Secularism, Religious Education, and Human Rights in Senegal

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Abstract
This essay explores how the evolving relationship between religion and the state is affecting the educational system in Senegal. In 2002, the state enacted reforms that introduced religious education into the state school system and also allowed all children enrolled in the daara (Senegalese Qur’anic schools) to be considered schooled in the same way as those enrolled in public schools. These are profound new developments, the author argues, that challenge the state’s longtime commitment to secular education. The decision to introduce religious education into the state system is the result of both the increasing need for politicians to appease religious authorities, and the growing influence of the Mouride tariqa (Sufi brotherhood). The inclusion of daara students in national educational statistics, according to the author, is motivated by a desire to increase Senegal’s primary education statistics in order to meet development markers set by international organizations. The daaras are controversial institutions that have also come to the attention of human rights groups because of the strong association between daara students (talibes) and mendicancy. While the author urges that the question be approached from a human rights’ perspective—recognizing the right of all children to receive an education and be free from exploitation—she also outlines a series of measures designed to protect the rights of these children.

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Introduction
In a very interesting article Jean Emile Charlier proposes as a postulate the illustration of the return of God in Senegal through the introduction of religious education in the schools of the secular Republic.¹ The return of God aside, facts have attested the incessant tension between religion and politics in Senegal, including in the area of education. Thus, in 1991 the marabout of Touba ordered the closing of about ten schools in Touba and more recently, the same thing was done in Medina Gounass. Needs of a metaphysical, cultural and religious nature are forced between the cracks created by an incoherent system of education.

The Senegalese public sphere is often the scene of a bitter struggle between secularism and religion. Does the State still have the means to preserve secularism? In any case, there was a grave warning in 2000 when the President of the Republic advocated the suppression of the mention of “secularism” in the new Constitution that was being drafted. But already under President Abdou Diouf and at the time of the Etats Généraux de l’Education et de la Formation convened in 1981,² the matter of the introduction of religious instruction into the educational system was put forth as a political stake that would appease the religious class of the country. Abdou Diouf’s main objective was certainly to calm the teachers’ movement but especially to gain a wide consensus that would allow him to govern with greater serenity.

During these meetings a strong recommendation was made favoring the introduction of religious education in the public school system and especially a financial contribution by the Republic to the informal education provided by Christians as well as Muslims. However, during the States General republican secularism was not challenged because it was inscribed in the Constitution; but with time, the Senegalese compromise would be weakened, threatening the balance between the spiritual and the profane, the dissociation between social time and religious time.³

Starting in 2002 the Senegalese State introduced reforms that, reason predicts, will have profound effects on public life in Senegal because, to cite Charlier again, the proposed innovations are not merely organizational or institutional; they signal a shift in reference, an evolution in the concept of the State and of the bases of its legitimacy. They constitute a de facto nullification of the political compromise endorsing its secularism in favor of a political doctrine more Anglo-Saxon than French, which allows explicit religious symbols to be displayed in public institutions.

The innovations announced at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year are part of a coherent project, the implementation of which does not follow a precise schedule but which is presented as inevitable. The reform was proclaimed in solemn terms by the Ministry of National Education⁴ that announced in mid-July, 2002 that the government had

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² Les Etats Généraux de l’Education et de la Formation (EGEF) constituted a major event in the history of the Senegalese educational system. The EGEF of January 1981 saw the participation of all sectors of society in dialogues about overhauling the educational system.
made “the fundamental and irreversible decision” to introduce religious education in the official school system. The term “irreversible” had also been used by the Minister Iba Der Thiam in 1985 when he presented the press with his project of reform that would never be implemented.

In this paper we will discuss certain ideas which a priori may seem preposterous but which should be addressed, thus the first part: the education system between hybridism and “brotherhoodism”; in the second part the argumentation concerning religious education. Finally, in the last part, the human rights dimension of religious education.

