Local Tradition or Islamic Precept ? The Notion of zakat in Wuli (Eastern Sénégal)
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Abstract
This article explores the role of zakāt in the marriage ceremony in Wuli (Eastern Senegal). In Islamic law, zakāt is defined as an obligatory alm, a gift ideally from the rich to the poor. In Wuli, zakāt is a ‘tithe’ substraction from the trousseau and divided among the sisters of the groom in return for the services rendered during the marriage ceremony. The specific adoption of zakāt exemplifies the direction taken by marriage in reformulating existing cultural practices in the light of Islamic precepts. It shows that the various forms of authority exercised by men and women through the performance of rituals are integral to the process of rethinking ‘local traditions’ and the way in which meaning is attributed to precepts derived from the ‘religion’.

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Local Tradition or Islamic Precept?
The Notion of zakāt in Wuli (Eastern Senegal)

This article explores the role of zakāt in the marriage ceremony of the Soninke Manding communities in Wuli (Eastern Senegal). In Islamic law, zakāt is described as an obligatory alm, an institutionalized gift ideally from the rich to the poor. In Wuli, zakāt is a ‘tithe’ subtracted from the trousseau and divided among the sisters of the groom in return for the services rendered during the marriage ceremony. First, I will show that zakāt must be understood as the outcome of a series of gift-exchanges which take place between various social groups linked by marriage. Then, I will discuss some factors relevant to the transformation of marriage as part of a wider process of social change which shaped the specific adoption of the zakāt in Wuli.

Trimingham (1980) reports that zakāt, one of the five pillars of Islam, is an important ritual provision throughout the Arabic world. The term zakāt literally means ‘increase’ or ‘purity’. The taxation has been named zakāt with respect to the first meaning of the word, because its giving leads to the increase of property in this world and the growth of religious merit (Arabic: thawāb) in the hereafter. With respect to the second meaning, the taxation has been called zakāt because its payment purifies the giver and the things from which it is given from sins (Aghnides 1916).

All Muslims are required to pay zakāt, which is a fard (obligation) fundamental to the religion. In Islamic law, zakāt is divided into separate kinds of taxes: levies on flocks and herds, on species, and commercial and agricultural goods. Maliki law, prevalent in the Maghrib and throughout the whole Sudan belt, stipulates that zakāt should be collected by the imam who divides the payments amongst the recipients that are specified as follows: the poor, the indigent (more needy than the poor, in the Maliki view), those appointed to collect zakāt, slaves seeking manumission, debtors,

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those unable to perform jihād, transients, and a complicated category of peoples composed of potential converts and those of weak faith (ibid.).

In West Africa, zakāt was imposed in some theocratic states (e.g., Fuuta Jallon) as state levy or a tax collected by local chiefs. Gomez (1992) reports that in the precolonial Muslim state of Bundu (Senegambia) several kinds of zakāt were distinguished, the most important being a ‘tenth’ on harvest and on commercial goods. The village heads who collected zakāt carried the contributions to the town where the almuami (head of the state) resided. When Bundu was partitioned into numerous zones of influence, the zakāt payments, though still collected, only occasionally reached the almuami (ibid.: 106).

Colonial government suppressed what it considered ‘arbitrary’ forms of zakāt. Yet in some parts of Senegal, zakāt is still an obligatory payment or taxation collected at harvest time by the imams or marabouts among local populations. It is said that the imam knows best who are the most deserving poor, i.e., the ones who should ideally receive the zakāt (Cruise O’Brien 1971: 91). Venema (1978) reports that in the Sine-Saloum married women and youngsters who can dispose of their crops themselves give a ‘present’ to the head of the compound. This present, called zaragh, the Wolof word for zakāt, is seen as a token of respect to the latter, and one way of obtaining his blessings (ibid.: 107). The slave-descendants pay a tenth of their harvest to their former masters, while the freeborn and artisans give it to the imam who divides it among the poor (ibid.: 131-132), which is also reported to be the case for the Wolof communities in the Gambia (Ames & Klein, in Klein 1977: 356). Here, it seems that no interest is taken in Islamic law which stipulates that zakāt payments may go to slaves who seek manumission.

In Islamic clergy, zakāt is distinguished from sadaka in that it remains a levy, while sadaka is a purely occasional and spontaneous gift (Weir 1994). Yet some Islamic traditions claim that there is no distinction between the two and that both denote the same thing (Aghnides 1916: 204). Indeed, meanings related to these two forms of almsgiving have often merged, as I will show below. In Wolof, sadaka (sadaa in Manding) may mean almsgiving, or offerings which are given at life-cycle ceremonies and Islamic festivals (e.g., the end of Ramadān).\(^2\) It is often a voluntary (albeit not spontaneous) gift, designated as bulu fengo. It seeks to attract divine approval, the protection for man’s activity or the blessings for the benefit of the deceased (Van Hoven 1995).

The sadaka offerings which are given at naming ceremonies and funerary rituals, appear to have been adopted at an early stage of Islam in the Senegambia (see Jobson 1969). In Wolof, zakāt appears to have a shorter history. It was introduced in the 1950s, and only in those communities people label as ‘Soninke’ or ‘pagan’. While other communities stick to the original (Arabic) sense of zakāt as gift to the poor (or as donation to local

\(^2\) I have followed the spelling for Manding terms as set forth in Rowlands (1959).
The notion of zakat in Wuli reveals a preoccupation with gift-exchange between marriage groups on which I shall elaborate in this paper.

