Confronting "The Conditions" of Sénégalese Higher Education: Reframing Representation and Activism

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Introduction

Higher education in sub-Saharan Africa is often described in terms of crisis, or, in the case of Sénégal, "sheer chaos" (World Bank, 2003, p. 2). Increased enrollment rates in the region—the highest annual tertiary education growth in the world at 10 % per year (UNESCO, 2009)—have contributed to this "crisis" in that there have not been concomitant increases in faculty and facilities to meet the student demand. In Sénégal, higher education enrollment increased by 56 % from 2005 to 2010 (UNESCO, 2015). Although Sénégalese expenditures per student for higher education are comparatively high within Africa, at 193.5 % of GDP per capita, the higher education system faces considerable challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, overworked and, at times, under-qualified faculty, dilapidating facilities, lack of resources, and technological barriers (World & World Development Indicators, 2014). Each of these issues combines to form the conditions of the higher education student experience in Sénégal.

In this study, I draw upon two meanings of the conditions of higher education to introduce the structural context on campus. The first meaning is the postcolonial condition, which refers to the intersection of European colonization and contemporary relations of economic inequality and international development in the global South. As Gupta (1998) explains, this condition pertains to "a specific set of locations articulated by the historical trajectories of European colonialism, developmentalism, and global capitalism" (p. 10). The postcolonial condition, in this usage, is an analytical category that captures the position of Sénégal within inter/national political, economic, and social relations that greatly affect higher education policymaking in the country. The second meaning is one in which students at Université

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J.G. DeJaeghere et al. (eds.), *Education and Youth Agency*, Advancing Responsible Adolescent Development, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-33344-1_4

Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD)—Sénégal's largest university—commonly refer to "the conditions" to describe the poor material situation on campus, particularly limited food, housing, and educational equipment. Students use the term, "the conditions," in a negative way to express their discontent with the physical components of campus as well as the psychological hurdles they face, such as the stress of paying for a meal ticket when government scholarships (stipends) are not paid on time or sleeping ten students to a dorm room created for two people. Whether in reference to physical or psychological conditions, it is my view that the use of "the conditions" expresses the material reality of the current postcolonial "location" of Sénégalese society (Gupta, 1998).

On the campus of UCAD in 2011, there was a confluence of events that led to unrest, including a faculty strike, delayed scholarship payments, and the possibility of an *année invalide*, an invalid year. UCAD professors went on strike in the beginning of March 2011 in an attempt to increase the budgets of Sénégalese universities and to advocate for more recruitment of teachers, better wages, increased health benefits, and timely payment for overtime work (English professor, personal communication, 2011). The strike ended in mid-April, only days before the year was deemed invalid due to insufficient classroom time. As a result, students began coursework in April and took exams in June. Two months of schooling—down from the "official" October to June, 8-month academic calendar—left students scrambling to attend courses, write papers, and prepare for exams.

I arrived on campus March 6, 2011, amidst the turmoil at UCAD. On March 10, students clashed with Sénégalese police officers, and this confrontation resulted in the payment of scholarships. On March 15, student members of The Collective, a student organization created by the students in the Faculté de Lettres et Sciences Humaines (Faculty of Arts and Sciences; FLSH) to promote student interests in place of the defunct *amicale*,[1] marched peacefully from the campus (where students live) to the faculté (where classrooms and faculty offices are located) and requested an end to the faculty strike, which was granted a week later. Thus, by the end of my first 2 weeks on campus, there had been two student protests and both resulted in outcomes sought by students. It is within these conditions on campus that I examined agency in this study.

Against the backdrop of these conditions, studies of student agency are particularly important because failed states and decaying institutions "produce new spaces for political assertion and the creation of identities" that affect educational pathways (Durham, 2000, p. 114). Based on 4 months of research in Sénégal and the United States with Sénégalese students studying English at UCAD I will illustrate how students negotiate "the conditions" collectively and how they organized to produce new discourses and reframe the large group protest in order to establish themselves

[1] An *amicale* is a body of students gathering around similar interests, with an elected student governing body. The *amicale* for FLSH is important because it is the largest *amicale* on campus, and the leadership has access to resources, such as tickets to the campus restaurant, which are then distributed to students in the *amicale*. It also controls the disbursement of rooms on campus. The *amicale* is responsible for liaising between a student and the administration if a student has an issue. The faculty of FLSH disbanded its *amicale* in 2008 due to violence during *amicale* elections.

as future leaders. I contend that in the arena of Sénégalese higher education, in which classroom time is severely limited, what occurs outside of the classroom is as important for understanding agency as what occurs inside the classroom. I consider collective organizing and protest activities in which students participate to be political and educational activities. Student activism, therefore, is the entry point for understanding how agency is produced at UCAD.

