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**THE PROJECT FOR THE RESEARCH OF ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS (PRISM)**  
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Islam in Africa Newsletter provides and analyzes information, political, religious, and social developments, events, or documents on Radical Islam and Islamic movements in Africa.

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**News Briefs from Around the Continent**

**The Coronation of Colonel Muhammad Sa'adu Abubakar III the 20th Sultan of Sokoto**  
In October 29, 2006, al-Haji Muhammadu Maccido, the 19th Sultan of Sokoto, was killed along with 95 other passengers in the ADC flight 053 that crashed near Abuja enroute to Sokoto. In November 2, following his death, his younger brother, Colonel Muhammad Sa'adu Abubakar III was crowned as the 20th Sultan of Sokoto. His coronation came as a compromise in a contest in which about eight people were short-listed.

**Muslims in Uganda Want Mini-Dresses Banned**

On October 23 2006, Muslim leaders in Masaka district have asked the government to ban women from wearing mini skirts and dresses. The district chief Qadi, Sheikh Huzairu Kiruuta, said Muslims were excited with the recent government move prohibiting indecent



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dressings by civil servants in public offices. Muslim clerics demanded during the 'Idd al-Fitr prayers at the Masaka main mosque that this should apply to all women. Kiruuta told the congregation that it was against African cultures for women to don mini dresses.

### **Succession Struggle on the Mufti Position in Uganda**

The Mufti of Uganda, Sheikh Ramadhan Mubajje, has been charged with 12 counts of fraud. It came a month after a commission of inquiry into the disputed sale of Muslim property found him and a host of his executives largely to blame. Mubajje and his co-accused, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) secretary general, Edris Serugo Kasenene, appeared in court on November 9 to answer charges of embezzlement, fraudulent disposal of trust property, making document without authority and conspiracy to defraud the UMSC. Thus, the battle to replace the Mufti has begun. The two leading candidates are Dr. Rashid Ssemuddu, Uganda's trade representative in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, and Dr. Muhammad Kisuule, Uganda's ambassador to Iran.

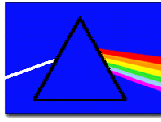
### **Somalian Islamists fight pirates in the Somalian coast**

In 7 November 2006, Somalian Islamists from the Islamist movement of the Union of Islamic Courts took over a hijacked vessel, the United Arab Emirates flagged ship MV Veesham I, which was hijacked on November 1, and freed its crew members. Somalia's Union of Islamic Courts fighters kept tracking down the hijacked vessel ever since it was reported missing. The Islamists boarded the ship and vehemently overpowered the eight pirates equipped with automatic weapons onboard, securing the ship and saving all 14 crew members and their Ethiopian captain. This has been the first victorious pirate hunting operation in Somalia's Indian Ocean by the Union of Islamic Courts since they took control of the capital city Mogadishu nearly five months ago, making their positions at the heart of Somalia's pirates' stronghold in Mudug province, central Somalia. MV Veesham I, registered in Emirates was the first to be hijacked in Somalia's coasts since Union of Islamic Courts seized most central and southern parts of Somalia including the capital Mogadishu early June this year.

It seems that the Union is persistent in implementing its power and Islamic laws. Few days ago it prohibited smoking cigarettes and chewing Gat in the areas it controls. Developments in Somalia remind us the control of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan.

### **Introductory comment**

This issue deals with Sufi orders and brotherhoods in different parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Sufism in Africa has a special nature, and significant socio-political influence in large parts of the Continent. In recent years, as a result of the spread of Salafi influence, Sufi conservative and reformist brotherhoods face a challenge, which is more significant as a result of the development of global communications, better education, and some improvement in living conditions. Some of the Sufi African brotherhoods have a history of past Jihadi struggles, which are integral part of their heritage, in addition to forms of Sunni apocalyptic notions. Infiltration of Jihadi-Salafi movements to the continent might form a mutual influence, which might involve also the element of tribalism, to create the emergence of new African radical movements.



