AN AMBIGUOUS ADVENTURE:
MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS AND THE DISCOURSE OF
'DEVELOPMENT' IN SENEGAL

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ABSTRACT

The article explores how the process of appropriating the discourse of 'development' by Muslim organisations and 'NGOs' might be a factor in the construction of new forms/contexts of Muslim political participation in Senegal. By promoting 'Islamic development', Muslim organisations have moved into a discursive field that was previously the fief of the secular state. It is shown how the discourse of 'development' and 'Islam' and the interplay between them are functional in the context of competition and negotiation amongst political actors in Senegal. The result observed is very complex and multifaceted. By claiming 'Islamic development' and playing with the content of these two concepts according to the power-political context, 'Muslim' organisations and personalities claim political space from the 'secular' state as well as from each other.

The discourse of 'development' has always had a prominent place in the Senegalese polity. Development was the very raison d'être of the post-independence governments: the Parti Socialiste, in power from 1960 until the 'elections de l'alternance' in 2000, called itself 'PS—Parti du Développement'. As in many African states, 'development' as it was conceived by the new bureaucratic elite was essentially a top-down process. A vanguard of trained bureaucrats was to lead Senegal and its citizens to modernity and prosperity. The state ruled by these bureaucrats was of a singularly Jacobin nature and was the only legitimate agency to interpret reality and to determine future actions. Although the top-down approach became less prominent after the early 1980s because of lack of means and the subsequent austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the bureaucratic elite seems to have tried jealously to guard its prerogative.
While it is therefore not surprising that most studies have focused on the state role of development—and donors have followed suit—the dynamics non-state actors generate have until recently been underplayed. This presentation looks at ‘development’ from the perspective of non-governmental organisations, more specifically at the discourse and activities of Muslim organisations. It explores how Muslim organisations talk about ‘development’ and how the discourse is matched with praxis. Analysis of the role of non-governmental organisations is important both for what it can reveal about political processes and the patterns of power and participation that underlie them and for what it might reveal about the construction of political space within a society. While ‘Islamic’ political parties are still constitutionally forbidden in Senegal, Islamic associations and NGOs are thriving and involved in a dynamic, often ambiguous relationship with state actors or agencies and each other. These organisations are not political movements sensu stricto, therefore are not directly involved in the ‘high politics’ of the Senegalese polity. Yet, individual members sometimes are, and through their activities (or even activism) Islamic associations and individual Muslims do have a relevant political impact.

The scope of this particular paper will be limited to one aspect of the construction of political space. It presents some observations based on interviews with prominent members of Muslim organisations conducted in Dakar, Thies and Kaolack in June-July 1999. It is an attempt to explore how the process of appropriating the discourse of ‘development’ by Muslim organisations might be a factor in the construction of new forms/contexts of Muslim political participation. By promoting ‘Islamic development’ Muslim organisations have moved into a discursive field that was previously the fief of the secular state. Using the development discourse provides Muslim organisations and individuals with a powerful tool to attack state ‘development’ policy. It also provides Muslim organisations with the opportunity of accessing networks and resources (including state subsidies) they otherwise would not have access to. On the other hand, it entails the danger of losing the unique position of being aloof from political struggle and of being co-opted by other political actors as subcontractors in their ‘development’ policy. What does the discourse of Muslim organisations on ‘development’ suggest? How do they see ‘development’? Do they have their own conception, which is fundamentally different from any other? Do Muslim organisations differ amongst themselves concerning the meaning and content of ‘development’? Are they perhaps staunch adversaries of state
‘development’ policy? Or is their positioning more a matter of (re-)negotiation rather than of competition?

1. Muslim organisations

There exist a great many Muslim organisations in Senegal and their number has been steadily rising since the so-called Renouveau Islamique in the late 1970s. Although the upsurge in Islamic fervour is often associated with the rise of Islamism, as it has led to a massive increase of non-tariqa associations, the tariqas shared in the success. Many associations were set up by representatives of the tariqas and many taalibés are members of an Islamic association. The new associations deploy a whole range of activities. Some of them are mainly concerned with Qur’anic study, others organise conferences on current affairs or devote themselves to political activism. Certain associations conduct social work in their communities, organise health care, set up schools, others yet are merely involved in preaching. Muslim associations can be so-called ‘reformist’ organisations, but they can also be organisations directed by marabouts, associations of Muslim intellectuals or charitable organisations as well as officially registered Islamic ‘development NGOs’.

There does not exist a general overview or list of Senegalese Muslim organisations that have ‘development’ as one of their objectives. The ones that are officially registered as NGOs are sometimes members of the Conseil des Organisations Non-Gouvernementales d’Appui au Développement (CONGAD), the collective of Senegalese and Foreign NGOs working in Senegal. Most of the NGOs are not members: one CONGAD official declared that ‘Islamic’ NGOs are for several reasons rather marginalised within the organisation. The relation between the predominantly secular Senegalese and international membership of CONGAD and the ‘Islamic’ NGOs is somewhat uneasy (Mohamad Seidou Ba, 5 July 1999). The principles of CONGAD do not directly appeal to them, although de facto they would not have a problem adhering to them. Another reason for the small number of ‘Islamic’ member NGOs is reportedly obstruction of such NGOs by the state authorities for reasons of national security (Mme Gaye, 1 July 1999). A few NGOs have some problems with financial control and accountability and were not admitted to CONGAD for that reason. The problem of corruption is said to be widespread amongst Islamic NGOs (Mohamad Seidou Ba, 5 July 1999). The president of CONGAD, Abdou Salam Fall, pointed out that the small number of Islamic NGOs that were members
were the fiefs of sons of marabouts. These organisations, however, are not very strong or sustainable (Abdou Salam Fall, 1 July 1999). The big international NGOs such as the Saudi Organisation Islamique de Secours, the Kuwaiti Zakat House or the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) are not members of CONGAD. These organisations rarely participate operationally in development projects: they provide the funding, but the project is carried out by local Senegalese NGOs. It has been suggested that the international NGOs avoid co-operation with associations that have an overtly ‘political’ agenda, to prevent internal struggle between Muslim associations, but also to prevent problems and complications with the government (Mohamad Seidou Ba, 5 July 1999).

