

## “These Walls Belong to Everybody” The Graffiti Art Movement in Dakar

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**Abstract:** While the graffiti artists of Dakar acknowledge the influence of the U.S. hop-hop movement, they also trace their beginnings to their own *Set Setal* (be clean-make clean) youth movement of the 1980s. Graffiti artist Mad Zoo explains that young Senegalese were responding to an “ethical crisis” in Dakar: “People would piss in the street and throw garbage all over... and when someone would ask them to explain themselves, they would tell you the street doesn’t belong to anybody, so I have the right to make it dirty... So [the participants of *Set-Setal*] decided to go and represent religious personalities on the walls and people didn’t have the courage to go and piss in front of those religious figures.” As for the phrase, “the street doesn’t belong to anybody,” pioneer *graffeur* Big Key expresses the *graffeurs*’ telling response: “But the walls belong to all of us... The only thing is, if [the walls] are for everybody, you have to use them correctly...” The graffiti artists pursue with passion their responsibility for the collective ownership of the public walls. They make graffiti art a force to cleanse and beautify the disintegrating spaces of their culturally rich but economically impoverished city. Aesthetic creativity, inspiration, technical ingenuity in the face of a dire lack of resources, and communal solidarity—these are enduring values in Senegalese culture. The graffiti artists both preserve and transform these inherited values to make them serve a globalized, urban society in economic crisis.

### Introduction

Pioneer Dakar graffiti artist Big Key (Thierno Moussa Sane, b. 1981) stretches his tall, muscular frame from the floor of the studio where he has been sitting. A windowless, ten-by-ten-foot room, in one of Dakar’s not-quite-rectilinear concrete buildings, the studio opens on to the interior courtyard where women do cooking and laundry. The building is in one of the mazes of sandy lanes off the paved thoroughfare of the crowded *Parcelles Assainies* neighborhood. Like many young Dakarois men who rent such rooms, Big Key has furnished it with a mattress, a TV, and his used laptop. A single twenty-watt bulb provides the only light. Piercing the gloom, his portraits, with their brilliantly colored, free-swirling brush strokes, line the walls.

I ask Big Key a seemingly technical question: “How do you make a gradation of tones with spray paint?” But Big Key, who speaks from his soul, answers:

Here we don’t have enough [spray paint] colors, only the basic ones. That teaches you a lot because with the experience of managing what you have, you can do better. In Europe, there are spray cans with several [tones of each color], so it’s easy. Here there might be two [tones of a color]. If you want a gradation of tones, you have to know how to use the equipment. You take a

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side of the tip and press lightly. It's a technique you learn with respect to pathetic equipment. With few means, you have to have a lot of experience.<sup>1</sup>

Big Key's younger colleague, graffiti artist Mad Zoo (Serigne Moumar Fall, b. 1987) expresses this deeply held value as an adage: "WITH FEW MEANS INSPIRATION MANAGES TO DO GREAT THINGS.....THAT'S AFRICAN INGENUITY."<sup>2</sup> Creativity, inspiration, technical ingenuity in the face of a dire lack of resources—these are enduring values of Dakar's culture that tailors, auto mechanics, dyers, fabric designers, and young computer geeks have expressed to me during two decades of my research in Senegal.

Pioneer *graffeur* Grafixx aka Afia (Omar Diop, b. 1985) talks about this value as it guides his daily life.<sup>3</sup> He suggests that "It's difficult... Fortunately, we know that comfort can kill inspiration."<sup>4</sup> But he also suggests how difficult it can be to ward off discouragement. Many *graffeurs* warn: "If it's money that pushes you to enter graffiti, you may as well go do something else. You have to put your passion first."<sup>5</sup> But Grafixx has sacrificed more than others. A protégée of the legendary rapper Matador since his teenage years in the low-income *banlieue* of Thiaroye, Grafixx left a paying job to help found Matador's Africulturban hip-hop arts center in 2006. He has worked as graffiti director for eight years without pay: "There have been days when I had a lot of inspiration but I didn't have the means to buy, for example, materials for them," he says, but quickly wards off discouragement: "It was really tough but I've gone beyond that."<sup>6</sup>

Grafixx joins the value of creative ingenuity to overcome lack of resources to another Senegalese value. He works within an ethos of communal solidarity. Docta (Amadou Lamine Ngom, b. 1975), internationally known graffiti artist and leader of Dakar's graffiti movement, emphasizes this as Senegal's crucial mark of identity within transnational hip-hop networks:

We are really socially conscious, super engaged by what goes on around us. Furthermore, our hip-hop remains pure. It's a hip-hop for the community; it defends the community and must speak for the community. If it doesn't do this, it no longer has a *raison d'être*.<sup>7</sup>

Dakar's *graffeurs* start from and constantly return to this inherited foundation of aesthetic creativity, technical ingenuity in the face of need, and communal solidarity.

### Modernizing Inherited Values of Senegalese Culture

How do the artists reshape these foundational values and make them serve a globalized, urban society in economic crisis? To begin exploring this central question of the essay, we need to take into account a serendipitous accident of history that has enabled the *graffeurs*' mission. Graffiti has never had an illegal status in Dakar. Every dictionary definition of graffiti I found begins with the notion that it is "illicit." From the beginnings of graffiti art in Western cities, officials have created a distinction between "legitimate" and "illegal," "vandalizing" graffiti.<sup>8</sup> But in Dakar, no such distinction has ever existed. Anyone can openly do graffiti on a public wall.

This unique advantage makes Senegal, according to Docta, "the paradise of graffiti": "The guys [in other African countries] tell me, oh, Senegal is becoming the paradise of graffiti. We don't have . . . the worry that when you go to graff a wall the police run after you to arrest you. On the contrary, they are going to appreciate what you are doing and say wow! that's beautiful. And this has been important in the work we've carried on from the beginning until today."<sup>9</sup> Officials, businessmen, and neighborhood people support the

*graffeurs*. They all see graffiti art as a force to cleanse and beautify the disintegrating spaces of their culturally rich but economically impoverished city. Expressing a vision of graffiti that might seem strange in the U.S., *graffeur* Triga (Youssoufa Touré, b. 1985) says: "There is nothing more noble, noting that a public place is unsanitary and coming to make it healthy."<sup>10</sup>

Dakar's graffiti artists have used their accident of history in their quest to modernize the inherited values of their community. To explore the question of how they do this, it is helpful to first envision the urban environment in which the *graffeurs* take up their historic task. Let's follow the *graffeurs* from wall to wall during one of their collective graffiti events. Dakar's annual *Festigraffis* the first "100% graff festival on the [African] continent," and remains the influential prototype of such events.<sup>11</sup>

