

Senegal

MAMADOU DIOUF

# Paths of Islam in Senegal

It is not easy to say exactly when Islam first established itself in our region. On the other hand, one can be sure that this religion infiltrated progressively from the central valley of Senegal or, to be precise, from the kingdom of Tékrou. To understand the influence of Islam in Senegambian societies, one must first trace its complete history from the conversion of War Jabi, the 11th century king of Tékrou, via the colonial conquests to the present day. Between these dates, social movements inspired by Islam took various forms according to the moment, the regions, and the ethnic groups, favouring always transactions between the influences and modifications provoked by Islam and the Senegambian cultures.<sup>1</sup>

A large part of Tékrou's fame is due to its status as the first Black kingdom to convert to Islam. Its economic power lay in its location on the edge of the Sahara, which enabled it to benefit from trade between North Africa and the *Bilades-Soudan*, the Black African countries. It exerted control on some of the commercial routes along which gold and slaves were transported from the South to the North, and cowries, arms and horses in the opposite direction.

Arab traders carried products, male and female slaves, and a religion – Islam – to this part of Africa. In the 11th century, the importance of economic interests and the close intermingling of economic and political activities and religious interdependence motivated the conversion of the sovereign, War Jabi. His subjects followed his example.

The distinctive face of the first wave of Islamization restricted itself to court Islam: well-read marabouts – usually Arabs or Moors, with a total absence of natives – and the peasant masses depending on their rural religions, were totally impervious to the new faith. The beginning of the slave trade that was gradually to kill off the economy of the Sahara and the Sahel (which fell into a deep crisis with the shift of commercial activities to the Atlantic coast and the mouths of the Senegal, Gambia, and Casamance Rivers) closes this first sequence.

With the expansion of the slave trade, European trading posts multiplied, as did wars and raids within and between the kingdoms. In effect, war was the means of producing slaves and one consequence of the strong European demand beginning in the second half of the 17th century was a generalization of violence, a profound economic and social crisis and feverish migrations of certain peoples and social groups.

The upheavals resulting from the slave trade were the origin of a very strong protest and resistance movement led by the marabouts. This movement, which in its ascendant phase attempted to seize power in the Senegambian kingdoms, is known as the Marabout War (1673-74). Initiated by a Moorish marabout, Nasr-al-Din, it shook all of the northern lands in the region.<sup>2</sup> The quick victory of the marabout party was short lived. The traditional aristocracies enjoyed the armed support of the slave traders of the coastal trading posts who had an interest in putting a stop to insurgents hostile to the Atlantic slave trade. In spite of their brief success and the violence of the repression that followed, the marabouts and the Muslim communities had, for the first time, succeeded in mobilizing the principal victims of the violence of the slave trade.

The second face, born in a time of frequent famines, wars and pillaging, imbued Islam with the following characteristic traits: a warlike, militant orientation; an increasing hostility towards the 'Christian' slave traders and the 'pagan' traditional aristocracies; and a resilient ability to recover and to restructure human communities which had been, at first, traumatized by the violence of the slave trade and then of colonization.

This reorientation, which continues unabated today in new forms in the face of the economic

crisis, rests on the erosion or the redefinition and the reformulating of the community structures and the challenging, dissolution or division of political power and command; The Muslim community has a specific composition. It is multi-ethnic and bases its existence not on some filiation or reference to a common ancestor, but on a religious conviction which puts the community ideal before all else while exalting it and affirming it in daily life. Work being the same for everyone, it pushes aside the obvious exploitation of the disciple by his marabout... Group solidarity is no longer based on ethnic membership; it transcends it to favour the community of faith. Muslim communities exist in networks which are within and beyond states. Their political appeal transcends national frontiers. In this way are forged the frameworks of a new history.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the Marabout War enlarged the Islamized area of Senegambia by attaching the northern regions of the *wolof* country to the *toucouleur* country. Here strong Muslim communities (some of them in the minority), were very attractive to their neighbouring communities, demonstrating great capacities for resistance and offensive action when confronted by traditional power, while creating the first training centres for native marabouts in these new territories.

