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Sciences et confréries soufies au Sénégal: Approches nouvelles de la violence et de la démocratie (Brill, 2022)

I Made This Book

CENTER FOR THE HUMAN

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What's on Your Desk?

A look into the office of African & African American Studies Professor Samba Diallo

Story by | Kefan Cui '29

Photo by | Mimi Zhou '28



1 “I’m originally from Senegal. Every other year, my wife and I take students to Senegal. One year after COVID, we went and we talked about stressing a lot. In Wolof, my mother’s language, there’s no term for stress. It doesn’t mean that stress doesn’t exist, but just through different forms. So I bought that painting, just saying to students, ‘no stress. We don’t need stress. That’s why I put it there.’”

2 “This is a guitar from the late Professor Garrett Albert Duncan, a professor in my department, African and African-American studies, who also first hired me at WashU.”

3 “These are also from Professor Duncan...he gave me these from his office. One is of the African continent and the other, it’s like a mother and then an African child—child bearing is very important in our society.”

4 “I like music. I’m not a musician, but I have a lot of songs that I bought from iTunes. I also have a sound system at home that, when we have our event here in Pudd, I bring my sound system and just let them relax and have fun. Because the reason why we are here is because of the students. So I want them to be happy. I want them to eat well and relax and enjoy being a student here at WashU.”

5 “This says ‘Greetings from Ghana.’ I visited a few years ago for a conference organized by the Association of the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora. I presented a paper there on a Sufi order called the Tijaniyya, an widespread islamic movement in West Africa that has a lot of followers in Ghana.”



Photos by | Mimi Zhou '28

Above: Professor Samba Diallo sits in his office. He is a professor of African & African American studies. His research focuses on Islam in West Africa, Sufism, Francophone Africa and cultural connections within the African diaspora,

“How can you preserve their memories, those people, their heritage, if you don’t study them?”

6 “A poster of my second book, ‘Science and Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal: New Approaches to Violence and Democracy.’ It’s on the role of violence in generating democracy—like removing a dictatorial regime and installing a peaceful democracy. I take Senegal as a case study, showing the role of religious leaders in building a democracy and democratic processes because most of the time, these people are neglected. We just talk about the elites, those who can speak French, who are in power, who write the laws, but not traditionalist people, or those using their religion to promote peace. They wrote in their own languages—Fulani, Hausa, and Wolof. Sometimes, people don’t consider them as a form of knowledge because knowledge should be just in European languages. It’s important to see ideas and forms of democracy that are deeply rooted in the community.”

7 “My poster of Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Sy—a religious leader who really inspires me because he’s a very good philosopher. Most Senegalese people refer to his work and his videos and talks. I use him as a reference, instead of always using European and Western thinkers. We have local thinkers who developed very good ideas about universalism. I want to know their perspectives and what they think about those global themes. It’s important because how can you preserve their memories, those people, their heritage, if you don’t study them?”

8 “I take an audio cassette that [Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Sy] made in 1960, then I listen to it, translate it, and transcribe it. A full cassette can be quite long, around 2 to 5 hours, but transcribing it makes writing about his philosophy easier because I know where everything is in my notebooks.”

