



[www.invisible-dog.com](http://www.invisible-dog.com)

[invisibledog@email.com](mailto:invisibledog@email.com)

---

## **THE WRECK AND THE OFFENSE**

### **"GIVE MALI BACK TO MALIANS"**

*« Every imperialist society sees in the Other the negation of the ideal Self it is trying to achieve. It seeks to tame him by drawing him in the field of application of his own ideals and placing him at a lower level »*

Wolfgang Sachs

#### **WHAT HAVE WE BECOME IN MALI?**

"Who should we hand the keys back to?" is the question posed by Pierre Lellouche, MP of the UMP at the French Assemblée Nationale on the subject of Mali. It was April 22 2013 during the parliamentary debate that preceded the vote on the extension of Operation Serval. Hervé Morin, former UMP Minister of Defense replied: "There is no one to hand things over to". Just like a letter at the post office, the requested extension was granted unanimously. Presidential election in Mali were instead set for July 2013. Officially France was not only unanimous, but also intransigent.

I shall show a "firm resolve", anticipated French President François Hollande. His words are in our heads and they hurt. The Minister of Defense, Jean Yves Le Drian, thinks "things should be carried out with force" (RFI). Those Malians that greeted President Hollande as a liberator thought Operation Serval served the purpose of quickly ridding Mali of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and of their affiliates from Ansar Dine and MUJAO and that life would have gone back to normal. The military intervention has definitely reduced the jihadists' strength, they have been killed in the hundreds and their weapons and fuel stock destroyed. But the cities of Gao and Timbuktu are free without truly being rid of groups the official rhetoric labels as "residual", but who nonetheless continue to carry out attacks. Even more worrying, Kidal is still in the hands of the National

Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) that has banned the national army from entering the city.

In the fear of getting bogged down, France has reduced the number of its troops on the ground, but has not withdrawn. Its cooperation with the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) to mobilize troops for the International Mission in Support of Mali (MISMA) has not attained satisfactory results. The UN Integrated Multidimensional Mission (MINUSMA) will see the light in July 2013.

France will not get stuck. But in what kind of adventure did it draw our country in with us being ready for it? What Mali will we leave for future generations? Will it be a country where the departure of the last French soldier will be the defining moment of decolonization while today we loose what sovereignty is left?

Self-portrayed liberator, President Hollande promised during his trip to Bamako a new independence "not from colonialism, but from terrorism". As if it is up to France to save us from a peril they know very well, as their recent intervention in Libya has proven.

Did Mankind in Mali sufficiently join history? Is he master of his own destiny to the point that he is capable of exerting his right to say "no" to the choices and decisions that directly affect him?

I hereby criticize militarization as a response to the failure of the neoliberal model in my country. Banned from sojourning in the Schengen area, I look up with admiration and respect to the rallies and determination of people across Europe in their fight against that very same system that is silently destroying Africa.

## **THE COLLAPSE OF THE "WINNING" MALIAN CAPITALISM**

Mali does not suffer from a humanitarian and security crisis in the north of the country because of the rebellion and of radical Islam and from a political and institutional crisis due to the coup d'etat of March 22 2012. Such a reductive approach is the first true obstacle to peace and national reconstruction. What we have witnessed is the failure of an apparently successful Malian capitalism that generated extremely high human and social costs.

Structural adjustment, unemployment, poverty and extreme poverty are the prize we gained starting from the 1980s. France and the other European countries are only about 30 years late on Mali and its African companions that have been for decades the subject of drastic measures from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

According to UNCTAD (2001 Report), Africa is the continent where during the 80s and 90s Structural Adjustment Programs have been more massively, with greater drive and more destructively applied. And during those decades international institutions did not worry about correcting the macro-economic imbalance and market distortions, but they rather focused on having States write down strategies for the reduction of poverty (DSRP).

- Margaret Thatcher's credo "There is no alternative" (TINA) marches in the sun under our skies. Translated on the economic level it means "liberalize your economies at all costs", on the political "democratize according to our rules and criteria" and, in the case of Mali, "vote in July 2013". To this risky agenda we also add the military level stating "secure your country according to our methods and to our best interest".
- Sacrificed on the altar of so called free and competitive trade – but totally unfair when it comes down to the production of cotton and gold as in our case – and of formal democracy, Mali will soon also join the fight against terrorism.
- The rebellion by the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), the coup d'état and the recruitment in the ranks of AQMI, Ansar Dine and MUJAO of dozens of unemployed and starving youth from both the north and south of the country are part of an explosive national picture. This was marked at the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012 by rallies against price-hikes, unemployment, job insecurity, a constitutional referendum, the issue of land ownership, corruption and impunity.
- Apart from a small minority of wealthy newcomers, the people of Mali are the great losers from the opening with forceps of our national economy. They are amused by the mendacious and soporific speeches on the example set by our democracy and on the economic results considered among the best in the ECOWAS. Any dissent is hushed up.

## **DENIAL OF DEMOCRACY**

Democratic within its borders, as the recent discussion in Parliament and in the streets on the issue of weddings for all, but intractable when it come down to its relationship with Mali. France sees nothing wrong with its forceful return on the scene. It plays down its agenda or pretends not to have one. You should only sing and dance to its glory if you wish to remain in her good graces, be able to exist politically and stay free to roam around Europe. Refusing to do so would imply not being with France, hence against it. It is like a leap in the past to the aftermath of 911 when U.S. President George W. Bush declared: "You're either with us or with the terrorists". In my case, it is the leftist ideals on the ravage caused by neoliberal globalization in Africa that have suddenly become subversive. Strangely enough the very same ideas had earned me an invitation to the French Parti Socialiste university in La Rochelle in 2010.

