

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian, Fula-Wolof, WOLOF (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): 639-3 (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Senegal, Gambia, France, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania (1)

1.4 Brief history: “The earliest Portuguese explorers in the fifteenth century observed that the Wolof and Sereer groups were well established along the Senegalese coast at that time. The Wolof had probably occupied that area for centuries.

From the 1600s to the mid-1800s, slave trading caused much dislocation. It did not deplete the Wolof to the same degree as other west Africans, however. (2)

Since the first political reforms in 1946, the Wolof have played a leading role politically, culturally, and economically in Senegal. Despite the country's weak economy, the Wolof have built a reputation for international commerce and trading. Wolof businesspeople are found throughout Africa, Europe, and even on the streets of New York City and Washington, D.C. (2)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: “ Since the first political reforms in 1946, the Wolof have played a leading role politically, culturally, and economically in Senegal. Despite the country's weak economy, the Wolof have built a reputation for international commerce and trading. Wolof businesspeople are found throughout Africa, Europe, and even on the streets of New York City and Washington, D.C.”(2)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 3,976,500

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): “Towns-people with money drink cacao and eat French bread with butter or mayonnaise, jam, and processed cheese imported from France. The traditional breakfast consists of a paste-like dough made of millet with milk poured over it (*lakh*), or *sombee* (boiled rice covered with curdled milk, sugar, and raisins).” (2)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: “The Wolof people also are known for their *Mbaxal-u-Saloum* , a spicy tomato, peanut, and dried-fish sauce with rice. Another popular dish, *Mafé* , is made with peanut sauce, meat, and potatoes, sweet potatoes, or cassava, with a bit of dried fish to flavor it. The favorite drink of the Wolof is *bissap* . It is red and tastes somewhat like cranberry juice. It is considered a purgative, or a drink to help digestion.” (2)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: “People eat together on a large floor mat. They kneel on one knee and eat the food directly in front of them, using only the right hand. After finishing their portions, they wait for their neighbors to push some food their way. The goal is to get to the center of the food tray.” (2)

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): “A typical family has as many as ten or eleven children” (2)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: “Polygamy (the taking of several spouses) is still practiced in the countryside.” (2)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: “A Wolof father blames the mother if the children make mistakes (“Look what your son did!”), but enjoys taking credit for a child's accomplishments.” (2)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): “members of the *Guer* (noble) caste, generally do not marry into the *Griot* (artist) caste. Similarly, members of the *Griot* caste do not marry *Jam* (serfs), whose ancestors were servants.” (2)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?: “here is a joking relationship between cross cousins: one's matrilineal cross cousins are called "master," and one's patrilineal cross cousins are called "slave." (4)

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

“The basic social units in a village are the residential groups, which usually occupy a single compound. These groups generally have at their core a patrilocal extended family but may also include unrelated members. Each such corporate group has as its head the senior male of the dominant family unit. Groups of contiguous residential groups usually consist of patrilineages. The larger and more important patrilineages may have segments in several villages. Traditionally, the patrilineages have been the pivotal kin groups at the political-legal level, especially with respect to the control of land and political offices. The senior male of a patrilineage becomes its official head, the *laman*. The Wolof also recognize the *meen*, a matrilineal descent line” (4)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

(SEE: Naming Ceremonies under Religion)

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?: “Traditionally, when a child comes of age, the mother looks for an appropriate spouse of equal or higher social status... The father waits for the mother's selection of a prospective spouse for their child and then usually approves it.” (2)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?: “We shall use the Wolof term, *doma*, which describes a person who attacks and ‘eats’ his fellows, often involuntarily, because of an innate and compelling supernatural power inherited from his mother. All Wolof agree that *doma* are a constant menace, and a greater threat to health and happiness than the malevolent jinni or other evil spirits.” (5)

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

“Wolof society is undergoing rapid change from a rural to an urban style of living. This places stress on social structures, family

relationships, and traditional values. Many Wolof migrate to the cities hoping to find white-collar jobs. Children and young people often find it difficult to adjust. This is a factor in the rising abuse of alcohol and drugs by the Wolof.” (2)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

5.4 Post marital residence:

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

a) Expectations of Women Towards Men: “It is considered impolite for a woman to look a man directly in the eye. Women and girls traditionally curtsy to their elders.” (2)

b) “Wolof respect both age and status.” (2)

c) “Wolof are accustomed to visiting each other unannounced, even as late as midnight. Impromptu visits are not considered rude or inconvenient. A visitor must share a meal, have tea, or spend the night. This traditional hospitality is called *Terranga* .” (2)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: “ In the cities of Dakar, Saint Louis, and Diourbel, homes have electricity and indoor plumbing, although the water supply is unpredictable. Houses are made of concrete with tin roofs. People who can afford it cook with bottled gas. However, most people use charcoal.” (2)

