

Dakar—the land of hospitality and coexistence

By: Badiyyah Waajid



If I am to describe the people of Dakar, I would use two words...*peaceful and caring*. These attributes extend, beyond to welcoming foreigners. The Wolof term *teranga* means *hospitality*. Actually, I found the whole of Senegal to exude an aura of peaceful caring hospitality. The Senegalese seem to seek ways to co-exist with one another and with those visiting this lovely country. This is quite a feat in a country which is so diverse, with: approximately 12 different ethnic groups; approximately 5 different groups of Muslims which makes up 94% of the population, 5% Catholics and 1% Indigenous people.

In my short time here, I have observed people coexisting with one another; different concepts and constructs find a common ground; people search for ways to find and embrace differences for the purpose of existing in peace with one another. So different from my experiences in the United States where people seem to seek our differences for the purpose of discord. The Senegalese in Dakar appear to be all about community and cooperation rather than individualism and competition. They really care about one another.

The Wolof language, itself, emphasizes the importance of caring. Unlike with some cultures, the importance of *greetings* is a focus. It is not sufficient to merely ask about the person's well-being during an initial interaction, rather it is expected that one would ask the following: how they had rested during the night, how their morning had gone thus far, and how members of the family were faring. It was unthinkable to begin a business or other conversation without first spending time to greet another, properly. Just like the Senegalese population, The Wolof language is made up of words from Muslims, Christians/Catholics, and Indigenous people.

Senegal is a country where a percentage of families are polygamous, with Muslim men being permitted to have more than one wife. Even with this, the women may choose whether or not to live a polygamous life. Those that choose polygamy are provided for, totally, by the husband...she keeps all of her own money. Some of the co-wives and children share a residence while others prefer to live separately from one another. Either way, they somehow make it work....co-existence in practice

Visitors are made to feel very welcome in Dakar. They were even patient with those of us who only spoke English, when a majority of them seemed to speak two-to-three different languages.... at a minimum...French, Wolof, and an ethnic language.

I would venture to say that Dakar is a model for others in the west.

Learn more about [Dakar](#).