Democracy without Ethnic Conflict:
Embedded Parties, Transcendent Social Capital & Non-violent Pluralism in Senegal and Indonesia

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Democratization has been widely celebrated in the past decade as the unmitigated liberation of the human spirit from the bonds of arbitrariness and oppression. Yet processes of political opening and democratic elections have been suspiciously close to the scene of the crime in the outbreak of genocidal violence in Burundi and Rwanda in 1992-94, the ex-Yugoslav wars of the mid-1990s, the secessionist violence of Russia’s southern rim, and the civil conflicts in Indonesia’s Moluku, Aceh, West Kalimantan and Irian Jaya provinces. There is no smoking gun here, but does democratization somehow precipitate sub-national cultural identity conflict?

This paper builds on field research in Senegal and Indonesia to argue that in post-colonial developing societies, democratization will be less likely to precipitate sub-national cultural identity conflict in the presence of either: a) socially embedded political parties or b) forms of social capital (trust, associationalism, willingness to cooperate and volunteer) that transcend ethnic and cultural identity groups. Senegal for many decades successfully embedded its otherwise elitist political parties in highly legitimate, ethnically transcendent Islamic Sufi brotherhoods. In Senegal north of the Casamance, democracy has not precipitated cultural identity conflict. In Indonesia, Moluku and Yogyakarta provinces mark sharp contrasts. In Moluku, Suharto-era state consolidation wiped out local institutions of Christian-Muslim conflict resolution and informal mediation. Since 1999, Moluku has been the scene of the bloodiest post-independence inter-religious violence in Indonesia. In Yogyakarta, by contrast, the neo-traditional Sultan supports institutional organizations and practices which deliberately foster frequent contact, discussion and trust between Muslims and Christians, Chinese and Javanese. Incidents of inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflict in Yogyakarta are among the lowest in Indonesia.

Together, these cases underscore the importance of embedding the formal organizations of electoral competition and political pluralism in either culturally meaningful political parties or in ethnically transcendent social trust as a means to prevent centrifugal violence in the context of democratization. This embedding is no guarantee – by itself it will not prevent the degeneration of democracy into the reification of cultural difference as the basis for political mobilization and conflict. But culturally embedded parties and transcendent social capital can provide a kind of bulwark against the natural tendency of political elites to seek the path of least resistance in political mobilization, which in culturally plural weak nation-states, often means playing the “ethnic card.”
This paper briefly frames the possible linkages between democratization and identity conflict in context of post-colonialism and late development. We then turn in sections three and four to analyses of case illustrations from Senegal as well as from Moluku and Yogyakarta provinces in Indonesia. Concluding comments reflect on the importance of overcoming the cultural limitations of liberalism by integrating neo-traditional and culturally transcendent institutions as post colonial societies build democratic regimes and inclusive nations.

2. Political Pluralism and National Fragmentation among Late Developers

Third wave democratization, coinciding as it has with the end of the Cold War and global liberal triumphalism, has too often slipped into the “all good things go together” analytic fallacy. From “end of history” praise-singing to facile “shock therapy” treatments, neo-liberals from Hayek to Friedman have sung a sweet, simple and tempting refrain: unshackle the human spirit, release the dynamic forces of free enterprise, open the public sphere to new voices and unfettered competition. Releasing these “natural human forces” of democratic capitalism, the lyric soars, will unproblematically generate equitable, civil, just and growing societies where authoritarianism, centrism, fear, coercion and internal distrust have long reigned. In the celebration of the liberal victory over statism, we have too often assumed that liberalism in economic life, in political organization, even in the management of cultural difference, represents an institutional panacea for all societies.

In point of fact, the rapid introduction of wide-open, unfettered electoral competition and political pluralism seems to have coincided with increased tensions and conflict between cultural identity groups in many societies making the transition from either statist-authoritarian regimes (as in Eastern Europe) or from personalistic authoritarian forms of government (as in much of Africa and parts of Asia and Latin America). In the former Yugoslavia after the collapse of Tito’s strong party-state, the carefully crafted revival of dormant ethno-religious hatreds helped consolidate inchoate would-be nations and provided the mobilizational appeal for new political elites suddenly forced to compete in popular elections (Silber and Little, 1997). When India’s Congress Party finally lost its quasi-dynastic grip on the electorate in the mid-1990s, it opened the door for a grass-roots Hindu nationalist movement to become the country’s dominant political force (Wirsing and Mukherjee, 1995). In post-Suharto Indonesia, democratic openness has been synonymous with the sometimes violent expression of sub-national hatred and irredentism, from the independence movements in Aceh and Irian Jaya to the explosion of inter-religious and inter-ethnic tensions in Moluku and West Kalimantan (Anderson, 1999). Democratization in Burundi brought the first ethnic majority (Hutu) regime to power in that country in 1992, only to be followed by a brutal coup
led by the minority ethnic elite (Tutsi), which intensified ethnic paranoia in neighboring Rwanda (Lemarchand, 2001). Intense fear and vilification of Tutsis, set against the pressure to democratize Rwanda, helped incubate the genocidal schemes that would be unleashed in the spring of 1994. Similar processes have ensued across recently democratized African polities (Zambia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo, even Mali in some ways) where electoral competition without the institutionalization and enculturation of strong political parties and civil society organizations has translated into varying degrees of ethnicization of political conflict and party competition (Herbst, 2001).