I will show that despite the various meanings and ideas attributed to Islamic precepts, there is just a very fine line between Islamic precepts and local traditions. Yet I will argue that the distinction is relevant for it brings to light the competing discourses surrounding the process of labelling cultural practices as 'religion' (din) and 'local tradition' (adat). For that purpose, I shall examine the different forms of authority exercised by men and women through the performance of rituals. It will become clear that those forms of authority are integral to the process of rethinking 'local traditions' and to the various ways in which meaning is attributed to precepts derived from 'religion'.

I will first discuss the major events relevant to the process of Islamization in Wuli, then I will present some features of the debate about din and adat at the national and local level. Ritual speech uttered during the marriage ceremony, indicates that certain elements of the national discourse are appropriated by men. Yet the description of the marriage ceremony in Wuli will reveal that male intervention in the marriage ceremony depends entirely on the ritual work performed by women. The specific adaptation of zakat to the marriage ceremony in Wuli bears witness to this.

Islam in Wuli

The Manding of Wuli are Mande people who, until the end of the 19th century, dominated the former kingdom (mansayaa) of Wuli, nowadays a group of Manding-speaking (Mandinkooli) communities bisected by the modern states of Senegal and the Gambia. Wuli was probably founded in the 15th century and flourished through the participation in the slave trade during the 17th and the 18th century. In the 19th century the economic basis of the kingdom shifted from warfare to the production of peanuts. At the end of the 19th century, Wuli was split up between the colonial powers, Britain and France (Galloway 1974).

Islam had been present in the region for a long time, where it was brought by various populations. First of all those coming from the Sudan, which for centuries had been in close contact with the Arabic world of northern Africa. Most of them were strong adherents to Islam. Secondly, for more than two centuries, Muslim clerics, often from other ethnic groups, settled in the region to assist noblemen with their skills. One of the European travelers who visited the Senegambia in 1620, Richard Jobson (1969), noticed the presence of marabouts, Islamic clerics, who instructed the children in the Koran and provided medical charms to non-Muslim. At the end of the 18th century, Mungo Park (1983) saw Islam as a civilizing force in a society still dominated by non-Muslims.

Since the colonial authorities had an interest in maintaining distinctions
between Muslims and pagans, these divisions dominated ethnographic writings (Van Hoven 1990: 187; Harrison 1988: 100). Rançon’s (1894) description of Wuli at the end of the 19th century exemplifies the manner in which these religious and racial stereotypes shaped the ethnographic writings of those days. Rançon emphasized the positive role of the Islamic Jula traders in this kingdom ruled by what he called an ‘animist aristocracy’. He reserved warm words for the Jula and portrayed this Muslim community as the most effective agent of development. The ‘animist’ section of Wuli, the Soninke were, by contrast, depicted as ‘non-believers’ who tyrannized the local populations. When the ‘cercle de Niani-Wuli’ was created, an important ‘canton’ was allocated to the Jula traders. The old ‘pagan’ king of Wuli was installed as chief of a rather smaller ‘canton’ called Wuli (Van Hoven 1995: 33).

In search for ‘terres neuves’, several Islamic (Mouriden) communities began to populate the northern part of the cercle from the 1940s onwards. The Mouriden, one of the major Islamic brotherhoods of Senegal founded by Ahmadu Bamba, had taken an active part in the production of peanuts. The French regarded the Mouriden as ‘good Muslims’ and ‘hard workers’, and were quick to see the economic potential of the Mouriden. Measures were taken and payments were made by local ‘commandants de cercle’ to support the Mouriden and their religious activities in the cercle (festivals, public readings of the Koran, pilgrimage to the holy city of Touba) (ibid.).

In the Soninke communities in the southern part of Wuli, Islam began to spread rapidly during the second quarter of the 20th century. The arrival of Muslim clerics in these communities, in the 1950s, triggered the spread of Islam and the first mosques were constructed. Most of these Muslim clerics were educated in one of the clerical centres of the Islamic brotherhood of the Jakhanke Jabi, a Serakhule people from Guinea (Smith 1965) who had founded the holy city of Touba in that country at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1956, under El Hadj Soriba Jabi’s guidance, the Jabi left for the village of Maka Colibantang, the old administrative center of the ‘cercle de Niani-Wuli’. Since then it has become a prosperous clerical centre which attracts large numbers of clerics and followers (Sanneh 1979).

Sanneh describes the religious practice of the Jakhanke Jabi clerics as ‘a blend of local resources and outside inspirations’ (ibid.: 244). The Jakhanke Jabi share close ties with a number of Sufi orders, most of them associated with the Quadria, of which the Jakhanke Jabi have long been members. Sufi elements are infused into the teaching and practice of Jakhanke clerics, e.g the necessity of a guide or director to the one who seeks guidance. Similar to the role they play in general Islamic Sufi traditions, dreams and visions have a prominent place within the Jakhanke Jabi clerical order. Many Jakhanke Jabi centres are said to have been founded following a dream (e.g when Karamokho Ba founded Touba). Dreams are often analysed or interpreted for healing purposes. An important area of healing activity is the provision of amulets which has a long history in West Africa. In fact, the cleric’s most called-for activity is the writing of amulets.
(safewo) which mostly contain phrases of the Koran or the names of angels and jinns (see Trimingham 1980: 84).

