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BLUE MARCHES

Public Performance and Political Turnover in Senegal

Vincent Foucher

Researching the birth of the separatist movement in Casamance, the southern region of Senegal, I kept an eye on legal politics and happened to witness several political shows, from local meetings to mass rallies, organized by legal parties. Attending these shows became particularly interesting during the campaign for the presidential election of March 2000, the one that was to bring about the first political turnover (*alternance*) in Senegalese history. During this campaign, the opposition coalition staged huge street marches throughout the country, the so-called *marches bleues* (blue marches). Initially received with scepticism by many politicians and journalists, these rallies are retrospectively regarded as having played a key role in the eventual *alternance*. This article aims to provide elements for an interpretation of these (supposedly) new shows, contrasting them with the 'standard' shows of Senegalese politics. The point here is not merely to produce a symbology of political shows, old and new, in Senegal but to see how these shows are embedded in meanings that are complex, ambivalent, never unified, and to emphasize that they address a variety of audiences and must be interpreted against the specific political and social history of Senegal.

The Context of the 2000 Elections

In 2000, for the fifth time, Abdoulaye Wade, the leader of the Parti démocratique sénégalais (PDS), a lawyer and the leading figure of the Senegalese opposition, stood against President Abdou Diouf, the outgoing candidate of the Parti socialiste (PS). On many accounts, the tide was turning; though the economy was slowly emerging from the crisis of the 1980s, social demands were high; because of internal party tensions, two major PS figures, Djibo Ka and Moustapha

Niasse, had left to create their own parties; they brought money and electoral expertise to the opposition, which campaigned forcefully for free and fair elections. In this campaign, the opposition parties enjoyed the backing of numerous non-governmental organizations and the independent press, which had grown stronger over the years. But this turning of the tides found the PDS in bad shape: Wade's party had been badly defeated in the preceding poll, the 1998 local elections; Wade's toing and froing between government and opposition had blurred his image as an opposition figure. Many of the PDS's best elements had engaged in what is locally known as *transhumances* (grazing) and joined the PS; others had formed splinter movements. Also the party was short of funds. In this context the revision of the electoral registers and the registration of the numerous young voters were major issues – and sources of uncertainty for both sides (Diop and Diouf 2002).

In retrospect, Amath Dansokho, the leader of a small opposition party then allied to the PDS, explicitly acknowledged the financial constraints which bore on Wade's coalition:

When [Wade] came here, he told us ... that money matters were settled ... He told the journalists that he had money, and that he had enough of it for the campaign and that each of us, Landing [Savané, leader of a left-wing party allied with Wade], Bathily [leader of another party allied with Wade] and myself, would have a helicopter for the campaign. But on the first day of campaign, there was not even fifty million [CFA Francs]. One day not a penny was left. And from there came this fundamental intuition: the famous *marche bleue*. With this *marche*, we spent nothing, no praise-singers to pay.¹ We had only our vehicles. What we had was the music of Youssou Ndour [a Senegalese pop star] and Alpha Blondy [an Ivorian reggae star]. We toured around Senegal like this, because we had no money (*Sud Quotidien*, 11 January 2001).²

Officially, thus, *marches bleues* started as a makeshift – the opposition coalition could not pay for the expected electoral shows – praise-singers, drummers, meetings with chairs, tents and free food. When the *marches bleues* began, Hawa Ba, a journalist of *Sud Quotidien*, a paper with a known sympathy for the opposition, described them aptly, but hid little of her skepticism vis-à-vis this novel campaigning method:

The *marche bleue* formula ... arouses many questions among observers of the political scene: is candidate Wade physically diminished or does he face a lack of funding to run his campaign? [Wade] himself denies all this, or more exactly he underplays the situation: 'I have wanted to do what no other candidate can do. I reach out to the people.' Noticeably upset by

such a questioning, he goes on: 'What matters in life, it is to do a lot with a little. I campaign with the means I have. I am not going to steal the people's money, nor am I going to sell off Senegal.' And also: 'I am not ashamed if I do not have money. The main thing is that I do not owe anything to anyone...'

Thus the candidate of the Coalition alternance 2000 (Ca 2000), Dr. Abdoulaye Wade, began yesterday Tuesday 8 February, to implement the agreed campaign strategy ... Operation *Marche Bleue* amounts to a deployment of a caravan of cars in the streets and lanes of some districts of town. The main leaders of the various member parties of the Coalition are in the cars that proceed at an average speed, and they wave to the onlookers and supporters that are found along the way. From time to time, Wade perched on his car engages in his favourite routine: with the airs of a real president, he does the V of victory or he raises his clenched fists to demonstrate his strength and that of his candidature. Brief stops to greet militants or visit a few notables are the only times for verbal exchange; at no point is any allusion to the programme or project of the candidate possible.

As far as the means of campaign are concerned, no four-wheel drive vehicles yet, not to mention helicopters; nevertheless, Dr. Wade says he has surprises in store in the logistics department. The ongoing campaign will instruct us (*Sud Quotidien*, 9 February 2000).

But on the next day, following the *marche bleue* in Médina, Fass and Gueule-Tapée, popular districts of Dakar, Hawa Ba changed tones. It was all 'a real tidal wave,' as she put it:

A wholly blue march. Such was the show given by the caravan of Coalition alternance 2000 (Ca 2000) which went through a large part of the capital city. Flags, robes and banners ... all blue marched with a triumphant Dr. Wade through some of the main streets of Dakar.

Yesterday Wednesday, 9 February, the candidate of Coalition alternance 2000, Dr. Abdoulaye Wade, put on a real show of strength in the popular boroughs of Médina and Gueule Tapée. This was on the occasion of the second day of the *marche bleue* ... Shouting '*Sopi*' [Wolof for 'change'], 'President,' '*Yow ya gnu safé*' [Wolof for 'you are our taste,' i.e. 'we like you'], a human tide unfurled all along the meandering itinerary of the procession, relentlessly writhing through the streets and lanes of Médina and Gueule Tapée.

