

# Art Worlds in Situation: Old Methods for a (New) Anthropology of Popular Music and Dance in Migration

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight how recent anthropological studies of musicians' and dancers' activities and networks in migration have attempted to theorize the links between the so-called 'local' and 'global' by both reviving older ethnographic methods and taking inspiration from recent theories and concepts in the anthropology of migration. It draws on the author's research on the migration of Senegalese *sabar* dancers in Europe (mainly France and Switzerland), and on other anthropological studies developed recently about the worlds of music and dance in migration and transnational contexts. After briefly recalling the long history of the intertwining of migration studies and ethnomusicology, it focuses on two main tools that help to grasp the transnational connections and creations that emerge through music and dance and to overcome the simple dichotomy between the local and the global. These methods consist in analyses of 'social worlds' and 'art worlds' on the one hand and of 'social situations' on the other. It is shown how, using these tools, the anthropology of music and dance in migration can find relevant methodologies and epistemologies to overcome the local/global dichotomy and explain how 'art worlds' (Becker 2008 [1982]) are built into the interstices between the two scales.

**Keywords:** migration, anthropology of music/dance, art worlds, social situations

## Introduction

In 2004, Henrietta Moore asserted that, while the existence of links between the notions of 'local' and 'global' was currently indisputable, the problem was rather how the social sciences could theorize and operationalize such links (Moore 2004). With regard to this question, Anne-Christine Trémon later highlighted how the debate about globalization actually 'resurfaced a question long raised by anthropologists,' namely how ethnographic fieldwork can account 'for the insertion of the social unit under study into a set of larger relationships and over a longer period than the here and now' (Trémon 2012). She reminded us that this methodological question divides anthropologists between those who consider there is a structural relationship between

the local and a global 'world system' (a view defended by authors such as Jonathan Friedman [2004] and Marshall Sahlins [1988]), and another view that sees globalization in terms of the flows, scapes, and networks that ethnographers can investigate. According to the latter perspective, the world system is not 'a theoretically constituted holistic frame that gives context to the contemporary study of peoples or local subjects,' but 'a piecemeal way, integral to and embedded in discontinuous, multi-sited objects of study' (Marcus 1995:97).

In various ways the anthropology of music and dance has tackled the possibilities of operationalizing the relationships between the so-called 'local' and 'global' and of overcoming this debate between the advocates of a world system and

discontinuous conceptions of globalization. In 2004, Martin Stokes provided an assessment of the approaches to globalization that ethnomusicologists had developed (Stokes 2004). He also recalled how the viewpoints of the early 1990s were sharply opposed. One viewpoint, seen as Marxist, insisted on the expanding and totalizing reach of global capitalism in the field of music that led to relationships between the West and the rest being exoticized, fetishized, and exploited. The other position, a more 'liberal' perspective, argued that the complexity of current flows could not be explained through a macro-systemic structural model, but should be envisaged instead through nuanced micro-descriptions of how people give shape and meaning to diverse music genres in diverse places. In his analysis of this literature, Stokes noted that much of what had been written since the 1990s mediated between these two positions, that is, between what were respectively top-down and bottom-up perspectives (ibid.).

This paper does not aim to build on Stokes' state of the art analysis by analyzing the ethnomusicological production of the last two decades, nor does it attempt to provide any theoretical input into the complex debates over the structural and discontinuous conceptions of global/local relationships. It aims more humbly at highlighting how recent anthropological studies of 'ordinary'<sup>1</sup> artists' activities and networks

<sup>1</sup> My use of the idea of 'ordinary' artists builds partly on reflections by Howard Becker and his successors on the sociology of 'banality' (Faulkner and Becker 2009; Perrenoud and Bois 2017). It results above all from the observation of several characteristics of my interlocutors' careers: most of the artists I worked with in my fieldwork in France and Switzerland are neither rich nor famous, and they cannot always be described as recognized artists in their cities of settlement, even though they were often famous on the Dakar dance scene. They travel partly in the margins of the institutional and high-culture circuits of France and Switzerland, and they develop most of their activities apart from official stages. Unlike famous figures in African contemporary dance, these dancers are often not recognized among the milieu of African dances, making them seem 'ordinary'. This category does not overlap with or refer to the distinction between 'profession-

al' and 'amateur' artists, as these artists all consider dance as their work and profession, even though they often have to engage in other jobs in Europe in order to boost their incomes. See the third part of this paper for more detail.

in migration have addressed these questions by both reviving older ethnographic methods and taking inspiration from recent theories and concepts in the anthropology of migration. To that end, I will draw on my own research on the migration of Senegalese *sabar* dancers in Europe (mainly in France and French-speaking Switzerland)<sup>2</sup> and on other recent anthropological studies of the worlds of music and dance in migration and transnational contexts.

Following A.-C. Trémon's advice (2012), and inspired by the Manchester School (or the Rhodes Livingstone Institute) and its extended case-study methods, my interest here is in describing how the anthropology of music and dance in migration might help to think beyond the local/global debate by reviving older ethnographic methods in current debates over migration and transnationalism. The anthropology of migration has been extensively transformed in recent decades thanks to the emergence of new theories and epistemological approaches. These

al' and 'amateur' artists, as these artists all consider dance as their work and profession, even though they often have to engage in other jobs in Europe in order to boost their incomes. See the third part of this paper for more detail.