"The Rule of Failure": Material and Ideological Conditions on Campus

During my time on campus, an unwritten rule of failure was pervasively felt among the student body. As one student articulated: "I will tell you an anecdote: When I first came [to UCAD], someone told me here in the university, the rule is failure. The exception is success" (Abel, personal communication, 2013). This "rule" is evident in the fact that thousands of students fail out of UCAD each year because they do not pass their year-end examinations, making failure, not success, at the university the norm.[2] The rule of failure affects other spheres of the student experience at UCAD, not only in the examination system. In classrooms, in the restaurant, and in residence halls on the campus, students fail to find adequate space for learning, eating, and sleeping due to pervasive overcrowding. Among the factors contributing to these conditions is the consistent increase in enrollment, where during the structural adjustment period in the 1980s–1990s, UCAD's enrollment grew to over 20,000 students without growth in infrastructure. Today, the student population is more than 60,000, so classrooms swell, restaurants deteriorate, and dorm rooms burst at their concrete seams.

Compounding their experience of these conditions on campus, students are also repeatedly represented in the media and by donors in negative terms such as lazy, non-studious, violent, immature, and greedy, particularly when they protest for access to scholarships or better living conditions (Marshall, 2013, 2014, 2015; N.A., 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2014; World Bank, 2003). Students' political and social activism is usually deemed problematic in the popular media and in development scholarship. The substance of their grievances, including poor university management, overcrowded classrooms and dormitories, and government corruption, is rarely recognized in these accounts. This problem of student representation is cogently expressed in Amutabi's (2002) overview of Kenyan higher education, and is applicable to Sénégalese context as well:

> … crises and disturbances in Kenyan universities have received a fair amount of attention in both the popular press and academic circles, although the main emphasis has tended to be upon incidents involving physical violence. Reports invariably suggest, especially to outsiders, that Kenyan universities are occasionally disrupted by a small group of aggressive and anti-establishment students, whose criminal activities are rooted out, punished

[2] There are two exam periods—one in May–June and one in October. If students do not pass their exams for two cycles of July and October exams (four total exam attempts) they are no longer enrolled at the university.

> severely, and then set aside so that the universities can get on with their main business of educating young Kenyans. Yet the democratic nature of the students' grievances and the autocratic nature of the institutions and structures under which they operate, are often ignored. It is rarely reported that university students in Kenya are responding to authoritarian leadership, institutional decay, and management crises at the universities and in the country as a whole. The students are always blamed; in fact, they usually are vilified by the media, parents, politicians, scholars and the public, who fail to listen to their side of the story. The public rarely acknowledges the role that university students have played in Kenya's struggle for democratization. (p. 169)

The vilification of students dislocates student action from the larger political economy, and it denigrates the calls for greater democratic and social justice at the heart of many of these movements. These reports acquit the state of any political or economic wrongdoing and frame the student as a burden to the nation rather than as its future leaders who are enacting agency to advocate for reform.

In Sénégal, the World Bank has referred to students as one of the major blockages to education reforms. For instance, the World Bank (2003) follow-up report to the Sénégalese Higher Education Improvement Project noted that "the resumption of violent student protests fueled by outside political interests led to a reversal of the many earlier ambitious reforms" (p. 2). In addition, the student movement in Sénégal has been labeled as "agitating" and "destabilizing" (Bathily, Diouf, & Mbodj, 1995, p. 369). Consistently, metaphors of violence are used to describe student activism (Konings, 2002). This negative framing conflicts with the more positive view of students as the future leaders of the nation, which is how African students were framed in the early independence period by development scholars and national governments. Reflecting on this change in representation of students, Zeilig (2009) argues that students are viewed in either positive or negative ways, as "a vanguard for democratic change *or* troublemakers manipulated by political elites" (p. 68).

Conceptualizing Student Agency: Cultural Production, Discourse and Social Justice

Informed by Bajaj (2009), Davies (1991), and Walker and Unterhalter (2007), I define agency as one's ability to recognize and act upon multiple subject positions within a given context and to choose if and how socio-cultural practices determine identity and action. The first influence on this definition is Bajaj's (2009) view of "transformative agency," which focuses on how a person conceptualizes her ability to impact society. This focus on an individual's ability to impact society is important for understanding how agency affects student's social and cultural influence in Sénégal. The second influence is the discursive constitution of agency. Davies (1991) argues that agency and freedom cannot be produced without understanding discursive relationships. Her work underscores the discursive nature of identity formation and creation by first identifying how one is being produced discursively within a cultural system. Lastly, I draw on Walker and Unterhalter's (2007) capability framing of agency, which frames people as individuals with valued goals that drive their decision-making within a context of social, cultural and environmental conditions.

