

FRENCH ATTITUDES AND POLICIES TOWARDS ISLAM  
IN WEST AFRICA, c. 1900 - 1940

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## Abstract

This thesis describes the development in French intellectual understanding of the nature of Islam in West Africa and analyses the policies adopted by successive colonial administrations towards Muslims in the French West African Federation. Three broad periods are identified and illustrated with a selection of case studies.

The first period (c.1900 - 1913) was one characterised by great uncertainty about the nature of Islam and by suspicion and fear of its power. French metropolitan political battles combined with the spirit of pre-war international diplomacy to create a climate which favoured conspiracy theories, and these were reflected in attitudes towards Islam.

The political dangers that had become apparent in this essentially hostile attitude and the loyalty of African Muslims to France at the outbreak of the First World War contributed to a reassessment of policy. This is described in the second part of the thesis covering the years 1914 - 1920 which saw major advances in French knowledge of Islam. Above all these advances were due to the work of Paul Marty, the Director of the Department of Muslim Affairs in French West Africa. His in-depth

studies of Muslim societies provided the administration with the information and the confidence necessary to construct alliances with a wide range of Muslim leaders. At the same time the influence of Durkheimian theories of religion was reflected in an increasingly sophisticated perception of non-Muslim societies and in a view of African Islam which stressed its pre-Islamic foundations.

The third and final period (1920 - 1940) was one in which the Russian Revolution and the growth of nationalism in Africa and Asia caused a certain amount of anxiety about Islam but in which, nonetheless, French dependence upon a number of Muslim leaders was the most striking aspect of Franco-Islamic relations. The highly personalised nature of this relationship survived until the end of the colonial era.

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For my parents

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Finally, my thanks go to Dorothy Ward for typing this thesis so beautifully.

## Abbreviations

AEF	Afrique Equatoriale Française
ANS	Archives Nationales du Sénégal
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française
BCAF	Bulletin du comité de l'Afrique française
BCEHSAOF	Bulletin du comité des études historiques et scientifiques de l'AOF
CEA	Cahiers des études africaines
CHEAM	Centre des hautes études administratives sur l'Afrique et l'Asie moderne
FD	Fouta Djallon (Futa Jallon)
HSN	Haut Sénégal & Niger
IC	Institut Catholique
IF	Institut de France
JAH	Journal of African History
JOAOF	Journal officiel de l'AOF
RCBCAF	Renseignements coloniaux: Bulletin du comité de l'Afrique française
RFOM	Revue française d'histoire outre-mer
RMM	Revue du monde musulman
SHAT	Service historique de l'armée de terre

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study is a contribution to the social, political and intellectual history of one of the largest colonial states in Africa - the Federation of French West Africa (AOF). The Federation grouped together the present-day states of Senegal, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso (Upper Volta), Benin and Guinea. Between them they straddle all the major bands of climate and vegetation that are to be found in West Africa - and the indigenous population is correspondingly varied. Yet this vast and varied area was for over fifty years treated as a single administrative unit presided over by an alien government based in the Federation's capital in Dakar. Muslims were to be found in all the colonies of the group - though the proportions varied from the exclusively Muslim society of Mauritania to the mainly animist and Christian societies in the southern coastal colonies of Dahomey and the Ivory Coast. By examining French attitudes and policies towards Islam it is possible to gain some insight into both the political nature and ideological underpinning of the colonial state of AOF. It is hoped that these

insights will contribute to an understanding of the nature of French colonialism on the one hand and to the African, and, specifically, Muslim African, reactions to this experience on the other.

### Methodology and themes

The need to come to terms not only with the importance but also with the complex and often contradictory nature of the colonial state seems unquestionable, and this constitutes the first of the major themes of this study. The capitalist penetration of Africa that took place during the colonial era, the creation of an infrastructure within the colonies designed to meet the needs of metropolitan capital and the determination of Africa's patently nonsensical boundaries have all had the profoundest of impacts on Africa's political, social and economic development. Claims that the colonial era represented no more than an 'interlude' in African history<sup>(1)</sup> do little justice to the enormity of change that has taken place over the last century. Yet at the same time it is necessary to add nuance to this 'enormity of change' for it is clear that there

(1) See E. Isichei A History of Nigeria London 1983 for a recent example of such an approach.

was much that colonialism did not change and much that the colonials never saw nor ever heard. Furthermore, 'change' occurred in ways that the colonial administrators could not anticipate for Africans were not the dumb and passive subjects of colonial rule that was often imagined. They - if one may be permitted the generalisation - retained their own identity and took advantage of any opportunity the colonial situation offered. (1)

Nor were the colonials homogeneous and all-powerful - whatever illusion of control the maxim-gun may have afforded. Political intrigue and competition flourished within the small and isolated colonial societies. However much the rhetoric of colonialism may have stressed the altruism of the 'civilising mission', Frenchmen by and large went to the colonies as a career in which they attempted to advance themselves as fast as they could up the complex hierarchy of bureaucratic promotion. As everybody knows, career-building is a vicious and fiercely competitive process and in the colonies it was no exception. However, at least for the early part of this study, Frenchmen not only had to look over their shoulders to keep an eye on their rivals but they also

(1) This is one of the main themes of J. Iliffe A Modern History of Tanganyika Cambridge, 1979 see esp. pp. 248-69.

had to look out for a wide range of fatal diseases. At the turn of the century medicine had advanced sufficiently to ensure that Europeans need not expect to die in the tropics. Nonetheless the death rate was still very high: in 1914 one in ten of the graduates of the Ecole Coloniale, the training school for colonial administrators, would die within the first few years of serving in the colonies. <sup>(1)</sup>

A parallel, though not a parallel that one would wish to push too far, to the relationship between the French administration and their colonial subjects can be seen in the social history of nineteenth-century Britain. The fear of the British ruling classes of the 'masses' (as they were both variously constituted throughout the century) was similar to the European's fear of Africans and, perhaps, the ignorance of each other's respective lifestyles was as near complete in both cases. The success with which the British ruling classes maintained social order with relatively few resources of coercive power is striking. This success has often been explained by recourse to theories of 'social control' according to which the ruling class made up for its lack of coercive power by controlling the education, morality and leisure of the masses,

(1) According to M. Delafosse 'L'école coloniale' RCBCAF 3, 1914 pp. 137-46.

thereby instilling them with respect for authority and encouraging them to pursue leisure activities that would take their minds off their economic exploitation. A similar argument could be applied to the colonial situation. However, the concept of 'social control' needs to be treated with care. The following remarks of the British social historian, F.M.L. Thomson, are important ones and deserve full quotation for they are very suggestive of the dangers of taking the relationship between rulers and ruled at face value. Of Victorian Britain he writes:

Authority and the legalized use of force on which it ultimately rested were, as always, exerted in ways intended to uphold a social fabric congenial to the holders of power, and they were concerned to induce the people to accept as legitimate the ways in which authority was exercised. That was the aim of social control. It should not be accepted as the sole or even the most important, of the non-coercive agencies in the process of social conditioning, partly because of the often yawning gap between the aims of the social controllers and the actual achievements; partly because many improvers and reformers were socializers rather than controllers, peddling recipes for better survival in a changing environment rather than weaving webs of subordination; and partly because there was an independent spontaneous life in popular culture, and the working classes were a great deal more than puppets on the end of bourgeois strings. (1)

(1) F.M.L. Thompson 'Social Control in Victorian Britain' Economic History Review xxxiv (2) 1981 pp.189-208. This passage is from p.207.

I believe that this is also a useful way of looking at the colonial situation. It is an amoral view of history in that it takes for granted the wish of the ruling class to maintain its grip on authority but in its awareness of the importance of survival in a changing world and in the rich variety of response to authority it is also a reassuringly humanist perception of history.

The second general theme concerns the problem of 'understanding' other societies and cultures. Studies of European perceptions of non-European societies<sup>(1)</sup> all rightly highlight the Eurocentric and innately racist nature of these perceptions. This study will provide further examples of these characteristic perceptions but it is important to stress, as M. Rodinson has done in his critique of E.W. Said's Orientalism, that one should not be tempted into arguing that the perceptions of the western scholar or administrator are inevitably invalidated by his or her race and social class:

- (1) For example, P. Curtin The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850 London, 1964; W.B. Cohen The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks 1530-1886 Bloomington, 1980; J-J Waardenburg L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident Paris & The Hague, 1963; H.Djait L'Europe et l'Islam Paris, 1978; E.W. Said Orientalism London 1978; M. Rodinson La fascination de l'Islam Paris, 1980.

It was entirely true that the conclusions of bourgeois scholars were partially, and to a greater or lesser extent according to the discipline, personality, conjuncture, and specific cases, influenced by their class situation. But that does not mean that their [conclusions] were totally without relationship with what one has to call reality.(1)

As I hope this study will show, of the several people commentating on Islam in West Africa some were much more competent than others and it would be a mistake to group them all together under one label.

Nevertheless, it is hard to disagree with Said's basic theme that the Muslim Arab world was grossly distorted in western perceptions, and that these distortions were well-suited to western political designs.(2) Another point which Said stresses is the ahistorical nature of the western vision of the Arab world:

The Orientalist attitude ... shares with magic and mythology, the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are because they are what they are, for once and for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter.(3)

(1) Rodinson op cit p. 15.

(2) 'Colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism' ... 'the essence of which lay in the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority' Said op cit pp. 39,42.

(3) ibid p. 70.

Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient, absolutely different from the West. And Orientalism, in its eighteenth-century form could never revise itself. (1)

This ahistorical vision was evident in many European accounts of the African past and was, as we shall see, an important factor in policy-formulation. However, it is important to recognise that Europeans often regarded their own past through similarly ahistorical eyes. The eighteenth and nineteenth-century collectors and chroniclers of European popular culture, for example, likewise assumed an unchanging, undifferentiated and timeless bucolic past. (2)

The third theme of this study is closely related to the second and concerns the contribution of the social sciences to colonial rule. The colonial era was characterised by, amongst other things, a relentless pursuit of facts and statistics. The reasons for this are clear enough. Firstly, at the end of the nineteenth century European powers found themselves in nominal governance of vast areas of land about which they knew very little. There was, therefore, a lot of ground to be made up. Secondly, the model of government in Europe with its increasingly bureaucratic

(1) ibid p.96.

(2) P. Burke Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe London, 1979. ch. 1 'The discovery of the past'.

and interventionist states relied heavily on statistics. Social scientists made considerable claims for their discipline and at the turn of the century, a time when Durkheim wrote that 'Sociology is on everybody's lips' (1) it was confidently predicted that government would soon be elevated to the status of a science.

However, the forward march of science was not without its obstacles. Not everybody had even heard of 'sociology' let alone agreed with its fundamental assumptions. A debate conducted in Africa, the journal of the International African Institute in 1929 between the anthropologist, Malinowski, and the future Governor of Kenya, Mitchell provides an excellent summary of the way in which the claims of 'Science' and the 'Practical Man' could sometimes conflict. (2) Even with the best will in the world it is not clear that administrators would have been capable of making use of the insights of social scientists. R. Buell, an early American political scientist who made a major study of the 'native'

(1) Cited in S. Lukes Emile Durkheim: his life and work, Harmondsworth, 1973 p.396.

(2) See Africa, 2, 1929; Africa, 3, 1930 for Malinowski's and Mitchell's articles. Mitchell argued that the 'Scientist' was incapable of reaching his conclusions with sufficient speed to be of any practical use and that he lacked the broad range of skills and knowledge that were essential to the 'Practical Man'. Malinowski countered that colonial rule urgently needed a base of scientific understanding if it was to be efficient and acceptable.

policies of the various colonial powers reported that, 'The French Colonial Office has an immense library and archives, but neither officials nor scholars can make use of them because of the lack of an adequate index or filing system. In 1925 the French budget appropriated 4,900 francs for the Colonial Office Library - a sum which would not even pay for book-binding.'<sup>(1)</sup> If this was the situation in Paris one would scarcely expect it to be any better in the colonies themselves, but it is, perhaps, as a symbol of the problem of using 'knowledge' in 'government' that Buell's anecdote is best remembered.

A final point related to this theme, and one which is much more specific to the question of French attitudes towards Islam, is to realise that the positivist social sciences cut in several ways as far as Islam was concerned. For whilst it is true, as Peter Clarke has pointed out, that the notion that Islam represented a step up from animism owes a great deal to the ideas of Comte <sup>(2)</sup> it should be remembered that in Durkheimian sociology (which belongs to the same positivist tradition as Comtean philosophy) Islam loses its favoured status. For when Durkheim argued that all religions are a means by which societies maintain cohesion

(1) R. Buell The Native Problem in Africa (2 vols) New York, 1928 volume II p. 93.

(2) P. Clarke West Africa and Islam London, 1982 pp. 189-90

and social order and that as a result 'There are no religions which are false' and that 'The God is only a figurative expression of the society'(1) he undermined the 'superiority' of Islam over animism. It was now possible to argue, indeed, that animism was a superior religion to Islam because it was better suited to the temperament and the way of life of African societies. This was to be a subject of considerable importance amongst certain influential circles of the French colonial administration.

The fourth theme of this study concerns the transposition by the French of their own metropolitan preoccupations and political battles to the colonies. Of particular significance were the Dreyfus affair and the battle over the Secularisation laws, which between them dominated French political life at the turn of the century, deeply divided France and highlighted a particular conspiratorial style of French politics. Conspiracy was as potent a myth as it was a reality. It provided a useful weapon with which to defame one's opponents and at the same time galvanise one's supporters into a show of solidarity against the threat of a well-organized, yet shadowy conspiracy. As a result a suspicion of conspiracy verging on paranoia came to be a characteristic of

(1) Cited in Lukes Durkheim pp. 460,461.

French political thinking.<sup>(1)</sup> On an international level also politics in pre-First World War Europe were dominated by intrigue amongst statesmen, and the presence of numerous small anarchist groups not only added spice to political life but also represented, as Sarajevo proved, a significant factor in world politics. Conspiracy should then be taken seriously and it will be very difficult to understand French perceptions of Islam in West Africa if one does not take account of its importance in metropolitan life.

The fifth theme is more specific. It concerns the attempt to identify the level at which colonial 'policy' in AOF operated. At one extreme AOF represented part of France's strategic interests elsewhere in the world. It so happened that France's most important and oldest overseas possessions lay across on the other side of the Sahara desert from AOF and that the indigenous population there was overwhelmingly Muslim. France's 'Muslim Empire' was further increased after the First World War with the share out of the Ottoman Empire between France and Britain. At this level 'Islamic policy' was practically synonymous with 'imperial policy'. At the other extreme AOF represented a

(1) See M. Riberioux La République radicale? 1898-1914 Paris, 1975 for general background. A Gide's The Vatican Cellars (1914) is an amusing satire on French preoccupation with conspiracy theories.

federation of parochial governments, isolated 'parish councils' whose perception of policy and strategic interest was necessarily limited and for whom the dictates of imperial bureaucrats in Paris may well have been quite meaningless. The federal government in Dakar was placed in between the parish politics of the cercle and the imperial politics of the Empire. This study attempts to cover the totality of this range. By focussing on particular case-studies it is hoped that it is possible to give some indication both of the diversity which existed within AOF and of the conflict of interests which was inherent in its position as half-way house between parish pump (or, more appropriately, village well) and the Colonial Office in the rue Oudinot. (It should, however, be noted that the Colonial Office was a poorly organised one and that one must be wary of talking over-confidently of such a thing as an overall imperial strategy.) (1)

The final theme is the one around which the thesis is organised: the attempt to impose a sense of periodisation on the events that were taking place and on the ideas that were taking shape. The periodisation

- (1) See C.S. Andrew & A. Kanya Forstner France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion London, 1981; C-R. Ageron France coloniale ou Parti colonial? Paris 1978; R. Girardet L'Idée coloniale en France Paris, 1971.

offered here is one that begins: (i) with the years in which administrators attempted to apply the knowledge gained by the French experience in Algeria and in which the growth of Arab nationalism and Germany's activities in Europe, Morocco and the Middle East preoccupied colonial minds and to a certain extent distorted their perception of local realities; that continues (ii) with the years in which a concerted effort was made to understand better the local realities, to play down the Algerian model and to establish a system of stable alliances and coalitions; and that finally (iii) ends with the years in which world events (notably the Russian Revolution) were allowed to re-enter the stage but were not allowed, however, to disrupt the pattern of alliances that had now been established. These three periods fall approximately into the years c. 1900 - 1913, 1913 - 1920 and c. 1920 - 1940.

#### A note on the sources

The sources used in this study have been exclusively written sources and include a large number of published works. The main archival sources were those of the Federal Government of AOF which are kept in Dakar and of the Colonial Ministry kept in the rue Oudinot, Paris. Smaller collections of personal

papers in the rue Oudinot and in the Institut de France were also of particular interest as were the military archives kept in the Chateau de Vincennes. In the AOF archives the series 2G is well-known to all historians of the colonial era. It contains the monthly, quarterly and annual reports of all the cercles and colonies of AOF and is therefore a fund of information. However, the series must be treated with care: carefully written reports tend by their very nature to edit out confusion, to hide ignorance and, more seriously, to give little sense of the dynamic forces behind any particular event. I have, therefore, made more use of the series covering individual colonies and specific areas of administration (Education, Justice, Muslim Affairs etc.) which contain not only official enquiries but also all the correspondence. They are not as easy to use as the monthly reports as one has to construct for oneself the sequence of events, but the effort is worthwhile as they allow us more easily 'to read between the lines'. My published sources have been the numerous monographs and articles written about Islam and West African societies early this century. Many of the authors were themselves administrators and their writings are full of fascinating insights and detail. They are all very revealing of the character and attitudes of the authors as well as being serious pieces of scholarship in their

own right. Inevitably some works were less scholarly than others, but this does not explain why the body of colonial scholarship as a whole was so ignored by the French academic establishment. The lack of interest of early French sociologists and anthropologists in the work produced in the West African colonies is a subject of French intellectual history worthy of a separate study and here we can only record the fact in passing. The lack of interest was certainly not mutual as it is clear that the scholar-administrators were well abreast of the latest theories of, for example, Durkheim and Levy-Bruhl. A closer study may even reveal that these theories were in some instances anticipated by the colonial studies. I have translated all the source material appearing in the body of the text. Some of the translations I know appear somewhat stilted and inelegant. This is due in part to the inadequacies of the translator but also owes much to the peculiar inelegance and long-windedness of much French administrative writing.

### Orthography

Sixty years ago T.E. Lawrence was able to dismiss the query of the copy-editor of Seven Pillars of Wisdom concerning the six different spellings he had given for the same Arab prince with the comment, 'Good egg. I call this really ingenious'. Today such attitudes are frowned upon, but each scholar continues to have his or her own personal system of transliteration based on a more or less intimate knowledge of the linguistic structures of Tamasheq, Fulfulde or Bambara.

This thesis covers a wide range of African languages and I can make no claim to scientific accuracy in the transliteration of any of them. I have simply aimed to be consistent as much as possible and to avoid the French use of -ou and dj- where -u, w-, aw- or j- would be more appropriate. Thus, the French spellings of 'ouali', Fouta' and 'Oulad', for example, are spelt in this thesis as 'wali', 'Futa' and 'Awlad'. In quotations spellings are given as in the original French. Placenames are generally spelt as they appeared on the colonial map,

but where reference is made to the pre-colonial town the spelling may be altered. Thus Djenne (the colonial town) appears also as 'Jenne' (the pre-colonial town). An exception has been made in the case of 'Timbuktu' which is never spelt, except in quotations, in its French version of 'Tombouctou'.

At this juncture it is appropriate to review some of the related secondary literature. A study of French relations with Islam can, it must be said, make little claim to originality. Scarcely had Africa been partitioned before French 'experts' were sent to investigate and report on Islam.<sup>(1)</sup> By 1915 two doctoral dissertations on the subject had been submitted to French universities.<sup>(2)</sup> Throughout the colonial period successive administrators, scholars and interested spectators produced a constant stream of works on the problem of what policies should be adopted towards France's Muslim subjects.

The concern of scholars in the post-colonial era has, not surprisingly, shifted away from the administrative 'problem' of Islam towards an attempt to understand its internal dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa. In analysing the huge increase in Islamic conversion over the last two centuries scholars have focussed their attention on such themes as Jihād and Islamic

- (1) The first such mission was led by the Islamicist A. Le Chatelier in 1886.
- (2) A Quellien La Politique musulmane dans l'Afrique occidentale française Paris, 1910; F. Carles La France et l'Islam en Afrique occidentale Toulouse, 1915.

reform (1), the economic and social foundations of the expansion of Islam (2), the relationship between Islam and slavery in Africa (3), Islamic response to

- (1) The literature on jihād is enormous. B.G. Martin Muslim Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century Cambridge, 1976 is one of the best introductions to the nineteenth-century movements. M. Last 'Reform movements in West Africa' in new edition of J.F.A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (eds) History of West Africa, volume ii (forthcoming) is the best survey of recent scholarship. I am grateful to Dr. Last for allowing me to read this chapter before publication. See also J.R. Willis (ed) Studies in West African Islamic History volume i London, 1979.
- (2) See M. Johnson 'The economic foundations of an Islamic theocracy - the case of Masina' JAH xvii (4) 1976, pp. 481-95; M. Klein 'Social and economic factors in the Muslim revolution of the Senegambia' JAH xiii (3) 1972, pp. 419-40; C.C. Stewart Islam and Social Order in Mauretania: a case study from the nineteenth century Oxford, 1973; C.C. Stewart 'Southern Saharan scholarship and the Bilad al-Sudan' JAH xvii (1) 1976 pp. 73-93; L.O. Sanneh The Jakhanke: the history of an Islamic clerical order of the Senegambia London, 1979; L.O. Sanneh 'The origins of clericalism in West African Islam' JAH xvii (1) 1976 pages 49-72; J.R. Willis 'The Torodbe clerisy: a social view' JAH xix (2) 1978 pp. 195-212.
- (3) P. Lovejoy Transformations in Slavery: a history of slavery in Africa Cambridge, 1983.

colonialism (1) and, finally, the political economy of Islam in the twentieth century. (2) At the same time scholars and Muslim leaders have been anxious to reintegrate African Islam - Islam noir as it is called by the French - into the mainstream of the Islamic world. This has been in response to the affirmation of many colonial 'experts' that African Muslims were not true Muslims because they practised a 'bastardised' form of Islam. Nonetheless the specificity of Islam in Africa retains its interest and the theological works of African Muslims are beginning to receive serious attention from western scholars. (3) A subject which is likely to attract increasing attention is the study of the esoteric sciences in Islam which were dismissed

- (1) M.A. Klein Islam and Imperialism in Senegal: Sine-Saloum 1847-1914 Edinburgh, 1968; C.A. Quinn Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia: Traditionalism, Islam and Colonial Expansion Evanston, 1972; D. Robinson Chiefs and Clerics: Abdul Bokar Kan and Futa Toro, 1853-1891 Oxford, 1975; A. Traore 'Contribution à l'étude de l'islam: le mouvement Tijanien de Cheikh Hama houllah' Thèse de 3ème cycle, Dakar 1975 (now published).
- (2) D.C. Cruise O'Brien The Mourides of Senegal Oxford, 1971; Saints and Politicians; C. Coulon Le Marabout et le Prince Paris, 1982.
- (3) See, for example, F. Dumont La Pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba Dakar/Abidjan 1975.

as charlatanism during the colonial era.<sup>(1)</sup> This bibliography (which makes no claims to being comprehensive) is essentially an Islamicist one. Yet it cannot be regarded as being peripheral to the colonial historian. Islamic response to colonial rule and colonial reaction to an Islamic presence are, clearly, related subjects. Although many of the works cited above discuss at some stage the nature of European colonial policy towards Islam none make any claim to a systematic treatment of the subject. As their titles suggest their subject matter is limited to specific years, regions and, in some cases, personalities. The one article which addressed itself specifically to the question of French policy towards Islam in West Africa is in reality an analysis of French policy towards Islam in Senegal.<sup>(2)</sup> Donal Cruise O'Brien outlined four stages of policy between 1854 and 1914: (i) the period of military conquest (lasting up to the turn of the century) in which the French had no Islamic policy; (ii) the attempts by the civilian administration

- (1) L. Brenner West African Sufi: the religious heritage and spiritual search of Cerno Saalif Bokar Taal London, 1983 has demonstrated the central importance of the subject.
- (2) D.C. Cruise O'Brien 'Towards an "Islamic policy" in French West Africa, 1854-1914' JAH viii (2) 1967 pp. 303-16.

in the first decade of the twentieth century to regulate and document Islam in order to make use of it; followed by (iii) a brief period of uncertainty and suspicion of the disruptive force of Islam throughout the world; before (iv) the evidence of Muslim loyalty during the First World War convinced the colonial administration that they had no interest in combatting Islam. This periodisation fits the situation in Senegal very well but it is far from certain that it can be seen as an accurate description of the policy changes in, for example, the Ivory Coast or the French Sudan. (1)

For a variety of reasons, which have as much to do with Senegal's liberal regime and its pleasant climate as with the intrinsic interest in Senegal's past, Senegal has been investigated in considerably greater depth than the other colonies of AOF. Whilst this is understandable it has perhaps led to a confusion that equates Senegal with French West Africa and the Senegalese sufi Muslim brotherhood, the Mourides, with West African Islam. This study will make use of a wider spread of case-studies to illustrate French relations with a

(1) On these areas see respectively J-L Triaud 'La question musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire' RFHOM lxi (225) 1974 pp. 542-71 and L. Harding 'Französische Religionspolitik in West Afrika "Soudan français" 1895-1920' Inaugural Dissertation zur Erlangung des Grades einer Doktor der Philosophie der Freien Universität Berlin, 1972.

variety of Islamic communities throughout West Africa. The selection of data is inevitably a subjective exercise. The main criterion used in the selection of case-studies in this study is that the events were of sufficient importance to involve all layers of the administration from the cercle up to the Colonial Office. In practice this is a much more inclusive category than might be imagined as even apparently trivial events were capable of generating a voluminous official correspondence. However, I have attempted to select cases where the involvement between cercle and the Colonial Office in the rue Oudinot was rather more active and dynamic than a mere exchange of letters. The case-studies are intended not so much to be 'typical' of a certain era (though I hope they are not untypical) as to be major - decisive even - events. The task of making the conceptual leap from incidents involving the Tuareg nomads of the Sahara to those involving the urban creole Muslims of coastal Dahomey is somewhat eased by concentrating also on the French personalities responsible for, or at least influential in, the administration of Islamic affairs. These personalities not only provide a unifying base from which to branch out to the corners of the vast French West African Federation but they are also worthy of attention in their own right.

Finally, it is necessary to sketch a brief historical background to the events covered in this study.

### Islam in West Africa to c. 1850

The history of the Islamic presence in West Africa is a long one.<sup>(1)</sup> The introduction of the camel to the Sahara in the second century AD had revolutionised transport and had made possible long distance trade across the deserts of North Africa. As a result it is probable that sub-Saharan Africa had some contact with the Muslim societies in Egypt and the Maghreb from the first days of these areas' respective Islamicisation. Until the seventeenth/eighteenth centuries Islam in West Africa was confined mainly to the royal courts and to the trading communities. Although centres of scholarship existed from an early date the type of Islam practised is generally regarded as being 'syncretic' - combining a good deal of pre-Islamic polytheism with the main tenets of Islamic

(1) For overall surveys see V. Monteil L'Islam noir (3rd edition) Paris, 1980; J.S. Trimingham A History of Islam in West Africa Oxford, 1962; P. Clarke West Africa and Islam London, 1983; M. Hiskett The Development of Islam in West Africa London, 1984. The following paragraphs are based on all of these.

dogma.(1) The first major development took place in the eleventh century with the conversion of the rulers of the ancient Soninke empire of Ghàna to Islam by the Berber Almoravids of southern Morocco. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the influence of Islam upon the rulers of the empire of Mali 'not only served to associate Islam with Sudanic kingship; it also drew the Sudan more closely into the world of international politics, diplomacy and trade.' (2) Several of Mali's rulers, most notably Mansa Musa, made spectacular pilgrimages to Mecca. The reputation

- (1) See Lansine Kaba's description of the operation of Islam in 16th century Songhay for example of the meaning of 'syncretic' Islam in 'The Pen, the Sword and the Crown: Islam and Revolution in Songhay reconsidered, 1464-1493' JAH xxv (3) 1984 pp. 241-56, especially p. 245. 'The Songhay cosmology appears to have had a two-tier structure, the first tier being that of the ancestral spirits and the second that of Islamic monotheism. Although the two did not blur into a unified new entity, they interacted on different planes, underpinning different processes, while the lesser spirits were viewed as forces deriving their power from a supreme being. This process indicates Islam's adaptiveness to different cultural systems. Gradually, the cultural change which brought about conversion could ultimately become an integral part of the life of the Islamic community and a distinctive, yet authentic, expression of the wider Muslim civilization.'

- (2) Hiskett Development of Islam p.30

of the learned ulema of Timbuktu was established during the sixteenth century in the Songhay empire under the askiya dynasty, surviving even the Moroccan conquest of Songhay in the late sixteenth century. In the Senegambia none of the smaller states that developed in the wake of the collapse of the Malian empire were ruled by Muslims until the seventeenth century, but through trade an Islamic influence was always present. In the Sudan, however, the empire of Kanem and later Borno, at the southern end of trade routes to Tripoli and Egypt were dominated by Muslim rulers. The Islamic presence in the various Hausa kingdoms dates back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries though none of the rulers accepted Islam before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

From the end of the sixteenth century the nature of the Islamic presence in sub-Saharan Africa began to alter and to acquire a broader base and, in some cases, a more militant leadership. It was at this time that Sufi ideas started to penetrate West African society more deeply.<sup>(1)</sup> The development of Sufism at this stage is associated in particular with the Qadiriyya, a Sufi order (tariqa, pl. turuq) that had been founded in Baghdad in the twelfth century AD and which had

(1) ibid ch. 15.

spread rapidly to North Africa. During the fifteenth century it was introduced to the western Sudan by the Tuareg Kel es Suq and the Arab Kunta. The doctrines of the Qadiriyya underwent some modification during the sixteenth century as to the characteristic (and wholly orthodox) mystical Sufi practices was added a growing veneration of Qadiri holy men or saints (wali, pl. awliya). The saints were thought to be capable of interceding on the believer's behalf with God and the Prophet Muhammed on the last day of judgement. The tombs of men, who might be local men, regarded as saints became centres of pilgrimage. As a result of the charismatic leadership of the saints whilst alive and the importance of their tombs after their deaths the Sufi turuq (at first the Qadiriyya but later also the Tijaniyya, Mourides (Muridiyya), Sanusiyya and several others) were able to attract a larger and more popular following than the early propagators of Islam had been capable of doing. Furthermore, the Sufi orders although tied into the wider Islamic world developed a stronger local identity.

At the same time as these developments were growing in momentum reform movements in Senegambia successfully created Islamic states in Bundu, Futa Toro and Futa Jallon. The leaders of the reform movements showed a willingness that had not hitherto existed to go out

into the countryside to preach and convert agriculturalists. At the same time they showed a marked unwillingness to tolerate the syncretic form of Islam that was practised in many of the royal courts and urban centres. (1) The most significant of the reform movements was the one led by Usman dan Fodio in the early nineteenth century in Hausaland which resulted in the creation of the Sokoto caliphate. The success of the jihadists or reformers greatly increased the numbers under Islamic rule and through a combination of violent coercion and more peaceful means many were persuaded to convert to Islam. The political and economic consequences were profound. (2)

### The French conquest of Algeria

Shortly after the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate Europeans showed the first signs that their interest in Africa was becoming more active. Long established in trading posts on the coast Europeans now began

- (1) Last 'Reform movements'
- (2) Lovejoy Transformation of Slavery ch. 9 'Slavery in the savanna during the era of the jihāds' gives one of the most important aspects of the political and economic consequences.

tentatively to show a greater interest in the interior. Mungo Park became the first European to reach the Upper Niger in 1795 and in 1824 Rene Caillié began his travels that were to take him to Timbuktu. However, the most significant developments were taking place north of the Sahara, in Algeria, where in 1830 a French force captured the town of Algiers.<sup>(1)</sup> For ten years the French were content to allow the principal Algerian leader, Abd al-Qadir to build up a sphere of influence in the interior leaving the French in peace on the coast but the appointment of General Bugeaud in 1841 to the command of the French army was a signal of France's intention to pursue the conquest further inland. Through the 1840s Bugeaud led a brutal military campaign, particularly during the years 1841-2 when he initiated a scorched-earth policy that soon sapped the will of Abd al-Qadir's followers to resist. In April 1845 Bugeaud justified his policy in language that was to become familiar later south of the Sahara:

We have never obtained anything from these people except through force. In vain we have often tried means of persuasion. Either there was no response at all or they told us that we would first have to fight (brûler de la poudre) and that if we triumphed, then they would submit.<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) Following paragraph is based on C-A Julien Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine Paris, 1964 and M. Morsy North Africa 1800-1900 London, 1984.

(2) cited in Julien op cit p. 223

However, Bugeaud also recognised the need to have Algerian intermediaries but these, he urged, should be closely supervised by specialist officers from the newly-created bureaux arabes. A ministerial decree in 1844, which served as the blueprint for the bureaux until reforms were introduced in 1867, stipulated that every administrative area in the military territory of Algeria should have a bureau that would be immediately subordinate to the commanding officer. In practice this was an extremely powerful position as the army was wholly dependent upon the bureaux for information and advice. In their early days the bureaux were credited with being 'a paternalist authority' taking a sympathetic interest in Arab affairs and as such were resented by the early colons who accused them of being arabophile. (1)

Bugeaud's career in Algeria ended in 1847 when he was asked to retire - a few months before Abd al-Qadir's eventual submission. The 1848 Revolution in France brought with it a new Republican Constitution in which the colony of Algeria was accorded the same status as a metropolitan département. In the same year 13,500 French colons were transported to Algeria which in this turbulent period of French politics had become a useful place to send political opponents. However,

(1) ibid pp.330-37

the most dramatic increase in the European population took place in the 1860s with a rise of over 40% in under a decade. The Algerian policy of Emperor Napoleon III who had seized power in 1852 was a paradoxical one. He shared the optimism of the Saint Simonians in the possibility of a planned and rational colonisation that as a result of providing the necessary infrastructure (particularly railways) to encourage industry would benefit the indigenous population and settler in equal measure. To the dismay of the settlers he encouraged the idea that Algeria was not so much a colony but an 'Arab kingdom' that was worthy of respect and protection. Examples of this paternalist attitude can be seen in the establishment and financing of several medersas - Muslim colleges named after the Arabic Madrassa, a school - where the French hoped to train an indigenous civil service and in a law or Senatus Consulte of 1863 which was intended specifically to protect Arab land rights. However, such paternalist liberalism merely antagonised the settlers who were able to find ways of interpreting the new law on land rights, for example, in such a way that Arab land was actually reduced. The Senatus Consulte of 1865, which was designed to enable Algerians to become full French citizens, was ironically to prove to be one of the corner stones of settler domination of the colony for its requirement that Muslims would have to forfeit

their personal Muslim status in order to qualify for French citizenship was unacceptable to the vast majority of Muslims. As a result they were condemned to perpetual second-class citizenship. The bureaux arabes went into decline as the early idealism was tarnished by cases of cruelty and corruption and they became weighted down with paper work. In the end the bureaux arabes alienated both the indigenous and the settler population. The remarks of one long-serving officer in 1870 illustrate the disillusion that had set in about the wisdom of the philosophy behind the bureaux and again it was a sentiment that was to be expressed later in West Africa:

As a result of the experience I have gained I would say that the indigenous society is in a permanent state of conspiracy against us and that any organisation which is built on the native element rests on an unstable base.(1)

The reforms in 1867 and 1870 abolished the upper sections of the bureaux retaining only the local bureaux de cercle. However, the bureaux remained a distinct feature of colonial rule in Algeria and were to reappear under a new name ( SAS - Sections Administratives Spécialisées) in the French fight

(1) cited in ibid p.341; see also C-R Ageron Les Algériens musulmans et la France vol. i pp. 131-34 for decline of bureaux arabes.

against the Algerian nationalists in the 1950s.(1)

The years 1830-70 were ones of great uncertainty in terms of French colonial policy in Algeria and although the increasing power of the settler population in the 1860s provided some clues, what the exact nature of the colonial state was to be was far from clear. However, in the course of the two decades following the fall of Napoleon in 1871 the confusion resulting from the dual tradition of a paternalistic military administration and an anti-Arab civilian administration was to be resolved very definitely in favour of the European settler population. (2)

The genesis of Algérie française does not directly concern us here, but two developments in the last quarter of the nineteenth century should briefly be noted. The first concerns the attempt by the civilian administration to identify and separate distinct races in Algeria in order to counter the impression that indigenous Algerian society was uniformly Arab and Islamic. Their efforts were concentrated principally on the population of the mountainous region of Kabylia, the Kabyles who, it

(1) V. Monteil 'Les Bureaux arabes au Maghreb (1833-1961)' Esprit Nov. 1961, pp. 575-600.

(2) The classic account is in C-R. Ageron Les Algériens musulmans especially Pt. 1 'Vae Victis'.

was claimed, shared along with the French and Berbers common Roman ancestors and whose attachment to Islam was of the most superficial nature. Because of these supposed shared cultural and racial characteristics it was confidently argued that the Kabyles could be assimilated with little difficulty to contemporary French culture. Attempts were made to introduce French food and to encourage intermarriage between French and Kabyles in order to rescue the latter from the 'decadence' caused by an over long contact with Arabs. It is also clear that such arguments were used by the civilian administration in order to discredit the military administration, particularly the bureaux arabes, whose system of government was based on the presupposition of a more or less uniform Arab culture and which the civilians held responsible for 'Arabising' and 'Islamising' Algerian Berbers. These theories and policies which C-R. Ageron has labelled the 'Kabyle myth' and the 'Kabyle policy' (1) were, as we shall see, to resurface elsewhere in Africa under only slightly different guises.

The second development concerns the attitudes of the Catholic Church towards Islam in Algeria. Until the

(1) Ageron Les Algériens musulmans Pt. IV 'Le mythe Kabyle' & Ageron Politiques coloniales au Maghreb Paris 1972 Pt II 'Mythes et politiques coloniales françaises'.

late 1860s the church had confined its activities to the European population, but the elevation of Mgr. Lavigerie to the Archbishopric of Algiers in 1867 signalled a change in policy. Lavigerie immediately embarked on a campaign to convert Muslims: during the famine of 1868-9 he adopted over 1700 Muslim orphans, baptised them and placed them in newly created Christian Arab villages. He, too, made use of the 'Kabyle myth' in order to justify his missionary zeal, claiming that he was merely reclaiming the souls that in the Fourth Century AD had belonged to the Augustinian Church in North Africa. The administrators - both civilian and military - soon developed serious doubts about Lavigerie's eagerness to evangelise amongst the Muslims and attempted to restrain him. However, Lavigerie, with the full backing of Rome, went on to found two religious orders specifically for the task of converting Muslims. Of the two orders, the White Sisters worked mainly in the Christian orphanages but the White Fathers were sent south into the Sahara with hopes (that were never realised) of reaching Timbuktu from across the desert. Lavigerie stated explicitly that he regarded Algeria as a base from which to spread the Christian faith across the whole of Africa:

Algeria is no more than a door opened by Providence to a barbarous continent of two hundred million souls. It is there above all that we must carry the work of the Catholic apostolate.(1)

The fact that several missionaries were killed by hostile Tuareg nomads as they attempted to reach Timbuktu did not deter young idealistic Frenchmen from joining them. Lavigerie, who argued that if Islam was allowed to spread throughout Africa then 'All blacks would become slaves', benefitted in particular from the strong abolitionist current of opinion in late-nineteenth century Europe.(2) Lavigerie's career illustrated many of the paradoxes in the relationship between the Church and the colonial state that were to become apparent later in AOF and which consisted chiefly of the fact that however well his charitable activities fitted with the rhetoric of the civilising mission of colonialism and however much his anti-slavery campaign fired the imagination of a metropolitan audience, the colonial authorities were, with good reason, fearful of the political consequences of allowing the missionaries a free hand in strongly Muslim areas.

(1) Cited in A. Prost Les Missions des Pères Blancs en Afrique occidentale avant 1934 Ouagadougou/Paris, n.d. p.5.

(2) See F. Renault Lavigerie, l'esclavage africain et l'Europe (2 vols) Paris, 1971. The Lavigerie quotation is from vol. II, p.369.

### French expansion in Senegal

The French experience in Algeria was to be of considerable influence in their colonisation south of the Sahara. Georges Hardy, one-time Inspector of Education in AOF and colonial historian, argued that:

It was Algeria that served as a testing ground for political and economic doctrines ... Whether for good or for evil one can affirm that the mark of Algeria's colonisation is to be found in all parts of the French domain.(1)

It was certainly true that many of the French military personnel who served in Senegal had gained their first experience of Africa in the Algerian campaigns. The best known of these soldiers was General Faidherbe who during his terms as Governor of Senegal in the mid-nineteenth century committed the French to expansion into the interior. In October 1859 Faidherbe himself bluntly informed the Naval Minister (at that time responsible for the colonies) that:

The analogies between Algeria and Senegal are complete. Senegal must be assimilated to Algeria and not to the other colonies. Senegal should be no more than a sub-division of Algeria. (2)

(1) G. Hardy Histoire sociale de la colonisation française Paris, 1953, p. 108

(2) Cited in R. Pasquier 'L'influence de l'expérience algérienne sur la politique de la France au Sénégal, 1842-69' in Perspectives nouvelles sur le passé de l'Afrique noire: mélanges offerts à Hubert Deschamps Paris, 1974 p.274.

Faidherbe arrived in Senegal at a time when the trading community of St Louis (where a French presence had been established in 1637, almost two centuries before the invasion of Algiers) was becoming increasingly irritated with the insecurity of their position in their trading posts established along the banks of the river Senegal since the 1820s. In particular, the merchants regretted their inability to exercise any authority over their trading partners, the Moors of the Trarza region on the right bank of the Senegal. It was therefore with the encouragement of the local merchant lobby that first Governor Protet and then Faidherbe pursued an expansionist policy along the river Senegal in the 1850s.<sup>(1)</sup> However, French expansion coincided with the rival imperialism of the Tijani leader, al Hajj Umar Tall, who, since his return from Mecca, had been building up a substantial following with the intention of waging a jihād in order to create an Islamic state in the western Sudan. By the 1850s his attention was focussed on Futa Toro, the land of his birth, on the left bank of the Senegal and this brought him into conflict with the French. After some early successes in 1857 he was eventually forced to withdraw from the Futa in 1860 and turn east to Segou and Masina.

(1) L.C. Barrows 'The merchants and General Faidherbe: aspects of French expansion in Senegal in the 1850s' RFHQ 1974 pp. 236-88.

He himself died in 1864 but his son, Ahmadu, maintained his empire intact until the final French conquest in the 1890s. By this time French expansionism had lost the support of the trading community who now feared the disruptive consequences of war. However, in the hands of the French military commanders and stimulated by rivalry with Britain, French imperialism had acquired a momentum of its own. (1) The French continued to come up against jihadist movements: notably with the movements led by Maba Diakhou in the Gambia and Sine-Saloum (1861-7), Cheikh Ahmadu Ba in Jolof (1869-75), Mahmadu Lamine in Bundu (1885-7) and most dramatically of all with the movement of Samori Ture who commanded a vast shifting empire that under French pressure moved gradually eastwards from the edge of the Futa Jallon to the kingdoms of Gonja and Kong before finally being captured by the French in 1898. As we shall see the memories of all these conflicts were to stay with the French throughout the colonial period and were inevitably a major influence on French policies towards Islam. However, it must be noted that in none of these conflicts was the possibility of an alliance between the French and the jihadists out of the question. The political situation in the western

(1) A.S. Kanya Forstner The French Conquest of the Western Sudan: a study in French military imperialism Cambridge, 1969.

Sudan in the late-nineteenth century was so fragmented and involved so many conflicting interests that all sorts of permutations of alliances were possible. Indeed, all the jihadists appeared at some stage in their career to have actively sought an alliance with the French. However, Faidherbe was the only leader willing - as his treaty in 1860 with al Hajj Umar shows - to contemplate the existence of a centralised Islamic state in the interior.<sup>(1)</sup>

From this brief historical survey three themes need to be stressed. The first is the length of Islamic influence in West Africa; the second is the variety of types of Islamic influence and; the third is that the Europeans arrived at a very specific juncture in the development of West African Islam. All these facts may seem obvious today but there were not surprisingly less apparent to contemporary Europeans.

(1) For summaries of these various movements see appropriate chapters in M. Crowder (ed) West African Resistance London, 1971 and in Ajayi & Crowder (eds) History of West Africa, vol. II, London, 1974; see also M. Hiskett Development of Islam ch. 14. D. Robinson Chiefs and Clerics is an excellent insight into the complexity of political alliances during these years.

The ahistorical nature of the colonial understanding of Africa was in this respect of considerable significance: coinciding with the jihadists many Europeans assumed that militant Islam was an unchanging and unchangeable characteristic of Islam in West Africa.

French attitudes to Islam in Senegal in the nineteenth century

In December 1836 a report prepared by a Naval Commissioner for the Governor of Senegal gave full backing to a request by St Louis Muslims to build a new mosque. He rejected the argument that such a concession would encourage Muslim fanaticism suggesting instead that such official patronage of Muslims would combat the influence of unscrupulous marabouts who exploited the credulity of the population to the disadvantage of the French. Muslims, he concluded, were 'the indispensable auxiliaries of commerce' and the French should take care not to alienate them. The Commissioner also believed that it would be a significant progress if Muslims became property-owners: 'Property engenders patriotism amongst men ... and patriotism creates useful citizens upon whom the future of a country depends.' The report met with some

criticism when discussed in a cabinet meeting of the Governor as some feared that it would harden religious sentiments amongst Muslims. The Governor shared these fears but by the time he reported back to Paris he had come to accept the inevitability of a strong Muslim presence and therefore accepted the need to encourage their loyalty. Nevertheless he was hopeful that schemes to convert young children to catholicism might provide an alternative class of French allies in the future.(1) What became of the mosque, I do not know, but this incident highlighted, as it seemed to the French, the fundamental question concerning Muslim policy: whether to sponsor an 'official' Islam or whether to attempt to exclude all Muslims from government and trade. It is important to recognise that such questions were being posed as early as 1836.

(1) Archives Nationales: Section Outre-Mer (ANSOM) Sénégal & Dépendances (S & D) X, 3 quat Commissaire de la marine 'Rapport à M. le Gouverneur' 16.12.1836; Procès verbal du Conseil de Gouverneur 19.12.1836: Gov. Sénégal p.i. to Ministre de la Marine et Colonies (Min. Mar. & Col.) 10.1.1837.

Education was clearly a major hope in the development of a pro-French sentiment amongst Africans. The first French school was opened in 1817 by lay teachers.(1) In 1838 missionaries took over responsibility for education and recruited Muslim pupils from amongst the slave population of St Louis. Two sets of missionaries - the Holy Ghost Fathers and the Ploërmel Brothers - set up schools which operated to their mutual disadvantage. With the official abolition of slavery in 1848 the schools could no longer recruit Muslim slaves and were, as a result, without any Muslim pupils at all. In 1852 the Governor of Senegal regretted that 'the Muslims do not care to send their children to our establishments, they fear the religious influence of our teachers' - but he was not prepared to take the risk of introducing radical changes.(2) The end-of-year report of the school run by the Ploërmel Brothers recommended two major reforms in order to attract 'the unfortunately over- numerous and neglected Muslim class which should also have a need to come and seek from the warmth of our religion and civilisation the warm air that will revive its heart extinguished by the chill winds of Mahommetanism'. With such reasoning it should not

- (1) D. Bouche 'L'école française et les musulmans au Sénégal de 1850 à 1920', RFHOM 1974 pp. 218-35; D.H. Jones 'The Catholic mission and some aspects of Assimilation in Senegal, 1817-1852' JAH xxi 1980 pp. 321-40.
- (2) ANSOM S & D X 5a Gov. Sen. to Min. Mar. & Col. 18.10.1852.

cause much surprise that the suggested reforms were not of the most liberal nature: they consisted of one concession - the employment of an Arabic teacher - and one counter-attack - legislation to close down or subject to strict police supervision the competing Qur'anic schools.(1)

However, Faidherbe realised that the most serious obstacle to the recruitment of Muslim pupils was the overtly Christian nature of the education offered in the existing schools. He therefore urged the appointment of two secular teachers. He told the Minister in Paris that he would like to be able to consider Muslims as a mere 'anomaly in our small Senegalese society' but that unfortunately this was unrealistic:

The Muslim element is here by far the most numerous and active and perhaps also the most useful: (I can tell you this in this letter because there is nothing wrong with telling you the whole truth, but I would not make this admission in front of Muslims). On all sides we are surrounded by Islam. The war we are waging on the Lower River is nothing compared to the serious and endless dangers of the Holy War provoked and maintained with such vigour by Alhadji [i.e. al Hajj Umar Tall].

(1) ANSOM S & D X 5a 'Commission superieur des études...' to Gov. Sen. 12.12.1854.

And then, in a very revealing appraisal of the French position in Senegal, Faidherbe went on to ask:

What is the class that is the most indispensable to us in Senegal? It is the admirable laptots of the river. They are all Muslims. ... If we need volunteers for war, whether it is a political war with the Trarza or whether even it is a Muslim war as with Alhadji, who is it that responds to our call? The Muslims.(1)

Faidherbe's realism was not universally shared. A book published in 1854 entitled De la Sénégambie française was violently anti-Islam and annoyed Faidherbe greatly (2) but it clearly reflected a widely held opinion that France should make no concession to Islam at all. The former Prefet apostolique of Senegal wrote to the Director of Colonies in May supporting the idea of secular teachers providing they were of 'sure morality' and met with the approval of the Superior of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, but that he agreed also with M. Carrère (one of the authors of De la Sénégambie française that 'Serious methods should be employed to destroy the mosque, to reject for ever the proposal of a Muslim tribunal, to expel all foreign marabouts and restrict the areas in which the marabouts

(1) ANSOM S & D X 15 bis Gov. Sen. to Min. Mar. & Col. 11.4.1856.

(2) According to L.C. Barrows 'Faidherbe's Islamic policy in Senegal, 1845-64' French Colonial Studies, 1977 pp. 34-53 (see p.41)

of St Louis can teach to two districts of the town'.<sup>(1)</sup> Faidherbe, however, had his way. The first secular teacher was appointed in October 1856 and in November the following year Faidherbe reported that the school was doing well with a roll of over 200 pupils.<sup>(2)</sup> Apart from being an interesting insight into French attitudes to education the debate over the provision of secular teachers provided an early example of the importance of realpolitik in French dealings with Muslims. Faidherbe's recognition of the dominance of Islam in St Louis and of the strategic value of a Muslim alliance appeared to run counter to the prevailing anti-Islamic ideology both of the missions and of the merchants - but neither group were able to prevent Faidherbe.

The question of the application of Muslim laws to Muslims provoked a debate that was in many ways similar to the education issue.<sup>(3)</sup> In 1832 St Louis Muslims petitioned the Governor to complain about the application of French Civil Law that had been introduced in 1830. However, nothing came of this

- (1) ANSQM S & D X 15 bis M. Barbieu to Directeur des Colonies 23.5.1856.
- (2) ANSQM S & D X 15 bis Min. Mar. & Col. to Gov. Sen. 11.10.1856; Gov. Sen. to Min. Mar. & Col. 16.11.1857.
- (3) B. Schnapper 'Les Tribunaux musulmans et la politique coloniale au Sénégal (1830-1914)' Revue Historique de Droit français et étranger 1, 1961 pp. 90-128 is an excellent summary of issues. I am grateful to Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris VI) for this reference.

petition.(1) Following further petitions in the 1840s a plan was drawn up in 1848 for the creation of Muslim tribunals with jurisdiction in certain civil matters affecting Muslims but, despite reaching an advanced stage, the plans were not put into practice.(2) Whilst in Paris in September 1856 Faidherbe wrote to the Naval Minister concerning the need for a Muslim tribunal:

It seems to me that one can scarcely ... refuse to the Muslims of St Louis who are sincerely devoted to us ... and whose support is essential to us ... what the French government has granted with such good grace to the Muslims of Algeria who are hostile from the depths of their hearts and on whom we could have imposed our rule (i.e. without granting such a concession).

Faidherbe stressed nonetheless that he regretted 'that we have to make this necessary concession to a religion which offends us by its intolerance'. Back in Senegal Faidherbe wrote in March 1857 emphasising the urgency of acting upon his recommendation as he had promised a Muslim tribunal and feared the consequences if he was unable to keep his promise to the Muslims. He did not have to wait long and in May a Muslim tribunal was created in St Louis by decree. (3)

- (1) ANSOM S & D VIII 4 bis Gov. Sen. to Min. Mar. & Col. 12.10.1832.
- (2) ANSOM S & D VIII 4 bis Gov. Sen to Citoyen Ministre Mar. & Col. 16.10.1848; same to same 25.10.1848.
- (3) ANSOM S & D VIII 14 bis Faidherbe to Min. Mar. & Col. 13.9.1856; Directeur des colonies to Min. Mar. & Col. 5.3.1857; Faidherbe to Min. Mar. & Col. 10.3.1857; Decree 20.5.1857.

