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Situating "wicked" women: gender panic and savoir vivre in urban Senegal

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Conclusion:
Women's *savoir vivre*
in a context
of gender panic

With this dissertation, I set out to understand women's gender and sexual dissidence in relation to broader social transformations in Senegal. Analysing gender panic and public debates about women's rights and -positions in society, on the one hand, I have studied how various forms of gender and sexual dissidence coalesce in the categorisation of "wicked" women (Hodgson and McCurdy 2001). On the other hand, I have brought together a variety of cases of women whose behaviour has come to be seen as a threat to the social and moral order of society. I started this dissertation with the question: *How do "wicked" women navigate gendered societal expectations and gender panic as they craft their lives?* I explored how different forms of agency have emerged, and transformed, among *féministes*, lesbiennes, and *ni génn guddi* (W: those who go out at night, i.e. women who engage in commercial sex), as women give shape to their supposedly wicked lives amidst gender panic, constraining gender and sexual norms, and in often precarious material circumstances.

The dissertation moved between women's engagements with public debates and representations of gender and sexualities on the one hand, and women's positioning and repositioning in their own social environments on the other. Women's agency shifts in the midst of intensifying public debates, but it does not wither. Through their craftiness, women develop a *savoir vivre*, a knowledge of how to live well, which enables them to respond to the boundaries of "acceptable" behaviour. Zooming in on so-called wicked women has allowed me to grasp the centrality of craftiness to navigate dissident practices in a context of gender panic. This allows for a deeper understanding of women's positioning as they respond to, but also as they generate social transformations.

Patriarchal anxieties in postcolonial Senegal

A key takeaway of this ethnography is that gender is important for understanding how women become cast as wicked. Studies of sexualities in Africa have demonstrated that gender is crucial for understanding sexuality because it "is an essential part of how people understand themselves, and it refers to social understandings and representations of being wo/man" (Spronk 2012, 33; see also Dankwa 2009; 2011; Gaudio 2009; Reid 2013). This dissertation has focused mostly on cases of sexual dissidence, but the overarching conclusions are about gender. Because sexuality is an important terrain through which gender relations take shape, transgressions of gender norms often become apparent through sexual acts. Fulfilling gendered expectations depends heavily on (women's) proper sexual conduct, and therefore supposed sexual immorality often serves as the grounds for casting women as "wicked." The stigmatisation of women often revolves around accusations of women being *caga* (W: "prostitute") or *lesbienne*. The dominant representation in the media of *lesbiennes* as "sentimental" and grouping together in "gangs" (see Chapter Four), however, expresses a fear of women who conspire against men in

groups. As women supposedly group together to escape control, they raise patriarchal anxieties about the loss of control over women.

Where *lesbiennes* are stigmatised, the concern is not primarily with their supposed same-sex orientation. The negative representation in the media of *lesbiennes* as violent women resembles that of women in polygynous marriages who engage in fights with one another (see Chapter Four). Together, such representations conjure up an image of women as lacking restraint and civility. This feeds misogynous ideas of supposedly hot-headed women who are caught up in allegedly trivial questions of interpersonal strife and status, and it suits patriarchal preoccupations of pitting women against each other (Gueye 2010a). By highlighting their aggressive behaviour, women's moral degeneracy is supposedly proven, and heteropatriarchal power – in the form of polygynous men or homophobic legislation and rhetoric for example – remains untouched by critique.

The patriarchal anxieties that are expressed through panic about the moral degeneration of society affect the possibilities of feminist activism. Senegalese *féministes* have been fighting for the right to abortion for decades, and although such demands have always been met with opposition, today they are increasingly linked to LGBTQI+ sexualities as a way to silence its proponents. *Féministes* are accused of conspiring with the West in a project to depopulate Africa with the legalisation of abortion and of LGBTQI+ sexualities. Such panic reflects anxieties about the reproduction of the population, and of the loss of patriarchal power structures (Tamale 2020). As a result of such panic, *féministes* largely keep quiet about questions of same-sex sexualities. Moreover, the risk of being exposed as a *lesbienne* has worked to silence women who have advocated for the right to abortion, as the story of Nguenar in chapter one showed.

