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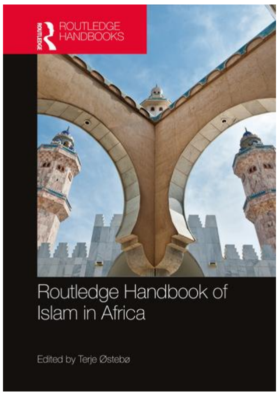

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PATHWAYS AND FORMATIONS OF "AFRICAN SUFISM"

Knut S. Vikør

Historians of Islam in Africa have traditionally ascribed a leading role to Sufism in the spread of the religion south of the Sahara (Klein 1968, 63–64; Hannoum 2016, 1–14). That may be both correct and incorrect, depending on what one means by Sufism. Briefly, there is no doubt that Sufi thought and concepts, the mystical teachings of Sufism (the "Way" or *tariq*), were from an early period present in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the social structures of Sufi practices that we know as the *tariqa*, Sufi brotherhoods or orders, appeared later and became instrumental only from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Vikør 2000, 441–476). When it did, it took different forms, as much due to social contexts as to doctrinal differences between the Ways.

Pathways to Sufism in Africa

Sufi ideas spread to Sub-Saharan Africa through different pathways. In West Africa, the Sahara was the main conduit for the spread of Islam, and so also for Sufi thought. By the thirteenth century, Sufism had gained a solid foothold in the Maghreb (Cornell 1998). In the Sahara, however, Sufism spread as part of specific social structures related to the acephalous nature of desert politics. The most important units in this were what we term "tribes" or "clans", which were most often structured horizontally into "noble" and "vassal" tribes. These clearly had differential access to social, political, and economic resources, but in spite of their internal assumption that they were based on genealogy, they were not stable entities: noble tribes could "fall down" into vassal or semivassal status, or they could ascend to a higher one. One avenue for such social group mobility was to achieve the status of religious tribe, clan, or lineage raising their social status or prevent social descent. Among the Arabic-speaking "Moors" of the western Sahara, such religious tribes were known as *zwaya*, a term easily linked to the Sufi term *zawiya* (lodge), while among the Tuareg speakers they were called *ineslemen*, from "Muslim", while further east we can find *mrabit* tribes (Stewart 1976, 73–93; Bernus 1981; Evans-Pritchard 1949, 65–70; Vikør 1995, 148–149).

To achieve such status required a spiritual resource known as *baraka*, saintly power, by either a leading member or a whole lineage. The *baraka* could be displayed by performing supernatural feats (calming ferocious beasts or similar) but could also be strengthened through a reputation of scholarliness. In some ways, we may observe an "accumulation of spiritual capital" starting with

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the mere presence of personal *baraka*, improved by the acquisition of demonstrable scholarly prowess in the competence in, and perhaps also production of written Islamic religious texts (in Arabic), and finally by the acknowledgment of such scholarly and spiritual status through the integration into interregional or international religious networks such as Sufi brotherhoods.

The first structure that we may consider as an organized Sufi brotherhood in West Africa appeared in one of these Arabic-speaking *zwaya* tribes, the Kunta of present-day Mali and Mauritania. Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (1729–1811) had been initiated into the Qadiriyya "way" by an unrelated Kunta scholar (Batran 1979, 2001, 113–146; McDougall 1986*,* 45–60). Sidi Mukhtar began spreading his mystical method (*wird*) among his family members, thus forming a Sufi lineage organization. However, while the *baraka* and top echelons of the new brotherhood (which became known as the Qadiriyya Mukhtariyya) were reserved for members of his family, he also began attracting students outside his family, thus transcending his organization from merely supporting his lineage's claim to scholarliness to becoming a regional Sufi brotherhood.

Further east, in the Nilotic Sudan, Sufi ideas appeared probably in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. But at that time, the Qadiriyya and other mystical chains that followed them to the Sudan could not yet be called "brotherhoods" in any organizational sense. They were rather individual teacher-student connections. Here too, it is from the mid-eighteenth century we see the first appearance of organized brotherhoods where the teacher-student relation no longer necessarily followed family, although leadership was here as well mostly inherited within families.

