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Panel 30, “Islamic education and activism in sub-saharian Africa”

The Baay Faal’s education: a protection against exclusion and extremism?

The Baay Faal community was founded in Senegal by Cheikh Ibra Fall (≈1858-1930), the most famous disciple of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of the Murid’s brotherhood. Since the beginning of the 1880’, inside his master’s *daara* (Islamic school), he has been criticised, mainly because he did not respect worship practices such as the five daily prayers and the fast of Ramadan. “The fool of Bamba” was working and praying (by singing the *sikar*, *zikhr*) all day, he showed various signs of extreme submission to his master (including the possibility to die for him) and neglected Koranic teaching.. According to oral history, the others Bamba’s students initially wanted to expel this strange man but progressively understood his religious path and recognized its power and its depth. Cheikh Ibra Fall set practice and action above thought and knowledge. His path is seen as complementary with the Murid one: “Cheikh Amadou Bamba is the spiritual, Cheikh Ibra Fall is the material” say disciples. The education of the Baay Faal is hard: young disciples must go to the *daara*, which means they must live and work inside a small community (about 10 young men) in the bush and deal with hunger, hard work in the fields and moving away from family. Nowadays, *daara* are still existing but they are diversified : some big ones welcome families and become villages, others multiply in urban areas. These structures deliver specific education, which seems to protect the weaker Baay Faal from social exclusion and religious extremism. In this paper, I will try to understand this process and evaluate its reality.

Baay Faal education and socialization in the *daara*

The traditional *daara* (called *daara-all* or *daara-tarbiyya*) is located in the bush, separated from villages by some miles, and welcomes some men behind the *jawriñ*, the representative of the sheikh. They come to live, usually during three years, the *tarbiyya*, the educational period based on practice. Education must be hard as the *daara* is a hardship test allowing *taalibe* (disciples) to “purify their heart” and “educate their soul”. They have to distance themselves from material needs and concentrate in God. They work in the fields and beg for food in the villages, because all the production is ought to be given to the sheikh.

They have to respect *jawriñ*'s orders (his *ndigël*) but, at the same time, socialization is not founded on explicit and constant orders. Disciples have to understand by themselves the "right" way of behaving. "Baay Faal path cannot be explained, you must live it" told me many Baay Faals. This is why studying the founders books is not necessary, even if it is encouraged. Socialization functions on imitation of the Prophet, of Cheikh Ibra Fall, of the sheikh, of the elder disciples, etc. Chadhîli, one of the most famous Sufi said that his books were his disciples (Popovic & Veinstein, 1996: 56). Indeed, the respect of the norms in the Baay Faal community is diffused by others disciples. Sanctions do not really exist and blame is told in a private context and generally by an unsaid or implicit mean. Wolof *sutura*, which means discretion, orders to protect privacy and prevents the contravening disciple from "public" shame and dishonour; except if his misbehaviour is serious. Baay Faal socialization drives the disciples to show the others the "good" behaviour, instead of explaining it.

The *daara* seems to radically influence disciples. Many of them, especially the ones who came from urban areas, explained me that the *daara* involved a break in their lives. According to Yankroba, a disciple living in Ndem's *daara*:

"The *daara* changed many things in my life. In Dakar, I wanted to live in luxury. I wanted all women. Today, I know that I can live *taalibe*'s life. What they give me to eat, I eat. I'm more calm and patient. I can leave anywhere without suffering. I can support everything, all situation." (Ndem, 2000).

Daara harden disciples and "clean" them, forgive their sins because, by their work and strength, disciples should gain God's congratulations. Above all, they will be recognized as *Gore Yalla*, men of God, courageous people capable of overcoming difficulties and dedicating their lives to God and his representatives on earth (the sheikhs). They will be admired for this experience. "Everybody is not able to do the *daara*" they repeat. According to Giren, a young *taalibe* living in Touba Sam' *daara*, many of his friends are afraid to come: "Now, my elders ('grands') told me that I am not a person, I have been chosen by God. They send me soap or any gift." He's now respected in his neighbourhood. By this way, *daara* allows an inversion or decreasing social hierarchy). Many young single men are respected by friends and family when they come back from *daara*. Cheikh Samb, the Cheikh Touba Sam Fall's *jawriñ*, told me that "the *daara*'s secret was here: it was so powerful that everyone linked to the *taalibe* would benefit his work. The *daara* is not an individual thing." That's why parents send young children to *daara*: they want to educate their son, thank the sheikh and also obtain "God's congratulations".

