
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Renowned Sect, Sunnism and Socio-sectarian bickering in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone

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| ABSTRACT

The renowned sect, Sunnism and sectarian bickering, are part of the same triangle, unavoidable in any analysis of the sectarian life of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. A conceptual social frame has not yet been established, however, to explain, from the point of view of the nation's own sectarian experience, the specific forms taken by this sectarian life and how they relate to other similar expressions worldwide, as well as to holistic processes such as secularisation. The paradigm of novelty; The paradigm of novelty seems to resist as long as it follows the guidelines of the gestation of a secularisation process which translates into the strengthening of individual social conscience, the debilitation of Dawah (Islamic preaching) control and the formation of freedom spaces for those who do not think like a group of Islamic believers. However, the social paradigm does not find its parallel in the Arabian Model of Shiism in the consolidation of a class or social group that feeds and explains this bickering sectarian social thought. Consequently, it is imperative; from a sociological standpoint, to question the centrality or pertinence of the modern social paradigm. Most of all, because the modernity social paradigm results in an Iran-centric social paradigm, too oriented towards a set concept of socio-economic development and, therefore, of sectarian 'evolution'.

| KEYWORDS

Sunnism, Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone, Novelty, Renowned sect, Shiism

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1. Introduction

The renowned sect, Sunnism and socio-sectarian bickering form a triangle which is unavoidable in the analysis of the sectarian life of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. A conceptual frame has not yet been established, however, to explain the specific forms taken by this sectarian life in Traditional Western-Urban Sierra Leone and how they relate to other similar expressions worldwide, as well as to holistic procedures, such as secularisation.

Perhaps the original social problem lies in the theoretical references used. The social history of Shiism and of the divergent forms of sectarian bickering in the nation has, until now, revolved around the modernity paradigm, as outlined by Mohamed Bangura and Mohamed Gibril Sesay. Most sectarian bickering phenomenon specialists have tried to explain why Traditional Western-Urban Sierra Leone societies, predominantly Sunnism, apparently did not permit the creation of modern economic, social, political and cultural structures, which they attribute to a sectarian monopoly that did not allow the development of bickering thought. These same specialists explain the weak, late and isolated political and socio-economic advance as being due to poor, localised penetration of modern Shia social thought.

In this explicate search, a great deal of social research is dedicated to the relationship between other social groups that seek to break the sectarian monopoly, which, in itself, is part of a social framework inherited by the colony and resistant to change. These works refer mostly to the minority phenomenon of 19th – century Shiism, which apparently followed the classic model imposed by the jihadists that appeared during the reformation.

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More recent studies try to decipher the complex relationship that exists between renowned sect and the phenomenon of sectarian bickering, expressed in the 20th century by an enormous thrust of Shiism and other types of emotional sectarianism. Beyond the cataloguing of these sectarian social expressions, in the analysis of the sectarian phenomena holistically classified as Shiism, Traditional Western –Urban Sierra Leoneans run the risk in the study of Sunnism: that is, to suppose that there is a single social model, from which all the other manifestations are only deviations. Mohamed Gibril Sesay, for example, points out:

In the technical language of Sierra Leonean sociology, Traditional Western –Urban Sierra Leonean society is undergoing the differentiation which occurred much earlier and more slowly in 'Krio' society. This process would have occurred independently of the earlier influence of Guinea, Mali and Senegal, though, of course, these countries provided models for the protagonist of change and, by reason of their social power and progress, brought Traditional Western-Urban Sierra Leone within the scope of their cultural radiation (M.G. Sesay, personal communication, April 16, 2021).

Consequently, it is imperative, from a Sociological point of view, to question the centrality of the modernity paradigm, not just because the alleged identification between Shiism (and more precisely, Ahlul Baytism) and capitalism hardly explains what has happened in countries like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Lebanon, the five main oppressed nations. Also, some scholars have identified theological sources that would permit the formulation of a similar sectarian hypothesis (Bangura, 2019) in the case of Sunnism (Heiner, 2013). But, most of all, because the modernity paradigm results in an Iran-centric, too oriented towards a set concept of socio-economic development and, therefore, of sectarian 'evolution'.

1.1 A Sierra Leonean Conceptualisation

The word 'sectarianism' originally referred to small groups splitting away from or acting in isolation from 'the renowned sect'. The words 'renowned sect', meaning 'national', referred to the whole cultural community of religious (Islamic) Sierra Leoneans, and 'sects' described groups separated from or organised in opposition to that whole. From this, the word 'sectarian' took on its dual meaning: it had something to do with religion and something to do with groups separated by hostility. Socio-cultural and religious networks in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone have been described over many centuries as 'sectarian'. In large part, this stems from the Jihads (holy wars) of religion that broke out across Northern Sierra Leone in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where the Islamic faith split into those still loyal to the old order (Wahabis) and a variety of independent challengers (Shias).

The resulting hostility, in which religious rituals, belonging and beliefs were seen to be in conflict, were not restricted to a narrow realm of 'faith' but shaped both politics and international relations and personal behaviour. It contributed directly to centuries of conflict and war. Often, the combination of politics and theology took on a 'dualistic' character, where each side defined their cause as a stand for good as opposed to evident evil. Within this broader context, the specific conditions of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone gave rise to particular waves or outcomes.

