

Elina Seye

Reflections on a Video Series (Re)presenting Local Dance Knowledge

Abstract

This article discusses a collaboratively produced video series aimed at documenting and representing local knowledge of the Senegalese sabar dance tradition. I reflect on the process of recording and editing from the perspective of the decolonization of knowledge, questioning how the audiovisual format and the focus on local dance knowledge might contribute to the goal of broadening and diversifying the scope of academic knowledge. I also consider how this particular way of working might differ (or not) from commonly used methods of knowledge production and publication in ethnomusicology.

Introduction

This article is about a video series that presents the *sabar* dance tradition in Senegal, including past and current practice. The word *sabar* refers to the drums used by Wolof-speaking people in present-day Senegal and the Gambia, the music played with these drums, and the dances accompanied by a *sabar* percussion ensemble. It is also frequently used to refer to any event where social *sabar* dancing takes place. Although playing the *sabar* drums has thus far been the almost-exclusive domain of certain *gëwël* (griot) families¹, anyone can join in the dancing. However, *sabar* events and the social dancing they include are dominated by women (Seye 2014:1-5, 42-49; Neveu Kringelbach 2013:77-95; Tang 2007:1, 10, 126-128). Nevertheless, with the establishment of various dance companies (*ballets*) and the use of *sabar* drums and rhythms in local popular music, the dances have also shifted from the domain of social dancing to that of stage performance (Seye 2016; Tang 2007:157-159; Castaldi 2006:124-127).

The video series thus focuses on *sabar* dance, presenting *sabar* drums and rhythms relatively briefly in one part. It was planned and filmed in collaboration

¹ For a detailed account of the Wolof *gëwël* percussionists, the *sabar* drums and their repertoires, see Tang (2007).

with dancer-choreographer Pape Moussa Sonko, who is widely known as a *sabar* dancer in Senegal. Since early 2021 he has also been the artistic director of *Ballet National "La Linguère"*, Senegal's National Dance Company, which performs staged adaptations of the traditional dances of several ethnic groups living in Senegal. Other contributors to the series in addition to Sonko included the company's percussionists led by Baye Mboup, as well as three female dancers, namely Ramatoulaye Cissé, Nogaye Ndiaye, and Aminta Sarr.

The idea for this video series started to take shape in late 2020. I was in Dakar to do fieldwork for my postdoctoral project focusing on the cultural knowledge of *sabar* dancing as it becomes embodied in different kinds of events and performances. However, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed my plans because all celebrations and gatherings were completely prohibited for several months and I could not document and analyze dance events as I had planned. While reflecting on other ways to approach local dance knowledge I participated in online *sabar* dance classes, including those of Pape Moussa Sonko, which I sometimes attended in person in his living room and stayed afterwards to eat lunch and chat. From time to time, I also went to the National Theatre Daniel Sorano to watch *Ballet National's* rehearsals, which were still going on despite the restrictions. As a result of these circumstances, and after several discussions with Pape Moussa, we started recording materials for an educational video series on the *sabar* dance tradition.

The video series is primarily targeted at foreign students of dance, many of whom lack contextual information about the *sabar* dance movements and choreographies they learn in dance classes.² However, Sonko pointed out that it would also be important to record the information he and members of the *Ballet National* had for young people and future generations in Senegal because knowledge was getting lost due to the rapid changes on the popular *sabar* dance scene and the lack of formal education in traditional dances in Senegal. The series therefore documents the current state of the *sabar* tradition in Senegal as well as local expert knowledge of this tradition.

In the following I reflect on this video project from the perspective of the decolonization of knowledge, which I understand as an umbrella term covering various critiques of Eurocentric academic knowledge and the Eurocentric struc-

² For discussions of *sabar* dance classes for foreigners, see Aterianus-Owanga (2021) and Bizas (2014).

tures of academic institutions (see, e.g., Hayes et al. 2021:888-889; Hall & Tandon 2017). One central theme in discussions about the decolonization of knowledge is the inclusion of different kinds of knowledge in the concept of academic research. For example, Achille Mbembe (2016:36-37) stated that knowledge can be universal only if it is *pluriversal*, and consequently present-day universities should be developed into *pluriversities*, institutions that acknowledge and make use of several knowledge systems for the purposes of academic research (see also Diamond 2022:330-331). Many other authors have presented similar ideas (see, e.g., Shahjahan et al. 2022:83), all advocating the inclusion of various kinds of local and/or Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies in academia (in ethnomusicology, see e.g., Tan & Ostachewski 2022: Introduction; de Carvalho 2021:200-203 et passim; Chávez & Skelchy 2019:137-138; Araújo 2017:71).

