

“The Role of Culture in Senegalese Muslims: A Betrayal of Faith or A Tool for Peace and Political Stability?”

M. SOULEYMANE MAIMOUNA DIOP

Enseignant Vacataire à L'Ecole Supérieure Polytechnique- Doctorant Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines-
Laboratoire de Litteratures et Civilisations Africaines Université Cheikh Anta Diop Dakar (UCAD)

Abstract:

One of the rare models of Islamic practice to have attracted the attention and curiosity of religious analysts, historians and social scientists is Islam as practiced in Senegal by the majority of Muslims. Indeed, far from being considered as a betrayal of the prophetic Sunna and the Sharia, this model reflects the abyssal depths of the culture and allows the Senegalese to be themselves and then believers. What the Senegalese Muslim does is that he is always in tune with his socio-cultural values while remaining faithful to religious (cult) practices, hence his ability to resist Arab and French cultures and draw from them a syncretic model that guarantees social peace and political stability without equal in the world. This expresses the tendency of a perspective with an assimilated and dominated culture (colonization) or that of a perspective integrated into culture (Sufi Islam).

Keywords: Eight Culture-syncretism- Islam- betrayal- peace –stability –model-Senegalese.

Introduction

Since the World trade bombings in 2001, the progressive spread of extremism and radicalization around West Africa and the Westerners' decision to launch a crusade against Islam, the last revealed religion has become a real concern for both Muslims and people with different beliefs. Senegal seems to escape this trend of radical Islam even though Fundamentalist movements have been existing in the country for more than six decades. The threats of extremist groups in the G5 Sahel countries also seems to be far from destabilizing Senegal. It is true that the Senegalese Muslims tendency not to get indulged in extremism and radicalism has had numerous explanations ranging from the prayers said by the glorious and pious Muslim leaders, who founders of brotherhoods or not, claimed their spirituality, their piety and their capacity of transcending materialistic issues with their spiritual closeness to God. This is according to their disciples an undeniable fact that we, as simple analysts, are not ready to deny too. However, other reasons can explain why Senegalese Muslims have a different view of Islam and are eager to keep living in this haven of peace and stability. Consequently, we would like to analyze deeper the fact by asking ourselves the following questions: What is the place of culture in the Senegalese Muslims' faith? To answer that precedent question taken as hypothesis, we'll need to deal with the following ones first. How did the Senegalese culture respond to the arrival of Islam and later that of Western civilization embodied by French colonizers? What Senegalese cultural behaviors impact their Islamic religious practices? Are such practices a betrayal of their faith? What advantages can arise from putting culture before faith? To what extent can the Senegalese political authorities take profit of this way of doing to foster peace and stability? And finally, can the Senegalese model of Islam be offered to the world as a way of counterbalancing the Westerners' negative views on Islam.

The answers to the above questions will help us clear up this problematic. We have prioritized a methodological approach that highlights a double-edged perspective on culture theorized by those supporting 'a cultural-free perspective' and those defending 'a culture-embedded perspective' (Pedrotti, Edwards and Lopez, 2009¹). This means today two main views are maintained by scholars when elaborating the rationale for cultural research and particularly how it interferes with religion which is also taken as cultural artefact. The researchers with culture- free perspective takes Culture as being able to transcend particular cultures and politics (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000²), whereas those with a culture-embedded perspective argue that human functioning can only be viewed from within a cultural context (Constantine & Sue, 2006³). With this in mind, those arguing for this second position pretend that human functioning never grows in a vacuum, 'it has to be understood in a given cultural context rather than in vacuum' (Christopher, 2005; Constantine & Sue, 2006; Pedrotti et al., 2009⁴), because cultural values are omnipresent at multiple levels in every Senegalese behavior and interaction, particularly in most Senegalese people's religious practice (Sufism) hence impacting the

¹ Pedrotti, J. T., Edwards, L. M., & Lopez, S. J. (2009). Positive Psychology within a Cultural Context. In S. J. Lopez, & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 49-57). New York, NY: Oxford University

² Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive Psychology: An Introduction*. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>

³ Constantine, M., & Sue, D. W. (2006). Factors Contributing to Optimal Human Functioning of People of Color in the United States. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 34, 228-244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000005281318>

⁴ Op cit, Constantine and Sue, 2006.

social and political life. Pedersen (1991)⁵ refers to it a multicultural perspective, which ‘combines the extremes of universalism and relativism by explaining behavior both in terms of those culturally learned perspectives that are unique to a particular culture and in the search for common-ground universals that are shared across cultures’ (p. 6). Hence, the last part of our analysis which offers the mix of culture and Islam in Senegal as being a guarantor of social peace and political stability and a possible model to the rest of the world.

Composed of two parts, this analysis will first lay emphasis on the dynamism of Senegalese culture which has been to a double-edged sword: Arab-Berber and Western civilization. This will lead us to dealing with the cultural syncretism that goes along with Islamic practices in Senegal and know whether Senegalese Muslims in their greatest majority betray the Sunna and Sharia or voluntarily adopt this way of living their faith for the sake of peace and political stability.

