

**Global Connections in a Sufi Order:
Roots and Routes of the Medina Gounass Tijaniyya.**

Abdoulaye Kane

Associate Professor

Department of Anthropology & Center for African Studies

University of Florida

E-mail: akane@ufl.edu

Paper delivered at the international symposium on “Religion and Migration.” Co-convened by the research Teams on “Religious Dynamics in Africa” and on “Planning and Development of Desert Regions,” Institute of African Studies. Rabat, Morocco, 25-27 November 2010.

Global Connections in a Sufi Order: Roots and Routes of the Medina Gounass Tijaniyya.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the concept of transnationalism has become an important anthropological lens for the study of how migrant communities living abroad maintain connections with their countries of origin (Basch and al. 1996; Vertovec 2009; D'Alisera 2006; Levitt 2004). However, as Matory (2008) suggests in a recent book, transnationalism has been a lived experience for a long period of time in the Muslim World, as well as between Africa and its Brazilian Diaspora. Islamic Sufi orders have been among the great players in transnationalism within the Islamic world through their rapid geographical expansion and their connections through pilgrimage routes to holy sites and reknown centers of Islamic teaching. Long distance travel for the purpose of learning, paying courtesy visits to living or dead Saints, and for acts of pilgrimage have been integral to the territorial deployment of Sufi orders. This phenomenon was influenced by the *Qaddriyya Tariqa*, which was born in Iraq but very rapidly gained pre-eminence across the Muslim World including West Africa by the early 19th century. Later Sufi orders followed similar patterns, simultaneously creating roots in the places of birth or burial of their founders while extending connections between Sheikh and devoted followers through travel (pilgrimage and *Ziara* routes and the attraction of centers of Islamic studies). The Tijaniyya Sufi order is no exception. It has created holy cities across Senegal, in Tivaoune, Kaolack and Medina Gounass, which duplicate the roles of the holy cities of Ayn Mahdi and Fes, as symbolic roots of the *Tariqa*. It has, at the same time, followed new routes to Mante-La-Jolie and Memphis, leading to the establishment of new communities of the faithful, which are paid visits by their Sheikhs (Soares 2003, Riccio 2003).

In this paper, I am interested in the transnational practices of a specific Tijani group, that of Medina Gounass, founded by Mamadou Seydou Ba. Although Tijani Sufi connections have existed for a long period of time between Algeria, Morocco, and Senegal and, by extension, the whole West Africa, the network has attained new geographical extensions in France and in the United States, opening up new spaces of travel and connections for Tijani Sufi clerics. Using Grillo's concept of Islam within transnational circuits, I will more particularly focus here on four places, Medina Gounass (Senegal), Fes (Morocco), and Mantes-La-Jolie (France), and their connections through the regular flows of religious practices, ideologies, communication, people, images and discourses (Grillo 2003). Examined here are the ways in which these various flows contribute to shaping the religious identities of Haalpulaar migrants in France. This paper is based on a fieldwork conducted in 2005 in Morocco and France. I spent a month following Tierno Mansour Barro (died 2007) in his annual itinerary from Senegal to France via Morocco.

The paper will first look at the relationship between roots and routes in the creation and territorial expansion of the Tijaniyya. It will address the importance of travel in the rapid expansion of the tariqa by reviewing the experience of the founder and that of his spiritual inheritors. I will follow by analyzing the creation of a transnational circuit by Tierno Mansour Barro and his followers in France and Morocco.

Sufi roots and transnationalism

The transnationalism of Tierno Mansour Barro¹ is, in part, an inheritance of a long tradition among Tijani scholars. Beyond the personal experience of the Order's founder, Sidi Ahmed Tijani, it mirrors the *hijra* of the prophet Mohamed. Tierno Mansour followed in the steps of his predecessor with the advantage of living in a more globalized world that eased the possibility of travel and communication between remotely located places such as Medina Gounass and global cities like Paris.

The Tijaniyya Sufi order, like most other Muslim Sufi orders, was born out of travel. The founder travelled across North Africa and the Middle East before settling down in Fes, Morocco where he died and is buried. Sidi Ahmed Tijani's travels clearly resembled the general patterns among Islamic Sufi scholars of his generation, as well as those of previous and following generations, made with the common purpose of satisfying their thirst for knowledge and climbing to the rank of sainthood.

A biography of Sheikh Tijani found in the official website of the *tariqa* that was created by his descendants, focuses on the relevance of his travel experience to his knowledge, and to his rise among the Walis and Islamic scholars of his epoch. The site summarizes the early transnationalism of the Tijaniyya founder in the following terms:

“In 1757/58 (1171H) when he was 21, he left Ain Madhi under the impulsion of an extremely strong thirst of learning, he went to Fes which was at this time a well known city of knowledge with notably its famous University-Mosque: Qarawiyyin. This town was also a place where famous masters and saints used to meet and Seyyidina Sheikh Ahmed Tijani visited them so as to take advantage from their blessings (Baraka).”Every day, in company of the Qarawiyyin's scholars, his knowledge was increasing. Finally, he got all the degrees that enabled him to teach all the science known by the Muslims of that time but his strong thirst to learn was not yet quenched.²”

To those who asked him what kind of great erudite would have been capable of teaching him so much knowledge, he always answered: “I did not receive this science from one person only but from all those I met while traveling.³” He confirms through this statement the tight association between knowledge, Baraka, and Travel.

¹ Tierno Mansour Baro (1925-2007) was a charismatic religious figure in Senegal. He is a follower and very important Sheikh in the Tijani Tariqa of Medina Gounass founded by Tierni Mamadou Seydou Ba, a student of his father. He lived in Mbour where he and his brothers have inherited a Koranic and Sharia learning center created by his father. He is very well known in Senegal but has earned a special reputation among the Haalpulaar in the Diaspora because his regular travels to the various destination in Africa and Europe where the Haalpulaar have migrated.