To obfuscate the meaning of my words and of my fight I have been labelled as in favor of the coup first and anti-ECOWAS later. Today I am stuck in my home. I owe to Karamoko Bamba of the N'KO movement for the following African thought according to which "he who has the gun does not use it to take power. He who holds power uses it in the interest of the people and under their control".

Why should I be entirely responsible for the wreck of the State in the hands of a wretched army afflicted, as the rest of the republican institutions, by corruption, nepotism and impunity?

We cannot blame the military for not having been capable of defending a country whose political and economic elite not only accepted opening up our markets at the worst possible conditions, but profited from it to enrich themselves. It is first and foremost their wreck for having claimed an economic model riming with the withdrawal and killing of the State, with the ruin of the peasants, the impoverishment of troops and endemic unemployment. If there were no means to halt the disaster of the system in the 80s, our leaders cannot ignore the impasse into which the system has dragged Greece, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus and... France, one of their role models.

### **FROM OSTRACISM TO A CRIMINAL**

- It was on April 12 2012, while preparing to travel to Berlin on invitation from the German leftist party Die Linke and to Paris to meet the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA), that I became aware that I had become a *persona non grata* in Europe on request from France. I shared the same fate as Oumar Mariko, Secretary General of the SADI (*Solidarité Africaine pour la Démocratie et l'Indépendance*) party. The German embassy granted me a Visa that allowed me to go to Berlin via Istanbul (Turkey), instead of by Amsterdam (The Netherlands) as initially planned. My stop in Paris was simply cancelled.
- I got to know about my *persona non grata* status thanks to the following message sent to me by the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation:
- « The German embassy in Bamako has informed us this morning that the *conditio sine qua non* to obtain a Visa for Germany is not to travel via a Schengen area country. This is why we have bought you a new ticket (flight via Istanbul/Turkey) that you will find attached. We are sorry you won't be able to stay for three days in Paris. But the German embassy has informed us that France has forbidden you from having a Visa for all the Schengen zone countries. We'll come to pick you up at the airport on Monday ».
- The Association « Afrique Avenir », co-organizer of one of the Berlin conferences, has protested and so have other participants. I thank each and everyone for their solidarity and would like to underline the meaning of my struggle, for all those who believe France does not have the right to mine my freedom of movement on grounds of my disagreement with Paris whose policies only follow their interests.
- How can I be accused of something the authors of the information report of the French Senate state so clearly: "France cannot loose interest in Africa, that has become, after decades, of strategic importance and in the future will be more populated than India and China (in 2050 Africa will host 1.8 billion people as opposed to 250 million in 1950), where the majority of scarce raw materials are held and that is undergoing an unprecedented, even though unequal, economic growth that is not the result of the price hike of raw materials, but of an emerging veritable middle class".
- If the data on demographic and economic development is founded, the so called "economic growth" mentioned in the report is uncertain, source of conflicts because

uneven, profiting only foreign corporations and part of the political and economic elite.

- The stakes of the military intervention are: economic (uranium, thus nuclear and energetic independence), of security (the menace of terrorist attacks against corporate interests, in particular French company AREVA, hostage crisis, organized crime, i.e. drug traffic and arms trade), geopolitical (Chinese competition) and migratory.
- What peace, what reconciliation and what reconstruction can we hope to achieve when the stakes are so accurately concealed to the people?

## **THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN**

The ban on my access to the Schengen area does not strike me as a woman, but shows that those who refuse to be exploited in the defense of mainstream ideas can be fought. I have been experiencing this on a national level for a long time. But I did not expect to be ostracized by a country cradle of human rights and in the precise moment my country is at war. This is a violation of UN Resolution 1325 on the participation of women in decision-making processes, in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in reconstruction.

Should I remind that on March 8 2013, World Women's Day, this is how French President François Hollande replied to his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, on why French troops are in Mali: "Because there were women victim of oppression and savagery! Women who were forced to wear a veil! Women who dared not venture outside their homes. Women that were beaten!".

With regard to the veil, I am one of those Malians and Sahelians who managed to escape from illiteracy and I try to eradicate the more pernicious economic ignorance that keeps Africans in the dark on the neoliberal policies affecting their lives and that have turned them into electoral herds. Would President Hollande be so intractable on the date of Mali's presidential elections if voters and the political debate were centered on economic, monetary, political and military sovereignty?

With respect to women that "dared not venture outside their homes", until now I freely left my country and with as much freedom travelled in Europe and in the world. Whatever the reason behind my present situation, this should not discourage other Malian and African women with the will to understand our globalized world from fighting against it and becoming active and aware citizens".

## **DEVELOPMENT AID OR MILITARIZATION**

The reply to armed jihadism should be, or so apparently it seems, an armed solution. This paves the way to the purchase of weapons, instead of analyzing and curing religious radicalism that flourishes where an adjusted and privatized State is lacking or simply absent.