In contrast with other Islamic brotherhoods of Senegal (Mouriden and Tidjaan), the acquisition of slaves and their widespread employment were essential to the clerical enterprise of the Jakhanke Jabi. Notwithstanding the legal penalties imposed by colonial administrations, slavery (jongyaa) still plays a key role in the economy (production of peanuts) of clerical centres of the Jakhanke Jabi. The need to make up for a manpower shortage paralleled a tendency to reconsider Islamic doctrines and local customs. The Jakhanke Jabi say that the French, who freed large numbers of slaves in Touba at the beginning of the 20th century, did not make what to them is a crucial distinction between slaves destined for a clerical centre and those used for mercantile interests. They thought that the measures taken by the French were aimed at undermining the clerical practice and Islam in general. The Jakhanke claimed that the institution of slavery was itself akin to Islamic notions of client status (mawla) and patronage (riayah), and thus, in accordance with Islamic precepts.

**Dīn and Adāt**

The conceptualization of slavery by the Jakhanke Jabi is just one example of a more general tendency to reconsider Islamic precepts in the light of local traditions and vice versa. In Wuli, the body of knowledge labelled as ‘Islamic’ is denoted as dinoo, derived from the Arabic term dīn. According to The Encyclopaedia of Islam, the notion of dīn, of which various meanings exist throughout the Arabic world, denotes ‘the corpus of obligatory prescriptions given by God, to which one must submit’ (Gardet 1965: 293). In Wuli, the most general and frequent sense of dinoo is ‘religion’. The term is often used in opposition to the notion of aadoo, derived from the Arabic term adāt (or āda) which means ‘pre-Islamic custom’ (Prins 1960: 170).

The terms dīn and adāt have other meanings as well. As the definition of the Arabic term adāt indicates, ‘pre-Islamic custom’ presupposes a process of marking cultural practices through temporal concepts. This reckoning of time is ingrained in a set of moral beliefs as well; ‘pre-Islamic custom’ is often equated to ‘superstition’, a term with negative connotations like ‘uncivilized’ or ‘backward’. One should note, however, that in many parts of West Africa, the ‘religion’ penetrated society through successive historical phases of Islamization. Every phase tended to represent itself as ‘reformative’ and, therefore, depicted preceding phases as ‘pagan’ or ‘pre-Islamic’ (Amselle 1990: 186). These labels are in fact ideological stances for they are construed by the reformers in order to redefine Islam and give it new élan.

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3. For the issue of slavery, Islam and colonialism, see Harrison (1988).
4. This point is discussed in Sanneh (1979: 235).
Most of these assumptions can be identified in the corpus of Islamic precepts formulated by the Muslim clerics in Senegal. The proliferation of Islamic precepts was said to be a reaction against the ‘ignorant’ and ‘superstitious’ forces in Senegalese society (see Gueye 1977). The Muslim clerics in general were pivotal in the construction of national Islamic identities and in filtering down religious beliefs and ideas to local populations. There are numerous examples of the interplay between national and local Islamic identities, as well as the variety of (unequal) ways in which both may interact.

In Wuli, public speeches may serve as an example of how elements of a national discourse on Islam are incorporated into local situations. In this corpus of knowledge, stress is laid by men (women rarely speak) on the moral conduct of the community members. For that purpose, men have a vast range of possibilities at their disposal to impose their views on morality and ethics. Besides the Koran, they use orally transmitted knowledge by quoting sayings and relating anecdotes from the lives of the prophets or other Islamic figures. In particular, the imam recounts morality tales related to marriage and the proper conduct of husband and wife. His blessings, called *diwa* (derived from the Arabic term *du`a*), are considered a powerful force while his prayers invoke the baraka of Allah. In the vocabulary of the Islamic faith stress is laid on morality which often parallels the idea of afterlife (*laakira*). It is emphasized that the individual’s ultimate destiny is determined during the forty days following the burial, a period of judgement in which the dead is ‘interrogated’ (*nininka*). The manner of burial reflects this idea of interrogation: the corpse is placed on the right side facing east, while the white shroud (*kasankewo*) is untied to accommodate the interviewing (see Schaffer & Cooper 1987). It is said that good deeds deriving from good will, ‘good behaviour’ (*jiki kendoo*) and respect (*buuhaa* or *horomoo*), assure that one will go to heaven (*arijana*). Sin (*jalafayla*) increases the likelihood of being sent to ‘hell’ (*jaxanaba* or *kiimaa*).

In Senegalese Islamic traditions ideas of morality are closely linked to ethics. Stress is laid on the fact that for men hard work is a requirement for being a good Muslim. Here, local religious practice and the so-called macro-arena (the state) are explicitly connected. Indeed, the saying ‘working is praying’, said to originate from the founder of the Mouriden brotherhood, Ahmadu Bamba, is subsequently appropriated by the state in the discourse on developpement, known as ‘l’exaltation du travail’ (Cruise O’Brien 1971, Coulon 1981, Copans 1988, Diop & Diouf 1990). For women, obedience, respect and appropriate behaviour are legitimated in the vocabulary of Muslim faith while disobedience and adultery are regarded as injunctions.

