IMPERIALISM, INDEPENDENCE AND ISLAM IN SENEGAL AND MALI

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Introduction

Pragmatism and cooperation have characterized relations between religious and secular leaders in the regions of modern Senegal and Mali from early colonial times to the present. While much has been written about the recent accommodation of the state and Senegalese Sufi brotherhoods, a similar, long-term pattern likewise emerges in Mali, formerly French Soudan. Given the Malian experience, this article suggests that the tendency to treat Senegal as an exceptional case of religious and political cooperation is misleading. Additionally, the ties of accommodation, often portrayed as fairly recent, can historically be traced back to the nineteenth century. The long-term perspective is essential for understanding the complex processes of cooperation and pragmatism pursued and developed by Senegalese and Malian religious and secular authorities.

An extensive primary and secondary literature, albeit mostly focused on western Senegal and particularly the Muride brotherhood, permits some preliminary conclusions about broad patterns of interaction. Both secular and religious leaders have overwhelmingly and publicly endorsed pragmatic cooperation, accepting the futility of resistance and the necessity of cooperation. The followers of the various Muslim movements have historically heeded their leaders’ calls for cooperation. Suspicion has existed on both sides at different times in the colonial and post-colonial periods, yet ultimately they have resolved their fears and doubts. From the early colonial period, the French realized that the Muslim brotherhoods were entrenched in the region and that the colonial regime could benefit positively by seeking the public support of religious figures. The brotherhood leadership likewise accepted the inevitability of secular rule and sought political support for their activities. Both sides realized they could manipulate the
other to enhance their own interests and agendas. Early confrontations between state and religion, which usually emerged out of suspicion and misunderstandings, were quickly replaced by acceptance and cooperation. This mutually agreed upon policy of pragmatic accommodation has served both sides especially well. In Mali, the religious community has periodically withdrawn its support from the state. Yet, as in Senegal, the secular state and the religious brotherhoods have survived and thrived, largely owing to their interdependence.

The colonial archives available in France, Senegal and Mali contain numerous files specifically on Islamic affairs, Muslim leaders, the brotherhoods and their followers. Correspondence files and reports often contain observations on religious matters and authorities. Files and references pertaining specifically to Islam increase markedly around the turn of the century but then decrease by the 1920s, coinciding with a period when French officials in Muslim regions of Africa and the Middle East closely watched Islamic leaders and movements. In addition, during the twentieth century, several French administrator-scholars, such as Maurice Delafosse (1912) and Paul Marty (1917, 1921) wrote monographs on Islam in the region of Senegal and Soudan that while dated remain immensely valuable for their insights and commentary. These works focused primarily on individual leaders and the two major brotherhoods, especially in Senegal. The archives also contain some documents in Arabic written by Muslim leaders and observations by local chiefs about Islam and the brotherhoods. Not surprisingly, the archival material focuses primarily on the colonial administration’s perception of how to deal with religious authorities and their followers. Much less evidence exists on how marabouts perceived cooperation and what they planned to do or did to insure continued colonial endorsement. This paper relies on some of the archival documentation and also some oral
interviews and personal observations made in the field in Senegal and Mali while working on other research projects in the 1980s and 1990s. Further work in the archives and in the region is clearly necessary to develop more fully some of the ideas tentatively presented here.

The primary data base for this paper is the extensive and well-developed, if often highly focused and problematic, secondary literature. The secondary literature on the interactions between Islam and secular political institutions in the region has generally focused either on the precolonial and colonial periods, with scant treatment of the independence period, or centered on recent developments with insufficient historical context. The historiography has also tended to eschew a comparative perspective by focusing on one country, one brotherhood, or one individual. Written during the colonial period, the works of Paul Marty (1917,1921) in particular reflect a respect for and tolerance of Islam, emphasizing the positive benefits of working with the Sufi brotherhood leaders and followers. J. S. Trimingham, in his antiquarian and short A History of Islam in West Africa (1962) and The Influence of Islam upon Africa (1968), concentrates on the islamization process in the region rather than interactions between the secular and religious spheres. In The Development of Islam in West Africa (1984), M. Hiskett likewise examines the spread of Islam in West Africa, with a particular geographic focus on northern Nigeria, his area of expertise. He ends his historical overview with independence in 1960. C. Harrison, in France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960 (1988), concentrates exclusively on colonial policy toward Muslim leaders and their brotherhoods, with scant information on the marabouts’ responses to colonial policy and actions. Harrison relies heavily and and somewhat uncritically on the colonial perspective and archival materials. The essays in the volume Le temps des marabouts: Itineraires et strategies islamiques en Afrique occidentale francaise v. 1880-1960 (1997), edited
by D. Robinson and J-L. Triaud, likewise concentrate strictly on the colonial period, with particular emphasis on biographies of important religious figures, virtually all of whom cooperated with the secular authorities. Works by anthropologists and political scientists, most notably the works of D. Cruise O’Brien (esp. 1971, 1975), C. Coulon’s *Le marabout et le prince: Islam et pouvoir au Senegal* (1981) and L. Villalon’s *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal* (1995), concentrate on recent developments in Senegal, especially the cooperation of political and religious authorities, with only brief historical background and no comparative perspective. They are also focused overwhelmingly on the Muride brotherhood of western Senegal in the 1970s and 1980s.

