

Destructuring the Discourse of “*Islam noir*” Persisting in Senegalese Islamic Education: One Islam, One Qur’an, and One Prophet

UCHIYAMA Chie*

Abstract

This paper aims to deconstruct the “*Islam noir*” discourse that has shaped perceptions of Islam in Senegal since the colonial period by framing Salafis and Sufis as a binary opposition. While Senegalese Islam is often portrayed as “moderate” and “tolerant,” mainly associated with Sufi orders, Salafi-oriented Muslims are frequently seen as outsiders or threats. While recent scholarship has increasingly challenged the binary opposition between Sufis and Salafis, there remains a lack of concrete empirical studies that illustrate how this complexity manifests in the Senegalese context. First, this paper examines Islamic school textbooks published by the government since the 2000s. These materials avoid divisive issues, focus on universal elements of Islamic belief and practice, and reflect Senegalese cultural realities, while remaining generally acceptable to both Sufi- and Salafi-oriented Muslims. Second, the paper analyzes interviews conducted with teachers, students, and officials during fieldwork, revealing that Sufi and Salafi identities are often fluid and overlapping. The study demonstrates that formal education contributes to the formation of a shared “Islamic sphere” where multiple orientations interact, offering an alternative to the conventional binary between Sufism and Salafism.

Key Words: Senegal, Islamic Education, *Islam noir*, Textbook, Soufi Order, Salafi

Introduction

Senegalese Islam is often described as “moderate” and “tolerant.” About 95 percent of Senegal’s population is Muslim, and the vast majority belong to one of the Sufi orders—most notably the Tijaniyya or the Mouride. In practical terms, references to a “moderate and tolerant Islam in Senegal” usually refer to the Islam practiced by these Sufi brotherhoods. However, there is also a small yet visible minority of Senegalese Muslims who dismiss the veneration of Sufi leaders and instead seek a faith rooted solely in the Qur’an and the Sunna.

These Salafi-oriented believers have gained increased visibility through support from

* Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute of Islamic Area Studies, Sophia University

Arab countries, including mosque construction, funding for school building, and scholarships for students to study abroad. Media reports often warn that their growing presence challenges Senegal's traditionally moderate Islam. Such concerns are reinforced by a sense of insecurity heightened by violence from Islamist extremists in neighboring countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. A 2017 article in the German public broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*, titled "Saudi Arabia's Unprecedented Presence in Africa," provides a typical example: "They are building mosques, Islamic schools and hospitals in Africa's poorest regions. They also grant scholarships to missionaries to study theology in the Gulf states. In Saudi Arabia, both religious and private organizations use their funds to export Wahhabism and its Salafist ideology to the African continent" [Assignon 2017].

In the context of Islamic education in Senegal, especially from the 1970s onward—when the global Islamic revival coincided with the oil boom—there was a notable increase in modern Islamic institutions called Franco-Arab schools. This growth is believed to have been driven by graduates who studied in the Middle East and returned not only with financial support from their host countries but also sometimes with new educational methods and ideological influences [Dia, Hugon and d'Aiglepiere 2016: 12–13]. Since the 2000s, the Senegalese government has initiated reforms in the Islamic education sector, including the establishment of public Franco-Arab schools and the development of Arabic-Islamic curricula and textbooks. Underlying these initiatives, it can be argued, was the government's aim to bring a previously unregulated field more firmly under state control.

On the other hand, the idea that Salafi-oriented Islam threatens Senegal's seemingly "moderate" Islam relies on an older conceptual framework that overstates the difference between African and Arabic forms of Islam, and considers the former to be inherently "moderate" or "syncretic"—a perspective often referred to as "*Islam noir*." This way of thinking dates back to the nineteenth century and was shaped by the writings of colonial-era French administrators and scholars. The long-standing portrayal of Senegal's Sufi orders as exceptionally "moderate" and "tolerant," too, can be understood as a product of this "*Islam noir*" discourse. More recently, however, a growing body of scholarship has aimed to go beyond this dichotomous framework that opposes Sufi and Salafi expressions of Islam.

This paper pursues two main objectives. First, it examines the Islamic school textbooks developed by the Senegalese government. Although these textbooks were introduced at a time when the influence of radical Islam from the Middle East was a concern, their contents do not appear to be designed to exclude any particular theological orientation. Second, it analyzes the narratives of Muslims I encountered during fieldwork—including collecting information on these textbooks and visiting schools. This inclusive understanding of Islam is not solely envisioned by the government. Rather, it is also reflected in the narratives of individuals encountered during fieldwork, which indicate that the identities of Senegal's majority Sufi

followers and Muslims with Salafi leanings cannot be neatly classified into two distinct and opposing categories. These accounts strongly suggest that the identities of Senegal’s majority Sufi followers and Muslims with Salafi leanings cannot be easily divided into two separate categories. Through these investigations, the paper aims to offer a perspective for understanding Senegal’s contemporary Islamic landscape—going beyond the educational sector—without relying on the traditional binary view that opposes Sufism and Salafism.

1 Colonial Legacies and the Discourse of “*Islam Noir*”

Anthropological research on West Africa was initiated by colonial scholar-officials, including Paul Marty, who created a significant body of work on Islam in Senegal. Through these figures’ writings, a specific perception of African Islam emerged: it was depicted as primitive and syncretic, and—when contrasted with the “radical” and “fanatical” Islam of the Middle East—as moderate and tolerant. An administrative document from 1910 even stated that Islam in sub-Saharan Africa had “the advantage of tending to lose its fanatical character as the color of blackness increases” [Quellien 1910: 111]. Behind this conceptualization, often referred to as “*Islam noir*,” lay France’s desire, from the latter half of the nineteenth century onward, to insulate sub-Saharan Africa from the influence of Middle Eastern pan-Islamism—a movement that had already provoked anti-colonial resistance centered on Islam in Algeria. For this reason, an “African” Islam was celebrated as a moderate and politically safe alternative.

This “*Islam noir*” perspective not only served as a foundation for French colonial policies toward Islam for a time, but has also continued to shape subsequent academic research. Triaud [2014: 11], for example, noted that traces of this colonial perspective could be seen in the work of Cruise O’Brien, a prominent scholar of the Mouride order, who used a framework contrasting it with “Arab” Islam and described the Sufi brotherhoods of Black Africa as follows: “To counter the humiliation that spiritual subordination to an Arab religion might signify, the Sufi brotherhoods developed religious autonomy in black Africa” [Cruise O’Brien 1981: 9–10].

Triaud further observed that West African Islamic studies have long placed a disproportionately heavy emphasis on Senegal and the Mouride order. He warned that, even today, the very presence of Sufi orders in the region is too much generalized and taken for granted [Triaud 2014: 11]. Such tendencies, he argues, reflect the lingering influence of an overemphasis on an “African” Islam.

The essentialist view of Islam that emerged from French colonial scholars spread in different directions. One example is that, in anthropological studies of West Africa after independence, Islam in the region was often seen as not a “pure” form of Islam and therefore not worth serious scholarly attention, while research tended to focus on small-scale traditional

societies—such as the Dogon—that were believed to represent “authentic Africanness” [Launay 2006; Şaul 2006; Soares 2014].

