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A broom to the head: ‘Cleaning Day’ and the aesthetics of emergence in Dakar

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Abstract

Senegal has a long tradition of the collective management of public space via community cleaning. Since the explosion of the popular ecology movement *Set Setal* (meaning clean and be clean in Wolof) in the early 1990s, ‘set’ or hygienic aesthetics have been central to the construction and control of urban space and deployed to include and enfold but also expel citizens. In January 2020 the Senegalese President Macky Sall called on the population to join him in ‘Cleaning Days’, bypassing ‘set’ practices. Cleaning Day was met with a response ranging from indifference to anger and open conflict. In this article I use Cleaning Day as a lens to analyse the production and reception of set aesthetics in a time of ‘emergence’. Focusing on the power of subaltern practice to resist the encroachment of a state in search of meaningful symbols, I challenge the idea that contemporary urban aesthetics is geared towards the creation of a perceived continuity of interests organised around an aspiration to a global urban standard.

Keywords

aesthetics, class, community, displacement, emergence, gentrification, inequality, infrastructure

摘要

塞内加尔有通过社区清洁集体管理公共空间的悠久传统。自20世纪90年代初流行的生态运动*Set Setal*（在沃洛夫语中的意思是打扫干净）爆发以来，“set”或卫生美学一直是城市空间建设和管理的核心。它既被用来包容和接纳公民，也被用来驱逐公民。2020年1月，塞内加尔总统马基·萨勒绕过“set”传统，呼吁民众和他一起参加“清洁日”。民众对清洁日的回应却是冷漠、愤怒和甚至公开的冲突。在本文中，我用清洁日作为一个镜头来分析在一个“新兴”的时代里，set美学的产生和接受。着眼于底层实践的力量对政府侵蚀的抵制（寻求意义符号），我质疑这样一个观点：当代城市美学的旨在围绕达到全球城市标准的抱负创造一种可感知的利益连续性。

关键词

美学、阶级、社区、驱逐、新兴、绅士化、不平等、基础设施

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In January 2020 the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, announced a new set of public policies inspired by the African ‘model’ of the city of Kigali. To achieve the objectives of the national ‘zero waste’ campaign, ordinary citizens were invited to participate in monthly ‘Cleaning Days’ where they would contribute to cleansing public spaces of rubbish. I watched the events of the first Cleaning Day unfold on television in Dakar. The appearance of the taciturn Sall, often mocked for his tendency to appear sullen, even angry in public, surrounded by a praetorian phalanx of supporters, with branded baseball cap and rubbish bag in hand, was a gift to comedians who got great comic mileage out of mocking the unpopular president. At the bottom of the screen the news tickered inexorably with the evaluation of the impact of the President’s new policy. Cleaning Day had been met by responses ranging from total indifference to attempts to interrupt and overtly undermine the programme, for example, by blocking access to landfill sites for the extra trucks and vehicles hired specially for the occasion. While Cleaning Days arguably had an agenda that was not acknowledged as covert harassment of ‘undesirable’ populations took place alongside the much-publicised official events, the programme was swiftly mired in chaos. As the President pressed on with Cleaning Days, the resistance became more overt. On 1 February, for example, a Cleaning Day in Mbour spilled over into violence. A video circulating on social media showed an undignified clash between supporters of Macky Sall and local people, with the new brooms and rakes supplied to participants deployed as weapons. Sharing the video of the scuffle, Twitter user @waangrin

warned the President that ‘This is what happens when you politicise *Set Setal*, you get a broom to the head!’¹

Set Setal (meaning clean and be clean in Wolof) refers to a historical event, the explosion of the popular ecology movement in Dakar in 1988, the year of controversial and publicly contested elections. The original event was a galvanising, ambiguous and still perplexing occurrence. Responding to what they saw as political corruption young people sought to cleanse and reform (*remettre en ordre*) political norms (Benga, 2001; Diouf, 1998). At the same time, revolted by their dirty neighbourhoods and the state’s abdication of responsibility for the maintenance of the urban environment, young people began to voluntarily clean and to paint murals on city walls targeting their fellow citizen’s behaviour (Diouf, 1992; Enda, 1990). The goal of this collective activity was to achieve *set* – a state of cleanliness – and, implied by the processual *setal*, to maintain the hygienic status of public space through a mixture of embellishing urban space until people no longer wanted to dirty it, visual communication enjoining citizens to preserve the cleanliness of space and, occasionally, coercion and violence. *Set Setal* also led to an ‘aesthetic revolution’ (McLaughlin, 2001: 154) that reverberated beyond the original event. This revolution aimed to reform and rewrite popular historical memory, using the apparatus of the city to create pragmatic and accessible accounts of Senegalese history (Biaya, 2000; Diouf, 1992, 2003). This also led to a loose ‘school’ of public art that evolved alongside the political movement and which continues to influence cultural production in the city today and shape Dakar’s status as an ‘art world city’ (Grabski, 2017). In a wider sense

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set aesthetics saturate the everyday in Dakar, they offer the imaginative resources necessary for creating alternative and autonomous spaces of experimentation and creativity, *Set* urban aesthetics continue to provide a resource for urban citizens navigating and interpreting the city (Diouf and Fredericks, 2016). Beyond the original event *Set Setal* endures as applied sanitary tactic, political practice and idiom of democratic hygiene. While *Set Setal* has never established a monopoly over popular narratives of the city and, indeed, waned in popularity when the movement was seen to be undermining the trash workers union (Fredericks, 2018), *set* images and practices have nonetheless formed the basis for the popular articulation and appropriation of a wide range of visions of national development futures: communitarian, populist, technological and spiritual.