However, this tribunal did not satisfy Muslims as the judge (cadi) was not allowed to settle inheritances and to act as ward to fatherless orphans despite the fact that under Qur'anic law these were included amongst the duties of the cadi. In 1865 the Governor was asked to extend the powers of the cadi.<sup>(1)</sup>

M. Carrère, who was head of the Judiciary Service, was predictably unimpressed by such demands, ascribing ulterior motives to them and arguing that the French had a duty to spread French ideas and culture. He concluded that if in the metropole adherents of all religions had to obey the code Napoleon then he saw no reason why the same rule should not apply in the colonies.<sup>(2)</sup> Pinet Laprade, the new Governor of Senegal, did not agree:

It would be impolitic to restrict the duties of the cadi so soon after the struggles that we have had to undergo with Alhadj and Maba, when the religious passions which in part provoked these struggles have not yet died down. But I hasten to add that the duties should not be extended but that it will be sufficient to define them clearly in order to give satisfaction to the Muslims of St Louis, the majority of whom, we must acknowledge, have never refused us help against the enemies of the colony.<sup>(3)</sup>

- (1) ANSOM S & D VIII 23 bis 'Petition' 28.4.1865.
- (2) ANSOM S & D VIII 23 bis Chef du Service judiciaire to Gov. Sen. 22.2.1866.
- (3) ANSOM S & D VIII 23 bis Gov. Sen. to Min. Mar. & Col. 26.2.1866.

However, no change was made to the *cadi's* duties.

When the question resurfaced again in the late 1880 the French administration were much more confident in their rejection. The crucial argument of the Head of Judiciary was that the situation in Senegal was very different to the one pertaining in Algeria where cadis had much greater powers. His argument is worth quoting at length for it was one that was to be of considerable importance in the early-twentieth century. It was one of the first signs that the received wisdom about the parallel cases of Senegal and Algeria was subject to doubt:

One cannot compare Senegal with Algeria. ... Islam was the only religion which existed in Algeria at the time of the conquest. It was natural as much as it was prudent to respect it and even facilitate the practice of its laws. ... But it is not the same here ... and we are not bound by the same obligations. Senegal is a colony created by France; the town of St Louis was shaped by the French and it was only gradually, indeed clandestinely, that Islam filtered into the black population of the town. ... [Islam] does not, therefore, have the freedom of the town and cannot claim the same rights to those in Algeria. Here, more than anywhere else, the Muslim as a result of his profound ignorance which his fanaticism has encouraged is absolutely hostile to our ideas, our usages, our language, our customs and our civilisation.

- (1) Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS) M 8  
Chef service judiciaire 'Rapport' 22.6.1888.

This report was presented to a special commission charged with reorganising the Muslim judicial system in Senegal. The commission included the cadi of St. Louis and for his benefit the substance of the report was translated into Arabic. However, the less than complimentary remarks on Islam and the ignorance of the Senegalese Muslims were tactfully left untranslated! (1)

The education and law debates in nineteenth-century Senegal provided some interesting pointers for the future. In particular they raised three fundamental questions: was Algeria an appropriate model for the Senegalese administration? were Senegalese Muslims true Muslims or merely profoundly ignorant imitations? and thirdly, should ideological/confessional preferences be allowed to dominate the dictates of realpolitik? All three questions were to be burning issues in colonial policy-making in the twentieth century.

(1) ANS M 8 'Procès-verbal de la commission chargée de l'étude de la réorganisation de la justice musulmane' 1.4.1889.

## PART ONE

1900-1912: FRENCH ANXIETIES AND THE  
SEARCH FOR A POLICY

Depuis notre conversation, tous les passants que je rencontre je leur trouve je ne sais quoi de louche dans l'allure. Je m'inquiète s'ils me regardent; et ceux qui ne me regardent pas, on dirait qu'ils font semblant de ne pas me voir. Je ne m'étais pas rendu compte jusqu'aujourd'hui combien la présence des gens dans la rue est rarement justifiable.

Andre Gide Les Caves du Vatican 1914

## Introduction

By the turn of the century the era of ~~ever~~ military conquest had come to an end. The conquest of the Western Sudan had created heroes - Archinard, Gallieni and Marchand amongst the best known - but the financial strain it imposed on the colonial budget made these heroes the enemies of the colonial accountants in Paris. By the 1890s economy was the order of the day, and Chaudié, the Governor-General of AOF, was expected to restrain the activity of his military colleagues.<sup>(1)</sup> The other imperative, linked to the need for economy, was organisation. Military conquest had not only been costly but it had also been haphazard. Legislation passed between 1895 and 1904 gradually imposed order on the situation with the creation of a federal government headed by the Governor-General based in Dakar. By 1904 the federal government had effective political control over the local governments of the various colonies of the federation. Through its control of the federal budget to which all colonies contributed their revenue raised from custom duties the federal government also exercised economic control.

(1) see A.S. Kanya-Forstner The Conquest of the Western Sudan: a study of French military imperialism Cambridge, 1969.

The system survived more or less intact throughout the period covered in this study.(1)

One aspect of the transfer of power from the military to a civilian administration was a change in attitude towards Islam. Chautemps, the Minister of Colonies in mid-90s, gave specific instructions to Chaudié not to underestimate the power and authority of Islam in West Africa and to accord it the respect it deserved.(2) However, these instructions and the attitude that lay behind them require qualification and explanation. They were directed principally at the administration of the French Sudan and were derived from an influential body of opinion in Algeria where a similar antagonism existed between advocates of military conquest and diplomatic persuasion as in West Africa.(3)

The link between Algeria and sub-Saharan Africa was personified in Xavier Coppolani, a young and highly

- (1) C.W. Newbury 'The Formation of the Governor-General in French West Africa' JAH 1 (1) 1960 pp. 111-28.
- (2) Newbury op cit p. 116; Kanya-Forstner op cit pp. 249-50
- (3) C-R. Ageron Les Algériens musulmans et la France Paris, 1968 'Vae Victis'.

ambitious 'expert' on Islam who was commissioned by the governments of both Algeria and the French Sudan to investigate the state of Islam in these two countries. The first chapter of this section is concerned mainly with Coppolani and his attempt to apply a grandiose Islamic policy based on his experience in Algeria in sub-Saharan Africa.

However, his scheme foundered, partly as a result of tension and conflict within the French community and partly as a result of its innate impracticability. Thus the hopes expressed by Chautemps and others in the 1890s that the final stages of the 'pacification' of African Muslims could be achieved without bloodshed were abandoned. The second chapter deals with the intense anxieties that succeeded this early optimism. In the first decade of the century events throughout the Muslim world caused considerable alarm amongst colonial powers, and the French moved from a policy of cooption to close surveillance of Muslim leaders. They were also years marked by an intense hostility to marabouts, and the chapter discusses aspects of this peculiarly French distaste for what was termed maraboutage.

The third chapter examines the question of education: at a time when religious legislation over education was dividing opinion in metropolitan France French attitudes to Muslim education were particularly illuminating and revealing of the often very contradictory way in which Islam was viewed by France's so-called anti-clerical colonial administration. The fourth chapter, concerning events in the Futa Jallon in 1909-11, is a case-study of the consequences of a combination of French anxieties about Islam generally, an overriding acceptance of racial and ethnic stereotypes and, again, conflicting ambitions within the French administration.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ALGERIAN SCHOOL - COPPOLANI,  
ISLAM AND THE CONQUEST OF MAURITANIA

Xavier Coppolani was born in the small village of Marignana in Corsica on 1st February 1866.<sup>(1)</sup> His early childhood appears to have been dominated by his relationship with his pious mother, who, despite his eventual marriage, was to be the only woman about whom he ever spoke with any great affection. Her simple piety together with the strong superstitions of the Corsican villagers served as models of popular mysticism which Coppolani later applied to his analyses of Islam.

- (1) There is no single reliable biography of Coppolani. His friend and colleague, Robert Arnaud, writing under the pseudonym of Robert Randau wrote a lengthy biography published in 1939 Un Corse d'Algérie chez les hommes bleus: Xavier Coppolani, le pacificateur Algiers, 1939 much of which he had already published in a barely fictionalised form in his novel Les Explorateurs. Roman de la grande brousse Paris, n.d. There are a number of other shorter works most of which draw heavily on Arnaud's work but which also include some obscure archival sources and personal memoirs: Lt d'Otton Loyewski 'Coppolani et la Mauritanie' Revue d'Histoire des Colonies 1938 pp. 1-69; G-M Désire Vuillemin 'Coppolani en Mauritanie' Revue d'Histoire des Colonies 1955 pp. 291-342; J-F Maurel Xavier Coppolani; son oeuvre St Louis, 1955.

Both sides of Coppolani's family had long-standing Algerian interests having been amongst the first settlers after the conquest, and ten years after Coppolani's birth his parents emigrated to settle in the Constantinois region of Algeria.

In Algeria Coppolani studied at the Ecole Normale in Constantine and by the time he started his administrative career as Secretary of the 'commune-mixte' of Oued Cherg in 1889 he was a competent speaker of Arabic. The 1890s were a crucial period for the Algerian administration as in addition to the problems of the conquest of the south, the ambiguities surrounding the dual heritage of civilian and military administration had not yet been resolved and there was increasing pressure from the metropole on the government in Algiers to identify more precisely its policy towards the indigenous Muslim populations. (1)

Jules Cambon had been appointed Governor-General in 1891 with the specific brief to implement a 'native policy'. He rejected much of the so-called 'Kabyle myth' and sought instead a more sympathetic attitude towards Islam. To this end he made efforts to

(1) The conflicts and tensions are analysed in Ageron Les Algériens musulmans vol. I, Part I 'Vae Victis'.

establish good relations with the Sufi brotherhoods of south Algeria, offered help to pilgrims to Mecca and, as a gesture, allowed Muslim pupils holidays on religious festivals - a minor concession which had been consistently rejected in the past by successive administrations.<sup>(1)</sup>

Significantly, he also obtained from the Cherif of Mecca a ruling or fetwa declaring that it was permissible for Muslims to obey a government of unbelievers. Cambon hoped that this would sufficiently impress the Muslims of south Algeria to obviate the need for the use of arms - a hope that betrayed a basic and widely shared misconception that equated the role and power of the Cherif of Mecca with that of the Pope in the Roman Catholic church. In any case he was pre-empted by the army who had already started a conventional military campaign in the south before he was able to distribute the fetwa. Somewhat aggrieved he nevertheless had fifty copies printed which he offered to other colonies including the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Senegal and the French Sudan.

(1) ibid pp. 513-18. Ageron concluded, 'Ce retour à une plus saine compréhension des usages et des besoins religieux des musulmans peut apparaître comme assez symbolique de la politique de Cambon.'

The offer met with a mixed response: in the Ivory Coast and Guinea it was welcomed, but in the Sudan the Governor, Grodet, thought that most of the local marabouts were mere 'ignorant fanatics' and incapable of understanding the document. (1) A relatively minor incident but one which nevertheless illustrates well certain European concepts of Islam: Cambon's over-estimation of the influence of the Cherif of Mecca and Grodet's virtual refusal to recognise African Muslims as Muslims worthy of the name constitute two distinct views of Islam which continue at least to the end of the colonial period.

Cambon's attitudes derived in part from the conclusions of Louis Rinn, the head of the Native Affairs Department. He was author of a major study of Islam in Algeria, (published in 1884)(2) in which he had argued - rather confusingly it must be said - that France should combat the highly dangerous and very well organised Sufi brotherhoods with an official salaried clergy. Rinn's definition of the Sufi brotherhoods was somewhat vague. He contrasted their membership with what he called the

- (1) ANSOM Afrique IV 37a Gov-Gen. Algeria to Govs. Senegal, Soudan, I. Coast, Guinea n.d.; Gov. I Coast to Gov-Gen. Algeria 6.1.1894; Gov. Soudan to Gov-Gen Algeria n.d.; Gov. Guinea to Gov-Gen Algeria 13.1.1894.
- (2) L. Rinn Marabouts et Khouan: étude sur l'islam en Algérie Algiers, 1884.

Muslim 'clergy' (the imam) and the marabouts. He argued that both of these groups could be co-opted. Not so the brotherhoods:

Their aim is the exploitation of human stupidity and the most ridiculous superstition. Their practices ... are more often than not noisy and theatrical. They do not shy from giving their followers supernatural powers or talismen against which nothing will resist. Almost everywhere the active members of these brotherhoods are itinerant musicians, singers, dancers, snake charmers, jugglers and acrobats who mix in with their acts the better known prayers and verses from the Coran to which all their spectators listen with respect. (1)

Cambon's willingness to deal with the Sufi brotherhoods of southern Algeria suggests that he did not share Rinn's pessimistic view, but his eagerness to distribute the cherifian fetwa indicates nonetheless that he shared Rinn's hopes in the official 'clergy' of Islam.

Coppolani, meanwhile, frustrated by his lowly administrative position, was actively engaged in the search for a high-ranking patron that he might be lifted swiftly into the corridors of power. (2)

(1) *ibid* p. 116.

(2) Randau Corse d'Algérie pp. 16-17.

He succeeded in attracting the attention of Octave Depont, an administrator of a commune mixte, and when in February 1895 Cambon issued directives for a major study of the brotherhoods in Algeria it was to Depont and his young protégé that the mission was entrusted. In 1897 they published their conclusions in Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes.

Robert Arnaud, a friend, colleague and biographer of Coppolani, claims that Coppolani did most of the work and that Depont's role was to lend to the conclusions an air of authority that would otherwise have been lacking. Certainly the language of the book is typical of Coppolani's later reports and, like almost all of his writings, it contains a large element of propaganda for his own career. Coppolani needed more than a patron, he also needed a *raison d'être*. Islam, or more precisely, the Islamic threat, was to be that *raison d'être*. Coppolani proposed himself as the master of the situation, and his 'Muslim policy' was henceforward to be the real servant of his career. In this Coppolani had on his side the almost universal distrust and fear of Islam which it should be said Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes did little to allay.<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) See Ageron's comments on the conduct of the enquiry whose result was, he said, 'un constat de non lieu ... La conclusion a été écrite d'avance' Ageron op cit pp. 514-15.

Nevertheless, in scientific terms the book did represent a clear improvement on the work that it supplanted, the idiosyncratic study of Rinn. It was also one of the clearest statements of the 'Algerian School's' understanding of Islam and remained for many years a standard text for students of Islam on either side of the Sahara.

The introduction of the book soon progressed from an explanation of the origins of Sufism to a warning that,

[Brotherhoods] are by their very nature the enemies of all established power, and Muslim states, as well as European powers which rule over Muslims, have to reckon with these anti-social preachers ... the very soul of the pan-Islamic movement.

Sounding the crusader's trumpet it continued

There is a work of justice and of compassion to be done here which must be carried through without weakness. We must tear away from the rapacious hands of merciless and oppressive bigots a population which for too long has been encouraged to attack our institutions by the words and deeds of this politico-religious madness. (1)

The account of the Islamisation of the Maghreb conceded,

(1) O. Depont & X. Coppolani Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes Algiers, 1897 pp. xiii, xxiv.

however, that Islam was not the all-conquering force it might seem to be and which Depont and Coppolani elsewhere suggested it was. Islam, they argued was brought to the Maghreb by Arabs 'holding the Coran in one hand and the sword in the other' and met with stiff resistance from the indigenous Berbers before finally, and here the authors stressed that there was a lesson for the French, the Arabs, realising the dangers of a religiously motivated resistance, compromised with the local customs and beliefs. (1) The tenacity of superstition was, they argued, universal for 'Humanity is everywhere the same: Man, no matter to what category he belongs, poses himself ... insoluble questions and even the most sceptical amongst us, in the midst of his pleasures thinks of the Invisible and gives himself up to Nothingness'. (2)

We are perhaps seeing here the start of the erosion of a positivist confidence in a clearly defined hierarchy of civilisations and cultures. However, it is doubtful that Coppolani's interest in and sympathy with superstition constitutes in itself a major

(1) ibid pp. 107-20, esp. 110.

(2) ibid p. 121.

masses whom they dominate and direct as they wish'. No longer able to mount open resistance - the French were too strong - they acted as 'Secret societies agitating in the shadows and exploiting the Orient's proneness to Mahdism and pan-Islamism'. (1)

The danger represented by the brotherhoods was, therefore, vividly portrayed, and Coppolani was to make much of it over the next few years. The reader might well have trembled as he read such dire warnings which probably confirmed all his worst suspicions of Islam but ... Depont and Coppolani had a remedy!

In the course of the description of the brotherhoods some hints were dropped that their fanaticism was measured and could be controlled. Firstly, although the authors stated that the strongest opposition to European expansion had been offered by the brotherhoods they admitted that not all brotherhoods were equally hostile and that in the conquest of Algeria, for example, the French were able to form an alliance with the Tijaniyya. (2) Secondly, despite the susceptibility of the Algerian masses to mystic

(1) ibid pp. 169,191, 192.

(2) ibid pp. 176-77, 263-65

departure from a positivist view of society. The contemporary vogue of exoticism appears to have left Coppolani relatively untouched and he was to fall far short of his companion Arnaud's later reappraisal of human civilisation.

Depont and Coppolani were impressed by the ability of the brotherhoods to assimilate traditional beliefs and rightly saw in this ability one of the greatest strengths of the brotherhoods. They warned that when the Sufi formula for spiritual regeneration was preached to an ignorant and, the authors conceded, often an ill-treated mass,(1) then their message became 'Extremely dangerous ... destroying everything, first of all preparing the election of fanaticism and later encouraging all sorts of excesses'. In such cases, 'One can sense ... all the extreme exaltation of religious madness in which there is always to be found unfortunately the echo of Islam and which demonstrates that we should never cease our vigilance, that we should on the contrary always prepare ourselves against the surprises that Muslim fanaticism has in store for us. The principal agents of this fanaticism are the brotherhoods, compact bundles of politico-religious forces which have seized hold of the minds of the

(1) ibid p. 182. The authors quote Cambon's reference to Bugeaud's description of Algerian society as a 'sort of human dust'.

appeals Depont and Coppolani argued that

Happily, the human soul has some penchants which not even the purest morality or the most austere doctrine can always succeed in controlling. Many of the founders of the brotherhoods whom posterity has painted as saints emerged occasionally from their solitude ... and abandoned themselves to the enjoyment of earthly pleasures. (1)

Earthly pleasures which in this material age the French could now offer in exchange for a little worldly obedience.

Tribute was also paid to Cambon's successful collaboration with some of the brotherhoods, and in their conclusions Depont and Coppolani sketched out the principles for policy in the future. They emphasised that history had shown that it was futile to attempt to destroy the brotherhoods and that, therefore, the French should try and work with rather than against them. Discreet official sponsorship of education and subsidies for the construction of lodges for the brotherhoods were favoured as the agents of future political control. By faithfully pursuing such policies France would do much, they concluded, to remove the threat of a pan-Islamic rebellion and would be

(1) ibid p. 175

assured of a broad sweep of allies rather than having to rely on a handful of proven collaborators.

Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes was an extremely important work and it contains a wealth of detail that has been used by successive generations of students of Islam. For our purposes, however, it is more interesting to see it for its ideological content, as a sophisticated statement of the Algerian school of Islamic experts with its long tradition dating back to Bugeaud. The most important thing to note is the emphasis placed on the Sufi brotherhoods to the extent that other forms of Islam are almost wholly ignored. The accent on Sufism is significant partly because it exaggerated in the European's mind the mystical and mysterious origins of Islam but also, and more importantly, because it highlighted a peculiarly French sensitivity to conspiracy. On the other side of the Mediterranean the idea of 'a secret society agitating in the shadows' was common currency and referred, depending on one's convictions, either to the Freemasons or the Jesuits. (For someone with Corsican origins it might, of course, have had other Godfatherly connotations.) The year after the publication of Depont and Coppolani's work France was divided over another great scandal full of accusations and counter-accusations of conspiracy, treason and worse as the Dreyfus affair broke on the political scene.

A few years later with the advent of the Bloc Républicain to power in France a four year battle was engaged against the church. The first attack was made against the monastic orders - congrégations in French. The same word was frequently used to denote the Sufi brotherhoods. Although neither the Dreyfus affair nor the conflicts over secularisation had in 1897 impinged upon domestic politics the tensions that lay behind them and which explain the passions they were to arouse were already apparent. Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes must be seen in this context.

That the book had an immediate impact on French policy can be seen in two sets of government circulars issued the year following its publication. The first, dated 4th June 1898, was issued by Lepine, the new Governor-General of Algeria, to divisional commanders and prefects in the departments of Oran, Algiers and Constantine, and it concerned the need 'To elevate the status of our native chiefs ... the indispensable intermediaries between their coreligionaries and the various services of the administration [and] the sole representatives of our authority in Arab country'. Chiefs could be recruited from three social categories, the nobility, men of proven ability and intelligence but the most important category was the third, the religious leaders - and by this Lepine meant the leaders of the brotherhoods.

In words that echo those of Depont and Coppolani he explained that:

As a result of their religious character, their austere lifestyle and the prestige that goes with their titles of chiefs of representatives of these occult powers that are the muslim corporations, the [Chioukh and Moqaddim] are the true spiritual and temporal rulers of their coreligionaries. They are the ones who form their minds, inspire and direct them. I am not unaware that their doctrines are hostile to our government. But we shall not succeed in either suppressing them or in restricting them through persecutions whose only result would be to increase fanaticism and to give them new recruits. On the contrary, I believe that by managing them by giving them some of the 'horma' which they esteem so highly we can attract their sympathy and use them for the greatest profit of our domination and the interests of our Muslim subjects. (1)

The second set of instructions were those issued by General de Trentinnian, Governor of the French Sudan, who was anxious to find a cheap and efficient means of administering his vast colony and its northern Tuareg nomads. A European trader who had spent 18 years in the Sudan advocated starving the Tuareg into submission or extinction along with the marabouts whom he described as 'a vermin that becomes dangerous unless it is crushed'. (2) However, de Trentinnian was of a more liberal and tolerant disposition and in December wrote individually to his regional commanders with instructions to respect local beliefs and customs

- (1) ANS 12 G 15 Gov.-Gen. Algeria to Generals & Prefets Oran, Algiers, Constantine 4.6.1898.
- (2) ANSOM Soudan 1/9a M. Audeod to Commt. Région Nord 15.9.1898; same to same 27.10.1898.

as much as possible. To the commander of the North and North-East Region he wrote,

Religion which looms up in front of us like an insuperable barrier can become in capable hands a precious instrument. By making ourselves the protectors of Islam we will get to know it better, we will make use of its resources made available through our political action and with perseverance we shall certainly be able to draw towards us certain influential men who still appreciate the goods of this world. In any case we shall reassure the masses to whom Christians have been presented as enemies. (1)

In his political report at the end of the year de Trentinnian reflected that,

The influence of Islam has almost always been a powerful lever used against us; it is an inexhaustable seam for the marabouts who exploit the credulity of the naturally simple and good blacks as well as the instincts of the Tuaregs, so proud of their independence and so ardent in war and pillage. ... The utilisation of the very real influence of Islam ... is a question of prime importance. It has become the object of the constant preoccupation of the Government of Soudan.(2)

Proof of this constant preoccupation was most evident in de Trentinnian's invitation to Coppolani to go on a mission amongst the Moorish and Tuareg tribes of the

(1) ANSCM Soudan l/9e Lt.-Gov. Soudan to Commt. Région Nord & Nord-Est 19.12.1898.

(2) ANSCM Soudan l/9e 'Rapport politique du 31 Décembre'

Sahel. Coppolani, whose request to the Foreign Ministry to be given the charge of a world-wide study of Islam had been refused earlier in the year, (1) had every reason to find de Trentinnian's invitation particularly interesting. At the end of Les Confréries there was much emphasis on the potential benefit of a correct Islamic policy in Algeria for French efforts south of the Sahara. For some time Coppolani had been privately critical of the slow progress in the Saharan hinterland, and now de Trentinnian had given him an opportunity not only to publicise his misgivings but also to put forward his own grandiose policies for a French Saharan empire.

At the same time as de Trentinnian wrote to his junior officers to inform them of Coppolani's mission (2) he issued a circular that might have been drawn up by Coppolani himself.

For some years, de Trentinnian wrote, the attention of the public powers has been drawn towards the important role played in Islamic countries by Muslim religious brotherhoods, veritable states within states. These sects of theocrats enslave believers and maintain them in a state of vulgar ignorance, preventing them from progress, levy private taxes and enrich themselves to the detriment of public and private

- (1) Randau Corse d'Algérie pp. 27-28; Maurel Xavier Coppolani p. 23. It seems that M. Hanoteaux, the Foreign Minister, disliked Coppolani.
- (2) S(ervice) H(istorique) de l'A(rmée) de T(erre) (SHAT) AOF Soudan VI/6 Lt.-Gov. Soudan to Commt. Région Nord 1.1.1899; same to same 6.1.1899.

wealth. From a political point of view these little governments hold and manipulate in the shadows and in mystery the strings of the Muslim world. ... The religious men personify the religious force which is the only one still capable of arousing the masses and creating difficulties for the European governments.

De Trentinnian concluded that it was vitally important to know who the religious leaders were and ordered each commandant de cercle to draw up a file on the leading local religious personalities. As a guide for the administrators a glossary of terms such as zaouia, chioukh and moggadim along with brief paragraphs on the principal brotherhoods was also included with the circular. (1)

In this little episode there are a number of elements worthy of interest. Firstly the initiative was a personal one: de Trentinnian emerges as a thoughtful administrator aware of the need of a cheap and long term policy. Although it cannot be proved it is reasonable to suppose that he read Depont and Coppolani's work very shortly after its publication and this would suggest that he took some care to keep abreast of the latest 'scientific' opinions. The inclusion of a glossary with the circular suggests

(1) ANSOM Soudan I/9e Lt.-Gov. Soudan to commts. régions & cercles n.d.

that he was not confident that the local administrators had even the most rudimentary knowledge of Islam. Secondly there was a curious ambivalence in the attitude towards Islam which was typical of the 'Algerian school'; Islam, and again by Islam de Trentinnian meant the Sufi brotherhoods, was described as a serious threat to the French, a state within a state, an agent of fanaticism and obscurantism, but, in the right hands it need not be a threat and on the contrary it might even prove a powerful ally. This pattern of personal initiative, widespread ignorance and ambivalent attitudes towards Islam was to be repeated several times in the next few decades.

Coppolani made it quite clear that the pair of hands most capable of transforming Islam into a compliant and benign force were his own. A military expedition was out of the question, he said, as it would have provoked the suspicion of the tribes and doomed the mission to costly failure:

No, he continued in language that reveals much about Coppolani's modesty, My role was greater, my action was to be one of energy, tolerance and humanity towards the untamed Muslims who were waiting for me. I had to inspire confidence on them and to achieve this it was necessary ... to surprise them ... as a friend, in the name of the Governor of the Soudan their natural protector. I needed confidence in myself and this confidence was never found wanting.

I knew from experience that these fanatics who had been generally described to me in a bad light were for the most part men appreciative of our sentiments of justice and wisdom. Furthermore I was only too well aware of their divisions, their interests and their misery to worry for a moment about the welcome they were to keep for me ... (1)

Coppolani neglected to mention his own writing on the subject of untamed Muslim fanatics and henceforward his emphasis was to be on his own unique understanding of Islam, thereby marking the beginning of a subtle change in his attitude to Islam.

From his report on his mission to the Sudan it is not at all clear what actually happened. It seems Coppolani left Nioro on the 19th January and returned barely a month later having obtained the submission of all the principal tribes (the Mechdouf and the Allouch) without a shot having been fired. According to Coppolani he simply rode out and met the chiefs who everywhere gave him a warm welcome because, 'In their eyes I was the happy messenger who brought lasting peace and the hope of tranquility that was so necessary in their tribes'. (2)

(1) ANSOM AP 1420/1 Coppolani 'Rapport d'ensemble sur ma mission au Soudan français' Paris, 1899 p.14.

(2) ibid p. 18.

Coppolani often mentioned in his report the help given him by Cheikh Sidi el Kheir, an influential religious personality who made many of the initial contacts with the hitherto hostile tribes, but in no place was it made clear where he came from or to what he owed his religious authority. Elsewhere Coppolani wrongly described him as the third son (he was the 48th) of Cheikh Mohammed Fadel, the founder of a major branch of Qadiriyya in Western Africa. (1) At this stage Coppolani's Islamic policy even at a rhetorical level appeared vague and in its details was often ill-informed.

Even greater confusion surrounds the details of the second part of Coppolani's mission amongst the Tuareg tribes around Timbuktu as there is no surviving report and very little correspondence between Coppolani and his colleagues. However a letter from Coppolani's companion, Robert Arnaud, gives a lively account that is worth quoting at length. Addressed to 'Mon Capitaine' it described how Arnaud and 'Coppo' had arrived in Timbuktu having successfully completed the earlier part of the mission;

(1) Coppolani 'L'action religieuse musulmane dans le nord-ouest Africain' Revue Franco-Musulmane et Saharienne (1 & 2) 1902, pp. 15-33; 12-31. See also P. Marty Etudes sur l'islam et les tribus du Soudan t.III Les Tribus maures du Sahel et du Hodh Paris, 1921 pp. 256-81 for details of Sidi el Kheir and the French.

At Tombouctou serious problems were waiting for us. Up until our arrival the policy followed had been to consider the nomad as the enemy, and to protect the negro excessively. This had naturally alienated us from the white populations, Moors and Tuaregs, and one couldn't wander outside Tombouctou without danger. We had to do something about this because of the great interest there is for France to win the sympathy, the alliance or the clientele of the tribes situated as much in the south of Algeria as in the north of the Soudan. An officer was there, a Captain Henrys, who agreed completely ... Unfortunately, all endeavour was premature for it wasn't a question of a pure and simple tour but of more serious matters. Coppo had worked upon the Moors ... The Tuareg as well had to come to terms with us. To this end, we left at the end of March in the direction of the eastern wells where we were supposed to find the main dissident tribes. The chief of the Bouamine came with us. One by one the chiefs of the eastern Kel Anstar arrived to ask for 'amam' and offered serious guarantees of submission provided we gave them justice, that is to say provided we didn't shoot them at random and that we stopped raiding their women in order to satisfy the ardours of certain men starved of white flesh and that we designated them land for nomadisation [terre de parcours]. Their demands were too reasonable not to be accepted, and an order has just been sent from Tombouctou designed to prevent the capture of white women in the future, and women held are to be released.

In short, our tour has been most fruitful. The regagda have joined the Kel Antsar in seeking peace; in this country of so-called savages there was only one cry - 'Give us tranquility!' At Bamba Coppo had in an Algerian officer a powerful and devoted helper who brought to him all the chiefs and marabouts of the region. ... The famous Sakraouai, chief of the Igoudanen, came to pay homage and complete his submission. It was truly a fine sight; there were just the two of us, alone without escort or arms, alone in the middle of a hundred imochar armed up to the teeth, all arrogant with great black eyes,

dark clothes, long medieval spears and the obligatory litham. Before returning to Tombouctou Coppo was able to open negotiations with the Auelliminden who had been upset by a recent patrol but the submission of this great tribe will be a matter of time.

After a perilous trip back in a leaky canoe they returned to Timbuktu where,

... Coppo had a hard task; he had to have the treaties ratified, receive delegations, reassure the chiefs and put up with all sorts of dirty handshakes. Finally, despite the nuisance caused by the petty resistance of men whose passive obedience ought to be their first virtue, all has been brought to a happy conclusion! ...

However the shortcomings of the old days when policy consisted of not having one and saying 'Kill everything' have alienated the chief of the Berabiches; he has been writing insolent letters ... and making a nuisance of himself. We had to change his ideas and so we have decided ... to go to Araouan. We are leaving this evening in the company of Moors from the Sahel and four meharistes for the town (?) or village (?) of Araouan. If we get there we shall be the first Frenchmen since Rene Caillié to have done so, if we get there that is for one mustn't forget that Major Laing was killed on the way. (1)

Arnaud's letter is interesting on several counts not the least of which is as an insight into the author's character. The unflattering comments on previous

(1) I(nstitut) de F(rance) (IF) Fonds Terrier no. 5984  
Arnaud to 'Mon capitaine' 8.5.1899.

administrative policies are particularly noteworthy, and the final evocation of Caillié and Laing remind us that at the turn of the century European knowledge of parts of Africa was far from complete, and it could still almost be said that, 'Geographers in Africa maps/ With savage pictures fill their gaps/and oer inhabitable downs/Place elephants for want of towns'.<sup>(1)</sup> But despite Arnaud's enthusiastic 'Boy's Own' description the mission did not appear to have had any concrete results other than a bundle of treaties.

This suspicion is reinforced by Coppolani's own reticence about the second half of his mission and by the letter of Capt. Henrys (whom Arnaud had portrayed as a man of similar ideas to Coppolani) to Auguste Terrier, President of the Comité de l'Afrique française and father-confessor to a generation of Africains. Henrys reported that,

From Tombouctou to Bamba, Coppolani has only had dealings with compliant regions and has obtained the submission only of the Kel Antsar, who had already submitted. Then he went to Araouan but did not enter the town. The chief of the Berabich forbade him to enter and made him establish his camp more than a kilometre from the town. Coppolani kept a watch on him for the two days he was able to stay with the few tirailleurs Commt. Damal gave him as escort.

(1) The verse is Swift's from 'On Poetry' cited in Curtin Image of Africa p. 198.

Unable even to take a photographic view he returned as quickly as possible and not in the least bit reassured. ... I scarcely believe more in what he has done in the Sahel than the results obtained here. (1)

Even allowing for personal prejudice on the part of Henrys it is hard to see his scepticism as unreasonable. Coppolani probably achieved as much as was possible in a lightning tour by two relatively inexperienced young men. However what was realistically possible under the circumstances fell far short of Coppolani's vastly inflated claims of what actually was achieved.

Apart from introducing Coppolani to the intricacies of Moorish and Tuareg society the tour in the Sudan gave him his first taste of black Africa. Arnaud made no attempt to disguise the degree of his colleague's dislike for what he saw. Whether an encounter with a prostitute in Kayes which proved to be a traumatic experience was the cause of his dislike is not clear but it is certain that his contempt for black Africa was to be one of the hallmarks of his philosophy. Arnaud wrote that, 'He believed the Bible story that Cham had no other destiny than to serve Sem and Jephath.' Coppolani's

(1) IF Fonds Terrier no. 5900 Capt. Henrys to Terrier 27.7.1899.

hatred was racialist; Africans, whether Muslim or animist, were simply dismissed as a race of slaves in need of a master.<sup>(1)</sup> A view that was shared, it should be said, by some Moors and Tuaregs who for centuries had treated the blacks as slaves.

In the late summer of 1899 Coppolani returned to Paris and began to seek official backing for his schemes for a unified North-West African Empire. His main interest was now in the vast area of contemporary Mauritania north of the river Senegal and south of the Cherifian empire in Morocco, an area which had hitherto been largely ignored by the French who had been content to pay tribute to the chiefs of the right bank of the Senegal in exchange for peace and trading possibilities. Despite a tradition dating back to the sixteenth century of trade with the coastal and riverain region of

(1) Randau Corse d'Algérie p. 30. See also ANSOM AP 1420/1 Coppolani 'Rapport ...': 'Quels que soient les sentiments de pitié qui peuvent nous animer à l'égard de la race noire du Sénégal et du Soudan, quels que soient nos efforts pour la sortir de l'état d'Asservissement où elle est plongée depuis des siècles, il faudra plusieurs générations avant de l'élever au niveau des peuples libres. Pour sa vitalité elle-même, il lui faut un maître. Le Maure le demeurera encore longtemps'.

Mauritania (1) the French were little tempted to engage in more direct action into the interior of the country. Therefore for Coppolani the area provided great scope for action provided he could convince the authorities that it was worth the effort.

In Paris Coppolani was able to convince the new President, Waldeck-Rousseau, of the benefit to France of a greater degree of French control in Mauritania. It also seems likely that he found an ally in the 'Parti colonial' which had long been interested in the possibilities of uniting France's colonies on either side of the Sahara. (2) However, there was as

- (1) In the past French, British, Dutch and Portuguese had competed for trading posts. The gum trade was the most important, West Africa having become the main supplier for Europe's gum needs. The gum was extracted from the plant Accacia senegal which grew mainly in Trarza and Brackna. A thriving arms trade based in St Louis supplemented the gum trade. See G-M Désiré Vuillemin 'Essai sur le gommier et la commerce de la gomme dans les escales du Sénégal' Thèse de doctorat, 1966.
- (2) On the 'Parti colonial' see R. Girardet L'Idée coloniale en France depuis 1871 à 1962 Paris, 1975; C-R Ageron France coloniale ou parti colonial? Paris, 1978. Interest in a trans-Saharan railway was almost as old as the conquest itself. The first schemes were drawn up by the St Simonians in the 1840s. See G-M Désiré Vuillemin 'Les premiers projets du transaharien et l'Afrique du Nord' Revue de l'Histoire Maghrébine 1977 pp. 107-21

many opponents of French intervention in Mauritania. The Foreign Office, with recent memories of Fashoda, was anxious about the consequences of such a policy on diplomatic relations with Spain and Britain both of whom had interests on the coast of the western Sahara, and in Africa the government in St Louis simply did not think that it was worth it.(1)

Coppolani had argued strongly in favour of a protectorate for all the country occupied by the Moors who, he said, were a population with a recognised hierarchy and a tradition of power. However he was only partially able to convince Binger, the Director of African Affairs at the Colonial Ministry of the wisdom of a protectorate. Binger was suspicious of Coppolani and would have preferred to work with a military man.(2) Nevertheless he accepted Coppolani's argument that in view of the racial differences there should be separate policies for the regions north and south of the Senegal. He was in favour of a new administrative unit to be called Mauretanie Occidentale governed by a Résident with the help of contrôleurs. He further recommended a new department 'designed to centralise all the documents relative to Islam, the brotherhoods

(1) Governor-General Ballay stated bluntly 'Une action en pays maure ne peut rien apporter' cited in Désiré Vuillemin 'Coppolani' p. 300.

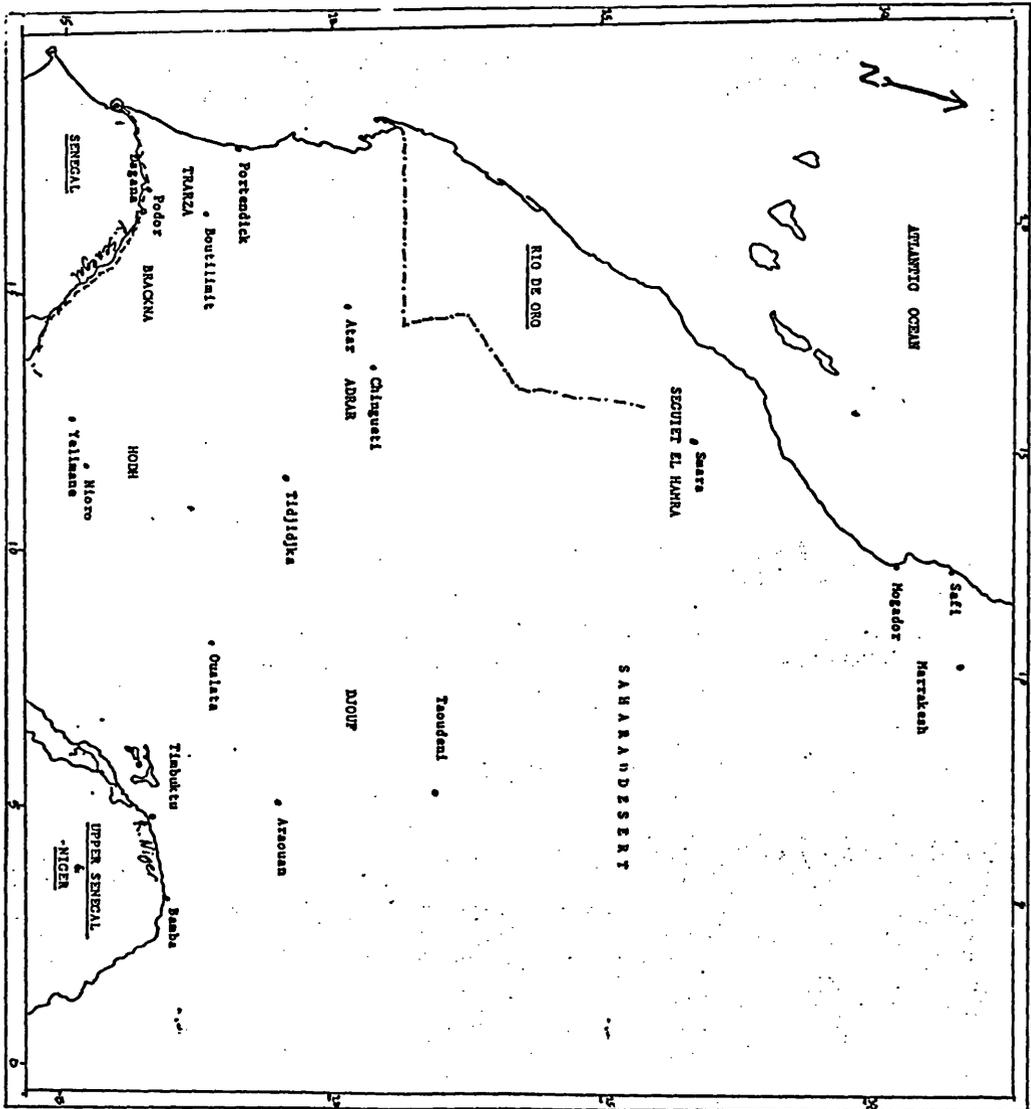
(2) Randau Corse d'Algérie pp. 71-74.

and the topography of the Saharan region' which was to be called the Service Special des Affaires Maures . Coppelani was to be put in charge, seconded by Capt. Lacroix, a former head of a bureau arabe and whom the Governor-General of Algeria had agreed to release for the work in Mauritania. These suggestions were put into effect by a decision of the 30th December 1899.(1) Coppelani was disappointed by this, considering it to be a half measure and objecting that the new special department was superfluous as the necessary studies had already been made, but, pending the creation of a true protectorate, he agreed to co-operate.(2)

The decision to create the new administrative unit and the new department has been described with some justification as the apogee of Coppelani's career.(3)

- (1) ANSOM AP 1420/1 Directeur Affaires d'Afrique to Min. Col. 27.12.1899. There seems to have been some confusion over the precise name and date of the 'Service spéciale des Affaires maures'. In ANSOM Afrique IV/68 'Note' to Min. Col. 31.5.1900 there is also a reference to a 'Service des Affaires musulmanes et sahariennes' created in 29.10.1899 and whose base was a room in the Ecole coloniale.
- (2) ANSOM AP 1420/1 Coppelani 'L'organisation politique et administrative des pays maures de notre empire du Nord Ouest Africain' 12.6.1901.
- (3) Maurel Xavier Coppelani p.26.

Political map of Mauritania, c.1905



The Yellow Fever epidemic (1900-2) in Senegal made the government there more reluctant than ever to spend scarce resources on an enterprise of whose value they were not in any case convinced. The failure of the Blanchet mission which had set out from France in an expansionist mood to investigate the possibilities of a trans-Saharan railway but which soon succumbed to illness and only narrowly escaped destruction at the hands of the followers of Ma el Ainin, served to reinforce the traditional objections to the occupation of Mauritania.<sup>(1)</sup> Coppolani faced a formidable task having to convince his opponents that occupation of Mauritania was economically viable, diplomatically acceptable and finally that it was possible at all. Between 1900 and 1902 he was forced to resort to the most optimistic prognostications in order to make his case sound plausible.

His first step was to emphasise still further the role of Islam. As the British in India, the Russians in Asia and General Bugeaud in Algeria had all done with success the French in North West Africa should, he argued, also make use of the predominant influence of Islam, and in particular, the brotherhoods:

(1) See ANSOM AOF III/4-9 for details of Blanchet mission.

With their co-operation ... we will have peace, the security of the caravan routes and the solution to the problem of the unification of our North West African empire.

Without their help we will have Holy War involving a disproportionate expense of men and money. It would mean a step into the unknown and a permanent state of hostility with the Saharan and Moroccan populations.

Fortunately, Muslims ... have more or less the same character under different latitudes. ... These white races whose adventurous and commercial spirit has, we believe, been wrongly presented to us as that of untamed Muslims lost in the so-called Saharan steppes are no other than those Arabs and Berbers of the tent that all Algerians have seen. ... We have found amongst them the same tribes, the same language, the same morals and the same religion albeit with a more liberal element than amongst their brothers in North Africa. What has enabled us to traverse without conflict the principal Moor and Tuareg camps is the presence of those same brotherhoods and those same religious groups that we have studied in Algeria and which we found there just as powerful and just as interested in serving our cause. (1)

Coppolani's emphasis on the uniformity of Islam under different latitudes was something of a two-edged argument. Here it was used to suggest how easily new territory could be acquired. It was a disarmingly simple argument and for Coppolani it also had the additional advantage of almost global applicability - the sort of grand strategy to which he was so attached. Yet the uniformity of Islam and the power of the brotherhoods was also the a priori assumption of those who most feared the political threat of Islam and was later to

(1) ANSOM AP 1420/1 Coppolani 'L'organisation ...'  
12.6.1901.

be used to justify policies towards Islam entirely opposite to those which Coppolani now proposed.

At the end of this report Coppolani advocated the creation of an 'Interministerial Commission' with representatives from the Colonial, Home, War and Foreign Ministries to investigate the problems of North-West Africa. The recommendation was accepted and the commission was formed in July 1901 with the aim of 'examining the respective situations of Algeria and West Africa with regard to each other and to neighbouring countries. (1) Coppolani reported to the commission in October elaborating a scheme which in his eyes answered all the possible objections to French occupation of all the land which lay between Algeria and the West African colonies.

He introduced his argument by suggesting that accounts of the aridity of the Mauritanian landscape and fierceness of its climate had been greatly exaggerated and went on to describe the various regions from the desert to the valley of the Senegal in language that would not have been inappropriate for a description of the lush pastures of Burgundy, concluding that, 'In general the temperature is healthy and certainly not to be compared with the debilitating temperatures of

(1) ANSOM Mauretanie IV/I Arrêté 6.7.1901

Senegal and the Soudan'.

Having dismissed one traditional obstacle to French progress Coppolani proceeded to explain why Europeans would be wrong to consider the nomadic tribesmen as a further obstacle. As in his report in June, Islam was seen as the crucial factor but by October Coppolani had discovered a way of giving his argument only one possible cutting edge.

First he stated that, 'From St Louis to Tombouctou there is a demarcation line between blacks and whites that not even El Hadj Omar and his Tukolor were able to cross'. He therefore conceded that Islam might after all change under certain latitudes and that he was only discussing its role in Arab or Berber-dominated society. Next he argued that Moorish society was particularly well-suited to a Muslim policy because of the peculiar division between the warrior Hassanic tribes and the religious clerical (or in the parlance of the day, 'maraboutic') tribes. The distinction, he argued, was simple:

A warrior is neither a trader nor a manufacturer, he can neither read nor write. He is the master of the gun, the representative of force and consequently the defender of the country ... The clergy is represented by veritable tribes of learned men...

They are independent of the Hassania, never take part in war but rather dispense justice and are mediators of peace. Their rosary replaces the gun. ... The action of the religious leaders is preponderant over the masses and often over the warrior chiefs as well. They have become the auxiliaries of our policy and could become the precious instruments of pacification if, bearing in mind the rivalry between warrior tribes, we combine the various elements and attack the question with determination and unity of views. (1)

Although based on fact Coppolani's analysis was something of an over-simplification. Until the tenth century Mauritania had been populated by a people - probably black - called the Bafour, centred in the Adrar. (2) In the eleventh century they were invaded and defeated by the recently Islamised Berber Almoravids. In the fourteenth and in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there were fresh waves of northern invaders but of Arabic origin (Beni Hassan) and in a drawn out conflict, known as the War of Babbah, in the mid-seventeenth century the Hassanic Arabs finally defeated the Berber tribes.

- (1) ANSOM Mauretanie IV/I Coppolani 'Rapport présenté à la commission interministerielle du Nord Ouest Africain' 14.10.1910.
- (2) The following account is based on P. Marty L'Emirat des Trarzas Paris, 1919 Part I chs. 1-5 and C.C. Stewart Islam and Social Order in Mauritania: a case study from the nineteenth century Oxford, 1973, ch.3.

The Hassanic tribes, although in a minority, became the effective masters of the country offering protection to the other groups in exchange for a variety of payments and services. The defeated Berbers abandoned - in theory at least - their arms, giving themselves up to study, commerce and agriculture. Beneath these two dominant groups there came a group of diverse origins known as the zenaga who were liable to pay tribute to both the warrior and the clerical tribes. Beneath the zenaga came the harratine - freed slaves who were closely associated to one or other of the Hassanic tribes - and, finally, slaves, smiths and griots.

There were also a number of very small tribes whose existence and position in society was related to specific economic activities in specific locations and which do not fit very clearly into the overall social hierarchy.(1)

Command within each tribe was exercised, in the case of the warrior tribes, by a chief advised by an assembly of notables - djemaa - acting as a consultative assembly

(1) For example the Imraguen, fishermen on the coast between Cap Blanc and Nouakchott and the Nemadi, primitive deâr hunters (hunters) who hunted on foot with packs of dogs in the Djouf. Both groups were in a vulnerable position, and the Nemadis were especially despised. See A TOMAS 'Les Imraguen de Mauretanie' CHEAM no. 757, 1937; Capt. Fondacci 'Les Nemadis' CHEAM no. 1009, 1946.

or, in the case of the clerical tribes, by a more powerful djemaa with a chief acting as spokesman. It was very rare that tribes joined to form a confederation and on the contrary each tribe was generally split into several fractions. Because of the highly segmented nature of society conflict was endemic. It could be controlled either by force or by the arbitration of a respected religious personality. It seems to have been only rarely that such a personality could make good the claim - to which everybody paid lip service - that spiritual authority was superior to temporel power. One such exception was Cheikh Sidiya al Kabir (1775-1886) whose reputation as both a Sufi and a jurist made him one of the most influential men in southern Mauritania in the nineteenth century. In general, however, clerical tribes were unable to command such respect and were relatively powerless against the warriors.

From this brief and rather approximate survey of Moorish society there are at least two points to be made. The first is that it was a highly complicated structure that cannot be easily described. The distinction between the groups was often blurred - there were religious men who took up arms and warriors who forsook them - and not even the racial distinction was as clear cut as Coppolani suggested as generations of black concubines had done much to dilute the purity

of the Arab blood. The second point is that although the social structure appeared remarkably static not having changed greatly since the end of the seventeenth century it was nonetheless the result of an historical process and quite capable of future change. It was likely, for example, that the intervention of the French would have a great effect on the relationship between the warrior and the clerical tribes. (1)

Coppolani's simplistic appreciation of the situation was perhaps best seen in his statement that, 'Cheikh Ma el Ainin is the brother of our friends and proteges Chiekh Saad Bu and Cheikh Sidi el Kheir and is consequently our ally'. (2) In fact Cheikh Ma el Ainin and his son el Hiba were to be the most bitter opponents of French rule in Mauritania and in Morocco.

Nevertheless his policy had a certain attraction and the idea that Moorish society was divided into two distinct groups, of which one was calling out for French support, seemed to have a sound scientific and humanitarian appeal. If Coppolani had gone a long way to convincing the authorities that a relatively inexpensive and peaceful occupation of Mauritania was

(1) One commentator thought that he could discern in the zenaga tribes the same characteristics as the bourgeoisie of 16th and 17th century Europe. See Capt. Aubinière 'La hiérarchie sociale des Maures' CHEAM no. 1496, 1949.

(2) ANSCM Mauretanie IV/I Coppolani 'Rapport ... ' 14.10.1901.

possible he still had to convince them that it was necessary.

Coppolani addressed himself both to the local Senegalese administration and to the wider audience of those concerned with the general direction of colonial strategy. To the first he emphasised the anomaly existing on the two banks of the Senegal whereby on the left bank the French collected taxes from the indigenous populations but on the right bank they actually paid an annual 'custom' to the chiefs of Trarza and the Brackna. (1) However, although this was an obvious offence to French <sup>price</sup> Governor-General Chaudié, at least, thought that it was a price worth paying for the assurance of peaceful relations. (2)

To the second group Coppolani urged the advantages to be gained from having a unified strategy towards Islam. Together with a group of like-minded persons he founded the Revue Franco-Musulmane et Saharienne of which thirteen issues were printed between 1902 and 1903. Despite its short life it enjoyed the patronage of most of the leading lights of the Parti colonial and had

(1) ANSCM AP 1420/1 Coppolani 'Rapport sur ma mission au Soudan français' 1899; 'L'organisation politique et administrative des pays maures' 12.6.1901.

