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AN AESTHETICS OF NORM-ADHERENCE: DISCOURSE AND POWER IN MATRIMONIAL AND MARABOUTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN DAKAR[1]

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This article shows the homology between two hierarchical relationships defined by Islam: husband-wife and marabout-disciple. Wives and disciples ostentatiously declare their submission to the authority of their husbands or marabouts although these stereotyped statements are not directly related to reality. Such contradictions are the *form* of these relationships rather than a demonstration of power. What matters is the conformity of the discourse -and not the actions of people- to the principles that govern these relationships. In ethnographic as well as daily interactions, people strive to say what is the most 'beautiful' and keep up appearances according to a moral system that values discretion and harmonious relations. The preservation of appearances and the ostentatious recognition of authority are not indexes of power relationships. Instead, they provide the 'dominated' a form of autonomy within the framework of hierarchical relationships.

Keywords: Norms, discourse, gender, household economy, Senegal

In the early 2000s, I began a long period of ethnographic fieldwork in the working-class neighbourhood of Thiaroye-sur-Mer, a suburb of Dakar, Senegal. The initial months of my investigations were devoted to exploring what later transpired to be a dead end: the domestic economy. My goal was to gather information, through interviews, on the impact of women's economic activity on household relations and the importance of their financial contribution to the household budget. My interviewees were, to a man and woman, willing and helpful participants, and showed a great deal of kindness in putting up with these conversations – a series of questions rather than a discussion.

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The vast majority of the women I interviewed about their involvement in household finances offered up the same stock responses, either in French or in Wolof. They consistently stated that the money they earned was not primarily intended for domestic expenses, but for their 'needs' (*soxla*); domestic expenses being mainly, according to them, the responsibility of the husband. These discussions were also punctuated by affirmations of the husband's authority as head of the household. Their husbands meanwhile, presented the same account, from the other side. According to them, the burden of the household rested on their shoulders. Their wives never did enough and did not know how to manage the household budget, which they frittered away on 'women's business', particularly on familial birth and marriage ceremonies. They also regularly reminded me of the principle of power asymmetry between spouses and complained that their wives did not always heed their words.

At first, the ease with which my interlocutors spoke about home economics allayed my fears that I might be rebuffed of chased out of certain homes. However, this stereotypical discourse of commonplace expressions, which I initially took to be a straightforward description of the domestic economy, later appeared to me to be a series of clichés that bore little relation to reality. I concluded from my travails that everyone had been gently mocking and misleading me , while politely trying to do me the favour of answering my questions.

In order to obtain more accurate data, I sought to circumvent this. First, I considered systematically collecting household budgets from the families of the people I had already interviewed. My interlocutors then became much less cooperative. Faced with the polite, but often outraged, refusal of many of my contacts to countenance the idea of my sticking my nose into their personal and domestic finances (and this after having already been interviewed), I decided to distribute expense sheets and ask them to fill them in. This too rapidly failed. The systematic discrepancy between the financial reality of the households, whose members I got to know much better as time went by, and the answers I obtained during the first weeks of my work in those household finance interviews never disappeared. Now, more than a decade later, my interlocutors in the field either continue to repeat the same thing or, sometimes, tell me to be cautious of such discourses.

This article focuses on the status of the discrepancy between the facts and discourses surrounding the domestic economy. This contradiction manifests itself in stereotypical statements about the contribution and hierarchical roles of husband and wife that clearly do not correspond to empirical relations between spouses, especially in financial matters. How can this contradiction be understood? Such discourse notably stresses the superior position of men and minimises the role of women in the domestic economy (Lecarme-Frassy, 2000). We could, for instance, apply a so-called 'critical' perspective, revealing the structures of power behind the discourse (Foucault, 1971), in this case, what Bourdieu calls 'masculine domination' (2001).

In order to answer these questions, we must first note that our interlocutors are well aware of the distinction between fact (action) and discourse (talk). This is the principle challenge the ethnographer faces, particularly in a place like Dakar where speech is the object of significant social control. Of course, public discourse, especially answers to survey questions, does not necessarily have a direct descriptive relationship to the facts or to the object of our questions. But insofar as this discrepancy is systematic and manifests itself in

stereotypical formulations, the apparent contradiction between facts and discourse on the domestic economy is worth exploring.

In this article, I suggest that the stereotypical nature of discourse on the domestic economy, as well as the direct association of issues concerning the domestic economy with the husband's position of authority, must be taken seriously. We are not simply dealing with a discrepancy or contradiction between the norms governing spousal relationships and empirical reality, but with a speech genre specific to the authority relations ordained by Islam.