In addition, historians of the early colonial period have tended to focus on Muslim marabouts (francophone term for religious teachers) as leaders of anti-French resistance movements, downplaying the more prominent but perhaps less appealing themes of cooperation and peaceful interaction (e.g., Willis 1979). Commentators on the recent and current situations in Senegal, on the contrary, have usually examined the counterbalance and cooperative links between the brotherhoods and the secular state which they find unusual on the contemporary scene in Africa (e.g., Villalon 1995). Little has been written on the interactions of religion and politics in independent Mali. This has resulted in a certain disjunction between the work done by historians and that of anthropologists and political scientists, as well as between specialists on Senegal and Mali. Relations between the state and Islam can be viewed more accurately as part of a dynamic, long-term process that has remained fairly consistent. Contemporary religious leaders in Senegal and Mali are acutely aware of and familiar with their historical predecessors. Politicians in both countries frequently invoke the traditional ties of cooperation between the
state and the brotherhoods to emphasize their own links to and participation in religious organizations.

Secular, political leaders and administrators in the areas of Senegal and Mali, both during the colonial period and after independence in 1960, sought to manipulate Islam and dominate the brotherhood leadership and membership, to exert control, maintain order, and to sustain and expand the local economic base. Muslim leaders and movements constantly transformed, and continue to shift, their responses to the secular state with various forms of accommodation, conciliation, cooperation and collaboration in order to further their own interests among the local populations. The process has been shaped most significantly by a series of Muslim religious leaders and their descendants who have traditionally headed brotherhoods. The leaders of these brotherhoods, especially the Tijaniyya in Senegal and Mali and the Murides in Senegal, continue to wield enormous powers, both spiritual and temporal, visibly and behind the scenes in the two countries. The brotherhood leadership in both countries has enormous political influence on disciples. Besides following a policy of pragmatism in their dealings with politicians, religious leaders have also pursued a path of coexistence with one another. Some divisions exist within the Tijaniyya brotherhood in both Senegal and Mali, yet the differences have not caused major political rifts. Political and economic expediency have taken precedence over ideology.

Most notably in the 1980s and early 1990s, pragmatism clearly dictated the interaction between the government and the dominant religious brotherhoods, resulting in a balance between the secular political systems and a non-militant Islamic society. Islam has historically served in Mali and especially in Senegal as an ideology, a basis for social organization and a conduit for mediating and negotiating opposition between a weak state and a predominantly Muslim society.
Despite a series of unprecedented political events in the 1990s, those interactions will most likely continue along a path of mutual cooperation and support, a path begun in the early colonial period. Any challenge to the existing political leadership would also be perceived as a threat to the religious leadership, and vice versa.

**Historical Background (to c.1850)**

Trans-Saharan traders from northern Africa introduced Islam peacefully into sub-Saharan West Africa by the tenth century. Some merchants and certain elite groups formed the primary, early converts. Arabic-speaking travelers to the region during the precolonial period described a syncretic Islam, shaped primarily by local traditions and beliefs. West African leaders were, by necessity, generally tolerant of both Islam and traditional religions. Some leaders resolutely refused to convert to Islam, fearing the loss of their own power and status as politico-religious leaders. Islam rarely penetrated beyond the Sahelian belt of West Africa and never engaged the majority of the local population (Hiskett 1984; Trimingham 1962).

Beginning in the 1690s and lasting until the 1890s, a series of jihads or holy wars fundamentally and irrevocably altered Islam in West Africa. The Senegambian region in particular was affected by this period of struggle and state formation which, while rooted in the rhetoric of Islamic reform, was shaped by numerous other economic and social factors. The end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; the growth of legitimate commerce; and the eruption of long-standing tensions resulted in a Muslim reform movement led by charismatic religious leaders. Most of the conflicts occurred in areas not yet conquered or dominated by the French who would only later come into contact with states created from these holy wars (Barry 1998; Curtin 1971,
The Colonial Period (c.1850-1960)

When the French embarked on the colonial conquest of the region in the nineteenth century, they encountered reform Muslim states which usually offered some initial resistance but ultimately succumbed to superior French military and economic power. Several charismatic reform leaders emerged onto the scene at this critical juncture in West Africa. Because of their widespread influence and because their careers reflect well the relationship between the early colonial state and Islam in West Africa, two Muslim reformers from the Senegambian/Sahelian region, al-Hajj Umar Tal from Futa Toro and Mamadou Lamine Drame from the upper Senegal valley, will be discussed briefly. Scholars have tended to portray both as anti-resistance leaders against the French and colonial rule. These portrayals reflect more accurately the scholars’ own agendas rather than the motivations of al-Hajj Umar Tal and Mamadou Lamine Drame. Both leaders also profoundly shaped the Tijaniyya brotherhood, the region’s largest Sufi group, in Senegal and Mali (Abun-Nasr 1965).