When it comes to a tradition such as the *sabar*, therefore, the goal should be to include local dance knowledge and local methods of acquiring it into the domains of academia, a goal towards which the video series in focus here could be a step. In Senegal, traditional music and dance are still transmitted only orally/aurally, and dance is learned mainly through imitation of more experienced dancers and with consideration of the musical feedback from the accompanying percussionists (see Seye 2014:45-46, 48). The video format thus allows a mode of transmission closer to the local context than a written article or book. On the other hand, already defining the primary target audience as foreign dance students must have encouraged consideration of other points of view in addition to the local. One should therefore ask what kind of knowledge is being presented and transmitted in this video series.

Furthermore, in the view of several ethnomusicologists, collaboration with practitioners and, more specifically, the joint production of knowledge are ways of overcoming colonial, racial, and/or social boundaries (e.g., Sardo 2018:225, 231-233; Araújo 2017:70; and several contributions in Tan & Ostachewski 2022). Although collaboration with local experts is not exactly new in ethnomusicology (see, e.g., Seeger 2008 and other articles in Barz & Cooley 2008), this current emphasis on collaborative research practices was certainly one of the motivating factors behind the video series. Working with audiovisual media, rather than text, seemed to offer more of an equal starting point in this collaborative effort to document and publish local knowledge of *sabar* dance.

Background

I have been studying the Senegalese *sabar* tradition, both music and dance, for about 20 years. My doctoral thesis was about the social and choreomusical interactions in *sabar* dance events (Seye 2014), and it was during my fieldwork for my doctoral thesis in 2005-2006 that I met Pape Moussa Sonko, who then became one of my *sabar* dance teachers. At that time, he was one of the few younger male dancers in the *Ballet National*, but he also led a small all-male dance group that appeared on pop music videos and performed at larger *sabar* events.³ At around the same time, world-famous Senegalese pop star Youssou Ndour chose him to perform at his concerts, initially as one of several dancers (see, e.g., Youssou Ndour & le Super Etoile: *Bercy 2005*), but later often as the only dancer touring abroad with Youssou Ndour and his band. Since then, Sonko has achieved more fame than any other currently active Senegalese dancer. He has choreographed and performed on numerous pop music videos in addition to fulfilling his duties as a dancer, choreographer and (more recently) artistic director of the *Ballet National*. At different times he has also been involved with other dance companies and productions, such as the pan-African circus show *Afrika! Afrika!* that has been touring in Europe since 2005 (Stargarage Entertainment 2023).

It is also worth mentioning that most members of Sonko's family are professional dancers and musicians, and many of his siblings live abroad. Both of his parents are former dancers of the *Ballet National*, and his father Bouly Sonko was the artistic director of the company for a long time (see Castaldi 2006:157-162). Although his father's family comes from the Casamance region in Southern Senegal and is of Mandinka ethnicity, Pape Moussa Sonko grew up in Dakar, where Wolof language and culture dominate. Through his family members and the dance companies in which he trained and performed he became familiar with several Senegalese dance traditions, but he is known primarily as a *sabar* dancer and choreographer. Given his multifaceted involvement in the Senegalese dance scene, Pape Moussa Sonko speaks from the position of an acknowledged expert of traditional dance in Senegal.

Sonko told me years ago, when I was still working on my doctoral thesis, that he also wanted to write a book about the *sabar*. When I brought this up in a casual

³ See also Seye (2016) on male *sabar* dancers.

conversation one day in late 2020 he responded along the lines of, "now that you have written your book, you could start writing mine". I was of course interested in what he would include in his book, and in how he would present the *sabar* tradition, but as he implied with his statement, someone else would have to do the writing if "his book" would ever get written. I therefore suggested that we could start recording a series of videos in which he would talk about the things he thought should be included in a book about the *sabar*. My suggestion was based on my feeling that an audiovisual format would fit the topic better, because unlike a written book or an audio recording, video would allow practical demonstrations of the dance. I further observed that, as a professional performer who frequently also appears on talk shows on Senegalese TV, Sonko would be quite comfortable presenting his knowledge in front of a camera. Sonko agreed with my additional observation that many people these days would rather watch videos on YouTube and other social media platforms⁴ than read books if they want to learn about something, thus working on the topic in a video format made sense to both of us. As a researcher, an additional motivation for me was to observe and document how Sonko and the other Senegalese experts to be included would express their knowledge about the *sabar*, and what topics they would choose to present. It therefore occurred to me that working on the video series could also be part of my postdoctoral project.

The planning of the video series started with my asking about the themes that Sonko felt should be addressed in the series, and I also added my own suggestions to the list of possible topics. Given that Sonko is very experienced in teaching *sabar* and other traditional Senegalese dances to foreigners, our discussions about the possible contents relied significantly on our shared knowledge of *sabar* dance activities outside Senegal, as well as on his awareness of my previous research in Senegal. As mentioned, the main target audience for the video series would be foreign dance students, who typically learn *sabar* dances in group classes focused on learning choreographies, whereas contextual information is less often shared. Most importantly, the knowledge and skills required to combine appropriate

⁴ Social media have become a central medium through which aspiring Senegalese dancers present themselves and their skills, and many foreign dance students rely heavily on these short video clips to give them glimpses of "authentic" Senegalese *sabar* dancing, whereas the local understanding is still based primarily on in-person experiences of participating in events featuring social *sabar* dancing.

movement patterns into a dance solo and to communicate with the soloist of the drum ensemble through movement, are rarely taught in dance classes, although according to Senegalese experts they are essential for *sabar* dancing (Aterianus-Owanga 2021:50-52; Seye 2014:70-74).