On the East African coast, with its short distance to Arabia and integration into the trading systems around the Indian Ocean, Sufi links were more closely related to identities and group formations of the Arabian Peninsula. An example is the Alawiyya *tariqa*, which had a double chain of authorities: one within the family known as the Alawis, a family of traders and scholars from the Hadramawt in Yemen who traveled between this homeland and settlements in East Africa, including Zanzibar and the Comoros (Bang 2003, 12–34). In parallel, there was a Sufi chain of teachers from the same Yemeni family. The two chains merged in the thirteenth century, and membership of the *tariqa* from that time also assumed membership of the Alawi lineage.

Thus, while Sufism is often credited with the spread of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara, it generally arrived in these regions several centuries after the first contacts with Islam, and long after Muslim identity had become widespread in the African communities south of the desert. However, there are at least two distinct periods of the formation of Sufi thought in Africa, the first with Sufism as an intellectual effort of respected scholars, the second as a distinct social reality with an autonomous organizational structure, the brotherhood.

The distinction between the two periods is not about the content of the teachings; there is no "brotherhood tendency" distinct from "scholarly tendency" within Sufi thought, or indeed any ideological distinction between "maraboutism" and "intellectual Sufism", which colonial authors often presented as a basic dichotomy in Africa (e.g., Rinn 1884, 14–20). Both "marabouts" and "scholars" seek the same spiritual goals, and are part of the same *tariqa*s, which encompass both types of Sufi practices: from the popular West African "marabouts" on the ground to the sophisticated mystical poetry and piety authored in *madrasas* and mosque centers of learning.

Sufism and jihad

The same is true for the distinction between "militant" and "quietist" Sufism. While this has often been seen as a clear opposition in the Islamic experience in Africa, it does not reflect a difference in the Sufi thought underpinning one and the other. At the time of Sidi Mukhtar's death in 1811, West Africa was marked by the religious-political upheaval of the Fulani jihads (Last 1967; Hiskett 1994, 67; Brenner 1988, 43–52). The most important of these was that of Uthman dan Fodio (1754–1817) in Sokoto (now north Nigeria). Uthman had an attachment to the Qadiriyya brotherhood, both through Sidi Mukhtar and through other scholars in the Sahara. Thus, his movement went at the time under the name of the "Kadirawa", from the brotherhood (Last 1967*,* lix, 216). Nevertheless, his Sufi attachment was primarily scholarly and spiritual and does not seem to have significantly shaped the political movement of the jihads. The scholarly impact was also followed by the work of his daughter, Nana Asma'u, an important case of female influence in African Sufism (Mack and Boyd 2000).

Later, a related Fulani jihad merged much more closely with Sufi identity in the case of Umar b. Said Tall (1796–1864), originally from Futa Jalon of present-day Guinea (Oloruntimehin 1972; Robinson 1985). As a young man, Umar encountered a new Sufi order that had spread to the western Sahara regions through the Idaw Ali tribe, the Tijaniyya order founded in Morocco by Ahmad al-Tijani (1735–1815). Umar was initiated into it, and when he went on *hajj* in 1828, he was both reinitiated into the order there and appointed its *khalifa,* or representative, of West Africa. This was a title he considered to give him authority over all followers in the West. On his return from Mecca, he spent several years in Sokoto and married Dan Fodio's granddaughter. In contrast to the Sokoto jihad, however, Sufism and his authority as *khalifa* of the Tijaniyya became central to Umar's effort. He first set up a scholarly center at Dinguiray, today southwestern Mali, and began attracting followers to the Tijaniyya. Initially, he focused on teaching Sufi doctrine, and wrote one of the central works of Tijani thought, the *Rimah* (Radtke 1995, 73–113; Hunwick 1992, 17–32). But his students, known as the *talibé*s, also received military training, and from 1852 his *tariqa* became a militant one, creating a *jihadi* state that lasted until his son and successor was defeated by the French in 1893.