I-The dynamism of culture in Senegal

In Senegal, the dynamism of culture can be measured in various ways. Since the middle of the 11th century up to the modern times, what was known as the Senegalese territory underwent many influences that mingled with the local traditions flourishing along the Northern coasts occupied by Toucouleur Kingdoms. Those influences and invasions were brought by the Arab-Berber traders who through the Trans-Saharan commerce landed on the Senegalese soils and introduced Islam under the form of cult and culture. Some centuries later, the Western people arrived along the Senegalese coasts with the aim of dominating, uprooting people and culturally assimilating them. The local populations faced all those invasions with dignity and pride despite the progressive imposition of the colonial administration and the spreading of Islam around the country touching the Center, the East, the South East and finally the South. Whatever may have happened, the traditional pagan beliefs and local cultural practices survived at least in syncretic practices giving birth to a ‘hybrid’ model which symbolizes Senegalese pride and genius up to now.

1.1. Senegalese culture at the test of Western civilization

Senegalese people think, act and behave accordingly to their culture. The first and most apparent thing in them is their being profoundly attached to the supernatural, the invisible beings, the myths and mythology, the inner world, the charlatans, the dibias, the blessed liquids, the social hierarchy (casts) the daily alms and animal sacrifices, the fact of casting spells on each other, the traditional naming ceremonies and weddings and so on. Thus, when the white people arrived in Senegal, their first reflex was to make cultural assimilation a reality by bringing up their two swords (church and school). So, they more or less succeeded in counterbalancing that huge weight of Senegalese cultural consistency and omnipresence through the teaching of their language and thoughts. But what is more striking is that the fact that even in their churches and schools, it was not rare to see the colonized having certain attitudes that could remind the white man that though assimilated, they were not totally stripped of what was in them, for them and by them. Their aim was to colonize the Senegalese minds and then turn them into what they wanted them to be. However, embracing Islam meant avenging the fact of colonial domination. Those cultural antagonisms were determining because ‘the Senegalese society was changing, adapting and adjusting itself to the new norms but in the long run the ethnic groups or most of them kept up their identities and reference frameworks’⁶

The school of ‘the sons of chiefs’ was one of the means by which the colonial administration started its assimilating policies as stated by Helene Grandhomme in many of her works, particularly in her thesis⁷. The political and judicial organizations assigned to the local people was a way for France to impose its socio-cultural frameworks and the Islamic ‘Medersas’⁸ were controlled, submitted to a hard regime, the masters selected and were required to write letters of acceptance or recognition for them to keep teaching the Qur’an and the Sunna and traditional education. Professor Rawane Mbaye⁹ analysed in his PHD thesis L’Islam au Sénégal how the French schools started spreading in the country and the recruitment strategies varied from blackmail, to corruption or harassment. Other colonial rulers and ideologists like Paul Marty started preaching Black Islam to widen the gap with the East where Islam came from. In the first volume of *Etudes sur l’Islam au Senegal*¹⁰, he pleaded for a ‘Black Islam’. In fact, Black Islam is one of the colonizers ‘concept to keep their ‘divide and rule’ policy meaning cutting the umbilical link between the Arab world and the African colonized countries; that link is simply Islam and the Arab culture that embodies it.

Later, after the Second World War, the colonial policies’ aim was to guide the colonized to the modern world but they will finally constitute relevant intellectual elites which they took for granted for Western causes. However, the latter even if well trained in Western culture remained genuine African and Senegalese nationalists and pan-Africanists such as Mamadou Dia, Cheikh Anta

⁵ Pedersen, P. B. (1991). Multiculturalism as a Generic Approach to Counseling. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 70, 6-12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1991.tb01555.x>

⁶ YORO. K. Fall. ‘ Crises socio-politiques et alternatives religieuses au Sénégal vers la fin du 19^e siècle, *Revue Sénégalaise de philosophie* 5,6. 1984, p.69-78

⁷ Helene, Grandhomme. *La France et l’Islam au Sénégal, la République face à une double altérité, le colonisé et le musulman*, B U numérique, Université Anta Diop, 2008.p.

⁸ Medersa is the name given to Arab- Koranic schools by the French colonial administration during colonial times

⁹ Rawane, M (1973). *L’Islam au Sénégal*, Thèse de Doctorat, Dakar, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines.

¹⁰ Paul. Marty. *Etudes sur l’Islam au Sénégal*, Paris, Leroux 1917, Vol 1.

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DIOP, Leopold Sèdar Senghor to name but a few.

1.2 Facing Arab-Islamic culture

Almost the same thing happened with the arrival of Islam in what was known as the Senegalese territory in around 1044. Several of the Toucouleur kingdoms were converted to Islam but it was utterly difficult to deprive them of their cultural beliefs and practices. For centuries, not only did they teach Arabic culture and grammar in the process of learning Coran but they also tried to denature the Senegalese Muslims but such results have never been achieved. Arab countries did the same thing as their European counterparts to assimilate the Senegalese people. They offered University scholarships to Senegalese youngsters, funded the numerous Muslim associations in Senegal and Muslim – inspired non-governmental organizations came closer to the Senegalese brotherhoods. They also contributed in splitting the spiritual authorities by creating rebellion and Crisis of authority within the Brotherhoods; and they helped the emerging leaders to foster their own authority and create a new leadership capable of manipulating the youths.