The domestic economy appeals to Islamic principles governing hierarchical relationships between spouses, and in particular to the husband's position of authority. Stereotypical discourses on household finances are also part of a system of moral principles that value discretion (*sutura*), harmony in relationships and 'getting along' (*maslaa*). This moral system translates into a speech genre that privileges saying what is most 'beautiful' (*rafet*) and keeping up appearances. From this point of view, it is possible to draw an analogy between the relationship between spouses and the marabout-disciple relationship. Both of these hierarchical relationships, instituted by Islam, are manifest in stereotypical discourse, both in everyday and ethnographic interactions, in which wives and disciples conspicuously proclaim their submission, devotion and obedience to the authority of their husband or marabout. These stereotypical discourses are *not* evidence of a power relationship, but rather of a form of hierarchical relationship based on Islamic principles. What matters is not the conformity of the discourse to the actions of people, but to the principles that govern these relationships. Correlatively, the privileged mode of being of these hierarchical norms is not action, but discourse. It is a matter of saying and not necessarily of doing. The respect for forms that preserve appearances as well as the conspicuous recognition of authority thus ensure that those in subordinate positions (wives or followers) have considerable autonomy within these relationships.

Islam, domestic economy and the relationship between spouses

The relationship between spouses is presented by my interlocutors as governed, at a normative level, by rules drawn from the wider Islamic tradition, or even directly from the Qur'an itself.[3] Overall, marital relationships are seen as based on three principles. First, the husband is head of the household (*borom kër*) and has authority (*kilifa*) over his wife, who is sometimes said to be her husband's slave (*jaam*). However, the idiom of slavery denotes here less a form of subjugation than a relationship of submission and dependence based on authority, comparable, as we shall see, to the relationship between a disciple and his marabout. Second, the authority of the husband is directly associated with his obligation to provide for his wife. In the Qur'an, this link is directly established in verse 34 of the fourth sura. The translation of one of the most widely distributed editions of the Qur'an in French in Dakar, presents the verse as follows:

[3] In particular verses 32 and 34 of the fourth Sura, '*an-nisâ*': 'Women'.

> Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because God has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct admonish them (first) (next) refuse to share their beds (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience seek not against them means (of annoyance): for God is Most High Great (above you all). (Qur'an, s4, v34, translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

The husband has a threefold obligation: to provide full support for his wife and children, to provide a home for them and to have sexual relations with his wife. In addition to these two complementary principles (the husband's authority and his obligation to provide for his wife and children), there is also the principle that spouses manage their personal property and income independently (Qur'an, s. 4, v. 32). Thus, in principle, there is no requirement for the wife to participate in household expenses, although she is usually the *de facto* manager of the housekeeping budget (she is in charge of shopping, cooking, and receives from her husband the money for the '*ration'* (i.e. allowance) given each month and/or daily 'expenses'.

Jane Guyer (1981) has clearly shown that the notion of household, in the sense of a localised group, characterised as a unit of consumption, of mutual solidarity and having a common budget, has no meaning in many West African contexts, be they Muslim or not. The resources of spouses are not directly pooled (Fapohunda, 1988), especially in a context such as Dakar where polygamy is still common. Households do, however, represent nodes of compartmentalised and divergent financial flows in which the people who finance the domestic economy (husbands) are not those (wives) who manage the household's money on a daily basis. In Dakar, the norms that govern this distribution of expenses are presented as religious. The reference to the Qur'an, in which these two principles are clearly stated and posited as complementary, gives absolute and indisputable legitimacy to these norms. As a corollary, because the husband's authority is linked, in Islamic terms, to the distribution of expenses within the household, speaking of domestic economy brings into play an indisputable Muslim value.

The economic difficulties of Dakar's working class call into question the economic basis of this norm. In the early years of the 21st century, few heads of household are able to meet their daily expenses by themselves. The financial responsibility that falls on the shoulders of women is thus significant. In many cases, it is up to them to collect or at least complete the 'daily expenses'. Women's participation is obviously not new. However, for over thirty years, the rate of women's participation in income-generating activities has been increasing and economic hardship has reduced the ability of many male heads of household to shoulder the burdens of the domestic economy alone (or nearly so), particularly in polygamous households. Women's involvement in the domestic economy is significant, although they appear rarely to be the main breadwinner. The extent of their involvement is difficult to assess, as the data that can be collected is uncertain and should be treated with caution. In the early 2000s, direct observation of a dozen households and a questionnaire survey of 350 people suggested that women's actual participation was generally higher than that reported in the interviews,

although it is not possible to assess this difference precisely.[4] Finally, the information obtained in the first few months of my fieldwork from interviews on household management proved to be radically different from the more fragmentary and partial knowledge I acquired on some of the households in the survey as my fieldwork progressed on other topics: in the interviews conducted at the beginning of the survey, women systematically minimised their participation in the home economy.