As far as the younger generations of Senegalese dancers were concerned, Pape Moussa Sonko referred to their knowledge of the *sabar* tradition as limited because *sabar* dancing is no longer an indispensable part of any happy celebration, as it used to be (Seye 2014:38-39; Tang 2007:126-127), and there is very little formal education available in Senegal in traditional dances such as the *sabar*. For the most part, such education is provided within *ballets*, dance companies that adapt traditional dances for stage performance (Seye 2016:41). These numerous local and regional groups train their own dancers, as does the *Ballet National*, but the training typically focuses on learning the choreographies the ensemble performs (Seye 2016:44). It is generally expected that dancers joining a *ballet* will already have good skills in *sabar* and/or other traditional Senegalese dance styles, learned by observation and imitation. Therefore, the training aims at refining these already acquired skills, and possibly expanding the dancers' movement vocabularies and familiarizing them with dance rhythms less commonly played at social dance events.

Senegal also has a lively popular *sabar* dance scene where one "hit dance" follows another at ever shorter intervals (Seye 2016:46-47). These dance trends are fueled by music videos of local pop stars and, more recently, by dance challenges on social media, but these short choreographies are often danced in *sabar* events, too. According to Sonko, many young people are not particularly interested in improving their dancing skills or deepening their knowledge of the *sabar* tradition by joining a ballet or seeking guidance from older experts, but rather hope to become famous by posting flashy dance videos on social media. Therefore, he also saw the video series as an opportunity to document and safeguard the knowledge of the *sabar* he had acquired for present and future generations of Senegalese dancers. As the newly appointed director of the *Ballet National* he probably felt that it was his duty to share his knowledge with others, not only with members of the *Ballet National* but also with anyone interested in learning more about the *sabar* tradition.

Capturing Local Dance Knowledge on Video

When I refer to local dance knowledge here, I mean the knowledge of Senegalese expert practitioners who have grown up and learned the dances in question in the social and cultural environment that is assumed to be the original environment for that dance style. Cultural knowledge might be a better term in the sense that living in a specific geographic location is not necessarily relevant, although in many cases such a place of origin and/or center for the practice of the dance style does exist, and is recognized by dance practitioners (see, e.g., Stepputat & Djebbari 2020:5-9). In the case of the *sabar*, however, I am specifically interested in the cultural knowledge shared by members of the communities in Senegal where it is actively practiced as a social dance, and therefore the term local knowledge makes sense. However, given that the knowledge represented in the video series is primarily that of Pape Moussa Sonko and other professionals, it is likely to be more detailed than the knowledge of an average person who only dances at occasional social events. The professionals are also familiar with the teaching and other *sabar* dance events that take place abroad, and their knowledge of the *sabar* dance tradition is therefore expressed with regard to the assumed (lack of) knowledge among foreign dance students.

My aim when starting to record the video series was to (re)present local dance knowledge in a way that would center the voices of local experts instead of being mediated through the academic language of a (in my case, white European) researcher in the conventional written form of a scholarly article or book. Throughout the years that I have been studying the *sabar* tradition in Senegal and elsewhere, I have repeatedly reflected on how I could represent my understanding of it in ways other than the usual written format of academic publishing. Verbal explanations and two-dimensional visual representations (such as notations and photographs) often fall short when it comes to dealing with an orally – and possibly even more significantly, corporeally – transmitted tradition of music and dance such as the *sabar*. This was a problem especially when I was trying to express my understanding of the choreomusical interactions of social *sabar* events (see Seye 2014 and 2021:70-76). Although I certainly know in practice how the communication between dancers and musicians works in these settings, and can easily demonstrate the most important corporeal and musical codes used in such interactions, I am not at all convinced that I have fully succeeded in transforming this knowledge into a verbal and graphic format in my publications. The same

knowledge could thus be conveyed much more effectively through a combination of verbal explanation and practical demonstration, which in turn could easily be captured in an audiovisual format. As a consequence, I feel that challenging the prioritized position of written publications in academia needs to be among the steps taken towards decolonizing knowledge along the lines of Mbembe's *pluriversity*. Knowledge presented in an audiovisual format is also likely to be much more accessible to non-academic audiences than knowledge in scholarly articles and books that those who are not used to the conventions of academic writing and discipline-specific vocabulary may find difficult to understand.