To play donkey to obtain hay is the sort of prevailing behavior in a context of widespread poverty, both at a State level and in some Non-governmental organizations. War -the worst of all evils- is also the occasion to pump some fresh money into our ailing economy.

Disappointed by Europe's hesitations and slowness, whose show of solidarity was limited to training the Malian army and to some bilateral support, France has invited her European partners to share the financial burden of defending its strategic interests in West Africa. Other donors will also join in.

On May 15 2013 in Brussels donors will examine an urgency and priority actions plan (for 2013 and 2014). Will the resources made available (or pledged) benefit the people of Mali or will they irrigate those same economic circuits along the same lines that have aggravated poverty and inequality?

In light of a restart of cooperation, the French minister charged with development has announced 240 million euros will be allocated to agriculture, basic services like water and electricity in the north of Mali and to the return of IDPs.

It is worth remembering that Tripoli, the Libyan capital, hosted on November 29 and 30 2010 the Third Africa-EU Summit and that the Libyan guide Muammar Gaddafi welcomed in grand style leaders of 80 African and European countries.

Job creation, investments and economic growth, peace, stability, migrations and climate change were all on the Summit's agenda. Participants agreed on a "plan of action" for an Africa-EU partnership from 2011 to 2013.

In that occasion, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to dedicate the 0.7% of its GDP to public development aid by 2015 and to earmark from 2011 to 2013 50 billion euros to the objectives identified in the partnership. We are now in 2013 and still very far from the Millennium Development Goals and no roads or means are in sight to reach them by 2020. Like a worm in the fruit.

Peace, reconciliation and reconstruction in Mali have no chance for success if they will rely on political agreements based on the hoarding of "external aid".

The State, or whatever is left of it since the rebels fight and negotiate along the same paradigm that has worsened unemployment, poverty and tensions. Disagreements are solved over investments in infrastructures, the ideal place for rapid enrichment and corruption. The list of badly constructed or unfinished public works is long. It partly explains the discontent of the people in the north of Mali that continue to suffer while the homes of certain designated individuals grow left and right through embezzlements and money from the drug trade.

### **LET US DARE A NEW ECONOMY**

Nothing will ever be the same. What was difficult before, will become even harder when militarization will start absorbing resources we desperately need for agriculture, water, health, homes, environment and jobs.

Operation Serval, the International Mission in Support of Mali (MISMA), the UN Integrated Stabilization Multidimensional Mission, the defense of our country and security, are not only a military issue, but first and foremost an intellectual, moral and political challenge.

I share candidate François Hollande's remarks when he stated that "the time has come to choose another path. It is time to choose another politic". This time has definitely come both for France and its former African colonies. The time for economic, social, political, civil and environmental transitions that bear nothing in common with the route traced by the "international community". They plea for a change of paradigm.

Those African leaders that have bowed to the lies on the unavoidability of war to put an end to the jihadist danger should not deceive themselves: the contagion they fear has little to do with terrorists moving around, but rather with the economic, social and political similarities induced by the neoliberal model.

If terrorist chiefs come from abroad, the majority of their fighters are young, unemployed, devoid of interlocutors and of any hope in the future Malians. Even drug traffickers can hire couriers or dealers from the ranks of the same disenchanting youth.

The material and moral misery of young graduates, peasants, herders and of other vulnerable groups is the veritable source of both unrest and rebellions. The fight, without bloodshed, against terrorism and organized crime in Mali and West Africa requires an honest analysis and a thorough evaluation of the past three decades of savage liberalism that have destroyed economic and social fabric, as well as the ecosystem. Unless the African States and their financial and technical partners are capable of revising the neoliberal model, nothing will stop hundreds of thousands of young men and women from Mali, Niger, Chad, Senegal, Mauritania and elsewhere that swell the ranks of the unemployed and Visa applicants from joining the terrorists.

### **THE NECESSARY CONCURRENCE OF STRUGGLES**

We ask for an outburst of solidarity to tackle the militarization, get back our dignity and safeguard our lives and ecosystem.

Everything would be fine if the 15 thousand soldiers were teachers, doctors, engineers and if the billion of euros that will be spent were allocated to those who need them the most. Our sons and daughters would need not to get killed acting as underpaid soldiers, drug traffickers or fanatics of God.

We all should, starting from ourselves, get to work on a primordial task such as the transformation of our deepest and weakened Self and of our dying country. The considerable advantage of a systemic approach is the de-tribalization of the conflict in favor of a political conscience reconciling all the damned of the global economy. Tuareg, Peul, Arab, Bamanan, Sonrhaï, Bellah, Sénoufos would stop quarreling with one another and fight together.

This alternative approach returns our "dignity" in a context where we tend to feel guilty and hand ourselves, hands and feet tied, over to the "international community", that is both party and judge of the issue.

We ask for the concurrence of all the struggles within our borders and among all those actors within our society devastated by the savagery of the capitalist system that do not want, do not give up and will not bow down. Together we need to explore the alternatives to war.

Liberalist States have privileged war and invested in weapons of destruction of lives, social ties and ecosystems. Let us innovate through the battle of ideas and let us call for a conference of the citizenry for another development of Mali capable of loosening the loop of capitalist globalization. We need to open a debate on the relationship between neoliberal policies and each and every aspect of the crisis: endemic unemployment of the youth, rebellions, mutinies, coup d'Etat, violence against women, religious radicalism.