Al-Hajj Umar Tal, born in Futa Toro in 1794, became a member of the Tijaniyya brotherhood, traveled to Mecca, and established his headquarters in Guinea in the 1840s. In 1854, he launched his jihad against existing rulers in the upper Senegal valley in preparation for conquering his homeland of Futa Toro in the middle and lower valley. In the upper Senegal he came into conflict with some rulers, primarily Fulbe, who had the backing of the French, the dominant colonial power along the length of the Senegal River. Repeatedly, Umar protested that his quarrel was with Fulbe and other indigenous leaders in the Senegambian region, not with the
French. He tried to gain the cooperation, or at least the neutrality, of the French but was unsuccessful. The French saw him as a threat to their economic and strategic interests and were not prepared to permit the setting up of a large Muslim empire so close to their own sphere of influence. They feared Umar primarily as a military and economic, not religious, threat. Umarian and French forces met in a series of skirmishes, initiated by the colonial administration and army, culminating in the massive defeat of the Umarian forces at the battle of Medine in the upper Senegal in 1857. Umar then redirected his campaign east into the Western Sudan, away from direct confrontation with the French. He also abandoned his goal of conquering Futa Toro in the lower and middle Senegal valley. He recruited in the Senegal region to attack existing states, both Muslim and non-Muslim, in the interior Western Sudan. He was successful in conquering much of modern-day Mali but local forces ultimately defeated Umar and killed him in 1862. His empire continued under his son, Amadu Seku, until the 1890s when the French took over the entire Western Sudan (Hanson 1996; Kanya-Forstner 1969; Robinson 1985).

Owing to the Umarian clashes in the late 1850s with the French in the upper Senegal, al-Hajj Umar is often portrayed in the historiography primarily as a Muslim anti-imperialist hero (Robinson 1985). Historians dwell on Umar’s clashes with the French, and perhaps most significantly, on French primary sources which label him an anti-colonial resistor. Umar’s career is considerably more complex and dynamic. Initially, he did not launch a *jihad* against the French; rather, he sought French cooperation for his efforts. The French made the initial decision to resist Umarian advances, forcing a direct confrontation in the upper Senegal region. Umar certainly raised the costs of French occupation of the upper Senegal and the Western Sudan. Yet after 1857 he turned away from direct engagement with the Europeans and focused his holy war
on interior states beyond French influence. Umar’s lasting contribution to the region’s history is not primarily as an anti-imperialist resistor but as the head of a movement that established a Muslim empire in the Western Sudan, served as a model for future Muslim state formation and spread Islam, most notably the Tijaniyya brotherhood in West Africa (Robinson 1985, 1988). Umar’s successors in the twentieth century have been among the most cooperative in all of West Africa with the secular states of Senegal and Mali.

The Umarian jihad profoundly shaped both French perceptions of the Tijaniyya and local attitudes toward the brotherhood. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the French viewed Tijaniyya Muslims as prone to conflict (Robinson 1988). By the early twentieth century, however, the colonial administration sought and accepted Tijaniyya cooperation and support as highly beneficial and critical to its success. Under the leadership of Umar Tal and his immediate successors, the Tijaniyya became numerically the largest brotherhood in the region of Senegal and Mali, a distinction it currently maintains. The brotherhood leadership also realized its fortunes were better served by cooperation, rather than direct or indirect confrontation with the colonial regime. Later Tijaniyya leaders, such as al-Hajj Malick Sy and Saidu Nuru Tal, cemented ties between the Tijaniyya and the state which continued after independence.

Another nineteenth century figure in the region who may have met al-Hajj Umar Tal and who had a similar ambiguous and shifting relationship with the French was al-Hajj Mamadu Lamine Drame. Born in 1835 in the upper Senegal region, Mamadu Lamine made the pilgrimage to Mecca before returning to his homeland and launching a *jihad* against the existing rulers, most of whom had the backing of the French. Like Umar, Lamine sought cooperation, or again at least neutrality, from the French. Lamine, a Soninke, repeatedly protested in numerous
correspondence that his quarrel was with the corrupt, impure Muslim Fulbe ruling class, not the French. Yet, as with Umar, the French did not want a radical Muslim state in the upper Senegal. They remembered their experiences with Umarian forces and assumed that Lamine, also a Tijaniyya and follower of al-Hajj Umar Tall, secretly had designs on exerting control over the region. The French supported their allies against Lamine when he attacked the Fulbe strongholds in 1886. By 1888, the revolt was crushed, Lamine was killed, and the status quo was restored, with the French in more direct control than ever. The Tijaniyya brotherhood gained even more adherents, especially in the upper Senegal region which straddles the border between modern-day Senegal and Mali. The quarrel with Lamine centered on political and economic control, not religion (Clark 1999; Fisher 1970; Kaka 1977; Oloruntimehin 1971).