(2) Maurel Xavier Coppolani p.29

Etienne as its President. (1) The editorial of the first issue spoke of the urgent need that would assure France's standing in the Muslim world, a world, it suggested, of 'remarkable unity' in which the faithful recognised no other capital except Mecca and Medina. It concluded,

France ... cannot without risk attempt a work of assimilation which almost certainly is condemned to failure. On the contrary, it behoves to her to take account of the state of mind of her Mahometan subjects and the elements which dominate them with a view to allowing them to evolve within their own civilisation in order to bring them more happiness, more peace and to influence their minds [pénétrer dans les esprits] without irritating their consciences. (2)

Applied specifically to Mauritania this approach was particularly suitable and likely to succeed because, Coppolani argued, here,

The brotherhoods are in principle the partisans of peace ... If we know how to show respect to their religion ... and protect their interests, their 'fanaticism', hitherto seen as irreducible, becomes a meaningless word. These are ... intelligent men. The essential thing is to understand them and to learn how to make use of their incontestable qualities. (3)

(1) Members of its committee included Binger, Bourgeois, Hanotéaux, Houdas, Jonnart, Leroy-Beaulieu and Poincaré.

(2) Editorial Revue Franco-Musulmane et Saharienne (1) 1902.

(3) Coppolani 'L'action religieuse ...' Part II p.30.

In two years of intense propagandising Coppolani had repeated his policy over and over again taking every available opportunity to publicise it. By the winter of 1901-2 he had refined it to the most simplistic and optimistic of formulae which equated the brotherhoods and the clerical tribes with a progressive, peace-loving and pro-French party whose support would obviate the need for any form of direct military action.

However, despite, or perhaps because of, Coppolani's bull-dozer tactics and even though his supporters included the President of the Third Republic, Waldeck Rousseau, and the new Governor-General of AOF, Ernest Roume, Coppolani succeeded in winning only limited approval for a French occupation of Mauritania. From the available archival material it is not at all clear when the major decisions were taken to go ahead with a partial occupation of Mauritania. This confusion reflects the uncertainty towards Mauritania in this period. The uncertainty was to persist for at least another three years as Coppolani's efforts were to be consistently marked by very hesitant official support.

However, in October 1902 Roume appointed Coppolani as Civil Commissioner of the Governor-General in

Mauritania and entrusted him specifically with a mission to the Trarza. The French had become increasingly impatient with the inability of the Emir of Trarza, Ahmet Salum, to control unrest and exercise proper authority over his subjects. (1) A small military expedition under the command of Lt Delaplane had been sent to the Trarza in the spring of 1902. It was intended as a demonstration, rather than as an exercise, of force in order to impress on Ahmet Salum's opponents that the French meant to support and protect their ally. Delaplane quickly persuaded the principal opposition group, the Awlad Ahmet ben Daman, to submit and thus, he claimed, assure the security of Ahmet Salum and French interests in the Trarza. (2) Later in April Delaplane's efforts were followed by a meeting convened in Dagana by Decazes, the Director of Native Affairs, of all the chiefs of the Trarza who were asked to pledge their loyalty to Ahmet Salum. Decazes reported that the meeting had been a success concluding that, 'The population of this part of the right bank feel that times have changed and that the era of pillages is over. In contact with us they, but especially the maraboutic tribes, understand the

(1) Marty Trarzas Book I, chs. 6 & 7 contains full details of intrigues within Emir's family.

(2) ANS 1 D 221 Gen. Houry (Comm. supérieur des Troupes en AOF) instructions to Delaplane 3.3.1902; Delaplane to Houry 13.4.1902.

advantages of peace'. Decazes paid particular tribute to Cheikh Sidia (1) who was to be one of the central figures of French policy towards Muslims in AOF as a whole, reporting that '[Cheikh Sidia] is eager to demonstrate that religion isn't a fanaticism tightly bound to sacred texts'. The following month Roume wrote to Decrais, the Minister of Colonies, that the mission had been a success and that it offered further proof of the need to revise policy towards the Moors of the Lower Senegal.(2)

However the loyalty of the other tribes to Ahmet Salum was short-lived. Ahmet's nephew, Sidiould Mohammed Fall, soon broke his promises, and this time Coppolani was sent to deal with the unrest. Five months later Roume reported in May 1903 to the Minister of Colonies that Coppolani, by exploiting the divisions between the Hassanic and the clerical tribes and with the help of Cheikh Sidia and Cheikh Saad Bu, had been able quickly and cheaply to restore French authority.

- (1) Cheikh Sidia - grandson of Cheikh Sidia al Kebir - as head of clerical Awlad Biri federation had a vested interest in French support against his enemies, the Djedjiba, in Brackna, and against the Awlad Bu Sba in the north. See P. Marty L'Islam en Mauritanie et au Sénégal Paris, 1916 ch. 2.
- (2) ANS 1 D 221 Decazes report 20.4.1902; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 13.5.1902.

Again, Roume urged a positive approach to Mauritania, destined, he said, to be 'l'une des plus belles provinces de l'Afrique occidentale' and an important link between French colonies either side of the Sahara. In order to establish more effective control he requested official permission to establish a post on the coast of Nouakchott in addition to those created by Coppolani at Souet el Ma and Khroufa in December and February respectively. (1)

That French control was still incomplete seemed to be confirmed very soon afterwards as reports came through of serious unrest and anti-French conspiracies near Kaedi. These reports worried Roume who cabled to Coppolani forbidding him to march into the interior as there had been insufficient preparations. Coppolani dismissed the reports as exaggerated saying that he had events under control and that he saw no obstacle to continuing with his mission to Brackna (2) and in characteristically self-congratulatory style Coppolani reported in July that he had succeeded in the space of a few months in establishing French authority throughout Trarza and Brackna. (3)

- (1) ANSOM AP 1420/1 Gov.-Gen AOF to Min. Col. 16.5.1903.
- (2) ANS 9 G 20 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Coppolani 24.4.1903; 26.5.1903; Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.5.1903; 29.5.1903.
- (3) ANSOM AP 1420/1 Coppolani 'Organisation des pays maures' 20.7.1903.

Many of the telegrams sent during the mission were coded. It would be interesting to know from whom they were being kept a secret.

Roume's worries about Coppolani's control of the situation may well have been sown by the misgivings of the military command. An analysis by the Bureau Militaire of Coppolani's budget provisions for 1903 did not fall far short of an outright condemnation: 'There is little to say about the report itself which is no more than a series of all kinds of affirmations whose value is necessarily relative since they cannot be judged by any precedent'. As for the budget, the expenses were, it warned, underestimated for, 'Whatever M. Coppolani may say there will be military expenses to include for 1903'. Finally it argued that Coppolani's plans for the organisation of Mauritania were 'nothing less than the creation of a new colony - having a special governor - the director of Muslim affairs'.(1)

Military suspicion of Coppolani was a constant feature of his career. The suspicions were well-founded. Coppolani's predictions were excessively optimistic, and he was determined to guard sole control over the

(1) ANS 1 D 222 Bureau militaire 'Examen et avis' n.d.

conduct of the campaign in Mauritania. In November 1903 he wrote to Roume that, 'It is essential that there is only one chain of command and that the delegate of the Governor-General ... is able to make use of troops without requiring the commanding officers first to inform their superiors of their orders and then wait for authorisation to carry them through.(1)

Coppolani had replied to Roume's anxious telegrams not only with assurances that the situation was under control but also with the argument that it was necessary to proceed further inland in order to protect the land in the north nomadised by Moors during the rainy season in the south. As long as the French were unable to control this area they would, he argued, be incapable of offering loyal tribes the protection they had been promised against the warlike tribes. In the autumn of 1903 Coppolani was again in Paris to plead the same case before potential sponsors.(2)

During his absence Ahmeidu, the former Emir of Brackna allied with the warrior Edouaich tribe against the French and shortly after Coppolani's return to Mauritania they mounted their most serious challenge in an attack on the new post of Aleg, (9.12.1903) .

(1) ANS 1 D 221 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 4.11.1903.

(2) Randau Corse d'Algérie p. 96.

The attack was crushed because, Coppolani explained,

It was necessary to reply to this insane act by an exemplary punishment to affirm the idea of our domination in this country ravaged by constant struggle and whose more or less war-like populations have a mentality formed by the fundamental principles of the Coran. That is to say, an understanding of power be it moral or material.(1)

This was a convenient argument for Coppolani as it enabled him to justify a policy of force on the Muslim's respect for power just as surely as his exaltation of the clerical tribes' naturally peaceful inclinations had earlier enabled him to justify a policy of minimalist intervention.

At the same time as the revolt was being suppressed the final arrangements were made for the creation of the post of Nouakchott which it was hoped would assure the stability of the western part of Trarza.(2)

(1) ANS 9 G 20 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 31.12.1903. In a later report Coppolani argued that 'cet acte insensé commis par Almeidou, loin de gêner notre action, précisait, au contraire, la situation et nous permettait d'agir sûrement pour la répression des uns et la protection des autres'. ANSOM Mauretanie IV/L Coppolani 'Rapport à m. le Gov.-Gen. de l'AOF sur la mission d'organisation du Tagant' 1.7.1904.

(2) ANS 9 G 20 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 30.12.1903. ANS 1 D 221 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 21.11.1903.

Coppolani's main concern, however, was with the administrative organisation of Tagant and the penetration into the region of Adrar. He had consistently urged the importance of French control in Adrar and had always made it clear that he regarded the occupation of Trarza and Brackna as merely the first steps of a grander design.

In the winter of 1903/4 he encountered some difficulty in acquiring the troops he considered necessary for the mission. (1) However, by the end of January this problem had been overcome, and Coppolani set out as overall head of a mission composed of some 150 men. (2)

Difficulties with the military continued throughout the campaign. Capt. Maroix, acting as Secretary-General in St Louis whilst Coppolani was away on a mission, wrote to Roume in March that there were inadequate forces to protect loyal tribes in Trarza and that there was a certain 'inertia' in the command as Coppolani's instructions were either non-existent or took too long to arrive. Maroix therefore suggested the appointment

- (1) ANS 1 D 221 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. ACF 4.11.1903. Coppolani requested 100 tirailleurs, 60 spahis & 100 frontier guards; Houry to Roume 7.12.1903. Houry thought that it would be possible to raise this force but doubts were then expressed by Houry's successor, Gen. Perreaux. See correspondence in this file.
- (2) ANS 1 D 221. Maroix list of personnel 27.1.1904.

of a major to assume command in Trarza whilst Coppolani was away. Roume shared these worries and communicated them to Coppolani who was, however, unimpressed and replied that if a temporary deputy was felt to be absolutely necessary then he would insist upon the employment of an administrator of an Algerian commune mixte. (1) Later Coppolani made a strong attack on Maroix' handling of the situation accusing him of being attached to 'A method of conquest and the vulgarisation of sterile efforts which are perhaps excellent in Madagascar, Tonkin and in the former Soudan but which are disastrous when applied to populations whose characteristics are entirely different'. (2)

Coppolani's difficulties were not confined to military suspicion as he also succeeded in provoking the suspicion of the Senegalese administration. Roume was worried by reports that Coppolani had been giving direct orders to the chiefs in the villages of Toro, Lao and Irliabe in the riverside canton of Deimette without prior consultation of the local administration. He had also received a complaint that Coppolani had taken with him Bokar Baidy, the chief of Deimette,

(1) ANS 9 G 21 Maroix to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.3.1904; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Coppolani 22.3.1904; Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 29.4.1904.

(2) ANSOM Mauritanie IV/I Coppolani 'Rapport au sujet d'agissements ... auprès des populations des régions Trarza' 27.6.1904.

along with two regional guards and four horses. Roume wrote to Coppolani to remind him that all the administrators in the region of the Senegal river had been given instructions to keep him informed of events of interest to him and that he should return this respect. 'Without wishing to limit' the powers granted to Coppolani Roume deplored his disregard for the Senegalese administration and in future expected to see more evidence of a co-operative spirit.(1) As a sequel it should be added that having recruited these extra forces Coppolani paid scant regard for their welfare. On their return the Tukolor from Lao complained that they had been forced to give their horses to the Algerian contingent and had not been compensated for their sacrifice. (2)

A third obstacle in the way of Coppolani was the trading-houses in St Louis which feared the consequences of French control of the interior of Mauritania on their lucrative arms trade. (3)

- (1) ANS 9 G 21 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Coppolani Jan. 1904; ANS 9 G 20 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 21.12.1903. Coppolani had written to Roume asking for permission to employ Bokar Baidy whom he referred to as the chief of the canton of Aleibi and not Deimette - confusion or ignorance on Coppolani's part?
- (2) ANS 1 D 225 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 15.3.1905.
- (3) ANS 1 D 222 The possession of firearms had been made illegal by a decision of 15.6.1904.

The Deves brothers in particular had a reputation for intrigue in local politics and were generally held responsible for the insecurity of Ahmet Salum prior to the Delaplane mission in 1902. (1) Such traders made use of their proximity to the French administration in St Louis to suggest to native Africans that they had the ear of the administration and belonged in some way to the 'djemaa français'. Along with military interference they were singled out by Coppolani as being responsible for the unrest in Trarza during his absence in the Tagant. (2)

In February and March Coppolani led a military campaign against Ahmeidu and his allies the Edouaich under the command of Osman and his son Bakar. In February he had been given firm orders to limit his action to Tagant and not to proceed further into the Adrar. Coppolani made no secret of his disappointment and in a long telegram to Roume he outlined again in familiarly optimistic language the rosy prospects for France if only he were allowed a free hand. The security of Senegal and the unification of the North-West African

(1) ANS 1 D 221 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 26.3.1902.

(2) ANSOM Mauretanie IV/I Coppolani 'Rapport ... Trarza' 27.6.1904; ANS 9 G 21 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.3.1904. Coppolani also held the traders responsible for leading Ahmeidu, the former Emir of Brackna against the French.

empire were, he argued, the two main advantages to be gained from a French occupation of Mauritania. The unexpected richness of the land in Mauritania added a further bonus and, as his rapid success in gaining the submission of almost all the tribes except the Edouaich indicated, all these benefits could be had at minimum expense. (1) A crucial victory against the Edouaich was won on the 14th March when they were scattered into the Assaba mountains, thereby isolating them from their former allies many of whom now began to seek French protection. Coppolani concluded that the security of the area was now complete and outlined plans for its subsequent political organisation proposing the division of the area into two administrative regions, Mal in the west and Gorgol in the south-east with a new post of m'Bout to add to those already established at Mal, Mouit and Aleg. In April the 'dissident' groups in Reguieba in south-east Tagant submitted, but Coppolani warned that in order to exploit such advances it was now imperative to organise the central northern plateau of Tagant and establish posts at Tidjikja and Oussinia. In June further 'dissident' tribes, the Awlad Seid and the Djedjiba,

(1) ANS 9 G 21 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Coppolani 9.2.1904;  
Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. 25.3.1904.

submitted and the Edouaich were rapidly changing their strategy leaving the Awlad Bu Sba as the sole opponents of the French. (1)

Coppolani summarised the main events of the campaign in the report he presented to Roume in July. The report was a predictable rehearsal of the argument for the need to occupy the Adrar and it attracted the scorn of at least one of its readers (unfortunately anonymous)

- (1) ANS 9 G 21 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 21.3.1904, 25.3.1904, 5.4.1904, 27.6.1904. Lt. Martin tells an interesting story about the relationship between Coppolani and the Awlad Bu Sba based on oral evidence from chiefs of the Awlad Bu Sba. According to Martin, the Awlad Bu Sba, traditional enemies of the Kunta, were the victims of a misunderstanding between Coppolani and Capt. Frèrejean in the spring of 1904. Frèrejean thinking Coppolani to be an admirer of the Awlad Bu Sba gave them permission to raid the Kunta. However, the Kunta were close to the French administration and immediately sought official backing for a reprisal which Coppolani gave on his way to Podor. Lt. Rosfelder led an attack against the Awlad Bu Sba whilst they were resting at a camp of Cheikh Sidia which would normally have been regarded as a sanctuary. The Awlad Bu Sba felt betrayed by Cheikh Sidia's Awlad Biri as a result. Martin deplored this treatment of a former ally of the French and argued that the Awlad Bu Sba could have been a useful ally in the French penetration of Mauritania. See H.G. Martin 'Une tribu marocaine en Mauritanie: les Oulad Bou Sba'. CHEAM (R) no. 1008, 1937.

who whenever he came across reference to the use of soldiers commented ironically in the margin 'Peaceful occupation?' or 'This isn't peaceful'. Such comments were symptomatic of the growing opposition to Coppolani's methods. (1)

In the course of the campaign even Roume, normally a loyal supporter of Coppolani, had shown, as we have seen, signs of impatience with Coppolani's reluctance to communicate with his colleagues. In March he added that even the reports which he received were 'much too vague and summary' and were especially lacking in details of troop movements. Roume was particularly anxious for such detailed information in view, he said, of the worrying situation in the Far East and its possible consequences on France. (2) Coppolani's preoccupation with a swift advance into the Adrar also provoked resentment from the administration left behind in Trarza. The administrator at Souet el Ma complained in the course of the year of the lack of staff left at his disposal. In particular the absence of an interpreter made, he said, his task impossible as he could neither understand nor be understood by the local population. (3)

- (1) ANSOM Mauretanie IV/I Coppolani 'Rapport à m. le Gov.-Gen. sur l'administration du Tagant' 1.7.1904.
- (2) ANS 9 G 21 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Coppolani 14.3.1904.
- (3) ANS 9 G 21 'Rapport politique de la région orientale du pays Trarza' 18-29 April 1904 & 1 - 10 August 1904.

Nevertheless when Roume wrote to the Minister of Colonies enclosing Coppolani's report he spoke flatteringly of Coppolani's achievement and urged that he be allowed to carry on to Tidjikja which would, he argued, be a sensible stopping point for the French advance and would guarantee complete control of the Senegal valley.(1)

Coppolani returned to France in the summer of 1904. Waldeck-Rousseau's death in August was a blow to Coppolani's power base in Paris but he still enjoyed the good-will of the parti colonial and he was at last able to secure official support for the advance into the Adrar. In October Mauritania was constituted as a 'Civil Territory', and Coppolani became its first 'Commissioner'. During his absence in Paris the political situation again deteriorated in Trarza as Ahmet Salum had started to intrigue with the Awlad bou Sba who were raiding clerical tribes loyal to France. In the east, Ahmeidu and the Edouaich were reported to be planning similar action. Adam, Coppolani's deputy, prescribed what was by now a familiar remedy to this apparently chronic unrest and argued that French authority would only become effective with the control of Adrar.(2)

(1) ANS 9 G 20 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min.Col. (Doumergue) July 1904.

(2) ANS 9 G 21 'Rapport politique de la Mauretanie depuis fin Août jusqu'au 20ème Octobre 1904'; Sec.Gen. p.i. Adam to Gov.-Gen. AOF 11.10.1904.

On his return to Mauritania Coppolani set about organising his campaign to achieve this goal. In December he wrote that, 'The respect of the religion, morals and customs of the population, backed up by a sufficient defensive force will be for us the guarantee of success'. (1) Having assembled his 'defensive force' Coppolani marched towards Tidjikja in the spring of 1905. He arrived at his destination in April and was impressed by the discovery of archaeological evidence of a large town dating back to the Ghana empire which he offered as further evidence of the present richness of the soil and the potential prosperity of the country. (2)

However the mission was held up by a delay in supplies and Coppolani was forced to stay several weeks in Tidjikja without being able to pursue his campaign into the remoter regions of the Adrar. It was during this enforced stay that on the night of the 12th May Coppolani was killed by a Muslim belonging to the Ghoudf brotherhood who had successfully penetrated the camp. (3)

- (1) ANSQM AP 1407 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF Dec. 1904.
- (2) ANS 1 D 225. Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 23.4.1905.
- (3) All the biographies of Coppolani have a blow by blow account of the manner of his death, all of which are based on the eye witness account of Arnaud in Randaou Corse d'Algérie pp. 155-85. See also ANS 1 D 224 for official reports.

His death marked the end of the fiction of the 'peaceful penetration' of Mauritania. As Coppolani's critics on all sides had pointed out, and as he himself admitted, he had always needed to make use of a military force to back up his diplomacy. From 1905 to 1909 Colonel Gouraud led an unashamedly military campaign in the Adrar. After the conquest of the Adrar resistance was confined mainly to the north led from their base in Seguiet el Hamra by Ma el Ainin and later his son el Hiba. From 1910 until 1930, the date of the final submission, the French conducted what amounted to a campaign of police action against raids when and where they occurred.(2) Even with the advantages of motor vehicles and aeroplanes the establishment of control over Mauritania posed major problems and despite Coppolani's claims for the great wealth of the country successive administrations seldom showed much enthusiasm for the colony.

Coppolani's was a brief but controversial appearance upon the Mauritanian stage. Locally many members of the Conseil Général in Senegal refused to mourn him

- (1) For details of this campaign see Col. Gouraud La Pacification de la Mauretanie. Journal des marches et opérations de la colonne d'Adrar Paris, 1909.
- (2) For details of such action, at least up until 1926, see Capt. Gillier La Pénétration en Mauretanie Paris, 1926.

or agree with the official description of his death as an assassination, saying rather that he had simply been killed in action. His severest critic was Monsieur Deves who invited the Conseil Général to spare their tears and to think instead of the unfortunate Tukulors who had been killed in Mauritania.(1)

There is little agreement even amongst his admirers about what Coppolani actually achieved in Mauritania. His immediate successor, Lt-Col Montané wrote that he was the founder of a Muslim policy in West Africa. (2) Successive commentators have, however, interpreted the 'Muslim policy' in different ways. Arnaud and d'Otton Loyewski, in their biographies of Coppolani, tended to emphasise the personal aspects of the policy suggesting that it was the product of a combination of physical attributes - notably broad shoulders - and a unique insight into the mentality of the Moors which enabled Coppolani to win their confidence. (3)

- (1) Cited by Désiré Vuillemin in Contribution à l'histoire de la Mauritanie, 1900-1934 Dakar, 1962, p.142. See also Randau Corse d'Algérie p.105fn. for account of same debate.
- (2) ANS 1 D 224 'Rapport du Lt.-Col. Commissaire du Gov.-Gen. en Territoire civil de la Mauritanie sur les circonstances et les résultats de la mission dans le Tagant' 29.7.1905.
- (3) Randau Corse d'Algérie passim; d'Otton Loyewski 'Coppolani et la Mauritanie' pp.35,69.

Another common interpretation of the 'Muslim policy' especially favoured by military commentators was that it was one of opportunism based on the principle of divide and rule. For Capt. Delby it was 'Anarchy, the principal vice of Moorish society which allowed the rapid success of Coppolani'. Capt. Frèrejean argued, and Lt. d'Otton Loyewski wholeheartedly agreed, that Coppolani was above all an opportunist who made use of tribal rivalries and of the clerical alliance not because he was particularly disposed that way but because the opportunity presented itself. Paul Marty wrote that Coppolani inaugurated 'une politique de tribus' - although he went on to say that, 'The principal task of the French occupation was to assure the protection of the clerical tribes, which were absolutely incapable of defending themselves against the raids of the Oulad bou Sba'. Coppolani himself was not shy of portraying himself as an opportunist.(1)

However to emphasise only the element of opportunism is to underestimate the importance that Coppolani quite clearly attached to the role of Islam and the clerical tribes in Moorish society. For it was his insistence

(1) Capt. Delby cited in Gillier Pénétration p. 138, Capt. Frèrejean cited in d'Otton Loyewski 'Coppolani et la Mauritanie' pp. 46,66-67, Marty Trarzas pp. 138-41; ANS 9 G 20 20 Coppolani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.3.1905.

on the importance of these factors which enabled him to argue that the occupation of Mauritania could be achieved at minimum cost and with maximum long term advantages. A policy of mere divide and rule implied a constant juggling of forces which in turn implied a constant degree of activity on the part of the French which might prove difficult to justify in terms of the material and strategic gains to be had out of the occupation of such a country as Mauritania.

A policy based on Islam offered something altogether simpler. Shortly before he was killed Coppolani told Arnaud that,

To achieve anything in a Muslim country, you need the support of the religious element, the only intelligent one and also the only one whose authority is uncontested ... Once we have got the religious chiefs on our side we will not intervene in the quarrels and polemics of doctrine ... The first principle of general politics is to divide and rule, but in Muslim politics it is to let well alone within certain limits.

It was for arguments such as these whose evolution we have attempted to trace from Coppolani's days in Algeria to his campaign for a 'positive approach' to Mauritania that caused Montané to speak of Coppolani as a 'founder' of Muslim policy and for Arnaud, in an important official

(1) Randau Corse d'Algérie pp. 155-56.

publication in 1906 to describe him as 'the apostle of French Muslim policy'. (1)

Like many 'apostles' before and since there was something of a gap between the rhetoric and the reality of Coppelani's achievement. Coppelani's lack of tact and diplomacy with his colleagues and superiors apart, there were very good reasons why the wholehearted support for his policies was never forthcoming.

Coppelani's policies were plainly simplistic and his description of the lush Mauritanian countryside was a considerable exercise in poetic license - and was recognised as such. The fact that he met his death at the hands of a Muslim, apparently claiming divine authorisation, served to highlight the fragility of the base on which he was seeking to unify the French north west African empire. It is not surprising that his successors no longer saw the clerical tribes as the trump card that Coppelani had suggested they were. Capt. Frèrejean considered that,

The marabouts have done everything to exploit the initial profound ignorance of the French, posing themselves as victims whereas too often

(1) R. Arnaud Précis de politique musulmane  
Algiers, 1906, pp.11-12fn.

they were merely trying to enlist our support in their illegitimate refusal to pay their suzerains for the protection which had been afforded them for centuries. (1)

In 1910 Colonel Patey gave instructions to allow more authority to the warrior chiefs who were by now starting to play an important role in the policing of the desert. Commt. Gillier in 1926 in an attack which was specifically directed against recent policy towards the 'grandes nomades' but which applied equally well to the earlier policy of 'peaceful penetration' asked. 'Why delude ourselves with the vain hope that dissidents will voluntarily submit ... when we have to admit our inability to compel them to submit by force.'(2)

Coppolani's career is of general interest to the colonial historian for the insights it provides into the relationships and conflicts within the French community in West Africa and as a reminder that the 'conquest' of West Africa had by no means come to an end

- (1) Frèrejean cited in Désiré Vuillemin Contribution p. 293.
- (2) Patey cited in Désiré Vuillemin op cit p. 183; Gillier Pénétration p. 286. Warrior tribes were first used in the méhariste units (formed in 1906) as a police force but recognised in 1912 as a strike force as well. See Désiré Vuillemin 'Notes sur les origines des pelotons méharistes du Mauritanie' Revue d'Histoire des Colonies, 1958 pp. 53-60.

with the defeat of Samori. However, for our immediate purposes two main points require emphasis.

The first is the fact that he brought Mauritania, which might otherwise have been regarded as a peripheral issue, to the forefront of French thoughts and thereby gave extra prominence to some of the country's leading Muslim personalities. Historically, Mauritania was of great importance in the development of Islam in West Africa and its leading marabouts had disciples as far afield as Casamance and Guinea. It was therefore impossible that these leaders would ever have escaped French attention. However, Coppolani was at least in part responsible for the importance attached by the French to Cheikh Sidia and to a lesser extent, to Cheikh Saad Bu. For Coppolani Cheikh Sidia was the personification of what could be achieved by a successful policy towards Islam and this view was shared by Coppolani's colleagues in the colonial administration. The Cheikh's camps in Boutilimit and Souet el Ma were to be regarded as important centres whose pro-French atmosphere made them useful places to send anti-French Muslims in need of 'education'.

The second point to make is that Coppolani's grandiose 'Islamic policy' was a failure. Starting from his original premise that Islam was a universal force which

if controlled offered the French the opportunity to dominate the whole of north-west Africa, Coppolani made some revisions to take into account the particularity of Islam and social order in Mauritania and to distance himself from African Islam generally. However, even on this more modest scale Islam did not reveal itself as the uniform force which Coppolani had suggested. Instead, Coppolani's failure and the manner of his death became object lessons in the complexity of Islamic politics. Paradoxically, therefore, his legacy was one of insecurity as much as of knowledge. As we shall see in the next chapter this insecurity was to be translated into a profound mistrust of Islam.

CHAPTER THREE: FRENCH ANXIETIES ABOUT ISLAM,  
1905-1911

Introduction

At the same time that Coppolani was embarking on his final mission to the Adrar the new Governor of Senegal, Camille Guy, was worrying about the influence of Mauritanian marabouts on their alms-collecting tours in his colony. The preoccupation with the activities of local marabouts was not new but it was to acquire a new urgency under the administration of men such as Guy, Francois Clozel and above all William Ponty in whose eyes marabouts were generally seen as greedy and illiterate charlatans who exploited African credulity for their private gain at great expense to the colonial economy.

In the first decade of this century the concept of maraboutage became common usage in the vocabulary of the French administration. It was a concept that had no direct equivalent in English and which was meant to evoke all that was considered disreputable in West African Islam - particularly the encouragement of

begging and superstition. The severest strictures were reserved for the category of marabouts ambulants, itinerant marabouts, whose crime was twofold; exploitation of credulity for private gain etc. on the one hand, diffusion and encouragement of 'pan-Islamic' sentiment on the other.

The control of the activities of the itinerant marabouts necessitated a centralised intelligence service so that in the ideal colonial state potential 'trouble-makers' could be apprehended as soon as they entered the colony. This chapter deals with some of the main preoccupations of the French during the first five years of the embryonic intelligence service under its first director, Robert Arnaud. The events of these years and the French response to them reflect the uncertainty of the French about what Islam in Black Africa amounted to, as it was seen variously as a peripheral heresy, a mildly superior form of animism or an orthodox part of the Islamic world whose spiritual leaders were to be found in Istanbul and Alexandria.

### Developments in the Islamic world

The decade before the First World War was rightly seen by the European powers as a time of great unrest in the Islamic world. Dramatic and alarming metaphors abounded in the numerous articles written about Islam as the rumblings in officer messes in Turkey and the nationalist printing presses of Alexandria were widely supposed to be the first signs of a 'volcanic explosion' within the world of Islam unleashing all the latent fanaticism of the 'Mohammedan peoples' against the ill-prepared defences of Europe.

The substance of European fears was founded on the revolutions in Persia (1906), the deposition of both the Ottoman and the Moroccan sultans (1908), the growing radicalism of the Egyptian nationalists and the first Italian -Sanusiyya war, all of which combined to add a fresh urgency and a new dimension to traditional European Islamophobia. The Japanese defeat of the Russians in 1906 was also a severe blow to European confidence about its ability to contain the diverse forces of

the 'Orient'. (1)

Missionaries came to see their major enemy as Islam, and two Protestant conferences in Cairo (1906) and Lucknow (1911) addressed themselves specifically to the problem of evangelisation amongst Muslims.(2) Even the scholarly Revue du Monde Musulman had a special issue in 1911 devoted entirely to 'La conquête de l'Islam'. (3) Snouck-Hurgronje and C-H Becker, the most respected experts in Holland and Germany on Islam, were employed by their respective governments as advisers on Islamic policy, and their articles were swiftly translated into other European languages. (4)

- (1) On developments in the Islamic world see A. Hourani Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age Oxford, 1962 and on European uncertainties see M. Rodinson La Fascination de l'Islam Paris, 1981 ch. 8.
- (2) cf. editorial of first issue of Moslem World 1911 and a series of articles in International Missionary Review 1912 on 'The vital forces of Christianity and Islam' for insights into mission attitudes to Islam during these years.
- (3) RMM 1911 and see Le Chatelier's justification for this issue in RMM 1912.
- (4) Becker's article 'Ist der Islam eine Gefahr für unsere Kolonien?' (1909) appeared in French translation L'Islam et la colonisation de l'Afrique Paris 1910.

There was then a perception of a struggle which opposed Christian Europe against the Muslim 'Orient', a struggle which, it should be stressed, the Europeans by no means felt entirely confident about winning. To a certain extent this perception was merely a continuation of a suspicion and fear of Islam that dates back to the Crusades but in the early twentieth century the fear was not so much of what Islam was (or what the Europeans believed it to be) but what, mixed up with nationalism, it might become. Le Chatelier, the editor of the Revue du Monde Musulman, wrote that 'Islam was at its 1789' - a date which in the Third Republic was as liable to evoke the Terror which followed as the birth of democratic and enlightened government - but Le Chatelier was cautiously optimistic. (1) Others, haunted by the spectre of a pan-Islamic revolt were less sanguine. All were agreed that Europeans had to be careful, that they had to do something, in short that they had to have an Islamic policy.

Colonial rivalries of the past thirty years were not, however, swept aside in the face of the common

(1) A. Le Chatelier 'Le pan-islamisme et le progrès' RMM 1907 pp. 465-71.

enemy of Islam. In particular, the French whose colonial expansion had been so intimately linked with the experience of metropolitan humiliation in 1870-1 were ultra-sensitive to European challenges to their Empire. Since Fashoda and the establishment of the Entente Cordiale (1904) French suspicion of 'Perfide Albion' had been tempered. Rather it was the Germans, the new lords of Alsace-Lorraine, who caused the greatest headaches for French colonialists as French and Germans clashed in two areas in Africa: In Wadai and Tibesti in Central Frica the French suspected that the Germans were intriguing with local chiefs against the infant French presence. The area, on the eastern border of the French Empire was of symbolic interest to French colonialists. A plainly barren land over which as yet the French army exercised no control it nonetheless represented an important link in the chain of French colonies running from the Mediterranean to the Congo. (1)

- (1) The political situation in the central Sudan was somewhat anarchic and no power - European or African - was capable of guaranteeing security for the trans-Saharan traders. Rabih, the Sultan of Borno, had been killed by the French in 1900 but his followers had taken refuge in Wadai, Tibesti and Borkou. The French particularly feared the power of the Sanusiyya, traditionally regarded by them as the most xenophobic of the Sufi brotherhoods. They were also alarmed by the activities of the Young Turk, political exiles banished by the Ottoman authorities to the Southern Tripolitanian province of Fezzan.

Morocco, the other area in which French and German interests clashed dramatically, was altogether different. Never part of the Ottoman Empire, its independence had been respected by the Europeans in the scramble for Africa but during the reign of Sultan Mawlay Hassan (1873-1894) European interest in Morocco increased greatly. Between 1864 and 1894 the European presence in Morocco increased from 1,350 to 9,000 as new commercial and administrative possibilities were provided by the Sultan's schemes for modernising his country. As the French reconciled themselves to British pre-eminence in Egypt and the Sudan their eyes turned to Morocco. Treaties were signed with both Britain and Spain in 1904 which prepared the way for an eventual French occupation of the bulk of the country. The occupation was justified by the French on the grounds of the anarchy of the Moroccan state which it was felt had grown worse under Mawlay Hassan and showed no signs of improving under his young successor Abd al Aziz (1900-8). Only the Germans stood in the way of the smooth diplomatic preparations for the carve-up of Morocco. In April 1905 Kaiser Wilhelm II landed in Tangiers and proclaimed German support for an independent Moroccan state. A diplomatic crisis ensued before the Algeiras conference the following year provided an acceptable

compromise. Meanwhile French plans for occupying Morocco moved on a stage as French troops arrived in Casablanca and Oujda, on the Algerian border, ostensibly to protect French citizens. In 1908 Abd al Aziz, whom the French had supported, was deposed and replaced by his younger brother, Mawlay Hafiz. The new Sultan, however, was no more able to defend himself against his (Moroccan) enemies than his brother had been. In 1911 he found himself besieged in Fez and had to be rescued by a French force. The Germans responded to the French march on Fez by sending a gunboat to Agadir, and a new diplomatic crisis resulted. The following year the myth of Moroccan independence was finally given the lie, and a French protectorate was declared. Resistance to French rule was stiff in the traditionally unruly Bilad al Siba ('Land of Disorder') particularly in the South and in the Rif mountains in the North, and it was not until 1934 that the whole country was eventually 'pacified'. (1)

- (1) H. Terrasse Histoire du Maroc vol 2 Casablanca 1950 gives a blow-by-blow account of the Moroccan crisis, C-A Julien Le Maroc face aux impérialismes Paris 1978 is a good introduction to more recent scholarship.

A glance through the Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique française in the years prior to the declaration of the Protectorate reveals the extent of French preoccupation with German 'interference' in Morocco. The German alliance with Islamic leaders in Morocco and in Central Africa was an example of how in the twentieth century relations between Islamic and European countries were changing - or, more accurately, were seen to be changing - as political developments outside Europe began for the first time since the seventeenth century to impinge on political strategies and calculations within Europe. The roots of post Second World War analyses of a Soviet plot to use Islam as a springboard for its own devices are to be found in the beginning of the century, and, as we shall see, in an environment in which conspiracies and rumours of conspiracies prospered handsomely even far-flung corners of AOF were at times included in an analysis of global conflicts that owed little or nothing to local realities and a very great deal to metropolitan politics, inbred phobias and personal whim.

This is not to say that no attempt was made to understand local realities. On the contrary,

learned journals appeared devoted to Islam, (1) and specialist government departments were created specifically to document developments in the Islamic world. In June 1906 a Service des Affaires Musulmanes was created in the French Colonial Ministry headed by Lt-Col Levé. Levé drafted a memorandum on pan-Islamism in which he warned that:

It is quite clear that the movements of a world which comprises in round figures 200,000,000 followers ... animated by a still active religious fanaticism and which one of the Western powers [i.e. Germany] may hope to enlist for its profit is a real danger if the opposing powers [i.e. Britain and France] do not know how to recognise the diverse elements which maintain this mass in its present state of anarchy. (2)

The danger in Islam according to this widely accepted belief lay not so much in the intrinsic fanaticism of Islam (for this was balanced by the intrinsic anarchy and internal divisions amongst Muslims) but rather with the possibility that such fanaticism could be exploited for political purposes by a third party - Muslim or non-Muslim.

- (1) Revue du Monde Musulman was founded in 1906, Der Islam in 1910 and Moslem World in 1911.
- (2) I(nstitut) C(atholique) Fr 378 i (Levé) 'Note au sujet du mouvement pan-islamique'.

But how could any European power harness the forces of Islam? An article written by one of the first specialists on Morocco, Edmond Doutté, which sets out to analyse 'scientifically and objectively' the reasons for the fall of the French-supported Sultan Abd al Aziz emphasised the delicacy of the problem. The author asked:

What are the causes of this acute fanaticism of the Moroccans who are so bitterly opposed to all influence of our civilisation in their country and how is it that the innocent amusements of Abd al Aziz could have precipitated his fall? ... How is it that a Sultan whom we supported seems to have been compromised by the very fact that we supported him, and that he cannot be sympathetic to Europe without arousing the suspicions of his subjects?

The answer, he argued, lay above all in Islam, 'The old Islam of the marabouts and prophets [which] weighs down like a cloak of lead over the country'. Until the very gradual process of the modernisation of Islam in Morocco was complete the obligation of the French (in 1909!) was 'To preserve carefully the present framework of Moroccan society, limiting ourselves to improving it and advancing the evolution of ideas that has

already begun.' (1) Le Chatelier argued that it was important to do more than this and that it was above all essential to be as completely informed as possible and that the French should follow the German example of reading and cataloguing all that was published in the Islamic world. Elsewhere he wrote that, 'There can be no Muslim policy without a social science of the Muslim environment.' (2)

What meanwhile was happening in AOF?

### 'Maraboutage'

Early in 1905 Cheikh Saad Bu, who, along with Cheikh Sidia, had been of much assistance to Coppolani, intended to make an annual tour to collect alms from his disciples on the left bank of the Senegal. As a leading member of the venerated

- (1) E. Doutté 'Les causes de la chute d'un Sultan' RCBCAF 1909 pp. 130, 135, 267. It should be noted that the formal declaration of a Protectorate was still three years away but the blueprint already existed.
- (2) A. Le Chatelier Politique musulmane Tours, 1907.

Fadel family Cheikh Saad Bu exercised great spiritual authority over the Fadelliyya branch of the Qadiriyya brotherhood, and his disciples were to be found as far away as the Futa Jallon. Great material interest went with the spiritual leadership and Cheikh Saad Bu profited from it handsomely. (1) Coppolani, who cared little for what went on on the other side of the river gave the Cheikh permission to go on his customary tours accompanied by his vast retinue of servants. However, Guy had not been consulted and was plainly displeased at Coppolani's lack of courtesy. Although Guy did not imagine that the Cheikh's presence in itself in Baol and Cayor was particularly dangerous nonetheless he wrote angrily to Roume,

It certainly reveals, in a particularly inopportune manner the fanaticism amongst the natives and it seems to me that the moment was badly chosen to allow the inhabitants to be robbed of the few savings they might possess ... Whilst the poor harvest of maize and the low prices [mévente] for groundnuts does not allow them to pay their taxes. (2)

(1) At the turn of the century the Fadeliyya were enjoying 'une grande vogue' according to J. Cuqq Les Musulmans en Afrique Paris, 1975 p. 135.

(2) ANS 9 G 21 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 6.2.1905.

The following day Guy received a telegram from M. Jacques, the administrator of the cercle of Thies, reporting on his interview with the Cheikh who openly admitted that he had come to collect alms in order to repay debts in St Louis.

M. Jacques continued:

Cheikh Saadibou exercises a great influence on black Muslims ... For these people his arrival was a holiday, a day of celebration. Quiet and tranquil in his camp he received numerous presents either in silver or in kind, some of them even from the far side of Baol. Every day emissaries bring more offerings than the previous day. The traders, who are somewhat unhappy, go as far as saying that the natives sell their groundnuts in order to get money which they can then offer to the great marabout. I think that they are exaggerating but it cannot be denied that many natives bring him presents and that his passage through the country will to a certain extent have made money rarer in the colony.

He concluded that it would be in everybody's interest if the Cheikh left the cercle without delay. Roume was not entirely sympathetic to Guy's complaints and rebuked both the Senegalese and Mauritanian administrations for their unwillingness to co-operate

(1) ANS 9 G 21 Jacques to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 7.2.1905.

with each other. Cheikh Saad Bu was to be allowed to continue his tour but not as far as Dakar as he had planned. (1)

In November two of the Cheikh's envoys arrived in Cayor with permits to collect alms, and again the Senegalese administration complained. Guy was on leave but his temporary replacement wrote, 'I am aware that this religious chief enjoys considerable political influence in Mauritania and in refusing his request I would be afraid of being ungracious about the services he has rendered on the right bank. Nonetheless, I feel obliged to point out that as it is the natives of Senegal have difficulty in meeting the numerous demands made on them'. This last remark attracted Roume's indignation as he noted in the margin, 'What are these 'numerous demands'? I know of no other except the capitation tax. The Governor of Senegal will have to explain himself'. (2)

(1) ANS 9 G 21 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Adam (Commissaire adjoint Mauritanie) 8.2.1905; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 8.2.1905.

(2) ANS 9 G 21 Lt.-Gov. p.i. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 17.11.1905.

The Mauritanian administration were in the meantime preparing their case, and Montané, Coppolani's successor as Commissioner, wrote a lengthy letter to Roume in favour of Cheikh Saad Bu. He argued that as the money collected by the Cheikh was used to repay St Louis traders it could not be said that the colony was being drained of money. The loyalty of the Cheikh, despite his family ties with Cheikh Ma el Ainin, could not be doubted, and he was a useful ally for the French - though in a different way to Cheikh Sidia: 'By their character, their mentality, their personal attributes and ambitions Cheikh Sidia and Cheikh Saad Bu are two different personalities, two tools appropriate for distinct uses, whose usefulness to France should not be compared in order to reject the less perfect'.<sup>(1)</sup> The comparison between the two men was an interesting one. Wisely Montané wanted to keep as many strings to his bow as possible and he thought it foolish to impose a self-denying ordinance on the recruitment of potential allies merely because they offended some purist Republican ideal. The moral qualities of Cheikh Sidia may have been superior but Cheikh Saad Bu was easily bought. The Senegalese

(1) ANS 9 G 21 Montané to Gov.-Gen. AOF 27.11.1905.

would just have to put up with him.

Guy on his return to Senegal in February 1906, was not prepared to give in without a fight and again he wrote to Roume to complain of the Cheikh's recent tour which he claimed the previous year had drained 100,000 francs from the cercle of Thies alone. More seriously he deplored the fact that, 'The facilities granted to these marabouts have a political repercussion which should be properly understood as the Muslims do not neglect to show to the faithful that our subservience with regard to certain Muslim chiefs proves that their power is as strong as ever'. (1)

The pressure on Roume to adopt a more rigorous policy towards Islam was further augmented by the events in the Military Territory of Niger in December and January. In December two 'gardiens de cercle' had been killed in the cercle of Djerma,

(1) ANS 9 G 21 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 7.2.1(06; see also ANS 19 G 3 draft decree on alms collecting Lt.-Gov. p.i. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.4.1914 in which alms were described as 'une perte sèche pour le commerce, une entrave au développement économique du pays et aussi, conséquence immédiate et non moins inquiétante, une extension continue du mouvement propagandiste anti-européen ... un danger à la fois moral, économique et politique'.

and a force of 50 guards under Capt. Loffler was sent out in what was thought to be a simple police action. However, it became apparent to the French that they had on their hands a general rebellion stirred up by one Saibu whom Ponty, Governor of Haut-Sénégal et Niger, described to Roume as, 'this marabout, or rather this charlatan, ventriloquist and adept trickster' who 'thanks to his talents was able easily to involve the natives in an anti-French movement'. Capt. Loffler was given reinforcements and forced Saibu to flee across the border to Northern Nigeria.(1) From Dahomey there came the

(1) ANS 11 G 4 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 26.3.1906. See also R. Adeleye Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804-1906 London 1971 pp. 322-25 and P. Marty 'L'islam et les tribus du Niger' REI 1930 p. 350 ... 'La cause de tout le mal, le marabout pélerin Sahibou, était un petit homme aveugle. ... Très adroit malgré son cécité, possédant le don de la ventriloquie il avait tout ce qu'il fallait pour persuader à ses naïfs coreligionnaires en faisant parler devant eux un arbre, une sandale, un Coran que c'était la parole de Dieu lui-même qu'ils entendaient. Et il annonçait ainsi l'extermination des Blancs, l'apparition subite d'une armée de vrai croyants ...'

warning, 'It seems that an Islamic movement is at the moment current in the French and foreign colonies of West Africa. Profiting from our respect for all religious belief the marabouts enter our colonies under the cover of religion and ... then push the natives more or less openly into revolt.' (1)

By 1906 as a result of these diverse reports from all over AOF the administration had developed a very strong and none too flattering image of the 'typical' marabout. The concept was not, of course, an entirely recent development nor was it restricted to the West African context: Rinn's Khouan, (2) for example, closely resembled the portrait of the 'typical' Senegalese marabout. However, it is clear that French antipathy to marabouts was peculiarly strong at this time. One reason for this lay in the fears resulting from the international climate and in the upheavals in the Muslim world. Another reason can be found in the political and intellectual currents of metropolitan France. At the time when village

(1) ANS 8 G 14 Lt.-Gov. Dahomey to Gov.-Gen. AOF 10.1.1906.

(2) Rinn Marabouts et Khouan cf. above p.60

curés were being so vehemently denounced in some quarters and legislation was being enacted against the power and wealth of the monastic orders it would have been surprising if similar arguments were not used against Muslims. Finally, it must be remembered that marabouts were not a mere invention of the French: marabouts did exist, they did collect alms, sell talismen, direct Qur'anic schools and some undoubtedly did preach against the French. Maraboutage should therefore be seen as a peculiarly French interpretation of an African reality.

#### The French reaction: the Arnaud mission

Roume responded to the various warnings about maraboutic activity with a number of measures. Firstly he issued a circular which was to serve as the basis for a new information service. He wrote that as the natives were themselves unable to understand that they were being cheated by the itinerant marabouts;

It is necessary to get to the root of the evil. As soon as the presence of a foreign marabout effecting unauthorised alms-collecting tours is communicated to you, you should immediately put them under surveillance and obtain more complete information about them. ... Whether the marabout is a peaceable man or whether he is considered as a dangerous individual, you should draw up a personal file, if possible with a photograph attached.

The files were then to be sent to Dakar where other documents concerning Islamic movements were to be centralised. Once the files were classified they would constitute 'A methodical register of Muslim proselytism which it is permissible to consider as a constant threat to the tranquility of our domination in Africa.(1)

This collection of files formed the basis of what was later to become the Service des Affaires Musulmanes.(2)

Secondly, he employed Robert Arnaud on a mission to investigate the state of Islam throughout the West African colonies. His instructions to Arnaud were detailed, precise and very extensive. Arnaud was to follow a fixed itinerary as follows:

(1) ANS 19 G 1 Gov.-Gen. AOF circular to colonies 10.2.1906.

(2) See below ch.6

1. St Louis, Fouta, Brackna, Guidimaka: propaganda of the marabouts of the right bank of the Senegal amongst the Ouloffs & Toucouleurs, special study of the Tijania.
2. Kayes: muslim population of the Soudan in general and a methodical study of influential religious personalities.
3. Kita & Bamako: study of the penetration of Islam amongst the fetishists.
4. Segou-Sikoro: Tijania brotherhood amongst the Fulani, relations of their marabouts with the French authority.
5. Sansanding: local marabouts, historical studies of the empires of Mali and Sonrai.
6. Djenne: center of religious influence - study of Muslim education in this town, local marabouts and their influence. You should coincide your presence in Djenne with the opening of the franco-arab 'medersa'.
7. Tombouctou: historical centre of maraboutic influence, study of bekkai Qadriya, the Kounta, local marabouts, their regional influence, their relation with the exterior, schools and mosques.
8. Say Kanday, Fada N'Gourma: study of mahdist & Senoussi influence, research on influential local marabouts and the services which they might be able to render.
9. Ouagadougou, Bobo Dioulasso, Sikasso: nature of religious propaganda in this part of the Soudan, how is it exercised?
10. Fouta Djallon, Timbo: study of religious propaganda amongst the Foulahs.

Finally Arnaud was to draw up a manual of Muslim policy, un précis de politique musulmane for the use of French agents in AOF.(1) A copy of these instructions was then sent to all the local governors along with an introductory note with an exhortation to give Arnaud all the assistance he required.(2)

Arnaud's brief was as unrealistic as it was impressive and, indeed, it does not appear to have been fulfilled. Little matter, for the instructions themselves are very revealing of the extent to which the French had already identified the potential trouble areas in Islam. Clearly marabouts as much as brotherhoods were now the focus of attention. Another theme touched on the instructions and which was to acquire great significance under the Governorships of Ponty and Clozel was that of the relationship between traditional African religions and Islam and the degree to which conversion to Islam might be prevented. The instructions to conduct historical research into the ancient empires of Mali and Songhay was an interesting diversion from traditional administrative preoccupations and is a reminder of the way in which the duties of

(1) ANSOM AOF 111/3 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Arnaud 21.3.1906.

(2) ANS 19 G 1 Gov.-Gen. AOF circular to colonies 26.3.1906.

scholar and administrator were supposed to be combined.

Robert Arnaud, the man who was credited with possessing the necessary combination of administrative and scholarly qualities, was born in Algiers on the 16th February 1873. (1) His father worked in the Algerian administration and had translated many of the Arab documents for Rinn, Depont and Coppolani. After completing his studies and mastering Arabic, Arnaud followed his father into the Algerian administration, becoming an administrateur adjoint of a commune mixte in 1898. At the end of the same year he was chosen to accompany Coppolani, whom he had already met through his father, on his mission to the Soudan. In 1905 he was a member of the Tagant-Adrar mission and was present in Tidjikja at the time of Coppolani's death. There can be no doubt that he was profoundly influenced by Coppolani not merely from an intellectual but also from a spiritual point of view. Coppolani was more than a tutor in Islam and Islamic policy for

(1) Biographical details are taken from Arnaud's c.v. in ANSOM (unclassified). I am grateful to the archivists for allowing me to see copies of this and other c.v.'s.

Arnaud, he was also a very great friend whose death Arnaud quite consciously set out to avenge. (1) The other great influence in Arnaud's early life was Isabelle Eberhardt, a young woman of mixed Russian and German parentage who emigrated to Algeria where she converted to Islam, married an Algerian and rode about the Algerian 'bled' disguised as a native Muslim male. She wrote articles for the liberal franco-Arab newspaper Akhbar and in the tense political climate in Algeria at the turn of the century her journalistic activity led to her expulsion from the colony. Arnaud had spent some time with her in 1902 (and had lent her his copy of Thus spoke Zarathustra which was one of his favourite books). Soon after her clandestine return to Algeria Isabelle was drowned in a freak storm at the age of 27 in 1904. (2)

(1) IF Fonds Terrier Arnaud to Terrier 18.5.1907. Arnaud's list of reasons why the conquest of Mauritania needed to be pursued was headed by the need to avenge Coppolani's death.

(2) These details are taken from Randau/Arnaud's biography Isabelle Eberhardt Paris 1945. For Algerian background see Ageron Les Algériens musulmans 'Vae Victis'.

