

## Islam: A Solidarity Factor in West African History

Omar Jah

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to refute the prevailing notion that Islam serves as a disunity factor in West African history. The concept of Islamic solidarity could be traced to the decision of the Prophet to send the first group of his Companions to the Negus, the King of Abyssinia and the receptive disposition of the Negus during the Islamic theological stage. Later, in the city of Medina Islam began to promote a triple ideological outlook with practical socio-economic and political solutions to the world. The paper has adopted a theoretical arm-chair research approach. The concept of Islam as a solidarity factor in West African history has been examined at two main levels: solidarity against Western secular ideology as a force of decolonization and as a force of de-neo-colonization. It focuses on the *sufi* experience in the Senegambia Region, critically looking into three main forms of resistance: The Umar al-Futio and Maba Jakhou's militant, the Bamba's *Muridi* confrontational servitude and the *Tijaniyyah* pacific intellectual approach. It concludes that even though a militant approach was used in promoting the Islamic beliefs, the mechanism later settled on three *sufi* basic principles of education, *daarah*, mosque, *Jakkah*, and farming, *tool*.

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## **Introduction**

Islam is the *din*<sup>1</sup>, translated in English as religion, of Allah; it is the communication of holistic guidance between Allah and His human servants on earth. It is against the creational logic that the human being is guided and ever since Adam first came to the earth, this line of communication never stopped. Every folk received a guide in a sequential pattern (*Surah Ra'd*, 13:7). However, due to the nature of forgetfulness of mankind, ignorance kept repeating itself throughout generations. The coming of the Prophet Muhammad, had shown that the laws of Islam that was promoted by Prophet Abraham were already tampered in many ways and again ignorance continued to perpetuate. This era was known as *jahiliyyah*, ignorance, or pre-Islamic polytheistic era, which can be characterized as: entertainment of primitive concept of God, rampant tribalism, disrespect for women and children and absence of an organized authority. The Prophet Muhammad was tasked to substitute the *jahiliyyah* worldview with a monotheistic Islamic doctrine taking a more universal approach to his Islamic teachings. Islam at this level was recommunicated in the year (610 A.D) from its inception and Muhammad, was vehemently and confrontationally opposed in Mecca by his own brothers and sisters from the tribe of Quraysh. Even though the Meccan tribes had many differences and used to engage in long wars against one another, the only thing they all had in common now was to unite in solidarity against Islam and its followers, which, to the Prophet, was some good news that calls for divine planning. The Meccans at the time were dominantly pagans and idol worshippers; they stood very firm to defend paganism against the new faith. The first thing that Islam created in the Arab mindset was unity amongst warring tribes in a polytheistic solidarity. As the Prophet's message and attitude became more appealing to pure reasoning, refined logic and to the defense of the oppressed, his call attracted the attention of the Meccans day by day. Islam became the melting pot and a source of universal homogeneity for the poor, the destitute, and the people of different colors and creed, languages and ethnicities. The likes of Bilal, who originally from Abyssinia, presently Ethiopia, Salman, from Persia, and Suhaib, from the Roman Empire etc. all had embraced the new religion.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *din* and its derivatives can be reduced into four meanings: *indebtedness*, *submissiveness*, *judicious power* and *natural inclination or tendency*; in Arabic Language and in the language of the Holy Qur'an, the term is more holistic than the term religion as developed in the wombs of Western Christian civilization. See Syed Muhammad al-Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, (Kuala Lumpur: Art Printing Works Sdn Bhd, 1978) p.48

Therefore, if one analyses the two periods of Mecca, 13 years of continuous suffering by the Prophet and his vulnerable disciples is symbolically represented in history and divine wisdom. Prior to the coming of Muhamad (pbuh), there was what I may call tribal polytheism or polytheistic tribalism. I strongly believe that the symbolism here serves two purposes, (a)reduction of camps into two: a monotheistic camp of the new faith and polytheistic camp of the old system, and(b) gradual consolidation of solidarity in both camps.

### **Africa, Islam, and the Early Eastern Christian Solidarity**

Due mainly to St Paul's attempt and failure to Christianize the West and its counter-productive results of Westernization of Christianity, history has proven that compared with Western Christianity, during the Meccan period and even long before that, Eastern Christianity (Coptic church) was more receptive to Islam than the Western Christianity. A series of attitudes and actions from different Christian monks proved that Eastern Christianity formed an early alliance with Islam in the form of *pacifc religious solidarity* against paganism.<sup>2</sup> However, the most obvious of this pacific alliance was the position of the Negus, the then Christian King of Abyssinia, towards the first batch of Muslim Meccan migrants.

### **Solidarity: A Definition**

It is necessary at this juncture to attempt to come up with a simple and workable definition of solidarity against which the subsequent line of activities can be measured. By solidarity, we simply mean "a feeling of unity between people who have the same interests or goals (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/>).” In his *Muqaddimah*, Prolegomena, Ibn Khaldun discusses the theory of solidarity, using the Arabic word *asabiyah*. In his translation of this book, Franz Rosenthal translates the term *asabiyah* as group feeling” (Arefkemel Abdullah, 2014) whereas other scholars like Baali translates it as “collective consciousness.” This feeling of unity may emerge from common features, shared values, or shared status. It may also manifest itself in a verbal

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<sup>2</sup>The attitude of Baheerah, the Busra Christian monk, who saved the 12-year-old Muhammad during a trip with his uncle destined to Syria and the passion of Waraqah b. Nawfal, the cousin of the mother of the faithful, Khadijah, when consulted by the latter at the beginning of the prophecy to explain the frightening incident of the Angel Gibril appearing before the Prophet, these in my opinion, represented the beginning of Islamic solidarity.

or actual form in defense of physical, economic, spiritual or intellectual insecurities. The following stand from the Negus fits the concept of collective consciousness for shared religious values in defense of spiritual or monotheistic insecurity.

