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Roman Loimeier (Ed.)

Negotiating the Religious in Contemporary Everyday Life in the “Islamic World”



Göttingen University Press

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“Islamic World”

Ed. by Roman Loimeier

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Foreword by the Editor

The present volume is the result of a conference organised by the ERC-funded research project “Private Pieties. Mundane Islam and New Forms of Muslim Religiosity: Impact on Contemporary Social and Political Dynamics”. In the context of our research, our research group, consisting of Roman Loimeier (PI, focus on Tunisia), Nadine Sieveking (focus on Senegal), Liza Franke (focus on Egypt), Johanna Kühn (focus on Lebanon), Katja Föllmer (focus on Iran) and Jan-Peter Hartung (focus on Pakistan), has worked hard to cultivate academic partnerships with colleagues in our respective fields of research. I would like to thank the members of our group for their numerous constructive comments and their support in realizing our annual conferences, which we also used as a special opportunity to invite guests from our countries of research. This volume thus also represents an effort to give our guests and local interlocutors a voice.¹

Avant-propos de l'éditeur

Le présent document est le résultat d'une conférence organisée dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche intitulé « Private Pieties: Private Pieties, Mundane Islam and New Forms of Muslim Religiosity: Impact on Contemporary Social and Political Dynamics » financée par le Conseil européen de la recherche (CER). Dans le contexte de notre travail, l'équipe de recherche (composée de Roman Loimeier, PI, pour la Tunisie, Nadine Sieveking pour le Sénégal, Liza Franke pour l'Égypte, Johanna Kühn pour le Liban, Katja Föllmer pour l'Iran et Jan-Peter Hartung pour le Pakistan), s'est efforcée d'établir des liens de partenariat avec nos collègues résidant dans les différents pays concernés. Je tiens à remercier les membres de notre groupe de recherche pour leurs commentaires constructifs et leurs efforts, surtout en ce qui concerne l'organisation des conférences annuelles à l'occasion desquelles nous avons pu inviter des partenaires de nos domaines de recherche. Le présent document est donc aussi l'occasion de leur donner la parole.²

¹ I would like to thank Philip Reuben for proofreading the English language chapters.

² Je remercie Alexandre Moreau pour la relecture des chapitres en langue française.

1a Introduction: Negotiating the Religious in Contemporary Everyday Life in the “Islamic World”

Roman Loimeier

For some time, Western academia and journalists have tended to focus on sensationalist representations of religion in the “Islamic World”, particularly “Islamic terrorism” and related political movements. As a result, the more banal, everyday and unremarkable aspects of life in the various countries of this region are often perceived incorrectly (although some prominent exceptions do exist)¹. In addition, the countries of the region are often said to be “saturated by religion”.² However, in the present volume we contend that the citizens of these countries (who are often referred to, simplistically, as “Muslims”) are not mere “epiphenomena” of Islam, i.e. prisoners of a reified concept of Islam that towers over human beings and societies and neglects their agency. Egyptians, Iranians, Tunisians, etc. (who happen to be Muslims) have multiple areas of expertise and negotiate their everyday lives in this world – as men and women, as elders and youth, as traders and farmers, as scholars and computer experts – in dynamic interaction with governments, religious organizations, society and texts.

¹ See, for instance, Samuli Schielke’s “Snacks & Saints” (2007).

² The idea of a (religious) “saturation” of a society is somewhat problematic; the term “saturation” – which can point to both a condition and a process – suggests there was a time when that society was in a “non-saturated” condition, and such a condition is usually defined in a rather chronocentric perspective relative to the present day. In addition, it raises the question of who determines what “saturated” actually means or should mean. The potential meaning of the term “saturation” is further expanded if we consider the possibility of an ‘over-saturation’ of a society by, for instance, religion.

Still, the “religious” does play a greater role in both politics and everyday life in Senegal and Iran, in Egypt and in Pakistan, than it does in Germany or even France. “Religion” is often seen, in fact, as the basis of the “Moralordnung” of a society, a “moral order” that must be defended against all kinds of threats and attacks, both external and internal. There are many groups who often claim to defend the “moral order” of a given society, including governments, “Islamic” NGOs and semi-independent bodies such as the Muslim World League, religious movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and self-proclaimed vigilante groups. They do this by referring to the concept of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar). This concept often provides a religious legitimization of efforts to defend the moral order of a given society and to consequently impose a hegemonic interpretation of what this moral order should look like and what it should mean for that society.

However, it is not only governments, NGOs and religious organizations/institutions that aim to establish a particular (moral) order; society, or rather, “public opinion”, should be considered as well. Public opinion – as manifested and mediated in different milieus and as informed by specific historical and cultural traditions as well as specific economic and political dynamics – plays a comparable role in proposing (and sometimes imposing) concepts of moral order. Public opinion defines, for instance, the question of whether and how women may move (or may not move) in the public (and semi-public) sphere.

Societies (i.e. “people”, “social groups”, etc.) thus have an idea of what is “proper” and what is “wrong” – what is possible/acceptable (ḥalāl) and what is impossible/unacceptable (ḥarām). They know what can and cannot be said (in terms of speech itself and etiquette) when, by whom and in what form; what can be done and shown (in terms of dress and behaviour, for example) and what cannot; what must remain hidden – but may perhaps be permitted in the “private sphere” (if such a sphere exists at all). Societies also define the “bare minimum” that makes one a Muslim, which may not be transgressed at all (even in the private sphere). At the same time, people learn rules and methods that grant them diplomatic/sensitive ways to breach or circumvent taboos and to address problematic issues and questions of etiquette. For example, accepted forms of talking about conventions (of speech and etiquette) and taboos are closely linked to concepts of apology and techniques used to ask for exceptions.

A major question that arises in disputes over the moral order and what it actually means in a specific context is that of how the reference to a moral order informs the ways in which individuals act and communicate. In other words, what influence does the moral order have on what one can say/show/reveal and in what ways, i.e. openly, discreetly/indirectly, or not at all? In many contexts we encounter “Leerstellen” (voids, vides)³ in communication that point to social taboos, to scenarios of political and reli-

³ The term “void” should be distinguished from a “taboo”. When people do not consciously talk about particular topics, even though they are aware of these topics, we usually describe this as a “taboo”. Only when people are not aware of certain themes or concepts do we talk about a “void”, i.e. a situation where people do not know that such a concept exists at all.

gious insecurity and to (hidden) threats. Such voids can be addressed and expressed in terms of jokes and rumours, but also in terms of silence, even multiple silences⁴, and can also be expressed in terms of (multiple) absences. Jokes, rumours, silence(s) and/or absence(s) can thus be seen as powerful forms of communication, and may be viewed as a means expressing power dynamics (forms of non-communication are themselves seen here, of course, as a form of communication).

The central question of the present volume – namely, how individuals act and communicate and in which ways – is thus a question of the social and political contexts in which people live and in which we move as researchers. In many contexts, we encounter voids in communication that point to social taboos, to themes that are difficult to talk about (in public, or perhaps even in private amongst our families and friends) such as one's "true" religious feelings and beliefs, one's "true" political position, one's "true" economic status, one's "true" origin and descent (in the case of "casted" societies) or one's "true" sexual orientation, but also issues such as drug addiction, pre-marital sex, suicide, psychological problems, and – last but not least – sexual and/or physical abuse of women and both male and female children. These examples show how difficult it is to identify the voids (*Leerstellen*, *vides*), taboos and "difficult" themes that any given society cultivates. They show that we as researchers must develop a sense for that society's specific ways of talking and not talking, of expressing and not expressing voids, taboos and "difficult" themes. Each society in fact cultivates its own voids, taboos and "difficult" themes, and, in a larger sense, its own strategies for coming to terms with them. In particular, societies differ regarding four questions, namely, how open that society is regarding taboos and "difficult" themes; second, what is perceived at all as a taboo or a "difficult" theme, and in which contexts we encounter voids; third, the ways in which such voids, taboos and "difficult" themes can be addressed and expressed; and fourth, which issues can be a subject of jokes, satire or caricature, and which issues are "sacred".

Within this framework of inquiry our basic questions are, thus: how do people (both individuals and social groups) navigate hegemonic discourses, as represented by a state, an organization/movement/group, or even by their society as a whole (in the guise of public opinion)? Do people talk openly about specific issues (such as religion)? With whom do they talk about them, and how? What do they omit? What do they stress, deny, reject, support, underline, show, hide, reveal, display or disguise? Are the ways of negotiating these boundaries open to everybody (i.e. men and women, rich and poor), and are there regulations/conventions that must be respected when being evasive? Are there established ways of communicating to show dissent, unhappiness and doubt?

⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot has thus stated famously that "silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments; the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)" (Trouillot 1995: 26).

We must also ask who speaks and who does not. Is this (as we assume) a question of seniority, gender and/or power? Who speaks when, why, how, using what kind of language, and in which contexts? Are the dynamics of hiding and revealing linked with specific times and places? How important are *taqiyya* (dissimulation) and *ta'arruf* (mutual recognition), pretence and politeness, jokes and rumour as “strategies” for navigating difficult contexts? How important are music, art, theatre and social media for the expression of the “unsaid”? Essentially, is religion a domain that limits communication to specific patterns of expression or is religion a domain that provides space for communication?

The contributions to the present volume show, first and foremost, that the countries that are often presented in the literature as forming part of a stereotypical and seemingly monolithic “Islamic world” in fact represent considerable diversity. From Iran to Senegal, passing through Lebanon, Egypt and Tunisia, we encounter (in both historical and contemporary times) a vast array of social and religious structures, historical trajectories, political regimes and relative positions of societies and individuals. We encounter also, in many different and often unexpected ways, the “individual” in multiple contexts. Citizens of Senegal, Iran, Lebanon, Egypt and Tunisia, are not “epiphenomena of Islam”; rather, they are navigating their often difficult social, economic and political contexts as individuals. In their own individual ways, they try to come to terms with the various problems and challenges they face, developing individual “*prises de position*” with respect to political, social and religious structures. Although we did not have time to explore the historical foundations of processes of “individualization”, we contend that – despite the “Islamic” emphasis on communality – “individuality” and concepts of the “self” are not a modern invention but have been present and deeply rooted in the people and societies of the region for a long time. We also contend, however, that expressions of individuality have changed over time and have taken new forms against the background of the processes of modernization (colonization and de-colonization), urbanization and globalization.

The issue of individual “*prises de position*” in the context of “religious politics” is the central theme of Liina Mustonen’s contribution, which deals with questions of gender and class during the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2012. In her contribution, she stresses the major role of satire (related to politics and religion) in contemporary Egyptian politics, and the ways in which satire is incorporated by people in their individual ways of combating their frustration with political developments. She also shows how debates over different versions of the Egyptian constitution have been informed by individual “*prises de position*”.

The “individual” is also of paramount importance for Lisa Maria Franke’s contribution on “self-pietization” in the context of Qur’anic reading circles in contemporary Alexandria. While one might assume that people (specifically women, in Franke’s case) attend Qur’anic reading circles for primarily religious purposes, she shows that these gatherings also serve to develop individual pieties that again serve to foster the “personality” (and the pious self) of women.

Individuality is again a central focus in Ariane Sadjed's contribution on the difficulties in defining religious dissent in contemporary Iran. Sadjed not only stresses the fluidity and flexibility of Iran's religious "scene" and disputes the analytical value of viewing societies in terms of a clear-cut "secular-religious" divide, but also stresses the fact that popular dissent and protest are often not directed against the regime (as Western media reports usually assume), but rather tend to negotiate with the regime. On a personal level, contemporary Iranian society is thus not characterized by a seemingly pro-Western "lipstick" faction against the "reactionary" "chador" faction (when looking at women), but rather by multiple "prises de position" that reflect different and evolving social, economic, religious and political contexts.

The theme of individual "prises de position" is also addressed by Katja Föllmer in her contribution on unveiling, everyday life and the significance of silence in contemporary Iran. In particular, Föllmer introduces "bad hejabi", i.e. "unorthodox" forms of veiling (and unveiling) in Iran, and the way in which "bad hejabi" is presented as a form of silent protest against certain religious regulations. Since "bad hejabi" is not commented upon by citizens, non-comment can be seen as a form of tolerance of silent protest by everyday citizens.

The veil and acts of veiling (and unveiling) are also the central theme in Khaoula Matri's contribution on veils, veiling and modalities of religiosity in contemporary Tunisia. Matri shows that both unveiling and downveiling are informed not only by state policies regarding dress codes, but also by processes of profanization and sacralization of the veil in recent decades, and that women use a plethora of veiling styles to express both individual "prises de position" and individual forms of religiosity (and non-religiosity).

The sacralization and profanization of the veil are equally addressed by Abdoulaye Sounaye's contribution on ethics and aesthetics among Salafis in Niger. Sounaye shows that the "Islamic" veil ("hijabi" in the Hausa and Zarma languages) has become a major sign of the increasing growth of the Salafi-oriented Yan Iazala (and Sunnance) movement in Niger. Sounaye also shows that women have started to tweak and stylize the veil, making it their own, a development that can be observed even in the veiling habits of female sex workers in Maradi and Niamey.

The focus on text that characterizes academic publications is complemented in the present volume by a visual account of religious (and non-religious) aspects of Senegalese everyday lives provided by the artist and photographer Elise Fitte-Duval – as introduced by Nadine Sieveking – who presents a very personal and intimate take on gestures through which she aims "to portray people in their environment". Nadine Sieveking's contribution on fitness and the bracketing of religiosity in Senegal consequently opens a third major theme of the present volume, addressing spaces, times and modes of practice where religiosity is "taking place" in new (and sometimes limited) ways. This development is explained by Sieveking (and in the subsequent contributions by Awa Diop, Mouhamed Ly and Abdourahmane Seck) with reference to certain major changes in Senegalese society since the 1980s, most importantly the processes of economic and political liberalization and the resulting transformation of Senegalese

(urban) society. These processes of change have brought about not only a process of “Islamization from below” and a corresponding development of new approaches to and modes of religiosity by individuals, but also social development that allows for the conscious “self-fashioning” of citizens, who may now even present themselves (in specific times and places) as being “non-religious”.

In her contribution on public silences and private relationships, Awa Diop addresses the question of why Senegalese religious authorities – particularly the leaders of Senegal’s dominant Sufi orders, Tijāniyya and Murīdiyya – refuse to comment on social scandals and transgressive behaviour of public figures, a phenomenon she describes as a “fuite de communication”. Diop explains this development with reference to social changes in Senegal in recent decades that have been characterized by the fact that marabouts have become increasingly involved in politics and business. This involvement has led to the “corruption” of religious authorities and to a certain distancing of religious authorities from their own domain, spirituality. As a result, the leaders of Senegal’s major Sufi order try to stay “aloof” (and remain silent) in order to avoid being identified with “corruption”. At the same time, the political and economic activities of marabouts have been interpreted and commented upon by Senegalese citizens as a form of pursuit of personal (i.e. non-religious) interests, which has again “legitimized” individual “transgression”.

Mouhamed Ly’s and Abdourahmane Seck’s contribution continues the theme of “transgression” by presenting the case of a specific “transgressor”, Assane Diouf, and his career as an “undisciplined disciple”. Diouf became famous as a “webactiviste” in the United States of America (where he had been living since 2002), due in particular to his inflammatory statements on social media, especially on YouTube, regarding corruption in Senegalese politics, the kleptomania of marabouts, social injustice, social hypocrisy, homosexuality, “transhumance politique” and deficient public morals. His rise to fame was linked with the rapid development of social media in Senegal from the early 2000s and his ability to represent himself to Senegalese audiences as “le prototype de débrouillard”, i.e. an individual who tries to come to terms with the demands of life, politics and economics, thus reflecting, in paradigmatic ways, the daily realities of many Senegalese.

In his conclusion, Robert Launay, finally challenges (again) established notions of piety and asks us to move towards “a broader theory of piety”. Against his own background of research in West Africa, he stresses, for instance, the need to look at factors such as age and generation when talking about piety. In this context, he quotes one of his local interlocutors in Ivory Coast, who, when questioned on issues of piety, responded “I have not yet finished misbehaving”. Equally, Launay proposes to focus in future research on piety on distinctly pre-modern shifts in modes of piety to get away from the by now well established focus (in academic literature) on “piety and modernity” that views shifting modes of piety primarily as a function of processes of modernization.

Ultimately, it is clear indeed that the daily realities of life, in Senegal and in the other countries of the region, are informed not only by “religion” but also (often more

strongly) by political, economic and social dynamics, as well as age and generation, and that Iranians, Tunisians and Egyptians are trying to develop individual strategies and “prises de position” in these varying and evolving contexts. This is, therefore, the common theme of the contributions in the present volume, and also points to a serious gap in research that should be addressed more prominently in future research, namely the predicament faced by individuals in their quest to make a (decent) living in a world full of challenges and problems. In this quest, Iranians, Tunisians and Senegalese show that they are acting more as individuals than as “epiphenomena of Islam”. Accordingly, they develop an array of different forms of religiosity (and non-religiosity) that are often difficult to explain based on what is found (so far) in the literature.

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1b Introduction : La négociation du religieux dans la vie quotidienne contemporaine du « Monde Islamique »

Roman Loimeier

Du fait d'une focalisation particulière des milieux académiques occidentaux et du goût des médias pour le journalisme à sensation, on identifie souvent le « Monde Islamique » à travers le prisme du terrorisme islamiste et de leurs différents mouvements politiques et religieux, au détriment de la vie normale et quotidienne des habitants de ces régions dans ses aspects les plus banals, qui n'est que rarement présentée de façon neutre (à quelques exceptions près)¹. On considère fréquemment les sociétés des pays de ces régions comme étant saturée par la religion.² Mais nous pensons que les citoyens de ces pays (souvent dit « pays musulmans ») ne sont pas des épiphénomènes de l'Islam, prisonniers d'un islam réificateur qui domine les gens et les sociétés et soustrait leurs capacités à agir. Égyptiens, Iraniens ou Tunisiens (musulmans ou non) possèdent des compétences multiples ; ils abordent leur vie quotidienne en tant qu'hommes et femmes, commerçants ou paysans, instituteurs ou informaticiens, et ils le font dans une interaction dynamique avec des gouvernements, des organisations religieuses, des sociétés et des textes.

¹ Voir par exemple « Snacks & Saints » de Samuli Schielke (2007).

² L'idée d'une saturation (religieuse) d'une société est problématique : le terme de « saturation » – que peut se référer ou à une condition ou à un processus – suggère qu'on a connu une époque historique dans la quelle une société n'était pas encore saturée. Une telle condition est cependant définit souvent d'une perspective chronocentriste contemporaine. De plus, la question doit être posée de qui définit ce que le terme « saturée » signifie. Une extension additionnelle de la signification du terme de saturation est achevée quand nous pensons à la possibilité d'une « sursaturation » d'une société par la religion, par exemple.

La religion joue malgré tout un rôle plus important dans la vie politique et quotidienne au Sénégal, en Iran, en Égypte ou au Pakistan qu'en Allemagne ou en France. En effet, la religion est souvent perçue comme le rempart moral de la société, qui doit être défendue contre des dangers de toute sorte, externes comme internes. Des gouvernements, des ONG islamiques (ou chrétiennes), des organisations semi-indépendantes comme la Ligue islamique mondiale, des mouvements religieux comme les Frères musulmans ou encore des groupes auto-proclamés de défense de la religion prétendent défendre l'ordre moral de la société. Cela, ils le font en appliquant le principe d'« ordonner le bien et interdire le mal » (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*), qui fournit une légitimation religieuse à leurs actions visant à imposer une interprétation hégémonique de la religion et son importance dans la société.

Gouvernements, ONG, organisations et/ou institutions religieuses ne sont cependant pas les seules corporations qui cherchent à établir un ordre moral spécifique : la société, ou plus précisément, l'opinion publique, doit aussi être considérée. L'opinion publique relayée par les médias en différents milieux, influencée par des traditions historiques et culturelles de même que par des dynamiques économiques et politiques spécifiques, propose (et impose) également des concepts d'ordre moral et définit par exemple la liberté (ou la restriction de liberté) de mouvement des femmes dans la sphère publique et semi-publique.

Ainsi, les sociétés (c'est-à-dire l'ensemble de leurs membres, les différents groupes sociaux, etc.) ont une idée de ce qui est « bien » et de ce qui est « mal » ; de ce qu'il est permis de faire et acceptable (*ḥalāl*), et de ce qui n'est pas permis et inacceptable (*ḥarām*) ; de ce qu'on est autorisé à dire (en termes de langage et de savoir-vivre), de qui peut le dire, quand et sous quelle forme, et de ce qu'on n'est pas autorisé à dire ; de ce qu'on peut faire et montrer publiquement (par exemple, en termes de vêtements et de comportement) et de ce qu'on ne peut pas faire et/ou montrer publiquement ; de ce qui doit rester caché, mais qui peut quand même exister dans la sphère privée (dans la mesure où une telle sphère existe). Des critères minimum auquel aucun musulman ne peut se soustraire (y compris dans la sphère privée) sont aussi définis par ces mêmes sociétés. Cependant, en pratique, il existe toujours des moyens de contourner les règles de la société et d'aborder les sujets sensibles, par exemple en s'excusant ou en demandant qu'exception soit faite.

Un aspect central de la confrontation avec cet ordre moral et sa réelle signification dans un contexte spécifique est la manière dont il influe sur la façon qu'on les gens de communiquer et d'agir : qu'a-t-on le droit de dire, quelle partie du corps a-t-on le droit de révéler, et de quelle manière ? Discrètement, directement ou pas du tout ? Souvent, l'existence de tabous sociaux, d'insécurité politique ou religieuse ou de quelconque danger se perçoit dans les trous, les « vides » (*voids* en anglais/*Leerstellen* en allemand) présents dans la communication.³ Ces vides peuvent prendre la forme de rumeurs ou de plaisanteries, mais aussi de silences multiples ou d'absences. Il s'agit de formes de

³ Le terme du « vide » doit être qualifié : Quand on ne parle pas avec intention d'un thème spécifique, même quand on est conscient de l'existence d'un tel thème, nous rencontrons un « tabou ». Nous pou-

communications (verbales ou non verbales) puissantes que l'on peut percevoir comme des expressions d'une relation de pouvoir.

Le thème central du présent document, à savoir la façon dont les individus agissent et communiquent au sein d'une société (ouvertement, discrètement, indirectement, de façon déguisée ou par silence), est donc indissociable du contexte social et politique de ladite société que nous, chercheurs, observons. Dans de nombreuses situations de la vie courante, nous sommes témoins de vides de communication qui renvoient à des tabous sociaux et à des thèmes dont il est difficile de parler en public, mais aussi en famille ou entre amis, comme le sentiment religieux, ses positions politiques, sa situation économique, son origine ethnique et généalogique (dans le cas des sociétés de castes), son orientation sexuelle, mais aussi des thèmes comme la toxicomanie, les relations sexuelles avant le mariage, la dépression, le suicide ou encore les abus sexuels ou physiques des enfants et des femmes en public.

Les vides de conversation peuvent aussi être signes d'insécurité politique ou religieuse, ou de dangers invisibles. Ces vides peuvent prendre la forme de plaisanteries, de silences (parfois multiples⁴) et parfois d'absences. Plaisanteries, rumeurs, silences et absences doivent donc être compris comme des formes de communication fortes, mais aussi comme le moyen d'exprimer des relations de pouvoir. La communication non-verbale est aussi une forme de communication. On comprend ainsi la difficulté d'identifier les vides, les tabous et les sujets sensibles propres à une société particulière, et à quel point il est important de développer un sixième sens pour décoder ces formes de communications verbales et non-verbales. Chaque société a ses propres tabous et sujets sensibles, et développe ses propres formes de communication et de vides autour de ces thèmes. On peut habituellement distinguer les sociétés selon les quatre points suivants : le degré de franchise d'une société envers les tabous et les sujets sensibles ; ce qui est considéré comme tabou ou sujet sensible, et le moment et le contexte dans lequel les vides peuvent être observés ; la manière avec laquelle de tels vides, tabous et sujets sensibles sont /peuvent être abordés et exprimés ; ce qui ne peut pas faire l'objet de plaisanteries, de satires ou de caricatures : ce qui est sacrosaint.

Dans un tel cadre d'investigation, la première question qui se pose est donc de savoir comment est-ce que les individus et les groupes sociaux vivent-ils les discours hégémoniques d'un État, d'une organisation, d'un mouvement, d'un groupe ou même d'une société (sous couvert de l'opinion publique). Les gens parlent-ils de manière transparente de questions spécifiques comme la religion ? Avec qui parlent-ils, et comment ? Que décident-ils d'omettre, d'accentuer, de soutenir, de rejeter, de montrer, de révéler ou de cacher ? Tout le monde peut-il discuter des sujets sensibles, ou est-

vons parler d'un « vide » seulement, quand on n'est pas conscient d'un thème spécifique. C'est-à-dire, on ne connaît pas même l'existence d'un tel thème.

⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot a constaté ainsi que les « silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments ; the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives) ; the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives) ; and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) » (Trouillot 1995 : 26).

ce réserver à un groupe social en particulier (hommes ou femmes, riches ou pauvres, etc.) ? Existe-t-il des règles et/ou des conventions devant être respectées à tout moment, même quand on est évasif ? Existe-t-il des manières établies et acceptées par tous de communiquer et d'exprimer son opposition, son doute ou son mécontentement ? Nous devons aussi nous demander qui a le droit de parole (et qui ne l'a pas) : est-ce une question d'âge, de sexe et/ou de pouvoir (comme nous le pensons) ? Qui parle quand, pourquoi, comment et dans quel contexte ? Les dynamiques de dissimulation et de révélation sont-elles liées à des facteurs de temps ou de lieu ? Quelle importance prennent les techniques de dissimulation (taqiyya), de reconnaissance mutuelle (ta'arruf), de simulation et de politesse, ou encore les plaisanteries et les rumeurs, lorsqu'il s'agit de parler de sujets délicats ? Quelle importance ont la musique, la littérature, le théâtre et les nouveaux médias dans l'expression du non-dit ? La religion limite-t-elle la communication à des formes d'expression spécifiques ou ouvre-t-elle des espaces de communication ?

Les contributions regroupées dans le présent document montrent d'abord que les pays de la région, souvent présentés de façon stéréotypée comme formant un monde islamique monolithique, sont en réalité d'une grande diversité : de l'Iran au Liban, de l'Égypte et de la Tunisie jusqu'au Sénégal, il existe une grande palette de formations sociales et religieuses, de trajectoires historiques multiples, de régimes politiques divers et des formes différentes de positionnement des sociétés et des individus en périodes historiques et contemporaines. On rencontre aussi des individus dans des contextes multiples et souvent inattendus. Les citoyens des pays comme le Sénégal, l'Iran, le Liban, l'Égypte et la Tunisie ne sont pas donc des épiphénomènes de l'Islam mais naviguent en tant qu'individus dans des contextes sociaux, politiques et économiques souvent difficiles. Ils s'efforcent individuellement de faire face aux problèmes et aux défis qu'ils connaissent et développent des prises de position individuelles envers des formations politiques, sociales et religieuses. Même si nous avons pas eu le temps de nous immerger dans les fondations historiques des processus d'individualisation, nous affirmons quand même – et malgré l'importance de la communauté dans l'Islam – que l'individualisme (et les considérations du soi) n'est pas une invention de la modernité mais est depuis longtemps enraciné au sein des peuples et des sociétés des pays concernés. Nous affirmons cependant aussi que les expressions de l'individualisme ont évolué au fil du temps et pris des formes spécifiques dans le contexte des processus de modernisation (colonisation et décolonisation), d'urbanisation et de mondialisation.

Le thème des prises de positions individuelles dans le contexte d'une politique religieuse est le thème central de la contribution de Liina Mustonen sur les questions de sexe et de classe sociale pendant l'administration des Frères musulmans en Égypte en 2012. Dans sa contribution, la chercheuse met en avant le rôle majeur de la satire (en ce qui concerne la politique et la religion) dans la politique contemporaine en Égypte, et la manière dont le gens s'en servent individuellement pour exprimer leur frustration du développement politique. La chercheuse montre aussi la façon dont les débats concernant les différentes versions de la constitution égyptienne ont été influencés par des prises de positions individuelles.

L'individualisme tient encore une fois une place centrale dans la contribution de Liza Maria Franke sur les formes de « piétisation de soi » dans le contexte des cercles de lecture du Qur'an à Alexandrie. Tandis qu'on peut s'attendre à ce que les gens (des femmes dans le cas de l'étude de Liza Maria Franke) participent à des cercles de lecture du Qur'an pour des raisons purement religieuses, la chercheuse montre que ces cercles servent aussi au développement des piétés individuelles qui sont encore une fois centrales dans le développement de la personnalité (et la piétisation de soi) des femmes.

L'individualisme est aussi un aspect central de la contribution d'Ariane Sadjed sur les difficultés de définir la dissension religieuse dans l'Iran contemporaine. Sadjed souligne d'abord la fluidité et la flexibilité du paysage religieux iranien avant de s'interroger sur la pertinence de la différenciation entre les sociétés laïque et religieuse. La chercheuse souligne aussi le fait que la dissension populaire et les protestations ne sont souvent pas dirigées contre le régime iranien (à l'inverse de ce qui est présenté dans les médias occidentaux), mais ont plutôt un but de négociation avec le régime. En ce qui concerne les femmes, par exemple, la société contemporaine iranienne n'est donc pas caractérisée au niveau personnel d'un côté par une communauté pro-occidentale « pro-maquillage » et de l'autre une communauté réactionnaire « pro-chador », mais plutôt par de multiples prises de position qui sont l'écho de contextes sociaux, économiques, politiques et religieux variés et évolutifs.

Le thème des piétés individuelles est aussi abordé par Katja Föllmer dans sa contribution sur les processus d'abandon du port du voile, sur la vie quotidienne et la signification des silences dans l'Iran contemporaine. Katja Föllmer se concentre en particulier sur le bad hejabi, c'est-à-dire sur les formes non traditionnelles de se voiler (et de retirer son voile), et la manière dont cette tendance est présentée comme une forme de protestation silencieuse contre des régulations religieuses spécifiques. Le fait qu'on ne parle pas du bad hejabi dans la société iranienne peut en effet être compris comme une forme de tolérance de la protestation silencieuse des membres de la société.

Le thème du voile revient dans la contribution de Khaoula Matri, qui aborde notamment le processus de se voiler (et de retirer son voile) ainsi que les modes de religiosité dans la Tunisie contemporaine. Khaoula Matri montre que le port du voile – comme son retrait – n'est pas seulement régit par les lois relatives à l'habillement, mais aussi par des processus de profanation et de sacralisation du voile. Les femmes se voilent de différentes façons pour exprimer leurs positions individuelles et indiquer leur rapport à la religion.

Les phénomènes de sacralisation et de profanation du voile sont aussi abordés dans la contribution d'Abdoulaye Sounaye sur les éthiques et les esthétiques des Salafis au Niger. Abdoulaye Sounaye montre que le voile islamique (hijabi en langues Haussa et Zarma) n'est pas seulement devenu un signal central de la croissance du mouvement Salafi des Yan Izala (et des Sunnances) au Niger, mais aussi que les femmes ont commencé à styliser, fléchir et courber les habitudes relatives au voile, et donc à se l'approprier ; un développement qu'on peut observer même chez les prostituées à Maradi et Niamey.

Le genre de textes qui caractérise les publications académiques trouve un complément visuel, dans ce présent volume, avec la contribution de la photographe et artiste Élise Fitte-Duval (présentée par Nadine Sieveking). Avec son regard très personnel et intime sur les aspects religieux (et non-religieux) du quotidien au Sénégal, Élise Fitte-Duval vise à « figurer les gens dans leur environnement ». La contribution de Nadine Sieveking, qui présente des salles de fitness à Dakar comme des espaces où la religiosité est mise en « parenthèses », aborde, dans cette logique, un troisième thème du présent ouvrage concernant la façon dont la religiosité se produit dans des formes nouvelles (et parfois limitées) en termes d'espace, de temps et de pratiques. Nadine Sieveking (et après elle, les contributions de Awa Diop, Mouhamed Ly et Abdourahmane Seck) explique ce développement par les changements qu'a connus la société sénégalaise depuis les années 1980, avec en particulier la libéralisation politique et économique et les transformations qu'elle a provoqué dans la société urbaine sénégalaise. Ces transformations n'ont pas seulement provoqué un processus d'islamisation par le bas et le développement correspondant de nouvelles approches de la religiosité, elles ont aussi été à l'origine d'un développement social qui tolère le self-fashioning (« auto-façonnage ») des membres de la société qui peuvent même se présenter dans certaines situations comme étant « non-religieux ».

Dans sa contribution sur les silences publiques et les relations personnelles, Awa Diop s'interroge sur le refus des autorités religieuses sénégalaises, et en particulier les guides des ordres soufis dominants du Sénégal, c'est-à-dire la Tijaniyya et la Mouridiyya, de commenter les scandales sociaux et le comportement transgressif des figures publiques, un phénomène qu'elle caractérise comme une « fuite de communication ». La chercheuse explique cette fuite de communication en se référant au changement social qu'a connu le Sénégal dans les dernières décennies, notamment avec l'augmentation de l'engagement de beaucoup de marabouts dans la politique et les affaires économiques du pays. Ce développement a conduit à une corruption des autorités religieuses et à une certaine distanciation de celles-ci par rapport à leur propre terrain : la spiritualité. En conséquence, les guides des confréries dominantes du Sénégal ont essayé de rester distant (et silencieux), par peur d'être accusé de corruption. Parallèlement, les activités politiques et économiques des marabouts ont été perçues par les sénégalais comme une poursuite d'intérêts personnels non-religieux, ce qui a contribué à la légitimation de la transgression individuelle.

La contribution de Mouhamed Ly et Abdourahmane Seck continue sur le thème de la transgression en présentant le cas spécifique d'un transgresseur célèbre, Assane Diouf, et sa carrière de « disciple indiscipliné ». Assane Diouf est devenu un web-activiste célèbre aux États-Unis (où il habite depuis 2002) particulièrement sur YouTube, pour ses prises de positions et ses déclarations acerbes sur la corruption de la politique sénégalaise, la cleptomane des marabouts, l'injustice sociale, la corruption, l'hypocrisie sociale, l'homosexualité, la transhumance politique et l'absence de moral publique. Son ascendance en tant que web-activiste est due au développement rapide des réseaux sociaux au Sénégal et à son don de se présenter aux Sénégalais comme quelqu'un de débrouillard qui essaye de (sur)vivre de quelque manière que ce soit avec les exigen-

ces politiques, économiques, sociales et religieuses du Sénégal contemporain, reflétant ainsi de manière paradigmatique les réalités quotidiennes de beaucoup de Sénégalais.

Dans sa conclusion, Robert Launay critique une nouvelle fois la recherche contemporaine sur les différentes formes de piété, et nous demande de nous diriger vers une « théorie plus large de piété ». En se basant sur sa propre expérience de ses recherches en Afrique de l'Ouest, Launay souligne par exemple la nécessité de prendre également en compte des facteurs comme l'âge et la génération dans l'analyse de mouvements de piété. Dans ce contexte, il cite un de ses interlocuteurs locaux en Côte d'Ivoire, qui remarquait à l'occasion d'une discussion sur les modes de piété, « I have not yet finished misbehaving ». Toujours sur le thème de la piété, Launay propose aussi de mettre davantage l'accent sur les changements prémodernes distincts des modes de piétés, afin de se libérer de la focalisation bien établie de la littérature académique sur le thème « piété et modernité » qui considère les différentes formes de piété surtout comme une fonction des processus de modernisation.

Les réalités contemporaines au Sénégal, mais aussi dans les autres pays de la région, ne sont pas seulement influencées en fait par la religion mais aussi (et souvent dans une manière plus proéminente) par des dynamiques politiques, économiques et sociales comme aussi les facteurs « âge » et « génération ». Les citoyens de ces pays essaient de développer des stratégies et des prises de position individuelles dans ces contextes changeants et variés. Dans leur recherche d'une vie meilleure, Iraniens, Sénégalais, Tunisiens et Égyptiens montrent qu'ils agissent en tant qu'individus et non en tant qu'« épiphénomènes de l'Islam ». Par conséquent, ils développent aussi des formes différentes de religiosité (et de non-religiosité) qui sont difficiles à expliquer sur la base des textes disponibles (jusqu'à aujourd'hui). Au-delà du présent projet de recherche, le combat de ces hommes et de ces femmes pour la recherche d'une vie décente au sein d'un monde plein de défis constitue une lacune de la recherche actuelle qui doit être adressée de manière plus proéminente à l'avenir.

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2 The Disguise of the “Secular”: Questions of Gender and Class During Islamist Rule in Egypt

Liina Mustonen

The Egyptian uprising in early 2011, and the overthrow of Egypt’s autocratic long-term president, Hosni Mubarak, were followed by unprecedented changes in the country’s political arena. The initial 18 days of demonstrations in Cairo’s Tahrir square and in Egypt’s other cities, squares, streets and factories, which brought Mubarak’s 30-year rule to an end, were succeeded first by a period of military rule under the leadership of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and then approximately one year later by the parliamentary elections in late 2011 and early 2012, which saw electoral victories by the Muslim Brotherhood and a group of smaller Salafi parties such as the al-Nour party (“the party of light”). These new ruling parties and their supporters are often referred to as “Islamists”. Consequently, I will use that term in this chapter to refer to representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood – a previously oppositional organization and target of state repression – and the Salafi parties. Despite the Muslim Brotherhood’s claim that they would not run for Egypt’s presidency, the Islamists’ electoral success was repeated in the presidential election in the summer of 2012, which was won by Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammad Morsi (Wickham 2015: 170). In the second round of what has been often referred to as Egypt’s first free and fair presidential elections, Morsi competed against a representative of Egypt’s previous ruling apparatus. He won by a narrow margin against the former senior commander of the Egyptian air force, Ahmed Shafik, who, in the eyes of many Egyptians, epitomized the regime of the deposed president, Hosni Mubarak. Although many revolutionaries and activists saw Morsi’s electoral victory as a significant setback on the revolutionary road, it still demonstrated a clear and visible change from past regimes.

Egyptians who did not vote for Morsi considered the revolution doomed and were worried about the possible consequences of electing a new political elite. Whether in the world of business or in Egypt's political arena, those who opposed the uprising in 2011 and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 saw their personal interests and societal positions threatened. As scholars have shown, the two fields – economics and politics – were strongly intertwined during Egypt's previous regime, where, among other things, formerly state owned property and land were distributed to the Mubarak entourage in the course of Egypt's privatization boom (Mitchell 1999, Achcar 2013). During the Mubarak era, a small number of businessmen took control of the country's economy (Roll 2013: 5). It was not uncommon for politicians to invest like businessmen and businessmen to perform the roles of politicians. While some Muslim Brotherhood members had managed to build their own business empires as well, the old Mubarak elite was far more powerful and capable of preserving its influence during Morsi's presidency. (Roll 2013: 5, 6, 15).

Beneficiaries of the previous regime had a clear material interest in the failure of Egypt's transition to democracy (a version of democracy that would have included the opposition in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular) and experienced some anguish in the face of a possible reallocation of power and resources. However, despite this, the transitional period (2011–2013) has been commonly viewed as the Muslim Brotherhood's failure¹ and not as the previous (and current) regime's success. In late 2012 and the first half of 2013, the new environment of relative freedom of expression allowed for critique of the government to be heard when this was impossible before. This in turn allowed the binary of “religious versus secular” to provide a framework for criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood. This framework, as Hussein Agrama (2012: 26) astutely explains, visualizes two opposite futures for Egypt: either it could become a democratic country with democratic freedoms, or it could become a religious state – possibly ruled by the Muslim Brotherhood – and Egyptians would have none of the freedoms that the democratic system would guarantee. Within this framework, the Islamists not only faced criticism for their mixing of politics with religion but also became objects of derision in various media channels. Bassem Youssef, a former surgeon who became one of the Arab world's most successful political satirists in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, was among the most prominent critics of the new government. He made a great but short-lived career out of mocking the incumbent President Morsi on his TV show “El-Bernameg” (“the programme”).² After initially finding success broadcasting from his small home studio, Youssef was

¹ Contributing to this view was discourse about the Muslim Brotherhood's inability to govern the country. In 2013, on the eve of President Morsi's overthrow, opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei published an article in *Foreign Policy* under the telling article title “You Can't Eat Sharia”, in which he explained that the Muslim Brotherhood was losing support because they were not able to govern and did not have qualified people (Mohamed ElBaradei: You Can't Eat Sharia. *Foreign Policy*, 24 June 2013. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/24/you-cant-eat-sharia/>).

² Bassem Youssef's career in Egypt was short-lived. A few months after the military coup he was forced to cancel his show – and, like many others, he left Egypt soon after the military coup in 2013.

invited to perform in the studios of ONTV, a private TV channel owned by Naguib Sawiris, a wealthy businessman and critic of the Muslim Brotherhood (Gordon and Arafa 2014: 35). As Gordon and Arafa note, for a year Youssef’s “bread and butter” was critique of President Morsi and his government (ibid.: 37). In his widely viewed show, the comedian carefully picked out the religious references that the new political leaders used, and, among other things, referred to the newly governing Islamist forces as “merchants of religion” (Pratt and Rezk 2019: 245).³ Youssef’s underlying warning to audiences was that the Islamists were misusing religion to advance their own causes. Claims about the Muslim Brotherhood’s religiosity also fed into the discourse of Egypt as a secular country. During my fieldwork, I was often told that Egyptians – though sometimes referred to as a deeply religious people by the same individuals – were not willing to accept the way in which Islamist political figures mixed politics with religion. This, combined with the new leadership’s mismanagement of state affairs in other areas, was considered a recipe for the organization’s downfall.⁴ In this context, as Gordon and Arafa (2014) note, Bassem Youssef’s TV show “El Barnameg” did not cause the deposition of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, but did actively contribute to it by demonizing the new rulers.

Without trying to deny the mistakes of the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi, or ignore their failure to reach out to other oppositional factions and revolutionary activists during their political tenure, I suggest that we should take a critical approach in positioning religion and Islam in Egypt’s transitional period. More precisely, I suggest that we should scrutinize the ways in which the presumed mixing of religion and politics by the new leaders was used against them. This context calls for a critical examination of the ways in which the ambiguous terms “religious” and “secular” are presented as diametrically opposed. The material that I study in this chapter illustrates that the opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood portrayed the organization’s presumed mixing of religion and politics as a new phenomenon. Furthermore, they assessed the Muslim Brotherhood’s way of practising religion as reactionary and a “false interpretation of Islam”. In comparison to other possible ways of practising religion, the organization’s practices were deemed inferior. Although much more thorough research is needed to uncover the long-term motivations behind the discourse that demonized the Islamists in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular during the transitional period of 2011–2013, in this chapter I illustrate that the claims about mixing religion and politics cannot be seen as separate from the larger power struggle that unfolded in Egypt during the transitional period. My focus is on the claims regarding the supposed newness of the phenomenon, which relate to a larger framework of nostalgia for Egypt’s presumably better past – one that flourished in 2012 and which I discuss elsewhere (Mustonen 2020). As the following pages will show, the

³ See also Max Fisher: The Real Tragedy of Egyptian Satirist Bassem Youssef’s Censorship Is He Played a Role in It. Vox.com, 2 June 2014 (<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/2/5772102/the-real-tragedy-of-egyptian-satirist-bassem-youssefs-censorship-is>).

⁴ See also ElBaradei’s article “You Can’t Eat Sharia” mentioned in the previous footnote.

concerns about the mixing of religion and politics were also articulated in gendered terms. A closer look at the arguments that suggested “mixing religion and politics” was a new phenomenon brings to light a question that remained unexpressed – one that was less about religion’s presence and more about who has the authority to decide how religion is practised.⁵ The developments that followed the overthrow of President Morsi in Summer 2013 – including the election of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the imprisonment of not only Muslim Brotherhood members but also activists, civil society workers, and representatives of other oppositional forces – demonstrates that for many of Morsi’s critics, the question was not whether religion should be a part of the country’s governing principles, but who has the right to interpret religion.

Notes From the Field

In the aftermath of the Egyptian uprising in 2011 and the election of the Islamists, my primary interest was to understand how the changes in Egypt’s political agenda were received by those who opposed the new rulers. One of the less commonly discussed aspects of Egypt’s transitional period is that, despite the revolutionary euphoria in Egypt that characterized the period from 2011 to 2012 and the international praise for the Egyptian people who had bravely demanded their rights and deposed an autocrat, many beneficiaries of the previous regime were unhappy. In my fieldwork in Egypt I took on the task of listening to the murmurs that were uttered by critics of the new Islamist regime and that echoed in various locations in Cairo. The disapproval of the Islamists among my interlocutors was evident from the early days of the Islamists’ electoral victories and had little to do with their legislative work. Gradually, after Mohammad Morsi’s election, a broader spectrum of society expressed its unhappiness with the new political direction and joined the chorus of dissatisfied beneficiaries of the previous regime. This manifested clearly in the number of signatures collected by the Tamarod campaign, which demanded new elections in the summer of 2013 and eventually led to the military coup.

I was interested in finding out how the election of the previously imprisoned Muslim Brotherhood members and other Islamists would be received by those whose social imaginary differed considerably from that of the new rulers. On that note, the time I spent in Egypt between mid-2010 and early 2014 allowed me to closely observe the reactions of a milieu of self-defined liberals who were in socio-economically privileged positions in Egyptian society. “Muslim” was not my informants’ primary self-definition, and they never talked about their religious practices (which is not to say that they did not practise religion). They were nominally Christians and Muslims. While religion was rarely mentioned, on the rare occasions when the discussion turned

⁵ Nathan Brown (2017: 123) discusses this in detail with regard to the Middle East and points out that the most pertinent question is not how much or how little religion, but who has the right to interpret *sharī‘a*.

to politics and the new regime, some of my informants would mention that they were Christians. They wondered whether they still had a place in Egyptian society, and their main point of critique was the Muslim Brotherhood’s usage of religion in politics. My informants – who attended opera performances and spent their leisure time in the previously colonial Gezira Club or sipping cocktails in the nightclubs of expensive hotels – had a different understanding of what Egypt was and what it should be. The annual Christmas fair in 2012 – organized by the representatives of European countries and attended by upper middle-class Egyptians – is a telling example of such a difference. It was rumoured in 2012 that alcohol might soon be banned. As a result, wine and spirits sold out quickly due to the fear that was instilled by the new rulers’ relationship to alcohol. The ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in places of elite social interaction allowed me to form a picture of the social milieu of the quantitatively tiny upper middle-class that opposed the Islamists. A number of interviews helped me to make sense of my informants’ motivations. For the interviewees, it was hard to understand why anyone would vote for the Muslim Brotherhood. The fact that, at the societal level, religion and religious organizations had played an increasingly important role in Egypt since the 1970s, as shown by other scholars (Browsers 2009; Ahmed 2011; McLarney 2015), was rarely remembered when support of the Islamists was criticized. Nor was there any mention of the state’s increasing participation in shaping the role of Islam in society (Rock-Singer 2019: 6). At the same time, the discontent with the new political leaders should be viewed against the backdrop of the propaganda that Egyptian cultural actors had fuelled for decades. As shown by Lila Abu-Lughod (2005), television dramas frequently portrayed the Islamists as dumb or violent terrorists in contrast to more enlightened teachers. There is not enough space for me to delve deeper into these important aspects of the social context within which the specific discourse about religion and its place in Egypt’s transitional period occurred, but this brief description highlights the social actors’ distinct status in Egypt.

Islam in Egypt’s Sociolegal Context

Despite the claims of those who opposed the Muslim Brotherhood and criticized the way it used religion in its rhetoric, the debate about Islam’s place in Egypt’s state affairs and society was not a new phenomenon. Islam has been mentioned as the state religion in the Egyptian constitution since the country’s independence. Hussein Ali Agrama frames the question that has been at the centre of Egypt’s state formation ever since the beginning of the modern state’s establishment as follows: “To what extent can and should it [the Egyptian state] incorporate the long-standing Islamic traditions [Shari’a] that had become deeply embedded in Egyptian social institutions and which exerted authority over a wide range of social activities?” (Agrama 2012: 42). Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution defines the place of religion by stating that “Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic is its official language”. The clause “Shari’a is a source of legislation” was introduced by President Anwar Sadat in the 1970s; it was later amended to

read “Shari’a is the main source of legislation.” Article 2 thereby formally resolves the question of religion’s place by separating the jurisdiction of public issues and family issues. Under this division, issues that relate to the family (often called “family law”) are delegated to religious authorities, thereby allowing for denominational differences in the regulation of family matters.⁶ “Shari’a law” thus regulates the personal status of Egyptian Muslims, while the family law of the Coptic Orthodox Church regulates the family affairs of Egyptian Christians, who make up approximately ten percent of the population (Agrama 2012). This division has the consequence that many Egyptian Coptic Christians are forced to contend with a strict family law which, for example, limits the grounds for divorce to adultery and conversion, while Muslim family law is considered more liberal (Mahmood 2012). Agrama (2012), building on Talal Asad’s work, notes that this arrangement, by confining both shari’a and the religious references of Coptic Orthodox Christians to the private sphere, actually speaks to the expectations of secularism. In practice, the arrangement has been blurrier, however, as illustrated by the actions of Egypt’s previous governments. For example, in the politically motivated case of Professor Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the Egyptian Court of cassation ordered Abu Zayd, whom it had earlier declared an apostate, to divorce his wife against the will of the couple (see, for example, Agrama 2012).⁷

In the early stages of the transitional period in 2011, the question of religion’s role surfaced in various public discussions in Egypt. This debate about religion’s place haunted the transitional period until the overthrow of President Morsi in the summer of 2013, which eventually led to the Muslim Brotherhood being banned. Islam’s place was contested: while for some the role of religion was tied to the notion of “Egyptian identity”, others feared an increase in religious references. The first referendum regarding the Egyptian constitution, drafted and organized by a group appointed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), took place just six weeks after the SCAF assumed power, which had had the effect of suspending the Egyptian constitution. At stake in the referendum was a constitutional declaration that would substitute for the suspended constitution until a new parliament was in place that could be tasked with drafting a new constitution. However, many critics felt that the drafting committee of this constitutional declaration lacked legitimacy because it did not include representa-

⁶ Religion-based family law (also known as personal status law) grants judicial autonomy to state-recognized religious communities over family affairs, often causing dilemmas related to religious identity, gender and sexuality. Reform of family law is often considered an attack on the right to practise religion (Mahmood 2012, 56).

⁷ Egypt’s personal status law defines that a non-Muslim cannot be married to a Muslim woman. Hence, after judging Abu Zayd to be an apostate, the court declared that he cannot be married to his Muslim wife. The case was initiated by a private citizen, who applied the concept of *ḥisba*. Agrama (2010) offers a longer discussion on the *ḥisba* concept, which technically gives citizens the duty (and ability) of “commanding of the good, when it has become neglected, and the forbidding of the evil, when its practice becomes manifest.”

tives of all political forces.⁸ Nevertheless, Egyptians were hastily encouraged to vote on “constitutional amendments”. Although the referendum did not touch upon article 2, those who voted “no” feared that this specific article would eventually be expanded to include other domains of social life in the future (Agrama 2012: 29). Much to the dismay of critics, political activists and reform-minded Egyptians, the Muslim Brotherhood – as the best organized socio-political group in the country – campaigned with other Islamists in favour of the amendments. The organization advised its voters that it was their religious duty to vote “yes” – that is, in favour of the constitutional declaration. Consequently, the constitutional amendments were approved by 79 percent of voters.⁹

After the presidential election in the summer of 2012, a new constitution was drafted by a constitutional committee that consisted primarily of the winners of the elections – i.e. representatives of the Islamist factions. What had started as an inclusive process turned into a homogenous drafting committee when the so-called “liberal/secular” representatives opted out of the drafting committee in the autumn of 2012. For understandable reasons, the committee’s Islamist-only composition came under heavy criticism from the opposition. The constitution that the committee drafted, and which was later approved in a new referendum, was criticized for being too “Islamic”. A group of civil society organizations claimed that it was an attempt to import an “Iranian” type of theocracy to Egypt (Pratt and Rezk 2019: 246). Though article 2 did not change in the new constitution, many were worried by the introduction of a new article, article 219. This article was introduced by the Al-Nour Salafi party, and its purpose was to complement article 2 by specifying the explicit sources of jurisprudence. It defined these sources as “general evidence, foundational rules, rules of jurisprudence, and credible sources accepted in Sunni doctrines and by the larger community”. Differing opinions exist regarding the question of the religious character of the 2012 constitution. Ellen McLarney (2016) explains that the 2012 constitution was not markedly more Islamic than the previous ones. She shows how the various clauses of the new constitution could in fact already be found in the previous constitutions. In particular, she elaborates that the contested and much-criticized legal framework that set parameters for gender policy did not radically differ from other governments’ gender guidelines. On the contrary, she concludes that the so-called “Islamist Constitution” of 2012 “raised the bar on women’s equality in Egyptian constitutional history” (McLarney 2016). Egyptian feminists, such as Hoda Elsadda (2015), do not share this opinion and point to the Islamists’ increased use of religion in legitimizing the lack of gender equality in Egyptian society and state practices.

The next time Egyptians went to the polls to vote on a new constitution was after President Morsi was overthrown and the Muslim Brotherhood was banned. Many

⁸ Gianluca P. Parolin: The Ticking Referendum and a “Smarter Strategy”. *Al-Masry Al-Youm (English)*, 13 March 2011 (<https://www.egyptindependent.com/ticking-referendum-and-smarter-strategy/>).

⁹ Issandr El Amrani: Sightings of the Egyptian Deep State. Middle East Report Online, 1 January 2012 (<https://merip.org/2012/01/sightings-of-the-egyptian-deep-state/>).

members of the Muslim Brotherhood languished in prison while the drafting process took place without them. The new constitutional committee, consisting of ten members, handed the constitution over to a 50-member constitutional assembly just a few days after Egyptian security forces had dispersed the pro-legitimacy (i.e. pro-Morsi) protest camps in Rabaa al-Adawiyah and al-Nahda Squares, causing the death of hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters and sympathizers. The new constitution – often referred to as a secular constitution – was hastily approved, first by the assembly and then later in a referendum. The much-criticized article 219, which had specified the principles of jurisprudence, was omitted, but article 2 remained. Interestingly, the Salafists, who had collaborated with the Muslim Brotherhood and vehemently demanded that article 219 be introduced in 2012, supported not only the drafting process but also the new constitution itself.¹⁰ Many have argued that the post-coup constitution did not comprise a considerable change from the 2012 constitution.¹¹ With regard to gender, McLarney's (2016) analysis of the gender-related aspects of the constitution illustrates that Egypt's newest constitution took the previous Islamist constitution as a model and attempted to add further provisions for women's rights.

This brief overview shows that the constitutional changes during Egypt's recent transitional period did not dramatically influence the relationship between the Egyptian state and its primary religion, Islam. Islam has been mentioned as the state religion in the Egyptian constitution since the country's first constitution (McLarney 2016), and, prior to the uprising of 2011, the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood had existed in various relationships with the Egyptian government (Starret 1998: 80). Therefore, aside from discussing the legal framework, scholars have long debated the causes of religious change and religious revival that took place during President Anwar Sadat's era. Among others, in his recent book, Aaron Rock-Singer (2019) shows how the Islamic Revival did not emerge only through the channels of Islamist organizations, but was also strongly shaped by Egyptian state institutions. In particular, he shows how the political imperatives of the political elite influenced the religious discourse. It was impossible to ignore the presence of this religious discourse as it was prominently channelled through the mass media and compounded the Islamic Revival in Egypt between 1970 and 2015 (ibid.: 6, 15–18).

Religion and Politics Do Not Mix – Unless...

It is evident that neither references to religion nor the Islamists' presence were new phenomena in 2012. This therefore raises the question: why did some see the Muslim Brotherhood's use of religion as a new development? Despite the visibility of religious symbols in Egyptian society prior to the uprising in 2011, and earlier references to

¹⁰ Bassem Sabry: 22 Key Points in Egypt's New Draft Constitution. *Al Monitor*, 23 August 2013 (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/egypt-draft-constitution-guide.html>).

¹¹ McLarney (2016), Sabry (details in previous footnote) and Brown (2017).

sharī'a in Egypt's legal framework, my informants' primary critique of the Muslim Brotherhood was that the organization mixed religion with politics. They had this in common with Egypt's media outlets, which were often in the hands of beneficiaries of the previous regime. The media claimed that the Muslim Brotherhood was “taking over” the state, aimed to sell the country to foreign powers (Qatar in particular) and would destroy what they saw as the true Egyptian identity (Pratt and Rezk 2019; Elmasry 2017).

These fears were the product of a crisis within a group of people who understood themselves as more liberal than the new political leaders. They were in socio-economically privileged positions and could practise a lifestyle that resembled the lifestyle of the previous presidential family. Their special position in Egyptian society calls attention to the distinction between “public issues” and “personal troubles”, as outlined by C. Wright Mills (1999), i.e. the distinction between the structural issues of the larger Egyptian context and the personal troubles of the distinct group who feared for their position within the new political context. As Mills explained, personal troubles are a private matter and they transpire within individuals in their immediate environment. They concern the person's “self” and “areas of social life” that are within the confines of an individual's “social setting” (Mills 1999: 9). Evidently, personal troubles do not always become public issues. Therefore, it is important to investigate the politics associated with “personal troubles”. One illustrative example of such personal troubles is an article that was published by a Cairo-based women's lifestyle magazine two months after President Morsi was elected. The article's author declared that she was a representative of a “minority” in Egypt, because she could not cope with the way in which religion was imposed on society by the new Islamist rulers. She further elaborated that article 2 of the Egyptian constitution (which states that Islam is the religion of the state) was contrary to her beliefs. And yet, the magazine, which reached a tiny number of Egyptians not exceeding 100,000 readers (out of a population of 90 million at the time), did not mention that article 2 had already been part of the Egyptian constitution before the Islamists were elected. Instead, the article presented it as a new fact that had been introduced by the new rulers. The author then moved on to discussing gender relations in Egypt under the new Islamist government. She expressed her longing for the days when women and men were able to socialize in nightclubs and swimming pools, a reference to the mixing of men and women in selected public spaces. However, it remained unsaid that most such locations in Egypt targeted the country's wealthy and socio-economically privileged citizens. Alongside this critique, she also criticized the Islamic veil (hijāb), which she felt had taken over the streets of Cairo. She explained that she was disturbed by the fact that veiled women were now empowered and marched on the streets. In doing so, she ignored the social realities surrounding the veil that have been recorded by many scholars (Mahmood 2005; Ahmed 2011; McLarney 2015). The reappearance of the veil in the 1970s in Egypt – accompanied by a large presence of women in public spaces (Ahmed 2011) – went unnoticed by the author in her criticism of the Islamists. Scholars have also noted that when women entered the public sphere veiled, this item of clothing gained a new and distinct mean-

ing. For many, the veil did not represent the earlier gender segregation and hierarchy (ibid.: 212). A visit to various university campuses prior to the uprising in 2011 in Cairo would have shown the writer that veiled women and girls were not only present on campus but also that they mixed with the opposite sex there, as they did in many other venues in Cairo. The performance of female modesty not only challenges but also helps to sustain mixing in Egypt's public spaces (Rock-Singer 2019: 157). It is common knowledge that the Islamic veil did not simply appear on Egyptian streets after the Islamists' electoral victories. The author of the lifestyle magazine article ignored multiple social realities in order to make her critique of the new rulers more persuasive for her readers.

By returning to Mill's distinction between personal troubles and public issues, we can see that the writing referred to the troubles of the writer's own specific reference group. None of her criticisms touched upon the issues that bothered other members of Egyptian society. As the majority of Egyptians suffer under tough economic conditions, the ability to freely mingle in nightclubs and swimming pools was not among the foremost demands of those who protested on Egyptian streets and started the uprising in 2011. The timing of the article, just a few months after Morsi was elected, indicates that its purpose was to criticize the new rulers. Even though it appeared in a political climate in which the new draft constitution was being fiercely debated and criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood seemed justified, President Morsi had not been able to institutionalize any changes by that point. Cairo's nightclubs were still running, and the swimming pools still opened their doors to both men and women (although in some places gender segregation was practised, as it had been before Morsi's election).

Around the same time, I recorded similar lines of critique in other locations. The Islamists' mixing of religion and politics was a common issue in this discourse. In September 2012, a film festival brought Cairo's cultural elite together to defend Egyptian civilization against assault from the ignorant Islamists. The festival's participants did not shy away from showing their indignation toward the new rulers, and they vocally expressed critique of the new rulers' use of religion for political ends. For example, one speaker at the festival explained that Egyptian artists had always been free as long as they did not engage in politics. This statement, expressed at the film festival by a prominent Egyptian cultural actor, indirectly referred to the "contempt of religion" charges that famous actor Adel Iman faced in 2012 for his role in an old Egyptian film. Above all, the statement speaks to the delicate relationship that Egyptian cultural actors had with the previous ruling establishment. The cultural actors' critique of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists has been well recorded by other scholars (Abu-Lughod 2005; Winegar 2006; Abaza 2010). The cultural actors have seen themselves as enlighteners of larger Egyptian society (and hence more enlightened than the Islamists), while they have often presented the Islamists as violent and dumb (Abu-Lughod 2005). An analysis of their criticism of the new rulers should take into account these past histories of antagonism. The criticism must be understood against the backdrop of existing pre-determined positions and tensions.

As others have shown, the number of charges based on a law in the Egyptian penal code that punishes “contempt of religion” did indeed increase during the short period of Islamist rule.¹² However, the law that provides the basis for these charges has been present in the penal code since 1983 (Culang 2018: 446), and the high number of new cases since President Morsi was overthrown illustrates that the charges in 2012 were not merely a phenomenon related to the political rise of the Islamists. In addition, the Public Morality Investigation Unit has been busy and “debauchery” charges (based on law that dates back to 1961) have increased since Morsi was deposed (EIPR 2017; Abd El-Hameed 2018). One example is the case of Ahmed Naji, an Egyptian author sentenced to ten months in prison for harming public morality by publishing a chapter of his book “Using Life” in an Egyptian literary journal.¹³ The reason for the sentence was not his critique of the government but the sexual content of the published book chapter.

These recent cases have not received as much attention as the cases discussed under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. Within the context of post-2013 Egypt – the Muslim Brotherhood out of the political game, many of its members either dead or in prison, and the former general and current President el-Sisi ruling with an iron fist – the absence of discussion about religion’s place in Egyptian society indicates that the issue has lost its urgency. In the aftermath of the overthrow of President Morsi, some of my informants explained that it was not the right time to discuss religion’s place on a societal level or in the constitution.

