

**Sufi Islam of Senegal**

A Model of Secular Islam in West Africa

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## Abstract

The West African nation of Senegal has a long, rich, and unique history of Islam as part of its identity as compared to other Muslim majority nations throughout the world in that it is one of the few examples of a secular state that shares its identity alongside Islam, long thought to be an incompatible marriage in religious-political relations, yet its unique arrangement of peaceful co-existence between the Sufi brotherhood *marabouts* that lead the vast majority of the population and the secular-minded state can provide a model for other Muslim majority nations to follow in seeking to adopt a similar position in a “secular Muslim” or “Muslim democratic” state. Yet Sufi Islam in Senegal has not been without its challenges. A new generation of Senegalese armed with new ideas and perspectives on a more intensive and pure application of Islam is seeking to upend a long-established and relatively peaceful status quo between the religious faithful and the state. This work seeks to identify the origins and establishment of Sufi Islam in Senegal, the structure of the relationship between the state and Islam, the challenges of Islamization through certain periods in Senegal’s history in the post-colonial era, why Islamist movements have not taken firm root in Senegalese society and future challenges that have the possibility to upend the relationship between mosque and state in Senegal.

*Keywords:* Senegal, Sufism, Islam, *marabout*, Islamist movements.

## **Deep and established roots**

“Senegal has a rich Islamic history, influenced by many Islamic movements over time” (Mecham, 2017, p. 106). Islam was imported into West Africa and in particular, the Senegambia region in the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Clark, 1999) where present day Senegal lies by traveling merchants from North Africa then later, by imams (teachers of the faith) who established themselves in the region (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). Over time, Qur’anic doctrines and other Islamic teachings melded with the prior animist and mystical religions that existed before to produce a “syncretic” (Clark, 1999) form of Islam that came to be known over time up to the present day as *Islam noir* (Quinn and Quinn, 2003) or “Black” or “Africanized” Islam. This form of Islam in the Senegambian region was also characterized by its roots in Sufi mysticism, a form of Islam that emphasizes asceticism, veneration of saints, and other aspects of belief often at odds with other major branches of Islam. The melding of prior local religious practices and Islam eventually allowed Islamic law to rule over the region and the area experienced relative peaceful relations amongst the different ethnic groups even to the point where Quinn and Quinn (2003) note “some semblance of state organization was in place...civility and public discourse was a feature of society” (p. 91). In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries Islamic practice brought social institutions such as schools, hospitals, courts presiding in the context of sharia, and trading networks (Quinn and Quinn, 2003) that shaped an established culture of Islam in the region. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a European presence driven by the exploration endeavors of the Portuguese, British, and French was made in West Africa. Seeing the local populations as primitive and savages, there was little understanding as to how to deal with the populations in the hinterland where rich resources lie; as a result, conflict over control of these resources emerged. It was during this time that the salience of Islam in the Senegambia region was recognized and established the current construct that the world sees Senegal today. Despite Islamist calls for jihad to maintain their rule in the area, the colonial and imperialistic French that later maintained a European presence over Senegal opportunistically used Sufi Islam as a bridge to maintain relations that have been seen as the status quo to this day.

## **An enduring paradigm**

Sufi Islam in Senegal is structured by brotherhoods or orders. With a population of about 14 million people and an estimated 94% of this population that identify as Muslims (Mecham, 2017), the vast majority of Senegalese belong to one for four major brotherhoods, Tijan, Mouride, Layene, and Quadriyya (Koter, 2020). Of these four groups the Tijan (Tijaniya) and the Mouride (Mouridiya) remain the most influential with Clark (1999) noting the “majority of Senegalese Muslims belonged to the Tijaniyya brotherhood (fifty percent), followed by the Murides (forty percent)” (p. 160). Though the Tijanis boast the most members, the Murides are deemed to be the most influential because of its domestic origins of being “homegrown” and is better able to exert a higher level of control over its members (Koter, 2020).

