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## Entangled Rhythms of Life in Dakar: Subject, community and time in Pape Pathé Diop's *La poubelle* (1984)

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## Abstract

In its reading of Pape Pathé Diop's urban novel *La poubelle* (1984), this article demonstrates that not only spatial but also temporal categories are necessary to describe structures and functions in the Global South city. Taking as a starting point the leading metaphors of transitivity, daily rhythms and footprint effects developed by urban geographers Amin and Thrift (2002), and Achille Mbembe's concept of a 'time of entanglement', the paper analyses the various time frames and temporal entanglements determining the relationship between subject and community in Dakar. It shows that by focusing on temporality, Diop succeeds in integrating both historical dimensions and global entanglements into his portrait of Dakar.

### Keywords

City in the Global South; Temporality; Entanglement.

## Introduction

This paper sets out to demonstrate that the city as a concept must, if it is to provide an adequate description of its structures and functions, be understood not only in terms of space, but also in terms of temporality.<sup>1</sup> African post-colonial cities in particular are largely characterised by an entanglement of various time frames, and they use temporal categories to construct social and cultural differences. I shall illustrate this thesis by examining Pape Pathé Diop's *La poubelle* (1984), a novel which is fairly representative of Senegalese literature of its time and which provides a new perspective on the topic of the city. The novel focuses on everyday life in Dakar in the 1980s, showing how notions of community and subjectivity have to be redefined in a growing megalopolis that is marked on the one hand by Muslim traditions and on the other by colonialism and Western modernity.<sup>2</sup> In his novel, Diop highlights the tensions between European-influenced modernity and autochthonous culture, while at the same time exploring entanglements with the global economy.

In contrast to the spatial conception of the city previously dominant in African literature, Diop makes significant use of the category of time to construe the differences between the neighbourhoods. This enables him not only to write about the contrasts between traditional and modern African society and the way they are geared to different time frames, but also to focus on reciprocities, mixtures and entanglements more successfully than the category of space would allow. Such entanglements,<sup>3</sup> both within the sub-areas of the city and between the city's urban and global dynamics, are particularly characteristic of the big cities of the Global South, where various different temporal politics, practices and imaginaries come together.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For their work on the English version of this paper, I should like to thank Patrícia Matos and Imogen Taylor. Unless otherwise indicated translations of the French citations are those of Imogen Taylor.

<sup>2</sup> Founded by Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century, Dakar fulfilled important political and administrative functions as the capital of French West Africa from 1902 until its independence in 1960, and had a relatively high number of European inhabitants as a result. See Dresch (1992) and Coquery-Vidrovitch (1988a) on the urban development of Dakar and the colonial period, and Faye (2000) for details on the district of Médina. Statistics on the post-colonial era can be found in Landing & Antoine (1989, pp. 18-19).

<sup>3</sup> The term 'entanglement' is defined by Sarah Nuttall in her eponymous book as 'a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness' (Nuttall, 2009, p. 1).

<sup>4</sup> This concept of 'Entangled Temporalities in the Global South' is the subject of a recently approved PhD program at Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen. The most important passages of the proposal can be found at the following link: <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/fakultaeten/philosophische-fakultaet/forschung/zentren-und-interdisziplinaere-einrichtungen/interdisciplinary-centre-for-global->

In classic urban discourses, such as those of Simmel, Benjamin, de Certeau or Lefebvre, the conception of the city is also primarily spatial. Only recently have urban studies begun to focus on the city as a temporalised space offering a set of instruments for analysing the city in terms of time. And in *De la postcolonie* (2000), Achille Mbembe has developed a concept for describing post-colonial African societies: the 'time of entanglement' (Mbembe, 2001, p. 16). This article aims to combine the two approaches and to demonstrate, through its analysis of *La poubelle*, the advantages of understanding the city as a temporalised space and of applying temporality as a crucial category in the construction of social and cultural difference in Global South societies.

## The City as a Temporalised Space

The city-country divide is a recurrent and much-varied theme in Francophone African literature.<sup>5</sup> In the colonial novel, starting with Mongo Beti's *Ville cruelle* (1954) the city symbolizes, above all, the colonial sphere of influence. During the colonial period, only the predominantly European city centre was referred to as *ville*, while the indigenous neighbourhoods were known as *villages*: Africa and urbanity were regarded as opposites.<sup>6</sup> In the post-colonial novel, the city increasingly represents the place of conflict between tradition and modernity, as for instance in Ahmadou Kourouma's famous novel *Les soleils des indépendances* (1968). Clear spatial borders play as important a role in the architecture of these textual cities as they do in Frantz Fanon's description of the colonial city in *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) when he writes about the concept of the 'monde compartimenté'<sup>7</sup> (Fanon, 2002, pp. 41–44). The same is also true of Tierno Monénembo's novel *Les écailles du ciel* (1986), which describes the turmoil and upheavals of independence in a city characterised by a strict divide between centre and periphery.

Let us begin by examining the description of the divided colonial city in Mongo Beti's first novel *Ville cruelle* (1954).<sup>8</sup> The two halves of Tanga, a fictional

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south-studies/phd-programme-entangled-temporalities-in-the-global-south/forschungsprogramm.html/05.07/2019.

<sup>5</sup> See Chemain's standard reference work (1981), but also Schomers (1985), Paravy (1999) and Coussy (2003).

<sup>6</sup> See Goerg (2006) who claims that historical urban research on Africa was not developed until the late 1970s. The first works on the city of (West) Africa come from geographers (Dresch, 1992; Vennetier, 1991). Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch was an early authority on historical urban studies (1988b, 1993). A sound overview of research on the history of West African cities can be found in Fourchard (2004).

<sup>7</sup> 'World divided into compartments' (Fanon, 1968, p. 38).

<sup>8</sup> The novel was first released under the pseudonym Eza Boto. See Tsofack (2009) on the division of the city in *Ville cruelle*, and Di Bernardini (2011) on the Cameroonian cities of that time.

city that acts as a paradigm for the colonial city in Africa, extend along the two opposite slopes of the hill and are presented as two cities, almost idealised antitheses of one another:

Sur les deux versants opposés de cette colline, se situaient les deux Tanga. Le Tanga commerçant et administratif – Tanga des autres, Tanga étranger – occupait le versant sud [...] (Boto, 2015, p. 16)<sup>9</sup>

L'autre Tanga, le Tanga sans spécialité, le Tanga auquel les bâtiments administratifs tournaient le dos – par une erreur d'appréciation probablement – le Tanga indigène, le Tanga des cases, occupait le versant nord peu incliné, étendu en éventail. Ce Tanga se subdivisait en innombrables petits quartiers [...].

Deux Tanga... deux mondes... deux destins ! (ibid., p. 20)<sup>10</sup>

The division of the city could hardly be more marked. The narrator, however, insists not only on the divide, but also on the circulation between the two parts, which comes about mainly as a result of the movement of the people who live there:

Le jour, le Tanga du versant sud, Tanga commercial, Tanga de l'argent et du travail lucratif, vidait l'autre Tanga de sa substance humaine. Les Noirs remplissaient le Tanga des autres, où ils s'acquittaient de leurs fonctions. [...] La nuit, la vie changeait de quartier général. Le Tanga du versant nord récupérait les siens et s'animait alors d'une effervescence incroyable (Boto, 2015, pp. 20–22)<sup>11</sup>

The city seems different, depending on whether the focus is on its architecture or on the movement of its people—which in turn depends on the various kinds of work they do at different times of day. It is only by observing Tanga over a longer period of time that it is possible to get a broader picture of the city, in which the apparently strictly divided districts are shown to communicate after all. The white people's city is presented as the Tanga of work and of the day, while the indigenous Tanga is a place of night-time festivities. Seen from this perspective, the colonial city is not a static, divided space, but a dynamic place, characterized by movement—and this means that a temporal category is brought into play.