In the last years of his own life Arnaud wrote biographies of his two mentors to defend them both against some of the charges that had been levelled against them. For Arnaud also fancied himself as a poet, philosopher and man of letters. His first novel Rabbin, a mildly anti-semitic tale of marital woe, was published in 1896 and from then until his death in 1946 at least twenty novels and collections of poems were published under the pseudonym of Robert Randau. (1) His favourite subject matter - indeed, his only subject matter - was colonial life as Arnaud attempted to write a sort of comédie humaine depicting French colonials north and south of the Sahara. Both Coppolani and Eberhardt, called Antonettii and Sophie Peterhof respectively, appear in several of the novels, and Arnaud, himself, under the name of Cassard or Lemare plays a prominent role in almost all of the novels. Arnaud saw himself as one of the leaders of a new and youthful 'colonial' school of literature which rejected both the dilettante lifestyle of the metropolis and the transient

(1) Full bibliography of Arnaud's writing is given in C. Harrison 'Bad monks and Frenchmen: a literary view of Islam in West Africa' unpublished seminar paper, African History Seminar, SOAS 2.11.1983.

fancifulness of the 'exotic' writers such as Pierre Loti in favour of a tougher, heroic, action-packed, patriotic and 'realistic' portrayal of 'Africans' (as they all liked to call themselves). These European 'Africans' were almost a race apart - Arnaud describes himself as a Franco-Berber - and they were characterised in Arnaud's novels by a seemingly unquenchable appetite for sex and drugs and an apparently limitless capacity to talk earnestly about Kant and Nietzsche whilst sailing down the Niger or crossing the Sahara on camels. Strong, intelligent and beautiful - a master race indeed.(1)

- (1) For the 'philosophy' behind this school see, for example, R. Randau 'L'écrivain colonial au colonies' La Grande Revue Feb. 1926; E. Pujarnisclé 'La littérature coloniale et ses difficultés' La Grande Revue Dec. 1921, Jan. - Feb. 1922; J. Pommer 'Le mouvement littéraire française de le l'Algérie' La Grande Revue June 1923; R. Lebel L'Afrique occidentale dans la littérature française depuis 1870 Paris 1925 chs. 3 & 4; see also Arnaud's prefaces to his novels Les Colons (1907) Les Explorateurs (n.d.) and L'Aventure sur le Niger (n.d.)

Whatever might be said for their literary merit - which was minimal - the novels nonetheless certainly provide evidence of a lively imagination on the part of their author, the man in charge of conducting the detailed survey of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. (1)

There appears to be no evidence that Arnaud did actually complete his mission but he did fulfil at least one of its demands and towards the end of 1906 his Précis de politique musulmane was published - significantly in Algiers. Only vol. I dealing with the Moors of the right bank of the Senegal ever appeared but it contains some interesting comments on more general issues. The introductory chapter discusses the nature of colonialism which Arnaud saw primarily as an economic activity safeguarded by a 'social policy'

- (1) Another example of Arnaud's imagination is seen in the incident when an administrator (Geubhard) found a document which Arnaud believed to be an original part of the 'Book of Enoch' and worthy of a place in the library of the Ecole des Langues Orientales in Paris. The Inspector of Muslim Education was asked for a second opinion and revealed that Arnaud's claims were unfounded and his scholarship faulty. ANS 19 G 2 Chef de Cabinet to Inspect. Enseignement Musulman 5.3.1908, Inspect. to Chef de Cabinet March 1908.

which respected the physiology and psychology of the indigenous societies.(1) In practice, in vast areas of Africa where Islam was the dominant culture, a social policy meant a Muslim policy.(2) The following chapters narrated the history and dogma of Islam. A chapter on 'Prophetism' denied that Sufism belonged to the Islamic orthodoxy and urged the need for 'the strictest prudence' when dealing with important Sufi figures. Luckily, Arnaud wrote, rehearsing a well-loved theme of Coppolani, few Sufis were indifferent to material persuasion and 'It is therefore necessary, having made sure of the influence of each one of them, to calculate the services he can render and from then on to make sure he renders the maximum within the framework of directives sent or approved by the central power.'(3) This maxim was to remain a central plank

- (1) R. Arnaud Précis de politique musulmane. vol. I Les Maures de la rive droite Algiers 1906 p. 8 'Tout conquête de pays d'outre-mer est une affaire commerciale et son but unique est d'assurer la sécurité des transactions commerciales'.
- (2) ibid p.10 'La politique indigène en Afrique est ... fatalement une politique musulmane'.
- (3) ibid pp. 24,25 'Le soufisme est contraire à la lettre et à l'esprit de la foi musulmane, ses doctrines se basent sur le panthéisme condamné par le Qoran; ses procédés empruntés à l'ascétisme le plus pur sont également condamnés par le Qoran.'

of French policy for the entirety of the colonial period. Religious leaders such as Cheikh Sidia and later the Tijani Cheikh Seydou Nourou Tall were selected - or selected themselves - as allies and in return for rich rewards were expected to deliver anything the French asked of them.(1)

However, Arnaud warned that, 'The tolba who initiate the youth into the Qoran are in general as a result of their fanaticism hostile to the French influence. They should be the object of a strict surveillance'.(2)

On the brotherhoods Arnaud made a firm and classic distinction between the Qadiriyya ('broad-minded and philanthropic') and the Tijaniyya ( distinguished by their 'extreme intolerance and their appeals to violence against all Christian domination').(3)

Again Arnaud showed that he had been an attentive and admiring pupil of Coppolani when he went on to argue the folly of attempting to destroy the brotherhoods: 'As long as they continue to exercise

(1) See below ch. 9

(2) Arnaud Politique p.35.

(3) ibid pp. 113,115. See also M. Ndiaye 'Rapports entre Qadirites et Tijanites au Fouta Toro' Bull. IFAN (série B) 1979 pp. 190-205 for a discussion of the differences between the two brotherhoods as seen through a contemporary text of Cheikh Moussa Kamara.

an undeniable political influence we have to make use of the brotherhoods and attempt to reduce them to simple and purely local associations that are not at the beck and call of outsiders.' (1) There then followed several chapters detailing precise colonial policies ranging from ensuring that each outpost was staffed with a native Muslim nurse and maintaining the moral superiority of Europeans through to granting honorific titles to heads of brotherhoods and above all encouraging divisions between Muslims. (2) Finally, he concluded that, 'The aim of native policy applied to Muslims is to lead them to our civilisation by making use of their's in order to achieve that aim'. (3)

In many ways the book (which was specifically about Mauritania) was simply a restatement of views long held in Algeria, and the influence of Coppolani was not only obvious but openly recognised. Islam was seen as an inherently hostile force that could not be destroyed but which with correct policies could

(1) Arnaud Politique p.119

(2) ibid p.120 'Le principe divide et imperes est ici plus efficace que jamais'.

(3) ibid p.182.

be contained and modified. At this juncture it is worth taking account of the state of the debate amongst Europeans about the nature of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa.

### Three French views on Islam

#### 1. Le Chatelier

At the end of the nineteenth century the only serious studies of Islam in Africa were confined to North Africa, and to Algeria in particular. In 1899 Le Chatelier published the first serious study of Islam in black Africa.<sup>(1)</sup> He had actually written the book in 1888 but had been reluctant to publish his conclusions because they ran counter to those of the Algerian school, and he feared that, therefore, his conclusions were wrong. However, in the 1890s further tours in Muslim countries outside Algeria made him more confident that he had been right to doubt the universal applicability of

(1) A. Le Chatelier L'Islam dans l'Afrique occidentale Paris 1899.

the Algerian experience and that his failure to appreciate the overriding importance of the brotherhoods south of the Sahara had less to do with his blindness and the inferiority of his research methods than with the fact that outside Algeria the facts were different:

The life of a people, he wrote in his preface, when seen through the administrative prism appears differently when viewed without this prism. There is, perhaps, no other society in the world so completely surrounded by administration than the native society of Algeria. On the surface it is entirely hierarchical and when one looks at it looking for hierarchies it is normal to find hierarchies everywhere. If to this point of view is added the political conception of the Native Affairs Department of Algeria which is excellent as an instrument of government but which is based on fiction and conventions there is nothing more natural than to attribute to the Muslim brotherhoods a character of strongly organised associations and of secret societies which they do not always have in Algeria and which elsewhere they have only in exceptional instances.

Le Chatelier admitted that there were some brotherhoods that combined great political and religious strength,

But that does not mean that all Muslim brotherhoods should be considered as immense temporal religious associations sending out their masonic roots throughout the Mohammedan world.(2)

(1) ibid pp. 10-11

(2) ibid p.12.

Later he described the Islamic culture in Kankan in Guinea:

The Muslim brotherhoods in reality count very few followers in the southern Sahara and in the Soudan. But there exists within the Muslim world a sort of ecclesiastical hierarchy of which the Cheikh el Triqa forms the head ... A few Kadriya affiliated to their brothers in the north, a few marabouts brought up in their schools are the sole direct representatives in Kankan of the doctrines of Sidi el Mokhtar el Kebir or his precursors. (...) It is from this viewpoint that it is true to say that the entire Muslim centre is attached to the Kadriyan traditions.(1)

However, even if Islam was not quite as powerful and organised as some argued, Le Chatelier forecast that it would spread rapidly south of the Sahara for:

In contact with European civilisation all the peoples of West Africa feel, consciously or unconsciously, the need to substitute their ancient beliefs with a more elevated religion. Christianity ... is too perfect, too absolute. Only Islam meets for everybody the needs of the moment.(2)

Le Chatelier was entirely convinced that Islam was far superior to traditional African religions which,

(1) ibid p.163.

(2) ibid p.259.

he said, entirely lacked 'a philosophical system'. (1)

In a paragraph which brilliantly stated the dilemma of Europeans he wrote:

When one studies the African races and when one lives amongst them one cannot help but be struck by the superiority of the Muslim over the fetishist. The former is sometimes a great cutter of throats, a slave dealer and a rebel but he has always a more open intelligence and a less primitive civilisation. Even when seen as an enemy it is nonetheless to him that we give our preferences. (2)

He argued that there was a great need for a detailed study of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and that meanwhile the French should understand that:

The fundamental rule in our African policy with regard to Soudanian Islam in its entirety ... should be an extreme reserve, an action determined by apparent indifference, by a rational sentiment of tolerance, neither aggressive nor tyrannical but attentive, unhesitatingly energetic and preferably preventive. (3)

Finally, he concluded that the key to the problem lay in the replacement of Arabic by French as the official language. (4)

(1) ibid p.313.

(2) ibid p. 348 (my emphasis)

(3) ibid p.350

(4) ibid pp. 355-66

## 2. Binger

In 1906 Gustave Binger, the Head of the African Section at the Rue Oudinot, published a book with the ironic title of Le Péril de l'Islam. Binger had spent much of his career in West Africa as a soldier and explorer (1) and this experience had led him to respect Islam. In 1891 he had written a little book which challenged the Christian Eurocentric notions about slavery and polygamy which he analysed in terms of the social hardships of the African environment. Islam, he argued, had been unfairly blamed as a cause of these two evils. France was officially monogamous only (Binger emphasis) and as for slavery in Africa:

It remains to be known whether the negro slave in his own country, would not prefer his situation to that which is reserved for those unfortunate people in Europe who struggle for a morsel of bread.

Amongst the Muslims the slave will always be fed; whatever his work he will not die of hunger; in Europe people hardly give a thought about where a poor fellow who has been dismissed from his work will find his bread; he might well die the following day and no one would be troubled very much.

(1) H. Brunshwig 'Louis Gustave Binger' in Gann and Duignan (eds) African Proconsuls New York 1978.

Are we as hospitable as the Muslims are?  
 Are we really as fair-minded as they?  
 Do we know, as they do, how to lend money  
 without usury, even to slaves? (1)

Binger undoubtedly painted an over rosy picture of social conditions but nonetheless he had challenged European Christian self-righteousness, and this broad-mindedness was reflected in the arguments of his later book in which he again stressed the importance of social issues in determining people's behaviour and shaping institutions in Africa. Pan-Islamism was, he argued, a defensive rather than an aggressive movement in which 'religion' counted for very little. France should practise a strict policy of religious neutrality and concentrate on social projects - such as railway construction but above all education - in order to make sure that unscrupulous marabouts, for he admitted that such a class existed, and secular leaders did not exploit native discontent to further their own aims at French expense.(2)

(1) L-G Binger Esclavage, islamisme et le christianisme Paris 1891 p.44.

(2) L-G Binger Le Péril de l'islam Paris 1906 passim

It is difficult to assess the importance of the intellectual arguments of men such as Le Chatelier and Binger. It is extremely doubtful that their books were read by more than a small percentage of administrators. To a certain extent this attitude was officially approved, and the quality that administrators were encouraged above all to cultivate was 'common-sense'. (1)

### 3. Dr. Barot

A lengthy book published in 1902 provides a fascinating insight into what may be said to constitute officially approved 'common-sense'. (2) Much of the book deals with the principles of colonial hygiene for at a time when mortality rates were still very high, Europeans worried more about

(1) See W.B. Cohen Rulers of Empire: the French colonial service Stanford, 1971 ch. 5  
M. Delafosse Broussard ou les états d'ame d'un colonial Paris 1909; R. Delavignette Service africain Paris 1946 for examples of encouragement of 'common-sense'.

(2) Dr Barot Guide pratique de l'européen en Afrique Paris 1902. The preface is by Binger.

their health than the finer points of Sufi Islam.(1) However, one chapter addressed itself to the problem of 'social relations' - a wide-ranging subject which included advice on choosing 'native wives' for temporary marriages which were regarded as un mal nécessaire. (2) Of more immediate relevance here was the section on relations with Muslims and animists:

Relationships with Muslims are codified, Islam being a religion recognised in the same way as others. ... Negro Muslims, who ... are distracted from the influence of the Turkish or Moroccan Sultans are not hostile to us. On the contrary, by a wise and just administration we should win their confidence and take the lead of Islam in West Africa. It is a considerable and vital force which is easy for us to turn to our profit and to use it to the best of our interests. One day [Islam] could assure us supremacy over all this continent.

The fetichist peoples who have lived some time in contact with us ... have adopted all our vices, especially alcoholism. ... They obey us through fear of the policeman ... It is necessary to consider and to treat fetichists as children. Only a slow adaption over three or four generations will lead them to a conception of social duties and moral laws.

(1) A short list of manuals on colonial hygiene includes: Dr. Villedary Guide Sanitaire de l'officier et du colon (1893); Dr. Gayet Guide Médical de l'officier colonial (1897); Dr. Legrand and Dr. Burot Hygiène des troupes aux colonies (1898); Dr. Treille Hygiène coloniale (1899); Dr. D'Enjoy La Santé aux colonies (1901).

(2) Barot Guide pratique p. 330.

Amongst the fetichist peoples whom we are in the process of conquering we have to struggle against the enormous influence of witches. ... In the countries still to be explored one cannot count on anything except chance and luck; for the griot bought one day for the price of gold, will declare himself against us the following day if the white rats, the Kolas or the other oracles give an unfavourable opinion. Many explorers have been the victims of the idiotic captriciousness of fetichists. (1)

For early European administrators worried about their health and generally impatient to get back to the metropole animist beliefs and rites must have been not only incomprehensible but also simply terrifying. One should not be taken in by the bravado of colonial rhetoric and believe that all Europeans were self-confident and unquestioning exporters of a hegemonic culture. Fear as much as arrogance made up the colonial psyche. Because Islam was 'recognised as a religion like any other' it was to 'Muslims even seen as enemies' to whom French preferences flowed. However, in the next few years with a second rate novelist responsible for advising the Governor-General and in an atmosphere thick with rumours of conspiracy spiced up with great upheavals throughout

(1) ibid pp. 316-17 (my emphasis)

the Muslim world the Muslim populations of West Africa could appear just as irrational and fearful as the animists.

### The Mahdist 'plot' of 1906

As we have seen the unrest in the military territory of Niger in December/January 1905/6 formed part of the background of the apparently religiously motivated unrest that prompted Roume to start a systematic collection of files of Muslim individuals, and to send Arnaud on a mission throughout AOF. Saïbu, the marabout held responsible for the agitation, fled across the border to Northern Nigeria but on the 10th March a large British force massacred his followers at Satiru, a village some 14 km. north of Sokoto and the scene since 1904 of much Mahdist unrest. The British had been concerned by the Mahdist phenomenon and 1906 has been described as a 'crisis year' for them. When Saïbu had encouraged Isa, the chief of Satiru, to revolt, the British had immediately sent out a force to arrest the two men. However, in one of the most serious setbacks suffered by the

British in Northern Nigeria, the force was ambushed and 28 were killed including Hilary, the acting Resident of Sokoto. Shocked by this reversal the British amassed a large force to put down the revolt. Satiru was razed to the ground and over 500 were killed. Saïbu was captured and later beheaded.<sup>(1)</sup> Roume had kept in touch with Lugard and offered him assistance against a movement which, he said, was 'Certainly of a religious character directed indiscriminately against whites, whether they are English or French'. Roume's offer of help was welcomed but declined as Lugard believed that the rout of Saïbu's forces had effectively put an end to the rebellion.<sup>(2)</sup>

Although William Ponty, the Lt. Governor of Haut Sénégal et Niger, denied that the revolt was a religious one, and stressed rather the social grievances of the African population of a colony which after a rapid conquest at the end of the century had been ignored by all but the tax-collectors,<sup>(3)</sup> the discovery of another 'plot',

(1) Adeleye Power and Diplomacy pp. 321-25

(2) ANSOM AP 193/3 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 26.3.1906.

(3) ANS 11 G 4 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 26.3.1906.

this time based around the Sultan or 'Sarki' of Zinder, reinforced the impression that politico-religious agitators rather than social grievances lay behind the unrest.

After the failure of a clumsy assassination attempt in early March on Capt. Lefèbvre, the commandant de cercle of Zinder, the French authorities believed that they had stumbled across a plot. A force under the command of Major Gadel, the commander of the region of Zinder, was despatched to Zinder and at around 8.30 a.m. on the morning of the 30th March Gadel arrested Ahmadu, the Sultan, together with eight others believed to be implicated in the plot. Around 6 p.m. the following day Gadel arrested three others, all favourites of the Sultan. (1) Unfortunately, although very precise about the times of the various arrests, Gadel was unable at this early

(1) The following were arrested on 30.3.1906; Ahmadu, Sultan of Zinder; Kaigama and Mosterama, both chefs de province; Malam Gpto, described as a 'marabout intime' of the Sultan; Cherif Hattin, the Sultan's Arab interpreter; Tchiakafada, former chef de province; Mamadu Chetima, 'marabout' of the Sultan; Malam Yoro, a trader from Zinder; and Ali, interpreter of the cercle. See ANS 11 G 5 Chef de Bataillon Gadel to Lt.-Gov. HSN 5.4.1906.

stage to provide precise proof of the guilt of the accused. Nonetheless, he listed nine 'moral and material' proofs, namely:

1. Mysterious correspondence between the Sultan and the marabouts who caused the trouble in Djerma and Sokoto.
2. Declarations confirming the preceding fact and rebellious speeches uttered at this time by the Sultan and his followers.
3. Public rumour.
4. Rapid preparation of guns.
5. Contradictory lies of Malam Yoro and Sultan.
6. Lie of the Sultan (who claimed to have no more guns).
7. Discovery of c.280 guns and other weapons.
8. Very probable means of transport to put [the guns] aside in the house of the interpreter Ali in the interior of Birni. (We are not yet completely certain about this.)
9. Feigned ignorance of Ali with regard to these events and formal accusations of certain parties which prove his active participation.

Gadel thought that these proofs were sufficient to justify demanding the execution of those he had arrested on the 30th but he would not act without further orders. Together with further 'evidence'

that Deuda, the chief of the Imezureg was also plotting with the Sultan of Zinder this incident proved, Gadel claimed, the absolute necessity of occupying Agades. (1)

Meanwhile Roume had had a meeting with Brigadier-General Morland, the Inspector of Colonial Troops in British West Africa in order to discuss Franco-British co-operation on the frontier of Niger and

- (1) The Imezureg, a quasi-territorial group, whose wealth was based on taxation of sedentary dependents, had quarrelled with Kel Ewey when the French had arrived in Zinder in 1899. The French allied with the Kel Ewey and killed the Imezureg chief, Musa Mai Damergu, in 1901. He was succeeded by his half-brother Deuda. See S. Baier An Economic History of Central Niger Oxford 1980 pp.81-82.



Northern Nigeria. Roume reported to the Colonial Ministry in Paris that the meeting had been cordial and productive, and that now that the era of colonial expansion was over the colonial powers should co-operate against their common enemies:

In the present state of these regions we have only one danger to fear ... that is a movement produced by an exaltation of religious sentiments which threatens all Europeans regardless of nationality. This exaltation is provoked by fanatics whose prophesies are quickly made known to the local administrations. Prevented in their action as soon as their influence starts to become dangerous, they find today a refuge from all pursuit in neighbouring colonies. Followed by a few disciples and their prestige augmented by their previous propaganda they can prove a real danger before the administration can stop them. It would be very different if a special organisation enabled us, through the exchange of regular communications between the local authorities, to warn each other of their movements from one colony to another. The strict surveillance under which they would be kept would be sufficient in most cases to foresee any disorder. (1)

British and French authorities were willing to provide such a service and after a trial period the exchange of regular bulletins with information

(1) ANSOM AP 193/3 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 14.4.1906 (my emphasis)

covering the whole of West Africa was established in 1907. (1)

No action had yet been taken against the Sultan of Zinder, but in May Gadel reported that now he had 'absolutely convincing material proof' of the connection between events in Djerma, Sokoto, Zinder and elsewhere. Gadel had managed to extract a confession from the Sultan's messenger that he had carried letters between Zinder and Sokoto in November 1905. The Sokoto letter gave instructions to Zinder to attack the 'Whites' in mid-April. The Sultan of Zinder had been tempted to attack on 7th March, but to the great luck of the French he was persuaded at the last minute to follow the Sokoto instructions. Gadel had the letter to prove the plot and a further oral testimony to prove another link with Kano. (2)

- (1) ANSOM AP 193/3 Min. Affaires Etrangères (Aff. Et.) (Bourgeois) to Min. Col. 19.5.1906; same to same 16.6.1906; Paul Cambon (French ambassador in London) to Min. Aff. Et. 8.6.1906; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 14.8.1906; Min. Aff. Et. to Min. Col. 8.6.1906; Min. Aff. Et. to Sir E. Grey (British Foreign Secretary) 12.2.1907.
- (2) ANS 11 G 5 Gadel to Lt.-Col. Commt. Région du Niger 8.5.1906.

Gadel and Lefèbvre compiled an enormous dossier containing around 250 pieces of evidence to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Sultan of Zinder was guilty. The 205th piece of evidence was a 100 page report by Capt. Lefèbvre in which he narrated how his suspicions had been alerted after someone had poisoned his milk. Again there was little evidence of a truly widespread and well-coordinated conspiracy. Lefèbvre argued that although the Sultan held a personal grudge against him for having reformed the anarchic system of tax-collection which had been a lucrative source of income for the Sultan, that this was not the fundamental cause of the revolt. Rather, he continued:

It is an undeniable fact that in all the regions where Islam is profoundly rooted we are held in the greatest scorn by certain marabouts. The biggest danger is that there is in this country a form of bastardised Islam, a mixture of religion and ridiculous superstitions, a superficial religion in which the marabouts and pseudo-marabouts who abound in this country are the carriers of malicious rumours, maintain the credulous people in sentiments of hatred against us and work towards the brutalisation of the race by superstitious practices. This element is perforce hostile to us. The chiefs need these marabouts who distribute

a thousand 'gris-gris' for the success of their pillages and, in exchange, these marabouts enjoy numerous privileges. (1)

The alliance between the traditional chiefs and the marabouts, it should be noted, was to become one of the principal targets of the Ponty administration. Unrest in the colony was not confined to the Military Territory of Niger. The visit of an Algerian marabout, Mohammed ben Abdallah, was blamed for the unrest in Bamako during the month of May when the Markas of Banamba had resisted the attempts of their servants to leave them. In Djenné in the same month eight marabouts were sentenced to three months prison for having 'exploited the credulity of our African Muslims'. Two more were sent to prison in Bandiagara - one of them for having made a speech in the market place at Kaba containing 'words likely to ridicule our authority'. (2)

- (1) ANS 11 G 5 'Rapport du Capt. Lefèbvre, comt. le cercle de Zinder sur les agissements du Sultan de Zinder et de ses complices en Mars 1906'. The other 250 pieces of evidence are also filed in 11 G 5.
- (2) ANSOM Soudan I/II 'Rapport sur la situation politique' 2eme Trimestre 1906. See also R. Roberts & M. Klein 'The Banamba slave exodus of 1905 and the decline of slavery in the western Sudan' JAH 21 (1980) pp. 375-94 for discussion of slavery and ambiguity of French attitude towards it.

Arnaud was sent to investigate the unrest in Niger. He confirmed the alliance of the aristocracy and marabouts against their former slaves and their liberators, the French. In the region of Zinder he claimed that slaves outnumbered free men by ten to one and that were it not for the French presence the slaves would have massacred their former masters. Interestingly Arnaud had revised his distinction between the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, and the Omarien branch of Tijaniyya was now described as the only truly loyal brotherhood in AOF. The Qadiriyya's reputation had been tarnished by Cheikh Saad Bu's alms collecting tours, by their close relationship with the Ghoudf brotherhood who were responsible for Coppolani's death and, Arnaud added, by their strong connections with Mahdism. The French, he said, had been lucky in Djerma and he warned that:

In a maraboutic revolt it is not the rebels killed that one should count; whether a hundred or a thousand are killed it still won't stop the other exaltés following the first imposter to appear. One has to go straight to the chiefs. Behind the sheeplike crowd we find ... the local chiefs: the present Sultan of Sokoto, the Sultan in Zinder, the chief in Karma and all the Hausa and Djerma nobility. The most guilty of all, the man who wanted to reconstitute the old empire was Sahibou.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century Africa, he argued, had become 'the chosen land of Mahdis'. All this was serious enough said Arnaud but it was exacerbated by the influence of pan-Islamist agents in the pay of the German ambassador in Cairo, Baron von Oppenheim. (1)

In one of his later (1931) novels Arnaud mocked the local administrator who was obsessed by the threat of a pan-Islamic revolt. (2) In the defence of the local administrator it should be said that Arnaud himself at the time not only shared but also contributed to this obsession. His report on the unrest not only confirmed, but it also amplified, Major Gadel's suspicion of a vast conspiracy, for Gadel never suggested that Baron von Oppenheim was involved. However, neither Gadel nor Arnaud succeeded in entirely convincing Gadel's commanding officer, Lt-Col Lamolle who had to admit that proof of the Sultan of Zinder's guilt consisted in a bundle of circumstantial evidence rather than in concrete proofs. Nonetheless he recommended to

(1) ANS 11 G 4 'Rapport à m. le Gov.-Gen. de l'AOF sur les mobiles islamiques des troubles de Janvier à Mars 1906 dans le Territoire Militaire du Niger' 22.11.1906.

(2) R. Randau Les Meneurs des hommes Paris 1931 p.28

Ponty in January 1907 that the Sultan should be exiled. Shortly afterwards the Sultan and his 'accomplices' were sentenced to varying lengths of imprisonment in the Ivory Coast. (1)

Arnaud's introduction of a German element into the conspiracy reflected anxieties in Paris about 'Perfide Teuton'. The government had received information of a German mission in Ottoman Tripolitania and had decided to take all measures necessary to prevent German obstruction of the link between Algeria and Lake Chad. Dakar was instructed to prepare immediately for the occupation of Bilma, Kawar and Tibesti leaving the Algerian authorities responsible for Djanet and south-west Wargla. Ponty transferred the instructions to Lamolle who was given an extra 150 men but warned that his action should be diplomatic rather than military. (2) The Paris analysis coincided happily with military demands for a second occupation of Agades which had been briefly

(1) ANS 11 G 5 Lt.-Col. Lamolle, comnt. Territoire Militaire du Niger to Lt.-Gov. HSN 6.1.1907 Marty 'L'Islam et les tribus du Niger' p. 397; Baier Economic History pp. 97, 101.

(2) ANS 11 G 4 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 24.4.1906; Lt.-Gov. HSN to Comnt. Ger. Mil. Niger 7.5.1906.

occupied in 1904. Between April and November of 1905 Gadel and Capt. Lefèbvre had made a tour in the Air region in order to obtain the submission of the Tuareg tribes and to study the possibility of further French expansion north and eastwards. Gadel's 'guiding principle' had been that,

Thanks to the nomads who wander on the borders [of our colonies] our reputation for humanity, tolerance and justice is established in the desert thus facilitating our penetration to the North and to the East which will soon be completed not by force and the superiority of our weapons but by persuasion and confidence. (1)

The parallel with Coppolani is striking, but logical, for official support for the occupation of vast areas of unproductive desert could only be won if it was argued that it could be achieved without recourse to arms. However, it was only when security of major French interests elsewhere was threatened that occupation and control of the desert was seen to be important and in any way urgent.

What then should one make of the distinctly manic efforts of Gadel and Lefèbvre to establish beyond

(1) ANS 11 G 4 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 22.6.1906 enclosing reports of Gadel and Lefèbvre.

a shadow of a doubt the existence of a vast Islamic conspiracy? To establish a dossier which included 250 pieces of often very lengthy pieces of evidence in order to prove their suspicions seems a clear case of overkill that can only partly be explained by the military mind's need for precision. To conduct all the interrogations of suspects and witnesses and then to write up voluminous reports are not normally favourite pastimes of a soldier unless he has a definite point to make. What was this point? One possibility is that the conspiracy was exaggerated if not invented in order to increase pressure for the occupation of Agades. In April, a month before Ponty gave directions for the occupation, Gadel had written to Ponty that the conspiracy proved the absolute necessity of occupying Agades.(1) A second and related possibility is that the French in Zinder simply felt isolated and frightened and were frustrated by the limits imposed on their actions by the central civilian authorities. Proof of a widespread conspiracy would provide justification for a widespread mopping-up operation,

(1) ANS 11 G 5 Gadel to Lt.-Gov. HSN 5.4.1906.

justification, that is, for more soldiers.(1)

Writing about rumours of rebellion in Natal in 1905, Shula Marks has commented in words that could easily be applied to Niger,

For some, both black and white, prophecies of a native uprising may have been an expression of wishful thinking, for others the projection of their own hostility, and yet to others a reflection of their deepest and most genuine fears.(2)

(1) IC fr. 378 (Lévé) see Lefèbvre letter to an anonymous friend for a fascinating insight into such feelings and for a clear expression of the desire for a 'simple', i.e. military, solution: 'Le coup de filet a été heureux, les preuves abondent, renseignements, fusils trouvés chez le Sultan, mensonges des accusés, il y aura des confrontations sensationnelles. Au fond tout le monde a été compromis car c'est un gros mouvement religieux qui couvait depuis trois mois. ... J'ai eu la chance d'échapper à 3 tentatives d'assassinat. ... Charmant pays n'est-ce pas? Vous voyez, mon cher Jean, nous avons passé près d'un grand malheur. Mais voyez notre situation à 800 km du premier poste télégraphique, quand aurons-nous des instructions du gouvernement? Il faudrait mettre le pays en état de siege et établir une cour martiale, autrement en n'en finira jamais'.

(2) S. Marks Reluctant Rebellion: the 1906-8 disturbances in Natal Oxford 1970 pp. 144-45

In Natal the Boers were also widely suspected of fomenting such rumours in order to win back the right to carry arms. (1) One cannot help feeling that Capt. Lefèbvre would have sympathised.

Did the Djerma and Zinder 'conspiracies' really amount to anything more than a handful of letters, the ambush of a police patrol and a bowl of 'poisoned' milk? Arnaud's claim that the Sultan of Sokoto was involved appears unlikely in view of the fact that none of the Northern Nigerian emirates had attempted to come to the aid of Saïbou and his followers from Satiru and that in 1904 the Sultan had come down unequivocally against an earlier Mahdist movement. (2) A recent analysis has argued that the early colonial impact in Damagaram and Damergu, the areas around the north of Zinder respectively, was much greater than has often been suggested and that after the entry of the Joalland-Meynier mission into Zinder in July 1899 the ruling elite were made immediately aware of the French presence. The first to suffer was the Sultan Ahmadu Kuren Daga whom the French executed soon after their arrival. He was replaced by a younger relation, Ahmadu 'dan Bassa,

(1) ibid pp. 158-59

(2) Adeleye Power and Diplomacy pp. 323-35.

who was made responsible for the collection of the newly created head-tax. However, the young Sultan was not highly regarded by the French, and on his arrival in Zinder in 1903, Capt. Lefèbvre attempted to reduce his authority. In the same year Ahmadu was suspected of plotting against the French. The following year relations between Ahmadu and his chief adviser, the bellama deteriorated, and an account written in 1921 suggested that it was the bellama who made up, and led the French to, the letter implicating Ahmadu in a plot with Saïbou. Lefèbvre's alarm was apparently augmented by the sight of the arrival on horseback of one of Zinder's richest traders, Malam Yoro, accompanied by his large retinue of servants whom Lefèbvre supposed to be Mahdist rebels. After Ahmadu had been deposed he was replaced by the bellama - no longer as Sultan but as chef de province. In 1921 the bellama was, himself, deposed and the sultanate restored. Whatever the verity of this account which, it should be recognised, may itself have been fabricated in order to justify the deposition of the bellama it is clear that the first decade of the twentieth century saw great change in the economic situation of the area. The most dramatic change was the decline in the trans-Saharan trade which was

diverted southwards as the Lagos-Kano railway (completed in 1911) and the introduction of parcel post to Kano in 1907 proved quicker, cheaper and safer than the traditional trans-Saharan routes.<sup>(1)</sup> Certainly there were common economic and social problems, recognised indeed by the French, which were sufficient to explain widespread resentment of the European presence. Nonetheless it was the religious nature of the unrest which appeared most worrying to the French. Roume took the Mahdist threat very seriously as was shown by his consultations with the British authorities about what action could be taken against the 'common enemy' - Islam. Although it is impossible to prove absolutely it seems likely that the great Islamic conspiracy was a French fabrication, that religious 'fanaticism' was used as a convenient scapegoat for more general socio-economic problems and that as is so often with conspiracy theories more can be learnt from the study of the documentation about the state of European preoccupations than about the local African reality. It is interesting

(1) See Baier Economic History chs. 4 & 5. See also Marty 'L'Islam et les tribus du Niger' pp. 394-47 for official version: 'Ahmadu ne fut jamais un auxiliaire dévoué. Glorieux, fanfaron, paresseux il était de plus extrêmement superstitieux' p. 394.

to see how the following year religious 'fanaticism' appeared to have evaporated as Ponty reported back to Paris that he believed the crisis was over:

The tax collection has been ... exceptionally brilliant. It is a criterion which well proves the progressive pacification of these populations formerly regarded as hostile to our occupation. (1)

### Ponty and Islam

William Ponty, Governor of Haut Senegal et Niger, was promoted to Governor-General of AOF when Roume was forced to retire as a result of illness in 1907. He remained as Governor-General until his death in 1915. A recent historian has made the claim that Ponty was 'probably the strongest and most influential Governor-General who ruled French West Africa'. (2) -

- (1) ANSOM Soudan I/II Lt.-Gov. HSN to Min. Col. August 1907.
- (2) G. Wesley Johnson 'William Ponty and Republican Paternalism in French West Africa' in Gann & Duignan (eds) African Proconsuls p. 127. The following paragraph is based on this article.

and the claim is probably correct. Ponty, born in 1866, joined the colonial section of the Marine Ministry having graduated with a law degree at the age of 22. He did not stay long in Paris as in 1890 he was appointed Col. Archinard's personal secretary in the campaign against Samori. A 'baptism by fire' which was rewarded with the Légion d'Honneur. In 1896 he was sent to Madagascar but returned the following year to West Africa where he was made commandant de cercle in Djenné where he continued his impressive record of impressing his superiors with his hard work and good manners. He succeeded de Trentinnian as Governor of Soudan in 1899 and despite his youth he was the favourite to succeed Roume in 1908. Unlike Roume, Ponty had had both military and administrative experience in Africa and was more sympathetic to the claims of the military than his predecessor had been. Indeed, Clozel complained privately that Ponty lacked firmness in his dealings with both the Colonial Ministry and the military. (1) Ideologically, Ponty has been dubbed as a 'Republican Paternalist' (2) - a woolly category justified by his concern for native administration

(1) IF Fonds Terrier Clozel to Terrier 22.4.1911.

(2) Wesley Johnson 'William Ponty'.

(establishment of sociétés de prévoyance, abolition of slavery) and his anti-clericalism. He was also a Freemason, a fact of which the significance is not clear. Whether or not Ponty's tolerance and protection of M. Courcelle, a manifestly unqualified Inspector of Education, who was also a Freemason, was a manifestation of masonic solidarity cannot be said. Nevertheless it took three years for Clozel and Hardy, the future Inspector, to convince Ponty that Courcelle, who was barely educated himself, was not the right man for the job of Inspector of Education in AOF. (1)

Ponty's first experience of Islam in Africa was gained not in Algeria but in the campaign against Samori, and the impression which this gave him seems to have stayed with him for the rest of his life. For in a series of circulars and official reports Ponty expressed his concern that there should be no successor to Samori and revealed his abiding fear that in Islam there lay a danger to France of the highest order. His circulars

(1) See D. Bouche L'Enseignement dans les territoires français de l'Afrique occidentale: mission civilisatrice ou formation d'une élite? Paris 1975 Ch. 19 for details of Courcelle's career (masonic references are on p. 787)

1906-11 (1) provide evidence of a degree of suspicion of Islam so profound that it could not be made compatible with the official policy of religious neutrality to which Ponty paid lip service. The concern with maraboutic activity within the context of a changing African social order, combined with the anxiety about 'foreign' influences - Moroccans, Syrians, the Arabic language itself - on local African politics leading to a perception of Islam as a potential threat that could only be countered by an effective intelligence system are recurrent themes within the circulars that require further explanation.

#### 1. Maraboutic unrest 1906-1910

Ponty stated in the preamble to the strongly worded circular of July 1906 (2) that the recent events in Zinder and the surrounding areas provided further evidence of the need to adopt a tough policy towards

(1) See Appendices for texts of circulars.

(2) See Appendix I

marabouts. This seems to have been a widely shared belief. M. Vidal, the administrator of Bamako described marabouts as 'Parasitic nuisances and charlatans'. (1) In Senegal Cheikh Saad Bu was not the only object of vilification; the stream of visitors bearing generous gifts for the exiled Mouride leader, Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba, was remarked upon with obvious displeasure in official reports. (2) Even in the Ivory Coast, a colony where talk was more of pagans and priests than of Muslims and marabouts, administrators knew all about the dangers of Islam. In the cercle of Bondoukou, in the north-east of the colony the administrator Benquey confessed that he was becoming ' a little sceptical about the beneficial and civilising influence of Islam on the Blacks' and proceeded to relate a harrowing tale of human sacrifice committed by pious Muslim Dyulas. (3)

- (1) ANS 15 G 3 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 16.5.1906 enclosing Vidal's report on unrest in Bamako.
- (2) For example, ANSOM Sénégal I/97 Gov.-Gen. p.i. AOF (Merlin) to Min. Col. 'Rapport sur la situation politique au Sénégal' 2eme Trimestre 1906 complained that gifts worth 10,000 francs had been given to Ahmadu Bamba.
- (3) ANS 5 G 63 'Côte d'Ivoire - Rapport politique' 4eme Trimestre 1905. See also Triaud 'La question islamique en Côte d'Ivoire' for analysis of French concerns about Islam in a predominantly Animist society.

Two years later Benquey was administrating the north-west cercle of Korhogo, and what had started as a twinge of scepticism was now a fully-fledged conviction: 'Islam is perhaps a perfect religion in theory' but one only had to cast one's eyes around to realise that in practice it offered 'very little from a political point of view and nothing from a moral one'. Furthermore, he reasoned that whatever divisions may have existed between Muslims they were all nonetheless agreed on one imperative - 'To wage Holy War against the infidel and chase him from the country'. (1) His immediate predecessor in Korhogo, M. Folquet was quite convinced that, 'It is preferable to administer people over whom Islam has no or at least a very superficial hold, than Muslims or apprentice Muslims with whom one cannot treat and who will never be made to evolve according to our ideas. (2) From all corners of AOF there came reports of disturbances - some of them serious - all of which were apparently the result of individual maraboutic activity.

(1) ANS 5 G 63 Benquey to Lt.-Gov. I. Coast 20.10.1907.

(2) ANS 5 G 63 Folquet to Admin. Region Kong 30.9.1907.

In the area of Guidimaka on the right bank of the River Sénégal the French claimed to have been the victims of a local conspiracy amongst the Sarrakole population who in the past had been the main group to support Mahmadu Lamine. According to the French account (1) in May 1907 the inhabitants of Selibaby employed an influential Senegalese marabout named Fodie Diaguili to prepare magic potions to rid the country of the French. The names of M. Dupont, the resident administrator, M. Audan, a junior official and Malami Tandia, the interpreter, were engraved on the skull of a hyena which was thrown into the well of the residence along with the putrefying entrails of the animal. A few days later M. Dupont fell gravely ill and the other members of the residence complained of upset stomachs. Seeing the success of Fode Diaguili's actions the Sarrakole attacked the local Africans who worked with the Europeans and the unrest spread to the Moors before Capt. Repoux along with 40 tirailleurs came to the rescue of the residence.

(1) ANSQM AP 145/2 'Procès-verbal de la séance du 29.2.1908 de la commission permanente du Conseil de Gouvernement de l'AOF'.

The principal leaders were sentenced to obligatory residence in Port Etienne in Mauritania for periods of one to two years.

In Dagana early in 1908 there was a minor revolt led by Aly Yoro Diaw, a marabout who in 1906 had been interned in Tivouane for having preached against the French but who had soon escaped and gone into hiding in either Mauritania or, more probably, in Bamako. (1) In 1908 he returned to his native village of Fanaye on the left bank of the Senegal claiming to have been to Mecca and that he was the Mahdi sent to chase away the Europeans whose guns, he promised, would be useless against him and his followers. On the 10th March the order was given to arrest him. However, French forces were too small to effect the arrest and so a local village chief was sent instead to try and persuade the people of Fanaye that the French would not tolerate insubordination and that their threats to quell it were sincerely meant. The effort was unsuccessful, and Aly Yoro recrossed

(1) ANSOM Sénégal IV/132 'Carnet journalier' Henri Chessé, Admin. cercle Dagana is the fullest account of the event. See also letters of Lt.-Gov. p.i. Sénégal to Gov.-Gen. AOF 26.3.1908 & of Commissaire du Gov.-Gen. en Mauritanie to Gov.-Gen. 16.3.1908.

the river from his sanctuary on the right bank and marched towards Dagana on the 15th March. Dagana was well defended, and the attack was easily repulsed; Aly Yoro and twenty-eight others were killed, sixteen were wounded and four taken prisoner. The French took comfort from the fact that the movement appeared localised and spontaneous. Van Vollenhoven, the acting Governor of Senegal, reported that the situation in Dagana had been good; taxes had been handed in on time and the cercle had not been called upon to supply reservists for the Moroccan campaigns. (1)

However, Van Vollenhoven's complacency about the social and economic situation was not universally shared. According to other reports a serious drought and an invasion of locusts had caused considerable suffering, and taxes had been collected with difficulty. Aly Yoro's followers were said to have been 'common and poor ... certainly men of little means'. (2)

(1) ANSOM Sénégal IV/132 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. ACF 16.3.1908.

(2) ANS 2 G 8 (36) 'Rapport mensuel - Dagana' Feb. & March. refer to locusts and drought. ANS 13 G 116 Commissaire du Gov.-Gen. en Mauritanie 21.3.1908 reports that the followers of Aly Yoro were poor.

Many of Aly Yoro's supporters were also in some way related to him, and Van Vollenhoven concluded fatalistically that nothing much could be done for 'Movements of this kind are always to be reckoned with in Muslim country'. (1)

At the same time there was unrest amongst the Mossi of Kipissi where a 'religious agitator' called Alassan Moumeri was attempting to convert the animist inhabitants to Islam and to persuade them not to pay their taxes. He led a force of some 2,000 against a much smaller, but well-armed, defence and was quickly killed leading his followers into battle. (2) French concern at the activities of a Muslim preaching in a predominantly animist area had been shown the previous year in Guinea where Tibini Connaro a 'Muslim agitator' had been destroying idols and converting animists. After he had refused to present himself to the French administration a force of 20 was sent to arrest him - a little incident, which the Bulletin du Comité de L'Afrique Française suggested merely

(1) ANSOM Sénégal IV/132 Lt.-Gov. p.i. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 28.3.1908.

(2) ANSOM Soudan I/II 'Haut Sénégal & Niger - Rapport politique' Iere Trimestre 1908. See also R. Arnaud 'L'Islam et la politique musulmane française' RCBCAF 1912 p.7.

merely offered 'Further proof of the care with which all Muslim movements should be watched in West Africa'. (1)

In March 1909 M. Bastié, the administrator of the Guinean cercle of Timbis was assassinated on what were widely believed to be the orders of a local religious notable. (2) In 1910 the French authorities in Niger again claimed to have uncovered a vast spy network this time centred around Abidin, the great-grandson of Cheikh Sidi Mokhtar al Kunti, who, having returned from Mecca in 1890 led a series of raids against the French from 1892 to 1911. These earned him a reputation as both a warrior and a holy man, and he was described by Marty as 'amongst the most unyielding of our enemies.' (3) The report on the discovery of the spy network admitted that the evidence was not conclusive but concluded that, 'Nonetheless their guilt was evident'. (4)

(1) BCAF Jan. 1907 p.29

(2) See below chapter 5 for account of situation in Futa Jallon.

(3) P. Marty Etudes sur l'islam et les tribus du Soudan vol. I Les Kounta de l'est Paris 1920 pp.100-13.

(4) ANSOM AP 145/2 Lt.-Gov. p.i. HSN 'Rapport au conseil de gouvernement' 20.6.1910.

These various incidents seemed to confirm the administration's fears that marabouts represented the biggest potential threat to French security. Although none of the incidents ever seriously challenged French supremacy there can be no doubt that they did affect French confidence away from the administrative centres of Dakar, St Louis and Conakry. Two main attitudes characterised the French response to these incidents. The first was to adopt a fatalistic attitude to the Mahdist phenomenon, to dismiss as inevitable the occasional actions of individuals judged to be no more than madmen. The archives are full of contemptuous remarks about such individuals and their gullible followers. The other response was to attempt to rationalise such events by portraying them as the death throws of a 'feudal' society in which nobles and marabouts had conspired to subjugate the populace. The French believed with some justification that they had engineered a social revolution which had destroyed the 'feudal' alliance between the nobility and the clergy and which had liberated the 'Third Estate' and the slaves. Unrest in these circumstances was inevitable as the French set about the destruction of the 'hypocritical facade' of religion with which chiefs and marabouts

had cloaked their secular ambitions.<sup>(1)</sup> Ponty was the chief advocate of this analysis, and his politique des races <sup>(2)</sup> with its commitment to ethnic particularism was offered as the means of breaking up the unholy alliance between overmighty barons and an unscrupulous clergy.

Slavery was the key to this analysis of society. At the turn of the century it was true that the Western Sudan comprised a very substantial slave population - in some towns of the middle Niger the proportion has been estimated as being as high as two thirds. Although the slave population had been enormously swollen by Samori it is nonetheless clear that the labour needs of large areas of the Sudan had traditionally been met by unfree labour. Faced with this situation the French were placed in a dilemma: on the one hand they did not want to be seen by their metropolitan observers to be condoning the system of slavery but on the other hand the French in the 1890s could not afford to antagonise African rulers by liberating their slaves. Furthermore, they had labour needs of

(1) See Appendix VI

(2) See Appendix III

their own - portorage, railway construction etc. - which were most conveniently met by recourse to unfree labour. The result of this dilemma was a fudged compromise consisting of abolitionist rhetoric (and a certain amount of legislation) to satisfy the metropolitan audience and a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of master and slave. Although the French did undermine the position of slave-owners by refusing to recognise the legal basis of the state of slavery (1903) and by a formal abolition of the slave trade (1905) it is clear from recent scholarship that it was the slaves themselves who took the initiative in deserting their masters in their thousands in the early years of the century. (1) Ponty's analysis of a social revolution in West Africa was accurate, but it was a revolution which had taken place as much in spite of as as a result of French policies.

In this social revolution it was convenient for the French to tar Islam with the brush of slavery. By arguing that Muslim unrest was a protest led by marabouts annoyed by the loss of their slaves the

(1) See Roberts & Klein 'Banamba slave exodus' and Lovejoy Transformation of Slavery ch. 11.

French were able to absolve themselves of all blame. The argument - as with so many colonialist analyses - was founded on fact, namely the historic ties between slavery and Islam in Africa, but the reasoning was contrived. In the Islamic unrest in Dagana and Futa Jallon, for example, it is clear that the 'rebels' were made up of the poor and hungry, including many former slaves.<sup>(1)</sup> However, it was much more comforting for the French to stick to their stereotypes.

## 2. Foreign influences

However, although the administration was worried by the evolution of Islam in West Africa and regarded the marabouts as the biggest trouble-makers, this perception was counterbalanced with a belief that, despite occasional unrest, local indigenous West African Islam did not in itself pose an overbearing threat to French supremacy. As common as the contemptuous remarks about 'charlatan marabouts' in the archives were the indulgent and patronising

(1) See below ch. 5 for Futa Jallon and above p. 186 for Dagana.

descriptions of Muslim loyalty. For example, in Casamance in 1910 it was reported that the elderly Muslim leaders who disputed amongst themselves rival claims of cherifian descent presented no problem: 'These elderly and respectable saints ... have well understood the interest there is ... in maintaining the most cordial and devoted of relations with the administrative authority'.(1) In 1911 Ponty wrote to Francois Clozel, Lt.-Gov. of Haut-Sénégal et Niger that, 'Luckily the Islam of our West Africa still retains a rather special character which we have the greatest interest in preserving. Our Muslims have not accepted the pure Coran, whatever their devotions they have wanted to conserve their ancestral customs' but he also listed three personalities likely to disturb this happy state of affairs - Baron von Oppenheim, the Sultan of Constantinople and the Khedive of Egypt ( who 'under the inspiration of Lord Cromer dreams of becoming the Commander of the Faithful in Africa (2)

- (1) ANS 13 G 67 'Rapport sur la situation en Casamance en 1910' unsigned. See also ANS 13 G 379 Arnaud: 'Mission en Casamance - étude des question musulmanes' 7.1.1908 for similar confidence in French position.
- (2) ANS 15 G 103 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. HSN August 1911.

Thus Ponty's main anxiety was about 'foreign' influences. Although the military campaigns in Adrar and Central Africa were proving extremely difficult and costly and were a reminder of the weakness of the French against some sections of African society the main threat to the French position in Africa was seen to lie in an alliance between Germany and certain Middle Eastern leaders. (1)

If the 'Islam of our West Africa' was to be kept unmolested by the likes of Baron von Oppenheim it was essential that the linguistic barrier between black Africa and the Arab world should be maintained. However, since Faidherbe Arabic had been used as the most convenient language for transactions with indigenous Africans, and as late as 1906 it was still possible for Roume to deplore the shortcomings of Arabic teaching at the Ecole Normale in St Louis. (2)      Increasingly over

- (1) See, for example, BCAF June 1906 pp. 105-6 for text of letter issued by the 'Comité central de l'union islamique' calling on all Muslims to unite against colonial powers.
- (2) ANS J 91 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Directeur Ecole Normale de St Louis 20.11.1906. Only 3 of the 18 candidates had achieved above average marks for translation from Arabic to French.

the next few years the stress was put on the importance of teaching French and the unsuitability of the Arabic language for Africans. In 1910 Mariani, the Inspector of Muslim Education in AOF wrote to Ponty that, 'Knowledge of the French language is the best possible antidote against the danger of a retrograde Islam'. (1) In May 1911 Ponty issued a circular banning the use of Arabic in judicial and administrative matters, (2) which was universally welcomed and in many cases had already been anticipated: in Dahomey all such business had always been conducted in French, in Guinea Guy had given instructions in March for the replacement where possible of marabouts with 'natives instructed in our schools and imbued with our civilisation' as secretaries of tribunals, and Ponty's move seems to have been similarly anticipated in Senegal where for some time French-speakers only were being employed as secretaries. (3)

(1) ANS J 86 Mariani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 2.4.1910.

(2) See Appendix IV

(3) ANS M 241 Replies from Lt.-Gov. to Gov.-Gen.:  
Dahomey 29.6.1911; Guinea 8.6.1911;  
Sénégal 28.3.1911.

In Senegal inability to speak French could cost a man his job. In December Assane N'Doye and Moustapha Diop the clerks of the Muslim tribunals in Dakar and Rufisque were both sacked because they could not speak French and were replaced by Ibrahim Kane and Abdoulaye Samba who could. (1)

The attack on the use of Arabic was partly aimed at stemming the growing influence of the Arab press in AOF. Ponty issued a circular in February 1908 banning all Arab publications which, since the Casablanca events, had become critical of the French position. He further requested information about any indigenous Muslim subscribers to such papers. In Guinea, Ivory Coast and Dahomey there were no subscribers and in Senegal only twelve. However, censorship of the Arab press was not an easy matter: in Dahomey, for example, there was nobody able to read Arabic and so the Lt.-Governor asked for a simple list of the names of the anti-French papers. (2)

- (1) ANS M 244 Lt.-Gov. Sénégal to Gov.-Gen. AOF 29.12.1911.
- (2) ANS 19 G 4 Gov.-Gen. circular to colonies 16.2.1908; replies of Lt.-Govs. Guinea 11.3.1908; I. Coast 16.3.1908; Dahomey 23.3.1908; Senegal 31.3.1908. See also Lt.-Gov. Dahomey to Gov.-Gen. 7.10.1910.