“Outside the cities, life is rustic. People live in huts made of millet stalks and thatched roofs. They sleep on traditional beds of wooden sticks with one end raised, and draw water from wells or rivers. With no electricity, the only modern appliance to be found in some villages is a radio.” (2)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): “Health care is available from the government for a small fee, though people must pay for their medicine. Many Wolof prefer to consult traditional healers first. While their spells have no known scientific basis, their other treatments involve the use of local herbs, bark, and roots that have medicinal properties.” (2)

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

a) **Naming ceremonies:** “Much significance is attached to names. Parents carefully choose a name for their children, usually the name of a family member or friend who has influenced them and who will provide a model for their child. The decision may take up to a year.” (2)

b) **Puberty (Men):** “At age seven to eight, boys are taken from their homes and circumcised in the bush, where they wear white gowns and caps. When they return, they are looked after by a big brother, or *Selbe*, until they are fully healed. The *Selbe* educates them about Wolof heroes and legends. After this rite, the community regards them as men.” (2)

c) **Muslim Ceremonies:** “The Wolof observe the major Muslim festivals, the most important for them being Korité, the feast at the end of Ramadan, and Tabaski, the feast of the sacrifice of sheep. The principal life-cycle ceremonies include the naming ceremony (*nggentée*), and the circumcision ceremony for boys. It is likely that circumcision was a pre-Islamic Wolof custom, given that the key ritual specialists and practices are non-Islamic.” (3)

6.4 Other rituals:

a) **Holidays-** “most important holiday for the Wolof is *Tabaski*, or the "feast of the lamb." This feast commemorates Allah's (God's) provision of a lamb for Abraham to sacrifice in the wilderness instead of his son. In the morning, prayers are offered at the mosque, and then a lamb is slaughtered. People get together with family to eat, and then visit their friends later in the day. Typically, children receive new clothing and money. Families often go into debt for the occasion.” (2)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): “Wolof are accomplished musicians and have pioneered modern forms of traditional griot music. Modern griot "rap" performed in the Wolof language tells stories about society, much like ancient griots narrated the lives of ancient kings.” (2)

“Traditional Wolof instruments include a small drum held under the arm, which can be pressed against the body to produce different pitches. The goatskin drum head is hit by a wooden stick with a curved end. The Wolof have skillfully adapted such instruments for pop music.” (2)

“The Wolof are known for their woodcarvings. They fashion statues, figurines, and masks, mainly for the tourist market. Wolof are also fine tailors. Men prefer silver bracelets and rings, while women wear gold necklaces, chains, and rings. Some Wolof are traditional weavers.” (2)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: “Dancing is performed mostly by women of the praise-singer group” (3)

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: “After the death of a person, the usual Muslim funeral ceremonies are followed. Burial is within a few hours unless the death occurs at night. Formerly, members of the praise-singer group were "buried" in hollow baobab trees, so as not to contaminate the earth. Suicide is rare, and it is believed that the soul of a suicide goes straight to hell.” (3)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

Islam (Sunni Muslim)(89%); Roman Catholicism (10%); Protestantism (1%) (2)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

a) **Alternate Names:** Ouolof, Yallof, Walaf, Volof, Waro-Waro (1)

b) **Writing system:** Arabic script, Ajami style, Latin script (1)

c) **Folklore:** “In Wolof and Senegalese society, there are professional storytellers, known as *griots*. They are historians, poets, musicians, and entertainers.” (2)

d) **Education:** “only about 30 percent of Wolof can read and write in French. Only about 20 percent of women are literate (can read and write). School is mandatory, but attendance is not enforced. At the age of four or five, the majority of children attend Koranic (Muslim) schools.” (2)

“A small percentage of high school graduates continue at the University of Dakar. Those who can afford it prefer studying abroad in France or in other French-speaking countries like Belgium, Switzerland, and Morocco.” (2)

e) **Crime:** “Unemployment is also a major problem. Poverty and idleness have led to an increase in burglary, prostitution, and mugging. Pickpockets are common in downtown Dakar. Beggars frequently knock on doors for food, and people often cook extra food, in preparation for these visits. Nevertheless, serious crimes such as murder and armed robbery are still very rare.” (2)

f) **Witchcraft/Sorcery:** “Thus, pagan spirits, notably the guardian village spirit and the spirit of the village well, are commonly identified with the jinni of Islam. Of all the non-orthodox beliefs, ‘witches’ are of the most concern to the Wolof people...” (5)

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5. Ames, David W. Belief in 'witches' among the rural Wolof of the Gambia