### **Islam of Theological Stage and Eastern Christian Solidarity**

Islam reached Africa through Ethiopia during its initial stage of theological development long before reaching Yathrib, which was renamed al-Medinah.<sup>3</sup> In the Month of Rajab, the fifth year of the prophecy, corresponding to 615 A.D., the first group of 12, followed by 83 companions led by Ja'far b. Abi Talib. They migrated to Abyssinia running away from the persecution of Quraysh.

When the news of their migration broke out, the Quraysh decided to send two emissaries: 'Amr b. 'Aas and Abdullah b. Abi Rabi'ah to convince the Negus to extradite them back to Mecca. The following quotation is an exchange between the emissaries from the Quraysh tribe, the refugees and the Negus. It clearly shows the degree of Islamic pacific solidarity at an early stage. In a meeting summoned by the Negus, 'Amr b. 'Aas, in an attempt to convince the Negus, addressed him with the following quotation:

Your majesty!

A group of lunatic boys has sought refuge in your country; they have abandoned the religion of their forefathers and have not converted to your religion, they have come with a new religion of their innovation, which neither we nor you have any knowledge of. So, we are emissaries from the dignitaries of their parents sent to you in order to take them back home (Safiyyu al-Rahman, 1994).

In response to this claim, which was supported by some priests in the Negus' circle, the King invited the other side to put their case across. In putting their case, Ja'far addressed the King as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> *Yathrib* was consciously renamed *al-Medinah* to serve as the source of light and the reference point for civility. It was from that center that a constitution was designed. In this constitution, the Prophet reciprocated Negus' solidarity stand by concluding agreement with the Christians of Najran and by even declaring the Jews as an ummah, a community, with Muslims. See the Constitution of Medina as edited by Muhammad Hamidoulah.

Your majesty

We were people of ignorance, who used to worship idols, to eat dead animals, used to commit adultery, and to disregard kinship, we used to harm our neighbors, and the powerful amongst us used to exploit and persecute the weak; that was our life-style until Allah sent to us a prophet from amongst ourselves, whose lineage, honesty and sincerity are well known to us; he invited us to worship Allah alone, to abandon the stones and idols, which we and our parents used to worship, commanding us to be truthful, trustworthy, preserving kinship and observing good neighborliness, to abstain from committing abomination, perjury, defamation and shedding of blood; he has equally commanded us to establish prayer, paying alms and fasting. We have believed in him and obeyed his commandments, to worship Allah alone, for which our people have antagonized us, persecuted and punished us in order to take us back to idol-worshipping and involvement in abomination. It is because of our refusal to yield to their demands that we have been subjugated and humiliated; and as a result, we have sought refuge in your country, we have resorted to you and to no one else, and have found security at your side; we are optimistic that we would not be unfairly treated at your majesty's side. (Safiyu al-Rahman, 1994)

Having listened attentively to both sides, the Negus, further asked Ja'afar to provide a proof about the validity of his argument by quoting a reference from the new faith. Upon that request, Ja'far read from the beginning of the *Surah* of Mary, 19:1. Having attentively listened to the recitation, the Negus and many of his priests could not hold their tears; they all wept and the Negus then said: "Indeed, this message {Islam} and that which came down to us from Jesus Christ emanates from the same niche; I swear I will not hand them over to you." He then asked the two emissaries to leave the meeting.

It may look awkward to speak of Islamic solidarity in such cases. However, the puzzle can be explained if one compares the contents of the two quotations in terms of philosophy of religion as well as in terms of authenticity on one side against the then Eastern Christianity on the other. The response from Ja'far first exposed the pagan nature of the Meccan religion and confirmed the monotheistic nature of the new religion. The then Eastern Christianity was still monotheistic, and that was what the Negus confirmed and used it as the basis for his solidarity with the Muslims.

To reciprocate this form of solidarity, one is reminded of the fact that the Negus was the only person the Prophet rendered his honor of giving funeral prayer, when the news of the former's death reached him. Of course, the record indicates that the Negus accepted Islam prior to his death upon an invitation to Islam which was sent by the Prophet to him and to a number of world leaders (Raheeql Makhtoum, p. 395). It is from this Prophetic action that the jurists have deduced the acceptability of distant funeral prayer.

Both the Negus' declaration and the Prophetic action are indicative of one important reality which is the fact that at the emergence of Islam, the Eastern Christianity was still largely preserved in its pure form. This is further confirmed by the records of the correspondence between the Prophet and other world leaders. The records show that unlike the Western Christian leaders like the Roman Emperor who tore the letter of invitation to Islam from the Prophet, the Eastern Christian leaders like the Egyptian King expressed high regard and lenience to a similar letter sent to them.

