

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF EUROPEAN STUDIES  
EUROPEAN PARADYGM DOCTORAL SCHOOL

*Islamization of Sub-Saharan African Radicalism*  
*Evolution of the Islamic neo-fundamentalist discourse in Senegal*

*PhD thesis abstract*

Coordinator: prof. Sergiu MIȘCOIU, PhD.

PhD student Ciprian–Gabriel OROS

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**Keywords:** Islam, radicalism, discourse theory, fundamentalism, jihad, anti-colonialism, Wahhabism, truth, power, hegemony, religion, politics, West Africa, Quran

## Introduction

The islamization of West-African radicalism is one of the most prominent topics in the public debates of the recent years, with the exacerbation of threats and radical attacks everywhere.<sup>1</sup> African Islam of the last decades has determined, somewhat similar to 1400 years ago, a new expression of the blend of religion and politics, a re-adaptation to the present of a Wahhabist fundamentalist Discourse. It takes over the significance of the anti-colonial struggle and ideologically combines it with religious elements to justify the rejection of Western values, and the transformation of foreigners into ‘the others’, the source of all the problems of African society.

From an historical point of view, Islam has spread to Sub-Saharan Africa since its beginnings, in the seventh-eighth centuries, compelled by the conquerors of Arabs coming from Mecca and Medina, but was often also peacefully facilitated by trade and transport routes from and to the Arab world. The process was relatively slow and gradual, with the new religion overlapping the local beliefs which, most of the time, it embedded or eliminated. As a result, in West Africa, Islam has always been characterized by practices that ‘adapted’ the rigid interpretation of the Quran in favour of a privileged relationship of the Allah believer, much more open and permissive than its original Middle Eastern version.

Starting from the discourse theory methodological elements of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe<sup>2</sup> and the relation between discourse, truth and power, my research analysed the paradigm shift of relations between state and religion, namely the transformation of the political relations in the Sahel, under the influence of the transfer of ‘expertise’ from the Middle East, and under the pressure of Islamic religious fundamentalism.

By choosing the discourse theory as a research method, I had the opportunity to move beyond the first layer of discourse, to its depths, to confirm the main research hypothesis that, in Sub-Saharan Africa, we are witnessing Islamization of radicalism and not radicalization of Islam.

I started from the idea that, at an early stage of West African Islam, local leaders turned to *sharia* and religious reform, in an effort to keep things in control, with the grounding of the local Islamic and pre-Islamic practice blend.<sup>3</sup> Later, at the end of the seventeenth century, with the first

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<sup>1</sup> Roy, *L'échec de l'islam politique*, Edition du Seuil, 1992, p. 124

<sup>2</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *La raison populiste*, Paris: Seuil, 2008, p. 89 - The supporters of the Discourse Theory perceive the capitalist political system as a completely discursive system, governed by the political logic of hegemony, at the expense of apolitical economic logic.

<sup>3</sup> Sakah Saidu Mahmud Lanham, ‘Sharia or Shura: Contenting Approaches to Muslim Politics in Nigeria and Senegal’, in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, June 2014, p. 339

signs of colonialism, the first movements that preach a much more radical form of purification of Islam burst into West Africa: *Jihadul*.

However, in this part of the Islamic world, the ‘Holy war’ goes against foreign influence and domination. We are mostly dealing with political action, and religious action, secondly. Given that in one of the poorest regions in the world, political claims mix with the social ones and lead to the emergence of social radicalism, on which a new type of Islam overlaps perfectly. Subsequently, gradually using an ideological-religious tool as a movement that comes from the outside of its own culture, from which they seek to eliminate any trace of African interference, the anti-colonial jihadists will fight the Western power to regain their independence. And all these come as a combination of West African anti-colonial political and spiritual commitment, dressed with the cape of a holy war, being mandatory to be followed by every believer.

## **Chapter 1. Discourse theory**

The first part of the research includes a conceptual analysis of the discourse theory (TD) for the theoretical fixation of nature, significance and discursive approaches from the perspective of post-structuralism by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and to understand the role of discourse in social construction. Furthermore, I have analysed discursive practices and interdisciplinary approaches that are used in ‘play’ of the various types of discourses, in their attempts to establish themselves in a dominant position and, implicitly, to obtain the status, either temporarily, of hegemonic discourse.

I initially focused on what Jacob Torfing described as the ‘first generation’ of the discourse theory, whose followers are focusing on the semantic aspect of the text, in a type of analysis focused on the study of discourse from a linguistic perspective.<sup>4</sup>

Later, I reviewed the second generation of TD and the interest its followers on the relationship between discourse and power. This approach transcends the initial conception, which perceives discourse limited only to spoken language and to the speaker's strategies. For followers of the second generation of TD, power and discourse cannot be separated, because discourse generates power and is generated by it.

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<sup>4</sup> Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe, and Žižek*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999, p.126

The advocates of the discourse theory, in its incipient phases, asserted that the analysis of the text (written or spoken) is made under the sentence form, its constituents and, in particular, what the author seeks to achieve by using those elements. For Lane, the discourse formula was:

discourse = text + context,

its analysis requires both a linguistic and a pragmatic study.<sup>5</sup> Later, Patrick Charaudeau proposes the following scheme separating the discourse<sup>6</sup>:

STATEMENT + COMMUNICATION SITUATION= DISCOURSE.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe comprise the initiators of the third generation of TD. They follow Foucault's ideas, but eliminate the institutions from the elements that change the discourse and, moreover, postulate the idea that all social practices and institutions are the product of discourse. For the third generation, there is no distinction between discursive and non-discursive, all social relationships being power relations.