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<sup>9</sup> 'On the two opposite slopes of this hill were the two Tangas. The commercial and administrative Tanga—the others' Tanga, the foreign Tanga—on the southern slope [...].'

<sup>10</sup> 'The second Tanga—the unskilled Tanga, on which the administrative buildings, presumably insufficiently appreciative, turned their backs, the indigenous Tanga, the hutted Tanga— fanned out over the shallow northern slope. This Tanga was subdivided into countless little districts [...] Two Tangas ...two worlds ...two destinies!'

<sup>11</sup> 'During the day, the Tanga of the southern slope, the commercial Tanga, the Tanga of money and well-paid work, drained the other Tanga of its human substance. The black people filled the Tanga of the others as they went about their business. [...] At night, life moved headquarters. The Tanga of the northern slope had its people returned to it, and came alive with incredible vibrancy.'

Recent urban geography<sup>12</sup> has concentrated increasingly on such dynamic aspects, understanding the city not as a closed spatial entity, but rather, in the words of Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift as 'a place of mobility, flow and everyday practices' (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 7) and as an 'amalgam of often disjointed processes and social heterogeneity, a place of near and far connections, a concatenation of rhythms, always edging in new directions' (ibid., p. 7). Michael Crang takes things in a similar direction, when he describes the rhythms of a city as 'temporalised space and motion' (Crang, 2001). All three urbanists understand the city as a space of social interaction and opt for a phenomenological approach, following Georg Simmel's urban sociology, Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*, Michel de Certeau's work on everyday life and Henri Lefebvre's urban philosophy. Their 'observer', a descendant of the *flâneur*, need not be a critical intellectual, but can be an ordinary resident walking about the city, just like Michel de Certeau's *marcheur*.

Hard though it is to for urban studies to practise such observation when their aim is to go beyond the point of view of the individual, it corresponds closely to the type of urban representation in many African novels. The literary representation of the city privileges a subject-centred perspective almost by definition. The passages from *Ville cruelle* quoted above, in which the city is presented from the bird's-eye view of an omniscient, Balzac-like narrator, are an exception, both in the novel itself and in descriptions of cities in African novels in general. On the whole, the predominant perspective is that of a single protagonist moving around the city.

Through the movement of the *marcheur*, the city comes to be read almost automatically as a temporalised space, characterised by movements and encounters. The busy, moving nature of the city was also a central aspect in Simmel's *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben (The Metropolis and Mental Life, 1903)*. Simmel famously attributes the heightening of nervous life to the 'raschen und ununterbrochenen Wechsel äußerer und innerer Eindrücke' (*the rapid and constant back and forth between outer and inner stimuli*), which contrasts with the 'langsameren, gewohnteren, gleichmäßiger fließenden Rhythmus' (*the slower, more habitual, more steadily flowing rhythm*) of small-town and country life.<sup>13</sup> More recent studies on the 'rhythms of the city' (Crang, 2001) take Henri Lefebvre's *Eléments de rythmanalyse (1992)*, as a starting point from which to develop a set of instruments capable of describing the plurality of the many rhythms of the city.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The most important works in this area are May & Thrift (2001) and Amin & Thrift (2010). For a cultural studies perspective, see also Donald (1999), which focuses more on the aspect of imagination.

<sup>13</sup> Simmel (1995, pp. 116–131).

<sup>14</sup> Crang (2001), Amin & Thrift (2002), Wunderlich (2008) and Goonewardena (2008).

They consider time from the perspective of an observer for whom time is an 'experience of flow' (Crang, 2001, p. 206), an approach which shows that the city's temporality is far more complex than Simmel's dichotomy suggests.

In their book *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (2002), Amin and Thrift develop three leading metaphors to describe the modern city: transitivity, daily rhythms and footprint effects. The first derives from Walter Benjamin's concept of porosity: 'Transitivity/porosity is what allows the city to continually fashion and refashion itself' (Amin & Thrift 2002, p. 10). For these changes to be perceived, the city must be seen from the point of view of the *flâneur*. In their descriptions of the daily rhythms of the city, the authors quote John Allen:

anything from the regular comings and goings of people about the city to the vast range of repetitive activities, sounds and even smells that punctuate life in the city and which give many of those who live and work there a sense of time and location (Allen, 1999, p. 56, quoted in Amin & Thrift 2002, p. 17)

For those who live there, the rhythms of the city represent a kind of system of coordinates that allows them to get their bearings, while the 'footprint effects' introduce a dimension of historicity, preserving traces of the past or pointing beyond the present place: 'imprints from the past, the daily tracks of movement across, and links beyond the city' (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 9).

A third term could be added to these three metaphors which are explicitly denoted as such, namely 'circulation', a term which Amin and Thrift cite as a central feature of the city, without counting it as a leading metaphor. In *La poubelle* it is certainly employed not only with the concrete meanings of traffic and the circulation of goods, but also on a metaphorical level.

All four metaphors are ultimately connected to dimensions of time and aspects of entanglement. This makes them well-suited to describe the copresence of heterogeneous temporalities, which, according to Achille Mbembe, are characteristic of African societies in general:

L'hypothèse centrale [...] est que la légalité propre des sociétés africaines, leurs propres raisons d'être et leur rapport à rien d'autre qu'à elles-mêmes s'enracinent dans une multiplicité de temps, de rythmes et de rationalités qui, bien que particuliers et, parfois, locaux, ne peuvent pas être pensés en dehors d'un monde qui s'est, pour ainsi dire, dilaté. [...] (Mbembe, 2005, p. 21)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 'The central assumption that guides what follows is that the peculiar "historicity" of African societies, their own raisons d'être and their relation to nothing but themselves, are rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualized outside a world that is, so to speak, globalized' (Mbembe 2001, p. 9, slightly modified translation).

The concept of a 'time of entanglement' developed in this context proves helpful for an analysis of *La poubelle*, where the characters are implicated in a variety of time frames and global dynamics. Although the colonial age is over, colonial structures persist in Dakar—mainly in the area of economics and the resulting power relations, but also in connection with the modernisation of traditional society in the city. In this study, I will use the term 'entangled rhythms of life' to describe the temporalities of everyday postcolonial life—temporalities which make visible the interplay (or entanglement) between autochthonous temporalities, the *longue durée* of colonisation and globalisation.

