WE HAVE A MESSAGE
SUÑU BAT

Printed Textiles as Communication Channel

Design Workshops with Girls and Young Women in Cooperation with AMWCY and Enda Tiers Monde in Dakar, Senegal

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Abstract
In my thesis I study possibilities to use printed textiles in communication. I am interested in the relation between prints and their context of use. I want to point out the power of local community in design process and study how messages are created in a grass-root level inside a local community. How can printed textiles serve the needs of these local communities and how socio-culturally important issues could be transformed into visual messages on textiles inspires me.

My thesis project was put in practice in Senegal, in Dakar. Senegal and senegalese culture has become familiar to me thorough family and dance studies. Because I was familiar with Senegal, I had a realistic view about my possibilities to carry out a project there and was able to evaluate the challenges I might face there beforehand. This was undoubtedly an advantage for me. I found collaboration partners, Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) Enda Tiers Monde and African Movement of Working Children and Youth AMWCY thorough organization Save the Children Finland. I planned and carried out two design workshops with two groups of girls and young women. Participants were mainly child workers, household servants who had not gone to schools. The aim was to inspire them to create prints for textiles about important things in their lives and issues they were willing to improve.

In West Africa printed textiles have visible role in streets which gives them interesting possibility to deliver messages within the local community. Also in Senegal textiles are used actively, i.e. for traditional clothing. These colorful industrially printed cotton textiles include often familiar motifs from every-day-life and have also been used in political and religious campaigns. They are nowadays incontrovertibly part of African identity, in spite that they were first imported to the Continent by European businessmen in the late 19th century and the technique is based on an Indonesian wax batik tradition.

In this thesis I describe workshops’ happenings and analyze the background of the participants. This is essential when reflecting the role of visual art and culture of visual expression in Senegal. Culture related differences in visual expression appear in the drawings made in workshops. Girls were drawing about children’s rights. To express their thoughts visually turned out to be surprisingly challenging for them. Another assignment was to design decorative prints and to make repeating pattern designs. We discussed about printed textiles, the production process of industrial printed textiles and their visual style. What surprised me, was that the girls had so little drawing skills in general. Pen was a totally new tool for many of those girls. I noticed they had not been drawing almost at all. How much or little we draw as children depends on our cultural setting. Visual expression and definition of art are culture related things. It would be hard to compare work of art made by people from different cultural backgrounds, because the way their art is done and understood in each cultural context is different and can not be judged or analyzed from same angle. These observations made me to think what are the local medias and how to benefit from them when dealing with locally important messages.

Out of the workshops’ drawings two pattern designs were brought to completion. All the visual material in these designs are made by the girls. My role was to do the final pattern repeat and layout. Also colors in both patterns are chosen by the groups. The original idea was to take these prints to production to a local producer in Senegal. Unfortunately it never became possible due to miserable situation of local textile industry today. Sample prints were printed in Finland and handed over to NGOs together with the visual material that girls had done. At least as important result as the textiles, was the experience these girls got.

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GUEDIAWAYE
Source: Google Maps 2013

DAKAR
Source: Google Maps 2013
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 From Superficial Surfaces to a Deeper Purpose

Textiles are essential. They keep us warm. What comes to prints in textiles, their main purpose is probably to be beautiful. What else than beauty can be communicated with pattern design?

As a designer, surface design felt sometimes too superficial. I needed to have more depth in my work than just harmonic patterns or functional forms. I searched for some deeper purpose of the visual messages in textiles. Printed textiles are all around us, in our clothes, homes and surroundings. Their different motifs and colours mix with each other, creating colourful jungle of different stories and messages. I knew a place, where textiles in general have a very visible role in people’s lives. This place had become familiar to me via family connections, travelling, dance studies and through friends. The place is Senegal.

_Dakar October 2012;
I am heading to a dance rehearsal. Sitting inside an old Citroën on a crowded market street of Dakar I see a vast spectrum of printed textiles. A lady dressed up in a tailored women’s dress of latest style is carrying a child in her back. Tightening the colourful woven textile that holds her baby up she walks towards the fish sellers. In the printed pattern of her dress images of chicken form a geometrical ornament on top of a multi coloured background. Chicken is one of the ever-popular motifs in printed cottons available in West-African markets. Chicken are expensive. Pattern with chicken depicts wealth. A few meters away in front of a corner shop, real chicken are waiting to be sold. A man wearing a colourful shirt with a pattern of the face of Virgin Mary repeated over and over again buys one chicken and hurries away towards the traffic. Cars are honking and crowds of people are pushing all directions. A ticket boy calls people to get on a colourfully painted “car rapide” heading to Guediawaye. A group of older ladies hasten towards the vehicle gathering up their gowns, “grand boubous” to get on faster. In their batik dyed gowns one can see all the colours of the rainbow blending into each other. Colours, motifs, smells, noises and voices, people and prints mix with each other. This is a place where textiles talk and stand out._

A fascinating thing with textiles is that messages in them can be read by everyone regardless age, gender, social status or level of education. Textiles can spread information and tell stories. Textile materials alone can carry certain messages. Expensive and top quality materials that carry high status speak of the wearer’s wealth. Textiles are close to people because we wear them every day. Because textiles have a visible role within society, they can easily be used as a channel of visual communication. An image tells often more than thousand words and therefore gives a textile print an interesting opportunity to deliver messages. Using locally familiar medium (textiles) helps when communicating locally important subjects.
This is how I became motivated to explore the power of textile design as a channel of communication in a grass root level in Senegal. I wanted to explore how socio-culturally important issues could be transformed into visual messages on textiles. Giving people an opportunity to speak thorough textiles would have an impact in two ways in the community. First of all, it would engage people in the community to be creative and to visualise their ideas thorough discussions’ which might lead to something valuable, strengthening people’s feeling of being able to make an impact. Secondly, it would open up a new way to see how textiles can be used locally, which may lead to new business models and ideas for the local textile industry. Getting local organizations, associations, schools or private individuals to order custom made prints would create new markets as well. New markets would be more than welcome because the local textile industry is constantly battling with Asian importers and regulations of the global textile markets.

The purpose of this document is to describe the project I planned and executed together with two Non Governmental Organizations; Enda Tiers Monde and African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) in Dakar, Senegal. I conducted small workshops in drawing and print design for two groups of girls and young women, who then produced visual material for the use of their organizations. Out of their designs two pattern designs were brought to completion. In the future, when printed on cotton, these textiles can be used in local campaigns and events. All the final visual material accomplished by the girls, patterns and images, were handed over to Enda to be used, for example in publications.

The original idea developed in this process. Things I had taken for granted turned out to be different, and some things I had not imagined to happen, did. This created a great journey through Senegalese culture, with an opportunity to learn about the people I worked with, about their everyday life, living circumstances, possibilities and challenges they face. I also learned a great deal about the role of the visual arts, designs and designers in the urban Senegalese community and made me to think about my role as a designer, a foreigner and as a foreign designer in Senegal.
1.2 Senegal : “Am Fulla ak Faida”

Senegal is located on the coast of West Africa, sharing borders with Mauritania in the North, Mali in the East and Guinea Bissau in the South. Inside its borders, on the Atlantic Coast, is the republic of The Gambia. People in Senegal and The Gambia share the same ethnic and cultural history and are linked to each other by the culture and religion in many ways. Organized local kingdoms have ruled in the area of Senegal and the Gambia since 8th century. Islam arrived with Arab traders in 11th century and became more popular among people by 16th century. Local kingdoms began to lose their power against European invaders after 15th century, while Europeans started slave trading in the area. After slave trade was stopped in 19th century French slowly started to expand onto Senegal’s mainland.

Colonial time begins after 1850s. During colonization the French ruled Senegal while the English occupied The Gambia. Influences of these two European cultures are still significant in each country, blended with local traditions and islam.

Senegal became independent in 1960. The Capital city, Dakar, is located on a peninsula reaching out to the Atlantic Ocean. There is an estimated population of 2.5 million living in the Dakar metropolitan area. Senegal’s entire population is nearly 13 million. Wolof people are the largest ethnical group (43.3%). Other large ethnical groups are Pulaar (23.8%), Serer (14.7%), Jola (3.7%) and Mandinka (3%) (CIA the World Fact Book, 2012). Wolof is the mother tongue of the Wolof people and it belongs to the Niger-Congo languages. In Senegal, Wolof has gained a strong role in the society, popular culture and the media. It is spoken and understood by the majority of the Senegalese throughout the nation. It unites people from different ethnical groups, functioning as the lingua franca on streets, markets, business, popular culture, radio and TV. Senegal’s official language is French, used in education and administration. People learn French at schools, but it does not have as strong role as the formal colonial languages French and English still have in some other African countries. Majority (94%) of population are muslims, following sufistic local movements. Islam and religion is strongly present in life rhythm and language, but blended strongly with local customs.

Senegal is considered as one of the success stories of West Africa, being the only country that has not had a coup d’etat after gaining its independence. It stays an example for other African countries, especially since the 2012 presidential elections, where the former prime minister, Macky Sall, won in relative peaceful and fair elections, leaving previous president Aboulaye Wade to admit his loss and step aside. Senegalese people have been able to develop and maintain a strong national identity and culture of their own, which might be the reason why the nation has survived with less conflicts and strides. Notwithstanding, Senegal has still many problems to solve.
The climate is dry and the region suffers from desertification. From the north, the Sahara pushes its limits further and further down, challenging fauna and flora to cope with the draught. Most of the trees are slowly growing, hard wood types. Therefore, the pace of cutting forests to firewood and building material is faster than the forests’ ability to sustain itself. Draught is constantly causing problems to many farmers and it destroys crops in vast areas. In Southern Senegal, Casamance, there are more wetlands and the climate allows farmers to cultivate rice, fruits and vegetables. Farmers are growing groundnuts, cotton and rice to export. Most of the crops cultivated in Senegal are exported. Because of this export and also because of the dry climate, Senegal is forced to import alimentary products. The paradox of exporting at low price and simultaneously buying expensive imported food renders management of everyday life difficult and sometimes impossible. Food prices have been constantly rising during the past few years, while the general economic climate shows no changes of improvement. The former president Abdoulaye Wade was criticized for policies that worsened the effects of the rising food prices. Families can barely afford buying their daily staple food products.

Fishing and groundnut cultivation form the majority of Senegal’s national export. All in all, agriculture and agriculture related work employs 77.5% of Senegal’s working population, whereas industry and service employ 22.5% (CIA the World Fact Book, 2012). However, these figures do not tell the absolute truth. The majority of the population is employed in the informal economy, i.e. they are self employed independent entrepreneurs and all-rounders, like sales men, workers of transport, household help etc. Money is scarce and the living costs especially in the Dakar area are rising all the time. In general, everything is available, but no one has the money to buy.

Local industry has ended up in a situation where it has to compete with the pressure from Asia. This is giving a hard time to companies as the production capacity is smaller than the competitors’ and the machinery old. This is forcing factories to close down in many industries. This seems absurd, because what countries like Senegal need, is more industry, more work, more local production to employ its workforce and simply more opportunities. Anyhow, the problems lie much deeper in the history of colonial structures than one can guess, and they are not easily solved because of their destructiveness and complexity. The new trend of Asian, especially Chinese, involvement in African countries seems to be heading to a direction that serves better the Chinese interests than those of Africa. Struggling industries and environmental uncertainties have increased the unemployment rate and more and more people seek new ways out from the hopeless situation. According to the World Fact Book statistics, the unemployment rate is as high as 48% (CIA, 2007). The consequences of unemployment falls heavily on women, who ultimately become responsible for both the household work and for sustaining their families.

Many people see that the way out of Senegal is the only way out of these difficulties. The urge to leave the country can be seen in the news and in the stories about drowned people and unsuccessful attempts to flee to Europe in overcrowded fishing boats. To get to Europe and help one’s family has become a dream for many young people. Those who, for one reason or another, have ended up living abroad actually form the largest existing monetary aid to their home country by sending money to their families. For some families
it is only this money they survive on when work is not available and living costs have risen.

“Am fulla ak faida”, Have self respect and personality, is a commonly used phrase that characterizes well the spirit of the nation. The Senegalese have a strong national identity and they believe that their strength lies in their believing in themselves, their nation and its future.
To be able to help their parents and their family is one of the main wishes young people in Senegal want to fulfill. To gain this goal they need more opportunities today and tomorrow. In Senegal – not outside.
2. TEXTILES ARE TELLING STORIES

In the center of my project idea are the so called “African prints”, printed cotton textiles, commonly called “Wax prints”. Wax print has become more or less a defining metaphor for African design. These textiles are common in many African countries, and include often unconventional motifs. I knew that these “African” printed textiles had actually an European origin, but were also nowadays manufactured on the African continent. They are very popular also in Senegal. It turned out that it was very hard to get information about the origins of these prints, or who were their designers, or where they were produced. I had seen examples of prints that had locally related patterns, like politicians’ faces or religious patterns. This inspired me to explore the possibilities of using printed textiles as a communication channel in the local community, challenging its members to express themselves thorough textile design. It felt fascinating to think what if the designs could be created on the grass-roots level. What would the outcome be and how could it serve the needs of the local community?

2.1 Short History of textiles in West Africa

Before I could understand the possibilities of textiles and their role in local communities in Senegal today, I needed to understand the meaning of textiles in the history of West African society. In the West Africa, textiles have always been important status symbols. Cotton has been valuable and was worn by chiefs and other members of elite while commoners were wearing goatskins.

Before cotton and the arrival of the spinning and weaving techniques that were to become the backbone of the traditional techniques in West Africa, there were other local materials used for clothing. The earliest textiles used by people in West Africa have probably been made of bark from different trees. The bark of trees was gathered in the forest and processed in different ways to produce cordage or fiber. It was then either pounded or plaited by hand into fabric or woven on a loom. According to archeological findings,
other natural fibers were used as well, like raphia and some linen like plants. Raphia, like many other natural fibers, was used for weaving traditionally without spinning. Anyhow, different spinning hurdles have been found in Senegal area giving us evidence that spinning and weaving were familiar techniques among West African people already before connections with outside cultures. There is evidences that in Egypt, Nubia people were weaving linen and some cotton already in the second century BCE. How fast the technique spread, and when the people in West Africa were introduced to this weaving technique, remains unknown. (Kriger 2005)

There is nothing definite heard recorded about the history of West African ancient kingdoms before the eight century. Written history starts with the Arab traders. The earliest writings and observations are from 734 A.D. by an Arab writer El Fazari. That time West African region was ruled by the kingdom of Ghana, located in the lands that today are part of Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and Guinea (Shinnie, 1965). Respected due to their gold, medieval West African kingdoms were rich and important partners to traders from the North. Africans traded gold for imported textiles, salt, iron tools and other goods from the North. Arabs had a functioning trading network all the way from Asia to Sub Saharan Africa. Trading gave people of this region access to many new tools and techniques. Presumably, the world’s oldest known pair of scissors has been found in the ancient ruins of Kumbi Saleh, merchant and religious center of Kingdom of Ghana. (Shinnie, 1965)

According to the present perception, it was the Arabs that presumably introduced Indian weaving technique and spinning of thread to West Africans. Probably, they introduced the use of cotton as a fiber as well. Although some old cotton species have existed in the region before the Arabs, studies show that cotton was used for feeding animals, not for textiles. Old semi-domesticated cotton vanished totally after the Europeans took the control of cultivation and imported the new species to the area (Kriger, 2005). West African cotton and narrow woven textiles called guinean cloth became an important trading currency between the West Africans and the Arabs and later Europeans during the Atlantic trade. Thanks to trading, West Africans had access to different new dying colors and techniques which developed the textile tradition in the region. The narrow woven textiles represent typical traditional Senegalese cloth and the narrow type of loom is still used in Senegal today. Plain textiles were dyed afterwards or woven with ready dyed threads. Simple woven textiles were usually dyed with natural earth dyes or blue indigo dye. Indigo comes from a plant called Indigofera tinctoria and its leaves give a deep blue color, called indigo blue. Indigo is still used today in West Africa, and the genuine indigo dyed textiles are both valuable and appreciated.