However, one cannot forget that the approach of Sufism is so flexible that it does not necessarily undermine the cultural beliefs embodied by the followers. It teaches them adaptation and not blind adoption. So, Sufism has been at the basis of the close and not opposed relationships between Islam and Senegalese culture. This is proved by the fact that a set of written rules as well as a system of law derived from the Sharia and Sunna were promoted and replaced the old mindsets. This process reinforced the Senegalese Muslims sentiment of belonging to a homeland. So, Alphonse Gouilly summed it up this way: ‘Islamic society, in short, was forever freed from the tremendous pressure of the dead upon the living’¹¹. So, it becomes evident that the acceptance of new laws that regulate family life, marriage, descent, succession, land owning and property caused profound changes for example the matrilineal descent was replaced by the patrilineal one. So, Souleymane Bachir Diagne in his article *Outlines of a critique on the discourse on culture*¹² says:

There were equally widespread changes introduced by Islamic laws on civil duties, contract law and real estate regulations. People swearing on the Coran to seal reciprocal commitments. Rules of commercial lending that recognized neither interest nor usury became a normal part of economic life. In sum, Islam brought a new legal, social and political culture which made profound inroads into the dynamics of social life’.

All that was made possible by the guidance of Sufi leaders who were able to adopt and at times adapt Islam to their disciples’ cultural realities

The most legitimate question to ask is to whether Senegalese Muslims are betraying the pure religious principles of Islam as defended by the Wahhabi and Salafi members who spend their time criticizing the Sufi rituals and rallies that are frequently taking place in Senegal. In all cases, the defenders of Sufi Islam would say no. It is quite logical to think that as long as the worship practices are not innovated (5 pillars of Islam), any other innovation would help the believers live in peace with their ‘self’, their milieu, and their existence. It would be a redundancy to say that the cultural values highly determine human beings as the latter have an ethical relationship with them.

II-Cultural syncretism: a provision for peace and stability

The role of culture in Senegalese Islamic practices has always raised very intense debates as it is generally known that Islam does not originate from West Africa and that some aspects of culture are totally in contradiction with the Muslim religion but others can be majestically syncretized with Islam to create an active synergy that can suit the Senegalese political, economic and even social contexts.

II.1. Sufi rituals: an expression of culture pride

It can first be noted that Senegal commonly known as the ‘Land of Teranga’¹³ has a secular culture of peace, tolerance and solidarity. This culture mingled with the Arab-Muslim cultural practices and the Western legacy of colonial times has given birth to a way of practicing Islam that doesn’t fundamentally betray the basic principles of the religion. On the contrary, it strengthens its humanism and contributes to its universalism.

First of all, let us precise that the philosophy being at the basis of all this specific way of practicing Islam is Sufism which can be considered as ‘an epic of faith’¹⁴ according to Roger Garaudy. The notion of Senegalese model of Islam can be justified by the fact that belief and culture are intimately linked. In Senegal, the development of Islam coincided with the colonial times thus the cultural invasion of our country. Obviously, Sufism constitutes the brotherhoods ‘strategy to make their followers appropriate Islam as a double-edged sword. They made them consider their religion as something of their own and also make it a barrier against the cultural assimilation processes undertaken by the Western school and church. The first element that clearly comes from Senegalese

¹¹ Alphonse Gouilly, *L’Islam dans l’Afrique occidentale Française* Paris, Larose, 1952

¹² Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Outlines of a critique on the discourse on culture* in *ESSAYS IN STATECRAFT*, edited by Macoumba Diouf, Codesria Book Series, Dakar, 1983, p 278-279.

¹³ Land of Teranga refers to the popular belief that Senegalese people are welcoming, altruist and pacific and the country is commonly named under that denomination.

¹⁴ Roger, Garaudy. *Promesses de L’Islam*, Paris Seiul, 1981, p47.

traditional culture is the integration of music, dance and folklore in the practice of Islam. The use of songs, chanting, and poetry can be derived from a high degree of Senegalese sensuality and emotion. We can illustrate this point by recalling the different poetic and prosaic verses written by Ahmadou Bamba and Elhadj Malick. Those poems reflect the Wolof repertoire of declamatory speech, similes, metaphors, allegories to name only a few. Although their texts were written in Arabic, they were in quasi conformity with the rhythm and musicality of the Wolof language and this is more visible when those poems are read or sung by people like Abdoulaye Niang for Muridiyya or Elhadj Mbaye Dondé Mbaye for Tijaniyya. All the literary devices used in those songs or poems came from the Wolof repertoire of declamatory speech, rhymes, diction, tone and length of verses. In Serigne Touba's *Matlaboul Chifaa i*, he says: ‘bismi illaahi, yanmoulouhaa i, billaamanaa i, wa lantihaa i.’¹⁵ This shows the Wolof 5 syllables verse which was very popular at that time. He uses it voluntarily or involuntarily to attract the masses and bring them into what they already know. Sheikh Musa Ka is another Wolof singer and Muslim poetry specialist, the richness of his poetry in Wolof to shed light on Ahmadou Bamba's teachings, personality and achievements and his attempts to promote Islam through Wolof poetry is illustrative of his genius.

