

**Defying the law, negotiating change**

**The Futanke's opposition to the national ban on FGM in  
Senegal**

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## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the politics of the preservation and ‘abandonment’ of female circumcision in Fouta Toro, Senegal. The focal point of analysis is the overt opposition to the law criminalising female genital cutting in 1999, and development projects raising awareness about excision in human rights and reproductive health education programmes. As an ethnography of the politics around bodily practices in the light of governmental and non-governmental intervention, the thesis looks at how different interest groups justify their position towards excision. This is a timely enquiry, given the Senegalese government’s ‘acceleration programme of the complete abandonment of excision by 2015’ and some Futanke leaders’ non-compliance with, and opposition to this intervention.

After providing details about ‘the ban’ on ‘female genital mutilation’ in Senegal and a critical reflection on the events that are seen to have led to the call for this ban, I carefully disentangle what ‘the opposition to the law’ is and who disagrees with ‘the abandonment’ of the practice in Fouta Toro. The central part of the thesis is guided by an analysis of how excision is embedded in constructions of personhood, sociality and ethnic identity, and how the body is imagined and located in this process. I show how conceptions of ethnic purity and pride are formulated in terms of fear about a ‘loss of culture’ and ‘foreign invasion’ which nourishes discourses of opposition to the law and non-governmental intervention. Others use ‘human rights’ associated with non-governmental organisations and the state as a vehicle to express their views against excision and those who oppose its criminalisation. I examine how idioms like ‘the state’, ‘human rights’ and ‘Futanke way of life’ feature in discourses around the ban of excision in Fouta Toro, and how respectability and honour are maintained through competing representations of the female body as a site of morality. Some claim the female body – a reproducer of cultural identities – with reference to duties through kin obligations, others with reference to ‘human rights’ and ‘the state’.

Based on 15 months’ ethnographic fieldwork in Fouta Toro and nine years working in and researching the impact of development in Senegal, this dissertation contributes to scholarship on Fouta Toro and indicates how governmental and non-governmental intervention stirs up the caste-related power structures of a society led by the *Toorobbe* since the Islamic revolution in the 18th century. It shows how the female body is located as a site of morality, key to the reproduction of cultural identities.

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## Note on orthography

The Pulaar language has sounds that do not exist in European languages. One particular characteristic is implosive consonants. These sounds are represented by letters that are added to the Latin alphabet used for Pulaar script.<sup>1</sup>

**D** or **d** is an implosive d with glottal closure.<sup>2</sup> ‘Ceddo’ – ‘warrior’; also in ‘Mbad-daa’ – ‘How are you?’

**B** or **β** is an implosive b with glottal closure. ‘Binngel’ – ‘child’ or ‘ɓamtaare’ – ‘development’; also ‘Fulɓe’.

**Y** or **Ƴ** is an implosive di with glottal closure. The sound resonates in the throat. E.g. ‘ƳiƳam’ – ‘blood’, ‘Ƴiyal’ – ‘bone’.

**Ñ** or **ñ** is pronounced ny as in the Spanish ñ in ‘mañana’. E.g. ‘Ñeeño’ – ‘man of skill’ or ‘ñebbe’ – ‘beans’.

**ŋ** is pronounced ng as in *feeling* in English. E.g. ‘Naaje’ – ‘the sun’, ‘kaŋge’ – ‘gold’.

All letters, consonants and vowels, are pronounced in Pulaar, not dropped, silenced or changed like in English or French. As for vowels, a is pronounced  $\alpha$  : like ‘father’ but more like the German ‘Mann’; e is  $\varepsilon$  as in ‘bet’; i is  $\text{ɪ}$  as in ‘bingo’ ; o is  $\text{ɔ}$  : as in ‘lost’ ; u is  $\text{u}$  : as in ‘boot’ but more like German ‘Mut’. The meaning of a word can change depending on whether vowels and consonants are single or double and hence are pronounced long or short.

E.g. for vowels: ‘sood’ – ‘buy!’ and ‘sod’ – ‘cut!’

E.g. for consonants: ‘sellaani’ – ‘unhealthy, false’ and ‘selaani’ – ‘does not divert’;

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<sup>1</sup> See Westerman and Ward (1990), which is the most recent edition of the 1930 publication by the International Institute for African languages and Cultures (IILAC). This text is still the up-to-date reference on the phonetics of African languages by the International African Institute. My orthography in Pulaar follows local pronunciation and spelling of the Pulaar language, which does not diverge from Westerman and Ward (1990).

<sup>2</sup> See Westerman and Ward (1990: 10) on implosive sounds in African languages for further detail.

‘fettaade’ – ‘click one’s finger’ and ‘fetaade’ – ‘to swell’.

The consonants h, f, r, s are never doubled.

- c is pronounced *ch* like ‘child’ in English. E.g. ‘caabi’ – key or ‘cubballo’ – ‘fisherman’.
- H is pronounced in Pulaar, not silenced like in French. E.g. ‘hakkunde’ – the middle or ‘Haere’ (name of a village), which is however pronounced and spelt ‘Aere’ in French.
- w pronounced like the English *w* as in ‘will’.

The spelling of some words or places may cause confusion as the pronunciation in French and Pulaar differ. For example the place Aere Lao is spelt Haere Laaw or Hayre Laaw in Pulaar. Mboumba (French spelling) is spelt Mbummba in Pulaar. Thioubalel (official French spelling) is Cubalel in Pulaar. Cascas (official spelling according to French orthography) is spelt KasKas in Pulaar.

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Map 1: Fouta Toro in Senegal



Map 2: Fieldwork villages showing Bito and Mboumba and other places mentioned in thesis.

*For Aly Sanyu Jidaado*

*The love with which your life began*

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introducing the actors: the public declaration of Semme

*Semme, June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007. An important day in the history of the opposition to the law against female circumcision in Fouta Toro – it is the morning of the second ever ‘public declaration’ of the ‘abandonment of excision and early/forced marriage’ in this region. Since the national ban on excision was passed in 1999, numerous governmental and non-governmental attempts to raise awareness about the law and the harmfulness of female genital cutting have been strongly opposed by some religious leaders and their followers. Afraid of the marabouts’ power and political influence, most NGOs have given up raising awareness in Fouta Toro, ‘the most difficult region’ in terms of reaching the national target of complete abandonment of excision by 2015. Only the NGO Tostan has some 40–50 education centres still running in the district of Matam. In Podor, the religious leaders’ polemics against Tostan have forced centres to close and have driven away public health education and literacy programmes that mention excision.*

*I have spent the night with Tostan facilitators and anti-excision activists I have come to know well on mats in the courtyard of a family who want to declare their renunciation of excision today. The compound is crowded with guests who have come from far to witness this event. There is a nervous tension in the air. Is it going to work? Are they really going to achieve the feat of running this ‘public declaration’ right through to the end? Are there going to be participants? Probably not that many, it is Ceedu, the hottest period of the year when temperatures climb up to 48 degrees Celsius during the hottest hours of the day. The NGO facilitators I am with have been working very hard to prepare this event, raising awareness about excision, persuading people to invite their relatives from other villages to join their declaration so that more villages declare their renunciation of excision and early/forced marriage. But people are not only anxious that enough locals will participate, but also that the event may be sabotaged by religious leaders saying that ‘abandoning’ is anti-Islamic. Although government officials, the prefect and the village chief will be present as well as health-care professionals and midwives who will explain why*

*excision should be stopped, many locals consider that publicly renouncing it equates with publicly confessing one's abandonment of religion. Although the UNICEF representatives and 'the white man's NGO', Tostan, are welcomed by those who aspire to 'change' and 'development', they are condemned and despised by others who believe that they are trying to destroy 'Futanke culture' and Islam.*

The aim of this thesis is to explore why there has been such vehement opposition to the law criminalising excision and NGO (non-governmental organisation) awareness-raising programmes in Fouta Toro. According to the Demographic Health Survey (DHS 2005), only about 28% of the Senegalese population practise excision, in contrast to neighbouring countries: Mauritania 71% (DHS 2001), Mali 92% (DHS 2001), Guinea 96% (DHS 2005) and the Gambia 55% (DHS2008); and, according to a UNICEF study (2008) and CRDH (Centre de recherche pour le developpement humain, Dakar 2010) the proportion of girls who are cut has been decreasing since the implementation of NGO awareness programmes. Since Tostan's approach to convincing people to stop practising has been recognised, the Senegalese government has officially recommended their strategies in order to reach the national target of complete abandonment of FGC (female genital cutting) by 2015. This target seems ambitious. When I began to prepare for my PhD research in 2004, people in remote parts of Senegal were barely aware that a law criminalising the practice existed. Furthermore, at the time many people hesitated to oppose a practice that had been recommended by religious leaders and was strongly associated with women's purity and honour. When I formulated my PhD research proposal, I wondered to what extent the passing of the ban had been a result of compliance with international standards of human rights by a government that was to a large extent in the hands of ethnic groups (Wolof, Serere) who do not practise female circumcision themselves and who might have had an interest in representing their country as 'advancing' and meeting transnationally recognised standards of 'development'. For the Futanke, however, the ban might have been read as undermining their ethnic and cultural integrity and attacking their beliefs by outlawing a religious practice they follow – but the Mourides Wolof in semi-urban Senegal do not. On closer inspection, however, I realised that it was more complicated – the divisions and differences between 'the Futanke' who oppose the ban and 'development', and the government as run by pro-ban Wolof was blurred. To introduce the main actors in the 'national call for

abandonment’, those who oppose the law and the NGOs involved, I shall explore the political role-play of the ‘public declaration’ at Semme that I have introduced.

*The NGO facilitators and anti-excision activists with whom I have spent the night take me to greet other local women, men and children who have prepared theatre sketches and dance performances. They have dressed colourfully in their best gowns (wutte) and traditional dress (cosaan). Despite the nervous uncertainty in the air as to whether everything will go well, people are proud of what they have prepared for this important event, where local authorities and officials will come together to witness the women’s resolution to stop practising excision.*

*At mid-day we approach the public space where the declaration is going to take place. There are tents and chairs for the representatives of each village to sit upon and hold up signs with the names of their villages. I have come to know a lot of them well over the last six months in Fouta and they invite me to come and sit with them. However, in the end it is decided that I should sit on the stage with the officials and the other ‘white people’ who are here to document this event for the NGO Tostan and UNICEF.*



Image 1. Meeting and greeting at a public declaration

*Radio presenters are getting their equipment set up, the microphones are being tested and people are taking time to greet each other at length while traditional hodu music is blaring through the loudspeakers. Eventually ‘the authorities’ arrive. They slowly get out of two cars, wearing their most beautiful gowns made of expensive Malian cloth, and approach the stage with solemn expressions on their faces.*



Image 2. The officials arrive

*I can see the regional Tostan co-ordinator Abou Camara, a Gallunke/Maccudo (the caste of former slaves). By his side is his assistant, a Ceddo (warrior), and the national Tostan co-ordinator Khalidou Sy, a Cubballo (fisherman) whose parents moved from Fouta Toro to Kolda before he was born. The Tostan co-ordinators are accompanied by some influential regional supervisors and other officials who I know must be the village chief, the prefect and some influential marabouts. Traditional music is playing as they slowly ascend the stairs of the stage. The UNICEF representatives, whose presence is also important at the declarations, are already seated on the stage: one of them Senegalese, accompanied by a white colleague based in Senegal. Harouna Sy, my Pulaar teacher and a poet, has accompanied me to Semme. We move to the side of the stage to make space for the officials. He is hoping for re-employment by Tostan once the job of teaching me Pulaar is finished.*

*So far everything is going well: the declaring villagers are in the shade of the awnings, there is an audience of at least 500 people, the music is playing, the officials and toubabs (white people) are there and no serious 'poisoning' (bonnitde), as Tostan staff in Fouta call polemics against their activities, seems to be threatening the*

*success of this event. The second-ever public declaration of the abandonment of excision in Fouta Toro is finally beginning, after many other planned and failed declarations that were boycotted by influential people or religious leaders.*

The public declaration of Semme follows the model of the first ‘declaration’ in 1998, when women in the village of Malicounda Bambara, near Mbour, came to a consensus to stop practising excision after having taken part in the NGO Tostan’s basic education and literacy programme for some months. After the director of the NGO and UNICEF Senegal had heard what effect the programme had had on these women, they asked if they would be willing to make their resolution public. The women agreed and declared that they had stopped excision in their village in front of the national media. This event became ‘nationally important’, and, as some say, a precursor to the law (see chapter 2). Since this first declaration in Malicounda, Tostan has attracted and received funding from organisations (e.g. UNICEF and USAID), to end its two-year education programme with a public declaration for those who ‘want to’ make their abandonment of excision and early/forced marriage public. Since then, more than 3548 communities officially declared their ‘abandonment’ of excision across the whole of Senegal by 2008: at that point, Tostan’s strategies became officially recommended in ‘the national plan for the abandonment of excision by 2015’ proposed by the government and a committee in Dakar in 2008 (République du Senegal 2008).<sup>3</sup>

*The declaration begins with different authorities making speeches, explaining that everyone has come together on this day to hear the villagers of Semme and 69 other villages declare that they are no longer going to excise their daughters. Five excisers are present who have come to lay down their knives forever in the name of ‘human rights’.*

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<sup>3</sup> ‘L’évaluation a permis de mettre en relief la pertinence de l’approche intégrée éducation communautaire et mobilisation sociale ainsi que l’impact important qu’elle a eu sur l’abandon de la pratique de l’excision dans plusieurs régions du Sénégal. L’évaluation a aussi révélé que Tostan était aujourd’hui la seule ONG à intervenir sur le terrain de manière large avec un potentiel et une capacité technique importante avec mise en point d’un paquet d’éducation communautaire fondée sur l’approche droits’ (République du Sénégal 2008).



Images 3. Left: ‘Association des ex-exciseuses du department de Kanel’ declaring that they no longer practise their trade. Right: Praise singers entertaining the audience.

*Nurses and midwives have come to speak of the difficulties excision causes women in labour and explain that un-excised women suffer less during childbirth. Participants of the Tostan classes have prepared a sketch about a girl who haemorrhages and dies after being excised. Two influential religious leaders vow that excision is not a religious obligation and is nowhere mentioned in the Koran. On the contrary, the Koran states that practices harmful to health are better abandoned. The woman’s body is sacred and it should be protected from any practices that cause harm. This is important for everyone, I am told, because without the consent of the religious leaders it would be impossible for people to abandon the practice which is embraced as a ‘Prophetic recommendation’ or sunna. The prefect affirms that excision has been banned by Senegalese law and anyone caught practising will be sentenced to between three months and five years of imprisonment. The speeches and sketches are interspaced with hodu music and dance performances. Individual women bear witness to the problems they have experienced through excision and encourage others who have suffered to be brave and speak out. Eventually, representatives of each of the 70 ‘declaring’ villages slowly walk to the centre of the square with a sign showing the name of their village. On the other side there are others who carry signs with symbols of human rights – ‘the right to health’, ‘the right to vote’, ‘the right to a name’, ‘the right to non-discrimination’, ‘the right to freedom of speech’ are important ones people refer to when they explain their reasons for renouncing excision.*



Images 4. Left: Villagers holding up signs with the name of their village and declaring their ‘abandonment’ of excision and early/forced marriage. Right: Women holding up Tostan’s human rights’ learning tools: ‘the right to work’, ‘the right to health’, etc.

*During these speeches and sketches a school teacher who is sitting behind me on the stage says: ‘Ah! They are never going to abandon the practice. If it really is as harmful as they say, why has it been around for thousands of years? That is not possible!’ My Pulaar teacher, who has half-heartedly been trying to convince his wife and mother to stop excising their daughters for years without success, turns around and explains why the practice is harmful. The discussion is taking place rather loudly simultaneously with the ceremony below in the centre of the square. The officials, who are sitting only a few seats away from us, pretend that they cannot hear the debate between these two men. They continue their polemics about the village of Semme now having ‘abandoned’ excision together with 69 other villages, even though the schoolteacher, who is a local, seems to think differently.*

We have been introduced to ‘traditional’ leaders, such as marabouts and village chiefs, who tend to be *Toorobbe*. Their views for or against excision are crucial with regard to whether people stop practising excision. Representatives of the state, like the prefect, have to represent the law. Midwives and health-care assistants also play a central role. As employees of statutory ‘health’ structures they officially represent the state but have their own views about whether excision is a good thing. Excisers and ex-excisers’ stances also inform debates on whether to stop or continue the practice. Then, we have the ambiguous role of activists against the practice and facilitators, who are partly driven to raise awareness about the harmfulness of excision as a source

of income, sometimes fervently convinced of the importance of their work, sometimes not so sure and sometimes personally opposed to stopping the practice.

The public declaration at Semme indicates that FGC is the nexus at which tensions between the global and the local, secular and religious, human rights and community law, NGO policies and sectarianism, new elites and inter-caste relations all come together and cross over, intersecting at various levels. The debate around excision is a point at which these groups' conflicting views meet. It is one particular component of their relationships centred in and on the body.

Why is it that the physical body is at the centre of these conflicts? Female circumcision is a practice that transforms not just the physical body but with it the social body. The body in its physical form is the site of political tension. It is not just the subject of these debates but also subject to changes that result from them. It is a locus of resistance to different forms of imperialism, to social and political movements that challenge existing social norms. But it can also be a pioneering agent of social change, a signifier of resistance to stagnant social structures and social norms that are perceived to be restrictive. The refusal to adjust the appearance of the body to socially acceptable standards has long been understood as a way of negating culturally dominant values. Whether this involves cutting one's hair or growing it long, tattooing or piercing one's body, or circumcision – the way in which the body is kept is a marker of social identity, a display of embodied values and concepts, of political orientations and of belonging to a particular group of people who share values and beliefs.

There is an interesting parallel between a woman being required to undergo intervention so that she can become a full member of society and a society being required to undergo intervention so that it can become a full part of international society. In both cases the body is saved from the 'other', which is considered to be barbaric and uncivilised. The 'body' is rendered appropriate; its integrity is restored and its dignity preserved. In this thesis I show how excision can be an act of protection against unwanted social change, how it can

be seen as a form of defence against cultural imperialism. But I also show how the ‘abandonment movement’ can act as a refusal to adhere to Pulaar social structure and can represent a form of disobedience to the authority of those who have been leaders of this society since the Islamic revolution in the 18th and 19th century.

This thesis therefore does not just look at what excision is for particular interest groups and how it constitutes relationships between people who disagree with each others’ ‘laws’ and oppose each others’ politics – it also looks at how excision makes women and men. An understanding of how excision represents the moral foundations for female personhood and the honour of the family is crucial for grasping why many Futanke oppose the law. Honour is not an abstract entity: it requires a particular comportment, it grants safety and loss of it brings sadness and grief.

When I was in the field, I discovered that, in the context of public declarations and NGO awareness-raising programmes, the ‘abandonment’ of excision came in a package with the renunciation of ‘early and forced marriage’. Early marriage was perceived to be between the age of 10 and 18. I frequently encountered girls of this age who were keen on marrying soon. So-called ‘early marriage’ is therefore not necessarily against girls’ consent or ‘forced’. The law against early marriage, Article 111 of the family code, was passed nine months after the law against excision, Article 299.<sup>4</sup> I did not set out to study these, and in this thesis debates around early and forced marriage mainly come up in the context of how they are raised by Tostan facilitators or participants in the programme. For my informants, excision was only indirectly associated with early marriage and not at all with forced marriage. A lot of people believed that excision, like early marriage, would prevent a girl from getting pregnant before wedlock. Stopping excision was not inextricably linked to stopping early and forced marriage. Some people wanted to renounce early marriage at a public declaration but could only do so by renouncing excision as well, because three things were ‘abandoned’ together (see chapter 8).

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<sup>4</sup> Article 111 du code la famille: ‘Le mariage ne peut être contracté qu'entre un homme âgé de plus de 18 ans et une femme âgée de plus de 16 ans, sauf dispense d'âge accordé pour motif grave par le président du tribunal régional après enquête’ (loi n° 99-82 du 02 septembre 1999).

## 1.2 What is ‘female circumcision’ or ‘FGM’?

Female circumcision practices only began to be called ‘female genital mutilation’ in the 1970s when internationally organised campaigns became successful. Although campaigns against the practice have been around since the beginning of the 20th century (Boddy 2007; Thomas 2000, 2003), international bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN) refused to take it up as an agenda or recommend legislation against it due to the conflicts campaigns against FGC instigated in the colonies of Sudan and Kenya (Abu-Salieh 2001: 398).

Abu-Salieh (2001) notes that female circumcision, as it was still called at the time, came up for the first time in a UN Conference in 1931, when some European delegates pleaded for an end to these ‘barbaric customs’. However, the majority did not share their views and the subject was dropped until the 1950s (2001: 398). In 1952 the ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) recommended its member states to take action towards abolishing female circumcision. However, by 1959 it was decided at an international assembly of the WHO that no further action should be taken because ‘these ritual operations ... are a result of social and cultural conceptions’<sup>5</sup> (Abu-Salieh 2001: 398).

In 1976 the ECOSOC pushed the WHO to publish the Robert Cook report, which defined four types of female genital mutilation (Abu-Salieh 2001: 398).

- Type I Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals) and, in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).
- Type II Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (the labia are ‘the lips’ that surround the vagina).
- Type III Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris.

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<sup>5</sup> My translation. In original it says: ‘les opérations rituelles ... résultant de conceptions sociales et culturelles’ (Abu-Salieh 2001: 398).

Type IV Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

These classifications are now on WHO factsheet no. 241.

Finally, in 1979, at a seminar on ‘traditional practices affecting the health of women and children’ in Khartoum, Sudan, the WHO officially became committed to ‘fighting against’ female genital mutilations. A feminist activist called Fran Hosken, who had been carrying out research on where and how the genital operations were practised, suggested that not getting involved in campaigning against the practice would lead to medicalisation – the practice being carried out by health-care professionals. People would seek to improve the hygienic conditions in which the procedure is undertaken and try to reduce complications rather than stop practising. The result would be that the ‘female sexuality’ of ‘healthy girls’ would continue to be ‘permanently impaired’, with the ‘objective of altering females to make them submissive to males’ (Hosken 1982: 47). Furthermore, Hosken argued that female circumcision was not just an attack on female personhood and sexuality but also a ‘planned manipulation of the human personality or psyche’ associated with the political control of men over women, ‘as for instance described by Huxley and Orwell’ (Hosken 1982: 47).

In 1991, the WHO recommended that the UN officially adopt the term ‘female genital mutilation’.

The extensive literature on the subject, the support of international organizations, and the emergence of local groups working against the continuation practices appear to suggest that an international consensus has been reached. The terminology used to refer to these surgeries has changed, and the clearly disapproving and powerfully evocative expression of ‘female genital mutilation’ has now all but replaced the possibly inaccurate, but less value-laden term of ‘female circumcision’. (Obermeyer 1999:80)

Although research since the 1980s has indicated that calling such practices ‘mutilation’ was causing anger, non-compliance with policies aimed at stopping the practice and psychological damage to women of minority groups who had undergone

the practice in France and the US, the term continues to be used by political groups, campaigners and activists.<sup>6</sup>

Other organisations (e.g. Tostan) expressed preference for the use of the term ‘female genital cutting’ (FGC) as it does not suggest that parents intentionally mutilate their daughters. In Senegal the most frequently used term in French is the value-neutral term ‘excision’. In Pulaar the term is *haddinde*. Throughout this thesis I use the three terms as they were used by my informants.

Instead of saying ‘to eradicate FGC’, which has radical connotations, or ‘to stop’ or ‘end the practice’, the official term used by NGOs and the Senegalese government is ‘to abandon’ excision. This term implies leaving a practice that has unquestionably been carried out for generations due to the realisation that it represents a threat to women’s reproductive health or rights. The Pulaar word for ‘abandonment’ of excision is *woppude* – to leave something. The same verb is used for ‘leave me alone’: e.g. *woppu am* (‘let go of my gown’) or to leave/abandon someone – *a woppi kam?* (‘have you abandoned me?’). Similar to the word ‘abandonment’ in English, in Pulaar it has connotations of leaving something/someone that was cherished.

### **1.2.1 Prevalence of excision in Senegal and Fouta Toro**

According to the Demographic Health Survey (2005), 83% of excised women in Senegal (comprising 28% of the female population) have had parts of their genitals, e.g. clitoris and labia, removed. Twelve percent of ‘excised’ women have also undergone infibulation. For the regions of Fouta Toro where this research takes place, 93% of women are excised in the region of Matam and 44% in the region of St Louis. In Matam 90.1% are said to have had genital tissue removed (resembling WHO type II excision), 0.7% are said to have just been nipped (WHO type IV mutilation), 8.7% said that they were closed (WHO type III mutilation). In the region of St Louis, 91% have had tissue removed (resembling WHO type II excision), 0% nipped (WHO type IV mutilation) and 7.9% had their vagina closed (WHO type III mutilation).

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<sup>6</sup> For instance GAMS (Groupe pour l’abolition des mutilations sexuelles), IAC (Inter African Committee), CAMS (Commission d’abolitions des mutilations sexuelles), COSEPRAT and others: see chapter 2.

As far as the age of excision is concerned, in Matam 45.1% of girls were cut in their early childhood ('dans la petite enfance', DHS 2005: 248) and 43.2% in St Louis.

Table 1. Age at which girls are excised in Fouta Toro according to DHS (2005)

Age of girls at excision	Matam	St. Louis
Early childhood	45.1%	43.2%
0–1	19.4%	21.2%
2–4	15.7%	18.4%
5–9	2.6%	4.0%
10–14	0.0%	0.7%
15+	0.1%	0.7%

### 1.3 Introducing the people and the place

In Pulaar the Fulani people are referred to either as Haalpulaar – which literally means those who speak Pulaar (*haalde* – to speak) or as Fulbe. The expression Fulbe does not refer to a homogenised group of people living in one place but is a generalised term for a society that consists of multiple status groups (*kinde*) that differ greatly in their livelihoods. In local discourses in Senegal people make a distinction between the 'Peul', who are thought to be nomadic cattle-herders, and the 'Toucouleur' who are thought to be the sedentary inhabitants of Fouta Toro. The Haalpulaar'en themselves, however, do not refer to themselves in such a way in Pulaar and the origin of this distinction is said to be rooted in the French colonial administration. Dilley (2004) notes that the term 'Toucouleur' became established in the French literature in the 19th century, though some lone voices, like the explorer Raffeneil, spoke out against its use because it was based on wrong assumptions (Willis 1989; Dilley 2004).<sup>7</sup> As I show in chapter 3, the so-called 'Toucouleur' consist of at least four noble status groups or *rimbe* (*Toorobbe*, *Sebbe*, *Subalbe*, *Jaawambe*) and six lower-rank status

<sup>7</sup> See also Ginio (2002) on French colonial anthropologists and their influence on policy.

groups called *ñeeñbe* or men of skill (*Maabube*, *Waylube*, *Sakkeebe*, *Lawbe*, *Awlube*, *Wambaaabe*) as well as different categories of former slaves: *Gallun̄koobe/Maccube* (*Soottiibe*, *Halfaabe*). The so-called nomadic Peul or Fulbe who are also noble (*Rimbe*), comprise just one category, whereas the term ‘Toucouleur’ comprises 10 local categories that are still used. In addition, the French distinguished between the noble who they called *non-casté* (without caste) and the *casté*, who are the men of skill and the slaves. In Pulaar, however, the different status groups are all referred to as *kinde* (plural) or *hinnde* (singular), including slaves (*Gallun̄koobe/Maccube*). A distinction between those with caste<sup>8</sup> and those without does not exist in Pulaar but has been adopted in local discourse in the French language.

Throughout my research in Fouta Toro I found that my informants and people in general referred to themselves as *Futan̄koobe* or *Futanke* in French. Regardless of which status group they saw themselves as belonging to, when people spoke of their ‘culture’ and ‘their way of life’, particularly with reference to foreign practices that they wanted to protect their society from, they very much identified with this term. I therefore frequently refer to ‘the Futanke’ when referring to local discourses on identity and ethnicity. Although I am aware that this local designation of ethnic and localised identity is made up of many different status groups and peoples living in Fouta Toro, my intention is to explore who the Senegalese refer to when speaking of ‘the Futanke’s opposition to the ban on FGM’.

The majority of the fieldwork took place in a village called Bito, which is located on the farthest corner of the Ile Amorphile, beside the upper river Senegal facing the border of Mauritania. However, when I was in need of a break from sandstorms and felt the lack of fruit and electricity, I stayed in Mboumba along the tarmac road. In the following I introduce the area and describe how these two places are connected.

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<sup>8</sup> The use of the term ‘caste’ is controversial in local and academic discourses on Africa and beyond. Dumont (1980) argued against the use of the term outside India. Goody (1980) shows that concepts derived from European feudalism are not appropriate when describing the centralised polities of West Africa. Schmitz (1986, 1994) uses the term ‘*groupe statutaire*’ in French. He suggests that many terms used for the analysis of the social and historical stratification of particular status groups are subject to etymological transformations (Schmitz 1986: 351). Terms like ‘caste’, ‘feudalism’ and ‘segment’ should therefore be reassessed (Schmitz 1994). I do not at any point in this thesis attempt to compare concepts of social stratification such as caste in other places to *kinde/hinnde* among the Haalpulaar.



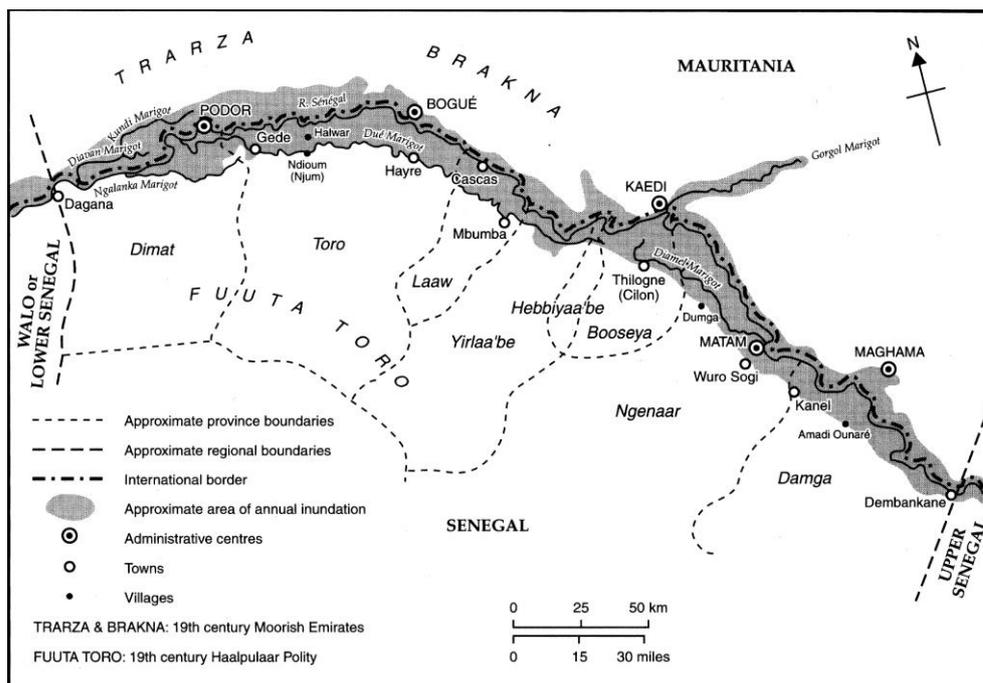
Image 5. Bito bordering Mauritania

The inhabitants of Fouta Toro divide their country into the zones north of the only tarmac road which crosses their country, and those to the south of it. The zones north east of the road are riverland, where the river Senegal divides into two, creating the Ile Amorphile, or Hakkunde Maaje in Pulaar. The Ile Amorphile is to all intents and purposes an island, as it is a stretch of land completely surrounded by the two rivers and their many branches during the rainy season. The border of Mauritania is naturally defined by the north banks of the upper river Senegal. This zone, north-north-east of the road is called Waalo. According to people's mental maps, it is where the Toucouleurs or Tukuloor live, the sedentary Fulbe of Fouta Toro. The Toucouleur have inhabited this land for over a millennium and defended it against foreign invasions (see also Robinson 1975a, 1975b; Wane 1969; Curtin 1971; Schmitz 1986, 1994).

The area south-south-west of the tarmac road is called Jeeri (Diery) and eventually, the further away you get from the road, it turns into the Ferlo, the grasslands where the nomadic herders graze their cattle. The landscape changes greatly throughout the year and the nomadic *Fulbe* are constantly on the move depending on how much grass

is available for their cattle. The *Fulbe* of the Jeeri, however regularly come back to the road for trade, to sell milk and buy other goods and some are settled there.

Administratively Fouta Toro is divided into the Département de Podor, Matam and Bakel with different *sous-préfectures*. To a large extent the fieldwork took place in the Département de Podor, except for some interviews that I did in Semme, Département de Matam. The Département de Podor is also divided into different provinces: Dimat, Toro, Laaw, Yirlaaʼbe, and Hebbiyaaʼbe. Bito is in the Communauté Rurale de Mboumba, Sous-Préfecture de Cascas, province of Laaw. These administrative categorisations were introduced by the French and do not conform to the mental and cultural landscape divisions between riverland and grasslands, Waalo and Jeeri, but they are frequently used as they represent political constituencies that affect work and relationships between people.<sup>9</sup>



Map 3: Fouta Toro indicating districts. Dille (2004) based on Robinson (1985) and Schmitz (1998)

Although the village officially numbers about 1000 inhabitants, a large part of this population has moved elsewhere for work, education or personal comfort. In actual

<sup>9</sup> Schmitz (1986: 5) also notes that the *communauté rurale* of Mboumba comprises eight *leydi*, the districts allocated to particular lineages by the Almaamies in the 18th and 19th centuries. The territory of some of these *leydi*, however, stretches into other *communautés rurales*.

fact there are therefore only about 500 inhabitants, the majority of whom are children and women. Sandstorms sweep across the lands frequently for nine months of the year, bringing fine dust across the river from Mauritania that gathers in all the corners of the mud-brick rooms, cleaned meticulously by the women on a daily basis. There is no electricity or running water here, no fridges – the food is prepared immediately before consumption by the women, for if it rests in the bowl for too long a dry crust forms on top of the *ñebbe* (beans) within hours and makes them inedible. People seek shelter from the hot winds in the tiring hours of the afternoon, drinking tea to keep awake, women plait each other's hair or nap, recovering from hours of physical work performed in the early hours of the morning, until the village comes to life again at five o'clock. People rise from their mats, continue with the errands they broke off in the morning, visit each other, greet each other and cheerfully prepare the compound for the evening ahead, fetching water to fill the drinking water basins that have been emptied throughout the day, cleaning the dust off the mats and mattresses, getting the children cleaned and looked after before dark, and arranging spaces for their husbands, who are on their way home after passing the afternoon with friends or at work. In these late hours of the day the children run wild, playing screaming games; the toddlers are tired, crying, not being able to keep up with the older children who unrelentingly tease each other and compete, negotiating their power amongst each other. Women do their last errands before dusk, come back from the river, switch on the radio and then darkness sets in and turns the compound into a cosy enclosed space, protected by the stars and the moon throwing its natural light onto the ground, providing just enough light for people to continue their evening activities: women cooking the food they have prepared during the day, children doing their homework on the mats with the torches that are handed around amongst each other when needed, boys making tea for the men, listening to their adult conversations. The older girls fetch things from different parts of the compound for their mothers whilst they are cooking or looking after the tired toddlers who are crying before falling asleep.



Image 6. Journey from Mboumba to Bito crossing the Ile Amorphile on the horse-cart

From Bito the closest point to cross the river from the Hakkunde Maaje to get to the main road is a village called Mboumba, 12km away. From Mboumba it is about 300km to St Louis and 600km to Dakar. Mboumba is also a centre of trade so to speak, where basic goods are available at the daily market (*jeere*): rice, vegetable oil and different forms of dried fish (*bunaa* but also half-dried sea fish), the main ingredients of the dish *maaro e liddi* (fish and rice), as well as *ñebbe* (beans), *lacciri* and other goods that are not always available in Bito. Here it is also possible to purchase some technological equipment imported from Dakar and other urban centres as well as batteries for radios – one of the Bitonaabe’s main evening entertainments is

listening to the local radio, especially to programmes presented by local knowledgeable men (*jontaado*), who are considered to be the ‘intellectuals’ of Pulaar culture. Bito is mainly inhabited by fisherman *Subalbe*, as well as *Toorobbe/Fulbe* (Jah/Dia also see Schmitz 1994) and some *Gallunkoobe/maccube*, none of whom perform work related to other caste occupational areas such as blacksmiths, carpenters or weavers (see chapter 3 for an overview). Any crafted goods therefore need to be ordered from the specialists of their trade in Mboumba. Mboumba has about 3000–4000 inhabitants; although it is quite large and a main centre of trade and point of administration for the people on the Ile Amorphile, it is not a ‘commune’, which is the term for large villages that are administratively independent.



Image 7. Mboumba, late in the afternoon.

Mboumba has a fair-sized daily vegetable market where all the local women who have produced vegetables on their patches of land come to sell their goods, laid out colourful cloths on the ground: okra, pumpkin, potatoes, tomatoes, aubergines, *haako* (bean leaves) and many other things. Women meet and greet and stop to buy things for the daily preparation of *maaro e liddi* (fish and rice), but they also exchange news and go there for personal entertainment. Here, the local Toucouleur, the sedentary *Fulbe* of Fouta Toro also come into contact with the cattle herder women of the Jeeri, who sit there amongst all the *Subalbe* and other sedentary castes with their vegetables and crafts to sell their milk. And how two worlds meet in this place! The *Fulbe* herders of the Jeeri look quite different and dress differently. Their women are said to be beautiful with lighter skin than the black *Subalbe*. Their dresses are colourful and blue, their language slightly different. The *Fulbe* herders believe themselves to be

superior to the sedentary ‘dirty’ *Subalbe* who own no more than two or three cows, whereas their clans own hundreds. But the *Subalbe* also smirk at the herders’ men who ‘only own one pair of trousers and wear 5 metres of tissue on their head instead’ in form of a turban. They may have hundreds of cows but they have no homes! In actual fact the relationship between these two peoples, who differ in their way of life, translates in ‘joking relationships’ – mocking the other: The *Subalbe* are black and ugly and the *Fulbe* own nothing but cows – not even a home. Inter-marriage is, however, acceptable at times.

Mboumba is also historically an important place as it was the residence of one of the Almaamy families of Fouta Toro for seven generations. The Wane’s territory stretched from Laaw towards Thilogne in the east and all the way to Hott in Mali, and in the north all the way to Brakna in Mauritania. In the West they defended their territory against the Bosoyaaɓe family of Almaamies and the famous Aly Bocar Kane. After taking over the territory of the Sow, who were previously chiefs of this district (*leydi*) according to Schmitz (1986), the Wanes defended their position for seven generations in warfare against other Almaamies and conquerors. They formed alliances with other renowned families and lineages throughout the region of Laaw, Mauritania and Mali. During these years of battle and conquest between the Wanes, the Bosoyaaɓe and the Euganor, and besides forming alliances and recruiting councillors, the Wanes also took many captives. These tended to be used as slaves and were considered a separate caste (*hinnde*), referred to as ‘the unfree’ and ‘the owned’ (see chapter 3), who performed labour on the land, were used as fighters in warfare, and exchanged between families. Many of the captives’ offspring still reside in Mboumba today. The last Almaamy Birane is known to have been particularly cruel to his slaves and is said to have buried a beautiful slave girl decorated with gold in each corner of his compound. He is said to have died in the early 1940s but is still vividly present in the Mboumbanaaɓe’s memories. Since slavery stopped in the 1980s, when the noble status groups of Fouta Toro were to set their slave families ‘free’, relationships between castes (*kinde*) have changed and the history of this important village is nothing but a memory – even though the relations between the Almaamy family and the former slaves is slightly tense. The *Gallun̄kooɓe/maccube* of

Mboumba refuse to be considered slaves and there was insurrection in the 1970s and 1980s. In other villages or amongst some families, 'slavery' still exists – some members of the former slave caste still perform work for the noble if they are asked to. Slavery is no longer 'coerced labour' but a relationship between two families whereby both parties have obligations towards each other. Many *Gallunjkooŋe*, especially of older generations, like to serve their noble patrons and do so without questioning whether it is 'right' or not. They faithfully honour and serve them, following what they perceive to be 'the tradition', but also expect protection and reward from their noble patrons in return. Younger generations often do not want to be associated with the social category 'slave'. We shall see how this tension between the nobles and the former captives affects relationships with regards to FGC later on.

Although the era of the Almaamies has passed, Mboumba has preserved its role as a place of religious importance. It is still considered a 'maraboutic village' and the renowned marabout Thierno Jamli passes on knowledge to his pupils of the Koran, the *Talibe*. People of all ages come to learn the Koran with Thierno Jamli. At night time, young men are seen memorising the Koran under the streetlamps. Others who have completed memorising the Koran go on to learn the Sharia and other religious 'sciences'.

Despite its political importance in the past, for many villagers on the Ile Amorphile, Mboumba does not represent much more than a place for purchases, craft and trade. Once something has been fabricated or purchased in Mboumba or other villages along the road, it needs to be transported to Bito on the mud track via horse cart after crossing the river(s) in one of the narrow canoes that wait for passengers who want to get to the Ile Amorphile (Hakkunde Maaje) from Mboumba to Subalo Mboumba. The current of the river is strong and it requires the full skill of the rowing boy at the back of the canoe to take the passengers and their goods safely to the other side of the river. The journey on horse and cart takes about an hour through difficult terrain, muddy or flooded patches, or bumpy dry fields, depending on the season, and it is expensive for local people. The journey from Bito to this trade and meeting point of civilisation is only undertaken if means are sufficient or if the case is urgent, for example due to ill-health.



Images 8. Left: View from Subalo Mboumba to Mboumba. Centre: Crossing streams and rivers during the rainy season. Right: Crossing a side stream with a horse-cart.

There is one pebble mud road connecting the Hakkunde Maaje to the tarmac road via bridges in Pete (although construction only finished in August 2007) and in Madina Ndiadbe. A local minibus does the tour of the villages along this pebble mud road and comes past Bito at seven every morning to take people to Pete. Other motorised transport is occasional: few cars come along this road as there are many diversions and inaccessible stretches that are better avoided. During the rainy season it is completely inaccessible at times.

Households in Bito therefore tend to purchase their goods in the villages along the tarmac road and take them back to Bito in bulk. There are three little shops or ‘boutiques’ in Bito, which consist of a mud-brick room. Goods available here may be purchased by the villagers on a day-to-day basis – matches, powder milk and sugar, as well as mobile phone credit which is purchased at a higher rate than normal due to ‘transportation cost’ from Mboumba or Pete.



Images 9. Left: One of three mudbrick boutiques in Bito. Centre: *Pale* plantations along the banks of the river Senegal during cold season. Right: *Pale* fields of Bito during dry season.

Apart from food imported into Bito in the ways I have described above, villagers live off subsistence farming after the rainy season and what has been stocked since. During the rainy season, the water levels are very high and inundate the fields on the banks of the river (*pale*). The landscape around the river changes dramatically – little streams connect different branches of the river through the raised water-levels. Waterholes fill up, leaving behind fertile land for agriculture once the water has evaporated and been absorbed. The fertile stretches of land near the river are very popular for planting vegetables, millet, beans and corn.



Images 10. Left: Bito during the hot season. Centre: Women working by the river in Bito. Right: Bito during the rainy season.

## 1.4 Locating the research in the literature

Extensive anthropological research on the effects of governmental policies and the banning of FGC look at the colonial context, and a number of studies describe how the ban causes upheaval and opposition among the population. Lynn Thomas (2000, 2003) looks at how missionaries' attempts to end female circumcision in Kenya and the insurgency and protest it caused in the Meru district in Kenya. Abu-Salieh (2001) shows that in Sudan, British colonial attempts to ban the practice aroused heated debates for decades before a law criminalising pharaonic circumcision (infibulations) was finally passed in 1944. However, after the imprisonment of a circumciser caused rebellion and the prison was demolished by protestors, there were no more cases of prosecution (Abu Salieh 2001: 363; also see Boddy 2007).

Although Gosselin (2000) and Hernlund (2000, 2004) have discussed the failure of non-governmental development projects to attain their target of getting communities to stop practising, there is no literature on opposition to legislation against FGC in Africa in the post-colonial context.

A body of anthropological literature looks at FGC in the context of initiation and coming of age (Ahmadu 2000, 2009; Bledsoe 1984; Hernlund 2000, 2003; Dellenborg 2004; Johnson 2000). However, none of the literature on FGC in Senegambia looks at female circumcision outside the ritual context. Only Diallo (2004) discusses the seeming contradiction of FGC controlling desire, and the use of sexual stimulants to enhance fertility and pleasure during marriage in Mali. In chapter 4 of this thesis I show that in Fouta Toro excision is not practised in the context of initiation. As Griaule (1965) showed among the Dogon in Mali, excision is about making an androgynous body masculine or feminine (see also Ahmadu 2000, 2006, 2009).

Since Hosken's (1982) and other feminists' claims that female circumcision represents a 'sexual mutilation' and impedes the ability to experience orgasm and sexual pleasure, there has been extensive discussion in anthropology about pleasure and orgasm (Abusharaf 2000; Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2000; Skramstad 1990; El Dareer 1982; Dopico 2007; Shweder 2002; Ahmadu 2007, 2009; Lightfoot-Klein 1989). Most recently, Ahmadu (2007, 2009) and Dopico (2007) argue, first of all, that the ways in which sexual pleasure is expressed by excised and un-excised women

depends on the cultural context. Whereas some women might downplay the pleasure they experience when interrogated because of social and cultural norms of their society, 'Western women' expect and are expected to have orgasms – so more of them do (Dopico 2007: 231). Women who perceive orgasm during sex to be an important component of sexual life feel like failures if they do not achieve it, which may lead to loss of desire. Hence Dopico argues that 'sexual response is a biopsychological phenomenon (Leiblum 2000) and, rather than envisioning an orderly, linear progression of desire, arousal, and orgasm, it can be more accurately understood as consisting both of sexual and non-sexual elements that affect each phase' (Dopico 2007: 231). Ahmadu argues that the 'Westernised' iconographic representation of the clitoris as the ultimate symbol of female sexual autonomy biases neurological research on our understanding of women's sexual response during orgasm (Ahmadu 2007: 295). She asks: how do we know what a woman experiences when she is having orgasmic contractions monitored by a machine? And how do we know if a woman who is monitored to have more contractions than another experiences more pleasure (2007: 299)? Ahmadu's ethnographic examples show that women's and men's sexual responses strongly depend on the cultural context and beliefs of what 'the other's' (excised or un-excised) experiences are, which are often tainted by ideas of race and of physiological difference. In this thesis I do not discuss women's personal experiences of sexual pleasure in great detail but take at face value local understandings that many Futanke women enjoy sex. I discuss how sexuality is enhanced through aphrodisiacs regardless of whether a woman is excised or not. I also look at how un-excised women are perceived as unclean and impure, and arouse feelings of disgust and repulsion (chapter 6).

This thesis indirectly contributes to literature on FGC in diaspora (Kratz 2007; Piot 2007; Obiara 2007; Johnsdotter 2002, 2005; Ahlberg 2004), by looking at emigration and marriageability, and successful marriages according to Futanke conceptions.

The body of literature on FGC and rights (Shell Duncan 2007; Hernlund and Shell-Duncan 2007; Gosselin 2000; Shweder 2002; Kapur 2002; Perry 2004) is very general and reflects upon the ways in which claims to one's right to practise or stop female circumcision is referred to in terms of customary and religious law or human rights laws, such as 'a physical integrity' or 'a right to practise one's religion'. Although Shell-Duncan (2007) has looked at how discourses recommending we stop female

circumcision have shifted from the 'health framework' towards the 'human rights framework' (Shell-Duncan 2007), I suggest that insufficient attention has been paid to how human rights ideologies and state laws can represent vehicles of change for people who want to stop practising but find it hard to break out of social conventions that require the practice and shun non-practice. Gillespie and Melching (2010) discuss how 'deep learning' of Tostan's human rights modules led to the Malicounda women's behaviour change in 1998. I suggest that rather than discussing how human rights are not universally accepted across the world and how development projects fail to achieve targets (Merry Engle 2006; Gosselin 2000; Green 2000), it is interesting to see how human rights are used both to justify behaviour change and to oppose it (see Strathern 2004).

Boddy (1989, 1998, 2007) discusses how sexual restraint is a matter of family honour among her Hofriati informants in Sudan. A family that loses honour risks being deemed unmarriageable, which endangers economic status, political leverage and the very continuity of the family itself (Boddy 2007: 62). Boddy argues that honour is vested mainly in the conduct of women; hence women's lives are more vigilantly watched. I show that conceptions of honour and social distinction are also relevant to the desire to hold on to excision in Fouta Toro. Women are not rendered powerless through their control over their bodies and physical desire, which is attributed to the practice of excision; to the contrary, a woman gains public status as her sons and daughters mature, marry successfully and reproduce, as Boddy has argued of the Sudan (1989, 2007).

For Boddy's informants in Sudan (1989, 1998, 2007) the purity achieved through female circumcision is associated with enclosure. Things that are exposed to the outside world risk being spoilt and becoming impure, whereas enclosed things like eggs and water inside jugs are thought of as pure. In Fouta Toro conceptions of purity are associated with ritual cleanliness achieved through ablutions, or ethnic purity through endogamy. The thesis therefore contributes to discussions on aspects of female circumcision raised by Boddy (1982, 1989, 2002), such as marriageability, honour and purity.

Most literature on Fouta Toro and the Haalpulaar'en focuses either on the Islamic revolution and the formation of the *Tooroɓɓe* (Clark 1996; Curtin 1971, 1974; Kane 1974; Johnson 1974; Robinson 1975a, 1975b, 1985; Willis 1978, 1979, 1989; Schmitz 1983, 1985a, 1985b, 1986, 1994, 1998) or social identities/categories (Dilley 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1992, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2010; Tamari 1991; Wane 1969). Although a number of scholars have discussed honour and sociability among the Haalpulaar'en of Fouta Toro (Ly 1967; Ly 1938; Iliffe 2005), as well as other Fulɓe groups (Azarya 1978; Brujin 1995; Riesman 1974, 1992; Stenning 1959), none of the literature places these codes of honour, particularly the roles of women as reproducers of 'cultural identities', within discourses around national identity and the role of ethnicity within the nation-state.

#### **1.4.1 Ethnicity, identity and imagined boundaries between social groups**

Over the last decades, the terms 'ethnicity' and 'identity' have come to be considered controversial in anthropology. The characteristics of different social groups and their subjective sense of identity have been discussed in anthropology since the emergence of the discipline (for examples, see Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fortes 1945; Mitchell 1956; Goody 1956; Epstein 1958; Gluckman 1960). In many pioneering ethnographies, groups with a shared sense of social identity were referred to as 'tribes'. Although this term was rejected by a number of authors, like Fortes (1945) and Goody (1956) for example, who held that 'no "tribe" ... can be circumscribed by a precise boundary – territorial, linguistic, cultural or political. Each merges with its neighbours in all these respects' (Fortes 1940: 239–240). Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) tried to use more neutral terms like 'peoples' instead of 'tribe', but tended to refer to the unit under investigation using terms like 'the Tallensi', 'the Kanuri' and 'the Nuer' to refer to presumably homogeneous socio-cultural entities (Lentz 1995: 315). Southall (1970) was the first to suggest that what had often been referred to as 'tribe' was in fact an invention of anthropologists and of colonialism.

Another influential but also much critiqued thinker on 'ethnicity' and social identity was Fredrik Barth (1969). Barth (1969: 14–15) holds that ethnic groups essentially exist in the relationship between 'us' and 'others'. Barth argued that ethnic groups:

designate a population which:

1. is largely biologically self-perpetuating
2. shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms
3. makes up a field of communication and interaction
4. has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order. (Barth 1998: 2–3)

For Barth (1969) it is not possible to define an ethnic group as a possessor of a particular culture, which makes it distinctive. Although cultural features like language, dress, lifestyle and moral values are not unimportant, it is the maintenance of the boundary between one group and another that is critical in defining ethnicity. ‘The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff which it encloses’ (Barth 1969:15). Hence, the culture of a group may be ‘transformed’ and the cultural items which mark A as different from B may be changed. Nevertheless, distinct groups A and B persist (Fenton 2010: 91).

I found that locals in Fouta Toro, regardless of status group, referred to excision as a marker of boundary and that women of other ethnic groups who do not practise excision were perceived as less moral, less able to contain their sexual desires and less civilised. In this thesis I will explore these imagined boundaries further and contribute to a body of literature that explores women’s reproductive and sexual capacity and how boundaries of group identity and purity are constructed around women’s chastity (see for instance Pitt-Rivers 1965; Caplan 1987; Goddard 1987; Davis 1977; Abu-Lughod 1999, 2008; Gupta 2002; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Kandiyoti 1988, 1991, 1998; Hawley 1994; Moghadam 1994; Wilson and Frederiksen 1995; Das 1996, 2007; Okeley 1983; Mody 2009).

Since the 1980s, the trend concerning ethnicity in anthropology has been to portray conceptions of group identities in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial contexts as not fixed, bounded and unchanging entities (Fardon 1996; Kopytoff 1987; Ekeh 1990; Sharpe 1986; Vail 1989; Comaroff 1995; Peel 1983, 1989); and it has been acknowledged that the effects of the ‘tribal politics’ of colonial administrations in many African countries, and the politics of difference it created, has a legacy in post-colonial Africa (see Malkki 1995; Mamdani 1996, 2012). In his recent work Mamdani

(2012) shows how social identities emerged from the ‘tribes’ that were created by colonial administration, and how claims to land and reference to customary law in the native territories persist among social groups who continue to identify with these colonial categorisations to varying degrees. Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) look at how what is called ‘ethnic’ identity is used as a brand by some, to sell a particular lifestyle or to make the business of a particular social group recognisable as belonging to them.

I am aware of the potential hazards when discussing, defining and generalising local conceptions of so-called ethnic identity. What some might consider a marker of identity may not comply with other social groups’ sense of identity, although they all belong to the same ‘ethnic’ category. To help us think about what ethnicity and identity are in this thesis I want to look some interesting and pertinent approaches to studying identity.

Comaroff (1995) argued that:

ethnic – indeed all – identities are not ‘things’ but relations ... their content is wrought in the particularities of their ongoing historical construction. Which is why, I believe, the substance of ethnicity and nationality can never be defined or decided in the abstract. And why there cannot be a ‘theory’ of ethnicity or nationality per se, only a theory of history and consciousness capable of elucidating the empowered production of identities. (Comaroff 1995: 249)

Leve suggests that an anthropologist studying identity should not look ‘at individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience’ (2011: 514) and focus ‘on the conditions and means by which specific kinds of experience come into being’ (2011: 514).

I find both, Leve’s phenomenological approach and Comaroff’s emphasis on keeping in mind the historical construction of identities crucial to ethnographic fieldwork on the practices of a particular social group generally referred to as ‘the Futanke’ or ‘the Haalpulaar of Fouta Toro’.

In local discourses, notions of ethnic identity are often related to physical aspects of the body – and vice versa, the body is often ascribed traits that are perceived as markers of identity. Bourdieu argues that this process of enculturation and ‘deculturation’ happens in the following way:

If all societies ... that seek to produce a new man through a process of ‘deculturation’ and ‘reculturation’ set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners*, the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of culture. The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as ‘stand up straight’ or ‘don’t hold your knife in your left hand’. (Bourdieu 1977: 94)

The relationship between the social world, the body and human experience has been explored in a growing body of literature since Mauss’s 1934 lecture on ‘techniques of the body’. Mauss explored how physical movement during activities like swimming, soldiers marching or digging, differed cross-culturally (Mauss 1973). Acquiring a skill is not merely a matter of learning a technique but this technique seems to be culturally embedded. For example Mauss, points out that: ‘There are techniques of giving birth, both on the mother’s part and on that of the helpers, of holding the baby, cutting and tying the umbilical cord, caring for the mother, caring for the child’ (1973: 79). The ways in which the body is ‘naturally’ employed in activities differ according to ‘*habitus*’, the ‘acquired ability’ and ‘faculty’ that varies ‘especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges’ (Mauss 1973: 73).

Merleau-Ponty suggested that:

It is false to place ourselves in society as an object among other objects, as it is to place society within ourselves as an object of thought, and in both cases the mistake lies in treating the social as an object. We must return to the social

with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification. (1962: 362)

Since Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977), with some precursors such as Mauss (1935) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), Douglas (1966), Elias (1978) the body is no longer seen as only an object of 'culture' – it cannot be placed outside an analysis of social processes. These theoretical developments have since been reflected in anthropological and ethnographic work on the politics of health and medicine (see for instance Lock 1991; Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1990; Morsy 1980; Murphy 1987; Taussing 1987; Kleinman 1988; Lindenbaum and Lock 1993; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1991), the politics of reproduction (see for instance Boddy 1989; Bordo 1993; Grosz 1994; Martin 1987, 1990, 1991; Rapp 1987, 1992); sexuality (e.g. Butler 1993), emotions (see Lutz 1986, 1988; Rosaldo, M. 1984; Rosaldo R. 1984), violence (see for instance Comaroff 1991; Ferrandiz 2004; Scheper-Hughes 1992), bodily inscriptions and memory (Connerton 1989, 2011) and phenomenological and epistemological approaches in anthropology (see for instance Csordas 1989, 1994, 1999; Farnell 1999, Lock 1993).

In accordance with this literature I suggest that bodily transformations (e.g. through excision) are simultaneously social transformations. Every change to the body that is justified as 'tradition' or 'cultural practice' is an act of reaffirmation of one's social identity and an act of classification about how one's own practices are different to those of others (Douglas 1966). Some alterations to the body or embodied practices can be seen as an act of approximation, the desire to resemble a particular social group, e.g. by dancing like or adorning oneself like, or imitating the bodily practices of those we desire, aspire to, find attractive or beautiful. Other bodily practices can be performed as an act of protection against cultural influences we want to keep away from. Throughout this thesis I shall explore the ways in which social identifications are achieved through the body and how excision as a practice changing the body is part of this process.

## 1.5 Research positionality

My interest in Fouta Toro dates back to my first visit to Senegal in 2001, when I was volunteering as a Student Volunteer Abroad in Guediawaye, a suburb of Dakar. We were 12 European volunteers between the ages of 19 and 22, guided by a French political science student, who had been there the previous year and decided to set up this project where we were to teach English to suburban kids in the morning and play with them in the afternoon. Most of us spoke hardly any French at all and, rather than our group of volunteers contributing to what we thought of as the ‘development’ of this run-down suburb ourselves, it was the members of the UNESCO club Guediawaye who spent most of their time looking after us. The group of young men and women in their late 20s were from different ethnic backgrounds, some Serere, some Wolof, some Diola, but the core of the club was run by Haalpulaar’en who were born in Fouta Toro and lived with relatives in Guediawaye. Grateful for having been able to attend French state school they were all keen to promote education amongst the youngsters in Guediawaye.

Although the project was not particularly satisfying for the volunteers from the University of Glasgow or the Senegalese volunteers, we had long discussions about many issues I had been studying in sociology and anthropology – modernity, tradition, development, gender, human rights. The difficulty of achieving what we had imagined as ‘development’, and the enormous generosity and warm-heartedness of our hosts, as well as long conversations with friends from Fouta Toro had an enormous impact on me and I came back from Senegal mesmerised. I wanted to know more about this place and the many issues that turned out to be so complex, so I organised another Student Volunteers Abroad Project to take place in 2003. At the same time I collected data for my dissertation in anthropology. On this trip I stayed in the family of one of the Senegalese volunteers I had met during my previous stay. There was little space in her family home in Guediawaye and I ended up sharing a bed with Rosa and her sister’s 3-year-old daughter while Maimouna slept on the floor. The household was lively and turbulent and, absorbing every bit of it, I did not mind the lack of personal space or privacy.

In 2005 I returned to Senegal to prepare for my PhD research and spent another five months living with this family in Guediawaye. I was working with ENDA graf, a Senegalese NGO. I had arranged for the Student Volunteers Abroad to work with *Talibe* in the suburbs of Thiaroye, Madina Gounass and Yeumbeul. This time I had come alone, which encouraged my Senegalese friends to watch out for me and make sure I was ok. Already familiar with the complexities of working with marabouts and *Talibe*, assisting at meetings with women's groups, at health-care centres and in hospitals broadened my understanding of health and 'development' issues people living in the suburbs were faced with on a day-to-day basis. As my PhD research was going to be on 'female circumcision' I had many informal discussions, carefully testing the ground to see how people talked about the practice without my being intrusive. I also organised some focus groups on female circumcision with NGO workers at ENDA graf.

That summer I also went to meet NGOs that worked on FGC in Dakar. I interviewed Madame Sidibe Ndiaye of COSEPRAT, one of the first NGOs to campaign against excision in Senegal. I also arranged a meeting with Molly Melching of Tostan, the most prominent NGO working on FGC at the time. Molly Melching was accompanied by a French volunteer, Sabine Panet, who was working on her *mémoire* on FGC for her *maitrise* in development studies at the Sorbonne. After hours of fruitful discussion and exchange I decided to accompany Sabine to Casamance in the south of Senegal to interview villagers about their decision to stop excision and why they decided to publicly declare this resolution. We collected rich interview material and I was asked to return to Senegal in 2006 to research the success of the public declaration in Salemata, a remote region in Kedougou for Tostan and UNICEF with Sabine Panet.

Before my fieldwork started I had therefore spent extended periods of time in Senegal. I had lived with people and built up relationships of trust and friendship over extended periods of time, worked for Senegalese development institutions and international NGOs, interviewed people in rural and urban settings and had established social networks that became useful during fieldwork.

My fieldwork in Fouta Toro, however, represented a completely new and extremely challenging phase of research to me. I had visited friends' families in Fouta on

various visits before my fieldwork started and went to the Tostan Fouta co-ordination at the beginning of 2007 in the context of a research project to improve Tostan's strategies in the four regions with the highest prevalence of FGC. However, my ethnographic research on the opposition to the law against excision required me to move away from development institutions and to learn Pulaar. Settling into rural life in one of the hottest regions of Senegal, where the average temperatures are between 30 and 45 degrees Celsius during the day for most of the year, there is no electricity, running water, etc. was not just physically but also psychologically challenging.

### **1.5.1 The fieldwork, methods and research constraints and opportunities**

I was put in touch with someone from Bito on the Ile Amorphile who would be able to teach me Pulaar. As I knew that I would learn a lot faster in an environment that was 100% Pulaar, I moved there in February 2007.

The bush-taxi dropped me off in Mboumba in the dark, where I had arranged to meet my teacher. From there we continued our journey to Bito – through Mboumba down to the river on a horse-cart, crossing the river in a narrow canoe in the dark and then on to another horse-cart, which took us across the Ile Amorphile for another hour to Bito. Although I had travelled through regions without electricity before, my senses were unaccustomed to the dark. When we arrived in Harouna's home at midnight we ate meat from a bowl with the family under the stars. I was exhausted.

The next weeks were spent learning Pulaar grammar every morning from nine till lunch-time. People came to greet me at length and neighbours sent bowls of food to welcome me to the village. Some had never seen a white person close up. Children were screaming and following me wherever I went; they laughed at my gestures, imitated my movements, ridiculing my sense of dress, which I tried to balance between dressing appropriately to meet people's expectations while being unable to bear the heat in these long cloths and gowns. I learned the greetings in Pulaar quickly but apart from that I could hardly communicate with anyone, because very few people spoke French. As soon as the children got used to me, they came into my room and started asking me things I could not understand. When I tried out the new words I had

just learned, they looked at me with big eyes and said: *Mbiy-daa?* (What did you say?) I suddenly understood that they had conjugated the verb to say *wiyde* in its reflexive form to ask a question. As I had no other choice I learned the basics fast.