While discourses are produced by text, either written or spoken, its meanings and contents transcend beyond this primary level, comprising a series of social practices which influence and often go beyond it.<sup>7</sup> The discourses have the ideatic function of establishing relationships between different social actors by creating forms of common beliefs and meanings of a particular group of individuals who share the same set of rules. Through this, discourses build social identities and contribute to the creation of social relationships between different actors, these functions turning discourse into a form of social practice through which 'individuals actively produce social and psychological realities'.<sup>8</sup>

Due to the development of power relations, the discourse has the capacity to change the social reality, incorporating the ideas, orientations, modes of understanding and the cultural and individual cognitions of the shareholders. The discourse represents the 'distinctive ways to speak/listen and often write, coupled with distinct ways of acting, interacting, evaluating, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing other people and to have various socially recognized identities, tools and technologies engaged in specific social recognition activities'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lane, Ph., *La Périphérie du Texte*, Paris, 1992, p. 7

<sup>6</sup> Charaudeau, P. *Grammaire du Sens et de l'Expression*. Paris: Éd. Hachette, 1992, p. 113

<sup>7</sup> Fairclough N., *Discourse and Social Change*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992

<sup>8</sup> Wetherell, quoted work, p. 193

<sup>9</sup> James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 79

Starting from this idea, Alvesson and Karreman distinguish between the two types of discourses, 'd' and 'D'. The 'd' discourse refers to simple text, conversations, discussions, and other communication elements that appear in contextual interactions. The 'D' discourse refers to historically developed truth systems or regimes that have become institutionalized and act as an authority in terms of treatment and presentation of a subject.<sup>10</sup>

Power is ambivalent: on the one hand, it builds the social world, and on the other it defines the manner in which it is represented. It is both productive and counter-productive.<sup>11</sup> In the first part of his work, Foucault argues that access to universal truth is impossible, as long as it is impossible to place it outside of discursive practices. In the second part, Foucault connects truth and power and argues that truth is 'created' by power, through power systems. The idea is developed by Laclau and Mouffe, for whom the purpose of discourse theory is to understand the changes the social field receives through discursive practices by identifying the interests, types of identities, and the various social movements that are formed by Discourse play.

The entire theoretical work of the third generation of TD is developed around the concepts of hegemony and antagonism.<sup>12</sup> For them, social reality is strictly discursive, and political logic is based on the logic of equivalence and difference, as well as on building a common enemy.<sup>13</sup>

To establish and conceptualize the group identity, political action will aim to annihilate the enemy, 'the others', to allow 'ours' to fully exist. Establishing identity is possible only by defining the common enemy of the group, and, only because of it, the existence of the group is jeopardized. And, by the total annihilation of the enemy Discourse, 'ours' will eventually receive the complete right to existence and, implicitly, to identity.<sup>14</sup> From the point of view of the discourse theory followers, hegemonic practices divert discursive space, by creating the identity of a group, simultaneously with the antagonism of the other. The process involves creating a coherent vision of 'ours', discursively articulated by opposition to the 'others'.

The search for a sense of identity and recognition, political and economic marginalization, the opposition of secular nationalist ideologies, the frustrations of political regimes considered corrupt and atheist, the lack of any educational offer, are only a few of the causes of the growing Islamic radical movements. The last part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century

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<sup>10</sup> see Alvesson and Karreman, quoted work

<sup>11</sup> see Foucault, 1977, quoted work, p.113

<sup>12</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *La raison populiste*, Paris: Seuil, 2008, p. 89

<sup>13</sup> *ibidem*, p. 141

<sup>14</sup> see Laclau, Mouffe, quoted work, p. 125



were marked by the revival and transformation of some radical Discourses, especially the Islamic ones. The demographic explosion, in the poor areas of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, the failure of Soviet social inspirational socialism, the lack of educational resources, and the chaotic urbanization were the generators of a radical trend, whose followers rebelled against the political status quo.

## Chapter 2. Anti-colonial Discourse signifiers

In the second chapter we analysed the particularities of the anti-colonial West-African Islamic Discourse from the perspective of the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, starting from the different perspective of jihad ('the holy war') in Sub-Saharan Africa. I have researched the emergence, development and evolution of the 'holy war' concept and its specific meanings in this part of the world. We started from general to private, to understand the complexity of anti-colonial struggle signifier evolution phenomenon and the specific West-African features. I sought answers to a series of questions to clarify the specificity of jihad in West Africa and the evolution of discursive practices towards neo-fundamentalism.

This part of the research has aimed the study of the West-African anti-colonial political and spiritual commitment, disguised as a holy war, binding for every believer. In West Africa, since the time of the colonial conquest, 'the local variant of Islam was regarded as having the status of an *anti-colonial religion*, due to the fact that Marabou warriors led the most tenacious and successful local resistance of all time'.<sup>15</sup>

Muslim *umma* leaders (Islamic community) justified their political actions that always aimed at obtaining hegemony through an ideological combination of secular elements and religious signifiers that covered the true purpose of the *Holy War*: the anti-colonial rule and the rejection of Western influences. In one of the poorest regions of the world, the anti-colonial political claims mingle with the social ones and lead to the emergence of a kind of radicalism which Islam perfectly overlaps.

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<sup>15</sup> Donal B. Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 32

Towards the middle of the twelfth century, Islamic sufi (Islamic/Muslim brotherhoods) orders were emerging, which would dominate the local religious landscape throughout the next centuries and would render one of the African Islam features of West Africa. It relates to establishing a network of faithful Muslim believers gathered around a central, charismatic figure, a sort of 'saint', a character whose grave is often the place of pilgrimage for his followers. This individual, at the borders between human and divine, possesses a 'divine charisma', *barakat*, which gives him special, mystical powers, and which, through his powers, can mediate the relationship of the believer with Allah. In the vast majority of cases, this individual, half man, half saint, would build his discourse on the struggle for spiritual perfection, but with a strong anti-colonial emphasis and an eminently political approach.