This influence went beyond West Africa and into the broader field of anthropology—especially within what is now called the “anthropology of Islam.” This discipline, initiated by Clifford Geertz, examines how different forms of Islam are understood across various regions. Talal Asad noted that the dualistic view—comparing a scripturalist, puritan urban Islam with rural Islam focused on saint veneration and rituals—promoted by scholars like Geertz and Ernest Gellner also reflects ideas originally shaped under French colonial rule [Asad 1986: 6].

Furthermore, outside of anthropology, the broader field of African Islamic studies has also been shaped by such perspectives. A well-known example is Trimingham’s three-stage model of how Islam spread in sub-Saharan Africa [Trimingham 1959]. According to this model, Islam entered societies that had long been dominated by traditional religions through a series of stages: (1) the settlement of Muslim outsiders in animist communities, (2) the conversion of local leaders, and (3) the eventual conversion of the broader community. Although subjected to various critiques, this model has continued to be cited up to the present and has retained a certain influence through more refined versions advanced by scholars such as Fisher [1985]. This perspective also relies on the essentialist assumption that “true Islam” ultimately emerges from a local, syncretic context [Loimeier 2013: 28; Sakai 2003: 15–17]. One can easily discern in it the enduring imprint of the “*Islam noir*” perspective.

Research on Salafi movements in West Africa, which has been accumulating since the 1970s, also largely reflects the historical framework proposed by Trimingham. Soares [2014: 32] notes that Brenner [2001], who discussed the transformation of epistemologies from esoteric to rationalist through the shift from traditional Islamic education to modern school systems, also depends on such a unilinear, developmentalist perspective.

Moreover, Rosander [1997], while distinguishing between “African Islam” and “Islam in Africa”—arguing that the former one or local expressions of Islam are found primarily in Sufi contexts, whereas the latter category, “Islam in Africa,” corresponds to more Salafi-oriented tendencies—can more directly be situated within the current of thought associated with the notion of “*Islam noir*,” even though she acknowledges the interaction between the two poles and the impossibility of a strict dichotomy.

By contrast, in recent years, studies of West African countries outside Senegal have emerged that move beyond such dichotomous models. For example, Saint-Lary [2012] has shown that in Burkina Faso practices once regarded as distinctive of Salafi Muslims—such as wearing beards or headscarves, praying with arms folded, and criticizing visits to saints’ tombs—have increasingly spread among other Muslims as well, suggesting that Salafi identity may be less clearly defined than it appears. Similarly, Kobo [2009] interprets mid-twentieth-century Salafis in Ghana and Burkina Faso not primarily as anti-Sufi actors but rather as

participants in a modernist movement closely aligned with Western-educated elites.

With regard to Senegal, Villalón [2007: 191] argues that since the late 1980s political movements emerging from within the Sufi orders have themselves begun to borrow certain Salafi elements, thereby blurring the boundaries between Sufis and Salafis. Villalón contends that merely revisiting the Sufi–Salafi dichotomy is no longer sufficient; instead, scholarship must illuminate the more complex range of identities and positions that have developed. Yet this line of inquiry has not yet been adequately explored in studies of Senegal.

2 Islamic Education Reform and State Curriculum in Senegal

The 2010s were a time when the violence from Islamist extremist groups in West Africa became a direct and present reality. The news article mentioned earlier, which fueled worries about ideological influences from the Middle East, should be understood in this context. In 2015, for example, President Macky Sall said at an international forum: “We cannot accept another form of religion being imposed on us, with practices that do not correspond to our traditions or our understanding of Islam,” and further, “We cannot accept that models from who knows where are imposed on Africa simply because Africans are poor, because mosques and schools need to be financed” [*Jeune Afrique* 2015]. Particularly since the September 11 attacks in the United States, madrasas have increasingly been associated—at least in public discourse—with the image of potential “hotbeds of terrorism.”

The Islamic textbooks published by the Senegalese government since 2008 were conceived in part as replacements for the materials imported from Arab countries and used partly in private schools established by Salafi organizations. At the same time, these state-produced materials must, by their very nature, reflect the government’s own view of what defines a desirable form of Islam. However, these initiatives should not be seen simply as a direct counter-movement against the radical Islam of the Middle East in the 2000s and 2010s. To understand their importance, it is crucial to consider them within the broader context of the Senegalese government’s gradual, decades-long effort to reform and organize the country’s Islamic education sector.

2.1 Trajectories of Reform in Islamic Education

Until recently, Senegal’s Islamic education sector—comprising Qur’anic schools known in Wolof as *daaras* and private Islamic institutions, known as Franco-Arab schools—remained largely within the sphere of non-formal education. In other words, for many decades, French-language public schooling and Islamic education coexisted as two parallel systems. The roots of this “benign neglect” policy can be traced back to the colonial period, when French

educational policy generally adopted a passive stance toward Islamic instruction. Although there were times when introducing Arabic-Islamic education into public schooling was considered, the French authorities ultimately decided that in the West African colonies it was safer and more beneficial to keep Islamic education “harmless” rather than to modernize it [Bouche 1974: 229–230]. This decision led to a policy that excluded Islamic schools from the scope of *laïcité*, relegating them to the margins of official education, where the state adopted a posture of non-intervention [Sakai 2018: 52–54]. The resulting situation—where Islamic educational institutions remained for so long in the realm of non-formal schooling—can itself be regarded as a product of the colonial “*Islam noir*” policy.

It was only after the 2000s that the government finally started addressing this situation, but until then, the modernization of Islamic education was mainly driven by Salafi organizations. Through students who had studied in the Middle East, modern methods of Islamic education were introduced, and knowledge of Salafi-oriented Islam began circulating even before independence. Most of these modern and private Franco-Arab schools used their own chosen teaching materials—often imported from the Middle East—and awarded their own degrees or certificates. However, these qualifications were unofficial in Senegal and generally held little value for further study locally. Since institutions of higher Islamic education were scarce in Senegal until quite recently, those wishing to pursue advanced studies usually sought scholarships to attend universities in the Middle East. In this way, the Islamic education sector effectively served as an open window for the transmission of religious-ideological influences from outside.

Since 2000s, the Senegalese government has embarked in earnest on educational reform, motivated in part by the long-standing expectation—given that the overwhelming majority of the population is Muslim—that religious education should be incorporated into the national school system. Yet before the 2000s such reforms were scarcely realized, largely because of chronic economic crises, the fiscal stagnation brought about by structural adjustment policies, and the resulting turmoil in the education sector. More recently, efforts to raise persistently low school-enrollment rates and to meet international development targets created an additional incentive: to incorporate Islamic educational institutions—especially the *daaras*, which enroll large numbers of school-age children—into the formal public education sector. Against this backdrop, a three-pronged reform program was introduced: (1) the inclusion of religious education as an elective subject in public schools; (2) the creation of the first public Franco-Arab schools as a countermeasure to the private Franco-Arab institutions described above; and (3) the modernization of *daaras* [Bodian and Villalón 2015: 75; Villalón and Bodian 2012: 8]. As a related measure, the Ministry of National Education (MEN)—responsible for Islamic education, including *daaras*—published the textbooks of Islam and those on the Arabic language for primary education in 2008, for lower secondary in 2013, and for upper secondary

in 2019, which are used in in public Franco-Arab schools as well as in some private schools.