Powerful amplifiers carried on a special truck gave unexpected resonance to the latest invention of Dr. Wade and his allies. Sometimes the four amplifiers of the powerful, 20,000-watt sound-machine played music. On Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop, on the market of Gueule Tapée, on Rue 6, on

avenue Blaise Diagne, at Soumbédioune ... and the crowd grew unceasingly. Young men, children, elders and women vied with one another to demonstrate their support to 'Sopi.' There were slogans and dancing along with the music. Some militants raised their party membership cards, others carried small placards reading a variety of messages: 'We are no longer a painless [sic] people,' 'Wade president to save Senegal,' etc.

Most militants wore blue robes and shirts, the colour of the PDS. A blue colour that blended with the blue flags, marked with the millet ear, the emblem of the party, and the yellow kerchiefs waved by a largely female crowd.

Stops on Avenue Blaise Diagne, on Rue 6, at Gueule Tapée, at Soumbédioune. Through the amplifiers, Landing Savané and Dr. Wade delivered short speeches reiterating their ambitions to change Senegal. At Soumbédioune [Dakar's fishing harbour], Dr. Wade centered his intervention on the importance of fish resources in the development of Senegal and on the 'destitution' of the economic agents of the fishing industry, the fishermen. And the caravan moved on again, carried along by the shouts and vivas of the people gathered along the streets or pacing along Wade and his allies. All the while, music beat the rhythm for the shouts and the dance steps (*Sud Quotidien*, 10 February 2000).

Throughout Senegal, for the weeks of the campaign, the *marches bleues* would unfold in the same way: a mass procession, led by a group of vehicles, would enter the main cities to applause and then roam around town, with a huge sound-machine playing pop music; the procession would be joined by onlookers, marching along – for a hundred yards or for the whole show. Once in a while the procession stopped, and from the platforms of vehicles, brief speeches would be delivered by key politicians – including Wade himself.

Right after the first *marche bleue* took place Hawa Ba, the journalist from *Sud Quotidien*, had quickly changed her take, for she saw that something was happening during those marches. Indeed, for many observers, what had started officially as a mere expedient for a hard-up coalition turned out to be a key element in Wade's final victory. The ambition of this article is to discuss the nature and functioning of the performance of these *marches bleues*. Drawing on personal observations of the *marche bleue* in Ziguinchor on 12 March 2000, and on newspaper sources, I shall assess and interpret these performances against a series of other performances by the outgoing PS which I also had the opportunity to attend during my fieldwork in Casamance, from 1997 to 2002.

Shows of the Party-state: Understanding Public Performances of the Parti Socialiste

To understand the *marches bleues*, it seems appropriate to examine first the

‘classical’ performances, those of the old regime – the PS regime which, under one name or another, ruled Senegal from 1960 to 2000. I am focusing here on the shows of the party-state, but until the *marches bleues*, the shows of the opposition differed little – the amount of money spent was the main difference. Indeed, money is an essential element in these shows, as Dansokho indicates above: the shows are something expensive, with praise-singers to pay. In most public performances the state and party authorities used to produce an expensive and complex show, weaving threads of majesty, munificence and representation. Their shows bore the lasting imprint of the standard paraphernalia of the 1960s party-state, overlapping the attributes of the state with those of the mass-party of the 1950s – party scarves, flags, police escorts, official vehicles and so on. But we shall not elaborate on those unsurprising features, and will instead describe the repertoires which PS shows mobilize, in the classical idiom of the postcolonial state – family celebrations, pre-colonial notability, authenticity. We shall also see that, as time went by, those shows became increasingly an arena for militants, dedicated primarily to internal party politics, with little appeal to the mass of citizens.

The Idioms of Family and Kinship

Perhaps the most obvious character of politics in Senegal is how embedded in the idiom of family and kinship they are.³ This is reflected in political shows, which tap into the repertoire of family celebrations, and which take full account of the difference between age groups.

Thus in 1990s Casamance the PS staged separate performances for the older men (*les adultes*) and for the youth (*les jeunes*), an elusive category which includes women as well as unmarried men. While mass rallies would cater for the *jeunes*, PS politicians would spend time talking with smaller groups of local elders. On these latter occasions a few dozen people would assemble in a neighbourhood, around local notabilities (the borough chief, the imam, the occasional marabout); all these people would be seated on rented plastic chairs, in the shadow of a tree or a tarpaulin, and politicians, local and national, would chat with the crowd. The meetings for the *jeunes* would be quite different: mass meetings with several hundred people; a stage sheeted with a tarpaulin for the notabilities to sit, and the crowd gathered around, waiting to be harangued. This dichotomy of shows indicates how politics mobilizes the idiom of kinship: while the youth can stand up under the sun, politicians stage their deference for the elders.

Another related feature is that standard political shows borrow a lot from family celebrations. A brief description of a PS meeting observed in one district of Ziguinchor will illustrate this. This meeting takes place in Peyrissac; it is attended by a crowd of about two hundred people. There is a speech by Papa Lo, the president of the PS union of the Saint-Maur market, and many traders are here, to pledge allegiance to Mayor Robert Sagna and President Diouf. But this looks also like a district meeting – women, old and young, regularly burst up in

the middle of the meeting's circle to dance to Diola and Wolof beats ... There is one leader of the Murids [a Muslim brotherhood]. Every once in a while women intervene to adorn the speakers (including the leader of the women's section of the PS in Peyrissac) whom they like best with necklaces and scarves (fieldwork notes, 24 February 2000).