I am certainly not the only researcher with such reflections on how best to publish their research, and this might explain the growing interest in audiovisual ethnomusicology in recent years. Audiovisual ethnomusicology refers primarily to the making of ethnographic documentary films on music-related topics (see D'Amico 2020 for an overview). However, ethnographic films made by ethnomusicologists tend to be seen as extended examples of their fieldwork materials rather than as audiovisual ethnographies that would be equal to written ethnographies as publications. One possible reason for this is the widespread use of film, and especially video, as a documentation tool in ethnography (Norton 2021:123-125; Baily 1989:3, 17). Another plausible explanation that Barley Norton (2021) points out is that theory and theorization in ethnomusicology are generally presented as having to be done in writing. Although references to (written) theory could be included in audiovisual productions verbally, for example, by using voice-over, Norton (2021:139) calls for a broader view of what theorizing is and how it can be done – which of course fits well the decolonial aim of broadening our Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge.

In any case, I would like to think that one could conceptualize working with video as one possible method of ethnographic research. When it is used in this way, editing would be the key task in analyzing the recorded research materials (Baily 1989:14-15), and not simply a tool for producing visual examples of research results arrived at through other methods. This idea is also expressed in the description of the new *Journal of Audiovisual Ethnomusicology* (JAVEM 2023), which states that the journal "aims to advance the use of multimedia as a method for exploring music and its entanglements", but what is meant here by "method" is unfortunately not elaborated on. It may reflect the fact that method(s) of video editing may vary in different research projects, just as analyses of any fieldwork materials may make use of different (and sometimes multiple) methods

depending on the materials and the aims. Accordingly, the resulting audiovisual productions could take many forms, although most audiovisual ethnomusicologists to date have followed principles and practices formulated to produce ethnographic documentary films (see D'Amico 2020:149-180).

Whereas the methods used by researchers are explicitly discussed in written academic articles and books, documentary films and other audiovisual research publications rarely include detailed information about the research process. Such information may be included in separate written accounts, however: for example, all contributions to the first issue of JAVEM include a written part that in most cases sheds light on how the audiovisual part was produced. I am not suggesting that ethnographic films should include a description of the methodology used to produce them, especially when I have chosen not even to include a narrator in the first (and thus far the only) documentary film that I have made. I am simply pointing out one key element that separates our written academic publications from many, if not most, audiovisual publications in our field. However, as Barley Norton (2021:126) states, this habit of providing a text to explain ethnomusicological films includes the "danger that film is only legitimated through textual sources outside the film itself and is treated as a supplement to text rather than as a medium of research." There is thus an obvious need for further discussion on the methods of audiovisual ethnomusicology. Indeed, I would expect the activities of the ICTMD Study Group for Audiovisual Ethnomusicology (established in 2015, see Norton 2021:122) and dedicated journals such as JAVEM will result in more discussions and publications that extend audiovisual ethnomusicology beyond the established "documentation paradigm" along the lines that Norton suggests in his recent article.

In the cases of both the *sabar* video series discussed here and the documentary film on Senegalese lion dance performances that was my first effort at ethnographic filmmaking, I struggle to explain in detail what constituted the research method or method of analysis, although I nonetheless claim that there was some analysis either during or before the editing. The idea of editing as analysis would be quite fitting for the documentary *In a Lion's Clothes* (Seye & Halsti-Ndiaye 2022) in particular. We had decided that the structure of the film should be based on the structure of the *simb* performances that it depicts, and that there would be no narrator, only excerpts from interviews with the performers. Apart from the overall structure, there was no script, so the film took shape during the editing (which I did alone). The resulting 30-minute documentary film could

thus be compared to an ethnographic description of a *simb* performance that simultaneously introduces the *simb* and the performers – also verbally with the interview excerpts – and conveys the atmosphere of excitement and mystery that surrounds these performances: it thereby constructs "a narrative evocation of interactions and meaning of performance", which Michele Kisiuk (1998:12) gives as her definition of the ethnography of performance that she was writing (cf. Norton 2021:127-130; Baily 1989:5-6).

Unlike in the documentary film, the main goal of the editing in the *sabar* video series was simply to cut out pauses and mistakes or disturbances that happened while filming. The series is thus a relatively straight-forward document of what Pape Moussa Sonko wanted to present, either verbally or through practical demonstrations. In some parts, the order of the things he talked about was changed to make the discussion more logical, or to add a necessary explanation, for example, to a Wolof language term that he had used. Otherwise, the contents of each part focused on one of the themes from the list we had compiled when planning the series, relying largely on Sonko's choices of how to approach the theme at hand. As a result, very few of the materials filmed were left out, and nothing was added to the original materials in the editing process. For example, it would have been possible to add transcriptions or other types of visualization to the video image to further demonstrate the structures of the *sabar* rhythms when they were being played by the percussion ensemble (cf. D'Amico 2020:254-258). In this case, one could say that the process of editing was not particularly analytical, but that the analysis took place during the stages of planning and filming. In fact, to a certain extent the analysis started even earlier, because the ways of structuring, verbalizing, and demonstrating local dance knowledge for the series relied on Sonko's individual expertise and experiences of teaching *sabar* dance to others, both locals and foreigners, as well as all our previous exchanges during the dance classes I had taken with Sonko over the years.

