Islamic religiosity is a phrase that often conjures up images of patriarchal societies, conservative, bordering repressive moral tenets, angry demonstrations, and even violence. With an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in 2013, there are individuals and clerics whose teachings and adherents fit elements of these descriptions, but many Muslim sects express their religiosity in very different ways. The Mourides, a Sufi Sunni sect indigenous to Senegal, is a growing religious order with prodigious financial resources and a strongly centralized power structure derived from spiritual origins without any violent tendencies.

The Mouride creed depends on a fierce devotion of the talibee or, follower, to one’s marabout, or spiritual leader. Marabouts are descendants of Mouridism’s founder, Amadu Bamba, and each marabout has their own following within specific geographic regions in Senegal. The marabouts are organized in a powerful hierarchy, their seniority based on their relation to Amadu Bamba; the Grand Marabout stands at the apex. The deep reverence that followers of a marabout have for his ndiguels, or commands, is particular to Mouridism and is at the heart of the Mourides’ rise to power in Senegal. The spiritual authority of marabouts is derived from the Quranic scripture “O you who believe, obey God, obey the messenger and those in authority” (4:59), the belief that material achievements are manifestations of spiritual blessing, and the firm belief that marabouts have the ability to understand and interpret the divine. Also, a central practice for Mourides is addiya, or donation to the religious order. Traditionally, addiya took shape as one day’s labor in a field dedicated to the marabout; however, due to the expansion of Mouridism into non-rural economies, addiya now can take the form of a cash donation. In theory, this gift is voluntary, in reality the spiritual authority of a marabout’s requests is tantamount to a command.
violent jihad that Western governments and societies associate with Islam.

The third element fundamental to the Mourides’ economic success is the city of Touba, which has specific economic, political, and spiritual connotations for the Mourides. These connotations allow Touba to flourish as a marketplace and a commercial hub for Mouride traders across the world. Since the 17th century, Mouride marabouts and their families have accumulated land that went untaxed by the regional political establishment, creating a parallel economy and education system existing outside the purview of the secular authorities. While other independent religious city-states continue to exist in Senegal, Touba is by far the largest, with an estimated 620,000 residents in 2010. The city uses its adherents’ addiya to pay for its school system, healthcare, municipal expenses and, until late 20th century, its water and electricity. In 2008, the city of Touba received more than US $20 million in remittances tax free, which is equal to two times the allotted budget for Senegal’s Ministry of Agriculture!

Touba has its own legal structure governing all but the most serious of crimes committed in the city and also enforces moral norms that derive from religious law, such as not smoking. This environment, coupled with the constant return of the Mouride diaspora who come to consult their marabout, makes it an excellent site for trading. The yearly Magal, or pilgrimage to Touba, attracts more than one million visitors from all over the world and is considered by many adherents as a spiritual substitute for a pilgrimage to Mecca, especially for those who cannot afford such a trip. Though this view may not be publically endorsed by the clerics, it has not been disputed either. This combination of a tax-free zone, wide interaction between Mouride followers in Touba, and the marabouts’ global networks makes Touba key to the success of the Mouride economy.

The fourth cornerstone of the Mourides’ economic success is the priority given to the achievements of the group over those of the individual. This community focus reflects traditional rural Wolof culture; the Wolofs being the predominant ethnic group that makes up the majority of Mourides. The late Professor William Foltz said of Wolof traditional culture, “Money is important only as something to display or give away, not as something to be sought for itself,” but the religious connotation this cultural norm is given in Mouridism is distinctive. There is a strong belief that material success is generated through baraka by one’s marabout, who are believed to reflect God’s will. When material success occurs, it is widely interpreted as a result of following God’s will and enjoying God’s favor rather than individual genius. It is this sense of religious obligation that has allowed this norm to continue despite the urbanization and modernization of Mouride society. Additionally, many of Bamba’s proverbs exhort followers to live modestly and to not risk peace or security for possible material gain. This pressure to be selfless, humble, and avoid conflict is clearly demonstrated by the example of Mouride immigrants in Italy where they have by and large earned good civic reputations. This is surprising in a society where both Africans and Muslims are often negatively stereotyped, but acts as an example of Islamic religiosity profoundly influencing people in a way that is seen positively, even by a Western culture.