The End of Critique

As Agrama (2012: 27) has noted, the binary of “religious” versus “secular” has a constitutive force, as it provides a framework with predefined outcomes according to which potential futures can be predicted. It was precisely the colloquial use of this framework that provided the basis for critique of the Islamists while establishing an image of Egypt’s past in terms of the “secular”. For example, the socio-political context in Egypt and the interplay of Islamists and state actors prior to the uprising in 2011 received little consideration among my interlocutors when President Morsi and the Islamists were criticized for their usage of religion. Instead, the criticism focused on the Islamists’ use of religion, which was treated as separate from the earlier evolution of religiosity in Egypt. The “secular” provided an effective notion for those who had earlier occupied powerful positions in Egyptian society but were pushed into opposition

¹² Culang (2018); Ben Hubbard and Mayy El Sheikh: Islamists Press Blasphemy Cases in a New Egypt. *The New York Times*, 18 June 2013 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/19/world/middleeast/islamists-press-blasphemy-cases-in-a-new-egypt.html>).

¹³ Mary Catherine Ford: In Using life Ahmed Naji Imagined a Riveting Ride across a Dystopian Cairo, Then He Was Arrested. *Words Without Borders: The Online Magazine for International Literature*, December 2017 (<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/book-review/in-using-life-ahmed-naji-imagined-a-riveting-ride-across-a-dystopian-cairo>).

in 2012. This notion was, first and foremost, related to its protagonists' personal troubles, which differed from the demands of those who initiated the uprising in 2011. Instead of demanding "bread, freedom and social justice", my informants feared for their lifestyle. In doing so, they spoke from their own specific class positions, as many of the practices in Egypt that they feared losing (such as frequenting nightclubs and mixed-gender swimming pools) were, and continue to be, associated with a certain social class. The criticism of President Morsi and the Islamists should therefore also be analyzed with reference to class politics and the social actors' privileges associated with their previously established positions.

While some Egyptians have, to borrow from Achcar (2013), succumbed to "melancholic depression", others have celebrated the return of an autocratic regime. The current political situation in Egypt is a clear reminder of how the notion of the "secular" entailed political power in 2012 and 2013. As Rock-Singer (2019: 183) notes, the current President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi shares "religious references and commitments" with the previous rulers, but it seems that he and his regime do not pose a threat to the lifestyle of those who, during the Islamists' rule, insisted that Egypt was a "secular" country. The silence over el-Sisi's use of religious references further indicates that the critique during Morsi's presidency was less about religion in politics than about class politics and social status.

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3 Individuality Beyond the Beaten Track: Self-Pietization, Qur’ān Circles and Organic Islam in Contemporary Alexandria

Lisa Maria Franke

Introduction

Islam, and its relationship to and with private space, has attracted the interest of an increasing number of scholars over the last few decades. Many of the works concentrate on the vivacity of private religion and how it is engendered and influenced by new developments, which can include new religious phenomena or innovations and private religious gatherings (Cf. Gauthier 2014). The critique is mostly centred around the hypothesis that privatization, or rather, individualization, leads to the weakening of established Islam and promotes self-centred personal development.¹ In order to study this multifaceted context of the numerous private varieties of religion that emerge from new forms or even waves of religiosity, which highlight its dynamic character, I will explore the concept of what I call self-pietization in the realm of individual religious agency.² This article deals with the impression that, in Egypt, there has been an enormous increase in the withdrawal of religion from the public space in favour of individually lived religiosity, particularly since the beginning of the 20th century – and that, moreover, religious gatherings of various types have spread throughout the country. I will analyse the ways in which different historical memories, each containing a

¹ I prefer the term “individual” rather than “private” in the context of religion and belief, as it points to more specific self-developments, whereas the term “private” tends to connote ideas of space and property.

² Cf. on how the self can develop Foucault (1988).

multiplicity of collective and individual religious experiences,³ are stratified according to age/generation and milieu in contemporary Alexandria.⁴

The following three spheres can be identified, of which the second will be highlighted in this article. First, the public space with its material and symbolical developments. Second, individual religious imaginaries with their immaterial developments, such as identity formation. And finally, the social realm, which encompasses both and which can be described by means of the simultaneity of the manifold religious deployments, even mobilizations, and terminologies as well as the increasing digitalization of religion and knowledge. Regarding the latter, knowledge and religion have opened up a whole new world for wanderers of the digital realm, referring to those who choose to acquire knowledge by browsing the internet and also to those who might be called spiritual wanderers⁵ searching for (religious) satisfaction and inspiration in a variety of forms. These developments will be discussed in this article by analysing select periodically held Qur'ān circles. Focus will be given to the gatherings and their participants as well as to the knowledge conveyed during the sessions and the informal discussions that occur. The lens applied is an anthropological one, with an element of Islamic and Gender Studies. These different approaches are merged together in order to acknowledge the complexity of social issues that require multifaceted methodology.

I will briefly describe the political and religious situation in Egypt in the periods when I conducted my fieldwork, as this is important in order to understand the implications of these Qur'ān circles. In 2011, political and social dynamics erupted that ultimately led to Egypt coming under a strict military rule that controls and defines all spaces of civil life, including religion (as well as social media). Alexandria, being the second largest city in Egypt with approximately 5 million inhabitants, plays a significant role in the structure by which politics and religion influence the public sphere. The majority of its population is Sunni Muslim, while roughly 10% are Coptic Christians. Among the Muslim population are members and followers of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, many of these have been imprisoned, and those who are still⁶ part of the Brotherhood act in secret and have gone underground. Some members

³ I will discuss other – non-conformist, atheist and agnostic – experiences in a forthcoming publication (Franke forthcoming a).

⁴ In the context of all those who are different and who deviate from the acceptable path within social limits, the other is something that allegedly does not even exist, and yet poses a threat to structures in society that currently form a binding social and cultural codex. Punishment is politically proclaimed and legally prosecuted. This phenomenon can be called “cultural flickering”. Cf. Sanyal (2009), see also Amr Ezzat: On the Precarious ‘Non-existence’ of Egyptian Atheists. *Mada Masr*, 11 December 2018 (<https://madamasr.com/en/2018/12/11/opinion/u/on-the-precarious-non-existence-of-egyptian-atheists/>).

⁵ This term was coined by Christoph Bochner, Martin Engelbrecht and Winfried Gebhardt (2009:31ff.).

⁶ I say “still” because the Muslim Brotherhood has been forbidden since the ousting of then-President Mursi during the military coup in 2013 which led to the presidency of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi (in power since 2014, re-elected in 2018). It has also been declared a terrorist organization. See “Egypt’s Police Stop Terror in Track, Arrest 6 Muslim Brothers in Alexandria.” *Albawaba News*, 16 September 2018 (<https://www.albawaba.com/news/egypts-police-stop-terror-track-arrest-6-muslim-brothers-alexandria-1186676>).

play a role in the public sphere without being identifiable as members of the Brotherhood. Others do not hide their membership, but still try not to attract attention. The current military regime's strict control over the public sphere, and sometimes even the private sphere via social media, has made members tend to act in secret and be more careful when wearing or saying things that would make it easy for others to recognise them as part of the Muslim Brotherhood. Other groups include the Salafiyīn, who are also not welcomed by the ruling regime, but are not as strictly prohibited as the Muslim Brotherhood, since they do not participate so actively in politics. By means of oppressive behaviour, the regime tries to control religious developments and dynamics in Egypt. Mosques and other public spaces are meticulously controlled, making it impossible for anything deviant from the 'mainstream' to be publicly visible or audible. This is intended to stem every possible act of 'otherness'.

From 2016 to 2019 I carried out extensive fieldwork among Muslim 'middle-class milieus' in Alexandria on the subject of individual piety, more precisely the search for individual (non-)religious identities. In doing so, I came across many different understandings of and approaches to the terms "religion" and "belief". "Religion" shall thus be understood as distinct from "being religious" and from "doing being religious". As the following quote by Bruno Latour suggests, belief and religion can be conflicting notions: "Belief has eaten up the originality of religion" (Latour 2019:31). What they mean in everyday life is not necessarily what is written in books and what scholars might suggest. Rather, they carry emotions with them, and are subject to a wide range of interpretations. My aim here is not to find a definition for religion, but to discuss how piety, belief and religiosity are (or are not) part of individuals' lives, and how these concepts and their corresponding practices shape and define identities. Moreover, I intend to discuss how religiosities and non-religiosities are not just an individual matter, but also a social and 'material' matter that manifests in many different but equally constitutive forms and media (e.g. in symbols, rituals, religious and other institutions or texts). Abdulkader Tayob highlights that thinkers from the 19th century did not focus on the individual Believer-God relationship necessarily, but rather on the development of society by means of religion as a new model.⁷ The personal was pushed to the background in favour of social and political issues. Today, the focus on the individual in terms of religion is back on the agenda, though at the same time we do not lose sight of society and its developments in general. In my research, it became clear that personal needs are prioritized when it comes to the subject of religion and religiosity and that the revitalization of Islam is a creative process to which the individual is dedicated.⁸

⁷ For a historical overview of the term religion and thoughts leading to its various definitions and creative transformations among select Muslim thinkers, see Tayob (2009).

⁸ I prefer the term "revitalization" over "revival/revivalism". Especially in the case of Islam, it is misleading to speak of a revival that can be observed since the end of the 20th century, as a revival can only take place if something has essentially vanished, which was not the case for Islam in Egypt or otherwise. Revitalization refers more concretely to the fact that Islam was on the decline, but became important again in daily life, albeit in a modified form.

In the present case of Qur'ān circles, I argue that this analysis is closely related to negotiating the self. Thus, it is not about finding out the essence of religion or the true meaning of Islam, but rather highlighting the different intimate perceptions and individual interpretations of what Islam can mean for oneself, and how this understanding can change according to time and space. The particular individual situation of each person I spoke to, including their background, upbringing, knowledge, education, age and social status, informed their interpretation of the notion of religion. My focus on these highly individual and intimate understandings of the term must be viewed in relation to the more public and politically informed understanding of religion – at least in the case of Egypt. Here, it is state Islam and the influence of authoritative institutions on the interpretation of religion that are decisive. While Saba Mahmood describes non-agency in her study on the women's piety movement in mosques in Cairo (see Mahmood 2005), my research on the Qur'ān circles focuses on the opposite, namely the (conscious) agency of my interview partners, who are very much aware of their own personal definition of what it means to be religious.

I thus contest the opinion by well-known scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Talal Asad. Individual agency is absent in their understanding of the term "habitus"; they might acknowledge it in relation to active processes, but they subordinate these under discursive orders or tradition, discourses and practices coined by Islamic theology (Mahmood 2005: 14; Bourdieu 1984: 466; Asad 1993: 75–76; cf. also Mellor and Shilling 2014). Instead, with reference to Margaret Archer, I argue that the habitus cannot be enough of a category to understand individuals and their lives, since these individuals must inevitably participate reflexively in the current global dynamics (Mellor and Shilling 2014 as well as Archer 2012). However, contrary to Archer, I still consider habitus to be relevant in reflecting on social contexts, since it can shed light on behavioural patterns, though I do so without denying the agency of individuals (Archer 2012: 1).

In the context of self-pietization, this is in line with Thomas Csordas, who further develops Irving Hallowsell's argument of the self as an object in a world of objects by "taking full cognizance of the constant reconstitution of the self, including the possibilities not only for creative change in [...] societies, but for varying degrees of self-objectification cross-culturally" (Csordas 1990: 6). He continues, with reference to Marcel Mauss, that "all humans have a sense of spiritual and corporal individuality. [...] [While] the paradigm of embodiment has as a principal characteristic the collapse of dualities between mind and body, subject and object. [...] Here again we find the themes of perception and practice as domains of the culturally constituted self" (Csordas 1990: 7).

The Circles

“Islam is a religion that requires constant awareness and practice, in the sense of acquiring and practising knowledge. It is too complicated to just sit and read the Qur’ān by ourselves – the language and the content need explanation. This is why we are here, why I am here.”⁹ With this statement from one of the participants, the floor was opened for a vibrant group discussion. This occurred towards the end of one of the circles that I attended, when the participants agreed to join me in a group discussion about why they attended this Qur’ān circle. However, before we discuss the subject in its full complexity, allow me to introduce the circles in more detail.

During the years in which I carried out my fieldwork, I had the chance to regularly take part in three Qur’ān circles. Two of these circles were held in the morning and restricted participation to women only. They were organized by my friend Nour, who initially hosted one of them, and hosted both of them towards the end of my last year.¹⁰ A female teacher, Haneen, lectured at both of them. The other circle I participated in was held in the evenings and was a mixed-gender group¹¹ for couples. However, it was also possible to attend if one’s spouse was not able to come due to illness or family responsibilities. This circle was led by a male lecturer, with the participants taking it in turns to host each week.

Happening off the beaten track, these circles are not yet clandestine in nature, but are nonetheless unofficial religious gatherings in the private space. The space in which they occur is private, as the meetings take place in the homes of the hosts. It is closed, as new participants can only attend by invitation. It is semi-religious, as it is not a formal religious space such as a mosque. As such, these three characteristics – semi-religious, private, closed – can form a new category, allowing us to define these spaces as intimate spaces. Since definitions of the term “intimate” focus mainly on the body and sexuality, or on architecture, I have tried to define it according to the phrasing used by my interview partners. For the participants, these intimate spaces offer a safe space where they can express emotions and ideas without the fear of rejection or judgement. In intimate spaces it can be possible to ask questions and show vulnerability (in the sense of ignorance, uncertainty or doubt about an issue or about oneself in ways that might feel have obvious answers) that might not be possible in public or semi-public spaces. Other categories that describe spaces outside of the private/public dichotomy and can be applied here are “sacred” and “secret”.¹² The former because the circles deal with Islam and the Qur’ān, and thus turn the whole environment into a sacred space, where

⁹ Statement by Sara during group discussion on 6 June 2017.

¹⁰ My friend offered to host the other morning circle due to renovation works at the previous host’s house.

¹¹ “Groups” are understood here as processes that underlie various influences. In this sense, Islam should be understood as being entangled with culture: religious, social, cultural and political dynamics are intertwined.

¹² Regarding the development of various kinds of spaces (private, public, intimate etc.) see Madanipour (2003).

participants can also leave the lecture to pray (in the same private home). The latter is because it is not publicly announced and because one can only attend upon invitation and recommendation. These invitations are usually expressed orally to friends and acquaintances considered worthy of participating in the circles. The invitation has to be approved by the host. Upon approval, the host accepts the new “member” by adding them to the corresponding WhatsApp group. This digital “membership” allows for straightforward communication about the date and time of the next lesson and its topics. It also allows for a shared feeling of belonging to a (virtual) group. Additional religious knowledge (i.e. in addition to the content of the lessons) is exchanged via these groups, such as religious videos, videos by famous religious figures, quotes from the Qur’ān and ḥadīth, prayers, religious sayings and reminders, as well as religious wishes and congratulations related to religious feasts, etc. All of the aforementioned categories can be used to describe the circles, but the applicability of each label also depends on who is present, who I am talking to, and what kind of meaning that person bestows upon the gathering (i.e. Sinnstiftung).

A quick note on the seating arrangements in the Qur’ān circles: I call them “circles” because the attendees sit in a circle facing the teacher. This was the case for both morning classes. In the evening classes, the seats were arranged either in a circle or in lines (also facing the teacher) depending on the architecture/space of the house that was hosting that session. Academic literature also generally refers to these courses as circles. The term circle also connotes a gathering that is private and exclusive – not open to the public, but only to select members or participants. The Arabic term used by my fellow students was *dars* (used in the singular, although it should correctly be the plural *durūs*), and when inquiring as to whether the lesson would be taking place, they would ask: “*andinna Qur’ān il-nahārda?*” Some of the participants would (always) be late, which would be only remarked upon if it required the usual time allowance for latecomers to be extended to an excessive degree. About thirty minutes spent waiting for fellow participants would be accepted, which also allowed time for clarifications and discussions regarding this upcoming lecture, last week’s lecture, or anything off topic. Throughout my research I came across various understandings and concepts of time, carrying with them the notions of memory and generation. Everyday concepts of time often correlated with religiously interpreted and lived concepts of time. In the lectures, time would not only play a role in terms of coming late or having to leave early, but also in relation to prayer and fasting or when to put on the veil, and even in discussions about concepts of afterlife. Regarding the latter, most of my interview partners made mention of the questions asked upon death about what one has been doing during their lifetime with their health, their youth and their time.¹³

¹³ In ḥadīth these questions are posed in the passive form, indicating that everyone will be asked by God on the day of resurrection what one has done with his/her lifetime, with his/her knowledge, with his/her wealth (everything one owns materially and immaterially, what one spent it on and where one got it from), and finally with his/her body. Regarding the concepts of afterlife see Franke (2015: 211–220) and Smith and Haddad (2002).

The circles can be characterized in the following three dimensions. First, the social dimension, i.e. gathering, networking, chatting. Second, the religious dimension, i.e. rituals, knowledge, practice (although knowledge is at the intersection of both the social and religious dimensions). And finally, the material dimension, i.e. food, fashion, religious texts, and design/architecture of the private space.

It should be highlighted that the knowledge in the written text (which was originally an oral tradition) can only be understood with the aid of oral commentaries, interpretations and explanations from a shaykh – someone who has gathered religious knowledge surrounding the Qur’ān within himself/herself, ready to share with anyone who wants to know about the book of secrets.¹⁴ The usual method involves recitation combined with conveying the knowledge afterwards, but this was not applicable in the Qur’ān circles I attended. There, the focus was on transmission of knowledge alongside recitation on a voluntary basis. Those who wanted to recite were welcome to, while those who did not want to, or had not practised enough, did not have to. The Qur’ān and ḥadīth would also be taught together, or at least one after the other. This was necessary, according to the teachers, because the overall context of the Qur’ān can only be understood if the surrounding circumstances and historical contexts are included. As Angelika Neuwirth puts it, it is “accessible only through the lens of traditional Islamic exegesis” (Neuwirth 2010: 143). The written is not self-explanatory; it needs complementary sources, such as the oral explanations provided in the Qur’ān circles, to be understood. But with the oral comes interpretation, and with interpretation comes influence, leaving the door open for manipulation, doubt, fear, insecurity, dominance and power.¹⁵

While spaces such as these offer a platform for religious agency within and outside the circles, the participants themselves are subject to transformation in what I call self-pietization. This is in contrast to the term Sana Chavoshian uses in her article about female pious circles in Iran, namely “self-spiritualization”, coined by Spencer Trimingham (Chavoshian 2017). All of the participants of the circles I attended were, according to their self-perception, spiritual – or, to be precise, religious – in one way or another. All of them were seeking to be “pious” or “more pious” and to be a “better Muslim” in general. I thus use the term self-pietization in order to highlight that the participants’ religious agency is consciously chosen, and that they are aware of both their own religious agency and their desire to improve their piousness. As a term, self-pietization confirms this agency and the motivation for development or betterment. I argue in line with François Gauthier that this trend of “religious individualization is not narcissistic but intrinsically tied to corresponding social forms, i.e. social interactions and communities.” (Cf. Gauthier 2014: 268).

Processes of self-pietization are essentially very individual, but nonetheless we cannot ignore the social environment of groups, communities and families. Indeed,

¹⁴ For more on the subject of orality and the Qur’ān see Graham (2003).

¹⁵ Cf. on the meaning and interpretation of the Qur’ān among others Neuwirth, Marx et al. (2008) and Wadud (1999).

these should also be highlighted, as individuals serve as multipliers for other individuals. The knowledge and piousness that individuals acquire does not go unnoticed by others and can cause a reaction in them, which might take the form of approval, opposition, imitation, ignorance or indifference. Self-pietization has an effect on one's religious identity by either fostering or transforming it through regular religious practice and the acquisition of deeper religious knowledge. In turn, it is reflected in one's love of God, oneself and the community. Equally, however, these processes reflect the dominant system of values in the relevant parts of society at that point in time. One's own religiosity is being mirrored, reassessed and judged according to this value system – from the inside and the outside. Though believing is invisible in and of itself, as are degrees of belief or non-belief, these can become visible to others to a certain extent via embodied practices such as praying, fasting or veiling/dress code.¹⁶ These are subjectively understood and valued, so attempting to objectively analyse the mind-body dualism can pose considerable problems for the researcher, i.e. in identifying and differentiating between them.

The topics addressed differed in all three circles and were highly dependent on the participants and their needs. In the first morning circle in particular (the one that was transferred to my friend's house due to renovation works), the level of religious knowledge was very low, and the participants would often ask the teacher to clarify terms and explain the hidden meanings behind passages from the Qur'ān. In some cases, if the teacher could not make the student understand, my friend Nour would offer to explain using different words or vivid examples from everyday life. The sessions typically began with Qur'ān recitation, followed by Qur'ān interpretation and corresponding ḥadīth. The latter was often in the form of a story that led into a group discussion. Most of the participants told me that the Qur'ān is impossible to understand without clarifying interpretations, especially for those with little religious knowledge and little experience of practising and living Islam. The participants' level of knowledge would always influence the discussions, and their everyday concerns and problems would often inspire the subject of the weekly discussion. The discussion would often focus on al-kabā'ir, the biggest sins. One of these is the consumption of alcohol, which in many families is considered ḥarām (religiously forbidden) and thus is not tolerated:

“Recently, alcohol is increasingly part of wedding ceremonies alongside the water and juice bottles, previously the only drinks offered. I don't approve of this. And I don't drink alcohol. But I also don't understand why this must be part of the weddings of young people nowadays?”¹⁷

My friend Nour is very unhappy about these “new” developments: “I only have two wishes for my children – to pray regularly and not to commit any of al-kabā'ir”.¹⁸ These

¹⁶ Unless these practices are carried out in order to camouflage non-belief or different forms of belief.

¹⁷ Interview with Nour, 19 April 2017.

¹⁸ Cf. “Kabīra” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8735). Among these

sins, said to be the major ones, “bring[s] down divine anger and punishment [...], but on the other hand, [they] nevertheless remain[s] within the operative sphere of the divine mercy.”¹⁹ Drinking alcohol has become a fashionable trend among the upper middle-class milieu, and Nour considers this a sign of the devaluation of religion, even a sign that the world is approaching its end. Here we find ourselves in the middle of a heated discussion – one that grows even bigger and more emotionally intense in light of all the other negative developments occurring both in Egypt (President al-Sisi is the manifestation of bad political decision-making; the deterioration of religion is obvious when looking at the behaviour of people “in the street”) and worldwide (Israel is continually blamed for the political situation in the wider Middle Eastern region; Trump is considered evil incarnate).

Haneen, the lecturer at the women-only circles, was azharī-trained, married with three children and in her early 30s. She was well prepared for the lectures and flexible regarding the topics of discussion. Her handwritten material was copied and distributed among the participants at the beginning of each lecture. She combined quotes from and references to Qur’ān and ḥadīth in her handouts. During the lectures, we usually sat in a circle around a large dining table with and juz’ (parts, excerpts) from it in the centre, accessible to everyone, along with paper and pens for us to take notes.

Hājj Ahmed, the lecturer of the mixed-gender evening circle, was a self-made shaykh with solid religious knowledge. He was a former marine officer, in his late 60s/early 70s, and married with children. He did not provide any written or printed material, but rather had his lectures prepared on a tablet that he put on a desk next to him. I never had a chance to get a glimpse at the screen of his tablet. He, like Haneen, would start with a qur’ānic reference and subsequently recount a related story from the aḥādīth, followed by a lecture about everyday issues – though sometimes it was the other way around, and he would start with the lecture, which was often triggered by a question from the audience or an unsolved issue from the previous session. There were usually no group discussions, but questions were allowed during the lectures. In these gatherings, we sat in a circle facing the lecturer. There was no Qur’ān available and nobody took notes. Some had difficulty staying awake after a long day of work, while others listened attentively. All unveiled women were asked (“out of respect”, according to my friend Shams) to veil during the lecture – including me. Although the shaykh saw us unveiled before and after the lecture, we each covered our hair with a loose scarf prior to the lesson.

The socio-economic backgrounds of the participants placed most of them in the ranges of the middle- and upper middle-class milieu. The participants not only had

sins are shirk (worshipping anything besides Allah), despairing of Allah’s mercy, not obeying one’s parents, zinā’ (adultery), theft, consumption of alcohol, gambling, speaking ill of someone who is absent, not praying ṣalāt, black magic, killing, etc.

¹⁹ Wensinck and Gardet (2012) define khaṭī’a as “apostasy from the faith, kufr and shirk, insults to the Prophet, fornication and adultery, sins against nature, murder, usury and black magic; very often, the use of fermented liquors, theft on a serious scale, and flight from the battle field, are added to these.”

the motivation to come, but also the financial freedom to be able to spend two to three hours per week away from work. Some of the women participants did not work at all, while some who did could make time for the circles on their work days (due to being self-employed or because their work allowed for flexible hours) and others came on their days off. Also, the hosts of the morning circles were well-off and had spacious homes (Arabic: sg. *bait*, pl. *buyūt*), in most cases referring to an owned flat; renting properties is not very common among these milieus in Alexandria) with enough space to host the gatherings, and had enough money to offer delicious food (usually prepared by a private cook or ordered from well-known restaurants) for all participants. In the evening circles, the socio-economic make-up looked slightly different. All participants acted as hosts in turn, which meant that everyone would offer their house to the others and would be responsible for preparing food. These circles took place in the evenings to allow for the husbands to participate as well. Most of the couples had small children, which meant that someone had to babysit them. In this social milieu, it is very common to have a live-in nanny (mostly from sub-Saharan Africa or South-East Asia), making it possible for both parents to leave the house together. The husbands often worked long hours; the tendency of some of them to fall asleep during the lectures showed their state of exhaustion.

The houses I saw at both the morning and evening circles had rather decorative interiors. We usually sat in the reception area of the house or at a large dining table. At many of the meetings, a maid would open the door and welcome me inside. All of the houses had one or more references to Islam on display. A richly ornamented Qurʾān was placed on a small table in the reception area for all family members and guests to read, or a frame on the wall held religious sayings from the prophet Muḥammad written in calligraphy or sūras from the Qurʾān. Prayer rugs might be casually hung over the armrest of a chair. These references hinted at the fact that in the private realm there is always a space for the religious ritual of ṣalāt. While the ṣalāt can be carried out anywhere in the house (except for the bathroom), usually each family/household has defined spaces for prayer facing towards al-Kaʿba in Mecca. These spaces are often in the private living room or each family member's own bedroom. Some families often pray together, while in others, each family member prays alone by themselves.

Most of the houses were furnished in a decorative style that is considered “colonial” and represents a French-European look from the 19th and early 20th century with the character of a museum. They typically had a reception area to welcome guests who were not part of the close circle of family and friends. Characteristic furnishings included antique tables, silver, couches and chairs, heavy curtains, carpets and paintings in golden frames. The cutlery and the porcelain, too, looked antique, and was in most cases. The atmosphere could be slightly surreal, because no actual everyday life would take place in the reception area; this was left to the private living room and the bedrooms. Children were usually at school or in bed at the time of the gatherings, so only the host, the lecturer, the participants and the maid(s) would be present. This was a representative space for others; everything looked beautiful and relatively untouched. Regardless of how small the flat was, there would always be a welcoming area

for strangers, a space that is used only on special occasions. Some other houses, albeit only a bare handful, were furnished in a more modern late 20th century style, with clear lines and colours and without antique furnishings. In those houses, too, religious references were exhibited in a similar manner as described above, and the same atmosphere was present.

What each of these houses had in common was that almost all the windows were always covered with curtains that made it impossible to look inside from the street or from neighbouring houses. These also made it impossible to look outside, and as such the circle gatherings took place in spaces actually closed off from the outside world – no interaction took place. When I asked about the tendency of people to live this way in their private houses, one of my young Egyptian interviewees, Ismael (who did not attend any of these circles) related that “we all live locked up in our houses, excluding the sun and fresh air completely; actually we live like cave-men. It is always dark and a bit stuffy in our houses. Windows are always shut; curtains are always drawn. Artificial light is switched on and if available the A/C is also switched on. Nature and neighbours, strangers are not supposed to get a glimpse of us in our own four walls.”²⁰ According to Ismael, this has to do with shyness, with fear of neighbours’ gossiping, with religion secluding women from the view of strangers (especially of male strangers), but it also has to do with preventing dust and heat from entering the house.

Most of the topics covered in the discussion portion of the meeting were prompted by either the previously read qur’ānic sūra or the corresponding aḥādīth. In some cases, it would relate to the current political or social situation. Since these circles always included breaks to eat during or after the lecture, food and cooking were central themes in the discussions. Other topics included the ṣalāt and the ritual washing, Ramaḍān/fasting, fashion/dress code, body modifications (such as beauty operations and tattoos), weddings, education (of the children), relationships/marriage, and gossip in its broadest sense. The latter was not necessarily about specific people, but more about a particular habitus (which can be related to dress code or behaviour). It also was not necessarily negative; it could likewise involve talking about this or that person in a favourable way – admiring their way of dressing, or praising how religiously active they are, e.g. in terms of almsgiving or putting on the veil. Veiling is understood here as a gendered embodied spatial practice that incorporates the entangled production of bodies and subjectivities.²¹ In these ways, current events were decisive in influencing the discussion.

However, my own presence in the circles also influenced the topics of discussion. My attendance was especially difficult in circle A (morning), which I attended from

²⁰ Interview with Ismael, 17 February 2017.

²¹ The discussion of the veil will be dealt with elsewhere (my forthcoming publication on the wearing and meanings of the veil, Franke forthcoming b). I will only remark here that in the last few years, especially since the shift in power from the Muslim Brotherhood to Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi, many women have taken off the veil or begun to strongly consider taking off the veil. Thus, women who start to put on the veil are rare nowadays, and if it happens it is talked about extensively.

the beginning of my field research. Towards the end of my first year of fieldwork in Alexandria, I asked the participants if I could hold a group discussion with them about the circle, why they came, what they expected from the group and how the gatherings affected them. They all agreed, and they also all agreed that I could record the discussion for easier recollection afterwards. Despite this, and despite my assurances of anonymity, they did not trust me anymore, and some of the women successfully managed to exclude me from the circle. After the summer break, I did not attend circle A anymore, and instead switched to circle B, as suggested by my friend Nour, who was also hosting this circle. When I inquired as to why they did not want me to participate in the gatherings anymore, Nour said that it was related to the recording, to my asking questions, and to my facial expressions showing emotions during the lectures. Ultimately it was a matter of trust, and I lost that trust because I am a researcher and because I asked questions and left the “safe space” of mere participant observation. This was the only occasion during my entire stay when I was obviously rejected and when trust became an issue that affected my work as an anthropologist.²² Here, my presence changed the setting and made some of the women feel uncomfortable. Another situation that highlighted obvious discomfort of one of the women was when the subject of the veil was being discussed, specifically whether or not it is *farḍ* (i.e. religious duty).²³ The woman, Maha, immediately asked the teacher not to discuss this issue, because she was definitely not going to put on the veil and did not want to hear that it was *farḍ*. The veil was not common in Maha’s upbringing, and neither was it common in her husband’s family; she preferred to ignore the debate about it in order to avoid being put in, or putting herself in, the situation of consciously deciding in favour of God (and putting on the veil) or against God (and refusing to put on the veil). In her case, ignorance was the best way to protect herself from making a difficult and potentially awkward decision (given the fear of facing rejection from both her family and her husband’s).

What Do Participants Bring to the Qur’ān Circle?

Those attending Qur’ān circles do not go there as empty subjects, ready to absorb as much information as possible. On the contrary, they come already filled with varying amounts of knowledge, and with personal issues that can trigger, guide or form part of the discussions. Most of the participants have at least a basic religious understanding, which they want to expand or simply verify in order to feel more comfortable in the

²² Trust was also an issue in many other situations, just not an issue that affected my work. The issue was usually that of why I work on the subject of religion, why I am interested in personal lives and opinions, etc. Some suspected me of being a spy (in a joking manner), but felt assured if I explained the fact that all data is anonymized and no real identities will be exposed.

²³ “Islamic law distinguishes the individual duty (*farḍ ‘ayn*), such as ritual prayer, fasting, etc., and the collective duty (*farḍ kifāya*), the fulfilment of which by a sufficient number of individuals excuses the other individuals from fulfilling it, such as funeral prayer, holy war, etc.”, cf. Juynboll (2012).

routines of religious rituals. Those with profound knowledge about Islam also attend the circles to deepen their understanding and for reassurance in more detailed aspects of and questions about the religion. In circle A (morning) and circle C (evening) the knowledge was usually fairly basic; in the evening circle, at least one of the married couples did not have a deep religious background and wanted to foster their knowledge by attending. In circle B (morning), the understanding of Islam among the female participants was usually at quite a similar, substantial level. Here, the discussions and questions would go into great detail, with philosophical debates about particular topics. This especially included questions of how to improve the overall situation in Egypt and how everyone can participate in making the lives of the marginalized less precarious. Characteristic of the Qur'ān circles, all three of them, was the production of knowledge and the associated power relation in a Foucauldian sense. Identity formation and feelings of belonging occurred within these circles as well, as did demarcation based on religious positions and from the teacher or other participants. Being part of a group of others who have the same or similar thoughts, who dress and act in a similar way, can induce the feeling of belonging to a group and also foster a sense of religious belonging to a Muslim community.

“How people choose to identify themselves is important because labeling is imposing a definition. One either lives up to or down to a standard when a label is used because the label denotes value. Some things are known about how labels emerge and how they work to define groups, but not much is known about how groups come to define themselves. Nevertheless, labeling is a process that defines ‘in groups’ and ‘out groups,’ the normal and the ab-normal, the legitimate and the deviant. Labeling is subjective. It not only reflects group values, but it also gives a framework for understanding. There are, however, dangers attached to labeling. One of them is stereotyping, making generalizations about a group with insufficient knowledge. The danger lies in the fact that there is usually a very small bit of truth that gets amplified and extended as reality” (Blea 1995: 5).

Although Irene Blea in her study among Chicano communities does not account for the non-dichotomous aspect of these “in groups” and “out groups”, which I consider highly important, not least because there are many more possibilities than simply belonging or not belonging to a community (such as being half-in, half-out, being in or out purely as a cover, etc.), I still find her point that labelling is subjective to be very accurate, as has been argued above.

At the same time, participating in the Qur'ān circles also evokes the atmosphere of being accepted by God through faith and through striving to be a better Muslim. Here, the notion of *niyya* (Wensinck 2012) should be highlighted. It has a historical meaning that links the notion to Islamic *sharī'a* and makes it necessary for the *niyya* to be clearly acoustically or spiritually expressed before carrying out the act of *'ibādāt* (Bousquet 2012). While legal opinions differ greatly regarding these acts, the only act that most scholars agree on necessitating *niyya ex ante* is the ritual prayer, the *ṣalāt*. While the *niyya* must be expressed before the respective act, it should also be carried out during the practice until its very end. “So the *niyya* has become a legal act of its

own. It is usually called obligatory, but in some cases, e.g. the washing of the dead, commendable” (Wensinck 2012). Hans Wehr translates *niyya* as “(good) intention, intent, design, purpose, plan, scheme; determination, will, volition, direction of will; tendency, inclination, desire” (Wehr 1958: 901). In this sense the *niyya* must be carried out by a Muslim who is in full control of their mental power; they must be familiar with the intended act and must have the intention to carry out this act. The notion of *niyya* is not mentioned in the Qur’ān but in canonical ḥadīth, and it has undergone a gradual development of its meaning that can be historically traced starting from the moral denotation of intention: “*innamā ’l-a‘māl bi ’l-niyya*”.²⁴ In this sense, the ritual act needs positive intention in order to be a morally and religiously accepted deed. However, the meaning has expanded to allow for a lack of evil intention to be considered *niyya* as well: “Good intention is taken into account by God [...], refraining from an evil intention is reckoned as a good work [...], the intention of the faithful is better than his work [...], *niyya* comes near to the meaning of *ikhhlās* [q.v.]” (Wensinck 2012).

This latter development of the meaning of *niyya* is how most of the participants of the circles understood it and how the lecturer Haneen explained it to us. In this context, it is important to highlight the two major religious positions that I encountered not only during the Qur’ān circles but also in almost all other situations, conversations and interview meetings, and in the large quantity of literature and grey literature I read on the topic of how to be a good Muslim.²⁵ There was usually a juxtaposition of the individual God-Believer relationship – which is untouchable – on the one hand, and society’s influence on this relationship on the other hand. A third component then comes into play, adding to this two-sided situation, namely what Nour described as “what you see out there in the street is not Islam.” This triangular relationship is complicated in itself, but other aspects complicate it still further. Most important of these are questions of doubt and insecurity in relation to God, society and the afterlife. This also ties into the collective memory and how it is negotiated in the discourse of individual belief systems. Here, underlying dynamics and changes depending on time and space play a role and reflect a process of exactly the aspects referred to above. Also key here is how individual religiosity can occur separately from politics or rather that individual religiosity does occur separately from politics. Most of the participants are perfectly aware of the, as Haneen put it, “original or pure” relationship, namely that “Islam is something between me and God”. This relationship implies that any outside opinion, influence, advice or doubt is not only unnecessary but actually wrong.

²⁴ Reference to *al-Bukhārī* in Wensinck (2012).

²⁵ Examples of such book titles are: *Being a Good Muslim*; *Educating Children in the Way of God*; *The Path to Paradise*; *Muslim Society*; *How to Fight the Evil*; *The Biggest Sins in Islam*; *Living a Good Muslim Marriage*; *The Prayer – How to Pray as a Muslim*; *The Book of Manners*; *Blessings of Marriage*; *How to Be a Good Muslim*; *The Stages of Heaven*, etc. Most of the books have colourful covers with paintings of and quotes from the Qur’ān. Those referring to paradise are depicted with heavenly iconographic references such as clouds or doves and even ladders or staircases.

When I asked Nour what she does, therefore, in the case of uncertainty regarding something written in the Qur'ān or in the ḥadīth, or when something she heard or saw somewhere caught her attention but she did not know how to assess it, she replied:

I follow my heart and I consult Qur'ān and ḥadīth and I try to find matching references. I might also consult someone like Haneen or even listen to a TV preacher like Mustafa Hosni. But in the end it is important what my heart tells me and I will ask God in my prayers and then take a decision upon the best of my knowledge. You know everyone tries to influence you or interfere in your life and also in your religious life, but it is none of their business. God does not appreciate this. What he appreciates though is difference in opinion and he encourages discussions with the freedom of interpretation left to each and every single one of us.

Since this needed some further clarification, I followed up by asking her: “Tab [so], what about those who interpret Islam in a very different, or rather, radical way, or those who are trying to oppress women in the name of Islam?” Her reply was very emotional, though at the same time she tried to focus on her understanding of Islam:

We shall not judge what others do. I can try to show them God's mercy and that he would not want any harmful acts to be carried out in his name, but in the end we are all free human beings responsible for ourselves and all the actions we do. It is upon God to judge, not upon me. So it is better to mind my own business and have a strong relation with God instead of finding mistakes in the actions of other people. What is wrong is wrong and he will correct the wrong on Judgement Day.

References to the afterlife and judgement day are a recurring theme in almost all the interviews I conducted and in almost all the gatherings of the Qur'ān circles. One can collect ḥasanāt through good deeds and good intention (*niyya*), according to Nour, “there is promise [of a life in paradise], we have to try and hope and believe in this”. I will continue discussing the subject of afterlife elsewhere.²⁶

Silences and Absences

Regarding the Qur'ān circles, it is important to also highlight that in many situations, topics were underlying and present yet remained hidden – topics that are silenced or absent (or rather made absent, intentionally or otherwise), expressed or not expressed. Difficult themes/taboo are social markers that constitute powerful forms of commu-

²⁶ See my forthcoming publication on notions of afterlife in contemporary Alexandria (Franke forthcoming c; cf. Franke 2020).

nication. In turn, voids in communication point to taboos in social relations. What, then, is the context for voids and taboos? They mirror grievances in society or in the respective community. According to Molly Andrews, it is necessary to differentiate between counter-narratives/counter-stories as opposed to master narratives. The former are narratives “which people tell and live, which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (Andrews 2004: 1). The latter are dominant cultural storylines and are the lens through which we view the stories of ourselves and others.

Problems occur as soon as one cannot identify with the master narrative anymore as one’s own experience does not harmonize with the master narrative. Consequently, the basis on which the dominant storyline was developed is questioned and poses a challenge. With the creation and circulation of (individual yet often community-wide) counter-narratives, counter-realities are produced and validated. The relationship of counter-narratives to master narratives is a close and conditional one; still, it is not a dichotomous relationship but rather one with blurred boundaries where the two can even merge. Identifying master narratives and counter-narratives as such is a fairly difficult task; it depends not only on the perspective of the storyteller but also on the researcher’s attitude towards the various narratives. Another factor which should be considered is the role of the reader/listener and the personal perspective from which they read the story. The researcher is also required to pay “attention to the interactional situation in which the narrative is produced [as it] helps to explain the ways in which speakers perpetuate or resist dominant cultural storylines.” (Jones 2004: 169; cf. Franke 2015: 207–209).

The aforementioned case of Maha serves as an example, as her counter-narrative remains silent – which does not disqualify it from being a counter-narrative per se, since narratives can also be silent, or even silences themselves be narratives. This only makes it more difficult to identify them. Maha does not want to speak about the veil, which reflects her own inner unease regarding the issue itself, but also that it is a highly contested issue related to religion, society, culture and tradition. She prefers not to talk about it in order to avoid exposing herself to critique or to encouragement to put on the veil. By means of the taboo – by being silent about the veil – she protects herself from socially and religiously based arguments. Although the community surrounding Maha is very much in favour of the veil and considers it to be *farḍ*, she does not want to put it on, and thus chooses to remain silent and, in fact, asks everyone around her to also remain silent about it. Not talking about the veil and thereby labelling it a taboo – at least in the space of the Qur’ān circle – enables her to keep her own personal opinion without allowing other perspectives to enter her realm of interpretation and plant a seed of doubt in her consciousness. She uses the taboo as a barrier, as a protective shield for her own personal well-being.

In a different situation, one participant, Iman, tried to avoid the subject of alcohol. This explicitly does not refer to the subject of drinking alcohol, as this is something all of the women unanimously agreed on to be *ḥarām*. It rather concerns situations where

one is exposed to others drinking alcohol, such as the aforementioned weddings or, in Iman's case, the numerous work meetings she attends.

In ALL of the work meetings I go to alcohol is being served and everyone accepts it. Even I accept it although I do not drink and although I am even veiled. I think it has become more common in the past years. But then again it is not upon me to leave a work meeting just because the other business partners drink. It is none of my business. I consider it wrong, *ḥarām*, but what they do is their choice.

Iman did not say this out loud in front of the other women; rather, since she was sitting next to me, she spoke in a lowered voice and made me understand that she disagrees with the others' outrage at the presence of alcohol at various events. In her opinion, the motto live and let live should be applied more widely in Alexandria: "people are wasting a lot of time and effort and energy on focusing on the lives of others instead of just following God and themselves." Both Iman and Maha prefer not to follow the majority; instead, they act differently. This difference is in line with mainstream religious understanding, though the degree to which it is in line remains open to debate.

Amongst the Qur'ān circle participants, three positions prevail with regard to their religious belief systems. First, those who seek to foster the religious knowledge they have acquired previously or elsewhere. Many participants attend with a thorough knowledge of Islam and want to be more confident in its texts and rituals. Those who have children, especially, want to have a deeper understanding of their religion in order to be able to pass it on to their offspring and answer their questions in a more nuanced way. Second, those who want to learn something new about Islam – aspects and understandings they were not aware of before. And third, those who attend in order to prove to themselves that they are different. They want to position themselves against the dominant knowledge and be confident about their varying, sometimes even opposing, position. While the first two positions are in line with the knowledge conveyed in the lectures, the third brings with it an awareness on the participant's part that they are not going with the mainstream religious flow. In some cases, these positions are lived and expressed consciously, while in other cases they happen unintentionally.

As mentioned earlier, there are many reasons for someone to attend these gatherings. The three positions listed above are in reference to the participant's specific religious position and its development, or potential for development, over the course of their attendance. It shows that most of the participants are open to change and ready to increase their knowledge, and to boost or "improve" themselves, in the sense of self-pietization. The minds and opinions of the attendees are permeable, and the lecturers (and even the other participants) are given the power to influence their state of knowledge. Thus, power is exercised here by means of knowledge.²⁷ To a limited extent this is even true for the third group of participants, those who contest the lectured knowl-

²⁷ Regarding the relationship between power and knowledge, see Foucault (1972) and Foucault (1982).

edge and the knowledge expressed by the other participants. This form of knowledge power (Wissensmacht) does not only remain within the circle, but can reach much further by way of the participants acting as multipliers and conveying their knowledge to others (e.g. family members, friends etc.). It can have a wide coverage, and this is where the boundaries of the circles are contested and transcended.

Boundaries are to be understood in terms of space, referring to both actual space and knowledge space. Knowledge traverses the confined space of the circles, which is being opened up through the movement of the participants in and out of the gatherings. Pre-existing knowledge is being reproduced, confirmed and manifested, while new knowledge is being produced and shared. Both forms of knowledge are conveyed and repeated in discursive practices. The Foucauldian concept that discourse consists of knowledge and power also holds true for the Qur'ān circles. Here, religious knowledge is a powerful element that also exerts power over the participants through its related discourse. Religious knowledge has an authoritative character in that it is directly linked to God and obedience, *ḥasanāt*, being a good Muslim if followed in the “correct” way (or what the lecturer and sometimes also the other participants consider as such), versus disobedience, being a bad Muslim if not followed in the suggested way. This “suggested” way can often turn into an enforced way, although many of my interviewees considered Islam to be a collection of options, where everything is possible – except for the belief in God and his prophet Muḥammad, as this is the most important aspect that makes one a Muslim and is undebatable. Thus, it is not only the lecturer and the other participants that can act as regulatory forces or correctives for Islam, but also Islam itself that is attributed with this power here, by depicting God as a punishing God and his followers as believers who are judged and put into the binary categories of good or bad followers. Within the lectures, freedom of belief is rather limited, and both the advice (spoken and unspoken) and the overall atmosphere suggest that one should adhere to the knowledge of the lecturer. Thus, choice is limited, as explained by Nour:

Even though God is the most merciful and it is upon him to judge us, there is a big chance that if we try to do everything the way He and prophet Muhammed [...] suggested, that we will be able to enter paradise. But if we do not strive to do as much good as possible then we do not know what will happen and this makes me and many others feel uncomfortable to have this knowledge about our religion and to have everything written in the Qur'ān and in the ḥadīth and still not follow his words. Especially if this is done deliberately. Those who do not know better, this is another story. But those who know all this about Islam and ignore it, this is I do not know, problematic.

In this sense, freedom of choice does not really exist in social life; it is abandoned in the face of the kind of emotional pressure that is exerted in the circles in a soft and sometimes hidden way. Nonetheless, it is present and part of the discourse.

The Psyche and the Lessons

Well-being, as Maha put it, is another mental and physical state that many of the Qur'ān circle participants seek, albeit not in the sense of standing out from the crowd, but by attending the lectures. Regarding this, another woman, Shams, said the following:

I come here because not only my body needs to exercise, which I do in the yoga classes, but my brain also needs to get training. The lectures are a perfect chance to let my mind work on something useful, something that gives me peace. This is my spiritual break from everyday life – very similar to praying actually. I give my mind spiritual input that keeps me going until the next gathering.

The reference here to “praying” needs further elaboration, as it has been mentioned in so many of the interviews with many different positions and intensities. People like Nour or Haneen who consider themselves to be “good” Muslims (as far as possible) told me that *ṣalāt*, i.e. the ritual prayer, is *farḍ* – a religious duty that is undebatable and mandatory for every Muslim; “[i]n the Qur'ānic universe in fact, there is no religion without prayer”.²⁸ The times at which one prays can vary, but the total of five prayers per day is a must for them. This was a recurring theme during the gatherings of both the morning and evening circles.

In this specific topical context, one of the issues was the question of whether a prayer would be accepted by God if the follower was not mentally in a state of prayer or was not spiritually connected to God because they were otherwise occupied by everyday matters such as work, family and friends – whether to go on this night out and what to wear, what to cook for the in-laws, or when to make time for the kids. Nour and Haneen had a very similar if not identical position in this regard. For them, it would be ideal for the believer to be in constant and direct connection with God basically all the time. However, if this is not possible, or is not the case for reasons such as not being used to it or being preoccupied with everyday life, then the *ṣalāt* should still be carried out to ensure that one does not get used to not praying. And, most importantly, the connection to God might form during the *ṣalāt*. As such, giving up on the *ṣalāt*, whatever the reason and whatever the circumstances, must always be a last resort if considered at all. Both women would always advise anyone to continue praying and to believe in the power of God, who is almighty, and – most importantly – to leave the judgement to him and not assume anything. The routine of praying should, according to them, not be interrupted unless it is for a valid reason, which may include the monthly break for menstruating women, as well as travel, sickness, and age-related difficulties. In all other situations, there is no excuse for not praying.

²⁸ Monnot (2012): “[...] the *ṣalāt*, principal prayer of Islam, forms part of the ‘*ibādāt* or cultic obligations. [...] In short, before becoming the obligatory and codified activity [...] prayer is first of all, and always remains so in the Qur'ānic vision of the world, the fundamental fabric of religious behaviour.”

God already made it easy for us due to the fact that he allows the prayers to take place within a certain time frame. He makes life easy for us, but he wants us to be dedicated to him and to give him this little attention. He is really not asking for a lot. And did you know that the five little breaks he offers to us as a present is a true gift? We have time to focus on him and to let go of all the worldly things that might annoy us. Through the routine of pre-prayer ritual washing [Arabic: *al-wuḍūʿ*] we keep ourselves clean during the day and we actually physically exercise five times a day like this. Many of the movements that we carry out during the prayer are similar to yoga positions and it is a healthy way to stay fit in the least of time. After the *ṣalāt* I am always much more attentive and if I was tired before, I am not tired anymore. God knows what is best for us and the *ṣalāt* is for sure one of his most precious gifts to us. Especially in these fast times we are living in at the moment, where everything is dominated by the internet, consumerism and competition. During prayer we can go back to our essential selves, the one true connection between us and God. If the connection is not felt immediately, it will come during prayer; maybe not the same day, but patience will tell it will come one day.

Nour is very confident here about the ritual effect of *ṣalāt* and how this improves the God-Believer relationship. For her, not praying means not only betraying God, but also betraying herself, or depriving herself of something divinely ordained and, simultaneously, divinely offered. It makes her happy to pray and to please God. In this sense, she connects to what Shams suggested earlier, i.e. that praying is “me time”, a moment of complete closure to the outside world that allows one to open up the heart.

In this sense, the ritualized *ṣalāt* should not be understood as a duty that needs effort and inner conviction, but one that connotes happiness and spiritual fulfilment, and where one worships of one’s own free will and experiences exclusivity and oneness. Being one with God, in the sense of having a pure relationship with him, is also reflected in the confined space of *ṣalāt*. It takes place on a prayer rug facing towards al-Ka’ba in Mecca. On this rug, the ritually purified believer assumes predetermined prayer postures and recites particular *sūras* depending on the time of the prayer. They enter a spiritual space of connection with God with the prior *niyya* of carrying out *ṣalāt*. This spiritual space is also a physical space – one that is also a sacred space in the sense that one would not interrupt the prayer unless it is an urgent matter. (Toddlers might start climbing on their praying parent, but this is usually accepted.) The unity of the believer during the prayer ritual, spatially confined and defined by the prayer rug, symbolizes an ideal state of spirituality. Inside this sacred space, the believer can let go of all problems and everyday concerns. The God-Believer relationship offers the latter a separate space where they can just “be” and not think about worries. In this sense, the spatial sanctuary is also a spiritual sanctuary, with the possibility of opening a space of social and mental peace. Within this space outside of time, the believer is offered new power to solve issues and to get back to everyday life with some distance and a fresh mind. As Haneen put it:

This is exactly what the divine relation to God should be like in an ideal setting, a revitalizing aspect in our lives, something that does not drain us but that refills our sources and triggers our brains and bodies to perform and to carry out good deeds. And this is why I tell my students and I teach my children to pray and to repeat this sequence of prayers five times a day, every day and not get lazy in praying. Actually, for me personally the *ṣalāt* is the most important thing in Islam. The *ṣalāt* is basically what Islam in its core is. Those who do not pray because they do not think it is necessary or those who are just lazy miss the biggest gift we received from God and I feel sorry for them.

The discussion of praying and not praying provoked an emotional debate within the circles that exemplified what was mentioned earlier regarding silences and absences in social interaction. While many religious debates are held with an assumption of freedom of interpretation and freedom from judgement, the perceived reality is often different. Participants feel too shy or even intimidated to express their real opinions, while those who appear to be very religious claim the power of interpreting Islam as their own – although they would not admit to this, as the last word is always up to God. Nonetheless, this creates a power hierarchy among the participants, leading them to remain silent or say things that do not match their own lives. For example, they might agree that *ṣalāt* is important despite not adhering to it themselves (by not praying at all, or praying less than the required five times). Sentiments of shame and fear thus dictate the oral (non-)participation in the circles. Samira told me after one of the sessions that:

I do not pray the five prayers every day. It is simply too much for me with the work and the kids. Some days I try to pray five times and I succeed but on other days I just forget or I remember because of the *aḍān*, even the prayer time apps on my phone which remind me to pray, but if I skip or postpone I sometimes forget. I really hope that God can forgive me. But I do not want the group to think I am a bad Muslim and to judge me because I am not such a conscientious worshipper. The dynamic in the gatherings can sometimes be rather intimidating and I feel shy, even scared to say something. Especially if it is not in congruence with the lecturer and the other good Muslim women there, those who do everything right and have nothing to fear.

Samira's sorrowful opinion offers an insight into the Qur'ān circles from another perspective, namely that the meetings consist of dynamics that do not make every attendee feel comfortable. Despite her reservations regarding some of the topics discussed, Samira still goes to the lectures regularly for social and spiritual reasons. By listening to the teacher, she has the feeling that her mind is enlightened and that her social position among the other women is stabilized and promoted, since most of them know

each other (or of each other) outside of the circles as well.²⁹ In these two respects she is empowered on both a religious and social level, with the limitation that she feels obliged to hide some of her sentiments from the other participants in order to avoid being marginalized, rejected, judged, indoctrinated or pitied.

The aforementioned notion of “me time” reflects the trend towards what I call an organic Islam that propagates a balanced life-work-religion/belief/practice relationship and hints at a post-conventional self-development.³⁰ “Me time” is no longer about the ego, but about a careful and mindful lifestyle that is compatible with the self and the community. With the revitalization of individual religion comes the awareness of how much religion is good for me, what I can do, what I have to do, and how I can put all these requirements in balance. At the same time, one must not forget the needs of the community, which is perceived to be an essential part of living an organic Islam that is focused on the here and now, yet aware of the afterlife and the necessities this brings with it. Religion is thus not only an individual but a social matter. Similar to clean eating, there is “clean Islam”, “cleansed Islam”, “detox Islam”, i.e. Islam without “bad” influences from ordinary people or scholars and doctrines.³¹ Despite the fact that global trends have the reputation of standardizing local specificities and propagating the mainstream, according to Theodore Bestor, “Globalization doesn’t necessarily homogenize cultural differences nor erase the salience of cultural labels. Quite the contrary, it grows the franchise” (Bestor 2000: 61). The trend is to live and practise a purified version of Islam – one that glorifies its cultural specificities while still being flexible enough for various local practices, and that only includes the aspects that fit the believers’ “way of religion” – is being fed by the promise of immortality in the afterlife. This concept is not meant to be a “light” version of Islam, but a sustainable one that highlights the cleansing of polluted versions of Islam; it is about a detox of the soul and the spirit. Organic Islam in this sense is soul food:

Emotional fulfilment is a welcome effect of practicing an ideal version of Islam; it helps to compensate for all the miseries and problems around us. And praying is the most visible aspects of our ritualized religion, so the more you pray

²⁹ Most of Alexandria’s middle-class milieu go to and meet at the same places or have kids who attend the same schools and sports clubs (after-school activities).

³⁰ The term “post-conventional self-development” was coined by the discipline of psychology and moral development. Moral development happens gradually according to different levels as coined by Lawrence Kohlberg (cf. Kohlberg 1996). The term “trend” concerns a spiritual topography that reflects global developments. As yoga and mindfulness seminars spread across the world, the idea of ‘organic Islam(s)’ is similarly becoming popular. Searching online, especially in relevant groups on Facebook, there is an increasing trend towards different, awareness-raising ways of being a Muslim believer, with ever increasing numbers of adherents.

³¹ Cf. on global food trends Kearney (2010). “Nowadays, many people do not believe in God anymore, but in health. What one used to do for God – pilgrimages, fasting – one now does for one’s health.” as Manfred Lütz, Psychiatrist and Theologist, stated 2017 in a radio interview (<https://www.domradio.de/themen/bist%C3%BCmer/2017-08-03/us-studie-religioese-menschen-leben-laenger> ; own translation). See also Wilk (2006) as well as Counihan and Van Esterik (2013) and Watson and Caldwell (2004).

the more fulfilled you are and the more appreciation and honour you receive from your peers,

explained Shams during one of our numerous car journeys throughout Alexandria. She went on:

it's about improving, maybe even tuning oneself and Islam in an individualized perfectionist version. About being different, different from the masses, who around us all claim to be Muslim. But we, as middle class, we want to be special, better, faster, richer, more beautiful and this is also true in terms of our belief. It has to do with identity and it can even become an obsession. Not in the sense of the Salafiyīn or the Qur'āniyyīn but in the sense of aligning one's life according to the individually believed principles.³²

Religion forms identity, and the way religion is practiced – and belief is embodied – becomes a way of life. But this optimized version does not only focus on the things the believer does but also on the things they do not do, i.e. their life conforms to a self-proclaimed religious diet. This form of self-pietization is indicative of many of the conversations I had with the women participating in the Qur'an circles. Religiosity is one aspect of life that can be optimized in order to get a better outcome (feel better, get more attention from peers, move one step closer to a higher level in paradise). It is also a domain which, according to these women, they are more or less in control of; from a religious perspective, nobody has the right to intrude on their individual believer space (though male members of the family may suggest and advise e.g. to pray or put on the veil). The women are in charge of designing their own God-Believer relationship and they are the ones holding the power in that regard.

Historicity and Trans-/Intertextuality

When religion and religiosity come into play, the question of historicity and intertextuality must be raised, especially in the context of social interaction and knowledge production. Concerning the notion of trans-/intertextuality – namely that a text consists of codes and discourses thus already having a social and historical dimension

³² This statement reflects not only the wish for self-pietization but also that being religious is a form of consumption, and that this consumption should be in alignment with oneself and the environment, i.e. a sustainable and healthy form of consumption (cf. Redden 2016). This trend was also identified and coined by Thomas Luckmann: "The new, basically de-institutionalized privatized social form of religion seemed to be relying on an open market of diffuse, syncretistic packages of meaning, typically connected to low levels of transcendence and produced in a partly or fully commercialized cultic milieu. The new situation permitted, even encouraged individual bricolage. Relying for its essential legitimations upon the modern myth of the autonomous individual, it had a pronounced elective affinity for the sacralisation of subjectivisms" (Luckmann 1996: 73).

while at the same time reflecting textual interplays within one text – Haneen explained this to her students:

The Qur’ān is God’s word that has been sent upon the prophet Muḥammad and that is universally valid. At the same time, it is a historical testimony of the period of his life and in combination with the ḥadīth and the Sunna we can understand Islam. In the Qur’ān there are also references to the Christian Bible and the Jewish Torah with similar stories in each of them, although we believe that Islam is the last and thus the most veritable version of these accounts.

Without using the terms, the lecturer here refers to the historicity and intertextuality of these religious sources. Haneen made a similar comment when the discussion turned to very modern, up-to-date topics such as fashion, specifically dress code, body modification (implants/cosmetic surgery, tattoos) and nail polish. According to Haneen and Nour, the best course of action should be interpretation of the relevant historical sources in combination with analysis of the current opinions of religious leaders (i.e. fatāwā), mixed with “the best of one’s knowledge and belief”. As Nour explained:

I consult different sources (aḥādīth) and religious persons and if they concur and my own knowledge tells me it is right, then I go with it. But if the aḥādīth differ and the religious persons also disagree and even argue about the issue, I choose to follow my heart. Mathalan, the nail polish issue that has come up recently: there is no corresponding religious source except that we should fulfil al-wuḍū’ prior to the ṣalāt. Now, many religious official persons have issued fatāwā regarding the nail polish with some saying it is ok, others saying it is not and others again saying ḥalāl nail polish is allowed. Now, the best of my knowledge and belief tells me that nail polish is wrong and my scientific knowledge doubts the functionality of ḥalāl nail polish. So what do I do? I consult my heart, I consult God and decide to be on the safe side by not using nail polish during ṣalāt.

Here, too, the historicity must be put in context – and again, in cases of doubt that are difficult to resolve clearly, consultation of one’s own heart is the last resort and the best possible option.

Individual Religion and Established Islam – A Powerful Relationship

Indeed, individual religion and its corresponding dynamics are often said to threaten established Islam, i.e. institutionalized Islam, the state Islam or the official Islam. In the case of Egypt, this would essentially be represented by al-Azhar and its religious

knowledge production institutions.³³ These institutions function in a centralized way. All scholars who claim to be Azhar-trained are required to have a certificate from al-Azhar University or one of its many branches throughout Egypt. This gives the scholars credibility, as al-Azhar is one of the most trusted religious institutions in Egypt (this is according to the participants of the circles; others I spoke with would have different opinions), while at the same time these scholars spread the intellectual position of al-Azhar and function as multipliers of its ideological perspectives. By means of its unique feature, al-Azhar is also interested in maintaining its exclusive position and making sure that its credibility is inviolable. Therefore, the standard of its religious knowledge must be guaranteed in order to maintain its position among so many other religious institutions, TV preachers and self-proclaimed scholars of Islam. Control is the mechanism that seems to be the most exploitable instrument for achieving this. In the case of Egypt, this means control in collaboration with the state and with the state's interests which concur with the interests of al-Azhar. Both the state and al-Azhar are actors with the same interests and agendas. They represent a community of interests with the same goal: to influence society. And this is the point at which the problem of private space comes into play. Private spaces can hardly be controlled at all, and the dynamics therein can be unexpected. Private space thus has the potential and the power to influence the religious realm of a society away from established and state-controlled Islam.