Ni génn guddi have been somewhat exempted from the current gender panic, but popular discourse nevertheless condemns women who go out at night for resorting to all sorts of immoral vice to obtain material wealth. Anxieties about the spread of commercial sex practices are visible in the media representation of women. Newspaper headings like “Object of all desires: The iPhone makes Senegalese women lose their minds. They are ready to sell their body for an iPhone” (Thior and Pouye 2020) put forward the idea that women in particular are susceptible to moral corruption. Concerns with women's propensity to immoral behaviour puts women under more scrutiny. They are stigmatised for their dissidence because it is understood to potentially upset the gender order. Therefore, when analysing women's stigmatisation as “wicked” and the responses that women develop to navigate such stigma, we have to look at the intersections of sexuality with gender, among other factors like socio-economic status.

Related to the argument that gender is an important factor for understanding how women become cast as “wicked,” is the point that the concern with women’s sexuality is not a question of sexual desires, orientations, or practices per se. Sexuality is a source of anxiety, but it is also a politically salient site for debate and contention through which political authorities claim power and influence in the public sphere (Bop 2008; Currier 2018; Meiu 2022; Nyanzi 2013; Tamale 2013). To address questions of sexual dissidence meaningfully, then, we may sometimes need to decentre sexuality from our analysis to focus on how gender panics emerge as a discourse that articulates other anxieties (Herdt 2009; Meiu 2023; Rao 2020).

The story of Ndella (Chapter Two) is insightful here. As a young teenager, she was called *caga* by her father when she came home from an evening at the beach with friends. Whether she was actually engaged in commercial sex by going out at night or by doing *mbaraan* (W: having multiple romantic or sexual partners from whom one receives material gifts) was not the family’s biggest concern: her father called her out because she was spending her money on herself, instead of sharing it with her family. Years later, when she had started dating Arame, her family accused Arame of having led Ndella astray, luring her into “lesbianism.” Arame had been taking care of Ndella financially by paying for her professional studies, something that Ndella’s family had never managed to do. It revealed a feeling of parental loss of control over their child’s life decisions, and a fear that this further worsened the family’s already precarious economic situation, as Ndella increasingly spent time away from her family to focus on her studies and her relationship to Arame. In addition to the importance of religious morality campaigns, political power contestations, and political leaders’ strategies of scapegoating certain groups and holding them responsible for economic malaise, such a sense of parental loss of control over youth who cease to respond to kinship obligations of reciprocity and sharing is important for understanding widely shared anxieties about sexuality (Pierce 2016).-

In widespread anxiety about sexuality, “lesbians” and “prostitutes” occupy a particular position as supposed threats to the postcolonial state. According to Jacqui M. Alexander (2005, 22-23):

Women’s sexual agency and erotic autonomy have always been troublesome for the state [...] Erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation [...] [P]articular figures have come to embody this eroticism, functioning historically as the major symbols of threat. At this moment in the neocolonial state’s diffusion of sexualized definitions of morality, sexual and erotic autonomy have been most frequently cathected on the body of the prostitute and the lesbian. [T]he categories “lesbian” and “prostitute” are now positioned together within black heteropatriarchy as outlaw, operating outside

the boundaries of law and, therefore, poised to be disciplined and punished within it.

“Prostitutes” have historically functioned as epitomes of dissidence, as women’s commercial sex practices have largely remained elusive to state control (White 1990). The way that “prostitutes” have functioned as a symbol of threat in Senegal is apparent since prostitution became regulated in the 1940s. The regulation of prostitution functions as a powerful mechanism for the exclusion of women who do not conform to sexual norms, and it provides a framework for the control over women’s sexuality (Bowen and Bungay 2016).

The control over people’s sexual behaviour has been high on the agenda recently, and it has been particularly visible in a proposal for a new law in 2021 that sought to further criminalise same-sex sexualities in Senegal. In these attempts, *lesbiennes* have joined “prostitutes” as epitomes of dissidence. The anti-queer protests *Non à l’homosexualité* of 2021 and 2022 alerted the public to the rise of “lesbianism” in Senegal: largely ignoring women’s same-sex practices thus far had supposedly led to a “lesbianisation” of society. The way men who are presumed to be *gay* have been victims of witch hunts, (mob) violence and the mediatisation of “scandals” about supposed “gay weddings” (Coly 2019; Mbaye 2016) can similarly be understood as resulting from gender panic. As supposedly *gay* men, they transgress the heteropatriarchal imperative of cross-sex relationships and the control over women’s bodies that comes with such relationships. Together with fierce resistance against women’s activism for access to abortion, these are attempts at holding on to colonial patriarchal power relations in the face of power contestations and change in family structures (Tamale 2020).

