Culture as a Resource for Development?
Critical Perspectives from the Field of Contemporary African Dance

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Abstract
This paper starts from the observation that relations and interactions between what is commonly considered the sphere of culture and the arts on the one hand, and the sphere of development politics on the other are gaining increasing importance. This trend is manifest on a global scale, where since the turn of the millennium the paradigm of "culture and development" has experienced a revival as a common ground for mainstream discourses and policies. The chapter offers a critical perspective on this paradigm by analysing the newly emerging interfaces between the world of development and the field of contemporary performing arts on the African continent. Focussing on an artistic project promoting female dancers and choreographers in West Africa, these interfaces are studied from an actor-oriented perspective in order to deconstruct the stereotypical dichotomy between "Western" development and its counterpart, "African" culture. This allows one to question essentialized and territorially defined meanings of culture without fully buying into the logic of current discourses on "cultural diversity" that tend to gloss over inequalities and asymmetrical power relations shaping cultural encounters across difference. By that means, the chapter provides a trans-disciplinary perspective on contemporary performing arts as a field of interlocking transnational and transcontinental relations that shape and reflect the dynamics of social transformations in a global era.

3 D.L. Klein, Yoruba Bida Goes Global. Artists, Culture Brokers, And Fans, Chicago/London 2007, p. xxv.
As many exhibitions, biennials, and festivals, as well as the very lively academic debates on the topic indicate, there is a "growing Western interest in 'contemporary African art'". Whereas most scholarly debates are taking place within the field of art history and concentrate on visual and plastic arts, there is also a growing interest in contemporary performing arts, namely in what has been labelled "contemporary African dance". This interest is most clearly manifested in the remarkable success, attention, and increasing recognition that contemporary dancers and choreographers from Africa have gained on international stages over the last decade. At the centre of this chapter is the broader significance of this border-crossing trend in terms of local/global transformations. Starting with impressions from a festival in Bielefeld, Germany, I highlight the asymmetrical power relations shaping cultural encounters in the domain of contemporary performing arts. After explaining my methodological approach, I turn towards the case study of an artistic development project carried out mainly in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The project is analysed as an instance of a new kind of interface between the globalized art world of contemporary dance and the world of development, which leads me, in the final paragraph, to a critical assessment of the currently dominant paradigm of "culture and development". The link between Germany and Burkina Faso demonstrates the increasingly complex ramifications of an "emergent structure" underlying transnational and transcontinental interactions at the examined interface. Yet, it is contingent on the fact that it has been the starting point of my research

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5 The contested nature of the label "contemporary" for performing arts in or from Africa is discussed below.


8 Long, Development Sociology (fn 1), p. 65.

9触发 and sustained to a large extent by French cultural cooperation, explicitly promoting "contemporary dance" on the African continent since the early 1990s, the success of this artistic genre has recently reached the rather conservative German cultural establishment, where the existence of contemporary performing arts in Africa has so far rarely been taken note of. In June 2012, the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) announced a new "international thematic focus" on Africa, launching a special fund to support artistic exchange and cooperation between German and African artists as well as institutions during a three-year period (2012-2015). This international programme intends to embark "on a new chapter in German-African cultural relations" and gives particular attention to contemporary dance by financing an exchange programme that involves some of Germany's leading institutions in the field. Dance Dialogues Africa, launched in April 2012, aims at the intensification of networking between institu-

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10 Fau, Figures de la "danse contemporaine africaine" en France (fn 9), p. 61.


12 Dance Dialogues Africa is an initiative of Tanzhaus nrw, one of Germany's most influential contemporary dance centres (http://tanzhaus-nrw.de/training_tabs?category_id=82, accessed on 24.9.2012)). It was conceived independently and even before the German Federal Cultural Foundation launched its new programme (http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/cms/de/sparten/buehne_und_bewegung/Dance_Dia
goues_Africa.html accessed on 24.9.2012).
In contrast to N'Goran's long-term engagement and recurrent frustrations, the choreographer was still fascinated and excited about his rather short-term encounters with the Mozambican children, which he described as a mutual estrangement and learning process aimed at enhancing self-esteem and critical consciousness. However, most of the participants in the debate, including the group of choreographers from Africa present at the festival, reacted rather sceptically to his presentation, questioning the general goals and concrete effects of the project.

Among the participants of the debate in 2006 was Kettly Noél, a dancer and choreographer of Haitian origin, since 1999 based in Bamako, the capital of Mali. There she has established a centre for contemporary dance that provides, amongst others, a three-year training programme for "young people in difficulties", set up with the help of the Belgian agency Africalia and funded by the European Commission. Kettly Noél's professional trajectory exemplifies the multi-scalar spatial dimensions and transnational entanglements of the above-mentioned interface. She has worked with street children and urban youth with problems ever since she moved from Paris to Cotonou, Benin, in 1996. Her work in Bamako is organized on the basis of a formally recognised association aimed at promoting cultural exchange, democratic consciousness, and local development through the generation of creative resources.

The centre is supported by the Malian Ministry of Culture and cooperates with Malian institutions on various levels, but for its permanent functioning mainly relies on funding from several European donors, including French, Belgian, and Swiss agencies. Kettly Noél managed to establish herself in a firm and very influential position on the artistic landscape of the region. Nevertheless, during the discussion in Bielefeld she remarked rather bitterly that in spite of her passion for the work with local youth, she was longing to work with professional dancers - a condition she could not afford in her current position.