The tradition of initiates, half saints, half men, half religious leaders, half tribe leaders, comes to West Africa from the pre-Islamic age of the animist era. The mediation of the relationship between man and Allah is now done by *marabou*, individuals who have taken the role of the shaman from animistic beliefs and adapted it to Islam, becoming the Quran semi-prophets who have drawn the main principles of Islam from West Africa.<sup>16</sup>

The 'turning point' of Islam in the Sub-Saharan area takes place towards the end of the seventeenth century with the emergence of European colonialism, when the first movements burst into West Africa, spreading a radical form of Islam purification: *anti-colonial jihad*, 'holy war' against foreign influence and domination. And to fight against the European colonizer, a 'holy war' is absolutely necessary, to which all members of the Islamic community need to participate. Therefore, the first 'jihad' movements in West Africa, mainly anti-colonial, took place somewhere at the end of the seventeenth century. Margaret Hill believes that the religious movements of Mauritania are the first signs of change, in a society divided between the warrior class and the clergy. That is, between two different Islamic Discourses. And, if in his era, the clergyman Nasir al Din failed in his attempt to set the *sharia*, two centuries later, the jihad movements of Senegambia overthrew the rule of law and imposed Islamic law, for the first time, but with a political approach, hidden under the dome of an early Islam.<sup>17</sup>

All leaders of these early anti-colonial radical movements convince their followers to fulfil the 'divine will' and use their own ascetic life to give the example of the other Muslims interested

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<sup>16</sup> *ibidem*, p.148

<sup>17</sup> Hill, quoted work, p. 12)

in jihad. But they always keep in mind the main reason for their war: the fight against imperialist domination. The motivation of the first Jihadi is quite simple to understand: religion had been corrupted, the state no longer exists, the foreigners/'others' are the masters of this world, and therefore 'we', the prophet's followers, are bound to overthrow the order of the world and establish the *sharia*. The 'other' undermined the foundations of Islam itself by legitimizing foreign innovations of religious dogma, by accepting adultery, by using fermented beverages, passion for fun, singing and dancing, neglecting daily prayers, and refusing to help the poor.'<sup>18</sup>

The paradox comes not so much from motivation, but especially from the method. Using an ideological-religious movement as a tool that comes from the outside of its own culture (Islam from the Arabic Peninsula) from which they seek to eliminate any trace of African interference, the anti-colonial Jihadi will fight the Western power to regain their independence. And all these come as a combination of West African anti-colonial political and spiritual commitment, dressed with the cape of a holy war, being mandatory to be followed by every believer.

Gradually, the specific confessional movement of West African Islam entered a phase of reconfiguration, the new transformations breaking the monopoly of the conjugal relationship - political power and creating more power centres with multiple actors. In recent years, the plurality of heirs of the Confederate 'empire' has led to attempts to create a space of expression in a deaf struggle for power. All this time, with an external influence coming from the Middle East countries, exporting Islamic fundamentalism, the development of a fundamentalist reformist movement becomes visible.

Located primarily in urban centres, several non-governmental organizations funded by Saudi Arabia claim returning to *salafiya* (the original Islam) and claim *ad-litteram* observance of the Quran and sunna. In its aggressiveness, the new reformist current vehemently waives the withdrawal from all practices considered contrary to Islamic orthodoxy, essentially confreric Islam.

This new fundamentalist Discourse comprises of the full deconstruction of the *marabou* system and especially of the *marabou-talibe* relationship, which is, in fact, the very foundation of it. New orientations go to the replacement of traditional Islamic schools (*daaras*), where the *talibee* depend exclusively on marabou will and where the Quran is memorized, to a dual, Franco-Arabian, bilingual education system, where the student studies Islamic sacred texts with a *salafiya* approach.

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<sup>18</sup> Oliver, R., Atmore, A., *Africa since 1800*, Third Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 65

All this is happening in a West African society, in full social crisis marked by the uncontrolled population growth and artificial urbanization that leaves a place for a neo-fundamentalist approach, destroying the traditional customer relations between political authorities and the marabout.<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of political Islam is generally attributed to the spectacular defeat of the Arab states to Israel, in 1967. The defeat marked the end of the pan-Arabic era and the beginning of some ‘revival’ movements of ‘Islamic brotherhoods’. At this time, social entities like the tribe or ethnic group become important players in the political landscape. Modern state institutions, political parties, trade unions, non-governmental organizations coexist with post-tribal organization and the idea of a utopian Caliphate. On the other hand, in contrast, the militant-violent Islam Discourse rejects any form of legitimation of the modern state or of an international order, seeking to return to the original caliphate of the Prophet Mohammed, and to reject any elements of the Western world.

Although they share a number of anti-imperialist signifiers, the emergence of political Islam has always been seen as an alternative to communism in the struggle against the ‘Great Satan’, represented by Western civilization and modernism. For the advocates of the anti-colonial Islamic discourse, the system and the existence of a single party represented the nodal points, at the expense of multi-partiality considered to be a mark of Western imperialism. Multiparty critics have feared an alleged ‘braking’ of the political life that the West might use to impose its own political agenda. Moreover, by a democratic system, the imperialists would seek to weaken the Islamic community and promote their own interests, especially those of an economic nature. The effort is to create a Muslim state backed by a society based on the rejection of Western values, the Muslim Brotherhood believing that after the collapse of colonial regimes and the gain of independence, Muslim states will be short-term, as nation-states, whereas, in the long run, they will unite to form the Islamic Caliphate.

