

West Africa

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If the Senegalese youth have, in majority, always manifested great fervour for their religion by strong involvement in *turuq*,¹ it seems that today they are rather investing their energies in the new Islamic movements that are specific branches of their original Sufi orders. While retaining close ties with and even reproducing the teachings of the latter, these movements address a specifically targeted audience – urban youth.

Islam in Senegal, by virtue of its historical implantation, is generally practised within the *turuq*, the greatest numbers of followers of which belong to the Tijaniyya and the Mouridis. For more than a century, researchers have shown particular interest in the latter, indigenous to Wolof territory and fascinating for its economic activism and its capacity to adapt itself to social change. However, the Tijaniyya, originating in the Maghreb and divided over several marabout families in Senegal, remains the *tariqa* with the most adepts.

The Dahiratoul Moustarchidina wal Moustarchidaty, gathering at its base young followers of the Tijaniyya (Tijans) who have taken an oath of allegiance to the Sy family of Tivaouane, has set itself apart since 1993 by its political orientation. This has meant severing ties with its affiliated brotherhood and has transformed the Dahiratoul Moustarchidina wal Moustarchidaty into a politico-religious movement.

From religion to politics

The main caliphs of the Tijaniyya in Senegal are all members of the Sy family, a marabout lineage based in Tivaouane. It is thus in this city that the Dahiratoul Moustarchidina wal Moustarchidaty was born in 1973. Its origins as well as its real founders are vague and discourse on the subject contradictory. Nonetheless, it is highly probable that the caliph of that period, Abdoul Aziz Sy, encouraged his grandchildren to regroup themselves in a *daaira* to learn the Qur'an. One of the grandsons, Moustapha Sy, moral leader of the current movement, began to follow in this direction in the early 1980s. In this same period, following the Iranian Revolution, numerous movements of Muslim youth (notably the Mourid youth movement) were created in Senegal. Moustapha Sy, in response to this competition, spread the Dahiratoul Moustarchidina wal Moustarchidaty throughout the territory (from then on the *daaira* became a genuine movement) more particularly in Dakar, where he established his headquarters. He created a pyramid-shaped hierarchy. Moustapha Sy, uncontested leader aided by his advisors, lead his followers with extreme precision in his teachings (e.g. the way one was to dress and to behave). His orders were transmitted to the leaders of each sector, zone and section, from the top to the bottom of the pyramid.

Until the 1980s, the doctrine taught to adepts was that of the Tijaniyya, and Moustapha Sy maintained close relations with Tivaouane from his base in Dakar. In the early 1990s, he improved relations with his father, Sheikh Ahmed Tidjane Sy, who, as a result of a family disagreement, lived in Dakar cut off from Tivaouane. Moustapha Sy aligned himself according to the directives of his father, who then – in his son's shadow – became the veritable leader and was named spiritual guide of the movement.

Since then, the line of conduct of the Dahiratoul Moustarchidina wal Moustarchidaty has changed: being clearly defined as apolitical in its preamble, it suddenly became a religious movement with political involvement. On 13 February 1993,

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Moustapha Sy intervened in a meeting with Abdoulaye Wade and declared his support of the Senegalese Democratic Party (Parti Démocratique Sénégalais – PDS) for the presidential elections against Abdou Diouf. His discourse was remarkable since, for the very first time, Moustapha Sy presented himself incontestably as a young, modern marabout breaking with the attitudes of the spiritual guides of Tivaouane. He involved himself in the electoral game, haranguing the crowd like a politician and showing a certain attraction for reformist discourse on Islam – despite his being the heir of a Sufi tradition.

Since then, the leader of the Moustarchidine has never left the political scene, which was to lead to his imprisonment and the prohibition of his movement by the government in 1994. In 1996, he reconciled with the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste PS) and the *daaira* was rehabilitated. By 1999, he had announced his desire to found his own political party. With the Senegalese constitution not allowing religious-based parties, he rejoined an already-existing party, the Unity and Rally Party (Parti de l'Unité et du Rassemblement, PUR) of the Diouf Caliphate. He became president of the party and declared, in January 2000, his candidacy for the presidential elections of February 2000. But this was not to last more than three days for Moustapha Sy immediately retreated under the orders of his father.