Docta, who leads *Festigraff* through his organization *Doxadem Squad*, explains its original purpose. A proud hip-hopper, he opposes the common conflation of hip-hop with rap: When people talk about hip-hop in Senegal, they are only talking about rap. Rap is not hip-hop. Rap is a part of hip-hop. And the other elements of hip-hop are almost non-existent. Why? Because there are no events which, properly speaking, showcase this whole [graffiti] form of expression... It was necessary to have our own event.<sup>12</sup> For the highlight of the ten-day event, the artists collectively perform mural painting on three successive walls.<sup>13</sup> At about 10:00 A.M on the first day of painting, young people begin converging at a seven-foot concrete wall lining the paved thoroughfare of the HLM Neighborhood. Between this wall and the wide busy thoroughfare, runs a well-used athletic track as well as a ubiquitous landscape feature of Dakar. This latter consists of a wide stretch of sand, studded with weeds, strewn with rubbish and rutted with stagnant puddles. Fifteen to twenty young artists are joined by "apprentices" who are trying to learn graffiti and hoping to assist one of the artists. Awaiting the arrival of Docta, the *graffeurs* gather around the equipment they will use: a carton of the low quality spray-paint cans, large cans of acrylic paint and gesso, pails, brushes, and rollers. Before the graffiti can happen, the apprentices cleanse the area. Taking up shovels and wheel barrels, they begin to collect the rubbish and fill in the pools of stagnant water. The most experienced artists begin to mix the gesso with which they will whitewash the walls before painting them.

At about 11:00 A.M., Mad Zoo gathers the artists together. Refusing the word "leader" and preferring the term "representative of all the *graffeurs* of the new generation," Mad Zoo gives the artists the "theme" they will paint.<sup>14</sup> At *Festigraff*, a "theme" is a one-sentence message intended to inspire the population to positive action. As a practice, it also emphasizes the collective engagement of the artists. Today's theme is "Believe in yourself for as long as it takes, and you will succeed." Mad Zoo assigns to each artist either one word of the theme or a *perso* (character). When the *graffeurs* spread across the wall, those painting a word and those painting a *perso* will alternate with each other. Finally, the *graffeurs* can approach the wall and start to paint. The air itself seems to exude their intensity.

The process seems magical as it combines this strong will to collectively influence the population with each artist's ardent effort to express, in Docta's words, "a certain form of expression which belongs to artistic liberty."<sup>15</sup> As the day goes on, herds of runners thunder along the track, kicking up clouds of dust to the annoyance of the artists. Groups of children, sometimes led by their teacher, come to watch and, if they are lucky, paint a few brush strokes. Journalists, photographers, videographers, and members of the Dakar art scene come to work or kibitz. The artists are intense, but they visit each other's walls to

comment and critique, make suggestions, and lend each other a hand. At the end of the day, a palpable release follows the intensity of the work.

On the second day, the artists trek to Guediawaye, one of Dakar's low-income *banlieues*. These outlying districts, lacking basic infrastructure, have taken on the edgy glamour of the "hood" since the advent of hip-hop. A maze of paved streets and sandy roads, Guediawaye has no apparent plan. Therefore, the site is hard for outsiders to find and people are late. Gradually, the artists gather in front of the old Guediawaye soccer stadium. Its wall presents real challenges. About twelve feet high, it is extremely rough, pitted, and in some places crumbling (see Figure 1 below). Here, the theme is: "Knowledge before action is more sure."



Figure 1: Diablos works on his word for the collective theme at the Guediawaye stadium. Dakar, 17 April, 2013.

The third day, the artists paint what is in essence a private wall. This very long and curving retainer wall lines the property alongside the Toll Highway that starts just outside Dakar at the entry to the *banlieues*, and leads to the other cities of western Senegal. Although this wall is smooth and new, the wide field of sand and weeds between the wall and the four-lane highway is studded with even larger pools of stagnant water and even more rubbish that the apprentices have to clean up. On this day, the young artist Mow announces the theme and organizes the artists. Expressing a core value of both the artists' practice and their mission, the theme reads: "Dirtiness is bad; be clean inside, clean outside." Oblivious to the streams of traffic rushing by, the artists spend two days creating the most elaborate and beautiful work of the event.

Beyond *Festigraf* and similar events, the artists work alone or in crews, whenever they have the time and materials. They have claimed the right to paint public walls all over Dakar. As Big Key puts it: "I would even say that the walls need us."<sup>16</sup> But the question of

how *graffeurs* seek, through answering this need, to preserve and transform inherited Senegalese values needs deeper exploration. This begins with their stories about the origins of graffiti in Senegal. A *graffeur* might tell different versions of the story depending upon which generation he belongs to. The graffiti artists divide themselves into two generations: the pioneers, born between 1975 and 1985, and the younger people born between 1986 and 1990. They often call the two generations "*les grands frères*" and "*les jeunes*."

The pioneers tell the story of discovering graffiti through the hip-hop movement that came to them from the U.S.<sup>17</sup> Grafixx fondly remembers: "I began to see something new, CD covers. And during this time I had a friend who sold CDs of American rap. His older brother was in Italy and he made pirated copies of the CDs. He brought them here and sold them."<sup>18</sup> Although younger, Mow remembers: "One of my cousins lent me a magazine called *Groove*. It even featured 50 Cent, and this issue had an interview... with *graffeurs* . . . When I saw it, I immediately loved graffiti. I went to the Net to see what was going on."<sup>19</sup> Big Key recounts: "I began graffiti in 1998, but not completely. It's just that I saw CD covers, like Snoop Doggy Dogg. At the same time I saw an American hip-hop magazine called *Radical*. It had a few pages where you could see some artists and their graffiti works. I tried to look at these works so I could redo them on the covers of my text books."<sup>20</sup> Then Big Key joined Deep to form the crew *Mizérables Grafff* in 1999.

Although *graffeurs* explicitly focus on the difficulties of their early lonely attempts, their story inadvertently reveals the striking acceptance of graffiti. Deep says: "I'd be graffitiing at a wall, and the people going by would say, 'You are crazy.'"<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Big Key says his parents would scold: "Someone saw you doing graffiti at the side of the road. Why are you wasting your time instead of being in school?"<sup>22</sup> But the two pioneers were nonetheless doing graffiti in public and in daylight. Within a few months, moreover, they received affirmation. Big Key recounts that they were unable to afford paint and so were reduced to graffitiing with charcoal.

We were covering the wall of a hospital with graffiti in charcoal, and when the director came, he said "what you are doing is really beautiful." And we didn't even have authorization. "But," he said, "if you are using only charcoal, it will wear away through rain and other weather." Later he gave us something to buy paint, because, as he said, with paint, that will be something with a guarantee that it won't have with charcoal. He gave us 10,000 francs CFA [\$20].

