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To Be and *Néég bi*:
Discourses on Home in Senegal

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For Pape Saliou Samb

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INTRODUCTION

In 2007 I was awarded a Global Studies Summer Fellowship to conduct independent research in Senegal over five weeks. My goal was to get a sense of the local discourses surrounding the concept of home, particularly among migrant populations and their respective families. To do this, I interviewed some nine respondents and spoke with countless other people in informal encounters on the street. I spent much of my time in Dakar, where many young men come looking for work, but I was also able to make two trips—the first one for three days, the second for a week—to a small village about three hours from the capital. The demographic breakdown of this village was typical for Senegal: it was largely made up of women and children because most of the working-age men had left for the city.

This rural exodus is the result of many factors, not the least of which is the prolonged 30-year drought in the Sahel, which has turned much of the once-arable land into desert, thus impairing groundnut production (one of Senegal's chief exports) and subsistence agriculture. Additional factors are economic and historical in nature. Like many countries on the continent, Senegal has been trying to develop out of its post-colonial history for decades. But poverty continues to be widespread, and the lack of infrastructure requisite to competition in the global economy keeps job opportunities limited. Structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank in the 1980s and 90s did little to improve unemployment rates or patterns of stagnation in the per capita GNP¹. As recently as 2006, demographic data showed that 63% of the population was living on less than US\$2 a day². Add to this what many in Senegal see as a corrupt government

unwilling to implement sound economic policies, and you have a situation ripe for exodus³. Population statistics in 2005 put Senegal in the top third of African countries whose urbanization levels exceeded 50%⁴, and the estimated number of rural-urban migrants stood at nearly 400,000 between 2000 and 2005⁵.

I became interested in Senegal in the summer of 2006 as news reports of clandestine emigration proliferated in the papers and on the web. These stories depicted the harrowing and often tragic journey that scores of young men were making in pirogues headed for the Canary Islands. I wondered: what does home mean to a young man who is willing to risk his life to leave it? How do culturally specific ideas and conventions regarding home inform identity discourses affecting both the individual and their community? How are those identities complicated when separation occurs? In what ways do migrants and their respective communities negotiate “native” identity within the modern framework of global mobility? Given the plethora of anthropological analysis on cultural adaptation systems for diaspora scenarios, what appeared to be comparatively under-researched was the notion of home itself as a culturally relative construction in the West African context.

Despite the brevity of my stay, I felt early on that I was making good progress—interviews were going well; I had established some crucial and serendipitous contacts; my work at the West African Research Center where I was affiliated was progressing apace; and people were, it seemed, generally eager to speak with me and tell me their stories. It was, in short, turning out to be a successful trip. But then the unexpected happened. My laptop’s hard drive

crashed, taking with it most of notes I had written. I say “most” because, in a stroke of fate, I had emailed my mother the first thirty pages. It turned out to be the only thing left, in the way of text, from my research in Senegal that summer.

Thankfully, I still had my interviews safely stored on an audio recorder, and I had taken two 35mm cameras with ten rolls of film that were also safe in my bags. In this way, I was able to come out of the ethnographic experience with ample audio and visual documentation, and yet I still lacked what most anthropologists consider to be their intellectual roadmap: field notes. This challenged me to look at the evidence of my research in new ways.

When I came back to the States for the rest of the summer, I undertook a project to reconstruct from memory what had been lost in my computer’s meltdown. But the task presented its own problems because I was no longer *in situ*; I was back in my own context, re-configuring events and encounters through the flawed mechanism of my memory. Almost immediately, I felt the tangibility of Senegal slipping through my fingers. As the weeks passed, it was getting harder and harder to remember, until I started getting memories confused, or sequences out of order, criss-crossing like the threads in a spider’s web. I began to ask: What happens when I reconstruct? Where do I go, physically and metaphorically when I remember? And is that place, or the data it generates, ethnographically valid?

Reflecting on the methodology of memory as an ethnographic device, looking at what kinds of evidence it yields, and examining theoretical assumptions about what constitutes valid data, prompted me to think critically

about how evidence comes to take shape in a text. I became interested in exploring the contested and important boundaries between fact and fiction, objective knowledge and partial truth, representation and interpretation. Perhaps incorporating all of my evidence (field notes, memoir, interview, photographs, and literary fiction) would help to flesh out some of these tensions in my ethnography on Senegalese notions of home.

What would happen, for example, if my field notes were not merely the personal jumping off point for analysis, but were integrated into and constitutive of the analysis itself? What would they say about the ethnographic project? Furthermore, what would happen if the “reconstruction” retained its fragmentary and episodic shape? After all, I didn’t just sit down one day to remember and write everything down in one session, so why shouldn’t the text reflect the contextual interruptions and distractions that influenced the very project of memory itself? Moreover, I felt sure that the interviews—not as interpreted by me but in the respondents’ words—would no doubt point out the collaborative nature of fieldwork, and have something to contribute to this textual conversation. Photographic testimony would help to underscore the challenges of representation in raising questions of position, documentation, and assumptions surrounding an image as a manifestation of ethnographic reality. Finally, I wanted to draw from all these sources in my interpretation of Senegalese discourses on home, and fiction seemed to be the best way to do this: I could use the facts of what I’d found while also handling the slippery, subjective terrain of memory. Putting all

of these elements together would necessitate a different sort of treatment than is generally seen in traditional ethnography.

Therefore, what follows is an experiment. I have tried to use narrative structure to express more than a single categorical reality, or focal horizon. Ethnography has the potential to reflect not only the field experience but the nature of the actual subject under investigation by using literary form as a tool. In the field, I was looking at discourses on home in Senegal, and given that these discourses are multi-sited, polyvocal, and culturally mediated, an overarching textual unity would not communicate this complex reality. Moreover, one of the salient, if self-evident, features of discourse is that it is conversational. It takes place in concert with other discourses—on family, obligation, kinship, gender, marriage, religion, etc. My goal is to highlight these patterns of discourse by adopting a conversational structure in which different sections would be “speaking” to, or referencing one another. Going beyond monolithic portrayals, I want to reflect multiple, site-specific realities in the structure of the ethnography by investigating how various literary forms could function in a dialogistic manuscript. I suggest that this framework, the literary shape of this ethnography can be used as a hermeneutic device to better understand the myriad discourses on home acting in Senegal today.

Notes

¹ Barney Cohen *et al*, eds., Population Dynamics of Senegal (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1995), 14.

² 2006 World Population Data Sheet (Washington D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, 2006), 5.

³ “West Africa: Bad economic policies driving migration.” IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 21 March 2008. <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=77404>> (22 March 2008).

⁴ Oumar Bouare, “Levels of urbanisation in Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone countries,” Views on Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa: Proceedings of an African Migration Alliance Workshop, eds. Catherine Cross *et al* (South Africa: HSRC Press, 2006), 51.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

PART I

THEORY

Since the middle of the twentieth century, anthropology has been facing a host of conceptual, epistemological, and methodological dilemmas associated with the contemporary ethnographic project. Many people are seeking ways to go beyond universalistic bounded portrayals of culture and identity by resituating the discipline in a post-structuralist landscape. On the one hand, changes in contemporary methodology underscore the ways in which ethnographers are challenging previously uncontested approaches to cultural analysis. In addition, fixed boundaries circumscribing legitimate forms of ethnographic writing have begun to adapt in order to include a multiplicity of perspectives. And philosophical discussions regarding objectivity as a contextual event have created a paradigm shift in the ways we think about knowledge and authority. In addressing some of these issues, I hope to situate my argument, and the experimental ethnography that follows, within the academic debate. Therefore, I will attempt to deconstruct my own text by isolating each section, and then illustrating how it engages with contemporary theory.

Field Notes: Objectivity, Vulnerability, and Presence

Think about the concept of objectivity, and words like impartial, verifiable, and universal probably come to mind. Though this lexicon possesses a kind of timeless aura, let's not forget that "objectivity" was born from very particular historical circumstances. Enraptured by Platonic ideals, Occidental scientists of the Enlightenment made it their radical business to quantify certainty outside the Church. For the first time in the Christian West, truth, or the *phusis* of things,

could be known by the individual without the pesky dictums of divine intervention. With this pendulum swing, objectivity (or, perceptions of the world that are “unaffected by conditions peculiar to the experiencing subject”¹) came to overpower all things intuitive, replacing religion on the hegemonic throne. But given the nature of pendulums (in that they swing) objectivity has of late lost some of its original luster. Many theorists advocate throwing it out altogether, reasoning that it does not represent manifold reality; others, like Donna Haraway, argue for remaking the traditional notions of objectivity not from the inside or outside, but from a different space altogether, one that she calls “positioned rationality”.² This location, according to Haraway, is the only one that accommodates site-oriented, historically situated, and socially contextualized perspectives that speak directly to the specificity of phenomena in action.

From elementary school on, most of us are taught that objectivity is the *sine qua non* of scientific authority. It is not encumbered or influenced by emotion or prejudice; it does not reference individual impressions or ideas, but instead refers to the “thing” or object itself existing in reality, regardless of our opinion of it. The ability to be objective is the ability to embody a kind of supra-humanity; to disregard personally motivated meaning—to forget the dirty kitchen, the fight with the wife, the dog hair in the bed—and to see the world for “what it really is.” We can then sit down at a microscope and observe something like a molecule, for example, and talk about it in some definitive way without agenda. This objectivity, in the physical sciences, has long been touted as promising a kind of

totality: it is all seeing, all knowing, God-like. And this is precisely why people like Donna Haraway take issue with it.

Rather than succumbing to one of the two opposing binaries—the “official” ideology of scientific method, on the one hand, which uses technology to play the “god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere,”³ and the social constructionist argument on the other, which argues that “science... is rhetoric”⁴—Haraway suggests a more critical positioning. The problem is:

“how to have *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings, *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world... We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future.”⁵

In the social sciences, this call for critical theory is especially poignant because people, unlike molecules, tend to be rather untidy and unique. When I first became a student of anthropology, my professor, who later became my mentor, made the distinction between the physical and social sciences as follows:

“In biology,” he said, “experiments can be repeated. But culture is a moving target.”⁶ The objectivity we need is not essentializing or reductionist. We cannot see everything; we cannot know everything. We will always be limited by our

For reference on this phrase, “we cannot know everything,” see Part II, Field Notes, p.40. Also, see Part V, Fiction, p. 210.

context, which on a fundamental level is our body. The “vision” Haraway is talking about is one that situates us. It can tell us where we are and where we are not so that we can be responsible for what we see. This kind of objectivity, which is particular to each embodied situation in all its limitations, particularity, and

context, is *situated knowledge*.⁷ Because so much of what anthropologists do is participant observation, Haraway would insist that what an anthropologist sees is inextricably tied up with their position. By incorporating my field notes into this ethnography, I am situating myself as a researcher in a fieldwork context, as a woman in a patriarchal society, as a Caucasian in West Africa, and as a person from the Christian West in a Muslim country. This acknowledgment enables me to be responsible for and theoretically engaged with the imperfection of my observations, while not forgetting that those observations are continually being shaped by experience. As Vincent Crapanzano says, “The ethnographic encounter, like any encounter, however distorted in its immediacy or through time, never ends.”⁸

And yet full disclosure is often held at a suspicious distance when it comes to the academy. I’ve heard anthropologists accusing certain ethnographies of descending into something they call “self-anthropology,” a phrase that is usually uttered with some degree of professional disdain. Renato Rosaldo aptly points out: “By invoking personal experience as an analytical category one risks easy dismissal.”⁹ But this raises a significant question: how exactly can we remove ourselves from the encounter when our presence is integral to it? Perhaps anthropologists are wary of too much exposure for fear of being impugned for what Alan Sokal would have called “sloppy sociology.”¹⁰ Or maybe the pristine environment often called on to support claims of authority in the biological sciences makes anthropologists look like they’re infecting their own Petri dish because they are necessarily *in* it. Rosaldo comments on this:

“If social analysts realize that they cannot be perfectly ‘clean,’ they no more should become as ‘dirty’ as possible than airline pilots, invoking the limitations of human fallibility, should blind their eyes. The usual notions of evidence, accuracy, and argumentation continue to apply for their studies. Because researchers are necessarily both somewhat impartial and somewhat partisan, somewhat innocent and somewhat complicit, their readers should be as informed as possible about what the observer was in a position to know or not know.”¹¹

This suggests two things: first, the anthropologist’s perspective is irredeemably informed by his or her own contextualized experiences both within and outside the field. And second, that context should be disclosed. Implicating oneself fully, then, should not be seen as weakness of credibility, but a deepening of understanding.

Some anthropologists openly embrace this kind of implication. For Kevin Dwyer, the ethnographer must see him or herself as participant observer *and* participant subject in their own research. In his work with the Moroccan Faqir, Dwyer comes to palpable terms with his involvement in the overall project by first admitting and then advocating a kind of ethnographic “vulnerability of the Self.”¹² Anything else, he says, would be misleading at best and duplicitous at worst. “[To] take the Other seriously [entails] conveying rather than concealing that moment when the Self directly confronts the Other, when the Self is most vulnerable... To do otherwise is not merely dishonest but is pernicious and self-serving, because it shields the Self and works to distance and disarm the Other.”¹³

In addition to contesting traditional notions of objectivity by positioning oneself within the context of situated knowledge, and disclosing a certain vulnerability in the ethnographic encounter, the reflexivity of fieldwork should not be overlooked. There were many occasions in Senegal that I found myself

thinking back to Paul Rabinow's book, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. In his oft-quoted Conclusion, he says, "Both the anthropologist and his informants live in a culturally mediated world, caught up in 'webs of signification' they themselves have spun... there is no privileged position, no absolute perspective, and no valid way to eliminate consciousness from our activities or those of others."¹⁴ I often felt that, in the process of examining Senegalese culture, I was not only being pushed into a position of examining my own, but my observations and my actions in the field were shaping the nature of the data I was getting. It was my own Observer's Paradox.

For example, when my guide, Pape Samb, first told me about *gris-gris* (in Senegal these are small leather pouches or bracelets that are worn on the body to ward

For my *in situ* comments on this, see Part II, Field Notes, p. 84, and Part V, Fiction, p. 226.

off demons or *jinn*), I employed a mixture of Western psychology, religious theory, and other conceptual springboards to help me "make sense" of this phenomenon. That didn't last long. First, I realized that I was imposing my own cultural framework onto this phenomenon much the same way a cookie cutter is imposed onto a slab of dough. Furthermore, Pape told me just how wrong I was. When I asked him to explain it to me, he was initially frustrated that I didn't just "get it" intuitively. Eventually, he told me that foreigners—like the Guineans who sold fruit in the street and performed all manner of other "lowly" jobs—were responsible for bringing these *jinn* to Senegal. These malevolent spirits entered your body at night and consumed you from the inside out, he said. That's why, if you went out in Dakar after dusk, you had to wear your *gris-gris* to protect you.

As a foreigner, a *tubaab* (Wolof word for “white person”), this did not apply to me. “They only want the Senegalese,” Pape said.

For however interested I was in this explanation, and for however much I continued to revisit the topic of *gris-gris* in my conversations with Pape, what was equally compelling was the fact that Pape was objectifying his own culture in order to explain it to me. What was implicit for him, he had to make explicit for me. Indeed, there were powerful cultural discourses regarding spirits, protection, immigrants, ethnic identity, and religious affiliation all wrapped up in these little pouches, but they were largely indirect. For Pape, *gris-gris* were normalized objects; what Clifford Geertz might call an “experience-near” concept.

“People use experience-near concepts spontaneously, un-self-consciously, as it were colloquially; they do not, except fleetingly and on occasion, recognize that there are any ‘concepts’ involved at all. That’s what experience-near means—that ideas and the realities they inform are naturally and indissolubly bound up together.”¹⁵

My questions prompted, even required, Pape to step outside himself, to stand in what Rabinow would call a “liminal, self-conscious world between cultures.”¹⁶ It is this reflective and reflexive world that makes fieldwork, and the ethnographies it produces, dialectic.¹⁷ As such, the information that the anthropologist gathers is ultimately shaped by their very presence. To overlook or minimize the importance of this dynamic would be, to use Dwyer’s words, dishonest.

In conducting interviews and gathering data, there can be some difficulty in negotiating the slippery slope of relevance. Just as Rabinow felt marginally guilty for wiling away the hours talking with Maurice Richard (the owner of the hotel in Sefrou) about anything and everything that didn’t have to do with his intended

research topic (rural religion and politics¹⁸), I too struggled with the sense that wherever I went and with whomever I spoke, my job was always to be investigating “home.” And yet, I found myself sidetracked by chance encounters with people and their families, which on some level became more interesting to me than the strict focus on “serious research.” Rabinow’s professors instructed him to be “problem-oriented,”¹⁹ and in a way, what Rabinow found himself in the middle of was indeed a “problem”: where to draw the defining line between the ethnographic and non-ethnographic encounter. What is relevant and thus deserving of ink? While there is the idea that once you’re “in the field, everything [is] fieldwork,”²⁰ there is nevertheless a sense that what you’ve gone there for in the first place is something relatively specific, and that in order to get that thing, you will have to pick it out of general experiences. You will have to delineate, edit, and slough off what is not relevant.

The Reconstruction: Memory, Loss, and Border Crossings

Indeed, we cannot include everything because then the research becomes about nothing. But the problem of where to draw the line, where to perform the “surgery,”²¹ as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett would say, is of central importance. “Ethnographic objects,” she says, “are made, not found.... They [become] ethnographic through processes of detachment and contextualization.”²² Many of my field notes had already been “detached” through the act of disappearing, and now my job was to remember as much as I could.

In the modern Euro/American practice, memory is not regarded as a valid means for information gathering. The many oral traditions of the world notwithstanding, in the West we often think of the document as ultimate proof. If there is some accident—burning buildings, raging floods, unexpected earthquakes—we lament the loss of what we call “evidence.” Of course, there is some debate as to what constitutes evidence. According to James Spradley, “An ethnographic record consists of field notes, tape recordings, pictures, artifacts, and anything else which documents the cultural scene under study.”²³ And what of memory? Is it not a kind of document within which information is stored? Is that information somehow less valid than other forms within the ethnographic record? Dwyer says, “[Just] as fieldwork does not encompass all phases of anthropology, neither does this ‘record’ of events and dialogues exactly reflect the fieldwork experience.”²⁴

What a writer chooses to leave out can be as informative as what they decide to mention. Omission is still communication. And it is this trouble spot, this deeply personal moment of decision-making that all writers, be they academic or populist, must negotiate. In that decision, a hierarchy of importance is laid out. In contemporary anthropology, we recognize that the pressure to be comprehensive, to capture a “whole culture,” is not only a reenactment of imperial domination, but it is impossible. Nevertheless, there is a way in which objectivity is still the premier editing tool. We should not fail to see that what we are doing—when we “make” ethnography—is essentially a matter of engineering. We’re designing an engine with implicit divisions of labor to perform a certain set of tasks. There is

nothing inherently wrong with this; in fact, there is no way to escape it. But any ethnography that does not openly engage or acknowledge its own structure—its “engine”—is liable to head off in a direction for which it cannot or will not be wholly responsible.

The fact is that I did not only lose my field notes when my hard drive decided to meet its maker; there were countless other documents (stories, poems, notes, journals) that were just as lost as everything else. And I was not happy to be back in the U.S. while I wrote the Reconstruction. I missed Senegal, and the people I’d met. Perhaps more importantly, I missed the “field” not as a geographic location but as an intellectual one. It was certainly more interesting than painting houses—something I had done professionally for ten years before coming to Mount Holyoke College, and was doing again as summer work. As anyone who has spent any amount of time with a brush in their hand will tell you, painting is mind-numbing work. Mount Holyoke was my ticket out of the manual trades, and my first fieldwork experience as a nascent anthropologist was important because it showed me that I might just be good at something besides cutting and rolling walls.

And so, losing the field notes (and everything else) *meant* more than just losing the field notes (and everything else). In a moment of suspicion, I thought it might mean that I would indeed wake up one day, be fifty-years-old while holding a brush on top of a forty-foot extension ladder. Suddenly, my computer crashing became a perfect de Saussurian moment: the signifier (loss of data) and signified (irrefutable doom) in bonded matrimony. Surely this influenced the nature of the

work I was trying to recover. For one thing, it was with a sense of urgency—and a deep undertow of sadness—that I undertook to reconstruct at all. I was bound and determined to divorce my signifier and signified. I cannot deny that these feelings were active agents in the Reconstruction. By including them in the ethnography, I open them to interrogation. I had to admit that I was no longer in Senegal but in a different space altogether, which put me in dialogue with social forces that had little, if anything, to do with my proposed fieldwork there, but were nevertheless acting in my project. In a phenomenological sense, the loss and trauma that happened *after* the field experience were informing what had happened *before* through the act of Reconstruction.

There is something decidedly *imaginative* about memory that again brings to mind Alan Sokal's repudiation of "sloppy sociology." Some anthropologists candidly struggle with this. In his reflections on his encounters with Tuhami, the Moroccan tile maker, Crapanzano examines the faculty of memory and his role as narrative translator in the ethnographic project. He recognizes that in the act of presenting Tuhami's discourse, he is effectively appropriating it.²⁵ The line where Tuhami stops and Crapanzano's interpretations begin becomes harder and harder to navigate, especially after ten years. He says:

"I have difficulty, both stylistically and psychologically, in distinguishing the time of encounter from the time of writing. For Tuhami, I have my notes; for myself, I have only my memory. I do not know when my theoretical confabulations, my observations and explications, result immediately from the encounter and when they result from the literary reencounter."²⁶

This reencounter is as valid a site for ethnographic inquiry as any dusty side street in Marrakech. Rather than putting memories on the true/false chopping

block, anthropology could use this as a springboard to ask interesting questions about the construction of knowledge. In this way, I am trying to open myself up to that line of inquiry: How do I remember? What happens, to me and the event, when I remember? Is there a way in which memory can supercede the reality it is intended to portray, and if so, how can we talk about this shifting terrain? For example, my treatment of tea making in the Reconstruction belies the degree to which my project was one of urgency. The tone of the writing is almost compulsive, and the exhaustive description takes place over several pages. Looking back on it, I think I may have gone a bit overboard with the details, but I think this goes to exactly how memory, meaning and importance shift over time and within situated contexts.

Comes up again later in this section, p. 22. See Part II, The Reconstruction p. 110, and Part V, Fiction, p. 242.

Some would say that my situation made it impossible for me to see things clearly; others would say that only by admitting my circumstances could I even approach accuracy. Perhaps all sciences that deal directly with human subjects value distance and professionalism over intimacy. Rosaldo says, “Disciplinary norms require that a cultural gap separate analysts from their subjects.”²⁷ Crapanzano calls this an “ethnographic distance”²⁸ that enabled him to hide, and hide behind, his position. They say a physician should limit personal attachments because it weakens their ability to make objective decisions in the best interest of the patient. Emotion, in other words, clouds our vision. But the ethnographer in the field—and later when she is recalling the field—is not a microscope; she is a filter. (Some, like Haraway, would go so far as to say that even a microscope is a

filter.) All collections and recollections are shaped by the experiential. James

Clifford says:

“The ethnographer’s personal experiences, especially those of participation and empathy, are recognized as central to the research process, but they are firmly restrained by the impersonal standards of observation and ‘objective’ distance. In classical ethnographies the voice of the author was always manifest, but the conventions of textual presentation and reading forbade too close a connection between authorial style and the reality represented... The subjectivity of the author is separated from the objective referent of the text.”²⁹

Rather than advocating a kind of free-for-all, or license to fabricate at will, I am interested in more authorial/ethnographic transparency so that the reader can have a sense of where and through whose filter the material is traveling.

Even in the field I was engaged in a kind of literary re-constitution.

Sometimes, when I had my notepad within reach, this re-constitution was immediate. Other times, it had to wait until I got back to my laptop at night. This made me wonder: does data have a shelf life? Is it five minutes, or five hours, but *not* five weeks? Does validity expire after a certain amount of time? In other words, when am I *not* reconstructing? Perhaps memory is distrusted because it is believed to be more susceptible to psychological influences. One could, ostensibly, remember things not the way they were, but as one would’ve wished them to be. On this subject, Crapanzano says:

“History can be conceived, somewhat too simply to be sure, as the opposite of the fairy tale... It is objective, morally neutral, and certainly not a product of ‘wishful thinking.’ It is to be believed. The contrast here depends on the absolute distinction between the *imaginary* and the *real* that has dominated Western thought... The historical text, like all texts, including those concerned with personal history, may be conceived as a verbal objectification of the tension between ‘reality’ (resistance, in phenomenological terms) and desire... [both of which] are structured, as is the text itself, by the idiom at the disposal of the author.”³⁰

In the seemingly “self-evident” boundaries between *real* and *imaginary*, there is a sort of uncharted territory. It’s easy to forget that what we see with our eyes, or what we think we see, is really a bifurcated world in which the middle region between the left and right eye, is actually not seen at all, but is filled in by the brain. The mind performs a kind of airbrushing: it connects the seemingly disparate through a kind of *in-sight*, so that instead of seeing like pigeons, our vision is panoramic, holistic. And yet, in our vision there is an indiscriminate place in the middle that we never talk about because it doesn’t register as a place at all. What we “see” in the middle is both a cerebral figment *and* a visual reality. There are ways in which these two concepts are not mutually exclusive, but are engaged in a kind of fluid overlapping. Opposing binaries are not useful in describing this zone where both the whole and the fraction intermingle.

It could be argued that our anatomical design has intellectually predisposed us to emphasize the importance of totalities. Anthropology has spent much of its history conceiving individual subjects and the cultures they inhabit as unified and homogeneous. But Renato Rosaldo makes a strong argument for the recognition of cultural borderlands in social analysis by arguing for “the concept of a multiplex personal identity... [and] the notion of culture as multiple border zones.”³¹ One of the ways we can talk about these concepts is through the employment of non-traditional research methods. Fractures, fissures, or in-between places in research are often regarded as slips or imperfections in scholarly technique, not as semantically valid in themselves. Exercising memory as a methodological device both reveals and makes use of the “indiscriminate

place” where much of our meaning actually takes shape. Memory is neither completely fictitious (because we recall things that *did* in fact happen), nor is it wholly “objectively distanced” (because it requires imagination); it is both. And as such, incorporating and examining memory might be a good way to begin to talk about the important cultural phenomena happening in the borderlands. Along with others, I suggest that this place between *real* and *imaginary* is ethnographically interesting.

Interviews: Dialogue, Distance, and Vantage Point

A traditional ethnography might consist of a thesis, data, elaboration, analysis, and a conclusion. As a piece of literature, the work itself is often continuous in the sense that, apart from chapter breaks, there are no drastic lesions in the text. At no point does a passage simply end for no reason; rather, one section flows into the next; chapters are followed to their logical conclusion; and to bear the mark of success, all the loose ends must be tied up by the final page. This type of organization doesn’t just make the ethnography readable for practical reasons; it imposes order on the data, while implying, and imparting to the research, a unified breadth through form. Foucault underscores this productive quality: “This law of coherence is a heuristic rule, a procedural obligation, almost a moral constraint of research... But this same coherence is also the *result* [my emphasis] of research.”³² In other words, in order for “coherence” to be constituted, it must be supposed beforehand that it exists at all. What I found in

Senegal was neither total coherence nor total disunity in the notions of home. Instead, I was able to look at how discursive and scattered they were.

In his essay, “Reading the File,” Alan Trachtenberg points out that both organization and presentation communicate as much as any sentence on a page: “The category projects a story or a meaning.”³³ In my case, a unified arrangement would have been inadequate to present the nature of the subject under investigation (discourses on home in Senegal) and what happened in the field (the people I met). This is one reason why I have decided to include the interview transcripts. Their presence helps to ground the research in its truly episodic milieu. I often felt that being in the field was like being in constant conversation. I was getting to know people as much as they were getting to know me. How better to show this than through *actual* conversations?

Another important factor in my decision to include the interviews has been the virtual silence of the subject in traditional ethnographies. It seems to me that approaching another culture openly in the moment of encounter, and then concealing the multitude of voices intersecting in that encounter does a disservice to the ethnographic project. Not only can it create tensions between the fieldworker and her respondents if paraphrased interpretations are faulty, it also reduces the Other to a kind of inconsequential specimen, a giver of information who remains in the dark, without a name or a face. Not only is their presence obliquely denied, so too is their influence on the encounter itself. In his book, *Moroccan Dialogues*, Kevin Dwyer’s aim is “not to treat theoretically the vulnerability and integrity of Self and Other, but to show them, as well as one can,

in the anthropological encounter with the Other; not to categorize, label, and compare vulnerability and integrity, but to render them *visible* [my emphasis].”³⁴

Moreover, my presence in the interviews is also important to reveal. I was there, asking questions, sometimes not very good ones, sometimes missing the meaning of what my respondents were saying. My “ethnographic distance” is partially realized in the text. With some of the respondents I am more familiar; with others I maintain a kind of formality. Above all, I am *present*. I have specific relational and emotional proximities to my different respondents that inform the social boundaries of our discourse. Should the

I am thinking specifically of the difference in tone between my interview with Pape (begins on p.168) and my interview with his mother, Sagar (begins on p.160).

anthropologist really be, as Geertz suggests, a fly on the wall interpreting cultures “over people’s shoulders”?³⁵ Today this kind of surreptitious stance is being supplanted by a fuller implication of the fieldworker, which is crucial to situated knowledge. James Clifford would say that once the “relations of production,”³⁶ embedded in every ethnography are recognized, then the overall project can be redefined as a single event in a single moment that does not transcend its unique temporality, but complicates it.

And finally, the inclusion of the transcripts helps to resituate the respondents’ observations as inherently valid *a priori* and without ethnographic translation. Granted, the interview as a social construct sets up a situation in which spontaneous or “real” untainted self-reflection is unlikely. Nevertheless, when Cheikh Kane or Sagar N’diaye say something, it is not *through* me or my interpretation that the reader will hear it. “Hence,” Rosaldo says, “the gains and

complexities in holding the social analyst's narratives in creative tension with those of the protagonists... [whose] narratives about their own conduct merit serious attention as forms of social analysis."³⁷

Fiction: Form, Partial Truth, Interpretation and Knowledge

If the point of fieldwork is to do research, then the point of ethnography is to write about it. And yet it's the writing about it that seems to be causing some disturbance within the academy these days. Anna Grimshaw says, "The stubborn persistence of a particular literary form, indeed its reification in the current climate of academic auditing, seems increasingly archaic."³⁸ Post-structural feminist theory has gone a long way to contesting historically hegemonic approaches to ethnographic form. Kirin Narayan's piece, "Participant Observation," is a prime example. This is a kind of third-person immersion into the mind of a woman whose liminality is reflected in her career, her marriage, her past, and her relationship to a colleague. In none of these spheres is the protagonist, Charity, fully realized: she is "professionally marginal;"³⁹ her marriage to Isaac is something she "[watches] from the sidelines";⁴⁰ her childhood in India makes identity problematic, so that "even when she was living as an American, she was watching from the outside";⁴¹ and, in her communication with her colleague, Joel, if "her present life pushed into this correspondence at all, it was only in hints from the margins".⁴² By employing third-person limited, and thus situating the reader firmly within Charity's point of view, Narayan does more than show Charity's struggles with her position; she reclaims the significance of

Charity's perspective. This woman may be "on the sidelines" in her life, but she is very much front and center in Narayan's piece.

John Gardner sums up the importance of point of view by saying, "The choice of point of view will largely determine all other choices."⁴³ In other words, point of view is structure, and structure is *meaning*. Subaltern perspectives, historically under-exposed, can find a kind of corrective in creative ethnography. And yet, even Charity is left to wondering, "How much [do] vivid stories, though, really count as 'professional'?"⁴⁴ This is, of course, the Big question, and it is one Faye Harrison engages through an analysis of Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*.

The legitimacy of ethnographic writing has long been predicated on male-dominated, ethno-centric notions of what constitutes rigorous scholarship, and what's destined for the paperback shelf at the supermarket. Female perspectives have historically been more tolerable when confined to the genre of entertainment. While Clifford defines ethnography as a "hybrid textual activity [that] traverses genres and disciplines,"⁴⁵ it is somewhat hard to believe that he would see Alice Walker as part of the anthropological discussion. Indeed, for many in the discipline, Walker is foremost a *novelist*. And yet what she accomplishes in her fiction, Harrison points out, is exactly what many are calling for: a multi-sited, dialogistic, polyfocal text that employs literary tools to describe complex interactions both within and across cultures.⁴⁶ If Walker's fiction is entertaining, that doesn't mean it's trivial. If it's reader-friendly, that doesn't mean it's intellectually lazy. By highlighting Walker's accomplishments in

fiction, Harrison is perhaps obliquely asking one very important question: for whom does the anthropologist write?

It seems ironic on some level that ethnographic texts, which are ostensibly written about people and culture, are nevertheless written in a style that prohibits most people (i.e. non-anthropologists) from understanding them. The fiction writer is perhaps a populist at heart, whereas the ethnographer has historically been more of an academic, using an exclusive language that precludes a wide readership. But isn't there something wrong with a discipline whose focus is people and whose intellectual production is largely inaccessible to those people? In his Preface to *Culture and Truth*, Renato Rosaldo quotes Adrienne Rich, who said: "When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing."⁴⁷ If anthropology has neglected to fully *see* people, it has, in some fashion, equally neglected to *talk* to them. Because, as Harrison says, "Fiction encodes truth claims—and alternative modes of theorizing—in a rhetoric of imagination,"⁴⁸ one solution both Harrison and Narayan point to is the canonic inclusion of alternative texts written in non-traditional genres.

Along with Grimshaw, James Clifford is one of many anthropologists of all persuasions and genders who are trying to address the issues of representation, authority, and form in redefining the ethnographic project. As previously mentioned, the writing itself can never be fully comprehensive (i.e., we cannot know or describe *everything* about a phenomenon), and so whatever "truth" the

author is trying to pin down is doomed to be partial. Though this might sound depressing at the outset, it also opens new doors for innovative analysis. Consider the possibilities on the level of architecture, for example. Every detail built into the ethnography says something about its overall import, including its shape. Going back to Gardner, a piece of writing, be it scientific or science fiction, is like a building: its structure is meaningful. In other words, you wouldn't build a jet hangar for a family of four, nor would you construct a cottage for a football game. Likewise, you probably wouldn't write an entire ethnography on Post-It notes (though that, too, holds interesting possibilities). With this in mind, Clifford argues for a poly-vocal, multi-sited, mixed-genre, dialogistic ethnographic form to help express the pluralistic world in which we live, wherein identities are fluid and cultures are shifting and changing faster than we can record them. By giving up the pursuit of pure representation, a new kind of ethnography may be created, one that, as Clifford says, will be less focused on *how* something is said and more interested in the *meaning* of it.⁴⁹

Another way we get at meaning is through interpretation. Take my description of Cheikh making tea in the village.

See Part II, Field Notes, p.110
and Part V, Fiction, p. 242.

Whatever you want to call it, it is without question “thick.” I interpreted the sociality, the cultural significance of tea as an enactment of both community and communication (namely phattic). This description was part of my project to look at how the concept of home is constructed in Senegal particularly among migrant populations and their families. Without the “thick description” of tea, and many more like it, any analysis I might undertake would run the risk of sounding

shallow, or at the very least hard to conceptualize. As Clifford Geertz says, “culture is not a power...it is a context,”⁵⁰ and as such, anthropologists *interpret* that context with all its symbol systems through the action that takes place. An ethnography without interpreted action, Geertz seems to suggest, would be like trying to understand the theory of gravity without ever seeing an apple fall to the ground. In other words, too many grand overarching ideas of culture obscure its reality—its apple-ness tumbling to the earth at thirty-two feet per second per second. For Geertz, ethnography, thick description, and interpretation are all intrinsic to cultural theory.

To the extent that “ethnography is thick description,”⁵¹ it is also an imaginative act. For Geertz, not only is this not such a bad thing, it is impossible to avoid. First of all, for however much we may try, we cannot separate ourselves out of what we see (they are, after all, our eyes), and insofar as thick description is the re-enactment on paper of some previously witnessed phenomenon it will naturally be influenced by our particular faculties and dispositions, be they eidetic, noetic, or ideational. The reason that this is not fundamentally troublesome for Geertz is because the imaginative glimpse into a particular cultural situation is usually the revealing one. If, for example, the anthropologist cannot imagine why a group of young boys might be standing around blinking at one another—a social phenomenon which has codes of different meanings and messages embedded within each type of blink—then the description could very well be factual in terms of what was witnessed (i.e. kinds and sequence of blinks), but it would nevertheless be “thin” because we wouldn’t understand what the

blinks signify, or the messages they are trying to convey. Without some kind of conceptual translation, description turns into a laundry list—a catalogue of details unable to express any kind of substantial meaning precisely because it does not situate the phenomenon within the realm of social discourse.

One might ask: what is the point of all this research, and going to other cultures, and wrangling with the problematics of methodology and interpretation? The point is, on some fundamental level, to understand how other people live. And yet, that understanding, that knowledge, is not static, even if for much of the last four hundred years we have thought it was. Twentieth-century anthropology has been tackling some of its own worst character flaws not the least of which is the process by which scientific knowledge has been constructed in the first place. If we could go back two centuries, we would find many a social scientist examining the objectified “Other” from a position of unquestioned authority. Within the empiricist framework, if science can point at something and give it a name, then we can “know” it in some way. Take an atom, for example. Atomic theory existed before John Dalton was born, and yet it was not until he took the concept from Democritus’s dusty shelf and gave it some empirical muscle that the atom became official scientific reality. And while many of us take the atom’s actuality for granted, contemporary philosophers challenge this kind of epistemology.

In his work on mental hospitals and human sexuality, Michel Foucault insists that knowledge is not floating around in the ether, waiting to be harvested by a microscope, but that it is in fact manufactured. In other words, Dalton didn’t just

discover the atom; he created it as an entity in social scientific discourse. It is the academic, familial, or commercial institution's job to appropriate this creation, in order to reinforce beliefs, identities, and practices according to codified rules of norms and deviations. For Foucault, people are not spontaneously normal or strange; in fact, these distinctions are problematic because they cannot answer for themselves. Rather, the condition itself is "entomologized" into existence by way of a previously configured *regional ontology*.⁵² Similarly, Donna Haraway identifies most scientific knowledge as being taxonomically driven. What we can know or "what can count as knowledge"⁵³ is often subject to a kind of linguistic reductionism, which renders the world into universal statements or distinctions, and not contingent, emergent, situated locations. Rather than debate the "right" or "wrong" of such distinctions or categories, Foucault—and to some degree, Haraway—is more interested in how normative discourses produce their own truths, whereby discourse appears not only to represent but to *constitute* reality.⁵⁴ Rather than calling these truths or categories illegitimate and disposing of them, Foucault argues:

"What we must do, in fact, is to tear away from them their virtual self-evidence, and to free the problems that they pose; to recognize that they are not the tranquil locus on the basis of which other questions... may be posed, but that they themselves pose whole clusters of questions (What are they? How can they be defined or limited? What distinct types of laws can they obey?...)." ⁵⁵

Therefore, what we "know to be true," at least in terms of the social sciences, is neither neutral nor self-evident; it is *made* just like Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's ethnographic object. And it becomes interesting when we start asking *how* it is constructed at all.