Four years later, during the public debate at the occasion of Passages 2010, another project promoting cultural exchange and local development in Africa through the medium of contemporary dance was on the agenda. A German choreographer presented a project involving school children in Mozambique that he had carried out in collaboration with a Mozambican dancer-choreographer and with the financial support of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, BMZ). In contrast to Kettly Noél's long-term engagement and recurrent frustrations, the choreographer was still fascinated and excited about his rather short-term encounters with the Mozambican children, which he described as a mutual estrangement and learning process aimed at enhancing self-esteem and critical consciousness. However, most of the participants in the debate, including the group of choreographers from Africa present at the festival, reacted rather sceptically to his presentation, questioning the general goals and concrete effects of the project.


Learning from Africa is a recurrent trope used to highlight the productive frictions in transcultural collaborations. It also prominently figures in the project descriptions of the famous “opera-village” in Africa, conceived of by the late theatre director and beloved enfant terrible of the German theatre scene: Christoph Schlingensief. This ambitious project, frequently and enthusiastically acclaimed but also not less critically questioned and debated, perfectly illustrates that “[b]ecause of misunderstandings across difference, new possibilities emerge all the time.” After searching in several countries for an appropriate place to realize his vision, Schlingensief finally settled on Burkina Faso. Ranging among the countries with the highest poverty indication worldwide, Burkina Faso displays an astonishingly rich landscape of artistic institutions and events. It is not only organizing the largest pan-African film festival, (Festival panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision de Ouagadougou, FESPACO) but also hosts an impressive number of other international, national, and local performing arts festivals. Regularly providing European artists and other foreign visitors with the inspiration of “African freshness”, Burkina Faso seems to be a perfect site for the development of what the distinguished French anthropologist and art connoisseur Jean Louis Amselle has termed the art of the fallow ground (l’art de la friche).

The contradictions of wanting to “learn from Africa” while putting one’s own seeds in the “fallow ground” of African soil are evident in the way Schlingensief reflected on his own project. In his last piece, the encounter between cultural “experts” from Germany and from Burkina Faso is put on stage in a radical satire. Via Intolleranza II emphasises a sarcastic “we’ve had it all” attitude in terms of theories and discourses about intercultural encounters and artistic exchange. At the same time, the piece also highlights the obstinate persistence and paradoxical coexistence of two contradictory but nevertheless vital motivations behind Schlingensief’s own ironically formulated desire to meet “artists and other completely normal people” from Africa: “I only want to help you” and “we need to learn from you”.

Klein, Yorùbá Bátá Goes Global (fn 3).

Klein, Yorùbá Bátá Goes Global (fn 3), p. xxv.

Amselle, L’art de la friche (fn 9), p. 130.

Approaching an Emergent Structure: Contemporary Dance as a Development Interface

The biennial in Bielefeld is only one of an increasing number of festivals where artists from Africa present their work as a form of contemporary “global art” and no longer as an exotic folklore representing andal the presumably authentic cultural traditions of “The Africa”. Yet, not everybody has access to the global art scene owing to the fact that artistic interactions and circulations across the globe “are not always ‘free-flowing,’ but instead continually structured by [...] political and economic inequalities.” At the occasion of a presentation of the programme Dance Dialogues Africa in the framework of Passages 2012 in Bielefeld, the monopolization of power and resources at particular places conceived as creative hubs or indispensable pillars (piliers incontournables) in the landscape of contemporary dance in Africa was criticised by the artists participating in the festival. The German programme director recognised and regretted this dynamic but nevertheless argued that it was an unavoidable side effect of a successful public promotion of African artists in Germany.

This tendency towards a reinforcement of structural inequalities is not specific only to the dance scene. The frequent emphasis on cooperation and “partnership” cannot mask the asymmetries between donors and “beneficiaries” of cultural and artistic development programmes. During a lecture and discussion on “New Strategies of Cultural Exchange in Theatre and Performance” taking place in Berlin in September 2012, the theatre director and cultural critic Rustom Bharucha inquired about the origin of what he saw as an apparent Euro-American drive behind current trends in intercultural exchange projects all around the globe. He also underlined that the question what is at stake in the interactions between artists and cultural “experts” from Africa and Europe remains intriguing. Answers to it seem to be caught up either in contradictions or in crude stereotypes and racialized representations, as the actors in Via Intolleranza II aptly illustrate.

Belting, Contemporary Art as Global Art (fn 7).

Ebron, Performing Africa (fn 2).

Winegar/Pieprzak, Afria North, South, and In Between (fn 4), p. 10.

Discussion round during the presentation of Dance Dialogues Africa, Passages, Bielefeld, 10.11.2012.

Klein, Yorùbá Bátá Goes Global (fn 3).

Klein, Yorùbá Bátá Goes Global (fn 3), p. xxv.

Amselle, L’art de la friche (fn 9), p. 130.
The artistic projects and programmes mentioned above have in common an agenda that combines the “desire for intercultural exchange” (Bharucha, 11.9.2012) with visions to promote local development in Africa. Analysed in a broader context, the recent German initiative that tries out “new forms of artistic cooperation with African partners” can be seen as an indication of the global rise of a new development paradigm based on the notion of “culture as a resource”. This trend is marked by the renunciation of modernization theories that considered culture in terms of local traditions as an obstacle to development. It goes along with the rediscovery of a supposedly essential and effective link between culture and development by leading agencies of international development cooperation – such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, or the European Union – as well as by national and local government institutions and other organizations, like nongovernmental organizations and public or private foundations on various scales.

