

TERANGA AMONG THE WOLOF PEOPLE

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These are the principal instruments of social organization among the Wolof:

- the idea of a vital force
- the cult of age
- the art of hospitality

THE IDEA OF A VITAL FORCE

Wolof education is based on an ideology that sees society as a sum of the life forces of its members. These individual life forces can be collectively mobilized to achieve the "specific energy" of a particular society. Social education — with this philosophy in mind — becomes a permanent quest for social cohesion, for progressive adjustments in individual behavior that provide a person with a stable sense of socio-cultural identity so that the individual's life force contributes positively to the social whole.

Hence, any disturbance to this collective plan, any individual sickness or impotence, any social failing produces a negative force that harms the "specific energy" of the community.

The Wolof word *nyumm* means both intellectual integrity and physical well-being; it is a condition for social acceptability.

THE CULT OF AGE

Ku magatul di mag, "He who has stopped growing is an adult." This aspect of Wolof thought envisions a process of maturing that leads a child through adolescence to adulthood. The process is marked by rites of passage, initiation rituals that are ordeals of separation and consecration:

- weaning
- circumcision or excision
- deflowering of the virgin newlywed
- tattooing the lips of a young woman.

For the initiate, the passage from one stage to another is marked by the accumulation of knowledge, information, feelings and discoveries. This process awakens the individual's consciousness and realization of the com-

munal burden of new rights and duties. As an individual matures, he or she is increasingly responsible for insuring socio-cultural continuity. But one becomes an active bearer of group values — a person of knowledge — only after acquiring extensive life experience. The person of knowledge exhibits virtues of carefulness and incorruptibility and thereby earns titles of conservator, exemplar and guardian of the communal socio-cultural heritage, that is, of the group's "specific energy."

THE ART OF HOSPITALITY: TERANGA

A principal of universal kinship places a Wolof individual perpetually in situations of both giving and receiving. Any neglect of the duty of social exchange is a source of disturbances that can threaten the "specific energy" of the community. Among Wolof speaking people, the word *teranga* appropriately conveys this spiritual attitude. The root of the word *teranga* means a part of the body — legs, arms, etc. — or a portion of the whole, the result of a division. *Taer* means a portion owed to a person by right. The verb *teral* means to reassure a stranger of the safety of a place to which he or she has just arrived.

A principal characteristic of Senegalese society, *teranga* is expressed in many customary practices. It is a set of formulas for well-being and for polite behavior taught particularly to young women, who are the future masters of hospitality. The formulas apply to relationships between both individuals and groups.

BETWEEN SELF AND OTHERS

The education of a young woman aims at giving her all she needs to perpetuate good manners. These manners epitomize politeness, child-rearing skills, generosity and hospitality — qualities that predispose her to meet others as a manager of the on-going "specific energy" of the community.

These are some formulas for good manners:

How to sit:

Avoid positions that are indecent or provoking to

others. Decency should rule all communication.

How to address others:

Make a habit of using a low tone of voice appropriate for confidential information.

Never raise your voice or use lewd words.

Avoid contradicting people who are older than yourself.

How to laugh:

Never have outbursts of laughter.

Smiling or discreet laughter is more appropriate.

Keep a kind and friendly expression under all circumstances.

How to look at others:

Avoid looking at others insistently in the eye; to do so indicates aggression and lack of respect.

How to eat:

Always eat from a communal bowl with others.

Never speak with a full mouth.

Never touch meat or fish until adults have served you a portion.

How to walk:

Walk at a normal pace, without hurrying or running.

How to dress:

Avoid sloppy, inappropriate or loud clothing or clothes that reveal the sacred parts of the body.

Dress cleanly and with decency.

How to offer and accept:

Never offer or accept anything from anyone with the left hand. Use the right hand which indicates consideration and friendliness.

BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS

Let us examine, as examples, the relationships between people who belong to a particular caste and those who do not. Castes in Senegal have tacit codes of rules that regulate relationships between people. Those who belong to a particular caste have rights that those who do not belong are obliged to respect, under penalty of offending the established order. The rule of social priority that demands a caste member to avoid a non-caste member is sanctified in the practice of endogamous marriages. This rule leads to exchanges of gifts between caste members, who cannot refuse to reciprocate without sustaining dishonor. This exchange, an expression of *teranga*, is the rule during ceremonies and feasts (wedding, naming ceremony, circumcision, tattooing of the lips, religious festivals and the like) to which relatives, friends and neighbors lend assistance.

TOWARDS NEIGHBOR AND HOST

By tradition, a neighbor who has just moved in must formally present himself to the inhabitants of his new community. In return, they will visit him and welcome him with ritual greeting, *dalal jamm*, "may peace greet you here." This obligatory exchange of civilities assures a reciprocal welcome and avoids intolerance and disorder.

The same ritual formula is used with a stranger to keep him from feeling *toumouranké*, "disorientation." To take care of all his small needs is to fulfill one's obligation of *teranga*. This form of *teranga* is expressed in a number of ways.

- A welcome is amplified by unrolling a ceremonial cloth under his feet as a "red carpet."

- A calabash full of milk or water is offered along with a cola nut.

- The guest house called *neeru gann*, "room for foreign guests," is prepared.

- Neighbors contribute prepared food for meals to families during a guest's stay; they contribute gifts and provisions when he leaves.

- A host shares his meals with his guest and avoids "leaving the table" first, abandoning him to finish the meal alone.

IN SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Teranga, which has the goal of establishing good human and social relationships, is also evident on certain special occasions.

The naming ceremony is an opportunity for parents, friends and neighbors to offer *ndokalé*, "congratulations," through their presence, a sign of respect and solidarity more meaningful than gifts of money. These recent expressions of *ndokalé* reflect the contemporary value placed on material goods. The greatest *teranga* on this occasion is a godparent's double gift. The newborn receives the name of this well respected person, whose good qualities, according to belief, will also be conferred on the child.

Offering condolences at a funeral — *deudj*, related to *deju* "to be or stay seated," — is a manifestation of *teranga* as compassion. It is offered as a communal act at the home of the deceased during the funeral ceremonies.

At weddings, in addition to the usual congratulations, *teranga* is expressed in giving someone the role of *ndiêke*, "first maid-of-honor," which is associated with a variety of responsibilities. It is a gesture usually bestowed on an admired, close relative for whom being head of the procession and ceremonial host is a source of great pride.

Teranga is proper conduct in communal rites. On these occasions good comportment is rewarded and songs are offered to men or women whose behavior indicates they have given the community their own *teranga*. They have shown themselves secure bearers of traditions and guarantors of Wolof socio-cultural heritage.

The Wolof word *teranga* is more than merely a synonym for hospitality. *Teranga* is an aesthetic and moral quality that encompasses much of the spirit of communality of Senegalese society.