between accompaniment and solo roles is less pronounced than in much West African percussive music.[34] The very definition of a solo varies depending on the musical world in which it occurs; as the case of modern jazz[35] or Baroque music[36] exemplify, the boundaries that separate and signify concepts such as improvisation, interplay, and interpretation can be very difficult to draw. In Baay Fall, every group of *xiins* plays a line of the

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[33] Cf. Tang, 2007.

[34] Cf. Chernoff, 1979.

[35] In this respect, Bill Evans marked the beginning of a new era. See Kenny, 1999, p. 163-194.

[36] Benson, 2003, p 19.

accompaniment, with different degrees of freedom to elaborate on the rhythm played. The rhythms played on a set of *xiin*s interlace in a dense and intricate texture, the outcome of which is a homogenous and powerful front of sound. The number of *xiins* can vary considerably, from four to more than a dozen, depending on the size of the event, the availability of drums, money, and, rarely, musicians.

The place of *xiin* and chants comes after the a cappella Sam Fall, together with the beginning of the dances. The body participation rises along with the crescendo of the ceremony. The ben-ben, the introductory chant to the official Mourid ceremonies, is sung rubato, along with the only rhythm of the alternating moments of deep breaths and concentration and the high-pitch notes that follows. No dance is involved. The subsequent Sam Fall is a moment of intense participation, and swaying one's body is almost inevitable even for an external participant. The third part of the night opens up to drums and more overt dancing. More loosely, the circle form of the Sam Fall is never broken, and the *dieurin*, the spiritual leaders among the adepts, choreographically coordinate the movements of each daara's disciples.

Yesterday Massamba spoke to me while I was playing, admonishing me not to listen to other musicians but rather to concentrate on me. Listening to him, to me, while making a selective exclusion of the others musicians' lines: differentiation of three levels of listening [field notes, Mbacké, July 30th, 2009].

I associate this note with my friend's lament about white people attempting to play the Baay Fall drum. Both point to an understanding of the music, at its relations

with other knots of identity, which a musicological approach does not usually contemplate.[37] While playing with Baay Fall for one of the first times, I "simply" had to play even notes in a fast tempo. However, I was having a hard time doing it: I could not *hear* the larger rhythmic structure in terms of which I was to position my line. Thus I always was on the verge of getting lost, sounding unclear and hesitant. Reflecting on his pessimism about white people never able to play *xiin*, my friend Ibrahima explained to me that *our* (white) preoccupations about technique and ways of learning prevent us from accessing the world of the *xiin*, which is intrinsically Baay Fallism. Hearing and playing are affected by the locus of listening. Difficulties in music thus don't reflect, but *are* part of the complexities of the social and the acceptance to be part of it. Relationality within music *is* what constitutes, along with other threads, a social entity.

Presenting myself as a musician, on the other hand, helped me in two intertwined ways. It reassured Baay Fall of my benign intentions, while providing a picture of who I was and what I was doing there significantly more understandable than the uncertain –and not just for them- terrain of an anthropologist's identity and job. It gave me a unique perspective on Baay Fallism. Perhaps its main contribution was paradoxically to render the whole picture more opaque. It forced me to interrogate my unquestioned category of 'music,' illuminating the frailties of my object and my method of study. The 'object' of my research, Baay Fall, kept

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[37] For an example of an opposite approach in the study of a Wolof drum, see Tsang, 2007.

receding under further interrogations during my field trip. The exceptional relationship between the founders of the Mouridism and Baay Fallism, Ahmadou Bamba and Ibra Fall, laid the ground for the complex entanglement of the two. Quite often I experienced a slippage from the doctrine of the Baay Fall into Mouridism, with Baay Fall explaining to me their essence by saying "*the true Mourid is/does…*" This, rather than being a sign of lack of precision, points to the intrinsic ambivalences of being Baay Fall. Uncertainties about Ibra Fall –visionary of the Mourid brotherhood or a *fou*, crazy person?— and the Baay Fall –charlatans or possessor instead of a *lumière du dedans,* an inner enlightenment?— multiply rather than lessen on further interrogations.[38]

Virtually all elements of Baay Fallism were contested by some Baay Fall, from the smoking of marijuana, the ritual quest for money and food, the dread-lock hair style, the *ndjaxass*, the collective life, to even the submission to the marabout. As just one example, Baay Fall appearance, with the colorful and recently trendy patchwork clothing, is an immediate marker of Baay Fall. A grandson of Mame Cher, a renowned marabout Baay Fall living in Mbacké, radically contested this outfit. He showed me a daguerreotype of his grandfather Ibra Fall, the founder of Baay Fall, surrounded by his first adepts. All of them displayed short hair and white