Although culture “has been part of development thinking all along”, the apparently revived “culture and development” paradigm that emerged around the turn of the millennium is new in the sense that the notion of culture itself is transformed: “culture has come to mean ‘otherness’”. Since culture has become an “expedient” for the purpose of development, it is “no longer experienced, valued, or understood as transcendent”. Within the new paradigm the focus is no more on territorially defined units of national or local culture but on cultural diversity, which is seen as a resource that “circulates globally, with ever increasing velocity”. This shift in the paradigm of culture and development, I argue, has led to the emergence of new interfaces between art worlds and the “world of development”. In its report *Our Creative Diversity*, the World Commission on Culture and Development (1996) draws attention to these global interfaces where creative industries are increasingly perceived as an essential motor for future development: “The arts are certainly the most immediately recognizable form of creativity.”

With this article I want to bring forward an actor-oriented approach to analyse these newly emerging development interfaces by focussing on the domain of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso. Following Norman Long, I consider development interfaces to be institutionalized contexts of interaction, where – individual or collective – actors in unequal power relations encounter each other and negotiate their respective visions of development. Long’s more general definition of social interface emphasises the systematic character of discontinuities occurring in such kinds of interactions: “A social interface is a critical point of intersection between lifeworlds, social fields or levels of social organisation where social discontinuities, based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power, are most likely to be located.”

In this understanding, the field of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso can be studied as an “emergent structure” or formation constituted by a “highly specific, self-transforming configuration of actor projects and practice” interrelated with institutions on different scales in various parts of the world. Adapting a statement by Long concerning the embeddedness of local farming practices within globalized commodity circuits, I argue that the transformative dynamics in the field of contemporary dance can neither solely be understood in terms of local cultural pattern, nor of global cultural flows: “Actors’ projects and practices are not simply embedded in structural settings defined by commodity or international performance arts circuits. Instead, it is through the ways in which they interlock that they create, reproduce and transform particular ‘structures’.”

Methodologically, my approach is based on micro-sociological ethnographic research and relies on theoretical concepts on a middle
level\textsuperscript{42} in order to "move into a fertile middle ground"\textsuperscript{43} and study artistic creation in a context of globalization by "departing from locally observed situations".\textsuperscript{44} Starting with actor-defined issues, interface analysis proceeds by identifying the position and agendas of the various actors involved, taking into account their historical situatedness and embeddedness in particular life-worlds. As underlined by Long,\textsuperscript{45} "[w]e should not, however, assume that actor analysis is primarily interested in face-to-face confrontations or interactions or only in local situations, interests, values and contests. Quite the opposite, since we are also interested in explaining how 'external' or geographically distant actors, contexts and institutional frames shape social processes, strategies and actions in localised settings." I argue that such an approach allows one to analyse the dynamics of broader social transformations manifested in the domain of globalized art forms and thereby critically question the culture and development paradigm with respect to some of its paradoxical assumptions and inherent contradictions. In particular, it challenges the widespread conceptual dichotomies, which legitimize and constantly reproduce the hierarchical order established between territorially defined areas representing the West and its counterpart – in this case Africa.

"A good example..." – The Project Engagement Féminin in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

"The UNESCO Convention\textsuperscript{46} underlines the importance of culture in social cohesion in general, and in particular, its potential for improving the status and role of women in society. A good example of an artistic and capacity building project enabling such change is Engagement Féminin initiated in 2008 by an independent dance company in Burkina Faso.\textsuperscript{47}

This statement introduces a short article in the comprehensive brochure published by UNESCO in 2010, under the title \textit{Mapping Cultural Diversity – Good Practices from Around the Globe}, where the project Engagement Féminin is described as a "response to the reality that despite the growth of contemporary dance on the African continent in recent years, female dancers and choreographers have been largely conspicuous by their absence".\textsuperscript{48} The project is seen as a good practice example for "promoting freedom of artistic expression" as recognised by the UNESCO Convention. Moreover, with its aim to encourage the professionalization of female artists in contemporary dance, Engagement Féminin is considered as an "innovative model for artistic and economic empowerment", representing "a bottom-up approach to provide artistic and technical skills to a still under-represented group of artists".\textsuperscript{49} In how far the project Engagement Féminin in fact can or should be considered as a bottom-up approach shall be discussed later. I will use it first as an entry point to the field of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso and as an example of the transnational and transcontinental entangledness, heterogeneity, and internal tensions of this field of practice.

Conceived and directed by the two Burkinabé dancers and choreographers Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazizé, co-founders of the company Art’Dév/Compagnie Auguste-Bienvenue,\textsuperscript{50} the project En-
professional training at a dance academy, none of the Burkinabé participants had completed secondary school education and many among them were barely literate. Some of the participants had already taken part in other editions of the programme while others were complete beginners in the particular genre of contemporary dance, although all of them were active in some kind of performing art. As expressed in various feedback discussions and conversations after the workshop, the participants had not only profited from the physical and technical sides of the training but also from the experience to work with professional female role models. In this respect, the fourth edition significantly differed from the previous one.

