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“Political” Islam in Senegal and Burkina Faso: contrasting approaches to mobilization since the 1990s

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ABSTRACT
This article compares the strategies devised by two Salafi-oriented Islamic associations, the Senegal’s Jamaatou Ibadou Rahmane (JIR) and the Burkina Faso’s Mouvement Sunnite (MS). Drawing on extensive field research conducted between 2002 and 2013, it shows that both organizations have been engaged since the 1970s in a similar legitimacy-building process, using contrasting strategies. The JIR intends to build a more constructive relationship with the State and the brotherhoods, while still continuing to cast a critical eye on these two groups. In Burkina Faso, recurring leadership crises and violent incidents has sapped a great deal of the MS’s energy. It therefore has to regain visibility and legitimacy by maintaining a certain distance from political debates. The comparison shows that political Islam has entered in both countries a transitional phase that took into account the emergence and perhaps even the consolidation of a cultural and religious form of citizenship.

Islamist associations – such as Senegal’s Jamaatou Ibadou Rahmane (JIR), created in 1978 – and their fundamentalist-oriented counterparts (for discussion of these words, see Ousman, 2004 and Kramer, 2003)1 – such as Burkina Faso’s Mouvement sunnite (MS), created in 1973 – began to stake out their place in the public sphere during the 1970s and 1980s. They advocated higher moral standards among the faithful, challenged the leadership of the Communauté musulmane du Burkina Faso (CMBF) by establishing Friday mosques in urban neighbourhoods (Cissé, 2009, 2010; Gomez-Perez, 2009; Kouanda, 1996; Koné-Dao, 2005), offered a virulent critique of state secularism and of the dominance of Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal, dominated the public debate through speeches given at the unfinished Yoff Mosque in Dakar and lastly, participated in political debates (Gomez-Perez, 1994, 1997a, 2005b). These developments must also be understood within the context of broader changes in the religious climate...
brought about by the Iranian Revolution and the new vitality of Islam, specifically in Africa (Gomez-Perez, 2005a; Esposito, 1990, 1988; Otayek & Soares, 2009).

Since the 1990s, the desire of Muslims to display their religious identity has become more widespread, especially among women and youths. Some authors have gone so far as to write of the de-privatization of religion or of a civil religion (Casanova, 1994; Hann, 2000). The public sphere has come to be seen as a forum for exchanging ideas, for promoting divergent discourses, for displaying polymorphous identities (Bowen, 2003; Holder, 2009) and in which protest marches can be organized in reaction to international news and government actions. Meanwhile, some authors have described the ‘failure of political Islam’ (Roy, 1992, 1999) or the decline of radical Islam (Kepel, 2000) in the Arabo-Islamic world, a thesis criticized by François Burgat (2001). They suggested this had opened ‘the way to a third watershed moment’ at the turn of the millennium (Kepel, 2000: 11) and that political Islam in sub-Saharan Africa was running out of steam. More recently, some have argued that ‘the 2011 Arab Spring was remarkable for the lack of leadership provided by Islamist movements throughout the region,’ that ‘a new trend toward post-Islamism’ meant ‘a new articulation of political Islam (…) which would recast itself’ (Volpi, 2012: 247–249) and that ‘the most significant recent changes in political Islam from Jihadism to institutionalism is viewed as a shift away from violence’ (Tibi, 2015: 153). These elements highlight the notions of the hybridity and multiplicity of ‘political’ Islam.

Furthermore, the development of the JIR and the MS reflected ongoing conflicts within certain Islamic associations in both Senegal and Burkina Faso. Greater cooperation between Salafists and Sufis (Villalón, 2004: 62) and the marginalization or departure of certain prominent activists in the two aforementioned organizations (Cissé, 2009; Gomez-Perez, 2005b: 216–217). However, contemporary headlines tend to underscore the risk of instability in Burkina Faso and in Senegal, two neighbouring countries of Mali, a country, which has for years experienced Islamist violence in its northern regions of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao. The heart of Burkina Faso’s capital, Ouagadougou, was hit by terrorist attacks claimed by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) on 16 January 2016 which took a higher toll than those perpetrated in Bamako in November 2015. Grand Bassam, in Côte d’Ivoire, was also attacked on 13 March 2016. All these attacks have caused a stir among the population because of their scale and novelty. Some wonder which country will be next and consider Senegal to be a potential target. In this context, the influence of Sufi Islam has supposedly become limited to the brotherhoods themselves and can no longer serve as a general bulwark against fundamentalism. The presence of more radical voices has given rise to worries among certain leading Muslim figures because of the threat they pose to interfaith harmony. Moreover, leaders of JIR and MS wish to dissociate themselves from these terrorist acts.
This article argues that the JIR and the MS opted for a pragmatic approach in their search for greater religious legitimacy. These associations appeared to enter a transitional phase during the 1990s and especially during the 2000s while each seeking two key objectives. The first was, in Senegal, to participate in political debates while establishing a critical and arm’s-length partnership with the state and, in Burkina Faso, to pursue an ongoing withdrawal from the political process while engaging in silent collusion with the state. The second objective was to foster a progressive and fundamental internal transformation that took into account the emergence and perhaps even the consolidation of a cultural and religious form of citizenship. This all points to a broader set of processes: the radical revolutionary Islam which fostered the JIR (in Senegal) and the puritanical and conservative fundamentalism (in Burkina Faso) were being replaced by contrasting forms of participatory citizenship, ranging from active to non-existent. We will illustrate these ideas through an analysis based on empirical research conducted in Dakar and in Ouagadougou, where the main Islamic associations have their headquarters. We have also enriched our analysis by examining the output of national media.