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[38] S. B. M'Bow, 1999.

clothes, without any of the colorful features that make Baay Fall style so distinctive.[39]

The constantly-asserted purpose of "doing good" as a founding principle of Baay Fall was one of their proclamations that most comforted me in times of doubt, when I experienced the most unsettling discrepancies between their worldview and mine. Rather than being trapped in mundane interests (money, sex, alcohol), Baay Fall claim to be moved only by the intent of "*faire du bien*," not harming and instead caring about the well-being of others. This, however, turned out to be only partially true, if not an utter misunderstanding. "*Faire du bien*" is a translation –thus a betrayal with Christian undertones telling of colonial relationships and a deliberate mimicry of the rulers' culture— of a radically other project. What is said to an outsider to be "doing good" should be brought back to its true meaning, "doing for God." As manifest in the centrality of labor in their self-definition as Baay Fall, every action should reveal the path undertaken to reach God; hence unconditional submission to the marabout, working hard, collective life in the *daara*, and music. "Doing good" to others is in fact inscribed in a perspective whereby every aspect of worldly life is superseded by a religiously other dimension.

Life, too, is irrelevant if not embedded in such a perspective. Not surprisingly, music, if it has a meaning, is only within the religious, transcendent horizon. Yet this

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[39] This highly suggestive feature, which too temptingly lends itself to the speculations of social researchers, has led to superficially suggestive, but ultimately unfounded, comparisons with the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica. Savishinsky, 1994.

linear and vertical path seems to be filled with unforeseen actors and interests. The agency of money exemplifies this issue: being rich is a characteristic to which Baay Fall commonly refer in order to speak of the false attractions of urban, secular life. On the other hand, the wealth of the brotherhood is an object of great pride and ostentation. The Mourids have a worldwide network of adepts, from which they draw remittances, power and prestige. Indeed, money is a vector of appreciation, a sign of submission and respect universally recognized across the community. In fact -as I suggest with the word 'vector'- money means when it is in motion: when it is given by other people during the ritual quest and when it circulates among them, as when a Baay Fall offers money to his marabout.

Music, too, seems to be despised as a "static," individualistic aspect –hence the condescending remark about white musicians' preoccupation with technique— but not when it moves, when a voice and instruments are themselves instrumental to a higher, all-encompassing, religious end. However, as for the money, the tensions of its material, individualistic, othering allure do not disappear. A Baay Fall friend of mine, aged twenty-one, spoke with authority and, to my ears, maturity about the irrelevance of money in relation to the ultimate truths of life. We could not be more in agreement. "But," he added, much to my surprise, "I want to become a millionaire, and if Allah wants this, one day I will." In a similar fashion, music is supposed to be a pure medium of religious devotion. Yet it thrives in the "wrong" world, the corrupted one; it mingles with worldly practices that ask for a new interrogation about their sense, besides the religious ultimate goal. Baay Fall serve

the sacred aura of marabouts through the evocation of a soundscape that requires their commingling with the profane world. Their attempt to attain holiness is always hindered by their own construction of it.

SOUND OF EMPLACEMENT

The *Sam Fall* is among the most characteristic events of Baay Fall. It is a chant that occurs in all religious gatherings, spontaneous or official. Most last all night, with the *Sam Fall* usually preceeding any instrumentally-accompanied prayer and dance. Its length varies from fifteen minutes to more than one hour. Usually it starts with a small number of Baay Fall who rally in a circle, closely behind each other, forming a dense "conga line." A minority –it can even be only one person at first- will sing a call, followed by the response of the others. Gradually the rest of the Baay Fall joins the group, swelling the circle. With the fullest voice, they sing the *shahada*, the proclamation of the uniqueness of Allah,[40] followed by a few words evoking the prophet Mohammed and Ibra Fall. One pattern of call and response can

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[40] *"La ilaha illa allah"* (Arabic): "there is no other God than Allah."

last up to ten minutes, before changing to another one, without interruptions, in a crescendo of rapture and ecstasy. All the participants (the *kourel*) slowly advance, tightly linked in an unique chain of movements, synchronically swinging and shifting their balance from one foot to another, inwardly and outwardly, in a mounting mass of hot, sweaty bodies, closed eyes, and high-pitched cries.

