

Sovereign Religion in a Secular State: Hidden Knowledge and Sufi Authority among “Taalibe Baay”

Presented at the Conference “Tolerance, Democracy and Sufis in Senegal,” March 7–8, 2008, Columbia University

Joseph Hill

March 11, 2008

Abstract

The relationship between Islam and secular democracy is not always a zero-sum contest privileging either an Islamic or a secular humanistic ground for sovereignty. Taalibe Baay in Senegal employ the Ṣūfī opposition of apparent (*ẓāhir*) and hidden (*bāṭin*) truths to accommodate participation in multiple sovereignties and networks of governance. Taalibe Baay religious authorities resolve disputes and oversee daily happenings according to Islamic jurisprudence and mystical principles. However, they keep religious governance and its principles largely hidden and thus avoid conflict with secular authority. Disciples acquire fluency in these principles through a unique form of mystical education (*tarbiyyah*) that has circulated Ṣūfī discourses and practices into daily Taalibe Baay practice and provided terms to relativize hegemonic notions of sovereignty. While secular liberalism aspires to pluralism by subordinating religious and cultural differences to universal humanism, Taalibe Baay practice a pragmatic pluralism acknowledging simultaneously valid principles of knowledge and authority.

Introduction

Understanding Sufism’s impact on democracy and tolerance in Senegal requires taking seriously the epistemology and metaphysics of Ṣūfī practice, or in other words, how religious experiences, beliefs, and outlooks condition people’s participation in liberal democratic nation-

states. Religious knowledge and experience play an important role in community governance among Taalibe Baay, better known to outsiders as “Ñaseen,” or adherents of the branch of the Tijāniyy Ṣūfī order founded by the Senegalese Ṣūfī leader Shaykh Ibrahim “Baay” Ñas.

After Baay Ñas’s¹ death in 1975, his followers disagreed over who would succeed him: his eldest son, Allaaji Abdulaay Ñas, or his right-hand man, Sëriñ Alliw Siise. While one can expect such disagreements, the way in which this particular disagreement has neither been resolved nor occasioned public controversy suggests a Ṣūfī politics of pragmatic pluralism. Rather than openly contest one or the other’s succession, proponents of either side tended to portray their favored successor as Baay’s hidden (*bāṭin*) successor and the other as his apparent (*ẓāhir*) successor.² They thus used Ṣūfī discourses of *ẓāhir* (apparent) and *bāṭin* (hidden) to accommodate two competing centers of authority, according greater spiritual legitimacy to one while pragmatically (yet sometimes defiantly) accommodating the other. The *ẓāhir/bāṭin* distinction has its roots in the Qur’ān and has a distinguished history in Ṣūfī scholarship, yet it was Baay Ñas’s unique practice of mystical education, or *tarbiyyah*, that popularized Ṣūfī knowledge, giving these terms wide currency among millions of disciples throughout West Africa, Europe, and North America. The Ṣūfī notion of multiple apparent and hidden truths has served innumerable uses among Taalibe Baay, perhaps the most notable of which is to negotiate and accommodate multiple more or less visible centers of authority, legitimacy, and epistemology.

1 “Baay Ñas” is the name most commonly used among Senegalese. French sources most often write his name as Ibrahima Niassé, and Arabic sources call him Shaykh al-’Islam al-Ḥājj ‘Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ḥājj ‘Abd Allāh Nyās al-Kawlahī.

2 For a more detailed discussion of this and other uses of paradoxical speech employing the *ẓāhir/bāṭin* opposition, see Hill forthcoming and Hill 2007.

This pragmatically pluralistic orientation to truth and power extends from Taalibe Baay's internal relationships to their engagements and disengagements with the liberal democratic state. Taalibe Baay participate in both secular and religious governance and their forms of knowledge, sometimes disengaging from secular governance to assert the religious as more profoundly yet less visibly legitimate. Thus, they highlight that Islam's roles in secular democracies extend beyond Muslims' visible engagements with secular state governance to hidden, disengaged religious governance. Recent world events have occasioned increasingly urgent debates (academic, political, mass mediated) concerning Islam's compatibility with liberal democracy, yet these debates have remained largely stuck on the question of "Islamism" vs. "liberal Islam"—of whether to ground sovereignty in religion or in secular humanism. "Sovereignty" here designates that which is above or outside the law and therefore has the prerogative of determining and breaking the law. Both Islamism and liberalism defend themselves by appealing to a single metaphysical principle assumed to be uniquely legitimate, whether Divine or humanistic. Western-educated academics and politicians tend to favor secular, liberal democracy, which derives its principle of sovereignty not from popular consensus but more fundamentally from metaphysical principles of secular humanism.³ However, for many Muslims, accepting liberal democracy hinges on its not infringing on God's higher law, while for non-Muslim liberals, accepting Muslims in liberal democracies hinges on

3 That contemporary understandings of liberal democratic sovereignty ultimately derive legitimacy from a metaphysical notion of humanism has become increasingly evident as the United Nations Organization and various organizations of international law have promoted universal principles of governance. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan told the UN General Assembly that "state sovereignty, in its most basic sense, is being redefined" in a global age and is now transcended by "individual sovereignty" or human rights and freedoms (Annan 1999).

Muslims privatizing their religion. Taalibe Baay by and large elude this monistic “secularist” vs. “Islamist” divide through approaching legitimacy, truth, and sovereignty as multiply constructed. A pervasive strategy is to recognize one authority as the apparent hegemon and another as the more profound, hidden hegemon without reducing them to a single principle of legitimacy as both Islamism and secularism do.

This paper approaches religious authority among Taalibe Baay as a form of “informal sovereignty” (Hansen and Stepputat 2005) that Taalibe Baay in Senegal implicitly recognize alongside secular state sovereignty. Taalibe Baay participate actively in state politics and governance while submitting to Divine sovereignty, which is represented and mediated primarily by representatives of the branch of the Tijāniyy Ṣūfī order founded by Baay Ñas. While religious sovereignty infuses the global Taalibe Baay network, its exercise is most overt in predominantly Taalibe Baay villages where Islamic authorities oversee day-to-day affairs and mediate disputes. My purpose in framing this question as one of multiple “sovereignties” is to highlight how participants in secular democracies are irreducibly subject to multiple regimes of governance and law.

The first of this paper’s three sections recounts a religious meeting dramatizing the visible engagements and hidden disengagements between Islamic authority and the state. The second discusses some of the implications of informal Islamic education and of Baay Ñas’s distinctive approach to mystical education (*tarbiyyah*). The third presents two cases of community rupture and reconciliation in which Islamic authority and specific Ṣūfī discourses serve to resolve potentially violent conflicts. These narratives illustrate two important points about Islamic knowledge and authority: first, that disciples approach Islam as the most

legitimate and effective means of approaching problems (such as violence or destruction of property) classically understood to be the province of the state; and second, that religious governance invokes specific Ṣūfī language, practices, and experiences.