The third edition in 2011 had been realized with much less financial and organizational support from outside as well as including only male trainers who had been recruited among the project directors' locally based professional network. Although on that occasion some critical voices from the established dance scene in Ouagadougou concerning the gender ratio among teachers and students could be heard, the workshop participants underlined that the project was nevertheless a very good thing, an initiative that was still unique and therefore all the more important. The participants’ feedback joined the project directors’ own position concerning the way to deal with gendered asymmetries: “someone had to start” even if the means reaching the aim may seem insufficient in the beginning and the outcome of the enterprise is uncertain.

To discuss what the outcome of the project may be in terms of changing gender disparities in the field of contemporary dance in Africa is not the aim of this chapter. What can instead be stated at this point is the fact that over a short period of time the project has considerably diversified not only in terms of funding options but also in terms of its human and artistic resources. Considering the changing gender ratio among the teachers of the third and fourth editions, it becomes clear that gender asymmetries characterizing the field of contemporary dance are as much related to structural constraints particular to this globalized art world as to structures of local societies.

The various editions encompassed the transmission of different kinds of practical and theoretical knowledge, ranging from classroom pedagogy to technical and administrative know-how concerning the set-

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51 A detailed analysis of the Engagement Féminin workshop in Ouagadougou during the 2011 edition is underway elsewhere.
up of a company, and the creation of a staged performance. Not only on a practical and technical level, but also on a conceptual level, the training programme was characterized by a diversity of approaches concerning the practice of contemporary dance, including the decomposition and re-appropriation of "traditional" dance forms. This diversity in terms of resources, approaches, and backgrounds, as well as the changing gendered composition of the respective workshop teams, characterizes the "highly specific, self-transforming configuration" of the Engagement Féminin project as an interface between interlocking local and global art scenes, together with development agencies in various parts of the world.

Since its conception, the project was not only meant to offer bodily training in specific contemporary dance techniques. Instead, the major pedagogical goal has been to transmit the knowledge and experience necessary to become oneself a creator, an author who knows how to "write" choreography instead of only following a given script. This pedagogy included frequent and extensive debates among teachers and students about the distinctive features of contemporary dance. The approach of the Engagement Féminin project thus confirmed the statement by Seydou Boro, one of the senior authorities in this field, that professional training and choreographic creation should not be based on authoritative genre prescriptions: "Contemporary dance doesn't mean anything today. There is nothing fixed, it's up to you to decide. [...] There is not one truth only, the truth is training [...] Then, everybody has a dance to invent" (SB, 22.7.2011).

This attitude confirms the common association of contemporary dance with "freedom of artistic expression" - just as emphasised in the above cited UNESCO brochure. However, as will become clearer in the following section, the degree of "freedom" attributed to this artistic genre should not be considered independently from aspects of scale. Analysing the history of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso in the broader context of power relations articulated at the interface between art fields and development institutions located in different spaces and places of the globe, it is less an idea of unconditional freedom that comes to the fore. Rather, it becomes clear that the geographically expanding and diversifying artistic networks are interwoven with shifting transnational and transcontinental relations characterized by mechanisms of social differentiation and exclusion.

**Critical Perspectives on the Movement of Contemporary Dance in Africa**

The conception of the Engagement Féminin training programme and its artistic goals reflect a notion of dance as an institutionalized profession and at the same time means of individual expression, which the project directors are not only sharing with their peers in the field of contemporary dance in Ouagadougou but with professional colleagues all over the world. It reflects the experiences Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazié have gained since they started to fully engage in dance, around the turn of the millennium, abandoning their studies and investing in a career as professional performers. At that time, the field of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso was already rapidly expanding, but it was still an exclusively francophone universe: "[W]e could not imagine that English would one day be important in our lives!" (BB, 26.7.11)

In fact, not only the first incentives but also the most influential permanent institutions explicitly promoting "contemporary African dance" (danse africaine contemporaine) have been conceived and put in place by French government institutions since 1992. What is frequently applauded as an "explosion of new choreographic talents" on the African continent began in 1995 with the first edition of the Choreographic Encounters of Africa and the Indian Ocean (Rencontres chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'océan indien). This prestigious festival was initiated by the association Afrique en création, then under the umbrella of the French Ministry for Development Cooperation and later integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Conceived as an itinerant contemporary dance competition, the first Choreographic En-

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52 Long, Development Sociology (fn 1), p. 63.
54 Fau, Figures de la "danse contemporaine africaine" en France (fn 9), p. 61.
counters, in the meantime renamed Danse l’Afrique Danse, was organized in Luanda, the capital of Angola, a country then in a state of fierce civil war but with promising resources of fossil fuels and minerals. The second edition took place in the same city in 1998 (still before the end of the civil war), the next three editions in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, then moving to Paris in 2006 before returning to the African continent with the seventh edition in Tunis. The next edition was organized in 2010 in Bamako, Mali, and the last one, so far, took place in 2012 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The undeniable influence of geopolitical considerations by the French government on the choices of the location of the festival as well as the composition of the jury, dominated by “experts” from Europe, have contributed to the ongoing controversies about contemporary dance in Africa. Not only the label — “contemporary African dance” — has been contested, but also the notion of it in terms of a movement, rooted and growing on local grounds. Not everybody applauds the “explosion of new choreographic talents” on the African continent. What is acclaimed on international stages as an innovative “current” of contemporary choreography is seen by many artists as well as by large parts of their audiences in Africa either as a reproduction of “the dance of the whites” (la danse des blanches), a copy of a culturally alien model imported from Europe, or simply as “the dance of the crazy” (la danse des fous). Hence, from a critical perspective, the rise of contemporary dance in Africa appears either as an “artificial” construction or as a kind of “polito-artistic movement”.