Firstly, we explain the new strategies employed by the JIR and MS to seek more legitimacy and visibility in the public sphere during the 1990s: the JIR attempted to improve its relationship with the Sufi brotherhoods and to develop a relationship with the state, whereas the MS decided to augment its internal cohesion with the support of the state. Secondly, we explain that these two associations showed political opportunism. The JIR sought to get closer to the state while simultaneously clinging to the expectations of a population, which was increasingly critical of the government. The MS abstained from all protests lest it lose the support of the state. Finally, over the last few years, faced with new political and religious events, these two associations changed their strategies. The JIR participated more directly in political debates and expressed its strong opposition to terrorism. As for the MS, the political turmoil surrounding the ousting of President Compaoré impelled it to reconsider its positions and to step out of its comfort zone.

The quest for legitimacy in the 1990s: to participate or not to participate in the political game

Both associations sought to gain legitimacy and visibility during this period. The JIR fostered a constructive but nevertheless critical relationship with the state and the Sufi brotherhoods in an attempt to bring an end to its isolation, but continued to manifest a sustained interest in international issues. The citizen act of voting became the slogan used by the JIR to channel the energy of young people who had formerly resorted to violence in reaction to election results in the previous decade. As for the MS, it attempted to increase its visibility by managing mosques on Friday without seeking any political influence. The association
relegated international issues to the background and opted not to participate in popular protests against government measures because its key objective was to accelerate its own reconstruction after a period of internal tensions.

**An increased interest in international affairs and the first steps in the political game in Senegal**

In the 1980s, Ayatollah Khomeini personified a spiritual guide who gave Islam a potent political force and made possible a return to a more authentic version of Islam (Esposito, 1990: 283), whereas Sayyid Qutb, author of *Milestones on the Road*, was a towering figure of political Islam (Kepel, 1993) and was seen as the father of all dissenting Islamic movements of the 1970s and beyond (Gomez-Perez, 2008). In addition, the JIR equally condemned the authoritarian and the expansionist policies of Saddam Hussein (*Le Musulman*, 1982), the presence of Western troops in the Arabian Peninsula during the Gulf War and the collaboration of Gulf states with the US (*Le Musulman*, 1990).

At the beginning of the 1990s, recognizing the overwhelming importance of the Sufi brotherhoods and their alignment with the state, the JIR shed its confrontational stance in order to avoid the risk of isolation (Cruise O’Brien et al., 2002). As Mohammed Sall pointed out,

> by confining ourselves to a narrowly-defined religious sphere, we risked becoming marginalized. Under Abdou Diouf, we began to meet with the president and his ministers, we consciously modified the nature of our activism. […] Diouf met with us along with Collin, his general secretary. This meeting paved the way for our meeting with Diouf in 1992. (Interview with Sall, 24 July 2002, Thies)

The JIR started to expand its role in the political arena. This strategy was intended to help prevent the movement’s leadership from being ‘overwhelmed’ by grassroots activism (Interview with Sall, 24 July 2002, Thies) and to help channel the political energy manifested in the urban riots youths were involved in during the February 1988 elections (Cruise O’Brien et al., 2002; Diop & Diouf, 1990). Thus, in the lead-up to the 1993 presidential elections, the JIR released a manifesto that clearly stated its social, political, economic and religious demands – and called on all participating politicians to declare their positions on these issues.

Meanwhile, the JIR encouraged young people to register to vote and to cast their ballot on elections day. By taking these two positions, the JIR sought to display its moral authority over young people who were concerned with political and social change. The association also showed a legalistic approach in its dealings with political power. This new strategy reflected the recognition by the leadership of the JIR that the state would tolerate its existence only so long as it did not advocate violence or public disorder (Gomez-Perez, 1994: 87). Despite the fact that the state was weakened by challenges to its legitimacy, the JIR accepted that the country was not yet ripe for major political change.
In 1993, we called on our supporters to vote for Iba der Thiam; it was the first time we got involved in an election. Thiam made a profession of faith and the PAI (Parti africain de l’Indépendance) came to meet with us. Faced with two evils, we had to choose the lesser one; Thiam was the closest to the Islamic associations. In 1996, the JIR supported Thiam’s slate. (Interview with Sall, 24 July 2002, Thies)

In this way, the JIR’s positions remained consistent with those of certain young marabouts (Samson, 2009a, 2009b). The situation in Burkina Faso was different. The MS sought to gain legitimacy by distancing itself from the political debate (Hilgers & Mazzocchetti, 2006).