The *Ben-Ben*, literally the "one-one,"[41] precedes the *Sam Fall* in the official ceremonies. A single Baay Fall sings the name of Ibra Fall without any instrumental or vocal accompaniment, only with the support of a microphone. Along with his name, the singer recites some of the fixed expressions that, like the ninety-nine names of Allah, define him: *Babul Mouridina*, the gateway of Mouridsm, or *Lamp Fall*, the enlightener of the Mourid way. Despite stylistic differences among the interpreters, a few elements define *Ben-Ben* as a specific genre: there is a sudden, abrupt cry at a high pitch when Ibra Fall's name is pronounced, which gradually descends (the 'decay'), while finishing the sentence and attributing to him his fixed virtues. This procedure is repeated endlessly. After a certain amount of time, usually no more than half an hour, another singer replaces the old one. The two main variations along which the value of the disciple as a singer is displayed are the length at which the first high-pitched syllable is held (the 'sustain'), and the extent to which the voice intentionally "breaks," loses its full tone, in an attempt to reach a high note. To an external listener, the latter feature is striking for its stark uniqueness: what may

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[41] In the Wolof language, repetition of the adjective makes the substantive.

elsewhere be considered an unintentional and embarrassing mistake, with the voice not able to sustain a note at that loudness, in the *Ben-Ben* is achieved intentionally. The *Ben-Ben* is performed at the beginning of every Mourid ceremony with the intention of informing the people that prayers are about to begin and telling them where. As I contend here, the *Ben-Ben* not only seems to draw people to the place where the ceremony will occur, but also to *constitute* the place.

Since most gatherings are generally held on the streets or in public places, the warning of their commencement also forms the religious space. Etymologically, 'sacred' derives from the past participle of the Latin verb 'to separate.'[42] Profane, conversely, means 'before the temple', where daily activities occur and from which the sacred needs to be separated. In the nomadic, contested, and ambiguous identity of Baay Fall, such sacred space is achieved through improvised infrastructures such as sound. To prepare a Baay Fall night in the central neighborhoods of Dakar, some big stones are put in the middle of the street, in order to stop cars. Once in front of the blocked road, drivers will understand the reason, and patiently turn back, finding another route in the thick traffic of the city. But also, in preparation for the night, big loudspeakers are hung in the trees along the street. The distorted sound coming out delimits the space as much as the stones do: both are temporal devices, tracing a space that becomes different through their presence.

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[42] I will discuss later how, thanks to Latour, to approach abstract or all-explaining concepts such as 'sacred' and 'social' as rather movements, domains that require a constant activity to be *in place*. In this sense, I relate the 'sacred' to the movement and action alluded by his etymology ('separated').

While I focus on the modes that music intervenes in the everyday making of Baay Fall world, the function of sound in creating a space holds for all Mouridsm. In the holy city of Touba and in Mbacké, almost entirely Mourid, such creation of a space starts prior to the morning prayer, before dawn. If there is electricity, the mosques begin to play at high volume Koranic recitations around three a.m., lasting for two hours at minimum. They consist of Imams' cassette recordings, which present a portion of the Koran in a structured melodic frame, with very few variations and a ternary meter (6/8), whose cyclical form eases the unfolding of the endless number of verses. In Mbacké, I once broached the issue of loud prayers before dawn to a friendly mother in the household where I was staying. The nights were presenting me with a mounting amount of issues: the mosquito nets safely hanging above the bed in which my friend and I were sleeping displayed unsafe holes no smaller than washing machines, which urged me to sleep fully covered. The overheating caused by the clothes in hot nights, the warmth of the bed shared with my friend, and the redness of my arms from mosquito bites did not predispose me to welcome loud prayers in the heart of the night.

Asking her about these nightly prayers, she told me about their purpose – chasing away evil spirits. My friendly acquaintance with her and my weakened spirit (meanwhile I was developing malaria) made me rhetorically ask if those prayers were not instead supposed to wake up people who were sleeping. Although benevolently accepting the joke, she naturally denied this, with a certain surprise about the question. Her explanations –and her surprise— helped me to reflect on the

way the sound creates a space in which people live because they share common values; it reminds them of and gives content to those values. For these reasons, the soundscape that I was experiencing, and sometime resisting, was not violently imposed –as I might have articulated during those hot and humid nights— but shared; no less, and perhaps no more, than the sounds of a metropolis that runs twenty-four hours a day.[43] A voice powerfully projecting in the night "*lahi laha illallah*" for hours could not, literally, *take place* without such a consensus. Other values, such as those of a capitalist society and individual consumerism, make people accept other sounds in other environments, not intrinsically any more pleasant, or less annoying, than prayers in the night.