In the historiography, Mamadu Lamine has been cast as a Muslim anti-imperialist resistance hero. As in the case of Umar Tall, this obscures the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of Mamadu Lamine’s revolt. It also reflects the nature of the French sources (Nyambarza, 1969). The French were suspicious of Lamine’s overtures, precisely because of their interactions with Umar Tal, and forced a direct confrontation which Lamine feared, knowing correctly that he could not defeat the French and their Fulbe allies. There were also elements of Soninke ethnicity or nationalism present in the revolt as the Soninke felt subordinate to the Fulbe. Lamine viewed himself primarily as a Muslim reformer, in the tradition of al-Hajj Umar Tal, against the corrupt, too secular Fulbe who were not following the Tijaniyya path. Finally, there was Lamine’s own personal drive for power in the region. The complexity of Mamadu Lamine’s revolt requires a careful and nuanced consideration of his motivations and activities, as well as a more careful reading of the sources. Labeling him an anti-imperialist resistor is too simplistic, static and
inaccurate, and more correctly reflects the view of the French primary sources rather than the reality of his mission.

Despite the inevitable disruption caused by conquests and the process of occupation, Islam spread in the region much more widely and rapidly during less than a century of colonial occupation than it had done during the preceding nine centuries (Hiskett 1984:281). The peace that the colonial administration imposed on the territory was an immediate and powerful aid to the spread of Islam. With increased trade and security, Islam and Islamic ideas were carried to areas where they had previously been unable to penetrate. Areas to the south of the heavily Islamicized northern sectors began to adopt Islam, and primarily the Tijaniyya brotherhood. Another factor aiding the spread of Islam was the construction of roads and railroads, most notably the Dakar-Niger railroad linking coastal Dakar to the interior Niger River. The railroad brought about a much wider and more rapid exchange of peoples between Muslim and non-Muslim areas. Bamako at the Niger River terminus of the railroad quickly became an important Islamic center and eventually the capital of independent Mali. Colonial economic policies in Senegal focused on agricultural production for export, linking interior peanut basin region with the coast, contributing to the spread of Islam. More importantly, colonial economic policies helped the development of the much studied and immensely influential Muride brotherhood in western Senegal (Behrman 1970; Callaway and Creevey 1994; Copans 1980; Coulon 1981; Cruise O’Brien 1971; 1975; 1988; Robinson 1991).

Amadu Bamba, a Wolof Senegalese marabout belonging to the Qadiriyya, founded the Muride brotherhood in 1886 in central Senegal, the heartland of the Wolof people, the dominant ethnic group in western Senegal (Creevey 1979). The most distinctive aspect of the Muride
brotherhood was the emphasis placed on disciples performing manual labor, especially in agriculture, for their marabouts. The Murides offered a rallying point for the displaced in rural Wolof society and also for those who resented the French and sought to protect the Islamic way of life from their influence. Amadu Bamba also offered an alternative to reliance upon traditional rulers who had shown themselves unable to resist the French and in fact often cooperated openly with them to remain in power. As Bamba’s followers increased, local chiefs complained to the French that Bamba was preaching *jihad* against Europeans. Several administrators felt that Bamba’s fanaticism was being exaggerated but they did worry about the growing number of his followers. As one French administrator noted:

> In the course of my mission I have made inquiries in several places about the activities of the marabout Amadou Bamba. Everywhere...I’ve heard only good about him. He is a pious and tranquil man whose only fault is that he takes on a lot of good-for-nothing pupil marabouts and if these people aren’t watched closely they will gradually cause trouble (Harrison 1988:111).

The early Murides have acquired a reputation for being staunchly anti-imperialist and anti-French. At the start of his career, Amadu Bamba may have had some ambitions to overthrow the French and set up an Islamic state. Later, he recognized that this was unrealistic and reconciled himself to a purely religious life, cooperating with the colonial administration to a limited extent. The administration never fully trusted him and kept a close watch over him. He was twice exiled from Senegal, contributing to the anti-imperialist historiography, but both times he was allowed to return. Despite their mistrust, the French valued the contribution that the Murides made to the economy, especially in the large amounts of peanuts produced for export.
By 1900, relations between the Murides and the colonial authorities had settled down into limited but growing cooperation. In 1910, Amadu Bamba issued a *fetwa* justifying obedience to the French. In 1926, Bamba was given permission to build a large mosque in Touba, today the largest mosque in Senegal. Bamba reciprocated by giving 500,000 francs, an enormous sum for one individual, to a fund designed to help stabilize the French franc. After Bamba’s death in 1927, the Murides and the French authorities cooperated ever more closely. The Murides became the key supplier of peanuts for export and main beneficiaries of colonial economic policies. Throughout the remaining years of colonialism and certainly since independence, the Murides, through their agriculture, commerce, and investments, were and still are in many ways Senegal’s economic lifeline. The Muride leaders, and their disciples, remained the key political constituency for the secular state in Senegal after independence in 1960 (Behrman 1970; Coulon 1981; Cruise O’Brien 1971, 1988).

