

**Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA)
Working Paper Series**

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in Senegal?**

Alexander Thurston

Working Paper No. 09-005
March 2009



**BUFFETT
CENTER**

The Roberta Buffett Center for
International and Comparative Studies
Northwestern University

Why is Militant Islam a Weak Phenomenon in Senegal?

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Abstract:

This essay asks whether the existence of a viable public sphere hinges upon the banishment of religion to the private realm. While some scholars have suggested that the encounter between “public” Islam and democratization inevitably produces political collapse (as in the case of Algeria), the author contends that the case of Senegal, a Muslim majority country and functioning democracy, challenges this assumption. Senegal’s lack of widespread radical Islamic political activity is often attributed to cultural factors—the supposed “peaceful” character of Senegalese Islam and the influence of the Sufi brotherhoods. He argues that we must look instead at the concrete social, economic, and political factors that have made co-existence of Islam and democracy possible in Senegal. He focuses on two Islamic movements—the AEMUD (Association of Muslim Students of the University of Dakar) and the Moustarchidine—both of which have the potential to develop radical political agendas and challenge the state. But in both cases, the state’s willingness to negotiate with and give these groups space (with the exception of a brief period of repression of the Moustarchidine) has prevented their radicalization. He concludes that the Senegalese case demonstrates that Islam’s emergence in the public sphere does not automatically undermine democratization; moreover it suggests that various relationships between Islam and democracy are possible. This calls into question the assumption that Islam must be “privatized” in order to maintain a viable public sphere and viable democracy.

Alexander Thurston is a master’s degree candidate at Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. He worked in Senegal as a Fulbright Scholar from 2006-2007.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference held in Dakar, Senegal in March 2007 on the role of Islam in the Senegalese presidential elections, and in Evanston, IL, USA in May 2007 on the theme of “Islam and the Public Sphere in Africa.” Both conferences were organized by the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), Northwestern University and supported by funds from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

Introduction

The existence of a viable public sphere wherein society may supervise and critique the activities of the state is often seen as a prerequisite for the existence of democracy. The public sphere's existence, in turn, is seen as hinging on the banishment of religion to the private realm. However, largely peaceful processes of democratization have taken place in Senegal, a majority Muslim country where Islam has retained a strong influence in the public sphere. The role of Islam in Senegalese politics, indeed, has been mediated by the responses of state and society. The trajectories of militant Islamic movements in Senegal, especially when compared with analogous movements in other Muslim countries like Algeria, suggest that the presence of political Islam does not necessarily undermine democratization.

Senegal's lack of widespread radical Islamic activity is often explained with reference to supposed cultural tendencies toward peace and the almost universal adherence of Senegalese Muslims to Sufi brotherhoods such as the North African Tijaniyya and the indigenous Mouridiyya. Yet, the notion of a "peaceful Senegalese Islam" is called into question by historical counterexamples, particularly a period of economic and political crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this time, severe rioting, ethnic violence, and a rejection of both state and traditional religious authority by disaffected sectors of the population largely comprised of unemployed urban youth were accompanied by indications that militant Islamic activity was on the rise in Senegal. Seeds of potential radicalism, for example, existed within Senegal's small but well-organized reformist movements, such as the AEMUD or Association d'Etudiants Musulmans de l'Université de Dakar (Association of Muslim Students of the University of Dakar), and perhaps even more strongly within the ranks of "hybrid movements"¹ that have incorporated reformist rhetoric while remaining connected to brotherhood structures, such as the Dahiratoul Moustarchidine wal Moustarchidaty ("The Circle of Those Who Seek the Straight Path"). Why, then, has militant political Islam – that is, the use of Islam as a political platform with the aim of installing religious leaders as political authorities or applying religious law in the public domain – never captured broad popular support in Senegal?

The case of Algeria, where militant Islamic movements did attract support and ultimately destabilized the state, provides a fruitful point of comparison with Senegal. In 1992, the electoral victories of the Front Islamique de Salut (FIS), an Islamist movement, precipitated a clampdown by the country's elite and subsequently, a civil war. These events have often been interpreted as "evidence" that Islam impedes democratization. Writing shortly after the outbreak of civil war, one account read:

Algeria's experience over the past three years has shown that in a Muslim land the process of democratization gives rise to currents which seek to destroy it . . . Society can escape that enclosure only if Islam is depoliticized . . . This involves the whole problematic of the construction of political modernity . . . [which] is premised on the 'private' character of religion.²

The authors' assertion that "public religion" inevitably undermines democratization, and that Islam must be "depoliticized" if Muslims hope to participate in modernity, implies that Algeria's

¹ Villalón, Leonardo A. and Ousmane Kane. "Senegal: The Crisis of Democracy and the Emergence of an Islamic Opposition." *The African State at a Critical Juncture*. Ed. Leonardo A. Villalón and Phillip A. Huxtable. Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder, Colorado, 1998. 158.

² Lahouari Addi, Zachary Lockman and Joost R. Hiltermann. "Algeria's Democracy between the Islamists and the Elite." *Middle East Report: No. 175, Palestine and Israel in the New Order* (Mar., 1992), p. 36.

experience was due to the failure of the country's Muslims to change. In this view, radical Islamic politics seems to result automatically from the encounter between Islam and modernity. However, reductive explanations such as these are challenged by accounts which posit the Algerian state's inability to deliver jobs, economic security, and political reform to a society faced with a growing population of unemployed and discontented young people as the main factor in the rise of the FIS, whose use of Islam as a mobilizing platform appealed to broad segments of society, including many people who were not particularly pious.