Images 11 Left: Children playing wildly at dusk – they followed me everywhere. Right: The compound of my host family in Bito.



Images 12. Left: Women at wedding in Bito a few days after my arrival. Right: Women preparing food.

Language was not the only challenge but also being taken seriously as a person. Initially I was not allowed to go out by myself in case something happened to me. My hands were as soft as a baby's, the women remarked and I was not allowed to help fetch water, or do any other physical work. My feet were softer than the children's hands, I was told – I was not allowed to go searching for firewood with the older children. There were snakes and scorpions in the bush under the branches and a bite can be fatal. Eventually I gained more autonomy and spent the late afternoons by the

river with the children or the three schoolteachers, who soon became my closest friends as I could communicate with them in French, not the child-like language I was forced to speak with my family. My family, however, objected to me seeing them after dusk. After all I was an unmarried woman and it was not appropriate for me to go out at night. They were my guardians and I was their guest – my behaviour reflected on their honour, they explained. Once I had a conversation with a woman in which I talked about boyfriends. Afterwards I was asked if I was not ashamed to talk openly about these things. Did I want to represent myself as a shameless woman?

As Bito borders Mauritania, the mobile phone network was terrible. At times it was only possible to make phone calls in the afternoon. When the battery was empty the phone had to be sent to someone else's house to be charged with solar power, which took two days. There was no internet – I had to travel 150km to Ourosogui to check my emails. There was nothing to buy in Bito apart from dried biscuits and no mineral water – I got used to the well-water very quickly. Batteries for my torch were sent from Mboumba. There was no fruit to purchase either. Every so often I crossed the river with the children and walked for 3 miles along the river Senegal to a mango plantation, where we spent all afternoon in the shady forest feasting on the fruit and took as much home as we could carry. No matter how much we brought back, the 20 members of the household and the many neighbours who had been so generous to me made them vanish very quickly. It was so hot that candles bent side-ways when I tried to write in my room in the dark. I therefore did most of my writing in the mornings before my lessons.

Although being a complete alien may seem a disadvantage, it also had its benefits. Beside the linguistic skills, I was taught codes of behaviour, morality and honour. People were not intimidated by me as a 'researcher', most women did not even understand what 'research' (*wittooji*) was. I was an unmarried girl (*mboomri*) who had come to stay for a long time to learn Pulaar and write a book about 'Futanke customs'. I was constantly instructed on how to do things correctly and told why they needed to be done a certain way. This process of learning, observing and listening carefully was invaluable to my understanding of conceptions of purity, honour and shame, gender roles and gendered spaces. It was a process of embodied learning of sociability, boundaries and moral codes of behaviour.



Images 13: Women in Bito dressed up in ‘traditional dress’ (*Cosaan*) for wedding.

My Pulaar teacher occasionally went to Radio Pete to read his poetry on a popular Pulaar-language radio programme called *Finaa tawaa Fulbe* (literally ‘What the Fulbe find when they wake up’)<sup>10</sup> or ‘Pulaar traditions’. We decided that when I was able to read Pulaar correctly and communicate enough I should accompany him to read some poetry. In May 2007 we therefore took a horse-cart to cross the Ile Amorphile for Pete. I was going to read a poem called *Mbayniigu* – which means ‘separation’ or ‘goodbye’. Radio presenter Geelel Jigo introduced me as Saara Sy, a *tuubaako* (white person) who has come to learn Pulaar language and customs with Harouna Sy from Bito. After I read the poem Geelel asked me in Pulaar to read it again. Afterwards people from all over the Ile Amorphile called to tell me how pleased they were that I had come all the way to Fouta to learn about their way of life. One man promised to give me a horse and horse-cart if I came to visit him in his village. When we returned to Bito the following day people cheered wherever we passed: *Saara Sy min mbeltiima* (Sarah Sy we are so pleased). Some laughed and joked, imitating my pronunciation; others congratulated me and told me I was brave. Some people from neighbouring villages walked to Bito for hours to come and see me. I became known as the white person who had come to live in Fouta to learn about their culture.

<sup>10</sup> The connotations are: what the Fulbe found when they were born and reproduce with pride.

As I knew that no NGO had been to Bito to raise awareness about FGC, I initially did not try to discuss excision or the governmental ban with people. This was first of all because I was not able to have a complex conversation with women in Pulaar and, second, for ethical reasons and for my personal safety. I felt that I needed to understand how people felt about the practice before asking questions in a region that has vehemently opposed the ban. I therefore focused on collecting data about everyday habits, things that were important to my informants and the boundaries I kept accidentally crossing out of ignorance of their social and moral codes of behaviour.

I occasionally left Bito to do research elsewhere. I found out what kinds of activities relevant to my research interests were going on at the Tostan Ourosogui co-ordination. In May 2007 researchers of the Sigrid Rausing project were staying at the Tostan co-ordination to type up the data from questionnaires that I had helped to design before going to the field. I was able to discuss excision, why people practised it and refused to comply with the NGOs and the governmental ban with these researchers, as well as the Tostan staff in Ourosogui, more openly. These discussions provided me with different data about excision. The Tostan Fouta staff were all local men and women who had stopped practising excision out of personal conviction. However, despite being on the side of the government, most of their families and relatives continued with the practice and they were deeply aware of how important excision was to them and why it was immensely hard to take the decision to stop practising in one's family. Long conversations with the Tostan supervisors and facilitators of different 'caste' backgrounds (*Toorobbe*, *Fulbe*, *Subalbe*, *Gallunjoobe/Maccube*, *Maabube*), some of whom I became very close to, also provided me with data about the 'opposition to the law and the NGOs'. They frequently told me about their everyday struggles at work and their encounters with marabouts and village chiefs, whose tolerance of the NGO they had to negotiate. Most of the data collected among the Tostan staff was through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, some of which were recorded.

In May 2007 a public declaration of the abandonment of excision was to take place but it failed, because the village demanded £5000 from UNICEF to pay the costs. I

interviewed people in the villages that were to declare for ten days, with the help of a research assistant who was a Tostan facilitator and had been trained to collect data for the Sigrid Rausing project,<sup>11</sup> as well as having already participated in other research projects. We wanted to find out how people felt about the fact that their declaration had failed. I had designed questionnaires for members of the management committee, village chiefs, marabouts, school teachers, as well as people who had nothing to do with the declaration. We undertook interviews as well as focus groups.

In December 2007 I interviewed villagers who had participated at the public declaration of Semme. This was six months after the public declaration had taken place. I also conducted interviews in Seedo Abass in February 2008. (For a chronological overview, see table of events of opposition at the end of chapter 2.) Most of these interviews were recorded or noted down in great detail with the help of a research assistant. I also interviewed 18 excisers and ex-excisers between December 2007 and February 2008 in different places (Semme, Ndouloumadji, Thilogne, Mboumba, Bito, etc.). I waited until the end of my fieldwork so that my grasp of Pulaar was good enough to communicate with them myself to some extent, or to understand how the translator interpreted what had been said. I knew some but not all of the excisers before the interview. In January 2008 I interviewed four members of the ex-exciser association in Thilogne and the president of this association in Ngouloumadji. This was also done with the help of a research assistant.

I also collaborated with researchers in Dakar. One of them was the Senegalese sociologist Abibou Camara, who was undertaking a WHO (World Health Organization) funded research project on excision in Fouta Toro. There were also other researchers from universities in South Africa, France and the UK.

In between these research trips I went back to Bito. My informants there were hardly aware of what I did when I left Bito. One thing however did change my status completely in Bito and during other interviews I did in Fouta Toro. After seven months of living in Fouta I became religiously attached (*humaneede*) to a Pulaar man

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<sup>11</sup> Enquiring into the reasons for practising excision in the regions with the highest prevalence of excision in Senegal. See: *Etude sur les pratiques d'excision dans les regions Ziguinchor, Kolda, Tambacounda, Matam. Abandons et résistances* (Tostan, financed by Sigrid Rausing, 2007).

with whom I had been working. He was a *Cubballo* like my host family in Bito and they were distantly related. Besides making me free to come and go as I wished without causing any scandals and discontent, this meant I was no longer addressed like a child but as a woman. This, however, also brought disadvantages. People expected me to behave like a married woman. They explained what duties I had towards my husband and local women made a great effort to explain to me and help me with the customary preparations of the bedroom and the household. The fact that my husband did not expect me to do any of this and in fact helped me with the work caused confusion. Many women worried and were very critical at times. Although this was immensely confusing for me on a psychological level, it gave me a deeper understanding of women's roles in the household and their expectations.

Although I became friends with people from different status groups, I came to know the *Subalbe* (fishermen) more intimately, because the Sy family I stayed with in Bito, and my husband, were *Cubballo*. Outsiders also associated me with the *Subalbe* and my views of inter-caste relationships are biased by the things I learned living with them.

### **1.5.2 Ethics – informed consent, confidentiality and reciprocity**

My fieldwork took place in three different spheres. The first was Bito, the second was Tostan Fouta and Tostan Senegal, and the third was villages that had declared and that were to participate at 'public declarations'. My approach with regard to how I addressed my research subjects, informants and interviewees differed depending on the context.

In Bito I spent most of my time doing participant observation and taking notes on conversations with informants. For confidentiality purposes I have changed most of their names in this thesis, apart from those who explicitly wanted to be mentioned or who would be recognised anyway. When I judged the subject of conversation to be very personal or sensitive I changed identifying information. The questions I asked people in Bito depended on how familiar they were with my research and what kind of information they provided me with. I paid my Pulaar teacher a monthly salary while he was teaching me and showed my gratitude by regularly giving presents to his

wife, his mother and sisters-in-law as well as the children. These presents mainly consisted of cloth, clothes, photos and sometimes small sums of money that were appropriate to local standards. I gave plenty of photos to other inhabitants of Bito, and occasionally other presents depending on the occasion. I rarely gave anyone anything specifically for giving me information because I did not want people to seek my company for money. Only on one occasion did I agree to buy half a goat for my teacher's older sister in return for magical incantations (*cefi*), the 'traditional' occupational knowledge (*gandal*) of the *Subalbe* of things related to water (see Dilley 2004; Wane 1966). I conducted a few long recorded interviews with long-term informants towards the end of my fieldwork. After informing them of what I wanted to talk about and before the interview started, they verbally gave informed consent – it would have been inappropriate to ask for written consent.

At Tostan people knew what I was working on. I formally interviewed 10 Tostan staff who were working in or had worked in Fouta Toro; prior to the interview they gave their informed consent. Most of these interviews took place after many informal and personal conversations with them throughout my fieldwork. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on their work for the NGO, their motivations, the opposition to the law and problems they had experienced. I refer to other Tostan workers' stories in this thesis but their names are changed for reasons of confidentiality unless they specifically indicated otherwise. I did not change the names of Tostan executives: they, however, gave their informed consent for a recorded interview. Some Tostan staff accompanied me to villages which had participated in the programme and acted as research assistants, helping me to find research subjects and translating. I mostly remunerated them for their services, especially if they helped me for extended periods of time.

The interviews I carried out in villages that had publicly renounced excision were mostly semi-structured with verbal informed consent, at times recorded if the interviewee agreed to this, otherwise I took detailed notes with the help of my research assistants. Here I followed questionnaires that I had prepared beforehand, sometimes adding new questions if they came up, sometimes leaving questions out if I sensed that the interviewee was uncomfortable. The questions were designed in a way that was considered sensitive and inoffensive by Tostan staff and other local people whose opinion I asked. I never asked any direct questions in this context, for example: 'Do you personally have problems because of your excision?' or 'Have any of the girls you excised died as a result of haemorrhage?' because this would have been

inappropriate. Apart from the president of the ex-exciser association, who would not have agreed to be interviewed otherwise, I never paid any of my interviewees as this is not done in Senegal. Most names of interviewees have been changed for confidentiality except in cases where the person could be recognised anyway (e.g. village chiefs) or when no confidential issues were discussed. If I felt that people were avoiding me because they did not want to be interviewed or their answers were short because they felt uncomfortable, I did not insist but looked for other research subjects instead. I always made an effort to dress according to the local style to make people feel more at ease with me despite being white, greeting them politely at length in Pulaar and showing them as much respect as I could according to local standards. I often joked and chatted with people in the household so that they felt comfortable with me and became curious as to why I had come to see them. When I met these interviewees again during my fieldwork, they were often warm-hearted and kind, asking me when I would come back to visit them.

## **1.6 Overview of chapters**

In chapter 2, **‘Events’, representations and ‘the beginning of the end of excision in Senegal’**, I look at the circumstances under which the law against FGM was passed in 1999 and how the opposition from Fouta Toro surfaced. I show that the legislation was the result of a number of events that led to a ‘national call for abandonment’ by politicians, activists and the national media. I argue that these ‘events’ were ‘critical’ (Das 1996) not just for making the law but with regard to how people began to perceive the female body, ‘the state’, and how they reconsidered their ‘culture’ and ‘ethnic’ identity. The opposition to the law and to NGO activities was triggered by the religious leader Thierno Mountaga Tall’s 1999 publication, *Preuves Eclatantes au Sujet de la Pratique Recommandable de l’Excision des Jeunes Filles (Striking Proofs for the Recommendable Practice of Excision)*.

In chapter 3, **Fouta Toro: a place of ties, networks and arrangements of solidarity**, I introduce Futanke livelihood and social structure by looking at status groups (also ‘caste’/*hinnde*), age groups and the household. Although excision is not held on to more by one status group than another, the law and NGO intervention are openly opposed by some *Toorodo* (singular of *Tooroŋbe*) marabouts and leaders who

consider the ‘religious practice’ of excision as their domain and not the state’s. I show how allegiance to different groups, obligations and solidarity between ‘cousins’ can affect someone’s decision to hold on to the practice or persuade another to join the ‘abandonment movement’.

In chapter 4, **Making gender: changing ‘traditions’, initiation and the procedure of female and male circumcision**, I discuss how the procedure of the cutting in Fouta Toro differs from the practice among other groups in West Africa (Ahmadu 2000, 2009; Bledsoe 1984; Dellenborg 2005; Gosselin 2000; Hernlund 2000; Johnson 2000; Mark 1978). I show that, in contrast to descriptions in much of the current literature, excision in Fouta Toro is not important in the context of rites of passage or initiation into a secret society and is surprisingly short of ritual. I show that the way in which excision is practised depends on the exciser’s family ‘tradition’ and occupational lore (*gandal*). In the last section female circumcision is compared to male circumcision to show how these practices, which are associated with making the androgynous body male or female, differ and what elements are subject to change over time.

In chapter 5, **Excision, gender socialisation and the physical foundations for moral personhood**, I analyse informants’ views that excision helps a woman to control her sexual desires. First of all I look at what desire is and how measures of control are embedded in everyday life. I then discuss gender socialisation and marrying successfully. We will see that women of ethnic groups where excision is not practised serve as negative examples for what the Futanke do not want their society to become and the kind of foreign influence they reject. I argue that the opposition to the law and non-governmental intervention are nourished by fears around Fouta being ‘penetrated’ and invaded by a way of life that is disdained.

In chapter 6, **Pleasure, desirability and purity: demarcating the realms of the appropriate**, I show that, despite the measures to control sexual desire discussed in previous chapters, pleasure is fostered and encouraged in the legitimate realm of marriage. In the realms of the forbidden, however, sexuality is shrouded in silence. I also discuss how the boundaries of the appropriate for everyday social interactions are demarcated by looking at how cleanliness is believed to be attained through excision and circumcision. In contrast to what is perceived as pure and clean, we have negative

images of un-excised women's genitals, which are considered dirty and smelly. I argue that these imaginations are linked to fear of the unknown on the one hand and ethnic superiority on the other.

Chapter 7, **Whose law, whose body, whose rule? The opposition to the law against excision and FGC 'sensitisation' in Fouta Toro**, disentangles the opposition to governmental and non-governmental incentives to stop FGC. In the first part I look at how opposition to such incentives has been formulated by NGO executives who designed and implemented awareness-raising programmes. In the second part I look at what a *Toorodo* village chief is opposed to – the NGOs but not the state. In the third part I look at religious leaders' reactions to the arrest of an exciser. Their discourses also convey fear of foreign invasion and cultural colonialism through intervention.

Chapter 8, **'A right to health, freedom of speech and non-discrimination': the role of human rights in the 'abandonment' movement in Fouta Toro**, looks at the anti-excision movement in Fouta Toro. I show that some women and men want excision to stop, support the NGOs' awareness-raising programmes and see the law as being put in place to support their right to the highest standards of health rather than being imposed 'by foreigners to destroy Futanke culture and religion'. In the first part I look at women's reasons for stopping the practice and supporting the NGO. The second part deals with divorced women who have gained independence and make a living by working for Tostan. Although they speak out against a religious practice defended by local traditional authorities, they are respected because they defend their views against the practice with reference to human rights and their personal problems due to excision and early marriage. The third part is about women in Seedo Abass and how they formulate their stance on excision with reference to human rights.

Chapter 9 is the **Conclusion**.

## **Chapter 2: 'Events', representations and 'the beginning of the end of excision in Senegal'**

L'événement qui survient est un moment, un fragment de réalité perçu qui n'a pas d'autre unité que le nom qu'on lui donne. Son arrivée dans le temps (c'est en ce sens qu'il est le point focal autour duquel se déterminent un avant et un après) est immédiatement mise en partage par ceux qui le reçoivent, le voient, en entendent parler, l'annoncent puis le gardent en mémoire. Fabricant et fabriqué, constructeur et construit, il est d'emblée un morceau de temps et d'action mis en morceaux, en partage comme en discussion. (Farge 2002: 2)

Finally, let us fight vigorously against excision. A law is without doubt necessary to mark the government's commitment in this domain. But above all we need to convince the populations that this practice constitutes a threat for women's health – governmental and non-governmental organisations included. Excision frequently causes haemorrhages, infections and deaths during child-birth. Today this custom is no longer justified.

In this respect, the example of Malicounda deserves being cited here. In this Senegalese village the women have become aware of the dangers of the practice and engaged in a dialogue with their husbands, the imam and the village chief. Through a collective decision the community decided that excision will never again be practised in their village.

Today I formally appeal that this 'oath of Malicounda' propagates through the whole of Senegal. I request that a great debate about excision should be organised in each village so that everyone becomes aware that the time has come to change these ancient practices.

(President Abdou Diouf's speech at the congress of Human Rights Federation in Senegal on 21 November 1997. Published in the governmental newspaper *Le Soleil*.)

This chapter is about the banning of excision in Senegal in 1999. NGOs, the government and the international press consider that the ban led to reactions that are often described as 'the backlash in Fouta Toro' or 'the resistance'. From this perspective, the passing of the law was an event of liberation from 'custom' and a victory for women's rights and the highest standards of health and physical integrity.

Abdou Diouf's speech, given at a human rights conference held in Dakar just over a year before the law against excision was passed, indicates important elements that framed the justifications for passing the law. I will show how the passing of the

legislation was constructed as having been the result of a number of events that led to a national call for abandonment by politicians, activists and the national media. In this sense I want to draw attention to a number of things Abdou Diouf mentioned in his speech in 1997, which frame the context in which the passing of the law was justified by those in power and the experiences of my informants in Senegal.

In his speech, Diouf appeals for a ‘vigorous fight’ against excision on a national level and the need for a law. First of all, intervention against excision was encouraged by the government, which pleaded for NGOs to be involved in convincing the population to abandon the practice. Second, Diouf’s speech justifies the government’s position against the practice in terms of an improvement of women’s health. Such discourses of the abandonment of excision in the name of ‘women’s health’ continue today and have provided an ideology justifying abandonment. Third, Diouf constructs an opposition between ‘the past’, and the practice of harmful customs, and a vision of the modern Senegalese state, where such customs are no longer justified. These echoes of modernity and tradition, whether perceived as negative or positive, played a crucial role, not only during the period leading up to the passing of the law, but also in debates about women’s bodies and cultural propriety in the resistance movement in Fouta Toro. Finally, Diouf refers to an event that is perceived by many as having initiated the ‘social change’ with regard to excision in Senegal – the ‘oath of Malicounda’. At this ‘historic moment’ in July 1997, 35 women publicly renounced their practice of excision after having followed Tostan’s education programme. I will show how the story of the Malicounda declaration has been told and used for particular purposes in debates about the national call for abandonment of FGC.

I look at the ban on excision in Senegal and NGOs’ intervention as an event that criss-crossed several institutions and redefined women’s bodies in different ways. It would be too simplistic to see the passing of the law and activism against excision merely in terms of an imposition by the state onto the population, or merely as an act of liberation. Das (1996) and Fortun (2001) argue that anthropology is no longer about the ethnographer’s experience in one place, for the local and the global are intertwined, especially in questions of advocacy and law. In this case, the event of the law moved across boundaries of law courts, the parliament and ministers’ decisions, the international community, village ‘communities’, the family, bureaucracy,

advocacy and funding proposals, and influenced how people feel, think, redefine, challenge and silence women's bodies, morality and honour.

Following Das (1996), I am therefore interested in how transformations in space propel people's lives into unprecedented terrains – how particular events set new modes of action into being, which redefine traditional categories such as codes of honour and purity, for example (Das 1996:6). These transformations in space are brought into being by the ways in which political actors represent 'events' in different documents for different purposes, and in this way redefine how bodies and lives may be perceived (Das 1996; Fortun 2001; Latour 2005).

This thesis concerns itself with women's bodies and how the law influenced how people perceived the body as a result of FGC being outlawed. The thesis is not about laws, governmental politics and how the public reacted to the mediatization of the event. However, these are immediately relevant to how women's bodies were perceived and how existing moral standards were challenged through different authorities. I am concerned with the law and NGO intervention in the light of its impact on people's perceptions of women's bodies and honour in Fouta Toro. The information provided about women's activism against excision in Dakar and the activities of NGOs should therefore not be seen as a discussion of these actors in themselves. It is relevant with regard to how these groups influenced national and global policies which challenged my informants' views of morality, justice, the state and women's reproductive behaviour.

However, events do not just affect the way in which people rethink themselves and their rights; they are also made for particular purposes. With reference to Farge (2002), Handelman (1990) and other authors, I argue that incidents involving NGOs and the government were made public in a way that turned these occasions into important 'events' in the making of the law and human rights. Some events, unheard of and insignificant for many, have been retrospectively seen as having fabricated social movements and having led to the passing of the law. I show how the national call for abandonment was fabricated in a way that complied with transnational standards of human rights and development agendas with reference to newspaper articles and NGO documentation. I argue that the Malicounda declaration, for

example, has been used in discursive practices that nourished politicians' public speeches to abide by international human rights and public health standards. Abdou Diouf's call 'for further governmental and non-governmental commitment to convince populations to stop the practice' (*Le Soleil* 21 Nov. 1997) provides an example that I discuss in this chapter. For others, however, the Malicounda declaration was a non-event (Farge 2002), and the passing of the law became an event only because of the emotional upheaval and anger it caused.

## **2.1 How activism for a law against excision was perceived and experienced: an introduction**

For many, the passing of the law against excision was the logical consequence of years of activism for women's rights in Senegal. Women's rights were first institutionally recognised in 1972 in the Family Code, which granted equal rights to inheritance, legally recognised marriage status, divorce, and private property.

Various informants of mine, who have worked closely with the government on feminist issues, told me that female ministers working in the Secretariat for the Promotion of Women (*Secretariat pour la Promotion de la Femme*) in the Senegalese government strongly believed in promoting women's rights and healthy behaviour based on evidence, which had been provided by the WHO since 1972.<sup>12</sup> Some of these politically active women participated at the International Women's Conferences, for example in Beijing (1995), where the harmfulness of FGC was hotly debated. These women consider the moral and legal support provided by international organisations of authority (e.g. WHO, UNICEF and UNIFEM) to be positive. According to Dr Abibou Camara, a Senegalese sociologist, researcher for the WHO in Senegal, development agent and women's rights activist, the female presence in the Senegalese government, as well as women's activism, created a favourable climate for passing a law against excision. In addition, only 28% of the population were recorded as practising excision. The majority ethnic groups in Senegal (Wolof 43%, Serere 15%), who make up 58% of the population, do not tend to excise either in

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<sup>12</sup> Dr Camara (a Senegalese sociologist) personal communication; Molly Melching (executive director of Tostan) – interview; COSEPRAT – interview.

initiation rites or for religious reasons. In addition, Camara reasoned that the most dominant religious brotherhoods in Senegal, the Mourides and the Tijannes (Cruise O'Brien 1971, Sanneh 1997) did not officially take a position on the practice. These factors influenced the parliamentarians to vote for a law against excision. When it was made public that a village near the city of Mbour had abandoned excision after having followed the NGO Tostan's basic education programme, there was even more of an incentive to help women protect their bodies by outlawing the practice in the name of a right to physical integrity and a right to the highest standards of health. Dr Abibou Camara concludes that, in governmental, NGO and activist circles in Dakar, the passing of the law against FGC is seen as having been a result of favourable social, juridical and cultural conditions, as well as the fruit of their hard work and activism.<sup>13</sup> Although this view was confirmed in conversations with figureheads of the movement against female circumcision in Senegal, like Melching and Mme Sidibe Ndiaye, none of these individuals belong to ethnic groups that practice excision, nor do they follow religious leaders who recommend the practice.

For others, however, the law against FGC represented a threat to their freedom to practice their 'customs' and religion. Excision is understood to be a *Hadith*, a recommendation of the Prophet Mohammed. In this view it was inconceivable that the Senegalese government should pass a law that prohibits following a religious recommendation. Some protested that the harmful consequences propounded by these 'international organisations' did not exist. Furthermore, in their view, there were many other practices far more harmful and against religion that should be outlawed before banning a practice that was recommended by the Prophet. Sex tourism and homosexuality were commonly cited as examples of 'harmful' practices. Instead of furthering women's rights, the law on excision (Article 299) was perceived as a form of cultural colonialism imposed by 'the white people' in the guise of an 'international community'.

A number of NGO-led 'events' are considered to have been crucial to the national call for abandonment. The next section will provide an overview of the NGOs

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<sup>13</sup> Besides Dr Camara, I also discussed conditions that favoured the law with Molly Melching (originally American), executive director of Tostan, who has been involved in development, governmental and UN politics in Senegal since the 1970s and Mme Sidibe Ndiaye (Wolof), head of COSEPRAT, who has been involved in activism against FGC in Senegal since 1984.

involved in raising awareness against FGC in Senegal. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to go into their activities in detail – and it is difficult to say to what extent their presence really had an effect on the passing of the law or to what extent ‘the success’ was constructed by the newspapers.

## 2.2 Movements against FGC in Senegal

Campaigns and ‘sensitisation’<sup>14</sup> activities against FGC had been taking place in Senegal since the beginning of the 1980s. A review is available in *L’Abandon de l’Excision* (INICEF Senegal 1999), which I draw on. Some associations focused on raising awareness through conferences that were supported and funded by international organisations in Dakar, which formed networks and lobbied the government in the 1990s. Other organisations focused on raising awareness and on ‘sensitisation’ at a grassroots level through basic education programmes in rural areas (see Table 2).

Table 2: Organisations involved in activities against FGC in Senegal (UNICEF Senegal 1999)

Year founded	NGO	Activities	Place	Funders
1982	<i>Femme et Société</i>	First to organise an international conference in Dakar on violence against women and women’s rights. Their preferred form of raising awareness was through conferences, radio programmes, publications and press articles.  In 1990s <i>Femme et Société</i> participated in activities lobbying the government to adopt laws against ‘the authors of violence against women’.	Dakar	UNIFEM, USAID amongst others

<sup>14</sup> The French word ‘*sensibilisation*’ is used in NGO and activist circles to describe activities whereby often uneducated and/or illiterate people are made aware of threats to their health through behaviour that they are not conscious of – such as drinking polluted water or feeding food to infants that they cannot digest and that may cause sickness/death (to reduce child mortality – one of the UN’s targets since the 1980s), as well as the benefits of vaccination and information about reproductive health and fertility. The verb ‘*sensibiliser*’ – to ‘sensitize’ in American English used by NGOs in Senegal – is thought of as making a person sensitive to recognising potential threats to their health and prevent sickness. In Pulaar the word *hirjino* is used, which has much the same connotations.

1984	COSEPRAT ( <i>Comité Senegalais sur les Pratiques Traditionnelles ayant un Effet sur la Santé</i> ) after creation of Inter-African Committee <sup>15</sup>	‘Sensitisation’ activities in collaboration with ENDA (see below) and the Red Cross to ‘inform the Senegalese populations about the harmfulness of female genital mutilation’.  During the 1990s it was involved in lobbying the Economic and Social Council of the government and the Ministry of the Family and Social Action through the network <i>Siggill Jiggèen</i> (see below).	Dakar, Tambacounda, Kolda and Mbour	UNICEF, WHO, European Commission, FNUAP
1986 (present in the regions)  1989 working on FGC	ENDA	Seminars and meetings with religious leaders, excisers, medical professionals and women’s groups with the aim of improving knowledge about ‘sexual mutilations’ in 1989.	Ziguinchor, Kolda	UNICEF
1995	<i>Siggill Jiggèen</i>	A network of associations created with the aim of reinforcing the status of woman in Senegal by promoting and defending their rights and integrity. Other activities include discussions, conferences and video projections, campaigning for changes to the Penal Code on violence against women, particularly Articles 294, 297, 319, 320 and 299 – the article relating to the abandonment of FGM. The main objectives were to facilitate and initiate lobbying and counselling activities. In January 1999, 300 women were mobilised at the National Assembly to push for modifications of the Penal Code that were being voted on by the ministers.	Dakar	

<sup>15</sup> The IAC (Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children) is an international non-governmental organisation (INGO), created in February 1984, at a seminar in Dakar. It started with 20 African countries. To date, the organisation has national committees in 28 African countries and affiliates in eight European countries and the USA, Canada, Japan and New Zealand. The IAC enjoys Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), an official relationship with WHO, and Observer Status with the African Union (AU). It works closely with UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO, who with the IAC, signed a Letter of Agreement for joint action in 2005. The IAC also has consultative status with L’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and is a Board member of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO). The IAC mission is the promotion of gender equality and justice by eliminating harmful traditional practices, to enable African women to participate fully in the social, cultural and political development (see: [www.iac-ciaf.com](http://www.iac-ciaf.com)).

1994	ASBEF ( <i>Association Sénégalaise pour le Bien-être Familial</i> )	Raising awareness against FGM: CECI-funded activities consisted of assembling local leaders of religious and political influence, opinion leaders, women's groups and administrative authorities for discussion and to establish committees to fight against FGM in their communities. In 1998 ASBEF undertook more sensitisation activities, consisting of village meetings and discussions, theatre groups and UNIFEM <i>caravannes</i> in 30 villages of the district of Podor (a district in Fouta Toro).	Region of St Louis, Matam	CECI
1991	Tostan	Thirty-month basic education programme designed to improve rural people's basic literacy skills in local languages, as well as improving knowledge of health, hygiene and nutrition to improve behaviour that works against the high infant mortality rate; reproductive health; problem-solving and resources management; basic calculation skills – and, from 1996, democracy and human rights.	Regions of Thies, Kaolack, Ziguinchor, Kolda, Tambacounda, Kedougou, Podor, Matam	UNICEF, USAID, GTZ, AJWS, Sigrid Rausing, etc.

Table 2 shows that Tostan and ASBEF were the only NGOs intervening against female circumcision in Fouta Toro.

Although many of the 'sensitisation activities' were funded by international development agencies, I disagree with the idea that NGO intervention is merely an imposition of the international community onto the Senegalese population. This position would deny that individuals act according to their personal convictions, presenting a rather monolithic, determinist view according to which individuals are completely guided by over-arching systems of power. Instead, as I argue throughout this thesis, it is important to understand why actors were motivated to participate in and lead activities that were supported and funded by 'international development agents' (Fortun 2001).

### 2.2.1 Tostan

Tostan is considered one of the most prominent actors in the movement towards ending excision in Senegal for a number of reasons. First, Tostan is present in all regions of Senegal and has continuously received funding from international agencies such as UNICEF and USAID since its establishment. Second, Tostan's strategy was officially recognised as 'a pertinent approach' (République du Sénégal 2008: 5) with regard to 'FGC abandonment', in the national action plan to reach complete abandonment of excision in Senegal by 2015. Besides its evaluated 'success', the impact of Tostan's education programme is perceived by many to have contributed to the passing of the law at the National Assembly.

The NGO was founded in 1991 by an American expatriate who had been involved in basic education and development associations in Senegal since 1976. Initially, Tostan's education programme did not aim to persuade villagers to stop FGC – this was more of an unexpected side-effect (Gillespie and Melching 2010; Tostan 1999). The objectives of the first versions of the programme were to improve women's literacy in local languages, as well as to promote self-development through adapted educational materials. After human rights modules were added to the programme in 1995, 35 participants decided to end the practice of excision in the village of Malicounda Bambara. This first declaration in Malicounda has been depicted by the NGO and some Senegalese newspapers as having initiated a process whereby more than 3548 communities officially declared their abandonment of excision by 2008 with the help of Tostan and its funders. The effect of the Tostan programme has been studied by various researchers and organisations. Diop et al. (2004) found in their evaluation that women and men became aware of the adverse health effects of FGC<sup>16</sup> after having undergone the programme, and that the willingness to continue practising FGC on their daughters went down by 50% on average.<sup>17</sup> In a long-term evaluation, UNICEF (2008) found that the Tostan programme certainly had an effect on attitudes towards FGC and 'abandonment'. The villages evaluated in the 2008 study had

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<sup>16</sup> Awareness of at least two consequences of FGC increased significantly for both men (from 11% to 83%) and women (from 7% to 83%) immediately after participating in the programme (Diop et al. 2004: 19).

<sup>17</sup> '[B]etween baseline and post-intervention survey, the proportion of women who approved of FGC decreased by 50% among participating women, and by 40% among non-participating women' (Diop et al. 2004: 20).

participated in some of the very first declarations in the country (Diabougou declaration, 11 villages, in February 1998 and the Medina Cherif declaration, with 18 villages in June 1998). The study found that although ‘there are still a few resisters who say they will never abandon the practice’ (UNICEF 2008: 26), ‘the abandonment of FGM/C is a reality confirmed by the majority of the people in the villages surveyed’ (2008: 26).

Although the founder and executive director of the programme is an American, in Senegal the NGO is run almost exclusively by Senegalese staff. It is important to stress that Tostan is more than an international NGO intervening in the rural regions of Senegal. Its ideology of human rights, democracy and public health promotion is one to which Senegalese staff and volunteers subscribe. The NGO is perhaps more appropriately described as a social movement or ‘directed ideological social group’ than ‘merely’ a ‘foreign-led NGO’ sensitising against ‘harmful’ practices. (For further illustration of how see chapter 8.)

Despite the positive evaluations cited, Tostan has faced considerable opposition, as I discuss in detail in chapter 7 (on the Futanke’s ongoing opposition to both governmental and non-governmental initiatives to stop the practice).

In the following section we shall see how Tostan unintentionally became one of the main actors in ‘the national call for abandonment’ through the ‘Malicounda declaration’.

### **2.3 Malicounda Bambara and public debates about the imminent criminalisation of FGC**

The village of Malicounda Bambara participated in a revised version of the Tostan programme from 1995 to 1997 which included new human rights modules. The following illustrates how the participants came to the resolution to stop FGC through a participatory process. I will eventually show how the mediatization of this process influenced the MPs when passing the law in the National Assembly in January 1999. The following should not be read as a historicising account of how one event led to

another but as fragments of a reality that was perceived and retold in different ways by different actors (Fortun 2001; Latour 2005).



Map 4: Malicounda Bambara is a village near the city of Mbour (indicated by A on this map). It is about 400km away from Fouta Toro by road.

### 2.3.1 Malicounda Bambara: the decision-making process retold

In July 1996 the women of Malicounda studied an education module in which the adverse health effects of FGC are discussed. According to the facilitator’s manual, the participants of the programme are supposed to perform a role-play telling of a girl who goes through the circumcision-rite, is excised, haemorrhages and dies. The volunteers for this role-play are asked to make the theatre as vivid as possible, using real circumcision songs and crying loudly, as one does when a death is announced in the village (Tostan 1999: 34). As this session follows others in which participants discuss the development of the body and reproductive health, the women had become accustomed to discussing sensitive subjects in class that were previously taboo. The facilitator, who was based in Malicounda, explained how participants initially reacted to discussing FGC:

The women were hesitant to do a theatre adapted from the story at first. We kept the same name as in the story – Poolel – which is a Pulaar name and didn't directly implicate the Bambaras in this tragedy, which may have helped. The women did the story as theatre but refused to discuss it afterwards. I kept asking them the questions that accompany the session [in the teaching manual] and no one would answer. The discussions in Sessions 1 through 13 were normally lively and animated. 'Why were they refusing to answer the questions?' I thought. 'Is it because I am Wolof and have not practised FGC?' So I did the session again and again. Three times. The third time they finally started talking timidly, and then more and more women spoke up. They admitted that it was an ancient practice that they followed because it was tradition and expected of them by the men and religious leaders. Nonetheless, their human rights helped them to understand that they have the right to the highest standard of health. They also have the right to express themselves and give their opinion. They hadn't known all this before and had never discussed it together. Finally, we ended up talking and talking about it together often. The women decided to talk to their 'Ndeye Dikke' [adopted sisters]<sup>18</sup> and their husbands about the dangerous health consequences. They also thought it important to get advice from the Imam and the village chief on the issue. They were surprised when they discovered that many fellow villagers supported an effort to end FGC. (Tostan 1999: 45)

This is how the women of Malicounda Bambara decided to stop practising excision according to the early Tostan documentation (Tostan 1999). From the facilitator's perspective, the NGO did not impose this decision on participants – it was the result of a participatory process (Nelson and Wright 1994). The taboo on discussing excision was not lifted through a top-down process in which a teacher crudely depicted the problems of excision, but through discussion which allowed participants to question a previously unchallenged social norm. The facilitator argues that the

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<sup>18</sup> Part of the social mobilisation method of the programme is that women are instructed to go and tell another person, an 'adopted sister' about what they have learnt in class.

women were ‘empowered’ (Panet 2009) by the discussion facilitated by the Tostan programme.<sup>19</sup>

As I did not have the chance to interview the women of Malicounda myself, I refer to the documentation of the decision-making process by Tostan staff who recorded the participants’ initial reasoning for stopping the practice. A lot of this material was then put together in *Breakthrough in Senegal: Ending Female Genital Cutting* (Tostan 1999). Besides giving a perspective on how the women of Malicounda came to this decision before it was picked up on and debated in the national media, it provides ‘expert’ accounts (Marcus and Holmes 2005) of those who had been more deeply involved with these women than could be accomplished by a journalist or researcher during a short visit. However, it is important to bear in mind that the Tostan documentation was designed to present potential funders with a ‘success story’ of how the ‘abandonment process’ worked in Malicounda and hence a guarantee of how it would work in other places.<sup>20</sup> Stern (2010) shows in her article on funding proposals for a town in the Cobalt region of Canada that stories are often fabricated in particular ways to apply for funding. The history of a place is relative according to who is intended to hear it and for what purposes. There is a lot of literature that critiques so-called ‘development’ (Escobar 1995; Nelson and Wright 1994; Mosse 2005) and NGOs’ representations of how their goals targeted in action plans are achieved (e.g. Green 2000, 2003, 2007). Green argues that satisfying the funders’ requirements, dealing with the bureaucracy of NGOs and representing oneself as a benefactor is often more central to daily routines of NGO staff than actually responding to the needs and desires of the targeted population.

After studying Tostan and public declarations since 2005, I found that many informants of mine retold what happened in similar ways. My aim is not to judge whether the stories told are ‘true’ or mere stories to attract funding and justify banning excision in Senegal, but to look at what so-called events are doing in forming a ban and the opposition to it. The Malicounda women’s decision to renounce excision and

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<sup>19</sup> Panet (2009) argues that the Tostan programme has an ‘empowering’ effect on many ‘abandoning communities’.

<sup>20</sup> For further details on what public declarations represent for people in Fouta Toro see chapters 7 and 8.

their press declarations are seen, by international players such as Tostan, UNICEF, the national and international press, etc., to have led to the ban of excision in Senegal.

According to Tostan documentation (Tostan 1999), by June 1997 participants of the Tostan programme had convinced enough people of the harmfulness of excision that no public circumcision ceremonies were held during the rainy season in the village. It is noted that a participant of the Tostan classes testified that: 'Everyone was aware that there was a movement to end the practice in the village. If any woman did cut her daughter, she did it in secret for the first time, knowing that she would be subject to public disapproval' (Tostan 1999: 45).

The director of the NGO, Molly Melching, was initially unaware that participants had stopped excision because of what they had learned in class. The primary intention of the programme had not been to convince communities to stop FGC but to provide them with general learning tools and information for personal development and the development of their communities. In June 1997 Melching was called by the co-ordinator who informed her that the women of Malicounda Bambara had stopped excision in their village (Tostan 1999: 45). Surprised, Melching and the head of training visited Malicounda to hear first-hand what the women had to say for themselves. Initially, Molly and the Tostan staff were hesitant to approach the subject of FGC openly, as they were aware of the sensitivity around the issue and did not want to raise any topics women might feel uneasy talking about (Tostan 1999: 46). However, they were immediately told that: 'We have decided to end "the tradition" in our village' (1999: 46). Excision had been discussed so much that it was no longer a delicate subject, according to Melching.

Melching noted how the women explained their initial decision in a report, which she sent to UNICEF (Tostan 1999: 46). Here, participants formulated their rights in response to the programme that echoed the discourse of the WHO agendas the government were dealing with. Coincidentally, the WHO had held a conference in Dakar three months before the Malicounda decision, in March 1997, in which Senegal had agreed with 27 other African countries to adopt an action plan on strategies for the abandonment of excision. I suggest that the Malicounda women's discourses sustained the human rights ideologies the government was trying to reinstate in

Senegal to prove to the ‘international community’ (WHO, UN, World Bank, etc.) that Senegal was complying with the desired human rights standards.

I quote in illustration:

We started thinking and talking about things in class that we had never before discussed, things that had always been ‘taboo’, you might say. [...] we learned about germs and the spread of disease and that made us think a lot about some of our traditions that might be dangerous for our children. [...] the Tostan program gave us a certain amount of confidence that we had never had before. Confidence that we could change things if we wanted to. (Tostan 1999: 46)

This passage shows how the programme was perceived as an agent of change. The Malicounda women’s experiences were seen as evidence that the programme would ‘empower’ communities to ‘break’ ‘oppressive social conventions’ in favour of the development agendas the government and NGOs had been prioritising.

Another Tostan participant in Malicounda said:

We studied Human Rights [...] in Module 7 on Women’s health and particularly the right to health. We learned that this right implies the freedom of each woman to decide for herself what she does with her body. She also has the right to preserve her body as it is, without mutilation or changes. This was a revelation for us since it was in contradiction with one of our oldest traditions: the circumcision of female children. In fact, in our traditions, it is unthinkable not to circumcise girls – why? She would be the laughing stock of the community and could never find a husband! It was so important that we were told that an uncircumcised woman was ‘dirty’ and not fit to prepare and serve food to those who study the Koran! Yet, we have always been uneasy about the disadvantages linked to circumcision. Many of us suffered greatly during sexual relations with our husbands and during childbirth. Many got infections or haemorrhaged after the operation. (Tostan 1999: 46–47)

This woman spoke of how they experienced the practice as important before – how it was impossible to question the practice despite the discomfort some were experiencing. Of course, the realisation of their ‘human right’ to stop the practice happened to be in the interest of what the WHO was pleading for – a conjunction of human rights and health.

During the meeting an older woman who had been listening added the following:

We old women were the ones who insisted that all the girls in the community be circumcised! Even when the parents were against it, we’d go take the child and do it when they weren’t around. But I’m in this class and I learned about Human Rights. Did you know that every man and every woman have the right to marry and live their lives according to their own beliefs? When I found that out, I realised I could no longer impose my will on my children and grandchildren. (Tostan 1999: 47)

This woman’s account brings the generational aspect into consideration. Whereas the elders are known to have had authority and their decisions bear more weight in decision-making processes than the younger generations, this old woman voices a rejection of this ‘right’ of the elders in favour of ‘human rights’. What is particularly striking about these accounts is the realisation of an individual’s rights in contrast to what is perceived as the obligations of ‘tradition’ and a community’s ‘laws’ (Das 1996). In all three accounts the women speak of the convention that could not be broken or was continued without question. However, what they had learnt in the Tostan programme changed their views of the unbreakable convention. In Das’s sense, the education programme was the trigger that brought new modes of action into being, and redefined ‘traditional categories such as codes of purity and honour, the meaning of martyrdom, and the construction of a heroic life, for example’ (Das 1995: 6). I argue that the Malicounda women’s discussion of excision can be seen as ‘an event’ because it problematised a practice that was in the realms of ‘the laws of the community’ and was now questioned in the realms of what the women came to perceive as ‘human rights’. In this process, the excised body moved from being pure,

chaste and proper to becoming a proprietor of 'human rights', subject to violation, mutilation and vulnerable to disease and discomfort.

According to Tostan (1999) the women's final stage before making their decision to stop the practice publicly was the imam's view, as we shall see.

After discussing excised women's health problems in the classes and deciding that these health risks corresponded to what they had experienced themselves, the women went to seek the Imam's advice on this issue (Tostan 1999). The Imam Serigne Amadou Touré told them that the Koran did not oblige them to practise this rite and personally, he was against it. He explained that he did not want his daughters to be excised. When he found out that his first daughter had undergone the operation without his knowledge he told his wife not to let it happen again. His other daughters were not excised. The women were surprised about this as they had assumed that excision was recommended by religion. The participants told Melching that the information they had acquired through the programme and the Imam's stance towards the practice gave them powerful arguments and the courage to tell others about their newly formed convictions (Tostan 1999).

Fortified by the certitude that they were not violating holy law, there were no longer any constraints to their desire to renouncing the practice, according to the Tostan rhetoric (Tostan 1999). In chapters 7 and 8 I discuss the role of religious and 'traditional' authorities in more detail with reference to my own ethnography in Fouta Toro. As we shall see, religious leaders' opposition to the 'abandonment' of excision does occur and can be an impediment to stopping the practice.

Although this decision-making process was an event of local importance, it was a non-event for others in Senegal.

### **2.3.2 How the women's decision to stop excising became 'the beginning of the end'**

To complete the account of how 'the nation' found out about the Malicounda women's decision to abandon, I will continue to follow Melching's account of how she brought the news to UNICEF and the national press (Tostan 1999; Gillespie and Melching 2010).

Molly Melching sent the report of her interview with the women of Malicounda to the UNICEF representative in Dakar and they discussed the surprising effect the programme had had on the women's decision to abandon excision. Mr Sonhy, the UNICEF representative suggested sending 20 Senegalese journalists to the village. Melching was initially hesitant but Sobhy reasoned: 'if these women are strong enough to make this incredible decision on their own, they are strong enough to defend their position before twenty journalists' (Tostan 1999: 49). When Melching told the women that UNICEF wanted to bring 20 journalists to their village they were excited and said 'Yes! We have good news to share with everyone. Why not discuss it? This will be an opportunity for us to explain why we made the decision' (Tostan 1999: 49; Gillespie and Melching 2010).

According to Tostan, the villagers prepared for the arrival of the journalists. They asked for more information about human rights articles to be in a position to defend their views. They rehearsed their play and invited the religious leaders and the village chief to come to the event. In *Breakthrough in Senegal. Ending Female Genital Cutting* (Tostan 1999), the media coverage of the event was considered to be extremely positive. Representatives from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Woman, the Child and the Family were present and congratulated them on their decision. Radio interviews in the national languages were broadcast during the following weeks: the news on television showed film-clips of the women, their play and an interview with the religious leader (Tostan 1999: 49).

## 2.4 ‘Events’ of ‘national importance’ for the ban on FGC – media representations

Besides governmental and non-governmental representations of how the Malicounda declaration became ‘the beginning of the end’ of excision in Senegal, newspapers played a crucial role in the making of a national debate on excision and the ‘need for a law’. In what follows we shall see how the pro-government and independent newspapers *Le Soleil*, *Le Matin*, *Nouvel Horizon* and *Dakar Soir* depicted the Malicounda ‘event’ and others. I discuss how modern Senegal is envisioned through these reports and for what purposes. Subsequently I will show how these ‘events of national importance’ were ridiculed and minimised by the critical newspaper *Walfadjiri* to illustrate their stance against the anti-FGC movement. The selected articles are from 1997–1999, the period when FGC was subject to public debate.<sup>21</sup>

The Malicounda event was publicised by the national press in the following ways:<sup>22</sup>

On 2 and 3 August 1997 the governmental centre right newspaper *Le Soleil* published an article called: ‘Malicounda Bambara: the women renounce excision’.<sup>23</sup> ‘In a male chauvinist environment that is still ruled by tradition’ the women of Malicounda have come to the courageous decision to abandon excision. And to make their decision public, they have invited the national press to their village last Thursday with UNICEF as an intermediary. The women participated in a prodigious education programme that was put into being by Tostan / UNICEF / Government of Senegal.

On 4 August 1997 *Le Matin*, a centre right daily newspaper, which tends to have a less critical stance and more commercial interests (Camara 2009: personal communication) published an article called: ‘The oath of Malicounda’<sup>24</sup> “No more excision!” The women of Malicounda Bambara, a village situated a few kilometres away from Mbour, have decided to put an end to the sexual mutilation of girls. Supported by UNICEF and Tostan, an NGO interested in the rights of women, they have lifted a taboo. A report.<sup>25</sup> This article describes the ceremony in great detail and glorifies ‘the conservative and tradition-abiding Bambara women and their decision to give up “an ancient tradition”’.

<sup>21</sup> I thank Dr Abibou Camara for sharing these articles with me from *L’Abandon de l’excision* (UNICEF Senegal 1999).

<sup>22</sup> The titles of the newspaper articles in the following text boxes are translated by me from French and the content was summarised by me.

<sup>23</sup> Translated from French by myself: ‘Malicounda Bambara: les femmes renoncent à l’excision’.

<sup>24</sup> In the original: ‘Le Serment de Malicounda’.

<sup>25</sup> Subtitle translated by myself. The original says: “Plus d’excision!” Les femmes de Malicounda, un village situé à quelques kilomètres de Mbour, ont décidé de mettre fin aux mutilations sexuelles des filles. Soutenues par l’Unicef et Tostan, une Ong qui s’intéresse aux droits de la femme, elles ont levé un tabou. Reportage’.

In the issue of 8 August 1997, the weekly journal *Nouvel Horizon*, read mainly by people who consider themselves to be ‘intellectuals’ (this includes school-teachers for example), published an article called ‘La fin de l’excision à Malicounda.’<sup>26</sup> The article emphasises the importance of ‘education’ for an abandonment of ‘this ancient and deeply ingrained custom’. It argues that without sufficient educational support (by government and NGOs) it is impossible to outlaw the practice.

In the issue of 9–15 August 1997 the *Dakar Soir* published the article: ‘Malicounda Bambara. The women demystify excision’. The article argues that the women of Malicounda declared because they do not want their daughters to suffer the same problems they have had to go through. It is therefore ‘normal’ that they have decided to defy this ‘deeply ingrained tradition’ to protect their girls’ bodies. Again, the article describes in great detail how the women came to their decision to renounce excision.

On 28 August 1997, the governmental centre right newspaper *Le Soleil* published an article called: ‘MALICOUNDA BAMBARA. The descendants of Malians well integrated’<sup>27</sup> and ‘The world is collapsing’.<sup>28</sup> These articles depict ‘the event’ of the declaration as a proof of the collapse of ancient traditions in a quickly changing Senegalese society. An emphasis is placed on how education programmes brought about this change in attitude towards ‘a Bambara custom’ that has been associated with the preservation of female integrity.

These articles convey how this ‘event’ was represented as a break from ‘tradition’ and the beginning of a new era in Senegal – a future that is depicted as more ‘modern’, and guided by international standards of ‘human rights’ instead of holding on to backward traditions of a past era. The governmental newspaper *Le Soleil* in particular used this declaration to sustain the idea that ‘education’ and ‘human rights’ are associated with ‘development’ and modernity. This place, modern Senegal, is depicted as free from oppressive customs, injustice, poverty and ‘the imprisonment of traditions’, but offers physical integrity, democracy and justice through a set of standards agreed upon by a so-called ‘transnational community’.

It was through the mediatization of the Malicounda declaration that the women’s decision to stop excising became ‘an event of national and international importance’ that was argued about across Senegal and outside. Handelman (1990: 15) argues that public events are locations of communication that convey versions of social order in relatively coherent ways to an audience. He says that in contrast to the general ‘flow

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<sup>26</sup> ‘The end of excision in Malicounda’.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Malicounda Bambara – Des descendants de maliens bien intégrés’.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Le monde s’effondre’, in *Le Soleil*, 28 August.

of mundane living’, which may be uncertain in terms of direction and outcome, public events are put together to communicate comparatively well-honed messages (Handelman 1990: 15). In this way, the Malicounda women’s decision was reproduced through the national media in a way that depicted Senegal as moving away from harmful traditions, changing in the ways prescribed by the UN, and abiding by the ‘international standards’ recommended by the WHO. The fact that Hillary Clinton also visited the women of Malicounda, to hear about their resolution and to congratulate them for having the courage to end the practice, underlined that this event was not just significant for the inhabitants of Malicounda but of interest across the whole world.

For many, what was happening in Malicounda was very much congruent with other events that were going on in Senegal at the time. For example, the WHO conference held in April 1997, in which 27 African nations developed an action plan to eliminate sexual mutilations.

Another event that is frequently referred to as ‘significant’ in the history of activism against FGC was a conference held at the University of Dakar on 12–13 July 1997. The aim was to discuss the religious point of view on sexual mutilations. At this conference, different scholars and *Islamologues* discussed the religious recommendations of the Prophet Mohammed (*Hadiths*) and eventually came to a consensus that mutilations of the body are not recommended by Islam but are cultural traditions. The Koran itself does not mention the practice, but recommends the preservation of women’s health. This event has been referred to as ‘the marabouts’ declaration’ by some informants,<sup>29</sup> as many perceived this intellectual and religious debate to prove that excision was not a religious obligation.

In this text box I have assembled some newspaper articles discussing public debates and ‘important’ events that were going on around about the same time as the Malicounda declaration. These events are also considered crucial by activists, NGOs, ministers and the national press to the passing of the law against excision two years later.

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<sup>29</sup> E.g. Madame Sidibe Ndiaye of COSEPRAT interviewed by me in 2005.

On Monday 14 July 1997 the Senegalese newspaper *Le Matin* published the article ‘Mutilations genitales féminines au Senegal. La face cachée du drame féminin’.<sup>30</sup> After an account of the discussions during the conference on FGM and religion at the University of Dakar, the article asks how an end can be brought to sexual mutilations in Senegal. There is no easy answer to this question as the practice is not yet penalised by law. The populations are very attached to their cultural traditions and are not aware of the dangers of the practice. Furthermore, mothers wish to protect their children and future mothers. Due to the patriarchal system women are virtually absent in the decision-making process in the rural areas as well as being marginalised in the Family Code.

*Le Matin*, 4 August 1997, published ‘Le point de vue religieux: “L’excision est recommandable, pas obligatoire”’,<sup>31</sup> The article discusses whether this practice, which is practised by some ethnic groups in Senegal but not others, is in fact recommended by Islam. Dr Taha, WHO specialist in hygiene, explains the difficulty of the situation in the following way: ‘It is likely that part of the confusion that appeared around the subject of the religious interpretation comes from generalising what applies to male circumcision to women. Although there is a general consensus about the fact that circumcision was one of the commandments that God gave to Ibrahim (Abraham), there was no clear indication as far as female circumcision is concerned.’<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the doctor argues that the Prophet Mohammed’s often cited *Hadith* that recommends ‘to reduce but not destroy’ (the clitoris through cutting) has been found to be of unreliable and inauthentic sources. Some Islamic theologians recommend partial removal of the clitoris and justify their point of view by saying that it ‘embellishes’ the woman. Nevertheless, one fact remains uncontested: historians agree that the practice of excision existed long before the arrival of Islam and other monotheistic religions, according to a professor of Sharia Law at Kuwait City University.

The weekly journal *Nouvel Horizon*, read mainly by intellectuals and educated people, published a few articles on excision on 8 August 1997, over three pages. The article ‘Mutilations sexuelles féminines’ explains that there are few countries in Africa where excision is punishable. Senegal is not an exception as there is no law in the Penal Code that punishes any form of female genital mutilation. However, according to Madame Maty Diaw, legal councillor of the Ministry of the Woman, the Child and the Family, excision is currently considered to be an act of violence towards women. The problem is that mothers cutting their daughters do not do so with malicious intentions or to mutilate their children but because they wish the best for them and want them to be well integrated into a society that demands these practices. As mothers are not performing a crime to harm their daughters, this act is not punishable at present. However, the National Plan of the Woman 1996–2001 recommends introducing a law punishing excision, as well as encouraging and introducing education and sensitisation programmes to change people’s mentality about these practices – which cannot be changed from one day to the next.

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<sup>30</sup> ‘FGM in Senegal. The hidden face of the female drama’.

<sup>31</sup> Translation into English: ‘The religious point of view: “Excision is recommendable, not obligatory”’.

<sup>32</sup> My own translation.

The *Point de Vue* of 23–29 December 1997 published an article discussing the need for a law ‘Il faut une loi. Elle est plus forte que la tradition’.<sup>33</sup>

The selected articles show how the debate about excision in Senegal revolved around its harmfulness and recommendations from the ‘international community’ on the one hand, and on what grounds it is ‘legitimate’ to stop the practice on the other. While the debates were at times initiated by activists, they also sought to inform the reader about the Islamic stance on excision and whether stopping the practice is legitimate from a religious point of view. Furthermore, the articles problematise the fact that although excision has been discouraged by the WHO on the basis of its harmfulness, the practice is not penalised, and questioned whether criminalisation of the practice would be an effective way of getting communities to stop.

Farge’s (2002) analysis of what makes an event significant in ‘history-making’ is relevant to the passing of this law. She bases her analysis on the premise that an event is not much more than a moment that occurs – a fragment of reality that is perceived and has not much more unity than the name it is given (Farge 2002: 2). This fragment of time is perceived, understood, shared and discussed by its recipients. An event is fabricated and fabricates (Farge 2002: 3). She argues that the event is a moment of illusion of what was there in the past, and what is to come in the future. In this way, the event can be significant in defining a vision of the future for those who experience it. One speaks of an event by characterising it with regard to an expectation of something that is to come. It is announced in view of the good or bad news that is expected to occur (Farge 2002: 4).<sup>34</sup>

An event, however, is not just relevant to those who witness it and who make it ‘an event’ in their memories through assembling moments understood as the past, present and future. It also gains historical and national importance through historians and the

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<sup>33</sup> Translation: ‘There is need for a law. It is stronger than tradition’.

<sup>34</sup> Derrida also writes about the future anterior puts in place a ‘lace of obligation’ that binds and unbinds the ethical actor. The possibility of pursuing justice beyond the determinations of law is one important effect (Derrida 1990: 329). Lacan (1977) writes about retroaction and discourse: the analyst and advocate (Fortun 2001) rework the past so that the future is anteriorised differently. I argue that these analyses of discourses of the past and the future relate to how events are represented in different ways for particular purposes.

national media (Bensa and Fassin 2002). Historians seize on and make sense of the event, and reify it in ways that affect how it is remembered by those who come after (Farge 2002: 6).

For many activists, politicians, journalists and NGO workers, the Malicounda event marked the potential beginning of the end of a past that they had lived and struggled to change in one way or another. It represented a vision of something new – a transformation to modernity.

However, no matter how the event is represented by the historian or the national media, it may remain a non-event for some. It may be too insignificant for some to register in their minds. They may not remember it years later because its ‘significance’ did not concern them personally. For example, a lot of my informants in Fouta Toro, who were not associated with Tostan, had never heard of the Malicounda declaration, although it was probably featured in radio broadcasts. For them, this event of ‘national importance’ was not significant enough to remember. Other informants in Dakar who were not involved in development work and activism against FGC had never heard of these ‘important events’ either, or if they had, they could not remember them. What registers in people’s minds as ‘of national importance’, therefore, depends on how relevant it is to their lives and how involved they are in the issue. Farge also looks at how a non-event can become an event because of the emotional reactions it provokes – it may be that the happiness and euphoria of some simultaneously produce the anger, outrage or sadness of others (Farge 2002: 5). As we will see later on, some of Tostan’s sensitisation activities against excision have been ingrained in a lot of Haalpulaar’en’s minds across the whole of Senegal – because they caused so much anger and upheaval although they were not intended to do so. One of these events, that neither Tostan nor the national press documented as significant, is still referred to as ‘les événements de Aere Lao’. This was an occasion where Tostan had organised a meeting at which people were to publicly discuss excision and human rights in presence of ministers and international agencies such as UNICEF. Locally renowned marabouts were strongly opposed (see chapter 7).

The daily newspaper *Walfadjiri*, which tends to be critical of governmental actions and is centre-left in political orientation, did not write about the Malicounda event. While other newspapers called for a need for a law against excision, *Walfadjiri* published various articles in 1998 that showed overt opposition to the idea of a law and ridiculed governmental and non-governmental activities to get populations to stop the practice.

For example:

*Walfadjiri*, 10 July 1998: ‘Les exciseuses n’ont pas déposé les lames’,<sup>35</sup> arguing that although the women of Malicounda Bambara declared their abandonment of the practice, excision is still widely practised in the neighbouring communities and the statistics have shown that the rate of excision has not decreased in the department of Mbour.

*Walfadjiri*, 31 December 1998: ‘Kedougou: 120 excised girls waiting ... about 10 days ago hundreds of girls were excised in this department. The penalisation of female genital mutilations is received without great illusion [sic] because the preliminary sensitisation work was rushed or indeed non-existent.’<sup>36</sup> The article explains that even though the government has decided to ban female circumcision, it is extremely unlikely that the whole population will stop practising if sensitisation has not yet reached the remote parts of the country. It is argued that the government should give people time before criminalising the practice as not enough groundwork has been done. Teachers ‘in the bush’ testify as to their doubts: they ask themselves if the government is serious about the criminalisation and sensitisation against excision because for diseases like polio great funds for projects were released. Efforts to raise awareness about excision seem minimal in comparison.

*Walfadjiri*, 31 December 1998: ‘Interdiction and Penalisation. **They want to humiliate us.** There are many ethnicities in the department and many different ways of practising excision. But the same line of defence is taken everywhere’. This article demonstrates again that despite penalisation by the government the practice is far from being abandoned in Kedougou. The law is seen as shaming people’s customs rather than as a reminder of the right to health and physical integrity.

As we can see *Walfadjiri* recorded different events as ‘significant’. Governmental attempts to discourage excision by establishing potential penalties are not taken seriously but are instead depicted as another potential failure like the many other

<sup>35</sup> Translation: ‘The excisers have not put their razor blades away’.