This would be an unprecedented and intense work of information and citizen education in our national languages allowing Malians to talk amongst themselves about the future of their country.

Since all Men are born free and with equal rights, we claim our right to:

- another economy, that will allows us to manage the wealth of our country and to freely choose the policies to enact to put an end to unemployment, poverty, migrations and war;
- a truly democratic political system that is intelligible to all Malians, inflected and debated in the national idioms, founded on widely shared values of culture and society;
- freedom of expression and of movement.

## **HAND US BACK THE KEYS TO OUR COUNTRY!**

French officials that declare *urbi et orbi* that we don't have anymore "a State worthy of this name", nor "an army worthy of this name" surely also believe that we don't exist as a people anymore if they get to the point of asking themselves "who should we hand the keys back to" and ask for elections to be held in July 2013. Furthermore, they also ease down on the cancellation of national talks that should have allowed Malians to reclaim the reins of their country. And foremost they make themselves comfortable in the State of Emergency that has been installed, prolonged one time and then another in order to "secure" the transition.

I don't believe that the "war on terrorism" brought peace to Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya or that the Blue Helmets have been capable of protecting the population of the Democratic Republic of Congo or Haiti as was expected from them.

But I am convinced that in each and every Malian man and woman lies a soldier, a patriot that can participate in the defense of his interests and of those of Mali starting from a good consciousness of the true state of the global economy.



The reply to the intolerable question posed by Claude Lellouche is clear: Mali should be given back to Malians. Only we can take care of it because, as reminded by Bouna Boukary Dioura, we know, we the people of the Sahel, that even rocks can blossom through love and perseverance.

***Rendez les clés du Mali au peuple malien !***

Aminata D. Traoré, Bamako le 03 mai 2013

\* *Wolfgang Sachs et Gustavo Esteva : Des ruines du développement. Les Editions Ecosociété 1996.*

## NIGER BETWEEN THE SECULAR STATE AND THE ISLAMIC DRIFT

1. Niger, although inhabited by a population that is 95% Muslim, has had a secular State and has avoided Islamic extremism thus far. From 1960 to 1974, in the years of the first Republic, under the umbrella of the unique party PPN-RDA (Progressive Nigerien Party – Rassemblement Democratique Africain) of Hammani Diori, Niger began exchanges with Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria. The first “Islamic Cultural Association of Niger” (ACIN) was founded with the goal of controlling the Marabouts and channeling the religiousness of the local population.

The ACIN operated through a complex network of regional and local seats without modifying the existing the religious structure (mostly Sunni from the Malikite school or connected to the confraternities: Khalwatiyya, Sanoussiyya, Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya), all the while reinforcing the notables of the time.

We've already discussed the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya (when speaking of Senegal); here follows some data about the Malikite school and the other confraternities mentioned above:

- The Malikite school: it is an ancient theological Muslim Sunni school of jurisprudence. It is widely diffused in western Africa; it takes its name from its founder Malik ibn Anas and is characterized by its effort to adapt to the peculiarities of the African context;

- Khalwatiyya: from Arabic “Khuluwu”, which means to “take refuge in a narrow space in order to meditate and pray”. The confraternity is diffused especially in the north of Niger, in the village of Tabelot and on the Bagzane mountains;

- Sanoussiyya: this confraternity takes its name from its founder Muhammad As-Sanoussi, a Maghrebin that would have founded the confraternity in Arabia to then spread its word in Libya. Since the XIX century the confraternity became especially diffused in the regions of the Air, in the north of Niger, on Lake Chad and in the Fezzan (in Libya). It has fought Italian and French colonialism with great dedication; after causing an uprising in 1917 in Niger, the confraternity was smashed by colonial power, losing many of its members to the Tijaniyya.

The ACIN Association has obtained a good number of scholarships from Arab countries, through which it sent its students across the Maghreb. It has organized pilgrimages to the Mecca until 1974, when the military regime of Kountche' (1974-1988) created a new "Islamic Nigerien Association" (AIN). The AIN was founded to promote the teachings of Islamic science and to license Marabouts with an authorization to preach, in order to marginalize those that were overzealous or not in line with the regime. The AIN was in the midst of every religious debate and kept close relationships with the Arab countries. In 1978 Niger hosted the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OCI) and founded the Islamic University of Say, with teachings in Arabic.

With the advent of democracy in 1990, the parties favored the proliferation of associations: 44 associations and 132 antennae spread over the entire territory. These went from the apolitical ones and the feminist ones to those founded by the heads of the confraternities. They were generally dedicated to the re-claiming of the Islamic religious identity endangered by the rampant secularization of society. Such secularization was perceived as anti-Islamic, especially regarding the rights of women (ex. "egalitarian division" of the inheritance among male and female heirs. The Islamic right says that women only inherit half of what their male siblings are entitled to). In short, there begins a critical process of re-Islamization and of reaffirmation of Islam as the basis for the public morale.

In the year 2000, as the associations are cajoled by the central state, the public critique against them begins to be widespread. Among the Tuareg, the term "Islamik", which means an association that speaks in the name of Islam while conniving with the government, becomes widely used (Islamik is the religious version of "laik", which means secular). The members of the associations are sent across the country to spread the government's political line. They do so by controlling births and by applying rules based on religious morality. They also strongly oppose the institution of a "western-styled feminism" that is thought to be in contrast with the spirit of the Koran and of the Hadith.