### **Chapter 3. Neo-fundamentalist Discourse**

In Chapter three, I analysed the emergence, evolution, and peculiarities of the West African neo-fundamentalist Discourse. In particular, I focused on the phenomenon of the anti-colonial

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<sup>19</sup> *ibidem*, p. 119

struggle migration from the discursive practices of the Islamic Discourse to the neo-fundamentalist Discourse. I have studied the transition from moderate Islamic religious confessions to fundamentalism, and then to Salafism. I focused on analysing the *jihad* mobile signifier of migration against foreign domination, as the nodal point underlying the entire discourse construction.

I have analysed the assumption that there is no distinction between the political sphere and religion in Islam and I have noticed that, in practice, despite the multitude of approaches to the Islamic phenomenon combined with the many divisions of different religious groups, the separation between the sacredness of the religious and political act is impossible, political actions being justified by reference to the religious act.<sup>20</sup>

Subsequently, in order to understand the mechanisms of the discourse theory by which the Islamic message is converted into a political message, we would turn our attention to the emergence in Egypt of the Muslim Brotherhood, an initially religious and, above all, social organization, to the original society of Islam.

Initially, the term *fundamentalism* was used to describe the Christian-Protestant origins of the 1920s and their struggle against modernism.<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, 50 years later, the term was taken over by Islamic religious movements during the Islamic Revolution in Iran, when it designated the struggle for returning to the foundations of religion and for imposing a form of political governance in line with Islamic values and principles.<sup>22</sup> Since that time, Islamic fundamentalism has become the major meaning bearer of the term, although there is no consensus, to date, on its exclusive use nor on its negative connotation.<sup>23</sup> In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between ‘Islamic’ and ‘Islamist’, where the first term represents a political trend of religious orientation, while the second term designates a variety of fundamentalist political forms that aim at imposing, sometimes violent, the role of Islam in society and politics, with the aim of establishing an Islamic Caliphate, following the model of the Prophet Muhammad's first Caliphate.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Sedgwick, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 2/2007, Published by: University of California Press Stable, p. 12, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2007.11.2.6> Accessed: 20-02-2018

<sup>21</sup> Aliva Mishra, *Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia A Comparative Study of Pakistan and Bangladesh*, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles 2012, p. 284

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 285

<sup>23</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *The new Cold War? Religious nationalism confronts the secular state*, Berkeley:University of California Press., 1993, p. 2

<sup>24</sup> Bassam Tibi, (1998).*The challenge of fundamentalism: Political Islam and the new world disorder*. Berkeley: University of California Press., 1998, p. 13

Starting from the thesis of Guilian Denoeux, which defines Islamic fundamentalism as ‘a form of Islamic instrumentalization by individuals, groups of individuals or organizations pursuing purely political purposes and importing differentiated and adapting/inventing, in the present society, concepts borrowed from Islamic tradition’, I studied the concepts borrowed from the Muslim tradition by neo-fundamentalist movements and the way this phenomenon is taking place.<sup>25</sup>

The emergence of Islamic fundamentalism is generally attributed to the spectacular defeat of the Arab states to Israel, in 1967. The defeat marked the end of the pan-Arabic era and the beginning of some ‘revival’ movements of ‘Islamic brotherhoods’, which will then pose challenges to the existence of Muslim states. Above all, I focused on studying the role of the state and of the authoritarian regimes that emerged in the 60-70s, in increasing the influence of the Islamist movements in the Middle East and the transfer to West Africa. I have analysed how the power vacuum and the anarchy that followed the changes since the independence of the new sub-Saharan states have determined the Muslim population of the region paradoxically see Islamic movements as the hope for peace and social development.

In the West African socio-political landscape, there is a visible contrast between two irrefutable irreconcilable approaches, both of which are considered reformist, in their own way. On the one hand, I speak of a ‘traditional’ Islam, essentially Islamic religious confreries, with very few changes over the last 50 years. On the contrary, I have also observed the emergence of another radical, fundamentalist discourse, relatively recent, with elements of origin from the countries exporting religious extremism in the Middle East, who consider the traditional Discourse to be discordant and, above all, corrupt. The dichotomy of the two Discourses is intended to be of conflict between ‘traditionalism’ and ‘modernism’, in a dispute based predominantly on an ideological conflict stemming from the presumption of the existence of a ‘pure Islam’, ‘of the beginnings’, ‘from the time of the Prophet’.

In the process of developing the Islamic fundamentalist Discourse, the anti-colonial *jihad* are taken over, along with those of *justice* and *inequality* between the *North* and the *South*. Hassan al-Banna, one of the first promoters of the Islamic fundamentalist discourse, explicitly asserts that

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<sup>25</sup> see Denoeux, quoted work

the Muslim world needs a new conceptualization and ideology in order to combat the imperialist ambitions of the decadent West, but starting from earlier models.<sup>26</sup>

Particularly seen as a political and religious movement, fundamentalism occurs in Sub-Saharan Africa with the Cold War, during the polarization of international politics. From the beginning, the fundamentalist Discourse is more than just a rejection of modernity, aspirations being those of a universality of the Islamic message and, therefore, a change of world order. Religion is imposed in its original sense and literally interpreted as a fundamental principle of establishment of the entire society. The call to the so-called *return to original Islam* is the effort to impose Islamic law, the *sharia*, in all social, economic, political and cultural strata, in a fundamentalist doctrinal vision, known as the '*nizam al Islami*' (Islamic order- ar.)<sup>27</sup>

By analysing the situation from the perspective of the constituents of Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory, I note that while the Islamic Discourse contains the meanings of an Islam that inspires and rebuilds the generally moderate political activity, and tends to impose religious values in political life and in international relations, in the totally opposite sense, the fundamentalist Discourse, although taking over an important part of Islam signifiers, seeks to gain hegemony through violent popular jihad. Gilles Kepel calls this phenomenon 'bottom-up Islamization'.<sup>28</sup> In addition, it should be noted that both Discourses essentially have the same purpose, namely achieving political hegemony and the construction of a totalitarian theocratic state.