2.2 Rationale and Objectives of Textbook Production

The following section examines the guiding principles behind the development of these textbooks and their distinctive features. According to the roster listed at the beginning of these textbooks, the editorial committee included senior officials from the MNE, regional Arabic-education inspectors, university faculty members, and secondary-school Arabic teachers. I had the opportunity to interview two members of this committee.

According to one of the interviewees—a senior official in the MNE responsible for Islamic education—this curriculum “contains only basic content and bears no particular ideological character.” He also stated that many of the committee members had experienced both traditional Islamic education and secular, French-language schooling; some had studied in Middle Eastern countries, and a few even held views leaning toward Salafism.¹ He explained that the distinctive feature of these textbooks, formulated through at times difficult discussions among committee members of such diverse backgrounds and convictions, is that “they can be accepted by everyone, including both Salafis and Sufis.” He further remarked, “Sufis and Salafis alike can simply put their own ‘jacket’ over this basic program.” In other words, more advanced or specialized study can be pursued independently, outside the school setting or at the university level, based on each person’s interests and motivation.

Another committee member, whose main profession is as a university lecturer in Arabic, voiced concern about the previous situation where private Islamic schools issued their own separate degrees and used textbooks imported from different countries—examples included Morocco, Libya, and Saudi Arabia—leading to education with inconsistent content. He emphasized the importance of implementing “a curriculum for Senegalese, by Senegalese, to cultivate Senegalese citizens,” consistently from the first year of primary school through the baccalauréat level. Prefacing his remarks by noting that Islam in Senegal is characterized by “well-regulated Islam of Sufi orders,” he responded to my questions by saying that it was only natural for the government to try to prevent outside influence from the Middle East. He also highlighted the importance of Senegal’s foundation in “a culture of tolerance and *laïcité*.” Below, I quote a passage from the preface that appears at the beginning of some editions of this textbook (drawing here on the French version printed alongside the Arabic text), which explains the principles underlying its publication.

¹ Villalón, Bodian, and Idrissa also observe that this committee was carefully composed from civil servants, including teachers and university professors. They paid close attention to members’ affiliations—such as Soufi orders and Islamic organizations—as well as ensuring geographical balance [Villalón, Bodian, and Idrissa 2025: 137–138].

As a country with strong Arab-Islamic traditions and a long history of adherence to them, Senegal finds a genuine pedagogical value in mastering and deepening of cultural knowledge, and of the Arabic language.

...This is why the design and creation of Arabic and Islamic education materials by Senegalese professionals appears as a salutary initiative.

The teaching of Arabic and Islamic education will undoubtedly gain renewed interest and motivation through this initiative, thanks to textbooks that convey—more harmoniously than any foreign material could—our own sociocultural realities.

...A textbook is never neutral: it is ideologically positioned through both the conceptual content it presents and the illustrations it contains.

The Ministry of National Education was guided by two main objectives:

- to provide teachers with appropriate teaching resources and to correct the proliferation of foreign materials in our schools;
- to offer teachers innovative approaches inspired by integration pedagogy to give real meaning to learning [MNE 2008: 2].

This preface highlights the importance of providing textbooks that reflect Senegal's own cultural realities instead of relying on foreign materials, while also clearly stating that these textbooks are not ideologically neutral. Considering the comments of the first committee member mentioned above, a reader might be tempted to interpret it—through the lens of “*Islam noir*”—as if it were promoting a uniquely Senegalese and moderate Islam in opposition to radical Islam from the Middle East. As will be shown below, the textbook definitely includes strong elements that support such an understanding of Islam; however, a large part of its content is focused on conveying universal knowledge that all Muslims are expected to share. Additionally, when viewed as a whole, the textbooks also contain important aspects that are inclusive of both Muslims devoted to Sufi traditions and those oriented toward Salafism.

2.3 Pedagogical Neutrality and the Management of Difference

The Senegalese government produced two types of textbooks: those on Islam and those on the Arabic language. Because the latter are essentially secular language-learning materials, the following discussion focuses mainly on the Islamic textbooks, examining their content and highlighting their distinctive features. The first notable feature, as one member of the textbook drafting committee observed, is the apparently deliberate avoidance of topics likely to cause controversy among Muslims of different beliefs.

One such topic involves the placement of the arms during prayer. In Senegal, among the outward features commonly linked with Salafi-oriented Muslims—besides distinctive dress

and avoiding shaking hands with members of the opposite sex—is the habit of folding the arms across the chest during prayer. More specifically, after raising both hands to the ears and reciting “Allāhu akbar” in the opening *takbīr*, they typically place their hands folded over the chest. In contrast, many Muslims in the majority Sufi orders keep their arms hanging straight down at their sides. The former posture is known as *qabd*, the latter as *sadl*, and this issue has become a source of debate not only in Senegal but across much of North-West Africa as the influence of Salafism has grown.

The correct performance of ritual prayer falls within the field of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) among the various subjects of Islamic studies. In the fourth lesson of *fiqh* for first-year primary students, the *fajr* prayer—one of the five obligatory daily prayers—is shown with illustration (Figure 1). The opening portion of the lesson text is quoted below.

When I wake up from sleep at dawn, I purify myself and perform the morning prayer in the following manner, consisting of two *raka’at*:



Figure 1. Page from the Grade 1 (CI) Islamic textbook illustrating the steps of ritual prayer.

Source: MNE [2019b: 42]

1. Facing the *qibla*, I stand upright, make the intention (*niyya*) and say, “Allāhu akbar.”
2. I recite the Opening Chapter and a *sūra* (chapter) aloud.

3. I say “*Allāhu akbar*,” bow, and repeat three times, “Glory be to my great Lord.”
4. I rise from the bowing position and say, “God hears those who praise Him [MNE 2019b: 42].”

If the intention had been to recommend performing the prayer in the *qabḍ* posture, one would expect that this would be stated at the beginning of step 2. However, as shown above, there is no description at all regarding the placement of the hands. At the same time, as illustrated in Figure 1, the page includes a drawing of a woman performing the prayer step by step; in the illustration for step 2, she is shown standing upright with her arms hanging at her sides. However, while the figure shows her standing in this way, the accompanying text neither instructs the worshipper to stand in that position nor explicitly states that the hands should not be folded. The matter is just left ambiguous.

Similar to the issue of *qabḍ* versus *sadl*, other topics where opinions typically differ between Salafi-oriented Muslims and most Sufi orders in Senegal include the use of prayer beads and amulets, as well as visits to the tombs of saints. Salafi-inclined individuals typically regard these practices as later deviations (*bid‘a*) that did not exist in the Prophet’s time and therefore avoid them. In the government-issued textbooks, however, there is neither any discussion of the merits or demerits of such customs nor any explanation of the concept of *bid‘a* itself.

2.4 Textual Emphasis on Moderation and Plurality

A second notable feature of these textbooks is their emphasis on the values of a moderate, peaceful, and pluralistic form of Islam. A good example can be found in part of the *ḥadīth* unit for the second year of the upper-secondary curriculum (Première). Lessons 4 through 6 emphasize that Islamic practice should not be pursued with excessive rigor and that one should avoid placing unreasonable demands on others, as such pressure can alienate people from faith or cause them to stray from the path of Islam through excess. Collectively, these lessons promote a moderate understanding of Islam [MNE 2019c].