With a nostalgic sigh Big Key remembers: "It was our first sale. So we began graffiti. It was fantastic at that time... Me and Deep, '99."

One of "*les jeunes*," Diablos (Maguette Traoré, b. 1989), who learned graffiti under the tutelage of Docta and Big Key, simply can't imagine that graffiti would not be respected. When he tells me that a French soldier has given him a room to use as a studio in the French military camp in Dakar, I ask in surprise if the commander knows about this. "Of course," he exclaims, equally surprised by my question. "Everybody knows me there—because I'm a *graffeur*, I'm a *taggeur*!"<sup>23</sup> This Dakarois acceptance of graffiti turns on its head the meaning that graffiti writers of U.S. and European cities invested in the practice. Nancy MacDonald insightfully concludes that "illegality... function[s] as the subculture's backbone. Without it, the threat, danger, challenge or test and the fame, respect and masculinity that writers earn from completing this would be lost."<sup>24</sup> The writer Col tells her that legal graffiti would have

no appeal: “there’d be no threat, graffiti would be a waste of time. I go bombing for the excitement, it’s like I get a great adrenalin rush out there.”<sup>25</sup>

The Senegalese *graffeurs* have other sources of inspiration. Mad Zoo says: “It’s born of a different reality. For example in France, or in the U.S.,... a *graffeur*—but not necessarily all of them—must have adrenalin to really feel like, O.K., I’m a complete *graffeur*. Here in Senegal, you note that *graffeurs* have a certain sense of duty. They feel invested with a mission... It really accords with the very beginning of our history of graffiti.”<sup>26</sup>

Mad Zoo traces Senegalese graffiti to a different beginning than that of the pioneers who personally experienced its introduction from the U.S. In this version: “It concerns a typically Senegalese system of thought. What pushed people to go to the walls for the first time here in Senegal... was that they had found a possible solution to [an] ethical crisis... The point of departure of Senegalese graffiti... was the *Set Setal* movement.”<sup>27</sup> Meaning “be clean-make clean” in Wolof, *Set-Setal* was a short-lived but historically significant youth movement in the 1980s. Young people took it upon themselves to clean up their dirty city and to inspire the population to do likewise through murals and other forms of public art. Although many murals depicted themes of cleanliness and public health, young participants initiated the now famous public murals of local legendary Muslim religious leaders.<sup>28</sup> Mad Zoo recounts:

Here in Senegal you see that religious personalities have a really huge influence on the population. . . . At a certain moment, we had a real problem with people’s mentality. People would piss in the street and throw garbage all over . . . and when someone would ask them to explain themselves, they would tell you the street doesn’t belong to anybody, so I have the right to make it dirty. And then you’d see this same Senegalese before a religious guide being like an exemplary person. . . . So [the participants of *Set-Setal*] decided to go and represent religious personalities on the walls and people didn’t have the courage to go and piss in front of those religious figures. . . . It was after this aha! moment that we saw the first generation of *graffeurs* here, through the Big Keys, the Doctas and others.<sup>29</sup>

The phrase “this street doesn’t belong to anybody” signifies the anomie of city life during the period of intense urbanization in Africa, when millions of people moved away from the communal solidarity of their villages.

Big Key expresses the *graffeurs*’ telling response to this phrase: “But the walls belong to all of us. They’re for everybody.”<sup>30</sup> He repeats this refrain in the course of an impassioned defense of Senegalese graffiti: “The only thing is, if [the walls] are for everybody, you have to use them correctly... and the reason is that sometimes people soil them, piss, throw garbage. And when the *graffeur* comes, he cleans, he creates a nice design, and he talks with the people. It’s a good act. The walls need to be cleaned, to be grafted.”

Big Key is speaking with great intensity to me and other people in the formal salon off the central courtyard of his family’s home. Typical of a middle-class extended family home, the salon is filled with overstuffed couches and chairs hand-made by local carpenters. Lace curtains cover the windows. One approaches the house by going behind some buildings on one of the apparently-leading-nowhere paved roads of Guediawaye and crossing a large sandy field. We have just returned from the Guediawaye Bus Terminal, at the intersection of two wide and curving roads. Big Key has filled the long concrete wall of the terminal with a giant white, orange, and blue “DISCIPLINE” (Figures 2 and 3 below). As Big Key works

intently, busses and the garbage truck rumble past, horse-drawn carts trundle by, sheep peck at the refuse lining the foot of the wall, pedestrians offer comments, and people sitting on mats under the bus terminal pavilion watch with amusement. Analyzing his adventure later that day, Big Key holds that indiscipline lurks at the core of people's failure to engage in communal responsibility. He firmly hopes that his striking graff will attract them to heed its message of civic-minded communalism.



Figure 2: Big Key's "Discipline" graff at the Guediawaye bus terminal. Dakar, 16 September, 2013.

"If I take off alone, all by myself, just to do a graffiti, without it being a collective or a festival, what I graff is something that makes a positive effect. . . . It's my contribution, because we make the walls talk, we make the walls live." Whether doing a formal festival or a spontaneous solo, the *graffeurs* see their mission as reshaping the old collective ethos for a new urban environment. Big Key says: "I've come to beautify and at the same time talk to people, and at the same time explain and let them know what discipline is. You understand? There's a professional, commercial side where I have to make money to live, but there's a side that is the true meaning of graffiti for me."

### Constructing Identities through Graffiti

Drawing their ardent attachment to graffiti from other sources than the thrill of dangerous illegality, the Dakar *graffeurs* also construct social identities differently than the Western writers of the 1990s. MacDonald writes: "Illegal graffiti writers position themselves as 'outsiders'; that is, members of a socially detached and isolated group... [T]hey use the 'world apart' construction to enhance their power, solidarity, and... the solidity of their subculture."<sup>31</sup> By contrast, the Dakar artists form their social identity through connection to the population. They see themselves as taking a leadership role. Mad Zoo comments: "For everything that goes on here, the artist should be the guiding pole for his young people, for his population, his public... In these troubled periods... an artist owes it to himself to be a haven of respect and profound peace."<sup>32</sup> Docta puts it this way: "It speaks to the community, because Docta belongs to that community..."<sup>33</sup> Many artists see their community as the economically impoverished neighborhood they come from. Atibou Diallo, the manager of Docta's *Doxadem Squad*, says: "Everything we have we bring back to the neighborhood, because we carry the neighborhood in our heart, and I mean forever. So that's what the combat is about."<sup>34</sup>



Figure 3: Big Key works on his graff at the Guediawaye bus terminal. Dakar, 16 September, 2013.