When the state goes home: performing sovereignties

Perhaps the most conspicuous and dramatic performances of religious community and its relationship to the state occur during the night-long *Mawlid* (*Gàmmu*), or celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birth. On the 12th night of the Islamic month of *ar-Rabī' al-'awwal*, Medina Baay draws hundreds of thousands of disciples from around the world. Smaller *Mawlid* events in other times and places and by other Senegalese Ṣūfī groups follow the same standardized structure. The *Mawlid* proper begins after midnight and consists of hagiographic chanted poems, *dhikrs* (chanting the name of God), religious speeches, and a stylized narrative of the birth and life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Beforehand, during the late afternoon, representatives of the state present themselves to show allegiance to religious leaders during a public meeting often conveyed by the print and broadcast media.

My friend Mamadu invited me to attend one of these smaller *Mawlids* in the Eastern Saalum village of Kër Móodu in 2004. In the late afternoon, thousands of people arrive on chartered buses from throughout Senegambia, and a handful of them have gathered in the giant tent in the village's central square, knowing that the meetings will soon begin. Mamadu, a 20-year-old student who combines study at an Islamic Institute and several informal schools, is a close disciple of the village *shaykh*, Daam Jóob, and an aspiring religious leader himself. Mamadu and several friends have been given permission to open the afternoon's activities with

a short meeting, where they practice the art of exhorting the audience to follow the Qur’ān and sayings of the Prophet.

A sparse crowd trickles into the tent, but after perhaps a half an hour, a piercing siren interrupts my young friends’ meeting. We look up to see a large, black four-wheel drive truck approaching the tent. Beside the truck, an old, dreadlocked man in colorful clothes stands carrying the megaphone that emits the siren sound. Daam Jóob emerges from the truck in a flowing robe and is escorted to a large, heavily cushioned armchair near the front of the tent. Surrounding the armchair are around ten other armchairs, most of them as yet unoccupied. An entourage of young men follow Daam Jóob chanting “*Lā ‘ilāha ‘illā-Llāh*”—“There is no God but Allāh.” When the commotion has subsided, my young friends resume their preaching, but only a few minutes later a smaller, white four-wheel-drive truck appears, and Daam Jóob’s deputies escort several men from the truck into the tent and seat them in armchairs beside Daam Jóob. another four-wheel-drive appears bearing three visiting authorities from Medina, and the same entourage of young men escort them to the armchairs.

By six o’clock, a hundred or so people have gathered in the tent, the men on the right side and the women on the left. As the events begin in earnest, hundreds more trickle in and fill most of the thousand folding chairs. My friends, apprentice shaykhs, have fulfilled their purpose of warming up the tent for the evening’s activities, and no one complains that they are not allowed to conclude their remarks. The master of ceremonies now takes the microphone and begins the main part of the afternoon meeting, welcoming the audience and welcoming several notables. He heartily welcomes the mayor of the village, the prefect of the district (*département*), the producer and camera crew from the national television station, and the representatives from

Medina Baay. One cameraman pans across the audience as the two others focus on the prefect, who takes the microphone and expresses his loyalty to Daam Jóob. The prefect declares that he would not have missed this momentous event for any reason. Political leaders, he says, are one with the members of this religious community, sharing the same religion and hopes, and he prays for the congregation. He excuses Abdoulaye Wade, the President of the Republic, who would have liked to come personally but who could only send local authorities in his place. He offers his apologies that the government was not able to pay the peanut farmers what it had promised for their peanuts on time, but he assures the assembly that the problem has been solved and everyone will receive their due.

When the political leaders have spoken, Daam Jóob thanks them for coming and then offers them some stern advice: they should work harder to help farmers and need to talk to them and understand their concerns. He exhorts them to be merciful and to do all they can to alleviate farmers' difficulties because, as the Qur'ān says, if you help God's servants, God helps you. The audience cheers. Jóob turns the time over to a posse of young chanters, and after a few minutes, as the sun nears the horizon, he stands up and heads back to his truck. The political leaders follow, boarding their truck to be taken home, and the television crew packs up their material. Disciples adjourn to their houses or their hosts' houses for a festive dinner and perhaps a nap before the big meeting that night. Thousands throng to Daam Jóob's house, some to seek cures for *jinn* problems, some to receive some of his mystical secrets, and others to benefit from his blessing (*barke*, *barakah*). Only a very small portion are let into the courtyard and an even smaller portion make it inside his house.

After midnight, the Mawlid proper begins, this time without the political leaders and camera crews. A famous Taalibe Baay chanter leads his posse in chants that lead many to enter ecstatic states of Divine Knowledge. A central Medina Baay leader, a grandson of Baay Ñas and brother of Medina Baay's current Imam, delivers the Mawlid narrative on the birth and life of the Prophet Muḥammad using the same stylized, sing-song delivery that Baay Ñas used. The meeting lasts until slightly after dawn, whereupon attendees board dozens of chartered buses that take them back to various parts of Senegambia.

The portion of the Mawlid events broadcast on national television—when religious and secular leaders performed their respective roles as popular advocates and public servants—was only the first performance. Political leaders' second performance was to exit the scene, leaving religious authorities as the uncontested authorities of the night meeting. Although the first performance was more visible to scholars, the national media, and the state, the second performance was far more important to disciples, setting up an autonomous space of religious authority and shared mystical experience. While religious authority may appear to state actors as a layer of indirect rule mediating state sovereignty, for disciples religious authority often acts as the ultimate authority governing daily life. Religious groups inevitably engage with the state, whether to share in its resources or to avoid conflict. Yet disciple communities tend to approach state power as something not above religious authority but below or beside it. Taalibe Baay's orientations toward religious authority and truth depend on several forms of religious education.

Hidden Knowledge

Sovereignty implies knowledge of oneself and of one's relationship to the sovereign and to the metaphysical conceptions of truth and right that legitimate it (Hegel 1991).⁴ Foucault (2000) has discussed contrasting models of sovereignty that rely on contrasting techniques of discipline and education conditioning subjects' relationships to power. For example, modern states employ techniques of "governmentality" to produce a population of docile subjects responsive to state surveillance and control (2000). As the secular state depends on discipline and education to form subjects and administrators, hidden practices of religious sovereignty depend on often hidden religious education cultivating dispositions toward religious authority and truth. A Muslim with an informal Islamic education and a public Francophone education participates simultaneously in multiple networks of knowledge, discipline, and authority rooted in contrasting epistemological and metaphysical principles. As multiple regimes of knowledge penetrate a single social context, relationships between them are perhaps better served by metaphors of interconnection like "networks" (Latour 1993) and "rhizomes" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) than by spatial imaginaries of "fields" (Bourdieu 1977, 1991) and "spaces" (Harvey 2000) or the temporal imaginary of "epistemes" (Foucault 1994). The relationships between contrasting knowledge regimes and sovereignties are often synergistic and imbricated rather than successive, contiguous, or oppositional.