Speeches by both women and men on the domestic economy are characterised by their formalism and the recurrence of stereotyped statements in which the husband's position of authority is acknowledged, and associated with the principles that order the distribution of domestic expenses. In their statements, women systematically downplay their participation in the domestic economy. They are characterised by two recurring clichés: 'I work for my own needs' and 'my husband pays, I top up the expenditure'. In general, such statements are associated with assertions, also stereotyped, of the husband's position of authority: 'the wife is her husband's slave', 'he decides everything', 'for everything, I ask for his authorization'. Such discourses can also be heard when it comes to women's economic activity: 'I work with the authorization of my husband', 'I asked my husband for permission to work', etc. Such platitudes establish a connection between the authority of the husband (as head of the household) and the domestic economy analogous to the one established in Islamic principles.

The aesthetics of discourse: beautiful talk and discretion

Daily life presents few opportunities to hear conversations about the distribution of burdens in the domestic economy. Financial arrangements between husband and wife(s) are subject to *sutura*, discretion. 'Issues of lack of "DQ" (daily expenses, [lit. *dépense quotidienne*]) are not to be discussed (outside of the household). We practise *sutura*. It's problematic to talk about such things. People see you doing that and they think you're destitute. It's a question of honour' (dixit a housewife, annoyed by my questions about household finances).

In Wolof society, the morality of *sutura*, the sense of discretion, is an essential principle of social interaction. To demonstrate *sutura* means not revealing or mentioning publicly anything that might bring another person into disrepute or back them into a corner (their faults, weaknesses, etc.) so as to show only what makes them respectable and promotes good relations. Discretion aims at doing what is 'beautiful' (*rafet*), i.e. keeping up appearances in accordance with an ideal of harmony and peace. No mistakes, problems or conflicts should be explicitly brought to public knowledge or even addressed directly. *Sutura* is not so much about honour as about potential shame: what matters is the preservation of appearances. Shame is predicated on public exposure: only a negative thing exposed publicly is a source of dishonour.

As Boubacar Ly (1966: 364) points out, *sutura* is linked to the notion of *kersa. Kersa* is the valorisation of restraint, modesty and self-control in all things: temper, speech, relationship to food, sexuality, etc. All forms of expression, everything that manifests itself in

[4] Some expenses, daily or otherwise, were not taken into account.

a person, whether it be words, conduct or emotions, must be controlled and restrained. To demonstrate *kersa* is to act calmly, controlling one's gestures, the display of one's emotions and, of course, one's words: to speak without raising one's voice, and relatively deeply, not to speak in public, not to sing someone's praises and, above all, to show discretion (*sutura*). *Kersa* is both an essential moral principle of social life, but also the value that statutorily distinguishes caste people (*ñeeño*), especially griots (*gewel*), from the rest of the population who do not belong to a caste (*géér* usually translated as 'nobles'[5]). Judith Irvine has studied in detail the link between discourse and social hierarchies between 'castes' in Wolof-speaking Senegal. According to her (1990), a real 'language ideology' articulates the distinction between 'noble' people and griots to verbal conduct in relation to *kersa*. In particular, she contrasts two 'styles of speech' that differ on the different levels of language (prosody, phonology, morphology, syntax and rhythm): 'noble-talk' (*waxu geér*), considered morally superior to the 'griot-talk' (*waxu gewel*).

Stereotypical discourses surrounding the husband's authority and household finances are about a hierarchical relationship pertaining to Islam, not caste. However, they are part of the same linguistic ideology. The morality of self-consciousness (*kersa*) and discretion (*sutura*) do not only imply that one should cast a veil of silence over that whereof one may not speak. As with griots, discretion is more or less directly associated with a speech genre, called *wax ju rafet*, literally 'beautiful talk' in Wolof. Beautiful talk is not the prerogative of griots, although they are recognised as experts in it. It is a speech genre that consists of saying only positive and valued things about a person, an act or a situation in order to make the relationship beautiful (*rafet*) through the speech. To put it another way, beautiful talk is wholly about embellishing (*rafetal*) through speech.