Moreover, in the Saloum land, the musicality given to Baye Niassé's poems by the different singers of the order clearly shows the adaptation of those songs to the rich traditional repertoire (Ngoyane-Ndaga) of the former griots of the region. Let's not forget that language is not only ‘a means of communication but also a career of culture’¹⁶ as Ngugi stated it in his work *Decolonizing the Mind*. Another cultural aspect that can be found in Islam is the Senegalese people's fidelity to their traditional clothing. Instead of systematically abiding by the way Arabs are used to dressing, Senegalese Muslims live with the remarkable pride of wearing African traditional bubus (Sabadoor) and trousers (Salopettes) that are neither tight nor too short. With this in mind they conform to Sharia without being obliged to look like Arabs. Some Tidiane disciples do copy Moroccans or Algerians' clothing but the phenomenon is not really dominant among Senegalese Tidianes. However, Mourides are recognizable by their Baye Lahad (very loose bubus named under the third Caliph who used to wear them). They also tend to speak in a low voice and very fast which also reflects the deeply rooted way of speaking in the Baol area.

Moreover, in the Murid brotherhood, the most devoted ones called Baye Fall express a total rootedness to their culture and their rejection of the imperialist culture. For that they turn their hair into dreadlocks, wear multi-colored bubus, use drums in the African style, ask for alms in the streets and assiduously but blindly obey their masters to whom they pledge allegiance. This practice of blind allegiance can be explained by the fact that their master Sheikh Ibrahim Fall also blindly obeyed Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba his master. Consequently, *Dieufe Ndigeul* is their most well-known attitude. It consists of proudly executing right after the order is given without the possibility to contest or complain. The act of ‘*Djebeulou*’¹⁷ has always been denounced by some Muslims as sins of association which is considered the most serious sin a Muslim can be condemned for but it remains popular in the Murid brotherhood. All those acts are ‘culturally Senegalese’. They are derived from the traditional management of the kingdoms with the ‘subjects’ witnessing total obedience and submission. This means that if we live our faith like Arabs, this will finally kill it as we will never live that faith profoundly. Consequently, that faith will be incomplete and turn the believers into intolerant beings.

With this in mind, the creation of brotherhoods constituted a fertile and ideal breeding ground for the emergence of a radical faith, its deepening, its sustainability and humanization.

One can still lay emphasis on many other cultural behaviors specific to the brotherhoods in Senegal. At first, Murids always try to let their “Senegality” appear inside their Islamic faith. In other words, they show up their pride to be Muslims deeply attached to their traditional cultural values, systematically rejecting cultural invasions (Arab, Western or others). We can illustrate this point with the Baye Fall dressing: a big belt around the waist, multi-colored clothes made with African fabrics, braids and sometimes naked feet. This is a typically African style.

Moreover, the Baye Lahad has well been vulgarized by the Hizbut Tarkhiya¹⁸ movement. It consists of a very loose and smart bubu reflecting Senegalese elegance and decency. Murid women put a veil on their heads but not on the Salafi way that they consider too linked to the Arab world so their clothing is almost totally in line with Sharia while keeping a Senegalese authenticity. It is also important to see the way Murids speak haltingly with a rural Wolof reflecting the Baol-Kajoor area. Ahmadou Bamba's poems are read in a Wolof tone though written in Arabic. Murid disciples do their best to link Muridism with their environment and their culture. For all this, Ahmadou Bamba can well be considered as a nationalist as his strategies were meant to help Black people not to be culturally assimilated and be proud of their values. He therefore deserves the title of the Pioneer of Negritude long before Senghor, Césaire and Damas. How could Bamba convince so many disciples if he didn't embody the status of a freedom fighter? The Almamis and Sheikh Umar Tall were admired and praised by Toucouleurs simply because they expressed their faith a clear

¹⁵ Mbacké, A.B. (1895). *Mawaahibou Nafih*, calligraphy made by Serigne Abdourakhmane Mbacké Darou Khoudoss in his reproduction of Ahmadou Bamba's poems, p 4, 1895.

¹⁶ Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in Africa*, 1986, p 58.

¹⁷ ‘*Dieubeulou*’ is the act of entrusting your life and destiny here and beyond to the Sheikh who promises you paradise.

¹⁸ It is a movement inside the Mouride brotherhood which is distinguished through its dressing, declamation of Ahmadou Bamba's poems and its dynamism to contribute to all the order's undertakings.

representation of their culture.