During the course of time, the textile tradition has evolved and taken influences from different cultures. However, the ancient materials can still be found in modern textiles. Natural dyes and some natural fibers are still part of the traditional and local textile culture. Patterns and symbols are traditionally created by weaving or resist dyeing. Woven patterns were geometrical. Resist dyed textiles were either decorated with tying or sewing. Decorations created by sewing resist are carefully detailed and also follow geometrical design. Woven narrow pieces were sewn together and used both in women’s and men’s dresses. Weavers have traditionally been men, and dyers of threads and ready
fabric have been women. This work order applies still today. Some later arrived techniques like printing and painting were introduced thorough trading connections. Imported printed textiles became first familiar to people by Arabs bringing printed cotton and silk originating from India. The local traditions evolved under the influence of travelers, traders and conquerors, but according to merchant’s observation during European trade in the Atlantic, West African people were very attached to certain styles and rather wanted to stick to tradition than seek new trends. They liked imported things that were similar to their traditional styles, but were not so open to imported novelties (Kriger, 2005). Techniques varied between different regions, and passed from one generation to another, changing during the times depending on the materials available and the influences from outside affecting the people and their communities. What is good to keep in mind, is that the ancient Kingdoms were wealthy and possessed valuable culture of textiles and jewelry well before the Europeans discovered Africa in 15th century. Trade connections with Arabs brought many new textile techniques and materials into West Africa, well before they even reached Europe. Later contacts with European culture have also shaped regions traditions and what is today considered as tradition is a result of a mixture of long periods of time under different influences.

Map: Ancient trading routes in West Africa

Source: Shinnie : Ancient African Kingdoms, 1965
2.2 “African Prints” - History of industrial Wax Print textiles

Wax Print Fabric is considered as a defining metaphor of African Design, fashion and expression. However, its origin was everything but African. Whereas it today stands as a symbol of African culture, “roots” and heritage, it was originally actually just a maneuver of businessmen to control the textile markets during colonial times.

Already in 17th Century, the Dutch had started to import colorful wax resist prints from their Dutch East Indies colonies. Although at first the prints were little too exotic for Europeans, they were appreciated and admired. By the 19th century Europe had reached out to many corners of the world. France had colonies in West Africa, England had East Africa and some Southern parts of Africa, India and Australia and the Dutch had Dutch East Indies. Europeans had conquered vast areas, forcing nations not only under their political power but also under predominant commercial control.

In Europe, the industrialization had created new ways to produce new products, more, faster and cheaper. Growing production needed raw materials. Raw materials were obtained from the colonies and transported to Europe where they were further processed to different products. Ready products were often exported and sold back to the colonies. During this time, Senegal, for example, produced peanuts and cotton for export. Local production in the colonies was banned by the Europeans to protect their own trade and their monopoly. Colonies in West Africa were forced to provide cheap raw materials and later forced to purchase expensive ready products. For long time there were no production units allowed in the colonies and the markets were strictly controlled by price and tax regulations for Europe’s benefit.

Similarly, Indonesian colorful textiles inspired Dutch textile businessmen to develop an industrial way to mass-produce wax printed textiles for their Dutch East Indies’ market. Their idea was to copy the looks of the traditional Indonesian wax batik, produce them cheaply in Europe and re-sell them to Indonesians. Indonesians, however, were very proud and picky when it came to the quality of their batiks and the cheap copies. Industrially printed textiles did not appeal to their taste and requirements and the Dutch sellers were left with their unsold stocks. The reason to unwanted results with quality was in the industrialized wax printing technique. In resist printing, motifs in textiles are created by protecting certain areas of fabric with a resist substance, in this case wax, letting colors react with fabric only in unprotected areas. However, the wax resist was cracking inside the industrial printing process, letting colors thorough. As the result of cracking there was a distinct crackle effect in the fabrics, which was not welcomed by Indonesians. Especially those cracks and “mistakes” are the feature that later made the essential trademark of the African “wax print” textiles.

The Dutch did not succeed in East Indies, but they had a plan B. Having already tight trading connections to West Africa, they looked now in that direction with their unsold textiles. The Indonesian batiks were already highly appreciated in the Gold Coast (Ghana)
and surrounding areas. The Dutch had recruited African men for their Dutch East Indies Army and these soldiers often brought home souvenirs like high class batiks to their wives and families. Batiks were considered stylish and had a high status. When the Dutch introduced the “copy” of Indonesian wax in West Africa, it rapidly became the most widely used textile among women in West, Central and East Africa. Markets opened for Dutch producers. Popular and wanted, Wax printed textiles are still today worn every day either as tailored dresses or as simple wrap-around skirts.

The original factories and the production were located in Europe; in Holland, England and France. Later, hand in hand with the liberation of Africa’s local production and industrialization, production units and new companies started functioning also around the continent. Some important producers were and still are located in Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Democratic Republic of Congo. Many of the factories were still owned by Europeans. In the beginning of the 1950’s, the local textile industry started to function also in Senegal. With the development of industrial printing methods the factories did not necessarily go on printing with the wax printing technique. There were cheaper ways to get the wanted look, but the typical visual style of wax prints with multi layered colorful motifs and wax cracks remained as a standard in prints all over the African continent. When the textile industry developed new printing techniques, also the original industrial wax prints became targets of imitation. Imitations that entered the markets were often printed with reactive colors, by rotation or screen printing. These rotation printed imitations of Wax prints are in Senegal called “Lagos”. The majority of the prints on sale today are imitations and it can be difficult to distinguish the difference between wax print and rotation print. Number of companies producing prints with the wax print method have decreased. In Europe at least the Dutch Vlisco (1) and Julius Holland (2) still produce with wax printing method. Also Ivorian Uniwax (3) is one of African companies still producing the wax prints by the original wax technique. These real wax printed cottons are still highly appreciated and much more expensive than their copies. But the copies and the real wax prints all aspire same cracking and overlapping nature of motifs which remains the visual style defining these prints.

2.3 Printed textiles as messengers

Despite their origin and history, wax-prints became a strong symbol of Africa. These textiles took their place in the local communities and served their purposes. Peoples’ needs shaped the textiles as well, and because of this it can be claimed that nowadays African wax prints can be seen as an African phenomenon, and as a part of African history. During late 20th century the textiles took an important role, functioning as a media of communication both in local politics and in All-African issues.

After their invasion of the continent, Wax Prints gained a stable role in African everyday life. Ways to use textiles varied among the continents diverse nations and people. In the West the cotton fabrics have traditionally been tailored to dresses. Traditional dresses had significant influence from 19th century’s European fashion. Common for West African models is that the same textile is used in a whole ensemble. A dress is usually built of 3 pieces; top or tunic, skirt or wrap around and a scarf. Also dress designs that are made

1) www.vlisco.com 2) www.waxprint.nl 3) www.uni wax.com
of one piece exist, but the basic evergreen solutions are the ones with 3 different pieces. Even if the models change, the textiles are always sold in 6 - yards (1 yard = 0.914 meters) pack where 2 yard is used for top, 2 yards for skirt and 2 for scarf and decorations. In Senegal dress models change continuously. Also Arab fashion has influenced to fashion and recently popular Indian Bollywood series brought an indian touch to local fashion when Indian styled trousers with tunic became popular among women in Dakar.

The printed textiles and wax prints in general have depicted valuable motifs or things that have been seen as status lifters. Mobile phones or computers are symbols of modern technology and chicken or jewelry depict wealthy. There is a range of traditional symbols as well as natural motifs used in prints. Textiles have also been used for political purposes and to spread different kinds of propaganda. Despite the fact that the wax prints carry the burden of colonial history, they have been in a significant role in representing the liberation of African people and strengthening their identity.

In the fall of the colonial era, countries of Africa gained their independence one by one. These times were simultaneously full of hope and optimism and also politically shaky and hectic. Complex relations between nations and the colonial governments, foreign businessmen and local people caused uprisings in many countries. The textile companies saw the opportunity of using textiles to reflect the state of people’s minds and they started producing textiles with prints that spoke the language of the prevailing political spirit. Italian author Felice Bellotti wrote a travelogue in 1950s titled “The Fabulous Congo” in which he explains the role of textiles that shaped as well as reflected DR Congo’s history. He describes printing house Vlisco’s print from 1940 called “6 bougies”, “six spark plugs” that became very popular in the time it was introduced. The story behind the pattern goes deep to the relations between rich expat mine owners and Congolese mine workers. Workers had been forced to work with the symbolic gesture of being given a red blanket. Accepting a blanket was considered as equivalent of signing a working contract by the Belgian government. Workers were paid very little while working under conditions that were risking their health. The rich expats enjoyed the money, and were hated among the workers. When wealthy mine owners first imported to the country six cylinder cars, using them to show off, people started to call these cars for “6 bougies”. Soon everything fancy was called to “6 bougies” and a Congolese expression was born: “six bougies” became a premium standard of excellence and wealth. Men who knew how to give a complement to a woman about her beauty, would call her with this name. Textile company Vlisco was quick to pick up this expression and turn it into a pattern. The pattern had six spark lights forming a round shape. In the colors the red was present referring to the red blankets which must have given it an even deeper meaning in the local level.

Wax prints have been also used in art due to their complex meaning in the history of African continent and its people. Yinka Shonibare, an artist of Nigerian origin, has used wax prints in his installations. In his work the printed textiles symbolize the power relations, colonial structures and questions of identity. Patterns and motifs in the wax prints are often linked to the messages of his art. Wax prints talk, and have a long history together with people in many African countries, Senegal among them. Based on that, the
printed fabrics create an ideal forum to communicate about important things in the society and to create a feeling of unity, raise awareness and strengthen the self esteem with links to the regional important issues or educational subjects. Textiles work as a media that is readable to everyone, regardless of age, gender, social status or level of education.

Yinka Shonibare
“How to blow up two heads at once” 2006
Photo: Karoliina Halsti-Ndiaye
2011

Print for political campaign
Photo Karoliina Halsti-Ndiaye2012

6 Bougies design
1940 by Vlisco
Source: Vlisco Book 2012
2.4 Senegal’s textile industry

When I travelled to Dakar in December 2010, with the purpose to find local textile and printing companies, I had no idea what I was going to face. It turned out that there was hardly any textile printing left in the country. The once so lively printing industry had vanished. No one knew whether there were some companies left, or how to get in touch with them. During my time in Dakar I started to get information about places and people who might know about existing textile companies, but there was not enough time to really find out if there were printing companies still functioning in the country. In my project I had planned to work with NGOs and local people, letting people create their own textile pattern that would later on be printed in the country using local printing factory. In this way, my project would support the textile industry proposing them new business models with smaller customer groups, like NGOs, on more individually adjusted basis. I saw this as one way to cope with the pressure from Asia and foreign markets. But I was late. Critically little bit too late. Most of the companies had already closed down.

History of Senegal’s textile industry

During the colonization all local production was banned for a long time and possibilities to open any industrial production in Senegal opened first after World War II due to the European economic crisis. During the days of the establishment of the Senegalese textile industry the state banned the less expensive textile products from local markets. This was when Senegal still was a French colony and its industry was run by French or foreign businesses. It was a common convention that local market was strictly regulated by French. The law was simple: to buy and export Senegalese products cheap, regulate import to benefit the French and sell imported goods with expensive price.
French textile company ETS Schaeffer had begun exporting printed cottons, “imprimés” to the French West Africa (AOF) in 1930s. Filling large contract orders for the trading houses that dominated the AOF textile market this company produced most of the French printed textiles sold in French West Africa by the 1950s. The idea was simple, like with groundnuts; buy the raw material cheap in Senegal, export to France and import readymade products to colony. However, after the World War II, the European markets had suffered from changes and economical unsuitability. ETS. Schaeffer suffered among others and its long-term security seemed lost. After trying to move the production to Morocco without success, ETS Schaeffer decided to create a factory in Dakar, and Industrie Cotonnière Africane (ICOTAF) was founded in 1949.

The company began operations in 1952 with 220 African workers and 18 French managers. The firm was not interested in cutting its own export markets in France, and continued to manufacture in France the printed textiles sold to Africa. New Dakar production unit produced carefully chosen articles and concentrated on heavyweight cottons called drills, becoming an exclusive supplier of the largest AOF consumer of this fabric, the colonial administration.

After ICOTAF, a number of other companies were established, producing a variety of staple cotton textile goods in Dakar. One of the firms created in early 1950’s was the Société de Teinture et Blanchissement Africaine (SOTIBA), that rose from humble beginnings to become Senegal’s most powerful textile manufacturer after independence. Sotiba was founded by two Moroccan textile distributor MM.Mekouar and Tazi. For Senegalese companies the major problem had turned out to be the surprisingly high production costs in Dakar, and therefore the liberation of the markets in 1953-4 for foreign importers gave them hard times. This hurt all the staple textile producers, except Sotiba. Sotiba was a finishing operator, not a spinning and weaving plant. It benefited from the lower-cost supplies of unfinished cotton cloth for dyeing. Even though the production in Dakar was costly, Sotiba managed to struggle through the difficulties by renewing its dyeing and bleaching equipments and recruiting some dyeing specialists from abroad. This improved Sotiba’s products. After 1956, the trading houses decided just to control rather than destroy the local textile industry, and started actively to promote the industrial development in the AOF. (Boone, 1992)

In 1958 Sotiba expanded to printing with its affiliate Société d’Impression d’Afrique (Simpafric). The printed cottons, imprimés, were highly protected from foreign competition. Sotiba Simpafric was able to create a position that took it on the top of Senegalese businesses by 1980’s. It dominated also Gambian markets and was a leading producer of wax prints and imi-wax (imitation of wax) in whole West African region during 1980’s. In 90’s it made a decision to expand towards USA. American customers ordered designs sold in U.S.A to African Americans. This expanding was to cause extra burden on the economical stability of the company which had remained good thorough protective contracts in West African markets. When protection was lost due to new global market regulations, the situation became too difficult even for Sotiba Simpafric. Asians took over the markets. Sotiba’s fabrics, that were the imitations of traditional patterns, became targets of imitation themselves. Cheap copies were suddenly produced in India and China. It was too much for the company and the once mighty Sotiba Simpafric drifted into difficulties. (Boone, 1992)
Senegal’s textile industry today
Today most of those local textile factories have closed down, despite existing demand of workplaces to ease the growing unemployment. Senegal would need investments in local production, but what happens is just the opposite. The difficult situation has its origin in the problematic history of colonial commerce that first limited and later protected unsustainably the local producers. With the production capacity and price, companies have not been able to challenge the foreign competitors on the local markets.