<sup>36</sup> Translated from title: ‘120 filles excisées, en attendant ... Dans ce département où une centaine de filles ont été excisées il y a ne dizaine de jours, on accueille la pénalisation des mutilations génitales féminines sans grande illusion. Car le travail préalable de sensibilisation a été bâclé, voire inexistant’.

governmental efforts to promote ‘development’ in remote regions like Kedougou. In addition to that, the articles indicate that the debates going on in the city amongst governmental organisations and NGOs are far from the lived realities in ‘isolated’<sup>37</sup> rural parts of Senegal. According to *Walfadjiri*, this law and the Malicounda declaration did not represent ‘modernity’ and the right to personal integrity, but, on the contrary, a form of cultural colonialism imposed indirectly by ‘the White people’. The article below depicts this form of cultural colonialism vividly and intelligently, referring to the Senegalese intellectual tradition of *Négritude*.<sup>38</sup>

*Walfadjiri*, 6 January 1999: ‘Criminalise paedophilia, not excision’. The article begins by pointing out that Senegal is a popular destination for sex tourism and particularly paedophilia, and that sexual exploitation of children and adolescents for prostitution and pornography has reached an unimaginable level.<sup>39</sup> These practices should be banned and become a matter of public concern and not the religious practice of female circumcision. International concerns about female circumcision are misplaced and not everything that is supported by Westerners and the international community is appropriate and relevant. The article defends excision as a practice of ‘civilisation’, as the Egyptian pharaohs attached the practice to the idea of divine androgyny and argues that the renowned Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop discovered that circumcision was introduced to the Semites through contact with the black world. Circumcision is meaningful because it is integrated into general explanations of how the universe is constituted amongst black people. One particular example of this is the cosmology of the Dogon (Griaule 1970). In this cosmology male circumcision must be accompanied by excision – to remove the feminine from the man and what is masculine from the woman (Diop 1979). The author reminds us that Senegal is up to 90% Muslim and Islam dominates social life in Senegal. It is therefore impossible to criminalise a practice without enquiring into the exact position of Islam towards it. Does Islam recommend or tolerate excision? Niang, the author, states that the practice is not mentioned in the Koran but it was reported that the Prophet addressed the excisers of the female slaves of Medina in the following way:

<sup>37</sup> Kedougou is called an ‘isolated’ (*enclavé* in French) region by most development agents because there are hardly any roads and in the rainy season it is virtually impossible to get to some places due to flooding. I found when travelling to Salemata in Kedougou that health-care assistants and teachers complained about the failure of the state to provide infrastructure and access to resources. They vividly described their difficulties trying to assist people in desperate need of health care, who ended up dying on the way to the health-care centre.

<sup>38</sup> *La Négritude* was a literary and ideological movement led by francophone black intellectuals, writers, and politicians. The founders were African and Afro Caribbean intellectuals (Césaire, Damas, Senghor) who lived in Paris in the 1930s. One of them, Leopold Sedar Senghor, became the first Senegalese president after independence in 1960. According to Senghor, the *Négritude* movement would enable black people under French rule to meet the colonial racism as equals. *Négritude* was a political and intellectual tool reinforcing solidarity among black people across the world against racism. The term *Négritude* is closely related to *Pan-Africanism* in Anglophone colonial and post-colonial African/Black literature.

<sup>39</sup> According to my knowledge, Senegambia does not have a particularly high record of paedophilia or commercial exploitation of children for sexual purposes. Sex tourism of white women with Senegalese men, however, does occur in the tourist areas.

‘Excise lightly and don’t cut the clitoris completely. This way you allow the woman to experience some pleasure, to have a radiant face and to give some pleasure to her husband.’<sup>40</sup> The Sharia classes excision as a practice of propriety/etiquette (*sunna* or *fitria*) that brings human nature to perfection – like circumcision, like cutting one’s fingernails, depilating, shaving one’s pubic hair.<sup>41</sup> The *Rissala*<sup>42</sup> says that circumcision of boys is a traditional obligation, whereas excision of women is merely an honourable practice (*khifad*).<sup>43</sup> The author of the article questions whether the health risks really are as grave as the press and the government presents them to be. If it really is a harmful practice, he argues, why has it persisted throughout the last few millennia? Is it right and legitimate to criminalise a cultural act, an act of civilisation? Does the Senegalese government not prepare to pass this law to comply with Western opinions, to imitate the West? If it is criminalised for this reason (to imitate the West) against the practices of ancient civilisation, then this law goes against common sense. Niang reminds the deputies who are about to make a decision on the law, that the law is the expression of the common will of the people and hopes that the deputies will abstain from voting for such a law. Instead, he recommends, paedophilia should be criminalised first.

Besides introducing us to arguments for a preservation of the practice and reasons for the opposition to the law, this article shows that the oft-cited assumption that excision is preserved ‘out of ignorance’ is misleading. On the contrary, the argument for the preservation of the practice is laden with symbolism revolving around civilisation and sophistication associated with highly regarded ‘ancient’ peoples such as the Egyptians, the Semites and the Dogon. Furthermore, excision is valued as enhancing the morality and social etiquette of society by relating it to the origins of the ‘Islamic community’ and to practices that were common during the time of the Prophet Mohammed and personally endorsed by him. Instead of representing a shift from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’, from ignorance to education and from being ‘victims of unquestioned customs’ to becoming autonomous, free-thinking citizens – the law against excision is seen as undermining ‘civilisation’ and as representing a threat to the cultural autonomy of ‘the Africans’. The influence of ‘the West’ is seen as

<sup>40</sup> ‘Après avoir souligné que la pratique de l’excision ne semble pas avoir un fondement coranique, rapporte des propos attribués au Prophète (psl) s’adressant à l’excisieuse des femmes esclaves de Medine (“... excisez légèrement et ne coupez pas complètement le clitoris; vous permettez de ce fait à la femme d’éprouver du plaisir, d’avoir un visage radieux et de donner du plaisir à son mari”).’

<sup>41</sup> ‘La charia classe l’excision parmi les pratiques dites de bienséance (*sunna*, *fitria*) qui concourent à la perfection de la nature humaine comme la circoncision, le fait de se couper les ongles, de s’épiler, de se raser les pubis etc.’

<sup>42</sup> *Rissala* is often used as another word for Islam or Islamic tradition. *Ar-Risāla* means word of God revealed through a messenger to the people. The messengers bring law and humanity guiding people on a straight path towards God (social laws, state laws, etc.).

<sup>43</sup> According to Abusharaf the term *Khifad* literally means decreasing the height of the clitoris. It is propagated by those who support female circumcision as an Islamic practice but not identical to male circumcision. As the other authors mentioned above describe, the notion of *Khifad* is based on a *Hadith* where the Prophet Mohammed advised an exciser to lower the clitoris but not cut so much (Abusharaf 2007: 107).

culturally and morally inferior – excision, it is argued, is not a ‘barbaric practice’ depriving women of their right to physical integrity but enhances their status and respect in the community in agreement with religiously sanctioned principles. The ‘West’, however, is thought of as merely having brought corruption and a breakdown of culture, community and civilisation – as the reference to sex tourism and prostitution shows (see chapters 7 and 8).<sup>44</sup>

So far I have argued that the call for national abandonment and the law in Senegal resulted from a fabrication of a number of events, such as the Malicounda declaration, feminist activism in Dakar and the representation of these events in the national press. I have also shown how these were non-events to others, and looked at the assumptions underlying propaganda against the law in leftist newspapers like *Walfadjiri*. The next part of this chapter looks at the debates in the National Assembly on the day the law was voted in – which in turn provoked ‘the resistance’ to the law and the NGOs in Fouta Toro.

## **2.5 Debates in the National Assembly and voting for the law against FGC**

The official proposal for modifying the Penal Code gave the following rationale for penalising FGC:

Female Genital Mutilations, although part of traditional practices and customs, constitute intolerable violations of the physical and psychological integrity as well as the health of many women and young girls. These practices are no longer relevant in the new socio-cultural dynamic of Senegal. Their legal abolition as indicated in Article 299 of the penal code takes this into account and also the respect of international conventions ratified by Senegal, especially convention 1979 on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination towards Women

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<sup>44</sup> While Niang refers to the intellectual tradition of *Négritude* in his defence of excision, the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop knew Molly Melching and suggested the name Tostan, meaning ‘Breakthrough’ in Wolof, for her NGO. I do not want to imply that the *Négritude* movement is against the abandonment of excision, although the author of the article seems to argue that it is.

and the convention of 1990 regarding Children's Rights. (from government's official proposal, in Tostan 1999: 69)

According to Molly Melching, a group of parliamentarians sought Tostan's advice concerning the impending law to be debated by the National Assembly at the beginning of January 1999 (Tostan 1999: 69). As Tostan had experience with villagers who stopped excision, they wanted to hear more about how to approach the 'abandonment'. Melching sent some ministers to meet the women of Malicounda to discuss their reasons for renouncing excision and how they felt about the passing of a law. Tostan was not in favour of a law penalising the practice, in contrast to other activists such as Madame Sidibe Ndiaye of COSEPRAT, who was a promoter of the new law. According to Melching, it seemed impossible to criminalise the practice before informing the population sufficiently of the reasons for the ban.

The day before the law was passed, on 12 January 1999, a delegation of villagers from Malicounda and Diabougou and Medina Cherif, as well as other women's groups who had fought for an abolition of FGC for many years, met with members of Parliament in Dakar. The villagers expressed their views that the government should take a firm stand against the practice by voting for a law. However, they unanimously requested a delay in its application. They were concerned about other members of their ethnic group who had not benefited from the education programme and 'did not know about the health risks involved in the cutting' (Tostan 1999: 70).

The parliamentary debate on the amendment of the law in the National Assembly on 13 January has been depicted in a number of documents, but unfortunately I could not obtain a complete recorded version of the event.

According to Melching (Tostan 1999), the event took place in the following way: Mata Sy Diallo of the women's parliamentary group began the debate and spoke of the dangers of FGC. She thanked the villagers who had testified in front of the committee and spoke of their warnings that sufficient education is needed before the application of the law. The famous and influential *Tijanne* leader Thierno Mountaga

Tall, a Pulaar marabout and El Hadj Omar's grandson,<sup>45</sup> had distributed a carefully put together document for the parliamentarians on the same day. It was called *Preuves éclatantes au sujet de la pratique recommandable de l'excision des jeunes filles*<sup>46</sup> (Tall 1999) and contained information about the religious importance of excision. On the grounds of Tall's arguments for the practice and against the proposed law, many parliamentarians raised concerns about outlawing excision during the debate. Some said that they could not vote for the law because they did not want to criminalise their relatives for respecting tradition and religion.

According to Tall's document, in which he explains different Islamic scholars' positions on what the Prophet and his companions thought of excision,<sup>47</sup> the purpose of cutting the clitoris (*khifad*) is to protect women from excess of sensuality.<sup>48</sup> 'Excessive sensuality' could tempt a woman to commit despicable acts, Tall argues.

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<sup>45</sup> The legendary Islamic leader El Hadj Oumar Tall (Al Hajj Umar according to Robinson [1985] and Willis [1989]) is celebrated for having introduced the *Tijaniyya* order (*tariqa*) to Senegal in the 19th century as well as for having defended Islam and the interests of the Futafulke against French colonialism. Islamic practice is said to have been present in the Futafulke empire, the region called Futafulke today, since at least the Mana dynasty in the 9th century (Wane 1969). Wane (1969) suggests that the Maninka ruler of Futafulke, War-Jabi, introduced Sharia law between 1030 and 1040. From here, Islam slowly spread further south into Djolof, Kayor, Baol and Sine Saloum, areas that are Senegal today. However, the predominant *tariqa* until El Hadj Oumar's reforms was the *Qadiriyya* (founder, Iranian Abdul-Qadir Gilani, 1077–1166) mixed with local religious beliefs and indigenous spiritual practices. Although El Hadj Oumar Tall, born around 1797 in Halwar, Futafulke, started his religious life as a member of the *Qadiriyya*, he later converted to the *Tijaniyya* and was declared a Khalifa of the order (Dilley 2004: 102). His mission was to proselytise the way of the *Tijaniyya*, fight against religious syncretism or mixing (*ikhtilâl*) and to 'reinstatate a purified form of Islam' (Dilley 2004: 102). Robinson suggests that he even considered the Muslim inhabitants of upper Senegal and Upper and Middle Niger valleys 'pagan', one of the reasons why he launched a Jihad against them (Robinson 1987: 249). Besides being known as a warrior in the name of Islam and the founder of the 'Umarian state' (Robinson 1987, 1988), he is admired by locals for contesting the French expansion in the upper and middle valleys of the Senegal River. Robinson suggests that, for the first time, the French had to seriously justify and defend a strong European presence in the region, an ideological challenge for Governor Faidherbe (Robinson 1988: 418). Locals interpret El Hadj Omar Tall's success in establishing an Islamic state in spite of the French antagonism as due to his spiritual strength and the guidance of Allah. For many Futafulke and Senegalese I met, Thierno Mountaga Tall's kinship ties to this legendary figure were of great importance. His recommendations were far more influential than a politician's.

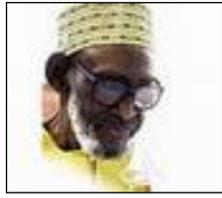
<sup>46</sup> Translation: *Striking Proofs Concerning the Recommendable Practice of Excision of Young Girls* (1999).

<sup>47</sup> 'Al-Fawz Wa An-Najah; Hadith of Tabarani called *Al-Awsa*; according to Abou Hurayra excision is *Fitra* (bringing the human being to perfection); Nawawi Tome; Abu Abdallah, Ibn Dawud a *Hadith* of the Prophet's wife Aicha; Buhayqi; the Prophet's companion Ibn Abbass. These *Hadith* can be found in *Al-Kabir de Dahhak b Qays ...: al-Fawakih ad Dawani ala Risala b ibn Abi Zeyd al-Qayrawani* and in *Bulghat as-salik* as well as in the *Fatawi* of Cheikh Ibn Taymiyya vol. 21 Tome, and in *ad-Dahhak b Qays*' (Tall 1999).

<sup>48</sup> 'Nous avons compris maintenant que l'intérêt de l'excision est de protéger la femme contre l'excès de sensualité qui pourrait la pousser à commettre des bassesses ou (simplement) à s'en approcher' (Tall 1999: 15). There is not a commonly used term for 'sensuality' in Pulaar except *mo waawaa jaggude hoore mum* – 'she cannot control herself', or *baawaado ngoraagu* – 'he cannot control himself'.

As nowadays most husbands travel and stay away from their spouses for long periods of time, the Prophet's warning against 'excessive sensuality' is even more relevant than it was in the past. What Tall means is that the desire for sensuality might tempt a woman to commit adultery rather than waiting for her husband to come home. 'The wisdom of excision lies in the fact that the woman can abstain from sex for longer and thus guard her honour (Tall 1999: 15). The *Al-Fawz Wa An-Najah* states that 'Virtuous women obey [their husbands] and protect what needs to be protected during the absence of their husbands, with the protection of Allah' (Tall 1999: 15). Furthermore: 'If the woman accomplishes her five prayers a day, lawfully, fasts her month [of Ramadan], protects her sex [exclusively for her husband] and obeys her husband, she is asked through which door she wishes to enter paradise', as the Prophet promised in a *Hadith*.

Tall reminds the Muslim Senegalese citizen that the teachings of the Prophet as well as those of his wise followers should not be abandoned for foreign Western pretensions that are unfounded and false. He raises the rhetorical question of whether a Muslim has the right to abandon what has been legally approved (Sharia), to follow a Muslim who cannot justify his opinion or, even worse, to follow the advice of a non-Muslim (1999: 16). Tall concludes his document with the following remarks: To prohibit Muslims from the practice of the recommendations of their religion and their customs is a sinful act and an injustice that retards human rights. He reminds the reader that breaching human rights is condemned according to the constitution of the country – it is the right of every citizen to practise their religion and their beliefs without hindrance or harassment. Furthermore, the discussion about excision and circumcision is religious and customary in nature and a secular state should not get involved. If the state intervenes on this question, why does it not intervene on worse crimes such as prostitution, the consumption of alcohol and tobacco? For there is no doubt about the fact that these practices are harmful to people's health, as has been proven by modern medicine. In the name of religion he therefore appeals for medicalisation of the practice instead of criminalisation (Tall 1999).



Images 13: Thierno Mountaga Tall

El Hadj Omar Tall in his fight against French Colonialism<sup>49</sup>

This document strongly influenced the views of those parliamentarians who adhere to the *Tijaniyya* brotherhood (Cruise O'Brien 1988; Brenner 1988, etc.), and particularly Haalpulaar'en who felt loyalty towards the most influential religious leader from Fouta Toro. Due to Tall's reputation as a renowned and influential religious leader it was very difficult for some parliamentarians, who had kinship ties or were morally obliged to this figure of authority, to speak out against his recommendations.

The effect of this pamphlet is depicted in an article on the debate in the National Assembly in the governmental newspaper *Le Soleil*.

*Le Soleil*, 15 January 1999,<sup>50</sup> documents the debate with citations. 'It is impossible to turn a cultural practice into an offence for it cannot stop the act', argued the Member of Parliament Cheikh Saad Bouh Fall. 'The motivations for the project of passing this law are unacceptable', said Abdou Fall, and Yoro Deh added to this that: 'The penalty of six months to five years of imprisonment foreseen in the new Article 299 is excessive.' Ibrahima Fall argued that 'The project of the law is precipitated. We did not expect this now. We wanted a penal code on family planning first that incorporates all these questions in a more general way.' The event of Malicounda was discussed in detail and it was said that abandonment was achieved there because of the beneficial social environment provided by the education project and NGOs' development efforts. However this change in opinion was not possible in other places, it was said. Some Members of Parliament, such as Cheikh Abdoulaye Dieye, referring to Thierno Mountaga Tall's declaration condemning the law for religious reasons, went as far as saying: 'My religion forbids me to vote for this law against excision.' Furthermore, the possibility of medicalising the practice was discussed. Dieye suggested that this would guarantee 'the girls' aesthetic charm without the harmful consequences'. Babacar Baptiste Dioh countered this: 'No! There is no charm, nor anything aesthetic about a mutilation.' Doudou Wade defended Dieye's point of view: 'Excision is a religious problem. To attack it would mean challenging [remettre en cause] Article 19 of the Constitution.' Jean Paul Dias reinforced their arguments saying that 'To criminalise excision means to criminalise a custom.'

<sup>49</sup> Pictures taken from [www.asalama.com](http://www.asalama.com); [www.rimaneclub.vip-blog.com](http://www.rimaneclub.vip-blog.com); [africansuccess.org](http://africansuccess.org)

<sup>50</sup> Translated by myself.

Despite the contradictory views voiced during this ‘long and difficult debate’,<sup>51</sup> the majority finally voted for the law against excision (Article 299) at 11:20 p.m. In the end the female parliamentarians, themselves being from ethnic groups that practise excision, seemed to be the greatest defenders of the law and were extremely critical of the practice – whereas the men were hesitant to vote for its criminalisation, according to Melching (of the NGO Tostan) and Ndiaye (of the NGO COSEPRAT). Some were afraid of passing such a law and wanted to protect their relatives and members of their ethnic groups from penalty, but surely also to avoid criticism from their own relatives and the people whom they were supposed to represent. However, it was agreed that without education and social mobilisation, it would be impossible to get people to accept the new law and stop practising, thus that its application should be postponed. Instead, national strategies for the abandonment of excision would be developed.

In this chapter, I have discussed the movements that preceded the ban on excision in Senegal and how the legislation came to be passed. I have explained which organisations were involved in campaigning against the practice since the beginning of the 1980s, and how Tostan’s basic education programme was perceived to have led to the Malicounda declaration, which became an event of ‘national importance’. I have also discussed how different ‘events of national importance’ were fabricated in ways that made many people perceive ‘a need for a law’ and a national call for abandonment. However, in contrast to these views there were others who did not register these events (Farge 2002) as important, and who defied the law on the eve of the debate at the National Assembly. I argue that the passing of the law and related activities represent events that dramatically changed the ways in which women’s bodies, their honour, morality and purity were perceived, legitimised and silenced in Das’s sense (1996). From this vantage point we will continue to explore throughout this thesis how the law challenged perceptions of women’s bodies and the authority of the state. This is particularly relevant in the region of Fouta Toro as it has been called ‘the most difficult area’, or ‘the area with the most overt opposition’ to the law and NGO intervention. I therefore want to end this chapter with a timeline of locally

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<sup>51</sup> According to witness accounts of activists, NGOs and the governmental newspaper *Le Soleil*.

relevant ‘events’ of opposition to governmental and non-governmental intervention raising awareness about the law in Fouta Toro.

## **2.6 The opposition to the law and non-governmental intervention in Fouta Toro**

I was told about these ‘events of resistance’ by Tostan staff in Fouta Toro<sup>52</sup> and other informants. The reader will learn more about some of these incidents in chapters 7 and 8, and will meet some of the key actors. This list of events should not be considered exhaustive; it is intended to indicate what kinds of incidents constituted ‘events of opposition’ for Futanke who worked for NGOs aiming to achieve an acceptance of the law, as well as for others who opposed governmental attempts to bring an end to the practice.

### **List of ‘events of resistance’ in Fouta**

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1992 | Tostan opens basic education centres in Fouta Toro focusing mainly on literacy, problem resolution, hygiene, health, management of resources, finance and feasibility study, and not on reproductive health, human rights, etc. The programme is popular and there is little ‘resistance’.  |
| 1997 | A new Tostan programme is introduced with changed modules commencing with reproductive health, the harmfulness of excision and women’s rights. A lot of people seem to find this shocking in Fouta Toro and the programme has difficulties continuing – some centres shut down.   |
| 1998 | In August, the women of Malicounda Bambara near Thies publicly declare their abandonment of excision and early marriage after following Tostan’s programme.   |
| 1999 | On 13 January, after much debate and controversy, the National Assembly passes a law criminalising the practice of excision in Senegal. The influential religious leader Thierno Mountaga Tall distributes a pamphlet arguing that excision is a religious recommendation according to the <i>Hadiths</i> and speaks out against the law. This document creates a lot of upheaval and dissatisfaction with the law in Fouta Toro. |

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<sup>52</sup> I thank Abou Diack, Abou Camara, Khalidou Sy and Khadija Ka at Tostan Fouta. They provided me with accounts of what happened and details of dates, villages and who was involved. They had all been present during some of these events.

- 2000 **Les événements de Aere Lao.** On 4 November the NGO Tostan plans to hold a meeting in Aere Lao, Fouta Toro, to discuss human rights, excision, and early and forced marriage with the population. Parliamentarians are invited to come to this meeting to ‘explain the law’ to the religious leaders and the population. Various women for the abandonment of excision are present to publicly discuss the issue with local women. However, the activities are blocked by religious leaders who threaten the heads of the NGO and religiously condemn them for publicly questioning the practice of excision. A week later the marabout loses two legs due to a diabetic shock. These incidents are widely seen as being linked.
- 2003 **Tyre burning incident.** The NGO Tostan plans another meeting to discuss the harmfulness of excision with the local population in Ourosogui. They are accompanied by a German delegation of funders and UNICEF. However the delegation is kept in the hotel and threatened by locals who order them not to discuss excision with the population. The foreign visitors are refused access to the local hospital. Tyres are burnt outside the hotel.
- 2003 The village of Seedo Abbass and 12 other villages publicly declare their abandonment of excision and early and forced marriage with the help of Tostan. The declaration is funded by UNICEF.
- 2004 The villagers of Gassambiri want to organise a public declaration in their village but the local authorities refuse to go to Gassambiri for reasons related to what is called *ñaa gunde Alla Jabaande*, which is translated into French as ‘*prière divine acceptée*’.<sup>53</sup> It is believed that since colonial times the village is protected by a spiritual force that kills any governmental administrator who enters the village. Enthusiastic ‘casted people’<sup>54</sup> of the village of Polel organise a public declaration but a returned emigrant from the leading *Toorodo* status group wants to take over the leadership. Tostan refuses because the organising committee of the declaration is already in place with democratically elected casted people in the leading positions. The *Toorodo* then blocks continuation of activities and the organisation of the declaration fails.
- 2005 In November Seedo Abass hosts another public declaration of 76 villages in Fouta Toro who followed Tostan’s education programme and want to abandon excision.
- 2007 In January, the influential religious leader Thierno Mountaga Tall dies. The question arises amongst NGO workers and activists as to what will happen now that the most vehement opposer is no longer alive.

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<sup>53</sup> Literally ‘divine prayer accepted/heard’.

<sup>54</sup> Haalpulaar’*en* society is hierarchically ranked according to status/occupational groups. Each group is called *hinnde* (plural: *kinde*), which is translated into French as caste. Among all groups there are three broad categories: the noble – *Rimbe*; the men of skill – *Ñeeñbe*; and slaves – *Jeyaa be*. Paradoxically, even though in Pulaar all members of these categories are referred to as belonging to *kinde*, in French the *Ñeeñbe* and *Jeyaa be* are referred to as ‘*casté*’ and the noble as ‘*non-casté*’ – literally ‘without caste’. This conforms to the Pulaar distinction between *rimbe* – the noble, and *rimaybe* – the bondsmen/women. I use the local French terminology here because it was used by NGO staff when speaking of opposition to their awareness-raising activities. The above conflict therefore takes place between the ‘noble’ and bondsmen (men of skill and former slaves). For more details on caste see chapter 3.

- 2007 A public declaration of the abandonment of excision is planned to take place on 6 May in Dounga Lao. However, the organising committee of the declaration asks for CFA 5 million from UNICEF for the festivities. UNICEF refuses and the declaration does not take place.
- 2007 In June 70 villages declare their abandonment of excision in Semme. The declaration is considered a success by Tostan and UNICEF.
- 2007 In June Thierno Mountaga Tall's son tours the maraboutic villages after his mourning period of three months three weeks and three days has terminated. He holds meetings attended by many influential religious leaders and the local population to speak of his father's death and answer questions about religious issues. As his father's son he takes on his father's authority, is listened to and respected. At this meeting in Semme he is asked about his stance on excision. He replies that the most important thing is harmony among Muslims, that the practice is a religious recommendation but it is up to individuals to choose whether they want to practice or not. Tostan considers this a success because he does not oppose the abandonment of excision like his father. In Semme, however, many local men reproach their wives for having taken part in the public declaration of their abandonment of excision and forbid them to continue working with Tostan.
- 2007 In October, 50 UNICEF-funded centres open in the district of Podor that has previously shown a lot of opposition to Tostan.
- 2009 In May, an exciser is arrested in Matam after the activist organisation Raddho (Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme) announced on the radio that a girl was excised. This creates enormous unrest in Fouta from religious leaders who write a press declaration in response. A lot of NGO education programmes are forced to close down by religious leaders all over Fouta.

As we can see, what constituted an 'event of opposition' for people affected revolved mainly around non-governmental intervention in Fouta Toro. Tostan is one of the main actors, but there were other organisations like UNICEF, GTZ and Raddho. Besides the law, the agendas of these organisations and their funders played a great role in what issues are prioritised despite the opposition. Some Futanke complied with these organisations because of the resources made available to them, rather than because of the agenda to 'stop excision' in their villages. On the side of the opposers, the religious leader Thierno Mountaga Tall plays a great role, as does his son's opinion on the subject of excision after Tall's death. Furthermore, we have conflicts between 'casted' people who want to abandon FGC, and *Tooroɓɓe* leaders who refuse to let public declarations take place in their villages. As well as the *Tooroɓɓe*'s political influence, people also fear their power in the realms of the spiritual – as we can see, 'magical' or spiritual power plays a role in the village of Gassambiri, where

statutory authorities refuse to go (also see chapter 7). Besides the money of international organisations, who are a great employer in Fouta Toro, the influence and status of 'emigrants' views on these issues also play a great role. An emigrant's approval or disapproval of the activities going on in a village can overturn the decision to comply with an NGO by stopping excision.

These actors and their reactions to the ban on excision will be explored further throughout this thesis. We shall see, as I argue along with Das (1996) and Fortun (2001), that the law was an 'event' that changed people's lives because of the political reactions it stirred up. These events also challenged the ways in which excised women perceive their bodies and redefine their identity (see chapters 5 and 8).

After providing more details about Futanke social structure and livelihood in the next chapter, I will begin to engage with how excision was perceived to be important and meaningful to my informants, and discuss the ways in which it brings honour to Futanke women and men.

### Chapter 3: Fouta Toro: a place of ties, networks and arrangements for solidarity

*Ladde anndaa biy moƴƴo, kono biy moƴƴo ina anndi hoore mum*

(Pulaar proverb [*Pulareeje*]: The bush does not recognise a good child but the good child knows itself.)

In the previous chapter I showed how Fouta Toro is constructed as a place of ‘resistance’ and opposition to the law due to its non-compliance with the national call to cease FGC. Thierno Mountaga Tall’s influential document *Preuves éclatantes au sujet de la pratique recommandable de l’excision des jeunes filles* (1999) is said to have kindled opposition to the law, particularly amongst religious leaders in Fouta Toro. But what is this place, Fouta Toro? Its inhabitants are known all over Senegal, for being relentlessly proud. Fouta Toro is thought of as the cradle of Islam in Senegal and the Futanke are known as fervent preservers of their ‘customs’, which are said to have been around ‘since the beginning of the universe’. The proverb above indicates that an outsider to a culture does not recognise what locals perceive as well mannered, well educated and refined behaviour. The ‘bush’ conveys an image of wildness, a place ruled by the laws of nature with no distinction between a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ child. The proverb suggests that it is important to remember who you are ‘at home’ when faced with unknown territory and encountering people who do not share the same values.

The aim of this chapter is to turn Fouta Toro into ‘the good child’ for the reader. I show how identity and pride are related to occupational background and how the castes (*kindé*) have emerged historically and are tied to codes of honour. Furthermore I illustrate how belonging to age groups and patronyms creates strong bonds of solidarity and inter-sociality between social ranks. Differences between occupational groups (*kindé*) are also overcome through joking relationships which uphold these bonds of solidarity. I argue that the ways in which people are related and obliged to each other influences decisions to stop practising excision or to continue. Finally I discuss another factor that influences livelihood in Fouta Toro – emigration.

When I arrived in Fouta I had no idea whether or how social structure was related to opposition to the law or to willingness to renounce the practice of FGC. My choice of fieldsite was not determined by ‘caste’, except that I did not want to live with *Toorobbe* because the Senegalese I first met in Dakar years ago were *Toorodo* and I wanted to hear a different story to that of ‘the Almaamys’ glorious past’. I therefore chanced to live with a *Cubballo* (fisherman) family on the Ile Amorphile, and thus most of what I know about livelihood and everyday life is coloured by their view on things. For the *Subalbe* (plural of *Cubballo*) I lived with, adherence to excision or the willingness to stop practising had no relation to occupational/status background (*kinde*). I have no interview material in which a so-called ‘casté’ (*Ñeeño* or *Gallunke*) admits to being oppressed and most of them told me that there was ‘no longer any difference between the castes’. It took me a lot longer to understand the subtleties of how occupational background or what locals call ‘caste’ (*kinde*) affects people’s behaviour towards each other. It wasn’t until the end of my fieldwork that I realised that ‘caste’ is one of the pillars of the platform from which this battle for the ‘preservation’ of excision is waged.

Away from Bito, I spent a lot of time with Tostan staff from different occupational backgrounds (*kinde*), and with people who had stopped excision, as in Mboumba, and I slowly came to understand how former slaves’ and *Ñeeñbe*’s (men of skill) wishes were undermined by the nobles, and that this was why a lot of them applauded Tostan’s human rights ideology. Besides recommending ‘an abandonment’ of excision in the name of the highest standards of health, Tostan’s ideology promised equality between people, democratic decision-making processes and a right to non-discrimination. Although no *Gallunke/Maccudo* (former slave) or blacksmith (*Baylo*) ever openly spoke to me about their status at the lower end of the social scale, their lack of say when decisions were made by the nobles at village council meetings frequently caused anger among certain families in Mboumba. I also witnessed how some *Gallunkoobe* friends of mine spoke of the Wanes, the family of the last Almaamy who resided in Mboumba. I got a sense of what a cruel and terrifying man the last *Almaamy* Birane must have been. When I went to see the Wanes to talk to them about their family history they said that none of the rumours about their grandfather circulating in Mboumba were true. The history of the Almaamies was

well known: they reintroduced Islam, brought peace and order, and protected the population from foreign invasion and raiding tribes. I should go and look it up in the history books, they said. They showed me the tombs of the seven glorious Almaamies of Mboumba buried near the derelict remains of a mud-brick mosque – soon to disappear forever in the sandstorms and rains.

Besides belonging to a social category (*kindé*), Islam is also inextricably interwoven with ‘Futanke’ identity. Most people are tremendously proud that their land was one of the first Islamic states in West Africa since the 1030s AD. Being a ‘Futanke’ thus means being a Muslim from the cradle of Islam in West Africa. Those who have knowledge of Islam, the *Toorobbe*, have power because they instruct and advise people on ‘correct’ Islamic conduct and define what is non-Islamic.

Perceptions of history, power and social hierarchy depend on the perspective of the observer and are thus portrayed differently depending on who is speaking or writing and what their intentions are (Tarlo 2003; Farge 2002; Das 1996). In what follows, I describe interactions between social groups (*kindé*) as they were presented to me by families I knew well during my stay on the Ile Amorphile.

The ways in which alliances are formed and how differences are emphasised is crucial for an understanding of why and how some people may oppose stopping excision or joining the ‘abandonment’ movement. I begin by showing how different occupational groups relate to each other by illustrating how the two noble groups (*kindé*) of Bito – the *Subalbe* and the *Toorobbe* – cohabit and construct their identity around what they do and how they differ from one another.

### **3.1 The *Subalbe* and the *Toorobbe* of Bito**

Inheritance of land has been arranged between the ‘free’ noble status groups (*rimbe*) since the land was divided up (*fecere Fuuta*) and allocated to different lineages by the first Almaamy Abdul Kader Kan (Schmitz 1986: 355). Schmitz suggests this happened between the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century (1986: 355). Even the land laws introduced after independence have not noticeably affected

land ownership (Schmitz 1994). In Bito and Thioubalel it is said that there was an arrangement between the Dia (*Toorobbe*, *hinnde* of religious leaders and knowledgeable about the Koran) and the Sy (*Subalbe*, *hinnde* of the fishermen) a few hundred years ago, when the Dia, the family of the village chiefs, had problems with the crocodiles in the river. Women doing their washing on the banks of the river would regularly be caught and killed by the crocodiles. As the Dia could not solve these problems by themselves, they asked the Sy *Subalbe* to come and live with them in Thioubalel to help. The *Subalbe* are known to have ‘control’ (*faddungo*) over the river and the beasts (*mbaroodi*) within through a magical or spiritual kind of knowledge (*gandal*) (Wane 1969; Dilley 2004). The *Subalbe* object to this spiritual form of ‘knowledge’ being called ‘magic’, because ‘magic’ (*ñenngi*) is considered inherently evil (see also Dilley 2004). They claim that their ‘knowledge’ (*gandal*) is acquired through communication with the spirits of the water and the river and wise, knowledgeable fishermen (*Jaltaabe*) take pride in communicating with them to obtain knowledge that enables them to exercise control over the elements. A *Jaltaabe* (knowledgeable fisherman) is not just a skilful fisherman and hunter of crocodiles and hippos, but also has the ‘knowledge’ to cast incantations (*cefi*) that can pull an object under the water, force a crocodile, for example, to appear on the surface and prevent someone who has not asked his permission from crossing the river.

The Sy (*Subalbe*) agreed to settle in Thioubalel and Bito in exchange for the stretch of land on the other side of the river which was in the Dia’s (*Toorobbe*) possession at the time. A pact (*aadi*)<sup>55</sup> was made between the two families and sealed through spiritual powers and to this day no one has dared breach the rules of the agreement. Fearing punishment through higher forces if the pact is broken, the Sy still do not plant on the Dia’s side of the river, although because of the dispute between Senegal and Mauritania in the 1980s, the Sy’s land on the other side of the river is now Mauritanian so in practice the Sy have lost all their legal claims over it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The verb is *aadondirde* – ‘to come to an agreement’. It can be marked by slaughtering a chicken or mixing one’s blood or crossing the branches of a tree.

<sup>56</sup> For more details, see Schmitz (1986, 1994), who discusses land claims and the *leydi* on the *rive droite* (Mauritania).

These fields on the banks of the river (*pale*) are flooded during the rainy season and, after the water retreats in October, are not irrigated again until the water levels of the river Senegal rise again the following year. This is where corn, millet and beans are grown between the months of October and February. Some vegetables, potatoes and okra in particular, are also planted along the river; however these days the majority of the vegetables are grown in ‘women’s gardens’ (*gese rewbe*). These are mostly patches of land irrigated by a water pump, funded to some extent by international organisations and looked after by somebody appointed or employed by the funders.<sup>57</sup> After the pump was put into place in Bito, the women formed their own association and the patches of irrigated land were divided between its members. Since then, most families<sup>58</sup> have their own patch on the irrigated fields, where they are free to plant salad, cabbage, carrots, tomatoes and other roots as they please. Some clans who own a lot of land allow others to plant, in return for half the harvest or for the planter’s labour on a different patch of land also owned by the clan. At times certain types of food are available in abundance, such as beans and potatoes. These are often given away in generous quantities to visitors and sent as presents to other relations who do not live by the river. Some also try to sell their goods at the local markets; however it is considered ‘better’ and more honourable to give them away, because it is a sign of generosity and wealth, as well as of the good nature of the donor. Furthermore, if the produce is sold at the market, the prices are incredibly low because of the oversupply and the family makes very little money. Once the season has come to an end and the stock is used up, the prices of these products increase dramatically.

Most families in Bito also keep livestock. Chickens as well as goats, sheep and cows are found in all households for the purpose of festivities and occasional special meals. Some families keep more livestock, especially those who belong to the status group (*hinnde*) of ‘traditional’ herders, the *Fulbe*. A *Toorodo* in Bito may own a lot of

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<sup>57</sup> Schmitz (1994) suggests that the *Subalbe* benefited greatly from share-cropping on small plantations along the Senegal River basin on land that, according to the *leydi* arrangement, belongs to herder groups. Schmitz explains that irrigation projects called PIV (*périmètres irrigués villageois*) were introduced in the early 1980s. These were established in response to the years of drought and desertification in the 1970s, and the consequential increase in migration to the cities and abroad (Schmitz 1994).

<sup>58</sup> For Pulaar definitions of family see below. Here I use ‘family’ to refer to people living in one compound. This differs from lineage because several compounds in a village may belong to the same lineage. As women do not change their family name (*yettoode*) upon marriage, members of a household often have different patronyms.

goats and sheep. The *Cubballo* family I was staying with kept a few animals for pleasure but said that they did not have the ‘knowledge’ (*gandal*) to look after animals and tend large herds; nor did they take pride in their animals like a *Pullo* herder would. Their ‘traditional’ family expertise was, and ideologically still is, related to fishing, communicating with the spirits of the river and healing scorpion and snake bites. In fact, some members of the family are known by the *Bitonaabe* to be able to ‘see’ the dangerous zones of the river during the rainy season and warn villagers where not to go bathing or wash one’s clothes. Two generations back, a Sy ancestor knew ‘the people of the river’ (*sirènes/jom maayo*) so well that he took a second wife in the river, descending into it every night to stay with her, and was seen arising from it again in the morning. It is believed that he still resides in the river today, which is also a reason why women in the family should not wash their dirty laundry in the river, as the spirits of the river told Hawa Sy, my teacher’s sister. Hawa Sy is a large *Cubballo* woman married to a great fisherman (*jaltaabe*) in Fonde, the neighbouring village. She dreams of the river and communicates with relatives who reside inside the river on a regular basis. Her ‘power’ or connection to the spirits has helped her in many difficult situations all over Senegal when she was close to water.



**Image 14: Hawa Sy and her son repairing fishnets**

Samba Sy is another knowledgeable *Cubballo* who resides in Bito. He is initiated into ‘sciences’ that allow him to see and communicate with *Jinne* who live in a parallel world invisible to most human beings. The *Jinne* gave him incantations (*cefi*) for healing wounds and curing snake and scorpion bites as well as protection against

attacks from the ‘beasts’ (*mbaroodi*) of the river. People come from far to have their bites soothed and cured through his ‘knowledge’.

The Sy of Bito therefore know very little about tending animals, as their speciality is the river. If they need an animal, they slaughter one of the few they do own or purchase one from a herder (*Pullo*).

My account of these two clans (patronyms – *yettoode*), the Sy and the Dia, indicates how the two noble status groups co-habit and see themselves as residents of their land. It also shows what aspects of their occupation and identity the *Subalbe* take pride in. Not all members of a particular occupational background (*hinnde*) follow their family’s ‘occupational lore’ (Dilley 2004). The *Sebbe*, for example, used to be the warriors of the Deniyanke emperors before the reign of the Almaamy. Their ‘knowledge’ (*gandal*) is related to incapacitating their opponents in battle, turning a sword into a snake or iron into water. As Fouta Toro is no longer at war and times when such knowledge was necessary passed long ago, their ‘knowledge’ is no longer ‘needed’ on a day-to-day level. However, according to my informants, the *Sebbe* as well as all other occupational groups (*kinde*) take pride in their family’s ‘traditional’ knowledge practices and strongly identify with them.

Although almost everyone (93% in the region of Matam according to DHS 2005) practises excision, and there is no direct relation between ‘caste’ and the willingness to preserve excision, occupational background is nonetheless important for understanding how things are run in Fouta Toro and who makes decisions. Dilley (2004) shows that each ‘caste’ is seen as an expert in its domain and others dare not question or challenge members’ knowledge of their trade. Caste occupational knowledge is not just about acquiring a practical skill, like welding iron or catching fish. As we have seen above, it is about one’s clan possessing a capital of knowledge related to one’s family’s occupation (*golle*). I argue that the importance of the family ‘expertise’ and the hierarchy of Haalpulaar’en social structure are crucial with regard to holding on to excision or stopping the practice. First of all, members of a particular caste/status group have authority over their domain of knowledge – for the *Subalbe* it is everything to do with the river and water and for the *Toorobbe* it is everything to do

with Islam and religious practice. Challenging the knowledge of someone else's domain is seen as insolent, contemptuous and potentially dangerous, as they are protected by spirits (also see chapter 7). Second, Futanke society is strongly hierarchical and the *Toorobbe* (Islamic clerics) have been the leaders since the Islamic revolutions in the 17th and 18th century (see below).

### 3.2 Social hierarchy and occupational categories

In Pulaar each social or occupational category (caste) is called *kinde* (sngl.: *hinnde*). The *kinde* are divided into three broad categories: *Rimbe* – the freeborn, *Ñeeñbe* – ‘the skilled’ or ‘men of skill’ who are called ‘*casté*’ in French, and the *Jeyaaɓe*<sup>59</sup> (Dilley 2004), the social category of former slaves. These former slaves are most commonly called *Maccube*, a term which they, however, perceive as derogatory. The politically correct term is *Gallunkoobe*, which means former slave. According to Dilley (2004: 29), the freeborn (*Rimbe*) compose around 70% of Haalpulaar'en, those of servile origin and bondsmen (*Jeyaaɓe*) about 20% and the remaining 10% are men of skill (*Ñeeñbe*).

The *Rimbe*, social groups of the ‘noble’ and ‘freeborn’, are the leading castes (*kinde*) in Senegal. My Haalpulaar informants used to define them in the following way: the *Rimbe* depend on no one, follow no one and do not have to obey anyone but their own elders, and allied families (except for God and the state). This ideology is also reflected in their code of honour – it is shameful to make oneself dependent on someone else or ask for money or a favour without returning it. I discuss codes of honour and obligations later on, here I focus on mapping out social structure as envisioned by the Haalpulaar'en. Within this category of *Rimbe* the major *kinde* are (Wane 1969; Tal Tamari 1991; Dilley 2004):

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<sup>59</sup> *Jeyde* – ‘to own’. The *Jeyaaɓe* are therefore ‘the owned’.

Table 3: Social hierarchy *Rimbe*

- I *Toorobbe* (Islamic clerics)
- II *Fulbe* (herders), *Sebbe* (warriors), *Jaawambe* (councillors of the Almaamy)
- III *Subalbe* (fishermen)

How the status of these different categories emerged historically is discussed below. Each category prefers to marry endogamously; however intermarriage is common, particularly with people of the same rank (see Table 3) – e.g. *Fulbe* and *Jaawambe*. It is also acceptable to marry a person from a category below (e.g. *Toorodo* and *Jaawando* or *Fulbe* and *Subalbe*) but some families prefer not to. Intermarriage with a *Ñeeño* (man of skill) or former slave (*Gallunke*) is extremely rare and shunned by many.

According to my informants there is no rank amongst the *Ñeeñbe* (men of skill) and everyone is proud of their family’s occupational lore, as I have explained for the *Subalbe* above. Wane (1969) and Tal Tamari (1991), however, rank the *Ñeeñbe* in the following way:

Table 4: Social hierarchy *Ñeeñbe*

<b>Rank</b>	Wane (1969: 33)	Tamari (1991: 228)
<b>High</b>	<i>Maabube</i> (weavers)	<i>Wayilibe</i> (blacksmiths)
	<i>Wayilbe</i> (blacksmiths, silversmiths)	<i>Maabube</i> (weavers)
		<i>Wambaabe</i> (bard)
		<i>Awlube</i> (praise singer)
	<i>Sakeebe</i> (leatherworkers)	<i>Sakeebe</i> (leatherworkers)
	<i>Lawbe</i> (woodworkers)	<i>Lawbe</i> (woodworkers)
<b>Low</b>	<i>Buurnaaabe</i> (potters)	<i>Buurnaaabe</i> (women potters)

Dilley (2004) demonstrates how each artisan is in some ways in touch with the spirit world of the elements he is ‘crafting’. For example, a blacksmith, who is constantly in contact with fire, associated with spirits and *Jinne*, has to acquire the powers that

enable him to handle red-hot metals (Dilley 2004: 71). In a similar way, a woodcarver's skill does not merely rely on the carving of a piece of dead wood. On the contrary, the trees are a home to spirits and must be approached with caution, 'for if the woodcutter does not follow the correct procedures, he will fall foul of their powers' (Dilley 2004: 73). Whether caste occupation is practised or not, it encompasses a skill in a trade that represents the pride and identity of its members because one's ancestors handled the same elements and the good and bad spirits connected to them.

Some *Ñeeñbe* also specialise in praise singing for noble families and remembering their genealogies. *Awluḃe* and *Wambaabe* are known as praise singers and musicians who honour and charm the *Rimḃe* at occasions like baptisms, weddings and funerals. If a *Gawlo* (singular of *Awluḃe*) sings of a noble's glorious family history, the latter feels obliged to reward him for honouring their ancestors with money or goods. If a *Dimo* (singular of *Rimḃe*) is not generous with their bondsmen they risk being given a bad reputation by the *Gawlo* singing about his lack of generosity. A *Ñeeño* can ask as much of the nobles as he wants without seeming rude or shameless – it is part of their occupation to honour the nobles and receive something in return. Even if a *Ñeeño* is richer than a noble they do not break a code of honour by asking for gifts. I found that, as a result, nobles tended to avoid a *Ñeeño*'s company in fear of being asked for things they do not have the means to give and thus having to embarrass themselves by saying no.

Wane (1969) distinguishes between two different types of *Jeyaabe*. *Soottiibe* and *Halfaabe*. *Halfaabe* are slaves who were or are owned by a noble family. Although today many people refuse to be considered slaves, some older generations still take pride in serving their nobles. *Soottiibe* are slaves who bought their freedom and hence are no longer obliged to the noble castes. Most slaves were acquired during warfare with other peoples in West Africa. In Mboumba a lot of them still had Malinke names such as Camara, Kulibally, etc. Other slave families have been with their nobles in Fouta Toro for centuries and have taken on their family names. It is hard to say where they originally came from and how they were obtained. A lot of Futanke I knew believed that they could distinguish between a slave and a non-slave because of

physical differences in appearance. Some former slaves were considered to be large and big-boned, not slender and tall like the *Fulbe* groups. Others were very small. This was associated with the part of West Africa they were captured in.

In the following I discuss the history of Fouta Toro with reference to Islam and the emergence of the *Toorobbe* to provide an idea of the importance of caste and social distinction as well as how the *Toorobbe* have become the leaders.

### 3.3 Islam, power and caste

The first known rulers of the Tekrur empire (*Tekuruur* in Pulaar), which was located in the area called Fouta Toro today, were the Dia Ogo dynasty, from AD 850 until the 10th century. Al-Naqar (1969) cites the Arab historian al-Bakri:<sup>60</sup>

the city of Takrūr, is inhabited by *sudan* [i.e. blacks]. They were, like any other *sudan*, pagans worshipping Dakakir; the Dukur is their idol, until they were ruled by War-Jabi ibn Rabis who became a Muslim, established among them the laws of Islam, forced them to obey them and adorned their eyes by that. (Al-Naqar 1969: 367)

Al-Naqar shows how the generic Arabic term ‘Takarīr’ came to be applied to all West African Muslims, derived from this ancient state of Tekrur. One common explanation for this is that fervent Muslims from the Tekrur empire became known in the Arab world whilst on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, as well as in Egypt (Al-Naqar 1969: 370).

After waging war against the pagans of the empire of Ghana in the 1050s in alliance with the Almoravids, the Tekrur empire (Mandinka dynasty of Mana) came under the domination of the empire of Ghana in the 11th century, the empire of Mali in the 13th century and the Djolof empire in the 14th century (Wane 1969). In 1512 *Fulbe* herders led by Koli Tengela Ba overthrew the Mandinka rule of the empire of Mali and founded the Deniyanke dynasty (Wane 1969). From then on Tekrur was called

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<sup>60</sup> *Kitab al mughrib fi dhikri bilad Ifriqiata wa-l Maghrib [of] al Masalik wa-l-Mamalik* (1911), translation (1913) edited by Baron De Slane (see Al-Naqar 1969: 367).

Fuuta Toro (*Fuuta* means land of the Fulbe and *Toro* is the name of a province by the river Senegal). The Deniyanke were ‘pagans’ who tolerated Islam in their empire and 250 years later (1776) were defeated by it through the emergence of the *Toorobbe* and the empire of the Almaamies (Wane 1969; Robinson 1975; Curtin 1971).

How did the *Toorobbe* become the most powerful status group (*kinde*) in Fouta Toro? Robinson discusses the emergence of the Almamaate of Fouta Toro in the 16th and 17th centuries. After regular raids from Moorish groups, particularly from Hassani tribes who supplemented their nomadic pastoralism with raiding and tribute collection (Curtin 1971: 12), many *Futankooɓe*<sup>61</sup> aspired to the *zwaya*<sup>62</sup> idea of an Islamic state ruled by Sharia law. The rulers of Fouta at the time, the Deniyanke, were not able to protect the inhabitants of Fouta from the regular attacks from the north and the south. A religious cleric called Nasir al-Din, who took the title of Imam, the constitutional equivalent of caliph (Commander of the Faithful), and possessed *baraka*, the power to bless, attempted to impose Islamic government upon Arab groups and the rulers of Fouta and the Wolof states (Robinson 1975b: 189). He opposed slave raiding and pillaging. This *zwaya* movement led by Nasir al-Din in the 1670s led to the emergence of the *Toorobbe* of Fouta Toro, who longed for the Deniyanke dynasty to be replaced by an Islamic state in which fervent Muslims could be protected and live in peace (Robinson 1975b: 190). The Deniyanke rulers, who were *Fulbe* herders with *Seɓɓe* warriors, made fun of the first *Toorobbe*, calling them ‘beggars of alms’ in the 17th century. They raided, enslaved or killed them as regularly as the Moorish groups from the north did (Robinson 1975b). Wane argues that by the 18th century, the last Deniyanke rulers had lost power and jurisdiction in their vast empire and were rulers only in name. Suleyman Baal brought an end to the ‘pagan hegemony’ in 1776 and the first Almaamy Abdul Kader Kan was inaugurated by the *Toorobbe* in 1778 to rule the Islamic state of Fouta Toro (Wane 1969). He accepted the oaths of allegiance of provincial and village chiefs throughout the whole kingdom. The Deniyanke negotiated virtual autonomy within the Almamate and although they harboured resentment against the new regime, they withdrew to the eastern floodplains of the kingdom (Robinson 1975b: 199).

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<sup>61</sup> Inhabitants of Fouta Toro.

<sup>62</sup> Clerical tribes.

Initially the *Toorobbe* were merely an association of fervent Muslims from different ethnic groups and caste backgrounds who were enthralled by Nasir al-Din's idea of an Islamic state, which would bring an end to existing insecurity. With the first Almaamy Abdul Kader Kan, however, the Futanke stopped paying the annual tribute of 5kg of gold to the Moorish groups (Wane 1966: 13). The reign of the Almaamies was brought to an end by the French in 1891. Wane says that it was not until they recruited 'armed Moorish assassins that the turbulent nationalism was brought to complete silence' (Wane 1969: 15). But the political and social position of the *Toorobbe* as 'leaders' of Futanke society was not ended when they were defeated militarily by the French and they continue to be the superior status group to the present day.

Today, the noble castes *Toorobbe*, *Fulbe* (herders), *Jaawaambe* (former advisers of the Almaamies and herders), *Sebbe* (warriors) and *Subalbe* (fishermen) still own 80% of land in Fouta Toro (Dilley 2004). The social distinction and endogamy of these 'ranked specialist groups' (Tamari 1991) means that the land – and power – is still held from generation to generation.

Even though in Senegalese law everyone is equal and has the right to be voted into leading positions, caste still determines who can become a leader. The fact that castes are hierarchically ranked affects the way that work, power and space are divided between different social groups and kin.

In addition to caste as a social group, according to which people define themselves and others, there are other categories which unite and differentiate people regardless of caste. One of these is age group (*fedde*) (Dupire 1970; Wane 1969). I also discuss how family names (patronyms; Dilley 2004; Galvan 2006; Smith 2006) are allied to each other, which creates bonds of solidarity and joking relationships (Davidheiser 2006; Galvan 2006; Smith 2006).

### 3.4 Inter-caste relations and bonds of solidarity and obligation

Although people classify themselves and others according to caste (*kinde*) and family background, and caste (*kinde*) is a determining factor for marriage, there is intense inter-sociality between members of different status/occupational groups and they mingle without distinction. In fact there are social factors creating ties and links of solidarity and loyalty between people that are of far greater importance in terms of obligations than differences in caste. We will see how these ties of ‘social kinship’ (Galvan 2006) can influence whether someone holds on to or stops practising excision. Before illustrating relationships between siblings (*bandiraabe*), cousins (*dendiraaɓe*), age groups (*fedde*) and patronyms (*yettoode*), I will explain how the family is structured around the household (*galle*) (Dupire 1970).

#### 3.4.1 The family and the household

There are three words for family in Pulaar. *Galle* is the family with whom one shares a household. It literally means house or building. However, *galle* can also be used to refer to members of one lineage who live in different households: for example, brothers who have founded different households but who have a common ancestor who is referred to as the head of the household. Dupire (1970: 83) notes that the term *galle* can refer to extended family and may include dead people and the descendants of a common ancestor after whom the household is named. Her examples are *galle* Tapsiiru Amadu Hamat or *galle* Wanwanɓe. In the first example a common ancestor is referred to; the second describes the households of the Wane lineage. The common greeting enquiring into how the family is, ‘*No galle ma wadi?*’ literally means ‘How is the house/family doing?’ The term *galle* therefore encapsulates the ways in which a lineage is tied to a spatial location.

Other terms for family are *besngu* or *endam*, which refer to extended family or kin with whom one may or may not share a household and who may not share the same patronym (*yettoode*), the family name of a common ancestor. They may be paternal or maternal relations.

Dupire (1970:84) describes how households are commonly inhabited by four generations. *Njaatiraabe* (great-grandparents), *Taaniraabe* (grandparents), *Jinnaabe* (parents) and *Bibbe* (children). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into how these relationships are characterised in detail (see Dupire 1970) but relationships that are relevant to the research question of the thesis, for example those between mother and daughter-in-law, or husband and wife, are explained in subsequent chapters (see chapters 5 and 6).

Households (*galle*) are very large in Fouta Toro. Women marry when they are between 10 and 20 years old and many produce eight to ten children in their lifetime. Men sometimes have more than one and up to four wives, which means that a lot of young people have 20 brothers and sisters from the same father. Furthermore, their father's brothers' children grow up in the same household.

The Haalpulaar distinguish between siblings (*bandiraabe*) and cousins (*dendiraabe*) in the following way: siblings of the same mother and/or the same father are referred to as *miñam gorko* or *mawnam gorko* (younger male sibling or older male sibling) and *miñam debbo* or *mawnam debbo* (younger female sibling or older female sibling). Mothers' sisters' children or fathers' brothers' children are referred to as 'brothers' and 'sisters' in the same way. Linguistically no distinction is made between brothers and sisters of the same mother and/or father and the offspring of the mother's sister or the father's brother. The children of one's mother's brother or one's father's sister, however, are referred to as cousins (*dendiraabe*).

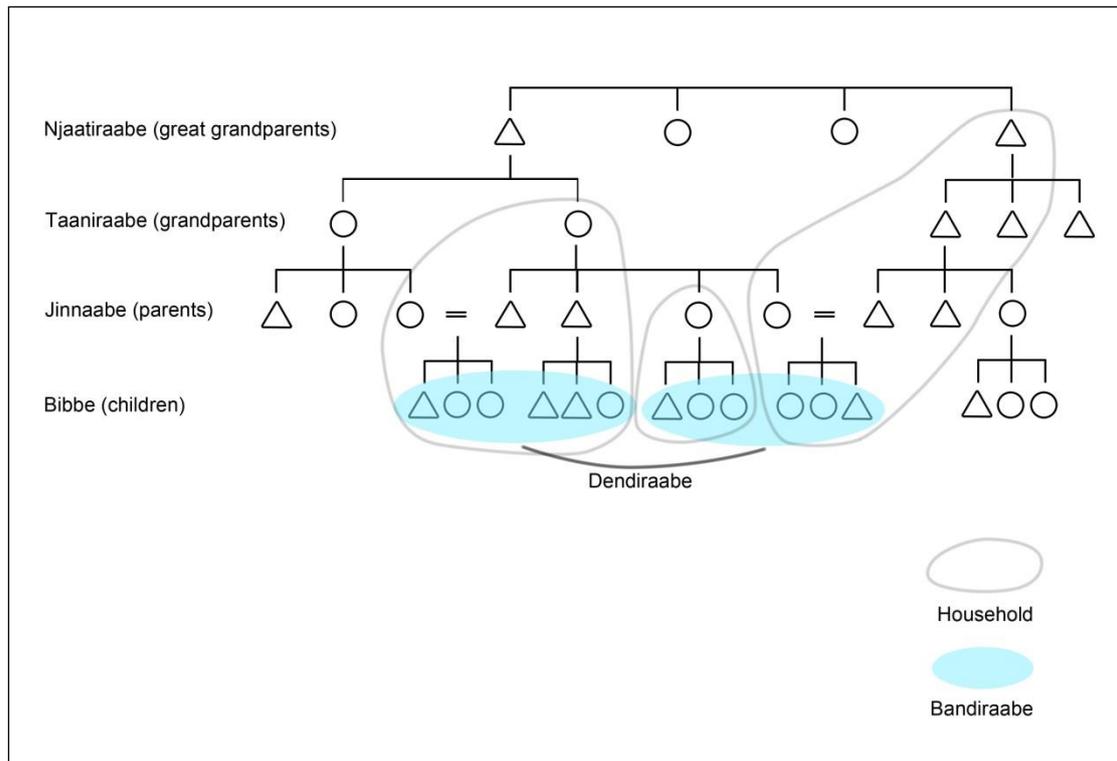


Figure 1: Differences between siblings (*bandiraabe*) and cousins (*dendiraabe*)

Marriage between the children of the same mother and/or fathers (*jiidube yumma e jiidube baaba*) is prohibited. Between father's brother's children (*biβbe baaba*) or one's<sup>63</sup> mother's sister's children (*biβbe yumma*) it is however acceptable, even if they have grown up together in the same household. Particularly common is marriage to one's mother's sister's children (*biβbe yumma*). Some elder women I spoke to preferred their sons to marry their sisters' daughters because they were their own children (*biyam*) and not strangers in their household. Although there is no particular marriage recommendation this seemed to be the preferred union amongst my informants. Although there is no formal taboo, marriage to one's father's sister's children is extremely rare and some children I met found the idea of getting married to their mother's brother's children (*dendiraabe*) incestuous.

A paternal cousin (*dendiraado*) is obliged to give support to his maternal cousins, regardless of sex. He in return receives support from his mother's brother's cousin.

<sup>63</sup> The same rules apply for men and women so it does not matter if the ego is masculine or feminine.

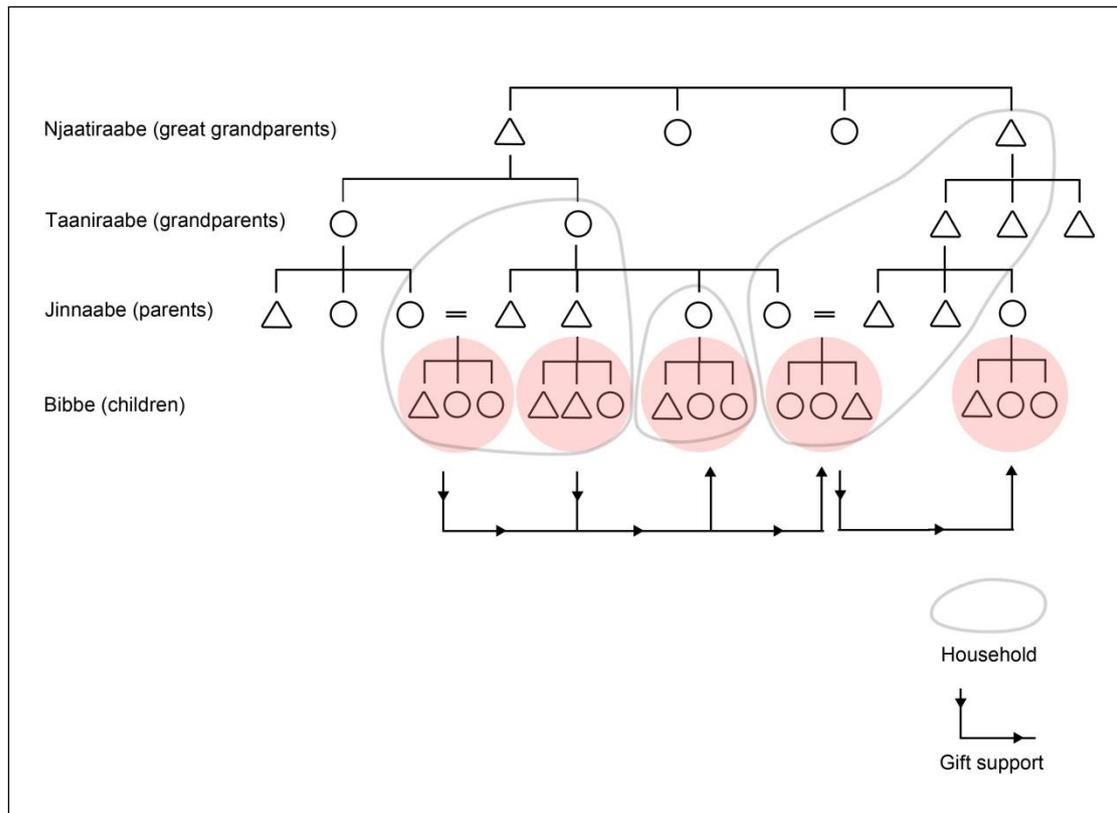


Figure 2: Support to father's sister's children (*dendiraabe*)

People are obliged to support their father's sister's children and receive gifts from their mother's brother's children in return. This support consists of small gifts or sums of money. It therefore frequently happens that one's father's sister's children remind their cousin of their obligations. If he or she is not able to support them financially they may feel pressured to help in other ways, for example by supporting a political or social cause. With regard to stopping excision or continuing the practice it may therefore be that someone decides to join the 'abandonment movement' not because they are personally convinced that it is better to stop the practice but out of loyalty towards their relative (*banndi am* – for examples of this see chapter 4 and 7).