So then, let us ask: what is this thing we call knowledge? How to be sure where it lives? And if we went knocking on its door one day, would we know how to speak to it? In their seminal book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann echo Foucauldian approaches to knowledge, in that “social truth” exists to the extent that we think it can, and what is meaningful in statements or “facts” is substantiated by a network cognitive rules that have undergone the process of “intersubjective sedimentation”⁵⁶ through typification, objectivation, and transmission.⁵⁷ Thus, social forms of knowledge (as opposed to biological knowledge, such as needing food and water to survive) are, by definition, constructed and partial. Therefore, not only are the discourses on home in Senegal socially constructed, so too is my knowledge of them. If that weren’t slippery enough as a subject for an ethnography, the truncated evidentiary repertoire with which I returned from the field further complicated matters of “transmission.” It became clear to me early on that the particular, unique, and yes, socially constructed, ethnographic encounters of which I was part in Senegal would necessitate a literary genre that could speak not to a universally bounded and hermetically encapsulated experience as such, but to a reality that held myriad semantic *possibilities* in its midst. In the end, fiction seemed to be the best way to address some of these possibilities.

Photographs: Visibility and the Construction of the Ineffable

Up to now, I have argued with and within some of the historical discourses on the production of knowledge in order to substantiate my claim that a divergent,

poly-narrative, dialogic ethnographic form has a place in the discipline of anthropology for the future. What I hope to do with the photographs in this piece is slightly, though not altogether, different.

For me, photography is like poetry: inclined to interpretation, difficult to deconstruct with any measure of universal certainty, and yet powerful in its ability to generate personal (i.e. individual, unique, situated, temporal) connections. When we see a photograph that “rings true” or speaks to us the same way a painting or a poem might, we are relating to it on the level of *possible worlds*, even though what we see before us, for all intents and purposes, is “concrete” in form. The image depicts something that is *actual*, but the image’s meaning transcends its materiality because we connect with it on the level of imagination. When we use our imagination, we become co-creators in the project, and therefore we become a part of it.

Lawrence W. Levine points out some of the difficulties associated with making photographs: “the photographers’ limited vision, the subjects’ ability to mask what they felt and thought, the force of ideologies, the intrusion of perceived political necessities.”⁵⁸ This complex of factors generates personal and inter-cultural tensions that often remain unexamined but converge nonetheless through the nexus of the camera lens. What results in the image is a sort of telegraphing of meaning, like an embossed card that looks flat until you turn it in the light. Ultimately, a photographic image is a site of collaboration, of co-creation between photographer, subject, and viewer. We can see some of these relations of production in the example that Alan Trachtenberg gives of the woman

who, in a moment of anger, writes an angry message to her brother upon a Walker Evans photo, thereby participating in the construction of its meaning.⁵⁹ Her particular context influenced that construction, underscoring the fact that photographs, while largely considered to be objective documents, do not communicate in a universal language; there is no “master” narrative.⁶⁰

Put another way, when I was fourteen, my mother took me to France, and I got to see firsthand the country home where she spent her childhood summers. I grew very attached to this place while I was there. Over the years, however, photographic images of that trip, and subsequent trips, have taken on new meanings that, when I “return” to the place itself, are not necessarily *about* the place. Instead, they are about me *remembering* the place from a distance—when I am in the U.S., when I am longing for the past in the present. In this way, the photograph is, or can be, a kind of meta-memory: the picture sitting on my desk of my mother’s childhood home in Anjou, which then became a kind of home to me, embodies both the memory of being there and the memory of so many hours spent remembering being there. There is a way in which the camera stilled a moment in time all those years ago from which an image was produced, which since then has taken on accretions of meaning not originally present. I cannot “return” to the house in the photo sitting on my desk because in the *actual* world, it’s actually not there; it exists only as a *possibility* of my own making.

The photographs of Senegal are likewise carriers of meanings that extend beyond the frame. Interestingly, many of the photographs included within this volume depict places that you, reader, could see for yourself: a building you could

put your hand on, a tree from which you could, ostensibly, pluck a ripe fruit. But if you do, they will not be the same building or tree in the photograph because those depictions are particular types of relations in a specific moment in time, which were stilled by light reacting on a small piece of emulsion, which was then transmitted, communicated, across time and locality through a strange process of “development” that yielded an image on a flat piece of paper that you can now hold in your hand. Through this process, from the shutter clicking to the final display, the photograph becomes more than the sum of its parts.

Turning now to the visual layout within the ethnography itself, the importance of montage becomes especially salient when we consider the concept of construction both of the knowledge of home and of the *actual* home itself, which is often in various stages of completion all over Senegal.

Physical houses are often built piecemeal between trips to Europe or elsewhere for work. During a return visit home,

See Part II, Field Notes, p. 104 for some examples of these structures.

migrants may put on a new floor to the dwelling or install a roof, whatever their savings will allow. When the money is gone, they go back to work. In this way, homes take quite literally years to build, a little bit at a time, and as a consequence, these half-finished shells of buildings are a ubiquity in Dakar.

At this point, bricolage becomes an important concept in the discussion of “home.” Claude Lévi-Strauss defines the process and product of bricolage as being determined by the presence of materials, or, as he puts it, “whatever is at hand.”⁶¹ These materials can be physical (technical plane) or intellectual (plane of speculation), but they are both limited. A bricoleur is one who fashions a project

based on these materials, not on a concept *a priori*. There are two points worth noting: first, in many ways, my project is a piece of bricolage in that I have constructed a piece of writing from the limited materials I had on hand: memory, truncated field notes, photographs, and interviews. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier in reference to the protracted construction projects in Senegal, home is also often constructed out of whatever is at hand. Because it is always “under construction” home is continually vulnerable to interruptions, to renovation or dilapidation; parts of it may be “recycled” and put back together in different arrangements; some pieces may be lost or damaged and need to be replaced. Therefore, home is one conduit through which we become creative in the ways we manage loss and renewal. The photographs within this ethnography function as an invitation to the viewer to co-create meanings and memories out of what is at hand.

Conclusion: Where To Go From Here

The discipline of anthropology has been largely unwilling to admit not only that it *uses* literary tools, but that it descends from literary traditions such as travel writing, memoir, and journalism. What, in the end, is so terrifying about any of these genres? Mary Louise Pratt suggests that by turning a blind eye to its antecedents, ethnographic writing “limits [its] ability to explain or examine itself as a kind of writing.”⁶² Self-examination should be as integral to the *inside* of the discipline as is examining the Other that endures, ostensibly, outside it. Pratt explains:

“Anthropologists stand to gain from looking at themselves as writing inside as well as outside the discursive traditions that precede them... Surely a first step toward such a change is to recognize that one’s tropes are neither natural nor, in many cases, native to the discipline. Then it becomes possible, if one wishes, to liberate oneself from them, not by doing away with tropes (which is not possible) but by appropriating and inventing new ones (which is).”⁶³

If home is something that “brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical,”⁶⁴ as Rapport and Dawson contend, then looking at how such a cultural notion is constructed and perpetuated should yield illuminating explanations on how migrants and families negotiate and adapt their lives in the global transnational landscape. One way to start understanding this complex of constructions is to engage the subject matter in a different way. I think narrative form holds innumerable possibilities for engagement. I agree with Clifford, who says:

“Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually—as objects, theaters, texts—it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture). The writer’s ‘voice’ pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced... And the crucial poetic problem for a discursive ethnography becomes how ‘to achieve by written means what speech creates, and to do it without simply imitating speech’ (Tyler 1984c: 25).”⁶⁵

One way I have sought to get at this discursive quality is through design. The “episodic” structure I have chosen for my ethnography is not arbitrary. Martin Smartt Bell convincingly argues in his book, *Narrative Design*, that there are at least two principal ways in which an author will handle their material. In the first, the narrative vector employed is one that starts at something like a Point A, and moves along to Point B, and so on. It is, foremost, a linear design. This narrative

shape is usually arrived at through a process of subtraction “so that the mass of primary experiential material is in fact shaped by being reduced.”⁶⁶

Conversely, the second type is one that takes its shape from addition, and is what Bell calls “modular” in design. “In the second case, the task of the artist is not to discover the essential form of the work by whittling away at the dross, but to assemble the work out of small component parts.”⁶⁷ The modular design is like a mosaic whose independent shapes, taken out of context, may be significant in themselves, but it is not until the shapes are arranged that a sum greater than its parts emerges. Under the compositional, interpretative, and analytical guidance of the ethnographer, these shapes can speak on a structural level to the uniquely situated reality of divergent voices and events that are continually interfacing—sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely—across shifting borderlands of identity and temporality, in much the same way that humans interact today. Modular design is global *through* the local.

Speaking of poetic form, Jorge Luis Borges once said: “Beyond its rhythm, the typographical layout of verse is there to inform the reader that what awaits him is not facts or reasoning, but poetic emotion.”⁶⁸ It is my hope that I have been successful in using some of the literary narrative tools at my disposal to create an experimental ethnography that does not assume a hegemonic stance over its material, but that embodies, in some fashion, the nature of discourse and the nature of fieldwork, and the possible worlds of knowledge inherent in each.

Notes

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³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶ Andy Lass. Personal communication, February 21, 2006.

⁷ *Op. Cit.*, Haraway, p. 188.

⁸ Vincent Crapanzano, Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 140.

⁹ Renato Rosaldo, Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 11.

¹⁰ Chaia Heller. Class lecture, October, 2007.

¹¹ *Op. Cit.*, Rosaldo, p. 69.

¹² Kevin Dwyer, Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 269.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

¹⁴ Paul Rabinow, Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 151.

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 58.

¹⁶ *Op. Cit.*, Rabinow, p. 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²¹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture: Museums, Tourism, and Heritage (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 18.

²² *Ibid.*, p.3, 18.

²³ James P. Spradley, The Ethnographic Interview (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1979), 69.

²⁴ *Op. Cit.*, Dwyer, p. 286.

²⁵ *Op. Cit.*, Crapanzano, p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139-40.

²⁷ *Op. Cit.*, Rosaldo, p. 188.

²⁸ *Op. Cit.*, Crapanzano, p. 134.

²⁹ James Clifford, Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography Eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 13.

³⁰ *Op. Cit.*, Crapanzano, p. 6-7.

³¹ *Op. Cit.*, Rosaldo, p. 166.

³² *Ibid.*, p.149.

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- ³³ Alan Trachtenberg, "Reading the File." Documenting America, 1935-1943. Eds. Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly W. Brannan. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 50.
- ³⁴ *Op. Cit.*, Dwyer, p. xxii.
- ³⁵ Clifford Geertz, Interpreting Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 452.
- ³⁶ *Op. Cit.*, Clifford, 13.
- ³⁷ *Op. Cit.*, Rosaldo, p. 142-3.
- ³⁸ Anna Grimshaw, The Ethnographic Eye: Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.
- ³⁹ Kirin Narayan, "Participant Observation," Women Writing Culture Eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 40.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ⁴³ John Gardner, The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft For Young Writers (New York: Vintage, 1991), 76.
- ⁴⁴ *Op. Cit.*, Narayan, p. 41.
- ⁴⁵ *Op. Cit.*, Clifford, p. 26.
- ⁴⁶ Faye Harrison, "Writing Against the Grain: Cultural Politics of Difference in the Work of Alice Walker," Women Writing Culture, Eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 237.
- ⁴⁷ *Op. Cit.*, Rosaldo, p. xxi.
- ⁴⁸ *Op. Cit.*, Harrison, p. 234.
- ⁴⁹ *Op. Cit.*, Clifford, p. 11.
- ⁵⁰ *Op. Cit.*, Geertz, Interpreting Cultures, p. 14.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ⁵² Edmund Husserl, Ideas Pertaining To a Pure Phenomenology and To a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book. Trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Luwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 18.
- ⁵³ *Op. Cit.*, Haraway, p. 188.
- ⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 68.
- ⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 26.
- ⁵⁶ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise In the Sociology of Knowledge. (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 67.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 53- 72.
- ⁵⁸ Lawrence W. Levine, "Photography and the History of the American People in the 1930s and 1940s." Documenting America, 1935-1943. Eds. Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly W. Brannan. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 38.
- ⁵⁹ *Op. Cit.*, Trachtenberg, p. 44.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- ⁶¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss. The Savage Mind. 2nd edition. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974), 17.

⁶² Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, Eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 27.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶⁴ N. Rapport and A. Dawson, "The Topic and the Book," Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home In a World of Movement, Eds. N. Rapport and A. Dawson (New York: Berg Books, 1998), 8.

⁶⁵ *Op. Cit.*, Clifford, p. 12.

⁶⁶ Madison Smartt Bell, Narrative Design: Working With Imagination, Craft and Form (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997), 213.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Jorge Luis Borges. Selected Poems. Trans. Willis Barnstone *et al.* Ed. Alexander Coleman. (New York: Penguin, 2000), 267.

PART II

FIELD NOTES

Leaving and Arriving

*Those who believed and left their
Homes and strove with their wealth
And their lives for the cause of Allah,
And those who took them in and helped
Them, these are protecting friends of
One another. And those who believed
But did not leave their homes, you
Have no bond with them till they
Leave their homes
--Qu'aran 8:72*

I cannot believe I am only two hours from my destination, the destination about which I have had so much ambivalence. I look out the airplane window across the Western Sahara, and I can see the dry sand banks of a river, corrugated like the crinkled sides of a pie tin. I count backwards from yesterday morning in Rhode Island with my sister's bright flower boxes filled with Impatiens, with her lawns and her sunshine filtering through the trees. My sister's stress and tired children and the coast of New England glinting against the shore, meaning something so different than this space I occupy next to this window alone.

I look down and I wonder if I will ever get any closer to that earth down there. Will I ever touch down, touch that sand, see those ripples in the dry riverbed up close, as big as mountains? From time to time, we pass over a small village with one road leading in and out, and I try to imagine the houses, the people, their lives and all. We cannot see it

Reference to Part I, Theory, p. 4 and Part V, Fiction p. 210.
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expressions. We cannot know it all, from all distances at once.

There is only a sliver that we can make out. We must imagine the rest.

Leaving doesn't feel right. I wanted to stay. I know I'm not supposed to say that. I'm supposed to be the adventurous anthropologist. I'm supposed to be professional. I fiddle with the strap of my camera bag; hope fleetingly that the airline didn't smash the school's audio recorder that I packed in my suitcase. I know I should feel lucky. Look, they gave me all this money; they loaned me all this expensive equipment, and now I'm going to Africa. It's a dream come true. I should be ecstatic, but I'm terrified. And exhausted. All I want is to go home.

I left from my sister's house, and she drove me and my luggage to the bus stop in Providence where my twenty-six hour journey would begin. She had some vague idea that I'd spent the better part of the morning in tears—crying in the shower while washing my hair, then while packing my bags, then on the phone with Mom—and though she didn't address it directly, because she doesn't do

Reference for Part V, Fiction,
p. 201.

tears anymore, she instructed me that if I
cancelled the trip, I'd be just like all those

“other” people who don't care about anything but their cars and their air conditioning and their flat screen TV's. Going, she said, is what differentiates me.

Parts of the desert are surprisingly red. Like veins, capillaries stretch out, riverbeds gone dry or just to a trickle. Funny how there really are only a few universal shapes—water moves over land the way that blood moves through our bodies the way that branches spread out from a tree the way that roots dig back into the soil looking for water.

Two references for Part V,
Fiction, p. 191 and p. 209.

Leaving is like losing sight. Intentionally. Or not using your legs when all you want to do is run the other direction. Right up until JFK, I contemplated turning back. I kept staring at my shoes as if to ask, “How fast can you go?” I still don't know what made me get on the plane. But then I did. First, I traveled to London, and from there to Dakar. I have no idea what to expect when I land. I imagine it will be like walking blind into an unfamiliar place.

We pass an outcropping of dark rocks; their backs are low but wide, drifting sands on all sides. From this distance they look like a family of

hippopotami who were walking up from the swamps one day, heading north,
when they got stuck in the earth. Slowly they disintegrated, becoming swallowed
up in their own particles; pieces of themselves
no longer attached, like memories picked up in
the wind. I see a mother, father, and a brood of calves, all turned to stone as their
feet sunk, facing north against the wind with the sand burying their bellies,
swallowing their faces.

Another reference for Part V,
Fiction section, p. 195 and p.
214.

The closer we get to Senegal, the more the desert evens out, pales in color,
until it is an undistinguishable sea of bleached earth. It stretches on infinitely
bleeding into the horizon. It is so immense it's peaceful.

This is referenced in Part
V, Fiction, p. 211.

First Days in Dakar

Day 1:

Hot. Stressful. At first, exciting; later, draining. Speaking French all day, trying to speak Wolof (and quickly realizing that the 2-credit beginner's conversation course I took at school is not going to help much). It's enough to make the head spin, which mine started to do right around 3PM. So many new people to meet at the Center. Coumba, Prof. Sène, Abdoulaye, Adama. It gets dizzying after a while. Besides I didn't sleep so well last night.

Despite the length of my journey, my consummate fatigue, and the hollow cored-out feeling in my bones, I knew very well that I wouldn't be sleeping soundly on the first night in Dakar. New bed. New continent. It may take me a while to adjust. What I hadn't planned on was the precise quality of air in my room when Madame Kane (pronounced like *Cannes*) first showed me in. Somehow sweltering just doesn't seem to say enough. The walls were a chalky turquoise with patches of pink showing through. They seemed to emanate a still heat that had been closed up for a very long time. On one side of the room, heavy fabric curtains hung to the floor. A bare bulb hung dimly overhead. I turned to smile at Madame Kane, telling her the room was perfect. She showed me the shelves cleared out in the tall wooden cabinet for my things, and left. Immediately, I drew back the 500-pound curtains and cranked open the jalousie windows, but the breeze was light and ineffectual. I looked at myself in the mirror that stood on a chest of drawers. What I needed was a wet cloth. In my bag, I found a pair of underwear and wet them down with water from my bottle. The

open windows would probably let in the city mosquitoes, but I told myself that's what the malaria medication was for.

It was late, and I expected everyone to have eaten already, but Madame Kane knocked on my door as I was unpacking and motioned me to come and join the family in the sitting room. A vinyl tablecloth had been laid in the center of the floor and on top of it was a large metal bowl of food. There was also a tray off to the side with plastic cups, a sweating bottle of water, a basket of baguette, and a *torchon* rolled around a cluster of spoons. The family sat around the bowl cross-legged or on low wooden stools. A stack of flip flops at the door told me I should remove my shoes, which I did with some reluctance because my feet, which had been imprisoned in a pair of canvas All-Stars for over twenty hours, really should've seen a bar of soap before seeing the light of day. Again, the room was stifling hot, and the windows were closed. I sat down.

I'd love to say that my first meal in Africa was something I've never tasted before in my life, but in fact it was pasta. Penne, to be exact, with a dry layer of tomato sauce gluing the cylindrical tubes together like tiny bundles of dynamite.

Madame Kane leaned back against the couch and smiled broadly at me whenever I looked at her. Her robe was a beautiful rose color, and the fabric matched her headscarf. Two shiny gold hoops dangled from her ears. The swooping neckline of her robe hung precipitously low on her left arm, revealing a smooth brown shoulder.

There was intermittent Wolof conversation around the bowl, hands and spoons all digging in together. A young boy, I'm guessing age ten, said nothing and looked at me as if I was an intruder. A man of perhaps thirty years spoke authoritatively to Madame Kane. And a silent deferential young woman in her twenties sat next to me. She kept her head bowed almost the whole dinner, and spoke hardly a word. I'd been introduced to everyone, but had already forgotten all their names.

I went to bed at 9:30, and, after a fitful first several hours, I did eventually fall asleep. Then before dawn, the muezzin called everyone to morning prayer, *Azhan*. For a moment, I was dreaming, hearing it as though underwater. Then I was awake in this room with the turquoise stucco walls, and the polyurethane foam mattress that was swallowing my body. There is something about a city completely silent and still, then a voice ringing out clearly like that just as the sun is beginning to tint the sky in its approach. I opened my eyes and the room was awash in indigo, the sunrise still a long ways off. The voice rang in the streets like a bell, something almost mournful about it. *Allahu Akbar*. For the first time, I was glad to be here.

I ended up falling asleep again until 7:30. When I woke up, I grabbed my camera and went to the windows to take a picture. Ever since my trip to Portugal in '97, whenever I travel someplace new, I take a photograph of the first vista I see on the first morning. I still remember waking up in Zambujeira Do Mar, that tiny fishing village on the rocky Portuguese coast, on the first morning. I'd arrived by bus late the night before, found a *pensione* in the village square, woke

up the proprietors, and then got a room where I fell fast asleep on the white sheets, having no idea what stunning beauty lay out there in the dark beyond the break. When I woke up, I jumped from bed and threw open the shutters—the blue ocean lay there below the high cliffs, churning under a bright sun, the white-washed houses lined up on small streets, their roofs undulating in waves of terra cotta, laundry hanging out to dry, a single white church steeple set against the dark rocks on the north side of town. So I took a picture.

The Rue 49 in Sacré Cœur Trois Dakar, Senegal, where I will be living for the next month was small when I first saw it, with a horse cart parked out front,



Dakar Window-5

June 2007

and people walking up and down the street; male students wearing dark slacks and white shirts and swinging blue European backpacks from side to side; women

with large handbags and shiny gold slippers tilting their long robes above the dusty path; barefoot young boys in tattered clothes going door to door with empty pitted coffee cans held out for money or sugar cubes or powdered milk; horse carts trolling past filled with racks of colorful soda bottles that clinked together like bells over the rutted road; a young man wearing a New York Yankees shirt polishing a blue sedan in front of the house; women bent over sweeping the tiled sidewalks with hand brooms, arms resting on one knee. The day was already hot, and I was thirsty. When I walked out to go to the bathroom, I saw Madame Kane in passing, sitting silently next door on the rug where we'd eaten the pasta. She sat facing East, swaddled in fabric, her hands fondling a string of wooden beads; she swayed a little back and forth. She turned to look at me as I passed, and even though her expression was gentle, I felt like I'd stumbled across something I shouldn't have seen, something private and sacred. I lowered my eyes and hurried to the toilet.

Breakfast was interesting. I was ushered down to the other end of the hall opposite my room, where a long curtain hung from the ceiling. Pulling back the curtain revealed another small room with a television, a refrigerator, a glass-topped table, and two puffy brown velour loveseats crowding its periphery. I sat with Papa (the boy from last night) who is, despite his name, Madame Kane's youngest son, and we ate together in almost complete silence watching French cartoons on the T.V. On the glass-topped table, a tray of cups and spoons had been set next to a plastic orange thermos with a white cap. Next to that was a tupperware container of powdered milk. Papa slathered a section of baguette with

Nutella. I absentmindedly forgot to read the directions on the packet of instant Nestlé coffee that *la bonne* (the maid) had given me, pouring about half the bag in my cup, and only after filling it with hot water did I read in BOLD letters on the package front: MAKES 12 CUPS OF COFFEE. Papa shook his head silently and turned back to the T.V.

Now I am here in my room, with the door open. There is a desk at which I can sit and work, and from time to time, I see Madame Kane or Papa or the quiet young woman, whose name I still cannot remember, pass by. Madame Kane is very concerned that I'm happy, enjoying myself so far. It's been less than twenty-four hours, and I'm still not entirely sure what I'm doing here, or if I will stay the entire five weeks, but I don't tell her that.

There are some things that one feels compelled, even obliged, to record in a situation like this. Some experiences are so vibrant that we may feel guilty if we leave them alone to collect dust in our memory. I remember in my Ethnography class with Joshua Roth, he told us that the first few days, or week, of field notes would be in a way the most crucial and informative. Before the magic wears off, he'd say. Before you start getting used to what you're seeing, before things start becoming normalized. And I gather this "normalization" happens rather fast. Soon, without even noticing it, you'll stop noticing things. So, Joshua said, it's imperative to document like crazy in the first week or so. Write everything down, no matter how trivial, put it on paper, because that way you'll have something to remind you. The problem is it's difficult to describe what you see without simply recounting a kind of laundry list of events, which is rarely interesting. But it's late

at night and I'm too tired for interesting, so I just want to put down some fleeting images and sensations from my journey in hopes that I may preserve some souvenir; I can always make it sound better later.

26 hours traveling.

Late flight, problems departing Heathrow.

At the terminal, I notice more than eleven single men, almost all of who seem to know each other—they talk and greet like old friends. All heading home, I think.

There are a couple of families (children and wives in tow), and only two women traveling alone. I make a mental note of it.

Reading “White Noise” on the plane.

<p>Many things in this “laundry list” show up in Part V, Fiction, pp. 227-230.</p>
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North Africa with red rocky mounds.

The Western Sahara opening like a hand.

Then the desert melts into one seamless color.

Sky, horizon, it's all the same.

Peaceful in its strange immensity.

Like something that is alive and watching us from below.

Then circling over Dakar.

Holding pattern over the ocean.

Broad ocean, and a heavy mist hanging over it.

I imagine how hot it is (26 C), and see the mist with a kind of dread.

Start sweating in anticipation.

Looking at Dakar from above:

White rooftops, stucco houses, laundry lines, palm trees, small dusty streets where children are playing soccer. Some sections look completely run down. The closer we get to the airport, the more dilapidated it becomes, shanties, corrugated tin shacks, sweltering under the hazy heat, piles of rubbish strewn about.

Landing at the airport, swinging a little from side to side.

Glad to be slowing down on the runway.

Garbage everywhere: in the brown grass that stands at all lengths catching plastic bags in its craggy fingers.

The margins of the tarmac fractured, breaking up.

Faded lane edging and directional arrows are barely visible.

Signs misshapen, pointing who knows where.

Pulling into the terminal.

A low-rise building, reads Aéroport de Léopold Sedar Senghor, palm trees flanking it.

There is something decrepit about it; maybe it's the broken steps, or the untended flowerbeds that collect cigarette butts.

This is the capital, I think to myself.

I anticipate that the poverty here will be pretty bad. And I might often find myself asking, how in the world does this exist? When, where I come from, we have so much. But I've still only been on Senegalese soil for five minutes, and I can't get into political economy or Western guilt—I have to get through customs and find my bags instead.

An old man wants to help me with my bags. I get the feeling he stands at the exit of customs waiting for *tubaabs* (white people) like me who are gullible and slightly awkward, with a penchant for feeling somehow responsible for stooped grey-haired old men looking to make fifty cents hefting some very heavy bags onto a cart and rolling it across the baggage terminal to the car... well, try two dollars, and I hefted the heaviest suitcase, and he “escorted” me for all of fifteen paces to the sliding glass doors that lead outside where he promptly deposited me with a wave and a toothless grin. Serves me right, I thought. Get ready to get challenged.

Standing in the well-lit foyer, all of Dakar out there beyond the sliding glass doors. A sea of black faces. Dusk fast approaching. I start feeling my color, being aware of it, something I’ve never experienced before. And it feels uncomfortable. I see my name on a piece of paper, waving slightly.

A man is holding it; he talks with the other men gathered there, taxis drivers all presumably. They are laughing and looking into the doors nonchalantly. I wonder what they’re saying. I will realize over the next day that my driver, Pape Bidane, talks like this with everyone in Dakar. Whether we’re in the centre ville trying to find a bank that will change my dollars into CFA, or if we’re in the *banlieu* at a stoplight, he has a way of becoming friendly with everyone immediately, calling them “*mon ami*.” Tonight, I don’t know this. I just see a stranger with my name on a piece of paper, and I only think one thing: I hope he speaks French.

I cannot adequately describe what hit me when those glass doors first opened. So again, I’ll make a laundry list within a laundry list: noise, movement all around

me, voices yelling, Pape's face waving me over to the side, dust, diesel exhaust, heat, the smell of something burning, more heat, young men running through the "parking lot" chasing cars and throwing things, laughing, sunlight draining from the murky sky, the sun a single unobscured orb perfectly round and dim behind the humidity and pollution.

The drive to Madame Kane's:

Again, this shows up in Part V, Fiction, pp. 230-31.

The road is partly paved, mostly red dirt. The asphalt doesn't end so much as it comes to a place of indecision, fraying with the red earth peeking up between the black fissures. Sidewalks for the most part do not exist, and often when they do, they're used as depositories for cars, piles of rocks, construction debris, or soil. Pape, who is being spoon fed some kind of yogurt dessert by his *copine* that he decided to bring along for the ride, is unaffected. He puts on the radio and we listen to loud Senegalese pop, Afro-reggae-ish stuff. We go over curbsides, into the median, come conspicuously close to other cars, pedestrians. I look out the window and see a swarm of other taxis all coming from the airport, all of which show signs of a recent meeting with guardrails or other taxis. Rear windows smashed in and covered in plastic and duct tape. Concave passenger doors. Missing parking lights. Bumpers askew, held on with string. And then there are the buses, large blue and yellow contraptions with the windows and rear doors missing, where men hang on off the back swinging their sandaled feet from the edges. There is an interesting kind of direction signaling here—sometimes Pape uses his blinker, sometimes his hazard lights, sometimes his high beams, all delivered in a beautiful kind of choreographed relay. Other drivers do the same

thing. I don't imagine it's arbitrary, but maybe it is. Judging from the state of the vehicles, drivers don't really pay attention to turn signals anyway, so who cares? As long as an effort is made to insinuate a change in direction, one really can't be blamed.

The sides of the "highway" are crowded with people, women cooking on small fires with sleeping babies strapped to their backs, horses laboring against wooden carts filled to brimming with indistinct detritus. Goats snacking on piles of trash, fistfuls of paper turning pirouettes in the corner of their mouths. Young men carrying placards with cell phones, phone cards, sunglasses, baseball caps—all of them walking into the fray when the cars come to a standstill. Seeing me, they lunge for the window.

The buildings are stucco, white, some with balconies that have arches. Tiled walls in the entryways. Palm trees, bougainvillea, fig trees, and other plants I do not recognize, some with clusters of beautiful red trumpet shaped flowers.

Now it's late, and I have another long and possibly hard day ahead of me tomorrow. I didn't get into it tonight because I was making my laundry list, but today totally fucking sucked at one point, and when I finally made it "home," I shut the door to this tiny room and paced the width of it, wondering how I might be able to leave. Strange how being in a situation that feels totally untenable, like the bottom is sure to fall out, can make everything look like a cage. The bars outside my jalousie windows don't help, even though they're painted a pretty blue. Since I couldn't get on a plane right at that moment, I took a walk instead. And the movement helped. But my chest is heavy, heavy, and I'm tired. Painful to breathe

a little bit. I think it's all the pollution. The air is literally murky with diesel exhaust.

Day 2:

Got home from WARC and went for a walk in the neighborhood. Said *Asalaa Malekum* to people I passed on the street. Most responded in kind, surprised, I think. One man stopped to talk with me. French-English, a little Wolof. Very nice man, older. Invited me to *déjeuner* with his family on Sunday. He used to be a schoolteacher *dans la brousse*, he says. Now he teaches primary school in the city. I tell him I'd love to see more of the countryside, but as it stands I only have arrangements for staying in Dakar. He tells me I should make every effort to go to the villages before leaving Senegal.

Now that I'm here and there's no turning back, it does makes me wish that I could spend some of my time in the rural areas. I have no idea how that would happen; I know not a single soul here except the people at WARC, and I don't know if I feel comfortable asking them. It just seems that there's something very "real" (whatever that means) in the villages that the city simply won't reveal. It could just be my imagination.

I think about Samba (my Senegalese-born French professor at school) and how he has lived in the amenity-driven, post-industrial, technologically saturated North American environment for twenty-five years, spending most of that time working at an elite women's college that sits in a cloistered valley among rolling farmlands and all-night grocery stores. And when I asked him what he plans on

doing after retirement, he said he wants to move not only back to Senegal, but back to his village, which sits sixteen hours from Dakar on the remote and arid sand blown border with Mali. I imagine Samba's village as a small, dusty, palm-frond roofed kind of place with scarce access to water and shade. And maybe that's not so bad, but I wonder: what does a person *do* in a place like that? It's the answer to that very question that I think I might just find if I were going out into the hinterlands.

A note on transportation: First, there are the Kar Rapides, an assortment of colorful blue and yellow ramshackle van/buses, then there are the Ndiaga Ndiaye, an assortment of not so colorful white van/buses, both of which barrel down the streets usually loaded with passengers, and with a couple of young men hanging out the back, clutching the ladder to the roof rack or the door jamb. These busses always have religious messages painted on them like "Allhamdullilay" or "Inchallah" which should inspire faith that they are guarded by the ever-present One, but it sounds more like a kind of surprised relief to me, as if to say "Allhamdullilay (thank God) we got here safely," or "This bus will make it Inchallah (if God wills it)." I took my first one this morning.

At first, I didn't know what to do because there are no official bus stops from what I can tell. I saw a group of people standing together across the VDN (the main road running north and south from downtown Dakar to the suburb of Yoff) and I started walking over. There was a young man holding a string of the same wooden beads I'd seen Madame Kane holding. I asked him if this was where you caught the bus to Fann. He said yes, and we struck up a conversation. He offered

to help me, and told me what to pay (fares depend on how far you're going and the mood of the *apprentis*—the young men who “hang off the back” and collect the money). A small herd of long-horned cattle started making their way across the divide, and a man in a long yellow robe followed them with a long walking stick in his hand. This brought all traffic to a total standstill for a moment. I wondered what it would be like to go to Washington D.C. and see a bunch of cows crossing Pennsylvania Avenue. Finally a Kar Rapide approached, and the man holding the wooden beads nodded to me.

The bus was crowded. Pictures of a Marabout were plastered across the windshield leaving, incidentally, very little space through which to see the road. Red tasseled banners swung from the ceiling as we bumped along. It's not so much that

In the Sufi Muslim brotherhoods in Senegal (of which the Mouride is the wealthiest and perhaps most widely-known), Marabouts are religious leaders with whom people often have personal connections. Pictures of these ascetic men are *everywhere* in Senegal.

the windows were *open*, as much as they simply weren't there. Anyway, I enjoyed the morning air, the swinging tassels, the radio broadcasting a reading of the Koran. I got off at the right stop, walked the rest of the way to WARC and was glad that I'd made it without incident. But this evening was a different story.

I figured that my morning routine—find a group of people standing around and a bus will probably appear—would work again. The problem comes when the people with whom you've chosen to stand are waiting for a bus that isn't going in your direction, which happened to me twice tonight. Then you go looking for another group of standers and hope. It makes getting home a bit of a crapshoot, which can be marginally frustrating. Finally, I managed to find the right group.

When the next van pulled up, I asked the *apprentis* if they were going to *Sacré Cœur III*, and he said yes, pushing me into the cabin while yelling at other potential passengers to get on. I was already feeling pretty overheated, and then I had to sit in a sardine can with 25 other hot people where there was no ventilation. That and carrying some bulky bags that you're trying not to flog people with as the bus makes its way down the potholed street before you've actually been seated. You think about standing, but there's nothing to hold onto. So you make your way down the tiny aisle, flipping the wooden seats up, and once again trying not to take anyone's eye out with your camera bag. Finally sitting, but then one of the passengers signals that she wants to get off. She's sitting in front of you, which, you quickly calculate, means that you will have to stand in order for her to leave. Of course, you try to do this, but your pants have become glued to your legs with sweat, so when you try getting up, you almost fall over. A man steadies you and says, "*Attention.*" And then again with the camera bag like a wrecking ball, and you're becoming so embarrassed, which is making you sweat even more. This is what was happening to me, as if the entire environment had conspired to show me just how out of place I was in this city. 'I don't belong here,' I thought. 'I can't even ride the bus.'

I could tell I was looking pretty worn and haggard when I finally got off. Frizzy hair coming loose from the bun, red and shiny in the face, a sheen of sweat everywhere, dust covering my shoes. Just looking generally frayed and discombobulated.

So this is what fieldwork is like. It spits you out frayed and discombobulated. Maybe Paul Rabinow would've said something more eloquent like "reflexively challenged." Something as simple as getting home on the Kar Rapide seems so normal to everyone around me. I wonder if I'll get used to it. I'm not sure that's exactly the point.

Day 3:

I decided to stay home this morning and catch up on some notes. Fatou, my translator that I hired through WARC, has exams today anyway, and won't be able to meet until 2PM at the earliest. I'm thinking of calling her and telling her to forget today; we can always meet tomorrow and get an earlier start.

I forgot to mention, in all my ramblings last night about transportation that she and I managed to conduct three interviews yesterday. The first was entirely in Wolof, so she was absolutely indispensable. The next was in French, and the last, a very proud and almost macho young male university student insisted on doing the whole thing in English, just to show off his proficiency. I thought it was interesting. He said he wanted to travel abroad—to the U.S.—to work and make money. It would seem only natural then that he'd want to show that his language skills are up to snuff. At the end of the interview, he joked with me, "Put me in your bag. Take me with you. I can become very small," he said, pointing to my satchel.

When I asked the other university student if he'd like to go back to St. Louis where he's from, he said, absolutely, because that's where his family is. Having

said that, he also feels like the university has become a new kind of family. Given that most of the university students are not Dakar natives, but come from all over the country and even larger West Africa, they seem to be able to reinvent a kind of community both within the institution and in the urban environment outside it. Both of these young men agreed that many students have blood relations (distant as they may be) in Dakar, and that helps to ground them here. They have been actively integrated into networks consisting of friend/relative connections that keep their ties to “home” salient.

Family, the concept of family—so closely tied to the concept of home—is at once highly specific and totally elastic. Because families are often necessarily separated for much of the year, the invention of new communities is an obvious and creative way to manage the discomfort of “natal displacement.” It reminds me of the example Benedict Anderson gave in his book, *Imagined Communities*, in which colonial schools actually played a major role in the formation of group identity among students, which laid the groundwork for later feelings of national identity. Students came from all over the colonial domain, from various ethnolinguistic groups, and, because they had to sit under one roof, everyone with the same standardized textbook, speaking the same standardized language, they essentially shared the same universe of experience. The movement and subsequent union of these “school pilgrims” engendered a sense of community despite whatever village tensions and hostilities may have existed outside the institution’s walls. It would appear, then,

Think of Berger and Luckmann’s concept of the institutionalization and social distribution of a body of knowledge, which creates roles and identities (see Bibliography, begins p. 260.

ironically, that camaraderie and solidarity have a way of becoming galvanized by dislocation.

It seems to me that many of the ideas of home in Senegal are conceived, sustained, and adapted in this new space wherein separation, ironically, seems to be the defining element. I suspect that the meaning of home has less to do with a tangible geographic place, and more to do with an index of identity. But how is a person's identity negotiated in this kind of elastic landscape? In other words, how does *who* you are change depending on *where* you are?

There are ways in which this “elasticity” shows up in cultural conventions. Take kinship titles for instance: Fatou, again, has been a great resource of information on this. She tells me that there are specific names given to particular relatives (father's youngest sister; father's oldest brother; mother's cousin on the father's side), and yet some of these names can be used interchangeably with people who are not blood relatives at all. An example of this is *tante*, which indicates—if I remember correctly—the father's youngest sister. However, this title is also used pretty broadly to describe any older female. I wonder if this and other interchangeable titles may very well create a sense of family where no blood is actually shared. How might this phenomenon contribute to or test the boundaries of community and family overall? Ibn Khaldun said that society exists out of necessity, and that “group-feeling” is the single most powerful glue holding it all together. But that glue is as culturally constructed as anything, so why couldn't it change? Today, male blood determines what constitutes family and where they live through patriarchal kinship and patrilocal post-marriage residence

rules, and yet with many of those male figures separated from the native family, whether it's because of work or school, both sides must develop new ways to create bonds of familiarity in their respective localities. Maybe calling an older woman *tante* is not only a sign of respect but also one of autonomous, self-determined attachment.