The African cases are especially illustrative because the empirical reality as well as the scholarly analysis of Third Wave democratization so resembles the era of decolonization south of the Sahara. Then, as now, a host of new democratic regimes were brought into being, somewhat unexpectedly, out of the breakdown of authoritarian political structures. Then, as now, there was a widespread feeling of living through a singular era of liberation with all the attendant hopes for transformation and national transcendence (not to mention the associated disappointment, frustration and cynicism when the high hopes were dashed, coups staged, blood of Patrice Lumumbas and other would-be republicans senselessly spilled).

The era of African decolonization also produced seminal analyses of the impact of sudden political opening, party competition and mass political mobilization on the stability of culturally plural societies (Coleman, 1964; Rosberg and Nottingham, 1974; Kasfir, 1976). During and since the era of decolonization, the effort to make sense of when, why and under what circumstances political opening can contribute to ethnic conflict has carried a decidedly Africanist echo, whether acknowledged or not. We should be sure to take note that this is not because ethnic conflict in the aftermath of democratization is a singularly African phenomenon. Rather, it has more to do with the analytic mis-characterization of African politics as quintessentially the politics of ethnicity (“tribalism” -- see for an especially nefarious example Kaplan 1994). This mis-understanding in some ways also accounts for the marginalization (is it ghettoization?) of the insights drawn from the African experiences with democratization, yet meaningfully applicable to the comparative analysis of democratization in other regions.

African and non-African cases give us some insight into potential relationships between democratization and social conflict based on ethnicity, religion or cultural identity. Societies marked by Crawford Young’s cultural pluralism (1976), in which the process of nation-state formation has been incomplete, truncated or weak, are especially vulnerable candidates for democratization-induced cultural group
conflict. States which reflect the “Bula Matari syndrome” – a legacy of a colonially-imposed state structure grotesquely out of proportion to civil society and the private sector (Young 1994) – intensify the problem. Controlling Bula Matari is so crucial for class formation, and for the everyday human pursuit of wealth, status and power, that gracious losing, the essence of the democratic process, is tantamount to a form of political, economic and social status suicide for oneself and for one’s clientelistic, familial and ethnic dependents. Concomitant with the Bula Matari syndrome, the lack of a vibrant, urban, educated middle class, as well as the attendant institutionalization of civil society (Diamond 1999), makes democracy a kind of Manichean, life or death struggle between invidious social blocs mobilized by elites along the simplest, cheapest, path-of-least-resistance means (that is, seemingly primordial cultural identifications like ethnicity, religion or other cultural identity).

We thus already know something, quite a bit indeed, about why, when and under what circumstances democratization might breed ethnic or other cultural conflict. What has been relatively missing from the analysis, however, is the flip side of the coin: what social patterns, institutional structures or value systems can block this unfortunate linkage between political freedom and cultural struggle? Even in culturally plural societies with unconsolidated nation-states suffering from the Bula Matari syndrome and consequently lacking vibrant middle classes and civil societies, even under all these circumstances, are there some institutional and cultural configurations that can inhibit or at least slow the tendency for open political competition and liberal enfranchisement to degenerate into wars of all of “us” against all of “them,” the vilified “other?”

The purpose of this paper is to begin to theorize about the institutional configurations (formal and informal) that can at least inhibit the slide from pluralism to ethnic war by focusing on two empirical cases of the non-politicization of cultural identity in the context of democratization. Senegal north of the Casamance and the Yogyakarta region of Central Java, Indonesia exhibit cultural pluralism, weak nations, and Bula Matari legacies, to be sure. They have also experienced varying degrees of political liberalization in the last 40 years. Yet in neither setting have elites turned with any success to cultural difference as a mobilizational tool in democratic electoral competition. As the case explorations below suggest, we can identify specific institutional cultural configurations in northern Senegal and in Yogyakarta which plausibly block the political appeal to cultural difference or hate as a democratic

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1 As Young describes, Bula Matari, roughly translates from Kikongo as “crusher of rocks,” a name Henry Stanley encouraged local people in the Belgian Congo to use to refer to the colonial state itself. The name caught on because the colonial state, product of an industrial capitalist social order, was so fantastically powerful in military, technological, administrative, extractive and political terms when placed suddenly and arbitrarily above decidedly pre-capitalist social orders and states (Young, 1994, pp, 1-12).
mobilizational tool. In both of these cases, key political institutions are “embedded” in local neo-traditions in a way which transcends historic ethnic and religious communities, providing an institutionalized, experiential basis for the idea of national citizenship and cross-cultural tolerance, identification and trust. These institutions, critically, are rooted outside the control of the state, in civil society. They are also conspicuously lacking in regions of both countries (Casamance in Senegal, Moluku province in Indonesia) that have been wracked by intense culturally-based violence during the very periods of maximal political pluralism in both countries.

3. The Social Embedding of Superficial Liberalism in Senegal

Since independence in 1960, Senegal has enjoyed both relative democratic stability and relatively isolated incidents of ethnic or religious conflict (Gellar, 1995; Hesseling, 1985). The key exception (to which we will return), the Casamance area south of the Gambia, has been marked by an on-again, off-again separatist guerilla war for the last four decades, motivated in part by regional identification, ethnicity and religion. But in the bulk of Senegal (north of the Gambia), conflict among the five major ethnic communities is almost unknown. Among a number of other factors which explain this lack of conflict, Senegal’s political parties, and in fact, the entire regime structure, have been built around a careful embedding of the urban, elite, nominally liberal political culture in a more rural, “familist” political culture mediated by ethnically transcendent Islamic Sufi brotherhoods. The careful articulation of these two political cultures and their associated forms of social capital make Senegal’s democracy stand out in sub-Saharan Africa for its stability, broad social base, and capacity to integrate otherwise potentially fragmentary ethnic communities.