My definition of agency is intended to link directly to cultural production theory, as discursive relations and culture are key elements in how students respond to the cultural system, in this case, university life. There are three important ideas in cultural production that I draw on for this study. The first is the notion of "confronting ideological and material conditions" (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996, p. 14). Secondly, the conceptualization of agency is active and creative beyond the spaces in which "confrontation" occurs, including change at the household and societal level. Lastly, cultural production contends that agency is contingent on subject positions and social circumstances. Sites of education, such as universities are, from this perspective, particularly rich for exploring how social and material circumstances like "the conditions" at UCAD help to produce certain kinds of identities among students.

Cultural production theory arose as a critique of the deterministic view of schooling presented by reproduction theories and illustrated how students could be agents with the ability to transform their schools (Willis, 1981). For critical education researchers, the potential for both oppression and emancipation lies within the process of schooling. Drawing on Freire, many critical theorists see the process of becoming educated as a process of "conscientization," or becoming aware of one's political, economic, and social realities with an eye toward changing them (Bajaj, 2005). Cultural knowledge, then, is the knowledge produced through meaning-making practices in a particular context (Jasper, 2005). Through academic lectures, student organization meetings, conversations with other students, sleeping, eating, living, participating in student protest, playing sports, and the other myriad of student practices, a cultural knowledge of student life is produced that raises awareness of the social positioning of students and how to transform that position.

Critical theory enables an analysis aimed at achieving social justice or equality (Anyon, 2008) and was useful in this study because it illuminated power dynamics that often led to the suppression of student voices in various arenas (policy discussions, political discussions, on campus advocacy). Suspitsyna (2010) refers to social justice as "the silenced discourse" because of the privileging of "national economic competitiveness" discourses in the global arena (p. 67). Similarly, Samoff (2009) underscores the dominance of economic, technical terminology in higher education reports and how this suffocates discussions of social justice within higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. As Samoff elaborates:

> As they work in an aid-dependent settings, often without being fully aware of the transition, African educators and decision-makers discard education as the vehicle for national liberation, for reducing inequality, and for constructing a new society in favor of education that consists of upgraded facilities, more textbooks, better-trained teachers, and improved test scores. (p. 147)

Social justice research moves beyond a focus on production-function models typically used in higher education research and critically approaches the topic of human capabilities. A human capability approach (Sen, 1992) allows us to move beyond the dominant assumptions of the human capital model that continue to drive higher education research and policy making, and instead allows us to examine "what education enables us to be and to do" (Walker, 2006, p. 163).

In addition to cultural production of students' lives within a social justice and capability framework, drawing on Davies (1991) allowed me to keenly focus on how discourses operated in the university and how agency was enacted in light of competing discourses. There were two primary discourses circulating at the university. The first discourse is what I call, "the educated person." Students discussed the roles as well as the rights and privileges of educated people in Sénégal. Several ideas were prominent, including: the educated person is socially just; she resists injustice and racism and seeks peace in the world; and, if an educated person works hard, she is deserving of a job and the right to ask for privileges. The second discourse, "the rule of failure," mentioned earlier, shaped the context of university life and the ways in which the discourse of "the educated person" took form. The interplay between "the educated person" discourse and "the rule of failure" context in which students lived their daily lives underpin the conceptualization of agency and the discursive and cultural structures in which to examine how agency takes form. Within this framework, this chapter is guided by two research questions: (1) How do students negotiate their social-cultural and material position in society amidst negative representation and competing discourses? and (2) How do students enact agency through protest and activism?

UCAD: The Compelling Qualitative Case

In order to understand these competing discourses and how they affected students' agency, I designed a qualitative case study, drawing on ethnography and critical analysis. The first part of the design consisted of 2 months of in-country fieldwork utilizing in-person interviews, participant-observation, document analysis, and students' journals. The second part of the design consisted of 2 months of data collection from the United States; during these latter 2 months, I engaged in document analysis and depended heavily on cooperative journaling, phone interviews, and Facebook conversations with students to address findings from the first 2 months in the field.

The focus of the study was the student body in the English Department, the largest departments at UCAD, which is housed within FLSH,[3] the largest of the UCAD faculties. FLSH students, and English students in particular, deal with many of the worst of UCAD's physical conditions and are very involved in student activism. As students in the largest department, they deal with overcrowding inside and outside of the classroom; additionally, these students face very limited job prospects upon graduation due to large graduating classes and already saturated markets.