Therefore, *daara*'s education is recognized as a salutary way, even if Baay Faal can be stigmatized as “fools” or “bad” Muslims because they do not respect worship practices, such as the five daily prayers and the fast of Ramadan. But these breach of Koranic pillars are accepted in a *daara* context because they are part of education and limited to a defined period of time. After the *daara*, the Murid will have to respect worship practices, but not the Baay Faal. They legitimate this transgression by the fact that they follow *haqiqa*, and not *sharia*. *Haqiqa* is the interior and esoteric path, the one of “the heart, the body and the soul”, the one who totally involves the disciple in the search of God and which is based on submission, internal) evolution and action.

Contemporary changes and *daara*'s efficiency

The Baay Faal community has experienced many changes in particular since the seventies. First, globalisation and impoverishment in Senegal led to urbanization and Baay Faal migrations to Europe, the United States and even to China, setting transnational networks, first on commercial and then associative bases. At the same time, many “Tubaab”, “White” or “Western”, converted themselves to Baay Faal path. These two developments deeply influenced Baay Faal mysticism and way of being. If Cheikh Ibra Fall was a “Black Prophet” fighting for Wolof identity, Baay Faal faith is open to any human being, regardless of colour, nationality or “civilization”. Nevertheless, the universalisation of the ideology of the Baay Faal is still mixed with Wolof and African pride, and the condemnation of Western values as individualistic and materialistic. By the same time, women have somewhere acquired recognition as autonomous disciples and are not only the *taalibe* of their husband. Some *daara* welcome them, even if the majority of the members of the community still advises or requires wedding for woman in order to be helped by a man. This quote from an old Baay Faal summarizes the image of the woman in the greater part of the community: “If you see a woman in Paradise, ask her which man brought her here; if you see a man in Hell, ask him which woman brought him here”! Nevertheless, *daara* welcome women nowadays and some become villages, even if they are still directed by a sheikh or his representative. A dozen families live in Ndem or in Ndigel, two *daara* founded by “modern” sheikhs. They have diversified their economic activities and the sheikh, who lives inside the *daara*, redistributes profits to the community. Ndem has developed arts and crafts activities, thanks to trade relationships developed with some European countries. It has been facilitated by Sokhna Aïssa Mbow, the French sheikh's wife, and by inclusion in international networks of

trade and of Development aid. However, these *daara* are still spreading hard education, even if they feed the dwellers and have electricity .

The second important change is due to the Baay Faal's own bid to gain Islamic legitimacy for their faith. Indeed, they produce an increasing number of texts, and are more and more involved in the organisation of conferences and Internet websites. After decades of stigmatisation, the Baay Faal want to be recognized as “good Muslims”. They have partially succeeded. In a context of pauperization and of “value crisis”, Baay Faal education, based on respect of hierarchy, on hard work and acceptance of destiny, becomes a national model. “People don’t like the Baay Faal, but everyone wants to have *his* Baay Faal”, told me a Baay Faal from Dakar, meaning that everyone seeks someone who accepts orders without negotiation. When Serigne Ousseynou Fall, Cheikh Ibra Fall’s grandson, ran for presidential election in 2000, he enhanced Baay Faal behaviour and put Khelcom, which is an enormous Murid farm, as a model for the development of the economy of Senegal. Therefore, representations about Baay Faal are extremely ambiguous.

But Baay Faal legitimization is curtailed by young urban disciples who live far from their master and who don’t appear to respect Baay Faal rules. They are accused of being “Baye-faux” (which means “Baye false” in French) or “Baye Mbedd” (“Baye from the street” in Wolof) and responsible for the stigmatisation of the Baay Faal community. This search for Islamic legitimacy is dividing the Baay Faal community. The “non Baay Faal” are generally identified as young, urban, single-life disciples, taking advantage of begging to buy goods and sometimes *yamba*, cannabis weed. But even the ones who stick to that caricatured description distinguish themselves from the “Baye faux” (Audrain, 2002). Individualization pushes disciples to perpetually demonstrate and explain their normativity, their acceptance and submission to the dominant norms. Meanwhile, they live far from their sheikh. Most religious interactions are inside associations (*daaira*) or informal places in town re-called *daara*. These urban “*daara*” are informal because they are autonomous from the authority of the sheikh. It is generally a room where some young disciples come during part of a day to discuss, eat, sing and smoke at times, before going back to the family house or to his own room (as in Ngor or Gorée islands). Some of them are now thinking that freedom is the pillar of Baay Faal path: “Baay Faal is a free man and not a slave to anyone or anything. We make our own rules, and we are accountable only to God and his prophets. Some Baay Faal smoke, some don’t, some pray, some don’t” said Moussa Ngom to Savishinsky (1994: 215). These Baay Faal must deal with the importance of *ndigël* and submission on one side, and freedom on the other side. Generally, they perfectly assume this contradiction, by claiming that faith and heart are

overcoming practices and mind. However, the Baay Faals are not unanimous and these evolutions lead up to many debates inside the community.