We thus see here both a connection and continuity from the Sokoto jihad to that of al-Hajj Umar, and a difference. One is the greater emphasis on the Sufi structure, and the other that it is a different (and younger) *tariqa*. However, these two are clearly not linked. The Tijani tradition comprised both this jihad endeavor and a political practice at its center in Algeria that rejected any political activity against the same French colonialists that Umar ended up fighting (Abun-Nasr 1965, 62–68).

Similarly, the contrast between the two Saharan Sufis, the militant politician Ma al-Aynayn – who also fought the French and was involved in deposing a sultan in Morocco – and his brother Saʿd Buh – who worked closely together with the French in Mauritania and Senegal, is striking (Boubrik 1999; Robinson 2000, 161–177). But both were leaders of the same Fadiliyya *tariqa*, and the disagreements between them, as between the nineteenth-century Tijanis, were not about the Sufi teachings of the *tariqa*. Similarly, the Salihiyya of Somalia is known for its connection to the "mad Mullah", Muhammad Abdille Hassan (1868–1920), but the leadership of the order rejected his politics while recognizing his Sufism (Martin 1976, 177–201; Bemath 1992, 33–47).

Contexts

If we look at the historical contexts, on the other contrary, we do find some clear distinctions. One obvious one is between stateless societies, such as those of the desert, and structured agricultural societies with a political center which, among other things, was in charge of the society's legal affairs. In the stateless regions, scholarly lineages or tribes could take on state-like functions, as middle men between conflicting tribes or as depositories of legal knowledge. In order to fulfil this function, these tribes needed scholarly legitimacy, and they found that in Islamic knowledge, including Sufi knowledge. If the legitimacy that Sufi authority brought was to bolster the status of one lineage or clan as "power brokers", then the Sufi identity would preferably be restricted to that lineage or clan.

The same factors could also discourage making too much of a distinction between legal, *fiqh*, scholarship, and Sufi knowledge, as they served the same purpose. In a settled state structure this may also have been true, but legal knowledge and the ability to act upon it would to a larger degree be the appanage of the sultan or other political leader. Here, a Sufi may find it easier to establish himself by keeping a certain distance from the political power. That might lead to a clearer separation between the scholars competent in *fiqh* and those who focus on the internal piety of Sufism. Colonialism may have strengthened this, in making clearer distinctions between political and legal competence on the one hand, and Sufi authority on the other.

However, as long as attachment to the *tariqa* was an aspect of membership of a specific *zwaya* tribe or holy lineage, that link was then itself a resource for social and economic gain. When the actual brotherhoods began to spread beyond the members of the lineage, it became a framework for exchange of resources. The brethren brought gifts or other economic contributions to the sheikh as a part of their affiliation to the brotherhood, and these contributions became its economic basis. They could also, as in the case of the Senegalese Muridiyya, take the form of the labor the brethren carried out on the brotherhood's plantations for a specific period of time.

In return, the brotherhood also provided resources to the brethren, as well as to the local community as a whole. This could take many forms, to settle poor families or others who sought help on land that was owned or controlled by the brotherhood, or providing welfare, such as education and other temporal services to the members of the local community (Vikør 2002, 80–97; Seesemann 2002, 98–117). Being a member of a brotherhood could also increase an individual's social standing, and in particular if he was able to rise in the ranks of the order, which was possible by his own efforts even if he was not of the leading family of the order or the branch.

As an organized structure, the brotherhood could also be a conduit to resources controlled by political leaders, be they settled state or dominant tribes, such as the land itself that was provided by this leadership to the brotherhood, or they could provide access to the powers that be merely by being a sizable organization in the community.

The brotherhood could also provide economic services indirectly, as being a chain of trust, providing a framework for nonreligious interchange, such as trade. A *hawala* transaction, or any other commercial exchange, presupposes an element of recognition or trust between the partners, in particular if they are geographically distant or there are otherwise no external frameworks that can anchor the trust in the other party (Vikør 2005, 331–332). A Sufi connection through membership of the same brotherhood could provide this chain of trust, in particular when the brotherhood grew beyond the lineage or other alternative social bonds, but where the brotherhood itself was the chain that the trust was embedded in.