I gathered data on students'[4] home region, religion, gender, and ethnicity, as well as contact information and used maximum diversity sampling to identify

[3] Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

[4] I established three criteria for involvement in this project: (1) Student was currently enrolled in the UCAD English Department at the time of research fieldwork; (2) Student had studied at UCAD for at least 3 years; (3) Student had participated in student protest at least once.

participants that represented regional, ethnic, religious, and gender diversity within the English department. Five male and five female students, ages 21–28, were chosen. I conducted multiple interviews[5] with each of the students for a total of 41 student interviews. Additionally, I conducted interviews with three English faculty members to better understand how they perceive agency and if they attempted to cultivate student agency in their classrooms. One of the faculty members had been previously involved in student activism at UCAD, described in Zeilig and Ansell's (2008) reserach and Zeilig's (2009) research, and was very helpful in providing insight into the history of activism at UCAD. I also conducted a survey in collaboration with a professor that was administered to Masters level students. The survey was completely voluntary and I received 180 completed responses.

To answer the research questions, this chapter analyzes these data to illustrate how agency was shaped and demonstrated when students at UCAD found themselves between the proverbial rock of deteriorating material and ideological conditions on campus and the hard place of misrepresentation when they attempt to advocate for themselves in a volatile political environment.

Confronting the Politics of Education via "The Educated Person" Discourse and *In Loco Cura* Critique

Students at UCAD confronted the politics that engulf higher education in "chaos" and crisis (World Bank, 2003) through collective action. First, students organized themselves in order to meet their own needs in the midst of administrative neglect and outside political influence on campus. The "educated person" discourse facilitates students' notions of responsibility to care for one another and for their country, a concept captured in the phrase *in loco cura*. Second, as a collective endeavor, students confronted negative representations and reframed activism by intentionally advocating for their needs in nonviolent and socially just ways.

"The Educated Person" Discourse

"The educated person" discourse derives from notions that the university-educated individual has the responsibility and moral fortitude to engage in future leadership and service to the nation. This orientation to their community impacted student actions on campus. Students identified as intellectuals with an obligation to serve their communities and ultimately the nation and they began such service by helping

[5] Interviews were conducted in English because students were fluent and proficient and desired to practice their English with a native speaker. Interview citations throughout this chapter do not reference student names so that students remain anonymous, as requested.

fellow students whose needs were not being met by the university staff. The discourse was acted upon by students as they envisioned a leadership driven by social justice and they upheld the responsibilities they believed to be representative of an educated individual. One student described these responsibilities as filling the gaps left by others who are unable or unwilling to serve the community:

> What is an intellectual? It is someone who fills a gap. Filling a gap fills a very important role in life. Before leaving this world, you have to leave some very important things. If I leave this world into the other world without doing anything, for me, I think there are other people who paved this way. You understand. I could not speak English [if not for those people before me]. Who taught me this English? My professors and speaking with other students. So, [filling in a gap] is very important. (N'deye, personal communication, 2011)

Students frequently linked being an educated person to responsibilities beyond those at the university when they spoke of leading their communities and, ultimately, the nation. The educated person, in this sense, had certain expectations placed on her shoulders that were framed in terms of moral obligations. This moral underpinning was used to contrast the responsible, educated person with the person who is powerful or successful in terms of wealth accumulation but morally bankrupt. One student summarized this moral dimension of the educated person as follows:

> What I see as good things, for example, be serious, responsible, don't spend your time lying, respect others. If a person is older than you, you have to respect him. If a person is younger than you, you have to give him respect also, in order to gain his respect and then try to help him, because sometimes they need your help because you're elder than him. You have more experiences than him. Sometimes, it's your duty to help him to grow, or to become more intelligent or to gain more experiences. (Moustapha, personal communication, 2011)

Giving back intellectual and material talents to the community was one of the major components of the "educated person" discourse, which drives the discursive critique of *in loco cura*.