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## **Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn's Jihad against the French – An Inspiring Figure for Present Sahrawis in Western Sahara<sup>1</sup>**

**Deborah Touboul and Moshe Terdman**

**Muhammad Mustafa Ould Sheikh Muhammad Fadil nicknamed Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn, was born ca. 1830–1831 in Mali and died in 1910. He was a Sahrawi religious and political leader and is considered to be the father of Sahrawi nationalism for his inspiration and leadership of a Sahrawi resistance movement in a six years holy war (1904–1910) against French and Spanish colonization in North Africa.**

Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn's father, Muhammad Fadil Ould Māmīn (1797–1869), created the Fadiliyyah Sufi order within the well-known Qadiriyyah order. He was born in 1797 in a region called Hawd, located in the south east of Mauritania. He belonged to the Ahl at-Talib Mukhtar tribe and was of Sharifian origin. Muhammad Fadil took advantage of the inter-tribal conflicts and of the absence of religious authority prevailing then among his tribe to create the Fadiliyyah order. Hence, the establishment of the order is mostly attributed to the charisma of Muhammad Fadil, who presented himself as a descendant of the Prophet, and was considered a saint protector and a savior. By establishing the Fadiliyyah order, he managed to impose himself as a religious leader. Muhammad Fadil took part in all aspects of his group's life and quickly became a political and social leader, as well as a religious and spiritual one. This close link between religious and socio-political power, which was sustained by his successors, became one of the Fadiliyyah's distinguishing characteristics.

After Muhammad Fadil's death in 1869, the survival and growing importance of the Fadiliyyah order continued to be based on its leaders' charisma, passed from father to son. Indeed, ever since Muhammad Fadil chose to give priority to his biological sons, succession in the Fadiliyyah movement remained a family matter. Hence, after his death, a few of his sons took over the order's leadership, which resulted in some fragmentation within the Hawd, but also in expansion in other regions. In the Hawd, two of Muhammad Fadil's sons managed to maintain unity within the order, but their almost simultaneous deaths marked the end of an era for the Fadiliyyah history in this Mauritanian region. Meanwhile, two other of Muhammad Fadil's sons were successfully spreading the Fadiliyyah order's influence--symbolically, religiously, socially, and politically--onto new territories: Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn, in Western Sahara, and Sa'd Buh in the Gibla (Trārza) – a region located in South West Mauritania. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Fadiliyyah order had spread from Senegal all the way to Morocco.

In 1859, Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn -- this nickname he received as a child, meaning "water of the eyes" in Arabic--settled in the oasis of Tindouf (present-day Algeria), whose inhabitants

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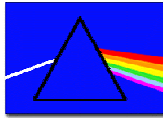
<sup>1</sup> This article is based mainly on Rahal Boubrik's research:

<http://etudesafricaines.revues.org/document25.html>;

<http://www.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/iea/cli/numero/4/sources/index.html>;

<http://remmm.revues.org/document2756.html>; <http://www.ehess.fr/centres/ceifr/pages/Theme3.html>;

<http://www.ehess.fr/centres/ceifr/N110/010.htm>



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were originally hostile to his father's religious discourse. Yet, also taking advantage of the lack of a strong political and religious power in the region, like his father had done, the Sheikh quickly became known for his extraordinary theological production (about 50 of his books were lithographed at the end of the nineteenth century in Morocco), and his exceptional intellectual and religious capabilities, as well as for his magical powers. Besides, Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn was also known for his political abilities and his active involvement in creating matrimonial alliances, alliances with influential political forces in the region, as well as the establishment of cities. As a result, his nomad encampment attracted many students of Islamic law and Bedouins asking for his blessing.

In 1898, Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn began building the town of Smara, in what was then Spanish Sahara and nowadays is the disputed territory of Western Sahara. His goal in creating the city was to make it a center of commerce between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Thousands of local Sahrawis, as well as the Sultan of Morocco who sent craftsmen and materials, assisted him in the construction. In 1902, once the main parts of the city were completed, he moved there and pronounced it his holy capital, creating, among other things, an important Islamic library.

Increasingly disturbed by Western penetration of the area, which he viewed both as an intrusion by hostile foreign powers and as a Christian assault on Islam, Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn started to advocate resistance. Sahrawi tribes performed *ghazi* raids against the foreign forces even before that, but French troops drew ever closer, conquering one local ruler after the other. In 1904, Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn proclaimed himself imam, and called for a holy war—or *Jihad*—against the colonizers. His charisma as both a religious and political leader allowed him to gather tribes around him. To gain support from the Moroccan Sultan, he proclaimed that the *trab al-beidan*—a desert area that includes today's Mauritania, Western Sahara and large swaths of Mali and Algeria—was under the Sultan's rule—a claim later echoed in the vision of Greater Morocco and the Western Sahara conflict. While the Sultan was never given control over Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn's forces, this display of effective cooperation helped assemble a large coalition of tribes to fight the colonizers. Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn began acquiring firearms and other materials, both through channels in Morocco and through direct negotiations with rival European powers such as Germany and Spain, and quickly built up an impressive fighting force.