Today most of the printed textiles are imported from Asia, particularly China and a minority from other African countries. Ivorian textile company Uniwax is printing in Ivory Coast, and has grown its popularity in Senegalese markets in past years. Another popular textile brand, Hitarget claims its designs as being done in Ghana while printing is done in China according to sources in internet. I find out that trying to find information about companies is very difficult. What comes to Senegalese textiles, all the big production units in Dakar have closed down.

The big textile companies that were visible landmarks of Pikine and Bel Air area in Dakar’s industrial district, are now replaced by factories of plastic products and cosmetics. Driving along the old Rue de Pikine, you pass by the gigantic buildings of Sotiba, standing empty, behind the closed rusty fence. What once was a pride of Senegal’s economy has now withered away. Sotiba Simpafric made bankruptcy after several difficulties with production costs, electricity suppliers and power cuts. Its sister corporation is said to be still in function in city of Kaolack, 200 km from Dakar to South East, but I never got to visit Kaolack to verify this.

While I lived in Dakar I heard rumors of rich people sponsoring Sotiba Simpafric to rise back again. I heard rumors of Youssou N’dour, internationally recognized musician and later the Minister of Culture and Tourism, talking about buying the remains of Sotiba Simpafric and making it functioning again. But despite that, the building is still standing empty and the iron gates closed.
Difficulties broach all the members within the textile industry. It has been a struggle for life and death to many Senegalese companies in this business, and many of them have lost the battle.

I met textile entrepreneur Aïssa Dione, Founder and owner of Aissa Dione Tissues (ADT) weaving mill. ADT has production units in Rufisque (30km outside Dakar) and in Dakar. Her company has been in business for 20 years and has 80 employees at the moment. The company produces both hand-woven and mechanically woven textiles, mainly in cotton.

- She describes the situation as difficult, almost hopeless. She complains about difficulties finding raw materials after the local production of cotton thread disappeared. Industry of raw material processing has vanished totally. Without spinning industry, the cotton, even home grown, have to be sent abroad for spinning. It will make the use of Senegalese or nearby grown cotton more difficult and more expensive, even impossible. This means that local raw material producers have to export and local industry has to import. Tax regulations often favor the foreigner part on the global raw material markets which also affects both the production and the industry. But even if the government could help local parties from growers to final producers in terms of tax arrangements, the benefits won’t be obtainable if the production chain is broken. Investments are heavily required in local production and factories.

Despite the difficulties Dione has still hopes for the future. She believes that the political changes would lead to better situation for local entrepreneurs and local industry. She is positive, but realistic at the same time, admitting that surviving is not going to be easy. The government should get involved heavily to ensure the future of local textile industry.

When big companies are struggling, the small scale business has developed a way to benefit from it. Along new printing techniques, like digital printing, it has become easier to establish smaller printing workshops. There are many small companies printing T-shirts with pictures of local celebrities, politicians, religious leaders or sports idols. These companies do screen printing and digital picture transfers. The quality of prints and T-shirts varies considerably, but it seems that the nature of these shirts is more like
advertising, aimed at campaigning and not meant to last long. T-shirts with political, religious or community-related prints are very popular. T-shirts were strongly present in the 2012 presidential elections campaigns. If before there were printed by-the-yard cottons of politicians, in 2012 you would mostly see T-shirts. T-shirts are today’s hit products, used constantly to advertise products and to show opinions of the wearer. They are popular among men and wearable by women as well. As a sales article, they are easy, cheap and fast to produce. There is no need to order huge quantities; it is possible to produce also smaller shipments. This means the risks in the business stay lower and the capital needed to start business is more feasible. But once again, the blank T-shirts need to be imported as long as there is no local spinning industry nor production of jersey or other cotton base materials.

Anyhow, T-shirts cannot fulfill the demand of fashion garments and fabrics, even if they bear locally attractive symbols and topics. Handmade or hand dyed textiles are popular and many people are working as tailors, dyers, weavers and decorators. This local small production and craftsmanship is giving a livelihood to much wider range of people than the industry when it comes to textiles. People like local things. When the local industry is not providing locally recognizable products, the small entreprenuers can meet this demand. Even if imported new imitations of traditional prints and textiles are cheap, they are missing the communication at the social and cultural level. Locals adjust fast to the society’s atmosphere which benefit them against big Chinese textile producers.

2.5 Textiles and clothing in Senegal: Tradition v/s Global influences

People in Senegal know how to look good. Senegalese fashion is a generally recognized attribute within West Africa. Senegalese love to dress up. Men and women both consider it important to pay attention to their style and clothes. Clothes show status and people invest large sums in clothes and accessories. Invest in themselves.

To me it seemed first weird how people are willing to spend so much in clothes in relation to their salary, for example. Realizing how important status symbols and appearance are for people to maintain their status in the society, one can somehow understand the phenomenon. Clothes are something personal. Something that defines who you are to the others. Maybe in the society where home is not a private place, but a base for a large extended family the focus of attention is rather directed to the personal appearance, accessories and clothes. Neat and proper appearance is also about respect. It is about giving a good impression and fostering good reputation of the whole family.

It is good to remember, that in the past people in Senegal area had a lot of gold. It was exchanged equally with salt during the Arab trade and it was part of the dress code in certain levels of society. Women carried all their wealth and valuables along, wearing them, which was the safest way to keep valuables safe. On the other hand, wearing them communicated others the wealth of the wearer, which affected positively to their status in the society. It is quite a contrast to the Finnish culture where I come from, and where it is considered inappropriate to show off. Here people have been used to the glow of gold. People are used to show off and clothing is one way to do it. A rule that nothing is
too much when it comes to glitter and glow in Senegalese dresses seem to apply. When I attend a party in Dakar, no matter whether it is a wedding or a birthday party, I am stunned by women and their dresses. Hardly anywhere have I seen such a level of preparation, make up and a variety different styles. The Independence Day ball in the residence of the President of the Republic in Finland remains far behind in comparison, I have to admit. Today people show status by choosing expensive materials for their clothes or wearing expensive looking accessories, jewelry, watches and mobile phones that are generally recognized as status symbols. I was surprised to see that so many of my friends in Dakar had expensive touch screen mobiles, iPhones, Nokias and Samsungs. They were barely finding regular income to pay the rent of their shared rooms at the same time.

No wonder that in printed textiles as well the most popular motifs are ones that designate high status. Latest novelties since couple of years back have been wax prints with golden print on top. These golden patterns have been very popular among women.

People are well aware of different materials and qualities. There are several different qualities of different cottons in market, each having their purpose. The most expensive hand dyed cottons can cost nearly 25€ per meter and are strong status symbols. Best type of hand dyed and jacquard woven fine cotton is called Ganyla. There are several categories of Ganyla, the first being most expensive. Prices vary between 10-25€ per meter. Wax prints are cheaper, but have also several price categories, according to their quality and colors. Wax is sold per yard (0,914m), in either 6 yards or 12 yard packs. Original genuine wax can cost between 6€ - 25€ per 6 yards. Lagos, the imitation of wax, costs usually 5-8 € per 6 yards. Chinese imitations are the cheapest.

Cottons are often stiffed with starch, which gives them a shiny appearance. This stiffness, unpleasant to wear in my opinion, is an important and wanted feature. Original starch looses its stiffness if washed, and these garments are specially washed and handled with starch to keep the desired glow and stiffness.

Even if the Western fashion has become part of modern Senegalese life, it still seems to be less important and dominant compared to many other African countries. The Senegalese have maintained their own dressing culture strong, which creates an interesting mixture of two fashion systems that function and develop side by side.

These two fashion systems can be roughly divided to so called “Traditional” and “European” styles. Here the meaning of traditional is defined as follows when it comes to clothing; In the common language the term “Traditional dress” is a synonym for “African dress” and “Wolof dress” (yere olof in wolof) and is a name for garments made by tailors. Under the term “Wolof dress” there are several different sub categories, depending on used material, model, decoration method and wearing purpose (interviews and notes from Dakar, 2012).

Arab fashion, as well as the 19th century’s European fashion, have had a strong impact on the development of this traditional fashion system which is bound to social as well as religious events. When people celebrate weddings, name giving, or gather for funerals they wear almost inevitably traditional dresses. On religious holidays dress is traditional. Traditional dresses might have religious links, but the dress has become more of a phenomenon of its own. For example on Muslim day of assembly, Yawm al-Jum’a, every
Friday people dress on the “yere olof”. This “traditional” Friday dress has become a common custom regardless of religion. Also Christians dress up on Fridays. Among women it is also about honoring your husband and family by dressing beautifully, looking good among your people. Traditional, however, does not mean old fashioned. On the contrary, new styles and models pop up frequently.

What defines this fashion system is that it is based on local craftsmanship, tailors’ knowledge and artisan skills. Clothes and textiles are the major visual aesthetic practice and maybe the most important two-dimensional art form in the region. (Rabine 2002) In that way, it is bound to traditions and keeping this part of culture alive. It also supports local businesses and expresses local identity. Based on this definition the traditional fashion system means it is local and uniquely Senegalese and thereby part of local tradition.

In traditional dresses the different textile materials and decorations indicate status of the particular dress and its bearer. Cotton is the most used material. People value artisan textiles. Hand dyed and painted or printed cottons are admired and desired. But also new materials like chiffon and velour are also popular especially among younger women. Young women wear dresses that mix influences from other fashion systems, like European, Indian or Arabic models. Young men prefer to have their yere olof cut tight fitting and might mix a traditional shirt with jeans. While the most basic model for women is a three piece dress, with separate top, wrap-around skirt and a scarf, also trousers, tunics and long “princess” like dresses are common. Important element is material and color. It is important that different pieces belong together. Usually everything is made from same fabric, but if different fabrics are mixed, the color coordination is important. Older women wear almost constantly a model called “Grand Boubou”, wide kaftan like dresses with wrap-around skirt and a head scarf. Even if the majority of Senegalese are Muslims, women do not necessarily wear a head scarf. However, it is considered appropriate for older or married women and is also a status symbol on its own.

Western style fashion follows global trends, but it is also influenced significantly by local artists, singers and celebrities. A great deal of western fashion garments sold in Dakar is imported from China. Affordable and trendy, these garments fill weekly markets and are popular, but poor in quality. There are several boutiques selling western imported clothes with better quality but also for high prices.

Another phenomenon among distribution of European fashion system are the flee markets. These circulating huge markets sell secondhand clothes from mainly the USA, the U.K. and France. Prices are low, and clothes are variable in quality. In Senegal people in general dress correctly. What comes to European fashion, these clothes are called “yere toubab”. Toubab is a wolof word for Frenchmen or Europeans, white men. Expression “yere toubab” means simply European or white people’s clothes. Western fashion system is a threat to the local fashion system and if it becomes more popular, the work of tailors will decrease. As stated earlier, T-shirt prints have started to replace the function of printed textiles in political campaigns and in other communicative purposes. Local textile industry has had hard time. The reason behind this is mostly the Asian invasion of the African continent and the effects of the complex international commercial law as was pointed out in the previous chapters. (Rabine, 2002)
3. COMMUNICATION

3.1. Challenges in communication

Illiteracy

Adult literacy rate in Senegal is low. Illiteracy is more common among women than men. According to the UNESCO rapport (2012) of Senegal, among adults aged 15 and over, 62% of the men and 39% of the women are literate while statistics from the CIA claim these same rates to be 51% among men and only 29% among women. Despite the fact that attendance to primary education has raised, only half of the pupils will continue to the Secondary level. The reasons why children are not able to continue their education are often economical. Girls are more often taken away from the school bench than boys. Majority of people who have never enrolled to school are girls. Girls are seen more useful supporting their families by working at home or elsewhere. (UNESCO, 2012)

In the 21st century the gap between the educated middle-class and the underserved has grown. Inequality concerning illiteracy is pulling people and their lifestyles further apart from each other. Still, people with very different life styles live inside the same society. Recognizing the importance of local media genres and using them is one way to keep wider audience part of the modern society. Meeting the demands of a constantly changing society, simultaneously serving the literate academic class and the underserved illiterate groups, is a big challenge for the Senegalese media today. So many different ways of life within same community, each of them having their own needs and dreams. Reaching people in a way that gets their attention requires the knowledge of their cultural surroundings and living environment. Using media that is understandable and reachable by target audience helps to deliver the wanted message. At a very basic level it is to be remembered that illiterate audience will not be reached by written flyers or posters, neither are they benefiting from newspapers or books. Even clear simple slogans, ads and comics may not reach the wanted audience. This target group pays better attention to other channels and sources of information. There are several other ways to reach out to this target group. They are often active members in local community and consuming traditional medias. By recognizing the importance of these medias and the power of the local community, the ability to reach these target groups will be much better. (Ugboajah, 1985)

Localization v/s Globalization

The globalization of Western or American lifestyles has affected to the nature of media around the World. Also in Senegal Western archetypes are used in the media. For example in TV commercials, typifications borrowed abroad are common. Distant from the existing reality these commercials will remain distant to the majority of the audience. If commercials communicate Western family values and are located in very Western surroundings they loose their credibility in front of the consumers. In my perspective this
leads to situations where the certain audience is not reached, or they are reached with ambiguous messages. To reach the people it is necessary to talk the language they know. This means as well the spoken language as the language of visual symbols, language of traditional music and traditional customs.

Commercials communicate a message of “how things should be” which leads people to believe they should become something else. This can have a negative effect on socio-cultural self esteem. In general Senegalese have been able to maintain a strong socio-cultural self esteem during the past. This includes a strong role of popular culture and arts in general, as well as strong local broadcasting companies in Radio and TV industry.

**Language**

Perhaps one reason why Senegalese have succeeded to maintain their customs and culture has been the dominant role of a language of local origin. The position of the Wolof language used as lingua franca between different ethnical groups may have been of significant privilege to the nation. Despite the fact that independent Senegal chose French to be its official language, the strong role of Wolof has not left people of the nation being dependent on only French, the foreign colonial language. It has united and strengthened the population’s own identity and the national spirit. With the Wolof language media succeeds to reach a much wider audience than with the colonial language French. According to studies (Afolayan 1999) literacy education given with the native language seems to give the best results and literacy is more easily acquired thorough this way. Today the early education is still mostly done in French keeping the literacy and reading comprehension rates low. Wolof is spoken by 80% of population as maternal or foreign language, whereas French is spoken by only 15% of the population. In the Senegalese written media French is the most dominant language. If only 15% of population understands French fluently, it means that only around 15 % of population could be reached with written media, in theory. Again figures among women being significantly lower. In Dakar the percent is higher, but on the streets French is not heard much. Only certain circles rely on French, while the majority of Dakar dwellers communicate in Wolof.