The Islamic drift also caused a loss of consensus on the part of the ruling elites in Niger. These social classes, which used to be secular (they were once supported by the francophone elites that were formed in public secular schools), are presently seduced by the religious moral as a way to preserve their power.

Through seminars, lectures, conferences, and other initiatives financed by rich Arab merchants, these elites are now embracing a new form of Islam:

- the Islamic associations, together with the schools (madrassa) have created new forms of aggregation and social visibility, such as study groups where women, students and officers meet to discuss Islam;

- in the other social classes, like among the elites, the re-Islamization of daily practices is just as strong. In the urban centers there is a widespread diffusion of Islamic DVD's and CD's and of written works that are shown in simplified televised or radio-phonetic formats;

- among the merchants there grows the phenomenon of religious patronage, which goes to finance the mosques, Islamic music stores, televised and radio lectures that are the basis for Islamic proselytism. All of these are instruments to manipulate the public opinion;

- the marketplace has also been changed by the lectures, poetry and Islamic chants that are heard coming of the music stores (whereas in the past the air was filled with Malian or Congolese tunes that can now be heard in nightclubs and pubs); the DVD's teach children how to recite prayers and women how to wear a hijab.

2. In 1990 a new reformist current, of Nigerian origin, spread through Niger. It is called Izala, from the Arabic "izalatul bid'a wa iqamat al-sunna" (to eradicate innovation in order to let the prophetic tradition triumph). The adepts are called Ahl al-sunna ("those of the sunna"), yan Izala or yan-Wahabia (wahabites).

The Izala movement was born in Niger in 1987 from the successor of Seyni Kountche', Ali Saibou. The movement was structured during the transitional period (1990-1993) and in January of 1993 the association "Adin-Islam" was founded. The association's goal was to purify the practice of Islam in Niger from innovation (bid'a) and from negative forms of association (shirk) as practiced by the confraternities, such as the Tijaniyya.

The members of Izala oppose:

- the cult of saints and their graves;

- the exaltation of the cult of the prophet (especially the assiduous reading of poems in his honor and the practice of "maraboutage", such as wearing amulets that associate koranic verses with other ingredients). The Izala went so far as to call the members of the confraternities "kafr" (infidels), to question their rituals (baptisms and weddings) and to stigmatize the excessively reverential behavior of the students with regards to their teachers.

The Tijaniyya's response was just as harsh: the Izala was defined a heretic association paid by the Wahabites. There also followed episodes of violence:

- in 1994 in Maradi, concrete tombstones and graves were removed and ruined (according to the Izalas, graves should not be made of concrete and should be devoid of decorations);

- once again in Maradi, a Marabut lectured on the radio in favor of the State's family code; the Izalas responded by attacking the radio station and causing material damages;

- in the year 2005, in Tillaberi, a clash against Islamic extremists caused the Izalas to be chased from the village; their wives were tortured.

The Izalas do not believe in the mediation between God and men. The confraternities, on the other hand, assign such task to the spiritual powers of their cheikh.

The Izalas think that the practice of wasifa (gathering of the tijanists around a white cloth to celebrate the birth of the prophet) is a corrupt practice.

The Izalas also attempted to stop the celebration of the Moloud because they believe that it incites sinful conducts.

Finally, the Izalas have taken their distance from the Boko Haram movement, founded in Nigeria by an Izala group.

There are also other Islamic reformist groups on the Nigerien scene:

- the Kalo-Kato movement, which only recognizes the Koran and not the Sunna;

- the Goungouni, which promotes the strict application of the shari'a under the guide of their leader Mano Ibrahim.

3. Unlike Senegal, the future of Niger appears quite vulnerable; it could be the first country after Mali to “catch fire” under the blows of the nebula-like groups with ties to “al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” (AQMI). Indications of this are quite visible:

- there are too many “beards” around lately (they could be “dormant Islamic cells”);

- even the peaceful herders peul/bororo of Niger have traveled to Mali to join the ranks of the “MUJAO” (the Movement for the uniqueness of Jihad in western Africa);

- in the case of an invasion Niger, unlike Mali, would have to defend itself against well-armed forces that outnumber them.

If there were an invasion, any further French military operations in the region (in the advent of a worsening of the situation in Niger) would be highly unlikely. This because of the already “muscular” presence of the French in its former colonies and nearby regions.

The so-called “Arab Spring” on Libyan soil (with the annexed military support in terms of air strikes, missiles and special teams) is a French trick, the motivations of which lie in the following considerations:

- the urgency of the then-president Nicolas Sarkozy to prevent losing consensus to the extreme right of Marine Le Pen (daughter of Jean Marie) before the presidential elections of 2012 (where he was defeated by the socialist candidate Francois Hollande);

- the aspiration of replacing Italy – through the toppling of the Libyan regime – in Italy's “backyard” (considering the traditionally preferential relationship between Italy and Khadafi) and to “cash in” in political, economic and energetic terms;

- the will to re-affirm French presence in northern Africa, even (especially) against their ally, the US, which was literally dragged into the Libyan adventure by the neck; such a

complex operation cannot be improvised in just a few weeks, it is part of a strategic long-range program. Here's how we know this:

- the French military intervention to save the government of Bamako (Mali) against the advancing Islamic militants was in a perfect neo-colonial style (or rather “colonial”, since the army was used). The offensive was followed by statements by Hollande saying that France would stay in Mali until the stabilization of the situation (those who speak the language of politics know what this means... especially considering that the political situation in Mali was abnormal even before the jihadist attack).