Several scholars have explored sound in Islam, especially through the roles played by sermons, the muezzin's call to prayer, and individual cantillation.[44] Yet the pervasiveness of visualism in these analyses, as manifested by the ubiquity of the word 'landscape', has until recently hindered attention to sound in studies of place and senses of placement.[45] In the early fifties, McLuhan and Carpenter's work on "acoustic space" pioneered the reintroduction of sound, arguing for an "earpoint" contribution against the unique perspective of a "viewpoint", accounting for a

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[43] Keila Diehl discusses how performances and aesthetic choices contribute to the sense of the emplacement. Diehl, 2002. See also Simon Frith "music can stand for, symbolize, and offer the immediate experience of collective identity", in *ibidem*, p 16.

[44] Charles Hirschkind (2006), Ammon Shiloah (1995).

[45] Steven Feld, *Waterfall of Songs*, in Feld and Basso, 1996, p 94.

sensual mode of emplacement purely built around the visual sphere.[46] Later in the seventies, the Canadian composer Murray Schafer's "World Soundscape Project" explored sonic paths of emplacement in cities and countryside settings in Canada and Europe. His subsequent book provided the first vocabulary to think about the modes in which sound informs the experience of place.[47]

Anthropology has come late to this topic, perhaps uninterested in poorly nuanced categorizations of sound as "active and generative" as opposed to visual as "analytical and reflective" in these early works.[48] In "Waterfall of Songs," Steven Feld acknowledges these early contributions, to which he adds the concept of 'acoustemology' to reflect on the importance of sound "to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth."[49] Rather than a reverse –equally unsatisfactory- primacy of a single sense over the others, Feld points to the interplay of all of them in the experiential creation and positioning in a place.[50] Drawing on this stress in accounting for a "sensually sonic" mode of emplacement, I look here at the religious

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[46] *Ibid*.

[47] Schafer, 1977.

[48] Also, musicology and ethnomusicology have been late to the study of the sound because of certainty that music "was different". Analyses of sound devoid of their aesthetics charge have been left to scientific studies of acoustic.

[49] "Acoustic ecology and soundscape studies have had rather less impact on ethnographers, who might study how people hear, respond to, and imagine places as sensually sonic." *Ibid*., p 96

[50] Veit Erlmann similarly argues against a univocal critique of visualism: "the notion that colonial and postcolonial power relations hinge fundamentally on the "gaze," even though it helped spur the questioning of Western monopolies over knowledge and representation, appears to have generated only more texts and more images." Erlmann, 2004, p 4.

genres of Baay Fall music, yet from a perspective that focuses on them as collective forms of the social rather that as ways that respond to it. Baay Fall music does not stem from their sect and broader social context, rather it intervenes in, and partially creates, both. Generative aspects of musical practices in relation to the collective sense of belonging do not foreclose but, rather, illuminate the fragmented and contentious struggles of Baay Fallism.

ANT SOUNDSCAPE?

Soundscape, even when applied to music, focuses on sound and what it produces, not on artistic individual merits or meanings. I have analyzed here the Baay Fall practices of music as constitutive of a sonic sense of emplacement necessary to the Mourid religiosity to emerge in otherwise profane spaces. However, deploying 'soundscape' in this context may be counterproductive. If linked to the category of perception advanced by acousticians, soundscape may bring us back to the expectations of fixity and homogeneity inscribed in the concept of "scape."[51] Tim

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[51] Tim Ingold, 2007, and Feld, *Waterfall of Songs*, in Feld and Basso, 1996.

Ingold articulates a series of compelling critiques along this line. "The fact that sound is so often unproblematically compared to sight rather than light reveals much about our implicit assumptions regarding vision and hearing, which rest on the curious idea that eyes are screens which let no light through, leaving us to reconstruct the world inside our heads, whereas the ears are holes in the skull which let the sound right in so that it can mingle with the soul."[52] Sound, thus, does not provide unmediated access to an outside reality; it is as problematic a mediation as light is. As Ingold suggests, sound speaks more about where it occurs, rather than about what one discerns: "sound is not *what* we hear […] It is what we hear *in*."[53] Furthermore, the very idea of a "scape" may seem to confine analysis to a discrete space, whereas in fact "sound, like breath, is experienced as a movement," as an irregular and unstructured flow. Those two critiques --of a tempting, but ultimately false, hope in the immediacy of hearing and a risk of fixity in accounts framed by 'soundscape'-- reach the very core of the issue. These unquestioned expectations have significantly affected traditional older studies of soundscape: in the excitement for the potentials offered by a sense different than the sight, these assumptions have simply transferred from old visual analyses to the new ones of sound. Yet a patient consideration of the material side of the soundscape production may help overcome both.