More so than in most African ex-colonies, Senegal’s public sphere has been marked by a pronounced version of Peter Ekeh’s classic two publics divide (civic vs. primordial patterns of participation, meaning and use of the public space; Ekeh, 1975). On one side, Senegalese political life is rooted, to an unprecedented degree for post-colonial Africa, in urban traditions of rule of law, associationalism, civility, and long experience with the forms of democratic electoral representation, competition, defeat and even sometimes, elite rotation in and out of power. This is the Four Communes half of Senegal’s colonial legacy: beginning in 1840, the assimilés and métis of Senegal’s coastal enclaves of colonial administration and European commerce (Gorée, Rufisque, Saint-Louis and Dakar – the Four Communes)

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2 This section is based on field research conducted in Senegal in 1992-93 and 1995, largely concentrated in the arrondissement de Ngayokhème, région de Fatick, as well as in Niari Talli and Usine neighborhoods in Dakar. This research was made possible by a grant from the National Science Foundation, as well as funding from the University of California-Berkeley Institute for International Studies.
enjoyed morsels of democratic self-rule and occasional representation in the French National Assembly as part of the wider French policy of cultural self justification and ideological window dressing known as “assimilation” (Crowder, 1967). On the other side, Senegalese political life is rooted, in keeping with the wider continental tradition, in the politics of the hypertrophic state (Young 1994), patron-clientelism, and prebendalism (Joseph, 1983), not to mention escape, avoidance or sabotage by state-wary peasants (Hyden, 1983). This is the politics of the other Senegal, outside the Four Communes, the interior, largely rural Colonial Territory of direct, quasi-military administration, forced labor, arbitrary justice, and no pretense whatsoever of assimilation or democratic self-rule (Klein, 1968).

Now, the literal Four Communes-Colonial Territory socio-cultural dichotomy no longer accurately depicts Senegal. Demographic change, the absorption of two of the old Four Communes into one (Rufisque and Gorée now part of greater metropolitan Dakar), the rise of new urban centers, and intricate networks of urban-rural labor migration, commerce (Mouride and other), and family resource transfers have blurred the old distinctions. In today’s Senegal, we find a new experiential reality of moving between and integrating the physical divide of the self-governing, French-educated societies of the coast and the occupied, arbitrarily governed, subordinate rural interior. One society, one set of circuits of migration and trade, one legal order now unify the formerly bifurcated Senegal. But the old Four Communes-Colonial Territory distinction remains useful as a metaphor for two distinct universes of political culture and social capital, both of which inform political life throughout the country.

The mythos of the Four Communes suggests that the colonial project of assimilation, whatever its cultural imperialism and not-so-implicit racism, succeeded in “transferring” from France to the urban coastal enclaves democracy-supporting liberal, individualistic, Enlightenment norms and practices. In the rhetoric of Senegalese political life, democracy works, there has never been a coup d’état, and the brief period of single party rule had to come to an end because, ultimately, Senegalese as a people have inherited the ideology and the social formations of liberalism. This means then, that at the social base of Senegalese democracy, there is supposedly a kind of liberal or individualistic social capital (a la Putnam 2000): autonomous actors trust, associate and cooperate with others with whom they do not necessarily have prior acquaintance or relationship. They come together because they share a common interest or because shared ideological convictions compel them to seek out other like-minded people with whom they can put their beliefs into practice in the public sphere. The notion that individualistic social capital is the critical basis for democratic success in Senegal is a useful, but empirically quite incomplete story.
There is another form of social capital at work in Senegal, which I refer to non-pejoratively as familist social capital. With this use of the term familist, I deliberately seek to re-claim from Edward Banfield a notion of personalistic, face-to-face relationships rooted in a sense of historic genealogical positioning, origin and place in community (Banfield, 1958). Familist ties and networks may build on literal kin relationships among people who are related and know how they are related, or more commonly, they may be loose and metaphorical. Familist relations entail diffuse obligations embedded in long-enduring, repeated ties enforced and maintained not simply by the interest-maximizing parties to a relationship, but by the wider network or community. Without launching into a full scale diatribe on the perils of an overly Parsonian reading of tradition-modernity dichotomies, let me simply state that we are not forced to conceptualize all familism as immoral, socially constraining, discriminatory and politically dysfunctional. Indeed, familist social organization can benefit from the strength, durability and perceived deep legitimacy of its bonds (Galvan 2002).

Familism overcomes its problem of scale (how far can one’s network of kin really extend?) and exclusion (if kinship bonds are primary, what guarantees civility, let alone egalitarianism, towards non-kin?), through the metaphorical extension of kinship-like bonds, behavior and norms to quasi-kin. We see this in the case of Senegal’s Sufi brotherhoods, in which the idiom of kinship is used to describe and cement affectively meaningful, economically important relations between people who have no literal blood ties, and indeed, usually come from different ethnic groups. Familism, redeemed from the categorical cesspool of primordial, backward, confining, “traditional society,” thus becomes a cornerstone of our ability as Western analysts to see and understand non-liberal elements of social capital (more easily recognized in non-Western settings like Senegal, but in fact equally identifiable in the West itself).