I figured this out when I realized it was much easier to improve my Wolof skills than my French, when I first spent a longer time in Dakar. Good French speakers are rare when moving outside University Campus or political circuits. And as I wasn’t one of the good French speakers myself, it turned out to be much faster to adopt the Wolof language. When I travelled to Dakar to start with the Thesis project I was able to communicate my needs in Wolof as well as perform basic conversations. The language helped me significantly during every single phase. Thanks to the language I have been able to follow the media, discussions and programs in TV and radio. I also understood and took part to discussions in the public transport, marketplaces and living rooms and learned to know people much, much better.

**3.2. The Local Important Art Forms : Theater, Music and Sabar Rhythm Tradition**
In Africa there is the usual interplay of custom and conflict, harmony and strife, fusion and fission, while interpersonal relations, social cohesion, soil process and historical continuity are largely maintained through symbolizing codes of oral tradition which include mythology, oral literature (poetry, storytelling, proverbs), masquerades, rites of passage and other rituals expressed through orally, music, dance, drama, use of costume, soil interplay and material symbols which accompany people from womb to tomb and much beyond. (Ugboajah, 1985 p.166)

Different cultures have different emphasis on different art forms. In Senegal the focus in artistic expression is very much on oral tradition, storytelling, singing and music. Theater and dance are traditional and also today very popular forms of culture.

Traditions lie deep inside Senegalese people’s life. Despite the period of French colonization, people have successfully maintained a connection to their history. Even though the world has changed and life in Senegal also follows more or less some kind of global guidelines, traditions play a big role in most people’s lives. There are myths, old rituals and customs that still are significant to people. Sometimes outsider experiences these things mystical and hard to understand, but the preservation of the old culture has also helped people to maintain their self-esteem and has kept the nation together in times of political struggles or economical crisis. Many old traditions are still going strong and are enjoying respect within society, even if they might have changed during the times.

Senegal has a very powerful, unique culture of its own, and it can even sometimes feel withdrawn from an outsiders point of view. Religion, weather Islam or Christian, plays a big role in culture and people’s lives, but has as well blended with the old belief systems and mystical methods, becoming something of its own, something Senegalese.

Oral tradition has been essential in passing the culture and history from one generation to another. According to tradition, stories were told by griots, great musicians and storytellers. The griots’ role is especially strong in Wolof communities. Griots are locally called gewels. In history the griots were serving kings and important families, providing them with music, dance and storytelling. Griots were and are the ones telling the stories and passing on tradition especially bound to families own life histories. Griots are called to act in the marriage ceremony, name giving ceremony and get-togethers. They are entertainers, storytellers and local wits.

Theater is a very commonly used form of art and used for rising up important issues in society or educate as well as with the purpose to purely entertain. Nowadays theater on TV is very popular. There are several well known actors who run regular series or shows in Wolof. Theater in Wolof reaches through the TV a great part of the population and it must be an effective media when reaching illiterate women and children. People gather often together to watch TV in the evenings of week-ends and people who do not have a TV of their own are always welcome to sit in the neighbor’s living room.

Music and drumming as well as dancing are tightly bounded to Senegalese life. Wolof sabar -drums and songs have been the traditional form of spreading information and messages. Sabar drums were used to send messages and give the news and they had a clear sound language. Even this culture has changed during times and partly become part
of urban, modern life, still today Wolof people are able to “read” the sound of drums and historical rhythms and melodies are still part of the tradition. Sabar rhythms have a significant role in modern society as well, and the language of drums is present in many modern phenomenons in the society. Even the national sport, wrestling, is accompanied by sabar drums. Each wrestler has their own rhythm verse, called “bakk” and these bakks are recognized by people all over. Often musicians reach out to people with their pop music by creating their own bakks or mixing inside some wrestling bakks or ancient bakks. New bakks become popular fast and have often popular dances that belong to them. These dances become quickly known among people, regardless social status or educational background, and are danced around the parties, clubs, naming ceremonies and weddings. Senegalese popular music “mbalax” is a blend of traditional sabar rhythms, salsa influences and western popular music. Mbalax music can be heard around the market places, cars, restaurants and homes. This music and the musicians playing it have a great importance in modern society. Artists are able to reach people widely by their art. Politicians, Non Governmental Organisations and many development campaigns have been benefited from using music and musicians as their messengers.

Ashley Maher, a Canadian musician with a long career with Senegalese top musicians, estimates that the power of mbalax music lies exactly in the fact that it is accessible to everybody and served to people in a way they feel comfortable with. She recorded in 2009 a mbalax song for fighting against AIDS that was played widely on TV and radio stations in Senegal. “The song and the video had a positive welcoming and got lot of positive feed back”, she says. She reminds that mbalax is used in the politics actively. Recent good examples of using mbalax music to reach people and to deliver messages, is Youssou N’dours political campaign “Fekke ma ci Boole”. N’dour, who is worldwide recognized musician went to politics to be posed for the presidential elections in 2012. His campaign was strongly benefiting from his music, using music to reach people and using his status as a respected messenger from past years influencing with his conscious lyrics. Later his candidature was rejected in a suspicious atmosphere, when the sitting president Abdoulaye Wade tried to make his way through to be elected on a third term. This despite the law restricting presidential terms to a maximum of two. Angry about his disqualification Youssou N’dour went on leading a wide opposition campaign against Wade. Later in the elections 2nd round people of Senegal voted for Macky Sall to be the nations next president. Youssou N’dour was strongly supporting the campaign. (Source: Newspapers and News, own notes from election time in Dakar)

Before the presidential elections, N’dour had also released a song about society’s tiredness with power cuts. The situation had gone out of hand in 2011, when power cuts were a severe disturbance in the Dakar region, affecting people’s ability to work. The reason was the power supplier SENELEC, that had been having financial problems during a longer time. After large demonstrations and Youssou’s song “Askan wi sonnuna ci leundeum bi” (the society is tired of the darkness) the situation got slowly back in track.

Aby Ndour sings about importance of breast feeding in her song “Nampal”, a catchy tune that has traditional sabar rhythm “gumbe” in the background. This rhythm is an ancient tradition of the Lebous, fishermen of coastal areas. I could claim, that choosing this
traditional rhythm makes the song more appealing to those groups of people that still have strong connection to traditions. Families of those groups are mainly still working with traditional livelihood methods and are often illiterate. This small detail, the rhythmical choice, can give the message more power to reach those women who benefit of the educative message of the song. Music is very big part of people’s lives and has enormous power and a very strong status in the Senegalese society.

3.3. Visual Art and Crafts in Senegal

In the history of Senegal region visual arts mostly consist of different mediums of handcraft. In Western terms art is not considered to be a synonym with crafts, but on the African continent the art history has its own evolutionary story. The difference between art and craft is indeterminate and visual art cannot be defined with same claims as in the European context. When talking about Senegalese art we have to consider history, traditional techniques and the influences of Islam and the colonial era. Drawing and painting in the way it has existed in the European culture, has not been tradition in West Africa. Drawings have been mostly carrying decorative, informative and symbolic purposes and therefore definition of arts needs to be done based on the local and cultural context. Textiles and their decorations have been an important media of art, as well as wood carving and pottery. Textiles in form of clothing are tightly bound to the tradition of music, dance and theater as well. Costumes play big role in traditional and modern happenings and shows. Textile tradition can be seen as the most important two dimensional art form in Senegalese culture (Rabine, 2002). In Simb Gaïnde, The Lion tradition, young men dress up in colorful dresses and play an act where different characters of a traditional story appear. During the act characters perform tricks and dance to the public, accompanied by sabar drum group. The men doing The Lion act are often making, sewing and decorating their costumes themselves. Costumes play an important role and can be very creative. This act is an old tradition, but still part of urban life. It is one of the living examples of traditions that have lasted and still interests young people in the society.

When talking about Senegalese visual arts, it must be remembered that there are several different categories of art with their own definitions and purposes within this society. This is the situation in modern post colonial society within many fields. There are communities that function with very global values and influences while other communities base their values strongly on local tradition. Local tradition itself has been influenced by religion and colonization. Therefore in my case it was important to first analyze and understand the art categories the people I work with are related to and influenced by. Great differences in education, social status and living standards are related to how people define, create and consume visual art.

The contemporary art scene in Senegal is vivid and internationally recognized. Dakar is hosting every second year Dak’Art Biennal of contemporary art. This is an international happening with lots of guests from all over Africa and the World. The happening introduces several local artists, but in general it seems to stay at the level of the European definition of art and serve the international Western art oriented audience.
The existence of the Biennal is however important, in the global visibility point of view, but it is serving only the globalized part of the art scene in Senegal. Artists presented there are also working in that art scene, influenced by the global definition of art. Even if art represents different things than Dak’Art exhibition stands for to majority of the Senegalese, it is shown in TV broadcasts actively during its happening time. Through TV people get an idea about art exhibitions and contemporary visual art, even though as such they are not a tangible part of their life.

3.4. Influence of Religion

In Senegal 94% of the population are Muslims. Muslims in Senegal are following Islam’s sufistic movements, which are deeply influenced by old traditions and beliefs. The Christians compose 5%, while animist and traditional religions remain in 1%.

“Africans, no matter the depth of their education or Christian and Islamic affiliation, have often turned to traditional belief and practice for consolation in times of crisis.” (Ugboajah, 1985)

Like Ugboajah expresses in his research, despite the small percentage of people fully following traditional religions, the influence of traditional beliefs and supernatural forces is strong in Islam as well as in Christianity. This applies to Senegalese as well. Religion has a strong role in the life of Senegalese people. It is present in the day to day life customs, spoken language and common expressions that people use in their daily discussions.
Religion gives strength to survive through difficult times as well as strengthen feeling of the good times. Islam in Senegal has strong emphasis on local saints and great Marabouts, religious leaders. Tidyanyak and Mouridyah are the largest groups of sufistic movements in Senegal. Under French regime the French gave considerable power to the religious leaders, Marabouts and Imams. The French obviously discovered how to benefit from this and worked with religious leaders to maintain the control over people and the markets of raw materials. (Boone, 1992) The power of religious leaders has remained strong until today. According to the Mourides, the work, more specifically cultivating and farming, is similar to serving Allah. Some say it even equals praying. Farmers have traditionally worked one day of the week free for the benefit of their religious leader and also gave their farming lands away in religious matter. The philosophy of the Mouridyah movement is altruistic and modest and has a big impact on many levels in the modern society as well. As most of religions do, Islam advices Muslims to give to those who have less. When you have eaten your stomach full, you give what you have to those who left hungry. Giving is one of cultural cornerstones in Senegal.

In Islam it is forbidden to depict Allah and human, as a creation of Allah. Taking pictures, drawing or simply trying to capture someone visually has been also considered stealing of spirit and soul in many African tribes. It was taken as a way to control someone, as art was widely used in rituals, rites and costumes of different power characters. It is possibly these factors of religious relation to visual arts that has kept people from taking interest to drawing human figures. It has not been in the culture of visual arts from Islam’s side nor from the side of visual arts of different African tribes. The exception however is the phenomenon of portrait painting within the Mouridyah movement. Mourides tend to carry photo’s or images of their great leader’s, the Serignes. There is known to be only one genuine photograph of the founder of the Mouridyah movement, Mamadou Bamba, Serigne Touba. That photo has been copied and re painted over all, used in necklaces, amulets, paintings, T-shirts, murals etc. The later leaders’ pictures are also often painted on the house facades, fences or cars. These portraits follow the aim to depict the person photo-realistically. They are often imitating the common photograph of the particular leader.

Islam’s role in the society is visible. Talking about illiteracy, it is to be noticed that there are two kinds of educative programs available in Senegal. Beside French school system there are plenty of Arab and Islamic schools. Standards of schools vary enormously, and some of the schools provide education only in Arabic. Some parents choose to enroll their children in an Islamic school instead of a French one. This leads to situation where some people grow up learning the Arabic alphabet system but never learning to read and write in French.
Guess Yalla-AK-SA Bop
XAM SA BOP-XAM SA BOROM
SO XAME SA BOROM, SA BOP RELE

الله إسلام
الله هو هو هو
4. ACTION!

4.1. Thoughts about Development

My motivation to work in Senegal is simply a result of my life journey. The Senegalese dance community, on one hand, made me familiar with the Senegalese culture and on the other, it was my daughter and her Gambian family that kept me in contact with the Senegambian area and culture since my early adulthood. After a long interaction with the culture I felt I wanted to learn more about Senegal, the culture and the language, and how that society works. Because I studied Senegalese dance I started to travel regularly to Dakar. Via the dance I got deeper into the society and later even met my husband. I am one of the very few foreigners currently dancing and performing in Dakar’s Sabar dance scene. All this has taken me deep inside the life in Dakar and given me an interest in the power of local medias.

It might not have been a coincidence that I was drawn to work in Africa, as my own mother had already in 1970’s been working in Kenya, together with Kenyan designers, developing models for a textile company in Nairobi. It felt natural to see the bigger picture and see design as a tool for working with people and for solving problems. However, I had understood long before, during my journeys in Senegal, that there was no such “knowledge” I possessed, that the Senegalese could not survive without. I needed to learn to understand what people needed. What I understood, was an adaptation of knowledge from my own country and culture. Now, going to work abroad, it was I who needed to adapt. I wasn’t on a mission to help or change anything. I was on a mission to learn and through learning, others would also learn from me. - I had become part of the Senegalese society. It had given me so much and I wanted to give something back in return. I wanted to open doors.

Development is a tricky word often used when talking about different projects happening in Third World countries together with Non Governmental Organizations (NGO:s). But what is this development? Often this discussion show an outside perspective. Development means different things for different scholars and parties involved, which is why it is important to define the word development in the context of this thesis. Here below is a definition of development by Sumi Krishna, writer and researcher in the fields of environment, development and social action. She underlines the importance of local perspective and reminds that development is not about economic growth or catching up with others, the “others”, in many cases, meaning the Western World.
“Development is about people, about enhancing their ability and power to direct their own lives, in the context of their environment, their history and aspirations for the future. Development is not about catching up with other people. But it is about an enlarged range and quantity of choices, of lifestyles, of occupations. It encompasses better nutrition, health, education and freedom from oppression and poverty. The process of development involves structural transformations in the organization of society and the economy. Such a process cannot take place without altering relationships of dominance and subordination, or affecting the interests of different groups within society. Therefore, questions regarding the character, direction and pace of development are fundamentally political questions” (Krishna, 2007)

The reason I want to discuss the word development is simply because my project can be categorized as development work in my native country. To be able to work in the best possible way I needed to challenge myself to see things from the perspective of the people I was going to work with. I needed to understand and realize the kind of development they needed and wanted to achieve.

Sometimes development can be different from what you would consider satisfying. This doesn’t mean it is wrong kind of development. Development is not about becoming something else, it needs to be achieved through locally sustainable and suitable solutions. Therefore the solutions most likely would be different from the solutions seen from outside. It is most important to let the development just happen and try to strengthen people’s capacity to move forward, to believe in themselves and in their community. Preferably, people are given a possibility to see things from another perspective, but it is also important that people are allowed to make decisions and develop from their own perspective.