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[52] Ibid.,p 11.

[53] Ibid., p 11.

Actor-Network Theory offers a better analytical framework to think about 'soundscape.' In my analysis, Baay Fall music creates and struggles to maintain a sacred aura in a temporary fashion and in a contested place. Moving away from artistic, expressive, and therefore, individual-centered aspects of music, 'soundscape' redirects the analysis of sound from aesthetic preoccupations towards an understanding of sound as a social actor –in the Actor-Network Theory sense. Traditionally attributed just to humans, 'actor' in ANT is "anything that changes the state of affairs."[54] ANT proposes a significant broadening of this concept, whereby 'action' does not depend anymore on the human faculty and intention to act. Far from envisaging any occult force, ANT solely wants to acknowledge all the entities that participate and contribute to make the social. Thinking about action beyond the category of intentionality does not imply a –rather absurd— non-human determinism, whereby objects do things instead of humans. Rather, it simply accounts for our every day experience of close entanglement of human and non-human interventions, to the point that the very distinction among them is not relevant anymore.[55]

Latour argues for a more inclusive notion of the social, better equipped to account for all the interventions that concur in making a social entity. Rather than a

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[54] Latour, 2005, p 67.

[55] ANT is not the establishment of some absurd symmetry between humans and non-hmans. To be symmetric simply means not to impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations. There are divisions one should never try to bypass, to go beyond, to try to overcome dialectically. They should rather be ignored and left to their own devices, like a once formidable castle now in ruin. *Ibid*, p 76.

constantly shrinking notion of society based on the category of human intentionality, a residual of the expanding domain of hard sciences, ANT instead proposes a notion of "actor" not confined to the human control. Society is the precarious result of these actions, rather than the fixed backdrop that stage them. Rather than a context –'social context', 'cultural context', 'sonic soundscape as context'— society is what is made and constantly remade by these heterogeneous interventions. An ANT soundscape accounts for a negotiated result, rather than being a permanent 'scape' from where its aura emanates.

As I contend, an ANT approach to 'soundscape' helps overcome the focus on music as an individual and cultural expression and not as a collective emergence that is affected by material and non-human contributions as much as by human ones. 'Soundscape' therefore allows an analysis of the site, the "horizon of meaning,"[56] where *Sam Fall* and *Ben-Ben* occur and contribute to 'create the social'. Often, discussions of what is not seeable are immediately charged with an aura of occultism and paranormal.[57] Yet sound works as other social entities do, and seems invisible only to the social sciences. Soundscape provides a unique insight that unveils the

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[56] Holland et al., 1998.

[57] The Mellon Sawyer Postdoctoral Fellowship of the MIT department of anthropology offers the seminar titled "Sensing the Unseen" for the year 2010. A slippage between 'to see' and 'to sense' is apparent in the overview. "This year-long seminar will explore how scholars in the social sciences and humanities study the unseen. Seeking to join more familiar attention to material culture with an innovative focus on immaterial culture, we pose the following questions: How might we best apprehend and represent the obscure, the elusive, the invisible, the occult, the uncanny?" "Here at the farthest end of our analytic spectrum, we locate those phenomena apprehended by some, experienced by many, and equally denied by others: ghosts, spirits, witches, angels, and gods." http://web.mit.edu/anthropology/sawyer.htm If what is not seen may tautologically be described as obscure, why also elusive, invisible, occult, and uncanny?

major contribution of Baay Fall chants to the sect and their position in relation to the marabouts. Superficial accounts of Baay Fall music, described as suggestive, but in regards to the anthropologist and not to them, and in any case never explained why, do not render justice to its crucial and vital role in their world making.

In illuminating 'soundscape' with ANT theory, two consequences are particularly relevant here: a broadening of the musical field to include listeners and a challenge to the ethnomusicology's traditional approach.[58] An analysis of musical practices challenges the assumption that listening is a pre-cultural form of perception. Looking instead at their cultural inscription, it offers an unexplored, because not considered as such, domain of the social. Social sciences assume listening to be either a purely unmediated reception of global mass media influences –as a variant to the physiological category of perception—or, as in the case of a few cultural studies scholars, a discursive practice, thus prerogative of interpretative critiques.[59] Anthropologists have recently questioned both assumptions -listening as passive[60] or, conversely, as an activity requiring full attention.[61] With a focus on audience and listeners, not all the meanings are confined to the text. A closer attunement to sounds, sharpens the –until than— poorly utilized ethnographer's

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[58] See Gray, 2007, p 107-128. See also Larkin, 2008; and White, 2008.