At the beginning of 2020 people in Dakar were angered by the apparent lack of respect for the cultural, linguistic and practical heritage of *Set Setal* and the spurious invention, in a foreign language, of ‘Cleaning Day’, bypassing the intense cultural significance that collective cleaning holds for Senegalese. ‘Cleaning day’ not only erased the networks of official and unofficial labour that oversaw the handling and processing of rubbish (Fredericks, 2013), it transformed cleanliness into a ‘slogan’ when it should be ‘everyone’s business’.² Dematerialising, decontextualising, evacuating cleanliness and cleansing of its complex constellation of meanings, the miscalculated citation of *set-work* left Sall and party activists who went into neighbourhoods under the auspices of Cleaning Day highly vulnerable to attack. The application of a ‘broom to the head’ seemed to be an assertion of the popular power to construct the meaning of public space. One young activist I spoke to, Mamadou, who used his blog to disseminate his writing on politics, conduct and the public sphere, protested that

‘Cleaning Day’ was a farce, but a revealing farce. Its symbolic incoherence and its lack of meaning painfully exposed latent tensions and long-simmering conflicts over the nature of urban public space and public tenancy. For Mamadou, Cleaning Day was a contest not only over the ownership but also the character (*paternité*) of the public: ‘on cleaning day there was only him and his supporters, the problem is Senegalese always want to be behind such and such an idea in order to claim that they invented it, it’s yet another example of how the authorities refuse to share public space with the people’.

The erasure of Senegal’s complex history of public cleaning may have been unusually crass but it was not out of the ordinary. Reinvention and rupture with anterior practices and attitudes has dominated Senegalese politics for the past 20 years. From 2000 to 2012 President Wade used spending on glamorous and charismatic infrastructure projects to create an ‘alluring if implausible vision of future possibility marked by wealth, abundance and global connectivity’ (Melly, 2016: 43). As the gap between spending and symbolic investment in these projects and the maintenance of everyday infrastructures relied upon by urban citizens widened, these projects came to reinforce a sense of ‘unbelonging’ (Ghertner, 2015) and to signal that ordinary people were excluded from the imagined future of the city. Since Sall came to power in 2012, Senegal has adopted a policy of emergence, a series of strategies designed to accelerate the country’s journey towards attaining the status of middle-income economy. While several West African countries are pursuing projects of emergence, Macky Sall has, since the launch in 2014 of the *Plan Sénégal Émergent*, been so identified with the policy that Dimé and Ba (2016) describe him as the ‘apostle’ of emergence. Achieving emergence has meant decisively reorienting the state towards the project of growing the economy, in

particular via investment and deregulation of special economic zones, including the new city of Diamniadio, located on the outskirts of Dakar (Mansoor et al., 2018). Most Senegalese will not experience these zones directly, instead encountering them via the circulation of authorised images.

As emergence supplants development and the aspirations, aesthetics and social practices that underpinned development in the popular imaginary, the question becomes how Senegalese can insert and inscribe their own desires within policies and trajectories of emergence and how, in turn, the state can materialise 'growth' within the poor urban communities peripheral to the emerging economy and build consent for a highly abstract set of policies. It is within this highly charged context, I argue, that we need to locate violent clashes between local *set* practices and the disembodied and opportunistic 'Cleaning Day'. The broom to the head that Macky Sall supporters received in Mbour also offers a means of obliquely approaching Asher Ghertner's account of 'rule by aesthetics'. Rather than marginalised people being enrolled into a 'community of sense' and encouraged to partake in an urban aesthetics defined by the state according to certain loose and consensual categories in construction (Ghertner, 2015), the state here encroaches on a pre-existing set of aesthetic commitments and political practice. These insurgent urban aesthetics pre-date the current regime's commitment to a reshaping of the urban around a politics of 'emergence', indeed, they have passed through prior visions of development and have been shaped by their encounters with each in turn. I argue that the reception and construction of Senegal's politics of 'emergence' continues to be structured by older aesthetic regimes, many of which retain paradoxical commitments to maximise latitude and freedom within expressive and

enunciatory projects while espousing aspirations for authoritarian government.

To make this argument I draw upon 18 months of ethnographic research on the production of urban aesthetics through *set* practices and what I call *set* theory, an embedded way of navigating the city, stabilising and mitigating the city's pluralities and ambiguities, and communicating with fellow citizens. In following *set* theorists of various kinds through the city, I encountered multiple forms of creative production. I began with artists working in the *Set Setal* tradition of public art but, as the category of *set* productivity appeared more and more capacious in practice, the research expanded to include a range of online activity and research with bloggers. This was partly in response to an explosion of interest during my research in how social media might expand visibility and increase the punitive reach of surveillance, and contribute to the transformation of the city and the governance of unsanitary behaviours: 'this is surveillance in real time' was how one blogger described to me the unique affordances of social media for policing fellow citizens' uses of public space. Indeed, depending on class position and location in the city, blogs and social media were often the primary ways through which people encounter and participate in the construction of a collective *set* aesthetic. In this way, social media has greatly facilitated middle-class participation in *set* aesthetics, while at the same time many of the forms of hygienic life that depend on solidarity and co-presence have been curtailed.