The wars of religion coincided with an age of expansion, as European explorers conquered new territories and reshaped the political and economic map of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. The expansion of the new, traditionalist Sunni government to include Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone often took on a religious character, and the slum settlement established in the coastal terrain –of the colony after 1808 left a long legacy of antagonism rooted in a fusion of politics, culture, religion and economics. Nowadays, hostilities would tend to focus on political rather than religious differences, although the historical association between religion and politics remains strong enough for religious terminology to be used for political, national and ideological divisions in everyday speech.

The sectarian division was in both the foreground and background of the politics that led to partition and shaped devolution and politics in devolved Traditional Western Urban after 1961. The possibility of violence reinforced community divisions along sectarian lines, and political experience, as well as access to power and resources, was shaped by those divisions. Although the civil rights movement initially drew in supporters from across the community, the descent into open and violent conflict after 1967 resulted in even deeper divisions. Between 1971 and 1973, terrified minorities fled from the mixed and largely working-class communities of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. Armed thug groups rooted in separated communities and territories dominated the political landscape of Traditional Western Urban in particular, and Sierra Leone as a whole became a national byword for religious sectarianism between 'Sunni' and 'Ahmadiyya' 'Salafi' 'Malikie' 'Tejani' and civil violence. Many people, both secular and mosquegoing, are suspicious of the word 'sectarian' for fear that it over-emphasises the religious dimension of conflict rather than the political and economic elements. In this paper, the word is used, with all of its uncertainties, to describe an inter-group struggle for socio-cultural power, in which both religion and politics have played a consistent part and which is widely used to describe the wider sociological division. What is consistent is the hostility: what may have changed over the years is the precise role of faith and doctrine.

It is important to note, however, that, as is the case with religion, sectarianism cannot be restricted to a specific text or set of beliefs. In Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone, hostility has shaped:

* Recognition, where belonging is often also tied to 'not being them', as well as deep memories of injury and struggle in one part of the community against an external other;

* Social Construction, including the divided structure of political life, the structure of cultural and community life, education and expectations of marriage and family;

* Demeanor, where long years of experience convince people that they must be wary about where they live, where they go, how they speak in public and what they wear; and,

* Vantage point, in which life is inevitably viewed through the lens of separated and often hostile community experience. 'Sectarianism' is, therefore, a part of both the historical legacy and the everyday engagement of the Sierra Leonean. After so many years, our understanding of each other and our social or religious knowledge of each other too often rely on received or second-hand knowledge or presumptions shaped by socio-religious dictates, Friday sermons and seminar speeches.

Prejudgement, or prejudice, thrives in a climate of fear. Friendships, of which there are many, usually thrive in spite of sectarianism and often survive on the basis of tacitly avoiding giving offence or discussing divisive Sierra Leonean issues. The attention paid to 'sectarianism' in this paper is not intended to be judgemental or pejorative but to describe a common predicament: we were raised in a Sierra Leonean society where sectarianism was 'built in' to normality. Although the term sectarian is widely used, it is a word without positive associations. It is, therefore, in true Sierra Leonean sectarian fashion, usually a social word which we resist when applied to ourselves and rest more easily when it is applied at a level of generality or to others. But it is perfectly possible, indeed likely, that attitudes, behaviours or presumptions that we take to be unproblematic or 'normal' are regarded as 'sectarian' by others. Escaping this bind is part of the purpose of this paper.

Efforts to transform the hostility and suspicion and the permission it has sometimes given for violence, discrimination and exclusion, therefore, challenge assumptions and habits which are so deeply rooted that they are taken for granted as 'normal'. It is, therefore, both a huge challenge to which there is understandable resistance and a necessity if peace is ever to become the norm. Seeking Peace in Traditional Urban Sierra Leone after the Civil War claimed over 3,000 lives and injured tens of thousands of others. Communities were separated on territorial, educational and cultural lines, and the political institutions of devolution were introduced in 2005. After many efforts, the Sierra Leone Government of Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the Revolutionary United Front signed the Lome Peace Accord in 1999 and embarked, haltingly, on a joint project for 'reconciliation' across the traditional division, now often called the 'peace processes'.

In 1999, the major government loyalist and rebel armed groups called ceasefires, and their political representatives entered direct negotiations with the governments and other parties. Financial and diplomatic support for the process came from the United Nations.

The first three paragraphs of the Accord set out its anti-sectarian and historic purposes:

1. We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning.

2. The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.

3. We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Sierra Leone, between Traditional Western Urban, North, East, and South. Suspicion and caution in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone would not disappear easily, however. For twenty three years after the signing of the Accord, serious disagreements, especially over paramilitary disarmament, made it impossible to establish political institutions on a stable basis. At the same time, reconciliation in society began to take root, with a reduction in the level of inter-community violence, especially after 2001, and widespread initiatives and efforts at the community level. For the first time, sectarianism seemed to be changing the 'dual antagonism' of Traditional Western Urban society. And in 2005, the British government produced its 'Shared Future' policy, declaring that "'separate but not equal' is not an option." When devolution was restored in 2005, the parties leading the new government were Civilians and the RUF, both of which had previously been defined by their deep polarisation. Above all, they represented voters who were characterised by deeply felt differences in national identity, religious background and attitudes to and experience of conflict in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, the Government established in 2007 proved to have greater sociosectarian staying power than anything in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone since 1999. The advent of devolution established politics as the primary public arena for the working out of peace, including addressing the deep sectarianism embedded in society. In symbolic terms, the government and Ministers, acting together in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone, became global icons of peace. Economic conditions, especially after the global financial crash in 2008-9, were challenging. However, political violence had

reduced to levels unimaginable in the 1980s, and in 1997, policing and justice were devolved to the new Government. Much had clearly changed, with hugely beneficial consequences for the quality of social life of the majority in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. What remained, inevitably, were the legacy of violence and the deeply-rooted patterns of sectarianism. Separation remained a basic fact of life in many areas, and paramilitarism proved difficult to erode. Issues of social identity or challenges to existing structures both held the possibility that they would reignite fears or reopen wounds. Underneath the visibly melting tip of the iceberg, a still-challenging social mass remained to be addressed. So when the government of the All Peoples Congress (APC) was replaced in 2018, many of the old divisions, especially in politics, reappeared, running the risk that this could spill into communities.