The failure of the marabouts in their attempt to control the whole of northern Senegambia did not put an end to the holy wars or *jihad*. Muslim communities continued to revolt against the aristocracies, the slave traders and then the expeditionary forces, from the second half of the 17th century up to the creation of the AOF (French West Africa) in 1895.

This sequence closes with the first great victory of the Muslim communities in the Fuuta Tooro in which the *toorodo* marabouts seized power and put an end to the *denyanke* regime, which they accused of paganism. In fact, while exerting tyrannical power, the *denyanke* practised a lax form of Islam. These characteristics explain the considerable mobilization of the masses to support the insurgents. They accused them of pillaging their own subjects to supply the Saharan slave trade and of being unable to guarantee the protection of the kingdom against foreign incursions, notably by the Moors.

The *toorodo* revolution of 1776 was thus a revolt of the oppressed. Its instigator was Souleyman Baal, while Abdel Qadir Kan assured its success.<sup>4</sup> He became the first *Almami* of Fuuta Tooro with the establishment of the Muslim theocracy, founded on a new political morality and whose order rested on the *shari'a*. The *toorodo* authorities sent missionaries and warriors throughout the whole of Senegambia and lent their unflinching support to all Muslim communities to promote Islam and to overturn the traditional aristocracies.

This religious proselytism, which coincided with the beginning of the colonial conquest, opened a third sequence – that of the *jihad* of the 19th century – the objectives of which were to destroy the pagan aristocracies, to convert the population and to put a brake on the territorial expansion of the colony of Senegal (Saint Louis and Gorée).

One figure totally dominates this sequence: El Haj Oumar Foutiyou Tal, whose action touched the whole of Senegambia and the loop of the Niger. Oumar's work was taken up and amplified by his disciples, of whom the best known were Maba Jaxu Ba, Cheikhou Amadou Madiyu and Mamadou Lamin Dramé. El Haj Oumar was born in Fuuta Tooro around 1794 into a family of

*toorodo* minor nobility. He led a spectacular holy war against the traditional aristocrats and the colonizers in the regions of Upper Senegal-Niger from 1852 to 1864, after having undertaken a long journey to Mecca and the Arab and African Muslim countries, between 1825 and 1832. During the pilgrimage, at the foot of the Ka'aba, Oumar was initiated into the *tariqa* (way) *tijaan*. He was raised to the rank of Caliph of the brotherhood for West Africa.

Between 1854 and 1857, he controlled several states on the right bank of the Senegal River (Gidimaxa, Bundu, Khasso and Kaarta). His repeated calls for an uprising of the Muslims of Kajoor, Bawol, Jolof, Fuuta Tooro, and Saint Louis against their rulers mobilized the governor of Senegal, General Louis Léon Faidherbe, against the 'toucouleur' marabout. After several skirmishes with the French, El Haj Oumar turned his forces eastward. In 1859, he seized the *bambara* kingdom of Senegal before defeating the alliance of Ségou and Macina, thus creating the biggest *pulaar* Muslim empire in West Africa. He abandoned Senegambia to the French forever. Oumar met with his death on the cliffs of Bandiagara following the insurrection of the *peul* of Macina in 1864.

Of the marabouts who followed in the footsteps of Oumar, three deserve mention: Maba Jaxu Ba, Cheikou Madiyu, and Mamadou Lamin Dramé. With them the phase of warrior Islam ended. Other marabouts attempted to repeat the *jihad* adventure briefly but to no avail. Islam took on a new face – that of the Sufi path of the brotherhoods – an Islam which rejected military holy war and favoured the constitution of solid, stable, and productive communities.

The new sequence merges with the ancestry of the principal Senegalese brotherhoods, *Qaddiriyya*, *tijaan*, and *mouride*. On the one hand it marks the end of armed opposition between the Muslims and the traditional aristocrats following the victory of the expeditionary forces and, on the other, the permanent admission of the brotherhoods into the project of colonial exploitation.

## The Qaddiriyya Brotherhood

The Qaddiriyya was the first brotherhood to establish itself in Senegal. It was introduced there following the reform movement initiated by Mactar-al-kabir Kunta, one of the greatest scholars of Timbuktu in the 18th century. In order to accelerate the Islamization of West Africa and to purify the message, he sent numerous disciples into the main regions of the Sudan. One of them, Bounama Kounta, arrived in Kajoor at the beginning of the 19th century. His excellent qualities as a trader and his erudition gained him access to the royal court in Kajoor.

