

# The bases of humanitarian thought in the Pulaar society of Mauritania and Senegal

by Ly Djibril

For the outside world, images of division, conflict and suffering today largely sum up the African continent. Even when these images do not reflect Afro-pessimistic clichés, they fail — deliberately or not — to take account of the secular traditions of respect for the individual and the enlightened humanity that exist virtually throughout Africa.

Africa's shortcomings, so prominent in human rights discussions regarding the continent, are surely proof, if not of the ineffectiveness, at least of the vagueness of the positive rules that are supposed to cover areas in which tradition has been relegated to the background.

The present text, which deals with the humanitarian rules of Pulaar society in Mauritania and Senegal, is therefore particularly relevant. Its aim is to try to understand the spirit of the rules rather than to sublimate them; to compare them rather than to over-simplify differences between positive and customary rules. Because written sources are scarce, we must tread carefully when assessing these rules, which can be slotted into two categories: those that aim to prevent armed conflicts and those that govern hostilities when these do erupt.

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