How Sufi brotherhoods work in Senegal is similar to how they maintain a relationship with the Senegalese state – a symbiotic form of dependency that benefits the participants of the relationship. Followers of an order pledge allegiance to a *marabout* (the leader of the order) who provides religious and social guidance such as Islamic interpretation and teaching, marital matters, and employment opportunities. In return, the follower is expected to provide for the *marabout* a portion of his earnings from his profession or to work for the *marabout* directly. The orders are hierarchical (Quinn and Quinn, 2003) and succession is often handed down along genealogical lines and by generation. The high percentage of Muslims who identify with these brotherhoods in Senegal is reflective of the fact that these orders “cut across ethnic, family, and class divides” and offered “social cohesiveness” (Quinn and Quinn, p. 95)

The French made their first efforts for colonial and imperial influence in Senegal around 1854 (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). The established Sufi orders were met with a far more powerful opponent than they had ever previously encountered. As a result, according to Quinn and Quinn (2003) the orders issued a call to jihad to meet this French incursion. A few notable jihadist leaders emerged to confront the French in the region that included El Hajj Umar and Maba Diakhou (of the Tijan brotherhood), (Quinn and Quinn, 2003) and another Tijan, Mamadu Lamine Drame (Clark, 1999). At the onset, armed conflict to root out the jihadists was the main strategy for the French. Though victories were achieved through this policy, French efforts to eradicating jihad in the area was primarily achieved through a policy shift. Using their experiences in Muslim North Africa, particularly in Algeria, they found common ground with the leaders of the brotherhoods to quell anti-French sentiments to a level where both sides benefitted from the other in their own pursuits. Quinn and Quinn (2003) note “a Darwinian aspect to French policy” (p. 94) in that Muslims were considered more respectable than animist pagans in the interior but held less equal than Christians. But there was a further distinction between cooperative orders and militant orders of the Islamic faith. Those who cooperated were provided with more benefits than those who chose jihad against the French. Cooperation permitted these brotherhoods to freely manage and administer social and religious affairs along Islamic lines such as education, social welfare, and some autonomy around their *Zawiya* (lodges) (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). “As long as the marabouts instructed their followers to work and cooperate fully with the secular state, the administration did not interfere in religious matters. Brotherhood leaders likewise did not interfere in political matters and decisions” (Clark, p. 158) (but as we shall see, they were instrumental in major political decisions post-independence in Senegalese politics for some time). For the French colonial administrators, the *marabouts* were seen as barometers of the populace over which they had influence over and could also be seen as the “guarantors of a pacified peasant class” (Mecham, p. 109) moving forward. Seeing Islam as having a “stabilizing effect” (Koter, 2020) on the population, Quinn and Quinn note the “most evident characteristic of Islamic leaders in Senegal during the colonial era was their easy cooperation with the French” (p. 95). This model of symbiosis and mutual benefits continued in Senegal up until the independence of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is important to note the origins of the two most influential brotherhoods during the pre-colonial era that has endured to the present day. It is these two orders that have the most to gain – and lose – due to other competing Islamist movements in Senegalese politics and society today. The Tijaniya (Tijani) brotherhood is an imported product brought to the Senegambia region by El Hajj Umar Tall in the 19th century (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). Its most notable leader of the order was the influential Malik Sy who effectively worked with the colonial administrators in the region to maintain a relative peace with the local populations and the French and whose descendants continue to be influential in Senegal today, both favorably and unfavorably. Quinn and Quinn (2003) estimate the total membership of this order to be around 3 million adherents. The Tijaniya is described as “a loose federation of largely independent, often quarrelsome local branches (Quinn and Quinn, p. 98), (Mecham, 2017). It is also considered by Quinn and Quinn as a “seedbed for Islamist agitation” (p. 98). Despite its importance in the French colonial period as a stable foundation of Islam in the region, a more recent, and more influential brotherhood arrived on the scene and proved to have a greater impact in Senegalese-Islamic relations post-independence (Mecham, 2017), the Mouridiyya (Mourides).