In 1906, however, the Moroccan Sultan accepted the Treaty of Algeciras, granting French colonial control over much of Morocco, over Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn's enraged accusations of betrayal. Even Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn's brother, Sa'd Buh, chose to side with France, and eventually took position against his brother's *Jihad*. A letter he wrote to Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn in 1906, when his partisans were occupying Tijagja, titled "*An-Nasīha al-Khāssa wa al-'Amma fī at-Tahdhīr min Muhārabat Farānsa*"—"The Particular and General Advice Warning Against Fighting the French"—marked the Mauritanian theological literature about *Jihad*. Meanwhile, Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn was writing a theological text titled "*Hidāyatu man Hārā fī Muhārabat an-Nasāra*"—"Guide for the One who Doubts the Legitimacy of the War against the Christians"—in which he was inciting to *Jihad* and calling its adversaries traitors or even miscreants. The following year, the Sultan began interrupting the flow of arms to the anti-French *Jihad*. The uprising crumbled, as French forces—then under colonel Gouraud's



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control—pushed forward. Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn retreated to Tiznit in what is today southern Morocco.

In 1910, anarchy spread through Morocco, as European pressures were making Moroccan Sultanate weaker and weaker. On March 4, 1910, the Sultan Moulay Hafid signed a treaty with the French that contained clauses directly aimed at Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn and the other enemies of France in the Sahara. Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn outraged by the Sultan's actions and concerned that Morocco would fall into European hands, decided he would try to seize the country. He was proclaimed Sultan of Morocco in June, and immediately appointed head of an army of several thousand men, whose mission was to overthrow Moulay Hafid. He was intercepted on June 23, and his forces were destroyed by the modern French army. Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn, then about 80 years old, fled back to Tiznit, where he died in October.

A few years after Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn's death, his son El-Hiba, known as the Blue Sultan after he proclaimed himself Sultan of Morocco in 1912, resumed the war against the French, but was ultimately defeated. In 1912, the French burned Smara; but the city still remained the symbolic center of the resistance. Merebbi Rebbu, another son of his, then rose in revolt, as would several of his grandchildren. It is only in 1934, exactly 30 years after Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn launched his *Jihad* that the combined French and Spanish forces succeeded to subdue the Sahrawi resistance to colonization.

Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn enjoys tremendous prestige as a nationalist leader of the Sahrawi Moorish people, who see themselves as a nation separate and distinct from neighboring peoples in what is now North Western Africa. His name is invoked by both the Polisario Front guerilla movement, and by Moroccan authorities claiming that Western Sahara is the country's southern province. Prestigious Sahrawi bloodline claims lineage from him, members of which hold high offices, both in the independence movement and on the Moroccan side, as well as in Mauritania. Most significantly though, Sheikh Ma al-'Aynayn went down in history as a representative of both intellectual Islamic leadership and militant engagement, laying base for contemporary Islamist militancy in the Maghreb in general and in Western Sahara in particular.

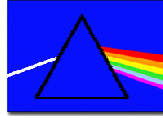
### **Clashes between Islamists and Sufis and Its Outcome: The Case Study of Yan Izala and the Sufis in Nigeria<sup>2</sup>**

**Abubakar Gumi founded Jamaat Izalat al-Bida wa Iqamat al-Sunnah (Society for the Eradication of Evil Innovation and the Establishment of the Sunnah; Hausa: Yan Izala) on February 8, 1978. But even before that, he preached the *tajdid* (reform) of Islam with the aim of creating political unity among Muslims in Northern Nigeria. The most**

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<sup>2</sup> The article is based on the following sources:

Irit Back, *Islam and Post-Colonial Identity in West Africa* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2005); Roman Loimeier, "Islamic Reform and Political Change: The Example of Abubakar Gumi and the Yan Izala Movement in Northern Nigeria", in eds. Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), pp. 286–307; <http://ase.tufts.edu/polsci/faculty/robinson/niger.pdf>; [http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/Af\\_Vortex.pdf](http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/Af_Vortex.pdf); [http://www.oup.com/pdf/0195063864\\_01.pdf](http://www.oup.com/pdf/0195063864_01.pdf)