<sup>2</sup> From 2017 to 2020, I conducted ethnographic research in the world of *sabar* in migration in France, Switzerland, Dakar (Senegal) and other European hubs of the *sabar* network. My research was conducted through participant observation at *sabar* dance events and workshops, by recording life stories and migration journeys, through ordinary interpersonal relationships with dance students, teachers and musicians, and through a film I made about one dancer (Aterianus-Owanga 2021). The research led me to conduct 71 semi-structured interviews with dancers and participants in *sabar* and other African dance classes. Even though a majority of my in-depth ethnography was conducted in France and Switzerland, I occasionally use the qualification 'European' in this paper because many migration pathways I observed travel across national boundaries, and because a trans-European network has emerged in recent decades to connect those artists and students of *sabar* from different cities, through festivals, workshops, digital connections, and yearly returns to Senegal. As part of my research, I have also conducted brief trips in several European hubs where *sabar* artists and students meet, for example, in Amsterdam, Paris, and Germany.

include theories of transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999; Basch et al. 1994; Levitt 2001), criticisms of methodological nationalism, critical analyses of the 'diversity' discourse (Vertovec 2012, Salzbrunn 2015), and ideas about diasporic citizenship (Laguerre 2016) and translocality (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). Previous papers and special issues have shown how the analysis of music in migration made it possible to counteract 'methodological nationalism' and to challenge 'the deep-seated disciplinary and conceptual divisions that prevent an analysis of the domains and relationships within which cultural production takes place' (Glick Schiller and Meinhof 2011:33), involving the notions of 'national borders, rural urban divides, and categories of native and migrant' (Glick Schiller and Meinhof 2011: 33).

In this paper, after briefly recalling the long history of the intertwining of migration studies and ethnomusicology, I will focus on two main tools that help to grasp the transnational connections and creations of music and dance and to overcome the simple dichotomy between the local and the global. These methods consist on the one hand of analyses of 'social worlds' and 'art worlds' and on the other of 'social situations.' Rooted in two different traditions in the social sciences, both positions have been defended by anthropologists who were interested in social and cultural change in the context of domination and transformation – in multicultural urban settings in the former case and colonial cities in the latter. These two traditions were then fruitfully appropriated and rethought by social anthropologists interested in globalization and ethnographic methods.

### **The Chicago school and the heritage of migration studies in the anthropology of music**

The 'migration crisis' of the 2010s led to an outburst of interest by ethnomusicologists and sociologists of music in investigating the relationship between music and dance, on the one hand, and migration on the other, resulting in a spate of publications that unintentionally left the impres-

sion that this was a 'new' topic (Glick Schiller and Meinhof 2011; Martiniello 2015). However, as highlighted by several other anthropologists and ethnomusicologists (Baily and Collyer 2006), the interest in migration in ethnomusicology is not new, but had been approached through a number of different aspects, including the idea of diaspora, urban ethnomusicology, and refugee studies (Stokes 2020). This long-term link emerged in the history of the anthropology of migration itself, including the Chicago School of the 1930s, of which several anthropologists are considered to have pioneered migration studies (Cucho 2009; Brettell and Hollifield 2013). In the 1920s and 1930s, the city of Chicago was in the midst of rapid urbanization and urban effervescence. Sociologists at the University of Chicago witnessed the increasing and diversifying migrations to the city and the formation of urban ghettos. These scholars, such as William I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, and Ernest W. Burgess, were interested, among other things, in the relations between the different communities in the city, particularly migrant groups. They studied them through participant observation and by drawing inspiration from other disciplines, such as the anthropology of Franz Boas.

In the wake of the Chicago School, another trend of research developed in the United States around the cultural recreations of African-American populations, following the work of W.E.B. DuBois, and later St Clair Drake, Zora Neale Hurston, and Melville Herskovits, an American anthropologist and former student of Boas at Columbia University in New York in the 1920s. Herskovits would become particularly famous for his research and reflections on the African heritage of Black Americans, contacts between cultures, and processes of 'acculturation.' Whereas other scholars trained in the Chicago School spoke at that time in terms of anomie, the loss of 'traditional' knowledge and cultural destruction because of slavery and segregation, Herskovits paid attention to the traces or 'resistances' of original African cultures in the black diaspora, especially in the field of music.

Although polemical and criticized by some of his peers,<sup>3</sup> Herskovits' work would be highly influential on subsequent developments in anthropology and ethnomusicology. His research helped raise interest in the African origins of musical genres such as blues, jazz, and gospel. Incidentally, Herskovits would become the thesis advisor of one of the pillars of American ethnomusicology: Alan Merriam, who graduated in anthropology at Northwestern University, where he met Herskovits. Under his supervision, Merriam completed a Ph.D. dissertation entitled 'Songs of Afro-Bahian Cults: An Ethnomusicological Analysis' in 1951.

As this brief overview of one of the roots of music and migration studies shows, the interest in the role of music in culture and society also arose among anthropologists who studied the diasporic experience and the transformation of customs and social organizations in migration, especially in the context of America in the mid-twentieth century, in the face of its history of slavery. As Baily and Collyer recalled (2006), this perspective would then be reinforced in the 1970s by the trend towards urban ethnomusicology and by Adelaida Reyes Schramm's work on the interactions between New York's various urban minorities formed through music (Reyes-Schramm 1975).

Obviously, after that period, the transformation of late-capitalism's cultural industries and the emergence of global markets in music and dance shifted scholarly attention towards other domains. They gave birth to a range of reflections related to the commodification and fetishization of alterity (Feld 1995), the synchronized processes of globalization and localization of popular music genres (Langlois 1996; Shipley 2013; Waxer 2013), and the tourism of music and dance (Ebron 2009). The new generation of researchers made huge strides in the understanding of contemporary music markets (Negus 1992; Taylor 1997; Hutnyk 2000), the hegemonic

forces involved in the production, circulation and consumption of music, postcolonial representations of the West and its others through music appropriation (Born and Hesmondalgh 2000), and cosmopolitan and hybrid identities created through music in southern cities (Turino 2000). Yet, for a while, the topic of music and migration was relegated to a quite marginal zone, in comparison with the focus on 'world-music' creations and institutions.