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5. Obeyesekere’s remark (cited in Parry 1986: 467) on the concept of sin as a religious evaluation of social behaviour is particularly relevant here: ‘actions that are morally good or bad are [. . .] also religiously good or bad’.
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against Islam, which may cause misfortune, sterility, illness, and decreasing food production. It is this body of knowledge that men tend to label as din ('religion'), and over which they exercise control in the form of public speech.

Many rituals performed by women, by contrast, are glossed as adat, which means that men see these rituals as inconsistent with the corpus of knowledge given by God. A ritual like pociroo, for instance, performed by women the night before the actual naming ceremony (kulliyoo), is much debated. Most men question the relevance of pociroo, while others put forward that the pociroo is not mentioned in the Holy book. Since the pociroo and other so-called 'non-Islamic rituals' are often maintained by women, men are often quick to state that women are less deeply involved in Islam. One should note, however, that generally speaking women order a ritual domain wherein men's intervention is completely lacking. Mothers for instance hold the exclusive right of determining the father of the newborn child. At birth, just before cutting the umbilical cord (batajuloo), the mother is asked to declare the surname (kontongo) of the father. If she refuses, the child is declared 'born dead' (dingo tambita) and buried at the washing place (jonkongo) of the compound. During the naming ceremony (kulliyoo), performed the eighth day after the birth, the child's head is shaved and the child is given a first name (too). This ceremony, which seals his or her Muslim identity—the child is given a Muslim name which corresponds to the day he or she is born—cannot be performed unless women have effected the pociroo. This form of dependency is a threat to men's control over life-cycle ceremonies in particular, and reproduction of the village society in general.

These examples suggest that the control over a distinct set of rituals, which are essential to the different forms of authority allocated to men and women, are integral to the competing discourses surrounding the debate over din and adat. Cultural practices controlled by women are labelled 'local tradition' and are said not to conform to 'official' (read Senegalese) Islamic doctrines. Men tend to monopolize the incorporation of Islamic ideas and transform them in accordance with their own ideological schemes. Of particular interest, then, is the adoption of zakât to the marriage ceremony for it shows that the incorporation of Islamic precepts is not necessarily a monopoly of men.

The Marriage Ceremony

The marriage ceremony (maañootaa) as it is performed nowadays can be divided into a series of events. The ceremony starts at the groom's compound when a delegation is formed which escorts the groom to the village of the bride. Normally, the delegation leaves in the early afternoon

6. For a detailed analysis of the marriage ceremony in Wuli, see Van Hoven (1995).
of a Wednesday and arrives at dusk in the village of the bride. There, the bride, dressed in white and accompanied by her mothers, waits until one of the young men or sisters of the groom enters the hut that night. After having paid a fee, the bride is 'carried' (bambu) to the village square. When the 'eldest sister' (baring musu keebaa) of the groom has spread out a mat (basoo), the bride sits on it, surrounded by her age mates. Women of both parties, here classified as 'mothers' (baali) and 'sisters' (baring musooli), gather, and sing and dance. The songs contain messages and are said to 'give advice' (sumundi) to the bride.

The following day, men gather on the bride's compound and address a series of speeches (lalindiroo) to the relatives and other people attending the meeting. Then, the bride, still dressed in white, leaves for her husband's village. During the trip through the bush, the bride and groom are accompanied by women of both parties who are thought to protect the young couple from the spirits of the bush (wulakono fengoli). At the village boundary, the bride is replaced by a younger sister, because people fear that the former will be the victim of malevolent spirits. The actual bride is led in secret to her husband's hut while at night the 'second bride' (maañoof fulanjango) enters that of the groom.

The bride stays in her husband's hut until Saturday morning. Still veiled, but this time dressed in a colourful costume, she is led, together with her husband, to the middle of the compound. Both are then seated, while the elderly men of the village start a series of speeches addressed to the married couple and their relatives. When the men have ended their speeches, the sisters of the groom lead the young couple to the kitchen hut (koobaa) of the compound. Both the bride and the groom are handed a new pestle (ninkaloo), subtracted from the trousseau. The groom's 'eldest sister' then steps forward and gives the bride and the groom a handful of sorghum (noonusoo) which they throw in the mortar (kulungo) and pound three times. It is said that when the bride is the first to pound the sorghum, the first-born will be a girl, and a boy if it is the groom. Other informants state that when the groom is the first to pound, the boys will outnumber the girls and vice versa. This ritual is called ninkalamutoo, 'take the pestle'.

While the groom is brought back to his hut, the 'eldest sister' removes a strip of white cotton (funtung koyo) which is tied around the head of the bride. This is followed by a gift (cloth or money) from the groom's sisters to the bride. People say that this ritual act, denoted as tikaboo kungo, brings an end to the bride's period of seclusion. All the sisters who participated in the ritual tikaboo kungo then gather around the trousseau, exhibited to the visitors at the groom's compound. The trousseau, designated as maanoo le fengoli (literally 'things of the bride'), usually consists of household utensils (pots, pan, plates, pestle and mortar) and cloth. Along with the bride, the trousseau has been transferred from hers to her husband's village.