Along with this social expectation, marabouts propagate the belief that static wealth has no value, so available money is constantly being shared and used by the wider Mouride community through their marabout’s networks. Amadu Bamba is said to have rejected personal wealth in favor of contributing to community coffers. Following his example is a religious expectation. The collection of money within the dahiras provides capital and insurance against failure for Mourides. The spiritual obligation to share and use wealth immediately also promotes a sense of trust within the community in a country where trust in state institutions is lacking. Touba itself plays a role in demonstrating an example of community
The marabouts all live in Touba, Senegal, the capital of Mouridism that acts as the epicenter for the religious doctrine and economic influence fundamental to the four to five million faithful Mourides world-wide. The influence of the city on Mouridism and its adherents cannot be overstated. It is in Touba that marabouts host their talibee who come to seek advice and baraka, or blessings for one's personal or professional life. Touba is the center for the trading empire that Mourides have built throughout the world. While two thirds of Touba's residents are professionally involved in trade, it is the marabouts that are the epicenters of networking between Mourides from different places and from different areas of employment. It is estimated that up to 30% of a Mouride emigrant's income is spent on phone calls to Touba, underlining the significance of Touba to Mourides. Centralization of the Mouride brotherhood in Touba is legitimized partly by Touba's spiritual identity and relics, which are subjects of pilgrimage. Another reason for the concentration of Mouride leadership in Touba is the focus and example of Amadu Bamba. His choice to live in a rural setting and shun public limelight has influenced today's Mouride leadership to remain in the yet rural city of Touba.

Mourides have a particularly tight-knit social structure that ensures community, camaraderie, and a strong connection with Touba and its religious authorities. As the Mourides expanded from their rural base, they formed dahiras, or religious associations, in their new settings. Inspired by the original communities that congregated around marabouts, dahiras are purposeful religious communities for worship and economic solidarity. Each week, these communities meet for dhikrs, which consists of prayers, recitation of qusa'id (a collection of Amadu Bamba's religious poems), and religious conversation. These meetings also act as a means of collecting addiya for the marabout. Marabouts visit these dahiras frequently to encourage their talibee, dispense baraka and enhance solidarity among members. These social structures also reinforce the values of humility, endurance, and sharing, which are promoted vociferously by Mouride marabouts and are integral to the group's success.

Economy

Four major factors lie behind the Mourides' growing economic power: a spiritual devotion to hard work, a perception of migration as a means of jihad, Touba's status as a tax-free zone and the strong social safety net that provides capital and insures adherents against failure. First, the motto proclaimed by the Mourides, “Work and Discipline,” stems from a belief that work is a moral and spiritual act of worship that helps one strive toward paradise. Mouridism came about shortly after France's decision to abolish slavery, severely weakening the economy of the regional Wolof Kingdom, leading to its eventual collapse. Many of the early converts to Mouridism were former Wolof slaves. Some academics argue that these former slaves were attracted to Mouridism because social class was not emphasized, resources were distributed, and labor was rewarded after several years by title to land and profit sharing. What is clear is that Bamba's decision to classify steadfast dedication to hard work as religious education allowed many individuals without Arabic language or formal religious study to feel religiously pious. Bamba's disciples, who took the initiative to create dahiras, capitalized on this mass appeal to Mouride values and the opportunities the community offered. These dahiras were originally

This is the only known photo of Ahmadu
formal communities consisting of young, unmarried men who dedicated themselves wholly to their marabout for study and work. Today this same sense of loyalty to marabout through one’s dahira continues but they have evolved to a monetized economy in urban areas of Senegal and in the Mouride diaspora outside of a marabout’s direct employment. At times, talibee would go as far as dedicating their children to be raised, educated and put to work by the marabout. Today, poor, rural peasants will send their children far away for this purpose, though often times the decision is reflective of the family’s economic woes as much as the family’s religious piety. Bamba is believed to have a spiritually elevated status just below, and sometimes equivalent to, that of a prophet. Mourides also believe that Bamba could communicate directly with the prophet, ensuring his words have spiritual as well as historic authority. His command to “Pray as if you were going to die tomorrow, work as if you were never going to die” has influenced generations of Mourides and continues to serve as the mantra of the sect. This is certainly an example of religion being used to encourage an extreme reaction from its adherents, but it is not a common stereotype of life choices inspired by Islam.

A second factor behind Mouridism’s success is the empowerment its followers internalize as they migrate from their homelands. Amadu Bamba interpreted his own two periods of exile to Mauritania and Gabon as spiritual journeys and Mourides seek to understand contemporary migration in a similar manner. Embracing migration allowed the Mourides to evolve from a remote, agrarian-based society to a sophisticated, global society whose strength is primarily in trade. The first major emigration from the Mouride rural strongholds in the 1970s to urban areas and overseas occurred due to a devastating drought that crippled the Mourides’ peanut-farming economy. Mourides began to draw parallels between their migration and the two periods of exile of its founder. Bamba portrayed his exile as a part of a Muslim’s greater jihad to submit to God. Specifically, he saw his exile as an opportunity to gain more knowledge, and he compared it to that of Mohammed’s hijra from Mecca to Medina. Mourides see the economic challenges they face in rural Senegal, as well as in cities and overseas, as their own personal opportunities to deepen the connection to their faith and practice jihad. This sense of spirituality in migration enhances the Mourides’ sense of unity and promotes community gain over that of individual gain, which is a critical value for their economic success. Although this interpretation of jihad is unorthodox, it looks nothing like the
as promoted by marabouts. In Touba, social services are free and marabouts disperse their addiya freely so as to demonstrate this sense of sharing publicly. Without the strong sense of safety and trust inspired by Wolof culture and reinforced by Mouride spirituality, Mouride adherents would not have access to the capital and networks needed for their economic success.

