

Dance at the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts: Of ‘Fabulous Dancers’ and Negritude Undermined

Hélène Neveu Kringelbach

Introduction

This chapter examines the dance programme at the 1966 Dakar Festival, thereby addressing a curious gap in the legacy of this important event.¹ Little is known about the fact that in addition to the visual arts exhibition, the colloquium and the major plays, the festival was also about people performing, and about audiences enjoying dance and music. There were national troupes from a broad range of African nations (which included Senegal, of course, but also Mali, Chad, Ivory Coast, Niger, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cameroon, Gabon, Zaïre, Congo, Zambia, Burundi and Ethiopia). Like much choreographic and musical production throughout Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, these troupes reimagined rural African life and performed ethnic identities while also projecting images of national unity (Askew 2002; Castaldi 2006; Edmonson 2007; White 2008; Djebbari 2011).

In dance and musical performance as in other art forms, Senghor’s explicit objective was to showcase the fundamental connections between all black expressive forms, and to celebrate Africa’s contribution to world culture. As with all major events, however, the choices made were as much about exclusion as they were about inclusion. At the heart of the festival was a purposeful juxtaposition of ‘traditional’ African arts and European modernist art (Murphy 2015). But what exactly was being juxtaposed? And what choreographic forms were excluded?

In this sense, the festival was very much an extension of colonial ideologies into the postcolonial period. Apter makes a similar point in his monograph on

1 This chapter considers dance as an integrated element in genres of performance, which include other expressive forms such as drama, music and song, since choreographic movement is rarely performed on its own.

FESTAC 1977, held in Lagos, when he writes that ‘the customary culture which FESTAC resurrected was always already mediated by the colonial encounter, and in some degree was produced by it’ (2005: 6). As Mamdani (1996) has argued, European colonial rule in Africa was structured as a dual legal system (a ‘bifurcated state’), one centred around civil law for the colonizer and a privileged urban minority, and the other centred around customary law for the rural populations. The ‘customary’, however, was not simply a survival of pre-colonial social organization made to work for the benefit of the colonial state. As Mamdani suggests, in the rural areas a despotic mode of government (‘decentralized despotism’) was made to replace pre-colonial forms of ‘distributed authority’. But this was couched in the language of ‘culture’, ‘tradition’ or ‘custom’ so as to legitimize the exclusion of rural populations from full citizenship. For Mamdani, the failure of many postcolonial states to ensure the wellbeing of their citizens is a direct legacy of this history. As I will elaborate in the section on antecedents to the festival, the presentation of African culture in musical and choreographic performance, as it emerged from the 1930s onwards, was indeed shaped by this colonial ideology. What does not always come across in Mamdani’s work, however, is a sense of African agency: more than a single model of indirect rule, the colonial experience was diverse, and this is largely due to the differentiated ways in which African citizens appropriated or rejected colonial structures. Although Mamdani discusses this differentiation early on in his study, what ultimately comes across is a top-down, violent mode of governance which largely gets carried over into the postcolonial period.

Focusing on cultural production, and on events like the 1966 Festival, I argue, sheds a different light on the continuity between the colonial and the postcolonial. This kind of focus enables us to bring to the fore the differentiated ways in which post-independence leaders sought to redress the violence of colonialism, as well as the aspirations of African citizens during the same period. Although the festival was explicitly designed to promote Léopold Sédar Senghor’s philosophy of Negritude and Alioune Diop’s version of Pan-Africanism, their traditionalism was only marginally embraced by the performers and the audiences. Senghor made no secret of his conception of art as ‘high culture’ (Murphy 2015), and his disdain for popular culture was already noticeable during his Parisian days as a student (Vaillant 2006). To him, the African masks and sculptures borrowed from the collections of European museums were ‘high art’, whereas modern African paintings were unfinished experiments. In dance, the dichotomy was even more noticeable since all the African troupes programmed at the Festival were viewed as restaging the folklore of particular ethnic groups, as if their work contained nothing modern, choreographed or experimental. Moreover, the classification of all dance performed by black artists as ‘Negro art’ did not do justice to the multiplicity of sources involved in choreographic processes.

But expressive performance has a tendency to defeat ideologies, and in the end the organizers’ traditionalist discourse was not what captured

the imagination of audiences and performers alike. What did capture their imagination were, rather, the elements of novelty, the cosmopolitan character of the festival, the combination of the familiar and the never-seen-before, like the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, and the dance parties held in the interstices of the official programme. The festival was a turning point in the circulation of performing styles, artistic ideas and individuals within Africa, as well as between Senegal and other parts of the African Diaspora. If anything, then, the dancing that went on at the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts demonstrates the limits of attempts by state-led ideologies to control people's bodily and creative engagement with the world. As the gap between Senghor's imagination of an African past and people's aspiration to cosmopolitan cultural forms was laid bare, did the festival mark the beginning of Negritude's quiet demise?

Choreographic Antecedents: Musical Theatre during the Colonial Period

The 1966 festival was in many ways a juxtaposition of dance events, but this did not happen in a choreographic vacuum. Indeed, as the capital of French West Africa since 1902, Dakar had long attracted artists from all over the region, particularly after the end of the Second World War. In addition, the presence of the William Ponty School to train African schoolteachers and colonial administrators helped to turn Senegal into a space of experimentation in the performing arts from the 1930s onwards. These developments form the historical backdrop to the festival, and the context in which local audiences and artists experienced both familiarity and novelty in dance.

The William Ponty School was set up by the French authorities in Gorée in 1915, and moved to Sébikotane, east of Dakar, in 1938. It attracted students from all over French West Africa. In 1935, Charles Béart, a Frenchman who had taught in Bingerville in Ivory Coast, introduced theatre to the curriculum, and was soon appointed director.² The students were asked to spend their holidays writing plays that would illustrate their 'native' traditions, with the aim of encouraging them to preserve a connection with rural life. Indeed, while these students epitomized the successful *évolués*,³ there was also a fear that they might lose touch with the populations they would have to teach or administer on behalf of the French. This concern was evident in Béart's writings:

Des élèves ont demandé au Directeur de l'école William-Ponty de leur prêter les costumes exécutés pour la fête afin qu'ils puissent 'jouer' pendant les

2 For an excellent study of the role of the William Ponty School theatre in the formation of an elite urban culture in Francophone West Africa, see Jézéquel (1999).