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**important precondition for achieving that aim was the elimination of the Sufi Brotherhoods. This preaching put him in a collision track with the main Sufi orders in Northern Nigeria, the Tijaniyyah and the Qadiriyyah.**

Abubakar Gumi was born on November 7, 1924 in the small village of Gumi, located in the Sokoto Province. On July 29, 1960, he was appointed Deputy Grand Qadi of Northern Nigeria. In this function he worked on the reform of the Islamic legal system there and was finally appointed Grand Qadi of the North in 1962. In 1966, after Ahmadu Bello, the Prime Minister of Northern Nigeria, was assassinated, Gumi was able to start his own campaign for the *tajdid* of Islam, while maintaining that the Sufis sectarianism posed a threat to Muslim unity. The open conflict between Gumi and the Sufi brotherhood started already in 1967 by way of mass media campaigns conducted through the radio and the newspapers. This campaign enabled Gumi to reach a much wider public than ever before.

In 1972, at the level of religious argumentation, Gumi began the fight against the Tijaniyyah and the Qadiriyyah with the publication of his major programmatic work entitled *al-'Aqidah al-Sahihah bi-Muwafaqat al-Shari'ah* (The Correct Faith According to the Shari'ah). As this treatise was written in Arabic it was at first confined to a limited circle of religious scholars, but in 1978 he wrote a booklet entitled *Musulunci da abinda ke rushe shi* (Islam and the things which destroy it), a popularized and abridged version of *al-'Aqida* in Hausa language. From the time of its publication in Zaria in 1981, the dispute between Gumi and the leaders of the Sufi brotherhoods ceased to be a conflict among religious scholars and evolved into a violent confrontation in the villages, towns, and mosques of Northern Nigeria.

The program of the Yan Izala, based on Gumi's teachings, stressed in the religious sphere the rejection of all *bid'ah* (evil innovations), such as *tawassul* (intercession) at the tombs of the dead, pilgrimages to the tombs of the saints, the religious rites of the Sufi brotherhoods or the recital of praise-songs to the Prophet. In contrast, it emphasized the importance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah as foundations of the faith, and the necessity of reopening the "doors of *ijtihad*". In the social sphere the Yan Izala stood for better education of Muslim women and they condemned as un-Islamic a number of customs and traditions in Northern Nigeria, such as high expenditures on bride-price, as well as various ceremonies and 'Idd celebrations. In addition, the Yan Izala condemned the submission of the faithful to the authority of the Sufi Sheikhs and the obligation to give them donations.

The Yan Izala's criticism of these costly social obligations was welcomed particularly by the socially disadvantaged and the poor. Thus the Yan Izala was in a position to provide a religious motivation and legitimization for the dissociation of many adherents of the Sufi brotherhoods from their Sheikhs. It is not surprising, therefore, that between 1978 to 1988, the Yan Izala gained most of its followers in Northern Nigeria from among the youth who were no longer willing to be subject to the authority of the old Sufi Sheikhs; from among women who increasingly strove for better education and higher participation in public life; and from among the poor who would no longer sacrifice their meager resources for costly social or religious ceremonies. Thus, as the Yan Izala not only destroyed an existing system of authority and values but also offered a new system of orientation and legitimization, as well as a complete network of modern schools, it could offer the Muslim population a real



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alternative and even give them the impression that their fight against the Sufi Sheikhs was a positive action in the sense of a struggle against *bid'ah*.

The religious and social protest of the Yan Izala led to a revolution in the established system of religious and social values in Northern Nigeria after 1978. The radical dissociation from former social and religious values explains the aggressiveness and militancy of the Yan Izala's actions towards representatives or symbols of the old system. On the other hand, it also explains the violent reaction of the Sufi brotherhoods to the Yan Izala's criticisms. The conflict between them has led to a deep split within many communities and families in Northern Nigeria, in which the youth rebelled against the old, the marginalized against the establishment, and women against their husbands.