## *La poubelle* as a Portrait of Daily Life in Dakar

Around 1980, everyday life in Dakar acquired literary relevance. A few years before Diop's *La poubelle*, Aminata Sow Fall's very successful novel *La grève des battù ou Les déchets humains* (1979) paints a portrait of Dakar addressing the tension between the model of European modernity and Islamic traditions of community. In a genre that falls between satire and utopia, the author focuses on the beggars in Dakar, who are tellingly referred to in the subheading as 'waste' and whom the council wants to drive out of the city to make it more attractive to European tourists.<sup>16</sup>

The tension between African traditions and European-influenced modernity in Dakar is also the theme of Diop's only novel. Like many other novels from this period, *La poubelle* highlights the existence of a double view of history and the world by integrating Wolof elements into the text.<sup>17</sup> In his portrait of the city, the author focuses on describing everyday life and social community in Médina, a 'quartier mi-bourgeois mi-populaire'<sup>18</sup> directly bordering the city centre, Dakar-Plateau. At the same time, Diop devotes a lot of space to the interplay with global economic dynamics, and in this context, the eponymous dustbin has an important part to play, representing on a smaller scale the circulation of goods between Africa and Europe.

So far, the novel has received almost no academic attention.<sup>19</sup> In 2012, Sara C. Hanaburgh dedicated a chapter to *La poubelle* in her dissertation about *Global Wreckage and Consumer Illusions* (2012), in which she read it as an

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<sup>16</sup> See Kalaora (2007), Diouf (2011) and Miller (1987) on Aminata Sow Fall's novel.

<sup>17</sup> See Diop (1995, pp. 82–83). Wolof is the most important Senegalese language.

<sup>18</sup> Diop (1984, p. 9).

<sup>19</sup> Although the novel is occasionally mentioned in surveys on Francophone African literature, there are almost no exclusive studies. Beside the chapter in Hanaburgh's dissertation (2012, pp. 110-123), there is an article by Diané (1999, pp. 101-107), which focuses on the linguistic problem.

example of the destructive effects of the global circulation of goods on the individual.<sup>20</sup> This reading differs sharply from the announcement of the narrator, who understands the novel as an 'histoire de l'après-adolescence de Babacar, de sa vie d'adulte dans Médina et dans la ville de la capitale' (Diop, 1984, p. 35).<sup>21</sup> His primary focus is on the local, and his coming-of-age story emphasises the relationship between individual and community.

Babacar or Mour—the name he is usually known by in Médina—left his native village a few years ago to move to Dakar, where he works in the construction industry, has learned the rudimentaries of reading and writing from student friends, and lives with his uncle in Médina. His is a typical biography of village-city migration, a frequent topic of the African novel. Diop does, however, modify the topos by focusing not on Mour's arrival in the city, but on his assumption of social responsibility at an important point in his life. He finds himself up against two social duties which mark important stages in his coming-of-age. First of all, he signs an instalment-purchase contract for a (social-housing) flat in an HLM which is still under construction—a first requirement for starting a family. Secondly, as the sacrificial feast of Tabaski approaches, it falls to him to buy the sheep and the festive clothing for all the relations in his uncle's house. That these duties are given equal weight by Mour shows that his life is marked both by African tradition and by the European-influenced demands of modern city life. But fulfilling both duties is beyond Mour's financial means. The consequences of failure are described in drastic terms, especially when it comes to the second duty:

L'homme de Médina qui ne respectait pas cette tabaski en abattant le mouton de sacrifice et en « habillant » les siens, se démarquait, se marginalisait par rapport à tous les autres Médinois; c'était un quasi-suicide (Diop, 1984, p. 39)<sup>22</sup>

This reflection foreshadows the end of the novel. Parallel to the story of Mour, we also hear the story of his neighbour Camara, who occupies a leading position in the city council.<sup>23</sup> Camara, as will become clear in the course of the novel, lives beyond his means like a typical postcolonial picaro, and does everything he can to create the illusion of wealth, even filling his dustbin with goods discarded by an American retailer. These are taken out by the local children and immediately

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<sup>20</sup> '[E]very human being will try to get ahead in the superficial game of material gain, but is likely to find out one day that one is not solely in control of one's own material success' (Hanaburgh, 2012, pp. 114–115).

<sup>21</sup> A 'story of Babacar's post-adolescence and adult life in Médina and the centre of the capital.'

<sup>22</sup> 'The man of Médina who did not respect Tabaski by slaughtering the sacrificial sheep and "fitting out" his family, set himself apart, marginalised himself from all the other people of Médina. It was virtual suicide.'

<sup>23</sup> 'Jeune cadre qui travaille au Building administratif, dans le centre moderne de la capitale, Dakar' (*Young employee who works in the administrative block, in the modern centre of the capital, Dakar*, Diop, 1984, pp. 30-31).

confiscated by their parents because with a bit of repair work they can still be used. Thus in Médina the dustbin comes to symbolise Camara's wealth. At the same time, it acts as a link with the global circulation of goods, whose waste products end up in Médina, where they cease to be rubbish and become desirable objects.

Despite the difference in social status, Mour begins to discover surprising parallels between him and his high-earning neighbour, who turns out to have financial problems of his own and resorts to illegal means of obtaining money. While Mour, with the help of his fiancée, eventually manages to honour both financial duties, Camara is unable to slaughter a sheep for the feast of Tabaski, and ends up losing his place in the community of Médina. In a spectacular final scene, his social fall is made palpable when Mour finds him living as a tramp on the city dump, a place he refers to as 'ma poubelle' (Diop, 1984, p. 199).

It is in Camara's story that Hanaburgh finds what she sees as the moral of the novel. As I see it, though, the crux of *La poubelle* is neither Camara's story nor Mour's, but the portrait Diop paints of Dakar—and especially of Médina. This district was built for the black population on dried swampland in 1914, and soon became the first port of call for migrants arriving in the city from the countryside.<sup>24</sup> The name comes from the Arabic word *medina* which translates roughly as 'slum'. In the 1980s, the population of Médina was socially mixed—this is explained in a passage detached from the plot, in which the narrator supplies information about the district. In the same passage, Médina is described first as a 'quartier populaire', a working-class district of Dakar (Diop, 1984, p. 34), and then, somewhat contradictorily, as 'le quartier de la classe moyenne' (*the middle-class district*, *ibid.*, p. 35). The 'paysan déclassé du champ' (*peasant who has been relegated from the fields*) makes his living there just as much as the upper-middle-class employed by European firms.<sup>25</sup> The narrator does not neglect to point out the dumping prices of the global agricultural market are to blame for rural exodus;<sup>26</sup> both rural migrants and the wealthy middle class owe their presence in the district to globalisation.

A careful study of the text reveals that, in quantitative terms alone, more space is given to describing life in Médina than to telling Mour and Camara's stories. The novel, which spans about a year, focuses on deeply traditional and community-forging rituals, especially the daily evening ritual of tea and the preparation and

<sup>24</sup> See Dresch (1950, pp. 622–626) and, for a more detailed account, Faye (2000).

<sup>25</sup> 'Mais elle peut aussi abriter les fonctionnaires et les cols blancs les plus élevés, ou peu s'en faut, de la fonction publique ou d'une entreprise privée réelle, c'est-à-dire européenne' (*But it also offers a home to officials and top—or nearly top—white-collar workers in the public service, or in a proper—which is to say, European—private company*, Diop, 1984, p. 35).