The Senegalese regime, in the broad sense of Hyden on governance, embeds institutional structures of democratic formalism in two distinct pools of political culture and social capital – the individualist social capital of an idealized Four Communes and the familist social capital found everywhere in the society, but idealized as a feature of rural society, the Territory. This regime structure, whose basic design dates to the colonial period, has three legs or props. First, relations among state elites, ruling party members, opposition figures, journalists and advocates of “modernized” urban interests (unions, human rights

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3 Regime in Hyden’s (1992) sense encompasses the routinized patterns of interaction between state and society, which may be formally codified but far more often are not. It refers to what Bourdieu (1977) might call the habitus underneath the state-society relationship. Regime entails the specific set of habits, practices and norms whereby members of society recognize their responsibilities to the public space (not simply rights carved out from that public space); officials of the state engage society in a predictable, rule-bound and reviewable fashion; and members of society interact with one another in a way that conforms to principles agreed upon as part of public political discourse.
advocates, professional associations, conventional civil society actors) manage their interactions primarily in the idiom of individualistic social capital. Interest and ideological association, as well as the rights and duties of the *citoyen* are the central rhetoric of the major political parties. Thus the long-dominant PS (Parti Socialiste) is nominally a European center-left party. Abdoulaye Wade’s PDS (Parti Democratique Senegalaise) has long claimed to stand for and represent the interests of a more moderate, classically liberal constituency. The spectrum is dotted with numerous small parties that seek to champion the radical left, etc. It is not that party expressions of ideology or interest are entirely meaningless in the articulation of platforms, attracting followers, mobilizing mass supporters. It is just that the parties rely on two other social foundations which easily eclipse in political importance their rhetorical appeals through individualistic social capital.

The other two legs of the regime structure stand firmly in the familist social capital of the idealized Four Communes. The parties themselves of course are patronage networks more than coalitions of individuals conjoined by commitment to an ideological agenda or interest goals. They mobilize support, distribute resources, develop new cadres and recruit the next generation of leaders through fundamentally familist networks of social capital. This is the second prop or leg of the regime structure, on display in the free handouts of rice and bolts of cloth at every political rally, but especially those put on by the long ruling PS and in the last year, by the now dominant PDS. It helps explain the recent phenomenon of transhumance, whereby party leaders of the PS have migrated, like cattle seeking greener pastures, to the PDS in large numbers since its Presidential victory and Legislative landslide. Deep ideological convictions to the political program of the PS seem to matter a bit less than simply securing the best seat at the huge state patronage banquet, now hosted by Abdoulaye Wade and the PDS.

Finally, the long ruling PS, the newly dominant PDS, and the regime structure as a whole would face social irrelevance, illegitimacy, instability – and might translate democratic struggle into ethno-cultural conflict, as elsewhere in Africa – were it not for the third and most crucial leg of the regime. The deep social foundations of Senegalese democracy lie not in the idealized Four Communes rhetoric of Enlightened, assimilated Africans (or the present day *mission-civilisatrice* equivalent, a robust civil society) but in the close patronage ties forged by coastal elites dating back to the colonial period with the Islamic Sufi brotherhoods. These brotherhoods, *tariqa*, born in the late 19th century struggle against colonial conquest, came to dominate rural political economy in the early 20th century and represent the most legitimate and popular social organizations in the country, as Cruise O’Brien (1971, 1975) and Villalón (1995) have already shown.
Colonial Governor Faidherbe, unlike his predecessors in both Algeria and Senegal, realized that neither assimilation nor coercion would easily transform or eradicate the Sufi brotherhoods (Kane and Robinson 1984). Rather than eradicate or compete with them, the pragmatic and innovative Faidherbe coopted Sufi leaders: they would retain social and spiritual dominance in the countryside and help promote peanut production on lands controlled by their religious schools, in exchange for making peace and collaborating with the French (Klein, 1968).

Founding President of independent Senegal Leopold Senghor -- unlike his perhaps more principled contemporaries Sekou Touré or Modibo Keita -- was a pragmatic student of history who recognized useful tools for social control when he saw them. Democratic stability in post-colonial Senegal thus rested on the same Faidherbe-style cooptation of the Sufi brotherhoods. Their leaders, bought off with state patronage resources in the form of infrastructure and other development projects, issued religious edicts for their followers to vote for the ruling party (the PS), which itself never had to develop a meaningful socio-political base in the countryside. As I have explored in greater detail elsewhere (Galvan 2001), the historic victory in March 2000 of longtime opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade’s PDS can be credited in great part to the demise of the votes-for-roads patronage deal between the PS and the Sufi leaders. Wade has been conspicuous in his efforts to court these Islamic leaders at every turn, fully cognizant that they mobilize a form of social capital – familist, socially compelling, decidedly neo-traditional and ethnically transcendent – which still holds the key to political power in Senegal.

This neo-traditionalism and transcendence is the key not only to political power and democratic stability in Dakar, but also to the lack of conflict among Wolof, Serer, Tukolor, Hal-Pulaar-speakers, and Mandé groups of numerous names in Senegal north of the Gambia. The Sufi brotherhoods have achieved a masterful impersonalistic extension of familist, personalistic bonds. The brotherhoods build quasi-kin relationships within a patriarchal structure in which allegiance to the charismatic Sufi leader or marabout, and relations of solidarity with other talibé (followers of a particular marabout) are defined in kin-metaphorical terms.

Followers are of course “kin” in the sense that they are fraternal brothers in the universalistic dar-al-Islam. But Senegalese Islam was also built out of the redeployed and remobilized detritus of historic pre-colonial and pre-Islamic social orders. Members of a key sub-sect (Baye Fall) of the largest brotherhood (Mourides), are in effect a reformulated version of the warrior caste of the old Wolof kingdoms. They still adhere to the warrior’s stereotypical behavioral and organizational patterns (they wear dreadlocks and patchwork cloth (to keep the Devil, an inveterate measurer and calculator, from being able to “focus on”
and control them), they do not fast, pray or give alms, yet they work with utter devotion and maximum effort for the glory of their Sufi leader). Indeed the sect originated when a warrior leader, displaced after the French conquest, threw his support behind a then-minor Sufi cleric (Amadou Bamba), brought literally thousands of ex-warriors with him into the sect, and added the dynamic force that catalyzed the most important of Senegal’s home-grown Sufi movements, the Mourides.