In Loco Cura*: Student Organizing for Community Provision*

Before the 1960s, United States on-campus higher education policy was driven by the theory of *in loco parentis*, meaning "in the place of a parent." From this perspective, the university took the responsibility for student conduct, discipline, and moral and life guidance. A related term (that I coined to apply to student life at UCAD), *in loco cura*, means "in the place of administration" or "care," and both terms applied to the university setting at UCAD but with students, not paid staff, playing this role of caring parent. Students organized to fill the gap left from cuts to administrative staff due to structural adjustment and downsizing of higher education budgets, or the lack of hiring adequate numbers of staff when enrollment expanded. They also filled the gap created by university officials who did not work their posted hours or when they neglected student requests. The lack of administration and care was one of the primary manifestations of the material conditions at UCAD. Students confronted this problem by creating their own formal and informal systems to advocate for student needs, such as providing informal orientations to new students and

distributing rooms in the *pavillon* (student dormitories), in collaboration with COUD, the campus administrative staff. In sum, *in loco cura*, was used as a discursive critique and an active response to the lack of student support at UCAD.

One way students modeled *in loco cura* was by filling in for the limited number of faculty members who are burdened with too many classes. In the English department, for example, there were 39 faculty members for almost 7500 students, too many students for the faculty to provide proper advisement, teaching, and administration. Additionally, frequent faculty strikes limited classroom learning opportunities for students. Students filled in these gaps by organizing study groups, planning academic events through the English Club, and by utilizing resources outside of the university, such as those available at the West African Research Association (WARC)—a research center located blocks from campus. Each of the students in this study was also formally or informally tutoring younger students, standing in for professors and earning a small amount of money. Primarily, students utilized consistent study groups to learn the material needed to pass the examinations, as one student explains:

> If we do not see the teacher or the courses are not sufficient, we can go to [Internet] sources for research and then after that we form groups of students, and most of the time these are formed during the examination period. And, we discuss about a given subject. You are supposed to bring your knowledge from the classes and the Internet. It is a rendezvous of giving and taking. […] We've been doing it since our first year. With friends you can discuss something you can't with the teacher. Because of the great numbers of [students in] the amphis, we do not have the possibility to ask questions so it is in these gatherings that you ask your friends what you'd like to understand. So, it worked in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year, and now we're in the 4th year. (Tapha, personal communication, 2011)

Because classroom time is limited, proactive scholarship and supplemental learning opportunities are required to overcome the "rule of failure." For example, The English Club hosted events for English students, such as grammar competitions and study sessions that allow first- and second-year students the opportunities to learn from older students in the English Department. While such supplementary learning is not unusual in higher education, the students participating in this study did not have the regular instruction (inside or outside of the classroom) or homework assignments, and therefore, they believed they must meet together *in order to* overcome this gap and pass the courses.

The problems of insufficient instructors and instructional time were compounded by the lack of accountability by the administrative staff. COUD, the administrative body at UCAD—not including faculty—was comprised primarily of political appointees, who contributed to the politicization of the campus. Additionally, as the ruling party appoints many of the administration, students lamented that their needs were often cast aside in pursuit of a political agenda. In this environment, students were frequently treated poorly in their interactions with administrative staff. The comments of one participant, after a particularly emotionally disruptive experience with administration, reflected on nepotism and corruption in Sénégalese society:

> For example, if you need something in the administration here at UCAD, you pay with your time and we have no time to waste. Instead of coming at 8:00 AM, they do not respect the hour and the hour is very precious. … [administrators] don't respect what they should do in

> their office because they have no experience, or no higher education. I think this is the main reason [for this behavior]. (Abel, personal communication, 2011)

This student identified several key tenets of the *in loco cura* phenome at UCAD, including administrators not taking seriously the work that they had been assigned and displaying a lack of care for UCAD students. Students lost a lot of time by waiting in lines at the restaurant, waiting for scholarships to be disbursed, waiting for classes to begin, and, as seen here, waiting for administrative staff to fulfill student requests. The shortage of administration, and their inadequate preparation as higher education administrators contributed to very little student support, which created the environment of *in loco cura* and essentially contributed to the "rule of failure."

Collective Student Leadership and Activism

In addition to the *in loco cura* actions taken by students, one of the major ways they enact agency to confront these conditions is through activism. The educated person discourse, with its moral leadership and social justice underpinnings, underlied the promotion of a "new" nonviolent collectivism for UCAD students. This activisim is exhibited through *Le Collectif* (The Collective), which was established in 2010 in an effort to re-establish the FLSH *amicale*. There is no official membership for The Collective, but their involvement was apparent during the March 15, 2011 rally when 600–750 students protested. As representatives standing in for the disbanded *amicale*, The Collective's group leaders committed themselves to an ideology of advocacy based on nonviolent leaders such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. They utilized these ideologies in interviews about nonviolence as well as in large group settings to rally student support. Recalling the reason for the March 15th Collective-led march, a student stated:

> [The Collective] stood up so as to go and speak our minds, as we represented students. So as not to stay there with mouths and eyes shut during this situation and I think it has been a good advancement to the [faculty] strike because they stopped it and asked students to resume classes. (Oumar, personal communication, 2011)

Students used the language of human rights and social justice to frame their activism ideology—they viewed the protest as an opportunity to care for students' rights to education and a valid academic year, modeling *in loco cura*. The success of this nonviolent approach contrasted with years of violent protest on campus. According to one professor:

> So, [the students] are right, they have the right to organize themselves to defend the interests of the students, but then it should be on a brand new basis which is that no one should promote violence in this space because this is a space in which we should all be defending our ideas using the brain and not using the strength of brutality or force. It should be the strength or the force of the brain and nothing else. So if we all agree on that, I think we could all live in this university, in this space, with peace, live in peace, live in harmony, for the three components: the students, the teaching staff, and the administration, which is something that is very important for all of us. (English professor, personal communication, 2011)

This assertion of their rights as citizens and students vis-à-vis the politics of education was most apparent in the realm of activism. Students, for instance, had advocated for the right to protest and demonstrate off campus. However, this was not possible due to police restrictions; once a demonstration, even if peaceful, moved off campus, the police had the right to arrest students. The following conversation with a student illustrates this perspective of students' rights and the need to advocate for increased freedoms from the government:

> For example, we are in a democratic country and we don't have the right to march, to celebrate. Because if you march outside of the campus … we can do it inside the campus because the police don't have the right to get into the campus, but if you do it outside the campus, the policeman will beat you or catch you and take you to the police. These kinds of things are rights, it's our rights that the authorities are denying. They don't want to give us the right to express ourselves, the right to march, the right to do things that we have the right to do. (Tapha, personal communication, 2011)

This student intentionally framed this conversation as a discussion of rights, appealing to Sénégal's democracy as a reason for students demanding access to resources and defending their rights in order to open up new freedoms for Sénégalese citizens. Students saw this demand for their rights as a responsibility of the educated person, and aligned this demand with both the historical traditions of intellectual leadership in Sénégal, as well as with the discourse of universal human rights.

Re-presenting the Large Group Protest: Nonviolence and Diplomacy

Drawing on this human rights discourse, students were reframing advocacy-through-politics on the university campus. Students commonly confronted the narrow representation of their motives and found pathways to succeed within the higher education system despite the “rule of failure.” In this final section, I focus on activism to show how students reframed the large group protest, which had often been used to misrepresent student collective action. As a participant in the March 15th protest organized by The Collective, I witnessed how their activism was reframed as nonviolent large-group advocacy.

As the protest began at 11:00 a.m., students were gathering and organizing themselves, to march around campus. They finally ended up at the Rector's office to file their request for the end to the faculty strike. My field notes begin with the gathering of students at Pavillon A:

> *In front of Pavillon A, on campus, the march is about to begin. The students will proceed from the campus to the faculté and onto the Rector's office. A student on a microphone appeals to identity asking “Qui sommes-nous?” (Who are we?) while imploring students not to divide on this issue. Another student gets on the microphone and says, “Come out of your rooms and participate and discuss this situation!” I ask a student, “Why are you participating in this march?” and he says, “Because otherwise, I am here wasting my time learning”. He is referring to the* année invalide *that could occur if faculty members don't end the strike. There are at least 500 students and the march has not yet begun.* (Field notes, 2011)

From the beginning of the rally, students appealed to their identity as students. The protest was based on an intellectual framing that students must unite and they "should" advocate for their own needs. They positioned their concerns within a discourse of the educated person in contrast to one of violence, such as the throwing of rocks and shouting of profanities in the protests that had occurred only 4 days earlier. Additionally, a community orientation was emphasized, encouraging students to stick together in an effort to fight back against the approaching *année invalide*. There was one clear goal throughout the protest: Fight the *année invalide* and continue education for the year. In contrast to the 1988 and 1994 protests in light of potential *invalide* years, The Collective protest was based in peaceful ideology and a rights discourse.

> *The march has now begun and students are chanting, "Nous voulons etudier!" (We want to study!) As we march down the road between Pavillon A and C, police officers are blockading the exit located by the women's dorms. Journalists are interviewing students as we walk. Most of the participants are male students, maybe 2–3% are women. What an interesting sight! Students demanding to study when many of them do not pay to study. The difference between the march and the strikes just four days ago is so stark: this is so calm and peaceful. There is no police presence on this side of campus. As usual, they only gather at the entrance to the campus near Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop.* (Field notes, 2011)

The protest began with students chanting, "We want to study!" From the beginning, before they started walking towards the Rector's office students made their intentions clear. The outcome of this rally was to end the strike and begin classes for the year.