Both mystical and textual religious knowledge are largely "hidden" in two important senses. First, they are inculcated and practiced primarily in private settings and through informal

4 This connection between metaphysical principles of right and good to subjective dispositions and educational practices is perhaps most explicitly developed by Bourdieu (1984, 1988) in response to Kant (1997, 2000).

and personalized arrangements. Second, and perhaps more importantly, outsiders may not recognize what they teach as “knowledge” at all as its epistemological premises are irreducible to hegemonic, modern conceptions of knowledge. Of course, Senegal does not lack formal Islamic institutions or media (Gomez-Perez 1991; Loimeier 1996; Renders 2002), and Islamic leaders’ influence on public affairs is no secret. However, Ṣūfī governance relies relatively little on highly visible and institutionalized manifestations. Indeed, it is largely by remaining invisible (*bāṭin*) that religious sovereignty avoids colliding with secular sovereignty. Religious sovereignty employs informal, diffuse, and often hidden analogues to the state’s institutions: networks of informal schools; private houses acting as meeting places and sites of religious governance; communication through personal interaction, handwritten texts, and informally copied cassettes; transnational networks of one-on-one mystical apprenticeship. Islamic authority figures study Islamic law (*Sharīʿah*) and invoke its principles in their recommendations, yet they intervene informally as moral authorities and not in the formal capacity of a *qāḍī* (Islamic judge).

Religious knowledge is the central figure around which the Taalibe Baay movement is imagined and enacted, and the global disciple network is held together largely by strands of personal religious apprenticeship. Economic ties, on the other hand, play a much less salient role among Taalibe Baay than among the global Murid community (Diouf 2000). Taalibe Baay describe Baay Ṣās as the “Pole” of his time, the “Succor of the Age,” and the long-awaited “Bringer of the Tijāniyy Flood.”⁵ In this capacity, they say, Ṣās received a uniquely high level of both textual and mystical knowledge, which he bequeathed to his disciples. In 1929, Baay Ṣās unleashed an era often called the “*Fayḍah*” (Flood), suggesting the effusion of Divine

5 “*Quṭb*,” “*Gawth az-zamān*” and “*Ṣāhib al-Fayḍah at-Tijāniyyah*.”

Knowledge that Baay Ñas made possible. Taalibe Baay consider this popularization of Divine Knowledge to be revolutionary and unique.

Popularizing mystical education

What many Taalibe Baay consider most revolutionary about Ñas is that he made direct, mystical knowledge of God available to the general population of disciples. In many Şūfī traditions, initiation into the Şūfī secrets is a long process reserved for those who have already pursued advanced Islamic textual studies, and discipleship for most entails approaching a leader to seek blessing (*barakah*) rather than Şūfī knowledge *per se*. Baay Ñas taught that he had received authorization to administer a mystical education (*tarbiyyah*) that would bring any disciple knowledge not available anywhere else within the space of days or weeks rather than years. Disciples who approached Baay or an authorized representative (*muqaddam*) would receive a sequence of sacred phrases to repeat for long periods until they achieved a spiritual opening (*fath*) whereby the self (*nafs*) would disappear, leaving awareness only of God. Terms debated in centuries of Şūfī scholarship—*zāhir* and *bāṭin*, states and stations, gnosis and obliteration (*fanā*) of the self—found uses in everyday Taalibe Baay practice.

Popularizing Sufism had several far-reaching consequences for Baay Ñas's movement. It directly incorporated disciples of all backgrounds into relationships of spiritual tutelage through which mystical knowledge and authority were transmitted, valorizing these relationships and making them the basis for transnational connections. Dissociating mystical knowledge from textual knowledge opened the doors of leadership to a wide range of disciples, such as women, converts to Islam, and civil servants. In its first decade, the movement attracted a particularly large number of women—many flouting their husbands' command—who saw an opportunity to

participate actively in a religious community despite lacking access to extended textual education. Perhaps more than any particular teaching on the status of women, it was the need to initiate this influx of women into the secrets of Divine Knowledge that led Baay to appoint several women as *muqaddams*, or representatives of the order. Although women and other *muqaddams* of non-specialist background tend to play limited roles in public meetings, the centrality of private apprenticeship to the movement gives them significant behind-the-scenes influence and important roles as local community organizers. These minor *muqaddams* occupy a paradoxical position between their disciples and the larger movement: distributing the means of reproducing charismatic Ṣūfī authority has allowed them to act as charismatic portals to the Divine with remarkable prestige among local disciples, yet their role in relation to the central authorities. made up of the family and close associates of Baay Ñas, is that of petty functionaries.

Tarbiyyah has come to serve as an initiation into the community of disciples and a diacritic marking Taalibe Baay from others, although nothing prevents someone who has not undergone *tarbiyyah* from identifying as a Taalibe Baay and participating fully in Taalibe Baay events. Most people from Senegalese Taalibe Baay families undergo *tarbiyyah* sometime in their teens, after receiving the *wird*, or the daily litany common to all *Tijāniyyis*. One presents oneself to a *muqaddam* of one's choosing and makes one's wish for *tarbiyyah* known, and if the leader accepts, he or she gives the disciple a prayer formula to repeat a given number of times and tells the disciple to come back the following day. Some who were expecting to receive some mind-blowing secret told me they were initially disappointed with the simplicity of their first instruction. The disciple returns and receives further phrases to repeat as well as explanations

of certain mystical secrets. Ultimately, the disciple ends up repeating “*Lā ‘ilāha ‘illā-Llāh*” (“There is no god but Allāh”) non-stop for days until he or she loses consciousness of everything but God. People sometimes refer to their *tarbiyyah* as “when I saw God” or “when I knew God,” not because one comes to know or see God among other things but because God is the only reality left to see or know when all distinctions disappear. It is essential to remember that *tarbiyyah* is understood not only as a technology of self cultivation (Foucault 1997) but as a process of literal spiritual transmission, meaning that the authority to transmit (beyond knowledge of the technique) is an indispensable part of the process. As we will see below, this connection between authority and knowledge applies to both mystical education and to informal textual education.

After *tarbiyyah*, most disciples join a local religious association (*daayira*),⁶ often associated with their initiating *muqaddam*. These associations reinforce disciples’ mystical experience and sense of community through regular chant meetings and organize economic and educational projects. Each *daayira* is under the authority not only of the *muqaddam* directly associated with it but also under a representative of Medina Baay (usually a son or grandson of Baay Ñas) either designated as the authority over a geographical area or with whom the local *muqaddam* has a personal relationship. Although federations of *daayiras* pool resources to coordinate large projects,⁷ institutional structure at the inter-*daayira* level is minimal. Disciple networks continue to depend on highly personalized relationships between *muqaddams*, their disciples, and central leaders. In urban areas, these relationships are often highly fluid, as a

6 From Arabic “*dā‘irah*”: “circle.”

7 The largest of these is the *‘Ansār ad-Din* Federation in the Dakar region.

disciple can develop relationships with many *muqaddams* and can easily switch active affiliation from one to another.