**Politics**

Politically, the Mourides can be described as quietists: there is no Mouride political party nor do they make donations to specific parties or candidates, yet they retain strong political influence. Similar to their economic success, their political influence owes itself to tradition and the religious connotation attached to this tradition. First, it is vital to look at the time period in which Mouridism emerged and statements attributed to Mouridism’s influential founder. Second, we must look at developments since Senegal’s independence to understand the Mourides’ understated approach to politics today.

Amadu Bamba was not a stranger to power or influence; his father was an influential marabout of the Qadriya brotherhood (the oldest and most powerful Muslim organization or, “brotherhood” in Senegal) and served in royal Wolof courts. Throughout Bamba’s childhood and youth, Islamic states expanded into territory previously controlled traditional kingdoms across Senegal. These self-proclaimed jahads spread Islam across virtually all of Senegal, causing great shifts in cultural norms, social class, and politics. Bamba’s father was the marabout for the court of Lat Joor, King of one of the last independent Wolof states, and leader of two violent revolts against the French government. Bamba’s rejection of violent jihad as religiously appropriate is almost certainly a reflection of his youth. In fact, Bamba believed that the jihad for the soul was the only legitimate jihad to be waged, which helps explain the absence of violence against minority religious groups within Senegal today. In 1882, upon his father’s death, Bamba was asked to inherit his father’s official role and instead stated, “I do not have the habit of mingling with rules, and I do not expect any help from them.” This is one of the clearest and earliest examples of Bamba’s hands-off approach to the secular, political world. Bamba continued to gain a strong following from both former traditional leaders and peasants who were attracted to Bamba’s teachings and spirituality, yet Bamba himself never sought to exert political power.

A few quotes from Amadu Bamba illustrate his dedication to the principle of non-state intervention and his belief in religion as a private affair. A French informant in 1893 quotes Bamba as saying, “They (the followers) were told to behave well toward the whites because they never harm those who submit to them. If they respect you, you are left in peace, but those who disobey them are punished.” Bamba similarly sought a reconciliatory tone by demanding his followers obey the law and religious practices of the time so as to avoid conflict with the Senegalese authorities put in power by the French. In the mid-1880s, during the last armed conflict between Wolof states and the French, Bamba refused to be drawn into the conflict. Upon being called into the court by one of the Wolof Kings in 1886 to give a blessing to the Muslim-Wolof army, Bamba is said to have prayed only for peace rather than a particular victor. The fact that this Muslim-Wolof leader ended up being killed in battle, leading to his army’s defeat and eventually to peace, is seen by Mourides as evidence that peace itself is to be prioritized above all religious and political interests.

Bamba was also fond of the following hadith, “The best kings are those who visit the ulama [religious leaders] and the worst ulama are those who visit kings,” which continues to influence the leadership style of the Grand Marabout and his subordinates today. Bamba
is also famous for having said, “I would be embarrassed if the angels saw me before the door of the king for a purely secular affair.” The impact of this quote is significant as marabouts are wary of commenting on or engaging in politics unless the Mouride organization or religion is substantially impacted. This clear demarcation between politics and religion seems to have been infused into Mourides’ political affairs, though its form has evolved since his death. Even now, neither the Grand Marabout nor lower-ranked marabouts go to Dakar to visit government officials. Instead, each year, politicians seek out their marabout in Touba and during the Magal there are special ceremonies in which sitting government officials as well as opposition leaders pay homage and the Grand Marabout publicly recognizes their leadership.

Upon Amadu Bamba’s death in 1927, his eldest son, Mamadu Mustapha, inherited the role of Grand Marabout and began in earnest to establish the Mouride organization as we know it today. This change of leadership was not universally accepted and Mamadu’s success required significant political maneuvering. Unlike his father, Mamadu actively sought political significance and, though religiously educated, he did not live a life dedicated to meditation and austerity like his father. Mamadu concentrated power in Touba, fostered his father’s status as a saint, and encouraged talibee devotion to their marabout. In his second year of power, he purposefully recalibrated the date of the Magal to coincide with the date of Bamba’s exile to Gabon in order to draw parallels between Mohammad’s hijra from Mecca to Medina and Bamba’s life. Although construction of the Grand Mosque (the largest in sub-Saharan Africa) at Touba had begun while his father was still alive, it was Mamadu who initiated intense fundraising and encouraged followers to dedicate themselves to its construction.