Following the lessons above appears a short column entitled “The Prohibition of Declaring Other Muslims Unbelievers (*takfīr*).” From this point onward, the lessons use the concept of *takfīr* as a starting point to promote the peaceful coexistence of Muslims. *Takfīr* refers to the act of pronouncing another Muslim a *kāfir* (unbeliever). Because apostasy can result in the death penalty under Islamic law, declaring another Muslim to be an unbeliever is an action with potentially severe consequences. Throughout history, including in the cases of the Islamic State (IS) and Boko Haram, many groups have invoked *takfīr* against rulers accused of poor governance as a justification for military action. For this reason, the concept

is often linked to violent jihadism. After defining *takfir* and explaining its implications, the column underscores that issuing an erroneous accusation of *takfir* is itself a serious offense: one who wrongfully declares another Muslim an unbeliever may thereby place oneself in the position of a non-believer [MNE 2019c].

Lessons 7 through 9, which follow, further develop this theme. They teach that even when another person’s inner faith appears uncertain, one must not hastily label that person an unbeliever. They also explain that, in some cases, the act of *takfir* is tantamount to killing the person concerned, and that issuing a false accusation of *takfir* is forbidden because, if it proves unfounded, the accuser thereby places himself in the very status he has ascribed to the other [MNE 2019c].

Furthermore, a passage demonstrating the government textbooks’ support for a pluralistic view of Islam can be found in the unit “Islamic Thought,” which concludes the textbook for the final year of high school (Terminale). Below is a quotation from the opening section of Lesson 3, “Currents of Thought,” in that unit.

Human diversity of thought is a universal law willed by God. If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people: but they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His mercy² (Underlined by the quoter. This phrase is a citation from the Qur’an, Sūra Hūd). God created humans and gave them different tendencies and traits. As a result, while some are satisfied with what is outwardly visible, others seek hidden truths and the ultimate goal, some prefer easier and more convenient options, while others pursue strictness and extremity.

In the understanding of religion, these differences are especially clear because the revealed texts often allow for multiple interpretations, yet no one has the right to force their understanding on others [MNE 2019a: 120].

The text then goes on to explain that within Islam there exist diverse currents of thought that differ in doctrine: Sunni and Shi‘i, the Mu‘tazila, the Khawārij, and the Murji’a; the principal schools of theology and jurisprudence; and subsequently Sufism and the major West African Sufi orders [MNE 2019a: 120–121]. The reference in the first paragraph to “those who are content with what is outwardly visible” seems to allude to materialists, while “those who seek hidden truths and the ultimate destination” appears to describe Sufi seekers. Yet, whether referring to those who practice Islam with strict rigor or to those who do not, the text contains no negative evaluation of any of these widely differing perspectives.

2.5 Embedding Islam in Senegalese Cultural Realities

2 The translation is based on Ali [c1946: 546].

Another important point is that, as mentioned in the preface quoted earlier, one of the advantages of these textbooks is their ability to “convey our own sociocultural realities.” In this way, they emphasize an Islam that is rooted within Senegalese culture.

At this point, attention should be drawn to the illustrations in these textbooks. What is especially notable about the women depicted is the large number shown without headscarves. For example, Figure 2 appears in Lesson 6 of the *ḥadīth* unit in the first-year primary (CI) Islamic textbook, which encourages maintaining one’s surroundings clean. Among the four women illustrated, two have their heads completely uncovered, and the other two, although wearing cloths wrapped around their heads, do not cover the neck and nape in the manner typically associated with pious Muslim women in Senegal. Moreover, all four women are shown with their arms and shoulders exposed and wearing clothing that does not hide the body’s shape—clothing that is very different from what Islamic norms usually require for women, though it is quite common for everyday dress among Senegalese women.



Figure 2. Illustration from the Grade 1 (CI) Islamic textbook.

Source: MNE [2019b: 29]

Figure 3 also appears in Lesson 8 of the *ḥadīth* unit of the same textbook, which promotes studying the Qur’an. It shows a scene typical of a small rural *daara*, where children are studying the Qur’an under the supervision of a marabout. Among them, three girls are depicted without headscarves. Even though most Muslim women in Senegal do not wear headscarves, it still seems unlikely for girls to attend a Qur’anic school without head coverings. In practice, even very young girls who attempted to attend a *daara* or a Franco-Arab school without a scarf would almost certainly be corrected not only by the teacher but also by others present. The illustration, therefore, gives a somewhat incongruous impression

and seems to reveal a deliberate intent on the part of the textbook’s creators not to foreground an image of women wearing headscarves.



Figure 3. Illustration from the Grade 1 (CI) Islamic textbook.

Source: MNE [2019b: 33]

It is also symbolic that the characters introduced in the first lesson of the first-year Arabic textbook are a boy named Samba and his sister Coumba [MNE 2019d: 8]. While the choice of their names was no doubt influenced by the fact that the lesson focuses on the Arabic letter *bāʾ* (ب), corresponding to the letter B, and therefore required names containing the “B” sound, the selection is nevertheless significant. In Senegal, where personal names of Islamic origin are very common, both Samba and Coumba are clearly Senegalese names with no Arab connotation. Similar to “John and Mary” in English, they are often paired as typical male and female names. Although later lessons introduce many characters with recognizable Islamic names, such as Fatimata, the choice to begin the first-year textbook with Samba and Coumba seems deliberate.

The absence of headscarves and the use of uniquely Senegalese personal names clearly highlight an Islam rooted in local cultural realities. However, it is important to note that what is presented here as a “Senegalese Islam” should not be equated with Sufi Islam. As Triaud [2014: 11] has pointed out, research on Islam in Senegal has tended to overgeneralize and take for granted the pervasive presence of Sufi orders, which can easily tempt us to read the textbooks in such terms. One of the committee members quoted above, for instance, emphasized that Islam in Senegal is the “well-regulated Islam of Sufi orders.” However, the textbooks contain almost no Sufi-specific content. The only exception, as noted earlier, is the inclusion of a list of major West African Sufi orders in the intellectual history section of the final-year volume [MNE

2019a: 120].

In other words, these are issues unlikely to cause disagreements between Sufis and Salafis. During fieldwork, I asked several Salafi-oriented interlocutors for their opinions on the content of these textbooks, and all of them responded that they were, overall acceptable.

3 Voices from the Field: Everyday Negotiations of Identity

This section presents the findings from the interviews I conducted during fieldwork. Interviewees were various actors in the educational sector, including officials from the MNE, teachers in both public and private schools, as well as Qur’anic schools, students attending these institutions, and university students involved in Islamic student associations. Among them were both dedicated Sufis and individuals with Salafi orientations. Their stories strongly indicate that, contrary to the simplified “*Islam noir*” framework—a perspective rooted in colonial history that continues to influence media and academia—the identities of Sufis and Salafis cannot be easily categorized into two opposing groups.

3.1 Transitions in Religious Orientation

In Senegal, children born to fathers from a specific Sufi order are basically considered to belong to the same order as their father. As a result, many Salafi-oriented Muslims consciously choose to distance themselves from Sufi orders. However, the stories of the four informants presented here suggest that their “conversion to Salafism” does not necessarily involve a drastic or complete break from Sufi traditions. Instead, this shift in consciousness often develops gradually through learning and personal reflection, rather than being sparked by a single dramatic event (in this sense, the importance of education cannot be overstated). Additionally, all accounts indicate that familial pressure on faith matters is relatively infrequent, with greater emphasis placed on individual freedom of choice.