The Yan Izala aggression affected especially the Tijaniyyah, since it was more strongly represented than the Qadiriyyah in most areas of the North, and especially in the rural regions. Thus, Many Tijanis from Plateau and Kaduna discontinued their affiliation with the Tijaniyyah in fear of attacks by the Yan Izala, or at least abandoned active participation in the brotherhood's ceremonies. A number of Tijanis also joined the Yan Izala and some, like Bala Sirajo, a co-founder of the movement, or Dahiru Maigari, a lecturer at Bayero University, Kano, and former Sheikh of the Tijaniyyah, became militant adherents.

In order to check the influence of the Yan Izala on their followers, the Fityan al-Islam, an organization founded originally in 1962 by a Tijani scholar, developed into an organization of both Tijaniyyah and Qadiriyyah. Most of its activities were carried out by the preaching group of the Fityan al-Islam, which was led by Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi. Since the late 1970s this Sheikh established his reputation as a major leader of the Sufi brotherhoods, the Tijaniyyah in particular, in their confrontation with the "Wahhabis", as the Yan Izala was called by them.

Another Tijani religious scholar who was a leading figure in the struggle against the Yan Izala was Sheikh Ibrahim Salih from Maiduguri. He acquired his reputation by publishing two major works in defense of the Tijaniyyah's often problematical dogmatic foundations. In his *Al-Takfir: akhtar bid'ah tuhaddid al-Salam* (Excommunication is the most dangerous innovation to threaten peace) he pointed out the danger which *takfir* represented for the unity of the Muslims in Nigeria. Thus, while condemning *takfir*; Ibrahim Salih was temporarily able to divert attention from the Tijaniyyah doctrine to the strategy of the Yan Izala, which was based on *takfir*. In his other book—*al Mughir* (the Aggressor)—Ibrahim Salih stated that anybody accusing another Muslim of being a *kafir* should be regarded as a *kafir* himself.

The attacks on the Tijaniyyah were generally based on the major work of this order, *Jawahir al-Ma'ani* (The Gems of Meanings), he recorded the deeds and sayings of the founder of the brotherhood, Ahmad al-Tijani. Ibrahim Salih argued that this work, originally written by Ali Harazim, a disciple of the founder, had been spread in a number of non-authorized, false versions, which included those presently in use in Nigeria. The criticism of the Yan Izala would be based, according to this logic, on false propositions. However, with the rejection of these "non-authorized" versions of *Jawahir al-Ma'ani*, Ibrahim Salih raised a serious problem for the Tijaniyyah, namely to find an authorized, "true" version of the book, purified of all problematical points. By stating that none of the current versions of the *Jawahir al-*



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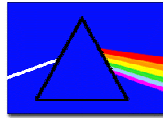
*Ma'ani* were authentic, Ibrahim Salih was able to develop a new strategy in the dispute with the Yan Izala, which it could not easily refute; the Yan Izala would have to wait until a new "authentic" version of the book had been published.

The strategy of Ibrahim Salih however, led to another split within the Tijaniyyah because the hard-line followers of Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi and others regarded his argumentation as a capitulation to the enemies of the brotherhood. But while Ibrahim Salih's new strategy was rejected by the older generation of the Tijaniyyah, he had won many followers among Western-educated younger adherents, especially at universities and high schools. Ibrahim Salih had also found support among non-affiliated Muslims of the younger generation, particularly because of his rejection of *takfir*. These young Muslims stressed the necessity of Muslim unity and regarded him as one of the few religious scholars in Nigeria above the feuding networks and groups. Thus, the conflict between Dahiru Bauchi and Ibrahim Salih in the 1980s showed that even the confrontation between the Tijaniyyah and the Yan Izala was insufficient to overcome the internal tensions within the Tijaniyyah.

The attacks of the Yan Izala on the Tijaniyyah were successful in light of the internal contradictions existing within the brotherhood. On the other hand, the Qadiriyyah was rarely touched by the criticism of Gumi's followers. This phenomenon can be explained in a number of ways: first, the Qadiriyyah had fewer members than the Tijaniyyah in almost every part of Northern Nigeria. Secondly, the Qadiriyyah under the leadership of Nasiru Kabara was relatively homogeneous and united. Thirdly, identification with the leaders of the Sokoto *jihad* was much easier for the Qadiriyyah than for the Tijaniyyah, since Usman dan Fodio and his followers had all been members of the Qadiriyyah. An attack on the Qadiriyyah was thus always risky for Gumi and his supporters. Lastly the Qadiriyyah, in contrast to the Tijaniyyah, did not have so many problematic dogmatic features, and thus attacks on it were less rewarding. Thus, in contrast to the Tijaniyyah, the internal cohesion of the Qadiriyyah became stronger in face of the Yan Izala attacks, and it maintained its rituals such as the communal *dhikr* and the celebrations of the birthday of its founder, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, despite ongoing criticism. Therefore, only a few Qadiris renounced their affiliation with their brotherhood.