<sup>26</sup> 'On y rencontrera effectivement le paysan déclassé du champ, déclassé à cause de la matière première qui se vend mal sur le marché mondial, donc sur le marché du pays occidental' (*And there, true enough, you will come across peasants who have been relegated from the fields—relegated because the raw materials sell so badly on the global market, which is to say the Western market*, Diop, 1984, p. 35).

celebration of the feast of Tabaski held annually in Médina. Embedded in this rhythm with its pattern of daily routines and annual events is the story of Mour and Camara, which is punctuated by two trips up and down Avenue Blaise-Diagne. One night at the beginning of the story, Mour follows Camara to the city centre, where Camara collects the discarded products of the American retailer. On the night before the feast of Tabaski, the American retailer and his wife pay a visit on Camara, but because Camara is out, the neighbours invite the couple to have tea and dinner while they wait. The meeting is described in great detail, and before the Americans leave, the provenance of the dustbin has been revealed. This and Camara's disappearance are discussed at length over tea when Tabaski is over. The novel ends with Mour's second trip to the city centre about a year later—this time he strolls the streets as a flâneur. Various *footprint effects* add a historical dimension to this part of the novel—until Mour's walk comes to an end at the enormous city dump where he finds Camara.

The analysis that follows in the next part of this paper will look at the construction of social community within the framework of daily rhythms, marked in particular by the ritual of tea. After that, the focus will be on the aspects of transitivity and *footprint effects*, and finally a last dimension of temporal entanglement will be examined—the circulation of goods.

## *Temps naturel versus heure européenne: everyday rhythms in Dakar*

Diop's description of Médina begins with the following words: 'Entre dix-huit heures et le crépuscule, l'éclat du soleil est à peine jauni dans les rues de Médina, quartier mi-bourgeois mi-populaire de Dakar' (Diop, 1984, p. 9).<sup>27</sup> It is in this period of time, marked not by the calendar, but only by the clock, that a large part of the action unfolds. It is the evening ritual of tea, when people meet up on the streets to drink tea and chat. This daily ritual has a community-forging function; as I will demonstrate below, it also serves as a marker of social position.<sup>28</sup>

The reference to time, 'entre dix-huit heures et le crépuscule', points to two different ways of measuring time. The chronometric reference, 'dix-huit heures', follows the Western way of measuring time and marks the end of work—an

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<sup>27</sup> 'Between six o'clock in the evening and dusk, the light of the sun is barely yellow in the streets of Médina, the half bourgeois half working-class district of Dakar.'

<sup>28</sup> The ritual can be defined as a '(social, political and religious) practice, institutionalised and regulated to a greater or lesser degree [...], in which a social group (or an individual acting as a member of a social group or society) agrees on or assures itself of its common values and beliefs.' (Braungart, 1996, p. 63).

area which is almost entirely absent in the novel.<sup>29</sup> The mention of dusk, on the other hand, refers to the course of the sun; there are also frequent references to the position of the sun in the sky and the strength of its rays as ways of measuring the passing of time.<sup>30</sup> The period of time referred to can, then, be said to be situated on the border between chronometrically measured time and solar time—or, as it is called in the novel, ‘temps naturel’ (Diop, 1984, p. 47).

The ritual as a social practice is characterised by repetition and rhythm.<sup>31</sup> But repetition also invariably contains the possibility of variation, and it soon becomes clear that the ritual of tea is performed by a group of people who are open to change and modernisation. The narrator makes a point of stressing that the first glass of tea, which was previously reserved for the adults, is now also offered to uncircumcised boys and unmarried girls.<sup>32</sup> The modernisation of society can also be seen in the mixture of people who meet for tea outside Camara's house. As well as public servant Camara and the illiterate Mour, who gives careful thought to the way he dresses so as to assert himself socially, the group also includes students. They, too, represent a form of modernity within society and discuss social mobility, change, and movement: ‘Vous avez balayé la vieille garde pour la remplacer, mais on vous aura à votre tour! (...) C'est la loi des générations’ (Diop, 1984, pp. 17-18).<sup>33</sup>

Camara, whose possessions Mour often admiringly describes as ‘modern’, has a special status in the circle of tea drinkers: ‘pour chacun des Médinois, les autres savaient d'où il venait, et où il en était avec son problème; les autres pressentaient même où il allait avec son problème. Mais sur Camara, rien!’ (Diop, 1984, p. 30).<sup>34</sup>

Teatime, like the children's game of football, ends at dusk, when evening prayers are said: ‘il faut arrêter le thé, car c'est le crépuscule. Il faut aller prier’ (iDiop, 1984, p. 25).<sup>35</sup> Natural time and religious time form a unity for the social community of Médina.<sup>36</sup> Once again, though, Camara is an exception. While all the

<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, we are told that Mour works from nine to six with half an hour's lunch break: ‘Entre 9 heures et 18 heures tous les jours, avec une demi-heure pour manger du riz au poisson!’ (*Between 9 and 6 every day, with a half-hour break to eat rice and fish!* Diop, 1984, p. 18).

<sup>30</sup> At first: ‘l'éclat du soleil est à peine jauni dans les rues de Médina’ (*The light of the sun is barely yellow in the streets of Médina*, Diop, 1984, p. 9); later on: ‘La pénombre crépusculaire, insensiblement, s'épaississait et s'étendait le long de la rue’ (*The dark of dusk thickened and spread along the street, imperceptibly*, *ibid.*, p. 25). The behaviour of the birds is also a part of this gradual nightfall.

<sup>31</sup> See Braungart (1996, p. 76).

<sup>32</sup> Diop (1984, p. 10)

<sup>33</sup> ‘You've swept away the old guard to take its place, but the same will happen to you! [...] It's the law of generations.’

<sup>34</sup> ‘With all the other people from Médina, everyone knew where they came from and where they were at with their troubles—even guessed where they were headed with their troubles. But with Camara, nobody knew a thing!’

<sup>35</sup> ‘Tea is over because it's getting dark. We have to go and pray.’

<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, the voice of the muezzin is compared to *temps naturel*: ‘C'était cela que, de sa voix aussi lancinante que ce temps naturel lui-même, le muezzin de cette Médina criait’ (*That was what the muezzin of this Médina was crying, in a voice as haunting as natural time itself*, Diop, 1984, p. 47).

others return home when the muezzin calls, Camara goes out: 'Il fait tout à l'envers,' Mour thinks, 'il sort quand les autres rentrent' (Diop, 1984, p. 47).<sup>37</sup> Or, as it says elsewhere: 'Les Camara, eux, vivent à l'heure européenne' (Diop, 1984, p. 117).<sup>38</sup>

What does it mean to 'live by the European clock'? A look at the city centre shows that the natural and religious rhythms do not apply there. The end of the day is marked not by the *muezzin*, but by the streetlamps: 'Ces lampes ressemblent à des muezzins de villes qui, en guise de voix, nomment le crépuscule, parlent en signaux lumineux du haut de leurs miradors' (Diop, 1984, p. 54).<sup>39</sup>

The lighting guarantees that public life continues at night. When owners close their stores, night traders begin to sell their wares: 'Les marchands du soir, de cette heure crépusculaire, veilleront jusqu'à l'aube, du moins jusqu'à la sortie des salles de cinéma, en fait au petit matin' (Diop, 1984, p. 53).<sup>40</sup>

European time stands in clear opposition to the daily rhythm of Médina, which is determined by the sun and by religion. This creates a marked temporal difference between Médina and the city centre—a difference which is also made explicit: 'La grande ville semblait avoir des conditions de rythme de vie qui lui sont particulières là où Médina et le pays intérieur, surtout, respectent la course du soleil et le temps de la prière' (Diop, 1984, p. 53).<sup>41</sup>

## Transitivity: Avenue Blaise-Diagne

Although Diop repeatedly points out marked differences between Médina and the city centre, there are also passages where he insists, with equal vehemence, on the connections and transitivity between the two districts. In a passage introducing Dakar, in which he addresses his readers in the style of a sociologist or urbanist, he explicitly highlights the difficulty of drawing boundaries between the districts:

On peut naître, vivre et mourir à Dakar sans savoir en réalité où finit la ville et où commencent les quartiers populaires du pays. Certes, dans le centre de la ville, l'on sait bien que l'on n'est plus dans un quartier comme Médina, ou Minzat, ou Colobane. Mais que l'on s'éloigne un peu du quartier européen, sur le plateau, au-dessus de l'océan atlantique, que l'on se dirige vers l'intérieur,

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<sup>37</sup> 'He does everything back-to-front, he goes out when the others are coming home.'