Yet, it is crucial to note, you do not have to be Wolof to be a good Baye Fall. Regardless of mother tongue, distinctive facial scars, place of origin, version of animist background beliefs, anyone can adopt the idiom of both the devout Sufi follower and the garb and style of the old Wolof warrior caste and thereby become Baye Fall. The key to the transcendence and neo-traditionalism of the brotherhoods is that they bring together people of any and all ethnic communities within a familist framework of quasi-kin bonds and relations. You certainly do not need to be Wolof or Serer or any other ethnic identification to be a Mouride, or a Tijane, Qadir, Niassene, Layenne or member of any other Sufi brotherhood in Senegal. Now, to be sure, if you are to become the Khalif General, the paramount marabout of the Mourides, Wolof background has historically been crucial. And make no mistake, some brotherhoods, especially smaller ones in distinct locales (like the Niassene in Kaolack) tend to have a particular ethnic identity (Villalón, 1995).

The pan-ethnic, transcendent, inclusive, universalizing nature of Senegal’s Sufi brotherhoods is a well understood, historical and ethnographic background fact to my argument here (Behrman, 1970; Cruise O’Brien, 1975). Senegalese democracy has been socially embedded because of the unintended irony that the major political parties have almost no popular social base to speak of. The patronage ties to the Mouride, Tijane and other brotherhoods have been and remain the social base of the parties. As a result, Senegalese democracy has been able to avoid the more typical pattern of culturally plural societies with weak nations states, Bula Matari syndrome and a thin middle class. To be sure, Senegal exhibits all these characteristics of post-colonialism. But democratic electoral competition, open and liberal media laws and a general tone of political pluralism, which have induced political elites to play the ethnicity, religion or cultural identity cards in Kenya, Zambia, even Senegal’s colonial sister territory, Cote d’Ivoire, have produced no such effect in most of Senegal. Where the Islamic brotherhoods already established real patterns and institutions of legitimate, neo-traditional ethnic transcendence – that is to say, Senegal north of the Gambia – the democratic regime sunk roots in a social base which inhibited the politicization of ethnicity, religion and cultural identity. Where the Islamic brotherhoods are weak – as in the largely Catholic and animist Casamance region – democracy has provided the political space and the incentive
for the intense, violent politicization of ethnicity (Diola), religion (Catholicism) and regional cultural identity (Linares, 1992).

Most account of democratic success and stability in Senegal observe the importance of the Four Communes legacy of liberal, individualistic social capital, a political culture which has long taught tolerance, civility and respect for the rule of law, as well as the reasonably vibrant and diversified civil society found especially in Dakar. This legacy is important, but it cannot account for the lack of ethnic conflict in northern Senegal without taking into account the articulation between this elite political culture and the institutions which mediate mass political mobilization. It is the transcendent, yet neo-traditionally embedded nature of these institutions which makes Senegal stand out in an exploration of the ways in which post-colonial democratization can promote tolerance and inclusion in culturally plural societies.

4. Neo-traditionalism, State Consolidation and Group Relations in Indonesia

Ironically, Indonesia offers another illustration of how political pluralism can expand without degenerating into conflict along the lines of ethnic, religious or cultural cleavages. Indonesia, in its geographical, demographic and institutional diversity, presents a number of faces with regard to the relationship between democratization and identity group conflict. It would be unreasonable to speak of one Indonesian experience in this regard. Rather, it makes more sense to treat specific regions of the country as cases unto themselves, some of which exhibit quite different relationships between political opening and identity conflict. In that regard, the contrast between Moluku and Yogyakarta provinces, especially since the fall of Suharto in 1998, could not be more pronounced.

In both provinces, as may have been the case throughout much of Indonesia, we find evidence of historic institutions which helped bridge differences between cultural groups, mediate relations and build tolerance, mutual empathy and cooperation (Soedjatmoko, 1980). We find evidence of both formal authoritative leadership structures and informal habits and values which served these functions. Yet the processes of state consolidation took widely divergent paths in the two provinces, with striking results in terms of these institutionalized patterns of inter-group cooperation, and by extension, radically different results when the democratic abertura arrived after the spring of 1998.

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This section is based on field research conducted in Yogyakarta Special District in Indonesia, April-July 2000. The research was made possible by a grant from the University of Florida College of Arts and Sciences.
Moluku province, an archipelago in the north central part of the greater Indonesian island chain, is the location coveted by Portuguese and the Dutch colonizers for its almost unique stands of clove trees (thus its former name, the Spice Islands (Chauvel, 1985)). Centuries of European commerce and colonial control in this region led to significant forms of cultural transformation, foremost of which was the conversion of nearly half the local population to Christianity. Following a roughly similar time-line, Islam spread to the area from the Javanese heartland. By the mid 20th century, the local population was nearly evenly divided between Christians and Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Prior to the round of violence that accompanied the opening of the political process in the late 1990s, Moluku was a showcase of inter-religious cooperation and tolerance. Although villages tended to be wholly of one faith or the other, communities were twinned with a nearby village or neighborhood of the other faith in a complex system of ritualized gift exchange known as pela. Religious holidays, births, funerals and other major life passages were marked by formal exchange of food, handicrafts and other items between communities. Building from this web of community-level relations, priests, pastors, Imams and traditional political elites from both sides interacted on regular bases to mediate disputes and coordinate resource management. Control of clove production and trade was the crucial material basis for the livelihoods of both communities, resulting in not infrequent conflicts. Although not a perfect arrangement, an institutionalized system existed at both the popular and official levels which prevented conflict from spiraling into inter-communal violence (Triono 2000; Bertrand, 1995).