Going back to what the university students said about the likelihood of anyone having a family member in Dakar, I should not forget that the sheer number of blood relatives deserves mentioning. These families are immense, continental, hyper-conceived. It is not uncommon for a single marriage to produce five to seven offspring. Ignoring for a moment the tradition of polygamy in Senegal, we can extrapolate that when there are seven siblings who go on to marry seven spouses and bear five children of their own, assuming that each sibling is a male, that alone makes thirty-five members in the immediate circle. But then you throw in polygamous unions, and one male can be responsible for as many as twenty children or more, each “branch” or group associated with specific secondary and tertiary relatives. You have uncles, once or twice removed, their offspring, grandparents and their brothers and sisters. Essentially everyone along the male line, if they're still alive, comes to the party. Each person has his or her place and function in the unity, with hierarchies running along lines of gender and seniority.

Fatou told me that not long ago a friend of hers was married, and they rented out one of the halls at the University (Cheikh Anta Diop) for the reception. Fatou said the auditorium was packed with people, hundreds of people, all part of this

girl's family and her groom's family. Think of the contemporary North American reunion and it pales in comparison. And it seems to me it's not just about birth rates. The largest family I know is my brother-in-law's. Two parents, seven kids and spouses, and fourteen grandchildren. That's still only thirty people. The way we think of family is categorically different. Most Americans don't try to look up their grandfather's paternal cousin when they're throwing a barbeque.

I found myself reflecting, in a moment of self-centrism that is not totally uncommon to me, on my own family, how small we are, how fractured and discontent. My family legacy is one of infighting, stubbornness, broken traditions, false accusations, tested loyalty, hard won allegiances, prolonged periods of guilty silence, disenfranchisement, disownment, closed doors and goodbye letters. Fatou asked me yesterday what I would call my father's female cousin. I told her I didn't know. "Oh, you have no name for her in your culture," she said. "No," I replied, "I mean I don't even know if he had one. He never really mentioned her." Fatou looked shocked. To her, the idea that I didn't know my family, that my family didn't even know themselves, seemed very strange.

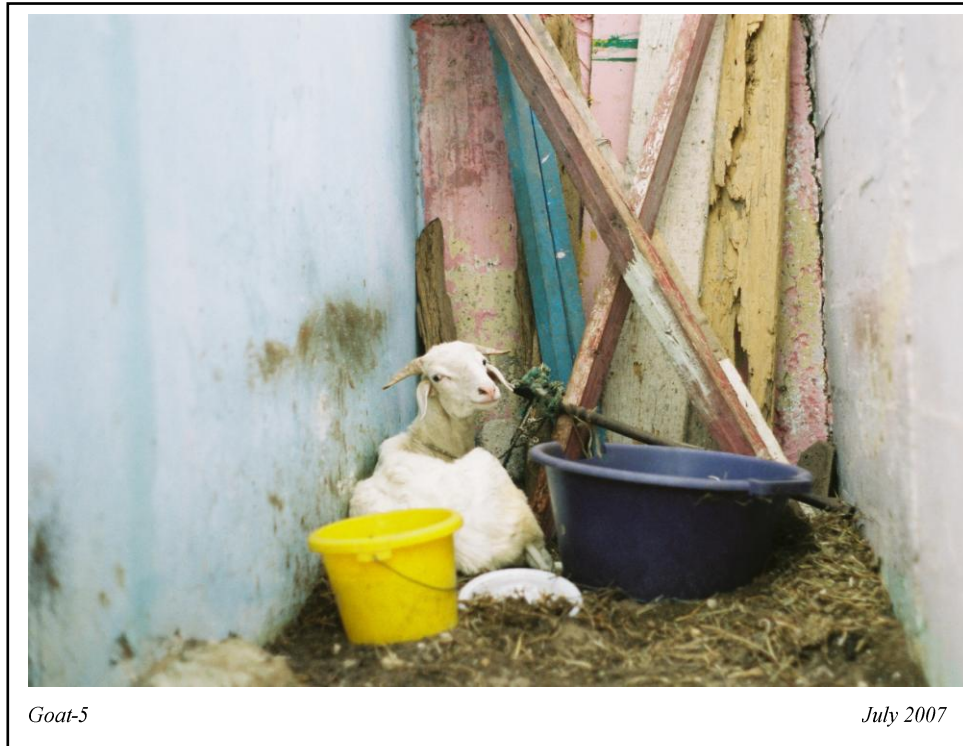
In addition to having Fatou as my guide and translator, I've also been meeting people around in the neighborhood. All I have to do is say "Asalaa-Malekum" and I almost always get a response, sometimes a shocked one, but favorably shocked that I would know the Wolof greeting. So far, I've met three people on the street like that in this small *cartier* of *Sacré Cœur*.

But before any of that, I have to tell the story of how I met Mamadou Touré.

After my silent breakfast with Papa on that first morning, I showered, got dressed and went downstairs to ask Madame Kane if she could ring Pape Bidane, the taxi driver, for me. I found her seated at a cluttered desk in an office at the bottom of the stairs. Outside her open unshuttered window was what looked like a schoolyard. A jungle gym stood colorfully in a small plot of sand. There were two square thatched-roof buildings, one painted blue, and the other yellow, sitting on



either side of a small tiled courtyard. A bare clothesline was strung up, zigzagging between the two eaves. Feral cats and their progeny crawled up the gentle roof pitches or along the cinderblock walls, and a goat bayed from some invisible proximity.



Goat-5

July 2007

I soon found out from the onslaught of running and screaming children and the ways that people addressed Madame Kane that this was indeed a school, and she was its *directrice*. (In fact, I can hear the young ones reciting their grammar lessons right now as I write this—their classroom is directly below me.) That first morning, I walked into her office, and she told me to sit while she tended to some urgent business, speaking seriously into her cell phone, saying “Ça va, Ça va. Allhamdullilay. Allhamdullilay,” many times. And then a young man came in clutching his stomach. I assumed at first that he was one of the students, but know now that he works for Madame Kane, though I’m not sure what he does. His name is Mamadou.

His bare head was hanging as Madame Kane scolded him for eating too much. “It’s not good to eat like that,” she said in French. “All day, everything in

sight. You wait for other people to be done, then you finish everything.

Something is wrong with your stomach,” she said harshly. He looked up at her, and then lowered his head again. She gave him some chewable tablets to eat, medication I guess. Later, while I waited in the little front courtyard for the taxi to show up, Mamadou was stretched out on a blanket with his arms over his head, looking awful and sick. I guess the cure must’ve made him feel even worse.

(The next day, I asked him if he was feeling better and he smiled and said yes. I actually got to see his face. What a beautiful young man. A little later he showed me the *épicerie* down the street because I wanted to buy some laundry soap and orange juice. On our way to and from the little “City Market” (that’s what it’s called, in English), we chatted. He told me he is from Mali and he came to Dakar to work. He’s so young though; I wonder where his family is. And he’s not in school, but he probably should be. I’d guess he’s about 15 or 16. It’s hard for me to know. I asked him if he lived with

Madame Kane and he said no, he just works here.

But then last night, he showed up and sat chatting in the living room—right next to my room—with

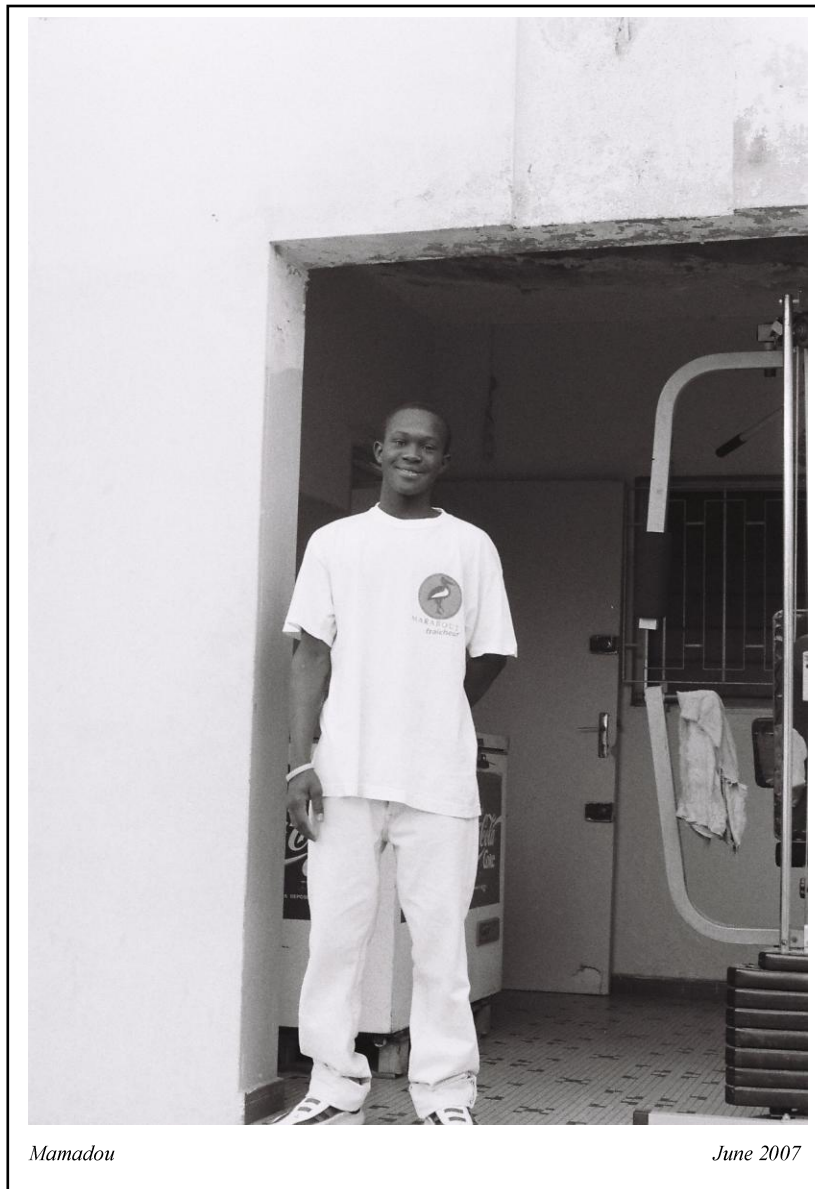
Madame Kane. It was late, and Mamadou’s voice

I later found out that Mamadou did in fact “live” with Madame Kane; or, at least that’s where he slept. The concept of living someplace as opposed to just working there is further elucidated in my interview with Pape Samb. See Part IV, Interviews, p. 171, and p. 175. Also, see Part V, Fiction, p. 233.

was hurried. Madame Kane seemed to get frustrated at one point. It was all muffled, coming through the wall. During the night, I thought I heard someone snoring in the locked courtyard below, and thought it must’ve been Mamadou.

I wonder what it must be like to be that age, fighting basically for your life, every day struggling to eat and sleep somewhere safe, not having your family to

protect you. He said he came here because the village where his mother and siblings lived was having a hard time. They used to grow most of their food, he said, but now the rains didn't fall as much and growing things was hard. So he came to Dakar to find work. Every month he sends money to his mother so that she can feed the family. Perhaps I should interview him. I realize he's not Senegalese, but he's living in Senegal, subject to Senegal's cultural disposition regarding immigrants and immigration. I wonder how he feels about home.)



Anyway, the taxi picked me up, and I left Mamadou convalescing on the cool tile floor. On our way to Fann, I took notes so that I could find my way back to Sacré Cœur on foot that evening. Coumba, who'd arranged my housing, had emailed me that Madame Kane's was within walking distance of WARC. Later that afternoon, Abdoulaye, (WARC's treasurer) thought it was too early for me to attempt walking, that I might get lost. He looked shocked when Coumba told him that I was going to walk to Sacré Cœur. *Mais, c'est très loin dis-donc* (But, that's really far), he said. Coumba replied, pointing to me, *Elle est bien, elle est jeune* (She's fine; she's young). She said she would walk me out to the main road and show me from there, which she did. I ended up getting moderately confused by her directions, but decided to have a go at it anyway. Well, an hour later, dusty, disheveled, and hot as hell, I walked back to WARC. I tell you, apart from it being slightly disconcerting and scary to be lost and verging on delirious with heat exhaustion in a city like Dakar on your very first day, it's a good way to get to know the neighborhood.

Coumba was surprised to see me; the expression on her face told me I must've looked like shit. And although I felt pretty shaken by the whole experience, I decided not to show it. I told her that I'd taken a nice little stroll, and then I got slightly turned around, so I'd come back to WARC to call Pape Bidane to take me home by taxi. I smiled broadly. Coumba seemed relieved that I wasn't about to fall apart like some of the other young American students about whom she had already complained. Showing her appreciation for my levity about the whole thing, she offered me a ride home. Her father, who evidently comes to pick

her up every day in his van, was there within five minutes and we were off. The funny thing is even her father said it was too far a distance to walk on foot. “Trop loin, trop loin,” he kept saying. As we drove and the meters ticked over on the gauge, Coumba grew silent and fought less and less with this general consensus.

When I got back to my room, I burst into tears. I wondered what the hell I’m doing here, why did I come? Maybe I should go home tomorrow. I thought of my mother’s garden, and it made me so homesick. Here I am, I thought, trying to look at concepts of home, and I can’t get my own off my mind.

Maybe that’s what traveling does to you. It breaks you down to your most basic element, your fundamental force. It takes all things that are comfortable away from you: friends, family, known quantities, bus stops, street signs, language, sidewalks, toilet paper, recognizable money, electrical voltage, tap water, time zones, telephones, email, weekly habits, reliable plumbing. When all these things are stripped away, you are reduced. You are left with only what is essential. But then what’s that? And how do you know when you see it? I actually felt a pain in my heart, a heaviness in my chest. I had a hard time breathing. Maybe I was having a heart attack. It was probably just the pollution.

That night as I was out walking, I struck up a conversation with Amadou Kébé. He is the schoolteacher I mentioned earlier that thinks I should make a trip into the bush. We talked a lot about politics, economics in Senegal, the hard times everyone is facing today, why people are leaving. One of the reasons, he says, that Senegal cannot get ahead is because it is poor in natural resources like gold and oil. And what small mining industry they do have, they don’t own. Instead French

companies control resource extraction interests in Senegal; even the utility companies are owned by the French. The phone, water, electricity are all under their control. The profits from those utilities? Kébé asked me. You think they are invested in Senegal? No, they're shipped off to France, to help France's economy. And people in Senegal do not protest. He shrugged his shoulders.

This morning while walking back to the City Market to buy some more orange juice, I met more people. First a man named Samba and I started talking, and then another man named Paul joined us. Paul spoke some English, but then slid back into French, saying it's hard to keep up with a language when there's no one around you can speak with. He said he learned English in school, but that he had to abandon school because he had to find work, make money. He said he'd like to go back to university, but it's very competitive because of all the foreigners who come to UCAD. Fatou and I had discussed exactly that same topic when she took me to the university yesterday, so I could confer with Paul about the educational situation. Both he and Samba agreed that times in Senegal are very difficult. There is little work, and even less money. It's hard to survive, just to eat. Paul works as a personal guard for a private residence here on this street (I guess this is a relatively affluent neighborhood). He sits in the shade of the fruit trees, watching people pass by, polishing the patron's car. He says many people want to leave to find work abroad, but only the lucky ones get to go.

Samba works for an organization that helps immigrants with things like health care and housing in Dakar. He seemed more intent on getting my phone

number than talking about the situation, though, which was too bad. But I'm happy to start getting to know people on the street where I'm living.

Later in the day: I just had lunch, a wonderful ceeb-u jenn (rice and fish), with Madame Kane and some of her women friends. It's such a strange experience to be kneeling around the food bowl while three very large, very proud matronly women, who are swathed and swaddled in exuberantly colorful robes, attempt the negotiating process that is sitting down, with their mid-rift layers, and their head scarves wrapped up like fruit baskets that are perched precariously on their heads, threatening to come loose and tumble into the rice as they kneel and shift and move loose bolts of fabric out of the way. They eat on the ground in Senegal, and I think it must be really difficult for these women. Once they get down, it has to be a trial to get back up.

Last night, Madame Kane sat on my bed and told me that her husband was deceased. She said it was hard to live alone, with raising the children and running the school. It surprised me that she would tell me something so personal. She had known me less than two days.

Day 4:

I had another chance to talk with Mamadou today. He told me he works here at Madame Kane's as a security guard. He left Mali three years ago, when he was seventeen (he's older than I thought). Again, he mentioned that the ground is no good for planting anymore. Not enough rain. He says he really wants to come to

the U.S. and points at me. He wants work, good work, he says, so he can make sure his family is taken care of. He asked me if the plane tickets were expensive, and I told him that my ticket from the U.S. was \$1,300. His jaw dropped. Then his face fell and he said that he'd never be able to go because he'd never have that kind of money. He

For a reference to this, see Part V, Fiction, p 235.
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gets one day off every other week to go visit his cousin who lives on the outskirts of Dakar. He hasn't seen his mother since he left. I really don't know what to say.

I went for another walk through the neighborhood. At one point, I stopped and leaned up against a building to watch some men across the road working on a construction site. Five of them were standing on a platform high up off the ground that stood next to the open floor of a building under construction and had no walls, just floors of cinderblock and mortar. They were digging their shovels into a pile of wet cement in the middle of the platform, and then all together with a beautiful rhythmic swoop they hoisted their shovels up to the floor above. As they shoveled and swung in rhythm, they sang a song (the man standing next to me told me it was Serer, another big ethnolinguistic group in Senegal), sometimes breaking out into a howl while they worked.

Day 5 (morning):

I had a fitful sleep last night, kept tossing and turning and thinking. I had a dream at one point, after I heard a loud sound in the street (like a door slamming) I had a dream that a man had gotten into our house and he was coming up the stairs. I saw him, in my dream, through the doorway and half of his face was red

and blistered and featureless like he'd been in a fire, his eye swollen shut, mouth turned down. With his other eye, he looked at me, and I said to myself in the dream (in French), "Ça c'est le Senegal qui vient me parler. (This is Senegal that has come to talk to me.)" Perhaps it's because I've heard so many hard stories since I've been here. The man in the dream was half healthy and strong, and half handicapped, blind, limping, speechless. I was thinking a lot before bed, feeling restless. And then, I didn't sleep. I guess it's not such a huge surprise.

The way people commune here is very different; I'm starting to get used to it. For example, last night Madame Kane had some distinguished guests for dinner, so she asked if we (the children and I) could eat in my room so the adults could have the parlor. Of course, I said. Then later, Madame approached me and told me how tired she was. She'd had so many visitors that day, so many things to do. I was in my room reading with the door open, which is often the case, so I put my book down and patted the bed to invite her to sit even though I knew she didn't need an invitation. She's come in before and plopped right down without so much as a hesitation. So different from the States. Anyway, we sat for a while talking. Again she told me how hard it is for her, being a widow, doing everything herself, running the school, raising the children, managing the house. All this and finding time to pray five times a day—she didn't say that of course, but I think it's got to eat into a busy schedule. In any event, what was most interesting for me about the interaction is that most of the time she was here, we didn't actually speak. She told Haddie, the housekeeper, to bring us some mangoes, and we ate on my bed in relative silence. Madame Kane finished before me, and then made a couple of

phone calls on her cell phone. I was not insulted of course; I just thought it was interesting. We can be here in the same room, on the same bed, which is a pretty personal space, and not say anything to each other, just be together. The same thing has happened, though not in quite the same way, with people I talk to on the street. Sometimes we are active in conversation; other times we simply stand beside one another and watch the people pass.

For a reference, see Part V, Fiction, p. 205.

Long periods of silence are not uncommon. And I don't think it's just because I'm a *tubaab*. I see the same thing happen between Senegalese in their conversations. There appears to be no rush at all to conclude much of anything, and that means conversations, too. While part of my job is to get information from them, I find I cannot and frankly do not want to approach my interactions in a goal-oriented way. I'd rather get a little caught up in the swing.

Later (at night): I want to talk all about today because it was filled, but first I feel like I need to make some notes on feedback I'm getting from people about immigration in Senegal and the state of Senegal in general. The opinions are the same in some respects, but vastly different in others.

A man I encountered yesterday outside a grand mansion of a house worked as a guard there. He said it was the house of the former prime minister. At first I thought (I assumed) that he was sort of upper class, perhaps by mere association, but upper class nevertheless. He wore a long golden robe, and spoke an articulate and versified French. But then as we continued to talk, I noticed his robe was dingy and soiled in places with missing stitches and buttonholes unraveling. He

also carried in his left hand a metal bowl, which he later told me, was essentially for begging for food at the grand house. He said the master, the *patron*, was very nice, a generous man always willing to share his bread with those in need. This particular man thought that the problems of Senegal all originate with the government not providing enough jobs for the people, not encouraging businesses to come here, to invest in Senegal. He said that the people want to leave Senegal not out of choice but out of obligation.

(Note: The hierarchy of Senegalese kinship systems seems to put most of the weight of responsibility on the eldest son. He is obligated to support his mother and sisters, indeed the female members of the family. Often this means that they must leave in order to take care of the women. When you start looking at households that are three generations deep, you get an idea of the magnitude of responsibility—mouths that need to be fed, children that need shoes, women that need new robes. I imagine it's an enormous pressure.)

Also, I made a trip to Ngor (a beach suburb of Dakar), and a man I encountered there was a teacher in the equivalent of an elementary school; his class is 8-9 years old. He was young, full of energy about his job with the kids. He felt that's how he could change Senegal little by little. When I asked him about what he thought was the biggest factor in people leaving Senegal, he said it was education. I responded that most people so far have been pointing the finger at lack of jobs. People had told me things like: "Y'a pas de travail au Senegal. Si y'a du travail, y'a pas d'argent (There's no work in Senegal. If there's work, there's no money—i.e., it doesn't pay very well.)." But this man shook his head and said

that there are plenty of jobs in Senegal. The reason they don't pay much is primarily because people aren't educated. If you have a population, he said, that for the most part barely gets through "high school" you're not going to be setting the bar very high as far as wages are concerned. He saw it as a kind of vicious circle: wages are low because people are under-educated and cannot compete in the global market; because wages are low, people are poor and have a hard time getting by to say nothing of getting ahead; because people are poor, and there are often many mouths to feed under one roof, the sons are encouraged to drop out of school to find menial jobs to help support to their families; because sons—and even daughters—are encouraged to drop out of high school (and you can forget about college), wages remain low. And so on.

Another man I met recently, Pape Samb, says that immigration is caused by overpopulation. He told me yesterday that sometimes men have four or five wives (polygamy is not only legal but common in Senegal, especially in the rural regions), and by each wife he will have four or five children. That makes a family of 20+ little mouths to feed. So the father has to leave to support them all. Then when his sons get old enough they have to leave to find work and send money home to feed his siblings.

Day 7:

What's the first thing I do when I am afraid or out of sorts? I arrange.

This morning I woke up early after another fitful night of sleep, and first I washed myself. Then I got dressed, and put my dirty clothes from yesterday in the

laundry pile in the closet. Then I cleaned my room: I made the bed, being sure to sweep off any sand or debris on the sheet with the palm of my hand. I fluffed the pillows as much as they will allow. I cleared the desk, bedside table and dresser counter of all my miscellaneous paraphernalia (open books, bunched up kleenex, pens, iPod and earphones, empty bottles of water, and all manner of electric cords connecting me to the outlet by the TV. Then I took one of the bunched up kleenex and wiped down the surfaces. It's amazing how much fine red dust is everywhere; it wasn't until I used the kleenex that I realized how filthy things were. I lined up the books at the edge of the desk where I write; I placed all extraneous cables and wires in my computer bag, which I then tucked away on a shelf under the window. I threw the kleenex and empty bottles in a sack, which I will deposit later in the garbage. Empty purses, or day-bags as I call them, went into the closet in a neat pile. Eye glasses, wallet, one pen (with ink), a packet of CVS tissues, one lip balm, and my room keys are all on the dresser, sitting evenly and ergonomically spaced on my Wolof book. Next to that a sack of laundry detergent, which Mamadou had helped me buy at the *épicerie* only a few days ago, looks like a relic from another time. It feels like so long ago that I bought it, so long ago that I heard Mamadou's story. How many pages was it—how many days? A lot can happen in between.

I am staring at the detergent. I am liking the idea of clean. I am thinking I will do some hand washing today of my undergarments and a few shirts. I am thinking I will not go to WARC. I am hoping Madame Kane does not knock on my door to see if I want breakfast. I am wondering if I should tell her that I am sick. Playing

hooky, at my age. I am deciding that I will keep my cell phone turned off today, except to call Fatou and tell her I cannot meet. But then, off it goes and off it stays all day. I am sure I have better things to do than listen to it ring. I am sure there is something more important waiting for me. Why do I feel so restless?

Maybe I will go down at some point today and write an email to my mother. Madame Kane, in addition to running the school, has a little hot spot, an internet café without the café, downstairs. There are about eight computers, and it's 300 CFA for an hour—that's about \$1.50. She's a very enterprising lady. I am becoming quite fond of her. She is terribly kind and she makes me feel very welcome in her home. And I am happy to be here, but I am also feeling strange today. I don't know why.

Later: Something happened a few days ago that I should mention. On Friday Fatou was sick, and so I stayed at the Center doing research. When it came time to go home, I marched over to the place where I am relatively certain the Kar Rapide stops for going to Sacré Cœur. I stood and I stood, waiting and waiting. They all passed because they were so full of passengers. Finally one stopped, and I asked one of the men hanging off the back if they went to Sacré Cœur and he said yes and told me to get on the bus. So I boarded. Several blocks down the road, I was ready to give him my fare when he asked me where I was going. I told him again Sacré Cœur. He said no, no, they were going to Yoff. Then his friends sitting in the back of the bus started laughing, and he couldn't help but crack a grin. No one on the bus did anything. A couple people turned their heads, but said nothing,

looking at me with empty expressions. An older woman, evidently taking pity on me, turned and said something in Wolof, which I didn't understand, but she pointed back in the direction from which we came. I could make out "Kar Rapide" and "Sacré Cœur" in her speech, and I knew she was trying to help show me where to go. I got off at the next stop and could still hear them laughing as the bus rumbled away.

Later, I came to realize that the bus going to Yoff is *the same one* that passes Sacré Cœur en route, so there was no need for me to get off.

I was pissed, so pissed that I walked home. I decided, fuck those buses; they're not getting my 125 CFA. I walked all the way. It took me an hour and a half. Sometimes, when I looked up from the path directly in front of me, I found the entire circumference of sky clogged with pollution. Red dust rose from the partially paved highway, car tires kicking up billows of fine particulate. Diesel exhaust pumped out of muffler pipes, turning the air into a noxious, thick poison. When I saw the haze, I couldn't believe that I was actually breathing this shit in. So I kept my gaze lowered, tried not to look. I have been here long enough now to know my way around a little bit, so I was able to recognize some landmarks and knew where to turn off the highway to come to Madame Kane's. When I arrived, my shoes were filled with small rocks and dirt. The soles were crusted with mud, and I wanted to smack them on the curb, clean them off before coming inside. I sat on the edge of the low cement wall that outlines Madame Kane's front garden, and breathed in deeply. I had let down my hair, and I sat with my elbows on my knees, hands dangling down. Hot in the face. Thirsty. Wiped out. But proud. It always feels good to be on the edge of a chasm, feeling lost, feeling like shit, lonely, all of it, and then to find the energy to walk away. To know you're not

stuck, that you have legs and they both work, alhamdullilay, and you can use them to take you.

In a way, in *this* way, I am very much a product of my world. I do not really know discouragement, not like people know it here. I have never been without food or shelter. I have never been separated from my family against my will. I have never been abandoned. I do not know the aloneness that exists everywhere here. I have, in the back of my mind, always known that there is a net. My mother: if anything should happen, if ever I should need her, she would be there. As long as she is alive, I will *never* be alone. Say for instance I needed to leave the country tomorrow. I *know* I could call her. It's always there, that knowledge. Even when I do not think about it, it is still there. I do not forget it. Even if I needed to borrow money to leave and she didn't have it, her position in American society would enable her to procure the money somehow, a loan, an advance, a credit card. She could call my sister. She could call her sister. She could even call on Priscilla, the next-door neighbor. When I think about it, I see how the network is wide. It surrounds the whole ground beneath me. I cannot fall. I am protected wherever I go. There is no place I can go where it does not cover. I simply do *not* know life without it. This is why in a difficult situation I think to myself, 'You have legs; use them.' Of course, I am perennially wracked with self-doubt, but ultimately there is a way in which I have been so deeply imbued with confidence, *au fond*, that I have taken it for granted. It seems *normal* to me.

My new guide, Pape Samb, does not have a net, or at least not the kind I'm talking about. To me, his family looks fractured. He lives in a house with cousins

and siblings (some full, some only half-brothers and sisters), all piled in together, while his mother is in the village—alone, he says—and his father is in Sardinia. When I go over to this house, there are beds in the courtyard and suitcases in the living room. No one seems permanent, and yet Pape tells me that permanence in Senegal doesn't mean the same thing, or look the same way. He has been to Europe; he was in Italy for a while working, and so on some level, he is able to reflect on and even comprehend my Euro-centric perspective. He explains things to me, though I still feel like I'm not getting much of it.

He has a scar on his right arm, and recently when I asked him about it, he said his father stabbed him one night because Pape was trying to protect his mother from the patriarchal fist. Stabbed...with a knife...by his father. Jesus. I later noticed a patched up hole in the door leading to a room he shared with his cousin. He explained that one night when he had fled his father's fury and locked himself in his bedroom, his father put his fist through the door (sure, they're flimsy hollow core things, but still...) just to get in and give Pape a horrible beating. Pape said he'd done something bad, but he didn't tell me what it was. He also insinuated that it didn't take much to anger his father. Corporeal punishment is by and large a *normal* occurrence in Senegal. But, Pape said, he doesn't believe in beating children. He used a phrase, then, that he would often use in my presence: *Ah, les Sénégalais? Il sont pas cultivés*. He seems able to straddle some strange distance between being Senegalese himself, and standing outside his culture to make judgments on it. There are many widely accepted conventions that he doesn't "agree" with: beatings, polygamy, even religion. For example,

Muslims pledge to lead a pious life, but they think all they have to do is pray five times a day. That's not enough, Pape said. You have to observe certain rules of conduct, like treating others with respect, which many Muslims don't observe. He told me he has never prayed and never will because he doesn't think of himself as a Muslim. He believes in God, but he isn't "religious" per se. The conversations I have with Pape are always interesting, and I feel really lucky to have met him in such a serendipitous way (on the street), I think he will be what most anthropologists would call an "invaluable informant or collaborator," because he is a sort of stranger in his own culture, and thus he is better able to objectify it. But somehow that sounds so exploitative. I have not known him for long, but I can tell already that we are becoming friends.

That is why when I go to his house and I see the doors broken down in fury and patched up, the walls smeared with filth, the fabric couches covered in flies, the faded pictures of a Marabout hanging cross eyed and crooked over suitcases of clothes, a bed of foam eaten away at the corners—there is something that affects me personally. It feels like people are lost in that house. Their quotidian existence is unknown. Though they may have a roof above them, they seem to me very exposed, very unprotected... left to fend for themselves. Pape loves his mother deeply, but she lives in the village far from Dakar, or at least far enough. To me, it looks as if Pape does not have a net. Instead, Pape has superstition.

He told me last night of these half-men/half-creatures that roam the streets of Dakar at night looking for victims, upon whom they inflict a particular disease that eats a person from the inside out. He was completely serious. After dark, you

should stay at home, not go anywhere. He said, “These people will come upon you in the street and get into you, eat you from the inside out. Your family can take you to the hospital, but doctors will not be able to help. Only your Marabout can cure you.” He showed me his *gris-gris*, a kind of talisman that one wears as protection. His consisted of a long piece of leather string and then three square yellow leather pouches, each one about the size of a wheat thin only thicker. He explained to me that when you have a problem or concern, you go to your Marabout and ask for guidance. Often times, the Marabout will write verses from the Koran—which are sometimes specific to circumstances, such as finding a job or having a healthy child, and other times are more general, such as being protected from malevolent spirits—and then you will take these bits of paper to the men who make *gris-gris*. From what I saw in Senegal, these street artisans work most often in informal stalls surrounded by piles of leather and bits of bread, making leather *gris-gris* by hand, sometimes using a broad needle and thread, sometimes tossing a bit of bread into a pot with water for making a kind of starchy glue. Pape swore that nothing bad would happen to him while he wore his *gris-gris*. When I asked him what these night creatures might do to me, he said, “No, *tubaabs* are untouchable. It’s only Senegalese they want.” When he walked me home last night, I noticed that he’d put on an additional charm on his arm, another leather string with beads. I wondered if he felt afraid being out at that hour, afraid and exposed to the dangers lurking in the dark, unexpected things that are invisible, unstoppable, deadly. I’m sure if I’d asked him, he would have said he wasn’t afraid, but how could he not be?

I don't mean to psychoanalyze Pape and his cultural heritage, but it does seem to me on one level to be a kind of coping mechanism for not having a real and cohesive sense of family; for being a child of the third world where "nets" are for the elite few; for not knowing what is around the corner; for not having the resources, capital or otherwise, that creates a sense of overall fundamental safety.

Some have luck; others have *gris-gris*, but we all want to be safe. I know that probably sounds totally Euro-centric. Here I am putting on my Freudian hat when looking at the ritual

For reference on *gris-gris*, please see Part I, Theory, p. 7. Also, see Part V, Fiction, p. 226.

practices of another completely different culture. Here I am superimposing my own structural framework around what I see. I make "sense" of Pape's behavior through a kind of appropriation, actually. If I don't see it through my lens, then it doesn't make any sense to me, and that is unsettling. So I take it, make it my own for a little while, and fit it into a nice neat little western context that I can explain easily and without much effort. Essentially, I'm doing what anthropologists and archaeologists have done for centuries: find something, take it out of its context, and put it in a glass box. Why do I do that? How do I know why he wears a *gris-gris*? Why do I need it to make "sense" at all? Isn't it enough that it makes sense to him?

I wonder, too if the creatures he talks about somehow represent a particular group. The only reason I mention this is because I've already picked up on some tension between the Senegalese and the immigrants who come here for work. If the immigrants are seen as stealing jobs, then the sickness that Pape described, which "eats you from the inside out," could well be acting as a metaphor for the

hunger associated with and often accompanying economic hardship. If there are not enough jobs even for the Senegalese, then maybe these “creatures” and the physical condition they inflict (i.e., hunger and malnutrition) is shorthand for the social situation on the ground (i.e., not having enough jobs to feed one’s family).

Day 10:

I’ve been having a hard time with something lately. Before coming to Senegal, I knew that fieldwork would always be a hierarchically structured event, setting up a power differential in all encounters. I knew, intellectually, that there would be no way to remove myself from that dynamic. My professors told me that certain questions must be continually asked and negotiated; such as, who has the *authority* to speak for whom? And who has the technological or cultural capital to be in a position to speak? But I’m struggling with my own status as the one who gets to speak for or represent others. I brought along my laptop computer to Senegal, and I am getting increasingly uncomfortable with how this tool seems to privilege me in the eyes of my respondents to “represent” their culture. I shouldn’t be surprised that the significance of being a white American woman in a developing African country is mediating every encounter I have both from the sending and receiving contexts, but it’s hard not to be bothered by it sometimes.

Day 12:

This is interesting: I just came back from a meeting with Pape, and at the end of our conversation, he demanded money. Not that I haven’t already been

compensating him for his time, but I guess he thinks it's not enough. What's strange though is that he didn't seem disgruntled. It's not as if he had reflected on our arrangement and wanted a raise. He just wanted a lump sum. When I asked him why, he said so that he could buy a cell phone. He explained that that way if I needed to get in touch with him, I would be able to call him directly. So, he wanted me to give him money to make my life easier?

I have to say, I'm very confused about this. I'm having a hard time not reacting emotionally. I mean I thought we were developing a friendship. But evidently, this is a business affair for him. And that's disappointing to me. That sounds horrible, I know. Why should it be disappointing? Let's face it, he has something that I want—abilities as a guide and translator with lots of great connections—and vice versa.

I am reminded of the passage in Rabinow's book when he realizes that his guide, Ibrahim, does not fit his conceptions. On page 27, he admits, "I had proceeded to 'typify' him [Ibrahim]. But my typifications were fundamentally incorrect and ethnocentric. Basically I had been conceiving of him as a friend because of the seeming personal relationship we had established. But Ibrahim, a lot less confusedly, had basically conceptualized me as a resource."

In addition, for the informant it can be a matter of getting something besides money in return. Judging from the way that Pape has almost been parading me around, I can guess that his social status in the neighborhood has probably been augmented by his affiliation with me, the American researcher. On the one hand, I do believe there exists between us a genuine fondness, but at the same time Pape

never really lets me forget that my American status and, more crudely, my American money are things he intends to use for his own benefit. And who could blame him? There have been times when I have struggled with what seemed like his contradictions in his motives; I want to believe I am his friend. But ultimately, I'm the privileged one; I get to leave in a few weeks and go back to my relatively cushy life in the States. Pape isn't stupid; he's going to get all he can while he can.

To be honest, where he sits in my universe, his position, is not so different from my position in his. I need him. Knowing him has allowed me to become more "integrated" into a Senegalese family than I ever imagined. Now he's talking about going to the village to visit his mother, which, of course, would be a dream come true for me. In order to get to the village, to spend time with his family, to meet his friends, I need the access he gives me. If he exploits my desire for this experience in order to put a few CFA in his pocket and be seen with the American woman, then I too exploit his desires in order to get my "ethnographic encounter."

Perhaps I make it sound too sinister, as if neither of us see more than a means to an end in each other, which would somehow invalidate whatever "friendship" we think we have. But this kind of opposing binary is a Western invention. In the U.S., we are fairly certain that friends do not "use" or "exploit" each other, unless there is something psychologically amiss. But in other cultures this is not so black and white. In Senegal, there is something called *teranga*, which means "hospitality." It also has connotations of generosity, sharing, and communal

welfare. The Senegalese take this concept very seriously. It governs much of what they do and how they interact with one another. For example, Mame Coumba, the assistant at WARC, told me over lunch one day that she'd had a guest the previous weekend and that she had swept and mopped the guest's room every morning after breakfast. When I asked her if this was not just a little bit excessive (how dirty can a room possibly get in twenty-four hours?), she told me that it was a gesture of hospitality. If she had not swept and mopped and arranged the room each day, then her guest would have felt insulted and unwelcome, like a burden. How, I wondered, did mopping a floor become so emotionally charged? Through culture, that's how. Through *teranga*. And it applies to more than just the guest/host relationship. In a sense, *teranga* is a kind of communal agreement, which implies, "When we are together, what's mine is yours." It took me a while to fully appreciate this concept, and it helps to explain why Pape is so often asking for my help.

When he asked me for the money today, I had a hard time concealing my discomfort. At first, I thought it was a little presumptuous, and I remember thinking, "I don't owe you anything. I hardly even know you." But this is a fundamentally foreign concept to Pape. The fact of our friendship means that we have agreed, on some tacit level, to help one another in whatever way we are able. In a way, by establishing any kind of relationship at all, we are agreeing to take on a bit of the other's burden. He is helping me with my research, and he wants me to help him with his livelihood. From his perspective, what's mine is, on some unspoken level, his as well.