As for Tidianes, they are culturally characterized by elegance and eloquence, two traits that are fundamental to distinguish them. Indeed, Tidianes are open-minded intellectuals who have always shown their mastery of oratorical art and their opening out to the other's culture. So, contrarily to Murids, Tidianes are more modernist and mingle the Wolof culture with Arab-Maghreb ones in an original syncretism. Late Cheikh Tidiane Sy Al Maktoum, his son Moustapha Sy and Cheikh Barham Diop are clear examples of eloquent leaders who could keep the audience's attention for long hours. It is also said that Elhadj Malick Sy and Baye Niass used to dress elegantly, which we can believe thanks to their pictures. The Layenes' cultural behavior can be distinguished by the way he or she chants the name of God moving from right to left and from up to down as a sailor in his canoe. Moreover, Layens totally dress in white, particularly during their ceremonies (Tabaski, Korite and Mame Limamou's appeal). The color can be expressed as the expression of purity because we haven't found any explanation in the Lebou culture. Limamou's predication as the 'black prophet' reflected his Lebou culture with the values of dignity, courage and resistance.

We can also think of the Qadr's cultural behavior. Here, it would be more interesting to deal with the local branch of Qadriyya led by late Sheikh Bou Kounta recently replaced by Sheikh Becaye They are half-Wolof half-Moor. Most of the time, they speak both languages and imitate Moors who incarnate the Mauritanian branch hence their frequent use of tobacco. We all know how fond of Tobacco Moors are. The Qadriyya members also beat a big drum called "tabala", which is a West African musical instrument even though they consider it as sacred thus accepted in Islam.

However, the reformist movements enriched Senegalese Islam with imported behavioral models

even though this is not well appreciated by Senegalese people, we think that it is a new contribution to the Senegalese authentic model and as such deserves to be mentioned. Those reformists are mostly dressed like Arabs, sometimes greet like Arabs and often use the Arab tone when speaking Arabic. In a word, we can say that except the Fundamentalists' option to behave like Arab Muslims, all the other components of Islam in Senegal share the use of songs and drum beatings. Songs have always played a tremendous role in mobilizing the masses around Islam and in promoting the brotherhood communities in Senegal. Poetry and drum beating have popularized Islam in Senegal because before Ahmadou Bamba and Elhadj Malick's time, Islam was elitist and hadn't reached the masses yet.

So, culture and brotherhoods are closely linked in Senegal. It would also be interesting to ask ourselves a very important question which is to know if the Prophet of Islam asked us to be Muslims and behave like Arabs. We really don't think so because we are convinced that no faith can be sincerely and deeply felt out of the believers' cultural realities. If it is the case, it can lead the believer to fanaticism which is the basis of extremism. Indeed, extremism is more developed in countries where people view Islam as an end and not a means. So, they are unable to adopt it without forgetting who they are and what they should make of their lives. Senegalese Muslims' dressing is in accordance with Islamic principles, so they often wear African traditional bubus keeping their 'Africanity' while remaining good Muslims. This even allows us to talk about the 'Senegalisation of Islam' as the space where Islam was born (The Hijaz) as well as the time are transcended. The Senegalese Muslim leaders did their best to make Islam theirs. These fundamental elements have been adapted to the Senegalese situation. Today Touba constitutes a place of reference for Senegalese Muslims and even beyond. The Grand Magal of Touba¹⁹ is yearly celebrated by Senegalese Muslims, particularly Mourides though it is a practice that has never existed during the prophet's lifetime and is said to be recommended by Ahmadou Bamba himself. This cultural appropriation also goes to some visible traits such as the use of beads, architectural forms of our buildings and amulets. Talismans let us contemplate the science of numerology which is said to originate from Africa. Those amulets and blessed liquids are not recognized by the members of Fundamentalists movements for example but they totally belong to the cultural universe of Senegalese people who resort to them during exams, for casting spells to each other or simply for protecting themselves. Another important thing is the way Senegalese mosques are built using mud or mud bricks. Such building materials were also used for the construction of houses. Culture is also very influential in the celebration of Muslim festivals like the Tabaski, the Korite and the Tamkharit during which there are more cultural practices originating from Senegalese traditions than those of worship. The sheep's horns are often kept and used for mystic practices whereas men wear women's clothes and vice-versa in the event of Tamkharit and the most apparent cultural practices can be seen during Korité where Muslims offer parts of their dishes to Christians. It is also noticed that wrestlers, job seekers, future brides and grooms resort to mysticism to achieve their goals. Even weddings and naming ceremonies are often celebrated in total cultural syncretism particularly by Muslims that is to say the way those events are celebrated recalls Arab, Western as well as local cultures. Muslim brotherhoods are getting adapted to urban realities. The fact that the existence of bars, dancing pubs, music, football industry, bets... is not denounced by the Muslim leadership does not mean that they are legal in Islam but expresses openness towards the modern artefacts of culture. Can we even so consider these muting processes as a betrayal of Islam? We would opt for a negative answer given that the quintessence of Islam is summed up in 4 basic elements: the profession of faith, good deeds, the preponderance of truth and the acceptance of destiny. Apart from those cited above, Islam adapts to and is adopted by the different cultures who got appropriated to it and abrogated it through various ways.