Islamic organisations and ‘NGOs’ are thus largely excluded from the mainstream development community. Nevertheless, numerous Muslim organisations are conducting activities amongst urban and rural communities. Although the activities conducted by the Muslim associations are not always designated by those organisations as ‘development’ activities, some of them can certainly be considered as such. These associations also construct their own implicit or explicit interpretation of and judgement about ‘development’ as they see and experience it. Therefore the organisations discussed below include officially registered ‘development’ NGOs as well as others. They are organised according to their main field of activity: schooling, socio-cultural activities and (reproductive) healthcare.

2. Schooling

Religious schooling is an issue of major concern among Senegalese Muslims. While Islam is traditionally taught in Qur’anic schools under the responsibility of a marabout, other forms of religious education have emerged over the last few decades, mainly instigated by reformist organisations such as the Union Culturelle Musulmane (UCM) of Cheikh Touré (Loimeier 2000: 174). Examples of ‘modern’ religious education are notably the so-called écoles franco-arabes, which, as well as religious study, also include French and other subjects in their curriculum. Today many organisations are active in the field of ‘modern’ religious education. Although it is indisputable that an overwhelming proportion of Senegalese Muslims think religious education is important and necessary, in practice it is, just like the Qur’anic schools, also a last resort for the young who for whatever reason have no access to the official school system (Fall 1993: 200). The reformist Jama'aatu Ibadu Rahaman (JIR, Association of the Servants of the Merciful) has made education its primary
vocation. Yet, tariqa-based organisations too, such as the Fédération des Associations islamiques du Sénégal (FAIS) and the Union pour le Progrès islamique au Sénégal (UPIS), an association close to the PS, have since long developed educational activities and run an (unknown) number of schools.

The JIR was founded by dissidents of the UCM. It is currently one of the most developed and organised reformist organisations and probably the one with the most extended membership. It has branches all over the country. The schools run by the JIR are all Franco-Arab schools located in Thiès (‘Bilal’ and ‘El Hadj Omar Tall’), in Dakar (‘Imam Malick’ and ‘Abdallah Bin Yassin’), in Sébikotane (‘An Nour’) in Rufisque (‘al Dahwa’) and in Louga. The director of the Ecole Imam Malick in a popular quarter of the capital (Dakar-Médina) emphasised that he considers his work in education ‘as his responsibility towards his Creator, the children, the parents, but also the state’ (by which, he said, he meant ‘the Senegalese’, and not necessarily the government).

‘The development of the country depends on the quality of the education it offers to future generations’, he emphasised. As the state is not capable of offering this education (especially not the religious education essential for the JIR), the JIR takes this task to heart, because ‘celui qui ne s’intéresse pas aux affaires des musulmans n’est pas des nôtres’ (Mr Diaw, 2 July 1999). After primary school the pupils enter the competition for a place at secondary school, and possibly go on to one of JIR’s secondary schools. After the baccalauréat, however, they are free to pursue any career. The schools are not geared towards the training of militants for the movement, but to the education of ‘citoyens respectables et respectueux des principes islamiques’ (Dieye 1994: 31). The director of Imam Malick added that the pupils are not exclusively children of devout members of the JIR, but come from all layers of the social and political spectrum and that ‘even some children of ministers and military go to JIR schools’. The movement insists that the schools have a good reputation, and pass rates are claimed to be very high compared to those in the official system.

As for their financial resources, the schools rely on contributions from the parents, which makes for a difficult situation. The School in Dakar-Medina is planning to move out of the area, because the rent for the premises is too expensive. The state does not subsidise the JIR schools. This is not for ideological or political reasons, but because the schools are not recognised, said the Secretary-General of the JIR. The schools have the legal status of being ‘authorised’ by the state as regular private schools (just like other secular or Catholic private schools). To gain the status of being ‘recognised’, and thus to be entitled to subsidies,
the school has to pay social contributions which are quite high and not all private schools have that financial possibility. Only one of the JIR's schools ('Bilal' in Thiès) has gained such 'recognition'. Not being recognised does not, however, mean that there is no inspection on the part of the state concerning standards of teaching and compliance with the official curriculum. The pupils pay fees, but these are not very high (2500-3500 Francs CFA per annum, the equivalent of £2.50-3.50) and in special circumstances the fees can be waived. 8 The rest of the working budget is said to be drawn partly from the regular contributions of members of the JIR, who pay 2% of their income or salary to the movement (Mamadou Sall, 12 July 1999).