### **Islam: A Jurisprudential, Mystical and Civilizational Stage**

Years after Abyssinia, in 624 A.C., Islam was introduced to *Yathrib*, renamed Medina, denoting holistic civilizational worldview: its theological, jurisprudential, and mystical combinations; offering Islamic independence and sovereignty, providing practical socio-economic and political solutions to the world. From Medina, the city of civility and refinement, Islam spread across the world through the soft and hard powers. It is, however, important to note that the geographical expansion of Islam from Medina was faster than its intellectual expansion, which seemed to have affected the efficiency and endurance of the Islamic epistemology as enshrined in the Holy Qur'an and as exposed by the Prophet. The nature of this new socio-economic and political phase of Islam, and the slow pace of intellectual expansion have its bearing on the dynamics of the subsequent development of Islam in the Senegambia area.

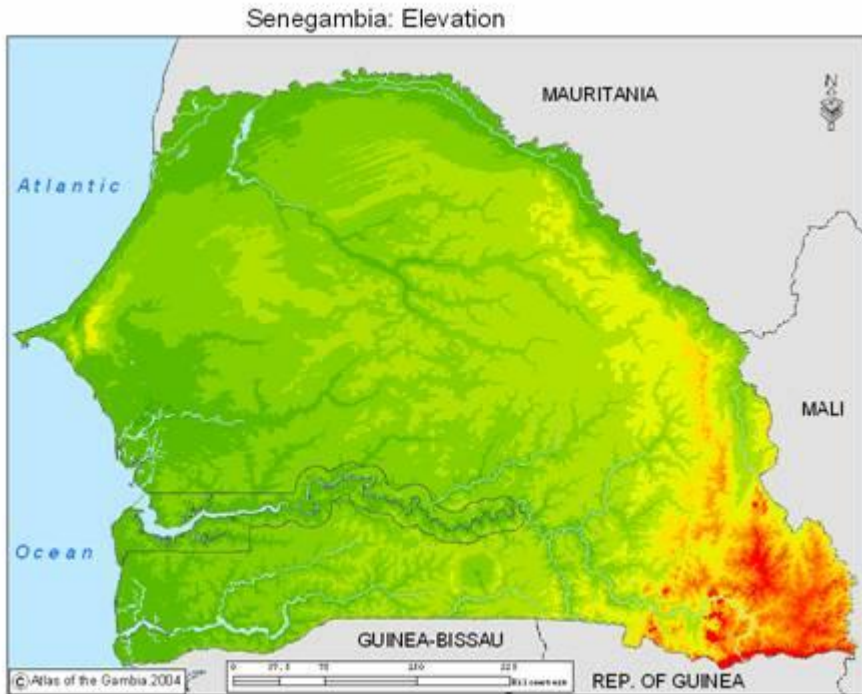
### **Senegambia, Islam and Forms of Solidarity**

#### **Senegambia**

The name Senegambia was used by the British as early as 1765 to refer to their settlements on St. Louis and the Island of Gorée in Senegal as well as the British settlements on James Island in The Gambia. The word was in use until 1783 when the Treaty of Versailles returned St Louis to Senegal ([www.accessgambia.com/](http://www.accessgambia.com/)

information/senegambia-meaning.html). The word Senegambia came into greater usage with the creation of the Confederation of Senegal and The Gambia on the 1st February, 1982.

Literature review has shown that there is little written history about the present-day Senegambia before the arrival of Europeans around 1450s. Before this date, a number of independent kingdoms settled in the area between the Present Senegal and Gambia rivers. The Wolof and Serer Kingdoms primarily settled in Western Senegal north of Gambia River; the Jola and the Bainoungas inhabited Kombo. Around AD 1000, people from the east, the Sarahule, Mandinka and Fula settled along the Gambia River in towns and villages and the Tukulor settled in central and eastern Senegal ([www.colombia.edu/~msj42/senegambia.htm](http://www.colombia.edu/~msj42/senegambia.htm)).



Portuguese are said to be the first European sailors to arrive in the region in 1455, and until 16<sup>th</sup> century, they had a trade monopoly between the Senegal and Gambian rivers. Later, Dutch, French and British displaced the Portuguese, trading salt, iron, beads, firearms and gunpowder for ivory, beeswax, gold and slaves. For trade accessibility and river navigability both James Island of the Gambia and St Louis of

Senegal were developed to control the trade in the area. The French and the British displaced the Portuguese at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The British settled in Bathurst Island (Banjul), the capital of the present Gambia, in 1820 and the French settled in Dakar, the capital of present Senegal, in 1857 ([www.colombia.edu/~msj42/senegambia.htm](http://www.colombia.edu/~msj42/senegambia.htm)). Between 1890 and 1900 both powers expanded their rule across the territories.

The European expansion in the area during the geopolitical multi-polar system can be described as “*economically and ethnically confrontational but religiously harmonious*”. With their many differences, what they all had in common was to unite in solidarity not only against Africans but against Islam as well. Furthermore, introduction and spreading into Senegambia of Christianity as developed in the wombs of Western civilization was what created a religious harmony amongst them.

