

Teranga and Pleasant Parent Kinship as strategies to ensure peaceful coexistence in Senegalese society

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Introduction

Recent social historiography of independent Senegal shows a long history of encounters of the country with foreign cultures, first Islam from the Middle East as early as the eighth century, and later with the West that brought to the African shores Christianity and colonization. Those encounters did not find a barren ground, a tabula rasa of values. Africa had its own traditional religions where human beings lived very close to nature and where spirituality was the emanation of the plant world as well as the physical or human one.

The combination of local realities and foreign influences created a culture with several layers of influence still visible on Senegalese culture and explain some of its peculiarities among which, in a country of 95% of Moslems to have as its first President Leopold Sedar Senghor, a Christian from a minority group, a Serere who received strong support from marabouts or Moslem clerics to access power. Both the second and third presidents among the four so far at the helm of Senegal as an independent nation are Moslems by faith but have Christian wives. The most conspicuous symbol of that syncretism is in the birthplace of the first President Leopold Sedar Senghor, in Joal and Fadiouth where Moslems and Christians share the same cemetery and their families are a mixture of Christians, Moslems, and animists interacting socially without any sign of discrimination or prejudices.

Concepts that I want to address in this paper in the context of Senegalese society are «Teranga» and «Pleasant Parent Kinship». The two concepts redefine Senegalese parenthood as not being just based on blood kinship but people are united beyond closed family units by the values of hospitality and tolerance where a stranger feels welcome in any visited home. While «teranga» opens the heart and urges the host to show a clean and hospitable face to any visitor, «Pleasant Parent Kinship» creates a network of relationships through patronyms, family kinship, ethnic group affiliations where people are taught never to do harm to each other. Just an example, in the Southern part of Senegal, there is an ethnic group called Joola.

They have been in conflict (armed groups) with the central state for 38 years now. They are in the South and want to secede from the Northern Part of Senegal. A «Joola» a Southerner will never kill a «Serere» (living in the Central part of the country) knowingly. The reason is that «Joola» and «Serere» are related by «Pleasant Parent Kinship». A «Joola» could kill a «Joola» which is not common but a «Joola» killing a «Serere» is abomination.

I. Definition of concepts

Those peculiarities are due, among other things, to a culture of tolerance embedded in the vocable *Teranga*, a concept that shows a welcoming and accommodating nature of the Senegalese people with regard to strangers. Perhaps, it is this sense of compromise that saved the country from political turmoils in a continent ravaged by military coups and ethnic clashes. Moreover, Pleasant Parent Kinship, the second concept in this paper, has come to reinforce that openness of Senegalese people and serve as a traditional mechanism to help ease off most conflictual situations. Both *Teranga* and Pleasant Parent Kinship are deeply rooted in Senegalese society.

The concept of *Teranga*, with the support of many other mechanisms such as «Pleasant Parent Kinship» or its French translation «Parenté à plaisanterie» found deep resonance in Senegalese social structure and strong life ideals to co-exist with other members of society and going beyond even beyond national borders. It has become a frame of mind that puts Senegalese people in constant interaction with the other, not the other as someone to conflict with but someone to show hospitality and comfort to. Today, *Teranga* is, as a matter of fact, is a brand name for Senegal and Senegalese people in Africa. It calls for openness to other people. Senegal is referred to as «Le Pays de la *Teranga*» or the Country of *Teranga*. The national soccer team players of Senegal are called: «Les lions de la *teranga*», to mean «The Lions of *Teranga*» urging the players to combine the power and strength of the lion with fair play, courtesy and elegance in the competition. As a core value in Senegalese society, *Teranga* implies empathy and solidarity with anyone who knocks at your door.

II. Illustration of *Teranga* and Pleasant Parent Kinship contexts.

The first element of *Teranga* is the greeting sequence and the time it takes before any serious conversation can take place. Long greetings with a newcomer is a sign of consideration and provides the visitor with a sense of comfort before any serious matter is addressed. It is very inappropriate, especially in traditional communities, to reduce greeting to just «Hello », or «Hi ». Greetings go through a litany of evocations from the person's wellbeing to the family to go to the wider circle of the extended family. The host will inquire about peace with various members of the family, about property without truly knowing the visitor's condition. It goes to offering water and food.

Pleasant Parent Kinship is another core value for peaceful co-existence in society. It establishes relationships through patronyms of people, family relationships, and ethnic groups where peace is absolutely required among people sharing those connections. Those are called «cousins» which means that people sharing that relationship are required to never do harm to a person within that space. You can joke, use inappropriate language if you wish in front of your «cousin» but should never do harm intentionally. It is believed if you do harm to your cousin something bad will happen to you. This goes into education and members of society are brought up with those views. The belief is strong that any transgression will result in punishment from hidden forces. This is enshrined so deeply in local culture and is transmitted from generation to generation.

The first stage for Pleasant Parent Kinship is with «cousin», when your fathers or mothers are related. Then, Pleasant Parent Kinship moves to patronyms. Diop and Ndiaye are the most common patronyms in Senegal. The clause of Pleasant Parent Kinship exists between those families. A Diop should not do harm to a Ndiaye. This exists in most patronyms. As a greeting commonly begins with asking a person's last name, once the name is known, Pleasant Parent Kinship can come into the interaction. In this regard, any village taken can become a set of family networks that recognizes among members the Pleasant Parent Kinship mechanism.

Another aspect of Pleasant Parent Kinship is what is seen as a «joking relationship». You can make fun of your cousin, say nasty words to him or her but this is not meant to be wicked and should not be taken seriously, should not be seen as harmful. It happens most of the time in a situation of anger. When someone realizes that the person in front is a «cousin» by patronym, by ethnicity, suddenly the discussion becomes lively and finishes with jokes and laughs. The problem is settled. They hug each other.

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