Despite this potential, I found that the three Qur'ān circles I attended were more or less congruent with the religious knowledge that al-Azhar and the state of Egypt promote. Yet, although the gatherings are not intended to be clandestine, since they take place off the beaten track, the state does not have a supervising instrument to trace these numerous lectures that are occurring throughout the country. Thus, even if the lecturers claim to be Azhar-trained, it does not necessarily mean that the knowledge they convey is always in line with the official tone. Moreover, the dynamics within the groups are unpredictable and depend on who is present and on the subject being taught, as well as on the developments within the discussion. This means that even if the lecturer is a graduate from al-Azhar, the participants also inform the other participants with their own backgrounds of knowledge that might not always be in line

³³ Cf. for a historical overview of al-Azhar: Hatina (2010) and for a contemporary analysis see Brown (2011). On the dispute about moral leadership in Egypt between the president and al-Azhar see Nathan Brown and Cassia Bardos: Power Politics or Principle. *Diwan – Middle East Insights from Carnegie Blog*, 12 December 2018 (<https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/77928>). On the ideology of al-Azhar in its teachings see Assem Hefny: Die islamische al-Azhar Universität in Kairo: Eine Frage der Interpretation. *Qantara.de*, 3 May 2017 (<https://de.qantara.de/inhalt/die-islamische-al-azhar-universitaet-in-kairo-eine-frage-der-interpretation>) as well as Ketchley and Biggs (2017). On the position of the Ahmed al-Tayyeb see Khalid El Kaoutit: Instrumentalisierter Glaube – Interview mit Al-Azhar Großscheich Ahmed al-Tayyeb. *Qantara.de*, 28 April 2015 (<https://de.qantara.de/inhalt/interview-mit-al-azhar-grossscheich-ahmed-al-tayyeb-instrumentalisierter-glaube>). On the general role of al-Azhar in Egypt see Hassan Hassan: In den Fängen der Politik – Rolle der Al-Azhar Universität in Ägypten. *Qantara.de*, 19 February 2013 (<https://de.qantara.de/content/rolle-der-al-azhar-universitat-egypten-den-fangen-der-politik>).

with the al-Azhar ideology. It is in the interest of al-Azhar and also of the state to control the religious education landscape of Egypt as much as possible, not only for the promotion of their own concepts but also (primarily) in order to fight radical Islamic interpretations, specifically (according to them most importantly) the Muslim Brotherhood and salafī oriented groups. As a consequence, they train as many lecturers as possible and send them even to more rural areas to promote their perceived moderate version of Islamic knowledge and their definition of what Islamic knowledge is, thereby “refashioning [...] ideas and [...] stabilizing [...] identity narratives” (Zeghal 2010: 107).

This influence of religious ideals has two sides to it. The first is the educational aspect, i.e. spreading a mainstream, moderate form of Islam. The second is the controlling aspect, i.e. preventing other forms of religious knowledge from taking root in the diverse social landscape of Egypt. Aware of the difficulty of gaining access to the confined spaces of the private space, their chosen method is to outnumber other lecturers and make use of the state-funded advertisement industry. Financial support allows for the publication of religious material that can be distributed throughout the country in the form of printed books, booklets, sheets and audio material (CDs and tapes). It allows for the establishment of informational centres and bookstores, as well as for audio channels on the radio, broadcasting of TV lectures, and online webpages with informative content and the option of engaging in question and answer sessions. Thus, a whole apparatus of religious knowledge production exists that not only informs the public space but tries to also enter and influence the private space.

It must be stated, however, that the Qur’ān circles I attended in Alexandria do not have the intention of resisting state-informed Islam; on the contrary, they consider themselves to swim along the same river of religious knowledge that al-Azhar and the state do. At the same time, this trend towards individual religiosity that takes place off the beaten track and outside of official influences has elements that are critical of both the regime and society. While power is part of this relationship, it is not necessarily exerted and made use of; in some cases even the awareness of such a power relation is absent. Examples include discussions about the deterioration of the economic situation in Egypt and accompanying rise in social disparities. Critical comments were regularly made on this topic, and the regime was blamed for the current conditions. Critique would also be expressed towards radical/fundamental religious opinions, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic State.³⁴ I highlight here that the development and processes of rising individual religiosity do not necessarily mean approval of a current status quo, but rather that individual religiosity can hint towards critical dynamics of various spheres, be they political, social, religious, economic, etc. This does not contradict the

³⁴ The Salafyyīn were usually not part of this critique; they were classified by my friend Mona “to be strictly religious – which is their choice, but they do not harm anyone and do not have open political interest as al-ikhwān.” Especially in the cases of non-conformist religious knowledge circles, this awareness is very present and the relevant power relations play a decisive role. Cf. my forthcoming publication on religious non-conformity in Alexandria (Franke forthcoming a).

aspirations critical voices had post-2011; on the contrary, critique from within Muslim religious perspectives can be even more influential in the long term than secularist tendencies that can be exposed to more headwind from various directions.

Conclusion

Most people confirm or transform their religious identities on a regular basis to varying degrees. The Qur'ān circles grant each participant a knowledge space that allows for exactly that negotiation of their own religious identity – to maintain and foster it, to value or balance it, to question it, to realize it, to share it, to hide it, to discuss it. Within this realm, it is possible to express to the others who one is and how one wishes to be recognized. Thus, people develop as a product of knowledge hierarchies. The social and religious processes present in the circles highlight religious ideals and an ideal type of religious worshipper. At the same time, these ideals are connected to self-confidence and self-perception in relation to the other participants. Internal expressions and needs become intertwined with external perceptions. Religiosity and its varying degrees can thus become codes/representations of social order. It is a valuable asset and a virtue in and of itself that enables demarcation from and conformity with others. Moreover, self-pietization in the realm of religious agency is developed and improved via the circles. Most participants state that they can become “better Muslims” by attending the lectures and thus sculpt their own religious identity. Their individual development is a reflection of collective knowledge and religious interpretation. The setting of the Qur'ān circles is a powerful environment that can transform the individual and influence the group and the wider community through its dynamic character. Even though the gatherings are not intended to be clandestine, since they take place off the beaten track, the state does not have a supervising instrument to trace these numerous lectures that are occurring throughout the country.

As I have shown, the reasons for participating in such circles can be manifold, among them trends of individuality as demonstrated by the notion self-pietization – while keeping in mind that individual developments and identity transformations have, in this case, nothing to do with narcissistic individualization, but should rather be positioned in close proximity to social relations and societies. Other prominent motivating factors can be networking, fashion and habits, perceived peer pressure, or even gossip. As the intimate spaces of the lectures are closed and safe, they pave the way for the expression and non-expression of emotions; the said and unsaid in the Qur'ān circles is noteworthy, as has been highlighted above, since it reflects on the power relations and the intriguing effect of religion and religious knowledge on the body and mind. In the context of space, we speak of the architectural space – in the form of the site of the lecture – as both individual (belonging to the host) and private (as mostly beyond the gaze of a possible “public”), while from an emotional perspective these spaces are closed and safe as well. A third category would be “intimate”, which applies from both perspectives. If acquiring knowledge is the participant's motivating factor

for attending these Qurʾān circles, then they focus on the knowledge conveyed by the teacher. This comprises the written and oral knowledge and the corresponding interpretation. It is about the Qurʾān and ḥadīth but also about advice from the teacher regarding everyday issues such as education of one's children, marriage, social interaction in places where alcohol is being served, and so on. Usually the lessons include set topics from the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, but the teachers are open to incorporating the wishes of the participants; this is also the case in the discussions. In all these lectures and discussions, it became clear again and again that individual religiosity is closely linked to self-development and identity formation in the sense of self-pietization, while at the same time it does not focus on the ego but on a thoughtful, caring life that takes the community into consideration and not only the self. It is about transforming religiosity into a liquid that can flow like a river, meandering through spheres, spaces and identities.

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4 Do Rebels Pray at Home? Religious Dissent in Iran

Ariane Sadjed

In February 2019, I was – along with a group of international researchers – invited to a tour marking the fortieth anniversary of the Islamic Revolution entitled “Today’s Iran”. Two of our female Iranian colleagues wore long, black chadors throughout the trip. While not obligatory in Iran, the chador suggests conformity to the public religious demeanour encouraged by the government. During a trip to a camp in the desert, the two ladies joked about a camel and donkey that were waiting in front of a tent designated the “House of Prayer” (namaz khaneh) (see the photo below). The tent had been set up to give privacy to those who wished to perform the ritual prayer (namaz), and I overheard the ladies amusing themselves about how the animals seemed to be waiting in line for it. I heard various kinds of jokes like this throughout the trip, and the ease with which the two women made fun of religious concepts might not have been evident from their outward appearance. This is just one example of the complicated nature of religiosity in Iran.

It is quite challenging to grasp the relationship between civil society, the state and religion in Iran, and even more difficult to convey these dynamics to audiences who tend to equate political Islam with fanaticism and presuppose an ideal of a secular society as an exclusive normative model. This chapter is thus not only concerned with the role of religion in Iran, but also with the stereotypes and blind spots inherent in representations of Iran in the Western world. The majority of scholarship on Iran since the revolution of 1979 has focused on political, legal and theological debates surrounding the establishment of the state. While many of these works point out the complexity of the clergy with its various factions, it has still not become conventional



“House of Prayer”. Photo by the author (2019).

wisdom to disentangle the authoritarianism of the state from Islam or the clergy. Since anthropological studies on state-society relations in Iran are rare, Iranian civil society often serves instead as a surface upon which images of rebellion against the state and their corollary – longing for the West – are projected.³⁵ These perceived dichotomies between state and civil society, religion and politics, the religious and the secular are major obstacles in understanding the role of religion in Iran. Indeed, this chapter will not contribute to any categorization, but rather focus on the fluidity between categories and the problems that arise in defining them.

Overview of the Chapter

The chapter starts with a discussion of how we have come to think about and define religion and the social contexts in which these discourses have evolved. It aims to add a few more nuances to a discussion that is usually based on stark dichotomies between the religious and the secular. I will discuss conflicting positions between the Iranian government and the clergy regarding the role of Islam in the realm of politics, and how these conflicts are reflected in individual and collective religiosity.

The final part of this chapter explores the meaning of collective religious prayer, how such practices have transformed since the revolution, and if, or how, they are con-

³⁵ These imaginations are related to classical modernization theory, in which democracy, a liberal market economy and secularisation are conceptualized as constitutive for a modern society. For a critical discussion see Wohlrab-Sahr and Buchhardt (2017) and Asad (2003).

nected to support for the government. I will show a variety of connections between religious and political positions, pointing out that the everyday lives of Iranians are driven by a much greater variety of positions than a binary division between the religious and the secular. This discussion is then applied to consumption practices and how they express one's position in society. This angle was chosen as consumption and religiosity are often assumed as dividing the Iranian society along a false dichotomy in which consumption is equated with "liberalism" and religion with "conservatism". Instead, I will present different forms of religiosity, and how they can assume an empowering, strategic or conformist stance. Examples such as women's reading circles and Qur'ān lessons represent forms of religious diversification within Iranian society and the creation of religious spaces away from government control. I will explore how this diversification from "below", and one's choice to be pious, can be part of individual self-development and determination without defining oneself in opposition to the state.

Talking Religion

The problem of authoritarianism in Iran tends to be ascribed to the alignment of religion and politics, in particular the politicization of Islam (cf. Hashemi 2013). As a "topos" (Reisigl and Wodak 2001), this view has entered mainstream discourses in Iran and become a part of the self-perception of Iranians – be they university professors, taxi drivers or artisans. Without my asking, people from different strata of Iranian society conveyed this view to me, practically as an introduction. There is no doubt about the existence of secular and atheistic people in Iran, but I wondered whether this position has also become a means of distancing oneself from a government that is perceived as malfunctioning and oppressive, especially when engaged in conversation with visitors from the West. As conversations continued, it often surfaced that these people's discontent was not connected so much to the intertwining of religion and politics, but to what they perceived as the abuse of religion for political self-interest. In other words, many Iranians did not necessarily understand secularism as the relegation of religion to the private sphere.

In recent scholarship, two aspects have contributed to a more precise understanding of the role of religion in society. Firstly, "religion" is not conceptualized as a reified and stable category; instead, the focus has shifted to the discourses and practices that produce ideas of "religion" in the first place. As Adam H. Becker points out, "the category of religion is itself a product of discursive processes (...) Ideas, practices, and affects we often label 'religious' have existed almost anywhere we look in human history, but religion as a category came into being in modernity and is constituted by various political, legal, social, and economic discourses" (2015: 11–12). These discourses are referred to as "religionization", a process that often entails the isolation, codification, and naming of a "tradition", and the spread of "religion" as a distinct social, intellectual, and experiential category in human life (Becker 2015: 15). Consequently, these

approaches emphasize the interconnectedness of religion with political, economic or cultural aspects, as religion cannot be universally and abstractly defined “except as a node of contestation and definition. There is no transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon ‘religion’” (Asad 1993: 54). Secondly, analyses based on a binary between religion and the secular have receded in favour of acknowledgment of the interdependence between religious and secular practices and discourses (Asad 2003). In this chapter, I will use the term “secularism” not only to refer to “the making of conceptual distinctions and the institutionalisation of differentiation between religion and other societal spheres and practices, but also in terms of the cultural meanings underlying these distinctions and differentiations” (Wohlrab-Sahr and Buchhardt 2017: 6). This means that secularism is not just the abstract and neutral opposite of religion, but rather is analyzed in relation to normative claims and political regulations of the religious sphere.

In European history, processes of the interiorization of religion as a private feeling have shaped our understanding of religion’s role in public life. Political or collective expressions of religiosity can therefore seem strange. However, in contexts where religion is significant in the public sphere, it is not automatically a relic from the past, but rather a different form of articulating the religious. The presupposition that a modern society can only be secular not only curtails Iranian history, but also reflects many blind spots concerning Europe’s own past. Most prominently, in European historiography the Enlightenment is portrayed as the decisive force by which Europeans woke from the nebulous religious tradition in favour of reason and, subsequently, secularism. However, as Barnett explains, the politicization of religion is what changed the religious outlook and initiated change at that time. Barnett challenges the central Enlightenment narratives such as the anticlericalism of the philosophes, a recourse to reason in religious thought, and a decline in levels of belief. He suggests that the language of reason was the product of religious conflict and not vice versa. Consequently, “ideological conflicts gradually pre-empted religion’s place in a politicized “public sphere” largely of religion’s own making, while continuing to bear the marks of various Christian origins” (Barnett 2003: 38). Instead of understanding religion as a dynamic repertoire of practices and discourses, inextricably anchored within – and even propelling – modernization, religion tends to be regarded as an isolated set of beliefs that one either clung to or was able to discard in favour of a modern self.

However, the positing of an Enlightenment tradition growing from extra-Christian roots is untenable, because Europeans experienced permanent, institutionalized anticlericalism as part of intra-Christian conflict, not as a form of anti-religiosity. Protestants and Catholics were anticlerical with regard to one another, and with regard to radical Protestants and Protestant-established churches – i.e. the polemics were aimed at religious opponents. According to Barnett, researchers have not looked sufficiently at this material due to their presupposition that evidence of modernity should take the form of secularization. After the Enlightenment, Catholicism was omitted as part of history and civilization. It has been constructed “as backwards, exotic, primitive or barbarian, and associated with faraway places and cultures outside of Europe”

(Borutta 2011: 48; my translation). Borutta has compared this interpretative framework with the concept of “Orientalism”, which was coined by Edward Said as a form of constructing the Other in the process of establishing Western modernity.

For much of the Muslim world, secularism was long embodied in top-down ideologies peculiar to authoritarian regimes. Secularism is remembered as the mission of the Western world to “civilize” former colonies. This was particularly the case in the newly established nation-states after World War I, when Muslim states adopted secularism as a political tool to build a nation of highly diverse populations. It is against this background that we should view Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza Shah’s authoritarian secularization in Iran. In response to the top-down secularism of the Pahlavi era, Islam became a framework for emancipation from foreign interference and oppression. Religious practices and beliefs assumed a political role in the struggle for self-determination and thus have a rather different significance than in the history of Europe. The revolution of 1979 represents the peak of a historically politicized understanding of religion in Iran.¹ Similar to liberation theology in South America, the religious discourses that led to the revolution in Iran contained emancipatory, nationalistic, self-determined, and anti-imperialistic elements. It was a transformation “of Iranian Shī’ism into a new (inter)subjective force of religiosity in opening up a new conception of the sacred and the profane, or as Foucault would call it, a new ‘political spirituality’” (Rahimi 2012: 55). The problematization of the fusion between religion and politics is therefore somewhat futile. The problems that Iranians themselves might describe as most pressing with regard to their government – such as economic mismanagement, lack of transparency, inefficiency and oppression – are not necessarily connected to “religion” or the concept of an Islamic state.

Political and religious authorities in Iran, on the other hand, still use Iran’s past under a secular dictatorship to dismiss secularism as a morally corrupt model from the West. Contemporary Muslim scholars, however, have begun to acknowledge varying models of secularism. For example, Naser Gobadzadeh (2015) emphasizes that secularity in the Iranian context does not advocate the total elimination of religion from political practice; rather, it specifically promotes the institutional separation of religion and state. The main proponents of this approach are religious scholars; they build their demands to free religion from political obligations – and vice versa – on religious sources. Ghobadzadeh claims that this “Religious Secularity” is congruent with the Islamic context in which it developed and where there is no fundamental distinction between religion and the most important dimensions of the secular. Consequently, secularization in Iran does not entail a comprehensive historical process whereby “individual belief in transcendental forces weakens, and, at the societal level, religion loses its influence in the public sphere through the prioritization of science, emphasis on worldliness, and the separation of church and state. By no means does my usage of the term ‘secularity’ refer to this comprehensive process of weakening religion

¹ For a history of the political implications of Shī’ism see Ghobadzadeh (2015: 32ff.) and Chehabi (1990).

in individual and public life” (Ghobadzadeh 2015: 8). The next section will discuss some of the conflicts and dynamics within the religio-political establishment as well as the representation of opposition to the Iranian state in Western media.

The Fragmented State of Religion

The religious establishment in Iran is deeply fragmented in its stances on fundamental issues such as whether religious authorities should be involved in politics. After the revolution in 1979, members of the clergy assumed political leadership for the first time. This new alignment profoundly changed the character of both politics and religion in Iran. Despite claims of a return to the original traditions of Iran and Islam, the Islamic revolution comprised a variety of new inventions as well as a new organization of the ulema (Chehabi 1991). This has led to a division between a “political” and a “purely religious” clergy. Although the traditional clergy tends to oppose political involvement, many among the clergy have turned to tacit consent. While there are openly oppositional clergy in Iran who wage a theological battle over the legitimacy of political and spiritual authority, the “quietists” seek to preserve the Shī‘ī seminary institution by keeping a degree of distance from politics (Rahimi 2012: 71).

The latter are a “silenced majority” within the religious establishment, while the minority who subscribe to the clergy’s political leadership have portrayed themselves as the sole representatives of Islam in Iran (Ghobadzadeh 2015: 169). Using their political power, they have silenced those within their circle who do not support their politico-religious ideology. Since the inception of the Islamic state, the marginalization of oppositional Ayatollahs has not only been justified under the banner of Islam, but also included unprecedented dishonourings of Ayatollahs (e.g. famous examples such as Ayatollahs Shariatmadari and Montazeri). Time and again, the ruling clergy also intervene in the clergy’s internal procedures to promote particular political goals. This form of intervention has both compromised the clergy’s autonomy and undermined the credibility of the religious establishment by privileging like-minded clerics independently of their qualifications. The oppression of dissenting religious authorities has diminished the pluralistic character of Iran’s clergy and, furthermore, jeopardized their spiritual potential.

This became evident during our first formal meetings in Iran, among them an invitation from the director of the Institution for Hajj and Pilgrimage Affairs, a Seyyed. The meeting began with a beautifully sung sūra from the Qur’ān by one of the officials, after which the Seyyed commenced his speech. He started by saying that there was too little time to go into the details of spiritual matters relating to the hajj. Instead, he offered us a speech about the evil intentions of the “superpowers” – America and Israel – and their vain attempts to destroy Iran. After attending several meetings and conferences, I noticed an almost total absence of “religious” topics (in the sense of spiritual issues), while religion was frequently used to frame nationalistic and political discourses. Of course, given the context of proving the success of the revolution to

foreigners, most speeches inevitably had a formal and propagandistic character. Still, this faction of the clergy understands religion as formative for national identity and intrinsically related to populist ideas of independence and strength. This example illustrates that the official use of “religion” in Iran has little to do with Islamic teachings or principles, but rather serves as a framework in which nationalistic and populist self-assurance is couched, with its main basis being the distinction between “us” (peaceful but strong Iranians) and “them” (corrupt superpowers and their allies).

The competing understandings of religious legitimacy became most visible after the presidential elections in 2009, when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected and the Green Movement took to the streets after what was widely discussed as electoral fraud. The protest movement used many Islamic symbols and chants in order to make themselves heard, and the government prohibited one of the most popular and sacred religious festivities during the month of Moharram for fear of its appropriation by dissenting voices. However, one should be careful not to interpret the events simply as opposition to the state. As Fariba Adelkhah points out, the Green Movement grew out of a civil society that was trying to negotiate with the regime, rather than attempting a regime change (2012: 19).

In much of the Western media, the reception of protests and more subtle forms of potentially rebellious behaviour are portrayed as part of a black and white categorization of Iranian society: on the one hand the “progressive and friendly Iranians, almost like Europeans”², and on the other hand the poor, possibly uneducated supporters of the “Islamists”.³ This common representation not only obscures the different and overlapping allegiances among various strata of society with the state, but also feeds into a perception of “us” and “them” in which the group that (at least outwardly) resembles “Europeans” is juxtaposed against the “Islamists”, characterized by their outward religiosity. Consequently, the widespread coverage of the protests in 2009 did not include reports of the women in full black chadors who were chanting and beating their chests in protest against the paid pro-government demonstrators regularly mobilized by the state in events designed to counter the Green Movement. Are these women excluded from representation because they do not qualify visually as able to evoke sympathy (or identification) among Western audiences? This type of coverage leads us to believe that opposition to the government is primarily embodied by the desire to consume and to look like Westerners (as was the case during the Pahlavi era, albeit only for a small, privileged stratum). It is of no concern to us what is on the minds of people whose appearance is “Islamic” yet who oppose an undemocratic and corrupt government, not least because it has corrupted their understandings of Islam. We hardly hear of the public critique from Ayatollahs such as Sane’i or Montazeri, to

² Radio programme on Austria’s National Broadcasting Ö1: “Iran, die Vergangenheit die nicht ruht”, broadcast on 4 April 2019, position 13:20, my translation (<https://oe1.orf.at/programm/20190404>).

³ Ibid.

name just a few, who protested the government's repression and violation of citizens' rights.⁴

The Green Movement contained many different factions, including religious forms of protest. The latter became particularly pronounced during the month of Moharram, when the mourning rituals were turned into a means of contesting the state's discursive power. In 1978–79, the Moharram rituals were used by the religious factions of the revolution to inject morality and social justice goals into politics; in 2009, however, Moharram was used to reclaim both politics and morality from the clerics' monopoly on the interpretation of Islam, which is explicitly antidemocratic and antirepublican (Fischer 2010: 513–14). These forms of opposition can be seen as a strategy designed to reappropriate Islamic symbols for Muslims of all ideologies; for some, the Green Movement was a recovery of the original values of the revolution, while for others it was a rescue of Islam from the revolution's coercive nature and a reacknowledgement of Islamic pluralism and tolerance. For others still, it signalled a need to move beyond constant reference to Islam. Far from being a dispute between religious and non-religious forces, the main protagonists in the protests represented divergent articulations of state-religion relations. Forty years after the revolution, it would thus be too simple to claim that disenchantment with the state's control of religion has led to a secularization of society. Studies suggesting a decline in religiosity inferred from a measured decline of religion in the public sphere (i.e. Ghobadzadeh 2004) should be assessed critically with regard to what they are actually measuring when dealing with concepts such as religiosity and secularism.⁵ As the next two sections will show, religiosity can neither be measured nor understood as an isolated phenomenon in itself – it evolves in tandem with the surrounding context of political, social, economic and cultural elements.

⁴ <http://saanei.org/?view=01,00,01,00,0> (accessed 4 April 2019); or Bendix Anderson (2009): Ayatollah Watch. *Frontline*, 21 July 2009, updated 22 Sept. (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/09/ayatollah-watch.html>).

⁵ While Naser Ghobadzadeh's article is valuable for bringing statistical data from Iran to the attention of academia outside of Iran, the interpretation of the results is at times imprecise. For example, when measuring whether religious influence is declining, Ghobadzadeh uses data on household expenses, grouping them into three categories – “religious”, “personal hygiene & cosmetics” and “hobbies & entertainment” – labelling the latter two as “Western influences”. The decrease in religious expenses and increase in the other two categories is then taken as evidence for a spread of Western influence at the cost of religion. This conclusion is too blunt for several reasons. Firstly, how can a wide array of practices pertaining to personal hygiene, cosmetics, hobbies and entertainment be assumed as simply “Western”? Secondly, this examination of expenditures disregards the political-economic context of the period under examination, which obviously shapes the purchase decisions. Consumer choices in Iran are important markers of social status and connected more closely to socio-economic differences than to “religious” ones. Thirdly – and related to the second point – “religiosity” and “Western influences” are taken as two opposing poles, disregarding the fact that they fuse or overlap on many different levels. However, the article closes as follows: “In fact, it must be admitted that religious values are still important in comparison with two other kinds of values (national and Western) and that it is still unrivalled, at least in the short term.” (Ghobadzadeh 2004: 105).

Religious Politics – From Emancipation to Repression

Religiosity has many forms and “being religious on one dimension does not necessarily imply religiosity on other dimensions” (Glock and Stark 1965: 22). This statement is relevant for the Iranian context, where within an individual, some aspects of religiosity can be linked to or overlap with official state-approved religiosity, while other aspects are oppositional to it.⁶ In this section I will highlight different forms of opposition to and support for the state, further strengthening the argument that criticism of the state cannot be reduced only to secular articulations.

A study by Kazemipur and Rezaei (2003) has traced different indicators of religiosity among Iranians such as experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, and cognitive. It suggests that there are different degrees of emphasis on different factors of religiosity. The study was carried out with 16,000 respondents and the results were compared to the only available set of data from before the revolution: a survey carried out in 1975. The data suggests that during the period of intense secularization in Iran under the Pahlavis (1925–1979), there was little change in individual religious practices. However, while 42% of respondents participated in collective prayer in 1975, in 2001 this number had dropped to 20%, a notable change in one form of public religiosity. Is the reason for this that Iranians have become more secular?

I argue that we should instead shift our attention to changes in the nature of this particular religious practice. Since the revolution, the nature of collective prayer has changed profoundly. During the Pahlavi era, religious institutions provided people with an alternative social and political identity, in the sense that they were an alternative cultural resource to the pseudo-modernist drive of an authoritarian regime trying to impose its own version of Iranian identity. Against this background, collective prayer was highly integrative as a socio-religious event (Föllmer 2014). As a ritual event, it brought people from all social levels together in one public place at a certain time and thereby fostered cohesion of the community and reaffirmed social, religious and moral values. At times it was also used for political propaganda. In post-revolutionary Iran, Friday prayers have become large public events and one of the main venues for political mobilization and propaganda. Participation in them is strongly correlated with political satisfaction. Since all studies cited above point to the fact that individual religiosity remains high, a decline in collective religious practice is more likely connected to the weakening of the socio-religious functions it used to provide and the appropriation of religious topics by the government. The results also suggest that individual religiosity is relatively independent from even the most extensive changes in socio-political religiosity.⁷ In addition to the points already mentioned, lower turnouts at Friday prayers

⁶ For different aspects of religiosity in Iran see Chehabi (1990) or Adelpkhan (1999).

⁷ According to Zooalam (2000: 408), mosque attendance and individual prayer had increased 20 years after the revolution compared to before the revolution, but in both periods was lower than in the period directly after the revolution. This data suggests a “normalization” of religious activity, rather than a decline.

have yet another implication: political strife contributes to the diversification of attendance in public religious rituals. Given that one mosque is not like another, the varying ideologies of Ayatollahs leading a particular mosque (and the prominent leaders of the neighbouring mosques) contribute to a clear political distinction between the different Islamic authorities.

In his study about conservative piety in one of the urban centres of Iran, David Thurffjell (2006) observed that many believers of a conservative mosque community, along with its associated Ayatollah, would not go to the Friday prayers because the Imam leading them had a clear reformist profile. This was enough to keep the followers of the mosque's Ayatollah from saying Friday prayers in a public mosque, as is the usual custom. However, while the mosque in Thurffjell's study is described as particularly conservative, it has links to Ayatollah Sistani, who represents a clear departure from the government's ideology. Ayatollah Sistani (born and educated in Iran, now operating in Najaf), is the most revered Shī'ī cleric in the world and opposes the idea of *Velayat-e Faqih*, suggesting Shī'ī clerics should not get involved in politics. This example shows that it is not possible to infer unrestrained support for the government even from outright religious conservatism, since the conservative faction also contains many different rifts. For the most part, however, these differences exist on a more abstract, intellectual, political or theological level. For many believers, the most meaningful element of their loyalty lies in a different realm, as I will discuss in the next paragraph.

The people who are loyal to the Iranian leadership are strongly underrepresented in scholarship on Iran. What do we know about their motivations, aspirations, and convictions? In particular, voices of economically and socially marginalized people who subscribe to a strict observance of the religiosity propagated by the government remain unheard in Western academia. They pose something of a paradox, because – despite their marginalized position – they support the Supreme Leader, who represents the central political power in the country. Their marginalization stems from a variety of factors, such as an ethnic minority background or a lack of education, which again are connected to economic disadvantages. Their religiosity helps them to turn away from their worldly problems; it is focused on that which they see as most important, namely their own spiritual development and relationship with God. David Thurffjell writes: “In this way their experiences of poverty, marginalisation and loss are diminished for the benefit of closeness to what is believed to be the truth. Naturally, the positive effects on self-esteem and feelings of fulfilment are great” (2006: 129). The reward for being religious is thus psychological and symbolic because it allows even marginalized individuals to identify with and be part of the powerful (the Supreme Leader, the truth, God's will).

While well-being and true religious conviction are interdependent, turning to a religious lifestyle should not automatically be seen as a strategic choice. Thurffjell shows how practised religiosity is embraced wholeheartedly. Individuals agree that turning to a religious lifestyle has improved their well-being, but it would diminish their devotion to suggest that they are using religiosity in order to feel better. That would be an

abstract judgement based on a rigid understanding of “pure” religiosity, independent from the individual’s social or psychological make-up or any other constitution. Any distinction between a “true” or “pure” religiosity and one that is motivated by “outside” factors is misleading in these cases, as it does not reflect the actual experiences of individuals. While there is definitely an instrumental use of religion in Iran (see below), I argue that the borders between a “true” form of religiosity and a “(self-) imposed” one are fluid, and individuals do not always make a conscious distinction between the two. As different scholars point out, submission to a religious authority is not necessarily a curtailment of one’s individual freedom, but is also employed as a form of self-development through “disciplined knowledge and personal discipline” (Asad 1993: 20).

One might argue that in the absence of alternatives, religiosity is the primary remaining avenue through which identity and social status are negotiated. However, in the process of escaping from or coping with a harsh reality, people do not only turn to “alternative spiritualities” but also to conservative Islam and its transcendental elements. Rather than escaping from religion, people are escaping from poverty, in some cases from the reality of living under a dictatorship, or from individual life crises. Additionally, support for conservative or neoconservative authorities is not only a matter of religious conviction. For many among the poorer segments of society, there is great appeal in a faction of the conservatives that Babak Rahimi describes as “Neo-Khomeinists”: rejecting domestic elites, they assert militancy and egalitarianism, paired with nostalgia for revolution and war, martyrdom and support for the destitute. They are hardliners from non-clerical backgrounds, such as former president Ahmadinejad; “they saw political authority in the form of charismatic authority led by figures who were detached from worldly interests and keen on bringing about social justice. In their view, the pragmatism of the old guard, led by figures such as Rafsanjani, had only produced an increasingly corrupt state, a politics of the status quo that benefited the rich” (Rahimi 2012: 66). Taking the country’s harsh economic conditions into account, the appeal of this neoconservative faction is not difficult to understand. This new revolution-oriented elite aims to manage and control the government, creating further division within the conservative establishment.

Individual Religiosity and Autonomy

In this section, I will discuss the relevance of socio-economic factors to individual religiosity. Most prominently, Iranian women’s outward appearance tends to be used in Western media as a marker of religiosity, traditionalism or progressivity (“chador versus lipstick”).⁸ Challenging the fixation on religious motivations for one’s outward

⁸ A few examples: “Lipstick Revolution: Iran’s Women Are Taking on the Mullahs.” *Independent.co.uk*, 26 February 2009 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/lipstick-revolution-irans-women-are-taking-on-the-mullahs-1632257.html>); Caroline Garnar: Iranian Woman Who Risked

appearance, it has been argued that socio-economic divides in Iran have a more decisive impact on women's fashion choices (Olszewska 2013; Sadjed 2012). Severe status insecurity, and the struggles resulting from it, have led to different codes of outward appearance – certain clothes, hairstyles and habits – which are employed in order to display one's symbolic capital and position in society. More specifically, when young people wear brands or clothes associated with “Western culture”, these choices in many cases express a desire for upward mobility, since brands from Western countries are expensive and represent a certain degree of wealth and access to the resources associated with it. Rather than being statements of rebellion against the state, these practices are part and parcel of the intra-Iranian negotiating hierarchies since the revolution, when social strata were reshuffled and the corresponding outward appearances were restructured. In a context where the state aims to control one's appearance up to and including small details such as lipstick, wearing make-up can become an implicit protest against restrictions placed on individuals by the state. However, the tendency to construct the use of make-up and related consumption practices as a rebellious act (pro-Western, anti-Islamic) adheres to a flawed polarization between the secular West and Islam – a binary similarly employed by the Iranian authorities.

The symbolic value of consumer goods, and their use in expressing one's identity, have gained additional meaning through the post-revolutionary attempts to denounce Western consumerism as part of the cultural, social, political and economic exploitation of Iran and to establish indigenous, Iranian-Islamic forms of appearance and consumption (Sadjed 2016). The increasing liberalization of the Iranian economy starting in the 1990s brought about a growth in consumer products, as well as interest in wellness, health, exercise and beauty treatments. My study on consumption practices among Iran's urban middle class discusses how one's socio-economic background shapes social and religious attitudes and how these attitudes are expressed through consumption (Sadjed 2012). The study shows that the importance given to individuality was high among all respondents; however, those who wished to consume more indicated that individuality could best be expressed by one's outward appearance, while respondents who were less inclined to consume reported that they expressed their individuality through meaningful social interactions and charitable activities. Similar responses revolved around the question of social hierarchies; the acceptance of a hierarchical social order was shared across all groups, but consumer-oriented respondents associated social hierarchies with material factors (“rich people are high achievers and deserve to be the leaders of society”), while those with a less consumerist outlook associated social hierarchies with more transcendental aspects. Both tran-

Arrest By Wearing Red Lipstick as a Teenager Launches Her Own Beauty Company After Moving to ‘Liberal and Tolerant’ Britain. *Mailonline*, 21 December 2015 (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3356449/Iranian-woman-risked-arrest-wearing-red-lipstick-teenager-launches-beauty-company-moving-Britain.html>); “Iranian Women – Before and after the Islamic Revolution.” *BBC News*, 8 February 2019 (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47032829>) and a response: Joshua Keating: Iranians Mock Netanyahu's ‘Jeans’ Comment. *Slate*, 7 October 2013 (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2013/10/netanyahu-says-if-iranians-were-free-they-could-wear-jeans.html>).

scendental beliefs about the self and society and purely materialistic ones can thus be defined as worldviews that structure meaning and social order in Iran. This does not imply, however, that those with fewer or no religious inclinations are more prone to believe in egalitarianism or democracy.

The study also measured “instrumental religiosity” – the employment of religious behaviour in order to achieve professional and financial success.⁹ In Iran, open displays of religiosity can evoke sarcasm, mainly in relation to the belief that individuals pretend to be religious in order to gain privileges from the state. A survey carried out by the Iranian National Broadcasting research centre included a question about how one viewed the “true” religious adherence of people who “claim to be devout”. The results show that over 70% of respondents view the “true” religiosity of devout people to be just 50%, or even significantly lower (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), cited in Ghoobadzadeh 2004: 92). This means that professing religiosity runs a high risk of being perceived as fake in order to gain social or financial advantages. In everyday interactions in Iran, consciousness of such “pretenders” is very high and a central theme of mockery.

According to Kazemipur and Rezaei (2003), access to certain social “privileges” on the basis of one’s degree and type of religiosity is associated with an abundance of “religiopolitical” beliefs. The authors furthermore suggest that the more religious a person is in other regards, the less likely he or she is to subscribe to this form of politicized religiosity. This categorization implies that religiopolitical beliefs form a category distinct from all other forms of religiosity and are even negatively correlated with them. It thereby conflates a political understanding of religion with the insincere motivation of gaining social privileges. This pitting of one form of religiosity against others is problematic for several reasons. First, it assumes a certain form of religiosity as the right and pure form of religiosity (otherworldly, apolitical, pertaining to the inner sphere exclusively). Second, even if a person displays religious behaviour in order to achieve material benefits, it does not necessarily follow that this person is devoid of other, more “pure” forms of religiosity. It is also assumed that the individual consciously distinguishes between true conviction and pretence. Third, in a society in which publicly demonstrated religiosity is highly rewarded, it has come to be taken for granted that one should employ it in social interactions. Religiosity is part of a social code, albeit one to which there is a heightened need to conform in the context of authoritarianism. However, those who do not support the public norms are well versed in navigating the circumstances and degrees of public behaviour in order to avoid getting into trouble with the authorities.

In my 2012 study, “instrumental religiosity” was disproportionately evident among the second highest income group (upper middle class). Challenging Kazemipur and Rezaei’s typology, this group also scored highly in religious values, showing that a strategic use of religiosity does not preclude other, more “pure” forms of piety.

⁹ This parameter was measured by asking for responses to statements such as “Adherence to Islamic principles leads me to professional success” (Sadjed 2012).

Rather than being governed by ideological motivations, this income group exemplifies the blending of neo-liberal values with Islamic ones such as constant self-optimization and discipline. It is motivated by the need to succeed in a society in which social security and welfare are increasingly undermined by deregulation and corruption. Last but not least, it should be mentioned that respondents who worked as civil servants received the lowest scores in “instrumental religiosity”. While the results cannot be generalized, they nonetheless suggest that government employees can have sincere religious convictions – an observation that challenges the stereotype of the Iranian government as individuals who use religion for their personal interests or as a way to exert power.

I will conclude this section by drawing attention to yet another form of religiosity in semi-public spheres and its contribution to diversifying the socio-religious landscape in Iran. Arzoo Osanloo (2009) has highlighted how religious meetings organized by women lead the participants to engage with religion on their own terms. In these gatherings, women read and discuss the Qur’ān first-hand, without authoritative interpretations and with the opportunity to doubt and object. Since the religious socialization of women in Iran is primarily conducted by female members of the family, women are socialized with a wide array of diverse individual approaches to religiosity. In the meetings, most women bring their own Qur’ān, each in a different translation. After a section has been read aloud, the women compare their translations, thereby already engaging in a form of dialogue and heterogenization.

These types of social and religious meetings are an integral part of Iranian social life and have taken place since before the revolution, but their character has been changing due to political circumstances. Osanloo shows how the exegesis of Qur’anic readings among “ordinary” women represents a new space where interpretive shifts in knowledge are occurring: increasingly, the Holy Writings are not mediated by a select group of specially trained clergy. The women at the meetings engage in their own personalized interpretation of Islam by reappropriating a community space “where they subvert the existing rational methodology for exegesis, and [find] the basis for it within the very texts of Islam itself” (2009: 84). Religiosity in these settings is a dialogic process; it transforms itself through the discourses and practices amongst the women and in tandem with the surrounding society. This is a type of religious devotion that seeks debates, some of which also revolve around the experience of living under a government that identifies itself as Islamic. This form of local agency harbours a variety of modes of self-formation: for some, it serves as a path to spiritual growth; for others, the meetings represent the reorienting of Islam toward the spiritual realm and away from the political sphere. Negotiating these terms collectively is meaningful for the participants because it allows them to seek and develop a stance vis-à-vis their religion. The women use the means provided in their social and cultural context to actively change their relationship to it. In spite of the government’s control, they have created spaces where they imbue religious icons and symbols with their own meanings in line with their own concerns.

While many of the women are critical of certain sanctioned approaches that they come across in the public sphere, the women themselves do not characterize their practices as political opposition. Neither do their readings of the Qur'ān have as an objective a call for or sanctioning of foreign-seeming concepts such as "individual freedom". As Osanloo writes, "faith in Islam does not preempt or prohibit a notion of individual freedom or responsibility but actually necessitates it" (Osanloo 2009: 95). Reflecting on such possibilities together is an essential element in fostering women's mutual support and stabilization. Similarly, Niloofar Haeri (2013) has pointed out that the meetings do not belong strictly to the private sphere since the participants often do not know each other. Taking part in debates and exchanging readings, CDs and cassettes in various "private" gatherings thus extends the appropriation of religious discourses and practices beyond the private sphere, albeit in a less visible way.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to contribute new angles to the understanding of religiosity in Iran and to disentangle religion from authoritarianism. Religion in Iran has many forms and interacts with many aspects of personal and social life. In some cases, a religious discourse aligns with oppressive practices or is used to justify them, but it was my aim to shed light on some of the lesser-known expressions of Islamic religiosity and to show that they defy an easy classification between either submission to the state or opposition to it. While this complication of matters might leave some readers unsatisfied, I hope to have contributed to an understanding of Iranian society as complex and lively, rather than merely governed by ideology. I also highlighted the problematic nature of categorizing women wearing a chador and women wearing lipstick based on oppositional poles such as traditional and liberal, religious and secular, Westernized and Islamist, conformist and rebellious. By overcoming such binaries, it will be possible to ascertain the motivations for specific groups to support an authoritarian government and the appeal of conservative politics for certain strata of society. The attempt to demystify some of these processes, however, is not sufficient on its own; as John Stewart remarked, "people won't even really accept being 'demystified' unless they have something to put in its place. So I feel that nothing much can happen unless and until we start producing knowledge which is positively relevant" (1988: 73–4). Religiosity, including its public, political and conservative forms, is of immediate relevance for many Iranians and should therefore be included as a source of knowledge. Religious activism can provide a space for agency, and for both individual and collective self-actualization. Far from homogenizing the people, religious discourses and practices provide a lively field for negotiation without necessarily challenging or opposing the government. Only by acknowledging these forms of agency can we extend our understanding of free will and individual choice in a religious context.

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5 Acts of Unveiling and Everyday Life: The Significance of Silence in Iran Today

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The most obvious and distinctive characteristic of Iranian society is the image of veiled women. For four decades, it seemed impossible to even imagine Iranian society without women in *hejāb* (modest clothing) and, in particular, women who covered their head and body completely with a black *chādor*. Not only on the streets, but also in the post-1979 media, Iranian women always appear veiled. After the revolution of 1979, it seemed that – other than the choice of model, the colour and the manner of wearing the veil – the obligation of veiling for Iranian women was not a prominent issue in social discourse. Rather, it was taboo to doubt Khomeini’s decree of 1983, and women’s efforts were limited to challenging the *gasht-e ershād* (morality police) with *bad-hejābi* clothing: gradually, wisps of hair began to peek out from under their veils, while the overcoats became shorter and the trousers tighter. For a long time, even Iranian feminists did not question the matter of veiling as a mandatory duty for women in general. For them, the demand for equal rights for women took priority. Recently, however, ‘voices’ proclaiming the abolition of the mandatory veil – especially the ‘voices’ of young Iranian people who grew up after 1979 – began to grow louder. Eventually, they broke the taboo and took off the veil completely in public spaces.

In 2017, these acts of public unveiling provoked a discussion about the legal requirement for women to wear the *hejāb*, when individual women started to take off their headscarf and put it on a stick like a banner while standing silently on a raised platform on the street. These women became well-known as “the girls of *Enqelāb Street*”. Their individual actions are characterized by silence: they did not make any verbal statements. Most passers-by did not react with disgust and clamour; they were unexcited and kept silent as well.

I myself bore witness to this type of meaningful silence during my stay in Iran in the days surrounding New Year in March 2018. It was a Wednesday, I believe, at the busiest crossroads in the north of Tehran. In contrast to her vibrant environment, an elderly woman sat silently on a bench, as still as a statue. Her eyes were not directed at anyone or anything. Her head was not covered, and none of the people who passed by took any visible notice of her; even the guards present did not address her. With the background of my long experience of Iran, I can say that such an action and reaction were unusual and thus obviously meaningful. There were two instances of silence: first, the silent action of the unveiled women, and second, the reaction of the passing people, namely to remain silent.

According to Bayat, Iranian women resist the Islamic government via their daily routines such as wearing the *hejāb* in a ‘bad’ manner (*bad-hejābi*). A non-movement like this is a resistance to the state-imposed enforcement of veiling and not a departure from religiosity; it is an example of women insisting on exerting individual choice and rejecting gender inequality (Bayat 2010: 103, 106–107). Since most women rarely articulate shared demands in everyday life, they act in a dispersed collective manner in their mundane practices (Bayat 2010: 111). Their daily struggles can subvert the conventional gender divide and enable women to become public players (Bayat 2010: 108). The most significant characteristic of this non-movement is the lack of a known leader to mobilize the masses. It is not an organized form of activism, but rather a sporadic, individual activism that hints at a social problem. This is visible in the actions of the participants as well as in the discourse. This is why the non-movement is neither silent nor illegal. Even though it is individualistic, it also has a collective dimension that can induce change (Bayat 2010: 109).

Collective sentiments and identities are formed in public and expressed through fashion choices, behaviour, or discourses related to these concerns. Even though the women participating and those who see them do not know each other, they spontaneously feel empathy and affinity (Bayat 2010: 110). With just the power of their presence, women can challenge the conventional patriarchal order without deliberate acts of defiance and protest. They do not need to employ extraordinary measures to compel authorities to make concessions (Bayat 2010: 112). When these acts, forming part of women’s daily routines, were backed up by careful argumentation and discursive campaigns that address the legal and theological contradictions, the non-movement developed into a social movement when women’s activists began to organize social protest and mobilize the masses, as in the One Million Signatures campaign and the Green Movement (Bayat 2010: 113–114). However, is this approach sufficient to explain the recent acts of unveiling? What does it mean that the unveiling act is carried out silently? How significant is silence in this context?

I argue that silence in this context is not a consequence of gendered practices of silencing; rather, it is active and carries creative potential. To understand these actions and their significance, it is necessary to look at the history of the women’s movement after 1979, the use of social media, and the daily lives of Iranian women. Accordingly, the following discussion of veiling or unveiling in Iranian society, as reflected in se-

lected journal editions in 2018, will give us an insight into the recent negotiation of the social, political and religious implications of the veil in Iranian society. The aim is to demonstrate the dynamic and ambiguous nature of individual and silent actions of unveiling and explain the development of a recent social non-movement with respect to the veil.

Veiling and the Women's Movement After the Iranian Revolution in 1979

The negotiation of veiling and unveiling in Islamic society has a long history. In modern Iran, this process is strongly connected with the Iranian women's movement, which began in the 19th century when the first Iranian women appeared unveiled in public. A few decades later, Reza Shah Pahlavi's decree prohibiting the veil (to foster a modernized image) divided Iranian society. Even though the Shah had to revoke the prohibition, it nonetheless had the consequence of making a deep social divide visible on the streets: the rich and 'modernized' elite women in the cities walked the streets without a veil, while the rural, poor and traditional decided to wear a chādor.¹ This appeared to change, however, with the protests against the Pahlavi regime beginning in 1978. The Iranian people, together with the Shiite clergy, were united in their resistance against the Shah, his insufficient reform programme, the repressive nature of the regime, and the superficial attempt at modernization. Many women wore a black chādor not as religious symbol, but rather as a symbol of protest. The chādor was understood, as can be seen by referring to Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari and Ali Shari'ati, as part of a return to their cultural roots and self-identification. For the cleric Motahhari, the veil was a good means of maintaining the social order between women and men (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 39). In his view, men and women are equal in the eyes of God, but not equal in their rights and duties because of their biological differences and social roles and functions; modern sciences underpin these differences and are not in conflict with shari'a (Islamic law). Shari'a takes account of these differences in the best way possible: men have to ensure the protection and safeguarding of women (Badry 2017: 92). Shari'ati, meanwhile, explained that the veil was a crucial symbol of Iranian tradition and social identity free of corruption from the west (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 39). In addition, like Motahhari, he perceived women as the weaker gender. They had to be controlled and protected by men to maintain social norms and order (Badry 2017: 94).

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the new regime wanted to express its separation from the former autocracy and declared the veil mandatory for every woman irrespective of her religious affiliation or belief. The journal *Zanān-e emruz* explains that the mandatory veil was not intended as a demand from the beginning

¹ For further information about the situation before the revolution, see Naghibi (2007) and Zahedi (2008).

of the revolution, but was rather the result of the intellectual and political developments of the anti-Shah protests (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 40). The Shiite gathering to remember Hosein's martyrdom at Kerbela had become an important religious and cultural tool for the opposing masses of any political and religious faction to demonstrate resistance against the Shah's tyranny (Keddie 2010: 438). The use of religious language and symbols was the best means to unite the multi-factional opposition. When even the urban secular middle-class women joined the anti-Shah demonstrations by putting on the chādor, women's religious dress became a central symbol of the anti-Shah and anti-imperialist protests and thus gained a political significance (Keddie 2010: 439). This did not change after the Islamic Republic's establishment and the rise of a religious political landscape that ushered in legal restrictions for Iranian women such as losing their right to divorce, inheriting only half the amount that men inherit, and not being permitted to work as judges or in certain other jobs. Khomeini's decree about the veil, announced 24 days after he came to power, caused discussions and a six-day protest (mainly comprising of leftist activists) with no effect (Daradeh and Witoszek 2013: 241). The morality police enforced the observance of the veil decree. Women who refused to wear the veil were arrested and lost their jobs.

During the Gulf War of 1980–88, the issue of the mandatory veil was marginalized and voices against it were silenced (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 40). However, the consequences of the war created unexpected challenges for the new regime. In post-war Iran, the traditional social role of the woman as mother, spouse and homemaker was destroyed to a large extent, as many families lost their male breadwinners. Now, many women had to provide for their families and thus entered the public sphere again. They demanded more rights and questioned the patriarchal system and the various forms of discrimination they faced. "Women activists [...] challenged the dominant ideological discourse that considered the private sphere of the home the best and the most suitable place for women. They rejected their confinement at home and managed to occupy the public sphere through economic and social activities" (Kian 2013: 47). The need for legal and social reforms was obvious. In the early 1990s, under President Rafsanjani, a Bureau of Women's Affairs was created to focus on women's problems and concerns (Kian 2013: 47). Women became politically and culturally active, for instance as journalists. At that time, the established women's press played a crucial role in fostering solidarity between women of different social classes and ideological and political factions. Women's magazines such as *Zanān* and *Hoquq-e Zanān* became a forum for advancing women's rights. They provided women with the opportunity to make private issues public. The scope of debate regarding their condition expanded.²

The hope of necessary reforms led women to play a large part in electing the liberal President Khatami in 1997. Even though the conservative faction tried to suppress liberal thinking and prevent reforms, women's issues were still an increasing part of Iranian public discourse and a prominent subject in literature, film and the press.

² For further information see Kian (1997).

Women themselves entered male dominated spheres such as journalism, literature and film production to speak about gender-related issues.³ Films made by female directors Rakhshan Bani-E'temad and Tahmine Milani, for instance, concentrated on current social issues such as working to provide for one's family, education, and the relationship between men and women in Iranian society.⁴ They created a new symbolic language, with the veil as a means of creative expression rather than a symbol of restriction.⁵

A major change in how activism is carried out by the women's movement has been the increasingly widespread use of the internet and its social communication platforms since 2000. Women became a public voice in the blogging scene – a new medium of individual self-expression, criticism and exchange.⁶ Since the blogosphere was observed by the state and then used by it to distribute its own cultural and political agenda, women subsequently preferred to transfer over to the social media services of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Telegram to build up their social networks.

Even though Sayyed Mohammad Khatami's presidency (1997–2005) was characterized by daily conflicts between liberal and conservative forces, a relatively liberal atmosphere prevailed, albeit without improvements in Iranian law with regard to equal rights for women. With the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, a neoconservative came to power. He let restrictive policies prevail, mobilized the morality police, and considered the women's movement and its activists to be political. In spite of – or rather, because of – these restrictions, women from diverse social, political and religious backgrounds joined the women's movement. They found new methods of interaction. In 2006, a new phase of networking started, with the online campaign for "One Million Signatures". This campaign collected signatures in favour of repealing discriminatory laws against women. The activists not only published their opinion and aims on the internet, but also distributed a pamphlet and had face-to-face discussions with the people on the streets in twenty Iranian cities (Daradeh, Witoszek 2013: 245). Leading activists were persecuted and arrested (Daradeh, Witoszek 2013: 247). The most important aspect of the signature campaign was that it set new paradigms for a social movement: "It was interested neither in questioning the legitimacy of the regime nor in contesting the principles of religion; rather its aim was to challenge laws within the legal framework of the Iranian Constitution" (Adelkhah 2012: 22). "Islamists along with secularists, and even monarchists, engaged in a dialog and cooperated with each other" (Adelkhah 2012: 33).

³ Mention should be made of the contributions of female satirists associated with the satirical journal "Gol Aqa", such as Roya Sadr and Giti Safarzadeh. One can also notice an increasing presence of female writers in the literary scene, for instance among short story writers; see Föllmer (2017b: 109–125).

⁴ Tahmine Milanis's film "Do zan" (Two Women) provoked widespread discussion about gender issues in the Iranian press between the main political factions; this is analysed in Föllmer (2004).

⁵ A good example of the veil's representation in Iranian film is Rakhshan Bani-E'temad's film *The Blue Veiled* (*Rusari-abi*) (1994), analysed in the article by Föllmer (2017a).

⁶ For further reading see Alavi (2005), Sreberny and Khiabany (2010), Shakhshari (2011).

The discriminatory policy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government impeded the activities of participants in the women's movement. Many of the leading activists were accused of being political (Sadeghi 2012: 127–129). As a result, the women's movement seemed to be silenced until the presidential elections and the "Green Movement" in 2009 (Sadeghi 2012: 130). However, women became active in other ways; they found space for self-expression in cultural areas such as literature, music, theatre, and even video games (Sreberny and Torfeh 2013) and showed more and more interest in sports and male-dominated jobs like driving buses and taxis. The governmental programme to promote physical health supported this trend with sports equipment in public spaces such as parks and small green areas in cities, where women nonetheless had to cover their heads and bodies as usual. Occasionally, a separation between male and female areas for playing sports in public spaces was intended but not successfully established. Over time, veiling in sports became more comfortable for women through the advent of elastic sports models of headscarf and the use of large jumpsuits.

Even the intended gender separation in public transport was undermined by mixed sections in places such as the metro. The percentage of women at institutions of higher education increased. "... [H]igher literacy rates and better education [...], and the active participation of women in social, cultural and economic realms ..." are indicators of social change in the Islamic patriarchal society (Kian 2013: 44). Even the conservative fraction cannot deny the important role women play in Iranian society today. Many of them have a high level of education, and they play a central role outside of the home in public life (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 128). This all promoted the self-awareness of Iranian women in public and in everyday life, and led to their widespread and active participation in the 2009 protests following the presidential elections, known as the "Green Movement".

The Green Movement might be understood as a reaction to the neoconservative and fundamentalist policies of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who failed to bring about social justice and economic liberalism, instead increasing the enrichment and corruption of the "sons of the elites". The various religious factions and institutions were divided in their interests, their claims to power and their influence (Adelkhah 2012: 24–29). In addition, the government enacted repressive policies such as a prohibition on women's presence in sports stadiums, raids to confiscate satellite dishes, and the reestablishment of guards tasked with ensuring compliance with the Islamic dress code. All these factors and more, including social and economic insecurity, recession and inflation as consequences of the sanctions against Iran's nuclear program, might have contributed to a decline in the importance of Islamic ideology and led to a more mundane orientation of the masses (Adelkhah 2012: 23). On the other hand, one of the main leaders of the Green Movement, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, made references to Islamic principles and the example of the Islamic Revolution in his argumentation for maintaining peaceful protests and opposition to the unfair election process of 2009 (Haghighatjoo 2016: 228). The Green Movement was an urban grassroots movement that gave the people a stronger and more central role in a protest movement than before (Haghighatjoo 2016: 233). General discontent and increasing criticism were exac-

erbated by an absence of transparency and a lack of trustworthy independent media. The movement united people from different political, religious and social factions in their protest, just as the One Million Signatures campaign had before. The active participants included a large number of women from diverse backgrounds, who protested not only against the result of the presidential election, but also against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's discriminatory policies regarding women, which primarily aimed to limit the participation of women in the public sphere. Enforcement of the Islamic dress code was only one of the restrictive measures imposed by the government.⁷ From 2005, the government also shut down a lot of women's media blogs and websites, and, in 2008, the influential journal *Zanān* (Women). A significant number of female protesters were arrested, convicted and sentenced to prison (Sadeghi 2012: 128).

Sadeghi concludes that the Green Movement was not a single event, but part of a civic process paving the way for a more egalitarian and less discriminatory society (Sadeghi 2012: 129). The activists made use of the methods employed by the women's movement's signature campaign, having learned to be creative, flexible and pragmatic without a hierarchical structure (Michaelsen 2013: 150). The Green Movement in 2009 not only replaced other kinds of civic activism with a political movement (Sadeghi 2012: 130), but in fact made civic action political.

Veiling and Everyday Life

Factors other than the women's movement and political protest movement may also have had implications for the women's acts of unveiling. With the aforementioned social and political developments of the last few years as a backdrop, it seems necessary to look at the lifestyle of Iranian women: how do Iranian women manage their daily lives, and what role does the veil play?

Before the revolution, the image of veiled women was a traditional one, whereas unveiled women were the physical indicator of a modern society (Zahedi 2008: 256). The black *chādor* was synonymous with *hejāb*. After the revolution, a modern outlook and meaning for *hejāb* developed: *manteaux* or *rupush* (overcoats) in combination with *rusari* or *maqna'e* (headscarves) were accepted as a more practical style of Islamic dress code and enabled women to be active in the public sphere. Especially in the post-war period, even traditional housewives and mothers spent several hours a day in public places. They had to take their children to school and deal with the civil service, banking and shopping without male support and sometimes until late at night (Bayat 2010: 101).

I have periodically visited Iran for 20 years now. During that time, many things have changed in Iranian society. Iranian people, like other people today, have to negotiate their individual freedom in everyday life – a process that is informed by one's particular social, cultural, religious and political circumstances and historical background.

⁷ For more details see Sadeghi (2012: 126–127).

Leaving regional and ethnic differences aside, we can observe differences in Iranian society between, for example, men and women, different social classes and different generations. On the one hand there is a strong division between the public and private sphere, but on the other hand, there are also many grey zones in between that the people use for their personal freedom. Their status quo and relationships with each other are challenged every day by hegemonic strategies. All these factors have a greater or lesser influence on people's daily interactions and private and public communication. They determine the time, place and manner in which people can (or cannot) act and speak about certain issues. Women, in particular, have to grapple with serious issues such as unemployment, poverty and a general breakdown of traditional family structures. Society's social and economic problems led to a gender crisis caused by the vast gap between the state's gender ideology and the reality of women's lives (Barlow and Akbarzadeh 2008: 26). In that context, veiling was an issue of minor importance; "most activists in Iran are more concerned with matters from women's unemployment to domestic violence."⁸ Indeed, Iranian women apparently have come to terms with the veil accompanying their daily activities in public, from their jobs and household tasks to their leisure time. This does not mean that all Iranian women always wear a black chādor everywhere they go, as is still a widespread image in Western media. It simply means that the female body is completely covered except for the face and hands; the head is covered with a headscarf in one of any number of different styles and colours, while the body is hidden under a typically knee-length or calf-length overcoat. Only some Iranian women additionally wrap themselves in a black chādor.

Over the years, the preferred styles of veiling changed and became more and more fashionable. For example, women were inspired by tribal and ethnic head coverings and ways of wearing them (Zahedi 2008: 260). Veiling was not necessarily linked with morality, chastity and Islamic virtue anymore, but with individual self-expression: "The dark color, shape-concealing manteau was transformed into a shorter, colorful, shape-revealing garment. Gone were the long dark pants, replaced by three-quarter-length trousers that hint at shapely ankles. The big dark rusary was discarded in favor of small, brightly patterned, and transparent head scarves" (Zahedi 2008: 261). In addition, women increasingly used make-up, and facial plastic surgery became very popular. Attempts to limit the improper or bad-hejābi look have generally failed.

A woman's manner of veiling is not only a matter of self-expression; it also depends on the type of activity she is engaging in, her social environment, the social milieu she comes from, and her age. The manner and style of veiling differ in general between rural and urban women, for example.⁹ They are determined by place and time, and can

⁸ Suzanne Maloney and Eliora Katz: Iran and the Headscarf Protests. *Brookings.edu*, 24 January 2019 (<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/iran-and-the-headscarf-protests/>).

⁹ Alavi mentions that even in 2003 some tribal women did not respect the mandatory veil but suffered no consequences, while urban women had to fear punishments. Rural women were freer in public and in communication with men than urban women, as pointed out by a commentary in a blog; see Alavi (2005: 164–174). In 2006, more than 70% of the Iranian population resided in urban areas. This led to a general

be used to express one's political affiliation. For instance, Iranian women do not necessarily wear the veil at home among family members, though some do in the presence of unrelated male guests. When a woman leaves her private home for a short time while remaining in her local area – whether it be to buy groceries, talk with her neighbours or simply to take out the trash – she at least covers her head with a scarf. When she wants to play sports in public she has to wear an overcoat and headscarf, even though this may be uncomfortable for her. If a woman works in a government institution, she usually wears a *maqna'e* (a special kind of headscarf) and an overcoat in a dark colour. Sometimes she additionally wears a black *chador*, particularly when she wants to enter religious and holy places such as a mosque. If so, the *chador* may be black or colourful. During her daily prayers at home or – less commonly – in the mosque or the Hosseiniye, the woman is also usually covered with a *chador*.

Meanwhile, the veil has become a major part of the Iranian fashion industry. Wealthy women can wear the latest models of veil and overcoat, which can also easily transgress the border between the allowed and the disallowed. Women from lower social strata prefer a more old-fashioned covering, not only because of their financial limitations, but also for security reasons. A young woman who wants to go shopping wears a small-sized, thigh-length and more colourful overcoat and a headscarf that does not hide the hair completely. Women from older generations are veiled more conventionally in a typically larger-sized, dark-coloured overcoat and a colourful headscarf.

Other aspects of behaviour must also harmonize with the different variants of veiling, such as how, when and where women move their bodies in public spaces and whether or not they avoid eye contact with men. For example, if a woman is wearing a lot of make-up or strikingly coloured clothes, or if she's wearing an open, short and tight overcoat paired with trousers, or is wearing her scarf too casually – all still within the limits of the mandatory veiling law – she can send certain messages to the public and hint at certain hidden aims and intentions. A woman who is accompanied by a man behaves differently in public than a single woman, and has a different status. A single woman cannot spend her time in public doing nothing other than sitting and talking to other people. She must demonstrate that she is busy to ensure that others don't object to her presence (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 24–26).

Some spaces situated in the grey zone between public and private, such as a private car or shared taxi, allow people to elude the gender separation. Similarly, in the closed private quarters of holiday cottages in the Caspian Sea region, with their own private beaches, people can move and act privately. There, the veil and gender separation are not necessarily an obligation. Recently, the sphere where people can move less conventionally has grown to include time spent in nature engaging in leisure activities such as walking, picnics and sports.