However, to capture the forms of the Islamic solidarity in Senegambia against the pagan, African traditional religions and Christian secular forces, the earlier phase of history must be captured. Long before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1455, Islam reached the Senegambia as early as A.D. 1040. By the tenth century, some of the Sanhaja Berbers of the Western Sahara already reverted to Islam. And by the eleventh century, Islam had spread onward to the Senegal valley where at least one Muslim ruler is reported as early as A.D. 1040.

This date and other earlier dates are cited in the literature and supported by accounts from a number of authoritative historians such as al-khwarizmi<sup>4</sup> and al-Bakri, who gave a description of the capital city of the Ghana Empire in a work he published in 1068 A.C. when he provides:

*The city of Ghana consists of two towns situated on a plain. One of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims is large and possesses 12 mosques, in one of which they assembled for Friday prayer. There are salaried imams and muezzins as well as jurists and scholars. In the environs are wells with sweet water from which they drink and with which they grow vegetables (Bakri, 2001)*

This description shows that Islam was already entrenched in Ghana during 11<sup>th</sup> century alluding to the possibility of an arrival date much earlier than that. This possibility is supported by other accounts. As earlier mentioned, according to other accounts, Islam

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<sup>4</sup> His name is Muhammad b. Musa al-khwarizmi (780-850) mathematician of the century of the Abbasid Caliph, Mamun



reached the Savanah Region, as early as 850 A.C., during the Dya' ogo Kingdom of *Tekrur* referred to as the land of the black Muslims.

In his work, *culture and customs of Gambia*, Abdulaye Saine mentions two distinct periods, 11-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which witnessed a slow pace of spread of Islam conducted mainly by the clerics and 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by the traders and others in seemingly a faster pace when he says:

*The spread of Islam and the resulting distribution of Muslim communities in West Africa came in two waves broadly speaking. The first wave during the 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, saw Islam spread slowly with the process led by clerics; Islam was then spread by traders among others in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Saine, 2012)*

However, the first wave cited above seems to have started earlier with the Dya 'ogo dynasty as earlier stated and the second wave represents the wave of al-Haji 'Umar Taal of Futa and his students and disciples from MabaDiakhou Bah to the present *Muridiyyah* and *Tijaniyyahsufi* schools. The following is an account of both stages.

### **Stage One**

The ancestors of the Tukulor founded *Tekrur* probably as early as 2,000 years ago. The significance of *Tekrur* is illustrated by the fact that early Arabic scholars of the Western Sudan described the whole area as "The Land of *Tekrur* ([www.accessgambia.com/information.futa-toro.html](http://www.accessgambia.com/information.futa-toro.html)). The Dya 'ogo Dynasty came to rule around 850 A.D. to be replaced by the Mandinka's Manna dynasty around 980 A.D.

It is believed that the Manna's Jihadist King, *War-Jabi*, who ruled in the 1030s and died in 1040 was the first king who reverted to Islam in the Western Sahara. He also forced his subjects to convert as well as introduced Sharia Law within the empire in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. A Muslim Jihadist named Abdullah Ibn Yasin, who was fleeing from persecution under the Sanhaja Berbers, sought sanctuary in the Senegal Valley. From here his teachings emphasized the need for a Jihad against the areas dominated by non-Muslims. Over the time he attracted a loyal and dedicated number of followers, particularly from the Lamtuna branch of the Sanhaja.

Leb, son of War Jabi, envisioned that there could be economic and political benefits for *Tekrur* if Abdullah Ibn Yasin was given military backing against the Berbers, Sanhaja, Mesufa and Goddala. These groups controlled the trading routes up to the north as well as the trading route from the Ghana Empire. *Tekrur* could expand

its power to Goddala which lay to the north. Ibn Yasin, with his followers transformed into a militant Islamic movement called the Almoravids. This movement collaborated with Tekrur to wage a holy war that led to the eventual conquest of Kumbi Sallah (Ghana's capital) in 1076.

*Senegambia, Islam, and the Source of Militancy.*

One may be interested in tracing the foundation of Islamic militancy in West Africa. Militant Islam in Western Sahara appeared with the rise of the Murabitun, whose movement led to the fall of ancient Ghana and the establishment of the Almoravid dynasty in the Maghrib and Spain (Curtin, 1971). In the region of Senegambia as discussed earlier, Manna's King, War-Jabi, and Abdullah b. Yasin are the embodiment of militant Islam in West Africa. However, it is important to raise relevant theoretical questions: What creates such militant tendencies in West African Islam? There are always general and specific reasons for religious militancy in West Africa. In my survey of West African Islam, militancy is rationalized on the basis of legitimate defensive militancy and non-legitimate aggressive militancy.<sup>5</sup> One specific reason for militancy in this situation was the reaction to persecution as in the case of Ibn Yasin and War Jabi.

However, the general reason for Islamic militancy can be explained in two main phases of Islam: the theological pacific phase of Mecca shorn of any militancy and hard phase of Medina impregnated with militancy. I already stated that this second phase of Islam combined with its fast geographical expansion and a slow pace of intellectual expansion has its significant bearing on the dynamics of the Islamic revolution in the Senegambia region.

Generally speaking, the Islamic international relations are largely regulated by the Medina phase, which has always been perceived as a source of tension in the world system dynamics. This was what led to clash of civilisation.