- the failed attempts by the French special troops to free hostages (including the counter-espionage agent in Somalia, which ended in the death of the hostage and of two special agents);

- the consistent and “active” French military presence in Ivory Coast, which began in 2002 and which counts over 500 men on the ground, not to mention the 2000 stationed in Central Africa (by the way, as the world watched in stupor the US attack against Iraq in 2003, French troops were opening fire against the crowd at the airport in Abidjan).

In such a political-military context, a further military intervention by France in Niger would raise worries among the international community and could tread on some “very sensible feet”, especially in Washington, which is paying the full price for the novel French expansion in Africa. One thing is to send a group of paratroopers on a special mission in some “banana republic”, another is to have a mechanized division driving through western Africa.

Yet back to the political-religious aspect of the whole story, one could safely say that the imposition of western secularism in the Islamic world – as in all the rest of the developing world – has triggered extremist and violent reactions which, cunningly used by leaders that govern through religion, have produced the so-called “jihadism”.

The imposition of western cultural models (one could call it “globalization”) is part of a strategy called “soft power”. It is a very efficient strategy but also one that requires a very delicate application: if one is not careful, the reaction to the “cultural invasion” will not be quite as soft as the exerted power.

Presently, the “enemy” is able to use the same instruments of cultural penetration adopted by the West against the West itself: we are speaking of high-technology, not just the television and the radio. Social networks and all the other forms of computer data exchange, although highly sophisticated, can be extraordinarily efficient in spreading a “medieval” message. The more technological the instrument, the easier it is to receive such message.

If we compare the spread of jihadist extremism to an epidemic, we could argue that the medicine should not be sought among the instruments that would reinforce the virus by making it “mutate” (the Salafites use the web to spread the most traditional Islam). Despite secular western “mass vaccines”, with or without a side order of “democracy”, the virus keeps growing strong. After all, when there is an epidemic, the pharmaceutical firms are eager to profit from it by selling their vaccine...

If we want to help Islam and ourselves against the spread of this disease we must strengthen its immune system. Religious Islam (and not political-radical Islam) has within it the antibodies to fight the virus; and the confraternities of western Africa are there to prove it. Yet it is the responsibility (and the interest of) the West that this epidemic not turn into a pandemic.



## **SENEGAL BETWEEN ISLAMIC CONFRATERNITIES AND THE ISLAMIST DRIFT**

1. Despite their outcome, the current evaluations on the Arab Spring seem to share the view that this has allowed more room for radical Islam, in the sense that:

- in the countries where the Spring has forced a regime to quit power, the new government after elections has usually been influenced by radical Islam (introduction of the Sharia, return of the protests etc.). For instance, in Tunisia violence is back and the ruling party Ennahda is pushing for a theocratic State. Libya is apparently sliding towards a tribally influenced government. The political and institutional crisis is still ongoing in Egypt while President Morsi, with the strong support of the Muslim Brotherhood, is taking on emergency powers. Finally in Syria, where “civil war” continues despite rising figures in deaths and refugees, the conflict that has taken the shape of a power struggle between Sunnis and Shiites;
  
- in the countries where the Arab Spring did not go beyond protests, radical Islam is on hold, ready to exploit future events.

It could also be worthwhile opening up our analysis to other Islamic countries (not only Arab ones). In Mali, for instance, weapons caches coming from Libyan post-Gaddafi stockpiles have revived ancient ethnic and territorial conflicts. Extremist groups have been able to infiltrate what were once moderate Islamic geographical areas. Here dominated the Sufi vision of Islam and Islamic confraternities (also known as Marabutic Islam, whereby Marabut identifies the head of the religious confraternities).

After the war in Mali, to the tally of questions that have somehow accompanied the different episodes of the Arab Spring (Democracy or a new dictatorship? Rights for all or Islamic drift? Etc.) we have to add a fresh query: will the moderate Islam of the confraternities be capable of halting the penetration of radical Islam in a context where Salafists and Wahabis cooperate with Al Qaeda militants?

As far as Islamic confraternities are concerned, they differ from country to country in West Africa. Their exam is extremely complex. But we can pick out two significant examples (Senegal in the positive and Niger in the negative) to deduce the current trend. Senegal and Niger both have a Sunni majority of population (90%) that practices Sufism with animist residuals and even Christian ones (cult of saints and of the dead).

In both these countries, Islamic confraternities have developed as a consequence of late Sufism, whence the Sufis, following their initial development during the first centuries of Islam (IX, X and XI century), started organizing themselves around confraternities in the XII century. These are complex structures (tariqa) built around disciples and masters (the first known as talibé, the latter as sheikh, murhid, pir, mawla etc.). The master taught the disciples the “mystic way” to a direct knowledge of God.

The roots of Sufism go back to the first centuries of mystic muslim preachers whence, through religious meditation, the study of the sacred books and asceticism, they expressed their search for divine and their will to dedicate their lives to God. The term Sufi refers to the white woolen clothes, from the Arabic “suf”, they used to wear or to their desire to live a life of purity and authenticity (whose color is white).