3 The term designated African individuals who were literate, educated in the French system, wore European dress and displayed modern lifestyles.

vacances. Demain, fonctionnaires, ils iront avec sympathie vers leurs frères des villages, ils étudieront les formes d'art trop longtemps négligées et les remettront à la place d'honneur. Ce sera précieux pour nous, qui aimons l'Afrique et qui la connaissons mieux; ce sera précieux pour ceux qui se consoleront des menus tracés du métier grâce à cette activité désintéressée et généreuse,—l'instituteur qui aura trouvé une nouvelle et gracieuse légende ou qui aura noté un vieux chant héroïque, oubliera vite qu'il s'est chamaillé avec l'interprète du commandant. (1937: 14)

[Some pupils have asked the Director of the William Ponty School to lend them the costumes made for the [end-of-year] party so that they may 'play' during the holidays. Tomorrow, as civil servants, they will meet their village brothers with sympathy, they will study the art forms neglected for so long and they will restore them to their rightful place. It will be precious for those of us who care about Africa, because we will know it better; it will be precious for those who will find comfort from the minor worries of the profession in this unselfish and generous activity—the schoolteacher who will have discovered a new and enchanting legend or who will have transcribed an old epic song will soon forget that he has quarrelled with the major's interpreter.]

If the Ponty training was successful in producing several generations of *évolués*, as far as the theatre was concerned things did not turn out according to the French plan. Indeed, a significant number of Ponty-trained schoolteachers played a crucial role in the emergence of nationalist politics in Senegal and in other parts of French West Africa after the Second World War (Foucher 2002a; Ly 2009).

If it is difficult to assess the role theatre played in this political awakening, it certainly provided the Ponty students with opportunities to express anti-colonial sentiments in subtle ways, by imagining and staging the lives of resistance heroes. *Bigolo*, for example, was written by a group of Ponty students and staged in the late 1930s by Casamançais student Assane Seck (Foucher 2002a; Ly 2009), who was to become a politician and a minister in Senghor's regime. In the play, *Bigolo* is a soldier who has defeated the French in the Casamance region in the late nineteenth century. While the Casamançais dance and sing to celebrate their victory, word comes that the French retreat was just a ploy, and that they are preparing a new attack. In a fit of rage, *Bigolo* destroys his fetish, which he believes to have betrayed him. He returns to war and is eventually defeated and killed. The plot leaves sufficient room for various interpretations: the villain may be the French army or it may be *Bigolo* himself, who is not sufficiently cool-headed to control his anger, and eventually betrays the traditional spirits who have protected him thus far.

We do not know much about the dances and songs in *Bigolo*, but plays like this one often contained their most subversive elements in the musical interludes, which seemed like innocuous folklore to the French authorities. Mbaye (2004) notes that the Ponty staff censored the plays at times, but this rarely affected the musical and choreographic elements. French actor Henri

Vidal, who had witnessed the play *Téli Soma Oulé* by Lompolo Koné from Burkina Faso, echoed this perception of dance as innocuous folklore in a commentary written for colonial magazine *Traits d'Union*:

C'est une pièce exclusivement folklorique, permettant d'incorporer les danseurs et danseuses qui, héritiers directs des personnages de la légende, danseront ce que leurs grands-parents ont dansé devant les chefs célèbres de cette époque-là. (Vidal 1955: 66)

[This is an exclusively folkloric play, which allows the incorporation of men and women dancers who, as direct descendants of these legendary characters, will dance what their grandparents danced in front of the famous chiefs of the time.]

As elsewhere in colonial Africa, the students were divided in their attitudes towards the colonial enterprise, and musical theatre provided a creative space where they could momentarily set aside their political differences. But modern theatre, involving acting, music and choreography, also became popular because it drew on regional performing traditions of a similar kind.⁴ Before the arrival of Charles Béart at Ponty, the students were already staging plays with dances and songs, but for entertainment rather than as a formal part of the curriculum. In Bingerville, it was after being impressed by pupils putting together a short play about villagers announcing the arrival of a colonial officer that Béart developed the idea of promoting theatre in school (Mouralis 1986). Thus the emergence of a modern theatrical genre combining regional performing traditions with European ones was the outcome of mutual inspiration rather than a top-down French imposition.

As this theatre spread over time and space with the appointment of Ponty-trained schoolteachers across Francophone West Africa, the genre became reconfigured in every location. During research I carried out previously on the choreographic world in Dakar, I interviewed men who had moved to Dakar from rural Casamance in the 1950s and 1960s, and who had set up theatre and dance troupes in the capital city. They all had memories of putting together plays in primary schools in Casamance, and from their testimonies it seems that dance and song gradually replaced dialogue because this meant that language was less of an issue for diverse audiences. Moreover, the first Ponty plays had been in French because the students there were fluent in French and the teachers probably found it a useful language to communicate with educated youths from all over French West Africa. But schoolteachers appointed in the rural areas would later find it difficult to motivate rural schoolchildren to perform in a language which, in this context, was associated with the violence of colonialism rather than social mobility and Pan-African politics.

From the very first days of its emergence in the 1930s, this musical theatre contained a contradiction: on the one hand, it had a modernist outlook since

4 See, for example, Labouret and Travélé (1928) on Koteba comedy theatre in Mali, and Diop (1990) on traditional theatre in Senegal.

its creators were French-educated young men with aspirations to become modern African citizens; on the other hand, it had a traditionalist outlook since its *raison d'être* was to act as a mediator for indirect rule. This, of course, illustrates the contradictions which formed part of the colonial project. Over time, however, African nationalist elites co-opted the genre for its traditionalist rather than its modernist dimension. By the time the genre was promoted in its diverse national and regional variations at the 1966 festival, it was framed as a re-enactment of tradition on stage. For this reason, I use the term 'neo-traditional performance' to describe the choreographic genre which emerged from the circulation and codification of musical and choreographic school theatre in Francophone Africa.