By analysing the emergence of West African Islamic fundamentalism, I came to the conclusion that this was a result of a combination of endogenous and exogenous factors that formed the complex and multidimensional character of this discourse.<sup>29</sup> The existence of a corruption culture, up to the highest level, poor distribution of social resources and chaotic urbanization have been the triggers of a profound crisis in society. Another important factor was the globalization process initiated by the Western states, at the end of the Cold War. This change came with the gradual entry into the West African culture of the political elements and, above all, the cultural, secular origin of the West, which initially marginalized and then even led to the exclusion of the local religious elite. These are elements of Westernism, coming from outside the community,

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<sup>26</sup> Al Banna apud Sedgwick, quoted work, p. 13

<sup>27</sup> Kelsay, quoted work, p. 118

<sup>28</sup> see Kepel, quoted work

<sup>29</sup> Mishra, quoted work 285. The fundamentalist discourse was primarily the source of the symptoms of a West African society in crisis emerging in the years after the declaration of independence from the European colonizing powers.

imposed by ‘foreigners’, which fundamentally change the political and socio-cultural landscape, turning the ‘other’ into the source of all the problems of the Islamic community.

The modernization of the state and the copying of Western models led, according to Islamic movements, to the loss of autonomy that the institutions governing the traditional Muslim political system benefited from, and in the void left by them, radical forms of Islamic fundamentalist discourse appeared.<sup>30</sup>

The peculiarity of these groups of young people is that, while in the past, the message of Islamic movements was articulated by the *ulema* (members of the Islamic clergy), as official issuers of all kinds of socio-political movements in the Muslim world, urbanized youth replaces this form of control with a new form of fundamentalism manifestation: the revival of the Imam's institution and the renunciation of the mediation by the *ulema* of the relationship between the believer and Allah. The marabu are accused of perpetuating *jahiliyya* (ignorance), and thus have assured total control on society, at any level. Their sin is all the more serious, as they allied themselves with the ‘others’ against ‘ours’ and thus accepted the domination of foreigners over an Islamic land.

Throughout West Africa, the Islamic fundamentalist followers copied the success story of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and developed a network of various religious organizations whose role was mainly to provide the community with social services that the state had been unable to provide them. In this way, a new, autonomous public sphere was created, which provoked the political status quo, following the pattern of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In the early 1990s, a number of intellectuals and members of the social elite became the spokespersons for re-affirming Islamic traditions and for Islamizing everyday life.<sup>31</sup>

In the new world, modelled according to the Prophet Medina, the neighbourhood mosque, led by an imam and not by a member of the ulema, as in the past, reverts to the centre of social activism, the basis on which to retreat to the lost territory, and this work is done with megaphones and loud messages. We are dealing with an Islamic space, which has started to be heard.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *ibidem*, p. 548 Popular support came immediately, especially among the poor young people, forced to leave their homes to find a point in the new urban centres under construction, but where they failed to find their own identity.

<sup>31</sup> Levtzion, quoted work, p. 549 Here, the fundamentalist discourse manifested itself from the very beginning with violence, through direct confrontation with the members of the Sufi religious confreries, accused them of apostasy, especially because of the cult of the ancestral worship and the removal from what they considered to be the Right Way of Islam.

<sup>32</sup> *ibidem*, p. 131



Gradually, the development of new technologies has made it easier for the community to gain access to various variants of Muslim religious dogma, other than the traditional sufi, which has gradually led to the erosion of traditional forms of religious message dissemination.<sup>33</sup> In addition, direct access to Islamic Radical Discourse emitters has led to controversy over the originality of the message received from several generations through marabou intermediation. Thus, an entire social group starts a discrete dissociation of the community, to which it complains about heading to the wrong path. However, the claims of this group are of a social and economic nature rather than of a religious nature. In the process, the Islamic fundamentalist Discourse the anti-colonial *jihad* signifiers are taken over, along with those of *justice* and *inequality* between the *North* and the *South*.

A radical variant of Islamism, neo-fundamentalism, distinguished itself by choosing the means of gaining political power, but also by the high degree of radicalism in discourse. The neo-fundamentalists try to destroy the whole democratic political system from the bottom and replace it with a *sharia*-based law, essentially a form of dictatorship. The use of the *Holy War* (*jihad*) signifier is taken from the old Islamic Discourse, where it was given value in every aspect of social life. In the new form, it retains these attributes, but receives the element of political activism, in addition, as a sacred responsibility of each believer. The Force of the Islamic ideology has the role of creating the radical dimension of the new fundamentalist Discourse, at the same time with a kind of Islamic universalism, opposed to secular Occidentalism.

## **Chapter 4. Islamization of West-African Radicalism Research among young Muslims in Dakar**

The most comprehensive part of the research has been focused on the case study, in chapter four, where I investigated the islamization of Senegal radicalism and its transformation into neo-fundamentalism, namely of the influence which radical movement leaders receive from the states exporting religious extremism, through the local imams/marabouts.

I have taken into account the fact that, in West Africa, Islamism and, later, islamic neo-fundamentalism have come, first of all, as a result of the political collapse of the end of colonialism

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<sup>33</sup> Schulz, quoted work, p. 153

in the 1960s, which led to the inability of states to manage their internal situation and, hence, to serious social problems and inequities caused by the disastrous economic situation.