In the region of French Soudan, later Mali, the Umarian jihad left a legacy of Tijaniyya Islam. After the complete French conquest of the area in the 1890s, the Tijaniyya cooperated actively with the colonial administration. The religious authorities realized their best interests were served by cooperation, not confrontation. Two small groups emerged to contest Tijaniyya hegemony and the brotherhood’s outright cooperation with and endorsement by the French. The Hamalliyya brotherhood, which developed in Nioro du Sahel, a prominent seat of Umarian power, declared itself the most “pure” form of the Tijaniyya brotherhood, in contrast to the Umarian branch. The Hamalliyya, under the leadership of its founder, Shaykh Hammalla, became identified with both anti-Umarian and anti-French sentiments. The Hammalliyya performed certain rituals, such as repeating a prayer twelve instead of the traditional eleven
times, and abridging certain prayers, which conspicuously set them apart from other brotherhoods. The group especially appealed to Koranic students, newly converted people and merchants in the Nioro area. The French closely watched the Hamalliyya, as they watched any new Muslim group that challenged the endorsed brotherhoods. However, their numbers never grew significantly and their impact remained very limited. The Hamalliyya were mainly concerned with reforming the practice of Islam and challenging the traditional Tijaniyya hierarchy and not with overthrowing colonial rule. The French perceived any reform movement, whether political or religious, as a threat to stability in the region (Brenner 1993, 1997).

In the late 1930s, another reform movement which was not a brotherhood, known locally as the Wahhabiyya, emerged among students and urban merchants with links to the Middle East. Some of the pilgrims returning from Mecca and Cairo set examples of piety and learning that contrasted sharply with the brotherhood establishment in French West Africa. The French, constantly preoccupied with the fear that Africans might find the means to unite under the banner of pan-Islam, quickly perceived the reformers as a threat. Some anti-French and anti-colonial sentiment existed in the movement, but the main concern centered on reforming Islamic education and the practice of Islam in the area. The Wahhabiyya rejected the consultation and following of marabouts, whose support the French sought to maintain. Their numbers remained small and their impact narrow (Kaba 1974). The Hamalliyya and Wahhabiyya reflected discontent with the dominant Tijaniyya and indirectly with colonial rule. Adherents of both groups felt that the Tijaniyya had abandoned its initial mission of confrontation and resistance for a policy of cooperation with and submission to the French (Harrison 1988; Kaba 1974).

Colonial policies toward Islam and religious leaders in the region encompassing Senegal
and French Soudan followed a pragmatic and fairly consistent pattern. Non-interference often characterized colonial attitudes toward Islam. The French were primarily concerned with maintaining order and encouraging economic activity, mostly agricultural production and commerce. This required the administration simultaneously to oppose *jihad* and the creation of anti-French Islamic states in the region and to support friendly, “officially” recognized and acceptable leaders. Colonial policy was not inherently anti-Islamic but opposed to individual leaders who rebelled in the name of Islam. Once rebellious leaders were contained, the administration, aware of the rapid spread of the brotherhoods, pursued a pragmatic and consistent policy of cooperation and co-existence, permitting the brotherhoods to recruit, organize local pilgrimages, and establish Koranic schools.

By the turn of the century, scholar-administrators such as Maurice Delafosse and Paul Marty were writing about the Muslim brotherhoods in Senegal and French Soudan as forces for peace and stability rather than resistance (Delafosse 1912; Marty 1917, 1921). Marty in particular stressed that Islam in French West Africa, labelled “Islam noir,” differed markedly from the Islam of the Arab world. While individual leaders in Senegal and French Soudan were perceived as possible threats to stability and warranted close supervision, the French viewed the large Islamic brotherhoods in general rather favorably. The French also openly endorsed Muslim leaders they largely controlled and gave their sanction to succession decisions. Thus, the Tijaniyya in both Senegal and French Soudan and especially the Murides in Senegal, continued to be led by figures acceptable to the secular state. As long as the marabouts instructed their followers to work and cooperate fully with the secular state, the administration did not interfere in religious matters. Brotherhood leaders likewise did not interfere in political matters and
decisions. Each group had its own separate interests, yet most often the concerns and interests of the political and religious authorities converged.

The marabout who did the most to alter French attitudes toward the Tijaniyya was al-Hajj Malik Sy, born in the 1850s to a Fulbe clerical family in the Senegal River region (Bousbina 1997; Robinson 1993). Sy’s maternal uncle, who had been initiated into the order by al-Hajj Umar, in turn initiated Malik Sy. In 1902, Sy, an assimilated Wolof, founded a religious center at Tivaoune in western Senegal which rapidly developed into the main Tijaniyya center in the region, a position it has maintained. Sy conducted his holy war on a spiritual and cultural plane only. The French considered him a reliable leader and with their tacit cooperation, he became the most effective proselytizer of the Tijaniyya among the Wolof. His adherents were largely drawn from the burgeoning cities and towns along the Dakar-Niger railway. His teaching criticized mysticism and blind obedience to marabouts, and emphasized diligent work and support for the secular state. One of his prominent sermons reflects his attitude:

*Adherez pleinement au gouvernement francais...Les francais se sont imposes par leurs beinfaits de justice, la securite interieure et par leur respect pour notre religion. Les souverains musulmans que nous avons connus en pays noir n’ont pas ete capables de nous assurer cet heureux etat, aussi bien dans le domaine spirituel que dans le domaine materiel...*(Magassouba 1985:44).

The branch of the Sy family established in Tivaoune continues to be immensely influential in Senegal, second only to the direct descendants of Amadu Bamba.