Sutura is a value in general, but a wife's words to preserve her husband's position are, according to my interlocutors, the archetypal example of this. It is part of the fundamentally hierarchical relationship in which the husband has authority over his wife. Insofar as possible, spouses display that they get along, their 'mutual understanding' (*maslaa*), and work together, through their stereotypical speeches or their silences, to preserve the husband's position. The asymmetry of the marriage relationship is, literally, unquestionable and wives' beautiful talk keep up appearances. In other words, this speech genre is undeniably the manifestation of a hierarchical relationship. My hypothesis is that it is not, however, indicative of a form of domination, but rather of the mode of being of the hierarchical relationships associated with Islam.

Conspicuous recognition of the authority of marabouts

The conspicuous declaration of authority is not unique to spousal relationships. In the Wolof context, it is a frequent aspect of the authority relations associated with Islam. In this respect, it is comparable to the relationship between marabout and disciple, which has a similar register: a relationship of authority, also marked by formalism, as many researchers have

[5] On the question of statutory categories, see discussion in Moya (2017: 81-115; 320-322).

demonstrated (see, for example, Audrain, 2004; Copans, 1980; Cruise O'Brien, 2002; Diop, 1981). A comparison between these two types of relationship of authority allows us to question the significance of efforts made to maintain a particular form of discourse about certain relationships at the cost of what may appear, from the outside, either as hypocrisy or as the expression of power relationships.

The religious, political and social importance of Muslim brotherhoods (*tarixa*) in Senegal and in the diaspora is well-known. And the marabout-disciple relationship is at the heart of most studies of the role and power of Senegalese Sufi brotherhoods. I will focus on the Mouride brotherhood[6] in which this relationship has been particularly discussed. Mouride *talibés* describe their situation vis-à-vis their marabout by ostensibly proclaiming their allegiance to the sheikh and their absolute obedience to his recommendations (*ndigel*) (Cruise O'Brien, 2002; Audrain, 2004). Such discourses may be prompted by a researcher's questions when interviewing disciples about their relationship to their marabout or to the brotherhood in general. But also, in conversations about religion, in everyday life or about politics, one regularly hears disciples proclaim their devotion and obedience in all things to the head of the brotherhood and/or to their marabout.

Disciples also regularly make offerings to their marabout: in the past, free labour in the fields of the holy man, today, monetary gifts (*addiya*). In Thiaroye-sur-mer, for instance, most people's relationship to their marabout is limited, at best, to a visit (*ziara*) once (or perhaps a few times) a year to give him a donation. This is often done collectively, the gift being given in the name of a localized prayer group (*dahira*). The disciples clearly acknowledge that they expect a return from this gift, namely the benefits of the marabout's blessing (*barke*). Moreover, this gift, because it is collective and because of its higher amount, is said to promise more benefits. In urban areas or even in a migratory context, these sums do not represent large sacrifices for each individual.

The vast majority of research has shown that the disciples' discourse of submission should not be taken at face value as an actual recognition of sheikhly dominance. Donal Cruise O'Brien, for example, has strongly emphasised this aspect. According to him:

> The disciple, in affirming his exploitation and subjection, is distorting the reality of his social and economic situation. In his own devotional language, he is in fact boasting. Boasting in varying degrees, certainly, but always boasting nonetheless. And it is logical enough that the disciple should wish to do so, in terms of the doctrine which the saint proclaims and which the loyal disciple must at least appear to accept. The declaration of allegiance, which is made by all disciples, is an engagement of total obedience to the saint 'in this world and the next'. Obedience in this world implies various forms of tribute, in labour, in kind, and in cash. This tribute in turn is ideologically justified by the disciples' access to the saint's charismatic powers of redemption *(baraka),* and by that alone. But Mouride ideology, however logically coherent on its own terms, in fact serves to conceal or disguise important aspects of the real relation between the saint and his disciple. (1975: 62-63)

[6] The Mouride brotherhood (*muridiyya*) was founded by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba at the end of the 19th century in the Baol region of central Senegal. Along with the *Tijaniyya*, it is the most important Sufi brotherhood in the country.

According to Cruise O'Brien, these discourses of ostentatious subjection are part of an ideology, but this ideology does not legitimise a form of exploitation or univocal power. Rather, it conceals the 'real relationship' between the marabout and his disciple. By 'real relationship', Cruise O'Brien means two things: the actual power[7] of the marabout over his disciple and the exchange relationship between the two. Disciples are indeed far from being as unconditionally loyal and obedient as they maintain, be it economically or politically. And disciples expect a material and spiritual return for their submission and gifts (*addiya*) (Cruise O'Brien, 1975).