I have analysed the radicalism islamization of youth from the capital of the Republic of Senegal and its transformation into neo-fundamentalism, namely of the influence which radical movement leaders receive from the states exporting religious extremism, through the local imams. I started from the hypothesis that Senegal is the archetype of the West African state<sup>34</sup>, where Islam, as a political movement, and then Islamic neo-fundamentalism, first came, as a result of the political collapse of the end of colonialism in the 1960s, which led to the inability of states to manage their internal situation and, therefore, to serious social problems and inequities caused by the disastrous economic situation. Over time, with the development of colonialism, the state, as political entity, has taken on a secondary role. The local population has given the state less and less legitimacy, most often deeming the central organization as a threat to its own sovereignty.

In order to determine the level of radicalization of the Muslim society in West Africa and to understand the influence that African radicalists receive from the Islamic fundamentalist exporting countries, I conducted a sociological research on a target group of 107 Muslim men, aged between 18 and 45, from the popular Grand Yoff neighbourhood in Dakar, Senegal. I have studied their level of religiosity and degree of radicalization, correlated with their attitude towards the West and their behaviour towards various daily life situations.

In order to analyse and interpret the data obtained through the questionnaire, I conducted 7 sociological interviews, the results of which I subsequently crossed with those obtained through a focus group (collective interview).

By combining the quantitative method with the qualitative one, which is more complex (triangulation), I intend to establish the degree of completeness, the level of knowledge and the accuracy of the subjective reflections arising from the quantitative research.

In order to determine the level of radicalization of Muslim society in West Africa and to understand the influence radicalized youth receive from Islamist fundamentalist exporting countries, as well as to confirm/refute, in terms of the discourse theory, the research hypothesis according to which, in West Africa, there is a process of Islamization of the radical Discourse, we

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<sup>34</sup> Mamadou Diouf, 'Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal' in *Religion, Culture, and Public Life*, Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 170

have analysed the sociological data obtained by triangulation.<sup>35</sup> By combining the quantitative method with the qualitative one, which is more complex (triangulation), I intend to establish the degree of completeness, the level of knowledge and the accuracy of the subjective reflections arising from the quantitative research.<sup>36</sup>

After performing the complete analysis of the data obtained by correlating the two research methods (the questionnaire and the qualitative method - depth and focus group), I put them in the theoretical context structured by discourse theory theorists, to understand the socio-political state of affairs, following to capture the time of change as an indication of religious Islam, into political Islam, and the reasons why neo-fundamentalist Discourse is seen as an alternative to Occidentalism, secularization and materialism.

## 5. Conclusions

In West Africa, Islam emerged through the Arab merchants who crossed the Sahara, and brought a new religion, together with their goods. Over the course of a few centuries, there has been a voluntary blend of local traditions, with Muslim practices in this area, as the average population has increasingly accepted the new reality. In an effort to avoid losing control, with the grounding of the local Islamic and pre-Islamic practices, local leaders returned to *sharia* and the religious reform, and by the end of the seventeenth century, with the emergence of colonialism, the first movements that spread the radical cleansing of Islam also broke out in West Africa: *Anti-colonial jihad* - a radical political movement against the 'other', the 'foreigner' and the values the latter represents.

Over time, Islam has played a fundamental role in creating 'globalizing' Discourses that have taken on the elements of a material emergence radicalism, which overlapped specific values of African tradition and, in particular, the legacy of Western colonialism. As we have seen in this part of the world, Islam has penetrated through a variety of means, making a kind of symbiosis between local specifics and new Muslim values.

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<sup>35</sup> see Septimiu Chelcea, Course: *Tehnici de cercetare sociologică*, Bucharest, SNSPA, 2001

<sup>36</sup> 'Triangulation' method - This is a method of analysis for sociological data, prepared by Norman K. Denzin. The author used the concept of methodological triangulation, by combining several types of research, considering that the use of a single method of sociological research is scientifically irrelevant.

With the emergence of the first forms of anti-colonial jihad, the struggle against foreign domination and influence, against external intervention, will turn the ‘other’, the ‘foreigner’ into the main source of Evil that threatens the Islamic community. One by one, the Holy War signifiers will be taken over by each of the various Discourses that will fight for hegemony.

Particularly seen as a political and religious movement, fundamentalism occurs in Sub-Saharan Africa with the Cold War, during the polarization of international politics. From the beginning, the fundamentalist Discourse is more than just a rejection of modernity, aspirations being those of a universality of the Islamic message and, therefore, a change of world order. Islam is imposed in its original sense and literally interpreted as a fundamental principle of establishment of the entire society. The call to the so-called *return to original Islam* is the effort to impose Islamic law, *sharia*, in all social, economic, political and cultural strata, in a fundamentalist doctrinal vision, known as the ‘*nizam al Islami*’ (Islamic order- ar.)<sup>37</sup>

Based on the charisma of the movement leaders, just as we have seen that the Islamic brotherhoods is also happening, the followers of the sub-Saharan Islamic fundamentalist ideas create a whole network of social support that enters the deepest layers of Islamic society. In the same way that the first anti-colonial jihad followers acted, Islamic fundamentalists have purely political purposes, ‘providing political answers to the challenges of civil society by imagining a future whose foundations are based on concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition, whose meaning they acknowledge’.<sup>38</sup> This approach is taken from the ideology of Sayyid Qutb, the ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. According to him, the whole world would be on the edge of a abyss and only Islam, as a complete social and political system, can save it. However, in order for this to happen it is necessary to trigger *jihad* against those who have changed the direction of the Islamic world, of ‘foreigners’, in general. And to accomplish this task coming directly from Allah, anything is permitted.<sup>39</sup>