By the early 1970s, Suharto’s New Order regime was consolidating the control of the center, in Jakarta, over peripheral regions like Moluku. In spite of the discovery of massive oil reserves and considerable forest and mineral resources in other reaches of the archipelago, Moluku’s clove plantations remained an important source of income. By the mid-1970s, Suharto’s Golkar party sought to gain more direct control of clove production, and began to replace local level traditional political elites with Jakarta-appointed functionaries. Eventually, family and friends of Suharto, particularly his infamous son, established direct control over the marketing, and later the production, of the bulk of the province’s cloves. Tomy and the new political leadership (largely of Javanese extraction) formed alliances with merchants from outside Moluku, especially ethnic Bugis and Makassarese traders from Sulawesi. Over the course of the next two decades, a wholesale change in political and economic control had taken place in Moluku, whereby community level elites and religious leaders were displaced in favor of regime-appointed agents of the centralized state (Triono, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 1999).
This is in some ways the normal logic and pattern of state consolidation. Seen in the best possible light, more direct control of Moluku from Jakarta and from the ruling party brought with it the high modernist, simplifying vision that state consolidation always carries (Scott 1998). Political appointees and allies of the regime from Jakarta could not really be expected to know, understand, or be able to make use of the intricate, locally adapted systems of inter-communal consultation, mediation and gift exchange so familiar to local leaders. In a somewhat less favorable cast, the new political class sent to Moluku found it explicitly and entirely in their interests to go out of their way to displace these local leaders and local institutions. They needed to push aside competing political actors, and the familiar strategy of divide and rule teaches that Muslim-Christian antagonism in Moluku only strengthens the position of the agents of Golkar and the Suharto family in their effort too establish control over the lucrative clove trade.

Whatever the exact causes, we know that by the late 1990s, pela was a memory, the power of local elites was almost entirely eroded, and formerly peaceful relations between Christian and Muslim communities were already tense. The norms, habits and leadership institutions that had managed the inherent structural tensions of a religiously divided region with one limited but valuable natural resource, had been displaced. It’s unclear whether the economic crisis that accompanied the fall of Suharto pushed these communities over the edge into more open resource conflict. Others have argued, with considerable credibility, that the post-Suharto-era has been marked by ongoing efforts on the part of Suharto family loyalists in the military and in civilian life to work behind the scenes to instigate ethno-religious conflict in areas where tensions were already high (Human Rights Watch, 1999; Laksono, 1999). By supplying weapons to Muslims in Ambon, instigating the Dayak to take up arms against Javanese migrants in Kalimantan, perpetrating military and militia atrocities in Aceh and in East Timor, Suharto loyalists may be creating a situation in which democratic Indonesia becomes so chaotic and ungovernable that a return to military rule will be welcomed as the last remaining hope for national salvation and unity.

Whatever the causes, it is clear that the new political pluralism of the post-Suharto era translated into ongoing, intense religious violence in Moluku. Once the authoritarian grip was loosened and neither the army, police or navy could be counted on to control the situation (all have been charged with restoring order at various moments since 1998), democratic political mobilization rapidly metastasized into an ugly confrontation between mutually hostile Christian and Muslim factions, each allied with their own increasingly militant armed movements. Beginning in January 1999 riots erupted in the provincial capital Ambon. In several rounds of fighting since then, several hundred civilians have been killed and tens of thousands displaced in mosque burnings, the razing of churches, and wholesale pillaging of neighborhoods that had long co-existed peacefully. It is striking that this situation came about in a
province where long-standing, culturally embedded mechanisms of inter-group cooperation, trust and mediation were effectively dismantled and displaced.

We find quite the opposite process as a result of a different trajectory of state consolidation in Yogyakarta province, an autonomous special district in Central Java. Yogyakarta, historic capital of the last autonomous Javanese state to accept Dutch colonial rule, consists of a medium sized city and surrounding rice farming areas which together mirror Java’s characteristic religious and ethnic cleavages. About 80% are self-identifying Muslims, about 20% Christians, but we find a high degree of syncretism with Javanese animist traditions in both monotheistic camps. Moreover, as in the rest of Java, Yogyakarta’s small minority of ethnic Chinese (less than 1% of the total population, by self identification) control what many presume to be a significant, in some eyes inordinate, amount of wealth, and play a significant role in local commerce (Siegel, 1998). Whereas the era of democratization after 1998 has been marked by sporadic inter-religious conflict throughout Java, as well as some of the most destructive anti-Chinese riots in history, Yogyakarta has experienced only minor inter-religious incidents and almost no anti-Chinese rioting. Moreover, political party mobilization on the basis of an exclusionary, doctrinaire interpretation of Islam, while gaining strength in many other parts of Java (especially the industrial northeast coast around Surabaya), has been generally ineffective in Yogyakarta province.

When asked to account for the low levels of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict in this region, respondents interviewed for this study, regardless of socio-economic, occupational, ethnic or religious background identified two interrelated institutional factors. First and foremost, the neo-traditional Sultan, who also serves as Governor of Yogyakarta province, is widely identified as “the reason that we get along and do not fight each other here” (Hariyono, 2000). Thanks in part to the Sultan’s example, popular wisdom goes, core Javanese ethics and practices which emphasize tolerance of difference, welcoming and accepting newcomers, and subordinating one’s own ego and preferences, are widely practiced and inculcated across religious and ethnic divides in the region. In stark contrast to Moluku, here the web of formal structures and informal practices that historically helped manage inter-cultural relations were not sundered, but have indeed been woven into the fabric of the state as it has consolidated itself in this corner of Java.