² Tidjaniya.com

³ Through travel and transnational connections, Sheikh Ahmed Tijani was successively the follower of many spiritual ways (6 in all) and he met famous saints (Awliya). Among those ways there was the one of the Qutb Mawlana Tayeb Ibn Muhammad dead in 1180, the spiritual way of Sidi Abdul Qadir Jilani, he took in Fes the Nasiriyah Tariqa with Saint Sidi Muhammad Ibn Abdallah Tazani then that of the Qutb Sidi Ahmed el Habib Ibn Muhammad known under the name of El Ghamary Sejelmassi. Besides, this great Qutb, miraculously after his death, came to see Seyyidina Ahmed Tijani in a dream and gave him one Divine Name to evoke. He also took the baraka from Saint Malamati Sidi Ahmed Tawachi (May God be satisfied with him) dead in 1204. This one gave him a Divine Name and told him: “You need retreat (khalwa), solitude (el wahda) and remembrance of God (dhikr), and be patient until God gives you a spiritual opening, for you are going to reach a very high rank.” Sidi Ahmed Tijani disliked those conditions, and then Sidi Ahmed Tawachi told him: “Repeat this invocation,

After his training in Fez, Sheikh Ahmed Tijani went to Tlemcen, where he taught for 5 years before accomplishing the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1772 at the age of 36. On his way to Mecca, he visited major Sufi scholars in Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt. Once he absorbed the teachings and the secrets of these well known scholars, he ascended to high spiritual ranks.

El Hajj Omar Tall, who led the expansion of Tijaniyya in West Africa, followed in the path of the founder of the *Tariqa* by “living a life on the road.” The Haalpulaar griot of the Tall Family, Abdou Guita Seck, loves to tell how Sheikh Omar was at home in the world. He described him as a cosmopolitan scholar who went to Mecca at a time when it was not common for Senegambian scholars to go to pilgrimage, and spent years in Medina before returning back to Africa. The epic songs of his travel to the Middle East mention how he impressed Islamic scholars in Egypt in the famous University of Al Azar. On his way back home, he stopped in the Sokoto (Northern Nigeria), in Fouta Djallon (in present-day Guinea Conakry), and the Kingdom of Fouladou (South Eastern Senegal). His stay at home, after more than 20 years of absence, was short-lived as he started to recruit soldiers and to raise money to arm his jihad movement that kept him constantly *en route*.

Mamadou Seydou Ba was another Tijani scholar who used travel and the *hijra* as ways of achieving sainthood. He wanted to follow the path of Omar Tall, but using peaceful means. After finishing his training in the Fouta Toro region, he went down south in a mission to perfect and purify the practice of Islam and the Tijaniyya *Tariqa* among the Fula Kounda Muslims (Gaido 2002). He found in Fouladu and Casamance other scholars of Haalpulaar origin who welcomed him and gave him the opportunity to rise in the leadership of the local Muslim community. After the death of his spiritual guide in the region, he founded the holy city of Medina Gounass and began traveling across Senegal and Mauritania, calling people to come and join him in his newly founded city for what he promised would be a more orthodox practice of Islam, and a stricter following of the teachings of the prophet and Sheikh Ahmed Tijani.

Mamadou Seydou created the *Daha*, an annual, 10-day spiritual retreat to a secluded, wooded area that allows his followers to submit themselves exclusively to Allah and his commands. By establishing the Medina Gounass community and initiating the annual celebration of the *Daha*, he established Medina Gounass’ as a force within the Tijaniyya, along the same lines as did Ibrahima Niass and El Hajj Malik Sy, in Kaolack and Tivaouane, respectively. Though he was able to get a large following among the *Fulbe* of Fouladou, only few families from his original Fouta Toro accepted to come and live with him.

Tierno Manour Barro (1925-2007) followed in the path of Mamadou Seydou Ba who was his father’s student. He settled, like his father, in the city of Mbour, which has become a major tourist hub near Dakar. Tierno Mansour distinguished himself through an emulation of the ways of Omar Tall. He reached out to the Haalpulaar Muslims of the Diaspora, venturing around West Africa, then to Central Africa before reaching Europe in the 1970s. He spent his life “*en route*”, a man of the world of sorts, easily adjusting to wherever he found himself. He soon became the face of the *Gounassianke*⁴ Tijani movement abroad.

be constant in doing so, without any retirement or loneliness, ALLAH will give you a spiritual opening in this case.”

⁴ Gounassianke (pl. Gounassiankoobe) is the Pulaar word referring to an inhabitant of the holy city of Medina Gounass. The meaning of the word has been extended to followers of Mamadou Saidou Ba branch of Tijaniyya even if they are not inhabitants of the holy city.

Tierno Mansour Barro is the one who is credited with establishing the transnational religious circuits linking Senegal, Morocco and France. He did it through a theology of travel and time that contradicted the self-inspired theology of travel and time of early Haalpulaar migrants in France. The Pioneers of Haalpulaar migration to that country, confronted with the question of religious practice and the expression of their Muslim identity, used their new secular surroundings as an excuse to reduce the observance of their Islamic obligations. They decided to apply the Haalpulaar proverb that states one should “live like people whom you find in a place.” They reserved for return trips to their country of origin, a regular and rigorous practice of Islam. When in France, they relieved themselves of the obligation to pray and fast. Instead of Islam, migrants followed the urban lifestyles they found in their host society. Many held Black American performers as their models for fashion and modernity.

Hearing reports of spiritually-ambivalent Haalpulaar Muslims returning home, Tierno Mansour assigned himself the mission to save the lost souls of Haalpulaar youth in France. His mission, like the one he undertook to Central Africa, is similar to the practice of *Dawa* by the adherents of Jamat At Tabligh across Europe and in the Sub-Indian continent. In both cases, the targets of the call to Islam are Muslims themselves, believed to be in need of reintroduction to purer and more orthodox forms of Islam.

Following in the footsteps of the Founder of the Medina Gounass branch of Tijaniyya, he held a version of the 10-day *Daha* retreat in France. The successful celebration of the *Daha* in Mantes-La-Jolie by Tierno Mansour is the outcome of 20 years of *Dawa*-style campaigning that has come to define the legacy of this spiritual leader, who Soares has described as a superstar for the Haalpulaar migrants in France. His popularity and authority were patiently built over two decades, beginning with his first trip to France in 1974. The transnational spiritual circuits that he built in Senegal, Morocco, and France are bound together through the circulation of money, Baraka, people, and the symbolic commodities that are the markers of belonging among the Medina Gounass Tijaniyya, such as white hats and scarves, prayer beads and oriental perfumes.