Issues of security, social pressure and control also have an impact on one's manner of veiling, but, with the exception of the six-day protests shortly after the revolution,

change in lifestyle, and in people's demands and expectations, even though regional disparities – depending also on ethnic background and religious affiliation – still persist; Kian (2013: 44).

veiling itself has not been questioned and not been a subject of public discussion until recently. Instead, the type of veil and manner of wearing it, along with the radius of women's daily actions and activities, were always negotiated by the women themselves. Young woman, in particular, neglected 'proper' veiling. They showed several inches of their hair in public despite the threat of penalties from the morality police. From the late 1990s, bad-hejābi became an established practice (Bayat 2010: 103). However, this does not necessarily mean that these women departed from religiosity, because the veil on its own was and is not an indication of a more moral, religious and secure society; it rather demonstrates a growing self-awareness of women and their consciousness of their importance to Iranian society.

In 2017, when the tense economic situation became evident, social unrest was accompanied by acts of unveiling. The mandatory veil was questioned, while at the same time, voices argued for a more religious and moral society. They disapproved of the increasing prevalence of bad-hejābi and the supposed departure from religion in Iranian society.

Recent Acts of Unveiling and the Importance of Social Media

The internet and social media enabled women from all over the country to join the women's movement, drawing attention to women outside of the capital Tehran, and also widened the scope of the movement's activities. The journalists of the women's movement learned to manoeuvre through the media, press, websites and blogs. They created a counter public sphere, where the abolition of the veil was discussed in a blog as early as 2005, provoking the conservatives (Michaelsen 2013: 287–88). After the government, under the presidency of Ahmadinejad, destroyed the organizational structure of the women's movement, the internet remained the best means of communication for women. The enforcement of the Islamic dress code under his presidency in 2007 even caused some women who "believed in the hejāb" to comment on and criticize it on their blogs (Akhavan 2013: 40–42). Though still existent, the blogosphere has lost its importance for women's activism since late 2007, when social media began to take precedence and the state had already begun to influence the blogosphere with its own proactive participatory campaigns to minimize the role of dissenting blogs (Akhavan 2013: 45, 49–57). After that, the digital community increased and diversified, but a physical gathering of the activists was impossible until the Green Movement arose (Michaelsen 2013: 293–313). The movement took advantage of the expansion of social media in order to mobilize people (Haghighatjoo 2016: 237). The social media site Friendfeed was of primary importance for the movement in 2009. This online communication platform was where the symbolic colour "green" was agreed upon (Akhavan 2013: 90). During the movement, social media facilitated the sharing of information. New media practices enabled political activists to circumvent state control. Since the decline of the post-election movement, a "soft war" has begun, with the state also using social media to promote its ideas (Akhavan 2013: 84,

100–104). Despite governmental efforts to control and interfere with online communication, social media did not lose its importance for Iranians – only its character and function changed. With such a plurality of opinions in the social network community, dissenting voices could easily get lost. Thus, again, new forms of action were necessary in order to be heard.

In the past few years, a new trend has become visible in Iranian society via the internet: women, primarily young women, removed their veil and took a photo or video of themselves without a scarf, then shared it with their community using social media. This trend was called ‘My Stealthy Freedom’. The initiator, Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist who emigrated in 2009, launched a campaign entitled “The Wind in My Hair” in which she posted photos of herself with loose hair. Unexpectedly, this caused a widespread reaction in Iran; a lot of women imitated her and posted photos of themselves without hejāb on the “My Stealthy Freedom” Facebook page. Within a month, the page already had 500,000 “likes”.¹⁰ To take these photos, women exploited the grey zones between the private and public spheres during their private leisure activities. Urban middle-class women, in particular, have the possibility of spending their leisure time outside of their private homes. Their lives are not restricted to the home and taking care of household affairs. They can play sports, go for a walk in the mountains or parks, or travel to the Caspian Sea in the North or to the Persian Gulf in the South. They can then take photos of these activities during short windows of time when the veil is removed (intentionally or by accident) and share it with their social media communities. The dissemination of these private photos and videos via social media transfers it into the public sphere but eludes legal oversight.

This trend went further with the hashtag campaigns ‘Girls of Enqelāb Street’ and ‘White Wednesday’. These are silent acts of unveiling performed on the street by many individual women of every age group. These acts started in December 2017 during the protests over economic issues, when a young woman, Vida Movahed, climbed to the top of a utility box and silently waved her white scarf like a flag. Her quiet performance was recorded and shared over social media. A few weeks later, another young woman repeated that act, and many other Iranians followed her and shared the images under the hashtag ‘Girls of Enqelāb Street’. Many of the earliest activists were arrested on the charge of “inciting corruption and prostitution”. Some of them were sentenced to prison.¹¹ After that it became a regular occurrence on Wednesdays for (mainly young) women to take off their headscarf, usually white in colour, in any public place, then wave it on a stick above their head. In addition, even elderly women in chādor showed solidarity with them, remaining covered but silently wielding a veil. Videos and photos were distributed and shared under the hashtag ‘White Wednesday’. What do these silent acts mean, and what do the women demand? Is it really a simple protest against the mandatory veil, or are there further implications?

¹⁰ Suzanne Maloney and Eliora Katz: Iran and the Headscarf Protests. *Brookings.edu*, 24 January 2019 (<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/iran-and-the-headscarf-protests/>).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

It is obvious that the silent acts of unveiling, and the numerous subsequent expressions of sympathy and tolerance, caused a broad echo in social media and the press in Iran and abroad. The individual acts of unveiling, as acts of silence, became part of a public discourse reflected in the public print media that I will explore in the next section.

Public Discussion on Veiling and Unveiling

What happens when women operate without words? What do they demand? What does a discourse of this variety look like? An analysis of the contributions of three Iranian journals will shed some light.

The journals in question are the liberal journals *Irān-e fardā* (Iran of Tomorrow) and *Zanān-e emruz* (Women of Today), and the religious reform-oriented but more conservative publication *Nasim-e bidāri* (Breeze of the Awakening/Enlightenment). In their March 2018 editions, each of these commented on the issue of veiling and unveiling in several articles and interviews. Only *Irān-e fardā* used a cover photo related to this subject: a historical photo of a mass demonstration during the revolution of 1979, with a focus on unveiled women standing side by side with men. Five contributions to the journal refer to the subject.¹² *Zanān-e emruz* does not refer to the debate about the veil on its cover. However, five articles refer to the veiling-unveiling discourse.¹³ The most thorough contribution to the discourse, with 15 articles and interviews, is found in *Nasim-e bidāri*.¹⁴ This journal refers to the subject with a short headline on the cover: Bi-parde az hejāb – barresi-ye hodud-e hejāb-e zanān az manzar-e shar' wa qānun (Revealing the hejāb – a study on the female veil from the perspective of Islamic law). The edition in question is primarily dedicated to historical subjects: the time of Pahlavi rule and the revolution of 1979.

The hejāb discussion in *Irān-e fardā* begins with an interview with three female activists involved in the women's movement in Iran and the recent protests against the mandatory veil.¹⁵ According to them, the women's movement and the acts of unveiling of the women in Enqelāb Street should be considered separately. Whereas the women's movement is defined as movement, they refer to the "girls of Enqelāb Street" as single acts and not as a movement. They conclude that the current women's move-

¹² *Irān-e fardā* was a religious reform-oriented monthly journal that was published from 1371–1379 (1992–2000) and resumed publication in 1393 (2014).

¹³ *Zanān-e emruz* is a monthly journal published since 1393 (2014). It followed the banned journal *Zanān* and exclusively covers social, cultural, scientific and artistic issues relevant to women.

¹⁴ *Nasim-e bidāri* is a religious reform-oriented monthly journal published since 1388 (2009).

¹⁵ Marziye (Minu) Mortazi Langarudi is a member of the Council of Nationalist-Religious Activists (shura-ye fa'alan-e melli madhhabi) and director of the Society of the Mothers of Peace (anjoman-e mādarān-e solh). Shahla E'zazi is a social scientist with a focus on women and family affairs. Fateme Sadeqi is a well-known opponent of the mandatory veil and had already criticized it in an article on Radio Zamane in 2008 (1387).

ment is a result of historical development since the beginning of the 20th century, but that recently it is in a sad situation (*Irān-e fardā*, 1396 [2018], no. 38: 52–65). In contrast to *Irān-e fardā*, the journal *Zanān-e emruz* maintains that the women's movement still exists and is growing with the help of digital media (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 21–23). *Nasim-e bidāri* does not refer to the movement at all. The journal instead problematizes recent tendencies of bad-hejābi, departure from religion, and a general decline of morals and ethics in Iranian society. In *Irān-e fardā*, violence against women in Iranian society is part of a religious-philosophical contribution that discusses the different meaning of nafs and ruh (soul, spirit, self)¹⁶ in the Qur'ān. The author comes to the conclusion that every human has a male and a female side. Those who reject this would, it is argued, show more violence against the other gender (*Irān-e fardā*, 1396 [2018], no. 38: 66–67).

The journals analysed reflect different notions of the parts of society demanding abolition of the mandatory veil. Like *Irān-e fardā*, *Zanān-e emruz* has a positive attitude toward those who fight for equal rights for women and against the mandatory veil. The journal points to the restrictions the women face in everyday life despite their influence on the public sphere and the economy. In contrast to men, women must show that they are busy in public. Their activities must not be aimless even when they spend their leisure time in parks, sport centres and shopping malls (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 24–26). The journals *Irān-e fardā* and *Zanān-e emruz* both refer to the recent acts of unveiling. Whereas *Irān-e fardā* argues that these actions are the consequence of a long tradition of veiling (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 68–73), *Zanān-e emruz* discusses the sentencing of women who appear unveiled in public. In that context, the journal considers the meaning of being unveiled (bi-hejābi) and badly veiled (bad-hejābi). Only the complete lack of an Islamic hejāb may be called bi-hejābi, and in those circumstances the journal accepts that security forces or the morality police have the right to intervene. In the case of bad-hejābi, the type of veil and manner of veiling vary considerably. Bad-hejābi is the result of an individual's decision and part of that person's private life. The author concludes that neither bad-hejābi nor even bi-hejābi are a danger for national security or against the regime. They are merely the expression of an individual's opinion and cause nobody to suffer any disadvantage (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 30–31). The acts of unveiling are – according to the author in *Zanān-e emruz* – not representative of Iranian society as a whole. They are merely the expressions of a few individuals, and as such the issue does not necessarily have priority for the women's fraction of the Iranian parliament. Another article discusses the reasons behind the acts of unveiling and points to international sporting competitions and music performances held in Iran. The author notes that non-Iranian female participants are not familiar with how to wear the veil, and that sometimes their veils slide down, arguing that this is why Iranian sportswomen

¹⁶ The meaning of both terms, nafs and ruh, is part of various theological and philosophical discourses and debates in Islamic history until today. A short overview of the different meanings of the terms is given by Macdonald ([1931] 1932).

were among the first activists of the unveiling campaign (*Zanān-e emruz*, 1396 [2018], no. 31: 37–40).

Nasim-e bidāri, in contrast, notes that in educational and cultural institutions, the focus has always been on people's external aspects and not on their inner condition. Thus, the journal takes a general look at Iranian society and the recent situation of women and asks several experts about possible solutions to resistance against the mandatory veil and ways to improve moral behaviour. Here, the term *hejāb* is used alongside the term *ʿafāf*, which means chastity. The experts interviewed all agree in their attitude that opposition to the obligation of wearing the veil is an expression of the insufficiency of Iranian politics and educational institutions. Security forces and morality police (*gasht-e ershād*) might not be the solution; rather, they feel that more profound and effective measures and reforms would be needed to re-establish a moral order.

All three journals are unanimous that the veil is not merely a religious symbol that was introduced in early Islam and became obligatory for every woman since that time. They rather recognize that the veil also has social and, more recently, political dimensions, and that all these aspects overlap. They see no basis for the obligation of veiling in the Islamic textual tradition or Islamic law. The author in *Irān-e fardā* even contends, with reference to Shahid Beheshti, that it is un-Islamic (*Irān-e fardā*, 1396 [2018], no. 38: 75). *Nasim-e bidāri* accepts that today, wearing the veil is considered an element of one's individual freedom. The obligation of veiling has no cultural background and cannot be indicative of the culture of chastity (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 131). It rather goes back to a decree made by Ayatollah Sayyed Ruhollah Khomeini in 1983 (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 124). Today, the *hejāb* has become political, just like other social and cultural issues (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 148). Nonetheless, there are also (political) voices in *Nasim-e bidāri* who consider veiling the most important value of the Islamic religion and a religious duty for a society with a political system whose tradition and national culture is also based on Islam. Fateme Rahbar, a former member of parliament, claims that the majority of Iranian people accept the veil, and that the participation of Iranian women in social and political affairs can be traced back to veiling (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 126). Such neoconservative voices admit that, even though the veil and chastity are the basic expressions of religious values and should not be questioned, there is a need for reforms. Such reforms, according to parliamentary cleric Hojjat al-Islam Hossein Pezhmanfar, should more strongly enshrine veiling in Iranian society as a cultural characteristic, and thus diminish the influence of foreign enemies (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 127). Another politician, law expert Shahindokht Mulawardi, adds that there should be a law that expresses the aim of veiling. Since the *hejāb* is not entirely religious or cultural, but always political, the law of veiling must be combined with cultural aspects of each individual's thoughts and actions (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 131).

The moderate cleric Sayyed Mostafa Mohaqqueqdamad acknowledges in an interview that veiling is neither a guarantee for chastity nor the result of Western influence.

The people should instead recognize that modest clothing is not only limited to religiosity (*imān*) but also to chastity and dignity (*'effat wa waqār*) (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 129). The daughter of Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani (1911/14–1979) is interviewed as well; she argues for a positive, mild and respectful view of the young people who oppose the veil and an appropriate education that teaches them to accept Islamic values and the veil (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 135–137).

The social dimension of veiling is discussed by sociologist Ebrahim Fayyaz, who points to a lack of gender competence in Iranian society. From a regional and historical perspective, veiling was not an obligation for all women in Iranian society. The *chādor* was not practical for female rural workers; it was a covering only worn by wealthy urban women who did not work and had enough money for the cloth. Veiling thus has an economic and social dimension and is strongly connected to the family (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 133). Fayyaz maintains that prevailing genderphobia has contributed to many problems such as prostitution, Aids and sexual abuse, and that in addition, the religion of today has nothing to do with Islam anymore. Instead, it has become a religion of censure, of boycott and of populism. Only the support and strengthening of the family can contribute to economic and social security and a strong political unit (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 134).

The lengthiest contribution in *Nasim-e bidāri* is an interview with the historical scientist Amir Tarkashwand, who wrote a book on the history of early Islam and the question of veiling (*Hejāb-e shar'i dar 'asr-e payāambar – The religious hejāb in the time of the Prophet*). His main argument is that the meaning of veiling has changed throughout the long history of Islam. In the time of the Prophet Mohammad, the meaning of the veil was dependent on the local, environmental, political and cultural context of the era and differs from the more recent understanding. The book was criticized and delayed before it was published, and it provoked widespread discussion, especially among specialists of Islamic law, because it differs from the official interpretation of the *hejāb* (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 143). It becomes obvious that the journal has a particular interest in the promotion of the book and asks for the author's advice for young girls today. He did not answer the question, just as the other interviewees did not when the journalist wanted to know their personal attitudes towards the practice of veiling. It seems they all considered it a private affair that should not be published in the mass media.

The question of whether veiling is a private affair is answered by Parwane Solhshuri, the acting parliamentary women's leader. She argues that the law always takes priority. When the law makes veiling an obligation, individual freedom of choice is subordinated to it (*Nasim-e bidāri*, 1397 [2018], no. 80–81: 148).

To summarize, a tendency to accept the veil becomes obvious in *Nasim-e bidāri* even though the journal recognizes the need for reforms. The recommended reforms should encourage veiling and chastity in Iranian society without restricting women's activities. In contrast, *Zanān-e emruz* and *Irān-e fardā* both support individual freedom of choice without reference to other problems in Iranian society, and without

discussion of any consequences. The three journals generally recognize a broad resistance against the obligation of veiling and a flight from religion, especially among young people. The political voices in *Nasim-e bidāri* seem to downplay the problem and focus on other issues of Iranian society such as a decline in moral behaviour, a lack of respect for religious values and reforms that could stop the decline.

Conclusion and Questions

Curiously, the silent acts of unveiling occurred at the same time as social unrest arose in multiple Iranian cities in winter 2017/18. It was not clearly expressed why these acts occurred at this exact time, and what the women involved wished to demand and demonstrate through them. Not all of these women referred to the women's movement or the online campaigns, even though these may have given important impulses to the silent activists. After the end of the Green Movement of 2009, the government pushed ahead with efforts to control and to disrupt online communication. Social networking did not lose its importance for Iranians, or for the formation of a plurality of opinions, but it is likely that its character and function changed.

It is clear that these acts gained attention and provoked a broad discourse with various focuses. As Bayat notes: "The women's incremental practices needed to be backed up by careful argumentation and discursive campaign" mainly drawn from alternative legal and theological interpretations (Bayat 2010: 113). The discursive negotiation process in Iranian society seems to occur mainly amongst the liberal and reform-oriented factions. The journal *Nasim-e bidāri* referred to the meaning of the hejāb in Islamic history, in Islamic law, and in Iranian society today. Because of its proximity to the religious faction, it is not surprising that this journal supports the notion of a moral and Islamic society. However, it still does not deny the necessity of reforms. Thus, it criticizes the work of state institutions and theological centres and also questions the role of the morality police and the interpretation of the law in the past. Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether the journal in general supports the obligation of wearing the veil or not. Those interviewed avoid answering questions about their own private attitudes toward the mandatory veil. Here, again, we feel a meaningful silence and must assume: not only religion, but also the hejāb is a private matter.

In *Irān-e fardā* and *Zanān-e emruz*, there is no particular religious or secular position that both journals identify with. We also cannot observe discussion of any particular generational or regional problem. The issues discussed in both journals are related to the whole of society, with no differentiation between rural and urban citizens, or between different ethnic and religious groups. The veil and the social position of women are only discussed in a national Islamic Shiite context. The main problems that were identified within this context are the recent economic and social changes, a perceived visible moral decline, and the increased influence of social media fostering perceptions and attitudes that can no longer be controlled by governmental institutes and forces.

While liberals stress the freedom of individual choice, religious voices take into consideration the morality of society as a whole, which they feel is in decline. Equal rights – in particular for women, who are crucial to Iranian society – are important for both sides. Even the religious voices acknowledge that the role of women cannot be reduced to that of housewives and mothers. They are, on the contrary, a very important resource, playing an active role in the development of Iranian society.

The recent debate surrounding the obligation of veiling demonstrates that only specialists of both the liberal and religious-conservative factions refer to religious arguments. While the specialists of the liberals emphasize legislative and theosophical issues, the religious-conservative voices stress the moral standards that should be maintained in society. For them, the religious meaning of the veil is strongly associated with the ideas of correct moral behaviour and chastity (‘afāf). Their duty is to simultaneously defend both the wearing of the hejāb and chastity (‘afāf) in society. The discourse primarily consists of discussion regarding the social circumstances, conflicts, and historical political background surrounding the veil, and how this impacts on considerations of the necessity or abolition of veiling.

In contrast to the prevailing opinions that the acts of unveiling are a result of either the online campaigns initiated by Masih Alinejad or part of the history of the women’s rights movement in Iran, one cannot deny the impact of recent social developments and the increasing need for self-determination by the individual in everyday life. My own observations of everyday life highlighted aspects related to the types of activity, time and place when women appeared without a veil. I witnessed four cases of unveiling in the days surrounding New Year in 2018. In the first case, a young woman was playing table tennis with a male relative in a small sports ground in a city quarter mainly inhabited by wealthy people. As she played, the veil fell off her head. She noticed it, but did not cover her head again, nor did anybody insist that she do so. In the second case, a middle-aged woman in a museum in the centre of the city did not keep her veil on while visiting the museum, despite the presence of the museum’s guards. Nobody seemed to be bothered by it or ask her to cover her head. In the third instance, a group of young women enjoyed a picnic in a big park during *sizdah-be-dar*, a tradition held during the New Year festivities 13 days after the beginning of the New Year. Some of them did not wear the veil, and neither the morality police nor the other people in the park took any notice of it. The last case I observed is the one I described in the article’s introduction. The silence of the passers-by might be interpreted as a silence of tolerance, and only a few examples on YouTube demonstrate open rejection, mainly from clerics and civilians.¹⁷

¹⁷ “Iranian Slaps Brave Woman for Not Wearing a Hijab on Revolution Street”, published on Youtube on 19 March 2018 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A09H_cIAjhw, accessed 18 May 2020); “Iranian Woman Attacks Women for not Wearing Hijab”, published on Youtube on 2 August 2018 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvygtD9y6A>, accessed 18 May 2020); “Mullah/Islamic Cleric Harasses Iranian Woman Who Is Refusing To Wear Hijab”, published on Youtube by ‘Democratic Iran Channel’ 2 January 2019 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAbIMm78Rxc>, accessed 18 May 2020).

It becomes clear that these acts of unveiling occurred in public, in places where women spend their spare time: playing sports, visiting a museum, having a picnic with friends or going shopping. They pursued their private activities in the public sphere and the morality police did not intervene. As the examples demonstrate, the public discourse reflected in some journals represents only one side of the coin, with the daily routines of individual women on the other side.

After one year, the silent unveiling protests have not yet stopped. On certain days, such as International Women's Day, the protests have become louder, while the silent activities in daily life continue unabated. Recent reports from visitors to Iran include accounts of silent acts of unveiling even a year later. Meanwhile, unveiled women are an ever more common part of everyday life, at least in the capital city of Tehran – in restaurants, in taxis, on the streets and in shopping malls.¹⁸ Even officials have realized that they cannot arrest every woman without a veil.¹⁹

Before the acts of unveiling, women's public presence enabled them to circumvent constraints, and to use what already existed to discover new spaces to make themselves heard, seen and felt. The recent silent acts of unveiling developed from dispersed individual acts of civil disobedience, which broke a taboo and led to a collective solidarity among women in everyday life. They transgressed the conventional norms via a multitude of tactics in everyday life and created a culture of defiance.²⁰ What became the new mode of self-expression for women from a variety of social, political and religious backgrounds was neither public gatherings nor online communication, nor even alternative spaces and discourses, but dispersed, individual, silent unveiling. An act of silence grants each individual woman visibility, substantial power and a "voice". The economic crisis faced by Iran as a result of international sanctions might have been the major cause of frustration for many people – and women in particular – and thus the impetus for their acts of unveiling.

I conclude that the growing self-awareness of Iranian women in everyday life, the economic crisis, and the limitations of the women's movement and online campaigns may have led to a new and individual form of activism based on acts of ambiguous silence. This does not entail passive subordination, but rather an expression of discontent with a unifying force in a context where speech can be dangerous. Silence is a new means of wielding power that has the potential for societal change.²¹ The silent acts of unveiling have thus made the veil a symbol of a larger process of negotiation: the negotiation of public and private, the individual and society, what is allowed and what is forbidden, social imbalances, and – last but not least – the veil itself in its political, social, cultural, and religious meaning.

¹⁸ Jörg-Christian Schillmöller (2019): Der wachsende Mut, zu widersprechen. *Deutschlandfunk.de*, 1 May 2019. https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/nachgefragt-iran-der-wachsende-mut-zu-widersprechen.2852.de.html?dram:article_id=447621.

¹⁹ Ina Rogg (2019): Revolution? Nein danke! In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 26 March 2019, 5.

²⁰ For details, see Khosravi (2008), in particular chapter 6, pp. 138–168.

²¹ This concept is based on the idea from Hoegaerts and Verstraete's edited volume in *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* (Hoegaerts and Verstraete 2016).

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6 Voiles, statuts du regard et évolutions des modalités de religiosité chez les femmes tunisiennes

Khaoula Matri

La question du voile dit islamique continue d'occuper le devant de la scène publique et médiatique internationale. Contrairement au voilement masculin comme celui des Touaregs, le voilement des femmes fait l'objet de législations et de politiques dans les pays à majorité musulmane ou ailleurs (voir Ferjani 2005). Entre l'interdiction, la tolérance et l'imposition, l'apparence des femmes continue de mettre au défile régimes politiques démocratiques, théocratiques comme autoritaires, et à interpellier les valeurs universelles relatives à la liberté de conscience et de confession et à la gouvernance du corps. En même temps, la question du voile incite à redéfinir le rapport à l'Autre, en soulevant des concepts comme l'universalisme et le relativisme (voir Kilani 1993). Le voilement des femmes musulmanes nous fait aussi réfléchir aux nouvelles formes d'expression de l'islam (voir Göle 2007). Mais cette question n'est-elle pas l'arbre qui cache la forêt ? En France, par exemple, un pays fortement politisé, cette question ne renvoie-t-elle pas à d'autres problématiques qui s'y rattachent, comme l'immigration, la laïcité et les valeurs républicaines ? La question du port du voile touche aux questions de la liberté individuelle, de l'engagement politique, de la quête identitaire comme marqueur culturel. Les significations accordées au corps féminin voilé se traduisent en termes d'appartenances, d'idéologies religieuses, d'enjeux politiques et du regard porté sur Soi ou sur l'Autre (voir Matri 2015). Cet objet fluctuant change de sens selon les circonstances, les conditions et les usages.

Sociologues, anthropologues et historien-ne-s ont examiné la question du hijab à partir de divers approches, mentionnant selon le contexte les causes et les circonstances des révélations du Coran, la conceptualisation des termes utilisés et les modalités

de son interprétation. Selon la vision méthodologique de L. Lakhdar, les versets de la Sourate 33 sont sous-tendus par trois contextes importants : « celui de la guerre et de l'agression extérieure ; celui du harcèlement des Hypocrites, cette lutte est interne permanente ; et celui des quelques problèmes complexes liés à la vie intime du prophète, comme les retombées de son mariage avec Zaynab sur les relations entre le Prophète et son environnement proche » (Lakhdar 2007 : 127). Le hijab/sitar porte une dimension spatiale et abstraite séparant deux hommes (Mernissi 1992). En dressant les dimensions historique, sociale, linguistique et conceptuelle de ce terme dans la civilisation islamique, F. Mernissi revient sur le contexte moderne pour expliquer l'usage insensé de ce terme pour séparer les hommes et les femmes : « il est, de nos jours, revendiqué comme un symbole de l'identité musulmane, une manne pour la femme musulmane » (Mernissi 1992 : 124). D'autres part, Lakhdar précise que :

La scène originelle dans laquelle s'est jouée la question du hijâb était une scène dynamique, peuplée d'acteurs multiples, d'enjeux interférents. Le sens que l'on doit tenir compte de l'interaction de tous ces facteurs, et non de chaque facteur isolément. Le contexte polymorphe de l'avènement du hijâb était celui d'une guerre qui ne pouvait que renforcer les valeurs rétrogrades régissant les rapports hommes-femmes ; celui du péril et de la dissidence politico-religieuse des Hypocrites qui n'hésitaient pas à s'en prendre à la vie intime du Prophète en vue de briser son charisme ; celui de l'urgence pour les Musulmans et pour leur chef de faire face au péril sans, pour autant, bousculer le fragile équilibre médinois... En un mot, c'était l'avenir de la Prédication qui était en jeu. L'imposition du hijâb est inséparable de cette conjoncture complexe travaillée par la dialectique de l'immédiat et de l'à venir. Elle n'a pas de « vérité » hors de ce contexte. (Lakhdar 2007 : 139)

Les diktats des religions monothéistes sur la condition des femmes touchent des ères culturelles diverses et remontent à des périodes historiques lointaines. En outre, le voile dit islamique n'est pas une tenue uniforme, il prend des formes esthétiques variant selon le contexte socio-politique (voile saoudien, voile afghan, voile iranien, voile turc, etc.) et socio-culturel (voile traditionnel de différentes régions du monde : tunisien, algérien, moyen-oriental, asiatique, etc.). Il représente également un signe de distinction entre générations (grand-mère, jeunes femmes, adolescentes) et entre confessions religieuses (chiite, sunnite, druze). Enfin, il peut marquer des spécificités relatives à l'engagement sectaire ou politique.

En comparaison avec d'autres sociétés arabes et musulmanes, la Tunisie, comme la Turquie, a vécu une rupture par rapport au voilement religieux des femmes, au nom de la modernisation de la société et de l'égalité des sexes. L'usage du voile traditionnel (safsari) a progressivement disparu notamment pour les femmes actives. En outre et pour contrecarrer la montée des islamistes, les régimes politiques (du premier président H. Bourguiba et du deuxième président Z.A. Ben Ali) ont opprimé cette pratique. Le

voile est considéré comme un habit confessionnel¹ opposé à une stratégie politique optant pour la modernisation de la société et l'émancipation des femmes. Selon Boukrâa (2008 : 270), cette modernisation volontariste assimilait dévoilement des femmes et libération. C'est ainsi que le voile traditionnel (safsari) et le voile dit religieux a été exclu de l'espace public tunisien durant une bonne décennie.

Toutefois les nouvelles formes de religiosité mettent en question ce processus de modernisation volontariste depuis l'indépendance et l'oppression contre certaines pratiques religieuses. Les expressions culturelles s'inscrivent dans une perspective du retour à l'islam, et de la quête identitaire des musulmans dans sa dimension la plus pure, profonde, étroitement rattachée à un islam globalisé amplifié dans les chaînes satellitaires et propagé par les nouvelles techniques de communication au plus large public. Une partie de la jeune génération, instruite et urbanisée, s'investit dans cette nouvelle forme de religiosité du début du 21^e siècle. Pour les initiatrices, celles qui ont transgressé la prohibition de ladite tenue confessionnelle, porter le voile constitue une résistance passive et une mise à l'épreuve de leur courage face à la persécution de l'État (Ben Salem 2010). Au bout de quelques années, le recours au voilement se transforme en une pratique courante suite à une rémission du contrôle des autorités et une permissivité politique. Une normalité de la pratique s'installe même avant la défaite du régime autoritaire et donne lieu à l'émergence d'une dimension religieuse non politisée, visible dans l'apparence des femmes dans l'espace public.

Je m'intéresse dans le présent article aux perceptions religieuses et sociales du voile et aux dimensions sacralisée et profane de cette pratique. Car l'adhésion à une tenue dite religieuse témoigne d'une diversité de choix qui révèle la capacité de l'individu à se définir en tant que sujet, entre une multitude d'identités hiérarchisées et de pratiques multiples telles que la manière d'identifier le Soi/Nous et l'Autre. J'examine le voile comme objet polysémique dans la vie ordinaire et les frontières qu'il installe entre les sexes, les identités et les catégories dans une dimension qui combine le traditionnel et le moderne, le religieux et le profane.

A partir d'un travail de terrain mené en Tunisie, j'essaie de situer la question du port du voile dans trois épisodes politiques différents, au cours desquels un changement de contexte a été un marqueur d'évolution au niveau de la perception comme au niveau de la pratique. Sur la base d'une relation inscrite dans la durée, mon enquête de terrain qui combine observation et entretiens prolongés, m'a permis d'établir une comparaison entre le discours et les pratiques des femmes qui portent le voile dit islamique, couvre-chef, hijab, hijab char'i ou niqab, et qui le vivent (selon le type de la tenue adoptée) comme une expérience ancrée dans le quotidien et les gestes les plus

¹ Trois circulaires sont venues interdire le voile considéré comme « tenue confessionnelle » : « N° 108 du 18 septembre 1981 pour les établissements scolaires publics, n°77 du 7 septembre 1987 pour les établissements primaires et secondaires, le 21 septembre 1987 pour les écoles supérieures d'enseignement, les cités et les foyers universitaires. Une quatrième datant du 12 août 1987 s'adresse aux agents de l'administration et des établissements publics des deux sexes. La prohibition du port du voile a été élargie aux établissements privés par une autre circulaire datée de décembre 1991, portant sur la tenue des agents de l'administration et des institutions publiques et privée. » (voir Maryem Ben Salem 2010).

ordinaires. La population cible est composée de jeunes filles et de jeunes femmes, qui représentent la « nouvelle » génération des femmes voilées, mais aussi de jeunes hommes.

Nous nous concentrons uniquement sur les manières de penser le corps voilé et de négocier les normes morales et religieuses relatives à cette pratique. Les appartenances idéologiques ne sont pas abordées dans notre analyse parce que nous voulons nous concentrer sur le port du voile en tant que pratique ordinaire, et sur les discours des acteurs sociaux en se limitant à ce qu'elles/ils disent d'elles-mêmes/d'eux-mêmes, des femmes et de leur vécu. Cet article propose de s'interroger sur la façon dont le voile est perçu, sur l'image de la femme musulmane idéale et sur les normes morales de conduite décrites par les pratiquantes, indépendamment des mouvances idéologiques de références à travers les récits de femmes qui portent le voile et témoignent de leurs expériences dans toute la diversité de cette pratique religieuse.

Je réalise mon observation à l'échelle microsociale pour appréhender le voile dans des situations vécues témoignant d'une pluralité de pratique aux niveaux de la manière de faire individuelle (habit adopté) et la manière de vivre (comportements) en société. On entend par voilement dit « islamique » les différentes manières de pratiquer le voilement au nom de l'islam. La problématique du voile est traitée d'un point de vue de la pratique sociale au quotidien, indépendamment des dimensions théologique et politique. Je questionne le voile en tant que norme régie par des conduites, des croyances, des idées qui reflètent les attitudes des individus avec leur entourage social le plus proche, avec la communauté musulmane réelle ou imaginée. La conversion au voile dit « islamique » englobe toute pratique vestimentaire guidée par une intention religieuse de couvrir le corps féminin. La norme du port du voile n'est pas rigide et laisse une marge de liberté aux femmes qui l'adoptent à partir de leur histoire personnelle, de leur entourage social et de divers référents d'appartenance et d'identification (voir Matri 2015). Les convergences et les divergences entre les différents modèles seront développées au travers des actions adoptées relatives au sacré et au profane, des perceptions de soi et du regard d'autrui.

A l'origine de l'interprétation : de quel 'awra et fitna parle-t-on ?

F. Mernissi s'arrête sur le verset 53 de la sourate 33 (objet polysémique entre islamologues ou scientifiques et prédicateurs) pour s'interroger sur la méthode de lecture du Coran et de la révélation prophétique, et pour analyser les interprétations du contexte sacré par les commentateurs : « le hijab est le dénouement de tout un réseau de conflits et de tensions » (Mernissi 1992 : 118). D'où le conflit entre « la tradition scientifique inaugurée par les Fuqahā[qui] nous encourage à pousser l'investigation aussi loin que possible » (ibid. : 119), et les interprétations des commentateurs (ceux qui expliquent le Coran), qui rejettent toutes formes de contextualisation ainsi que les causes multiples d'une sourate. Pour M. Enejji, « Du temps du Prophète, le verset décrétant l'adoption du voile à l'occasion de son mariage avec son ancienne belle-fille vient tracer les

frontières entre deux espaces, celui de la vie courante et celui de l'invisible dont seuls les êtres extraordinaires ont les clefs » (Eneji 2018 : 62). Dans d'autres interprétations, « le concept de hijab est tridimensionnel, et les trois dimensions se recoupent très souvent. » (Mernissi 1992 : 119). Elles sont d'ordre visuel, spatial et éthique (ibid. : 119-120).

L'exégèse relative à l'imposition du voile aux femmes musulmanes se fonde sur les versets 31 de la sourate 24, verset 59 de la sourate 33. C'est ainsi que les théologiens musulmans (imams, prédicateurs) ont développé à partir de ces versets une perception du corps de la femme fondée sur les notions de 'awra et fitna. Je rappellerai ici deux définitions simples de ces notions. Présente dans le Coran (XXIV, 31), la notion d'awra relève selon E. Chaumont (2006) de « la question des statuts du regard » : « La 'awra d'une personne désigne de manière générale les parties de son corps qu'elle ne peut dévoiler, qu'elle ne peut laisser apparaître et qu'autrui ne peut regarder ». Figurant fréquemment dans le Coran au sens d'« épreuve, tentation », la notion de fitna signifie plus généralement discorde, désordre (voir J. et D. Sourdel 2004). Ces notions constituent la pierre angulaire autour desquelles se fonde l'image de la femme musulmane dans l'imaginaire collectif, selon les contextes socio-culturels à travers le temps jusqu'aux prédicateurs récents (21^e siècle) qui ont renforcé cette rhétorique (voir Göle 2007).

Longtemps cantonnées à l'espace privé à cause de l'oppression politique, les expressions religieuses des jeunes et des moins jeunes émergent et commencent à s'afficher progressivement, témoignant d'une nouvelle forme de socialisation religieuse qui s'inscrit dans un islam globalisé. En Tunisie, en début de la première décennie du 21^e siècle (les premières femmes voilées sont apparues à partir de 2001/2002) et à l'ère d'internet, la pratique du voile se dissémine et s'installe en tant que norme (voir Matri 2015). Sur la scène politique et au bout d'une décennie (entre 2001/2011), la pratique du voile dit religieux passe d'une dépréciation avant la révolution, à une survalorisation depuis la montée au pouvoir du parti politique islamiste Ennahdha, en 2011.

Dans sa perception générique, le voile symbolise la piété et témoigne de la foi. Toutes les femmes interviewées affirment que, relevant de l'ensemble des « droits » (haqq) et « devoirs » (wâjib), le voile est un devoir religieux (fardh). Elles le présentent comme une reconnaissance de la suprématie d'Allah. Certaines citent le verset coranique considéré comme imposant le voilement des femmes, tandis que d'autres se contentent de dire qu'il s'agit d'une obligation prescrite par l'islam sans arriver à dire les sourates relatives à son imposition. Le terme « voile » symbolise le respect féminin du religieux. Le porter ressemble à une concrétisation de la foi et une obéissance à la divinité. L'évidence de son caractère incontestablement obligatoire et religieux revient dans le récit des femmes avec une tonalité variée et un discours nuancé. Cette perception se fonde sur trois constituants du noyau central du voilement féminin. Le premier correspond à l'identification du voile comme un pilier de l'islam : « le hijab a la même valeur que la prière ». Le deuxième est une manifestation de la glorification distinctive des musulmanes : « Dieu tout-puissant a honoré (akrama) la femme musulmane par son voile ». Le troisième renvoie à l'adoration divine : « on porte le voile pour satisfaire

Dieu (‘alâ khâtîr rabbî) ». La représentation du voile dit islamique reproduit la tridimensionnalité de cet objet en termes de fondement culturel, identitaire et sacrificiel propre aux femmes musulmanes. Porter le voile pour gagner la vie éternelle ou avoir une place au paradis ; tels sont les objectifs poursuivis par les femmes interviewées. L’observation des obligations prescrites dans les versets coraniques est une manière de garantir la paix dans les « deux vies », « ici-bas et dans l’au-delà » (fî al-dunyâ wa fî al-âkhira). Cependant la conversion au voile n’est pas à la portée de toutes les femmes ; d’après certains récits, seules les vraies croyantes ont l’honneur de pouvoir le faire. Quelques femmes expriment leur fierté d’être choisies par Dieu parmi d’autres. Dans ce sens, le voile en tant que vêtement est perçu comme une spiritualité et un sacrifice qui distingue les femmes converties de celles qui ne le sont pas. La croyance en la parole de Dieu est strictement liée au sens de la gratification (thawâb) et du châtement (‘iqâb). Cependant, la peur de la pénitence vient après le désir de satisfaire Dieu et de mériter sa récompense. Les significations centrales du voile relèvent de la chasteté et de la vertu de la femme convertie. Ainsi, l’adoption du voile est un travail sur soi par lequel la femme espère atteindre un état supérieur. Idéalement, parce qu’il constitue un acte volontaire et un motif de fierté, la conversion au port du voile amène sur la voie du salut. Sa dimension spirituelle est traduite comme un lien entre le fidèle et la divinité, ce qui explique le sentiment d’apaisement intérieur et la réconciliation du fidèle avec sa foi. Le voile est aussi perçu comme une passerelle qui restaure le lien d’une société à sa religion, après une période de rupture imposée par le politique. Les significations rattachées au hijab comme signe de culte intrinsèquement lié aux femmes musulmanes sont fondées sur les mouvances islamiques wahabites et salafistes diffusées comme évidence historique, liturgiques et identitaires. Ainsi, la construction des croyances autour du voile renvoie à ce que les femmes intériorisent du discours des prédicateurs médiatisés ou par ce qui est transmis dans les échanges intergroupe. Ces voies de socialisation contournent les structures sociales traditionnelles (famille, institutions religieuses nationales) pour défier la politique hostile avant le renversement du régime dictatorial en Tunisie.

Néanmoins, le sentiment de devoir religieux d’une part diffère d’une femme à l’autre, et d’autre part se présente sous des symboliques variées. En outre, la dimension profane et le vécu révèlent l’importance d’une pratique liée aux normes sociales et culturelles, mais aussi l’importance des perceptions et des conduites correspondant à une vision individualisée du culte. Les motifs subjectifs, sociaux et sociétaux constituent la couche latente de l’implication dans les pratiques religieuses : déception amoureuse, deuil, pression sociale plus ou moins forte, bien des motivations peuvent conduire les femmes à se convertir au port du voile. La « zone muette du voile », pour reprendre les termes de D. Jodelet (2003), témoigne de sa dimension profane, utile et, parfois, libératrice. Au-delà de sa dimension religieuse, le voile est une matrice d’ordre moral qui réorganise les codes normatifs entre les sexes dans la vie quotidienne. Il est signe de respect de l’ordre social sexué et des codes de conduite des femmes censées passer inaperçues dans la sphère publique. Particulièrement après la révolution tunisienne, les prédicateurs locaux, dont la liberté de la parole est garantie dans les lieux

publics et sur les canaux médiatiques, prennent leur revanche et présentent un discours moralisateur sur la conduite des femmes. S'alignant sur le discours de leur pairs à l'étranger, ils mettent en avant le modèle de la femme musulmane voilée parfaite. Le voilement du corps de la femme se transforme en un retour à la religion, incitant les hommes à préserver leur honneur et à soumettre les filles à cette pratique dès le plus jeune âge.

Au quotidien, porter le voile permet aux femmes d'éviter l'embarras dans les transports en commun ou dans la rue à des heures tardives, mais c'est aussi pour « faire comme les autres » : le sens de l'imitation prend plus d'essor. Le voile est alors perçu comme régulateur de tensions, un compromis visant à réactiver la normalité des rapports sociaux sexués. Il propose de traduire la conformité féminine à l'ordre social, traçant les seuils entre le féminin et le masculin et redéfinissant les codes de communication par la religion. Néanmoins, la conduite de la majorité des femmes voilées est souvent en contradiction aux dictats religieux selon le discours moralisateur. Elles sont souvent jugées plus sévèrement puisqu'elles arborent un signe ostentatoire de piété.

L'exigence de maintenir une image positive des muhjabet/des femmes voilées incite les un-e-s et les autres à limiter les choix individuels, en comparant leur conduite à celles qui ne sont pas converties. En effet, leur rejet d'une attitude laxiste révèle leur souci d'un contrôle social plus strict pour elles-mêmes qui, du même coup, les surexposent aux critiques. Pour certaines femmes voilées, l'autocontrôle en public est un réflexe permanent servant à promouvoir l'exemple de la femme pieuse. Ainsi, les « promoteur-trices de la morale » se considèrent comme les gardien-nes de la norme religieuse et infligent aux autres leurs propres conceptions (sur le vêtement, la conduite) même en public. Ces personnes sont motivées par une volonté de purification du modèle de la femme voilée. Certaines décident alors soit d'y recourir soit de l'abandonner provisoirement au gré des circonstances.

La femme voilée est représentée comme responsable de l'ordre social et de l'ordre moral de la société. En lui accordant un rôle prédéterminé dans les interactions sociales entre les sexes même dans les situations les plus banales et quotidiennes, la femme voilée est censée orienter et canaliser le regard porté sur elle, les réactions des autres et la maîtrise de soi. L'intériorisation de cette image exemplaire se traduit dans des expressions comme « la dignité de la femme », « la chasteté », « la vertu », « le respect de soi », « le respect du foulard qu'elle porte », « la prise en considération de l'habit », « la peur de Dieu », « elle doit honorer ce qu'elle met sur sa tête », « elle doit donner l'exemple », « quelle est la différence entre celle qui porte le voile et la non-voilée ? », « qu'elle l'enlève si elle n'est pas capable de l'assumer ! », « les voilées ne sont pas toutes voilées », et plus encore. Le voile comme expression corporelle est une glorification qui doit être méritée. C'est ainsi que les premières années de l'installation de cette norme, en Tunisie, furent marquées par l'exigence du respect des codes moraux et des rituels religieux. Néanmoins, celles qui regrettent leur engagement, continuent à le porter par courtoisie ou pour éviter les critiques de leur entourage.

La finalité de la notion de fitna

La notion de fitna est liée à l'ordre social. Éviter la fitna signifie maintenir l'ordre social entre les hommes et les femmes dans l'espace public. Par ordre, on entend aussi la gestion de la sexualité « licite » et « illicite » mentionnée dans le Coran pour tout/ toute croyant-e. Cette conception religieuse est réduite dans l'imaginaire collectif des Tunisiens et des musulmans à la prohibition de la sexualité féminine en dehors du cadre marital en générale et le tabou de la virginité en particulier (Matri 2013). Le voile est appelé, dans ce cas de figure, à « consolider » la conduite morale des femmes et à les prémunir contre toute tentative de transgression des normes liées à la sexualité. Pour certaines, le port du voile permet aux femmes converties de mieux contrôler les relations conjugales et extraconjugales. Sa sacralité contribue à suivre la bonne ligne de conduite pour les fidèles tentées par la séduction des hommes et ainsi appelées à la fitna. « Le Hijab, c'est entre autres le rideau derrière lequel se tenaient les khalifes et les rois pour se soustraire aux regards de leurs familiers, (selon l'encyclopédie de l'Islam) », (Mernissi 1992 : 120). Contrairement au sens accordé pour les soufis, « on accède aux horizons sans fin des aspirations spirituelles auxquelles le musulman doit prétendre, où le Hijab est un phénomène essentiellement négatif, une perturbation, une incapacité » (Mernissi 1992 : 121).

De nos jours, la finalité du voile est donc de créer une sorte d'auto-gouvernance du corps permettant de se protéger d'une sexualité considérée illicite en dehors du cadre de mariage. Le voile facilite le respect de la prohibition sexuelle en agissant comme garde-fou contre les tentations et les pulsions masculines. La conformité aux normes sexuelles incomberait ainsi à la femme, estimée responsable de sa propre sexualité et de celle de l'homme, dont elle doit maîtriser le désir en maintenant une attitude pudique en public. Une femme mariée, portant le niqab (avant la révolution tunisienne) explique : « [la femme musulmane] doit penser à la vie de tous les jours [...]. Elle peut être la responsable du péché d'un homme qui peut la rencontrer par hasard [...]. Il peut l'admirer [...]. Et ce pauvre homme va la regarder, non ? Et si cet homme n'a pas les moyens pour se marier ? [...] Cela veut dire qu'elle commet un double péché : d'une part, parce qu'elle est dénudée (ariâna) et, d'autre part, parce qu'elle est la cause d'un péché commis par un musulman ! » Pour d'autres, porter le voile adoucit les angoisses des familles relatives à la sexualité préconjugale de leurs filles. Les femmes mariées trouvent dans le voile un tranquillisant face à la jalousie de leur époux, même pour un époux opposé à son port. De plus en plus présent dans l'espace public, le voile permet d'échapper au contrôle familial en apaisant les hommes chargés de surveiller la mobilité des femmes sous leur tutelle. Le voile remplace l'autorité masculine directe en accordant aux femmes une visibilité conditionnée.

Les variations structurelles marquées par le recul de l'âge du premier mariage, l'augmentation du taux de chômage, le coût élevé du mariage ; les difficultés économiques des ménages à subvenir aux besoins essentiels autrefois assurés par le chef de famille, d'une part, et la scolarisation massive et l'accès des femmes au travail salarial, d'autre part expliquent pourquoi les femmes sont amenées à préserver leur corps. Les nou-

veaux rôles et statuts des femmes, fruit d'un processus de modernisation de la société par l'éducation, le travail et l'urbanisation, et qui se traduisent entre autres par une mobilité et une visibilité accrue des femmes dans l'espace public, perturbent les mentalités conservatrices. La féminisation croissante des métiers et l'augmentation du taux de femmes diplômées mettent en péril le pouvoir masculin. En effet, le voile n'est qu'un élément du code de conduite féminin. Il est une forme de résistance de la hiérarchie de genre dans l'espace public, relevant des performativités sexuées, dans le sens où l'organisation sociale communautaire teintée de religiosité cherche à maintenir symboliquement les statuts dits « traditionnels » des hommes et des femmes, sous l'égide de la religion et des spécificités culturelles. Néanmoins, cette dimension s'interpose à la dynamique sociale marquée par une présence active et concurrentielle des femmes dans la vie publique et une égalité judiciaire consolidée par la nouvelle constitution de 2014. Ce rappel sert à ralentir les glissements possibles des Tunisiens et des Tunisiennes vers des modèles dits occidentaux, ou récupérer les personnes que l'on voit s'aligner avec la culture occidentale.

Dans cette logique, la femme se pense comme acteur pernicieux dans le rapport sexuel, émotionnel et social. Elle est source de séduction et dispose par là d'un pouvoir important incarné par son corps dévoilé/diabolisé. Cette image intériorisée rappelle le mythe d'Adam et Eve, d'après lequel la femme a séduit l'homme et l'a poussé au péché originel. Elle est associée au diable qui a trompé l'homme en l'incitant à désobéir à Dieu, qui se déresponsabilise dans le mythe et dans l'imaginaire collectif. Le mythe de l'origine de l'humanité (dans l'anthropogonie biblico-coranique) est ainsi reproduit par la diabolisation de la femme en tant que source de séduction et de tentation. D'une part, l'homme ne peut pas maîtriser son désir sexuel et est représenté comme victime de la provocation/*fitna* féminine, que ce soit par ses gestes ou par son maintien. D'autre part, la femme est considérée comme un vecteur du mal par son corps séducteur. Au terme de ce raisonnement, les hommes sont appelés à contrôler les corps des femmes pour maintenir l'ordre social et accomplir le devoir religieux, conformément aux discours des prédicateurs. Ce constat est confirmé par plusieurs sociologues comme Fatima Mernissi et a été éprouvé dans plusieurs recherches récentes, en Tunisie comme ailleurs. « C'est [...]l'histoire, soit l'action des fondamentalistes de toutes nuances, qui l'a emporté en imposant sa vérité officielle au détriment de la « vérité vraie » et a soumis le discours coranique à une lecture simplificatrice dont on connaît les terribles conséquences » (Lakhdhar 2007 : 140)

Le corps *ʿawra* : une notion à relativiser

Selon la religion, le corps est une création divine. Les femmes perçoivent le corps comme un instrument à mettre au service de l'adoration de Dieu. Il est signe de Son pouvoir, l'illustration d'un miracle où s'incarne Sa puissance et Sa sagesse, et un objet fonctionnel pour l'existence humaine. En même temps, il est parfait puisqu'il est à Son image. « C'est un chef-d'œuvre de Dieu qui dans Sa générosité et Sa perfection, nous

a créés dans la plus belle forme [...]. Porter le voile, c'est la moindre des choses pour le remercier ! [...] C'est une manière de lui manifester notre reconnaissance ! ». La chair humaine est une propriété divine que chacun est appelé à préserver du péché et de tout ce qui peut la souiller ou la dénaturer. En somme, équivalent physique de l'âme, le corps est le premier à témoigner de la personne, le jour du jugement dernier : « Tout membre du corps avec lequel on a commis un péché ou un acte illicite (harām) va témoigner contre nous le jour du jugement dernier », explique une femme interrogée.

Dans le discours des femmes interrogées se combinent trois niveaux : une vision sociale en termes de jugement (le regard de l'entourage proche), une représentation personnelle individuelle (des rapports entre le physique et la moral, des mobiles utilitaires ou pragmatiques) et des motivations spirituelles ou religieuses. Le lien entre le corps et sa représentation est inséparable de la conception que l'imaginaire collectif entretient au sujet du divin : le corps est « image de Dieu », « un don du ciel », « la création de Dieu ». S'ajoutent au corps féminin des normes physiques de beauté, « un don précieux » qui engendre des enjeux moraux. L'apparence physique est la base du charme de la femme et fait partie de son capital social. Les principaux critères de beauté énumérés dans les récits femmes interrogées se centrent sur les traits de la féminité (cheveux, seins, fesses, silhouette, etc.), qui sont source de trouble, de tentation, et peuvent donc provoquer le désir sexuel. C'est pourquoi cette apparence doit toujours faire l'objet d'une surveillance et d'un contrôle social. « Le corps de la femme est un danger, un vrai danger surtout pour les hommes, je ne sais pas pourquoi ! [silence] Il séduit vraiment ! Le moindre geste, la moindre partie du corps de la femme peut séduire ! » Ce propos constitue le noyau dur de la représentation du corps féminin qui symbolise la séduction et le désir sexuel. En effet, les femmes voilées se représentent comme supérieures aux femmes non-voilées à travers la neutralisation et la purification du corps. La dialectique entre corps et esprit est souvent présente dans le discours des femmes interrogées. Celles qui se déclarent engagées religieusement, maintiennent une image du corps comme un « présent d'Allah », un « don » à préserver contre tout abus et à protéger contre les désirs et l'âme « al-nafs al-'ammara bi'l- sū' » et les tentations du diable comme chez les « mécréant-e-s ». La préservation de la chair vise une spiritualisation et un bien-être personnel en rapport avec le devoir religieux.

Les prédicateurs et les imams, héritiers de fuqahā et muhadithūn associent le port du voile à une déontologie islamique du regard et du vestimentaire. On peut compléter ici la définition de la 'awra faite par E. Chaumont et précédemment rappelée (début de la 1^{re} section) par celle donnée par A. Bouhdiba (1986 : 52) selon laquelle la 'awra « signifie d'abord la perte d'un œil. La qualification 'awra a fini par signifier la parole ou l'acte car, précise le Lisan al-'Arab, tout se passe comme si la parole ou l'acte obscène crevaient l'œil et l'empêchaient de porter le regard très loin et avec vivacité ». Inscrivant la position de la personne regardée et de la personne regardante dans une conception religieuse du corps, la notion de 'awra s'interprète en fait de différentes manières. Certaines considèrent que le corps entier est 'awra, d'autres estiment que la notion concerne en particulier la chair, les formes, et les cheveux, tandis que d'autres limitent la 'awra à la chevelure et la peau.

Selon le sociologue D. Le Breton (2004 : 29–30), « le corps est une fausse évidence, il n'est pas une donnée sans équivoque, mais l'effet d'une élaboration sociale et culturelle ». Le corps est pris dans un jeu de rôles et constitue un enjeu de l'organisation sociale. Ajoutée à sa beauté physique, et amplifiée par ses mouvements et les manières de se présenter ou de paraître, l'abstinence sexuelle imposée aux femmes musulmanes par la charia et les traditions culturelles ouvre la voie à tous les fantasmes masculins. Le corps est le socle central de la construction mentale et culturelle de l'homme et de la femme. Les règles sociales se confondent dès lors parfois avec les prescriptions religieuses, mais dans d'autres cas elles sont dissociées et même contradictoires. La concordance et la discordance entre règles religieuses et pratiques profanes se construisent dans une recherche combinant l'estime de soi, les liens d'appartenance, le regard de l'autre, la reconnaissance sociale et les normes sociales adoptées en rapport avec les attributs sociaux de chaque femme. Le corps voilé reste un corps tiraillé entre volonté individuelle, conditionnement collectif (des groupes d'appartenance ou d'identification) et « volonté divine » incarnée par les valeurs sacrées.

Quand elles se présentent, certaines femmes interrogées avancent l'aspect religieux comme composante « figée », exprimé dans une langue chaste et pudique. Ainsi, la femme doit être discrète, prudente dans ses mouvements, ses actions et son discours. D'autres ajoutent à cette image un aspect « dynamique », celui de femmes sociables, tolérantes, ouvertes et joyeuses qui, selon elles, ne se privent de rien. L'estime de soi se définit en termes d'équilibre et de comparaison sociale (Doran et Parot 1991 : 263). Chez les femmes voilées, l'estime de soi se repère par l'image qu'elles se renvoient et les obligations religieuses et sociales auxquelles elles obéissent. Certaines parlent du corps comme de quelque chose qui est approprié : « mon corps, c'est moi ». D'autres insistent sur l'importance du regard social porté sur leur corps et leur statut. Par ailleurs, la dimension religieuse n'est pas envisagée comme un obstacle à une perception individualisée de son corps ou de l'autonomie sociale dans les activités ordinaires. La représentation subjective du corps est partagée entre une partie rationnelle dans ses activités ordinaires et une partie métaphysique où le sujet fait face à des questionnements existentiels au regard de ses croyances. D'autres vont plus loin en traitant le corps comme un objet dont chaque partie non recouverte (les bras et les jambes, les cheveux dévoilés, le cou et autre) alourdira la peine de la femme le jour du jugement dernier.

Le port du voile sert à renforcer l'estime de soi, mais peut aussi engendrer un mal-être provoqué par l'écart qui existe entre l'image de soi et les obligations sociales et religieuses. Certes, l'engagement dans cette pratique change la perception de soi ou du moins la modifie, selon l'histoire individuelle de chaque femme et la quête de sens permanente, surtout chez les plus jeunes. Pour les femmes qui renoncent à leur ancienne façon d'être, décider de porter le voile constitue un moment de bien-être et un soulagement. Dans une société qui accepte le voile, la femme voilée se sent bien dans sa peau, valorisée, respectée, proche de la femme idéale. D'autres éprouvent plus de difficulté à s'habituer au voile et à admettre leur nouvelle image. Précédée par la ritualisation des journées par les prières, la période préparatrice se prolonge selon les histoires

individuelles. Le regard d'autrui (surtout celui des proches) est pris en compte dans l'acceptation ou le refus de la nouvelle image.

Le voile comme tenue « pratique » ?

En tant que tenue, le voile est une invention individuelle qui s'inscrit dans la mode contemporaine. L'esthétique du voile dit islamique s'oppose aux habits portés traditionnellement dans les différentes régions du monde et standardise la fonction sociale des autres types de vêtement. Le voile dit islamique s'inscrit dans la modernité et témoigne des identités religieuses variées et des formes de religiosité contrastées. Le port d'un voile est loin d'être univoque ; les critères de choix du voile traduisent le statut social assumé, les expressions et les expériences corporelles ainsi que l'image recherchée. Pour certaines femmes, le voile dit islamique est éminemment déterminé par la longueur, la forme, la couleur ou encore la qualité de tissu. En règle générale, le voile ne doit pas être transparent ni dévoiler les formes du corps. Une jeune étudiante le décrit comme suit : « Le hijab *châr'i* est tout habit qui ne montre pas les formes et qui ne dévoile rien du corps [...], absolument rien [...]. Ni les formes ni la peau (*lâ yaçifu wa lâ yachuffu*) ; sinon, on ne peut pas dire que c'est un voile ». Celles qui appliquent à la lettre les exégètes considèrent que la tenue ne relève pas du libre choix, des envies ou du statut social, mais plutôt d'une obéissance à un devoir fondamental de l'islam. L'habit doit être esthétiquement neutre, et dénué de tout accessoire, parfum ou ornement. Ce voile uniforme est un costume liturgique comprenant le voilement du corps et de la tête. Il couvre tout le corps et ne laisse paraître qu'une partie du visage (entre les yeux et la bouche) et les mains. Les femmes qui se disent ressembler aux *nîsâ es-sahaba* (les femmes des compagnons du prophète), couvrent leur visage et leurs mains aussi. Ce qui signifie aussi se dérober à tout regard et neutraliser voire effacer au maximum la présence féminine dans une époque dite de désordre (*asr el-fitna*). Selon les femmes qui l'adoptent, ce genre de voile répond à un ordre moral de lutte contre le désenchantement du monde. D'ailleurs, dans la tradition des sociétés maghrébines, les femmes ne s'embellissent qu'après leur mariage et uniquement pour leur époux. Ainsi, « la parure n'est pas un innocent embellissement, mais de véritables charmes d'amour, chargés d'un sens érotique » (Naamane-Guessous 1991 : 212–213).

En outre, si leur accès à l'espace public est inévitable, les femmes doivent éviter d'attirer l'attention des hommes en provoquant leur sens que ce soit par l'odeur du parfum, le son provoqué par des chaussures ou des bijoux, ou des ornements de l'habit ou tout autre accessoire. Il faut aussi porter des gants pour éviter de saluer et esquiver tout contact physique. Les adeptes de ce type de tenues en Tunisie sont souvent des jeunes femmes qui l'ont adopté après la révolution et qui ont des convictions fondamentalistes. Bien qu'elles représentent une minorité, leur forte visibilité est liée à des événements socio-politiques particuliers. Leurs habits affichent une attitude particulière face à l'islam et un rejet du mode de vie sociétal en général. Ces femmes, qui représentent une minorité, placent au quotidien des barrières avec le monde social et les

règles de communication des sociétés contemporaines, concrétisant ainsi l'idéologie fondamentaliste qui interdit la mixité et qui cherche à éviter la promiscuité des corps dans les lieux publics. « Personne n'ose te serrer la main ou t'aborder d'une manière non respectueuse, si tu portes un libâs char'i », raconte une jeune étudiante. Le hijab char'i est un symbole de vertu et un signe de moralité publique, s'agissant particulièrement des hommes muhrim. Dans les interactions les plus ordinaires, il impose des barrières entre les sexes et instaure un rapport d'évitement du face à face, pour reprendre E. Goffman. Pour les femmes qui ont choisi de poursuivre leurs études, leur habit les protège de tout contact indésirable ou illicite, selon les adeptes de cette idéologie. Cellier (2008 : 111) a ainsi écrit : « Les représentations du corps standardisé, observées sur la grande scène du sport international ou, au contraire, dissimulées comme dans les pratiques confidentielles des arts martiaux et certaines coutumes confessionnelles, n'ont d'autre signification que d'assurer une protection contre l'angoisse ». Une double séparation s'effectue lors des rencontres/miâd ludiques ou religieuses par la séparation entre les sexes dans n'importe quel espace réel ou virtuel. Une mère de 29 ans raconte ainsi que s'agissant de leçons (dourous) de religion suivies sur un forum destiné aux femmes, elle vérifie d'abord le sexe du conférencier avant de se lancer dans la conversation. Elle s'abstenait de parler lorsque le cheikh était présent sur la plate-forme et préférait lui écrire pour des questions relatives à la chari'a. Pour les femmes qui assistent aux cours à la mosquée ou dans les écoles coraniques pour femmes, la séparation avec les hommes est garantie par le cloisonnement de l'espace et l'interdiction d'accès à l'espace masculin.