The Contents of the Video Series

The video series, for the most part, features Pape Moussa Sonko speaking on various themes relating to *sabar* dance, and some parts include practical demonstrations of the dancing and of the different rhythms played at social events. As such, the episodes could best be described as short lectures and lecture-

demonstrations. They are not dance lessons, or short documentaries, but rather give a broader view of the *sabar* tradition in Senegal, as well as detailed information about the rhythmic structures and codes of improvised social dancing. Most of this is knowledge that people in Senegal will learn by observation if they live in a Wolof cultural environment and attend *sabar* events, but foreign dance students generally do not acquire it in dance classes and workshops unless the teacher makes a conscious effort to include it in their teaching.



Figure 1: Pape Moussa Sonko demonstrates sabar dance movements, accompanied by Ballet National's percussionists. Dakar, 31 May 2021. Photograph by Elina Seye.

I divided the materials filmed for the video series into five thematic episodes of 15-30 minutes. In addition, there is a sixth episode in which Pape Moussa Sonko introduces himself and talks about his career as a dancer and a choreographer. The first episode introduces the *sabar* tradition and the various occasions on which it

is practiced, the second covers the structure of a *sabar* dance event, and the third demonstrates the basic structures of the dance solos and their relationship to dance rhythms. The second and third episodes include practical music and dance demonstrations by members of the *Ballet National*. The percussion ensemble's leader Baye Mboup explains the structure of the *sabar* dance event, and together with the whole group he plays the rhythms that are normally included. Mboup and Sonko together explain the relationship between dance and music, and Sonko demonstrates the dance movements to the accompaniment of the percussionists. The fourth and fifth episodes discuss the evolution of *sabar* dancing from two slightly different perspectives. The focus in the fourth is on the concrete changes in the style of *sabar* dancing, and it also includes dance demonstrations by members of the *Ballet National*. The discussion in episode five concerns the manifold processes of change that are happening in the field of dance in Senegal, and in particular the changes that have occurred since *sabar* dances started to appear in the concerts and music videos of Senegalese pop stars.

The language spoken in the videos is French, which was chosen to make the contents directly accessible to all Francophone audiences, including most Senegalese people, and only English subtitles would have to be added to reach a very broad audience worldwide. From the perspective of decolonization, it would have been more logical had Wolof been the primary language, but this would have caused more challenges in translation because my Wolof skills are limited, whereas Sonko's French is fluent. French is also the language that he normally uses when teaching foreign dance students, at whom the series is primarily targeted.

Whose knowledge is this?

Although, in my view, the video series nicely captures many central aspects of *sabar* dancing, I am hesitant to claim that it is simply a presentation of local dance knowledge captured on video, even if it certainly relies on the knowledge of local experts, and they are the ones who are seen and heard in the episodes. Someone watching the series might feel that I have simply captured on video what Pape Moussa Sonko and members of the *Ballet National* wanted to present: I am not seen at any point and the questions I posed while filming were edited out whenever possible, so even my voice is all but absent from the final edit.

However, not only was I taking care of most of the practicalities associated with making the video series, especially doing the filming, I also had a directorial role. There was no script to follow in the filming, thus the process was relatively similar to the conducting of semi-structured interviews for other research purposes. Sonko would start to talk about the theme we had agreed to deal with that day, and I would ask a question from time to time, usually to prompt him to speak about an aspect of the chosen theme that he had not discussed thus far. Quite often I also suggested that he should explain or clarify certain concepts that he had mentioned, and sometimes I pointed out something that I noticed had been difficult for foreign dance students, asking him to explain it. In fact, Sonko had expressed the wish that I would ask questions while filming, thus it seems that he was also trusting me to tease out his knowledge and remind him of questions that were relevant to foreign dance students. The filming sessions that included members of the *Ballet National* proceeded in a similar way, except that apart from Baye Mboup, the leader of the percussion ensemble, they did not talk but simply demonstrated the rhythms or dances according to Sonko's instructions.

My knowledge of and views on the *sabar* tradition and its transmission in and out of Senegal thus influenced the contents of the series in many ways. Furthermore, I did all the editing. I also sent the edited videos to Sonko for him to check before I added English subtitles, but he requested no changes to any of them. My understanding of the *sabar* tradition is, of course, based on everything that I have learned over the years through my interactions with Senegalese experts and other people invested in this tradition. Nevertheless, as someone who learned to dance and play the *sabar* as an adult largely through formal dance and drumming lessons, I cannot claim to possess the same kind of local dance knowledge that is instilled in many Senegalese people as a result of having grown up in an environment where *sabar* dances are actively practiced. Although observation and imitation has been part of my learning process, too, as a European researcher I have, of course, been guided by Eurocentric academic norms of presenting and structuring knowledge in my research on the *sabar* tradition.