**Opting for a legalistic approach under the semi-authoritarian state in Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso’s difficult political climate meant that freedom of expression was very limited, if not completely absent, and the state relied on an aggressive policy of repression (Wise, 1998) and infiltration of the opposition (Hilgers & Mazzocchetti, 2006). In this context, the MS naturally tended to avoid any involvement in social movements that could be interpreted as an act of opposition to the state. In January 1997, the organization did not become involved in the youth and student protests against the changes to the constitution that allowed Compaoré to serve as president for life (Harsch, 2009). The MS did not join the Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masse et des partis politiques in the public reaction to the assassination of journalist Norbert Zongo on 13 December 1998 even though the event had sent shockwaves through the entire country (Hagberg, 2002; Harsch, 1999; Loada, 1999; Ouédraogo, 1999). Under El Hadj Aboubakar Ouédraogo, the MS was content to call for the preservation of social harmony (*L’Observateur Paalga*, 1999).

Furthermore, the MS worked to progressively affirm its legitimacy by staking out a place for itself in the country’s Islamic landscape. Beginning at the end of the 1980s, Souleymane Ouédraogo, president of the MS, demonstrated a commitment to move closer to other movements active in the public sphere. Yet the association apparently chose not to officially participate in a new initiative that led to the creation of the Conseil islamique burkinabé (CIB) on 19 August 1992. This new organization sought to unite all Islamic groups and overcome divisions between the Tijâniyya, the Qâdiriyya and Sunni Muslims (*L’Observateur Paalga*, 1993).

The MS also took a legitimising position in its relations with the state because the association had to rebuild itself after a long period of internal conflicts and tensions between Arabic and French speaking groups vying for control of mosques (Cissé, 2009; Kobo, 2012: 286–288; Madore, 2016). In 1991, the national office of the MS decided to decentralize the locations of Friday prayers and opened three more Friday mosques (Pissy, Hamdallaye and Daganoen neighbourhood). This decision revived tensions, which increased after the death of
a supporter of President Idrissa Semdé at the opening of the mosque in Sector 29 on 21 April 1995. Semdé supporters suggested that there was ‘complicity between the (opposing) faction of Imam Sayouba Ouédraogo and government officials’ (Cissé, 2009: 24). Since 2000, the MS has continued its strategy. By contrast, the JIR has increasingly participated openly in political debates.

**Contrasting mobilizations during the early 2000s**

The leaders of the two associations demonstrated a degree of opportunism in their endeavour to gain legitimacy from the state while opting for diametrically opposed positions regarding the population’s growing demands for political change: the JIR sought to accompany its fellow citizens, while the MS instead decided to disengage itself from popular aspirations. In Senegal, Wade’s candidacy in the 2000 presidential election opened new opportunities for the JIR. Afterwards, the deterioration of the political and social climate led its leaders to be cautious because they were aware of the growing popular discontent. By contrast, due to the hegemonic weight of the semi-authoritarian regime of president Compaoré, the MS refused to participate in any public demonstration and pursued its policy of seeking state assistance through the intervention of religious leading figures to help settle conflicts within the association while providing moral backing to key government initiatives.

**For political change, but not at any price, in Senegal**

Conscious that conditions favourable to political change were at hand, the JIR came out strongly in favour of regime change.

> In 2000, it was clear that the system was broken, that new men were required; the JIR supported Moustapha Niass on the first ballot and Wade on the second. Our slogan was, ‘After Niass, ensure Wade’s victory’. In 2000, we considered ourselves part of the movement that brought Wade to power. Niass would do no harm to the Islamic movement. He did not make it beyond the first round of voting. The second round saw Wade opposed to Diouf; at that point, it became necessary to ally with the Wade camp in order to defeat Diouf. (Interview with Sall, 11 March 2010, Bilal Center, Thies)

Niass had rejected the Socialist Party’s appeal to form a broad coalition around Abdou Diouf that would compete with Wade’s *Front Pour l’Alternance* (FAL) in the second round of elections (Diop et al., 2000). Just after Wade’s victory, the FAL changed its name to CAP 21. Still, the JIR didn’t go so far as to put forward a candidate of its own, nor did it create a religiously based political party because its leadership was both wary of the state’s ability to manipulate or channel the energies of opposition parties and opposed to any moral compromise.