This dichotomy cuts across time and space; it still generates questions such as whether an Imam can be involved in politics? This is still debatable among many non-experts in the field of comparative law. The dichotomy did even appear in the physical

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<sup>5</sup>Freedom of belief is a fundamental human right in Islam. Out of many verses, two stand out to protect this aspect of human right: *al-Baqarah*, 2:256, and *al-Ahzab*, verse 72 "**Let there be no compulsion in religion**", and **we did indeed offer the trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it..., but man undertook it**" respectively. These verses distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate militancy.

lay-out of the Capital of ancient Ghana. Kumbi Salleh, the capital city of Ghana was divided into two sections: one part pagan and administrative, the other part Muslim and mercantile (Curtin, 1971).

It is against this dichotomy that the Negus' Christian-Islamic passive solidarity, firstly at its theological level, which was closer and easier to entertain by Judeo- Christian experience as well as his acceptance of the Medina phase, which was far from Judeo- Christian practical experience must be evaluated.

With the Westernization of Christianity, the Islamic Christian passive solidarity had to stop at its infantile age and give the religious harmony amongst the economically competing European powers in West Africa. Confrontation between Islam and Christianity in Senegambia was unavoidable during the colonial and neo-colonial eras. This created potential tension and as a result, much had to be done by both Muslims and Christians to replicate and adopt the Negus' form of religious solidarity in the Senegambia.

### ***Stage Two***

The history of Senegambian Islam has witnessed three forms of solidarity: militant, confrontational servitude and passive intellectual solidarities. Al-hajj Omar of Futa Jallon and MabaDiakhoubah of Niore belong to the first category; Chiekh Ahmadou Bamba of Touba belongs to the second, and Alhajj Malik Sy of Tivaon belongs to the last Group.

### ***Alhaji 'Umar Taal<sup>6</sup> and Maba Diakhoubah and the "mission civilisatrice"<sup>7</sup>.***

As mentioned earlier, the scramble for Africa took place during the geopolitical multi-polar system. Even though the Portuguese were the first to arrive in the Senegambia in 1455, competition for economic domination amongst the then European superpowers led to the scramble for Africa 1880-1914. In this unfortunate fragmentation of Africa, France had a lion share. And at the height of her dominant influence in West Africa, France territorial control was far ahead of other colonial forces.

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<sup>6</sup> His name is 'Umar b. Sa'id Tall; he was born in 1794 at Halwar in Futa Toro and died in February 1864, having journeyed to Mecca, he received the honorific title of "Alhajj" and was later vested as the Tijani *khalifah* for Western Sudan.

<sup>7</sup> Mission *Civilisatrice* refers to the French Cultural Policy in the Middle East 1860-1914.

France is selected and used here as a sample of Western secular forces against which both Alhajj ‘Umar and Almamy Maba had militantly confronted. The word “*mission civilisatrice*” is a French word, which means the French mission to civilize other nations. The French used this concept to justify their colonial hegemony over Africans. In his Article, *Toucouleur Resistance to French Imperialism*, Erving E. Beaugregard describes the Toucouleur Muslims as indigenous warriors, heroes and remarkable champions against the French expansionist dream (Beaugregard,1984).

As the Prophet’s arrival in Yathrib became an embodiment of civility for Muslims, any claim of civility contrasting to Islamic outlook would have been unacceptable. The present Muslim generation is obviously intellectually impoverished. As for Alhajj ‘Umar, western civilization through colonialism was a sharp contrast to Islamic civilization. This served as the basis of his rejection of the premises of the Western argument rather than their conclusions.

However, there is more in Alhaji‘Umar’s militancy. Unlike many reformists, he travelled extensively, developed an interest in *sufi* doctrines, and was later appointed upon his trip to Mecca as *khalifah*, representing the Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani in West Africa. He also traveled widely in major West African Islamic revolutionary centers such as Sokoto (Nigeria) Masina (Mali), Sine-Saloum (Senegambia). He also settled in Futa Jallon at a place called Dyegouanko. Emulating the Prophet, he embarked on *hijrah* to Dinguiray (Beaugregard,1984, p. 145).

In Futa Jallon, ‘Umar spent ten years teaching his growing numbers of disciples. He was especially renowned for his teaching of jurisprudence, hadith and, of course, Sufism. Many of the oppressed and downtrodden of the region sought refuge under him. Envious of his growing influence, the non-Muslim leaders in the area attacked his settlement in 1852 triggering his militancy. The offensive jihad was first exclusively directed against the non-Muslim Bambara who were very tyrannical to Muslim inhabitants.

Alahagie Umar successfully conquered the Bambara city of Segu in 1861. Following his success, Umar continued to attack Masina who were allied to Bambara non-Muslim against him. He captured the capital, in 1864, touched off a virulent polemic between the supporters of al-Hajj Umar and the supporters of Masina. The latter included the scholars of Timbuktu (Mahibou and Triaud, 1983). By 1854, Shaykh Umar’s mobilization of Futa Toro led to direct conflict with advancing French commercial and military hegemony. To form a convenience alliance with his French rivals, in 1846-1847, he came to an understanding with the French whereby he would pacify the Senegal Valley, and thereby facilitating commercial activities for them.