The putting into discourse of female and dissident sexualities, which runs against some long-standing expectations and values of discretion around matters of sexuality, signals a growing anxiety over the loss of control over women’s bodies and sexualities. It also reveals how heteropatriarchy is constantly being defended through the reiteration of norms, the identification of bodies that should be excluded from normative citizenship, and through the policing of morality (Meiu 2022; Wiegman and Wilson 2015). Leaders have politicised questions of gender and sexuality as they construct ideas about national identity and citizenship in an attempt to secure the status quo and their own power therein. The problems and uncertainties associated with socio-economic transformations are largely displaced onto women’s bodies, who become blamed for social ills (Sow 1997).

Some political and religious leaders are mobilising “traditional values” in postcolonial contexts like Senegal to serve anti-colonial arguments against the continuous power of the West and the influence on supposedly traditional Senegalese ways of living. Such

discourses constitute Senegal as radically different from the West, a dominant tendency in much scholarship and popular thinking on Africa (Awondo 2012; Awondo, Geschiere and Reid 2012; Diabate 2020a). In presenting a stable and static image of Senegalese socio-cultural norms, conservative political and religious leaders ignore the ever-shifting nature of norms and practices. Studying supposedly wicked women and their interactions with gender and sexual norms, gender panic, and family expectations, has provided a framework for understanding how social transformations engender not only gender panic, but also bring about particular forms of dissident practices.

Situating “wicked” women in the study of gender and sexualities in Africa

By studying ethnographically how *féministes*, *lesbiennes*, and *ñi génn guddi* navigate gender norms and gender panic as they craft their lives, I have drawn upon three interrelated scholarly fields: African feminist analysis, queer African studies, and studies pertaining to global health and development. These fields have made important contributions to the scholarly debates about gender and sexuality. For a long time, studies on sexuality, women’s bodies, and women’s sexual pleasure were absent from most African feminist analysis (Hendriks and Spronk 2020; McFadden 2003; Spronk 2012). A racist colonial history of the study of sexualities in Africa as one of “permissiveness” and “sexual excess” (McClintock 1995; Salo and Gqola 2006) led many African feminist scholars to approach the study of sexualities with caution. Although much research on sexualities in Africa remains donor-driven and informed by the portrayal of sex as a “problem,” the scholarship on sexualities in Africa has expanded considerably (Arnfred 2009; Hendriks and Spronk 2020). I drew upon this growing field of studies on sexualities in the field of African feminist analysis as I explored the, sometimes tense, relations between sexual rights debates and feminism in Senegal. This dissertation contributes to the field of African feminist analysis by analysing how same-sex sexualities enter the spaces of feminist analysis and activism. Although this remains a challenge, particularly in a time when accusing someone of being a *lesbienne* is the fastest way to silence her, some of my interlocutors have demonstrated how they find ways to carefully address sexual rights in their work, even if much secrecy is required.

In the fields of global health and development, which significantly increased research activities in Africa in the 1980s with the discovery of HIV/AIDS, studies of sexualities were predominantly approached as a problem (Hendriks and Spronk 2020). Epidemiological studies of individuals’ “risky” sex practices have been central to much research (Cornwall and Jolly 2009), and in studies of “sex work,” women’s agency is often denied as “sex work” is understood to be the result of coercion or violence (Ditmore 2008). In this dissertation, I have moved beyond an analysis of the reasons why women choose to engage in commercial sex, and instead I focused on the centrality of women’s “oddkin”

(Haraway 2016) bonds with other *ñi génn guddi* and with *lesbiennes*, and the forms of sociality and dependency that emerged in women's networks as they seek ways to navigate the challenges of life together.