I begin by describing in detail the role of *Set Setal* in the life of one young Senegalese man: Alioune, a migrant to Dakar from Ziguinchor. I begin with this biographical account because it illustrates the centrality of *set* practice not just to the construction of urban space but to the personal identities

and trajectories of the people who seek a place in the city. Alioune's story differs significantly from what I describe as *Set Setal's canonical* accounts, and in the middle section of the paper I consider how some of the 'original' set images were spliced into a canon, reflecting the interests and interpretations of intermediary organisations. This prurient interest in set work and a resulting critical narrative that stressed its exhausted, recuperated and tamed character, has left contemporary practitioners committed to fugitive aesthetic practice that resists incorporation into a hegemonic urban form. After considering the production of knowledge about *Set Setal*, its ambiguity and capacity for attaching itself to a range of political movements and ideologies, I return to 'Cleaning Day' and examine what the instructive failure of this sanitary spectacle can tell us about urban aesthetics in a time of 'emergence' and ultimately the prospective success or failure of emergence itself in capturing imaginations and conjuring tangible futures.

Travelling through *Set Setal*

Despite critiques that Sall was 'politicising' *Set Setal*, set ideas and practices have been at the heart of political life in Senegal for 30 years. As Rosalind Frederick's work on waste work, labour and *Set Setal* has shown, the processing of rubbish has always been a highly politicised and scrutinised activity (Fredericks, 2014, 2018). It is incoherent, therefore, to describe these domains as being co-opted into political formations: *Set Setal* is already a highly politicised form. Many Senegalese, however, do think of *Set Setal* as potentially and ideally existing outside of bureaucratic politics and formal political life and, as I explore further below, Senegal has a long history of critiquing the opportunism of politicians who try to yoke their messages to set practices. In order to understand how *Set Setal* resonates with

individuals and comes to play a significant role in how they construct their biographies, I first consider the experience of a young migrant to Dakar. I met Alioune in the shaded courtyard of an artistic workshop during the annual *Partcours* art festival in Dakar. I began talking to him because of the simple and striking image on his hand-printed t-shirt: two brooms clenched in raised fists above the slogan *Seetal Set*. The semantic play with *Set Setal* was suggested to Alioune by his artistic mentor, the venerable and visionary Senegalese artist Issa Samb, also known as Joe Ouakam, who died in 2017. Samb suggested that *Set Setal* should be inverted to make a new slogan, *Setal Set*, *Set Fagaru*, modifying the meaning from 'clean until it is clean', to 'make clean and be the prevention'. Alioune explained that *fagaru*, to prevent in its reflexive form, indicates societal transformation. Clean subjects embody, radiate and model good behaviour that others can then mimic (*topatoo*). The question of cleanliness, Alioune warned me, was *rey* – huge – indeed, *limitless* (*du jeex*); overlapping with every form of social, spiritual and political life imaginable. The cleanliness of people shaped their capacities in every sense, physical, moral and intellectual, but also crucially their creative and expressive potential.

When we first met, Alioune was a student in the agronomy department at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. He had arrived in Dakar 2 years previously from the southern city of Ziguinchor. It was his prior familiarity with the practice of *Set Setal* that had prepared him for navigating Dakar's distinctive spiritual and cultural identities and interpreting and unlocking the city, helping him to integrate into a city that can be unforgiving for an unnetworked migrant. Growing up in Ziguinchor, a city without its own *Set Setal* tradition and far away from the cultural reference points of Wolof history and Mouride Islam that visually and

intellectually coordinated the philosophy and aesthetic of *Set Setal*, Alioune and his peers improvised. Indeed, Alioune explained, they began 'doing' *Set Setal* without knowing it, they were organising the cleaning of their communities before a group of young men in the neighbourhood on their summer break from their studies in Dakar began to instruct them on the spiritual and collectivist dimensions of *Set Setal*. These ideas were not wholly new to Alioune. From the education he had received at home he knew of the importance of personal cleanliness and through his religious education he had been taught that it was impossible to acquire knowledge in a state of uncleanness. However, the encounter between the young people in Ziguinchor and the Dakar *cadres* was transformative. These young men sought to transmit some of the knowledge of spiritual, social and public life they had encountered in their adoptive Dakar neighbourhoods. For example, they explained that before a public cleansing, it was necessary to cleanse yourself until you had a 'clean heart' and a 'clean conduct'. They impressed upon the young Casamançais participants that a true *Set Setal* was not only about cleansing the environment. Indeed, if it was *just cleaning*, the significance of the act was quite distinct and separate from the significance of *Set Setal*.