Tierno Mansour preached against what he saw as the fallacious nature of the Pioneer migrants' view that their status as travelers relieved them of religious obligations to be resumed only upon return home. Although recognizing the difficulty of being Muslim in a predominantly secular society, he insisted on the idea that the migrants should understand their stay in France as a presence inscribed in the *longue durée*. That is, they were not mere visitors in France, but were residents. Understanding themselves as residents, Haalpulaar migrants increasingly ceased using travel as a pretext to stop praying or fasting waiting the return back home to become practicing Muslims again.

Tierno self-identified as a cosmopolitan Muslim traveler who finds home wherever he goes. Based on a belief that he belonged wherever he went, he never reduced the number of *rakas* he prayed while in transit in Morocco, or during his short stays in France and other European countries. The Tierno challenged Haalpulaar Muslim in France by asking them that if a few days in transit does not relieve him of his religious obligations, how could Haalpulaar migrants escape religious duties by invoking a status as “travelers” after staying in France for ten or twenty years.

There is a recurrent narrative among the Haalpulaar migrants in France celebrating the role of Tierno Mansour in transforming the “sinful” Haalpulaar youth of the 1960 and 1970s into the

pious Muslims of today. He is also credited with playing an intermediary role between the Muslim community and their employers, advocating for breaks during the praying times. It is widely believed that he convinced the Renault factory managers in Boulogne-Billancourt to give their Muslim employees breaks during prayer times, arguing that they would be more productive if allowed to perform their prayers on time.

Tijani transnational circuits: Senegal, Morocco, and France

I will argue here that both the Qadriyya and Tijaniyya Sufi orders have been transnational since the inceptions. The extensions of the genealogies of *tariqa* transmission from Sheikh to followers, transmitted through an elected group of high-ranking lieutenants (*Moqadam*), have always been accompanied by travel, as well as the creation of new holy places that mirror and connect to the rooted, symbolic places of the founder's birth and burial.

The recent nature of transnationalism as a topic of anthropological study, involving the increasing focus on so-called "deterritorialized" identities (be they national, religious or ethnic) that characterize transnational spaces has led many to associate this phenomena with the flows of people, commodities, money, ideas, and images, that have been identified as new processes associated with an era of globalization (Appadurai 1997). As Matory argues, however, what the transnational lens presents as new has been a reality in the Islamic world since the seventh century. Clifford's seminal work related to the anthropology of travel in a post modern world, which rightly focuses more on routes or flows than roots and essentialized identities, nevertheless presents travel as if it was only a 21st century reality. In place of Clifford's hotel lobbies and airport salons, which are for him symbolic places of transit in which many restless travellers' lives are spent, one could substitute the *zawiyas* that, across the history of Islam, have played a similar role, with the important difference that the latter are places of rootedness by excellence. The *zawiyas* have always been social spaces that bring together Sheikhs and their followers of different national, ethnic and racial background, nevertheless sharing one *tariqa*.

Rather than dwelling in this paper on the history of travel and holy city formation around the Sahara, I analyze the contemporary forms of travel in which the Tijani Sufi Haapulaar are involved and the various ways in which they create transnational connections between established holy places like Fes and Medina Gounass and Satellite communities in the West, such as Mantes-La-Jolie and Memphis. How do the Tijani of Medina Gounass construct a Sufi Islam through their Transnational circuits? I will try to answer that question through the presentation of ethnographic accounts of the transnational practices of both the Sheikh and the followers of the Medina Gounass branch of Tijaniyya that shape the *Gounaasianke* transnational circuits.

In 2005, like in previous years, Thierno Mansour Barro was invited to France by Haalpulaar immigrant communities to come and celebrate the *daha* with them. Prior to his trip to France, he toured remote areas of the Senegal River Valley, attending a mosque inauguration and several *ziarra* dedicated to religious saints, and oversaw the organizing of small *dahas* to take place in October and November 2004. Tierno Mansour was a tireless traveller who spent most of his time away from Mbour, where he had established his family, and entrusted his brothers with the management of the Koranic and Law schools they inherited from their father. Tierno was a Tijani affiliated to the Medina Gounass branch of Tijaniyya that was founded by Tierno Mamadou Seydi Ba a student of Tierno Mansour's father and his brother-in-law, as well. The Ba and Barro families are intertwined both spiritually and through

kinship relations. The highlight of the Tierno's annual travel schedule was, like with all the *Gounassianke*, the annual *daha* organized in the South East of Senegal at the outskirts of the town of Medina Gounass, founded by Mamadou Seydi Ba in the 1920s.

For the *Gounassianke* followers in France, Tierno Mansour embodied the charisma that many in the Diaspora associated with the Sufism of the Medina Gounass branch of Tijaniyya. The celebration of the *daha* of Mantes-La-Jolie would mark the closing of a month-long travelling tour for Tierno and his delegation. The transnational circuit of *Gounassianke* Sufism linking the faithful in Senegal, Morocco, and France is manifested through the annual travel of the Tierno to those three places, and the exchanges involving the Diaspora's money, the Tierno's prayers, and the Tijani family Baraka.

Bringing *Daha* from Home to the Diaspora

The routes of pilgrimage for the Tijani *Gounassianke* have been extended with the post-colonial migration to western countries. For the great majority of *Gounassianke* in Senegal and Mauritania, the common route of pilgrimage linked the Senegal River Villages to Medina Gounass. Once a year, *Gounassianke* followers converge on Medina Gounass where they celebrate the 10-day *daha* spiritual retreat. The event has become for the *Gounassianke* Tijani what the *magal* of Touba or the *gamou* of Tivaoune represent for the Mourides or the Sy family branch of Tijaniyya. Like the *magal* and the *gamou*, the *daha* of the *Gounassianke* is attended by government officials and followers in the Diaspora. The sounds and images of the *daha* are then sent around the world in the form of home videos, audio cassettes, and through the Internet via online radios such as Radio Fondou, Radio Haere Lao, as well as YouTube.