The source of funding for the Franco-Arab schools, and especially the amount of funding involved, is notably difficult to pin down. JIR, but also FAIS and UPIS, are sparing with information concerning this issue (Gomez-Perez 1999: 65). Gomez-Perez and Vuarin (1990: 612) suggest that a considerable share comes from the Arab world. As a large share of funding comes from outside Senegal, state subsidies are not really an issue for the Franco-Arab schools, they are not desperately needed. The issue seems rather to lie with the ambiguous relationship between the schools and the state authorities as well as between the respective movements that organise the education. As pointed out by Gomez-Perez, authorisation, recognition (including subsidies and even secondment of state teaching personnel) of any one school does not entail recognition of the certificate or degree awarded by a non-official school. While some certificates are tolerated, the baccalauréat is not recognised, and students are thus de facto excluded from official higher education (Gomez-Perez 1999: 66) and consequently from a considerable segment of the job market. On the other hand, the Franco-Arab schools do not always comply with the official curriculum and inspections are inadequate or simply not taken into account.

Attempts to tackle these problems by starting to integrate the Franco-Arab system with the official system through uniformisation of Franco-Arab programmes met with resistance in the organisations. Gomez-Perez attributes this positioning to the fact that the organisation of educational activities provides associations and individuals with financial means, external contacts and networks and a certain prestige and status locally, regionally and even nationally. The associations are very reluctant to give up that prerogative (Gomez-Perez 1999: 67). When it comes to defending the merits and necessity of religious education as such, the associations and other Muslim organisations rally behind the same position against the secular authorities. The traditional Qur’anic
schooling system has repeatedly been questioned by the Senegalese government and by UNICEF, on the basis of the harsh treatment of the residing *taalibés*. This is also an issue of concern for Muslim organisations such as JIR, but ‘outside’ intervention in this matter is looked upon with fundamental distrust. On one occasion the JIR vigorously attacked the signing of the Convention of Children’s Rights and accused humanitarian organisations of trying to take over the Qur’anic schools with the intention of damaging Islam. *Le Musulman* fulminated that ‘progress is not the same thing as deviation’ (*Le Musulman* 43, p. 14, 1993) and traditional Qur’anic schools subsequently got regular coverage on its pages.

The Arab funds received by the associations are used not only for formal education. Many of them also organise numerous ‘cultural activities’ to promote Islam. Apart from the *écoles franco-arabes*, JIR also organises summer camps for Qur’anic study, cultural events, discussion sessions and *écrans témoins*. The purpose of awareness-raising and preaching is the ‘moralisation’ of Senegalese society and its youth in particular. In an editorial entitled ‘Variatique de la jeunesse musulmane’, published in the journal of the movement, the editor emphasises that Senegalese youth needs to be called to Islam, as the majority is currently a victim of Satan. While the youth is the hope of the country, many succumb to the seductions of drugs, alcohol or adultery. ‘... Yet others’, the editor continues, ‘the partisans of the least effort, have nothing else to do but to steal and to make music! Do you think that the development of our country will be brought about by such a youth?’ (*Le Musulman* 43, p. 30, 1993). While the JIR is best embedded amongst the educated, it also conducts its preaching activities in popular quarters and factories. Themes to be discussed are chosen according to the audience involved: students discuss different matters from merchants or workers.

The ‘cultural activities’ are supported with some social services: the movement has a few centres where they have small dispensaries, the members of JIR (men and women) visit hospitals and prisons to provide moral but also material support for the patients and inmates. They organise regular collections of mainly food and clothes, which they distribute amongst the poor. In co-operation with a number of international Islamic NGOs (e.g. *Zakat House Kuwait*, the World Association of Muslim Youth, the International Islamic League), they have some small projects in rural areas, mainly the digging of water wells and the building of mosques. The JIR sees its activities as ‘complementary’ to what the state is doing, or in fact as a coming to the rescue of the state, which is not capable of doing certain things in the field of social
services. However, the JIR and the state do not have the same ‘sources of inspiration’ as one of the officials called it (Ibrahima Lô, 7 July 1999). They claim to respect the ‘légalité républicaine’, but also point out that they do not go along with whatever projects the state proposes. The example was given of a project in the field of sexually transmittable diseases and HIV-prevention where the JIR was invited as a ‘respectable organisation’ to participate. They refused on the grounds that it was not in keeping with their convictions, as they refuse to promote other means of prevention than abstention for the unmarried. Yet, it was emphasised that, despite any differences in conviction and instruments between the authorities and the association, ‘all JIR activities are public and legal’ (Ibrahima Lô, 7 July 1999).

3. Socio-cultural action

While socio-cultural action is for JIR only a secondary activity, some organisations, mainly consisting of influential and well-connected Muslim intellectuals, make it their most important occupation. The socio-cultural action is less directed towards ‘preaching’ in the narrow sense and proselytisation as such. Most of the activities consist of publishing articles on religious themes (often scientists are invited to contribute as well) and organising conferences or round tables. The atmosphere surrounding these activities is generally rather academic than proselytising and aimed at the well educated. Sometimes charitable initiatives are deployed on top of the cultural activities, albeit generally modest in scope.