### 3.4.2 Fedde age groups

Children are categorised into age groups and go through certain tasks and experiences like circumcision or sharing the workload together (see chapters 4 and 5). Thus children of the same age group are often much closer than siblings. This is the case

not just for children of the same household but for the whole village, regardless of caste background. When boys of the same age group become teenagers they often no longer sleep at home but in a room allocated to them on one of the *fedde* boys' family compound. If one of them has a problem, the others are there to help them find solutions on a personal but also practical level.

For example, when my teacher left Bito to go to work, his brother's oldest son, Ahmadou, who was 16 years old, was charged with the full responsibility of looking after the household as he was the only 'man' there. His age mates (*fedde*) came over to sleep at the Sy's home every night to support him. When Ahmadou was called to another village on an errand, his friend would still sleep in the house to 'look after' his family out of loyalty. It was considered his duty. I have encountered similar situations with men and members of their age group. When I was in Dakar before going to Bito to learn Pulaar, my teacher asked me to get in touch with his *giyiraado*<sup>64</sup> Hamidou Dia to arrange everything to get to Fouta safely. Hamidou Dia went out of his way to help me for his age mate (*giyiraado*). He left his work in a shop to come and find me in another area of Guediawaye and took me back to his shop, bought me soft drinks, paid for transport, found safe places for me to leave my luggage and made sure I was safe without accepting any gifts from me in return. All this was out of loyalty towards his 'brother' – age mate. A man will look after his age mate's wife as if she was his own wife and if someone is trying to get in touch with a person but cannot get hold of them, their age mate is likely to know where they are.

There are strong ties between members of women's *fedde* as well. However, as women have to leave their parental home upon marriage, often get married in other villages and have a lot of work in their household and responsibilities towards their husband and in-laws, their solidarity towards their *fedde* is not as practically based as amongst men. However if a woman entrusts you to one of her *giyiraabe*, you can be assured that she will look after and care for you in her household as best as she can out of loyalty towards her friend. Even though *giyiraabe* can be from different caste backgrounds, they are obliged to assist each other as much as possible.

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<sup>64</sup> *Fedde* means age group. It also means association. *Giyiraabe* (sgl. *giyiraado*) are the members of the age group.

There is trust amongst members of the same *fedde* and it is said that most secrets are shared amongst *giyiraabe* but not with others. As the level of personal intimacy is often greater between *giyiraabe* than between marriage partners, most women and men are more likely to share a secret with their *giyiraabe* than with their husband or wife. Solidarity and emotional closeness are therefore a lot stronger between *fedde* than between siblings.

Although boys and girls of the same group do not mix all the time, they undertake many activities together. This is particularly the case for activities organised during the rainy season. There is a joking relationship between men and women of the same age group. On a few occasions I witnessed a female member of a man's age group (*fedde*) come into the compound and mercilessly insult the man, putting him down in front of his family. A man's *fedde* can be extremely rude and vulgar but his wife and sisters do not take offence and he mostly laughs at his *giyiraado*'s jokes. There is a joking relationship between older and younger age sets (*rewiraabe*) as well. Even as adults they beat each other up for fun, play tricks on each other and try to embarrass each other in front of their families. For example, I have frequently heard men of different age groups say to each other jokingly: 'As soon as you leave the compound I enter your house and sleep with your wife.' Considering the strong codes of modesty (*pudeur*), morality and respectability, I found this talk quite shocking at times. However, these succeeding age sets (*rewiraabe*) have fought and joked about many things throughout their childhood and youth, and these jokes entertain people and are seen as reinforcing the relations between each other and their families. Joking kinship (Galvan 2006; Smith 2006) is greatly cherished and endorsed as 'a tradition'. Furthermore these jokes remind everyone of the code of honour and their obligations towards one another (also see chapters 5 and 6).

Joking relations between age groups bridge differences due to caste background. Smith (2006) argues that joking kinship does not just create entertainment and laughter but reinforces ties of solidarity and loyalty between people that affect politics and decision-making processes across ethnic groups, castes and patronyms. Galvan argues that 'joking kinship' is a syncretic informal institution that affects ethnic co-operation and nation-building and is therefore of interest to policy makers and

analysts of politics in post-colonial settings (Galvan 2006:809). Social and political alliances formed through ‘joking kinship’ between members of society who are neither genealogical kin nor from the same caste can affect why people hold on to excision out of solidarity towards their ‘joking cousins’ (*dendiraaŋbe*).

In the following I explain how joking kinship between particular family names (*yettoode*) reinforces solidarity beyond caste or age-group differences.

### 3.4.3 Patronyms and joking kinship<sup>65</sup>

Rather than asking where someone is from, what their first name is or what caste they belong to, one of the first questions a stranger is asked is what their patronym (family name or *yettoode* in Pulaar) is. People are identified with their family name and the history that is associated with it. Besides identifying which clan the person belongs to, it enables a person to show their respect by honouring their family name (*yettoode*). This is done by repeating the person’s family name upon greeting them. If someone likes you as, is pleased with your behaviour or wants to show you affection, there are ways of galvanising your patronym even more to honour you. This is done in the following way: for patronym Sy, the galvanising phrase is ‘Sy saa waande’. Niang – ‘Niang Baalo’; Thiam – ‘Thiam Demba’ (for *Toorodo*); Kane – ‘Kane Dialo Dierry Dialaalo Waalo’. The longer the greetings and exchanges of galvanisation go on between people, the more respect is shown for the other person. This might sometimes take up to two minutes of greeting, enquiring about family, relations, children, work, heat, tiredness, etc. Older people especially have to be greeted for a long time to show them respect.

Men and women keep their father’s family name upon marriage. This means that women who have married into the clan of the Sy, for example, keep their maiden names despite their children taking on the names of their husband’s lineage. In

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<sup>65</sup> Canut and Smith (2006) review debates on joking relationships and whether they should be defined as ‘kinship’. In West Africa, in particular, these relationships are often referred to as ‘*parenté à plaisanterie*’, ‘*cousinage à plaisanterie*’, ‘*alliances à plaisanterie*’, ‘joking kinship’, ‘joking slavery’, and can refer to joking relations between ethnic groups, castes, families, patronyms, age groups, etc. (Canut and Smith 2006). In Pulaar, joking partners are called *dendiraaŋbe*, which means ‘cousins’. In Wolof it is *Kal*, which also means ‘cousin’ but there is also the term *Gammu*, which means ‘joking cousin’. I argue with Galvan (2006) and Smith (2006) that joking relationships in Senegal are a form of social kinship that represents a syncretic institution between particular groups which have ties of solidarity and obligation towards each other.

Senegal, particular clan names (patronyms) are joking cousins (*dendiraaŋbe*). Some of these family names (*yettoode*) are considered ‘cousins’: Sy, Ndiaye and Diop; Niang, Fall and Gaye; Kane, Ba and Diallo; amongst the *Jaawamŋbe*: Bocum, Daff and Niane (also see Wane 1969; Dilley 2004: 48). As women do not change their family name upon marriage, joking relationships can exist between husbands and wives and mothers and their children. For example my teacher Harouna Sy often jokingly insulted his mother, whose family name was Ndiaye, according to the rules of the joking relationship. He said that she loved beans so much that she even woke up at night to eat them. His sister-in-law who lived in the same household carried the patronym Diop so she was also a joking cousin. He jokingly ‘insulted’ her as well, saying it was impossible to enter her house because it smelt of bean-eaters. Harouna’s sister-in-law and his mother refused ever to eat any beans, although it is a major element of everyone’s diet. They accused Harouna Sy and their husbands of eating too many beans. In the case of the Sy family, ‘joking kinship’ merely livens up the households and entertains everyone. As Davidheiser (2006), Galvan (2006) and Smith (2006) argue, joking kinship can create ties of solidarity and loyalty between members of different castes who possess the same family name.

On local transport in Fouta, I would often talk to people with the same patronym and our joking cousins more than with others, as the tie between these family names is already established before knowing the person personally and they are in a way obliged to act in solidarity for their honour.

One of my informants was a teacher at the school in Bito. He was a Sy *Tooroodo* from Podor. Although the family I stayed with and his family were not biologically related, the fact that they had the same family name meant that my family could not openly show offence when he had done something they were not pleased with, because they needed to show loyalty. When he came to the compound he often honoured them by galvanising their *patronym* Sy and jokingly insulted the wives who were called Diop and Ndiaye. Due to the fact that this political alliance is based on having the same family name, they could not openly tell him that they were not pleased about the fact that he had taken me out until after dusk – which was not honourable for a woman. Whereas his ‘joking cousins’ Diop and Ndiaye, my

teacher's mother- and sister-in-law, could insult him in a joking way, the other Sys could not. They had to accept the situation without taking offence.

Joking relations with so-called 'cousins' (*dendiraabe*) can also represent a reality check between people. A joking cousin can say what they want about their 'cousin' without the former being allowed to take offence. Getting angry means losing face. After all, none of these insults are serious even if what is being said contains an element of truth and hurts, since the joking cousin has to control himself, laugh off the accusations and pretend it is all a joke. When someone's behaviour diverges from the norm or someone has done something they should not have, the joking cousin's insults remind them of the code of honour and their obligations towards others in the following way: he ridicules his behaviour, depicts him as shameless and uncivilised – exaggerating enormously and thereby reminding them of others' expectations and their obligations. These insults can be so humiliating that they would cause offence if expressed outside the context of the joking relationship, and if it was not one's joking cousin voicing them. However, within the context of this joking relationship, outsiders always take sides with the insulting joking cousin and the insulted person embarrasses him or herself even more if they take offence. After all, it is all a joke.

With regard to stopping excision, a person may fear their joking cousins' ridiculing laughter and insults. The joking cousin may say to a woman that her daughters are not pure and that no one is going to marry them, that they are worth nothing. Although these are 'just jokes' and the woman has to keep face and pretend that none of this talk hurts her, deep down she may fear that this is what other people really think and that her joking cousin's ridiculing talk will continue, entertaining everyone at her expense.

To understand the context in which joking cousins tease each other, I explain the code of honour which is valid across the castes and other social categories in Haalpulaar'en society.

### 3.5 The Futanke way of life, *Pulaaku* and honour

The notion of *Pulaaku*, the way of the Fulani or ‘Fulaniness’, was used by my informants to refer to a code of honour and behaviour when interacting with others. It is also commonly referred to in literature on the Fulani (Riesman 1974; Stenning 1959; Ly 1938). According to Jamtan.com, a website run by Fulani from across West Africa, *Pulaaku* ‘enables them to maintain their identity across boundaries and changes of lifestyle’. The *Pulaaku* code of honour is therefore used to demarcate a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘others’ by some Fulani, in the sense of Barth’s (1969) conceptualisation of ethnicity. We shall return to this notion in chapters 5 and 6.

According to Stenning (1959: 55), *Pulaaku* includes a code of behaviour that is tied to the language but incorporates a whole range of rights and duties particular to the *Pullo*. In Pulaar, the traits that define *Pulaaku* are: *muñal* – endurance/patience, self-discipline; *hakkille* – intelligence or forethought and managing one’s own; *gacce* – literally ‘shame’, meaning modesty and respect; *tinnaade* or *cagataagal* – bravery, courage. For my informants the *Pulaaku* code of honour had the same significance.

According to my informants *muñal* means enduring pre-ordained vicissitudes of life. *Muñal* is needed, for example, to describe withstanding pain or heat. The word *hakkille* conveys a blending of prudence and shrewdness in livelihood management and face-to-face encounters. *Gacce* is best described both as restraint and self-control in daily social interaction, and as lacking in weakness when facing adversity (*semteende* for Riesman 1974). The French term *pudeur*, modesty or informed sense of decency conveys the sense of *gacce* better. In essence it represents resistance to weakness or to non-conformity to the code of *pulaaku*. *O alaa gacce* means ‘he has no shame’. A *Pullo* must know of the social constraints on behaviour and be able to avoid contravening them in all situations, especially in front of his in-laws. A true *Pullo* is in total control of his emotions and impulses (Riesman 1974, also see chapters 5 and 6). *Cagataagal* means bravery in the sense of both the courage of a warrior and the hard work of any person. It is often used to congratulate someone for their valour and accomplishments.

Someone who behaves according to this code of honour is seen as having decorum, good manners, and as being chivalrous. The term *Pulaaku* originally referred to the code of behaviour of *Fulbe* herders and how to look after their cattle. However I frequently heard reference to a code of honour among the *Subalbe* as well. They used the term *Cubalaagu* to refer to the way of life by the river and the mastery of everything that involves fishing, killing the beasts of the river and knowledge of their trade, as well as the human qualities described above.

In addition to the Pulaar terms described above, Ly argues that the Pulaar code of honour constitutes not only respect for others, courage, honesty, generosity but also pride at being a member of one's group – caste and family. An honourable person always has his name and his family in mind when interacting with others, bearing in mind that bad behaviour will reflect badly on their name (Ly 1938: 47). Ly also says that someone who does not fulfil their duties towards others is not a person. 'Ne pas remplir ses obligations de sociabilité c'est n'être pas Homme' (Ly 1938: 58). Dignity for the Haalpulaar'en is therefore strongly linked to fulfilling one's obligations towards others and behaving according to the codes of honour of one's society (see also chapter 5; Strathern 1990, 2004). Joking relations are a control mechanism against breaking this code of honour, being different and not meeting people's expectations.

I have explored concepts and categories according to which the Haalpulaar'en of Fouta Toro identify themselves and each other and how these spheres of belonging create ties of solidarity and obligation between groups. I have shown that some differentiating social factors, such as caste (*kinde*), can be overcome through age-groups, having the same patronyms and joking kinship. Despite being from different castes (*kinde*), belonging to the same age group or having the same patronym can create ties between people that make solidarity and loyalty obligatory despite their being from different 'occupational' backgrounds. More examples of this are discussed in chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

In the final section I discuss other factors that have increasingly influenced Futanke livelihood since the advent of capitalism, and since it has become less and less possible to live from local subsistence farming.

### **3.6 Emigration**

There are few *Subalbe* who still practise their ‘traditional’ occupation, as most places in Fouta are not self-sufficient and the need to participate in a monetary economy is forcing men to seek paid employment. Many young men seek work in urban centres to support their families. Today a man who stays in the village and undertakes the traditional occupation of his occupational group (*hinnde*) is not as highly regarded as his brothers working in the urban centres or abroad. Economic migrants come back with money which improves the family’s standard of living. They are able to eat better, construct more stable houses and buy goods; their wives and children receive new clothes and shoes more regularly. They are able to pay for medical treatment of relatives – the families enjoy better physical and psychological health. There is therefore an enormous pressure on young men of any caste to bring back as much money as possible, in order to receive consideration and be respected.

‘Emigration’, however, is not a recent phenomenon. Wane (1969) writes that the ‘Toucouleur du Fouta’ uses the same tools for agriculture that his ancestors have used and attempts by the colonial government to modernise the ‘anachronism’ of its methods and the insufficiency of production have had limited success (Wane 1969: 23). Whereas peanut plantations are successful in many Wolof areas in Senegal, agriculture has never gone beyond subsistence farming in the Senegal River valley. Instead of making money by working on his land, the Toucouleur migrates to urban centres to earn cash to provide for the family (Wane 1969: 23; also see Diop 1965).

Emigration statistics from the 2002 census show that 3.3% (43,363) citizens registered in Matam and 8% (105,214) of those registered in the region of St Louis left their home regions to seek work in other regions of Senegal. In contrast, 1.6 % or 21,080 persons, migrated into the region of Matam from inside or outside of Senegal. 3.3%, or 43,327 persons, migrated into the region of St Louis from outside Senegal.

These statistics inadequately depict migration and do not sufficiently distinguish between short-term and long-term migration. Nevertheless the 2002 census emphasises that the region of the ‘Vallée du fleuve Senegal’ has been affected by international emigration for longer than the other areas in Senegal. The reason for this is given as the increasing desertification since the 1970s.<sup>66</sup>

The Futanke themselves say that emigration has always existed and if a migrant does not manage to make money on his journey, he at least accumulates wisdom and friends. Some of the men clandestinely emigrate to Europe and work illegally.<sup>67</sup> Some perform unskilled jobs in dire conditions for 10 years or more until they have saved enough money to construct new buildings for the family and the village community. Although they have faced years of hard work, the respect they receive from their relatives upon their return is enormous. As a result some men therefore prefer to take on these hardships rather than work locally for NGOs and local councils, who are the main employers in the area, as teachers, medical professionals, etc. ‘Development’ through organisations and local structures is not as well respected as ‘emigration’ because remittance brings wealth into the heart of the families and is much more visible than change through NGOs and community development projects. Instead development ‘projects’ are often criticised for not ‘giving’ enough money. ‘Giving’ is extremely important in Futanke society, a gesture that goes beyond goodwill, hard work or intelligence. Someone who gives and is able to give receives respect and recognition – more than a *Jaltaalbe* (skilful fisherman) could ever earn by following the ‘traditional occupation’.

To make the differences more explicit I want to elaborate on two cases of emigrants in Bito. When I first came to Bito, there were two men who had ‘made it’ to Europe, one of them clandestinely in a canoe from Morocco to Spain, where he pretended to

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<sup>66</sup> ‘L’émigration internationale, qui jadis affectait principalement les peuples de la Vallée du Fleuve Sénégal, est d’envergure nationale.’ (Senegal – Troisième Recensement Général de la Population et de l’Habitat 2002: 32).

<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately the 2002 census shows no statistics for international emigration. However, as far as international immigration is concerned, the highest proportion of immigrants from abroad are Peul (Fulani) at 28.6% (Senegal – Troisième Recensement Général de la Population et de l’Habitat 2002: 40) and 50.5% of international immigrants reside in Dakar. In terms of long-term immigration for the regions of Matam and St Louis, 0.4% are other West African migrants in Matam, 0.9% in St Louis; Central African long-term immigrants are 0.1% in Matam and 1.2% in St Louis; American 0.6% in Matam and 6.3% in St Louis; Europeans 0.1% in Matam and 4.8% in St Louis.

be an asylum seeker from Guinea who had lost his papers. As he could speak one of the Guinean languages (Pulaar) he was accepted. After doing unskilled work in Spain for seven years, he had just returned for the first time in March 2007 and married one of the local girls, a beautiful girl about 14 years old. This trip had been far from easy, he was stabbed, nearly drowned and, even after he was granted the status of ‘asylum seeker’, life and earning money had not been easy. However, Khalidou was able to have a more luxurious wedding than most of his other kin because he had more money. It was also possible for him to give little sums of cash to other villagers when they were in need. In a way he was also considered a bit of a hero because, despite the hardships he had to endure, he will be able to secure a better life for his wives and kin than other villagers.

The husband of a female informant of mine, Hawa Sow, was also an emigrant who was back for the first time in five years to visit the family. Adama was a well-educated man who spoke good French, some German and English and had worked in accounting before emigrating to France. In France he had worked in a factory in the suburbs of Paris for years and had evidently been broken by life there. Although he was unhappy about not seeing his wife and children for years, it was preferable to staying in Bito with no employment. Sending money back to his family secured their livelihood and security as well as social standing and respectability within the community. Hawa’s house had solar electric cells on the roof, which meant that they had enough electricity for a few hours of light in the evening and for her friends in the village to leave their mobile phones to be charged up. They also had a television and a DVD player that worked sometimes.<sup>68</sup> Her bedroom was beautifully decorated with painted walls – not mud-brick – and a wooden carved bed with a spring-mattress instead of a foam mattress. Hawa has to fetch water from the well and perform her daily duties like all the other village women but her family never runs out of food and others consider her lucky.

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<sup>68</sup> During the Africa Cup 2007, some villagers brought three charged up car batteries into the emigrant houses with television to watch the match. Whenever one of the batteries was empty it was quickly exchanged. Apart from that people rarely watch television and have perhaps seen a few images on DVD.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide the background for understanding salient relations which may influence someone's decision to hold on to excision and oppose the national ban or to join the 'abandonment movement'. These salient relations are based on status group, age group, kinship and patronym. When thinking about what might influence people to join others in opposing the law and the NGOs or to join the 'abandonment movement', it is important to highlight the following aspects discussed in this chapter.

First, Futanke social structure is hierarchical and the noble status groups take the political decisions that affect social life and the livelihood of everybody.

Second, each status group is considered to have authority over the knowledge and skills of an occupational background, which is rarely challenged. This means that a *Toorodo* marabout who recommends excision on religious grounds can only be challenged by someone who is also an expert in this field and not by those whose expertise is related to weaving or the river.

Third, social kinship practices, like joking relationships between age groups (*fedde*) or patronyms (*yettoode*), create ties of solidarity between people from different social backgrounds and oblige so-called 'cousins' to be loyal towards each other and help each other out. This may mean that someone feels obliged to support the group they have 'traditional' alliances with when having to choose between taking sides with 'abandonment movement', or opposition to the law. (For further examples see the section in chapter 4, on the exciser Kumba Kawri, as well as chapters 7 and 8.)

Fourth, joking relationships represent a mechanism that reminds people of social norms, codes of honour and obligation, because their 'joking cousin' ridicules them if their behaviour diverges from what everyone else does. When it comes to continuing excision or renouncing the practice, joking relations may stop someone from doing something different to everyone else for fear of being humiliated.

Lastly, I discussed the high esteem accorded to emigrants and the great influence emigrants have on their kin at home. This is mainly due to the financial support they are able to provide to family and friends. Thus, people try not to displease them.

## Chapter 4: Making gender: changing 'traditions', initiation and the procedure of female and male circumcision

This chapter explores how gender is made through female and male circumcision. In my fieldwork village, Bito, the men were barely aware of when exactly their daughters were excised. Many men I met across Fouta explained this to me in a similar way to the following informant: 'With girls, you cannot know when they are excised. It's women's business. Your own daughter can be taken away for excision one evening and the next day you don't even realise that she was excised the previous night' (H. Ly, Bito). Just as Ahmadu (2000, 2009), Dellenborg (2004), and Hernlund (2000, 2003) argue for Mande subgroups in the Gambia, Casamance and Sierra Leone, excision in Fouta Toro is considered to be something that women take care of, men do not get involved or need to be informed of the details. However, in contrast to the respective literature, in Fouta Toro excision is not practised during initiation at all and never has been, according to my informants' views and anecdotal evidence.

Roy Dilley notes too: 'While male circumcision and initiation is the focus of much communal activity, female excision, involving clitoridectomy and sometimes infibulation, is done much more privately behind closed doors and with little public ceremony' (Dilley 2004: 119). Some of my informants explained that excision did not need the celebration and time of seclusion that boys needed after circumcision because it was not 'a big deal' and much less problematic than male circumcision. For example Aissata, a woman in my host family, told me that: 'They [girls] are just taken over to the exciser and *tack*, it is cut away. It's not so bad [*c'est pas grave*], they cry a bit and then it's over after 24 hours, it's all healed up and fine.' In contrast, she said:

the boys have more problems with their circumcision to heal than the girls. With the girls, the little thing that looks like a *ñebbe*, you know? It's like a little bean. It is cut, *tack*, they cry a bit and then it is all over. But the boys can't wash for weeks and are all kept together.

Throughout my time in Fouta I met many women and men who shared the belief that male circumcision is a lot more traumatic and harmful than female circumcision, which is why boys needed a period of seclusion after circumcision whereas girls did not. The rhetoric of governmental and non-governmental intervention against female circumcision bases its appeal for ‘abandonment’ on the opposite assumption. To come to an understanding of how the Futanke reacted to the ban on excision and how the so-called ‘consequences’ of excision are problematised in local discourses alongside the governmental and non-governmental propaganda, it is salient to look at how male and female circumcision are practised in Fouta Toro.

Upon reading recent West African ethnography on female circumcision one might expect that initiation and coming of age would be strongly associated with the practice in Fouta Toro as well. Furthermore, one might presume after reading such ethnography that the Futanke’s opposition to the ban by the Senegalese government was somehow related to constructions of gender and ethnic identity through initiation and the ‘making’ of a person through coming of age. If this was the case, one would imagine that the Futanke’s opposition was a symptom of their holding on to so-called ‘traditions’ that incorporate rites that are markers of ethnic identity and personhood. However, I will show in this chapter that none of these presumptions are accurate.

In the first section of this chapter I discuss West African ethnography on initiation and reaching the status of a woman through excision. As I show, becoming a responsible person is intrinsically tied to initiation ceremonies among the Mandinka in the Gambia (Ahmadu 2005; Ahmadu and Shweder 2009; Hernlund 2000, 2003) and southern Senegal as well as co-habitants like the Diola (Dellenborg 2004). I contrast these cases to excision in Fouta Toro subsequently. I argue that the opposition to the law from Fouta Toro is not connected to the loss of ‘tribal rites of passage’ and coming of age through circumcision, as might be expected among Mande sub-groups (Ahmadu 2000, 2009; Bledsoe 1984), as female excision in Fouta does not involve such rites. Nonetheless, by contrasting how female excision and male circumcision are practised according to local discourses, I show that gender is made through circumcision. I argue that as Griaule (1948) described among the Dogon, female excision and male circumcision are about feminising or masculinising the

androgynous body (also see Ahmadu 2005, 2009). Excision and circumcision create the physical foundations for appropriate adulthood and render a person marriageable.

Furthermore, the imaginary boundaries between ‘the state’ and the ‘NGOs’ on the one hand and the ‘traditionalists’ (those who want to hold on to the practice) on the other, are by no means as clear-cut as one might imagine. On the contrary, the division between those who uphold the practice as an ethnic and religious tradition, and NGO workers, is often blurred, and individuals move freely between the two conceptual camps. I show that so-called ‘tradition’ is a term that accords value to a practice because of the relationship it represents between those who have passed it on and those who have taken it up. ‘Tradition’ does not mean that the practice has never changed, but that it is re-invented and accorded value by each generation who take it up.

#### **4.1 Initiation and becoming a person in West African ethnography**

The West African ethnography on female circumcision mostly focuses on the importance of the practice in relation to initiation, and becoming a person/member of a group through it.<sup>69</sup>

Ahmadu (2000, 2007, 2009), an American/Sierra Leonean anthropologist who underwent initiation amongst the Kono in her parents’ home village in Sierra Leone but did her PhD research on FGC among the Mandinka in the Gambia, argues that circumcision for boys and excision for girls during initiation makes male and female gender (Ahmadu 2000, 2009). She explains that among the Kono, as for most Mande groups, children are seen to be part of nature, undefined and possessing both male and female elements (2009: 14). In initiation rituals the male foreskin of the penis symbolises femininity. Its removal represents the ‘masculinisation’ of the boy. In parallel, ‘the exposed clitoris represents the male sexual organ or penis and thus its removal symbolizes the feminization of the girl child and marks her adult status’ (Ahmadu 2009: 14).

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<sup>69</sup> An exception to this is Diallo (2004) whom I discuss further in chapter 6.

Ahmadu (2000: 289) argued that for the Kono, initiation affects adult female identity through the act of excision and realises a novice's procreative value. Fertility is transferred to the *bain den moe* – the matrilineage – represented by the mother's brother and descendants (Ahmadu 2000: 287; Hardin 1993; Amadiume 1987, 1997). It embodies a 'motherhood' or 'one womb' ideology whereby 'relations are marked by closeness and familiarity' (Ahmadu 2000: 287). Although a woman resides in her husband's *fa den moe* (patrilineage), to which she contributes her labour, and her children will belong to her husband's lineage, she can count on her *bain den moe* as a check against her husband's *fa den moe* (2000: 287). It is believed that only through excision, and the maternal uncle's ancestors' blessing, can a newly 'created' female with reproductive powers successfully procreate (Ahmadu 2000: 289).

Also focusing on a Mande subgroup in the Gambia, the Mandinka, who traditionally practise excision during initiation, Hernlund (2000) looks at 're-ritualization' of the initiation ceremonies without female circumcision. These 'alternative rituals', run by an NGO, aim to eliminate FGC without losing the ceremony that people embrace as 'culture' and 'tradition' (and which provides a potent avenue for women's empowerment) (Hernlund 2000: 235). Admitting that not everyone agrees that these expensive rituals are a good idea or that they can replace the original ceremonies, Hernlund looks at increasing incidents of girls who are cut outside the initiation ceremonies on a compound with no further ritual (2000: 242). Hernlund establishes that for some families the expense of the lavish celebrations is perceived as problematic; others say that schoolgirls have no time for lengthy seclusions after 'circumcision'. In a few cases the girls concerned were considered too old to participate in the ceremonies (a case of a 14- and a 17-year-old girl). Furthermore, some families who adhered to a more orthodox form of Islam insisted on 'cutting without ritual' because they considered the traditional 'circumcision' rituals un-Islamic (Hernlund 2000: 243).

Although Hernlund is interested in 'cutting without ritual' and discusses aspects of the practice that are not directly related to initiation, her research shows clearly that amongst the Mandinka in the Gambia initiation and coming of age are strongly associated with excision. Ahmadu also shows in her PhD thesis (2005) on the Mandinka in the Gambia that a non-initiated or un-excised woman would not be

allowed to enter the seclusion area where the rites and ceremonies take place. Excision and initiation are inextricably connected to the making of a person among the Mandinka.

Dellenborg (2004) looks at excision in the context of initiation and personhood among the neighbouring Diola in Casamance. She argues that the Diola adopted female circumcision from the Mandinka for several reasons (Dellenborg 2004: 82) including the adoption of peanut cultivation, promoted by colonialism at the beginning of the 20th century, which brought the two ethnic groups closer together. Young Diola men who wanted to gain independence from their elders went to the Gambia to sell their labour on the groundnut fields and stayed in Mandinka families. Dellenborg (2004: 83) like Mark (1978: 11) argues that 'Islam offered a more rapid means of attaining adulthood'. It bestowed on them the financial independence and authority to gain adult status and start a family without performing the traditional Diola initiation rite, *bukut*, which was held every 25–30 years. Islamic practice adopted from the Mandinka involved circumcision of men and excision of women. For Diola women the declining importance of indigenous religion, according to which they were ascribed a ritually central role as guardians of agriculture and human fertility (Dellenborg 2004: 84; Linares 1992; Journet 1983, 1985), meant that new strategies for gaining ritual and religious authority had to be found. Besides becoming a person through Islamic practice, practising excision was incorporated into a new form of female secret society that allowed for unmarried and childless women to gain ritual power, respect and authority in their communities. Dellenborg (2004) argues that whereas the pre-requisite for being initiated into the secret society used to be childbirth, with Islam, the pre-requisite became excision.

In Dellenborg's (2004) research excision is also associated with coming of age and becoming a member of a group of women who are not just initiates but also Muslims.

Johnson (2000), who researched female circumcision amongst the Mandinka in Guinea-Bissau, argues that female circumcision practices must be understood in relation to the ritual of girls' initiation and the construction and transformation of religious identity and personhood. Initially assuming that female circumcision was linked to social adulthood through initiation, Johnson found that among the Mandinka

of Guinea-Bissau, most male and female children are ‘circumcised’ well before puberty and the practice did not bear any direct relationship to marriage (2000: 218). She was told that whereas in the past initiation occurred shortly before marriage, ‘nowadays’ girls are often excised long before marriage. As for adulthood, the Mandinka did not associate initiation with ‘becoming’ an adult. Instead the birth of the first child and the woman’s move to her husband’s compound designated the end of childhood. Circumcision and excision on the other hand were first and foremost linked to religious identity – being a Muslim (Johnson 2000: 219).

The West African literature on FGC focuses on the Mande subgroups and co-habitants who tend to associate excision with initiation, either as a requirement for becoming an initiate or as part of the ceremony itself. Beyond excision in the context of initiation, Ahmadu (2005) focuses on the symbolic significance of the clitoris in ancient Mande myths, and the need to remove the ‘female penis’. Johnson (2000) looks at religious personhood alongside initiation among the Mandinka in Guinea-Bissau. Although Amadou Hampate Ba describes circumcision and initiation rites in his tales of Fulani initiation (*Contes Initiatiques Peuls*; Ba 1993), which are presumably of the Peul of Macina (Mali) like himself, to date no work has been published on excision practices among the *Fulbe* in West Africa.

If excision is not important in the context of initiation in Fouta Toro, what is its relevance, how is it practised and how does the performance of female excision differ from male circumcision? Let us first of all look at the terminology of words for circumcision in Pulaar.

## 4.2 Terminology

In Fouta Toro, the noun for female excision is *Kaddingol*, the verbs are *haddinde* or, interestingly, *sunninde* (derived from the word for religious recommendation *sunna*). Although male circumcision and female excision are both considered religious recommendations, the term *sunninde* is almost exclusively used for female excision and rarely for circumcision. In some areas of Fouta Toro an un-excised woman is called *Jiwo*, however this is not a universally used term; it is frequent to say *Mo*

*haddinaaka*<sup>70</sup> – the one who was not excised, or *Mo haddaaki* – the one who is not excised.

There are two words for male circumcision: *duhaade*, which means to knot up (a pair of trousers for example) or *boornaade*. In addition, *boornaade* also means to dress up in everyday language. *Boornaade* resembles the word *boorde* which means to take off (for example to strip bark off a branch). The word therefore has various connotations. An uncircumcised boy is called *solima* in Pulaar in Fouta Toro. Interestingly the same expression is used for un-excised women in the south of Senegal as amongst the Diola or the Mandinka (Dellenborg 2004; Ahmadu 2005). However, in addition to merely referring to an un-excised woman, the term also means impure in Mandinka and Diola. In Pulaar *laabaani* means impure (negation of the verb *laabde* – to be clean/pure in the tense for accomplished actions), whereas *solima* is not used for impurity in everyday language. A newly circumcised boy is called *Njulli* until his circumcision wound has healed. Adolescents also call circumcision *haddaade* which resembles *haddinde*, the term for excision. However, this term is considered vulgar in the vernacular.

Terms for female excision thus refer to religious practice. Male circumcision, however, has connotations of getting ready for the outside world – ‘dressing up’ or ‘knotting up one’s trousers’. Whereas female circumcision takes place in the realms of the private – besides those involved no one really knows when or how it is practised – the performance of male circumcision is more public and has the connotation of getting the boy ready for life.

In the following we shall explore how excision is practised in Fouta Toro.

#### **4.3 Excision in Fouta Toro: conversations with three excisers**

During my fieldwork in Fouta I interviewed 18 women who had performed excision either as traditional excisers or at health-care centres. Some I knew quite well; with

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<sup>70</sup> *Hadinaaki* is the negation of the verb *haddinde* – ‘to excise’ in its past tense

others I just had one in-depth interview; others I only asked a few questions. The procedure of the cutting and the techniques these ‘experts’ used to stop the bleeding after excision differed. Some women said that, at times, a few girls are cut together, however none of them said that there were any other ritual activities involved or that they had ever performed the practice during an initiation ceremony. Although the procedure of excision is said to be passed down from generation to generation, none of the excisers said that they had ever heard of any of their ancestors performing the practice as part of a female initiation ceremony. As far as they knew, it had always been practised either at the exciser’s house or the house of the family who were paying for the work, but there were no activities or celebrations to make public that a girl had been excised.

Most excisers said that the age at which the girls are cut depends on their clients. Some parents want their daughters to be excised within the first two weeks after birth. Others prefer to wait until the girls are 4 years old.<sup>71</sup>

Besides excision, most traditional excisers tended to do work related to childbirth or gynaecological operations. Some were also midwives and called when young women needed to be opened upon the wedding night. Others also pierce earlobes and cure cuts and sprains with incantations. The cost of the cutting varies between CFA1000 and 5000 (~ £1–5),<sup>72</sup> depending on how much the exciser feels she can charge. If the family are well off it is acceptable for her to charge more.

I describe in greater detail my conversations with three of these excisers. The first one, Awa Dickel, lived in my fieldwork village in Bitou where no NGO-led sensitisation against the practice had taken place. The second exciser, Kumba Kawry, also defends the family lore with pride. However she is registered as an ‘ex-exciser’, a member of an association of former excisers who sensitise against the practice at governmental and non-governmental-led events to promote reproductive health. The third exciser, Ramata Niane, is a midwife at the health-care centre of Mboumba where she unofficially excised girls in ‘hygienic conditions’ in what she considers to be a

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<sup>71</sup> According to the Demographic Health Survey 83% of girls were excised under the age of 4 in the region of Matam and 64.5% under the age of 1 (DHS 2005: 248).

<sup>72</sup> A Tostan facilitator’s salary is CFA50 000, a state-schoolteacher’s approximately CFA150 000. A goat cost about CFA8000–15 000 during my fieldwork.

less 'traditional' manner. All three excisers are either part of or have close ties to the statutory legal structures; none considered the practice to be associated with initiation or coming of age.

#### **4.3.1 Awa Dickel, exciser of Bito**

I met Awa Dickel on a cool late afternoon in January 2008. She was known to be a good exciser, so I was told by many women in Bito. People come from far to have their daughters cut by her. My friends had encouraged me to go and see her before, but I had waited until my grasp of Pulaar was good enough to be able to communicate without a translator. At this stage, I was already well known to the *Bitonaabe*, had spent the mornings joking with the women by the well fetching water, and the late afternoons down by the river with the unmarried girls (*mboomri*) and boys or working on the fields. People knew that I had not come to change their way of life and to persuade them to 'abandon their customs' (*woppude adaa mon*). According to many, this is white people's only motivation for staying in these lands, with their harsh climatic conditions and lack of commodities that bring comfort.

My teacher and host Harouna Sy insisted on introducing me to the exciser Awa Dickel. He spoke of her in an affectionate, respectful way as one of his 'mothers' – she belonged to his own mother's age-group and had helped to bring him up. The Dia and the Sy families had entertained strong ties of friendship and solidarity in Bito for generations. Harouna emphasised that their families are tied together by more than just the friendship of the two women. On this late January afternoon before dusk, when the households liven up before nightfall, Harouna, my husband Seydou and I go over to Awa Dickel's house. She is an elderly lady dressed in a slightly torn boubou with a head-scarf, like most women of her generation on a normal working day on the fields or in the household. We greet her respectfully for a few minutes as is customary and upon shaking her hand, I can feel the curiously strong, rough and leathery skin that I have noticed so many times upon shaking the hands of women her age – just as my hands must seem like the hands of a baby to her. Awa Dickel takes Harouna by his hand and tells us that he is her son and she has seen him grow up. Even though I have come with 'her son' and my intentions are good, the situation makes me a little

uneasy. It is unusual for a girl, as I would appear to her, to come and ask questions accompanied by two men. Excision is against the law and by admitting to practising she admits to having committed a crime which in theory can see her put in prison for up to five years.

Awa Dickel tells us that her family has practised excision for five generations and that they do it from Nouakchott in Mauritania, to Cascas and all over Fouta. She learnt excising at the age of 15 by watching her mother. Every time a girl was brought to their home to be cut, she and her siblings were called to watch and learn so that one day they would be able to do it themselves. 'I was the oldest daughter, so I learnt,' she says, 'and started excising independently when I married.' Some of her sisters who learnt with her now practise in Mauritania. Others don't. Excising is not for everyone, she says. Awa Dickel is quiet about whether her own daughters practise. Times have changed. Excisers need to be more careful and some prefer to keep their practice quiet. As to the importance of the practice, she says that it is religious. The marabouts say that it is a *sunna*, a Prophetic recommendation. She says that when she cuts, she only cuts a little, otherwise the girl loses a lot of blood. Only the clitoris is cut, the labia stay the way they are. To soothe the pain and stop the bleeding she casts some incantations. These verses are part of the family lore (*gandal*) that has been passed down from generation to generation with pride. Awa Dickel tells us that to stop the bleeding they used to take the faeces of a goat, boil them and put them on the wound after the cutting. If the girls were old enough, they would ask them to sit down in the boiled goats' faeces (*borgo*). Besides excision Awa says she also opens women up upon the wedding night if they are too tight to be penetrated by their husbands. Being tight, she explains, is something a woman is born with and is not caused by excision. Harouna and Seydou, who have both worked for NGOs sensitising against the practice, are confused: according to doctors and midwives closure of the vagina only takes place when the labia are cut as well as the clitoris and the blood coagulates and heals as scar tissue. They ask her if she has ever opened a woman who had not been excised. Awa Dickel replies that in Bito, all girls are excised so she has never come across it here. However, once she was called to Juude, a village about 8km away, to open up a newly married girl whose husband could not penetrate her. She also excised her.

Having in mind the ethnographic accounts of excision and the spirit world (Boddy 1989; Gosselin 2000) I ask her whether an un-excised woman is thought to be more vulnerable to attack by *Jinne*. She starts laughing and says ‘Not at all, they have nothing to do with it! But when the clitoris gets big it can get in the way.’ She now has a passionate sparkle in her eyes as if something is about to burst out that she has tried to keep quiet:

The clitoris can grow big, like a little boy’s penis. Sometimes it grows bigger than the labia so it has to be cut away! I didn’t want to tell you this but now you have started me off and I’m telling you everything! It grows huge like a boy’s penis. You understand? And sometimes a white liquid collects inside the clitoris. So it needs to be cut to let it out. An unexcised woman has a big clitoris that splits into two big pieces of skin, like the ears of a rabbit! One rabbit ear hangs down on the right, the other on the left. (We start laughing.)

Dusk is approaching and calls for prayer are blaring from the mosque. Harouna and Seydou get up for prayer. I say good bye to Awa Dickel and leave with Harouna and Seydou. Awa Dickel was one of the few excisers I met in a place where the practice had not been questioned by most people. At the time, no NGO programme or sensitisation activities had called upon people to stop practising. Most women and men from Bito the reader will meet throughout the next few chapters had taken the validity of the practice for granted. It was their *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977): unchallenged and unquestioned habits that are embraced as normal. Although Awa Dickel, like most excisers, might have been aware that her occupation was outlawed by the Senegalese government, ending the practice seemed even more ludicrous and wrong than continuing.

The next exciser I introduce here comes from a rather different context, which is also typical for Fouta. In contrast to Awa Dickel, she has seriously considered abandoning the practice and is a member of the ‘ex-exciser association’. However, despite discourses around and political movements against excision, Kumba eventually decided to stay with her family occupation.

### **4.3.2 Kumba Kawry and the ex-exciser association**

Thilogne was pointed out to me as a good place to meet ‘ex-excisers’ – women who realised that the practice was not good and had joined the ‘abandonment movement’. Jainaba Kane, the president of the ex-exciser association, who I went to see in Ndouloumadji, told me that I should meet Hawa Diawa. So on a cool morning in February Seydou and I ride to Thilogne on a motorbike to meet Hawa Diawa and other ex-excisers. Her phone is not working. Not sure where she lives, we follow people’s directions, noisily riding through the sandy lanes of Thilogne until we eventually find her compound. Sandy and dirty from the ride, we enquire whether Hawa Diawa is there. As we couldn’t let her know that we were coming she is not expecting us and is not at home. Her family are smiths who are making jewellery in the front yard. As the women in the compound cannot tell us where she might be and when she might return, we decide to look for another ‘ex-exciser’ in the village after I have changed into Senegalese clothes. The smiths in Hawa Diawa’s compound do not know much about ‘ex-excisers’, but send us to an exciser who lives around the corner.

When we arrive, cheerfully greeting the family and the children, they welcome us into their home with curiosity as to what a white Pulaar-speaking woman well-dressed in a boubou, and a Pulaar man, have come for. The veranda is very lively. A very old man is sitting in the corner playing with a toddler; children are playing and laughing. After lengthy greetings Seydou tells them that we have come to speak to the member of the ex-exciser association. Kumba, the exciser, immediately starts explaining that a relative of hers had come to see her and her mother and suggested that they give up excising and join the ex-exciser’s association. Instead of excising, the association would organise other income-generating activities. A few other excisers in Thilogne became members and Kumba introduced the president to some of her relatives so that they could join as well. But one day there was a meeting in Seedo with French people about the abandonment of excision and Kumba found that the board members were sharing the money amongst themselves instead of doing as they had promised – sharing it with Kumba’s relatives and the other members. Since then she had decided not to go to any of these meetings.

If I participate in something I want to be told the truth and not find out later that I've been ripped off or taken advantage of. Either you act with transparency or you have to go separate ways. That's how things are in life. If we are thieves together and one day I find out that you are trying to steal from me ... I'm not going to accept that!

After listening to Kumba's disappointment with the ex-exciser association at length we tell her that we have come to talk to her about excision and why the Futanke hold on to the practice with such pride. Kumba is curious as to what we want to discuss and explains everything in great detail. We ask her if this association has created any problems between the excisers of Thilogne, but Kumba tells us that there aren't any problems between excisers. Everyone practises in their homes on their own account, but before this association there was never a collective movement among excisers of any kind. 'We all became members of the association because we trusted the president. She asked us to give up the practice so we joined her movement.'

We ask, 'So you have all stopped since Khadija came and asked you to leave the practice?' Kumba replies that she does not know. She has stopped going to the meetings and as everyone practises in their home, it is hard to know who has abandoned and who has not.

And if the religious leaders found out that this association even existed and that some excisers have stopped practising there would be a big noise! Some would get very angry! Some people don't think it's normal to leave behind something that you have inherited from your parents and that has always been practised in the past.

Kumba learned the practice from her grandmother, who herself was also taught by her own grandparents. She says that their family is one of the few in Thilogne who have practised excision 'traditionally', whereas others picked it up from others. The family tradition is not restricted to excision. They also assist women in labour and cure headaches and bruises and other illnesses. If someone in the neighbourhood has an accident, their aid is called on first because, she says, they are known as healers and very skilled at easing people's pains and bruises. Kumba learned how to excise from a

very young age. Whenever a girl was taken home to be excised, she and her sisters were called to help hold the girl down. She therefore observed the procedure from a very early age. However, not everyone has the courage to take on the practice and excise girls. Her sisters, who are sitting with us during this conversation, did not become excisers. To emphasise how the family lore (*gandal*) is associated with pride and the identity of the matrilineal line, Kumba says that even her grandmother had once gone to St Louis to train in a different job for a few years. She was so good that she was offered a job there. However it was more important for her to come home and practise the family lore. In addition to that, the exciser speaks of the tie of solidarity between their family and the Cherifian family of religious leaders.

The Ly baptise all the children in our family. When someone dies, they are the ones who wash the body and say the last prayer. In return our family has always excised their daughters since the times of my grandmother. There is a very strong tie between our families.

As to the procedure of the cutting, Kumba's sister tells us that there used to be a very efficient technique to stop the bleeding. Sheep dung was taken and boiled and left to cool down and then the girl was asked to sit down in it after the excision. That would help to heal the wound well. However, these days only shea butter is used. Before the operation, the blade is boiled in hot water to disinfect it. Then incantations (*cefi*) are cast onto the blade. Then a third of the clitoris is cut. Only a tiny little bit is cut (she indicates on her little finger). I ask if the girl does not bleed a lot after the cutting. Kumba, replies that after the incantations have been recited, the girl has been cut and the shea butter applied, it's all over. That is where the spiritual knowledge helps.

You recite the incantation and go over it with your hand and it's all over. The girl can go home and there will be no further complications. And no man will be able to penetrate the girl until she marries.

### 4.3.3 The midwife Ramata Niane

The last exciser I introduce here is a midwife at the health-care centre of Mboumba. A lot of *Mboumbanaabe* had participated in Tostan's education programme and many had stopped excising. However, Mboumba is also the site of renowned religious leaders who pass their knowledge on to *talibe* and who have opposed Mboumba participating in any kind of declaration of the abandonment of excision. I got to know Ramata Niane through my friend Bilel Daff whom I had met the first day I arrived in Mboumba on my way to Bito. Bilel was adamantly against excision and had been raising awareness about the practice with Tostan for ten years. This year she was not working because her mother was getting very elderly and sick and needed to be cared for. However, whenever I stayed in Mboumba, Bilel and I spent many afternoons and evenings together during the rainy season and the cold season of 2007. She was in her late 30s, had three daughters, the youngest of them 8 and the oldest in her in her early teens. None of them had been excised due to the many problems Bilel had experienced from her own excision. Bilel was divorced, her husband had left her many years before, though she did not seem particularly bitter. She was extremely independent and self-sufficient, interested in health care, education and a great advocate of democracy and equality between people. Bilel liked to spend the afternoons at the health-care centre with her friends, the nurses and midwives. One day, Bilel and I arranged to meet at the health-care centre to talk to her friend, the midwife, Ramata Niane.

Ramata tells us that she has been in the service for 20 years. She trained as a midwife in Ndioum. She says that many people have stopped excision since governmental and non-governmental awareness-raising programmes have been introduced. I ask how it is possible for so many people to 'abandon' the practice if it has always been so important.

'Excision was practised so that girls guarded their virginity until marriage. However, now, since sensitisation, women are told that child-birth is sometimes more difficult because of excision and so a lot of mums have decided to stop practising.'

I ask: 'Being a midwife yourself, have you found that this is true? That excised women have more problems in labour than others?'

'No,' Ramata replies. 'To be honest it's rare. If women come to their prenatal consultations it's rare to see any serious problems. Except for women with hypertension. They sometimes experience shock during child-birth.'

Bilel adds: 'Don't excised women have problems during labour for example with tissue that tears ...?'

Ramata replies: 'The majority of women are cut before labour so that it's rare to see tissue tearing these days.'

I ask: 'Do you cut the women at the back, where it does not cause any harm?'

Ramata: 'If the woman's vagina is straight, yes. If not then on the side.'

I tell them that in Europe many women go through episiotomy as well although they are not excised. Then I ask Ramata if women come to have their daughters excised. She says that she used to do it but now she has stopped. A midwife taught her how to do it, she says. But they used to cut just above the clitoris to conform to the fashion. Just a tiny little bit, not like the old excisers who cut everything.

'If women come to have their daughters excised we now say no. It's against the law. If someone catches you doing it. Ah! You've spoilt your life! And particularly as a mother of a household. It's not worth it!'

As midwives at health-care centres are employees of the state it is more risky for them to practise as it is explicitly outlawed and they can be sentenced to prison for up to five years. Whether Ramata really does practise, as Bilel and some *Mboumbanaabe* say, or whether she has stopped as she says, having circumcision performed at the health-care centre has been an alternative for many mothers deciding where to have their daughters cut. Because the procedure is said to be more hygienic and causes few complications, many people plead for medicalisation, which the government has adamantly refused.

I ask if there are other excisers in the village and Ramata says yes, but they are afraid, because ‘they used to practise with blades, whereas we cut with scissors and alcohol and sterile material. But these excisers did it with blades which can lead to infection.’

‘And with *cefi* (incantations),’ I add.

‘Maybe, I don’t know. Perhaps they learned it from their parents and their grandmothers. (laughs) But I don’t know anything about that.’

Ramata says that there have been a lot of changes over the last 20 years. Before, you’d find a lot of women who did not come for pre-natal consultation until the day they gave birth.

‘They didn’t take the anti-tetanus serum ... but now, with sensitisation, women come more regularly for consultation and if they have pains when they are due, they come and find the midwife. Women used to prefer giving birth at home but now a lot of them come to the health-care centre. And after birth we give women treatment and weigh the baby. Later on they come back for vaccinations. If the baby is under-nourished we give the women advice on what to do. A lot of women have stopped excision. I have seen women have three to four babies here who have not been excised.’

Bilel adds that her daughters have not been excised, even the oldest one who is 13 years of age.

I am still not convinced that it is possible for women to stop without being discriminated against by their neighbours and other members of the family. I have seen that in Bito it is not easy for people to stop even if they are against it. However, if there has already been on-going discussion in a village about whether it may or may not be good to practise and some are very outspoken against it, like Bilel in Mboumba, then it seems to be easier for women to stop. I remember what Awa Dickel told me in Bito about women growing rabbit ears – an image that many women in Bito think of with abhorrence when they even toy with the idea of not cutting a girl. I say to Ramata:

‘I have heard women say in Bito that if a girl is not cut, her clitoris grows big and splits into two like rabbit ears.’

‘Well that is true,’ Ramata replies.

‘It is true?’ I say with astonishment

‘Because the clitoris, you grow and it grows. You grow and it grows. Like a tree that you have seeded. If you cut it when it is small is it going to grow? Ah! It’s going to die!’

We laugh and joke. I tell them that I have never seen a woman with rabbit ears. Then Ramata continues.

‘I once spent three months in France in a hospital. But I tell you with the toubabs (white people) there you could think that it’s the noses meeting each other.’

Bilel laughs and Ramata says, showing her disgust: ‘It’s true. You know that the white people don’t practise excision. Hmmm!’ She turns up her nose at the memory.

‘They smell?!’ I ask.

‘Mmm’, she affirms. ‘There is a very big difference.’

We all laugh and Ramata tell us that she has to get back to her duties. I thank her for her time.

The three cases provide insights about how the practice is performed and for what reasons.

#### **4.4 Family lore, ‘tradition’ and ‘the state’**

Although two of the women claim to come from a family who have practised for generations, there is no reference to excision ever having been part of an initiation ceremony. Instead they learned at home, from a young age by watching their mothers and grandmothers and performing independently as soon as they married. The two ‘traditional excisers’ learned how to excise along with other things: delivering

children, opening women upon the wedding night and curing people of other aches, pains and bruises when they've had accidents. They therefore also perform the role of midwives and healers for women's problems or minor injuries.

It would be interesting to record in greater detail how excision is 'passed on' from grandmothers or mothers to daughters in clans that pride themselves on excising as a 'family tradition'. The data I collected indicated that excision was practised by women from a variety of caste backgrounds. Some of them were *Toorodo*, like Awa Dickel and Jainaba Kane (see chapter 6), the president of the ex-exciser association who took great pride in excision being an occupational lore (Dilley 2004) and 'family tradition' according with Islamic practice. Other 'traditional' excisers belonged to the caste of blacksmiths (*Waylube*) or leatherworkers (*Sakkeebe*) and entertained strong ties of patronage with *Toorodo* families, like Kumba Kawri (above). But I also met excisers who had taken up the profession to make money or because it was related to what they were already doing – as in the case of the midwife Ramata Niane.

All three cases show that the distinction often drawn between those adhering to the practice and those who adhere to governmental institutions implementing its ban is blurred. All three excisers are closely tied to 'institutions' in different ways. Awa Dickel's 'son' sensitises against excision at an NGO. Kumba Kawry is officially a member of an ex-exciser association but continues practising the family lore with pride. And Ramata Niane, midwife at a statutory health-care centre, has excised many girls and believes in it, despite governmental recommendations and legal sanctions. I want to emphasise here that there is no clear-cut distinction between those who adhere to 'traditional ways of practising' and those who are 'followers of the state'. As Borofsky (1987) argues, referring to Pukapuka, traditions are re-invented and celebrated over the passage of time. What people chose to call 'important traditions' and which ones are redundant can change very quickly. When people refer to 'tradition' in Fouta, it does not mean that these practices or beliefs have never changed. I argue that these accounts indicate that what is referred to as 'tradition' often relates to habits and practices one generation has taken on from the previous generation. As we can see, the maintenance of a practice or a strong bond between people over generations increases the value of the relationship or the practice.

‘Tradition’ is cherished because it points towards a form of stability that is highly valued. Although the exact procedure or relationship with the object or clan may change, certain elements of it are ‘passed on to’ or ‘taken up’ by the next generation and the continuation is attributed with value. This is perhaps the root of the logic of ‘some people think that giving up a practice that was cherished by your parents or grandparents is not a good thing’. Breaking a ‘tradition’ means breaking the continuity of a habit that people cherish.

As far as the procedure of the cutting is concerned, the discussions with the first two excisers shows that ‘knowledge’ acquired during apprenticeship is not just about the physical cutting but requires a spiritual form of ‘knowledge’ (*gandal*) that has been learned from mothers or grandmothers. Part of the skill involved in the cutting and what is believed to render it ‘safe’ comes from the fact that it is a ‘family tradition’. What has been evaluated as ‘effective’ and ‘safe’ by one generation is believed to be effective and safe for the next.

The interviews also show that the non-governmental movement and the opposition to the law are both tied up with political and economic interests and motivations. In all three cases we can see that people joined the ‘abandonment movement’ or NGO sensitisation out of economic interests, without losing their personal convictions or beliefs about the benefits of excision. Taking on a position that some consider political does not necessarily mean dropping beliefs that are thought of as opposed to that political position. Someone may have joined the NGOs and anti-excision movement out of economic motivation – because of financial recompense – but may not be completely convinced of the harmfulness of the practice. Others may say that they are against the law and the ‘abandonment’ of excision because it is a tradition that has always been there since ‘the beginning of the universe’ (*kaddungal gila dawaa-dawina wade*) or because ‘we have inherited it from the ancestors’ (*min tawri ko taaniraabe amen*). However, when they are personally affected by its harmful consequences they may change their minds, although they would never publicly say so. If the practice no longer provides stability and associated social reward, an alternative ideology is found to justify change and replacement of what existed before. I discuss this in further detail in chapter 7 and 8. Some marabouts who officially speak

out against ‘the abandonment’ of excision based on claims of it being a religious recommendation are known to have avoided excising their own daughters and granddaughters for health-related or other reasons.

#### **4.5 The androgynous body and making gender**

All three women have beliefs about how a woman’s genitals may ‘mutate’ if not cut. Awa Dickel tells us that the clitoris grows big and splits into two big pieces of skin, reminiscent of ‘rabbit ears’. What she is describing is tainted by the gaze of a woman who is used to seeing a flat, ‘empty’ vagina upon looking at a grown woman’s clitoris and labia. The midwife, Ramata Niane, who has delivered the babies of excised and un-excised women, agrees with Awa Dickel’s description that un-excised women have rabbit ears. Their perceptions of uncut female genitalia illustrate the need to ‘feminise’ the androgynous body by cutting away the ambiguous masculine parts as seen in Griaule’s (1948) description of the Dogon myth of origin. It implies that gender is made through excision.

Like most midwives I interviewed, Ramata Niane feels that despite governmental recommendations to stop practising, un-excised women are ‘un-cleaner’ (*inpropre* in French or *laabaani* in Pulaar) than excised women and that they can be clearly distinguished by their smell. Classen (1992: 134) argues that odour is used to ascribe characteristics of difference and is a marker of social identity. She looks at how ‘pleasant scent’ and ‘foul smell’ are attributed with meaning and social significance in different societies. She argues that something or someone “stinks” when it disagrees with our notions of propriety. In the same way that we may feel antipathy towards something because its odour offends us, we equally ascribe an offensive odour to something because we feel antipathy towards it (1992: 135).

Classen shows that distinctions are made between the smell of the sacred, pure and divine on the one hand and the stench of promiscuous women, prostitutes and witches on the other. Evil spirits are often chased away with incense and the odour of the sacred. Furthermore, through the act of smelling, one fills oneself with the presence of the divine, as in Hindu practices for example (Classen 1992: 156). Maidens, wives

and mothers tend to be identified with pleasant, non-threatening odours. The odours of seductresses are more ambivalent: sweet, heavy, exotic with overwhelming powers of fascination. Classen argues that Cleopatra and Marie Antoinette are classic examples, while perfume-vending models and film stars are modern ones (1992: 143). Prostitutes and ‘sluts’ are often characterised as having an unpleasant smell and with a ‘failure to regulate their bodies in accordance with the cultural norms’ (1992: 143). To exemplify how promiscuity can be associated with a foul smell, Classen cites Courbin’s 18th-century example of a French reformer who said that the prostitutes disappeared along with the foul odour of the drains of Florence when the streets were cleaned and covered with flowers (Courbin 1986: 194). The association between corrupt women and corrupt odours is manifest (Classen 1992: 143).

We shall explore purity and personhood in more detail in chapters 5 and 6. For now I want to focus on the perceptions of uncut female genitalia as ‘dirty’ and ambiguously male. Kumba Kawry does not speak of purity, cleanliness or mutating clitorises. However, she suggests that a woman is closed through excision and cannot be penetrated by a man before marriage. Thus, the practice renders a woman socially appropriate – she allegorically stays a virgin until marriage (*mboomri* is the term for an unmarried woman and virgin simultaneously). It is assumed that an unmarried woman is a virgin in Pulaar language and society. The ‘smell’ imputed to an unexcised woman perhaps points to the fact that she is socially ambiguous – androgynous because the male elements have not been removed. To what extent does male circumcision in Fouta Toro fit with Griaule’s Dogon (1948) imagery of making the androgynous body ‘masculine’ and what is the role of initiation here? We shall explore this in the final part of this chapter.

#### **4.6 Male initiation and circumcision: disappearing practices**

I have shown that female excision is not, and according to my informants never has been, associated with initiation and coming of age in Fouta Toro. On the contrary, it is surprisingly lacking in ritual: every exciser performs the practice in a slightly different way.

Paradoxically, male circumcision used to be, and sometimes still is, performed during initiation. However, according to informants' views and descriptions of their own initiation experiences, the practice seems to have changed since as far back as people can recall. I present views and memories of what circumcision and initiation were like and how it is performed now in order to compare it to female circumcision.

#### 4.6.1 Myths and memories of male initiation

I was frequently told that 'in previous times', which no one I met actually remembered, all the boys of the same age group would be taken to 'the forest'<sup>73</sup> together to be circumcised, as among the Diola and the Bassari in the south of Senegal today. The forest is called *dulndu* or *foonde* in Pulaar and denotes an area densely populated with trees in the *Waaloo* along the banks of the river. It was dangerous because of wild animals such as lions and hyena. However, since the beginning of the desertification in 1973, woodland has almost completely disappeared.

In 'the forest', young men who had been sheltered at home were faced with challenges that should teach them that life is hard and how to overcome the difficulties involved in looking after one's family. Initiates were taught that it was important to be brave and carry out one's duties with honour and not give up, even if the conditions seemed dire. Some of the lessons they learned included how to endure pain without tears and hunger without complaint. This corresponds to what Turner says about the purpose of initiation among the Ndembu – for boys an emphasis is put on obedience to elders, endurance of hardships and sexual instruction (Turner 1967: 7).

Many people have told me that in these times, circumcision would take place during late adolescence or when men were in their early 20s and considered ready to marry. Uncircumcised young men were not considered ready to marry or have sexual

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<sup>73</sup> Amongst the Diola there is a conception of the 'sacred forest' where circumcision takes place and boys learn their duties and responsibilities as men and towards the elders. It is forbidden to speak of what one has learnt, seen or experienced to un-initiated members of the community amongst the Diola (see Dellenborg 2004). Although coming-of-age rites involving circumcision are not uncommon amongst some Fulani communities in West Africa, to my knowledge there is no concept of 'secret society'.

relations with women because their penis was not yet clean and virile and they were seen as not yet having been initiated into adulthood. Even after circumcision, a man was not considered an adult until he had sex and married. Newly circumcised young men or boys (*Njulli*) are still teased with the following phrase: ‘*Ittude ñaande paaka*’,<sup>74</sup> which means ‘take off the leftovers of the knife’ by sleeping with a woman. I have heard various different interpretations of what this phrase means. My informant Niang told me that, on the one hand, it reminds the boys that they are not yet men because they have not yet completed the initiation process until they marry. On the other hand this phrase is an encouragement and consoles the *Njulli* that the pain and discomfort they are experiencing due to their circumcision will soon pass when they have sex with a woman and will sense pleasure and gratification instead. Symbolically, circumcision and initiation are therefore not completed until the boy has sexual relations and marries. It is also said that in the old days, a man should not wait for more than a year after circumcision before taking a wife and ‘taking off the leftovers of the knife’ by sleeping with a woman.

Circumcision, thus renders a man virile and takes away the impurities and parts of the penis that are associated with childhood. In the same way that it would be considered inappropriate for a woman to have sex before she is excised and she is believed to be closed by the practice. The thought of a man having sex before circumcision arouses reactions of disgust – to the extent that some people I met in isolated areas believed that it was impossible for men and women to have sex if they are not circumcised or excised. Like excision, circumcision makes a man physically masculine and prepares him for adulthood – a stage that is not completely attained until he has sex and marries. Circumcision and excision therefore signify an entry into a liminal stage which is completed with marriage. They render the body appropriate for eventually becoming a socially recognised adult.

This account, however, is an abstract and idealised version of what circumcision used to be like and how it was tied to initiation and becoming an adult. Niang, who is in his mid-30s, remembers how circumcision used to take place in his natal village Aram

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<sup>74</sup> *Ñaande* is also what is left over when millet is ground in the mortar. If these leftovers are put on the skin, they cause an itching, burning sensation similar to the discomfort experienced after circumcision before the glans gets used to exposure.

when he was a boy. At the time, initiation took place just before puberty, between the ages of ten and 12.

#### 4.6.2 Niang's memories of circumcision in the 1980s

As in the myth of how circumcision used to take place a long time ago, Niang emphasises that circumcision used to be a very important event in a boy's life because it meant becoming a responsible member of the community. When men refer to someone when they were young and naive they often say: 'A long time ago, when he was young, not even circumcised', to emphasise that the person had not yet developed a moral consciousness, had no responsibilities and was in the process of learning how to become an adult and valued member of the community. The companions with whom one was circumcised will always be close as they went through a significant stage in their lives together.

Niang says that in the 1980s circumcision took place in the following way: all the boys and their parents, male and female, were assembled in someone's compound. Anyone could attend this part of the ceremony; there were no taboos or secrecies. The boys waiting to be circumcised (*solima*) were already wearing the traditional white or black dresses. The gowns were wide so that air could enter freely for the circumcision to heal. The cutting took place in the *taarorde*, the toilet area which is enclosed by a mud-brick wall or hut, depending on the compound. The boy entered the *taarorde*, encouraged and cheered by the members of the family and spectators who were waiting outside. As soon as he entered the toilet area, he was out of sight of the family and alone with the circumciser (*Kaddinowo*). He sat down on the mortar (*howru*) that is normally used by the women to grind millet and other grains and is circumcised. After the cutting, a bandage with the powder of a herb called *gawde*<sup>75</sup> was wrapped around the circumcision wound and helped the cut to heal. Outside the *taarorde* people were cheering and encouraging the boy to endure the operation with courage. If the boys did not cry, they were considered courageous, if they did cry, they were consoled when they come out. Songs of encouragement were sung to all the newly circumcised *Njulli* and to those who yet had to wait for their circumcision (*solima*).

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<sup>75</sup> This powder is made of the dried fruits of a tree.

After the cutting a celebration took place somewhere in the village to honour the boys. They received little presents to comfort them and often an animal was slaughtered for the festivities. Over the next couple of days they were fed food called *mbayyungu* that was supposed to give strength. It consisted of millet and corn. From now on the newly circumcised boys (*Njulli*) were always accompanied by an older boy who had already undergone circumcision called *Selbe*. He guided the boys in whatever they did, showed them how to walk with their wound, how to lie down to sleep and when someone made a mistake or was naughty, he was the one who punished them. When the wound began to heal, the boys began to roam the village to prove themselves as ‘men’. They were often teased by the older boys who had already undergone circumcision as well as other villagers with the following songs:

*njulli yoo booroo dotel, kalle maa caami e bolol, hanno maa yeftude ndogaa,  
yimbe fof yefti ndogii*

which means:

Oh circumcised boy with the naked bottom, your penis has fallen on the path.  
Why don't you pick it up and run? All the others have picked up theirs and  
run.

When teased with this song, the *Njulli* often chased after the older boys to beat them or teased them back. The newly circumcised boys often teased each other with the following song:

*Heedi cagal fowru ηola*

The one who is left behind will be eaten down to the bone by the hyena.

This song encouraged the boys to compete, run faster, aim with more focus and perform better during the games played throughout the seclusion period in the village. There are also jokes between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. The

uncircumcised were teased as women. The *Njulli* took pride in saying that the uncircumcised were not yet men.

One of the *Njulli*'s challenges was to prove themselves as men in front of the girls of the village. My informant Niang told me that making women submit was part of becoming a man. They did this by obliging girls to kneel down in front of them. If the girls refused to do so, they beat them and told them that they were preventing the healing of their circumcision scar.

Part of the general mischief the *Njulli* undertook in the village was the theft of chickens from villagers for slaughter. Although this would have normally caused anger and the owner of the chicken would have disciplined the thieves with the approval and encouragement of the boy's father, when the *Njulli* did this it was tolerated, as they were known to be in a special phase of their life.

The boys did not go their separate ways until their circumcision wound was healed, about three to four weeks after the circumcision. The last thing they did together was go down to the river to wash for the first time since their circumcision, as they had not been able to wash while it was healing. They also washed their gowns and then went back into the village.

Niang's account of circumcision in the 1980s supports my interpretations regarding the myths of how circumcision used to take place a long time ago. The initiation represents a liminal stage; the *Njulli* were no longer 'like girls' and teased those who had not yet gone through circumcision as being 'like women'. Circumcision therefore makes gender; it removes the parts of the genitals that are feminine or androgynous. It also represents the beginning of social manhood: the *Njulli* practised making girls submit to their orders. Refusal slowed down the healing process, they said. Metaphorically, the healing of the circumcision scar and becoming a man recognised as a responsible member in the community go hand in hand. Circumcision is not just about physically making the boy's penis virile, pure and ready for marriage but also prepares the boy for social manhood – accepting one's role as superior to women. Making girls obey their orders is part of this process.

The fact that the *Njulli* were teased by the older boys and adults and that their mischief was tolerated and laughed at also shows that they were in a liminal sphere until the initiation phase was over and they married and took on the responsibilities of grown adults. Turner, along with Van Gennep, argues that rites of passage are transitional moments in which individuals change status within the community. Neophytes are structurally 'invisible' according to Turner (1967: 98). They belong neither to one group, nor the other as they have not completed the final steps of the initiation rite. In that sense they are both androgynous and sexless at the same time as long as they are in this transitional stage of ritual seclusion (1967:98). The *Njulli* of Fouta Toro, as well as excised unmarried girls, have entered liminality. They are no longer androgynous children but have attained the first stage towards marriage and becoming adults – they have been made appropriately 'male' and 'female'.

Niang said that when he was a child, he witnessed large circumcision ceremonies where sometimes 60 boys from different villages would be circumcised together. Today, such large ceremonies with boys from different villages coming together do not exist any more in Fouta Toro. If communal circumcision ceremonies do take place, it is often boys of the same age group from a family or a neighbourhood of a village.

Today most boys are circumcised between the age of 4 and 9. It is rare to see an uncircumcised boy reach the age of puberty: this was considered to be too late by most of my informants. Although I have seen boys wearing the traditional gowns and hoods the initiates wear after circumcision in different parts of Fouta, circumcision ceremonies are becoming rarer and a lot of boys tend to be circumcised individually at the health-care centre or by a *Sakke* (member of *hinnde* of leather-workers) in the village. Sometimes the reasons given for this include the risk of infection or fear of transmission of disease, such as HIV or tetanus.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that, in contrast to Mende groups in Senegambia and West Africa, FGC is not important in the context of initiation and coming of age in Fouta Toro. It is about making female gender by removing the external genitalia reminiscent of a

boy's penis. Thus the ambiguously androgynous body is rendered female. The excised woman is 'pure', 'virgin' and socially appropriate. The process of becoming a woman, however, is not completed until she marries. For boys, on the other hand, there are initiation ceremonies, although circumcision is also frequently undertaken without them. Circumcision removes what is feminine and impure. It makes the penis virile and ready for sexual intercourse and marriage. A boy metaphorically enters a liminal phase through circumcision which is not completed until he has sex and marries. Until then he has not attained adulthood. Female excision and male circumcision thus both create the physical foundations for gendered personhood.

Why does male circumcision involve more ritual and why does it happen much later than female circumcision? I have shown that in Fouta Toro, most girls are excised during infancy without much celebration, either at the exciser's house, the health-care centre or at home. We have also seen that even though male circumcision ceremonies exist, they are constantly changing. I have argued that 'traditions' are never unchanging but what is called 'important tradition' signifies a practice or relationship between people that is cherished and valued. Most people I met in Fouta Toro did not feel much regret about male circumcision ceremonies disappearing. For them, the main thing was that the boys were circumcised – initiation was not necessary. On the contrary it was considered expensive by many. Perhaps Futanke society has changed in ways that mean the emphasis on learning to become a responsible adult within the community, who is able to fend off wild animals and distinguish himself through bravery and endurance of hardships in the bush, is no longer necessary. The 'traditions' associated with becoming a man are redundant in modern Senegalese society – where it is more important to provide for one's family by earning money.

We have seen that none of the elements associated with the procedure of excision, nor the celebrations around the practice such as initiation, coming of age nor fear about of 'loss of tradition' associated with any of the aforementioned are the cause of the opposition to the law in Fouta Toro. In the next chapter I will look at how personhood is constituted through gender socialisation and how excision creates the moral foundations for female personhood.

## **Chapter 5: Excision, gender socialisation and the physical foundations for moral personhood**

No it's not in the Koran but the Prophet said that excision should be practised. The Prophet was a kind man. Very kind. He only wanted the best for his wives and women in general, that's why he created these rules. Do you know how women were treated before? They were like domestic slaves. They were worth nothing. It didn't matter if you killed them or violated them, they were worth nothing! But the Prophet loved women and said that a man is only allowed to marry up to four if he can treat them equally. Since then, a Muslim is not allowed to harm or treat them badly. He can't just do what he feels like with women but has to abide by the recommendations of religion. But the Prophet also knew that women have a great sexual desire. They want to have sex and get aroused very quickly. That's why they were not respected, because they were like animals. They get aroused so quickly that the Prophet recommended diminishing the clitoris just a little bit so that desire is diminished and women are more respectable.

(10 March 2007, first conversations with Harouna Sy, Bito)

This chapter is about the control of desire. In the words above, my teacher Harouna Sy explained to me why the Prophet Mohammed recommended excision to help women control their sexual desire better. Excision, like Islam, brought law and order to the world, as some Futanke see it. Lawlessness, injustice and social disarray, which mainly affected the weak, were replaced by divine law, faith and solidarity between Muslims. Throughout my time in Fouta, I was frequently told stories of times in the past when powerful men kidnapped other men's wives and killed those husbands who could not defend themselves. Once in their possession, they adorned their beautiful acquisitions with treasures of gold. Women, as the 'weak sex', were not only vulnerable to the aggressive, self-righteous, uncontrolled desires of men, but also to their own desire. According to the ideology, Islam brought an end to these barbaric times and helped to establish harmony and solidarity between the Futanke that most people would not want to replace with anything else in the world. Excision is not only a social norm defended by men and women, it also assures a certain level of safety and maintenance of what is seen as social order and law, as I will show in this chapter.

The quote at the beginning refers to key themes of the chapter: control of desire, conceptions of law and order as well as the untamed mayhem and lack of civilisation that would perhaps exist if the Prophet had not put forward his recommendations. Since Hosken's radical proposition that 'female sexual mutilations' are a result of male control over women and 'a systematic surgical attack on the essence of our female sexual being'<sup>76</sup> (Hosken 1982), which caused outrage among female African intellectuals (Amadiume 1987; Ahmadu 2000), the ways in which excision is linked to the control of desire in local discourse has hardly been addressed in anthropological analysis (see absence of in-depth discussion in major references on FGC: Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2000, 2007; Nnaemeka 2005).

Janice Boddy, who undertook her fieldwork in Sudan around the same time as Hosken, discussed discourses on women as 'weak, morally inferior beings, oversexed and inherently inclined to wantonness, devoted to sensuality' (Boddy 1989: 53) As with Rosen's (1978) and Dwyer's (1978) descriptions of gender differences in Morocco, Boddy's Hofriyati stipulate that women and men differ in their amounts of animal force (*nafs*), which includes lust, emotions and desires as well as their ability to reason and control emotions and behave in socially appropriate ways (*'agl*) (Boddy 1989: 53). Due to women's lack of ability to exercise conscious restraint, circumcision is used to curb and socialise their sexual desires so that they do not bring irreparable shame to their family through misbehaviour. Boddy suggested, however, that this is an essentially masculine point of view. I found that a lot of my male interlocutors took a similar stance on women's capacity to constrain their emotions. However, in this chapter I show that mothers were very concerned with the risk of undesired pregnancy before marriage for their daughters and the consequential shame. Hence women were also strong advocates and perpetrators of the idea that excision helps to control desire.

I suggest that rather than thinking of excision in terms of male domination over women and a symptom of patriarchal society, we need to consider the complex

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<sup>76</sup> 'These operations are a systematic surgical attack on the essence of our female sexual being and on the vitality and superiority of the female personhood which men seek to control at any price – even the price of our lives' (Hosken 1982: 47); also: 'In order to effectively deal with the abolition of these mutilations, it is necessary to recognise that we are concerned here with a basic power issue: the issue of control by all males over all females – or the ordering of society along patriarchal lines' (Hosken 1982: 48).

sociality of obligations and mutual expectations in the gendered spaces of the household as well as conceptions of ‘civilisation’ (Simmel 1997; Strathern 1990; Elias 1997) in order to make different perspectives on excision intelligible.

I argue that, for women, excision creates the physical foundations for moral personhood as it prepares a girl for the responsibilities she will have to take on as a mature woman and mother. Besides gender socialisation, excision makes a woman ‘Futanke’ in local discourses – it renders her socially and morally appropriate in ways that mark the Futanke’s sense of ethnic superiority.

In the first section I introduce ‘the making’ of the physical foundations for female personhood and show how women consider that moral personhood and control of desire are related to the practice of excision. In section 5.2 we will see how ‘desirable womanhood’ develops in childhood and how female and male traits differ from those of other societies whose members are not perceived as well brought up and accomplished. This section has two elements. First, I show how obligations of reciprocity are constituted and responsibility develops throughout childhood and adulthood. Second, I look at the gendered spaces of men and women and what mutual expectations they have of one another in their domains of responsibility. I discuss how women’s sexual behaviour and reproductive capacity can lead to loss of honour and hence to shame and other consequences. In the last section of this chapter, I come back to the control of desire as an aspect of ‘civilisation’ suggesting moral superiority over other ethnic groups whom the Futanke perceive as less able to control their physical needs than the Futanke.

### **5.1 The control of desire and the physical foundations for moral personhood**

The control of sexuality has been discussed in a body of literature on honour and shame and the role of women’s behaviour in boundary marking (Pitt-Rivers 1965; Caplan 1987; Goddard 1987). Pitt-Rivers argued that honourable behaviour for men and women differed. Whereas a man must defend his own and his family’s honour, women must preserve their purity (see Goddard 1987: 167). Men’s relationship to

honour is therefore active whereas women's is passive (Pitt-Rivers 1965: 45). Pitt-Rivers's view implies men's control over resources and women's submissive compliance with their standards of honour and reputation. Davis (1977) challenged Pitt-Rivers's view by suggesting that women's role in the preservation of honour is not just passive. Davis argued that they have an active role in upholding the family honour by looking after their husbands and defending their interests (Davis 1977, in Goddard 1987: 198). Despite Davis's challenge it seems that much of the 1980s literature on control of sexuality and honour somewhat victimises women in their role as preservers of their group's reputation, rather than leading to a deeper understanding of how power and forms of resistance (Abu-Lughod 1999, 2008) are negotiated.

Some anthropologists have looked at how different groups maintain their identity through strict rules and recommendations in everyday practices. Okeley (1983), for example, looked at Gypsy Travellers' conceptions of purity and pollution, and how they protect themselves from other non-gypsies who are perceived as threatening their purity. Goddard (1987) was concerned with women and honour in Italy. She argued that their role as boundary markers and carriers of group identity requires their sexuality to be controlled. Due to their capacity to bear children they are a potential menace to the group they belong to – giving birth to the wrong kinds of children because of sexual encounters with the wrong kinds of men threatens the 'purity' of the group (Goddard 1987: 190).

The interest in honour and shame and the role of women as 'guardians of race' (Gupta 2002) or preservers of ethnic identity continued to be explored in the literature in the 1990s and 2000s. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) were interested in the delineation of the boundaries of 'the state', 'the nation' and 'civil society', not as reified entities but as processes in which women play a key role as 'biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities' and 'transmitters of culture' (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989: 7). The centrality of gender in identity politics, be it fundamentalist, racial or nationalist, has been explored further by Kandiyoti (1991), Hawley (1994), Moghadam (1994) and Wilson and Frederiksen (1995). This body of literature is concerned with ideas around keeping ethnic boundaries intact and demarcating the juncture between internal cohesion and external difference. Constructions of the 'other' supply protective anxieties, be it with regard to numbers – fear around one's

own population declining – or being overrun by ‘the other’ who is more sexually charged and more fertile. For many, anxieties around declining populations are related to the loss of ‘culture’ and the extinction of ‘race’.

Few of my informants saw themselves as victims of male control. On the contrary, even when men asked the women in their families to stop practising, they often continued, instead of passively obeying their male relatives’ wishes. I suggest that it is far more inspiring and productive to consider how local categories are naturalised as god-given and represent the basis for gender socialisation (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995).

### 5.1.1 Controlling desire

In Pulaar, desire for something or someone is expressed in different ways. The verb *yidde* means to want/to love. *Mbada yidmaa* – ‘I love you’ or ‘I want you’ is, however, rarely said between couples in love – there are more subtle ways of expressing one’s desire through gestures or by doing things for each other. For example, a woman might cook a meal or dress in a particular way for her husband, which arouses his desire for her. Men show their love or desire by giving a woman presents.

As far as physical desire or sexual excitement is concerned, men and women express their feelings differently – according to my interlocutors between the age of 20 and early 40s from rural Fouta. A man may express his desire to sleep with a woman like this: *mbada yidi yettaade ma* which figuratively means ‘I want you/ I desire you’, but literally ‘I want to arrive at you/with you’. Some, however, would consider this too direct. A woman would never voice her desire to sleep with a man so explicitly. It would be vulgar to do so and there are more subtle ways of showing one’s desire through gestures or looks. I was told that if a woman does verbally express sexual desire for a man it could be with the words ‘*Mi rokkiima hoore am*’ – ‘I give myself to you’ or ‘*wad ko welmaa e am*’ – ‘Do what you like with me’ or ‘*Kala ko woni e am hannde oo ko aan jeyi*’ – ‘All that I am belongs to you today’. Other words for sexual

desire regardless of gender do not exist in Pulaar in Fouta Toro. As we can see, men actively want/desire, whereas women submit to men and give themselves away, in words or speech at least.

For the Futanke, control of the body is essential to social etiquette. This is most explicit in humour, where ‘lack of (physical) control’ (*jogaade hoore mum*) is often subject to jokes and laughter – for example in common jokes about lack of control during mealtimes (*fonngi* or *saali*). When people get together for a meal and someone notices in the course of the meal that a member of the family is not present around the bowl or on the compound and asks ‘Where is so and so?’, everyone laughs and says that the speaker was so hungry that they did not notice that the person was not there at the beginning of the meal and are only remembering them now that their stomach is beginning to fill up. Forgetting the other at mealtimes is a sign of weakness because the hunger was greater than the care for the other and represents lack of honour on a small scale, which, in everyday life, translates into jokes about lack of control. In a similar way, farting is against social etiquette, and is a popular theme in joking relationships (Smith 2006; Launay 2006; Galvan 2006). ‘Joking cousins’ (*dendîraabe*) take pleasure in accusing each other of being bean-eaters. It is asserted that one’s own clan never eats beans because ‘bean-eaters smell and you cannot enter their rooms’. Farting is a sign of weakness. In fact, black-eye beans (*ñebbe*) are a major element of everyone’s diet and, due to the relative scarcity of food, no one can refuse to eat beans.

The importance of self-control (*jogaade hoore mum*) is reflected in other spheres of everyday life as well. For example, I was told that it was a sign of weakness to ask for food and one should wait until it is offered or served. Even a husband who incessantly asks his wife when lunch will be ready displays a lack of control. His behaviour elicits laughter and humiliating comments. In a similar way, a man who is in love with a woman is sometimes teased by his age-mates: ‘Go and wash, go and practise ablutions, you can’t control yourself’ – ‘*Yah lootoyo a roŋkii jogaade hoore ma*’. What they are stressing is the need to be pure for prayer after being sexually aroused to the extent of ‘wetting oneself’ (see also chapter 6). These jokes point to a social code of honour and humiliation that treasures the ability to control desires and

physical needs in general. In fact, endurance and self-discipline (*muñal*), intelligence and forethought (*hakkille*), shame or modesty (*gacce*) and bravery or courage (*tinnaade /cagataagal*) are all part of the *Pulaaku* (Riesman 1974; Stenning 1959) code of honour for which the Fulani are famous (as noted in chapter 3).

Foucault (1975) argues that discipline in 18th- and 19th-century Europe produced docile bodies. On the one hand, discipline increases the forces of the body by turning the body's power into 'aptitude', 'a 'capacity' which it seeks to increase. On the other hand, it reverses the course of energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjugation.' (Foucault 1975: 138) With regard to Fouta Toro, being in control of one's body, being disciplined and being able to constrain one's physical needs is seen as an asset in which the Futanke take pride. A person who can control himself is powerful, superior, aware of a social ideal and conforming to it. Although, as Foucault suggests, discipline of the body implies strict subjugation to social order, it is experienced as empowering. For Foucault (1975), power is not 'possessed' by the dominant classes, nor is it a privilege acquired or preserved by them:

but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the positions of those who are dominated [...] this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure on them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (1975: 26–27)

With reference to Foucault (1975) I argue that the ability to control desire should not be attributed to a particular social group or gender in Futanke society but seen as a characteristic of 'civilisation', refined social conduct and moral personhood among all strata of society. Control of desire is a *doxa*, the experience by which 'the natural and social world appears as self-evident' (Bourdieu 1977: 164).

### 5.1.2 The control of desire and sexual behaviour

The greatest fear with regard to not cutting one's daughters that has been expressed to me was that an un-excised girl might not be able to control her sexual desire when she reached a certain age. This might tempt her to sleep with a man before marriage. In Pulaar it was said '*o waawa fadde gorko makko*' – 'she cannot wait for her husband' or '*o waawa jogaade hoore makko*' – 'she cannot control herself'. In French people tended to use the expression '*elle ne peut pas controller ces pulsions sexuelles*' – 'she cannot control her sex-drive'. Considering that virginity upon marriage is extremely important to the Futanke, and a family's honour and social standing are contingent upon their daughters' virginity, this is seen as a serious threat.

In Seedo Sebbe, a village where the majority of women had decided to stop practising excision, I interviewed a middle-aged woman called Juulde Mbaye, who was opposed to a collective 'abandonment' of the practice. Even though the option of not practising had become the subject of open discussion between families, Juulde, like many other women, considered excision important for the following reasons:

If a girl is not excised, her clitoris will continue growing, like the girl's body is growing as well and that will weaken the rest of her apparatus. [...] When an excised girl's husband is not there, she will not look for another man to sleep with. If the clitoris is not cut, the girl will not be able to rest still. She will not be able to sit and wait for her husband. We are not for the abandonment of excision. It is a good thing.

Since the desertification of the 1970s, it has become increasingly difficult for people to live from subsistence farming and herding. Men search for paid labour in urban areas and abroad where they hope to be paid higher salaries. Many women I met had husbands working in Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Central Africa, Gabon, as well as European countries and the US.<sup>77</sup> Juulde emphasises the importance of two things with regard to excision: first, a girl cannot wait for her husband while he is away working.

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<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately the 2002 Census did not adequately display emigration figures (also see chapter 3).

Second, she brings up the notion of the ‘weakening of the girl’s apparatus’. I frequently came across this belief in comments suggesting that an excised girl is physically stronger – her life force goes into her physical and moral strength, turning the body’s power into ‘aptitude’ (Foucault 1975) as a socially appropriate woman who performs her duties in the household well, rather than the development of her sex organs and sexual desire, which could potentially become dangerous. It could also be argued that Juulde is using ‘the weakening of the apparatus’ in a metaphoric sense to describe an un-excised girl’s incapacity to control herself, which signifies physical, mental and moral weakness. The image of an un-excised girl not being able to ‘sit still’ was also frequently used. It conveys the idea that she is waiting restlessly for her husband to satisfy her sexual desire and lacks the patience (*muñal*) an excised girl possesses.

Similar images of a girl being tempted to commit adultery when her husband is away were expressed to me by Hawa, a close female informant of mine in Bito:

Excision is practised when girls are babies. It is practised so that when the girl has grown up, if her husband needs to emigrate she will be able to wait for him. She will be able to go without sleeping with a man for a long time.

Another lady explained the importance of the practice to me in a village where many other women had abandoned it:

G: We have practised excision since the generations of our grandmothers. If you hear people say that it is a practice that needs to be done, it is because if a woman’s husband travels to France or to the US she cannot stay without a man for more than two months. An excised woman can wait for her husband for years.

S: Aren’t there excised women who look for men as well?

G: Yes there are but without excision it would be worse.

(Gedda Sy, in Semme)

In both comments, excision is seen to help women to wait for their husbands and to control their sexual desire. These women's views are those of mothers who want their daughters to be socially successful in a society where the domestic sphere is associated with women as reproducers while men are charged with the responsibility of producing income to support their families. The spheres of production and reproduction are strongly gendered. But even beyond social recognition through marriage to a man who is 'successful', it makes mothers proud and happy to see that their daughters are able to contain their desires and devote their lives to their husbands, in-laws and children.

To what extent can these women's views be seen as a result of male oppression over women as Hosken (1982) suggested? Strathern (1988: 26) stipulates that feminism's theoretical concerns focus upon the extent to which women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex. As the practice of female circumcision has been under sharp scrutiny from feminist scholars who suggest that it is a result of inequality in gender relations, I briefly assess how my ethnographic data corresponds to some feminist academic notions of inequality and gender relations.

## **5.2 Gender differences and feminist analyses**

Kandiyoti (1998) discusses to what extent perceptions of personal interest and concern for family welfare help sustain 'traditional inequalities' as put forward by Sen (1990). Sen suggests that the absence of protest and lack of questioning of inequality are not evidence of their absence. Instead, he argues, acute inequalities often survive precisely by making allies of the deprived; the underdog, accepting the legitimacy of unequal order, becomes its implicit accomplice (Sen 1990: 126 in Kandiyoti 1998: 139).

Kandiyoti discusses Agarwal's (1994) disagreement with Sen's vision of inequality as tied to 'false consciousness'. Agarwal (1994) favours a position that presents subordinates as conscious actors generally capable of penetrating the ideological fabric woven by the privileged (Kandiyoti 1998: 139). Agarwal (1994) argues that it

is the material impossibility of fulfilling needs that stands in the way of alleviating disadvantage. She suggests that, instead of sharpening women's sense of self-interest, an improvement in the ability to pursue that interest by strengthening their bargaining power should be sought (Agarwal 1994: 54).

Kandiyoti (2002) further looks at Apffel-Marglin and Simon's (1994) stance on inequality. They go so far as to suggest that Sen's argument about lack of awareness of personal interest and great concern with family welfare (Sen 1990: 126) exemplifies the imposition of the women-in-development discourse, which Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994) call the 'direct heir of Victorian colonial feminism' (quoted in Kandiyoti 2002: 139). What is at stake is not degrees of consciousness about self-interest but a radically different sense of selfhood expressed through a fundamentally different set of values and priorities (Kandiyoti 1998: 140).

Apffel-Marglin and Simon's (1994) stance echoes African feminist critiques of what they called 'White Western Feminism', the project of middle-class educated women, whose mission it was to expose sexism in public life and to alter the male bias in scholarly work and popular culture (di Leonardo 1991: 2). What 'African feminists' reacted to most strongly were the racist and ethnocentric assumptions of feminist academic writing on motherhood, marriage and sexual practices (Amadiume 1987). Yanagisako and Delaney (1995) suggest that:

Assimilating "them" to "us" can do violence to what people cherish that is distinct about themselves. [...] The superficial assessments of similarities in the roles and sentiments of women in different societies can lead to the naïve conclusion – rampant in U.S. white feminist scholarship in the 1970s – that all women can readily comprehend each other's suffering, sorrows and joys. In short, they can lead to patronizing representations of other women as 'ourselves unclothed' (Rosaldo 1980). (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 16)

With reference to my data on why excision and control of desire were perceived to be necessary, most women did not see themselves as seriously disadvantaged because their desire had been 'controlled'. On the contrary, the ability to control desire through excision was perceived as an asset, something that enabled them to behave in a way that they were proud of and perceived as honourable. From a feminist perspective that focuses on the manner in which certain structures are perpetuated to

the advantage of men (Strathern 1988: 26), it is possible to argue that gender inequalities in Fouta Toro exist because of the material impossibility of women acting in their personal interest due to lack of bargaining power (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998). For local women, however, such notions of 'inequality' did not make sense. Rather, they regarded gender roles as complementary and that each sex had a heavy burden to carry due to the responsibilities they were expected to take on.

Yanagisako and Delaney (1995) suggest that an analysis of sex and gender requires understanding how certain categories are naturalised in a society. They refer to Schneider's (1968) example on Yap beliefs in procreation. For Schneider (1968), as for most Euro-Americans, coitus and pregnancy were unquestionably linked – whereas for his Yap informants they were not. The explanations they put forward were that some promiscuous women remained childless and other women, who were considered ugly and with whom no man would think of engaging in sexual relations, did have children (Schneider 1968: 127, in Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 7). 'So thoroughly has the process of naturalizing sex and reproduction been accomplished that it is difficult for a Westerner to realize this has not always been the case' (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 7). Before the term 'reproduction' came to be used in the 19th century, the process of coming into being was referred to in one of three ways: procreation, begetting or bearing – highlighting what were conceived to be the male and female roles in the process (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 7).

Rather than equating Futanke women's and men's wishes to control sexual desire with Western notions of gender equality and satisfaction of needs (Sen 1990; Agarwal 1994; Kandiyoti 1998; Apffel-Marglin and Simon 1994), I prefer approaches that explore how local categories are contextualised and associated. For example, Yanagisako and Delaney, who argue that:

Cultural domains are culturally specific, but they usually come with claims of universality, which are part and parcel of their seeming to be given-in-nature and /or god-given. The apparent logic and naturalness of these domains is a consequence of the way they are made real through the institutional arrangements and discourses people encounter in everyday life. (1995:12 )

Yanagisako and Delaney (1995) suggest that unlike explicit ideologies, which can be traced to people with particular social position, cultural domains seem to emerge from each person's own experiences. The separateness of domains is encountered directly by people whose lives are organized along institutional fault lines that are themselves the products of hegemonic cultural distinctions. As a consequence, religion seems to be about god rather than about gender; the family seems to be about reproduction and childbearing rather than about gender and religion (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 12).

In Fouta Toro notions of desire, sexuality and satisfaction are expressed through idioms of kinship and the honour of the family. We shall explore in further detail how kinship is not merely added to an abstract notion of bounded individuality but kin relations are perceived as an intrinsic part of the self (Carsten 2004: 107). Doing things for other members within one's group (status group, clan or ethnicity) according to social expectations and pre-set patterns of agency are intrinsically linked in local notions of personhood and assure a sense of self-value and pride. I argue that social identity (ethnicity, caste, clan group) cannot be conceptually separated from individual desires and the will to control one's physical needs.

### **5.3 Creating the physical foundations for moral personhood**

When women explained the importance of excision to me metaphors were used to emphasise the importance of cutting the girl when she is young 'to diminish the force and size' of the clitoris (*sedere*):

Before a field is seeded, it needs to be worked on and prepared to make the harvest a good one.

This metaphor has various connotations. It could be argued that she is speaking of the importance of excision for women's fertility and producing good children.<sup>78</sup> More

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<sup>78</sup> Also see Hernlund on the origin of the word for female circumcision in Mandinke, *nyiaka* – which is a contraction of *nyiyama* (grass or weed) and *kaa* (to cut clean). The excised genitals resemble farmland that must be weeded and cleared according to people's conceptions, as Hernlund points out (2000:

important, however is the idea that a girl cut young can be physically prepared for her responsibilities in the household and community. Like a field that, if tilled, weeded and looked after, will produce good crops, a girl who is cut when she is young will not develop the threatening comportment an un-excised girl is imagined to develop. With regard to excision preventing a woman from behaving inappropriately, Ramata Niane, the mid-wife and exciser of Mboumba, used the following metaphor:

It's like a tree, you know, that you have seeded. If you cut it when it is small, is it going to grow? It is going to die.

This metaphor suggests that a girl who is cut when she is young will not develop the desires of one who is not cut. In addition to the frightening image that one's daughters might turn into sexually insatiable beings who risk damaging the family honour for their personal gratification, pregnancy before marriage causes sadness and social loss (see end of chapter). Furthermore, women expressed other fears and concerns to me related to aesthetics, childbirth and purity (see chapter 6).

Gendered sociality is based on a conception of personhood according to which reciprocity between the sexes is an a priori presumption (Strathern 1988). As among Strathern's Eastern Highlanders, the person in Fouta is not self-evidently 'an individual' who, as in 'Western' formulations, derives integrity from his/her position as prior to society (Strathern 1988: 93). Instead a person defines him or herself through what they do for others. To elucidate how this takes place, I discuss how boys and girls are socialised into the gendered spaces and relations of reciprocity. What people understand as 'reciprocity' is associated with a particular comportment and duties towards the elders in the community. To locals the obedience necessary to fulfil one's duties towards others requires the ability to control one's personal desires and interests for the common good of the family/community.

### **5.3.1 Gender socialisation**

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238). Bledsoe (1984) and Ahmadu (2005, 2009) argue that clitoridectomy during ritual initiation is thought to 'invest' women with fertility (Bledsoe 1984: 457).

In Fouta a person is likely to be identified by who they are related to and how well they fulfil their duties towards the family. Most of my female informants did not know how their husbands and sons or fathers actually earned their money and, unless they were influential in local politics or a famous religious cleric, men got little recognition for what they actually ‘did’ in life. To most people what was far more important was how well a man supported his family, how generous he was towards the community, and who his children married. A person’s wish to strive for the realisation of personal pursuits and passions was considered selfish if they did not serve the common good of the family.<sup>79</sup>

A person, whether a child or young adult, who refuses to serve others they have obligations towards based on age or rank, is considered badly educated. There is a customary rule in Fouta that the younger ones always have to give way to and serve the older ones. This applies to all ages. I was told that even if a 65-year-old asks a 60-year-old for a favour which requires them to walk to the other side of the village on an errand, they cannot refuse without appearing extremely impolite. Even if they are physically not capable of doing it themselves, it is their responsibility to delegate to someone else and make sure the task gets done. If the task is not done suitably it reflects badly on their honour and reputation. The person is at risk of being considered unreliable, disobedient or impolite.

Children are taught from a young age how to serve elders and perform certain tasks in the household. Boys and girls below the age of 5 are often asked to run errands for the elders<sup>80</sup> without gender distinction. Besides greeting correctly, one of the first things a child learns from the time they can walk is how to bring things from one person to another. Although this is initially only a game, as soon as children understand ‘give’, ‘take’ and ‘bring to’, they are asked to give and bring things to adults such as pots of water or empty bowls etc. If they refuse, they are either considered impolite or as not yet having reached a certain stage of development. The jobs young children are asked to do are never very difficult but the challenge lies in doing them properly. When, for example, children lose coins in the sand on the way to the shop or bring back the

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<sup>79</sup> Mauss (1985) discusses conceptions of personhood and ‘the self’ as developing differently in different societies. Morris (1985, 1991) argues that the idea of the development of ‘the self’ as socially separate from others is rooted in humanistic philosophical ideas of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

<sup>80</sup> By ‘elder’ I mean an older person (*mawbê*), not necessarily blood relative.

wrong things they are often disciplined, sometimes through beating. If they have performed the task correctly, their achievement is merely acknowledged but not necessarily rewarded; it is considered their duty to do these things. Toddlers and young children who do not understand or perform the 'give, take, bring to' game properly are often compared to older children who do understand. A child who follows these orders is considered 'cleverer' than one who does not.

This understanding also relates to schoolwork and obedience at home. In the family with whom I spent a large amount of time in Mboumba, there were a few girls between the ages of 5 and 10. One of the girls, Nioo, who was about 5 and did not yet go to school, loved playing around at home and doing things for the elders. She would try to sweep the ground and help the women in the kitchen, and keenly obeyed when someone gave her a job to do. When she was called to go on an errand she did not get distracted by play and it was well known that she transmitted messages correctly. For example, when members of the family spent the mornings in other areas of the village, she would be asked to call them home for lunch and she always gave the message to the right person. Mariama, another girl in the same household, who was about 7 and very good at school, was considered a little slow because she did not manage to do some of the basic household chores properly and often gave messages incorrectly or to the wrong person. Women in the household would say about these two children 'Nioo [the little one] is clever, she obeys and understands when you give her jobs, whereas Mariama does not. She is not so clever.'

I noticed the importance of such obedience in well-brought-up children all over Fouta, not just on the Ile Amorphile, but, interestingly, not amongst Wolof families in Dakar. Whereas in Fouta every child has to greet and serve a guest and obey the elders' instructions as far as they are capable, children in Wolof families in Dakar often do not greet and they often refuse to help or serve strangers even if asked to. To a Futanke, this behaviour is a sign of being badly brought up and extremely rude.

One day a French girl about 4 years old came to spend the morning with me and my friend in Mboumba. She had grown up in France but her mother was from Fouta. I spoke to her in French, the language with which she was more familiar than Pulaar. My male friend gave her a coin to get us some matches from the shop to heat up some

hot water. The girl refused. He asked her again to go, as it is unusual for an adult to go to the shop if there is a younger person capable of doing so. I told him that she had not grown up in this society and that she would not understand these orders. When she heard me say that, she took the coin and went to the shop which was just around the corner. We waited and waited. Half an hour later she came back with cigarettes instead. My friend said to her: ‘I told you to bring matches and you brought cigarettes? Why is that? That does not make sense.’ Instead of returning the cigarettes for matches as he ordered her to do, she refused and said that it was not her fault, she asked for matches but the shop-keeper gave her cigarettes. From my friend’s point of view the child was extremely impolite because she argued back instead of obeying and refused to do as she was told. From my point of view it could not be assumed that such a small child who had not grown up learning to follow orders from the elders and to whom everything was foreign could be expected to understand what she was expected to do. My friend told me later on that he witnessed a conversation between the mother and the girl, where they were discussing why she had been ‘naughty’ on various occasions. For my friend it was remarkable that there was a dialogue between them instead of the elder just telling the child what to do, as is common in Fouta.

Teaching children to serve and obey elders from a young age makes them aware of their responsibilities (also see chapter 3 on obligations between *banndiraabe* and *dendiraabe*). This arrangement is experienced as ‘solidarity’ (*jokkere endam*)<sup>81</sup> by many: in the same way you have obligations towards others, you can rely on help from others who have obligations towards you in times of difficulty. Whereas someone who has grown up in northern Europe, like myself, would consider it their own responsibility to carry heavy luggage, a Futanke would not hesitate to whistle the boys in the neighbourhood together to carry the luggage to wherever it needs to go, even if a 15-minute walk is involved. Instead of seeing this as a burden, the children enjoy tackling challenging tasks because of the recognition they receive. To make the importance of ‘solidarity’ and obeying the elders explicit, I was told a story of a boy who caught a big fish in the river and was on his way home full of pride to show his parents. On the way, an elder saw the boy with the fish and asked the boy to hand it over to him. The boy could not refuse, as he knew that the old man was of his

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<sup>81</sup> *Jokkere* means ‘connecting’, *endam* means ‘relation’ but also ‘breast’.

grandfather's age group – he was one of his 'fathers'. After handing over the fish, the boy ran home crying. When his father found out why the boy was upset, he became angry and scolded him. It was the boy's duty to hand things over to the elders if they claimed them. Instead of crying, he should have felt proud that he had been able to give something to the elder.

Instead of pursuing personal interests, recognition and respect are received by acting in the interest of the community and by creating and successfully maintaining networks of solidarity between people. Loyalty and respect are achieved through fulfilling responsibilities towards elders and, in addition, children become socially aware and are socialised into the gendered spaces of the household and their duties as a boy or a girl. They learn, from a very young age, what their duties toward their male and female elders are and how to meet expectations.

### **5.3.2 Becoming a woman - girls' duties in the household**

Girls learn to perform and take over certain responsibilities in the household until they are considered marriageable. As soon as girls reach a certain level of maturity, little time is spent playing but I noticed that they take pleasure in participating more and more in the activities of the household. Initially some of the tasks girls try to perform, such as fetching water or searching for firewood, seemed dangerous to me. However, girls pride themselves on trying as they are then taken more seriously – it shows that they are becoming adults and will soon be marriageable. In the family I stayed with in Bito, women and their daughters had to perform extremely hard physical work in the household, according to my perception, because the family was large and there was no running water, electricity or gas for cooking. One of the girls, Kadia Sy, was 10 years old, lean and strong, and took on several duties to help her mother who was pregnant with her ninth child. One day Kadia asked me to help her lift a heavy bucket of water up on her head. I told her off for trying to lift such a heavy weight; her body was still growing, I reasoned and she could damage her back. Kadia would not listen and half a year later she had become one of the main water carriers. Rather than trying to avoid certain tasks, a clever and ambitious girl quickly learns and understands what

needs to be done. In this way she builds up respect in the community and comes to be seen as a good catch, which increases her chances of finding a good husband.

A girl is not considered marriageable until she demonstrates that she can run the household independently and perform all the duties a wife has to perform. This includes sweeping the compound in the morning, setting the fire alight to heat water for breakfast, fetching water, preparing lunch. She must demonstrate that she can look after small children responsibly and treat guests (*hobbe*) with hospitality and respect. At times I witnessed discussions amongst women wondering whether a girl was marriageable or not and commenting on how she performed household chores independently. My friend Polel in Bito, who was 15 years old, desperately wanted to get married. Her parents and other women, however, considered that she was not yet mature enough to run a household by herself in a respectable fashion. Although she performed all the household tasks well and was reliable, she was very boisterous and rebellious, which is not desirable in a newly married woman.

When a girl marries she is fully in charge of her husband's household and has to obey her mother-in-law. She has years of hard work ahead of her until her own children are old enough to help with the chores. Her views will finally be heard and her wishes executed by others when her sons bring daughters-in-law into the family who then take over the chores and serve her.

### **5.3.3 Becoming a man, becoming a breadwinner: 'It is better to go on until death than to sit down in shame'**

For very young boys and girls the chores are the same. However, in the same way that girls around the age of 8 participate more actively in housework, boys are charged with responsibilities outside the compound, to run errands that are considered too risky or unsuitable for girls, such as fetching something from another village that requires them to walk for hours or running errands at night-time. In my host family in Bito there was a boy called Amadou who was 14 years old and went to secondary school in Juude about 8km away. He had a very old broken bike for a while, which he spent a great deal of time repairing and often ended up walking to school instead. The

journey was long and tiring and he often did not eat anything all day. In addition he was routinely asked to pick things up from Dounyel or Cascas 8–12km away, which also required him to go for a long time without food. If he did not get the jobs done because of tiredness or schoolwork, he would get into serious trouble as the elders relied on him to perform jobs that required responsibility, like carrying money or delivering important documents. He reasoned that, although the girls had to help with the household, at least they got their meals regularly and did not have to walk for long periods during the hottest hours of the day.

I also witnessed that if a roof needed to be repaired or scorpions killed, the boys would be called. Many boys were asked to accompany herds and search for livestock that escaped or got lost. *Subalbe* boys also practise their fishing skills. Following livestock and fishing involve risks of encountering potentially dangerous wildlife such as snakes, crocodiles and hippos.<sup>82</sup> Boys' tasks therefore often require bravery.<sup>83</sup>

In terms of formal education, boys would also be encouraged to go to Koranic or state schools, whereas many parents would arrange for girls to leave school to stay at home once they reached puberty. This was because their help was required in the household and because state school was seen as potentially corrupting girls' morals and virtues. A girl learns what she needs to know in life on the compound instead of at school, whereas a boy may benefit from learning things that will help him to get a better job than farming. Some uneducated men regret that their chances of employment are compromised by their lack of literacy that would qualify them for well-paid jobs in urban areas.

A young man is not considered a 'responsible' adult until he marries and has a family to support. Furthermore, to be considered an honourable, important and respected man (*jontaado*) he needs to earn a good salary and be able to show his success by

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<sup>82</sup> Although there are no longer any crocodiles in the river today, there are many stories of brave fishermen and their successful defeat of the beasts of the river (*mbaroodi*). These stories point to the idea that these are dangerous places.

<sup>83</sup> Many boys wanted me to acknowledge their bravery by taking photos of them undertaking dangerous activities like standing on top of the roof, whereas girls often wanted their pictures taken in their most beautiful clothes or when their hair was beautifully plaited.

supporting as many members of the family and the community<sup>84</sup> as possible. To become someone whose opinion carries weight in the village community, he either needs to be a scholar of the Koran or earn a good salary and impress locals with his generosity and 'kindness'. It is acceptable for him to stay away for months or even years to earn money; however, he cannot come back into the heart of the family if he has no money to bring home.

To take an informant of mine as an example, Hamidou Niang had been working for a local NGO for years. He started off as a simple teacher in the literacy programme of an NGO, but, as he was a very ambitious man and a hard worker, he managed to work his way up and became one of the regional managers of the NGO's programme in Kaolack, the centre of Senegal about 1000km (by road) away from his home village of Aram. With promotions and increases in salary over the last couple of years, he has gained more and more consideration and respectability at home. His wife and fiancée both lived in his mother's compound and looked after the household and his children. Because of the distance, he could rarely go back, although he missed them dearly. In addition to the distance, the more respect he gained the less acceptable it was for him to go back if he did not have enough money to make his return an honourable one. At the end of the Ramadan celebrations in 2007, Hamidou could not go back to Aram despite the fact that he was incredibly lonely, homesick and tired and had time off because it was a religious holiday. He had not managed to save enough money to distribute amongst the family and other relatives he had obligations towards. A return with empty hands would have been dishonourable. '*Yahde haa maaya buri joodaade haa hoye*', he said, 'It is better to go on until death than to sit down in shame.'

Hamidou's case was not exceptional. Most men who worked for local NGOs or the council and were beginning to be highly respected could not return home just for one night whilst they were 'away working' if they had nothing to take back to the family. Even if they were in the area, it was preferable to spend the night in the neighbouring village than to come home with empty hands.

Relationships between men and women therefore are viewed in terms of the man

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<sup>84</sup> In this case the community is the neighbourhood, the village, relatives and acquaintances.

being the breadwinner and providing for the family and the women being in charge of the household. Women know that it is hard for their men not to be able to come home when they are away working. Nevertheless, coming home with empty hands is not honourable. A man who cannot support his family is not a good husband and is undesirable.

#### **5.3.4 Choice of marriage partner and the family**

A girl is not considered mature enough to choose her husband at what is seen as the age of marriage, between 10 and 20 years. Although girls might be infatuated with the idea of being married to someone in particular, marriages between relations or allied groups (e.g. caste, friendship, parent's age group) are considered safer because these marriages are thought to be long-lasting. Choosing a partner in marriage is not a personal issue but concerns the future and respectability of the lineage. Even if husband and wife do not love each other passionately and may not satisfy each other intellectually, sexually or personally, the bond that has been created through marriage, by bringing two families together, ensures that the marriage will be successful rather than relying on passing emotions, which only last for a number of years and are not a solid basis for a household. An arranged marriage between kin groups is thought by many to secure the respectability and honour of the family and the bride. Furthermore, if the daughter-in-law is a relative chosen by the family, it is more likely that she will fit into the household well and that mother and daughter-in-law will get on as there is already a strong bond of affection due to kinship between the two.

This ethos, of being married to the right person, is encapsulated in the proverb *Dewgal bonngal buri innde bonnde* – ‘A bad marriage is better than a bad reputation’. Especially for the older generations, companionship or passion between husband and wife are not considered relevant. What matters is that their children are well brought up. Many women and men do divorce, which brings sadness to the family, and the

women have to return to their parents' compound and secure financial means for themselves.<sup>85</sup>

It is a young man's responsibility to make sure that his mother has enough support in the household from daughters-in-law and grandchildren. As soon as the sisters marry and leave, young men become conscious of the fact that their sisters' housework needs to be replaced by their own wives who will live with their mother in the compound. This also explains why it is hard for young men to refuse their mother's chosen daughter-in-law in marriage.

As a young man, my Pulaar teacher Harouna loved indulging in Pulaar language, grammar and poetry. He personally aspired to marry a woman whom he loved and would stimulate him intellectually. However, his mother had chosen for him his maternal cousin in the neighbouring village in Fonde as a gesture of gratitude towards her father. Harouna refused, and continued following his intellectual passions and interests in Dakar with other Pulaar scholars while his mother was waiting for him to return to take her niece in marriage. After a year, Fatimata, Harouna's mother, grew very upset – believing that her son had abandoned her. Eventually Harouna's older brothers, who had also given in to their mother's choices in marriage, told him to come to his senses. They said that it was his duty to follow his mother's wishes and take her chosen daughter-in-law in marriage. Begrudgingly, Harouna gave in, left his personal pursuits behind and began to earn a living to support the family.

#### **5.4 Dishonour and shame**

Notions of loss of honour and shame for a family are mostly provoked by incidents where it becomes known that a girl engaged in sexual relations before marriage or, for a married woman, sexual relations out of wedlock. For unmarried girls this may become known either through pregnancy before marriage or because a girl is found not to be a virgin upon the wedding night. Both cases are devastating for the girl's family as this brings shame upon them and the girl's reputation is ruined. In most cases pregnancy before marriage means that a girl cannot marry her parents' chosen groom, a respectable young man with whom a union would secure social standing and

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<sup>85</sup> I introduce some divorced women in chapter 8.

tie the families closer together. At such a 'respectable' wedding, the praise singers (griots) would have sung in her honour and praised her lineage and reputation. The praise singer would have reminded the wedding guests of the groom's and the bride's distinguished ancestors and their unforgettable deeds. This would have made both the bride's and the groom's families proud and happy.

If a girl falls pregnant before marriage the degree of dishonour very much depends on who the father of the child is. It is less grave if the father is of the same status group. In that case marriage can be arranged once the child is born. For a noble girl it is extremely shameful if the father is of a lower status group. The worst case scenario is if he belongs to the status group of slaves (*Gallun̄koobe/Maccube*). Not only is marriage between a noble woman (*Dimo*) and a man of skill (*Ñeeño*) unthinkable but the child would be considered of inferior 'pedigree' growing up in a noble household. Parents whose daughters are impregnated by a *Gallun̄ke* find this outrageous.

To make the indignation this might cause explicit, I was given an example in a *Subalbe* village where the population consists to 80% of *Subalbe* and 20% *Gallun̄koobe*. There are no other noble inhabitants. In this village lived a young and extremely attractive *Gallun̄ke* man who was sporty, charming and very popular with the girls. One of the unmarried girls fell pregnant with his child which infuriated the elders. They summoned a meeting to come to an agreement on how *Gallun̄koobe* men who impregnate *Subalbe* girls should pay for their crime. It was decided that a fine of CFA100 000 should be paid to the girl's family in compensation. Many young people in the village ridiculed this regulation because if a slave girl fell pregnant by a nobleman, which frequently happened, it was unthinkable that a compensation payment would even be offered.

I often heard people say that only 15 years ago it was rare to see girls raising illegitimate children in their parents' village. A girl who fell pregnant before marriage had to leave without further ado and never come back. They would flee to a distant relative or acquaintance far away, where no other villagers had acquaintances who could report back on the girl's life. She was forced to bring her child up there and perhaps marry a local man in this area. Families found this very sad as it meant losing

a daughter or sister who was not able to marry her parent's chosen groom.

Nowadays a girl does not have to break off all contacts with the family and vanish forever but having a child before marriage still has consequences. When I returned to Mboumba in January 2008 I found that one of the girls in the family with whom I had spent much of my time was not there. I asked where she was because I missed her – she used to cheer everyone up and make me laugh while she was doing the housework. I was told that she had moved somewhere else. One day we were sitting in front of a boutique and she walked past with a baby tied on her back. Rather than greeting us loudly and warm-heartedly as she would have done a year before, she seemed embarrassed, looked at the ground while shaking our hands and walked on without exchanging much news. I said to my friends that I did not know she had had a baby and that I was happy for her. They replied that she was not married, which was why she had left her father's compound and lived with a relative. Although girls are not shunned for pregnancy before marriage as they used to be, they still bring shame upon themselves and often have to leave their homes.

Rather than having to go through this humiliation some seek other solutions. One of them is a clandestine abortion with a herb cocktail prepared by knowledgeable women. However, no one speaks of this publicly; these women are consulted secretly at night-time because if it is discovered the consequences are socially even more devastating than pregnancy before marriage. Abortion is condemned by religion and by society. There are also known cases of infanticide. I was told of a case that happened in the 1980s, when a dead newborn baby was found in the bush outside a village. The villagers were outraged and tried to find out whose child it was and who left it there. The mother was an unmarried girl who claimed that the baby was already dead when she left it. The case was referred to the police.

The consequences of a girl not being a virgin upon marriage are not so devastating. Nevertheless, if it becomes known to everyone in the village through gossip it does bring shame upon the girl and her family. To prevent this from happening, techniques have been developed by girls, their accomplices and sometimes prospective husbands to pretend that the girl is a virgin. Most families proudly display the blood-stained sheet of the bride the morning after the wedding night and the bride receives visitors

in her bedroom for the rest of the day, displaying CFA10 000 banknotes the groom has attached to the bride's hair to show that he is pleased that he found her a virgin. If the groom knows that his bride is not a virgin but he wants to preserve the family honour, the couple may arrange for the sheets to be stained with the blood of a secretly slaughtered chicken. I have also heard of girls, eager that their grooms believe them to be virgins, placing a bag with animal blood or red liquid inside their vagina that bursts upon penetration.

Even if some grooms do not object to their brides not being virgins, most grooms feel deceived if they only discover this on the wedding night. I have heard on various occasions that most marriages where this happens break up within a year, regardless of what the family think, because of loss of trust by the groom. It is said that he cannot be certain of her not lying to him again and of her not taking more lovers when he is away. A woman's self-restraint and control of sexual desire when her husband is away is crucial to her reputation and his.

Men feel loss of honour when they fail to be taken seriously by the local community due to their own misbehaviour or the misbehaviour of close kin. As I have explained, the more a person helps others and fulfils his or her obligations, the more recognition he or she receives from the community and the more likely he/she is to be considered a respectable, influential person. If a man's behaviour is shameful he loses recognition and is less likely to be consulted when decisions are made by elders or important family members. For some men, being denied a say in communal decisions because of their past misbehaviour or display of weakness is so shameful that it is preferable to move elsewhere.

One way of gaining a bad reputation is by displaying a lack of bravery, for example by avoiding dangerous and problematic situations. If, for example, a young man avoids walking to places by himself in the dark, or refuses to undertake dangerous or tricky jobs, he is regarded as a weakling, which means that he is not sought after by women and becomes a figure of ridicule.

It is also said that a man's sexual behaviour can reflect badly on his reputation and can result in him being considered a threat. For instance, I was told about a man called

Ablaye who was known to have extra-marital relations frequently. On one occasion the solar panels of the water-pump outside his village were stolen and the villagers decided to patrol the village at night-time in order to catch the thieves. Everyone was instructed to stay in their homes unless urgent business required them to leave. Respectable men of the community could still move around if they explained where they were going and for what purpose. However, when patrolling villagers caught Ablaye walking through the village at night-time they did not hesitate to beat him up because he had broken the curfew. Even though Ablaye was not a thief, the village-security did not refrain from punishing him for breaking the agreement because his moral personhood was already compromised. Lack of honour can therefore lead to lack of respect and denial of rights.

Some people, especially close kin, consider it a grave matter if a man has a child before marriage or out of wedlock. However, I knew a few men who had children before marriage and this did not seem to reflect badly on their reputation – they were still considered honourable men. It seemed to be far more shameful if a man's wife conceived a child outside wedlock. It was unthinkable for the real father to recognise the child as his own – the mother's husband had to recognise the child as his own, even if he was not physically present during the period when the child was conceived and born. Such cases bring dishonour and sadness to the husband, the wife and the child, who is not told who its real father is. I was told of a case where a young man resembled his biological father a great deal and was often mistaken for his son, instead of his mother's husband's. This was extremely embarrassing for him as well as his parents.

These examples may serve as justifications for the importance of control of desire and excision. The social consequences of a man having a child out of wedlock do not affect his professional life and long-term respectability to the same extent as women conceiving illegitimate children. Illegitimate children are somewhat less respected and have less status than those born in wedlock. While I was in Bito, two women named their daughters after me in my honour. One of the children was from a respectable Toorodo family, the other was illegitimate. I was encouraged to go and see the legitimate little Sarah more than the illegitimate one. People would avoid mentioning the latter's existence. It seemed that her having been named after me did not count

towards my honour to the same degree as the legitimate Sarah.

We can see that a man's honour can be more easily compromised through women's sexual misconduct than the other way round. A woman's upright behaviour is what keeps Futanke society in order. The woman is the pillar of society, some marabouts told me. As long as her behaviour is exemplary, the honour of the family remains intact. If she does not behave well, however, the consequences of her behaviour affect her husband's as well as her children's and parents' reputations.

### **5.5 Ethnic stereotypes and 'othering' sexual behaviour**

In interviews and conversations about 'control of desire' with people all over Fouta Toro I found that 'Futanke women's' sexual containment and moral virtues were juxtaposed against the sexual behaviour of women of other ethnic groups, who were known not to excise their daughters. In Senegal, Wolof women served as such an example but also women in other countries, such as Ivory Coast, Central Africa and Angola. This view becomes explicit in my informant Hame Sy's views on the control of sexual desire and the Wolof:

*Sarah:* The Wolof for example don't excise and guard their virginity until marriage. Guarding one's virginity until marriage doesn't necessarily depend on excision.

*Hame:* Yes but the Wolof are not considered to be good women. They cannot control their sexual desire and they do not follow the rules of the religion. Have you seen the way they dance? Uhhhh!

*Sarah:* Yes.

*Hame:* The majority of the Peul in Fouta would say that the Wolof are not good people, they don't have honour. Dancing like that in public is not honourable... A Peul would not trust a Wolof because they are not good people. All they do is follow the money. I would never trust a Wolof, they are criminals.

After I challenge the idea that excision controls desire because the Wolof, who do not

excise, hold similar expectations as far as their respectability and sexual containment is concerned, Hame Sy reveals his beliefs on what he thinks are ‘Futanke’ conceptions of this particular ethnic group. He thinks that Wolof women are sexually promiscuous based on the way they dance and that most ‘Futanke’ would ascribe to ‘the Wolof’ in general, characteristics such as corruption, disloyalty and dishonesty. The Wolof’s dancing – by which he meant *Mbalax* as I gathered from subsequent conversations with him – clashes with the moral and social code of behaviour in Fouta Toro, presumably because the dance involves a lot of hip rotation and sexual innuendos.

At the beginning of the chapter I presented some Futanke women’s ideas on the importance of control of desire that showed that un-excised women were thought to be physically incapable of staying faithful to their husbands. In the following we shall see how men express explain the importance of excision:

The Prophet said that circumcision is an Islamic tradition. It is a sunna. Excision is the honour of a woman. I do not agree to abandonment as I have seen the importance of excision. There are more women than men on earth, to every boy born there are three girls [I questioned this fact and was told that in Fouta the women–men ratio is believed to be 3:1]. As far as Islam is concerned, every man can have up to four wives. If every man sufficed with only one woman – there would still be another three women strolling through the streets. They are in need of satisfaction as well. At the moment men emigrate too much, they go away for six or seven years without coming back. A man cannot sexually satisfy a woman. Even you know it [to me, laughing]. A woman who is not excised cannot control her sexuality. Even when she is asleep she thinks of sex. Islam does not want adultery.

*S:* How do you know that un-excised women cannot control their sexuality?

*D:* I went to Ivory Coast and saw some un-excised ethnic groups. Women prostitute themselves over there. Do you think prostitution is a good thing?

(Marabout Diop in Doumnga Lao)

This marabout bases the need for excision on personal experience of living in another un-Islamic African society. For him, Islam and excision assure law and order, which differentiates Fouta Toro from other places where this ‘order’ does not exist and

women are more sexually enticing and promiscuous. Excision helps women control their sexual desires better, which is essential for Islamic life – otherwise there would be chaos and social disarray, as the marabout makes clear by describing women strolling through the streets in search of men to satisfy their desires. Although this might be the norm in other societies, it is abhorrent to him when he considers Fouta Toro. This image of what happens in big cities or among other ethnic groups haunts many Futanke's minds. Similar views were expressed by a man I interviewed in Semme, a village where many women had decided to stop practising excision.

*Oumar:* The practice of excision exists for the fidelity of the woman. Those who want to abandon the practice are corrupt.

*Sarah:* Does excision really increase the fidelity of the woman?

*Oumar:* It diminishes a woman's sexual pleasure during sex so that when her husband is travelling she can patiently wait for her husband. If she is not excised she cannot wait the way she should.

*Sarah:* Are women in countries where excision is not practised less faithful?

*Oumar:* I lived in Angola for a few years and whilst I was working there I realised that women in other African countries search for men and for sex more than here in Fouta. In central Africa as well I had conversations with women who cannot wait for more than six months for their husbands. During discussions with these women I realised that they were amazed that women in Fouta have to go for six years without seeing their husbands. They could not understand how a woman could stay without sex for that long. This is why we are for excision. Excised women can wait for their husbands the way they should.

Again, experiences whilst travelling made Oumar believe that women in societies where excision is not practised are different. He had also formed a negative image of what Futanke society would be like if women were not excised. In both examples we get a sense not just of men's fears of their wives being unfaithful when they emigrate but also their perception of 'Futanke' moral superiority and 'civilisation' in contrast to other ethnic groups.

In these discourses around the benefits of excision, Futanke women are put on a

pedestal in terms of their moral superiority and capacity for controlling themselves in contrast to Wolof women, for example, whose dances are perceived as more sexually enticing and erotic. Excision thus renders a woman ‘Futanke’ – a *Fulbe* woman of Fouta Toro with the virtues and values embraced by its people. Many women refer to excision as a Pulaar custom and say that ‘If you see a Pulaar woman you can be sure that she is excised.’ And ‘All Pulaar women are excised.’ Whether this belief is factually accurate or not is a different matter. What I want to underscore here is the idea that excision is perceived as an essential element of belonging and gender identity.

We therefore have an affirmation of what is seen as ‘Futanke’ moral superiority built through a negative image of un-excised women from other ethnicities who lack civilisation, morality and ‘proper’ Islamic practice.<sup>86</sup> The practice of excision defines a woman as ‘virtuous’ and morally superior in contrast to those who do not follow the recommendations of the Prophet, who are seen as deficient in morals and reduced to the uncivilised barbaric state of human beings before ‘civilisation’ began with Islam.

The lawless, barbaric image of society ruled by brutish, self-interested individuals somewhat resembles Hobbes’ image in the *Leviathan* of what society is like without a ‘commonwealth’. In the state of nature, man is driven by competition, envy and glory. Like the stories I referred to at the beginning of the chapter of glorious men who stole other men’s wives because they desired them, in Hobbes’s image of society without the commonwealth, we would be in a condition of war ‘of everyone against everyone; in which everyone is governed by his own Reason’ (Hobbes 2002: 189). It follows that in such a condition ‘every man has a Right to everything; even to one another’s body. And therefore, as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man’ (Hobbes 2002:190). However, the second natural law says that, to secure the advantage of peace and defence of himself, man is required

to lay down his right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himselfe. For as long

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<sup>86</sup> The Wolof are 90% Islamic as well, but many Futanke perceive their own practice of Islam as ‘the real’ way.

as every man holdeth this Right, of doing any thing he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of Warre. (Hobbes 2002: 190)

Like the commonwealth for Hobbes, Islam brought peace, law, order and ‘civilisation’ to Futanke society. In chapter 7 we shall look at this juxtaposition of ‘civilisation’ through Islam and the foreign invasion represented by images of NGOs and the state that conjure up fears concerning a ‘loss of culture’.

The image of Futanke men and women constantly having to ‘control themselves’ with regard to temptations that bring pleasure or egotistical pursuits, postulates a vision of human beings in constant search of personal gratification. Many Futanke are convinced that, without excision, their desired form of civilisation would not be possible. Instead of social cohesion, morality and ‘culture’ there would be fornication and dissidence. Marabout Souleyman Diop in Dounga Lao, in May 2007, articulated the link between civilisation and excision in the following way:

A woman can be source of all evil in society. She is at the centre of society. Before Islam authorised marriage between men and women, if you saw a woman you liked you could take her if you were stronger than the man who was in charge of her. That does not exist any more. Islam abolished these ancient customary practices. It is authorised that she should be excised because it is her honour. If a person loses their honour they<sup>87</sup> will gain a bad reputation. She will have no value whatsoever. A woman who remains un-excised is devalued in a way. An unmarried woman would be more prone to give herself to men. Sinner.

I initially found marabout Diop’s first statement that women can be the source of all evil in society shocking as I assumed he meant that women are inherently evil. However I came to understand that many men believe women to have the power to make men do things for them, even if they are not in the man’s interest. There is a saying that there are three things in life a man should beware of: women, children and money. All three things make a man lose his senses and do things that are irrational or harmful to others. Furthermore it is said that most problems between men arise

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<sup>87</sup> In Pulaar the neutral third person singular is used: *o waasi teddungal makko*.

because of women. The proverb *Debbo yid, kono woto hoolo*, meaning ‘Love a woman but never trust her’, is linked to the belief that most great men in Africa were brought down by seductive but malicious women. The source of all evil in society is therefore the passion and senselessness a woman can invoke in a man. However, Islam is believed to have enabled a solution to this problem because it brought an end to the chaos and anarchy of the past in which men were driven by their desire for women.

Most locals I spoke to held that men’s desire was controlled through the sexual control of women. However, whereas women seemed to comply with this more for practical reasons, to save their daughters from ruining their future as respectable wives and mothers through the consequences of sex before marriage – men who were concerned with women’s control of desire were riddled with fear of what their wives might get up to when they were away. I also found that rather than seeing women as in need of control and men being able to get away without having their sex drive controlled, men were far more concerned with the idea that sexual temptation outside marriage was linked to the devil. A man’s lack of being able to control his sexual desire was linked to Satan seducing him to go to hell. The following example is illustrative:

*Sarah:* Why is too much pleasure not good?

*Ly:* Well, anything that gives human beings too much pleasure is dangerous. Because Satan always tries to persuade us to do things that are evil, that give us pleasure to take us off track so that we don’t follow the religion. So we have to beware of any pleasures in life because Satan is trying to seduce us so that we go to hell.

[...]

*Ly:* According to religion we should avoid all kinds of perversions and women in Senegal experience too much pleasure anyway. So much pleasure needs to be reduced.

*Sarah:* What do you mean?

*Ly:* Well, just the way of life in some parts of Senegal – in Dakar the way women behave, what they do, the way they dress, they just get carried away with pleasure. And that way of life is penetrating Fouta as well. Many people

have ideas and conceptions that did not exist before, that they should not have because of the religion. The influence coming from Dakar is bad.

*Sarah:* Hm. I see what you mean.

*Ly:* There are many perversions in Dakar that are brought about by a different way of life. It's better to reduce women's pleasure to protect us from perversion.

This was one of the first conversations I had with Ly, in March 2007, and he became a good friend. After many subsequent conversations it came out that he had had a very promiscuous past with sex workers in Nouakchott when he was a young man, which he felt bad about because of his religious faith. A decade later, when he was ready to have a family and choose a wife, it was important to him that she was a good woman who would not fall for the temptations of the devil. He believed this to be facilitated by excision. Men do not fall out of the parameters of control of desire but rather than being concerned with shame and social consequences – which do not affect men to the same degree as women – I found that they were worried about their own loss of control affecting their afterlife and evil coming over the society they lived in and cherished.

As in most patriarchal societies, men's moral and social well-being is contingent upon the extent to which women invoke desire in men. If men cannot control their desire within the boundaries of what is seen as legitimate, it is the fault of 'evil' women or the incarnation of the devil in female form. Women, on the other hand, are concerned with their daughters' control of desire for their own safety and to prevent the consequences of pregnancy before marriage in a society where this is associated with shame and social disarray.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which excision is linked to the control of women's sexual desire in local discourses. I have argued that although structural inequality between men and women exists, it is not useful to think about relations between men and women in such terms if one seeks to understand the need for desire

to be controlled. Yanagisako and Delaney's (1995) approach helps our understanding of how particular 'cultural' concepts are naturalised as 'god-given' or 'given in nature' in a society. Considering how things are naturalised as 'cultural' helps in observing how local people relate what they call desire to other concepts that have positive or negative connotations.

In Fouta Toro, desire, as in a singular individual's personal quest for sexual satisfaction, is not considered positive – on the contrary, any kind of behaviour seeking personal gratification is considered barbaric and uncivilised. Moral personhood is intrinsically linked to the ability to control one's desires and go through the hardships of life with the ability to constrain one's personal needs and wants for the good of family and kin.

I have shown how girls and boys are taught from a young age the necessity of serving and obeying elders rather than pursuing their personal interests and passions – which in turn provides them with the certainty that they can rely on others' help if in need. Being able to rely on the support of relations – whether that relationship is through kinship ties or solidarity between age sets – represents a form of social security that requires strict subjugation to the rules. Those who refuse to participate in this social arrangement are considered not to be moral persons and are said to be 'not like us' or 'not Futanke' or 'not Pulaar'. A person who does not adhere to this moral code of behaviour is therefore outside the boundaries of what the Haalpulaar of Fouta Toro identify with. Other ethnic groups, who are not concerned with the control of their needs to the same degree or in the same way are perceived as less moral and civilised than 'the Futanke'. A society without excision conjures up fears of perversion and temptation, illustrated with references to women not behaving in an appropriate manner, dressing and dancing differently and getting 'carried away with pleasure'.

I have shown how women can bring shame on themselves and their families through their sexual behaviour. The consequences of sex before marriage are not just devastating for the girls, who will no longer be trusted and respected by their kin, and unable to pursue the marriages their family wish. Although men can lose social recognition through their sexual behaviour, a woman's lack of control of her sexual desire does not just concern herself but risks bringing shame and sadness on her

husband, parents, in-laws and children because the place of a child resulting from sex out of wedlock is compromised in Futanke society. Most mothers therefore do not want to run the risk of this happening and so prefer to help their daughters by excising them. Desire is therefore not seen as an enjoyable pursuit of personal pleasures but a threat to social harmony.

For some, Futanke values and 'culture' are already penetrated by outside influences associated with sexual libertarianism and fornication. Stopping excision represents a threat to moral propriety and the possible disintegration of 'Futanke culture' due to 'foreign ideas' that are permeating Fouta Toro. I will come back to the role of marabouts in the 'abandonment movement' in the final chapters of the thesis, but I want to emphasise here the relationship between the image of safety and social harmony that excision seems to represent, in contrast to the fornication, lack of civilisation and sadness that, for many, accompany the idea of stopping the practice.

## **Chapter 6: Pleasure, desirability and purity: demarcating the realms of the appropriate**

If uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanness or dirt are that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained. (Douglas 1966: 50)

This chapter is about pleasure and the boundaries of appropriate sociality. It is about what draws people close and pushes them away without words or action; what people find attractive and desirable or repulsive – the thin layers of familiarity and difference between people with which our senses nourish us. For many of us it is hard to give in to desires if we perceive the object of our desire as impure or unclean. In this chapter I am concerned with what the Futanke perceive as desirable and attractive and how their ideas of the un-excised body trigger feelings of repulsion. First of all, I discuss how pleasure and desire are fostered. Then we shall look at how the purity that is believed to be achieved through excision is linked to repulsion and social differentiation.

In the previous chapter I argued that excision creates the physical foundations for female moral personhood. A girl cut at a young age is believed not to develop the uncontrollable sexual appetites that an un-excised woman will. I have also shown that failure to control desire is associated with a lack of civilisation for the Futanke, and a mark of their own moral superiority over other ethnic groups who are ‘known’ to be more promiscuous and less sexually contained. On this basis, one might assume that sexuality in general is seen as something evil, and giving in to desire a sign of the human weakness of flesh. However, I will show that the enjoyment of sex within the legitimate realms of marriage is encouraged in Fouta Toro, and fostered using sexual stimulants and aphrodisiacs. These practices are not seen as having come into Fouta from the outside but are embraced as ‘customary’ (*aada*) and existing ‘since the beginning of the universe’ (*gila dawaa dawi*). As we shall see, older women are experts who tease and instruct the young ones upon marriage.

In the second part I am concerned with the ways in which boundaries of appropriate sexuality are demarcated. We shall look at the ways in which

sexuality is located within the realms of what is socially desirable. I show that there are practices undertaken to render oneself 'pure' again after sexual intercourse without which social interaction is inappropriate. We will also examine how perceptions of what is impure and what is clean in everyday sociality are related to excision and circumcision. Although we have explored women's role as markers of the boundaries between 'them' and 'us', we have not discussed the conception of 'religious purity' on which appropriate everyday sociality depends and which concerns women and men.

I observed that many women in Fouta Toro take pride in the art of charming their husband into having sex with them through aphrodisiacs and stimulants. They do not perceive themselves as 'mutilated', as the Senegalese law defined excised women when outlawing 'female genital mutilation'. On the contrary, I will show that many women expressed abhorrence at the image of un-excised women whose genitals they considered to be mutating into repulsive impure growths that 'get in the way', not just in childbirth but also during sex.

### **6.1 Marriage and the enjoyment of sex**

Enjoyment of sex within the realm of marriage is encouraged and fostered. Outside marriage women have to keep sexual experiences secret. The best way to convey how sexuality is celebrated and made public upon marriage and kept quiet outside of wedlock is to draw on my experiences as an unmarried woman upon my arrival and how this changed when I married.

As I have shown in previous chapters, a girl who has kept her virginity until marriage is highly respected in Futanke society. It is taboo for her to speak of any sexual experiences in public. Openly admitting to having lost one's virginity before marriage is shameful and unmarried women are talked of as if they were virgins, even if it is unlikely that they are. As in Mali, even when a girl is not found to be a virgin upon marriage, the family are often in denial and pretend that marriage expectations were met (Diallo 2004: 177). Instead of openly admitting to no longer being a virgin, the bride and her parents are congratulated in public

through songs and compliments. However this is only possible if the bride has not had any children before wedlock (Diallo 2004: 177).

When I arrived in Bito, it was assumed that I was a virgin (*mboomri*), and I was treated like the other unmarried girls in the household. It was extremely shocking to people if I was seen outside the compound of my host family after dusk. When I did go out and was seen with men, the women in my family would show disapproval of my behaviour upon my return. They did not just fear that I might lose my virginity but also that my behaviour might jeopardise their reputation in the village, as they and others considered them to be my guardians. It apparently did not occur to them to ask me whether I really was a virgin or not, but their behaviour showed concern about my personal safety, since being publicly exposed as not being a virgin and being unmarried would have reflected badly on my reputation as a 'responsible', respectable person. Whenever I did speak to anyone who enquired about my marital status, of past boyfriends or sleeping arrangements, sexuality and intimacy in Europe, I was told that such talk would bring dishonour upon me and potentially upon my guardians. Linguistically, unmarried women and virgins are the same: *Mboomri*. Unmarried women are treated like virgins and girls have to conform to a comportment insinuating virginity; failure to respect this code of behaviour dishonours the girl and her guardians.

Beyond the presumption that unmarried women/virgins need protection, they are treated as if they know nothing about sexual pleasure. This is because women and men who engage in sexual relations before marriage have to do so secretly without the things that are considered to make sex 'good' and satisfying – the aphrodisiac, the chains of beads women wear around their stomach to excite their husbands (*binbin*) and the erotic underskirts (*njodom*) that people associate strongly with marital sex and pleasure.

During my fieldwork, older women spoke to me as if I knew nothing about life, pleasure and duty, as I was not yet married. They often jokingly insinuated what was waiting for me when I married. This was particularly the case if I remarked

on the lovely smell of incense in their bedrooms or teased them about their *binbins*. Besides being a sexual stimulant due to their clacking sound, wearing these beads shows that a woman is sexually interested because the sound is seductive to men. When women's husbands were not around it was not appropriate for them to wear *binbins*, or to burn aphrodisiac incense (*cuuray*) in their bedrooms. Habi Sy, a close relation of my teacher who lived on another compound in Bito, was a middle-aged lady who had about eight children and was known to joke and tease young women and men in a sexual way. As her compound was closely linked to my family's and she was 'our' grandmother's daughter, I spent a lot of time with her, her husband and children. She often teased me when I remarked upon her lovely smelling gowns (*boubou* or *wutte*), saying that the day I married I was going to encounter a huge surprise. With sounds and gestures she crudely imitated what my husband would do with the *binbins* when I wore them upon my wedding night. Initially confused about what I perceived as the contradictions within this conservative society, that did not allow me to go out at night and assumed that I was a virgin with a reputation to lose, I was not sure how to react to such vulgar depictions of sexual acts and explicit advice. I laughed and was left perplexed.

Habi's teasing of unmarried young people for knowing nothing about life or sexuality indicates the difference that people in Fouta Toro perceive between the child-like ignorance of sexual pleasure on the part of an unmarried woman to married 'adult' life where women (*ceemeedo*) and men are encouraged to enjoy sex. Whereas pre-marital sex is shrouded in silence and regarded as shameful and dangerous, marriage represents a transition to adult life, the taking on of responsibility (see chapter 5), the running of the household and indulgence in corporal pleasures.

After I married, women, particularly of older generations began to tease me, asking if I had learned their customary room preparations with aphrodisiac incense (*cuuray*) and the *petits pagnes* (*njodom*), which are loin cloths with holes in them believed to arouse men. Some women sent me presents of incense, others showed me how to sprinkle the incense made of African spices over hot ashes and

explained how else I could make the sheets and clothes smell nice. When I was seen walking down the village paths with bowls of hot coals for *cuuray* or other utensils, women cheered and told me that I was doing well, learning their customs and surely my husband would be very satisfied.<sup>88</sup> If women found out in the mornings that I had not burnt any incense the previous night, or forgotten to wear the *binbins*, they looked worried. It did not make sense to them why I was so slack in preparing what they perceived to make sex good. They were concerned that if I did not perform these customs correctly, my husband might not be ‘satisfied’ and that I risked losing him. Besides making me aware of my duties, the emphasis in many conversations with women was on learning how to use these sexual stimulants.

I do not want to imply that my experiences were similar to a Futanke girl’s. Moreover, I was spared most of the duties of a newly married woman (*jombaaajo*). However, these examples serve to illustrate the importance of sexual pleasure, and its enjoyment, to Futanke women and men. I argue that despite the existing measures of control that are taken to assure chastity in women, the enjoyment of sex (*ngende*) and expression of desire through the use of these utensils in the legitimate realms of marriage are not taboo in Fouta Toro. A wife’s and a husband’s failure to satisfy one another sexually can be a reason for divorce. A man’s impotence, for example, is seen as a valid reason for a woman to divorce her husband. I have also heard that women who refuse to have sex with their husbands breach the contract of marriage according to the Sharia. I knew of a man divorcing his wife because she refused to have sex with him. The reason given was that she was in so much pain – presumably because of complications arising from her excision scar after the birth of their first child. The cause of the pain was, however, not subject to public discussion. After a while he said ‘If you do not have sex with me I have to divorce you according to religion.’ The wife agreed, realising that she had violated the rules of marriage. Other people who were informed of their reasons for divorce agreed that the reasons were perfectly legitimate.

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<sup>88</sup> The local term used is *weltinde*, which locals translate as ‘*satisfaire*’ in French. It could also be translated, however, as ‘to please’ or ‘*rendre content*’ in French. There is no distinction between ‘to please’ and ‘to satisfy’ in Pulaar.

Diallo (2004) also discusses the seeming contradiction between excising women in Mali to take their pleasure away and simultaneously enhancing pleasure of married couples through sexual stimulants. She argues that in Mali, marriage imposes sexual duties on a woman. Some say that: 'In general, wives' sexuality is based on values and practices that aim primarily at satisfying their spouses' needs' (Diallo 2004: 182). Western conceptions of marital rape are laughed at because it is a woman's duty to give herself to the man. However, Diallo adds that marriage provides women with a right to sexual fulfilment (2004: 182). Women request and enjoy sexual intercourse in perfect harmony with religious and customary requirements.

I encountered mixed views about sex being an 'obligation' or a 'right' during marriage. Some women evidently enjoyed making themselves desirable and motivating their husbands to have sex with them. Men react strongly to the smell of incense. I heard men say that the smell of *cuuray* 'calls the husbands home and into the bedroom'. According to local discourse, the smell of *cuuray* is irresistible to men. I witnessed various occasions when a woman strongly smelt of *cuuray*, was dressed beautifully, walked slowly and spoke gently and men would say: 'she wants to kill him tonight' referring to the way in which she invoked desire. Although I showed in the previous chapter that women do not express their desire in words, making themselves desirable for their own man and 'seducing' him is considered 'the art' of Futanke women by many. Other women I met enjoyed sex less and performed the bedroom preparations only occasionally, reluctantly or as a response to social pressure rather than personal enjoyment.<sup>89</sup>

Diallo (2004) writes about the role of the *magnonmakan* upon a girl's marriage in Mali. The *magnonmakan* is an elderly woman who advises the virgin bride on how to give pleasure to a man, or helps an already sexually active bride to improve her sexual performance. Besides advising on the preparation of the

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<sup>89</sup> Unmarried men make themselves desirable by being economically productive and displaying generosity by buying presents for girlfriends or fiancées. Men who do not manage to support their families well are not considered good husbands and are said not to 'satisfy' their wives' or girlfriends' needs. Men can also be desirable to women if they are socially successful – e.g. politically or as religious leaders.

bedroom she prepares special drinks made of roots and plants that are known for their aphrodisiac effect (Diallo 2004: 177). Although I have not heard of such experts being involved in marriage preparations in Fouta Toro, there certainly are experts on aphrodisiac tinctures who can be called upon by men and women. Men consult these experts if they suffer from impotence, or to improve their sexual performance. Women seek their help if they are worried about infertility or to ask for products that lubricate the vagina if they suffer from dryness which makes sexual intercourse painful.

Besides the experts that are consulted in cases of emergency, the aphrodisiac effect of different types of food often comes up in everyday conversation. I witnessed on numerous occasions during meal times how men praised the strengthening effect of yam. They claimed that it helped them to keep an erection at night-time. Similarly, expressing a taste for ginger juice is associated with liking its aphrodisiac effect. Such conversation often produces jokes and laughter at meal times, despite unmarried people being present. I also observed on various occasions people laughing when white volunteers bought dried roots at the market in Ourosogui to put into drinking water to improve its taste. Men laughed, asking these women who they were waiting for at night time. To locals these roots are known to have a lubricating effect on the vagina.

So far I have discussed how people talk about and prepare for sexual activities in the realms of the legitimate. None of what I have presented above is taboo or makes people feel uncomfortable; it is part of everyday sociality and banter. However, people also joke about what happens in the realms of the forbidden at night time when no one can see. In contrast to the ways in which sexual pleasure is enhanced without much concealment during marriage, the ways in which unmarried lovers meet each other are 'secret' but also known to people. Although it is not possible to admit having lovers, people gossip about what happens at night time and who has been seen wandering down the village paths in the moonlight.

## 6.2 Secret encounters in the dark

Sexual relations also take place in the sphere of the ‘forbidden’ (*haram*), the ‘secret’ (*suturo*) and if made public, the shameful (*gacce*).

When the moon waxes everything becomes visible in the dark and the villages in rural Fouta are lively and animated.<sup>90</sup> Children roam through the village playing. They can be heard running along the village paths singing, cheering and laughing everywhere. Adults take pleasure in sitting outside in the moonlight drinking tea, listening to the radio and visiting each other. Evenings at full moon are a time when people relax, all the housework has been done, the heat of the day has disappeared and people socialise.

When I was in Bito, girls of a certain age were not allowed to leave the compound at night; their friends had to come and see them and they played in the far corners of the compound, visible to their parents’ eyes. This was because no one could be sure what they might get up to in the dark and no one wanted to risk them falling pregnant before marriage. When the moon decreases the village quiets down and children and young people are discouraged from going out. It is said, however, that this is the time when lovers go and see each other because no one will be able to recognise them in the dark. These lovers could be unmarried men and women or married men and women and it would be very shameful for any of them to be caught. People sometimes jokingly accuse each other of having been seen walking down the village paths at night. The connotations are that they are going to see their secret lovers whom they cannot see throughout the day. To some extent these jokes may point to a sphere of secret activities that exists. For others it may just be a fantasy of things they dare not do because they are forbidden.

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<sup>90</sup> A third (33%) of the population of the region of St Louis has access to electricity for light in contrast to 16% of the population in the region Matam. However, these figures are not representative of Fouta Toro as the city of St Louis and urban agglomerations bring up the rate for that region (Senegal – Troisième Recensement Général de la Population et de l’Habitat 2002).

There are widespread legends in Senegal that Pulaar wives receive lovers in their bedrooms when their husbands are away. It is said that this is why *Fulbe* (herders) men always carry knives – in case they find a man in their wife’s bed when they return home late at night. The men then fight and the stronger kills the weaker, without losing his honour. According to these myths, the wife would never be blamed for having committed adultery and men secretly take pride in their wives being desirable to other men.<sup>91</sup> However, they see it as a matter of masculine honour and strength to kill the other. None of the *Subalbe* men I knew during my fieldwork carried knives, and it would be extremely shameful for adulterers to be caught out in that way and would lead to dishonour and eventually divorce. The *Subalbe* and *Toorobbe* I knew think that these practices only exist amongst nomadic *Fulbe* herders who carry knives.

Despite the strict morality that exists about legitimate and illegitimate sex and all the measures that are taken to ‘control desire’ through excision and observing women, myths of the secret practices of *Fulbe* women, and jokes about having been spotted walking through the village at night time, point towards a fear of lovers seeking each others’ company in the dark. Although romantic encounters and enjoyment of sexual pleasure can only be openly talked about and made public if a couple are married, jokes about forbidden encounters in the moonlight point to the fact that sex in the realms of the secret and the illegitimate is also present in people’s minds. Some may fear what would happen if women were not controlled. Others fantasise about what they would like to do but dare not. Some may seek their lovers in the dark. In any case, these encounters are forbidden. Personal stories only shared with closest friends or shrouded in silence are the material of which legends and jokes are made.

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<sup>91</sup> Also see Riesman (1971) on courtship among Fulani in Djibo, Upper Volta. Riesman discusses notions of beauty, desire and how men seek out married women. What Riesman describes is however different from what I observed among the *Subalbe* of Fouta Toro.

### 6.3 Purity and sociality

In this section I am concerned with other ways in which boundaries of appropriate sexuality are demarcated. We shall look at the ways in which sexual activity takes place in the realms of ‘the clean’ and ‘the pure’. I show that there are practices undertaken to render oneself ‘pure’ again after sexual intercourse without which social interaction is inappropriate. We will also examine how perceptions of what is impure and what is clean in everyday sociality are related to excision and circumcision.

In chapter 4 we learned that excision is about making the androgynous body feminine by removing the ambiguously masculine parts of the genitals. I have also noted that although the foundations of appropriate female personhood are made through cutting, the process is not completed until marriage – when a girl/virgin (*mboomri*) becomes a woman (*ceemeedo*). In the previous chapter I discussed how the excised Futanke woman connotes moral superiority in contrast to women of other ethnic groups, whose ‘purity’ is often questioned. All of this, however, concerns purity in terms of moral behaviour and kinship or group identity. In addition, there is a sense of cleanliness and dirt associated with excision in everyday sociality (Simmel 1997) that affects the ways in which people interact.

Impurity and uncleanness are called *labaani* in Pulaar, which is the negation of the word *labde* – to be clean or pure in a spiritual as well as material sense. *Labaani* is used for uncleanness in terms of religious impurity (see below), as well as for dirt, such as a child that has a dirty mouth or a dirty mat or a dirty bowl of food. The other Pulaar term for unclean and impure is *sobe*, which can also have spiritual connotations. In French *labaani* and *sobe* are both translated as impure and ‘*pas propre*’.

Why is it that people in Fouta Toro turn up their noses at the idea of an un-excised girl? I heard activists against the practice say that their mothers sometimes were not as warm and loving towards their un-excised granddaughters as they were

with the excised ones. This was to do with purity. I, too, witnessed Demba Sy, Habi Sy's husband, asking his granddaughter not to sit on his prayer mat because she had not yet been excised. Un-excised girls are sometimes emotionally rejected not just because of the women they will become but for reasons to do with a form of purity and cleanliness that is necessary for appropriate social interaction.

This form of purity is linked to Islamic ablutions. These ritual washings are a meditative preparation for prayer. Anything sinful that has been seen, heard, felt or thought since the last prayer is washed away so that the believer can address himself to God in a way that is perceived as 'pure'. Purifying washings are called *sallige* in Pulaar. For devout Muslims, male or female, the day begins with the first prayer, *Salaatu*, at 5 a.m. before dawn. Thereafter, *Tisubaar* is performed at 2 p.m., *Takkusaan* at 5 p.m., *Futuro* at dusk and *Geeye* about an hour after *Futuro*. These prayers are said to be compulsory. Many devout Muslims in Fouta Toro also perform a prayer called *Wolluha* at 11 a.m., which is not compulsory. Before each of these prayers, a small ablution (*sallige*) needs to be performed. This consists of washing one's hands and arms, the mouth, the nose, the eyes, the top of the head, the ears and the feet with water. If a person has had sexual intercourse, the whole body needs to be washed according to a particular procedure called *lootngal janaaba*, beginning with the genitals, the loins and thighs, hands and arms, mouth, nose, eyes, top of the head three times and the ears. Then, the body is divided into two. The right hand side of the body is washed first following the procedure described for *sallige*, finishing off with the feet. Then the left hand side of the body is washed. These washings need to be performed with 'pure' water, meaning water without soap or any other contents or additives. If a person has not performed these ablutions after sexual intercourse, they are not clean enough to address themselves to God. Even when a person was merely aroused, as soon as liquid is excreted from the genitals, *lootngal janaaba* needs to be performed, according to religion. Men and women are both subject to the same procedure after sexual intercourse or arousal; however, in addition, women also need to practise *lootngal janaaba* after their periods and 40 days after having given birth. Men have to practise these long ablutions on Fridays before going to pray at the mosque as well, even if they have not had sexual intercourse throughout the week.

Most Futanke men and women therefore constantly assess their own purity and practise purifying ablutions before addressing themselves to God. At prayer time, people often pass around the water-jug (*satalla*) and do *sallige* in front of each other before they pray together. The small ablutions are therefore performed very publicly and people notice if someone does not do ablutions. Being impure (*laabaani*) is considered inappropriate. If there is no water available, it is preferable to refrain from sexual activities until there is water as not being able to pray at prayer time because of impurity is very embarrassing. It is not appropriate to interact with people before having rendered oneself pure. I therefore suggest that religious purification through ablutions does not just serve a spiritual purpose but has also become a code of social decency and cleanliness without which social interaction is inappropriate.

My male informant Ba explained how excision and circumcision are linked to purity in the following way:

The Prophet wanted all men to be circumcised, and the same applies to women in order for them to undertake prayer. Because for example, there is a white liquid under the foreskin before a man is circumcised and that is dirty and smells bad. It prevents a man from being able to undertake prayer in a way that is appropriate because all human beings have to be pure before addressing themselves to God. So it needs to be cut for the man to be pure because too much dirt would collect under his foreskin so that he is never clean when performing prayer. The same applies to women. Women too excrete this white liquid around the clitoris that makes them impure and prevents them from being able to undertake prayer, at least not with the same purity, so just a little bit of the clitoris needs to be cut off. Not all of it, just a third. That is what the Prophet recommended. It needs to be undertaken so that the woman can pray with the appropriate purity, just like the man needs to be circumcised because of this inappropriate impure white liquid. (Bito, March 2007)

Circumcision is about being able to address oneself to God with appropriate physical cleanliness which is perceived to assure spiritual sanctity. The belief that a circumcised man is cleaner than an un-circumcised man, and that the latter cannot address himself to God with the same purity, is transferred to women. However, the circumcision of a man is not associated with the control of sexual desire, it is merely thought to reduce the amount of bodily fluids that need to be washed away through ablutions. According to local religious discourse, ablutions are merely a preparation for prayer, to be able to address oneself to God after a purifying procedure described in the Koran. Ablutions are not supposed to make someone a 'better' or more 'spiritual' person, they are said to render a person 'clean' for prayer.

For women, however, the implications are different. Many people feel that for un-excised women it is not just about the amount of bodily excretion washed away through ablutions but also about how much more 'impure liquid' is produced. I was told on numerous occasions that it is practically impossible for a woman to cleanse herself of impurities if she is not excised. This is because her clitoris is constantly stimulated by her underwear or the cloth of her skirt (*pagne*) which means that she is sexually aroused and excretes this impure white liquid. In the same way that she cannot address herself to God with the purity of an excised woman – because she cannot help but think of sex more than is appropriate – she is considered dirtier in everyday life as well. This was why many marabouts to whom I spoke said that it was inappropriate for an un-excised woman to do housework and look after children. This liquid did not just inhibit praying with an appropriate standard of purity but also meant that she soiled others with whom she was interacting throughout the day.

Some people show disregard for un-excised women because they fear their uncontrollable lust; some feel repulsed by them because they are thought of as 'dirtier'. Local discourses on cleanliness and dirt, whether rooted in concerns about sexual control, preservation of group identity, purity or social decency, have become embodied in people's physical reactions to bodily practices that do not conform to this order (Foucault 1975; Douglas 1966). Bourdieu's concept of 'bodily *hexis*' is helpful for thinking about how particular social and cultural

values become embodied in local discourse as well as people's emotional reactions to practices that are not part of the local habitus.

Bodily *hexis* is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*. (Bourdieu 1977: 93–94)

Bourdieu suggests that particular 'cultural' principles are embodied beyond the grasp of consciousness and 'hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit' (1977: 94). Many of these principles are *doxa*, part of Bourdieu's concept of 'the universe of the undiscussed and undisputed', which are only ever fully revealed when they do become subject to discussion and are confronted by competing discourses (1977: 168). The questioning of what is taken for granted (*doxa*) is brought about by 'culture contact', which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation and can potentially lead to crisis (1977: 168). The crisis is 'when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon' (1977: 169) and the conventional character of social facts can be questioned. Bourdieu argues that crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of *doxa* but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of critical discourse (1977: 169).

Mary Douglas's analysis of purity and pollution makes the visceral reaction to what is perceived as 'dirt' or 'smell' more explicit. She argues that purity and dirt are intrinsically linked to the categories of the beholder. The world is divided into things that smoothly fit into these categories, and those ambiguous things that are categorised as either or. Ambiguity is unpleasant (Douglas 1966: 46). Anomalous things are dangerous (1966: 49) and can cause anxiety. We could therefore argue that Douglas's 'ambiguity' and 'abnormality' are what represent crises to Bourdieu's *doxa*. The emotional reaction is shock and discomfort, disbelief and sometimes anger.

Douglas argues that:

dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning and avoiding dirt. Dirt offends order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment. [...] In chasing dirt, papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience. (1966: 2–3)

If we use Douglas's interpretation as a lens through which to think about Futanke notions of cleanliness that are believed to be achieved through ablutions and circumcision, what is it that is positively made and created? What kind of 'dirt' are the Futanke clearing from their society and what society is being positively created?

We shall explore this further in the following section on images of un-excised women's androgynous bodies and what happens during childbirth.

#### **6.4 Repugnance and shame: the aesthetics of the un-excised body**

We are revolted by something because it disagrees with our conceptions of what is 'normal' or aesthetically pleasing. The Futanke's disagreement with the un-excised body is to some extent linked to notions of social decency as I explained above, but it also constitutes a rejection of its physical appearance: the idea of an impure growth resembling a penis between a woman's legs. The image of the rabbit ears that we explored in chapter 4 is evocative. The androgynous body of an un-excised woman is anomalous (Douglas 1966). It is different, ambiguous (Douglas 1966), something to be ashamed of. I suggest that these images of what an un-excised girl's clitoris will grow into encourage many mothers to excise their daughters. On the one hand, these images are repulsive to them personally; and, on the other hand, they do not want to expose their daughters to the shame of growing something impure and ugly between their legs. What is undesirable to

mothers is also believed to be undesirable to men as the following extract taken from an interview with a middle-aged woman in Seedo Sebbe on 8 February 2008 conveys:

If a girl is not excised, her clitoris will continue growing, like the girl's body is growing. Her vagina will not be big enough to facilitate penetration by her husband. And when she gets ready to have a baby, when she is pregnant, her clitoris will split into two, which can cause the tissue to tear. When a man wants to sleep with a girl and he realises whilst touching her that she is not excised, he will abandon her because he will be afraid that her clitoris will cut his penis. The clitoris can cut a man's sex (*tergal*)<sup>92</sup> and hurt him if he is not careful and touches it with his own sex (*tergal*). So men are afraid to sleep with un-excised women. If a girl is not excised, there can be little grains that collect around her sex (*tergal*) everywhere and all the way into the vagina.

The ambiguous, un-excised genitals clearly convey images of danger, impurity, potential disease as well as the threat of being sexually rejected by a man for Juulde Mbaye. We are already familiar with the idea that the clitoris splits into two when a girl is fully developed. In addition, Juulde believes that the clitoris may cut a man's penis. I have heard other people express similar ideas. Although evidently not all men fear their penis will be cut if they have intercourse with an un-excised woman, such myths are common in Futanke discourses.

Fears of disease and impurity suggest that people perceive the un-excised woman as being 'other' because she is different, unknown, unpredictable and ugly. She may cause harm, which is why she is rejected. More specific examples follow.

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<sup>92</sup> When people talk about genitals they often refer to them using the neutral Pulaar expression *tergal* – member. This can refer to a man's penis or a woman's vagina. I have translated this Pulaar expression that locals consider unoffensive with the English gender-neutral term 'sex'.

#### 6.4.1 Rabbit ears and childbirth

It is the evening after our visit to Awa Dickel's house. Harouna Sy, his wife Fama Sy, Seydou and I are lying under a blanket on the veranda of their mud-brick house in the dark, before going to bed. It is a cold and clear January night. Harouna, Seydou and I recall what the exciser said about an un-excised woman growing rabbit ears and laugh about the image she has put into our heads. None of us has heard anything like that before. Fama Sy and Harouna talk to each other, I temporarily drift away from their conversation until Harouna and Seydou suddenly burst into laughter. Fama Sy has just said that an un-excised woman's clitoris gets in the way when she is in labour. The clitoris and the labia need to be tied around the back of her bottom with a piece of string so that they don't get in the way when women are giving birth. Harouna says to his wife:

‘Do you really believe that Fama Sy?’

‘Yes. That is what women say. That is what I have heard happens when a woman is not excised. The exciser said that the rabbit ears need to be tied back so that they are not in the way when a woman is in labour and I have never questioned it.’

Harouna has been telling his wife to stop having their daughters excised for years, but she will not agree. All the girls are excised and in this social environment it would be strange if someone refused. Besides, Harouna's mother is a strong defender of the practice because it makes a woman 'cleaner'. While Seydou and I continue laughing Harouna tells Fama Sy not to believe everything people say. Fama Sy is my friend. We have spent a lot of time together and joke a lot. I have met her brothers, sisters and her mother who live in the neighbouring village of Fonde. I also met her father who died half a year before. The pictures of him that I took during our first visit are greatly cherished. Fama Sy has never been further away from home than to the main road in Mboumba or Pete, about 10km away. She did not go to school, does not speak any French and has hardly watched television. When I first arrived in Bito she asked me if we cook with firewood or charcoal in Europe and was surprised to see that I was not used to carrying water or

performing household chores. She had never seen a creature like me. But she helped me and my need to communicate with her forced me to learn Pulaar quickly. I admire her for the hard work she does in the household and I often take her side against my teacher who I know can be very severe.

I say: ‘I am not surprised that women insist on excising their daughters if this is what they think happens if they are not excised. I would excise my daughters as well if I believed that their clitoris would grow like rabbit ears one day that need to be tied back when my daughter is in labour. If this was what I heard from other women and did not know anything else I would not want to leave my daughter un-excised.’

Fama Sy gets up, whilst Seydou is laughing and Harouna continues telling her to stop believing such things. Fama Sy’s expression of disgust is visible in the moonlight – caused both by being told off by her husband and the image of letting her daughters grow rabbit ears. She spits on the floor.<sup>93</sup>

I ask Fama Sy in a joking manner:

‘Excision is good?!’

‘Yes it’s good. Do you think it’s good?’ She replies.

‘No it’s not good.’<sup>94</sup> ‘Why should it be good?’ I say.

Fama Sy: ‘Why shouldn’t it be good?’

I don’t answer.

Fama Sy continues more seriously: ‘It’s a custom we have practised since the ancestors.’

I reply: ‘It doesn’t hurt?’ Fama Sy and I have had this conversation many times before this one but I am bringing it up again for the sake of the discussion.

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<sup>93</sup> Spitting is not as offensive a gesture as it is in the West.

<sup>94</sup> Fama Sy and I had a game, in which one person puts down and reduces what the other person likes. Fama Sy knew that I liked *ñebbe* (beans) and she would keep saying that *ñebbe* are not nice and good but I liked them, which makes me a bean eater. I knew that Fama Sy liked sugar and called her *sucar Sy*, and insisted that sugar was not good and not nice, so she likes things that are not nice. Many people in Fouta jokingly reduce what a person loves to make the relationship between them stronger. People say, for example, ‘Your husband is not good, he is a bad person’, or ‘He doesn’t look after you’ and ‘He is ugly’, even though the person knows that none of this is true. This tightens bonds of solidarity between people, as among friends of the same age group or between *dendiraabe* (joking cousins).

‘Noo.’ Fama Sy says soothingly. ‘It’s done when the girls are just little children. It doesn’t hurt. It doesn’t do any harm at all.’

I say: ‘Do you think people will abandon one day?’

‘I don’t know what people will decide,’ she replies. ‘At the moment everyone practises. If everyone decides to abandon it, then maybe yes, if it is in God’s will. If everyone sees a reason to stop maybe, but at the moment everyone practises and we have not seen any reasons to give up the practice.’

It is getting late. We continue conversing about other things until we go inside the house to sleep.

Fama Sy’s sense of repulsion is based on the thought of what an un-excised woman’s body might look like, how the genitals might mutate into ugly-looking rabbit ears and how embarrassing this situation might be during childbirth. She rejects the image of her daughters being different and exposing themselves to ridicule. Excision has proven itself because it has been practised for a long time, as she affirms by mentioning that it has existed ‘since the ancestors’. Stopping the practice, however, would mean leaving girls’ genitals to grow into something that is unknown, not just morally ambiguous and potentially dangerous but also possibly exposing un-excised girls to embarrassing situations where they might be stigmatised.

In the following conversation we return to the idea that un-excised women are impure and how this might be potentially embarrassing.

#### **6.4.2 Jainaba Kane, president of the ex-exciser association**

Being the president of the ex-exciser association Jainaba receives visits from researchers who want to interview her about the practice as well as from NGOs who ask her to mobilise other ex-excisers for sensitisation activities. When I arrived at her house in February 2008, she asked me to write down who I was in a visitors’ book, what I was researching and to what organisations I was affiliated. I

noticed the names of other familiar researchers in her book. She also expected me to give her a sum of money in return for an interview, which rarely happened in Fouta Toro. Despite her unusual professionalism, which many Futanke would perceive as calculating and rude, she was friendly and helpful, although careful. Jainaba Kane was a *Toorodo* woman but said that she used to cut anyone regardless of their caste and background. Like the other excisers she had learnt the skill from her mother from an early age. In her teens, she trained as a midwife at a hospital and turned against the practice of excision as a result of the problems she saw excised women going through during childbirth. When her mother was getting old Jainaba asked her to stop practising. But her mother replied: ‘I cannot stop as long as you have not taken up the practice.’ Although Jainaba felt that there were risks and she had already started her training as a midwife, she decided to take up the practice so that her mother could retire. Years later she became the founder of the ex-exciser association. Although Jainaba is a well-known activist against the practice, she expressed similar views to the excisers cited in chapter 3, that excised women are unclean and the growth of the clitoris resembles ‘rabbit ears’. When I asked her why excision was practised she replied in the following way:

*J*: Ah! The importance is that it is our culture ...

*S*: Is it the religion or ...

*J*: It’s the religion! It’s for the religion and to be clean (pure). A woman who is excised is cleaner than a woman who is not excised.

It seemed hard to imagine how people can stop practising if they perceive non-practice to be impure and ‘against the requirements of religion’. So I ask her: ‘Do you really think that people can abandon the practice if they believe that their daughters are not clean?’

Jainaba replies: ‘Yes, normally you can smell that.’

‘Hmm!’ I say unsure of how her response was related to my question.

She continues: ‘A lady who is excised, she is clean. More than the un-excised.’

‘Ah really? Is that what you have noticed?’ I reply, knowing that as a midwife she has delivered the children of excised and un-excised women.

‘That is what we have noticed.’ She replies with certitude.

‘How?’ I ask.

‘That is what we have noticed, *dey!*’<sup>95</sup> says Jainaba.

Not sure what exactly she is referring to I repeat my question: ‘In what way?’

‘In all the ways!’

Sedina, my research assistant who is present during the interview and a supporter of the practice says:

‘In all the ways.’

Jainaba agrees with Sedina: ‘The men as well have noticed that.’

‘The men as well have noticed?!’ I ask perplexed about hearing this from an activist against excision.

‘Aha!’

To find out what exactly she means by cleanliness I ask for more detail: ‘She does not excrete as much liquid?’

‘Hmm. No it’s just cleaner.’ Jainaba says.

Sedina, referring to the religious recommendation that the man’s foreskin should be cut for religious purity, says: ‘There is the “prepuce”.’

‘Mhm’ Jainaba affirms Sedina’s statement.

I recall what Awa Dickel, the exciser of Bito said about excision and ask: ‘I have heard an exciser say that if you don’t cut the clitoris it becomes big, as big as rabbit ears.’

Jainaba replies: ‘Mhm. It will grow big, *dey.*’

And I repeat Fama Sy’s statement: ‘And there are women who think that during child-birth you have to take a piece of string and ...’

Jainaba finished my sentence for me: ‘and attach it.’

‘And attach it behind the bottom.’ I repeat, surprised that she says it before I finish.

‘Mhmm sometimes that happens.’ Jainaba says calmly.

‘That is what happens?’

‘Yes sometimes that happens.’ She replies. ‘Not everyone. Persons are different. Sometimes it’s big, eh? Sometimes it’s not.’

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<sup>95</sup> *Dey* is an affirmative sound very common throughout Senegal.

‘Really?’ I am astonished to hear this from a midwife and ex-exciser.

‘It depends on the women. There are some very big women and their clitoris grows big as well. It depends on the size of the woman and on her body. Sometimes you get a large woman, when it comes to childbirth you are obliged to attach it.’

‘Hm?’ I utter questioningly.

‘Mhm.’ Jainaba affirms. ‘It is very embarrassing! Very embarrassing’.

I listen. Jainaba repeats:

‘It is embarrassing, *dey*.’

Jainaba thus shares the views of other Futanke women and men who perceive the un-excised woman to be less clean than the excised. She also perceives the ‘rabbit ears’ that need to be tied back during childbirth as embarrassing. Although her depiction of the un-excised woman is not as shocking and full of danger as Awa Dickel or Fama Sy seem to perceive it, she ascribes lack of purity to it and potential embarrassment. It seems contradictory that as an activist against female circumcision and the president of the ex-exciser association she maintains local discourses on hygiene and smell at the same time as embracing the national and international discourses on the harmfulness of the practice. I argue that this underscores the fact that local beliefs and discourses around bodily hygiene, poise and social decency are embodied and become part of people’s *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). Even though Jainaba Kane has adopted the national post-ban biomedical discourse of medical professionals, her visceral reaction to un-excised women reflects embodied local conceptions of purity and pollution.

Douglas (1968) argues that the physical body is polarised conceptually against the social body. Its requirements are not only subordinated, they are contrasted with social requirements (Fraser and Greco 2005: 80). Particularly in ‘complex social systems’, ways of behaving are devised which suggest that human intercourse is disembodied compared with that of animal creation (Douglas 1968). Different degrees of disembodiment are used to express social hierarchy in the following way: ‘The [more] refinement, the less smacking of the lips when eating, the less mastication, the less the sound of breathing and walking, the more carefully

modulated the laughter, the more controlled the signs of anger, the clearer the priestly aristocratic image' (Douglas 1968 in Fraser and Greco 2005: 80)

This contrast of the physical comportment of the body to social sophistication and refinement relates to Classen's analyses of the role of smell in social differentiation. Classen argues that 'It is common, for instance, for the dominant class in a society to characterise itself as pleasant-smelling, or in-odorate, and the subordinate class as foul-smelling' (1992: 136). As an example Classen describes the Dassanetch pastoralists of Ethiopia who consider everything associated with cattle as good – even the smell – so that they do all they can to augment their identification with this prestigious odour: men smear manure on their bodies to advertise their herds' fertility, women smear butter on their shoulders, breasts and hair, which serves to attract men and is the 'perfume' – so to speak – of women (Almagor 1987: 109 in Classen 1992: 138). The smell of fish and lower-class fishermen, on the other hand, are repulsive to the pastoralists. The social and olfactory codes of Dessanetch society perceive pastoralists as smelling good and fishermen as smelling bad, as the odour of cattle is held to be superior to that of fish.

If we apply this reasoning of the Dassanetch to Futanke society, we can say that their moral superiority is not merely a feeling that their women can control their desires better than the Wolof for instance, but is an embodied perception of un-excised women being 'impurer', 'dirtier' and inferior. Describing the un-excised female body as odorous and impure is not just attributing social and moral inferiority to it but also points towards the fact that it is socially undesirable.

### **6.5 Control and 'foreign invasion'**

With reference to the control of girls' virginity in the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa, Wickström (2010) follows Mary Douglas in arguing that rituals expressing anxiety about body orifices are connected to the protection of political and cultural unity. Ritual protection of the body becomes a symbol for social care. 'The individual body is the most direct, the most proximate area where social

truths and disputes take place, as well as the place for personal and social resistance, creativity and struggle' (Wickström 2010: 545).

Fears around loss of control of the body and foreign invasion or loss of culture are indeed a common theme in anthropology. Emily Martin (1990), for instance, suggests that discourses on the body's immune defences in 20th-century USA are often imagined in a similar way to a nation state at war, constantly fighting 'foreign intruders'. The life of the body apparently depends on its ability to keep all its functions under control. According to this imagery, loss of control equates with being defeated by disease.

Veena Das's recent work on abducted women during the partition in India analyses women's role as reproducers of citizens within a nation state, and shows how honour is associated with national identity, purity and the need for sexual control (Das 2007). She argues that a political community is dependent on reproduction. Within this scheme, women's allegiance to the state is proved by their role as mothers who bear legitimate children. A corollary is that a woman's infidelity, even if brought about inadvertently by violent rape in times of war or conflict, is an offence not just against the family but also against the sovereign (Das 2007: 36). Thus, in this context the political community is also hinged upon women's chastity, lack of which is perceived as a threat to the group's integrity as a cultural and moral unity.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to what I have shown in chapter 5 about the importance of the control of desire, I argue that the Futanke's abhorrence of images of the un-excised body as 'impure' and socially indecent is an embodiment of fears around a loss of civilisation and foreign invasion and concerns with the preservation of ethnic identity. Whereas in the previous chapter I discussed how the ability to control one's desires is linked to kinship ties and a sentiment of pride and honour that arises from successfully maintaining these ties, I want to underscore in this

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<sup>96</sup> Also see discussion of literature on the role of women's reproductive and sexual capacity in the construction of boundaries of group identity in chapter 5 (e.g. Pitt-Rivers 1965; Davis 1977; Okeley 1983; Caplan 1987; Goddard 1987; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Kandiyoti 1991; Hawley 1994; Wilson and Frederiksen 1995).

chapter that emotional rejection of the un-excised body is linked to social decline in an embodied way.

## **Conclusion**

I have discussed sexuality in the realms of what is considered appropriate and inappropriate. Excised women do not consider themselves and are not considered 'mutilated', sexually handicapped or unable to experience pleasure. Sex in itself is not taboo, dirty or shameful. On the contrary, some women enjoy making themselves desirable and performing pleasure-enhancing customs with aphrodisiacs. There are however inappropriate, dirty and repulsive aspects of sexuality. For unmarried women, the open use of pleasure-enhancing utensils would be shameless. Extra-marital sex is shrouded in silence, the stuff of which myths and gossip are made but not openly practised. It is inappropriate to interact with people if they have not rendered themselves pure through ablutions after sex. Uncircumcised men and un-excised women are perceived as unclean because of the accumulation of impurity around the parts of their genitals that have not been cut. I have argued that many Futanke men and women perceive uncut genitals not just as dirty but also as ambiguous due to their androgynous status – being neither what is perceived as 'male' or 'female' (also see chapter 4). I have shown with Douglas (1966, 1968) that ambiguity is potentially embarrassing and dangerous. On the one hand such images are associated with fear of the unknown and the unsafe; on the other hand the fact that a smell and impurity are ascribed to the uncut woman points towards moral and social inferiority. An un-excised woman is not just potentially loose, unable to control her desire and uncivilised but also 'dirty', dangerous and repugnant for some people. With reference to Douglas (1966) I argue that excision creates social order by removing the inappropriate desire that threatens to arise in women if they are not cut. This sense of desire is associated with the demise of 'Futanke society' and the values that people cherish, and is largely associated with pregnancy before marriage and illegitimate children. I have explained how the consequences of illegitimate sex (childbirth before marriage or illegitimate children) lead to social chaos. The sense of repulsion that people feel towards un-excised women and their imagined impurity

is an embodied reaction to the fears associated with discourses around what society might turn into if women no longer managed to control their sexual desires.

## **Chapter 7: Whose law, whose body, whose rule? The opposition to the law and FGC 'sensitisation' in Fouta Toro**

All the activities organised by the state and the NGO are pure trickery and a way to fight Islam. The law against excision was passed against the Futanke but to let you and those who have sent you know: We will continue to excise our daughters until the end of the world. No one can stop us! I have been told that Senegal is a secular state. If that's true why don't you let us practise our religion? [...] The problem is that we are blinded by the Westerners who are ready to do anything to destroy our culture and our identity. The most shocking and abnormal thing is that we have to undergo French influence and even the unleashing of [sic] homosexuals.

(Thierno Hamidou Aliou, imam of Ndioum at meeting with NGO Tostan after an exciser was arrested in Matam, May 2009)

In this chapter we will return to the question of why there has been such overt opposition to the law against excision from Fouta Toro. At the beginning of the thesis, it was noted that Fouta has been called 'the most difficult region' in terms of reaching the national target of complete abandonment of excision by 2015, set by the Senegalese government with the aid of international NGOs.

In chapter 2 I discussed the 'events' that were seen to be significant in the process of making the law against excision in Senegal. I also discussed immediate reactions to the proposed legislation against excision by the Pulaar religious leader Thierno Mountaga Tall as well as his justifications for his position based on 'Prophetic recommendations'. The table of 'events of opposition' at the end of chapter 2 provided an idea of what kinds of reactions to governmental and non-governmental attempts to implement or publicly discuss the law made Fouta Toro into 'the most difficult region'.

Since then, researchers of governmental and non-governmental organisations (Senegal census; DHS; Sigrid Rausing; WHO) have experienced more difficulties interviewing research subjects about reproductive health in Fouta Toro than in any

other region of Senegal. Researchers collecting data have frequently been asked to leave, been refused accommodation in some remote villages and told that neither the government nor anyone else is welcome to ask inappropriate questions about their private lives. During the Sigrid Rausing project,<sup>97</sup> which I was involved in designing and evaluating, the results from Fouta were full of gaps because researchers were unable to find the required interview subjects in certain villages.

In this chapter I will show that these ‘events’ of opposition in Fouta Toro are, in many ways, intangible. In contrast to the Malicounda Bambara declaration, for example, which was ‘made’ into ‘the beginning of the end of excision in Senegal’ by the national and international press as well as the Senegalese government (Handelman 1990; Farge 2002), the ‘events’ in Fouta did not receive the same press coverage and somehow remained non-events (Farge 2002) in the making of a national success story. Tarlo notes that ‘certain characters, moments and events are splashed large across the canvas of public memory; others are watered down, diminished, reduced, faded out of the picture altogether’ (2003: 21). Similarly, the events of opposition in Fouta Toro have somehow been ignored or forgotten; they are absent from public memory and discourses around ‘the beginning of the end of excision in Senegal’. Since the beginning of my research I have not come across many official versions of the events of opposition that I discuss below; they only seem to exist in the memories of those who were involved or directly affected. They are however ‘critical events’ in Veena Das’s sense, because they propelled people’s lives into unprecedented terrains and brought about new modes of action that changed the way in which people perceived of the role of the state and women’s bodies.

In the first section, I therefore attempt to reconstruct what happened during these ‘events’ of ‘resistance’ to the NGOs and the law, who was involved, and why Tostan decided to stay in Fouta Toro despite the overt hostility against their FGC ‘sensitisation’. I present two interviews with Tostan officials who were directly involved in the events of Aere Lao. The interviewees claim that, although some religious leaders raised their voices against the ban on FGC, many people wanted to know more about the potential health consequences of the practice and their ‘rights’

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<sup>97</sup> *Etude sur les pratiques d’excision dans les régions Ziguinchor, Kolda, Tambacounda, Matam: abandons et resistances.* (Tostan financed by Sigrid Rausing, 2007).

as guaranteed by the state. In view of this material I argue that the opposition between those who dislike the law/state and the NGOs is not clear cut with ‘the Futanke’ on one side and ‘the white people’s NGO’ and ‘the state’ on the other.

We shall see that those who are against the law and NGO intervention paint a picture of binary opposition between ‘us – the Futanke’ as a cultural unity, and ‘them – the NGOs’ as outsiders bringing in subtle forms of cultural colonialism disguised as ‘development’. ‘The state’ is seen to be corrupted by the international community. With regard to governmental and non-governmental intervention, the state and the law are not superior entities hanging above its citizens; they are manifest in everyday transactions and interactions, through different bureaucratic forms associating government employees and the rest of the population. As Gupta (2001), Ferguson (2006), Hansen and Stepputat (2001) and Foucault (2007) have shown, the authority of the state is diffused and represented in many different forms of power in different bodies of society and its institutions. Ferguson (2006), for example, suggests that governmentality in Africa seems to be suffused by transnational processes that reach from beyond the state all the way through imagined hierarchies down to the ‘local level’. It is not at all a top-down process whereby governmental officials act and take decisions according to a vertically arranged hierarchy.

The second part of the chapter presents a more recent ‘event’: a failed public declaration that took place during my fieldwork. According to the national storytelling this was another non-event. I present this incident to demonstrate opposition to NGO intervention from the perspective of the village chief of Waande. I argue that the opposition to Tostan’s public declarations does not just result from a disagreement with the ‘abandonment’ of the practice but is a symptom of a conflict in leadership and decision-making processes, as well as disobedience and generational conflict.

In the third section I look at the most recent example of opposition in Fouta Toro, which received national and international press coverage. In May 2009, an exciser was arrested and put on trial in Matam for cutting a 16-month-old girl. I discuss the coverage of this event as well as the marabouts’ interpretation of the intervention. I argue that their public outcry and pain about what they saw as an attack on their

culture and religious faith is again strongly related to questions of moral authority and social standing in Futanke society.

### **7.1 The NGOs and ‘the opposition’: understanding the conflict in Fouta Toro**

In this section I disentangle ‘the opposition’ in Fouta Toro by looking at the accounts of two NGO workers in senior positions who were involved in events that caused social disarray. The first is Khalidou Sy, presently national co-ordinator of the Tostan programme in Senegal.

Before Khalidou Sy became national co-ordinator he managed the implementation and running of Tostan’s education programme in Fouta Toro from 1992. Khalidou is a Haalpulaar, born in Kolda in southern Senegal, but his parents originate from the *Subalbe* (fishermen) village of Aram, in Fouta Toro. Although his own wife and children live in Kolda, he maintains strong ties with his kin in Aram as well as using these relations and ties of solidarity and obligation for work. Many Futanke I met respected him as ‘a relative’ (*banndi am* – ‘my relative’) who creates employment in the area. Khalidou has authority within the NGO as well as in the communities where the programme is successful. Although Khalidou occupies a senior position within the NGO he has no higher education and is neither an intellectual, nor a member of the elite (the educated middle classes in Dakar). He is unmistakably rural in origin, which facilitates his acceptance by rural populations and makes him a leader faithfully followed by employees who identify with him. I found that a lot of Tostan staff were captivated by his strong belief in human rights, democracy and the promotion of education. Many admired his work ethic and ambition for the Tostan programme to succeed and wondered what motivated him to fight so vigorously for its acceptance by rural populations despite Tostan’s low pay. Being from a rural background himself also put him in a position of generally being able to empathise with villagers’ day-to-day problems in a way that an outsider could not.

I interviewed Khalidou at the beginning of my fieldwork on 16 January 2007 in Kougheul, where we were staying together in a hotel with a delegation of officials

who were going to the public declaration of Koumbidia. Khalidou agreed to be interviewed for my PhD research on the opposition to the law in Fouta Toro. After this initial meeting I had numerous discussions with him on various occasions.

I began the interview by asking Khalidou how the programme was introduced in Fouta and how it continued. He replied that when the programme was implemented in Fouta in 1992, Tostan entertained good relations with the communities. However, at the time, the programme covered only basic education: teaching literacy, problem resolution, hygiene, health, management of resources, finance and feasibility study. There were no modules on human rights, democracy or reproductive health. In 1997 the modules were changed, starting with reproductive health and aiming to ‘sensitise’ women about their ‘rights’.<sup>98</sup> Khalidou explains that this was when the image of Tostan changed and after a successful beginning the first problems were experienced.

Then, the communities started seeing a different NGO in Tostan: a reactionary NGO that does not just try to put women before men but also touches on a very sensitive subject: excision. So when that started off, the Senegalese government voted ... the parliament passed a law against excision, the most influential marabout of Fouta wrote an oath to say that he was for excision.

In chapter 2 I showed that the national call for ‘abandonment’ was paralleled by movements that questioned whether it is legitimate to stop practising on religious grounds. Those who argued that excision was a Prophetic recommendation called the state’s policies into question. The high point of this movement was the renowned religious leader Thierno Mountaga Tall’s appeal to the parliamentarians not to pass a law criminalising the practice because prohibiting Muslims from practising a religious recommendation is sinful and an injustice that retards ‘human rights’ (Tall 1999). Khalidou explains the effects of these opposing views on local people:

Suddenly two different things happened: the government said we will now abandon in Senegal and someone who practises is sentenced to between two months and five to six years in prison. Whereas on the other hand he says [the

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<sup>98</sup> For detailed account of how the Tostan programme changed see Gillespie and Melching (2009).

religious leader]: listen, continue with excision, your religion recommends excision. So that created problems! Everywhere it was suddenly said that it's UNICEF, it's Tostan, it's ASBEF it's ... they cited various NGOs and funders that were there working for community development and they asked for these NGOs to be chased out of Fouta. This was how the difficulties started!

Khalidou notes how people find themselves in a conflicting position between what the government orders and the religious leader recommends. Faced with having to take sides, many blame the NGOs and, apparently, want them to be 'chased out' of Fouta. In these new circumstances, Tostan had to rethink what they were going to do. To provide a stronger sense of how NGO workers in charge of the implementation of the programme perceived of 'the opposition', what it consisted of and why they decided to continue raising awareness against FGC, I want to look briefly at Molly Melching's account of how Tostan experienced 'the problems' in Fouta.

I have already discussed Melching and her account of the Malicounda declaration (chapter 2) and therefore no further introduction is required. In an interview with Molly in Paris in November 2008, she confirmed that when Tostan first started working in Fouta, FGC was not part of the teachings.

We've been in Fouta since 1992 and had nothing to do with FGC. We never mentioned FGC.<sup>99</sup>

However, Molly emphasised that many religious leaders perceived Tostan's teachings as beneficial for their communities. So despite the dissatisfaction with and opposition to the Tostan programme beginning after FGC and human rights were introduced, Tostan decided to stay because they were also supported, sought after for help, and encouraged by others. We will see more examples of this below (also see chapter 8).

[Molly explained] how we got into Fouta doing FGC. I went to see the religious leader [Thierno Ahmadou Ba] and it was said: 'because you've been

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<sup>99</sup> Gillespie and Melching (2010) explain that reproductive health and human rights modules were introduced after a survey of 10 000 former participants, undertaken 1995, showed that this was what rural women were interested in learning more about.

here since 1992, you've never discussed FGC... now, if the women are talking about it, if they're having those problems then I will support you.' [...] because I told him if you say to me to not do this now, I will stop! And he told me: 'Since you've included me in the process, you know ... and since you tell me it's detrimental to women's health and they're afraid of talking, I say, yeah, go ahead and be victorious because it is a noble cause.' So it was very beautiful. [...] that was how we got to it because even the supervisors were really afraid of discussing this! They were very, very afraid of discussing this and told me not to say anything about it.

In view of the dissatisfaction and anger caused by the revised version of the education programme, Molly was confronted with the decision of whether to continue it or not. She said that many of the Tostan staff working in Fouta Toro were afraid. Given the threats of religious condemnation if the awareness-raising activities continued (see below), she was confronted with a serious decision, potentially risking her staff's safety. Although the programme was backed by the government and the international community (e.g. UNICEF), it visibly caused disarray amongst local authorities. However, Thierno Ahmadou Ba encouraged her to stay because it was beneficial to women (see further below).

## **7.2 Aere Lao and Ourosogui the 'events of opposition'**

Although there was overt opposition to talk of FGC and the law in Fouta, some locals were interested and found the teaching useful. In this section I discuss some of the events of opposition against Tostan and 'the law' which are remembered as significant by many people who are interested in the issue all over Senegal. However, according to the success story of 'the beginning of the end of excision in Senegal' these might be classified as non-events (Farge 2002).

Tarlo (2003) describes how the official narratives of the Emergency in India differed greatly from how people experienced and remembered mass sterilisation in an impoverished area of Delhi called Welcome. Although 'the events of opposition' in Fouta did not involve such harsh governmental measures, some of them were remembered as 'critical events' (Das 1996) by people I met all over Senegal. Once,

for example, I met a school teacher in Kedougou who was originally from Fouta. He immediately associated the name of the NGO Tostan with the marabout's religious condemnation of their staff in Aere Lao and religious leaders' defence of excision as a religious practice. It was difficult for me to find out exactly what had happened in Aere Lao and why people were so shocked. The general sense I got, without being told any of the details, was that Tostan had gone too far and should not have discussed issues against the religious leaders' will in Aere Lao. It was implied that Molly and the parliamentarians who were present at this meeting were put right by the religious leaders and had been successfully 'chased out' of Fouta. The religious leader who condemned Tostan had put this 'foreign NGO', and the parliamentarians who had been bought by 'the white people', in their place and let them know that they were not welcome. People who remembered 'Aere Lao' as a positive event alluded to the religious leader's success in doing what was in the interest of the Futanke as devout Muslims. Although absent from the national story-telling, Aere Lao was therefore 'critical' in many people's memory in terms of defending Futanke cultural and religious identity against the state and international NGOs.

