

Book Reviews



Diouf, Mamadou. Ed.

2013. *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*. New York: Columbia University Press.

This edited volume engages issues of interest to policymakers and scholars: Is Sufism a particularly tolerant interpretation of Islam and thus more conducive to democracy than other interpretations? In engaging this question, the work brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to discuss how the social contract developed in Senegal, where Sufism plays an essential role in political and religious life. The volume grew out of a conference hosted by Columbia University in 2008 on Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal. A title like *Sufism, Secularism and the State in Senegal: a Social Contract* would have more accurately described the various contributions.

The Senegalese social contract, the “Islam-Wolof model,” relies on Sufi leaders called *marabouts* mediating between their followers, *taalibes*, and the state. The model, which developed in the colonial period, is flexible enough to survive shocks and crises. Chapter six by Cheikh Anta Babou presents the *taalibe* as a consumer of religious goods that expects to be satisfied. This conceptualization presents the *taalibe* with more agency than other works on Senegalese Sufism. Etienne Smith’s chapter further elaborates on the social contract, cautioning that beyond religion, kinship is an important factor in the country’s peaceful history.

Readers may find the introduction hard to follow. It suffers from weak theorizing of the relationship between *taalibe* and *marabout*, and at times aligns uncritically with American national security discourses. For example, the introduction claims that Sufism “continues to be the only way Islam will be able to coexist with the West” (p.3). The chapter needed to present Sufism’s relationship to democracy and tolerance with more nuance and less deference to War on Terror discourse.

The chapter by Souleymane Bachir Diagne analyzes the particular version of secularism that undergirds Senegal’s social contract, unique in both its formulation under the auspices of a Catholic president in a Muslim-majority country

and in its form, embracing the involvement of all religious actors in the public sphere and approaching religion with respect rather than hostility. Diagne laments that the model's reliance on the discipline of religious actors provides too few protections, and identifies signs that individuals can take advantage of the model. He concludes with a call for a reexamination of Senegalese secularism if only to make those participating in its expression more aware of it.

The third chapter by Beth Buggenhagen builds on Diagne's chapter. It analyzes why the visibility of Islam in the public sphere particularly in the form of *Mággal* videos and portraits, and facilitated by a secularism tolerant of religion, is increasing in contemporary Senegal. She argues that the presence of new forms of Muslim consumer goods is directly related to the economic advances of the Murid Sufi diaspora and foreign membership. These goods allow those who live abroad to stay connected to their religious communities while allowing diaspora women in particular to provide evidence of their own pious lives abroad. Provocatively, Buggenhagen questions if the increased visibility of Islam's material culture threatens Senegal's unique approach to secularism.

Erin Augis' chapter on Dakar's Sunnite women demonstrates how the Senegalese social contract allows for the flourishing of religious movements not only beyond Sufi brotherhoods, but also those who directly reject the religious practice of Sufis. Sunnites, basically Senegalese Salafis, reject the relationship of obedience between *marabouts* and *taalibes*, concerned that it prevents believers from developing personal relationships with God. It would have been helpful for Augis to point out that though Sunnites reject Senegal's secularism and its social contract, it is the basis by which they practice a minority interpretation of Islam in a country otherwise dominated by Sufi brotherhoods. Her chapter raises an important question in need of further elaboration: How does the social contract operate for those Senegalese who are not members of Sufi brotherhoods?

Alfred Stepan's contribution places the Senegalese case in conversation with other works on secularism, highlighting how Senegal's model and its absence of hostility to religion allowed for effective cooperation between political and religious leaders on campaigns against human rights violations such as anti-AIDS policy and anti-female genital mutilation policy. The chapter helps clarify the role of respect in institutional arrangements. Stepan emphasizes how repeated rituals of respect create a meta-knowledge where everyone understands the role of respect in the system, and everyone knows that everyone else knows too.

The central premise of the volume is challenged in multiple ways in Leonardo Villalón's chapter.¹ Villalón identifies Senegalese Sufism's varied responses to political involvement, ranging from dialogue to noninvolvement to violence, in effect questioning the assertion that Sufism has an inherent relationship to tolerance. He also argues that it does not make sense to examine the relationship between Sufism and democracy prior to the beginning of the country's democratic transition in the 1990s. Elsewhere in the volume, Joseph Hill questions the category of moderation often associated with Sufis. It would have been helpful for the editor to address these critiques.

Villalón's chapter compares the Senegalese experience with Mali and Niger, finding that Senegal is not as exceptional as it is frequently described. His most interesting finding is that democratization in these three Muslim countries led to a dramatic increase in the influence of religion. The chapter thus emphasizes how democratic practice may shape religious beliefs and institutions, effectively reversing the causal story presented by other contributors.

Overall, readers attracted by the volume's title are likely to be unsatisfied. While it is appropriate to ask if Senegal's democratic success is related to the institutional arrangement and predominance of Sufism, the volume does not answer this question. Rather, it offers reflections on the kind of secularism that developed in Senegal and the wider social contract that Sufism facilitates without clearly connecting these two concepts with democracy. The reader is left believing that it is the Senegalese social contract that facilitates tolerance *toward* religion, but not necessarily tolerance in citizens. Readers interested in the religious landscape of contemporary Senegal and its political implications, however, will find the volume useful.

Ann Wainscott

St. Louis University

wainscottam@slu.edu

¹ Villalón was my dissertation advisor and remains my primary academic mentor.