The Cercle d’Etudes Islam et Développement (CERID) was founded in 1984. The initiators and the membership are francophone and western-educated; a number of them are former Marxist militants. It is a high profile and select organisation: candidate-members have to be proposed by two current members and subsequently accepted by the bureau (Art. 5, Charter CERID). Amongst its members CERID counts professionals like doctors and lawyers, university professors, senior managers and teachers. Although the association is by many authors (e.g. Gomez-Perez 1991) classified as an ‘Islamist’ organisation, this seems not to be true of the affiliation of its members. Its current president, Ibrahim Mahmoud Diop (dit ‘Barham’), is a prominent Sufi leader, an ‘arabisant’ close to the Parti Socialiste (Khadim M’Backé, 26 June 1999). But the membership includes different allegiances and some opposition supporters are also represented. The organisation targets an educated, francophone audience and publishes (irregularly)—only five issues have been
published since 1984) a *Bulletin du CERID* with articles by its members and reports of its activities.

The first *Bulletin* gives an account of how CERID was set up as an answer to allegations of ‘secular’ intellectuals, that Islam was an obstacle to ‘development’. CERID states that Islam fosters ‘development’ rather than being an obstacle to it: ‘The building of an habitable universe, a [common] life based on socio-economic development is always linked with the submission to God, who is the source of progress and transcendence’ (*Bulletin* no 1, 1986: 2). CERID points out that Islam is a civilisation founded on the universality of knowledge and spirituality, reason and wisdom, and therefore cannot be a source of underdevelopment. Moreover, underdevelopment is on the contrary to be attributed to non-adherence to Islam. Islamic civilisation died when Muslims became decadent, no longer defended their superior system and indulged in materialism. Muslims are in trouble now, because they no longer follow Islam and thus become vulnerable to outside attacks. The image of Islam as it is spread by its enemies is misleading and malicious: ‘it is a valid way of living and the Islamic message is one of progress and renewal’ (*Bulletin* no 1, 1986: 2). ‘To ban the eternal values of Islam as a point of reference for the Senegalese . . . is nothing less than deliberately throwing back this people to the level of what Lévy Bruhl called . . . the primitive mentality’ (*Bulletin* no 1, 1986: 4).

The relation between CERID and the government has been rather ambiguous. CERID has long been refused permission to broadcast cultural programmes on national television, which is controlled by the government, on Muslim holy days and festivals (this policy has recently been reversed). On the other hand, CERID’s 1989 seminar on the ‘Scientific miracles of the Qur’an and the Sunnah’ got considerable coverage in the official government daily *Le Soleil* (*Le Soleil*, 22 Nov. 1989). The government also provided the association with land: CERID is currently in the course of finishing a new Muslim cultural centre, including a school, an adult formation centre, a mosque and a refectory (Mbacké, 26 June 1999[12]). The association claims intellectual openness to different positions in politics. There is no common position taken on political issues or policy in general, except for the promotion of Islam as a civilisation, an identity and a moral standard. This does not prevent individual members of the *Cercle* from criticising the government over certain issues. They do this, however, in a personal capacity: moreover, says Khadim Mbacké, editor in chief of *Bulletin*, in their capacity as intellectuals (in the strong French sense of the word) they are supposed and obliged to be ‘critical’. Some members of the *Cercle*
were critical of the PS government; others, like the president, Barham Diop, are close to the party. Khadim Mbacké himself, now head of the department of Islamology at IFAN/UCAD, has written a doctoral dissertation on the involvement of the Senegalese in the pilgrimage to Mecca. The research addresses the problem of the ‘financial haemorrhage’ Senegal faces as more and more Senegalese take part in it. Mbacké points out that Senegal needs the hard currency to finance its economic and social development (Mbacké 1991). Over the last few years the number of CERID’s activities has declined and the Bulletin has stopped appearing regularly. One member attributed this to the persistent lack of funds due to the construction of the cultural centre. Another member pointed out, however, that the reduced activity is at least partly attributable to continuous ‘infiltration’ from the JIR during the past eight years. JIR was too radical and not prepared to compromise. This allegedly resulted in frictions and misunderstandings between members. As the Cercle is open to people from any political or Muslim background, it is prone to be an instrument in inter-religious and political rivalry.

One ex-member of CERID, Momar Kane, is now member of the Organisation pour l’Action Islamique (OAI). Like the JIR, the OAI was born out of the Union Culturelle Musulmane. It is presided over by the former leader of UCM, Cheikh Touré, a member of an influential family within the Tijaniyya tariqa. The OAI has inherited the radicalism of the JIR, but unlike the latter it is not a mass organisation. More significant are the intellectual contributions of individual members. The OAI also seems to attach somewhat more importance to issues of social justice; yet, it is not active in the field of social work or in education. The journal of the organisation, Études Islamiques, devoted considerable column space to articles against secularism and in support of the Islamic revolution in Iran. The last issue of their journal was published in April 1990. Its demise was said to be mainly due to lack of funds and the general logistic difficulties of publishing anything in Senegal. However, members of the organisation publish in the journals of other organisations, for example the JIR’s Le Musulman. Momar Kane, lecturer at the École supérieure des Travailleurs Sociaux in Dakar, asserts that the Senegalese crisis is centred on a lack of morality in the hearts and minds of the people who rule the country. To gain popular support for the development effort, it should be pursued in a genuinely Islamic spirit, as people only work and strive for what they believe in. Yet, the government has abandoned the Islamic social system for policies designed and imposed by foreign agencies, while enriching themselves. Islam
rejects all this compliance, resignation and unethical behaviour. The Islamic social system can be reconciled with the modern world and has something to add. The teachings of Islam contain the very values that are the foundation of development, Kane noted. The ethics of Islamic leadership are based on faith, ‘or patriotism if you like’. This faith guarantees a different attitude towards leadership: good behaviour will be rewarded and bad practice or abuse of power will be punished by the Creator in the hereafter (Momar Kane, 25 June 1999). Despite referring repeatedly to Marxist jargon, concepts and analysis, Kane insists that Marxism cannot be the solution as Marxists lack the moral and ethical force resulting from faith: they can therefore not be just rulers.