For all these reasons, I cannot claim that the series simply documents local dance knowledge of the *sabar*, despite my goal to produce something other than the habitual academic article or book and to center the voices of local dance experts. In any case, the primary target audience was foreign dance students, which already set the tone for the series; a similar educational video series intended for local dance enthusiasts might be quite different. On the other hand, I

believe most Senegalese dance experts with as much teaching experience as Sonko would have included more or less the same themes, although there might have been differences in emphasis and in ways of explaining certain central elements. For example, some might have used verbal mnemonics (see Tang 2007:100-103) or counted beats when explaining and demonstrating the roles of the different drums in the ensemble and how the dance relates to their rhythm patterns; Sonko simply instructed the percussionists to play their patterns individually for the sake of demonstration, and used physical gestures such as thumbs up or down to indicate the beat and the offbeat.

A major factor in the process of making the video series was that I had known Pape Moussa Sonko for more than ten years. I had taken numerous dance classes with him during this time, both in Senegal and in Europe, and I had also interviewed him for my research a few times previously. Additionally, we have many common friends and acquaintances in the international circles of *sabar* professionals and enthusiasts. As a result, we both knew quite a lot about each other's skills, knowledge, and viewpoints on the *sabar*, and there seems to have been a mutual understanding of what we could expect from each other. This made our collaboration very uncomplicated compared to many of my previous fieldwork collaborations. None of the knowledge that Sonko shares in the video series was really new to me, although I might not have heard him explain all of it in the same way previously.

In all probability, the information included in the video series is already available in academic writings on the *sabar*, but the mode of presenting it is very different, and more effective in my opinion, when it comes to conveying an understanding of *sabar* dancing and the phenomena to which it relates in Wolof culture. Of course, there are no references to previous research in the videos (although a list of literature and other available sources will be shared as an appendix to the video series), nor are any theoretical viewpoints explained or research methods discussed, all of which would be essential in a written academic publication. Furthermore, academic writing generally tends to center the views of the researcher whether the author writes explicitly in the first person or not, or makes efforts to center the voices of research collaborators, whereas in the video series my contribution to its contents is much less apparent to the viewer.

Nevertheless, on the whole the process of making the video series was not very different from my previous fieldwork and writing. The only major difference I can think of is that very few of the filmed materials were excluded from the final video

series, which would be quite unusual in a doctoral dissertation, for example. It was also very different from the above-mentioned documentary film *In a Lion's Clothes*, in which only a fraction of the materials we had filmed at various performances ended up being included. This was due in part to the format, a series of videos rather than one documentary film, but I am convinced that the relatively long history of experiences in the *sabar* dance field Sonko and I shared was equally significant: after some planning, we had an understanding of what would be the most important themes to include, although we never discussed the contents in detail beforehand.

It was clear to me from early on that Pape Moussa Sonko and I would share the authorship of the video series. Interestingly, it seems to be the practice in audiovisual ethnomusicology that the director of a documentary film, usually the researcher, is generally considered the primary and often sole author, while other contributors might well be acknowledged in the credits as people appearing in the film or as assistants and consultants to the director. On the long list of "ethnomusicological films" in Leonardo D'Amico's (2020:445-470) book *Audiovisual Ethnomusicology: Filming Musical Cultures*, I could not spot a single occurrence when a central figure in a film or a local authority on the topic was also named as its (co-)author. Although I might have missed something, and the list of films is probably not exhaustive,⁵ I find this quite surprising when questions of authorship are increasingly discussed in the field of ethnomusicology (e.g., Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2019). Sharing authorship with research collaborators is becoming more common in ethnographic research in general, especially in projects adopting some kind of applied or participatory approach (e.g., Araújo 2017:68). It seems to me that the use of audiovisual methods would actually make it much easier for non-academic research collaborators to assume a more active role in the research process. Whereas capturing images on video is something that anyone with access to a mobile phone is more or less used to doing nowadays, the conventions of academic writing are much harder to figure out. Still, sharing the authorship of an ethnomusicological film remains uncommon, if not completely unheard of (Harbert 2022:308).

As I have mentioned, the video series discussed here is not a documentary film but more or less equivalent to a series of lectures by Sonko, which is probably

⁵ However, it does include many films by directors who have no training in ethnomusicology or anthropology.

why it was obvious to me that he had to be named as an author. He also took the role of (co-)director when we filmed the demonstrations of *sabar* dancing with other dancers of the *Ballet National*, whereas the practicalities of filming were always left to me. My right to be named as a co-author could be questioned if the series is first and foremost a document of Sonko's expert local dance knowledge that I captured on video, but I hope that the above account of how the video series came about explains why I feel entitled to be acknowledged as a co-author rather than a videographer or a technical assistant.