The Islamic fundamentalist Discourse fills the gap left by the loss of confidence in marabu and sufi confreric Islam, in a society where Western consumerism and the values of European imperialism have reached the most intimate community resorts. The new imams, the main propagandists of the neo-fundamentalist Discourse, without religious preparation at marabou level, have taken over from them the signifiers of social justice and used them in combination with anti-

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<sup>37</sup> Kelsay, quoted work, p. 118

<sup>38</sup> Denoëux, quoted work, p. 61

<sup>39</sup> Olivier Roy, *La Peur de l’islam - Dialogues avec Nicolas Truong*, La Tour d’Aigues, Éditions de l’Aube, 2015, p. 101

colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. The message is an anti-system one, which articulates the strong opposition to the hegemony of the symbiosis between secular political power and traditional Sufism.

The advocates of Islamic fundamentalist radicalism speak of creating a ‘new society’, superior to the present one. Their message is sent directly from the street, from bottom-top. In general, their violence is only verbal, limited to attacks on the political and social status quo, the mechanism being used to build a dichotomy between disadvantaged and oppressed minority Muslims and the Western majority. The Type of Discourse is one of the conflict between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’. Here, all ‘ours’ are ‘brothers and sisters’, and the authority of the leader derives from the vast religious knowledge he has and from the experience he has acquired, most of the time living among the ‘others’. The source of this antagonism is the disjunction between the meaning of the concept of ‘justice’, which becomes a nodal point of the new Discourse. Thus, the Muslim ideals disagree with alleged social injustice, democratic ‘despotism’ and the secularization of society. The violent overthrow of these secular regimes will become fundamental to the Islamic alternative, as imagined by the followers of Islamic radical Discourse.

After the post-colonial crisis and with the failure of the African socialist project, the state, as an entity, has lost its central role in providing social, educational and community-guaranty services. Gradually, his role was occupied by Islamic religious movements directly linked to the main Muslim confreries, who in fact ensured the financing and coordination of the work in exchange for ensuring the political control of the community.

However, although the appearance of the approach is religious, the signifiers of the West African neo-fundamentalist Discourse are eminently of material origin, the demands of young Muslims fall within the sphere of political and social claims, Islam being used only to bring together the social movement and to give the impression of belonging/common identity.

Robert D. Kaplan said that ‘where the population is struggling in poverty, people find their way into violence’.<sup>40</sup> In the daily struggle for survival, deprived of the most elementary means of social protection and without even the hope of a better future, the frustrated Western-African masses become the easy prey of social radicalism over which the signifiers of jihadism of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. In this extremely complicated context, an extremely violent resentment of a ‘holy war’ against everything that the ‘other’ means resurfaces.

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<sup>40</sup> Robert D Kaplan, ‘The Coming Anarchy.’ *Atlantic Monthly*, 1994, p. 44

In Sahel, the state exists only in the capital and in the immediate vicinity, where most of the political and economic elites are and when the state is no longer capable to provide living conditions for a good Muslim according to Islamic perceptions, the *jihad* is deemed as the only solution. The ‘Holy war’ goes against Western influence and domination. We are mostly dealing with political action, and religious action, secondly. Given that in one of the poorest regions in the world, political claims mix with the social ones and lead to the emergence of social radicalism, on which a new type of Islam overlaps perfectly.

The old West African social order, which has balanced society over time, will gradually be opposed to a different form of expression, much steeper, but also more direct, and more suited to disappointed youth. The symbols of a decadent, unreligious Occident will be used to justify the emergence of a new Islamist fundamentalist discourse in the last 20-30 years. Overcrowded, Western-style cities with large avenues, apartment blocks in insidious and unpopular areas, luxury office buildings, banks and cinemas, etc., are the counterpart of the old centres of the traditional Muslim settlements where the mosque occupies the most important place, next to the Grand Bazaar, the Medina and the central market.

In this context of changing traditional forms, young people discover their own lack of identity. Insufficiently Westernized, disappointed by a world that does not want them, they will take refuge in a utopian past, which gives them the chance to rediscover their values. For them, Salafi/Wahabi Islam is ‘nizam’, meaning ‘the true one’, ‘complete’, in the same way that at the beginning of the twentieth century Abdul Al Maududi, the central figure of the original fundamentalist Discourse, the creator of the Jamat of Islami movement, considered the Quoran to be the central element of a system that covered all aspects of human existence.

Through its signifiers, neo-fundamentalist Discourse offers young people a form of frustration apology.<sup>41</sup> Lacoste talks about blocking them between the two worlds. On the one hand, young West Africans choose the elements of culture in the outskirts of the West, but, at the same time, they are trapped in traditional morals.<sup>42</sup> The joint living of young people in schools, universities, school and university dorms has increased the temptations of a sexual libertarianism that society has not accepted. The value associated with girls' virginity did not disappear, while the age of marriage has increased, which automatically led to experiencing promiscuity that was

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<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 89

<sup>42</sup> Lacoste, 2013, p. 232

unknown up to now. Above all, they overlap the cultural patterns developed by the media, Western cinema and the experiences of those who lived in the West.

Extreme poverty and overcrowding of districts at the outskirts of major urban centres have made the lives of young Muslims even more difficult. For West African youth, pleasure is just a privilege for the rich and Western. And all this leads to an apology of chastity, virtue, renunciation of consumption, and rejection of the values that they cannot actually have.