<sup>38</sup> 'The Camaras live by the European clock.'

<sup>39</sup> 'Those lamps are like city muezzins announcing dusk in light signals from the tops of their towers.'

<sup>40</sup> 'the night traders will be up from dusk until dawn—or at least until people come out of the cinemas in the small hours of the morning.'

<sup>41</sup> 'The city seemed to have rhythms of life all its own, whereas Médina and the countryside respect the course of the sun and prayer times.'

lentement, et l'on aura du mal à établir les limites réelles de la ville réelle de la capitale de Dakar, avec les commencements des quartiers populaires médinois (Diop, 1984, p. 36)<sup>42</sup>

The difficulty arises because there are areas of transition which do not permit the gradually moving observer to discern a clear-cut boundary. A similar transitivity applies to social mobility in the city: 'la même imprécision des limites entre le petit bourgeois médinois et le pauvre du pays qui, après avoir quitté les champs, est venu à Dakar tenter sa chance' (Diop, 1984, p. 36).<sup>43</sup>

The most impressive example of transitivity is the description of Avenue Blaise-Diagne, which is linked with Mour's already-mentioned pursuit of Camara in such a way that the narrative perspective is automatically connected to Mour's spatial movement. At the same time, though, the narrative voice is independent of Mour, occasionally providing additional information. When first mentioned, the avenue is referred to as the backbone of Médina, but also as the umbilical cord connecting Médina to the city centre:

Cette avenue Blaise-Diagne est l'épine dorsale de Médina. Mais c'est aussi elle qui relie cette pauvre et vaste Médina à la ville de la capitale, à la ville centrale; par conséquent, elle est également un cordon ombilical qui rappelle la consanguinité de Médina et de la grande et moderne ville de Dakar. (Diop, 1984, p. 48)<sup>44</sup>

Although he focuses on the differences (*pauvre et vaste Médina vs. la grande et moderne ville de Dakar*), Diop also highlights the connecting element by employing the image of the umbilical cord, with its associations of circulation. Later in the passage, too, the narrator's description of the avenue focuses on spatial movement and change, attributing both to the street itself, and thus anthropomorphising it to a certain extent:

Cette avenue Blaise-Diagne, si on la prend ainsi depuis Médina et qu'on suit le cours en direction de la grande ville, on la voit à chaque étape, à chaque jalon de son voyage, se *muer* et *devenir* de plus en plus centrale, moderne, nette et moins peuplée [...]

*Cette avenue court, s'enjolivant d'autres commerces, vers le centre-ville, marquant également sa course en se dévêtant de sa substance*

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<sup>42</sup> 'You can be born and live and die in Dakar without really knowing where the city ends and where the working-class districts begin. To be sure, in the city centre you know you're no longer in a district like Médina, or Minzat, or Colobane. But when you begin to move away from the European district, "le plateau", above the Atlantic Ocean, and head slowly for the interior, you have trouble making out the true limits of the true city of Dakar's capital and the beginnings of the working-class districts of Médina'.

<sup>43</sup> 'The same fuzziness of boundaries between the petit bourgeois of Médina and the country poor who have left the fields to try their luck in Dakar'.

<sup>44</sup> 'This road, Avenue Blaise-Diagne, is the backbone of Médina, but it also links that poor, vast Médina to the capital, the city centre, so that it is, at the same time, an umbilical cord which reminds us of the blood shared by Médina and the big modern city of Dakar.'

humaine médinoise, en particulier dans la frange populeuse. [...]

*Toujours en s'enjolivant*, par des boutiques d'habits de mode et de tissus à coudre, souvent lamés et brodés, et par d'autres boutiques de prêt-à-porter toutes, ou presque, tenues par les communautés libano-syriennes, *cette avenue Blaise-Diagne quitte Médina* (Diop, 1984, pp. 48-49, my emphasis, SG)<sup>45</sup>

Here the active verbs of changing and moving are attributed to the street so that the course it takes seems to involve active spatial movement.

In this description of the avenue—unlike in the previously quoted passage—there is mention of a clear divide between Médina and the centre. The cut-off point is a bend described as an elbow, where a market is situated:

elle [l'avenue Blaise-Diagne] fait un coude au niveau du marché Sandaga, pareil à une foire internationale où peuvent, par hasard, se rencontrer le Médinois comme le vrai citoyen du centre. Mais ce coude est là : il est interdit aux cars rapides de prendre ce coude pour descendre, avec leurs passagers non vraiment citoyens, vers ce centre de la ville capitale (Diop, 1984, p. 49)<sup>46</sup>

On the one hand, this market is a place where the inhabitants of Médina and the city dwellers from the centre can meet. On the other hand, the bend marks a point of separation, and this is emphasised once again when Mour makes his last trip to the centre: 'le coude magique, par lequel Médina et ses oripeaux se séparaient brusquement de la grande ville moderne et européenne de Dakar, Dakar-Plateau' (Diop, 1984, p. 182).<sup>47</sup> At the bend, Avenue Blaise-Diagne becomes Avenue William Ponty (today Avenue Pompidou). As the narrator follows the street, he remarks on the clothes of the passers-by, which look more and more European, the further he advances. Special attention is given to the 'secrétaires-citadines gracieuses et ampoulées dans leurs pas déhanchés', who are described in sociological terms as being 'marque du sous-développement' (Diop, 1984, p. 50).<sup>48</sup> The young ladies work in the city, but allow themselves to be kept by men at the same time, so that they have plenty of money to spend on Western clothes and jewellery, before going on to marry and change their way of life. In Médina and the countryside, they will give everything up for their children. The narrator compares

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<sup>45</sup> 'If we follow Avenue Blaise-Diagne from Médina into the city, we see it *change* at every step of the way, every stage of its journey—we see it *become* more central, modern, clean, less populated [...]. The avenue *runs* into town, smartening itself up as it approaches the city centre, with different kinds of shops, and marking its *course*, too, by stripping itself of its Médinian human substance, particularly in the highly populated outskirts [...]. Still continuing to smarten itself up, with fashion boutiques, other prêt-à-porter boutiques and shops selling shiny, embroidered dress fabric—all, or almost all run by the Syrian-Lebanese communities—the Avenue Blaise-Diagne leaves Médina.'

<sup>46</sup> '[...] the Avenue Blaise-Diagne bends like an elbow round about Sandaga Market, a kind of international fair where you are as likely to meet a man from Médina as a proper city dweller. But the elbow is there—the express buses, with their non-city-dwelling passengers, are banned from driving down it towards the city centre.'

<sup>47</sup> 'The magic elbow, abruptly separating Médina and its rags from the great modern European city of Dakar, Dakar-Plateau.'