Connecting chains

As we have seen, then, Sufi identity could flow from three different types of chains linking the individual to the larger body, separately or in tandem. One type was the *nasab*, biological or genealogical descent. Here, it was the bloodline that cemented the transmission of *baraka* associated with leadership, even when the membership of the *tariqa* could encompass tens of thousands with no *nasab* at all to the founder. But in some orders, *nasab* and Sufi lineage merged into one entity.

Baraka could, however, also be acquired by individual efforts, through amassing scholarly knowledge. In the traditional model of Islamic scholarship, this was provided by a teacher authorizing a student to teach a certain body of knowledge by giving him an *ijaza*, permission to teach (Lydon 2004, 49). These chains of student-teacher relations were formalized in an *isnad*, chain of scholarly authority: the student had learned and received an *ijaza* from a teacher who had received an *ijaza* from his teacher, from his teacher again, and so on. These *isnads* could go back to the earliest and most prestigious scholars of Islam. Sufism was such a scholarly subject, an *ilm al-din*, and Sufi works could also be transmitted like exoteric knowledge through teacher-student chains. Such authority could also be provided from a distance, and several African Sufis and scholars contemporary to the great polymath Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti in Egypt (1445–1505) claimed scholarly authority simply from having corresponded with him, or at least through the *claim* that they had corresponded with this eminent scholar, who clearly was full of *baraka* (Hunwick 1999, 52, 60).

However, the esoteric elements of the Sufi experience, while it too was transmitted from teacher or guide (*murshid, pir*) to the *murid* student, most often required a much more physical contact. These chains of transmission of mystical knowledge and legitimacy were known as *silsilas*. They could contain a scholarly element like the *isnad* – the student had learned a certain prayer formula from his teacher – but it also required that the teacher had tested the mystical strength and competence of the student, as mystical knowledge was dangerous and not to be put in the hand of the unprepared.

These different types of chains of authority, or of legitimacy, could thus coincide, or be separate, according to circumstance. Clearly, mystical authority for the prominent Sufi *sheikh*, such as those called the *qutb*, “axis”, could also require the ability to perform miraculous acts, *karamat*, or otherwise have their divine friendship (*wilaya*) proven by visions of meetings with the ultimate authority: the Prophet.

A renowned Sufi sheikh would gather up many such *silsila*s going through various saintly authorities, and sometimes write scholarly and mystical autobiographies listing these authorities (e.g., al-Sanusi 1968; cf. Vikør 1996, 127–141). As to whether the individual Sufi would collect *silsila*s from different Sufi orders, or restrict himself exclusively to one, varied with each *tariqa*. The Tijaniyya were famous for their exclusivity, as their founder Ahmed al-Tijani (himself a former initiate of the Khalwatiyya order) decreed that his order integrated all others, and that later Tijanis need not seek esoteric knowledge elsewhere (Abun-Nasr 1965, 28–33; Wright 2020). Most other Sufi orders were, however, inclusive, and itinerant scholars would often collect *silsila*s of many, sometimes dozens, of different orders, while retaining a primary identity with one, which would be the one with which his students identified.

Thus, most Sufi orders were tolerant of each other as parallel ways to reach the mystical experience they all sought. Nevertheless, rivalries could also erupt between the orders. They could simply be “turf wars” between two or more local orders to compete for adherents in a region but could also focus on theologies and practices. An important such rivalry broke out in the 1880s in parts of East Africa between the older Qadiriyya order and the Shadhiliyya, originally a North African order, when the latter arrived in this region and began recruiting younger members (Greenstein 1976–1977). The newcomers accused the older Qadiris of adopting syncretic practices from the local societies, in particular their usage of “loud *dhikr*”, dance and music during burials and other rituals. Such rituals should be sober and quiet, according to the Shadhilis, while the Qadiris insisted that they were in full conformity to Islamic and Sufi ideals and traditions.