2. The Formation of Shiism in Sierra Leone

The historical stages of Shiism in Traditional Western-Urban Sierra Leone are marked by a series of recurrent images: the emergence of the Ayatollah in Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Iran- Iraq war, and finally, the invasion of Iraq by western powers, highlighted by the capture of Iraq as a result of George Walker Bush senior military expedition. All of these, however, are no more than enclaves bonded to the economic and military penetration of western powers that are rivals of Iran and China and (because of this) the dissipation of the sectarian phenomenon of Shiism remains within the limits of their limited expansion.

In reality, the first feeble establishment of Shiism in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone was achieved only after the declaration of the Iranian Islamic revolution and especially after the establishment, throughout the 1980s, of the freedom of sectarian ideology that 'tolerated' beliefs other than Sunnism. One of the most interesting and productive lines of thought on this matter has been developed by Sheik Ahmad Tejan Sillah, who considers Shiite communities in Sierra Leone to be communities of ideas which means privileged associative spaces for the inculcation of modern values and democratic sectarian practices. This way, Shiites, Ahmadies, Hanafis, Malikies, Hanbalis and sect free thinkers would have banded together in political town halls, mosques, and Tabligh outreach and seminars, to combat intolerance and authoritarian spirituality that had one of its pillars in Sunnism (Bangura, 2019).

Up to this point paradigm of modernity seems to resist as long as it follows the guidelines of secularisation procedures which translates into the strengthening of individual social conscience, the debilitation of 'tabligh' (evangelist) control and the formation of free spaces for those who do not think like the group of believers. However, the paradigm does not find its parallel with the Iranian model of Shiism in the consolidation of a class or social group that explains the dissident sectarian thought. In other words, there is nothing to prove the existence of something similar to what Weber talked about, a social group imbued by 'worldly asceticism' and economic development or the emergence of a middle class influenced by sectarian individualism. There is difficulty in explaining, for example, the geography of Shiite communities resulting from the modern economy in the 19th century in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. Sillah, who without a doubt is one of the most astute specialists in Shiism and sectarian dissent in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone, pointed out that 'the Shiite movement was implanted and developed in Iran, in pioneer and basically rural regions far away from power centers, with a booming agro exporting economy. And concerning the social composition of those Shiites, the same author stated that:

It was about social sectors in transition, whose dissident sectarian interests coincided with the vindication of regional autonomy and politically liberal culture, traits of rural environments on their way to modernisation (Bangura, 2019: 1-10).

In fact, more than trying to explain the emerging Shiism in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone through economic causes, it is worth analysing the political and social reasons that generated a certain type of geography of sectarian bickering. For instance, Sillah points out other factors linked to the emergence of these societies of ideas, like the defense of spiritual autonomy, which is linked to the pre-eminence of liberal groups. 'It was not the foreign missionaries', he claims, 'who spread Shiism in these rural communities, but Western-Urban Sierra Leonean Sheiks who were at the same time active liberals (most frequently mubalighs or evangelists)'. This way, he claims, 'Shiism was essentially a way to create, in some communities, associative nets that would carry a liberal protest with a sectarian and political content' (Sillah, 2017). In other words, it is the link with liberal groups and other bickering ideological associations of the prevailing authoritarian spiritual and social structure that permits the generation of an incipient 'Shiism'.

More than trying to produce the geography based on the impacts of a modern economy, it is necessary to identify the political bonds and, above all, the deficiencies in the Sunni tabligh social structure, which were replaced by more effective alternatives in terms of socio-sectarian organisation. In other words, an examination which places Sunnism could not cover because of its historical shortage of Sheiks and the relative advantages (in education, for example, or in the appropriation of a mutually binding social identity)resulting from membership in a different sectarian organisation. In the second place, due to the links evident in other politically bickering social groups, Shiism really appeared in the 19th century more as a beneficiary than as a generator of liberalism. It is not, therefore, Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone which is the driving of a modern mind but its social usufructuary.

Finally, these elements permit at least an advanced question as to the real 'Shiite' character of the sectarian bickering associations of the 19th century. Up to what point can one establish that these associations were religiously different from the Sunni ones? This question is important because several specialists tend to make 19th century Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean Shiism an 'ideal' model that, in reality, maybe never have existed. Moreover, this supposedly 'classic' model of Shiism, imbued by democratic modernity, is compared to the one of the 20th century, emotional, Wahhabis and fundamentalist, integrated into the social practices and values of the renowned Sunni culture (Bangura, 2019). The Shiism of the 19th century is transformed into a kind of 'lost paradise' in the immensity of the culture and sectarianism of the Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean masses. And since sectarian bickering is becoming more and more extensive and, as such, close to renowned sectarian nature, it tends to be disqualified because of its closeness to a spiritual and authoritarian culture.