*Action Solidarité Islamique* (ASI) shares OAI’s criticism of the government. President of the organisation is Ciré Ly, medical doctor at Point E, Dakar, and one of the founding members of the UCM. Dr Ly insists on the importance of resistance against the secular state: the government is currently not capable of conceiving its own policy, but is totally dependent on the former coloniser, France. Independence is only nominal and a ‘Mafia économique’ dominates the country’s economy. The government is corrupt and submissive to western governments; national elections cannot change anything about it, and are, in any case, fraudulent. However, Dr Ly pointed out that ASI, as an NGO, has no political doctrine or ideology. The organisation is not interested in politics in the current situation. It aims to break the vicious circle of corruption and dependence by moralising the society. When government and citizens would adhere to Muslim morality, everyone would have a better life, materially as well as morally. Islam is not only prayer: it is also about moral and social rules (Ciré Ly, 10 July 1999). The ASI considers its vocation as mainly ‘cultural’ and directs the bulk of its efforts towards organising and attending conferences and instructing Muslims and Muslim converts on how to practise Islam (prayer, Ramadan, the practice of Zakat). In addition, the organisation assists Qur’anic schools and training in agriculture in rural areas and has a dispensary in Thies.

Despite the rather harsh criticisms the president of ASI directs towards the secular state and its government, the relation is somewhat ambiguous. On conferences organised by ASI, there are always high-ranking state representatives present. Each time a full report of the occasion was published in *Action Islamique*, the official publication of OSI. At the second ASI *Congrès Ordinaire* (January 1993) on ‘International Islamic Solidarity’ the President of the Republic, Abdou Diouf, was represented by Serigne Lamine Diop, minister of Justice. Also present were the adjoint and the *chef de cabinet* of the Governor of Dakar, a number of
anciens ministres, representatives of amongst others the PS and the PDS and representatives of the embassies of Morocco, India and France (Action Islamique, March-April 1995). On the occasion of the opening of the third Congrès Ordinaire (May 1998) on ‘Religion, Politics and the Family’, Moustapha Niasse, minister of State and minister of Foreign Affairs and representative of President Diouf, declared: ‘Le Président Diouf vous assure de son soutien actif’ (Action Islamique, July-August 1998). During the interview, Dr Ly pointed out that the state does not censor the publications of ASI and moreover that the state subsidised the last conference to the amount of 1 million francs CFA and contributed 100,000 CFA for the opening ceremony (Ciré Ly, 10 July 1999).

Some intellectuals active in the socio-cultural organisations deployed some initiatives beyond study and discussion. In 1987, Khadim Mbacké—responsible for the CERID Bulletin—founded the Fonds Sénégalais de Solidarité Islamique (FSSI). The organisation aimed to ‘reinforce the solidarity, promote collaboration and to fight for the social and material well being of the needy without distinction and in compliance with the shari’a’. Members of the Fonds would be expected to contribute 25,000 FCFA per annum personally to the activities of the organisation (Le Soleil, 1 July 1988). Planned projects included the setting up of a centre for women’s vocational training and a school for religious education (Vuarin 1990: 614), and some socio-economic projects based on the principle of micro-credit. The amount of the contribution scared many people away according to Mbacké, leading to a somewhat bitter but ardent appeal in Le Soleil (19 April 1990). In the article Mbacké points out that Islamic action is much too oriented towards cultural activities and conferences and not enough attention is being given to social problems. He suggests that some Senegalese Muslims who definitely do have the means to contribute to the social action of FSSI consider themselves ‘too important’ to do so and that some others are ‘simply afraid and ashamed to be considered integrist should they actively engage in Islamic [social] works’. They prefer to contribute instead to secular organisations and charities ‘which they consider as being better managed’. Others still ‘pretend they have no time and think that they can reconcile themselves with God when they retire from professional life’. He proposes to conduct sociological research into ‘the real motives’ of Muslim personalities who refuse even the smallest collaboration with Islamic organisations in the field of aid to the poor. Mbacké finally points out that ‘one cannot be a good Muslim when one is not at the service of his equals, in other words, a good agent of development’.13
4. Reproductive health care and family planning

Reproductive health and family planning are sensitive and difficult issues in African Muslim societies. The 1994 UN conference on population and development held in Cairo provoked a lot of reaction in Senegal. However, the attitude of Muslim leaders and organisations was not univocal. Some organisations such as JIR refuse to consider any of the concerns voiced at the conference, dismissing them as a Western-Christian plot to harm Muslim societies. In *Le Musulman* it is argued that what the West calls the ‘demographic bomb’ is in fact the source for the future ‘sustainable development’ of Senegal. The article argues that it is at least partially due to their demographic weight that the USA and the USSR succeeded in becoming superpowers. The only reasons why the West wants to curb population growth is malicious ‘neo-Malthusianism’, a ‘security psychosis as western countries start to fear new barbarian invasions’ and ‘the pressure of feminist movements wanting to cause women to revolt by allowing them to decide by themselves about issues of procreation’. According to *Le Musulman*, all reference made to ‘development’ by the Cairo summit is deliberately misleading and ‘too simplistic an alibi as shown by the insignificant space it is attributed in the final document: six pages out of 83’. The 17 billion USD associated with the implementation of the measures are a mere ‘ransom for a satanic programme geared at the depopulation of the planet’ (*Le Musulman* n° 47, pp. 4-5, 1994).