For whatever reason Pape and I established an easiness being together very early on. We get together during the day, he makes me *attaya* (tea, which at some point I will have to describe the ceremony surrounding the making of this stuff, it's amazing). His family offers me food. I get to play with his half sister, Bouso, who is so adorable and sweet. Sometimes, Pape and I just grab a couple of plastic chairs and sit outside on the street watching people pass, without saying much of anything to each other. We both share similarities in things like views on the world, political leanings, and even our sense of humor. So, each day, we crack jokes and make each other laugh. Well, not long ago, we were joking around about something, and the mood was very light, and he said, just as lightly, that I should buy him a plane ticket to the U.S. and that way he could come visit me.

I laughed incredulously, saying, "I don't have that kind of money."

"But you have more than me," he said.

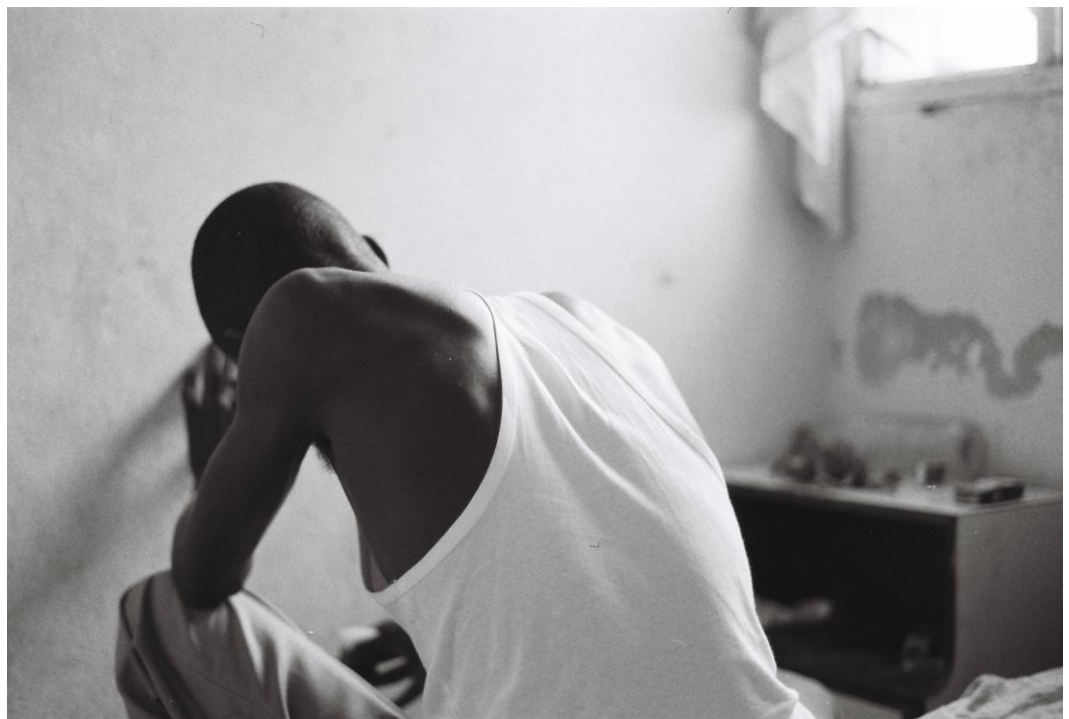
"That doesn't mean I have enough."

For a reference on this dialogue, see Part V, Fiction, p. 253.

He looked at me seriously as though weighing the implications of what I'd just said. Then he nodded and we let it drop. At the time, I was struck by this exchange. After all, we were both right.

There is almost a naivety about Pape, as if things like bank balances, credit card bills, and car insurance don't really exist. Well, for him I suppose they don't. And so, it's complicated. On one hand, we are engaged in a "professional" endeavor, and on the other we are personally implicated in one another's lives. The longer we know one another, the more that implication seems to grow.

I don't know what to tell him about the cell phone. I really don't know if I can afford it. I'll have to think about it. Of course, I *want* to get him the phone. But, my god, I'm having such a hard time figuring out where I stop and Pape begins. Whatever "distance" the anthropologist is supposed to have in the field is totally eluding me.



Pape Making Attaya

July 2007

PART III
MEMORY

The Reconstruction

Day 1 of the Reconstruction:

Job #247309. Email message from Marc Grabis from DriveSavers.com
August 2, 2007:

Thank you for choosing DriveSavers for your data recovery needs. With over 20 years of professional data recovery experience, we have successfully handled hundreds of thousands of data loss situations.

Economy Service: 5-7 Business Days turnaround time
Recovery Quote: \$500-2700 (*after discount, successful recovery will fall between \$1600-\$2430*)
Attempt Fee: \$0 if data is unrecoverable
Type of Drive: 60 GB
Data Returned on: DriveSavers supplied DVD @ \$10.

Sincerely,
Marc Grabis

Data Recovery Advisor
DriveSavers Data Recovery, Inc.
400 Bel Marin Keys Boulevard
Novato, CA 94949
800-440-1904
415-382-2000
415-883-0780 fax
marcg@drivesavers.com
<http://www.drivesavers.com>

Message on the voicemail, August 9, 2007: *This is Jennifer Marshall calling with DriveSavers; please call us back at 800-440-1904. Reference job number 247309 when calling. Again that number is toll-free 800-440-1904. Thank you.*

And then the next morning when I call and get a person, and when I patiently tell “Bob in Customer Service” on the other end of the phone with as little extraneous information as possible about my hard drive situation and that I’d gotten a voicemail message the night before that they had news for me, he asks, *What’s your job number?* And I notice his tone of voice is cold. Probably he’s had

to deal with hours-worth of people like me, a bunch of sorry sacks waiting for the golden cow or the silver lining or bullet or whatever, and because there are times when Bob on the other end of the phone can't deliver even some bit of good news even some of the time, he grows cold. I imagine him as a middle-aged man with what seemed like a whole life in front of him; with a single's existence and a nice apartment and a good job; but then there were those persistent needling phone calls from his mother urging him to marry; and then his friend in the hospital was dying; and all the while there was that nagging suspicion that he should've tried to please his parents by marrying a woman and having many dewy-eyed infants for them to pamper; but he couldn't because they would be children blunted against the perpetual disappointment of not knowing fulfillment, a fact which they would never come to recognize, even if they were intimately involved in the business of breakage, which is especially dicey when dealing with the human psyche and computer hardware, both of which— getting back to our subject—are exactly what Bob and I are trying to negotiate on the phone. Two strangers managing losses on both ends of the continent. But then how do I even know? I can only imagine what kind of day he's having, what kind of life. It's finicky anyway, or at least that's what Bob is telling me about internal hardware. No one can predict it, he tells himself. *No one can predict it*, he tells customer number 12 on line 3, which is me. *The drive heads scratched the surface*. This is what he calls irretrievable. *The data is irretrievable. I'm sorry but it's gone*. I wonder if he's looking at my file: the one that might say that I just got back from Africa with the bulk of my field notes hanging in the balance, that I don't care about anything but

the *.doc* files. Pictures, audio files, you-name-it...I don't care. "I just want to retrieve the writing." This is what I told one early processor of my broken computer. Is this information in my file somewhere, like a black mark, or a curse? Does Bob know who I am? Does he know I'm a writer, that I said it out loud instead of keeping it to myself? Perhaps that was my downfall. And so this time Bob hears my silence on the other end of the phone. The dropped from the gut, soul-leaking-out-of-my-shoes silence. Like I'm going to vomit, but I stop myself. So Bob steels himself today, like each day, even though he has an unnerving family and a quiet, still home and a cat that purrs when he watches TV alone at night, and all manner of personal effects like the rest of us. Despite all this, he grows cold.

Every time I think about it, I get nauseous, so I don't think about it. At least not yet. Not now. Today, I have a number and it's only six digits long: Job #247309. Funny how it seems so arbitrary. And why am I so surprised that it's so short?

Day 2 of the Reconstruction:

There's not much to say today. I would have liked to start reconstructing the past—the one I lost when my hard drive shit the bed, when the Senegal of the last two weeks of my stay were lost—but I'm stuck in the interminable present. I'm back to painting houses, back to worrying if there will be enough time to finish the job before school starts again, back to worrying if I can possibly work more hours that I am already, even with working weekends, and amidst all this

worrying I'm realizing that the last of my summer is draining away from me in an unstoppable flow of brush strokes and roller frames and tipping off and being concerned with colors and straight cut lines and dust-free surfaces, which is ultimately shit that doesn't even matter to me, even though I pretend it does when I see my sweet, blonde-haired, fair-complexioned, bike-riding, outdoorsy, emotionally uncompromised clients who just moved from Ballard to the suburbs with their adopted child and middle-aged dog who's on "puppy prozac" because the move has been stressful, and so the owners—my clients—wrangle over reds and greens, which I pretend to be interested in, which is ultimately what I spend most of my time doing in general while, in the last few days, I've been thinking very consciously and very much aware that my life is just—and get ready for the mushroom cloud now—slipping away from me altogether and one day I'll die and it will all be over.

Africa couldn't feel farther from me at the moment. I know I can remember it, but it's like remembering a movie. I wish I could feel even the slightest bit of interest. This is a terrible thing to admit, but it's true: I wonder if it's not a fool's errand to try and recover what's gone. I'm tired, that's the problem. Tired and not even wanting to try. This is Day 2 of the reconstruction. This is me choosing an early bed over the rollercoaster.

Day 5 of the Reconstruction:

Tonight I will make a list of some of the things I'd like to try and remember from the "lost thirty." Tonight, as I was driving across the University Bridge on I-

5 coming home, I realized that there is little, if any, time to reconstruct what I've lost before school starts. And then once school starts, it will be another year before I can even think of working on it. After a year, my memory will be gone. I will have lost it. All the details, the nuances, the life in it will be gone. I haven't been thinking about it because each time I do, I get sick. But tonight it dawned on me that with this summer the way it's going, I've not just lost the data, I'm losing, with each day, the chance to remember it. It's dawning on me just what is slipping through my fingers. So in an effort to deny the irrefutable, I'm going to make a list:

- *The first trip to the village (bush taxi and regular taxi from Thies to the village, getting stranded in the desert at midnight)

- *The first morning in the village (the birds on the roof and breakfast)

- *The children

- *Cheikh, Sagar, and the grandmothers

- *Pape's grand-uncle

- *Fatou and the wedding in Dakar

Day 20 of the Reconstruction:

I write that much and then walk away to boil water for another cup of tea.

Day 20, indeed. It's been a while.

I walked over to Pape's house that evening, just like the many others, and when I arrived he met me outside. He had lost the jeans-and-t-shirt apparel and was suddenly wearing slacks and a button-down chemise, both made of silky

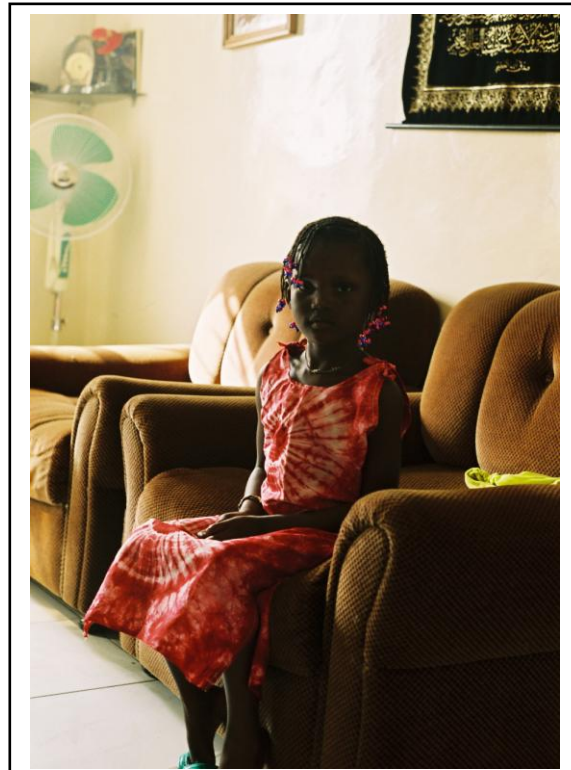
material that was just a little shiny. He was heavily perfumed. I asked him why he was dressed up, what was the occasion? He shrugged, saying something about wanting to be handsome for me. “Very funny,” I told him. By that time, I’d gotten used to his advances, and they didn’t irritate me anymore. It turned more into a kind of game, or repartee, that we played. I knew that I had in some sense crossed the line of objectivity, but rather than insist on some circumscribed degree of impersonal “professionalism,” I decided to become his friend. I’m fully aware that that’s not very scientific of me, but I never wanted to be Erving Goffman anyway. Pape smiled at me from the corner of his mouth and asked me if I was hungry. A little, I said.

Dinner at Madame Kane’s was usually served at 9PM, and it must’ve been only about 7 at the time. I didn’t want to spoil my appetite, but Pape insisted that we eat something. He called to Bouso three times, each time with a little more volume and a little less patience, when finally she came to his side diligently. He spoke harshly to her, which was his and everyone else’s custom, ordering her no doubt to go and fetch us some food. He gave her some money and she turned down the hallway but not before glimpsing back at me and giving me a knowing smile.

Bouso, as it turned out, liked to believe that she and I had some mysterious secret, and she was always stealing glances at me and putting her little finger over her lips where an irrepressible grin was unfolding. She spoke no French; I no Wolof, but we managed to become the best of friends. Maybe it was because I

didn't yell at her, and as time wore on my influence over Pape grew, I counseled him at first and then started reprimanding him for treating Bouso like a slave. It

It was as if he'd never thought of such a thing. "She's not a slave," he told me. "I don't treat her like a slave. We all treat the children like this. In Senegal it's not like in Europe, like in Italy, where if I wanted something I would say *per favore* and *gracie*. Here in Senegal, we don't have this. No one says please or thank you. You see,



Bouso-2

July 2007

the Senegalese, they're not gentile." And he would purse his lips and flick his hands dismissively as if I should pay no attention to conventions of his culture. Still, I didn't stop yelling at him whenever he yelled at Bouso, and I may have been the first person ever to do that for her. That and I just plain paid attention to her. We made faces at each other, and she made me laugh out loud. That evening, she returned to the house with a paper bag filled with, judging from the stains on the bottom, something pretty greasy. Ribs, as it turned out. Pape put this and some rice on a platter and we ate in silence. The ribs were gristly and tough.

Day 23 of the Reconstruction:

He asked me if I wanted to go to his village that night. It was such a surprising question it took me a minute to respond. His village... in the bush? How could I say no? He informed me that we could leave in a half an hour. I thought I had no better plans waiting for me in Dakar, and I was thrilled to have a chance to see a different part, and what most people said was the “real” part, of Senegal. I wanted to go to Madame Kane’s to get a bag of clothes and my toothbrush, but Pape insisted that I wouldn’t need clothes. Just an overnight, he said. (We ended up staying a couple of days, which meant that my clothes ended up getting fairly disgusting.) He bought me a toothbrush and a tube of Colgate from the boutique around the corner, and I wondered why we were in such a rush that I couldn’t even grab a pair of underwear. But I let the serendipity of it run its course. After all, I never imagined I’d get a chance to travel outside Dakar. So I took the toothbrush, and I was going to the village, and that was enough.

Our journey started in a taxi that we caught on the main drag in Sacré Cœur next to Pape’s house, not far from the VDN. Pape gave him directions, and the driver dropped us off on the outskirts of town in a large crowded parking lot packed with people and cars, Ndiaga Ndiaye and Kar Rapides, all vying for space in the dusty cramped plot of land. The sun had long since set, so everything was completely dark except for the occasional headlights of a running car that lit the paths in between moving bodies. Whenever I could see them, footprints and tire tracks mixed chaotically together in the red sand. Divots, troughs, slippery slopes, all the marks of people trying to get somewhere, all the marks of transit with no

overhead lighting and no sure footing. Pape barreled through the crowd, full of purpose, sometimes looking back to make sure I was still there, stopping from time to time to ask drivers if they were going to Thies. More than once, Pape reached out a hand to pull me through a crowd. His gait was rushed, but his grip on me was fast. Finally, in the midst of this confounding sea of cars and people, he found someone going to Thies. This would be my first introduction to the *bush taxi*.

They are regular cars, *banalisées*, Pape explained. That evening, ours was a late-model Subaru wagon that had been, like all bush taxis, outfitted with extra seats to accommodate more passengers than originally intended. Pape opened the door, pulled the lever on the back row and pointed to the space in the ‘wagon’ area, which had been transformed into an extra row for three more riders. “Sit,” he told me. In order to give passengers room so that they weren’t reclining on their knees, the “outfitters” had built the seat up higher than the rest of the car. I climbed in, crouching beneath the low ceiling of the wagon hatch, and sat, with my knees hitting the seat in front of me and my head grazing the ceiling. Pape got in next to me, and I marveled at how he managed it—he’s easily 6’5”. I am at least a foot shorter than him, and I was completely cramped.

We sat in the car waiting for someone to come along and fill the last space, flanked on all sides by people shouting in Wolof, selling bananas, batteries, flashlights, the ever-ubiquitous phone cards, sunglasses, newspapers. As I sat there, compacted into that tiny space, hunched over my camera bag on my lap, every so often someone selling something would shine their flashlight into the

cabin, sometimes straight into my face, revealing the fact that there was a *tubaab* in their midst, which always attracted more persistent vendors. Pape bought a flashlight and some batteries. “For the village,” he said. At the time, I felt so protected by his presence. I didn’t know how, in that chaos of foreign language and custom, I could’ve been there without him; I knew I would have felt, and likely *been*, totally unsafe. Finally the wait was over, and in a modern miracle of space dynamics, we managed to squeeze one last person in next to Pape, and we were off. I had no idea how long the journey would be, or how long we would be sitting like that.

The drive out of Dakar was quiet except for the radio that played reggae music and the crowd of other bush taxis and busses that crowded the narrow and crumbling highways next to us. I watched the city lights diminish as we got farther and farther from the capital, out to the suburbs, then Rufisque and past into the dark travel ways with one very distinct concrete factory along the route that I craned my neck so much to see that Pape took notice and told me what it was. Fitting, I thought. In a country like this, with all the signs of poorly planned or simply under funded development projects like half-built houses on dirt-track roads sprouting up in townships everywhere you look, there’s one great beacon lighting up the night out in the middle of nowhere West Africa and that’s a concrete factory. In this part of the world, concrete is commodity. It’s the weight against which we judge our accomplishments: the more floors you need on your house (regardless of whether it’s ever finished or not), the more of a success you are. In fact, I often thought if someone in the West asked me—as a temporary



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observer—to sum up Senegal’s development efforts, I could do it in one word: cinderblocks. They’re everywhere. Cinderblock houses, shells of mortar and empty staircases leading nowhere, up to empty rooms where no one lives. Or, at least that’s what you think when you first look but then you see the flicker of fire on the ground floor in between window openings with no glass, and you realize that people are cooking there; or you see a laundry line strung between the grey faceless dwellings pinned with brightly colored clothes out to dry and you think, people are living there. And who wouldn’t? In Dakar, people cook on the sidewalks; mothers spend their days in the hot sun, baking along the highways with their children napping on woven mats, looking for the latest handout from cars passing by.

Because everything in Senegal seems to be under continual construction — highways included—several detours took us across medians, over rugged unpaved sections, and into oncoming strips. As we bumped along, I felt the closeness of everything around me, the seats, the ceiling, the floor, and, just because I have known to be a little morbid in my day, I envisioned what would happen in an accident where, after the rush of impact with another box of steel rushing down the dicey roadway, my body would have nowhere to go except closer to the sheet metal, closer to the drive axel beneath me, or the plate glass rear window behind me. I imagined mangled doors and bumpers, gas tanks leaking diesel into the dirt, but what’s funny is that I wasn’t scared. I realized, perhaps a bit too late, that I was in a death trap rolling across unknown and decidedly unfinished territory, and yet I felt perfectly at home. In retrospect, and perhaps a bit too philosophically, I

think, when are we ever *not* in a death trap rolling across and unknown and decidedly unfinished territory?

Day 24 of the Reconstruction:

I sit here in this bright sunny summer's day, looking through clean glass windows out to the vibrant green garden outside where my mother, dressed in a pair of bright blue shorts, works cutting down old and unproductive azaleas with a saw. Everything is clear, and I can see it brightly, shining and bending through the windows next to me, the light is single-minded. And my mother is going at the shrubs with a vengeance. And it makes me think of the air, the sweet smell of lake water not far away from our drive, the sparkling waves, the deepness of that clear water, how black it is at the bottom where no light penetrates. I think of how good it feels to breathe here. How my lungs are not heavy. The Puget Sound just beyond the rise of Magnolia bluff and outward to the islands in the distance, we have many trees that take our pollution and turn it into air, breathable, delicious air. Tall evergreens tower above me, cooling the dirt floor below, cooling the sun through bent branches and pine needles. It makes a filigree of the ground.

And I remember breathing in Dakar. The menace of breathing in Dakar. How do I describe it? Sometimes I'd be walking along and I'd look up into the urban cacophony and I'd see the particulate swarming around us, thick clouds of dust and exhaust, and I'd think to myself, "My god, we're all breathing that in right now." At midday, you could look straight at the sun and not need sunglasses. So filtered was the light through the pollution. On the way to the village that first

time, our humble little bush taxi was often caught behind one of the many dump trucks that seemed to prowl the highways at all hours, with their lumbering gears and their fat tailpipes. On one occasion, stuck behind one particularly sluggish beast that had started from a dead stop on a small incline, the slow flash of oncoming headlights lit up the inside of our cabin and the plumes, the roiling clouds of diesel rolled in through the open windows like lethargic ballerinas, 500-pound acrobats, flat-footed and heavy. My lungs seized up like a fist. I could hardly believe my eyes, they burned so badly. In front of me the round heads of the five other passengers all facing forward, hardly moving, and the currents of exhaust curling around them. It felt like it took a half an hour for the air in the car to clear out. I made a mental note to check asthma statistics in Senegal.

By the time we got to Thies, I was sweaty and tired, with only half the journey behind us. Pape hired another taxi, one that would take us to his mother's house in the village, and we were off again. It felt good to spread out in the back of the black and yellow Renault.

Soon, outside of Thies, the bush, *la brousse*, lay dark and manifold just beyond the car windows. The air smelled dry and mercifully clean. Pape spoke with the driver about, what I assumed, were inconsequential things, but I later found out were negotiations on what would ultimately lead to how we spent the better part of the evening—they were talking about how to get to the village. Pape later told me that the driver claimed to know a shortcut, a *racourci*, but when Pape advised him against it, the man didn't seem to care. At a fork in the road, the driver went left when presumably he should've gone right, because Pape started

yelling at him. Then driver argued back, and they went at it for a while, finally quieting down, resolving, I assumed, to see where this way would take us.

At first everything seemed fine. Then slowly, very slowly, what was a wide road of well-compacted dirt and bits of small gravel degraded into nothing more than tracks in the sand, and then nothing at all. The driver, who didn't appear to know how to drive in this kind of environment, used speed as an antidote to inexperience, and so we ended up careening through the desert, curling around corners, fishtailing through the sandy ruts, narrowly avoiding instant matrimony with tree trunks on several occasions, and Pape is the whole time yelling at the man to slow down as we take off small branches from passing shrubs. (Just judging from the way the car was behaving, I thought that driving in sand must be somewhat like driving in snow. When I asked Pape later about it, he confirmed it, adding, "*Ah, ce type là, il a un problème de cerveau.*" Translation: "This one, he has a problem with his brain.")

We rolled into a tiny village and in the half-moon's light, I could just make out the thatched-roof houses, the narrow passageways, then a couple of gas lanterns in the public square as we rounded the corner. Pape got out to ask for help. He came back with two young men who would go with us in the taxi for part of the way and show us how to get to Banganhge Samb. We drove out back into the desert, and the young men pointed ahead, directing the driver, who still was having a horrible time negotiating the sandy terrain. At one point, he stopped, which wouldn't have been such a bad thing had it not been at the bottom of a small ravine in pocket of loose sand three feet deep. That's when we got stuck.

The driver tried to move forward, but succeeded only in digging the rear wheels even deeper into the sand. We all got out of the car and tried to push, but it didn't budge. The two young men left, heading back to their village to get help, and while we waited for their return, the taxi driver continued his pointless efforts, stalling out several times, and with each turn of the key, the starter sounding less and less vigorous as it drained the battery until finally the engine wouldn't turn over at all, and made nothing more than a small, feeble clicking sound when the driver turned the key. Pape was furious. I could tell because he had become silent. The driver held his head in his hands. I stood at the edge of the path, where the "road" stopped and the desert began, and looked out to the palm and baobab trees in the distance, the cool sandy floor gleaming a pale white, the perfect stillness and then the sound of wind in the palm fronds, the birds—perhaps disturbed by our presence—sending their shrill songs into the air. I put my hands on my hips and breathed in deeply. This was one of those moments where you just feel so lucky to be alive and experiencing something, one of those 'oh my god, I'm actually here' moments, as if even in your best dreams it was never as good as this. Even though we were stranded in the middle of the African desert at midnight, there was no other place I would have wanted to be.

Getting the car out of the sand took a lot of digging, pushing, prayers to Allah, and general force of will. But we did it finally, maneuvering the car up onto harder ground and then pushing like hell to get some momentum so the driver could pop the clutch. We thanked the young men from the village and were

on our way, this time with a driver that was terrified of getting stuck again and so he listened to Pape's instructions as he drove.

We rolled into Banganhge Samb at close to 1 AM, and to my surprise people were still awake as gas lanterns and voices coming out of the dark public square attested. Pape insisted that we go to his mother to let her know we'd arrived safely, even though I thought it would be bad to wake her. He went first into her room, and then waved me in. Under the murky light of a twenty-five-watt bulb above, I was introduced to Pape's mother, Sagar Ndiaye. It was hard to make out her features, so hard that when she came into the room next door five minutes later wearing a wig I didn't recognize her at first and thought she was an aunt. Another man named Cheikh Kane came into the room where I would be sleeping, and we all sat together, talking softly. Sagar did not speak French, but Cheikh did, and so he translated. In the midst of our multilingual, dimly lit conversations, I felt the first stirrings of what would develop into a profound affection for them both.

Day 27 of the Reconstruction:

Where did I leave off? That's right, my meeting with the village.

Cheikh made *attaya* (tea) that night, which was my first taste of this particularly African drink, and my first glimpse of the ritual surrounding the making of it. A small propane tank was brought into the room. It had been fitted with a burner on the top where a small metal teapot would sit. Cheikh poured

For reference, see Part I, Theory, p. 13 and 22. Also, look at the abbreviated *attaya* making in Part V, Fiction, p. 242.

three shot glasses full of water into the pot and added half a box of green tea.

Then it sat there to boil for a while, Cheikh giving it a good swirl every now and then. After a while, he poured out one shot glass worth of the brew, making sure to tip the teapot forward in one swift movement, and then pull it back, then tip it again, pull it back, give it a swirl, tip forward, and pull back until the dark green liquid reached almost the top of the glass.

These machinations served as a way to strain the tea while at the same time making sure the spout didn't get clogged with leaves. With one glass filled, he took another empty one and began the long and graceful process of what can only be described as "froth-production." From the small metal tray sitting in front of him, he took the filled glass and emptied it in one long, tall pour into the other glass, then reversed the pattern, pouring again into the empty vessel. Back and forth, for maybe as many as twenty strokes, he tipped and released, tipped and released, from the one to the other, then from the other to the one, until a good "head" of foam had grown on top of the drink, and another one rested in the empty glass. When the size was satisfactory, he set the recently decanted glass down on the tray, and from beneath the table a small plastic sack filled with white powder appeared—sugar, super-refined. One and a half shot glasses worth, I found out, as he dumped the sandy confection into the teapot. Then as the brew festered in its own sweetness, still boiling on the propane burner, another stage of tipping and pouring ensued. Another twenty strokes or so, and the end product, usually frothing high above the glass rim with the recent addition of sugar, was then poured back into the pot.

Cheikh then tore loose a handful of dried mint, *nana*, from a clump by his side, washed it thoroughly, tipping the jug of water over his right hand and rubbing the brown, crackling mint in his fingers, then shaking the water off. He put this mint into the pot, let it steep and boil for a minute, then the final process of froth-production. At one point, he tasted the tea to make sure it was sweet enough, and then continued the tip-and-pour until a sizeable foam was created in each glass. The remaining liquid he poured back into the pot, careful not to lose the foam, which as it turns out appears to be saved only by a quick and expert flick of the wrist during the pour. (I watched enough tea-makings to get this.)

Then, whatever liquid has accumulated in the tray—what with all the tipping and pouring—he poured back into the pot. He took the jug of water in his left hand, and with his right, he gently scrubbed the sticky sides of each glass, massaging and turning them gently in his palm, the sweet juice running down into the tray. He then used this liquid to clean the tray rubbing the sides and curling the water between his fingers methodically.

When he was finished, he again dumped it all back into the pot. Now, he seemed to have just what he needed: two clean glasses each with ample foam sitting on a clean tray, and a metal pot steaming with caffeinated sugary tea. The final pour began slowly, much like the first, but this time with extra care not to get too many leaves in the glass. When, eventually, the beverage is handed to you in that clear glass that is only as tall as your middle finger, you feel like it's a little bit of gold, and that you must be careful not to spill it.

There are a couple of things about this that are amazing to me. One is the fact that during this whole process, which takes about 45 minutes, we were talking, visiting. And in any tea-making that I witnessed after that, it was always the same, people always talking. Over my handful of weeks in Senegal, I would see something of a ubiquity in tea making. It took place in the street, beside the road, after dinner, but *always* with others around. In Dakar, Mamadou, would make *attaya* daily for a group of young men like him, almost all from Mali, having come to Senegal to look for work to support their families at home. I began to suspect that what appeared to be “making tea” was in fact a kind of making of community that happened among both relatives and relative strangers. Like phatic communication, the tea itself was perhaps a way of saying “hello, do you see me?” and the community is “made” while it’s brewing. My interpretation of this event as a way to *make* community within a specific population demographic—i.e., that of migrants and their families, for whom community is also bound up with contested notions of separation—comes from sitting around many a propane tank, and watching the daily routine of these groups in action. In the village, tea was a way to affirm familial and communal connections. In Dakar, or at least for Mamadou, it was a way to create new connections with non-kin. When Pape first made tea for me, it was a way to induct me into his home, his family, his social world. Because tea is never a private affair, but always a communal one, it establishes and re-galvanizes human relationships through the ritual of affinity-making. This affinity comes from the fact that, while we’re all sitting around the same propane burner (same primordial fire, maybe?) and we’re

all drinking the same substance, the small glass gets emptied, and then refilled and passed around. Through the gifting and re-gifting of *attaya*, we become implicated in one another's lives. In this case, *attaya* can be a way for non-kin to stage and enact claims of legitimate human bonds outside the strict realm of blood relations. And that first night in the village, this is what the Samb family was making and gifting to me: an invitation into their circle.

And the other thing I find so extraordinary is that, from my perspective, when something takes you that long to make, you'd better enjoy it, and that means enjoying it slowly. I lingered over that first glass of *attaya*, thinking that, by taking my sweet time, I was sending my compliments to the chef. But in the end, they were just waiting for me to finish my glass so they could pour another for someone else sitting in the room. Pape drank his glass in three fell gulps, then reached for the bottle of water because, he said, tea always made him thirsty. And then they all continued to stare at me, as I sipped rather regally at my glass, not wanting to seem like a glutton, and slowly, very slowly, I realized, the same way the road getting here began to degrade before our eyes, that what I was doing was not paying a compliment but holding up traffic. So with one tilt, I swallowed the rest, and handed the glass back to Chiekh, who then poured some for himself.

By the way, one pot of tea can last three brews, the second widely considered to be the best because the edge of the first has been taken off the tea and it's not yet so weak as the third brew. Needless to say, it was very late by the time we got to sleep.

The whole time, Sagar looked at me, and we began our preliminary communication, albeit wordless, on the fate of her son. Over the next few days, and then during my second trip to Banganhge Samb, I would come face-to-face with issues of entitlement, gender roles, hope, loss, guilt, responsibility, and an irrepressible fatalism on my part. Despite the fact that I would develop, even cultivate feelings of friendship for Pape, I would nevertheless never be able to shake the suspicion that this would all be over when I got back home, back to my own context, and it made me angry and wanting to hang on. Maybe even in spite of signs that I should've been letting go long before.

What I remember is her face: longing, tender, and young. I remember her wig, made of a bright auburn red and tied up to one side with an elaborate gold barrette. At first, it seemed surprising to me because for one thing a red wig was such an obvious mis-choice (nothing in her natural hair or skin complexion would make it look like anything other than...well a wig) and who was the idiot that had chosen such a color anyway? That and the gold barrette seemed odd for a woman who washes clothes by hand and cooks her food on a wood fire every day. I realized that wigs are one way a man has to display his wealth and status. But is it also a way he shows love for his wife? And is that even important? After that first evening, I never saw her without the wig.

She said something that night, and Cheikh translated: "I hope you take my son to America." I could do no more than smile in response.

Day 22 of the Reconstruction:

The first morning, I woke to loud scratching sounds on the corrugated tin roof, a flock of birds congregating before dawn. I heard Pape grumbling and then a loud bang. He told me later that he'd thrown one of his loafers at the ceiling, which scared the birds off for a while, but they were back before the muezzin called the first prayer.

Of course, when I woke up I opened the shutters and took a photograph of the first thing I saw:



Pape's mother brought in a tray, cleared a space on the floor and set our breakfast down before leaving, surreptitiously glancing back at me the same way Bouso did—smiling like we shared a secret. On the ground, there was a basket of

bread, two glasses, a bag of powdered milk, some instant coffee, a pot of hot water, and a bowl of what Pape called *mayonnaise*, which turned out to be a translucent gel of palm oil and egg yolks with bits of red onion and black pepper that he spread generously on a section of baguette and handed to me. I've never been a big breakfast person. Usually all I need is a little caffeine. But in this situation, I didn't feel like I could refuse the bread. The more I bit down on my baguette, the more my teeth squeezed the *mayonnaise* to the back of the crust until large dollops of the oniony goop were dripping from my pinkies onto the tile floor below. I felt obligated to catch as many as I could because it was food and they were generous enough to give it to me.

Day 25 of the Reconstruction:

I'd like to write more about my first day in the village, but tonight I'm distracted. Thinking—again—about what the hell I'm doing. What am I hoping for from this exercise? Is the act of remembering enough? I mean, here I am, working on the Reconstruction, and I keep coming up against this nasty little contradiction. I have my photographs of what I saw, and my audio recordings of what I heard, and those things seem very real and verifiable. But then I have my memories; I have what I'm trying to piece together from a lost manuscript, and I keep wondering if what I remember is *true*. Sometimes I wonder if what I will lose in the attempt to document is the very realness I seek. I put my experiences in a medium they were not designed to accommodate. Being in the desert with Pape and watching the sun descend over the palm trees and scrub brush, walking back

to Banganhge Samb after a visit to his Marabout, when this old man refused to shake my hand because I might be dirty and he was already washed for evening prayer (Pape explained this to me to quell my indignation), and having seen Pape take off his city loafers and crouch under the low ceiling of the hut where he and the Marabout talked quietly, their silhouettes barely moving against the open doorway, and me sitting outside on the one chair in the entire compound, whose legs were swallowed in sand, while the nearby family shelled peanuts on their mat under the tree, casting glances at me and saying things in Wolof I didn't understand, every once in a while inserting a *tubaab*, which meant they were speaking of me, the short and very white American sitting on the single European chair with its legs sinking in sand in this tiny village in the middle of the West African bush, but then somehow, despite my discomfort and my growing distaste for the word *tubaab*, Pape comes out of the shelter, bending low to put on his city loafers, and we walk back to his village, a place where I'm beginning to feel *at home*, and he sings me African songs, swinging his arms from side to side, his deep voice resonating in the quiet, the sun slowly descending behind the palm trees and scrub brush, and I feel the desert sand in my shoes, and it feels like being alive. Being there, and being here remembering are two completely different things. I wonder: is that really the time he sang me the African songs, or was it on another walk? Would it matter if I got the sequence mixed up?

Above all it hurts. You know they say you only remember the important things. Well, you remember everything, but it's only the important events that make it through the cerebral selection committee. And remembering Senegal

hurts, because I miss it. And I want it back. Recollection is like a kind of torture. We're constantly faced with realities that are no longer in front of us. What I wouldn't give to go back and walk in that desert again. My photographs, my interview sessions, even what I write about it now, are all in an attempt to hold on. And yet, it's gone.

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Don't get me wrong, I see the beauty in evidence. It's what I gathered while in Senegal. It was one way I could validate my impressions. By saying, look, I'm

not making it up, this *really* happened. And while my field notes were always more “subjective” than the audio recordings, they nevertheless helped to give my experience some weight. They were a way to chart my daily life. And now that they’re gone, it’s like discovering that a house you used to live in has burned down: even if you wanted to go back, you can’t. What I do now is I try to remember. Or am I calling it *reconstruction* when it’s just another way of imagining. What makes it real? I don’t know if I can answer that.

I’m not simply reconstructing. It’s not like knocking down a stack of Legos and then putting them back together when all the pieces are the same size, shape, and dimension. What I’m dealing with is more slippery. My memory is naturally shaped by loss; it is the engine of loss. What reality I don’t have in front of me, I must visualize. And so my experiences of Senegal are no longer existing in this untouched and immediate space as I lived them. As memories, they are naturally impressionistic, which makes them vague and personal and deeply iconic of some greater overall meaning. And then there’s the desire of remembering. We can, of course, block out what we don’t want and remember what we do.

This whole process recalls the primordial emotion in the human psyche: loss, longing, pining for things past, parents, lovers, the smell of autumn as child, these are the things we leave behind as we go through life, each day closer to losing one more thing until ultimately we lose ourselves. We must lose the ideal of an existence; we as children imagined it as perfect, but that was before we knew, before we grew up and discovered that perfect is just another way of saying “unicorn” or “pure” or “me.” And memory is the balm to comfort those wounds.

The balm and the torture of never returning. And so we make memories what we want, we make them work for us.

Even as I was sitting in my room in Dakar at night writing, that too was an act of recollection. I would try to remember all the things that had happened that day, and so one could argue that the process is never actually immediate or untouched. In other words my impressions were always being filtered through my memory. It's just that when I was in my Dakar bedroom, I was closer to the experience. So is it a matter of proximity? Because now that I am far away, I cannot recall as well. My accuracy may be flawed. Isn't it always flawed, though? Well maybe it's *more* flawed now that I'm here in Holyoke, Massachusetts trying to recover a kind of experiential shape-shifter because I just can't for the life of me seem to let it go. Here I am in the midst of this boarded up American mill town, once an industrial star in the valley now gone quiet. I drive past the old brick buildings; I drive along the canals, and I slow down next to the broken windows in the empty textile factories to see the evening sky reflected in their teeth. I see narrative in ruin, in remains. Maybe I'm trying to make fabric from the dusty memories of a textile mill that shut down in the seventies when the jobs moved south. I wonder if that even makes any sense.

Yes, I still have the interviews, safe on a disc, and I still have my photographs in their negative sleeves. And somehow that makes what I did in Senegal relevant. It's proof that I was there. But in a very real way my building is empty.

Day 32 of the Reconstruction:

Where did I leave off? The first morning of the first trip to the village, yes. I wonder if I can skip right to the second trip because I feel like remembering the day my computer died.