Un autre modèle d'habillement plus commun est apparu sur la scène vestimentaire et dans l'espace public. Il s'agit d'une tenue intermédiaire entre pudeur et religiosité. Plus répandu dans les régions du Sud du pays, ce voile s'inspire de la morale traditionnelle relative aux tenues vestimentaires féminines et s'adapte à une piété semblable. Le changement de la façon de s'habiller n'est pas indissociable de celui qui s'opère au niveau des comportements et de la perception que les femmes ont d'elles-mêmes et du monde dans lequel elles vivent. Il s'agit de tenues mettant en valeur la féminité : les tailleurs en jupes et vestes, les robes longues assorties au foulard porté, etc. L'harmonisation entre les couleurs portées et les accessoires n'est pas moins importante. Cependant ce type d'habit n'adopte pas les couleurs éclatantes et attirantes pour des raisons esthétiques liées au prestige, au statut ou à la classe sociale. Il s'adapte également aux occasions dans lesquelles il est porté. Pour les femmes qui optent pour cette tenue, l'usage du jilbâb est courant dans quelques cérémonies ou sorties, mais différent de celui du voile dit char'i : il est plus étroit, orné de motifs, de couleurs contrastées et de broderies, selon l'offre du marché et la mode. En même temps, le foulard qui l'accompagne peut se porter en couvre-chef, avec des motifs contrastés. Habituellement, ce type de vêtement n'exclut pas un ornement discret combinant ainsi prescriptions religieuses et traditions sociales et culturelles.

Le troisième modèle de tenue s'inscrit dans l'innovation. C'est ainsi que les tenues bricolées renforcent la mise en scène du corps et l'importance accordée à la beauté et à l'apparence. Ces voiles individualisés, métissant le sacré et le profane, jouent entre dis-

simulation de la chair et de la chevelure et mise en valeur des formes et de la silhouette. Différents du voile dit islamique des années 1990, ils révèlent une certaine appropriation du corps et proposent une religiosité alternative distante. En ce sens, l'esthétique du vêtement adopté concerne les formes, les couleurs, l'ornement et le style. C'est un voile en couleur et en harmonie avec les vêtements et les accessoires portés. Il peut être remplacé par un bonnet ou bien par un chapeau de toute sorte, à condition qu'il couvre la chevelure. Cependant, la jeune femme peut tolérer le dévoilement de quelques mèches « rebelles ». Les oreilles peuvent être mises en valeur avec des boucles de toutes sortes. L'habit de la jeune femme voilée n'est pas défini. Il n'a pas de spécificité. Il peut changer avec le temps et selon les personnes et les circonstances ; il dépend de la mode vestimentaire en vogue comme le jean, les pulls ajustés, les vêtements serrés, les minijupes portées au-dessus du pantalon.

Dans l'espace public, la variété de couleurs et de forme, les accessoires et l'ornement témoignent d'une attention particulière au paraître. Le voile/couvre-chef est étroitement lié à la tenue portée. Dans ce cas, le voile supposé neutraliser la visibilité de la personne et la dérober au regard n'assure pas sa fonction, c'est l'inverse qui se produit. L'importance accordée à la chevelure, comme signe de féminité, est remplacé par l'ingéniosité à nouer le foulard. Les jeunes femmes voilées tiennent compte de l'attention réservée à leur présentation de soi par le biais de la beauté du visage. Le choix des couleurs est attentif et se fait en rapport avec la couleur de la peau. « Je ne porte pas de couleurs [...]. Je n'aime pas les couleurs foncées, ça ne me va pas du tout », disait une jeune fille voilée qui considère que les couleurs foncées sont tristes. En outre, les couleurs comme le noir et le marron sont considérées comme des couleurs de vieilles femmes, comme le précise une jeune femme voilée de 20 ans : « Alors là ! Pas de couleurs foncées [...], ça fait moche ! Comme les vieilles ». Le jilbâb ou la jibba (robe ample qui couvre le corps jusqu'aux pieds) ne répond plus aux exigences de la circulation quotidienne et à la mutation de l'image des femmes voilées, en particulier les plus jeunes d'entre elles. Il n'est plus commode pour les femmes actives qui travaillent dans les bureaux, les étudiantes et les ouvrières qui se déplacent partout et utilisent les transports en commun.

L'invention du costume n'est pas le fait d'une évolution propre à la dynamique de la société tunisienne comme en Europe. Apparue comme mode dans l'Europe de l'entre-deux-guerres, la mise en avant de la ligne de silhouette des femmes est due au changement des normes de beauté féminine dont a résulté une « réforme du vêtement féminin ». Cette réforme relevait d'un changement de statut de la femme, qui émergeait alors dans l'espace public comme acteur social. Or, en Tunisie, l'histoire du nouveau voile et l'invention du costume discret et moderne sont liées à des femmes déjà familiarisées avec l'espace public, au même moment où émergeait une réforme de la norme religieuse tant sur la scène nationale qu'au niveau international.

Les habitudes vestimentaires adoptées par ces jeunes femmes voilées mettent en correspondance les choix personnels et la consommation de masse. Une majorité des femmes qui ont toujours porté des pantalons et des jeans continuent de le faire. La plupart d'entre elles sont des étudiantes, des fonctionnaires ou bien appartiennent à des

professions libérales. Ce sont des femmes actives qui se déplacent et communiquent tous les jours dans l'espace public. Désormais, ces nouvelles femmes voilées propagent une nouvelle image de la femme voilée qui quitte l'enfermement de l'espace privé et exerce une activité dans la sphère publique. Une femme interrogée qui a porté le voile avant la révolution raconte : « Je n'ai pas changé mon style jusqu'à présent ! Je porte un jeans, avec un vêtement long en haut, je me trouve plus à l'aise ». La manière dont le voile est noué et les accessoires qui l'accompagnent montrent la créativité de la personne qui porte « le voile comme si [c'était] une broche ». L'attention portée au design du voile renvoie à l'estime de soi de la personne. Elle exprime la manière dont la personne cherche à se présenter. Ce couvre-chef représente l'image de la jeune femme voilée qui transmet et communique sa modernisation. L'image de la femme voilée n'est pas figée ; celle-ci cherche à exprimer une beauté active qui témoigne de son statut de femme moderne. Une femme interrogée précise : « Je change de foulard ! Parfois je mets mon foulard à la manière traditionnelle et la plupart du temps, je l'attache à l'arrière ! En hiver, je mets un bonnet et un cache-col [...] Je n'aime pas la routine [...] Je change toujours de look ! »

En outre, la mode importée du Moyen-Orient et des pays du Golfe offre des tendances variées selon les goûts et les choix, notamment au début de l'adoption de cette pratique. Indépendamment du style d'habit (traditionnel relooké pour les fêtes ou moderne au quotidien), les professionnels locaux et internationaux proposent aux femmes une variété de choix, de motifs, de couleurs et de coupes, répondant à tous les goûts, et présentent chaque année, voire chaque saison, de nouveaux articles. Le style de foulard répond aussi à un « islam de marché » (voir Haenni 2005) et à la fétichisation de la religion. La diffusion des modèles vestimentaires s'effectue par plusieurs moyens pour mettre sur le marché des créations dernier cri et de nouveaux looks afin d'attirer les consommatrices et répondre aux demandes. La commercialisation sur les sites internet (les réseaux sociaux comme Facebook, mais aussi les magazines en ligne, etc.), concurrence la commercialisation classique (magasins, boutiques et marchés spécialisés dans la vente de marchandises importées, etc.) pour offrir un vaste choix aux femmes converties comme pour celles susceptibles de se lancer dans cette pratique. En effet, les tenues de plages, de soirées, de cérémonies ou encore de sport sont de plus en plus disponibles sur le marché, y compris les robes de mariée ou les costumes traditionnels revisités. S'ajoutent à cela les centres de soin et de coiffure qui s'ouvrent à une clientèle juvénile soucieuse de son apparence. La pudeur qu'implique le port du voile n'efface pas l'importance de l'apparence affichée en public. La mode révèle la capacité du voile islamique à se réinventer selon le contexte et les circonstances.

En effet, la commercialisation du vêtement dit religieux est en rapport avec les circonstances socio-politiques liées à la période de son interdiction. Au début des années 2000, les premières femmes à porter le voile font face à une double contrainte : la première est en rapport avec son interdiction et au difficile accès à la vie active ; la deuxième est liée à l'indisponibilité sur le marché d'habits religieux. Ceci a retardé la conversion de plusieurs femmes à cause du manque de choix vestimentaire correspon-

dant à leur statut. Autrement dit, la conversion au voile est un projet qui répond à une planification et dans lequel les femmes s'investissent avant de s'engager.

Après 2006, le commerce des tenues mouhadjabât est devenu rentable, vendues au début dans les petites boutiques spécialisées et chez quelques artisanes, envahissant les grands magasins de vêtements, le marché populaire et les boutiques haut de gamme. En particulier pour le voile char'i ou niqab, le recours à la couture non industrielle était la seule possibilité de se vêtir d'une manière dite conforme à l'islam avant le 14 janvier 2011. Ce costume liturgique s'est depuis largement commercialisé, désormais vendu même devant certaines mosquées et à bas prix. C'est ainsi que le marché tunisien s'aligne sur les demandes et concourt à un marketing religieux global développé.

La Tunisie n'a pas tardé à se connecter au marché international de marchandisation dite islamique. Le port du voile dit religieux s'inscrit, simultanément, dans le contexte de la globalisation et de la réislamisation. En effet, « le foulard oblige à de nouveaux compromis entre revendications identitaires et dynamiques d'extraversion culturelle » (Haenni 2005 : p.28-29). Les différents modèles de voile adoptés s'inspirent des habitudes vestimentaires des autres sociétés dépassant donc la spécificité d'une communauté musulmane dans les différentes aires géographiques. Les nouveaux voiles,

dénotant un bricolage juvénile continu, ne sont pas spécifiques à un espace public national particulier, mais agissent dans un contexte d'acculturation et de mondialisation, affectant, selon des rythmes différenciés, toutes les sociétés musulmanes ainsi que les pays occidentaux où vit une communauté musulmane immigrée (Kerrou 2005 : 40).

Les mutations de la norme du port du voile : le religieux face au social

Indépendamment du style d'habit adopté, la manière de s'afficher dans les lieux publics constitue une définition de soi. Le souci de projeter une image fidèle à leur personne et à leurs opinions est un souci commun à la quasi-totalité des femmes interrogées. Les femmes qui jouissent d'une position sociale importante sont particulièrement méticuleuses par rapport à tout ce qui concerne leur allure. Pour une femme pieuse, la manière de s'habiller ne prend pas uniquement en compte la pudeur mais répond à d'autres motivations et d'autres impératifs. En effet, la piété est associée à la beauté, au goût de l'esthétisme et à la mise en valeur de la jeunesse. Cette contradiction est à l'origine de nouvelles définitions du statut de la femme convertie au port du voile, et de nouvelles perceptions du voile dit religieux. Les nouveaux voiles, riches en significations, servent à se distinguer, à se démarquer de l'environnement communautaire et du discours religieux.

Le voile personnalisé se distingue du hijab et de ce qu'on appelle le « foulard des grand-mères ». Les jeunes filles défendent leur manière de se voiler en disant : « Je ne suis pas une mamie [...] Je mets le voile et, en même temps, je prends soin de moi et de

mon élégance [...] Je reste toujours coquette ! ». Les femmes interrogées mettent l'accent sur leur statut de femmes modernes en rejetant l'image stéréotypée infériorisant la femme voilée, comme femme au foyer, ignorante et arriérée. Les tendances actuelles en matière de voile reflètent les nuances de religiosité, le changement social qui traverse la société et la hiérarchisation des identités intersubjectives (de statut social, de religion, de féminité, de génération, de communauté, etc.). Les nouvelles tendances révèlent les écarts et les conflits intergénérationnels, le rapport au religieux, la diversité du sens de l'islam contemporain et les rapports de genres. Le port du voile est une expérience, un processus de quête de sens où se cristallise l'approfondissement de soi à travers les tentations multiples et des tentatives de réalisation d'une individualité désirée. Ce travail sur soi combine le souci permanent de reconnaissance sociale et d'appartenance personnelle.

Les normes relationnelles des genres dans l'espace public définissent aussi le sens accordé au voile. Le comportement des femmes voilées dans l'espace public a transformé la signification du voile. Sa pratique au quotidien banalise sa dimension confessionnelle et le place dans le champ de l'ordinaire et du normal. Par ailleurs, l'accès des femmes aux différents lieux publics modernes et même masculinisés affaiblit la spiritualité du vêtement. En plus, la posture décontractée des femmes voilées désacralise la dimension symbolique de l'habit. Les visages maquillés et l'élégance affichée, qui échappent aux contraintes religieuses et sociales, remettent en question les significations d'antan. Les techniques de séduction perturbent encore plus les mentalités conservatrices.

Par ailleurs, le recours à une morale religieuse soucieuse des apparences vestimentaires protège à un certain degré ses adeptes contre le harcèlement moral et sexuel. En même temps, il facilite la mobilité de certaines femmes jouant sur la symbolique du voile. L'usage de ce symbole contribue à établir de nouveaux rapports avec les hommes selon les circonstances : le voile est tantôt porté contre la volonté de l'homme, tantôt pour le satisfaire ou pour lui plaire. En effet, certaines jeunes filles enlèvent leur foulard en sortant du cadre du foyer familial et le remettent en rentrant. C'est dans les milieux conservateurs, en particulier, que les jeunes étudiantes décident par exemple de l'abandonner loin du contrôle social communautaire. Dans leurs petites villes, elles se trouvent obligées de le remettre pour ne pas susciter la colère et les soupçons de leurs proches. Le foulard peut ainsi aussi être utilisé comme ruse pour se libérer de la surveillance familiale et communautaire.

En public, le voile peut réprimer les désirs. Car le regard est sexué et relève d'une normativité élevée. Le regard de la femme n'est pas le même que celui de l'homme. « L'homme est toujours celui qui regarde la femme », affirme une jeune étudiante. Le regard des hommes porté sur les corps des femmes est chargé de désir. Il est plus audacieux, moins discret ; le regard se pose longuement sur ce qu'il voit. Par contre, le regard de la femme s'oppose à celui de l'homme. Selon les codes normatifs, la présence féminine doit répondre aux impératifs sociaux de la discrétion, en ayant un regard rapide et mobile. Les femmes voilées considèrent que les regards insistants et concupiscent des hommes sont provoqués par les parties exposées du corps de la femme. En même temps, elles leur trouvent des justifications. Ceci est illustré par le propos

d'une jeune fille qui explique : « Les hommes n'ont pas froid aux yeux ; ils ne peuvent pas s'empêcher de vous déshabiller du regard ; c'est malgré eux ! Dieu les a créés ainsi ! ». D'autres justifient les agressions morales et sexuelles contre les femmes qui ne respectent pas les codes moraux. Ainsi, l'usage du voile sert à atténuer toutes formes de violence, surtout dans les villes. La présence des femmes voilées dans les lieux de divertissement occidentalisés, cafés mixtes, espaces culturels, cites balnéaires, bars d'hôtels et piscines, accentue la finalité profane du voile (Matri : 2015). La vie sociale empiétant sur la foi, l'univers religieux et le monde ordinaire n'ont pas de frontières étanches. C'est à travers la réadaptation des normes religieuses que certaines femmes gagnent plus de visibilité et échappent au contrôle social exercé sur leur corps.

D'un habit confessionnel dérochant le corps à un habit exhibant la féminité, la perception du voile comme symbole religieux devient suspecte pour certains Tunisiens et Tunisiennes. D'après les témoignages des hommes, les pratiques des femmes par rapport au voile ne relèvent plus d'une moralité particulière ni d'un statut distinctif. Les histoires racontées et les expériences vécues dans les relations amoureuses, amicales et même professionnelles avec les femmes voilées déplacent les croyances et dépouillent le vêtement de sa signification confessionnelle. Alors qu'ils le voyaient hier comme un retour à la morale de l'islam, les hommes en particulier critiquent aujourd'hui le comportement des jeunes femmes voilées : « Elles ressemblent aux non voilées... Je ne vois aucune différence » ; « le voile est une fausse vérité » ; « elles cherchent un époux, elles cachent leurs cheveux raides » ; « elles font du cinéma pour satisfaire leur famille ». Le déplacement du regard sur l'usage du voile s'est construit à la lumière des comportements des femmes voilées au fil des années. Les mouhajabât ne se privent de rien et utilisent le voile de façon pragmatique et profane, sans égard aux préceptes religieux. Avoir des relations sexuelles avec des jeunes femmes voilées ou observer les frôlements amoureux des corps dans les lieux publics ne choque plus les hommes. Certains voient dans cette attitude une hypocrisie sociale et une fourberie envers la divinité. D'autres distinguent les vraies religieuses des fausses : « Comment veux-tu que je crois à une voilée qui ne prie pas et qui prononce des injures... Le voile n'est plus qu'affaire de mœurs ! ». En somme, la pratique du voile ne relève plus uniquement du sacré et du religieux mais plutôt du profane et du social, même selon les partisans de cette norme.

Les femmes qui ont adopté le voile par pression sociale ou pour raison psychologique ne gardent pas sur la durée les mêmes convictions et les mêmes pratiques. Le sentiment initial qui accompagne la conversion s'estompe au fil du temps en laissant place aux gestes ordinaires et répétitifs de la vie de tous les jours. Même le rythme des pratiques religieuses décline et s'affaiblit. Dans certains cas, le voile ne représente plus qu'un accessoire accompagnant une tenue de ville, dont on ne peut se débarrasser, surtout dans les lieux d'interconnaissance. Pour les femmes interrogées se présentant comme les plus religieuses, les choses évoluent vers la banalisation. Celles qui utilisent le voile comme uniforme religieux et marqueur de séparation entre les hommes et les femmes n'arrivent plus à maintenir leurs convictions au quotidien, particulièrement celles qui s'accrochent à leur statut social. Une jeune femme médecin dentiste stagiaire à l'hô-

pital universitaire continue de porter son niqab et de soigner ses patients en même temps. Elle s'est convertie au voile intégral en 2012 contre la volonté de ses parents, et s'est mariée deux ans plus tard. Malgré son attitude réservée vis-à-vis de son entourage professionnel, elle ne renonce ni à son maintien vestimentaire ni à sa position professionnelle. Du fait de l'émergence d'une radicalité religieuse recrutant des femmes pour les instrumentaliser au profit de revendications identitaires et politiques, ce type de voilement connaît une mutation considérable. Indépendamment de leur endoctrinement, les adeptes du voile char'i et du niqab ne renoncent pas à l'accès à l'espace public ni au statut social acquis. Les codes vestimentaires ont légèrement changé, en couleur, accessoires et broderies. De plus, elles ne se privent ni de divertissement ni de sorties dans des lieux publics. Certaines renoncent au voilement du visage pour préserver une position sociale et échapper à toute de stigmatisation associant le niqab à l'extrémisme religieux, et considèrent ce type de voile comme étranger à l'islam tunisien.

Conclusions

Se (re-)présenter comme une femme voilée implique plusieurs dimensions d'une identité affichée de manière à la fois consciente et inconsciente. Le port du voile est une expression corporelle où s'impriment les rapports complexes à soi et à autrui. Il est aussi un engagement subjectif et interactif face à une religion considérée comme absolue par ses fidèles. En outre, l'obéissance aux croyances perçues comme divines n'exclut pas la marge de manœuvre dont disposent les sujets selon les situations auxquelles elles doivent réagir. En effet, les appartenances communautaires, religieuses, culturelles, sexualisées ou sociales renvoient à une perception du voile où interfèrent plusieurs dimensions de la définition de soi. Ces dernières sont ordonnées ou classifiées différemment selon la position de l'acteur. En effet, la hiérarchie de sens attribuée à la pratique du voilement féminin dévoile son ancrage dans les habitudes culturelles et sociales.

Chez les jeunes, le paraître se construit au quotidien, une expérience qui s'élabore au fil du temps en imitant et en innovant selon les dispositifs possibles et où se croisent les communications intersubjectives, entre attraction et rejet. Les modèles propagés comprennent une concordance entre neutralisation et valorisation, entre intime et spectaculaire, en cherchant à établir à la fois un islam intemporel et un corps pieux et moderne (Matri 2015). En outre, le port du voile s'inscrit dans une logique de représentations et d'usages divers où la définition du modèle corporel est en permanente négociation.

L'usage du vêtement « répond à deux motivations essentielles : la parure et la protection [...]. Sa dialectique est d'ailleurs singulière, le vêtement cache en même temps qu'il désigne » (Le Breton 1991 : 112). La parure du voile est liée aux rapports du particulier et du général, du personnel et de l'impersonnel, du subjectif et de l'intersubjectif. Cette parure moderne se situe dans une vision intermédiaire de l'islam et de la femme. Les enjeux entre proximité et altérité sont aussi illustrés dans la manière de s'approprier et de négocier les espaces communs entre visibilité et invisibilité, mixité et

séparation de sexes. Le voile permet aux femmes qui l'adoptent, à travers les couleurs et les formes, de jouer sur les contrastes de la dissimulation et de la révélation, de l'intime et du public, de l'individuel et du communautaire.

En tant que norme et pratique, le voile s'inscrit dans une dynamique permanente en perpétuel changement. Il est un phénomène aussi complexe que ses usages et ses contextes. Il est la fois une remise en cause d'un modèle social considéré comme allogène, et une remise en question de la division de l'espace en fonction des sexes. Par ailleurs, habiter un corps voilé ne va pas de soi ; cela exige un apprentissage et un long processus d'adaptation. Le port du voile est à la fois une soumission aux normes d'un ordre social patriarcal qui remonte à la nuit des temps, et une remise en cause de l'exclusion des femmes de l'espace public, qui est considéré comme un domaine réservé aux hommes (Matri 2015). Reprendre le voile ne veut pas dire renoncer au statut social et aux droits d'ascension sociale acquis par l'éducation ou le travail. Cela exprime les difficultés des femmes de se réaliser en tant qu'individu autonome et indépendant. L'abandon du voile, c'est à dire tourner le dos à une pratique historique traversant les religions monothéistes et les aires géographiques, ne va pas de soi. Le renoncement à la pratique est une expérience assez pénible pour les femmes qui l'ont vécue. Car l'individu se trouve face au social et au collectif qui sacralise le voile et le corps des femmes. La rupture avec le voile, pour quel que motif que ce soit, se fait en plusieurs phases. Le port du voile est une expérience corporelle qui peut être durable ou momentanée : on peut le considérer comme un signe corporel et identitaire (au niveau de l'engagement) comparable au tatouage. Cette expérience peut s'accompagner de sentiments qui oscillent entre la gêne, la peur, l'insatisfaction et la frustration, d'un côté, et la fierté, la quiétude, la confiance en soi, de l'autre. Il marque l'histoire corporelle, entre l'émotionnel, le social et sociétal. La gestion du corps féminin voilé s'inscrit entre autres dans le rapport de pouvoir des genres, où le désir de s'approprier le corps se confronte à sa gouvernance communautaire. Le corps de la femme continue à incarner l'objet de désir et de culpabilisation féminine, qui traverse les époques et les cultures. C'est ce qui explique, entre autres, le rapport de force perpétuel entre les sexes, au niveau des rôles et des représentations. Par ailleurs, la gouvernance du corps constitue l'un des marqueurs culturels d'opposition dans le cas du voile, entre le monde musulman et l'Occident, par rapport au statut des femmes dans la religion, à la performativité des genres et à l'espace public.

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7 “My Religiosity is Not in My Hijab”: Ethics and Aesthetics among Salafis in Niger

Abdoulaye Sounaye

In the study of contemporary Islam, once we have exhausted the arguments revolving around *bid'a*, *mawlid*, *shirk* and *kufr*, the politics as I would put it, what else is left to be discussed? What about ethics? Or aesthetics? Most importantly, how are these two dimensions bridged and connected? Scholars of Islamic reform in West Africa have rarely examined the relationship between these two dimensions of reform religiosities – and even when they have, their attempts have remained mostly cursory.

Building on my fieldwork among the *Izala*¹ and the *Sunnance*² in Niger, mainly in Niamey, I offer in this contribution to examine the connection between ethics and aesthetics, focusing on how Muslims navigate the structures of morality and aesthetics that their groups, communities, associations, etc. have set up. As a discourse on religiosity and being a good Muslim, *Izala*, for example, has set up a code of conduct, an aesthetic of conduct one might call it, and certain standards that Muslim subjects strive to follow in their daily lives and interactions. These standards, norms and codes are what I call structures of morality and aesthetics, as they define ways of treating one's body while shaping conduct. While I do not claim that each human action is always 'principled' in the sense that it is based on clear and conscious rules and norms, human behaviour is constantly shaped by both the agency of actors and the structures

¹ *Izala* is a Salafi-Wahhābi trend that emerged in northern Nigeria in the 1970s and spread to Niger, becoming a major player in the 1990s. It was strongly anti-Sufi. It aimed at reforming Islam and correcting Muslim practices to be in line with the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad.

² *Sunnance* are also *Izala*, though mostly a second generation.

within which acts and actions occur. The interaction between these two dimensions has been central to my focus as I try to make sense of what many scholars, especially in the Francophone literature, have referred to in terms of *fait religieux* – the religious, as I would simplify it here.

Promoting religiosity based on notions of authenticity, appropriateness and goodness, Izala and Sunnance call for particular aesthetics that involve the body, dress code, choice of colour, etc. in order to achieve fairness, goodness and truthfulness, three values Salafi Muslims want to prioritize in daily practice and interactions. However, as we know, people are not just subjects that accept and adopt the injunctions and models they receive. It may happen that they reject whatever is offered to them out of hand. Or, even when they take it, they may affect it, tweak it, stylize it. And, while making it their own, they may take it into social interactions and modes of identification that could both challenge and upset established frames of reference, official norms and expected attitudes. Thus, when lived and experienced, the structures prescribed, promoted and even imposed have in fact rarely remained untouched and unchallenged. How are individuals navigating and privatizing those structures? What touches and spins are they adding? These are questions that we need to reflect on as we try to make sense of the historicity of religiosity and the anthropological factors in religious practice.

Take the case of the hijabi,³ whose appearance in various social contexts has prompted a major debate on (im)morality. What is the appropriate form of hijabi? How is the personal touch affecting the value of the veil as a marker of religiosity? How do individuals combine the quest for beauty with that of being a good Muslim? This is a key question, especially when, as one young woman notes, “my religiosity is not in my veil”, or when the hijabi is linked to sexuality and used to conceal misdeeds, for example. Because veiling could be deceiving, and be strategically used and misinterpreted, the colour of the hijabi, as well as its design, its size and the way it is donned, all matter. Forming part of a dress code, the hijabi doesn’t stand alone; it has both an aesthetic function and ethical significance. In the broad religious context, it is complemented with moral assumptions and principles, and ethical behaviour, which build on concepts and perceptions of dignity and goodness (*mutunci*, in Hausa). What else can one unearth in those and similar sites of encounter between ethics and aesthetics? How does the quest for beauty that has taken over the use of the hijabi affect morality and ethics? *I-hanno*, in Zarma, connotes both the morally good and the aesthetically beautiful, linking two domains that we tend to keep separate and even exclusive from one another.

Emphasizing the personal and interpersonal dimensions, this contribution will also use the examples of the beards and shin-length trousers worn by Izala men to show that looks and appearances are important forms when it comes to expectations and assertions of religiosity, but also when it comes to actual interactions. They are sites of ethical expressions and moral agency. Similar to donning the hijabi, wearing

³ The term hijabi (Hausa and Zarma, Arabic *ḥijāb*) here refers to women’s veils and to veiling practices introduced at the end of the 1980s by the Islamic reform movement Izala.

the beard is important for a young man and his customers because his appearance affects his trade and commerce, for example. The aesthetics of wearing a beard could be decisive because it could be read as a sign of moral disposition and ethical business. As I show below, belonging to the same group or religious community can also influence trade. However, trade is also influenced by fairness and concern about *riba* (excessive interest), further illustrating the fact that not only are aesthetics and ethics intricately linked, but they might both find their origins in the same understanding of religiosity.⁴

I will contend that while particular aesthetics tend to relate to particular ethics, the defining factor rests with the individual, personal and private appropriation, use and experience of those structures and frameworks. This chapter is intended to link my interests in religious aesthetics and ethics, two domains that I myself have, until recently, engaged with separately. Theoretically, it contributes to my attempt at conceptualizing *la religion à la première personne* (Sounaye 2016) and echoes the long-standing anthropological debate on the category of person (Carrithers, Collins and Lukes 1985; McIntosh 2009).

I also view this chapter as an examination of alternative formulations of religiosity. While we continue to locate religiosity primarily in religious institutions (texts, scriptures, rituals, etc.), I draw attention to the process through which religiosity is produced via social relations and interactions. The individual, the self and the person are all largely socially produced. To borrow a Maussian expression, I would argue that they are total social products (cf. *fait social total*) and yet highly individualized and personalized.

The perspective I am outlining is not only important to our understanding of a key dimension of religiosity, but also brings to the fore the central issue of the aesthetics of virtue. What do goodness and morality look like? In that regard, I would like to draw attention to the fact that virtue has a face in the social and cultural contexts of my discussion. That is what Islamic reform, in particular *Izala*, offers us a glimpse of.

In the Beginning Were the Hijabi and the *Izala* Trousers

When the Islamic reform movement known as *Izala* (Umar 1993; Loimeier 1997; Masquelier 1999; Kane 2003; Zakari 2007; Masquelier 2009) made its way into the public arena in Niamey, physical appearance, and one’s appropriate dress and outfit, became matters of concern. “Men started wearing pants that hardly went beyond the tibia, and women started wearing hijabi as a way to mark their difference and practice authentic Islam. That was really new here and nobody was doing it before” (Sambo in 2011). The genealogy of *Izala* as a religious trend and a social movement in Niger and Nigeria is tied to both sartorial practices and aesthetic forms, to borrow Meyer’s con-

⁴ Islamic banking, which picked up in Niger only in the last 10 years, is a case that further illustrates these connections.

cept (Meyer 2010b). What came to be the Izala dress code was then decisive, because it helped followers of Izala to be visibly different, asserting their identity and consequently introducing a particular sartorial culture, as represented by veiling in particular. Though veiling is a common practice that predates this movement and transcends religious domains, with Izala it acquired a new significance and a definitively religious connotation, becoming the marker of a self-proclaimed corrective religiosity. Suddenly, the hijabi was displayed, seen and voiced as a sign of piety and virtue and as part of being a better Muslim.

As one might expect, the Izala dress code was dragged into Muslim politics and became central to Muslim sectarianism. Unsurprisingly, veiling in particular became a topic of heated debates that mobilized fellow Muslims to argue over the meaning of Islam, the performance of the tradition, and appropriate conduct. Particularly in the 1990s, the hijabi was instrumental to Izala's conquest of the public sphere and its politics of presence in an already structured but also continuously changing religious landscape. Up to that point, press articles in and about Islam in the country pointed to the high visibility of the hijabi and its disruptive effect. Regularly, the hijabi was equated with the rise of intolerance in a country where Islam was more readily associated with peaceful coexistence, good morality and everything but unrest. Often alarmist, these articles joined a body of voices worried that the country was under threat from "intégrisme" (fundamentalism) or, as Izala men were referred to in many circles, *les barbous* (the bearded men, in French). Putting their bodies on display was part of their being Izala and their performance of its reform agenda.

Most of these accounts saw in the hijabi the influence of a militant, disruptive Middle Eastern Islam which they contrasted with a local and tolerant one (cf. Rosander and Westerlund 1997). Additionally, as in many other contexts, feminist accounts insisted on the hijabi as a sign of an abuse of both women and religion, even when the agents of these sartorial practices pointed to their own choice and personal decision. In the broader sociopolitical context, it is fair to say that the appearance of the hijabi marked the beginning of an era of alternative norms, of arguments about authentic Islam and of a new formulation of virtue.

In sermons I have collected and conversations I have had, the hijabi is frequently discussed as a mark of distinction that signals piety and good morality. It is part of the aesthetic of a good Muslim and a marker of Muslim femininity. A clear statement of a reformed religiosity, it was intended, for example, to discourage an unrelated man from expecting to shake hands with a woman wearing it. At the same time, the hijabeuse, as a woman wearing a hijabi would be referred to in Niamey's small talk, expects to receive proper treatment in her interactions with people. By separating gender and differentiating forms of devotion, it keeps men at bay and helps the hijabeuse avoid unwanted physical contact and attention. In most contexts in Niger, the popularization of the hijabi was viewed and experienced as an act restricting private space and inscribing new rules and norms of social engagement (cf. Avison, McLeod and Pescosolido 2007). As such, and in the new dispensation of Muslim morality, it was described and understood not only as part of a dress code, but more importantly as moral progress.

The hijabi was then drawn into the aesthetic formulation of virtue and good manners (cf. Elias 2000; Bourdieu 2010).

Historically, it must be said that, more than anything, women’s veiling practices were tied to respectability and marital status (Cooper 1997; Alidou 2005; Masquelier 2009). With the rise of Izala practices and aesthetic prescriptions, the hijabi veiling was quickly imported into Muslim politics of presence, with a particular intent to demarcate themselves from all other Muslim groups including the *ṭuruq* (Sufi orders, sg. *ṭarīqa*), whose dominance in the sphere of organized Islam they sought to upend. Hijabi thus became a sign of a new era, a differentiating factor, while additionally symbolizing a proper and authentic attire. In fact, until Izala emerged and became established in the 1990s, girls in Niamey rarely veiled. Hair extensions (*mèches*, in French), braiding (*rasta, tera tera*), hair dressing (*coiffure*) and other treatments for the body were not only common, they were also the rule, as women cultivated beauty (*kolliya* in Hausa, *nyalawaytarrey* in Zarma) and fully displayed their arms and hair for that purpose. In other words, girls and unmarried women were rather relaxed with veiling or covering their hair. When they carried a *kallabi* or *musoro* (light veil), it was usually to protect themselves against the dust or the sun, or for special occasions such as weddings, funerals or naming ceremonies.

Today, however, even in formal secular school settings where one might think it to be exceptional and counter-normative, hijabi has become so common and naturalized that those who are not wearing it seem to stand out the most. A more detailed and eventful account of the way the hijabi became an established norm should be told and socially historicized, but it will suffice here to note that in the last two decades, this sartorial practice has had a lasting impact on the aesthetics of religion and morality in urban Niger within and beyond Salafi circles. Along the way, veiling itself was stylized to include new shapes and colours, illustrating both the aesthetic creativity of girls and women and the way in which fashion trends were combined with social and religious modes of distinction.

Hijabi appeared and gained currency as a term of the Muslim lexicon of religiosity around the beginning of the 1990s as women embraced Izala aesthetic norms and suggestions. Within that context, it became a sign of religiosity and a marker of femininity that the new dispensations of Islam and being Muslim sought to impose. In the Izala networks I researched at the beginning of the 2000s, mostly in Maradi, Niamey and Zinder, the hijabi culture was tied to families’ desire to transmit good values and norms to their daughters. It derived also from individual and personal decisions women made to craft an image for themselves in a context where displaying identity and being seen had become important. The hijabi thus marked and differentiated ways of being Muslim while stressing the importance of conduct.

Concerns about the female body in the public sphere favoured the development of what may be called an Izala veiling culture. The late Ahmad Yahya, the leader of the first Izala organization in Niger (Adin Islam) and also a popular figure of the movement, repeatedly called on his fellow Izala followers to “distance themselves from others, not let their wives go out without the hijabi” (Yahya in 1994). According to some

of my interlocutors who place importance on the cultural element of Izala, Yahya was at the forefront of the effort to make “our women dress properly and as recommended by the Sunna” (Issaka in 2014). In her caricature of the pre-Izala era, a young Sunnance woman I heard preaching on TV Dounia, one of the main media outlets in Niger, claims that before Izala, “people dressed improperly and were walking almost naked” and “one can hardly distinguish women from men, boys from girls. I followed Izala suggestions and I started donning hijabi” (Saude in 2015).

Ahmed Yahya pointed the way for the Izala, representing a good example to many of his followers in Niamey and also across the country. Before the hijabi became a sign of distinction for and among Izala women, “he [Yahya] was the first to require his women and all [other women] in his household to wear it.” Hijabi and virtue resonated with each other and were finally equated in a context where Izala were slowly but surely affecting moral norms and the perceptions of a virtuous woman. As Renne (2018) shows in her recent book on veiling and turban culture in Northern Nigeria, appearance and clothing serve both religious and gender ideologies. This is even more important to note with regard to the current Salafi culture in Niger, where the Izala effect has been instrumental in the rise of new religious aesthetics (Sounaye 2017a).

For the Izala discourse on masculinity, the matter corresponding to the female hijabi revolved around the shin-length trousers, often ridiculed by their critics as “pantalon sauté” or “masu guntun wando” (those who wear short trousers). While followers of Izala saw the simplicity of the Sunna in these sartorial items, and considered them conducive to cleanliness, their critics judged the followers wearing them as being slovenly, too pretentious and lacking in good manners. Izala men’s aesthetics also included keeping one’s facial hair, particularly the beard. Ahmed Yahya, too, had a reputation of maintaining a beard⁵ in order to convey both his Izala affiliation and his commitment to the prophetic look. In fact, for Izala men – who were keen on following the prophetic model – the beard and the shin-length trousers were important markers. They were viewed as ‘the prophetic way’, so adherents drew on practices that tapped into this association to produce an Izala style. This element of religiosity conveyed via aesthetic forms has remained significant among the young Sunnance of Niamey, the Izala’s second generation.

How a specific veiling practice is made possible is worth investigating. In the case of Izala, and as Bourdieu would argue, faith transpires in a state of the body. For a number of years, hijabi was primarily an Izala signifier more than anything else. However, it is important to note that, while Izala imposed the hijabi norm and triggered new veiling practices in most of its sphere of influence, today hijabi can no longer be reduced to its association with Izala. Since that breakthrough, the hijabi has lost its exclusive association and has been appropriated by various discourses and groups beyond Izala.

Certainly, at the origin of the current veiling culture, especially in Niamey, lies Izala’s intent to reorder norms and inscribe a discipline onto the woman’s body. Both

⁵ For example, I have never seen him shaved even in his pictures.

the discipline and the intent to inscribe it derived from prescriptions that created first a structure of aesthetics within which the female body was perceived and reordered, then a structure of morality that saw virtue in the hijabi and therefore an imperative to prescribe it. Obviously, for those sharing this perspective on being Muslim, adopting the hijabi translates as a key gesture of religiosity that grants the subject respect, trust and good reputation. The rise of the Izala hijabi culture in the 1990s speaks to those considerations, but also to a discourse on the female body which, as we can see today, has managed to produce specific images and performances of being a Muslim, a husband, a wife, or simply a trustworthy person.

But Both the Hijabi and the Trousers Could be Deceptive...

The systematic connection that Izala established between the hijabi and Islamic good morality eroded as the hijabi became popular and was gradually questioned as a sign of piety and an indication of moral disposition. Semantics is not enough to grasp the significance of the hijabi and its investment into the moral economy and the production of norms today. One must also be aware of its transgressiveness.

A few weeks ago, an assistant of mine – struck by the ambivalence of a particular variety of social conduct – opened up to me as follows: “I was surprised to see self-proclaimed Izala young women in Maradi wearing heavy make-up along with their veil. I wasn’t sure what to make of that. Isn’t Izala condemning that?” (Baki in 2019). What my assistant points to is part of the overall problematic of being Izala. While Izala has cultivated an austere or dark aesthetic, as I call it (Sounaye 2017a), it is important to keep in mind that Izala as a discourse is subject to evolution and appropriation. In that process, Izala norms have certainly been adopted, but also affected, tweaked, and invested into personal and individual agendas. In other words, usage takes over and one must focus in particular on the pragmatics of embracing Izala, its code of conduct, and its values and norms, beyond mere claims and prescriptions.

As wearing the hijabi became a popular social practice, it followed fashion trends and, most importantly, rose to a practice of good manners (cf. Elias 2000; Bender 2011) and became part of the perceptions of good looks and appearance. Practice and uses thus need to be given priority, as they shape the trajectories of the hijabi in a social context, but also in individual lives.⁶ It is not enough to say that the hijabi is a sign of morality, though that probably is the case in most situations where we encounter it. We must also pay attention to the moral environment it appears in and the intent it serves, for it is often used to navigate social realms, spaces and expectations. In these ways, the Izala look may be used and diverted. Thus, by focusing on their social life, one can better understand the ambivalence of both the hijabi – and the Izala look in general – and the various social spaces in which it appears. Indeed, the social life of the hijabi, an expansion of the body, should thus be analysed while keeping in mind the

⁶ We should not overlook the example of the many women who have donned the hijabi but later dropped it.

cultural production of the hijabi as a signifier and marker of both individual religiosity and the politics of religion. As such, a discussion of the hijabi in light of the perplexity of my assistant cannot overlook the case of the alternative uses of the hijabi⁷ such as that of the female sex workers in Niamey or Maradi.⁸

(Im)morality can hide behind the hijabi. That is the main message of a discourse that has been pointing to the fact that many women use the hijabi to go unnoticed. Prostitutes in urban centres like Niamey, in particular, have been at the core of this discourse. I first came across this discourse of the hijabi hiding immorality in 2004 while conducting fieldwork in Maradi, a town in the south-central part of Niger. The town's inhabitants complained about the inability of the local authorities to quell the "wave of prostitutes" that was affecting Maradi even as Nigerian authorities on the other side of the border were implementing a strict moral code following the adoption of shari'ā as state law. Several of my interlocutors then pointed to the "new strategies" (*nouvelles stratégies*) sex workers were using to escape the wrath of the inhabitants and the attention of local authorities. In the wake of these "strategies" of concealment and revelation, hijabi proved central to the moral economy of the town, but also to the aesthetic modes of appearance and presence of the subjects. What we should be concerned with in this instance is not so much what is religious. On the contrary, we should focus on how the hijabi, as a statutory object of religiosity, is appropriated and invested in the moral economy of the town, producing specific images of women (cf. Barré 2018).

Whether aware of the moral connotations of the hijabi or not, the act of the female sex worker who wears it merely illustrates that the device is part of a moral discourse that bridges personal use and social expectations. Not many would expect a woman wearing a hijabi to be a sex worker, in the same way that my assistant was not expecting to see a hijabi accompanied by heavy make-up. That doesn't mean, however, that the hijabi remains under the same ethical principles forever and is therefore fixed to a unique moral space. Its moral value depends on its use and the context in which it finds itself.

In this specific case, I would argue that the meaning of the hijabi is not only changing, but also transforming as it moves from one space to another and relocates in a web of meanings, significations and uses. The same object enters different fields and can have diverse trajectories and lives. When a sex worker wears the hijabi in Niamey or Maradi, it is likely that she acknowledges the importance of the sign and both follows and challenges expectations at the same time, allowing the possibility for radically different hermeneutics and even contradictory interpretations to emerge.

In this situation, I could readily understand the anger of many of my interlocutors who insult and "pray Allah damn those culprits of the kind of the prostitute", and who declare them to have "injured Islam", "soiled the reputation of Muslim women",

⁷ Perhaps what we need to attend to is not the hijabi and heavy make-up per se, but my assistant's reaction.

⁸ I personally witnessed such practices of concealment via the hijabi on several occasions during fieldwork in those two urban areas.

and exposed each woman wearing hijabi if not to suspicion, then at least to scepticism. This affective rendering of the sex worker's gesture thus appears to be a disturbing sign that uncovers the dark side of the hijabi and unveils the possibility of this sign meaning something quite contrary to most expectations. One learns not only about the (im)morality of the hijabi, but also about the anxiety of the defender of public morality who is challenged by the sex worker's relocation of the hijabi. The sex worker validates a contradictory code and draws attention to the (im)morality of concealment and veiling, a situation that unsettles the Izala moralism and code of conduct.

However, all this happens because the hijabi is taken for granted and reduced to a specific moral space where it is perceived and lived as a protective device. Many Sunnances refer to the hijabi not only as a protective sartorial practice, but also as an empowering one in a context where women feel too exposed, ignored, victimized and even subject to aggression. Thus, as many scholars in other contexts have pointed out, and as applies also to the context I am concerned with, piety was not the only reason for the hijabi veiling practice; many women donning the hijabi are also anxious and wary about how they are perceived.

Fair Trading and Trust

In urban contexts in Niger, trading is perhaps one of the most important sites for the examination of the connection between ethics and aesthetics. In its formative years in Niamey, the Izala movement was dominated by petty traders who formed the social base of a reform discourse that they rapidly embraced, as it emphasized entrepreneurship, prosperity and therefore economic independence. The success stories of Izala businessmen in Maradi and Niamey further contributed to the mobilization of young men eager to build up wealth. Echoing Weber's thesis of a religion-inspired ethic, scholars have pointed to the ways in which Izala groups, and traders in particular, produced an ethic of productivity and self-making (Grégoire 1993; Sounaye 2009). Early on, larger-scale Izala traders (*alhazai*) sponsored the younger ones, creating an intra-communal chain of solidarity and self-help which in many ways helped Izala to gain visibility and establish its social base in urban contexts. In some of my conversations in Maradi in the early 2000s, my interlocutors were quick to point to how rapidly “petty traders [mostly seasonal migrants] grow as soon as they join the [Izala] movement. And once they become established, they pass it on to others” (Isia in 2004). “We knew each other and we were part of the same community”, confirmed Sale (in 2004). At the time, a popular criticism of the young men who joined the Izala was that they lack sincerity and “hide behind Islam” to acquire wealth and money. Unethical and un-Islamic, as their critics insisted, these “seekers of money” (Filo in 2005) supposedly reduced religiosity to material gains, turning into agents of corruption and unlawful practice. According to these critics of Izala, their pursuit of wealth not only burdens their religiosity, but actually runs counter any true Islamic reform agenda.

It is worth noting that whether in its self-assertion as a revolutionary ethos of good practice or its rejection by critics who see in it nothing but a bluff, the Izala movement is understood as a moral agent, whose discourses and acts are judged and assessed based on the ethical principles of its followers and their impact on the local moral economy. What moral norms and spaces emerge, and how these norms affect the structures of morality, are major issues for a critical examination of this process.

Izala followers, perhaps even the most committed ones I have encountered, have vehemently countered this criticism, arguing that in a country of ignorance (*jahilci*, in Hausa) and poverty (*talawci*, in Hausa), one serves Islam better with one's own pockets (Sale in 2004), an image that suggests the role of economic capital. Both Izala and their Niamey offshoot, the Sunnance, pride themselves on being good businessmen and at the same time "men of the Sunna" (Alfari in 2014). "Wealth, money and economic prosperity are no harm to my religiosity" (*adina*, in Zarma) and "can only facilitate my good deeds" (*aikin adini*, in Hausa), as Musa, an Izala shop owner, argued.

He made this point on a day when he felt compelled to preach "common sense" (*lakkal*, in Zarma) in the mosque where he serves as Imam, next to his shop in the Terminus quarter in Niamey. In this somewhat middle-class neighbourhood where he is now well established, Musa started trading in 2014 because he "was looking for something to do." From a *tablier* (stall owner, in local French), he grew into a *boutiquier* (shop owner, in local French) selling various items from soap to mobile phone top-up cards. From a makeshift stall, his business grew into a metallic kiosk offered to him by Airtel, one of the major mobile phone networks in the country. I witnessed the development of this Sunnance business as its owner became a major player in the daily life of his street. Many Sunnance turn, like him, to the example of the Caliph to justify their search for wealth and prosperity: "We have good examples to learn from in the history of Islam [*tarihin Islam*]. The Caliph Umar was a wealthy man, and he was able to contribute all those deeds because he wasn't poor. Wealth makes one [a] good Muslim, but being a good Muslim also brings wealth and *albarka* (blessings)."⁹ He went on to claim that "piety doesn't despise wealth; on the contrary, it needs it to expand and prosper. I just need to do it right." Similar narratives abound within Salafi circles as the Caliph Umar inspires religious entrepreneurship and an ethic that opens the way to prosperity.

The chain of prosperity that shaped Izala socio-economic practices has instituted something of a regime of accountability, or – to put another way – an expectation of counting on each other, and certainly on fellow adherents of Izala. In this context, a major concern is trust. How does one trust traders not only with the quality of their products, but with their pricing? For example, while halal food is not a preoccupation in Niamey, as it is assumed that food is necessarily halal in a Muslim majority context, other commercial practices such as overpricing and selling expired food products are common. These practices create anxiety about the quality of market products and the unfairness of transactions as traders rush to achieve prosperity and wealth.

⁹ Musa has the reputation of not being cheap.

Izala’s rapid emergence and social success should be read against the backdrop of its claims of ethical practices. Indeed, Izala’s criticism of socioeconomic practices that it views as un-Islamic (such as *riba*) and its promise of fair trade, for example, have drawn many to its business model, so to speak. In fact, its rejection of *riba* served Izala’s image and gave its traders and businessmen the reputation of trustworthy partners and fair traders. In a highly competitive trade centre such as Niamey, most customers would expect traders to carry those values. At the same time, traders need a good reputation in order to be successful. The fear of being duped (*zamba*, in Hausa and Zarma) drew many Izala I interacted with toward their fellow Izala traders. “They charge [a] fair price” but “we also trade good and authentic products”, as Musa argued. For both the traders and their customers, fair trade were important because “nobody wants to be cheated on”. But, as he added later, “we all know that [cheating] is part of the [economic] practice in Niamey. Would you tell me how all those traders amassed their fortunes? Would you swear that they lawfully acquired their wealth? I don’t think so. I will not wear a beard and do what they are doing” (Musa).

Young Sunnance at the Grand Marché, the main market of Niamey, have built on those ethical expectations and moral aspirations by showing off their identity. Because, as Musa claimed, it would be a sacrilege to wear the Izala beard and engage in *zamba*, they keep their beards, wear Izala trousers and do not speak much, in line with the Izala code and manners. They build their businesses on the trust and reputation they cultivate: “Trust me, I buy my goods from the Sunnance of Grand Marché” is a phrase I have heard many times in the Medina neighbourhood of Niamey, where I witnessed another boutique become, in a span of three years, a key player in the daily lives of most households on his street. Initially a seasonal migrant, the young man came from Loga, about 170 km north east of Niamey. Particularly critical of the youth culture and practices of his hometown and its surrounding area, he embraced Izala, a rather courageous and exceptional move for an inhabitant of a region known for its drug use and abuse. The Logayze¹⁰ stereotype runs deep in Niamey, where identifying as Loga boro (coming from Loga, in Zarma) could be socially devaluating for young men. So, when Hima, the boutique, embraced the Sunna and became the most prominent Sunnance of his family, he challenged this stereotype and the traditional trajectory of youth in the region. “It is not that I don’t know tramol;¹¹ I tried it, but found no benefit in it. It is not good for my body and harms my religiosity. I want to live honestly.” Both assertive and reflexive, Hima stresses his rupture with his previous social environment and the moral commitment that led to his new life. As I can tell from daily conversations I had with him and the interactions I observed, he is not shy of reminding his customers of his choice.

Like Musa, Hima inspires trust (*nanay*) and fairness in his neighbourhood, and in particular amongst his Sunnance fellows. His case exemplifies attitudes, expectations,

¹⁰ Literally “from Loga”, in Zarma.

¹¹ Tramol is the term people in Niamey use to refer to Tramadol, a popular narcotic pain reliever easily accessible across Niger and West Africa.

trajectories and performances of religiosity that have influenced and shaped the moral universe of interactions in Niamey. Displaying their beards and Izala trousers, both Musa and Hima personify the Sunnance narrative of a moral transformation through migration to Niamey, where many young people have found wealth and piety.

What impact are these practices and relationships having on trade and commerce? In a context where bargaining is the norm and an important act/ritual of trading, Izala traders have gained the reputation of not looking for *riba* and therefore price tagging their goods: “the price we tell people is the price we sell it” (Hima). I have heard this claim, for example, from many Izala young men involved in the used tyre business in Niamey’s Katakò market. An important social base of the Izala movement in the city, these young men illustrate both the aesthetics and the ethics of Izala.

Over the years, I have seen these traders build up wealth and expand their businesses, establishing their trades in a moral space where one expects to find trust and fair treatment all based on the fear of God (*tsoron Allah*, in Hausa). “They may not be cheap; at least they have good products,” said Seyni, a housekeeper whom I asked to get me a toothbrush from the *tablier* in the street where I was staying. When I asked Seyni why the brush was so expensive (800 Fcfa/\$1.80), he responded: “Izalaize no [He follows Izala]! You know, he is Izala, and has already warned me that people might find him too expensive.”¹² As a matter of fact, according to Seyni, while some people prefer to skip him and go a few minutes farther to another shop, many others have built up good relationships with him because he is reliable (Seyni in 2018).

While this moral model is important to mention, I must point out that the moral universe within which it emerges has usually been aligned with a particular sense of the body. That said, I will not use the concept of embodiment to characterize the translation of Izala values into bodily expressions and performances. Embodiment conveys a sense of externality and importation that may not help us grasp the process through which the values and moral norms emerge and shape life, creating a mirror effect and interdependency between aesthetics and ethics. The beard and trousers are important markers for the trader, but also for the customer. Both are concerned with the way they are treated and the way they are affected.

My Hijabi and My Religiosity

I have argued elsewhere that Salafism has achieved a revolution in West Africa (Sounaye 2017b). It has introduced new moral and knowledge economies, produced new political concepts and ideologies, and taken unprecedented cultural forms that have become normative. This development has relied on the privatization of religion as religious practice insists on the subject and its self-awareness in everyday practice (Sounaye 2016 and 2017a). This reflexive turn toward the subject as the one to assert and ascertain religiosity has proved particularly efficient in Niamey, where – as the previ-

¹² I personally checked the price of the toothbrush.

ous sections have shown – Salafi moral discourse has been usually tied to one’s dress, and both men and women’s bodies, looks and tastes. One does not inherit religious status, as the Izala claim goes, but earns it. This emphasis on self-making, common among Salafi youth and women, is actually a critique that targeted traditional modes of devolution of power and acquisition of authority.

For many women in Niamey, donning the hijabi was one of their first acts of taking charge and asserting that they are Sunnance and therefore breaking with, or renegotiating their relationships to, the structures that had been shaping their lives, religious or otherwise. Much like other attitudes that cultivate religiosity, Sunnance attire and aesthetics were intended to be unmistakable statements. The hijabi and the Izala trousers thus appeared to be signs attesting a subjective quality of goodness; contrary to many readings, their attire is not accessory but deep-seated in the substantive side of the matter. Appearance thus becomes significant, and aesthetics central.

Often, the popularization of the hijabi, a process that has, as I have already pointed out, gone beyond Salafi (Izala and Sunnance), has given way to a private space of religiosity (Sounaye forthcoming)¹³ marked by a stylization of the hijabi, its fabric, colours, shapes and models.¹⁴ In some instances, this attention to the sensory and forms has taken inspiration from the Prophet Muhammad. In public and private pronouncements, Sunnance have insisted on the beauty of the Prophet.¹⁵ I have heard references to the physical beauty of the Prophet and how this makes him even more lovable and therefore a model to emulate (cf. shaving like the Prophet). The evocation of love here is important, as love affects and shapes both relationships and interactions. Love can trigger association (with the community of the Sunnance, for example) and desire to be with the Prophet, be like him or be on his side, and therefore celebrate his beauty.¹⁶ The Prophet symbolizes and represents the perfection of beauty,¹⁷ which is emulated by the servants of the Sunna, as the Sunnance usually self-identify.

What does this concept of beauty encompass? In most cases, the evident answer is moral goodness. However, in many instances it has an aesthetic connotation, drawing attention to the physical features of the Prophet: “Alboro sogante no” (he is a hand-

¹³ In an upcoming publication, I use the concept of “fabrique d’une sphere privée de religiosité” to capture the significance of the individual’s construction and experience of religiosity.

¹⁴ It is within this context that, in a discussion during a seminar I taught at Abdou Moumouni University in 2017, a student claimed while entangled in a heated argument with her classmate, “my religiosity is not in my hijabi”. The statement was informed by current uses of the hijabi, in particular by the sex workers I mentioned above.

¹⁵ The concept of the beauty of the Prophet is not specific to the Sunnance. Various groups have also built on this narrative to establish the legitimacy of their practices. The Tidjaniyya is one of those groups. See their Mawlid celebrations.

¹⁶ The evocation of love here points to another dimension this paper does not deal with, namely intimacy. Though an important dimension of the discussion here, I engage with it in another publication which provides a more systematic discussion of the topic beyond theological divides. For now, it suffices to flag it up and recognize its significance.

¹⁷ This is not specific to Sunnance, but across the region and regardless of theological orientations, I have observed many inspiring evocations of the beauty of the Prophet.

some man), as the phrase goes in Zarma. For a young woman I met at a preaching rally (wazu in Zarma) in Maradi, “that explains why nobody can draw his picture” (Ilia in 2015). As an extraordinary being, he also had an exceptional physique. This image of the Prophet has resulted in a trend of imitation, as his sartorial and bodily practices and postures are emulated by many who strive to follow in his footsteps. This has resulted in lifestyles, bodily postures, and methods of care and hygiene that have significantly contributed to the repertoire of distinctive gestures, acts and attitudes of the Sunnance. In other words, as one may see in circles in Niamey, the beauty (moral and aesthetic) of the Prophet is at the centre of the Sunnance’s quest (cf. Stokes 2016).

Though deeply private and personal, the domains of ethics and aesthetics have greatly contributed to building publics and communities. Among the Sunnance, it is evident that the aesthetic of their sartorial practices is at the heart of their forming and being a community. Both the internal and external perceptions of their dress code, especially when it comes to women, have contributed to their identity. They may not claim that identity, and even when they do, it is generally not in a straightforward way. Regardless, their Sunnance identity clearly transpires in the clothing they wear. Their individual styles and tastes may vary, but they still contribute to a broader scheme which they claim and which shapes their belonging.

Conclusion

A major point I wanted to make in this paper is that the ideas of public and audience do not exclude the possibility of an individually carved out and reflected sense of religion. On the contrary, religiosity operates in many ways by combining the individual side – style and taste – with the framework provided by the group and the collective (Marie 1997). This is illustrated by the shared sense of being part of an ensemble or unit. This has been a missing perspective in the study of Izala, as scholars have usually preferred its conceptualization as a trend or a movement, an approach that has usually silenced the minute and messy details of the idiosyncratic side that disturbs or even unsettles generalizing accounts. And yet, what makes Salafism an agent of social transformation are also the various ways in which individuals appropriate its ideals, sense of self and norms. The significance of this way of being Sunnance or Izala, or more precisely privately religious, has revolutionized how people conceptualize, experience and practise Islam. One has to look at ethics and aesthetics, and the developments in these domains and at their intersection, to grasp the significance of the dynamics I have discussed here.

Of course, ethics and aesthetics do not develop in a vacuum (Meyer 2015, 2010a, 2010b; De Witte 2003, 2011; Lambek et al. 2015; Lambek 2010; Stokes 2016; Renne 2018; Schulz 2011; Sounaye 2017a); they are produced through our engagement with the world. They are part of our lifeworld (cf. Meyer 2015; Meyer and Pels 2003; MacIntyre 2007; Jackson and Piette 2015; Marsden 2007; James 2003) in that they manifest both the sociality and relatedness of both the collective and the individual, a reality

that not all individuals will always be aware of. Note that I mean sociality in the sense that people translate individual or communal ways of interacting or desire to relate to each other, and relatedness in the sense that aesthetics and ethics are evidence that individuals and collectives have neighbours to whom they pay attention in one way or another (association, participation, opposition, conflict, etc.).

The drama of the hijabi that consisted of equating it to extremism or “integrisme”, as the lexicon of the 1990s would have it, no longer holds, in part because the critics of the hijabi have, over time, started wearing it. Without even having converted, they have also embraced a social trend that has transformed the conditions and terms of the presence and appearance of the female body in public. The culture of hijabi and short trousers I have referred to here is certainly a way for many Muslims to embrace a code (aesthetic or ethical), but it is also the way in which many have handled their presence in a social space. Again, the hijabi and the Izala trousers exist in a context. In that presence and act of being, they have gone beyond official representation and the normative framework to define or redefine, sometimes in an egocentric manner, what being Muslim means and entails. In my own research, I have attempted to show how a particular community, namely the Sunnance, has taken religiosity beyond the official terms, representations or norms that come with the definition of a structure, and produced ego-centred practices, disciplines, norms and values.

The notion of ego-centrism refers here not only to the way religiosity is experienced and talked about by the individual, but also the way we as scholars attend to that individual expression through what we may term the private, the personal and the intimate. Obviously, what I have offered here has yet to take onboard the intimate in a satisfactory manner. Perhaps we can leave that for another opportunity to revisit *la religion à la première personne*.

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8 Photographic Essay: Everyday Religious and Non-Religious Gestures in Senegal

Élise Fitte-Duval

I have always intended to address intimacy, especially how we live our bodies, through my photography. When I moved to Senegal, my approach evolved into one of documenting aspects of everyday life in an attempt to address the intimacy of people as they show themselves.

The position from which I intervened in their lives was to make people look at themselves in images that were not posed, but extracted from reality. I switched focus from the image of the individual face to the one that is positioned within the society. This invites the viewer to accept a part of today's reality that I am depicting through photography as it occurs, by telling a story through images that override the fact that this reality is unspoken. It is a matter of understanding how society works, and how it is unable to question itself – of showing people as I see them, each of them accounting for the situation in which society finds itself. This form of documentary photography, which may be akin to taking an inventory, allows one to think about and build the future.

For the Private Pieties project, I proposed to catch parts of the body engaged in daily activities that suggest intimacy – the things that people are doing every day but don't want to talk about, because this society is quite modest and leaves little room for investigative photography, which is perceived as inquisitorial. The point was to determine what can be shown and what cannot amongst daily religious and non-religious gestures.

For instance, we have chosen to illustrate that special moment of womanhood, maternity, because it crystallizes a dichotomy between the outside (what can be shown) and the inside (what is hidden). It is a moment where a woman's intimacy is specially protected, so the very fact of being pregnant is not disclosed outside of her close family. In this moment, too, the religious coexists with other customs. How women treat their hair is another of these moments. The crux of this is that in Senegal, women are keen to wear artificial hair designs in public and natural ones at home in private. The time when a woman uncovers her hair in preparation for prayer is an intimate moment. Natural hair means authenticity. I have previously explored this theme through a social documentary project by taking portraits of those who dare to wear their natural hair uncovered in Dakar. For this study, the approach was to shoot close up and to show as few of the subjects' faces as possible in order to focus on the appearance of their bodies. Photos of artists are prominent in the collection I am presenting here because they gave us the opportunity to access moments that others would either have hidden from us or not allowed us to publish.

Collaborating with Élise Fitte-Duval

Nadine Sieveking

Born in Martinique in 1967, Élise Fitte-Duval was trained as a photographer and visual artist (in Martinique and France) before settling in Dakar, Senegal, where she has lived and worked since 2001. She describes the common theme of her photographic projects as an effort to portray people in their environment, encompassing both its physical and social dimensions. Through her work, she has actively engaged in people's everyday lives, following civic movements (such as the protest movement *Y'en a marre*: "Fed up") with the goal of understanding the ways in which people join together in collective action while also allowing individuals to express their personalities through portraiture, which she conceives of as a social commentary rather than an aesthetic representation of someone. Her art is characterized by the desire to capture movement and to reflect on the language of the body as a perspective on life in society, as her work on "Dancing Hope" and her "Wrestlers Series" illustrate.