It is stipulated that the sisters of the groom take a 'tenth' of the trousseau. This part is called jakoo (zakāt). The 'eldest sister', usually a cross-cousin
sanawo of the groom receives the biggest part of the jakoo since her role during the ceremony is considered the most important. The other sisters receive smaller parts. This ritual act is called jakaboo, (literally 'take away the tithe'). Since the large majority of the sisters receive household utensils, the jakoo is usually destined for food preparation. When the sisters are married, the part of the jakoo they receive is used in the household of their respective husbands. As such, the jakoo 'feeds' a wide range of households spread over several villages of Wuli. On each pot, plate or bowl, the first name (too) of the bride is written. So every household contains a variety of utensils on which different first names are inscribed. In this manner, the pots and bowls visualize women's participation in the marriage ceremonies and point to their role in the construction of a complex network of relationships between houses in Wuli.

The trousseau, from which the jakoo is subtracted, is the outcome of the conversion of the bride-price into goods. Nowadays, the bride-price, referred to as futu naafuloo (literally 'richness of marriage'), is a large sum of money which is usually collected by the groom himself and/or his elder relatives. Before the marriage ceremony, the money has been transferred to the father of the bride, who passes the money onto one of his wives (but not to the actual mother of the bride), referred to as 'little mother' (nanding) of the bride. She is the one who converts the money into household utensils and cloth. While the cloth is considered the property of the bride, the household utensils are often confined to the eldest inmarried woman of this house (e.g. the first wife of the head of the compound). This means that a considerable part of the trousseau is destined to the husband's house rather than to the bride herself. The bride-price is neither conceived as a compensation for the transfer of rights in a woman's reproductive and domestic services (cf. the classical interpretation of bride-price), nor as a payment to the bride (cf. Islamic law). Only the cloth bought with the money goes to the bride herself, but it is not the only good into which the bride-price is converted. A considerable part of the money goes into household utensils, which suggests that the bride-price enables the inmarried women to feed the house of the groom.

To Contract a Marriage

The transfer of bride-price, although the final prestation of a series of gifts which are required by wife-givers, does not contract the marriage. Essential to 'tie a marriage' (futusiti) is another series of gifts given by the

7. The Manding term people use in these cases is balundi, which means 'to feed' (e.g. an infant), but also 'to make (dii) life (balungo').
8. In the old days, the trousseau consisted of locally produced goods. Nowadays, marriage goods are bought on local markets.
9. Goody (1990) labels this form of bride-price 'indirect dowry'. 
groom and his relatives to wife-givers prior to the marriage ceremony. These gifts aim at ‘feeding’ wife-givers instead of wife-takers.

The gifts, which constitute the contraction of marriage, are divided into three categories of goods. The first one consists of a large amount of kolanuts (kurUtwo), a gift designated as bulunda, which in this case means ‘village’, with reference to the fact that the kolanuts are distributed and consumed by all the adult members (male and female) of the bride’s village. The second prestation is called domoroo, which means ‘food’ or ‘(the act of) eating’. It consists of a large sum of money (50,000 francs CFA in 1992) which is equally divided among the ‘fathers’ (faali) and ‘mothers’ (baali) of the bride (i.e. the heads of the compound and their spouses which are part of the kaabiiloo [cluster of houses] of the bride). The third gift, nonkong laa fataroo, consists of the white cloth (faani koyo) used to veil the bride when she leaves for her husband’s village, two or three bundles of sorghum (nOO caffoo) and a sack of salt (koo). The white cloth is kept by the mother of the bride, while the other components of the nonkong laa fataroo (sorghum and salt) are consummated by the members of the bride’s house.

These gifts as a whole suggest that the contraction of the marriage is made possible by the transfer of ‘consumable’ goods which aim at feeding wife-givers, i.e. the village (bulunda), the kaabiiloo (domoroo) and the house of the bride (nonkong laa fataroo). After having accepted these prestations, wife-givers announce the bride-price which, as we noticed, set in motion an inverted movement of feeding, namely the conversion of money into goods which enable the bride to feed her husband’s house. The difference between these two related movements of feeding lies first of all in the fact that in the latter movement no ‘foodstuffs’ are given but goods which enable the bride to feed wife-takers. Secondly, the ‘feeding’ is initiated by wife-takers themselves and subsequently mediated by wife-givers, more precisely by an inmarried woman (‘little mother’ of the bride) responsible for converting the money into goods.

The specific direction taken by the exchange of marriage gifts places the role of zakat in a particular perspective. It indicates first of all that the intermarriage relationship, primarily expressed in rituals, is a lasting one. Secondly, this relationship is maintained by married women who are not mere objects of exchange but acting subjects: they are at once responsible for ‘feeding’ the house of their husbands and perform ritual services in the life-cycle ceremonies of their brother. The zakat, destined to the groom’s sisters, shows that their role is indeed entirely relational.

Considering the pattern of exchange articulated in marriage, one could say that the great emphasis is on marriage relationships rather than on descent. The key role played by women in the construction of these relationships questions the classical predicament of women’s position in (patrilineal) society as ‘ambivalent’ or ‘marginal’. This view is grounded in the assumption that society is made up of ‘corporate groups’, and underestimates the various kinds of relationships involved in the process of reproduction and
continuity of society. Above all, zakāt, as the outcome of a series of gift-exchange, bears witness to this; zakāt is ‘the women’s part’ (musooli le taa), precisely because, in my view, women perform rituals in which the various relationships between marriage groups are articulated rather than the ordering principles (patrilineality, social status, locality) which structure these groups internally.10 The way in which zakāt is adopted to the marriage ceremony in Wuli, shows a tendency to mould religious innovations in accordance with existing patterns of gift-exchange. From this, one might conclude that the adoption of an Islamic precept does not favor the trend that individualizes forms of social interactions, a feature often attributed to communities which embraced Islam.