I was strongly advised against doing interviews in Aere Lao because of hostility towards white people interested in female circumcision. Things had calmed down when I was in the field, seven years after these events, and I frequently passed through Aere Lao and occasionally spent the night there. Nevertheless I always felt uneasy despite the polite hospitality. I knew that white people were not always welcomed.

The Senegalese sociologist Abibou Camara, who was researching reasons for practising excision in Fouta Toro on a research project for the WHO in 2007, also had great difficulties finding interview subjects in Aere Lao. He told me in an informal conversation that Tostan had made some significant mistakes there and were still extremely unpopular.

Besides uncertainty about what exactly had happened, I was struck by the fact that many people were afraid of the spiritual forces and the religious 'power' of the marabouts. The shock that the event had caused was not just due to conflicting opinions about excision, Haalpulaar'en cultural heritage and ethnic identity; there was

also a great element of fear of those who opposed the law and sensitisation against what they called ‘a religious practice’.

This fear cannot be grasped without an understanding of the role of marabouts in ‘spiritual knowledge practices’, as Dilley (2004) writes. Some might think of these practices as witchcraft, although many Senegalese and Futanke strongly oppose this term because it associates respected religious leaders with evil forces. ‘Maraboutage’, however, as Senegalese and French scholars would refer to these ‘supernatural’ practices, is not inherently evil but a powerful skill based on knowledge of the Koran or what people think of as ‘ancient’ ‘traditional’ knowledge acquired from *Jinne* (spirits). In Pulaar, such spiritual practices are referred to as *gandal* which literally means ‘knowledge’ (also see Dilley 2004).

The marabouts of Fouta are thought to be extremely powerful and adept in spiritual knowledge practices. Many people believe that the reason for this is that Fouta Toro was the first area to be Islamised in Senegal. Others think that many marabouts in Fouta are skilled in what are called ‘Islamic sciences’ (Dilley 2004). Others again think that a lot of the spiritual power is based on the knowledge practices of the Haalpulaar’en of Fouta in general. As Dilley explains, these are based on occupational lore. Fear of what happened during ‘the events’ in Fouta and of the marabouts’ power seems to be strongly associated with these ‘Islamic knowledge practices’ (see further below).

In view of the ambiguity about what exactly happened and why the events were so frightening, we can now explore Khalidou Sy’s and Molly Melching’s accounts of the incidents. As I have already indicated, their versions are the only stories I managed to elicit about these events – partly perhaps because many Futanke who had heard of what had happened did not witness these events themselves, and partly because they did not want to talk about it in order to avoid inflicting evil upon themselves.

### 7.2.1 Khalidou's account of 'the events' in Fouta

In Haere Laaw they [participants of the basic education programme and people who wanted to abandon excision] organised a public declaration, but on the day the declaration was to take place, the minister of health was there ... everyone was there [the officials] but on that day no one dared to speak of excision! No one! The authorities ... no one dared to speak of excision even though it was supposed to be a declaration of the abandonment of excision. But on the day, all those who were for the abandonment and who wanted to talk about it suddenly changed their minds because people came to them and told them: Listen as far as the abandonment of excision is concerned, it would be a catastrophe and there will be deaths!

'Ah!' I interject. Khalidou continues:

So instantly people [the participants at the meeting] changed their language and spoke of the promotion of children's rights, of women's rights, of health ... all that. So the people returned [to the place where the speeches were being held]. It was difficult to keep the meeting going but luckily people stayed. But no one dared to speak of the abandonment of excision.

'What were they afraid of?' I ask.

It was because in the communities, the marabouts stood up and said, these are maraboutic villages, the marabouts stood up to say: 'Listen, they [the NGOs and the ministers] have come here to fight against religion, they have come here to create difficulties.' This is why we told ourselves that we [Tostan] would continue with the work. But while the programme continued, people were speaking of it everywhere. There were teams of marabouts who went to inform other marabouts about the practice of excision. So this is why in 2000 we wanted to organise another declaration in Ourosogui. But there, again, the marabouts rose up. Because at the time there was a German committee that was present, there was UNICEF, there was Molly the representative of Tostan and all the partners were there, the

communities wanted to mess it all up and said no to the abandonment of excision and yes to excision. They said: ‘Outside there are NGOs who are for the promotion of abandonment of excision and we are for the continuation. It is a sacred tradition.’

Khalidou emphasises that ‘these are maraboutic’ villages. He is referring to two things with this statement: first, the leaders of these villages are marabouts who belong to the *Toorobbe* status group (*hinnde*). As explained in chapter 3, the *Toorobbe* have been the most powerful status group since the Islamic revolution under the *Turudiyya* (Robinson 1975; Johnson 1974; Willis 1978; Dilley 2004). They are those who are learned in the Koran and, with few exceptions,<sup>100</sup> tend to be the village chiefs in Haalpulaar’*en* areas. Second, ‘maraboutic villages’ are places where renowned religious leaders and marabouts reside. Some of the marabouts are followed for their wisdom and piety, others for their spiritual powers and knowledge of the ‘Koranic sciences’. Many are believed to have demonstrated their spiritual power and skill on plenty of occasions by healing the sick or helping people with their personal problems. A lot of these famous leaders have *Talibe* who come from far away to learn the Koran. It is common for *Talibe* who have already memorised the Koran, the first step towards becoming a marabout, to move to other places to learn the Sharia or other ‘religious sciences’ from another religious leader.

Khalidou also speaks of ‘teams of marabouts’ who ‘inform each other about the practice of excision’. I often heard from NGO staff and people working for the promotion of the law in Fouta Toro that some marabouts regularly communicated with each other about what kinds of ‘sensitisation’ activities had gone on in their villages and who the main actors were. Some NGO literacy projects were welcomed. PIP (Programme Intégrale de Podor), for example, was a Senegalese education programme that exclusively focused on teaching Pulaar literacy and numeracy. It was widely accepted and experienced no problems because the teachings did not include any controversial recommendations such as human rights, health and nutrition, which are associated with ‘the White man’ (*tuubaako*). Whether they appreciated it or not, most people I talked to felt that such teachings were ‘foreign to Futanke culture’.

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<sup>100</sup> See final section of this chapter and Willis (1978) and Schmitz (1998).

A lot of the marabouts who became involved in this movement against Tostan, ASBEF and the law had strong views on excision and came to a consensus with the renowned religious leaders that the practice should be encouraged and ‘defended’ as an Islamic tradition. Many marabouts, who have to take position on the practice, orient themselves according to what the most influential marabouts recommend. In interviews with marabouts all over Fouta, I found that they almost always referred to what other marabouts had said and decided. According to my informants working for the NGO, it was therefore crucial for Tostan Fouta to communicate with the marabouts in the villages where the programme was running to prevent what they called ‘poisoning’ (‘intoxication’ in French). Such ‘poisoning’ was perceived to arise when participants felt that the teachings of the classes were against the Futanke way of life or anti-Islamic. As many of the modules touched on contested issues, such as rights based on equality, and leadership through democratic elections instead of birthright, ‘poisoning’ regularly needed to be prevented.

I ask: ‘Isn’t it strange that they opposed in this way? The reasons for practising excision are the same in all the regions of Senegal but in this case there was an opposition.’

‘Yes’, Khalidou replies, ‘there was a very strong opposition! Because here, as I said, the people are very tough and they speak of religion. And they are unforgiving as far as religious issues are concerned. They are very tough, you see, here the people are convinced that the religion requires it, and that others want to change and turn them away for other purposes. That’s where the difficulty lies!’

‘Hmm’, I interject.

I have noted in chapter 3 that in other regions of Senegal, amongst Mende groups and the Diola in Southern Senegal for example, excision is not immediately associated with the supposed ‘Prophetic recommendation’ but with initiation. However, in Fouta Toro, the belief that excision is a religious recommendation seems to strengthen the marabouts’ justification to defend excision against the law and international organisations. Recommendations based on the Koran and the Sharia are seen as having more legitimacy than recommendations of non-Islamic origin. Any legal,

social or political issue is discussed with regard to the Islamic point of view on the matter. But in addition to Islamic jurisprudence, something else led to opposition to the law: the authority of *Tooroɓɓe* marabouts and their recommendations based on their occupational lore: the Koran and Sharia (Dilley 2004). The *Tooroɓɓe hinnde*,<sup>101</sup> of those who are learned in the Koran have been the leaders of Haalpulaar'en society, alongside official governors of the colonial and post-colonial state, since the Islamic revival in the 1760s. The opposition is about more than women's bodies and personhood. It is tied to the conviction that holy law is superior to 'the state' – and that the *Tooroɓɓe* religious leaders know best. Their public outcry against the law on excision thus represents a clash in authority between religious and secular leaders and contradictory ideas of justice.

Khalidou goes on to explain why Tostan decided to stay despite opposition to the programme by local authorities:

That's the difficulty! But we tried to work out a strategy and see how to explain and then, when the programme started, again ... certain religious leaders said: 'No we don't want this.' But the women wanted the programme! So we said: 'OK. Women we're going to work with you. The men, if you don't like the programme you can stay at home and keep your girls by your side if you don't want them to come, ask them not to come to our classes, but all those who want to come, this country is a country that is governed so all those who want to, everyone has the right to learn what they want!'

Again, the clash of authority is evident in Khalidou's reasoning. He justifies Tostan's resolution to continue with their work by saying 'this is a country that is governed' and 'everyone has the right to learn what they want'. Khalidou believes that the state is a democratically elected entity governed by values based on human rights and equality. Although some very respected 'traditional' and moral authorities (from the *hinnde* of the *Tooroɓɓe*) do not agree with this national law jeopardising women's honour and religious recommendations, Khalidou strongly believes in the authority of the state, which provides citizens with rights to freedom of speech, education, health

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<sup>101</sup> Status group or caste.

care, and freedom of choice. I discuss human rights ideology vs. protection of cultural and religious identity in more detail in chapter 8.

However, we shall see that this disagreement is about more than political differences between secular and religious authorities, the sacred against the profane and differing conceptions of what ‘justice’ is based on. In Molly’s version of ‘the events’ in Aere Lao it becomes clear that a battle between these two types of authority took place in the realms of the supernatural as well.

### 7.2.2 Molly’s account of ‘the events’

We had another meeting where the minister Abdou Fall came. And that was not a public declaration but it was a community meeting and we were gonna discuss FGC. It was an inter-village meeting and we were gonna try and make it a place where people could discuss the issue too! [...] and all the religious leaders went up there and told us that we could not pronounce the word FGC and they became very angry and afterwards, even after that meeting, they held a meeting and one guy got up and said that my soul and the other woman, Aissatou Tall [representative of another NGO] I think it was [...], that our souls should be damned for, for even having that meeting and then that guy, from what I understand had a diabetic crisis and his two legs were amputated because of his sickness. And everybody felt like, well OK, then maybe ...

Molly hesitates before continuing her story. Aware of how this incident might have been read I finish her sentence for her:

‘Mystical reasons’, I say referring to spiritual knowledge practices and powers many people believe in.

Although the term I am using here is controversial in academic English, it is a local term<sup>102</sup> people use when they speak of ‘occult forces’ (Geschiere 1997) or forms of

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<sup>102</sup> When Senegalese speak French, they often translate human interference through spiritual means as ‘*des choses mystiques*’ or ‘*mysticisme*’. Such spiritual knowledge practices are referred to as *gandal* – literally ‘knowledge’ – and include ‘*maraboutage*’ (the manipulation of the powers of letters, words

affliction that might also be associated with ‘spiritual knowledge practices’ (Dilley 2004). I prompt Molly to talk about the ‘mystical’ interpretation of these events because I have heard many people say that Tostan is ‘protected’ by spiritual forces.<sup>103</sup>

‘Yeah, mystical reasons.’ Molly replies. ‘He should not have gone that far and maybe there is something about this ending FGC.’

The fact that the religious leader lost both his legs two weeks after an important event in which ministers, NGO officials and people who wanted to speak out against excision was not seen as a coincidence. Ashford notes that ‘Cases of premature death or untimely illness in Africa are almost always attributed to the action of invisible forces, frequently those described as “witchcraft”’ (2004: 147).<sup>104</sup> In a similar vein, most Senegalese would see a relation between the two incidents and think about whose spiritual forces were stronger and who was better protected against evil.

Niehaus (2001) shows that ‘Whites’ in South Africa do not necessarily fall outside the parameters of ‘witchcraft’ or ‘occult forces’. He shows that witches were often believed to poison innocent people with the technologies of the Whites. He also argues that beliefs in witchcraft mirror the way that Whites managed to control the Africans and make them work hard (Niehaus 2001). The end of apartheid and the

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and numbers using the names of God by marabouts or *seernaabe* – scholars of Islam) *gandal bileejo/mbileewu* (the knowledge and power of what Dilley [2004: 140] calls ‘witch-hunters’ and healers), *ñengi* (trading precious possessions like one’s own organs or the death of family members for desired material objects like money). Dilley (2004) extensively discusses the distinction between what is called the ‘white knowledge’ (*gandal danewal*) practices of Islamic clerics and the ‘black knowledge’ (*gandal balewal*) practices of the men of skill but acknowledges that, despite the dominant ideology that the marabouts’ ‘white knowledge’ is good spiritual practice in contrast to all other spiritual knowledge practices sought after by locals, it can also be used to inflict evil. My *Subalɛe* informants sought out both Islamic marabouts using ‘white knowledge’ and local wise men (*ganndo* or *bileejo*) using ‘indigenous’ herbs, potions and spiritual practices. According to them, the latter was called ‘black knowledge’ because it was the spiritual practice of the ‘Black man’, not of the White man or Arab, nor of Islamic origin. Both black and white knowledge could be used for good and for evil. To facilitate comparison of spiritual knowledge practices with occult forces (Geschiere 1997) in other parts of Africa I would suggest that *gandal balewal* (black knowledge) is best translated as witchcraft.<sup>103</sup> There are rumours that in the past some people have tried to do Tostan harm through corruption or by stealing money. However, according to these stories, whenever the NGO’s survival was seriously threatened by an adversary’s actions, they ended up dying or getting seriously injured. Most people I know believe that such incidents are not coincidental but conclude that the NGO is protected against evil inflictions.

<sup>104</sup> Ashford (2004: 162) notes that most English terms for ‘witchcraft’ are not satisfactory in understanding spiritual practices and local definitions for them. I am referring to the ‘mystical reasons’ or ‘occult force’ (Geschiere 1997) locals refer to when trying to explain the cause of the marabout’s loss of his legs.

demise of white domination were also associated with witchcraft (Niehaus 2001: 82). Beliefs in witchcraft are often about who is more powerful and how they manage to subjugate those who are weaker. Shaw (1997: 857) shows how Temne beliefs in 'the witch city' are strikingly similar to images of affluent modernity: skyscrapers made of gold and diamonds and Mercedes Benz cars driven around by powerful witches, stalls where human flesh is sold in the roads. Like Niehaus (2001) Shaw describes how ideas of witchcraft resemble the power of Europeans using modern technologies. 'Like the Place of Witches, European and North American cities represent inaccessible urban landscapes of wealth, power, commodities, technology, mobility – and witchcraft' (Shaw 1997: 860).

In Senegal I sometimes heard similar views; technological equipment like mobile phones and the mp3 players I used to record interviews with were perceived as the *toubab*'s 'witchcraft', a sign of their spiritual strength and abilities. As Shaw (1997) and Niehaus (2001) argue for Southern Africa and Sierra Leone, in Senegal, success, political power and influence are also commonly perceived as a result of 'occult force' (Geschiere 1997) and domination.

In addition to the 'events of opposition to the law' being about different conceptions of justice and authority, these incidents are also about power. Power struggles between the 'traditional' and moral authorities of Fouta on the one hand, and the secular state and NGO officials on the other, do not just take place in realms of the profane. But, like other conflicts across Africa (Evans-Prichard 1937; Gluckman 1956; Turner 1957; Douglas 1970; Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 2001; Ashford 2004), success and misfortune are immediately associated with the realms of the spiritual – people succeed because their prayers have been heard or they are well protected. Others encounter misfortune, injury or death because they are not well enough protected – someone else is stronger or spiritually more powerful, or has evil inflicted on them.

Some glorify events like the 'Aere Lao incident' as a defeat of 'foreign NGOs', putting them in their place and successfully chasing them out of Fouta. Others interpret them in a different way: although religious leaders condemned NGO officials and ministers and they had to leave, they were well protected and the

infliction fell back on the religious leader who pronounced their condemnation. While many felt that the meeting ‘didn’t go very well’ and Tostan experienced a major backlash with social and political consequences in the realms of the profane, others see the NGO in a different light: the fact that Tostan centres are still present in Fouta and have not completely disappeared means that they are powerful in the spiritual realm and have not been defeated by the religious leaders.

### **7.3 Doumnga Lao**

The next event of opposition discussed here was another ‘non-event’ in the national story telling of the beginning of the end of excision in Senegal. Most Tostan staff and people who are keen to raise awareness about the harmfulness of the practice have probably already forgotten this ‘event’.

This section is about the failed public declaration of Doumnga Lao, which had been planned for 5–6 May 2007. Although other declarations that took place in Fouta were considered successful by the NGO because there was a consensus amongst the leaders, I want to take the example of this failed declaration to bring out the controversies and debates that take place locally with regard to NGO intervention and FGC ‘sensitisation’ (*hirjino*). As ‘public declarations’ are increasing across the whole of Senegal and the Senegalese government has recommended Tostan’s strategy to reach the complete abandonment of excision by 2012, it is important to show what kind of opposition manifests itself during such an intervention.

In order to explain why this ‘declaration’ failed I refer back to what we have learnt about ‘public declarations’ at the beginning of the thesis.

#### **7.3.1 What are public declarations?**

In chapter 2 I explained how the first ever declaration of Malicounda came about: participants of the Tostan programme in Malicounda decided that they would no longer cut their daughters after seeking the approval of the imam and the village chief. When Tostan and UNICEF realised that the women had stopped, they asked

them if they were prepared to declare their decision to abandon it ‘to the whole world’. The villagers agreed and told their stories during a meeting in presence of the national and international press. I have argued that this legendary ‘Malicounda declaration’ was made ‘the beginning of the end of excision’ in the national storytelling on the ‘abandonment’ of excision in Senegal. Since this first declaration, the NGO Tostan has been evaluated as successful in getting people to stop excising (see chapter 2). Their programme has received more international funding, mostly with the aim of getting people to stop excision in different parts of Senegal and other African countries.<sup>105</sup> Since the first declaration, where women decided to stop on their own account according to Tostan’s and the government’s discourses, declarations have taken place rather differently. I provided a description of a public declaration in the introduction. I emphasised that, besides the witness accounts of women who have experienced problems because they were excised, it is crucial that some very influential local authorities and leaders are involved and that the population hear their stance on excision.

Observations and conversations with NGO workers involved in the planning of the declarations helped me understand how they come into being. My account will differ from Tostan’s presentation of the procedures of these declarations.<sup>106</sup>

When the education programme comes towards its end and women have openly discussed ‘democracy’, health care, nutrition and everyday problems in their village and potential solutions, they are encouraged by the NGO to publicly declare their abandonment. As in Malicounda, the idea (or theoretical model) is that the participants of the classes will be persuaded to stop practising excision once they have learned the health consequences and that the Senegalese law has forbidden it. It

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<sup>105</sup> Tostan also works in the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Somalia and France.

<sup>106</sup> I thank Professor Diane Gillespie for her comments on an early version of this chapter. I have reiterated that to explain their strategy to funders Tostan refers to the case of the Malicounda declaration. It is argued that the participants of the classes come to a consensus to stop excising after having understood the consequences as well as their human rights. I agree with Tostan that the programme has this effect on some/many participants. However, it is also said that the participants then organise their declaration of the abandonment of excision. After researching the NGO staff’s proceedings since 2005 I suggest a more nuanced view of this claim. These ‘public declarations’ would not take place without the NGO’s encouragement. Although, according to my observations, some communities are keen to declare, others feel more apprehensive about making their private decision and experiences public in this way. Tostan’s ground staff (facilitators, supervisors and co-ordinators) often push the communities to participate at public declarations, even if this is against their wishes.

is reasoned that, as in the case of the Malicounda women, an in-depth understanding of human rights, participatory democracy and the workings of the state will lead to an acceptance of this form of law and government. The modules have been designed to make governmentality on a statutory level comprehensible by relating it to local decision-making processes, forms of leadership and the organisation of communal life that people can grasp and identify with. They have come to the understanding that every citizen of the Senegalese state has certain rights: to health care, to work, to vote and be elected, to education, to freedom of expression and non-discrimination. However, having rights also means having duties towards the state – obeying its laws, voting and working for its development.

In chapter 8 I demonstrate that a large number of people who have experienced the programme do become convinced that it is better not to practise excision. I show that they feel supported by the state and also that it is their right not to have their daughters cut, despite other people's disagreement. The Tostan staff work with these women during and after the programme and pay them *per diems*<sup>107</sup> to travel from village to village to tell others about their convictions and personal experiences. These are called 'sensitisation activities' or '*caravannes de sensibilisation*'. I met some women who greatly enjoyed these activities because they loved discussing reproductive health and questioning the adequacy of 'good' and 'bad' traditions in open debates. Such activities were unthinkable until recently in Fouta and women like Bilel Daff (chapter 4) and Kumba Tochala (chapter 8) seemed immensely encouraged by it.

When participants have come to a consensus that they want to participate in or organise a public declaration of their abandonment of excision, they need to get the approval of the village authorities. These are the village chief and members of the council, religious leaders or other influential members of the community. Tostan staff often help at this stage as they are experienced in talking to authorities. As we saw in Khalidou's interview, they are often involved from the beginning of the classes in 'explaining the programme' to the leaders to avoid misinterpretations of its purpose and 'poisoning'.

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<sup>107</sup> Small daily allowances for food and transport.

Often, communities are divided – some want to declare their abandonment of excision and be part of organising this meeting and others are against it. Whether a village takes part in a public declaration or not depends in part on whether the most influential leaders of the village offer support. Sometimes people who want to declare their willingness to give up the practice are supported by the religious leader and the village chief. In that case it is likely that they will participate in a declaration somewhere in Senegal, even if other villagers do not decide to stop excising. If villagers want to declare their abandonment of excision but are neither supported by the village chief nor the religious leaders, the organisation of the public declaration is likely to be a failure.<sup>108</sup>

The preparation of the declaration also involves logistical organisation. Other declaring villages need to be mobilised and prepared. Again this mainly involves Tostan staff's arranging meetings with villagers to plan the declaration. These meetings are run by the NGO with the help of local leaders. During these meetings religious leaders explain that excision is not a religious obligation but a *sunna*, a Prophetic recommendation. It is important to emphasise that in the Koran itself excision is neither mentioned nor recommended. It is said that it is a practice that existed when the Prophet Mohammed was alive and that he personally approved of it. However, during the meetings marabouts who support 'the abandonment movement' argue that although excision is a Prophetic recommendation, there are plenty of passages in the Koran where it is clearly stated that practices harmful to a person's health should be abandoned. Furthermore, the majority of Muslims around the world do not practise excision. These arguments often succeed in convincing people who are ambivalent about whether it is legitimate for a Muslim to stop excision.

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<sup>108</sup> I collected evidence for this in research I did in Casamance on the Marakissa and Oulampagne declarations in August 2005, and in March 2006 in the region of Kedougou on the Salemata declaration. On both trips I collaborated with Sabine Panet with the help of Tostan staff. (Thanks to Bacary Tamba, Tabara Cisse and Aly Ba.) Further research on public declarations and actual abandonment of excision was undertaken by myself and Sabine Panet in the Sigrid Rausing project, enquiring into reasons for adherence to excision in the regions with the highest prevalence in Senegal, which we designed and evaluated with a team of researchers in 2007. During my fieldwork in Fouta Toro I also looked at 'abandonment' and motivations for declaring at the Semme declaration (June 2007) and the failed declaration of Doumnga Lao (planned for May 2007).

The prefect, as a representative of the state, also tends to be present at these ‘sensitisation’ meetings. He informs participants that the law against excision was passed to improve women’s health. Midwives and nurses talk of health consequences. It is said that women who are not excised have fewer problems during child-birth: for example, midwives testify that nine out of ten excised women have obstetric problems during labour compared with four out of ten un-excised women. Sometimes women who have personally experienced problems also bear witness. Participants at these meetings are asked to return to their villages to inform everyone of what they heard and that a public declaration of the abandonment of excision and early and forced marriage is planned. These meetings instigate debates and discussions in the villages which then lead to the decision-making process about whether to renounce excision and whether to participate in this public declaration or not.

Despite Tostan’s discourses that public declarations take place due to the participants’ personal initiatives in wanting to renounce excising and to make their decision public, in practice Tostan work hard to persuade communities to publicly ‘abandon’ at these declarations. Although those who stand up to declare in front of the representatives of other villages and authorities do so out of personal conviction, not everyone attending wants to declare. Many are curious as to what this public spectacle is about. In addition, not all the members of ‘declaring’ village communities agree with renouncing the practice. As we will see, there is often conflict and disagreement about stopping excision and making this decision public.

### **7.3.2 The failed declaration of Doumnga Lao**

Various people in and around Doumnga Lao desperately tried to organise a public declaration for reasons discussed later (see also chapter 8). Reasons for the failure of the declaration, given by Tostan officials, are that the declaration was not well prepared and the community was not ready. Furthermore, the village chief and the organising committee claimed that they needed CFA 5 million (about £5000 at the time) to pay for the costs of the organisation in a declaration of about 20 villages. UNICEF refused to pay the sum. After spending ten days interviewing people in the villages that were supposed to participate, I found other factors of a social and

political nature that contributed to the failure of the declaration. The village chief Thiam and his councillors, as well as various women, were very keen on the declaration. They were supported by one marabout, who was known to have great spiritual power but was from the *Maabube*<sup>109</sup> ‘caste’ (*kinde*). This marabout was the father of one of the main organisers, a woman called Funti Sanghot, who incessantly spoke of the importance of the abandonment of excision. However, two other influential marabouts in the village denounced the declaration and one of them went so far as to ask the organisers, including the village chief, not to come to his mosque any more. Many said that they were not good Muslims and that their desire to declare their abandonment of excision was tantamount to abandoning religion. This evidently created a scandal, and many villagers grew very careful about expressing their views in order not to get onto the wrong side of the marabouts.

### 7.3.3 The village chief of Waande

Five days after the public declaration had failed to take place I interviewed the village chief of Waande, on 11 May 2007. Waande was the village where the panel of the public declaration of Doumnga Lao was to be held. ‘The panel’ is an event where members of the community are interviewed by journalists about their decision to publicly declare their ‘abandonment’ of excision.

The village chief was sitting in front of his house surrounded by his councillors and was furious that his village had already been put on the list of declaring villages. Angry discussion took place during this interview of which only the gist is captured here as it was translated by my research assistant. My research assistant was from the neighbouring village, and the interviewee had known his father and the family. Even though the village chief did not know me, the fact that I was accompanied by a local man whose family he knew facilitated communication and the village chief was very frank.

*Sarah:* Did you know about the public declaration that was supposed to take place?

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<sup>109</sup> Weavers, who are traditionally considered unfree and inferior to *Toorobbe* in terms of the hierarchy of Haalpulaar’en society, although not less spiritually competent.

*Village chief:* I knew about it but I did not agree to it. Because we had a meeting beforehand and I did not agree to what was said.

The village chief is referring to the preparatory meeting when he must have been informed not only of the law, conceived as an attempt to protect women and children's health, but also the planning of the declaration of the abandonment of excision and early/forced marriage.

*S:* What didn't you agree with?

*Village chief:* What we refuse is to abandon excision! It is our tradition. We don't agree to it. That is what we refuse.

*S:* Who doesn't agree?

*Village chief:* 'If there are people who are for [excision], that is nearly general in this area. If there are others who are for the abandonment, that is good as well because we are not afraid of anyone!

*S:* Even if you were not for the declaration you agreed to its planning in your village?

*Village chief:* Even if there are people who agree with it [the declaration], there are people who do not agree to it. And if the village chief doesn't agree to it? What does that mean? The village chief plays a great role in the village and if he does not agree then the declaration should not take place!

At the beginning of the interview my research assistant and I were unaware that the village chief had not been involved in the planning of the public declaration. Despite Tostan's supposition that anyone who has understood the reasons for the law and the 'abandonment of excision' will stop practising, the arguments put forward at the meeting did not convince him. Furthermore, he points out that although there are people in Waande who want to abandon, their decision does not carry much weight if they are not supported by the village chief and the leaders of the village. So what we find here is a conflict of authority. Some villagers want to make their decision to stop practising public but those who also hold authority, the village chief and the councillors, are against it.

S: Why don't you agree with it?

*Village chief:* Everything that is not in agreement with the religion, we are against it! That is the reason!

S: What is the importance of excision?

*Village chief:* I don't know anything about that! [angry] But it is our tradition! Even if there is any importance in this declaration for our development, we don't want anything to do with it. We don't want any kind of development that wants us to stop excising. All we want to do is continue practising our traditions!

The village chief follows the dominant interpretation of the Futanke marabouts in the region. We can see that the conflict between influential religious leaders and the state and the NGOs we encountered in the interviews with Khalidou and Molly is present here as well. The village chief perceives 'development' through NGOs and the state to be threatening or at least challenging cherished 'traditions'. Although he clearly affirms the importance of 'development' brought to communities by NGOs and 'foreign aid', anything that challenges 'traditions' and 'customs' is not welcome. Interestingly, he recognises the law and the state as important:

S: Are people here in the area aware of the law criminalising excision?

*Village chief:* Whether people know about it or not, no one told me about it! I was not informed; no one has given me a document stating that it's against the law. As long as I, the village chief, do not receive an official document stating that it's against the law, I will not do anything about it because how do I know that what people say is true? I have no proof in my hands and it's against the religion! No one has directly informed me of anything at all. The NGOs are NGOs not the government. If the government wants me to do something they should come here and speak to me directly.

The clash between different authorities is mirrored in these comments about whom to listen to and obey. The state apparently passes a law against excision but the village chief is informed of it through the media and the NGO, which he does not recognise as a legitimate body of authority. What the 'foreign NGO' is trying to do, from the

village chief's perspective, is against religion and Futanke custom. He argues that only the state could make his village abandon, but not this NGO with their 'embarrassing declarations'. Finally the village chief talks of a conflict between generations.

If we received valid proofs from the state, we could abandon without a public declaration. But these public declarations have not created anything but trouble. Those who have accepted [the abandonment], it is true that they must be aware of something. So it would be logical that they should come here to inform us. Us who don't understand what they have understood. But if they go to some meeting and accept something without informing me, I can't accept that. No one can force nor convince us to abandon! No one! If it's not the government. [...] Because the state is everything!<sup>110</sup> Without the government they can't do anything! The young people are the ones who want to abandon excision but they don't come here to inform us because they know that we will not accept that. What we don't want is a public declaration. If there are people who want to stop excising, that is their concern. But to say publicly 'Waande is going to abandon', that we don't want! It's going to give a bad impression of the village and its leaders. We don't want to be on a list of villages that have abandoned. We want to be supported [by development projects] to improve the situation of the village but want to be left in peace. We want to practise our traditions. All we want is to be left in peace and to practise our traditions.

I have not as yet drawn a clear distinction between the opposition to the law and the opposition to NGOs in Fouta. In the interviews with Molly and Khalidou it seems that the opposition they were experiencing was a unified one against the law and NGO

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<sup>110</sup> In contrast to the Mauritanian state, which has gone through many civil war crises and has been proven not to protect the rights of its citizens, many Senegalese people cherish the protection the Senegalese state has offered to Haalpulaar'en. In this part of Fouta many Mauritanian refugees live amongst the Senegalese Haalpulaar. Families used to live across borders before the 'events' between the countries in the 1980s, but since then, some families cannot return to the natal villages across the border where they still have relatives. This gives many people the idea that the Senegalese state is important and without the state, they would be vulnerable, whereas in Mauritania, Haalpulaar'en people's status as citizens is compromised.

intervention. However, the village chief of Waande is not against the state. Many inhabitants along the rivers of the Ile Amorphile and the border of Mauritania I have met greatly cherished the peace and refuge the Senegalese state offered to Mauritanian Haalpulaar'en following 'the events' between Mauritania and Senegal in the 1980s. Although the village chief supports the state, he does not agree with his village publicly declaring the abandonment of excision. He is for 'development', but seems very much opposed to Tostan's anti-circumcision politics and what he perceives as 'anti-Islamic' influence. For him, the public declarations give a bad image of the village and its leaders, which is linked to the religious leaders' disapproval of NGO sensitisation. Furthermore, the village chief is unhappy about how the planning of these declarations has shifted power structures in the village and in the area: he says that 'the young people' have been persuaded by something the leaders have not understood and that they take decisions without the village elders.

In chapter 5 I showed that obedience to elders is an important virtue for the organisation of tasks around the household. I showed that girls obey their parents until they marry and then submit to their husband and mother-in-law until they have their own children to help them with the workload. Men are also subject to orders from their mothers and elders. I suggest that 'the young people's' disrespect for the village chief's disapproval of the public abandonment of excision signifies the village chief's anxieties about a rupture in power structures that fundamentally challenges the existing hierarchy in society. Instead of obedience to elders until one has gained a certain respectability and authority in one's community, 'the young people' are taking decisions on their own account and elect leadership according to criteria which are alien to the elders' ways of doing things.<sup>111</sup>

But rather than this merely being a generational conflict between *Toorobbe* leaders and the young, 'casted' men and women are also part of the movement against excision. 'The unfree' *Ñeeñbe* occupational/status groups of blacksmiths, potters, weavers, leather-workers and slaves (*Galluykoobe/Maccube*) have had no say in Futanke society as far back as people can remember. Even when the era of the

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<sup>111</sup> Also see von Hellerman (2010), who analyses the role of youth in conflict around claims to authority and leadership in Edo, Nigeria.

*Almaamies* came to an end and throughout colonialism they were subject to the leading *Rimbe* groups (*Tooroɓɓe*, *Fulɓe*, *Jaawamɓe*, *Subalɓe*), who were landholders and struggled against each other for power. With Tostan and other organisations, however, these power-structures have changed because so-called ‘casted people’ are charged with responsibility in the management committees of the NGO. At the time of the Doumnga Lao declaration, the co-ordinator of Tostan Fouta was from the former slave ‘caste’ – something very extraordinary for Fouta. The idea that someone from the former slave caste gives orders and manages projects and people is groundbreaking. Despite the disapproval of older leaders, like the village chief of Waande, many welcome this change and see it as a chance for social mobility and as a way out of stagnant decision-making processes led by birth-right instead of competence.

Besides Tostan introducing eligibility to leadership regardless of age and caste, women are also involved in community projects and take on roles of responsibility (also see chapter 8). Not surprisingly this is difficult for the elders to accept. They see it as a sign the demise of the Futanke way of life and culture.

In this way, Tostan’s education programme fundamentally challenges habitual decision-making processes in society. I have shown that the authority to make decisions is gained through age, status and gender. Decisions concerning community life have ‘traditionally’ been taken by *Tooroɓɓe*, the *hinnde* of those who are learned in the Koran, who have been in power since the Islamic revival in the 17th and 18th century (Dilley 2004). It seems that the abandonment of excision is associated with the fear of ‘loss of tradition’ and it threatens the Futanke way of life not just because the practice concerns women’s bodies but also because NGO and state interventions challenge the authority of the *Tooroɓɓe*. In the final section of this chapter I want to look at such fears in relation to cultural colonialism. In order to do so I refer to one of the most recent ‘events of opposition’. In 2009 this event was ‘splashed across the canvas of public memory’ (Tarlo 2003: 21). A year later, however, there were no longer any traces to be found on the internet, apart from in the *US Department of State Human Rights report 2009*. This ‘critical’ event has been watered down, practically effaced from the national story-making of ‘the beginning of the end of excision in Senegal’.

## 7.4 The trials of Matam

On May 28, the Court of Matam sentenced a woman who had carried out FGM on a 16-month-old baby. The court also handed down the same sentence to the baby's grandmother, who had requested the FGM to be performed. The baby's parents received a suspended sentence of six months' imprisonment. After failing in their efforts to pressure government authorities to abandon the case, local religious groups influenced local persons to stone security force members. (US Department of State 2010)

According to the report, this was an incident where 'human rights' were breached. It is listed along with other cases under categories such as 'unlawful deprivation of life', 'sexual violence' and 'torture and other cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment'. It is astonishing that the only traces of this event left on the internet about are written by 'foreigners' – the US Department of State's Human Rights Watch. Despite the strong views of many Futanke, there are no longer any articles on the internet interpreting state intervention as a form of cultural colonialism or the infringement of the right to practise one's religion. The latter, incidentally, is also a 'human right'.

From informants working for Tostan in Ourosogui, 5km from Matam, I heard that the exciser was denounced by the human rights group RADDHO (Recontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme) over the radio. Subsequently the authorities were obliged to act and arrested the exciser. This was the first time anyone had ever been arrested and put on trial for excising in Fouta Toro. People were very angry: Tostan staff had to be on guard as many accused them of having denounced the exciser, and some Tostan centres in neighbouring villages closed down.

The journalist Pape Ndiaye wrote a newspaper article entitled 'Opposed to the prosecution of excisers, the religious leaders of Matam rebel'<sup>112</sup> on 14 June 2009, three weeks after the initial arrest of the parents.

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<sup>112</sup> Title translated by myself, article summarised in English by myself.

A few hundred demonstrators from different religious groupings had mobilised and informed their communities. The demonstrators blocked the regional law courts with public transport buses to show their allegiance to their marabouts who had demanded the freeing of the offenders. Police troops were also present. The trials therefore took place under strong police surveillance and access to the law courts was denied to the public. After a few hours the case was suspended. This caused anger among the demonstrators who were expecting the charges to be dropped. They started throwing stones at the police force, who countered the attack with tear gas. The contesters are already planning strategies for another mobilisation under the religious leadership of Thierno Abou Ly – imam of Ourosogui; Thierno Salif Thiam; Thierno Mamadou Lamine Ly.

The article is neutral and dispassionate compared to the religious leaders' strong reactions. Shortly after the initial arrest of the excisers, the ulamas, imams and religious leaders of Fouta, the Ferlo and the Bundu declared made a press statement (29 May 2009).

#### DECLARATION DE PRESSE<sup>113</sup>

Après la guère froide, la disparition de l'Union Sovieétique et l'URSS les occidentaux à leur tête les Etats-Unis d'Amérique combattent l'Islam par des méthodes intelligentes qui consiste à combattre certaines pratiques recommandées par l'Islam pour effacer la culture musulmane car une société sans culture va disparaître.

Cette lutte généralisée se mène par plusieurs formes ambiguës. Des ONG ont été créées soit disant pour aider des citoyens pour mieux comprendre leurs droits et devoirs, mais en réalité c'est pour faire disparaître l'Islam. **Ils ne pourront jamais.**

Aujourd'hui au Sénégal (Pays musulman de 95%), on se permet d'interdire des pratiques recommandées par l'Islam telle que:

- L'excision qui était pratiquée par les Arabes depuis le temps du **Prophète Paix et Salut** sur lui qui nous est venu par l'Islam, car les sociétés Africaines non musulmanes ne le pratiquent pas. Nos illustres ancêtres le pratiquent sans problème. Honte à tout ceux qui ont voté cette Loi satanique. Honte à tout ceux qui ont voté cette Loi impraticable au Sénégal.

<sup>113</sup> I cite the original in French because to a French reader the language, with grammatical and spelling mistakes, seems very peculiar. I have tried to capture the sense of how it reads in my translation into English below.

### **Press Declaration**

Since the cold war and the demise of the Sovie Union ex USSR [sic], Westerners led by the United States of America have been fighting Islam with intelligent methods which consist of combating certain practices that are recommended by Islam, to efface Muslim culture, for society without culture will disappear.

This conflict is taking place in various ambiguous forms [sic]. NGOs have been created and say that they are there to help citizens understand their rights and duties, but in reality they are there to make Islam disappear. **They will never succeed.**

Today, the Senegalese state (95% Muslim) allows itself to outlaw practices that are recommended by Islam, such as:

- Excision was practised by Arabs since the time of the Prophet (**peace and greeting be with him**) [sic] who came to us with Islam. Non-Muslim African societies do not practise it. Our illustrious ancestors [sic] practised it without problems. Shame on those who voted for this satanic law! Shame on those who voted for this impractical [sic] law in Senegal!

In addition to what I translated word for word in the text-box above, the religious leaders appeal to the ‘authorities of the country’ to: (1) remove the law against excision in Senegal; (2) drop the law against early marriage because the Prophet Mohammed himself married his wife Aicha at the age of nine; (3) repeal the law legalising prostitution. Furthermore, they asked the authorities of the country to work with religious leaders on the development of a legal codex. They emphasise that they do not want to cause problems like in Algeria or Afghanistan but are denouncing the mass destruction of the foundations of Islam in Muslim Africa.

In contrast to the press release and human rights report above, we can see here that the marabouts perceive the arrest of the exciser as an invasion and an ‘intelligent’ attempt to destroy Islam and ‘culture’. Although the exciser was arrested by the police, the ulamas associate this event with non-governmental and foreign intervention, which uses concepts such as ‘rights’ and ‘duties’ to annihilate existing Islamic forms of order and justice.

In order to understand the *Toorobbe* claim to authority over law and justice, I refer to Willis (1978), who explains how the *Turudiyya* ‘*ulama*’<sup>114</sup> developed in Fouta Toro in the 17th and 18th century. He argues that a number of Haalpulaar’*en* warriors who strongly believed in Islam, Malik Sy being one of the most famous ones, created an Islamic community in the Bundu. Protection and asylum were offered to different socio-linguistic groups (Dianicunda, Tenda, some Dulet who had difficulties with the Wolof of Saloum, some Fulbe groups, some Mande-speaking groups and various Sarakhole peoples) (Raffenel 1856, cited in Willis 1978: 201). In this community (*Jama’a*), Pulaar was spoken and Sharia was practised. Non-Muslims, who were excluded from the *Jama’a*, were kept as slaves. European travellers at the time noted that Europeans as well as ‘all Sudani infidels’ (Hecquart 1853 in Willis 1978) were not allowed to enter certain urban settlements and were excluded from the *Jama’a*. Willis points out that: ‘One of the striking features of the Torodbe *Jama’as* was the clear distinction which evolved between dar al-Islam (‘the land of Islam’) and dar al-harb (‘the land of war’ or polytheism) (Willis 1978: 205). The ‘Torodbe’<sup>115</sup> clerisy became the dominant occupational group in the Bundu, Fouta Toro and Fouta Jallon. Initially it was possible for people from any ethnic or caste background to join the *Toorobbe* if they were devout Muslims and agreed to settle (some people who lived in caves and trees or were nomadic had to give up their way of life to join the community according to Willis [1978]). Other ‘free men’ and landholders (*Fulbe*, *Jaawambe* and *Subalbe*) were integrated into the newly forming hierarchy. They kept their land but had to pay revenues to the imam (*ushr*, *zakat* and *Jizya*) in return for internal and external security (Willis 1978: 206). The imam was everywhere recognised as the principal political and religious figure. ‘It was to the *imam* that believers looked for maintenance of Islamic traditions, the enforcement of the Sharia, and the wisdom necessary for a sound economic and social policy’ (1978: 206).

At the beginning of chapter 5, I mentioned the common belief that Islam brought law and order to Futanke society and offered people protection. For many, following Islamic recommendations is still important for this reason – the holy law and order it has brought to Futanke society. Although this sense of sanctuary has not remained

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<sup>114</sup> Those ‘who lay down the canons of Islam and interpret them’ (Willis 1978: 195).

<sup>115</sup> The spelling of *Toorobbe* varies in the literature.

unchallenged since the Islamic revolution (Robinson 1985; Wane 1969), statutory and NGO intervention seem to defy this order that has offered protection from invasion, and spiritual salvation as well as socio-economic order for three to four centuries. Although the colonial and post-colonial state has imposed its power alongside this socio-religious system, not only the law against excision, but foreign intervention through NGOs, have directly challenged a religious recommendation. That is part of the domain of the *Tooroɓɓe* clerisy of which the colonial and post-colonial governments mostly stayed clear.

I suggest that the following comments of religious leaders after the trials of Matam should be read in the light of the role of the *Tooroɓɓe* in the history of Fouta Toro. In the following I discuss the reaction of some marabouts of Podor to the trials of Matam. These were recorded during a meeting that took place in Ndioum after rumours that Tostan had been involved in denouncing the exciser to the police. The marabouts threatened to order all Tostan centres in the department of Podor to be closed and the NGO chased out of Fouta Toro if it turned out this rumour was true.<sup>116</sup>

Even if excision was not *sunna*, it is our tradition, our identity! That is why we will never abandon. Tostan you are frightening! What hurts me most is that the children of Fouta are being used to eradicate their own culture. An ethnicity that loses its language and customs will disappear! Why have other countries like Mali, Mauritania, the Gambia and Guinea not become part of the United Nations Embargo?<sup>117</sup> Even the politicians are supporting them. It is shameful to want to efface one's identity. [He starts crying.]

(Thierno Hassirou, marabout, May 2009)

Westerners have tried everything to win Fouta: Thierno Mountaga Tall himself predicted the arrival of NGOs whose mission it is to destroy Islam. I regret that the Futanke is too easily corrupted. The state and those who

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<sup>116</sup> Seydou Niang (2009). These were recorded and noted down carefully 15 months after I left the field by my former research assistant, who had become assistant co-ordinator of Tostan Fouta.

<sup>117</sup> The marabout uses the word 'Embargo' meaning the UN agreement among African countries that FGM is a form of violence against women (VAW). Also see Shell-Duncan (2008).

support it are the same. What I hope is that you as Futanke can help us to fight against those who are combating the religion.

(Zackaria Thioune, imam, May 2009)

These extracts convey not just the sense of feeling threatened by governmental and non-governmental intervention and their challenge to the moral and social order of society, but also a lack of trust in the Senegalese government. Although the NGOs tend to refer to the national law in their sensitisation activities and discourses against the practice, the marabouts do not see this law as resulting from a national consensus but as an imposition by the United Nations and ‘the Westerners’. They interpret the renouncing of excision and Senegalese officials’ collaboration with NGOs as due to corruption and loss of morality, which results in the demise of Futanke culture. This loss of holy law and order clearly disturbs and saddens many *Toorobbe* marabouts, leaders of what they perceive to be a glorious society built on the foundations of Islam.

## **Conclusion**

I have shown how governmental and non-governmental intervention on excision disturbs and unsettles Futanke social, moral and political order. The opposition to the law and the NGOs are an act of defence against changes in morality and leadership that challenge the *Toorobbe* leaders’ moral authority and political power. I have shown that they perceive the Futanke way of life to be threatened and seriously challenged through these interventions and the associated social change. Whereas they fear the ‘foreign influence’ of NGOs and believe the Senegalese state to be corrupt, local people, including NGO workers and state representatives, fear the marabouts’ spiritual power as well. I have shown that they are not just spiritual guides but also the symbolic leaders of Futanke society. Although statutory law has been introduced alongside holy law and theoretically grants non-*Toorobbe* and caste people rights to positions of leadership in local politics, in practice it is incredibly challenging for a non-*Toorodo* to be listened to and followed to the same degree as a *Toorodo* leader.

If many Futanke perceive what is happening as a sign of demise of Futanke culture and values, governmental and non-governmental intervention may be counter-productive. However, in the next chapter I will show that many women and men feel not only that it is important to stop practising excision, but also that the NGOs are providing them with information that helps them to take this decision. Tostan's teachings provide people with tools and inspire them with ideologies that give them the courage to stand up against those who require them to obey a 'stagnant' social and moral order. In the next chapter I will show that, for them, the state is not corrupt but provides them with the right to the highest standards of health, freedom of expression and non-discrimination. Even though the marabouts' outcry against governmental and non-governmental intervention opposes the social and moral disintegration of a society that takes pride in its 'traditions' and moral integrity, social change may be what many people aspire to: hence they support abandonment and seek Tostan's support.

## **Chapter 8: 'A right to health, freedom of speech and non-discrimination': the role of human rights in the 'abandonment' movement in Fouta Toro**

There are nearly always problems. Most women know that the problems Tostan is talking about exist but it is difficult to abandon. It's honour and their religion that stops them from leaving excision.

(Tostan facilitator, May 2007)

There are 19 human rights. Among these 19, the right to health impressed us the most. We were 145 participants in Demba Diallo's classes. After the classes we felt like getting the message out there to others who had not participated and had not understood. We did some sketches. There were some people who were reticent about the activities we organised. We went from door to door to sensitise them and finally we came to an agreement for a public declaration. Seedo Abass had understood but that wasn't enough, we could not stop there so we went out to meet others who agreed to a public declaration.

(Kumba Tochala, president of the management committee of Seedo Abass in February 2008)

This chapter is about those who have stopped practising excision and who collaborate with the NGOs to raise awareness about the health problems excision can cause. In this chapter I introduce those women who are not afraid to break social conventions and who go out to talk to others about the problems they have experienced. I show that they often seek Tostan's help and justify speaking out against excision by reference to the Senegalese state and to human rights. For them, human rights are a vehicle for renouncing the practice despite social conventions that suggest they continue.

Engle Merry and Ferguson call intervention involving so-called 'global' standards of human rights 'transnational'. These transnational standards of what human rights are and what constitutes their violation have been defined by international committees as issues of women's rights.<sup>118</sup> Engle Merry and Shell-Duncan have emphasised that these international agreements frequently need to be translated into the vernacular, with the aid of NGO education programmes or through activist groups. This process of 'translation' (Engle Merry

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<sup>118</sup> At the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights 1993 'Female Genital Mutilation' became classified as a form of violence against women (VAW). At this conference VAW was for the first time acknowledged to fall under the purview of international human rights law (Shell-Duncan 2008: 227). In 2008, the WHO published a policy statement on FGM representing the views of UN agencies (UNAIDS, UNDP, UNECA, UNFPA, UNHCHR, UNIFEM, etc.) to highlight the wide recognition of human rights and legal dimensions to the problem of FGM (Shell-Duncan 2008: 229; WHO 2008: 3).

2006) takes place because many 'indigenous women' do not perceive their problems or personal conflicts as 'human rights violations'. They are often assisted in formulating personal issues in human rights language by NGOs and activists in order to make their case viable and strong (Engle Merry 2006; Strathern 2004).

Futanke women use this 'transnational' ideology to justify not cutting their daughters regardless of the *Toorobbe* authorities' recommendations. Although in the past such talk may have been shameful, it is becoming more and more acceptable as they are backed by the state and an international community.

Engle Merry's supposition – that it is mostly 'middle-level women' and transnational elites who adhere to human rights ideology and who are more committed to using human rights approaches than 'indigenous' women – seems misplaced in the case of the Futanke. Engle Merry says that so-called 'indigenous women' are often pushed by NGOs to formulate their personal issues in terms of the violation of human rights. She argues that their orientation to human rights models is often temporary. Although I have shown that some Futanke women and men feel pressured to publicly declare their 'abandonment' of FGC, I show in this chapter that many Futanke women perceive the international human rights agreements as protecting their bodies and rights. I contend that those who have personally experienced difficulties because of their own excision, but find it hard to stop practising, see the rights framework provided by transnational institutions and the state as a way out of oppressive structures in their own society. It provides them with an ideology that gives courage (*cuusal*) to publicly discuss their health problems and speak out against excision. As we shall see, vernacular human rights discourses revolve around the idea that daughters have the right to non-discrimination and the highest standards of health. The fact that many women in Senegal have declared their abandonment of excision before them and that they are supported by an international community has given them strength to challenge local leaders' opposition to the abandonment of excision.

The first part of the chapter explores the views and experiences of those who are against excision and shows how they perceive the opposition. Most of them have personally experienced problems because of excision and came to a conscious understanding of the source of their problems through NGO education classes. They perceive the law as being in

place to protect women's health and believe that those who oppose it are either not aware of the underlying cause of the problems most women experience, or are socially constrained to adhere to a moral order that has been in place for a long time and is not normally challenged. I argue that the attribution of gynaecological problems to excision, whatever the strength of the empirical evidence, leads women to perceive the opposition as 'wrong' or to 'have not understood', and that this motivates women to go out and raise awareness against excision. If the law is seen as being there to protect women from the health problems associated with excision, and an 'international community' is perceived to be there to support them, it is possible for women to stop practising and stand up against leaders who are oppose the ban. I support Mackie's argument (2000) that it is hard to break a social convention on one's own and activists wish to create an environment where people are free to stop without being ostracised.

In the second part of the chapter I explore some of the issues associated with excision, especially sexual dissatisfaction and divorce. I also discuss how activists remain respectable despite openly discussing sensitive issues against the religious leaders' wishes. In the final part of the chapter I discuss the role of human rights in the 'abandonment' movement.

## **8.1 Awareness of health problems and public declarations**

This section draws attention to the ways in which idioms of health have replaced those of purity and control of desire in discourses around excision. In contrast to the anger and fear in discourses around 'the abandonment' of excision explored in the previous chapters, the women below express hope and desperation for change.

### **8.1.1 The president of the management committee for the public declaration in Waande**

In the previous chapter we discussed the case of the village chief of Waande who expressed anger and outrage about the planned public declaration in Doumnga Lao. The president of the management committee for the public declaration in Waande disagreed: I interviewed her shortly after my meeting with the village chief of Waande, on 11 May 2007. After the

interview with the village chief, my research assistant and I walked over to the other end of the village and were approached by a man who had been looking for us. He was one of the organisers of the public declaration and aware of the village chief's opposition. However, he explained to us that 'the young people' in the village had wanted a declaration anyway and he hoped that the village chief had not turned Tostan against the idea of Waande participating in one.

The mid-day heat was becoming oppressive and it was approaching lunchtime. This man took us to a house to rest. We lay down on mattresses arranged in a cool, mud-brick room. The children brought us *ataaya*, the strong tea that helps to fight the lethargy that accompanies the heat. Hosting important guests (singl.: *kodo*; pl.: *hobbe*) is prestigious. Members of the management committees for public declarations are fairly used to having researchers, journalists or volunteers sent to them by the NGO to discuss excision and 'declaring'. Those villagers who want 'development' go out of their way to present them with a certain image of the village in order to make them believe that they are dynamic and worthy of funding. When people hear that a white person has come to the village, those who have something to say come to the hut where the white person is hosted. They are keen to talk about issues that are on their mind and tell stories of their struggles as they believe that they will be heard by people who will be able to help.

Soon, various people, all part of the management committee for the failed declaration came to greet us. As I was white, the president of the management committee of Waande presumed that I was one of those volunteers or NGO workers who had come to ask questions about their decision to stop practising excision. The presidents of management committees are often articulate and courageous women who are not afraid to express their opinions and are not easily intimidated by people who challenge their decisions. They are often the driving force behind the 'declarations' and encourage other women to join their cause.

While I try to stay awake in the mid-day heat and before I ask any questions, the president of the management committee begins to talk:

People are so keen on doing a public declaration! They really want to do a public declaration if the misunderstanding won't stop them [Tostan and the

authorities who had planned to come to the declaration that failed to take place] from coming back here to organise a public declaration. We are for Tostan. We have understood the programme well. We will always support Tostan and their work even if there are people here in the village who don't, we want Tostan!

At this point we are not sure why and what this 'declaration' means to them. I asked: 'What is it that makes you want to abandon?' The woman replies:

In fact we've had problems with many of our young girls' health. Upon marriage a lot of young girls have had problems with penetration. They often needed to be taken to the doctor to be opened. And we didn't know why they were having these difficulties. We asked why and it was said that it was because of the excision. Then Tostan came to the village and explained the same thing. That is why we want to abandon.

In chapters 4 and 5 I showed that girls tend to be cut during infancy. I explained that most women do not remember any pain and rarely have any medical problems due to excision until they are penetrated upon marriage, or at pregnancy and child-birth. Throughout my fieldwork I often asked myself why some of my informants, like my friends in Bito, never complained of health issues, whereas whenever I went to interview women about their decision to stop practising they spoke of their troubles. I was not sure whether only some women suffer from these medical problems or whether it was very common. Was the anti-excision movement guided only by those who had experienced health problems or were more complex social and political factors involved? I ask: 'The consequences you were talking about, do only some women suffer from them?' The woman replies:

It is very common! Because before, young girls who were cut used to be treated with 'traditional' products but this treatment is not done anymore.<sup>119</sup> The girls' excision is not treated anymore. One just expects them to be virgin upon marriage and then they are taken to the healthcare centre to be opened.

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<sup>119</sup> The 'traditional' products applied by some excisers during excision are discussed in the interviews with the excisers in chapter 4.

[...] Nowadays, the most important thing is that the girl is closed so that her vagina is closed and she cannot have sexual intercourse.

In previous chapters, I presented the views of people who felt that excision was safe and does not cause harm by saying that it has been around ‘since the beginning of the universe and has never caused problems’ (*gila dawaa-dawi kaddungal ina wadee kono cadeele meedaa heen wonnde*). Here on the other hand, it is said that the problems have become more common with reference to ‘loss of tradition’. The woman implies that there has been a shift in the way excision is practised so that it causes more harm. The emphasis is on ‘closure’ and control of desire. It is possible that there is an increasing concern with virginity before marriage and with making sure that the girl does not risk losing her honour. In that case excision could be seen as a preventive measure against the threats of a changing society, where women need to wait for their husbands for longer periods than in the past, or where there are more pregnancies before marriage than in the past. The Futanke are ‘losing their traditions’ and the values that have made them proud of who they are.

However, I also met many people who saw no relation between the way in which women are cut and any increase in risk that girls lose their virginity before marriage. These people did not perceive excision to be more harmful than in the past, and said that the ‘problems’ always existed. They said that they did not know that the problems were due to excision but thought that all women experience difficulties when in labour.

In view of the village chief’s disagreement with the organisation of the public declaration I asked the following question:

*S*: Is it not possible to abandon without doing a public declaration?’

*Woman*: Yes that is possible. There are people here in the village who have already abandoned.

*S*: If that’s the case why do you want to have a public declaration?

*Woman*: To prove to everyone that we have abandoned so that others can follow our movement as well.

Tostan developed its strategies in line with Gerry Mackie's concept of 'organised diffusion'.<sup>120</sup> Mackie (2000) argues that if a practice has become a social norm, it is impossible for individuals in a group to abandon a harmful practice alone. He compares the abandonment of FGC to the disappearance of Chinese foot-binding. He argues that, as with the abandonment of foot-binding in China, FGC needs to be abandoned collectively. Otherwise individual members of the community remain ostracised. Mackie and Tostan therefore suggest that this 'abandonment process' can only happen if a whole community decides to stop together and makes their decision public. The president of the management committee, however, asserts that it is possible for individuals to separately abandon the practice. For her, the declaration is important so that everyone in the region hears about it and can join their movement. This will raise awareness about the impact of the cutting. As we shall see, others disagreed with this. To find out more about their motivations, I ask:

*S:* What are the most convincing reasons to abandon excision? (1) Health, (2) the harmful consequences of excision, (3) the law, (4) human rights or (5) money.

*Woman:* I think it's health because if you are sick you can't choose to refuse anything that will make you feel better. The main reason to abandon is health. Every time a woman is in labour or has to have an operation because of it, she realises. I think that is even why the law was voted in, in the interests of the population, for the health of the population.

I asked this question in many interviews with people who wanted to stop practising and had organised public declarations in Fouta Toro and other areas.<sup>121</sup> The responses varied. The village chief of Waande says that only the law can make them stop practising, not the NGOs nor anyone else. In Doumnga Lao, on the other hand, the village chief suggested that his

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<sup>120</sup> Organised diffusion means that if a person has learned something and is convinced, they go and tell others about their conviction. At every public declaration, there are villages which have participated in the Tostan programme and 'organised diffusion' villages that apparently joined the movement because they were convinced by the others. Mackie (2000) argues that if a social norm changes for the dominant inter-marrying group, the others feel obliged to adapt. In practice, however, I have found that only a few inhabitants in the organised diffusion villages are actually convinced of the importance of stopping excision. Other inhabitants are not even informed that they had officially declared their 'abandonment'.

<sup>121</sup> We designed this question for the Sigrid Rausing project. It was phrased in this particular way because these were the responses given by people in interviews we had done in previous research in Casamance and Salemata. As some were slow replying to this question we thought that providing them with different possible answers to choose from would make the interviewee think of possibilities they may not have thought of before. This seemed to work so I sometimes asked the same question in my own research.

village would become more important through a public declaration. He had aspirations for his village to be in the newspapers and on the radio, and to hear people say that it was a 'progressive village' that wanted to develop. He seemed to believe that this would attract more funds. In the Diery, however, in a village called Sinthiou Mabube, a village chief we spoke to said that the law had no power and could not stop anyone from doing anything. If people decided to stop practising 'their customs', there had to be a well-founded reason that had been approved by the religious leaders.

In contrast to those who oppose the anti-excision movement and the law and see it as a form of cultural colonialism, and as a way of persuading people to abandon Islam, the respondent quoted above believes that the law was passed because of the health problems associated with excision. What she has learned from health professionals and in Tostan classes has given her courage to speak out, despite the social importance of excision and the leaders' opposition, as I explore in greater detail through the case of Funti.

### **8.1.2 Funti in Doumnga Lao**

Funti was one of the main organisers of the failed public declaration in Doumnga Lao discussed in chapter 7. Her father was a powerful *Maabube* marabout in the village who supported her cause and was ready to speak out despite the other marabouts' disapproval. When we first arrived in Doumnga to discuss the failed declaration, Funti accompanied us everywhere and tried to determine whom we should speak to. She was evidently afraid that we would meet people who were against the declaration. This was against her interests because, me being white, she saw me as someone who had been sent by Tostan to enquire. Nevertheless, after a few days, she despaired and was frustrated that the declaration would not take place. In a formal interview she told us that it was difficult for those who wanted to stop excising to stop alone and that it was better if everyone heard why they were abandoning and that they were supported by the law and international organisations. She was afraid that because the declaration had failed, Tostan might abandon them and focus on working in other villages where there was a general consensus to stop excising.

My research assistant and I had come back to Funti's house after a few days of visiting Waande and other villages which were supposed to take part in the public declaration of

Doumnga Lao. Funti, whose husband was in the Ivory Coast, had prepared our bed under a mosquito net under a tree in the compound. I slept there with her and her baby. Funti and I were creeping under the mosquito net and settling into bed in the dark, when she asked me where we were going the next day. I told her. She asked me if it was not going to turn Tostan against the declaration if we found information that showed that not everyone was in favour. I said, no, not at all ...

‘Tostan needs to know what’s going on in order to be able to organise things better. In Waande for example, the village chief and quite a few other people are against the declaration. But there are also a lot of people who are passionately for the abandonment of excision and I think it’s going to help them to organise a public declaration. I don’t think they will change their mind. And they support people who want to abandon excision and these women are so convinced of the consequences themselves.’ I say hopefully.

‘Mm’, she replies. To give her courage I continue:

‘Yes. I think it’s amazing. One of the women in the *comité de pilotage* is so strongly against it, she says that everyone is aware of the consequences without exception. Because every woman needs to be opened upon the wedding night and most women have problems with their excision.’