Founded in 1886 by a former Qadiriyya brotherhood adherent, Amadu Bamba founded the Mouride order in Central Senegal (Clark, 1999). He acquired many adherents in the post-jihadist era of the late 19th century through a philosophy of positive thinking and hard work (Quinn and Quinn, 2003) particularly in the area of agriculture for which the Mourides have become known for in their near monopolization of the ground-nut (peanut) trade (Clark, 1999) (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). Acquiring a reputation “staunchly anti-imperialist and anti-French” (Clark, p. 156), the Mourides were distrusted by the French colonial administration (Clark, 1999), (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). At some point, both Bamba’s and the colonial authorities’ interests began to align and Bamba eventually came to abandon their resistance against the French and began to cooperate with them. In turn, the French colonial administration changed course on their policy with orders like the Mourides and enacted a “policy of accommodation” (Clark, p. 150) (Villalón, 2004), (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). Cooperation, although tenuous, reaped benefits for both the French colonial administration and Bamba’s order; The colonial government obtained an ally where they could continue their colonial and imperial endeavors of resource control and management while Bamba was free to manage the activities of his religious endeavors as the French were not concerned with such Sufi brotherhoods as a religious threat, only a military and economic one. Bamba, through this cooperation was able to construct a mosque in Touba and establish this as a pilgrimage site, thus exerting greater influence for himself for not only his followers but other Muslims in Senegal. Their monopoly on agriculture was strengthened after Bamba issued a fatwa to his followers to support French efforts in World War I. In turn, the local French authorities provided the brotherhood with large tracts of land and trading concessions effectively placing them as the apex power in this sector (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). Since then and since independence, “the Mouride leaders, and their disciples, remained the key political constituency for the secular state” (Clark, p. 157). Despite its large following of about 4 million adherents, The Mourides have displayed better cohesion than other

orders in Senegal and remains “the country's most dynamic political and religious force, one with diverse economic interests” (Quinn and Quinn, p. 97)

Senegalese presidents since independence have been virtually dependent on Sufi brotherhoods and in particular each order's *marabout* for their political success. Quinn and Quinn (2003) note that Islamic institutions like the Sufi brotherhoods have “been central to (Senegal's) political life..(and) to the stability of Senegalese politics (p. 101). Since its independence, Villalón (2004) asserts that Senegal has been “unquestionably” a democracy, yet in 1960 90% of the Senegalese population identified as Muslim (Clark, 1999). Given that scholars, intellectuals, political scientists, and international observers overwhelmingly claim that democracy and Islam does not mix, how can such a nation-state for the most part peacefully exist as a secular state dominated by a Muslim-Majority population? As Villalón (2004) notes “Much of the colonial and economic regime was built on collaboration with the orders” (p. 63) This cooperation played in the favor of the *marabouts* in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. A little over a decade before Senegal achieved Independence, the constitutional reforms adopted during the French Fourth Republic permitted broader voting rights that extended to French colonies to include Senegal. This proved to give the *marabouts* a valuable and coveted commodity in Senegalese politics – the vote of the populace, as now, “much of the power in the countryside rested with the Sufi religious leadership” (Mecham, p. 109). By providing vote orders (*nidgals*) *marabouts* could mobilize their followers to vote for a particular candidate that sought favor from the *marabouts* for their followers' votes. The *marabouts* now only waited for the candidate that could deliver on the most appealing promises in return for the votes. Thus, Koter (2020) noted “Muslim religious leaders largely emerged out of the colonial period in a strong social and material position and immediately became coveted partners for politicians looking to strengthen electoral ties with the population” (p. 295). This was readily apparent in the first presidential election in independent Senegal in 1960. Léopold Sédar Senghor, a Catholic by faith, effectively worked the existing relationship between government and mosque to become the first democratically elected president of Senegal despite have a Muslim population of over 90% and having a Muslim as his opponent. Promising the Mouride *marabout* the construction of a mosque in Touba Senghor was able to secure the blessing of the *marabout* along with the votes of his millions of followers. During the multi-decade rule of Senghor's tenure, his party consistently received the support of the Sufi brotherhoods (Mecham, 2017) despite his ability to manipulate the brotherhoods by working them against each other (Quinn and Quinn, 2003). Even during political crises when there was Muslim alternatives to take power, the *marabouts* consistently supported Senghor. Villalón (2004) notes that though on the surface these Sufi brotherhood orders were Islamic organizations based on their demographic makeup, they were not *Islamist* groups that sought to instill more fundamentalist or orthodox elements of Islam in Senegalese society and politics. *Marabouts* had delivered on their promises on the existing arrangements to keep out of politics if the government kept out of religious matters which as Clark (1999) asserts would have “antagonized a key constituency” (p. 160). There was too much at stake to lose for the *marabouts* and their order.