The field of queer African studies is budding, yet ethnographic knowledge on same-sex desiring women remains scarce. To date, Serena Dankwa's (2021) *Knowing Women* remains the only monograph published on women's same-sex intimacies in West Africa, in addition to Zethu Matebeni's (2011) monograph on black lesbian identities in Johannesburg, and the ethnographic work of Henriette Gunkel (2009; 2010) on same-sex desiring women in South Africa. In Senegal, studies on same-sex sexualities have focused almost exclusively on male same-sex intimacies. My contribution to the field of queer African studies is an ethnographic inquiry into same-sex desiring women in Senegal. It reveals the many crafts that women develop to follow their same-sex desires, including concealment, secrecy and trickery. Most importantly, this dissertation shows how the necessity for women to stick together and transmit the know-how of navigating same-sex desires together, also creates the conditions for conflict among women.

Overall, the developments in these three scholarly fields reveal how women's lives and sexualities are often studied in silos: research on same-sex sexualities is often conducted separately from research on "sex work" and from gender research. The main contribution of this dissertation is that I bring these three fields together. I have brought together three groups of women who are differently positioned in society, and who have consequently largely been studied separately. By bringing *féministes*, *lesbiennes*, and *ñi génn guddi* together in one study, I challenge the compartmentalisation of research by showing how different acts of dissidence, such as same-sex love, commercial sex, or vocally contesting particularly gendered norms such as *sutura* (W: discretion, privacy, modesty) and *muñ* (W: enduring, persisting silently in the face of hardship), coalesce and bring about forms of agency whereby the supposed differences between these women are sidestepped. I have shown how women's craftiness in navigating gender dissidence differs on some points, while converging on other points. Particularly in a time of right-wing nationalism and populist rhetoric that has appropriated identity politics as a way of pitting groups against one another, undoing the fragmentation of society into isolated, supposedly incompatible identities and groups is crucial (Eng and Puar 2020).

An ethnography of gender dissidence

Faced with rising anti-queer sentiments and gender panic, I was interested in understanding how women's agency takes shape and transforms, in the midst of intensifying debates and public visibility. Following a qualitative methodology, this thesis offers a contemporary ethnography of gender dissidence in urban Senegal. By

following women in their everyday lives, I have been able to observe how they navigate their relationships with friends, lovers, family, and in a professional context, as they seek ways to live their dissident lives.

This dissertation started and ended with the role of the public sphere in delimiting women's agency at the precipice of supposed wickedness. In Chapter One, I explored how *féministes* give shape to their agency in the public sphere in a context of gender panic. This context, and particularly the virulent anti-queer debates of the last years, highlights new tensions concerning women's agency. From these debates emerges a picture that, despite an increased visibility of *féministes* and a growing presence of women in the public sphere in positions of leadership, there is little room for a questioning of gender and sexual norms. Female sexualities remain seriously policed, and the efforts of women to acquire the right to abortion in cases of incest or rape are heavily combated. The domain of sexual rights proves to be a contentious terrain, and anti-queer sentiments in particular, mark the precipice of supposed wickedness in the current era. Nguenar's decision to take a step back from abortion activism for fear of being publicly accused of being a *lesbienne*, reveals how anti-queer sentiments impact feminist activism.

In a postcolonial context, critiquing *féministes* for being uprooted and Westernised is an effective way to disqualify women's agency as disrespectful and ignorant of local cultural and religious values. Nguenar argued about the consequences that women face for speaking out in public that “*Ku bëgg wax, day gaawa dee*” (W: the one who likes to talk dies quickly). Speaking out publicly about questions of gender and sexuality is subject to backlash, and this helps us to understand that speaking out is not a preferred option for most women. Where the cultural expectation of *sutura* has transformed with the liberalisation of the media, leading to a “sexualised public sphere” (A. Diop 2012; Wittmann 2008) in which sexuality is extensively discussed, *sutura* nevertheless remains a stick to beat those women who challenge the patriarchal status quo. Paradoxically, women's spaces for dissident expressions may shrink with growing public debate about sexual rights. While the public sphere is an important arena for the debate about women's rights and for setting public norms pertaining to women's roles and behaviour, to really understand how women's lives are impacted by social transformations we have to look beyond these debates.

Most women respond to, and navigate, gender and sexual norms by staying away from these tense public debates. In Chapter Two, I analysed how women draw on the affordances of silence, ambiguity, and elusiveness to live their lives as supposedly wicked women. Women's gender dissidence is largely shaped by the Senegalese norm of *sutura*. By maintaining ambiguity and elusiveness around their persona, women avoid public debates and discourses about LGBTQI+ identities, prostitution, or feminism.