This analysis seems to me to require clarification on one point. Is there really anything here that is the object of concealment and, if so, who is it being concealed from? For no one is fooled. Neither the marabouts nor the disciples were surprised by the revelations of the 'mouridologists': the 'reality' of the relationship is not a secret for anyone. On the contrary, it is notorious and, for the protagonists in the first place, it is just as obvious, albeit in a different register and on a different level, as the disciple's conspicuous declaration of his subjection. The constitutive principle of this relationship is the *baraka* (divine blessing, *barke* in Wolof) which legitimises the status and authority of marabouts and defines the relationship between men and God through the intermediary of marabouts. The *baraka* is especially manifest in the material success of marabouts and disciples. Finally, marabouts are, by virtue of their *baraka*, mediators between men and God on the one hand and between men on the other. Equality is thus excluded from the relationship between Marabouts and disciples on principle.

There is reciprocity here only from a purely external point of view. In no way or form is the gift to the marabout (*addiya*) or the conspicuous recognition of the marabout's authority (which does not commit to much) placed in an equivalent relationship with the blessing since the relationship is precisely hierarchical. The transactional aspects of the relationship, presented by Cruise O'Brien and many researchers as a kind of external strategy, underlying, even subversive of, the proclaimed authority relationship, or simply as a form of exchange, are rather one of its mainsprings: the marabout is, by definition, a mediator and he is judged, among other things, on his 'results', i.e. his capacity to mediate. There is no need, therefore, to try to reduce this relationship by trying to eliminate, always somewhat arbitrarily, one aspect or another. *Talibés* are neither credulous devotees nor irredeemable calculators, any more than marabouts are. The marabout-disciple relationship, based on the religious value of *baraka*, includes the devotion and gifts of the disciples as well as their material and spiritual expectations. There is nothing contradictory in admitting the different aspects of this relationship, provided that the statutory asymmetry and the importance of mediation are recognised. His status undeniably confers a certain power (deriving from this status) on the marabout as an individual. The marabout can 'legitimately' exercise a certain amount of power (by respecting the forms), but there is also a threshold, which varies according to the context, beyond which he may not tread. Doing so, entails overstepping his remit and committing an

[7] Its capacity to command, to act on the actions of others.

abuse of power (which will be recognised as such) or giving orders that will not be followed, particularly in political matters.[8]

In this configuration, the conspicuous declaration of submission to the authority of the marabout by the disciple is not a secondary or superficial element. There is an obvious aspect of ostentation or conspicuousness, which is specific to Islam in Senegal. For example, it is not uncommon to come across men, either adults or the elderly, who, in order to display their deep religiosity, carry huge rosaries and ceaselessly chant *bismillahi* ('in the name of God') in a voice that is low but loud enough to be heard. Others display, as far as possible, all sorts of images of marabouts or signs of their devotion. But beyond these general aspects, respect for form and, above all, the discourses of conspicuous submission that researchers hear and record are central. Just as wealth and success are manifestations of *baraka*, discourses of conspicuous submission manifest - or publicly display, if you like - hierarchical relationships. Moreover, one becomes a disciple through a speech act by pronouncing one's allegiance/self-giving (*jebalu*) to the marabout. In this way, the disciple acknowledges the spiritual authority of the marabout and accepts the obligations that flow from the relationship. The conspicuous recognition of the marabout's authority is also an act that is valued as a reaffirmation of this initial declaration of allegiance. It is the reiteration of a performative act. This speech genre is simply affirming that the disciple is a disciple and recognising the marabout as such. Such stereotypical discourses have no direct connection with any actions of the disciple, but ultimately this lack of connection does not matter. The disciple's deference is the exact opposite of a cynical posture.[9] It is the manifestation of the constitutive character accorded to the respect for form.

The 'boasting' of disciples noted by Cruise O'Brien is not a demonstration of pride, but speech genre : beautiful talk that embellish the relationship with the marabout. In this respect, it may evoke *la langue de bois* (wooden language[10]), which, like *beau parler* (smooth speech), is a form of expression that is generally devalued in French, just for instance as are clichés or embellishment. However, this devaluation shows that discourse is still fundamentally understood as standing in a special relationship to reality or truth (whether facts, opinions, feelings, etc.) and not, for example, to an aesthetic norm. The transactional dimension, as well as the discourse of absolute submission, are constitutive of this relationship. The 'beautiful' rhetoric of the disciples is the form in which the fundamentally hierarchical relationship between marabout and *talibé*, established in Islam, is manifest. Disciples' conspicuous declarations of their submission to the authority of the marabout do not conceal anything (neither the disciples' autonomy, nor their expectations of return) for the simple reason that they are not intended to be illusory. These speeches express clichés in a stereotyped phraseology that has no direct link with the marabout's actual power over his disciple and the latter's obedience. They are nonetheless the form – i.e. the mode of being - of this relationship.