The analyses of the diverse Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean 'Shiisms' in the 19th century require, therefore, some additional thought about its relationship to popular religiousness. Just as Sunnism penetrated Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean society, transforming itself into a sect similar to but distinct from Arabian Sunnism, so did Shiism adapt to a cooperative spiritual and authoritarian culture, transforming into something diverse from its Iraqi and Iranian origins. However, the authoritarianism contemporary Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean Shiism cannot be explained only by endogenous factors. Iraqi and especially Iranian Shiism has a conservative and authoritarian streak. For this reason, it is essential to avoid automatic social identification between Sunnism and the spiritual and authoritarian social culture. Not everything Sunni is traditional and 'pre-modern'. There is Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone, as in Arabia, an open Sunnism that is not always opposed to that 'modernity'.

It is an undeniable fact that renowned Shiisms and the current Wahhabism's come from a spiritual and authoritarian culture present in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean communities, but they do not necessarily originate in renowned Sunnism, which seems to be equally affected by its social context. After all, as has been noted, a renowned sect can also be a sect of resistance, both liberating and revolutionary. Sunnism is, on occasion, less resistant and authoritarian than it is usually portrayed, and traditional Shiism is less liberating and democratic than one would like to imagine.

The key to the interpretation of these sectarian phenomena may reside in the elimination of or relativism of the modernity paradigm. It is not by contrasting or comparing the advances of Sunnism and Shiism (or the rest of the religious groups) with modernity that one can recognise their internal characteristics, social impact and influence on the future of the nation. Actually, Bangura himself has moved from a definition of 'ambiguous modernity' to a definition of 'peripheral modernity' as well as that of 'social particularistic modernity'.

The new sectarian movements reconstitute the bond of the community, opposing the endogenous and exogenous forces that destroy it. They are powerful and influential movements of affirmation of dignity denied to the poor and the excluded. When the sectarian demands are transformed into political demands, there is an open way for a new social community which refuses to copy the Arabian and Iranian model of the sovereign individual because it does not want to eliminate spiritual solidarity as a fundamental basis of social action in Traditional Western –Urban Sierra Leone (Conteh, 2011).

In a recent social chapter, discourse from Conteh, in order to claim that AhlulBaytism can legitimately be considered a form of Shiism, though emotional and with a charismatic type of leadership, in charities that are profoundly intertwined with local culture, breaking with the idea that Shiism must necessarily be associated with progressivism. Bangura claims, for instance:

AhlulBaytism is modern when it legitimises the rupture of traditional customs; it is postmodern because of its capacity to manage social and cultural fractures of modernity; it is pre-modern as it re-enchants the Western-Urban Sierra Leonean society (Bangura, 2019:24).

This example shows that it is relevant to define whether Traditional Western – Urban Sierra Leone Ahlul Baytism forms part of a Shiite tradition, but it is more important to know when it displays distinctive traits that make it a unique movement, different from other movements, although referring to them.

3. Sampling and Mode

The researcher concentrates on seminars and Friday sermons as they are a textured medium of communication between the Sierra Leonean Sheik/ Imam and the follower. They also offer what Mohamed Bangura (2019) calls "spaces of Sierra Leonean social appearance" (p. 17), where the Sheik would appear to others explicitly. As Bangura (2019) argues, "everything the Sheik does or says... communicates 'something'." (pp. 19-30). Seminars and Friday sermons are thus a calculated and deliberately coordinated manifestation of the Sheik's or Imam's agency by showing not only his capacity to act, influence or mobilise. The discourse is based on seminars and sermons and is "communicative discourse," that is, "the narrative between sectarian actors and the public" (Scollon., 1996, p.3). It is also a "coordinative discourse," which Luke Temple and others define as "narrative utilised among policy actors" (Scollon., 1996, p.3), especially as the sermons involve scripting, censorship, and controlled propagation. The sermons carry

the power of Sheik less in terms of his direct physical influence or constraint and more in terms of symbolic sectarian representation. It is what Stuart Hall (2001) calls the "power in representation" (p. 338), which he defined as the "power to mark, assign or classify" or the "power to represent someone or something a certain way" (Hall, 2001, p. 338). The sermons show not only Sheik's power to represent but also the power to produce; that is how Sheiks produced new "kinds of knowledge" (Hall, 2001, p. 339; see also Said, 2003) relating sectarianisation and desectarianisation as "objects of knowledge" (Hall, 2001, p. 339) serving the practices and institutions of spiritual authoritarianism. The sermons thus turn the reiterative conflation of meanings of both terms under analysis into a form of sectarian action with regularity and pattern to it.

The sample is admittedly biased as it focuses on specific representational sectarian practices, that is, those sermons delivered from 1980, when the sectarian conflict erupted, and onwards. The Sierra Leone government has uniquely witnessed a ferocious contest of narratives where different factions compete to break the discursive monopoly of the sectarian meanings that have become less fixed or completely controlled from above. The analysis in the paper does not imply that the Sierra Leone government propagates its discourse unchallenged or ignores how the opposition has resisted or weakened the leader's discursive dominance. Rather, the researcher analyzes meanings identified in Sheik's sermons in the sect, that is, how they interact with other or oppositional meanings, including those which have emanated from 2007 onwards.

