

## **The Politics of « Sensitization » in NGO Practices : « Performance » to the Rescue of a Political Critique.**

Guy J Massart<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Independent researcher, Belgium/ Cape Verde

[guy\\_massart\\_us@yahoo.com](mailto:guy_massart_us@yahoo.com)

This paper is based on two cases studies, taking places in West Africa and in which the author was involved as an anthropologist. Both cases show how « sensitization » implies powerlessness of the objects of sensitization, and as an act reproduces it. Whereas performances authored by « target-populations », by subjects, sparked conflict between performers and public and commissioning institutions. That is, the reception of those performances, their effects, the way they were assessed and acted upon by various authorities and actors show amply the political dimensions of performances.

The first case is about the production of what was meant to be a sensitization play against women's excision in Guinea. The play was commissioned by an international NGO. The debates about the play as it was produced collaboratively by its very future performers allow to underline clear power issues set in the categories of the NGOs themselves. The second case considered is an experimental project developed in Senegal : following an ethnographical study, youth and children's groups, ethnographers and artists (rapper, actor, video) worked together during several months to produce performances staged in their communities under the guidance and with the finances of an international NGO.

This paper shows how those performances collaboratively produced but maybe not quite as much as first thought, also produce radical political critiques. From these two experiments, the anthropologist has to take position for s/he is in a political game, one first step is the relinquishing of « sensitization » for collaborative learning processes, a completely different performance.