<sup>48</sup> 'urban secretaries, graceful and pompous with their swaying steps'; 'a brand of underdevelopment'.

these urban secretaries with the avenues that flow into one another, but this time, the point of view is changed: the street is seen as beginning at the harbour of Dakar-Plateau and described in terms of the life of a woman, each section of the avenue representing a different stage in her life:

Celle-ci [la double-avenue], en effet, quitte le port aussi graduellement que l'on quitte l'enfance, ou l'adolescence. Elle forme, au centre de Dakar, le temps du célibat doré, entre les hauts buildings et les maisons européennes les plus cossues de la ville [...]

Soudain, cette chic avenue William-Ponty fait un coude brutal et devient nommément l'avenue Blaise-Diagne, de Médina, comme si, par un coup de foudre survenu au milieu de son célibat doré, elle allait aimer et se marier à Médina (...); elle prend le chemin qui se revêt de prisunicis et de boutiques de plus en plus populaires, d'hommes et de femmes de plus en plus habillés à l'africaine (Diop, 1984, pp. 51-52)<sup>49</sup>

By equating the different stages of life with the sections of the street, the chronology of life is, as it were, spatialised. At the same time, this process further anthropomorphises the avenue, thus translating the course of the street into temporal categories. Lastly, the transitivity between the city centre and Médina is highlighted once again, because the two areas are described not as distinct and independent, but as flowing into one another and subject to change.

## Footprint Effects

A historical dimension is introduced very early in the novel, in the narrator's sociology-style description of Médina: 'Si Médina l'a été [un bidonville très marginalisé, SG], Médina ne l'est plus qu'en partie' (Diop, 1984, pp. 34-35).<sup>50</sup> Later, too, there are moments when the past 'shows through' to produce *footprint effects*. The most obvious effects are related to the colonial past, but the historic dimension also covers pre-colonial history and the post-colonial period, even affording occasional glimpses into the future. This shows that the present cannot be imagined without the past and the future, but must be thought of as an

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<sup>49</sup> 'And indeed, this [double avenue] leaves the harbour as gradually as we leave childhood or adolescence. In the centre of Dakar, between the high-rise blocks and the city's most opulent European houses, it forms the golden age of the single life. [...] Then suddenly, the elegant Avenue William-Ponty bends abruptly, entering Médina and becoming Avenue Blaise-Diagne, as if, in the middle of the golden age of singledom, it had fallen in love and married and settled in Médina [...]; it goes on its way—a way which is decked out with bargain chains and increasingly working-class shops, and with men and women in increasingly African dress [...]'

<sup>50</sup> 'If Médina was once [a very marginalised shantytown], it is now only partly so'.

'emboîtement de présents, de passés et de futurs qui tiennent toujours leurs propres profondeurs d'autres présents, passés et futurs' (Mbembe, 2005, p. 36).<sup>51</sup>

The colonial period is evoked right at the beginning of the novel, when the children take over the streets to play football and their appropriation of public space is described as a form of colonisation: 'Ceux-ci [les petits Médinois footballeurs] colonisent le bitume médinois dès qu'ils ont un moment de libre' (Diop, 1984, p. 33).<sup>52</sup> But the colonial past is particularly in evidence in the encounters between black people and 'toubabs', as the white people are called. The first such encounter takes place when Mour buys himself a ticket to the cinema in the city centre. He is not really afraid of the European lady in the box office, but he feels uncomfortable, because the toubabs are always in a position of power and economic superiority: 'pour acheter comme pour vendre, le toubab, toujours, pouvait plus, pouvait mieux' (Diop, 1984, p. 58).<sup>53</sup>

The second encounter takes place when the Americans who provide Camara with the discarded goods he puts in his dustbin, come to Médina to bring him a message. Camara is not at home, and so his neighbours take it upon themselves to welcome and feed the couple. When the Americans first arrive, though, the people of Médina are afraid: 'Les conditions de l'époque coloniale, à commencer par cette peur, n'avaient pas tout à fait disparu' (Diop, 1984, p. 90).<sup>54</sup> The reason given for this fear is that almost all the people of Médina are scared of the bailiffs and the legal system—a legacy of the colonial rulers, standing for immutability and rigidity. The Wolof word for this system is *Yôn-wi*. *Yôn*, the narrator tells us, means law, but in common parlance it also means path and street. Thus the abstract principle is projected onto space and also—since a path is connected to whoever walks on it—onto time. In a country where the paths follow the rhythm of the seasons, adapting themselves to people's movements and to changes in nature,<sup>55</sup> only the streets of the whites are not subject to change: 'les yôn tracés par le toubab colon étaient, eux, faits d'une seule pièce, rigides, immuables, comme des routes de fer, des chemins de fer' (Diop, 1984, p. 88).<sup>56</sup> This colonial form of justice stands in opposition to the traditional form of 'taranga', which is based on rules of politeness and reciprocal duty. Furthermore, taranga constitutes a basic principle for peaceful community life—a principle that suffered some damage in the colonial period, but has nevertheless survived:

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<sup>51</sup> 'an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures' (Mbembe, 2001, p. 16).

<sup>52</sup> '[The little footballers of Médina] colonise the local bitumen as soon as they have a moment to spare'.

<sup>53</sup> 'whether buying or selling, the toubabs could always do more and better'.

<sup>54</sup> 'Colonial conditions, starting with this fear, had not disappeared entirely.

<sup>55</sup> Diop (1984, p. 87).

<sup>56</sup> 'these yôn set down by the colonial toubab were all of a piece, rigid, immutable, like iron roads, like railways'.

Cette taranga, ce sens de l'hospitalité et de la sociabilité, ici, existait bien avant les toubabs et certainement leur survivra, quand bien même elle porterait les flétrissures de leur passage, de leur colonie, de leur monde, ce monde où celui qui a plus d'or méprise celui qui n'en a pas assez (Diop, 1984, p. 109)<sup>57</sup>

The encounter between toubabs and the residents of Médina is accordingly described as a confrontation between yôn and taranga. Just as inexorable as yôn, the approaching toubabs continue along their path—an approach that appears in the text in a kind of slow motion, thanks to frequent reiterations of phrases such as 'Et les deux toubabs avançaient dans la rue médinoise' (Diop, 1984, p. 89).<sup>58</sup>

Despite the initial linguistic obstacles and a constant underlying mistrust, the visit nevertheless turns out well; the encounter is successful. In compliance with the rules of taranga, the toubabs are invited to tea and later to dinner. They accept both offers, conform by eating with their hands and, when they leave, are able to say: 'Les Camara, eux, vivent à l'heure européenne, tandis que nous, nous avons vécu aujourd'hui la taranga traditionnelle africaine' (Diop, 1984, p. 117).<sup>59</sup> Thus social and cultural difference are represented as at least partly surmountable.

In several places in the novel, reference is made not only to the colonial period, but also to a pre-colonial African history. This is clearest in the conversation with the toubabs, where talk about the origins of a surname leads to a discussion of the beginnings of Wolof culture—beginnings which are traced back through the peaceful Islamisation of the Wolofs all the way to the culture's Egyptian roots. This creates an identity-forging historicity, independent of colonisation.