Fodéba Keita and the Emergence of Neo-traditional Performance in West Africa

A Guinean student and poet, Fodéba Keita, played a central role in simultaneously popularizing and politicizing the genre. As one of Alioune Diop's friends, he would later be a member of the 1966 festival's performing arts committee, even though Guinea, under Sékou Touré's leadership, refused to participate. Born in 1921 in the Maninka district of Siguiiri in Guinea, Keita was a student at Ponty between 1940 and 1943. A keen performer and writer, he soon distinguished himself through his multi-faceted talent and his ability to integrate various elements of performance. He had already played banjo in a school orchestra in Conakry before attending the William Ponty School, and while in Senegal he also developed an interest in poetry, theatre and song writing ('Fodéba Keita, ambassadeur itinérant' 1957; Cohen 2012). In subsequent years he taught briefly in Tambacounda, then for four years in Saint-Louis, at that time capital of the French colony of Senegal. There he formed a jazz band, Sud Jazz, and played in a small theatre troupe aptly named *Le Progrès* ('Fodéba Keita, ambassadeur itinérant' 1957). He returned to Guinea, where he worked as a schoolteacher and youth leader for a short period, and probably resumed a friendship with Guinea's future president Sékou Touré, whom he had met in secondary school (then named *École Primaire Supérieure*) in Conakry ('Fodéba Keita, ambassadeur itinérant' 1957). But the young Keita was ambitious, and he soon made his way to Paris to study law. There he socialized with other African students and artists, among whom were Léopold Sédar Senghor, the latter's nephew and future leader of the Senegalese National Theatre Maurice Sonar Senghor, Alioune Diop and other founders of the Negritude movement. Senegalese students who had engaged with theatre, such as Assane Seck, Henriette Bathily, Annette Mbaye d'Erneville, and the older and already well-established dancer Féral Benga, socialized in the same circles. Benga had been successful in the Parisian music-hall scene in previous decades after being one of Josephine Baker's lead dancers at the Folies Bergères in 1926 ('21 troupes artistiques' 1966). By the

time Keita arrived in Paris, Benga was choreographing shows at the cabaret-restaurant he had opened in 1938, 'La Rose Rouge' (~~'21 troupes artistiques'~~ 1966; Sonar Senghor 2004). Léopold Sédar Senghor had arrived in Paris in 1928, at a time of excitement and experimentation in the performing world. Following the Russian revolution, Diaghilev had brought his *Ballets Russes* to Paris, where they produced modernist choreographies with decor from avant-garde painters like Picasso, Bakst and Matisse.

Parisian musical theatre, then, formed part of the intellectual milieu in which Léopold Sédar Senghor, his nephew Sonar Senghor and Alioune Diop forged their ideas on the intimate link between arts and politics. In the 1950s, these ideas would lead them to create the Société africaine de culture, modelled on the Société européenne de culture. The African intellectual milieu in Paris would also compel them to view events like the 1966 festival as cornerstones in the rehabilitation of African cultures and the development of the newly independent African nations.

It was in this highly politicized, cosmopolitan environment that Fodéba Keita set up his first theatre troupe, *Le Théâtre Africain*, in 1949 ('De Ziguinchor' 1965; Straker 2009). The first performances took place at the Cité Universitaire in Paris, and students from Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast and Cameroon made up the initial troupe ('Fodéba Keita, ambassadeur itinérant' 1957). Keita joined forces with musician Facelli Kanté, whom he had probably met in Saint-Louis (Cohen 2012), and with Senegalese actor Bachir Touré ('De Ziguinchor' 1965). Keita's subtly anti-colonial scripts, his poems and his skills as a stage director and choreographer, combined with Kanté's modern music, produced immediate success. His most famous drama, *Minuit* (Keita 1952), was banned in French West Africa because of its explicit anti-colonial stance, but others were less openly political. At the height of its successful trajectory in Paris, Keita's troupe, now renamed *Les Ballets Africains de Fodéba Keita*, restaged Assane Seck's *Bigolo* at the prestigious Théâtre des Champs Élysées in March 1954 ('Dans le monde' 1954; Straker 2009). In the early 1950s, as the troupe began to tour around Europe and North America, the choreographic and musical dimension gradually displaced spoken dialogue, probably because this was more appealing to international audiences (Straker 2009). The repertoire featured choreographed versions of ceremonial practices from various parts of West Africa, with 'special emphasis on the Mandinka folklore of Guinea and Casamance' (Kaba 1976: 102), combined with movement styles the dancers had picked up during their travels. Then steeped in the Negritude movement, Keita conceptualized his artistic production as a project of cultural revival, modernization and moral salvation all at once (Keita 1955).

The success of these first years led to a tour of West Africa in 1955 and 1956, at the invitation of the Governor of French West Africa. During the tour Keita's troupe recruited a new generation of young, lesser-educated performers to replace the first Paris-based students (Straker 2009: 97–98). At Guinea's independence in 1958, the group was renamed *Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* and toured the world as the nation's 'cultural

ambassadors' under Kanté's leadership. Keita was appointed Interior Minister in Sékou Touré's first government, and although Touré later turned against him and had him executed in 1971, he was highly influential in Guinean politics up to the 'cultural revolution' of 1968. The generational shift that took place in the late 1950s not only marked the end of textual plays in favour of musical and choreographic performance, it also ensured that the new generation would be politically malleable. In addition, it offered the cultural material from which Touré's regime would sculpt a national identity that reified and marginalized the populations he considered most likely to oppose his modernization project: people from the forest areas, the *forestiers* (McGovern 2013). In retrospect, one might say that this generational shift prefigured Touré's descent into despotism in the 1960s. At any rate, the genre, which had initially been developed by revolutionary intellectuals, was already being co-opted to serve authoritarian state agendas. Had the neo-traditional performing genre been restricted to Guinea, this would not have concerned the 1966 festival. But this is relevant to the history of the festival because the success of the Ballets Africains on stages worldwide meant that they served as a template for many national dance troupes across West and Central Africa.

In the first half of the 1960s there was growing animosity between Touré and Senghor, for a range of political reasons as well as a degree of personal rivalry. Despite this animosity, or perhaps because of it, Senegal, alongside Mali, would go the furthest in emulating the model of the Ballets Africains. It also mattered that Mali and Guinea shared very similar musical repertoires, an important factor in the imagination of a wider Mande area (Charry 2000; Djebbari 2011).

Following the success of the West African tour in 1955 and 1956 and a new performance in Dakar in 1959, the Guinean troupe returned to Senegal in 1961 ('Les Ballets Guinéens' 1961). By then Dakar already featured a significant number of neo-traditional troupes of different kinds, from the offshoots of rural migrant associations to youth clubs and the family-based troupes headed by the talented members of *griot* lineages.

Maurice Sonar Senghor had established his own dance troupe upon his return from Paris, but it was only in 1961 that it formally became the National Ballet of Senegal, one of three components of the new National Theatre.⁵ As several interviewees who performed with the National Ballet in the 1960s and 1970s have confirmed, the Ballets Africains were the Senghors' main source of inspiration in creating a Senegalese equivalent to the Guinean troupe. It served as the primary inspiration for the performers too, and they all dreamt of being acclaimed the world over, just like Keita's troupe. Throughout the 1950s, Francophone African magazine *Bingo* regularly featured articles on the success of the Ballets Africains abroad, and in Dakar this success was the talk of the town. Having attended the 1959 Dakar performance by the Ballets

5 The other two were the National Drama Troupe and the Traditional Instrumental Ensemble.

Africains, Léopold Sédar Senghor himself felt compelled to write a review in *L'Unité Africaine*, the magazine of his Socialist party, the UPS. This performance had been an opportunity to articulate his ideas on 'Black African dance', which he saw as embodying the 'emotional' nature of African cultures:

Les danses négro-africaines restent très près des sources. Elles expriment des drames. La danse est, pour le Négro-africain, le moyen le plus naturel d'exprimer une idée, une émotion. Que l'émotion le saisisse—joie ou tristesse, gratitude ou indignation—, le négro-africain danse. Danse si différente du ballet européen. Rien d'intellectuel. Ni pointes, ni lignes droites, ni savantes arabesques ou entrechats. Ce sont des danses telluriques, les pieds nus posés à plat ~~sur~~ le sol, martelant le sol sans fatigue ni répit. (cited in Sonar Senghor 2004: 66)

[Black African dances stay very close to the sources. They express dramas. For the black African, dance is the most natural way of expressing an idea, an emotion. When taken by an emotion—joy or sadness, gratitude or indignation—the black African dances. Dance so different from European ballet. Nothing intellectual. Neither pointe shoes nor straight lines nor elaborate arabesques or entrechats. These are earth-bound dances, bare feet flat on the ground, pounding the ground without either tiredness or rest.]

Though he was not much of a dancer himself (Vaillant 2006: 124), it is evident in Senghor's writings that he regarded dance as a quintessential African art. His poem, 'Prières aux Masques Africains' (Senghor 1956) ended with an allusion to Africans as 'people of the dance': 'Nous sommes les hommes de la danse, dont les pieds reprennent vigueur en frappant le sol dur' [We are the people of the dance, whose feet regain strength by pounding on the hard ground]. Further in the *Ballets Africains* review, however, Senghor was also critical of the Guinean production, and there is little doubt that the National Ballet of Senegal was tasked, from the beginning, with outshining the Guinean troupe. In this context, the absence of the *Ballets Africains* from the festival in 1966 was a political statement. There were Cold War and postcolonial politics at play, of course, since Sékou Touré's Guinea had elected to leave the French Federation in 1958 and initiated a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Senghor, on the other hand, had no communist leanings, and was probably no revolutionary at heart, even though his government ended up renting a Soviet cruise ship to accommodate some of the festival's foreign delegations. Senghor saw to it that Senegal remained closely associated with France, and he openly courted the USA in the run-up to the festival; France and the USA were also the event's biggest financial contributors.⁶

6 In addition to official contributions to help finance the construction of several new buildings ahead of the festival (the new Parliament building, the Musée Dynamique and the Daniel Sorano Theatre), France probably covered the substantial deficit left in its wake (Verdin 2010).

In official discourse, the work of the National Ballet of Senegal aimed at recovering rural ceremonial practices from the past, celebrating the nation's diversity and showcasing Senegalese culture abroad (Castaldi 2006).⁷ The juxtaposition at the festival of similar cultural projects from a variety of African nations would help to create a link between the past and the present in the imagination of audiences. In practice, the National Ballet staged tableaux combining music, dance and drama drawn from Sonar Senghor's Parisian days, the troupe's creative work and the dance styles the young performers knew, either from contemporary practices or from their experience of musical school theatre. Some of the young performers had even performed abroad already, with Dakar's existing troupes ('Les Ballets Sénégalais' 1961). There were also recruits among migrants from the Casamance region, from the Sereer-speaking Siin-Saalum south of Dakar and from towns like Louga and Coki in northern Senegal, all areas where school theatre had been particularly successful (for a discussion of Coki, see Niang 1961). Finally, there were students from the School of Arts and youths from the long-established Cape Verdean community in Dakar, who often shone on the dance floors of Dakarais nightclubs pulsating with Cuban music. Young as these recruits were, they would have had limited knowledge of regional histories. Behind the discourse of historical recovery, therefore, the work of the National Ballet consisted mainly in the further codification of the neo-traditional genre.

As far as celebrating the nation's diversity was concerned, the National Ballet followed both French colonial policy and the Guinean troupe in introducing an implicit hierarchy between the urban and the rural, and between different linguistic groups. Urban life was never represented since it was associated with the present (mistakenly, given the long-standing existence of cities in West Africa), and therefore in no need of cultural preservation. In continuity with the Ballets Africains, as well as a French tendency to regard the forest areas as the repositories of 'authentic' African cultures, and therefore as backwards, a substantial proportion of the performance drew on the rhythms, movement styles and instruments from Casamance. The work of the National Ballet was in effect making manifest the peripheries of the nation as Senghor conceived them.

Outside Senegal, the Senegalese troupe had some success from the beginning. The first European tour in 1961, for example, gained very good reviews in the printed press in the UK, Germany and France, and the tour was extended by several weeks ('La Presse allemande' 1961). But the most challenging test for the National Ballet would be its juxtaposition with other troupes at the 1966 festival. By then, the genre imagined by Fodéba Keita had lost much of its modernist edge, and all ambition to act as a mediator in the liberation of African populations.

7 See Djebbari (2011) for an excellent analysis of a similar political project with the National Ballet of Mali.

Neo-traditional Performance at the Festival: The Making of a Conservative Tradition?

The dance programme at the festival seemed to capture perfectly Diop's Pan-Africanist ambitions and Senghor's vision of Negritude as a philosophy of shared black creativity, rhythm and emotion. There was a juxtaposition of the new and the old, modern dance and neo-traditional performance, the work of diaspora artists and that of Africans from the continent. The printed press coverage celebrated the diversity of African cultures as expressed in the 'live spectacle' (spectacle vivant) programme. There was genuine diversity, but as far as the dance displays by various African nations were concerned I suggest that what was shared was the aspiration to emulate the Ballets Africains, and their attempt to reimagine a rural African past. Interestingly, in his colloquium speech, French Minister of Culture and writer André Malraux warned against the temptation to ~~study~~ contemporary ceremonial practices ~~in order~~ to recover the past:

Puissiez-vous ne pas vous tromper sur les esprits anciens. Ils sont vraiment les esprits de l'Afrique. Ils ont beaucoup changé; pourtant ils seront là pour vous quand vous les interrogerez. Mais vous ne retrouverez pas la communion en étudiant les cérémonies de la brousse. Il s'agit certainement pour l'Afrique de revendiquer son passé; mais il s'agit davantage d'être assez libre pour concevoir un passé du monde qui lui appartient. (*Premier Festival mondial des arts nègres 1967*: 47)

[May you avoid misunderstanding the ancient spirits. They really are the spirits of Africa. They have changed a great deal; and yet they will be there for you when you call upon them. But you will not find communion by studying rural ceremonies. Certainly, Africa must claim her past; but it is even more important to conceive a past of the world that belongs to her.]

What Malraux did not say was that the way in which the past was being reimagined in neo-traditional performance, through the selection and standardization of a limited number of performing practices and elements of material culture from the young nations' perceived peripheries, served a contemporary political purpose: it was about co-opting these peripheries into state agendas, while at the same time neutralizing them by representing their heritage as backwards (McGovern 2013).

The choice of troupes, the press coverage and the assessment by the festival's performing arts committee at the end of the programme all indicate that the festival organizers sought to promote traditionalism and that they rejected the elements of experimentation and innovation in the work of these troupes. Little was left, by then, of a sense in which the performing arts could embody a diversity of ideologies, including open-ended ones, and ones that did not fit with the nation-building agendas at hand.

The element of standardization was evident, for example, in the costumes: in several of the dance troupes (Ivory Coast, Liberia, Togo, Chad, Cameroon,

Niger, Congo) the performers wore raffia skirts and criss-crossing chest bands made of beads or cowrie shells, similar to those favoured by the Ballets Africains. In several troupes the dancers wore high fringe hats typical of the Mande area, and particularly of the Siguiri region from which Keita originated.⁸ These elements did feature in ceremonial practices in some of the forest regions, but forest regions only form part of these countries. Although these regions' status in the new nations varied (they were not, in all cases, regarded as marginal or as minorities), all seemed to have adopted the Guinean model of an implicit opposition between the tradition-bound forest people and the modern coastal cities or Savannah areas. The young female dancers of several countries (Senegal, Mali, Chad, Congo) performed with bare breasts, even though many communities were uneasy with this kind of display. This echoes McGovern's observation that, in Sékou Touré's Guinea in the 1960s and 1970s, populations from the Savannah-forest frontier feared the forced recruitment of young women into ballet troupes, where they would be forced to perform bare-breasted for all audiences (2013: 215).

There were also strong similarities with the selective process described by Apter (2005) for FESTAC '77 and the Nigerian Festival of the Arts (Nafest) in 1974, which had served as an important step in the preparation of FESTAC. Like the Nigerian festivals in the 1970s, though perhaps less explicitly so, the selection of dance troupes and genres at the 1966 festival followed 'ideal types' seen to embody Pan-Africanism and Negritude. In other words, the work of the African dance troupes did not so much showcase the cultural diversity of the new nations as it involved a careful process of selection and editing that diversity. African authenticity, as it was conceived of in the performances selected for the festival, was a rather standardized affair which bore the mark of the Ballets Africains and the colonial ideology from which it had emerged.

The festival's concern with traditionalism and authenticity also came across in the organizers' and the media's insistence that true African dance is spontaneous, rather than the outcome of lengthy training and choreographic work. In this sense, organizers and media alike had internalized stereotypes on Africans dancing which can be traced back to the nineteenth century, if not earlier (Neveu Kringelbach 2013a). This perception was reflected in the press coverage, such as the following portrait, entitled 'Dance, a traditional mode of expression', of a Gabonese woman dancer in *Bingo*, whose editor-in-chief at the time, Beninese poet and journalist Paulin Joachim, was one of Alioune Diop's protégés:

Micheline Sofoum du Gabon est une toute jeune fille, très intimidée, qui a répondu à nos questions. Elle danse depuis l'âge de 6 ans et, aujourd'hui, à 15 ans, bien qu'elle fasse partie de la troupe nationale du Gabon, elle ne

8 Djebbari (2011) also describes these hats as a recurring feature of the National Ballet of Mali's favourite costumes.

pense pas que sa promotion soit extraordinaire et n'envisage même pas de faire un métier de ce qui n'est, pour elle, qu'un moyen d'expression traditionnel dans son pays. Elle vit simplement dans son village, au milieu de ses onze frères et sœurs, dansant non pour gagner sa vie ou pour devenir une vedette, mais parce que c'est un délasserment sain et mystique et le festival n'est qu'une occasion de plus de danser et d'apporter le message intact de la brousse. ('Elles ont dansé' 1966: 17)

[Micheline Sofoum, from Gabon, is a shy young woman, who has accepted to answer our questions. She has been dancing since the age of six. Today, aged 15, although she is a member of the national troupe of Gabon she does not think of her promotion as extraordinary. She is not even considering making a profession of what is just, for her, a traditional mode of expression in her home country. She lives simply in her village among her eleven brothers and sisters. She does not dance to earn a living or to become famous, but because dancing is a healthy and mystical pastime, and because the festival is yet another opportunity to deliver the true message of the bush.]

The festival committee gave prizes which followed the classification of different art forms which emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century: there were prizes for the best literary works, films, records and contemporary visual arts. In the performing arts, however, it was decided that comparison across the different genres would be too difficult, and that there would be no prizes. Rather, the performing arts committee would assess the quality of each of the performances according to the following criteria: staging, music, decor, costumes and quality of the performance. Probably in an attempt to avoid causing offence, the performances by established non-African artists like Duke Ellington, Josephine Baker or Marpessa Dawn, the American-born French actress who had starred in the film *Black Orpheus* by Marcel Camus, would not be reviewed. The committee was headed by African American choreographer Katherine Dunham, Marpessa Dawn, French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch, Senegalese theatre producer Mr Crespin, and committee secretary Ibrahim Samb. The assessments, which were published in some of the festival's official publications (e.g., *Premier Festival mondial* 1967) and in the state-controlled Senegalese daily *Dakar-Matin*, reflected a similar kind of traditionalism and lack of recognition of the experimental nature of the African choreographic work presented at the festival. The National Ballet of Mali, for example, was praised for its capacity to 'interpret the traditional dances of Mali, regardless of the origin of the dancers and musicians' (*Premier Festival mondial* 1967: 117). But the committee also expressed a fear that the dancers' training might, one day, 'destroy their spontaneity'.

For the Togolese troupe, the committee found particular interest in 'traditional dances from the "Krikri" Voodoo sect', and did not seem to acknowledge the fact that many Voodoo dances would not be performed outside this religious context without significant transformations. The National Ensemble of Ivory Coast was said to have shown an 'interesting

transfer of traditional wrestling and showcasing of spontaneous dance schools', but it is unlikely that there was anything spontaneous in the work of a troupe that became a major point of reference in West African neo-traditional performance in the 1970s. The Ethiopian troupe was said to have presented 'interesting archaic dances, interpreted by a fresh and naïve troupe' (*Premier Festival mondial* 1967: 118), and yet the Ethiopian dancers wore white outfits very reminiscent of Ethiopia's Christian heritage. Niger's National Ensemble was deemed to have displayed a 'flagrant authenticity of all the dances, both naïve and charming' (120).

There was a tendency among the festival organizers, then, to reify African choreographic performance as timeless, immutable and open to a single exegesis. In this sense, they chose to play down the complexity of many African expressive genres, the thrill of which often comes precisely from the contextual nature and the open-endedness of interpretation. This was demonstrated masterfully by Karin Barber (1991) in her work on the Yoruba *oriki* genre of oral performance. But these qualities, which extend far beyond Yoruba society, were not recognized in the creations of the festival invitees.

Among the non-African troupes, Haiti and Brazil received a fairly negative assessment. It was as if, having praised many of the African performances, the committee wished to demonstrate that the review was also a critical exercise. The Brazilian show, in particular, was deemed to have been 'a disappointment, despite the individual talent of the artists. The Brazilian fever, exuberance and elegance, much admired worldwide, were lacking' (*Premier Festival mondial* 1967: 120).

But there were also contradictions, which probably reflected the ideological tensions within the festival's organization. Whereas it was feared that the dancers of the Mali ensemble might become too well trained and not sufficiently spontaneous, for example, the dancers of the National Ballet of Senegal were deemed to lack training. This may explain why Katherine Dunham was charged with recruiting new dancers and raising the level of the National Ballet of Senegal as soon as the festival was over. Ousmane Noël Cissé, one of the National Ballet's lead dancers in the 1970s, said Dunham had recruited him into the troupe shortly after the festival.⁹

Oddly, too, Alioune Diop turned to the USA for academic expertise on 'traditional' African dances, a request that seemed to assume a lack of institutional knowledge about dance among the African invitees. Diop sent a late telegram, dated 18 March 1966, to Gray Cowan of the African Studies Association, asking him to recommend a speaker on the subject: 'Connaîtrez-vous experts signification danse traditionnelle—Si oui donner adresses—Amitiés. Président Alioune Diop' [Do you know any experts in the meaning of traditional dance—if so, please send addresses—yours truly].¹⁰ Cowan must have suggested dance scholar Judith L. Hanna at the University

⁹ Personal interview with Ousmane Noël Cissé, Dakar (April 2011).

¹⁰ Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS), st928/FMAN/Pl.

of Wisconsin, for the festival archive I accessed at the National Archives in Dakar includes a telegram addressed to her by Diop a few days later (dated 23 March 1966), this time in English: 'Could you write a paper on the significance of the dance on a given tribe or ensemble of tribes for colloque—Could you also participate in eventual jury for dance prize. Président Alioune Diop'.¹¹ The archive contains a copy of a typed paper on dance in Africa, based on Hanna's earlier fieldwork in Nigeria, but, unsurprisingly given that she received the invitation only a week before the festival began, she did not attend.

Consistent with Senghor's traditionalism, other performing genres that were popular in African cities at the time were excluded. The 21 Senegalese dance troupes selected to perform all worked within the neo-traditional genre ('21 troupes artistiques' 1966), even though the 1960s were also the heyday of Cuban music and dance, when Senegalese salsa bands filled the dance floors of Dakar, Saint-Louis or Ziguinchor with Cuban rhythms and songs in Spanish or Wolof (Shain 2002). Many of my older informants in the dance world remembered the Cuban nights of their youth with enchanted nostalgia (Neveu Kringelbach 2013b). Ousmane Noël Cissé's Cuban dancing skills were what had distinguished him from other candidates when he auditioned to join the National Ballet. Saliou Sambou, a prominent Senegalese politician and an early playwright for the Dakar-based Casamançais troupe Bakalama, remembered the Cuban dance parties of his youth so vividly that he performed an entire Johnny Pacheco song when I interviewed him in Dakar in April 2011. Cuban rhythms were indeed popular throughout the coastal cities of West and Central Africa (White 2002). Yet, no Cuban rhythms featured in the festival's dance programme.

What the festival did achieve, on the other hand, was to help codify the neo-traditional genre initially developed between Senegal, Guinea and France by working as a large-scale 'contact zone'. For many young artists, this was the first opportunity to see a wide range of choreographic practices, to meet performers from other parts of the continent and beyond, to be confronted with cosmopolitan audiences, and to receive worldwide press coverage, however uninformed. It is likely that WoDaaBe dancers from Niger had performed in France in previous years, for example, but this was undoubtedly the first time that their dances were reviewed in US newspapers and magazines like the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* or *Ebony*, in which African American writer Hoyt Fuller wrote that they 'enchanted the sophisticated audiences with their astonishing charm and innocence and their strange, bird-like songs and movements' and that they 'wore feathers, painted their faces, and chirped like birds' (Fuller 1966d: 102). It is evident from the festival's visual archive that the WoDaaBe performed a young men's dance, the *geerewol*. Understandably for someone unlikely to have known much about the social context of WoDaaBe performance, the reviewer struggled to make sense of what he saw. There was no drumming, no speed and no athletic feats, for, as Lassibile (2004)

11 ANS st1033/FMAN/PI.

has shown, the WoDaaBe value elevation, slowness and precision in the movements, as well as a skilful display of different facial expressions, which form part of the choreography. The *geerewol* simply celebrates the beauty of individual performers, according to WoDaaBe aesthetic criteria. As noted by Apter (2005), there was some continuity between colonial fairs and pan-African festivals. It is thus no accident that the *Ebony* review echoed the press coverage of African performances during the major 1931 colonial exhibition in Paris, for example, where animal imagery was also abundant. In a similar exoticizing style, the *New York Times* wrote that:

lance-wielding tribal dancers in leopard skins lent a roaring welcome [...] to the World Festival of Negro Arts, Africa's largest such event. The leopard men presented traditional dances from the Republic of Chad, and the National Dance Troupe of Mali, wearing ferocious symbolic masks, presented a century-old ritual devil dance. ('Tribal dance' 1966: 16)

There was no sense that performance might have been choreographed for this specific context, and old stereotypes about Africans dancing reverberated in the international press throughout the festival.

American Dance: A Game of Absence and the Legacy of Alvin Ailey

The most imposing delegation was that of the USA, where, at the height of the Civil Rights movement, there was intense interest in African diaspora connections. Moreover, it did help that Senghor's old friend Mercer Cook was now the US ambassador in Senegal. However, the American committee suffered from a lack of funds. There was also hostility from a number of prominent African American artists, some of whom were appalled to see the presidency in the hands a white woman, Virginia Inness-Brown. The head of the American delegation to the World Festival of Negro Arts carried great symbolic value, and the presence of a white person in this post ~~was perceived as implying~~ that no black individual was good enough for the job. Although officially chosen by Senegal, in reality it is likely that Inness-Brown had been appointed at the suggestion of the State Department in an attempt to raise the \$600,000 budgeted for the American delegation's participation. But the fundraising campaign was a failure, and the State Department was forced to give out a substantial sum to avoid a complete debacle. The failure unleashed a flood of criticism towards Inness-Brown's presidency, and the much-reduced American delegation was marred by tension. Other African American artists openly criticized Senghor's philosophy and his politics. Harry Belafonte, for example, refused to attend and declared, speaking from Paris, that Senghor was 'too soft on Rhodesia' (Garrison 1966a). But it is also likely that the State Department made sure that no black radical artist would attend the festival, for fear that the wind of independence in Africa would provide further ammunition ~~for~~ the Civil Rights movement (Kelley 2012; Jaji 2014).

In this context, the only American dance group that made it to Dakar was the Alvin Ailey Dance Company (Figure 9). Flown in from Rome during a European tour, the company enthralled the audience at the national stadium with Ailey's 1960 piece, *Revelations*. The performance was a last-ditch attempt by the State Department to include black dance in the programme after the initial plan to have a major show involving six choreographers led by New York City Ballet dancer Arthur Mitchell, named the American Negro Dance Company, was cancelled at the last minute due to lack of funds. As late as 2 April, the *New York Times* wrote that 'the participation of an American Negro dance group [was] unlikely' ('Tribal dance' 1966: 16).

The festival, and the sojourn in Senegal, must have left their mark on the performers at a time when many African American artists dreamt of travelling to a continent they regarded as a mythic motherland. Jazz pianist Randy Weston, who travelled to West Africa the following year on a tour supported by the State Department, recalled the pain of being excluded from the festival delegation at a fairly late stage (Weston and Jenkins 2010). Star Ailey dancer Judith Jamison did make the trip with the company, and later wrote in her memoir that it had been her first voyage to Africa (Jamison 1993: 82).

Likewise, the Ailey show had a tremendous impact on the Senegalese—and probably other African—choreographic scenes for many years to come. After all, this was the first time most participants saw a (mainly) black dance group of such a high standard, and the combination of modern choreography and American spirituals captivated the audience. Ousmane Noël Cissé told me that watching the performance had been one of the turning points in his career, and that it had compelled him to carry out his own choreographic experiments in the 1970s and 1980s, when he led various dance groups and combined West African dances with American modern jazz. He did not so much attempt to copy the Ailey style as to develop his own choreographic 'language', but it was the thrill of watching the American company that inspired him to look for a style more modern, and more cosmopolitan than what the National Ballet was producing in the 1960s. According to Cissé, Senghor too was deeply impressed with the Ailey show, and this may have been one of the reasons he chose to support the modernist, Pan-African Mudra Afrique dance school, which opened in Dakar in 1977.¹² But the impact of the Ailey visit extended further into the Dakarais choreographic world, and probably also into the dance scenes of other African nations who had sent participants to the festival. Dakarais choreographer Jean Tamba, for example, has fond memories of performing sections of *Revelations* with one of the dance studios he attended in Dakar in the

12 Mudra Afrique was established at the initiative of French choreographer Maurice Béjart, Senegalese-Beninese choreographer Germaine Acogny—the school's director on a daily basis—and President Senghor. The school was housed in the building of the Musée Dynamique, a choice that seemed to stress the continuity with the festival. A unique experiment in Africa, Mudra Afrique was forced to close in 1983 due to lack of funding (see Neveu Kringselbach 2013a).

1980s. In dance the biggest popular success at the festival, then, did not come from one of the Pan-African troupes cherished by Senghor, but from the work of an African American choreographer steeped in the modern dance techniques of Martha Graham and Lester Horton, and in African American Church music.

Dance Parties and Street Events: Popular Cosmopolitanism?

Did audiences, too, dance at the festival? Concentrated in Dakar, the festival remained largely an elitist event with paid entry the norm for most events (~~although there were still many sold-out shows~~). But in the interstices of the official programme, dance parties were organized in abandoned army barracks, cinema halls and other large spaces, and there people threw themselves into the cosmopolitan dance crazes of the moment:

At the flag-bedecked Place de l'Indépendance, and at less imposing spots throughout the city, local groups in gay—and sometimes outrageous—costumes enlivened the streets and the Medinas with spontaneous explosions of song and dance. Long after the theatres had dimmed their lights, merry-makers crowded the floors of the nightclubs of the city and along the sea-cooled corniche, doing the frug and the Watusi until near-dawn. At Camp Mangin, a mid-city outpost recently abandoned by the French army, a Nigerian band played riotous Pied Piper to devotees of the High Life, that free-wheeling ancestor of the dance crazes currently sweeping the Western world. (Fuller 1966d: 100)

Duke Ellington's performance at the stadium was a resounding success, and the genuine enthusiasm of the large audience is almost palpable in Greaves' and Borelli's documentary films about the festival (Figure 10). The *bal populaire* held at the El Mansour cinema, in one of Dakar's old African quarters, with music by Senegalese band Harlem Jazz, took the dancing crowds by storm. The dance parties must have been the organizers' compromise to address the abundant critiques of elitism Senghor faced both within and outside Senegal, and to give the festival the air of a popular event. Even Senghor's guest, Katherine Dunham, criticized his ideology in thinly veiled terms, saying that she saw no reason 'for putting any particular label in front of what we are doing that requires an elaborate explanation. The Negroness that we are in there. There is no way to get out of it' (Garrison 1966b).

Away from the clubs and the bands, people also danced in the city centre's streets, alongside the lesser-known Senegalese troupes selected to provide the festival's *animation* [entertainment]. These included the amateur troupes established by hometown associations, mainly from the Sereer-speaking Siin Saalum region south of Dakar and from Casamance. The choice of the nation's perceived cultural peripheries to represent Negritude, then, was carried all the way into the participative dances that set ordinary city dwellers in motion throughout the festival.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to give a sense of the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts as a crucial moment in the development of choreographic scenes in postcolonial Africa, and as a turning point in Pan-African politics. In many ways, the emphasis on reimagining rural practices for the stage, on timelessness and on the selection of particular ethnicities to stand in for emerging national identities was in continuity with the late colonial politics that followed the Second World War. These were very much about the confrontation between the artistic experiments of an emerging class of African intellectuals and French (and British) attempts to maintain their empires for as long as possible through indirect rule. Indirect rule as it had evolved during the first half of the twentieth century involved the reification of 'traditional' practices and the construction of rural Africans as stuck in the past, as radically different from Europeans and European-educated urban Africans, and therefore as undeserving of full citizenship. Given the legacy of nineteenth-century stereotypes about African dances, dance played an important role in this construction of rural Africans as modernity's 'other'. When Fodéba Keita and his peers experimented with bringing West African (mainly Mande) dances to the stage in the 1940s and 1950s, they attempted to develop a modern genre that would recover the glorious African past while also providing a sideways critique of colonialism. By the time this neo-traditional genre had been elevated to the status of national heritage through national ballets and their offshoots, however, there was little left of the original radical edge. By then, the troupes selected by Alioune Diop and other members of the festival committee during travels through Africa in the run-up to the festival were charged with serving the political agendas at hand—nation-building internally, and projecting their nation's image abroad. In the process, the colonial construction of certain regions as the cultural peripheries were reproduced, and nowhere was this as visible as during the 1966 festival.

The dance programme at the festival also magnified the dissonance between Senghor's version of Negritude and the Senegalese audiences' appetite for cosmopolitanism: while Senghor and the festival organizers focused on the neo-traditional genre, people moved to Cuban rhythms and high life, educated youths organized ballroom dances, and the performers who attended the festival were enthralled by Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*. Over time, however, the neo-traditional genre fostered by Keita's experiments and by the Dakarois performing scene after the Second World War established its legitimacy through the worldwide touring of such troupes as Guinea's Ballets Africains, the National Ballet of Senegal and the National Ballet of Mali. What Keita, and later Senghor and others, conceived of as a project of cultural salvation became a project of cultural 'extraversion' (Bayart 1999). The 1966 festival, it turns out, was a milestone in Senegal's postcolonial history of extraversion.