

ISLAMIZATION OF WEST-AFRICAN RADICALISM. RESEARCH AMONG THE YOUTHS IN THE GRAND YOFF NEIGHBOURHOOD IN DAKAR, SENEGAL

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Abstract: *In order to determine the radicalization level of the Muslim society in West Africa and in order to understand the influence coming over radicalized Africans from Islam fundamentalism exporting countries, we conducted a sociologic survey on a target group consisting of 107 Muslim men, aged between 18 and 45, from the popular neighbourhood Grand Yoff in Dakar, Senegal. We surveyed their religiousness and radicalization in correlation with their attitude towards the West and their behaviour in front of various daily life situations. That is because in one of the poorest regions in the world, political claims mix with the social ones and lead to the emergence of social radicalism, on which the Islam overlaps perfectly.*

Keywords: *jihad, sharia, anticolonialism, Islam.*

1. Introduction

The article herein is part of a broader study regarding the islamization of Senegal radicalism and its transformation into neo-fundamentalism, namely of the influence which radical movement leaders receive from the states exporting religious extremism, through the local imams/marabouts.

Starting from a series of constraints, first of all, of pragmatic (logistic) nature and not methodological ones we conducted a sociologic survey on a group of 107 youths, aged between 18 and 45, from the popular neighbourhood Grand Yoff in Dakar, Senegal. The article herein is part of a broader study regarding the islamization of Senegal radicalism and its transformation into neo-fundamentalism, namely of the influence which radical movement leaders receive from the states exporting religious extremism, through the local imams/marabouts.

2. Quantitative Method

We have prepared a questionnaire, in French, targeting the young male population (aged 18-45), from one of the popular neighbourhoods of Dakar, the capital of Senegal.

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The research paper has included 44 questions on the following topics: influence of Western civilisation, its positive and negative elements, Arab/English learning by the Senegalese, sexual segregation, Western consumerism, Western fashion, religiousness level, radicalization and the jihad.

We have used the quantitative method (sociological questionnaire), which brings the advantages of objectivity - the data obtained is one of the most objective means of measuring individual opinions, and scientific nature - the advantage of collecting actual data, numerically significant for the research in question.

The 107 questionnaires have been implemented directly, orally (question-response), by three operators (the author of the study and two volunteers, students of Cheik Anta Diop University of Dakar) in French and/or Wolof. It should be noted that the level of French is relatively low among the population of the Grand Yoff neighbourhood (Ndione, 2001, p. 148).

3. Location

From a territorial point of view, the research was located in Grand Yoff neighbourhood of Dakar, where the Muslim population is around 98.6% (Darnault, 2015) in a population of over 185,000 inhabitants.

The choice of this neighbourhood, Grand Yoff, as the survey location was due to the mixture of the main five out of seven ethnicities constituting the Senegalese population in this area. In this regard, we have tried to limit the financial constraints potentially incurred by a nation-wide study, since the resources and techniques used in such a study would have exceeded, by far, our financial means.

Grand Yoff is one of the 19 *communes d'arrondissement* (neighbourhoods) which constitute Dakar. It is located midtown and it also comprises of 66 sub-neighbourhoods. Built in the '50s by the members of a shepherd tribe, as of 1960, it has welcomed thousands of migrants coming to Dakar from all parts of West Africa. (Ndione, 1994, p. 112) The neighbourhood's population was estimated at 128,740 inhabitants in 2002, 144,859 in 2007 (Tall, 2009, p.72) and, according to the most recent census of Senegalese population, in 2013, at only 185,503 inhabitants, therefore Grand Yoff is the most populated district in the capital of Senegal.

The infrastructure of the neighbourhood is one of the lowest, since out of 156 km of streets and alleys, only 46 km are asphalted, while the rest are covered in sand (source: Laboratoire de Cartographie de Grand-Yoff). Extreme density and high unemployment rates (over 74% according to www.ansd.sn) turn Grand Yoff into one of the places with the highest social insecurity rates in Senegal. All these add to the problems caused by the lack of health infrastructure, education and the lack of minimum living conditions, especially with regard to the young population (Laurent, 1969, p. 65 and Diop, 2000, p. 74).