Élise Fitte-Duval has accompanied many artists and activists in Senegal over a long period of time, and her intimate personal knowledge of her subjects' lives is an extremely rich resource for a social researcher. Collaborating with Élise Fitte-Duval as part of my ethnographic fieldwork in Senegal for the ERC-project "Private Pieties" has been a highly rewarding professional and personal experience. On the one hand, the visual exploration of our research topic required us to be very sensitive and confidential concerning matters of privacy in relation to the people who agreed to be portrayed. On the other hand, the topic of "Private Pieties" implied a constant questioning of how to draw the boundaries between a private and a public situation, how to distinguish between religious and non-religious aspects, and how to assess the actual relevance

of each of these aspects for people's everyday lives. Our questions about what was to be depicted in the images soon turned into a continually enriching mutual exchange regarding what can be shown in terms of visibility and invisibility – a question deeply imbued with religious meanings in the Senegalese Sufi context. It also raised the question of what *should* be shown, in terms of the ethics and aesthetics of those portrayed, but also our own respective standards as an artist and an ethnographer.

In her photographic essay, Élise Fitte-Duval demonstrates her resolution to these fundamental questions as an artist, even if her 'visual story' has to remain partial, leaving out many elements that could not be reproduced in this publication. To ensure that consent could be given to the publication of personal images, and to respect people's right to privacy, some images were partly anonymized,¹ while others reveal an identity that is part of the subjects' public self-representation (for example as an artist, an imam, or a restaurant owner) or show aspects of their privacy that they deliberately wanted to be seen and publicized. The photographer's choices of how to deal with these self-representations are part of her own social commentary about private pieties in Senegal. Her special focus on women's hair reminds us that behind a simple veil or an artfully arranged mussor (Wolof expression for the headscarf used by adult women, from French: mouchoir de tête) there is a lot to discover. In Senegalese society, the symbolic potential of hair includes complex gendered notions of wealth and beauty, of care, protection and (self-)cultivation that are needed to demarcate the individual from society's 'other' and make a person recognizable as a valuable part of society. An individual hairstyle can affirm, or even challenge, current norms of embodied cultural identity, and as a symbolic marker its meanings go far beyond the distinction between religious and non-religious or public and private domains.

Élise Fitte-Duval does not prescribe how her images should be interpreted and invites the audience to engage in the open hermeneutic process of understanding them – according to each spectator's own knowledge and curiosity – and ultimately appreciating them as an inspiration that allows for resonance between 'us' and 'them'. As an ethnographer, this process deeply resonates with my own research experiences. More concretely, some of the questions that might be raised by the images remind me of moments during my fieldwork in Senegal. Questions such as: Where is this person going? Is her attire a religious marker? How to interpret the body language of a person reading the Qur'an? Which parts of a prayer are considered to be public and for whom? Is ritual ablution for women a more intimate moment than for men? Why is the non-religiosity of "women's business" (l'affaire des femmes) during naming ceremonies so vehemently denounced in public discourse? How to assess the power of bureaucratic organization of religious practice as compared to aesthetic expressions of religious feelings? Élise Fitte-Duval's photographic essay includes an image of a silhouette reflected in a display case that is at once both very vague and very concrete – just like many of the answers we can give to these questions.

¹ This also applies to the names indicated (or omitted) in the texts or subtitles.

These images of religiosity in everyday life contain public and private aspects. Some of them appear with the subjects' identities revealed, while others must remain anonymous.

In everyday life in Senegal, religiosity is negotiated between public and private domains, continually switching between what can be shown and what has to be hidden.





Giving Birth

Pregnancy in Private

Normally women wear large dresses during pregnancy in order to hide their state in public.





Mané, artist manager

Namegiving

The namegiving – *ngénte* in Wolof – is a public event divided into the religious ceremony and “women’s business” (*l’affaire des femmes*).





Women's Ngénte









Mother and child

After that, mother and child hide from public view for 40 days.



Marème and her firstborn



Praying



Mamadou, tailor





Haby, artist



Layenne Pilgrimage

The Layenne Brotherhood is a local Sufi organization based on the Cap Vert peninsula.

Every year, the Layenne Brotherhood followers celebrate “the call” of their founder, Seydina Limamou Laye (1843–1909), at places in Dakar where he lived and preached.

This is a time of meditation and family reunion, an opportunity to wear beautiful white clothes and to take souvenir photos.









Saly decided to wear the veil at the age of 18.

In her search for a guide she first became Mouride, then Tidiane, before becoming Layenne.

On Sundays she meets the members of her prayer group – dahira – and reads the Qur'ān at the beach of Ngor.





Living With Faith on a Daily Basis

Haddiatou, journalist





Dasso, restaurant owner





Imam Kanté

Dakar et sa Banlieue du 17 mai 2015

ATTENTION : Sunnah de l'IFTAR : Appel du Muazzin, puis Rupture du jeûne en 3 ou 5mn, puis Prière de l'iftar.

LA JOURNÉE DU	IMSAK	FADJAR	SUBA	TISBAR	TAKUSAN	IFTAR	ITIMIS	GUEWE
1 jeu 17-mai	5:10	05:26	05:41	13:30	16:45	19:32	19:35	21:15
2 ven 18-mai	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	16:45	19:32	19:35	21:15
3 sam 19-mai	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	16:45	19:32	19:35	21:15
4 dim 20-mai	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	16:45	19:32	19:35	21:15
5 lun 21-mai	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	16:45	19:33	19:36	21:15
6 mar 22-mai	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	16:45	19:33	19:36	21:15
7 mer 23-mai	5:14	05:25	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:34	19:37	21:15
8 jeu 24-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:34	19:37	21:15
9 ven 25-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:34	19:38	21:15
10 sam 26-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:35	19:38	21:15
11 dim 27-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:35	19:38	21:15
12 lun 28-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:35	19:38	21:15
13 mar 29-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:36	19:39	21:15
14 mer 30-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:36	19:39	21:15
15 jeu 31-mai	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:36	19:39	21:15
16 ven 1-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:37	19:40	21:15
17 sam 2-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:37	19:40	21:15
18 dim 3-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:37	19:40	21:15
19 lun 4-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:38	19:41	21:15
20 mar 5-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:38	19:41	21:15
21 mer 6-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:38	19:41	21:15
22 jeu 7-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:38	19:41	21:15
23 ven 8-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:39	19:42	21:15
24 sam 9-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	16:45	19:39	19:42	21:15
25 dim 10-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	17:00	19:39	19:42	21:15
26 lun 11-juin	5:13	05:24	05:39	13:30	17:00	19:39	19:42	21:15
27 mar 12-juin	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	17:00	19:40	19:43	21:15
28 mer 13-juin	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	17:00	19:40	19:43	21:15
29 jeu 14-juin	5:14	05:25	05:40	13:30	17:00	19:40	19:43	21:15

AMA

Appel par le Muazzin à l'heure de l'IFTAR (pour la rupture jeûne), puis prière de Timis 3 à 5 mn après
 offert par Khadim Rassoul GUEYE 70 639 23 61 - badourahmane@gmail.com

NB : La prière de GEWE est faite à 21H15 cette année pour les besoins des « nallou » ou « Tarawilil »
 Ce qui permet aux fidèles de bien « couper » le jeûne à la prière et se réjouir avant la prière

DAL'AILLY

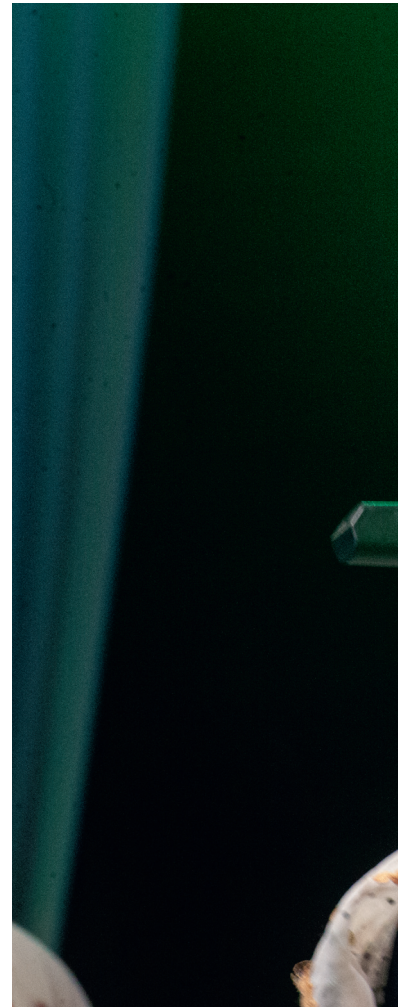
Celebrating Ramadan

Festival Salam

During Ramadan, religious remembrances and meditations – zikr – are abundant.

The Festival Salam, organized in May 2018 by Youssou N'Dour, music star and media entrepreneur, at the time also presidential advisor with the rank of a minister, puts on stage zikr performances by various Sufi brotherhoods.

Participants joyfully engage by singing, dancing and snapping their fingers.





Religious singer Saida Binta Thiam





Breaking the Fast



At the bakery



In a car



At home



Artists Chakroun and Fayad at a special Ramadan Vendredi Slam Dakar event



Gallery reception

9 Fitness and the ‘Bracketing’ of Religiosity in Senegal

Nadine Sieveking

Introduction: Fitness – What is That?

“Fitness – moy lan?” (Wolof: Fitness – what is that?) the young Imam asked my companion, who was acting as an interpreter for an interview regarding a contested bodily practice introduced to the village of Toubab Diallaw a few years ago. The issue concerned the project *Danse à l’école*, which had prompted negative reactions on the part of the Imam Ratib, the Grand Imam of the village, shortly after some dance classes had been held with children at the public school. Since the Grand Imam had spoken, the dance courses had stopped, even though the same pupils had already been taking classes at the nearby international dance school *École des Sables* for quite a while without any objections. Relocating these classes to the grounds of the public school and leaving the private domain of the dance centre had made them an issue of public concern. Hence, the Imam Ratib felt entitled to intervene and condemn them, on the basis of religious criteria, as *ḥarām* – an illicit practice.

A lot of people involved with the *Danse à l’école* project were unhappy with this turn of events. This included Aliou*¹, the man who had agreed to interpret and arrange interviews with local authorities for me. He had played a central role in finding a consensus for establishing the dance project at the public school, and he was very

¹ All names of my interlocutors are anonymised (and marked with *), apart from public figures or persons who are referred to in terms of an official public position that they occupy.

disappointed when the Imam Ratib stepped in with his veto. According to Aliou*, younger and more open-minded Islamic scholars in the village had been more supportive of the dance project, and he suggested talking to one of them. The young Imam with whom we then met didn't explicitly contradict the statement issued by the Grand Imam, but he did propose an interpretation of dancing as a kind of "play" that was more open to negotiation. This encouraged me to dig deeper with my questions. Would he consider all kinds of dance as problematic from an Islamic perspective, and where would he draw the line between dance and other forms of bodily practice, such as "fitness" for example?

I was speaking French but used the English term, which is fairly well established among francophone speakers in Dakar and other urban areas in Senegal. The Imam in Toubab Diallow, who was speaking Wolof² because his French was not fluent, seemed not to be acquainted with the English notion of 'fitness'. However, when Aliou* explained that it meant the movements carried out to the sound of music in a gym (*salle de gymnastique*, *salle de sport*),³ the Imam was immediately reminded of a gym he knew, owned by a certain Habib Sy – probably a fellow Tijani.⁴ With a sense of pride, he told us: "if you go to Habib Sy, you would say that it is dance because he does everything!"⁵ The Imam made this comment with an expression of admiration very current among Muslims in Senegal (and elsewhere), who also signal their own piety in using it: "Machala!"

In the remainder of our interview, the Imam elaborated on the need to adjust religion in accordance with the real world – *diine ak jamono*⁶ – in order to adapt to current circumstances and be able to "live with your generation". Evidently, he saw the bodily practices carried out in a gym as a perfectly appropriate way to do so. His admiring

² While French is the only official language, Wolof is the most widely spoken vernacular in Senegal.

³ My interpreter started to explain fitness like this: "Mooy comme *salle de gymnastique*, *salle de sport* yi, andak mouvement ak dañuy teg musique". The English term "gym", which has no equivalent in French, is derived from the Ancient Greek notion "gymnasion", which designated a place of physical and intellectual education, but the English term only retains the aspect of physical training. I use it interchangeably with the French notions *salle de gymnastique* and *salle de sport*.

⁴ The young Imam in Toubab Diallow, like most of the inhabitants of this village, is a member of the Tijaniyya Sufi order. Sy is the family name of an important Tijani dynasty in Senegal.

⁵ My translation is based on the French translation of the Wolof transcript by Mamadou Gueye. In the original Wolof phrasing (*danga naan fecc la parce que lu nekk lay def*) the Imam uses the Wolof concept *fecc*, which refers to popular dances and has a distinctively female connotation (Neveu Kringelbach and Skinner 2012: 3).

⁶ Mamadou Gueye explained this notion in French using the phrase "*la religion par rapport à la génération actuelle*". *Diine*, adapted from Arab, is the current Wolof term for (Muslim) religion. *Jamono* is a more ambivalent and context-specific term for time, age/era/epoch or generation. According to the translation by Gueye, the meaning of *jamono* also refers to "the world of today" (*le monde d'aujourd'hui*) or even to practices diverging from religious dogma (*pratique différente de la théorie*). Aliou* gave the following explanation, referring to a popular Senegalese TV show in Wolof called *Diine ak Jamono*: "*Jamono, cela veut dire le monde. Il y a une télévision qui fait ça, Walfadjiri, il dit diné et diamono, cela veut dire la religion et la culture.*"

comment regarding gym fitness highlights what appears to be a paradox – one that inspired me to write this chapter. Although there are a lot of similarities between dance and fitness practices in terms of their physical movement patterns, Senegalese Muslims perceive and depict them very differently from a religious point of view. Throughout my research in Senegal, I have consistently been confronted with positions confirming the status of dance as inherently immoral, illicit (haram) or at least somewhat problematic from the point of view of Islam, and therefore “not recommended” for a pious Muslim. In contrast, I have never heard any similar statements concerning fitness, and this began to intrigue me.

What is the significance of these divergent attitudes? What does it tell us about the social position of the respective practices? If we take up Mary Douglas's (1970) claim that there is a correspondence between the “two bodies”, the physical body and the social body, what can we learn about contemporary Senegalese society from the recent introduction and rapid expansion of gym fitness among Senegalese urbanites? How does the current fitness boom relate to other trends and the larger dynamics of social change in Senegal? And, more specifically, how can we understand the increasing popularity of fitness practices against the background of a growing pressure on individuals to embody some form of religiosity and a ‘saturation’ of public space with performances of Muslim piety?

Since the mandate of President Abdoulaye Wade (2000–2012), the amplification and diversification of religious (especially Muslim) practices and modes of belonging,⁷ although discernible since the late 1980s (Seck 2010: 24), have become ever more evident, notably through the public display of piety and realignments of the relationships between the spheres of political and religious power (Dahou and Foucher 2004; Diouf and Leichtman 2009; Diouf 2013; Seck et al. 2015). This indicates a trend of long-term changes within Senegalese society whereby, in spite of a certain disenchantment concerning political Islam (Loimeier 2000), political and economic liberalization since the 1980s has been accompanied by an ongoing process of Islamization ‘from below’. The interlocking political, cultural and religious patterns and glocal dynamics of these transformations have been subsumed by Mamadou Diouf (2013: 12) under the concept of an “Islam-Wolof Model”. The results of these changes have been analysed by Abdourahmane Seck (2010) under the heading of an “Islam-Nationalism” – a term he coined in order to depict the way in which Senegalese society is inventing its own political and religious modernity (*ibid.*: 224ff.).

Focusing on bodily practices, we can ask how this new “religious modernity” is embodied and what kind of “correspondences” between physical and social body (Douglas 1970) are characteristic of it. Interestingly, in stark contrast to my parallel research on professional dancers (Sieveking 2017: 238), from the point of view of my enquiries into fitness practices and the career trajectories of fitness entrepreneurs and

⁷ An estimated 95% of the Senegalese population is Muslim, mostly belonging to one of the locally established Sufi brotherhoods (Tijaniyya, Muridiyya, Qadiriyya or the comparatively small community of Layennes, locally rooted in the region of Dakar).

coaches, the issue of religiosity seemed rather irrelevant. As Abdoulaye*, a graduate student in computer science and regular customer of a fitness gym in Dakar, clarified in an interview, his physical training and his religious practice are “in no way interfering” with one another (*ca n’interfère en rien!*). So why incorporate the study of fitness practices into a research project focused on ‘private pieties’ and the articulations of individual religiosity within Senegalese society?⁸

I had initially started to develop an interest in fitness practices in Dakar in order to gain access to and explore the lifeworld of the new middle-class milieus that have evolved and visibly expanded in this city over the last two decades.⁹ In following this research avenue together with a small team,¹⁰ I realized that those practising fitness in a gym are usually not especially inclined to communicate and open up for discussion with an anthropologist. As I will explain in more detail below, there is a kind of gym etiquette that limits communication. Engaging fitness practitioners in discussions that went beyond gym small talk, let alone raising the topic of religiosity, turned out to be difficult and contradictory to the informal laws structuring the social space constituted by this practice. In general, gym etiquette excludes symbolic references to religion. The particular type of “aesthetic formation” (Meyer 2009) constituted by fitness practices seems completely disconnected from the realm of religious experience.

In order to engage with fitness practitioners in conversations that would eventually allow us to address the topic of religion, we resorted to experimental methods that created a communicative space separate from the fitness gym.¹¹ In doing so, we maintained the separation of different experiential spheres that was claimed by fitness practitioners – implicitly through their reluctance to discuss religiosity, as well as explicitly. In fact, between the two realms “il n’y a rien” (there is nothing), as Fatou* put it when asked to describe the relationship between her fitness training and her religious practice. For this young pious Muslim woman, manager of a small restaurant, retail trader and regular gym practitioner, practising her religion, specifically by carrying out the

⁸ My empirical research on fitness gyms in Dakar was carried out between March 2017 and December 2018, on the basis of qualitative methods including participant observation in various gyms, formal interviews with professionals such as gym managers, coaches and state officials, and informal conversations with gym clients.

⁹ The ERC project Private Pieties explores the tendencies in various contemporary Muslim social formations to insist on individual religiosities (and non-religiosities) and “to privilege an individual approach to the faith” (Loimeier forthcoming). My research within this framework started with a focus on “new social groups”, often described as “middle class” and located “between the utterly rich and powerful as well as the utterly poor and weak” (Loimeier 2016: 3ff.).

¹⁰ From January 2018, part of my research on fitness in Dakar was carried out in collaboration with Mbanga Diallo, who helped me significantly in providing documents and carrying out interviews with professionals and state officials, and with Anais Cadillon, who carried out qualitative interviews and participant observation in fitness classes. I thank both of them for their inspiration, commitment, diligence and endurance during this study.

¹¹ Anais Cadillon set up a photographic project with the aim of visualizing particularly valuable aspects of everyday life from the perspective of fitness practitioners. In the context of this project she was able to carry out interviews touching on the aspect of private religiosity.

five daily prayers, is a “duty” – something that is “diametrically opposed” to her (almost) daily physical practice in a gym, because the latter is “facultative”.¹² She had started to practice fitness based on medical recommendation, and she maintains that if she stops she gets sick, but she considers this motivation to be a concern for health in a purely physical sense.¹³ In a similar manner, Abdoulaye* explained that he frequents his fitness gym on a daily basis purely to obtain “certain physical objectives” and “liberate” himself from stress, doubts and social constraints, but “in no way” does this influence his perception of religion: “Ça n’a aucune, aucune, aucune interférence.”¹⁴

How should we interpret this disconnect between and strict separation of spheres? Should we understand fitness practice in Senegal as the manifestation of a kind of “secular body” in the sense of “a particular configuration of the human sensorium – of sensibilities, affects, embodied dispositions – specific to secular subjects” (Hirschkind 2011: 633)? Or, if we don’t want to adhere to the notion of “secular subjects” or a secular body, should we at least concede that fitness practice contributes to “the sensibilities and corporeal formations through which secularism is realized” (Scheer, Johansen, Fadil 2019: 7)? Fitness culture in Western countries has indeed been analysed as a secular “body project”, materializing “the idea that in late-modernity the self becomes a reflexive and secular project which works on an ever refined level of body presentations” (Giddens, cited in Sassatelli 2010: 2). However, on empirical grounds it seems obvious that “religious subjects often poke about” in places that they themselves conceive of as “secular”, such as gyms, engaging in the body project of fitness training without thereby automatically engaging in “God-bashing” (Engelke 2019: 204). People training in a gym rather seem to be temporarily ‘bracketing’ their particular religiosity and religious identity.¹⁵ However, is it therefore appropriate to interpret the boom of fitness practices in Dakar and other Senegalese cities as an indicator of processes of conscious self-fashioning of modern subjects, who are, at times, free to simply be and act non-religious? And what are the conditions for the embodiment of such a (temporarily) “liberated” modern subjectivity in a Senegalese context?

¹² “... pour le sport et ma religion, il n’y a rien [...] c’est mon devoir de prier parce que je suis musulmane. C’est diamétralement [opposé] au sport. Parce que le sport c’est facultatif. Je peux le faire ou je peux ne pas le faire. Pour la prière, c’est obligatoire. Je dois toujours le faire.” (Fatou*, 24 May 2018)

¹³ “C’est juste la santé. Et si je pratique le sport, je ne suis jamais malade. Si j’arrête, je suis malade.” (Fatou*, 24 May 2018)

¹⁴ “... je veux continuer à faire du sport pour atteindre certains objectifs physiques. Mais ça n’influence en aucun cas sur ma perception de la religion, de la prière ainsi de suite. Ça n’a aucune, aucune, aucune interférence [...] le sport, je le fais juste comme ça, dans le but d’atteindre certains objectifs physiques, de me libérer ...” (Abdoulaye*, 8 May 2018); “... la première des motivations [...] être un peu souple avec ma personne et essayer de me libérer un peu du stress, des doutes [...], des contraintes sociales” (Abdoulaye*, 5 March 2018).

¹⁵ Whereas Engelke (2019: 204) refers to bodybuilders who simply “don’t do what they do as Christians”, Kühn (2020) shows that the ‘bracketing’ of religious identities during ‘spiritual’ meditation courses in Beirut, Lebanon includes dimensions of experience that practitioners privately link up with their own religiosity while insisting on the separation of their ‘spirituality’ from the domain of official religious institutions.

In his analysis of the “new Senegalese modernity”, Seck (2010: 229) cautions that the “classical contradiction” between modernity and religion (and its corollary notion of the secular) is misleading as a tool for understanding the dynamics in contemporary Senegalese society. Accordingly, we should probably see the claims by pious fitness practitioners that “there is nothing” between their religiosity and their fitness practice and that “in no way is this influencing my perception of religion” as evidence that fitness practice can stand “outside that division between the secular and the religious” (During 2010 cited in Engelke 2015: 91). However, should we therefore consider gym fitness a “mundane” practice in the sense of “those forms of life and experience that are not available for our moral or political or philosophical or religious or social aspirations and projects” (ibid.)? Although the “physical objectives” of fitness practitioners appear, at first glance to be “mundane” in this sense, a deeper analysis of fitness culture (Sassatelli 2010) reveals its inherent morality that is intimately linked with the experience of body transformation on the physical level.

While it could certainly be fruitful to analyse the various forms of fitness practice in Senegal in their own right, in this chapter I focus on the way this bodily practice has acquired meaning within social formations that can be described as part of middle-class milieus.¹⁶ I have been inspired in my approach by Birgit Meyer’s concept of “aesthetic formations”. With this concept she underlines the “forming power of a shared “aesthetic style”” within a community that “evolves around shared images and other mediated cultural forms” (Meyer 2009: 9). An important aspect of Meyer’s idea of aesthetic formations is her emphasis on the bodily dimension. She insists that “the emergence and sustenance of social formations depends on styles that form and bind subjects not only through cognitive imaginations, but also through moulding the senses and building bodies” (ibid.: 22). In my analysis of the social spaces of fitness practice, I build on Meyer’s understanding of social formations and their coming into being through particular forms of “building bodies”.

However, instead of studying social or aesthetic formations that are (pre)conceived as religious, I have focused on the aspect of bodily practice and methodologically ‘bracketed’ the aspect of religiosity. In doing so, I want to foreground the question of how particular modes of embodiment are related to specific social formations, taking into account that particular social aspirations might prevail over concerns about religious style (Schielke 2012: 35). While bracketing the religious, I also bracket the secular, in order to concentrate on the practical meanings of emic notions. This includes an analysis of the term fitness and its local translations, as well as the notion of a “new body” that is associated with legitimate body transformation and “body ownership”.

In the first part I introduce the globalized concept of fitness, which originated in the USA but rapidly spread worldwide. I explain that fitness practice is part of con-

¹⁶ In the outline of her comprehensive ethnographic project on fitness in Mozambique, Julie Soleil Archambault particularly highlights questions concerning the intersections between local manifestations of a globalized “fitness revolution” and a “rise of middle class” (<https://sweatyethnography.com/>) – an aspect that has also been central to my own case study on fitness.

sumer culture and essentially determined by the institution of the gym, where gender mixing is the norm. Tracing the history of fitness gyms in Dakar, which goes back to the 1970s, I show that the idea of the unisex gym only materialized in the 1990s. In the meantime, the social dynamics of gym fitness in Dakar are strongly shaped by the principle of gender mixing, which seems to remain morally unproblematic because gym etiquette entails an "official body de-sexualisation" (Sassatelli 2010: 74) of the body. This aspect is part of a more encompassing process of disconnecting the body symbolism of fitness training from the embodied norms and values of local culture and society. Going to the gym does not only symbolize active participation in global consumer culture, a form of "doing being middle class" (Lentz 2016),¹⁷ a materialized "aspiration for world" (Schielke 2012), and an embodiment of urban modernity. It also provides the moral legitimacy of a kind of individual body ownership that seems disconnected from the "spaces of reciprocal obligations" and their inherent logic of *teranga* – a Wolof term usually translated as hospitality and denoting a cultural ideal that has become a symbol of national identity, enacted in private or public on the level of families, communities and constituencies in a compulsory manner (Seck 2010: 229, Riley 2016).

In the conclusion, I reflect upon the possibilities of gaining a better understanding of the "new Senegalese modernity" through an analysis of its modes of embodiment. Bodily practices illustrate the ways in which divergent and partly contradictory sociocultural norms and values are enacted and experienced on a daily basis. The study of fitness in contemporary Senegal illustrates that the body is always a site of moral projects, where concrete, situationally defined negotiations of embodied gendered morality occur. They are articulated in different 'languages' that do not easily fit within categorical dichotomies between religion and modernity or between the religious and the secular.

Introducing Fitness

In answering to my question of why negative associations and moral critique tended to prevail in public discourses about dance in Senegal, my interlocutor responded with a smile: "The first immoral gesture is to mix what cannot be mixed; [...] men, women – you must not mix them" (Babakar*, 19 December 2018).¹⁸

This slightly ironic citation goes back to a lively discussion I had with a trained linguist who happens to be one of the many Muslims I encountered in Senegal that proclaimed themselves as pious yet tolerant and self-critical, and who were ready to prove their rhetorical skills by critically commenting, in a cheerful manner, upon the typical

¹⁷ See also Julie Soleil Archambault's paper for ECAS 2019 on "Class, conspicuous perspiration and the pursuit of fitness in Mozambique" (<https://www.nomadit.co.uk/conference/ecas2019/paper/49434>).

¹⁸ "Le premier geste immoral, c'est de mélanger ce qui n'est pas mélangeable ; [...] hommes – femmes, il ne faut pas les mélanger."

aspects of Senegalese Muslims' everyday religiosity. In my discussions with Muslims of various walks of life regarding bodily practices in Senegal, two main moral problems were raised explicitly and recurrently, sometimes with joyful irony, sometimes with serious anger. First and foremost, exposure of the body, especially the female body, was considered counter to Islamic principles. Second, as categorically stated in the citation above, the mixing of men and women raised concerns about the (external as well as internal) control of sexuality. Both aspects are combined in public discourses on dance, and especially in the critique of immoral dancing, as Diop (2018) shows with respect to "scandalous" media stars and their strategies of indirectly countering accusations of sexually permissive behaviour and a lack of bodily control by referring to their personal allegiance to a Sufi authority who is supposed to provide internal spiritual protection.

Considering the prominence of arguments that are in one way or another related to religiosity, constantly mobilized in moralizing discourses about dance,¹⁹ it is quite striking that fitness practices are themselves generally not considered a problem by Muslims in Senegal. As we will see, both exposure of the body and gender mixing are rather salient features of fitness culture in Dakar today. As such, we might assume that if people were more acquainted with these aspects of fitness, its practitioners would no longer be exempted from moral reprobation. However, it seems that this is not the case. I suggest that the way in which people in Senegal have become acquainted with the notion of fitness, and how they have come to know – discursively as well as experientially – what it is meant to be, prevents them from a moral judgement on the basis of religious principles. Fitness culture in Senegal entails a specific morality and legitimacy that is "in no way interfering" with religiosity, as Abdoulaye* put it. This non-interference of religiosity with fitness practice on the individual level could be understood in terms of a moral economy that has become rather globalized and relatively disconnected from the "thickness of local culture and moralities", including local norms and codes of religious belonging (Smith 2013: 156).

However, the field of fitness practices is only relatively disconnected from its local environment, since the dynamics of global and local transformations are inextricably intertwined in globalization processes. Moreover, the inherent moralities of fitness as a social formation have also changed in the course of its evolution. As Andreasson and Johansson (2014: 96–97) show in their analysis of the historical development of global gym and fitness culture, during the first phase of this development (until the 1970s) in the USA, the values of the "physical culture" of bodybuilding, which later became part of a larger "fitness culture", were still exclusively associated with masculinity and strongly related to both nation-building and (Christian) religion.²⁰ The transformation of this movement into a globalized mass cultural practice involving both men and

¹⁹ It seems that the issue of dance is often used as a kind of 'pretext' to discuss public or private, individual or collective aspects of aspects of religiosity and its embodiment.

²⁰ These aspects are also highlighted in Bromber's (2017) analysis of fitness and the cultivation of "new bodies" in Ethiopia under the reign of Haile Selassie.

women occurred only later (from the 1980s onwards), when “working out became part of an urban middle-class and single lifestyle” (ibid.: 102). The massive development of gym fitness in the 1990s, depicted by Andreasson and Johansson as “the fitness revolution”, crossed social as well as territorial boundaries, because the techniques and concept of the fitness workout started to circulate on a global scale. This led in one sense to a more uniform and homogeneous global gym and fitness culture, and in another sense “to glocal variations in the adaptation of this global ‘culture’.” (ibid.: 104).

The same dynamics, although mediated by the particularities of local and national economic developments, also characterize the evolution of fitness culture in Senegal. Moreover, ever since fitness has become part of the cultural landscape of Senegalese society, there has been an intermingling with local moralities, which are not permanently fixed orders or immutable entities, but continually negotiated, shifting and transforming as society changes.²¹ As we will see later, bodily practices play an effective role in these changes. In order to understand the role of fitness practices in these transformations, it is useful to examine where and how this intermingling started. Therefore, we must take account of when and how the English notion of “fitness” was introduced into local discourses and into which local terms it has been translated. First of all, though, I should explain what I mean by fitness.

Fitness – A Globalized Concept and its Local Translations

In contrast to dance, which can be considered to have been a feature of humanity since its origins (Hanna 1977), the concept of fitness has a rather short history. As mentioned above, Andreasson and Johansson situate “the fitness revolution” in the 1990s, pointing out that in the 1980s the notion was still not yet popular (the term used then for what became known as fitness was “workout”). In the meantime, however, “most people just use the term fitness when talking about fitness gyms, characterized by a mixture of training styles and methods” (Andreasson and Johansson 2014: 103). In my own use of the term I follow Sassatelli’s (2010) more critical conceptualization of fitness as a commercialized practice that she analyses in terms of a “lived culture” centred on the individual body and, more fundamentally, on the subject (ibid.: 168).²² Although its origins in the USA in the late 1970s and early 1980s reveal specific features of post-industrial consumer culture (Featherstone 1982, Sassatelli 2010: 22), fit-

²¹ In her outline of an “anthropology of sweat” based on an ethnography of fitness in Mozambique, Julie Soleil Archambault (forthcoming) systematically analyses the interrelated local and global dynamics of socio-economic, bodily and moral transformations.

²² This concept of fitness as a leisure activity practised by consumers capable of acting as responsible subjects (Sassatelli 2010: 206) is different from much older and more widespread notions of physical education and gymnastics that are (in principle) addressing the masses, who are called upon to serve a nation or imperium (as in Bromber’s (2017) analyses of “fitness” and its fascistic connotations in the context of imperial Ethiopia).

ness practice has also spread out into regions of the world that have not undergone similar industrialization processes. As Sassatelli (2010: 8) points out, the negotiation and active “re-working” of gender identities is an important feature of the continually globalizing fitness culture. The introduction of a new brand of physical exercise promoted by Jane Fonda under the label “Aerobics” was very influential in that regard. Aerobics was conceived as a form of gymnastics “largely designed for women aspiring to have a harmonious slender appearance” (ibid.: 22).²³ Aerobics strongly contributed to the “opening” of the formerly male-dominated space of gyms to women, by introducing popular music and effectively combining physical education with pop culture and dance (ibid.: 21–22). Conversely, the institution of the fitness gym has been crucial in providing the conditions under which gender identities are reworked in specific ways.

Building on Sassatelli, I consider the gym an essential element for the diffusion of fitness practices, including those that take place outside of a gym. I argue that the way in which such practices are interpreted and symbolically charged is determined by the cultural location of the fitness gym. According to Sassatelli, fitness gyms constitute (in principle) “non-competitive environments aimed at providing recreational exercise to boost physical form and well-being; and as such, they are at the core of a much broader fitness culture” (ibid.: 6). This broader fitness culture overlaps with sports, but also differs from sports in many ways; the latter usually include an element of competition as part of the ‘rules of the game’ and/or consist of a type of bodily performance that is seen as an end in itself. Gym fitness, by contrast, “is all training” with the prospect of modelling one’s own body (ibid.: 99–100). Moreover, fitness has become the overall concept for a “folk movement” centred on practices that are “a highly individualized and personal task” (Andreasson and Johansson 2014: 105). The fitness gym is an important institution for the development of this form of collective individualized training, framing specific practices as an effective and rational way of getting “a better body” (Sassatelli 2010: 101). It is important to remind ourselves that this ideal applies to both sexes. In general, fitness gyms “present themselves as unisex and appeal to an as wide as possible public of consumers”, which reflects the fact that “[t]he fitness phenomenon is commercial at its core.” (ibid.: 5).

According to the findings of my research, this characterization is also valid for fitness gyms in Dakar. Nonetheless, in current public discourses around fitness, largely diffused through social media, its commercial aspect is virtually eclipsed, remaining mostly hidden behind the framework of concerns surrounding public health, including national policies and discourses that focus on this problem. These public health concerns are reflected in the concept of *activités de remise en forme* (activities of get-

²³ Aerobic workouts go back to a specific kind of aerobic training developed in the USA in the 1960s to improve the fitness of astronauts and pilots (Sassatelli 2010: 209, FN 2; République du Sénégal 2014: 13). Jane Fonda was also inspired by the medically trained pioneer of functional gymnastics, Bess Mensendieck, who had developed a system of training especially designed for (educated) women in order to enable them to fulfil their duties as “healthy mothers of a healthy nation” (Klein 1992: 151–152).

ting back into shape), which was introduced as an official translation of the English term fitness (see below). This concept suggests that there is already a deviance from the ideal norm of physical shape. From a government perspective, this norm is not related to aesthetic appearance, but to the functionality of a healthy body. However, the centrality of the public health problem to the evolution of fitness culture in Dakar as expressed in official public discourse does not entail the existence of effective public policies in this domain. Rather, it has become an engine of private entrepreneurship. Its commercial aspect was expressed as follows in an informal interview with a private fitness entrepreneur: "Ma salle est comme une pharmacie – on soigne les gens [...] c'est comme un hôpital!" (Karim*, 27 January 2018).

This citation confirms the economic impact of the health problem, since "il y a de l'argent dedans!" (ibid.). At the same time, it points to the centrality of the gym in understanding the institutional and economic basis of fitness culture in Senegal. Moreover, the gym is also the converging point of popular images of fitness. This was illustrated in my introductory vignette, where I reported that my interpreter in Toubab Diallaw used the term *salle de sport* to explain the meaning of fitness in Wolof. In fact, the French term *salle de sport* (often abbreviated to *salle*, as in the citation above) is the most current translation of the term "gym" into French (and into Wolof).

The Evolution of Fitness Gyms: From the Association Sénégalaise de Culture Physique (1970s) to the Olympic Club (1990s)

Considering the centrality of the commercial gym to the diffusion of globalized concepts of fitness, it is worthwhile to ask when and how the first professionally managed fitness centres were locally established. Interestingly, the example of what can be considered the precursor to the contemporary fitness gym reveals that when the first local appropriations and adaptations of globalized fitness practices took shape in Dakar in the 1970s and 1980s, it was not only commercial strategies that were important for their success, but also the use of state-based moral and social resources. This element of (masculine) nationalism corresponds to the characteristics of the first phase of the development of global fitness culture as analysed by Andreasson and Johansson (2014). In Senegal, where the development of commercial gyms was temporarily dampened by the economic crisis that became generalized in the course of the 1980s (Antoine et al. 1995; Dimé and Calvès 2006), the second phase in the development of fitness culture only started in the 1990s, when the idea of the unisex fitness centre began to be popularized. At their outset, fitness practices in Dakar were not gender-mixed.

According to my interlocutors, the most influential precursor of professionally organized gym fitness in Dakar is Jean Baptiste Laberry. Born in Dakar in 1937 to a French father (who was already born in Senegal) and a Cape Verdean mother, Laberry is a Franco-Senegalese whose training in sports administration goes back to his military service during the late colonial period. Another important element of Laberry's

professional career as a gym founder and manager was his participation in competitive bodybuilding. From the 1960s he was a member of the International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness (IFBB), founded in 1946 by Joe Weider, a Canadian of Polish origin who is himself one of the people most influential in the development of a globalized fitness industry (Andreasson and Johansson 2014: 98ff.). Laberry, who was also trained as a sales agent and has always combined his activities in the bodybuilding and fitness sector with entrepreneurial activities in various domains, acted as the Senegalese representative for the Olympic Committee in the domain of bodybuilding. Before opening his own bodybuilding and fitness gym, he had been employed by a Lebanese who owned a studio that was called the “Weider”, because it was equipped with Joe Weider machines and marketed Joe Weider products (including nutritional supplements such as proteins for bodybuilders).

In the early 1970s, Laberry took over the “Weider”, which was located en ville, in the old centre of Dakar on the plateau, where the French colonists had once constructed ‘their’ European city.²⁴ He reorganized and formalized the gym, which was officially registered in 1975 as the Association Sénégalaise de Culture Physique (ASCP). On the basis of this registration, Laberry proudly claims – not only in our interview but also on promotional leaflets for his gym – that it is “the only gym recognized by the state” (*la seule salle reconnue par l’état*). Given the commercial aspect of the fitness training delivered by the ASCP, its status as an “association” could be questioned, but Laberry has worked hard to ensure the acknowledgement of his work as a kind of common good that contributes to the development of the nation. Since the era of Senghor (1960–1980), Laberry has always maintained good and direct relationships with the government of the day. He has received official distinctions from each of Senegal’s presidents, including the highest symbolic award, the National Order of the Lion (*Ordre National du Lion*). In our conversations, he nostalgically recalled his close relationship with Senghor, who had been a friend of Laberry’s father since the days when both of them attended a Catholic missionary school in Ngasobil, not far from Senghor’s birthplace in Joal. Laberry’s father remained a fervent Christian and raised his children accordingly. Despite his efforts to push his son Jean Baptiste into a career as pastor, the latter has never actively engaged in pious religious practice. Nevertheless, as Jean Baptiste Laberry confirms with a smile, he has retained his faith in God.

In 1980, Laberry expanded his fitness business by opening two other salles, this time in Soumbédioune, a location situated at the coastal border of the former ‘African’ quarter of Médina, adjacent to the plateau. Soumbédioune is best known for its huge fish market and for the beach where the fishing boats are harboured and where fresh fish is grilled on the spot in the evenings. Close to the fishermen’s beach and the lively market area of Médina, the newly opened gyms appealed to a more diverse set of cus-

²⁴ The construction of the “white city” of Dakar on the plateau by the French colonial power involved the displacement of the indigenous Lebu population in order to create an exclusively European habitat (Faye 2017: 48ff.).

tomers than the predominantly white elite,²⁵ composed mainly of expatriates or Lebanese, that had constituted the clientele of the "Weider". The gyms in Soumbédioune attracted a lot of wrestlers (*lutteurs*), whose usual training spots in Dakar are beaches, where they can build up their strength and endurance through special techniques practised in the deep sand. Laberry's new gyms opened at a time when traditional local wrestling practices had already fused into a nationalized and extremely popular sport that was rapidly expanding, commercializing and professionalizing (Faye 2002). With these two gyms, officially inaugurated by the then sports minister, Laberry significantly contributed to both a popularization and nationalization of fitness practice in Senegal. He was able to establish personal and professional relationships with a number of leading state representatives, who not only came to these gyms themselves to train with the help of "competent experts" and the support of "ultra-modern" technical equipment, but also brought about an integration of fitness practices into the training of the police and military forces (Laberry, 11 May 2018).

Hence, with his gyms, Laberry was not only catering to customers who came to train and shape their bodies as a leisure activity, but also to diverse groups of – predominantly male – professionals, including various categories of state officials. Against this background, his decision to organize gym fitness in a gender-segregated manner was, at that time (the late 1970s and 1980s), certainly a way to appeal to the widest possible range of public consumers willing and able to pay for access to an environment where they could train and shape their bodies according to globalized norms transmitted by scientifically underpinned expert knowledge. It is significant that Laberry didn't attribute his decision in favour of gender-segregation to the religious norms of his mainly Muslim environment, but rather to a kind of general patriarchal social conservatism: "Most husbands don't want their wives to work out with men" (*La plupart des maris ne veulent pas que leurs femmes travaillent avec des hommes*; 11 May 2018). Given that Laberry combined his own passion for bodybuilding with a keen entrepreneurial spirit, I assume that his choice to divide the week into gender-segregated training days worked out well in both social and economic terms – at least for the first two decades.²⁶

The rather unique and avantgarde position that Laberry assumed with his fitness gyms in the Senegalese capital was challenged in 1992 when a new fitness centre opened in Dakar, the Olympic Club, where the Western model of unisex fitness training was embraced and put into practice on a professional level. This club, located on the Corniche in a district called Mermoz, was initially established in the late 1980s as a tennis club and constitutes a comparatively upper-class venue. Its founder, Cheikh

²⁵ I use the term white in order to refer to a privileged position in a power hierarchy underpinned by race politics.

²⁶ In 2010, aged 73, Laberry decided to sell the gyms in Soumbédioune, but kept the ASCP en ville, where the gender-segregated arrangement is still maintained: the gym is open for men on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and for women on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (after 4 pm on Saturdays the training is gender-mixed).

Berté, was a former state official who had directed the administration of social services at the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, including its sports facilities. After concentrating on tennis for several years,²⁷ he decided to open up the club to various other physical disciplines, starting with the introduction of a fitness gym in 1992. Step by step, the idea of a club multisport materialized, as befitting the notion of ‘Olympic’, which deliberately evokes the famous international multisport event. Nowadays the club encompasses a large area and includes a whole complex of venues for different forms of fitness practice (two halls with machines for individual training and several halls for group fitness), sports (tennis, martial arts, basketball), and leisure activities, including a swimming pool, a wellness centre, a bar, and two shops selling high-priced sports and leisure outfits.

Set up as a family enterprise, the club is currently directed by one of Cheikh Berté’s daughters and her French husband. After a stay in France where both of them received professional training in managerial and pedagogical skills, Cheikh Berté entrusted them with the task of introducing and then continually expanding the gym fitness segment of the club. In doing so, they resolutely maintained the conscious decision of its founder to refrain from separating men and women in the context of sporting activities – as long as said activities did not require gender segregation as part of the ‘rules of the game’. In this respect the Olympic Club was an innovation, deliberately contradicting the way that fitness training was organized in existing gyms at that time, namely in the salles managed by Jean Baptiste Laberry, who still maintains the gender-segregated organization of his gyms.

Today, however, the ASCP’s formerly “ultra-modern” environment for remodeling one’s own body appears somehow outdated and more of a throwback to times past than an up-to-date venue for the city’s ever-growing clientele of fitness consumers. The Olympic Club, in contrast, has managed to maintain its position as one of the most ‘classy’ fitness centres in Dakar, catering to a cosmopolitan upper middle-class and elite clientele. Moreover, it is an important reference point for professionals in the field of fitness practices and has been influential in shaping Dakarois fitness culture far beyond the social milieu of its clients. This is due in no small part to the Olympic Club’s role as a training ground for fitness coaches, many of whom work there for a while before continuing on elsewhere. The directors of the club are continually expanding their offering of new training formats, including for example some of the globally standardized courses of the branded Les Mills Body Training System.²⁸ They also provide the conditions for certifying as a Les Mills coach. In this way, the bodily techniques transmitted and the way that fitness culture is embodied in the Olympic Club develop a multiplier effect.

²⁷ Cheikh Berté continued promoting tennis in Senegal, in particular by supporting the professionalization of women – starting with his own daughters, who played tennis at an international level.

²⁸ Les Mills International is a New Zealand company that has launched several exercise-to-music formats under the Body Training System brand name since the early 1990s (cf. Andreasson and Johansson 2014: 106; Sassatelli 2010: 90).

The most important multiplier effect, however, is probably the economic success of the ideal of the unisex fitness gym and the way it is put into practice via the principle of gender mixing. The impact of this principle on the evolution of popular fitness culture in Senegal is depicted in a government report that was commissioned to provide data on the current state of gym fitness in Dakar roughly 20 years after its introduction by the Olympic Club in 1992.

Fitness Culture in Dakar – A Government Perspective

A study carried out by the Ministry of Sports in 2014 accounts for the current fitness boom in Senegalese cities by referring to an increasing popularity of *activités de remise en forme* (République du Sénégal 2014).²⁹ At the time of our research, the concept of *activités de remise en forme* was current among professionals in the domain of physical education, including representatives of the Ministry of Sports and the National Physical and Sports Education Institute (Institut National Supérieur de l'Éducation Populaire et du Sport: INSEPS). The notion had been coined to define a particular subset of physical activities considered in need of public policies. Encompassing the idea of shaping the body, the notion also reflects a concern with public health, which was perceived as under threat from an increasing incidence of cerebrovascular accidents and other effects of lifestyle diseases related to “sedentarism”, such as diabetes, obesity and hypertension.³⁰

According to the government report, *activités de remise en forme* could be observed in a variety of outdoor activities as well as in a growing number of gyms (*salles de sport*).³¹ Although the study notes the strong growth of the latter, it also explicitly recognizes that this phenomenon completely escapes state control. It hence refers to gym fitness as being an “individual” practice (*pratique sportive individuelle*), in the sense that is not collectively organized in federal structures such as the various officially recognized forms of sport. Moreover, the study points to the fact that there is still no coherent national legal framework for establishing a formally recognized *salle de sport* and that most gyms do not have adequate papers. A first attempt in 1996 by the Min-

²⁹ The document of the study to which I refer here is an unpublished draft that was provided in 2018 to Mbang Diallo by a representative of the Ministry of Sports. We could not verify whether a published version exists.

³⁰ In Senegal, cerebrovascular accidents (French acronym: AVC) constitute 30% of hospitalised cases. Two thirds of mortalities in the neurological services in Dakar are attributed to AVC (Mboup et al. 2015).

³¹ I treat the term “gym” as synonymous with the French notion *salle de sport*, which is most current among Senegalese (francophone as well as Wolof) speakers. Some of my interlocutors also referred to *salle de gymnastique*, but this term is much less widely used. The term *salle de sport* is used throughout the Ministry’s study, although the activities that are carried out there are explicitly distinguished from sports and summarized as encompassing *la musculation et le fitness*. The English term *fitness* is used to refer to practices that derive from Aerobics, characterized as a kind of *gymnastique modelant le corps par des mouvements effectués en musique* (République du Sénégal 2014: 13).

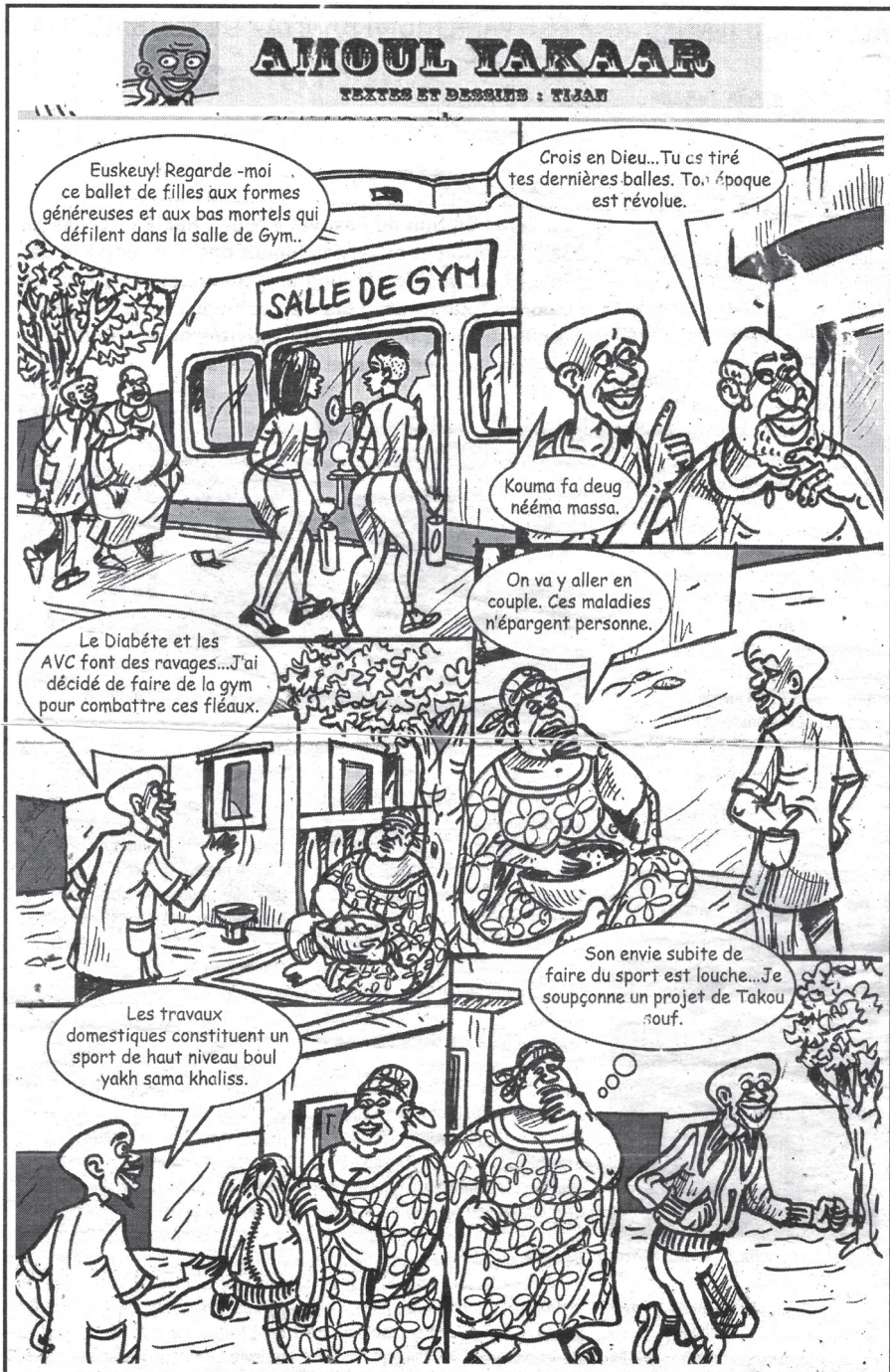
istry of Sports and Youth to regulate the creation of what were then identified as sports and leisure centres (*salles de sport* and *centres de loisirs sportifs*) has so far been ineffective, but it clearly indicates that the existence of such centres was already quantitatively remarkable in the 1990s.

Interestingly, the study from 2014 points out three main motives of gym clients which are assumed to contribute to the increasing numbers of *salles de sport* in the cities: firstly, a medical prescription issued to counter the effects of urban lifestyle diseases; secondly, the aim of “feeling in shape”, augmenting one’s muscular strength or “just staying young”; and thirdly, the search for a partner for a sentimental relationship or a lifelong partnership, since *salles de sport* are also said to serve as places for men and women to meet (République du Sénégal 2014: 5). It is worth noting that the explicit reference to gendered interactions as a motive for gym clients appears only in the introductory section of the study. In the section where the results of the empirical research based on qualitative methods (participant observation and interviews) are summarized, the reasons given by gym clients themselves are specified as: *recherche de la performance physique, besoin d’amélioration de sa santé physique, raisons esthétiques* and, last but not least, *le loisir et la détente*.

Some gender-specific aspects are added in relation to health issues and body aesthetics, but it seems that interactions between men and women were not explicitly mentioned in the interviews. Instead, the study states that gyms are described as places where people go to make friends and find pleasure (*les salles sont aussi des lieux pour se faire des amis, pour se faire plaisir*). Some specific pleasures that clients derive from gym fitness are described in more detail, albeit in a gender-neutral manner. These include meeting people (*rencontrer des gens*), but refer also to the purely individual aspects of a physical workout, such as sweating and expending energy while doing exercise or dancing (*suer et dépenser de l’énergie en faisant des exercices ou de la danse*) (*ibid.*: 12).

The fact that the study nonetheless refers to gyms as “places for men and women to meet” is remarkable because it indicates the existence of a public discourse in which fitness gyms are depicted in that manner.³² It also points to the fact that nowadays, most fitness gyms in Dakar are gender-mixed. Last but not least, the study clearly indicates that the notion of fitness practice includes elements of musculation, but is nonetheless viewed as different (in principle) from all-male forms of training for wrestling, boxing and bodybuilding – practices that precede and coexist with the introduction of fitness in Senegal.

³² The relevant sentence in the study is *de facto* formulated in indirect speech, indicating a reference to an “on dit”: “Les salles de sport seraient aussi un lieu de rencontre pour des hommes et des femmes à la recherche de relation sentimentale ou de partenaire pour la vie” (République du Sénégal 2014: 5).



Caricature from the journal *Le soleil*, 22. October 2017, p. 14 (courtesy of *Le soleil*).

The Social Formation of Gym Fitness

In the meantime, fitness gyms of various categories, catering to customers from different socio-economic milieus, can be found all over Dakar. The government report referred to above is based on a study of gyms in Guédiawaye, a large suburb of Dakar with a population consisting primarily of less privileged and comparatively lower-class inhabitants and it is important to point out that fitness gyms are also popular in these milieus. My own explorations of the field of fitness gyms, however, were motivated by an interest in the lifeworld of new middle-class milieus in the city. Therefore, my research (partly carried out in a small team with two locally based research partners) concentrated on gyms that fall into a more elevated economic category. The average fees required by gyms in Guédiawaye (10,000 CFA for registration) marked the lower end of our sample. Compared to upper-class gyms that exist in Dakar, the upper end of our sample (30,000 CFA to register at the Olympic Club) can still be considered as situated within a middle-class category.³³ However, in terms of numbers it is important to note that no statistics exist. In my own research I have focused on a few venues that represent contrasting cases with regard to the degree of formal establishment and professional management.

In general, the level of formality tends to increase in accordance with the economic standard of a gym. The small gym established at the Maison des Jeunes in Ouakam, where a fee of only 500 CFA was enough for a single entry, marked the lower end of the economic spectrum of our sample.³⁴ It was the only fitness centre I visited where registration was not officially required, but in many gyms the relevant fees could be negotiated. In contrast, the fees at the Olympic Club are fixed and part of a technologically sophisticated system of access management (including an electronic membership card and an identification system based on digital fingerprints). The payments at the club are unlikely to be affordable for people with an economic background comparable to the income of the 'old' middle-class categories, such as teachers, employees in the public health or public administration sectors, or members of the police or military forces. In the less formally established gyms, meanwhile, registration fees vary greatly and payments for membership or single entry tend to be open to all kinds of situational adaptations. In fact, many gyms do not have a formalized administration system and literally cannot register their clients because they keep their records of regular participants on the basis of oral agreement and memory.

In Dakar, fitness practices have become an omnipresent feature of ordinary urban life. They are not only carried out in gyms, but also in various (semi-)public open-

³³ When I started my research in 2017, the club's registration fee was 30,000 CFA, and the monthly membership fee allowing use of the machines and participation in all group fitness activities was 30,000 (raised to 35,000 CFA in 2018). Alternatively, a single-use entry could be purchased for 5,000 CFA. Most of the gyms we visited officially required between 1,000 and 2,000 CFA per session/per single entry or between 10,000 and 20,000 per month for unlimited participation.

³⁴ In a gym at the foyer des Jeunes in Yoff, a single session was only 200 CFA.

air spaces, most prominently on the Corniche (the road along the cliff-lined coast of Dakar). Here, and in many other places (including beaches, but also small parks and traffic islands), fitness training intermingles with other sporting practices and with a broad range of activities carried out by members of associations that do not follow a commercial agenda. Even so, commercial venues for fitness practices are definitely still on the rise.

This trend is important because it contributes to the evolution and diffusion of a kind of “aesthetic formation” that is specific to the fitness gym. Embodying local appropriations of a globalized culture of consumption, the aesthetics of gym fitness also enable the celebration of body-centred forms of “doing-being middle class” (Lentz 2016: 42). This aspect of fitness culture in Dakar was clearly expressed by Djibril Seck, a leading cadre at the INSEPS (Institut National Supérieur de l’Éducation Populaire et du Sport), who conceived of fitness practice as the manifestation of a “new body”.

Forming “the New Body”

Djibril Seck’s perspective on fitness practices is particularly interesting, because he is familiar with the logic of private fitness entrepreneurs, with the needs and expectations of trainers and gym clients, and with public politics and discourses. He teaches and coordinates scientific research at the INSEPS, but also collaborates with the directors of the Olympic Club in the training of professional fitness coaches while giving courses for amateurs at the club. In his capacity as a state official, Djibril Seck has played an important role in national commissions intended to expand public sports and physical education programmes. The resulting public policies range from the promotion of professional competitive athletics to national initiatives aimed at preventing the effects of lifestyle diseases and age-related health problems. Since 2001, Djibril Seck has been involved in organizing seminars and empirical studies on the effects of changing bodily practices and consumption patterns. For example, he organized the first official workshop on “fitness” in 2002, to which professional experts from France were invited.³⁵ Since then, these ‘imported’ concepts have been locally appropriated and put into practice by a “new category” of actors that Djibril Seck locates somewhere in the middle of society, where this emerging social formation is collectively moulding and forming the “new body”:

“On vient maintenant au nouveau corps, le fitness. [...] Il y a l’émergence d’une nouvelle catégorie de personnes de niveau moyen qui donne une importance au corps selon le code social ...” (19 December 2018)

³⁵ The main motivation for this workshop was a concern for public health: “... parce que déjà on voyait l’avènement des maladies chroniques non transmissibles liés aux modes de vie, au changement de comportement : manger trop gras, trop salé, trop sucré, être de plus en plus sédentaire, se déplacer en car rapide, en auto ...” (Djibril Seck, 19 December 2018).

Interestingly, in Djibril Seck's account of fitness practices in Dakar, he points out that the physical body and the social body are always corresponding (Douglas 1970) according to a "social code" that is specific to each category of people, confirming, thereby, Douglas's assumption that the body is a "highly restricted medium of expression". His description of the motivations of people practising fitness not only confirms the government report, where both health concerns and the possibility of "encounters" in a gym are mentioned, but also highlights the aspect of social status that can be conveyed through a particular image of the self, as represented by a healthy body that can be obtained through working out according to global technical standards: "Il y en a qui viennent pour l'expression de leur statut : tu viens, il y a plein de machines, tu fais des selfies, tu te présentes, etc. ... et tu partages, pour montrer que tu es 'in', tu es en bonne santé, et que ce qui se fait partout dans le monde, se fait ici." (19 December 2018).

Djibril Seck's descriptions contain an illuminating analysis of a new social formation that is made up of a comparatively privileged category of urbanites with the means to engage in the practice of gym fitness. He points out the particular symbolic value ascribed to this practice, related to a social status that is allegedly de niveau moyen and sustained by a healthy physical condition. This condition has de facto become an ideal that is increasingly difficult to attain and maintain, and not only for the parts of the population who lack the means to pay for medical treatments. As many Dakarois complain, the city's growing population, its unavoidable traffic jams and mushrooming construction sites have contributed to living conditions that have become "unbearable" for all categories of inhabitants. The challenge of putting one's body into a healthy condition hence also concerns people with well paid jobs that are forcing (even enticing and enabling) them to submit their bodies to the constraints of an increasingly "sedentary" lifestyle.

The "new body" promoted by fashionable, well equipped fitness gyms like the Olympic Club is a symbol of globalization and its effective appropriation by local society. In contrast to the frustrating experience of 'waithood' (and the immobility endured in the daily traffic jam), it represents active participation in global culture and constitutes a medium that locates the self in a here-and-now that could be anywhere in the world. In the context of globalized consumer culture, fitness training symbolizes the (anticipated) success of a new generation of "digital natives", socialized as cosmopolitans and oriented towards upward social mobility. According to Djibril Seck, these social groups are particularly sensitive to the symbolic potential of fitness culture in terms of a self-affirmation based on body appropriation: "leur corps devient leur nouvel objet et leur possession pour s'affirmer" (Djibril Seck, 19 December 2018).

Body appropriation, in the context of fitness practice, has a particular logic that must be understood on both an economic level and a technical one. Both levels are intertwined with the specific rationality and 'objectivity' of fitness practices that will be explained below in relation to the idea of the body as a machine and the concept of energy that is produced by fitness training. However, the economic aspect of fitness training also plays out in relation to the symbolic capital and prestige that can be achieved by training in a gym. Reflecting on the circumstances of the rather well-off

middle- and upper-class categories of fitness practitioners who frequent the Olympic Club (*couche moyenne à élite*), Djibril Seck concedes that their social profile is far from the average Senegalese: “c’est pas le Sénégalais lamda qui vient ici” (19 December 2018). Compared to the *Sénégalais lamda*, the Olympic Club’s customers – who pay between 30,000 and 50,000 CFA per month just for their fitness gym³⁶ – represent an economically highly privileged elite, encompassing expatriates as well as members of the upper social strata, among whom many have been abroad, work for multinational companies and occupy leading positions in Senegal’s highly globalized economy, where liberalization has led to an expanding private sector: “C’est des cadres de haut niveau, ils travaillent dans le business”. That said, fitness training at the Olympic Club is also based on some fundamental principles and mechanisms that do not differ very much from the training offered by more modest and easily accessible gyms that cater to a clientele with a comparatively lower middle-class lifestyle. Some of these principles are part of informal gym etiquette – a set of implicit rules shaping the embodied ethics of fitness practice that seem to be ‘universal’. However, another set of principles and mechanisms is structuring fitness practice on a more technical level, apparently independent of social behaviour and its culturally determined morality.