Hidden schools

While *tarbiyyah* integrates disciples into a community and a spiritual hierarchy, Islamic textual knowledge remains a pillar of religious elite authority. Many Taalibe Baay families in the Kaolack region diversify their children's education, sending all children to Qur'anic school initially and then moving some to a Francophone school while leaving one or two in the informal Arabic track. While a Francophone education is more economically promising, many families value having members who can act as ritual experts and who can interact actively with the leadership. The Taalibe Baay spiritual capital, Medina Baay, is home to hundreds of informal Islamic schools, which range from one to three hundred students. There are no public Francophone schools inside Medina Baay, although many young people study nearby at the El-Hadji Ibrahima Niass public elementary school (named after Baay Ñas) and the Valdiodio Ndiaye secondary school. Additionally, two large primary through secondary Islamic institutes originated in Medina Baay: the El-Hadji Abdoulaye Niass Islamic Institute founded by Baay Ñas in Medina Baay but now relocated to the nearby Saam neighborhood, and the African American Islamic Institute founded in Medina Baay by Baay Ñas's grandson Shaykh Hasan Cissé. The former has dozens of small, satellite elementary schools in the villages around Kaolack, while the latter has been instituted as an international NGO focusing on education, health, and development with branches all over the world, notably in Atlanta and Detroit. At any given time, dozens of young Americans study the Qur'ān and other subjects at the African

American Islamic Institute. Beyond these large institutes, a handful of small, formal Islamo-Arabic schools in and around Medina Baay are recognized by the government.⁸

Such formal Islamo-Arabic schools have become more widespread and received increasing government support as the state has attempted to regulate Islamic education and incorporate it into its education system. The state's forays into Islamic education reflect not an Islamization of the state but its response to a far more extensive yet largely invisible and uncontrollable network of what I call "informal" Islamic schools, the principal form of textual education in Senegal for centuries. These schools are invisible to outsiders partly because they take place in private, unmarked homes, in contrast to even the humblest formal schools, which take place in easily identifiable buildings (often seasonal structures made of millet stalks). Perhaps more importantly, their understanding of "knowledge" is incommensurate with hegemonic modern understandings of knowledge. Informal schools teaching Qur'ānic memorization are called *daara*,⁹ while more advanced schools teaching both memorization and interpretation of texts from a broad range of Islamic disciplines are called *majlis*.¹⁰ Of the two, *majlis* are typically less visible, involving only a handful of students sitting inside the teacher's courtyard or bedroom, often for only one or two hours during the morning or evening. Most

8 Officials I interviewed at the Inspection des écoles, the government agency overseeing education, listed what they believed were all the formal Arabo-Islamic schools, most of which received state funding, although they did not name a single informal school and simply said there were at least a thousand of them in Kaolack.

9 From Arabic *dār al-Qur'ān*, "house of the Qur'ān."

10 This usage of "*majlis*" (literally "assembly," "place of sitting") is particular to West African formal Arabic. In modern standard Arabic, "*majlis*" refers to a council, congress, or house of parliament. In Western Saharan Arabic, both Qur'ānic and advanced informal schools are known as "*maḥḥzara*" (from "*maḥḥdarah*," "place of gathering").

Qur'ānic schools (*daara*) also take place in private homes, often shifting from one side of the courtyard to the other or to a makeshift shelter as the sun changes position throughout the day. While some are small and invisible like *majlis*, larger *daaras* can be seen and heard from the street, dozens of boys and girls filling the air with the buzz of reciting their lessons. Many Qur'ān students (*taalibes*)¹¹ are more visible than the schools themselves, wandering the streets in their rags to beg for food and school fees, repeating the mantra "*Laarabi laaral*."¹² Their living conditions have drawn much media and organizational attention (see Perry 2004), yet this visibility only further obscures any possible connection between these schools and learning.

The knowledge (*xam-xam*) said to be produced by studying the Qur'ān and other texts involves not internalizing information but shaping a moral self and transmitting spiritual power through webs of spiritual authority. Knowledge (*'ilm*, *xam-xam*), authority (*ndiggël*, *'idhn*), and spiritual power (expressed as both blessing [*barakah*, *barke*] and secret [*sirr*]) are overlapping and largely synonymous. Although post-Qur'ānic informal schools (*majlis*) add textual interpretation to memorization and may therefore appear more commensurate with hegemonic modern notions of knowledge, transmitting and embodying spiritual blessing and power remain important constituents of "knowledge."¹³ Indeed, the importance of "secret" (*sirr*) aspects of the text only become more important as more advanced students are taught the occult uses of particular passages of the Qur'ān, hagiographic poetry, and more advanced prayers. To

11 From Arabic "*tālib*:" "student," designates both a student in a Qur'ānic school and a disciple of a Ṣūfī leader (e.g. Taalibe Baay). The use for both "student" and "disciple" suggests the inseparability of spiritual filiation and knowledge transmission.

12 I have not determined the etymology or meaning of this phrase.

13 The connection between between knowledge and power here is not necessarily Foucault's (1972) connection. Both terms are defined differently in this context.

become a scholar (*boroom xam-xam*, *`ālim*), one must not only learn to converse upon a large number of texts but must also embody the spiritual power of these texts and use them in prayers, amulets, and so forth. As in mystical education, personal transmission is integral to knowledge in this context: one cannot internalize these texts and their occult uses in isolation but must receive these texts and accompanying secrets from an authorized agent.

I had been living in Medina Baay for months before I began to realize that many if not most of the houses I visited served as either regular or occasional informal Islamic schools. The house I lived in became the site of an informal school for a couple months when one of my house mates, a twenty-year-old student of the nearby El-Hadji Abdoulaye Niasse Islamic Institute, was asked to teach a young relative and his two friends the Qur'ān and Islamic jurisprudence during the summer vacation (*fiqh*). My house mate concurrently studied part-time at another informal school while the Institute was not in session. I knew several others who offered lessons for an hour or two either in the early morning or in the evening in addition to working another job. Others taught both *daara* and *majlis*, teaching from a dozen to several hundred young Qur'ān students during the daytime and offering lessons in other texts during the morning or evening to more students who have memorized either all or a substantial part of the Qur'ān.

I often visited Ammat Bittéy,¹⁴ who teaches the Qur'ān in Medina Baay to nearly a hundred young boys and girls during the day and teaches the Islamic disciplines to several teen-aged students during the morning and evening. Three teen-aged students— a girl named

14 All people and place names in this article are pseudonyms aside from those of major leaders and urban areas.

Ndey and two boys named Omar and Ibra—recently certified their Qur’ānic memorization in a large ceremony presided by one of Baay Ñas’s elder sons. Since the ceremony, they have advanced to studying Arabic grammar and hagiographic poetry while assisting Ammat Bittéy in teaching the younger students. Ndey has combined her study at Ammat Bittéy’s school with Arabic studies at the El-Hadji Abdoulaye Niass Islamic Institute, where she has studied since the beginning of the school year, coming on weekends to help teach girls at the Qur’ānic school. All three continue to receive daily lessons from Ammat Bittéy in “*xam-xam*,” or Islamic and Arabic disciplines.