For young people, creating meaning from the obdurate materials of the city was part of the 'struggle' on which the city's associational life was founded; how to reconcile one's own spiritual reflection and maturation with existing forms of collective practice? For Alioune, the social role of the artist was deeply important, combining practical, tutelary and mystical functions. He described being an artist as being 'like a teacher, the president, a member of parliament, and an intellectual all at once'. In his provincial *Set Setal* practice, however, Alioune did not focus on creating art and

diffusing it to visually naïve publics. Instead, in Alioune's account, the Ziguinchor movement capitalised on a deep local *belief* in art (*gëm nanu art*). Rather than rigid or didactic forms of instruction or static pieces of communication, the *Set Setal* movement in Ziguinchor incorporated urban *détournement* into the hygienic aesthetic and designed agile and subversive interventions into urban space. For example, they hung *fictive* or placeholder traffic lights at busy and unsupervised intersections, drawing attention to the absence of basic infrastructures. For Alioune and his associates, singular and striking interventions were the answer to the key political and aesthetic question of *Set Setal*: how to prolong peoples' wondering and credulous engagements with enchanted infrastructures and translate that into durable and lasting behaviours? The forgetting, laxity, the punctures and rupturing of attention; the backsliding and undoing of practice preoccupied *Set Setal* artists. Alioune repeated what I heard many times, that *forgetfulness* was the defining characteristic of urban dwellers, who must be responsive to modernity's ruptures, to its sutures and jump cuts and to the fundamental unpredictabilities it induced in daily life, and be capable of prolonging practice throughout these vagaries and across these interruptions. The message of *Set Setal*, Alioune told me, was not revolutionary. Rather, through *Set Setal* young people uncovered forms of rigour and obedience that had been second nature to their parents and grandparents, habits and rhythms and ways of relating to one another that had been forgotten. For Alioune, then, *Set Setal* was a project of renewal through return, recovering values guided by religious principles: practicing cleanliness, demonstrating humility before hierarchy and manifesting mutual respect. Through these practices, young men growing up buffeted by crises of social reproduction, masculinity and meaning attempted to become *les gars*

stables through the surest way available, by following the religious guides. Alioune chose this path of respect because those guides ‘do everything for us, they sacrifice themselves for us, it is only correct that in return we follow them’. Alioune gently corrected my interpretation of the *Seetal Set* image he wore on his t-shirt. Where I had read a clenched fist grasping a broom and interpreted this as a transnational image of militancy, he intended to evoke a more modest ethos of solidarity. Return, recovery, repair, continuous practice, aesthetic and material victories over the ephemeral: in a context of ephemerality, insecurity and flux, what could be more revolutionary?

Set work: Aesthetics, interpretation and the city

I have shared Alioune’s story because I think it illustrates the multiplicity of the politics of *Set Setal*, drawing attention to the fact that the ‘politicisation’ of *set* practice does not have a predictable or linear trajectory towards mobilisation or political identification. Alioune’s experience shows how an aesthetic consciousness saturates understandings of political life. Of the many *set* narratives that I collected from people with a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, the unifying narrative was that although *set* practices might guide conduct and, eventually, regulate public life, the most important element of it was self-fashioning: turning oneself into an exemplar through careful, imitative practice and the structured initiation into responsible urban life. The question of what political, economic and social programme these behaviours and habits might translate into was less clear and *Set Setal* could be enrolled in a range of political movements. The capacity of *Set Setal* to serve a wide range of ideologies was part of its intrinsic heterogeneity, its openness and a large part of its durable appeal.

Because of its enduring association with youth, *set* aesthetics, tactics and strategies continuously (re)emerge at the heart of youth-led, counter hegemonic projects (Ba, 2016). For example, when the *Y’En a Marre* movement arose against President Abdoulaye Wade with the intimate pedagogic and political goal of creating a *Nouveau Type de Sénégalais*, *Set Setal* was at the heart of a project concerned with revolution and renewal. One member of the movement described the embeddedness of *Set Setal* in the movement’s political practice in the following terms: ‘to do *Set Setal* is to rid ourselves of this colonial heritage, that regulates our way of being, of conceptualising things’ (Nelson, 2014). The *Nouveau Type de Sénégalais* is an agile attempt to capture ideals of renewal, recreation and reproduction for a project of citizenship with counter hegemonic intentions. The project was certainly not immune to critique and recuperation, pedagogic projects skirt the irreligious in their intimate remakings of public and private lives. At the very least, the project can be critiqued for its ostentation, its lack of humility. At a public meeting in Pikine for a new political party a local politician criticised ‘undisciplined’ young people of the *Y’en a Marre* movement for their ‘spectacularisation’ of citizenship. For him and many other Senegalese like him, he claimed, citizenship was an ordinary quality of the everyday. The example he reached for to illustrate the perfect join of humility and the public, was *Set Setal*. Through his invocation of *Set Setal*, its cultural appropriateness, its humility and its religiosity, he called for a ‘return’ to values of respect that were sadly lacking in today’s politics. In this case it was explicitly framed as the prescription for a youth-led form of boisterous politics that drew too much attention to itself, placing individual perceptions above those of the collective and the civic. Just as the political practices that *Set Setal* has stimulated and encompassed over the past 40 years have been plural, the openness of the practice and the movement seems

to lend itself to being cited as part of many different kinds of political and social programmes, and many different kinds of urbanism, even ones that are contentious or explicitly opposed.