The Senegalese Educational System between Hybridism and “Brotherhoodism”

During 2006 we saw the inauguration of the Islamic Institute, a modern daara (Senegalese Qur’anic school) in Tivouane instructing youth in religious practices as well as in the trades of mechanics and carpentry. President Wade claimed to have brought to fruition an idea ending the discriminatory treatment of religious education. He did not fail to mention that his idea was to build not only modern schools for the daara but also high schools and, why not, even a university.

In reading certain commentaries and studies one discovers astonishing ideas that, however, do conform to certain practices. Is it simply a question of interpretation or of sentiments? In any case the inauguration of the daara of Tivouane, said to be financed by the Caliph General Serigne Mansour Sy, seems to have been intended as reparation for some obstructive measure against marabout families.

Doubts arose in the minds of some, navigating between the existing realities and the injunctions of the international institutions urgently exhorting the Senegalese authorities to quickly take measures in view of increasing the percentage of children in school. These authorities introduced several important innovations in the educational system at the beginning of the 2002 school year. First of all, children enrolled in the daara are considered to be schooled in the same way as those enrolled in public schools. Secondly, religious education, which means basically instruction in the Muslim faith, the majority religion at more than 90% in Senegal, was included in the curriculum of the elementary schools of the Republic. Thirdly, in the year 2002-2003 an experiment was started in 150 elementary schools, providing this instruction in local languages.5

How can these measures frustrate some religious families? They are measures that do not contradict the secular nature of education recently reaffirmed in the first cycle of the 2001 Constitution, unchanged from the text of 1963. Secularism is not reintroduced into the Constitution but the ideological bases of the procedure must be examined. On this point Charlier’s conclusion as well as Cheick Guèye’s comments are interesting.

It has been pointed out that the State authorities who wanted to suppress the reference to secularism constantly renew gestures of allegiance to the religious authorities (not all). However, the State’s position in the debate is weak: it admits the impossibility of enrolling all children in school, abandons the requirement of a common curriculum and

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5 Mamadou Basse, Projet de rénovation des Daaras. Séminaire…août 2002
6 We must acknowledge that during the revision process of the Constitution that was voted upon in January, 2007 the term secularism had disappeared from the first version. This omission was remedied thanks to the mobilization of minorities such as women, Christians and certain democrats. The aim of the elimination of the concept of "secularism" had been to send a coded message to the marabout class.
advocates contents adapted to local needs. Without the means to control the forces outside its authority it cannot intervene directly. “This weakness of the State may mean leaving the implementation of the reform to the Murids.” The ensuing debates bring together the descendants of Serigne Touba, like Minister Sourang, like the intellectuals who denounce the mendicancy of the talibës (Khadim Mbacké), like the head of the powerful network of daara. The social debate is conducted among the parents and it “opposes only Murids, which could only result in the heightened influence of their common convictions on society in general. Then society could tend more and more to identify with Muridism, a tendency deemed a fait accompli by some.”

How did this development come about? It is true that since its creation, school has always been a source of tension between the religious figures on one hand and the secular and republican ones on the other. The system of education (especially elementary education) founded on the triple values “free, secular, compulsory” is being called into question more and more. Education as compulsory for every young citizen is secular as is the Republic declaring itself the guarantor of the balance of powers and independent of religious power. On the other hand, society is often governed by a religious code shared the majority while school declares itself to be sovereign yet also in the exclusive service of society. This is what places education in a vicious circle between the rock that is the Republic and the hard place that is society. But in Senegal’s case the imbalance is even more pronounced because of the role played by the brotherhoods.

The upset in the fragile balance of power was particularly evident when the Caliph of Touba vigorously intervened several years ago. The city of Touba, built around the mosque, is the property of the marabout. Schools began to sprout up all over the city, teaching French and other secular subjects. Though the masters of the Qur’an had thousands of students, these French style schools led to absenteeism in the Arabic classes. The Arabic language teachers appealed to the marabout who ordered the closing of the French schools. The incident is a fact of public notoriety; it is said that about one hundred schools were thus closed and that the inspector who carried out the order turned over the keys to the marabout. It is because the Arabic language teachers felt threatened that they sought the aid of the religious authority. The Senegalese continue to think that knowledge of Arabic is indispensable for a dialogue with God.