Nevertheless, the JIR did openly support certain government initiatives when these corresponded to the association’s objectives. For example, it supported
and participated in the reform of the Islamic Institute and threw its weight behind the introduction of religious education to public schools (Gomez-Perez, 1997b). At the same time, the JIR chose to quietly maintain its distance from political power when government measures or controversial statements threatened to disturb public order, had the potential to weaken cohesion between different religious groups or exposed the state’s attempts to impose its hegemony through extreme patronage and overt authoritarianism (Dahou & Foucher, 2004). When Wade professed allegiance to the General Caliph of the Mouride brotherhood following his election victory in 2000, the JIR declined to comment publicly on the gesture and remained circumspect in light of its potential effects. ‘The JIR said nothing; as an individual it did not shock me, but as a citizen I have some concerns; the Tijâni believed they were being marginalized’ (Interview with Sall, 24 July 2002, Thies). The JIR behaved similarly when Wade stated that, in churches, Christians prayed to Jesus and not to God. Some of those we interviewed expressed concern at these questionable statements, conscious of the fact that they could endanger the peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims. As such, these reactions reflected a new reformulation of Islam, one that advocated a new public morality and a public culture of pluralism (Hefner, 2001).

At the same time, the JIR opted to stake out a middle ground in the debate on whether to remove the word ‘secular’ from the constitution. In 2001, the JIR had approved the constitution in spite of the word ‘secular’. We were being realist; even if the term were removed, it would not have brought about an Islamic constitution. It was a matter of recognizing what the constitution gave us in terms of freedom of action to attain our goals. (Interview with Sall, 11 March 2010, Bilal Center, Thies)

Thus, the leadership of the association was conscious of how the new constitution gave it the means to openly pursue its activism. These leaders went so far as to use the words ‘positive secularism’ to describe a situation where they could refrain from questioning the supremacy of the state while still holding up sharia as an ideal, albeit an unattainable one given the political context. This had already been the case in the 1980s (Gomez-Perez, 1994, 1997b).

Simultaneously engaging with the state and treating it with circumspection could be interpreted as lack of consistency. In fact, the JIR was carefully striving to obtain the state’s recognition and respect in a context where, between 2000 and 2005, ‘strategies deployed by the PDS (Parti Démocratique Sénégalais) to expand its electorate’ (Gueye, 2006: 277) led the association to join the political coalition supporting Wade. The JIR also took pains to retain sufficient independence for it to remain credible in the eyes of a profoundly disillusioned population, from which it drew its support (Gomez-Perez, 2005b: 219–220). These efforts reflected a degree of political prudence on the part of leaders who knew they risked losing credibility if the association’s willingness to cooperate with the state were to become unconditional.
Still, the JIR saw positive changes in its relationship with the state, which suggested a ‘certain reciprocal understanding’ (Interviews with Sall, 24 July 2002, Thies and with Diène, 8 June 2008, Dakar). Thus, at the opening of the JIR’s 2002 congress, government ministers, including those responsible for finance and culture, were present for the first time. Meanwhile, the association began to participate more directly in the political arena. However, such efforts did not succeed during the legislative elections of 2001; the JIR made contact with Niass but the resulting discussions led nowhere and the association withdrew from them because it was unsatisfied with the proposed distribution of positions. The distribution was ‘for one to 10 elected members, give one to the JIR or for 10 to 30 elected members, give two to the JIR’ (Interview with Sall, 11 March 2010, Bilal center, Thies). By contrast, in Burkina Faso, the MS leaders wanted to avoid actively participating in political debates.

**In search of internal cohesion while staying close to the state**

Compaoré’s re-election in 2005 and the crushing victory of his party – the *Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès* (CDP) – in the 2006 local and 2007 legislative elections banished the prospect of political change for at least several years and led civil society actors to keep a low profile (Hilgers & Mazzocchetti, 2010). In this political context, the MS remained quiet, although it did highlight its connections to leading figures who openly supported the ascendant CDP while other Islamic associations, such as the *Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans du Burkina* (AEEMB), participated, at least to some degree, in political debates.

Furthermore, in response to the weakness of the MS following a new wave of internal conflicts (*L’Observateur*, 2002; *Le Pays*, 2002), Dr. Kindo, a member of the Arabist cohort that returned to the country in the 2000s, skillfully calmed dissent by creating a council of elders (‘younger members (40 and under) who were Arabists and had nothing to do with the crisis’) (Interview with Dr. Kindo, 5 April 2010, radio Al Houda, Ouagadougou). He also adopted his predecessors’ legalistic approach. When he recommended that the association’s two competing factions consult El Hadj Oumarou Kanazoé to try and settle their differences, they were redirected to the Ministry of Territorial Administration (Interview with Dr. Kindo, 5 April 2010, radio Al Houda, Ouagadougou). Dr. Kindo was conscious of power structure intricacies and, thus, of Kanazoé’s central role in the political, economic, and religious sectors. Kanazoé was a respected figure because of his advanced age (over 80 years). He was also a major player in the country as he was its biggest public works contractor and carried influence in both the religious and political spheres, at both the national and international levels. He was the man to turn to in difficult situations. Thus, he was elected president of the CMBF in September 2004, replacing El Hadj Aboubacar Sana, who had been roundly criticized for his lack of transparency in managing donations received
by the association (L’Observateur, 2004; Journal du jeudi, 2004; Sidwaya, 2004; L’événement, 2004). While serving as honorary Moroccan consul to Burkina Faso, Kanazoé had personally managed the distribution of 45 million CFA francs to various Islamic associations (Sidwaya, 2005). An electoral college selected Kanazoé to chair the presidium of the Fédération des Associations Islamiques du Burkina Faso (FAIB) and he financially supported the organization’s founding congress, held in December 2005 (Cissé, 2009; L’Observateur paalga, 2005). Despite divergent positions taken by the associations, these did not lead to a social or religious split in the FAIB.