Women crafted *pexe jigéen* (W: women's solutions) that enabled them to avoid coming into full view, which would make them vulnerable to criticism and stigma. Whether it is the shifting ambiguity of religious and gender appearances that Astou embodies, the tricks and humorous deceit that Ndella and Arame played to escape stigma, or Coura's multiple names and identities as she shifts between "going out at night" in Dakar and living with her mother in another city: by playing with people's perceptions of them, these women have found various ways to circumvent direct confrontation about their relationships.

Such craftiness creates room for dissidence, but adopting a trickster modality in itself is not enough to remain elusive. In a context in which disclosure and exposure increasingly characterise the Senegalese public debate, women's craftiness needs to be embedded in a moral economy of not-knowing. Rather than hiding dissident practices from others in an absolute sense, secrecy concerning one's dissident practices is a collective affair. Mariama's wedding to Yacine had to proceed with utmost care, given the regular mediatization of so-called gay weddings since 2008. When they were married, however, both wore a golden wedding ring. Mariama's mother had asked twice to whom Mariama had got married, but she never pushed for an answer when Mariama responded with a short, evasive "no one." While Mariama felt that her mother is aware of the nature of her relationship with Yacine, she also trusts that her mother will not confront her about it directly. Keeping this secret is a shared concern of Mariama and her mother, on whom public knowledge of her daughter's same-sex relationship would also reflect negatively.

Craftiness is not an innate capacity of women, but it relates to a set of skills that are developed, learned, and transmitted in women's networks in particular ways. In Chapter Three, I analysed mothering as a central practice for women to share resources and knowledge with each other. Mothers make their daughters streetwise, introducing and initiating them into a new milieu – whether this was a football team, the milieu of nightlife, or the city in general for newcomers. They house and feed daughters, and negotiated ties with women's biological families. The kinship bonds that women developed, are indicative of the spatial constraints that women face to live their supposedly wicked lives. In a context in which social control, of women in particular, is high, women have to create spaces away from family. Women's kinship bonds also shed light on the relevance of presumably "odd" connections between *ñi génn guddi* and *lesbiennes*. Although often considered to be living different lives and to have different concerns in terms of health and rights, my research shows that *lesbiennes* and *ñi génn guddi* often live together and share a *savoir vivre* in networks of kinship. Beyond the supposed boundaries between heterosexual sex work and same-sex love, *ñi génn guddi* and *lesbiennes* have developed meaningful oddkin bonds as a way to share knowledge and resources for survival in an urban context. Mame Diarra's "house of *kóoba*," where *ñi génn guddi*, *lesbiennes* and drug addicts live together, sharing rooms and resources, is an example. While the space of

the house offered the possibility to establish oddkin bonds, the substance of these bonds concerned the creation and transmission of a *savoir vivre*, a knowing how to live, together.

At the same time, the importance of such kinship bonds is not meant to suggest a harmonious peaceful community of so-called wicked women who always bond together to collectively confront marginalisation and precarity. Chapter Four revealed how the forms of sociality that women construct for a collective *savoir vivre* are fragile, affected by the broader societal context that criminalises and stigmatises their relationships or work, and by an economic context of scarcity of jobs and resources. Women's tight-knit networks, in which everything is shared – from scarce economic resources, to housing, as well as lovers – inevitably occasionally lead to jealousy and (violent) arguments, with women envious to keep and possess the little that is available to them. Women develop values of reciprocity and loyalty with regards to such sharing, and they can punish a (former) lover or a friend when they break these promises. In this chapter, I analysed how practices of violent exposure and humiliation, which women refer to as *wàcce*, has emerged among some *lesbienne* networks in a context of gender panic. The practice of *wàcce* engages a paradox: women need each other's care and support to be able to live their dissident lives, yet they also compete over the scarce resources that are available to them.