On March 19, 2000 the ruling party lost the election. The government born of this profound change included in its program the introduction of religious education in the educational system. This option, initiated by the Head of State, is an urgent and recurring demand of a large proportion of Senegalese. Education as a tool of development encompasses a basic concept that must be revised regularly in light of the evolution of mentalities, the psycho-sociological and historical transformations. In this sense education must not be bound by constraints or resistant to innovations; but it must draw its subsistence from the culture of the people and in the dynamic of existential reflections.

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7 The Murids are not alone in denouncing mendicancy but when foreigners come to investigate they are channeled toward certain people, this explains the tendentious character of the observation.
9 The Republic is in dire straits and the increasingly pressing lack of funds is a significant factor in the steadily diminishing quality of the public schools even though for decades they produced the political and intellectual elite of the country.
Those are the arguments put forth by the Minister Moustapha Sourang at the seminar on “The Introduction of Religious Education and the Creation of Franco-Arabic Schools in the Senegalese Educational System” in August, 2000.11

How should we interpret this confusion between an educational system and the Murid brotherhood or Islam in Senegal? In several circles it is said that Abdoulaye Wade, who received only 31% of the vote in the first ballot of the presidential election, won the election only because of the silence of the Murid leaders who had refused to declare a ndigel (dictated vote) in favor of Abdou Diouf. One thing is certain, the exploitation of Touba provided him with a coherent base and allowed him to free himself from the allies who had helped him come to power. There is a correlation between his desire to control religious education and his political preoccupations even if the role of international authorities cannot be discounted, although their aid is of little consequence if it “does not clear the urban intersections of these hordes of little beggars in rags.” But this measure could also be a suggestion of certain dignitaries of the Murid brotherhood who believe that the reform of the daara is essential to their continued existence.

Setting aside political considerations we might view these measures as attempts to bring the educational programs more in line with the concerns and interests of the people. The evolution they reveal can first be analyzed as a consequence of the influence of financial organizations that advocate the application of the logic of free market economy to all areas of human activity, including education. The introduction of religion and local languages in the public school system amounts to adapting the educational supply to the demands of the consumers, assumed collectively to be rational. A second interpretation, complementary to the first, favors endogenous explanations and underscores the idea that these measures are in line with a long-term perspective of Islam in Senegal in which the founding of a secular State appears as merely an epiphenomenon inherited from the colonial interval.

The advocates of these reforms have denied the absolute nature of the characteristics differentiating the official school system from traditional modes of socialization. They quickly refuted the definition of modernity that restricted the religious domain to individual consciences or the private sphere.12 These denials undermine the French definition of the State and of the boundaries separating public and private spheres, the relevance of which is questioned in Senegalese society. In spite of its option for modernity, there are a few contradictions in its approach.

The Senegalese “educational system” is defined by some observers, especially foreigners, as “a heteroclite constellation of educational, training or socialization programs administered and operated by multiple agents: official bodies, non-governmental organizations, religious congregations, various community groups.”13 But we must now analyze the argumentation of the Senegalese State.

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12 The decline of the religious dimension announced by an “ineluctable law against which it would be absurd to revolt” (Durkheim, 1994: 146) was already invalidated by the facts (Davie, 2002), is already invalidated by the Law.

Argumentation Concerning the Introduction of Religious Education

To understand the Senegalese State’s approach we must look for the elements of justification in the system composed of French schools, formal schools or modern schools.

The private Catholic schools are considered adept at avoiding the pitfalls of excessive formalization and at benefiting from the advantages of a rigorous codification of content and behavior norms without suffering its consequences.

Finally there are the Arabic language schools that are hardly distinguishable from daara whose principal aim is teaching the Qur’an which, for the Muslim faithful, must be completely memorized in Arabic. The Qur’anic school “does not prepare one for a trade or a role but only to be a believer, a perfect man, by using all the techniques of inculcation designed to domesticate the body and the spirit.”14 However, the pedagogical methods used in the daara are becoming more diversified, particularly because they are receiving more contrastive demands. So, if certain traditional daara continue to make children learn the Qur’an by heart without understanding its meaning, others teach Arabic first, so that it precedes then accompanies the memorization of the sacred texts. Another difference is that urban daara function only outside of school hours which allows the children, the talibés, to go to formal school as they progress in their religious instruction.