The French were not only concerned with the written word but also with images. The following incident reveals the extent to which all branches of the French administration - in Conakry, Dakar, Cairo and Paris - co-operated in order to control 'subversive' propaganda. In 1911 several caseloads of engravings depicting the Ottoman fleet outside Constantinople were seized in Dakar and Conakry. The engravings were printed on the presses of the Cairo Punch in Bologna and so the Colonial Ministry wrote to the Foreign Ministry to ask for information about the paper. The Foreign Ministry made enquiries to the French plenipotentiary in Cairo and the details were in time transmitted back to Dakar where Ponty decided that the best way to combat this insidious propaganda was to fight kind with kind and commissioned some engravings of portraits of French heroes and the interior views of French factories. In July 1912 the Colonial Ministry approved the payment of 100 francs to 'Cantin Brothers', lithographers of 104-5 rue Oberkampf for the supply of a quantity of these improving engravings. (1)

(1) ANSOM AP 907 bis/1 contains all relevant correspondence.

Both Guy and Clozel seem to have got carried away in their enthusiasm to stamp out Arabic in their respective colonies. Guy regretted that the laws on the freedom of the press prevented him from banning the sale of 'Arabic works, Corans, books of prayer etc.' and proposed adopting a similar decree to one used in Madagascar in 1901 which gave Governors powers to decide what books written in a foreign language were to be allowed to go on sale in the colony. Ponty agreed that, 'We should not neglect any opportunity to combat an ardent proselytism which is hostile to our influence and to European domination' but he felt obliged to remind Guy that a distinction should be made between religious and political works. (1) In Bobo Dioulasso Clozel was worried about the increased sales of Qur'ans through representatives of the 'Maurel & Prom' and 'Dutheil & Rochene' trading houses and thought that the two houses should be requested to forbid their African agents from trading in Qur'ans. Ponty replied to Clozel's interim that Clozel did well to investigate such matters but that the sale of prayer books and Qur'ans was not illegal, 'officially at least'.

(1) Lt.-Gov. Guinea to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.9.1911;  
Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Guinea 14.10.1911.

Nevertheless, he continued,

As our role obviously does not consist in favouring the development of coranic doctrines especially in countries where the fetishist element is still strongly represented, it is in our interests to restrain as much as possible the propaganda of religious works whilst carefully avoiding any measures which could be considered to inhibit the thought and faith of our subjects. (1)

Many of the measures we have discussed in this section were aimed primarily at Arabs, either as residents or as traders in AOF. Levantines - both Christian Maronite exiles and Muslims - had first arrived in Guinea in 1897 and by 1919 the Levantine population of the colony (986) exceeded that of the Europeans (963). (2) In AOF according to an official report made in 1920 a Levantine could expect to become rich in a third of the time it took in the United States. (3) Initially they were welcomed to AOF as they provided a valuable service as middlemen for French trading houses and,

(1) ANS 19 G Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen AOF 14.12.1911; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. HSN 25.1.1912.

(2) ANSOM AP 1054/2 'Mission Depont: Emigration syrienne et les syriens en AOF' 28.7.1920.

(3) Ibid

in Guinea, they helped to monetarise the trading network in rubber - buying rubber from Africans for barter and reselling it to Europeans for currency. However, in Guinea the smaller European traders very quickly sensed the threat which they posed to their position, and the first petition against the Lebanese was organised in 1898 - only a year after the first arrivals. It was not until 1910 - a critical year both politically and economically - that there was more concerted official opposition and they became the target of official measures designed either to destroy their means of livelihood or even to prevent them from coming to AOF at all.(1) In Senegal opposition to Levantines appears to have been muted until the depression of the 1930s. (2)

Libyans and Moroccans were also included in the list of suspect Arab groups in AOF and it is interesting to follow the correspondence in 1911 concerning

- (1) O. Goerg 'Echanges, marchés, réseaux. L'impact colonial en Guinée (mi XIXème - 1913' Thèse de 3ème cycle, Paris VII, 1981 pp. 510-28; see also BCAF June 1911 'Les ~~Indésirables~~ de l'AOF'
- (2) R. Cruise O'Brien White Society in Black Africa. The French of Senegal London, 1972 pp. 42, 49-54.

one Abdul Karim Mourad, a Moroccan who had been trading along the West African coast for several years. In August 1911 the Lt. Governor of the Ivory Coast wrote to Ponty to warn him that Abdul had left Abidjan for Dakar. Ponty passed the information on to the Lt. Governor of Senegal, who wrote back to Ponty in October to inform him of Abdul's arrival. 'I do not believe', he said, 'that this Moroccan can be considered as a disturber of public order and I do not believe that he has ever taken part in any anti-European propaganda but I consider that he should, in the words of Monsieur le Commissaire Central de Dakar, be considered as an 'undesirable'.' He proposed to make use of the fact that his immigration cards were not in order to expel him from the colony. Ponty wrote to the Lt. Governor of the Ivory Coast to warn him that this unfortunate trader might be back after a stay in Senegal in which 'under the cover of commercial operations he has in reality been taking part in active Muslim propaganda, very probably of an anti-European nature'.(1) This exchange is

(1) ANS 19 G 5 Lt.-Gov. I. Coast to Gov.-Gen. AOF 7.8.1911; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 24.8.1911; Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 14.10.1911; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. I. Coast 31.10.1911.

interesting as evidence not only of the existence of a relatively efficient intelligence service but also of the quite arbitrary way in which that service worked. On the admission of both the Lt. Governors of Senegal and the Ivory Coast Abdul Karim Mourad was probably innocent yet Ponty portrayed him, relying more on innuendo than fact, as a subversive character. His real crime was to have been a 'foreign' Muslim who travelled widely.

### 3. Surveillance of Islam

Perhaps the most striking theme running through not only Ponty's circulars but throughout all administrative thinking was the importance attached to 'knowing thine enemy'. Ignorance about Islam in Africa was profound. Lt-Col Levé, the first head of the Service des Affaires Musulmanes in the Colonial Ministry wrote a memorandum about pan-Islamism from which we have already quoted. In the section devoted to Africa he said that there were 6,100,000 Muslims in West Africa of whom all but 100,000 'Sierra Leoneans' lived in 'Senegambia'.

In 'Central Africa' there were some 46,000,000 Muslims of whom 16,000,000 lived in 'Central Africa' (sic) and 30,000,000 in the 'Sahara'.<sup>(1)</sup> Statistics and geography that were hardly calculated to enlighten! It was to improve on this ignorance that Roume started the systematic collection of files on Muslim personalities. Ponty promoted Arnaud by appointing him to his cabinet to allow him greater freedom to pursue his investigations into Islam and because he was such an important adviser for the cabinet.<sup>(2)</sup> In Mauritania local administrators were exhorted to befriend religious leaders because:

Every scheickh is a precious intelligence agent [for] a religious chief has disciples scattered throughout the desert ... A representative of France in Mauritania must have a wide outlook and in the extreme complexity of Muslim politics he should manage to move about, ... mobile as the nomads themselves, he will not stay placed in a post but will move around with his tent from tribe to tribe, seeking out gatherings, arriving without warning at camps

- (1) IC fr 378 i (Levé) 'Note au sujet du mouvement pan-islamique' 1906.
- (2) ANS 17 G 37 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 30.8.1907. Arnaud was not allowed to publish anything official without the formal permission of the Gov. Gen.

at the time of day when the djerma assembles, taking part in discussions, ... avoiding taking sides in divisions but prepared to make use of them later in order to govern.(1)

But this picture of industry and commitment was an ideal. In 1911 Ponty complained to Clozel that he had received very few of the personal files that had been requested by Roume in 1906.(2) He therefore had to repeat the request in the circular of 26.12.1911. Information was lacking not only because administrators were lazy but also because quite simply they did not know what to look for, and in future requests for information were accompanied with brief explanatory notes explaining what to look out for and what sort of information was required. Until local administrators had access to more sophisticated information on Islam than was available their concept of Islam was necessarily of the most impressionistic kind based on casual observation and hearsay. The local administrator was given very little guidance from Dakar where at the seat of government even experts appeared in at least two minds about what Islam in AOF actually amounted to. Arnaud in his novels painted a confusing picture

(1) ANS 9 G 26 E. Sabatier 'Etude sur l'organisation administrative de la Mauritanie' 30.10.1909.

(2) ANS 15 G 103 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. HSN Sept. 1911.

of Islam in Africa sometimes equating it to the Islam of the Maghreb, sometimes dismissing it as a barely altered village totemism. This confusion and uncertainty was in part an accurate reflection of the diversity of Islamic worship within AOF but it also reflected genuine ignorance. (1) In such circumstances it is easy to understand how, when the metropolitan press was full of German intrigues in the casbahs of Cairo Islam could grow into the monster it was sometimes seen as, a somewhat surreal monster that could only be tamed with the distinctly odd remedy of pinning up engravings of the interior views of French factories all over West Africa.

- (1) ANS 5 G 63 Lt.-Gov. I. Coast to Gov.-Gen. AOF 26.11.1912 reporting that the commt. de cercle of Haut Sassandra had found a piece of Arabic writing attached to an amulet and requesting a translation. Gov.-Gen. replied (30.12.1912) that the writing consisted of a few prayers and magic squares and that it was of no political interest - a small example of the awe and suspicion arising from ignorance with which even senior administrators regarded such commonplace items as an amulet.

Amusing as the poster campaign seems in retrospect and as illuminating as it undoubtedly is about the extent of French preoccupations it should not obscure the fact that the principal object of vilification during these years was the domestic marabout. Reading Ponty's circulars on the surveillance of marabouts one cannot mistake the violence of the language. The reasoning, furthermore, was plainly unfair, reminiscent of a medieval witch-hunt in which it was impossible for the accused to prove his innocence. The passion behind the denunciation of the marabouts can only be understood in the context of metropolitan French political and intellectual life - the Dreyfus affair, the election of a Republican and anti-clerical government, the advances of the social sciences and a climate of the intensest mutual suspicion between rival political and ideological groups were as much the backdrop to French attitudes to Islam as were the recent memories of war with al hajj 'Umar and Samori. One issue in particular, education, served as a focus for all the hopes and suspicions of the rival factions, and it is with the subject of Qur'anic education that the following chapter will be concerned.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FRENCH EDUCATION POLICY AND ISLAM

Education has always played a peculiarly important role in French society and politics (1) and it is not surprising that the establishment of an educational system in AOF preceded the final administrative organisation of the federation itself. The various arrêtés of November 1903 provided a structured system of education, from the village schools at the bottom to the Ecole Normale de St Louis at the top with curriculum and personnel appropriate to each type of school. (2) Until these reforms French education had been left to private - mainly missionary initiative but the combined pressure of metropolitan secularisation laws and the growing realisation of the urgency of finding new alternatives to military conquest

- (1) See T. Zeldin France 1848-1945: Intellect and Pride Oxford, 1980 ch. 4 for a survey of the importance of education in French society.
- (2) D. Bouche L'Enseignement dans les territoires français de l'Afrique occidentale de 1817 à 1920: mission civilisatrice ou formation d'une élite Paris, 1975, vol. 2 pp. 500-1. See also her article 'L'Ecole française et les musulmans au Sénégal de 1850 à 1920' RFHOM 1974 pp. 218-35

forced the colonial authorities to take a more active part in the education of its newly conquered subjects. The moral conquest of the Africans had explicit political and economic aims: Governor-General Clozel's preface to a book by Georges Hardy, the Inspector of Education in AOF, stated plainly that 'The first requirement of the education which we give in our colonies should be one of practical utility, first of all for us and then for the natives'. (1) In an earlier survey of the colony of Niger it was argued that 'To instruct the natives is to augment their economic value'. (2)

In no case was the political aspect of education reform more clear than in the question of Muslim education. Camille Guy, who as Lt Governor of Senegal appreciated the low cost of mission education, was reluctant to allow the traditional Qur'anic schools to go untouched whilst at the same time being forced to close down the mission schools (3) and in July 1903, along with his

- (1) G. Hardy Une Conquête morale: l'Enseignement en AOF Paris, 1917 p.iii
- (2) F. Dubois Notre beau Niger Paris, 1911 p. 208.
- (3) Bouche L'Enseignement vol. 2 pp. 704-46

Inspector of Education, Risson, he drew up a decree designed to control and restrict the number of Qur'anic schools. Schools with less than 20 pupils were outlawed, the pupils were not allowed to beg, teaching during French school hours was forbidden and evidence of pupils attendance at a French school became an essential requirement if the marabout was to be allowed to continue teaching. Finally, the marabout's competence to teach was to be examined by local Muslim scholars. In the Four Communes only 51 of the 202 marabouts recognised by the French authorities as directing Qur'anic schools were authorised to continue. In the rest of Senegal only 28 of the 95 teacher marabouts received official authorisation.(1) A year after the arrêté was issued Guy wrote triumphantly to Roume that the question of Qur'anic schools 'can finally be considered as closed in Senegal'.(2)

However, the triumph - if triumph it was - was more apparent than real. In reality the French

(1) ibid pp. 704-47

(2) ANS J 86 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 29.7.1907.

authorities were wholly incapable of regulating Qur'anic schools - a huge task even for a large and dedicated administration. As later reports recognised the existing administration could not seriously hope to restrict or even control Qur'anic schools. (1)

In any case Guy's views on the relative merits of mission and Qur'anic education were not universally shared. Mairot, the Algerian-born Inspector of Education in AOF (2) was not impressed with the standard of mission education:

What decadence. What apathy!' he wrote to Roume early in 1905, 'have I seen in the schools directed by the missionaries in the Soudan. Classrooms, dormitories, they all breathe of neglect. In Kita the children have classes at most one hour a day. ... So the general results are not as satisfactory as those obtained in the modest official school directed by native monitors (3)

- (1) See below ch. 6
- (2) For his c.v. see Bouche L'Enseignement vol. 2 p. 718fn
- (3) ANS J 11 Mairot to Gov.-Gen. AOF n.d.

Ponty also thought that the educational achievements of the Pères Blancs had been paltry and scarcely justified further official subsidies. (1)

A more serious objection raised by both Mairot and Ponty was that the mission schools created a barrier between France and her African Muslim subjects.

It is difficult for them, Ponty wrote, to believe in our religious tolerance and our respect for freedom of conscience as long as we appear to favour the proselytism of the missionaries. (2)

Mairot made a similar point and warned Roume that:

Wherever the Muslim natives - more intelligent than the fetishists - dominate, the country remains absolutely hostile to all forms of religious proselytism attempted by the missionaries ... What an error it would be, and perhaps also what a danger if the government favoured Christian teaching in Muslim country, if they also let it be supposed that in making common cause with the missionaries they were also encouraging the spread of Christianity. (3)

- (1) ANS 17 G 33 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 30.1.1904; same to same 9.9.1904.
- (2) ANSOM Soudan I/II bis Ponty 'Note sur la colonie du Haut Sénégal et Niger' 25.6.1905.
- (3) ANS J 11 Mairot to Gov.-Gen. AOF n.d.

Coppolani had spoken optimistically of what could be achieved by a policy of co-operation with the Qur'anic schools, (1) and Mairot wholeheartedly agreed. In an official report he urged the French not to underestimate and despise traditional Qur'anic education but rather regard it as a 'moral force' which should be exploited.

France, he continued, the natural guardian of her Muslim subjects in Africa, has always protected their doctrines and their customs ... In AOF the Peuhls, Toucouleurs and the Woloffs represent an intellectual and military elite who would be glad to see the local government interest themselves in the doctrines of Islam. Let us raise their children in sentiments of respect towards France. Let us collaborate with the marabouts in the education of the Muslim youths ... Let us make our collaboration serve the development of French influence, otherwise the Muslims will continue to raise their children away from us and left to themselves the Qur'anic schools will conserve their predominantly religious influence. To suppress the schools would be dangerous, to abandon them to themselves would be folly. (2)

- (1) See conclusion to Depont & Coppolani Les Confréries and ANS J 91 Coppolani 'Note ... au sujet de l'enseignement à donner aux indigènes musulmans'.
- (2) JOAOF 22.7.1905 pp. 371-75 Mairot 'Etude sur les écoles coraniques de l'AOF'

So although the Qur'anic schools continued to irritate the French - one of the most unchanging features of colonial rule were the derogatory adjectives used to describe the schools - no serious effort was made to close them down. The French could not afford to do so, they were not able to do so and they had nothing to put in their place. (1) Furthermore they were left untouched by the various secularisation laws that had been passed in France.

The secularisation laws were a central plank of the Radical and Republican programmes and were the most important and controversial pieces of legislation of the governments of Waldeck-Rousseau (1899-1902) and the Bloc Républicain of Emile Combes (1902-5) and Maurice Rouvier (1905-6).

- (1) ANS J 10 Inspecteur de l'enseignement  
'Statistiques relatives à l'enseignement'  
5.5.1907 - Quelle que soit l'importance  
des sacrifices budgétaires et quel que  
puissent être le dévouement et l'activité  
des maîtres, il n'est malheureusement pas  
possible de recevoir dans les écoles  
publiques tous les enfants qui ont  
atteint l'âge de scolarité.'

In July 1901 the attack on the clerics was opened with a law (Loi sur les Associations 1.7.1901) designed to regulate the religious orders whose wealth and power had increased greatly over the last quarter of a century and whose schools were attracting increasing numbers of pupils. However, the law was without a cutting-edge until a series of ministerial decrees in June and August 1902 led directly to the closure of over a hundred Congregational institutions. In 1904 Congregational education was outlawed. Finally, under pressure from the Free-Thinkers and the Socialists and incensed by the apparent desire of the Vatican to interfere with the government's religious policies the government took the decision to proceed to the dissolution of the Napoleonic 'Concordat' between the Roman church and the secular government and to promulgate the separation of the Church from the State. The law of 1st December 1905 promised to assure freedom of conscience and declared that the government would neither subsidise, recognise nor pay the officers of any religious belief. (1)

(1) For good summary of issues see M. Riberioux La République radicale? 1898-1914 Paris, 1975 pp. 65-71.

In April of 1905 Clémentel, the Minister of Colonies, wrote to the various Governor-Generals for information on 'native associations and secret societies - especially Chinese Congregations and Muslim Brotherhoods' and for suggestions as to how these institutions should be treated legally. Roume, having consulted with the colonies of the Federation, replied that the secularisation laws should be applied with little modification to AOF where despite the fact that missionaries did some good work their presence aroused the suspicions of Muslims and made the task of recruiting Muslim pupils for French public schools very difficult.(1) In reply to a later question about the applicability to Senegal of the law separating Church and State, the Lt-Governor of Senegal told Roume that with a few qualifications the law could be applied in Senegal and that within four years all state financing of priests

(1) ANS 17 G 33 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF  
15.4.1905; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col.  
n.d.; Gov.-Gen. AOF to colonies June 1905.

could be withdrawn. (1)

However, the Lt-Governor emphasised that the law was entirely inapplicable to Islam:

The Muslim religion has been in Senegal since time immemorial. Almost all the natives practise it with a fervour bordering on fanaticism. The Muslim cult does not have any clergy ... The pecuniary resources of the Muslim cult in Senegal are almost nil; they are made up of offerings by the faithful and are used for the benefit of the needy amongst their fellow Muslims. (2)

The description of Islam as a poor and rather humble religion which used what money it did have for the relief of the needy contrasts sharply with the far more commonly expressed opinion that Islam

(1) The main qualification related to the lack of funds available for carrying out surveys of Church property and the need to continue support for the charitable mission institutions such as orphanages and dispensaries. In 1905 the colony paid 47,200 francs in salaries for Christian clergy plus 4,625 francs to the Muslim Tamsir of St Louis. The Tamsir, unlike the priests, was to retain his stipend as he was considered as more of a judge than a priest. ANS 4 E 2 Lt.-Gov. Senegal to Gov.-Gen. March 1906.

(2) ANS 4 E 2 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF March 1906.

enabled a handful of corrupt and scheming marabouts to exploit the poor, not help them. Evidence perhaps of pro-Islamic anti-clerical colonial officials? Roume echoed the Senegalese Governor's doubts about the applicability of the Separation Law to Islam. He told the Minister of Colonies that:

The Muslim brotherhoods which exist in Guinea, Ivory Coast, Dahomey and in Haut-Senegal et Niger exhibit, like those of Senegal the same characteristics which clearly differentiate them from any other religion ... Furthermore, reasons of a political nature oblige us not to apply the law of 9th December 1905 to the Muslims. These people, particularly secretive in their faith ... would misconstrue the measures laid down in this text and would see in it an attack on their secular traditions.(1)

Those opposed to the secularisation laws in France saw in them the hand of 'satanic Free-Masonry' (the phrase is taken from the Papal encyclical of Leo XIII Humanum Genus (1884) ) and the subsequent decision that in the colonies Islam was to be spared confirmed opponents of the laws in their belief that the priests were being victimised by an anti-clerical, atheistic even, colonial administration. The belief was a strong one which

(1) ANS 17 G 35 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 26.5.1906.

was restated at regular intervals over the next decades. In a series of lectures delivered at the 'Institut Catholique' in 1933, J. Maze, a 'Père blanc' denounced French colonial education policy again and again speaking of,

The monstrosity of the fact that in the French colonies the conversion of a Pagan or a Muslim to the Catholic religion is considered as an act of rebellion against France ... France, alone amongst the great colonial powers, rejects the help of the missionary church in the so difficult and yet so important task of the education of the natives. (1)

Another Père blanc accused the Education Inspectorate of being run by anti-clerical freemasons and argued that,

This islamophile position was convenient for all those who did not want the Catholic religion to spread in our colonies. At this time of most violent anti-clericalism in France, in the colonies even if administrators felt closer to the missionaries because of the small numbers of Frenchmen nonetheless they were happy to seize a supposedly scientific reason to refuse them all support.(2)

(1) J. Maze La Collaboration scolaire des gouvernements coloniaux et des missions Algiers, 1933 pp. 151-52 & passim

(2) A Prost Les Missions des Pères blancs Ouagadougou n.d. p. 79.

Mgr. Bazin, the head of the Pères blancs in AOF in 1908, warned dramatically that 'Islam is the sin of Europe in Africa. She may well yet pay a high price for it. (1)

The 'Islamophilia' of the administration was, and still is, greatly exaggerated. Whilst it is true that there were Free-Masons and anti-clericists in the colonial administration, perhaps especially in the Educational Inspectorate, it should not be imagined that this automatically meant that they were in any way pro-Islam. It has often been said that some administrators favoured Islam 'pour embêter les curés' but in practice this was seldom the case. If an anti-clerical administrator wanted to annoy priests there were far simpler ways of doing so as the complicated etiquette of colonial 'society' afforded ample scope for discrete social snubs. Most anti-clerical administrators regarded marabouts as being just as offensive as Catholic priests and, as we shall see, did as much as they could to combat them. It is understandable that the Church made the

(1) Cited in J. Audoin & R. Deniel L'Islam en Haute Volta à l'époque coloniale Paris & Abidjan, 1978 p. 87.

accusations it did for the Secularisation laws in France were an ideological and divisive piece of legislation. However, the decision not to apply them to Islam was based on raison d'état and nothing more.

Neither Mairot nor Ponty approved of simply giving the marabouts carte blanche in the field of education. Mairot argued strongly in favour of creating the post of Inspector of Muslim Education and the inclusion of 'French' subjects such as 'theory of agriculture and elementary notions of social hygiene' in the curriculum of the Qur'anic schools. (1) However, a scheme in 1906 to encourage the teaching of French in Qur'anic schools by offering a small financial incentive of not more than 300 francs per annum to marabouts who gave two hours of French instruction a day failed to attract any support. Camille Guy, the architect of the scheme, reissued the relative arrêté the following year, but again there were no takers. (2)

(1) JOAOF 1905 Mairot report 22.7.1905.

(2) ANS J 86 'Arrêté accordant des subventions aux professeurs libres d'arabe qui enseignent le français dans les écoles' 12.6.1906. This arrêté was reissued 26.2.1907. See also Bouche L'Enseignement vol. 2 p. 725.

However, the idea of offering a reward to marabouts who taught French was not entirely abandoned.

In August 1910 Ponty wrote that,

We cannot subsidise Koranic schools and we should avoid the appearance of encouraging the development of a religion whose followers to say the least are not always favourable to our influence or to the new ideas of which we are here the representatives. But if we are obliged to continue observing the strictest confessional neutrality we should not abstain from rewarding the efforts of the teachers who wish to help us. Not all the marabouts are hostile to us and I even believe that there are some amongst them who ask for nothing more than to get along with us and who would willingly send their pupils to our schools and take lessons in French themselves. (1)

Coppolani's plan for Franco-Arabic universities was more realistic based on the experience of similar institutions known as medersas in Algeria. In 1906 Clozel was sent to Algeria on a mission to study the workings of the medersas. In his final report he included a copy of the lengthy (300+ pages) report made in 1891 by the then Senator Emile Combes who had argued that the medersas should seek not just to train Muslim administrators but that they should

(1) ANS J 93 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 22.8.1910.

also act as 'an effective instrument of pacification and rapprochement'. If France was prepared to act resolutely, he concluded, these institutions would assure France control of Algerian Muslims as their leaders would no longer have to leave the colony in order to complete their studies. Clozel agreed that providing a suitable balance was kept in the curriculum between, on the one hand science and French and, on the other, Islamic doctrine and law, the medersa should be introduced to AOF as well. (1)

The first medersa to be formally opened in AOF was in Djenné, in the colony of Haut-Sénégal et Niger where Ponty was an enthusiastic supporter of the idea. The medersa had two aims specifically stated in the arrêté by which it was founded. It had firstly 'To develop higher Muslim education and train the teachers of Koranic schools' and secondly 'To teach an elite of young Muslims how to speak and write in French and at the same time to give them proper views on the civilising role of France in Africa'. (2) At the end of the year

(1) ANS J 91 contains both Combe's and Clozel's reports.

(2) ANS J 94 Arrêté 4.7.1906.

Roume reported optimistically to Paris that, 'The young men who are educated in this establishment will be able in a few years time to expose the marabout preachers of holy war and to reveal their true nature to the credulous mass of natives. The 'medersa' at Djenné will be our most effective answer to Islamic propaganda. (1)

The first year's recruitment was not easy, and Ponty regretted that of the 30 pupils admitted only six had had experience of schools other than traditional Qur'anic education. Nevertheless he remained optimistic that 'in a few years time the 'medersa's' [education] will deservedly be respected by all the Muslim population of the colony and that it will contribute immensely to the raising of the moral level of our natives, enlightening them on the dangers of fanaticism and showing them that the duties of a good Muslim are not in the least incompatible with their duties as French subjects'. (2) Mariani, the Inspector of Muslim

(1) ANSOM Soudan I/II 'Rapport politique. AOF. 2eme Trimestre' 1906.

(2) ANS J 94 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 11.5.1907.

Education, reported that initially many of the locals had been hostile to the project as there had been widespread rumours that its first director, Mohammed Merzouk, the 22 year old Algerian répétiteur of the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes in Paris, was a Christian, but that now that the rumour had been scotched 'The Djenninkes ... are starting to show pride in their 'medersa'.' He warned that with the limited resources available the French should not try and make the medersa a carbon-copy of the Algerian medersa but rather they should more modestly seek to 'Train according to our methods young men capable of giving a liberal interpretation of the Koran and of spreading in our language our ideas of justice and of tolerance'. (1)

In St Louis the possibility of creating a medersa to complement the existing 'École de Fils des Chefs' and the 'École Normale' had been discussed since 1906 (2) but it was not until 1908 that it was finally created. The 'École de Fils des Chefs' appeared incapable of training Arabic interpreters,

(1) ANSOM Soudan X/7 Insp. Ens. musulman to Gov.-Gen. AOF Jan. 1908

(2) ANS J 92 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF April 1906.

and in 1906 only three of the 18 candidates for the final exam - introduced for the first time that year and consisting of a simple translation from Arabic to French - achieved a reasonable standard. Roume wrote to the director of the school when he heard of these results to emphasise the importance of Arabic instruction and asked him 'To neglect nothing that might raise the level of Arabic studies in the minds of the pupils and of your colleagues'. (1) Mariani also urged Roume to create a medersa at St Louis arguing that it was the best way of combatting the marabouts. He stressed that the medersa should not just be a centre of Islamic learning but that rather the 'French spirit must give it life. Conceived in the manner of the reformers Combes and Houdas ... the 'medersa' will always be the most logical form of education in Muslim country, the only one capable of usefully serving our policy whilst at the same time flattering the vanity of the natives.'(2) A measure of the life-giving

(1) ANS J 91 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Directeur de l'Ecole Normale à St Louis 26.11.1906.

(2) ANS J 92 Insp. Ens. musulman to Gov.-Gen. AOF 10.11.1906.

French spirit can be seen in the proposed curriculum for the 'medersa'. In addition to traditional Islamic subjects, first year pupils were to be given elementary French language lessons including explanations of such mysteries as white men's houses, the postal system, work, travel, hunting and fishing. The 2nd year pupils were to learn about agriculture and hygiene and the 3rd years about the geography of the colony, AOF, France, the countries of Islam and a history of the French conquest. (1)

In the first years of its existence the medersa underwent something of an identity crisis as it was not clear whether it was intended to supplant or to complement the existing 'Ecole de Fils des Chefs'. Initially pupils were recruited by means of an exam but following the decision to close the 'Ecole' in 1909 exam entry became less common and pupils were recruited on the same basis as had been used for the 'Ecole de Fils des Chefs'. At the same time the period of study was lengthened to four years and there were some changes in the curriculum - tacit

(1) ANS J 93 'Enseignement français: curriculum de la medersa de St louis' 1906.

admissions perhaps of the lower standards of the new intake. (1)

In 1910 there were 56 pupils at the medersa of whom 23 were the sons of chiefs, five sons of cadis, 13 sons of marabouts or Arabic teachers, three sons of traders, six sons of farmers and six from other backgrounds. Over half were in their early twenties. 45 came from Senegal, nine from Mauritania and two from Haut-Sénégal et Niger. Most of the Senegalese received a grant (32 full grants) but the non-Senegalese had to fend for themselves. (2) These figures reveal the uncertainty in French minds about whom the medersa was supposed to educate in these early days of its existence.

But whether the pupils were sons of chiefs or sons of traders the pupils were to learn the same basic lessons that loyalty to France need not be at the expense of abandoning the duties of a good Muslim. As important as encouraging loyalty to France it was also hoped that the medersa would encourage the

(1) ANS J 92 Arrêté ... réorganisation de la 'medersa' de St Louis 28.10.1909; Bouche L'Enseignement pp. 741-42.

(2) ANS J 92 Insp. Ens. musulman to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.4.1910.

development of a more 'progressive' Islam open to the latest discoveries in science.(1) Mariani wrote that he considered, 'The installation of medersas in AOF as a laicisation of Muslim education' (2) - in other words that the obscurantist marabouts would be replaced by a new generation of open minded free-thinking Muslim teachers (3) just as in France the village schoolteacher was replacing the village priest as the spiritual guide of the nation's youth.

The medersa was intended both to diffuse the Islamic threat and to give the French some control over the Muslim leadership. Mariani was concerned about the inability of the French to contain the increase in the number of Qur'anic schools. In the Soudan he observed that, 'The attendance of the Qur'anic schools has become increasingly significant in

- (1) ibid.
- (2) ANS J 12 Insp. Ens. musulman 'Note sur l'enseignement musulman en Guinée française' 20.4.1907.
- (3) One of the common Muslim 'types' encountered in the novels of Randau is such an enlightened, French-educated Muslim whose hallmark is a subscription to the Revue des Deux Mondes - and, of course, an intimate acquaintance with the complete works of Robert Randau.

Tombouctou and in the region of Djenné. This situation concerns us for, if Islam represents a progress from fetishism, Muslims in general are difficult to handle and they have a tendency to consider themselves superior even to us, simply because they were born Muslims'. His solution to the problem was to propose the creation of another medersa in Timbuktu for he argued that money spent on the clergy (in December 1908 the Conseil Général voted to renew the allowance of 38,000 francs to the Catholic clergy with a further 2,000 for the Protestants and 3,000 for the Tamsir of St Louis) would be better spent on teaching French. 'The study of a living Christian language is the most effective remedy to Muslim fanaticism ... The Mahommetans who know French or English are less fanatical and less dangerous than their coreligionists who can only speak Arabic, Berber or Turkish'. (1) Two years later he argued that 'Knowledge of the French language is the most effective antidote against the danger of a

(1) ANSOM Soudan X/7 Insp. Ens. musulman to Gov.-Gen. AOF 15.1.1908.

retrograde Islam'. (1) Thus it was hoped that the medersas would be a step towards the creation of a liberal pro-French Islam in Black Africa.

However, such developments could only be in the long term. In the short term the medersas were intended to train a pro-French Muslim élite who on completion of their studies were intended to take up positions in the administration. (2) However, the French could not guarantee that there would be jobs available. At first Ponty believed that former pupils of medersas should not be given automatic preference for jobs over other candidates but when he learned that only two of the seven pupils who had left the St Louis medersa in 1910 had found jobs he became anxious and asked the Lt-Governor of Senegal if the other five graduates could not be made monitors in schools. The Lt-Governor regretted that the colony's education budget was insufficient to make this solution possible but he believed that in time suitable jobs would be found. Ponty was not satisfied and thought that the time had come to give

(1) ANS J 86 Insp. Ens. Musulman to Gov.-Gen. AOF  
24.4.1910.

(2) ibid

pupils of official French schools some help in their search for jobs and issued a circular stating that henceforward all candidates for administrative jobs were to provide proof of two years consecutive study in an official French school.(1)

As we shall see the concept behind the medersa was by no means universally accepted. The decision not to attempt to apply the laicisation laws to Islam and at the same time to create official schools where religious instruction inevitably took up a large part of the time might appear incongruous from an administration which otherwise appeared to identify Islam as the greatest threat to French security in AOF. Some saw in this educational policy the cynical hand of free-masonry. More accurately it represented a combination of raison d'état and wishful thinking. Raison d'état because to have assimilated the position of Islam in AOF to that of the Catholic church in metropolitan France would have been not merely

(1) ANS J 93 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 22.8.1910 same to same 6.10.1910; Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 24.10.1910; Gov.-Gen. AOF circular 'Emplois dans les services publics à réserver aux indigènes anciens élèves des écoles officielles' 31.10.1910.

inaccurate but also extremely foolish. Wishful thinking because the French never ceased to think of themselves as 'the natural guardians of Islam'. The logic behind this belief was perverse and based on the fact that by a process of often bloody conquest France ruled over the Muslim population of Algeria. France was thus a 'Muslim power' with not only a right but also a duty, so the theory ran, to direct the evolution of its Muslim subjects. In Black Africa this often meant that the French had a duty to 'purify' Islam noir - and the place to start this was in the medersa. (1)

- (1) See Combe's report on medersas (in ANS J 91 for statement of France as a Muslim power - a point which is also forcefully stated by Le Chatelier in his various articles. France's sometime political identification had a spiritual equivalent in Louis Massignon. Massignon, a Catholic mystic, whose thesis was on the Muslim mystic al-Hallaj identified very personally with Islamic mysticism and regarded it as a French duty to help Muslims rediscover their traditional culture. Such an intense personal identification with Islam - or at least a certain view of Islam - seem to be a peculiarly French tradition. Few British Islamicists seem to have been capable of equalling the personal commitments of scholars such as Massignon, Rodinson, Berque, Monteil and Giraudy - the last two have carried this commitment to the extent of conversion to Islam. On Massignon see Waardenburg L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident passim ... Said wrote 'It became France's obligation ... to defend Muslim traditional culture, the rule of their dynastic life, and the patrimony of believers'. Orientalism p.271.

The medersas were, however, only one part of French educational policy towards Islam. Whatever encouragement may have been given to the higher level of Muslim education, at the other end of the scale, attitudes to the mass of Qur'anic schools remained suspicious and hostile. In April 1907 Roume, prompted by information which 'leaves no doubt about the organising effort of the muslim brotherhoods in AOF' issued a circular requesting details of Qur'anic schools.

It is important, he wrote, to be informed exactly on the number of schools. (These schools disseminate religious doctrines and the political suggestions issued unknown to us by the more or less secret agents of the big religious orders.) It is also important to make enquiries about the very personality of the marabouts who teach in the schools so that we know something of their origins, degree of learning, their means of instruction, their local influence and of any contact they may have kept with their former teachers ... From another point of view the Administration wishes to know what subjects are being taught, what books are used and what categories of pupils the schools are designed for (children, adolescents, adults). And when a French school exists in the locality, or in a neighbouring one, it is necessary to find out whether the pupils of the Qur'anic schools come to complement their religious education or, if they do not attend the European school, to discover the reason for their refusal to attend.

The task required a great deal of tact on the part of the researcher but it was a very important task which would enable the administration to establish as accurately as possible 'the size of the forces at the disposal of the brotherhoods and the means of action they have available through the intermediary of the teaching and preaching marabouts'. The results were to be sent to the Governor-General marked 'Very Confidential' (1) The attitudes expressed in the circular were entirely in keeping with the administration's anxieties about Islam at this time as the Qur'anic schools were suspected of being the crucial link between the foreign directors of the brotherhoods and the mass of credulous African Muslims. The role of French administrators making discrete enquiries for their very confidential reports was almost as mysterious and as exotic as that of the 'more or less secret agents' of the brotherhoods. The reality was no doubt more prosaic. However, at the time the French felt a great need to have as much information as possible on Islam.

(1) ANS O 85 Gov.-Gen. AOF circular to colonies  
18.4.1907.

The practical results of the survey of the Qur'anic schools are hard to gauge but if nothing else the piles of statistics which were sent at regular intervals over the following decades to the Governor-General must have been reassuring - evidence, perhaps, that the secret agents were becoming less and less secret.

Less spectacularly the Qur'anic schools continued to be accused of severe pedagogical shortcomings. Cor, Lt-Governor of Senegal from 1911 to 1914, declared that:

Nobody is unaware of the unfortunate effects which these schools have from both a social and a political point of view, on the one hand depriving the numerous pupils who frequent them of the benefits of French instruction and, on the other hand, as a result of the confessional education, raising a veritable barrier between the young generation and ourselves.

He commissioned Souleyman Seck, the Arabic teacher at the St Louis medersa and M. Zanetacci, also from the medersa, to make an inspection of the Qur'anic schools of St Louis. They described a 'typical' school where children were taught all about the Muslim obligation to wage Holy War in

physical surroundings of the most extreme squalor:

Cows, calves, sheep and goats graze peacefully beside the pupils who frequently have to brush away the accumulated excrement of several months, even years, before sitting down. Flies and insects of all kinds go from one dirty child, stricken with leprosy or scabies to a clean and healthy child ... and all this little world lives, unconscious of the dangers surrounding it, mechanically repeating to each other words of a language which is not theirs and which they can only memorise with the greatest difficulty.

Cor wrote to Ponty that, 'These revelations show a most critical situation which the public authorities cannot ignore any longer' and he drew up a proposal of legislation designed to regulate the schools, introducing minimum standards of hygiene etc. However, Ponty noted in the margin to the letter that he considered the proposals 'utterly impossible - especially at the moment this measure would not be wise because it would be considered as the start of a persecution. That is what we must above all avoid. I repeat, especially at the moment.' (1) The events to which

(1) ANS J 86 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 6.5.1911. This letter included the Seck & Zanetacci report.

Ponty referred which made Cor's proposals so inappropriate were those that had taken place a few months earlier in the Futa Jallon in Guinea and it is with these events that the next chapter is concerned.

CHAPTER FIVE: FRENCH ISLAMIC POLICY IN CRISIS:  
THE FUTA JALLON, 1909-11

The Futa Jallon region of the modern state of Guinea (Conakry) has a rich and important history. It is the most mountainous area of the western Sudan and, indeed, it is in its hills that the two great rivers of West Africa - the Senegal and the Niger - have their source. The two dominant ethnic groups are the Fulbe and the various Mandinka groups known collectively as the Jallonke from whom the region gets its name. (1) The Jallonke agriculturalists invaded and settled on the plateau of the Futa between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries animist Fulbe pastoralists followed but, preferring to graze their livestock on the higher hills, did not seriously clash with the Jallonke. In the seventeenth century Muslim Fulbe coming from either Macina or the Futa Toro

(1) The Mandinka groups included: Baga, Sussu, Landuma and Malinke-Bambara.

defeated both the Jallonke and the animist Fulbe and imposed their suzerainty over the area exacting tribute and taking slaves from the defeated tribes. Despite their great numerical inferiority they succeeded in imposing themselves as the dominant political force in the region in the course of the century. A further grouping which deserves comment were the Jakhanke, a clerical group belonging to the Soninke people, who settled in the Futa in the eleventh century and founded the town of Tuba which acquired a reputation as a centre for Islamic learning, attracting visitors from all over West Africa. (1)

Towards the middle of the eighteenth century the chief or almamy of the Futa, Karamoko Alfa, organised the Futa into seven provinces or diwal

- (1) See T. Diallo Les Institutions Politiques du Fouta Dyallon au XIXe siècle Dakar, 1972, pp. 27-35, P. Marty L'Islam en Guinée: Fouta Diallon Paris 1921 pp. 2-6; N. Levtzion 'Notes sur les origines de l'islam militant au Fouta Djallon' Notes Africaines (1971); L.O. Sanneh The Jakhanke: the history of an Islamic clerical people of the Senegambia, London 1979; J. Suret-Canale 'Touba, Holy Place of Islam' in C. Allen & R.W. Johnson (eds) African Perspectives Cambridge, 1970 pp. 53-82.



each of which had its own chief and which together formed the Futa Jallon federation which lasted more or less successfully until the French conquest. When Karamoko Alfa was forced to give up through ill health in 1751 the 'Council of Elders' elected a relation, Ibrahim Sori Mawdo, to be almamy as Karamoko Alfa's son, Alfa Saadibu, was too young. This decision led to disputes between the two families known henceforward as the Alfa and Soriya. The dispute was eventually settled by an arrangement whereby an almamy was chosen from each family, the two of them taking it in turn to reign for a period of two years at a time. This original system lasted a remarkably long time and it was not until 1888 that it finally collapsed. T. Diallo, a Guinean historian, described the period when the system worked properly as the 'most glorious of nineteenth century Fuuta history'. Marty, although less enthusiastic argued that the Futa federation was a more impressive state than those of either Ashanti or Dahomey. (1)

(1) Diallo Institutions politiques pp. 35-55, Marty Guinée p. 21.

Religion, ethnicity and force all cemented the federation, and religion was also the most important factor in its political relations with its neighbours. On the whole relations with other Muslims were good but throughout the nineteenth century there was almost constant war with neighbouring animists, in particular the Sussu. (1) The rulers of the Futa were then a theocratic aristocracy whose wealth derived from the efforts of its very large slave population which it was able to capture and control through a remarkably effective political system. The federation was neatly described by Marty as 'A confederation of small states under a sovereignty of religious origin but which was rapidly transformed into a political power'. (2)

(1) Diallo Institutions politiques, p.46.

(2) Marty Guinée p.20; c.f. also Rene Caillé 'Le Fouta-Dhiallon est gouverné par un almamy nommé par les principaux de l'état; ils se rassemblent à cet effet, et ont également le droit de le déposer, si le peuple n'est pas content de sa conduite: le gouvernement est théocratique.' Voyage à Tombouctou (1830) reprinted Paris, 1982, vol 1. p.267

The intense factionalism which was a constant feature of the political life of the Futa and the increasing attentions of the European powers finally made the system of alternating almamys unworkable. In 1888 the almamy designate of the Soriya family, Mamadu Paathe, was ousted by his younger brother, Bokar Biro, who reigned with the Alfya almamy Ahmaadi Ahmaadu until 1895, when the regional chiefs rebelled against Bokar Biro. At the same time the French were also trying to win control of the federation and had signed numerous treaties with the various almamys but, unable to make Bokar Biro come to terms they eventually decided on the use of force. In 1896 Bokar Biro was defeated and subsequently killed in a battle against an alliance of the French and regional chiefs. By the Protectorate Treaty signed in 1897 France agreed to recognise the heads of the two ruling families of the Futa, Umaru Bademba for the Alfya and Sori Illili for the Soriya, and to respect the original constitution of the Federation. However, this latter promise was soon neglected as the French decided to divide the Futa into two provinces, Timbo and Mamu, under the leadership of Sori Illili and Umaru Bademba respectively. The chiefs who had fought alongside

the French were similarly rewarded with recognition of the 'permanent' quality of their chiefships. (1)

Writing to the Colonial Minister to report on his recent visit to the Futa the Governor-General explained his policy of indirect rule and respect for the status quo. In Timbo he was met by a delegation of chiefs, who, he said, all expressed themselves enthusiastic supporters of the French:

I would even go as far as to say, he continued, that if I had pressed them it would have been easy to make the Malinkes, who constitute the base of the working population of the Fouta say 'Free us from the Foulahs', to make the Foulahs say 'Free us from the chiefs', the chiefs say 'Free us from the almanys'. But the moment is not ripe for such a radical social revolution and I believe that we should govern the Fouta Djallon with the social organisation that we found there. Without in appearance changing the actual institutions we will remain the only masters of the country through

- (1) For history 1888-1897 see Diallo Institutions politiques, Marty Guinée, A. Arcin Histoire de la Guinée Française Paris 1911, W. McGowan 'Foula resistance to French expansion into the Futa Jallon, 1889-1896' JAH 1981, pp. 245-61. For account of French relations with Bokar Biro, see ANSOM Guinée IV/6 Gen. Boilevé, chargé de l'expédition des Affaires Militaires du GG to Min. Col. 17.1.1897.

the intermediary of the almayys who can only remain in power thanks to us and who will succeed in place of us in doing the police work necessary to maintain the tranquility of the populations and the security of the roads. (1)

That such a policy involved turning a blind eye to despotism cannot be doubted. For example, Alfa Yaya who was confirmed as chief of Labe, Kade and Gabu after the defeat of Bokar Biro enjoyed two years of absolute rule:

During these years, Marty later wrote, when Alfa Yaya was the uncontested master of Labe he earned himself the reputation of a prize tyrant and bandit which has perhaps been exaggerated. Like all African potentates, Alfa Yaya didn't hesitate to cut off a few heads and to seize the goods of his victims but at the same time he introduced order and tranquility into the country, encouraged agriculture and kept war outside his frontiers. These procedures of summary justice ... the very product of the feudal organisation of the Fouta should be judged with the indulgence required of the surroundings.

Furthermore, tax receipts between 1898 and 1903 increased from 250,000 francs to over a million -

(1) ANSOM Guinee IV/6 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 18.2.1897.

and for this the French would forgive anything, as Marty admitted: 'We were very happy with the financial results and we didn't attempt to discover by what methods ... the tax was collected.' (1)

Umaru Bademba who had been made sole almany of Mamu appears to have gone too far even for the indulgent French administration: 'His countless exactions, his abuses of power and his acts of cruelty were such that he had to be deposed in 1900.' (2)

However, the wisdom of using the existing chiefs soon came to be doubted. The accession of Frezouls, a Radical Republican, to the Lt.-Governorship of Guinea in 1904 played a part in this change of heart. (3) Certainly in the case of Alfa Yaya it was reported that he felt vulnerable as a result of changes in Conakry. (4) But Alfa Yaya's

(1) Marty Guinée p. 41.

(2) ibid p. 22

(3) See J. Suret-Canale 'Un aspect de la politique coloniale française en Guinée: le mythe du "complot féodal et islamique" de 1911' Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire Moderne 1970 pp. 13-19 and R. Cornevin 'Alfa Yaya Diallo fut-il un héros national de Guinée ou l'innocente victime d'un règlement de compte entre gouverneurs?' RFHOM 1970 pp. 288-96.

(4) ANS 7 G 95 Billault, Comm't de Labé to Gov. Guinée 26.4.1905.

unpopularity with the French was, it seems, as much due to his claim to one tenth of all tax receipts and to suspicions that he was intriguing with the Portuguese, who, under new boundary arrangements, had been given control over a large section of Labe, as it was to the arrival of new Radical Republican ideals in Conakry. (1)

In October 1905 Alfa Yaya was arrested on charges of plotting against France and sentenced to five years internment in Abomey. (2) How much can this be imputed to Frezouls' Republicanism? Frezouls was not the first person to clash with Alfa Yaya. As early as 1896 de Beeckman, the administrator who had been given the task of drawing up the treaties with the chiefs of the Futa Jallon was accused by Cousturier, the Governor of Guinea, of pursuing a personal attack against the chief of Labe. (3)

(1) Marty Guinée pp. 41-4

(2) ANS 7 G 96 Frezouls to Gov.-Gen. ACF 25.10.1905, same to same 31.10.1905, Gov.-Gen. to Min. Col. 28.11.1905, Marty Guinée p. 44

(3) ANSOM Guinea IV/6 Cousturier margin note in de Beeckman to Cousturier, 9.11.1896.

Nor was Frezouls exactly consistent in his treatment of the chiefs of the Futa. In the same year that Alfa Yaya was deported, Umaru Bademba the deposed almany of Mamu, was made chief of Dare, Telike and Pale Sara. (1) So one should be wary of imagining that the arrival of a good Republican as Lt.-Governor of Guinea automatically spelt the end of an era for the chiefs of the Futa. In practice such changes as occurred in chiefship depended on a host of factors which combined to form the political make-up of the colony, of which the chiefs were themselves an important part and not just the more or less passive victims of changing ideological currents in Paris or even Conakry.

In purely ideological terms Radicalism, in any case, was probably not as important as the ideas held by the administration on religion and race. Such ideas were particularly strong in relation to the Fulbe of the Futa Jallon. Early European travellers were struck by the fairer skins, fine features and apparently higher social and political organisation of the Fulbe. Caillié, for example, was very

(1) Marty Guinée p.22

impressed but he added that 'The Foulahs are proud, suspicious and liars'. (1) These same characteristics of on the one hand an apparently superior intelligence and on the other of a passion for intrigue and an abhorrence of work continued to impress European observers. By the first decade of the twentieth century early ethnologists had drawn up a hierarchy of African ethnic groups, and although opinions differed about the exact ordering and about what criteria should be used for judging all agreed that the Fulbe came at

(1) Caillié Voyage I p. 269.

the top of the black African races. (1)

- (1) c.f. ANSOM AP/170/3 'Rapport à la commission extra-parlementaire et administrative pour la protection et la sauvegarde des populations indigènes.' présenté par N. Duchène 6.7.1909. This classification went from: i) Berber & Arabs of white origin, ii) Peuhl - semitic traces, iii) Hausa, Songhay, Wolof & Soninke - destined for better things, iv) Mandingos, Bambara, Malinke, Soussou, Agni, Nagos 'although retaining the crudeness of the primitive customs, distinguish themselves by their relative intelligence and energy', v) Serers, Dioulas, Balankes, Habes, 'a state of primitive savagery'. See also L. Tauxier Le Noir de la Guinée Paris 1908 (Bulletin de la société internationale de la science sociale suivant la méthode d'observation.) which likewise has 5 categories. At the bottom the 'Primitives - or the relatively primitive, for the absolute primitives ... where are they to be found?' then the 'Inferior pre-Mandingos' the losers, defeated because of their lack of social political organisation, e.g. Mendes, Baga, then the 'Superior pre-Mandingos' - Nalous, Landoumans - then the 'Mande-Mandingo' - Bambara, Malinke, Diallonke, Soussou and finally at the top the 'Foulahs', including the Soninke. See also M. Park Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa, London, 1816, pp. 87-8 'The Foulahs of Bondou ... consider all the Negro natives as their inferiors and when talking of different nations always rank themselves among the white people.'

The classification was both 'scientific' (i.e. based on observation of physical characteristics) and moralistic for although the Fulbe were regarded as being beautiful and clever (Fulbe women were particularly recommended as native wives for French administrators for both these reasons) (1) there was also a sense in which they were seen to be too clever for their or anybody else's good. Frobenius was the least equivocal of the moralisers as he drew a sharp distinction between the state-forming but lazy 'Hamitic' peoples and the non-state-forming but hard-working 'Ethiopic' peoples. (2) Others made similar judgements. Tauxier, for example, writing in a journal pioneering the 'method of observation' in the infant social sciences declared that:

The Foulah is cunning and two-faced; superficially he will show a deferent, even obsequious submission to the French authority, but inside he will be determined to do nothing that he is commanded to do.

(1) Barot Guide pratique p. 330

(2) J.M. Ita 'Frobenius in West African History' JAH (4), 1972 pp. 673-88.

He makes a lot of promises but keeps none of them. By contrast the ordinary black obeys and once he has promised, keeps his word ... In short, the Mande makes less objections to our authority and gives us better services ..... The Foulah is more intelligent and scholarly as a result of the superiority of his blood and the nordic (sic) influence ... He is more authoritarian and knows how to command in his family and in his state. This Foulah who is so intolerant of our authority, is very authoritarian in his own home .... It is this quality which has made the Foulah capable of founding a small empire in the Fouta Djallon and which has made them dominate politically and militarily over their Mande neighbours.(1)

In a history of Guinea, published in 1911, the author described the pre-colonial administration of the Futa Djallon in the most unflattering way:

The shameful exploitation of the people became the principle of an administration which had forgotten that its primary task was the defence of the tribe. To this abuse of power the Peuhl replied with perfidy, lies and inertia all of which he considered as qualities. Intrigues, armed struggles and assassinations became increasingly frequent ... Thus Dochard could write of the feudal inhabitants of the Fouta-Djallon in 1817 that 'their distinctive character is cunning and two-facedness'. (2)

(1) Tauxier Le Noir pp. 191-92.