Although *Set Setal* does rub up against formal politics, it is also embedded in *set* work and *set* theory, everyday practice in the relation to the city. The broader historiography of *Set Setal* shows that whatever began in 1988 it was multiple and contested from the start. Even in accounts from the time, the fervour and excitement seem tinged with ambivalence. Even as the paint was drying on the first murals in Medina, Colobane and Guediawaye, the meaning of the event seemed to be migrating into a curated world of abstraction, valorisation and theorisation. *Set Setal* was the subject of multiple and intersecting gazes. Not just what Azoulay (2012) calls the 'practical' gaze; but idealising, curatorial and colonial lines of sight collided in Dakar in the early 1990s. As such the original movement is often seen to have been co-opted or 'recuperated' (Biaya, 2000), its original creative resources churned back into a hierarchical and institutional vision. It is clear, then, that the dynamic and multiple meaning-making of *Set Setal* is built on an edifice of citation, reproduction and co-optation. Why, then, was Cleaning Day and the sight of President Sall with bin liners and rubber gloves a twist too far in this dynamic, cyclical process through which *set* values are renegotiated and remade?

Set values: Distributed authority and the exercise of 'civility'

Before I ever really saw a *Set Setal* I had managed my expectations by reading a stack of crit on the movement's co-optation and redundancy, and by listening to my more middle-class friends who assured me that it was no longer possible to participate in a 'real' *Set Setal*. Witnessing my first *Set Setal*

was still a deflating experience. It was difficult to connect some of the narratives I had collected about the social and spiritual connotations of *set* practice in the everyday to the branded busy-work of people in tabards cramming rubbish into bin bags. I suspected that perhaps the more oneiric, inchoate and inventive parts of *set* practice had been hived off and existed in the now hygienically separate genealogy of art-practice, where, as art historians have shown, artists preserve significant continuities between original *set* practice and their everyday (Leduc-Gueye, 2016; Rabine, 2014). Perhaps it was true that the movement had only really gathered up popular and practical energies for a brief moment. What also became more tangible witnessing a 'real' *Set Setal*, a physical event of collective cleaning, was the potential of the practice to exclude, alienate and critique, the persistent and lacerating critique of others who 'just watched', or lounged by the side of the road encouraging or teasing more responsible and community-minded citizens. Where *Set Setal* challenged the state's claim to *paternité*, the paternalistic claim of the right to legally, socially and symbolically define public space, *set* practices do not always claim that space on behalf of everyone. In flipping urban public as audience they may construct masses as receptive to their didactic messages, but claims to the right to the city are not always universal.

As much as *Set Setal* represents new forms of coming together, new formations and alliances, the critique that *Set Setal* directs towards the state can equally connect to other targets. As Diouf (1992) made clear in his original and foundational analysis of *Set Setal* this urge to differentiate publics and expel those who appear to threaten the cleanliness of the collective is in the DNA of the movement. From the very beginning and throughout, *Set Setal* has engaged in violent practices of vigilantism and censure (Diouf, 2013). *Set Setal* events were uncertain,

kinetic and open ended. The movement was associated with outbursts of punitive violence against women who practiced *xeesal* or skin lightening and against sex workers. In other words, the movement has always oscillated between contesting and reinforcing the imposition of bourgeois and urbane bodily norms in the name of *civility*, between countering a singular and hegemonic vision of the city as clean and pure, and attempting to expand cleanliness and purity to make them states that can be accessed by the poor. While the politics and aesthetics of *Set Setal* reach towards the excessive and sublime, on a local and specific level the practice can drift into banal ‘acts of aesthetic ordering’, such as those described by Jessica Winegar in Egypt in the aftermath of the revolution. These acts, Winegar (2016: 610) argues, ‘powerfully reveal the contradictions and class contours at the heart of utopian visions’. In the 1990s *Set Setal* evolved alongside an austere and hierarchical discourse of ‘civility’ as a counterpoint to disorder that dominated public life during the presidency of Abdou Diouf. Participating in *Set Setal* was not just a way of interrupting claims on space, it could also demonstrate *fitness* to occupy space. When President Sall appeared in his cleaning gear in 2020 he was even accused of ‘playing Diouf’, meaning that he was embodying a kind of paternalistic political role familiar to Senegalese from the 1990s. *Set Setal* is after all a movement based on the re-making of the self, of carrying over values of rectitude developed in private and translating them into acts of public self-assertion, via a tactic of forming a collective corps. It is hardly surprising that the elite in the 1990s, highly concerned about political unrest and protest, sought to frame these questions as intergenerational conflict, claiming that civility was a key Senegalese cultural value that had been lost along the way through a lapse into *laxisme* and *indiscipline*.