A Canadian designer Kara Pecknold (2009) talks about development work, design and importance of getting to know the local needs and wants after leading a design project in Rwanda. The noble ideas of a designer later turned out to be useless when the reality did not correlate with the expectations. Pecknold planned to work with a women’s collective in Rwanda and help them to find tools to make contacts and create a network to grow their business. She had an idea of a website that could promote and help building a network for the collective. She soon realized that a website would not work for these women, as they did not have computers or access to internet. Women would not benefit from it; they needed other kind of solutions. The reality these women were living in was quite different from what Pecknold had anticipated from her own perspective. She needed to rethink the methods she had been planning and take a whole new perspective to be able to help the women.

By learning about the local culture and community, outsiders succeed in contributing with their knowledge and giving both theoretical and concrete tools to enhance development. If this integration doesn’t happen and projects are led without seeing the needs of the target group, they will fail, because the target group cannot benefit from the given methods or knowledge as it is not in a right format. Sometimes an outsider can feel that results don’t
turn out to be as expected, and in her perspective the project did not succeed. However, the project can have had a different impact in the target group from the expected. Often an outside perspective is needed to bring new methods and bring in the wind of change. But the change itself will happen from inside. “Locals are best experts” is a phrase worth remembering, and it will encourage educated people all over the world to work for their home communities. Cooperation between local experts and those from outside is the key in finding new innovative solutions that will develop the world to a better place.

4.2. On your marks - set - GO!

To realize the project I needed partners, more precisely cooperation with a Non Governmental Organizations. Save the Children Finland had started cooperative projects with Enda Tiers Monde, aiming to evaluate and develop activities in grass-root groups of working children and youth. My project fitted inside this theme perfectly and through Eeva Johansson, who worked for Save the Children, I got contacts to Enda’s representative Pierre Coulibaly and Ndiaya Sene in Dakar.

Enda Tiers Monde
The NGO Enda Tiers Monde was founded in Dakar in 1972. Its headquarters is located in Dakar, and the organization consists of separate entities, coordinated by an executive secretary. Enda has 21 decentralized branches, 14 in Africa, 5 in South America and 2 in Asia.

Enda’s aims include working with grass-roots groups, contributing to the search for “alternative development possibilities”, and contributing to intellectuals’ and trained personnel’s involvement to set up development programs. Enda focuses on working in fields like human rights, support for culturally endangered people, socio-spatial disparities, children and youth facing unemployment, ecology and the urban population economy, grassroots communication, the fight against “imported consumption patterns and production models” and actions against AIDS, to mention a few.

It focuses on integrated action, reflection and training and prefers the local technical, human and national resources. Enda declares working by carrying out a permanent search for a methodology which will cater for the need and desire of the people in the Third World. Enda is cooperating closely with other NGOs in Africa and internationally.

Slow start
My first impression was that it was extremely hard to get contacts in Senegal while sitting in Finland. E-mail seemed to be slow, nearly hopeless communication method. Having prior experience about Senegal and about doing projects there, I knew that things may take their time. Contacts overseas are slow and difficult. E-mail is not always a real-time solution for keeping in touch.

Reasons for this slowness are many; power cuts, expensive tariffs in internet cafes and lack of technical equipment which prevent fluent communication. Or a high work load that prevents one from answering e-mails. Once you find yourself in Dakar everything gets easier. It is possible to discuss over the phone, and to meet people face to face, which is of course the traditional way.
In general, things often progress slowly and funding is always a problem. Many things get delayed or are left undone due to lack of money. My project was quite small compared to bigger programmes the NGOs try to execute. Although my project was a nice extra addition to the grass-root activity, it also meant extra work for those who I needed to help me to arrange workshops and to assist in them. It was important to keep in mind that my schedule would not be significant to anyone else but myself. I had to prepare myself for delays. Because arrangements could not be done from distance, the best way was to travel to Senegal and stay there as long as possible to give time for the project to happen. This is why I arranged a 6 months trip. It took all 4 months before any actual workshops happened. Maybe the time could have been shortened, but it did not feel appropriate to push things too much. In Senegal nothing is never just up to you. Unexpected things happen, despite your plan. Sometimes delays are caused by illnesses, sometimes people had travelled away. In times of religious holidays people go to their home villages and may stay there for weeks.

**Action**

My contact person in Enda was Mme Ndiaya Sene. She works in Enda’s Guediawaye office and is responsible for the coordination of literacy groups that Enda is supporting in different places in Senegal. These groups are work in cooperation with a Pan-African movement called The African Movement of Working Children and Youth, AMWCY. With Mme Sene I got in touch with these AMWCY’s grass-roots groups in Guediawaye, a poor suburb of Dakar. These groups offered literacy training amongst other income generating skills. These particular groups had only young female members. I would have preferred to work with both genders represented in groups, but according to my experience it is best to take what you are offered because you might need to wait too long to get what you want.

**African Movement of Working Children and Youth - AMWCY**

*Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs - MAEJT*

The African Movement of Working Children and Youth, AMWCY was set up in 1994. In 2008 it consisted of 126 association members (town or rural level). Functioning in 21 African countries it has about 1020 grass-roots groups with power of over 148 000 members and close supporters (figures of March 2007). Members, who mostly work as housemaids, apprentices, small vendors, self-employed working children and youth in streets and markets.

When AMWCY was founded in 1994, its founders identified twelve prior rights to signify fight against the exploitation and the bad conditions of child labour.

One important objective of grass-root groups is to promote and strengthen their 12 rights through concretization and improvement of living and working conditions of working children and youth, WCY. They aim to strengthen communication skills with members and associations and work for capacity-building in order to undertake successful Income Generating Activities (IGAs). They also develop the collaboration between Working Children and Youth and local authorities, international institutions, other NGOs and children’s right movements.
Today AMWCY is acting in 64 cities around Africa. Among the members of AMWCY 62% are children, 38% are youth. Gender division among members is around 53% girls and 47% boys. (figures of March 2007)

In Dakar the grass-root groups are functioning very locally, making it easier for new members to find their way to meetings. Groups are offering to their members free literacy education and Income Generating Activities. Another important purpose is to act as workers union, give the child members information about their rights in the society as children and as working children. The groups have different roles depending on their members and the area they are located. There are groups for girls where members usually work as household maids or vendors. There are groups for boys who are working in the taxivans as apprentices or in the garage. In some areas most group members come from villages far away, being sent to work outside their families. These groups provide their members an important network, contacts to adults as well as their fellow colleagues, information about their rights and even juridical help to those who might need it. Some groups have members who were taken out from schools by their parents to help at home. These members get from AMWCY a second chance to learn income generating skills and become literate. It will help them later in their lives. They will also learn how to act as observers inside the community to recognize and help other children in difficult situations.

AMWCY and grass-root groups are actively visible inside the society thorough different campaigns and happenings. All the members are taught the common backbone of AMWCY, The 12 Rights of a child worker.

- The right to learn how to read and write
- The right to be taught a trade
- The right to stay in the village (no exodus)
- The right to work in a safe environment
- The right to light and limited work
- The right to rest when sick
- The right to be respected and dignity
- The right to be listened to
- The right to play (leisure)
- The right to healthcare
- The right to express oneself
- The right to equitable legal aid

Selecting the Groups
Thus, through Enda I got contact to girl-groups in Guediawaye. I went to visit three different groups. When it occurred to me during the visits, that the groups were enormously big, each having from 30 to over 40 members, I decided to make the workshop with only two of the groups. I chose the group in Cheikh Wade, because it was nearer Enda’s Guediawaye office and its active members were used to participate in workshops according to Madam Sene. It would be my pilot group. My second group was to be a group called Nimzatt 1.
Located in a dirty, poor district behind the market place Marché Bu Bess, the group had no equipments, material or even enough benches and sitting places for its over 40 members. It felt fair to work with them and provide the group with some pens, rubbers and rulers. We made a timetable, and told the group leaders to inform girls about the workshops.

The idea was to work with girls through discussion and drawing assignments around the topics their groups are standing for. In addition I would show examples and talk about printed textiles and possibilities to deliver visual messages through textiles. We would do drawings and designs that were targeted to be used as prints. The group could together pick up some of their drawings with the strongest messages and make a suggestion collage that later would be worked further on computer. The work with computer would be done by me, but I had said to Madam Sene I offered to take an assistant or two who could be learning the computer programs with me while I was working. Unfortunately that never happened, and I put the patterns together all by myself.

Materials
The material costs would be paid by the NGO’s. Save the Children had indicated that my project will go under their collaboration activities in supporting these grass-root groups, and therefore they can sponsor workshops with required material. I would myself be responsible for the charges regarding the prototype printing and costs during the process to design and prepare the drawings into printable form. This I was funding with the grant given for this project. The problem was, that Enda directly had no budget for my project and nobody had time to start asking for funding inside the organization. This did not happen until Save the Children Finland took the initiative. When their worker and my Finnish contact person Eeva Johansson arrived to Dakar, things started rolling and we were able to start the project.

The materials I bought were simple, but I wanted the groups to experiment also different art medias, brush, pencil, ink, felt pens. The budget limited me, because the groups were big. I bought lots of basic copy paper, but could afford only one sheet of thicker paper per person. Because the aim was to draw and make pattern designs, it meant that the drawings would be later scanned and handled with computer. This made me choose felt pens and black ink to be our main working tools. Groups would work with different sized felt pens, with limited colors. In addition they would be able to try painting with ink. Groups were also given pencils, rubbers, rulers, glue, pen sharpeners, invisible sellotape and scissors.
12 droits de AMWCY

Lire et Ecrire
Formation pour avoir un métier
Soins médicaux
Etre écouté
Retour au village
S'exprimer et s'organiser
Respect
Loisirs
Repos en cas de maladie
Justice Equitable
Travail limite par rapport à l'âge
Sécurité
Me and Madame Sene at Enda’s office
4.3. Workshop Diary
Groups of Cheikh Wade and Nimzatt 1 in Guediawaye, Dakar

Group of Cheikh Wade
Day One
I meet my contact person Ndiaya Sene in the Guediaway headquarters of Enda. From there we head with local transport to Cheikh Wade Cultural center where the group is gathering every week-day from 3pm to 6pm. The cultural center looks like being under construction. But so do maybe 80 per cent of all buildings in Dakar suburbs. I have heard that house owners are not obligated to pay tax of uncompleted houses, so that would explain why it is advantageous to be slow. The cultural center is located in the quarter of Hamo 5. Here AMWCY holds one of its regular grass-roots groups. The class room of the grass-root group of AMWCY is found in the far corner of the building. The room is small, but it is quite well equipped. There are several sewing machines standing on their tables along the wall and enough tables and chairs to fill the floor. I notice some evidences of previous workshops, like printing screens and samples of tie & dye textiles.

Girls start appearing one by one. Here in the grass-root groups they have the possibility to learn how to sew clothes, make accessories and do decoration with pearls and embroidery. In this group there are over 35 children and young women. Madame Sene explains that almost all of the members of this group are born here in Dakar. These girls have different stories in their past, but there is one thing that is common: They want to learn and get chance to develop their situation in the society towards the better. The youngest member of the group is 11-years-old and called “Thiat” (in Wolof meaning the last born baby) by other members. Most of these girls are around the age of 16. They have either not gone to schools at all, or dropped out of school after a couple of years of schooling. They are mostly working at home or as household maids in other families. The consequences of not keeping girls at schools are showing in this group clearly. Teenagers who today are basically responsible of cooking and cleaning at home lack dramatically skills to provide themselves later in the future. Many of them are totally illiterate, some of them can read and write a little. They have time, but no means to aspire for something more. With them I sense the presence of today so strongly that it wipes out thoughts of tomorrow. Maybe that is the key to survive in a life where you don’t have great expectations from the future. Today is what matters. These groups of AMWCY offer education and a forum for discussion about important things. Groups offer also help to them who need adult support in difficult situations.

Girls are curious about what we are about to do in this four day workshop. I explain that we are going to draw, and some of the drawings will be later used in a textile pattern carrying the messages of their organization. I tell them that these patterns can be used in their happenings and campaigns and in principle they could later be printed even industrially. I speak Wolof when explaining, but need help of Ndiaya Sene to clear out details. Girls don’t understand or speak French. Neither do I very well, so it only makes things more simple. Anyhow I notice that even mixing in some French words or sentences, what I’m
used to do while speaking Wolof, is generating problems. Girls get confused about French and Madame Sene needs to help with Wolof explanations. It is usually very common in Dakar that people mix French with Wolof, more or less, but it seems that when speaking to young girls with no school background that does not apply. Uneducated girls are the last group of people being influenced by French words and expressions. But I have Wolof. I learned myself Wolof by listening. Since I was teen-ager I have had Wolof speaking friends and contacts. And I had the music of Youssou N’dour. His music made me to get used to so many Wolof words and expressions. Spending time in Senegal gave me fast the ability to use Wolof and I completed my skills with some private courses. By the time I arrived to do my thesis project I had a functioning vocabulary and was familiar with basic grammar structures. Each week spent in Dakar gave me stronger skills with the local language. Thanks to my dancer friends, whom I hang out with daily, listening to their conversations.

I notice the privilege of being able to teach in Wolof. It gets me immediately closer to the girls. Anyhow it feels sometimes that I don’t quite understand the way of teaching they are used to. I search for a dialogue with the group. Teaching moment misses communication and contact, while the group more rather wants to be in a silent role of learners. They rather just take in all what I say without filtering it. My aim is to discuss with the group about the 12 rights of Working Children and Youth’s manifestation and about the campaigns they have been doing around them. I wish to show examples of printed textiles with visual messages and then go on to drawing assignments. The discussion is weak. We go through the rights but nobody dares to comment more deeply. Madam Sene is squeezing out answers and I wish she would not be leading so strongly. I long to hear the thoughts these girls have, but maybe this is the way it goes here. Have to try to come close to them with another technique.

The first assignment is to draw a picture based on the 12 rights of AMWCY. I tell that everyone can pick one right and concentrate on drawing around that topic freely. When we get to work the girls start to look insecure and I soon realize that my first assignment is too much about self expression, opinions and making statements. These girls are not ready to produce or give comments. They want to do what they are told, following clear concrete guidelines. I need to use other methods to get them liberated and to get them to draw. To draw independently about children’s rights seems to be difficult for the group. I decide to continue next day but with narrower assignment.

**Day Two**

Next day we divide the group in smaller groups.

After discussing about the 12 rights again girls pick up the six most important or interesting ones. I give every group one of the rights to draw about. I am very much encouraging with Madame Sene the groups to come up with different drawings and points of views. Girls complain about that they cannot draw. They keep on asking what exactly they should draw. I tell them to go ahead and think on their own. In the critique held the next day I see some great results. And I learn again a lot about these girls. The group drawing about “The right to play (leisure) “ has an airplane in every five drawings. I ask one of them what the airplane is about and she answers that she just draw it after her friend had
drawn one in her drawing. And that there is no meaning why there was an airplane in the
drawing so far she was concerned. Madame Sene and I remind the girls to think that what
they draw is a story, and everything inside a drawing has a meaning. We discuss about
airplanes and its possible meanings in the drawings. Girls start to observe more closely
every detail in their drawings. Girls tend to draw separate objects, loosely attached to the
subject, but do not tend to capture a moment or a scenery of a story. Skills to draw are in
different levels. I am surprised that so many have big difficulties when drawing people.
I understand from the drawings that these girls have not been drawing much. When I ask
them about drawing I realize that they really have not been drawing. They tell me there
are no materials at home, but those who attended schools have learned to draw little bit.
In their drawings there are certain ways of telling the story that reminds me of educative
posters with informative text. Many of the girls ask those who can write to complete
explaining words beside drawn objects, ecole next to the school building and piqûre next
to vaccination needle.