(2) Arcin Histoire de Guinée pp. 98-99

The ability of the Fulbe to form states commanded respect from the French but their admiration was qualified by their insistence of on the one hand the near anarchy of the states and on the other of the Machiavellian virtues by which the state was created. Witness a monograph on the history of the cercle of Timbo written in 1908:

During all this history of the Fouta Djallon ... anarchy ruled supreme. As a result of circumstance however, and partly due to the influence of an advanced religion, customs and traditions established themselves which finished by giving this society an organisation which was less rudimentary than those of other native peoples. Moreover there was nothing surprising in this; less primitive than most of the blacks, intelligent and double-dealing, as lazy as he is proud and greedy the Foula was bound to reserve an important place in his life for political affairs. (1)

The Fulbe were also generally described as being fervent Muslims. P. Guebhard, whilst the interim commandant of the cercle of Timbo wrote that 'The greatest part of the existence of a foulah is passed with the Coran in his hand, whether as a child bleating out verses, or as a talibe ...

(1) IFAN Fds Vieillard (F-D) 30 M. Maillet  
'Monographie du cercle Timbo' 1908.

or finally as an old man thumbing through the yellowing pages of the family book in between the hours of prayer'. (1)

Another French administrator wrote that;

All travellers to the Fouta have been struck by the depressive influence that religious practice seems to have on the Peuhl. Go to the mosque when the 'calyo' calls the faithful to prayer. You will see the natives going there walking slowly, muscles languid, back bent, shoulders hung and head low. The expression on the face is fixed, the eye is dull and the mouth (Oh, that mouth!) always open. It seems as though the blood has been drawn from their veins ... Look at them pray. Whether they say the words out loud or whether they whisper them ... not a muscle on their face moves. And when they tell their beads nothing can disturb them from their imperturbable gravity of thought. Truly they give the impression of being saintly men. (2)

- (1) ANS 7 G 68 Guebhard to Comm't de la région du F-D 15.7.1903.
- (2) C. Dupuch 'Essai sur l'emprise religieuse chez les Peuhl du Fouta-Djallon' Annuaire du Comité des Études Scientifiques et Historiques de l'AOF 1917 pp. 291-92, c.f. also M.P. Delmond 'Un aspect de l'Islam Peuhl:Dori' CHEAM (R) 1103, 1947 who argued that the contemplative nature of the Fulbe was similar to that of the Bedouin.

Some suggested that this attachment to Islam constituted a threat to the French. Capt. Normand, writing in 1902, warned that 'The marabout is slowly creating a force which can only be hostile to us and which to my mind will always be a worry for the future of French Africa. For let us not forget the words of Bugeaud: 'Boil up the head of a Christian and the head of a Muslim together for a week, the stocks will never mix.' (1)

However, it should be said that the Fulbe of the Fouta Jallon were not invariably accused of religious fanaticism. Another essay written soon after the establishment of French rule noted that although music and singing were rare in the Futa this was not so much a result of fanaticism but rather of the puritanism of the Fulbe character. 'Respectability' the author argued was one of the distinguishing features of a Fulbe village. (2)

(1) Capt. Normand, 'Notes sur la Guinée française' RCBCAF 1902 p. 146.

(2) J. Machat Les Rivières du Sud et le Fouta-Djallon Paris, 1906 pp. 293-94; on respectability see also Caillié Voyage I pp. 268-9 for an early description.

According to the official guidebook to Guinea produced for the 1906 Marseilles colonial exhibition the Fulbe of the Futa were not in the least bit fanatical in their religion, and the author was pleased to note that the almamy openly drank wine and alcohol and enjoyed talking religion with Christians. (1)

Finally a word should be said about the way in which the political organisation of the Futa Jallon as a whole was regarded by the French. The existence of a military and religious aristocracy of a minority ethnic group, the Fulbe, alongside a subordinate and often completely enslaved population who performed all the manual labour not unreasonably reminded contemporary observers of what can loosely be called feudal society. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that they likened it to the pre-1789 situation in France - Marty, for example, entitled his chapter on the nineteenth century Futa Jallon the Ancien Regime. A positivist view of history

(1) F. Rouget La Guinée, Corbeil, 1906 p. 172. c.f. see also Randau novels for warm approval for wine-drinking marabouts.

demanded that there should be a 'third estate' to secure the progression of society from the absolutism of the Fulbe aristocracy to a more just system based on self-determination. However, in the absence of an obvious candidate for the third estate the French took it upon themselves to play the part, and the most explicit statement of such a doctrine is to be found in Ponty's politique des races circular. As we have seen in 1897 the French - or at least the Governor-General - did not think that the time had come to introduce a social revolution into the affairs of the Futa Jallon. Ten years later official policy had changed - though as has been emphasised this did not necessarily mean that all chiefs of the Ancien Regime were out of a job - far from it. Nonetheless there existed at this time a very special sense of the mission civilisatrice - much more fundamental than the construction of schools, hospitals etc. - which related to the wish to engineer a social revolution in Africa, to bring in other words 1789 to the Futa Jallon.

This has been a lengthy but necessary introduction to the events of 1909-11. Two main themes should be emphasised. Firstly, whatever may be said of the anarchy of the pre-colonial Futa Jallon it was a powerful and well organised state which the French had never conquered but which they had been able to control only by entering into the local power struggle against Bokar Biro. The loyalty and the value of their alliances were as a result far from certain, and, indeed, the French were very suspicious of many of their allies, especially Alfa Yaya. Secondly, there existed a whole string of stereotypes, based no doubt on reality but which also like all stereotypes ultimately confused rather than illuminated.

As early as 1899 the government in Guinea had been alerted to the possibility of an Islamic uprising. Noirot, the resident in the Futa Jallon, warned the Governor that Tierno Ibrahim, the Wali of N'Dama (1) who had been given an important position by the Senegalese administration was causing Alfa Yaya trouble in Labe and that in the tradition of al Hajj Umar, Ma Ba Diakhu and Mahmadu Lamine he

(1) On Thierno Ibrahim see Marty Guinée pp. 64-65. He was exiled to Gabon in 1902.

was planning to wage holy war against the French.<sup>(1)</sup> Again in 1900 the Governor was worried by rumours of Islamic rebellion in Kankan, rumours that were especially worrying in view of the labour difficulties on the recently started Conakry to Niger railway.<sup>(2)</sup> However, the administration must have been reassured in 1903 by answers it received from commandants de cercle to questions it had sent out concerning the state of Islam. Almost without exception the local commandants replied that Islam was not a serious threat to the French.<sup>(3)</sup>

However, in March 1909 a French administrator, M. Bastié, was killed in an ambush and as a result the French became less complacent about Islam.

- (1) ANSOM Guinée IV/6 Noiroto to Lt. Gov. Guinée 26.5.1899.
- (2) ANS 17 G 35 Lt. Gov. Guinée to Gov. Gen. AOF 30.6.1900. In two months in 1901 there were c. 4,000 deserters from the workforce for the railway, whose supervisors were accused of great brutality in their methods. See J. Mangolte 'Le chemin de fer de Konakry au Niger' RFHOM 1968 pp. 37-105.
- (3) ANS 7 G 68 Circular 'Renseignements concernant le mouvement musulman' n.d; replies from commandants dated June and July 1903.

The murder itself had a traumatic effect on the Europeans in Guinea. Marty described it as 'a unique event' in the history of the colony. (1) At first it was assumed that the murder was committed for personal reasons as Bastié was a man of violent temperament, disliked the Fulbe and was willing to take bribes. However, personal vendetta was ruled out as a motive for the murder, which quickly came to be seen as an act inspired by religious fanaticism as suspicion fell on a marabout, Tierno Amadou Tijani, a member of the religious community of Missidi in the province of Goumba. (2)

The person most responsible for this line of argument was Mariani, the Inspector of Education, who happened to be on a mission in the Futa Jallon at the time. In particular he accused Tierno Aliou, the Wali, or saint, of Goumba of masterminding an anti-French conspiracy throughout the Futa Jallon. Born around 1820, Tierno Aliou was an elderly man and apparently nearly blind when the Bastié murder took place. (3) He was born in

- (1) Marty Guinée p. 77 & ANSOM Guinée IV/9 'Rapport Pherivong' (1911.)
- (2) ANSOM Guinée IV/9 'Rapport Bobichon' 16.6.1909.
- (3) Marty Guinée pp. 69-77. The following paragraph is based on this account.

the province of Ditinn in the Futa Jallon and was initiated into the Chadeliyya which had been introduced into the Futa by 'Ali le Soufi', a Fulbe from Labe, and which in the nineteenth century was the tariqa with the largest following in the Futa. However by the beginning of the twentieth century it had lost ground both to the Qadiriyya and to the Umarien Tijaniyya. (1) Having got involved in the political in-fighting of the mid-nineteenth century Futa, Tierno Aliou moved from the centre of the Futa and around 1880 settled in Kindia where, bringing men and cattle, he was welcomed. His first contacts with the French date back to 1885 and from the start he was on the best of terms with the Europeans in Conakry. He then moved, with French permission, to Goumba where he attracted a large following especially from amongst the Hubbus - a disparate collection of people who for one reason or another had refused to integrate fully into the Futa state. This following earned him the hostility of the local almamy of Timbo who intrigued with the Sussu against Tierno Aliou. However, benefitting from the French alliance Tierno Aliou was able to beat

(1) ibid pp. 57-60

off the Sussu attacks, and the last decade of the nineteenth century was something of a golden age for the zawiya of Goumba. The missidi constructed by Tierno Aliou (1) and his followers became a religious centre for Lower Guinea and in a monastic atmosphere the daily routine in Goumba was dedicated to prayer and agriculture. From 1900 onwards Tierno Aliou was acknowledged as a saint - hence the name by which he was most commonly known, the 'Wali of Goumba.'

The fact that he enjoyed good relations with the French seemed to be proven once again when he quickly handed over his disciple, Tierno Amadou Tijani, whom the French had identified as the murderer of Bastié. However, Mariani saw only fanaticism and intrigue at work in Goumba. A week after Bastié's murder he warned the commandant of Kindia that:

- (1) Missidi in Ffulde means a place of prayer.  
 c.f. IFAN Fds. Vieillard 'Monographie du cercle de Timbo' (1908) missidi ...  
 'une unité religieuse' & IFAN Fds. Vieillard (F-D)  
 12 Vieillard notes 'Marga c'est là ou on mange ...  
 C'est le marga qui est le lieu de nourriture,  
 la missidi c'est la lieu de devotion envers Dieu.'  
 Missidi was also the name of a village.

Although the people of this country are very docile, unfortunately they all become dangerous and incapable of reason when under the pretext of religion they are encouraged to wage holy war against the infidel. Now the marabout of Goumbo is a past master of egging men on. On leaving my residence yesterday he didn't stop shouting 'Allah Akhbar' in a loud voice as if he was leaving for holy war. Three times a day the vaults of the vast mosque echo with chants in honour of the prophet. I haven't come across anything like it elsewhere in AOF. To conclude, I tell you, something is going on in the missidi. The Ouali's intentions may momentarily change but he must be closely watched. You must be careful of such a man agitating in such a fanatical environment where everybody obeys him blindly.(1)

The following day in another letter to the commandant of Kindia he regretted that the French 'had foolishly allowed a sort of theocracy to develop in Missidi ... Death alone will rid us of this astute saint who is already very old and it's only after his death that we can seriously go about reducing the prestige and influence of his successors.' However, such prudence was not necessary outside the missidi and in other areas Mariani concluded, 'It is up to us to ruin his good reputation completely'. Such warnings were also telegraphed to the authorities in Conakry and Dakar. (2)

(1) ANS 7 G 86 Mariani to Comm't Kindia 20.3.1909.

(2) ANS 7 G 86 Mariani to Comm't Kindia 21.3.1909, Mariani to Lt. Gov. Guinée 10.4.1909, same to same 22.4.1909, see also 7 G 69 Mariani to Ponty 23.5.1909.

In the wake of the Bastié murder, Liotard the Lt. Governor of Guinea, decided to send Bobichon, the Inspector of Native and Political Affairs on a tour of the cercles of Ditinn, Timbis, Labe and Yambering. Bobichon agreed that the missidi of the Wali of Goumba was a centre of religious fanaticism but he maintained that the murder of Bastié was the isolated act of a fanatical individual for which Tierno Aliou could not be held responsible. He further emphasised the uneasy relations based on fear and mutual suspicion which had developed between the French and the religious leaders of the Futa since the murder of Bastié. Liotard issued a circular to the local commandants asking for more information on the state of Islam and forwarded Bobichon's findings to Ponty, adding that he agreed with Bobichon's analysis, although he also stressed that Islam was more fervently practised and better organised in the Futa Jallon than in other parts of AOF. (1)

Mariani, however, continued to be very preoccupied with the question of Islam in the Futa Jallon.

(1) ANS 7 G 86 Bobichon 'Rapport sur la mission politique dans la F-D' 16.6.1909, Lt. Gov. Guinee July 1909.

In two letters written at the end of July to the Governor-General he again stated his beliefs and fears. There was, he argued, no real danger in Guinea or anywhere else in AOF of a serious pan-Islamic revolt organised by the brotherhoods but, nonetheless, Islam could be a nuisance in the hands of certain individuals. 'In this time of social changes', he said, 'one would be wrong not to try and discover the political, economic or religious reasons which can lead men such as the Ouali of Goumba into becoming or attempting to become at once a temporal and a spiritual chief'. According to Mariani Islam was on the increase in Kindia as the Bambara and Sussu were forsaking their ancestral religions. Any satisfaction which the French may have felt about the moral and social improvement which, said Mariani, attended conversion to Islam soon went when 'entering the Missidi one realises with what little regard we are viewed by the natives who only have as much respect for us as the Ouali chooses to allow'. Mariani concluded that there were two imperatives: to create a medersa in Labe and to give more power to traditional chiefs to act as a counterweight to the likes of the Wali of Goumba.(1)

(1) ANS 7 G 69 Mariani to Gov. Gen. AOF 28.7.1909 & Mariani 'Notes sur l'Islam en AOF. Les marabouts du cercle de Kindia.' 30.7.1909.

Mariani's analysis of the social situation in the Futa struck a chord with the administration in Dakar. On the advice of Fournier, the head of the Bureau of Native Affairs, Ponty wrote to the Lt-Governor of Guinea about the issues raised by Mariani. He argued that what was happening to the Muslim populations of Guinea was similar to the pattern elsewhere in AOF where, he said, the French were attacking the position of certain privileged minorities who lived at the expense of the masses. The Muslim question was therefore a social question which required a great deal of thought and attention. A month later Ponty wrote again to Liotard to emphasise his view: 'To maintain in the Futa Jallon the hegemony of the peuhl race is', he argued, 'to maintain with all its inconveniences the existence of the kingdom of the Almamys'. France needed to fight the alliance of the aristocracy and the marabouts, and the most effective weapon available to the French was to eradicate slavery, the basis of the aristocratic and maraboutic wealth. Deprived of their wealth the grands commandements of the Fulbe almamys would no longer be able to maintain their political hegemony, and each race would become its own master. Islam had been the only factor

which had been able to unify the almamys. but it was, said Ponty,

Islam based on slavery and we cannot allow it to prevail. The Islam which we protect, without actually helping its propaganda, is the modern Islam which does not permit tyranny and which abolishes captivity. (1)

All this was of course a familiar argument of the Ponty administration and was the essential feature of the stereotype of the mission civilisatrice discussed above. Superficially attractive, both as a description of the state of affairs and as a prescription for the remedy of social inequality, it was as we shall see deeply flawed in both respects.

- (1) ANS 7 G 86 Fournier 'Note pour M. le Gov. Gen. de l'AOF' 15.9.1909, Ponty to Lt. Gov. Guinea 25.9.1909. For a discussion of slavery in the Futa Jallon see Sanneh Jakhanke chapters 6 & 9 and Suret-Canale 'Touba' pp. 64-66. Touba's population fell by several thousand as a result of slave exoduses in the first decade of the century.

Islam continued to be a major preoccupation in 1910. In April the political report from the cercle of Mamou warned of 'A veritable clerical peril which has found a well prepared terrain in the hostile dispositions of the foula leaders, discontented by our intervention'. The marabouts - led by the Wali of Goumba - were all in regular correspondence and often read out each other's letters at Friday prayers. Even if the contents of the letters were not subversive they were still dangerous simply because, the argument ran, the native Africans held the written word in such reverence. 'The letters open the door to excitement or crime, to insurrection, to the preaching of holy war. That's why one cannot be too careful about maraboutism and even if it is true that black Muslims, even the foula, are not fanatics, the same cannot be said of the professional marabouts'. (1) Ponty warned the Lt. Governor of Guinea that, 'The example of two or three major Mauritanian marabouts whose very real services to us are known throughout AOF, should not delude us about the temporal role that certain religious notables, profiting from what

(1) ANS 7 G 69 'Rapport politique mois d'Avril, cercle Mamou 1910'

they imagine to be weakness on our part and which in reality is tolerance, would like to play, serving as intermediaries between us and the mass of natives.' (1) In his instructions to Guy, the new Lt. Governor of Guinea, Ponty spoke of the reported maraboutic activity in the cercle of Mamu and continued:

We must put an end to this Islamic clericalism, which is a vulgar deformation of the Muslim doctrine. Responsible for the assassination of the Administrator Bastié, it will cause a lot of damage if we leave it free. Of course, we shouldn't imagine that it will cause a generalised movement against the French but it does increase the natural suspicion of the native. Through the contagiousness of the fanaticism it inspires it could, if we don't take it seriously, cause numerous local troubles. (2)

Specifically French attention was directed at Missidi and on the ageing Wali of Goumba whose every action was now being ascribed a sinister ulterior motive. Marty wrote later that 'The most ordinary and benign statements of the marabout were interpreted in a tendentious way'. (3)

- (1) ANS 7 G 99 Gov. Gen. AOF to Lt. Gov. Guinée. 17.10.1910.
- (2) ANSOM 5 PA Gov. Gen. AOF to Lt. Gov. Guinée 1.11.1910.
- (3) Marty Guinée p. 79.

Yet there was really very little evidence that Tierno Aliou had moved from his life-long position as a supporter of the French. Indeed, M. Sasias, the commandant of Kindia who at the end of 1910 was sent to investigate the Missidi of Goumba admitted that,

I have never had the proof that he has acted against us or that he took part whatsoever in the assassination of M. Bastié ... The foulah of Goumba seem absolutely tranquil, and the Wali whose body is covered with ulcerated wounds finds it impossible to leave his house or even to get up. His health is very poor and in the Missidi every one expects him to die soon. Certainly no one has been able to give me information as to his intentions but I doubt that having been in such pain for so long he has thought about stirring up agitation amongst the foulah of this and of neighbouring cercles.

But Sasias added as a qualification, 'It seems that he is surrounded by six or seven thousand men, all well armed and ready to march and that he possesses large numbers of weapons. Finally I have seen for myself the swiftness with which the smallest orders are carried out'. (1) Sasias made a further visit - taking all his family - and again found the Wali apparently loyal to the French.

(1) ANSOM 5 PA Sasias to Lt. Gov. Guinée 14.1.1910.

In July the assistant administrator of Kindia, Roberty, went to investigate rumours of arms purchases and reported that the Wali was friendly but suffering from bronchitis and a thigh wound that wouldn't heal. (1)

However, French anxieties increased as the year drew on and the date of Alfa Yaya's return from exile drew nearer. The administration in Conakry would have preferred to have postponed Alfa Yaya's return, but to each of their letters making this request Ponty replied that a postponement was not possible for legal reasons. (2) It should be remembered that 1910 was a year of serious economic and political crisis in Guinea. The collapse of wild rubber deprived the colony of a major source of wealth. French traders' resentment was focussed on the Lebanese community whose political attitudes were also suspected by Ponty and Guy. It is against this background of widespread anxiety and uncertainty that the fears relating to Alfa Yaya

(1) M. Verdat 'Le Ouali de Goumba' Etudes Guinéennes, 3, 1949, pp. 33-35.

(2) See correspondence in ANS 7 G 97.

and his son Aguibu should be seen. (1)

In December 1910 Ponty was in Guinea, and Tierno Aliou was summoned to appear before the Governor-General and Guy in Kindia, but he refused. Just as Cheikh Amadu Bamba's refusal to pay his respects to the Governor had been interpreted as a sign of open revolt so too was Tierno Aliou's action interpreted in the most sinister way possible. (2) For Marty, too, it represented a turning point: 'It is at this moment and at this moment only that I would place the abandon by Tierno Aliou of his traditional policy of friendship and collaboration with the French. The latter abandoned him and even let it be understood that they were about to deal

- (1) On wild rubber see P.A. Mark 'Economic and religious change among the Diola of Boulot (Casamance)' unpublished Ph D thesis, Yale, 1976 pp. 81-90 & on attitudes to Lebanese see O. Goerg 'Echanges, reseaux, marchés. L'impact colonial en Guinée (mi-XIXeme-1913)' These de 3eme cycle, Paris VII, 1981 p. 525.
- (2) ANSOM Guinée IV/6 Pherivong 'Rapport ...'

with him very severely'. (1) Certainly from December events developed rapidly.

By chance Mariani, who had been chiefly responsible for sowing doubts about the loyalty of the Wali of Goumba in 1909, was once again on a mission of inspection in the Futa Jallon and once again he painted a disturbing picture of the situation. Sensibly he recognised that one of the major problems was lack of contact between the French administration and their subjects. 'In general', he wrote, 'the population of the Fouta, indeed the population of Guinea hardly know us at all. (2) That Mariani contributed to a better mutual understanding is doubtful. He was disturbed by the fact that his porters carried him from town to town singing the praises of the Prophet Mohammed. (3) On another occasion he argued that,

(1) Marty Guinée, p. 81.

(2) ANS J 12 'Rapport de m. l'Inspecteur sur les cercles de Ditinn & Pita.' 8.12.1910.

(3) ANS 7 G 69 'Extrait d'un rapport de m. Mariani en mission en Guinée, 21.11.1910.

In adopting the Muslim religion the blacks of Guinea have in large measure renounced the amusements of their ancestors and since I left Kindia I have very rarely heard music being played ... Only exceptionally in the isolated hamlets do the Foulah still enjoy themselves and the youngsters take pleasure in disturbing the peace of the household with their joyous songs ... Above all it is the sound of the muezzin and the recitation of prayers which troubles the silence of the Fouta night.

Mariani was also distressed to learn how popular Samori still was after his stay in Kankan. (1)  
The following month he reported to Ponty that,  
'The action of the marabouts is seldom favourable to us and those amongst them who would like to help us in our efforts would gradually lose their prestige if they did so ... I do not see in the loyalty to us of which some give proof anything other than a desire to obtain a few advantages'. (2)

Mariani, however, had an axe to grind. As Inspector of Public and Muslim Education he was a firm believer in the importance of French secular

(1) ANS J 12 'Rapport de M. L'Inspecteur sur Kouroussa ... ' 19.1.1911.

(2) ANS J 91 Mariani to Gov. Gen. AOF, 10.2.1911.

education and of the medersa. Just as his frequent polemics against the mission schools should be seen as part of the campaign for secular schools so too should his tirades against the Muslim leaders of the Futa Jallon be seen as a means of highlighting the urgent need for a medersa in the Futa Jallon. The medersa was proposed as the only solution to a problem, (i.e. the spread of Islam) which French negligence had already allowed to go too far. Having visited the cercles of Pita and Ditinn Mariani concluded that, 'Unable to eradicate Islam we should try to channel it, and the present moment would seem to be the most opportune to create a "medersa".' (1) However, Ponty and Mariani could not agree on a suitable location for the new medersa, and the scheme was forgotten. (2)

- (1) ANS J 12 Mariani 'Rapport sur les cercles de Ditinn & Pita' 8.12.1910.
- (2) ANS 7 G 69 Fournier 'Note pour M. le GG' 4.8.1909, Ponty to Lt. Gov. Guinea 25.8.1909; 'Note pour M. le chef du cabinet du GG' March 1910. Mariani wanted the medersa in Labe but Ponty and Fournier favoured the Jahkanke centre of Tuba, whose scholarly atmosphere they compared to the medieval Sorbonne.

Despite official misgivings Alfa Yaya returned to his native Guinea in December of 1910 and swore an oath of loyalty to France. In return he was accorded a pension and allowed to reside in Labe. At first the administration thought that the ex-king of Labe would not cause any trouble but when his son, Modi Aguibu, returned from exile at the end of the year Alfa Yaya's attitude appeared to change. In January he protested at not being reinstated as chief of Labe and he was suspected of getting in contact with leading marabouts and chiefs from neighbouring Sierra Leone and to be plotting against the French. So, early in February Alfa Yaya together with his son Modi Aguibu and his counsellor Umaru Koumba were all arrested. Alfa Yaya was shortly afterwards sentenced to a ten year prison sentence in exile. As Guy explained to Ponty Alfa Yaya's return in 1910 was a major political event in the colony:

His return preoccupied not only Alfa Yaya's family but also the aristocracy of the entire country, who anticipated it eagerly. The Foulahs saw in their ex-chief a power whom they could use as a counter-weight to our authority. For his parents and friends he was a protector. The notables found in his return yet another element for their perpetual intrigues. The marabouts, despite taking care to disguise their opinions

favoured him and it is certain that it is on them that Alfa Yaya's party would rely, in order to recover their sovereignty. (1)

Ponty reported to Paris that:

Alfa Yaya, blinded by his religious fanaticism and his feudal mind learnt nothing from his contact with us in Dahomey ... It is therefore of the highest political importance for us to eject from the Fouta Djallon all the militant elements liable to obstruct the work of emancipation that we are undertaking in this country. Given the nature of Islam in the Fouta, the excessive credulity and social nervousness of the Peuhl and the existence of links between Muslim groups from one end to the other of AOF, the presence of Alfa Yahia and his son Aguibou, not just in Guinea but even in AOF would enable his partisans to maintain their secretive agitation ... A moral embarrassment would continue to weigh down upon the populations who are quite willing to rally to our cause if we protect them against their credulity. (2)

Thus the peculiar logic of the French vision of the civilising mission spiced up with more general anxieties about the international situation, particularly the course of events in Morocco, was leading to a situation in which conflict between

(1) ANSCM 5 PA Guy to Ponty 21.2.1911. see also Marty Guinée pp. 49-51.

(2) ANS 7 G 97 Ponty to Min. Col. 7.4.1911.

the French and the former ruling elite of the Futa Jallon would soon be inevitable.

Soon after Alfa Yaya and Aguibu were exiled for the second time, M. Pherivong, the Inspector General of the Colonies who also happened to be in Guinea on a mission, published a lengthy report containing his views on French policy in the past towards Alfa Yaya and the marabouts. (1) Pherivong went back to Bastié's murder describing how French suspicions came to light on Tierno Aliou. He criticised Liotard for not having instructed Bobichon to look specifically for the responsibility of religious elements in Bastié's murder - Bobichon, it will be recalled concluded that the murder was an isolated act of religious fanaticism and not part of an orchestrated campaign against the French. Luckily, according to M. Pherivong, Mariani was in the area at the time and he could not believe that the murder was a simple act of fanaticism. Mariani pointed the finger at the ageing Wali of Goumba. Seemingly innocent actions now took on a sinister light. It was recalled that shortly before the

(1) ANS 4 G 12 'Rapport ... concernant la situation politique de la Guinée à l'époque du 25 Février 1911.

murder Tierno Aliou had asked for permission for armed men to assemble in Goumba in order to go elephant hunting - permission which had readily been granted at the time but it was now realised that the elephant hunt was a ruse, a cunning way of assembling armed men in order to attack the French. Tierno Aliou denounced Amadu Tijani, the man suspected of killing Bastié, but this again was simply in order to fool the French. Tierno Aliou was always the first to pay his taxes but he did so out of cunning not loyalty. He refused to go and pay his respects to the Governor-General in Kindia and through his disciples who worked as interpreters and secretaries in the French administration he was able to spy upon the French and keep one step ahead of their moves. Pherivong noted that, 'If all the other Karamokos are of the same metal one can see with what dangerous men the administration, whose only auxiliaries are of dubious loyalty, has to deal'. The situation was exacerbated by the return of Alfa Yaya. Almost immediately he started organising the import of arms and soon 50 guns a day were reported to be pouring into Guinea from across the border with Haute-Gambie in Senegal.

The arms were hidden by the marabouts,

who were said to have formed an association which was designed to combat the French influence, whose final demise had long been prophesied, and which would profit from the return of Alfa Yaya to realise its goal. Secret meetings called by emissaries from Touba were said to have been held as far away as Rio de Nunez to persuade the Muslims to fight. But they refused. All the documents agree on the fact that Guinea was being worked by Islamic propaganda.

Mariani, said Pherivong, explained how the marabout network functioned, but his warnings were not taken seriously until the return of Alfa Yaya in December 1910 and the appearance of fresh evidence of an Islamic conspiracy. Pherivong concluded therefore that the unrest of February 1911 was without doubt a continuation of the unrest of March 1909.

Guy wholeheartedly agreed with the conclusions of the Inspector and in the space made available for his comments on the report he restated in the clearest and most unequivocal terms the way in which his administration viewed the situation in the Fouta. It is worth quoting at length for it

summarises many of the themes discussed so far in this chapter:

Indeed, wrote Guy, it is not a question of isolated acts perpetrated by the members of the Foulah aristocracy who regret the disappearance of their former power, but rather it is an organised movement in which are involved all the karamokos and the marabouts of the country, whose boundaries unfortunately are not just those of French Guinea ... and if one wants to go back to the mysterious sources of this permanent conspiracy one should recognise the commands which the Muslim prophets receive from Mauritania and from even further afield, Morocco and Tibesti. The generosity we showed towards the Ouali of Goumba at the time of Bastie's assassination has made this redoubtable and hypocritical chief into a powerful enemy who thinks to deal as an equal with the Governor-General, and consents, whilst biding his time before showing his true colours, to execute his orders on condition that he doesn't have to enter into direct relations with him. Such a situation cannot carry on without giving the population of the Fouta-Djallon ... the impression that we are afraid of them and that we do not dare to act. Indeed, the population of the Fouta Djallon have never been easy to handle because they have never been made aware of our strength and they have never seen our soldiers. Our policy which since the beginning of our installation has consisted of obtaining their submission and getting them to pay taxes through the intermediary of a big chief, grossly overpaid for his services and assured that all his crimes would go unpunished, has been a disastrous policy. Acting thus we have gained time but there comes a time and that time is now when appetites reveal themselves and ambitions stir and when uprisings are prepared in the shadows.

I therefore believe that the Fouta should be occupied militarily, that the leaders of this movement should be arrested without weakness, and then when we have struck down the leaders that we should penetrate not just the country but the souls of the natives as well by means of the doctor, schoolteacher, roads and railways and finally by means of a more numerous and active administration than exists today in this almost unknown country. In doing so we will avoid the pain of having at a certain moment, perhaps not so far away, of having to repress a full-blooded revolt against our poorly understood and mistrusted authority. (1)

Recruitment of schoolteachers and doctors could only be increased slowly but Guy was already poised to strike the first blow for the French Revolution in Guinea by arresting the chiefs of this 'permanent conspiracy' in the Futa Jallon. The time of pussyfooting with hypocritical marabouts was over, now there was going to be a bit of action.

On 7th March Guy gave the following instructions to Capt. Tallay of the 7th Company of the 2nd Regiment of Tirailleurs;

The Fouta-Djallon is a mountainous area inhabited by natives of the Peuhl race, known under the name of Foulah in the

(1) ANS 4 G 12 'Rapport Pherivong ... Suite donné à la vérification par le Gouv. Guy' 26.2.1911.

colony. This population is Muslim and its religious faith, its hope in the definitive and imminent triumph of the laws of the prophet and, in consequence, their aversion - often even their hatred - for whites who do not have the same beliefs, are all carefully nourished by numerous marabouts whose influence is sometimes considerable.

Since Alfa Yaya's return, Guy continued, the situation had progressively deteriorated to the point that it was now necessary to arrest the ringleaders, namely Karamoko Sankoun and Ba Gassama in Touba and Tierno Aliou, the Wali of Goumba. From Guy's subsequent description of the Wali it appeared that his health had improved dramatically, for this man who had recently been described as being on his deathbed was now portrayed as 'an alert old man who goes horseriding daily and who would be capable of riding 50 to 60 kms in one stretch if his safety depended on it.' On 22nd March Tallay was warned that the Wali was surrounded by a force of 500 able-bodied men in the Missidi which had been specially fortified in anticipation of an imminent attack and that, therefore, the greatest care should be taken in making the arrests. On 29th March on the eve of the planned arrest there were three detachments of 76, 53 and 38 men camped around the Missidi ready

to make the arrest early the next day. However, the following morning Capt. Tallay decided on impulse to arrest the Wali using only a small force of men, but once inside the encampment he and twelve of his men were all killed. There was then a fierce three and a half hour battle between the rest of the 7th Company and the defenders of the Missidi. The battle was finally ended after a French sergeant 'showing heroic courage' set fire to the village which was completely destroyed. The French forces did not suffer any further casualties but over 300 of their opponents were killed. (1)

It is not certain that the Wali was in the village at the time of the attack (2) but a price was immediately put on his head and Sussu chiefs were employed by Guy to help the French track down the

- (1) ANS 1 D 174 'Rapport d'ensemble établi par le Capt. Lanssu, de l'infant. coloniale à la suite de l'affaire de Goumba, le 30.3.1911' contains detailed account of military proceedings, including copies of all Guy's instructions. see ANSQM Guinee IV/9 Guy to Ponty for 'heroic courage' & description of battle.
- (2) Verdat 'Le Ouali de Goumba'

Wali and his followers. (1) Ponty sent Guy an extra company of tirailleurs to contribute to the show of strength and a police tour of the Futa Jallon. (2) However, Ponty emphasised to the Colonial Ministry that the importance of the incident should not be exaggerated and that it was due to clumsiness and lack of caution on the part of Capt. Tallay. A few days later he again played down the incident. Although he did not think that it would have a serious repercussion it was nonetheless, he said, yet another example of the problem of religious fanaticism in West Africa:

One must not forget that religious fanaticism pushed as far as the complete destruction of the personality puts in the hands of the marabouts men who obey them blindly and who are prepared, if ordered, to sacrifice themselves. Very fortunately the rivalry which exists between the religious chiefs forces them to act in isolation. There is no doubt that a suitable policy can win us the support of the least compromised. For if for the mass of the foulahs only the religious question is at stake, for the marabouts it is really a question of ameliorating or at least of maintaining their material situation which has inevitably been affected by our domination. We can furthermore count on the devotion of the Soussou population, the enemies of the Foulah.

- (1) ANS 1 D 174 'Rapport d'ensemble ... du chef de bataillon, Boin' 18.7.1911 for details of police tour. The report argued in favour of a policy of divide and rule & supporting younger chiefs against older ones.
- (2) ANSOM Guinée IV/9 Ponty to Min. Col. 31.3.1911, and same to same 7.4.1911.

There should not have been any real danger of the colonial Ministry forgetting the problem of religious fanaticism or the official explanation of why the marabouts were hostile to the French for they were arguments that were regularly rehearsed at every available occasion.

In Guinea, however, the situation was more complicated than the description given to Paris by Ponty. The deaths of the two European officers, Capt. Tallay and Lt. Bornand, deeply worried the European population of the colony. Guy, who arrived in Goumba in the middle of the battle, and who accompanied the corpses back to Conakry reported that at the station of Kindia, 'All the European population ... were waiting on the platform in order to show their solidarity in such painful circumstances'. The dead African tirailleurs were buried in Kindia but the bodies of the European officers were taken on for burial in Conakry where once again crowds of Europeans gathered to pay their respects.<sup>(1)</sup> However, European mourning soon acquired political overtones. On 15th April a Conakry-based paper published an editorial article under the title of 'The Truth about the Fouta-Djallon Affair'. Having stated

(1) ANSCM Guinee IV/9 Guy to Ponty 1.4.1911.

that the 'Goumba massacre is merely a tragic episode in the Alfa Yaya affair, whose beginnings take us back five years' the article went on to comment on the succession of Lt.-Governors who had passed through the colony. Frezouls was praised for having exiled Alfa Yaya and for having laid the foundations of 'une Guinée saine, grande et prospère' but Roume, so the article ran, underestimated the 'Foulah peril', obstructed Frezouls so that 'the results of the personal policy of the Governor-General are so nefarious that five years later, all our Fouta is up in arms and the commerce of the colony brought to a standstill'. Frezouls' successor, Richard, was dismissed as a lackey of Roume. Poulet, the interim successor, did not have time to realise his good intentions and Liotard had been too hesitant towards Alfa Yaya and was partly responsible for the Goumba massacre. Guy was credited with having started well and acted against the Muslims with courage.<sup>(1)</sup> Guy was not, however, treated so kindly by two articles appearing in May in Annales Coloniales in which he was accused of having given Tallay last minute instructions to go

(1) ANSOM Guinée IV/9 L'AOF: L'Echo de la Côte Occidentale d'Afrique. 15.4.1911. The article was written by the paper's editor, L. Ternaux.

unarmed into the Missidi and so to a near certain death. (1) Similar charges appeared the following month in another Paris-based weekly La France d'Outre-Mer in which under the heading of 'The Truth about the Goumba Massacre: The Balance Sheet of a Whimsical and Arbitrary Administration in French Guinea' it accused Guy, without actually ever naming him, of short sightedness and of having been in complicity with Tierno Aliou. The accusations against Guy were peculiarly virulent and it called for Guy's removal. (2) The investigations into the 'Goumba affair' were causing embarrassment all round and everybody was looking hard for a scapegoat. Guy for his part was not without his supporters. The articles written in Annales Coloniales met with a swift protest from, amongst others, the Conakry 'Comité Union Sportive', the members of the 'Cercle de Conakry', the Conakry 'Grand Orient', the Conakry Chamber of Commerce and from all the members of the 'Commission Municipale' all of whom sent telegrams in defence of Guy. (3) Guy also counted Ponty, Pherivong, the

(1) ANSOM 5 PA Annales Coloniales 12.5.1911 & 19.5.1911.

(2) ANSOM Guinée IV/9 France d'Outre-Mer 13.6.1911 & 20.6.1911.

(3) Telegrams in ANSOM 6 PA.

Conakry paper L'AOE and August Terrier, chairman of the 'Comité de l'Afrique française' amongst his supporters and claimed that the campaign against him was being orchestrated by Poulet, Bobichon and the paper Annales Coloniales. (1) Guy's defence proved effective and towards the end of the year he was not only promoted but also made an Officer of the Legion of Honour, a sign which he took as final proof that his job was safe. (2)

The personal campaign against Guy is yet another factor which has to be included in the Goumba affair and serves as a reminder of the omnipresence of politics - both high and low. France and Islam are the two main protagonists in this thesis but within 'France' and within 'Islam' there were a multitude of conflicts.

Tierno Aliou, meanwhile, having fled to the neighbouring colony of Sierra Leone, was arrested by the British authorities in the second week of

(1) IF Terrier Guy to Terrier 5.6.1911, 3.7.1911, 30.10.1911. See also ANSOM Guinée IV/9 Ponty to Min. Col. 11.7.1911 for defence of Guy against accusations from the military.

(2) IF Terrier 5900 Guy to Terrier 30.10.1911.

April and by the end of June all the extradition formalities had been accomplished so that the Wali of Goumba could be brought to trial in Conakry. (1)

Concrete evidence against Tierno Aliou was lacking. A prisoner captured after the destruction of the Missidi was reported to have been carrying a message written by Tierno Aliou urging the murder of Europeans, and, when pressed, the prisoner also admitted that Tierno Aliou had an efficient spy network based on loyal disciples in the employ of the French administration. (2) Such confessions seemed to confirm the conclusions reached in Pherivong's report in February. However, as in other attempts to prove the existence of an Islamic conspiracy proofs were in short supply. Instead the French relied on innuendo, and chief amongst the basic suppositions behind French thinking was the belief that the Fulbe were not to be trusted. In his political report for the month of April the administrator of the poste of Touba wondered,

(1) ANSOM Guinée IV/9 Ponty to Min. Col. 11.4.1911  
& same to same 29.6.1911.

(2) ANSOM 5 PA Comm't cercle Ditinn to Guy 3.4.1911.

'What goes on in their minds? ... One can never say - Hypocritical and cunning they know how to hide their feelings'. (1) Sasias explained how he and all his predecessors had been taken in by Tierno Aliou's show of loyalty: 'With all the cunning of which a foulah is capable he was able to fool the commandants de cercles, make himself appear harmless and so spread his influence throughout the region'. In retrospect Sasias could clearly see that the Wali of Goumba's elephant hunt and his swift denunciation of the murderer of Bastié were mere ruses, and although Sasias was still surprised that the murderer, even when under interrogation, had never even indirectly implicated his old master in the crime, nonetheless he was now sure that the Wali was 'the true instigator of Bastié's murder'. (2)

The other basic supposition in French thinking was that there was a widespread Islamic conspiracy generally and that specifically in the Futa Jallon Islam was peculiarly hostile to the French. Thus

(1) ANS 7 G 99 'Rap. pol. Avril, cercle Kade, poste de Tuba.'

(2) ANSCM 5 PA 'Rapport de m. le comm't de cercle de Kindia sur les événements qui se sont produits dans le Goumba foulah ...' 15.5.1911.

in the April report from Touba the administrator wrote that,

The Foulah is in general very superstitious. They have a blind confidence in the gris-gris which are confected by the marabouts, who make a fortune from them. The influence of the marabout is limitless. For us he is an irreducible enemy whom we must put in a position where he cannot possibly do us any harm. (1)

Guy recalled the warnings he had been given by Ponty about the circulation of Mauritanian marabouts and the increasingly widespread dissemination of pamphlets in Arabic. 'The pamphlets are generally written in vague terms but all prophesy the arrival of an unknown Mahdi, and for the natives of the Fouta Djallon this, as they were told each Friday in the mosques, could be no other than Tierno Aliou, the famous Ouali of Goumba'. (2) An article in the newspaper L'AOF gave a melodramatic account of the events of 30th March for which the reader was given as 'general background information' the astonishing fact that 'The disciples of Scheck Saad Bou form a vast brotherhood in West Africa. The hatred of the

(1) ANS 7 G 99 'Rap. pol. Avril, cercle Kade, poste Touba.

(2) ANSOM 5 PA Guy to GGAOF 8.6.1911.

white man is the unique aim of their activities'. Tierno Aliou, the article continued, thanks to his spy network knew all about the plans to arrest him and so he laid a carefully-planned ambush. When Capt. Tallay and his men entered the Missidi, 'All the village shouts "Allah-ou-Akhbar" with great fervour; that's the war hymn ... there is a precipitous rush onto the whites; its holy war. The officers' bodies are mutilated, their mouths are stuffed with their cut-off sexual parts. The tirailleurs are also wounded horrendously'. (1)

Pherivong, still in the colony, reported to his superiors in the rue Oudinot that the recent events showed that it was no longer possible to deny the existence of an Islamic problem. He argued that the surest solution lay in the spread of the French language, 'the best method of combatting the activities of the marabouts about whom we are poorly informed since between them and us there is no contact except through interpreters who are their own pupils.' (2) Nowhere was the insecurity of the French

(1) ANS 7 G 99 'Reconstruction inédite du massacre de Goumba' L'AOF 27.5.1911 casualty figures given in this article. French killed 15, Fulbe 1,028.

(2) ANSOM Guinée IV/9 Pherivong to Min.Col. 14.6.1911.

more obvious than in their fears about having to rely on untrustworthy, even downright hostile, intermediaries. The role of interpreters in the Goumba affair was an important one: it matters little in the end whether or not the French were being spied upon - it was certainly very possible - what really counts is that they believed they were.

The Goumba affair reached its climax in the trial of Tierno Aliou in September in the Palais de Justice in Conakry. Unfortunately the only records available of the case are the press reports in the Conakry paper L'AOF (1) As we have already seen this paper was much given to journalistic flourish, often at the expense of the truth. If it is not too heretical for an historian to say so the 'truth' in this particular court case does not much matter, it is the atmosphere that matters. Thus we learn that at the opening of the trial ... 'On the balcony of the Palais de Justice are the ladies, come to

(1) The fact that the newspaper accounts are the sole source is confirmed by Verdat 'Le Ouali' p.60. Verdat was a former archivist and presumably had free access to archives. The following account is based on newspaper reports 20.9.1911 - 30.9.1911 which can be found in ANS 7 G 99 & ANSOM Guinee IV/9

witness this spectacle. Despite the fact that it is morning, they are very well dressed. If the object of their curiosity was not so solemn, one could believe that one was at a revue or some sort of show'. In the next few days the prosecution based their case on the official reports from which we have already quoted. Mariani's reports, in particular, were of crucial importance. Sasias gave evidence that he had always distrusted Tierno Aliou saying that he had always considered him a stirrer. The judge consistently refused to accept evidence that pointed to the Wali's innocence. On the last day of the trial the courtroom was again full - 200 Europeans including 60 'Ladies' - had come to hear the verdict. The Chief Prosecutor summed up his case. 'He was', the paper reported, 'by turn moving, ironical, biting and always eloquent. A merciless accuser, he put his long experience of criminal affairs, at the service of the society which he represented and which he sought to defend'. M. Facciendi, the Counsel for the Defence and a young lawyer, 'put his case splendidly. He was as eloquent as one could hope for and right to the end, right to the very last minute he put all his efforts into saving his client. He pleaded with an energetic desire

to win and truly it required an unshakeable conviction on the part of the court for it not to be convinced'. Facciendi decried the press campaign against the Fulbe and the lack of positive proof against Tierno Aliou who had paid his taxes right up to 28th March. He had only been appointed as lawyer six days before the trial began and so, arguing that his client had acted in self-defence when he saw that a whole company of tirailleurs had been sent to arrest him, he demanded an acquittal. In order to dispel doubts about his loyalties, M. Facciendi ended by declaiming that 'I am not a lover of Negroes but a lover of justice for Negroes'. He pleaded in vain, and the Wali was sentenced to death.

That the trial was a mockery is, of course, beyond doubt. It is rather pathetic to think of Tierno Aliou, a man in his eighties who had spent most of the latter part of his life as a loyal and dutiful French subject, being brought to trial in the pomp and splendour of the Palais de Justice for a crime which he may not have committed and without any chance of defending himself, for anything that he said or was said on his behalf, simply would not have been believed, because, as everybody knew, the

Fulbe were cunning schemers and not to be trusted. It is also shocking to realise the extent of the French 'overkill' during their counter-attack on the Missidi, but such responses were common in this early colonial period. (1)

What was perhaps less common was to stage a full-scale European-style trial in order to judge the accused whose guilt in the nature of things was a pre-established and known 'fact'. Why bother? Mock trials like sham elections clearly serve a basic function of providing at least an appearance of justice - or, as the case may be, democracy - which the conventions of 'civilisation' require to be preserved.

But the trial of the Wali of Goumba was more than a mere exercise of cosmetic justice cooked up for metropolitan consumption. It was also an act of ritual. Just as the Europeans all came to the station platform in Kindia and in Conakry to meet the train carrying the bodies of the two dead officers, so too did they now flock to the Palais de Justice to see that justice was being done. But the justice

(1) On other overkills see Weiskel Baule Resistance and collaboration on the Baule revolt & Iliffe Tanganyika ch. 6 for the German suppression of the Maji Maji rebellion.

was emphatically not the summary justice of the battlefield, but rather the elaborate and civilised affair of the French judicial system. One had to dress up for it, and it was a fitting spectacle for ladies. Lawyers pleaded their case eloquently and wittily - just like in France. The defendant - this curious Wali of Goumba - played a suitably passive part, no unseemly outbursts or violent physical attacks on his captors, in short, he had been tamed. And whilst Europeans may have squabbled amongst themselves and used this incident to settle some old scores with their colleagues and compatriots, here in the courtroom they were all united in solidarity with the dead officers, in abhorrence of the Islamic peril and in a shared feeling of relief. The trial was homely and reassuring, but also quite exciting really. All in all not so very different from a good melodrama in a provincial theatre.

What then was the significance of the Goumba affair? Firstly it is perhaps the clearest example of how Ponty's 'politique des races' could work in practice. Ponty's policy was based on the observation of profound inequalities in African societies, inequalities both between and within different ethnic

groups. Such an observation was based on reality as few people today would seek to deny the existence of such inequalities in pre-colonial African societies. However, the inequalities were complicated inequalities and it was these complications which Ponty and his colleagues tended to gloss over. (1) Nowhere was this more evident than in their attitude to the Wali of Goumba. The Wali's position in the Futa Jallon was very particular. He had quarrelled with the Almamy of Timbo and was forced to move literally and metaphorically to the periphery of the federation and found a new settlement away from the established political and religious centres. The following that he attracted was recruited from a wide assortment of social backgrounds including ex-slaves. The Wali, himself, was on excellent relations with the French for most of his life. However, the combined beliefs that the Futa Jallon was a feudal society and that the greatest obstacle

(1) For discussion of some of these complexities see F. Cooper 'The problem of slavery in African studies' JAH 20 (1) 1979 pp. 103-25; Lovejoy Transformations in Slavery passim; Klein and Roberts 'Banamba slave exodus'.

to French progress in Africa was an alliance between feudal slave-owning chiefs and a religious caste more interested in its own temporal welfare than in ministering to the spiritual needs of its followers required a revision to be made of the portrait of the Wali. Thus a man whose followers included many former slaves and who had quarrelled with the local chiefs and who was quite content with the French presence was now portrayed as somebody who inevitably was hostile to the French. Thus when Mariani began to sow doubts in the minds of the administration about the loyalty of the Wali, conflict between him and the French became a self-fulfilling prophesy as the French, prisoners of their own republican rhetoric and blinded by their stereotypes of the Fulbe character, came more and more to suspect their erstwhile ally to the point of sending an entire armed company to arrest him. Given this treatment by a power whom he had loyally served for most of his life it is not surprising that the Wali and his supporters attacked the soldiers sent to arrest him.

Secondly, the Goumba affair highlights the importance of stereotypes. In this Mariani's role was particularly important as it was he more than anybody

else who by playing on the stereotype of the Fulbe character managed to discredit Tierno Aliou in the eyes of the French. In the end the stereotype proved more powerful than the empirical evidence, and Tierno Aliou was guilty of nothing so much as being a Fulbe marabout and all that that implied. We ourselves should be wary of type-casting the French. The French were divided amongst themselves and far from confident that their Gallic birthright would protect them against all misfortune. The deaths of Bastie, Tallay and Bornand were all unnerving experiences. Once again we have to include fear and insecurity in our description of the French psychological make-up. The good Republican liberator is clearly as inadequate as the double-dealing Fulbe.

Thirdly, it is important to note that much of French insecurity stemmed from the fact that Futa Jallon had never been conquered, that its people had never been made aware of the reality of French force. The French always felt uneasy about their choice of intermediaries and suspected them constantly of plotting against them. It is significant that chief amongst Guy's proposals for policy reform in the Futa Jallon was a military occupation.

Fourthly, a lesson was learned from the episode, and there seems to have been a tacit admission from the French that they had overreacted. Marty's account of the whole affair is explicitly critical of the way in which both Tierno Aliou and the Jahkanke marabout, Karamoko Sankoun, were treated by the French. He ridiculed the attribution of ulterior motives to the Wali's slightest gesture and thought that the French had acted clumsily in the whole affair. The violence was unnecessary, he argued, because, 'Right up to the eve of the conflict the relations and the attitude of the Ouali have always born witness of his desire to return to his first loves ... There are numerous facts of all kinds which suggest that even at the start of 1911 this old man of eighty years desired at bottom only his own tranquility'. About Karamoko Sankoun he wondered, 'By what chain of circumstances did one manage to make of this sympathetic marabout and conciliatory magistrate the deportee of Port Etienne?' French fears of a St Bartholomew Day massacre instigated by the marabouts were' ... pure imagination. Through an unreasonable sentiment of fear one wanted to capture in one sweep of the net all the Islamic notables of the Fouta'. The French were unable to discover the huge arms caches whose existence

had been reported so confidently before the Goumba affair. (1) To a certain extent the affair marked the end of a period in terms of French attitudes to Islam, a period characterised by exaggerated fears and belief in the 'permanent conspiracy' of Islam.

The Wali of Goumba was the clearest victim of this understanding of Islam. Condemned to death by the judge in Conakry he died naturally of illness whilst awaiting execution on 3rd April 1912. The French authorities felt cheated that he had escaped his punishment and were worried that the population of Guinea would interpret it as an indication either that the French did not dare execute him or that Allah had intervened to prevent the Wali suffering the indignity of the guillotine. However, an official investigation in June revealed that Tierno Aliou was largely forgotten by the Fulbe. (2)

(1) Martyr Guinée pp. 86, 117

(2) ANSQM Guinée IV/0 Gov. Gen. p.i. AOF  
to Min. Col. 7.5.1912.