For the kind of show described here, PS or other, typical of Senegalese politics in the 1990s, the reference is popular celebrations, sessions of music, drumming and dancing usually organized by families or other groups on special occasions. Their influence on shows is unmistakable: before the speeches actually begin, drummers and singers (nowadays alternating with a sound-machine) perform, sometimes for several hours; women from the crowd occasionally join and dance. Drawing on family celebrations, PS politicians thus choose to pose as benevolent relatives. These shows require the presence of drummers and praise-singers. In Ziguinchor, the PS has a quasi-official drummer, Ba Sané, a very famous character; with his three powerful drums, Sané takes part in the warm-up of the audience, performs interludes between speeches, and highlights the main points of discourses through brief solos. The presence of the traditional praise-singers of pre-colonial African aristocracies gives a clue about the mobilization of the repertoire of pre-colonial notability by PS politicians, which we will now examine.

The Repertoire of Pre-colonial Notability

The praise-singers are a feature of the hierarchical societies of West Africa. Historically, they were a caste, each family of praise-singers being theoretically attached to a noble family; they would intervene on public occasions to recite the illustrious genealogies and the praise of their patrons. But with the demise of the aristocracies, those permanent ties of patronage have weakened and, as Panzacchi (1994: 195) puts it, the '*gével* [Wolof for praise-singer] do not sing the praises only of real *géer* [Wolof for nobleman]; they will praise anyone who is, or wants to be, or whom they want to make believe is, their social superior.' Demand has been high in the late colonial and post-colonial political sphere, and real or self-proclaimed praise-singers are used to performing in meetings in praise of the new political elites. Nowadays, up to ten praise-singers may perform during a single political meeting.

There is another common feature between politics and Sufi Islam, which owes also to the pre-colonial ethos of notability – the use of a repeater. Mc Laughlin (1997: 564) thus describes maraboutic speeches:

Typically, the marabout is seated on a platform and speaks in a low voice, so that the *gével* must draw close to be able to hear. After a few phrases the *gével* addresses the crowd with the phrase *Ne na...* ([the Wolof for] 'he said'), pronounced in a distinctive declamatory style, and proceeds to paraphrase with embellishments what the marabout has just said.

PS leaders make a rather similar use of repeaters, though they are usually not praise-singers, but lower-rank politicians: while the leader speaks in discrete tones, not engaging in the undignified business of rhetoricking and speaking out loud, some of his followers paraphrase the leader's sayings; just as *gèwél* do, they actually do a lot more than repeat – they embroider and praise and emphasize; they get applause, shouts and laughter from the audience. In itself, the contrast between the volubility and gesticulation of the repeater and the contained and dignified attitude of the leader is powerful political rhetoric – the one who speaks little is the man with real power. Bazin (2004) insists that the figure of the distant, silent and sometimes even hidden leader is typical of the pre-colonial aristocracies of the Sahelian zone (see also Panzacchi 1994). The Diola, the dominant ethnic group of the region of Ziguinchor itself, though not quite Sahelian, seem to share in a different version of the same tradition: though they can be heard to speak, their priests-kings are under a strong taboo not to be seen engaged in standard human activities (Baum 1999: 76).

But contrary to the maraboutic setting, in the context of political meetings, this laudatory paraphrasing often coincides with translating: the leader speaks mostly French, and only occasionally indulges in the local languages – it is the repeaters' responsibility to convey in various idioms the leader's message. The ability to speak French, which is by no means generalized in Senegal, has long been a determining element in political careers, and though the prestige of the bureaucrat has suffered from the crisis of the state, French has remained a sign of power. More generally, a 'European' hexis – dress and body language – is important. Here, a pre-colonial ethos (the use of repeaters) mixes with an emblem of modernity (the ability to speak French) to form a show of prestige.

Performing Munificence

As with dancing and praise-singing, shows of the party-state are occasions to demonstrate a key political virtue: munificence. Contrary to the European usage whereby militants who attend a meeting often pay for admission and for the eventual banquet, in Senegal, the politicians themselves finance most of the shows. To Senegalese politicians, meetings are occasions to prove how benevolent and selfless they are towards their people, how well-disposed they are to sharing the spoils of office. Munificence allows the leader to perform as a notable – no one would dare to behave as a notable if one had not given repeated and conspicuous examples of generosity.

During meetings, munificence is demonstrated in various ways. The financing of a good show, with plenty of praise-singers and a meal, is taken by the audience as a sign of munificence. The politician who does not organize appropriate meetings risks losing a lot of consideration among the public – '*dafa nay*' [Wolof for 'he is petty']. But there are a number of other amenities. The distribution of T-shirts and caps adorned with party slogans or the picture of the leader, for

instance – in Senegal, where occasions to earn cash and buy manufactured goods are rare, the sharing of these apparently minute spoils of militancy is a serious matter, which can occasionally lead to bitter arguments among party supporters. Indeed, this low-cost clientelization has now been adopted by all sorts of other performers on the public scene, like NGOs or religious groups; the distribution of T-shirts by certain NGOs funded by international donors was a key factor in the success of the campaign for the registration of young voters.⁴ Female supporters of the PS may receive coupons of cloth bearing the emblems of the party and/or the pictures of party leader(s), from which they have dresses cut – dresses which they wear during party meetings (but also on other occasions). Finally, preparing meetings is a key activity in PS political militancy, and militants who take part in the organization are given some money or goods by the leaders, as I witnessed:

A discussion erupts among the young core PS supporters. Apparently, the forty PS billposters have been given collectively a lump sum of CFA Francs 15,000 (approximately £15); they have taken the money to buy meat and share it among themselves. People discuss whether they were right to do so, or whether it might not have been better to share the money (which would have amounted to about CFA Francs 400, i.e. 40 pence) so that every one could deal with their own needs (fieldwork notes, 23 February 2000).

This is by no means a side aspect to meetings – asked about why he engaged in PS politics, a rank and file militant replied that ‘when you have nothing, if you follow the PS, you spend a day preparing for the meetings; at the end of the day, they will give you one thousand francs, so you can go sort out your own needs’ (interview with A. Sané, 23 February 2000). In a society where cash and occasions to earn it are a rarity, politicians are employers (and patrons) whom some find worth pleasing.