Not only did students protest for primarily academic reasons, but the media also took notice. Student leaders of The Collective were able to speak to reporters and researchers and challenge their representations of students as violent and selfish.

> *The leader of the Collective holds up a peace sign and the crowd explodes with cheering and clapping. He approaches the microphone, taking his time to speak, eloquently articulating the reason for the strike using French, Wolof, and English. He references UCAD as the premier institution of West African intellectualism. He [identifies/notes] student representation as violent and aggressive and says "not today", then begins a chant "Nous sommes etudiants!" "Nous sommes etudiants!" "Nous sommes etudiants!" (We are students!) Students wave their student cards in the air as they chant. He makes multiple references to students as the future of Africa and calls out despotism, nepotism, and corruption on campus and in Sénégal.* (Field Notes, March 15, 2011)

Again, the leadership of The Collective was very aware of their representation in the media and addressed it directly in the speech made by the leader. In addition, the leader spoke in three different languages to reach the multiple audiences present at the protest, illustrating their engagement with a larger global discourse about students' rights and positioning them as the "educated persons." The leader also framed his argument within a Sénégalese historical context, recalling the history of UCAD in a proud way, and then calling upon their collective student identity. He ignited students' passion as future leaders and critiqued non-moral leadership in the nation:

> *He now turns his attention to the professors and asks them to end the strike. He chronicles the history of UCAD proudly recalling that UCAD began as the only faculty of medicine in*

> *West Africa. Other references include Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela, and MLK for their nonviolent approaches to social justice. His oratory skills are excellent. I feel myself becoming more excited as he speaks. His voice intonation is similar to Barack Obama's, but even more resolved to his point. He shouts (in English), "We need education, They [the world] need Africa!" He then addresses students again, "Don't ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country!" He then presents a letter to the Rector and asks him to pass the message on to President Wade.* (Field notes, 2011)

Throughout his speech, the leader of The Collective emphasized the nonviolent approach to conflict resolution and recounted the long history of UCAD as a leading West African institution. He also made an international reference, placing Sénégalese students in the greater global political economy, and he directed his request to President Wade to appeal for a continued school year.

Making Sense of the UCAD Case: Re-presenting Student Activism

The 2015 protest provides an example of student activism in the form of political and educational participation at UCAD through which students are attempting to re-present themselves in relationship to the nation. The use of the educated person discourse worked to place the protest in the larger picture of the Sénégalese political economy, and to advocate for leadership within the community and the nation. The motivation for community organizing was social justice concerns, rights of students, and reasonable governance in order to ensure that students continued to have access to education and a valid school year. Confronting the representation of students as uninterested in their studies and disobedient of the rules, students in this study believed being educated comes with certain responsibilities. Namely, they were committed to contributing to national development, building their communities, pursuing social justice, ending violence, and upholding moral leadership in the process. Students wanted to fulfill duties to their communities and the nation. They felt that they could be current and future leaders, and more importantly, they acted on these ideas to change their representation as students and to promote broader social justice in a potentially transformative way. In 2012, following the success of the nonviolent protest, the FLSH *amicale* returned and students in FLSH now have a representative group with access to resources, such as meal tickets and dormitory disbursement. This successful activism, in turn, affected students' beliefs in their ability to contribute to national development and their conceptualizations of the nation and their future within it.

This re-presentation of their activism had three important effects. First, by taking a nonviolent approach to activism, students challenged the notion that it takes violence to "grab the attention" of the government on campus or in the suburbs of Dakar. Second, the March 15th protest did not take up material concerns, such food or scholarships; instead it revolved around academic issues, thereby limiting the influence of

political parties who work through student organizations that distribute dorm rooms and meal tickets. Third, the localization of the rally was very important. The protest stayed on campus and dealt with an on-campus issue in campus terms, rather than engaging the police or national authorities. Zeilig and Ansell (2008, 2009) have shown how Sénégalese students use their proximity to national politics to engage national leaders. In this case, there was an academic focus that allowed students to deal with their issues without disrupting the rest of the city. By remaining "local" in their activism, students were able to achieve their goal, impressing faculty and administration in the process because they did not cause destruction to the campus. This march demonstrated a different kind of student activism—nonviolent, local, and focused on learning—and it had the potential for long-term impact on the broader political sphere during a period of youth-led political activism across the continent.