Footprint effects, which add dimensions of historicity and futuricity to the text, can also be found at the end of the novel. Almost a year after the feast of Tabaski, between knocking-off time and dusk, Mour makes a second trip to the city centre. This time he adopts the role of a flâneur: 'Mour marchait, flânait' (Diop, 1984, p. 182).<sup>60</sup> Once again the narrator follows Mour along Avenue Blaise-Diagne, although this time the description only sets in on the other side of the *coude magique*, where the city centre begins, and focuses mainly on the various ethnic groups and goods that are to be found there.

The first part of Avenue William-Ponty is dominated by the Laobés, who offer their handicrafts to tourists. Their language reveals the close ties between the history of Dakar and global history, because the English which the Laobés learnt from the American soldiers based in Dakar in the Second World War has been

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<sup>57</sup> 'This taranga, this sense of hospitality and sociability existed here long before the toubabs and is sure to outlive them, although it will be marked by their passage, their colony, their world—this world where those with more gold despise those who do not have enough'.

<sup>58</sup> 'And the two toubabs continued down the street of Médina'.

<sup>59</sup> 'The Camaras live by the European clock, but today we lived by the traditional African taranga'.

<sup>60</sup> 'Mour walked, he strolled along like a flâneur'.

developed into an argot that has spread all along the west coast of Africa. Thanks to this process of appropriation, something that started off as foreign has ended up becoming part of the Laobés' own culture: 'Et depuis, ces laobés se sont transmis verbalement, phonétiquement, l'américain, de la même manière qu'ils se sont transmis leur propre histoire africaine' (Diop, 1984, p. 184).<sup>61</sup>

After crossing the market, Mour passes the windows of the Syrian-Lebanese shops, moving deeper and deeper into the city centre, and eventually arriving at the symbolically and historically laden Place de l'Indépendance, formerly Place Protet, after the founder of Dakar. Here, the colonial past is present, if only implicitly and negatively. Diop, however, emphasises the modern side of Dakar: Hotel Taranga with its associations of Senegalese hospitality, the election posters which demonstrate the country's democratisation and give hope for the future, and the planes in the sky, which act as reminders of global interconnectedness. In this context, the discourse surrounding the paradigm of underdevelopment is subjected to critical revision: 'le pays sous-développé, ça n'existe pas: il n'existe que le pays trans-développé, développé de loin et pour les besoins propres de ce « loin »' (Diop, 1984, p. 190).<sup>62</sup>

In this place full of memories, Mour feels himself to be a resident not only of Médina, but of all Dakar: 'D'ici, de cette Place de l'Indépendance, Mour est fier de sa capitale' (Diop, 1984, p. 191).<sup>63</sup> He also feels an awareness of historical development and of the present moment, and imagines the future:

Car ici, avant, il n'y avait rien: les cases ont cédé aux baraques, les baraques ont cédé aux maisons de pierres, et ces maisons ont cédé la place à ces si hautes maisons de la Place de l'Indépendance. Mour pense qu'un jour, que peut-être il ne verra pas, des maisons plus grandes encore surgiront de la terre, que son petit quartier de Médina sera aussi beau, qu'il y aura des maisons identiques dans sa campagne natale (Diop, 1984, p. 191)<sup>64</sup>

This passing vision of progressive optimism, however, is immediately thwarted: 'Il voit mal sa bonne campagne et ses habitants se mouvoir dans un pareil désordre de circulation et de précipitation!' (Diop, 1984 p. 191)<sup>65</sup>. Only a moment before, the city, with its high-rise buildings, was associated with modernity and progress; now it is described negatively as *désordre de circulation et de*

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<sup>61</sup> 'And since then, the laobés have handed down the American language orally and phonetically, in the same way they handed down their own African history'.

<sup>62</sup> 'the underdeveloped country doesn't exist: all that exists is the transdeveloped country, developed far away and for the specific needs of that faraway'.

<sup>63</sup> 'Standing here, on Place de l'Indépendance, Mour is proud of his city.'

<sup>64</sup> 'Because in the past there was nothing here: the huts have been replaced by shacks, the shacks by stone houses, and those houses by the tall, tall houses on Place de l'Indépendance. Mour thinks to himself that one day, which he may not live to see, even taller houses will rise from the earth, and his little district of Médina will be as beautiful as this—there will be identical houses to these in his native countryside.'

<sup>65</sup> 'He can't imagine his lovely countryside and its inhabitants rushing around in such chaos and such traffic!'

*précipitation*, and once again critically contrasted with the natural, slower rhythms of the countryside.

*Circulation*, however, means not only traffic, but also all the ways people or objects circulate in the city, creating movements and encounters. In the words of Amin and Thrift: 'cities exist as means of movement, as means to engineer encounters through collection, transport and collation' (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 81). Let us, then, turn in the final section of this paper, to the circulation of goods which, in *La poubelle*, is most notably symbolised by Camara's dustbin.

## The Dustbin or the Circulation of Goods

The topic of throwing things away is first raised on Mour's stroll across the market: 'ils [les toubabs] achètent même des fleurs qui durent peut-être un jour, et que l'on jette ensuite' (Diop, 1984, p. 187).<sup>66</sup> The purchase of products that don't keep distinguishes the toubabs from the residents of Médina. While the former buy goods only to throw them away soon afterwards, the latter know how to put the waste products to use: 'Ici, les savetiers et cordonniers savent, comme tous les artisans locaux, récupérer, de mille et une carcasses (voitures, objets, maisons démolies...), leurs matières premières' (Diop, 1984, pp. 147–148).<sup>67</sup> The different rhythms of life in Médina and the city centre recur in the different ways of dealing with waste. While the wealthy Western world gets through things quickly, the people of Médina recycle even broken objects. From a temporal point of view, rubbish means the end of a product that is no longer useful. Accordingly, rubbish belongs to a different timeframe from the continuous cycle of reusing and recycling most common in Médina. It is in this context that Mour interprets the huge mountain of rubbish he sees on his evening walk to the harbour and the end of Avenue William-Ponty—a mountain that receives everything the city throws away:

C'est une poubelle à la mesure d'une grande ville moderne, la poubelle de la capitale. Car la ville moderne est riche, elle est puissante et elle rejette vite les choses dès qu'elles commencent à s'user. Dakar, la capitale, et sa poubelle... (Diop, 1984, p. 198)<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> 'they [the toubabs] even buy flowers that last perhaps a day, and are then thrown away'. Cf. Diop, 1984, p. 189: 'on vend et on achète des choses qui peuvent se détériorer le lendemain' (*people buy and sell things that go off the very next day*).

<sup>67</sup> 'Here, the cobblers and the shoemakers, like all the local craftsmen, know how to salvage their raw material from a thousand and one kinds of carcasses (cars, odds and ends, demolished houses...)'.

<sup>68</sup> 'It's a dump on the scale of a big modern capital, the city dump. Because the modern city is rich, it's powerful and throws things out as soon as they start to wear. Dakar the capital, and its dump...'

At this point, it is worth re-examining the role of the dustbin in the novel and asking what it symbolises. But let us first have a look at Frantz Fanon's description of the colonial city in *Les damnés de la terre*, a passage which even today continues to influence the way we think about the African city:

La ville du colon est une ville en dur, toute de pierre et de fer. C'est une ville illuminée, asphaltée, où les poubelles regorgent toujours de restes inconnus, jamais vus, même pas rêvés. [...]