Rather a different point of view is held and disseminated by the NGO *Réseau Islam et Population* (RIP). The *Réseau* was founded at the instigation of the Ministry of Finance and Planning and the UN Population Fund in the aftermath of the Cairo Conference. It is however an autonomous organisation bringing together experts in Islamic religion, imams, researchers and representatives of the maraboutic families. It is presided over by Professor Ibrahim Mahmoud Diop (*dit* Barham), the Secretary General of the *Ligue des Ouléma du Maroc et du Sénégal* and president of CERID. The organisation works together with other ‘Réseaux’ to promote knowledge, reflection and discussion on matters of family planning and reproductive health. Different ‘Réseaux’ exist which target, amongst others, women, traditional authorities and the elderly; RIP is specifically aimed at religious leaders and their constituencies. The organisation wants ‘to clarify the population policy and wants to show the interest of Muslims in adopting family planning, because often they are victims of propaganda which portrays the West as the main promoter aiming to reduce and to weaken the Muslims’
(Kébé sd: 6). RIP aims to make certain aspects of family planning acceptable to religious leaders and heads of family and wants to do so from an Islamic point of departure, using arguments illustrated with Qur'anic references. Two channels are used to disseminate information and to generate discussion. RIP sets up workshops led by religious key persons and called ‘education à la vie familliale’ (EVF). The sessions address married men and women (separately) and provide sex education, information about sexually transmittable diseases (notably AIDS) and information about methods for family planning (including the use of contraceptives). The methodology underlying the sessions is the RAPID system, which has been developed in collaboration with academics from Johns Hopkins University, UN Population Fund, USAID and the Senegalese government finance the project. Apart from its work at grassroots level, RIP has taken part in the publication of ‘La déclaration de politique de population à la lumière de la jurisprudence islamique’, conceived as an accessible work of reference for population issues. Every three months the organisation publishes the bilingual (Arabic and French) Bulletin Islam et Population, with articles discussing reproductive health issues ‘from an Islamic point of view’. A lot of attention is given to taking the edge off certain ‘miscomprehensions and prejudices’ attributed to Islam (Kébé 1998a: 2). One example of these miscomprehensions is the position of women in Islam.

Abdul Aziz Kébé, the Secretary General of the organisation, explained that true Islam does not permit certain practices, which stem from local custom. Violating the physical integrity of humans is forbidden in Islam and therefore female circumcision—still widespread in Senegal—is not a practice authorised by Islam. The emphasis has to be on the well-being of the woman and the family in general. Special attention has to be given to the education of women. A conservative mentality implying certain conceptions of the role of women in Islam could be an obstacle to development. RIP tries to diffuse different, more progressive interpretations of Islam, illustrated with examples from the Qur’an. Kébé himself, author of a ‘Répertoire thématique des versets coraniques relatifs à la femme’ (Kébé 1998b) and holder of a doctorate in Arabic, asserts that although Islam explicitly forbids certain roles for women there is still ‘enough room to manoeuvre’. Muslims have to discuss these issues and agree on dynamic interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence: the gates of ijithaad have to be opened for society to progress (Kébé, 6 July 1999).

RIP itself, as an organisation, has not taken a firm position on the practice of female circumcision. Some of the religious leaders within RIP approve of the practice and point out that Islam does not forbid
it. Yet others maintain that female circumcision is not an Islamic, but a traditional practice, which has to be stopped. Other issues as well are permanently debated within the Réseau. Although abortion is illegal under Islamic law, certain Muslim leaders nevertheless reportedly argue that women who have undergone an abortion are entitled to medical care, since doctors have to come to the rescue of everyone who is in need of help, as demanded by the Qur'an (Wilson 1998: 14). Discussion also takes place between the Réseau and religious leaders outside the network. Not all the religious leaders agree with the generally very progressive position of the Réseau concerning family planning. In November 1997 the Réseau was attacked by some religious leaders who accused it of being 'bought' with the money of foreign stakeholders. They virulently criticised the initiative of the Réseau to promote the use of condoms in an AIDS awareness campaign (Wilson 1998: 14).

The Réseau is not the only organisation concerned with family planning and reproductive health. Local partners include the Association Nationale des Imams et Ouléma du Sénégal (ANIOS), Institut Islamique pour le Développement (ICHRA), the Institut Islamique Africain Américain (IIAA) and several individual Muslim leaders (Kébé 1998a: 4). Serigne Modou Bousso Dieng, the son of the second Khalifa General of the Mourides, has set up health posts in rural areas under his spiritual guidance, where he also provides services for family planning. The medical equipment of the health posts has been provided by UNPF. ANIOS promotes Islamic reflection on issues related to the status of women, family planning and population. The organisation has branches all over the country. Activities include religious broadcasts on state television as well as independent radio stations, preaching and the hosting of conferences. ANIOS also promulgates Islamic 'opinions' concerning family planning and EVF.