The king of Kajoor granted him a fief on which his successors founded Njassan, the holy place and religious centre of the Kounta branch of the brotherhood. In fact, the *qadir* brotherhood was subdivided into several, more or less rival branches, each having its own marabouts and holy places. The *qadir* sphere of influence is confined to the regions of Thiès, Loga, the outskirts of Dakar, and several pockets in Casamance. Demographically speaking, the Qaddiriyya is the smallest of the great Senegalese brotherhoods.

## The Tijaaniyya Brotherhood

It has already been mentioned that El Haj Oumar introduced this brotherhood into West Africa. His initiative was continued by various charismatic leaders. Each of them marked out his own territory for his religious undertaking.

El Haj Saïdou Nourou Tall (1879-1980), a grandson of Oumar, had numerous disciples and a large influence among the populations of the Senegal valley and towns such as Dakar and Saint Louis. He played a significant role in Senegalese political life from the colonial period until his death. For his disciples, the political and religious success of Saïdou Nourou was not translated into economic success compared to that of the mourides.

El Haj Malick Sy (1855-1922) was the founder of the principal *Wolof* branch of the *tijaan*. He was first a wandering marabout before deciding to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Afterwards he settled in Saint Louis, then at Tivaouane where he established his *Zawiya*. Today, this town is the holy city of this religious branch. El Haj Malick launched a vast programme of proselytism and religious education. He appointed marabout teachers at the commercial stops along the railway and in the cities, thus imparting a strong intellectual and didactic orientation to Senegalese Islam.

Upon the death of the founder, his son Ababacar Sy (1890-1957) succeeded him and assumed the title, recognized by the colonial administration, of Caliph General of the *tijaan*. He had to confront the opposition of his two younger brothers, El Haj Mansour Sy and Abdoul Aziz Sy. At the end of World War II, this opposition had taken a political turn: the Caliph supported the partisans of Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Senegalese Democratic Block, while his two brothers took sides with the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO) of Lamine Gueye. This confrontation within the brotherhood has left indelible stains on the history of the brotherhood.

The defunct Caliph General, Abdoul Aziz Sy (1905-1997), credited with great erudition and a deep sense of justice and political compromise, succeeded his brother in 1957. He too had to confront the insurrection of the late Caliph's children, one of whom, Cheik Ahmed Tidiane Sy (1920- ), has been one of the principal figures in the politico-religious life of Senegal since the end of the 1950s. He is the moral guide of a movement of young Muslims, the *Moustarchidin wal Moustarchidati*, which was the principle opposition party to the power of the President of the Republic during the 1990s. Accused of being at the instigation of the bloody riots of 16 February 1994, the son of this marabout, who is the moral leader of the organization, was imprisoned for a year.<sup>5</sup>

The main commemorative religious festival of the *tijaan* is the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, the *Gamou*, which is an evening recitation of the Koran and a revalidation of the brotherhood's collective memory. Every year, this religious ceremony brings thousands to Tivaouane. As did the colonial administration, the Senegalese government sends a strong delegation.

Today, the *tijaan* branch of the Sy is profoundly shaken by internal crises provoked by the struggles for power and antagonistic political positioning of the principal marabouts who are immersed in partisan political quarrels. The multiplication of political parties and manifold dissidence within the party in power have led to a restructuring and rearrangement of alliances and vote-catching groupings which are traumatizing the marabout families, certain segments of which found themselves profoundly opposed to the others.

The Niass de Kaolack branch was founded by Abdoulay Niass (1850-1922) but the principal

► creator was his son El Haj Ibrahima Niass (1902-1976). An erudite and charismatic marabout, he succeeded in establishing his brotherhood firmly in the Gambia and the north of Nigeria. Like Cheik Ahmed Tidiane Sy, with whom he allied himself in creating a political party opposed to Senghor, Niass was a political player of the first order. The great success of this branch of the *tijaan* is, thanks to its Gambian and Nigerian connection, the fact that it took root in the United States, notably in Chicago and Washington DC.