The integration of the daara in formal education is a truly astounding move. What were the different stages? We note “The Program for the Introduction of Trilingualism” in 2001 and “Curriculum for the Introduction of Trilingualism and Professional Training in the Daara in Senegal” in 2002. Officially the measure is intended to allow Senegal to maintain its rank among the other countries of the region and to declare a percentage of children in school calculated according to the criteria comparable to those habitually applied (stakes: the Conference of Jomtien en 1990 and that of Dakar in 2000 declared the unanimous desire, confirmed by the Objectives of the Millenium, to achieve education for all expeditiously.) Countries that have not yet achieved this goal are encouraged to make significant efforts toward making education accessible to the segments of the population currently excluded.

The authorities think that by promoting all plans that provide in some way for all the children in the country, whatever the aims pursued and the agents accomplishing them, they will be able to attain a gross percentage of children enrolled in school approaching the universal norms. Clearly, this is the path chosen by the Senegalese authorities who, to maintain the country’s public image, prefer to abandon, if only partially, the secular character of public education. It is expected that the addition of the talibés (students) of the daara to the statistics of the Ministry of National Education will raise the gross percentage of children in school to more than 95%. This is a technical maneuver designed to attain rather effortlessly the objectives set by the 10-year program for education and training (PDEF)15 and, as an affirmation of national pride, inclusion on UNESCO’s list of countries with chances of actually achieving education for all in 2010.

It is also a way for the public authority to exercise a minimum of control over these establishments and introduce elements of professional training in their programs.

According to the Minister Moustapha Sourang, though scheduled as early as 1981 after the CNREF, the inclusion of the religious dimension in the school curriculum was

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always postponed due to a lack of political will. “In fact”, he says, “the main difficulty is solving the problem of secularism as it relates to the administration of the religious dimension in our public schools. Secularism is a concept that we inherited from the Western world. It originated in Europe in a specific historical context. Our political institutions have been significantly influenced by the concept. Add to that the vicissitudes of colonization that created a climate favorable to its implantation. Those are some of the obstacles to the implementation of our paradigms in the development of our cultures.” Criticizing secularism is the favorite sport of those who seek to justify the implication of the Republic in religious affairs. Perhaps we should pause here to better examine the historical dimension of education as it relates to religion.

It was in 1817 that Jean Dard opened the first elementary school in Saint Louis of Senegal. Sourang believes that education developed in divergent directions because of the impact of sociological factors. Thus, schools operated by religious congregations (the Brothers of Ploermel and Saint Joseph of Cluny) flourished from 1841 in Saint Louis and on Gorée. And it was only after 1857 that Governor Faidherbe ordered the creation and establishment of Muslim schools by the decree of June 22.

The education that had long existed among the Islamized populations of Senegal was thus recognized by the supreme authority of the colony. French opinion was mixed in regard to Governor Faidherbe’s decision to officialize Qur’anic education; while some saw in it a spirit of tolerance, others viewed it as a policy that could lead to the emergence of a Muslim elite hostile to France.

To reconcile the two positions, the French authorities opted for the creation of Medersas. These were institutions where teaching was done in French and Arabic, as was the case in the French possessions of North Africa. The first Medersa was founded in Saint Louis in 1908, the one in Dakar, in 1937; Faidherbe wanted to reconcile the civilizing mission of France with the specific needs of the people involved. By the decree of June 22, 1857 the governor was guided not only by a philanthropic intent but also by the desire to establish his authority by assuming responsibility for these needs while respecting the people’s beliefs (“provide all necessary guarantees for children’s education […] the French government takes an interest in all classes of the Senegalese population and …it cannot remain indifferent to the question of the education of families.”)