Islamic confraternities have played a key role in the Islamization of the African continent through their constant dialogue with local pre-Islamic cultures that have also generated syncretic forms linked to the sanctification of local lineages. The recent conflict in Mali has highlighted the plight of tombs and mausoleums dedicated to saints in Timbuktu, Gao, etc. that were the target of extremist attacks.

The confraternities, that also originate from Christian tradition, have precise spiritual tasks: access to them follows an admission procedure, they are guided by charismatic spiritual leaders known as “mahdi”, literally “well lead by God”, that have previously held political posts (in ruling or opposition parties according to the cases) and have returned to Earth to guide muslims through difficult times.

Confraternities have had a greater impact in Sunni countries because, in the lack of an intermediary between man and God, the masters fill the gap between the divine and the human. Spiritual guides usually live in the Cultural Center (zawiya) of the community that believers periodically visit. Rituals stem from the Sunni tradition, but other specific rites, like the zykr or dhikr (repetition) on the uniqueness of God repeated in chorus hundreds of times, and recurrences have been added.

At first, religious guides were tasked with spreading Islam in West Africa; subsequently they installed themselves and set up koranic schools and began educating their disciples. Then caliphates, the venue of the religious leader, were also founded. The Islam of the confraternities and marabouts has developed with both a spiritual and social role for populations in search of a guide.

Before colonization (until the end of the XIX century), spiritual leaders took care of their disciples and of their families. They would receive respect and gratitude in exchange. During colonization, the French exploited the leaders trying to obtain their collaboration, if not they were deemed dangerous and eliminated.

Even local political leaders look up to the guides for support in a sort of social contract between secular and religious powers:

- religious guides grant the social control over the population;
- the administrative and political apparatus allocates resources to the guides and praises them in public

This deal has given birth to what is known as “ndigel” (religious guide suggestion to voters), widely used by all Senegalese presidents, from Senghor to Diouf to Wade. They all have courted the most popular confraternities.

As far as the ritual is concerned, West African confraternities are Sunni, thereby they keep into consideration the Koran, the Sunna and the zykr (or dhikr). In this context, Koran will be referred to as “the account” of the revelations shared by Allah with his envoy, Prophet Mohammed, during a period of over 20 years and that represents for muslims the basis for public and civil law, theology and Islamic rituals. The Sunna is instead the combination of acts, words and behaviors Prophet Mohammed transmitted to his disciples through the “hadith” (the narrations); for Sunnis this is their orthodoxy. Zykr (or dhikhr) is the key ritual consisting in the repetition of the uniqueness of Allah (“La ilaha illa'Allah”).

The initiates were traditionally hermits who had given up all material life; with the rise of the confraternities, the followers went in search of God immersed into daily ordinary life. In this context, religious leaders have played a key role by adapting Islam to local cultures in a oneness with animist beliefs and practices already based on peace, tolerance and traditional values.

Every confraternity (tariqa) has its own General Caliph, its Cheick (spiritual guide), its “wird” (combination of prayers and invocations with the aid of the Islamic rosary beads), its places of worship and pilgrimage sites, its radio channel, its iconography (pictures on walls, in shops, hanging from buses and taxis).

**2. In Senegal**, the most important and bigger Islamic confraternities are known as: Tijaniyya, Qadriyya, Muridiyya and Lahimiyya.

a. **TIJANIYYA** (The way of the Koran to learn and teach).

This is a Sufi confraternity founded by Algerian **Ahmed Tijani** (1737-1815), a descendant of the Prophet, who received his “call” when 46 years old; Mohammed ordered him to follow him on the “right path”. The Tijaniyya founded a worship center in Fez, Morocco, where Caliph Tijany Zoubir resides.

Education and teaching are central for the Tijaniyya. The general Caliph is referred to as “Borom Daraji” (the professor). This was the title once held by **Serigne Mansour Sy**, who died in December 2012, and whose place has been taken over by his brother **Cheik Tijane Sy**.

The Tijaniyya follows “the way of the Koran” along a spiritual path based on the sacred book known as “Turbiya” that spells out the followers' main obligations including the “wird”, the plea for forgiveness to God, the prayer on the Prophet and the zykr. A shorter version of the latter is the “wasifa”, collectively recited in the mosque.

The pilgrimage site is Tivaouane, where all Tijanis converge on the anniversary of the “gamou”, the birth of the Prophet.

b. **QADRIYYA** (the oldest confraternity, “one way, two souls”).

It was founded by **Abdel Qadir al Jilani** (1077-1166), a Sufi ascetic the preached in the well known “Islamic Center” of Baghdad, Iraq. The confraternity spread from Arabia to North Africa (Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Senegal) along two lines:

one was lead by a descendant of the Prophet from the Fadl dynasty (99 sons scattered in the whole of West Africa), Mohammed Fadl. It was his son **Cheikh Saad-Bouh** that ventured to Senegal. Their place of worship is in Nimzatt (Mauritania), whilst their spiritual center is in Guéoul in the north of Senegal. The Caliph is currently Cheikh Bounana;

the other were the members of the Kounta family, the Qadr from Senegal or from Ndiassane, whose initiator was **Cheikh Sidy Moctar al Kountiyou** (1724-1811) who installed himself on the border between Mali and Mauritania. It was **Cheikh Bou Kounta** that first moved to Senegal and settled in Ndiassane (a few km away from Tivaouane) building a mosque, schools and establishing his Caliphate.