4. Sampling

Sampling is one of the difficulties of research in social sciences, the difficulty being the objective representativeness of positioning for the chosen sample (quantitative and qualitative), which often determines the scientific validity of the research. For this

purpose, we have used the formula of the 'availability sample', since the logistic constraints force us to limit ourselves to this option, at the expense of strictly scientific rigor. Our study is a pilot study, statistically unrepresentative of the Senegalese population, because the field conditions and the specific area did not allow applying a statistical stage for the selection of respondents, to allow classification of the study as 'statistically representative'. However, in the context of the topic being studied, the findings are relevant and confirm the fundamental research hypothesis. The objective of the study has not been the generalization of the results beginning with individual cases, but rather the investigation of the level of radicalization of the young population in West Africa and the influence it perceives or not in the states exporting fundamentalism, without claiming exhaustive scientific research.

5. Actual Performance of the Research

Data has been collected using a questionnaire comprising of 44 questions. The actual field research was conducted between April 15th and November 30th, 2017. The chosen method has been direct administration, face to face. This method has allowed us to interact with the survey respondents and, additionally, the researcher/operator had the opportunity to observe the respondent's environment, and to correlate these data with the answers to the open questions (8 out of 44). The questionnaire has been completed by the researcher/operator, together with the respondent, in an individual and interactive manner, so as to avoid the responses being influenced by other people from his entourage.

The research was conducted throughout the day, between 9 and 20, both during the week and the weekend.

Remark: Given that the research was conducted in a Muslim majority environment, we considered the hours of prayer and avoided making contact around the collective prayer ceremony time, on Fridays, as of 2 P.M. Although some of the field research was conducted during the Ramadan (May 27th -June 25th 2017), we believe that scientific activity was not influenced by it.

The respondents have been contacted individually, directly, randomly, in the street, in the workplace or in the mosque yard. We have always considered that the place where the questionnaire is administered, as well as the time of day, has certain influence on the answers. Thus, we have avoided 'official' places, interviews taking place just like a regular discussion, in an ordinary setting, depending on the availability of the respondents. (see Chelcea, 2001, p. 95)

6. Questionnaire and Results Obtained

The questionnaire had several distinct parts, but they were not marked as such to avoid influencing the answers. In the first part, we have prepared a series of 10 questions allowing us to place the respondent in the comfort zone needed to get honest answers (the introductory questions). Please note that, from the very first approach, the respondent was told that the survey is anonymous, therefore his identification data would be unknown to the researcher/operator.

For the first 10 questions, the respondent was asked about his age, profession, marital status, and level of studies. Also, in this first part, we have tested the respondent's level of sensitivity in terms of his belonging to the Senegalese. These are the 'buffer' questions. (Chelcea, 2001, p. 98)

Thus, the data obtained have allowed classification into the age margin of the respondents, 41 out of 107 being under 25, 51 between 25-34 years and 15 between 35-45 years. In terms of marital status, 75 are single, 27 married and 5 divorced.

The following 4 questions have made the transition to a second part of the questionnaire, where we included topics with a higher degree of sensitivity: Western influence on Senegalese culture and the positive/negative elements imported from Western culture (France and the United States of America) as opposed to similar ones in Saudi Arabia - the 'crossing' questions.

To the question on where they would have preferred to be born, 36 out of 107 responded that in the US, 22 chose Senegal, while the rest chose different European countries and Saudi Arabia (7). A total of 93 respondents negatively perceive the influence of Western culture on Senegalese life as being important and very important, while 69 out of 107 respondents positively view the influence of Saudi Arabia on Senegalese culture and civilization.

Question 14 has been an open one, the respondent being asked to give an example of the first word that comes to his mind when thinking of the colonization of Africa. According to Septimiu Chelcea, 'open-question questionnaires (free, post-coded), unlike closed ones (pre-coded), allow respondents free individualized expression of their answers. Open questions allow collecting a wide range of information without the risk of suggestiveness.' (Chelcea, 2001, p 81). Here, the answers have been quite varied, most of them choosing an answer from the semantic sphere of the terms 'exploitation' or 'domination'. The next set, questions 15-17, have tested the respondent's view of Western fashion. Among these, we squeezed in one of the key questions of the questionnaire: *If you could choose, what would you prefer to learn, Arabic or English?* and another question on the separation of girls and boys in the education process. When asked about learning foreign languages, 32 would choose Arab, 43 English and 32 would choose both, equally. There is a different situation on the issue of separating girls from boys in the education process, where 46 support separation and only 34 oppose this measure. Please note that a number of 24 respondents have refused to answer.

To re-establish comfort for the respondent, the following set of questions has been aimed at Western consumerism and its suitability for the Senegalese society. At this point, 88 out of 107 respondents have stated that, for the Senegalese society, consumerism is not at all appropriate or very little appropriate. Moreover, 94 of the respondents showed disagreement with the purchase of goods other than those of strict necessity.