Although protest marches became much more frequent, such as those held in reaction to world events (9/11; the second Gulf War) (Gomez-Perez, 2005a) and in opposition to the eviction of residents from the neighbourhood of Zangouettin, in central Ouagadougou, in 2001–2002, the MS abstained from participating (Audet-Gosselin, 2012; Audet-Gosselin & Gomez-Perez, 2011) because it was more concerned with ensuring the future of its local Friday mosque, which ‘had an advantageous geographic location next to the commercial district’ situated in one of the city’s central neighbourhoods (Interview with MS former staff, 20 July 2005, Ouagadougou). Indeed, the MS was placing da’wa at the centre of its strategy. To increase its visibility in the central neighbourhoods of the city and its legitimacy, the MS tended to take a legalistic approach, which enabled it to acquire parcels of land surrounding the Great Friday Mosque in Zangouettin (Interview with MS former staff, 20 July 2005, Ouagadougou). This opportunistic stance showed the extent to which the association’s strategic planning could be difficult to understand ‘outside of the system in place and existing patronage networks’ (Hilgers & Mazzocchetti, 2006: 14).

The MS went so far as to support a national Day of Forgiveness on 30 March 2001, alongside all of the country’s other religious groups, regardless of faith or denomination. El Hadj Oumarou Kanazoé championed the initiative by promising ‘to work outside of the Day of Forgiveness so that questions of forgiveness and reconciliation would be raised in places of worship’ (Sidwaya, 2005). The regime saw this Day of Forgiveness as an opportunity to issue a nationwide public mea culpa for all political crimes committed since Independence. In this way, the perpetrators could be pardoned without actually being found guilty of their crimes (Traoré, 2010: 41). The moral authority given to the event by the main Muslim associations once again highlighted the deference of Muslim elites – including the leaders of the MS – to the state as well as the widespread acceptance of self-censorship within their ranks.

By choosing to be represented within the FAIB in December 2005, the association was not merely acting on the desire of its leaders to be less isolated on the Islamic scene and to interact more with other associations. This choice also clearly reflected a will to join national associations that were close to the Compaoré regime and capable of serving as go-betweens in relations with the state. Indeed, the FAIB’s main objectives could generally be described as broad
and consensus-based: cohesion among Muslims, the expansion of Islam’s role in Burkina Faso, the promotion of greater solidarity and social harmony and mutual respect in relations with other religions.

**Adapting to Jihadism and demands for regime change (2007–2016)**

Since 2007, the political and religious environments have evolved in both countries. Talk of possible constitutional amendments by the regime led to a political effervescence during which the JIR became more involved in public debates and backed popular demand for a new head of state. The same issue arose in Burkina Faso and, for the first time, the MS broke its silence and took position on the issue. Moreover, both organizations wanted to distance themselves from jihadist movements in the light of the situation in northern Mali and the terrorist attacks in Bamako and Ouagadougou.

**For an enhanced democracy and against jihadism in Senegal**

In light of the accelerated neopatrimonialism of the Wade regime (Gueye, 2006: 280–283), the JIR began participating more resolutely in the political arena while distancing itself from Wade’s policies. When the association finally came to recognize the importance of participating in the National Conference (during these *Assises nationales*, between 1 June 2008 and 24 May 2009, the civil society discussed the political, economic and social situation of Senegal and the solutions to take), it was the result of discussions initiated by young educated professionals (la structure des cadres) who were able to raise awareness of the issue with the *imara*: ‘at the outset, the answer had been no because we saw it as politics, but when we realized that it was civil society, the answer became yes’ (Interview with Fall, 12 June 2008, Dakar). This new strategy came in the wake of the JIR’s ninth Congress in January 2007. The theme of the Congress was ‘even more spirituality and commitment for the society’ and one of its conclusions was that ‘Jamaa is an inclusive movement attuned to all components of the nation’ (*Le Soleil*, 2007). One interviewee explains that ‘the National Conference contacted almost everyone (NGOs, churches, groups in civil society, *tariqas*) but not the JIR. The association’s group of young educated professionals prepared a document titled “Why we should participate” and spoke with the leadership of the JIR, encouraging it to reach out to the organizers of the Conference’ (Interview with Lo, 2 March 2010, Dakar). Subsequently, if the claims of certain leaders are to be believed, the JIR played an active role in debates and discussions: ‘the JIR participated in the Civil Forum project on Islam, transparency, and corruption. It contributed to discussions on fundamental principles as well as analyses of legal and economic issues’ (Interview with Lo, 13 June 2008, Dakar). One interviewee specifies: ‘the JIR had representatives in the Conference’s steering committee
and social committee’ and that ‘on the ethics committee, [the JIR] did a lot of work with the Christians. (…)’ (Interview with Lo, 2 March 2010, Dakar). Another interviewee mentions that ‘at the level of the National Conference held in Thies, [he] served as chair of the science committee’ (Interview with Sall, 11 March 2010, Bilal center, Thies). In a context of ever-growing social despair, this reformulation of Islam advocated a new public morality capable of regenerating a public culture of pluralism in a context of national unity (Hefner, 2001).