The researcher traces the language less as formal items or rhetorical components as other scholars have done when they systematically describe the style and form of sermons of other Sheiks. Rather, the researcher focus on thematic meanings mainly explored in the content and substance of Sheik's sermons, how these meanings are mobilised during the contingencies of the 2007 conflict, and how they are shaped or reshaped within the practices of power or, as Foucault put it, "discursive configuration which assists in the production of order" (Gabbard, 2021, p. 40-47) under which a Sheik seeks to emphasize specific meanings and ignore or hide others as part of stabilising his sectarian social powers. The researcher grouped themes into the three main predefined master frames (internal unification, externalisation, and legitimation). Each one of these frames is identified in the texts of sermons through keywords, stock phrases, or whole sentences as long as they all provide specific meanings or "thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Bangura, 2019, p. 60).

As the social construction process is based on emphasizing specific meanings while ignoring or hiding others, the process relates to power dynamics in sectarian politics as the selected personality social constructions are thus a product of actions as a "powerful social agent" (Giordano, 2022 p.3-10). The construction is based on social consistency (judged by repetition or social frequency), coherence (judged by coordination in meanings building up a more unified theme), or resonance (judged by coordination between the three frames and their interaction with the surrounding context offering supportive shared meanings and opportunities for Sheiks to stabilise their meanings within the surrounding sectarian common sense). In this vein, the social constructions are not presented in isolation but are related to each other as "culturally structured differences in discursive constructions" (Scollon, 1996, p.1) or components of a broader and continuous process of production of social meanings and how these social meanings turn into a "strategic resource" in the sectarian's influence radio programmes that can help Sheiks rally their own support bases and demobilise its sectarian opponents.

In this sense, the frame analysis is loosely adopted even at the expense of overlapping with other perspectives of discourse analysis, such as descriptive discourse analysis (units of language in the text neutrally and transparently describing reality, including how some Sheiks think of sectarianism), critical discourse analysis (discursive and social practices where tribal language can create help Sheiks create social and spiritual reality) as well as the Foucauldian discourse analysis (rules and relations setting patterns, trajectories across history)

3.1 The intramural consolidation chief scholar: Contradiction and vindication

Imam Sillah builds the unification frame to the meaning that all Sierra Leoneans are united and the country, therefore, has no space for the rise of sectarianism, defined in his sermons as synonymous with division and polarisation. The meanings are emphasized in almost all of his Friday sermons and statements since 2000, as these citations indicate: Sierra Leoneans already experience "a perfect sense of common or shared living" (Sillah,2017), today, we witness not just coexistence or tolerance, but full integration and harmony (Sillah,2017), the Sierra Leonean society now enjoys "blending and integration... among sects, ideas, traditions, concepts, visions," (Sillah, 2017), and all components of society now "complement each other and integrate to build the unified national color" (Sillah, 2017).

Sillah took the developments unfolding in 2007 onwards as a testament to this reality as we have surpassed the concepts of common or shared living, which prevailed before the events, to a stage of full integration and social cohesion among Traditional Western-Urban Sierra Leoneans (Sillah,2017). Sillah went more direct and conclusive to stress that the "Traditional Western-Urban Sierra Leonean society has never been sectarian... otherwise; it would not have endured as such" (Sillah,2017). All these thematic

constructions gain their salience through repetition and frequency across many Friday sermons. He always told his audience that the civil war proved that "Sierra Leonean society is in a much better position today than at the beginning of the war or before it" (Sillah,2017). Furthermore, it is a redemptive moment where all Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leoneans can now get rid of any "hidden" or "unconscious" feelings of sectarianism as they now "learn the lessons that they have to condemn sectarianism otherwise their homeland would descend into destruction." (Sillah,2017). If any Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean has "sectarianism in his soul as fire under ashes" (Sillah, 2017), it is now the time to extinguish it as the eruption of the events came as a perfect time since "if we waited longer or more years these sectarian sentiments could have gone deeper into the souls of Syrians" (Sillah,2017). The Syrian president welcomed "those who were misled and wanted to abandon their wrong path on the other" (Sillah,2017) as part of sectarian repentance.

Sillah had built the frame of a desectarianised Traditional Western –Urban Sierra Leone by systematically subjecting Sierra Leoneans to a "constant barrage of its rhetorical iterations" (Bangura, 2019, p.38), reiterating that Sierra Leone and Sierra Leoneans are fully united. The moments of hardships or national crises were repackaged as a collective struggle where Sierra Leoneans "suffer together" (Bangura, 2019, pp. 26-28). This deniability even goes back to the early formation of the Sierra Leone Republic (1971); the ruling elites have always denied the issue, and they never considered sectarianisation a "major issue worthy of public discussion" (Bangura,2018, p.3). This articulation has contradicted reality since sectarianisation has been rampant and continuous as part of Sierra Leone's "national political climate in Sierra Leone's modern social history" (Bangura,2019, p.41).

The chief Shiite scholar managed to impose this social reality on the ground by what Bangura (2019) calls "the articulation-jurist authority or Faqihu Balad," which is simply combining words with actions. For example, Sillah's personality also mobilised its use of social compromise to guarantee its Ahlul Bayt social narratives and an "absolute combination" of any discussion of sectarianism (Bangura, 2019). In 2016 radical Shiite scholar, Imam Alie and self-effacing radio presenter Mohamed Jaward Nyallay were criticised after airing an evening programme entitled "Sierra Leone sectarian intolerance," in which he emphasized that "in a wahhabi community the level of hate for the Shia sect is high although they underlie the Sierra Leonean society" (Bangura,2019). The silence, Bangura elaborated, is not "because they ignore their existence, but out of fear of the wahhabi spiritual authorities, which claim to have neutralised all sectarian and ideological differences and treat any talk on these issues as insecurity" (Bangura, 2019).