Subsequent regimes after Senghor's tenure in power also worked under the existing paradigm of cooperation between mosque and state. Abdou Diouf, Senghor's prime minister at the end of Senghor's tenure and a Muslim was greeted enthusiastically by the *marabouts* and their followers. Instead of playing each order off on each other like his predecessor did however, Diouf sought to harmonize the brotherhood's interests along with the Senegalese government's course of secularism (Quinn and Quinn, 2003) as what his successor (and opposition opponent) Abdoulaye Wade did up to the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What has emerged in the context of Senegalese politics and a Muslim majority populace is what Quinn and Quinn asserts as a "symbiotic, albeit often ambiguous, relationship" (p. 101) between the two because of the power each holds and what the other desperately needs. Nevertheless, this relationship also has permitted the democratic and secular experiment of post-independent Senegal "to survive the violent growing pains of a democratic process and allowed it to take balanced positions on controversial international issues while maintaining internal stability" (Quinn and Quinn, p.102) in a Muslim majority country. As a result in Senegal there exists a "pragmatic and successful cooperation (between state and mosque)...(that has been) maintained and enhanced after independence" (Clark, p. 160)

### **Islamist movements of Senegal since independence**

While this seems to be a rather utopian relationship in the Muslim world between Islam and a secular/democratic state, can Senegal really be considered democratic? After all, the arrangement between Senghor's Union Progressiste Senegalaise, (UPS) (since 1976 known as Parti Socialiste du Sénégal [PS]) and the Sufi brotherhoods that have supported the party had remained in power for over 40 years, which more or less describes a one-party state that is supported by non-political elements that wields great power in controlling a large voting bloc. Could the argument be made that instead of a democratic and secular state, Senegal actually characterizes an authoritarian or oligarchic state? Islamist movements that exist in Senegal seem to think so. Miles (2004) notes that Islamist groups found fault in *Islam noir* and claims to offer alternatives to a return to Islam either in the form of an Islamic state or with secular elements. Movements have been primarily university-based (Miles, 2004) or have occurred as rifts within Sufi orders between the existing older generation *marabouts* and lower-level (second tier) *marabouts* seeking influence with members and the state or by brotherhood members with alternate philosophies. They have occurred throughout Senegal's post-independence and for the most part their endeavors have been seen as having no influence on the national level (Clark, 1999). Other commentary on Islamist movements in Senegal have been described as "gaining (no) more than a small student following" ... "failed to take substantial root" (Quinn and Quinn, 2003), and "Islamist mobilization... characteristically low... largely (falling) flat, either never gaining an audience or else rapidly losing it" (Mecham, 2017, p. 106)

Some notable examples of Islamist movements in Senegal during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been the Hizboulahi (Party of God) movement in the late 1970s started by Ahmed Niass, a descendent of the Tijaniya brotherhood order (Quinn and Quinn, 2003), (Mecham, 2017). Despite originating from within the brotherhood, it failed to attract a noticeable following. An offshoot of the movement spawned another party, Rassemblement pour le Salut National (RNS), in later years but again no interest was found for the movement to gain any traction.