From the 2000s, while the world was being transformed more and more into a collection of camps and refugees (Agier 2002; Agier and Lecaet 2014), and as new academic institutions grew up to tackle the 'migration turn,' anthropologists of music have again started paying attention to these questions.<sup>4</sup> Ethnomusicological projects that developed from the 2010s onwards provided new insights by developing an action-research perspective (Caruso 2019), by questioning the experience of making and listening to music in refugees camps (Kaiser 2006; Puig 2007; Greenberg 2009; Da Lage and Hassan 2020), by studying the political economies of prestige forged by musicians in transnational markets (Trapido 2011), and by considering the complex intricacies between mobility and immobility in African music scenes (Navarro 2019). At the same time, several recent anthropological studies of music and dance have renewed approaches to the study of 'art worlds' and 'social situations' through their analysis of ordinary artists' migrations.

### **Art worlds in migration**

Building on interactionist theories about 'social worlds' and the sociology of work, Howard Becker considered art to be the product of collective action held together by a chain of cooperation between different actors who share common conventions and who belong to the same 'art worlds' (Becker 2008). Even though he defined art worlds as areas of collective activity more than as sites of cultural production, Becker's the-

<sup>3</sup> For a biography of Herskovits, see Gershenhorn 2007.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Bender 2009; Dor 2015; Rastas and Seye 2016; Laborde 2019.

ory drew partly on the concept of ‘social worlds’ put forward by diverse sociologists related to the Chicago School (Hammou 2012).<sup>5</sup> Through a contextual approach that valued ethnography over deterministic theoretical frameworks, Becker highlighted the negotiations between different actors that govern the actions and the conventions that order artistic work, regimes of value, and norms. Whereas Becker’s theory has often been used to support a sociology of musical work — notably in the French-speaking sociology of art (Buscatto 2013; Perrenoud 2014) — here I am interested in a broader anthropological perspective on music and dance worlds, one that questions the intricacies between artistic careers and migration careers,<sup>6</sup> and that envisages art worlds as sites of the reconfigurations of cultural meaning, moral values, aesthetics, and artistic forms. These reconfigurations are achieved through social interactions and cooperation between artists in migration and a variety of other agents they meet and work with.

Gilles Suzanne’s research into Algerian transnational music worlds provides a first interesting example of the relevance of this perspective by avoiding simplified and stereotyped representations of artists’ pathways and creations in migration. By tracing the cultural history of Algerian musicians’ mobilities between French and Algerian cities during the twentieth century, Suzanne observes their moves between different musical genres, networks and art markets. He also notices how, in previous studies, these artists often made use of reductive approaches that were infused either with an ethnicization that understood their music as ‘the expression of

the immigrant,’ or with an ‘ethnologization’ that mainly considered their music as ‘traditional.’ Through a critique of studies based on the theory of social fields, Suzanne proposed a more flexible approach to the study of art worlds, and hence a much more realistic framework of understanding the wide array of forces and influences at play in Algerian networks and creations:

Rather than being merely the reductive intersection between the habitus and the social position of the immigrant who is supposed to spread them, whether or not he or she is an artist or an actor in the worlds of music, artistic productions are generally at the core of a more complex arrangement. They articulate, firstly, a particular artistic field (music or other arts), or even a music genre (raï, rap or Arab-Andalusian) or a singular style (pop raï or robotic raï); secondly, a sector of cultural activities (show broadcasting, production or distribution of records, etc.); thirdly, a migrant population (or a group of migrants); [...] finally, one or more urban places that each serve, according to their characteristics, as a drop-off point and, in relation to one another, as a pivot point. (Suzanne 2009: 22).

Suzanne’s critiques of the interpretation of Algerian musicians’ pathways in terms of social position or ethnic framework are worth thinking about in relation to art and migration more generally. This is because they remind us that artists’ migration pathways and creations cannot be homogenized or defined as the simple product of their social conditions or their ethnicity. Furthermore, he points out that social scientists need highly complex and flexible frameworks to grasp the ambiguous nature of these art worlds and cultural networks in motion, as they are neither deterritorialized, nor bounded and influenced only by the states and cities where artists work. Following Suzanne’s perspective, Algerian musicians’ worlds in migration must not be conceived as a simple ethnic enclave, nor as a reflection of migrants’ social position: ‘formed much more by the impact of social and aesthetic contiguity than the impact of ethnic concentration’, these musical networks articulate a complex set of social and spatial spaces and constitute the foundation of a cosmopolitan ethos of creation (Suzanne 2009: 27).

<sup>5</sup> Karim Hammou provides an analysis of the similarities and distinctions between the notions of social worlds and art worlds (Hammou 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Further to the Chicago sociologists, several sociologists have used the approach in terms of migratory careers to account for the processual aspects of migration (Martiniello and Rea 2011; Debonneville 2015). Even though I cannot expand on this question in this paper, those art worlds in migration provide interesting lenses through which to view the complementarity of migratory careers and artistic careers.



As I will show in the next section, my ethnography of Senegalese dancers' migrations and activities between Europe and Senegal benefits greatly from these recommendations. I hope to complement Suzanne's observations about the transnational making of art worlds in migration by confirming how each art world constitutes a complex and flexible set of entangled networks, actors, and influences.