After they send the young Qur’ān students home at the end of the day, I accompany Ammat Bittéy to his house (the school is held at his uncle’s house) and Omar and Ibra soon rejoin us there for their evening lesson. Ammat Bittéy sits up in a plastic chair against the wall facing the door while I sit on his bed, and Omar and Ibra kneel on their prayer rugs before their teacher. Although they are socially close to their teacher and sometimes converse with him casually (both are extended relatives), during the lesson they show the attitudes proper to a student, looking downward and speaking softly when called upon. Many students in Senegal, especially younger boys boarding with a Qur’ānic teacher and making their living by begging, are their teacher’s moral wards and must submit completely to his authority with little recourse to relatives. As these students live with their families, Bittéy’s authority is not quite so absolute, yet he still acts as their spiritual mentor and takes on a quasi-paternal role.

Before the group lesson begins, Omar spends a few minutes with the teacher quietly going over the *Burdah*, a hagiographic poem by the poet Muḥammad al-Būṣayriyy,¹⁵ a poem

15 Al-Būṣayrī was a 13th-century Ṣūfī poet living in Baghdād. His poetry praising Muḥammad is often

often chanted in meetings and also used in occult cures. Then both students sit before the teacher to learn a passage from *Al-'Akhḍariyy*, a verse text on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that students often learn directly following their Qur'ānic studies. Like most texts studied in *majlis*, this one follows the sing-song *rajaz* meter to facilitate memorization. Today's lesson concerns a passage on pronouncing Qur'ān verses during prayer. The students have copied the text into their notebooks and they follow along as their teacher reads it. After reading through the text once in its original Arabic, the teacher repeats it, this time interlocking each Arabic word or phrase with its Wolof equivalent, thus providing the original text and its translation in a single reading.¹⁶ Ammat Bittéy's students listen intently, as tomorrow morning they will be expected to recite not only the Arabic but the Arabic interlocked with the Wolof.

After reading through the entire lesson without explanation, Bittéy goes back and reads each line separately, this time explaining and giving examples. At certain points he demonstrates scenarios, for example, acting out the situation of someone who begins a prayer from memory but must finishing it by consulting the Qur'ān. After his explanation and demonstration, he has the students read the passage in unison while interspersing the Wolof glosses. At several points, he has to remind one or both of them of the Wolof gloss, and occasionally he even has to explain the meaning of the Wolof gloss. The lesson lasts no more than a half hour, after which he dismisses the students until the following morning. They must

sung at Taalibe Baay and other Şūfī meetings, and in addition to its poetic content, many believe it to have both occult properties and to facilitate mystical experiences. The full title of the poem is *Burdat al-Madīḥ* (Mantle of the Praised One [Muḥammad])

16 That is to say, if one were to teach the first *sūrah* of the Qur'ān in this fashion in English, one would recite it thus: "*Bismi*: In the name of; *Allāh*: God; *Ar-raḥmāni*: the merciful; *Ar-raḥīmi*: the compassionate; *Al-ḥamdu*: Praise; *li-Llāhi*: to God; *Rabbi*: Lord; *Al-`ālamīna*: the worlds," and so forth.

now return home and repeat and internalize these lines of verse to recite them for the teacher tomorrow.

The teaching methods Bittéy uses in his informal school differ in several important ways from methods employed in the public Francophone system and in most formal Islamic schools.¹⁷ As opposed to monolingual French education, which aims to assimilate students into a national Francophone culture at the expense of their native language,¹⁸ informal Islamic education actually broadens students' native lexicon through teaching them a conventional gloss for each Arabic phrase encountered. Also, whereas formal schools emphasize the content of the lesson with little emphasis on the origin of the text and how and by whom it is transmitted, informal instruction depends on two primary components: an ancient, canonical text and oral transmission through an authorized teacher. The teacher's oral explanation and presence is indispensable as a text is unintelligible on its own, not only for its foreign and arcane vocabulary but for its elliptical phrases that serve only as a mnemonic for the teacher's explanation. To have studied a text with a teacher is not only to have certified memorization of the text with the teacher but to have received the teacher's interpretation and, in many cases, to have received the teacher's authorization to teach the text to others. In an informal school, rather than sit before a teacher as a body of citizens sits before the state, one enters into a personal relationship of tutelage linking one into a channel of knowledge and authority. Rather than

17 Providing the local-language translation interlocked with the canonical text is not common in informal Qur'ānic schools, but some formal Qur'ānic schools emphasizing the Qur'ān's meaning have adopted it alongside more typically modern teaching methods.

18 Francophone education is thus used in colonies and post-colonies to assimilate a culturally diverse population into a new national culture in the same way it was used in France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to assimilate France's own diverse population (Eugen Weber 1976).

inculcate an imagination of a horizontal community of peers studying the same thing in the same way, such informal schools cultivate a direct, physically close relationship with a teacher whose sublime moral authority embodies and transmits that of God.

While the methods of informal and formal schools have contrasting results, important continuities unify the bodily methods and principles of spiritual transmission used in such informal Islamic schools and the methods used in mystical education (*tarbiyyah*) and occult practices. Textual education is not a prerequisite for mystical education for Taalibe Baay, yet most have some Qur'ānic education and thus experience *tarbiyyah* more as a continuation than as something radically new. In each case, the act of knowledge transmission consists of approaching a religious specialist in a humble attitude, receiving a text and either an explanation or instructions on how to use it, and repeating this text to achieve a desired result. In each case, whether the student is a five-year-old or a full-grown adult, the teacher sits above the student while the student sits on the floor, facing the teacher but not directly, eyes downcast, and speaking softly.¹⁹ Females cover their heads when in the presence of a teacher or leader for any of these purposes. The same bodily positions generally apply in ritual visits to a leader to seek *barakah* or authorization for some undertaking. The reception of knowledge and divine blessing (which are not clearly distinct from one another) go hand-in-hand with submitting oneself to the conduit of that knowledge and blessing.

The attitudes taken in informal Islamic schools such as Ammat Bittéy's and in *tarbiyyah* inculcate particular dispositions toward authority and—at least as importantly for participants—

¹⁹ The exception is when two occult specialists of similar status exchange occult secrets: one does not necessarily sit above the other.

transmit a particular chain of spiritual power to the student. Informal Islamic education at its most basic is the transmission of a text and the blessing accompanying it from master teacher to supplicant. The student joins a network of knowledge transmission in which each piece of knowledge is traced back to an authoritative source, often an eminent saint such as Baay Ñas. One might say that the primary difference between textual and mystical education is the relative emphasis placed on text as opposed to the spiritual power (*sirr*) behind it. As Foucault (2000) has pointed out, such methods of inculcating knowledge accompany principles of sovereignty, legitimacy, and moral order. However, participating in religious education and sovereignty does not preclude simultaneously participating in the secular state and recognizing its sovereignty. As the following narratives illustrate, hidden religious knowledge provides the language and dispositions through which Taalibe frame religious sovereignty as uniquely authoritative while occupying a hidden (*bāṭin*) plane that does not directly confront the visible (*ẓāhir*) principle of secular state sovereignty.