Another key moment of the questionnaire has been represented by questions 24-28, where the respondent was requested to state an opinion on how Western women dress and on the potential banning of Dakar nightclubs. Here, the answers have been as follows: 64 respondents have a bad and very bad opinion about the Western fashion, and 88 have said Western fashion is not appropriate for the African society. 57 do not agree with women wearing jeans, and 43 have a very bad opinion about how Western women dress.

Special focus was given to the question on the possibility of banning nightclubs. 49 respondents agreed with the measure of prohibition, while 50 did not agree.

The next set of questions has constituted both the hard core of the whole questionnaire and its most delicate part. From question 30 to question 39, the respondent was asked to give an opinion on religion-related topics. The first questions in the set were aimed at collecting data on the level of religiousness: how often they pray, how often they go to the mosque and whether they had read fully the Quran. Further on, the respondents have been asked to state an opinion on the importance of religion in the development of African youth and to indicate a person who could change African society.

From the beginning, the overwhelming majority of the respondents declared they are Muslim (89 people), 51 of whom said they go to the mosque every Friday. However, only 24 gave an affirmative answer on the matter of daily prayer, while 39 of them said they rarely read the Quran, and 82 stated they had never fully read it. Moreover, for the key question on the importance of religion in the evolution of a young man, 98 out of 107 have declared religion to be important and very important, while 12 deem it as being truly defining for an individual. This latter part is directly connected to the question on who could change the African society for the better, to which 57 respondents chose the 'imam', as opposed to the other answers: the 'teacher' (36), the 'politician' (36) or the 'policeman' (3).

Questions 35-39 have been the key points of this survey: 35. *Can we justify the armed struggle against injustice?* For this question, 17 people answered 'yes' and 'definitely yes' and 63 answered negatively. However, 20 of the respondents gave an 'I don't think so' neutral answer, which can be associated with the previous ones and interpreted as indecision on a delicate matter of African society. For question 36. *Do you agree with individuals choosing to be martyrs, sacrificing their life for a better world,* 45 respondents answered 'yes' and 'certainly, yes', in an almost equal share with those who answered negatively, namely 50. For question 37. *Do you agree with those who join radical movements?* and 38. *Would you join an organization considered terrorist by the Western countries?* The answers have been somewhat unexpected: 61 say they disagree with individuals joining radical movements and 58 would not join a terrorist organization. However, 27 and 34, respectively, answer 'I do not think so' to these questions. This type of answer is not typical for questions which are generally answered directly and has been encountered several times throughout the survey, especially in questions with a high degree of sensitivity.

The last question in this set, 39, was an open question: *What is jihad for you?* Practically, this reaches the peak of the entire questionnaire and it is also when the respondent expresses his opinion about Jihad and, eventually, armed struggle. To this question, the vast majority of the respondents have used terms from the semantic field of 'struggle' in their answers. The responses have been somewhat predictable, in Islamic culture, the jihad being deemed as an inner struggle of the follower. However, we believe that this answer needs to be corroborated with the answers for questions 35-39, thus giving us the answer on the polarization of the Senegalese society between those who accept armed struggle against the 'others' and those who see this struggle as being strictly inner.

The last questions of the questionnaire (40-44) have been the ending points of the research. The respondent's level of life satisfaction was tested. He was asked to make a projection regarding the future, about his hobbies (football), as well as his level of literacy in technology. At this point, the outcomes have been again somewhat surprising. To the question on satisfaction with the current life, 65 respondents have answered 'yes' and 'definitely, yes'. With regard to projection in the future, 72 of the respondents see themselves as leaving Senegal, in the following 5 years, while 63 would choose US as their destination.

The link with the Western model of life is also very stable. 89 out of the 102 respondents use a smartphone in their everyday life, and 82 out of 106 have an idol in European football.

7. Findings

In time, with the development of colonialism, especially French colonialism, in West Africa, the state, as political entity, has taken on a secondary role. The local population has given the state less and less legitimacy, most often deeming the central organization as a threat to its own sovereignty. In this area, Islam gives way to Islamic neo-fundamentalism, which takes over a number of meanings, the 'jihad' going against foreign influence and domination. We are dealing with political action, mostly, and religious action, secondly. That is because in one of the poorest regions in the world, political claims mix with the social ones and lead to the emergence of social radicalism, on which a new type of religious fundamentalism overlaps perfectly.

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