It happened during the second trip to the village. Pape and I left Dakar on Monday afternoon and headed to Banganhge Samb via the same odd assortment of vehicles, but this time we did not get stuck in the desert and we made it to the village well before midnight. Pape had bought a flat of eggs in Thies and he carried it precariously like a waiter holding a tray of champagne glasses and offered it to his mother when we arrived. It was a symbolic offering. It seemed paltry in comparison to what I'd had planned. Previously, in making arrangements for the trip, I'd told Pape that I wanted to bring some food with us, that I wanted in some way to give his mother a gift for her hospitality. So we'd discussed a hypothetical list of goods: rice, oil, eggs, maybe some fish, a bag of onions. Staple items, things that would last beyond our visit. But we had to scale down our plans because shortly before our departure from Dakar, I realized, while looking at my checking account balance online, that someone had stolen my debit card number and was buying cosmetics from a company in England. They had essentially cleaned out my account in a matter of a couple of days. I was, in a word, broke, and I couldn't afford my own generosity anymore, so the copious bags of overflowing sundries became a single flat of white eggs.

I had remarked, several days before, that my cards had been rearranged in my wallet, as if someone had rifled around in there and not taken the care to put

things back where they belonged. A few days later I noticed some weird charges on my online bank statement. I called my mother, emailed the bank, and thought, on Friday evening, that everything was taken care of, but by Monday morning I had only \$110 left in my account when there should have been \$1,200. In a panic, I called mother again, but she was already at work. I also emailed the bank again and asked them to block the card. All of this happened on the day I was supposed to leave for the village with Pape.

I went to his house and told him I wanted to cancel the trip, or at the very least wait until I sorted out the money situation. I was in a state of shock I think. He convinced me that we should still go, even though there was no way I would be able to buy as much food as I'd wanted. I don't know if he was trying to comfort me when he said that he'd told me so, but that I hadn't understood or hadn't listened, or both. *Les Sénégalais sont des voleurs, je t'avais dit, mais tu n'as pas compris* (The Senegalese are thieves. I told you this, but you didn't understand).

His voice was hard and angry. I had a hard time not bursting into tears. Sitting in that shitty salon with the stale air and the fly-covered couch, with the pictures of the religious men looking fiercely into the distance, I wondered why I wasn't getting up and walking away. I wondered what those men were staring at, what did they say to their converts, their followers, that was so fucking important that every blessed household had these fucking ubiquitous pictures, these old men in their turbans and their sanctimony, walking on water, erecting castles in the desert, with their long robes and wizened beards, dark eyes filling the horizon

with self-importance. I was so angry, I was angry at anything. Even the Marabouts, even the dust that covered everything.

The walls of these houses are made of the same fine dirt that covers every single surface that gets wiped down in futility every morning. We cannot escape it—it's on the floor, in the roof, it's in our clothes, in the cracks we sweep out like dirty fingernails, it's in the eyes, in the bones and the blood of this land. It's the one thing that people spend every day cleaning that is impossible to get rid of. It's so impossible that we come up with ingenious ways to live with it. In the village, they clean the dirt. I'm not kidding.

In the center of the Samb house compound there is a large sandy courtyard with a big acacia tree in the middle around which mats are laid for people to nap in the shade or where we gather to eat from the large bowls of *ceeb* together. Every morning the young girls sweep out the bedrooms, bending low over the handheld "brooms," and then move on to the courtyard. Because most of the Senegalese (at least the ones I've seen) throw garbage in the street, the street gets clogged with rubbish very quickly. And so did the courtyard at the Samb house compound. So every day the second wife or one of the girls would sweep the dirt, collecting all the large bits of trash (candy wrappers, match boxes, bones, goat shit, bits of paper, plastic bags) into a pile and then she would sift the pile through a basket. The sand would run through the cracks and whatever debris remained in the basket would get upturned into a bucket for disposal elsewhere. It was effective really, but for me the sight of someone sweeping dirt just never lost its novelty.

My time in Senegal was coming to a close, I had no more interview potentials waiting for me in Dakar, and going back to the village where I had found such happiness the first time seemed like the perfect antidote to my depressing liquidation. And so the plan was still on. But all of this meant that I arrived in Banganhge Samb with very little money. In a way, I would have preferred being penniless rather than endure the next calamity waiting for me.

Pape and I arrived in the evening, early enough that people were still awake. The kids were hanging out in front of the boutique whispering to one another in the near complete darkness. I could tell they were looking at me as I stumbled out of the cab with my overstuffed backpack. I wanted to look back and I tried smiling, but their faces were muddy in the thick air, blackness blurring the edges of faces, white teeth barely visible. The adults were sitting inside the compound on their large mats wiling away the hours before bed. Pape and I made the rounds, greeting his mother, grandmother, and Cheikh, and then Pape asked me if we could watch a movie on my computer. I'd brought my laptop because I wanted to be able to take field notes over the week-long visit. I told him it would be fine.

He found a DVD (some low-budget Senegalese comedy that was entirely in Wolof so I didn't understand any of it) and we popped it in. I set up the computer on a chair, and we all sat there, Pape's grandmother, all the kids, a couple of neighbors, all of us fixing our gaze on this tiny fourteen-inch computer screen in the middle of the bush under the starry sky watching some slapstick comedy in Wolof about a village in the middle of the bush. It was just such a *mélange* of contexts. Technology and modernity turning on its artificial light in a place with

nary a light bulb, and we're watching a DVD about a place just like Banganhge Samb, like watching ourselves. Everything folds in on itself sometimes.

Sadly, the sound quality on the DVD wasn't very good, so even when the volume was turned all the way up, you could barely hear what the actors were saying. I tried a couple of things to fix it, but to no avail. Then Pape asked me if we could hook it up to a stereo speaker. In theory, yes, I said. But we'd have to have the right kind of plug. We walked into the salon where there was, strangely enough, a collection of motherless dusty speakers. We looked at the various plugs and I explained to Pape that they were all wrong, that none of them would fit into the earphone jack on the side of my laptop. We needed an adapter.

Resourceful and undaunted and terrifically Senegalese, Pape left the room and went to enlist the help of some neighbors. He brought back a guy who lived across the way and was allegedly a pro with technical things, but who looked rather nonplussed when he walked up to my computer. The first thing he pulled out of his trouser pockets was a small device resembling an earphone jack. He sat down on the ground close to the chair and Pape stood over him shining the flashlight down. As I watched him go to work, I realized that his trouser pockets were like little grab bags of random incidentals filled with all manner of rudimentary paraphernalia for quick-fixes. He kept digging into them and bringing out new things, the you-never-know-when-you'll-need-them kinds of items: miscellaneous wire, electrical tape, nylon string, shoelaces, batteries, a small stapler, pliers, safety pins, a tube of glue—everything you need to put something broken back together, which should have been my first indication that

we were going down the wrong path because approaching a perfectly functioning piece of equipment with the tools of disaster is never a good idea.

I'm still not sure if what they did killed my hard drive, but I do know that I left the scene for a moment to go to the bathroom (again, bad idea when the bush mechanics have their pliers out facing your laptop), and when I returned, they had one end of the aforementioned miscellaneous wire taped to the terminals of a Duracell double-A battery and the other end sticking precariously into the earphone terminal of my computer and when that didn't generate any sound, they proceeded to stick the free end of the wire into the USB port, the Ethernet port and the landline phone jack—in other words anywhere there was a hole, they were pushing that wire.

Then, the computer froze. I noticed a strange clicking sound coming from the body of it. After trying to shut down and then pushing the power button in frustration, I started to think something might be very wrong. It must have been the unresponsive spinning wheels that told me. Or the icons of question marks looking inquisitively from the computer screen back at me, and then me sitting there like an idiot not knowing what to do, but knowing all along that it did not bode well.

That's how it started. I wouldn't find out until much later, until I was back in the States that everything was gone.

Day 40 of the Reconstruction:

I remember a morning. I think it may have been the first one, though I can't be sure because it's all so far away now, but I think Pape had invited me into his grandmother's room next to her "boutique" to have coffee and baguette that first morning of the second trip. The room was like a kind of spare bedroom with a double bed in one corner, and a small bench for personal belongings in the other, just big enough for a coffee pot and a bowl of sugar and a plate for a basket of bread. All the requisite paraphernalia was there: a stainless steel kettle for water, a pouch of crystallized coffee granules, a glass cup with dehydrated milk sitting in a mound at the bottom waiting for me.

The boutique she owned was a one-room *épicerie* of random goods like bar laundry soap and popsicles housed in a three-wall unit of broken stucco just next door. It was from this boutique's opening that I'd first seen the hollow faces of the children the night before, staring as blank as they were into the evening when Pape and I arrived...again, for the second time. I knew they'd been expecting us. I knew they'd heard about our arrival, and sure enough, they were waiting when we came in on that taxi. I had already missed them so much, and I remember wishing at the time, wanting to call out to them and to say hello to each one of them as I stood beside the car. But for some reason, I felt shy, embarrassed of how happy I was to see them. I didn't say anything. I remember being so excited to be back in the village, it was a little unsettling. In a way, I didn't want to admit it, because soon, in a matter of days, I'd have to leave it for good.

The next morning, when Pape called me from bed, I joined him, his grandmother, and some of the young girls in my pajamas and borrowed flip flops only to have Pape excuse himself not long after my arrival, leaving me alone perching on the edge of his grandmother's flat and very horizontal bed looking into her gentle and uncomprehending face. She was the same woman who, in Dakar, had tried to make friends with me. I had seen her on more than one early evening occasion taking her banana peels out to the rubbish bin on the curb, waving to me as I sat wiling away the hours with Pape by the side of his house, sitting on plastic chairs in the dirt, drinking orange soda.

I remember seeing her walk out the front door in Dakar (that heavy metal front door with its temperamental latch) and walk out to the plastic can on the street, lifting her robe to avoid the piles of dirt and rubble from the next door's renovation and not trip over them, and I remember watching her lift the lid to deposit her banana peels inside, and Pape telling me she had a thing for bananas. Couldn't get enough of them, evidently. I loved that about her, even though the first time when he told me, I paid too much attention listening to him tell me about it and not enough time realizing that she was standing across the way waving and calling to me. "Ma grand-mère. Elle te salue," Pape said, smiling into the distance just beyond my head. I turned to look and saw his grandmother standing in her blue robe hanging precipitously from one shoulder, showing her flat black palm to the heavens and looking directly at me. It was a look I wouldn't forget, something about welcoming and responsibility and love. I waved back that afternoon with a nervous feeling in my gut, feeling feeble and very much like I

could never live up to her expectations. I wish I could have communicated with her.

And then there's the part in the sand, the line in the waters, and we can say something beyond our ability, we can communicate with more than just a lot of compressed air being pushed through our diaphragms. That first morning of the second trip, Pape's grandmother and I sat in that one-room stucco building and we sat in a lot of silence and hand gestures. She fanned herself intermittently, and I smiled so much and so ineffectually that I started staring at the walls, smattered as they were with years of truncated color, turquoise bleeding into blue bleeding into green. She began speaking Wolof to me, and when it didn't immediately work, when I didn't immediately understand, some of the children tried to help out. The girls gathered around us—Sagar, Aida, and Fatou—to lend their hand gestures and pleading eyes to the conversation. It began as an effort in getting over the language barrier; it ended in fits of laughter.



Thiare ag Aida-3

July 2007

Day 50 of the Reconstruction:

Tonight it's 26 degrees in Holyoke, Massachusetts USA. Fall is done and Winter is braving her way through my drafty windows. I look across the little valley, and I can notice, even at this hour of night that the trees have already lost many of their leaves. Across the valley more lights in Chicopee are visible. It's the beginning of a new cycle. And I'm here.

I remember: the way, at night, the few lights in the village (usually just a bare 25 watt bulb every three households) dimmed each time the muezzin called out his song with the bullhorn. It was, I hate to admit, never a pleasant sound in the village. Depending on the time of day, say it's after lunch when we're all lounging on the plastic mats outside the compound, the men would gather up their robes and caps and make their way to the square cinderblock bunker in the center of the town's pavilion, next to the Kapok tree. It was their mosque. I remember that.



View From a Doorway

July 2007

And also the way Pape's grandmother would roll out her prayer rug under the acacia tree inside the family compound. She would wrap her head in a long blue headscarf that fell down over her every time she knelt her head to the rug, so that upon rising she would have to throw it back and readjust it.

Then she would sit and pray, rocking herself a little back and forth. I have a vivid image of her in my mind as I see her through a doorway. The light under the acacia tree is greenish because the midday sun is filtered through the leaves. Her name is Thiare Mbaye and her husband, after whom Pape is named (his birth name is Saliou), died some time ago. She colors her palms and the bottoms of her feet with some kind of concoction that turns them a dark navy blue, almost black. Pape says she does this for decoration, the way a woman wears jewelry. Pape is thirsty, so I hand him the water jug. The flies on the couch scatter when I move. I've been lounging here for probably half an hour, and I still have no intention of getting up. I read an article on the network culture of the Senegalese Mourides only half-heartedly. I keep looking out the doorway where Thiare is kneeling again, and then throwing the blue fabric back over her shoulder as she rises.

I first met her in Dakar. I don't know if I've already mentioned that. Typically, she stays for maybe two or three weeks in Dakar to visit her grandchildren there. First, there was Bouso with the braided hair and her little brother Malik who liked to scratch people. They were both children from the third wife. Then there was Fatou, Pape's oldest sister who everybody thought was crazy because she tried to commit suicide once. Omar was his younger brother, and he could've been Pape's twin. He liked to wear 50-cent or Tupac t-shirts whenever he wasn't praying. Sometimes, Awa, Pape's youngest sister would visit the city, but only when she was on break from her studies at school in Thies.

There were also some people that I remember only vaguely: Pape's cousin, Bass, shared a room and a bed with him, which I always thought must have been

awkward. He tried to kiss me once only to get lambasted by Pape. There was Ousmane, another cousin of Pape's, who worked for him down at the clothing stall in Sandaga. He sold me a pirated copy of Youssou N'Dour's latest CD. There were two live-in housekeepers who did all the cooking and cleaning. I don't remember their names.

And finally, there was a young man, a cousin, whose name I also cannot recall. He was the son of Pape's paternal aunt who worked in a travel agency and had a chauffeured Mercedes parked out front. The house was essentially hers; she lived upstairs in a private suite with her husband and son. On one occasion, I remember her getting out of the Mercedes, decked out in flowing colorful robes with gold slippers and gold jewelry everywhere. She instructed the men of the house to unload the trunk of the car, which was filled with bags of rice and boxes of vegetables. Pape said she bought food for everyone. Her son, who was seen as the privileged one, bragged that his mother bought him a plane ticket to England. He had his own computer, a portable CD player with headphones, and a wardrobe of new, fashionable clothes. Whenever he looked at me I always felt like one of those cartoon characters that suddenly turns into a juicy ham in the eyes of the wolf. Perhaps that's why I don't remember his name.

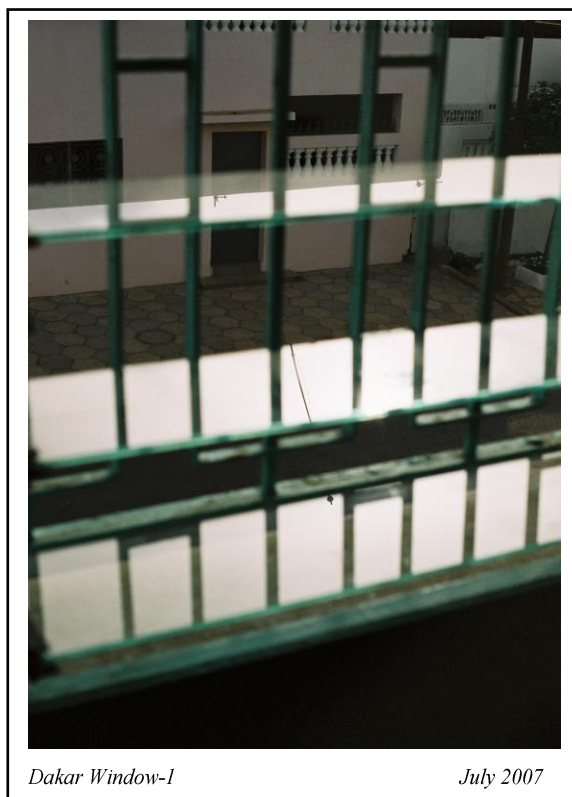
Anyway, here was a house where the only paternal figure around was the aunt's husband, who, by the way, I never saw once in all the time I spent there. The rest of the men were essentially young, unmarried adults who, for the most part, were looking for a way to make money almost all the time. All of them (except the aunt and the housekeepers) were grandchildren to Thiare. As I

mentioned, she would visit them for a time, and then go back to the village where her other grandchildren lived. Here is another photograph of her with Aida in Banganhge Samb:



Day 210 of the Reconstruction:

It has been some time since I last worked on the Reconstruction. Last night I finished the fiction part of the ethnography, the “short” story that is currently sixty-eight pages long. I’d been working on it pretty steadily for the last several days, and I don’t think I’m the only person to ever say this, but there’s something that happens when you get into a story, or any piece of writing like that. When it’s all you do from morning till night. It’s like you go there. You get taken out of your dining room in Holyoke, Massachusetts because your mind has



become so involved in conjuring the environs of what you're describing that you stop seeing the street, the window, the house across the way, and you begin, maybe not in a strictly visual way, but in some sub-conscious way, you see the street in Dakar, the jalousie window in your old bedroom, the palm-frond huts in the village. It's not as if, yesterday, I stopped seeing what's here in front

of me; of course, there were cups of tea, trips to the bathroom, an occasional petting of the cat. And I saw all of that with my eyes, but then there was this other parallel vision in my head that was also engaged. Like being in two places at once.

It's similar to how I feel in the darkroom, as I fiddle with negatives, or stare into enlargements, trying to get the focus right, all of which are very precise and studied machinations, and I am very conscious as I do all of that. But when I place the paper in the developer and the silver halide reacts, turning all variation of grey and black, it's like a different part of my brain gets switched on. At first, nothing is visible, and then suddenly there is something, a shadow, an amorphous shape, indistinct and blotchy. Then, there is some definition, something familiar, something you have seen before. There is a memory taking shape, coming out of

nothing and you place it somewhere on your timeline. As I stand above the tray, watching the image form itself, I often think something like, ‘This is when I went for a walk in the morning and found those abandoned buildings on the outskirts of the village.’ Or ‘This is when Cheikh and Pape and I all sat under the mango tree that afternoon, eating the ripe fruit with our hands. But wait, no, that’s not right. When that happened, I had forgotten to bring my cameras. And so I went back later to photograph the hanging mangos with their beautiful shapes that had so affected me the *first* time.’ The photograph, then, can be a memory of a memory.

The same can be said of the story. Not only do I constantly find myself trying to recall what *really* happened, I am struck by the irony that, in fiction, it doesn’t seem to matter. Or at least, that’s what conventional wisdom would say. But I struggle with verisimilitude, with remembering things *accurately*, and I think I do this for two reasons. One is that part of me thinks that what happens in real life is always going to be more interesting than anything I could dream up. And moreover, when I sit in my chair and think about how it was, how something happened, what something looked like, I want my chair to become a time machine. In that moment, if I can go to a different place, *the* place, then. And whatever comes out on the page is, like the photograph, memory in form, in some kind of tangible form. Like a photo sitting in a tray of developer, it takes shape (as text) out of nothing.

And so, when the story is “finished,” or at least finished enough to hand over to my thesis advisor who has done me the favor of enforcing a deadline (because otherwise, I’d work on it for the next ten years), there is a feeling of loss. Of

course, at first I was glad that I'd accomplished my task. But that lasted only for about an hour. Then came the emptiness, and I don't know if it's just exhaustion, but I feel sort of hollow. When you live in a story like that, when you make it your home morning noon and night, then where do you go when it's over?

I love writing about Senegal, because not only do I get to remember, and thus go back, there, but it's a unique kind of "there" in that it has been altered by time passing, by feelings changing, by existing in me. It is a "there" that lives nowhere but in the mind. And when I write about it, it's as if, in a strange transition of materiality, I'm making it "real" again. I know, for instance, that sometimes when I read a really good book it feels the same way. I hold a book in my hands, I read the words with my eyes, I register the concepts and then a world begins to form in my mind's eye, this time not *out* of nothing, but back *into* nothing.

PART IV

INTERVIEW

Paul Tine Interview

(Interviewer: Stephanie Maher, henceforth referred to as SM.

Interviewee: Paul Tine referred to as PT.)

SM: OK. So, first if you want to introduce yourself, your name, where you come from, where you live here, etc.

PT: Well, my name it is Paul Batay Tine. I come from the region of Djourbel, department of Bambey. I have been here approximately ten years or so. I've been here since before I did my Bac [final French exams every student must take to graduate high school]. I came here [to Dakar] before, then I went back [to the village]. I did my Bac, and then I came back here. I live now with a cousin.

SM: Is it far, where you live?

PT: Yes, it's far. It's about 3 km, something like that.

SM: Does your family, are they still in the village, or do you have relatives here?

PT: My family, all my family is in the village.

SM: So, you're here alone?

PT: Yes, I'm in Dakar all alone. Except for people who lived in the same village that are here now, except for that, yes.

SM: And why did you come?

PT: I came for the work.

SM: Do you like it here?

PT: I like it, on the one hand, but often, on the other hand, I don't like it. First, I like it, because I see things that I didn't see in the village. I learn other things, new things here. It's an advantage for me. But, on the other hand, I don't like it, because I am obliged to abandon my family in order to find something to help them. I prefer to be near my family and to have something to help them. I prefer that. It's a mode of living, you know.

SM: Are you the oldest son?

PT: No, I am the second son.

SM: And your family, is it large?

PT: Yes, it's fairly large. We are about 8 children, plus the Mamma, plus the Papa, and the Papa's brothers also.

SM: Do you think about going home?

PT: For sure!

SM: And will you be able to do so, I don't know ... say, in five years, or do you have some plan to be able to do so?

PT: Maybe I won't go back in five years. Often I go back there if I find some money at the end of the month. I go back to at least see my Mamma, my Papa and the children...

SM: Yes, I see. What do you miss you most from the village?

PT: Well, in the village what I lack the most, at the very least, is to find something for the family. There is no work over there that would permit me to give something to the family. [In this case, Paul and I are using the same word to express to different things. The French word *manquer* means "to miss," but can also mean "to lack; to be missing or lacking something." In short, I ask him what he misses, and he tells me what is missing. It is interesting to me to look at the two ways in which Paul and I handle the semantics differently.]

SM: Is it primarily agricultural work?

PT: Yes, it's agriculture, but farming doesn't really work very well, because often the rains fall OK, but other times water gets rare, and agriculture doesn't give what it should give. In the past it went well, because there were animals who produced manure for the fields, cultivation was good, but now, there are no animals left, there is no more manure, the fields are degrading.

SM: Did you take something with you, from your family in the village, to help you remember, an object, something like that?

PT: Something that comes back into my head often here, that I took from there. Well, truly, there was always this maternal love that I lived with over there. And that comes into my mind often here, because I'm not able to find it here. Truly... it hurts me still.

SM: So, most of my questions are short, very simple. I just want to know how long you are here for, if you feel comfortable here, if you miss your family.

PT: Yes, I miss it very much. I have been here, in this place [job] for a little over two years. Yes, I am here for two and a half years. In time, when things ease up maybe I won't have to give everything to work like this. I could do some other work. If I have the opportunity.... But in this country, the work doesn't pay, or rarely. You see, something's missing. We are obliged to go find work, even if it doesn't pay.

SM: In your opinion, why is Senegal so short on available work?

PT: One would say, with the state of unemployment, we can't afford *not* to educate the children. The priority is to be educated, to raise children with education. With the current situation, you need to have something in your brain to make a profession. Most of the population... You see, we started with

centralization, when we start to go to school, but many don't finish. Currently, there are a lot of people that didn't go to school. Yes, there are many that didn't go. Especially the big ones [the eldest children]. Because with the guy, for him to go to school, he cannot leave, so he stays to cultivate the land and take care of the animals. They preferred this rather than going to school.

SM: So, it's education, or lack of education that makes finding work so hard?

PT: Yes, and the population, too. It's just growing and growing. [In other words, there are too many people, and not enough jobs to go around.] And the politicians, they act as if it were "country time" here. They tell you things that they never do. It's only to get elected. Once you elect them, they forget you. They don't do any of the projects or things like that for others. For me, this just means we must work more. Truly, this is a country filled with corruption. Because instead of looking for someone who has studied well, you prefer to go get your friend, your brother, or something like that, who didn't even go to school. You only give work to those who you know well. You leave the rest of the people with nothing. You see, like I said, it's corruption. Or else, you come and you have 5,000 CFA (~\$10). Then, there is me, who has passed the day working for it: you owe it, but you don't give it to me. You see, it's bad.

SM: OK, so, maybe, as I said earlier, maybe in five years you can return home, to your family?

PT: If... in five years I may be able to go back to the village, if I find at least something to do with my family over there, I could go back then. But as long as there isn't any of that, I won't be able to go that way.

SM: With the "arms crossed," that is the expression, isn't it?

PT: Yes, with crossed arms, but that's not good, it won't work. [This is an expression I learned in Senegal that references the nature of trying to find a job among obstinate employers who look at you with crossed arms because they don't know you personally and thus won't let you in. I found many people talking about the varying levels of corruption in Senegal's government, which had a direct impact on civil jobs to be had, but also had an indirect "trickle-down" effect on workers of all education and skill levels. Projects and social services get promised during election season and then don't get implemented after election day.

Villages, with the proper structural support, could become viable centers again, but the money simply gets "invested" elsewhere. Many say it lines the pockets of upper level governmental officials. This familiar dynamic helps to explain not only the phenomenon of migration in Senegal and why people—primarily men—have to migrate in order to find work to support their families, but it also illuminates how, once in Dakar, many of these "unconnected" men struggle to survive. Paul made the equivalent of \$10 a day, which, when you consider that the whole point of moving to the city was to save enough each month to support his family, doesn't seem like that much.] For me, if there was something like maybe gardening or farming there in the village, or a grain mill, then maybe we could

survive. If not, it's hard there in the village. We have a really hard time finding food, then. Especially with the fields where we grow things: often things are fine, then things are not fine. It's hard. Often you will cultivate something, and it doesn't grow. And then there's nothing to eat. Without cultivating other things, without having other resources, it's difficult.

[It's in moments like this I don't know how to react. I don't know how exactly to "distance" myself from this person or his situation. I met so many people that struggle every day to survive; it makes me wonder why and with what strange arbitrary luck was I spared such a fate. At the risk of sounding naive, it often strikes me as fundamentally unfair that simply because I was born on another continent, in another hemisphere, that I should be so different, that life should be so undemanding by comparison, when really it could just as easily have been the other way around. I've learned enough about colonialism and politics to understand the situation intellectually, but that doesn't make it any less absurd. When I think that I'm in this position—the one with the tape recorder and the college education and the money for a plane ticket—as a *result* of colonialism, that my developed Western world is this way largely because of resources and labor that were extracted from this continent, and now people like Paul can't find a good job, it makes me so angry. Paul seems to sense my discomfort and points to one of my bags to ask me what's inside.]

SM: I brought my camera. Would you mind if I took a picture?

PT: “Une” photo. [I made a mistake in gender, giving “photo” a masculine article, and Paul corrects me.]

SM: Yes, right. Your picture, is that OK?

PT: Yes, it’s OK.

SM: Because it’s for my project. I think that people in the States must get to know what’s happening in Africa, in Senegal. Because they don’t know.

PT: Really?

SM: Yes, it’s true. Personally, I think we are all somewhat responsible for each other: Americans for Africans; Europeans for the Chinese, and so on.

PT: Yes, that’s true.

SM: But there is a lot of ignorance in the States. People aren’t aware of what’s going on. You know education is the same for us: it’s crucial.

PT: But you need time, so you can discover the rest of Senegal. You are here for how many months?

SM: Only one month. In fact, tomorrow, there’ll be only three weeks left. It’s already been one week. It’s sad.

PT: In fact, things pass very quickly. To do what you're doing, a month is not a lot of time.

SM: I have to—speaking of work—I must go back to the States to work to earn money, because when I go to school, I don't work, so I must earn money in Summer so I can survive.

PT: That's for sure. That's for sure. But you have family there, no?

SM: Yes, I have family. My mother lives... well, me I am in Massachusetts, and my mother is in Washington, Washington State.

PT: Washington...

SM: It's on the West Coast. It's far.

PT: For sure. So, over there, you live with a friend/boyfriend?

SM: No, I live alone.

PT: Yes? [He seems incredulous.]

SM: With my two cats. That's it.

PT: For real? [Paul is shocked, I imagine, because people in Senegal don't look at animals as pets. Horses are for pulling carts; goats are for ritual slaughter during

religious feasts; and cats... Cats seem to be there to annoy people. They're everywhere in both the city and the village. They hover at a safe distance when people are eating because there are times when someone will throw them a fish skeleton or a bit of gristle, but even that's rare. They're skinny, mangy looking things that are scared of humans (probably for good reason), even though they live in relative proximity with them. I can see why, in this context, having a pet would seem like a luxury. After all, who needs another mouth to feed?]

SM: Yes, with cats.

PT: [Long pause] Over here, even your wife, everyone is always with family, Papa, Mamma, the children, brothers, everyone together.

SM: Yes, I've already seen this here. People live together in a big house.

PT: Yes. If you have the time, we'll go over there to visit the countryside, the village. Because it's not expensive, maybe about 2,000 francs [~\$4], to travel there. When you go to see the family you need to bring a little something for the children [like toys or sweets]. But it's not that expensive.

SM: Yes, I would like to do something like that. I didn't plan on leaving Dakar because I didn't have any contacts. But I would like to talk to people in the villages as well.

PT: In the city you can misunderstand, you don't find reality. Or what you find is not exact. You'll see people that are tired and struggling here—but over there, it's worse, there is nothing. There is nothing over there. With Dakar, we can manage, and you may say to yourself, 'It's not that bad.' But in the country, it's something else, to see the true reality of Senegal. I don't know if you are going to return to Senegal someday?

SM: Yes, I would like to come back, but I don't know when. Maybe it's a good idea to travel to the countryside this time around, because you are not the first person who told me that I should see it. And I can't be sure when I will return.

PT: Then you must go. [Paul has been looking for a light switch to turn on for me to take a photo.]

SM: OK, the light switch.

PT: The light must be... here it is.

SM: Let's see. Ah no, that's not enough.

PT: You need more light.

SM: Yes.

[As we walk away from the recorder, trying to find a good spot to take his photo, our voices become fainter. The last distinct sound is me saying, “Oh look, it’s a garden!” From then on, Paul and I continue talking, but it’s not possible to hear exactly what we’re saying. Instead, there are only murmurs, and the click of my camera shutter. When we come back into the room, I switch the recorder off.]

*Paul-2**July, 2007*

Cheikh Kane Interview

(Interviewer: Stephanie Maher, henceforth referred to as SM.

Translator: Pape Samb, referred to as PS. Interviewee: Cheikh Kane,
referred to as CK)

SM: Can you introduce yourself, your name, where you live, your age, etc.?

CK: Well my name is Cheikh Tidiane Kane, and I am from Keur Ndiaga Mbaye;
that's my maternal village.

SM: Where is that?

CK: It's between Piir and Ngaye.

PS: He said it's near Piir and Ngaye. Ngaye is part of Kebemer [a region in
Senegal].

SM: Is it far from here?

PS: Yes, it's far from here because it is on the road going to St-Louis and St Louis
is very far from here. I went once and I was driving but it was very hard.

SM: So is it a small village?

CK: It's the same size as Banhange [the village we were at the time)

SM: So, you used to live with all your family?

CK: Yes, I used to live with all my family, but half my family is in Dakar. My big sisters are married and have their houses there; some of my brothers bought houses and moved there, my aunts are there... So in sum half of my family is in the village and half is Dakar.

SM: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

CK: I have 2 big sisters and 2 younger brothers. I had other siblings but they passed away.

SM: And why are you here in Banhange Samb?

CK: I am here to work and make a living.

SM: How long have you been here?

CK: Hold on let me count. I have been here for one year.

SM: How do you like it in here? Are people nice to you?

CK: Yes they are nice! I feel at home here.

SM: Do you miss your family?

CK: Yes I miss them. But some of them passed away so... I have two sisters and two brothers that died.

SM: Do you mind if I ask you what the cause was?

CK: Illness.

SM: Were they young?

CK: Yes they were young?

SM: Do you visit your family often?

CK: Yes. Twice to three times a year.

SM: Do you go for some days, a week or...?

CK: A week or 3 to 4 days.

SM: Do you want to go back?

CK: Yes I want to go back when I earn enough money.

SM: Do you send some of the money you earn back home?

CK: Yes I do.

SM: You send money to your family, your mother... Is she alive?

CK: No, she is not. I send the money to my big sister.

SM: And there is no job like the one you have here back in your village?

CK: No. There is no job. The only thing you can do there is cultivate during the rainy season. There is no well to get water during the dry season.

PS: This is the only village that has wells even the neighboring villages don't have wells. This village [Banhange Samb] is extraordinary.

CK: Yes it is! It's a garden in the middle of the desert. Very important people came here and gave money to dig the wells. Sometimes they give you a house, you get married and you move in.

SM: If you get married here will you stay?

CK: Yes.

SM: You prefer that to going back home?

CK: No, it's the same thing because the people here are also my family. Pape Samb is like my brother. When I have problems he helps me and all that... So I am building a new family here.

SM: How old are you?

CK: I am thirty-five.

SM: I know that here in Senegal there is polygamy meaning a man can have many wives. Do you want to have more than one wife?

CK: No I prefer monogamy. Having one wife is much simpler; I want to have two three kids and that's it.

SM: And it cost less.

CK: Right it costs less!

SM: And you know women are expensive [I'm teasing Cheikh now].

CK: Yes. In Africa having a wife makes you spend a lot of money. I prefer to have only one wife. They cost you a lot. You have to work four years to invest in a wife, especially in such an underdeveloped country.

SM: How long have you done this job for?

CK: We harvest every 10 to 13 days.

SM: No I mean how long have you done this job for? At what age did you start?

CK: I have done this for three years.

SM: And before this what was your job?

CK: Before this I was a trader. I did business. I used to buy merchandise like shoes, trousers or anything that was fashionable.

SM: And where was that?

CK: It was in Dakar.

SM: So you were in Dakar?

CK: Yes! I was married there, but I divorced my wife and I came back here; because in there [Dakar], it is hard to make a living when you don't have a lot of money.

SM: And how long where you in Dakar?

CK: I was there for a long time! I was there for four years straight.

SM: Do you have kids?

CK: Yes, I have one. He lives in Yeumbeul.

SM: What's his name?

CK: Mor Kane. He is four almost five-years-old.

SM: Does he visit you here?

CK: No. He went to visit my family in Mbalen [another village], but that was long ago.

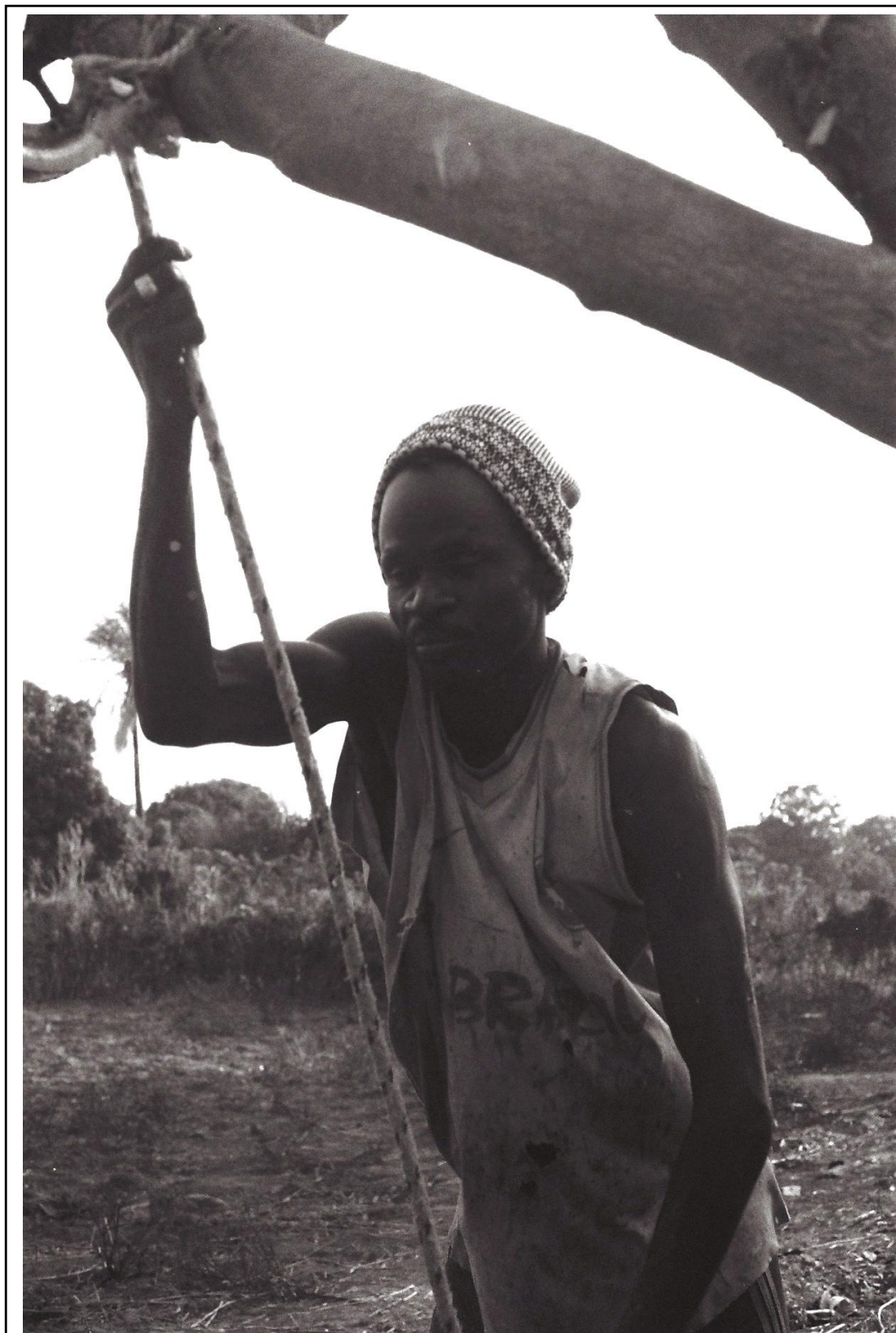
SM: So how well do you know him? Do you talk to him?

CK: Yes, I talk to him when I go to Dakar. We go shopping together, and I buy him clothes. I am even planning to go one of these days just to visit him and come back.

SM: OK, I think that's it. Thank you very much, Cheikh.

CK: Thank you.

[Below is a photograph I took that day of Cheikh getting water from the well in the *champs*, where the interview was conducted.]



Cheikh At the Well-3

July 2007

Sagar N'Diaye Interview

(Interviewer: Stephanie Maher, henceforth referred to as SM.

Translator: Pape Samb, referred to as PS. Interviewee: Sagar N'Diaye,
referred to as SN)

SM: Can you introduce yourself; tell us your name, your age, etc.?

SN: My name is Sagar Ndiaye, and I am 35 years old.

SM: Where were you born?

SN: I was born in Rhombole.