Set politics have long articulated with and intertwined with cognate and adjacent visions of cleanliness rooted in a bourgeois and gentrifying vision of a socially cleansed polis. These politics can be interpreted as attempts to capture the symbolic privileges of the upper classes on the part of the working class, recently urbanised illiterate and otherwise ‘symbolically naïve’, people who might have been accused of lacking fluency in dominant languages and capacities to ‘read’ the city. *Set* politics create a *place* within national development for productive and civil bodies, labouring to bring together a healthy future and in doing so they often inadvertently relieved the state of certain key functions (Fredericks, 2018). Policies of emergence, based on a rupture with pre-existing models of economic, social and cultural development, threaten development’s vernacular aesthetic regimes with obsolescence, questioning the very place of citizens within the production of the nation’s future. From what I have shown so far of *Set Setal* it is apparent why the state might want to displace the movement or sap some of its power. *Set Setal* functions as a kind of portal through which the past can continually reassert itself through creative citation and lateral leaps of association. Little wonder that the state might seek a novel political idiom through which to express appropriateness and cleanliness and through which to construct the future.

Citizenship in a time of emergence: Rule by aesthetics?

I have considered the accusation of ‘co-optation’ levelled at Sall and why his citation of *set-work* and identification of his own political campaigns with public cleansing generated a popular backlash in Dakar. The other context for the Cleaning Day debacle is the development and promotion of Senegal’s social and economic programme of

'emergence'. In 2014 the government of Senegal introduced the *Plan Sénégal Émergent* (Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et du Plan, 2016). These programmes are designed to increase annual per capita growth, which has hovered around 0.5% for the past 30 years, to between 4% and 5% in a short period of time. Emergence is first and foremost a *post-development* discourse (Dimé and Ba, 2016), it is a way of capturing the future outside of a more incremental vocabulary of development, a lexicon that is seen as exhausted and cynical. Relatively disinvested from pre-existing developments, goals, thresholds and indices, emergence seeks to generate a self-evident transformation and improvement. Setting aside an evaluation of the wisdom of the economic and social policies, there are clear advantages for political leaders who draw on the language of emergence. The sheer novelty of the semantic possibilities of emergence compels. Emergence offers a new vocabulary of state intervention, it is based on an immanent potentiality. Tactics of emergence (investment in zoned areas and investment in household resilience through social protection programmes) constitute a break with broad schemes of improvement that see swathes of terrain and portions of public and social life as potentially susceptible to improvement (Li, 2007). Even grammatically, emergence functions differently from development, it is more difficult, for example, to conjugate emergence, a processual phenomenon, in relation to specific subjects. For the remainder of this paper I suggest certain ways that we might put some ethnographic flesh on the bones of Dimé and Ba's description of emergence as succeeding and supplanting development. Emergence is not just an economic policy, it imposes changes in the vocabularies and practices that have organised urban political life in Dakar across the 20th century. How is

emergence configured within the enunciatory apparatus, the symbolic image-world, and the structures of political mobilisation and organisation that constitute *Set Setaf*? And how might this violent conflict over the public register of futurity and possibility result in collisions between brooms and heads in Mbour?

The Senegalese government has made a concerted effort to anchor the inchoate and unfamiliar term 'emergence' in the Senegalese imaginary. They have done this, for example, by associating it with large infrastructure projects such as the *autoroute de l'émergence* and the *cité de l'émergence*, attempting to associate 'emergence' with desirable social goods in the present (Dimé and Ba, 2016). Alongside the building of these charismatic, globally standard infrastructures, public events are organised 'under the sign of emergence', opening up 'emergence' to vulgarisation but also to a 'folklorisation' (Dimé and Ba, 2016: 4, my translation), the translation of emergence within local idioms and expectations. This possibility of 'folklorising' infrastructures and infrastructure-led visions of future development such as emergence connects to ethnographic and historical accounts of the charisma of infrastructure and the capacity of these projects to stimulate affective attachments on the part of the poor, who do not need to believe that they will necessarily be included in the vision they encode or even to believe in their eventual realisation to be captivated by their aesthetic power. The mere existence of this heterotopia and the force of the imaginative act that it took to bring this space into being, even virtually, can in certain places catalyse a 'shared dream' of what the city should be like, and an aesthetic consensus that supports that dream, even as the right to the city fragments and contracts (De Boeck, 2011; Ghertner, 2015; Harms, 2012; Melly, 2013).

These claims are particularly pronounced in De Boeck's (2011) work on Kinshasa. Here I want to unpick one strand of de Boeck's work on the negative aspects of urban imaginaries – their capacity to create spaces of shared affective investment without redistribution – and develop it conceptually and empirically by placing it within the field of meaning and cultural production I have already identified *set* crit or intellectual production on *Set Setal*. Through his account of urbanism in Kinshasa, de Boeck shows that the *urban imagination* is not necessarily a popular and positive repository of ideas for living. In fact, de Boeck and others break with a narrative of cultural production as an urban resource that, I have argued, has roots in the curatorial fascination, academic reception and general explosion of crit on *Set/Setal*. The urban imagination is instead here a terrain where the poor and marginalised can partake in a dominant aesthetic strategy, based on the invention of a 'new space that escapes from the real order of things' (De Boeck, 2011: 278), without benefiting from the material goods or prosperity generated by these new infrastructures.