Other religious leaders likewise endorsed a path of peaceful cooperation and expedient
co-existence, encouraging their followers to obey laws, pay their taxes, and participate in labor
and war recruitment schemes. This earned them the warm support of the colonial administration.
Whereas some of the most influential religious figures during early colonial rule were leaders of
violent movements, in the later colonial period all the key leaders were those who cooperated
publicly with the secular state. The most significant Tijaniyya religious leader in the region
during the late colonial period was al-Hajj Saidu Nuru Tal, a grandson of al-Hajj Umar Tal, born
in the 1890s, and leader of a Tijaniyya branch in Dakar (Garcia 1997). Saidu Nuru Tall married a
daughter of al-Hajj Malik Sy, further cementing his ties both to the legacy of Umar Tal and the
Tijanniya brotherhood. The administration viewed him as the statesman and mediator of the
clerical community of Senegal, a role for which he was well-suited by temperament, age and
distinguished lineage. During the middle decades of the colonial era, he served frequently as
mediator between secular and religious leaders as well as between different marabouts, traveling
throughout West Africa at government expense, settling disputes and advocating the extension of
peanut cultivation for colonial markets. By 1957 he had been decorated twenty-four times for
outstanding services to the administration and was revered by his followers. In the late 1940s and
early 1950s, Tal, like other marabouts, sided with Leopold Senghor against his main political
rival Lamine Gueye, assuring Senghor’s victory. Tal’s relations with the Senghor government

The Independence Period (1960-1990s)

At independence in 1960, both Senegal and Mali were overwhelmingly Muslim
countries, with Senegal being about 90 percent Muslim and Mali being 80 percent Muslim. The
majority of Senegalese Muslims belonged to the Tijaniyya brotherhood (fifty percent), followed by the Murides (forty percent) and then other smaller groups. In Mali, the Tijaniyya dominated as well but with far fewer Murides. Both political administrations embarked on a path of secular, African socialism with religious tolerance for all. The two leaders, Leopold Senghor in Senegal, a Catholic, and Modibo Keita in Mali, a non-religious Muslim, had to court the support of Islamic authorities to stay in power and to enact their programs, support which they overwhelmingly received. Keita, however, rapidly lost his religious as well as political backing. Senghor and Keita followed a strictly pragmatic approach to relations with their own Muslim populations and the Islamic world in general. The two republics joined the Islamic Conference, and both sought the aid of wealthy Islamic countries for their economic and social development programs. Saudi Arabia and Morocco in particular assisted the countries in mosque construction in major urban areas and the development of religious education. The secular leadership saw no contradiction in this acceptance of aid based on religious alliance (Clark and Colvin 1994; Gellar 1995; Imperato 1989, 1996).

In both Senegal and Mali, colonial policies toward Islam, which had proven effective and durable, continued after independence. The secular state, which had to consolidate its power among the brotherhood leadership and their followers, did not interfere in religious matters and avoided antagonizing such a key constituency. Political authorities continued to encourage certain festivals and traditions, including local pilgrimages within the countries. Secular and Islamic education remained separate, and Arabic language instruction was offered in public schools. Political and religious leaders gave their mutual sanction to any leadership change. Any figure outside the accepted leadership in either sphere was likewise isolated in the other sphere.
The pragmatic and successful cooperation that emerged between religious and secular authorities during colonial rule was, not surprisingly, maintained and enhanced after independence in both Senegal and Mali.

**Senegal**

President Senghor of Senegal in particular had to seek the active cooperation and support of the powerful Muride leadership and its disciples. He achieved this with an astonishing degree of success for a non-Muslim and non-Muride. During a constitutional crisis in 1962, the leading marabouts of the Murides and the Tijanniyya unanimously supported Senghor against his main rival, Mamadu Dia. Senghor later declared the town of Touba, site of the Murides’ largest mosque, a religious center beyond government control (Ross 1995; Villalon 1995). Senghor also worked closely with the Tijaniyya leadership, declaring the town on Medina Gounass in the upper Casamance region an independent religious center, and frequently visiting the Sy family at Tivouane (Magassouba 1985). During periods of social unrest, especially in 1963 and 1968, the marabouts staunchly defended Senghor and criticized the protestors. Even though Senghor ran unopposed in national elections every five years, the religious leadership publicly urged all their followers to vote for Senghor and his party, initially called the *Union Progressiste Senegalaise* (UPS) and after 1976, the *Parti Socialiste* (PS). Senghor actively courted the religious authorities’ support, never taking them for granted. When Senghor resigned in 1980 and passed the presidency to his chosen successor, Abdou Diouf, the fortunes of the state and the two main religious brotherhoods were as inextricably interdependent as ever. Many marabouts welcomed the presidency of Abdou Diouf because he was Muslim and was also perceived as being less tied
to the French and the previous colonial regime than Senghor.