Concluding on this issue of munificence, one should insist that PS shows are not only about immediate personal gains, but also about virtue and morality: many Senegalese think munificence is an important quality for a politician, and leaders who do not perform generosity in a convincing manner come under severe criticism for it is assumed that, once in power, they will evade the obligations of solidarity and redistribution. This situation is reminiscent of that described by Paul Veyne (1995), who insisted that Greco-Roman political munificence, the well-known ‘panem et circenses’ (what Veyne himself calls ‘evergetism’) cannot be reduced to a cynical political strategy aimed at depoliticizing the citizens, but that there was a moral aspect to it.

The Ambiguous Room for ‘African traditions’: Ethno-populism and the Pretence of Modernity

Another feature of the shows of the party-state is the abundance of ‘ethnic’ elements: ‘local’ dances are performed to hail the leaders; traditional notabilities

make an appearance; men and women dressed in 'traditional' gear play a part ... The role of 'African tradition' in the shows of the party-state is nevertheless quite ambiguous, a curious game of distance and proximity. During these shows, 'local' people, in what is most specific to them – their 'customs' – come to pay allegiance to the state; these 'authentic' demonstrations confirm the state in its role as a modernizing, leading force in the transformation of somewhat backward populations. At the same time, politicians want – perhaps increasingly so with democratization – to demonstrate their representativity, to prove that they are familiar with their culture: the politicians are not simply successful and benevolent patrons or dedicated modernizers, they also try to present themselves as true sons of the soil.

The ritual initiation of Robert Sagna, PS mayor of Ziguinchor and leading minister, as described by Ferdinand De Jong (2001), provides a wonderful example of these ambiguities. This initiation took place in the village of Thionck-Essyl in 1994. A noted Catholic and former student at the *séminaire*, Robert Sagna has made his career on a non-separatist defence of Casamançais, and particularly Diola, interests. While the Church had long been hostile to initiation, it has been changing its attitude since the Vatican II Council. In the 1990s, undergoing initiation was no longer the shameful behaviour of primitive pagans, but a sign of respect for one's culture. But Sagna entered the bush on his own terms: he went into the sacred grove only for a few days in September, while most candidates had been there from July onwards. He approached the sacred grove in his official car, while the three other candidates who went along him came on foot, and spent only one night in the bush. Also, as a grown and powerful man, he could not quite admit the fact that he had not been initiated before, that, in traditional terms, he was the equal of the kids and juniors that entered the sacred grove on the same year as he ... De Jong thus describes Sagna's tactics:

When we talked about his initiation, Sagna denied that his entering the sacred grove in Thionck Essyl was his initiation. He said he had been initiated before. Entering the sacred grove in Thionck Essyl was merely a training exercise, he used the word '*recyclage*,' which is used by men to refer to their second or third entrance into the sacred wood (important for acquiring secret knowledge, especially if they were initiated at an early age) (in De Jong 2001: 147).

Though it did not take place during a campaign, Sagna's performance aptly illustrates a key aspect of the performances of the party-state – their ambiguity, their complex mixing together of patronage, prestige, traditionalism and autochthony, of distance and belonging.

The Shows as Tests of the Tendances

We have thus far tried to provide elements for a 'thick description' of the shows of the party-state, as they can be perceived by the Senegalese public. But to interpret PS shows properly, one has to realize that their primary audience is internal, that shows are a key element of internal PS politics. To understand this, one must explore how the PS functioned until 2000.

A proper illustration of the working of the PS can be observed from a flash forward in history, to the day of the 2000 poll. Sitting under a mango tree near the polling station, I witnessed the poll with Thierno Mané, a friend and local PS figure; he had been quite busy over the past weeks, canvassing his neighbourhood, visiting houses to mobilize in favour of President Diouf. The local primary school hosted two polling stations, the one that catered for my friend's neighbourhood having about three hundred registered voters. I realized that my friend knew *personally* every voter in his neighbourhood, and thought he had a rather good idea as to whom they would vote for. But earlier in the morning of the day of the poll, in Thierno's absence, local PDS members had turned up together with several dozens of voters, escorting them in order to avoid interference by PS militants. As the day went on, my friend seemed increasingly worried: despite promises, some of 'his' voters were not coming; others had turned up and voted, but judging from their behaviour to him, Thierno felt they had not kept their word. As it turned out, he was right and the PS was badly defeated even in 'his' polling station, usually considered a PS stronghold.

This episode tells a lot about the nature of the pre-2000 PS: the party functioned as a pyramid of political entrepreneurs with a 'clientele.' At the bottom of the pyramid, this 'clientele' may have seemed inexpensive to maintain. The neighbours who formed part of Thierno's clientele would not ask for money – a poor man himself, Thierno would actually have little to give, though he occasionally paid for tea and sugar and attended all familial ceremonies around, trying to hand out some money every time. Instead, Thierno's clients made use of his connections with the local authorities, particularly with the PS town council. In fact, most of the communal administration was staffed with PS supporters, and Thierno enjoyed good relationships with many of them, particularly with those working at the *Etat-Civil*, a very important section in Senegalese bureaucracy. Thus Thierno recruited his clients thanks to his 'helpfulness' – by providing access to the local authorities, simplifying access to identity papers and birth certificates.⁵ The personalized nature of politics is evident: in the area, Diouf's defeat was interpreted by everyone as Thierno's own; soon after the vote, on the tarmac of the main road, an anonymous hand wrote with chalk 'A bas Thierno, à bas Diouf' ('Down with Thierno, down with Diouf'). PS politics in Thierno's suburban district thus depended on an unceasing series of interactions and exchanges: if Thierno delivered the goods, people voted for him – i.e. voted Diouf; if Thierno demonstrated his capacity to get people to vote, he was given access

to small resources and privileges with which he could maintain his clientele.⁶ Knowing one's clients and being able to produce them in shows was thus a key to political success: Thierno's 'value' inside the PS was gauged according to the number of people he was able to mobilize when the party needed them most – in shows and at the polls.⁷