The *daha* caravans leave the Senegal River Valley villages where lorries and buses filled with human beings head East. The followers in Dakar organize also caravans with several buses most of which are given by the government. For People in the Diaspora, attending the annual *daha* was difficult because of financial burden and the lack of vacation for many workers, and only a few people in the Diaspora arranged their vacations so that they would be able to attend the annual *daha*. The idea to celebrate a similar event in France was proposed by Tierno Mansour who wanted to give the people in the Diaspora the chance to express the same religious piety as their fellow *Gounassianke* back in Senegal.

The *daha* of Medina Gounass is an expression of religious piety experienced through and developed from travel. Tierno Mamadou Seydou travelled from his native Fouta to the Southeast of Senegal to create a religious congregation that would preserve the legacy of Omar Tall, who introduced the Tijaniyya to West Africa through his jihadist movement (Robinson). Like Omar Tall, Mamadou Seydou travelled extensively to seek followers to whom he beseeched to move to Medina Gounass in order to fully live their faith in accordance to the Sharia, Sunah, and the teachings of Cheikh Tijani and Omar Tall. As a student and follower of Mamadou Seydou Ba, Tierno Mansour of Mbour continued the tradition of travelling and recruiting new followers for the *Gounassianke*. If Mamdou Seydou's travels established the Medina Gounass branch as a transnational movement, in that it involved his crisscrossing of Senegal, the Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Guinea Conakry, Tierno Mansour's travels consolidated the branch's transnational status by following the routes of Haalpulaar migration to their Central African and European destinations.

In the 1970's, the Tierno travelled across West and Central Africa where he began to preach and remind to Haalpulaar migrants the importance of keeping their faith in places where Islam was not a dominant religion. He travelled several times to Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Gabon, the Central African Republic, and the two Congos during the 1970s and the 1980s where he and preached and taught the faith, oversaw conversions of people to Islam and recruiting new followers. In addition, he lobbied local authorities to permit the building of mosques and Muslim cemeteries.

The Tierno increased his travels to Europe in the middle of the 1970s, when he received reports that the Haalpulaar youth in France were abandoning their religious duties, which they justified by arguing the impossibility of Islamic piety in a predominantly non Muslim country. Members of the Yeye generation, with their *patte d'elephant* pants and carefully maintained tufts of hair, had in the 1960s developed their own theology of travel, which exempted them of all religious practices until their returns home. They applied to the letter the Pulaar proverb that says "if you go somewhere and find everybody naked, you should also be naked," spending their time in local pubs and their weekends in night clubs drinking beer and cavorting with prostitutes. The mission of Tierno Mansour has been since his first trip to France in 1974, to save the souls of these Haalpulaar *yeye*. Though they ignored him for years, he kept coming back with the same message.

Yeye generation, or the sins of youth

The Gounassianke transnational circuit has involved the creation of means to keeping close relations between Senegalese Sheikhs like Tierno Mansour and their followers in the Diaspora. The travelling of the Sheikh and the organization of religious events in the host-country context has increased the expression of Haalpulaar religious identity in France. The outcome of the continuous circulation of Sheikh between Senegal, Morocco and France can be felt in the increasing demand for and visibility of Black Islam in French communities like Mantes-La-Jolie. This was not the case during the first two to three decades of Haalpulaar migration to Europe.

The mission of Tierno Mansour Barro, as I mentioned earlier, was to bring those Haalpulaar youth in France reported lost to Western culture and behaviour back to Islam. The relationship that Tierno Mansour had with these Haalpulaar migrants went from one of mostly rejection in the middle of the 1970s, to one of veneration, the same people who previously rejected him having returned to Islam in a rather dramatic way. To really appreciate the changes wrought by the Tierno's patient efforts, it is important to set the scene of the life of young Haalpulaar in the 1960 and 1970s.

The first generation of Haalpulaar migrants in France in the 1960s and 1970s participated in a cultural movement influenced by the music and culture of Black America. James Brown inspired a lot these young Haalpulaar, who were "Black and proud." Although they were Muslims, most the young Haalpulaar migrants followed a lifestyle that contradicted the basic principles of Islam. They went to bars and night clubs on a regular basis, drank alcohol and visited prostitutes. Their outfits and hairstyles followed the fashion trends of Black America.

This new culture was transmitted to their home villages, when young Haalpulaar like Mamoudou went back home with their huge and carefully maintained hair tufts. The term *yeye* was used in the Senegal River Valley villages in the 1960s and 1970s to describe the returnees who came back with hair tufts, combs and hair pomade. For the young Haalpulaar

returning home this style was the main indicator of their modernity. The “*patte d’elephant*” trousers and the tight long sleeve shirts were the most valuable clothes for the returnees. For two decades, this fashion trend marked for two decades the embodiment of modernity by migrant subjects aspiring to represent Black modernity in their rural communities.

In popular songs during the 1970s, returnees are referred as “*sukka hoore*” or “*Yeeso lettina sayaande*”, which referred, respectively, to dense hair tufts and combed and laid-back hair. They created through this style a particular culture of return that defined characteristics of the successful and modern returnee. Contrary to more conservative generations of migrants, who returned with signs of wealth while demonstrating that they have not been changed by their travel experiences, the *yeye* generation insisted on their cosmopolitan identity, showing the villagers how they had been changed by their travel experience.

Mamoudou, 57 years old, was considered to embody the *yeye* style in Thilogne. His returns in the early and mid-1970s still make an impression among his peers in the village. He now lives in Rambouillet with his wife and 7 children, where I met him in his three-bedroom apartment in June 2006. He was hosting the bi-monthly meeting of the Toroobe of Thilogne, and wore a large green Boubou bazzin, as he was seated on a prayer rug holding prayer beads. I asked him to tell me what it meant to be *yeye* in the 1970s. Mamoudou smiled before answering. He said to me “why don’t you let that past rest?” Then he continued:

“It was a youth phenomenon. You know, you don’t really think about it. It was fashionable to wear pattes-d’éléphant trousers and have a huge and well cared tuft. As young returnees, we wanted always to show that we were different. Most of us were not married and wanted to impress the girls. I would say that the *yeye* style was just a youth thing. Now there are other styles and it is how things change over time.”