An additional concern related to authorship was the value of the knowledge presented in the video series, and in particular how Sonko and the others participating in the filming sessions would be compensated for their contributions. Ultimately, I was able to send some money from my postdoctoral funding to Sonko and the members of the *Ballet National* appearing in the series, but I was not sure whether that would be possible when we were filming the series because the video series was not originally included in the plan for my postdoctoral project. I therefore explored the possibilities of having the video series made available on an online platform for which viewers would have to pay to access. After looking into different options, I thought the most suitable one was Udemy (udemy.com), a portal for online learning whereby people pay a one-off fee for unlimited access to a particular course, typically consisting of a set of video lectures and possible accompanying materials. The creators of the courses retain full rights to the materials they have produced. According to the principles of open science that my university follows, I should have published the video series open access. However, it also seemed reasonable that Sonko and the *Ballet National* would receive some revenue from people viewing it, just as they would be paid for teaching, therefore I decided to stick to this plan regardless of the remuneration they received from my project funding (cf. Harbert 2022:303-304).

Concluding Thoughts

Looking back, I realize that the process of making the video series in focus in this article was not significantly different from my previous research experiences on the *sabar* tradition, despite my efforts to find a more collaborative way of working and an alternative mode of publication – both inspired by ongoing discussions on the decolonization of knowledge in ethnomusicology. It is hard to estimate the

extent to which this apparent similarity was attributable to the collaborative nature of ethnographic research in general, or an inability to detach from old habits and to proceed differently in this project. Video recording has been a central method of documentation in most of my fieldwork, and collaborating with local dance experts and relying on their knowledge are naturally essential elements of most ethnographic studies of dance. Furthermore, as stated above, the process of editing could be compared to the process of writing an ethnographic account of the topic under study. The major difference, then, would be that the video series as a publication centers the voices of my collaborator(s) instead of mine, and therefore my efforts to adopt a decolonizing research approach could be deemed to have succeeded in this respect.

In addition, being able to include practical examples such as demonstrations of music and dance helped to connect the verbal explanations, more resemblant of the analytical language of academic writing, to the embodied knowledge of practitioners in the video series. I assume that for most viewers, regardless of educational level or cultural background, these demonstrations are much more easily understandable than graphic transcriptions or verbal descriptions of the same elements that are to be found in written research publications. In any case, the parts with the practical demonstrations are much closer to local, embodied ways of transmitting dance knowledge, while still being representations of *sabar* dancing and drumming, because they were purposefully produced by professionals for the specific context of the educational video series and with the conscious aim of demonstrating certain aspects of *sabar* dancing. As such, they are not simply examples of how people dance *sabar* or of local, embodied dance knowledge, they are rather analytical representations of *sabar* dancing based on local dance knowledge. Furthermore, the oral mode of presenting is closer to the local modes of transmitting knowledge than academic writings. Nevertheless, the ways in which Pape Moussa Sonko verbalized his knowledge (in French) must have been guided by his experiences of teaching foreign dance students, the primary target audience of the video series.

As a result, the contents of the video series could best be conceptualized as situated somewhere in between local (embodied) and academic (formal, analytical, and probably Eurocentric) knowledge. I am not suggesting that Sonko brought the local and I the academic knowledge to the table, but rather that we have both been moving between the two for our respective professional purposes. Thus, the video series is a joint effort that bridges these two knowledge systems.

List of References

Bibliography

- ARAÚJO, Samuel
2017 [2008] "From Neutrality to Praxis: The Shifting Politics of Ethnomusicology in the Contemporary World." *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Jennifer C. Post. New York & London: Routledge, 67-79.
- ATERIANUS-OWANGA, Alice
2021 "Libre comme l'autre? Perspective post-exotique sur l'enseignement du sabar en Europe." *Journal des anthropologues* 164-165:43-66.
- BAILY, John
1989 "Filmmaking as Musical Ethnography." *The World of Music* 31(3):3-20.
- BARZ, Gregory F.; Timothy J. COOLEY
2008 *Shadows in the Field. New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Second Edition. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BIZAS, Eleni
2014 *Learning Senegalese Sabar. Dancers and Embodiment in New York and Dakar*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- CASTALDI, Francesca
2006 *Choreographies of African Identities. Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- CHÁVEZ, Luis; Russell P. SKELCHY
2019 "Decolonization for Ethnomusicology and Music Studies in Higher Education." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 18(3):115-143.
- D'AMICO, Leonardo
2020 *Audiovisual Ethnomusicology. Filming Musical Cultures*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- DE CARVALHO, José Jorge
2021 "Ethnomusicology and the Meeting of Knowledges in Music: The Inclusion of Masters of Traditional Musics as Lecturers in Higher Education Institutions." *Transforming Ethnomusicology: Political, Social & Ecological Issues*. Vol. 2, eds. Beverley Diamond and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco. New York: Oxford University Press, 185-206.
- DIAMOND, Beverley
2022 "Afterword: Complicating the Conversation about Ethics in the Pluriverse." *The Routledge Companion to Ethics and Research in Ethnomusicology*, eds. Jonathan B. Stock and Beverley Diamond. New York & London: Routledge, 329-339.