This more substantive explanation of events in Algeria helps to shed light on the role of Islamic politics in Senegal. Similar demographic pressures and political problems were at work in Senegal's crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s, yet movements like the AEMUD and the Moustarchidine remained relatively minor political forces. The difference between Senegal and Algeria, it seems, is more one of degree than of kind: the different outcomes in these countries resulted more from the responses of state, society, and religious leaders to economic strain, political crisis, and challenges from militant Islamic groups than from inherent attributes of Senegalese or Algerian Islam. The willingness of President Abdou Diouf's regime to allow meaningful dialogue with opposition leaders, the state's generally positive relations with Islamic movements, and traditional religious authorities' successful adaptation to changing social conditions proved critical in managing Senegal's social crises. Far from undermining the hypothesis that radical Islam is an outgrowth of social conditions, then, the Senegalese case confirms it. Senegal's relatively successful passage through a period of crisis, while still preserving space for Islam in the public sphere, offers evidence that the Algerian experience, and others like it, do not exhaust the potential relationships that can exist between Islam and the public sphere: political Islam and democracy, it seems, can coexist effectively.

Explaining Radical Political Islam

The rise of mass movements that articulate political demands through a platform of radical Islam is often explained by means of what Mahmood Mamdani calls "culture talk." This ideological perspective, espoused by scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, holds that peoples' political behavior stems from deep-rooted cultural dispositions. Mamdani believes this discourse treats Islam as both "incapable of" and "resistant to" modernity,³ thereby distorting the relationship between culture, religion, and politics. Understanding radical Islam, he concludes, requires disentangling religion – including religious rhetoric – from political demands and action situated in concrete historical situations.

For example, the growth of Islamist mass movements in North Africa in the 1980s such as the FIS appears to have largely been a response to prevailing conditions of political economy. The Islamic resurgence that began in the 1970s, along with cultural nationalism that spread through the Arab world after 1967, were factors in the growth of Islamist movements. But cultural concerns were ultimately secondary, political and economic ones primary. As Mark Tessler writes, "What many North Africans and other Arabs appear to want is meaningful political change, and above all responsive and accountable government, rather than Islamic solutions per se."⁴

This thesis is corroborated firstly by survey data from across the Arab world indicating a weak correlation between membership in Islamic political movements and personal religious

³ Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*. Pantheon Books: New York, New York, 2004. p. 18-19.

⁴ Tessler, Mark. "The Origins of Popular Support for Islamist Movements: A Political Economy Analysis." *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa*. Ed. John P. Entelis. Indiana University Press: Indianapolis and Bloomington, 1997. p. 109.

piety, and secondly by the fact that ideological platforms other than political Islam, such as the challenge to the regional status quo represented by Saddam Hussein, also captured the imagination of discontented North Africans in the early 1990s.

Additionally, not all segments of the Algerian population – though they shared much of the same culture – were equally attracted by the FIS. Islamic political mobilization in North Africa largely involved disenfranchised urban poor, especially youth, whose anger at economic problems was fueled by the perception that political systems were inflexible and antagonistic toward change. Accelerated population growth, governments' inability to provide enough jobs to young people, and demographic trends including rapid urbanization and a shift toward a younger population were the primary causes of the political disturbances that broke out in North Africa in the 1980s. Human rights violations perpetrated by governments against dissidents and the slow, halting pace of attempted reforms bred a lack of confidence in the established political process. When the traditional opposition, especially the Marxist left wing, seemed impotent in the face of repression, Islamism entered the void as a viable political alternative to authoritarian government.

Islamic Politics in Senegal

Cultural stereotypes of Arab Islam often depict it as violent, antimodern, and inherently repressive. But in various ways, “culture talk” describes West African Sufi Islam as the inverse: “traditional,” “peaceful,” and backward, perhaps existing as only a thin veneer over a barely forgotten animist past. According to a popular saying in Senegal, for example, the country is “95% Muslim, 5% Christian, and 100% animist.”

Senegal's reputation for “peaceful” Islam is due in part to the perception that the doctrines of Senegal's Sufi brotherhoods and the shaykhs or “marabouts” who head them are less harsh than, for example, Saudi Arabian Salafism. Additionally, relations between marabouts and the Senegalese state have been largely positive. Indeed, as scholars like Leonardo Villalón have effectively argued, Senegalese exceptionalism, a concept that refers both to Senegal's rare degree of democracy in the African context and to the brotherhoods' dominance within Senegalese Islam, has hinged on the mutually reinforcing relationship between the brotherhoods and the state. The brotherhoods, and their ability to represent the demands of “citizen-disciples” to the state, seem to constitute “a religiously-based ‘civil society’.”⁵ Senegal's marabouts are not only deeply respected spiritual figures, but also powerful patrons who stand at the center of important clientelist networks. For its part, the state has sought the cooperation of marabouts at both the national and local level because of their perceived ability to deliver votes in blocs and to act as intermediaries between the state and its citizens.

The dominance of Senegal's Sufi brotherhoods was established in the context of social upheaval provoked by the onset of French colonial rule and the defeat of violent uprisings led by Muslim clerics like El Hajj Omar Tall in the 1850s and 60s. At the end of the nineteenth century, marabouts such as El Hajj Malik Sy, Abdoulaye Niassé, and Ahmadou Bamba founded important spiritual centers, attracted mass followings, and to one degree or another collaborated with French colonial authorities to promote security and economic development. These marabouts set important precedents by passing authority over their disciples to members of their own families, founding dynasties whose prestige, wealth, and influence have increased over time.

Yet intense pressures seemingly inherent in the maraboutic system threaten its cohesion. All three major maraboutic families have experienced significant tensions over questions of

⁵ Villalón, Leonardo. *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York, 1995. p. 12.

succession to the position of khalifa or head of the brotherhood. Combined with the competition for clientele that exists between marabouts, even members of the same family, such struggles have increased the incentive for younger members of maraboutic families to emphasize their status as charismatic spiritual figures in their own right. With the passage of time and the multiplication of claimants to maraboutic authority, pressures are growing.

External factors also place pressure on the maraboutic system. Reformist organizations, present in Senegal since at least the 1930s, have periodically attacked the brotherhoods as a heterodox "innovation" contrary to the dictates of Islam's original sources. The number and visibility of such organizations increased following the Iranian revolution of 1979, and the repercussions of the worldwide Islamic revival in Senegal seemed for some to challenge the brotherhoods, the state, and the patterns of collaboration between them, even to the point of threatening the secular nature of the state itself.⁶ Less alarmist observers were nonetheless struck by the transformative effects the revival had for Senegalese society. Christian Coulon, for example, saw the militant form of Islam that erupted in students' associations and other youth organizations in Dakar in the early 1980s as an indication that youth viewed Islam as a weapon "against gerontocratic powers" and as "vehicle and symbol of the right of young people to speak."⁷

Marabouts, even at the highest levels of religious leadership, responded to the Islamic revival with a successful strategy of co-optation. For example, the Tijan khalifa Abdoul Aziz Sy preached against the Free Masons, joined with other major leaders in opposing the visit of Pope John Paul II to Senegal in 1985,⁸ and spoke out in support of the Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989.⁹ By incorporating some reformist rhetoric, the maraboutic system was largely successful at nullifying its threat. But the reformist challenge has continued to the present, and has exacerbated tensions within maraboutic families as members position themselves differently with regard to reformist ideology.

At the same time the Islamic revival was gaining ground in Senegal, the country experienced a severe economic crisis which began with a period of drought in the 1970s and worsened throughout the 1980s. Structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and the World Bank increased the privations that ordinary people experienced, and curtailed the state's ability to distribute money and resources through clientalist networks, reducing its maneuverability in dealing with social unrest. As lower and middle classes suffered under the burdens of structural adjustment, but political elites were left relatively untouched by deprivations, inequality – and anger on the part of various segments of the population – grew accordingly.¹⁰ Economic despair became the source of political grievances directed at President Abdou Diouf's regime, especially by disenfranchised urban youth, who were particularly affected by the economic crisis.

A series of events in 1988 and 1989 posed direct challenges to the authority of the state and called into question the authority of marabouts over their young disciples. First were the presidential elections of 1988, plagued by accusations that Diouf and the Parti Socialiste (PS) had defeated Abdoulaye Wade of the Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS) through fraud. Differences in the results proclaimed by official sources diminished the regime's credibility and

⁶ Magassouba, Moriba. *L'Islam au Senegal: Demain Les Mollahs?* Karthala : Paris, 1985.

⁷ Coulon, Christian. *Les Musulmans et le pouvoir en Afrique Noire*. Karthala : Paris, 1983. p. 171.

⁸ Magassouba.

⁹ *Le Soleil*, March 9, 1989.

¹⁰ Diop, Momar Coumba and Mamadou Diouf. *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf*. Karthala : Paris, 1990. p. 25; 407.

even before the final proclamation of Diouf's victory made by the Supreme Court in early March, violence broke out in the city of Thies from February 25-26. Nationwide riots, which were particularly intense in Dakar and were fueled largely by the anger of urban youth, followed two days later.¹¹ In response, Diouf instituted a state of emergency, which was to last for several months, and arrested Wade and other major opposition leaders.

The elections of 1988 also saw the rejection of maraboutic authority, at least in the political realm, by disciples. While the Tijan khalifa "did not take the risk" of directing his disciples to vote for a certain candidate, the Mouride khalifa found his orders rejected by a sizeable number of his disciples, and even by lesser marabouts within the Mouride hierarchy, some of whom recanted later, while others did not.¹²

The limits of maraboutic authority were also made clear in the episode of ethnic violence that broke out between Senegalese and Mauritians the following year, when urban youth were at the forefront of attacks and looting against Mauritanian shopkeepers in revenge for the killing of Senegalese in Mauritania. Senegal's major marabouts kept silent despite the fact that violence against fellow Muslims was occurring during Ramadan, likely out of a calculation that their appeals would not be heeded by youth.¹³ Simultaneously, the fragmentation of the opposition, the curtailment of their activities by the regime, and their reluctance to provoke a real crisis of state legitimacy in the face of major social meant that the opposition was not at the center of the action either.¹⁴ The violence quickly subsided, but Senegal had been shaken by the ferocious anger of youth who no longer respected the state or the marabouts, and perhaps even the opposition.

Who were these youth? Defined as such not merely for biological reasons but even more because of their inability to complete key economic and social transitions into "adulthood," their political expression must be understood against a backdrop of profound strain placed on contemporary sub-Saharan African societies by increases in the proportional weight of youth and the level of urbanization in African populations. The 1988 Senegalese census, for example, revealed that the population was approximately 58% below the age of twenty years old and 39% urban, with around 80% of the country's urban population concentrated in Dakar.¹⁵ Demographic shifts and economic crises intensified the difficulties African societies faced in successfully socializing young people. Youth all over the continent, and especially in urban areas, were unable to find work or achieve independence from their parents. This predicament, and their parents' own financial difficulties, engendered familial tensions. Episodes of severe social upheaval further exacerbated such problems.

On the cultural level, Mamadou Diouf argues, the failure of African nationalism in the 1970s removed youth from a place of social prominence. Youth, formerly a symbol of nationalist dreams, came to be perceived by adults and the state as a threat to social stability. Left to create new identities on their own, youth began to redefine their roles vis-à-vis their societies, families, and nations. Interestingly, Diouf sees religious organizations like Pentacostal Christian churches and reformist and fundamentalist Islamic movements as "the best illustration of these youthful gestures of self-creation."¹⁶ Being "born again" into the alternative social

¹¹ Diop and Diouf, p. 335-6.

¹² Diop and Diouf, p. 321-4.

¹³ Villalón and Kane, p. 155.

¹⁴ Diop and Diouf, p. 394-401.

¹⁵ Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. "The Future of Tradition." *Senegal: Essays in Statecraft*. Ed. Momar Coumba Diop. CODESRIA: Dakar, 1993. p. 273.

¹⁶ Diouf, Mamadou. "Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2, September 2003, p. 7.

orders provided by such movements allowed youth a break with the past and the power to control their present.

African states' strategies for handling the problems posed by urban youth have met with mixed results. African democracies like Senegal have provided some youth with a means of political participation, and even, in the clientalist networks of political parties, with material support. Mass education provides short-term benefits by responding to popular demand, absorbing potential malcontents, and drawing international aid money, but its implementation sows the seeds of future bitterness by creating expectations which neither the state nor the formal sector can fulfill.¹⁷ Partially educated youth without formal employment or access to established informal economic networks drift into petty hustling, crime, and permanent unemployment. With "little to lose," few resources, and little organizational cohesion, such a mass is ripe for mob action or exploitation by political entrepreneurs.

The rioting of 1988 revealed that many young Senegalese people's confidence in the state had collapsed. Asked by a journalist from the station Tropic FM on February 29, 1988 to list their grievances, young people cited corruption in the regime, misuse of government funds during the campaign, and the exclusion of youth from political debates and indeed from the democracy itself.¹⁸ Many young Senegalese felt insulted by the ways in which politicians had talked about youth during the campaign.¹⁹ Problems, however, went deeper than youth's immediate political complaints to encompass their entire situation as "the 'mutes' of Senegalese democracy, 'the cursed part' of a society in which they are however the majority."²⁰ In a climate of increasing distrust for the state, and for adult society as a whole, violence was the foremost tactic by which youth could make their presence felt.

As the Diouf regime reacted to events in the late 1980s, many of its maneuvers fueled the anger in the streets. The imprisonment of Abdoulaye Wade and other opposition leaders in 1988 was followed by a trial so vehemently disputed that at one point the opposition's lawyers simply walked out.²¹ Yet some of the regime's actions diminished popular anger. For example, Diouf announced the lifting of the state of emergency on the Muslim holiday of Korite (the last day of Ramadan) in May 1988 in a symbolic gesture of reconciliation that seemed to be "an attempt at winning back the followers of a militant Islam."²² In June, Diouf agreed to a series of roundtable talks with opposition leaders, and though these negotiations were plagued with difficulties and disputes, they showed Diouf's willingness to compromise. The revised electoral code that served for the 1993 elections was one of the outcomes of such negotiations, and though the new code provoked some problems it also symbolized progress toward democratization. Furthermore, Wade and other opposition leaders entered into Diouf's government following their defeats in the elections of 1988 and 1993, demonstrating both the limits of their anti-regime stances and the extent to which the regime was willing to work with its critics. Finally, many of the tensions left from Diouf's struggles with Wade were defused by Wade's victory in 2000; though Wade's administration has engendered a whole new set of tensions, it seems reasonable to say that the 2000 elections affirmed for many that peaceful change is possible in Senegal.

¹⁷ Cruise O'Brien, Donal B. "A Lost Generation? Youth Identity and State Decay in West Africa." *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. Ed. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger. Zed Books: Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1996. 58-9.

¹⁸ Diop and Diouf, p. 338-9.

¹⁹ Diop and Diouf, p. 337.

²⁰ Diop and Diouf, p. 340.

²¹ Diop and Diouf, p. 351.

²² Diop and Diouf, p. 356.

The Diouf regime was also receptive to working with different types of Islamic movements, cultivating relationships with major marabouts and funding and facilitating Arabic and religious education in Senegal, a perennially important issue for reformists. By permitting Islamic activists to function openly, the regime prevented their radicalization along political lines. It also seems that permitting a vocal opposition to function with minimal interference and repression, at least in comparison with many other parts of the world, meant that Islam did not become the last bastion of political contestation. Furthermore, the one major case of outright state repression, the interdiction against the Moustarchidine movement following the events of February 16 1994, seems to have diminished the movement's political influence. Whether due to cooptation, repression, or lack of opportunity, potentially radical movements have gone in other directions, maturing and in time softening their political stances.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several Islamic movements present in Senegal conceivably could have formed the nucleus of Islamic contestation against the state as the FIS did in Algeria during the same period. An examination of two movements, the reformist AEMUD and the hybrid movement the Moustarchidine, will provide further insight into the lack of popular support for radical Islam in Senegal.

The AEMUD

The AEMUD is not formally a part of the Jama'at Ibadou Rahman (The Association of the Servants of the Most Merciful), an influential Senegalese reformist movement, but their doctrines have much in common. Members of the AEMUD have been affiliated with Ibadou Rahman, such as two prominent Imams, Ahmed Kante and Mouhammed Niang, who often delivered Friday sermons at the AEMUD-run mosque at Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University during the 1990s.²³ Both organizations have at times argued that Senegal's Sufi brotherhoods represent a departure from the example of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community. Both have cultivated modes of dress that may be characterized as somewhat "counter-cultural" in the Senegalese context; for men, beards and short-legged pants, and for women, headscarves and "modest dress." Many members of both groups could be described as militant in attitude and demeanor.

Over time, however, both groups have modified their rhetoric and entered to a greater degree into the mainstream of Senegalese Islam. The Ibadou Rahman's national conference in February 2007, for example, featured a unit of pre-teens who marched, saluted, and shouted "Allahu Akbar!" on command – but was also attended by distinguished representatives of major maraboutic families. The AEMUD has softened its rhetoric against the brotherhoods at the campus level to a lesser degree; as recently as 2004 there were incidents of violence between Mouride students and students affiliated with reformist movements.²⁴ Yet AEMUD leaders reject Sufism less stridently than formerly, and prayers at the university mosque attract many students affiliated with brotherhoods.

In addition to running the university mosque, the AEMUD publishes the student journal *L'Etudiant Musulman* ("The Muslim Student") and often holds conferences on Islamic themes. The organization views itself as the propagator of the call toward greater Islamization or da'wa. Its rhetoric, as judged by the sermons delivered at the mosque and the articles in *L'Etudiant Musulman*, can justifiably be considered "Islamist" – a term, indeed, that Kante said he could

²³ Interview with Ahmed Kante, April 12 2007; interview with Mouhammed Niang, April 20 2007.

²⁴ Kante, Ahmed. "Incidents Entre Mourides et 'Ibadou'," sermon delivered at Cheikh Anta Diop University Mosque, June 18 2004.

“tolerate” as a description of his own position.²⁵ Student participation in Senegalese national politics is strong, as evidenced by the number of students’ wings of national political parties and the amount of political graffiti on campus, and campus politics are explosive; student protests against the administration, or their own standard of living on campus, frequently erupt into riots severe enough to warrant a serious police response. But Islamic student organizations like the AEMUD do not play a major role in national politics, and most political activism on campus is secular: calls for an Islamic state are rarely heard, religious leaders are rarely at the forefront of protests, and denunciations of national politicians or university policy are rarely made with reference to their “un-Islamic” quality. Even the sermon Kante delivered before the elections of 2000, which was reprinted in *L’Etudiant Musulman* in February 2007, offers not an “Islamic” critique of democracy as a western innovation, but rather a simple appeal for order and dignity.²⁶

Some of the increased “Islamization” that has been felt on campus (such as women wearing Islamic dress and higher visibility of students praying in public, as well as attendance in the thousands for Friday prayers at the mosque) is undoubtedly a result of the AEMUD's efforts. But the degree of influence that the AEMUD and the university mosque have on the religious atmosphere of the campus must be qualified in several respects. Friday prayers at the mosque attract a broad spectrum of students; those dressed in “Ibadou” style pray next to students wearing t-shirts with Akon, 50 Cent or, even more tellingly, President Wade. The “Ibadou” students perform their prayers in the “Ibadou” style, while at their sides are students who pray in the standard Senegalese style – a religious pluralism that passes, apparently, without conflict and even without much notice. And although female students who pray inside the mosque must be veiled, young women wearing Western garb that is far from “modest” by Islamic standards walk by the mosque during prayer times without receiving so much as a hostile glance. During other times of the day, one can often see veiled and unveiled women interacting amicably. In such an atmosphere it does indeed seem like the reformist trend has affected campus culture, but also that it is only one cultural and religious current among many.

Meanwhile, life experiences have affected both Kante and Niang. Niang, a student at the time of the university mosque's founding and at one time president of the Ibadou Rahman's youth wing, was strongly influenced by Islamist thinkers like Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, and Hassan al-Banna. As a young man, he called for the application of shari'a and denounced Western culture as corrupt and immoral, but now he dismisses such views as student radicalism. His priorities no longer include the establishment of an Islamic state in Senegal, and he believes there is room for dialogue between different Muslim groups in Senegal, as well as between the Muslim world and the West. He hopes to continue learning about the United States, where he has already spent time as an official invitee of the State Department.²⁷

Kante's life has taken a broadly similar course. A successful professional who still delivers sermons regularly at the university, he has entered a phase of spiritual reflection – a phenomenon that occurred for many other reformists in Senegal, he suggests, as initial enthusiasm about the Iranian Revolution diminished as disagreements arose over questions such as the depth of difference between Sunnism and Shiism. Kante still favors the application of shari'a in Senegal and has reservations about democracy as a political system (he has, he stated,

²⁵ Interview with Kante.

²⁶ Kante, Ahmed. “Les Musulmans Senegalais Face aux Presidentielles 2000,” sermon delivered at Cheikh Anta Diop University Mosque, February 2 2000. See also *L’Etudiant Musulman*, No. 63, January-February 2007.

²⁷ Interview with Niang.

never voted, though he would vote for a candidate who incarnated proper Islamic values). Yet there is no Islamic country that he considers a model in terms of the establishment of shari'a, or an Islamic state, in a modern context. Kante now favors a process of Islamizing Senegalese society from the bottom up, rather than immediate change.²⁸

Significantly, Niang and Kante are now both imams at the mosque in Dakar's Point E neighborhood near the university. Financed by businessmen and intellectuals attracted by the style of preaching at the university mosque, the Point E mosque is a place where elites (up to and including former Prime Minister and prominent Senegalese politician Idrissa Seck) come to experience a more intellectual version of Islam. This older, more mature constituency seems to show that reformists like Kante and Niang have been incorporated into the relative mainstream of Senegalese society, indeed even into its elite. While some of their views could still be labeled "radical," they clearly represent no threat of an Islamist takeover.

If the reformist current as a whole, and particularly its student wing, did not become the voice for a radicalized generation of Senegalese Muslim youth, what then was the fate of movements from within the brotherhoods that attempted to occupy that position? It seems that "hybrid movements," though they have at times taken more explicitly political stances than their reformist counterparts, have also remained marginal in comparison with mainstream political parties.

The Moustarchidine

From a highly charged anti-regime speech which its leader delivered several weeks before the presidential elections of February 1993 to the banning of the movement almost exactly one year later, the Moustarchidine passed through a phase of intense politicization – even radicalization – and represented "the first challenge to PS hegemony cast in Islamic terms."²⁹ The longer trajectory of the movement, however, has shown that its radicalization neither positioned it to become a major spokesman for disenfranchised youth nor did it have a radicalizing effect on Senegalese politics in general.

The Moustarchidine's spiritual head and official founder is the Tijan marabout Cheikh Tidiane Sy, and in many ways the movement represents a continuation of intra-familial struggles and political activism begun by the shaykh in the late 1950s. Effectively, however, the Moustarchidine is headed by the shaykh's son Moustapha, a charismatic and unpredictable figure. The movement's origins in the Islamic revival of the 1970s and its emphasis on reformist themes such as "Islamizing society from below" and Arabic education, while embracing modernity in a way that sets it apart from other reformist movements, justify its classification as a "hybrid movement." According to a master's thesis written by Moustarchidine leader Makhary Mbaye, the movement regards Islam as a total way of life and seeks to offer youth a return to Islamic values.³⁰ Its educational, cultural, political, and economic programs are "designed to adapt modern life to the prescriptions of the Muslim religion." Mbaye calls the movement "a synthesis of traditionalism, brotherhood-ism, and modernism."³¹

Around 1980, Moustapha Sy moved to Dakar and began teaching Arabic to young people in his neighborhood, where "he would not hesitate to distract his hosts with the music of

²⁸ Interview with Kante.

²⁹ Villalón, Leonardo A. "Generational Changes, Political Stagnation, and the Evolving Dynamics of Religion and Politics in Senegal," *Africa Today*, Vol. 46, No. 3/4, Summer/Autumn 1999, p. 141.

³⁰ Interview with Makhary Mbaye, January 25 2007.

³¹ Mbaye, Makhary. *Naissance et Evolution du Dahiratoul Moustarchidina Wal Moustarchidaty (1978-2002)*. Mémoire de Maitrise, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Département d'Arabe : 2001-2002. p. 90.

Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and others."³² As the movement grew, Sy established chapters in Thies, Rufisque, Saint-Louis, Fatick, the Gambia, and Kaolack. In 1985, Sy organized a special Moustarchidine celebration of the Muslim new year or Tamxarit in Tivaouane, the Sy family seat,³³ and in 1989 proudly hosted an International Conference on Muslim Youth in Dakar.³⁴

At first, the Diouf regime tolerated the Moustarchidine's attempts to attract frustrated urban youth and even encouraged the movement with funding and public gestures of approval. During the 1988 elections the Moustarchidine took no political position, but Cheikh Tidiane Sy campaigned vigorously for Diouf. This behavior discredited Sy in the eyes of many young Senegalese, and rumors in the local press concerning the shaykh's financial difficulties seemed to support their suspicions that Sy had sold his support to Diouf.³⁵ The perception that Moustarchidine leaders were collaborating too closely with the state caused a number of youth to leave the movement. These considerations, as well as pressure from within the Sy family "suspicious of his growing independence," prompted Moustapha Sy to position himself closer to the rest of the family at the end of 1989. During the early 1990s the movement was quiet.³⁶

The 1993 presidential elections took place in a climate of tension. Having undertaken a number of significant reforms, especially the revisions of the electoral code, the state had demonstrated some willingness to change. However, opposition supporters believed that if the regime adhered to the standards established in the new electoral code, a Wade victory was inevitable; in their eyes, a PS victory would automatically be evidence of fraud. For their part, the country's major marabouts abstained from giving orders to vote to their disciples, a decision which opened the door to political maneuvering by younger marabouts.

Shortly before the elections, Moustapha Sy delivered a highly politicized speech in which he accused both the President and members of his own family of shocking scandals. The speech "immediately caught the attention of much of the urban population, and especially youth," and provoked a stern rebuttal from the main branch of the Sy family.³⁷ Several months later Sy was arrested in connection with the investigation of the assassination of the jurist Babacar Seye; throughout 1993 he was arrested several more times for anti-regime activities, and in January 1994 he was sentenced to a year in prison. In February 1994, a speech given by Sy's brother at an opposition protest helped push an angry crowd over the edge, turning rally to riot, and in the ensuing violence five police officers were killed. The Moustarchidine, widely blamed for the violence, was soon officially banned.

For a time, the Moustarchidine's radicalization seem to signal the "emergence of an Islamic opposition,"³⁸ a perception that was supported by the movement's continued clandestine operations after its interdiction and "the dramatic reentry of Cheikh Tidiane Sy into public life" in 1995 after an absence of nearly seven years. The "overflowing crowds" at Cheikh Tidiane's public conferences over the next two years, and the conspicuous absence of Moustarchidine leaders from ceremonies marking the death of the Tijan khalifa Abdoul Aziz Sy in 1997, seemed to provide further confirmation of the movement's intention to establish itself as an independent force.³⁹

³² Mbaye, p. 78-9.

³³ Mbaye, p. 80.

³⁴ Villalón and Kane, p. 160.

³⁵ Diop and Diouf, p. 324.

³⁶ Villalón and Kane, p. 160.

³⁷ Villalón and Kane, p. 143.

³⁸ Villalón and Kane, p. 143.

³⁹ Villalón, *Generational Changes*, 143.

The Moustarchidine's cultural and religious significance has endured. Their annual Ramadan conferences, the "University of Ramadan," which began in 1996 and have continued to the present day, attract large crowds who come to see lectures given by Moustapha Sy and prominent Senegalese intellectuals. The Universities of Ramadan address broad and global topics, but under such politically neutral themes as "Humanity in Search of a Better World." A performance of their Afro-Arab orchestra in January 2007 filled Dakar's CICES center to capacity, suggesting an attendance of well over 5,000 persons. The movement's elite includes major intellectuals and businessmen; until their recent public rupture, the Moustarchidine counted among its ranks Abdoulaye Diop, Wade's Minister of Finance.⁴⁰

Politically, however, the Moustarchidine has not come to represent a significant source of opposition. In 1996, Cheikh Tidiane Sy publicly reconciled with the PS and supported them in that year's legislative elections; at the beginning of 1997, Moustapha Sy invited PS dignitaries to a conference where he announced his break with the PDS, hinting that Wade had betrayed the Moustarchidine and even that he owed them money.⁴¹ Following this, the movement was again officially allowed to act freely.

Subsequent political behavior on the part of Moustapha Sy, Cheikh Tidiane Sy, and the Moustarchidine has been contradictory and even confusing. In January 2000, Moustapha Sy presented himself as a presidential candidate for a few days before abruptly withdrawing. Sy iterated his support for Wade throughout the campaign leading into the second round of elections, even as his father came out in support of Diouf. Ultimately, Moustapha Sy gave no direct voting orders to his disciples.⁴² Similarly, in February 2007 Cheikh Tidiane Sy supported Wade, while Moustapha Sy ordered the Moustarchidine to vote for Wade's rival Idrissa Seck. Following the elections, at the annual Tijan pilgrimage to Tivaouane, the Gamou, Moustapha Sy again attracted attention for a speech in which he accused Wade of dividing the brotherhoods and also of involvement in various financial scandals.⁴³

The Moustarchidine's influence over elections in 2000 and 2007, however, appears to have been slight. Though in 2007 Seck won in his hometown and Moustarchidine stronghold, Thies, this appears to have been more a result of Seck's personal popularity than of his alliance with the Moustarchidine. One observer even suggested that Moustapha Sy's pronouncement in favor of Seck produced a backlash from Mourides, contributing to an even greater Wade victory.⁴⁴

The shifting positions of father and son during the elections of 2000 and 2007, as well as public differences of opinion between them, may spring from a desire to appear in support of the incumbent should he win, but not risk alienating youth as Cheikh Tidiane Sy did in 1988. Moreover, as Fabienne Samson argues, it is possible that in 2000 Moustapha Sy was anxious to avoid the fate of his contemporary Modou Kara, a young Mouride marabout whose movement also caters to disaffected urban youth. At a rally in December 1999, Kara announced his support for Diouf and suffered the ignominy of being booed by his own disciples, an almost unprecedented event in Senegalese history.⁴⁵ In a broader sense, the Moustarchidine leadership's behavior seems best explained by the maneuvering that typically goes on in Senegalese clientalist politics – where candidates and groups feign opposition so as to attract the political and financial

⁴⁰ See *Walfadjri Grand Place*, April 2-5 2007, and *L'As*, April 2-5 2007.

⁴¹ *Le Soleil*, January 6 1997.

⁴² Samson, Fabienne. *Les Marabouts de l'Islam Politique*. Karthala : Paris, 2005. p. 132-135.

⁴³ *Walfadjri Grand Place*, April 2-5 2007.

⁴⁴ *Walfadjri March 1 2007*.

⁴⁵ Samson, p. 125.

attention of larger political entities – rather than by a logic of direct opposition to the state. Given Sy's alliance with mainstream politicians, and the contradictory nature of his stances, it seems that he too hopes to emphasize his importance as an ally worthy of being wooed.

The Moustarchidine, of course, would not agree with such an assessment. But the words of Babacar Thiaw, who heads one half of the Moustarchidine apparatus in Dakar, are telling. Comparing Senegalese politics to the concept of mutually assured destruction in a nuclear arms race, Thiaw stated that the Moustarchidine became involved in politics in order to "protect" themselves.⁴⁶ The behavior of other young marabouts also seems to corroborate the idea that the Moustarchidine's political maneuvers are part of mainstream political strategizing in Senegal. In the fall of 2006, for example, graffiti appeared throughout Dakar promoting Modou Kara's candidacy for the presidency. By the time of the elections, however, Kara was actively supporting Wade and appearing at Wade's rallies. The radicalization of young marabouts only extends to a certain point, it seems: none of them are prepared to contest state authority in explicitly Islamic terms, and none are above the political games of patronage and the purchasing of allegiance.

The exception to this rule is, again, the genuine radicalization that the Moustarchidine passed through in 1993-1994, which ultimately constituted a major stumbling block for the movement. Tellingly, Mbaye refers to the 1993-1994 period as "the crossing of the desert."⁴⁷ The experience of prison strengthened the conviction of some Moustarchidines, he says, and the movement emerged stronger from its trials. Yet significant numbers of people left the movement following the events of February 1994, and the governmental interdiction "created a certain lethargy" for the movement.⁴⁸ State repression appears to have convinced the movement's leaders, and some of its membership, that direct conflict with the state would not be effective.

The Diouf regime's repression of the movement, moreover, included not only political and legal measures but also social and cultural branding. Coverage of the events of February 16 in the state press, for example, suggests an effort to portray the movement's radicalization as anti-social and destructive. Days after the riot, *Le Soleil* reported that three individuals accused of having taken part in the riots had been captured. Two of the men were Moustarchidine, and their status as leaders of the movement at the neighborhood level was noted. Their companion, described as "completely drunk," when apprehended, was said to have "excelled at throwing rocks." As for the Moustarchidines, one was accused of the cold-blooded act of stealing a policeman's shoes after murdering him, and both were charged with having destroyed property.⁴⁹ Other coverage called the Moustarchidine "indoctrinated" and highlighted their superstitious beliefs in amulets and strange potions.⁵⁰ The stigma attached to the Moustarchidine has continued up to the present for some: an article that appeared during the 2007 campaigns recalled "bloody Tuesday" as a low point in Senegalese history.⁵¹

Finally, Moustapha Sy's break with his own family seems to have decreased his prestige. Some observers believe that Tijan cohesion has eroded and that despite their majority status in Senegal, Tijans have low economic and political clout especially in comparison with the better organized Mourides,⁵² whose membership is highly visible from the streets of Dakar all the way

⁴⁶ Interview with Babacar Thiaw, April 19 2007.

⁴⁷ Mbaye, p. 106.

⁴⁸ Mbaye, p. 109-110.

⁴⁹ *Le Soleil*, February 22 1994.

⁵⁰ *Le Soleil*, February 22 1994.

⁵¹ See *Nettali*, February 16 2007.

⁵² See *Reussir, Special Maouloud 2007: Y a-t-il un "Business Tiidjane?"*, April 2007.

to the presidential palace. In such a context, it seems, Tijan marabouts who strike out on their own risk isolation. Name recognition of the Moustarchidine is also beginning to slip among many Dakar youth; while many are familiar with Modou Kara's PVD movement, fewer are familiar with the programs and politics of the Moustarchidine.

Islamic Politics in 2007

In 2007, Senegalese youth still face severe problems: widespread unemployment, barriers to adult status, drug abuse, political disenfranchisement, and sheer hopelessness. In interviews conducted with young men working as informal tourist guides and unlicensed vendors in Sandaga and Colobane markets, and with others who were completely unemployed, complaints frequently emerged indicating distrust for the regime and despair at the country's economic situation. Such sentiments are prevalent in the documentary *Democracy in Dakar* as well, where a number of young Senegalese rappers and journalists express their dissatisfaction with the Wade regime and its perceived failure to deliver on promises of social change and economic growth.⁵³ Economic desperation is also evidenced by the high number of young Senegalese men who attempt to reach Europe by boat and often, tragically, lose their lives in the process.

Yet such desperation has not sparked a growth in radical Islamic activity. Indeed, the most prominent Islamic political movement during the 2007 campaigns was arguably that of Cheikh Bethio Thioune, a former civil servant turned Mouride marabout whose connections with Wade, and the Mouride khalifa Saliou Mbacke, could not be closer. The version of Islam Bethio offers to his disciples is far from rigorous. His meetings are characterized by vast amounts of food, instantaneous marriages between strangers, and a festive atmosphere where even those returning home from nightclubs are welcome. Moreover, his aggressive support for the incumbent during the campaign (posters featured Bethio proclaiming, "In 2007, I will re-elect Wade!") appears to have held limited sway over his disciples; as one interviewee pointed out, Bethio's support did not secure a Wade victory in the shaykh's home town of Thies.⁵⁴

Like Diouf, Wade's willingness to collaborate with Islamic leaders seems to keep radical Islam outside the realm of political possibility. Islam continues to pervade Senegalese culture, but other factors are equally important in shaping the identities of today's youth in Dakar: musical forms like hip hop and reggae, and the influence of western culture which is transmitted not only through mass media, but also through the many Senegalese emigrants who remain in close contact with friends and family. Should economic desperation or political bitterness reach a breaking point, radical Islamic politics could emerge in Senegal, but for the moment such a development seems unlikely.

Conclusion

Attempts at democratization in Senegal and Algeria resulted in vastly different outcomes. Algeria's first attempt at open multi-party democracy after thirty years of authoritarian one-party rule resulted in a near takeover by Islamists and a devastating civil war, while Senegal became progressively more democratic from its reinstatement of multi-party politics in 1974 until the alternation of 2000. A consideration of recent Senegalese history, especially the period from 1988 to 1994, suggests that a mobilization of political Islamic identity among discontented urban youth would not have been out of the question during this time. Yet the responsiveness of the Diouf regime to certain pressures for change, the willingness of the state to engage

⁵³ *Democracy in Dakar*.

⁵⁴ Interview with "Petit," March 10 2007.

constructively with Islamic movements, and the capacity of traditional religious authorities to adapt to changing social environments seem to have prevented widespread radicalization.

The case of Senegal both helps to refute cultural explanations for radical Islamic political activity and to strengthen arguments that postulate concrete economic, political, and social conditions as the major sources of such activity. Such arguments imply, moreover, that Islam's emergence in the public sphere does not automatically undermine democratization; the trajectory of Islamic political movements, as seen by the examples of the AEMUD and the Moustarchidine, is affected by the responses of state and society. The social and cultural importance that Islam retains in the Senegalese public sphere, despite the presence of significant Islamic political contestation against the state, suggests that the time is ripe for a reconsideration of whether the "privatization" of Islam is necessary for the existence of a viable public sphere, and hence a viable democracy.

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