Still, most significantly, the frame gains validity and continuity as Sillah built his legitimacy on it in a number of ways. He consolidates his status as the guarantor for a unified Sect under which the minorities (shiites), in general, are "protected" (Bangura, 2019) under the allegedly unified Sect. Second, Sillah's personality turned his ethnic belonging as a member of the Mandingo minority into leverage through combined untouchability.

Strikingly, or perhaps ironically, the top-down imposition by the personality of the rhetoric of desectarianisation and the bottom-up submissiveness of Shiites created a sense of sect integration or unity based on "the generalised familiarity with the Imam's language and iconography" (Bangura,2019, p. 45). It is unity in the sense that "every citizen in every location of the political landscape, from those who admire Sillah's religious and political savvy to those who despise him, have been required to share in this experience of Sillah's leadership" (Bangura,2019, p.43). All these practices on the ground have contributed to what Mohamed Bangura (2019) called a "sectarian chastity" (p. 10) based on a constructed state of not having any problems appertaining to sectarian relations or never having any sectarianism with other Sierra Leoneans.

4. Shiism and Domestic Culture

A map of the influence of Shiism or religious bickering in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone (with the exception of Koinadugu) would show a relatively uniform distribution. At the same time, there are some districts in which non-Sunni sects have an important historical presence, such as Kenema, Pujehun, Kambia, Makeni and Bo, and there are others in which an above average portion of the population is Shiite. In the Western-Urban, in the communities with a strong indigenous presence such as Fulas, the percentage of non-Sunnis (about 40 percent according to conservative calculations) is much higher than the national average, which confirms the impact of bickering sectarianisms among the Fulas.

The reasons for this growing identity relating Fulas to Shiism or sectarian bickering are multiple. But the main cause should undoubtedly be attributed to the lack of focus that the Sunni community gave to non-Fula Sierra Leoneans. Despite the historical image that characters like Imam Basharr, Sheik Mufti Gibril Sesay, and Sheik Muhammad Mujtabah helped to create, 'Fretonians' were quickly disappointed by the indifference and lack of disposition towards a united Sunni life among the Fulas, in both the urban and rural communities. The founding of the Badrudeen Fula Mission remains a symbol of the desire to rapidly establish Sunni Wahhabism among the Fula elite. When the Sunni Scholar Alhaji Junisa gathered more than 2000 children that belonged to the Fula nobility and entrusted them to the Wahhabis for their Islamic education, all indications were that this would germinate a native 'tablighood' (evangelisthood). 'So impressed were the Badrudeniens' states Alhaji Junisa, 'that three or four young disciples were admitted to the order, although experience soon demonstrated that the Fulas were not yet ready for 'tablighood', being

more inclined towards business than Wahhabism. The idea of a fundamentalist tablighood was an enormous obstacle to the creation of an indigenous 'tablighood' in the second half of the 1980s. Even Sheik Alimamy Sesay stated at the time that New Sierra Leone had transformed itself into a 'sterile and difficult-to-harvest field' (Personal communication, 5/9/ 2021).

After the first half of the 1980s, neither the Shiites community nor the Sunni community would develop a true Fula Mubaligeen (Evangelism). The greatest Islamisation efforts were directed towards the growing groups of 'locals' rather than towards the Fulas, who were more and more excluded in time from the Mubaligeen influence. Actually, Wahabism focus on the Fulas recovered very slowly during the second half of the 1990s.

In the same way, Shiite organisations have emerged, as has been mentioned, basically due to endogenous efforts; they had dedicated themselves mainly to the local portion of the population. It was until the first stream of missionaries in the period between the Iran and Iraq wars that many Saudi Wahabi societies directed their focus to the Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean Wahhabi Fulas, with spectacular results. The Sunni hierarchy has always blamed the 'sects' for seeking the destruction of the culture and social identity of the Traditional Western - Urban Sierra Leonean Sunni populace. This hypothesis, currently out of favour in the sociological world, but still predominant among the Sunni sheiks, supposes the existence of a specific plan by the United States of America and Great Britain to debilitate the countries of the Manor River Basin and make them dependent on the Anglo-Saxon powers. The persistence of this thesis among the Sunni hierarchy explains the accusations that First World countries and international organisations are promoters of cultural models 'alien' to the Third World.

Sillah maintains that the 'the popular Shiism gives way to a more efficient space of resistance and/or adaptation to modernity than do popular Sunnism' (Sillah,2017). Abdul Muthalib states that this compatibility is due, at least in some cases, to the coincidence between some aspects of evangelistic activities and indigenous ones, such as the existence of curative and therapeutic powers attributed to the religious leaders, similar in many aspects 'autochthonous Shamanism'(Conteh, 2011). Other analysis explain the rapid growth of non-Sunni sects as a form of rebellion against the dominant social culture or simply as a mixture of the practical and economic benefits that come from a determined spiritual vocation and the feeling of being predestined for salvation (see, for example, Conteh, 2009). In any case, it is obvious that the causes of the unusual success of Shiism, Tabligh and 'paralamic' sects are complex and still being explored.