If the critical juncture in the displacement/incorporation of neo-traditional practices of tolerance in Moluku came in the mid 1970s, in Yogyakarta it occurred during the war for independence against the Dutch just after World War II. In the darkest hour of the liberation struggle, Sukarno and his entourage faced immediate capture by Dutch forces. The young Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengkubuwono IX,
whose predecessors had served as quiescent colonial collaborators for many decades, saw this as his opportunity to side with historic forces of anti-imperial liberation and Javanese cultural vindication. The Sultan pronounced that his personal palace, the Kraton, was to be a university and that Sukarno and other leaders of the independence struggle were enrolled as students. The beleaguered independence fighters took refuge in the palace. The Dutch, faced with having to storm the central place of Javanese historical pride, make a martyr of the Sultan and possible rouse the until-then passive Javanese peasant masses against colonial rule, backed off (Kahin, 1952). Hamengkubuwono’s harboring of Sukarno proved a decisive turning point in a struggle for independence which would achieve victory by 1949.

For his courage and loyalty, the Sultan of Yogyakarta was the only “traditional” ruler officially sanctioned by the new republic. Indeed, his throne was not only preserved, he was also granted the position of Governor of the only administrative special district (equivalent to one of the country’s 27 provinces) save the capital, Jakarta. The importance of this constitutional reward cannot be overstated. Whereas the rest of Indonesia was subject, at the political-administrative level, to various forms of ideological and organizational modernization (building a Weberian legal-rational order, making it more friendly to nationalism, making it free of socialist tendencies, making it more free market capitalism, etc), Yogyakarta was governed by a regime which followed its own peculiar logic in terms of administrative modernization and ideological and symbolic transformation.

The Sultanate, through 1) symbolism, 2) action and 3) patterns of popular loyalty, has come to embody the idea that historic traditions of tolerance, acceptance and inter-group cooperation are part of the constitutional order of the Yogyakarta special district. First, at the symbolic level, respondents, regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation, identify a set of core Javanese cultural principles and practices (tepo seliro and nrimo ing pandum, translated respectively as “make your heart understand others” and “bury your objections inside”) as important mechanisms for inter-religious and inter-ethnic cooperation. When we explore why Christians and Muslims do not attack each other in this region (as in Moluku), why Chinese and Javanese can do business with each other, live as neighbors, go to school together, get married, etc, we find repeated and consistent reference to this set of four core Javanese practices and principles. Even among respondents who are not ethnically Javanese, such as migrants from other islands who have come to attend the university in Yogyakarta⁵, and even more strikingly, among the ethnically Chinese, these sets of core Javanese values are cited as part of the explanation for the lack of conflict in

⁵ After the Sultan’s gambit to protect the independence movement, a real university (Universitas Gadjah Mada) was founded in Yogyakarta, and has become the premier institution of higher education in the country, attracting students from all over the archipelago and making Yogyakarta a decidedly cosmopolitan and ethnically mixed city.
Yogyakarta\textsuperscript{6}. The Sultan comes into play because he and his office are perceived as the symbolic embodiment of these values. Because he espouses them and practices them, they are in circulation, promoted and inculcated in a more public way than might otherwise be the case.

Second, the political positions taken by Hamengkubuwono IX, and his successor and son, the current Sultan, Hamengkubuwono X\textsuperscript{7}, especially on matters of cultural identity politics, have set a tone of civility, inclusivity and tolerance. The Sultan has been an important sponsor of a variety of inter-faith dialogue groups, which have mushroomed in number and profile since the political opening of 1998. Two groups have benefited enormously from the Sultan’s patronage. Interfidei has brought together religious leaders, intellectuals and artists to run seminars and workshops on cross-cultural understanding (Interfidei, 2000). At a more grass roots level, FPUB (\textit{Forum Persuadaraan Umut Beriman}, Interfaith Brotherhood Forum) has worked with the Sultan to organize a series of mass rallies and prayer vigils, all of them explicitly inter-denominational and inclusive of not only Christians and Muslims, but also the tiny Buddhist, Hindu and animist minorities. The rallies have followed major incidents of inter-ethnic or inter-religious violence in other parts of Indonesia, deliberately staged to “make sure this kind of hatred does not spread to Yogyakarta, a city of tolerance” (Aziz 2000)

In the worst outbreak of inter-ethnic violence in recent years, the anti-Chinese associated with the 1997-98 panic of foreign investors/Asian financial crisis, the Sultan played a crucial role in preventing an outburst in Yogyakarta. After brutal attacks on Chinese businesses and homes in Yogyakarta’s neighbor and sister-city, Surakarta, angry mobs formed in Yogyakarta. As the crowd gathered and seemed ready to erupt, the Sultan shocked the would-be rioters by leaving the gilded courtyards of his walled palace, to drive out to scruffy Jalan Solo, the ramshackle commercial strip where the riot was about to happen. The Sultan alighted his limousine, taking many by surprise for his informality. He spoke plainly but with some passion to a crowd bent on smashing, looting, raping and perhaps killing long-resented Chinese merchants and shopkeepers. The angry crowd, already whipped up for action, fell silent when the Sultan admonished them from the roof of his car:

\textsuperscript{6} In the survey conducted during my field research in Yogyakarta, “traditional Javanese family practices and values” ranked highest among factors which “teach people to be tolerant and respectful of those with different beliefs and habits” (other, lower-ranked factors included role of religious leaders, public school morality education, the fact that Yogyakarta is a university town, and the role of the Sultan). This high ranking prevailed across ethnic and religious sub-groups within the sample population.