**Day Three**
We start with critique, or more like discussion around the work we have done previous
day.
Each small group present their work and first others will tell what right they see that the
works represent and why. We discuss about meanings of different objects, expressions on
faces of characters and what kind of messages they tell the viewer. In general girls are
quite shy to discuss, but they present their work and comment on each other’s drawings.
This critique gets the group to relax. Maybe relax with me, but also with the drawing
assignments.

This is the third day and we go on drawing. But now I give an assignment that is decorative.
We exam the printed textiles I had requested them to bring along. Everyone has brought
along pieces of printed textiles or a cloth with printed textile. I explain about patterns,
repetitive images and textures. We look at the different examples and the visual style
and layer like feeling of wax prints. I remind that some of the work will be then selected
to final patterns and that there will be need for bigger motifs as well as some surface
textures, like we can see in the wax print examples.

I tell the group to draw surfaces with decorative motifs from their surroundings. Abstract
motifs or articles, natural motifs. I tell them not to draw people. I notice suddenly the
Girls creating wonderful motifs, ready patterns, with no such difficulties they were facing
the day before with the drawing assignments about 12 rights. I teach about creating a
repeat and tell each and every one to produce one of their ideas to repeat. The results of
the decorative pattern assignment are inspiring. Girls really relax with this assignment.
I am so thrilled after seeing their work. Some girls seem to draw motifs that resemble
traditional batik dyed textiles. They combine also the concrete motifs referring to their
life in the pattern designs, like kitchen pots and spoons, and here they get this sudden flow
into their work. Still working with pen and paper, but obviously now much closer to their
comfort zone.
Day four
The last day is for finishing previous works and on top exploring new technique. The last day we paint with ink. I tell girls to draw about what they would want to change in the World or in their life, if they could. They experiment with the water, brushes and ink, discouraged about uncontrolled strokes. But they draw about power cuts, about education centers, hospitals and small villages. I feel they finally start to get my point about drawing what is in their mind and trusting themselves. But at this point the workshop is over. It feels that the door just opened for them, and now the fun is over before it really even begun. But I guess it was the purpose of my being here, to open them up. Later they will continue to think ahead. Maybe next time when they get to draw they will be able to start from a new basis. Maybe next time they want to decorate a textile, they will be inspired by the idea of continuous surfaces.

To close up the workshop the group creates its color map. The color map will be used for the final print. It needs to contain darker colors used for outlines and lighter colors for the background. All in all they choose 5 colors for the pattern. Five colors is a typical amount in patterns, still to be printed with average price and possible to most producers. Everyone has brought small patches in different colors with them. All the colors are gathered on the table and everyone gets to suggest colors they like best. Best colors are spread next to each other and we go on eliminating colors until girls have picked up their collection of five colors. Both dark and lighter colors are chosen to the color combination. I understand that the assignment is abstract, because girls have never gone through the process of understanding how colors work in printed textiles. They do not know concretely why there has to be darker and lighter colors. But I try to show the reason for that from the examples I have brought along. We also go through the work they have done, and I point out some good examples that can be applied to the pattern. We find out what kind of drawings could work as background and what kind of drawings on the patterns top layer.

Later when the workshop has finished, girls insist that I join their dance rehearsals. They are rehearsing a mbalax song and want to participate in a competition that will be held soon. Madame Sene instigates the group to sing and dance the latest hit moves, and soon I find myself exchanging the dance moves between my quarter in Parcelles and their Guediaway style. Like always when it comes to Senegalese dance, when people notice I know it, it is an instant ice-breaker. The time with the girls has been interesting. I will return here to present the results later, and do some interviews.
Group of Nimzatt 1
Day One

It is the turn for the second workshop with grass-root groups. It is the turn for the group called Nimzatt 1. We walk inside Marché Bu Bess in Guediawaye, suburb of Dakar known for its bad reputation. I walk together with Madam Sene, and she stops to greet every second shop holder. It is crowded here. We take a turn from the main road inside into the market’s inner sections. Madam Sene shows me where they make shoes together with girls and shoemaker guys. Girls that have been learning to crochet sandals will be taught to cooperate with shoemakers. Later they know where to turn to with their possible own shoe business ideas.

Behind the market place, after passing the narrow passage between spice sellers, parfumerie “Thiouraye bu nex”, blacksmiths, shoe makers’ strong smell of glue, cafe rosters, stinky fish smokehouse and garbage dumping places, we arrive to the gathering premises of AMWCY’s grass-root group called Nimzatt 1. This grass-root group has about 45 members. Members gather in the group every weekday after 3 pm, when they have finished their work. This group has an important purpose to provide both literacy education and education to gain professional skills. In this group girls are learning to crochet shoes and sew clothes. Crocheting shoes together, they can later take the pieces to shoemakers in Marché Bu Bess for preparing soles. Afterwards they can sell the ready shoes. By this they can collect small funds to their common savings. With this savings they can buy material for their group and possibly even give micro loans to each other in case of an urgent need.

Group Nimzatt 1 has only one sewing machine. There is very little materials and almost no furniture in the gathering venue. The room is simple, surrounded by harsh concrete walls and no lights. Furniture is missing, a few benches and 2 small tables are available. The girls arrive little by little after 3pm, after finishing their work. The session will end before it gets dark, to ensure a safer walk home. The girls organize big plastic carpets, basangs on the floor and I divide the group into 6 smaller groups. The group responsible is called Sophie and she is the key holder of this house and teaching crocheting. She has her little baby girl Nafi with her. She lives nearby and is always present, though there are other teachers that come to give specific lessons during different weekdays, like literacy education.

This is my second workshop with girls in grass-root groups of AMWCY. Like in the group of Cheikh Wade, these girls and young women haven’t gone to schools. Some cannot even write their own name, while others can do it only in Arabic after attending Qur’an Schools. Most of the girls are working as household maids, some in street kitchens or as sellers at markets. Being a member in this group resembles being a member in a workers union for them. In the group they not only get a chance to learn to read and write or learn about income generating skills, but by being members in a group they can also learn about their own rights, strengthen their voices inside the community and try to improve children’s rights in the society. This is also a way to keep in touch and build contacts with other girls in similar life situation and maybe connect with people from the same
home village. They also get valuable information about their own rights as workers and as children and can pass this information easily to other children. Madame Sene told me that many girls who have been attending education in groups have been able to help their colleague children in difficult situations. Their eyes can often see where help is needed, and they can connect with other children in their own community easier than adults coming from outside.

This group consists mostly of girls with village background. It means the girls originate from countryside villages. They have moved to Dakar with their family, some of them came alone to find work. Many of them tell they had been attending schools as children, but had to stop when the family moved to Dakar. Some attended Arabic schools. Mostly girls are living with their families and working at home. Although in this group many of them work outside home as well. According to Madam Sene finding those girls who are in most need of group support is sometimes hard. They are the girls who have no safety net in Dakar. They do not know the city or people and they do not know their own rights when it comes to issues at work. There are some areas where AMWCY grass root groups have specially focused on finding children and youth of this category. In these groups the focus is much more on giving information about workers’ rights and on building networks and offering safe adult contacts.

In the group of Nimsatt 1 the focus is on IGAs, income generating activities. The group is big. There are over 50 members according to Enda’s lists, but about 40-45 active members. Crocheting shoes seems to be the group’s main focus. That is maybe because of lack of materials and furniture. Learning to make shoes gives also direct possibilities to earn money. This group is about to establish a saving system. Each member will need to bring every week 200CFA (30 euro cents) to the common cash-box. After a while they can organize happenings, buy some materials or invest to a business project with the
money they have saved together. This kinds of group savings, called the rotating saving and credit associations - ROSCAs - are very common among women in Senegal, and have been fully functional saving models for a long time. (Rosenlew, 2012) Women members in ROSCAs donate regularly a small sum of money to a common cashier. Collected money is given to members in turns, but from the savings money can be given also as a loan or donated to the member who needs it. Often money is needed for big family occasions like name giving ceremonies, weddings or funerals, but women even establish businesses with the help of ROSCA funding.

For the particular group of Nimzatt 1 this kind of saving system is also a way to engage members more tightly to group activity.

With this group I made some changes in my plan with assignments. After discussions in a big group we immediately divide girls in smaller groups. It is challenging to work here, when the facilities are limited. Only one group gets a table. The rest of the girls are drawing on the floor. When we start, the same thing happens here. Questions about what I want them to draw, discouraged faces and comments about drawings difficulties. The difference is that this time I am prepared. BintaNdiaye, 16, is drawing people. She is in the group drawing with the topic “right to self-expression and to get organized”. She fills the paper with small characters with long legs and arms reaching out from a big round head, in other words tadpole guys. It reminds me strikingly of what my daughter (born 2000) used to draw back in the days she was in kindergarten. Binta is telling me she has never been drawing. She is saying she does not like drawing. I tell her that I am sure she has not made her mind about that yet and encourage her to continue. She continues while her friends giggle to her complaints about drawing.
Day Two
Following day I get sick and I call Madame Sene if we can postpone the rest of the workshop with one day. She says it will be too difficult, because next week there would be some field trips she needs to attend. But she adds gladly that she already has seen how we explained and executed the surface assignment with the previous group and she is sure that she can handle continuing with it even I am not present. I miss one day.

Day Three
During the day two, while I was absent the group has advanced to the surface assignment like it was proposed in the program. Surface assignment was about decorative motifs, with more abstract grip. In the surface assignment the aim was also to learn to create repeating designs by cutting and filling the paper. I see they have been cutting and gluing like I had taught in previous groups, only that the pictures they have been cutting are not the ones with abstract decorations, but the illustrative ones. Adorable drawing of a girl cooking with a huge kettle is cut into four parts and glued together as I had shown how to do when creating a continuous decorative pattern design. What can I say? Misunderstandings happen. I try to save some inspiring drawings by gluing them back together carefully. Later when I’ll scan them I can fix the problem with the computer, even if it will take some extra time.

I need to take the decorative assignment from the beginning. We continue with explaining this assignment, and I choose to hand out small papers. With the smaller papers the girls can fill the whole area, and explore easily the idea of a repeat. We examine patterns and textiles, that I have asked them to bring along from home. We observe bigger repeats and smaller repeats. I show how there can be different scales of patterns and motifs within textiles. I observe once again, how much easier this decorative assignment seems to be for them and how they approach it with creativity. Some girls do pure abstract motifs with structural influence of Ornament Art and tiles. Some use natural motifs and some are creative and come up with patterns using things around them as a source of inspiration, like coins, scissors etc. All in all it is positive to notice how well the assignment is understood and how the girls use their imagination. Smaller paper works well. Way to avoid phobias towards blank paper. Results are cute and inspiring.

The youngest member of this group is 10-years-old and she cannot speak. She has probably some kind of a disorder, but nobody knows exactly what. She does not communicate a lot but she seems to be very artistic, and really gets concentrated with her work. Some girls get really inspired of drawing and it is a pleasure to see how they enjoy. This group is bigger, but the discipline and concentration is a little bit better than in previous group.

Ndeye Marou Ndiaye is drawing very concentratedly. I notice that she listens carefully and puts effort to the assignments. Later she comes to me and tells me she would like to work later as textile designer. It is great to notice that some of the girls really get inspired. I hope sincerely that they will someday work with textiles. Who knows what they will come up with the techniques they learn in the groups. It won’t be lack of inspiration or interest that will keep them from accomplishing their dreams. Unfortunately lack of money is often the reason why nothing ever happens. Ndeye is talented, and her work has stayed in my mind. Maybe one fine day she gets a chance to realize her dream.
**Day four**
The last day I introduce ink and paint brushes. Everyone gets to paint, most of them for the first time in their life. Results are more or less wild, but people are enjoying themselves. Last but not least we choose the color map. Later I will have two color maps, one from Cheikh Wade group and one from here, Nimzatt 1. When I’ll design and build the final patterns, I will use each color map to one design. This group has brought a lot of different color samples, small patches of textiles from tailors’ shops. The group cooperates well and chooses its colors. The result is sweet and much more girly than the colors of Group Cheikh Wade. Lilac, rose and light yellow are all part of their color map. I am happy to notice how different color combinations these two groups chose. But I have already learned that girls and women in Dakar are masters of colors and very open and active color users when it comes to dressing and fashion. Like the previous group, this group also has difficulties in understanding how the colors will be used in textile design. We go through examples and I explain. But it seems to remain little bit abstract to them. I tell them that they would understand this better through experience by printing themselves with different colors. To close the workshop we go quickly thorough drawings they have made and take group pictures. I really wish their group will get more materials to run activities, because the situation is now discouraging.

After I leave the group the last time, I have material more than enough for hundreds of patterns, but I will be completing only two different pattern design for Enda and AMWCY. I agree that I will process with the computer all he drawings that are more ready illustrations or patterns. This material can be used by Enda in their publications.
5. REFLECTIONS :

Analyzing the Group Members and the Social Setting

Working with the girls was inspiring and interesting. While working with the groups I felt that in order to understand their design, I needed to know them better. I needed to know about their background and present conditions, their living environment and how they see themselves and their possibilities to influence their lives now and in the future.

5.1. Workshops Observations

Girls in these groups come from social surroundings where they are used to do what they are told. I know that from my own experience from Senegalese families - children do what they are told and help a lot with chores at home. The younger are always expected to help the older, according to the culture. Hierarchy is seen also in schools where there is little discussion and more pure repetition. These girls are not used to expressing their own ideas nor to expressing any independent opinions. This is, however, what I asked them to do, and therefore they responded with confusion.

There is another confusing factor as well. They are convinced that they cannot draw. After being encouraged to go on, they started drawing, giggling, keeping on asking whether they are doing as I wanted them to do. I had to tell them again and again that there were no right answers or right results in this assignment. Drawings are equally individual products. Bit by bit they got the idea and started to relax with the task.

I observed that they really had not been drawing much, some of them most likely not at all. Some of the girls showed more interest and talent towards drawing, but most of these teenagers drew like children in kindergarten. I did expect that drawing skills of the group would not be very advanced, but I was surprised by how little they actually could do. It had not crossed in my mind that 16-year-old young ladies would be scribbling and drawing like my daughter at the age of 4. That was something I had not considered when I planned the workshops and the whole idea of my project. I had never thought about the culture of drawing nor about the lack of it.