[59] See Sutton, 1996.Radway, 1991.

[60] Referred back since Aristotle: see Erlmann, 2004, p 10.

[61] Hirschkind, 2006, p 13.

ear.[62] Soundscape, secondly, allows a further move from classical ethnomusicology, ushering in an approach more attentive to the material conditions of musical practices. In this perspective, 'sound' adds materiality to historical and ethnographic accounts, giving substance to the spatial dimension of every social phenomenon - here the creation of a sacred sense of emplacement on public streets. Attuning our ears to the sounds of the field puts to rest our objectifying gaze,[63] and gives objects a livelier role.

MAKING THE BAAY FALL

Why, one may ask, trace how different forces compose a social group, and bother about inconsistencies, ambiguities, and instability? Why, in other words, must

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[62] Clifford, 1986.

[63] I allude here at the legacy of the Enlightenment primacy of the visual sense, followed by its cascade of metaphoric words or expression (starting with 'enlightenment' itself) that tightly links it to rationality. Cfr. Foucault, 1995, Walter Ong, 1982.

the social be made? Few scholars have studied Baay Fall.[64] Recent studies mention the distinction between Baay Fall and *Baay Faux*, as I noted before as well. Yet no one has explored the choice to pursue one group, the "true" Baay Fall, and not the other. Charlotte Pezeril explicitly draws attention to this contentious fracture, but implicitly centers her study on just one side of it.[65] What if, instead, one wants to study the Baay *Faux*? What are the resistances to studying something "unauthentic"? Those questions challenged me significantly during my months of fieldwork, and forced me to acknowledge a certain natural proclivity for 'a field' that could please my thirst for a well defined, traditional, possibly outcast, and of course *authentic*, object of study. However, simply dismissing the question and beginning with a silent assumption has not satisfied me, either in reading books or in doing research.

Paraphrasing Latour, 'Baay Fall' can't be a solution, nor can it be used to tautologically explain itself.[66] Rather, the 'social' –here the Baay Fall— is a constant movement of reassociation and reassembling, where what moves –the actors— are humans and objects that are not, in themselves, *social*.[67] Society cannot be the

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[64] Scarce attention from the international social researcher is surprising but perhaps justifiable in a certain uneasiness of social sciences in dealing with it that I`ll discuss here. From a national perspective, it speaks of the mix of marginalization of the sect and fear that generally surrounds it.

See Pezeril, 2008.

[65] *Ibid*.

[66] "According to [ANT, sociologists] have simply confused what they should explain with the explanation. They begin with society or other social aggregates, whereas one should end with them.

[67] "'social' is not some glue that could fix everything […]; it is what is glued together by many other types of connectors", Latour, 2005, p 8. Furthermore: "analysts run the risk of believing that it's the invocation of social forces that will provide an explanation", p 66.

starting point or assumed as a discrete sphere of action. Xavier Audrain centers his analysis on the paths that lead a person to become Baay Fall, stressing the dimension of this, tellingly named, "individual choice."[68] Focusing on the *njebelu,* the act of submission that marks the entrance into the Baay Fall sect, Audrain takes for granted what Baay Fallism is, without questioning what "*communauté Baay Fall*" means to them, and what he means by it. Acknowledging the individual path bravely challenges the focus on the collective that has been a major trend in African studies. Yet one may ask: what happens after the initiation? 'Baay Fall' remains a "*système*," a fixed set of markers that anchors the boundaries of an identity. Pezeril and Audrain, the two main scholars studying this sect, prefer to confirm the individual/community dichotomy, and not to deal with how Baay Fall negotiate their world, beyond those two categories.

Unlike those studies, I have attempted here to shift attention to a heterogeneous, fragmented, and never completed world. Rather than being at the periphery, either spatially or theoretically, drawing boundaries and making sacred spaces through soundscape are intrinsically part of the endless creation of the Baay Fall. Following Latour again, the remaking of the group *is* the group.[69] Thus there is nothing before the movement of assembling, nor after: the 'social' is the displacement that occurs, the unforeseen result of many actors.[70] Once freed, a

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[68] Audrain, 2001.

[69] *Ibid.*, p 35

[70] *Ibid.*, p 64.

broader definition of the social includes any movement that accounts for such a gathering, such a continuous, contested emergence.