Throughout the 1980s, Diouf continued Senghor’s policy of pragmatic cooperation and friendly support with the Murides and the Tijaniyya as a matter of necessity. His public base would have quickly evaporated without the solid backing of key religious authorities and their disciples. As a Tijaniyya, Diouf received strong support from that brotherhood’s hierarchy and their followers. Government agricultural, commercial and investment schemes favored the brotherhoods, especially the Murides, who were the largest investors in the country. The government did not interfere with internal religious matters, remaining officially staunchly secular. Religious leaders understood their economic fortunes were intertwined with government policies and endorsed the initiatives, encouraging their followers to participate in government schemes. The religious authorities only engaged in politics to support the government and the ruling political party, the Parti Socialiste (PS) in elections, and to insure voter turnout among their disciples. Muride marabouts pronounced ndigals, or religious instructions, ordering their followers to vote for the PS, which they obediently did. Marabouts actively supported PS candidates in all elections, virtually assuring a one-party state.

While undoubtedly there was some minor, localized religious opposition to the Diouf regime in the 1980s, especially from groups influenced by the Iranian Revolution and radical Islam, their influence was virtually negligible on the national level and had no influence on secular decisions or policies. Some commentators have labeled the Senegal of the 1980s a “quasi democracy” because of the dominance of the PS and the close cooperative links between state and religion. One of the primary reasons Senegal remained a fairly stable state despite economic stagnation in the 1980s and unrest in neighboring regions, was the interdependency of state and
religion, especially the Muride brotherhood. While other nations in West Africa experienced military coups, the ousting of political leaders, and growing radical Islamic movements, Senegal maintained its secular, civilian administration with Abdou Diouf as president and the traditional brotherhood leadership dominated Islam in the country (Coulon and Cruise O’Brien 1989; Creevey 1985; Diouf and Diouf 1990; Fatton 1987; Magassouba 1985).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political influence of the religious leaders appeared to be on the wane or at least in some retreat from the political arena. Despite an ndigal to vote for the PS in 1988, many Senegalese supported the opposition which achieved almost thirty percent of the popular vote. The religious leadership did not endorse or condemn the subsequent unrest which erupted owing to charges of electoral fraud. During the serious ethnic violence between Mauritanians and Senegalese in 1989 which occurred during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, brotherhood authorities were again silent, perhaps aware of their inability to stop the upheaval. France’s decision in January 1994 to devalue the CFA franc sparked the most serious uprisings within Senegal in recent years. The leading Tijaniyya and Murid marabouts did not make any statements regarding devaluation or the violence, led primarily by urban youths. Some religious opposition figures joined in the protests, and hundreds of moustarchadines (Muslim reformers) were arrested and jailed after the riots. The demonstrations, however, involved mostly disassociated urban youths with no religious agenda (Vengroff and Creevey 1997; Villalon 1993; Villalon and Kane 1998).

By the mid-1990s, the leading religious authorities had completely refrained from publicly giving any political advice to their disciples, neither condoning nor condemning protests and violence. The marabouts were too intertwined with the government to criticize it openly as
any challenge to the secular state and the existing order likewise represented a challenge to the religious leadership. Brotherhood authorities were also likely conscious of their inability to dictate to urban youth who were increasingly dissatisfied with the Diouf regime and inclined to violent protests. While some minor but highly vocal Islamic reform movements, or *moustarchadines*, have increased in numbers and visibility in the 1990s, primarily in urban areas, the rise of radical Islam is not a serious threat to the secular government of Senegal. These groups favor a move toward a less secular, more Islamic-oriented state and have also criticized the leading brotherhoods in Senegal for their close ties to the Diouf regime. Yet the traditional Islamic leadership in Senegal maintains overwhelming popular support (Vengroff and Creevey 1997; Villalon and Kane 1998).

Any serious challenge to the secular government will most likely come from political opposition forces, or urban youth, and not the religious leadership or from within Islamic orders. Urban youth might also eventually pose a threat to the religious leadership. The shift in support centers on disciples distancing themselves from the religious authorities, rather than tensions between secular and spiritual leaders. The major crisis currently facing the Diouf regime is the secessionist movement in the largely non-Muslim southern region of the Casamance which spilled over into Guinea-Bissau in 1998-99. The conflict involves questions of autonomy and economic resources. Some ethnic and religious overtones have been emerged in the national discussion of the secessionist movement but it is primarily a political and military struggle. The Muslim leadership is solidly behind the government in its actions to keep the Casamance within the Republic of Senegal. The religious authorities likewise refrained from any criticism of the government’s recent intervention in the Guinea-Bissau army mutiny and coup d’etat (Lambert
1998). While popular support for the Diouf regime and many of its recent actions continues to decline, there is no diminution of the cooperative ties between politics and religion in Senegal.

Mali

Independent Mali has pursued a different political path from its western neighbor. Religious brotherhoods have wielded considerably less social and political influence, and the government has not been nearly as dependent on their economic and political support as in Senegal. Under Modibo Keita, a secularist who sought close ties to the Soviet Union, economic conditions worsened, all political opposition was suppressed, and the regime became increasingly dogmatic and dictatorial. Religious leaders did not call openly for Keita’s ouster but they gradually and unanimously withdrew their support from his regime. Because of their limited role in politics and society, withdrawal of the religious leadership's backing did not signal the end of the Keita regime. Yet, in combination with other opposition forces, most notably the military, a coup d'etat was not surprising. In 1969 a military coup, led by General Moussa Traore, deposed Keita. Because of the hardship caused by Keita’s failed socialist policies, and the contrasting prosperity of its neighbors, most Malians, including the Muslim leadership, cautiously welcomed the change of administration, even if it meant military rule. Traore modified some of the centralized economic structures, improved relations with neighbors, including Senegal, and sought to win the support of the religious community as well by directly addressing some of their concerns (Imperato 1989, 1996).