Implications of UCAD's Student Activism for Agency Research and Theory

Agency in educational research has tended to focus on two types of resistance: oppositional and transformative (Bajaj, 2005). Additionally, in Africa, scholars have used agency as a category for examining African youth and their relationship with schooling (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005; Diouf, 2003; Sharp, 2002). Oppositional resistance usually focuses on action taken against a dominant force or structure, as in the cultural production notion of confrontation. Transformative behavior, instead, includes the concept of "possibility" beyond resisting a dominant force, such as a student starting a trash cleanup day on campus (Bajaj, 2005). As Bajaj (2005) points out, agency in educational literature does not always have a positive connotation because it is used primarily as an analytical category to explore resistance to domination regardless of the outcomes of this resistance, rather than focusing on the form of the resistance undertaken and the impact it has on self and others. Conceptualizing possibilities within resistance allows us to theoretically move beyond oppositional resistance and consider agency as neither pre-determined nor prescriptive.

Within the low-resourced and politically intense environment of UCAD, students enacted agency in productive ways that shaped the student experience. Confronting their representation and using activism showed their ability to recognize and act upon the conditions and discourses that shape their lives as educated people. This moves beyond the student belief in transformation (Bajaj, 2005) to acting on this belief. The examples in this chapter highlight the importance of discourses as they "acted" upon and shape the conditions of students' daily lives. By confronting and reframing these discourses and utilizing a nonviolent approach to protest, student actions have the potential to serve as a model for citizens who seek change within the country.

Students were not only made into objects and subjects through their activism, they were also active participants in creating their own discourses and reshaping those available to them. Students represented themselves in particular ways based on the discursive, material, and political condition in which they lived even though these representations were often subsumed within dominant media representations of students as negative societal actors. As Torfing (2005) summarizes:

> Identity is always constructed within a particular discourse. However, the formative order of discourse is not a stable self-reproducing structure, but a precarious system that is constantly subjected to political attempts to undermine and restructure the discursive order. (p. 154)

In this way, discourses, rather than *concealing* power in social relations, actually *contribute* to the exercise of power in social relations (Nash, 2010). They construct the range of ways most people see the world and themselves in it: it 'governs' the conduct of people and groups even though it does not completely determine it. In brief, discourses operate "on [people's] own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct" (Foucault, 1980, as cited in Rabinow, 1984, p. 11). The negative discourses and representation of students had a material effect on students and their confrontation constructed a new way of moving forward as a student community, impacting identity and community organizing. The re-presentation and enactment of the "educated person" discourse took place through participation in these re-presentative events, such as the nonviolent protest; they shaped and reshaped their conceptualization of agency and their identities through these productive and socially transformative events. Drawing on Davies (1991), understanding how students change, resist, and appropriate discursive constitutions allowed me to see how individuals positioned themselves in social situations and therefore allowed me to better understand transformation and change within UCAD's "precarious system." In other words, by focusing on student discourses, scholars can better understand how students conceptualize and participate as "educated persons" and link this discursive constitution to their actions in order to understand their motivation for activism.

Utilizing the capabilities framing of agency (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007), I was able to understand how access to resources— representation in the *amicale*, a valid school year and classroom time, and the right to protest—enabled students to "function in and through education" (Walker, 2006). A capabilities framing of agency focuses on the freedom to choose and to act on one's beliefs and goals. This focus allows scholars not only to concentrate on the outcome of agency enactment (activism, in this case), but enables us to understand freedom (the ability to act on one's belief and goals) and unfreedom (the constraints on choice). For the students in this case study, standing up for what they perceived to be "right," reflecting and acting on their values, and organizing were motivated by their goal to become the future leaders of the nation. By understanding the resources available to them and how to access them, students were able to achieve their short-term goal of a valid academic year and, eventually, the re-establishment of the *amicale* and representation at the university.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the ways Sénégalese students enacted agency to confront "the rule of failure," a set of issues including difficult living conditions, high-stakes exams, limited faculty interaction, and financial struggles, in order to succeed at the university level. An analysis of the means through which students enacted agency, including the large group protest and student organizing, provided insight into the active and discursive production of student identity and representation as well as how students negotiate their future role as leaders of the country. Three primary theories informed this analysis: transformative agency to examine how student action was driven by belief, discursive constitutions of agency to understand how students confronted discourses, and the capabilities framing of agency to illuminate how access to resources affects agency. The findings reveal how students reframed the traditional means of accessing educational and financial resources—the student protest—in a nonviolent way in order to change the discourses that negatively affect their educational experience and create new venues to promote their interests on campus. The chapter provides insights into how agency operates outside of the classroom, the role of discourse in agency studies, and how youth agency operates in resource-limited educational environments.

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