Besieged on two fronts, Shaykh Umar died in a battle in 1864 near Hamdulillahi. His empire was held together by his son Ahmad until being dismantled by the French some twenty years after the Shaykh's death ([www.tijani.org/al-hajj-umar-al-futital/byZakariyaWright](http://www.tijani.org/al-hajj-umar-al-futital/byZakariyaWright)).

His reform was not only directed against the French civilisatrice scheme, according to Jah (?), his reform was also against what he perceived to have been the rigidity of the traditional jurists (*fuqaha*) in their method of solidarity as well as against the corrupt leadership, which had failed to reform itself before attempting to reform others. In 'Umar's opinion, both temporal and religious authorities had suffered from defective orientation as a result of narrow and rigid interpretation of the Shari'ah by the ulama (Omar Jah, [www.lib.iium.edu.my](http://www.lib.iium.edu.my)). So, by this we can see that Islam and particularly *sufi* experience was the basis of his solidarity. Saine (2012) confirms this by saying, "He succeeded in establishing a theocratic state from Futa Jallon to Timbuktu occupying both sides of the Niger River and converting the Bambara to Islam." He added, "Shiekh 'Umar was killed in a campaign trying to convert his co-ethnic Fula in Massina in 1864."

### ***Alhajj 'Umar's Method of Reform and Basis for Solidarity.***

Like the Prophet, who suffered 13 years of persecution and two migration attempts before being permitted to resort to militancy, to Alhajj 'Umar, Islamic militancy only comes as a last resort. So, to exhaust all other options, al-Hajj 'Umar was able to use two very effective methods of reform (i) spiritual self-discipline (*tarbiyyah* and *ta'lim*) through which thousands of disciples were initiated and (ii) migration, which allowed people to first move from place of insecurity and material temptations to a place of security and less material temptations.

From 1830-1852, al-Hajj Umar used these methods to reform the society; during the period, he instructed his students and disciples to adopt self-discipline and self-control (*jihad al-nafs*) against provocations from adverse forces of the time. He, however, realized later that like the phase of Mecca, mere moral integrity and theological independence were not sufficient in his case to establish a viable Muslim community and protect its interest through the region.

This fact became very obvious to him when his safe place of Dinguiray was attacked in 1852 by Yemba Sakho, the King of Jalunkadungu. It was only after this attack that he adopted militancy (bloody *jihad*) for self-defense against not only the infidels but also against whosoever actively supported them. Military campaign was

conducted by Alhaji‘Umar from 1852-1862 against the Kingdom of Tamba, the Bambara Kingdom of Kaarta and the French in Senegambia. With the army of *sufi* disciples, mostly recruited from his home land, Futa Toro, ‘Umar systematically destroyed the pagan kingdoms, causing so much damage to life and property that his jihad became of the bloodiest in West African History (Jah , 2001).

***Achievements and Failures of Alhaji‘Umar’s Islamic Militant Solidarity.***

‘Umar’s militant approach did yield a number of achievements as well as failures. The following are some of his achievements:

1. converting many Bambara of Segu, Jalunkes of Futa Jallon, Fullanis of Gabu, wolofs and Seerers of Senegambia,
2. Slowing down the European political and cultural encroachment in Western Sudan,
3. breaking the wall of fear and inferiority complex of many people and inspiring other leaders to raise arms against the French and the British in Senegambia,
4. spreading the *Tijaniyyah* order and the Sufi philosophy of resistance through initiation into self-discipline, education, and farming for food security.

However, his militancy suffered the following failures in terms of Islamic solidarity.

1. engagement in bloody confrontation against some other Muslims of Masina under the pretext of them harboring his infidel enemies,
2. occasional alliance of convenience with his French enemies<sup>8</sup>,
3. like the previous era, the geographical expansion of his state was faster than the intellectual expansion,
4. a lack of economic and political plan to stabilize the conquered lands, which led to different uprisings, which weakened the state and led to its final defeat by the French in 1891.

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<sup>8</sup> Like his agreement with Faidherbe in 1860 to give up his influence in Senegambia in return of French giving up their influence in the area of modern Mali. See, Erving E. Beauregard note 26. P 146

### **Mabadiakhou Bah and the Soninke War 1850-1901**

MabaDiakhou Ba or MabaJakhou Bah is a descendant of the Fulani dynasty of Denyankobe from the branch of the Bâ family in the region of Badibou. MabaJakhou Bah combined political and religious goals in an attempt to reform or overthrow previous Soninke monarchies, and resist French encroachment in Senegambia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maba\\_Diakhou\\_Ba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maba_Diakhou_Ba)). Like al-Hajj ‘Umar, as will be seen later, Maba resorted to militancy to react to the provocations of the Chedoes’ brutal attack on Muslims. His jihad revolutionized the states of West Africa at the time of colonialism. MabaDiakhouBâ founded the city of Nioro in Rip; and the village of KeurMabaDiakhou near Kaolack is named for him. An oral account captured in youtube from one of his grandsons, Njogou Bah, states:

Maba originated from Mbanto, in the area of Podor in Senegal. His father’s name was Njogou Ampaateh Bah and her mother’s name was Jakhou Jaye. His father originated from Futa and travelled through Jolof, Baol, Salum and the Gambia; he established a village called Tawakkaltu, 5 kilometers from Nioro, which became known as Makah SaitJakhou where Maba was born in 1809 and started his Quranic education and was later moved to a village called Loncor to pursue his Quranic and other traditional education under a master called BabucarrMbai. Upon his father’s demise in 1853, his brothers asked him to return to deal with the family matters but particularly to deal with a wave of aggression and persecution from the crown slaves or Ceddos of Saloum, the need to his return, however, became pressing when the King of Saloum, Samba LawbeFaal of Kaouneled many ceddos, attacked and killed ‘Umar SohnaNyang of Njigie, burned down its Mosque and killed 50 memorizers of the Holy Qur’an.