Legitimate Appropriation of Body Transformation

Fitness training techniques rely heavily on the idea of the body as a “machine” – an idea that was “essential to calculate and rationalize individuals’ energy as productive potential” in the context of the industrializing Western countries from the nineteenth century onwards (Sassatelli 2010: 187). Moreover, fitness training also addresses the ‘natural’ body, referring to its organic rationality – for example by taking individual physical limits or anatomical specificities into account – to optimize the results of training. Much like the disciplinary power that enabled industrial capitalism to rule over the bodies of the working population in the most effective manner (Foucault 1975), discipline in the context of fitness practice combines principles of both mechanical and organic rationality.

In a gym, the stress of everyday working and living conditions is transformed into productive energy that can be used and consumed by its legitimate owner – the fitness practitioner. This is accompanied by a particular temporal structuring of training, in order to guarantee that time spent in the gym is not ‘wasted’. Moreover, the discipline of fitness practitioners who concentrate solely on their workout (instead of on socializing with others) provides them with a particular morality. As Sassatelli (2010: 193) remarks, fitness clients “seem convinced of the moral stance of fitness training, on the grounds that it allows for a legitimate appropriation of body transformation”. This idea contradicts conceptions of the body as something that a human person can only

³⁶ These fees correspond to roughly half of the average wage (estimated as below 100,000 CFA in 2019: <https://tradingeconomics.com/senegal/wages>, accessed 15 May 2020).

partly own, inhabit and control. As Djibril Seck maintained during our interview, local concepts of the body that are transmitted in everyday practices within ‘traditional’ Senegalese communities remind us that the individual body is always partly “owned” by the community: “Tout ton corps ne t’appartient pas. On dit [en Wolof] : Sa genn wala nga mom – le restant appartient à la communauté” (19 December 2018). Fitness practitioners, by contrast, fully “own their bodies”: “leur corps devient leur nouvel objet et leur possession pour s’affirmer” (ibid.).

This combined effect of body ownership and self-affirmation can be compared to the forms of cultural appreciation and increasing valorization of the body that are described by Diouf (2002) in his study of the urban youth culture that took shape in Dakar in the course of the generalized crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. As an effect of this crisis, large parts of the younger population – especially from less privileged social milieus and from the peripheries of the city – lost any prospects of a decent livelihood, let alone of upward social mobility in the future. According to Diouf (2002: 278), for these socially and economically marginalized groups, the body became “their only good” (l’unique marchandise don’t ils disposent). In contrast to the body-centred youth culture depicted by Diouf, contemporary fitness culture in Dakar is neither restricted to the youth, nor is it a protest movement, a rebellion against an older generation that refrains from sharing its power and resources. On the contrary: fitness practices are increasingly popular among the middle aged and (parts of) the older population.

Fitness gyms are commercial venues, and in order to reach as broad a range of potential customers as possible, they “typically play on variety” (Sassatelli 2010: 40) regarding the social background of their clientele. As already explained above, there is also a wide variety of gyms in terms of their economic access conditions. In principle, one’s level of education does not matter in terms of access. Conversely, fitness gyms constitute institutions that provide prospects for jobs and upward social mobility to individuals without much educational capital. Although a lot of coaches in Dakar have inadequate training, are badly paid and are working under precarious conditions, the opportunities to obtain professional qualifications that exist in the fitness domain are quite varied and far more flexible than in the sector of professional sports. On the practitioners’ part, fitness training entails the adoption of a particular “fitness habitus” (Sassatelli 2010: 38) that is not only implicitly reworking gender identities, but also ‘officially’ reframing and temporarily replacing social distinctions.

Gym Etiquette: “De-sexualisation” and “Filtering” of Social Attributes

Gym etiquette requires that clients learn “to distance themselves, at least partially, from their external roles and social obligations” as soon as they enter a fitness centre (Sassatelli 2010: 61). “This may entail a partial, official filtering of those social attributes which should not interfere with training – including class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity” (ibid.). Not all gyms in Dakar have changing rooms, and some don't even have a proper toilet, let alone a room to take a shower. Where such facilities exist, they constitute liminal spaces that mark the transition between an 'ordinary' person and a fitness practitioner. Usually, such spaces strictly separate men and women. In contrast, gender segregation in the rooms where fitness training is actually practised is generally completely informal. As in the formal context of mixed working environments, in a gym, “training operates on official body de-sexualisation and its surreptitious sexualisation” (ibid.: 74).

As such, to speak of “official body de-sexualisation” does not seek to deny that gyms have become places of encounter between men and women who are searching for a partner “for a sentimental relationship or a lifelong partnership” or a less permanent sexual relationship. The “surreptitious sexualisation” of the body may be very effective in attracting people to a gym, as the government report cited above suggests. Equally, it is a factor that can lead fitness practitioners to quit a particular gym or to stop practising gym fitness altogether. Importantly, sexualised behaviour is viewed as something that is not the aim of fitness training per se and should therefore not become too evident or predominant in its social organization. It is often morally condemned by (female) gym clients (or their husbands) and also seen as something improper on the part of gym managers: “il y a de la saleté dedans” (Karim*, 27 January 2018). A powerful mechanism for implementing the rules of de-sexualisation is the individual management of the gaze and the practice of a kind of “civil inattention” that is mutually expressed and recognized among fitness practitioners (Goffman 1963, cited in Sassatelli 2010: 58).

The concept of gyms “as places where the body should lose its sexual connotations” (ibid.) is part of a broader logic of de-contextualization also operating in Dakar. Gym etiquette compels practitioners to adopt a habitus that systematically separates the body from the “thickness of local culture and moralities”, including norms and codes of ethnic or religious belonging (Smith 2013: 156). Although some female fitness practitioners carry a veil and long-sleeved training suits, other expressions of individual religiosity are largely suppressed and remain almost hidden. There is a striking absence of religious symbols in the space of the gym (compared to their omnipresence in many public spaces and private ones such as houses, shops, offices, etc. – and in public transportation, where they are very prominent). Aside from these more visible aspects of “filtering”, there is also a gym-specific time management that effects a temporal separation and ‘purification’ of the gym space from religious symbolism.

Fitness exercise “demands not only that time is subdivided into exact and infinitesimal units, but that each movement should be assigned a length of time which matches its effectiveness” (ibid.: 101). The precise temporal structuring of fitness exercises, along with the rigorous counting and measuring that underpins the economic rationality of training in a gym, excludes pauses for the regular prayers that are often respected in other sporting contexts.³⁷

Regarding the social position of the gym fitness phenomenon as it appears in Senegal, it is helpful to remind ourselves of Sassatelli’s observation that “the fitness centre is at the crossroads of differently positioned social formations” (ibid.: 21). In fact, just as it did elsewhere, the emergence of fitness gyms in Senegal draws upon a pre-existing tradition of typically male, relatively informal gyms, where bodybuilding as a specifically male activity is practised. This tradition of the bodybuilding gym contrasts with the elitist “upper middle class athletic or executive clubs”, as well as with the “more low to middle-class sports associations” (Sassatelli 2010: 21), which also have a very strong tradition in Senegal, specifically in conjunction with state efforts to organize the youth. Compared to these three types of social formation, the fitness gym introduces different “forms of engagement with the body” again, as well as a new logic of rationalization. These new forms of physical exercise are supposed to guarantee “a time of good quality” by effectively combining discipline and fun as important “experiential moments in fitness” in the context of a commercialized leisure activity (ibid.: 121).

In the meantime, the boom of fitness practices seems to have reached even as far as smaller cities and more rural environments. The comment by the Imam in the village of Toubab Diallaw, for example, indicates that even if a proper fitness gym does not exist in the village itself, he is aware that, in some specially equipped salles de sport, new kinds of bodily practice are carried out. His appreciation of practices that “resemble” dance was related to the unique framework of a gym – a space that separates these bodily activities from the local environment and frames them as a specific kind of physical training. In the context of our conversation, it was clear that his appreciation did not refer to the dance aspect of the practices carried out in the gym, but rather to their aspect of bodily work and the impressive variety of their new and sophisticated technical equipment.

However, a neat distinction of fitness from dance is not always evident. If fitness practice is not adequately framed, it can easily be interpreted as a kind of dance, as shown by the example of Lamine*, a sports teacher and coach at the Olympic Club. Lamine* only works part-time in Dakar because he is officially employed as a sports teacher at a high school in a small town in the Fouta Toro,³⁸ located in the northern

³⁷ I observed prayer pauses in the context of dance rehearsals or martial arts training and heard about it in relation to boxing training.

³⁸ The name of the Fouta Toro region, located in the northern part of Senegal along the border to Mauritania, goes back to the Pulaar-speaking group of Toucouleurs, who mainly inhabit this region and who are known for their early Islamization (since the 11th century) and the influence they had on other parts of the country through their empires and the theocracies established by their Muslim leaders.

region of Senegal. In the Fouta, he told me, cultural values are strongly related to the specific Muslim identities of local communities, especially among the Toucouleur. Some of his female pupils initially refrained from exercising together with the boys, because they had been educated by their parents not to “mix with the boys” – an argument that he refuted by pointing out that among their parents’ generation, most girls were not sent to school anyway. If they were attending school now, this was part of the changes to which their bodily behaviour had to adapt: “il y a un changement. Donc, adaptez-vous à ce changement!” (25 May 2018). Nevertheless, some people in town perceived his teaching as problematic from a religious perspective and started to spread rumours that he was a teacher who made his pupils dance in school. In our interview, Lamine* recalled how he dealt with this problem, which he considered to be caused by a “misunderstanding”, as he was actually just doing “fitness exercises” with his pupils. In order to prevent the misinterpretation of the bodily practices in question, he had to engage in a process of ‘translation’ on various levels, because – as in the case of the Imam in Toubab Diallow – people were not acquainted with the concept of fitness: “Là-bas, ils ne connaissaient pas ce que ça veut dire, fitness. [...] C’est après que je leur ai expliqué. J’ai dit que les mouvements qu’on fait là, c’est des mouvements naturels.” (Lamine*, 25 May 2018)

While recalling his own explanations of fitness training as based on “natural movements”, Lamine* showed me how he used his pedagogical skills and anatomical knowledge to make people understand the logic of the “new body” of fitness by literally embodying it in his demonstrations of a sequence of “step” movements, a very popular Aerobics-style type of fitness training that resembles some kind of dance: “Maintenant, vous, si vous faites élévation genoux – comment vous faites? [...] Maintenant, si tu intègres les bras, avec élévation genoux, ça donne comme ça [he shows the movements]. Voilà, maintenant, quand tu veux faire à un rythme un peu élevé, tu peux faire des sauts, tu as vu? // Nadine : Ah, ça ressemble la danse! // Voilà, ça ressemble la danse!” (Lamine*, 25 May 2018)

In this way, he introduced the naturalizing logic of globalized fitness practices and translated it into local discourse. The idea of “natural” movements that are purely physically motivated and mechanically structured excludes possible expressive intentions and thereby holds the moral connotations of dance (as sexually suggestive) at bay. Lamine*’s explanation of fitness was meant to clarify that the intention to move one’s body while performing a fitness exercise is fundamentally different from dance: it is about moving bones and muscles, limbs and articulations, in a purely functional manner that can be analysed and controlled even if the speed of the rhythm is accelerated – it is not about producing the excitement and pleasure of transgression. Moreover, by introducing an anatomically defined notion of the “natural” body, he underlined his scientifically legitimized expert knowledge as a trained sports teacher.

According to Lamine*, the reason for the parents’ critical reactions was their lack of knowledge about fitness practice. Because of this lack, they had to fall back on their notions of dance as an activity that contradicts their ideas about the disciplinary function of public school education as well as their sense of religious restrictions of bodily

behaviour. Lamine* knows very well that as a teacher, he is not supposed to make his pupils dance. The Fouta is not the only place where dancing is not regarded as an activity of appropriate educational value in the context of public schools, as shown by the controversies in the village of Toubab Diallow referred to in the introduction. Within the framework of local norms and values, dancing could compromise girls' and boys' moral integrity and embodied religiosity, and Lamine* recognized these restrictions: "il y a des interdits". At the same time, he is well aware that fitness practice is an embodied element of an ongoing cultural change that can no longer be denied: "il y a un changement. Donc, adaptez-vous à ce changement!" (Lamine*, 25 May 2018).

Conclusion: Embodiment "Prêt-à-Porter"

Before getting the job in the Fouta, Lamine* had gained his first experiences with teaching at a public school in Dakar. Here, the situation had been different, and he had never encountered any similar problems with his pupils. It seems that in Dakar, and probably in many other places in Senegal, people have become acquainted with the aesthetic formation of fitness culture and grown used to its "sensational forms" (Meyer 2009). This is also due to the fact that fitness exercises are increasingly practised outside the framework of a gym, even if this implies bodily behaviour that could be interpreted as utterly inappropriate if it was not framed as fitness. A good example is a video that was posted in the WhatsApp group of a Qur'anic reading course, which showed elderly women wearing large and casual versions of traditional women's attire while training on a beach following the instructions of a young fitness coach.³⁹ Presenting their physical abilities and explaining the concrete positive health effects of what they are doing in Wolof in the highly playful and good-humoured manner that is characteristic of local rhetoric and performance styles, the women on the beach give an account of their successful body transformation: "Machala!"

These women's explanations have a similar function to Lamine*'s 'translation' of the symbolic meanings of fitness exercises in the Fouta. They establish a particular "natural" and bio-medical rationality as the framework in which the meaning and effectiveness of fitness practice – in terms of purely "physical objectives" – should be interpreted. This framework suggests scientifically grounded objectivity and excludes ambivalence. On the level of individual practitioners, it "filters" markers of cultural difference, social distinctions and hierarchies, and it symbolically excludes any markers of religiosity. At the same time, the official de-sexualisation of the "new body" that is engaging in fitness exercises allows for a reworking of gender, or, more generally, of the patriarchal social order as part of a broader process of social and cultural change, without "interfering" with religion. The kind of physical education transmitted by Lamine* to his pupils in the Fouta resembles a course in modern citizenship corre-

³⁹ The video was uploaded to YouTube by BBC Afrique on 3 April 2019 under the title "Au sport, quel que soit l'âge" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Xqp8xidQeg>).

sponding to the "imported" Western ideal described by Seck (2010: 227) as the opportunity for an emancipation from "traditional tutelage".

Lamine's account of his own teaching experience suggests that fitness can function as a practice whereby a "conversion of the communitarian subject into the citizen" (Seck 2010: 227) is performed on the level of the body. The gym is a place where "misunderstandings" in this process are avoided – it provides an individualistic and universalistic environment for self-controlled body transformation. Thus, it allows for an enactment of modern citizenship under the conditions of consumer capitalism in a way that "is in line with the received view of modern subjectivity: the self as a body-owner who chooses to discipline the body in order to obtain happiness, freedom, dignity or more simply to realise subjectivity" (Sassatelli 2010: 14). I suggest that the particular moral economy of gym fitness, along with its social prestige and its connotation with the promotion of public health (underpinned by modern science), has helped to integrate it into the Senegalese cultural landscape as an element that enables the individual to "adapt" to change without inciting (religious) contestation.

Meanwhile, fitness practices have been popularized in many domains of public and private bodily practice. They have become part of associative structures and are also strongly promoted via new media. What the video of the women training in their traditional female attire on the beach and the reported scenes at the public school in the Fouta also illustrate, alongside many other similar sights of culturally hybrid bodily practices, is the "extraordinary mix" that characterizes cultural dynamics in Senegal and which Djibril Seck proudly referred to in our interview. Accepting this "mix" allows people to "live with their generation" without abandoning their religion, to be part of change and at the same time retain the basis upon which the distinctive Senegalese culture of tolerant pluralism, with its exceptional peacefulness (as compared to other countries of the region), has developed – in both religious and "ethnocultural" terms (Diouf 2013: 29).

An assessment of Senegalese notions of citizenship that goes beyond its discursive expressions should take into account the particular modes of articulation and embodiment of this "ethnocultural" dimension. As Seck (2010: 228f.) suggests, shared notions of citizenship and "being together" (*être-ensemble*) in contemporary Senegal are sustained by "the fact of *teranga*". By this he means the complex system of locally rooted socio-economic relations and moral values that is pertinent not only in expressing a common ideal of national culture, but also in effectively binding together individuals and groups through norms of generalized reciprocities. Seck's suggestion corresponds with Smith's (2013: 149) findings concerning the particular "sociability ethos" that is shared by many ethnic groups and cuts across religious divides in Senegal. Smith confirms Seck's analysis by conceding that in emic discourse, "the religious sphere or the political culture is not the most distinctive feature of Senegal's exceptionalism. Sociocultural practices and values come first" (2013: 151).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Both of them build their arguments on an analysis of discourses and political practices, without taking into account how sociocultural practices and values are enacted through bodily practices in various

As a central node in this cultural web of symbols and practices, the value complex of teranga encompasses partly contradictory and conflicting “social codes” and modes of sociability, framed by gendered ideologies and embodied by a range of practices including life cycle rituals, religious ceremonies and even political rallies (Riley 2016). Embodying teranga through acts of generosity and generalized reciprocity not only crosses social boundaries but also effectively illustrates that the individual does not completely “own” its own body (*tout ton corps ne t'appartient pas*). This also accounts for popular sports or dance forms, where “ethnic, gender and class identities are tied together” (Castaldi 2006: 13).

It remains to be seen to what extent the local appropriations and adaptations of gym fitness can develop similar connective dynamics, or if the practice’s inherent individualism and symbolic disconnection of the body from its sociocultural environment are paramount. Taking the social formations of this increasingly popularized bodily practice into account helps us to understand its socially inclusive dynamics without neglecting the practice’s potentially conflicting or contradictory gendered dimensions and moral implications. Conversely, studying the gendered aspects of bodily practices, and the moral discourses surrounding them, provides insights into everyday lived experience in terms of “*vivre au monde concret*” (Mbembe 2000, cited in Seck 2010: 226).

In doing so, it can help us to ascertain how “the pursuit of body efficiency and secular moral salvation” (Sassatelli 2010: 18) might become part of the “new Senegalese modernity” (Seck 2010: 229) in which the social and physical body’s relationship with religion is constantly being reconstructed and reinvented. In Djibril Seck’s words, this is a process of “incarnation” whereby traditions are inevitably re-enacted and performed as “acts of re-presentation with critical difference” (Drewal 1991: 38). Thus, predetermined “*prêt-à-porter*” models are individually adapted and become “made to measure” in processes of transformation that concern all kinds of everyday social practices, including religiosity:

“On ne s'approprié pas son corps, ses traditions à l'identique, on se les approprié en les incarnant. On les met dans sa chair. Et donc, toute incarnation sort du prêt-à-porter pour être sur-mesure. [...] Et, la religiosité c'est sur mesure.” (Djibril Seck, 19 December 2018).

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10 Rapports privés – silence public : le cas du Sénégal

Au nom de l’islam et des valeurs culturelles

Awa Diop

L’islam, en tant que pratique religieuse et socioculturelle au Sénégal, occupe une place privilégiée dans la vie quotidienne des Sénégalais. Sa présence peut en effet s’observer dans son incursion systématique dans les pratiques sociales, sous la forme de mobilisation de référents religieux. Par ces derniers, nous désignons par exemple la maîtrise du Coran ou encore la revendication par des personnages publics ou des Sénégalais-e-s ordinaires d’une proximité à un marabout, à une famille religieuse/confrérique (voir Jean François Havard 2009).

La pratique religieuse est par ailleurs constamment mise sous projecteur dans les récits médiatiques, surtout à des moments précis tels que le mois de ramadan, pendant lequel toutes les télévisions et radios islamisent leurs programmes, les espaces publics deviennent sobres et religieux (des conférences religieuses sont tenues sur les places publiques), une « désérotisation » de l’habillement des jeunes femmes est presque imposée, etc. En d’autres termes, on assiste à une forme de retour momentané vers les fondamentaux de l’islam : les tenues modernes et sexy sont remplacées par un habillement traditionnel perçu comme plus correct et répondant aux normes islamiques en termes de décence, les boîtes de nuit sont fermées les défilés de mode suspendus et ainsi de suite. Au niveau des chaînes de télévisions privées, les émissions sont retravaillées pour arborer une coloration religieuse, et les animateurs et présentateurs de programmes de divertissement se transforment en prédicateurs religieux.

Ces éléments sont par ailleurs des schémas que les Sénégalais-e-s utilisent pour se définir et se singulariser par rapport à autrui. Cependant, en dépit d’une présence du discours religieux et la mobilisation de référents religieux voire confrériques (montrer

son affiliation à un marabout, une confrérie, justification de la croyance, de la maîtrise du Coran) comme code de conduite, on note une certaine ambivalence dans la façon dont les pratiques sociales se rapportent à l'islam. Il semble en effet exister une dissociation entre les fondamentaux de l'islam et la façon dont les individus se l'approprient et les mettent en jeu. Une telle ambivalence s'observe par exemple de façon caractéristique lorsque des personnages publics parfois controversés pour leurs pratiques contraires aux normes sociales et à la morale publique parlent d'acteurs maraboutiques dans un contexte de silence public de ces derniers. En d'autres termes, ces personnages controversés font référence aux marabouts dans une stratégie de légitimation de leurs actions et de fuite de la critique. En effet, les figures publiques controversées dont nous parlons sont souvent à l'origine de scandales publics qui touchent à des pratiques perçues comme problématiques concernant des questions de mœurs (décence vestimentaire et corporelle) ou de travestissements de versets coraniques (utilisation douteuse de l'islam dans le sport de la lutte)¹. Pourtant, dans leurs discours publics, ils font référence à des acteurs maraboutiques qui sont vus et perçus par l'imaginaire collectif comme des représentants de l'islam et de ses préceptes. La référence faite à la lutte nous semble importante dans un contexte national où ce sport connaît un véritable engouement. D'abord sport traditionnel, la lutte s'est par la suite transformée et attire beaucoup de jeunes qui voient en ce sport un moyen de gagner de l'argent rapidement, d'acquérir un certain statut social et de devenir célèbre. L'engouement que connaît ce sport a été observé avec l'arrivée de la génération « bul faale »² représentée par le lutteur Mohamed Ndao Tyson. Ce dernier est décrit comme étant à l'origine de la surenchère qui s'est construite autour des cachets, ou encore de la transformation de ce sport en tant qu'entreprise générant des salaires considérables. Les lutteurs sont également à l'origine d'un argot et de styles de danses qui ont fini par devenir des produits de masse consommés par la société sénégalaise. Par exemple des termes comme « dem ardo »³, « quatre appuis »⁴, « tax ci ripp »⁵, « dem ci ginaaw saakuyi »⁶ ou « cumbukaay »⁷ se sont imposés dans le langage populaire sénégalais. Ce sport mobilise considérablement

¹ La lutte sénégalaise qui est un sport traditionnel a fait l'objet de divers publications scientifiques (voir Havard 2001 et Faye 2002).

² Expression tirée de la langue wolof qui signifie « t'occupe pas », ou « t'en fais pas ». Elle a aussi été, dans les années 90, le slogan d'une jeunesse, porteuse d'une certaine révolte urbaine, à la recherche d'émancipation notamment par rapport aux acteurs politiques.

³ Expression utilisée dans l'arène pour qualifier de manière caricaturale un lutteur mal au point, blessé ou encore qui est sur le point d'être vaincu. Notons que « Ardo » est le diminutif d'Abdourahmane Dia qui est le médecin du Comité National de Gestion de la lutte sénégalaise.

⁴ Dans le règlement de la lutte sénégalaise, un lutteur qui a les deux bras et les deux jambes à terre est considéré comme vaincu. L'expression « quatre appuis » fait donc référence aux deux bras et aux deux jambes.

⁵ Terme pouvant signifier « se donner à fond »

⁶ Littéralement, ce terme veut dire « être derrière les sacs servant de limites à l'enceinte de l'arène ».

⁷ Expression pour désigner l'arsenal mystique utilisé par les lutteurs.

un côté mystique (recours au Coran et d'autres savoirs traditionnels) dans lequel les marabouts occupent une place importante.

Pendant que les marabouts restent silencieux (concernant la lutte et d'autres sujets), les auteurs de faits perçus comme transgressifs tels que danseurs(-seuses), chanteurs(-euses), mannequins et lutteurs parlent publiquement de ces acteurs religieux, revendiquant même via les médias locaux leur relation voire leur proximité avec ces derniers. On observe alors une forme de communication où les destinataires identifiés de messages n'y répondent pas, ou du moins ne le font pas publiquement. Cela amène à nous interroger sur les dynamiques qui poussent les acteurs religieux à rester silencieux. Pourquoi assiste-t-on à une telle « fuite », à un tel refus de communication ? En quoi ce silence dans le discours publics constitue une forme de communication ? Les figures transgressives (voir Diop 2012) contribuent-elles à une perte de légitimité des figures religieuses ? Et si c'est le cas, à qui profite-t-elle (parmi les citoyens) ? Quel est l'objet de leurs négociations, en privé et en public ?

Les relations entre personnalités religieuses et figures transgressives donnent d'emblée à voir une instrumentalisation en faveur de ces dernières. Cependant, il s'agit aussi de s'interroger sur la signification du silence des marabouts. Le fait que des figures marginales fassent référence à eux publiquement est-il important pour leur popularité ? Et d'un autre côté, le rôle social et spirituel du marabout comme protecteur et sauveur est-il susceptible de donner du sens au rapport que ces figures transgressives tentent d'établir entre eux et les religieux ?

Nous soulignons que le silence public dont nous parlons concerne plus les figures maraboutiques de l'islam confrérique sénégalais que d'autres acteurs qui se définissent et sont perçus comme des défenseurs publics de l'islam⁸ (ceux-là même qui portent souvent les dénonciations en cas de transgression réelle ou supposée de normes religieuses voire sociales ou culturelles). En effet, ces défenseurs, que nous différencions ici des marabouts, parlent des acteurs transgressifs dans la sphère publique sur fond de condamnation et de dénonciation de leurs pratiques. A chaque fois qu'une pratique transgressive traverse la sphère publique, les défenseurs publics de l'islam sollicitent une condamnation sur la base d'instructions morales et éthiques tirées de l'islam et des normes locales. La mobilisation de tels acteurs s'effectue par voie médiatique (conférence, communiqué de presse, etc.) débouchant parfois sur une mise en marche de la machine judiciaire⁹ (plainte auprès du procureur de la République, saisie de la brigade des mœurs). Leur posture critique dépasse même l'univers de ses acteurs et des faits qu'ils dénoncent, et trahit une stratégie de moralisation de la société sénégalaise, d'une rapide association entre le corps des femmes et la moralité publique. Une telle association montre d'ailleurs que leur regard dénonciateur est souvent biaisé en termes

⁸ Référence aux associations islamiques sénégalaises telles que Jamra, le comité de défense des valeurs morales, l'association des maîtres coraniques, etc.

⁹ Ces acteurs se fondent souvent sur le code pénal relatif à « l'outrage public à la pudeur » (article 318) et « l'attentat aux bonnes mœurs » (article 324).

de genre et prend la forme d'un jugement moral qui devient plus pressant et pertinent dès qu'il s'agit d'une femme. Analysons l'association qui est faite entre le corps féminin et la moralité publique à l'aide des quelques exemples ci-dessous :

- Fin janvier 2019, un téléfilm intitulé *Maitresse d'un homme marié*, mettant en scène l'infidélité d'un homme marié n'hésitant pas à coucher avec sa maitresse dans son lit conjugal, est diffusé sur une chaîne privée du pays, la 2STV. Le téléfilm est dénoncé l'ONG islamique Jamra¹⁰ et le Comité de défense des valeurs morales du Sénégal auprès du Conseil National de Régulation de l'Audiovisuel (CNRA¹¹). Les dénonciateurs estiment que le téléfilm ne reflète pas la réalité du Sénégal musulman car il prône la fornication, l'indécence verbale et la revendication de relations sexuelles extra-conjugales : « Cette série fait la promotion de l'adultère et de la fornication. C'est une dérive audiovisuelle qui, à travers le scénario, propose un mimétisme déplorable des cultures occidentales », a déclaré un représentant de l'ONG Jamra sur une chaîne privée, 7TV. Ainsi, dans la logique des pourfendeurs de la série, en matière de modèle féminin, le personnage incarné par l'une des actrices (Marième Dial, qui joue le rôle de la maitresse) ne peut pas représenter la femme sénégalaise car elle assume sa sexualité hors mariage, vit dans son appartement et revendique une certaine émancipation par rapport à des normes sociales qui prônent la virginité et la vie sous tutelle des parents pour les filles célibataires. Pendant ces réactions of-fusquées, les défenseurs de la série parlent, quant à eux, d'une mise à nue de choses qui se passent réellement au Sénégal, ils estiment que la série ne fait que montrer un quotidien des Sénégalais-e-s différent de celui qui est toujours montré par les médias. Ainsi, selon ces défenseurs les thématiques que la série aborde (relations extra-conjugales, sexualité, mariage forcé, polygamie, violences physiques et psychologiques dans la sphère domestique, etc.) reflètent bien le Sénégal contemporain. Après délibération, le CNRA a demandé à la production de la série d'apporter des mesures correctives par rapport à certains contenus pouvant heurter les Sénégalais.

¹⁰ Jamra intervient sur les questions de défense des valeurs islamiques et de morale publique. L'ONG tient une place centrale dans les stratégies d'activation des actions judiciaires, notamment en cas de scandale de mœurs. Selly Ba précise l'historique de Jamra en notant que : « le mot < Jamra > signifie < braise > pour lapider Satan. L'idée de Jamra est née en 1982. Des jeunes intellectuels, de diverses disciplines, se sont regroupés autour d'une Revue intitulée Jamra, la première publication sénégalaise spécialisée sur les problèmes sociaux : drogue, prostitution, délinquance juvénile, pauvreté, etc. Les idées contenues dans la revue sont prises en charge par les jeunes du lycée Maurice De la Fosse qui créent l'Association des Jeunes Amis de Diamra (AJAD). Cette dernière s'implante dans les quartiers populaires et mobilise davantage de jeunes. [...] A la suite d'une augmentation croissante des adhérents, en même année 1982, l'association devient l'Organisation Islamique Jamra, et installe des cellules dans toutes les régions du Sénégal. » (Ba 2015 : 148)

¹¹ Le CNRA a été mis en place à travers la loi 2006-04 du 4 janvier 2006. Il a un rôle de régulation sur tous les médias audiovisuels. Il exerce des fonctions de contrôle sur le contenu et les modalités de programmation des émissions. Il veille au respect de la loi, à la préservation des identités culturelles, à l'objectivité et au respect de l'équilibre dans le traitement de l'information.

Ce qui ressemble ici à de la censure est aussi une négociation mise en place par deux catégories d'acteurs ne qualifiant pas les faits de la même façon : le CNRA apparaît ici plutôt conformiste par rapport à des valeurs locales, tandis que les producteurs de la série raisonnent davantage sur des logiques d'innovation dans un contexte marqué par une grande compétition au sein de l'audiovisuel sénégalais. Les seconds acteurs sont alors obligés, en se censurant, de corriger leur posture afin de reconstruire leur image et de revenir dans les rangs.

- L'affaire Déesse Major : Déjà pointée du doigt en 2014 par le Comité de défense des valeurs morales à cause de sa tenue vestimentaire lors d'un concert jugé obscène, la rappeuse est ensuite emprisonnée en 2016 suite à une plainte de ce même comité concernant la diffusion d'une de ses vidéos sur Snapchat. Le motif de la dénonciation reste le même : l'exhibition publique d'un corps féminin érotisé. Les poursuites ont été finalement abandonnées après plusieurs heures de garde à vue, sans qu'une explication soit donnée. Le Comité de défense des valeurs morales au Sénégal, qui est à l'origine de la mise en accusation, s'estime être l'instigateur de l'arrêt des poursuites : « Si nous n'avions pas [donné notre accord pour lever] notre plainte, je pense qu'elle serait dans de sales draps. La liberté d'expression totale n'est permise nulle part, n'existe nulle part, à part [dans] les sociétés qui ont vraiment vocation à sacrifier leur culture et leurs enfants » (Par Rfi le 21 juin 2016).

Comment les rapports entre personnalités religieuses et figures transgressives se matérialisent-ils ?

Les personnages publics qui communiquent avec les religieux sont principalement des danseurs (-seuses), des chanteurs (-euses), des mannequins, des lutteurs, etc. Ces personnages s'illustrent dans des pratiques perçues comme déconstruisant les codes normatifs en termes de décence dans l'habillement, la façon de danser, les paroles des chansons et d'usage du Coran dans le champ du sport de la lutte. De tels personnages font parfois l'objet de perceptions négatives mais celles-ci ne sont jamais définitives ou totalement durables, et montrent ainsi que la société sénégalaise fonctionne sur un va-et-vient constant entre ce qui doit être visibilisé ou non, ce qui est acceptable ou inacceptable, ce qui est permis ou interdit. Les moments d'arrangement et de tolérance dans l'accusation sont possibles à chaque situation de tension dans la sphère publique (voir Diop 2012).

Nous appréhendons les rapports que les acteurs cités plus haut entretiennent avec les figures religieuses à plusieurs niveaux : tout d'abord les chefs religieux sont toujours cités dans les productions musicales des chanteurs. Il n'est pas rare d'entendre le nom d'un guide religieux être cité dans une chanson. Pourtant, la norme religieuse défendue par de tels marabouts peut condamner la pratique musicale. Dans le sport de la lutte aussi, les lutteurs convoquent les marabouts comme des soutiens mystiques, l'af-

filiation maraboutique incarnée serait pour certains un gage de victoire. Cependant, la façon dont les référents islamiques sont utilisés dans cette sphère est controversée au même titre que la pratique de ce sport que d'aucuns n'hésitent pas à décrire comme proscrit par l'islam en raison de la nudité partielle des combattants. L'utilisation de l'image des acteurs religieux dans l'univers artistique, musical ou sportif semble répondre à une stratégie de prévention contre la condamnation possible, face à l'interdit. En effet, les acteurs religieux savent qu'ils sont cités dans des productions (qu'ils critiquent de manière générale pour des raisons d'obscénité et d'incorrection), mais l'accent n'est jamais mis sur l'association faite entre l'image religieuse qu'ils représentent et les sphères dans lesquelles les figures artistiques et sportives évoluent. Ensuite, certains artistes font le choix de porter l'affiliation confrérique sur leurs noms (en ajoutant à leur état civil le nom de leur marabout, dans un rapport de propriété, par exemple Fatou bu Serigne Fallou¹²). Selon certaines représentations sociales ambiantes, montrer de cette façon son affiliation (en l'occurrence à la confrérie mouride) ouvrirait la porte vers le succès, la célébrité et la richesse.

De ce fait, on peut légitimement se demander si les rapports privés qui existent entre les acteurs religieux et les figures transgressives – que ces rapports soient partiellement dévoilés au public ou totalement invisibles – ne servent pas davantage des intérêts individuels que ceux de la collectivité ou des préceptes islamiques. Le fait que de tels rapports soient mis en jeu subtilement ne témoigne pas pour autant d'un caractère scandaleux ou transgressif. Soulignons que le public pourrait le percevoir comme tel, mais que l'affaire serait vite diluée par l'importance du marabout dans la vie des Sénégalais.

Enfin, se réclamer d'un marabout publiquement via les médias est une chose courante. L'identification à un marabout constitue un rempart face à la critique sociale et même un moyen efficace de plaire et de s'assurer une certaine popularité auprès de l'opinion publique. Ces références aux acteurs religieux peuvent être considérées comme relevant d'une stratégie ; on fait appel à eux pour s'excuser, (re)construire sa réputation et valider son statut social. Intéressons-nous à la façon dont s'opère réellement cette utilisation stratégique des acteurs religieux et de la rhétorique religieuse. Pour assurer une légitimité, ou encore se dédouaner et revenir dans les rangs après avoir violé par exemple une norme religieuse, une référence au fait religieux s'effectue typiquement par une mise en scène de l'affiliation confrérique (« je suis disciple de tel marabout », « tel est mon marabout », « tel marabout a prié pour moi », « j'ai la bénédiction de tel marabout », etc.).

Le fait d'afficher une appartenance supposée ou réelle à un marabout apparaît donc comme une plus-value utilisable dans diverses circonstances. En janvier 2011, une jeune chanteuse sénégalaise (convertie à l'islam en 1996 et qui porte désormais le nom de la mère du fondateur de la confrérie mouride), prétendit avoir été témoin de l'apparition miraculeuse de Serigne Fallou (un fils du fondateur de la confrérie mou-

¹² Fatou de Serigne Fallou

ride¹³ et figure adulée au Sénégal) sous forme de photo sur son téléphone portable. Elle annonça rapidement qu'après ce qu'elle décrit comme un miracle, elle allait revoir sa façon de s'habiller et abandonner certaines pratiques. L'époux et producteur de la chanteuse annonça simultanément faire preuve de volonté dans le contrôle de l'habillement de la chanteuse ; « Maintenant on va rigoureusement veiller sur son port vestimentaire, car après le miracle qu'elle a vécu, il y'a un certain comportement qu'elle doit adopter dorénavant »¹⁴.

Bien sûr, une expertise a montré que la photo était truquée. Ce qui est intéressant ici, c'est la tentative de construction d'une nouvelle image, une image de sainte, de miraculée, diamétralement opposée à celle, moderne et sexy, renvoyée par la chanteuse jusqu'alors. Ce passage d'une féminité à une autre constitue aussi une façon de renaître autrement dans les représentations sociales, et sans doute de rentrer dans la catégorie de « fille bien » (Clair 2008 : 38). Le changement opéré trahit une ruse consistant à modifier la façon dont on est perçu par rapport à l'étiquette religieuse. Par exemple, pendant l'épisode de la photo truquée, à l'occasion d'une conférence de presse organisée par les époux pour expliquer les circonstances de l'apparition, la chanteuse est apparue portant une longue robe couvrant les jambes et la poitrine ainsi qu'un foulard sur la tête, une tenue très éloignée de la sexualisation habituelle de son corps. Toute cette affaire s'est déroulée dans la sphère publique avec toute l'attention des médias, mais les acteurs religieux, et notamment la famille confrérique concernée, n'ont pas réagi face à ce qui était qualifié de blasphème.

Si au Sénégal l'islam semble constituer une force publique, on observe aussi ces vingt dernières années plusieurs changements qui mettent en question le statut et les fonctions des marabouts : il s'est produit un déploiement d'acteurs religieux dans d'autres espaces (politique, économique, etc.) hors de la logique spirituelle. Cela s'apparente à une distanciation vis-à-vis des dimensions spirituelles au bénéfice de considérations politiques, matérielles et mondaines (voir Bayart 2010). L'immixtion de figures religieuses dans la sphère politique ces vingt dernières années est problématique dans un contexte où, dans l'imaginaire populaire sénégalais, « faire de la politique » est davantage synonyme de poursuite d'intérêts individuels (souvent économiques) que des préoccupations collectives. Aussi, les rapports que les acteurs religieux entretiennent avec le politique est souvent perçu comme subjectif, tendancieux, et leurs interventions souterraines participent même parfois au dénouement de certaines affaires publiques. En outre, leur absence du débat public, y compris sur des questions de société ou de violation de codes moraux et des préceptes islamiques, les font paraître déconnectés des réalités nationales quotidiennes.

¹³ Le mouridisme est une confrérie soufie fondée par Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké à la fin du XIXe siècle.

¹⁴ « Apparition de Serigne Fallou : Viviane va changer de port vestimentaire et de comportement », *xalima.com*, 03 février 2011 (<http://xalimasn.com/apparition-de-serigne-fallou-viviane-va-changer-de-port-vestimentaire-et-de-comportement/>).

La logique du silence des religieux

Ne pas parler publiquement de telles affaires constitue une stratégie visant à sauvegarder une réputation et, notamment en préservant autant que possible l'image de sérieux qu'on les marabouts dans l'opinion publique.

Leur silence témoigne par ailleurs d'une ambivalence : ils ne parlent pas publiquement avec les figures transgressives, mais la communication que ces dernières établissent publiquement avec eux trahissent l'existence de rapports privés. En effet, en instaurant une communication publique avec ces personnalités, les marabouts risqueraient de se discréditer aux yeux des Sénégalais en se mêlant aux affaires sensationnelles. En même temps, les personnalités transgressives ont besoin de parler d'elles publiquement, car il s'agit pour elles de se construire une image positive en s'associant au fait religieux. Montrer son affiliation à une figure maraboutique serait ainsi un gage d'honorabilité et de reconnaissance publique.

Ces situations se déroulent dans un contexte où les Sénégalais-e-s ont quotidiennement affaire à des normes religieuses contredites et contournées. Le contournement des normes islamiques est bien une réalité symbolisée en l'occurrence par les personnalités transgressives, mais les marabouts mourides, par exemple, expriment à travers leurs discours publics non pas leur désapprobation par rapport à ce qui est perçu comme dérive, mais davantage leur effort général de protéger la ville de Touba (ville-capitale de la confrérie mouride). Les marabouts opèrent donc de telles stratégies en restant toujours silencieux sur les pratiques transgressives en question, Touba étant la cause à défendre. La circulaire datant du 24 juin 2019 et relative aux orientations et directives venant du khalife général des mourides Serigne Mountakha Mbacké confirme bien cette mise en évidence de Touba et pas forcément des pratiques à un niveau plus collectif : « [...] considérant le fondamental du principe islamique d'adoration sans condition au Souverain Absolu Allah SWT, en observant ses recommandations et en s'éloignant de ses interdits ; ce qui fut la principale raison de la création de la ville sainte de Touba masquée à ses mêmes principes qui s'appliquent à tous ses habitants et invités pour s'y conformer absolument [...]. A cet effet, le khalife général des mourides, Serigne Mountakha réitère son engagement à faire respecter strictement tous les interdits et pratiques prohibées dans la ville sainte de Touba dont la liste est la suivante : « [...] les jeux de hasard, la musique, la chanson, la danse et tout autre spectacle de divertissement illicite en islam utilisant les instruments musicaux y inclus la lutte, le football, les concerts, etc. [...] » (Fait à Touba le 24 juin 2019, Serigne Mountakha Mbacké, Khalife général des mourides)

Soulignons qu'au niveau des rapports entre les « grands marabouts » et d'autres marabouts dont la légitimité est parfois contestée car incarnant une autre vision des textes religieux ou des bases confrériques, nous observons aussi une communication particulière. En effet, ceux que nous appelons les « grands marabouts » sont souvent, comme nous l'avons vu, assez réservés par rapport aux affaires publiques et aux situations qui sortent du cadre religieux. Ils adoptent par ailleurs le même silence avec

les marabouts controversés qui parlent parfois d'eux publiquement. Prenons ici le cas du marabout Cheikh Béthio Thioune, qui ne jouit pas d'une reconnaissance totale au niveau de la confrérie mouride du fait de son rapport avec des normes islamiques que d'aucuns perçoivent comme problématiques, comme la mixité des sexes, la diffusion de musique au cours de ses activités religieuses ou encore sa posture critique vis-à-vis du port du voile. Cheikh Béthio Thioune se réclame disciple de la confrérie mouride, notamment de l'un des fils du fondateur du mouridisme, et revendique une telle affiliation à chacune de ses interventions publiques. Les marabouts qu'il évoque ne parlent presque jamais de lui, y compris dans des contextes de scandales le concernant explicitement. Par exemple, sur une chaîne de télévision publique, il soutenait publiquement incarner la voie d'un islam mouride qui n'impose pas aux femmes un foulard sur la tête. D'après sa (re-)lecture, les *xassaïd* (poèmes religieux du fondateur du mouridisme) de Serigne Touba l'emportent sur tous les autres préceptes. Cette démarche constitue un des motifs de sa « disqualification » du champ religieux.

En somme, nous indiquons que le fait que l'islam, et plus spécifiquement la confrérie mouride, constitue des référents sur lesquels les Sénégalais s'appuient pour se déterminer et se faire bien voir dans des situations problématiques, est toujours d'actualité. Nous faisons une telle observation pourtant dans un contexte où les gens qui représentent les valeurs islamiques sont parfois disqualifiés, surtout dans des moments où on attend d'eux une prise de position ou une réponse. Les rapports entretenus par les figures transgressives avec les personnalités religieuses indiquent un chevauchement d'acteurs dont les logiques d'actions sont souvent contradictoires. De telles contradictions montrent aussi que la sphère publique sénégalaise fonctionne sur un dispositif de négociation où les divergences s'accordent finalement et les « pressions et contre-pressions finissent par s'équilibrer. » (Seck 2010 : 13).

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11 L'affaire Assane Diouf : l'odyssée d'un disciple indiscipliné

Mouhamed Abdallah Ly et Abdourahmane Seck

Introduction

Entre juillet et novembre 2017, un migrant sénégalais, entré illégalement aux États-Unis avant d'en être expulsé, s'est fait bruyamment connaître de la part de ses concitoyens et des autorités américaines et sénégalaises en devenant le « webactiviste » sénégalais le plus populaire¹. Un succès qu'il doit à des vidéos violemment injurieuses à l'encontre de figures politiques et religieuses, ainsi que de personnalités issues du

¹ Le paysage des réseaux sociaux au Sénégal fourmille de figures dont la popularité est certaine dans le milieu des initiés ou des publics qui ont un intérêt plus ou moins réel ou sporadique pour ce type de médias. Le passage, en tant que sujet de curiosité ou d'intérêt public, aux médias classiques est souvent une consécration recherchée ou involontaire. C'est un critère parmi d'autres pour statuer sur cette notion de « popularité ». Assane Diouf est l'un des rares – sinon le seul – à avoir attiré de manière aussi forte l'attention aussi bien des médias nationaux qu'internationaux. Ses diatribes contre le pouvoir de Macky Sall, son succès populaire, les péripéties de son expulsion des États-Unis ou encore son retour au Sénégal et ses démêlés avec la justice ont épisodiquement été suivis et couverts par des médias comme BBC Afrique ou Jeune Afrique, pour ne citer que ces deux exemples. BBC lui consacre un post sous le titre « Sénégal : un YouTubeur controversé expulsé des USA », le 30 août 2017 (<https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-41095727>). Le magazine Jeune Afrique, sous la plume d'Olivier Liffra, lui consacre un article au titre évocateur, « Sénégal : retour sur la rocambolesque affaire Assane Diouf », publié le 05 septembre 2017. Dans cet article, le journaliste revient avec une très bonne analyse sur le contexte politique local qui a permis à Assane Diouf d'émerger comme figure de curiosité. Il revient également sur le traitement dont Diouf a fait l'objet de la part des autorités politiques et judiciaires sénégalaises (Olivier Liffra : Sénégal :

monde des affaires et de la culture, qu'il a réalisées et diffusées sur Facebook et YouTube.² Ces productions ont reçu un accueil viral, tant dans les communautés sénégalaises vivant à l'étranger qu'au Sénégal même, faisant le bonheur des uns et suscitant l'indignation des autres.

Le 23 novembre 2017, Assane Diouf est la victime d'une brutale agression physique. L'attaque a été perpétrée, selon le témoignage des assaillants, dans sa maison familiale, dans la banlieue de Dakar, alors qu'il était en train de réaliser une énième vidéo injurieuse. Le motif de l'« expédition punitive » est décliné, avec fierté et passion, par ses agresseurs. Ils accusent leur victime d'avoir proféré « des insultes »³ à l'encontre du porte-parole du khalif général des mourides, Serigne Bassirou Abdou Khadre Mbacké⁴. L'incident, rapidement médiatisé, est suivi de l'interpellation d'Assane Diouf par les forces de l'ordre, puis de son placement en détention par la justice. Il ne sera toutefois jugé que le 26 décembre 2018, soit un peu plus d'un an après son arrestation. Le tribunal le reconnaîtra « coupable d'insulte par le biais d'un système informatique, d'outrages à agents dans l'exercice de leur fonction et de diffusions de fausses nouvelles ». Il est condamné à 2 ans de prison, dont 9 mois de probation et 3 mois de mise à l'épreuve. La peine est assortie d'une interdiction d'émettre un avis ou une opinion publique quelconque via les médias ou de participer à des rassemblements publics, ainsi que de l'exigence de se soumettre à un suivi psychologique et psychiatrique⁵.

Les avocats du mis en cause voient dans cette décision une volonté de mise à « mort civile » de leur client, privé d'après eux « du droit d'association, du droit de parole, du droit d'expression, du droit d'avoir une opinion » et saisissent la Cour de justice de la CEDEAO. Celle-ci estimera, en février 2019, que les droits d'Assane Diouf à être jugé

retour sur la rocambolesque affaire Assane Diouf. *Jeuneafrique*, le 5 septembre 2017. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/471739/societe/senegal-retour-sur-la-rocambolesque-affaire-assane-diouf/>).

² Les vidéos insultantes étant susceptibles de faire l'objet de signalements et de censures, certaines vidéos mentionnées ici ne sont plus consultables au moment de la parution de cette contribution ou ne le seront probablement plus à l'avenir.

³ Dans un montage vidéo de 11 minutes et 27 secondes, posté le 23 novembre 2017, sur une chaîne YouTube, Wise TV Sénégal, trois éléments sont disposés : une prise de parole d'un homme qui justifie l'agression en semblant en être un commanditaire dans un média privé, Zik FM, relativement bien écouté en milieu urbain ; une prise de parole filmée de deux individus qui déclarent avoir participé à l'attaque ; enfin une prise de parole audio d'Assane Diouf en conversion avec une autre webactiviste (à l'époque des faits, son soutien). Nous reviendrons plus loin sur cette conversation d'Assane Diouf (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYgXfwsQqA>, dernière consultation le 27 mars 2019). Sur les propos d'Assane Diouf qui sont incriminés, voir la vidéo à l'adresse suivante : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3pxXL-72f8> (Dernière consultation le samedi 31 août 2017).

⁴ Serigne Bassirou Abdou Khadre Mbacké est né en 1976, selon le magazine *La Gazette*. Il n'est âgé que de 33 ans lorsqu'entre 2009 et 2010, la majorité de ses concitoyens le découvrent, d'abord comme organisateur du Grand Magal de Touba, puis porte-parole du khalif Serigne Bara Mbacké (m. 2010). Il est reconduit dans cette fonction par Serigne Sidy el Moctar Mbacké (m. 2018). L'actuel Khalif, Serigne Mountakha Bassirou Mbacké le reconduit également dans cette fonction. En 2016, le journal *Le Quotidien* a consacré au marabout une présentation largement reprise par plusieurs sites internet.

⁵ Ces termes du jugement sont partout repris et commentés durant des jours dans les médias en ligne. La presse fera aussi un large écho des réactions de ses avocats.

dans un délai raisonnable et à bénéficier d'un procès équitable ont été bafoués par l'État du Sénégal. La Cour a d'ailleurs condamné l'État sénégalais à dédommager le plaignant pour un montant de 20 millions F CFA. La question que pose cet article est la suivante : l'affaire Assane Diouf est-elle juste un incident anecdotique ou s'inscrit-elle dans la dynamique des glissements sociopolitiques et socioreligieux qui mettent à l'épreuve l'état du contrat social sénégalais ainsi que Donal Cruise O'Brien en a posé l'hypothèse, il y a 27 ans déjà (voir Cruise O'Brien 1992) ?

Le corpus de notre étude s'appuie largement (mais de façon non exhaustive) sur des vidéos d'Assane Diouf, mais aussi sur les commentaires des internautes dans la presse en ligne, de même que sur des vidéos diffusées pour le contredire, le désavouer ou le soutenir. Nous nous sommes intéressés aux thématiques qu'Assane Diouf a mobilisées dans la construction de son ascension médiatique, tout en prêtant une grande attention aux opinions « politiques » et « religieuses » qu'il n'a cessées de véhiculer dans la formulation de ses insultes. Nous nous sommes également intéressés aux personnes qu'il a attaquées en mettant en contraste leurs positions sociales et institutionnelles avec des éléments épars de la biographie d'Assane Diouf. Dans la démarche, enfin, cet article est le fait d'un sociolinguiste et anthropologue du langage et d'un historien-anthropologue. Ils ont cherché, ici, à allier l'analyse de la violence verbale à une mise en perspective historique et anthropologique des questions que pose l'affaire Assane Diouf dans le contexte de la problématique subsidiaire à celle du contrat social énoncée plus haut : « Où va l'islam sénégalais ⁶ » ?

Assane Diouf : éléments de biographie fragmentaire

Cette section revient sur divers moments qui nous semblent importants dans la biographie fragmentée d'Assane Diouf, qu'il convient d'envisager à l'intérieur de la trajectoire plus large du Sénégal contemporain⁷. L'échelle du fragment s'impose d'elle-même tant le parcours d'Assane Diouf reste opaque, notamment du fait de l'absence de références claires et solides qui a pour conséquence une multiplication de narratifs, faisant ainsi apparaître l'« insulteur public n°1 » tel un « météore » ayant subitement fendu l'horizon des conversations publiques au Sénégal. Ce que l'on sait de lui provient donc essentiellement de ce qu'il dit de lui-même, notamment dans certaines de ses vidéos, et de ce que les gens en disent à travers la rumeur⁸.

⁶ Détournant ainsi le titre de l'ouvrage de P. Fougeyrollas : *Où va le Sénégal ?* (1970)

⁷ Sur ce processus de production du Sénégal contemporain, voir la série d'ouvrages dirigés par Momar-Coumba Diop, dans le cadre du programme de recherche Sénégal 2000. Se référer aussi aux publications qu'il a éditées à la suite de ce programme, notamment les deux volumes dédiés à la gouvernance de Wade et parus en 2013 aux éditions Karthala. On rajoutera à cette somme, *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf*, paru en 1990 aux éditions Karthala et *L'histoire du Sénégal. Le modèle islamo-wolof et ses périphéries*, paru en 2001, aux éditions Maisonneuve & Larose.

⁸ Nous revenons plus loin sur cette notion et sa portée heuristique dans le cas d'Assane Diouf.

Assane Diouf dit être né en 1971. Il affirme avoir vécu 16 années à l'étranger. Ces informations sont glanées à partir des récits qu'il élabore, depuis Dakar où il a repris ses activités de « webactiviste » à la suite de son expulsion des États-Unis. À partir de divers recoupements, on peut retenir, grossièrement, qu'Assane Diouf aurait quitté le Sénégal entre 2001 et 2002, date qui n'est pas sans intérêt. En effet, une abondante littérature s'est attardée sur ce point, cherchant à démêler les raisons pour lesquelles, beaucoup de jeunes qui ont été massivement à l'origine de l'alternance politique intervenue en 2000, et à qui Abdoulaye Wade avait semblé vouloir consacrer son magistère, se sont mis à défier déserts et mers (dans les cas extrêmes) pour sortir du Sénégal et embrasser la vie de clandestins en Europe ou ailleurs. Chose encore plus remarquable, c'est la clientèle du parti au pouvoir (le Parti démocratique sénégalais – PDS) qui allait, dans une large mesure, être la principale bénéficiaire des accords de migrations temporaires que le régime de Wade allait signer pour freiner le phénomène de la migration clandestine. C'est ce qui ressort du travail de Hannah Cross (2013) qui a mené, dans la banlieue de Dakar, une enquête auprès de plusieurs associations de jeunes, de femmes et de migrants refoulés ou expulsés. On sait qu'Assane Diouf, s'est présenté, à plusieurs reprises, comme un wadiste ; mais il ne nous a pas été possible, cependant, d'établir un lien entre les offres de mobilité que le PDS a utilisées comme appât pour fidéliser sa jeune clientèle et les ressources qu'Assane Diouf a déployées en propre pour migrer⁹.

Ce que l'on sait, par contre, de façon plus sûre, c'est qu'Assane Diouf était revenu auparavant sur les raisons sociales et personnelles qui l'ont poussé à migrer. Ce fut à l'occasion d'une émission de télévision, *Enquête exclusive*, produite par la chaîne privée française M6, dans un numéro titré « La multinationale des vendeurs à la sauvette ». Dans ce reportage, paru initialement le 24 mai 2009 et remis au goût du jour en 2017 par la presse sénégalaise en ligne, soit huit années plus tard, Assane Diouf n'est alors qu'un illustre inconnu pour la plupart de ses concitoyens. Et, de fait, son apparition en 2009 dans le reportage de M6 n'aura rien changé à son anonymat¹⁰. Mais le chargé de casting de M6 n'avait pas manqué de flair. Assane Diouf incarnait déjà à cette

⁹ Le seul moment de militantisme que nous avons pu retrouver concernant Assane Diouf est son passage bref et tardif en 2008 au mouvement politique de jeunesse (Union des jeunes travailleurs libérales) du parti présidentiel de l'époque (Parti Démocratique Sénégalais). Au plus fort de son combat contre le régime de Sall, on l'a vu aussi donner des consignes de vote en faveur d'une coalition menée par le Parti démocratique sénégalais. Il peut être utile d'ajouter à cette phase militante deux autres moments qu'Assane Diouf revendique lui-même : sa participation à la première élection de Barack Obama et une soirée « F... Trump » qu'il aurait organisée juste après la victoire du 45^e président des États-Unis.

¹⁰ Certes, le documentaire a reçu un accueil polémique au Sénégal. Cependant, l'objet de la querelle fut loin d'être Assane Diouf, mais surtout la note d'intention du programme que nous citons ici et l'image suspicieuse qu'il semblait véhiculer à propos de la communauté mouride. « Paris, Rome, New York, les grandes villes touristiques voient tous les abords des monuments investis de vendeurs à la sauvette proposant des gadgets en tout genre, Tours Eiffel, porte-clefs ou masques exotiques. La plupart d'entre eux sont Sénégalais et font partie d'un véritable réseau qui, depuis plus de trente ans, organise leur venue en Europe, sélectionne les produits et les emplacements les plus rentables. Il semble que cette étonnante organisation soit aux mains d'individus mystérieux et fortunés qui, grâce aux bénéfices récupérés, font construire au Sénégal des écoles religieuses et des mosquées ». Pour la note et pour le reportage se référer

époque le parfait client du storytelling qui met à l'honneur le cliché du self-made man africain, « immigré » dans une grande métropole occidentale (New-York), démarrant comme « vendeur à la sauvette » et qui, à force de sacrifices quotidiens et de ferveur morale et religieuse, réussit à sortir de l'ornière sa famille et sa communauté restées au pays. En effet, l'histoire d'Assane Diouf dans ce reportage est avant tout celle d'un jeune Sénégalais qui a choisi de migrer pour aider sa famille et prendre la place de son père, décédé en 1987. Mais c'est aussi l'histoire d'un homme qui rêve de construire de belles maisons et conduire de jolies voitures. Le reportage comporte en effet une scène où le jeune homme exhibe sa réussite en posant à côté d'une belle voiture, jouant ainsi sur le stéréotype du migrant « qui a réussi ».

Ce qui va sortir Assane Diouf de l'anonymat et le propulser du statut de producteur de vidéos en direct sur Facebook et YouTube destinées à une audience plutôt limitée, à celui de phénomène d'intérêt public, c'est le contexte de consolidation hégémonique du pouvoir de Macky Sall. Celui-ci est marqué par une amplification des accusations, contre lui et son régime, de népotisme et surtout de favoritisme clanique et de promotion d'une justice à deux vitesses. Un climat vicié et délétère règne alors et qui va favoriser une certaine violence verbale. Les jeunes qui avaient combattu le projet de Wade d'obtenir un troisième mandat se montrent plus exigeants encore vis-à-vis du régime de Sall et font désormais des réseaux sociaux l'espace privilégié de leurs critiques des différents establishments politiques et religieux, mais aussi de leurs propres querelles internes. À ce titre, comme l'a souligné Olivier Liffra, le procès intenté à une certaine Penda Ba pour insultes contre un groupe ethnique, durant le mois d'août 2017, a constitué un incident déclencheur de la soudaine popularité d'Assane Diouf¹¹. Toutefois, il importe de noter aussi qu'au moment de l'arrestation et du procès de Penda Ba, Assane Diouf était déjà relativement bien connu des Sénégalais qui s'intéressaient de façon croissante à cet intrigant personnage qui attaquait les peuples, les marabouts et les politiciens. C'est dans ce contexte aussi mixte que flou que l'on voit que le fait de prendre du recul et de s'interroger sur une rumeur et son statut constitue une démarche heuristique à bien des égards. On peut emprunter à Philippe Aldrin, dans *Penser la rumeur*. Une question discutée des sciences sociales, sa synthèse de l'approche classique de cette notion telle qu'elle a été élaborée par G. Allport et L. Postman. Chez ces deux auteurs, rapporte Aldrin (2003 : 129), « la rumeur fonctionne comme un mécanisme collectif de < transfert d'agressivité > par lequel le corps social projette une < angoisse collective > sur un groupe minoritaire (élite politique ou sociale, administration, communautés étrangères, etc.). Les rumeurs surgiraient lorsque, autour d'un événement, se rencontrent deux facteurs : l'ambiguïté (incapacité du corps social

à l'adresse suivante : « Enquête Exclusive : La face cachée d'Assane Diouf » *Senescoop*, le 16 août 2017 (<https://www.senescoop.net/enquete-exclusive-la-face-cachee-dassane-diouf/>).

¹¹ L'accusée avait, en effet, invité le grand public et ses juges à comprendre que ses insultes dirigées contre le groupe ethnique des Wolofs, n'étaient, selon elle, qu'une réaction colérique et excessive, en réponse aux insultes récurrentes qu'Assane Diouf dirigeait contre les Peulhs en prenant le prétexte de s'attaquer au président de la République. Voir l'article de Olivier Liffra du magazine *Jeune Afrique* mentionné plus haut.

à interpréter la signification de l'événement) et l'implication (haut degré d'intérêt des membres du corps social pour l'événement et son interprétation) ».

Précisément dans le contexte social et politique détaillé ci-dessus, le succès d'Assane Diouf s'explique en grande partie par l'existence d'individus et de groupes qui ont pensé qu'ils n'avaient plus que l'insulte à opposer à un régime politique qui n'était plus capable de les entendre autrement (voir Ly et Seck 2012). Ces individus et groupes ont alors organisé, de façon paradoxalement consciente et inconsciente, la diffusion de la rumeur et donc le « transfert d'agressivité » contre des segments spécifiques de la population sénégalaise au cœur de l'appareil central d'État, mais aussi des institutions sociales, culturelles et religieuses qu'Assane Diouf va identifier et attaquer nommément par un commérage injurieux et le colportage de rumeurs salissantes.