Explanations of this politicization

During the reign of Ababacar, father of Sheikh Ahmed Tidjane Sy and caliph from 1922 to 1957, serious contention broke the Sy family in two: the father and son on one side, openly opposed to other members of the family, half-brothers of the caliph. This crisis worsened with the succession to the throne since Abdoul Aziz Sy, opposed to Ababacar, was elected caliph. Sheikh Ahmed Tidjane Sy, who was always considered the successor of his father, has since unceasingly claimed his right to the caliphate. As Villalon explains,² his entire marabout and political career are interpreted under the angle of his will to compete with Tivaouane by regrouping his father's followers so as to found a sort of parallel brotherhood.

The coming together of Sheikh Ahmed Tidjane Sy and his son Moustapha was accompanied by the latter's break with Tivaouane. The new political line of Dahiratoul Moustarchidina wal Moustarchidaty should also be understood as a strategy still aiming to position the father in the marabout field. In 1993, during the presidential elections, Sheikh Ahmed Tidjane Sy was removed from the public scene. Yet in that period the caliph of the Tijans was aging. The question of succession was soon to be posed. Sheikh Ahmed Tidjane Sy thus had to reinforce his marabout status in the eyes of his followers. But his position of retreat prevented him from doing so. At the same time, Moustapha Sy needed to consolidate his legitimacy. Allying with the opposition allowed him to re-establish ties with urban youth, unhappy with the current

regime, and also to recruit adepts for his father by explaining that the political positioning of the movement was a decision emanating from Sheikh Ahmed Tidjane Sy himself.

The strategy of politicization brought with it changes in the movement's proclaimed religious education. From Tijan apprenticeship, strictly religious, the movement oriented its teachings in such a way as to transform adherents into Muslim patriots. The latter learned to rationalize their daily acts in order to correspond to a type of 'perfect' behaviour and to act in service of the community. They became ambassadors of an ideal Islamic society yet to be constructed. The non-religious state was to be combated, society lost in Western atheism to be changed. It became necessary to return to the real values of Islam.

Consequences of politicization

The Dahiratoul Moustarchidina wal Moustarchidaty is composed of two types of followers: those from a relatively wealthy social background and/or those with an occupation allowing them to participate in social life (artists, journalists, academics, etc.); and those from less wealthy backgrounds that generally have an occupation involving them to a lesser degree in social activities. The former, which constitute a sort of elite within the movement, are close to Moustapha Sy in his political choices; while the others, who constitute the majority of followers, are often not completely in step with the positions assumed by their leader, whom they have difficulty in understanding. Most adepts, in fact, consider the movement first and foremost of a religious nature (which is why they adhere to it). They feel that political matters are not of their concern.

How can a movement, declared as politico-religious by its leaders, be non-militant at its base? How can one explain the movement's incessant political turnarounds? How can one understand its discourse, more concerned with social aspects than with political ones? How can one approach such a closed movement, which threatens its detractors while maintaining an image of openness and tolerance?

The attitudes and desires of the Moustarchidine leaders are difficult to read. However, Moustapha Sy does not seem to genuinely want to take power. Politics would be for him a way in which to distinguish himself from other religious guides and to make himself heard at the level of the state: the movement is composed of thousands of followers – and thus thousands of voters.

It is quite apparent that religious leaders are increasingly directly involved in the political sphere in Senegal. This was confirmed during the last presidential election: the religious discourse was extremely present during the electoral campaign and, in addition to Moustapha Sy, two other Muslim guides presented their candidacies. Many wanted to clearly demonstrate that, as citizens, they too had the right to participate in politics. Nevertheless, the *ndigals*³ have never failed

as they did during the last election. It seems that religious leaders' efforts to influence citizenship are no longer within their reach: following their advice, people did indeed vote, but also demonstrated political maturity by considering the act of voting as an individual act. Does the end of the *ndigals* also mean an end to political Islam in Senegal at the very moment that the religious leaders are more mobilized than they have ever been? ◆

Notes

1. *Turuq* (plural), *tariqa* (singular): Arabic term designating Islamic brotherhoods.
2. Villalon Léonardo (1996), 'The Moustarchidine of Senegal: The Family Politics of a Contemporary Tijan Movement', paper prepared at the workshop 'Tijaniyya Traditions and Societies in West Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries', Urbana: Illinois, pp. 18-21.
3. Wolof term designating the voting instructions given by religious leaders to their followers.

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