Relevant, then, is the argument put forward by Parry (1986) about the nature of the gift (and gift-exchange for that matter) in world religions. The author argues that there are fundamental differences between ‘world’ religions and religions of small-scale ‘tribal’ societies. In the former, great stress is laid on the merit of alms as free and unconstrained (‘pure’) gifts while in the latter gifts are reciprocated and, therefore, carry a strong socio-political load (cf. Mauss’s notion of the gift as the primitive analogue of the social contract).11

I agree with MacCormack (1976) that the ‘language of reciprocity’ should be used with the greatest caution. When reciprocity is understood as ‘the expectation that a return will be made’, it is clear that the notion of alms, as it is formulated in various Islamic strands of thought, casts doubts on Parry’s assertion. It is true that in Islam a distinction is made between religious alms and ordinary gifts. The difference, however, is not between unreciprocated and reciprocated gifts. It lies in the recognition that alms (ṣadakah and zakāt) are not subject of revocation or reacquisition, which is strongly disapproved. This does not mean that religious alms are entirely unreciprocated because they are given to obtain something in return, that is, a heavenly reward. One might say then that alms are distinguished from ordinary gift by the intention with which it is given: the hope of a reward in the hereafter.12

The adoption of zakāt in the marriage ceremony in Wuli shows that the embracement of a world religion does not necessarily coincide with an elaboration of an ideology of ‘desinterested’ exchange, as Parry suggests. Here too zakāt practice is premissed on gift-exchange rather than on unrecip-

11. This kind of reasoning echoes, of course, Horton’s paradigm (1993) of contrasted patterns of thought, i.e. ‘traditionality’ vs ‘modernity’, a proposition recently amended by the author himself.
12. Religious alms might as well carry a socio-political load. To this the discussion in Sufism on whether the upper (superior) hand of the Prophet refers to the donor or the recipient of alms bears witness. The explanation that the upper hand symbolizes the recipient was often given by wealthy Sufis in justification of their abusive amassing of fortunes from alms (discussed in Weir 1994: 715).
rocated almsgiving essential to the notion of the ‘pure’ gift. When we take into account the set of beliefs related to almsgiving, and to zakāt in particular, we observe again a very fine line between ‘world’ and ‘tribal’ religions.

Sisters and Zakāt

Informants state that prior to the 1950s the whole trousseau went to the bride and to her new husband’s house. No part was divided among the sisters of the groom. Other Manding groups in Wuli, like the Sulamoro who claim to be more deeply Islamic than the Soninke, do not perform the ritual jakaboo. Asked why Soninke practice the jakaboo and other Manding groups do not, some informants replied that the jakaboo ‘cleans’ (seneyandi) the trousseau and those who contribute to it. This argument has much to do with the idea that marriage is considered as a ritual of conversion to Islam, on which I shall elaborate below. A no less frequently cited explanation (by men) is that women want to profit from the jakaboo. This is the reason why, in their view, nowadays even Sulamoro women try to introduce zakāt into the marriage ceremony. Other reasons for the introduction of jakaboo in the marriage ceremony are provided by informants who state that zakāt is a remuneration for the sisters in return for the services rendered to their brother. Indeed, great stress is laid on the fact that the sisters play a key role in the marriage ceremony; people say that ‘the marriage ceremony belongs to the sisters [of the groom]’ (maañoottaa mu baring musooli le taa ti). A closer look at the ritual work performed by the sisters may reveal why their participation is said to be crucial.

The sisters’ role in the marriage ceremony is said to guarantee a safe transfer of the bride and the groom. Spirits of the bush (wulakono fengoli) could possess the young couple, kill them, or render the bride childless. Good care is taken of the bride, who is extremely vulnerable. The sisters are her closest companions and protect her against the spirits. The bride cannot speak to anyone except to her female companions. Water is brought to her from a special water jar (jidumbo), carried along the trip through the bush by her younger sister. Other women assure that no agressive charms are buried under the mat which is carried by the eldest sister.

The rules that must be observed as well as the location where the transfer of the bride must take place (i.e. the bush) point to the fact that the bride (and to a lesser extent the groom) undergoes a ritual transformation which renders her fragile. For the bride, this period of fragility is brought to an end during the ritual tikaboo kungo (see supra). Here again, it is the groom’s ‘eldest sister’ who unties a strip of white cotton (juntung koyo) and ‘takes off the headtie’ (tikaboo); a gesture which renders the bride ‘visible’ again, which means that people may ‘look at’ (jiuubee) her. The tikaboo kungo and the jakaboo are two closely related rituals. Only the sisters who
have given their headtie (or gifts in cash) to the bride may participate in the jakaboo, and this indicates that the jakaboo itself is valorized as part of a wider set of exchange. In that sense the zakāt is the return of an initial gift from the groom’s sisters to the bride. In other words, the zakāt is a response to a gift which permits the bride to pass the threshold from the ‘invisible’ domain of the bush to the living community of the village.