'Civility before emergence': The enclosure of the imaginary

An obvious but important point to make about emergence is that even if proponents and architects of emergence-oriented politics do attempt to occupy the symbolic ground of *Set Setal*, that occupancy will not be sufficient to shut down the imaginative and creative energies of Senegalese, or to stop them using an idiom of cleanliness to express and contest the right to the city. One obvious way in which people are already doing this is by satirising emergence through linguistic play with its lexical field and its acoustic association. So the P.S.E., the *Plan Sénégal Emergent*, becomes in times of disruption to

electricity and water supplies the *Plan Sans Electricité* or the *Plan Sans Eau*. Equally, on social media people exploited recent images of urban populations responding to floods, a frequent occurrence that the government has not managed to develop an effective political and infrastructural response to, with comments on how *this* was an image of Senegal 'emerging', not metaphorically from poverty into a prosperous future but literally out of dirty floodwaters. In other words, the linguistic and visual creation cannot be contained and as fast the state generates new authorised symbols, satire and pushback rushes in.

The *set* imaginary remains open, the terrain of creativity, reinvention and contestation across the physical space of the city and the virtual spaces of social media where *set* theory surfaces. However, as I thought about the *set* theorists, bloggers, political activists and artists I spoke to, I remembered how often they stressed that the difficulty was translating this huge mass of words into more concrete actions. The blogger Mamadou told me that it was *only Set Setal* that had succeeded in coupling creation with action, or verbal and imaginative agility with acts of civility. In so doing, *Set Setal* had punctured the tendency that these young men attributed to Senegalese: lassitude, incivility and an unwillingness to pass from words to action. What *set*-workers of all kinds had to do now, according to Mamadou, was to make every citizen conscious of the unique and powerful role that they had to play in transforming the country. This assertion, however, becomes complex in a time when the regulation and planning of public space revolves around policies of emergence. As a 'jumpstart' policy articulated in elite spaces and elite language and territorialised in special and separate zones, emergence creates a rupture not just with anterior economic and social policy, but with the vernacular and popular enactment of

those policies in local government, on community level and through associational life. In essence, where Senegalese have in the past been enjoined to participate and build the nation's future via acts of civic engagement and by the eradication of those habits and mentalities that ostensibly constitute a 'brake' on the nation's development, emergence demands little explicit reciprocal social action and organisation from its citizens. If it is the responsibility of the state to grow the nation's economy there is no meaningful way in which the dispositions, habits and attitudes of Senegalese can facilitate or obstruct the preparation of national space for the seeding of foreign capital. For many years, via authorised government communication and via *set* communication, ordinary Senegalese received the idea that the success or failure of development depended on their capacities and their hard work, and they broadcast that message to each other, using whatever was at their disposal. That is not to say that *set* practice would not have a place within an emerging Senegal. One vision and interpretation of emergence might be that citizens should stay in their neighbourhoods, pursue strategies of self-reliance rooted in the *esprit de corps* cultivated by *Set Setal*, deploy the goods distributed to them via new social protection schemes responsibly and wait, patiently, for emergence. Examining the archive of *Set Setal* and the range of ways it is practiced and imagined in the contemporary city, I think it is clear that the vision of *Set Setal* contained within this possible future trajectory of emergence would be classified as 'just cleaning', that is to say, voluntarism without solidarity, busywork without its spiritual, social, communal and popular significance.

One way that people sought to counter this view of the future was to place emergence within older and more familiar vocabularies of self-fashioning, bourgeois rectitude and citizen participation. In

particular a set of ideas emerged here around the slogan 'civility before emergence'. It is hard to remember where I first encountered the phrase '*civilité avant émergence*' but as my fieldwork developed I heard it again and again, and not just heard it but *saw* it, as the phrase began to appear on walls, part of the undertow of constant, contrapuntal annotation of public space, the use of walls to express the *pensée collective* that has long been practiced in Dakar (Benga, 2016). The idea that older values of civility should chronologically *precede* emergence for which Senegalese would be otherwise unprepared, was taken up and repeated in online spaces. Writing for the site *Dakar-Actu*, for example, Mame Abdoulaye Tounkara underlines the limits that indiscipline places on tempos and trajectories of national development and also of emergence:

Can we really aspire to emergence without letting go of this very Senegalese disease, this notorious INDISCIPLINE. Let's dare to say it loud and clear! We will never get out of the pit of underdevelopment unless we stop soft soaping the real issues. Our strong taste for trickery, for the violation of clearly established rules, our tendency to believe that we ourselves are smarter than everyone else, up to the point of using shortcuts, whatever the cost, just to satisfy our own needs, all of these behaviours are pushing us backwards. Last but not least, the *masla* this constant *laissez allez*, always punctuated with a 'grawoul' [it doesn't matter], the catchphrase of mediocre people, another cause of our delayed development.³

The history of *Set Setal* is one of constant innovation and creativity as new media and technological possibilities, new visual codes and languages, and changes in the landscape of official and authorised political discourse are churned through *set* aesthetics and theorised using *set* interpretative materials.