This theoretical shift introduces a new insight into the Baay Fall's soundscape construction. An ANT notion of agency opens up the possibility to re-consider technology.[71] The use of microphones and loudspeakers, in their complex relationship with the aesthetic of the voice in Baay Fall, elicited my interest in this. A few scholars have recently argued for a more nuanced understanding of the introduction of Western technologies outside of the West.[72] Often seen as a pure transposition –or imposition— of immaterial advancement, new technologies rather enter into dialogue with the culture they encounter, defying any linear model of either passive reception or critic resistance. The quality of sound that results from the sound systems commonly used during a Baay Fall ceremony does certainly strike a listener unaccustomed to it. The voice appears significantly distorted and modified, making the sung words almost incomprehensible.[73] Regardless of any aesthetic considerations, such characteristics eminently affect the sonic environment: a

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[71] Larkin, 2008, p 20.

[72] "The use of electronic sound technology, a pervasive form of Western influence in the music of the world, does not in itself Westernize the musical culture in which it is adopted" Sutton, 1996, p 250. See also Penley and Ross: "technologies are not repressively foisted upon passive populations, they are developed and placed in accord with a complex set of existing rules or rational procedures, institutional histories, technical possibilities, and last, but not least, popular desire". In *ibid*.

[73] For the delicate usage of the word 'distortion', Sutton refers to the -attempted- neutral definition offered by Walser (1993): "electronic distortion results when components are overdriven –required to amplify or reproduce a signal beyond the capacity do to so 'cleanly'", in Sutton, 1996. This still leaves open the vast gamut of cultural differences in the perception and use of such phenomena.

floating, distant, and unpolished sound reverberates on the air and pervades the whole space.

I constantly asked myself if they notice it, if they hear in the same way I do, and if they would change for better equipment were this economically feasible. Part of the answer lies in most of the recordings made by local producers or independently by musicians: the same highly suggestive sound is achieved through a considerable recourse to voice effects, namely the reverb. Yet I don't think the question ends here. The creation of this incredibly poignant sonic aura emerges out of both human and material agency. The primacy of human intentionality simply fades away and mingles with the hisses of the microphone, the unexpected black-outs, the rattles and static of the speakers.[74] Beyond speculating on whether Baay Fall really mean that sound or not, it is worth considering the role of material objects in the creation of any social outcome, overcoming the desire to determine to what extent something is truly intended or not. A closer look does offer possibilities other than exploring –and exploiting— ideas of subjectivity and intentionality. In ethnomusicology the increasing importance of new technologies, along with unexpected uses of them, has caused embarrassed silence and unjustified negligence.[75] In the search for authenticity, it took a while before scholars could

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[74] Shai Burstyin recalls the argument of the "intentional fallacy", instrumental in shifting attention from composer/composition to performance. Yet the listerner/listening has been until recently almost comlpletely neglected, the object of an unquestioned extension of the aura of authenticity emanating from the composition and the performance. Burstyn, 1997, p 693.

[75] Sutton, 1996.

acknowledge that sonic tradition is mediated —not only by the intervention of memory, politics, power, but also by technologies.[76]

In the *Sam Fall* the microphone is, first of all, singular: it is held alternately by one or more people, the ones that make the call and the ones who respond, when they don't take advantage of the larger pool of singing people to overcome the lack of amplification. Contended among the participants because of the call and response structure, the microphone obviously affects the sound that is heard through the amplification system. Not only are the first and the last parts of phrases are often cut but, not also, the microphone "records" the movements and the anxiety that it creates: the density of human presence and the busy activity around the microphone itself. Whether intended or not, such activity, rather than being marginal, defines and signifies the musical and religious experience. Coincidentally, Latour mentions the microphone as an example of "redistribut[ing] the local" beyond what he identifies as the last belief in unity of the Western imaginary: the self.[77] Such illusions of a unitary subject as the exclusive holder of agency and meaning are constructed by maintaining objects as, in ANT jargon, 'intermediaries' rather than 'mediators': purely passive transportators of agency rather than fully-dignified actors involved in shaping content. "At every point during the lecture, something could break, be it the microphone, the speaker, and perhaps even the teacher. If any of the intermediaries mutates into a mediator, then the whole set up, no matter how solemn or controlled,

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[76] *Ibid.*, p 250.

[77] Latour, 2005, p 200.

may become unpredictable" (*ibid*, p 202). In Actor-Network Theory it seems that actors become evident when intermediaries "break," when something goes wrong, so humans are forced to pay attention to something otherwise left unnoticed.[78]

However, the same sense of estrangement can occur in different ways: to me, it was given by my outsider position, more precisely by a clash of hearing and listening practices: an intentional attention to a sonic source (listening) while playing did not prevent me from missing fundamental elements of it, hence my inability to hear the rhythmic frame, and situate myself in the system of references.[79] As one argument in favor of not doing native anthropology, also, I immediately found noticeable the crucial relevance of certain objects in creating the Baay Fall world. Passing the microphone, longing for it and contending it among all the other participants ties in tightly with the texture of the sound produced.