During the funeral, Muslims expressed concern about the threat posed by the *Ceddos* and deemed it necessary to unite in Islamic solidarity to protect themselves by any means necessary. After consultation, the choice of leadership fell on Maba who was still pursuing his advanced education in the circle of Babucarr Mbai. Maba was chosen because of his family background, his knowledge and charisma. Maba accepted the invitation and warmed up for the challenge; he first spent some time engaging in *dhikr*, invocation of certain names of Allah, in different formulas, and consulting men of experience in militancy and *sufi* militant strategies. Earlier in 1850, al-Hajj ‘Umar Taal arrived in Sine Saloum to visit Buur Sine Kumba Ndoffene Famak Joof in Diakhaw and later moved to Tabakoto. It was there where Maba was said to have visited him and received from him permission to engage in militancy when necessary.

However, ‘Umar did warn Maba about attacking Sine pre-maturely because of the fact that he did pray for them.

Tafsir Maba remained passive till 1861 when he was attacked by a Soninke group (Mark R. Lipschuts and R Kent Rasmussen, 1989). He defeated them and was later joined by many Muslims in persecuted communities. This included Mandinko, Fulas and Wolofs. His charisma, courage and strong belief in the divine mission attracted many followers and led to many victories in the state of Saloum. He seized Baddibu and drove out its traditional rulers. His advance on Nuimi was repulsed by the British forces. It took several decades of action by his deputy, Amar Faal before Nuimi was finally subdued in the 1880s (Saine,); his military operation in early part of 19<sup>th</sup> century defeated the Wolof state of Cayor and converted its population to Islam, winning the allegiance of its King, LatDior Jobe<sup>9</sup> and winning him over as an ally.

In addition to converting traditional states to Islam, Maba’s forces sought to abolish the traditional caste system of the Wolof and Serer aristocratic state. In unifying with other Muslim forces, West African Jihad aimed *to* end the reign of small kingdoms.

Lat Dior, a military strategist with a wealth of experience in fighting the French, reverted to Islam in Niore in the hands of Maba. His conversion and allegiance to Maba was very pivotal in the defeat of the French by Maba’s forces in Paateh Badjan. However, LatDior’s conversion and allegiance to Maba also triggered the conflict between Maba and the Serers of Sine Saloum in 1867. We have seen earlier that al-Hajj ‘Umar warned him not to attack Sine prematurely. So, based on that instruction it was pre-mature for Maba to engage the Sine Saloum militarily at the time. In his oral account, Njogou Bah stresses that Maba was aware of that reality and as a result, was not expecting to survive that encounter.

Notwithstanding, he was intuited to the effect that his martyrdom in the battle fields of Sine Saloum would mystically lead to peaceful reversion to Islam of its people later in larger numbers. This symbolizes that his blood stained in that soil would serve as faith fertilizer after rainfall.

Very committed to and conscious of the rules of Islamic militancy (jihad), an oral account from the late Serigne Alieu Saho<sup>10</sup> narrates to me that when Maba was

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<sup>9</sup>Lat Dior NgonéLatyrDiop (1842–1886), son of SakhewereSokhnaMbye and the Linguère royal NgonéLatyr Fall, was a 19th-century Damel (king) of Cayor, a Wolof state that is today in south central Senegal.

<sup>10</sup>Alieu Saho, was a former *Qadi* (judge) of the Islamic Court, a historian, jurist, linguistic and poet with a quantitative and qualitative legacy of poetry; he was from Fass Omar Saho in Nuimi, he died in April 2016.



severely wounded in the battlefield, he fell down in a posture, facing the enemy but giving his back to the Qiblah, (not facing Mecca) and disapproving that posture his disciples attempted to change his position to face the Qiblah while dying. However, even though in agony, TafsirMaba disapproved that attempt, quoting the verses 15- 16 of *Surah Anfal*, which says:

O you who believe! When you meet those who disbelieve, in a battle field, never turn your backs to them; and whosoever turns his back on such a day-unless it be a stratagem of war or to retreat to a troop (of his own), he indeed has drawn upon himself wrath from Allah. And his abode is Hell, and worst indeed is that designation.

Consequently, he was left dying facing the enemy in a jihadi posture rather than facing Qiblah. After his death Maba's mystical intuition seems to have come true today, because according to the associations of Imams of Sine, presently there are 75 mosques in the area<sup>11</sup> and the descendants of Maba and the descendants of the King of Sine Saloum are currently intermarrying, indicating the success of TafsirMaba's militant solidarity.

But even after his death, Maba's influence on Lat Dior remained strong; even though he reached some form of agreement with the French forces in 1871 when he was reinstated, Lat Dior was able to affect Islamization of a large segment of Western Senegal before his death while re-engaging the French militarily for insisting on denying them passage through the rail they intended to build for trade reasons (Mark and Kent).

