

## **Contemporary Dance on Stage in Burkina Faso and Senegal - Creating New Publics**

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Since the turn of the century contemporary performance art from various parts of Africa is gaining a lot of attention and recognition within the international art scene. Until recently in Western dominated academic and cultural discourses the category of ‘African dance’ was used to designate practices associated either with nationalistic folklore or local customs and traditions but rarely with art. The current boom of contemporary dance companies from Africa on the stages of prestigious theatres and festivals in the ‘global north’ signifies a change, contributing to a (re-)creation of artistic practices and cultural institutions, as well as to the emergence of new publics in Africa.

Why is this trend gaining momentum now and what is its meaning? The paper deals with this question focusing on Burkina Faso and Senegal, thereby taking into account two major sites of artistic exchange, choreographic production and professional training in the region, namely the ‘Centre de Développement Choréographique – la Termitière’ and the academy ‘École des Sables’. These two centres, which often collaborate, are of particular importance in establishing networks, creating new connections and spaces for artistic practice. The paper tries to identify the (individual and collective) actors involved, assess their (re-)sources and analyse how they are trans-locally related and locally embedded. Thereby it shows not only the obvious influence of European (particularly French) donors and respective cultural policies, but also points to the entanglements with local and national cultural politics promoted by (public and private) actors and institutions in (West-)Africa.

Moreover, the paper examines the signification of contemporary dance performances for local publics based on fieldwork during the festival “Dialogues de Corps” 2010 in Burkina Faso and FESMAN III in Senegal. In the framework of these festivals the political meaning of contemporary dance performances is analysed. With respect to the context of national politics the two festivals present very different constellations. However, in both cases the staging of a distinctive genre of contemporary dance can be interpreted as advancing a form of sociality that is embodied by a well established cosmopolitan urban elite whose cultural resources and symbols are being appropriated by a locally emerging middle class. Still, questions concerning the kind of public addressed by contemporary performance art are hotly debated. To whom it is ‘talking to’ and whose concerns it is articulating? Answers to these questions are pointing to fractions, frictions and tensions in the processes of recent social transformation.