\textsuperscript{7} Every Sultan of Yogyakarta is named, with no lack of presumption, Hamengkubuwono, which translates roughly as “the universe rests in his lap.”
Do this if you wish to. Go ahead and destroy our home. But I tell you, if you love me, you will not do this. If you still love me, you will put down your stick sand your knives and you will follow me back. We will all go back home.

The crowd stood stunned for a few tense minutes, then reportedly started to break apart. Eventually the riot that might have been turned into a peaceful march back to the public square in front of the Sultan’s palace. A kind of spontaneous commemoration of civil peace, led by the Sultan and religious leaders, ensued before the crowd finally dispersed in time for dinner (Pamungkastiran, 1998; Sumartana, 2000).

Finally, patterns of popular support and loyalty underscore the importance of the Sultan as a transcendent, neo-traditional institution. Regardless of religion or ethnicity, we find extremely high levels of support for the Sultan as a venerated moral authority and trusted political leader. This holds true even for those of Chinese descent, who otherwise treat political leadership in Indonesia, and Java in particular, with considerable skepticism. The Sultan’s position reflects the reality that his office was in effect administratively nationalized as a reward for harboring Sukarno and company. Yet this nationalization did not entail an ideological or symbolic takeover of the Sultanate by Jakarta. Unlike in Moluku, local elites were actually permitted to retain the symbols, rhetoric and material power of a quasi-traditional institution. This institution came to “apply” to all those who live in the Yogyakarta special district, cutting across religious and ethnic divides.

As in the case of Moluku, or the contrast between northern and southern Senegal, we have no smoking gun, but an intriguing correlation. In Yogyakarta, we find not simply the preservation of traditional authority as some kind of cultural relic or antique. We find the positive reconstitution of local institutions as neo-traditional structures which are symbolically connected to the past and thereby culturally embedded, yet which are accepted as legitimate moral and political authorities across ethnic, religious and cultural communities. Thus, as the period of democratization has unfolded in this corner of Indonesia, it has been difficult for political contenders to mobilize on the basis of anti-Chinese or anti-Christian sentiment. The salience and legitimacy of the Sultan, as well as the informal practices of tolerance his office has come to embody, provides sufficient mutual identification and trust across communal groups to mitigate the divisive pressures unleashed by political opening and democratization in a culturally plural weak nation states suffering from the Bula Matari syndrome.

8 In the 601-person opinion survey mentioned above, 69% of all respondents agreed that “The Sultan is more important in national politics than ordinary Governors of other provinces because he combines a connection to history and contemporary political functions.” This level of support remained high among Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, the ethnically Javanese and those of Chinese descent.
5. Conclusion

What lessons can we draw from these illustrations from Moluku and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, as well as from Senegal, north and south of the Gambia? Sometimes small-scale or local traditions of inter-group cooperation, derived from civil society and illiberal in social structure, can be integrated into state/regime structures. When this is done in a way that preserves legitimacy by emphasizing at least the appearance, if not the reality of neo-traditionalism, and provides for transcendence across divergent communal groups, democratization can take place without ethnic conflict.

Democratization by itself demands cultural unity of some kind. One of the fallacies often associated with Western liberal democracy, as Eugene Weber has pointed out, is that liberal democratic politics in the West were built from the civil norms of trust, tolerance and cooperation among people who were ideologically of the Enlightenment, who were liberal citizens of a unified, unproblematic, harmonious political community. While this notion works reasonably well within the confines of Rousseau’s Social Contract, it is not how democracy developed in the West. Liberal democracy required a fair degree of values-consensus, and values consensus rested on a shared sense of community rooted in common cultural identity. As Weber and others have notes in France as well as England, it took coercion to establish a common cultural identity. Real violence was part of the process of building one language community, one set of common values, habits and orientations, one national cultural identity (Weber, 1976; Elias, 1994). Out of that uniform cultural core, within that now limited ethno-cultural community, a politics of civility which would support democracy could arise. It also helped that democracy involved a very few elite people, that political rights were only gradually extended out from the dominant estates of early modern Europe, incrementally bringing in the bourgeoisie, and only in the 20th century after labor incorporation becoming a mass political phenomenon (Bendix, 1978; Anderson 1996 [1974]).

In the developing post-colonial world, there is not time for this slow expansion of the franchise as cultural uniformity gradually develops. This is why democracy, especially in the context of cultural pluralism, weak national identities and the Bula Matari syndrome, is almost always associated with centripetal political movements that sunder societies along ethnic, religious or cultural identity lines. It’s as if post-colonial societies are supposed to follow an artificially idealized path toward liberal civic communities, or are doomed to either internal conflict or brutal authoritarian stabilization.
There is another way, a way not envisioned in the historical experience of the West, but in evidence in a few developing societies themselves. This way involves drawing out and remobilizing local traditions of inter-group cooperation, trust and tolerance. It requires that these neo-traditions be woven into the fabric of state building itself to provide culturally meaningful forms of trans-ethnic identification that insulate culturally plural societies from the forces of cleavage and political mobilization-on-the-cheap almost always unleashed in the process of democratization.

At the end of the day, the cases presented below do not tell us in clear, operational terms, how to prevent democratization from degenerating into ethnic conflict. But they begin a process of comparative analytic induction whereby we learn from a series of empirical cases in which new democracy and cultural tolerance co-exist to begin to generalize about the general mechanisms and patterns for breaking the all too common and tragic link between political liberalization and cultural hate in the post-cold war era.
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