Case of informant A: He is a university student and member of a Salafi student organization active at Cheikh Anta Diop University. Alongside five years of Qur’anic schooling in childhood, he attended a secular public school for his formal education. He only started to identify as Salafi during his high school years. According to him, his parents—affiliated with the Tijaniyya order—do not hold any resentment toward their son’s adoption of Salafism. Furthermore, he states that he would have no objection if his own children chose to join a Sufi order in the future. Interestingly, he does not mention any specific motivation or key event that led him to accept Salafism; instead, as he learned more about Islam, he simply felt that he only had to follow the Qur’an

and the teachings of the Prophet.

Case of informant B: He is a senior government official in the MNE responsible for Islamic education administration. His grandfather was a marabout affiliated with a Sufi order, and he himself received Sufi education under his grandfather’s guidance. Nevertheless, he notes that his grandfather’s instruction focused mainly on the teachings of the Prophet. His grandfather even allowed him to study at a school linked to a Salafi organization. Around age twenty, he adopted a Salafi-oriented understanding of Islam, driven by a growing sense that what people around him said conflicted with the teachings of the Prophet. He emphasizes, however, that this change was not caused by any single dramatic event or a particular lesson from his schoolbooks; rather, it developed gradually. He compares being a Sufi to having two hands, explaining that one must pay attention to both God and one’s marabout, which he describes as feeling internally torn. He also chose not to succeed his grandfather as a marabout, explaining that doing so would require him to respect practices—such as prayer beads—that he considers lacking a basis in the original teachings of Islam, and would make him financially dependent on others. Even so, he considers himself a tolerant person who neither rejects nor disparages the beliefs of others.

Case of informant C: He is an Arabic-language teacher at a public junior high school. Like the two informants discussed above, he was born to parents affiliated with a Sufi order. He also does not identify a specific moment of “conversion,” instead explaining that as his knowledge deepened, he gradually sought obedience to God alone. (It may be added that he attended the same school affiliated with a Salafi organization as Informant B.) He believes that because God created humans to be free, he felt he did not want to be bound. According to him, failing to obey God means being bound by someone else, even if you do not realize it—such as when you are ill or in prison. Conversely, when a person follows and practices the commandments of the Qur’an, they are truly free and liberated. He attributes this belief to his observations of members of the Baye Fall³—a branch within the Mouride order—whom he saw as being subservient to their marabout. As will be discussed below, he is highly critical of them.

Case of informant D: The fourth informant is a teacher living in a provincial city who

3 A subgroup of the Mouride order which descended from Ibrahima Fall, a close disciple of Ahmad Bamba Mbacke, the founder of the order. They are known for their willingness to engage in strenuous labor for their leaders, but because of their tendency to downplay Islamic norms such as prayer and fasting, they are often regarded as a heterodox group.

runs a Qur’anic school for children at his home. His father followed the Tijaniyya order, but among his father’s children (including half-siblings), six follow the Tijaniyya, one is affiliated with the Mouride order, and four others—including the informant—do not belong to any specific order, leaning instead toward Salafism. His wife is also a Tijaniyya adherent, and he stated that his children should learn about Islam and choose their own religious paths when they grow up. Previously, because his parents were Tijaniyya, people assumed he was too, and he vaguely accepted this. However, during his youth, he studied in Egypt, where he adopted the practice of crossing his arms during prayer, that is, in the *qabḍ* posture. After returning home and taking a teaching position in Dakar, he became too busy to attend the regular gatherings of his order—such as the *wazifa*, the devotional assembly unique to Tijaniyya followers in which members meet at the mosque. He found this comfortable, as it allowed him greater personal freedom and time.

This is how his gradual departure from Sufi-oriented Islam happened, even though he did not specify the exact moment of his “conversion.” However, he still takes part in Mouride and Tijaniyya events. Notably, after teaching for many years in Mbacke, near Touba—the holy city of the Mouride order—he has also attended the annual Magal festival. He mentioned that even now he sometimes accompanies his neighbors when they visit their marabouts, and that no one probably suspects his religious orientation. (Significantly, as discussed later, he wears a cross—something Salafis generally avoid.) He remarked that, apart from situations like this survey, no one ever questions him about such matters.

3.2 Attitudes toward Non-Salafi Practices

The practices common in Senegal—such as the use of amulets,⁴ prayer beads,⁵ sorcery, and possession rituals—are often criticized as *bid’a* by Salafi-oriented Muslims. Yet, stories from the three informants above suggest that local customs involving such items are not always rejected outright or in a clear-cut way; there is still some level of tolerance. Additionally, people’s attitudes toward these customs do not always match their formal religious identities.

Case of informant A: The university student introduced earlier is part of a student

4 While amulets are condemned as *bid’a* by Salafi-oriented Muslims, the fact that Saudi Arabia is the primary export destination for such Senegalese products [Loimeier 2016: 132] is highly suggestive for the central argument of this paper, which questions the usefulness of a strictly dichotomous view of African and Middle Eastern Islam.

5 Used to count the number of times divine names are invoked during practices like *dhikr* (literally “remembrance,” namely, the act of reciting and praising God’s name during prayer or daily life, also performed as a collective ritual in Sufi orders).

organization known for its Salafi-oriented stance. However, membership is not restricted to those who share Salafi views; for example, not all female members wear headscarves.⁶ He and other members explain what they see as the correct teachings of Islam and encourage others to recognize their importance for themselves, but they do not force these practices. After explaining why it is desirable to do so, they leave the decision to the individual, saying, “Now it’s between you and Allah (*Des na yow ak yalla*).”

Case of informant C: The teacher, critical of the Baye Fall and introduced earlier, is regarded in his neighborhood as a knowledgeable authority on Islam due to his experience studying in Egypt. He is often invited to serve as an imam at naming ceremonies and to mediate family disputes. This freedom-oriented, Baye Fall-critical figure is nonetheless remarkably tolerant of many local customs that shape Senegalese Muslim life but are not explicitly *bid’a*. For instance, regarding naming ceremonies, he notes that the Senegalese features—such as large communal gatherings with shared meals and the afternoon exchange of gifts among women—are neither mandated by Islam nor forbidden. He emphasizes that these monetary and material gifts are important for raising children and foster a spirit of mutual aid; as long as the practices do not conflict with Islamic principles, he sees no issue. He also shows understanding that most Senegalese women do not cover their hair with scarves, pointing out that each region has its own pre-Islamic clothing traditions.

Case of informant D: As previously mentioned, this individual appears to be notably tolerant of Sufi traditions. For instance, he still uses prayer beads, which are generally avoided by Salafi-oriented Muslims. “They’re just for counting,” he says. “What’s the problem?” Conversely, he has completely stopped using amulets called *téere*, which he once wore. This is because *téere* often contain small slips of paper inscribed with Qur’anic verses (*téere* literally means “book,” referring to the saint Qur’an), including the name of God, and Islamic law forbids bringing objects with God’s name into a toilet. While acquiring a more thorough knowledge of Islam was an important catalyst for this decision of abandoning amulets, practical considerations also played a significant role.