### **Moving (*sabar*) to Europe**

In Senegal, the word *sabar* refers to a musical instrument, a dance and a moment of performance. Often characterized as a women's dance circle among the Wolof,<sup>7</sup> its fame has grown in recent decades. In particular, it became an emblem of Senegalese nationhood, it infused different sorts of popular music genres emerging in the recording industry, and it stimulated tremendous interest among the youth of Dakar. In the meantime, the 'end of development expectation' (Coumba Diop 2008:19) and the pauperization of daily life in Dakar's suburbs, as well as the growing number of connections with Europeans who are passionate about African dances, increased a trend to engage in travelling dance experiences and to take the opportunity of an 'adventure' abroad.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, since the 1990s, a growing number of *sabar* musicians and dancers have travelled out of Senegal,<sup>9</sup> sometimes settling in European cities, but also in the United States, Japan, Australia or South America. Due to the small number of paid concerts for dancers in the field of 'traditional' and *sabar* dances, these

artists often become dance instructors teaching African dance classes to Europeans, mainly women interested in African dances and cultures. Through their dance classes and activities, they create a new transnational network, which is gathered around the production and promotion of *sabar* and Senegalese dances in Europe, and connected digitally and by the occasional organization of large workshop events.

Diverse motives and means of migration can be observed throughout careers mixing dance and migration. Some dancers settle in Europe after the tours of their dance troupes have ended, others after marrying a European citizen, and yet others thanks to previous collaborations with contemporary dance institutions or associations promoting African dances. Artists who settle clandestinely after the tours of their ballet companies often have to travel between different towns and places as a first step in their migration careers, following the opportunities offered by their social networks to give classes, shows, and festivals. In their journeys they rely on kinship ties, solidarity within their previous dance troupes in Senegal, religious *murid* networks, and friendships and love relationships they have created in this new European context with their students (as expanded below), associations or audiences.

Furthermore, in many cases the decision to stay in Europe is the consequence of previous mobilities and travels, and of their career progressively becoming anchored in transnational spaces. Some took the decision to stay in Europe after already doing several tours and travels because they felt the call to provide an opportunity for their peers back in Senegal to travel in their turn and to experience the social success that travel has represented for them. Others opted to stay in Europe after their very first trip there, influenced by their families and neighbours pushing them to stay in Europe in order to find more rewarding incomes and recognition as dancers. Even for those artists whose first steps in settling in Europe were followed by severe periods of precarity or illegal settlement, the experience of

<sup>7</sup> *Sabar* music and dance characteristics have been described by several ethnomusicologists and anthropologists of dance, such as Tang 2007, Dessertine 2010, Neveu Kringelbach 2013a and Seye 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Whether it is for short-term travel or longer pathways of migration, the experience of having been abroad is generally regarded as a proof of achievement and success in dancers' and musicians' careers.

<sup>9</sup> It would be difficult to provide quantitative or statistical data to support this statement, but most *sabar* artists in Dakar state that an important part of the dance scene has moved through out-migration in the last two decades.

migration was regarded as a merger between a piece of 'destiny' and a chosen step in their artistic career. For example, a *murid* and *baay fall*<sup>10</sup> dancer I interviewed explained that, when he was in Senegal, his main aim was not to settle in Europe but just to undertake short journeys as a proof of his success. However, unexpected events led him to stay and to achieve his 'destiny' in migration in order to give another boost to his artistic and cultural projects:

I have to say that leaving Senegal was part of my destiny. [...] My brother who owned a homestead wanted to make me move out of Senegal, but I said no. My brothers who lived in Italy wanted to make me to go there, and I said 'No, I won't come'. But you know, if someone's destiny is to leave...' (Interview with N., April 2018)

After his visa expired, he stayed in Europe thanks to his relatives and acquaintances among Senegalese artists, and started giving classes with different associations before getting married and regularizing his situation. He now owns an association that organizes cultural activities in the region where he settled, as well as in his hometown in Senegal.

For this interlocutor, as for other dancers I met in the field, mobility is not just considered a migration project, but a life destiny that is tightly entangled with one's artistic destiny and engagement in the country's artistic development. As such, these artists' pathways are far removed from stereotypical representations of migrants as the 'passive' subjects of hegemonic forces (Leclerc-Olive 2018). Observation of their trajectories proves the intricacy of the links between artistic and migratory careers.<sup>11</sup>

Despite variations in the first steps in their migration careers, the ability of *sabar* dancers to

settle for longer periods in France or Switzerland appears to be constrained and limited to a small range of possibilities. Due to the restrictions of immigration policies in many European countries introduced in the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s, with the establishment of the Schengen regulations, long-term residence visas for people coming from outside Europe have mostly been permitted for family reunifications or for the spouses of European citizens alone (Maskens 2013; Neveu-Kringelbach 2013b; Wray, Agoston, and Hutton 2014). For these reasons, even though some dancers might rely on their family networks or solidarities with their Senegalese dance groups when they arrive in Europe, many will settle for longer periods thanks to a marriage or family reunification. As a consequence, encounters with Swiss and French women through teaching activities are not incidental, but become a core underlying component of dancers' migration and artistic careers.

Altair Despres' in-depth analysis of Afro-contemporary dancers' mobilities in Europe has already provided similar input with regard to the important contribution of women who have intimate relationships, friendly or romantic, with artists to the latter's careers (Despres 2011; 2015). Anchored in the sociology of gender, her ethnography of contemporary dancers' careers between West Africa and Europe highlights the peculiarities resulting from the (cultural and economic) domination of women in this art field and the logic of the mobilization of women's capital to support men's careers (Despres 2015). In Afro-contemporary dance worlds, the participation of contemporary African dancers in choreographic activities depends on their capacity to adapt themselves to the institutional and aesthetic rules of European dance institutions. In this context, the assistance of European partners and the 'acculturation' produced through intimate relationships happens to be crucial (Despres 2015).