Nevertheless, I contend that, however politically motivated, contemporary dance manifests itself neither as an artefact, nor just as a spatially and socially contained practice, but as a border-crossing artistic movement. It has gained momentum on the African continent, and in particular in Burkina Faso, since the late 1990s. And in spite of the tensions raised by old and new relations of dependency not only in economic but also in matters of symbolic power, the example of the company Art’Dév/Compagnie Auguste-Bienvenue clearly shows that the movement has already taken on its own dynamics. Characteristic of these dynamics is the increasing importance of transnational networking and its diversification, manifested in the multiple scales, variety, and growing density of transnational artistic cooperations and partnerships, which can be illustrated with the example of the project Engagement Féminin.

Another feature is the highly self-reflexive and critical attitude among the artists active in the field of contemporary dance, whether they identify with the label of “contemporary African dance” or not. The controversial debate around the meaning of this label, the ambivalent position that many artists assume with respect to essentializing categories of “African dance” or “African art”, as well as the frequent rejection of “Western” artistic genre conventions and aesthetics can be seen as an expression of this critical attitude. Many contemporary artists from Africa who perform on international stages feel discriminated against by racialized stereotypes and claim that they want to be recognised as artists and not as “Africans”. Yet, generalizing labels are not easy to reject because they provide access to funding opportunities specifically designed for the promotion of artistic exchange with Africa. They allow artists who comply with them to organize or be part of exhibitions, festivals, and competitions that are catering to the needs of a public fond of “black” bodies and “things African”. Moreover, expressing a belonging to a pan-African community is an important means and effective mode to connect with audiences among the growing cosmopolitan urban populations in various parts of the continent.

Last but not least, another important feature of the work of contemporary choreographers from Africa is their critical perspective on the reality of social and political life on the continent. The way this aspect of criticism is made explicit very much depends on the targeted public and on — anticipated — reactions by the authorities who control the respective performance space. This is certainly the case in Burkina Faso, where the same person who is seen as being principally responsible for the assassination of Thomas Sankara, charismatic leader of the Democratic

58 Amselle, L’art de la fiche (fn 9), p. 147.
60 Ibid., p. 77.
62 Despres, Des Migrations Exceptionnelles? (fn 9), pp. 120–139.
and Popular Revolution (1983–1987), has since then been the president. Whereas Thomas Sankara is still revered by many artists in the country as well as having become an icon for popular artistic and political movements all over the continent, pieces that make explicit reference to him — such as Tourments Noirs by Auguste Ouédraogo — may be received enthusiastically outside the country but do not easily find spaces to be performed within.

Owing to this situation, many artists see the lack of government assistance and insufficient support by national institutions not necessarily as a curse. Working with foreign funding agencies and leading a transnational professional life can be a way to stay attached to one’s own society of origin and avoid emigration or forced exile. If such a lifestyle is combined with social and political criticism by African artists, this is supported by international donors. The new programme for German-African cooperation mentioned above explicitly targets artists and art centres that “work outside the public funding system and attract audiences which are politically active and have a globally cultural orientation”. Yet, the programme directors are aware that financially supporting “independent” artists with a critical attitude towards the situation in local African societies bears its own bias and contradictions. Accordingly, they acknowledge that “[i]n response to the new, globalized circumstances (especially in the fields of fine art and dance), African artists are discussing the value of their continent’s artistic traditions and characters and reflecting on the predominance of European/Western lines of discourse and funding programmes.”

Due to the many issues and interests at stake, the question who defines the frame of reference, raised by Bharucha (11.9.2012), and how the power of definition is legitimized, provocatively staged by Schlingensief, becomes more and more pressing. In this respect, an actor-oriented perspective can provide insights into power constellations characterizing specific networks and interfaces without generalizing “Western” dominance over “African” agency. Hence, with regard to the most influential single funding agency in the field of contemporary dance in West Africa, namely the Institut Français, which defined the Choreographic Encounters explicitly as a “tool for development at the service of creation and an instrument of cooperation”, several questions arise: How do artists in Africa or more precisely in Burkina Faso appropriate the Choreographic Encounters and other European funding schemes? What is their own vision of development? On which terms can they engage in cooperations, and with whom? Or more generally: How can dance be transformed into a “tool for development” and how can such an “instrument” be integrated and shared within a movement?

“To Bring Change Through Creation ...” Dance and Social Transformation

Interestingly, the movement of contemporary choreography seems to have become increasingly male dominated, at least in regards to the West African region. Whereas some of the most influential pioneers in the history of contemporary dance on the continent are women, the explosion of this genre over the last decade has marginalized female choreographers and dancers on stage. At the 2010 biennial Danse l’Afrique Danse in Bamako, none of the performances selected for the contest were created by a woman, a fact that was “regretted” by the


66 See: http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/cms/en/programme/deutsch-afrikanische_Kooperationen/index.html (accessed on 24.9.2012). In how the programme will in fact consider artists working outside the powerful public funding system established by French institutions for cultural cooperation remains to be seen.