Some people view amulets—known as *téere* or *gri-gri*—positively, regarding them as

6 During my field research, I observed one of this group’s events held on a university campus and was shown the questionnaire sheets completed by students seeking membership. Among the reasons given for wanting to join, responses such as “I want to study Islam more” were particularly notable. I did not get the impression that many of these students were necessarily inclined toward Salafism.

protection against *jinn*, but many do not, and this is true even among members of Sufi orders. When I asked three teachers at the Franco-Arab elementary school in the village where I conducted my research how they addressed *gri-gri* in class, their responses varied. One said, “I wear it myself and don’t say anything negative about it in class.” Another stated, “I don’t really approve of it and don’t wear it, but I don’t say anything in class.” The third replied, “I don’t wear it myself and teach that it’s meaningless in class.” Notably, the second teacher is from Touba and belongs to the Mouride order. The third teacher, though not asked explicitly, clearly appears to have Salafi leanings. When asked about the role of marabouts, he responded unequivocally: “There is no problem with respecting them, but they are human like us. They are religious guides, but they are not like Allah.”

3.3 Perceptions Toward Muslims Belonging to Sufi Orders

Among the informants encountered during the research, those affiliated with Sufi orders acknowledged that certain practices within their communities—such as using prayer beads or amulets, not wearing headscarves, or displaying portraits of prominent Sufi leaders—might be viewed unfavorably by Salafis and could even lead to criticism. The existence of a degree of difference between the two groups appeared to be a shared understanding. One person remarked, “Some go abroad and learn different ideas...” The term “different ideas” about Salafi Islam often appeared in interviews. Still, most informants highlighted common faith elements over differences. None claimed that their practice of Islam was more African or diverging. One informant from the Tijaniyya order summed up this view: “There are multiple paths and various types of vehicles, but the destination is the same,” while affirming that both groups are Muslims sharing the same foundation.

Conversely, as the narratives above also suggest, even among Salafis there is not necessarily a complete rejection of Sufi orders or their practices. In fact, Informant A, quoted below, provides positive remarks about certain leaders of the orders.

Case of informant A: He said that he respects renowned Sufi leaders as knowledgeable and virtuous figures who guide Islamic education, but he disapproves of displaying their photographs as is common in Senegal. According to him, since these leaders are human and capable of error, it is important to focus only on their positive qualities.

On the negative side, Informant C was especially harsh in his criticism of the Baye Fall, as described below. To a lesser degree, this attitude was also seen among other Salafis. Overall, Salafi informants seemed more critical of the Mouride order than of the Tijaniyya, probably because of factors like a perceived subservience to marabouts and a seeming indifference

toward formal Islamic learning.⁷

Case of informant C: The Baye Fall are commonly known for their total submission to their marabouts and the strong emphasis on physical labor carried out for them. Yet he described the sight of Baye Fall members “working like slaves under the sun” as “like hell,” insisting that there is no religious need for such practices because the Prophet never commanded them. Furthermore, he characterized the Baye Fall as pitiable beings whose ignorance consigns them to these conditions. They believe, he said, that their marabouts will guide them to heaven, “but heaven never comes.” Instead, they are “perpetually exhausted, already on the brink of entering hell.”

3.4 Perceptions of Islam in the Middle East

I also found several examples showing that Salafi-oriented Muslims—contrary to their common image—are not necessarily completely positive about Islam in the Middle East. Below, I share comments from another informant as well as from Informant C.

Case of informant C: While expressing some understanding toward Muslim women in Senegal who do not necessarily cover their hair, he expressed a somewhat negative view of wearing the *niqab*. He believes that the *niqab* should be banned in places like airports where security is crucial because it could potentially enable criminal activity, such as hiding guns or concealing identity. Commenting on the mandatory wearing of the *niqab* in Saudi Arabia, he even remarked, “Saudi men cannot control their desires.”

Case of informant E: This individual belongs to the same Salafi student group as Informant A. He gave examples like women’s clothing and the recent lifting of the ban on women driving, stating, “Islam in Saudi Arabia is closed Islam,” before adding, “Of course, I know that Islam there is more legitimate...”

3.5 The Shi‘i Presence in Senegal

Here, I present another noteworthy comment from an individual with a Shi‘i background. In

7 At a Salafi-affiliated school in Dakar where I conducted fieldwork, several students I interviewed belonged to the Tijaniyya order and said they saw no conflict between the school’s curriculum and their personal religious beliefs. However, among the interviewees, I did not meet any Mouride students. According to Amo [2025: 244], who also gathered comments from members of a Salafi student group active at Cheikh Anta Diop University, while they maintained good relations with Tijaniyya group members, they kept their distance from Mouride students, who perform rituals in praise of their marabouts.

Senegal, the Shi'ite presence is said to have increased since the Iranian Revolution, partly through missionary work carried out via the Iranian embassy; furthermore, many Lebanese-Senegalese are Shi'i Muslims [Leichtman 2015]. Although Shi'ism and Salafism are entirely distinct, they share two points of convergence in the Senegalese context: both have generally expanded their influence amid the global rise of Islamism, and both are similarly regarded by some as posing a potential threat to Senegal's traditionally moderate Islam. Perhaps as part of their efforts to integrate into Senegalese society, Shi'i organizations have engaged in a wide range of charitable activities. During a visit to the home of one such organization's leader, I even observed portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and Aḥmad al-Tijānī, the founder of the Tijaniyya order, hanging side by side in the entrance hall.

Case of informant F: This educator, now in his thirties, differs from the typical image of someone who embraced Shi'ism under the influence of the Iranian Revolution. According to him, the principal of the Franco-Arab school he attended as a child was a Shi'i and taught students both Sunni and Shi'i perspectives on various issues. His interest in Shi'ism started when the principal discussed the Battle of Karbala—the historical event of 680 CE when Ḥusayn, the Prophet's grandson and 'Alī's son, was killed. He was shocked and asked himself, "How could Yazīd, a fellow Muslim, kill the Prophet's blood relatives?" He then broadened his understanding of Shi'ism by attending lectures and engaging in conversations with knowledgeable individuals.

Although this account slightly diverges from the main theme of this paper, it is important to note that his shift away from Senegal's traditional Islam toward Shi'ism was not driven by resentment toward Sufi orders but by a deep empathy for the Prophet's family and a strong faith in them.

These interviews reveal that the perspectives of those called Salafis are not necessarily hostile toward Sufis, nor do they usually break away due to dramatic events. More often, as they deepen their Islamic studies (though the influence of people around them also deserves separate consideration) or aim to be righteous Muslims, they gradually abandon practices such as sectarian rituals or local Senegalese Islamic customs. Moreover, the significance of education in enabling such shifts in thinking cannot be overstated.

It should also be noted that terms such as "Salafi" or "Sufi" were virtually never heard in the informants' own comments.⁸ While it is often observed that the label "Salafi" is typically

⁸ I did use these terms when explaining the purpose of the investigation to the informants. Although the interviewees occasionally repeated them in response or referred, for example, to how such labels are used in the media, they did not employ these words spontaneously—either as self-designations or as labels for others.

used as an appellation for others rather than for self-identification, none of the participants in this survey used it to describe themselves (the same holds for the Senegal-specific term “Ibadou”⁹). Instead, when asked to describe their Islamic orientation, they used expressions such as “simply Muslim (fr: musulmane simple)”¹⁰ or “Sunnit.” Sometimes it is hard to say that these individuals fully match the typical image of “Salafis,” who are often portrayed as wanting a return to early Islam, the implementation of fully Islamic politics and society, or the Islamic modernization of their world.¹¹

Notably, the following three statements were often voiced by both those generally identified as “Salafis” and individuals affiliated with Sufi orders. Overall, these informants emphasized the similarities between the two groups more than their differences:

- The difference between being a Sufi and being a Salafi is not significant.
- Both share the fundamental elements of Islam: there is one Islam, one Qur’an, and one Prophet.
- Belonging to a Sufi order is not obligatory in Islam.