The *sabar* world observed in my research reveals at first sight a similar engagement of European partners (friends, lovers, spouses...)

<sup>10</sup> The term *baay fall* refers to members of *Baay fallism*, a marginal brotherhood within Senegalese *murid* Sufism, which has become very popular among urban artists and youngsters in the last decades (Pézeril 2008).

<sup>11</sup> I give more detailed examples of these overlapping careers in my forthcoming book (Aterianus-Owanga forthcoming), where I recount several life stories of dancers I met during my fieldwork.

and a similar overlap between ‘art migration’ and ‘marriage migration.’ Yet, unlike the Afro-contemporary dancers’ mobilities described by Altaïr Despres, *sabar* dancers’ careers are not an adaptation to a set of rules and institutionalized laws dictated by Northern institutions. On the contrary, these artists expand their pathways through ‘ordinary’ individual mobilities and informal spheres of performance, rather than through official cultural institutions and networks. Rather than institutionalized systems, these intricate routes of migration and artistic careers expand on what Alain Tarrus fruitfully conceptualized as ‘circulatory territories’ in order to qualify the knowledge and skills that are shared in informal circuits of migration, as well as the collective memories built into mobility in a variety of interconnected spaces (Tarrus 2002; Tarrus 2010).

Dancers’ migration journeys rely on common underground routes which are not often investigated by research focusing primarily on the cultural industries of music and dance, and they are also hardly understandable if we just perceive them as an aspect of ‘Senegalese migration’ in general. Contrary to contemporary artists or musicians, the *sabar* dancers I met in France and Switzerland evolve partly out of official dance and music institutions and markets, and they rely on small associations and interpersonal networks to become involved in dance teachings and performances. Certainly, in some exceptional cases, collaborations with famous singers, dance schools or choreographic centres helps some of them find more institutional support for their performances and broadens their spheres of activity. But this possibility is only accessible to the few dancers who master a broader repertoire of dance genres besides *sabar*, and who can use their skills in Afro-beats, Afro-contemporary dance or their training in recognized contemporary schools in Senegal to develop collaborations out of the niche of *sabar* and African dance classes.<sup>12</sup> This weak access to institutions reflects the

<sup>12</sup> For example, artists who have graduated or experimented with training in the famous ‘Ecole des sables’ often find more opportunities to give courses in

hierarchies of the French and Swiss art markets, which relegate traditional African dance forms to a lower position than Afro-contemporary dance, which is more valued for its ‘creativity’ (Fratagnoli and Lassibille 2019).

Except for those few artists who have trained in contemporary dance, most of the *sabar* artists I met develop an important share of their collaborations in the realm of African dances, with other dancers from Senegal and Western African countries, in the unofficial market built around those practices in their own localities and beyond. Depending on the nature of black and African music and dance markets in the cities where they settle, these artists are pushed to collaborate with different spheres: in French-speaking Switzerland, *sabar* dancers recently supported black struggles by holding joint performances with other West African artists during ‘African cultural days.’ In some cases, these collaborations resulted from connections and engagements with associations acting to boost the visibility of black people in their city, and they witnessed a current social movement in French-speaking Swiss cities that aims at giving more voice and visibility to black and African cultures, as a consequence of Black Lives Matter global mobilizations.

As in the case of their participation in these mobilizations, these artists navigate in both a transnational network of *sabar* activities with their peers from Senegal or *sabar* adepts, and smaller-scale spheres of dance performances during festivals or political mobilizations in support of black and African cultures in their localities. Rather than fixed positions in a set ‘field’ of power, they permanently negotiate their positions through various kinds of moves in different European and Senegalese cities, different aesthetic and dance styles, different types of relationships with their partners, and different types of collaboration and involvement.

dance schools, as their experience in Senegal is more recognized, and their cultural capital is reinforced by the experience of this international dance academy.



As for Algerian musicians in migration, *sabar* dancers' artistic and migratory careers play permanently on an articulation of different configurations. At the intersection of their personal artistic orientations and knowledge, they negotiate the encounters they experience with other actors involved in the promotion of *sabar*, the field of possibilities existing in 'African dance and music' markets in the cities where they settle and, last but not least, the immigration policies that only partly determine their range of possibilities. Considering these networks as a complex multiscalar 'art world' highlights the intricacies of the different types of relationships, networks, markets and forces at stake in these worlds, rather than compartmentalizing the analysis. This broad transnational system of cooperation and interaction connects people with different forms of social and cultural capital in Europe (artists in mobilities, associations, promoters of African dances, students of dance classes, etc.), but gathered around the same interest in *sabar* dance and its promotion in Europe.

In his analysis of the transnational art world of Algerian music, Gilles Suzanne noticed that migrants come to develop urban, social and artistic creations in migration 'as long as they nourish in turn the local social worlds in which they are anchored and their activities are deployed' (Suzanne 2009:29). In the case of my research, the approach in terms of art worlds and collaborations can help to tackle these complex transnational networks of musicians and dancers, and to overcome the local/global divide through a multiscalar analysis of the varied forces involved in different spaces and networks within art worlds.

However, the understanding of how *sabar* dancers make sense of their art forms for their audiences and the spheres of activities in which they settle need to complement the perspective on art worlds with a more micro-ethnographic analysis of the experiences, emotions and interactions that emerge from concrete situations. Indeed, can we understand how art worlds hold

together despite, within and through migration if we do not pay special attention to the community of meanings, aesthetics, and emotions that they create among the participants and with the audience? Can we provide an in-depth comprehension of the dance world if we do not take into account the specific images and emotions that are created among the participants through dance in situation?