¹⁹ The Mourides' yearly gathering in remembrance of Ahmadou Bamba's departure to exile. This departure far from being a defeat constitutes the beginning of his triumph up to his coming back in 1902.

II.2: Culture mix for peace and stability

Since their arrival in Senegal through the trans-Saharan trade, brotherhoods have most of the time rejected violence which according to the Sheikhs leading them does not match their vision of Islam.

However, what is commonly noticed is the way the disciples of those communities are educated. Their first followers' behavior lets appear a certain distance with the materialistic life that is to say politics, prestige and blind enrichment although such attitudes are progressively changing. Brotherhoods cultivate nonviolence which is the only way to guarantee pacific relationships between the different components of the society. This rejection of violence can be seen in two aspects that we will try to highlight in the following lines. The first aspect will tackle the different interventions and contributions the brotherhoods' spiritual leaders have made to calm down political, social and economic tensions inside Senegal and secondly, we'll also see their involvement to the ongoing of world affairs as far as the fight against radicalization and the research of global peace is concerned.

Inside Senegal, brotherhood communities have always educated their disciples to be moderate and respectful towards the state, the Christians and also all the other components of the society in order to strengthen the foundation of our nation. A religious example is the launch of an interreligious and intrareligious dialogue that has made the social space pacific and peaceful. They have always been the first promoters of democracy, freedom and civil rights.

However, the first question that comes to my mind is: can Islam be compatible with democracy?

Those who say no do not really know what Islam is or they are in line with the so called Western democrats who in their attempts to diabolize Islam find it unable to promote democracy. So, Senegalese Muslims have never opposed any principle of their constitution except when it seriously hinders their freedom of cult. The fact of being Muslim and Senegalese is not really a problem and does not prevent them from finding the balance between their citizenship and their religious life. This doesn't seem to be the case in Egypt for example where 'The Muslims Brothers' could not conceive living in a laic State while being Muslims. Finally, Caroline Fourest stated that 'they got indulged in extremism to conquer the power and set up definitely an Islamic State'²⁰. As a result, Hassan Banna's movement finished by integrating the rest of the world using terrorist violence to destabilize those so-called laic States in order to impose Islam everywhere.

In Senegal, such situations have been avoided thanks to the enlightened contributions of the spiritual leaders known as Sufis who taught their disciples to respect their political authorities let alone the latter don't act or speak contradictorily to Islam's interests. Thus, they used Islam as a means to make the traditional Ceddo practices collapse by theorizing equality (the end of castes and hierarchy), the social promotion of marabouts whatever their social belonging, the practice of mass agriculture destined to consumption and their acceptance of Imam Ghazali's theory that Sufis need science and vice versa. Malick Sy urged his followers to be knowledge seekers and established a lot of Koranic schools and decentralized his action by promoting some of his disciples. Such promotion was under the form of posting the disciples in remote places where they would keep vulgarizing Islam in Senegal. He also recognized the white man's domination telling his disciples to obey the new rulers of the country as facing them would certainly end up in failure. In that, he strengthened their citizenship by telling them to be in accordance with the conquerors as long as their freedom of cult is respected by the latter.

At any rate, Islam has contributed to the building of the Senegalese Nation-State, deeply rooted in its culture. After El Hadj Oumar Tall, Ahmadou Bamba, Elhadj Malick Sy and so on, their disciples, sons or simply heirs also played their role to maintain Sufism at its place, particularly during the decolonization processes. Some prominent religious figures such as Sheikh Ibrahima Niasse, Sheikh Gainde Fatma, Elhadj Amadou Dem, Elhadj Seydou Nourou Tall, and Sheikh Mouhamadou Moustapha and so on worthy of being heirs of the first pioneers peacefully helped the Senegalese Muslims to fight against the alienation of Senegalese identity. They have transmitted an immense patrimony full of spiritual and artistic legacy even though that Sufi heritage is sometimes viewed as innovations or changes that Salafis call 'bidha'²¹.

Marabouts in general try to guide their disciples to the path of redemption and the purification of their souls. This is so true that they are in line with the Koranic verse stating that 'that which is in heaven and that which is on earth belonged to God'²². They also try to make them acquire spiritual light and knowledge even though some of them finish by alienating them in order to better dominate them. However, the acquisition of spirituality can make the disciple venerate his marabout. In both cases, the latter conscious of having a great control upon his follower can help them avoid indulging in extremism despite the fact that they can also use that dominant position for their own individual interests. In Senegal, the role of Islam to control the masses cannot be minimized. As the youth is vulnerable, the marabouts controlling them should lead them towards the rebirth of the society. It will be an opportunity for those young people to be the levers for the economic development of the country. Religion should be a development factor that promote peace and tolerance. The two most well-known preachers and not warriors are Ahmadou Bamba and Elhadj Malick Sy who used their brotherhoods to conquer the masses. Today, their legacy is assumed by the current leaders of

²⁰ Caroline Fourest, Frere Tariq, Paris, Grasset 2004, p85

²¹ All the innovative practices brought to Islam after the Prophet's lifetime

²² The Qur'an: English meanings and notes Sura 2, verse 284, Saheeh International, 2010.