In the early 1990s, the Yan Izala suffered two serious blows: First, when Ismaila Idris, the formal leader of the Yan Izala, was accused in 1991 by other members of having embezzled funds and was excluded from the organization. He refused to acknowledge his exclusion, while continuing to maintain his claim to be its leader. Since then the Yan Izala has split into two groups. A further blow was Abubakar Gumi's death on September 11, 1992, which has left the reformist movement of Muslims in Northern Nigeria without a charismatic and renowned leader.

To sum up, Gumi and his followers actively worked for the establishment of a modern Islamic system of education and furthered the education of Muslim women. As a result, the Tijaniyyah and the Qadiriyyah were forced to adopt similar strategies in order not to lose their influence on the Muslims to Gumi and the Yan Izala. Thus, from the late 1970s, a considerable increase of activity related to the expansion of a modern Islamic school system and increased social and political integration of Muslim women took place in Northern Nigeria. The conflict between the Yan Izala and the Sufi brotherhoods resulted in a further



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politicization and modernization of society. These changes were defended like earlier movements of reform in Nigeria by Muslim politicians and religious scholars as a *tajdid* of Islam and legitimized at the religious level by referring to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

It should be mentioned further, that numerous Islamist movements were formed in the same environment that cultivated the Yan Izala. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Ikhwan for example, led by Ibrahim Zakzaky, emerged as a prominent player in Nigerian Islamism, proclaiming that "there is no government except that of Islam". With this environment prevailing in Northern Nigeria, especially following the implementation of the Shari'ah in twelve states in Northern Nigeria as from 1999, the Sufis are standing before their greatest challenge until now. Will they survive this challenge? Will the heritage of Usman dan Fodio's *Jihad* help them to endure the hardships and criticism? Or, will they adapt themselves to the new Islamist "trend" until it will hopefully pass?

### **The Idea of the *Mahdi* in Senegal's Mouride Brotherhood<sup>3</sup>**

**The religious history of Senegal has long been associated with charismatic leaders of the various Sufi brotherhood lineages. These leaders are looked upon as saints because of their inheritance of *barakah* (the blending and fusing of spiritual grace which may include the ability to redeem souls). Mourides (followers of one of the most dominant Sufi orders in Senegal) have a reputation for revering their Sheikh as if he were God himself. However, the one and the only Mouride Sheikh who proclaimed himself *Mahdi* is Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop (1881? –1945).**

Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop was a Wolof holy man of the Mouride Sufi order. He was not born into the religious elite but, rather, appeared in the Kajoor region of Senegal under miraculous circumstances. Mouride history in the Thies region is extremely rich and complex, due in part to the sociology of the Wolof, who comprises the dominant ethnic group in this region. Some observers have suggested that there is a Kajoorian personality – termed in Wolof, "Ajoor Ajoor." Their defining mythology is that of the desperado, extremely tenacious, difficult to sway, lacking entirely in frivolity. References to the city of Thies always mention its importance in the colonial resistance movement. Thus, it is only fitting that Mahdism would evolve in a region like Kajoor, with its long history of persistent resistance leaders.

While being in the Kajoor region, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine became a disciple of the newly formed Mouride brotherhood, founded on the principles of work and total devotion of a disciple to his Sheikh. In 1930, he declared himself *Mahdi*. Throughout his life, he wrote numerous religious texts, the most controversial being his own version of the Qur'an. Even

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<sup>3</sup> This article is based on the following sources:

Rose Lake, "The Making of A Mouride Mahdi: Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop of Thies", in eds. Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), pp. 216–253; <http://www.africaresource.com/war/issue8/thiam.html>; [http://www.isim.nl/files/newsl\\_1.pdf](http://www.isim.nl/files/newsl_1.pdf)



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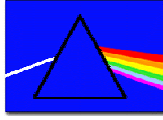
though he had twelve sons, none survived him, and he appointed a daughter as *khalifah* of his lineage. He is considered by some to have been the third pillar of Mouridism (following Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba and Sheikh Ibra Fall, the founder's most famous disciple).