The Traore regime actively courted the religious leadership. The military government increasingly adopted the trappings of a Muslim identity in public and on a national level. Traore and his colleagues officially portrayed Mali as a Muslim country with a secular constitution.
From about 1980, however, the regime openly sought to reinforce Mali’s Muslim identity and encourage adherence to Islamic principles and practices. General Traore did not actively seek a Muslim state but he and his cabinet were directly involved in Muslim affairs, allowing and even encouraging numerous public expressions of Islam. The regime sought closer diplomatic and financial links to Muslim countries, especially in North Africa and the Middle East. Religious leaders greeted these moves with cautious optimism. Their public support was often more to avoid persecution rather than genuine backing. It soon became apparent that Traore’s motives were not to encourage the brotherhoods, but to co-opt and neutralize them. Once again, religious leaders gradually and unanimously withdrew their public support and criticized the regime privately. The Traore regime became increasingly repressive toward all groups perceived as potential threats, including religious communities. Some marabouts went into exile while others were silenced in various ways (Imperato 1996; Brenner 1993).

In 1992, a military coup overthrew Traore to much popular acclaim and support, briefly installing a transitional military government. The new leader, Lieutenant Colonel Amadu Tumani Ture, promised to return the country to civilian rule through open, competitive elections after convening a national conference of all groups to decide the exact process and timing for elections and a new constitution. The goal of the conveners was to include all segments of Malian society, although in reality the political, military, economic and intellectual elite of the country predominated. Religious leaders had very little active participation in the national conference but they endorsed the process. The new constitution endorsed a secular state, forbidding the formation of religiously-based political parties (Clark 1995).

National elections in early 1994 elected Alpha Oumar Konare, an avowed secularist and
intellectual. The Konare government soon faced an uprising of some Tuareg rebel groups in the Saharan region. This rebellion, which has periodically flared up, has been based primarily on ethnicity rather than religion. A fragile peace has been achieved, and religious organizations have supported the government in its attempts to end the Tuareg conflicts. As in Senegal, the 1994 devaluation of the French franc, on which Mali’s currency is now based, sparked violence between state security forces and university students protesting economic hardship. Yet there were no religious undertones to the protests and national religious authorities remained silent, as they had done in Senegal. Currently, there is only minor religious opposition to the Konare government which has sought cordial and respectful relations with the various religious movements. As in Senegal, neither the traditional religious authorities nor the secular government is seriously threatened by the development of radical Islamic groups, whose influence is limited to the urban areas and who have not been able to wield any political power.

In May 1997, Malians reelected Dr. Konare as president, and his political party won most regional and local elections as well. There were some protests among urban youth and opposition politics about the electoral process and results but the situation has been largely defused. It remains to be seen however if the democratically elected government of Mali’s Third Republic can operate effectively with and maintain the backing of the religious leadership. The Islamist-secular divide appears more sharply drawn than ever, although this may be owing primarily to the new openness in Malian society. Several new Muslim organizations have developed in the last few years, some with very active religious, educational, social and economic programs. There has been no overt political action by these groups. A nascent Islamic reform movement in Bamako, the capital, poses no immediate challenge to the secular state or
the dominant brotherhoods. As in Senegal, it is highly unlikely any serious threat to the Malian government will come from the religious sector.

**Conclusion**

By examining relations between state and religion from the long-term perspective in both Senegal and Mali, certain tentative conclusions can be drawn and certain predictions can be suggested. Pragmatic cooperation and interdependency have historically characterized relations between the secular states of Senegal and Mali and the dominant religious brotherhoods in the region. This is not a recent development. Even during the early and middle colonial periods, most religious leaders sought cooperation or at least neutrality from the state. Periodically, clashes erupted, generally at the instigation of the state which eventually crushed any resistance. Once the rebellions ended, adherents of the brotherhoods endorsed a policy of peaceful cooperation and mutual support which the government likewise enthusiastically followed. The result has been a counterbalance between religion and politics that has served both sides exceedingly well, especially in the case of Senegal but also in Mali. The tendency to treat Senegal as a unique case of religious and political cooperation in West Africa is misleading given the similar experience of its neighbor, Mali.

The rise of radical Islamic reform movements, anathema to both the existing political and religious leadership, does not pose a serious or immediate threat to either government or the traditional brotherhoods. The traditional ties of cooperation and interdependency will most likely be maintained by political and religious leaders because both sides’ interests are best served by continuity rather than change. The possibilities of a viable opposition to challenge the dominant marabouts remains severely limited. In order to maintain the status quo, which benefits both
sides, the governments of Senegal and Mali need to court the support of the existing maraboutic leadership while the marabouts simultaneously must support, or at least not challenge publicly, the dominant political parties. As long as the interests and agendas of the two sides converge, which certainly appears to be the case for the foreseeable future, the pragmatic and rational cooperation between Islam and the state will continue in both Senegal and Mali.