Perhaps most importantly, Mamadu was a shrewd political leader and courted the French colonial leaders and their Senegalese deputies deftly. Recognizing France’s interest
in exploiting an export-heavy production of peanuts, Mamadu used his influence over his talibee and Mourides in general to encourage them to move to rural parts of Senegal and grow peanuts. These fields generated substantial profits for both the Mourides and the French government. France returned this favor by granting an ever-expanding amount of land to the Mourides and recognizing and enhancing the unique benefits Touba enjoys. With the goodwill built through this cooperation, Mamadu ensured that France’s representatives in the region would be friendly to him rather than Sheikh Anta, the younger brother of Amadu Bamba, an early confidant and disciple of Bamba, and the only other significant pretender to Amadu Bamba’s authority. Eventually Mamadu was able to persuade the French to arrest Sheikh Anta and force him into exile. Without Mamadu’s shrewd political skills and successful economic relationship with the French, the internal divisions within the Mourides may have doomed their success. Mamadu’s leadership as Grand Marabout from 1927 until his death in 1945 provided stability as Mouridism developed, expanded, and formalized many of its practices and community.

Mamadu’s aggressive political involvement was in stark contrast to his father’s reclusiveness and proved influential throughout the colonial and early independent periods. In particular, Mamadu utilized marabouts’ influence over talibee to push Mouride interests. The primary tool used by marabout, and particularly the Grand Marabout, to influence followers is the ndiguels that their followers are required to obey. While these are generally religiously-oriented, Mamadu Mustapha and the next three Grand Marabouts used this power shrewdly to demonstrate their influence to secular authorities. The reign of the Catholic Leopold Senghor provides a clear example. Mamadu’s issuance of an ndiguel to vote for Senghor resulted in a large increase in electoral support and in return Senghor enacted policies meant to advance Touba and Mouride interests. So strong was the influence of the Grand Marabout on Senghor, that Senghor is said to have consulted with the Grand Marabout over political appointments. Even after Senghor consolidated power, and votes were not as important, the Mourides maintained their influence through their ability to give out baraka to their followers, including Mouride politicians and businessmen.

Questions facing Mouridism
Mouridism has proven resilient to changes in economic realities, political environment, and demographics, but today it faces significant challenges. The first challenge is leadership. With an increasingly large and disparate list of descendants of Amadu Bamba, choosing the Grand Marabout by consensus is becoming more and more difficult. Second, marabouts’ need to focus on trade, maintain close relationships with their global talibee, and collect adiyya competes for time with their
traditional duty of religious study. These dueling priorities may cause schisms between marabouts and have the potential to damage the Mourides’ spiritual reputation. Third, Mourides’ continued strength depends heavily on funding from its international diaspora, which is estimated to make up to 20% of Senegal’s direct foreign investment. As these emigrant populations age and their children are increasingly raised in other nations, the Mourides will have to find ways to retain their appeal to the next generation or manage to continue sending substantial populations overseas to maintain this income stream.

A fourth challenge is how the Mourides can sustain their quasi-parallel redistributive state within Senegal. Its success is crucial to Mouride influence, but is dependent on sufficient addiya to meet the needs of a growing body of talibee. Recent years have seen the Mourides cede some of their autonomy in Touba to Senegal: allowing the state to charge for electricity, allowing the state to implement public health measures during the Magal, and most significantly, allowing French language government schools into the city for the first time in 2013.

A fifth challenge facing Mouridism is whether its success is dependent on Wolof identity or if it can further expand its following and power by converting large numbers of other ethnic groups. At this point, only a small percentage of Mourides belong to non-Wolof ethnic groups and this greatly limit its transnational religious and economic potential. The sixth and final challenge is what will happen if a secular government comes to power that attempts to take away the economic privileges of Touba, other smaller Mouride city-states, and the expansive quasi-legal markets that Mourides operate in Dakar and other cities within Senegal. Could a government impose such changes and how would Mouridism react? Despite Mouridism’s strength today, it is clear that that the next fifty years pose significant challenges.

Conclusion

Mouridism offers a clear example of the often-overlooked diversity that exists in the umma or Islamic world. This paper does not argue that Mouridism is good or bad, nor does it argue that it represents ‘true’ Islam. Instead, it demonstrates how Mouridism’s values of obedience, self-sufficiency and hard work, along with the condemnation of violence, contrast Mouridism with the hardline, conservative and anti-Western Islamic sects that dominate Western headlines. Significant challenges face Mouridism and the secular state of Senegal as they co-evolve but it seems evident that the Mouride vision of religiosity will continue to play a central role in the future of both.

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A portion of the proceeds benefit Lexington Humane Society!