67 Ibid.
jury\textsuperscript{71} and left many observers with the impression that there is an urgent need to train more professional female dancers.\textsuperscript{72} Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazié obviously anticipated this need. Nevertheless, in 2010 they applied in vain to be invited to Bamako together with a group of female dancers in order to represent the project Engagement Féminin in the framework of this prestigious festival — which they finally did, travelling to Bamako by their own means — as well as to give the women with whom they had worked an opportunity to present themselves.\textsuperscript{73} Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazié directed their proposal to the person they knew best among the organizers of the biennial, namely the above-mentioned choreographer and director of a contemporary dance centre in Bamako, Kettly Noël, who acted as an associated artistic director of the festival in that year. Although the proposal was never officially rejected, in the end it was not realized due to the fact that no funds were provided.

This was certainly regrettable for Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazié because the festival would have been an ideal platform for presenting their project and at the same time bringing forward its very goals. As is explained on the blog of their company, the motivation to launch the project Engagement Féminin was “part of their will to contribute to the development of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso and in Africa” by offering a framework for women to participate in multidisciplinary workshops, residencies, and tours. So far, the project has not been successful in entering the competitive arena of the international Choreographic Encounters. Nevertheless, its agenda might provide a sustainable strategy for an alternative path of professional advancement since it perfectly matches the formal conditions of project funding in the framework of globalized cultural development policies, which increasingly promote not only bilateral North-South but also multilateral South-South exchange relations and networks.

Taking into account the second pillar of Art’Dèv/Compagnie Auguste-Bienvenue established by the association in Bordeaux, and considering the fact that economic support from within Burkina Faso is minimal, adapting to respective funding schemes seems to not only be an opportunity but also a necessary option. In this respect, the presentation of the project Engagement Féminin in the above cited UNESCO brochure is certainly helpful. It not only provides visibility but also an important symbolic legitimacy for the project since it confirms that its agenda is in line with mainstream development politics. With its aim to contribute “to the development of choreographic creation on the African continent”, the company does not aim at purely artistic development, producing art for art’s sake (l’art pour l’art), but rather wants to bring forward social transformations in a much broader sense:

The main goal is to bring change through creations, to meet and share, to give and receive through dance. The training of young dancers is the main concern of the company; hence the launch of the project Engagement Féminin in 2008 by Auguste OUEDRAOGO and Bienvenue BAZIE. This project aims at contributing to the emergence of a new generation of female choreographic artists in Africa. In addition, the company works on how to bring awareness to creative dance among a larger audience in both big cities and remote places, through exchange after the shows.\textsuperscript{74}

Although the concept of gender equality is not explicitly mentioned in the project description, its agenda implies an effort to eliminate gender disparities and therefore clearly corresponds to the third Millennium Development Goal: promote gender equality and empower women.

The reasons for the current underrepresentation of women on the stages of contemporary dance in Africa are only very vaguely indicated in the Engagement Féminin project description — this is probably because they seem too obvious and well known to be repeated. After all, women’s general economic marginalization, social discrimination, and political subordination on the African continent have been a recurrent topic of public discourses and official development politics for several decades. In the framework of the different waves of promoting women’s


\textsuperscript{73} The proposal included a public presentation of the project Engagement Féminin with a piece that had been created with participants of the 2009 edition as well as a two-week training workshop to be organized on the spot involving 15 participants who would show the results of their work during the festival. The proposal had already been prepared for the seventh Choreographic Encounters 2008 in Tunis, where the absence of women on stage was also a topic among the actors participating in the event (interview with Bienvenue Bazié and Auguste Ouédraogo, 13.8.2012).

years for a formal recognition of their profession on the part of the government. Compared to the generation of pioneers, who “cleared the undergrowth” for the field of contemporary dance in Africa in the early post-colonial period, those who followed them generally find themselves in a more difficult situation with regard to state support.

In Burkina Faso, the revolutionary regime between 1983—1987 had set up a range of institutions in order to create a framework for the public and collective performing of a “new culture”. Similar to other cases of socialist or Marxist-inspired nation-building (e.g., Tanzania, Benin), although with a significant historical gap, performance was used as an effective means to evoke and represent a “new society” devoid of ethnic differentiations and “bad” traditions, such as feudalism, patriarchal, and gerontocratic structures. In this context, the task of cultural representation was considered a serious occupation and an important contribution to the education of the masses. Moreover, culture was ascribed a transformative potential, but it was clearly defined as territorially confined.

Today, the meaning of culture as well as the status of its representatives has changed. The young generation of artists in Burkina Faso is confronted with an older generation of artistic directors who had made their careers while occupying a position of state officials (most of them were employed in the national education system or in the ministry of culture). In contrast to these representatives of the established educated middle class, the generation of contemporary choreographers like Auguste Ouédraogo and Bienvenue Bazid find themselves in a much more volatile and unstable situation where they feel lacking recognition: “we are artists and they don’t know how to classify us” (AO/BB, 13.8.2012).

Culture as a Resource? Assessing Unequal Relations

The international success of the contemporary dance movement in Africa, as well as similarly successful trends in the domain of plastic and visual arts, seem to confirm the visions advanced by the culture and

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75 These waves have followed global trends, from the approach of women’s integration in development (Women in Development, WID) in the 1970s, shifting towards an acknowledgement of women’s actual contribution to development (Women and Development, WAD) in the 1980s, and to an emphasis on the influence of gender relations (Gender and Development, GAD) since the 1990s.