This alternative offer to the failure of state policy attracts, in particular, young people from urban or recently urbanized areas that have been excluded from any form of social aggregation and ignored by the leaders of typical African confreries. The neo-fundamentalist Discourse provides them the opportunity to belong to a globalizing Islamist idea, which comes with a range of social, educational, cultural and ideological services.

The theoretical framing of the Discourse signifiers gives us the possibility to state that the research hypothesis has been confirmed, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Islamization of a material emergence radicalization, by phrasing a neo-fundamentalist discourse that turns the anti-colonial jihad signifier into the nodal point of its discursive practices. The main followers of this Discourse are young people from new urban agglomerations, for whom engaging in radical movements provides assurance of a relative social security that the state is no longer able to offer and which gives them the much sought after identity. And when the state is shown powerless to act and show its sovereignty, different entities begin to monopolize its functions.

The analysis of the data obtained through three-component sociological research, a questionnaire, a series of seven in-depth interviews and a focus group, also confirmed the research hypothesis. In Senegal, the state has become the archetype of African development<sup>43</sup>, the signifier of the anti-colonial struggle being taken over, in turn, by the early jihadist Discourse, and then by the Islamist and the Nationalist ones. In the last 20 to 30 years, the revival of a tough line Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa, from the entire Middle East, based on an unprecedented demographic explosion, overlapping the dramatic drop in the living standard of the population, has led to transforming the idea of anti-colonial struggle into the nodal point of a new fundamentalist Discourse. The supporters of the new approach refuse any compromise on religious topics, reject

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<sup>43</sup> Mebometa Ndongo, 'La désétatisation en Afrique : un processus d'influence externe et d'incubation locale au Sénégal', *Revue Interventions économiques*, 53 | 2015, accessed on 02.04.2018 at <http://journals.openedition.org/interventionseconomiques/2647>

the traditional order of Sufi origin African Islam and, in particular, blames the religious leaders of their collaboration with the neo-colonial Western power.

Although the research has confirmed the main hypothesis, the methodological limitations caused by the lack of adequate financial resources led to the impossibility of validating some of the topics tackled. Thus, it has not been possible to precisely set the extent to which West African young people, overall, are open to the idea of active involvement in extremist organizations. Also, there was no scientifically documented link between the degree of radicalism and their possible participation in violent movements towards ‘the others’, since this requires a much more in-depth study relative to the real intention to act. Moreover, as a result of the high level of sensitivity of issues related to terrorist organizations, part of the subjects' answers to these questions seemed unbelievable, which led me to the impossibility of validating the hypothesis regarding the imminence of violent actions in the near future.

The literature is poor in treating the subject of the radicalism Islamization in Sahel. My research, using the method of discourse theory, represented a novelty in the field, especially in the Romanian research, and hereby filled this gap. In international practice, the latest study on a related topic, the radicalization of youth from the peripheral localities of the Senegalese capital, was carried out in 2016 by the Timbuktu Institute, in Saint Louis Senegal, and the African Centre of Peace Studies, with US government funding. Its conclusions are similar to those of my research, with the observation that the study led by Dr. Bakary Sambe particularly aimed to provide answers on the imminence of terrorist attacks on the territory of the Republic of Senegal and less to identify the real causes of radicalization of young people. Researchers at the Timbuktu Institute have stopped at the first level of radicalism, the exclusive use of quantitative research, by not allowing them in-depth access to the issue.

As far as my research is concerned, the use of results triangulation, combined with a solid theoretical foundation, has allowed me to obtain in-depth data relative to the radicalism of young Muslims, find out its real sources and, above all, to clarify the way in which a series of signifiers are taken from other discourses to form chains of significance in the neo-fundamentalist Discourse. By analysing the data obtained, I noted that over a first level of radicalism, there is a layer of signifiers coming from the Islamic religious area, which, in turn, forms nodal points in the new Discourse. Thus, over the signifiers of the radical Discourse, based on anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideas, extreme poverty, generalized corruption, and betrayal of community interests in



favour of foreigners, there are significant Islamic religions that form chains of meanings, together. Thus, the Holy War becomes anti-colonial jihad, the presence of foreigners is assimilated to the banishment of the Prophet in Mecca, and the West becomes ‘the other’ and is perceived as the source of all the problems, namely the main threat to the integrity of the Islamic community, *umma*.

When searching for their own identity, young Muslims reinvent a ‘tradition’ that has never really existed. Long clothing for men, beards, burka and gloves for women, all for developing the authenticity of an identity, which essentially has little to do with traditional Islam. The positioning between the two worlds, without belonging to any, leads to a break even in the centre of the social group. The young followers of the neo-fundamentalist Discourse are caught between two poles, a revolutionary one, where society is changed through the political, peaceful class and a second one, violent, reformist, aimed at reforming the whole society, from the bottom up.<sup>44</sup> The dichotomy of individuals, followers of the new Discourse, comes from the impossibility of choosing the best solution, because the real sources of their radicalism are, by no means, religious in nature, but they have strictly profane, material springs.

In conclusion, our research into the Islamization of West African radicalism has allowed us to understand the springs by which the neo-fundamentalist Discourse is structured, which takes over from the other Discourses, in order to obtain their own hegemony. It has clarified the ways in which the mixture of West African anti-colonial political and anti-colonial engagement are disguised as the holy war, being mandatory to be followed by every believer, since, in Sahel, we are primarily dealing with political action, rather than religious.

The research also opened a series of development lines for future projects, particularly on the role that former colonizing empires had in remodelling the Western-African society and the Muslim world in this area. These possible research lines may generate new elements on understanding the phenomenon of Islamization of radicalism throughout the world, with the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa as an archetype of evolution.

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<sup>44</sup> *ibidem*, p. 43

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