An analysis of why women would resort to *wàcce* in a context in which the consequences of being exposed as a *lesbienne* can be so serious has brought me to an understanding of the importance of feelings of honour and shame in shaping women's agency. Where the risk of tainting the family honour can be a reason for *féministes* to avoid speaking out too loudly for abortion rights or for sexual rights at all, for *lesbiennes* who have been stripped of their *sutura*, and who have thus been positioned outside of what are deemed honourable subjects already, shaming others through *wàcce* can seem the only way to restore or save their honour in their network. In other words: honour is an important element for defining and protecting one's social status, and once it is lost, attacking the honour of someone else can be a powerful way, if also the only way, to regain honour and to reposition oneself in one's social world. Stripped of their *sutura*, leading to their social positioning outside of what are deemed honourable subjects, women experience greater freedom to show their passions, compared to women of higher social status. *Wàcce* serves the negotiation of social hierarchies in these women's networks, where successful performances of superiority – in appearance, verbal wit, and physical domination – gain women respect and recognition in their network. By calling out someone else's wickedness, women who perform *wàcce* attempt to reposition themselves in a moral order by exposing someone else's immoral behaviour.

Women's diverse forms of agency demonstrate how vulnerability and strength go hand in hand in people's lives (Diabate 2020a). Like Serena Dankwa's "knowing women,"

“wicked” women display a capacity to value and pursue dissident desires as they navigate a context of hostility and constraints (Dankwa 2021, 74). This know-how to live well and to enjoy dissident practices circulates among women’s networks where they learn with and from each other. This transmission of *savoir vivre* enables so-called wicked women to develop the necessary multiple crafts of secrecy, elusiveness, and trickery to survive and live well under adverse conditions. But more than allowing women to survive in their own social environment, their craftiness also displays a potential to undermine the disciplinary agendas of religious and political leaders. Women embody and navigate multiple and supposedly conflicting identities, occupations, kinship attachments and social obligations as they craft a *savoir vivre*. This *savoir vivre* proposes a nuanced perspective on dissidence and the seemingly ever-increasing polarisation that gender and sexual dissidence appear to evoke across the world.

These different forms of agency that women enact in living dissident lives point in the direction of the influence of positionality for women’s capacity for action. Analysing the different ways in which *féministes*, *lesbiennes*, and *ñi génn guddi* cultivate ways to live gender dissident lives and push the boundaries of women’s gender roles, has led me to consider a number of factors that shape women’s “wicked” lives, which I discuss in the next section.

“A desire for freedom”

“C’était juste un désir de free. Un désir de liberté que je voulais exercer aussi. Un désir d’homme qui peut à tout moment imposer son point de vue à tout le monde (F: It was just a desire for freedom. A desire for freedom that I wanted to have. A desire of a man who can impose his perspective on the world at any moment), Astou (Chapter Two) told me, as she recounted what had led her mother to kick her out of the house. She had refused to be bound to home, instead going out with friends and coming back at whatever time suited her. She did not listen to her mother, nor would she pick up the phone when people called her to ask where she was. Astou was aware that her behaviour – she also flirted openly with women on the streets – was considered unfeminine and indecorous. She nevertheless continued to live like this for a while, staying with friends whenever she was not welcome at home. When she met her current girlfriend Rokhaya years later, she had found a way to win back respect from her family, and to avoid people from questioning the nature of her relationship to Rokhaya. Wearing the veil, as well as Rokhaya’s marriage to a man, changed Astou’s appearance from a rebellious teenager to a respectable Muslim woman.

My interlocutors aspired to “freedom” in different ways and to different degrees, but they shared a longing to live their dissident desires. An exploration of how they sought ways and spaces to live their dissident lives, led me to distinguish three key factors that affect societal responses to women’s dissident practices, as well as women’s abilities to

live supposedly wicked lives. The first is social status. Women's abilities to deviate from gender norms without being stigmatised as wicked depends on their social status. Social and cultural capital enhance women's opportunities to speak up in the public domain. The *féministes* in this dissertation have access to institutional settings where norms are being debated. Their level of education and familiarity with public discourses allow them to take part in public debates about women's rights. Most of my other interlocutors, however, lack such social and cultural capital, and they depend on other networks and spaces to realise dissident lives, away from the often-virulent debates about female and dissident sexualities.

At the same time, high social status also comes with higher expectations of respectability and honour. The visibility of *féministes* in the public sphere, and their direct engagement with tense public debates about gender and sexuality, makes them vulnerable to accusations of supposed wickedness. Moreover, mostly coming from families with higher social status makes women responsible for upholding this status. The Wolof proverb *liggéeyu ndey añub doom* (the mother's work is the child's lunch), conveys how family status and honour are relational: a mother is directly judged for a child's misbehaviour. In Chapter One, I described how both Nguenar and Ramatoulaye took family honour and status into account in their lives as *féministes*. *Lesbiennes* and *ñi génn guddi* who participated in this research mostly held lower social status. Although *lesbiennes* are most certainly under public scrutiny with rising anti-queer sentiments, a lower social status nevertheless enables many women to live their lives in relative quiet.