Islamic authority in local governance

Taalibe Baay distribute authority geographically between a number of *muqaddams*, or representatives of Baay Ñas authorized to induct into the Ṣūfī order. Although an individual Taalibe Baay is free to seek *wird* and *tarbiyyah* from whatever *muqaddam* he or she chooses, individuals and religious associations (*daayiras*) are generally subject to a geographical hierarchy independent of one's personal spiritual relations. During his lifetime, Baay Ñas delegated geographical areas to his sons and associates. He assigned his son Sheex Tijjaan Ñas and his Mauritanian Arab representative Hādī wuld Sayyid to represent him in Nigeria and certain other parts of West Africa, and later Shaykh Hasan Cissé became the movement's

representative in the United States. Several other children of Baay Ñas act as liaisons to Niger and other parts of West Africa.²⁰

It is in Western Saalum, the area south and east of Medina Baay, where Taalibe Baay Islamic authority plays the most decisive role in local governance independently of the state and where the geographical divisions are most minute. Each predominantly Taalibe Baay village has a *muqaddam* who represents Medina Baay there, acts as a moral authority, arbitrates disputes, and petitions government officials for improvements. In several villages I visited, the Shaykh overseeing the village had procured or was in the process of procuring running water or electricity through their relations with various politicians. The *muqaddam* might provide funds for mosque construction or religious schools. Sometimes the *muqaddam* lives in the village and plays an active role in everyday affairs, while sometimes the *muqaddam* lives in Medina Baay and delegates everyday affairs to one or more local leaders (the village chief, a local *muqaddam*, the imam). In many cases, Baay might assign a son or a close associate to represent him in a village because of some prior connection to the village—often the representative’s mother was born there—and in other cases there was no apparent prior connection. In villages that have more recently come into the movement, especially those further from Medina Baay, disciples in the village generally rally around a local *muqaddam* or another of their own choosing, although all *muqaddams* are ultimately under the moral authority of some male descendant of Baay Ñas.

²⁰ Baay’s son Makki is Medina Baay’s liaison to parts of Niger, partly because his full sister, Ummulxayri, married the Zarma *muqaddam* Abubakar Kyota (d. 2004) who became the movement’s representative in Niger.

In predominantly Taalibe Baay villages in Western Saalum, especially those long recognized as fiefs of Medina Baay, state officials deliberately have little presence and leave local governance and conflict resolution to religious and customary authorities.²¹ Mayors and prefects coordinate bureaucratic matters from nearby administrative towns but only appear publicly at major religious meetings, where they come primarily to demonstrate loyalty to religious leaders. Important decisions affecting the village must be approved through the *muqaddam* assigned as Medina Baay's liaison and coordinated through local religious leaders and chiefs, themselves approved by the religious leadership. Thus, with regards to most day-to-day happenings, Medina Baay and not Dakar is the capital of this area.

Conflicts between disciples who are not close kin typically require religious leaders' mediation, and cases of major rupture require the intervention of Medina Baay's central leadership, namely a senior son of Baay Ñas or of his closest disciple, Sëriñ Alliw Siise. Police may occasionally be called to avert immanent violence, but the case is subsequently settled through voluntary mediation by religious leaders who invoke both Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and mystical unity to determine a course of action and then to restore unity. Any attempt to settle a dispute through the court system would be likely viewed as a definitive repudiation of the bond shared by members of the religious community. As is the case with many informal conflict resolution practices, religious authorities aim to repair a rupture within the community and have little interest in openly assigning blame, although the timing or fashion of their intervention might favor one party.

²¹ Many of the historically Taalibe Baay villages were founded by the same "Njolofoon" families that Baay Ñas comes from. They are thus united not only by religious affiliation but by kinship and are therefore intimately connected and have a strong sense of autonomy from state institutions.

Case 1: A village divided

I spent much of the 2004 rainy season in a village south of Kaolack to participate in peanut farming. The village chief—a peanut farmer and an occult healer of some renown--hosted me and told me of how, over thirty years before, Baay Ñas had intervened to settle the chiefly succession dispute that ended in his appointment as chief. His father had died, and the rival Jóob patrilineage claimed to be the village's rightful chiefs. Although even my host could not explain exactly how he and the village founder were related, they shared the same last name, Sekk, which is often sufficient to establish two people as being of the same family. Baay Ñas was personally called in to resolve the dispute and named my host the village chief, explaining that the village bore my host's family name and that if the Jóob family wished to be chiefs they should go to a village called "Njóobeen," the nominal form of the family name. As a compromise, Baay named a member of the Jóob family to be the principal imam. This arrangement allowed both families to maintain their claim to village primacy in some sense: the Sekk family found vindication as the village's uncontested chiefs while the Jóob family could claim to be the village's hidden spiritual leaders.

When I arrived, a large Friday mosque had just been completed, and villagers made preparations for the inaugural Friday prayer, which would draw numerous Medina Baay notables and people from neighboring villages without their own Friday mosques. The imam whom Baay had appointed from the Jóob family, now advanced in age, was nearly deaf and blind and could not speak clearly. My host expressed worries about whether the imam could effectively and gracefully lead the larger Friday crowd. He proposed to the village elders that they name a new principal imam to lead Friday prayers while keeping the current imam to lead the smaller congregation in ordinary prayers. After visiting village elders to discuss several

candidates, the chief proposed a twenty-five-year-old son of the village—a member of neither rival clan—who was just finishing his studies at a large informal school in Gambia.

The Jóob family saw the appointment of such a young man above the current imam as an outrage and likely as an attempt to take away the spiritual role Baay had given them. Nonetheless, after much controversy, the village elders voted to accept the chief's proposal, a majority agreeing that the young man was amply knowledgeable despite his youth. The *muqaddam* delegated by Medina Baay to oversee the village approved the decision. My host cited a Wolof proverb: "Being old and enduring many rains are not the same."²² This young man, he insisted, was everyone's elder in terms of knowledge and wisdom. The new imam led several Friday prayers without incident despite festering antagonism.

On the morning of the Feast of Sacrifice (*'Īd al-'aḍḥā*), the villagers donned their finest clothes and gathered under the giant fig tree for the Feast Prayer. Appointed by the village chief to lead the prayer and to deliver the sermon, the new imam approached the congregation flanked by young men chanting *Allāhu 'akbar!* and *Lā 'ilāha 'illā-Llāh*. But he found members of the Jóob family already under the tree, gathering around the old imam. They ordered the new imam to desist and to let the old imam lead the prayer. The new imam, fresh out of school and nervous about taking the job in the first place, froze. My host urged him on, saying they had full authorization to go ahead with the prayer. When he began to move to the front of the congregation to begin the prayer, members of the Jóob family bore machetes and ordered him to stop. A man who owned the only working telephone in the village called the police at the

²² "Doo mag ak yàgg tawte duñu benn."

nearby administrative town. The police arrived and arrested those who had threatened the young imam. The Jóob faction boycotted the holiday prayer.