Therefore, 'Classic Sunnism' seems to march at a parallel pace with the secularisation of process, which is the individualism of beliefs, and the separation of the political and religious spheres, melting with secularised society. In the meantime, in the twentieth century, a new sectarian dissent was born in urban Freetown, and it represented a threat to the control of the salvation goods held by the Sunni community and shared to a lesser degree by the Shiism organisations.

4.1 Sectarianism and Sunnism in Freetown

In a social discourse about sects in Western Urban Sierra Leone, it is necessary to mention the Sunni sect's experience since, due to its monolithic character, it establishes behaviour and 'acculturation' guidelines among the Fula population. The importance of this relationship is bidirectional. On the one hand, the impact, Freetown has the most Sunni of any region in the country, with Mahads (Islamic colleges), missionaries and Dawah (Islamic preachings) implications this brings. In a sense, 'liberation theologies' theoretical and Practical, even though condemned and persecuted, are no more than a sample of this growing regional weight on the institutional life of the Sunni community. At the same time, despite the predominant role of Sunnism in the country, the twentieth century was an era of feeble sectarian plurality and incipient tolerance. The forecast for the end of the millennium seems to confirm the tendency towards a more open society, although also foreseeing the risk of a fundamental backlash (whether Shiism or Sunni). The emergence of new actors (new sectarian movements) or of forgotten actors (the Fulas) in the always changing Freetown Urban communities forces 'Freetonians' of what remains and what transforms in the socio-sectarian panorama of the region.

It is often forgotten that contrary to the Arabian Peninsula; Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone suffers from an endemic lack of Sunni Wahhabi missionaries which directly affects the Tabligh capability to cover the whole country as well as producing weak Dawah (Islamic preaching) with strong renowned traits. At the end of the twentieth century, the Sunni sect still had distinctive mission zones in Freetown urban in the valleys and mountains despite the fact that paradoxically the region itself was a generator of missionaries for other parts of the country.

We have then a map of the extension of "Arab" Islamisation(the researcher intentionally avoiding terms like conservative or orthodox) that for centuries has limited itself to cities and important populations and is accompanied by "renowned Sunnism" where several sectarian traditions not only "adapt" and refunctionalise" themselves but where they lack a sectarian bureaucratic - type leadership. In the vacuum this generated, there arise all kinds of Ilmu seer (knowledge of the secret spirit domain), mostly but not limited to the rural areas barely controlled by a mission and a civil power that complement and contemporise themselves to whatever possible degree. One could venture to say that in the same way, the development of this "lay" or "a clerical" Sunnism will

be an influence in centuries to come for the consolidation of a renowned laity which constituted the foundation of secularised political movements in independent nations.

For several centuries Shiism, Malikiism, and other sects different from Sunnism could be kept out due to expressed prohibition and the lack of border zones or direct contact with other cultures. But when forest spaces have been occupied (due to Freetown's growing settlements) and the communication and transportation revolutions have eliminated 'natural barriers' geographical isolation ends and is substituted by a growing competitive market in which the most diverse sects participate.

5. Sectarian Dissents, Reconstruction and Social Struggle

In Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone, in most cases, the socio-sectarian resistance exists under the guise of the building of separate identity but within the dominant sectarian system. In other words, resistance is not only open or dissimilated opposition, but it is a search for assimilation to keep a unique social; identity. As affirmed by Alusine Jalloh in reference to the geneology of his ancestry case,

... by means of a positive confession of Islam, the Fula elite found the concept that enables them to establish an acceptable defense of their social identity. As much as the nomads could evade the challenge due to the acculturation', using a mixture of stoic resignation and dissimulation (Jalloh, 2018).

Thus, between resistance and integration, the Sunni practice was assimilated at several levels and in very different ways by the population.

In this way, 'that difficult process of Islamisation of the Fulbe Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone or the Fulbelisation of the Sierra Leone Islamic educational community, that still subsists in a lot of communities' (Jalloh, 2018; xvi + 320); was achieved.

The Fulas, like the Mandingoes, used every means available, including sectarian, to survive under the colonial regimen as well as in the modern-liberal one. The Fulas and renowned masses do not generate a diverse sectarian practice, completely autonomous from cultural institutions; instead, they participate in a complex relationship within a dominant system of beliefs.

The renowned sect has been, in this way, a resistance mechanism for some and, for others, a mechanism of integration into a dominant culture and sect. The renowned sect is not only a sect for the lower classes but also for many who fight for the control of salvation goods. Often, however, it is the most significant way for the lay masses to demonstrate to their cultural institution.

We must note that the notion of a renowned sect is related to the idea of secularisation, as it is frequently seen as a type of vestige or residue of beliefs or of the ancient (colonial past), which would be considered a hindrance in the rationalisation process of society.

Why not think that this myth of Arabian Medieval Islamisation has its equivalent in the Islamisation of myth during the colonial era of Western-Urban Sierra Leone? Certainly, the differences are enormous: first of all, the Islam that arrived in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone was already a reformed Islam. Also, the social context was different because of the relationship with Jihadist dominated sects. But undoubtedly, the questioning of the supposedly almost absolute moral and ritual control that Sunnism has over its followers, as well as the questioning of Sunni's real social and political influence on institutional life, is an important analytical exercise that would allow us to explain the early diffusion and ample development of anticlericalism and of secular policies in most of the independent regions in Sierra Leone. This would tend to demonstrate that the central problem of the 'modernity obstacles' does not come from the sect but from the social structure itself, which does not necessarily pretend to be ruled by the laws of modern rationality.