[8] For example, the speeches of the marabouts in favour of the incumbent president during the 2000 presidential election did not prevent the opposition candidate from winning (Samson, 2000; Dahou, Foucher, 2004). See also the work of Leonardo Villalòn on the limits of the influence of marabouts on local politics in the medium-sized town of Fatick (Villalòn, 2006: 193-199).

[9] In the philosophical sense of disregard for convention.

[10] The use of fixed talking points to avoid answering questions directly or addressing the 'reality' of a situation.

Norm aesthetics, power and hierarchical relations

The marabout-*talibé* relationship and the relationship between spouses share, from a formal point of view, several comparable features. Both are characterised, first of all, by the conspicuous declaration of authority, recognised and established on the basis of Islam. The authority of the husband and that of the marabout are, moreover, designated by the same term: both are *kilifa*, a term of Arabic origin which means 'authority' or 'chief' in Wolof. Moreover, both relationships are constituted by an act of submission. *Jébbalu* means the solemn act by which a disciple pledges allegiance to a marabout. The consummation of the marriage on the wedding night, which concludes the Muslim wedding ritual (*takk,*) is referred to as *jébbale*. These two terms are not identical, but have the same root. Finally, both relationships have an important transactional aspect: on the one hand, the maintenance of the wife by the husband and, on the other, the gifts of the disciples and, above all, the benefits of the marabout's *baraka*, which are manifested in the world, notably, by material wealth.

This comparison calls for caution. The conspicuous declaration of the husband's authority or the downplaying by wives of their contribution to household finances are, no more than that of the *talibé* vis-à-vis his marabout, proofs of the credulous recognition and fatalistic acceptance by women of their 'domination'. On the contrary, like the disciples, wives know very well what they are doing (or, to put it another way, their speeches are intentionally formalised): they consciously downplay their importance in the domestic economy and claim their subordination, which is in this context a valorising and valued attitude.

The relative silence[11] around the 'reality' of domestic economics, the stereotyped speeches of both sides must be understood as what they are: 'beautiful talk' (i.e. wooden language). Beautiful talk in this situation is indicative of the importance voluntarily given to the recognition of the husband's authority, which as it is instituted by divine law, is *constitutive* of the relationship between spouses, whatever the 'reality' of this relationship. If there is strategising at play, understood in the language of choice, it does not have power as its object, but rather the discursive preservation of the fundamental asymmetry constitutive of the relationship. The apparent respect for authority relations in Islam, whether between spouses or between marabout and disciple, is above all an aesthetic of discourse, not of one of action. The authority on which the relationship between husband and wife and that between marabout and disciple are based comes from Islam, an order of values that governs the relationship between men and God. The principles that govern these relationships are therefore considered universal and transcendent, and cannot therefore be discussed (and are not discussed). However, the stereotypical discourses of wives and disciples, as well as their 'beautiful talk' that embellish the 'reality' of authority relationships, are not a mere consequence of Islamic norms. They are part of a linguistic ideology, which results from the

[11] Of course, not all discourses on home economics embellish the financial 'reality'. It is common for women to criticise husbands for not supporting their wives financially or, in polygamous households, for women to blame their husbands for favouring one wife over them.

conjunction of these universal normative principles with a system of moral principles, which value the preservation of appearances.

My purpose here is not to undertake the converse demystification to that assayed by Pierre Bourdieu (2002), when he highlights the reality of male domination beneath appearances. I argue instead that there is nothing to reveal. Conspicuous speeches of submission and 'beautiful talk' in general conceal nothing, neither a *de facto* equality nor a relationship of power or symbolic domination. Of course, however formalised the assertion of the husband's authority, in many cases some husbands still exercise actual power over their wives. However, as Adjamagbo, Antoine and Dial note, 'it is as if equality in the household is not a crucial objective for women' (2004: 269). To put it another way, neither equality nor power, let alone rivalry, correctly describes the relationship between spouses. The authority of the husband, a recognised constitutive principle of the spousal relationship, is clearly distinguished from relations of power or exchange. The conspicuous declaration of the husband's authority signals that the spousal relationship is one of authority. It indicates nothing about the actual power relations or the nature of the private relationships between husband and wife. The same is true of stereotypical discourses on household finances insofar as the distribution of expenses within the household is understood in reference to Islam and the authority of the husband. Beautiful talk embellishes the marital relationship and makes it appear to conform to the Islamic norm. Keeping up appearances is not a stage set to hide the reality, but the way the norm is respected. Indeed, it is the relationship of the discourse to the norm that is valued, not the relationship of the discourse to the reality of the financial relationship between spouses.