- HALL, Budd L.; Rajesh TANDON
2017 "Decolonization of Knowledge, Epistemicide, Participatory Research and Higher Education." *Research for All* 1(1):6-19.
- HARBERT, Benjamin J.
2022 "Images Beyond Consent: Developing an Ethics of Ciné-Ethnomusicology." *The Routledge Companion to Ethics and Research in Ethnomusicology*, eds. Jonathan B. Stock and Beverley Diamond. New York & London: Routledge, 299-311.
- HAYES, Aneta; Kathy LUCKETT; and Greg MISIASZEK
2021 "Possibilities and Complexities of Decolonising Higher Education: Critical Perspectives on Praxis." *Teaching in Higher Education: Critical Perspectives* 26(7-8):887-901.
- KISLIUK, Michelle
1998 *Seize the Dance! BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MBEMBE, Achille Joseph
2016 "Decolonizing the University: New Directions." *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15(1):29-45.
- NEVEU KRINGELBACH, Hélène
2013 *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- NORTON, Barley
2021 "Ethnomusicology and Filmmaking." *Music, Dance, Anthropology*, ed. Stephen Cottrell. Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 121-143.
- SARDO, Susana
2018 "Shared Research Practices on and about Music: Toward Decolonising Colonial Ethnomusicology." *Making Music, Making Society*, eds. Josep Martí and Sara Revilla Gútierez. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 217-238.
- SEEGER, Anthony
2008 "Theories Forged in the Crucible of Action: The Joys, Dangers, and Potentials of Advocacy and Fieldwork." *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Second Edition, eds. Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 271-288.
- SEYE, Elina
2014 *Performing a Tradition in Music and Dance: Embodiment and Interaction in Sabar Dance Events*. Global Music Centre Publications 14. Helsinki: Global Music Centre.
2016 "Male Dancers of Sabar – The Stars of a Female Tradition." *African Music* 10(2):35-56.

- 2021 "The Corporeal Dynamics of Choreomusical Interactions in *Sabar* Dance Events." *World of Music [new series]* 9(1):67-81.
- SHAHJAHAN, Riyad A.; Annabelle L. ESTERA; Kristen L. SURLA; Kirsten T. EDWARDS
2022 "'Decolonizing' Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Comparative Review Across Disciplines and Global Higher Education Contexts." *Review of Educational Research* 92(1):73-113. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543211042423> (accessed 30 January 2024).
- STEPPUTAT, Kendra; Elina DJEBBARI
2021 "The Separation of Music and Dance in Translocal Contexts." *World of Music [new series]* 9(2):5-30.
- SWIGHUISEN REIGERSBERG, Muriel
2019 "Ethical Scholarly Publishing Practices, Copyright and Open Access: A View from Ethnomusicology and Anthropology." *Whose Book Is it Anyway? A View from Elsewhere on Publishing, Copyright and Creativity*, eds. Janis Jefferies and Sarah Kember. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
<http://books.openedition.org/obp/8344> (accessed 30 January 2024)
- TAN Sooi Beng; Marcia OSTASHEWSKI (eds)
2022 *Dialogues. Towards Decolonizing Music and Dance Studies*. International Council for Traditional Music. <https://ictmdialogues.org/> (accessed 12 June 2023).
- TANG, Patricia
2007 *Masters of the Sabar. Wolof Griot Percussionists of Senegal*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Multimedia Sources

- JAVEM 2023. *Journal of Audiovisual Ethnomusicology*. Website. <https://javem.org/> (accessed 9 August 2023).
- SEYE, Elina; Karoliina HALSTI-NDIAYE
2022 *In a Lion's Clothes*. Documentary film.
- STARGARAGE Entertainment
2023 *Afrika! Afrika!* Website. <https://www.afrikaafrika.info/> (accessed 12 June 2023).
- YOUSSEU Ndour & le Super Etoile. [n.d.] Bercy
2005 Dakar: XIPPI International. DVD.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.



Shaker Verlag 2024
© Kendra Stepputat, Felix Morgenstern (Eds.)

This book is available under the license CC BY
Attribution 4.0 International
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Print-ISBN 978-3-8440-9652-1
PDF-ISBN 978-3-8440-9686-6
ISSN 0945-0882
eISSN 2944-4543
<https://doi.org/10.2370/9783844096866>

Printed in Germany.

Shaker Verlag GmbH • Am Langen Graben 15a • 52353 Düren
Phone: 0049/2421/99011-0 • Telefax: 0049/2421/99011-9
Internet: www.shaker.de • e-mail: info@shaker.de