The JIR’s political ambitions became increasingly obvious in the lead-up to the 2007 elections (Le Matin, 2007). As the association prepared its ninth congress, some members raised the issue of missing voting cards and unidentified names registered on the national voting list. These problems pointed to the regime’s unwillingness to consider the possibility of releasing its grip on power. The JIR called on its members to vote against Wade but abstained from endorsing a particular candidate while bemoaning the large number of presidential candidates.12

Furthermore, the leadership of the JIR sought to participate more directly in political debates. Following a meeting of the advisory committee held on 8 February 2008, Mamadou Sall emerged as the leader on the list of opposition candidates in Thiès. The coalition, named ‘Benno Sigil Senegal’ (United to get Senegal back on its feet) and dedicated to ‘restoring political values’, stood against the outgoing mayor, Idrissa Seck, as well as the Sopi 2009 coalition. The association’s discourse was clear on this point:

> if we do not engage in politics, politics will be used against us to keep us from making our own decisions. We have to participate… this time, we will not be supporting someone else. We need to present our own candidates, register, vote, and campaign. (Interview with Lo, 17 March 2010, Dakar)

Notwithstanding this declaration, the JIR showed a certain lack of preparation. The JIR leadership resolved to organize common slates in order to have its candidates elected to social committees to demonstrate the JIR’s abilities on the ground and to test its popularity. One interviewee states that,

> in Thies, it was a matter of allying ourselves with the Benoo coalition, which had come to meet with us at a time when the vast majority of Ibadou supporters in Thies wanted to ally with Idrissa Seck, who had not contacted the JIR. After reaching an agreement to participate in the coalition, we fought for positions. We had asked to be represented in each municipality. (…) Our objective, especially in Dakar, (was to have) members of the JIR on the social committees…. In fact, we also took care of the marketing aspect, ensuring that these actions were covered in the media. (Interview with Sall, 11 March 2010, Bilal center, Thies)13

However, this direct involvement in the management of local communities was not unanimously supported and it raised questions about the credibility of the JIR’s political activities and representativeness in so far as direct political participation brought with it the risk of being exposed to criticism from the population and losing the population’s sympathy and confidence – key forms of capital for the association.
On the eve of the Constitutional Council’s decision concerning the eligibility of presidential candidates, the JIR invited the five members of the Council to meditate on verse 135 of the Sura An-Nisa, which emphasizes notion of justice, and highlighted that,

the legitimacy of a regime and its leaders depends on four essential conditions: the people's freedom of choice, the respect of applicable laws, consultation with the people regarding questions for which there was yet any legislation, and the equitable management of public assets. (Senewebnews, 2012)

The JIR therefore deplored the Constitutional Council’s decision to declare Abdoulaye Wade eligible for the presidential elections scheduled for 26 February 2012. However, the association also called on the authorities and Wade’s adversaries to show restraint and remain peaceful. Furthermore, it reminded the Senegalese authorities of their ‘duty to guarantee the exercise of citizens’ freedoms, especially the freedom to peacefully express support or disapproval in public places.’ The JIR urged the government ‘not to give in to the temptation of excessive and counterproductive security measures, leading to the suspension of opponents’ civil liberties.’ The association also called on authorities to free the human rights activist Alioune Tine, coordinator of the M23 protest movement (Faye, 2013). Finally, it decided to ‘put all of its resources toward the election of Macky Sall on 26 February (2012)’ (Senewebnews, 2012).

On the social front, demonstrating its commitment to address the concerns of the population, the JIR issued a fatwa on 28 December 2009 asking Wade to abandon immediately his intention of erecting the African Renaissance Monument (officially inaugurated on 3 April 2010), which it considered to be a representation of debauchery (a woman was depicted semi-nude, wearing a loincloth) and incompatible with African values.14 Imam Amadou Dia, amir of the JIR, wrote an open letter to Wade in Thies (9 December 2009) in which he explained, in a firm but courteous tone, the association’s objections to the statue and encouraged the president ‘to participate in the debate proposed by Imam Mbaye Niang.’ Mbaye Niang was known for his opposition to the Family Code as part of the Comité Islamique pour la Réforme du Code de la Famille au Sénégal (CIRCOFS), an organization created in 2002. He was also the founder of an opposition political party, the Mouvement pour la Réforme et le Développement Social, which was able to emerge in a context where the principle of alternating political power had been accepted.