You are an intelligent fellow, and you will ask how a Polish adventurer, meaning Enver, and a collection of Jews and Gipsies should have got control of a proud race. The ordinary man will tell you that it was German organization backed up with German money and German arms. You will enquire again how, since Turkey is primarily a religious power, Islam has played so small a part in it all. The Sheikh-ul-Islam is neglected, and though the Kaiser proclaims a Holy War and calls himself Hadji Mohammed Guillimmo, and says the Hohenzollerns are descended from the Prophet, that seems to have fallen pretty flat. The ordinary man again will answer that Islam in Turkey is becoming a back number, and that Krupp guns are the new gods. Yet - I don't know. I do not quite believe in Islam becoming a back number.

John Buchan Greenmantle (1916)

## Introduction

After the fiasco of the 'Goumba affair' both the French and, as Cheik Sankoum's poem bears witness, the Fulbe appear to have gone in for some soul-searching. The second part of this thesis describes the first wave of considered intellectual reflexion by the French about the nature of their presence in West African society. By the First World War some French administrators had acquired considerable respect for indigenous societies and during the war years themselves French knowledge of African societies increased beyond all reasonable expectation. This burst of intellectual activity is associated with three men in particular: Francois Clozel and Maurice Delafosse - both old hands on the West African scene - and above all with Paul Marty, a newcomer. Although all three operated within and for the benefit of the colonial system all nonetheless to a greater or lesser degree provided insights into West African society that continue to command respect.

However, these intellectual advances coincided with years in which the burden of colonial rule grew

heavier than ever before as Africans were enrolled into supporting both directly and indirectly the allied war effort in Western Europe. Inevitably the strain which these demands caused were profound, resulting in a number of major revolts and widespread migration across colonial frontiers. Furthermore, the fact that the Allies were also at war with the Ottoman Empire ensured that the conclusions of French scholars regarding the nature of Islam in West Africa acquired a special significance. Although the view of the scholars was increasingly at odds with the perspective and priorities of the Paris strategists it was clear that neither group regarded Islam as 'a back number'.

CHAPTER SIX: THE DEFINITION OF ISLAM NOIR:  
THE CONTRIBUTION OF CLOZEL,  
DELAFOSSÉ AND MARTY

The Futa Jallon was not the only area in which the French feared an Islamic rebellion in 1911. In March Clozel, the Lt-Governor of Haut-Sénégal et Niger, telegraphed Ponty warning him of three marabouts recently returned from Mecca and who were rumoured to be plotting against the French. Neither Ponty nor Clozel thought there was much substance to the rumours but, nonetheless both thought that in view of recent events in Futa Jallon it would be wise to take precautions. Ponty immediately wrote to the Governors of Senegal, Mauritania and Guinea informing them of the rumours and asking them to make discrete enquiries. He thought it necessary, however, to ask the Governors 'to moderate ... the zeal of certain administrators who might be tempted to make premature arrests whose only results would be to excite fanaticism and perhaps unleash local

movements against us'. (1) In Senegal, recruitment for the Moroccan campaign and fears of a renewed yellow fever epidemic, made the authorities particularly apprehensive. In June Cor, the Lt-Governor, wrote to Ponty that 'Circumstances have never been as favourable for an Islamic rebellion as they now are in the colony ... Those who watch from the side of Islam - and they are still numerous - are aware of the circumstances which would make it very difficult for us to repress troubles were they to occur'. Cor proposed to conduct an investigation into the state of Islam in the cercles of the Fleuve, Niani-Ouli and Haute Gambie. The investigations were to be made by two trustworthy 'native agents', Soce So and Bakhane Diop, chiefs of Diambour and Goe-Joal respectively supervised by M. Brunot and M. Bonnassies, two of the very limited number of administrators whom Cor thought were competent on Islamic issues in the colony. Cor also increased the number of guards in the cercles where he most feared an Islamic uprising and made

(1) ANS 13 G 67 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 31.5.1911; Gov.lGen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen, Guinea, Mauritania 31.5.1911.

arrangements for an extra 1,496 rifles and 134,500 cartridges to be sent to these cercles. However, the enquiry which he commissioned revealed no trace of a plot, but it did show 'a certain effervescence in maraboutic cercles'. All in all Cor was confident that 'the severe repression of Goumba' had introduced a certain 'salutary fear in the maraboutic milieux'. (1)

In August Mariani reported rumours of a meeting of marabouts from all over AOF in N'Diawara on the right bank of the River Senegal to discuss a movement against the French. The rumours were, he admitted, impossible to verify but nonetheless he believed that, 'The marabouts ... are organising a silent conspiracy against us or else they are giving unsolicited, but false, information designed to mislead us in our research'. (2) In September a Soninke marabout, Fode Ismaila, who had recently returned from Mecca was exiled with four other marabouts and chiefs for having caused anti-French unrest by proclaiming to enthusiastic

(1) ANS 13 G 67 Lt.-Gov. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 11.6.1911; same to same 19.7.1911.

(2) ANS 9 G 28 Mariani to Gov.-Gen. AOF 27.8.1911.

crowds the news that the French were about to withdraw. (1)

In the same month the Italians declared war on the Ottomans and invaded Cyrenaica. With vastly superior forces the Italians were able to inflict heavy losses on the Ottoman forces but their initial calculation that the Sanusiyya would not support the Ottomans proved wrong. Even after various treaties between the Italians and the Ottomans had been signed the Sanusiyya continued to resist the European invaders and by using guerilla tactics were able to tie down the Italians with great effect. (2) The war was watched with great interest by the French authorities south of the Sahara. The interim Governor of Haut Sénégal et Niger was worried by the contents of correspondence from Tripoli which had been seized by the postal service of his colony:

(1) ANS 9 G 28 Colombani, (Res. Guidimaka) to Commissaire du Gov.-Gen. en Mauritanie 7.9.1911; Commission permanente en conseil to Gov.-Gen. AOF 29.9.1911; arrêté 30.9.1911.

(2) See E. Evans-Pritchard The Sanusi of Cyrenaica Oxford, 1948 ch. 5 'The First Italian-Sanusi War'

The general tone of these letters is of an exaggerated optimism. Losses on the Italian side are said to be enormous and minimal on the Turkish ... But the real danger lies above all in the accounts of the efforts made by the Faithful of all nationalities ... to achieve unity against the Foreigner. (1)

In June 1911 an Interministerial Commission on Muslim Affairs was created in Paris whose task was, 'To determine the means of our Muslim policy and to look for a solution to the problems common to different departments concerned with the Muslim question'. (2) In October the Colonial Ministry nominated three of its most senior officials - You, Marchand and Commt. Julien - to the Commission. One of its first policy documents stated that:

Without doubt Islam with its moral precepts and its rudimentary social organisation constitutes a superior principle of civilisation for primitive peoples. But its doctrines, so simple in appearance contain some abstractions which the humble mentality of the recently-converted Blacks and the uneducated Arabo-Berbers cannot assimilate. As a result the suggestions of the Islamic faith cause ... a sentiment of religious exaltation that is always lively and which consequently make the handling of native Muslims singularly delicate.

(1) ANS 19 G 4 Lt.-Gov. p.i. HSN to Gov.-Gen. AOF 23.3.1912.

(2) ANSOM AP 913/1 Decree 25.6.1911.

Explosions of fanaticism are always to be feared ... It seems that African Islam is never stable. (1)

Felix Chautemps warned in a newspaper article published the following year that 'The awakening of Islam is not a vain formula. It is an undeniable fact. Muslims are agitating on all sides with certain cohesion ... either at war with the infidel or simply in rebellion against their foreign protectors'. Chautemps therefore welcomed the creation of the Interministerial Commission and urged that it should be taken seriously. (2)

But what relevance had the Commission for West Africa? It would appear very little. The most consistent activity of the Commission was to publish a regular review of the Muslim press, copies of which were sent to Dakar where they were regularly left unread and are even today available in neat, dusty piles arranged in exact chronological order in the archives. As far as I am aware it is the most complete series in the archives. Unfortunately

- (1) ANSOM AP 913/7 'Note sur la politique musulmane et la commission interministerielle des affaires musulmanes n.d.
- (2) IF fds Terrier 5917 'La commission des Affaires musulmanes' L'Action 16.1.1912.

its completeness seems to be in inverse proportion to its value and interest, not only to the contemporary French administrator but also to the present researcher on Islam in West Africa.(1) Increasingly Paris and Dakar came to have two very different perceptions of Islam. Although pan-Islamism did not disappear from the nightmares of administrators in West Africa, the more internationalist perspective of Paris gave way to a localised view which caused fewer anxieties. The shift in perspective did not, of course, take place overnight.

The localised view of Islam developed from a remarkable series of studies carried out between 1912 and 1921. These studies themselves developed from a series of government directives to local commandants to send in information about Muslim notables and Qur'anic schools to Dakar. However, such requests, made initially in 1906 met with a mixed response. In 1911 Ponty complained that he had received very few of the personal files that Roume had asked for in 1906. (2) and so he repeated

(1) The reviews are filed in ANS 9 G

(2) ANS 15 G 103 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. HSN  
Sept. 1911.

the demand in another strongly worded circular at the end of the year. He warned that Muslim agitators were making use of modern methods of propaganda such as the printing press and that the need to be informed about their activities was more urgent than ever. (1) In his instructions for his interim replacement Ponty described the circular as having created 'a central Muslim information service for all the colonies of the group' and he stressed that 'an essential condition' of France's successful action in AOF was finding 'a solution to the problems posed by the incontestable development ... of Koranic doctrines'. (2) It is from around this time that one can begin to talk of the existence of a special Muslim department in the federal administration though it was not until 1913 that such a department was formally instituted as part of wider administrative changes. (3)

In 1912 Robert Arnaud in his last year as chief adviser on Muslim affairs (although he stayed in the

(1) ANS 19 G 1 Ponty circular 26.12.1911. See Appendix VIII.

(2) ANS 17 G 39 Ponty to Gov.-Gen. p.i. AOF 12.1912.

(3) See below p. 350

Governor-General's 'Service des Affaires Civiles' until 1914. (1) ) published an account of French Muslim policy which can in some sense be seen as a bridge between a view of Islam obsessed with brotherhoods and conspiracies and a more pragmatic view. Unlike his 1906 book this work was concerned with the whole of West Africa and not just Mauritania. The tone of the book was as a result much more patronising and paternalist. The African Muslim, we learn on the first page 'is still like a child who has just learnt his catechism'. (2) Nonetheless they could still be a nuisance, and Arnaud proceeded to give a summary of the Islamic rebellions - major and minor - that had taken place since 1905 and which we have discussed in previous chapters. (3) Arnaud, like Ponty, saw Islam as a social issue, intimately associated with the indigenous African aristocracy. In the case of the Wolof he argued that the original Islamisation had been 'A veritable social revolution ... the opposition of the proleterian caste to the

(1) See Annuaire du Sénégal (1914)

(2) R. Arnaud 'L'Islam et la politique musulmane française en Afrique occidentale' BCAF 1912.

(3) ibid pp. 5-8.

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the grands marabouts who were to become the focus of French Islamic policy during and after the First World War. (1) Arnaud concluded that France should ensure that 'Islam should never be anything other than a religious belief' (2) and that, 'Still half confused with fetishism Islam must not evolve in the sense of Turko-Egyptian nationalism nor in the political traditions of Muslim states, but in the sense of French ideas'. (3)

It would be exaggerating to claim that this series of articles amounted to a major shift in perception from, say, the 1906 book. Clearly it was much influenced by Ponty's thinking on the relationship between Islam, a 'feudal' aristocracy and slavery.

This view was shared by most other contemporaries including Clozel, Delafosse and Marty, and it is with these three that this chapter is concerned.

(1) Ibid pp. 117-19

(2) Ibid p. 144

(3) Ibid pp. 144-49

15  
page order may

aristocracy, a class struggle' but that since then Islam had been assimilated by the aristocracy who had made it the hand-tool of their own political supremacy.(1) Arnaud therefore wholeheartedly endorsed Ponty's commitment to religious neutrality and his 'politique des races'. His main fear about Islam was that:

The Black in becoming a Mahometan has less admiration for us since he knows that knowledge and wealth come from God. He has even a feeling of the superiority which God gives to the believer over the infidel. He believes that our paradise, created by our own effort is of this transitory world whereas he will enjoy his, created by prayer, throughout eternity.(2)

The Sufi brotherhoods were no longer seen as the powerful and well-organised institutions that he had portrayed them as in 1906. Indeed he even suggested that the French exaggerated the xenophobic tendencies of the Sanusiyya. Arnaud specifically rejected the idea of following the Algerian example of providing financial support for the mosques. (3) More importance was attached to

(1) Ibid p.9.

(2) Ibid p.121.

(3) Ibid p.150

## Clozel

Marie-Francois Joseph Clozel was born in 1860 in the Ardeche. (1) In 1881-82 he did his military service with the 1st Regiment of Zouaves (the mixed Franco-Algerian troops) in Algeria where he also worked between 1885 and 1886 as an interpreter in the Native Hygiene Service. In 1892 he was a member of the Maistre mission which explored Central Africa between the Congo and the Niger and the following year he himself led an ethnographic mission in Adamawa and Chad. In 1896 he was posted to the Ivory Coast where he remained for ten years.

He arrived in the Ivory Coast at a time when the military were being forced to withdraw by a coalition of interests between the Treasury Department in Paris and local traders, anxious to increase trade with the prosperous Baule region.(2)

- (1) I am grateful to the archivists in the rue Oudinot for showing me a copy of Clozel's official c.v. on which the following paragraph is based.
- (2) T.C. Weiskel French Colonial Rule and the Baule Peoples: resistance and collaboration Oxford, 1980 ch. 3.

In contrast to the military view the civilian administration under the governorship of Louis Gustave Binger preferred the Muslim Dyula traders to the animist populations of the colony, and this preference was reflected in the writing of Binger and Clozel. In order to rule the colony without soldiers it was decided, as in the Futa Jallon, to make use of existing social structures but, unlike in the Futa, a serious attempt was made to understand the customs and institutions of the indigenous population. Early in 1901 Clozel, now the interim Lt. Governor of the colony, issued a circular to the local administrators requesting ethnographic details, especially details of local customs relating to legal procedures. He included a detailed questionnaire to help the administrators. The circular and its replies were published in a 600 page volume the following year under the title of Les Coutumes Indigènes de la Côte d'Ivoire. (1) It was in his introduction to this volume that Clozel spoke most positively of Islam:

(1) F. Clozel & R. Villamur Les Coutumes indigènes de la Côte d'Ivoire Paris, 1902.

[Europeans] will obtain faster and more satisfying results from the Muslims than from the Pagans because their very religion, their special but undeniable civilisation makes them less distant than the fetishists and more able to understand what it is that we require of them ... Binger, in the course of his great journey in the Niger Bend seems also to have experienced on his arrival in Kong the same feeling of relief and well-being that I myself felt when, as part of the Maistre mission, we arrived in Muslim Adamaoua after eleven months of travel amongst pagan peoples. (1)

Clozel reserved especially warm words for the Dyula for, as traders, 'They consider as the greatest of goods peace and the security of the roads ... and so they willingly accept the foreign authority which assures them these advantages'. (2) He concluded with a plea for a less prejudiced view of African society based on deeper understanding which would permit good and efficient government. (3) Pride of place amongst the ethnographic studies went to Delafosse's work on the Baule. It has recently been argued that the quality of this work led to 'a premature sophistication' of French understanding of the Baule:

(1) Ibid p.41

(2) Ibid p.46

(3) Ibid pp. 68-72

'Once [administrators] had read Delafosse's writings on Baule history and customs and memorised a few key words from his published vocabulary lists they felt sufficiently introduced to the Baule to handle administrative affairs with confidence'. (1) The author of these comments goes on to show how in the context of a rapidly-changing economic system (Baule prosperity was based on the slave trade with Samori and on the rubber and palm oil booms all of which suffered greatly in the 1900s) this confidence was misplaced. More interesting for our purposes is the fact that such studies changed people's perception of the 'primitiveness' of animist cultures. Clozel himself was the most obvious case of such a change, to the extent that one may almost speak of his 'discovery' of animism as a coherent and well-structured system of beliefs and institutions. Certainly by the time that he moved on to take charge of Haut Sénégal et Niger in 1908 he had acquired great respect for traditional African religion and, at the same time, had lost his early admiration for Islam.

(1) Weiskel Baule p. 152n.

The religious make-up of Haut Sénégal et Niger was more balanced than that of the Ivory Coast. The Muslim Tukolor and Moors lived alongside (though not always peacefully) the animist Bambara and, further south, Mossi whose preservation from Islam was to become one of the main concerns of French policy.

In Haut Sénégal et Niger Clozel again emphasised the role of the Dyula traders as the most effective agents of Islamisation but he now saw their role in a less positive light describing the trader as 'a sort of religious travelling rep who earns his way to heaven by paying for it handsomely on earth'. The suppression of the slave trade had, he said, destroyed the basis of their economic wealth and consequently they were anxious to take their revenge on the French. (1) But above all he was struck by the influence of ancestral beliefs on African Islam:

- (1) ANS 15 G 103 Clozel 'Note sur l'état social des indigènes et sur la situation présente de l'islam au Soudan français' 1908. It is interesting to contrast Clozel's attitudes to slavery in the French Sudan with his earlier more indulgent view of the same institution in the animist Ivory Coast where he was above all concerned to maintain good relations with the (slave-owning) Baule chiefs. See Weiskel Baule p. 151.

The fetishist convert in uttering the ritual formula does not acquire the mentality of the Arab or Berber. His psychic constitution is in no way upset by this fact. The survival of local superstitions, belief in spirits and in an order of ideas, customs and traditions which are often contrary to the rules of the Koran show that the man has made a gesture only, that he has given up nothing of his personality. Sudanic Islam seems to be profoundly stained with fetishism. It is a mixed religion, the product of two different original beliefs. (1)

One of the most striking aspects of Clozel's character was his bookishness. There is no doubt that he was a man of great learning and of great commitment to learning. He appears to have had little time for the military with whom he clashed in both the Ivory Coast and the Soudan.(2) Typical of his intellectual approach was a letter to Ponty in October 1909 in which he reported that: 'Islam is losing ground amongst the arable farmers but is expanding slightly amongst the pastoralists.' This fitted in well with Renan's theory on the origins of monotheism amongst Semitic peoples which he summarised thus:

(1) ANS 15 G 103 Clozel 'Note sur l'état social ... '

(2) See IF Fds Terrier Clozel to Terrier 22.4.1911 for Clozel's criticism of the military. See also Weiskel Baule pp. 152-56.

The nomad, constantly aware of the immensity of his surroundings, is naturally carried towards contemplation and meditation which give birth in his uncultured spirit ... to the idea of a divine power, the unique dispenser of laws ... and sovereign mistress of human destinies ... The arable farmer, constantly bent over the nourishing soil whose inexhaustable fecundity ... has for infinite generations assured him the good fortune of being able to live without fatiguenor constraint of any kind, naturally envisages his future destiny in a comfortable and agreeable light entirely lacking in metaphysical speculation. His present divinity and faith are contained in this natural world which feeds him, which supplies all his needs and whose magnificence and mysterious power ... are sufficient for his spiritual aspirations.

Slavery, he went on to argue, in freeing a Negro from the obligation of manual labour on the soil encouraged Islam through allowing more time for contemplation of the eternal and universal verities of life. Thus Clozel arrived at the formula: 'Islam has always prospered and continues to prosper in countries ravaged by slavery and in towns inhabited by non-farming elements of the black population'. (1) Whereas the initial argument about the relationship of monotheism to the type of life-style commands respect and bears obvious similarities to more recent theories of conversion, and although

(1) ANS 15 G 103 Clozel to Gov.-Gen. AOF 1.10.1909.

there was a close relationship between Islam and slavery, the attempt to relate these facts to hard and fast rules about slavery and Islam appears contrived. As we have seen the belief in an intimate and almost exclusive link between Islam and slavery was one of the cornerstones of French Islamic policy at this time.

Clozel did make a serious effort to document the precise state of Islam in his colony. In August 1911 he issued a circular to the local administrators asking them each to make an annual report on the Islamic situation in their cercle. (1) The circular contained a long preamble in which Clozel outlined his belief of how the French conquest had altered the religious balance in the colony:

Fetishist society, deprived of its chiefs and no longer able to exclude the Muslim element from its bosom has been without defence against ... the marabouts and Dioulas who, using sweetness and persuasion and often presenting themselves as our auxiliaries, have ... gradually obtained results which have been as successful as those of the savage conquering prophets.

(1) ANS 15 G 103 'circulaire au sujet de la politique musulmane dans le Haut Sénégal & Niger' 12.8.1911.

In contemporary West African society there was, he suggested, a new solidarity between the Muslim Fulbe, Tukolor and Soninke:

Thus it is certain that not only rivalries between Muslims of all nationalities will die down but that also a Muslim nationality that transcends all ethnic differences will one day constitute itself. The religious ideal will cement all the diverse groups which in the past were separate. One can thus state that we are witnessing on the one hand the breakdown of fetishist society and on the other the concentration of Muslim forces which are profiting from the social transformation resulting from the French conquest.

This conquest had been made easy by the very divisions along ethnic and religious lines which were now in danger of disappearing. 'We have, therefore, he wrote, a primordial interest ourselves in maintaining these divisions, the religious ones at least, and in opposing the invasive Islam with a strong centralised and self-conscious fetishism. This concept is ... the pivot of the native policy of our colony.' Clozel then proceeded to a distinction between Muslims and Animists which was to be heard frequently over the next few years:

Everywhere the fetishists appear to us as submitted, devoted and open without any malicious thoughts about the fertile influences of our civilisation. One should note that these excellent dispositions have been fortified by the liberation of captives from which animists have greatly profited. Islam, by contrast, shows itself to be unjustifiably reserved ... and if we have sometimes found amongst its votaries loyal and convinced partisans, how many on the other hand have borne a sneaking grudge against us, considering us as infidels who must be suffered until they can get their revenge?

In order to prevent the breakdown of animist society Clozel reminded his local administrators of the importance of using local customary law in preference to Muslim law:

You will be aware of how much our subjects of non-Muslim status (de statut coutumier) are attached to their ancestral traditions. Having studied them, you also know how logical, just and respectable these traditions are. ... These customs are the corner stones of fetishism and it is around them that we should group the scattered elements of this society which is in danger of falling apart.

However, the task did not end there: 'At the same time as we build up the defences of fetishism against the Muslim contamination we should ensure that we can follow, day by day, the developments of Islam'. So in view of recent events in the

Futa Jallon Clozel proposed to create 'a Muslim police force' which would be able to force local chiefs to declare the names of all the marabouts, imams and karamokos resident in his area and which, through a network of informants, would be able to spy on the activities of the Muslim leaders.(1)

The following year Clozel received a flood of reports in response to the circular. Most of the reports contained little more than repetitions of ethnic and religious stereotypes, padded out with tables and statistics of doubtful value. Others were more interesting. In the cercle of Ségou the commandant claimed to have made extensive tours in the bush and to have held many 'palavers' with local chiefs whom he exhorted to remain faithful to their traditional customs, providing that these were not contrary to civilisation. One of his local agents was proving invaluable, he said, because as he could write in Arabic he was able to write down conversations before he forgot them - an interesting comment on the general standard of agents, perhaps.

(1) Ibid (emphasis added)

In Nioro, however, despite the efforts of the local administration it was reported that, 'fetishism is unfortunately disappearing, its followers lost in the great Islamic family'. (1)

Clozel's most comprehensive statement on Islam and what French policies towards it should be is contained in his 'Lettre de Korbous' published in 1913 and which Delafosse later described as 'perhaps the best summary of Muslim policy ever made'. (2) Clozel repeated the arguments about the need to protect animism from Islam whose followers in any case, he claimed, accounted for a mere fifth of the total of the Soudan. He did not deny that conversion to Islam represented 'a real progress' for animists but he said that, 'Once this first step has been taken the people become less willing to take the second step'. (3) However, the originality of the account lay in his attempt to define Islam by ethnic group, and most of his article was taken up with a consideration of the different ethnic types of Islam: the Wolof community

(1) Replies are filed in ANS 15 G 103.

(2) F. Clozel 'Lettre de Korbous: politique musulmane au Soudan. Pacification du Sahara français' BCAF 1913 pp. 60-2; 106-9; 149-52; 182-85. Delafosse writing in BCAF 1918 p. 81.

(3) Clozel 'Korbous' p. 61.

in the Soudan was proud and religious and a potential threat, the Soninke and the Fulbe, despite their fanaticism could easily be bought off. Education would rid the Songhay and the Moors of their fanaticism, and for the warlike Tuareg Clozel believed that the best hope of winning their allegiance was to recruit them into the French army. (1) Clozel's work clearly bore the stamp of an ethnologist. It was also an approach which had much in common with later British attempts to adopt a 'tribal' policy for its administration. (2) It was, of course, also in keeping with the underlying principles of Ponty's politique des races.

As something of an intellectual it is not surprising that Clozel took a keen interest in education. Indeed, it was he who was chosen to undertake the mission to Algeria in 1906 to study the working of the medersas. Although he had then reported in favour of applying the medersa system south of the Sahara, within a few years he had become much more

(1) Ibid pp. 106-9, 149-52.

(2) See, for example, Iliffe Tanganyika ch.10 'The creation of tribes under Sir D. Cameron, 1925-31'. Clozel was also an admirer of British policy in West Africa, see Weiskel Baule 15ln.

sceptical about their value in black African society. He was worried that they might give new life to a religion which he hoped had lost much of its earlier vitality. He now argued that all the French should seek to do was to 'channel' Islamic belief. He was accordingly in favour of creating a medersa in Timbuktu which, with a curriculum that allotted a large place for French, would, he hoped, help to win over the Songhay population. (1) He stressed, however, that the medersa should not try to emulate the Algerian model. When Mariani, inspecting the new medersa, argued that not enough attention was being given to training Muslims for administrative functions Clozel was incensed:

I protest against this tendency,' he wrote to the Governor-General, 'which is all too common amongst our administrators raised in Algeria, of assimilating the races and institutions of the Soudan to those which they have got to know in our great colony in North Africa. There is absolutely no a priori reason for such a comparison. We should simply try and give our Nigerian population the institutions which suit them without worrying ourselves about those that exist in Algeria or Tunisia. If I have not chosen to make the Tombouctou medersa into a nursery for administrators it is because I believe that in the Soudan, unlike in Algeria, we are not under the obligation to create administrative openings for an entirely Muslim population ... I believe we have done enough for Islam - perhaps too much - in creating the medersa

(1) ANS J 94 Clozel to Gov.-Gen. AOF 14.10.1910.

at Djenné and that it would be both pointless and dangerous to open a similar institution in Tombouctou. My aim, uniquely political, has been to control indirectly the action of the native teachers of Tombouctou and to create a place for French influence in the intellectual education of the young pupils ... In a word my concern was political and not pedagogical.

Mariani defended himself by denying (rightly) that Islam was declining and arguing that the medersa à l'algérienne was a tried and tested system. (1) However, Mariani's star was waning and in 1913 he was replaced by a new Inspector of Education, Georges Hardy.

### Delafosse

Maurice Delafosse, whose career spans most of this thesis, was born in 1870 in a small town in the middle of France. (2) It is thought that at the age of eighteen he entered a seminary but,

- (1) ANS J 94 Mariani 'Rapport ... sur la medersa de Tombouctou' March 1911; Clozel to Gov.-Gen. AOF 14.5.1911; Mariani to Gov-Gen. AOF 10.11.1911.
- (2) The best account of Delafosse's career is his daughter's biography: L. Delafosse Maurice Delafosse, le berrichon conquis par l'Afrique Paris, 1976. Except where otherwise indicated biographical detail is taken from this source.

realising that he had no vocation, he left after nine months in order to study medicine. As a student in Paris he was introduced into colonial circles and began to think about a teaching career in Senegal. To this end he started to attend Arabic lessons with Octave Houdas, one of the most respected of French orientalist and whose daughter Delafosse was later to marry. As his Arabic interests increasingly dominated his medical studies Delafosse came into contact with the work of Cardinal Lavigerie, who had recently founded a quasi-monastic anti-slavery society - L'Institut des Freres Armés du Sahara - which was intended to complement the work of French troops in the Sahara. (1) The Institut was to be based in one of the oases on the caravan trade routes and, using arms if necessary, would free any slaves carried by caravans

- (1) See Renault Lavigerie, l'esclavage et l'islam pp. 388-409. The order was a controversial one, chiefly because the brothers carried arms. Cambon thought they should be confined to areas where France was already firmly in control. The Radical press was hostile: for example, the Lyons Republicain wrote 'N'écoutons pas trop m. Lavigerie et ne nous brouillons pas trop avec Allah' (cited in Renault op cit p. 398)

stopping in the oasis. Delafosse was impressed by the idea and was one of the first volunteers when he joined up in the winter of 1890-91. However, the Institut was a disappointment for him: the romantic vision of freeing slaves in far-flung oases was unfulfilled as the young volunteers were simply used, it seems, as gardeners and domestics for the full-time missionaries. Within a year Delafosse had left the Institut and started his military service as a zouave in Biskra. His military career, however, was brought to a premature end through illness.

In September 1892 he returned to his studies at the Ecole des Langues Orientales where he specialised in Hausa, still with a view to teaching in Senegal. However, in 1894 Binger, whom he had got to know in Paris, offered him a post as a Native Affairs Officer in the newly-created colony of the Ivory Coast. It was in the Ivory Coast that Delafosse struck up his partnership with Clozel and where he conducted his first serious ethnological research. It is interesting and important to note the link between the anti-slavery movement and ethnology.

Charles Monteil, another of the early group of ethnologists who worked alongside Clozel and Delafosse in the Ivory Coast and the Soudan, cites an article published in 1913 in L'Afrique libre, a French anti-slavery journal, in which the relationship is clearly spelt out: 'As long as the natives do not enjoy tutelary institutions they will not be truly free, and their fate will not improve noticeably. But such institutions do not improvise themselves. We first have to know the mores, customs and traditions of the population.' (1) The link between the anti-slavery movement and ethnology is personified in Delafosse, a member of the French Anti-Slavery Committee and one of the most respected and influential of the early ethnologists.

After Clozel left the Ivory Coast Delafosse quarrelled with the new Governor, Angoulvant, who supported the military in their wish to deal with unrest amongst the Baule by force of arms. Delafosse left the colony to join Clozel in the Soudan. He did not stay long there and by the end of 1908 he was back in Paris where he was given charge of a course at the Ecole Coloniale on

(1) C. Monteil Les Khassonké. Monographie d'une peuplade du Soudan français Paris, 1915 p.8.

'African Languages and Culture' - a course which he taught until the war. Shortly before his return to France Delafosse lost his faith. He wrote to his wife, 'I am not a hypocrite and I would hate to pretend to practise a religion in whose divine character my reason forbids me to believe'. (1) In the next two years he published three short articles on the subject of Islam in which his own personal religious neutrality and a certain disillusion with the French colonial effort are apparent. In the first and most interesting of the articles he argued that Islam was a better influence on Black Africa than either Christianity or 'Europeanisation' and that France was no more threatened by Muslims than by animists as both were equally unenthusiastic about the French presence. (2) He argued that Islam in West Africa was almost always the product of a mixture between traditional religions and orthodox Islam and that the Sufi turuq were much less powerful and less organised in West Africa than in the Maghreb. (3)

- (1) Delafosse letter 23.5.1909, cited in Delafosse Berrichon p.270.
- (2) M. Delafosse 'L'Etat actuel de l'islam dans l'AOF' RMM xi 1910 pp. 32-54.
- (3) M. Delafosse 'Le Clergé musulman de l'Afrique occidentale' RMM xi 1910 pp. 177-206; 'Les Confréries musulmanes et le maraboutisme dans les pays du Sénégal et du Niger' RCBCAF (4) 1911 pp. 81-90.

However, Delafosse's principal publication whilst he was in France was his three volume account of the country, people, languages, history and civilisation of the colony of Haut-Sénégal et Niger. (1) The work was proposed by Clozel who had laid the foundations with a circular in January 1909 (reprinted in the introduction to the work) outlining to his administrators a proposed study for his favourite subject of indigenous customary law. Delafosse based his work on personal observation, conversation and correspondence with like-minded administrators - notably Gaden (who devoted his life's work to a study of the Fulbe) and Monteil - and a truly impressive amount of reading as the nine page bibliography at the end of volume three testifies. The originality of the work lay in the fact that it should have been written at all for the idea that it was actually possible to fill three volumes on the culture and history of such an area was in the early twentieth century a revolutionary one. The manifesto of the book is contained in the last section on 'Civilisation':

(1) M. Delafosse Haut-Sénégal & Niger (3 vols) Paris, 1912.

If by 'civilisation' one understands the state of social, moral and material culture attained by the great nations of Europe and America, it is certain that one is forced to consider the natives of the Soudan as not being members of what is commonly called 'the civilised world'. But if one gives to the word 'civilisation' its true meaning, that is if one understands by this word the present state of culture of any society or nation, if, in other words, one speaks not of 'the civilisation' but of 'civilisations' ... one is forced to admit that although they have a social state that is very different from ours, the inhabitants of the Soudan nonetheless have themselves civilisations which are worth the trouble of studying and describing. They are constructed by a group of customs which although only transmitted by tradition have an effect on the life of the people as considerable as our customs augmented by our laws have on our life.

Although these customs varied in detail from village to village nonetheless said Delafosse, 'the guiding principles of custom law are the same'. (1)

Delafosse applied the same argument to religion as he attempted to show that for all the local variations, 'animism' constituted a coherent religion in its own right and one which was practised throughout Africa:

(1) Ibid (vol. III) pp. 1-2

In reality the non-Muslim blacks have a true religion, which is in general quite complicated, presenting itself in many different aspects despite a common source in which fetishism proper, that is to say the confidence accorded to amulets, forms only one superficial part without actually forming part of the religious belief. (1)

Most of the natives of West Africa, probably even all of them, believe in the existence of a unique God, God the creator, which they are not far from considering as a pure spirit, to which in any case they never give an anthropomorphic character but which they often confuse ... with the sky. (2)

The Black believes that in all natural phenomena and in all living beings there exists a spiritual power, a dynamic spirit ... which can exist by itself. From this is reached the religion of the spirits, personifying the natural forces, and that of the spirits of the dead, spirits that have been liberated by the death of their temporary human receptacle. To each of these genii or spirits the Black accords both reason and passion. (3)

The strength and universality of this system of animist belief together with the strength of local social systems embodied in the local civilisations were such, Delafosse argued, that pure Islamic beliefs and institutions were rare in West Africa:

(1) Ibid p. 161

(2) Ibid p.163

(3) Ibid p.165

Whatever may be the number of our Soudanese subjects converted to Islam and practising the religion of Mohammed ... it is very rare that the native Muslims have adopted Coranic law, at least in its entirety. In Islamism proper, religion and law hold together, both deriving either from the Coran or from the hadith. But when people other than Arabs convert to the Muslim religion, be they in Asia, Europe or in Africa, they by no means always adopt the Muslim code which in many cases clashes with secular customs and a social or economic state at odds with the proscriptions of Coranic law. ... As a result the official Muslim code ... is of very restricted use and in order to apply it with discernment it is necessary to know the principles of native customary law with which the spirit of the Muslim regions of this colony are strongly impregnated. (1)

In his final section on Islam Delafosse repeated the essential arguments contained in his earlier articles. He did not see that there was any particular reason to be either an Islamophile or an Islamophobe. Although Islam had put an end to some of the worst excesses of some animist societies and was a good barrier against alcoholism it was not, he suggested, a greatly superior social or political influence than was animism. In his final paragraph he summed up his arguments and briefly stated his own vision of the future.

(1) Ibid pp. 2-3

In my opinion Islam in the Soudan should be regarded as neither good nor evil ... I would say that in our political interests it is sometimes preferable, especially at the beginning of an occupation of a country to deal with Muslims rather than with animists, and that in any case the Islamisation of our subjects would be less serious than their Christianisation. But I would add that from a purely objective point of view and considering only the interest and future of the native races, even though from this angle too Islamisation is preferable to Christianisation, the best solution would be for the Soudanese population to limit themselves to perfecting the local religions. And, perhaps, in the end that would be the best solution for everybody. (1)

This benevolently paternalist and rather Voltairean vision of everybody cultivating their own religions was to be dealt a severe blow by the war in which Delafosse was to fall foul, both of the authorities in Paris, who were for the first time unashamedly and unequivocally decided upon extracting from West Africa every available resource both human and material, and of a Senegalese Christian and Europeanised elite equally anxious to use the war as a lever on the French with which to attain better recognition and representation not as Senegalese, still less as Wolofs or Lebus, but as Frenchmen.

(1) Ibid pp. 214-15

However, the intellectual strength of the arguments contained in Haut-Sénégal et Niger was sufficient to ensure that it survived the vicissitudes of war. Written at a time of personal spiritual crisis and disillusion with the colonial establishment (1) it was a remarkable book which implicitly raised many of the doubts about the 'civilising mission' that were later to be raised explicitly (by Delafosse amongst others). In the immediate context in which it is discussed here its importance lies in the added weight it gave to the view that non-Muslim societies deserved greater respect than they often received and that Muslim societies themselves owed as much, if not more, to pre-Islamic custom than to either the Qur'an or to the hadith.

(1) Delafosse Berrichon ch.7.

Marty

Paul Marty was born in 1882 in Boufarik, a small village outside Algiers. (1) At the age of nineteen he volunteered for a four year commission in the zouaves. He soon started training as an interpreter and was posted to the Native Affairs Bureau in Tunis where he remained until 1907. The following year he was sent to Casablanca which had recently been occupied by the French and from 1909 to 1911 he was on a detachment to the Foreign Ministry to help and advise on Moroccan issues. In September 1912 he was detached to the Colonial Ministry and was sent to Dakar to advise the Governor-General on Muslim affairs. He remained in AOF until 1921 during which time he was promoted to officier interprète 1ere classe and made a chevalier of the Legion of Honour. After AOF he returned to Morocco where he was made Director of the Muslim College of Fez (1922-5) before joining the Native Affairs Department in Rabat

(1) Marty's papers are still subject to restrictions, but I am grateful to the archivist of the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre in the Chateau de Vincennes for allowing me to see a copy of Marty's official c.v.

of which he became the head in 1930. He was actively involved in the controversial Berber dâhir. (1) In 1935 he was posted to Tunisia where he joined the High Command of the Tunisian troops. Three years later he died in the military hospital in Tunis. For someone whose origins appeared to have been humble and whose schooling was modest his career was an impressive one. It was above all his Dakar posting which established his reputation.

It is perhaps surprising that such an impressive military career has not been more widely celebrated, and although no-one who has worked on Islam in West Africa has failed to acknowledge their debt to the pioneering work of Marty, the man himself appears anonymous. Little is known of his personal character beyond the official description on his military record card of a man 1.80 metres tall, with grey eyes, large nose and mouth and a high forehead.

(1) For background to dâhir see Ageron Politiques coloniales pt. 11.

Around the time that Marty arrived in Dakar, Ponty added the finishing touches to the series of circulars and administrative changes that resulted in a specifically defined Muslim information service with Marty at its head. In January 1913 he reminded the local administrators of the order given in December 1911 to send files on marabouts to Dakar.

It is impossible, he wrote, to exercise a real surveillance of Islam, to follow its development and, if necessary, to take suitable preventive action, if one does not have an effectively organised information service. More than in other Muslim countries, Islam in West Africa takes on the form of anthropolatry. Superficially it is still the religion of Allah but above all it is the cult of maraboutism. Consequently ... the political surveillance of Islam primarily involves the surveillance of Muslim personalities. These people are not numerous and are very well known. It is easy, but delicate, to get information on their family, ethnic and religious origins. (1)

In a circular on 'Native Policy' in April Ponty restated the 'liberal principles' which dominated his politique des races and emphasised that in his view 'the surest factor of stability amongst the

(1) ANS 19 G 1 Gov-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Govs. Sen. Guinea, HSN etc. 15.1.1913.

Blacks lies in a combination of their material progress, justice, thoughtful generosity, well-wishing firmness and, to use an expression which I like, of apprivoisement'. (1) In August he reviewed his achievements and summarised his future concerns. The circulars of 26.12.1911 and 15.1.1913 had, he said, established the need for an index of Muslim personalities but he added:

Today a larger and more complicated task is necessary. It is our duty to study the Muslim society of our colonies in West Africa in the minutest detail. It is a study which demands almost a scientific method. It presupposes special studies, a previous documentation and a serious knowledge of the sociological laws of Islam which the great Orientalists of France and of Europe have now virtually succeeded in establishing ... [The study] will seem very attractive to many because of the scientific interest attached to it. But above all it is interesting for political and administrative reasons. It is almost impossible to administer an Islamic people wisely, if one does not understand its religious faith, its judicial system and its social organisation which are all intimately connected and are strongly influenced by the Qoran and the prophetic tradition. It is this understanding of native society which, alone, will enable a peaceful and profound action on the minds of the people. It is, therefore, in this study ... that we will find the surest bases and the most suitable directions for our Muslim policy.

(1) ANS 17 G 38 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Govs Sen, Guinea, HSN etc. April 1913.

Ponty also included a specimen copy of a questionnaire to aid local administrators, guiding them on what sort of information was required through 'very discreet questioning'. (1) From these circulars we should emphasise three main themes. The first is the importance that was attached to acquiring more knowledge of Islam, an indication both of the shortcomings of Arnaud's earlier contribution and of the increasing awareness of the extent to which the 'scientist' could contribute to the work of the 'practical man'. The second theme is the emphasis placed on the need to achieve security through means other than force, a message which had long been dear to ministerial accountants in Paris and whose importance had been underlined by the Goumba affair. Thirdly they show how the administration had arrived at the conclusion that they should direct their policy at individuals rather than the invisible forces of society, preparing the way for what has been described as 'the co-option of the Saints'. (2)

(1) ANS 19 G 1 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Govs. Sen., Guinea, HSN etc. 1.8.1913.

(2) D. Cruise O'Brien Saints and Politicians ch. 3. 'Chiefs, Saints and Bureaucrats' p.90.

In September 1913 the departments of the federal administration were reorganised by administrative decree and, for the first time, the existence of a Service des Affaires Musulmanes was officially and explicitly recognised. Its duties included the centralisation of information on Islam, the translation of Arabic documents and the study of Islamic developments. Paul Marty was, of course, in charge. (1) Although Marty's obligations were varied - soon after his arrival he was consulted on Muslim burial rites by the head doctor of the colonial hospital in Dakar who was anxious to ensure that Muslim soldiers who had failed to survive his treatment were at least buried properly (2) - there were in 1913 three issues on which he had to report as soon as possible. The issues were those of education, the Mauritanian conquest and the Mourides.

(1) Arrêté 1.9.1913 JOAOF (1913) p. 894.

(2) ANS 19 G 2 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Général Commt. supérieur 23.3.1913; Médecin principal, Garnier to Marty 18.10.1913.

## Education

Education was a major administrative preoccupation, and Marty was expected to address himself immediately to the question of what type of education was best suited for Muslims. In September he wrote to the appropriate administrations in Algeria and Tunisia for information on the systems adopted in those two countries (1) but in his report to Ponty in November it was clear that he did not believe the North African model was suitable for Senegal. He introduced his report with an account of the marabouts who taught in the Qur'anic schools of which there were, according to official figures 1,385 in Senegal at the end of 1912. Although he admitted that some marabouts taught out of piety he argued that their main objective was to recruit children to work in their fields, or, if they were urban traders, to open a school as proof of their religious zeal and thus attract favourable publicity using the schools, said Marty as 'a sort of religious advertisement'. He regretted that only a very few

(1) ANS J 85 Marty to Directeurs de l'Enseignement musulman, Algeria & Tunisia 2.9.1913.

scholarly marabouts discussed non-Islamic religious texts because 'this religious eclecticism could bring about profound transformations in Black Islam'. The general level of scholarship was very poor and there were serious language problems. Blacks, he claimed could only pronounce 15 of the 38 letters of the Arabic alphabet with the result that, 'If truly as the purists maintain Allah can only understand Arabic - and well pronounced Arabic at that - the prayers of our Senegalese marabouts certainly do not rise up to his throne'. The pupils having finished their education at the age of thirteen then go on to learn a trade and to forget most of what they had learned. For Marty this was a point in their favour: 'The Coranic schools, he wrote, do not create any déclassés'. He then went on to criticise past French policy to the schools, reserving particularly harsh words for the decrees of 1903 and 1906 which he castigated as,

too severe ... Rules which produce the opposite of the desired effect ... which upend all customs, traditions and wishes of the natives. They seem to hinder the natives arbitrarily without any advantage to our administration. They have never been used and everywhere administrators have turned a blind eye ... and left things as they were.

He listed all the proposals suggested by Cor and Risson for the reform of the Qur'anic schools, explaining why for the most part the reforms were unworkable. There was, he said, a need to respect tradition and so,

To forbid children to work for their marabout amounts to the same as wanting to abolish the school altogether. As for the begging of the children, it is in general discreet, it amuses the local people, doesn't annoy anyone and benefits the children as much as the marabout and constitutes a rather interesting aspect of local civilisation.

The only restriction with which Marty was in favour was to deny Qur'anic schools access to animist regions. Marty argued that although the French should make certain improvements in the standard of education and that they should attempt to by-pass the use of Arabic by transcribing native languages into the latin alphabet they should not attempt to do much else besides:

The Coranic school such as it functions is riddled with faults of all kinds, no-one denies it. It is a purely religious and purely mechanical education which has no effect on the intellectual development of the time. The slow disappearance of local customs and its traditional inflexibility results in our Senegalese becoming islamicised

using the same school slate as was used in the first century of the Hegire at a time when the Orient itself, the cradle of Islam, is modernising. But one must acknowledge that this Coranic education system does not cause any political danger ... and has no bad repercussion on public tranquility. It would, therefore, be impolitic to upset this institution which satisfies those who use it or to remedy its unfortunate social consequences by opposing it with French schools, burdened with all sorts of privileges, which restrict the freedom of the Coranic school. (1)

The report was interesting on several counts. It showed how quickly Marty adapted to his new environment, and whilst one may object to his insistence on the racial reasons for the intellectual inferiority - as he saw it - of the Blacks as opposed to the Arabs one should also applaud his willingness to recognise Qur'anic schools as an integral part of Senegalese society which met an identifiable need of the local people. The begging of talibés continues even to this day to be a very contentious issue in Senegal, and objections to the system are understandable, but Marty was correct to set it in its wider social

(1) ANS J 86 Marty 'Rapport à M. le Gov.-Gen. sur les écoles coraniques du Sénégal' 20.11.1915.

context, emphasising that the custom was part of a way of life, 'a rather interesting aspect of local civilisation'. Such an attitude was a radical one - and undoubtedly raised a few eyebrows at that time. (1)

In the same year the Djenné medersa was closed down. In his annual report the local commandant stated that initial hopes that the medersa would purify Islam had failed:

In our medersa it is ... ignorance that we cultivate ... In the future we shall do without the help of the marabouts and we shall work not actually against them but at least independently of them. The creation of the medersa seemed to bestow Islam with official recognition and protection. Religion will now be a private affair. It will rest in the field of conscience. Until the day comes when we can tame it, Islam will be a form of opposition to our domination. (2)

Whilst Marty would never have suggested that France should actually do without the help of the marabouts he did agree that the Djenné medersa had been a failure. In 1917 he reflected that,

- (1) See, for example, comments of Administrateur du Sine Saloum to Marty 21.6.1915 in ANS 13 G 67.
- (2) ANS 15 G 103 'Rapport sur la politique musulmane suivie par le cercle de Djenné pendant l'année 1913'

It is an accepted fact that medersas are an error in Black Africa. The veneer of Islam and Arabic that cover this faith ... is extremely superficial. Except for a few scholars whose intellectual achievements are quite impressive total ignorance dominates everywhere. Most of the teachers don't even know the elementary catechism to say the simple prayers correctly. The result is perhaps deplorable from an Islamic point of view but it is excellent from the French point of view. Perfectly ignorant, the natives have never been able to understand the reason for the struggle of Islam against Christianity ... The purely Islamic danger has never been an issue in the Soudan amongst the Blacks ... It has required the solidly thick skulls of our young Blacks to resist such an education. (1)

The smugly patronising tone of these comments was very typical of European writing on black Africa. 'Perfect ignorance' and 'solidly thick skulls' conjure up a host of European cliches about Africa. They also defined the limits of colonial enterprise, and it is within this framework that we must understand Marty, a man of great talent but nonetheless a soldier and a scholar of his time. It is interesting to note his willingness to preserve 'the perfect ignorance of the natives' which he

(1) ANS J.94 'La Medersa de Djenne' 16.6.1917.

regarded as an asset rather than a liability to the French. Such a view contrasts with the philosophy behind the medersas when they were introduced as a means, it was hoped, of educating the Muslim elite and of inculcating them with a better understanding of the modern world.

### Mauritania

The second question to which Marty addressed himself was that of Mauritania. It will be recalled that after the death of Coppolani official backing was given to occupy the region of Adrar. However, even after this was achieved under General Gouraud in 1909 the French were still unable to exercise serious control over their main enemy Cheikh Ma el Ainin and his son el Hiba whose operational base in the Seguiet el Hamra was strategically situated and threatened French positions both in Morocco and in Mauritania. In 1910 Ma el Ainin was said to have claimed a right to the Moroccan throne and in May he visited Marrakesh, but the French prevented him from continuing on to Fez as he had intended. Soon after his return to his zawiya in Tiznit he died at

the age of 79. (1) However, his son el Hiba took up the challenge and just at the time when the French were establishing their Protectorate over Morocco, succeeded in mounting effective resistance against the French. On 10th January 1913 his men ambushed and annihilated almost an entire detachment of the meharists at Liboirat, 175 km. N.W. of Atar. Lt.-Col. Mouret, the Governor of the colony, described it as the most serious trouble ever experienced in Mauritania and argued that only a concerted action from French forces in Morocco and Mauritania would be capable of defeating el Hiba.

Marty, who had been actively involved in the French occupation of Morocco prior to moving to Dakar, laid more stress on a Mauritania-orientated policy. There were, he said, two possible ways of dealing with el Hiba. The first possibility was a military campaign, but this Marty rejected for practical and financial reasons and fears of political objections from Paris and from Spain. The second possibility

- (1) B.G. Martin Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa Cambridge 1976 pp.141-45
- (2) ANSOM AP 1402/20 Mouret 'Rapport politique, 1ere Trimestre 1913'

was to adopt a diplomatic approach using the influence of the elderly and pro-French Cheikh Saad Bu over his young nephew el Hiba. Marty argued that el Hiba would welcome a settlement with the French and proposed conceding him the command of Seguiet el Hamra. Marty realised that Mouret preferred to work with the warrior Emir of Adrar, Ould Deïda, but he stressed that Cheikh Saad Bu was more influential and more amenable than the Emir. He further denied that using Saad Bu in this way would make him too powerful. The Cheikh was an old man with no likely successor and any power he did obtain, argued Marty, would serve the French as a useful balance to the growing prestige of the (admittedly ultra-loyal) Cheikh Sidia. (1)

By December Marty thought the submission of el Hiba was 'imminent' and along with Lyautey in Morocco he argued the need for a coherent French policy towards him. Both Marty and Lyautey agreed on the need to make concessions to el Hiba. However, Marty added that making el Hiba responsible for an area approximately the same as Seguiet el Hamra was only an

(1) ANS 9 G 30 Marty 'Note à m. le Chef de Cabinet sur notre action politique dans les confins Maroco-Mauritaniens, 1913'

interim aim and, in words that could have been lifted straight from Coppolani, he said that, 'The true, the only aim of our present policy, it is perhaps cynical to say so, is to provoke anarchy in order to have peace in our territory'. (1)

### The Mourides

The Mouride question was curiously and indirectly related to the Mauritanian question but, more fundamentally it concerned the much broader issue of French perception of Islam in black Africa. The Mouride tariqa of Ahmadu Bamba is probably the best known of all the west African turuq and it is not the purpose of this thesis to describe in great detail what has already been described and analysed many times over, sometimes more eloquently and pertinently than others, in the scores of books and learned articles devoted to the tariqa of Serigne

(1) ANS 9 G 30 Marty 'Note à m. le Chef de Cabinet sur l'éventualité de la soumission d'El Hiba'

Ahmadu Bamba, the borom of Touba. (1) Nonetheless, it is necessary briefly to trace the main lines of its history.

The French military defeat of the Wolof kingdoms of Kayor, Walo and Sine in the last quarter of the nineteenth century left a vacuum in the political leadership of these states. The most decisive defeat was that of the damel (king) of Kayor, Lat Dior, in 1886. However, even before this defeat the authority of the traditional rulers was being undermined. For, as the Wolof rulers had grown increasingly autocratic allowing their slaves armies to terrorise the countryside, the marabouts had attempted to intervene and to curb the worst excesses of the secular authority. (2) It should be remembered that many of the sub-Saharan societies

(1) P. Marty Les Mourides d'Amadou Bamba, 1913; D.C. O'Brien The Mourides of Senegal Oxford, 1971; Saints and Politicians Cambridge, 1975; C. Coulon Le Marabout et le Prince Paris, 1982 are the best introductions to the subject.