Indeed, pre-2000 PS shows are to be read not only as the fully-controlled performance of the leaders on stage, but as co-productions between the PS leaders and their pyramids of clients, each client performing his own dedication to the party. During PS meetings, supporters – supposed onlookers – would frequently break ranks and perform solos (of speech, dance or praises), in an attempt to demonstrate their exceptional dedication to the party. The organisers of the shows had a hard time controlling these 'enthusiastic' meeting-crashers, as is shown in the example below.⁸

During one meeting, a plump married woman, a local PS militant, stands up. She manages to draw the attention of the audience through a torrential praise of the merits of Robert Sagna, the local PS big man, and President Abdou Diouf. Though the organizers of the show discreetly try to control her, she keeps the floor and pours praises on the PS; the high point of her intervention is when she claims that she is so fond of 'Robert' and the PS that she is 'Madame Robert.' This last statement provokes an outburst of joyful laughter among the crowd, and the successful performer finally stands down (fieldwork notes, 24 February 2000).⁹

This example is reminiscent of James Scott (1985) and his analysis of derision as a 'weapon of the weak': it seems as if the only way the 'weak' can occupy the front-stage is buffoonery. The success of the woman's performance (the laughter of the audience, including Robert Sagna himself) could nevertheless give her a legitimate access to some retribution on the part of PS big men.

Counting the clientele was all the more important as there were in fact several clienteles inside the PS, behind competing political leaders – usually, this competition was more or less organized between two main factions (*tendances*), themselves divided in a set of equally competitive sub-factions. Meetings were thus much less about unanimity than what could have been expected: they served as gauges for intra-party politics. In fact, the contest of factions was barely hidden from public view – partisans of the various leaders grouped around banners which indicated their belonging to certain 'sections' or support groups (*mouvements de soutien*) whose allegiance every serious political entrepreneur knew.

Tensions were no smaller among the various sub-factions, as the case of local meeting of the PS in February 2000 demonstrates: this meeting, hosted by Michel Sambou, a municipal counsellor of Ziguinchor and an aide to Robert Sagna, in Sambou's own district, was assessed as poorly attended – only about 300 turned up. Most people came to the conclusion that Sambou had not 'worked' hard enough, but PS insiders argued that one of Sambou's internal enemies, Mustapha

Diédhiou, another municipal counsellor and Sagna supporter, in charge of supervising the transportation of militants, had consciously failed to do his job to attack Sambou's credibility (Interviews with PS activists).

The PS depended on a competitive pyramid of clienteles, and the form which collective PS performances took had to do with this dependence. In fact, one of the main functions of PS meetings was to allow for the assessment of the PS brokers of the various echelons: every one looked at what everyone else had contributed (in terms of militants, money, labour, transportation and so on), and this functioned as a kind of stock exchange between the opposed factions.¹⁰ Of course, the rallies were not quite Panoptikons, but on this basis, people formed rough estimates of the various factions and their influence. Indeed, during rallies, political entrepreneurs at all levels knew – or spent some time learning – who was a follower of whom and how many people their competitors, allies or dependents could mobilize.

Les Marches Bleues, a Successful Political Performance

Wade's skill and originality as a political communicator have long been noted. In the 1980s already, Wade's style cut a striking contrast to that of Abdou Diouf – Wade used Wolof as a public language very early on, he appeared wearing typically Senegalese gear, the 'grand boubou,' thus a contrast with the style of both Francophile President Senghor with the famously bad Wolof and his successor, President Abdou Diouf, the three-piece-suit-wearing technocrat (Donal Cruise O'Brien, personal communication).¹¹ This difference in political styles is intriguing. It is personal to an extent – Wade is a lawyer with a background in student activism, Diouf is a top-level technocrat who entered the PS late in the day, in an ex post legitimization of his political power, with little apparent taste or flair for political communication with the masses. But the *marches bleues* went beyond Wade's flair. What was it that made them so popular, and turned this invention into a success?

The Rhetoric of the March in Senegalese Politics

Political marches are no novelty in urban Senegal, and already in the early twentieth century, demonstrations were taking place in the main colonial cities. But the era for street rallies was the 1950s, the coming of independence; in 1958, the demonstrators confronted General de Gaulle himself, when he famously came to campaign for Senegal's adhesion to the Franco-African Community. This was the time when Wade was socialized to politics, and these mythical episodes of liberation struggle may well have been an implicit reference for the *marches bleues*. In fact, The PDS security is known as the blue caps (*calots bleus*), a likely reference to the 1950s, when Léopold Sédar Senghor's green berets (*bérêts verts*) stood opposed to Lamine Guèye's red berets (*bérêts rouges*). Though this reference might have been clear to Wade, it would have made little sense to his young audiences.

Following independence in 1960 and the progressive establishment of a single party-state, rallies ceased to function as oppositional modes. With the liberalization of the late 1970s, opposition parties, clandestine and legal, tried to take to the streets again. But they would often feel the wrath of the state; in August 1985, Wade and a number of opposition leaders were arrested during a march against Apartheid (Diop and Diouf 1990). In the 1980s, the authorities were thus reluctant to having the opposition parties marching the streets. Progressively, during the 1990s, opposition parties gave up marching as they began participating in 'national unity' governments (Villalon 1994). From marches to cabinets, the opposition parties lost credibility among the population, and marching anew in 2000 was a way for the opposition to re-establish its credentials by invoking its glorious years, the years when its leaders would end up in jail and never in ministerial office. Of course, in 2000, the risk was minimal, for the Senegalese state had become accustomed to its increasingly moderate and legalist opposition.