76 Thery, Danse, Bamako, Danse! (fn 2), p. 2.

development paradigm. They highlight the significance of culture as a manageable "resource" and no longer as a fixed "tradition", constituting a "hindrance to development".\(^\text{82}\) In his partly autobiographic book on contemporary dance in Africa, the choreographer Salia Sanou describes in detail the rich repertoire of local performance practices he became acquainted with while growing up between a village and the second largest city in Burkina Faso, Bobo Dioulasso. Similarly, his compatriot Seydou Boro, with whom he co-directs an internationally acclaimed and award-winning company, as well as the most influential contemporary dance centre in the region,\(^\text{83}\) emphasises that "our culture is vast, it is enormous, and one can really be inspired by it to create".\(^\text{84}\) While he underlines that cross-cultural influences (métissage) are not only a "key" for artistic creation but also an essential resource for artistic survival,\(^\text{85}\) the resourcefulness of his particular cultural background nevertheless remains vital for his work as an artist: "I need Burkina Faso to create".\(^\text{86}\)

According to these two choreographers, who are among the most influential leaders of the above-discussed choreographic movement, an essential characteristic of contemporary dance is the way this practice allows to go beyond the confines of "traditional culture" and use the wealth of cultural heritage in new ways. Ingeniously defined by Sanou\(^\text{87}\) as "dancing differently" (danser autrement), the notion of contemporary dance implies difference and a confrontation with the other. This notion, while confirming the above-cited statement on culture standing for "otherness", contests specific genre definitions of "contemporary dance" and rather adopts a concept of global art.\(^\text{88}\) As conceived by Salia Sanou, contemporary dance reflects the reality of social life by confronting other actors, times, and spaces in terms of a deliberate creative choice: "It is the life of today that we are dancing and that we choose or not to connect to the past."\(^\text{89}\) By that means, contemporary artists consciously draw on diverse cultural references while at the same time creating a new culture of diversity.

This culture can be seen as a specific configuration of "connections and creation"\(^\text{90}\) characterizing the field of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso. In spite of essentializing labels strategically used by various actors involved, these connections and processes of creation are crossing national and continental borders, and cannot be comprehended in terms of a territorially defined and spatially contained "African" culture. Yet, the analysis of the project Engagement Féminin also shows that the particular choreographic culture of contemporary dance that emerged in Burkina Faso cannot be conceived as a resource freely and easily accessible for everyone. Not everyone is in the position, like Salia Sanou, to "choose, or not choose, to connect to the past" while following a professional career as a dancer.

To engage in dance as a profession means in many cases a definitive rupture with one's society and family of origin, and especially for women it might imply a decision to renounce engaging in a marriage and starting a new family according to the norms of past generations. Similar to "figures of success" in other domains of performance or sports,\(^\text{91}\) the remarkable achievements of the contemporary dance movement have meant a social and economic empowerment for some of the actors involved. But it has at the same time contributed to new cleavages and inequalities between those who have been able to go far and travel abroad with their art, and those who stayed behind, between "insiders" and "outsiders" of the relevant networks, or between ascribed "experts" and target groups of artistic exchange and development programmes.

The initiators of the Engagement Féminin project, with their vision to "meet and share, give and receive" might have been driven by a genuine motivation "to help" as well as "to learn". Nevertheless, their posi-

\(^{82}\) Sanou, Afrique danse contemporaine (fn 56), p. 100.

\(^{83}\) The two choreographers have co-founded the company Salia n't Seydoux in 1997, and the Centre for Choreographic Development (Centre de Développement Choreographique: CDC – la Termitière; see: http://www.cdc-latermitiere.org/ (accessed on 24.9.2012) in Ouagadougou, officially inaugurated in 2006, which has become a central node in the expanding networks of contemporary choreography on the continent.

\(^{84}\) "Notre culture elle est vaste, elle est énorme et on peut vraiment s'en inspirer pour pouvoir créer" (Seydou Boro in his documentary film on Irène Tassembodo: "Danseuse d'Ébène", 2002).

\(^{85}\) "L'art a besoin d'autres matières pour se nourrir. Le créateur doit aller voir ailleurs sinon il meurt" (Seydou Boro cited in: Mensah, Corps Noirs, Regards Blancs (fn 57)).


\(^{87}\) Sanou, Afrique danse contemporaine (fn 56), pp. 27 –28.

\(^{88}\) Belting, Contemporary Art as Global Art (fn 7), p. 44.

\(^{89}\) Sanou, Afrique danse contemporaine (fn 56), p. 28.


tion as project directors and as knowledgeable "developers" who are able to "bring awareness" amongst larger audiences and promote the empowerment of economically and socially marginalized parts of the population, like women or the unemployed youth, structurally enforces existing knowledge inequalities. In this respect, it can be questioned in how far the project should really be considered as a bottom-up approach. The role models given by the various male as well as female teachers of the Engagement Féminin project might be very inspiring but actually very difficult to follow for the participants — especially for those from Burkina Faso, where women generally have a much lower degree of formal education than men.