Because of economic difficulties and women's necessary involvement in income-generating activities, they also participate in domestic finances. Herein lies the paradox: because the form of the discourse is given and does not change, the gap between the financial aspect on the one hand and stereotypical discourse and rhetoric about the authority of the husband on the other widens and becomes more obvious. In other words, the greater the importance of women in the domestic economy, the more it is minimised, at the expense of increased formalism. This gap and this formalism are not, however, a sign of increased symbolic violence against wives as they participate in the domestic economy, but of the aesthetics of norm-adherence. They tell us nothing of men's and women's agency or of power relations between spouses.

The limits of discretion (*sutura*) and formalism are very clear: not only is it still difficult for a man without resources[12] to get married, but above all, financial problems put a strain on couples. Muslim marriage is not a sacrament. Divorce is not an impossible prospect and occurs frequently. In the early 1950s, Ames David reported an apparently high rate of divorce among the Wolofs of Gambia (1953: 135). As far as Dakar is concerned, the 1955 census indicates that out of 100 married men, nearly half later divorced at least once and half of the women were married twice. Five years later, Luc Thoré (1964: 531) found a similar figure (44.5% of marriages in his sample ended in divorce). According to Abdoulaye Bara Diop, in the 1970s, in rural areas, nearly half of all unions ended in divorce, mainly for economic reasons (1985: 212-217). In 2001, according to a survey conducted in Dakar, a quarter of marriages failed to

[12] An individual's income is not his or her only resource because of the importance of family solidarity.

last ten years and a third failed to reach twenty (Adjamagbo, Antoine, 2002). In more than 80% of cases, whatever the generation, divorces are initiated by the wife. And the reason most frequently given is lack of maintenance by the husband. The frequency of divorce contradicts the image of submission displayed by women in marriage if it were essentially about power. In a context where a minority of men manage to assume financially their essential duty as head of the household by themselves, the relationship between spouses has not changed in principle. The alternative is either to respect the forms or to end the marriage by divorce without at any time explicitly and permanently calling into question the principle of the husband's authority.

Speaking out publicly to describe the actual distribution of domestic expenses is not a mere description of the facts. It is tantamount to denouncing the husband's inability to support his wife and jeopardising the marriage. The answers given by woman to outsiders' questions about the household finances (such as those posed by anthropologist) should not be understood as the effect of a relationship of domination, but as a deliberate choice that amounts to simply saying whether financial arrangements within the household are satisfactory or not. The formal deference of wives to their husbands should not be taken to mean that the husband is free to spend his money, maintained in any case by a wife who respects his authority. The husband must, when he has resources, provide for his wife or wives and their children. Running a household is not a particularly secretive business. Although there is no joint budget and spouses generally have only partial knowledge of one another's resources, this knowledge is far from zero. It is not uncommon, when the husband keeps money for his own use, gives more importance to his mother than to a wife or, above all, favours a co-wife to her detriment, to see a wife firmly demanding her due, whether for expenses or personal needs. The request is sometimes very explicit: the left hand on the hip, the right extended open in front of the husband: 'give me my share' (*jox ma sama wàll*).

Beautiful talk and autonomy

Discretion and rhetoric preserve the husband's position of authority and lead to the downplaying of the crucial economic role of women in the household. But the Islamic norm governing the relationship between spouses and assigning the wife a subordinate status also gives her real autonomy in financial matters, just as disciples act as they please.

This phenomenon is not new. In her work on female fishmongers, Colette Le Cour Grandmaison showed that in the early 1960s, 'the Islamic principle of assigning to the husband full responsibility for the upkeep of the family and making this obligation unconditional, strengthened the independence of women in the use of their earnings or of the property acquired through their work' (Le Cour Grandmaison, 1969: 148). Thanks to their substantial earnings from trade and the absence of domestic expenses, some women even became owners of *pirogues* (fishing boats), which they eventually entrusted to their husbands as their employee. They then applied the usual rules for sharing the product between boss and employee without, however, calling into question the statutory relationship between spouses (Le Cour Grandmaison, 1979). These are undoubtedly extreme cases. However, today, in

urban areas, all or at least a large part of the sums allocated to domestic management are in practice in the hands of women and are added to the income they earn from their labour. They have cash at their disposal and thus have considerable latitude to manage it as they please. Men's control over the domestic economy is very limited and almost non-existent, in terms of the use women make not only of their own money, but also of the money put into circulation in the domestic context. Women are the main facilitators of informal savings networks, particularly tontines (rotating credit societies), which gives them a considerable capacity for autonomous action (Guérin, 2003; Moya, 2017).