During the 1990s, demonstrations were thus left mostly to students and workers protesting against the degradation of their living standards – in fact, those marches became a symbol of the growing frustrations of the Senegalese population vis-à-vis the economic conditions. Marches had always been a mode of mobilization for students – a group which includes both the small but highly mobilized university students of Dakar and Saint-Louis and the masses of secondary school pupils. Structural adjustment bore down hard on students, and the 1980s and 1990s witnessed periodical student marches. But adjustment also allowed for the emergence of powerful trade unions independent from the PS, which were actively engaged in protests... Typical of this evolution was the spectacular political emergence, in the late 1990s, of Mademba Sock, a trade unionist. Sock, an employee of the state-owned Senegalese power company Senelec, and the secretary-general of the independent trade union UNSAS (Union nationale des syndicats autonomes du Sénégal), became a public figure during the strikes and marches led by Senelec's employees; gaining unexpected popularity as a result of state repression (and a song by Senegalese popstar Youssou Ndour), Sock himself finally decided to run for the presidential elections; he earned few votes in the first round, and rallied behind Wade for the second round.

When they set out to organize *marches bleues*, the leading opposition parties, which had been partly discredited by their occasional collaboration with the regime during the 1990s, thus invoked their early years, as well as they were trying to draw on the marches of the students and trade unionists of the adjustment era. To them, it was a powerful way to prove that they stood with the people.

Youth as an Electoral Target

In Senegal, high-school and university students have never shied from marching through cities, not infrequently in a rather riotous way. Staging the *marches*

bleues, Wade and his men were thus trying to appeal to the youth, using their own mode of protest.

Indeed, in Senegalese society as in most African societies, '*les jeunes*' have become the key electoral target. As Gérard (1993) and Villalon (1994) insist, though hostile to the PS regime, the youth had also long failed to mobilize in elections. In 2000 though, an unprecedented effort had been made by NGOs and the donor community to encourage them to register and to vote.¹² A substantial portion of the electorate was new, still to be conquered and mobilized. While the rhetoric of the PS meetings kept drawing on pre-colonial Senegalese culture, the *marches bleues* were a symbolic pledge to the votes of the youth.

The PDS shows reflected this shift in political rhetoric. They moved away from both bureaucratic and African idioms of notability towards practices valued by the youth – demonstration, of course, but also music: the PDS did not recruit praise-singers; instead, they had sound systems playing Senegalese pop music and Ivoirian reggae. Also, the PDS security, a group of several dozen young men, were equipped with uniform blue denim clothes (jacket and trousers) – young onlookers could not fail noticing and admiring this, and took it as a promise that all supporters of Wade would soon have access to the yearned for 'American' goods. Implicitly, Wade was promising the young citizens not the gifts of a caring father, but access to the new world every one was getting interested in: no longer France, but the USA. One should insist on the replacement, as a figure of success, of the French-speaking civil servant by the migrant returning from the USA, *l'Américain*. The epithet *américain*, in modern urban Wolof, denotes *débrouillardise*, survival skills, initiative – something close to what Paul Richards (1996) describes about Sierra Leone and the valorization of the figure of Rambo, as a symbol of the cunning of the meek against a brutal and unfair order. This evolution has a sociological dimension: while the established ways to enrichment – migration to France and state employment – have become problematic over the past 20 years, migration to new places – Italy, Spain and the USA – is the new and most prized pathway to social success.¹³ With the set-up of polling stations in the bigger cities of Europe and the USA, the 2000 election campaign granted the Senegalese migrants a role that far exceeded their actual number, and all parties were eager to canvass the Senegalese expatriates (Monika Salzbrunn and Linda Beck, personal communications). In fact, according to Monika Salzbrunn, prior to their import in Senegal, the *marches bleues* were tried out in New York, among the Senegalese migrants in Harlem.

Wade seems to have measured the nature of this change, and his security were not the only ones to Americanize their dress. We have mentioned above that Wade, in the 1970s and 1980s, had been a pioneer of the use of the wide robes typical of Senegalese traditional dress (*boubous*) instead of Western-looking suits, thus putting forth a statement of nationalism and denouncing implicitly the Francophile bureaucratic and PS elites as rootless compradores. All other

Senegalese politicians, including president Diouf himself, had followed along and started to wear robes. But in 2000, Wade moved on again: he left the robes, that now stood for notability, and chose to appear, on the first night of the campaign, in a three-piece suit with braces, setting a trend that led to a temporary shortage of braces on Dakarois markets. This time, the style of dress had nothing to do with the old French ways – to a Senegalese audience used to watching US serials, Wade's dress was identified as that of Wall Street businessmen. On his own terms, for he could not pose as a rapper or a boxer, Wade was demonstrating his capacity to appropriate the symbols of globalization and America, and was thus making a further pledge of access to the youth.

La Menace de la Rue: *The Strength of Euphemism*

Wade's campaign was not targetting *les jeunes* only as an electoral force, but also as a barely euphemized threat. Throughout the campaign, Wade played an ambiguous game, explicitly calling *les jeunes*, as well as the armed forces, to 'take their responsibilities' if the PS were to 'confiscate' the elections again (*Sud Quotidien*, 31 December 1999). This threat was not empty, as the Senegalese youth have a tradition of riotous demonstrations; in fact, the youth had already shown a disposition towards violent political contest in 1988, after Wade's controversial electoral defeat: thousands of young Dakarois had taken to the streets and fought with the security forces; one year later, in April 1989, following tensions with Mauritania, crowds of young Senegalese roamed the streets of Senegal's main cities, slaughtering Mauritanian residents and pillaging their shops; in 1993 again, the Moustarchidines, a Muslim youth group then supporting the PDS, demonstrated violently.

The *marches bleues* thus functioned as a euphemized rehearsal for what would happen if the PS tried to rig the elections. Grouping thousands of youth in every city of Senegal and getting them to march through town, Wade was giving weight to his threats. *Marches bleues* mobilized the rhetoric of rebellion and conquest: marching through town, as if they were taking over, Wade and his supporters were striking a contrast with the very static campaigning of the ruling PS and his candidate, Abdou Diouf. This metaphoric conquest by thousands of youth worked as a powerful symbol. Wade's political calculation was not entirely misguided: if the PS were tempted (and there is little doubt that some PS leaders were) to rig the elections, the euphemized actualization of the threat in the pre-electoral *marches bleues* made it clear that Wade's defeat would result in serious civil disorder.¹⁴ At the same time, with the peaceful *marches bleues*, Wade was demonstrating that he could control the marching masses, that he could restrain them from turning into a riotous and looting crowd – to the establishment, he was trying to prove that he was the only alternative to political unrest.