Moreover, the JIR condemned the terrorist attacks of Boko Haram and AQIM, declaring its opposition to all acts of terror. The JIR Advisory Board ‘condem(ned) any partition of Mali’s territory and the destruction of the cultural and scientific heritage of Timbuktu and Gao’15 The collective of Islamic associations, which include the JIR, called on the Senegalese authorities to ‘develop a comprehensive and inclusive strategy to protect against all forms of terrorism’ [...] ‘in cooperation with all local, regional and international actors for a more efficient fight against this scourge’ (Senewebnews, 2015). This declaration contrasted with the
contents of speeches made in the 1980s, in which any Western intervention on Muslim soil was condemned.

In fact, the government and population of Senegal had become quite concerned that the country might be one of the future targets of jihadists and suicide bombers. This foreboding manifested itself when Macky Sall declared a ban on the full veil during the International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa held in Dakar in November 2015, declaring it incompatible with West African societies. His speech has received criticism from some religious organizations and religious figures, including the imam of the mosque of the University of Dakar, who is ideologically close to the JIR. After the attacks in Bamako (November 2015) and Ouagadougou (January 2016), the leaders of the JIR called for ‘an Islam of measurement and peaceful coexistence between Muslims and members of other religious communities’ by advocating ‘Al Wassatiyya’ and the ‘unity of Muslims’. To this effect, the JIR established a committee intended to work in collaboration with the National Observation of the Lunar Crescent Commission, headed by Mourchid Iyane Thiam, and to use ‘education’ in the struggle against terrorism (Sudonline, 2015). In Burkina Faso, the MS decided to participate in the public debate when political changes began to accelerate. Indeed, he MS broke its silence after the heart of Ouagadougou was hit by jihadist attacks for the first time in January 2016.

**The Sunni movement: adjusting to a change of regime**

Efforts to rework key political institutions in Burkina Faso had been underway since 2011. Debates were held on the creation of a Senate and a referendum was organized to amend article 37 of the constitution, which set eligibility criteria for presidential candidates, an obstacle to Compaoré running again in 2015. There had been significant opposition – which generated divisions in the country’s Muslim community – to the creation of a Senate in early 2013 because its detractors saw it as a ploy by Blaise Compaoré to amend article 37 and to allow him to stand again as a candidate in the 2015 elections. However, a consensus was reached around the idea of creating a Senate, but a majority opposed an amendment to article 37 (for more details, see Madore, 2016).

In his sermon of 20 August 2013, Mohammed Kindo criticized the leaders of the FAIB ‘for their lack of sincerity and courage as well as their search for material interests’ (Madore, 2016). This stance demonstrated a significant change for the MS during its eighth congress. Indeed, the President of the MS Adama Nikièma justified the theme ‘Islam, a solution for balanced economic and social development’ by explaining that Islam encourages the pursuit of profit and wealth through honesty and hard work, adding that Muslims must get rid of the ills that plague their society such as theft, embezzlement, corruption, individualism and prostitution. The initiative was well received by both the Minister of Territorial Administration and Security and the Minister of Housing
and Urban Development, which had sponsored the event. The president of the MS also stated that ‘it is through daily acts that Muslims must prove to the public that Islam is a religion of peace and solidarity’ (Le Pays, 2013; Sidwaya, 2013). Moreover, Kindo seemed to open the way for other criticisms against the FAIB. The tense situation generated by disagreements on the creation of a Senate deteriorated relations amongst the various Islamic associations, which held opposing views on this issue. After a meeting between the secretary general of the FAIB, Souleymane Compaoré and President Blaise Compaoré on 14 September 2013, the former publicly supported the creation of a Senate (Sidwaya, 2013). As a result, the AEEMB and the CERFI distanced themselves from the FAIB (Lefaso.net, 2013). Imam Sana of the CMBF also positioned himself against the constitutional amendment supported by the regime when it became clear that the latter was in a desperate position (for more details, see Madore, 2016). These criticisms demonstrate how, since the death of Kanazoé in 2011, the FAIB lost its legitimacy and was incapable of uniting Muslims. The decision to proceed with a rotating presidency was indicative of the conflicting relations within the FAIB (Vanvyve, 2015). When popular riots erupted in October 2014, which resulted in the ousting of President Compaoré, Mohammed Kindo advised on the importance of restoring peace.