### The Mouride Brotherhood

Demographically speaking, the mouride brotherhood has fewer followers than the *tijaan* brotherhood but, in terms of organization, discipline and its capacities for mobilization and economic entrepreneurship, it has the most influence. In spite of critical episodes and serious confrontations with the colonial administration, by directing the development of the groundnut industry (the product of colonial exploitation) it was able to interfere in political affairs by very quickly granting itself a privileged position.

Today, the economic, social, and religious networks of Mouridism extend throughout the world, most notably in the marketplaces of international commerce. This 'spider web' assures them control of Senegalese commerce and of the informal *Sandaga* sector – the big market and the small shops in the adjacent streets in the centre of the Senegalese capital are the bridgehead of their influence. The holy city of Touba and the minaret of the grand mosque (*Lamp Fal*) symbolize their attachment to one earth (the *Bawol*) and to one ideology and source of inspiration: Mouridism, the central values of which are the cult of work, success, discipline and absolute obedience to the marabout (*Jebëlu*).

The *bawol-bawol* reference, the mouride attributes, and inclusion in a genealogy of which Ahmadou Bamba Mbacke is the ultimate expression, drawn out on a holy land (Touba), and captured completely in a monument, the mosque and its minaret, offer an identity which is exhibited throughout Senegal. Its most spectacular moment is the great *Magal* which sees not much fewer than a million people converge on the town. Every year, the *Magal* commemorates the return from exile of the founder of Mouridism, Ahmadou Bamba.

Amadou Bamba Mbacke (1850-1927) was the son of a former Kadi of Kajoor, close to Maba Jaxu and Lat Joor. He lived for a certain number of years at the Kajoor court. On the death of the *damel* of Kajoor in 1886, he settled in Mbacké-Baol and began to attract a considerable and growing number of *taalibe* (disciples), from among the poor, peasants and slaves to princes who had been traumatized by the violence of colonial conquest.

Although he only viewed his actions in a spiritual context and his resistance to colonization in a passive sense, his notoriety and influence alienated him from the colonizers. He was arrested and deported to Mayombe in Gabon where he stayed from 1895 to 1902. The *Magal* commemorates his departure into exile. This episode, the origin of the Mouride collective memory, constitutes the framework for the miracles of Bamba: the prayer on the carpet held up by the waves of the ocean; his resistance to the attempts of his French jailers to debase him; and the domestication of the dense forest, of wild animals and supernatural beings.

His return to Senegal was of short duration. He was once again deported by the colonial authorities – this time to Mauritania where he stayed from 1903 to 1907, the date on which he returned to Senegal to remain under house arrest in Jolof. Ahmadou Bamba's deportations increased his fame and the number of *taalibe* only grew. In 1910, it finally dawned upon the French that Bamba was not plotting a jihad. They allowed him to found his holy city of Touba and, in 1926, to make a start on the great mosque of Touba in which he is buried.

The understanding with the French opened up new territories for the Mourides who adhered to Bamba's message of 'work is a form of prayer; it sanctifies'. They therefore supported the expansion of growing groundnuts. The marabouts developed a particular relationship with the colonial administration and their own marabout way of representing the peasantry. From this time, the marabouts installed themselves as the inescapable intermediaries between the colonial administration and the rural masses.

The other great figure of the saga of this first Mouride period was the faithful disciple (the 'man to do and undertake everything') of the marabout, Cheik Ibra Fal, called Lamp Fal (1858-1930), who founded the sub-brotherhood of the *Baay Fal*. His name is closely associated with that of the founder of Mouridism. Because of his noble, warrior background as a *ceddo* (a traditional Wolof warrior), he symbolizes the link between the old *Wolof* political formations and the new communities of the brotherhood. His integration, at the periphery of the latter, favoured the granting of the right to transgress certain Islamic prescriptions: the consumption of alcohol and a dispensation from regular prayer. The *ceddo* and the slave warriors rushed towards this opening.