In justifying his views the Minister thinks “we must recognize that the structure of our school system bears the imprint of the educational policy of the Third Republic with the laws initiated by Jules Ferry between 1881 and 1886.” He holds that the project relative to the introduction of religious education in the school system supposes that there is a positive approach to the concept of secularism. Secularism must not be a concept that leaves religion and the State in an outdated ambivalence. The separation of religion and the State must be considered a declaration of principle that must be adapted to the socio-cultural context. Rather than peremptory separation (religion/State) ex nihilo, religion must function within the State (understood in the strict sense of the term). The State is and remains secular which means that the State manifests positive neutrality regarding religion, recognizes all religions and reserves the kingly right to administer the development of religions without bias. If indeed each one is entitled to protect his own interests, the State has the duty to transcend different religious persuasions to effectively guarantee the legitimate aspirations of all, in the respect of their differences. Is this a declaration of principle?
At this juncture the Minister redefines the neutrality of the State; for him the practice of one’s faith, its dogma and its rituals is accomplished in the perfect symbiosis of hearts and minds, in a brotherly harmony and the strict respect of beliefs. There could never be obstacles to freedom of religion in Senegal. Precisely, we believe that religious education should be the responsibility of the family and the community while the State should be concerned with making education compulsory for all.

Where we can no longer agree with Moustapha Sourang is when he maintains that the practice of religion supposes training co-religious representatives of different persuasions. The absence or insufficient level of religious training is often a cause of fanaticism and undesirable behaviors. Religious intolerance is most often a consequence of an inadequate religious education. “One of the aims we want to include in our system is the protection of our children from the perils of religious intolerance by affording them a religious education based on universally accepted normative values.” Does the State really have the means to take the place of parents and communities?

We must point out that the introduction of religious education in the school system cannot be done without modifying several statutory texts, notably Law No. 91-22 called the Orientation Law of National Education. The modification of this law concerns particularly Article 4 (2nd paragraph) that guarantees on the one hand religious freedom in public institutions and on the other, religious instruction in private schools.

In the spirit and the letter of the modifications proposed in the reform of the Orientation Law it is clearly stated that religious education could in no way be compulsory. It is the parents’ responsibility to choose to enroll their children in religious instruction courses. Moreover, the bill modifying Law No. 91-22 of February 16 is unequivocal, stating:

National education is secular; it respects and guarantees in all respects the freedom of conscience of citizens.
Children enrolled in a public institution have the possibility of receiving religious instruction in school. This instruction is optional. It is the parent’s responsibility to request this religious instruction.
According to the requests expressed by the parents, public institutions must offer religious instruction corresponding to the different religions of Senegal.
Religious instruction organized in public schools must respect the principle of the secularism of the State. It must be based on tolerance toward other religions and must give rise to no phenomenon of exclusion.
A decree specifies the conditions for the application of this article.

Moustapha Sourang admits that another objective of the reform is to raise the percentage of children enrolled in school. Posted currently at 69% it does not include the enrollment figures for children in Arabic language schools, as if literacy were limited exclusively to Latin letters. He points out that in addition to the populations mastering classical literary Arabic “our country has huge populations literate in national languages. Ever since the colonial period these people have been reading and writing their language using the Arabic alphabet.”
Senegal has reached a point where the evolution of mentalities requires that our educational policy be revised in light of the socio-cultural transformations. “The introduction of religious education and the creation of Franco-Arabic schools are a real and urgent need.

In many regions there is a movement away from enrollment in school. Let’s have the courage to admit that recruitment campaigns for elementary school enrollment are becoming more and more difficult. Despite interventions by the public organizations, the parents are reluctant to comply. Rather than a phenomenon of demand the problem is that the appeal of Senegalese schools has been eroding over the years. Faced with this development, one response is to take into account the pressing social demand for religious education and the creation of Franco-Arabic schools.”

This questioning is profound given the changes in the curricula brought about by the reform of Arabic language instruction and the introduction of national languages. But it is the former measure that interests us at this point.