As far as the rituals are concerned:

the wurd consists in the recital (even over 200 times) of pleas for forgiveness to God and prayers to the Prophet ending with the zykr or dhyr (on the uniqueness of God).

every year at the end of the Ramandan the Qadr Fadl go to Nimzatt to receive the blessing of the Caliph; they return there every July 22 for the anniversary of the death of Cheikh Saad-Bouh;

the Gamou (anniversary of the birth of the Prophet) is celebrated by the Qadr Fadl in Guéoul, whilst the Tidjanis go to Tivaouane;

the Qadr Ndiassane also celebrate the baptism of the Prophet a week after the Gamou in their own village that for the occasion turns into a pilgrimage site.

c. **MURIDIYYA** (the most influential and well known)

The adherents to the Murid are followers of **Cheikh Amadou Bamba**, who fought against French colonialism. In 1883 Bamba left the Qadr confraternity to found the Muridiyya (from the word “murid”, disciple) initially in Mbacke Cayor, north-east of Dakar, and then in Touba, where he built villages for the confraternity. Touba is their holy city and home to the biggest mosque in Sub-Saharan African built with the funds of the talibé scattered across the world, from the States to Europe. Every year millions of pilgrims go to Touba for the Great Magal.

Amadou Bamba, also known as Serigne Touba (Cheikh of Touba), wrote treatise on theology, sufism, grammar, law and good manners. The wird of the Murid is based on the reading of the verses (Khasidaf) and on parts of the Koran. The Muridiyya is the largest and most influential Senegalese confraternity. It has been lead since 2010 by **Cheikh Sidy al Moukhtar Mbackè**.

Cheikh Amadou Bamba was opposed to colonization and was jailed and exiled for over 30 years by the French. Paris eventually gave up after having sent him to Gabon, Congo and Mauritania and placed him under house arrest in Thieyene and Djourbel. Finally Amadou Bamba was awarded the French Legion D'Honneur!

One of Bamba's disciples, Ibrahima Fall, followed his guide for years until he was eventually ordered to found his own community. This is how the Bayfall were born, where “bay” means father and “bay fall” disciple. The Bayfalls are not highly regarded in Senegal because they don't fast for Ramadan, nor to they pray five times a day. But they do practice the zykr by playing drums and moving in a circle to go in a trance. Bayfalls should represent the highest state for the Murid, their perfection: they wear large tunics known as ndiakhass (with a patchwork of colors), thiaya pants, big belts and woolen pom-pom hats.

d. **LAHINIYYIA** (the Prophetic cycle at the end of the Earth).

The advent of the Mahdi and the return of the Messiah characterize the doctrine of this confraternity. The majestic mausoleums of **Seydina Limamoulaye** and of his son **Seydina Issa** rise in two coastal villages, Yoff and Camberene, in the outskirts of Dakar. In the two fishermen villages (ancient caste of the Wolof ethnic group) people greet each other with “Lahi Lahi”, derived from the name of Allah, and preach humbleness, generosity and equality.

For the Layene everything is the work of God (not of chaos), hence the names:

- Limamou, meaning guide, “al Imam”;
- Issa, the Wolof word for Jesus.

**Seydina** was born in Yoff in 1843 and received his “call” when he was 40; he declared he was the Mahdi of Islamic tradition, but his community refused him. After being exiled by

the French on the island of Gorée, he founded his Layene community in Camberene. **Seydina Limamoulaye** died in 1909, but his work was continued by his son Issa, then 33 (the same age of Jesus when he was crucified).

Contrary to the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ does not stand out amongst the five prophets sent by God (Noah, Abraham, Moses and, after Jesus, Mohammed). Christ is thought to have been recalled by God in the heavens and hidden there waiting to return to Earth. According to the Layene, Jesus did return in the form of Issa in 1909 to complete his mission, have a descendant and a tomb on Earth. Furthermore, Jesus is the morning star announcing the new day and will return at the end of time. If Christ had come the first time to announce the arrival of the Sun (Prophet Mohammed), his return in 1909 was to confirm, this time in the form of the Mahdi, Mohammed as his prophet and to put an end to the prophetic cycle.

The main place of worship for this confraternity is the Ngor cave, not far from Yoff. Every June the cave turns into a pilgrimage site to celebrate the “call” of Limamou Laye, that claimed he had waited 1000 years before coming to light. Today the Layene community is represented by its fifth Caliph, Seydina Abdoulaye Lahi.

**3.** To conclude, Radical Islam will not find adequate room in Senegal, regardless of the alarm signals sent by the Dakar government and the religious fanaticism of some religious guides. Moderate and marabutic Islam continues to play its role of stabilization of society. Following the July 2012 legislative elections, there were some fears related to the election of some religious leaders to the Assembly. They were eventually forced to step down because the Constitution bans spiritual guides from holding political posts.

There are some radical groups in Senegal, some of them host foreigners or Senegalese students who have returned home after attending Wahabi religious courses in the Mecca. But also in this case the teachings of the confraternities have proven to be stronger: traditional African values (non-violence in particular) have taken the upper hand on extremism and political Islam. Despite the rising secularism in Senegal (caused by increasing urbanization, education levels and migrations), confraternities continue to play a key role in society and cannot be marginalized.