It was also amongst Maba's entourage, influenced by him during this period, two important individuals: Mammour Anta Sally, the father of AhmadouBmaba and the young Bamba himself. This company, as will be seen later, had a bearing on the subsequent Muridi solidarity style.

### **Malik Sy and Passive Intellectual Solidarity**

Malik Sy was born in about 1854 in the village of Gae, near Dagana in Dimar, the province of Futa Toro. He grew up at a time when *Tijaniyyah* order of West Africa was closely associated with the Jihad of the sword and the careers of "Umar and Maba

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<sup>11</sup> This view has been supported by an oral account of Serigne Moustapha Saliou Mbacke when he on a YouTube video confirms that Cheikh Amadou Bamba personally says that the conversion of the King of Saloum was what Maba was looking for when he died in Jihad in Sombo.

(Robinson, 2000). He spent most of the time in his early age in Gae, where his mother Fatimah lived and took care of pupils in a Qur'anic school. Her brother MayoWele who had received his *sufi* initiation from 'Umar Taal was a prominent influence upon Malik. Malik was initiated to the *Tijaniyyah* order by MayoWele and was fully committed to this order. However, Malik Sy's commitment to *Tijaniyyah* order was styled on a passive intellectual solidarity. So, his point of link with and departure from the *Tijaniyyah* order has been described by David Robinson as:

*Malik's family was sedentary and Wolof. They established link to the 'Umarian cause, but primarily at the level of sufi affiliation rather than through participation in the Jihad. Malik Sey sought to keep a peaceful and respectable distance from the 'Umarian cause, break the Tijaniyyah-Jihad connection and establish a Tijaniyyah constituency in a Wolof milieu (Robinson, 2000)*

Departing from the jihadi path of 'Umar and Maba, but living under the same French civilisatrice mission but with less animistic pressure, Malik Sy had only one option left and that was a pursuit of passive intellectual solidarity. His method on intellectual solidarity can be classified into: education, Mosque and farming. And since to educate necessitates getting educated first, like many *sufi* clerics, he passed gradually from being a student into being a teacher from being an initiate of a *sufi* order into being an initiator. Mauritania was then the traditional intellectual center closer to Senegal. Malik Sy traveled to Mauritania, then to Saint Louis, Senegal in 1884 as a religious student. He traveled to Mecca, and then returned to teach at Louga and Pire before establishing a *zāwiya* (religious center) at Tivaouane in 1902, which became a center for Islamic education and culture under his leadership. In Senegal, especially the northern regions of Kajoorand Jolof, the Tijānī Order was spread primarily by Alhajj Malik Sy.

### **His Philosophy and Methodology of Intellectual Solidarity**

It is difficult for any researcher of this limited pages and time to detect his philosophy and methodology. However, reading from Robinson's work, *Paths of Accommodation*, I want to believe that Malik Sy's overall philosophy is captured here:

Unlike some of his contemporaries, he did not participate in jihad, express any significant political ambition, develop close relations with traditional courts or establish a reputation for performing miracles (Robinson, 2000).

Abstinence from jihad here means from minor jihad (war) and not from major jihad (self-control), by political ambition, it means avoiding involvement in real politics for personal reasons, which resulted in him distancing himself from the traditional courts in order to secure respect from the secular political leadership. It seems that Malik was very much aware of the thorny and stormy history between governance and jurisprudence in Islam. The case of Imam Malik b. Anas and others with their governments must have still been fresh in his memory. Any learned scholar especially in the sense of Islam has a propagation mission to execute with wisdom and beautiful words. However, it is the last portion, “abstinence from performing miracle”, that I want to expand further. In one of his poems, Malik Sy says, “*Innalkaraamaatihydunlirrijaali i.e.Indeed performing of miracles (by a saint) is likened to a woman in menstruation*”

By this utterance, Malik Sy is drawing the attention of his disciples and the society at large to his conviction that life and success, especially in the face of the French mission *civilisatrice*, cannot be built on miracles but on reason, intellection, planning and sweats. This view on insignificance of miracles has been generally shared by many other *sufi* masters like AhmadouBambaMbacke who also refers to his *ink* and *pens* (*midadiwaaqlami*), meaning his writings, as his real miracle rather than other aspects of super natural performances, which sometimes occur out of necessity. This stand is traceable to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) whose real miracle is the Holy Qur’an.

However, even though this is a shared value, compared with AhmadouBambaMbacke, we can clearly see and hear the talk of miracles featuring more with the Muridi literature and public opinion than the Maliki *Tijaniyah* literature and public opinion. The secret behind this lies in the difference between their two styles of solidarity: Maliki’s passive intellectual and Bamba’s confrontational servitude.

Malik Sy’s above stated philosophy is theoretically scattered in his works. He had many works on poetry, treatise on law, theology and pedagogy, and it is economically manifested in agricultural labor and farming. The period between 1895-1900 was pivotal in consolidating his network of disciples. It is called the period of Ndiarnde. He took his entire family and key disciples to Ndiarnde, investing heavily in teaching and agricultural labor as he did in earlier years in Gandiole. He had fields at Diaksaw and Fass where they grew millet for their own consumption and peanuts for exportation.

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