The quality of sound relates in two ways to the techniques and aesthetics of singing: the appreciation of breaking the full tone of the voice with high-pitched cries finds, on the one hand, support, extension and, on the other hand, inspiration in

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[78] Even though Latour acknowledges other ways of triggering this paradigmatic shift. See ibid., p 80.

[79] I draw a distinction between hearing and listening to investigate the domain of the sonic sense of emplacement that relates more to a collective and generative domain of the social than to individual will. In studying cassette sermons in contemporary Egypt, Hirschkind describes in detail the physiological and bodily involvements entailed in their reception. "'to hear with heart' […] is not strictly something cognitive but involves the body in its entirety, as a complex synthesis of patterned moral reflexes." While I have tried to complicate this relationship away from a pure stimulus/response pattern, I share the concern with accounting for the extra-cognitive aspect of religious music, as manifested in separating hearing from listening. "Listening with attention, *al-insat*, is figured as a complex sensory skill, one opposed to mere hearing (*sam*), understood as a passive and spontaneous receptivity." Hirschkind, 2006, p 70. Yet, surprisingly, Hirschkind is not consistent in the distinction of the terms throughout his book. See *ibid.*, Chap. 3.

the effects of the sound system's mediation.[80] Robert Walser notes that "not only electronic circuitry, but also human body produces aural distortion through excessive power. Human screams and shouts are usually accompanied by vocal distortion, as the capacity of the vocal chords is exceeded."[81] In this mutual relationship, neither of the two, the aesthetics of sound and the sound of microphones and loudspeakers, can be said to precede the other in importance, nor that should that be the main interest. Rather, the point is to note the close entanglement of the two, the enmeshment of human possibility and choice with technological mediation. This human and technological *excess* –to which I have alluded in the *Ben-ben* and in the *Sam Fall*, as well as the one referred by Walser— contributes to the creation of the sacred.

This religious aesthetics has been expanded in recording, with an abundant use of reverb and distortion effects on the voice: the singer's efforts for an impossible

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[80] A similar mutual inspiration reminds me of the jazz aesthetic of a singer's improvisation with an instrument's tone (often saxophone or trombone) and, conversely, the instruments' shift towards the sound of a voice in their solos. Cf. some of the paranoid, yet in a odd way exact, prohibitions of foreign music, here jazz, in the Germany of the Third Reich: "[it is prohibited] the use of tonally undefined mordents, ostentatious trills, double-stopping or ascendant glissandi, obtained in the jazz style by excessive vibrato, lip technique and/or shaking of the musical instrument. In jazz terminology, the effects known as "dinged," "smear" and "whip." Also the use of intentional vocalization of an instrumental tone by imitating a throaty sound. In jazz terminology, the adoption of the "growl" on brass wind instruments, and also the "scratchy" clarinet tone. Also the use of any intentional instrumentalization of the singing voice by substituting senseless syllables for the words in the text by "metalizing" the voice. In jazz terminology, so-called "scat" singing and the vocal imitation of brass wind instruments. Also the use in Negro fashion of harshly timbered and harshly dynamic intonations unless already described. In jazz terminology, the use of "hot" intonations. Also the use in Negro fashion of dampers on brass and woodwind instruments in which the formation of the tone is achieved in solo items with more than the normal pressure. This does not apply to saxophones or trombones. Likewise forbidden, in the melody, is any melody formed in the manner characteristic of Negro players, and which can be unmistakably recognized." *Conditions Governing the Grant of Licenses for Dance Music ww*w.shellac.org/wams/wnazi01.html

[81] In Sutton, *1996*, p 254.

unity of full tone and highest pitch found an ally in the recording's unconcealed intervention. Both in recordings and live, deliberately because of the voice effects or unintentionally due to the quality of the sound system,[82] the result is extremely suggestive, unique and in its way precise, whereby the powerfulness of the name evocation literally reverberates through a blaring, distant voice. This comingling, and not a jealous affirmation –and imposition- of human subjectivity, even when argued as a creative appropriation of Western sound technology as Sutton compellingly claims, creates the space of identity of Baay Fall.[83]

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[82] As I will discuss in the last section.

[83] Ibid.

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