The traces of the *yeye* lifestyle and fashion can be found in the photos young Haapulaar migrants took during the 1970s. These photos are not kept in the family album but hidden in boxes with old letters. The *yeye* generation, most of whom are now in their 50s and 60s, look back at this period as a shameful one. Most of them, like Demba, have become very religious. Demba spent most of his weekends in Brussels in bars and night clubs accompanied by prostitutes. I came across some of his photos in “*patte d’elephant*”, hair tuft and tight long sleeve shirts that indicate a complete contrast with the life Demba now leads in Compiègne. He seems to believe that he should not be judged for these sins of his youth. Demba is certainly not alone. Mama, a Sufi Tijani practitioner who is very conservative told me how amazed he was at the sight of certain people around the Tijaniyya prayer circle on Fridays. Most of these people were completely lost in the 1970s, when they ridiculed Mama for his religious zealotry. They would admonish that he was young and should enjoy himself like all young people of his age. Mama continuing our discussion about the changes in the *yeye* generation:

“The people you see around the wazzifa prayer circle in Compiègne were for many years *yeyes*. They use to drink and go out with prostitutes. I used to remind them about Islam and the need to be good Muslims here but they would not listen. They often ridiculed anyone who talked to them about religion. But if I look them now, I realize that only Allah can change his servants. We often joke about these dark periods in their life although most of them do not want to look back for obvious reasons.”

The youth who incarnated the *yeye* spirit in the 1960s and 1970s have become fathers. As they get old they have become more religious and tend to look at their past as sinful and regrettable. They give credit to religious leaders, who they believe were the ones who took them back to Islam.

Religious revival or the reconversion of the yeye generation

As noticed by Timera (1996) and Stoller (2002), religion and language are the two important elements that West African migrants insist on reproducing in their host countries. Religion was not taken seriously by the Haalpulaar immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s. The predominantly young Haalpulaar migrants decided that since they are away from home in a non-Muslim country, they could keep their religious practices to a minimum. In fact, Muslim travellers are permitted to reduce the number of rakas to two in the four rakas prayers, and they are not required to fast. By defining their presence in France as travel, most of the young Haalpulaar stop all together the religious practices. Alpha, 59, one of my informants in Trappe described the situation in the 1960s.

“We were young. We were interested more in going to pubs, night clubs than following our religious obligations. In those days those among us who were praying regularly and fasting during ramadam could be counted with my hands’ fingers. For the most part, the young Haalpulaar were engulfed in the vices of modern life such as over-drinking, smoking, and sleeping with prostitutes. I and the vast majority of the youth in their twenties and early thirties were not married. Coming from not really very religious families, we said to ourselves, ‘let’s leave the religion to the *Toroobe* families and enjoy life in France’.”

Alpha’s view is widely shared by the pioneers of Haalpulaar migration in France. The echo of Haalpulaar migrants abandoning their religious duties altogether triggered considerable alarm among Haalpulaar religious leaders in Senegal. Tierno Mansour Barro took it upon himself to visit France every year to address the problem. During his first visit in 1974, Alpha recalled how young Haalpulaar ignored him and refused also to contribute money to pay for the rent of the room in which he was staying. Alpha said that:

“people would say that Tierno has time and that he was wasting his time to preach to people who are not interested in listening. Some suggested he better work to take care of himself and his family back home. Several other Haalpulaar marabouts who visited France in the 1970s faced a similar challenge. However Tierno Mansour Barro was persistent and had won over a slowly growing crowd composed of migrants belonging to the Tijaniyya tariqa, the version of Medina Gounass.”

After the arrival of women and children leading to the building of Haalpulaar communities across France, particularly in the Ile de France region, there seemed to be an Islamic revival among the same migrants who had previously rejected Islamic practices and religious leaders as irrelevant in their host society. There has been a lot of debate about Islamic revival and reform in an immigration context that tends to be restricted to discussion of North Africans in France, Southeast Asians in Britain and Turks in Germany. West African Muslims are, in fact, involved to some degree in the global revival of Islam, which is a response to a rapidly

growing global culture rooted in western values, practices and traditions that are often seen as a threat to any religion because of their secular undertone.

The revival or return to Islam by Haalpulaar migrants who had previously rejected their religion can be explained primarily by two interrelated factors. The first is the correlation assumed in Muslim societies between the natural process of aging and increased religious piety and practice. The young Haalpulaar migrants who rejected religion in the 1960s and 1970s when they were in their twenties and early thirties now range in age from their late fifties to their early seventies. The *yeye* generation has exchanged its tufts for prayer beads and white hats, items that symbolize their belongings to their Tijaniyya Sufi Order, which is now one of the most widespread Sufi orders in West Africa. Gassama, 67, a close follower of Tierno Mansour Barro, made the following statement:

“The blessed one is the one who lives longer. People of my generation who came to this country 30 or 40 years ago are truly blessed to live long enough to become part of the Gounaasianke religious association in France. Many of us were lost in this country. It is thanks to Tierno Mansour’s persistence that they came back to Islam. I know many in my generation who were completely uprooted. They used to do things that are not expected of a Haalpulaar. Some of us who remained committed to Islam were ashamed every time that they see other sons of Haalpulaar doing evil things. We talk to our religious leaders back home about the situation and Tierno was the first one to react by coming to visit in 1974. Since then he comes here almost every year.”

I heard several informants repeat this narrative of how in the early stages of their migration to France, the Haalpulaar youth turned its back on Islam only to become heavily involved in religious practice by the 1990s. The common narrative is rendered here by Gassama’s comments. It gives the credit for this sudden change to transnational marabouts like Tierno Mansour who tirelessly hammered on his Islamic message to the Haalpulaar living in France. Beside what is claimed by this quasi-official narrative, there are other factors explaining this sudden return to Islam by the young Haalpulaar, and one of them, as I explained above, has to do with their advancing age. However, the young Haalpulaar migrants who arrived in the 1980s and 1990s have a different attitude toward religion than their predecessors. Most of them respect their daily prayers, fast during Ramadan and attend the Friday prayer on a regular basis. If younger age means less interest in religion, how can one explain the interest in religion expressed by the younger generation of migrants? I think the answer to this question lies in the fact that Islam piety, whatever its nuances, is often contingent upon the presence of a moral and religious authority demanding a strict observance of religious practice on the part of groups such as Haalpulaar migrants.