I know most of them did not go to school and those who did, dropped out at an early age. Obviously drawing was something they had not been doing either. This observation gave totally new perspective to my project and I needed to rethink my own attitude and expectations towards the group and the assignments I had planned. I realized also that my approach to drawing was a product of my own culture. I had taken for granted that people have basic drawing skills. I needed to understand better the background of these girls and to take under consideration the impacts of their cultural sphere in order to see what messages their pictures were carrying. I also needed to know more about the background and history of visual arts and arts in general in the Senegalese society in order to understand which techniques and art forms were familiar and which not. Also, that they were drawing for me, an adult European workshop leader, would have an impact on their productions. The way I was prepared and able to explain the assignments was probably unfamiliar to them as the culture of learning is different and the contacts that they were used to have with adults and teachers were probably different from my perception.
5.2. Story Behind

The majority of the girls I worked with were household helps either in their own home or working outside in a family. Many of them were working in their home, which indicated that their life situation was maybe not the worst possible. This means they were more free than the girls who worked outside their own families. They still had to take care of exactly the same kind of duties and tasks as those outside the family. They were also not getting paid for their work. – On the other hand, the girls who work outside their home get a salary but they are more tied up with their work. The story of each girl is unique but the lack of basic education is common in them. The following chapters introduce the situation and the life of girls working as household help.

Household Maids in Senegal “JANK BI”

Household maids, called “jank” in wolof, are most often young girls or women between 10-25 years old. (Word “jank” means generally a young woman, and can be used also when speaking to a person whose name is not known. “Bi” means the) Maids are responsible of all housework like cleaning, fetching water, cooking, washing laundry and ironing. Sometimes they also do babysitting. They work hard and long hours, with a small salary. Some household maids do only cooking or laundry, working in several different families during a week. Many are living with the families, while others arrive only according to the contracted hours. Households in Senegal are large and mainly driven by female labor. The laundry is washed by hand, cooking is often done using firewood or charcoal, outdoors and without easy access to running water. Everything is done by hand and request a lot of time and energy. Women who are working elsewhere are not able to take care of the heavy chores at home. And vice versa. Women who can afford to hire a maid prefer to do it to free themselves from this demanding labour.

If the household is large, with more than one woman, cooking and cleaning is usually done in shifts but if the number of adult women is low, daughters are easily considered as work force. Sometimes families prefer to keep their daughters at home and working full time, which does not leave them a chance to go to school. Rather than paying for the education of a girl, she is kept at home, working. Some families are facing such financial burdens that they need to send their daughters to work in other families. This is done mainly for two reasons; the number of mouths to be fed at home decrease, and the money girls earn can be sent home to feed the rest of the family. Many girls are sent, or leave voluntarily, from their home village to work in bigger cities. Like many West African countries, also Senegal is struggling to keep girls in schools and to prevent young girls from being taken away to work. In Senegal, where girls’ primary school enrollment rates are some of worlds lowest, the chances for a girl to be able to continue her schooling are low. According to the Unicef report by Ricci Shrylock in 2010, even though girls’ enrollment rate has increased in the past ten years, it is a challenge to keep them in school. National surveys show that twice as many children from the richest households attend primary school, compared to children from the poorest households. (Shryock, 2010)
It is hard to estimate the number of household maids because they often stay indoors and often do not even own identity papers, nor do they have any status in their neighborhood. Girls move from villages to town to work in families they don’t know, with a salary of between 20 000 - 40 000 cfa (30-60€) a month. The salary barely covers their living costs f. ex. in Dakar, where they can afford only an unfurnished room without electricity and running water (Hinshaw, 2010). Often they get to live and eat in the family they work for. That makes it possible for them to save some of the salary and send it to the home village. What is left for sending is very little.

Some girls work from Monday to Sunday. Some have weekends free. The dust and sand makes the cleaning job a never ending story. Cooking lunch and dinner, washing dishes, cleaning the floors, broom and sweep, fetching water and going to market if needed, not to forget doing the laundry and ironing. Unable to influence their own work situation it seems difficult for them to be able to get a better job. As illiterate and unaware of their rights they have no information about salary standards, sick leave or working hour regulations. Girls are often also exposed to sexual violence and harassment in their work, and do not have anybody to help or listen to them.

Many girls have dreams of other jobs, like running small businesses, but possibilities of getting one are minuscule for someone who cannot read or write or has no capital to start a business. Many of the girls who dropped out from school would have liked to continue schooling. In Senegal fewer than one in five girls are able to go to the secondary school – and later in life there are only 6 literate adult women for every 10 literate men. Despite lower education, the women are most likely to be the ones who take major responsibility of their family’s alimentation support when their men sit unemployed or vanish to Europe. It is a hard world out there and the future does not offer many options.
Mariama Diallo does not know how old she is exactly, she can only guess. She estimates to be around 21 to 24. She has got a five-year-old daughter and has divorced from her husband recently. She is working as a household help in Dakar. Her daughter is living with her mother in her home village, because in Dakar Mariama has no one to look after her during the day when she is working nor does she have money to put her into a preschool. During weeks Mariama lives in Yoff, in the house she works for, and goes to her relatives for week-ends when she has her two days off. Her relatives live in suburb of Pikine. Lots of people live there under the same roof and Mariama has no room of her own.

She has been working as a “jank” since her mother sent her to work when she was just a little girl. Mariama is from Kumpentoum village near Tambacounda. Her mother would have rather put her in a school to learn, a clever girl as she was, but her father would not accept that. Her father said that “girls get beaten at school” and thought it would have been too dangerous and expensive to pay schooling for a girl. So she was sent to work. She started working in the home village, but because the salary was so small she was tempted to travel to Dakar by her friend. She came to Dakar with the friend and lived with her relatives. Her friend found a job where they needed two maids, and so Mariama got her first job in Dakar.

Mariama’s mother tongue is Peull, but she learned Wolof fast after moving to Dakar. Even in the home village she had heard Wolof thorough many radio programs. Mariama does not know how to read or write. She did not know how to write numbers before she got her first mobile phone. After that she by force learned to use numbers and also their names in French. Because she cannot read she needs to ask help to find contacts from her mobile, even though the most usual contacts she have learned to recognize. She would like to know how to read and write, but she barely has time to learn when she is working. Recently she has been learning alphabets with the help of a teacher that helps the kids in the family she is working. She is interested in reading but finds it very difficult. Now, when she knows a bit, she is interested in browsing magazines and children’s books.

She cannot calculate with the French system when it comes to money. Instead she is used to calculate with the Wolof names and terms used for calculating money. She is listening to the radio while working and likes different discussion programs. She does not understand French, but the majority of Senegal’s radio broadcasts are in Wolof. Wolof is today used in most of TV and radio programs in Senegal and it is enjoying a dominant role when it comes to communication and media broadcasting. There are programs and news in the other local languages, as well as in French. Mariama likes to listen to
discussion broadcasts and programs where listeners can call and speak in the radio. Radio is her most important source of information, because there is no television at the moment in the house she is working in. “TV and radio are good”, she says, “it is important to know about what is happening in this country and how people live”

Mariama is happy about having work, but she thinks Dakar is expensive. The salary is small to cover both her own needs and to support her mother. Her daughter does not go to school yet, but she would like her to start soon in a preschool. She wishes that her daughter will be able to learn to read and write. Sometimes she misses her daughter and she wishes the daughter could stay with her in the city. She is worried that in her home village it is very hot and there are many deceases which children catch easily. But Mariama does not feel she has any choice. “If you have a good job you want to hold on to it.” Even though sometimes there are difficulties with the boss, hard work and compromises, she feels that changing to a new job or quitting is not a solution. Even if you have a terrible work place it can be difficult to quit. It is not easy to get a new job if you have left your previous one. She says that “in order to get what you want you sometimes just have to suffer quietly”. Money needs sacrifices. However, at the moment Mariama is happy about her current work contract, even though household work is tough.

She sometimes dreams about office work. She says that she wishes she had had a chance to go to school, to study in a University and later to work in a nice air conditioned office with a desk and a comfortable chair. If Mariama had money, she would like to open a restaurant. That is in fact feasible, because Mariama is an excellent cook, and she knows how to prepare all the local dishes. You name a Senegalese dish, and she can make it! She knows how to cook rice in several different ways, how long to steam or how to prepare it inside the oily sauce. All this she learned from her mother when she was just a little girl. There are a lot of skills she learned just because she is a girl, while doing chores with her mother.

Mariamas world is bound to traditions originated from her childhood, but she has got plenty of influences through different working environments that have opened her view of life. Mariama has never worn trousers. Her father said to her when she was a little girl, that trousers are not for women and therefore he would not have a woman wearing them under his roof. Mariama says that she has no major reasons why she would not wear trousers now, as an adult and an independent woman, but she says she is so used to wearing skirts and sharongs that she hardly ever would be able to put on trousers. She also prefers to wear a scarf when going out to the streets or market, for the same reasons why she doesn’t wear trousers; she is used to it, and not doing it would feel weird. Mariama is a devout Muslim and she respects God. But when she dresses for a party - a naming ceremony or a wedding - and wears her hair twisted to shiny braids that form beautiful zebra stripes along her head, she leaves the scarf at home.

Mariama dreams about things like having money to buy a fan for her mother. Or a freezer, so that her mother could start selling ice in her neighborhood. She also dreams that she would be able to live with her daughter and send her a good school, but at the moment there is no money for that. An European lady that she used to work for had promised to support her daughter and send her money to pay her schooling but the woman went back to Europe, and it took a long time before Mariama heard about her again. When she got to speak to her again, the school enrollments had already closed for that year. She believes that she will be able to send her daughter to school next year. At least she is hoping and praying for that.
Mariama’s story is similar to thousands of stories in Dakar. Girls in the groups I worked with live in the same world with her. It is a world of few possibilities. Also a world where living in the present moment is everything. Illiteracy prevents the girls from increasing their knowledge. They have fewer channels of communication to follow which restricts their possibility to seek or find information, options and solutions. Money is everything and nothing. Lack of money is the reason for the lack of opportunities. But when the life ahead seems far and unmotivating, people concentrate on living today.

5.3. Analyzing the Culture of Visual Expression in Senegal

In mainland Europe and Scandinavia drawing becomes a part of children’s culture in their early years. We learn what drawing is by observing adults or older children. Children learn to draw at home or in kindergarten. They develop an idea about drawing based on examples around them, by seeing how others draw and what they draw. To me it became clear at a very early stage that by drawing I was supposed to capture moments. I was encouraged to draw about feelings and my typifications came from other children, pictures around me like children’s books and television. Later at school I was fascinated by the realistic and detailed illustrations of Jill Barklem and I copied her style in my own drawings. My childhood was full of visual material, illustrations in books, paintings on the walls and people around me encouraging me to follow their example and draw. People’s conception of art is a result of all the visual material around them (Gardner 1980)

In some cultures people have less visual art and images around them. If these are not around at home and in near surroundings, there might be other sources of images, drawings and visual material, such as schoolbooks, children’s books, magazines etc. In the article “When Children Draw” by Ph.D. Sandra Crosser she refers to cultural studies by Alexander Alland (1983) saying that when children are provided with drawing materials and encouragement they tend to compose works that reflect the particular culture. According to Alland’s studies for example Japanese children’s drawings would be harmonic, complex and complete while French children were filling the entire paper with colorful large designs. Crosser writes that in general children tend to draw from a cultural perspective, imitating design and composition reflected in fabrics or other aspects of the adult culture including symbol systems such as written letters or characters and numerals. This is logical, and referring to this it is understood that also girls in my groups were drawing from their cultural aspect. To understand their approach to visual arts and awaken them to express themselves in that way was a challenge to me

Dr Karin Aronsson’s and Dr Barbara Junge’s research in intellectual realism and social scaling in Ethiopian children’s drawings indicates how society and culture around us affects our artistic expression. In 1200 drawings by Ethiopian village children there were some features that seemed similar to my groups’ drawings. One third of Ethiopian drawings contained text as integral element, enclosed within the contours of the drawings as such. On the whole, explanatory texts are much more common than would be found
in most comparable Western material. Within my project groups the majority of drawers also included text when drawing about the 12 rights. If they were unable to write, they asked their friends to write on their behalf. Writings were explanatory texts to objects that were often depicted separately, not as a part of a composition and action that was happening in the drawing. In decorative assignments writing was not included.

Writing is explanation and might be a style that originates from schoolbooks and educative material with illustrations and explanatory texts. Examples from schoolbooks become significant when they are the main available example of visual expression. (Aronsson and Junge, 2000)

I could see that also the assignment lead children to a certain way of expressing themselves. When the assignment was more close to their own cultural environment, they were able to use influences from around them. But perhaps when my assignment was further away from their cultural context, they became confused and executed the assignment with a different idea.

In the history of West Africa the way of drawing human figure differs from the Western way of drawing it. It is suggested that in Western culture human figure and especially its head, with facial expressions plays an important role in the culture of drawing (Cox, 2000). Dr. Maureen V Cox explains about these differences in her studies about children’s drawings of the human figure in different cultures as following:

*Typically in western children’s figures the head is disproportionately large. In contrast some of the African drawings collected by Paget (1932) have very tiny heads with no facial features at all. Now, it may be that the head is not particularly important. On the other hand, the pin-head style may have been “imported” from some other traditional medium in the society, such as designs on pottery. The diversity of styles prevalent in children’s drawings in different societies indicates that there is no “natural” way of drawing the human figure. One particular society may already have a style used in another medium, which children may borrow in their drawings. In societies where there are no pictorial tradition, a child may construct his/her own solution and then this may be copied by others until it becomes a local style (Cox, 2000 p.127-128).*

Among the girls one can find a vast variety of drawing styles and levels of capability to express oneself by drawing. There are girls that draw people with realistic proportions, not missing any important details, but some girls struggle with the pen, producing round torsos with four lines indicating legs and arms, marking bellybuttons with a dot. Some girls depict a person with a stick figure and some use a rectangular torso solution. According to Cox (2000), a rectangular torso is very typical in Islamic societies. Within the group there are found several versions of pinhead-styled stick figures and triangular figures, common to all of them is their flatness and lack of three dimensionality. Some of the girls seem to draw with a style similar to Western round torsos. The group’s vast spectrum of drawing skills and styles may designate a lack of strong pictorial culture in their society. My observations of their society back up the perception that visual culture is more about mediums, such as wood carving, textile art and pottery.
When I interviewed girls, most of them told me that they were not familiar with drawing and that there were no drawing materials available at home when they grew up. Where they come from, people simply do not draw. As children grow up they are not exposed to drawing by their parents or fellow play mates. There is no existing habit of drawing among people. Furthermore, most girls in the groups had not been to schools. They had not had any reason to hold a pen because they cannot even write.

It is important to distinguish the difference between developing the motoric technique of drawing and the development of being able to understand what we draw. (Gardner, 1980)

A child must learn how to use the medium first before she can go on exploring, aiming to express what she sees around her by using that technique. Whether it is building with blocks, producing sound or rhythm or painting with paintbrush, the child must spent several months coming to know the medium. It is combining the natural talents and the cultural setting that give a child the privileges to use the medium (Gardner, 1980). Not all the Finnish people are talented drawers, but I can claim that all of us have spent several months learning to draw and being exposed to pens, brush and paint. Nor all the Senegalese are talented dancers, but I suppose they all have spent several months learning to dance when playing on the streets where they automatically were exposed to rhythms and steps as children. But take a Finn and make him to dance without alcohol - I bet any Senegalese would be surprised how on earth it is possible that a person cannot move her body!