The *Baay Fal* branch of Mouridism retained the clothing and certain aspects of the *ceddo* way of life: long hair, wide leather belts encircling their loins, multi-coloured gowns, half a pestle to use as a club, drum music and religious chants deeply influenced by the *Wolof* 'peasant' rhythm and beat and an expressiveness in dancing which is now found in contemporary *mbalax* (dance music). Of the totality of the teaching which issued from Ahmadou Bamba – the piety, obedience, discipline and work – *Baay Fal* have retained only the last element. Their devotion, dedication and commitment to the quest and to work in the service of the brotherhood and of the marabouts have assured the primitive accumulation of the brotherhood. Like the other brotherhoods, the *Baay Fal* sub-branch has a Caliph General and has been fragmented into several 'houses' (branches).

Trade and the cultivation of groundnuts favoured the rapid enrichment of the mouride community and its leaders. Today, a blind belief in work and economic success has innervated the entire brotherhood.<sup>6</sup>

On the death of the founder of Mouridism, a dispute arose regarding the succession between his brother, Cheik Anta Mbacke (1878-1930), a prosperous businessman, also known as 'the brotherhood's banker', and his eldest son Mamadou Moustapha Mbacke (1880-1945). The colonial administration preferred the latter who was the real organizer of the brotherhood. He maintained the structure, the hierarchy, the principle of absolute submission of the *taalibe* to their marabout and the cult of *diggël* (marabout prescription). He accelerated the construction of the mosque, the cultivation of groundnuts and the territorial expansion of Mouridism which extended beyond the *Wolof* groundnut basin to reach the *sereer* and the city dwellers of the colony of Senegal.

The succession to Mamadou Moustapha Mbacke created the same difficulties as that of his father, with a conflict between his eldest son Cheik Mbacke, also known as *Gaïndé Fatma* (1905-1978), and his brother, Falilou Mbacke (1885-1968). Benefiting from colonial support and that of Léopold Sédar Senghor, the most influential politician of the period, the latter became Caliph General while his rival was supported by Lamine Gueye, who was entering a phase of political decline. Having failed to control the brotherhood, Cheik Mbacke devoted his life and his energy to the construction of an economic empire which was to make him one of Senegal's most important private successes, investing both in the production and the commercialization of groundnuts and salt, as well as fishing and real-estate.

Falilou Mbacke continued the work of his brother by consecrating the mosque in Touba and by strengthening relations between the marabout hierarchy and the BDS, Senghor's party which would later become the Progressive Senegalese Union (UPS). His importance in the history of the Mouride brotherhood lies in the fact that throughout his reign he maintained the unshakeable support of the peasant masses. It was also during this caliphate that the fragmentation of mouridism into increasingly numerous 'houses' was accentuated, as was the acquisition of a certain autonomy vis-à-vis the central authority of the brotherhood by the marabouts.

The death of the Mouride marabout coincided with the intensification of social movements, notably strikes by workers and students. For the first time, the urban crises were now combined with peasant unrest, which thanks to the unflinching support of the marabouts had always been contained. The causes of this were: the end of French subsidies to the groundnut industry, which was henceforth aligned at a lower world price (an alignment which entailed a lowering of producers' prices and a fierce erosion of the incomes of peasants and marabouts); an exacerbation of the debts owed by peasants; and increasingly frequent recourse to brutal methods of recovery by the Senegalese authorities. Even worse, this marked the start of the cycle of droughts which would accelerate the exodus of peasants from the groundnut basin to the towns and towards commercial activities.

This context led the new Caliph General to inaugurate a new style. The seventh son of the founder, Abdou Lahat Mbacke (1905-1989), took charge of the grievances of the peasants whom he publicly defended, notably at the annual *Magal* in Touba. However, he did not break with the regime which he continued to support while developing autonomy for himself and his community. He will certainly be remembered by the Mouride community under his nickname 'the Builder'. Indeed, he was the architect of the urbanization of Touba, the centre of gravity where a mosque was completely finished under his caliphate. He constructed an immense library and set up a print-shop to preserve and disseminate the works of the founder.

He was simultaneously the architect of the brotherhood's financial security and of its entrance into the city, with the control of the commercial sector by the *Modou-modou* (itinerant traders, organizers of the informal sector, importers of household electrical appliances and rice, small industrialists, haulage contractors, etc.) Today, the success of Mouride urban economic enterprise can be read in all of the features that bear traces of Mouride identity. The followers of Mouridism have become the masters of all the urban markets in Senegal and have woven dense networks of solidarity throughout the markets of the world, through which they circulate capital and offers of work with an unrivalled security. These changes mark the end of the 'groundnut marabouts' and herald in the era of the 'wheeler-dealer' marabout.