‘Mm’, she says, not sounding particularly surprised.

‘Do you think that what she says is true? That most women have problems upon the wedding night and need to be opened?’ I ask.

‘Well yes. There are problems with it and most women, I would say 90% of women experience it – the opening upon the wedding night. And then you have to be cut again when you give birth. My wound didn’t heal for a whole month it was so painful. I would say that most women know that these problems exist but many of them don’t know where they come from. Because it’s what they found with the ancestors.<sup>122</sup> They cannot imagine anything else. But most women know the problems.’ Funti says.

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<sup>122</sup> I translated this interview into English from the French translation where it was said: ‘C’est ce qu’on a trouvé avec les ancêtres.’ In Pulaar the common expression is ‘to inherit from the ancestors’ – *min tawrii ko taaniraaŋbe amen*. The verb *taawirde* – ‘to inherit’, similar to *taawde* – ‘to find’, is used when people talk about practices that are believed to have been practised by the ancestors and passed down from generation to generation. In *Freedom in Fulani Social Life*, Riesman discusses the meaning of *tawaangal* – the Jelgoŋbe Fulbe’s word for custom – literally translating as ‘that which is found’. Riesman explains that the meaning of *tawaangal*

'That is so strange that they don't talk about it.' I reply.

*Funti*: 'Mm'

*S*: 'So strange.'

*Funti*: 'It's their honour and the religion that stops them from abandoning.'

When Funti says that religion stops people from renouncing excision she is referring to both the concept of religious purity explored in chapter 6 and the religious leaders' opposition to 'abandoning' a Prophetic recommendation. 'Honour' could mean being able to control one's desires and being able to resist temptations. A number of marabouts said that 'a woman who loses her honour is devalued'. This implies that a woman who cannot resist temptation is shameless. 'Honour stops them from abandoning' may also mean that someone may be ashamed to be different from everyone else and being rejected or ostracised as a result.

My conversations with these two women raise a number of questions with regard to excision and 'health' and women's desire to participate in public declarations. First of all, is excision a harmful practice or not? As we can see in the ethnography, women's views on whether FGC is harmful or not vary. Throughout the last few chapters, we have discussed women who do not perceive the practice as harmful and reason that it is a tradition that has existed for a long time, which must therefore be safe. However, the women we met in this chapter do perceive excision as harmful. They argue that most women experience the problems associated with excision but are not aware that they are due to the cutting. Most women think that the gynaecological problems they are suffering from are an inevitable side-effect of child-birth. Others who do attribute their 'problems' to excision continue cutting because they perceive the risk of not cutting their daughters to be worse. Whether or not someone stops practising therefore does not seem to depend solely on whether they have experienced problems, but also on to the extent to which it is possible for them to talk about their problems openly and to admit that they are against excision. This is why both Funti and the president of the management committee find the public declarations useful. The president of the management committee said that it is possible to stop without 'declaring', but the declaration is useful so that everyone can hear about the cause of the problems most women experience. Funti, on the other hand, supports Mackie's theory (2000), saying that it is hard to stop practising alone and a public declaration where everyone hears that a group of women

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'concerns the manner in which one acquires the possibility of accomplishing this activity, notably by the passage "from hand to hand", from generation to generation, of culture' (Riesman 1977: 9).

has stopped saves women from being ostracised. Where purity and honour are the social norm everyone excises and those who do not are ‘different’ and ‘repulsive’ (chapter 6). In these circumstances, however, health and human rights reasons justify collectively stopping the practice. If everyone understands and accepts that the problems most women experience are due to excision and people come to a consensus to stop in the name of women’s health, then purity perhaps becomes less of a priority and honour becomes associated with taking pride in being one of the few who as given up the practice ‘in the name of women’s health and reproductive capacity’.

Shell-Duncan (2008) argues that the anti-excision campaigns’ arguments have shifted from discourses about health to discourses about human rights. This has been particularly the case since different biomedical studies have shown that the so-called ‘medical facts’ of long-term and short-term risks of FGC were either trivial or based on small or poorly designed studies (Shell-Duncan 2008: 226). In a 2006 WHO study on the health risks of FGC it was found that ‘for women with WHO III mutilations (the most severe) there was a relative risk of 1.3 for both caesarean section and infant resuscitation, and 1.6 for stillbirth or early neonatal death, and there was no increased risk for the 32% of women who had WHO type I mutilation’ (Conroy 2006: 106). Conroy (2006) further notes that this places the risk of FGC somewhere behind maternal smoking (in Shell-Duncan 2008: 226).

Perhaps the number of those who really do stop practising is relatively low because the so-called ‘health effects’ are exaggerated and ‘human rights’ are perceived as an imposition by many and an ‘intelligent form of cultural colonialism’ (chapter 7). However, as we can see here, some women do find the health information given to them incredibly useful and do want to stop practising and declare their decision for the reasons discussed above.

In the following we will explore how women who raise awareness about the problems associated with excision are accepted despite the opposition.

### **8.1.3 Faty Ba**

Faty Ba was a Tostan facilitator who came to work and live in Bito from October 2007. Bito, along with some other villages on the Ile Amorphile, was considered a ‘difficult zone’ by the

Tostan co-ordination, as there had been fierce opposition from the neighbouring villages of Abdallah and Wallah in the past. When the idea of participating in the programme was introduced during meetings with the village council in Bito, Tostan still had an extremely bad reputation. This was why initially I did not tell people what my research was about nor did I tell them that I was associated with Tostan and occasionally went to the local headquarters 150km away to check my emails. Although the women would not have known much about Tostan as they were not involved in local politics nor particularly interested, influential men in Bito might have disapproved and ‘poisoned’ others against me. However, by the time Tostan became active in Bito I was already well known to most *Bitonaabe* and they were proud that I had chosen to live in their village. I was in no way considered a threatening intruder but was more like a grown-up child learning to talk and live like them, constantly laughed at, ridiculed and taught how to do things ‘properly’. When Tostan introduced themselves to the village council of Bito, Harouna Sy, who had been a Tostan facilitator for a number of years, informed the villagers of the benefits of the programme, and the *Bitonaabe* agreed to the implementation of Tostan classes. The Tostan co-ordinator picked Faty Ba to teach in Bito because she had been teaching the Tostan programme in Fouta for many years and had successfully handled some fierce opposition. Although she regularly complained about the fact that she was sent to the most remote villages where transport was extremely difficult, where there was no electricity and few other comforts, the Tostan management knew that she would do a good job and prevent any polemics against Tostan. Faty Ba was a round, sociable and kind lady who liked to come over to my hosts’ compound in the afternoons to have a chat with Fama Sy or Maimouna. As Fama Sy’s husband Harouna Sy also worked for Tostan, Faty Ba felt welcome in their household. She got to know the household I had become part of well. At first she refused to speak to me in French and I did not know that she spoke any French at all so she got to know me by speaking to me in Pulaar and observing me interacting with my family in Pulaar. After a few months we started speaking in French, with which I was more comfortable, and we had many long conversations during the sandstormy afternoons of January and February 2008.

For the first few months of the Tostan programme, Faty Ba had mainly focused on human rights. Having ‘rights’ (*jojjande*) meant having duties (*fojde*) towards one’s community, as she explained. The classes were well attended and women were interested in these rights and duties, as well as the structure of the state and democracy. On 23 January 2008 we spoke of

Tostan's ambition to get communities to organise public declarations against excision on the veranda of Fama Sy's house. Until this point Faty Ba had only expressed her opposition to excision in personal conversations with villagers, not during classes.

I say to Faty Ba: 'You know what always surprises me? Some people have never had any problems with excision, how are they going to be convinced that they should stop if they've never had any problems? People like Maimouna for example, she has given birth to I don't know how many children? I think eight or so. And she doesn't seem to have any problems and all her girls are excised. How would you persuade someone like that to abandon?'

Faty Ba replies: 'Well but often there are problems. I think in most cases there are problems. I've had many problems which is why I don't want any more children. When I was pregnant with my first child, the nurse looked at everything and said "Oiooo child-birth is going to be very difficult!" Because of the excision. Everything is very tight down there and I would have many problems so my first child was a caesarean.'

'Ah', I reply.

'There are nearly always problems.'

I had known the views of the *Bitonaabe*, and particularly the women in my household, on the benefits of excision since the beginning of my fieldwork and knew how their beliefs were associated with conceptions of purity, cleanliness and ethnic identity. It was hard for me to believe that they could ever change their minds about practising excision as no argument seemed to change their attitudes towards the practice in the slightest. As the women in my household never complained of any problems because of their excision, I believed that convincing them of the necessity to stop practising was an impossibility and Faty Ba's work was somewhat futile. However, Faty Ba did not see it the same way. Like Funti and the president of the management committee, Faty Ba was convinced that women think that complications are an inevitable side-effect of child-birth and having many children. These, they thought, could be prevented.

Knowing that Faty Ba did not hesitate to speak about reproductive health and the problems she had experienced because of her own excision, I asked Maimouna again what she thought

a few days before the end of my fieldwork. I implied that I had understood that she had never experienced any problems and considered it a good thing, as she had told me so many times before. However, this time, she replied that there are always many problems during child-birth (*ina heewi cadeele*) and that she was not sure whether excision was a good thing.

How was this change of view on excision possible? For a number of reasons, I suggest. Even if Maimouna thought that her excision had never caused her any problems, Faty Ba's personal stories of her pregnancy and childbirth are something Maimouna can relate to. Perhaps she recognised some of the symptoms Faty Ba talked of and came to the realisation that she had also suffered from these 'problems' during child-birth, but had not previously linked them to excision.

Even if there is hostility towards anti-excision campaigns in an area, because the facilitators are women who know how to communicate their personal experiences to others this makes them more difficult to disagree with. Personal witness accounts seemed to be more convincing than human rights rhetoric and threatening people with 'the law'. Even if Maimouna and other women were concerned about purity and their daughters' control of desire, a woman who speaks out against the practice cannot be ostracised if her reasons are based on personal experiences.

We can see that speaking out of personal conviction and courage can have a stronger effect than concerns with purity and the control of desire. In addition, Faty Ba fitted into the community. She was well respected and knew how to defend her views with reference to the state and human rights. In contrast to those who oppose the law, she interpreted laws as being in place to defend women's health and interests. This was also persuasive for many *Bitonaabe*.

Faty Ba, as well as Funti and the president of the management committee, who could all be defined as 'grassroots activists',<sup>123</sup> are undermining the authority of those who oppose the law and the NGOs. They are not 'middle-level women' of the educated classes who have been socialised into accepting human rights ideology and associated conceptions of 'violence against women', nor have they been taught to parrot human rights language to defend their

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<sup>123</sup> According to the criteria of Engle Merry (2006).

personal agendas and issues for other purposes, as Engle Merry argues for women in China. These women dare to speak out against excision in an environment hostile to FGC sensitisation and the political institutions associated with them because they have personally experienced what the NGOs and the state say to be true. For them, the law, therefore, does not represent a threat to their cultural integrity and gender identity, but is seen as a force protecting them and their reproductive health, as well as that of future generations.

The following example will explore how arguments about ‘human rights’ have helped women and men to stop practising excision.

## **8.2 Excision, sexuality and divorce**

The previous section has explored why women want to stop excising and why Tostan’s abandonment movement appeals to them. In this section we shall explore other motivations for joining the abandonment movement. First of all I show how excision has affected some women’s sex lives and their relationships with their husbands. Then I discuss how women who have divorced as a result of the sexual problems they experienced with their husbands use the NGO as a place of work. Tostan is not just an employer that provides them with income and social mobility: it allows these women to speak of issues that have affected them in their personal lives, such as excision and early marriage.

Binta was another woman working as a Tostan facilitator for the abandonment of excision. She was around 40, had four children and was divorced. I met Binta, who had been involved in organising the public declaration of Seedo Abass, when my research assistant and I stayed at her house to interview villagers who had abandoned excision. Binta did not want me to interview her formally and laughed a lot, saying that she had nothing to say. Her father, who was the village chief, had died a few weeks before and the family was in mourning. We spent the day lying on a mattress talking about life and work for the NGO in between interviews with people who came to see us. When no one else was in the room I told her that I was confused about the fact that some women really wanted to abandon excision and said that the practice had consequences whereas others said that they had never had any problems and that they did not exist as far as they knew. Binta looked at me and said that if you excise a girl you create a scar. When the girl marries, the scar is opened again through penetration. Then

again, when the woman is pregnant and gives birth the scar needs to be opened again or tears. After you've had a few children you have so many scars, you have been cut so many times and healed again that you feel nothing! When you have sexual intercourse after having had a few children you feel nothing! It's all scar tissue inside the vagina.

I have discussed local discourses on pleasure and argued that most Futanke women do not see excision as a mutilation or perceive themselves as less sexually desirable than un-excised women (chapter 6). For Binta however, things were different. She related the necessary cutting, tearing and scarring that accompanies excision to sexual satisfaction. For her, excision was not just problematic during labour but also an impediment to satisfaction. Binta perceived her divorce as to some extent caused by her excision. Although sexual problems due to excision are personal, and mostly only confided to someone one feels close to, I heard other divorced anti-excision activists express similar views. According to them, fear of and pain during sexual intercourse, as well as bleeding and tearing, strongly affected their relationships with their husbands. The following account of Aissata Djibby Dia at the Tostan meeting with the marabouts of Fouta after the denunciation of the exciser in Matam gives an impression of the medical problems some women suffer from and the effect on their relationships with their husbands.

I was excised at the age of 7. On the day my mother took me to an old woman who did it. I haemorrhaged. I was bleeding for three days and my family were afraid that I would not be able to walk. They used *borgo* (boiled sheep faeces) which eventually stopped the haemorrhage but afterwards I was nearly completely closed. When I first had my period I could only see it for a day and there was only a small quantity of blood coming out. I was obliged to go to the health-care assistant every month for him to get out a thick beige and black liquid by pressing on my abdomen. When I married for the first time I had to be opened and I was scared of having sex with my husband because it hurt so much. Three days later I was closed again and had to be cut open again. Since then I've been afraid of having sex. I am with my fourth husband now and all my divorces are because of that!

(Aissata Djibby Dia at a meeting with Tostan and marabouts of Fouta, May 2009)

Even for activists it is rare to speak of personal problems in this way and most women who speak of them in public do so in a less personal way. However, when women say that their

divorce was due to excision, they are not implying that their husbands divorced them because they were excised but that fear of sexual intercourse or lack of mutual satisfaction eventually led to a breakdown in the relationship. We also have to bear in mind that most of these women married when they were very young, between the ages of 10 and 15.

A lot of divorced activists I met had been through a series of marriages before the age of 20 and possibly because of this had not managed to establish a functioning relationship with their husbands. In Bito I heard some people say that early marriage was a good thing, it taught a young girl responsibility and manners. If she did not get on with her first husband and they divorced, she was considered mature enough to choose her next husband but at least she did not get pregnant before marriage. Some of the activists I met decided not to get married anymore after a few divorces but enjoyed the freedom and independence work gave them. For these women, Tostan did not just represent an avenue to talk about issues they felt strongly about (excision and early/forced marriage) but also gave them financial independence from their kin. Furthermore, the facilitators emphasised on numerous occasions that Tostan let them travel, teach, be listened to and respected by people in the communities they were working with.

### **8.2.1 Being a working woman and activist**

During my first month in Bito I met a facilitator at a wedding. Kadia was on leave for a few days. Her workplace was in Semme, at least 250km away in Matam, but her four children stayed on her father's compound in Bito. I met her again in the coming months at preparatory meetings for the public declaration in Semme, at the Tostan co-ordination in Ourosogui, at home in Bito. Our get-togethers were always warm-hearted and we became friends. She was then promoted and became a Tostan supervisor. When I interviewed her in December 2007 at the Tostan co-ordination, I found out that she had married her first husband at the age of 10, the second at the age of 15, the third a few years later. Since she had divorced her last husband she had decided not to marry any more. Kadia wore the clothes of a respectable well-to-do woman. She could afford the most beautiful boubous made of Malian cloth. Other women admired and envied her whenever she came to Bito. Although she was not married and spent her time debating controversial issues, she had status because she had money and could do as she pleased. Kadia's behaviour was not considered shameful as she behaved in a

very respectable way and justified her behaviour with reference to ‘human rights’. She was listened to when she spoke. I admired her greatly for her courage and strength after her divorces. It was not easy for her to gain so much respect and independence after the difficult youth she had with her husbands.

How was it possible for Kadia to achieve this independence without losing her honour? How was it possible for her, as well as Faty Ba and Bilel Daff (chapter 4), to discuss controversial issues despite widespread opposition to the law and NGOs and live as a single woman? Besides the financial independence gained through work, these women were convincing and persuasive for two reasons. Their life experiences and stories make the NGO’s messages strong and credible. Their talk, while raising awareness, was not considered vulgar and shameful because they could relate what was said to their own lives. Furthermore, because they could justify their views with reference to the law and human rights they were not easily intimidated by those who disagreed with what they said. The education they had received, and were actively passing on in the Tostan classes, had perhaps provided them with social mobility. However, in contrast to Engle Merry’s example, they pass the ‘human rights’ message on out of personal conviction after a deep learning process (Gillespie and Melching 2010).

The next example will discuss how it is possible to break social norms by referring to human rights.

### **8.3 Human rights and the public declaration of Seedo Abass**

Seedo Abass was the first place where a public declaration of the abandonment of excision took place in Fouta Toro. After many difficulties with the religious leaders and failed declarations, Seedo Abass declared with 10 villages in 2003 and again in 2005 with 70 villages. Due to the many ‘events of opposition’ and incidents where anti-excision activities were blocked by local authorities (see chapters 2 and 6), Molly Melching and UNICEF officials did not believe that this declaration would succeed until it was actually over. Since then, the villagers of Seedo Abass have been frequently visited by journalists, film-makers, ministers, UNICEF representatives and other NGOs who want to speak about their courage in ‘abandoning’ in this conservative region. Kumba Tochala, a member of the blacksmith

'caste' and president of the management committee, is a representative of those who stopped practising and the face of public declaration. I went to Seedo Abass to interview people in February 2008. A Tostan supervisor dropped me off at Kumba Tochala's house early in the morning. I greeted her politely and spoke to her in my broken Pulaar, which she was very pleased about as she said that she often had to receive visitors who pass by only for a couple of hours for some quick filmshots and then disappear again. Often they showed little appreciation of Pulaar customs and hospitality and appear very impolite. She preferred people to stay for longer so that she got some pleasure out of conversing with them as well. I stayed in Seedo Abass for two nights. Kumba Tochala and I got on very well. She was a warm and charismatic woman who did not hesitate to say what she thought. On the second night of my stay in Seedo Abass, Kumba Tochala's co-wife gave birth to a baby. It was the last child of their late husband who had died recently. They decided to name the girl after me. I had brought good fortune to their home, they explained. I had come to stay and she had had a good birth. This gesture was extremely honourable for me. It commemorated my visit and showed that they appreciated my presence.

The following interview with Kumba Tochala and another member of the management committee took place in Kumba Tochala's room. I was not allowed to record the interview because Kumba was in mourning and said she was not allowed to have her voice recorded during this 40-day period. I therefore noted everything they said down carefully.

I began by asking: 'Why organise a public declaration? If you want to abandon excision, why go as far as organising a public declaration?'

Kumba indicated that Jainaba Diallo should answer first.

Everything started with the Tostan programme. There is a session about human rights and health and we realised that there was a health problem. Excision is harmful for women's health. There were a lot of girls who were having problems, who lost a lot of blood, and there were others who were having problems during labour. After following the teaching we started doing theatre sketches in the village. Afterwards we went to other villages to raise awareness about the practice. After all that we decided to organise a public declaration.

Then Kumba continues:

I welcome you to my home, everyone who is sent here by Tostan is welcome. There is a good relationship between us. We have done two public declarations. The first one was in 2003, the second in 2005. Before Tostan came to the village, the side-effects of excision were ignored. We learned all the Tostan modules and there are 19 human rights. Among these 19, the right to health impressed us the most. We were 145 participants in Demba Diallo's classes. After the classes we felt like getting the message out there to others who had not participated and had not understood. We asked the facilitator to show us how to go about raising awareness. Khalidou Sy came and watched some of the sketches. There were some people who were reticent about these activities. We went from door to door to 'sensitise' them and finally we came to an agreement for a public declaration. Seedo Abass had understood but that was not enough, we could not stop there so we went out to meet others who agreed to a public declaration. In 2003 we organised a declaration but there were only 10 villages. We continued the sensitisation activities until 2005 and declared again with 70 villages.

Like the president of the management committee of Waande, Kumba Tochala and Jainaba Diallo express how much what they had learned in the Tostan classes impacted upon them and encouraged them to change their lives. They became motivated to go out and spread the word amongst others who 'had not understood'. I found that people who declared their renunciation of excision often used metaphors like 'We were blind but now we can see' or 'We were in the dark but now we have understood' to express what they had gained from the Tostan programme. There is a slogan that is often used to express how people are encouraged to change their lives: *tiidinde mbaawkaaji*. *Tiidinde* means 'to reinforce' or 'make stronger' and *mbaawkaaji* means 'what can be done' or capability. This phrase is also used when someone wants to improve their language skills. A similar expression I found widely used in Tostan circles was '*renforcer les capacités*'. Following the Tostan programme was seen as helping people to improve their capabilities in everyday life – not just with regard to excision, but giving them courage (*cuusal* – 'to dare', *pellital* – 'to be decisive') and strength to take decisions themselves rather than relying on 'what has existed since the beginning of the universe' or what others decided for them. Kadia from Bito incessantly used the expression

*renforcer les capacités* to explain how people had to take their lives into their own hands rather than complain and give in to other people's wishes. Although these expressions are originally from Tostan, they have taken on meaning in people's personal lives. This is why Tostan is not just an NGO and employer but a 'directed ideological social group' for many who strongly subscribe to its ideology of the importance of promoting education and human rights.

What also comes across is Kumba Tochala's gratitude to Tostan when she says 'Everyone who is sent here by Tostan is welcome.' Kumba knew that I was a researcher and Tostan's work had nothing to do with me – she was not doing anyone any favours by complimenting their work to me. The connections between understanding, gratitude and the motivation to go out and tell others about one's positive experience and new personal convictions are important to my argument.

Kumba also emphasises how much the role of human rights impressed them. I discuss further below:

'Fouta is a very conservative area', I say. 'How was it possible for people to dare speak of customs that are normally taboo like that?'

She responds: 'In the Tostan programme it is taught that discrimination between people is not to be desired. We also learnt the effects of excision. We wanted other communities to understand the same things we had understood. We wanted to let others know that Senegal is a democratic country, that we have the right to express ourselves openly without hiding our views and that we have the right to take decisions in public. So we worked incredibly hard for this public declaration. The path was hard but eventually we achieved what we wanted. After the first declaration the management committee had become a bit weak. But they worked a lot, especially raising awareness and eventually managed to declare again.'

Kumba describes human rights not as abstract but basic rights like 'the right to non-discrimination' and 'the right to freedom of speech' and 'the right to health', which she lists in her explanation of what gave them the courage to publicly declare their decision. It is important to bear in mind that as a member of the blacksmiths 'caste' (*kinde*), Kumba Tochala

cannot be a leader according to traditional Futanke social structure, where only noblemen are granted rights to leadership. However, the transnational human rights ideology and democratic election processes make it possible for her to be a leader on the basis of her personal conviction and drive to raise awareness among those ‘who have not understood’ and who have not dared to ‘break with the tradition’. Although the fact that the lower castes are organising movements against a so-called ‘Islamic recommendation’, which some *Toorobbe* strongly disagree with because their authority is being undermined (see chapter 7), others draw hope and ‘strength’ from it. These frequently repeated slogans during sensitisation activities are not merely an adoption of NGO terminology, they justify speaking out against a matter that traditionally has not been theirs to decide. They are an expression of hope for social change. Even if the abandonment of excision is not a priority for some of those attracted to the movement, the fact that it bypasses the usual hierarchy of decision making processes lets people aspire to social change.

‘Do people really have these “problems” because of excision?’ I ask.

Kumba replies: ‘Here, people are really convinced of the harmfulness of the practice after what they have learnt! That is even why we created another association. All the people present here in the room are here because they feel passionate about it.’

‘What is the origin and the aim of this association?’

‘We personally never met Anna Lindh<sup>124</sup> but we know that she is very active over there for human rights and children’s rights. That is why we called our association after that woman. Then we found out that this woman is very dynamic over there and that we are working towards the same goal. In the end we found out that she was killed and it made us very sad because we were fighting for the same cause – for human rights. Once Molly gave us an Anna Lindh prize and said it was because we were working for the same cause. We were so upset about her death that we named our association after her. The aims of the association are human rights, the abolition of excision, early and forced marriage, and the education of children and vaccination of pregnant women. We want girls to go to

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<sup>124</sup> Anna Lindh was the Swedish minister of foreign affairs from 1998 to 2003. Before her death in 2003 she criticised the invasion of Iraq without the support of the UN as a major failure and advocated greater respect for international law and human rights in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2003 she was murdered by a Swede of Serbian origin who was suffering from mental illness at the time of the killing. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but was moved from prison to a psychiatric ward.

school. Thirty-two villages are part of the Anna Lindh association and here in this village we have 120 members. Even the village chief is one of them.’

Again, for Kumba Tochala, the ‘health problems’ caused by excision are immediately associated with human rights. The fact that they decided to name the association after a Swedish human rights activist may be partly motivated by the fact that the name will attract funds from abroad but it is clearly also motivated by concern for gendered human rights.

‘Is there still forced marriage in this village?’ I ask.

Kumba replies: ‘Haa?! No. Girls go to school here! They don’t leave their studies to get married like they used to. There has been no forced marriage since 2003.’

Among those who do not support Tostan activities it is possible that some still give their daughters in marriage at a young age. However those who are part of these human rights networks have come to an agreement that girls should not get married before they have finished school. I suggest that public declarations work in a similar way for excision. Those who have come to a consensus to stop practising adhere to the agreement but nevertheless in most villages that have declared some families do not join the movement. During my two days of interviewing different families in Seedo Abass I spoke to a few who were not part of the movement. One was a marabout living on the outskirts of the village, who endorsed excision as an Islamic recommendation, rejected the abandonment movement and was afraid of the demise of Futanke society through Western influence. He perceived the NGO’s influence in the village as a serious threat. Although he knew that the village chief was behind the movement he was not part of the consensus.

I met another family who were not part of the movement. When we came onto the compound we were greeted warmly by the family and were asked to sit down. No one spoke any French. Engaging in friendly banter we found out that none of the four young women who were bringing us tea and water had gone to school. They all learned the Koran instead. The family did not value state-school education, the women’s movement and any of the activities going on in Seedo Abass. Nevertheless they were friendly towards me and I did not notice any hostility towards me because I was white. However, I did dress according to local custom, my head was covered and I communicated with them in Pulaar as much as I could.

Perhaps these families did not see a benefit in joining the movement because they were *Toorobbe*, who occupy the highest rung of the social hierarchy and had nothing to gain from the democratisation process going on in their village. It is interesting that whereas the ‘abandonment and human rights movement’ is led by a *Ñeeño* blacksmith and *Gallunke* (former slave), the religious noble families in the village seem to have withdrawn from the discussion and the social activities associated with the declaration and ‘abandonment movement’, which frequently attract media attention. In the official discourses claiming that ‘everyone has abandoned’ and ‘all girls go to school now’ the voices of those who were previously the leading social groups in the village are being pushed aside. In places like Seedo Abass, their ‘culture’ and ‘society’ is falling apart, first of all because the NGO’s and the state’s recommendations are more important than their interpretation of the Koran and religious way of life. Furthermore, they are no longer the leaders – instead the village is run, to a large extent, by a charismatic blacksmith woman, her followers and the co-operating village chief, who has received plenty of gifts from the NGOs, the frequent visitors, celebrities and the media throughout the years.

## **Conclusion**

Both Engle Merry and Shell-Duncan argue that international human rights are a top-down process whereby international agreements are ‘translated’, transferred and in some ways imposed onto ‘local’ populations. Kumba Tochala’s case has shown us, however, that in Fouta Toro some people come to perceive human rights as assurances of their personal integrity and rights as individuals. The case of the villagers of Seedo Abass shows that ‘human rights’ were understood as a transnational ideology that advocated values such as ‘equality before the law’, ‘the right to non-discrimination and freedom of speech’ and ‘the right to the highest standards of health’. I have shown that these principles, and the idea that they were universal and backed by an international community, helped people to speak out against structures and authorities that they found oppressive and detrimental. Although local women felt that this transnational ideology had come from somewhere else, it gave them strength and courage to stop practising excision despite religious leaders’ opposition to the ban, and to speak up for ideals that they believe many communities have come to an

agreement to abide by. As we can see, Kumba Tochala and her followers in Seedo Abass do not just feel part of a network of communities in Senegal that have decided to publicly declare their decision to abandon excision, but feel united with women who fight for human rights across cultures – as their solidarity for the Swedish human rights activist shows. I therefore argue that human rights ideologies are not just necessarily top-down and prescribed by ‘middle-level women’ and ‘transnational elites’ (Engle Merry 2006) but, in this case, represent a lever that can alter the social structure, allowing those who have traditionally had no say in Fouta Toro due to their social status (*ñeeñbe*) to make decisions without their noble patrons’ approval and themselves become leaders of local development movements.

I have argued that for those who have stopped practising excision as part of the Tostan movement, idioms of health and human rights have replaced those of purity and ‘control of desire.’ I have shown that women who are against excision for health reasons are convincing to others because they can relate the law and human rights to their personal stories. Due to the fact that their behaviour is respectable and decent, they are tolerated, if not respected, by those who have concerns about purity and control of sexual desire. In addition to this, they are backed by the local authorities, the state and NGOs that are seeking to ‘develop’ the area according to local discourses.

I suggest that because those who want to stop practising are supported by the state, the NGOs and a growing number of locals who agree to leaving the practice, the authority of those who have concerns for religious reasons or control of desire is undermined. The local discourses are changing to some extent through the social changes that are instigated by Tostan’s human rights teachings. The fact that lower-status groups are provided with possibilities of leadership and social mobility through this movement means that those *Toorobbe* who feel threatened by the changing society and who are concerned about their women’s chastity are side-lined. Their discourses on purity and control of desire do not carry the same weight as they once did, because they are no longer as respected and listened to in an environment where large numbers of people have come to the realisation that excision is related to the gynaecological health problems most women experience after having many children.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this thesis I have been concerned with the politics of the preservation and abandonment of excision in Fouta Toro. I have created an understanding of the opposition to the ban on FGM and to non-governmental intervention by exploring the multiple ways in which the body is constituted, how gender is made and socially reproduced, and how embodied notions of being are related to local conceptualisations of identity and social differentiation.

In chapter 2 I look at how the body was challenged by the process of banning 'FGM' and how this propelled 'different people's lives into different terrains' (Das 1996). I discuss how national, non-governmental and independent discourses were produced in reaction to the law and how these reflected concerns regarding the gendered female body. The un-excised female body was perceived as lacking femininity by some, and as being vulnerable to the threats of a changing society, to 'Western imperialism' which was seen to devalue womanhood by omitting a practice that preserves dignity and protects from evil. Other discourses presented the ban on FGM as a form of protection and liberation from 'harmful traditional practices' which deprived women of their right to 'physical integrity'. From this perspective, the passing of the law was an event of liberation from 'custom' and a victory for women's rights, and a step towards the highest standards of health and physical integrity. At the end of this chapter I look at what kinds of events were described as 'the backlash in Fouta Toro' or events of 'resistance' by NGOs, the government and the international press.

Chapter 3 explores localised notions of the body as belonging to different groups in more detail. I explain that among the Futanke, the salient social groups that people identify themselves as belonging to and according to which they identify others are: ethnicity (*leñol*), social rank (*hinnde*), age group (*fedde*) and patronym (*yettoode*). Thus, the individual physical body carries a gender and a rank to which the social body responds and reacts. I illustrate how people's patronyms and the age groups they belong to create strong bonds of solidarity (*jokkondiral endam*) and inter-sociality between social ranks. Differences between occupational groups (*kinde*) are also overcome through joking relationships which uphold bonds of solidarity. I argue that

the ways in which people are related and obliged to each other can influence the decision to stop practising excision or to continue.

I suggest that Islam is also seen as being inextricably interwoven with ‘Futanke’ identity. Most people are proud that their land was one of the first Islamic states in West Africa. According to local discourses, being a ‘Futanke’ means being a Muslim from the cradle of Islam in West Africa. I briefly discuss how the social category of *Toorobbe* emerged historically and how they became the leaders of Futanke society as ‘those who have knowledge of Islam’. Each social category (*hinnde*) is considered to have authority over the knowledge and the skills of an occupational background and it is insolent for someone who is not of the same occupational background to challenge or question this knowledge. The *Toorobbe* have power because they instruct and advise people on ‘correct’ Islamic conduct and define what is non-Islamic. I explain that a *Toorodo* marabout who recommends excision as a religious recommendation can therefore only be challenged by someone who is also an expert in this field, and not by those whose expertise is related to weaving or the river. Similarly, it is inappropriate for someone of higher social rank to challenge the skill or knowledge of a craftsman.

Chapter 3 also introduces the *Pulaaku* code of honour, a social ideal defining a ‘good Fulani’ (*Pullo moŶŶo*) not just as brave and intelligent but, most importantly in the context of this thesis, as in control of his or her emotions and able to endure the vicissitudes of life. The needs of the physical body are subordinated to those of the social body in accordance with the moral code of behaviour.

Chapter 4 moves on to how the body is gendered through excision and circumcision. I argue that, in contrast to Mande subgroups in Senegambia and West Africa, excision is not important in the context of initiation and coming of age in Fouta Toro. It is about making female gender by removing the external genitalia reminiscent of a boy’s penis. As the literature on FGC among Mande subgroups (Ahmadu 2000, 2005; Ahmadu and Shweder 2009; Griaule 1948) and Boddy (1989) suggest, excision renders the ambiguously androgynous un-excised body female. The excised

woman is 'pure', 'virgin' and socially appropriate. The process of becoming a woman, however, is not completed until she marries. For boys, on the other hand, there are initiation ceremonies, although circumcision is also frequently undertaken without these. Circumcision removes what is feminine and impure. It makes the penis virile and ready for sexual intercourse and marriage. A boy metaphorically enters a liminal phase through circumcision which is not completed until he has sex and marries. Until then he has not attained adulthood. Thus, female excision and male circumcision both create the physical foundations for gendered personhood.

I also argue that so-called 'tradition' is a term that accords value to a practice because of the relationship it represents between those who have passed it on and those who have taken it up. 'Tradition' does not mean that the practice has never changed, but that it is re-invented and accorded value by each generation which takes it up. The body is accorded value by changing through practices that have been 'inherited' from the previous generation. Female gender is hence made by connecting the physical body to the social body of the previous generation in a way that is believed to render it safe.

Chapter 5 engages with local conceptions of control of the body as an asset of Futanke civilisation. I discuss how the control of desire is considered to contribute to the maintenance of social harmony in Futanke society – an image resembling Hobbes' idea of a society without law and order and in complete disarray without the commonwealth. I show that, in local discourses, excision is said to help women control their own sexual desire when their husbands are away making a living for the family. As Yanagisako and Delaney (1995) among others have shown, particular cultural concepts become especially powerful when they are naturalised. I have attempted to show how control of desire is similarly taken for granted and how this affects the imagination. The power of this local conception of control of desire might benefit from being explored further in terms of gender inequalities, but this was not my purpose here.

I found that in Fouta Toro, desire, as in an individual's personal quest for sexual satisfaction, was not considered positive – on the contrary, any kind of behaviour seeking personal gratification was considered barbaric and uncivilised. I suggest that

moral personhood is thus intrinsically linked to the ability to control one's body and one's desires; a respected person, whether male or female, goes through the hardships of life showing that they can restrain their personal needs for the common good of the larger body of family and kin.

I argue that prioritising the needs of the social body over those of a person's physical body begins with socialisation during childhood. Girls and boys are taught from a young age the necessity of serving and obeying elders rather than pursuing their personal interests and passions – which in turn provides them with the certainty that they can rely on others' help if in need. However, being able to rely on the support of relations – whether that relationship is through kinship ties or solidarity between age sets – represents a form of social security that requires strict subjugation to the rules. Those who refuse to participate in this social arrangement are considered not to be moral persons and are said to be 'not like us' or 'not Futanke' or 'Pulaar'. A person who does not adhere to this moral code of behaviour is therefore outside the boundaries of what the Haalpulaar of Fouta Toro identify with. Other ethnic groups, who are considered to be less in control of their desires are perceived as less moral and civilised than the Futanke. A society without excision conjures up fears of perversion and temptation, illustrated with references to women not behaving in an appropriate manner, dressing and dancing differently and getting 'carried away with pleasure'.

Chapter 6 engages with the sexual body and the boundaries of what is considered appropriate and inappropriate. Excised women do not consider themselves and are not considered 'mutilated', sexually handicapped or unable to experience pleasure. I showed that sex in itself is not taboo, dirty or shameful. On the contrary, some women enjoy making themselves desirable and performing pleasure-enhancing customs with aphrodisiacs. Nevertheless there are aspects of sexuality that are considered inappropriate, dirty and repulsive. I explained that, for unmarried women, the open use of pleasure-enhancing utensils would be shameless. Extramarital sex is shrouded in silence, the stuff of which myths and gossip are made but not openly practised.

It is thought inappropriate to interact with people if they have not rendered themselves pure through ablutions after sex. Uncircumcised men and un-excised women are

perceived to be unclean because of the accumulation of impurity around the parts of their genitals that have not been cut. I argue that many Futanke men and women perceive uncut genitals not just as dirty but also as ambiguous due to their androgynous status – being neither ‘male’ nor ‘female’. Following Douglas (1966, 1968) I have shown that ambiguity is potentially embarrassing and dangerous. On the one hand such images are associated with fear of the unknown and the unsafe; on the other hand the fact that the uncut woman is imputed to be odorous and impure points towards moral and social inferiority. An un-excised woman is not just potentially loose, unable to control her desire and uncivilised but also ‘dirty’, dangerous and repugnant to some people. With reference to Douglas (1966) I argue that excision creates social order by removing the inappropriate desire that threatens to arise in women if they are not cut. This sense of desire is associated with the demise of ‘Futanke society’ and the values that people cherish, which are largely associated with pregnancy before marriage and illegitimate children. I explain how the consequences of illegitimate sex (childbirth before marriage or illegitimate children) bring social chaos. I argue that the visceral sense of repulsion that people feel towards un-excised women and their imagined impurity is an embodied reaction to the fears around what society might turn into if women no longer manage to control their sexual desires.

Chapter 7 looks at the body as threatened by the law and non-governmental intervention from the perspective of those who opposed the law and ‘foreign’ influence. It was not until I came to chapter 7 that I managed to explore the multiple conflicting voices in which the Futanke spoke about the ban on FGM and non-governmental intervention. The first part of this chapter reconstructs versions of what happened during two so-called ‘events’ of ‘resistance’ to the NGOs and the law by looking at two interviews with NGO officials who were directly involved in the events of ‘Aere Lao’ and ‘Ourosogui’. The interviewees claimed that, although some religious leaders raised their voices against the ban on FGC, many people wanted to know more about the potential health consequences of the practice and their ‘rights’ as guaranteed by the state. Thus, I argue that the opposition to governmental and non-governmental intervention does not emerge from a unified group in Fouta Toro. Contrary to the picture painted by those who are against the ban, there is no clear-cut division with ‘the Futanke’ on one side and ‘the state’ as corrupted by ‘the white

people' on the other bringing in subtle forms of cultural colonialism disguised as 'development' through NGOs.

The second and third parts of this chapter demonstrate that disagreement with the NGO's 'abandonment' movement is a symptom of a conflict in leadership and decision-making processes as well as disobedience and generational conflict. I argue that the public outcry and pain about what is seen as an attack on their culture and religious faith emerges mainly from the status group of the *Toorobbe*, the religious clerics and leaders in most villages in Fouta Toro (see Schmitz 1994). Governmental and non-governmental intervention on excision disturbs and unsettles Futanke social, moral and political order by undermining the religious clerics' advice in a domain that they are not used to being challenged on: the so-called religious recommendation of female circumcision. Although statutory law has been introduced alongside holy law and theoretically grants non-*Toorobbe* and 'casted' people rights to positions of leadership in local politics, in practice it is incredibly challenging for a non-*Toorodo* to be listened to and followed to the same degree as a *Toorodo* leader.

The opposition to the law and the NGOs are an act of defence against changes in morality that challenge the *Toorobbe* leaders' moral authority and political power. I have shown that many nobles perceive the Futanke way of life to be threatened and seriously challenged through these interventions and the associated social change. Whereas they fear the 'foreign influence' of NGOs and believe the Senegalese state to be corrupt, local people, including NGO workers and state representatives, fear the marabouts' spiritual power as well.

Chapter 8 discusses the female body as protected by the law and 'saved' from the sickness and disease inflicted by the practice of excision. I introduce women who are not afraid to break social conventions, who collaborate with the NGOs and go out to raise awareness about the health problems excision can cause. Their support of these campaigns is often based on personal experiences with the practice. These women often seek Tostan's help and justify speaking out against excision by referring to the Senegalese state and to human rights. For them, human rights are a vehicle for renouncing the practice despite social conventions that suggest they continue.

Engle Merry (2006) suggested that so-called 'indigenous women' are often pushed by NGOs to formulate their personal issues in terms of the violation of human rights. She argues that their orientation to human rights models is often temporary. This, however, seems misplaced in the case of Fouta Toro. Although some women and men feel pressured to publicly declare their 'abandonment' of FGC, many Futanke women perceive the 'international human rights' agreements as protecting their bodies and rights. I contend that those who have personally experienced difficulties because of their own excision, but find it hard to stop practising, see the rights framework provided by transnational institutions and the state as a way out of oppressive structures in their own society. It provides them with an ideology that gives courage (*cuusal*) to publicly discuss their health problems and speak out against excision.

I found that although local women felt that this transnational ideology had come from somewhere else, it was used as a vehicle for speaking out against excision despite religious leaders' opposition to the ban, and to speak up for ideals that they believed many communities had come to an agreement to abide by. The fact others in Senegal had declared their abandonment of excision before them and that they were supported by an international community gave them strength to challenge local leaders' opposition to the abandonment of excision.

I therefore argue that human rights ideologies are not necessarily top-down and prescribed by 'middle-level women' and 'transnational elites' (Engle Merry 2006) but, in this case, represent a lever that could alter social structure. It allows those who have traditionally had no say in Fouta Toro due to their social status (*ñeeñbe*) to make decisions without their noble patrons' approval. They themselves become leaders of local development movements. The fact that lower-status groups are provided with possibilities of leadership and social mobility through this movement means that those *Tooroɓbe* who feel threatened by the changing society and who are concerned about their women's chastity, are side-lined. *Tooroodo* discourses on purity and control of desire do not carry the same weight as they once did because they are no longer as respected and listened to in an environment where large numbers of people have come to understand excision as related to the gynaecological health problems most women experience after having many children. For those who defy the leaders for whom

excision is sacrosanct, the image of the female body has shifted from being part of a kingroup with a localised form of identity to being a possessor of ‘rights’ subject to ‘international standards of health’.

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The conclusions of the thesis throw up some questions. In national, international and local discourses it appears that the Futanke are a unified social group and who collectively opposed the ban on FGM and anti-excision campaigns. However, throughout the chapters of this thesis it has been established that the opposition to the law did not spring from a ‘unified’ group in Fouta Toro but from a particular section of society which has taken it on itself to speak for ‘the Futanke’ and in the interest of ‘Fouta Toro’ as a whole. This group consists mainly of *Toorobbe* who are concerned with their society being penetrated by outside influence and with the demise of their culture and religion. Such fears are formulated in terms of concerns with moral personhood and women’s capacity to control their desire.

Furthermore, ‘Haalpulaar’ identity is hinged upon women’s virtues and defined through excision in local discourses, which are prevalent in all sections of society in Fouta Toro. Statements like ‘All Pulaar women are excised’ and ‘When you see a Pulaar woman you can be sure that she is excised’, for example, show that the practice is not intrinsically linked to so-called ‘ethnic identity’ but that excision stands for a particular comportment in women that is believed to be brought about by excision – moral astuteness, control of desires, etc. – *Pulaaku*. Although, when seeing a woman, it is not possible to know whether she is excised and to what degree (apart from for a doctor or midwife during medical consultation), it is assumed that the desired moral and social code of behaviour is achieved through excision.

Despite some nobles’ claims that excision is an intrinsic part of Futanke identity and that renouncing the practice poses a threat to Futanke culture, a belief that has penetrated discourses against the ban on FGM and non-governmental intervention, we encountered numerous individuals throughout the thesis who had stopped practising or who believed that it was important to renounce the practice. However, when

questioned about purity, for example, they reverted to discourses perpetuated by the nobles. Even those who disagreed with or opposed the culturally dominant views embracing excision were caught up in everyday practices that underscore the importance of excision. Thus, I argue that the noble ideology that excision is linked to notions of civilisation and its upkeep through the control of the body are embodied as *doxa* and bodily *hexis* (Bourdieu 1977) by the whole of the Haalpulaar population in Fouta Toro.

How is it possible that a particular practice or comportment becomes an embodiment of civilisation? Elias's work on the civilisation process in Germany and France between the 17th and the 20th century provides an insightful comparison. With many evocative examples Elias (1997) shows how the way of life of common people in Friedrich the Great's kingdom was considered barbaric by the aristocracy, who spoke French, were educated according to French etiquette and were accomplished at their code of politeness. The 18th-century writer Mauvillon, who had received a French aristocratic upbringing but was raised in Germany at the time of Friedrich the Great, described German culture as 'rough' and 'backward', the language as 'semi-barbaric' (Elias 1997: 100). Mauvillon did not ascribe any value to the beginnings of the 'Sturm and Drang' poetry of Goethe and Schiller.

The growing 18th-century German bourgeoisie, however, had a similar dislike of aristocratic manners, etiquette and art. Goethe wrote about the French that they were too 'aristocratic', the poetry cold, their critique too destructive and their philosophy 'far-fetched' and 'insufficient'<sup>125</sup> (1997: 107). The German word for promise, '*Versprechen*', conveyed an obligation of having to be kept, in contrast to the common use of the French word '*promesse*' among aristocrats, that did not. The German bourgeoisie's poetry and manners thus developed in opposition to the noble classes, and with a sense of rejection of aristocratic etiquette, according to Elias (1997).

In France, however, the relationship between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie was different. The bourgeoisie socialised with the aristocracy much more and thus

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<sup>125</sup> My translation from German.

assimilated their manners, interests and tastes in art and philosophy as their habitus. Even after the French Revolution the polite comportment and the ideal of being '*civilisé*', which was originally an aristocratic notion juxtaposing the 'lower' classes and 'other' 'barbaric' and 'rough' ways of life (e.g. Germanic) against their 'civilisation', continued to be observed by the bourgeoisie and involved a particular understanding of what it was to be a well brought up, educated person (Elias 1997).

I suggest that in Fouta Toro, excision has been taken on as an aspect of civilisation by all social categories in a similar way to the French bourgeoisie's assimilation of the tastes and manners of the aristocracy. Elias's examples fit well with Foucault's notion of bio-power (Foucault 1978) and Bourdieu's analysis of how taste and a sense of appreciation of particular objects in society, for example in the arts, comes with habitus (Bourdieu 1984).

Rée's (1992) and Leve's (2011) thoughts on 'personal' and 'national' identity in the context of 'internationality' are useful when thinking about how a practice that is endorsed particularly by the dominant classes becomes a marker of 'national' identity (or in this case 'Futanke culture'). Rée notes that, as far as questions of 'national culture', 'national character' and 'national identity' are concerned, the term 'national' unlike 'state' and 'country', has entered into partnership with words normally reserved for the discussion of individual personality (Rée 1992: 8). 'Nationhood, one might say, is an attempt to treat questions of social power as if they were matters of personal feelings; it is a psychologisation of politics' (1992: 8).

The idea of nationhood, Rée argues, is a false friend to the ordinary affectionate sense of place whereby people associate nations with songs they learnt as children, the landscape, the streetcorners and alleyways (Rée 1992: 10). Local affections are multi-dimensional, full of ambiguity and ambivalence. They can involve many different geographies; the treasured songs and stories may belong to localities with different boundaries. Nation-lovers, argues Rée, insist on 'squaring off people's geographical attachments and forcing them to conform with the boundaries ordained by legal, commercial and military power' (Rée 1992: 11).

The perceived sense of unity of those who opposed the ban with reference to ‘Futanke culture’ is deceptive as it seems to silence the voices and views of those who do not share this view and who feel that their sense of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ is not threatened by the law and by ‘outside’ influence. ‘Nationhood is a device for making ordinary people feel responsible for the activities of “a number of men united into one political body”’ Rée suggests (1992: 11). In this thesis I have brought out the multiple voices of those who share the habitus of those who opposed the ban. However, their rejection and subversion of these values comes out in conflicting discourses and is neither always in disagreement with the Senegalese state nor with the NGOs.

I showed that some lower-status groups welcomed Tostan’s human rights ideology, which provided them with the possibility of becoming leaders of development movements. What are the implications of speaking out against a practice that is endorsed by the religious leaders of society?

Leve (2011: 523) suggests with reference to Holloway (2002) that making an apparently affirmative identitarian statement can carry a negative identitarian charge. For instance, to say ‘I am black’ in a society characterised by discrimination against blacks is to challenge the society and its ideologies. Similarly, I argue that the statement ‘I am going to stop excising my daughters’ acts as an affirmative identitarian statement which does not just imply the rejection of widespread notions of purity and chastity as attached to excision, but is also a public statement of rejection of the values that the dominant groups in society propagate. If we see it like this, it makes sense of why the marabouts at the meeting subsequent to the exciser’s arrest in Matam were so upset, so concerned with the demise of their culture and perceived ‘the children of Fouta’ as having been corrupted by the government, and as trading off their values and way of life. There was never an inkling of questioning why this sense of ‘loss of culture’ and foreign invasion did not seem to upset other social groups in Fouta Toro as much as it did these marabouts.

What happens to a society where the leaders reject the authority of a new order and feel undermined by the law in contrast to others who see it as a vehicle for social change? Furthermore, what happens to concerns about chastity, purity and marriage in a society in which some perceive the un-excised body as impure, dangerous, less

feminine, and as representing a threat to the future lineage because of the risk of women not being able to control their sexual desires – in contrast to others, who say that none of these things matter any more because the practice is harmful to women’s gynaecological health? Does this imply a social revolution whereby the *Toorobbe* will be side-lined, perhaps as the *Deniyanke Fulbe* leaders were once side-lined by the emerging power of the *Toorobbe* Islamic scholars? An alternative possibility is that ‘Futanke’ society will split, creating two separate *Fulbe* groups, those who excise and those who do not. Or perhaps these differences will be ignored and people will just carry on as if there was no physical difference between female bodies and no concern with chastity and purity.

These questions persist, 15 years after the ban. Whereas at the beginning it was impossible to question excision and NGOs were afraid of opening centres in some parts of Fouta because of the opposition, Tostan has not experienced any major problems more recently. The girls who have not been excised by those mothers who renounced the practice over the last 10 years are still young. It is too early to tell whether they will encounter rejection due to ‘lack of purity’ and their ability ‘to control their desire’.

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**List of Interviews during fieldwork** (in order of how they appear in thesis)

1. Awa Dickel, exciser of Bito. Interviewed in January 2008
2. Kumba Kawry, exciser in Thilogne. Interviewed in February 2008
3. Ramata Niane, midwife in Mboumba. Interviewed in February 2008
4. Niang from Aram. Interview about circumcision in July 2008
5. Harouna Sy from Bito. Interview about the Prophet Mohammed, March 2007
6. Gedda Sy from Semme. Interview about abandoning excision, December 2007.
7. Juulde Mbaye from Seedo Sebbe. Interview about abandoning excision, February 2008
8. Hame Sy from Bito. Interview about women, March 2007.
9. Marabout Souleyman Diop in Doumnga Lao. Interview on religious practice and excision, May 2007.
10. Oumar from Semme. Interview on abandoning excision, December 2007.
11. Amadou Ba from Podor. Interview on religious practice and excision, March 2007.
12. Jainaba Kane, president of ex-exciser association. Interviewed in Ndouloumadji, February 2008
13. Khalidou Sy, national co-ordinator of Tostan Senegal. Interviewed in January 2007.
14. Molly Melching, founder and executive director of Tostan international, interviewed in November 2008.
15. Funti Sanghot, Tostan facilitator from Doumnga Lao. Interview on abandoning excision, May 2007.
16. Village chief of Waande. Interview on abandoning excision, May 2008.
17. Kumba Tochala, president of management committee of public declaration of Seedo Abass. Interview on abandoning excision, February 2008.
18. President of management committee of the failed declaration of Doumnga Lao. Interviewed in May 2007.

19. Thiam, village chief of Doumnga Lao. Interview on failed public declaration of Doumnga Lao, May 2007.
20. Ba, brother of village chief of Sinthiou Mabube. Interview on failed public declaration of Doumnga Lao, May 2007.

## Pulaar glossary

### A

<i>aadi</i>	pact
<i>aadondirde</i>	to make a pact (spiritual or other)
<i>Almaamy</i>	derived from Arabic: al-Imam. The rulers who succeeded the <i>Deniyanke Fulbe</i> herders in the 16th century (see chapter 3)
<i>Awluɓe</i>	praise-singers (status group)

### B

<i>baawaado ngoraagu</i>	someone who cannot control him/herself
<i>bandiraaɓe</i>	relatives
<i>bannde</i>	relative
<i>banndi am</i>	my relative
<i>ɓanndu</i>	body
<i>Baylo</i>	member of blacksmiths (status group) (singular)
<i>besngu</i>	extended family
<i>biɓɓe</i>	children
<i>biɓɓe baaba</i>	father's brother's children
<i>biɓɓe yumma</i>	mother's sister's children
<i>binbin</i>	chains of beads women wear around the stomach to excite men
<i>bileejo</i>	healer/witch-hunter
<i>Bitonaaɓe</i>	inhabitants of Bito
<i>biyam</i>	my child
<i>bonnitde</i>	to spoil

<i>boorde</i>	to strip off (e.g. bark of a branch)
<i>boornaade</i>	to dress up, but also male circumcision
<i>borgo</i>	boiled sheep faeces (traditional remedy to stop bleeding after excision)
<i>boubou</i>	gown/dress in (French/Wolof)
<i>Buurnaabe</i>	potters (status group)

## C

<i>cadeele</i>	problems
<i>cagataagal</i>	bravery/courage
<i>ceemeedo</i>	non-virgin/married woman
<i>cefi</i>	incantation
<i>Cubalaagu</i>	the way of life of the Cubballo
<i>Cubballo</i>	a member of fishermen (status group)
<i>cuuray</i>	aphrodisiac incense
<i>cuusal</i>	to dare

## D

<i>debbo</i>	woman
<i>debbo yid, kono woto hoolo</i>	love a woman but never trust her (proverb)
<i>dendiraaɓe</i>	cousin, also joking cousin
<i>Deniyanke</i>	Fulɓe herders who were the rulers of Fouta Toro from the 16th to the 18th century
<i>dewgal</i>	marriage
<i>dewgal bonngal buri innde bonnde</i>	a bad marriage is better than a bad reputation (proverb)
<i>dimo</i>	a noble person (singular)

<i>duhaade</i>	male circumcision but also to knot up (e.g. a pair of trousers)
<i>dulndu</i>	forest
<b>E</b>	
<i>endam</i>	extended family
<b>F</b>	
<i>fadde</i>	to wait
<i>faddungo</i>	control over the river
<i>feccere</i>	piece
<i>fedde</i>	age group
<i>fonngi</i>	speaking at meal times
<i>foonde</i>	the forest
<i>fotde</i>	duties
<b>G</b>	
<i>gacce</i>	modesty/shame
<i>galle</i>	house
<i>[No] galle ma wadi?</i>	How is the house/family?
<i>gammu</i>	joking cousin (Wolof)
<i>gandal</i>	knowledge (spiritual)
<i>gandal balewal</i>	‘black knowledge’ – spiritual practices of occupational groups used for healing or craftsmanship; passed on in families
<i>gandal danewal</i>	‘white knowledge’ – spiritual practices of Islamic clerics
<i>gawde</i>	powder that is put on fresh circumcision wound

<i>Gawlo</i> (singular of <i>Awlube</i> )	a member of praise-singers (status group)
<i>gese rewbe</i>	women's gardens (irrigation projects)
<i>gila</i>	since
<i>gila dawaa dawi</i>	since the beginning of the universe
<i>gila dawaa-dawi kaddungal ina wadee kono cadeele meedaa heen wonnde</i>	since the beginning of the universe excision has been practised but it has never caused problems
<i>giyiraaɓe</i>	age mates (plural)
<i>giyiraado</i>	age mate (singular)
<i>gorko</i>	man
<i>griot</i>	praise singer (French)
<b>H</b>	
<i>Haalpulaar'en</i>	those who speak the Pulaar language/Fulani people
<i>haddaade</i>	circumcision (vulgar term used by adolescents)
<i>haddinde</i>	to excise
<i>hadith</i>	a recommendation/saying/imitation of the prophet Mohammed
<i>hakkille</i>	intelligence/forethought
<i>hannde</i>	today
<i>haram</i>	forbidden
<i>hinnde</i>	occupational/status group (caste)
<i>hirjino</i>	to raise awareness
<i>hoɓɓe</i>	guests (plural)
<i>hoore am</i>	my head/myself

## I

*ina heewi cadeele*

there are lots of problems

*innde*

name

*ittude*

take off

*ittude ñaande paaka*

take off the leftovers of the knife

## J

*Jaawambe*

Councillors of the Almaamies (status group)

*Jaltaabe*

skilled and honourable fisherman

*jeere*

market

*jeyaaɓe*

the owned (slaves)

*jeyi*

belong

*jiiduɓe baaba*

father's children

*jiiduɓe yumma*

mother's children

*jinnaaɓe*

parents

*jinne*

spirits

*jiwo*

un-excised woman

*jogaade hoore mum*

to control oneself/keep control of the body

*jojjande*

rights

*jokkondiral endam*

solidarity

*jombaaɓo*

newly married man/woman

*jom maayo*

people who live in the river

*jontaado*

respected man/knowledgeable man

## K

*kaddingol*

excision

<i>kaddinowo</i>	exciser
<i>kala ko woni am hannde oo ko aan jeyi</i>	all that I am belongs to you today
<i>kinde</i>	status/occupational groups (plural)
<i>kodò</i>	guest (singular)
<b>L</b>	
<i>laabde</i>	to be clean/pure
<i>laabaani</i>	to be dirty/impure
<i>Lawbe</i>	woodworkers (status group)
<i>leñol</i>	ethnicity
<i>leydi</i>	land
<i>lootaade</i>	to wash oneself
<i>lootngal janaaba</i>	big ablutions washing the whole body
<b>M</b>	
<i>Maabuɓe</i>	weavers (status group)
<i>Maccuɓe/Gallunɓe</i>	slaves (plural)
<i>Maccudo/Gallunke</i>	slave (singular)
<i>marabout</i>	Islamic leader (not always Imam of mosque)
<i>mawnam</i>	older sibling
<i>mbaawkaaji</i>	what can be done
<i>mbada yidi yettade ma</i>	I want you/desire you
<i>mbada yid maa</i>	I love/want you
<i>Mbalax</i>	Wolof dance
<i>mbaroodi</i>	beast (crocodile or lion)
<i>mbayyungu</i>	boiled maize or millet

<i>mboomri</i>	un-married girl/virgin
<i>Mboumbanaabe</i>	inhabitants of Mboumba
<i>miñam</i>	younger sibling
<i>min tawrii ko taaniraaɓe amen</i>	we have inherited it from the ancestors
<i>mi rokkiima hoore am</i>	I give myself to you
<i>mo haddaaki</i>	the one who was not excised
<i>mo haddinaaka</i>	un-excised woman (literally the one who is not excised)
<i>mo waawaa jaggude hoore mum</i>	he/she cannot control themselves; also used when talking about sensuality
<i>muñal</i>	endurance/self-discipline
<b>N</b>	
<i>ñaaɓunde alla jabaande</i>	divine prayer accepted – God’s protection of a village against colonialism
<i>ñaande</i>	leftovers when millet was ground in mortar
<i>ñebbe</i>	beans
<i>ñeeñɓe</i>	men of skill status groups (not noble) (plural)
<i>ñeeño</i>	man of skill (singular)
<i>ñengi</i>	‘magic’
<i>ngende</i>	to have sex
<i>njaatiraaɓe</i>	great-grandparents
<i>njodom</i>	erotic underskirt worn by married women during sex
<i>njulli</i>	circumcised boy

## O

*o waasi teddungal makko*

he/she lost his/her honour

*o waawa fadde gorko makko*

she cannot wait for her husband

## **P**

*paaka*

knife

*pagne*

skirt/sarong (French word)

*pale*

field on banks of the river

*pellital*

decision

*Pulaaku*

way of life of the Fulani/Fulani-ness

*Pullo*

a herder (singular of Fulbe)

## **Q**

## **R**

*rewbe*

women

*rewiraabe*

succeeding age-sets

*rimbe*

noble status groups

*rokkude*

to give

## **S**

*saali*

forgetting something/leaving something behind because of distraction or lack of self-control

*Sakkeebe*

leatherworkers (status group)

*sallige*

purifying washings/small ablutions

*satalla*

watering can/jug (to wash)

*Sebbe*

warriors (status group)

*selbe*

circumcised boy who instructs *njulli*

<i>sernaabe</i>	scholars of Islam
<i>sirènes</i> (French)	people who live in the river
<i>soŋe</i>	dirty/impure
<i>solima</i>	uncircumcised boy
<i>Subalŋe</i>	fishermen (status group)
<i>sukuñaabe</i>	soul-eaters
<i>sunna</i>	recommendation of the Prophet
<i>suninde</i>	female circumcision – term derived from sunna
<i>suturo</i>	secret
<b>T</b>	
<i>taaniraabe</i>	grand parents
<i>taarorde</i>	toilet area
<i>taawirde</i>	to inherit
<i>talibe</i>	students of the Koran (Wolof)
<i>tawde</i>	to find
<i>tergal</i>	member/sex – neutral term for either male or female sex organs
<i>tiidtinde</i>	reinforce
<i>tinnaade</i>	be brave/courageous
<i>Tooroŋŋe</i>	status group of Islamic clerics/leaders of Fouta Toro (plural)
<i>Tooroodo</i>	a member of status group of Islamic clerics (singular)
<i>toubab/tuubaako</i>	white person

## U

<i>ulama</i>	those ‘who lay down the canons of Islam and interpret them’ (Willis 1978: 195)
<i>waalo</i>	riverland
<i>waawde</i>	to be able/capable
<i>wadde</i>	to do
<i>wad ko welmaa e am</i>	do what you like with me
<i>Wambaaɓe</i>	bards who specialise in playing <i>hoddu</i> guitar (status group)
<i>Wayilɓe/Wayluɓe</i>	blacksmiths, silversmiths (status group)
<i>weleede</i>	to like
<i>weltinde</i>	to satisfy/please
<i>wonnde</i>	to be
<i>wutte</i>	gown/dress
<i>woppude</i>	to leave/abandon something
<i>woppu am</i>	let go (of my gown)
<i>woppude adaa amen</i>	to leave behind our customs
<i>wittooji</i>	research

## V

## W

## X

## Y

<i>yah lootoyo a ronkii jogaade hoore ma</i>	go and wash yourself you can’t control yourself
<i>yettade</i>	to arrive

*yettoode*

family name

*yidde*

to want/love

**Z**