The understanding of these 'communities of practice' (Eckert 2006; Wenger 2009) — bringing together *sabar* artists and other actors of this art world who enter into sensitive and emotional transactions with one another — requires, I suggest, recourse to a more grounded and sensorial perspective on music and dance performances that supports the perspective in terms of social situations, as described in the next section.

#### **Grasping *sabar* meanings through the analysis of social situations**

The concept of situation emerged from an anthropological school born in the 1930s-1940s around the study of African cities: the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. Suggested by scholars such as Max Gluckman and James Clyde Mitchell, the idea was to use a micro-local description of situations in order to shed light on a broader system of social relations, hierarchies, and cultural dynamics in a context of intense urban transformation. Through the analysis of a dance ritual (Mitchell 1956) or the opening ceremony of a bridge (Gluckman 1940), the concept of situation has offered a pioneering way to think about the articulations between the different scales, meanings, and social hierarchies that occur in a given time and place, which provided a groundbreaking critique of racial segregation during the colonial era (Schumaker 2001).

Situational analysis has represented a foundation for the elaboration of the extended case-study method and network analysis (Kempny 2005), and its legacy can be traced in several schools of thought, such as symbolic interactionism, migration studies, and the globalization of

culture (Hannerz 1992).<sup>13</sup> The analysis of social situations therefore brings together scholars who share a common criticism of structuralist perspectives, and who tend to pay attention to the ‘imponderabilia of actual life’ (Malinowski 1963 [1922]: 75), and the “‘real stuff’ of the social fabric’ (Garbett 1970:214). However, situational analysis has long been divided between two contradictory views about how to produce abstract knowledge from ethnographic situations. A first perspective conceptualized social space as a field of relationships, institutions, resources, and events that is heuristically bounded and from which events<sup>14</sup> are abstracted to constitute a system for analysis. A second perspective adopted ‘an actor-oriented approach and abstract in terms of ego-centred networks’ (ibid.). With the development of social network analysis, the second view tended to take on more importance. From the 1960s, social scientists have attempted to distance themselves from the structural perspective in order to provide more flexible frames for conceptualizing social situations. As described in my introduction, one of the debates relating to globalization replays this antagonism between the system- and actor-centred views.

The analysis of music-dance performances and their circulation can thoroughly contribute to this reflection on the situated making of meanings in the social and art worlds. In her long-term study

of the reception of hip-hop in French suburbs, Virginie Milliot built an inspiring model of analysis in order to understand the different steps of appropriation of hip-hop aesthetics and culture in France (Milliot and Noûs 2020). In her model, she paid particular attention to two aspects. On the one hand, she analysed the roles of ciphers and dance circles as first steps in the reproduction and recreation of hip-hop meanings in the social circles of French youth. On the other hand, she notes that, before being a set of representations or meanings, hip-hop dance was appropriated as a ‘technique of the body’ (Mauss 1936, cited in Milliot and Noûs 2020: ), that is, as an ‘attitude’ and a style. The observation of the logics of improvisation, performance, and challenge in dance circles allows her to understand how this globalized dance culture has ‘resonated in the French working-class suburbs as a way of being to oneself and of being in the world that is specific to the cultures of the “‘fragile life’” (Milliot and Noûs 2020: ). Before the institutionalization and inclusion of hip-hop in cultural industries, the situated bodily practices and embodiment of hip-hop moves, relations and attitudes accompanied the development of a subculture (Hebdige 1979) allowing resistance to be expressed to dominant values, while remaining ‘vertiginously polysemic and labile’ (Milliot and Noûs 2021).

Although I investigated the circulation of a very different type of music and dance genre, I also noticed the core importance of dance circles as moments in the simultaneous reproduction and recreation of bodily techniques. For instance, *sabar* dance practices are mostly shared and transmitted through concrete face-to-face encounters and performances. The sounds and images of this music-dance genre certainly circulate via digital means, through documentary films or reportage, and more recently through social media and YouTube, which participated in the diffusion of *sabar* activities and moves at least from the end of the 2000s. The Covid pandemic, with its ban on social dance activities and dance schools, further increased the trend for

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Kapferer contributed greatly to renewing the understanding of this epistemological perspective. Noticing how social situations were often used as a simple illustration of the processes being described, he advocated going ‘toward the exploration of the event as a singularity in which critical dimensions can be conceived as opening to new potentialities in the formation of social realities.’ Following this ‘Deleuzian perspective,’ the social is ‘a complex emerging and diversifying multiplicity that is enduringly open and not constrained within some kind of organized, interrelated totality of parts, either as real (existent), imagined, modeled, or projected’ (Kapferer 2010: 214).

<sup>14</sup> The notion of social situations itself is often used interchangeably with the notion of an event by some heirs of the Manchester school and situational analysis, including Bruce Kapferer (Kapferer 2010). On the relevance of event analysis in multicultural contexts, see Amiotte-Suchet and Salzbrunn 2019.

online classes and the digitalization of connections within this network. However, a majority of dancers also rejected the idea of learning or teaching dance online. They were convinced that online events could not replace the sensitive and physical connection occurring through dancers' and musicians' strong kinesthetic interactions, and they did not see this as an efficient way of learning. For *sabar* as for other music-dance genres, performance moments contribute to the permanent making of communities of practice and the transmission of dance meanings and conventions.