6. Conclusions and Waves

The trajectory of the sect in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone is marked by some central elements. Despite the vast space that this trajectory covers and the diversity of situations generated in the last centuries, there are some permanent and recurrent elements, as well as conducive threads, that permit an appreciation as a whole.

Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean sects have lived in the last five centuries under the sign, apparently contradictory, of a monopoly of salvation goods at an institutional level and of a profound diversity of sectarian manifestations which relate to and interact with it. Resistance, adaptation and integration are only of the few options found in the sectarian expressions as a whole in order to attain some type of relationship, required and inevitable, with the dominant system of beliefs.

The key to the weak institutional control, manifest throughout the social history of the Sunni community in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone, is the endemic lack of Sheiks that also explains the social power of the so-called renowned sect and of the other type of sectarianism, which normally develops in the region. This also means that in spite of being considered a sectarian reserve for tabligisation (evangelisation) efforts in the fourth millennium; Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone cannot be

considered a fully Sunni region, given that the enculturation process has not yet been fully achieved. In other words, the culture of the Western-Urban Sierra Leonean people, despite hundred years of evangelisation, is not identified with Sunnism in the same way Islam, Hinduism, Baha'ism, and Confucianism are with Asians or Christianity with Europeans. Therefore, Shiite organisations, the 'paraislamic' sects and other types of sectarian movements can easily be introduced to society. The latter is even more evident if Fulbe communities, where the process of transformation of sectarian beliefs is even more accelerated than in the rest of the society.

The Sunni sect was part of the colonial state until independence and, in many ways, continued to be a part of the independent state throughout the 19th century. The influence and prerogative that this sect still enjoys in many districts are explained by the subsistence of this colonial heritage since it represents a common temptation for the government and the Sunni hierarchy of the nation.

The emergence of sectarian dissent and its growing diffusion in all Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leonean communities is a clear manifestation of the aforementioned signs: Sunnism institutional frailty, the strength of renowned sect, identification of mosque and state, the persistence of jurisdictionalisation (state of interventions on mosque affairs), growing social mobility and, therefore, rise in the number of sectarian options. The future challenge for the nation lies in the management of this new plurality. The main ingredient for this is tolerance. However, it does not seem to be found among the principal values of its civil or religious social history.

In sum, the sectarian situation of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone on the eve of the third millennium appears to have a great deal of mobility, highly dynamic and increasingly pluralistic. Sectarian dissent, as it overtakes larger sectors of the population, will soon stop being dissenting, despite the fact that it continues to be a marginal force. In its interaction with renowned beliefs, dissent is becoming a unique sectarian social phenomenon, not necessarily explained by the modernity paradigm, with long range spiritual, social and political dimensions whose repercussions in the future of the nation are only to be imagined.

6.1 Waves

a. There is an obvious sociological trend towards a change in the religious minority-majority structure of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. On a strict analysis of social identity, there is no longer a Sunni majority in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone.

b. There is a measurable trend toward a Shia majority within Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone. The extent to which this translates into choices about national Sectarianism in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone: A sociological discourse on Traditional Western Urban social identity is uncertain. Following the observation, there is consistent evidence in the Friday Sermons and Seminars that a relatively high proportion of Shiites are determined to remain in Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone in the long term. However, there is also evidence that the changes in population have significant effects on the Islamic politics of Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone.

c. The opportunities and challenges of living in a secular or plural society are likely to grow in coming decades as this issue changes its nature. Planning for a shared society with an important new or emerging population is a significant social structure for preparing for the future.

d. The changes in the Traditional Western Urban Sierra Leone are striking. The traditional image of Western Urban Sierra Leone as a politically and Islamically unionist area has been changing for many years. Under the new local government boundaries established in 2016, Traditional Western Urban has become a shared terrain where the religious population is younger and more confident. This is particularly true in areas close to interfaces, where there are persistent concentrations of poverty and contentious cultural issues. Community cultural organisations appear to have an ongoing presence, and there is evident competition over control of specific areas. In the context of the population dynamic, the narrative of 'two sides of a wall' may soon change into a narrative about growing and declining communities with different demands and real social impact. Anger and alienation among young Mubaleegeens or evangelists have already resulted in Islamic - political protests and street demonstrations. Issues of cultural identities, such as esoteric regalia and associations and the routes of traditional parades, have both become contentious in recent years.

e. The cumulative impact of demographic transformations is experienced differently in 'Sunni' and 'Shia', 'Ahmadiyya' 'Tejanniya' communities, especially where they are separately organised and still perceived as hostile, as is the case at interfaces. This 'asymmetric dynamic' has an important impact on Islamic politics and the dilemmas facing politicians, which is likely to accelerate in coming years. Unionist Islamic politics often reflects the perception that Sunni neighbourhoods face:

- A reduction in the physical area of territorial control;
- A potentially expanding restriction of their area for community celebration (parades, regalia and associations);

- Perception of growth in influence of feared enemies – ‘extremists’, ‘dissidents’; and ‘culturalists.’
- Cultural pessimism – loss, dying out, things are getting worse. National politics appears to be more optimistic about future prospects. In the absence of fears of further cultural loss, concerns about unequal access to social goods predominate. Instead, Culturalist narratives tend to be characterised by:
 - Concerns about housing issues, including overcrowding and multiple deprivations, rooted in unequal access to space, housing and other amenities;
 - Any continuing evidence of residual deprivation, discrimination, tribalism, cronyism and regionalism, especially where equality demands are deemed to have been shelved.

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