Thus, if a man does not have the means to meet domestic expenses alone, his position is formally preserved, but he is then, to use the wonderful phrasing of one of my interlocutors, 'but a king without an army'. The preservation of his status is accompanied by an absence of control. On the other hand, if an husband's income enables him to meet his obligations, his wife will be relatively free to use her personal resources for her own purposes while managing the cash available for household expenses. Many women, for example, fiercely reject the idea of pooling resources, and some even go so far as to make a small profit on the money spent on domestic management by playing on the difference between retail and wholesale prices. Ultimately, that which is *a priori* the most obvious expression of men's 'power' - the recognition of the husband's authority - is precisely that which allows wives to act beyond the husband's control, and this manifests itself most spectacularly in family ceremonies where women display unparalleled wealth and indulge in financial excesses (*ëpp*) and waste (*yaax*) condemned by all in the name, inter alia, of Islam (Moya, 2015). This is what I call 'the paradox of Islamic norms'.

But is these women's agency obtained at the cost of their subjugation? The paradox of Islamic norms would then echo many works by anthropologists or Africanist political scientists on 'subjectivation' (Audrain, 2004) or the emancipation of what Alain Marie, following Marc Augé, has gone so far as to call 'lineage totalitarianism' (Marie, 1997). I am tempted to say that the question is badly posed. Women's relative autonomy (which can be very important) under the cover of an authority relationship is not the sign of the liberation of a (previously hindered) subject or a kind of counter-hegemonic strategy (Heath, 1992). While the question of individualism is of course worth addressing, it is doubtful whether it can be satisfactorily answered in this way. It is primarily a question of values (Dumont, 1986). The refusal to consider the religious values that institute the relationship of authority and to recognise the value of appearances and beautiful talk leads instead to the fabrication of two erroneous representations of power that correspond to one-another: those of the subjugation of women and disciples (declarations of the husband's authority, formal deference, etc.) and, by a mirror effect, that of their emancipation (financial autonomy in particular).

Discourse, power and truth

There is a current of contemporary anthropology that has taken an interest in 'linguistic ideologies' and has shown that both Melanesian or Indonesian societies marked by massive conversions to Pentecostalism as well as Western critical thinkers (Michel Foucault, Pierre

Bourdieu, Jürgen Habermas...) are haunted by the privileged relationship between language and truth (see e.g. Robbins, 2001). In the context of the marital relationship or that between marabout and disciple, the value of discourse does not lie in its propositional force (its ability to describe - or not - reality). On the contrary, in this case, the relation of the discourse to the truth, to put it briefly, its conformity to the state of the world, to the action or opinion of people (if they say what they think, if they do or do not do such and such a thing really) is subordinated to the conformity of the discourse to the values that order the relations and to the respect of the aesthetics that preserve these values. In Boubacar Ly's beautiful phrase, 'the social lie is [a form of] politeness and social beauty, and as such, it prevails over realism' (1966: 361).

The role of lies and unspoken words in Muslim societies marked by values of honour is well known (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Gilsenan, 1976; Jamous, 1993). It seems to me, however, that in Dakar, the phenomenon is of a somewhat different order. The morality of *sutura* (discretion), *kersa* (modesty, sense of self) and the art of accommodation (*maslaa*) determine discourse. They consist in keeping up appearances and proposing 'beautiful talk' under all circumstances. These embellishments (*rafetal*) through discourse may appear at first sight to be a performance intended to deceive by concealing objective reality (whether that be power or simply the financial reality of domestic management). Yet they are precisely what is valued. In many circumstances, lies, in the sense of assertions contrary to reality (*fen* or *nar*), are condemned and denounced. Beautiful talk, conspicuous declarations of the husband's authority, stereotypical discourses about household finances or submission to the marabout, as well as the morality of discretion (*sutura*) are not intended to deceive or mislead. They do not fall into the category of lying, but into that of beauty (*rafet*). In other words, the privileged mode of being of the hierarchical relations established by Islam is not action (maintaining one's wife, obeying one's husband...), but the aesthetics of discourse.

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