Fissionary tendencies in Senegal

Divisions could also arise within *tariqa*s that shared a common affiliation to a single order, but split up into different branches that spread out alongside each other in the same region. Senegal provides a striking example of this. That the Tijaniyya-based jihad of al-Hajj Umar ultimately failed in the face of European colonialism had two opposite effects: on the one hand, the Tijaniyya had gained a solid stronghold in Senegal; and on the other, later Sufi and Tijani leaders shied away from explicit politics and from overt opposition to French rule, and sought to free themselves from the heritage of Umarian militancy.

Thus, there grew up two directions of transmitted authority among the Tijanis in Senegal. One was the "Umarian" line with separate branches led by descendants of al-Hajj Umar but eschewing his political ambitions. The other sought new initiation lines, preferably directly from the Tijani headquarters in Morocco and Algeria, bypassing the one through al-Hajj Umar. The Umarian lines became centered on his grandson Sayyidi Nourou Tall (d. 1980), who was close to the French authorities and was appointed *grand marabout* by them (Garcia 1997, 247–275), while the non-Umarians flocked under the leadership of al-Hajj Malik Sy (1855–1922) who set up a center at Tiwawane; his branch of the Tijaniyya was often known by the name of this city (Marone 1970, 140–141; Villalón 1995, 67–68, 139–40; Gomez 1992). Later in the century, a third major branch was established in Kaolack by Ibrahim Niasse (1902–1975) (Seesemann 2011; Wright 2015). This branch spread to Nigeria and became an Africa-wide distribution of the Tijaniyya *tariqa* in the course of the twentieth century.

The Tijani *tariqa* is thus central to Senegalese Sufism. However, there is another great tradition there, which grew out of the older Qadiriyya order and which was founded by Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké (d. 1927) (O'Brien 1971, 1975; Behrman 1970). While his intellectual chain goes back to Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti, the order he established, the Muridiyya, is generally considered to be a separate order with its own *wird* rather than just a branch of the Qadiriyya.

Once these founders of the brotherhoods had passed, the Senegalese brotherhoods shared a history of segmentation. Thus, after the death of Ahmadu Bamba, two of his brothers claimed succession to his position as leader in dispute with his son. Each of these established their own division of followers and were in turn succeeded as leaders of their separate branches. The same happened with the Tiwawane branch of Tijanis and the Niassène; Ibrahim Niasse had himself broken away from the authority of his brother who originally had succeeded their father as Sufi *sheikh* (Seesemann 2011, 37).

The crucial element in these rivalries seems to be the following they engendered. A successor had to draw followers who accepted his authority and provided him material support. This they also showed by participating in the communal activities organized by his branch. If the claimants were successful in gaining such support, they all seem to have been able to fission off from the unilineal authority of inheritance. In this way, it would appear that authority, while it presupposes spiritual and scholarly authority and lines of transmission "from the top", in reality comes from the bottom up, from the actions and choices of the followers who accepted each of the successors as a bona fide *khalifa* of his branch.

Holy families in the Sudan

Further east, in the Sudan of the Nile valley, the development of Sufism had taken a somewhat different path. Here, too, some men had acquired a reputation for *baraka*, for example, by calling for rain, and were known as "holymen" (Karrar 1992; McHugh 1994). This *baraka* was most often inherited in family lines, which then could be termed "holy lineages". Like in the Sahara, competence in Islamic knowledge eventually became an important element of what made these lineages stand out, initially without too much distinction between "exoteric" knowledge of religion and mystical knowledge, expressed in the term *fekki* (pl. *fuqara'*), which was the local term uniting the concept of *faqih*, religious scholar of law, with *faqir*, mystic (Holt and Daly 2000, 29–30; O'Fahey 2008, 12). Some of these local scholars then came into contact with Sufi traditions from the north, in particular the Qadiriyya, and added their chains of authority to their own religious armory.

Here too, divisions emerged, within the brotherhoods or by new orders being imported from outside. However, we do not see the large-scale generational fissionary tendencies typical of Senegal. While the various Tijani sub-branches in Senegal all use the term "Tijaniyya" with sub-qualifications, break-out orders in Sudan more often do not present themselves as sub-branches, but rather as distinct orders in their own right. In some way, this may illustrate that if legitimacy of leadership in the Senegal came "from below", through the choices of the adherents, in Sudan it to a somewhat greater degree came from "above", if not from the family or lineage unit, then from direct access to a new source of authority from Sufi masters in the Middle East, and in particular nearby Mecca.

Transmission of knowledge

Sufi knowledge like any Muslim knowledge was transmitted by individuals traveling from Sub-Saharan Africa to the central lands of Islam, and in particular by the continuous passage of local scholarly and religious authorities to Mecca on the *hajj* and often passing through other centers of learning, to seek *isnads*, *silsilas,* or simply to visit the shrines of the holy men of their order.

Equally important was the travel in the opposite directions: Sufi scholars and sheikhs from the central lands traveling to Africa for a shorter time for missionary, economic, or other motivations, or who settled there permanently and established Sufi *zawiya* communities. An important aspect of this where local and outside scholars came together were the local centers of learning sought after both by scholars from the Middle East or Asia, and local scholars and students who did not have the resources to travel the long way to Mecca. Regional centers of Islamic learning such as Timbuktu in West Africa and Zanzibar in East Africa were important nodes for the transmission of Sufi scholarship in their region (Bang 2014; Jeppie and Diagne 2008), but there were also many similar smaller nodal points within each *tariqa*, such as the Senegalese centers of Touba, Tiwawane, and Kaolack, or cities such as Kano, Omdurman, Lamu, and Brava in other parts of Africa. Together they provided a network for the transmissions of Sufi awareness and scholarship and laid the groundwork for inserting local Sufis into the chains of trust and of distribution of resources (material and spiritual) that the international *tariqas* constituted across the world.

A more permanent attachment to these chains was provided by the written word. The literary output could be imported from outside and copied, repeated, and commented on locally, but pious works were also authored in Africa, one example being the *Rimah hizb al-rahim* of al-Hajj Umar mentioned above. For this activity, paper brought from the north was an important precondition and a crucial aspect of the promotion of scholarship (Lydon 2009).

Competence in the language of Islam, Arabic, was also an essential asset that gave access to this scholarship. Clearly, this demand for knowledge of a foreign language created an intellectual and social divide – or at least a division of labor – within the Sufi brotherhoods. Not all Sufi adherents could or would achieve the competence in Arabic necessary to directly access and discuss writings in that language. So, the scholars transmitted the spiritual essentials to a wider audience using the various vernacular languages, Wolof, Hausa, Somali, Kiswahili, and others. We particularly know of an increased use of these African languages from the late eighteenth century onwards, which coincides with the change from Sufism as a purely scholarly pious effort of selected people with *baraka*, to a wider social brotherhood phenomenon. To bring these wider groups of people into the fellowship of the brotherhood, they needed to be instructed in a language they were familiar with. Attracting them to a particular brotherhood (possibly over rival orders) also meant the ability to convince and mobilize them. Poetry, spiritual or didactic, in the vernacular language hence became an important element in drawing wider audiences deeper into the piety of the order. In some cases, such poetry (or other writings) in local languages could be written down, creating a written literature in African languages in Arabic script (with necessary modifications), and these were collectively known as *ajami* script (Kapteijns 1996*,* 25–34; see also Ngom 2016).

These writings were spread to the brethren, and many kept Arabic works in family manuscript libraries that we find scattered around Muslim Africa, and thus demonstrating both the spread of knowledge and the importance that the family gave to the manuscripts. This applies to exoteric as well as Sufi writings, but the collections of prayers or *awrad* used in Sufi ceremonies, and which marked one order off from the other, were of particular importance to keep.

With the advent of printing, we find an interesting new development. Many local brotherhoods, in particular in the eastern part of Africa, edited collections of writings, *awrad*, collections of *silsila*s, hagiographies of particular saints and similar, and sent them off to the Middle East to have them printed. The printing house of Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi near al-Azhar in Cairo became a typical example of this from the early twentieth century: he received manuscripts from African Sufi orders, had them lithographed or typeset, and printed. The copies were then sent back to the local brotherhood for distribution among the brethren. This clearly was also an element of democratization of the knowledge required for participation in the religious life of the brotherhood (Bang 2014, 134–135).

To what degree these pathways also were lines of authority varied between the brotherhoods. Some, like the Qadiriyya, were so decentralized that each local branch was virtually independent, save perhaps for a nod to the symbolic leadership of a descendant of the founder. Others, like the Tijaniyya, kept a much closer connection to the central lodges of the order in the Maghreb, at least to settle (or intervene in) rivalries between various branches of the order. As we have seen, the famous al-Hajj Umar used his appointment as *khalifa* for West Africa actively as a resource to build his position of authority in the region. But it was rather rare that such *khalifa* appointments from afar had a real decisive impact, at least unless the authority of leadership was already locally founded. Scholarly authority and the status of the *silsila* chains were probably equally or more important signs of approval of the local sheikh and proof that he was part of the global spiritual and intellectual network of his order.

The European impact

Modernity, in the form of European colonialism, had a deep impact on Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa, and thus also in the case of Sufism, but of course in different ways in each region. The imposition of colonialism often led to a rapid collapse of the established political authorities that were in place. In search for an alternative leadership in an anti-colonial struggle, the organization and legitimacy of Sufi brotherhoods turned out to become an evident asset, and Sufi leaders and their brotherhoods in many cases became the focal point for jihads against the colonialists around the Muslim world (Vikør 2015, 212–232).

In West Africa, however, jihad states already existed before the arrival of colonialism, with varying degrees of Sufi influence. They were the established political authorities in place, or in al-Hajj Umar's case, were struggling to become such. These were thrust into the role of fighting the Europeans and are therefore often seen as anti-colonial forces. Actually, Umar himself initially sought to avoid fighting the French; his aims were directed at the local non- or semi-Muslim communities, as he saw them. But as his was the dominant state power in the region, it was attacked by the French for this reason, and his Sufism was thus only incidental to the anti-colonial aspect of this war imposed onto him.

In the Sahara, however, there were more cases of a specifically anti-colonial Sufi-led resistance movement. Apart from Ma al-Aynayn in the western Sahara, there was the Sanusi rebellion of Kaossen in Agadez (Niger) in 1916 (Martin 1976, 125–151; Salifou 1973), and in the Horn of Africa, Abdille Hassan's struggle around the same time. These were not the result of any Sufi militant ideology, but their struggles were clearly linked to the religious authority that the resistance leaders had gained from their Sufi brotherhood connection.

In East Africa, the situation was different in that the Islamic impact had been so geographically narrow until the late 1800s, contained on the coast. Thus, conversely from the militant conflict between Muslim-led states and the colonialist expansion in the west, European impact in the east rather helped spread Islam to the continent, by promoting greater mobility of Muslims from the coast to the mainland and the interior. With greater Muslim presence, evidently the knowledge of Sufism also spread, with Zanzibar as an important nodal point. Sufi brotherhoods could here interact with or influence local religious structures, so in this region more than in West Africa it may be correct to link Sufi expansion with the spread of Islam itself (Nimtz 1980).

What is African about African Sufism?

In studies on Sufism in Sub-Saharan Africa, the question of its "African-ness" has been an important element of controversy. Views have ranged from the *islam noir* approach of some French colonial authors, who saw Sufism as a specific "African" form of Muslim practice; more moderate and more influenced by pre-Islamic thought than the "orthodox" and more rule-focused Islam taught in the mosques (see Evers Rosander and Westerlund 1997, 1–54). Thus, Islam in Africa was not so "dangerous" as that of the Middle East. At the same time, colonial authorities feared that the militant tradition of the jihads should be transmitted through Sufi thought, and kept a close watch over organized Sufism, giving rise to a "police surveillance scholarship" which still today is a source for scholarly knowledge, but at the same time was framed in a hermeneutics of distrust that often overemphasized both the organizational strength as well as the political relevance of the orders (e.g., Rinn 1884; Depont and Coppolani 1897). Thus, the French took the precaution of sending into exile such Sufi teachers as Ahmadu Bamba of Senegal and Hamaʾullah of Mali, neither of whom actually seem to have had any political activity or ambition at all (Hamès 1997, Soares 2005).

This French conception of a separate African and Sufi *islam noir* must be treated with skepticism, as the claimed dichotomy between "uneducated" local *marabout*s and the scholarly discourses of Sufi poets and learned theologians has little basis in fact. Not all Sufi sheikhs were structured into brotherhoods, but the *tariqas* did create a scholarly, spiritual, and social domain that unified all these levels of Sufi experience. The scholars were also *marabout*s.

In this sense, African Sufis are like any other Sufi the world over. Sufi orders anywhere span the range from local brothers in their lodges who perform the rituals without delving into the esoteric experiences of the higher levels of Sufi ranks to the most elaborate of scholarship, as we know many of the foremost poets but also religious scholars of Islam were Sufis. Africans were no different; there is no "African Sufi Islam" in the sense of an antinomian Sufism in contrast to "normal Islam". But of course the Sufi experience everywhere, and also in Africa, is colored by the local environment, so we may perceive aspects of Sufism in Sub-Saharan Africa that is specific to that continent, like Sufism in India or Central Asia would be colored by their environments.

Since these African societies, and the historical contexts, were so diverse, they do not constitute one "African model", but many, each of which is African in its own right. For instance, the role of saintly or holy families and lineages can be found in different ways both in West and East Africa, and in different social circumstances. Particular for Africa may also be the distance from the scholarly centers, but that again divides the continent rather than uniting it: the distance from West Africa to Mecca may be so forbidding that Touba could provide an alternative center for pilgrimage, while the trip across the sea from the Nile Valley or Ethiopia was short, and the East African Sufis traveled back and forth to Arabia on a regular basis.

It would therefore be useful to focus on Sufi thought and doctrine on the one hand, and Sufi organizational and social structure on the other. Sufi thought and doctrine do not seem to distinguish Africa from the rest of Islam: al-Hajj Umar's *Rimah* – perhaps the most important Sufi treatise to come out of Africa – is read by Tijanis everywhere without any thought or knowledge that it is "African". The Tijaniyya is notably "African" in that it has spread so swiftly and widely throughout Africa south of the Sahara (Seesemann 2011, 144–216), but its origin and its recognized center is in the Maghreb, and it has now also spread widely outside the continent. It is African in distribution, but not in any significant way in its doctrine.

Conclusion

Sufism may not have been the way Islam spread to Sub-Saharan Africa, but it has become central to how Islam is lived for millions of Africans and helped to deepen the experience of Islam. Sufi festivals or celebrations of the life or death of its masters are often the high point for "how to live as a Muslim" on the continent, even though it may be challenged today by Muslim reformist movements. Sufism is deeply local, but at the same time binds African Muslims into international networks, and has historically promoted Muslims' trade as well as travel to the Middle East and other Muslim lands. It has provided frameworks for intellectual development and interaction, in writing and in person, and when read outside Africa, it has become part of the general Sufi heritage rather than a parochial "African" text.

At the same time, local social and historical conditions have profoundly shaped how the Sufi experience has been lived out. We see it in the way scholarly knowledge became interwoven with tribal and family relations in the state-less societies in the Sahara; we have seen it in how it differentially impacted the jihads of precolonial and colonial West Africa as well as the anti-colonial response, and even in the degree colonialism prevented or promoted the spread of a Sufi presence in the regions they controlled.

These Sufi experiences were "African", but not exclusively African, nor uniformly African. To be a Sufi could mean one thing in one part of Africa or in one social setting, and something quite different in another. Today, Sufism while sometimes challenged is part of what makes African Islam African, and it is part of what makes Muslim Africans Muslim. Not all Muslims, but in tremendous numbers. Thus, Sufism has become embedded into the Muslim experience of Africa.

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