Mouridiyya and Tidjaniyya whose high influences on the populations remain intact.

In addition to that, faith is so sensitive that it should be dealt with carefully. However, Senegalese

Muslims are proud of being so without overcoming the limits of mutual respect demanded by citizenship. In other words, if faith makes people lose their reason, it can lead them to radicalism and intolerance. That's the reason why the Senegalese political leaders should be more careful for the continuity of this State. In one of his speeches, President Sall stated it like this: ‘When we see new forms of veils appearing in our society, we know this is neither in line with our culture nor our society’²³. He also added that the country should not “for political reasons tolerate a certain kind of discourse”. We should therefore propose the standardization of curriculums in Islamic schools to ensure radical teachings are eliminated. It is obvious that today warning signs should be taken more seriously as whatever people's high degree of commitment to peace or respect to their country's institutions, unemployment which is progressively rising can be a factor that makes extremism flourish in this country. Today, young adults are all looking for a job that is quite inexistent. Another factor that can deteriorate their high degree of citizenship is the progressive decline of agricultural industry encouraging villagers to come to urban areas or emigrate to look for work. All those combined factors can cause people forgetting their nation's interest to be tempted by radicalization.

One possible solution comes from the Senegalese Sufi orders which control the biggest majority of Senegalese believers. They are so significantly well-organized that they can contribute to stabilizing the society and this explains why Senegal has one of the most stable political system in Africa. Those brotherhood Sufi communities are so influential that they can be the levers on which the government lean to label the youngsters' behavior towards the established order. This can be illustrated by the various interventions the marabouts had to make in Senegal's political history. In May 1968, the then different brotherhoods' leaders had to intervene to put an end to the demonstrations, strikes and riots that could destabilize President Senghor's government who finally recognized the outstanding role played by the marabouts to end that fierce social crisis. However, during the 1988 presidential elections, the Mourides' leader, Sheikh Abdoul Akhad Mbacke tried to save Abdou Diouf, saying that those Murid disciples who refused to vote for him had betrayed Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of the brotherhood.

Fortunately, some Murid disciples voted for the opposition. This is just to show to what extent citizenship can be at times stronger than faith in Senegal.

Furthermore, the Senegalese Muslim guides have never attempted to conquer the power and establish an Islamic regime even though Muslims are by far more numerous than non- Muslims in Senegal. When Cheikh Umar Tall²⁴ tried to create an Islamic political party in Senegal for the establishment of an Islamic State in Senegal, the political authorities refused and no complaints or emotion was noticed after that decision as most of them think that a radical practice of religion can be a delayed bomb which can explode and put a country definitely into political instability and chaos. Other examples can be drawn from daily life from the past up to now. One has constantly seen through history very remarkable facts that can highlight that point.

First, during colonial times, some Senegalese marabouts accepted to send their sons, relatives or followers as ‘tirailleurs’ to help France in the first and second world wars. On the contrary, they tend to define religion as being nonviolent and positive. So, most of them think that what unites people is by far stronger than what makes them different. These are evidence that Senegal has a secular culture of peace without which no solidarity would be possible between the different ethnic groups and particularly between the different religions.

With this in mind, Blondin Cissé's very insightful work *Confréries et communauté politique au Senegal* published in 2001 clearly shows the interdependent relationships between Islam and the political regimes in Senegal. He explains how the two dominant brotherhood communities in Senegal (Tijaniyya and Mouridiyya) are organized. Their attempts to dominate the socio-political space putting sometimes pressure on the political powers and willingly accepting to be

instrumentalized by the latter. Aware of their political strength, they politically manipulate the masses towards their own interests. The Tidiane and Mouride Sheikhs in Senegal profit by their social standing to launch political actions either by being themselves political actors (late Sheikh Mamoune Niassé, Moustapha Sy, Serigne Abdou Aziz Al amine...) or by supporting a political leader's action. It is the case of Serigne Fallou Mbacké, Serigne Babacar Sy, Sheikh Abdoul Akhad Mbacké who supported the first presidents Senghor and Diouf. So, Senegalese Tarikhas in addition to their mystic values also get involved in political actions.

However, all this can be positively appreciated as marabouts prepare their disciples to political commitment by helping them discover who they are, what they need, in a word their human conditions. By doing so, they made their followers become free and critical, teaching them how to take part in the ongoing of politics in their country. Today, the Ndigueul which is an order given to the disciples to vote for a given candidate is losing its force now. Senegalese citizens vote for who they want as citizens of the State and not as disciples blindly responding to a marabout's claims. Thus, Blondin Cissé quotes Fabienne Samson who in her article *Une nouvelle conception des rapports entre religion et politique au Sénégal* says :

‘Cette responsabilisation des individus génère une immanquable sensibilisation à leur rôle de citoyen ; progressivement, ils prennent

²³ President Macky Sall's inaugural speech at the international meeting on Terrorism, Dakar November 2017.