As Villalón (2004) describes, the protests Senegal experienced in the 1980s were a result of economic distress and political strife. Born from this discontent in Senegalese society was a militant student group Moustarchidine wal Moustarchidaty (Moustarchidine movement). A university-based movement, the group had Tijani ties similar to the Hizboulahi movement. Citing Islam as the answer to the problems being experienced in Senegal at the time, the party was identified as “the first serious contestatory political movement built on a religious basis in Senegal” (Villalón, 2004, p. 65). Its founder was Moustapha Sy, again a descendant of the founder of the Tijani order. Originally supporting the movement, the government soon clamped down on it after Sy openly challenged the ruling regime which did not bode well for Sy or the movement. In the wake of challenging the Diouf regime, violent protests erupted (Mecham, 2017), (Back, 2008), and Sy’s own family denounced the movement straining familial relations and having to make amends with the Senegalese government. In the end the movement failed to find a following beyond the youth found at universities throughout the country. The example of the Moustarchidine movement also underlines a startling observation that reflects other brotherhood order-based movements; it signifies the infusion of Islamist thought in an existing arrangement between mosque and state that originally was thought to be a strong relationship between the two to maintain the peace within Senegal between two unlikely partners.

Two university student organizations that also have existed and sought Islamist movements have been the Hizbut Tarqiyya, and Jamatou Ibadou Rahmane (JIR) that existed in the 1980s and 1990s. The JIR was notable for the projecting of Islam through visible Islamic practices such as women wearing headscarves in public (Mecham, 2017). Though it did make some advances, its goals were not to overthrow the ruling regime but to establish more mosques and Islamic schools throughout Senegal (Back, 2008), (Berkley Center, 2016). Hizbut Tarqiyya however did not have much success as it sought to challenge hereditary leadership in Sufi orders, which was easily quashed by the orders.

Even with the opening of political liberalization in the 1970s, political parties also have failed to garner much change in the secular nature of Senegalese politics. In the 2000 presidential election two candidates ran on Islamic platform and both failed to earn more than one percent of the total vote count (Mecham, 2017).

Lastly, Shi’i Islam did not become a noticeable movement until around 1969 (Leichtman, 2009). With Sufi brotherhoods being Sunni in faith, Senegalese Shi’a converts do not identify



with the authority Sufi marabouts, yet they still identify as Senegalese and appear to support secular endeavors, just not at the expense of the dominant brotherhood orders. Today's conversion of Senegalese Shi'a was prompted instead by the Iranian Revolution as it was the one example in the Muslim world of an Islamic resistance that "overthrew a Western-influenced secular regime" (Leichtman, P. 16). This global event of Islam versus the West inspired a small but enduring population of Senegalese to establish their own Shi'a movement and a desire to learn more about Islamist resistance trends in other Muslim nations in hopes that a replication of Iran's success could happen in Senegal against the secular government in power. Leichtman (2009) cites other scholars and experts that despite the "Iranian Revolution being a "development disaster" (p. 18) and that such a revolution could not occur in Senegal due to its strong relationship with other secular nations, particularly France, this small group of believers are still inspired by Khomeini's message though it is not entirely revolutionary in militant terms. They seek to "portray themselves as leaders of an intellectual movement and use their Islamic knowledge as a weapon to educate—and modernize—the Senegalese population" (Leichtman, p.17) and offer the Senegalese people an alternative to the existing status quo.

### **The status quo endures**

With the existence of various Islamist movements throughout Senegal's rather brief independent existence, a reasonably insightful observer would wonder why a fledgling secular, democratic state has not experienced more civil strife and unrest as elements of Islamic movements seek to upend the secular government. Several experts have had their own observations and have come to their own conclusions. A sampling of these observations follows.

Mecham (2017) notes three reasons that Islamists movements have gained little traction in Senegal; first movements have been fragmented and brief, in that they have narrow aims that do not entirely represent the broad appeal of other Islamists seeking change, and secondly, Senegal's secular nature allows for liberalization (albeit slowly) to engage potential movements on a civil level rather than a militant and violent one. The democratic experiment in Senegal thus helps the country deal with potential Islamist challengers (Back, 2008). A third reason mentioned by Mecham is that the syncretic form of Sufi Islam that has taken root in Senegal and has found a symbiotic relationship with the secular state is just not conducive for an Islamic republic or movement to take hold. This led several Islamist groups by the 1990s also come to concede that Islam just does not sell in Senegal. While the Senegalese people identify with Islam, they do not seek to install it in their daily lives through sharia nor do they want it to be institutionalized in their government. The existing secular contract and incentives works for all parties involved. Based on this, Miles (2004) notes that "Islamism is not an independent variable in West African politics. Its power depends on how well the postcolonial state manages to salvage its legitimacy in the wake of economic decline and urban insecurity" (p. 116)