Shortly after the police jailed the offenders, a senior son of Baay Ñas arrived by car from Medina Baay and ordered that they be released and that the two parties convene to work out their differences peaceably. The police released the offenders, and after the leader exhorted both sides to be united in their love for God, the two sides compromised, agreeing that the old imam would continue to lead feast prayers while leaving the new imam to lead Friday prayers.

Both conflicts in this story—the earlier chiefly succession resolved by Baay Ñas and the current imam situation resolved by Baay Ñas’s son—involved the threat of violence but were resolved through Islamic leaders’ mediation rather than through appealing to state authorities. In the latter case, villagers called on police as an emergency measure to prevent injury or death, yet subjecting either party to the secular state’s legal process would not only have disgraced both parties but would show an unwillingness to submit to Islamic law. Both incidents show not only the unique legitimacy ascribed to religious authority but, more particularly, how specific logics of Şūfī negotiation serve to preserve competing narratives while diverting them from open collision. Both sides of these conflicts were allowed to preserve their own narrative by framing it as the deeper, *bāṭin* narrative and the opposing narrative as the more superficial, *ẓāhir* one.

Case 2: Cultural Difference and Divine Unity

The second case involves a potentially more decisive rift in the Senegalese Taalibe Baay community. Among the ongoing cultural rifts in the Senegalese Taalibe Baay community is between the Njolofoon of Western Saalum and the Saalum-Saalum of Eastern Saalum. The Njolofoon, a group of long-Islamized families related to Baay Ñas that immigrated to Saalum

together during the nineteenth century, now predominate in Medina Baay and surrounding villages. Njolofoon trace their ancestry to the Pulaar-speaking Senegal River Valley, which was Islamized a millennium ago, and many claim Arab ancestors. Eastern Saalum is dominated by Saalum-Saalum, families of mixed cultural origins who have been established in the area far longer and who were predominantly non-Muslim until the late nineteenth century. Both groups speak Wolof but descend from people who emigrated from other regions and spoke other languages. Many Njolofoon view themselves as more orthodox Muslims, coming from villages with a long tradition of Islamic learning and where religious chanting replaces the drumming and dancing found in Saalum-Saalum villages. They view many Saalum-Saalum as overly fanatical about their local religious leaders at the expense of the larger Taalibe Baay movement and of Islamic orthodoxy.

Daam Jóob is a prominent 38-year-old *muqaddam* from a village in eastern Saalum where, he once told me, most people only began practicing Islam seriously within his lifetime. He is famous beyond his years as an occult specialist of jinn, witches (*dëmm*, or soul-eaters), and other unseen problems. A *muqaddam* of the Imam of Medina Baay, Shaykh Hasan Siise, Jóob is perhaps better known for the occult knowledge he is said to have inherited from his legendary father and through his relationships with *jinn*.²³ Thus, he traces genealogies of knowledge through Medina Baay, through his father, and through *jinn*. His disciples, mostly Saalum-Saalum whose recent Islamization sets them apart sharply from the majority Njolofoon

23 Relationships with jinnes are often cited as sources of occult knowledge and signs of a person with formidable powers. See Chapter [dissertation-revolution].

population in Medina, have a reputation in Medina of fanatical devotion to Daam Jóob at the expense of their loyalty to Baay, the larger movement, and Islam.

From early in my stay in Medina Baay, I heard divided opinions of him. Many Medina Baay residents question whether he is truly a Taalibe Baay or if he has become too independent to be considered a “disciple.” His disciples, on the other hand, describe him as the *Fayḍah*'s most knowledgeable living leader and the possessor spiritual gifts that not even Baay Ñas's sons possess. Despite his disciples' claims of his Arabic erudition (which some in Medina Baay question), there is no Arabic school associated with him as there is with nearly every other major *muqaddam*. His disciples' soaring talk combined with his unproven erudition lead many in Medina Baay to approach him with suspicion.

One Friday afternoon, I heard that there had been a fight at the Medina Baay mosque following the Friday prayer. Young men from Medina Baay described the situation to me: as Daam Jóob was leaving the mosque with a large entourage who were chanting the *dhikr* loudly behind him, some disciples walked ahead to clear a path for him. A man sat in their way counting prayer formulas on his prayer beads. Daam Jóob's disciples ordered him to move. According to these young men, the man ignored them and remained seated, whereupon Daam Jóob's disciples grabbed the man and started beating him. The man revealed that he was a younger son of Baay Ñas whom the disciples likely did not recognize. (Some accounts insisted that they must have known who he was, making the act especially offensive.)

The young men continued: later that day, as word spread through Medina about this “attack on Baay Ñas's family,” outraged Medina residents came and seriously damaged Daam Jóob's house and four-wheel-drive truck. Medina Baay authorities made no haste to intervene

and some accounts say that certain sons of Baay Ñas encouraged the destruction. Imam Hasan Cissé, Baay Ñas's maternal grandson and Daam Jóob's personal leader, came that evening and expressed his horror that these disciples would so mistreat a son of Baay Ñas. Daam Jóob and his disciples returned to his village that night, soon sold the house, and for months neither he nor his disciples dared show themselves in Medina, including my friend Mamadu.

The following week, Mamadu (whom several of our mutual acquaintances had described a prime instigator) returned briefly and surreptitiously to Medina Baay and told me a very different account. I told him I had heard there were problems, and he nodded and said yes, big problems. I prodded him, and he recounted that when the disciples of Daam Jóob had asked the son of Baay Ñas politely to move, he had become angry and yelled at them. Mamadu insists that no violence took place at the mosque. In fact, he says, he and his fellow disciples were caught off guard that night when the son of Baay Ñas brought his friends to Daam Jóob's house and attacked Daam Jóob and his younger brother. Jóob's disciples had moved to defend their leader but he had ordered them to forbear and not to strike back. But, as people in Medina love controversies, Mamadu lamented, the incorrect version quickly spread, and the son of Baay Ñas and others damaged one of Jóob's cars beyond repair, damaged another car significantly, and caused part of the roof of his house to cave in. The Imam was so dismayed at the destruction that he came to Daam Jóob and cried over Medina Baay residents' lack of hospitality.

Another house mate, a Njolofeen high school student from Medina Baay, assured me that, although he had not witnessed the event, he was sure that Mamadu's version was grossly twisted, and that the son of Baay Ñas, whom he knows well, had not lifted a finger against Daam Jóob or his disciples. If they had not beaten the son of Baay Ñas, why was he treated at

the hospital that evening for an injury above his eye? I said that at least I hoped that Mamadu was not involved, and my friend (also a friend of Mamadu) assured me that Mamadu was a fanatic and had been the first to strike. Likewise, nearly all Medina Baay residents I spoke with were convinced that Daam Jóob’s followers bore the blame and had shown themselves to be “impolite” (*reew*) and lacked discipline (*yar*).