Other important factors in the Islamic revival among the Haalpulaar include the tremendous challenges faced by those among them who brought their families in France. The appearance of a Haalpulaar second generation born and/or raised in France raised a number of problems for parents. The obvious failure to transmit their mother language and their basic cultural and religious values to their children made a lot Haalpulaar migrants worry about the future of these children and the punishment the parents would face at the hands of Allah for having neglected to educate their children in Islam. The crowds that attend the annual religious ceremonies in Mantes-la-Jolie are interested in learning practical solutions to this problem. The transnational marabout provides some basic Islamic education to children while they are

in France. Other marabouts have asked their followers to send their children back to Senegal for an extended period of time to help them get the proper Islamic training.

Mother tongue transmission to second generation turns out to be very difficult in France for Haalpulaar families because of the role schools play in the education of children. Generally, only children who were born in Senegal and came when they were at least 6 six years old are able to speak Pulaar with their parents. Most children born in France are not able to communicate in Pulaar, and siblings talk to each other in French. In peer groups around their neighbourhoods and housing projects, young boys and girls use French as their language of communication. Many parents have given up to the hope that their children will one day speak their mother tongue fluently. Moussa, 57, told me “It is now parents who adapt to the children. We speak French to our kids even if we know it is poor French. When we speak French the kids laugh at us because of the mistakes we make. We, the Haalpulaar are not good at keeping our language by forcing everybody to speak Pulaar at home! Look at the Soninke! Their kids can all speak Soninke.”

The religious leaders insist on the importance of transmitting the Pulaar language to the second generation, and Tierno Mansour’s proposal to parents to send their children to Senegal for Islamic education has actually solved the language problem for some. By sending their children at young ages, the Tierno once exhorted followers in Mantes-la-Jolie, parents ensure that they will learn the language. There are also some grass-roots organizations like KAWTAL that promote the teaching of Pulaar to the second generations of migrant families, and literacy classes for the first generation of Haalpulaar migrants. These initiatives transmitting religion and language transmission to second generation Haalpulaar migrants are critical to any explanation of Islamic revival among the Haalpulaar migrants in France.

Senegal-Morocco-France: The Gounassianke Transnational Islamic circuit

Since 1990, the Haalpulaar community in France has been celebrating the *daha* in Mantes-La-Jolie. The Mantes-La-Jolie *daha* is a diasporic complement to the great *daha* that takes place in Medina Gounass every year. Through his travels across Senegal and Mauritania, as well as across Central Africa, Tierno Mansour brought the *daha* to his followers in the Diaspora. Instead of requesting his followers in the Diaspora to return home to attend the *daha*, which can be a huge financial burden that many could not afford, he suggested his followers to “bring the *daha* to them.” The followers created a religious association, *Dental Medina Gounass* in France, to raise money for the celebration of the annual *daha* in Mantes-La-Jolie.

The first *daha* was organized in Trappe in a small room incapable of accommodating the large crowd that turned out for the event. The following year, the association found a large room in the outskirts of Mantes-La-Jolie which is used by the local city council to host cocktail parties, socials and concerts. This paradoxical aspect of the *daha*’s setting- that a religious event planned as a rebuke to the profane life of the city was to be conducted in a venue normally reserved for the boozy hobnobbing of non-believers- was not lost on the legendary Tierno. Tierno Mansour’s discursive resolution to this apparent contradiction was found in his declaration that the *daha* actually served the pious aspirations of the soil underneath the venue, which blessed the event as an antidote to the more spiritually pollutive gatherings with which it is usually graced.

The organization of the *daha* in Mantes-La-Jolie connects Senegal, Morocco, and France, creating religious circuits of travel that link together multiple holy cities. In Senegal, *Gounassianke* holy sites include the cities of Medina Gounass where they hold their annual *daha* and Mbour, residence of members of the Barro family left behind by the late Tierno Mansour. In Morocco, Casablanca is the site of a *Gounassianke zawiya*, located at the rue des Libelules. Rabat and, most importantly, Fes, are significant symbolic places where the *Gounassianke* are well represented among the masses of Tijani followers that come to get the Baraka at the source. The annual organization of the *daha* in Mantes-La-Jolie since the early 1990s, as well as the collective pilgrimages to Fes that the *Goussianke* Diaspora has organized in collaboration with delegations from Senegal and Mauritania (continuing since the Tierno's death), have established well-worn travel routes maintained by experienced *jatige* (hosts) well-versed in receiving pilgrims and members of the spiritual elite, not to mention refined religious performances and discourses.

Each year, in the run-up to the the annual *daha* in Mantes-La-Jolie, more and more *Haalpulaar* Tijani followers based in France would go to Morocco to spend a few weeks waiting for the arrival of Tierno Mansour, with whom they would perform the pilgrimage to Fez. The group of *Haalpulaar* pilgrims that came to Fes in 2006 included two young French-born followers, including a convert to Islam, several traders known for their success in employing Islam in their business practices, and five men sent to Morocco by the *Gounassianke* Association in France specifically to welcome Tierno and accompany him from Morocco to France. Tierno came with his brother, two nephews, two aid-de-camps, and five close *Gounassianke* Religious guides.

The *zawiya* of Tierno Baro in Casablanca was also invaded by the small but vibrant *Haalpulaar* community in Casablanca and the Moroccan followers of the Tierno who rented a suite in the Hyatt hotel to which he could retire after long days of preaching, consulting, and praying for the faithful. The *zawiya* served as a hotel for the followers coming from Senegal and France. Around fifty people would gather in the *zawiya* during each of the five Tierno Mansour spent in Casablanca. Food and drinks were provided by the Tierno's *jatige*, a successful *Haapulaar* engineer and his brother, as well as the Moroccan followers and admirers who provided grilled meat, couscous, drinks and fruits throughout his stay. The followers coming from France brought money to cover the expenses of the Tierno and his delegation.