Citizens against Militants

Probably the most important aspect of the *marches bleues* is that they appealed to citizens at large rather than to party militants. Indeed, for the PDS, this was a sensible thing to do: as an organization, the PDS had had a hard time through the 1990s; as said above, it had been losing militants, including a number of major figures; the PS had managed to enlarge its 'hegemonic bloc,' winning over some of its former opponents. But the tide was against the PS too – all parties of militants were dying out in late-1990s Senegal... This evolution relates to deep trends – while state power and resources had been weakened by the impact of forced liberalization, the population was growing quickly, and was increasingly operating outside the control of the state; with decreasing resources, clientelistic networks, even those of the PS, could no longer cater for a substantial enough portion of a growing electoral body. The first signs of this evolution had been seen in town, where growing portions of the urban poor could not be taken into the competing party machines – Dakar had thus been an early backer of the PDS. The multiplication and radicalization of internal party struggles and the proliferation of splinter groups plagued the PS at least as much as the PDS... In fact, while Senghor had created the PS through a progressive incorporation of most parties during the 1950s and 1960s, the 1990s saw the fragmentation of the ruling party.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the PS had owed its victories probably less to vote-rigging than to high rates of abstention, and to the fact that the clientelistic networks of the PS still controlled a significant part of the actual electorate. But in 2000 the campaign for proper elections and registration attained unprecedented intensity, and the PS itself was increasingly divided; there were thus more citizens, and fewer PS militants... For the first time in Senegalese political history, electoral victory depended much less on the number of clients/militants of the parties than on the number of citizens those parties could bring to the polls.

While the shows of the party-state had become essentially arenas for internal party competition rather than external mobilization and attracted (almost) only militants, the coalition around Wade put on the kind of show that could reach the maximum number of citizens. By now, shows of the party-state were attended mostly by 'militants' who came to take part in the confrontation of *tendances*. Only the most devout and/or dependent militants now agreed to being moved around, from show to show, to make the numbers. In a context where the capacity to maintain an electorally significant percentage of militants had eroded, shows of the party-state were increasingly seen as failures by both citizens and PS leaders. For PS militants alone, they remained important occasions where one's status inside the party organization could be advanced. In contrast the *marches bleues* were a show for citizens, not for militants: typically, there was no system for mutual observation and counting – of course, component parties of the Coalition often wore signs of their allegiance, but there was no serious measurement of followership.

Even fun had changed sides: shows of the party-state, whose rhetoric dated from the 1950s and 1960s, had lost much of their novelty and attraction; they had turned into ritualized and unexciting performances, relying as they did on pre-colonial, familial and bureaucratic idioms, they were not appealing to the young voters who had become the strategic segment for the election – this was all the truer as, in Senegal as in the rest of West Africa, the youth are faced with a serious crisis of integration and maintain equivocal relationships with familial/traditional order (Cruise O'Brien 1996). Shows of the PS were all the less attractive as, in 2000, they were increasingly seen as 'nay' (Wolof for 'petty'): the PS had difficulties to fund their shows, and the quality of the performances declined.

Contesting Munificence: The Coming of a New Morality?

The success of the *marches bleues* also owes something to a shift in the moral economy of politics in Senegal. Over the years, the old idioms of kinship and munificence have been, at least in part, displaced by a new discourse – that of the denunciation of the mismanagement of state funds (for a nuanced approach to the 'moralization of public life,' see Dahou 2000). The main explanation given by opposition leaders for the *marches bleues* (the lack of money) is in itself part of the meaning that the opposition tried to convey during these marches: demonstrating that, just like the mass of the Senegalese population, they had little money, that they had to make ends meet and organize the *marches bleues* as a cheap alternative, the opposition were implicitly denouncing the supposedly lavish shows of the PS. This is indeed confirmed in an interview of Idrissa Seck, then Wade's cabinet director and campaign manager, in February 2000. Seck was careful to point out both the Islamic and the scientific legitimacy of the *marches bleues*:

Being an assiduous reader of the Holy Scriptures [the Quran], I realized that all the prophets who have engaged in a mission to liberate their people have actually walked. (...) Such is the primary source of inspiration. The next one is modern science currently dominated by the concept of interactivity. We had to make the most of the good health and maturity of Sopi and the leader that embodies it (*Wal Fadjri*, 22 February 2000).¹⁵

But Seck was also very aware of the dangers of expensive shows in his reply to a *Wal Fadjri* journalist who was asking him about 'a certain difficulty of [the PDS] to fund its campaign':

Incidentally, I have long said that, in a context of growing poverty in Senegal, of total misery, it was indecent to put on a show of wealth – everybody knows that Dr. Wade is not a poor person and among those around him, there are people who can take care of themselves. Recruiting a very

expensive external consultant, spending millions on posters, on things that, in the end, do not work (*Wal Fadjri*, 22 February 2000).

But should one interpret this claim as significant of a change in political virtue? Are humility and honesty now favoured over munificence? As seen above, a month before the election, when asked about the poverty of his coalition, Wade declared that 'What matters in life is to do a lot with a little. I campaign with the means I have. I am not going to steal the people's money, nor am I going to sell off Senegal'; he added: 'I am not ashamed if I do not have money. The main thing is that I do not owe anything to anyone.' More than humility and honesty, it is the capacity to make-do, '*débrouillardise*,' the ability to be an 'Américain' which is vindicated as the new political virtue – of course, this strongly echoes with the daily life of most Senegalese at the time of structural adjustment, struggling in a context where the wealthy state of the pre-adjustment era can no longer help. Seck's answer points in the same direction: he takes pains to establish that Wade and some of his followers are 'not poor' and can 'take care of themselves.'