I observed groups did well when it comes to the decorative assignment. Their living environment is not lacking colour, it is not lacking symbols and patterns with complex ornaments. Children in Dakar are out on the streets exposed to the vivid jungle of textiles, colors, decorations and patterns. Many girls have learned embroidery and various decorative techniques at home. Having seen this kind of pictorial material around them gives them ability to produce similar material as they already had a strong idea of what it means to create decorative images. It was wonderful to see girls creating and enjoying with this assignment and they showed more creativity when choosing their motifs and styles as well.

Seeing the girls drawing in the class room, sometimes asking me if they are drawing right, made me see that I had made them approach the assignment from my cultural point of view rather than theirs. When I saw them working with the decorative assignment it showed clearly that it was closer to their own experiences, environment and traditions. When I asked them what is art, they defined it as something creative, often including in their definition the decorative crafts and arts. And music.

Mbéné Seck, 17 years, went to a French school for a couple of years before she changed to an Arabic school. She had never any opportunity to draw at home, but she learned some at school. For her, art is something creative, mostly drawing, but also music. She had been in the group of WCY for a year and said that her father would like her to learn sewing, so that she could work in an atelier or maybe even start one on her own.
Awa Dieng, 15 years, described art to be something creative and beautiful. She went to school until she was 11 years old, but dropped out after her family moved to Dakar from Mbour. She had been provided with drawing materials as a child, she says. There are artists in her family, like her uncle who is a sculptor and her aunt who thought her to do pearl decorations.

Bator Niang, 16 years, had been in the group of WCY around a year and a half and had learned all kinds of skills. For her art is about the arts and crafts they have learned to make, fashion design and decoration, but also music and dance. She had never been to school, neither had any of her sisters and brothers. There are no artists of any kind in her family, and she had never learned to draw. In the future she would like to work with clothes doing pearl decoration to women’s dresses.

Only few of the girls I interviewed said they had been given an opportunity to learn how to draw at home by encouraging and providing materials. Those who had attended school said there had been some art education, and they had learned to draw. Some indicated they had not had any art lessons at school. Art education is included in theory in the Senegalese study programs, but it depends on the school how and how much the school provides it. There is a great difference between public schools and private schools and again between different private schools what comes to art education.

A friend of mine, Fatou Kineh Ndiaye, 20, who went to school up to Senior Secondary level, showed her drawing sketch book and explained about the assignment they used to have in the drawing classes in schools. Art lessons were not many, and the assignments were very theoretical; practice of perspective, still-life and ornaments. Assignments in her drawing block have been evaluated with grades. She has got mostly good grades for the assignments, but in the perspective assignment she had to redo the assignment because she had drawn only one boat instead of two. Assignments seemed to be strictly controlled, theoretical acts, with only little space for individualistic storytelling, expression or creativity. When I discussed about drawing with girls I asked what did those who went to school learn in the school art classes. They told they had learned to draw things like a flower, a car, a cow or a house. It seems that learning to draw meant learning to draw ideas of objects. It was not about catching the essence of different flowers, or noticing the details in them. It was about learning to draw a symbolic flower. Objects were taken under observation one by one, like mathematic assignments. To me, this learning method favors copying and using similar symbolic ways to depict certain things. However, it may have a connection to the traditional use of symbols and decorations.

The aim to depict things in realistic three dimensional way is typical for European art. It originates from European art history. Drawing or painting, according to European standards, is at its finest when it imitates realism. Even if artists during history have broken that rule, the ability to produce realistic pictures has been the measure of artistic talent by art schools and the public. Drawing with shadow and light comes from European art history as well, taken to its extreme by the Impressionist movement in 19th century. Has
our Eurocentric thinking lead us to think that visual art that doesn’t follow the principles of European standards, is somehow less progressed or less talented? As a result of Euro-American cultural globalization, the concept of visual arts in other cultures has changed from its original traditions. This conceptual colonization (Kupiainen, 1994) has lead many cultures to copy from the West, changing, even destroying the local traditions and art forms. Realism, light and shadow are not present in girls’ work in Senegal. Their work is born from different basis and it communicates with a different environment.

In the workshops, moments of learning were observed. Girls learned some drawing and some textile design. The ways I asked them to express themselves might have been strange for them, but then it only means they got new experiences. It was also great to notice that by letting them experiment they showed me what they were good at. It is important to let that happen. It is probably impossible and even unimportant to avoid the clash that is created when two different worlds collide. As long as one won’t try to suppress the other the collision is only for good.
6. THE PATTERN

6.1. Processing the material: Environment sets rules

After the workshops were over I took a huge pile of drawings home with me. I had lots of material. Unfortunately all the good work could not possibly fit in the final patterns. This was first and hard thing to accept and do the selection. Because groups were so large it would have been difficult and unfair to choose the “best” works with them. It was me who was going to do selection and decisions how much could be used in the patterns. To be able to select I had to anyhow scan everything, or at least all the potential material into computer. I did not have scanner of my own. Scanning in the near by Cyber Cafe costed 500CFA (80 euro cents) per document. I had over 50 documents to scan, so that was not an option. Luckily there was a scanner in Enda’s office. In Finland you never think about that your work will be delayed caused by technical problems. Sure there are rare occasions that a printer is out of service, but usually there are other printers available anyhow. In Finland everything works. If I had had a functioning printer and electricity, I could have done the scanning in one working day easily. Scanning process took me over 2 weeks. Why?

The time in Spring 2011 was hard. After Global Economic Crisis since 2008 the economical situation had become difficult. Since 2006 Senegal had countered series of domestic and external shocks and was slowly getting back to its feet. Pace was slower than initially expected due to poor electricity supply, higher food and fuel prices, and a poor rainy season. (World Bank Country Overview 2012) For long there had been difficulties in electricity supply and power cuts got only worse. We noticed this first as regular cuts in the evenings, but soon the cuts were randomly occurring and their duration got longer. Cuts started to appear during working hours, and sometimes took for hours. Working started to get impossible for everyone relying on electricity. Tailors stood outside their ateliers unable to sew. Deep-freezers melted in food stores. Anything run by computers was out of function. It was getting hot, because we were in May. Days were sweaty and long in offices, waiting the electricity to come back. People got discouraged. Guediawaye was far. I had to take bus 36 and travel with crowded car through Parcelles and Golf until I reached Enda’s office in Guediawaye. Cuts occurred locally, so that poorer suburbs and quarters suffered more while some areas seemed not to have any power cuts at all. If I would find out that there was electricity in Enda by the time I left home, it sure was cut when I reached there. If I knew the power was already off, I could try my chances and travel there to wait for electricity to return. If it would return. Often days just went by without possibility to work. But when there was power and things for once rolled, one certainly learned to respect the value of electricity!

When the power was off we often sat and drank ataya (strong green tea) in Enda’s office and chatted. In a way that was very interesting time to hear about peoples opinions. I sensed that people were frustrated about the situation. Presidential elections of 2012 were ahead, and air was full of expectations. Power cuts arose reactions in people and there were demonstrations in suburbs. In a way it was perfect time to work with locally important textiles as well.
Due to difficulties with power it became most convenient to work at home when the power was on. Unfortunate thing happened and my laptop got stolen from our home. Luckily I had a backup with all the workshop material, photos and thesis notes, but all the programs were gone. I had another older computer, but working with it was not as smooth and convenient. It had also bad battery, and basically worked only when plugged in to the socket. During power cuts it did not help me.

My time got short. I was soon returning to Finland for the Summer. My original idea to connect a local printing company with NGO customer didn’t seem possible anymore. Despite the effort we had not managed to find any printing houses in Senegal. The new plan was to print prototypes in Finland and take them back to Dakar later. Prototypes would have only about 5 meters of each pattern. I still tried to find out new information about Senegalese textile industry. I got contact to a textile designer Elise Manneh thorough Elise’s relative who works at Enda. Elise Manneh tells me that she as well is hunting down possible production places, but has not been succeeded. I drive to HLM 3 to meet her and she introduces me her studio and small atelier where she runs also a clothing business. She is print designer. She uses also computer aided design methods, and works very much on same basis as I do when designing patterns. She is Christian and actually used to be a Catholic nun, but gave up of that status to work on her design business. She had to get married, she states, because it was nearly impossible for her as unmarried woman to negotiate contracts and get customers. Often her customers have been Church related Associations, and she used to print in SOTIBA Simpafric before it drifted to difficulties. Now she has no production contacts left in Senegal and she is preparing a journey to Mali to meet some producers there. She has been in contact with a production manager from SOTIBA’s affiliated company in Kaolack. This Kaolack based company seems to be one of last printing companies in Senegal, but extremely hard to reach. Elise and I talk about meeting this production manager together.

Elise manages to get appointment for us. It is my last week in Dakar. Production Manager doesn’t show up on the given time. I have to accept that I will not reach what I wished.

6.2. Visual choices

When I started working I begun to build idea around two different themes that had been most visible in girls’ drawings. Those themes were Education and Work. In terms of 12 rights of AMWCY these themes were including following rights;

“The right to learn how to read and write”
“The right to be taught a trade”
“The right to work in a safe environment”
“The right to light and limited work”

Names of two final patterns are “Jank” and “Jang”. Jank referring to the name of hose hold servants and Jang referring to wolof word to learn.

I decided to choose drawings from as many different girls as possible. I needed both decorative patterns to be used in the background and interpretive motifs, human figures etc to the top.
The inspiration for the style came from Wax Printed fabrics. Those designs have many layers, colors and alignment of motifs are overlapping and unexpected contrasts are used when creating a repeat. I did not imitate wax crackles though, but concentrated on creating pattern using other features characteristic to Wax Prints. I still felt that I wanted to let the pictures tell their story. Even girls had struggled when drawing human figure the pictures they had made were incredible interesting and adorable.

The pattern about education was implemented using colormap of Group Cheikh Wade and the pattern about work was implemented using Group Nimzatt 1 colormap. Motifs and drawings in the patterns were mixed, both containing material from both groups. I followed the colormaps strictly, even it felt that I would have loved to change the colors. So decision of colors in final patterns is made by the groups, but the decisions of relations between colors and their places are decided by me. Also the final layout of each pattern was created by me even though all the drawing was done by the groups. Because there was so many drawings and so much great material and designs, I wanted to create a magazine with photos from workshops and the patterns made by girls. I also handled many of the decorative drawings with computer programs in a way that they became ready-to-use pattern in repeats. These patterns can be easily used by Enda or AMWCY in their other projects if wanted. Actually these decorative patterns media by girls became most interesting part of this whole project in their own perfection. I see definitely a great potential in many of these designs, and got inspired of developing this whole workshop concept further.
6.3. Back in Senegal with the Patterns

I returned to Senegal in September 2012. With me I had 5 meters of both patterns. I made appointment with Madame Sene and she connected me with new group manager Mareme to visit both groups. Mareme is supposed to make a list of members while we visit the groups and I get to present their work and discuss with girls. When I arrive to Enda, Madame Sene shows me pile of drawings that they have been doing with same group. She tells me that girls had insisted more drawing and had got really excited about it after my workshop. Pictures are cute, I think I recognize some drawers behind these art pieces by their characteristic style. I am happy girls have continued to draw. I wonder if they got inspired by repetitive surface designs as well.

In group Cheikh Wade I get a warm welcome. Many of the girls who were in group previous Spring are not active anymore, and some new members have started after the workshops. I present the textiles and everyone is excited about their professional look. They go and search their own drawings in them. I also show the magazine where even more work is presented with photographs. In general girls comment that they would never have believed that their drawings can make a textile that looks like real textiles sold on markets. We memorize workshops and choosing color map. They tell me that first now they understand fully how the color map was used. We take photos and I ask girls who had their drawings in the final pattern to pose with the textile outside. We end up taking group pictures again. Everyone thinks that these patterns have value for their group and potential to be used for campaigns and happenings.

Group of Nimzatt 1 seems quiet. Where are people? Previous week was a holiday and many of the girls had travelled to their home villages. They have not yet returned, and this is why I only get to meet a few girls who were present in my workshop. They are able to remember who’s drawings are used in final patterns and tell me if those girls are active members anymore or not. Reaction is similar to group Cheikh Wade’s. Girls are stunned by the professional look of textiles. They think the colors are beautiful and they really seem proud of their work. Members who are new, and did not know about the workshops seem surprised and think textiles are beautiful. We discuss again about workshop memories and how girls see these patterns in actual use. They think Jang could be used for clothing, especially men’s shirts and other products, while the bigger pattern Jank was appealing in colors and its rhythm.

I leave patterns to Enda. Madame Sene is happy. I also leave the digital material of photos and patterns. They are just preparing to publish a small book about sewing and how to teach it. Some of the pictures drawn by group members will fit perfectly into this publication.
7. SUMMARY

Project workshops became an interesting experience both to girls and to myself. Girls were able to channel their thoughts into pictures that later became real textiles. They saw their own work on textiles and this made them feel proud of their own work. Their own creations, drawings, their message, had become something concrete.

How the others, the surrounding community is going to respond to these patterns will be seen in the future if the groups use these textiles in happenings or campaigns. What is interesting in these patterns in relation to other textiles, is that people are able to recognize familiar symbols and visual language that have been part of their lives as well. These kind of symbols can be style related, a certain way to depict buildings or human figure, or it can be a certain object. It is the power of locally recognizable objects and style that makes the design appealing to people and awakes feeling of nostalgia.

Knowing the history of Wax Prints (Chapter 2.2) and the paradox between their origin and what they stand for today, it actually carries a certain symbolism that these Senegalese girls took over the textile’s surface and told their own story on it. This is why the project in my opinion was so interesting and why I thought it had so much potential to become same time an educational and an artistic achievement.

It was sad and unfortuned to find out that the Senegalese textile industry is in such a difficult situation at the moment.

Afterwards it is natural to think what should have been done differently, or how things would have worked better. Workshops are always unique. I learned a lot and understand now better the culture of visual expression in Senegal. Feedback has been encouraging, both in Senegal and back in my home country Finland.

In Dakar I went to show the results of workshop to musician Ndongo D, member of Daara J Family in their Studio Bois Sacré. Daara J Family is internationally recognized Senegalese rap group, known for its awareness and activity within Senegalese society. Ndongo said he saw a fresh and powerful spirit in the textiles and that he can think many organization will be interested in this concept of local communicative textile design, in case I wished to continue with it. It is possible that the project will be developed further. It would be great to combine these textiles with Senegalese music scene. Because textiles with message need visibility, they need to be worn by people who are visible in the society!
ADT = Aissa Dione Tissus; a Senegalese weaving company

AMWCY = African Movement of Working Children and Youth

AOF = French West Africa; A federation of French colonies in West Africa (1895 - 1960)

ICOTAF = Industrie Cotonnière Africane; Senegalese textile company founded in 1949

IGA = Income Generating Activities

NGO = Non Governmental Organization

Simpafric = Société d’Impression d’Afrique; Sotiba’s affiliate textile company

SOTIBA = Société de Teinture et Blanchissement Africaine;
Senegalese textile company founded in 1952

WCY = Working Children and Youth
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All the photos, if not informed otherwise are taken by Karoliina Halsti Ndiaye

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Map of Ancient Trade Routes in West Africa: Shinnie: Ancient African Kingdoms, 1965 p.66

photo “6 bougies” : Grant Bridgman 2011