Toutefois, on ne comprendrait pas pourquoi Assane Diouf a semblé penser qu'il était prédestiné à revendiquer et à incarner le rôle de porte-parole le plus téméraire de son camp¹² si on ne mettait pas cela en lien avec l'arrière-plan sociologique qui est le sien. Et celui-ci, dans la biographie fragmentée d'Assane Diouf, se décline en termes de « géographies symboliques » qu'il évoque régulièrement pour s'autosignaler. En effet, lorsqu'il raconte qu'il est un « habitant de la banlieue de Guédiawaye » où il aurait grandi, ou encore un « natif de la Médina », Assane Diouf construit un personnage enraciné au cœur d'une imagerie sociale qui lui permet de revendiquer une légitimité de nândite, mot wolof qui renvoie à « quelqu'un à qui on ne le fait pas », « quelqu'un qui est qui est branché », « qui n'est pas un loser »¹³. Et l'homme rajoute à ces marqueurs déjà forts deux autres traits qui ne sont ni moins significatifs ni moins enracinés dans des géographies particulières. Le premier est sa socialisation « en pays mouride ». Le second est son statut d'émigré¹⁴. Dans le premier cas, toutes ses vidéos le montrent, il met un trait d'honneur à se présenter comme un fervent disciple mouride et un Baay Fall¹⁵ sans concession. Dans le second cas, on le voit bien aussi dans ses vidéos, Assane Diouf aime sur-jouer sa qualité de Sénégalais expatrié. Il prend un réel plaisir à s'exposer et faire étalage de son quotidien, de son environnement et des lieux où il fait ses courses et n'hésite pas, à l'occasion, à tourner la caméra sur les liasses de dollars de son

¹² Assane Diouf a d'abord affirmé être dans le camp du peuple, avant d'expliquer, au sommet de son conflit avec les institutions de l'État et ses soutiens sociaux, défendre la cause de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, fondateur de l'ordre des mourides.

¹³ Sur l'importance symbolique et sociologique de ces deux espaces dans les mutations de la production des modes juvéniles, en passant par les quartiers du Grand Dakar, comme ceux des SICAP, on peut se référer aux travaux d'Abdourahmane Seck dont *La Question musulmane au Sénégal* (2010), *La < production > du Sénégal postcolonial* (2013) et *Les migrations au Sénégal* (2014).

¹⁴ Voir notre chapitre commun : Le migrant de la chanson sénégalaise : aperçu thématique et enjeux socioculturels des années 80 à nos jours (Seck et Ly 2015).

¹⁵ Les Baay Fall sont une sous-branche de la confrérie mouride liée à un ancêtre fondateur, Cheikh Ibrahim Fall (1858–1930), compagnon et disciple de Cheikh Amadou Bamba (1853–1927), figure tutélaire de la mourididiya. Sur les Baay Fall, on se référera à toute fin utile à l'ouvrage de Charlotte Pezeril, *Islam, mysticisme et marginalité* (2008).

portefeuille ou filmer des plans extérieurs ou intérieurs de sa maison, et se met alors à s'exclamer : « C'est là où j'habite », « C'est là, ma maison »¹⁶.

Mais, au-delà de ces identifications proclamées avec démesure, Assane Diouf incarne, en outre, le parfait profil de « l'homme aux douze métiers ». Des banlieues dakaroises à la Nouvelle-Orléans, en passant par le célèbre marché Sandaga de Dakar aux trottoirs de New-York, il affirme avoir été tôlier, mécanicien, vendeur ambulant, ouvrier, agent de sécurité, promoteur de spectacles, et plus encore. Ce que l'on ne voit pas assez, par contre, sous le portrait de cet homme débrouillard et de ses lieux, identités et poses photogéniques de prédilection, c'est l'orphelin de la République et de son école nationale, le laissé-pour-compte qui perçoit une opportunité d'ascension sociale. Dans ses autoportraits, Assane Diouf est, en effet, souvent revenu sur la revanche de l'écolier éconduit. L'homme utilise souvent le sobriquet de « nullard » dont il s'affuble en le retournant comme une ressource discursive, dans une forme d'autodérision, pour mieux montrer que son échec scolaire n'a pas eu raison de ce qu'il présente comme sa réussite sociale et économique. Les occurrences de cette préoccupation sont multiples dans son discours : « le nullard parle français », « vous verrez avec le nullard », « vous saurez que le nullard a bien appris ». Dans une vidéo encore disponible sur YouTube¹⁷, après avoir montré son habileté à faire des recherches sur son smartphone, Assane Diouf affirme : « Nullard amatul, there is no nullard in this world »¹⁸. Et de poser une question à ses suiveurs : « Comment un téléphone peut être intelligent sans que la personne qui le manipule ne le soit pas ? »

La carrière de webactiviste ou la fabrique de la vidéo virale

Cette partie traite de la « carrière » proprement dite de webactiviste d'Assane Diouf, en s'intéressant particulièrement aux traits de style qui ont fait le succès de ses interventions. Dans ses vidéos, Assane Diouf combine des principes moraux, des ressources culturelles et symboliques, des arts oratoires et des techniques de mises en scène, qui relèvent de plusieurs genres. Cependant, cette démarche éclectique peut faire l'objet d'une saisie d'ensemble, à partir de deux principales considérations. D'une part, il emprunte à l'influenceur créateur de contenu sa « fonction tribunicienne » (voir Lavau 1981). D'autre part, il emprunte à la télé-réalité, le goût de l'exposition, voire de l'exhibition. Se montrer sans aucune forme de réserve devient une habitude chez Assane Diouf. Sous ce dernier rapport, Aslama et Pantti soulignent un point de lecture important :

¹⁶ Ce mélange de satisfecit et d'exhibitionnisme semble aussi répondre de divers autres paramètres, liés à la revanche sociale de l'exclu, dans un contexte socioculturel de type consumériste. Il peut être utile de noter également qu'Assane Diouf ne se considère pas comme un exclu. On y reviendra plus loin.

¹⁷ « ASSANE DIOUF N 111 », posté par « DAKAR 24 » le 5 mars 2019 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iyk7NAR0nc8>, dernière consultation le 12 avril 2019).

¹⁸ Traduisant en anglais, ce qu'il venait de dire en langue wolof.

« Reality television seems to be a hybrid in many ways, but it is one-dimensional in its focus on the emotional. The question of emotion-based authenticity is crucial to reality television, as all talk situations seem to have one more implicit or explicit mission. They claim to disclose what truly occurred and how it was experienced » (Aslama et Pantti 2006 : 177).

S'il apparaît parfois dans la rue ou vaque à quelque occupation, pour l'essentiel, cependant, les vidéos d'Assane Diouf sont plutôt enregistrées dans un décor intérieur. On le découvre alors généralement assis sur une chaise. En arrière-plan de la vidéo, il affiche les drapeaux des USA et du Sénégal, une carte de l'Afrique, la photo de son marabout, une paire de baskets posée en trophée, une peluche de tigre et divers autres objets. Il est habillé, selon les jours, de différentes façons : un maillot de l'équipe de basketball des Lakers ici ; un maillot de l'équipe nationale de football d'Italie là, et, parfois, il porte un blazer ou une chemise. S'il n'apparaît pas toujours avec sa casquette, Assane Diouf oublie rarement sa grosse chaîne autour du cou. Enfin, le spectateur ne peut manquer d'être intrigué par l'objet à l'apparence de gris-gris entourant son poignet droit et qu'il réajuste souvent à la manière des lutteurs sénégalais¹⁹.

Toute cette mise en scène, soutenue par des étoffes, des dessins, des symboles et des objets d'apparat, évoque des attaches à des signifiants divers : le personnage joué par Assane Diouf se définit comme un émigré confortablement installé, un mouride, un guerrier, un homme branché, partisan d'une Afrique en lutte et aussi un Sénégalais mystiquement protégé.

C'est dans ce cadre kaléidoscopique que le personnage fantasque opère avec dextérité dans le maniement des couplets des variétés sénégalaises qu'il utilise pour mieux diffuser son message. Il n'hésite pas non plus à se montrer bon danseur. Le tout se tient dans une forme de laisser-aller et d'absence d'autocensure qui rejoint ce que nous décrivions plus haut comme une exigence de nudité ou de transparence devant son audience. Quelques invités sont parfois reçus sur l'interface notamment des internautes qui téléphonent du Sénégal, mais surtout de l'étranger. Nous avons pu constater, du moins en apparence, que les appels pouvaient venir des États-Unis, de l'Italie, de la France, de l'Espagne, ou encore de la Chine. Il arrive au YouTuber, en bon maître de cérémonie, d'activer le haut-parleur de son téléphone, permettant ainsi à son auditoire de suivre la conversation qui a lieu durant son émission diffusée en direct. Chacun de ses directs prend pour cible une ou plusieurs personnes, du chef de l'État, Macky Sall, à son épouse, Marième Faye Sall, en passant par des membres du gouvernement, des

¹⁹ Cet objet qui pourrait être un gris-gris, tout comme la manière ostentatoire avec laquelle il le resserre fréquemment, sont aussi une forme de message qu'il délivre. Dans l'imaginaire populaire, cela veut dire « Faites attention !! Je suis blindé sur le plan mystique. ». L'usage du terme « mystique » peut être mieux clarifié. En effet, il est compris dans le contexte social de sa mobilisation comme une force magique de protection contre les sorts que certains pourraient vouloir nous jeter. L'expression « retour à l'envoyeur » est aussi courante pour qualifier l'attitude que semble adopter ici Assane Diouf. Elle signifie que « tout ce que vous tenterez de me jeter comme mauvais sort, se retournera, par la force de la protection dont je jouis, contre vous ».

chefs religieux, le procureur de la République, des célébrités du show-business et de la jet-set dakaroise. Et l'audience est au rendez-vous. En effet, lorsqu'il compte 2 700 connexions simultanées pour son direct sur Facebook, la presse parle déjà de record d'audience établi par un Sénégalais et affirme que seules des stars arrivent à atteindre ces niveaux²⁰. À la fin du mois d'août 2017, il atteindra plus de 5 000 connexions simultanées. Chaque live donne lieu à des dizaines de milliers de vues lorsqu'il est posté sur YouTube. Dans ces vidéos, Assane Diouf ponctue ses saillies d'une formule qui a fait sensation au point de se retrouver dans des spots publicitaires ou des sketches : « Partagé leen vidéo yi, partagé leen ko » (« Partagez les vidéos ! Partagez-les ! »). Ici, le lien entre médias sociaux et économie digitale ne peut être entièrement éludé, au regard du développement rapide de la communauté d'abonnés d'Assane Diouf et surtout la reprise, par les milieux du marketing et de la publicité, de ses slogans. Assane Diouf, ne l'oublions pas, est quelqu'un qui a le sens du marketing, même si, au demeurant, le temps n'a pas permis de voir comment la chaîne « Domaram Tv » qu'il a créée pour porter sa marque aurait pu évoluer en termes de professionnalisation.

De « bête noire » des peuples au cauchemar du landernau politique et de l'establishment religieux

Le fulgurant développement des médias sénégalais depuis le début des années quatre-vingt-dix a rendu publique la vie d'un nombre important de personnes (journalistes, animateurs, laudateurs, artistes, politiciens et marabouts amateurs de buzz) dont les vies sont suivies par la population et qui font l'objet de potins en tout genre. De la même façon, une culture de l'usage des réseaux sociaux comme modalité d'expression et de publicisation des petites querelles internes à la jet-set dakaroise s'est consolidée durant la dernière décennie. De nombreuses vidéos circulent en racontant des histoires aussi fantasques que désolantes, des petites haines ordinaires, des messages détournés, que les célébrités locales s'adressent. Des jeunes webactivistes se sont également emparés de ces réseaux pour s'improviser critiques ou satiristes sociaux. C'est fort de ce contexte, et surtout grâce à son expérience du milieu du show-business, qu'Assane Diouf entre en scène et met à profit un style qui va rapidement faire la différence : colère, indignation, et surtout violence verbale vont être une partie essentielle des ingrédients de son succès. Le propos d'Assane Diouf peut d'autant plus séduire qu'il s'ancre dans des ressources narratives très classiques, plaçant au cœur de ses intrigues des histoires de trahison, d'abandon et de reniement des amitiés passées.

Aussi voulons-nous surtout tenter, dans cette section, de dresser une carte des cibles et des thèmes de la courte carrière d'Assane Diouf. Il est possible de broser cette carte dans une évolution logique à trois temps. Chacun de ces trois tournants représente, plus ou moins spécifiquement, un groupe particulier d'acteurs qu'Assane Diouf

²⁰ « Facebook Sénégal : Assane Diouf bat des records sur le web avec plus de 2700 personnes connectées... ». *Osiris*, le 2 août 2017 (<http://www.osiris.sn/Facebook-Senegal-Assane-Diouf-bat.html>).

a pris pour cible autour de quelques thèmes de prédilection formant un noyau ou spectre qualifiable d'objet discursif structurant. Cette rhétorique se décline sous les récurrences de la revivification de l'orthodoxie confrérique en général et mouride en particulier, de la moralisation de la vie publique, de la dénonciation des injustices sociales, de la critique de l'hypocrisie sociale, de l'homosexualité et de la transhumance politique²¹. Cette fibre moraliste va stimuler sa propension à révéler des informations sur la vie et les conversations privées de célébrités et personnes notables qu'il déclare par ailleurs très bien connaître²². Ces dernières, quoique représentant des groupes relativement distincts, n'en constituent pas moins un ensemble relativement homogène. Leur solidarité tient au lien de fréquentation et d'instrumentalisation réciproques qui existe (jusqu'à un certain point) entre ces différentes personnes issues du monde du spectacle et des médias, du monde politique et du groupe des marabouts. En effet, ces personnes constituent des clients les uns pour les autres et se rendent mutuellement service. Elles partagent des scènes, des cérémonies et des salons. Les multiples rencontres et relations générées par leurs régulières interactions ont alimenté la machine médiatique et critique du « maître des insultes » qui va les attaquer les uns après les autres ou tous ensemble à la fois.

De manière schématique, le premier groupe qui semble avoir offert à Assane Diouf une solide rampe de lancement dans le landerneau des bloggeurs sénégalais semble plutôt être lié au monde du spectacle. Assane Diouf, rappelons-le, a aussi un passé de « promoteur de spectacles ». Comme il le soutient lui-même, il aurait rendu possible à ce titre, durant les années qu'il a passées aux États-Unis, la tournée de plusieurs de ses compatriotes sénégalais connus : lutteurs, animateurs, musiciens ou encore comédiens. Les interactions qu'il aurait eues avec ces artistes et célébrités du monde de la culture, du sport et des médias ont constitué une réserve d'anecdotes qui a abondamment alimenté ses vidéos. Au-delà de l'admonestation, du dénigrement, de la dénonciation et de l'insulte, Assane Diouf, dans cette phase première de son ascension, a surtout réussi à convaincre qu'il était un homme qui connaît les raisons cachées des conflits qui traversent le monde du show-business sénégalais²³.

²¹ Dans le discours populaire, la notion de transhumance politique est une image pastorale qui sert à décrire le mouvement de yo-yo des hommes politiques qui quittent toujours le camp des vaincus pour se retrouver dans le camp des vainqueurs, afin de mieux servir leurs intérêts et préserver leurs privilèges.

²² Rappelons qu'Assane Diouf ne se considère pas comme un exclu. Il lui arrive, régulièrement, de décliner des fragments biographiques qui lient sa trajectoire avec des places, des célébrités, des lignages, qui ont occupé une place importante dans la société sénégalaise. Selon lui, son éducation en pays mouride se serait faite avec des marabouts devenus des figures publiques ; il porterait le prénom d'un ami et condisciple proche de l'ancien Président Wade. Lorsqu'il était encore enfant, il se serait fait repérer par Wade qui lui aurait témoigné une certaine affection. Il serait neveu de Cheikh Anta Diop. Il serait parti en vacances dans le village natal de celui-ci et aurait rencontré ses fils. Il serait aussi un petit fils des Rois du Sine (Pays sérère). Ses parents et les parents de Youssou Ndour seraient des amis de longue date, et ainsi de suite. La vidéo qui suit est une illustration de ce qui vient d'être dit : « ASSANE DIOUF N 112 », posté par < DAKAR 24 > le 27 mars 2019 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJAljNXRG34&t=3003s>, dernière consultation le 12 avril 2019).

²³ Par exemple, confronté à une polémique sociale sévère liée au port d'un sac féminin, Waly Seck, la jeune

Il est très important ici de montrer que le succès qu'Assane Diouf commence à enregistrer dans la sphère publique en tant que bête noire des peuples n'est pas sans contreparties. Il étale sur la place publique ce qu'il prétend savoir de certaines personnes, mais celles-ci aussi répondent et étalent sur la place publique ce qu'elles prétendent savoir de lui. À ce stade, la question de sa situation irrégulière aux États-Unis commence à se poser et ses adversaires, souvent des partisans du régime en place, l'accusent de chercher à préparer sa chute en se faisant passer pour un martyr.

Au regard de ce qui précède, le développement de la critique injurieuse des hommes politiques chez Assane Diouf pourrait donc être perçu comme une évolution à la fois logique et prévisible. Logique, par la chaîne de solidarité qui existe entre les personnes de la vie publique qu'il attaque. Prévisible, car sa tribune publique semble être devenue, par la force des choses, un instrument de réponses à la précarisation de son statut légal aux États-Unis. Macky Sall et son régime vont donc occuper une place croissante dans les diatribes de l'homme, et faire l'objet d'accusations récurrentes d'enrichissement illicite, mais aussi de comportements non démocratiques²⁴. Assane Diouf déroule une véritable opération coup de poing, appuyée par des internautes motivés qui s'emparent de ses vidéos et les propagent sur les réseaux sociaux. Ses cibles, notamment les hautes autorités de la République sénégalaise et leurs familles, sont touchées dans leur honneur, car Diouf ne cesse d'en faire des gens de peu, voire de rien, à coups de révélations calomnieuses aux conséquences désastreuses. La régularité et la violence des insultes combinées au succès populaire de ses vidéos créent un malaise au cœur de l'establishment politique et religieux. Les collaborateurs du chef de l'État ne peuvent

star de la musique de variété sénégalaise, dénonce une cabale menée par des adversaires qui ont pris peur et qui n'admettent pas de le voir devenir populaire. Assane Diouf, récupérera la communication du chanteur pour mettre un nom sur ces « adversaires » dénoncés, en filigrane, dans le propos du chanteur. Il désignera en particulier Pape Diouf, autre grande star, considéré jusque-là comme le potentiel successeur de la vedette mondiale Youssou Ndour (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ut6_70_6K6c, dernière consultation le 30 décembre 2018).

Ailleurs, il se présente comme le « grand » d'Akon qui l'appellerait « brother » et qui lui retournerait ses messages textos en l'appelant. Il le met en garde contre Youssou Ndour (prétendant ainsi connaître suffisamment bien l'artiste). En réalité, Assane Diouf a cherché, régulièrement à dépendre Youssou Ndour et sa famille (enfants, frères et sœurs) comme un groupe qui représente une puissante machine qui trônerait dans les milieux de la culture et des médias, position à partir de laquelle cette famille, et Youssou Ndour en premier, négocierait avec le régime en place. Pour Diouf, cette « puissance » des Ndour se serait construite de manière peu éthique. Assane Diouf soutient qu'il a été escroqué de 14 000 dollars par le label Prince Arts, détenu par un des frères de Youssou Ndour, qui aurait annulé un contrat qu'il aurait signé avec Pape Diouf pour des prestations aux États-Unis. Assane Diouf insiste également sur le fait que la sœur de Youssou Ndour, Ngoné Ndour, aurait produit une émission à succès Sen Petit Galé qui exploiterait les enfants. Pape Diouf, qu'il perçoit comme le protégé des Ndour, devient une de ses cibles favorites. Une rixe opposera d'ailleurs les gardes du corps de Pape Diouf à Assane Diouf à Xelcom peu de temps après le retour forcé de celui-ci au Sénégal : « Assane DIOUF explique sa bagarre avec Pape DIOUF à XELCOM », posté par < Ndarinfo.com > le 7 octobre 2017 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFy-5YuQsXo>, dernière consultation le 13 avril 2019).

²⁴ Il fait, à ce titre, régulièrement allusion à l'expérience démocratique des États-Unis et à l'importance des libertés d'opinion et d'expression.

plus continuer de faire semblant que l'affaire Assane Diouf est juste incongrue, et sont obligés de monter au créneau pour contenir la charge de Diouf contre leur patron. Le directeur de cabinet du président Sall, cité par les médias en ligne, s'est indigné au cours d'une émission de radio bien suivie : « J'ai quelque part souvent peur pour le Sénégal, parce que je sens qu'il y a une montée réelle de l'indiscipline, de l'inconscience, de l'irresponsabilité et ça doit inquiéter les Sénégalais. Si je vois maintenant que l'exercice favori, c'est l'injure, surtout adressée à des autorités telles que le président de la République, le Premier Ministre, le Gouvernement, les chefs religieux, les directeurs d'écoles, les enseignants... personne n'est respectée²⁵ ». Il ajoutait, plus loin : « [...] Il appartient aux autorités qui sont investies du pouvoir de sanction de faire ce qu'elles doivent faire, il n'y a pas de stratégie particulière contre des irresponsables... Quelque part, il y a une dimension clinique qu'il faut observer, c'est inquiétant, il nous faut un ressaisissement collectif pour réagir et protéger notre corpus social²⁶ ». Alors que l'État sénégalais enclenche la riposte, le « maître des insultes », de manière imperceptible, mais en toute logique, poursuit son escalade. Il va alors cibler de façon croissante le dispositif symbolique des ordres confrériques et la complaisance que ceux-ci témoignent au régime en place. Assane Diouf va alors considérer que les responsables des institutions confrériques sont « descendus de la voie tracée par leurs ancêtres », et le point culminant de cette odyssee allait être la sortie frontale qu'il a faite contre le porte-parole du khalif général des mourides. Sortie qui allait lui valoir une tentative de lynchage de la part de certains disciples qui se réclament du khalif, mais aussi un placement en détention, comme nous l'avons vu en supra.

Dans cette posture offensive (ou de survie selon le point de vue), deux dimensions fortes et révélatrices se mettent en place dans l'objet discursif d'Assane Diouf, et qui nous intéressent ici. L'influenceur ne se contente en effet plus de mots (profanes ?) du domaine politique pour construire sa querelle contre la figure du chef politique sénégalais et de ses soutiens. Il va se mettre à broder pour le chef de l'État, de manière symbolique, la tunique de pharaon. Sall devient, dans la rhétorique de Diouf, le tyran, transgresseur et arrogant vis-à-vis de Dieu et des croyants. Pour affronter un tel régime, Assane Diouf est conduit à requalifier sa cause. Il ne sera plus seulement alors le militant ou l'activiste, mais le missionnaire de la moralisation de la vie publique, l'annonceur de l'avènement de la justice sociale, mais surtout encore le combattant de la foi et plus particulièrement le gardien du temple de l'héritage des guides propagateurs de l'islam confrérique sénégalais, dont le Cheikh Amadou Bamba en premier et son disciple Cheikh Ibrahima Fall. À ce stade, les rumeurs concernant les peuples qui lui ont valu ses premiers succès continuent d'agrémenter son discours, mais le cœur du propos a basculé. Et, surtout, chose remarquable, il cherche, désormais, à profiler son auditoire et n'arrête plus de dire qu'il s'adresse spécifiquement à la masse des jeunes gens qui sont assis aux portes des commerces, des kiosques à pain, des coins de rue ou qui errent à la

²⁵ Ayoba Faye : « Me Oumar Youm se confie : < J'ai peur pour le Sénégal > ». *Pressafrik*, le 13 août 2017 (https://www.pressafrik.com/Me-Oumar-Youm-se-confie-J-ai-peur-pour-le-Senegal_a169361.html).

²⁶ Ibid.

recherche de subsides ; population dont les parts du contrat social sénégalais auraient été volées par des personnes qui se font passer pour respectables mais qui ne seraient guère plus que de vulgaires détrousseurs et charlatans

C'est à l'occasion de ce virage qu'il va aussi davantage veiller à réorienter le message de ses vidéos vers le registre discursif de la conscientisation. Il prétend alors « réveiller les Sénégalais », leur « faire prendre conscience de leurs droits » autant d'objectifs présentés comme leitmotiv. De fait, cette re-symbolisation de son action n'est qu'une des réponses qu'il va apporter face à la riposte de l'establishment qui s'organise, comme nous allons le voir.

Organiser la contre-attaque : la défaite d'Assane Diouf ou la victoire à la Pyrrhus de l'establishment ?

Assane Diouf a suscité chez les personnes qu'il a attaquées : du mépris, de l'indifférence, des contrepoints, mais aussi des opérations répressives. Cette section décrit et analyse de façon sommaire quelques aspects seulement de l'organisation, de la signification et des implications du retour de bâton qui a frappé le YouTuber. Nous allons également examiner la défense d'Assane Diouf dans ce contexte de punition. Deux événements, à ce titre, paraissent déterminants : son expulsion des États-Unis suivie de son refoulement au Sénégal, et les incidents à l'origine de son procès, notamment sa sortie médiatique contre le porte-parole du khalif des mourides. Dans l'un et l'autre cas, la clameur qui a accompagné la situation a constitué le signe manifeste d'un débat ou tournant sociétal qui débordait, très largement, la personne propre d'Assane Diouf.

Le « maître des insultes » aurait été signalé aux autorités américaines, par les autorités sénégalaises, comme étant en situation de séjour irrégulier aux États-Unis, puis comme terroriste. Cette action imputée au gouvernement de la République du Sénégal, à travers la clameur publique, et dirigée contre un ressortissant sénégalais basé à l'étranger, a divisé l'opinion, contraignant le gouvernement à communiquer officiellement sur le retour forcé d'Assane Diouf au Sénégal, mais sans le nommer au demeurant²⁷.

²⁷ Le journaliste sénégalais basé à New-York, Dame Babou, a déclaré à l'époque de la polémique sur les causes réelles de l'expulsion d'Assane Diouf, que c'était le motif « d'actes d'agression » qui avait été mentionné sur la fiche d'expulsion de ce dernier. Cité dans la presse en ligne, on peut lire : « On a parlé de terrorisme. J'ai dit qu'aux États-Unis, dès que vous êtes entre les mains du service de l'Immigration, c'est un problème de papiers. Il ne s'occupe pas de vol de voiture, ni d'accidents. Le motif officiel écrit sur le document de déportation de Assane Diouf, c'est pour agression. Il y a certains délits que vous commettez, même si vous avez des documents, vous êtes expulsés », dit-il avant d'ajouter : « Le FBI n'arrête pas quelqu'un pour terrorisme et le libère après deux heures ? Ça n'a pas de sens ». (Ayoba Faye : « Le journaliste Dame Babou établi aux États-Unis révèle : < Ce qui a été écrit sur le document de déportation d'Assane Diouf... > ». *Pressafrik*, le 31 août 2017. <https://www.pressafrik.com/Le-journaliste-Dame-Ba>

Il faut bien dire ici que ses adversaires n'ont pas eu besoin de se torturer les méninges pour porter un coup fatal à Assane Diouf. En effet, c'est Diouf lui-même qui a avoué être entré aux États-Unis en 2001 avec les documents de voyage de son frère Mame Cheikh Diouf. Ensuite, c'est lui-même qui affichera un soutien bruyant à l'imam Alioune Ndao, détenu à l'époque pour financement au terrorisme, mais qui bénéficiera par la suite d'un classement sans suite de l'affaire. Assane Diouf ira jusqu'à demander aux chauffeurs dakarois qui conduisent des bennes de sable de cogner le mur de la prison de Rebeuss afin d'en extraire imam Ndao et Khalifa Sall, l'ancien maire de Dakar, opposant au président Sall, détenu également à cette époque, après avoir été reconnu coupable, par la justice sénégalaise, de malversation.

Assane Diouf sera arrêté tout d'abord par le FBI le 18 août 2017 et, plus tard, remis aux services américains de l'Immigration, après avoir transité par une prison de haute sécurité en Louisiane. Ces épisodes, et surtout, l'appel téléphonique qu'Assane Diouf aura pu passer, dans le Live Facebook, d'une autre webactiviste sénégalaise, Hélène Gaye, sont largement relayés pas la presse en ligne sénégalaise. Assane Diouf y raconte les conditions de son arrestation et met en garde le Gouvernement du Sénégal : « Sept voitures, 20 personnes venues de Washington avaient encerclé ma maison à la Nouvelle-Orléans avant de m'arrêter. Je les ai vus depuis ma fenêtre. Quand ils ont ouvert la porte, je fumais un joint de boon (yamba en wolof ou chanvre indien). Ils m'ont dit qu'ils ne sont pas venus pour ça. Tout ça c'est l'œuvre du Gouvernement sénégalais parce que je les insulte jour et nuit. Mais ils ne vont pas me faire taire »²⁸.

Cette toute dernière phrase concentre une grande partie de l'enjeu du retour forcé d'Assane Diouf au Sénégal. En effet, comment Diouf allait-il contenir d'un côté une pression sociale qui ne pouvait manquer d'être plus forte et de l'inciter à adoucir son discours, et de l'autre satisfaire les abonnés de sa chaîne YouTube qu'il n'a su attirer et fidéliser que par le biais de ses insultes ? De fait, on peut noter un moment de flottement lorsque Diouf reprend ses vidéos en direct depuis le Sénégal. Celles-ci demeurent, en effet, relativement épurées dans cette première période. Il n'insulte plus à tout va et essaie de montrer que le sens ultime de ses propos vise à instruire et à faire prendre conscience, comme nous l'indiquions plus haut. Cette phase est, cependant, de courte durée. Les insultes allaient reprendre une place assez importante dans son propos. Le dilemme auquel Assane Diouf a fait face n'était pas des moindres : soit continuer sur sa lancée et risquer de perdre des soutiens de proximité dans son nouveau cadre concret de vie soit mettre de l'eau dans son vin, et perdre la base populaire qui avait accompagné son ascension. Il allait choisir de protéger son style injurieux, tout en essayant de ne pas passer pour un partenaire encombrant par rapport aux adversaires du régime (hommes d'affaires, leaders politiques, chefs religieux). Pour réussir ce double écart, il lui fallait re-symboliser son arme fatale : l'injure. Au fond, Assane Diouf va osciller

bou-etabli-aux-Etats-Unis-revele-Ce-qui-a-ete-ecrit-sur-le-document-de-deportation-d-Assane-Diouf_a170058.html).

²⁸ « Un début de calvaire... ». *SeneNews.Com*, le 22 août 2017 (<https://www.senepus.com/diaspora/un-debut-de-calvaire-0>).

entre deux perspectives. D'une part, il s'évertue de justifier ses insultes comme une pratique sociale et culturelle bien établie au Sénégal et donc, il rejettera, dans ces moments, les pressions morales l'invitant à réviser son langage, et renverra les censeurs ou conseillers à leur hypocrisie. D'autre part, et de manière plus conciliante, il expliquera que recevoir une insulte ou en proférer n'est pas quelque chose de réellement grave, car après tout, « cela ne tâche pas²⁹ ».

Assane Diouf opacifie ici, de manière consciente ou involontaire, le sens étymologique du mot « insulte » (du latin *insultare*)³⁰ à savoir : transgression et sédition, en amalgamant la distinction sociolinguistique entre violence verbale personnelle et violence verbale rituelle (voir Labov [1972] 1976). En effet, d'une part, Assane Diouf insulte gratuitement et vulgairement les mères de ses cibles, dans un répertoire fort coloré, marqué par un leitmotiv : « di naa xorom » (je salerai), et d'évoquer le vagin de la mère de la personnalité visée. D'autre part, toutefois, Assane Diouf fait usage de grossièretés et d'insultes, sans que l'on ne puisse parler, du point de vue sociolinguistique, de violence verbale personnelle. Par exemple, la chaîne YouTube à travers laquelle il diffuse ses vidéos est prénommée Domeram TV. « Doomaraam », mot de la langue wolof qui ponctue fréquemment ses conversations et qui signifie « bâtard ». Ce mot est composé de la racine « doom » (enfant) et du suffixe « aram » qui est en réalité un emprunt à la langue arabe « haram » (interdit/ prohibé mais également inviolable et sacré). Seulement, dans le parler des jeunes, « doomaraam », « bâtard », a été re-catégorisé en mot affectueux, dans de nombreuses situations³¹.

Dans tous les cas, cette ambiguïté ne sera pas suffisante à sauver Diouf de ses adversaires qui tirent parti d'un de ses directs contre le porte-parole du khalif des mourides et des réactions que cela a suscitées pour le faire arrêter et le traduire en justice. Le ministre de la justice de l'époque, Ismaëla Madior Fall, profitera d'une cérémonie sociale à Touba pour forger une expression relativement nouvelle dans le débat public sénégalais : « insulte à un ministre du culte » et qui sera fortement reprise par la suite à

²⁹ Traduction d'un proverbe wolof qui dénie à l'injure toute force illocutoire, notamment lorsque le destinataire la juge comme parole insignifiante.

³⁰ Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales: <https://cnrtl.fr/definition/dmf/insulte?idf=xxx;etym=insultare> (consulté le 10 juin 2020).

³¹ Plusieurs chercheurs sénégalais ont travaillé, du reste, sur ces formes de violence verbales rituelles. C'est le cas de la pratique de joutes injurieuses opposant des coépouses et leurs familles le soir où une nouvelle épouse rejoint la concession de son époux, polygame, appelé xaxar, en milieu wolof (Cissé 2010). En milieu sereer, les Sañit étudiés par Amade Faye (2008 et 2016) pouvaient injurier n'importe qui dans la société, y compris les autorités les plus puissantes, sans être inquiétés. Selon Amade Faye, la société sereer garantit l'impunité à ses Sañit qui font dans l'insanité, l'obscénité, le sarcasme, l'invective et la menace contre les pouvoirs et les anciens. Cette impunité étant toutefois moins au service du désordre verbal que celui du bon ordre social. En effet, la désinvolture apparente des Sañit est ce qui leur permet de traquer, de débusquer et de dénoncer librement les pratiques néfastes ou cachées des pouvoirs et des aînés. Les Sañit se posent donc en « milice de la vertu, hostile aux aînés » et exercent leur impunité dans l'inversion de la hiérarchie et de l'autorité. Dans le même ordre de phénomène de culture fonctionnelle de la violence verbale rituelle, on peut citer les travaux de Aboubacry Sow (2017) sur les Coolooji et Almube Ngai chez les Pulaar.

travers les médias. Dans cette sortie, Ismaïla Madior Fall affirme avec force, en s'adressant aux autorités de Touba, la volonté du gouvernement de punir sévèrement celles et ceux qui, via les réseaux sociaux, s'en prennent aux chefs religieux. Il dira : « La loi sera appliquée dans toute sa rigueur contre toute personne qui s'attaquera à un ministre du culte. Je ne citerai pas de nom, mais déjà des gens sont sous mandat de dépôt. Et à chaque fois que des faits d'injures sur les réseaux sociaux sont avérés le ou les coupables seront sévèrement punis, conformément au code pénal ³² ». L'allusion à Assane Diouf, qui est alors depuis deux mois déjà emprisonné et en attente de jugement, est sans équivoque. Toutefois deux énoncés restent instructifs, dans cette deuxième phase critique depuis son retour au Sénégal. Le premier est dans les précisions qu'Assane Diouf ne cessera d'apporter, aussi bien dans ses dernières interventions publiques jusqu'au tribunal correctionnel, et qui ne changeront rien à sa situation. Il y déclare : « Je n'ai pas insulté les chefs religieux. J'ai juste demandé à Serigne Bass d'où lui viennent les milliards qu'il a. Il a des maisons à coups de milliards. J'ai le droit de parler avec Bass Abdou Khadre. On a été éduqués par Serigne Bara. Serigne Bass n'est pas un marabout, il est juste un porte-parole des mourides. Un chef religieux est un homme qui a ses « daara », ses champs, nourrit ses talibés et non un homme qui est dans sa niche dorée et qui demande des « adiya ». Et au Sénégal c'est ce qu'il y a »³³. Certes le tribunal n'aura pas retenu, en fin de compte, la charge d'« insulte à un ministre du culte », mais la nature de la sentence laisse entendre ce que son avocat, Maître Clédor Ciré Ly, avancera : « La mort sociale » de son client. Ce qu'il faut noter dans ce premier énoncé, c'est bien cette idée que l'État, à travers, le Parquet qui avait requis cinq ans d'emprisonnement ferme contre Assane Diouf³⁴, a voulu donner un signal fort aux éventuels successeurs d'Assane Diouf. Par la même occasion, on peut penser que l'État a cherché à rassurer le haut personnel de l'institution confrérique.

Dans le deuxième énoncé que l'on retrouve dans la vidéo de 11 minutes³⁵ que nous évoquions au début de cet article, Assane Diouf, après être revenu sur la brutalité et les circonstances de l'attaque intervenue à son domicile, reprend un message qu'il va répéter plusieurs fois : « [...] Je ne me tairai pas, jamais ! Je le jure au nom de Serigne Fallou. Je ne me rendrai pas, je ne demanderai pardon à personne ! Je le jure au nom de Serigne Fallou [...] C'est en lui que j'ai foi ». Il opère par la suite une séparation entre un état premier et authentique, et un deuxième état déviant du mouridisme. Et c'est dans le rapport au politique et, particulièrement les relations avec les détenteurs du pouvoir gouvernemental, qu'il voit le problème : « Le Sénégal, ça ne devrait pas être un Sénégal

³² Aminata Diouf : « Injures sur les réseaux sociaux-Ismaïla Madior Fall prévient : < La loi sera appliquée dans toute sa rigueur > ». *PressAfrik*, le 15 janvier 2018 (https://www.pressafrik.com/%E2%80%8BINjures-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-Ismaïla-Madior-Fall-previent-La-loi-sera-appliquee-dans-toute-sa-rigueur_a176273.html).

³³ Voir l'article en ligne en date du 8 janvier 2019 sur le site *l'express.sn* : « Lourde sanction : Assane Diouf dans une prison à ciel ouvert » (https://www.lexpress.sn/Lourde-sanction-Assane-Diouf-dans-une-pri-son-a-ciel-ouvert_a25.html).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYgXfwbsQqA> (Dernière consultation le 27 mars 2019).

où quand le gouvernement débarque avec ses présents, vous prenez fait et cause pour lui, et quand les disciples ou les serviteurs sont dans le besoin, vous gardez sereinement le silence. Oui c'est cela et je le dis haut et fort ». Lorsque son amie webactiviste tente de le recentrer en lui demandant de clarifier si oui ou non il est l'auteur des propos attaquant le khalif des mourides qu'on est en train de lui prêter sur Internet, Assane Diouf ne saisit la balle au rebond que pour mieux relancer l'objet de sa querelle contre l'institution confrérique. Il ne cherche donc pas, manifestement, à ouvrir une porte de sortie, mais à pousser jusqu'au bout la logique de son engagement. En effet, il se contente de répondre rapidement qu'il n'a jamais attaqué le khalif de Touba et que les images qui circulaient à ce moment-là sur la Toile étaient manipulées, avant de repréciser le sens de sa sortie médiatique qui était en train d'avoir des incidences tumultueuses : « Je n'ai jamais attaqué Serigne Sidi Moukhtar. Ce que j'ai dit est clair, j'ai dit : « Quiconque ne se conduira pas comme il se doit, nous le rappellerons à l'ordre... (Tu vois). Et ceci qui qu'il puisse être, du porte-parole au khalif général... (Tu vois). Et [le problème³⁶] c'est ce mot de khalif général que j'ai prononcé... Mais combien avons-nous ici de khalifs généraux ? Mais combien avons-nous de khalifs généraux au Sénégal ? Thanks You³⁷, et voilà toute la question : je n'ai pas prononcé le nom de Sidi Moctar³⁸. Mais, [par contre, oui³⁹], pour ce qui est de Serigne Bass Abdou Khadre, c'est moi qui ait posé la question « d'où lui venaient ses milliards ? ». Et cette question je la poserai encore demain, et encore après-demain... ». Une attitude bien singulière qui peut être interprétée soit comme suicidaire, soit comme inscrite dans la logique des recompositions des jeux de rôle et d'attente entre disciples et corps dirigeant de l'institution confrérique. En réalité, contrairement à une idée très répandue et qui pourrait faire penser que la voix du disciple ne saurait se faire entendre contre l'establishment, plusieurs exemples existent qui montrent que cela n'est pas toujours le cas, et encore moins lorsque les enjeux posés recoupent des contradictions sociales, politiques ou économiques. Assane Diouf est loin de constituer la voix la plus téméraire ou éventuellement perturbante qu'une partie du clergé mouride a affrontée dans le passé. Par contre, il représente quelque chose qui semble inédit, au niveau de l'échelle d'action, et qui semble étaler, jusqu'à ses limites les plus extrêmes, ces fameux processus de subjectivation dans lesquels les réappropriations de l'héritage du chef fondateur de la confrérie entraînent l'émergence de disciples qui tiennent à être fidèles sans être pour autant obligés. Ce qui est aussi en jeu dans cette transition, il faut le préciser, ce n'est pas un relâchement du lien ou de l'identité religieuse et confrérique, mais au contraire son approfondissement (voir Seck 2010). Cet approfondissement dans une forme davantage intime et moins sujette à l'encadrement classique entraîne justement cette situation dans laquelle le disciple fait valoir son désir d'aller plus loin que le marabout dans la défense du temple. Reste à

³⁶ Le terme est sous-entendu dans son propos.

³⁷ En anglais dans le propos.

³⁸ Le nom est prononcé différemment chaque fois et nous le rendons tel qu'il apparaît dans la bande sonore.

³⁹ Sous-entendu dans le propos.

savoir de quel temple on parle. Lorsqu'Assane Diouf poursuit ici son propos, il donne à mieux penser ce que nous venons d'avancer : « [...] Maintenant si, pour cette raison précise [le fait d'interpeler sans aucune précaution oratoire, Serigne Bassirou Abdou Khadre], les mourides se lèvent et décident de tuer Assane Diouf... [la voix se fait plus calme et grave au moment où il poursuit]... Yeah, c'est ceci que j'ai toujours demandé à Serigne Touba : finir en martyr de sa cause. Oui, cela veut dire qu'il a exaucé les prières que je lui ai adressées, (... tu vois ce que je veux dire ?). En faisant des mourides les mains de mon martyr (... tu vois ce que je veux dire), il a accédé à mes prières d'une manière inespérée. Je rends donc grâce à Dieu, encore et encore ».

Et Assane Diouf de conclure à propos de ceux qu'il accuse alors de chercher à casser sa voix : « [...] mais il faut qu'ils sachent au moins une chose, Ils doivent savoir au moins une chose : « Assane Diouf a déjà marqué l'histoire⁴⁰ ! » et [ce] geste (... tu vois) survivra à ma mort ».

En guise de conclusion

Cet article a tenté d'analyser la courte et fulgurante carrière de webactiviste d'Assane Diouf, en la situant à l'intérieur d'une perspective plus large qui permet de revisiter le sens du contrat social sénégalais (voir Cruise O'Brien 1992). Les différentes identités revendiquées par Assane Diouf, à titre personnel, s'inscrivent toutes dans le tissu conflictuel du Sénégal actuel. Elles y déterminent des points de bascule qui viennent mettre à mal nombre de certitudes dans le partage des rôles à la base du contrat social sénégalais consacrant deux signataires majeurs (l'État et les marabouts) et un bénéficiaire aphone et mineur (le peuple).

D'origine rurale, le mouridisme est devenu une partie intégrante de la culture urbaine. Et ceux qui, comme Assane Diouf, revendiquent une culture ou socialisation urbaine, savent tout également afficher, comme identité fondamentale, leur qualité de disciple mouride. En grandissant au sein des villes, l'ordre confrérique mouride gagne aussi, par devers lui, des troupes et des espaces qui ne répondent pas forcément aux caractéristiques de ses bases sociales de départ. Assane Diouf se situe au cœur de cette contradiction, il incarne tout autant le disciple qui se veut sans reproche et même prêt au martyr que le fidèle sévèrement rappelé à l'ordre. Cheikh Anta Babou ne s'y trompe pas lorsqu'il décrit, de manière plus large encore, ce tournant :

« The urbanization of the Muridiyya and the transformation of the order's economy has resulted in the creation of new Murid religious institutions and sub-identities, a new role for the Murid in Senegalese civil society, a new understanding of the principle of *ndigël* (religious ordinance), new ways of in-

⁴⁰ L'expression est exclamative et est dite en français dans le propos.

teracting with the shaykh, and a reevaluation of the power of the state and its rapports with the Murid leadership » (Babou 2013 : 137–138).

Perçus sous l'angle des expériences migratoires sénégalaises de ces 40 dernières années et qu'a connu Assane Diouf durant 16 ans, ces changements se font encore plus nets. En effet, les communautés migrantes sénégalaises, même si elles continuent d'abriter d'importantes clientèles des régimes en place, sont devenues des foyers politiques de contestation de ces derniers. La critique de l'état du pays devient un cri de ralliement, qu'Internet permet d'amplifier et de répercuter sur le débat national. De manière plus remarquable encore, ces expériences migratoires ont été le creuset de nouvelles manières de se penser et de s'organiser en tant que disciples, autour d'initiatives aux multiples enjeux et agendas (voir Lanza et Seck 2018). Ces nouvelles formes d'auto-organisation ont induit des accélérations inouïes des phénomènes de rationalisation bureaucratique que Momar Coumba Diop avait déjà cernées dans son étude sur les dahira-s en contexte urbain (1981). Ici encore, Cheikh Anta Babou prolonge, d'une façon éclairante, la description de la culture organisationnelle qui accompagne les nouvelles manières de se dédier à sa confrérie, en surlignant l'importance de la redevabilité. Pour lui :

« [...] with the internationalization of the Muridiyya, new dahiras appeared that were modeled on the international nongovernmental organizations, as shown by the example of Hizbut Tarqiyyah and Matlabul Fawzayni, and the Foundation Cheikhul Khadim, which are run by a board of secretaries accountable to the membership » (Babou 2013 : 138).

Enfin, les identifications mourides revendiquées par Assane Diouf, bariolées et indisciplinées, sont aussi nourries par ces cadres de changement globaux qui viennent télescoper d'autres formes de changements beaucoup moins bruyantes décrites par Cheikh Guèye au début des années 2000. En effet, à propos de l'espace confrérique qui a donné, sans doute, le plus à penser ce fameux contrat social sénégalais, Cheikh Guèye, dans son ouvrage *Touba : la capitale des Mourides* (Guèye 2002), s'interrogeait, entre autres, autour de deux notions constitutives à ses yeux, de deux tendances qui affecteraient l'institution confrérique : d'une part la fragmentation du symbole et d'autre part le délitement de l'autorité. Guèye souligne : « Cette fragmentation qui trouve son origine dans les premiers conflits de succession a été accentuée et formalisée par Serigne Abdoul Ahad Mbacké dans les années soixante-dix. Elle a consisté en une demande de reconnaissance officielle de l'identification des lignages à des morceaux de la ville. Cette fragmentation du symbole et des méthodes de la gestion urbaine est à la base du délitement de l'autorité khalifale » (Guèye 2002 : 300).

On le voit donc, c'est une situation globale complexe qui a rendu possible la mésaventure d'Assane Diouf, auteur de cris et d'insanités dans l'espace public qui en ont choqué plus d'un. Mais ce qui semble être un coup de folie, à y regarder de près, ne pourrait très bien être qu'une variante dans les multiples figures du « sauve-qui-»

peut », qu'expérimentent les Sénégalais depuis fort longtemps (voir Seck 2017)⁴¹. Assane Diouf n'est qu'un membre de ce corps social secoué et défiguré par la quantité et la diversité des défis auxquels il doit faire face et dont les différentes composantes cherchent chacune à garantir et protéger leurs parts. Diouf est un entrepreneur social et un opérateur idéologique comme beaucoup d'autres, qui fait bon usage des armes à sa disposition pour, comme il l'a si bien dit, « remplacer son père », « construire de belles villas » et « conduire de jolies voitures ». De diffuseur de buzz sur les peuples, il se retrouve au cœur d'une quasi affaire d'État qui n'a pas voulu dire son nom. Assane Diouf a navigué dans cette histoire qui le dépasse, mais dont il dit qu'elle retiendra à jamais son nom, avec le vocabulaire qui est le sien, celui dont l'historien et linguiste Jacques Guilhaumou qualifie de parole inaudible : « réduite à des cris terrifiants et à des injures, la parole populaire est inaudible pour les élites » (Guilhaumou 2008 : 60).

Ce que nous avons voulu faire, c'est justement nous saisir de cela comme d'un corpus qui n'a pas à être ignoré dans la galerie de « notre corpus social » pour reprendre l'expression du ministre Youm. En cela, nous espérons au moins avoir réussi à signaler deux observations signifiantes dans la lecture des croisements entre « entrepreneuriat social et idéologique », « sauve-qui-peut », « contrat-social sénégalais à l'épreuve » et... le Sénégal de demain.

En premier lieu, les migrations clandestines issues de la crise de confiance envers l'ascenseur social promis par l'État-développeur, qui s'est renforcée des années soixante à la seconde transition démocratique, a produit des figures non homologuées de la contestation de l'establishment politico-religieux, figures qui contre toute attente n'ont pas pris ombrage de n'avoir pas réussi à l'école, de n'avoir pas eu de diplômes, et qui produisent un discours social qui non seulement rencontre son audience, touche sa cible, suscite des vocations, mais aussi contribue à positionner au sein du champ confrérique d'autres modalités de participation.

En second lieu, l'affaire Assane Diouf révèle, à notre sens, une poussée subversive pour une renégociation de ce qui doit être « dicible » dans le Sénégal d'aujourd'hui. Ainsi, la transgression des normes socioculturelles liées à la politesse, à la bienséance, à l'encontre des autorités politique et maraboutique, renseigne sur une intention d'arriver à de nouvelles possibilités d'échanges avec les pouvoirs établis.

Toutefois, l'expédition punitive menée par des disciples à l'encontre d'Assane Diouf, ainsi que la condamnation d'exception qu'il aura subie, semblent avoir montré une résistante forte de ces mêmes pouvoirs à descendre de leur piédestal.

⁴¹ A propos des figures du « sauve-qui-peut », nous référons aux discours et comportements sociaux et politiques qui amènent chaque citoyen à tenter de tirer sa part du jeu, sans trop tenir en compte, la dimension collective.

Addendum

Quinze mois après la dernière mouture de cette contribution, Assane Diouf a été, de nouveau, arrêté et emprisonné, le 2 juin 2020. Cet incident est survenu suite à une vidéo qu'il a produite et diffusée en direct le 31 mai 2020, sur fond d'une persistante pénurie d'eau, dans la banlieue de Dakar, à deux jours du retour officiel des élèves dans les salles de classe, suite à un arrêt des cours lié aux mesures étatiques de lutte contre la propagation du coronavirus⁴². Le propos central de la vidéo est une critique des pouvoirs publics à qui il reproche une gestion calamiteuse de la pandémie de la Covid-19. Cependant, au cours de ce live, Assane injuria, fidèle à son style, copieusement le Président Sall et son frère Aliou Sall (maire de Guédiawaye). Il associera aux insultes l'épouse du Président, Marième Faye Sall, ainsi que le frère de cette dernière, Mansour Faye, non moins ministre du développement communautaire, de l'équité sociale et territoriale⁴³.

Diouf a filmé son arrestation et l'a diffusée en direct sur les réseaux sociaux, lui donnant ainsi un caractère aussi populaire que spectaculaire⁴⁴. Son avocat souligne toutefois que les motifs de l'arrestation de son client n'auraient pas à voir avec les insultes proférées, mais pour « incitation à des attroupements armés » et « outrage à agent dans l'exercice de ses fonctions »⁴⁵.

Notons, accessoirement, qu'au cours de cette vidéo réalisée le 31 mai, Diouf est aussi revenu brièvement et allusivement sur son antagonisme avec ses agresseurs qui se réclament disciples de la confrérie mouride, non sans réactualiser son positionnement de laudateur des guides fondateurs des confréries. Cette nouvelle affaire ouvre ainsi une énième séquence dans l'odyssée manifestement inachevée d'un « disciple indiscipliné ».

⁴² « Vidéo bi motax police arrêté Assane Diouf, il insulte gravement macky sall et Marième Faye Sall », posté par <Radio Dakar Internationale> le 1^{er} juin 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiBbneJT2gg>, dernière consultation le 16 juin 2020).

⁴³ Les insultes contre le Président et sa famille font ressortir des accusations de prédation des ressources publiques. Assane Diouf alimente sa charge en puisant, pour chacun des concernés, sur des actualités plus ou moins anciennes ou récentes les concernant.

⁴⁴ « Arrestation de Assane Diouf », posté par < Seneweb TV > le 1^{er} juin 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDrul3X7rHI>, dernière consultation le 16 juin 2020).

⁴⁵ Mamadou Sall : « Affaire Assane Diouf : Me Ciré Clédor Ly trouve la charge < rigolo > et dépose une plainte contre la police ». *Senego.com*, le 9 juin 2020 (https://senego.com/affaire-assane-diouf-me-cire-cledor-ly-trouve-la-charge-rigolo-et-depose-une-plainte-contre-la-police_1104356.html).

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12 Conclusion: Tomorrow Is Another Everyday – Religion and the Shifting Terrain of Quotidian Experience

Robert Launay

Islam, more than any other religion, is too often categorized in Manichean terms: “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims” (Mamdani 2004), Sufis and Salafis, tolerant and intolerant, secular and religious. More recently, Samuli Schielke (2009, 2015; Schielke and Debevec 2012) has stressed the ways in which Islam (like any other religion or for that matter any ideology) intersects with and interacts with ordinary life, with concerns about family, honor, romantic love, or consumer goods among a multitude of others. Piety, he argues, is just one “grand scheme” among others, an uncertain compass in the rough waters of everyday experience. Like any other theoretical concept, Schielke’s notion of the “everyday” risks reification. Everyday, it is important to emphasize, is precisely not like any other day, but rather contingent on place and on time. The essays in this volume, by presenting cases from countries that are all overwhelmingly (though not necessarily officially) Muslim – Egypt, Iran, Tunisia, Niger, Senegal – collectively demonstrate how varied the experience of the everyday can be within the contemporary Muslim world, through the interplay of striking differences but also striking similarities.

One dimension that is absolutely central to almost all of these chapters is gender. The expression of gender in everyday contexts is, it must be stressed, by no means exclusive to Islam. Even so, the extent to which these concerns emerge prominently in so many of these chapters is striking. It would be a grave mistake to attribute these empirical and theoretical preoccupations with the liberal biases of Western observers uncomfortable with alternative modes of being in the world, not least because many of

these papers are authored by Muslim women and men. I would argue that what distinguishes gender in Islam from other religious traditions is the emphasis on visibility, on the ways in which women are expected to behave and especially to dress in public. As Sounaye points out, men may adopt Islamic dress codes (see also Renne 2018), though these are not nearly so pervasive.

As an index of women's everyday religious practice, the hijab seems virtually overdetermined, a visible means of revealing – and also at times of concealing – one's religious engagement. Perhaps for this reason, the hijab is at the center (quite literally!) of this volume, the principal if not the only subject of the chapters by Sadjed, Föllmer, Matri, and Sounaye, and somewhat more incidentally for Franke. What these chapters reveal, individually and collectively, is that exactly what the hijab is intended to or understood as indexing is anything but straightforward. To cite only one example, as Sadjed rightly points out, it is far too simplistic to reduce the contrast between wearing lipstick and wearing the chador to opposition to or support for the Iranian regime.

As this example suggests, politics and the State are an important dimension in determining the meanings of everyday action in Islamic religious life. Political regimes, however, are hardly fixed entities, and several of the nations discussed in different chapters have undergone regime change once if not more. In Iran, for instance, as Föllmer argues, wearing the chador was an act of political opposition under the Shah's aggressively secularizing rule. In the Islamic republic, on the other hand, "bad-hejabi" – how and not simply whether one wears the hijab – can (rightly or wrongly) be indexed as a token of political and/or religious resistance. Behaviors are not always easy to categorize; if the women of Enqelab Street may remove their hijab and silently wave it on a stick in protest, the silence of passersby is more ambivalent; are they ignoring or endorsing such protest? Similar shifts in the meanings of the hijab or other forms of public religious (or irreligious) behavior are equally characteristic of Egypt (Mustonen, Franke) or Tunisia (Matri). Regimes do not only inflect the meanings of public behavior. They may induce retreats into the private sphere; women's Qur'an study circles (Franke, Sadjed) are a way of insulating participants from the public, and a fortiori the regime's gaze.¹ But it would be a grave mistake to limit historical shifts in meaning to instances of regime change. As Sounaye shows, the hijab, once an index of adherence to Islamist movements (Izala, Sunnance) in Niger, has now become such a standard practice that even prostitutes wear it, if only as a means as concealing, rather than revealing, their behavior in public.

Even in countries where political opposition and sometimes radical change have deeply inflected the meanings of religious life, it is a grave error to understand such meanings exclusively in political terms. Considerations of class run through these chapters as insistently as politics, and often intersect with political engagements. Mustonen discusses the example of an article in an English-language lifestyle maga-

¹ Of course, women's Qur'an study circles are not by any means simply a product of regime changes, and are a global feature of women's engagement with Islam; see Masquelier (2009), Van Doorn-Harder (2006) and Mouftah (2019).

zine in Egypt criticizing the political interference of religion in everyday life at the outset of the presidency of Muhammed Morsi, denouncing the Muslim Brotherhood's project of constitutional reform. At stake, in particular, was the mixing of sexes in discotheques and swimming pools, sites of elite sociability. However, Sadjed shows how class concerns sometimes override rather than reflect political engagements in Iran. Western-style clothing, sometimes hastily identified with opposition to the regime, is actually far more an index of upward social mobility. Wearers of the chador, on the other hand, are sometimes suspected of opportunistically attempting to ingratiate themselves with government officials rather than expressing genuine religious commitment. In any case, the oppositional Green Movement involved participants wearing the chador as well as those dressed in more Western-style clothing.

As this last example demonstrates, class is intimately related to consumption. One of the participants in the upper middle class Qur'ān study groups described by Franke was concerned with the question: can one wear nail polish during salat? The very question prevents any disentangling of class, gender, consumption, and everyday religious practice. Another participant even compared the benefits she derived from Qur'ān study to yoga practice, suggesting that in a neo-liberal economy, Qur'ān study is, in a real sense, another form of consumer choice. This comparison with yoga calls to mind the fitness centers in Dakar described by Sieveking. While the passion for fitness is shared across class lines, it is equally clear that mixed gender fitness centers cater to a relatively prosperous clientele, if not to the elite. Not surprisingly, women's dress, and particularly the hijab, are the locus where gender, class, consumption, and religiosity intersect most conspicuously. As Matri notes for contemporary Tunisia, the hijab is integrated into a "look" precisely as it has become more and more commonplace. Combined with other items of clothing (even tight-fitting jeans), it becomes an item of fashion, in stark opposition to the kind of hijab worn by elderly or rural women, and as such a marker of class as much as of religiosity (Sounaye makes a very similar point for Niger).²

These relationships between gender, class, religion, and consumer preferences are all reflected, projected, and disseminated through mass media. Several chapters discuss very different types of media and starkly contrasting forms of involvement. Mustonen uses the example of print media, specifically an Egyptian magazine targeting an elite audience (it is, after all, in English) reflecting their specific concerns about the politicization of religion and its possible effects on elite patterns of sociability. Diop mentions television in her chapter on Senegal, noting how the tone and content of programs during the month of Ramadan is adjusted to correspond more closely to norms of Islamic religiosity than at other times of the year. Finally, Ly and Seck analyze the deliberately outrageous behavior of an erstwhile internet star, Assane Diouf, a behavior conceivably modeled on American talk radio; Diouf had indeed sojourned for some time in the United States before being expelled as an undocumented immigrant.

² On the hijab and Islamic fashion, see also Moors (2003), Tarlo (2010), Rabine (2013) and Masquelier (2013).

It is important to point out that the meanings of individual behaviors, their status as indices of religiosity or for that matter of irreligiosity, is not at all fixed. The hijab, again, functions as a convenient example, though it certainly should not be taken as a unique, much less uniquely important, sign. It can be a sign of protest or a sign of conformity, an article of fashion or a token of the rejection of worldly fashion. The religious significance of everyday behavior is inherently contextual and consequently fluctuating and subject to historical change at the micro as well as the macro level. The meanings of behaviors ultimately hinges on their evaluation, first of all in terms of the ways in which they are the objects of discourse. Sieveking's chapter furnishes the striking example of how a Muslim cleric could categorize "dance" as illicit but accept "fitness" as legitimate. Both activities involve relatively scantily clad people, sometimes in gender mixed environments, moving their bodies rhythmically. Clearly, evaluation depends on the ways they are categorized rather than the concrete content of the behavior .

Silence is important as well as speech. Sometimes, the silence is on the part of the person committing (or omitting) the action, most dramatically perhaps in the case of the women of Enqelab Street but also, more discreetly, among some of the participants of the Qur'an study group in Alexandria. A participant who does not always pray five times a day is unsurprisingly unwilling to raise the issue in public; but this is also the case of a woman who does not wear the hijab, and who fears that if she elicits a spoken judgment she will be obliged either to conform to or to flout the collective norm. Indeed, Diop shows how speech and silence can be dialectically intertwined. In Senegal, prominent celebrities whose public behavior seems to violate religious norms flaunt their loyalty to prominent Sufi shaykhs as a gambit to affirm their ultimate religiosity, while the shaykhs themselves pass over such declarations in silence, neither approving nor disapproving. Assane Diouf, again in Senegal, attempted to frame his behavior by categorizing himself as a Baye Fall, in other words as someone whose transgressive behavior was nonetheless intrinsically religious, but whose online attacks of religious leaders led to violent reprisal, a demarcation of the limits of silence.

Collectively, these chapters demonstrate that the understanding of everyday religious behavior cannot be detached from considerations of gender, of class, of consumption, of mediation, indeed of speech and of silence. These different factors cannot be neatly separated out, but are constantly in dialectical interplay with one another. Nor are they fixed, but on the contrary in perpetual fluctuation. They are subject, in other words, to history, sometimes writ large – like regime change – sometimes writ small – like fashion. Attempts to separate out Islam from this fluctuation, to identify a transhistorical if not ahistorical essence, are bound to distort the fleeting realities we can observe – and live – in everyday life.

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The contributions to the present volume show that the countries that are often presented in the literature as forming part of a stereotypical and seemingly monolithic “Islamic world” in fact represent considerable diversity. From Iran to Senegal, we encounter a vast array of social and religious structures, historical trajectories, political regimes and relative positions of societies and individuals. We encounter also, in many different and often unexpected ways, the individual in multiple contexts. The present volume presents perspectives on everyday life in Muslim societies beyond the spectacular. From a broad academic background in Islamic and Iranian studies, social anthropology, sociology, philosophy and history, its contributors show that everyday life as well as religious practice in countries as diverse as Senegal, Niger, Egypt, Tunisia and Iran is not informed by one single “Islamic” tradition, but rather by multiple and often surprisingly different modes of religiosity and non-religiosity.

Roman Loimeier holds a position as professor for social anthropology (Ethnologie) at the University of Göttingen. He is Director of the ERC funded research project “Private Pieties”. Since 1981, he has done extensive research in sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal, Nigeria and Tanzania) as well as Tunisia. Among his publications are *Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa* (Edinburgh 2016) and *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Bloomington 2013).



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