Similar activities, but more at grassroots level, are conducted by ICHRA. The Khalifa General of the Layènes actively supports the organisation.15 It organises awareness-raising talks and presentations in traditional villages to make people aware of the issues around Islam and family planning and has 'taken some courageous positions concerning female circumcision and family planning' (Kébé 1998a: 4). A network of women was set up by ICHRA to introduce other women to these issues in private. With the support of the tariqa and under the aegis of ICHRA, Éducation à la Vie Familiale will be introduced in Qur'anic schools in a test phase. Where the schools of the official system (primary and secondary state schools) already made some arrangements to allow for EVF in the curriculum, ICHRA will lead the way for the
écoles franco-arabes and the Qur’anic schools to follow. The dahiras16 and the women’s groups under the supervision of ICHRA will be involved in similar initiatives (Le Soleil, 14 July 1999). The organisation emphasises that boys and girls have to be educated to be able to participate in the ‘development of their country’. For the same reason, ICHRA pays special attention to women’s issues: women have to ‘return to the place that was originally accorded to her by Islam’. All traditional customs that fall short of the rights accorded to women by Islam and prevent women from taking their rightful place have to be eradicated. Concerning initiatives in the field of gender rights, the NGO has worked in close co-operation with the Senegalese government. The Khalifa General of the Layène tariqa has been an avid supporter of the PS government. The Senegalese authorities honoured him with the Ordre National du Lion. On this occasion he promulgated an official religious order to ‘support the President in all his undertakings’ (Le Soleil, 12 July 1999).

The gender theme is also one of the major points of concern for IIAA, another RIP partner. IIAA is directed by Cheikh Assane Cissé, a prominent religious leader and marabout from the Niassènes, a branch of the Tijaniyya tariqa. IIAA is registered as an international NGO based in Senegal. It deploys activities in the United States, Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Benin. Cissé works together with different UN agencies including UN Development Programme, UN Population Fund and ECOSOC’s committee for fighting desertification, as well as with the Senegalese and United States Governments. Its self-stated purpose is to ‘develop a capability for sustained self-help in the areas of education (religious and secular), agricultural development, health care, economic development and cultural change’ (Web Pages IIAA, 11 August 1999). IIAA runs a project of adult education to foster literacy especially amongst women, supported by the publication of a small newspaper in easily understandable language with ‘news from the world’. The NGO runs a school where American and West African children are educated in Qur’anic study and secular subjects, including English, maths and computer literacy (Cheikh Aassane Cissé, 11 July 1999). Initiatives in the field of family planning include a dispensary in Kaolack Médina, ‘under the medical direction of Khadijah Cissé, a board certified American physician’ (Web Pages IIAA, 11 August 1999). IIAA installed a sewage system in the Médina of Kaolack and has recently been involved in a reforestation project (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 1998: 61). One other offshoot of the Niasse family, Ahmed Niasse, also founded an Islamic international NGO. The Institut Islamique Agricole was set up when Ahmed
Niasse reconciled himself with the government of Abdou Diouf after serving time in prison for burning the French flag and calling for the establishment of an Islamic republic. Not much is known about the organisation’s activities. It is suspected that there are not too many, as the NGO is allegedly just an instrument to channel Gulf money to finance the lifestyle of the President-fondateur of the IIA. The Government, happy that they had appeased him, did not interfere (Mohamad Seidou Ba, 5 July 1999).

Yet another formerly active opposition member, the ex-Marxist journalist Abdoulatif Gueye, set up his own NGO in 1988. Jamra, originally founded as a reformist publication is mainly concerned with problems affecting the urban youth. These problems (such as drug addiction, prostitution and AIDS) are attributed to the state of Jahalia Senegal is currently in. Jamra’s aim is to work towards the moralisation of state and society. The organisation has a reputation of being opposed to the tariqas, the state and the political parties, although Vuarin asserts that it received support from the ministry of social development and several international organisations (Vuarin 1990: 613). Gomez-Perez points out that it is also careful to maintain good relations with the leadership of the tariqas (Gomez-Perez 1994). Most of Jamra’s activities seem to be in the field of care for and detoxification/resocialisation of drug addicts. However, the organisation has also been mentioned in connection with the programme for family planning that RIP is participating in (Wilson 1998: 26).

5. Final Remarks

In the discourse of socio-political actors in Senegal, ‘development’ is presented as a common aim of the Senegalese, by the state, secular and Muslim organisations alike. Muslim organisations engage in the discourse of development and deploy some social activities that can be designated as ‘developmental’. Yet, ‘development’ means different things to different people. A highly nuanced and varied discourse is constructed around the term ‘development’, which should be seen in the wider context of power relations in the Senegalese polity. Muslim organisations in general put a lot of emphasis on the need for ‘Islamic development’, entailing a more ethical, and a more moral approach. Islam is presented as a valuable cultural framework in which to conduct ‘development’, which will motivate the Senegalese themselves to do their work properly and to accept certain sacrifices for that purpose. This is put in contrast with the perceived position and actions taken by the
secular state. Some organisations and individuals, notably JIR, OAI, ASI, accuse the secular state of promoting development that is alienating, too dependent, unislamic. Although the Muslim organisations are at times each other’s allies, they are also each other’s rivals. They sometimes accuse each other of promoting unislamic development and accuse other organisations of being ‘bought’. Notably the JIR has reproached other organisations cooperating with the state in the field of family planning that they were co-opted by the state and its international ‘partners’.