Here, as in the case of the hip-hop dance described by Virginie Milliot (Milliot and Noûs 2020), the embodiment of *sabar* body techniques and knowledge is a means of learning and asserting certain 'attitudes,' values, and modes of interaction that are considered properly 'Senegalese' among the participants. However, contrary to hip-hop, *sabar* dance circles are not only moments of socialization among peers — i.e. Senegalese dancers and musicians in the diaspora — as they also represent sites of encounter, teaching and the co-construction of meanings between participants of different origins, often categorized by participants themselves as 'Senegalese' and 'Europeans' (even though artists and students will both establish more national and regional distinctions within this broad category).<sup>15</sup> The analysis of dance situations highlights how the improvisational dance system that is *sabar* is not only reproduced, but also recreated through and for the inclusion of these French and Swiss participants.

In Senegal, *sabar* dances are performed during dance meetings that take place in the streets or courtyards, during the day or at night (Seye 2014, Neveu-Kringelbach 2013a). Already in Dakar, these performances gather together a wide number of participants — amateurs and professionals, men and women, local and foreigners

— and they constitute core events in the making of this art world. These moments of performances have been moved by *sabar* artists and by the Senegalese themselves through their migrations, to be launched as one of the meetings of diasporic associations, or in dance workshops and lessons (Aterianus-Owanga 2018). Dance classes and *sabar* ceremonies, such as *tànnëbéer*,<sup>16</sup> thus become sites of the permanent adjustment of meanings and gestures in order both to respect the core conventions of the dance and to transform them so they make sense to the new audience. I will elaborate further on these aspects in the following section by providing a concrete example.

### Adapting *sabar* meanings in situations

In October 2020, a small village in French-speaking Switzerland hosted a *sabar* dance weekend during the Covid-19 pandemic. The three-day workshop was presented as an 'immersion' into Senegalese culture and *sabar* by means of dance and drum workshops, a night performance and party, and the serving of Senegalese dishes. Whereas *sabar* workshops often occur in Swiss cities downtown, the idea here was to provide an intensive learning experience based on a mixture of Senegalese dances, music and food in a traditional Swiss landscape. The organizers, a Senegalese dancer and his Swiss wife, had the novel idea of playing music and dance as late as they wanted by holding the workshop in a nuclear bunker, of which there are a number in Switzerland.<sup>17</sup> Furnished with a large amount of bedding in common dormitories, a kitchen and a room that could be used as a dance hall (despite the concrete floor), the location allowed the different participants to come together to play music, teach dance, and forget the problem of the sanitary restrictions for three days.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, an online video where solos are presented as a battle between 'Europeans' and 'Africans' (Yaye Dib TV 2020).

<sup>16</sup> The word *tànnëbéer* refers in Wolof to a night ceremony where *sabar* is played and danced, generally in the streets or in a courtyard.

<sup>17</sup> Swiss law requires the provision of a nuclear bunker for each dwelling construction.

The main elements of this immersive *sabar* weekend consisted in the dance workshops that occupied the three days and the evening party, which included a *sabar* ceremony on the model of a *tànnëbéer*. They both proved to be interesting moments to observe the entanglement of meanings at stake during the event and the adaptation of *sabar* rules to new social situations. During one of the daily workshops, the dancer Khadim Thioune, who lives in the south of France, started his class by reminding his students that in Senegal he used to be the choreographer of a famous group. There, he directed many dancers who now live in Europe, including Mbaye Sall, the organizer of this weekend. Through this reference to his status as a respected choreographer in Senegal, he displayed his professional status and wide experience of dance to his European students. He also summoned the memories of the long-term friendship, solidarities, and connections he shared with other Senegalese who were present at the workshop, and who now live in European countries (namely Switzerland, Germany, and France).

Later, he explained his commitment to teaching students how to improvise in dance circles, as Senegalese people do in ‘real’ Senegalese *sabar* parties and *tànnëbéer*, rather than just demonstrating choreographies. Khadim is one of the *sabar* teachers in Europe who have changed their teaching in order to give more importance to improvised dance and solos. Rather than just transmitting choreographies, these *sabar* instructors teach the moves with which to enter into the circle with the right steps and attitudes, to select the appropriate moves according to the rhythm being played, and to develop and end their dance sequences smoothly by having a playful relationship with the musician. This teaching reform is based on two main elements. First, it results from the teachers’ interactions with some of their students who had travelled to Senegal and were willing to engage more closely with the genuine performances observed in Senegalese dance circles. Second, it emerged from the impulse given by teachers who criticized the

‘Western’ conception of teaching that was based on the centrality of choreography (Aterianus-Owanga 2021).

This new impulse was demonstrated during the workshop mentioned above and entangled with the social dynamics of this local dance network. At one point in the class a circle formed, and students tried their improvisatory skills with the musicians. One white Swiss woman, married to a Senegalese dancer who was present, was applauded by the musicians for her successful solo. It was full of play with the musicians and of the dance tricks that the musicians enjoy, as it allows them to play with musical phrases. She and her husband were both acclaimed for her successful solo, proof of the progress in her dance and her ability to use *sabar* as a playful language and self-expression with her Senegalese ‘brothers in law.’ As often during similar events, parts of the workshop and the solos were recorded and shared on Facebook, which helps to promote events and dancers in the broad network of *sabar* that is split between Europe and Senegal.