²⁴ Cheikh Oumar Tall fought for the implementation of political Islam in Senegal. His book *Islam: Engagement politique et démocratie was an appeal for an Islamic revolution under the form of the Iranian one*.in 1979.

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conscience du monde qui les entoure, des problèmes liés à leur environnement et au désengagement croissant de l'état (...). D'autre part, la ville, lieu de métissage et de diversification politique et culturelle semble la mieux indiquée pour connaître l'émergence d'une société et d'une individualisation des populations qui doivent gagner leur autonomie afin de lutter quotidiennement pour exister²⁵

“This responsabilisation of individuals makes them good citizens, they become aware of all that is around them, of their environmental problems and of the progressive decline of the State's authority. On the other hand, cities are the places well designed to responsabilise citizens and lead them to autonomy so that they can live for a daily survival”²⁶

This shows us that our brotherhoods have stopped imposing a unique thought but let their disciples integrate politics passively and actively. We can thus consider the brotherhoods as being a strong and determining component of the civil society in Senegal and as such have well participated to the stabilization processes of the country. Senegalese brotherhoods can consider themselves as political forces that are not compelled to always be against the State provided the latter does not jeopardize the Muslims' interests. When some marabouts happened to lead the Senegalese citizens' political choice, they were at times unsuccessful because they never dissociate the disciple and the citizen. It is as if Senegalese people trust their faith to marabouts but fully assume their political life. Blondin Cissé states it like this: ‘les sénégalais sont devenus plus critiques envers leurs marabouts et veulent maintenant prendre leur destin en main’²⁷

The Senegalese Muslims have become more critical towards their marabouts and they want to lead their own destiny now.²⁸

This situation makes us think of the impossibility for those marabouts to impose the parties of Islamic obedience or those they support in Senegalese elections even though they sometimes weigh on the balance. Such outcome means a reinforcement of democracy and this is where the secret that keeps Senegal in total cohesion and stability lies.

Conclusion

To conclude we can say that the appropriation of Islam through cultural syncretism is taken as a betrayal by the defenders of literalist Islam known as ‘pure’ and theorized by Ibn Taymiyya²⁹ at the very beginning of Islam's spreading around the world. So, the Senegalese model of Islam is the well the outcome of the meeting between three cultures. The first is the local cultures particularly (Wolof, Pulaar, Serer, Diola, and Soninke), the second is the Arab-Berber civilization and finally the Western civilization brought by colonization. In our opinion the syncretic practices surrounding Islam in Senegal do not fundamentally change the Islamic religious principles (Sunna and Sharia) but has just adapted it to its realities in order to practice it more convincingly (meaning a synergy between self and faith). We can therefore draw people's attention that the marabouts' political role on their disciples have been constant through Senegalese history. They have always been between the State and their disciples and the latter have often avoided to put their faith over their citizenship. This allowed them to have a stronger and bigger influence on the masses and at times caused the Republic to kneel down before the religious authorities and the citizens to recognize them as social regulators. Through cultural appropriation by Sufi orders, Islam has thus become not only a balancing power ensuring political stability in Senegal but it keeps reinforcing social cohesion in the country. The dominant religion in Senegal also reveals a way of calling for new relationships between faith, culture and the future of human beings for which it embodies a vital project in a context of decay of Western models.

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²⁵ Blondin Cissé, *Confréries et communauté politique au Sénégal*, Paris, L'harmattan, 2001, p 4. 45

²⁶ My translation

²⁷ Blondin, Cissé, op cit, p. 92

²⁸ My translation

²⁹ A member of the Hanbali School, Ibn Taymiyyah's iconoclastic views that condemned numerous folk practices associated with saint veneration and the visitation of tomb-shrines; made him unpopular with many scholars and rulers of the time, and he was imprisoned several times.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Baay Fall: Disciples of Cheikh Ibra Fall whose spiritual master is Ahmadou Bamba. They reflect Senegalese cultural pride.

Bidha : innovative practices or thoughts that are said to come after the Prophet’s lifetime.

Ceedo: Those practicing pagan cults and beliefs

Dieubeulou: it is entrusting your life and destiny here and beyond to the Sheikh who promises you paradise.

Layènes- Disciples of Mame Limamou Laye

Mourides: Disciples of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Ngoyane: Traditional music style in the Saloum region in Senegal.

Ndaga: A Senegalese dance and music style.

Ndigueul: the act of executing an order right after it has been given by the Murid Sheikh.

Sabadoor- A bubu made in African style.

Salopette- a trousers in Senegalese style

Senegality: typical to Senegal.

Sufi: Someone whose heart and soul are enlightened by his devotion to God. He is said to be very close to God.

(Sunna and Sharia): The two feet of Islam ritual and judicial laws. Nobody has the right to invent new laws. But for some jurusconsults, it is not forbidden to interpret them as jurisprudence.

“tabala”: Abig drum used by Qadriyya disciples during their celebrations.

Tidianes: Disciples of Cheikh Ahmad Attidjani with several sub-branches in Senegal.

Talibes: Beggars in the Wolof language

Tirailleurs: African soldiers who were to Europe to defend France during the Second World War.