For eight months, Daam Jóob and his disciples avoided Medina Baay. Some told me Daam Jóob and his disciples would likely face violent reprisals if they were seen again. Yet this situation was unacceptable for both the Medina Baay leadership and Daam Jóob and his followers. He could not go on teaching mystical knowledge without Medina Baay’s blessing, and Medina Baay’s leadership depended on him represent the movement to a large rural constituency. To be restored to the community of disciples, he first had to demonstrate that he accepted his place as a disciple.

In December, 2004, Daam Jóob convened a large religious meeting in his village and invited the son of Baay Ñas who had been involved in the conflict to come and speak. Several buses and cars packed with Medina Baay notables and the religious associations (*daayiras*) associated with them trekked from Medina Baay to Jóob’s village. Daam Jóob received the guests in his sitting room before the public meeting and briefly addressed them. He indexed his discipleship to the “family of Baay”—represented metonymically by Baay’s son—by sitting on the floor and seating Baay Ñas’s son in an armchair. His speech mobilized the mystical opposition between the *zāhir*—represented by the “world”—and the *bāṭin*—represented by the words “God” and “unity”— to call for unity over division:

The fact that the family of Baay has come here today to give us a speech about God is a momentous act of unity for God. Because, you know how the world is today—if he were following the world he would never dream of coming here. But God is all he sees, God is all he experiences, and God is all he finds here too. All he finds here are his disciples and his loved ones who have nothing to offer him but peace. They place everything they have in his arms and tell him that he has come home to his family. We are listening to you—wherever you point us, that’s where we go; whatever you say, that’s how it is; whatever you want, that’s how it will be.²⁴

Later, during the meeting in the public square, other speakers similarly invoked the mystical principle of *bāṭin* unity, as well as the mystical unity between Baay, his family, and the community of disciples. Daam Jóob’s younger brother declared: “one might say that a son of Baay did not come here today, but rather Baay himself came.” It is common to say that Baay himself is attending a meeting, not meaning that he is looking on in spirit, but that his family, or the community of disciples, are mystically one with Baay.

The resolution of this conflict illustrates how language of mystical unity serves to restore moral community following a violent rupture. It also shows the productive tension between horizontal imaginations of a unified and egalitarian religious community and vertical relationships between disciples and a sovereign regime of religious knowledge to which they are subject. Disciples approach subordination to Baay and his family as a medium for the community’s oneness.

²⁴ These details come from Medina Baay Historical and Social Research Committee member Aadi Faal, who recorded and transcribed the meeting.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to show how Islam can have enormous consequences for local governance even where it neither challenges liberal democracy nor accepts its unique sovereignty. Taalibe Baay do engage in national and local secular politics (to an extent far beyond what this paper represents), yet to take this engagement as representative of their entire political orientation would be a serious mistake. Rather, their relationship to secular democracy is often paradoxical: they approach both secular democracy and Islamic authority as simultaneously legitimate yet in some ways irreconcilable.

In sum, Taalibe Baay do not generally expect any single set of propositions to reflect or address complex realities, and their preferred way of expressing this pragmatically pluralistic approach to sovereignty is in terms of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* levels of truth. The educational practices I have described emphasize the internal (*bāṭin*) qualities of Islamic knowledge and authority, creating hidden spaces outside public (*ẓāhir*) spaces of modern, secular knowledge. *Ṣūfī* knowledge and authority are oriented inward toward interpersonal relations rather than outward toward publics.

I have insisted on treating Islamic authority as grounded in a conception of “sovereignty.” Perhaps the most obvious reason is that Islamic authority addresses the kinds of conflicts involving violence and destruction of property classically reserved for state power, which “upholds the claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force” (Max Weber 1978, 54). The control of violence and physical force has long been understood to be the essence of sovereignty and therefore of the state as sovereign (Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Schmitt 2006; Agamben 1998, 2005). Yet beyond the violence that many scholars have seen as fundamental

to sovereignty, I have approached sovereignty as grounded in a metaphysical principle that legitimates it, which is inseparable from epistemology and education. Disagreements over which metaphysical principle should be treated as sovereign may be the unacknowledged root of confusion over whether Islam and secular democracy can be reconciled at all: the former grounds sovereignty in God's will while the latter grounded sovereignty in humanism. Taalibe Baay implicitly recognize multiple sovereignties through recognizing multiple epistemological principles that can exist side-by-side. While secular democracy aspires to pluralism through privatizing religious differences and subordinating them to humanistic principles, Taalibe Baay demonstrate pluralistic practices based on simultaneity—rather than subordination—of principles of knowledge, authority, and community.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Annan, Kofi A. 1999. Two Concepts of Sovereignty. *The Economist*, September 18.

Antoun, Richard T., and Mary Elaine Heglund, ed. 1987. *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Behrman, Lucy C. 1970. *Muslim Brotherhoods and Politics in Senegal*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Berger, Peter L., ed. 1999. *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

Berger, Peter L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1988. *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Comaroff, John L., and Jean Comaroff, ed. 1993. *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Copans, Jean. 1980. *Les marabouts de l'arachide: la confrérie mouride et les paysans du Sénégal*. Paris: Sycomore.
- Coulon, Christian. 1981. *Le marabout et le prince: Islam et pouvoir au Sénégal*. Paris: Editions Pedone.
- Cruise O'Brien, Donal B. 1971. *The Mourides of Senegal: the Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Athlone.
- Diouf, Mamadou. 2000. The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism. *Public Culture* 12, no. 3:679-702.
- Falk, Richard. 2004. *Declining World Order: America's Imperial Geopolitics*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1997. Technologies of the Self. In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 223-51, New York: New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1994. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage.
- Gauchet, Marcel. 1997. *The Disenchantment of the world: A Political History of Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gomez-Perez, Muriel. 1991. Associations islamiques à Dakar. *Islam et sociétés au Sud du Sahara* 5:5-20.

- Hansen, Thomas Blom, and Finn Stepputat, ed. 2005. *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harvey, David. 2000. *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Fredrich. 1991. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1997. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Ed. Gary Hatfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kepel, Gilles. 1994. *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Modern World*. University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Loimeier, Roman. 1996. The Secular State and Islam in Senegal. In *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*, Ed. David Westerlund, London: Hurst.
- Martin, David. 1990. *Tongues of Fire: The Explosioin of Protestantism in Latin America*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Renders, M. 2002. An Ambiguous Adventure: Muslim Organisations and the Discourse of 'Development' in Senegal. *Journal of religion in Africa* 32, no. 1:61-81.
- Sahliyah, Emile, ed. 1990. *Religious Resurgence and Politics in the Contemporary World*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Schmitt, Carl. 2006. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Ed. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Villalon, Leonardo Alfonso. 1995. *Islam and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weber, Eugen. 1976. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weber, Max. 1958. Science as Vocation. In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 129-157, New York: Oxford University Press.

Westerlund, David, ed. 1996. *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*. London: Hurst.