Koter (2020) notes that the “most remarkable aspect of religion in Senegalese politics... (is that it) has not produced significant religious divisions” (p. 298). This is because it is not religion that is the salient part of Senegalese politics but the material and influential rewards that Sufi *marabouts* stand to gain in siding with one politician or another. Koter (2020) further notes “the symbiotic relationship between religious leaders and Senegalese politicians has been so successful and lucrative for the former that there are few reasons to change the winning recipe” (p. 298) It has become for the most part, the accepted status quo. The fluidity of support is reflected in the highest bidder for the votes of the order. This helps explain why such religious cleavages do not exist in Senegal according to Koter and why Islamic movements fail to gain traction.

Delvin-Foltz (2010) notes that “there is a general inverse relationship between extremist Islamists’ influence and state strength” (p. 2). Despite being an economically poor state, Senegal is a stable state that enjoys the authority and legitimacy of power. They have earned that legitimacy through a secular and democratic political openness in addressing grievances that are done in a civil manner. They seek to avoid when possible the use of force in dealing with Islamist movements (Delvin-Foltz, 2010) and would rather engage them. Such behavior tends to diffuse such militant Islamist rhetoric and movements. For example, Delvin-Foltz notes that “marches against government policies by Islamic youth groups in the 1990s prompted government officials to publicly consult with opposition leaders and undertake reforms that addressed some of their grievances while marginalizing those pursuing solely violent strategies” (p. 6). This permits more moderate movements to exist, and it is these moderate movements that often do not seek to challenge the status quo.

According to Loimeier (2000), to quell discontent amongst Islamist movements that threatened to disrupt the state-mosque relationship, the Senegalese state offered to give concessions to the Islamist groups that were willing to play the *jeu politique* (the political game) that has been played since colonial times in Senegal. Those unwilling to play by the rules would be removed from the game. In effect, the Senegalese government obtained the upper hand as it not only softened the militant Islamist rhetoric of these groups, but it also maintained some control over the movements that challenged it.

Finally, Clark (1999) notes that “pragmatism and cooperation (has) characterized relations between religious and secular leaders in the regions of modern Senegal...(from) early colonial times to the present” (p. 149) Both the ruling regime and the Sufi orders have little reason to ruin a framework that has since colonial times bode well for both groups. “Any challenge to the existing political leadership would also be perceived as a threat to the religious leadership, and vice versa” (Clark, p. 152). Any challenges to the status quo initiated by any of the various brotherhoods’ members is often policed by the *marabouts* to prevent such challenges from happening. As a result, the *marabout’s* efforts to quell such dissent prevents any real movement from gaining traction and adherents.

## What lies beyond the horizon

Senegal is often heralded as one of the most economically and politically stable countries in West Africa. Villalón (2007) notes that Senegal is a postcolonial oasis of stability, that has endured to a symbiotic relationship with a Muslim majority population. Yet despite these accolades as a stable and robust democracy in an unstable region, it faces serious issues moving ahead (Berkley Center, 2016).

Further, Villalón (2007) notes external conditions between Islam and the secular and democratic West has called into question “what does it mean to be Muslim living in a secular state like Senegal? Likewise, internal conditions in the 1990s were “marked by a deepening crisis of the Senegalese regime in the face of its eroding legitimacy and mass popular protests that were further driven by economic downturn and the growing impoverishment of much of the population (Villalón, 2007, p. 161)

Quinn and Quinn (2003) note that Senegal’s Muslim community is “at the threshold of major institutional changes” (p. 89). They note that the Sufi marabouts are slowly losing grip to a younger, more restless generation that wants more and will use Islamist movements as a vehicle to achieve those goals. When this moment will arrive is unclear. In the near-term Quinn and Quinn argue that the existing relationship will continue to resist such Islamist movements...for now. Longer term, this younger generation of restless souls will acquire more ideas, more adherents, and ultimately more power.