The satirical play with ‘emergence’ ties into the ludic and rebellious nature of *Set Setal*, while the tendency to rewrite emergence’s temporalities and to place it within a linear and incremental trajectory dependent upon the ‘civility’ of ordinary Senegalese represents another strand. As in John Manton’s account of Nigerian ‘environmental akalism’ which, through its *will* to change and cleanse the urban environment, constitutes itself as a ‘viable and potent political philosophy’ in the face of continuing and unresolved material and infrastructural challenges (Manton, 2013), *Set* politics has long laundered structural issues as personal responsibility and individual identity. As people begin to apply *set* theory to ‘emergence’ and to chip away at its high sheen façade, it can feel as if Senegalese are trapped in a repetition in which values of civility and the power to create and define the meaning of public space and the norms of governance are claimed by the state, reclaimed by citizens, arrogated, appropriated, cited, fought over and contested, while the material organisation and status of the urban space continues to fall short of the expectations of those who seek to transform it. The political gambit of emergence in Senegal appears to be not only to accelerate growth but to cleanse political discourse and practice of idioms of civility and participation, discourses into which people can easily project themselves, and to avoid the unbordered, unbridled potentiality of a *Set Setal*. In this context of symbolic enclosure and erasure it is easy to see why Sall’s citation of *Set Setal* caused extreme offence.

Like *Set Setal*, Cleaning Day also implied not just carnivals of communal cleaning but also violent practice of harassment and social cleansing. In Pikine a largely informal suburb of Dakar, I walked with my friend Moussa through the *Grand Niaye*, a piece of protected ecology in the heart of the overcrowded city and a space of urban

agricultural production. In the field I take care not to indulge or to express my own bourgeois bodily values and impulses to value cleanliness, light and space, and order. I have learned that my Senegalese friends can define spaces as *set* even when to me they look ‘dirty’. Nonetheless I was dismayed at the mass of tenancy that had rushed in to occupy the space and the residence it had become for marginalised people, rough sleepers, addicts and the mentally ill. Moussa commented that the space had become more unruly since the police had taken advantage of Cleaning Day to ‘clear out’ (*déguerpi*) the sides of the motorway, shaking down informal sellers that clustered around the road and people living in improvised habitations. Like the majority of people I spoke to, Moussa broadly *approved* of the more coercive policies enacted under the sign of Cleaning Day, repeating the argument I heard again and again in Dakar that unlike in Europe ‘where public space is *more* normed and *more* regulated than private space’, Senegalese will always need authoritarian approaches to encourage them to use private space ‘correctly’. Moussa’s response was not unusual, it was the *symbolic* violence of the state’s appropriation of cleaning as a localised and meaningful activity not the banal physical violence and harassment of vulnerable and marginalised urban citizens that was generally perceived as offensive.

Conclusion: A broom to the head

Across the countries most associated with the policy – Senegal, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Cameroon – a conceptual and theoretical literature is being written on emergence, its popular and cultural dimensions and how it can be rooted in African cultural dispositions and political formations (Péclard et al., 2020). Often cited is the Cameroonian economist Daniel Etounga-Manguelle and his observation that a

country ‘cannot emerge by decree’,⁴ popular ownership of the idea is necessary for true transformation. An inculcation of behaviours and a change of *mentalités* is certainly important, although where it is discussed in the technical literature on emergence it often refers to the creation of cultures of meritocracy, competition and achievement, and the cultivation of a sense of esteem and parity with other states (Kouakou and Zongo, 2017). The intense, internal and local, even parochial nature of *Set Setal* might from this perspective disqualify the movement from potentially adding cultural heft and ballast to policies of emergence in Senegal. The two examples that I have given of responses to emergence are signals of the new forms of public life that are appearing in response to discourses of emergence. Whether those responses are satirical, creating distance between the population and emergence by mocking its pretensions, or covetous, attempting to re-frame emergence around citizenship and civility, the meaning of emergence will not stay in the hands of the government.

I have considered the turns that *Set Setal* has taken, emphasising its flexibility, its resilience, its ability to incorporate critique of new hegemonic forms into its distinctive aesthetic world. I have also shown how *set* theory orientates a wide range of everyday practice and political identification, forming the building blocks of the personal identities of urban citizens. The movement itself is riven with internal contradictions and vulnerable to co-optation, and, perhaps because of this, people who associate themselves with *Set Setal* tend to react violently to the misappropriation of *set* labour and aesthetics. However, my explanation for why this particular Cleaning Day descended into violence does not just rest on an understanding of the complex history of *Set Setal*. At stake is the question of whether people in Dakar can integrate the incremental, participatory

and communitarian ethos that *Set Setal* has brought to urban development in Senegal into a new programme of growth-oriented, economic and infrastructural reform. Cleaning day represents a clash between a deeply rooted vernacular aesthetic repertoire and a future orientation that encapsulates ‘unbelonging’ through an interpellation of the public to participate in an active quiescence, to practice self-reliance in the interregnum between the present and emergence.

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Notes

1. <https://twitter.com/Waangrin/status/1223713474792083458?s=20>
2. ‘Cleaning Day: Cette Politique Vouée à l’Echec’ El Hadji Abdoulaye Dia https://www.dakaractu.com/Cleaning-day-cette-politique-vouee-a-l-echec_a175405.html
3. https://www.dakaractu.com/LA-CIRCULATION-ROUTIERE-UN-RESUME-DE-L-INDISCIPLINE-SENEGALAISE-Mame-Abdoulaye-TOUNKARA_a110118.html
4. <https://www.linodrome.com/afrique-monde/20065-emergence-de-l-afrique-dr-daniel-etou-nga-manguelle-economiste-beaucoup-de-dirigeants-africains-emergent-par-decret>

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