Yet, all Muslim organisations discussed have some sort of working relation with the state, with some getting political or even financial support from it. Even organisations highly critical of the government seem to accept a degree of state patronage. This evidence raises three important issues. The cooperation with Muslim associations provides the authorities to a certain extent with access to a population they would not otherwise have access to concerning difficult issues such as family planning. Muslim organisations and individuals both use ‘Islam’ at one and the same time to distance themselves from the state and to benefit from the resources the state can provide, or indeed to access some of the power that is associated with the state or its bureaucratic institutions. It can be used as a discourse of dissent but at the same time it represents symbolic capital that also appeals to the state. As pointed out by Van Hoven (2001) the Senegalese state increasingly uses Islam as a legitimising instrument for its own authority. Similarly, Muslim organisations cannot avoid referring to ‘development’ if they wish to access some of the resources associated with it, as well as the symbolic capital one can gain from claiming to contribute to ‘development’. Appropriating the ‘development’ discourse provides them with the opportunity to access resources and networks they would otherwise not have access to. It provides them with financial and political leverage towards their own constituencies and even the state. Organisations such as RIP can at least partially contribute to and to a certain extent control the population aspect of the state’s development policy. At the same time, however, adopting that very development discourse makes Muslim organisations vulnerable to ambiguous strategy on the part of the state. This is shown in the example of schooling: the state goes along with the Muslim organisations to the extent of seconding state personnel to the écoles franco-arabes, but refuses to recognise the degrees awarded by the schools. The state thus chooses to deny the schooling provided by Muslim associations any official ‘developmental’ value. It seems keen to keep Islamic associations in their ‘niche’ of religion, morality or cultural activities and out of the ‘official’ sphere, while at the same time
cooperating with them and appropriating Islam as a legitimising discourse. Muslim associations and their individual leaders or members try to protect their prerogative of religious-moral authority and legitimacy, but at the same time are entering the 'official' sphere the state regards as its walled garden.

The discourse of 'development' and 'Islam' and the interplay between them are functional in the context of competition and negotiation amongst political actors in Senegal. The result observed is very complex and multifaceted. 'Muslims' are not pitted against the 'secular state' concerning 'development', or the other way around. To be sure, in a country where 95% of the population is Muslim the 'secular state' apparatus mainly consists of Muslims. On the other hand, the membership of Muslim organisations is not at all homogenous and there is a fair deal of disagreement and competition between them. Many prominent members of Muslim organisations have strong political or even personal links with the 'secular state'. Designating oneself as a 'Muslim' or a 'Muslim organisation' in a particular political context is essentially a 'political' act, a matter of creating a functional (political) 'other'. Attaching 'developmental' value to something is also a 'political' act: it attributes a degree of legitimacy in a context dominated by 'development' ideology. By claiming 'Islamic development' and playing with the content of these two concepts according to the power-political context, 'Muslim' organisations and personalities claim political space from the 'secular state' as well as from each other. Although this needs further detailed research, the process might allow them to manoeuvre themselves in an optimal negotiation position for co-optation by state and eventually to win recognised political participation.

NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank Louis Brenner, Christopher Parker, Muriel Gomez-Perez, Abdul Aziz Kébé and Elizabeth Sirriyeh for their comments.
2. They are not involved in party politics, are not linked with one political party or another, they do not participate in the parliamentary process.
3. 'Non-governmental organisation' here refers to a concept as opposed to a legal status.
4. The officially registered NGOs, national and international, are governed by an agreement they concluded with the Senegalese state under the law that regulates NGOs: Décret n° 966-103 du 6 février 1996 modifiant le décret n° 89-775 du 30 juin 1989 fixant les modalités d'intervention des organisations non gouvernementales. Officially, there is no distinction made by the state between confessional ('Islamic' or other) and non-confessional NGOs. The secularism of the state has to be respected and the NGOs are not allowed to participate in any political activity, be it nationally or internationally (Mohamad Seidou Ba, 5 July 1999).
5. ‘Islamic’ here refers to a declared philosophical/religious affiliation by the organisation rather than to the (religious) background of individual members.

6. UPIS is designated as embodying the relation between the Tijaniyya and the Arab world. It runs a vocational training centre (Centre Faiçal), funded by Saudi Arabia and several schools over the country (Vuarin 1990: 612).

7. UPIS claims to run about a hundred, as cited in Vuarin (1990: 612), Fall (1993: 201) suggests the number of 968 schools founded.

8. The case was cited of a factory closure where the children of laid-off workers had their fees waived, as was also the case with the children of returning Senegalese after the conflict with neighbouring Mauritania in 1989.

9. *Taalibés* at traditional Qur’anic schools often have to provide their own food by begging in the streets and their living conditions at the marabout’s quarters can be very poor.

10. This is a session in which the participants watch a film and later discuss the most important issues and dilemmas involved in the plot.

11. A senior official of Zakat House and another consultant who had worked in Islamic NGOs before tended to downplay the co-operation with organisations like the JIR. Maybe the projects were so insignificant that they did not even remember, maybe they thought it was not opportune to maintain a high profile on their co-operation.

12. The bulk of the funding for this project was provided by Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco and the Islamic Development Bank although the operation was scaled down considerably after the second Gulf War (Mbacké, 26 June 1999).

13. My emphasis.


15. A small *tarîqa* populated by the Wolof-speaking Lebu population north of Dakar.


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