State, Religion and Muridism in Senegal

The Role of Islam and Islamic Movements in Africa since 1883

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Abstract:

Africa's social and political movements are very diverse especially because of the nature of their emergence in different parts of the continent and the peculiarities of the conditions that informed their emergence which also differs. Even though they all emerged in opposition to colonial rule and domination, often these movements provide links for exploring the nature of the relationship between local and national movements that culminates into the independence of African states. This is a study on the role of Islam and Islamic movements in Africa, it explores the dynamics of religion and its impact in state affairs. The paper examines the role of religion in organizing people for liberation struggles and the development of states in Africa and Senegal in particular. It maintains that religion was a fundamental tool in the development of social and political movement in Senegal. The paper uses Muridism as one of the most influential religious groups in Senegal to demonstrate the strength of religious institution in mobilizing people against colonial state. Murid's philosophy of work, worship and service inspired the zeal to human, social and political development. These religious principles provided an alternative system of social, political economic and spiritual control to colonial rule whose imperialistic drive was to dominate and suppress the people. Thus, at independence, the philosophy of Murids found expression among the people and contributed to the formation of nationalist ideology and state-politics in colonial and post-colonial Senegal.

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Introduction

One of the early modern religious and social movements in 19th century Africa to contribute to the advancement of the Islamic religion and the development of the state has been the rise and growth of Muridism especially in the West African state of Senegal. This was carried out at the level of the social order of Sufi Islamic development which sought advanced spiritual knowledge and enlightenment for its adherents. Muridism was another aspect of a revolutionary movement which can also be referred to as part of the Reformation of Islamic Movement in Africa which began in 1883 (Basil, 1974). The movement therefore developed in the late decades of the 19th century in various forms and culminated in the middle and later part of the 20th century when the principle and practice of Muridism became more pronounced (Brill, 1993).

The Muridist Islamic movement was to a large extent influence by the state building aspirations of the Jihadist movements and were fittingly most notably evident in West Africa especially in Senegal, where they were forged, expanded and developed. The period of the growth and development of Muridism coincided with the period of the European quest for imperialist expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa, but particularly in West Africa and other areas in the continent. Indeed, there are pointers that the central character of this movement was the reform and purification of Islam and the advancement of the spiritual knowledge base of its adherents who could contribute to the social and cultural development of modern Senegal (Donald, 1971). This paper is about the significance of the role of Muridism and its movement in Senegal and how the nature and character of these movements have affected the development of the state and religion across Africa. It examines this significance generally in terms of the movement as an example of spiritual growth and individual Muslims and their promotion and advancement of the African renaissance in the 19th century and even in the contemporary period (Donald, 1971, Oloruntimehin, 1998).

Framework of Analysis

The paper conceives State from the Weberian sense. According to early scholars such as Marx Weber, "the state is a human community which successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." This implies that the state is responsible for the enforcement of law and order and the maintenance of administration and equitable distribution resources for the well-being of the people within its boundaries. The state achieves this development in the major areas of accountability to the people, the administration of justice, and the overall administration of its territory for the common good of all. Scholars such as Hobbes, Plato, and others, have over the years debated nature and character, its relevance to the galvanisation of forces for the progress and development of society within given territories (Francis, 1992). Religion is described as a community of people who are joined by spiritual or religious beliefs in a Supreme Being or deity. Furthermore, these people devote their energies to supporting their members' spiritual, social, and cultural

requirements. Religion, once again, refers to the activities of faith-based organizations that are affiliated with a solid spiritual community and are concerned with personal or societal development (Francis, 2004). Woldehanna sees religious groups as "religious and religious-based organisations, places of religious worship or commissions." (Sarah, 2005). Religion can also be seen as the practice and adherence to values that are based on faith and or belief in the future promises of a supreme being. As religious actors, the practitioners have played an increasingly relevant historical role in state building in several African countries such as Senegal. Over the years therefore, religious institutions such as those of the Islamic sects across Africa have worked or served as educators, advocates, intermediaries, and mediators, and have helped in the promotion of good behaviour among Muslims, they also provide a framework for building peace and as well as provide other humanitarian services. But most importantly, the dissemination of knowledge of traditional democratic practices that safe-guard the rights of the individual, encouragement of peace and disarmament (Jacob, 2009). Muridism is an Islamic movement with roots in the Sufi Islamic order in Senegal with profound influences in the African sub-region. Believers under this order, known as Murids in this Islamic movement traversed the path of knowledge and enlightenment under a tutor or guide known as a Murshid. They are also called Murids as they are the seekers of spiritual enlightenment who have taken a clearly marked path for them under the Islamic religion (Brill, 1993). Muridism was a social and political movement in Senegal which aspired to attain these values through the banner of religion and faith, specifically, the Islamic religion (O'Brian, Donald, 1971).

Origins and Development of Muridism in Senegal

Sheik Amadou Bamba of Senegal—an Islamic scholar who lived between 1850-1927 is credited to have founded the Murid Brotherhood. The movement spread to the Gambia but recognition was given to its headquarters in Touba, Senegal as the holy city for all adherents of Muridism. It is estimated that the Murids constitute a significant population in Senegal. Politically and economic wise, Murids influence the politics, economically and society of Senegal, this is not only in the country but throughout the West African sub-region. Sheikh Bamba's mystical works on religious issues such as mediation, rituals, work and worship, enterprise and industriousness, became the touchstone for the movement (Mbacke, 2019).

Sheikh Bamba belonged to the Islamic intellectual movement, the Qudiriya, which was not really as militant and aggressive in approach to issues of state and national affairs. This was evident where the deep learning, piousness, and enterprise and industriousness of the Murids became a great asset to the interests of French colonialism in Senegal. Moreover, Bamba and others saw their mission as the creation, development and expansion of a greater Jihad known as the Jihad Akbar, or 'greater struggle' for Islam in the areas of learning, worship for Allah, submission to the Mujahidin or renewal of Islam, and commitment to social work for the uplift of the people. Thus, the emphasis on faith and hard work became the driving forces of a new

religious movement of Muridism in Senegal within this period. During the colonial period, the movement struggled as a result of French officials' distrust of the Murids who were seen as potential nationalists and rivals for power against European imperial interests in Senegal. However, Bamba and his movement thrived and work began on the Murids' main mosque, known as the Great Mosque at Toubaby 1926 (Mbacke, 2019).

Since the Murid Islamic movement's founding, attraction had been laid by the people of Senegal upon the structure and organisational hierarchy of the faith. Many of its adherents believed that becoming a working organisational structure remained steps towards attainment of the rank of elitism in Senegal. But the Murids after the demise of Sheikh Bamba, known as the Caliph or the Grand Marabout, have remained hereditary and have maintained absolute authority and control over the followers. Within the lower ranking adherents of Marabouts that other hierarchical roles have been assigned to other followers other than to members of the grand family or descendants of Sheikh Bamba. These lower ranking hierarchical structures include the Dahiras, Daaras, and other sects that make up the structural organisation of the Murid Movement. The membership of the Murid brotherhood therefore has followed this hierarchical structure religiously and faithfully fulfils the duties and obligations of their calling.

The Dahiras' structure of the Murid brotherhood relates to the associates of the descendants of the Marabout who may share certain allegiances or commonality by belonging to the same village group or geographical region. The Dahiras mostly live in the urban or township centres where they are recognised as religious leaders in their own right serving under the leadership and direction of the collective body of Marabouts, who themselves serve under the Caliph or Grand Marabout (Mbacke, 2019). Another important structure of Muridism is the Daaras. These are also Madrassas, or the Qur'anic Schools for instruction in Islam, but specifically focusing upon the assumptions and tenets of the Murid brotherhood concerning or with regard to Islam. Since they were initially founded by the Sheikh himself, it became a tradition among his descendants to continually initiate and found such Madrassas throughout the strongholds of Muridism in Senegal. These Sheikh Bamba's descendants and disciples have also been responsible for teaching and instruction in these Qur'anic schools which add the Khassida or poems in remembrance and honour of Prophet Mohammed to the general curriculum of Muridic Islam. Among the Daaras, the first aspect of self-development taught to them was agriculture and the cultivation of land for their sustenance. Thus, many of them continued to live as agriculturists and peasants in Senegal, Gambia and in other strongholds of the Murid brotherhood (O'Brian, 1995).

One of the close followers of Sheikh Amadou Bamba, Ibrahim Fall, further added to the historical development of Muridism in Senegal by forging a sect and structure which later became Baye Fall. Ibrahim Fall's development of this sect was based upon training for personal hard work and dedication to a life of religion and to the Marabouts, regarded as the Holy among the Faithful. This development in Muridism regarded as the Dieuf Dieuel, also known as 'with hard work, one reaps what he sows,' has remained the creed and article of faith

among members of the sect. This structure of Muridism has helped the brotherhood to acquire ready labour force in fields of general work and construction, personal safety and security of the higher rungs of the religion during its services, including at pilgrimages, the Grand Magal, at Touba. With the success of this movement and sect within Muridism, Ibrahim Fall has been recognised as 'the Light of Muridism,' and the Bab al-Muridina or Gate of the Murids'. The influence of the Murids has continued to grow in the state of Senegal and Gambia and other immediate environs of the West African sub-region (Christian, 1999).

As a religious practice, members of the Murid Brotherhood consider the following; prayer, ablution, fasting, pilgrimage and alms giving as their core principle that should be imbibed as part of individual obligation. The achievement of Imani, or faith is through six articles such as: the belief in God, his angels, his prophets, the holy books, judgement day and divinely decrees. These beliefs are grouped under the three pillars of Muridism. In these three pillars of Muridism, adherents follow what has been regarded as the Murid Triangle, which is encapsulated in love for Allah and his Sheikhs, work and service for Allah and to all humanity, and knowledge and the divine light of Almighty Allah (Christian, 1999).

Muridism, the Role of Islamic Movements in Senegal since 1883

Muridism was influenced by Islamic intellectual and social movements, the Quadiriyya, Tijanniya and the Jihads in Western and Central Sudan in the 19th century. All these movements were aimed at the reform and purification of Islam and the creation of a society of fairness and justice. This was also the premise upon which Muridism based its growth of Senegalese society even during the period of European imperialism and colonialism in the country (Roland, 1972). The great significance and influences of Muridism in Senegal were in areas like the political, economic, social and cultural realms. Sheikh Bamba's Muridism saw himself as the central figure in a reform movement and united front first against European imperialism which he did not support, and for his religion and movement's political renaissance of Senegal and most parts of West Africa.It is to be acknowledged that Sheikh Bamba's efforts were certainly an inspirational example for similar movements elsewhere (Roland, 1972).

Muridism encouraged the Senegalese, Gambians and other West Africans to look to Islam as the rallying point and the ideal system for the revitalisation of the society through work and service and to resist the secular systems imposed by alien powers. In the western Sudan for example, about 40 percent looked up to the Sheikh and his descendant Caliphs as the father figure of nationalism, a brand-new Islamic religion, independence, and political development. The Muridist movements galvanised moral and religious aspirations and their fulfilment as the decisive factors for the country's political development. A fine example was the growth of the Baye Fall movement in Senegal which was established in the post-Bamba period and was an effective movement for organisation and achievement in the political life and development of Senegal. Thus, although the Murid brotherhood did not fully participate actively in the politics

of Senegal and Gambia, systematically, the character of its influence continued into the 20th century and beyond in many areas (Roland, 1972).

Scholars have shown that the significant political achievement of the Muridist movements in Senegal and beyond was creeds and the carving out of their own religious and political spheres of influence which provided an indigenous alternative first to colonial rule and then to the measures for the advancement of the society in the post-independence era. A major significance of the Muridist movements' contribution to state building in Senegal has been the tenacity and legacy of work, worship and service that it has imparted to its 40 percent adherents which in turn, has contributed significantly to human social development. Thus, history has recorded that Amadou Bamba--the Muslim leader established the Muridism, which resisted all forms of imperialist and colonial intervention and its influence was felt up to Tunisia as it protected Islamic values from European colonial politics. Although the French attempted to break his resolve by forced exile from 1895-1907, he left an enduring legacy of resistance and struggle for freedom.

The religious philosophy and ideology of Muridism has been a major influence on modern Senegalese nationalism and political development as the nationalists were inspired and fired by the zeal of the earlier quest for social works and human advancement and drew inspiration from the life and times of the Sheikhs and Caliphs and other disciples' courage and valour which was deployed in the religion and society. Beginning from Sheikh Amadou Bamba, the Sheikhs and Caliphs of Muridism have worked for the modernisation of the political space and have influenced similar like-minded movements. Murids have contributed to the struggle for universal suffrage and the right to vote and participate freely in the political process throughout Senegal and beyond (Mbacke, 2019).

In the course of development of modern politics and mobilisation, the Murids have proven the ideal partnership struck by political leaders in Senegal beginning from French rule. In the period of the entrenchment of universal suffrage in 1956, this development quickly galvanised into a crescendo and became truly a national movement with the Murid brotherhood. Following the footsteps of their leaders who were Clerics, Sheikhs and the Ulama, the majority of people were reached in campaigns of mass mobilisation and political education for the soul of Senegal. Thus, the Murid brotherhood has proven its mettle as state builders even beginning from the period of French colonial rule. As the movement increased in membership and continually refined in doctrine and ideology, many aristocrats and royalty sympathetically won over to their cause. Therefore, the Murids became gradually integrated as the masses and found shelter in various villages, communities and urban centres of Senegal (Catherine, 2003).

The influence of the Murids in contemporary Senegal has been great indeed. For many believe that political support and the attainment of power cannot be entirely successful without the impact of the Murid brotherhood. For, the politicians have courted the support and partnership of the Murid brotherhood for their success in general elections through the

mass mobilisation, spread and reach by the Marabouts of the religion. At the social and political level too, the religious leaders of Muridism are believed to possess power and influence through their adoption of Islamic sciences and magic. This has also led to a large and influential following cutting across various sections and classes in Senegal and Gambia. It is known that several private citizens, government officials and politicians seek their partnership and friendship in demand for magical and fetish power in political struggles, government service and the private business sectors. Therefore, the Murids, especially their Marabouts, have used this influence in acting as intermediaries in the development of Senegal. But their influence has also continued to be felt in the highest office of the land as the former President Abdoulaye Wade was a member of the Murid Islamic movement (Tim, 2011).

The Murids' influence in the economic life of Senegal has been felt in their production and cultivation of groundnuts and other agricultural products. Thus, since the cash crops era of French colonial rule, the Murids agricultural output has led to an advantageous position in the market economy and the national scheme of things of Senegal. Between the religious leaders and the followers of the order, land and cultivation of groundnuts have led to certain aspects of feudalism which has in turn led to mass production and monopoly held by the Murid brotherhood. This development has generally placed the Murid brotherhood at the centre of Senegal's national economy and has also placed its members at a well-established position in Senegal and the Gambia. In addition, at the cultural level, there has been great bondage and cooperation through common brotherhood and support of the secular state and social order in all ramifications. Through artists such as Youssou N'Dour, the brotherhood also has representation in popular culture that has been recognised internationally (Cheik, 2005).

Islamic Movements in Africa since 1883

Apart from Muridism, various Islamic movements such as Mahdism with influences in Sammaniya, Wahabiya, the Sadisiya of Morocco, the Quadiriyya and the Sannusiya in North Africa, the Tijanniya, and many others, have influenced developments in Africa. These have forged and shaped developments in nationalism, community development, socio-economic and political development and cooperation, and various state building efforts, not only in Senegal and the Gambia, but throughout Africa. Ultimately, these Islamic movements in their militant resistance and struggle for self-determination in the face of violent European imperialist conquest of the African continent especially in the 19[th]centurywere instrumental to the spread of early forms of nationalism in the Muslim-dominated pre-colonial and colonial states of Africa (Basil, 1974).

The influence and inspiration of these Islamic movements have also laid the foundations and established the militant traditions upon which the modern nationalist movements and liberation struggles were built, nurtured and solidified across the African continent. In the independence era, these movements also contributed to various sectors of the entities and polities of African states. Thus, as Ali Mazrui has asserted, in the gallery of Africa's resistance

to imperial conquest, domination and control, and the capacities for independent state building, the Islamic movements' successful struggle for recognition has occupied a privileged position in the various processes for the development of the African continent.But as Basil Davidson has noted, the time of their emergence and the level of development of the African continent within the period, diminished this impact in the light of imperialism and the varied ideological struggles for modernity in the post-independence era of African history (Ali, 1987).

Conclusion

The Islamic movements in Africa such as Muridism in Senegal and the Gambia and others are many responses that the Africans made towards their indigenous development and international interactions within and outside the continent. These particular responses laid a pattern and the structures for future liberation struggles in those countries particularly, and the rest of the continent in general. This paper presented the general ideology of these movements, their strategies for the development of their immediate communities and the state at large. It has presented these movements as significant in the latter indigenous African struggles for freedom and self-determination in leadership and statecraft in both colonial and the post-colonial periods. The paper finally dwelt upon the significance of these movements in Africa's long history of religion, faith and the forging of nations, with Islamic standard bearers in the struggle for an indigenous knowledge system for the independent development of the continent.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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