In addition to social status, two other factors are important in determining the space for living supposedly wicked lives. A second factor is financial autonomy. In many of my interlocutors' stories, financial autonomy appeared to be indispensable for being able to defy family expectations. Providing for one's family not only prevents family members from speaking out against the sources of income, as Ndella's story (Chapter Two) about her doing *mbaraan* revealed, but it also provides women with the means to move away from their families in an attempt to live their lives as they desire. The leeway that financial autonomy allows women to make their own decisions does not, however, set them free from family expectations and judgement.

The ways in which *ñi génn guddi* obtain financial autonomy through their dependency on men reveals the paradoxical freedom that dependency on others brings. This brings me to a third factor affecting women's agency to craft dissident lives: community embeddedness. The necessity for women to stick together was expressed by Adjé (Chapter Three) when she said that "*Si tu es pauvre, tu ne peux pas être gouine. C'est ça ma philosophie*" (F: If you're poor, you can't be a dyke. That's my philosophy). Poverty is not just economic, it is also social: a combination of economic means, physical appearance, moral values,

and social relations determine someone's social standing. In order to be able to make your own life choices, regardless of family expectations and societal norms, you need some degree of financial autonomy. But women like Adjii have also been able to sustain a so-called wicked life because of the oddkin bonds that they have created. By sharing resources, spaces, and *savoir vivre* to survive collectively, they forego economic and social poverty that would foreclose the possibilities to sustain sexually dissident lives.

Dependency on others, paradoxically, brings women some freedom. Although going out at night signals women's dependency on men to make ends meet (Foley and Dramé 2013), it also affords women some financial autonomy to provide for their families (Fanta, Chapter Two) and to postpone marriage (Coura, Chapter Two). This reveals how elusiveness provides room for dissident practices while women simultaneously fulfil their responsibilities and attachments to their families. Ironically, *ñi génn guddi* may experience more freedom in their lives than *féministes*, because of their stronger embeddedness in communities of oddkin. *Féministes* may lose some of this embeddedness in communities because of where they live – often removed from family because of their professional commitments in town and their financial means which allow them to rent apartments individually – but also because they make themselves known in the public sphere as *féministes*. Visibility renders vulnerable, and this is also visible in the ways in which the discourse on “homosexuality” has put (supposed) *lesbiennes* under more scrutiny and policing.

The instability of freedom

Women's social positioning is always in motion, and an increasingly tense public debate about gender and (same-sex) sexualities can easily destabilise women's previously stable situation. Social status, financial autonomy, and community embeddedness are neither fixed in people's lives nor do they always suffice to protect women. In Chapters One and Three, I wrote about Meta, a former semi-professional football player who had become a mother for younger football players. Meta had proven to be a very responsible person, and she had worked hard to establish her own business. She had her own *boutique* from which she sold sports clothing, and she was financially autonomous. She was of tremendous help to many young women football players whom she mothered, and with her involvement with the Association des Footballeuses Professionnelles she had demonstrated a continuous commitment to the development of women's football in Senegal. She also had a girlfriend with whom she managed a discreet relationship. Her girlfriend was married, and she and her husband had a young child. Apparently, her husband had developed doubts about his wife's relationship with Meta for a while, and one day, when his doubts had been confirmed, he and his friends threatened to hurt Meta and divulge her story. She had seen too many examples of women who had got into troubles

with their families, and who had been forced to marry a man to solve their problems (see Chapter Four). Meta did not want to get married just to save her family's honour, so she decided to seek a way to leave Senegal. From the US, where she had been able to travel to with the help of a friend who sent her an invitation, she contacted me for help in filing an asylum application on the basis of prosecution for her sexual orientation.

While her flight allowed Meta to choose not to marry, she has given up intimate, proximate relationships with friends and loved ones in Senegal, and she has had to leave her girlfriend behind. With no realistic option of seeing each other again, their heartbreak must have been immense. Meta's status as a responsible person who worked hard for her own money, and who was visibly committed to ensuring better football futures for women in Senegal, was not enough to protect her from the risk of exposure as a *lesbienne*. Nor could Meta's strong embeddedness in women's football networks help her to overcome the risk of dishonouring her family if they would be informed about Meta's same-sex relationship.

Meta's story is an exception, and I do not tell it as a way to argue about the impossibility of living *lesbienne* lives in Senegal. Most women stay in Senegal, and they do find ways to live dissident lives, despite the many constraints that they may face. The women in this dissertation have demonstrated this creative agency to navigate gender and sexual dissidence while maintaining relationships with family. But Meta's story does reveal the looming threat of becoming exposed as *lesbienne* in Senegal, and what the ultimate consequences of becoming "known" as a *lesbienne*, for which women face humiliation and shame, can be. Meta's story is, furthermore, illustrative of the unpredictability of life and of the instability of women's social positioning.

With growing anti-queer sentiments and panic about the supposed moral decadence that seeps into Senegalese society, it is tempting to consider the stories of gender and sexual dissidents like Meta as representing victimhood only. The media representation of *lesbiennes* paints a frightening picture of witch hunts and public exposure of people who are accused of being *lesbienne* or *gay*. Moreover, stigma, violence, and the legal position of LGBTQI+ persons dominate research and policy documents on the situation of *gays*, *lesbiennes*, and other dissidents in many contexts, including Senegal. Much of the knowledge on same-sex sexualities in Africa is developed in NGOs and policy research, which engage with questions of sexual and reproductive health and rights (Cornwall and Jolly 2009; Hendriks and Spronk 2020). This imaginary conveys that Senegal is no place for *lesbiennes* or *gays*. This dissertation has suggested otherwise. In order to do justice to the variety of experiences of sexually and gender dissident lives in Africa, and not just those pertaining to anti-queer violence for example, ethnographic research is important. Instead of understanding so-called wicked women as victims of patriarchy and heterosexism only, this study

diversifies our understanding of women's lives by attending to the myriad ways in which they have shaped, and continue to shape, their lives.

In their own lives, women's positioning shifts as they relate to different spaces and networks of people. My interlocutors easily switched between words like *jump*, *sexy*, *lesbienne*, *ñi génn guddi*, *mbaraaneuse*, and *kóoba* when describing their gendered and sexual sense of self. This reflects the relationality of such categories and the inability of any of such terms to reflect their personhood fully. To better understand how women experience discourses of gendered and sexual morality, and to grasp how women shape and understand their own dissident practices, we need to approach the question of gender in its intersections with sexuality and social status, among other things, and to avoid a fixation on separate identities such as “lesbians” or “sex workers.” This will help to challenge assumptions of sexually and gender dissident women in Senegal as only victims in a heteropatriarchal context, and to challenge assumptions about sexual identities and what they mean for the lives that unfold. Mindfulness of the indeterminacy of supposed identity categories is a first step to take.

Studying different “groups” of women together also has implications for human rights interventions. Sexual and reproductive health and rights should not be approached as singular issues, detached from other social issues and relationships. Sexuality is relationally experienced, and sexual and romantic relationships are often established, sustained, and broken in a collective (Dankwa 2021). The dynamics within women's oddkin bonds are so central to how women experience and shape their dissident practices that individual approaches to sexual and reproductive health and rights do not correspond well with how people approach questions of sexuality themselves. We cannot really understand the lives of *lesbiennes* in Senegal if we do not explore how they form bonds of kinship with *ñi génn guddi*. And we cannot understand the work of *féministes* in Senegal if we do not compare the constraints that they face in their activism to the stigmatisation of other supposedly wicked women.

The different ways in which women navigate gender and sexual dissidence – from *féministes* who speak out in the public sphere, to women's craftiness to remain elusive and ambiguous, and to the development and transmission of *savoir vivre* in networks of *lesbiennes* and *ñi génn guddi*, and, finally, the violent exposure of women who *wacce* another woman when they have nothing to lose and everything to gain – reveal the situatedness and relationality of agency. Supposedly wicked women develop and maintain sites of socialisation – including the “house of *kóoba*,” the football field, and through mothering practices – which allow them to get by. Their knowledge of how to live well (*savoir vivre*) reminds us that we cannot do without each other, even if we do not get along.