So even in the shows of the opposition, politics is still very much about accessing wealth. But it is not the wealth one gains through the benevolence of the state, now quasi-bankrupt. The wealth that Wade and his allies pledge to deliver is the wealth which the skilful and daring ones, the *Américains*, the *businessmen* and the migrants can get. Wade himself embodies the ambivalence: he portrays himself as the man who comes 'from abroad,' with Wall Street braces, but also the man who makes it through, thanks to his prolonged effort in a difficult contest, displaying both cunning and strength.

Conclusion

From the fact that the turnover took place after the opposition developed their new performances, one should not necessarily conclude that Wade owes his victory to the *marches bleues*. But there is little doubt that the *marches bleues* played a part. As an innovation, the *marches bleues* had met with the initial scepticism of the Senegalese press, surprised at the coalition's apparent 'poverty.' In fact, the *marches bleues* were hugely successful, and surely did much to remobilize and publicize the elections, particularly among the youth, who had hitherto been very reluctant to register and vote in elections.

But one should not analyse it simply as an element in the change from a parochial culture to a participant culture – in fact, the ethos revealed in these shows is complex: if bad governance comes under severe criticism, it is resourcefulness which is the political virtue of the new era; one now has to be an '*Américain*.' It is precisely because the organizers of the *marches bleues*, consciously or not, were playing on this ethos that their performance worked out so well. It was a successful 'meeting,' in the full sense of the term, between inventive showmen and their audience. But six years have passed since the *alternance* and the enthusiasm of the

marches bleues has not survived the dog-fighting of cabinet and coalition politics; Abdoulaye Wade and Idrissa Seck have parted ways in a highly conflictual way; it seems unlikely anyone will be able to muster such shows in the presidential election due in 2007.

The conclusion of this exploration of political shows in Senegal bears on the ambivalent nature of politics: as we have seen, African political spheres are no less ambiguous than European ones; violence and threat are never far behind civil peace. Historians of European politics (Robert 1996) have indeed shown how, from the eighteenth century onwards, through a long and frequently brutal process, the demonstration was progressively transformed by the interaction of politicians, rioters and security forces into a pacified mode of political representation, paving the way for modern democracy. Behind such civic behaviour as peaceful demonstration, violence still looms; in euphemized violence, political institutions can be born.

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Notes

- 1 On praise-singers, see below.
- 2 This is also the view of Abdoulaye Bathily, another leading opposition politician allied with Wade in 2000: it 'was necessary to resort to the innovation of the *marches bleues*' because 'the leading figures of the turnover had gotten no foreign assistance.' See *Le Quotidien*, 14 December 2003. All translations are mine.
- 3 As Schatzberg (2001) indicates, metaphors of kinship play a particularly strong part in subsaharan Africa.
- 4 Research among the t-shirt printing shops of Dakar would produce fascinating information on the state of Senegalese society.
- 5 For some time, Thierno has been lobbying the town council to get power lines to his neighbourhood, something which would hugely increase his political stature in the neighbourhood (and consequently within the PS).
- 6 It is worth insisting that these relationships cannot be properly described as market transactions – they belong to the gift/counter-gift genre, and are infused with ideas about morality – Thierno is 'helpful,' and his clients are 'thankful.' A number of clients who failed Thierno were indeed 'ashamed' and dared not come to him for quite some time.

- 7 Usually it is not too difficult, and Thierno's results in the previous elections were excellent (he is very active) and followed the pattern which he had predicted. But in 2000, the stakes were higher, uncertainty had risen; the PDS had developed powerful local sections and the opposition as a whole had put a lot of efforts into registering new voters; Thierno himself did not work as hard as he used to, because he had become disillusioned with his own hierarchy, whom he thought had done little for him.
- 8 Real party 'insiders,' such as Thierno, do not use such a mode of intervention: they perform as discrete, efficient and dignified string-pullers, not as buffoons.
- 9 The fun here comes from the sheer ludicrousness of the claims of this old woman 'of the people' to be the wife of the powerful mayor of Ziguinchor, and from the sexual sub-text.
- 10 Of course, the most important apparatus for the measurement of the influence of the *tendances* remains the internal party elections, but these are rather rare, and they are partly pre-ordained by the number of party membership cards which each *tendance* is allowed to try and sell. Not infrequently, party membership cards are paid for by the party brokers.
- 11 Swigart (1994) specifies that Wade was the first politician to speak *urban* Wolof, a Creole language of French and Wolof. Interestingly, when Swigart interviewed Wade, he rejected staunchly the idea that he spoke urban Wolof, insisted that he did not Creolize French and Wolof, and argued (wrongly) that, in the same speech, he could make some statements in 'pure' Wolof and others in 'pure' French: while Wade makes use of urban Wolof, he cannot acknowledge it publicly.
- 12 As mentioned above, with funding from the USAID, NGOs mobilized the youth in a manner not too different from that of the PS: t-shirts were handed out to all youth who turned up with a valid voting card.
- 13 A number of authors point to the emergence and/or valorization in Senegal of a new ethos and cultural style, less dependent on French education and formal employment, in the context of structural adjustment. See for instance Ndiaye (1996 and 1998) and his research on the *moodu-moodu* [the diminutive for Momodou, a standard Senegalese first name, initially a derisive designation for the ruralites coming to Dakar, now referring to the illiterate but successful traders of the Muridiyya], or Havard (2001), on the *bul faale* ethos. The phrase *bul faale*, a Dakar Wolof slang phrase meaning 'don't pay attention,' was popularized by the rap music group Positive Black Soul and expresses the rebellious attitude of the Senegalese youth. It subsequently became the catchphrase of an immensely popular (and wealthy) Senegalese wrestler, who has taken the name Tyson, frequently sports a US flag and has established links with the real Mike Tyson.
- 14 The international community was really worried about the risks of civil strife and put a considerable pressure on President Diouf for free and fair elections.
- 15 I am indebted to Leo Zeilig for this reference.