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## From the Field

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**from the field**

*photo by  
David G. Nicholls*

*Madonna blows a  
kiss to passing  
motorists from the  
back door of a car  
rapide.*

*Dakar, West African metropolis and capital of Senegal, is a transit hub in the broadest sense. The streets are crowded, and not only with private cars, mopeds, trucks, city buses, taxis, and cars rapides: Dakar is the nexus of a bustling traffic in images in which graffiti, murals, advertisements, T-shirts, and the like converge. Operators of cars for hire contribute to this visual economy in striking ways. The cars rapides—the ubiquitous privately operated minibuses—are painted with bright bands of color and decorated with ornate patterns, motifs, and slogans. These include eyes, pineapples, flowers, and religious sayings like “Alhamdulillah.” A lexicon of specifically American icons has also been developed. These include the Nike swoosh, the U.S. flag, the eagle, Marilyn Monroe, and Malcolm’s X. Madonna also makes frequent appearances on the streets of Dakar.*

**David G. Nicholls** teaches at Bilkent University in Turkey and is the author of the forthcoming *Conjuring the Folk: Forms of Modernity in African America*. He was a Fulbright Senior Lecturer in Senegal for 1997–98.

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