The group travelled together between Casablanca and Fes, stopping in Rabat along the way to pay a visit to the Tijaniyya *zawiya* located in the Moroccan capital. Tierno Mansour led a *ziarra* in the Rabat *zawiya*, at which he explained to the followers the relations between Sheikh Tijani and those of his followers and servants buried there. After a long series of prayers, the group paid a courtesy visit to the local *sharif*, who lives next to the *zawiya*, and to whom the Tierno handed the sum of voluntary contributions collected at the *zawiya*, as a form of *hadaya*. The seven cars composing the caravan left Rabat in the direction of Fes, stopping along the way for the *Maghrib* and *Icha* prayers. The caravan was met at the entrance of Meknes by one of the great grandsons of Sheikh Tijani living in the city. He gave dates and milk to his guest and had a half-hour conversation with Tierno Mansour who is, as I was explained later, a great friend to this family. The Tierno collected *hadaya* among his followers, asking them to be generous toward the Tijani Family, because of how generous Sheikh Tijani had taken care of his followers. The *hadaya* was given to the Tijani family before the caravan's move to Fes.

The caravan arrived in Fes around 1:00 AM, the *Gounassianke* in Fes having received regular cell phone updates about the whereabouts of the caravan. At the entrance of the city, the caravan was met by the Tijani family in Fes, who also provided dates and milk to the caravan before guiding them through the city of Fes to the old Medina where the Tijani *zawiya* is located. Tierno Mansour was welcomed warmly by his followers from France, who had flown to Fes where they eagerly had been awaiting his arrival.

Attached to the Tierno's caravan as an embedded ethnographer, I had brought a video camera to capture some of the tour's highlights. I was asked by members of the entourage to film what they saw as the major steps of the route, including some stops and some of the more well-orchestrated protocol. Walking along the narrow street that led from where vehicles had dispatched the caravan toward the *zawiya*, the followers begged me not to miss recording with my camera Tierno Mansour's entrance. Tierno, who refused to be photographed, did not have any problem being filmed, and he sometimes slowed his pace to make sure I was able to capture important moments in the route. Tierno's brother, El Hajj Malik, helped by alerting me to those moments that were very important to catch on film. The entrance into the *zawiya* was one such moment, marked by excitement from the followers who jostled to be among those entering the *zawiya* at the same time as their Sheikh. Tierno offered a warm greeting to the guardians of the *zawiya* before starting his first of a long series of prayers during a three days visit.

In Fes, the *zawiya* is always filled with pilgrims from West African or of West African origin, who come from all over the world. In many ways, the route of pilgrimage to Fes has been always well attended by Tijani scholars, traders, and wealthy individuals from West Africa. What seems to be new is the arrival on the scene of Haalpulaar migrants in France. There is now a regular flow of pilgrims of all ages who travel from the major hubs of the Haalpulaar diaspora to Fes and Ayn Mady, often resembling tourists with their digital cameras, as they search for their authentic religious roots, the major source of *baraka*. The end of the 1990s saw the beginning of a new trend of Haalpulaar retirees going to Morocco for extended periods of time, as a form of spiritual vacation. Many travel to Fez before crossing the border to Algeria to visit the places at which Sidi Ahmed Tijani spent some of his life. They often conclude their travel in Ein Mahdi, Algeria where they visit the Tijani families, some symbolic places that shaped the Sheikh's life, his place of birth, his Koranic School, the mosque, and the cemetery where his parents and ancestors are buried.

During Tierno Mansour's *ziarra* at the Fes *zawiya*, we met Mbodj, 61, a retiree living with his family in Rouen, but who had spent two months Fes. He told me that this was his second time visiting there for an extended period, and described his goal of his time spent there as one of service to Sheikh Tijani. Samba Thiam, 45, a *Haalpulaar* resident of Fez, serves as a *jatige* to such *Haalpulaar* retirees who, dividing their time between France, Senegal and Morocco, connect through travel the Tijani symbolic places located across the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea. During Tierno Mansour's *ziarra*, those retirees based in France join the French delegation in representing Dental Medina Gounass. They also helped, I observed, in the logistics of housing and food preparation during the Tierno's stay in Fez. They have established very close relations with the few Tijani family in Fes and in surrounding areas. It was, for example, Mbodj who used his influence with Mahmoud Tijani to get me an interview with the latter, a great grandson of the Sheikh.

Beyond the retirees, organized groups of *Haalpulaar* pilgrims come to Fez for the days of the *ziarra*. In 2005, more than fifty Haalpulaar migrants based in France came to meet Tierno

Mansour in Fez. For three days, the group eagerly awaited the arrival of Tierno Mansour as he was in his usual transit or *lappol* through Casablanca, where he spent some time with his Moroccan followers. Dental Medina Gounass organized the tour from France, negotiating deals with travel agencies, using the same methods as those of many organized tour companies in the West. The logistics of the group's stay were entrusted to Samba Thiam, who also is the *jatige* of all the *Haalpulaar* Sheikh arriving in the *zawiya* for a pilgrimage. He rented hostels and rooms in some houses of the old Medina, where the *zawiya* is located.

After the arrival of Tierno Mansour, the group spent most of their time in the *zawiya* where they alternated between praying and eating sessions. After each prayer, Tierno Mansour talked about the Tijaniyya *tariqa*, and preached Islamic teachings before formulating additional prayers for the Universe, people, Muslims, Tijani Followers, and the people present in the *zawiya*. The followers coming from the Diaspora asked Tierno to make prayers addressing some of the problems that they have encountered in France. The delegation of clandestine Haalpulaar migrants also requested special prayers from Tierno, for a safe border crossing to Europe.

After formulating prayers for the migrants, the clandestine migrants in transit, and the people attending the *ziarra*, Tierno Mansour put his hand in his pocket to give a *hadaya* to the Tijani Families of Fez. The delegation of French-based migrants gave 500 Euros that the Tierno thought was insufficient. He increased his contribution before asking the "Parisiennes" to increase theirs. After consultation amongst themselves the contribution from the migrants' delegation was doubled. With the voluntary contributions, the total amount of *hadaya* was a little more than 3000 Euro, which was satisfactory to Tierno. He insisted again and again to take care of the Tijani family. "If you want your wishes and dreams to become reality keep on giving to the Tijani Family. He said to the audience that:

"Sheikh Tijani takes care of his followers better than his own family. The followers should understand that and take care of Tijani family by taking from the baraka they get from Sheikh Tijani."