Clark also recognizes the rising challenge from this younger generation. This rising class is more attuned, and educated, and is questioning the existing status quo by challenging the leadership on both sides. There appears to be in some respects that this challenge is growing in force in this new century based on developments in the last decade of the last century. The last openly made *ndigal* (voting order) for a political candidate in 1988 went surprisingly unheeded by a number of brotherhood members (Clark, 1999) (Mecham, 2017). This resulted in the *marabouts* from publicly making any such endorsements in subsequent presidential elections. Could this be a sign that these older generation leaders are losing a grip on their own power in the orders? It’s still too early to tell; Clark notes that “the traditional Islamic leadership in Senegal maintains overwhelming popular support” ... (and that so far,) radical Islam is not a serious threat (p. 162).

Mecham (2017) notes that while “Muslim elites in Senegal have not had strong incentives to mobilize against the state in Islamic terms” (p. 129) there have been historical examples when it has occurred and could occur again in similar contexts: economic crises due to droughts leading to recessions, a devaluing of currency, and lowered incomes that lead to unrest and a challenge to the existing regime. In addition, accusations to electoral fraud in the 1980s and 1990s led to the development of small but noticeable movements. Other secular (and Western) nations’ decisions that can directly affect Senegal can also be a precipitating cause for Islamist movements; for instance, France’s decision to devalue the CFA franc in the mid-1990s

caused widespread protests that threatened to destabilize the region. With the leading marabouts maintaining silence on the matter, this allowed for Islamist movements to mobilize (Clark, 1999). Reflecting this silence, Clark predicts that “Any serious challenge to the secular government will most likely come from political opposition forces, or urban youth, and not the religious leadership or membership of Islamic orders, (eventually) urban youth might also eventually pose a threat to the religious leadership” (p. 162)

The dangerous equation of a poor economy and a rising youth demographic can be another flashpoint for the Senegalese government to experience even more potent Islamist movements. Though Senegal is not the poorest country in West Africa it does have a high poverty rate with 46.7 percent of the population in 2011 falling below the poverty line (Berkley Center, 2016). Add to the rising rates of under- or unemployed or employed in low-paying informal sectors like agriculture there is cause for people to start considering regime change once again. Given that 98 percent of respondents in a Pew survey cited that religion is ‘very important’ in their lives, the selling point of Islam being the answer could rise from the ashes. This young Senegalese demographic is also better educated and more aware of its relative condition as compared to other secular as well as other Muslim countries globally. When they begin to digest new ideas in the hope of bettering their condition, Islamist thought is not filtered out by any means. Dangerous ideas also have begun to enter the thoughts of the Senegalese. In a 2015 Pew survey, though most respondents had an unfavorable opinion of the terrorist group ISIS, 11 percent indicated that they had a favorable view of the group (Berkley Center, 2016). This reveals that elements of extremism do exist in the population.

## **Conclusion**

In 1630 the English Puritan John Winthrop, upon deck of the ship *Arbella* off the coast of North America, delivered to his fellow passengers a sermon titled “*A Model of Christian Charity*”. In it he described the settlers’ endeavors to this new continent as a “city upon a hill” an example for the world to see and to predict that these challenges would be a prelude to American exceptionalism. Winthrop’s treatise held; despite difficult challenges and numerous errors throughout its history, the American example has remained at the forefront and a global example for all. For Senegal, the same challenges await for the country to be the city upon a hill for the Muslim world; a shining example of exceptionalism that Islam and a secular/democratic can both exist in a Muslim majority state. It has and will continue to meet challenges in the near and long term, but it has seemed to have found an effective means to maintain stability and peace in a tumultuous region of the world. Senegal needs to hold the course and not stray to the extremist and militant influences that speak in the name of Islamism. Should it falter in its endeavors, it will only confirm a self-fulfilling prophecy that Islam and democracy cannot exist peacefully and will cause the nearly 1.6 billion Muslims to lose hope for a brighter and richer future.

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