It is tempting to think of the ideas central to the jakaboo ritual as an example par excellence of an ‘indigenized’ form of Islam, or ‘Islam noir’ in the words of Monteil (1964). But the idea of alms as a mechanism to ward off afflictions is not at all foreign to Islamic traditions in which almsgiving are formulated. In Koranic verses and traditions of the Prophet (hadiths) the giving of alms (zakāt and sadaka) is said to serve in the first place as expiation of sins. Related to the expiatory function of obligatory or spontaneous almsgiving is its special role in affording protection against all manner of evil; an argument on which great stress is laid in local explanations of the sisters’ role, i.e. the recipients of the zakāt.13

Parry (1986) argues that in world religions supernatural sanctions on violation of religious norms are often saved up for the after-life. It is true that a similar assumption is built into morality tales reported during, for instance, the public speeches held by men. We recall that herein social behaviour is judged on the basis of a set of religious morals, and that great stress is laid on the idea that the actor’s behaviour in this life determines his or her destiny in the after-life. The premise that alms are given to orient the individual’s destiny in the hereafter could be in line with this view.

This characterization of alms is limited in the sense that it does not exhaust their significance neither in Islamic traditions nor in the jakaboo practice in Wuli.14 The importance of giving alms to avert the punishment of hellfire but also to avoid tribulation in this life is the topic of many hadiths. For example, it was Jacob’s failure to give alms to an unrecognized prophet in the guise of a beggar that led to the tragedy of Joseph (Weir 1994: 710). Likewise, the giving of zakāt, received by the sisters as ritual honoraria in kind, has to some extent the effect of orienting supernatural sanctions which are immediate rather than postponed to the after-life. Numerous examples are given by informants in which infertility of the bride or groom, misfortune, drought, decreasing food production, and even death were attributed to witchcraft (koritewo) from which the young couple had to be protected.

Nevertheless, the distinction Parry draws is relevant not so much to assert that there are fundamental differences between world and tribal religions, 13. One also observes, however, that the intervention of sisters is more than just a mechanism to ward off afflictions. In protecting the bride’s fecundity, the sisters bring life to the village community. They guarantee future off-spring in handling over the hoomusuoo to the bride and the groom during the ninkalamutuoo ritual. As a force that is seen as good, they act in the interest of the community. Here, one must admit, Islamic doctrines have little to say.

14. For recent overview of the use and meanings of the term zakāt in the Arabic sources, see Decobert (1991).
but to bring to light the competing interests which animate the adaption of religious ideas. By this, I mean that we should take into account the different forms of authority that shaped the way in which meaning is attributed to religious norms on the one hand, and the historical circumstances because of which the balance between these forms of authority have been altered on the other hand. It is to these issues that the conclusion of this article is devoted.

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The examples discussed above suggest that there is a very fine line between Islamic traditions and local customs. Both 'systems of belief' are intimately related in the sense that both borrow elements and ideas from each other. Trimmingham (1980: 35-52) considers the two attitudes ('African' and 'Islamic') towards the Holy as a form of 'parallelism'—the existence of elements from two religious cultures alongside each other—to be characteristic of the last phase of Islamization of the continent. The example of sex division in religion, which according to the author exemplifies 'making the best' of two cultural spheres (ibid.: 46) suggests that this parallelism does not however imply an equal balance between the two terms. Statements like 'men are Muslim and women are pagan' basically mean that men monopolize religiocultural practices labelled as Islamic while women are allocated a sphere of life that provide them little scope for participation. I have indicated that these tactics are grounded in a partial reading of Islamic precepts which are far from being coherent.

In Wuli, the outcome of the struggle over Islamic representations was such that a major ritual setting controlled by women has been transformed in the most palpable way since the second half of this century, a period of intensified Islamic activities. By illuminating the nature of these changes and the forms of authority that were restructured, it becomes possible to appreciate the specific direction taken by marriage in reformulating existing cultural practices in the light of Islamic precepts.

Until the 1930s marriage was part of wider series of pre-marital rituals for young girls to which several mask traditions were linked. These mask traditions were structured by the age grade system which formed the basis for initiation societies. The female age grades controlled five masks. In most villages of Wuli, the pre-marital rituals lasted until the end of the 1930s, although in some it did take place until 1955. But the number of masks was reduced and eventually a large part of the masks and related rituals have been abandoned altogether. The limited number of masks (e.g. kankanrango) that survived did so because an Arabic origin (Mecca) was attributed to it (Weil 1988).

Jessup (1980: 23) reports that many Soninke women felt that the disappearance of the mask traditions and their related rituals led to a lower
rate of births or to children dying at low age. As a consequence, some people ‘were going back to the Soninke traditions’. In other parts of the Senegambia, fertility associations like Kanyalangkafo and Dembajassa were created to recruit married women who were barren or whose children tended to die at low age. In Wuli these associations, though present in some villages, are less popular. One reason being that its members perform ‘transvestite’ dances in male trousers and shirts, and that men regard these associations as injunctions against Islam.

Despite its valorization in Islamic doctrines, the institution of marriage underwent important changes which restructured the gender divisions in the ritual setting. We note first of all, a change in the composition of the marriage prestations, and the bride-price in particular. By the end of the 1930s, Holderer (1939) reported that locally produced goods (bands of homespun cloth) were replaced more and more by commodities (money). Since then, bride-prices increased rapidly. Nowadays, it is not unusual that the bride-price required by wife-givers is four or five times a farmer’s average yearly income. Commenting on the monetization of bride-prices, people stress that it effected to a large extent the composition of the trousseau. Since money serves several goals (household and personal needs), people tend to question whether the sum of money involved is actually destined to the trousseau, a trend which seems to be accelerating at present. This has an immediate impact on the position of inmarried women since the part they receive from the trousseau (cloth) is regarded as insufficient. However, men who pay a high bride-price are less willing to support their wives financially. To this, we must add that the autonomy exercised by women in the economic domain—married women cultivate their own (peanut) plot and realize an income through the sale of their crops—has been decisively undercut by the erosion of domestic self-sufficiency and innovations in the cash-crop economy (introduction of commercial cotton cultivation in the 1960s). This led to major transformations in the structure of agricultural production which contributed directly to the deterioration of women’s econmic resources (see e.g. Carney & Watts 1990).