Moreover, Kindo condemned the attacks in Paris (12 November 2015) in these terms:

We distance ourselves from these acts and we denounce them but unfortunately whether we want it or not, the consequences of these acts will follow us. This is why it is our duty raises the level of awareness among Muslims and let them know that Islam condemns such acts.20

After the attacks in Ouagadougou in January 2016, a rumour spread that the perpetrators had come equipped with their weapons to pray in the MS’s Zangouettin great mosque. Although this was quickly denied, the MS was at risk of being amalgamated with the terrorists in the eyes of the public. Mahmoudou Ouédraogo, an imam of the central mosque in Ouagadougou, declared in an interview with the newspaper Le Pays that the association was ready to assist authorities in their investigation: ‘Only the competent authorities can determine what happened once their investigation is complete. In any case, at our level, we do not possess that certainty. For us, it is but a rumor.’ Mahmoudou Ouédraogo followed with these terms:

What concerns us now is how to fight these terrorists. We really need to educate the faithful and spread awareness to the whole population so that all Burkinabe are united in the war against these terrorists. (…) Let each of us work towards peace in Burkina Faso. Let each of us collaborate with the security services to denounce all those whose behavior is suspicious. We must quickly denounce them so we can put them out of harm’s way. (…). We strongly condemn these barbaric acts because Islam is against any act of violence. (…) You know that Islam is a religion of peace. Islam condemns any kind of violence against the innocent. It is not the behaviour of a Muslim. (Le Pays, 2016)
The imam of the large Sunni mosque in Ouagadougou, Mohammed Kindo, issued similar statements and declared in his sermon that ‘the jihadists are enemies of religion’. Together, these public declarations demonstrated a call for vigilance and the encouragement of civil behaviour in order to preserve the harmony between religious communities in a country where people are used to respecting their fellow countrymen and kinfolk despite differences in their religion (see Audet Gosselin, 2016). Thus, the jihadists are considered a common enemy that endanger the harmony the MS and all other communities wish to preserve.

Conclusion

In spite of different political contexts, Islamic associations in both Burkina Faso and Senegal have favoured a legalistic approach to their relations with the state. However, the quest for legitimacy in the eyes of different regimes followed a very uneven path. In Senegal, the JIR progressively sought to penetrate the political sphere by adopting positions in relation to the state, which oscillated between opposition, rapprochement and circumspection. As for the MS, rapprochement with the state has been its habitual position since the 1990s. It was only when Compaoré’s power was seen as precarious that the leaders of the association thought it best to change their position. Hence, political opportunism was used by both associations in various ways. In this context, the leaders of the JIR were sensitive to the aspirations of the population, whereas the MS accorded less importance to public opinion.

Both associations sought to ensure that Islam was well represented in the public sphere. The MS prioritized the construction and the management of Friday mosques, the management of which generated internal tensions that drove the association to ask for the support of the state in its bid to gain legitimacy. By contrast, the JIR, who was known for its rather uncompromising positions in the 1980s, opted for a less radical stance in order to garner legitimacy. For several years now, this association has become a major religious, social and political actor. This effectively marked the end of revolutionary political Islam in Senegal. On this matter, François Burgat argues that ‘Islamist rhetoric, under the guise of a religious discourse, can convey a plethora claims that are secular, be they economic or social, and increasingly so, democratic’ (Burgat, 2001: 85).

The jihadist attacks have made the positions of both associations converge. When the religious context became very violent and risked undermining social order and harmony, the MS broke its silence and, to avoid any confusion on its motives both advocated public-spirited gestures and condemned terrorist acts. Likewise, the JIR called for a return to the foundations of Islam in the ecumenical respect. Only the future will tell if these stances will gestate an awareness of the dangers of intolerance.
Notes

1. Many Muslims interviewed during my various fieldworks reject the labels ‘fundamentalism’ or ‘Islamism’ and prefer to be called Sunni Muslims.
4. The association’s only Friday mosque in Ouagadougou had been located in the Zanguettin neighbourhood.
5. Several members of the JIR took part in the meetings dealing with the implementation of this programme. Previously, the JIR had repeatedly called on the Abdou Diouf regime to undertake a review of how Arabic was being taught.
6. After violent clashes between 2002 and 2006, the mosques were again closed by the authorities.
7. The term ‘Arabist’ refers to non-native Arabic speakers who got most of their post-secondary education in North African or Middle Eastern universities.
8. He had been President since 1997.
9. He was reappointed to the same position during the 21st congress of the CMBF in February 2010.
10. To ask the entire nation, once a year, to pardon the state for the political assassinations it had carried out since independence.
11. Created in December 2005 and presided over by El Hadj Oumarou Kanazoé, who oversaw a company specializing in construction and public works. He also had ready access to the halls of power.
12. Fifteen in total.
13. Following these local elections, the JIR found itself with 16 elected representatives in the regional councils (Thies, Dakar and Louga region); 18 representatives in borough municipal councils (communes d’arrondissements) and 9 in city municipal councils (communes de ville).
16. Call for moderation in religion.
17. Times have changed. In March 1977, a group of youths left the Union culturelle musulmane, headed by Iyane Thiam, since they considered that the association was co-opted by the regime. The JIR was founded after this split (Gomez-Perez, 1997b, 2005a).
19. By being too close to the CDP, the leaders of the CMBF seem to have recognized that they were endangering their own legitimacy in the eyes of young Muslims who were very critical of the CDP and the way it wielded political power. Imam Sana invited the opposition leader to the Grand Mosque for Mawlid in August 2014, «François et Assimi veulent la tête de l’Imam Sana», Mutations, 58, 1 August 2014.
22. Even if some changes have been noticed since the last decade.
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