In order to fully understand the circumstances for the appearance of the notion of the *Mahdi* within the Mouridiyyah brotherhood, it should be mentioned that at the center of the Mouride piety stands the Sheikh/Talibe (disciple) relationship, which makes manifest the desire for and expectation of a messiah. Moreover, it should be noted that religious leaders replaced traditional rulers in response to the colonial dismantling of Wolof society. Thus, with an intensification of certain problematic social conditions, a religious figure can easily assume the role of *Mahdi*/messiah, replacing the traditional Wolof ruler as a focal point for mass dependency. Endemic Islamic and Mouride longing for the reign of a *Mahdi* is certainly nothing new. In fact, Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine was merely the latest in a long succession of regional *Mahdis*/messiahs dating from as far back as the sixteenth century. Since there are no specific Mouride references to a messiah prior to Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's appearance, it seems that the Mahdist philosophy manifested simultaneously with the person, at a time of supreme crisis precipitated in 1927 by the death of Mouridism's founder, Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba, and in 1930, of Sheikh Ibra Fall. Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba's role in the religious history of Senegal could be compared to that of a *Mahdi*; however, he was never identified as such.

In 1886, the final defeat of Lat Dior in the Kajoor region of Senegal made the French colonial conquest complete. In its aftermath, Wolof society regrouped, nominating Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba to be its savior. In an attempt to ward off an "Islamic uprising", the French colonial government forced the exile of the Mouride founder to Gabon (1895–1902) and, later, to Mauritania (1903–1907). Again and again, throughout the periods of disunion, messianic prophecy permeated the air, kept alive with enduring devotion and the fervent belief that Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba would one day return from exile. When that day finally arrived, his minions upon seeing their leader were compelled to shout "Allah has arrived".

Thus, the flames of dissent were fuelled by imperialist attempts to destroy this Senegalese Muslim leader, disregarding of Wolof psychology. More than ever, the population was convinced that salvation lay in attachment to the newly established Mouridiyyah brotherhood. Consciously or unconsciously, the Mouridiyyah's religious leaders fulfilled the specific popular expectations of a savior king, an age-old pattern.

However, nowadays, more than forty years after Senegal won her independence from France, Mourides no longer recognize publicly any *Mahdis* among them: they simply reject the notion. The explanation for the prejudice against using the word *Mahdi* stems perhaps from French censorship of Mahdism in general, which was associated in the French colonial imagination with the notions of treason and inevitably, *Jihad*. It was perhaps the vocabulary of Mahdism and Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine's use of and identification with the title "Mahdiou" that separated him from other mainstream Mouride leaders, eventually resulting in his virtual disappearance from the annals of history. Anyway, in today's Senegal, accepting Mahdism could be dangerous, since followers of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine are sometimes regarded as heretics and madmen by other Muslims.



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The Mouridiyyah brotherhood, as many other Sufi brotherhoods in Africa, is influenced by Islamic religious developments occurring elsewhere and must adapt itself to these developments and challenges. Thus, traditional Saudi-style pressures are present in modern Senegal and can be traced to any of the Mouridiyyah Sheikhs who send their sons to Morocco, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia to study. These returnees often espouse a much more austere devotional life. There is also a similar element of opposition to popular Mouride expression in the extraordinarily popular Dahira Etudiant Mouride (DEM), with its various branches in Dakar, Paris, and New York. Instead of following the Mouride norm of making contributions through their local *dahira* (urban association), they prefer to move as a group and make their pledges to the Khalifa General directly. DEM members meet frequently, spending much of their time rehearsing and preparing presentations for large Mouride events like the *Magal* (the annual pilgrimage to the Mourides' holiest city, Touba). They do not recognize any particular Sheikh other than the Khalifa General as Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba's representative. DEM is a modern, well-funded, well-organized organization. Its members call themselves the "real" Mourides. DEM philosophy accords with traditional Muslim beliefs holding that anyone acting or pretending to act as an intercessor is standing in the way of God. This is in direct opposition to the fundamental principles of Sufism. Traditionally, disciples' identities are intertwined with that of their Sheikh and this has been the root cause of the Sheikhs' success in attracting and converting disciples in the first place.