SM: Is it far from here?

SN: No, it's not very far from here.

PS: It's not very far from here. It's about 40 kilometers away.

SM: Is your family still living there?

SN: Yes my family still lives there.

SM: Who in your family lives there?

SN: My big sister lives there, and also my younger brothers Ali N'Diaye and Mbaye Sy Ndiaye and his wife, and my other brother Mbaye Ndiaye.

SM: When you were young did you live with all your family?

SN: Yes, we lived all together in the same house.

SM: And was the village the same size as this village?

PS: No, it is not a village; it's a region. It's called "Departement de Rhombole"
There is water, electricity and everything there. They even have access to the internet.

SM: At what age did you get married?

SN: I was 15 years old when I got married.

SM: How did you meet your husband?

SN: His sister lived in my village with her husband. We met during one of his visits and we fell in love. He brought me to his village [Banhange Samb] to introduce me to his mother and she liked me a lot too. That's how we got married.

SM: So did you celebrate the wedding here?

SN: No, we celebrated it in my village.

SM: How long did the ceremony last?

SN: It lasted only one day.

SM: How were the first weeks of married life? Were you happy, stressed? How was it?

SN: I was very happy because he loved me and I loved him back that was important.

SM: Did you move here immediately after the wedding?

SN: Yes.

SM: Did you miss your family?

SN: Yes, I did. But whenever I missed them too much I would go visit them.

SM: At what age did you have your first child?

PS: I should answer that because I am her first child and I was born August 12 1981...

SM: But how old was *she*?

SN: I had a baby less than a year after I got married. [There is some confusion

here: if she had Pape when she was sixteen—a year after her marriage—and Pape is twenty-six at the time of the interview, then that would make her forty-two years old. But she said earlier that she was thirty-five. At the time when we were talking, I didn't pick up on the discrepancy. Maybe it was just a mistake.]

SM: How many children do you have?

SN: I have five children.

SM: Do you take care of the children of the second wife? [The reason I ask this is because I've gotten the impression that Sagar does most of the house work, including caring for the children. Cheikh, for one, spoke vehemently with me about his dislike for the second wife, who, he said, spent her allowance—what Malik Samb, the husband, would dole out to each wife—on clothing and jewelry, while Sagar picked up the slack and bought food for everyone. I make a comment on this in the interview with Pape Samb, p. ?]

SN: No, they are under their mother's care.

SM: Was this house exactly like this when you moved in or has it changed?

SN: No, this house was very different. All this was not here. [She is pointing to the *salon* where we are seated. I get the feeling that this room is locked up most of the time, but when guests come, it's opened. There are one large couch, two recliners of the same material, and a loveseat also of the same material. On each

of these, an assortment of delicate crocheted spheres is arranged at the top of the cushions and on the arm rests. There is a glass-topped table in the center with a vase of silk flowers whose colors are faded and whose petals are dusty. On a tall ornate wooden shelf in the corner, there is a television that doesn't work, and a few sets of speakers not hooked up to anything.]. I used to live in that room over there next to the door. These buildings were built later.

SM: Was it small?

PS: [Pape answers.] No, it wasn't small. It's just that at the time they didn't have enough money to build more.

SM: Where is your husband right now?

SN: My husband is in Italy.

SM: How long has he been there?

SN: [She turns to Pape.] When did your father start traveling to Italy Pape Samb? Do you know?

PS: I don't know! He started traveling long ago! My mother doesn't know the date, but it's been almost ten years since he first left.

SN: But he doesn't stay long in Italy.

PS: She says he doesn't stay for too long. He stays for around three months, then he comes back. He works there.

SM: Is he here in Senegal the nine other months?

SN: Yes.

SM: Do you think he is going to come home for good soon?

SN: That's what I am hoping! He doesn't like traveling anyway.

PS: If God gave him what he wanted here, he would have never gone to Italy. He would have stayed here in Senegal.

SM: So when he comes back from Italy what do you do? Do you have special meals for him or a small party?

SN: When he comes back sometimes he buys a sheep and we kill it, or we cook chickens. Sometimes we invite people too.

SM: So it's like a small village party.

SN: Yes.

SM: This is the last question. As a first wife do you have a particular position in the house?

SN: Yes, I do.

SM: Do you have responsibilities that the other wives don't have? Do you lead things here?

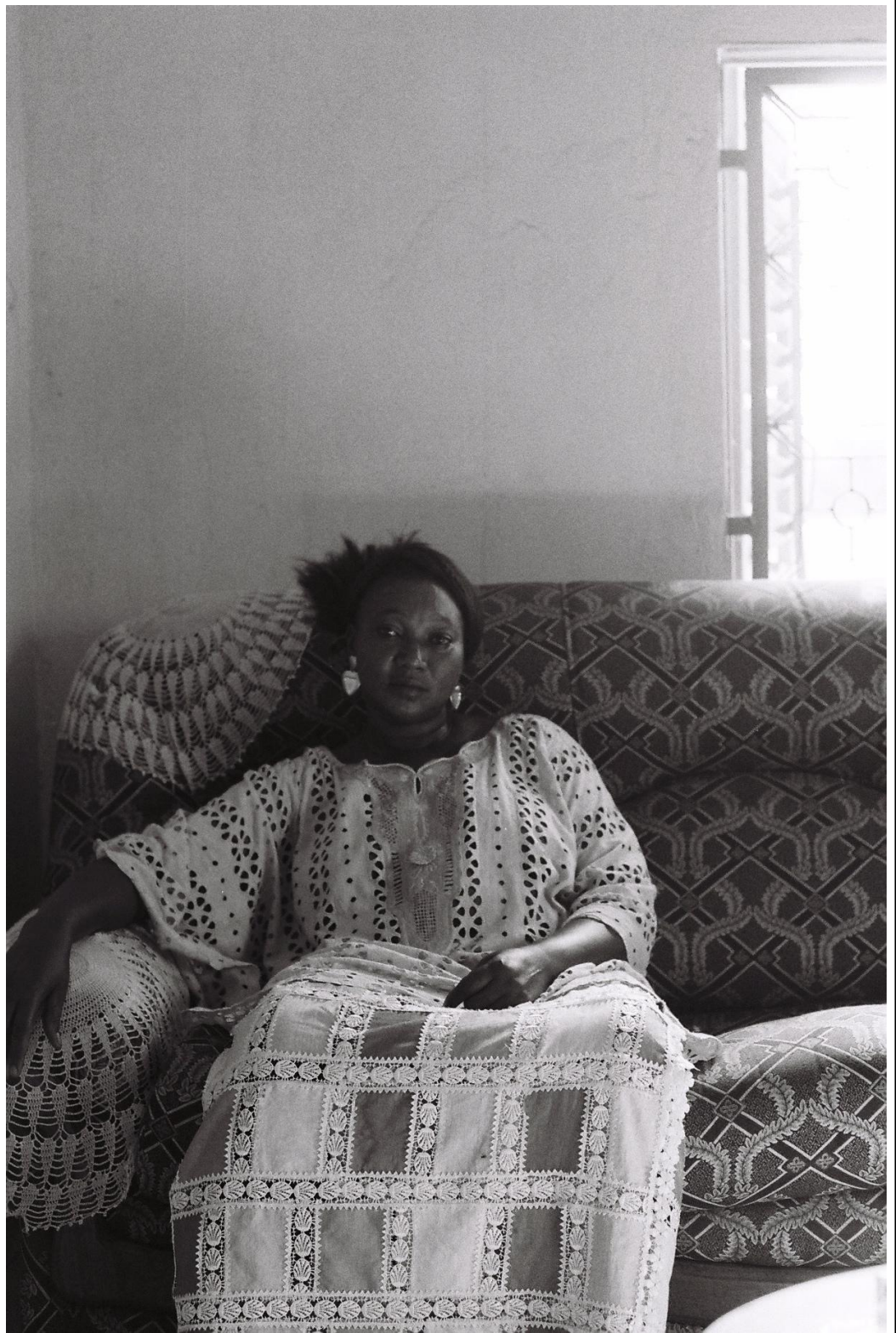
SN: Yes! Whatever my husband wants to do, he tells me about it first. Or when he has something to tell to the others he tells me first. Sometimes he assigns things to me. For example, he will tell me do this or do that! [Also, I happen to know, because Pape told me, that Sagar has taken a lot of initiative in her family's economic welfare. For instance, Pape told me that a few years ago, she pooled resources with some other women of the village, and they bought a slew of eucalyptus saplings. Today, their plantation on the outskirts of the village is pretty impressive. When fully grown, these trees bring a good price for use as telephone poles. Pape also told me that his father, Malik Samb, was very impressed with Sagar's plan. When he came back from Italy that year, his pleasure was not easily missed.]

SM: That's it. Thank you very much, Sagar.

SN: I thank you! I am very happy.

PS: We are very happy because you are very respectful and nice. That's why I brought you in here to meet my mother and my grandmother.

SN: You're my son's friend and his friends are my friends!



Sagar N'Diaye-2

July 2007

Pape Samb Interview

(Interviewer: Stephanie Maher, henceforth referred to as SM.

Interviewee: Pape Samb, referred to as P.)

SM: Do you want to tell your name, where you live, your age, what kind of you work do you do?

P: My name, it is Saliou Samb [Pape is his nickname], my age it is 12/10/1981 [He gives his birthday, October 12, 1981, which made him 26 at the time of the interview], I am born at Rhombole, also my profession it is retailer at Sandaga [This is a market in Dakar. Pape sells shoes, clothing, and accessories there, out of a stall maybe 7 ft. long and 3ft. wide].

See the end of the interview for a photograph of Pape at his stall in Sandaga.
--

But my origin, where I live, it is at

Banhange Samb, the village there, where we were.

SM: And now you live in Dakar?

P: Yes.

SM: When did you come to Dakar?

P: When I left school.

SM: And you were how old?

P: I was 16.

SM: So that was 10 years ago. And why did you come here, to Dakar?

P: Because I wanted to learn my “craft.”

SM: What craft?

P: For how we make mechanic.

See later in this Interview, p. 181. Also see Part V, Fiction, p. 234.
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SM: For cars?

P: Yes.

SM: Do you like Dakar, do you feel at home here, in Dakar?

P: Yes, yes. I like it very much.

SM: And with whom do you live?

P: I live with my aunt, and my brothers and sisters, and also my father.

SM: And cousins.

P: Yes, cousins.

SM: And your parents, where do they live?

P: My parents. There are some that live in Rhombole, where my mother lives before she came to live in the village with us. I have some parents also that live in Thies. I have an aunt that lives in Thies. I have parents, like my grandmother that lives in Kayar, yes, in Kayar [Pape includes relatives other than just parents in this description].

SM: But your mother and your father, where do they live?

P: My mother she lives in Rhombole, and my father, my father he lives in Banhange.

SM: But your mother doesn't live in Banhange?

P: No, she lives in Rhombole. And he was born in Banhange.

SM: Who, your father?

P: Yes, my father, but my mother she was born in Rhombole.

SM: Ah, yes. OK [This confusion in communication arises from the concept of "living" where your immediate family is, or, to use his word, at your place of "origin," see above. For this reason, his mother "lives," in some sense, in Rhombole where she was born and where her parents still live. Likewise, he said

that he “lives” in Banhange where his mother lives, even though he spends most of the year in Dakar].

For reference, see Part II, Field Notes, p. 66, and later in this interview, p. 175. Also see Part V, Fiction, p. 233.

P: It’s because of this, my family, I have a family in Rhombole. But right now my mother lives in Banhange.

SM: OK. And your father, he also lives in Italy, doesn’t he?

P: No, it’s for the work there. He’s not living there. Definitely. Not forever. It’s for the work. As soon as he earns money, he can come back here.

SM: How long has he been doing this?

P: A little more than 10 years.

SM: How long does he stay in Italy each year?

P: Three months per year.

SM: Do you feel at home when you are in the village, in Banhange?

P: I feel more at home there than in Dakar.

SM: Do you want... Are you going to go to Banhange to live permanently? It means, you don’t leave. You live there, and you don’t leave.

P: Yes, I would very much like to live there. When I find the money I need, I will live there. If I leave it is to go back to Dakar to take care of some business, but I will live there.

SM: So this is your preferred scenario?

P: Yes.

SM: OK. You said that you feel more at home in the village. Why?

P: Because my mother, she is there. Now and then I miss the village, but sometimes I need to be in Dakar 6 months or 5 months without going to see her. Usually, I spend 2 months or 3 months here, and then go back to the village. I can go see her for 5 days or a week, and then I go back to Dakar.

SM: What do you miss most from the village?

P: My mother, yes, it's my mother, yes. Also, if I had a fiancée there, I will miss that, too. I miss that.

SM: Did you ever live outside of Senegal? Abroad?

P: In Europe, yes. I was in Italy.

SM: When did you do this?

P: To go to Europe? I did this since 2001.

SM: And you stayed how long?

P: Three years. It seems like something but it's not much. I came back here in 2003. From 2001 to 2003.

SM: Why did you go to Italy?

P: I wanted to be there for the work, but I didn't succeed, because, over there, when I was in Italy, I didn't have papers, and that's why I started to sell things, copied CDs, Gucci bags, Rolex watches, travel bags, but you know, these are the things that we make some money with there. But, once in a while, I have problems with the police. They take the luggage and all that. After that I tell myself I need to return to Senegal because I don't like to continue this work, because it's hard, you know.

I took this direct quote and inserted it into the fiction, when Mamadou is talking to Peter, p. 232.

SM: What did it feel like to be away from Senegal?

P: When I was there for two years, I missed Senegal a lot. Yes. I missed it a lot. Once in a while I thought of it; afterwards, I cry. Yes, because, even Senegalese music at that time, to listen to it, it's a problem [i.e. not easy to find in Italy]. Yes. I listened only to Italian music, things like that. I missed it a lot.

SM: Did you feel at home in Italy?

P: In Italy, no. No, not at all. I felt myself always like a stranger. I felt good there, but not like here in Senegal.

SM: Do you want to leave Senegal again?

P: Yes.

SM: Why?

P: To work, because, here, there isn't much work. That's why I wanted to go abroad, but not to African nations. I wanted to go to European countries or in the United States to work there. But not Africa.

SM: Who in your family lives in Europe?

P: In my family? I have a cousin in Europe. He is spending a year there, and then he'll come back here. But he doesn't live there.

SM: This is interesting, because you say that if people come back to Senegal that means they don't live in Europe.

P: They don't live there.

SM: Even if they are there for ten years?

P: No they don't live there. It's the people who don't come back, those are the ones who *live* there. But if you go there, and you come back, you don't live there. We, the Senegalese, that's what we say, "to live someplace." Someone who lives abroad, he doesn't come back any more. But if you go and come back, you still live in Senegal.

For references on this concept see Part II, Field Notes, p. 66, and earlier in this interview, p. 171. Also, see Part V, Fiction, p. 233.

SM: So, who in your family works in Europe?

P: My aunt who is in Europe, she works. My father, he works. That's it.

SM: What about your aunt's husband?

P: Who?

SM: Your mother's younger sister [I'm speaking of Pape's aunt, whom I met in the village. She is the sister of Sagar, Pape's mother. Her husband works in Spain for much of the year].

P: The little sister of my mother... I don't have... Ah, OK! Yes, that one he is not my family. He is the husband of the younger sister, my mother's younger sister, that's not my family. No, no. The *sons* of my mother's sister, *that's* my family, but the husband, he is not my family. Do you understand?

SM: Not exactly.

P: My mother's younger sister, her sons or her daughters, her children are my family, but my aunt's husband, he is not my family. Because it's a thing like that.

[Pape is making a gesture with his hand as he taps his arm] You understood?

SM: [I start laughing.] Well, I won't be able to see what you're doing when I am listening to the recording later. You need to say it. What does this mean? [I mimic the gesture back to him].

P: It's a little too far to be my family.

SM: It has something to do with skin?

P: It's not the same blood. I am not of the same blood with him. It's because of this that he's not my family. Even my aunt's husband who lives here, it's the same. My aunt who has the same father, same mother, she is my father's elder sister, but her husband is not my family either. I can tell you, there is a way that is more respectful, but he's not my family [Pape treats his uncle—the husband of his blood-aunt—deferentially, not because they're related, but out of respect.]

SM: If you had a choice, where would you live? Actually, where would you want to live other than Senegal?

P: I want to live in the United States.

SM: That's your preferred choice? More so than Italy?

P: Yes, more than Italy.

SM: And why?

P: Because, I think over there, if I go over there, I can earn a lot of money, and I would prefer live over there, also with you, Stephanie.

SM: Mmmm... [I made the decision not to challenge him during the interview, while he was being recorded partly because I didn't want to put him on the spot. But also, this was a topic that we had revisited more than once. No matter how hard I tried to tell him that I couldn't bring him to the US, he persisted, and sometimes the conversations got to be unpleasant. At the time, I didn't want the interview to get derailed into being about my relationship with Pape nor the contentious moments we shared. So I decided not to engage him in this debate by asking him another question]. Do you believe it will be easy or difficult to find work?

P: Yes, it will be easier to find a job. But the problem is that the work I want to find over there, it'll be hard but they pay. It's hard work but I know they will pay good money. This work, I can do this.

SM: What kind of work?

P: It's like I told you. I can do any kind of work if I go over there. Because the work I can find here, I can't do that work. Because me, I am Senegalese. It's foreigners that come here to do that work, but I can't. Even in your country there are certain groups who can't do certain work.

SM: What, for instance?

P: Actually you told me you did painting work on houses for ten years and now you are studying at school.

SM: Yes.

P: It's like that.

SM: But actually, I *can* do that work. And sometimes I have to do it still.

P: I know. But right now, I can tell you one thing. For example, there are the Guineans who sell in the streets, bananas and things like that. Me, I must not do that. Never. Never. It's difficult to see a Senegalese who sells in the street here.

SM: Why?

P: It's a matter of...of... How to say... Wait, I'm going to tell you. [Long pause.] In Italian, we say "vergogna."

SM: Well, that's helpful [laughter], because I don't speak Italian.

P: But when you go back to the U.S., you can find someone who speaks Italian and can translate. It's, I don't know... like shame, shameful.

SM: Why is it shameful if you sell bananas in the streets?

P: Ah, no, I don't do that because it's [again, he makes a gesture, pointing to the ground], it's low. I cannot do it because it's too low for me. I can do these things abroad, in Europe. But that's because I don't live there; people don't know me.

SM: How could you get better work in Senegal, work that is not too low?

P: First, you need to finish school. After that, if you have your diplomas, you can work, you can have work. But still it's difficult. Because there are people who have been in school for a very long time and have all the diplomas, but in order to find work here, it's not easy for them. That's the problem. That's why the immigrants want to go abroad to work there, because here, in order to find this kind of work here, it's not easy. There are people who take the "chips" to go to Spain. You know the "chips"? Kind of little boats.

Reference to "chips," see Part V, Fiction, p. 236.
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SM: Ah, yes, I have read articles about that. It's very dangerous.

P: Yes, it's very dangerous. We take chips to go to Spain, but it's hard.

SM: If you were abroad, in the United States, do you believe you'd miss Senegal?

P: Yes! I believe I'll miss Senegal, that's true. Because of the things I told you. That is true; I'll miss Senegal a lot! Because, if I were there, I would like also to be there and here as well. If I am working there for one year, then during vacation I can come back here to spend 2 months, and then I go back. You understand? This I think it's a good idea. But I cannot stay there indefinitely. I'll miss Senegal. The "ceeb-u-jënn" like this. [Ceeb-u-jënn—pronounced cheb-oo-jen—is the national dish of Senegal, and one of the most delicious things I've ever tasted.]

SM: If you could do whatever work you wanted—either here in Senegal, in the United States, in Italy, doesn't matter—if you could have a choice, what do you want to do?

P: Me? I want to be able to be a cab driver in the United States, or in Italy, but not in Senegal, because I have already tried here, it doesn't work. Not in Senegal.

SM: And why do you want to do that?

P: Because I know my craft, that's why.

SM: Because you know cars.

P: Yes. Because when I was sixteen, I started studying, studying what to do when the car breaks down. Other than that, I learned how to drive, because you can study auto-mechanics, but you don't need to know how to drive. It's like that in

Senegal. You can know auto mechanics to repair cars, but to drive... Because people don't give you cars that you can drive like that. But afterwards, I left that behind. I studied how to drive. I know, little by little, it's going to work.

See earlier mention of a *métier*, p. 169. Also, reference, Part V, Fiction, p. 234.

SM: What is important to you? In your life?

P: The most important thing in life, I must earn money to support my family, my mother, and my brothers and sisters, and my father. That's what is the most important thing. I don't know if I will have that, but I would like to support my family.

SM: Is it because you are the oldest son?

P: Yes. But, even if you are not the eldest, you see, the family counts on you, because, you see, right now, my mother, I don't like how it is for her there [in the village]. She is all alone there. She doesn't even have a daughter, or a son. She works all the time, and has to eat with the children of the "others" [By this, he means the children of the second wife, with whom there was evidently some tension. While I was in Banhange with Pape, there was talk of how the second wife was selfish and didn't help in communal efforts. Sagar, Pape's mother, was indeed working all the time while I was there. She was doing laundry and cooking for everyone. Cheikh Kane told me that the Second wife used her "allowance" to buy to buy pretty clothes and jewelry instead of buying food to feed her children, so it

Please see the interview with Cheikh, which begins on p. 152. Also, he shows up in the short story, begins p. 188, under the same name.

was Sagar who not only prepared the meals for offspring that were not hers, but she paid for the food as well. I have no idea if this is accurate because I was effectively forbidden to talk to the second wife; I never even learned her name]. For me, I need to get money so I can buy a house for my mother and to buy a house for me to live with my wife. If I buy a house, I can live with my wife alone. But I must buy a house for my mother. My mother over there and me here. Occasionally, I'll go over there to see her, and like that.

SM: OK. Now, it's the last question: you have told me that you would like to build yourself a house at Touba.

P: Yes I would very much like to have houses all over the world. [We both laugh.]

SM: But why Touba? Does it signify something for you?

P: Why Touba? It's a... I don't know.

SM: But that's where the mosque is. [I am trying to elicit a certain response from Pape, and it's not going well. I want him to talk about Touba, and what it means to him, if it means anything to him. Touba is a holy Islamic city in Senegal. Founded by the Sufi religious leader Sheikh Amadou Bamba in 1887, it is seen as the home of the Mouride tradition, which he started in response to the fracturing effect French colonialism had on Muslim unity in Senegal. He advocated a pure spiritual path of hard work and prayer for all Muslims, and was seen as a true pacifist. During his detentions by the French government, he is said to have

performed miraculous feats, such as riding a magic prayer rug over the ocean in order to pray on his way to internment in Gabon. The Grand Mosque, completed in 1963, is one of the largest mosques in Africa and sits on the place where the Sheikh died in 1927. Each year, in addition to many smaller pilgrimages, there is the Grand Magal, which draws anywhere from one to two million pilgrims from all over Africa and the world. I cannot overstate the importance of this city or of the man, Amadou Bamba, in Senegalese society. There is everything from “Touba” coffee to “Touba” gas stations, and the single photograph ever taken of the Sheikh is a common wall adornment in most Senegalese households. Even Pape had this picture of Amadou Bamba in his bedroom in Sacré Cœur.]

P: Yes, I know. But I told you earlier, I don’t pray. The thing there [the mosque], it’s not for me. They built it for everyone. Even you, if you want to be Muslim you can go to over there, to Touba.

SM: Do you think of yourself as a Muslim?

P: Me? No.

SM: Why not?

P: Because I don’t feel like a Muslim, that’s all. A Muslim has to pray, all five prayers, a true Muslim. A Muslim doesn’t drink alcohol. But me, I do everything.

SM: Do you believe in God?

P: Yes, God, yes. Yes, I must believe in God. That is true. I like to believe in God.

SM: Do you say small prayers?

P: I have never prayed.

SM: No, no. Not like in the mosque, but do you think of God and maybe ask for things?

P: Yes, I can ask things of God, but that's not a prayer. A prayer is when you must do this and this and this [He is gesturing the formal preparations, the ablutions, etc. for an enactment of prayer].

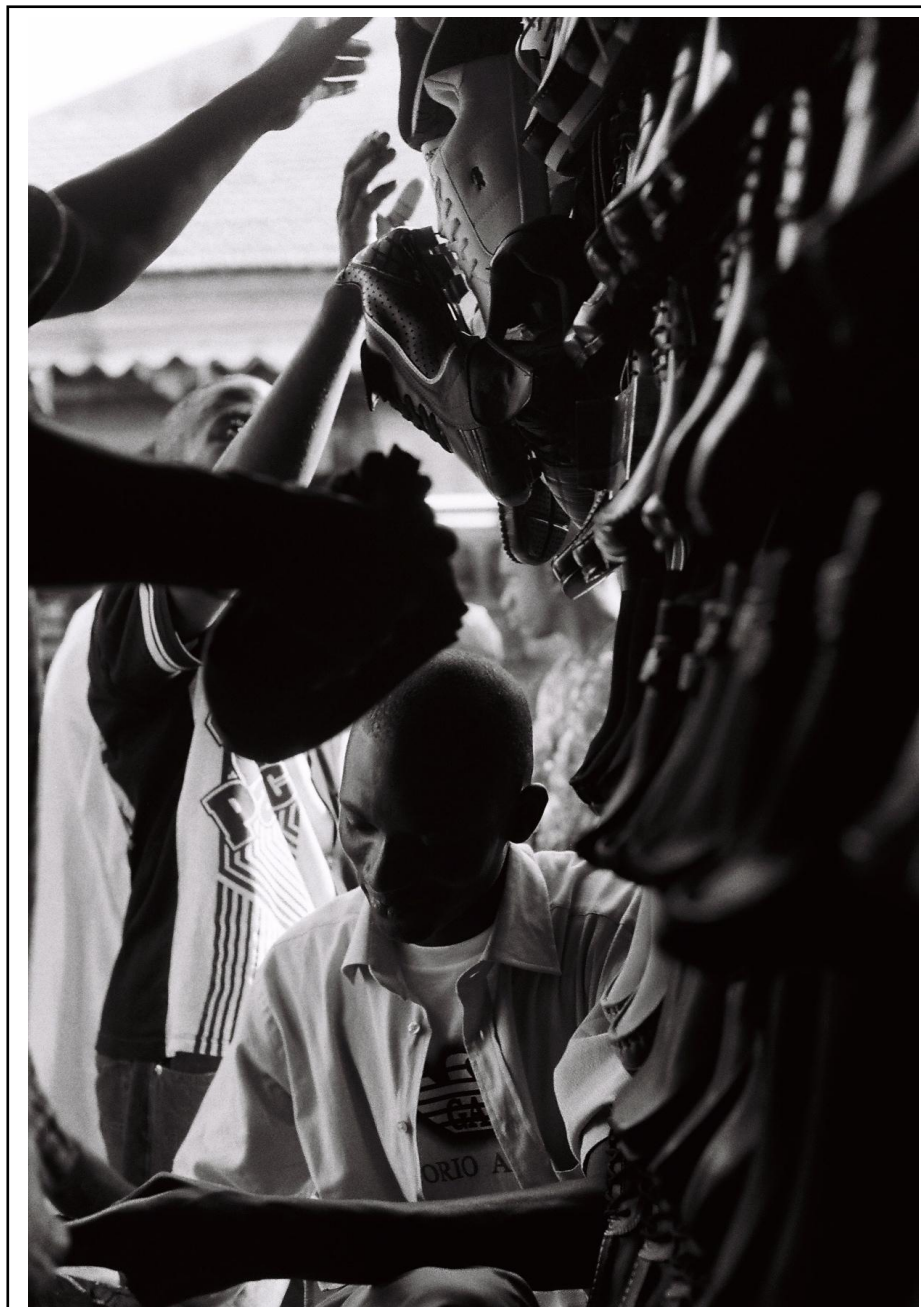
SM: In the States, prayer has a different meaning.

P: Really?

SM: In the Christian religions, yes. Prayer is when you do like this [I make a gesture with my hands, holding them together] just that, with your hands and think of God. Well, that's it.

P: OK.

SM: OK. I think that's it.



Pape Samb Selling Shoes at Sandaga

July 2007

PART V

FICTION

Infusorial Earth



Desert Walk-2

July 2007

Blue Song

*I am tired.
I am tired of speech and of action.
If you should meet me upon the
street do not question me for
I can tell you only my name
and the name of the town I was
born in—but that is enough.
It does not matter whether tomorrow
arrives anymore. If there is
only this night and after is
morning it will not matter now.
I am tired. I am tired of speech
and of action. In the heart of me
you will find a tiny handful of
dust. Take it and blow it out
upon the wind. Let the wind have
it and it will find its way home.*

—Tennessee Williams

When she runs out of the house, she is not wearing her shoes. Instead, they're left at the door's threshold, at the base of the small step next to the empty water thermos. It's not as if she forgets them. It never even occurs to her to look down. She is running, and the sand is cool already because it is evening. Outside the house, the light is yellow, sickly looking, and it should make her stop or hesitate at least. But she doesn't stop. She is trying so hard to move, afraid she's dreaming again, the dream when she cannot run no matter how hard she tries. Inside the house, the wind is howling between the shutters, dust leaking in from every crack. In the morning, they will wake up, when things are calm, and they will sweep the floors with hand brooms, leaning on one knee and slanting across the rooms like strange crabs. She will spend her life like this, bent over, trying to fend off the interminable dust that is everywhere. That is what she is thinking as she runs, stumbling over the sand.

She'd been curled up on the cool tile floor in her grandmother's bedroom facing the wall, while the dust settled upon her and around her like a weightless conch. She'd been daydreaming, imagining a lovely dress made of the finest fabric, something blue and gold that showed off her eyes, something her husband might have bought her. But he had not sent her any dresses. He had not been home in years.

Slowly, she had lifted herself up. On her way to the toilet, she had stopped at the mirror by the doorway, and within its frame, she saw her face powdered with the finest earth. It was almost white, like the dust of ancient abalone shells culled from some distant dead sea. How strange she looked in it, like a mask of someone

else. It clung to her hair, to her eyelashes. She bared her teeth and found their wetness pleasing. Her skin crinkled, making rivulet shapes, the way that branches spread out from a tree the way that roots dig back into the soil looking for water. She imagined that she was going back into the soil. She fingered her lips, caked as they were with dried saliva and dirt. Then she turned from the mirror and started running.

This excerpt about the branches and roots looking for water is from Part II, Field Notes, p. 41. It also shows up again later in this story with another character, p. 209.

Now the wind is moving her, she is caught up in the swirls of sand and dust as if she is in a crowd of people all going in the same direction—she is funneled along between the houses and the trees. She can hear her mother's voice yelling after her, but she's already too far away.

There is a wind that blows over Africa. Like everything, it begins its life in water, rising out of endless motion. It is born high above the Tropic of Cancer, right around 35 degrees, where the cool easterlies blowing off the Mediterranean hit the dry barrens of Libya and Egypt and spiral south. From there, these trade winds are convected into the Sahara where they bristle against the heat, against the endless palisade of sand below.

They sail over the desert, cleaving the air in two like a flock of divers separating the water, sending the heat into the upper troposphere and cooling the land below with their pungent breath. In Ghana people call this wind the *Haramata*, derived from the Arabic word (*haraam*) for “prohibition” or “evil thing.” Arcing from Algeria to Senegal, it picks up the loose earth as it travels, forming vast clouds of dust that charge over the Sahel with roiling speed.

These sandstorms, visible from miles away, charge over Mali and over Mauritania, churning up pieces of them along the way—a family of curling plumes bent on the horizon, heading for the coast. And once they get there, these Harmattan dust clouds lighting off the shores of West Africa can be several thousand square kilometers in size. Above the southeastern Atlantic in winter, the sky is often blanketed in the powder culled from the earth and from the inland seas that once populated this land, but are now turned to dust.

Keep in mind the inland seas bit for later, p. 244.

It begins as a small disturbance, high above the Tropic of Cancer. It begins as a kink in the balance, a contentious meeting of hot and cold, a slow reckoning of

pressures, and it grows into a body made of sand and air: agitation and particulate swirling around one another, taking shape and then flight. Some clouds are precipitated into the sea by rainfall; some are pushed to South America or the Caribbean. And still others are led by the prevailing winds to the eastern seaboard of North America.

On a February morning in Harlem, an unseasonably warm weather pattern has left several windows open along W. 123rd Street. On the windowsills, without the residents even knowing it, a fine layer of dust is deposited like a secret.

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Elhadji Amadou N'Diaye stands on the threshold of his bedroom, looking over the empty compound. In the pale moonlight he can make out the familiar shapes: the acacia tree standing in the center, surrounded by the stucco buildings that his father built—each of them a home for a branch of the family—then the two plastic chairs left out by his mother who had stayed up late listening to the radio and talking with her sister. He wants to go get the chairs and stack them in the parlor where they belong when nobody's sitting in them, but he doesn't. He only thinks about it.

Today Elhadji Amadou N'Diaye will bury his daughter in the desert where his family's crops once grew. Behind him, his wife snores quietly into her pillow. He slides his feet into the flip-flops by the door, skidding his heels along the ground as he situates his toes, and walks out into the compound, his robe grazing the sand. Outside, beyond the cinderblock walls and the tall metal gate, lies the

village, his village, *suma wilaas*, he thinks. He stops near the trunk of the acacia, puts out his hand to touch the bark.



Tree Series (No. 1-4)

July 2007

When Elhadji Amadou N'Diaye was a young boy, his father would reminisce about the land. He would talk about the dense groves of bush mangoes and tamarind, the fields of millet and groundnuts reaching into the distance, the lush green plantations of hibiscus whose flowers made the sweet red bissap juice. There were forests in this place, his father would say, and he would pat the bark of the sole acacia left standing in the family compound. There was shelter. Tonight, Elhadji N'Diaye feels the coarseness of the trunk under his palm and lowers his head. Trees like this all around, to shelter us from the sun, his father said. To keep the soil moist. To help us grow our crops. Whose roots kept the earth on the ground, and not caught up in the winds. Not so weak to be carried away, but keep it here, where it belongs. But then, his father said, we cut down the trees and burned the land. And fields once fertile were now barren, and so we moved on, into the forests and cut them to the ground for fresh soil. And we set the brush on fire and sent their plumes of smoke up into heaven. Some say it was

necessary; yes we had to grow crops to live, to pay the taxes and fill the quotas, to put food in the bowl. Still, we asked too much from the soil. The fields had been exhausted, the soil degraded, and then came the drought, the one that would outlive Elhadji's father by thirty years. And over the decades, the winds grew stronger and stronger, picking up and carrying off with them what was most precious. We asked for too much.

"Elhadji?" A whisper comes out of the darkness behind him.

He turns, startled by the sound.

When he was young, the rainy season lasted from May until November, drenching the land with *ndox de Yallah*, Allah's water. He would stand outside with his father to feel the first drops each year, as if they were brothers coming home, and he would look up to see his father's face bathed in cool wetness, his arm around Amadou's shoulder. The cycle, his father would say, was as old as the small bits of sand that the wind had shorn away from the great boulders that once lived here. Boulders shaped like hippopotami that walked up from the swamps one day and got stuck in the earth. Slowly they disintegrated, becoming

swallowed up in their own particles; pieces of themselves no longer attached, like memories picked up in the wind. This was their land now. What was built on memory, what was left after the bulk had been worn away. It was the most important soil on the continent, his father would say. Because it held the past in its grains.

This bit about the boulders shaped like hippopotami and how they get worn down is a reference to Part II, Field Notes, p. 42. And it shows up later with another character in this story, p. 214.

"Elhadji?"

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“Honey, what are you doing?” Rupert asks.

Fatou is standing at the window in the living room, looking out into the night. She couldn't sleep. She turns her head slightly, to show her husband that she heard him, then turns back to the window. During the day, the view over west Harlem was bleak. Tall buildings, each encroaching on the next, made a sea of grey concrete that stretched into the distance. But at night it was like a sea of stars. She hopes he will go back to bed. Surely, he'd only gotten up for a glass of water.

“Fatou, do you hear me?”

She pushes the wooden beads back into her velour robe pocket and turns away from the starry window. “Yes, husband,” she says. “I hear you.”

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There is a region, like a wide swath bending over the mid-rift of central Africa, where the Sahara desert turns into the tropics, where the sand dunes slope and change, over hundreds of kilometers into scrub, savannah, tree stands, and finally into dense jungle. This region, this intermediate place, is called the Sahel, the transitional zone. And as if in constant tension between the two extremes flanking its north and south, forever being tugged in one direction or the other like a sibling trying not to take sides in a fight but being forced to, this region has both sand and greenery, both monsoons and drought. The Sahel has always been the moderator. And because it doesn't take sides, it's the perfect place to start a fight. But the desert is winning.

Peter put down his pen. Stared out the window. He thought about taking a break, going for a walk, but then he just kept sitting there, watching the late afternoon press down on the remaining daylight like a palm on top of a cardboard box. New York could be so oppressive sometimes. He took a deep breath and looked back at the sheet of legal paper where he'd been writing. He was trying to find a way of talking about desertification to his geology students, something that would resonate with them. 'And so, we anthropomorphize the dirt,' he thought idly. 'We make climate change sound like something that happens at the dinner table.'

Peter Brousseau was a pedologist, which simply meant that he studied soil. He stayed happily cooped up in his lab at the university till all hours, working on models of soil erosion, adjusting vectors in his wind simulations, charting deposition patterns, and plotting decadal land morphologies. He loved his work. But he would nevertheless stand up on occasion, walk over to the window and stare out as if something was missing, as if something didn't fit quite right.

Peter pushed aside the pad of paper upon which he had written and tried to console himself with a printout of sedimentation data on Tertiary soil horizons in the Gobi desert. Then, unexpectedly, the door opened. Peter looked up, adjusted his glasses, and then smiled. "Bob Denforth," he said, getting up from his chair. "What a surprise."

Bob was an old friend and roommate from college. He had gone from being a moderately promising paleoclimatologist in graduate school to being a vocal environmental activist and finally to becoming the CEO of a highly profitable

wind turbine manufacturing company in the San Fernando Valley. Bob's parents were old Connecticut money, and they helped him start up Turbine Technologies, even though Bob didn't know the first thing about wind power. It didn't seem to matter; he was at heart a network man. He hired a staff of geophysical engineers, chemists, and aerodynamic scientists that did all the designing, which left him time to do the selling. Peter hadn't seen him in five years.

Shaking hands, he asked, "What brings you to my coast?" He remarked to himself how fit Bob looked, how tan. His neatly cropped blonde hair was streaked with sun, his white teeth gleaming. He looked like a man you might see climbing a rock face or sailing a boat, keeling over with frothy spray and slow motion. Peter looked down at his feet.

"I don't know," Bob said, walking over to the window. "I guess I'm just partial to New York in February." In the window's reflection, Peter could see him peering outside, grimacing. "Seriously though," he said, turning around so that his nylon jacket made a swishing noise. "I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I'd come up and congratulate you."

"For what?"

"Oh, don't be so modest, Peter. You're quite the talk of the town these days. I read your piece in *GeoJournal* last month linking desertification in Africa to warming trends in the Indian Ocean. Very exciting work. I bet the university is bringing you flowers and chocolate. You know, if it weren't for the fact that the hermit's life never appealed to me, sometimes I wish I'd stayed in the lab, too. Ride a little of that glory train with you."

“You’d be miserable.”

“Probably.”

“Besides,” Peter said, “it looks like the corporate world is treating you alright. Look at you; you’re not even wearing a suit.” Peter wiped his palms surreptitiously on the back of his thighs, and offered Bob a seat next to his desk.

“I’m sort of on vacation,” Bob said.

“Really.”

“Actually, it’s more like unofficial business.” He paused. “I think you might be interested.”

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During the week, Rupert is almost always the first one out of bed. He has to be up and showered, dressed and on his way to work by seven. That means he’s pushing the alarm button and slipping on his slippers at five-thirty, then clicking the coffee maker in the kitchen, then yawning in the shower without ever having to be awake because no one at that hour is needing anything from him. He is alone in his routine. His wife sleeps until after he leaves; he insists on this; it’s the least he can do. There’s no need for her to be awake so early. And he likes the solitude.

He opens the closet and finds his shoes, the brown ones, and sits on the stool by the dresser. The light from the kitchen rakes across the carpet and onto his hands as he fumbles with the laces. He wishes he’d closed the door. He stands up to grab his coat and realizes that Fatou is sitting up in bed.

“I’m sorry, baby. I woke you up,” he says. She is silent and in the dim light cast through the door, he sees that she is looking at him. This is always unsettling, whenever he finds her staring at him with that wordless gaze. In their two years of marriage, he has tried to understand it, tried to console her, not even knowing if consolation is what she’s been asking for. Not knowing how to approach her dimness, the half-lit silence in the space between them. It always makes him feel like a stranger in his own home. Later that morning, on the train, he will read the Post and forget this sinking feeling. He will look at the pictures of the war, the snapshots of crumbling buildings, the dirty children, bleary-eyed and hungry, and he will become distracted with the suffering of the world by forgetting his own.

Rupert Dutemps was the product of a proud African American family of intellectuals, religious leaders and activists. He was raised among men and women who took their role in social justice seriously and who instilled in Rupert a sense of obligation to do the same. Among them, there were no politicians looking for Senate seats, or icons angling for the bullhorn, or even philanthropists trying to ease a guilty bourgeois conscience. Within the Dutemps family, there was no one public to live up to, which meant they could simply go to work in the neighborhoods, in the streets, and in the justice system where, they always said, intelligence was most needed. And so for this reason, Rupert Dutemps was born with a sense of duty in his blood.

He met Fatou in Senegal where he had volunteered to teach English for a year after graduating college. There was a silent expectation that, like all the Dutemps, Rupert would do something good in the world, and naturally his

relatives celebrated the idea of him helping the children of Africa. But what they didn't know—and Rupert didn't tell them—was that behind his veneer of decency he felt like he wasn't a Dutemps at all. He wasn't nearly so generous. He did not want to spend all his time helping those less fortunate. He cared about them, of course he cared, but he hated to think that he owed them his life. Just because he wasn't starving or dying of AIDS or living under a bridge.

His mother used to say, “With ability comes responsibility.” But at night in bed he fantasized selfishly about going someplace his family would be ashamed of, someplace like Florida. Maybe when he graduated, he'd get a job on a shrimp boat, and he would rent a cabana on the beach where he could sit in a hammock and listen to reggae music and maybe develop a marijuana habit and be alive with no strings attached. He knew it sounded absurd, but the idea of it made him smile.

As his departure date approached, he felt the possibility of long afternoons down on the Keys slipping away, and the ceiling of responsibility, of Africa, bearing down on him. His mother sensed his worry, and although she didn't address it directly, because she didn't believe in fears anymore, she instructed him that if he cancelled the trip, he'd be just like all those “other” people who didn't care about anything but their cars and their air conditioning and their flat screen TV's. Going, she said, is what differentiated him.

Reference to Part II, Field Notes, p. 41.

Rupert was assigned to a small hamlet in the middle of nowhere—“not even on the country map,” his father had said at dinner, toasting his departure. Fatou was the eldest daughter of the most influential family in the village. Because Rupert was widely seen as the guest of honor, Fatou's father insisted that he take

a room in their compound. At first, this insistence made Rupert uncomfortable, as if his presence was already too public, too many children staring, too many silences as he walked by. He had assumed that being black would help him blend in; at least he would *look* African. But soon after his arrival, he realized that his visibility in the village was not so much about him as it was about his host family. The ability to accommodate a guest, to share food and resources, was a sign of wealth and status, and Fatou's father was not only obligated to offer shelter to Rupert because of his position in the village, but he was eager to show his eminence by associating with a foreigner from *America*. Still, Rupert could not escape the discomfoting feeling of being a little bit on display.

In the mornings, Rupert would teach in the single-room cinderblock school, with its crumbling paint and lack of air circulation. Luckily, in the middle of the



day when it was hottest, the whole village seemed to shut down. Lunch was followed by two hours of repose; shady spots under acacia or neem trees were covered with plastic mats where people visited and napped together, with

babies breastfeeding and elders dozing. Then, two more hours of teaching, and Rupert was done for the day.

In the evenings, he liked to go out into the village square to watch the young boys play soccer. He would grab a plastic chair from the stack in the parlor and walk out of the family compound into the village, skirting the periphery of the large sandy square where people were gathered. The elder men with their long dashiki robes and embroidered caps were often sitting on plastic mats, and they waved, offering a Muslim greeting, *Asalaa Malekum*, as Rupert passed. The elder women in their long damask robes and colorful head wraps were sitting nearby on their own plastic mats, smiling at him. Young women nestled their babies in swaths of brightly colored fabric.

On one occasion, Fatou was sitting close to her mother, and she smiled hesitantly at Rupert as he approached. “Bonsoir,” he said, smiling back. Then the group of females erupted in conversation, and although Rupert could not understand Wolof yet, their nudges and laughter told him that they were teasing Fatou. He thought she was beautiful with her smooth skin and her long, slender fingers, but he didn’t know how to communicate with her. He quickly learned that, like most of the women in her family, Fatou had not gone to school, but had stayed home to help with the children and cooking, no doubt waiting for the day when she would be married, cooking and having children of her own. As a consequence, she didn’t speak French, which meant that when she brought him his clean, folded laundry, or held the water bowl and soap for him so he could wash his hands after meals, they did not speak except by glances. That evening, Rupert felt a mixture of desire and pity as he walked past her. Fatou looked down, tugging gently on the edge of her pale blue headscarf with her fingers.

The game was already well under way, young boys kicking up dust in front of the small square cinderblock building that served as the town mosque, and from which issued a screeching call to prayer five times a day out of a rusty bullhorn hanging from the southern eave. At one end of the square, an old well served as a goal, on the other end stood a large Kapok tree with a trunk like an old man's wrinkled neck. Some of the players used their bare feet; others wore white plastic sandals—the kind, Rupert remarked, that girls would wear in the States. Families of goats and errant chickens crossed his path, talking to each other and shitting indiscriminately in the dirt. He kept walking until he saw Cheikh Kane sitting with a group of young school kids who waved him over.

“Eh, Rupert. *Nanga def?*” Cheikh asked, holding out his large rough palm. Cheikh worked in the fields, in the *champs*, cultivating eggplant, mangoes, and hibiscus for Rupert's host family.

Rupert shook his hand, searching for the right words. “*Mangi... fi rekk,*” he answered, unsure. Sometimes Cheikh would take the harvest to market in Thies, and other times the first wife, who was Fatou's mother, would barter for oil or rice when the provisions cart came to the village. It came once a month, horse-drawn and loaded with stacks of soap and eggs teetering on the wooden platform.

“*Waaw, waaw,*” Cheikh said, smiling, motioning for Rupert to sit. “Very good.” Despite the temperature, Cheikh was wearing sweatpants, a sweater and a wool cap—attire he always wore unless he was working in the fields, hoisting buckets of water from the well.

“*Laaylaa, kana bi dégg-në Wolof.*” One of the young girls said, and the other kids giggled. Cheikh flicked his hand at the children and sent them on their way.

“What did she say?” Rupert asked. He could see himself in Cheikh’s large white-rimmed sunglasses.

“Oh, she said only that you speak Wolof now. And you see, I can ask how you are, and you can say you’re fine. That’s progress, yes?”

“Yes.” Rupert nodded.

They were silent for a long time, just sitting in their plastic chairs watching the people who walked past or who sat watching them.

Reference Pt II, Field Notes, p. 74.

When he first arrived in the village, Rupert found these prolonged periods of silence and inactivity uncomfortable and difficult to sustain. He marveled at how people could be in the same room, or reclining on the same mat, and not say anything, just be together. In this place, there appeared to be no rush to conclude much of anything, and that meant conversations, too. There was no pressure to talk, no pressure to explain or to prove oneself. There was only this company, this quiet company everywhere. In the US, silence was only ever a brief precursor to noise. That’s because no one took it seriously. In Senegal, it seemed it was the other way around. The talking was a kind of filler, like a kind of glue sticking the continents of quiet together. Here, you didn’t have to *do* anything; you could just sit around the dinner bowl, eating and listening to the others breathe, listening to the squishy sound of wet rice being molded by palms and fingers, listening to the evening bugs wake up, their song percolating up from the darkness.

And so he became accustomed to the silence, so that on that night watching the soccer game, like so many others, he sat with Cheikh Kane on the periphery of the village square, and they watched the boys play without saying much of anything.

Rupert gets up and walks over to the bed where Fatou is still sitting, looking at him. As he sits on the edge of the mattress, he takes her hand and brings it to his lips. Her smell, by now so familiar, is intoxicating in its warmth, and the softness of her hand is like a child's. Suddenly, he is filled with desire, and he thinks about wrapping his arms around her, sinking into her dewy warmth. But he does nothing. Instead, he looks up and smiles gently at her. "Have you been dreaming again?" he asks her in Wolof. For the most part, they speak English together, though sometimes they revert to Wolof, which Rupert picked up during his year in the village. She had helped him learn to speak it. Many afternoons they spent together, laughing over his fumbling mistakes. It was their first language together.

Fatou is silent. Rupert searches in her eyes, "You were up at three in the morning. Did you have bad dreams?"

She shakes her head. "No, I couldn't sleep."

"Why? Are you feeling alright?" he asks urgently, feeling her forehead with his hand. He worries about her, and maybe he worries too much, but he can't help himself.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she says, removing his hand. She lowers her eyes. “You will be late for work. You should go.”

There is something about her this morning. Something that surpasses even those common moments when he finds her staring into some strange distance where he is not welcome. She is more remote, he thinks. He nods slowly and gets up. Before leaving, he leans over and kisses her warm cheek. “*Nob naa la*,” he whispers in her ear.

“I love you, too” she says. This should reassure him, except that she says it in English. They always say it in Wolof, the way they first said it.

Thinking of this, Rupert is feeling uneasy as he turns to leave the room. He is feeling strange as he grabs his briefcase and leaves the apartment. Walking down W. 123rd Street, there is a nagging suspicion, like a child tugging on his jacket, though he can’t say about what. He doesn’t *suspect* anything with Fatou, except that maybe this is a small breach; that maybe a tiny almost imperceptible tear in their fabric had started. Later, on the train, not even the Daily News distracts him enough. The war-torn buildings, the rising body count, the bleary-eyed children hold his attention only for a time. His thoughts return again and again to that moment with his wife in the bedroom.

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Peter laid the magazine down on the tray and turned to the window. From this height he couldn’t tell exactly where he was, but he guessed it was somewhere over the Sahara. He adjusted his glasses and looked down into the vast expanse of sand.

He'd been reading a magazine that he found tucked in the seat pocket in front of him. It was the kind his ex-girlfriend, Laura, would have liked. But all the witty political commentary, the acerbic satire, the incomprehensible short stories, and all those strange little cartoons everywhere did little more than make him feel out of touch, like there was a joke he wasn't getting. He could have used the earphones to listen to the radio, or take part in watching the latest "Rush Hour" movie where Jackie Chan, while scaling walls and performing acrobatics with furniture, tries to speak like a black man from south central LA. But Peter was tired, and so he had grabbed the magazine instead. As he'd flipped through the pages, he remembered the way Laura would chide him for spending too much time in the lab, saying he needed to get out more, "Get involved in the human race," she'd say. She was working as the director of a literacy program in Philadelphia now, dating a man named Beauregard who called himself an artist because he made two hundred pound paperweights out of bottle caps. Peter had tried to focus on the magazine, but it was no use. The only thing of interest he found was a poem that talked about dust and wind, so he tore it out and put it in his pocket. The land outside was pale, almost monochromatic.

It was a late flight, problems departing JFK. At the terminal, Peter noticed a group of men, maybe aged 25 to 40-years-old. The younger ones wore denim jeans and t-shirts with Def Jam or Adidas logos on the front, Yankees baseball caps, shiny gold necklaces. The older ones looked much the same except they had

This is also taken from the lost Field Notes, as an incident that I did witness, but it actually happened at Heathrow, London.

more gold—their watches, rings, and bracelets sparkled in the morning sun. They all seemed to know each other—a new person would walk down the skyway and would be greeted by the others like an old friend. He’d seen men like this before, men who came to drive taxicabs or peddle “authentic” African artifacts that were carved and antiques in Malian villages only a few weeks before. He’d heard about them sleeping in tiny Harlem apartments, all crowded in together. Later, sitting on the tarmac for over an hour waiting to take off, Peter listened to them in the back of the plane speaking a language he didn’t understand. Perhaps they were all heading home.

Leaning his head against the seat and staring out, Peter could see that parts of the desert were surprisingly red. Like veins, capillaries stretched out, riverbeds gone dry or just to a trickle. He thought it was funny how there really were only a

This is a reference to a comment above p. 191 and Part II, Field Notes, p. 41.

few universal shapes: water moved over land the way that blood moved through our bodies the way that branches spread out from a tree the way that roots dug back into the soil looking for water.

When he met Laura, he was working on a project to design a model for calculating standard deviations of cryptobiotic crust disturbances during the monsoon season in Nevada’s Mojave Desert. She was a friend of one his graduate assistants. Young was the first thing he thought when he saw her. Young and forceful. She had pursued him without relent because, she admitted later, she thought his intelligence was sexy. Peter remembered when she had said that. It was right after they first made love. They were both still in her bed, Laura was

smiling and cuddling, and Peter—having forgotten what it was like to have an orgasm inside a woman and not his hand—was staring up at the Indian tapestry on her ceiling, thinking very seriously that he might be having a heart attack. She was saying something about admiring the work he did with the environment, but he wasn't listening. He had an uneasy feeling being there in her bed, wrapped in her velvet patchwork blanket, surrounded by her long brunette hair. It was the same feeling that wouldn't entirely leave him for the next two years.

He looked down and wondered if he would ever get any closer to that earth down there. Would he ever touch down, touch that sand, see those ripples in the dry riverbed up close, as big as mountains? From time to time, they passed over a small village with one road leading in and out, and he tried to imagine the houses, the people, their lives and expressions. 'We cannot know it all,' he thought. 'We cannot see it all, from all distances at once. There is only a sliver that we can make out. We must imagine the rest.'

Reference to Part I, Theory, p. 4 and Part II, Field Notes, p. 40.

She was ten years younger than him, and she was beautiful. Long dark hair, green eyes, pale skin. She worked at a non-profit, Peter forgot the name, something to do with homeless people. She was like a mermaid in bed, all arms and legs floating. Peter thought he might begin to love her, but then there was that nagging suspicion, like waking up in the wrong house. Whenever he looked in the mirror and found that he was still the same skinny, unshaven guy with the bad haircut and unusually large toes, he felt it. Whenever she introduced him to her friends, who all looked at him smiling as if they *knew* something, he felt it. And

he knew it from the beginning, though it wasn't till the end that he admitted it: he was Laura's trophy.

Peter shook his head. He never should have gotten involved with her. People were always so complicated. Down there, that was his element: the red rocky mounds of North Africa were reassuring, the Western Sahara opening like a hand. The desert melted into one seamless color. Sky, horizon, it was all the same. Peaceful in its strange immensity, Peter thought. 'Like something that's alive and watching us.'

Reference to Part II, Field Notes, p. 42.

The last fight they had, contrary to most fights, was actually over something important. Laura had been singing his praises at a dinner party, and later in the car, Peter was seething.

"What did I do that was so wrong?" she asked.

Peter waited for the traffic light to turn green. "You brag too much," he said finally, staring down the dark avenue.

"Well, excuse me if I'm proud of you. Jesus, there are worse things a girlfriend could do."

Peter shook his head. "You really don't get it, do you?"

Laura started laughing. "Get what? I mean, are you seriously mad at me?"

"You told them about the project," he said.

"Yes, I did. And I'll tell you why: Because no matter how obscure you think you are tinkering in your lab with your little particles of dirt, what you do in there actually has an effect on all of us, out here, in the *real* world. And believe it or not, it's incredibly fucking exciting for some of us who care about the planet to

learn that all of Europe is essentially going solar. Do you know how major that is?”

“You see, that’s not exactly how it works. And then you start misinforming people,” he said, tapping the steering wheel, “and you get their hopes up because they don’t understand enough to think critically about what you’re saying. *You* don’t understand enough to think critically about what you’re saying.”

“Why do you feel the need to talk down to me? Just because I’m not as educated as you doesn’t mean I’m stupid, Peter.”

“That’s not what I said.”

He pulled the car into the garage and parked.

Once the engine was off, Laura turned to look at his profile. “Aren’t you excited, though?” she asked.

“That’s not the point.”

“But don’t you care, Peter?”

“Care about what?” He clenched his fists in front of him as if shaking some invisible person by the shoulders.

She stared at him, frowning with disbelief. “About the work you do. About the environment. About saving the planet.”

Peter stared up at the roof of the car and let his dirty badly-cut hair fall on the seatback. It had been two years since he started seeing Laura; a year and a half since she moved in. And in all that time, he’d never been completely honest. He turned his whole body in the seat to face her. “You want the truth, I’ll tell you. I frankly don’t give a shit about what you call ‘saving the planet’. When people

start using that kind of terminology, I just tune them out. Because, to me, it smacks of neocapitalist dogma thinly disguised as environmental responsibility.”

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” she asked.

“It means that the planet doesn’t need saving, Laura; we do. I’m always stunned when people or TV ads portray the Earth as this fragile little ball floating in space, not realizing that they’re infantilizing this huge complex system of life that will outlive every one of us. It’s absurd. And after we make the planet look helpless, we give ourselves a nice little god complex by conjuring this image of the environmental warrior as the new path to sainthood. And then everybody and their mother wants to be “environmentally friendly” because suddenly it’s fashionable, and no one wants to be the dipshit burning tires in his backyard anymore. If you think that buying a “green” toilet scrubber is going to help you sleep better at night, then be my guest. But the way I see it is your delusions of grandeur for “saving the planet” just got turned into a commodity that someone decided to package and put on the grocery shelf, and there you are buying back your own pathological bullshit in a pretty, blue, recyclable container. God, when I think of it, I almost want to laugh. I mean, it’s *crazy*, Laura! “Renewable resources?” Why not? Might sound like good stewardship, but what we’re saying basically is that we want to ensure that this “thing,” which we consume, sticks around so we can keep consuming it. Don’t you see? That’s why lumber companies plant trees, because they want to keep making paper, not because they give a shit about the forest. The whole idea of conservation is legitimate only to the extent that it guarantees consumption.”

He paused, gazing through the windshield. “So you can stop talking me up at dinner parties because I’m not in this for the publicity, or the Holy Grail, or the big right fucking answer, Laura.”

“Then why are you in it?” she asked.

Peter remembered her packing her things. He remembered the way her hair spilled down her back as she turned to leave. And the sound of the door, the last sound before quiet, he remembered that too. He wasn’t sorry.

The plane passed an outcropping of dark rocks whose backs were low but wide, drifting sands on all sides. From this distance they looked to Peter like a family of hippopotami who were walking up from the swamps one day, heading north, when they got stuck in the earth.

Reference to Part II, Field Notes, p. 42, and earlier in Fiction, p. 195.

slowly they had disintegrated, becoming their own particles; pieces of themselves no longer attached, like memories picked up in the wind. Peter could see a mother, father, and a brood of calves, all turned to stone as their feet sunk, facing north against the wind with the sand burying their bellies, swallowing their faces. ‘This is what happens,’ he thought. We are reduced. People, mountains, it was all the same. We all get the sharp angles filed down by time; we become boulders, then pebbles, then grains of sand, each moment sloughing off what is not essential. In the end, we are whatever is left over after the bulk has been worn away. Thinking about Laura, he didn’t even miss her.

He imagined that
swallowed up in

He reached into his pocket and felt for the poem. It was still there. Bob had said no one but the scientists, politicians, and venture capitalists knew what was about to happen. That day in February, Peter had, at one point, taken off his glasses and run his fingers through his unkempt hair. “Is this for real?” he asked.

Bob stood proudly above his colorful map that was laid out on one of the long tables. He smiled. “If Europe can sell the idea for cutting their carbon emissions and staying on target for projected renewable energy usage, then I think it’s a done deal.”

“Forty-five billion Euros is a lot of money.”

“It’s an investment in the future, Peter.”

The air in the lab was still, a police siren sounded below on the street, changing pitch as it turned the corner. “So what do you say?” Bob asked. “You want to come on board?”

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Elhadji turns to find Sagar standing behind him. “Yes, I heard you,” he says, reaching his hand toward her.

She approaches him slowly. “Why are you awake?” she asks.

In the moonlight that streams through the acacia branches, Sagar can see that his face is dappled with pearly spots. There is one above his left eye, another to the side of his mouth. Little patches of light on his crown shiver like soup bubbles in a pot over the fire. She can make out his eyes because they glisten wetly, but that is all. His mouth is still, and yet she knows its shape all the same. She does not wait for him to answer, but kisses his hand. In the dim light, she feels his skin

more acutely, the wrinkles moving over bone, moving under her lips. It is cool and familiar, this skin—a kind of fabric woven from the strongest thread. She wishes she could take comfort in it, but tonight she is weary.

He came to her village of *Rhombole* for the first time when she was fifteen years old. She can still remember peeking behind the doorway and giggling with her sisters over the broad-shouldered young man and his old father standing in the courtyard. They had come to visit Sagar's *grand-père*, a religious man well-known in the district. The young Amadou was very good-looking, with bold eyes and a handsome smile. As the eldest son of a chiefly family in a village far away, he could've asked any number of young girls in *Rhombole* to be his wife, and yet he chose her. She was barely sixteen when they were married.

She bore him seven healthy children—two daughters and five sons—and in return he treated her like a queen, bringing gold jewelry and elaborate wigs with fancy hair clips back from his work in Europe. He was *à l'étranger*, in the *tubaab*'s world, for six months a year, and those times were punctuated both by the soreness of longing for him, and by the uplift of fleeting independence. As the first wife, she was able to make family decisions while he was away, which gave her a sense of autonomy and pride. She managed things, made sure the allowances lasted, made sure her children had enough to eat. She even economized enough to pool money with other women of the village to start a plantation of eucalyptus trees just past the burn pile on the western path. Once fully grown, these trees would be highly valuable. When Elhadji returned from

Europe that year, he greatly approved of her initiative and spent the next



Eucalyptus-4

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uninterrupted month with her, acknowledging his other wives only surreptitiously.

Elhadji never raised his hand against her, as she knew most other husbands did. He was neither temperamental, nor prone to fits of desire; instead, he was contemplative and pious, always weighing his decisions against the teachings of the *Qu'ran*, always conferring with his Marabout when something troubled him. She never thought there would come a time when she would question him, or doubt his judgment. And although tonight the feeling gives her shame, and she tries to push it from her mind, in her heart there is a sadness and a bitterness so

heavy it is like a boulder that she cannot move or leverage aside, that she cannot but lean against in exhaustion.

Beyond in the night, a bird calls out, its cry like a rip in the air. Sagar cannot bear it anymore, and so she begins to weep. With her husband's hand against her lips, her tears fall on his skin, streaming through his wrinkles before hitting the sand below.

Everything is lit by the moon. All the contours of her figure bowing next to her husband as he stands beneath the acacia tree in the middle of the family compound which sits within the circle of the village under the sky that sees everything. "Coura is dead," she whispers. "Coura..." She lifts her head and finds her husband's face, his cheeks glistening with tears.

"Yes," he says. His hands are trembling now. "Our daughter... She is dead." At saying these words, he takes her in his arms and holds her there, close to his chest. With his hands against her back, he can feel her labored breathing, the sadness shaking her. And he knows it's his fault. This pain she has, this heartache, is because of him.

He is thinking of the burial that will have to take place later that day. He is thinking of his daughter, who is dead, who will be laid into that earth that took her. And as he does this, Elhadji feels as if his knees are beginning to buckle, and slowly he is caving under the weight of what he has done. He feels himself sinking into some kind of darkness where images of Coura and then memories of his stern prohibitions that kept her so unhappy all converge upon him. After the incident with the knife when she cut herself and bled out on the tile floor, people

in the village, even in the family, decided she was not right in her mind. Her younger brothers said, “This one, she is crazy,” and their wives avoided Coura as if she were infectious. But Elhadji knew—even though outwardly he agreed with the others and hoped for her sanity—he knew that Coura’s was not a problem of mind. Still he didn’t want to admit it, that he was the cause of it. He was too arrogant; he asked for too much; he thought he knew best. But her death was his punishment.

He had forced her into a life of solitude by forcing her to marry a man whom she did not love and who did love her. This man—though the son of respected family in the village—this man would leave Coura under the pretense of finding work to support her, but he would never return. And though she bore his child and had no income for food or clothes, and had to rely on her parents instead, her father would stubbornly refuse to let her remarry. He insisted that her husband would be returning soon with baskets of money and suitcases full of clothes, which would prove that the marriage was right to impose. Slowly, though, as the years passed and the baby grew, Coura became more and more despondent. Her energy slackened like a dangling rope, and she would increasingly leave her son in Sagar’s care, so that she could go and lie on the cool tile floor in her grandmother’s bedroom and face the wall for hours on end. This was the fate Elhadji had forced upon her. How would God forgive him for such a thing? How could he have saved her? He was not even here when she died.

Sagar was the one who’d found her in the sand. Coura had run out of the house into the wind, half-crazed, yelling and shaking her arms. Sagar called after

her, but the wind was too loud, and Coura did not hear her. Elhadji and the other men were in town for Friday prayers, and so Sagar was alone. She ducked back into her room and gathered a swath of fabric, covering her head and face, so only her worried black eyes shone through the gold veil. She left the room and walked down the steps, past the tree where she now stood with her husband. The wind was strong even in the compound, swirling up small funnels of sand between the cinderblock walls, but out in the open it was fierce. It took her by surprise as she staggered backwards a few steps. Clutching her scarf with her right hand, and holding her left arm out in front of her as if to fend off the raging dust, Sagar lowered her head and walked, trying to keep her balance.

Sagar's eyes stung painfully as she walked. She had already been looking through the village and, after finding nothing, she made her way slowly up the path that lead to the fields. She passed the eucalyptus plantation and the trees bent and swayed, their blade shaped leaves twirling in the air like threshers. In the distance, over the next few troughs in the sand, her daughter lay delirious on the ground, her body overcome by seizures and her eyes rolling back into her head. But Sagar saw none of this because she was protected by the inclines in the earth, shielded by the dust on the wind. She knew nothing of what was happening to Coura's body in that trough in the distance, and so she walked carefully, hoping secretly that she would find nothing.

Coura was already dead. When Sagar saw her on the ground, she rushed forward almost falling among the shifting sands, breathing in mouthfuls of dust. She came swiftly upon her daughter and knelt by her side, trying to see if she'd

been injured someplace. There was no blood, only a little vomit. Coura's eyes were closed and her body was limp. Sagar tried to wake her, but it was no use, Coura just lay there. Suddenly, everything felt very wrong. She pulled her daughter's arms up and lifted her into an embrace, rocking her back and forth.

Cheikh Kane had been working down the path in the fields, trying to cover the crops with a tarp of old rice sacks that he had stitched together last summer. He was hammering a stake in the ground when he heard something. He lifted his head, and heard it again. Someone was calling out in the distance. Cheikh abandoned his stakes, and before he made it out of the field and onto the path, the tarp was sailing high up in the air.

When they got back to the house, Cheikh laid Coura's body on the bed in Sagar's room. He removed the kerchief from his mouth, and looked down at Coura. The faintness of the single 40-watt bulb cast a terrible pall over her face, which was crusted with sand and vomit. He was suddenly overcome with grief, and felt as if he was suffocating.

Tonight in the compound, Sagar kneels beside her husband who has been unable to stand and so has slid down to sit at the base of the acacia tree, limply. She strokes his head and cradles him in her arms, rocking him back and forth slowly, the way that she did with Coura. He whimpers softly into his palms, remembering the look on Sagar's face when he walked into the room, his daughter's body on the bed. Though they weep the same tears for the same child they have lost together, neither Sagar nor Elhadji know how they might be able to face each other in a few hours when daybreak will ask so much of them.

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There is still one day that Rupert can recall like it happened last week. It was a summer afternoon, and Cheikh had suggested that he come to the *champs* after lunch. When Rupert got there, Fatou was gathering up a basket full of onions on her way back to the village. She and Rupert looked at each other, and then looked at Cheikh, who was walking in the rows of eggplant, pretending he didn't see them.

"Asalaa Malekum, Fatou," Rupert said.

"Malekum Salaam," she replied.

"Hey, ho! Rupert!" Cheikh exclaimed. "*Nanga def?* Look we are all here. We should sit in the shade. It's too hot out here in the sun." He waved them over to the mango tree. It took some extra effort to convince Fatou to stay, but eventually she agreed, bringing her basket back into the field.

When Rupert first ducked his head under the branches, he felt as if he was entering a room, a beautiful room, protected from the sun by the low-hanging



Mango-3

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mango boughs. Cheikh reached his large rough palm up to the branches and pulled down some ripe fruit, handing one to Rupert and one to Fatou. "You do like this," Cheikh said to him, as he began to eat the fruit straight from his palm. Rupert lowered his face, and the almost piney scent of the mango skin filled his nostrils. "Go ahead, it's good," Cheikh said, encouraging him. Rupert gently tore the pale skin back with his teeth and sucked at the soft flesh beneath. It was unlike anything he'd ever tasted before. The sticky mango juice ran between his fingers and down his arm. And somehow it made him exceedingly happy. He felt like a child, as he began to giggle at the deliciousness of it, the brute sweetness of such a fruit. Fatou and Cheikh both teased him, smiling with wet lips and holding their mangoes like handfuls of water. "Today, you are little more Senegalese," Cheikh said, grinning. They sat there quietly for a while, enjoying the luxurious shade. Fatou played with a small kitten that had come out from the hibiscus bushes, trying to get him to come onto her lap.

"Ah, Rupert Dutemps," Cheikh said in his untroubled tranquility.

Rupert answered in kind and with the same calm authority. "Cheikh Kane."

"Today you are here in Senegal. You like the village?" Cheikh asked. "Life is good here?"

"Yes. Yes, I like it very much," Rupert said.

"And you like the teaching, the work?"

"Yes, I do. It's different than what I expected."

"Ah," Cheikh replied, staring straight ahead. "And have you decided yet?"

"Decided what?"

“If you’re going to stay.”

“What do you mean, ‘stay’?”

“You should decide soon because the longer you are here, the more people will come to depend on you. You see,” Cheikh nodded at Fatou, who was oblivious of their conversation. “People are already attached. Everyone in Elhadji’s family is very fond of you.” Cheikh paused. “They have taken you into their home, *ça signifie quelque chose très importante*, you must remember that.”

Rupert stared into his palms on his lap. “I committed to the agency to do this, so I imagine I’ll see it through.”

“But you have the luxury of leaving, while we are left behind with your memory,” Cheikh said.

They sat under the mango tree for a long time, sometimes talking, sometimes saying nothing. The sunlight filtered through the dark green leaves as they sat together, Fatou trying to pet Mieu-Mieu, Cheikh playing with the dial on the small transistor radio that played Senegalese pop. Rupert often looked out into the fields, where the rows of hibiscus that were shaded by eucalyptus trees shone the most beautiful green, sunlight dappling across them. The heat of the day bristled just beyond their little circle of shade, bleaching the colors of the pale brush and dry grasses to almost white. Inside their room, Cheikh was making Fatou laugh about something. Out in the distance, Rupert heard workers singing in the neighboring fields. Two black and white goats were tied up next to the well, snacking on whatever debris they could find and baying from time to time like bored children. Birds filled the trees, chirping their strange songs.

Rupert is remembering this moment as he sits outside on his lunch break. The weather is so strange these days. It's February, and here he is sitting on the park bench across from his office building. He is even tempted to take off his blazer. The warm air feels wonderful on his face, reminiscent of something. In his mind, he can go back to that afternoon under the mango tree whenever he feels like it. He remembers it as one of the best moments of his life. But he wonders if that's exactly how it happened.

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Fatou cleans the last coffee mug from the morning and sets it in the drain. Her books are laid out on the kitchen table, along with her notepad and highlighter pens. She opens one of the books and begins to read aloud, albeit haltingly.

"The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind..." she turns the page, "and another..."

After her second miscarriage, she asked Rupert if she could go to school.

"Of course you can," he'd said. "But are you ready? Do you feel up to it?"

"Rupert, I did not come to this country to be trapped in this apartment all day!" she yelled. It was one of the only times she'd ever been cross with him.

Rupert paused, searching her face. "I didn't know you felt trapped," he said.

She walked over to him and took his hand. "Rupert, I am happy to be your wife and to make a nice home for you. But this is all I do. I have no one else to care for, no children, no parents, no uncles or aunts. My brothers and sister, I miss them all so much. Maybe I do not feel trapped today, but I will."

And so he had helped her enroll in some basic classes at the community center. First, she was learning how to read. "... And when he came to the place where the wild things are they roared their terrible roars..." she continues.

The doctors had said that there was little chance she would be able to take a baby "to term." That's what they called it. Fatou learned that it meant there was something wrong with her. Something in her body was broken or in the wrong place. And so she would not be a mother.

"...till Max said, 'BE STILL!' and tamed them with the magic trick..."

After the first time, she went to a local woman who said that there were *jinn* in the US just the same as in Senegal. Just because she came to a new continent did not mean she was safe. One of them must have gotten to her and stolen her child, she said. Fatou did not have the right protection. This woman took her to see a Marabout, who wrote a

For my comments on *gris-gris*, see Part I, Theory p. 7 and Part III, Field Notes, p. 84.

charm and had it bound up in a small leather pouch with a long string attached.

"Wear it always," he'd said. "Except when you 'know' your husband." Fatou did not tell Rupert about the *gris-gris* she wore religiously around her waist, or about the trip to the Marabout, but she felt the sadness of having lost the first child suddenly lift from her shoulders, and she was renewed with hope for a second conception.

"... 'And now,' cried Max, 'let the wild rumpus start!'" Fatou's voice falters.

After the second time, when she lost a lot of blood and had to be hospitalized for several days, Rupert became constantly worried about her. He did not understand when she wanted to be left alone. He did not understand when she was

silent. He seemed to think she was always on the verge of needing medical attention, and it made her anxious because she did not know how to tell him the truth. Secretly, she wondered if she was being punished for having left her family. Or, she wondered if she had done something wrong that had weakened the Marabout's charm.

Then, yesterday the phone rang. And everything changed.

"... And Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all..."

Fatou puts the book down on the table and begins to weep quietly. She feels so lost, she hardly knows which way is up. It is such a foreign place to be, this apartment, this city, so far from home. The window in the kitchen is open, and she can feel the warm breeze blowing across the few potted plants she has on the windowsill. Their leaves tremble inconsequentially and the sun has washed everything out to the same monochromatic gray in the distance.

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The plane circled slowly over Dakar.
pattern over the ocean. Peter could see it

From here to page 230,
what follows is taken
directly from Part II,
Field Notes, pp. 50-53.

A holding
all, the

broad ocean, and a heavy mist hanging over it. He imagined how hot it must be out there, and saw the mist with a kind of dread. Looking at Dakar from above, there were white rooftops, stucco houses, small dusty streets, palm trees and children playing soccer in the streets. Some parts looked completely run down. The closer they got to the airport in their spiraling descent, the more dilapidated

the neighborhoods became, shanties, corrugated shacks, sweltering under the hazy heat, piles of trash everywhere.

Then they were landing, swinging a little from side to side. Peter was glad to be slowing down on the runway. But there was garbage everywhere in the brown grass that stood at all lengths catching plastic bags in its stalks. The margins of the tarmac fractured, breaking up. Directional arrows and paint lines were faded. Signs misshapen, pointing who knows where. Then pulling into the terminal. It was a low-rise building, reading *Aéroport de Léopold Sedar Senghor* above the entryway, palm trees flanking it. There was something decrepit about it; maybe it was the broken steps, or the untended flowerbeds that did little more than collect cigarette butts. This is the capital, Peter thought.

After politely declining the assistance of an old man who stood at the carousel, grinning toothlessly, Peter gathered his bags and walked to the sign that read “Sortie.” Standing for a moment in the well-lit foyer, Peter suddenly had the sense that all of Dakar was out there beyond the sliding glass doors. It was a sea of black faces, and, for the first time in his life, he became extremely aware of his color. It was not something most Americans ever experienced; he felt distinctly as if he was in the wrong place, where he didn’t belong. Dusk was fast-approaching.

He saw his name on a piece of paper, waving slightly. A man was holding it, only paying half attention to the people who exited. He talked with the other men gathered there, presumably all taxis drivers. They were laughing and looking into the doors nonchalantly. Peter wondered what they were saying. He would realize over the next day that his driver, Mamadou Bidane, talked like this with everyone

in Dakar. Whether in the centre ville trying to find a bank that would change Peter's dollars into CFA, or in the *banlieu* at a stoplight, Mamadou had a way of talking to people that earned him respect and amity. But on that first night, Peter didn't know that. He just saw a stranger with his name on a piece of paper, and he only thought one thing: 'I hope he speaks English.'

When the sliding glass doors first opened, Peter was assaulted by the noise, the movement all around him, voices yelling, Mamadou's face waving him over to the side, dust, diesel exhaust, heat, the smell of something burning, more heat, young men running through the "parking lot" chasing cars and throwing things, laughing, sunlight draining from the murky sky, the sun a single unobscured orb perfectly round and dim behind the mist and pollution.

"How are you, Mister Brousseau?" Mamadou asked, grabbing Peter's bags.

"Oh, thank God you speak English," Peter said, following him hurriedly.

From behind, this man looked like a giant, he must have been six-ten, and his stride was enormous. He looked back only rarely to see if Peter was keeping up.

"Of course!" Mamadou said. "I was in England some time working. Now I am back in Senegal. And I speak English for job, you know? That, and taxi." He strode up to his car, and opened the trunk.

"You're a fast walker," Peter said, breathing heavily.

Mamadou smiled broadly, but said nothing.

On the drive to the hotel, Peter noticed that the road was only partly paved, mostly red dirt. The asphalt didn't end so much as it came to a place of indecision, fraying at the margins with the red earth peeking up between the black fissures.

Sidewalks for the most part did not appear to exist, and when they did, they were used as depositories for cars, piles of rocks or soil. Mamadou, who was being spoon fed some kind of yogurt dessert by his *copine* that he had decided to bring along for the ride, was unaffected. He put on the radio and sang along: “One love, one heart. Let’s get together and *feel* alright!” He looked in the rearview mirror and shouted above the music to Peter, “You like reggae?”

“Sure,” Peter said, trying to look enthusiastic.

“Yah, Bob Marley. *C’est cool.*”

In the midst of singing and eating yogurt, Mamadou drove over curbsides and into the median, coming conspicuously close to other cars and pedestrians. Peter

Reference to Part II, Field Notes, p. 53- 54.
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looked out the window and saw a swarm of other taxis all coming from the airport, all of which showed signs of a recent meeting with guardrails or other taxis. Rear windows were smashed in and covered in plastic and duct tape. Concave passenger doors. Missing parking lights. Bumpers askew, held on with string. And then there were the buses: these blue and yellow contraptions with the windows and rear doors missing where young men hung on, swinging their sandaled feet from the edges, and from which descended a passenger from time to time—women with colorful headdresses and gold slippers exiting into the dirt.

The sides of the “highway” were crowded with people, women cooking on small fires with sleeping babies strapped to their backs, horses laboring against wooden carts filled to brimming with indistinct brush. Goats were snacking on piles of trash, fistfuls of paper turning pirouettes in the corner of their mouths.

Young men carried placards with cell phones, phone cards, sunglasses, baseball caps—all of them walking into the fray when the cars came to a standstill. Seeing Peter, they lunged for the window, tapping on the glass.

“EH! EH!” Mamadou started yelling at them with his deep booming voice, then he turned in his seat. “Mister Brousseau, you must be careful not to buy on the street like this. These people will take advantage of you. You need something? You ask me, and I will get it for you, okay?”

Peter nodded and slouched into the back seat. Again, he felt hyper-aware that this was not his natural habitat. He was in a place that he would likely not be able to handle without some kind of guidance or protection. He imagined himself left out on the street, and then in a matter of minutes, without clothes or shoes or money, stripped like a fancy car in the wrong neighborhood.

Later, at the hotel as Mamadou unloaded the trunk, they made plans to meet the next day. But before letting Mamadou go, Peter asked him, “Listen, do you drive outside of Dakar ever?”

“Outside? Yes, sometimes.”

“Well, that’s where I need to go. Maybe you’d be interested in taking me?”

“Ah, you want to see *la brousse*, the *real* Senegal. Yes, I can do this for you. We will talk tomorrow.”

Bob, of course, had arranged everything. Everything from the taxi, to the hotel room, to the contacts in the Earth Sciences department at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, or as local people called it “UCAD.” The next day, while changing his money, Peter learned that Mamadou often drove, translated

for, and acted as general guide to English-speaking scholars affiliated with UCAD. He was a curious young man, and he wanted to know why Peter had come to Senegal.

“To study the soil,” Peter said.

Mamadou looked at him in the rearview mirror. “The soil?” he said, laughing. “Well, it’s everywhere, as you can see.” He shook his head and made a tisking noise. “It’s not like in England, man, you know, where things are clean. Here in Senegal dust is being in every place.” He waved his hand dismissively.

“Did you like it in England?” Peter asked.

“Oh yes. I make very good wages there.”

“What did you do?”

“I was selling things, you know. I wanted to be there for the work, but I didn’t succeed, because, over there, when I was in England, I didn’t have papers, and that’s why I started to sell things, copied CDs, Gucci bags, Rolex watches, travel bags, but you know, these are the things that we make some money with there. But, once in a while, I have problems with the police. They take the luggage and all that. After that I tell myself I need to return to Senegal because I don’t like to continue this work, because it’s hard, you know.”

Reference, Part IV, Interview, p. 173.
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Peter nodded, unable to comprehend what life must be like for this young man. “How long did you live there?” he asked.

“Oh, no. I don’t live there. I just work.”

Peter was confused. “But in order to work there, you must have lived there for at least a little while.”

Mamadou shook his head. “No, no,” he said casually. “I always live in Senegal. But I work in England for three years.” Mamadou looked in the rearview mirror. “You understand what I’m telling you?”

“Not really,” Peter said.

“When you go to another place, but you come back in Senegal, you still live here. We, the Senegalese, that’s what we say, ‘to live someplace.’ Someone who lives abroad, he doesn’t come back any more. But if you go and come back, you don’t live there, you still live in Senegal.”

Reference Part IV, Interview with Pape Samb, p. 171 & 175. Also, see p. 66 in Part II, Field Notes.

“So when you were in England, you only worked there; you didn’t live there. Even though you were physically there for three years.”

“I know people who are working in England ten years, and they come to Senegal for five maybe six months. So Senegal is home because they are always coming back here.”

Peter nodded. “I think I get it now.”

The whole first week, Mamadou would pick Peter up at his hotel in the morning, and take him to the University, and then pick him up in the evening and take him back to the hotel. Each time they rode in Mamadou’s cab together, Peter got to know him just a little better. He knew that his mother and siblings lived in a small village about three hours from the capital and that Mamadou was able to visit them only rarely. He knew that Mamadou had stopped school at sixteen so

Reference Part IV, Interview, p. 169 and 181.

that he could learn what he called his “*métier*,” which meant fixing cars. After becoming *mécanique*, he taught himself to drive because, he said, knowing how to fix the car was only half the story. He had gone to England with a man he met in Dakar, but ended up selling enough merchandise only to cover his plane ticket and living expenses. He grimaced whenever he spoke of the flat on the outskirts of London where he lived with a pack of other immigrant street vendors. He was glad to be driving a cab instead of selling phone cards on the streets like so many of the young men in Dakar today. That was a hard way to live, he said. Walking in the sun all day to make the equivalent of five dollars. He never mentioned a father, and Peter never asked. Mamadou hoped, probably like all Senegalese men his age, to go the US, where, he said, he would drive a taxi in New York City and make enough money to buy his mother a house in Senegal someday. “Something with running water,” he’d said. Mamadou was twenty-four years old. Each day, Peter’s admiration for him grew until by the end of the week, he felt as if this young man was becoming a friend, which started to complicate things.

Peter had a fitful sleep on Friday night because he kept tossing and turning and thinking about an exchange he’d had with Mamadou.

“If you’re ever in New York, you’ve got a place to stay,” Peter had said.

Mamadou’s face lit up. “You serious?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“How much does the plane cost?”

Peter frowned. “I’m not sure. For me to come here it was \$2,500. I know, that sounds very expensive now that I think about it.”

Mamadou’s expression fell, and he said, “I will never be able to save that kind of money.” See Part II, Field Notes, p. 72.

Peter turned in the sheets and cursed himself. You idiot, idiot. What were you thinking, inviting him like that, getting his hopes up? As if it’s the easiest thing in the world to hop on a plane! Maybe for *you*, you First World jackass, but think of Mamadou! Peter was angry at himself, at his status, his profession, his wholly unreasonable, inexplicable place in the world. He thought of the students at his University, many of whom walked around campus worrying about how they looked instead of worrying about where their next meal would come from, not realizing the utter arbitrariness of their condition—that they happened to be born into the right class on the right continent, but it just as easily could’ve been the other way around. He put a pillow over his head, remembering the sound of Mamadou’s voice, like the door of a cage slamming shut. Peter could not imagine being so young and knowing that you will never make it out.

But what was he to do? He remembered the time he asked Mamadou if he was obligated to take care of his mother because he was the eldest son, and Mamadou answered that yes, it was partly that. “But, even if you are not the eldest, you see, the family counts on you, because, you see, right now, my mother, I don’t like how it is for her there in the village. She is all alone there. She works all the time, and has to eat with the children of the others. You see I love her, I love my family, and with love comes responsibility, you know. So even if you

finish school, after that, if you have your diplomas, sometimes you can work. You can have work. But it's difficult. Because there are people who have been in school for a very long time and have all the diplomas, but in order to find work here, it's not easy for them. That's the problem. That's why the immigrants want to go abroad to work there, because here, it's not easy. Most of the men in my village have left to find work elsewhere. There are people who take the "chips" to go to Spain. You know the "chips"? They are kind of little boats, like for fishing."

"Oh yes, I've heard of them," Peter said. "I've read in the papers, it's very dangerous."

Reference to the "chips", Part IV, Interview, p. 179.

"Yes, it's dangerous. We take the "chips" to go to Spain and all that, but it's hard. Many don't make it. Many of the chips don't make it."

Peter hesitated. "Do you ever think of taking one of those boats to Spain?"

"Me? No, no," Mamadou had said, smiling. "I will find better way."

That night Peter wondered what that must be like, having to support your mother and siblings, maybe a wife someday, and then there are kids and friends and a whole community of people that are counting on you. Laura flashed through his mind unbidden and Peter groaned in the pillow, "Leave me alone!" He was not sorry she had left. She had always asked for too much, or maybe he just never had it in him. To give her what she wanted. What, love, sex, loyalty? No, she wanted something more. She wanted him to take on her burdens. To "share her load" as she'd said. God, he hated it when people said shit like that. He called it "tea-bag speak" because it was like the kind of silly messages you get on the tags

of tea bags that were meant to be uplifting, but always pissed Peter off. As if it was even physically possible to “share her load.” What did that mean?

His thoughts became more and more jumbled as exhaustion took over, and he was unable to distinguish if he was even thinking of Laura anymore. Eventually, Peter drifted off into a dark abysmal slumber.

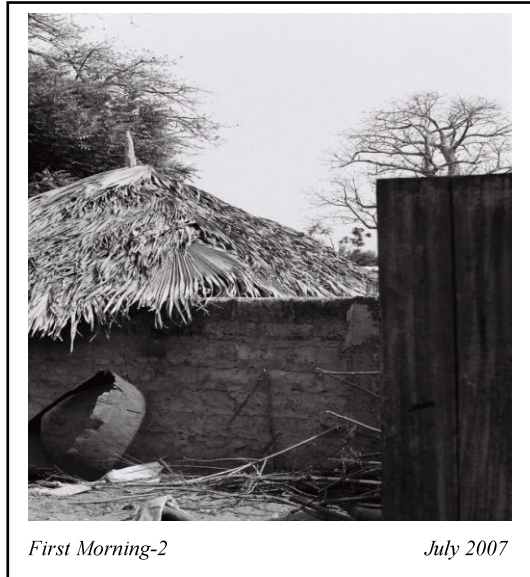
“You *tubaabs* are funny,” Mamadou said. “Everything with you is *très compliqué*. You understand?”

“What’s that word?” Peter asked. They were riding in Mamadou’s cab, heading out to his village. After a week of research at UCAD, Peter was ready to go into the field and set up his instruments. He’d hired Mamadou to be the guide, and the first stop was a visit to his family.

“*Tubaab*? It’s you! You are *tubaab* because you are white.” Even though Mamadou tried to reassure him that there was nothing derogatory meant by this word, Peter didn’t really believe him.

The journey was long, and it was evening by the time they arrived. Mamadou stopped in the village square and they both got out. Some of children gathered looking at Peter suspiciously and whispering to each other. Mamadou saw this and shooed them away with one powerful wave of the hand.

Peter looked around. There was an enormous Kapok tree in the center of the square and cinderblock walls all around the periphery. Behind the walls, he could make out different buildings, some with corrugated metal roofs, and some with



layered on top, like sable colored feathers. Peter bent down and felt the sand with his fingers. It was finely-sorted and light in color unlike the soils in Dakar, which were almost always iron-loaded and reddish. In this part of the world, he expected to find a mixture of entisolic and alfisolic soils, those

lacking horizon zonation and those with clay-enriched subsoils, respectively. But right away, what he held in his palm felt decidedly more alkaline, like many soils found in deserts or semi-arid regions.

“Find what you’re looking for?” Mamadou had come around to Peter’s side of the car.

Peter was staring into his hand. “Not exactly, but that’s okay.”

Mamadou patted Peter on the shoulder. “Come, let’s meet my mother.”

When he had come to the hotel earlier that day, Mamadou wasn’t wearing his regular jeans and t-shirt, but instead, was decked out in slacks and leather shoes and a silky looking button-down. Peter noticed it then, but it was not until arriving in the village that he understood why Mamadou had done this. It became clear very quickly that he was the prodigal cosmopolitan son returning home with not only an American in tow, but an American *scientist*. Everyone treated him deferentially, and he showered his mother with affection, teasing her and making her laugh. Her eyes were both overjoyed and worried as she looked at her son,

playfully petting his fancy clothes and stroking the top of his newly shaven head. Mamadou introduced Peter to her, saying, “This is Zeinab, my mother.” She took Peter’s hand firmly and although he couldn’t understand what she was saying, the expectancy on her face was unmistakable.

Mamadou took Peter on the rounds of greeting all the neighboring families. He introduced him saying, “*Kii suma xarit-u american lä. Mungi tudd Peter.*” And then he would lean over and say, “I tell them you are *mon ami*, my American friend, yes? Good!” Mamadou seemed to be in excellent spirits, but Peter felt distinctly as if he was being shown off, and something about it made him uneasy.

Peter went to bed early, and the next morning, he woke up with the sunrise. He decided not to wear his shoes as he walked out of the compound and into the village. There were abandoned buildings on the outskirts of the square that had been worn out under the sun, and were filled with sand. The patterns of erosion



Empty Building

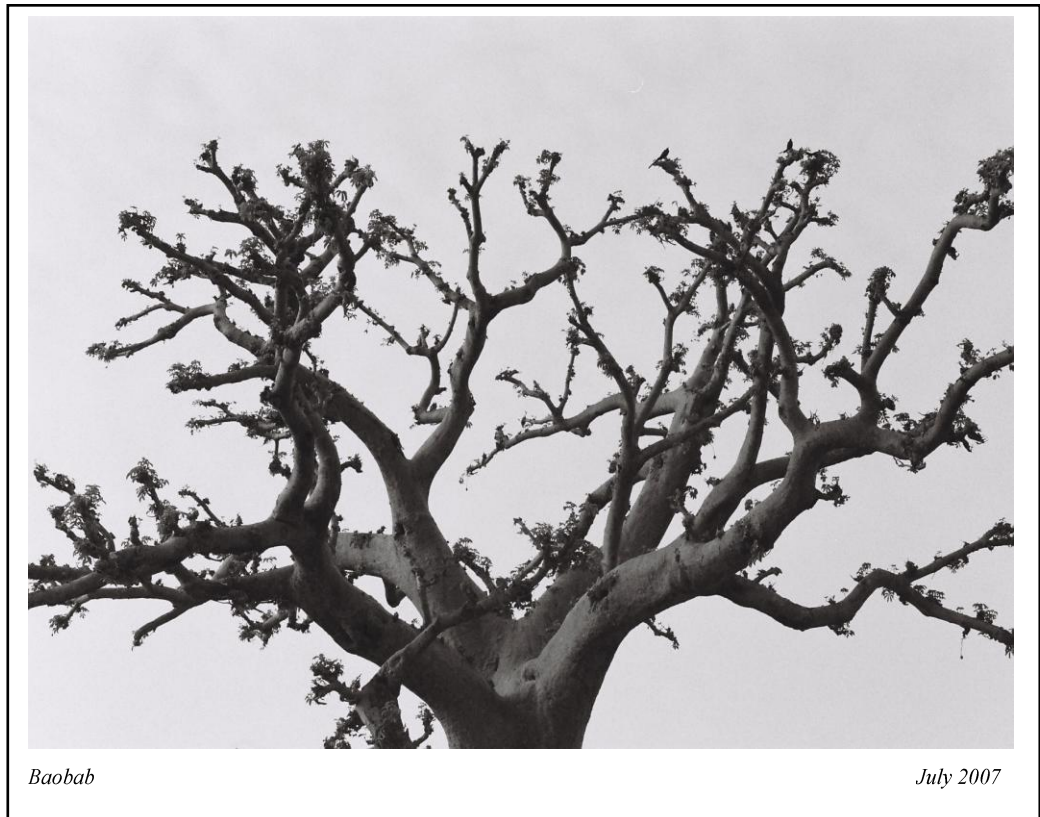
July 2007

and weathering on these human structures made Peter keenly aware of why he was here in the first place. He had not told Mamadou, and he felt strangely as if he was withholding something. But he quickly stifled the thought and headed back to the house.

He spent the day collecting soil samples and installing small

digital sensors on baobab trees for several kilometers around the village. He looked up to the sparse canopy above and then at the massive trunk.

“It really is a beautiful tree,” he said. Mamadou had replied that it was the tree of Africa.



Later that afternoon, they headed back to the village, and Peter complained of a headache. “You are tired?” Mamadou asked. “You should rest now. Go have some sleep and when you wake, my friend comes soon to make us tea.” Peter slept for an hour and when he woke, though it was still unbearably hot, he felt oddly refreshed. He walked out of his room to find Mamadou who was sitting in the shade outside the compound with another man.



Cheikh et Pape

July 2007

“Peter! My friend. Here, come sit with us. We were about to start making the tea,” Mamadou said, pulling a plastic chair over for him. “This is Cheikh Kane, an old friend. He works in the fields for several years. You should ask him about the soil.” Mamadou seemed proud that he had provided Peter with a contact for his very important and mysterious academic work.

Cheikh was not so tall as Mamadou, and his build was stockier. He had smooth brown eyes, and from beneath his wool cap, a sprouting of nappy dreadlocks peeked out. A large space between his two front teeth showed whenever he smiled, which was often.

“Hello. How... are you?” Cheikh said, as they shook hands. His voice was gravelly and his palm was rough.

“Oh, you speak English?” Peter said, surprised.

Mamadou yelled something into the compound in his booming voice, and a young girl came running with a canteen of water. Cheikh set up the paraphernalia for making *attaya*: a small propane tank with a burner fitted to the top, one metal teapot, a matchbox of green tea, a bag of granulated sugar, a clump of dried mint, and two shot glasses sitting on a round metal tray.

Reference, Part I, Theory, p. 13 and p. 22. Also in Part II, Field Notes, p. 110.

Through an elaborate process of brewing, pouring out, pouring back in, sweetening, and brewing some more, the tea was ready nearly an hour after it was started. During that time, Mamadou talked with Cheikh, who laughed heartily or shook his head as if in grave consideration of what Mamadou had just said. He also tried as best he could to answer Peter's questions about the crops he grew and the condition of the soil. He had only recently learned some English, he said, because they had an American teacher in the village not long ago.

"Yes, there is wind here," Cheikh was saying. "Any... No, *every* year. Harmata is name. It's... come soon."

"And what happens to the fields where you work?"

"The *champs*? They are become like sand. I don't know how to say...." He leaned over to Mamadou and said something in Wolof.

"He says that the sand moved across the land from our fathers' graves," Mamadou translated. Cheikh nodded emphatically.

"Graves?" Peter asked.

"Yes. It's like this in Senegal, we say the earth, the sand here, is most important because it holds the dust of our grandfathers' bones. You understand?"

“Okay,” Peter said, skeptically.

“And when the wind comes, it takes it, takes our ancestors, you know. Like this, poof!” and Mamadou blew on a handful of sand. “The wind is coming from far away, outside of Africa, and it hits the ground here and picks up the dust. And then it goes, I don’t know where...” he waved his hand disinterestedly.

Cheikh nudged him and explained more in Wolof. “Okay, so Cheikh says that this is why things do not grow so well anymore. His boss, his *patron*, the Elhadji, says that when his fathers cut down the trees and burned them, God became angry, and so He makes the desert get big, you see, until nothing will grow.” Cheikh nudged him again. “Okay, he says that without the trees, the wind can get into the graves and turn them up. You say this, turn them up?”

“I’m not sure,” Peter said. “What do you mean by graves? Like real cemeteries, where dead people are buried?”

Cheikh shook his head and explained to Mamadou. “He says that there is an old sea that used to have water in the middle of Africa. One day, the water dried up, and all the things living there die, and they become like dust. But they should not be moved, they should stay in their graves, yes?”

“And these ‘living things’ were like your fathers,” Peter said.

“Our ancestors, yes. Do you know what I’m talking about?”

Peter sat back in his chair, rubbing his chin. “Yes, I know it,” he said finally. “In fact, I did my dissertation on it. My dissertation, like a kind of test I had to pass for my college degree.” Mamadou nodded and translated periodically for Cheikh. “I studied something called ‘infusorial earth.’ What that means is that

you're right, a long, long time ago, there was a sea, a very large sea in Africa, surrounded by land." Peter picked up a stick and drew the shape of Africa on the ground. "The sea was here, in present-day Chad, East Africa. When it dried up, millions of years ago, it left a depression in the earth, like a bowl." Peter scooped out some sand. "People call this the Bodélé Depression. Anyway, when the northeastern winds come across the Libyan Desert like this, they are channeled, or funneled here through two mountain ranges called the Tibesti and the Ennedi Mountains. When they get funneled like that, they increase in speed, so that when they come across the Depression here they are strong enough to pick up small pieces of the earth. Now this earth is essentially composed of the fossilized remains of diatoms; or, I should say, when the sea was still there, it was filled with these tiny little creatures called diatoms that live in water. Now these guys have this funny characteristic in that their cells are encased in silica. What that means is that they've essentially got the makings of rock inside them, so that when they die and fall to the bottom of the sea, in a sense they make a kind of rock called *diatomaceous silica*. And when that sea dries up, this rock is exposed to the wind. You follow me?" Both Cheikh and Mamadou nodded. "So, the wind comes through the mountains like this, right? Then hits the Bodélé Depression here, and it picks up pieces of this Infusorial earth, putting an average of 700,000 tons of dust in the air each day. And these pieces are very sharp and abrasive, which is why you probably notice that the Harmattan winds can hurt your lungs?"

For a reminder: inland seas were mentioned earlier on p. 192.

"Yes, sometimes people become very ill," Mamadou said.

“Well the Harmattan is associated with all kinds of airborne diseases: meningitis, tuberculosis, fevers. And it presents many problems not just for you here in Senegal, but for people on the other side of the Atlantic, too. Sometimes the dust clouds go all the way to America. We’ve actually found evidence of African dust in New York City, if you can believe it.”

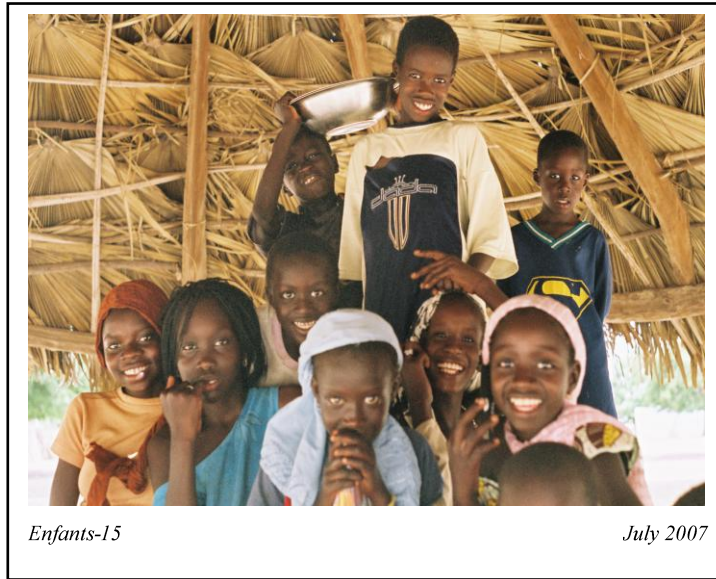
“No!” Mamadou said. He translated quickly for Cheikh, who nodded seriously. “But Cheikh says that the sand, the desert keeps getting bigger, and he is afraid that one day there will be no place for growing food, you see.”

“Yes, I’m afraid of that, too,” Peter replied. “Once arable land turns into a desert, it is almost impossible to turn it back.”

Cheikh sat back and made a tisking sound. “You see, without rain, we have no tree. It is for protection. But without the tree, nothing can stop the wind.”

Over the next two weeks, Mamadou drove Peter all across the region during the day, and they spent the evenings in endless conversation with Cheikh and Zeinab and other people of the village, mostly women and elderly men. Peter noticed that indeed, many of the younger working-age men were nowhere to be found. Their wives and children remained here, living from the allowances that were wired from Spain, Italy, or England, and many of them looked forward to the day their husbands and fathers would return.

When the time came to leave the village, Peter was surprisingly melancholy. He stood next to Mamadou’s cab with his bags packed and the family all



around—the kids who adopted him and peeked through his window when he made his fieldnotes, trying to make him laugh; Zeinab and her mother, Madame Ndoye who both teased him for still being

unmarried; the neighbor Sagar N'Diaye who made the best frozen bissap juice; and Cheikh who looked at him somberly saying, “You will come back?”

“I will try,” he said hopefully.

Zeinab approached him and shook his hands in a criss-cross fashion. Cheikh leaned over and said, “This handshake means you come back one day.” As they drove out of the village, waving their arms out of the window, Peter had this terrible feeling that he would never see any of them again.

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Rupert opens the door and can smell the *ceeb-u-jënn* on the stove. He finds Fatou in the kitchen and embraces her. “I feel like I’m back in the village,” he says.

She kisses him on the cheek and goes to the sink to wash her hands. As she rubs her palms together, she says, “Rupert, I have something to tell you.” She reaches for the towel and turns around. “My sister, Coura. She is dead.” Fatou has

cried so many tears that as she says this now, her voice does not falter, and her emotions are worn like a piece of old cloth. “My mother called yesterday.”

She explains how Coura’s husband had never returned and how their father refused to let her remarry. Coura was despondent and depressed, and then she became ill. Very quickly, her condition got worse. There was nothing they could do. She is quiet for a long time, and Rupert, who has slowly sat down in one of the chairs, says nothing.

“I am afraid,” Fatou says finally. “I feel that I abandoned her, my whole family by coming here. Please do not misunderstand me. I love you. I am happy I married you, but I am also torn. It’s like half of me lives here, and the other half I left behind when I got on that plane. Sometimes when I think of it, when I think of Senegal, I miss it very much and I cry. I could not talk to you because we were starting our “new” home here in America. But I have been confused, so confused, about where I belong. Where *is* home for me, Rupert? Partly, it is here with you, and partly it is in the village. But it can never be both at once, you see?

“I know you said I would meet my new family here, but your parents have been so strange with me....”

“Fatou, I am so sorry about them... “ Rupert interrupted.

“Please let me finish. I know they don’t mean any harm, but they also don’t understand why you married me. They don’t understand me. They look at my headscarf and they make assumptions because I am a Muslim. They look at my lack of education and they make assumptions because I come from poverty. They even look at my skin and make assumptions that I am too black, too African.

What do you call that here, irony, I think? They don't know me at all. They know nothing of my culture, or my religion, or anything. And now we cannot start a family of our own..." Fatou trails off.

Rupert gets up and walks over to her. "Tell me what you need, Fatou. I'm trying so hard to understand what I should do. You go away, I see it in your eyes sometimes. It's like you leave the room, and I cannot reach you. Please tell me."

"Samba," she says.

"What?"

"Samba, I want to bring him here."

"Coura's son?"

"Yes."

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Peter was not happy to be back in the city. The air was clogged with diesel exhaust, and it reminded him that he would be getting on the plane tomorrow. Even though Mamadou had the Senegalese pop station playing, the ride through the Rufisque and then Dakar was somber. Peter saw the alleyways piled high with construction debris, the posters of the President saying "We will build Senegal together," half-peeling off rusted doorways, the exposed highway meridians where women cooked their food in the hot sun, the young boys with bare feet and pitted coffee cans begging for sugar cubes, the unfinished buildings everywhere like cinderblock skeletons, all made Peter feel as if a ceiling was bearing down on him. Everything seemed to be sadness and struggle. He remembered what Zeinab had said to him. As she shook Peter's hands, Cheikh translated. "She asks that

you help her son. He is a good person. And will do good things, but you must help him.” Peter closed his eyes, and laid his head back against the seat as Mamadou drove them onward.



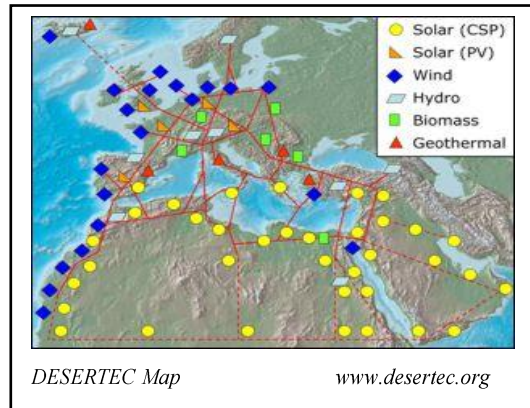
At the hotel, Mamadou helped Peter up to his room with his bags. “Here, let me pay you,” Peter said. As he counted out the bills, Mamadou roamed around, looking at the scattered papers and magazines strewn everywhere.

“You are messy,” Mamadou said.

Peter laughed. “Yes, I suppose I am. Here you go. I put in a little extra just because.” He handed Mamadou the stack of money.

“Thank you,” he said, stuffing the fold into his pocket. “What’s that?” he pointed to a map on the table.

Peter looked down and saw the familiar African coastline, the colorful grid of lines crossing the Sahara and going north. He decided that he would tell



Mamadou everything. All about Bob and DESERTEC, and the plan to build solar and wind farms across the Sahara and all along the North and West coasts of Africa. He showed Mamadou on the map how the energy

would be harnessed and then essentially shipped across a vast network of power lines, some of which would lead to the Middle East, but most would be heading up to Europe as far north as Scandinavia. It was called the Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy Cooperation project. And Peter was doing research for Bob to gather data on wind and sand patterns so that they could design turbines to withstand extreme temperature fluctuations, sandstorms, and shifting topography. Peter had set up an array of digital sensors on the edge of the Sahel to track environmental changes during the Harmattan season. The data would be transmitted remotely by way of satellite over to Peter's lab in the US, where he could analyze the information and make projections to give to Bob.

"This could be really big if Europe and the Middle East can cover the cost," he said. "I don't know how much people talk about global warming in Senegal, but where I come from it's a hot topic. And there are going to be some very smart people that are going to make a lot of money off the industries that cater to renewable energies. My friend Bob is probably one of those people. He wants to put a bid in at the next planning meeting in June, telling them he has designed just the right kind of wind turbine to undergo Sahelian stresses without breaking

down. When you consider that proven oil reserves are drying up and climate change is a serious reality, the time to start thinking about solar and wind energy has certainly passed, but better late than never, right?”

Mamadou frowned with concentration. “You say this is for energy, so that people can have energy without using oil?”

“Well, yes. And it will be cleaner, too. No messy carbon emissions, and no other greenhouse gases either. Which means we could actually forestall permanent global warming if we do this fast enough.”

Mamadou was quiet, staring at the map. “But is this the whole picture?”

“What do you mean?”

“There are no power lines going south, only north,” he said, rubbing his chin.

Peter was silent for a moment, looking at the map with its web of lines stopping just below the Sahel. “Yes, this is the whole picture,” he said. He suddenly felt very thirsty and very tired. He wanted to explain how this would be good for everyone, if global warming stopped then there would be a good chance that the desert where Mamadou’s family struggled, that desert would stop growing and Mamadou’s children could have plenty to eat. He wanted to explain—Laura would’ve said he was trying to *excuse* himself—but he didn’t have the strength.

“Sometimes,” Mamadou said somberly, “I don’t understand things.” Then he put his hand on Peter’s shoulder and tried to smile. “You are the scientist, my friend. If you believe it is good, then I do too.” Mamadou gave him a few taps with his wide palm, then he turned to leave the room. Before shutting the door

behind him, he said, “I will pick you up tomorrow and take you to the airport so you can go home.”

Laura would have loved this. Peter just standing there, saying nothing. “Don’t know how to talk to him like he’s a human being?” he could almost hear her saying. “Serves you right.”

Peter looked out the hotel window and could see the frothy fountain spray in the center of the Place de l’Indépendance. Down on the street, young men stood outside beat-up taxicabs waiting for a fare. Even though it was still early, Peter lay down on the bed and fell asleep in his clothes.

Mamadou stopped the car in the taxi parking next to the terminal and got out. Both he and Peter had been silent on the ride to the airport. Peter hadn’t known what to say. Thanking Mamadou seemed so antiseptic. Saying he would miss him seemed trite. The truth was he was afraid, but he had no idea of what. He only thought he needed to go home.

Mamdou lifted Peter’s bags from the trunk and set them on the ground. Then, he cleared his throat. “Peter I want to ask you a question.”

“Okay.”

“We are friends, yes? You have met my family, you have seen where I was born, your have touched the earth where I will be buried one day. So, I need to ask you for a favor. Please, take me to America with you.”

“What?” Peter said, surprised. “But Mamadou, I can’t.”

“You could buy a ticket here tonight and I could accompany you.”

“But it doesn’t work like that. You have to have papers and how will I pay for such a ticket? I don’t have the kind of money.”

“You have more than me.”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean I have enough.”

Reference, Part II, Field Notes, p. 89.
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“You can send me a ticket later, then.”

“No,” Peter said. “I mean I don’t know, maybe.” Peter looked into Mamadou’s face that had grown hard and determined, almost frighteningly so. “There’s nothing I can do,” Peter said.

“Yes you can. You have to help me. You’re my only chance to get out of here, to help my family. You said I could stay with you. I will get a job, driving taxi like here, and then I will come back to Senegal once in a while to visit my mother. You see, it will work.”

Peter shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

“But why? We are friends. You said you would help me.”

“I never said that.”

“But friends always help each other, right?”

“I don’t know.” Peter reached into his pocket and drew out the rest of his CFA, about fifty dollars worth, and handed it to Mamadou. “Here, this is all I’ve got,” he said. “I’m sorry, but I have to go.” He turned to leave, but Mamadou caught his arm.

“No, you can’t leave me here, Peter. My uncles have planned to have me marry a girl from the village that I don’t love. And she doesn’t love me. If this

happens, I will never be able to do more than struggling all the time. I will have a wife that I cannot support...”

Peter tugged at his arm. “Mamadou, I have to go now.” When he looked into Mamadou’s face he could see that his eyes were filled with tears.

“You can’t leave me here. I will never make it otherwise. Please Peter.”

“NO, dammit! Why do you keep asking me for something I can’t give you? I cannot help you, alright? Now, leave me alone.” Peter turned and walked toward the terminal. When the sliding glass doors shut behind him, it was as if he had never left. Had he turned to look, he would have seen Mamadou standing in the fading Senegalese dusk, with a cool bluish light thrown across him.

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Sagar wrings out the washcloth and flattens it against Coura’s cold belly. Elhadji had procured special rose oils for this, and so the whole room smells like a garden. Coura’s face is washed, her hair is brushed and braided, her fingernails are cleaned, and they dress her fragrant body in a navy blue robe. Her head is wrapped in golden fabric.

No one believed that he was dead, not even his family. His mother, whom Sagar knew very well, refused to admit that there was even the possibility. But Cheikh had gone to Dakar to visit a cousin and he had asked around, and people on his street said that Mamadou had bought passage on one of the pirogues leaving for Spain not long after the American left. Some also heard that the “chip” didn’t make it. But that was long ago. If his body was anywhere it would be so

degraded as to be unrecognizable on a distant shore somewhere. Perhaps only his bones would remain, bleaching in the sun.

When Cheikh came back to the village, he tried to mask his sadness, but Coura sensed something. As he wept softly at night in his bedroom for his friend who was dead now, Coura crept below his open window, where she heard him whispering, “Mamadou, Mamadou.”

Sagar places fragrant boughs of eucalyptus beside Coura’s body. Little Samba walks in and looks at Sagar. In the dim light, she can see that his face is strong and angular, his eyes like black seeds. She waves him over, and he kisses his mother’s hand.

The men outside would be ready by now with the grave already prepared.

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Peter opens the door to find his class in disarray. “Okay everyone, settle down please. Come on, it’s time to learn.” The students groan collectively. “Please turn to page 25 of your text. Would someone like to read aloud for us? Rachelle, how about you?”

“There are three ways a rock can be made. The first way is through something called vul... vul. What’s that word?”

“Vulcanism,” Peter says. “You’re doing great. Continue.”

“That’s when molten lava comes out of the core of the Earth and then cools into ig...ne...ous, igneous rock. The second way is when that first rock gets worn down and little pieces of it break off and then get compacted together to make

sedimentary rock. Then, the last way is when a rock gets put under a lot of heat, or pressure, or both, to make meta...morphic, metamorphic rock.”

“Excellent. You can stop there,” Peter says. “So, when you think about it, rocks are made as a result of heat, or pressure, or heat and pressure together.”

Just then the door opens. Peter turns to find Principal Robbins standing in the doorway with a young boy. “Oh good, this must be our new addition,” Peter says. “We’ve been expecting you.” He holds a hand out, and the boy walks toward him tentatively. He doesn’t know much about him, just that he had come from, where was it, the Caribbean? No, that couldn’t be right. Peter looks at his face and is struck by a mysterious feeling, as if there is something familiar about him. He is lost for a moment in trying to figure out where he has seen him when the Principal clears his throat to get his attention. “Yes, sorry. Where were we? Introductions. Class, this is...what’s your name?”

“Samba,” the boy says quietly.

“This is Samba everyone. Say hello please.”

“Hello please!” The class starts laughing.

“Yes, yes, very funny. You got me. Now can you please say hello to our new classmate, Samba.”

“HELLO SAMBA!”

“Okay, you’ve all proven you got lungs, now let’s get back to it. Samba, just take that empty seat over there.

The rest of the class is relatively uneventful. Peter keeps feeling distracted by the new student, and he resolves to ask him to stay for a bit after class. When the

time comes, Peter is nervous. All the students have left. Samba is sitting in one of the front row seats, and Peter is standing, leaning back against his desk, trying to look conversational.

“Where are you from, Samba?”

“From a public school across town,” he says.

“No, no. I mean, you’re not originally from America, eh?”

“I was born in Senegal, sir. But now I live here with my aunt.”

Peter feels a chill. “Where in Senegal?”

“You wouldn’t know it. It’s a small village.”

“Try me,” Peter says, smiling. He can almost hear Laura telling him to loosen up and be friendly, otherwise he’ll scare the kid off completely.

“It’s called Banhange Samb,” Samba says. His young voice is elastic as it springs off the vowels and then closes down around the last consonant. Just like Mamadou would say it.

Peter steadies himself. He walks over to the desk where Samba is sitting and kneels before him, looking intently into his face. My god there he is, in the eyes, and the cheekbones. He is in the forehead and the fingers, and the long eyelashes.

When Peter came back from Senegal, he abandoned DESERTEC, pissed off Bob, quit his job at the University and went to work in the public schools teaching science. Laura would have said he was trying to repent.

He attempted everything, short of returning to Senegal, to try and find Mamadou. He didn’t know what he would say or do when faced with him, but he knew he had to make it right. Mamadou was his friend; he had been right about

that. Because Peter cared about him, it meant that in some way he had already agreed to take on some of his burden, whether he really wanted to or not. “That’s what happens,” Laura would have said. “Against our better interests, we love.”

No one could tell him anything about Mamadou’s whereabouts. He wrote letters, he tried to contact people in the village, people at the Hotel de L’Indépendance where he’d stayed, people at UCAD. But nothing turned up. He stopped searching after a while, telling himself that Mamadou was a resourceful young man, and probably figured out a way to make some money.

But seeing Samba here in front of him, he suspects the worst. Suddenly, images of Mamadou, his cab, his eyes framed by the rearview mirror as they talked, all of it comes back on him like snapshots falling from the ceiling. The sadness of remembering is almost unbearable.

“Mr. Brousseau, you alright?” Samba asks, looking worried.

Peter sighs and stands up. “Yes, of course. I’m fine. Why don’t you head on home now. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Samba nods and grabs his backpack. Before closing the classroom door behind him, he turns to steal a glance at Peter, who has gone suddenly very pale. The look on Samba’s face is somehow calm, as if he knows what Peter has done. But how could he?

When the door finally shuts and Peter is alone, he sits at his desk and for the first time in many years, he weeps for all that is lost.

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