In the highly educated milieu of contemporary dance, where "writing" and communicative skills in various languages play an increasingly important role, the significant knowledge disparities between men and women in Burkina Faso have obviously contributed to the marginalization of the latter. This marginalization, however, can neither be solely understood as the result of an imposed Western culture, nor as a remnant of local traditions. Gendered asymmetries in the domain of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso emerged from specific transnational configurations of actors and practices in particular historical situations. When analysing contemporary dance in terms of a development interface, its gendered structuration can be seen as an effect of the intersection of different lifeworlds and logics of action, rather than as a reflection of a given social structure or cultural pattern existing somewhere "out there", prior and independently from the encounters and interactions of concrete actors.

Conclusion: Acknowledging Complexity

Discourses on culture and development have certainly never been thoroughly coherent. The recurrent dilemma in early post-colonial nation-building to define cultural "authenticity", to choose between "good" and "bad" traditions, and to select among customs considered as "appropriate" or "inappropriate" for the advancement of a particular vision of development give apt evidence for the intricacy of linking culture and development not only conceptually but also practically. In contrast to the focus on national culture during the early phases of post-colonial nation-building on the African continent, or the re-evaluation of a diversity of local cultures in the context of democratization processes, the concept of cultural diversity brought forward by the new culture and development paradigm seems to be less place bound. Considered as instrumental in a variety of functions, culture is seen "as a set of resources that adds value to development", constituting not only a "dynamic and innovative economic force" but also as a "sustainable framework for social cohesion".

On empirical grounds, this conceptual framework turns out to be inconsistent and contradictory. It ignores the emic meanings of culture as a historically situated relational category, constituting "the result of a relation of intercultural forces". The notion of cultural diversity, while emphasising a multiplicity of options and the freedom of choice, glosses over the dynamics of various kinds of inequalities structuring the field of artistic practices. The idea that contemporary performing arts can be used as a resource to improve the situation and life chances of structurally disadvantaged groups — and thereby contribute to social cohesion and equality — may correspond to attitudes, values, and beliefs of many of the actors involved. Nevertheless, it can be misleading not only with regard to unequal relations shaping the local development interface, but also with respect to the monopolization of resources and inequalities structuring transnational and global art circuits.

Moreover, the developmentalist framework tends to reify a conceptual dichotomy between "Western" and "African" culture(s), reproduced in the opposition between "developers" and developing, as well as "experts" and "beneficiaries". From the point of view of artistic development programmes formulated in Germany or elsewhere in Europe, the African artists still remain in need of technical and infrastructural devel-


95 Ibid., p. 5.

development, even if their agency is symbolically acknowledged by celebrating African choreographers’ creative potential and “new aesthetic initiatives” and “talents”.

From this perspective, “The Africa” as an object of knowledge – continues to be comprehended as a target of development interventions. “This dominant paradigm has made instrumentalizable knowledge more or less the only form in which ‘Africa’ can be apprehended” – even if, or all the more, as it is also conceived as a reservoir of culture. It is precisely the wealth of Africa’s cultural diversity that is now calling for development in the sense of a more systematic and effective exploitation. This logic reflects the order of priorities in mainstream development discourse, where “culture is discussed primarily in relation to economic rather than political or social development”. Although the paradigm of cultural diversity indicates a critical reflection and formal rejection of “Western ethnocentrism as the implicit culture of developmentism”,100 it remains developmentalist. Therefore, it not only conjures up the stereotypical dichotic opposition between “Western” development and “African” culture(s), but also legitimizes the implicit hierarchical order between the respective cultural areas.

Focussing on the actors involved in the project Engagement Féminin, analysed as an example of a new type of artistic development interface, different perspectives and orders of priority come to the fore. Emphasising the wealth of “our culture”, Burkinabé choreographers do not give priority to an economic, but to a moral order that serves simultaneously as a foundation of a national and pan-African identity, and stands as a basis for artistic self-assertion and emancipation with regard to Western dominance in the arena of global art scenes.

At the same time, the interactions between junior and senior artists, male and female dancers, or teachers and students within the framework of the Engagement Féminin project show that “our culture” is contested and becomes a terrain of struggle where notions of culture and visions of development are mutually interrelated, constructed, and reproduced. The diverse visions of an authentically “African” culture reflect the ways how different actors involved in the field of contemporary dance are dealing with social discontinuities and discrepancies in values that are produced by this practice. This became apparent not only in the controversial debates about criteria determining the difference between “traditional” and “contemporary” dance, but also in the explications of gender disparities in the field of the latter.

Instead of interpreting these discontinuities and tensions as a clash of “African” and “Western” cultures, they can be seen as being characteristic of the way global art circuits and development politics are interlocking with the local arena of contemporary dance in Ouagadougou. In this respect, the visions of a “horticultural anthropology” conceiving of the local as a kind of “fallow ground” where “cultural and artistic offsprings” can grow their organic roots are misleading. The local arena of contemporary artistic practice has not only emerged from a complex set of transnational and transcontinental relations, it also constitutes a gendered “terrain of power with its own patterns of stratification, an uneven distribution of cultural knowledge and boundaries separating insiders and outsiders – hierarchical and exclusionary politics in fine print”. Hence, acknowledging the complexity of the connections and creations shaping the field of contemporary dance in Burkina Faso also means to recognise that human resources are never thoroughly manageable, while at the same time they are always distributed unequally.

97 Ebron, Performing Africa (fn 2).
99 Nederveen Pieterse, Development Theory (fn 28), p. 73.
100 Ibid., p. 64.
101 Ibid., p. 68.
103 Nederveen Pieterse, Development Theory (fn 28), p. 69.