Secondly, through the vocabulary of Muslim ideas about marriage, a strong gender-based partition of the socio-religious domain was advocated by local imams. On numerous occasions, I witnessed public speeches in which great stress was laid on the role of marriage as conversion to Islam. It is said, for instance, that marriage transforms husband and wife into good Muslims. Through marriage, the bride and groom in their new statuses of husband and wife, become part of the umma, the community of believers. In contrast with men, however, women are not part of the umma by direct allegiance but through their husbands, who are said to be responsible for instructing their wives in Islam—which means that for women marriage is considered a necessary requirement for being a Muslim. Moreover, many informants emphasized that the engagement to follow the precepts of Islam is symbolized in the act of covering bride and groom with a white cloth (faani
koyo), enacted, as we observed, during the marriage ceremony. People say that the young couple will then realize that the path of paradise lies in good behaviour, obedience, and respect of Muslim precepts. Given the interpretation of the marriage ceremony in terms of a ‘ritual of conversion’, it may not come as a surprise that it was thought of as a suitable context for adopting zakāt.

I have explained elsewhere (1995) that the marriage ceremony, as it is performed nowadays, encompasses a series of rituals in which various forms of authority are brought to light. While men dominate the rituals wherein ‘political’ relationships are articulated, in ideological terms defined as umma, women mediate the relations between bush and village. The shift of ritual setting from the bush to the village parallels a change in ritual discourse: songs and dances of women are replaced by spoken words uttered by men. At the same time, the loosely organized ritual setting of women is converted into an authoritative structure of the village based on sex, age, and social status to which the public speeches of men bear witness.

Women’s formal status in the umma is marginal, but they order, to a large extent, the ritual domain. The sequence of rituals performed during the marriage ceremony is such that rituals controlled by women precede the ones ordered by men. The authority of women and their control over a distinct ritual setting, in which male intervention is completely lacking, means, of course, a threat to men’s authority and undermines the ideological basis of the umma. The fact that men tend to label ritual work of women as adāt and feel that it is inconsistent with the ‘religion’ is ingrained in the fear of women’s authority to which the marriage ceremony as a whole bears witness. The competing discourses surrounding the process of labelling cultural practices as adāt and din mirrors a fundamental opposition between the authority exercised by men and by women. It seems that in embracing the precept of zakāt, which has its basis in the ‘religion’, women anticipated on the process of rethinking their ritual domain in the light of Islamic tradition in order to retain their control over an important sphere of social life.

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This article explores the role of zakāt in the marriage ceremony in Wuli (Eastern Senegal). In Islamic law, zakāt is defined as an obligatory alm, a gift ideally from the rich to the poor. In Wuli, zakāt is a ‘tithe’ substracted from the trousseau and divided among the sisters of the groom in return for the services rendered during the marriage ceremony. The specific adoption of zakāt exemplifies the direction taken by marriage in reformulating existing cultural practices in the light of Islamic precepts. It shows that the various forms of authority exercised by men and women through the performance of rituals are integral to the process of rethinking ‘local traditions’ and the way in which meaning is attributed to precepts derived from the ‘religion’.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of zakāt in the marriage ceremony in Wuli (Eastern Senegal). In Islamic law, zakāt is defined as an obligatory alm, a gift ideally from the rich to the poor. In Wuli, zakāt is a ‘tithe’ substracted from the trousseau and divided among the sisters of the groom in return for the services rendered during the marriage ceremony. The specific adoption of zakāt exemplifies the direction taken by marriage in reformulating existing cultural practices in the light of Islamic precepts. It shows that the various forms of authority exercised by men and women through the performance of rituals are integral to the process of rethinking ‘local traditions’ and the way in which meaning is attributed to precepts derived from the ‘religion’.

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Résumé

La notion de zakāt au Wuli (Sénégal). — Cet article analyse le rôle de la zakāt dans les cérémonies de mariage au Wuli (Sénégal oriental). Dans le droit musulman, la zakāt est une aumône que les riches sont en principe obligés de donner aux pauvres. Au Wuli, la zakāt est une « dîme » soustraite au trousseau et partagée entre les sœurs du marié en échange des services rendus pendant la cérémonie de mariage. Le choix de la notion de zakāt fournit un exemple de l'orientation prise par l'institution du mariage en liaison avec la reformulation de pratiques culturelles sous l'influence des préceptes musulmans. Il apparaît ainsi que les différentes formes d'autorité exercées par les hommes et les femmes à travers l'accomplissement des rituels sont directement associées au processus de redéfinition des traditions locales et à la façon dont le sens est attribué à des préceptes issus du domaine religieux.

Keywords/Mots clés: Senegal/Sénégal, Manding/Manding, Islam/Islam, marriage/mariage, ritual/rituel.