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**Thème : Sciences sociales et pensée frontalière : la sociologie et l'anthropologie africaines face au discours décolonial**

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Axe 1 : Hommage au professeur Malick Ndiaye : penser les épistémologies locales à la frontière du discours décolonial

***Rethinking the Study of Islam in Senegal: Serigne Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Sy's Oral Speech as a Tool for Decolonial Cosmopolitan Critique***

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**Abstract:** Senegalese Islam holds a prominent position in global studies of religion in sub-Saharan Africa. However, most scholarly research has focused primarily on the *Murīdiyya*, both within and beyond Senegal. Thus, other Sufi orders, including the largest *Tijāniyya* and its numerous offshoots remain underexplored. This oversight extends to the anthropology and sociology of Islam, where studies of *Tijāniyya* are limited, with few exceptions, such as research on the *Tijāniyya Ibrāhīmiyya* of Kaolack and its extensive networks across West Africa and the African diaspora. One of the most visible Sufi Schools of Thought and sociopolitical movements in Senegal is the *Tijāniyya Mālīkiyya* of Tivaouane, but it remains significantly understudied in both in sociology and anthropology.

This paper addresses this imbalance by first examining the status of anthropology and sociology in the studies of Islam in Senegal. I analyze the reasons behind this gap and explore how scholars can address it using the *Tijāniyya Mālīkiyya* as a case study. Second, I delve into the intellectual contributions of the Tivaouane current of thought, highlighting the oral speech of Serigne Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Sy (1925-2017). As a Sufi scholar, he is at the same time a knowledge producer, a transmitter of multiple sciences, and a translator. His decolonial vernacular cosmopolitanism offers an alternative framework for navigating debates within Africana Studies, challenging the dichotomies between Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, and Arabocentrism.

Serigne Cheikh's intellectual formation was shaped by multiple worldviews. The Qur'an and the Sunnah serve as his primary sources of inspiration, but his thought was also deeply influenced by Sufi figures such as Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijānī and his muqaddams, as well as Senegalese scholars, including his grandfather El Hadji Malick Sy and his father Serigne Babacar Sy. Also,

he engaged with Arab poets and writers like Ahmad Shawqi, and French intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Cocteau, and Jacques Maritain. His perspective was further informed by global social transformations—to avoid the term “modernity”—which he reframed and reinterpreted to develop a unique form of high theory (*grande théorie*).

This paper is structured around four parts, each examining different dimensions of Serigne Cheikh’s intellectual contributions:

1. Revisiting the history of ideas through the “Senegalese cultural unconsciousness”
2. The conflation of African philosophy and philosophy in Africa; Islam in Africa and African Islam
3. The longstanding debate on subjectivism and objectivism in the social sciences and the humanities
4. The ongoing debates on universalism, particularism, and globalization, and more.

I employ decolonial thought as an analytical framework to examine the lingering effects of Euro-North American cultural imperialism. This approach offers an alternative way of conceptualizing the self, society, and cultures, in the meantime allowing scholars from diverse intellectual traditions to engage in discussions beyond Eurocentrism, rationality, and the so-called Western modernity. Specifically, I draw on Walter D. Mignolo’s notions of “border thinking,” “border sensing,” and “border doing” (as discussed in *Border Thinking and Decolonial Cosmopolitanism: Overcoming Colonial Imperial Differences*, Routledge, 2018, p. 102; and *The Politics of Decolonial Investigation*, Duke University Press, 2021, p. 188). These concepts help transcend rigid dichotomies within an African Muslim context, where different realms: phenomenal, noumenal, vegetal, and mineral, are not mutually exclusive but coalesce to shape people’s worldviews, needs, and aspirations.

In conclusion, the philosophical contributions of Western or Asian thinkers are not more significant than those of their African counterparts. The intellectual legacy of African Muslim scholars such as Serigne Cheikh is important to understanding universalism, democracy, cosmopolitanism, decoloniality, human rights, philosophy, and the social sciences mean locally. Serigne Cheikh carefully deliberated on events of his time and foundational texts before addressing the public, arguing that only well-nurtured words can serve humanity (*wax bu ñoree jariñ*). He emphasized that one must be well-educated before speaking publicly or writing on any subject. In this regard, he engaged in both cultural and hermeneutic cosmopolitanism, acting as a Sufi guide, teacher, public intellectual, and critique of ways of being and doing. His prolific intellectual legacy makes this Sufi master one of the most frequently cited scholars in Senegal’s public sphere today.