Conclusion

Research on Islam in West Africa, including Senegal, has long been influenced by the concept of “*Islam noir*,” formulated since the nineteenth century, which established a dichotomy between a scripturalist, Salafi-oriented Islam of the Middle East and a supposedly syncretic, African Islam. In Senegal, this perspective was reinforced by earlier scholarly tendencies that focused on Sufi orders, paying little attention to the religiosity of Salafi-inclined Muslims or the complexity of identities that cannot be neatly divided between the two groups.

9 This designation, originating from Senegal’s well-known Salafi organization Jama’atou Ibadourahmane (JIR), is also used more loosely and broadly to describe people—such as women who wear headscarves—whose appearance is similar to that of Salafis. It doesn’t necessarily imply strict adherence to Salafisme.

10 The term “simply Muslim” was often heard, but in Senegal, it clearly signifies non-confrérie [Seck 2001: 42]—meaning not affiliated with any Sufi order. In my research, among those who said they did not belong to a Sufi order—that is, in the Senegalese context, those who are Salafi-oriented—only one person said that his family had never belonged to an order in its history, rather than that he himself had “converted.” Contrary to the common perception that the rise of Salafi Islam is a recent phenomenon, he took a longer-term view, arguing that affiliation with Sufi orders is itself a relatively recent development in the history of Islam in Senegal.

11 Loimeier classifies Salafis into (1) groups oriented toward politics (*siyāsa*), (2) groups oriented toward education (*tarbiya*), and (3) jihad-oriented groups—drawing here, it seems, on well-known tripartite typology of Wiktorowicz [2006]. In addition, he proposes a fourth category that has emerged relatively recently: “piety-minded” individuals, who often distance themselves from the first type. Since they place emphasis on personal faith, they differ from the organized movements represented by categories (1)–(3), and are characterized by a certain flexibility, in that they are not necessarily hostile to local customs [Loimeier 2016: 69–71]. This fourth category thus appears especially useful for identifying those who are not active members of Salafi movements but whose focus on Islamic purity remains largely at the individual practice.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11 and amid the security crises that affected West Africa during the 2010s, such dichotomous frameworks contributed to the spread of alarmist media narratives portraying Senegal's otherwise "moderate" Islam as being threatened by Salafism through the construction of schools and mosques.

This paper has focused on the field of education to deconstruct the discourses rooted in the notion of "*Islam noir*." First, it examined the Islamic school textbooks produced by the Senegalese government since the 2000s. These textbooks show that their content is generally acceptable to both members of Sufi orders and Salafi-oriented Muslims, as they highlight universal Islamic teachings that do not favor either side. They endorse a moderate, peaceful, and diverse Islam, while also emphasizing Senegalese cultural elements, but without being exclusively Sufi in character. Additionally, by presenting stories from interviews with individuals involved in the education sector—including those with Salafi tendencies—the study has demonstrated that the divide between the two groups is not as clear-cut as often believed. Instead, alongside their differences, there are significant commonalities, sometimes even more prominent than the divergences.

For many informants, their relationship with the Sufi orders was less a matter of a decisive break driven by strong rejection and more about a gradual process of distancing as they deepened their study of Islam. Many emphasized respect for others' choices regarding religious affiliation. In their daily lives, Muslims of various orientations regularly interact—as colleagues, friends, neighbors, and even within the same family. In a neighborhood mosque or within Salafi students' associations, Muslims with no ties to a Sufi order might patiently explain Qur'anic teachings to those practicing customs they consider *bid'a*. They might join friends in attending the Magal, Mouride festival, or even display a portrait of Ahmad al-Tijānī next to that of Khomeini as a gesture of goodwill toward Sufi members.

These examples may contribute to the challenge raised by Villalón—and largely unmet so far—to move beyond the binary distinction between Sufi and Salafi and instead illuminate "today's complex realities of new identities and positions" [Villalón 2007: 191]. Moreover, as an alternative to the theories that continue to reproduce traces of the "*Islam noir*" paradigm by insisting on a stark division between Salafis and Sufis, it seems fruitful to draw on the concept of the "Islamic sphere" proposed by Launay and Soares [1999]. In its original formulation, which builds on Jürgen Habermas's concept of the "public sphere," the term referred to a social space that emerged under French colonial rule in West Africa—based on newfound freedom of movement—where individuals who had become Muslims outside the constraints of ethnicity, kinship, or class could establish themselves in society. In this study, this idea can be understood as a shared domain where Muslims of different orientations—not only Sufis and Salafis—maintain their differences while still participating in a broader realm of shared practices and values.

This concept can be visualized as a polygon with multiple corners and a shared center, with the example of Shi‘ism suggesting that the figure is not simply bipolar, as often assumed to be only between Salafis and Sufis, but rather multipolar. It generally refers to the shared consciousness of being Muslim that believers of different orientations hold; and physically, it may include the actual spaces where they interact, such as mosques, universities, or even the entrance hall where portraits of Khomeini and Aḥmad al-Tijānī coexist. In this way, the Islamic education conveyed through government-issued textbooks discussed in this paper acts as a medium that unites people within the nation by fostering both a common Islamic literacy and a shared civic morality among different Muslim communities.¹²

Reconsidering the observation that a number of Salafi-oriented informants reported gradually distancing themselves from Sufi orders in the course of their religious studies, it may be argued that Islamic education conducted through modern schooling tends to exert a force oriented in the opposite direction from the dynamics of Sufism. Traditional Islamic learning within Sufi orders is fundamentally rooted in a personal master–disciple relationship and centers on spiritual training, whereas modern education, with its replaceable teachers and standardized curricula, stands in sharp contrast. One informant even remarked that if one pursues Islamic study, everyone will inevitably return to the Qur’an and the Sunna alone. From this perspective, learning Islam in the form of formal schooling can be seen as harboring an inherently de-Sufi orientation. In any case, the “Islamic sphere” mediated by the governmental textbooks not only fosters interaction, connection, and mutual understanding among Muslims of different affiliations; it may also serve as a medium that enables movement between the various “corners” of the polygon.

However, attention should be directed more to the fact that through the many everyday interactions taking place within the “Islamic sphere,” a kind of “greatest common divisor” of Senegalese Islam emerges. Regarding concerns about extremist Islam, a typical explanation has long been that the dominant networks of the Sufi orders leave little room for outside intrusions. Yet, it has been some time since scholars started pointing out that the state’s stability—largely dependent on the organizational strength of these orders—has itself begun to show signs of fragility. Therefore, even this widely accepted explanation can no longer avoid the need for deconstruction from the perspective of the “*Islam noir*” paradigm. If there is indeed a safeguard against extremist Islam, if any exists, it may be found less in the

12 In this regard, Amo [2025: 384] points out that during the early 2010s—when youth-led movements seeking social reform through Islam gained momentum in the political sphere—the notion of a “classical Islam (islam classique)” was frequently invoked as a set of norms shared by Muslims both affiliated with Sufi orders and those unaffiliated with them. This invocation reflected people’s shift away from being disciples under the authority of Sufi leaders toward becoming self-aware Muslims who act as individuals, united by shared goals for social reform. Although the term “classical Islam” itself might easily evoke associations with Salafism, in this context it is notable precisely because it signified a universal framework that did not conflict with Sufi Islam either.

homogeneous social networks historically provided by the Sufi orders than in the “Islamic sphere” itself—an arena that offers a foundation for mutual understanding across differences among Muslims.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 20J13303.