The secular marabout, Abdou Lahat, was succeeded by the erudite Abdou Khadre Mbacke, the imam of the mosque of Touba for two decades. His caliphate was of short duration (1989-90). He preferred meditation and the silence of prayer to his predecessor's flamboyant personality and clear-cut political stand in favour of President Abdou Diouf. He passed away on 13 May, 1990.

Abdou Khadre was succeeded by Serign Saliou Mbacke (1915-). Closer in style to his predecessor, he seems to wish to put an end to the brotherhood's political engagement. No longer having a secretary to maintain a link with political power, the new Caliph seems to be opting for a return to the original Mouridism and agricultural activities. He has thus succeeded in obtaining the declassification and the deforestation of the last protected forest in the western centre of Senegal – Khelcom. Nevertheless, he has resumed the urbanization of Touba by

deciding to enlarge the mosque and complete the construction of an Islamic university begun by Abdou Lahat Mbacke. Certainly his style leaves more room for the activities of different branches of Mouridism, notably the young marabouts looking for economic and financial opportunities and for lucrative political patronage.

The organization of the brotherhood is hierarchical. It relies on the relationship of submission of the *taalibe* to the marabout. The latter may require the former to make a contribution in kind, money, or work in the fields just as he may tell him how to vote, which must be obeyed without any sort of hesitation or question. On the other hand, the marabout undertakes to save the soul of his disciple. He must also act as his intermediary with the bureaucracy and modern institutions. He must help him in time of need. Even if the relationship tends to favour the marabout, the latter does have his duties towards the *taalibe*. From their marabouts *taalibe* civil servants derive the support needed to occupy the highest positions in the administration and the government.

Beyond these contingencies, it is clear that the brotherhood system has been the particular form of appropriating Islam of certain Senegalese societies which, at the same time, have made of it a syncretic way of conserving/expressing their traditional religiosity. Senegalese Islam has followed varied and unstable paths, embracing all of the economic, political, social, and cultural sectors. Today, in the diversity of its brotherhoods, in its idioms and its areas of predilection, it is attempting to construct an identity removed from the influence of the ruling class and the ruling party. If the Mouride brotherhood fulfils itself in its economic activities and in its venture to achieve modernization and internationalization rooted in its own values, the *tijaan* will not succeed in freeing themselves from the constraints of political vote-catching. Probably the convergence of the different brotherhood identities is the principal obstacle to developing so-called fundamentalist religious movements. This would probably result in the marabouts' direct participation in the political arena. ◆

*Dr Mamadou Diouf is professor at Cheikh Anta Diop University/CODESRIA, Dakar.*

### Notes

1. Wesley Johnson (1991), *Naissance du Sénégal Contemporain. Aux origines de la vie politique moderne (1900-1920)*. Paris, Karthala, pp. 34-5.
2. See Boubacar Barry (1972), *Le royaume du Waalo. Le Sénégal avant la conquête*. Paris, Maspero, (republished, Paris, Karthala, 1985) and *La Sénégambie du XVème au XIXème siècle*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 1988.
3. Mamadou Diouf (1990), *Le Kajoor au XIXème siècle. Pouvoir Ceddo et Conquête coloniale*. Paris, Karthala, p.89.
4. See D. Robinson, 'Almamy Abdul Kader', *Les Africains*, Vol. 10, Paris, Jeune Afrique, 1978, 'The Islamic Revolution of Futa Toro', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 1975 and *Chiefs and Clerics. Abdul Bokar Kan and Futa Toro, 1853-1891*. Oxford, 1975.
5. See Ousmane Kane and Leonardo Villalon, 'Les Mustarchidin du Sénégal', *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, No.9, November 1995.
6. J. Copans (1980), *Les Marabouts de l'arachide*. Paris, Le Sycomore, E.B. Diop (1984), *La Société wolof. Traditions et Changement*. Paris, Karthala, and D. Cruise O'Brien (1971), *The Mourides of Senegal. The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, and *Saints and Politicians. An Essay on the Organization of a Senegalese Peasant Society*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975.