Later that day, the evening party also encapsulated moments of performance: the party began with a contemporary dance creation by a Senegalese male dancer and a Swiss female dancer, followed by a music session by a Swiss DJ who played popular African songs like Yousou Ndour’s hits, or the popular South African song ‘Jerusalema’. The main event at the party, however, was the *tànnëbéer*, which partly reproduced and respected the structure of a Senegalese *tànnëbéer*. In particular, it had in common the preliminary musical phrases that are supposed to protect the drums and drummers, the succession of rhythms — as in a Dakar ceremony — and the same type of oral speeches from the musicians. In addition, both the Senegalese dancers and their Swiss students wore same glossy and elegant outfits that the Senegalese used to wear during *tànnëbéers*, whether in rich African *bazin* or tailor-made waxed clothing, and they trained to perform solo improvised interactions with the musicians. At one point, a dancer

stood up and explained that it was customary in Senegal to thank the musicians' and griots' families by giving them a money note. To comply with this tradition, he gave fifty euros to his friends; he was then followed by some Swiss and French students, who ended their solos by giving small notes to the musicians.

Despite some similarities, as the students were not all familiar with *sabar* dancing, the ceremony did not last as long as parties in Dakar, and after most of the participants had tried their skills once or twice, the *tànnëbéer* came to an end. The party finished with the usual rhythm '*Lëmbël*', which is accompanied by a sensual hip roll. On this occasion, one of the Senegalese female dancers called the European women onto the dance floor to show them how to roll their hips properly to the rhythm. After the *tànnëbéer* the DJ's performance continued, and some couples consisting of Senegalese artists and their Swiss students started to get closer to each other on the dance floor.

This short description offers some elements to envisage the transmission and arrangement of meanings and relationships at stake during performances of *sabar* in migration. While the music and dance structures or bodily aesthetics partly remain the same, their meaning and the social relationships established in the *tànnëbéer* are different. In this context, *sabar* events are not a means of the construction of Senegalese female identities as in Dakar, nor an expression of Senegalese nationhood as in community events in the diaspora. Instead, they become a site of inclusion for the new members of this art world, leading to a social situation in which different experiences and understandings of the dance overlap. For some of the Swiss and French women involved, learning *sabar* and successfully executing their solos is conceived as proof of an impulse to seek 'self-achievement', of learning about themselves through dance, building their confidence and self-esteem so that they know how to enter into the circle and 'speak' through their dance moves with the musicians. For other students who emphasize their African origins,

the experience of dance might be related to an impulse to return to their 'African roots' and culture. For the Senegalese musicians and dancers involved, these moments are synonymous with a mixture of memories of Senegal encapsulated in the listening and synaesthesia of *sabar*, of fun and pleasure related to dance, of pride in seeing their knowledge of the dance being promoted and enjoyed by foreigners, and of a more pragmatic professional duty of teaching their skills. Thanks to the agreement on common codes of dance and music interactions, *sabar* dance performances ultimately become the mediating cement of a community of practices that is bonded by diverse transactions: economic, kin-aesthetic, emotional, and intimate.

In addition to the tracking of mobilities, collaborations, and interactions that are played out in *sabar* social networks and worlds, in-depth descriptions and observations of social situations provide a precious understanding of the reinvented meaning of these dance practices, a crucial entry into the mechanisms of the transmission of codes, emotions, and relationships that are replayed through performance. As such, an analysis of social situations nuances our understanding of the 'real stuff' that allows this art world to connect.

### **Conclusion: art worlds in the interstices of the local/global debate**

This paper has described how the study of music and dance in migration might contribute to long-lasting epistemological and methodological debates about the ability to address the links between the 'here and now' of fieldwork and the broader networks, scales, institutions, and forces that contribute to shaping the social spaces we investigate. Even though I do not claim to give a clear-cut answer to this complex issue, I have attempted to show how current ethnographies of the 'ordinary' networks of artists in mobility could provide some elements of discussion that overcome the pitfalls of a simple conception of music and dance circulation in terms of the local-global dichotomy.



Having recalled the existence of ancient connections between the social sciences of migration and the anthropology of music, I described how recent research on music and dance tackled the making of art worlds in transnational migratory contexts. Whereas institutionalized music and dance worlds tend to be considered as fields structured by issues of power and domination, the approach that is centred on collaborations, interactions and circulations between different actors, places, networks, and values allows us to consider the complex overlapping of the different values that are articulated in this transnational network as variously organized, depending on their local rooting. Finally, I suggested that, beyond the social space of the art worlds, the understanding of cultural meanings, aesthetics, and knowledge that are shared within these spheres require a conceptualization of art worlds that is complemented with a more grounded approach to the events and 'generic moments' (Kapferer 2010) that make those art worlds 'hold together,' particularly in the case of dance.

In conclusion, I would like to revisit the initial discussion: Do we really need the local/global 'concept-metaphor' (Moore 2004) to understand the social groups, the dynamics of cultures and the power issues that are at stake in art worlds in migration? It is by investigating the realm of ordinary, underground and inter-individual dance worlds that we see how the ideas of the local and the global might eventually remain present as emic notions in the field. Besides, in some cases, the concept of the 'local' might remain relevant in addressing some of the 'phenomenological property of social life' (Appadurai 2018:107). As for the global, this could still be used to describe a certain level of the spreading of cultural forms, paradigms, and ideologies that have been sunk 'globally,' such as neo-capitalist economies and industries. However, most of the time the idea of a world-system looks inefficient, if not inadequate, if we aim at understanding the complex social and cultural makings of social worlds in everyday life, as this creates more vagueness and shortcomings than understanding the dif-

ferent configurations and forces involved. Conversely, the anthropology of migration, and even before that, the pioneer anthropologists of social transformation, devised tools and reflected on mediating the opposition, without shrugging off the issue of power relationships and systemic inequalities. With these tools (art worlds and social situations), the anthropology of music and dance in migration might find the methodologies and epistemologies it needs to overcome the local/global dichotomy and explain how art worlds are built in its interstices.

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