La ville du colonisé, ou du moins la ville indigène, le village nègre, la médina, la réserve est un lieu mal famé, peuplé d'hommes mal famés. [...] Le regard que le colonisé jette sur la ville du colon est un regard de luxure, un regard d'envie. Rêves de possession. Tous les modes de possession: s'asseoir à la table du colon, coucher dans le lit du colon, avec sa femme si possible. Le colonisé est un envieux. (Fanon, 2002, p. 42)<sup>69</sup>

When reading *La poubelle*, it is hard to resist the impression that the novel's basic structure was inspired by the above description. Two features of Fanon's *ville du colon* in particular seem to be taken up by Diop. The first is the city centre as *ville illuminée*; in *La poubelle*, where the centre of town is above all the scene of nocturnal activity, it is repeatedly described as *illuminé*: 'Facettes du monde moderne, du centre de la capitale, vitrines qui restent illuminées lors même que les boutiques sont fermées et que les rues sont désertes' (Diop, 1984, p. 192).<sup>70</sup>

The second element common to both authors is the idea of a dustbin overflowing with luxury objects. In adopting this image from Fanon, however, Diop makes a crucial change: it isn't the city-centre dustbins, but Camara's dustbin in Médina which is overflowing with things that most people wouldn't dare dream of. Because of these luxury objects, the bin holds great appeal to the people of Médina—even if they do leave the scavenging to their children:

Tous les habitants du quartier [...] auraient tous fouillé dans la poubelle des Camara, pour y trouver des choses intéressantes. Cependant, dans le quartier, on préfère laisser les enfants fouiller;

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<sup>69</sup> 'The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. [...] The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. [...] The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible.' (Fanon, 1968, p. 38)

<sup>70</sup> 'Facets of the modern world, of the city centre, windows that remain illuminated even when the shops are closed and the streets deserted'. Cf.: 'tout au long de ces rues modernes, les vitrines et les enseignes illuminées, comme les réverbères, étalent graduellement la lueur pâle de leurs lampes' (*all along these modern streets, the windows and illuminated signs, and the streetlamps, too, gradually spread the pale glow of their lights*, Diop, 1984, p. 54).

ensuite les grandes personnes récupèrent (Diop, 1984, p. 26)<sup>71</sup>

A shift takes place: the white people's dustbin ends up, as it were, in Médina. And this shift brings another in its wake: the neighbours' envy is directed not at the white people, as in Fanon's description, but at Camara:

On enviait sa place, sa villa moderne, son métier. Quel homme de Médina n'aurait pas aimé avoir une femme comme Marième! [...] Qui n'a pas cette envie d'avoir cette villa, cette femme ? Qui n'a pas envie d'avoir cette poubelle où finit la chasse au trésor des enfants, des familles de Médina? (Diop, 1984, p. 31)<sup>72</sup>

In *La poubelle*, it is Camara who tries to mark himself out from the others by his possessions, to all intents and purposes assuming the position of the *toubab*. He lives in the European rhythm, and his dustbin contains things that only take a little repair work to restore to working condition. At the same time, though, Camara contributes to the circulation of these objects in Dakar, by going to fetch them from the American retailer. This shows that things are put to use in Médina which, because of minor defects, would be deemed unusable in Western consumer society. The retailer who throws them out doesn't have time for the repair work like the people of Médina:

Je suis négociant et il me reste sur les bras, à chaque déplacement des produits, des articles plus ou moins détériorés que je n'ai le plus souvent ni le temps de réparer, ni le temps de brader ou, même, de jeter à la poubelle. [...] Camara vient m'en débarrasser (Diop, 1984, p. 118)<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the residents of Médina avail themselves of the surplus goods of the West—a form of 'trade' in which Camara (who also owes his job to the American) is ultimately only a middleman. That Camara ends up on the city dump is, in three senses, a logical ending to the novel.

Firstly, the mountain of rubbish symbolises the extent of economic interdependence and the circulation of goods. The origins of the empty cigarette

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<sup>71</sup> 'All the inhabitants of the neighbourhood [...] would have rummaged through the Camaras' dustbin to find interesting things. In this district, however, people prefer to let their children scavenge; after that the grown-ups take what they want.'

<sup>72</sup> 'People envied his standing, his big modern house, his job. What man of Médina wouldn't have liked a wife like Marième! [...] Who didn't want that house, that wife of his? Who didn't want that dustbin where the children's treasure hunt came to an end—where the treasure hunt of all the families in Médina came to an end.'

<sup>73</sup> 'I'm a retailer and every time I shift products, I'm left with more or less damaged articles which I don't usually have the time to repair or sell off or even throw in the bin. [...] Camara takes them off my hands for me'.

packets and fag ends on the dump<sup>74</sup> are themselves revealing of the global flow of goods, already symbolised on a smaller scale by Camara's dustbin in Médina. Secondly, Diop carries to an extreme the theme, borrowed from Fanon, of the dustbin as an indicator of wealth: 'Mour [...] n'a jamais vu une poubelle aussi grande, aussi fournie que cette poubelle du centre-ville' (Diop, 1984, p. 198).<sup>75</sup> An in-depth analysis of the several-page-long list of objects on the urban waste pyramid would be beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that everything is there, from empty packages to leftover food, to radios, refrigerators and furniture. Thirdly, the dump reveals itself as the reverse side of the modern city centre. Mour's futuristic vision on the architecturally modern Place de l'Indépendance is followed by a microcosm of decay, in which there is nevertheless still a form of life cycle. The dump has a whole host of inhabitants, from insects and worms to rats, birds and dogs attracted by the rotting leftovers and carcasses, to Camara himself, whom Mour finds dressed in rags, with a bottle of wine in his hand, clearly living off the food people have thrown away. In a haunting scene, he declares all the rubbish of modern Dakar his property, employing the same method he had earlier used in his attempt to simulate wealth: 'Car, qui te dit que c'est sa poubelle, à la capitale? [...] Babacar, c'est ma poubelle ! Ma poubelle ! Ma poubelle !...' (Diop, 1984, p. 198).<sup>76</sup> At the same time, though, he is now an inhabitant of the dump, and far from displaying wealth, he is barely distinguishable from the rubbish he lives off.

Diop's portrait of Dakar shows the splendour and misery of a big and modern city, but above all, it demonstrates the social challenges to forming individuals and communities. This analysis has been able to make clear that the construction of cultural and social difference is to a considerable degree effected on a temporal level. Beside the dividing elements, phenomena of transitivity and entanglement also play a central role in describing life in the city. Finally, it has been shown that within the time and space of the city, other temporal dimensions and global actors and structures are invariably present too.

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<sup>74</sup> 'Il marche sur de vieilles boîtes d'allumettes, sur des pots de yaourt, des paquets vides, des mégots de cigarettes de tous les coins du monde: Viking, Gauloises, Lucky Strike, Safi, Camel, Peter Stuyvesant, tabacs bruns, blonds, mélanges, en vrac, feuilles de tabac roulées' (*He walks over old match boxes, yoghurt pots, empty packets, cigarette butts from all over the world: Viking, Gauloises, Lucky Strike, Safi, Peter Stuyvesant, dark tobacco, light tobacco, blended tobacco, loose tobacco, rolled tobacco leaves*, Diop, 1984, p. 194).

<sup>75</sup> 'Mour [...] has never seen a dump as large or as full as this city-centre dump.'

<sup>76</sup> 'Because who tells you it's the capital's dump? [...] It's *my* dump, Babacar! My dump! Mine!'

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