

Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Senegalese Migration and Religious**Conversion in Senegal** by MARA LEICHTMAN

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Mara Leichtman has a dual focus in *Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa*: the Lebanese Shi'i diasporic community and the Senegalese Shi'a, both minorities in this majority Sunni, mostly Sufi, nation. Her ethnography compiles historical archival material and interviews with both religious leaders and laypeople. Its back-drop includes the events that have shaped both of these communities: national and global economic downturns, political conflicts, and religious movements starting with the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The result is a valuable resource for scholars of transnational religious ties, minority religious identities, and global Muslim communities. It is a welcome addition to West African studies that are often focused on Sunni groups, and scholarship on Shi'ism that does not often mention African religious movements.

The Lebanese diaspora is a visible presence in Senegal, predominantly in Dakar, Senegal's capital. Its visibility comes from well-established businesses, charitable endeavours, and prominent teachers and Islamic centres. It consciously maintains ties across Christian and Muslim affiliations, creating what Leichtman calls a 'secular ethnicity': a Lebanese identity and culture within Senegal. Discriminatory state policies targeting this minority population have fostered their unity, as have a number of other events, including demonstrations in Dakar showing solidarity with Lebanon during the 2006 Lebanon War.

Unlike Lebanese Shi'a, who identify with Lebanon and its politics, Senegalese Shi'a deliberately distance their religious movement from Middle Eastern politics while maintaining their global religious ties. Their Shi'i identity sets them apart from the majority Sunni population, and is an alternative to the Sufi religious authorities that influence Senegal's social and political life. Within the context of this influence, adherents consider Shi'ism to be reformist and modernising. Even Shi'i converts, however, work to maintain Senegal's national identity as a tolerant nation, consciously reaching across religious affiliations.

While Lebanese and Senegalese Shi'a keep separate for the most part, a number of religious leaders are influential in both communities, notably Lebanese Shaykh al-Zayn, a central figure in Leichtman's ethnography. Leichtman integrates her discussion of the two groups within the framework of cosmopolitanism, a concept describing global religious ties while also paying attention to local histories and cultures. The complementary concept she explores is autochthony: the idea of being indigenous, belonging to a place from birth. Both concepts describe the tension for both communities: who belongs to which communities, how have they shaped their religious identities, and how do they practice and publicly show them? Arguing for the autochthony of the Lebanese community in Senegal, and of Shi'ism in Senegal, is part of forming their distinct religious and social identities.

Leichtman's decision to combine two separate communities into one ethnography serves to illuminate the different cosmopolitanisms they create and

autochthonies they argue for. Her interviews with religious leaders show the influence they have had in shaping their identities; her interviews with lay-people show diverse attitudes toward these religious identities. In this way, Leichtman's ethnographic study follows a historical trajectory of two separate groups while keeping in mind diverse, even divergent, perspectives within them. Her volume is a theoretically packed, historically grounded and ethnographically rich exploration into minority religious communities and their migrations.

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Humor, Silence and Civil Society in Nigeria by EBENEZER OBADARE

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In *Humor, Silence and Civil Society in Nigeria*, Ebenezer Obadare attempts to advance and deepen the tradition of critical scepticism toward scholarly inquiry into the meaning and possibilities of civil societies by posing critical questions around the non-associational concept of civil society. He then argues that thinking about civil society without referring to associations has the potential to liberate scholarship from the solitary confinement of associational fetishism in which it is currently imprisoned. Steering away from associational thinking is one way to escape what many scholars agree has now become a deliberating status in the civil society literature.

Obadare further argues that once the probability of imagining civil society beyond the strait jacket of associations is accepted, a new analytic horizon opens up in which we can be more attentive to the totality of social life outside organisations. The author argues that humour and silence are two key strategies of civic engagement utilised by the civil society for resisting the government particularly given those moments when open rebellion is an initiation to violent penalty.

The first chapter, titled 'A Terrain of Contention', traces the evolution of civil society and the idea behind it, while taking note that civil society has always been a site of hermeneutic battles. 'An African Discourse' is the title of Chapter 2, where the author described how the language of civil society emerged and became part of the vocabulary. In Africa this language was born in the late 1980s during the struggle between democratic forces and military regimes when African countries were in deep economic meltdown. According to Obadare, the circumstances surrounding civil society emergence were vital for an associational understanding of civil society. The exclusive focus on associations in Nigeria has thus led to a neglect of the historically robust social life outside associations.

Chapter 3, 'The use of Levity', focuses on the relatively overlooked weapon of resistance, which is 'humour'. The author observes that beside humour other non-traditional strategies include poetry, music, proverbs, dance, invective and drumming. In the Nigerian/African context, humour is integral to a