Docta remains attached to the neighborhood *La Médina*. One of Dakar's oldest neighborhoods, it was called "the native quarter" and then "Tilene" under French colonial rule. Low ramshackle buildings, built for extended families, line the grid of narrow paved streets. Although Docta has a house in the tonier neighborhood of *Point E*, he lives in his grandfather's house in the *Médina*. His tiny windowless room, at the furthest corner of the large courtyard, has just enough space to hold his single bed and a pile of suitcases. Over the bed, Docta has draped a canopy in a way that gives the tiny space a magical, fantasy quality. Sitting cross-legged on his bed at our first interview, Docta explains his commitment: "I am a hip-hopper, as they say. What have I brought to the *Médina*? I've brought a different vision of urban art and culture. I've brought another point of view, the commitment of youth to clean up the environment."<sup>35</sup> Like Big Key, Docta expresses the identity of a youthful generation born into globalization and engaged in modernizing inherited values:

It's seeing filthy, disgusting places where I take up my responsibility to go to that place without asking my right from anyone. I brighten up the environment to make it more livable, more beautiful to see, even beautiful to sit beside and to smell that it's clean... The *Médinois* appreciate it. People come to me and say, there's a wall at my house, and I'm giving it to you... What I learned in this neighborhood, I bring back to this neighborhood – solidarity, citizenship, commitment.

A later interview with Docta performs communal values. Six people are sitting on hard metal chairs in the grandfather's large courtyard with its old doors shadowed in mysterious

alcoves. Present are my husband, my friend the photographer Malika Diagana, Atibou, and Docta's younger brother, whom he is apprenticing. In addition to educating me, Docta is also educating them.

Even more people are present at my interviews with Mad Zoo. He lives in a room almost exactly like Big Key's studio. He has hung his paintings representing Sufi Islam themes. He has also adorned his walls with a genealogy of Muslim prophets and posters of the *graffeurs'* African American heroes: Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks, along with KRS-One's *Hip Hop Declaration of Peace*. The room is filled with people—his brother and the *graffeurs* Mow, Triga, Beaugraff, and Chimere. Malika has also come. The young men seated on the mattress are sketching in their black books, listening to their iPods, and watching a soccer match on TV. Yet at one point in this interview, Mad Zoo does confide a negative aspect of African communalism: "Most people in my own family... thought that I was straight out crazy. That's because I wanted to be alone in my corner and do what I wanted to do. Solitude is very, very frowned upon here. If it's a child, they think that you are mentally retarded. If it's an adult, they say you aren't a social person."<sup>36</sup> But he ends this analysis on a positive note: "Now I'm here, all the guys are here, so it's something I've learned to transform..."

Mad Zoo, like Big Key, analyzes the Senegalese *graffeurs'* identity through reference to the transnational graffiti networks:

An exchange can take place only on condition that you know in the first place what you really have. If you don't know... you won't be able to see the difference between what you have and what the others have... So if there's an exchange, it's because you know what you're doing, but you're also recognizing the others' worth. I respect the Western *graffeurs*. I admire them, because they hold firm in spite of a system that oppresses them.

Mad Zoo then clearly states what differentiates his identity: "The Senegalese *graffeur* cannot break this tie with his people." He goes on: "Here in Africa, we have a certain sense of respect, of ethics. As a *graffeur*, I can't personally go and write my name on private property, because my very sense of Senegalese ethics doesn't allow me to do it."

Mad Zoo raises here yet another way in which the Dakar *graffeurs* have transformed Western graffiti and its process of identity construction. For the young pioneers in the U.S. and Europe, graffiti, "embodying a desire to put one's name about town," became "the pure mark of individuality."<sup>37</sup> Although the Dakar *graffeurs* may begin their careers by tagging their names, they have to move beyond that. Docta says: "My blazon Docta everywhere—Docta, Docta, Docta—who does that serve?... It doesn't serve anyone... What interests us is that we can talk to the population, that we can touch with our finger what the population is living through every day."<sup>38</sup>

Although the artists do strive to make a name for themselves, many argue that the essence of graffiti lies elsewhere. Docta does so in terms that combine the social with the spiritual. Although the graffiti "themes" generally communicate a secular and civic message, graffiti can fulfill its social mission, according to Docta, only as "a divine expression translated into the human... It attracts the other because it's divine. If it's just human, it remains individual." Like Big Key, Docta unites the responsibility to educate the people and the creation of beauty as inseparable elements of a single practice and mission: "That's our identity. We are one hundred per cent social, very engaged in what we do.

That's what defines us, but also the way of our aesthetic, the way each artist lays it on... So this graffiti coming from Senegal has an international level."

### Organization and Ethical Issues of the Dakar Graffiti Movement

Given their mission to enhance the collective responsibility of the population, the graffiti artists also see the need for the same mission among themselves. They have not found it easy to develop a code of behavior, nor to live it faithfully day to day. But over time, they have developed a discourse and organizations that attempt to avoid egotistic rivalries.

The *graffeurs* can organize themselves toward this goal because they are few in number. Senegal, according to *Hip Hop Africa*, has one of the strongest international reputations for hip-hop among African countries.<sup>39</sup> But while Dakar rappers number in the thousands, graffiti artists number in the dozens. The accomplished and intensely dedicated artists "in the scene" number "fewer than twenty."<sup>40</sup> Before the artist Mbautta (Moussa Kane) joined the Dakar scene, he could identify the best-known artists: "If you asked me about the *graffeurs* in Senegal who have a name, I would say there's Docta, there's Mad Zoo, there's Diablos, there's Mow, there's Grafixx."<sup>41</sup>

Graffiti art, as Docta says, demands, "rigor" and long-term "apprenticeship."<sup>42</sup> *Les jeunes* are constantly sketching and writing in their "black books." Mad Zoo says: "We aren't many. That's because graff doesn't allow for cheating. It's different from rap where you can see a super terrible rapper but with a beat constructed to mask his weakness . . . Graffiti is free style."<sup>43</sup>

Through their artistic reputations and leadership abilities, Docta and Mad Zoo exercise influence in determining who has attained the level to qualify as an accomplished artist, and "to have his own wall," as Docta says, at *Festigraff*. Having created *Doxadem* as a small crew in the 1990s, Docta grew it into a force for organizing the graffiti movement. In 2010, *Doxadem* was able to mount the ambitious *Festigraff* and then to make it an annual event. The fourth annual *Festigraff*, in 2013, announced as its object: "To experiment with new techniques and to communicate a passion and convictions to a new African generation of *graffeurs*."<sup>44</sup>

Docta has the charisma to gain financing for this and other events. He and Atibou negotiate sponsorships with the Minister of Culture, the few large businesses, like the Senegalese telecommunications company, and cultural institutes of dominant countries, mainly France, but also the U.S. This financing serves an array of events. Before the four days of mural painting described above, the artists exhibit their paintings on canvas or paper at the French Cultural Center in the old colonial downtown of Dakar. Then, during three days of workshops, guest artists from Switzerland, Germany, and Togo instruct children, adolescents, and, finally, the accomplished *graffeurs* themselves.

Even as most of "les jeunes" continue to work closely with *Doxadem* Squad, some of the most highly regarded young artists have begun their own organization. Mow explains: "Every time we worked together during the festivals, there was this feeling for doing something as a graffiti group of the young generation."<sup>45</sup> In 2012, Mow and Mad Zoo formed the RBS Crew. By the end of 2013, RBS, grown to nine members, has become in its own right an active force. The main criteria for membership are, in Diablos's words, "to contribute something beautiful, and to constantly strive to surpass yourself," through "a schedule of intensive *jobs* and a schedule of intensive work."<sup>46</sup> RBS exercises influence in deciding which *graffeurs* have attained a high artistic level. It does so through the reputation

of its members, its collective murals all over the city, and its power to invite new members. RBS continues to enjoy harmonious relations with Docta and other pioneers.

Beyond *Doxadem*, RBS and other crews, the *graffeurs* are enmeshed in the networks of Dakar’s hip-hop movement. As members of rap crews, they perform the visual—what they call the “aesthetic”—forms of the hip-hop arts, without which rap cannot flourish. They tag the city walls with the rap crew’s name, design their costumes, and paint the backgrounds for their concerts. So much does a rap crew need a good graffiti artist that Atibou’s crew *Attentrap*, in the isolated, remote *banlieue* of Yeumbeul, took steps to transform the local artist Mbautta, who had decorated their studio walls, into a talented *graffeur*. Atibou recounts: “We all chipped in to buy two or three spray cans. Then we said to Mbautta, go out there and write something about *Attentrap*. So he threw it up, and you realize the rest!”<sup>47</sup> Mbautta’s somewhat less enthusiastic version goes: “They told me, since you’re the designer of the group, ... you are its *graffeur*.”<sup>48</sup> When the Yeumbeul artist turned *graffeur* came to Dakar for his first *Festigraff* in 2013, he chose to apprentice with the much younger Diablos so that he could learn what he called his “secrets.” At the Toll Highway, on the third day, the leaders deemed that Mbautta could advance to “having his own wall.” In this way does the graffiti movement determine artistic quality and push its members to raise the aesthetic level.

In their struggle against egotistic rivalries, the Dakar *graffeurs* have transformed to fit their own culture the “fierce” competition of Western graffiti writers “to be the most artistic, the most innovative, the most daring, the most suicidal.”<sup>49</sup> Mad Zoo explains: “No one needs to claim to be the best. We are all expressing ourselves in different styles. So it’s just a waste of time to devote ourselves to a real competition. Positivity remains the essence of our art, and competition must be positive and strive to heighten our abilities and techniques.”<sup>50</sup> Docta deploys this discourse as he talks about *Festigraff*: “At the moment that I’m in front of a wall with many *graffeurs*, and I see someone do a certain technique, ... I go and ask him how do you do that... Then you’ll try it out in front of him, and he will correct you. He’ll tell you: no, it’s not like that, you have to do this... I’m not ashamed as an artist to ask my colleague artist... because he too has things he needs to ask me.”<sup>51</sup>

Among the *graffeurs*, Mow has an innately non-competitive spirit. Mad Zoo says that he originally formed RBS “between Mow and me,” because “Mow always had this reserved personality. That’s his philosophy... with regard to a certain kind of behavior in our milieu where some people have the impression they’re entering into competition with others.”<sup>52</sup> Among the pioneers, Big Key also has an innate inability to be competitive, and has not taken a public leadership role. But he quietly exercises his immense gift as a mentor. Mad Zoo writes, “Here in Senegal, in particular the person who inspired me in graffiti was Big Key... He initiated me... He wanted to support me on this path and I have become a *graffeur* in his image. ‘RESPECT BRO.’ He repeated to me all the time, ‘I believe in you...’ He’s the one who gave me the idea of graffiti.”<sup>53</sup>

Diablos also singles out Big Key: “I was very much side by side with Big Key. He just encouraged me. He said that I must not stay where I was, that I had to think much more about art. I had to dig down much deeper. He told me: ‘You have to go forward, believe in yourself.’ Since then I believed in myself, and I began to do things.”<sup>54</sup> So much does Diablos fashion himself “in the image of Big Key” that even at the age of twenty-four, he was the only *graffeur* at the 2013 *Festigraff* who constantly mentored two apprentices. He did this, he said, to be “like Big Key.”<sup>55</sup> Big Key continues behind-the-scenes to mentor yet a younger generation.

## Masculinity and Gender Identity

If the London writers celebrate their fierce competition, while the Dakar *graffeurs* struggle to transform this urge, in each culture the artists construct identity through graffiti. And in each graffiti scene, identity is decidedly masculine.<sup>56</sup> Yet here too, the artists construct different masculine identities as their specific gender system determines. According to MacDonald, in London and New York of the 1990s, a militaristic discourse transforms the “war” with police into “a celebration of masculine supremacy.”<sup>57</sup> If one admits that women are equally capable of performing the dangers of graffiti, “The male writer has everything to lose because ‘If women can do what “real men” do, the value of the practice for accommodating masculinity is effectively challenged.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, “the female writer is not particularly welcome” and “the exclusion of women is used to nourish, amplify and salvage notions of masculinity.”<sup>59</sup>

The Senegalese *graffeurs* do not define graffiti as exclusively masculine or attempt to exclude women. Rather they simply assume a masculine voice, a masculine audience and a masculine membership. There is only one woman *graffeur*, Zeinixx (Dieynaba Sidibe, b. 1990) in the Dakar movement.<sup>60</sup> Also the youngest artist in “the scene,” Zeinixx is a university student in business management and an accomplished slammer. In RBS, she says, “there are only boys. But in any event, I belong to the biggest graffiti collective in Senegal, *Doxadem Squad*.”<sup>61</sup>

When *graffeurs* such as Mad Zoo say that “graffiti is universal,” and I ask them how it can be universal when so few women participate, they offer several answers.<sup>62</sup> Most of these relieve them from responsibility for gender inequality. The most common response blames the Senegalese family. Mad Zoo explains:

Many parents want to see their children really succeed in school... and they see those young people with a certain rebel approach... That shocks the parents. Boys . . . lay claim to their position much more aggressively. Girls don't have that liberty... So the parents lack understanding vis-à-vis their [daughters] with respect to hip-hop... because in its essence hip-hop has everything that's most healthy to guide young people in search of an identity.

More proactive, Docta and Atibou express the wish for more women in the movement, and say that they are actively trying to recruit women through *Doxadem Squad*. In fact, large numbers of girls and young women do participate in their workshops, financed by the French and US institutions legally required to give lip-service to gender non-discrimination. But when these female participants come of age, will they have the collective courage to graff on walls in public? Ironically, where the clandestine night-time forays of London graffiti functioned as an excuse to exclude British women, the highly public Dakar graffiti events work to exclude Senegalese women. Although the *graffeurs* welcome Zeinixx and Western women guest artists, Zeinixx says that passersby stare and comment about her “as if I were a Martian!”<sup>63</sup> If Docta and Atibou give more thought to gender inequality than their peers, they must also deal more directly with neo-colonial inequality in seeking financing for *Festigraff* and other events from European and U.S. sponsors. This need for foreign sponsorships creates a contradiction.

## Economic Poverty and Artistic Wealth

Grafixx, Mow, and Diablos express a passion for the “artistic liberty” of “deforming academic letters” in graffiti styles.<sup>64</sup> Mad Zoo elaborates: This has become “a rebellion with respect to school itself, to a system of education which is not anchored in our African realities.” The education system, established when “the African francophone countries . . . were French colonies,” is still in place. “Independence hasn’t happened yet.”<sup>65</sup>

Yet in order to create these liberating deforming styles, the *graffeurs* have to depend on neo-colonial sponsors. At the fourth annual *Festigrapp*, they find this sponsorship capricious and controlling. Resentment about the high-handed treatment of the Festival from the French sponsor and the paltry payment the *graffeurs* receive are muted undertones. The European guest of honor at the 2013 *Festigrapp*, however, openly expresses dismay. Mode 2, born in Mauritius and raised in France, lives in Germany. Angered about the treatment meted out by both Senegalese and foreign official sponsors, he says that they did not deliver on promises, nor were funds available when needed.<sup>66</sup> He himself has brought materials, acrylics, and good quality European brushes worth much more than the money the Minister of Culture donated. Thus Mode 2 was prepared to find the infamous lack of resources, but does not expect to find a situation as dire as it is. He says, the artists “are still in front of the walls with not enough paint.”<sup>67</sup>

While Mode 2 finds dismaying the official neglect of the artists’ material needs, he is impressed with the young artists’ social and cultural consciousness. Compared to the Senegalese *graffeurs*, the Europeans, he says, are spoiled. By contrast, the young Dakarais *graffeurs* know how to manage the immediacy of real life. Mode 2 asks: Where do we strike the balance? He sees that it is our duty to find the missing links between the resources available in Europe and the consciousness of the Senegalese artists.

This lack of resources, we have seen, stimulates the *graffeurs* to encourage each other to higher levels of aesthetic creativity.<sup>68</sup> When the leaders assess the artistic level of aspiring *graffeurs*, they have to evaluate beauty according to the internationally accepted canons of graffiti art that the U.S. writers established in the 1980s. As in many art forms—think of jazz or Petrarchan sonnets—the challenge of working within strict codes, and at a certain level of mastery playing with them, inspires artists to infinite creativity and originality. Among the many graffiti styles, most artists play upon variations of wild style, semi-wild style, three-D, and bubble style.<sup>69</sup> Wild style, with its hyper-deformed, intertwined letters is the most difficult to write and to read (see Figures 4 and 5 below).



Figure 4: Wild style graff of the word “set” [clean] by Diablos, for the *Festigraff* mural: “Dirtiness is bad, be clean inside, clean outside.”  
Dakar, 19 April, 2013.



Figure 5: Wild style graff of the word “set” [clean] by Mad Zoo, for the *Festigraff* mural: “Dirtiness is bad, be clean inside, clean outside.”  
Dakar, 19 April, 2013.

Diablos and Mad Zoo are well known for their creative mastery of wild style. Like the pioneer New York masters of the form, Diablos and Mad Zoo make the word as a whole the unit of expression, but with a culturally different cast.<sup>70</sup> The New York artists wrote their names repeatedly. But when the Dakar *graffeurs* participate in a collective "theme," they won't know what word they will write until they arrive at the site. Diablos has developed a "symmetrical form" that can adapt itself to whatever word he must paint. His basic structure, although constantly evolving, has an elegant shape that stands out distinctly from its surrounding negative space. At the 2013 *Festigraff*, Diablos experiments with a tension between a vertical, angular center and flowing billows (see Figure 6 below). The billowing curvaceous stokes surging through and around the energetic vertical and oblique lines seem to symbolize the marriage between expression of collective social engagement and individual artistic liberty.



Figure 6: The unit of writing is the word. "Dii" [verb particle expressing the future] by Diablos. For the *Festigraff* HLM neighborhood mural: "Believe in yourself for as long as it takes, and you will succeed." Dakar, 16 April, 2013.



Figure 7: The unit of writing is the word. "Xam" [Know] by Mad Zoo. For the *Festigraff* Guediawaye stadium mural: "Knowledge before action is more sure." Dakar, 17 April, 2013.

Mad Zoo's wild style incorporates his intellectual passion for philosophy, and like Docta, a "profound experimentation in the spiritual area."<sup>71</sup> He combines elements of Chinese calligraphy, Arabic script and sharply angled Fraktur-style typeface in his ultra fluid wild style (see Figure 7 above). He says: "Many people think it's a paradox that I have strong messages to convey while on the walls they see an illegible style." But he makes form and function coincide: What people take for "reality and human nature... is only a manipulation... Media images emphasize... what divides us: stories of race, stories of religion." These seductive images, he maintains, "smother us in our intellectual idleness."

Mad Zoo elaborates the notion that difficulty inspires one to great attainment while comfort leaves one clueless: "My message bears upon a vision of a single community without psychological, religious or even racial barriers." He aims to convey this message through a writing style that encourages readers to "break those ties of facility of the image." If a message is too easily readable, people "will never take the time to decode it." For Mad Zoo, inspiring "this passion to go to the very bottom of things and wrest the message constitutes the very utility of what we do."

In addition to mastering styles that aesthetically deform letters, another criterion for beauty concerns the famous lack of resources. The artists call upon their ingenuity to master the use of make-shift tools. In Claudia Walde's interviews with graffiti artists around the world, Aple 76 (Grenoble, France), and Casper (Osaka, Japan), say that what they like about graffiti is that all you need is a wall and a spray can.<sup>72</sup> But for the Senegalese, even the poor quality spray paint is too costly. They must use brushes and rollers with acrylic paint for much of their work. Mode 2 also finds dismaying the poor quality of the paints and brushes available in Dakar. These are manufactured in China purposefully for export to Africa. When I ask Diablos about the brushes, he says that he has to cut the bristles in order to be able to use them. So knowing how to cut the brushes, and then how to achieve effects with them, are hard-won skills in themselves.

But one of the most difficult skills does require the use of the precious aerosol paint. An accomplished artist has to be able to write the outlines of the giant letters free-form and, says Docta, "if you don't know how to use the spray-can, you will waste it, because... you must make one single, very clean line."<sup>73</sup> Often not knowing in advance what word he will write, a *graffeur* must write the complex deformed letters with an unhesitatingly free and sure sense of space and proportion. Once an artist creates the word, he may supervise apprentices in filling in the letters with a brush. Thus the first thing an apprentice learns, when he finally advances from his sketchbook to the wall, is how to use the poor quality brushes. The artists again use the precious aerosol paint for the decorative flourishes, spatters, star bursts, and splashes in the graffiti code. Here too, they must exercise ingenuity in the face of economic scarcity. Where the Western writers use specialty fat caps and thin caps on their spray cans, the Dakar *graffeurs* must master the same effects using just the one standard-issue tip of their low-quality spray cans.

In addition to mastering all these technical difficulties, a *graffeur* can advance to the charmed circle only when he has achieved an original, distinctively individual style of lettering within the graffiti code. If not, says Docta, "we can't be permitted to give you a wall." He explains the necessary dialectic between collectivity and individuality: "Your style... must develop individually, and when you've developed it, at that moment you can share." After the 2013 *Festigraff*, Docta, like the young *graffeurs*, expresses elation: "The *graffeurs* have jumped several levels because there was this aspect of individual work."

The *graffeurs* intensely perform this dialectic between the collective message and individual artistic freedom during the *Festigraff* mural paintings. The performance itself has to be visible in the graff. As Docta maintains, the marriage between social engagement and high artistic quality happens only when one can clearly read both the social message and "the expression of artistic liberty" in the final product. Each word of the theme is both a sign with a familiar meaning and the pure trace of the graceful, energetic body movement that wrote it.<sup>74</sup> Mad Zoo and Diablos are known for expressing artistic liberty through their physical performance of writing as well as through their wild style visual products. Hip-hopppers have written about dance as graffiti and graffiti as dance.<sup>75</sup> Mad Zoo and Diablos make their graffiti into a kind of choreography.

Mad Zoo walks up to his wall. He has often alluded to his fight to transform his penchant for "violence" and "anger" into an "an ethic of respect."<sup>76</sup> He has said: "Hip-hop rose up at a certain moment like the first rampart in this struggle against criminality in the urban environment... In my case, graff helped me to channel my impulses... without it, there would currently be a disaster."<sup>77</sup> Now at *Festigraff*, he takes his brush and forcefully swings his whole body in gigantic, rapid sweeps. Twisting his body from right to extreme left, he ends with abrupt flourishes, leaving in his wake fiery swashes of magenta and red (see Figure 8 below). At the same time, Diablos approaches his wall. He too engages a struggle against internal demons. He prevails over speech defects, a lack of formal education and a health so fragile that his skinny body seems to disappear under his baggies. All his eloquence goes into his art. He takes up a spray-can, bends low in the wide stance of a skater or martial artist, puts all his weight on his left leg, and extends his right. Then he smoothly, rapidly, and gracefully shifts his weight to his right and leaves in his wake in a long, sinuous stroke with no breaks in the thin, fine line (see Figure 9 below).



Figure 8: Mad Zoo rapidly twists his whole body and ends with an abrupt flourish to create an energetic stroke.  
Dakar, 20 April, 2013.



Photography © Leslie Rabine

Figure 9: Diablos bends low like a skater, and smoothly shifts his weight from one side to the other, to create a long, fluid line.  
Dakar, 20 April, 2013.

## Conclusion

All day long, Dakar's *graffeurs* will perform the thrill of reminding the population that, in the words of Big Key, "Those walls are for all of us." By proclaiming themselves guardians of the collective ownership of the walls, the artists have become the intermediaries of inherited foundational Senegalese values. They have charged themselves with rebirthing these into a new society where unplanned urban sprawl and economic crisis have threatened their wellbeing. The *graffeurs* paint the walls all over the city, so that, in a very meaningful way, the walls, the city itself, do belong to them as the custodians of a common heritage they seek to modernize. They have given themselves the task, at once a burden and an inspiring privilege, of enlarging those values beyond the old confines of family and village, to embrace the entire sprawling city.

## Notes

- 1 Sane (Big Key) 2012, personal interview, 22 June. All personal interviews quoted in this paper were conducted in Dakar, Senegal, by the author. Quotations from interviews, conversations, emails and Facebook are translated from French into English by the author. When the person quoted uses an English word, it is italicized. The first instance of an interview will be footnoted, and then not noted again unless quotations from other people or sources intervene.
- 2 Fall 2013, Facebook post, 8 June, <https://www.facebook.com/madzoo.fall>. Caps and the five-point ellipsis in the original.
- 3 In the U.S., the terms for graffiti artist are "writer" or "spray-can artist," but in Dakar graffiti artists call themselves "*graffeurs*."
- 4 Diop (Grafixx) 2013, personal interview, 25 April.
- 5 Beaugraff, qtd. in Drame 2013, 11 June.
- 6 Diop (Grafixx) 2013, personal interview, 29 April. In July, 2013, Grafixx left Africulturban for a paying job and an opportunity to start his "Graffiti Skool" for children. (Diop 2013, personal Facebook message to the author, 23 July).
- 7 Ngom (Docta) 2012, personal interview, 29 June.
- 8 On the outlaw status of graffiti art in cities around the world, see Atlanta and Alexander 1988, p. 159; Cooper and Chalfant 1984; Edlin 2011; Klopper 2003; Mansbach 2006, p. 92; Savelli et al. 2007. For the tension between legal and illegal graffiti, see Gastman and Neelon 2010, pp. 126-31; Grody 2006, pp. 257, 281; Schacter 2013, p. 9; Tucker 2013.
- 9 Ngom (Docta) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 10 Triga, qtd. in Drame 2013.
- 11 Centre de Documentation 2013.
- 12 Ngom (Docta) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 13 For panoramic photographs of the three murals, see Rabine 2013a, 14 May. <http://www.leslierabine.net/senegal-arts-project-gallery/dakar-graffiti-festival-festigrapp/>.
- 14 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 15 Ngom (Docta) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 16 Sane (Big Key) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 17 For the entrance of graffiti in other African countries, see Ariefdien and Abrahams 2006; Klopper 2003, p. 224; and Perry 2012.

- 18 Diop (Grafixx) 2013, personal interview, 25 April.
- 19 Souare (Mow) 2013, personal interview, 27 April.
- 20 Sane (Big Key) 2012, personal interview, 22 June.
- 21 Diba (Deep) 2012, personal interview, 26 June.
- 22 Sane (Big Key) 2012, personal interview, 22 June.
- 23 Traoré (Diablos) 2012, personal interview, 24 June.
- 24 MacDonald 2001, p. 128.
- 25 Col quoted in *ibid*, p. 128.
- 26 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 27 Diouf 1992.
- 28 On murals of Senegalese Muslim religious leaders, see Roberts et al. 2003.
- 29 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 30 Sane (Big Key) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 31 MacDonald 2001, p. 153.
- 32 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 33 Ngom (Docta) 2012, personal interview, 29 June.
- 34 Diallo 2013, personal interview, 25 April.
- 35 Ngom (Docta) 2012, personal interview, 29 June.
- 36 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 37 Atlanta and Alexander 1988, pp. 164, 167; see also Ganz 2006, p. 10.
- 38 Ngom (Docta) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 39 Charry 2012, p. ix.
- 40 Traoré, Maguette (“Diablos”) 2013, personal Facebook message to the author, 30 May. See also Drame, 2012.
- 41 Kane (Mbautta) 2013, personal interview, 2 May.
- 42 Ngom (Docta) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 43 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 44 Centre de Documentation 2013.
- 45 Souare (Mow) 2013, personal interview, 27 April.
- 46 Traoré (Diablos) 2013, personal interview, 15 September.
- 47 Diallo 2013, personal interview, 25 April.
- 48 Kane (Mbautta) 2013, personal interview, 2 May.
- 49 MacDonald 2001, p. 78, and graffiti writer Acridqtd. in *Ibid*, p. 105.
- 50 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September. For this kind of collaborative spirit among Los Angeles crews, see Grody 2006, pp. 219-22.
- 51 Ngom (Docta) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 52 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 53 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013. Personal interview of April 24, written transcript edited by Fall, caps font in edited transcript. 2 July.
- 54 Traoré (Diablos) 2012, personal interview, 24 June. Big Key also initiated me into graffiti art, and mentored me with just as much heartfelt encouragement, though with much less success, than in the case of Mad Zoo and Diablos.
- 55 Traoré (Diablos) 2013, personal communication, 18 April.
- 56 This section will be brief, since I have written at length about gender and masculinity in the Dakar youth arts movement in another essay. See Rabine 2013b.

- 57 MacDonald 2001, pp. 122-23.
- 58 Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 32, qtd.in MacDonald 2001, p. 142.
- 59 MacDonald 2001, pp. 143, 149.
- 60 In the first generation of Senegalese hip-hop, the few women rappers quickly went on to concentrate on other genres of music. In this younger generation, the only well-known woman rapper is the dynamic Toussa Senerap. Her crew Gotal includes the multi-talented Ndaye Fatou Ina Thiam as beat-maker. Ina is also a videographer and photographer, and works at Africulturban.
- 61 Sidibe (Zeinixx) 2013, personal interview, 29 April.
- 62 Fall (Mad Zoo), personal interview, 2013. 24 April. Other graffeurs have made similar comments.
- 63 Sidibe (Zeinixx) 2013, personal interview, 29 April.
- 64 Diop (Grafixx) 2013, 25 April; Souare (Mow) 2013, 27 April, Traoré (Diablos) 2013, 15 September—personal interviews.
- 65 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September. In his essay on graffiti in Dakar, Ndiouga Benga 2013, pp. 358, 362, writes that the “graffs seem . . . to pull the letter to its ultimate limits,” thereby “destabilizing so-called classical culture, always centered around reading.”
- 66 Mode 2 2013, group interview, 15 April. Mode 2 did his interviews in English. They were not recorded by the author. The material is from the author’s notes taken during the interviews.
- 67 Mode 2 2013, personal interview, 18 April. Interview not recorded and material taken from author’s notes.
- 68 Veterans and historians of early graffiti in New York and Los Angeles point out that those pioneer artists faced a deprivation of material resources. “But as in many creative traditions, the paucity of user-friendly materials and adversity of the entire endeavor give rise to exceptional results” (Grody 2006, p. 47). Yet Andrew Paul recounts that “in London, it became a product of the predominantly White, Middle Class suburban youth” (2013, loc. 4).
- 69 Atlanta and Alexander 1988, pp. 157-58; MacDonald 2001, pp. 82, 185; Walde 2011, p. 7.
- 70 Walde 2011.
- 71 Fall (Mad Zoo), personal interview, 2013. 24 April.
- 72 Walde 2011, pp. 20 and 48.
- 73 Ngom (Docta) 2013, personal interview, 24 April.
- 74 On the relation between writing as sign and writing as trace, see Derrida 1978, pp. 11,199.
- 75 Mode 2 2013; Pabon 2006.
- 76 Fall (Mad Zoo) 2013, personal interview, 16 September.
- 77 Fall (Mad Zoo), personal interview, 2013. 24 April.

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- Drame, Djibril. 2013. "Beau Graff, Artiste Graffeur : "Qu'ils sachent que cet art est urbain et que si c'est l'argent qui te pousse à y entrer, il vaut mieux aller faire autre chose.'" *Peuplesénégalais.net*. 11 June. <http://peuplesenegalais.net/index.php/sante/item/1163-beau-graff-artiste-graffeur-qu%E2%80%99ils-sachent-que-cet-art-est-urbain-et-que-si-c%E2%80%99est-l%E2%80%99argent-qui-te-pousse-%C3%A0-y-entrer->
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### **Interviews:**

Interviews were conducted in French, by the author, in Dakar, Senegal. All transcripts are in the author's possession.

Diallo, Atibou, 2013. 17 April; 25 April.

Diba, Mame Mor (Deep), 2012. 26 June.

Diop, Omar (Grafixx), 2013. 25 April; 29 April.

Fall, SerigneMoumar (Mad Zoo), 2013. 24 April, 16 September.

Kane, Moussa (Mbautta), 2013. 2 May.

Mode 2, 2013. 15 April; 18 April.

Ngom, Amadou Lamine (Docta), 2012; 29 June.

Ngom, Amadou Lamine (Docta), 2013. 24 April.

Sane, Thierno Moussa (Big Key), 2012. 22 June. 2013, 16 September.

Sidibe, Dieynaba (Zeinixx), 2013. 29 April.

Souare, MouhamedMoustafa (Mow 504), 2013. 27 April.

Traoré, Maguette (Diablos), 2012. 24 June. 2013, 15 September.