Arabic language instruction was introduced in the curriculum informally soon after independence. At that time the country had eight teachers of Arabic. The status of this instruction is not clear. It is taught one hour a week and is an optional course usually placed in a late-morning slot.16

Instead of this informal instruction of vague, uncertain status the State plans to introduce for Muslims formal instruction in Arabic as an aid in the study of the Qur'an and the Islamic sharia, a reformatted modular instruction with a definite curriculum. Two hours a week could be allotted for this module. Time could be taken from subjects such as Morality, Singing, Art or Health Education. The purpose of this instruction in Arabic would be twofold: first the study of classical Arabic as a foreign language, but also of Arabic as a language enabling the Muslim to live his faith completely.

In addition the authorities will offer Christians infrastructures with pedagogical possibilities for insuring religious instruction in catechism and Christian morality.

The second part of the reform addresses the creation of public Franco-Arabic schools – a major innovation (even if many think that these schools lack credibility). The plan was to open the first school in October, 2003 in the targeted regions where the demand is great. The planned Franco-Arabic elementary schools would prepare students for middle and high schools of the same type. The old Islamic Institute which is in the process of being reformed (it will become the National Institute of Islamic Education in Senegal) will take over from secondary education and in the long run will house the first structure of higher Islamic education.

As for the administration of the daaras their integration is complex and deserves very careful thought. However, the term daara has been given a connotation that hardly translates the idea that the forerunners had of this type of structure. Of course, the economic crisis and its perverse effects have transformed urban centers into outlets for vulnerable categories of the population, among which young children figure prominently. A problem this complex requires concerted intersecting actions and the cooperation of several ministries. Today the great number of informal structures for the study of the Qur'an creates a veritable typology of daaras. They must not all be grouped together in the process of classifying the

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implicit objectives. But one thing is certain: the urgency to solve the problem of human rights as it relates to religious education in Senegal.

**Religious Education and Human Rights**

In December 2003 the George Soros Foundation, OSIWA, and the Citizens’ Movement organized a meeting attended by representatives of several organizations including UNICEF. It was not the first time that organizations, physical and moral persons, have attempted to pose the problem of the eradication of the *talibé* phenomenon or the mendicancy of children in the street. There is unanimity about the necessity to end this abuse seen along the main thoroughfares of the city of Dakar. This initiative was a part of the Citizens’ Movement commitment to youth issues since its inception; the impossibility of turning a blind eye to the *talibé* situation in a world where the promotion of human rights has become a key factor in all societies. Education alone can help to insure the dignity of each and every one, thus the necessity to promote and respect the Jomtien agreements signed by our country. To do that the problem of the *daaras* must be addressed as they are the only structures considered as informal schools even if they alone compete with formal schools, that is those that function full-time. There are the examples of the *daaras* of Coki, of Keur Mame Mor Cissé which are boarding schools with a minimum of amenities where the youth learn the precepts of Islam and also technical skills preparing them for success in their professional life.

Others, especially in urban centers, send their children out into the streets to beg for food and money without necessarily providing them with the Qur’anic instruction for which they were sent there. The justification for this forced regime is a religious one: a lesson in humility, so that the child will know what abject poverty is and will then show compassion to his fellow man and be generous upon succeeding in life.

The number of children enrolled in *daaras* is estimated at between 600,000 and one million; this is only an estimate, basically because there is no census taken and the *daaras* are not obliged to provide any data to any authority which makes it impossible to distinguish between those that function full-time and those that are in session outside regular school hours. The frequently cited figure of 800,000 could well be just the result of subtracting the number of 1,100,000 children enrolled in formal school from the total number of school-age children the same year. Non-formal education encompasses community schools also.

Returning to the campaign against the mendicancy of the *talibé*, the right of each child to education must be placed in the context both national and international of the promotion of human rights. The crisis of the family and the growing impoverishment have contributed to the disorganization of the Senegalese educational system. The mendicancy of children is the most visible consequence because it is linked to the disintegration of the Senegalese family, the gulf separating the educational sites from the politicians and an inversion of the pedagogical model. Each region of Senegal has its specificity affecting the situation of its children and this fact must be taken into account: the region of Thies is characterized by an elevated rate of STD and AIDS, the River Valley, by the conflict between Senegal and Mauritania. In the city of Saint Louis the young *talibés* are subjected to the dramatic practice of the *neeraan*.

17 This is a unique event occurring between 1 and 2 a.m. To obtain the required earnings (800 CFA francs) the young *talibés* wait for the arrival of the fishing boats to dive into the sea to collect small fish for resale; these *talibés* are quite often victims of fatal accidents.
Today the combined effects of the crisis and the conflicts explain that in certain zones of Africa abandoning children is legitimized (sorcerer children, for example). On the other hand, in Senegal the most obvious phenomenon is the Senegalese men’s abdication of their responsibilities. Traditionally our societies were based on a matrilineal system in which the authority fell to the uncle. But today the uncle cares neither for his nephews nor for his own children. Meanwhile there is a total incoherence in the social policies of the State, the reduced number of structures in no way insuring efficient action.

The widespread mendicancy is disturbing to many because even if there is a degree of commitment it is still negligible and has produced no results. The *talibé* phenomenon is incomprehensible in a modern world; a child has the right to education, to training, to health care for if his health is at risk he cannot fully enjoy his rights as a citizen. He is most often not registered in the Civil Registry and yet he has the right to a name.

Today the child must be reinstated in his right to education; the first step is to outlaw mendicancy by children, then raise the awareness of families; enforce compulsory education starting with elementary education for it is not a question of seeing the child as a beneficiary of education but rather as one entitled to a right. Strive on all levels (local, national and international) to implement the Jomtien agreements on education for all. We must especially avoid introducing discriminatory measures in the educational system.

We should evaluate the solutions proposed and applied so far: voluntary service, the role of non-governmental organizations, various experiments. The Ministry of National Education should create a unified structure to coordinate all these initiatives.

An Observatory\(^{18}\) should be set up to combine initiatives on the education issue and serve as an agency for consultation among institutions. This Observatory’s function should be one of warning and vigilance in identifying the links, the obstacles to remove so that the State can act responsibly and draw up a plan of action for raising awareness.

If the modernization of the *daaras* can aid in the anti-mendicancy campaign the first step will be to identify those that have innovated like Coki where instruction in French and English was introduced. Then, thought should be given to providing trilingual instruction in the schools because there are traditional schools that have produced excellent students: those of Thierno Kâ, of Ibrahima Hanne of Kaolack that sent students to the Sorbonne. There are about ten Franco-Arabic elementary schools.

The State must set about finding solutions for the crisis in Qur’anic schools, beginning by giving them a chance through substantial subsidies. Parents must also get involved in seeking solutions. Working in true synergy we can envisage the following strategies:

- Encourage organizations such as the Fund of Islamic Solidarity to aid in the search for material solutions.

- Concerning the modernization of Qur’anic schools, begin by defining the kind of person we want to promote, conceptualize modernization before determining the purpose of these schools. Avoid at all costs creating schools that are non-conformist: for example, can one associate this type of school with teaching a lifestyle? What are the organizational plans for better integrating Qur’anic schools in modern life? But also, what institutional plans are involved? Do these schools extend to secondary education and university? These

\(^{18}\) Recently (during 2007), an initiative was launched in collaboration with the World Bank, UNICEF and various NGOs under the leadership of the author Cheick Hamidou Kâne to end the phenomenon of children’s mendicancy.
schools must be useful and attractive; making them boarding schools, for example. Even if
the instruction is multidimensional the curricula must be standardized.

- Offer real salaries to Qur’anic teachers but also enact measures encouraging
them to make instruction more comprehensive.

- Outlaw mendicancy which in the traditional context lasted only thirty to forty
minutes a day and allowed the talibé to feed himself. Have citizens understand that in a
school environment alms are not mandatory. Limit the number of talibés per teacher to
reduce costs.

- Develop comparative research to determine the rationale that will guide the
children’s progression.

Even if some are skeptical regarding the introduction of religious education in school
as a solution, it can, if well organized and supervised, serve in an intermediate phase as a
palliative and an initial implementation of children’s rights.

We must face facts and admit the principle of the universality of human rights and
avoid dividing them. Since it is a problem of application and not of applicability the solution
is dependent upon a political decision, or to put it better, the system is created and
maintained by us.

It must be recognized that the State has failed as it is its responsibility to insure the
training of children, their education, and to provide them with the conditions for good
health. Better still, the first act toward true citizenship is enrollment in the Civil Registry, an
act that is not automatic in the case of the little talibé. A child needs a wholesome
environment in order to flourish but the talibé is far removed from such a situation, hygiene
and public health measures are not part of his daily life. As for the lack of leisure time, it is
exemplified by the fact that the child cannot even confide in his mother. Parents have
entered a phase of abdication and have thus failed in their duties. In such conditions, the
State must assume its responsibilities and insure the protection of a child who, in the talibé’s
predicament, has no recourse but the street. 50% of all street children come from the daaras
having fled the marabout and so have no more connections. Also, the young marabouts are
modernizing this exploitation as mendicancy is a profitable activity; except it does the child
no good and his education is diverted. Since reactions to the necessity to act are no longer
hostile, we must seize the moment and draw up a true plan of action involving community
leaders and civil society; in Gambia there is no mendicancy.

Factors of a psychological nature must be identified and we must insist on the need to
correlate democracy and citizenship. Develop dynamics separate from political
circumstances to address the task of raising awareness. It is true that we can economize, find
resources to invest in education by eliminating lavish celebrations, for example.

These needs are amply justified by the necessity of promoting a wholesome
environment and opportunities for leisure time but when the child is sent far away from his
parents he cannot even have the privilege if confiding in his mother. Among the many
proposals we mention:

- Combine the initiatives of the different agents involved and rationalize them.
Cooperation between the different sectors of the State concerned with population is vital as
the population variable must be introduced in a systemic way in State policies.

- Identify the organizations working toward the same goals such as those
concentrating on street children, sexual exploitation of children and mendicancy to define
common strategies.
- Involve local collectivities more in the search for solutions and organize meaningful action in the neighborhoods.
- Raise awareness of families so that they will not send their children off to beg because if they really go to Qur’anic school, begging should not be the main activity of the talibé since the schedules are strict and school begins at 5 a.m.
- Analyze economic policies like the DRSP and make alternative propositions with the aim of improving them.
- Create centers to receive children partially or totally separated from their families. ENDA-Graf succeeded in reintegrating 27 children in their families in the region of Diourbel; even if the impact is limited, the move is commendable as returning a child to his family can help him to thrive.
- Increase significantly the enrollment in supervised education and social protection where a decrease in enrollment has been observed; supervised education has lost almost 90% of its personnel.
- Do an inventory of the children’s origins and the causes of their delinquency. After a thorough census establish the classification of the daaras and their lists. Actually, they are not all of Senegalese origin. Based on questionnaires determine the proportion of talibés among the street children. For example, in the Department of Pikine out of ten Qur’anic schools six are operated by Bissau-Guineans. The regions providing talibés are: the Futa, Kolda and the Salum’ this data is of capital importance when the question of returning them arises.

Some children are sent by their own families to beg for their daily earnings. There is also the example of adults who are frequently jitney conductors who rent children for 2000 francs a day to send them off to beg.

Conclusion
The educational system in Senegal is in difficulty as the supply is far below the demand. But Senegalese society must modernize for we cannot progress while maintaining ancient practices. Every child has the right to education in a homogeneous system with equal chances of success.

School is the training ground for citizens who will serve the Republic; also it must be a place for acquiring the knowledge and social behaviors that the Republic needs to function and govern properly all citizens over and above their religious convictions. The knowledge and comportment thus acquired can be handed down in a republican space.

During the Senghorian era, a time when secularism was a reality in public schools, Qur’anic schools or daara, private religious schools all functioned in conformity with the Republican statutes. The knowledge, the transmission and the practice of religion was a matter of personal, private conviction, even if persons sharing a common conviction met together in private spaces called mosques, churches or the sacred forest.

But the practice of mendicancy by talibés must be abolished and the only valid solution is to apply the law in all its glory.

References