Nonetheless, the informal structures also help Baay Faal in their everyday life and offer them communitarian recognition. At least, they can be proud of themselves and multiply the Baay Faal signs (such as dreadlocks, *njaxaas*, the patchwork dress, and *sujoot*, a particular way of greeting). The sheikhs themselves want to help the weakest disciples: this action has even become one of the main missions of Baay Faal hierarchy. Cheikh Gunda Fall is seen as a “great marabout” because he “controls the *say-say*”, the rowdies . Serigne Modou Kara wanted to save the delinquents “because they had Serigne Touba in their heart” and “we don’t have the right to abandon them” (*Taxwa*, 02.03.1998). Indeed, *daara-all* or *daara-tarbiyya* appear to be efficient as a way to social salvation. They can help drug addicts (Werner, 1993, 1997) and more largely, every young man who is criticized by his family for his unemployment and celibacy. So he will prefer to leave the family house and go to the *daara*. Furthermore, in a context of pauperization, *daara*’s life becomes “easy”, as said Baye Modou, a disciple from Rufisque who lived some years in Europe. “It’s better to work for God than to take a measly remuneration outside. After Europe, you know that there is no money here.” (*daara* Ndiaye Lo, Rufisque, 2000) At last, some Baay Faal artists who had economically succeeded are setting up collective structures to help *goorgoorlu* Baay Faal, the ones who need to seek everyday their income. Ndiaye Diagne for example created the “Espace Cheikh Ibra Fall” in Dakar to regroup Baay Faal artists and propose them a place to work and sell their production. According to him:

“This creation is a demonstration of the *goorgoorlu*, resourcefulness ideology. Beside the artistic aspect, artists manage the security in the area. They work in collaboration with the police and help to reintegrate young delinquents or marginalized people. We must give Senegalese people a positive image of the Baay Faal: a worker, respectful of human being and who participates to the development of Senegal.” (Maucci, 2003: 104)

The common belonging to Baay Faal path allows solidarity networks and structures and reinforces collective consciousness and pride.

Conclusion

Baay Faal education and structures of socialization relatively prevent the weakest disciples from social exclusion and, at the same time, from religious extremism. The influence of reformist groups, even inside the Sufi brotherhoods (the *Izbut Tarqiyya* in the Murid brotherhood for example), had first weakened the Baay Faal community, by accusing them of being “false” or “bad” Muslims who corrupt the Muslim faith. By the time, they learned to coexist and nowadays some Baay Faal are recognized as models of disciples, as the ones who respect religious and social hierarchy. Nevertheless, there is still confrontation between Baay Faal and others religious groups and some can be violent as in 1999 with the fundamentalist group *Ibadou Rahmane*, which degenerated in fight and fire in the mosque. The urban and *goorgoorlu* Baay Faal did not gain legitimacy in the Senegalese society. Fortunately, they can find solidarity and recognition from their “brothers”. They now try to obtain legitimacy by presenting themselves as a Wolof path made of solidarity, peace and esoteric way of being which could satisfy any human being in the world.

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Panel 30: [PhD Sören Gilsaa](#) ; [PhD Annette H. Ihle](#)
[Islamic education and activism in sub-Saharan Africa](#)

This panel proposal considers studying current trends in Islamic education in sub-Saharan Africa from a social activism perspective. The study of Islamic education and Islamic

'reform' movements has had much attention in the later decades. However, in these studies there has often been much emphasis placed on theological Islamic debates and less on relating these issues to the broader social trends in the adjoining societies and the continent as a whole. Islamic educational and 'reform/activist' debates are, however, deeply interconnected, and they share much with non-Islamic issues and broader development debates. Among 'reformist' Muslim activists the issue of education is always at front, perceived as the requisite needed not only for correct Muslim living and conduct, but also for increased social welfare and political mobilisation. The issues of Islamic education and activism furthermore connect the topical discussions on 'local' and 'translocal' influences among African Islamic expressions. Also, they link disputes over Islamic and non-Islamic knowledge to debates on Islamic activism and entrepreneurship, just as they relate closely to ongoing debates on the proliferation of Islamic civil society and NGO's. Thus, the panel proposes to place special attention to the somewhat overlooked linkages between Islamic education and broader development-related debates on youth and gender, social deprivation and mobilisation, contentious politics, and movement activism. The hope is that we can conjure up better understanding of the countless Islamic initiatives in Africa these years and discuss them within a framework of alternative African agency