After the three-Day *ziarra*, the Tierno returns to Casablanca where he boards a Paris-bound airplane with his delegation. The day of his arrival, all the *Gounassianke* followers are mobilized. Hundreds of people go to the airport to welcome him. During the Tierno's 2005 *lappol*, to the surprise of many passengers, the airport was filled with Africans in traditional white *bazin boubous*, small white hats, and white scarves. Upon the Tierno's 2006 arrival with his delegation, the group prayed the *Asra* prayer in the airport before heading in the direction of Mantes-La-Jolie with a line up of more than twenty cars transporting Tierno and his delegation, as well as the board members of the Dental Medina Gounass. Many followers who came to welcome Tierno returned to their respective cities waiting for the celebration of the annual *daha* in Mantes-La-Jolie that took place a few days later.

Usually the *daha* is organized four days after the arrival of Tierno. The delegates from far outside the Iles de France region arrived on Wednesday morning while the followers in the vicinity of Mantes-la-Jolie wait until Wednesday afternoon. The *daha* is opened up by Tierno Mansour with the *Asra* prayer followed with the *lazim* formed in group. After each prayer, Tierno and his hosts and guests take the floor to talk about logistics, and the daily program of each of the four following days. The *daha* is tightly scheduled around the five daily prayers, with some pauses to eat, rest and sleep. Many of the followers come with their mattress, sheets, and blankets, spending the night in the big room where the *daha* takes place.

The important moments after the prayers are the discourses delivered by Tierno and the spiritual dignitaries he brings along. Tierno insists in his discourse on the need for followers to perfect their Islam. He also addresses the need to fund Islamic activities back home and make fundraising for Mosques and other various Islamic causes. He also addresses the immigration situation and the challenges it poses to Muslims and how his followers should behave in the host country. Aware of the rising of Islamophobia, he insists on the need for his followers and all Muslims to give a good example, to respect the laws, and to love their neighbours.

The eagerness to present an Islam defying politicized Western caricatures of the faith is present in Tierno's discourse of 2005. He used the metaphor of the boat in the sea to make his point. He said to his followers:

“You are in the same boat with your French neighbours who welcomed you on board. Now it is your responsibility to protect the boat. It is our responsibility as Muslims to show the real image of our religion which is all about peace.”

The biggest event of the *daha* takes place on Friday afternoon and evening, when many additional followers come to participate for the week end. Prayers are formulated for the followers in France as well as those residing in the Diaspora. At the *daha* I attended, Tierno addressed more specifically the need for children born in France to be brought up according to *Gounassianke* Muslim tradition. He urged parents to send their children back home for religious training, citing the tough punishment faced after death by parents who have not properly educated one's children.

Between prayers, Tierno Mansour goes back to a small tent inside the big room to rest and receive people upon special request. The crowds become bigger and bigger on Saturday and Sunday, as many more followers come to attend the conclusion of the *daha*. The *daha* comes to an end after the *Fajr* prayer on Monday morning, and many followers go directly to work after leaving the *daha*. This marked the end of one of many tours involving the Tierno spending about a month or so in France, as well as travelling to neighbouring European countries, where he would often be invited by his followers. He also engaged in tours of *Haalpulaar* communities in France, involving nights spent in unexpected surroundings, the leading of Friday prayers in unfamiliar mosques, and the rapid passing through small, strange cities. By the time he would get to France, he would already be fully booked, with the result that some small France-based *Haalpulaar* communities became frustrated due to their not having a chance to meet and honour him.

Tierno Mansour Barro has conquered the *Haalpulaar* Diaspora after more than 20 years of patient preaching. He died in January 2007 in France but was buried in Mbour. The *daha* continues to live on with his brother Sheikh Barro having assumed Tierno Mansour's leadership role. The Transnational circuits of the *Gounassianke* are still shaping religious practices and identity across the three countries. The celebration of *dahas* in the United States has added one more leg to the *Gounassianke* leadership's outreach through its network's transnational circuits. However, the Barro family fell short of earning the right to present itself as bearers of the *Gounassianke* torch in the eyes of the Diaspora. Feeling the growing influence and the large sums of money at stake, the Ba family of Medina Gounass has quickly moved to the United States proposing the organization of an annual *daha* under their supervision.

References

- Appadurai Arjun (ed.) (2001). *Globalization*. Durham : Duke University Press.
- Diop, Momar Coumba (ed.), (2008). *Le Senegal des migrations. Mobilité, identité et societies*. Paris: Karthala.
- Glick Schiller N., Bash L., Blanc-Szanton C., eds. (1992) “Transnationalism: a new analytical framework for understanding migration.” In Glick Schiller N., Bash L., Blanc-Szanton C., eds. (1992). *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*. New York: NY Acad. Sci.
- Grillo, Ralph. “Islam and Transnationalism,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 30, No 5, September 2004, pp. 861-878.
- Levitt, Peggy (2000). *The transnational villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Matory, Lorand. 2005. *Black Atlantic Religion. Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- McGaffey, J. Bazenguissa-Ganga, R. 2000. *Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bruno Riccio. “Transnational Mouridism and the Afro-Muslim Critique of Italy,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 30, No 5, September 2004, pp. 929-944.
- Schmitz, Jean. 2007. “Des migrants aux “au notables” urbains: les communautés transnationales des gens du fleuve Sénégal (Sénégal/Mali/Mauritanie).” In Boesen, E. et Marfaing L. 2007. *Les nouveaux urbains dans l’espace Sahara-Sahel: Un cosmopolitisme par le bas*. Paris: Karthala-ZMO.
- Soares, Benjamin. “An African Muslim Saint and his Followers in France,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 30, No 5, September 2004, pp. 913-927.
- Spellman, Kathryn. “A National Sufi Order with Transnational Dimensions: The Maktab Tarighat Oveyssi Shahmaghsoudi Sufi Order in London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 30, No 5, September 2004, pp 945-960.
- Stoller, Paul 2002. *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2009. *Transnationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2001. “Transnationalism and Identity.” In *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 27, issue 4, pp. 573-582.
- Vertovec, Steven and Cohen, Robin. 1999. *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar