INTRODUCTION

MAKING AND RE-MAKING MOSQUES IN SENEGAL

SENEGAL, colonie française faisant partie de l’Afrique-Occidentale: 1.318 000 h. (Sénégalais ou Sénégalien) sur 195.000 kilom, carr., sans compter [sic.] les États nègres protégés: capit. Saint Louis: v. r.; Bakel, Dakar, Gorée, Rufisque, Thiès—Visité par les Français dans la seconde partie du xve siècle, le Sénégal fut exploité par des compagnies à partir de Richelieu. Le gouverneur André Brué y jeta les fondements d’un sérieux établissement colonial de 1697 à 1723; mais après lui s’écoula une période d’inertie, parfois même d’occupation anglaise, Faidherbe, gouverneur du Sénégal de 1854 à 1865, sut asseoir solidement notre domination, soumit diverses tribus récalcitrantes, organisa l’administration, fit construire des routes. A partir de 1876, un but nouveau a été poursuivi avec succès par les administrateurs qui se sont succédé dans la colonie: la pénétration au Soudan par le Niger, qu’un chemin de fer relie au Sénégal.1

Senegal’s diverse cultural influences straddling Atlantic and Saharan trade routes make it at once a Sahelian and an Atlantic country. The former came about through the trans-Saharan trade and the latter through its early commercial ties with Europe, later giving way to the slave trade. The interconnectedness of the region through commercial exchanges in both directions (North-South and West-East) is crucial to the understanding of religious, cultural and political phenomena spanning over a millennium in West Africa. The present study, based on several fieldtrips, focuses on the upper half of Senegambia: from the north-eastern, Sahelian region of Futa Toro to the peninsula of Cap Vert on the Atlantic coast and as far East as Touba (Map 1) Within this geographical delimitation, I have concentrated on mostly urban centres (Dakar, Saint-Louis, Touba, Thiès) and zoomed into smaller rural settlements around Podor in Futa Toro and Jenne in Mali.

Senegal is home to different ethnic groups, the largest of which consists of Wolof (42,7%) who mostly inhabit the north-west of Senegal, Serer (14,9%) usually found in the south of Sine Saloum, Futanke

(pl. Futankobe), Peul or Fulbe \(^2\) (14.5\%) of Futa Toro. These groups are related linguistically as are the group including the Soninke, Maninka/Malinka, who were associated with the empires of Ghana and Mali. Finally, there are the Jola/Diola of Casamance who inhabit the south-east of the country and the Lebu of Cap Vert (less than 0.8\%). \(^3\) Reflecting my field trips to central and northern Senegal, my study correspondingly focuses on Wolof, Sereer and Peul ethnicities although it is worth mentioning that the vast majority of my informants from in and around Dakar are thoroughly Wolofised, Wolof being their default or even main language. \(^4\)

As the predominant religion of Senegal is Islam—it accounts for some 95\% of Wolof society—it seems fair to say that in many ways it defines Senegalese identity. Granted, Senegalese Islam tends to be defined and characterised by the *turūq* or brotherhoods but according to Gellar, “Although Islamic and Western influences have done much to shape modern Senegal, the Senegalese people remain deeply attached to traditional Black African values and world views.” \(^5\) What I hope to illustrate in the ensuing chapters is that the attachment to Islam and the consequential rise in conversions to the religion beg to differ with such a view. The entrenchment of Islam, I argue, is so deep that Senegalese identity is commensurate with Muslim identity. Indeed in the words of Cheikh Hamidou Kane author of *L’aventure ambigue*, “if Islam is not the only religion in West Africa, it comes first in importance...it is the religion of its heart.” \(^6\)

How Senegalese Muslim identity is defined depends largely on whether local or extra-local forms of Islam are incorporated into practices and beliefs. Moreover this preoccupation with ‘which Islam’ is not confined to Senegal or West Africa for here in London, just as much as in Senegal, it is not uncommon for *ʿĪd ul-Fitr* to be celebrated on three separate days. This is because there is no consensus on

\(^2\) Known as ‘Toucouleurs’ by the French, they speak Pulaar, hence they are also called *hal-pulaaren*, those who speak Pular.


\(^4\) There are some 37 languages spoken in Senegal of which twelve are official. See ethnologue.com.