References

- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. c1946. *The Holy Qur-an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Qatar: Presidency of Islamic Courts & Affairs.
- Amo, Kae. 2025. *Wakamono Tachi no Isulam: Gendai Nishi Africa wo Ugokasu Shūkyō-sei no Jinruigaku (Anthropology of Religious Dynamics: Young Muslims and Political Change in Contemporary Senegal)*. Fukyosha (in Japanese).
- Asad, Talal. 1986. *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Washington, D. C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University.
- Assignon, Carole. 2017. “L’Arabie Saoudite plus que jamais présente en Afrique.” *Deutsche Welle*, November 7. <<https://www.dw.com/fr/larabie-saoudite-plus-que-jamais-pr%C3%A9sente-en-afrique/a-41275277>.> (Accessed on September 30, 2025.)
- Bouche, Denise. 1974. “L’école française et les musulmans au Sénégal de 1850 à 1920.” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 223: 218–235.
- Bodian, Mamadou and Leonardo A. Villalón. 2015 “Islam et réforme éducative au Sénégal: Tensions et négociations vers un modèle hybride.” In *État, Sociétés et Islam au Sénégal: Un air de nouveau temps?* ed. Abdourahmane Seck, Mayke Kaag, Cheikh Guèye and Abdou Salam Fall, 73–93. Paris: Karthala.
- Brenner, Louis. 2001. *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Cruise O’Brien, Donal. 1981. “La filière musulmane: Confréries soufies et politique en Afrique noire.” *Politique africaine* 4: 9–10.
- Dia, Hamidou, Clothilde Hugon and Rohen d’Aiglepierre. 2016. “États réformateurs et éducation arabo-islamique en Afrique.” *Afrique contemporaine* 257: 11–23.
- Fisher, Humphrey J. 1985. “The Juggernaut’s Apologia: Conversion to Islam in Black Africa.” *Africa* 55(2): 153–173.
- Jeune Afrique*. 2015. “Forum de Dakar: Macky Sall appelle à la promotion d’un islam africain tolérant.” November 10. <<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/278264/societe/forum-de-dakar-macky-sall-appelle-a-promotion-dun-islam-africain-tolerant/>> (Accessed on September 30, 2025.)
- Kobo, Ousman. 2009. “The Development of Wahhabi Reforms in Ghana and Burkina

- Faso, 1960–1990: Elective Affinities between Western-Educated Muslims and Islamic Scholars.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51(3): 502–532.
- Launay, Robert. 2006. “An Invisible Religion?: Anthropology’s Avoidance of Islam in Africa.” In *African Anthropologies: History, Critique, and Practice*, ed. Mwenda Ntarangwi, David Mills and Mustafa Babiker Ahmed, 188–203. Dakar: CODESRIA; London and New York: Zed Books.
- Launay, Robert and Benjamin E. Soares. 1999. “The Formation of an ‘Islamic Sphere’ in French Colonial West Africa.” *Economy and Society* 28(4): 497–519.
- Leichtman, Mara A. 2015. *Shi’i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion in Senegal*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Loimeier, Roman. 2013. *Muslim Societies in Africa: An Historical Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 2016. *Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ministry of National Education, Republic of Senegal (MNE). 2008. *Ata’allamu al-‘arabiyya, aṭ-ṭawr aṭ-ṭānī, al-ibtidāyī aṭ-ṭānī* (CE2).
- . 2019a. *Kitāb at-tarbiya al-islāmiyya, aṣ-ṣaff aṭ-ṭāliṭ aṭ-ṭānawī* (Terminale).
- . 2019b. *Ata’allamu dīniyya, aṭ-ṭawr al-awwal, at-taḥḍīrī al-awwal* (CI).
- . 2019c. *Kitāb at-tarbiya al-islāmiyya, aṣ-ṣaff aṭ-ṭānī aṭ-ṭānawī* (1ère).
- . 2019d. *Ata’allamu al-‘arabiyya, aṭ-ṭawr al-awwal, at-taḥḍīrī al-awwal* (CI).
- Quellien, Alain. 1910. *La politique musulmane dans l’Afrique occidentale française*. Paris: Emile Larose.
- Rosander, Eva Evers. 1997. “Introduction: The Islamization of ‘Tradition’ and ‘Modernity’.” In *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists*, ed. David Westerlund and Eva Evers Rosander, 1–27. London: Hurst.
- Saint-Lary, Maud. 2012. “Du wahhabisme aux réformismes génériques: Renouveau islamique et brouillage des identités musulmanes à Ouagadougou.” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 206/207: 449–470.
- Sakai Sinzo. 2003. *Islam to Shōgyō no Rekisi Jinruigaku: Nishi Africa no Kōeki to Chishiki no Network (The Historical Anthropology of Islam and Commerce: Network of Trade and Knowledge in West Africa)*. Sekai Shisosha (in Japanese).
- . 2018. “Nishi Africa no Muslim Shakai ni okeru Shūkyō-sei to Sezoku-sei: Senegal to Nigeria ni okeru ‘laïcité’ to ‘sharia’ (« Laïcité » et « sharia » dans les sociétés musulmanes en Afrique Occidentale: Comparaison des cas du Sénégal et du Nigeria).” *Journal of the Nanzan Academic Society, Natural Science and Health and Physical Education* 16: 49–68 (in Japanese).
- Şaul, Mahir. 2006. “Islam and West African Anthropology.” *Africa Today* 53(1): 3–33.

- Seck, Abdourahmane. 2010. *La question musulmane au Sénégal: Essai d'anthropologie d'une nouvelle modernité*. Paris: Karthala.
- Soares, Benjamin. 2014. "The Historiography of Islam in West Africa: An Anthropologist's View." *The Journal of African History* 55(1): 27–36.
- Triaud, Jean-Louis. 2014. "Giving a Name to Islam South of the Sahara: An Adventure in Taxonomy." *Journal of African History* 55(1): 3–15.
- Trimingham, J. Spencer. 1959. *Islam in West Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Villalón, Leonardo A. 2007. "Sufi Modernities in Contemporary Senegal: Religious Dynamics between the Local and the Global." In *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, 172–191. London and New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Villalón, Leonardo A. and Mamadou Bodian. 2012. "Religion, demande sociale, et réformes éducatives au Sénégal." *Africa Power and Politics Research Report* 05.
- . 2021. "Education, Citizenship, and National Identity in the Sahel." In *The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel*, ed. Leonardo A. Villalón, 683–699. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Villalón, Leonardo A., Mamadou Bodian and Abdourahmane Idrissa. 2025. *École, religion et république au Sahel: Éducation arabo-islamique et réforme de l'enseignement public*. Dakar: L'Harmattan-Sénégal.
- Wiktorowicz, Quintan. 2006. "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29(3): 207–239.