(2) Coulon Marabout et Prince pp.59-60; O'Brien Mourides p.21.

had a specific clerical caste whose function in theory at least was to act as adjudicators in disputes and generally to encourage conciliation.(1) The clerical caste of marabouts was then offered as a balance to the violent instincts of the warrior aristocracy. Abbé Boilat wrote in 1853 that,

[The marabouts] preach to the people and generally counsel peace and conciliation ... The word tiedo is the opposite of the marabout. It means one who is impure, a man with neither faith nor probity ... Living only of theft and pillage, they are made for war ... Without belief of any kind they give themselves up to all vices. (2)

Thus when the power of French arms finally discredited the traditional leadership it was only natural that the marabouts should take their place, even though Wolof society was at this stage a long way from being thoroughly Islamised. It should not be imagined that the marabouts were merely peasant leaders. On the contrary they had close

- (1) C. Stewart 'Southern Saharan scholarship and the Bilad al-Sudan' JAH xvii (1) 1976 pp.73-93
- (2) Abbe Boilat Esquisses sénégalaises (1853) cited in Coulon Marabout et Prince pp.62-63.

connections with the aristocracy for whom the presence of holy men at their courts added to their prestige and, it was hoped, helped to secure their protection. In this respect Ahmadu Bamba's relationship with Lat Dior was crucial. Both he and his father were members of Lat Dior's court and, on the eve of the decisive battle of Dekkile in 1886 Ahmadu Bamba blessed Lat Lior - though it should be stressed that the blessing was designed to bring peace rather than to continue the war. (1)

After the battle Ahmadu Bamba returned to his family village of M'Backe where he began to attract large numbers of talibes (disciples). It was, of course, normal for a marabout to have a number of talibes but in the wake of Lat Dior's defeat there were exceptionally large numbers of leaderless men, mainly from the old slave armies, the tyeddo, who were looking for new leadership. As in the case of Tierno Aliou, the arrival of large numbers of strangers brought Amadu Bamba into conflict with the old authorities of M'Backe and within two years of his return he was forced to leave and settle elsewhere.

(1) Marty Les Mourides pp.4-6; O'Brien The Mourides pp. 19-40

In 1888 he founded a new village, Darou Salem, not far from M'Backe. (1) A year later his name appeared for the first time in the official French correspondence.

In March 1889 the department of Political Affairs wrote to the administrator of Kayor that they were worried by rumours that, 'a marabout called Amadou Bamba' had settled between Baol and Kayor and that he was attracting a large following. The administrator was asked to make discreet enquiries. In April the administrator, Angot, reported that,

In the course of my mission I have made enquiries in several places about the activities of the marabout Amadou Bamba. Everywhere ... I've heard only good about him. He is a pious and tranquil man whose only fault is that he takes on a lot of good-for-nothings as pupil marabouts and if these people aren't watched closely they will gradually cause trouble. (2)

Angot was the first of several Frenchmen who thought that reports of Ahmadu Bamba's fanaticism were much exaggerated but who was nonetheless worried by his

(1) O'Brien Mourides pp.40-41

(2) O. Ba Ahmadou Bamba face aux autorités coloniales (1889-1927) Dakar, 1982 pp.25-26.

popularity amongst those that were considered to be the less desirable elements of society.

It was about this time too that Ahmadu Bamba, who had been initiated into the Qadiriyya, began to receive visions and to develop the specific doctrines which distinguished his teaching from that of other Qadiriyya marabouts. For the rest of his life Bamba continued to produce an impressive quantity of religious poems, the form in which most of his doctrinal work was written. (1) His following continued to increase. Local chiefs, who had become increasingly anxious, found it easy to persuade the French that more direct action was needed to be taken against Bamba who, they claimed, was preaching Holy war against the Europeans. Of all the local chiefs only one, Samba Laobe the chief of Jollof, was not upset by Bamba's influence. In July 1895 M. Leclerc, the administrator of the cercle of St Louis reported that Ahmadu Bamba had held a meeting attended by 700 men, many of whom were former followers of Lat Dior.

(1) F. Dumont La Pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba Dakar/Abidjan, 1975 contains a very comprehensive collection and annotation of Bamba's religious poems.

I do not know, he said, the exact words of his speeches but it is certain, as anybody who knows the prudence of Amadou Bamba will know, that nothing reprehensible was spoken by him. But it is no less certain that in the evening whilst the marabout was talking in his hut ... his talibes circulated from group to group giving instructions for an uprising later in the year. (1)

The following month the same M. Leclerc warned that

All the old followers of the Damel, all the tiedos who lived only through war and pillage and whom the present administration has reduced to poverty have grouped around the Mahdi marabout, the destroyer of the white man ... If Amadou Bamba is cunning and protests his devotion to the French cause, his talibes are less circumspect and openly proclaim him Mahdi in the middle of St Louis. Add to these bands of discontented tiedos, the band of fanatics who always follow these preachers of Holy War and you can judge the size of the movement which could explode at a sign from Amadou Bamba.

Leclerc thought that it was unlikely that Bamba would try anything before the end of the hot season and so he thought that the French had time to prevent unrest by exiling Ahmadu Bamba to Gabon. This was also what the chiefs wanted to see. (2) The director of

(1) ANSOM Sen. & Dep. IV/127 Leclerc to Dir. Affaires politiques 10.7.1895

(2) ANSOM Sen. & Dep. IV/127 Leclerc to Gov. Sen. & Dep. 15.8.1895.

Political Affairs was worried that if the French did not act against Bamba they would be guilty of what Faidherbe, in connection with French attitudes to Mamadu Lamine, had called 'excessive tolerance'. (1) Accordingly in September, despite a lack of concrete evidence, the Conseil Privé exiled Bamba to Gabon. Samba Laobe was replaced as chief of Jollof by Bouna N'Diaye, a very young man but the product of a good 'French' education in the Ecole des Otages in St Louis and of the Alaoui college in Tunis. (2)

Bamba's reputation was enormously enhanced by his period of exile in Gabon (1895-1902) and when after the intervention on his behalf of the Senegalese deputy, Carpot, Ahmadu Bamba returned to Senegal late in 1902 he was greeted by huge crowds, all the more enthusiastic as a result of the widespread belief that Bamba had been released through a miraculous divine intervention. The French authorities, especially M. Allys the administrator

(1) ANSOM Sen. & Dep. Dir. Aff. pol. to Gov. Sen. & Dep. 29.8.1895

(2) O'Brien Mourides p.42; Ba Ahmadou Bamba pp.81-87

of the cercle of Tivaouane, were worried. Allys went to the extent of employing his most trusted secret agent, Omar Niang, to infiltrate Bamba's following by posing as a would-be talibé and he provided 300 francs for Omar to offer to Ahmadu Bamba as the customary present of a talibé to his marabout. (1) In May 1903 Bamba refused to appear before the French Governor in St. Louis. In June he was arrested again and exiled to Souet el Ma in Mauritania, the camp of Cheikh Sidia, whose tolerance and loyalty to the French would, it was hoped rub off on his disciple. In 1907 Bamba was allowed to return to Senegal but he was kept under administrative surveillance in the village of Cheyen in the Jollof region. A secret agent sent a daily report to St. Louis with details of visitors (and their presents) to Bamba's residence. (2)

Despite the fact that in 1910 Bamba issued a fetwa justifying obedience to the French, the authorities remained suspicious. In his instructions to his

(1) Ba Ahmadou Bamba p.101

(2) Ba Ahmadou Bamba pp.134-38; O'Brien Mourides pp.44-45; Coulon Marabout et Prince pp.76-77

interim successor Ponty summed up the basis of French fears about Bamba:

It seems as if it is in our oldest colony of the group that Islam manifests itself in the most mystic form to such a degree that we have to ask ourselves if this deviation which the Mourides have imprinted on the great and rigid traditions of the true faith will not finally create a sort of politico-religious association in which religious interests will merely be a pretext for exploiting the ignorant masses. That the followers of the sect rely entirely on their cheikh for the direction of their earthly life and for guarantees of their future one, it matters little to us. But we cannot turn our eyes from the repercussion of a form of propaganda which concerns equally our political, administrative and social actions. It is undeniable that for the Mouride our authority scarcely exists and that in matters concerning his disciples it is often the Cheikh who intervenes and decides for them. Finally ... one cannot disguise the fact that if the sect develops it will greatly disturb the economic life of Senegal. Under the cover of religion a part of the public fortune is removed from the colony each year. (1)

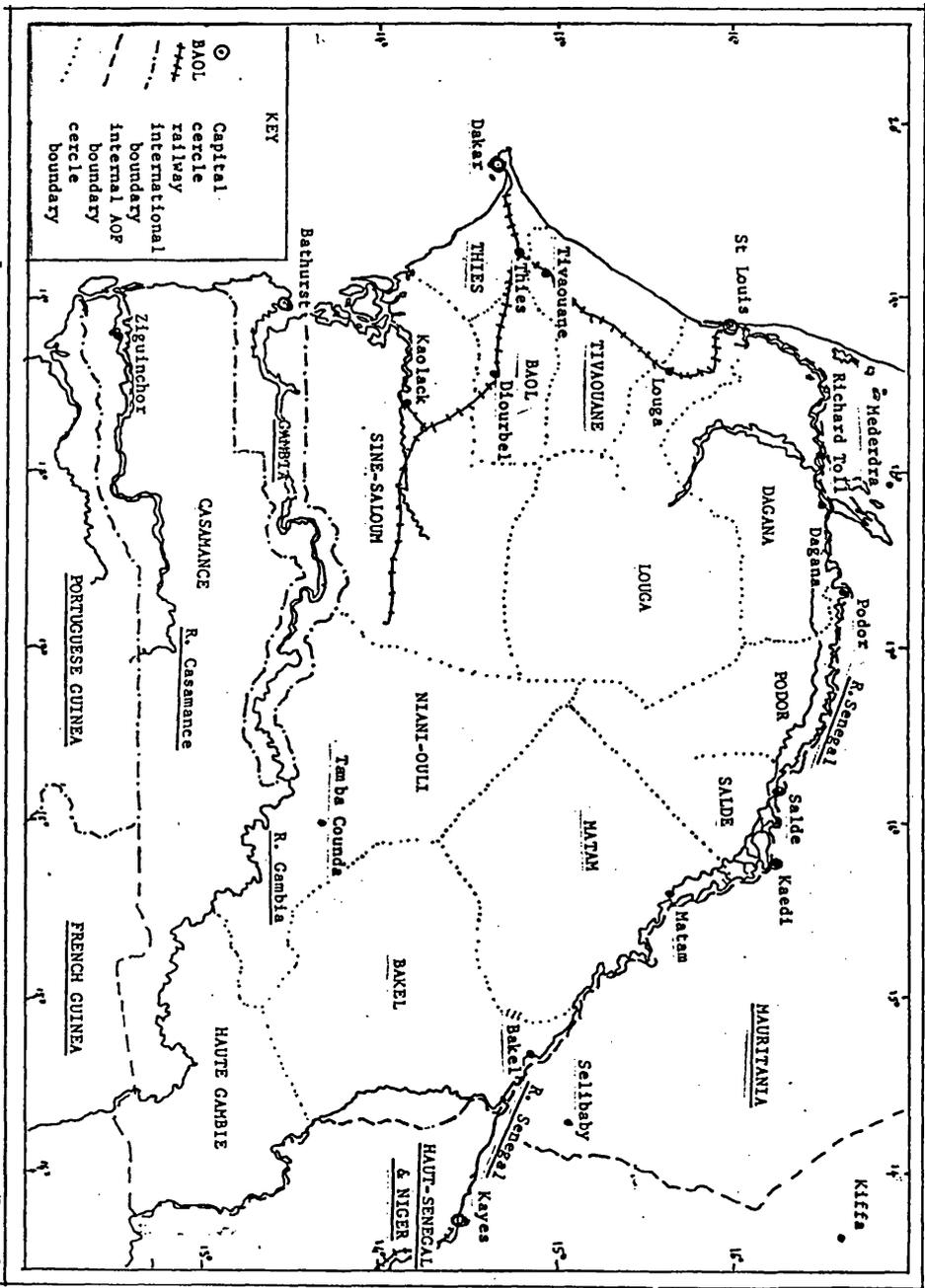
Apart from the role played by the chiefs in bringing Ahmadu Bamba to the attention of the authorities and lobbying for his banishment, French action against Bamba was motivated by two main concerns. One was political and concerned the fear that, in the words

(1) ANS 17 G 39 Ponty to Gov.-Gen. p.i. AOF 12.1.1912  
(emphasis added)

of Coppelani, sufi turug could form 'a state within a state'. In the case of the Mourides the fear was perfectly justified as the bonds of allegiance that are strong between any talibe and his cheikh were - and still are - peculiarly strong in the Mouride tariqa, whose doctrine emphasised the absolute submission of the talibe. The second base was economic. We have already seen the objections raised about the alms-collecting tours of Cheikh Saad Bu and similar objections were also raised about the gifts given to Ahmadu Bamba by a stream of visitors to his residence in Souet el Ma and Cheyen. Such fears were particularly acute in view of the fact that the vast majority of Bamba's disciples came from the area in which groundnuts were grown. Groundnut production in Senegal had expanded rapidly: 25,000 tonnes exported in 1885, 140,000 in 1900 and 508,000 in 1930. (1) Cheikh Ibra Fall, a former tyeddo who had in 1886 attached himself to Ahmadu Bamba pledging eternal and absolute devotion to the cheikh and who was later described by Marty as 'the Minister of

(1) Coulon Marabout et Prince p.76

Administrative map of Senegal, c.1914



Economic Affairs' for the Mourides (1) was quick to see the economic potential of using his own devoted following - mostly ex-tyeddo like himself - for groundnut farming. By 1912 he was said to have 1,000 talibes working for him producing an annual income estimated at nearly 50,000 francs.(2) Thus Ponty had good reason to fear the economic might of the Mourides.

However, in the course of the next two years the French came to realise that neither the political nor the economic strength of the Mourides need be detrimental to their authority, that indeed, on the contrary, to continue regarding Ahmadu Bamba and his followers as enemies would be unwise and dangerous. Signs of a change of heart were evident in Ponty's comments on proposals made by M. Theveniaut, the administrator of Baol, for imprisoning Bamba and his brother Cheikh Anta who was also widely regarded as a schemer. (3) Ponty argued that,

(1) Marty Les Mourides p.28

(2) O'Brien Saints and Politicians p.19

(3) Marty Les Mourides p.19.

Our policy towards the islamised native should make use of skill and tact rather than severity. This is especially important when dealing with an Islamic group which has numerous followers ... Furthermore, we should not forget that Amadou Bamba is a pupil of Cheikh Sidia, the most venerated chief of the country of the Moors. Cheikh Sidia was the pivot of my predecessor's policy and also of my own action in Mauritania. The Mouride sect was started in Senegal by Amadou Bamba. The word 'mourid' properly means 'disciple of the faith'. That is to say that Amadou Bamba is still under the authority of Cheikh Sidia, the most devoted artisan of our influence beyond Senegal. How would our double-faced policy appear to Cheikh Sidia? On the one hand, favouring his influence we make use of his great authority whilst on the other we are persecuting his own pupils. ... That would be to play a double game from which we risk being ourselves the victims. It would be to adopt a policy which the present incidents are in no way sufficient to justify.

When dealing with Islam Ponty warned against following the narrow instincts of local commandants as he argued that action should be taken within the framework of French Islamic policy in AOF and in North Africa. So when Theveniaut wanted to imprison Cheikh Anta immediately before even a judicial enquiry was made Ponty warned against such haste, 'Whatever the result of the enquiry I will decide in good time what measures seem to me to be

best suited to avoiding a recurrence of a new Ouâli of Goumba affair'. (1) This letter provides an excellent insight into how Ponty's perceptions and priorities were changing. It clearly shows the importance of Cheikh Sidia and his family in French calculations, and this was one of the great constants of French policy through from Coppolani to the post-Second World War era. (2) Cheikh Sidia's

- (1) ANS 13 G 12(17) Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 13.8.1912. (emphasis added)
- (2) See ANSOM AP 2258/5 'Note de m. le Gouverneur Beyries' 25.7.1948. Beyries in recommending an annual allowance of 500,000 Fr CFA to the head of Cheikh Sidia's family wrote: 'Nous devons nous montrer d'autant plus généreux à l'égard des Ahel Cheikh Sidia [i.e. the Cheikh's family] que le nombre des personnalités marquantes de l'Union française sur qui la France peut compter en toutes circonstances n'est pas si grand. Notre générosité n'étonnera aucune personne de bonne foi parmi les musulmans de l'Afrique occidentale française; elle montrera d'une manière tangible que nous savons et que nous pouvons aujourd'hui comme dans le passé, reconnaître dignement les services de ceux qui nous gardent leur confiance'. It appears that the Minister of Colonies wholeheartedly approved of the grant: see in file, Delavignette 'Note pour le Ministre' 31.7.1948. See also the undated monograph in this file written by M. Le Geay on history of relations between the Ahel Cheikh Sidia and the French.

role was particularly important at a time when the Mauritanian and Moroccan issues were at the forefront of French preoccupations. Secondly it is further evidence that the Wali of Goumba affair came as a real shock to senior French administrators, and Ponty's warning about the narrow-mindedness of local administrators is interesting too in this respect.

Cor, the Lt.-Governor of Senegal to whom Ponty's comments were addressed was not convinced and continued to provide Ponty with evidence of what he saw as maraboutic fanaticism. Ponty, however, was dismissive:

I have not been particularly struck by the fanaticism with which you believe the writings of Amadou Bamba to be filled. They do not seem to me to indicate a more obviously hostile character than most of the writings of this genre ... We should not be unduly alarmed.

Ponty did, however, share Cor's doubts about the wisdom of using Ahmadu Bamba to help in recruitment for the Moroccan campaign for both feared that this would give added weight to his prestige and authority. Recruitment and tax-collection were

to be entrusted to political chiefs only.(1) Such then were the limits of French action in 1912. As we shall see the administration would soon, under the pressure of war, embark on a more opportunist policy, as Ahmadu Bamba was to become in his own right a pillar of French policy in Senegal.

That the French felt more confident to make use of him in the war was in large part due to the report made by Marty on the Mourides in 1913. (2) Marty produced the report very rapidly. It is not clear when he started but by August 1913 the typescript was in the hands of Le Chatelier, the editor of the Revue du Monde Musulman through whom all of Marty's work in West Africa were published. (3)

(1) ANS 13 G 12 (17) Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 8.11.1912

(2) The report was published as Les Mourides ...

(3) ANSOM Sen. & Dep. IV/133 Le Chatelier to Hardy(?)/ Marty(?) 25.8.1913. Le Chatelier was annoyed with the AOF government for using the Revue du Monde Musulman as a cheap way of publishing its documentation on Islam and he hesitated for this reason over the publication of the Mouride report but decided to publish it in view of 'its scientific importance'.

The speed with which the report was made is reflected in the brisk and administrative style which was characteristic of all of Marty's studies. Marty relied heavily on local archives and it is not surprising to find that he repeated the official version of events leading up to the first and second exile of Ahmadu Bamba. In later years Marty became more critical of his sources. However, in the account of these early years of French contact with Bamba, Marty's most original contribution was to argue that Ahmadu Bamba should never have been allowed back from Gabon for whilst he was away there was a period of 'perfect tranquility' in the colony. (1) The book was intended as an administrative report and it proceeds from a consideration of the Mouride personalities in the various cercles of Senegal to a discussion of the doctrine of Ahmadu Bamba through to a more general consideration of its relation to indigenous judicial, social and economic customs and institutions. The report was relatively short (136 pages) with a further 20 pages of appendices.

(1) Marty Les Mourides pp.9-10.  
Page references given in the following paragraphs refer to this report.

One of Marty's strengths as a writer was an ability to write excellent character sketches of which a professional biographer would not have been ashamed. His descriptions of the leading personalities of the Mouride tariqa are as lively as any that have ever been drawn since. Cheikh Anta is portrayed as a cynical politician who has used his family position to build up contacts with the most important businessmen and politicians of the colony:

One cannot deny, writes Marty, that this 'Minister of Foreign Affairs' as he is called, has acquired ... a very practical way of dealing with situations. He is certainly not bothered by scruples of hindering his brother's religious mission. Cheikh Anta, it is easy to see, has not believed in this mission for a long time. Mouridism provides him with excellent personal opportunities. (p.20)

Cheikh Ibra Fall, whom Marty described as 'a veritable black Potin' (after Felix Potin, the founder of a chain of groceries in France) is also portrayed as an astute businessman despite his superficial appearance of madness:

Ibra Fall has an unfortunate physique which does not help him. With his nervous tics and his wild laughter, a sort of delirium tremens with which he is afflicted, one would be tempted to take him for a simpleton. However,

one should remember that he was one of the first disciples of Amadou Bamba at a time when no one suspected the future importance of the Serigne, and this shows a certain flair on his part. Since then he has devoted himself, tenaciously and intelligently, to the increase of his material wealth. He owns houses in St Louis and in Dakar, and has concessions in Thies, Diourbel, Ndaule and Kebemer. He has set up commerce houses at several trading posts and gets his disciples and wives to manage them. Commerce does not take up all his time. Under the supervision of one of his disciples he also gets his followers to cultivate enormous fields of groundnuts, millet and various other grains, and he himself skilfully takes care of their retail. (p. 28)

Ahmadu Bamba is the only person to emerge without a strong character - a reflection perhaps of the fact that he was a reclusive holy man lacking the penchant for political and economic activity in which his family and followers seemed to revel. Marty suggested that Ahmadu Bamba had had political ambitions in his youth but that these had been frustrated by the French conquest. (p. 13)

However, the most important aspect of the book was the way in which it contributed to a fundamental change in the understanding of Islam in Senegal. The main theme of the report was that 'mouridism' was a bastardised form of Islam - 'une sorte de

religion nouvelle née de l'Islam ... en plein  
vagabondage islamique ... l'islam à l'usage des  
Ouloffs' (pp. 42-3) Marty showed how in doctrinal,  
 judicial and economic habits Mourides differed  
 from 'orthodox' Islamic teaching.

The black mentality, he wrote, is completely incapable of bearing the metaphysical concepts of the Oriental semites and the ecstatic digressions of the Soufis. These scenes are nothing other than an act of common prayer, soon followed by dances, choreographed mimes and bamboulas of which the blacks are so fond. (p.53)

As Islam distances itself from its cradle ... as races and conditions change, it becomes increasingly deformed. Islamic confessions, be they Malaysian or Chinese, Berber or Negro, are no more than vulgar contrefaçons of the religion and state of the sublime Koran. (pp. 123-4)

Marty believed that Bamba had been guided by the invisible hand of Wolof custom and that this had proved a more potent force than the original Islamic doctrine. (p. 120)

Marty, therefore, argued that the Mourides should not be assimilated in French minds to the Islam of the Arab world. This meant, for example, that there was no point in using Sidi Khalil as a legal

textbook in Senegal, however cheap and convenient it may have been. (This was something of a 'hobby-horse' for Marty who devoted four pages to the subject in his report and mentioned it also in his correspondence with local administrations.) Instead, Marty urged native tribunals to make more use of Wolof customary law. (pp. 90-3) It also meant that the Mourides - along with most other West African Muslims - were immune from pan-Islamism. Marty said that stories of Mouride connections with the Ottomans or even El Hiba were 'much exaggerated'. (pp. 113-15)

He did not suggest that the Mourides represented no danger at all. Indeed he emphasised that there were local dangers and that, whilst observing the strictest religious neutrality, the French should exercise a close watch over the activities of the Mourides and be prepared, in the event of crimes 'to act repressively, immediately and vigorously. (p.130) The administration should make use of family disputes in order to keep a balance of power. (p. 133) As for Ahmadu Bamba himself, Marty believed that he had renounced his former ambitions and that he was probably sincere in his protestations of loyalty. (p. 137)

It is clear that Marty's argument that Mouridism was deeply influenced by Wolof custom was not an original one. Right from the start of the development of the brotherhood the administration was aware of the way in which the old elements of Wolof society - especially the tyeddo were being reconstituted in the Mouride brotherhood. Both Clozel and Delafosse had argued that African Islam was heavily influenced by local traditions, that there were as many different types of Islam in West Africa as there were ethnic groups. Clozel, in particular, had emphasised the importance of local traditions and had urged the use of customary law by Native Tribunals. Ponty, too, was sympathetic to this line of argument. What Marty had done was to document a specific example of 'African Islam' with a thoroughness that was unique in the writing that until then existed on the subject. For the first time ever the French administration was starting to develop an official line on what Islam in AOF actually amounted to. With the publication of Marty's report the era of French doubts and uncertainties about Islam in Africa was drawing towards a close. In the next decade - a decade which included the First World War - Marty continued to document in minute detail

the state of Islam in AOF and the next chapter will examine more closely his contribution to scholarship against the background of the war in Europe.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FIRST WORLD WAR

## The War and Islam

The outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914 and, more particularly, the break-off of diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire on 1st November inevitably caused great apprehension amongst the French administration. Antonetti, the interim Lt.-Governor of Senegal, told Ponty that the greatest danger of unrest in the colony came from the Mourides. Despite the fact that he believed that Ahmadu Bamba's attitude since the declaration of the war had been one which suggested he could be trusted, Antonetti argued that, 'The suppleness, the patience, the obsequiousness even with which the Mourides are acting towards us ... should not delude us. We can be certain that if one day war against the 'roumi' unbeliever is declared in Senegal, the declaration will come from this

sect'. (1) Clozel was the most anxious of all the administrators and asked for permission for special emergency powers, including the declaration of a state of siege, in order to deal with troublesome marabouts in the Soudan. Ponty, however, thought that such powers were unnecessary. (2) With the rupture of diplomatic relations with the Ottomans came a flurry of correspondence between Paris, Dakar and all the other administrative centres of AOF concerning what attitudes should be taken towards Ottoman subjects resident in AOF. The Colonial Minister counselled strict surveillance rather than expulsion. He later urged Ponty to show indulgence to Lebanese Maronites, Syrian Armenians and Catholics, Gregorian and Greek Orthodox Ottomans and finally francophile Syrian and Turkish Muslims. Ponty assured Paris that most African Muslims were not interested in the Ottomans and in any case looked to the Moroccan Cherif rather than

(1) ANS 13 G 87 Lt.-Gov. p.i. Sen. to Ponty 8.9.1914.

(2) ANS 19 G 4 Clozel to Ponty n.d.; Ponty to Clozel 17.9.1914; Ponty circular 20.9.1914.

the Sultan of Turkey for ultimate spiritual guidance. (1) The various Governors relayed instructions from Ponty to their commandants de cercles: malicious rumours were to be suppressed and the traditional friendship between France and Islam was to be exalted throughout AOF. The successes of the French army (at this stage just beginning to recover from the initial German push into northern France) were to be likewise glorified. Nonetheless a careful watch on the marabouts was to be maintained, and a strict censorship of the post was to be enforced. (2)

French anxieties were not confined to fear of Muslim unrest. The Liberian Christian prophet Harris and his followers who had for some time been active in the Ivory Coast, was seen as posing a very similar sort of threat as Ahmadu Bamba. The administration admitted that Harris himself appeared loyal and calm but feared that his less restrained disciples might cause trouble. In view of the reduced

- (1) ANSOM AP 907/3 bis Min. Col. to Govs.-Gen. Algeria, AOF, AEF, etc.
- (2) See ANS 7 G 69 Lt.-Gov. Guinea to cercles 8.11.1914; SHAT AOF Niger 3/iii/d Lt.-Gov. Niger to cercles 10.11.1914, same to same 18.11.1914.

European personnel in the colony the Governor of the Ivory Coast thought it would be wise to persuade Harris to return to Liberia. (1) But clearly the German-Ottoman alliance made the question of Muslim loyalty one of the most immediate administrative preoccupations, and both French and British minds were set to work on finding a Muslim card of their own with which to trump the German's Ottoman ace. In the Arabian peninsula, the Levant and in the shadowy streets of Constantinople this search was, quite literally, the stuff of which novels are made. Richard Hannay and the weird 'Companions of the Rosy Hours' doing battle with the agents of 'Hadji Mohammed Guillamo' was thrilling stuff - whichever side of the English Channel one was on. (2) But in French West Africa there was to be little scope for such daredevil adventure.

Just as fears in metropolitan France that the Socialists would oppose the war were quickly dispelled, so too in AOF were anxieties about Muslim resistance

(1) ANS 5 G 62 Ponty to Admin. cercle Lagunes 12.11.1914, Lt.-Gov. I. Coast to cercles 16.12.1914.

(2) See John Buchan Greenmantle London 1916.

in the name of the Ottoman Sultan quickly proved to be without foundation. Within a very short space of time Muslim leaders from all over AOF were inundating the Governor General with assurances of loyalty. Ponty telegraphed the Colonial Ministry in November to say that 'The most reassuring news about the attitudes of the Muslim populations is reaching me from all over the colonies'. The situation in Mauritania was particularly promising as there was a virtually unanimous denunciation of the Ottoman Sultan. (1) Almost without exception Muslim notables from all over AOF wrote addresses and poems in praise of France and in condemnation of the Ottomans and the Germans. These writings were collected and published in two issues of the Revue du Monde Musulman. Cheikh Sidia was one of the first to declare his loyalty;

Through the penetration of French power into the countries of the Toucouleurs, the Moors and the Blacks God, the generous, the merciful, the savant and the sage has revealed incalculable advantages that we never knew before. The abandon by the tribes of the instruments of war, the abolition of acts of oppression inherited from our ancestors,

(1) ANSOM AP 907/1 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min.Col. 22.11.1914; ANSOM AP 1420/20 Lt.-Gov. Mauritania to Gov.-Gen. AOF 11.11.1914.

the repression of pillage and death sentences ... France has also developed justice and security in the countries of all their sedentary and nomadic subjects. She has sunk abundant wells ... She has introduced capable doctors to the natives, rich and poor ... It is God whom we ask to consolidate ... this power and to protect it against all enemies. (1)

The leaders of the Senegalese Tijaniyya all showed their devotion to the French cause. El Hajj Abdullah Niasse declared in Kaolack,

We have loyal sentiments and pure affection for our glorious French nation which is the most powerful of all the European nations because of its justice. Why shouldn't we like France? It is she who has made us progress from barbarity and savagery towards the light of civilisation. When she raised her Tricolore flag in our country we were without a leader. We lived in anarchy and were cutting each other's throats. We enslaved children and committed acts of brigandage on the roads. Fear and anxiety were widespread throughout our country. The French government in taking possession of Senegal has punished the guilty and helped the oppressed until there were no brigands or thieves left in the country. (2)

(1) Cited in 'Les Musulmans français et la Guerre' RMM 1915 p.17.

(2) Ibid p.132.

El Hajj Malick Sy, who said prayers for a French victory every Friday, gave this message to his talibés: 'Know, oh Muslims, ... that we must live on good terms with the French government and pray that God accords it peace and victory. For its happiness is our happiness. He who denies it is like the man who cuts his throat with his own hand.' (1) The address of the notables of Timbuktu gave a rather more legalistic reason for their refusal to respect or follow the Ottoman example in the war:

We have learned that the Turkish Sultan has embraced the cause of Germany against France. We condemn this act for we are attached to France and we will always be the enemies of those who declare war ... Furthermore, the Turkish Sultan does not know us. He is not our chief. He is a usurper. Nor did our ancestors have any relationship with him. They knew only the Sultan of Morocco. ... We are faithful to God, His Prophet and the Cherif of Mecca. This man is our only legitimate chief according to the witnesses of the hadith. (2)

This reference to the sole legitimacy of the Cherif of Mecca could not, however, have been altogether

(1) Ibid p.107

(2) Ibid p.99.

welcome. For the Ottoman alliance with Germany raised doubts once again in French minds about where the ultimate authority in the Islamic world lay. As we have seen Marty, Delafosse and Clozel had already done much to emphasise the particularity of African Islam and thus redress the wilder and more absurd universalist images of Islam that were the order of the day at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, the French administration, including Marty, were not at the end of 1914 absolutely confident that African Muslims would not at some stage follow the orders of a foreign Islamic authority. The Interministerial Commission on Islam decided that the French would be unwise to get involved in the issue of authority and obedience in the Muslim world. The Colonial Ministry reported to Ponty in December,

The Commission expressed its opinion that as much as possible we should keep away from questions of obedience in Islamic matters. It would be ... doubtful that we could achieve the desired aim if we appeared to recognise a claim to Mahometan orthodoxy from one of the elements who claim spiritual authority in Islam. ... It does not in any way appear desirable to spread in Muslim circles the notion of rallying around a religious centre. Our Islamised natives of AOF are for the most part ignorant about the questions of the Khalifate or

or the Imamate and we can only benefit from maintaining this state of ignorance. (1)

The most obvious and the most important connection between Black Africa and the rest of the Muslim world was the pilgrimage to Mecca. Soon after the rupture of diplomatic relations with the Ottomans the French authorities in North Africa decided to forbid Muslims to go on the pilgrimage in order to lessen the possibility of pan-Islamic agitation in their colonies. The Colonial Minister wrote to Ponty to tell him of this decision and to urge him to do the same. The ban should, he stressed, be issued in such a way,

so as not to provoke unflattering comments or to upset the religious sentiment of the Muslims. It would perhaps be impolitic to stop the pilgrimage through a formal decree at a time when such a measure would appear to be motivated by fear of letting our subjects have contact with the Turkish empire. But the local administration could advise against departure for the pilgrimage by arguing that the boats normally used to transport the pilgrims have been requisitioned by the belligerent powers and that, therefore, the pilgrims run the risk of waiting indefinitely at the ports without ever having the opportunity to embark.(2)

(1) ANS 19 G 1 Min. Col. to Gov.lGen. AOF 21.12.1914.

(2) ANS 19 G 4 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 21.10.1914.

The following year similar instructions were given. The Allies were helped in their task of dissuasion by a fetwa issued by the Grand Mufti of Egypt which strongly advised Muslims not to go on the pilgrimage. However, in both 1914 and 1915 Ponty reported that there were in any case no requests from would-be pilgrims for permission to leave AOF. (1)

The pilgrimage question became much more interesting the following year when the Cherif of Mecca supported by the Arab tribes of the west and central Arabian peninsula proclaimed their independence from the Ottomans. In June 1916 the Colonial Minister wrote to Angoulvant, the interim Governor-General with news of the Reuters report carrying details of the Cherif's proclamation. Angoulvant was asked to give wide publicity to the proclamation taking care not to mention the part played by the Allies in the Arab revolt nor the fact that the information came from Reuters rather than France's own information sources and finally to emphasise that the Sultan of

(1) ANS 19 G 9 DeFrance (Plenipotentiary Min. in Alexandria) to Min. Aff. Et. 23.7.1915;  
Gov-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 14.10.1915;  
Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.8.1915.

Constantinople no longer had the authority to act in the name of Islam. Angoulvant then issued these instructions in a circular to the colonies of AOF. The interim Lt.-Governor of Niger thought that the news was splendid and suggested celebrating the independence with extra festivities on 14th July which he thought would be a symbolic manifestation of the union between France and Islam. Angoulvant was not impressed with the idea which he thought would prove hard to square with the official line on the independence of the independent Cherif of Mecca. (1) More serious thoughts on the implications of the proclamation of independence came from the Foreign Ministries in Paris and London who both, for separate reasons, thought it wise on reflection not to give wide publicity to the proclamation and so decided against a formal publication of its contents. In London the Foreign Office was reported to be worried about the repercussions of the news in India, and the French were anxious not to encourage the idea of Muslim unity. (2)

(1) ANS 19 G 10 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. p.i. AOF 23.6.1916, Gov.-Gen. p.i. circular 28.6.1916.

(2) See file in ANSOM AP 907 bis 5 for correspondence Paris - Alexandria - Dakar in July 1916 and also IF Fds Terrier 5917 for good collection of press cuttings.

The decision was taken instead to send copies of the proclamation to selected Muslim leaders in French colonies. From AOF the following were selected: Cheikh Sidia from Mauritania; El Hajj Malick Sy the leader of the Tivaouane Tijaniyya in Senegal; El Hajj Sliman from Agades (1); Karamoko Dalen, a Fulbe Tijani from Timbo in the Futa Jallon who had, according to Marty, been Bokar Biro's eminence grise and who now helped the French with carrying out censuses, collecting local information and organising vaccinations; (2) Abdullabba Ahmed Baba, a Chorfa and Cadi of Timbuktu (3); Imam Mohammed ben Essoyuti, also of Timbuktu who had formed part of the delegation of Timbuktu notables who had approached the Moroccan Sultan Mawlay Hassan in vain

- (1) Lt.-Gov. Niger said that el Hajj Sliman was of 'lukewarm' loyalty to France and was therefore an unsuitable person to receive a copy of the proclamation. The interim Governor-General on the other hand thought that the proclamation would be a good influence. See ANS 19 G 10 Lt.-Gov. Niger to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.8.1916, Gov.-Gen. p.i. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Niger 14.9.1916.
- (2) P. Marty L'Islam en Guinée Paris 1921 pp. 248-49.
- (3) Marty described him as 'l'un des meilleurs artisans de notre occupation' Etudes sur l'islam et les tribus du Soudan vol. II Paris, 1920 p.12.

for help against the French but who in 1911 was appointed by Clozel as a teacher in the medersa of Timbuktu (1) and finally Imam Mohammed Kunandi Timitie from Bondoukou in the Ivory Coast, the almamy of the town's principal mosque and with a long record of pro-French activity spoilt only by a two month flirtation in 1914 with the British authorities in the Gold Coast who were apparently anxious to see the Kunandi settle in west Asante.(2)

At the beginning of August it was also decided - in Paris - that the French should send an official mission of pilgrims from French colonies in North and West Africa. The mission was due to catch a boat from Marseilles on the 1st September leaving very little time for the AOF authorities first to select a representative and then to send him on to Marseilles. The metropole would bear the cost of the mission from Marseilles onwards but AOF was expected to pay the boat fare from Dakar to Marseilles. Angoulvant, the interim Governor-General

(1) Ibid p.16

(2) Marty Etudes sur l'islam en Côte d'Ivoire Paris, 1922 p.222. See also ANS 19 G 10 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 4.8.1916. Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 28.7.1916 for list of chosen leaders.

was not enthusiastic. He replied to the Colonial Minister that there were only two Muslim notables, Cheikh Sidia and El Hajj Malick Sy who lived close enough to Dakar to be able to catch the boat on time, but Angoulvant doubted that El Hajj Malick Sy who was old and nearly blind would agree on such a voyage and he felt that the presence of Cheikh Sidia in Mauritania was too important. He also feared that the sudden disappearance of the two men would cause confusion and might be seen as a deportation. He regretted, therefore, that AOF could not participate in the mission at such short notice. However, the Colonial Minister quickly replied that the mission had been postponed by two weeks and wondered if that might not be enough time to find a representative, not necessarily a marabout, he added, but any good Muslim, although in view of the possibility that he would miss the Marseilles boat and would have to travel to Alexandria by himself it would help if he could speak French. Perhaps, he suggested, a good loyal Senegalese chief? (1)

(1) ANS 19 G 10 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 4.8.1916. Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 17.8.1916, Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 9.8.1916. See also R. Bidwell 'The Bremond mission in the Hijaz, 1916-17. A study in inter allied cooperation' in Bidwell & Smith (eds) Arabian and Islamic Studies London 1983.

Angoulvant wrote to the Governor of Senegal asking him if he could think of a suitable candidate and suggested himself the *cadi* of St Louis or Bouna N'Diaye the chief of Djollof. Six days later there was still no reply from the Senegalese Lt.-Governor so Angoulvant wrote again adding the somewhat loaded question, 'Do you see any inconvenience from the point of view of our Islamic policy in sending to the Cherif of Mecca delegates who even though chosen from outside the circle of influential *marabouts* might return from their voyage with a tendency to unify the diverse Islamic groups which exist at the moment?' Angoulvant wrote to his superiors in Paris to explain the delay and to express his own misgivings about the project:

Without talking of the risk of torpedoes and of tendentious rumours that the delegates might pick up and be unable to interpret properly it is to be feared that they will bring back cherifian directives from Mecca intended to unify the present diverse groups of AOF, the multiplicity and contrary tendencies of which make it easy for us at the moment to restrict and to supervise Islam, whereas anything which favours unification inevitably creates a danger for us.<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) ANS 19 G 10 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. 11.8.1916, same to same 17.8.1916, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 18.8.1916.

Neither the Colonial Minister nor the Lt.-Governor of Senegal were, however, unduly worried by these thoughts. From Paris Angoulvant received a swift explanation of the official motives behind the mission:

It is not a question of either seeking to strengthen the Muslim faith of our subject peoples or of involving ourselves in Islamic controversies and internal dissensions but rather of elevating the prestige of the Cherif, whose attitudes coincide with the interests of the Allies ... The mission is being sent by and in the name of the French Government in the well-considered interests of the Nation. The mission should therefore be made up of political personalities who are devoted to our cause in preference to religious chiefs.

The Lt.-Governor of Senegal, seeing no objections to the mission, selected Abdou Kane, a jurist from Kaolack who had been nominated for, but had not received, the Légion d'Honneur several years before. Since the outbreak of the war he had helped with recruitment amongst the Tukolor and so, having been selected to go to Mecca, he was nominated again for the Légion d'Honneur which he was duly awarded towards the end of August 1916. On the 24th August he left Dakar for Marseilles in a first class cabin and with a personal cook provided courtesy of the AOF

government. (1)

The mission was reported to have been a great success. Lt.-Col. Bremond who accompanied the pilgrims told Briand, the French Prime Minister and also Foreign Minister, that the Algerians gave proof of their French mentality and expected to get the vote after the war as a reward for their sacrifices, that the Tunisians were Turcophile and the least co-operative of the group, whilst the Moroccans had 'a good attitude although a bit simplistic'. As for Abdou Kane - 'this good old man with the finesse of a peasant' - Bremond reported that he had become increasingly pro-French as the journey had continued and was struck by the lack of racism on the part of the French officers with whom he ate at the same table. (2) The Colonial Minister rewarded him with another honorific title. (3) The following year the Quai d'Orsay insisted that there should be more French pilgrims in order to avoid the

(1) ANS 19 G 10 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.8.1916, Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 17.8.1916, same to same 18.8.1916, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 28.8.1916, Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 30.8.1916.

(2) ANS 19 G 11 Lt.-Col. Bremond to Briand 19.10.1916.

(3) ANS 19 G 10 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 27.11.1916.

impression that Germany still controlled the Mediterranean. Such an impression would, it was feared, weaken the French bargaining position with the King of Hedjaz at a time when a powerful lobby in Paris was already staking its territorial claims in the Levant. However, the French were not prepared to pay for the pilgrimage as they had done the previous year unless there were not enough pilgrims able to pay for themselves. (1)

The Caliphate question highlighted the dilemma that characterised much of French thinking on Islam. On the one hand, as we have seen, frequent claims were made that France was a Muslim power (2) and, of course, it was true that the French colonies contained many Muslims. But, on the other hand, France did not control any of the great world centres of Islam. The degree of French obsession with and suspicion of Islam that continued right up until decolonisation cannot be adequately explained without reference to this fact. That they never controlled what were

- (1) ANS 19 G 9 Min. Aff. Et. to Gov.-Gen. Algeria & Res.-Gen. Morocco, Tunisia 3.4.1917. For Paris Levant lobby see Andrew & Kanya Forstner France Overseas passim.
- (2) See, for example, ANSOM AP 907 bis/5 Min. Aff. Et. to Min. Col. describing France as 'la plus grande puissance musulmane arabe'.

imagined to be the puppet strings of Islam seemed to many to be a terrible weakness.

General Lyautey was particularly sensitive to this weakness. As news of the Cherif of Mecca's proclamation reached him he wrote to the Foreign Minister with a long account of his views. His main theme was the desirability of the French sponsorship of an alternative western Caliphate that would act as a balance to the eastern Caliphate of Mecca which he said was tinted with pan-Islamic sentiments and was in the hands of the British. If the French upheld the idea of a unique Caliphate, he argued that they would put themselves at the mercy of the British, reliant upon their goodwill in order to participate in decision-making. Furthermore, he argued,

Even if we were always to encounter loyalty from our ally and all its agents we would still have to reckon with their clumsiness. The quant-à-soi of the English, their disdain for natives, their confidence in the all-mightiness of Great Britain serve them ill for handling the moral forces of Islam ... It is all the more important to recognise the clumsiness of the English when one compares it to the skill we possess in such matters. Thanks to the universalist character of the French genius and an experience of Islam we have at our disposal personnel who offer both a vocation and an infinitely superior suitability ...

I am aware of the fact that in religion as in any political affair we have an interest in dividing rather than unifying. But it is not a question of knowing whether the religious unity of French Islam is good or bad but rather of knowing whether this unity isn't the only guarantee against a greater evil, namely the unity of all Islam, including our own, under the primacy of a foreign or enemy chief. It is also a question of whether within the limits of our African possessions the religious unity under a Khalifat docile to our wishes ... isn't the surest guarantee against dangerous excitation, notably against the actions of brotherhoods who are involved in all insurrections.

Lyautey, therefore, proposed backing the claims of the Moroccan Sultan for the spiritual suzerainty in north west Africa, Tunisia excluded - and for this country he preferred to recognise the Ottoman Sultan rather than the Caliph of Mecca. The idea of opposing the Caliph of Mecca with a strongly backed Moroccan Caliph was not an original one. Felix Gaillard, the Secretary-General of the Cherifian government, had used a very similar argument early in 1915 but it is interesting to see it put forward so strongly by Lyautey. (1)

(1) IF Fds Terrier 5917 Lyautey to Min. Aff. Et. 16.6.1916 & see also in same file 'Note de M. Gaillard'. (Gaillard, the Sec.-Gen. of the cherifian government also argued in favour of a western caliphate.)

However, to a certain extent this debate was of academic interest only in AOF where for some time increasing emphasis was being placed on the particularity of African Islam, a particularity that was so strong that African Islam was barely recognisable as 'orthodox' Islam. Marty for example had described the Mourides as being 'en pleine vagabondage islamique' (1) In addition to the spiritual heresy of African Islam there was, according to this same belief, an ethnic heterodoxy which made the idea of a unity of African Islam almost a contradiction in terms. So when in January 1916 the Colonial Ministry proposed as part of a package deal to reward Muslim loyalty, which included a mosque and a special hospital for Muslims in Paris (2), to elect some Muslim representatives onto the Interministerial Commission on Muslim Affairs, Clozel's response was swift and predictable:

Our Muslim populations understand and apply their Muslim faith only in the form of affiliation to maraboutic groups. These groups almost always correspond to ethnic collectivities. One can state as a principle that West Africa is like

(1) Marty Mourides p.43

(2) Details of the plans for the mosque and hospital are to be found in ANSOM AP 907 bis/5.

a chess-board where religious chapels and ethnic groups almost always coincide and where as a result maraboutic jealousies and polemics have attached themselves to the secular rivalries of peoples and races. This extreme division of Islam noir has been up until now the main factor in our policy. It is because of it that our action has been easy and effective. It is thanks to this that neither before nor since the outbreak of war have we had to fear any general uprising. . . . It is because of this that all local incidents can be dealt with quickly and have no repercussion and that we are able to find in the next chapel, in the same way as in the neighbouring ethnic group, the most devoted and committed auxiliaries. Should I myself attempt to bring together in one electoral college all the Serignes, Alfes and Karamokos . . . to elect a Muslim counsellor? Will I myself be the artisan of a rapprochement of people who do not know each other and who are jealous of one another? Will I myself prepare the way for an agitator or simply an adventurer who will use Islam as his electoral springboard and perhaps even cause a pan-Islamic action? It is out of the question. For in this mosaic of peoples and brotherhoods no attempt at unification . . . should be risked. Such an action would amount to organising ourselves the Muslim dream and creating the lever which has always eluded the leaders of Holy War, to succeed in a general uprising of West African Islam. To ask us to prepare with our own hands the means of our eventual ruin seems to me to exceed all the limits of possible madness.

Clozel proposed nominating four men to represent some of the major strands of West African Islam - Cheikh Sidia, Aymin Seck (the *cadi* of St Louis),

Ahmed Baba and Tierno Ibrahim Dalen - but if the Colonial Minister insisted on only one representative then Clozel would choose the last of the four mentioned. (1)

The Colonial Minister did not appear to insist and the scheme to co-opt West African Muslims onto the Interministerial Commission was, like many other such schemes of the time, still-born. Instead Clozel himself sanctioned the creation within AOF of a 'Consultative Committee on Muslim Affairs' to be composed of the heads of the Department of Civil Affairs, the Department of Muslim Affairs, the Military cabinet and selected Muslim notables of AOF. In all 20 Muslims were nominated, including Cheikh Sidia, Cheikh Saad Bu, Serigne Ahmadu Bamba, El Hajj Malick Sy and Karamoko Dalen. (2) However, the Committee met with the disapproval of at least one local administration. Guinea feared that it would provide an alternative system of advancement for Muslims and would therefore undermine the colony's means of patronage. The scheme did not have a very illustrious history and it too quickly

(1) ANSOM AP 913/1 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 30.1.1916.

(2) ANS 19 G 1 Arrêté 28.4.1916.

faded into oblivion.(1)

So what then was the reality of French policy towards Islam during the First World War? The grandiose schemes of official missions to Mecca apart, the humdrum of everyday dealings was mundane and apparently undemanding. One task consisted of censorship, overall supervision of which was entrusted to Mary. In January 1915 Antonetti, the Lt.-Governor of Senegal, reported that Syrians were selling colour prints of the Italian and German royal families, the Sultan of Turkey and other political subjects 'which might have a bad effect on the mentality of our natives'(2) But Ponty assured the Minister of Colonies that there was little to worry about on that score. A history book written by Enver Pacha on the Turko-Italian war which had been ordered by several Syrians before the war would, he said, be confiscated as soon as the order arrived. (3)

(1) ANS 7 G 69 Lt.-Gov. Guinea to Gov.-Gen. AOF n.d.

(2) ANS 13 G 17 Lt.-Gov. Sen. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 21.1.1915

(3) ANS 19 G 1 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 4.3.1915.

In 1917 Delafosse, the Head of the Department of Civil Affairs, drew up a circular banning the Revue du Maghreb which he had been told by the Minister of Colonies was an instrument of German propaganda. Delafosse instructed the Head of Customs to allow Franco-Arabic dictionaries but to confiscate German printed editions of the Qur'an and a French textbook, L'Histoire moderne which had been published before the war and contained pictures of the Kaiser alongside portraits of Allied heads of State. (1) The French, of course, countered with their own propaganda and produced posters of their own showing portraits of the President of the Republic and various military chiefs. (2)

### The Development of Scholarship

Apart from such vigilance there was no real alarm about Muslim loyalty once the initial shock of war itself was over. It is interesting to reflect that

- (1) ANS 19 G 4 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 1.7.1916, Delafosse 'Note pour m. l'Inspecteur des Douanes' 7.7.1916, same to same 15.11.1917.
- (2) ANS 5 G 63 M. Joseph (Chef Bureau Politique) to Marty 29.4.1916.

it was precisely during the period of the war that Marty did the bulk of his research and writing on Islam. A period that one might have expected to be intellectually barren turns out paradoxically to be the time when research on all aspects of African culture actually flourished as it had never done before. In part this was due to the influence of Clozel who was delegated Governor-General following Ponty's death in June 1915. As we have seen Clozel was a scholarly person and as Governor-General he continued to support scholarly activity. In 1915 he founded the Comité des Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'AOF. The Comité had the specific aim of fostering scientific research in which Africans were also encouraged to participate. Clozel was to be its president, and Delafosse and Dr Bouet its two Vice-Presidents. The Comité published a regular Bulletin. For the last two years of the war Delafosse also occupied a senior position in the Dakar administration. On the invitation of his patron, Clozel, he was made head of the Department of Civil Affairs (SAC) early in 1916. Clozel had to work hard to secure the post for Delafosse whose articles under the pseudonym 'Broussard' in the Dépêche Coloniale attacking Blaise Diagne and his party known as

the Jeunes Sénégalais had earned him some powerful enemies in high places in Paris. Diagne was a central figure in France's recruitment campaign in AOF and the Rue Oudinot was anxious to retain his services. Clozel had to threaten to resign before Delafosse was finally appointed. Clozel himself, who had never actually been nominated as Governor-General but only 'delegated' for the duration of the war was sacked in May 1917 as a result of differences with the Rue Oudinot over recruitment. He was replaced by the 'technocrat' Angoulvant who had 'pacified' the Ivory Coast and who was more sympathetic to military demands than were either Clozel or Delafosse. Delafosse survived Clozel's removal from office though he was later treated badly by both Angoulvant and Van Vollenhoven who blocked Delafosse's candidature for promotion to Lt.-Governor of a colony in West Africa.<sup>(1)</sup> Marty, the good soldier, appeared never to be involved in the colonial politics of the war period. The scholarly triumvirate of Clozel, Delafosse and Marty

(1) A good account of the internal politics of these years is to be found in L. Delafosse Un Berrichon conquis par la France pp. 264-341 - although it must be remembered that the author is Delafosse's daughter.

which held the stage for much, if not all, of the war was an impressive one by any standards. As a result the war period was a far richer one in terms of research and publications than one would have expected.

Marty was the most prodigious of the wartime scribblers. L'Islam en Mauretanie et Sénégal (1915-6), L'Islam en Guinée (1917-20) and L'Emirat des Trarzas (1917-8) all appeared in wartime volumes of the Revue du Monde Musulman (RMM). In collaboration with Col. Mangeot he wrote in 1918 a study of the Tuareg of the Niger bend which was published in the Bulletin du comité des études historiques et scientifiques de l'AOF (1918). The first volume of Etudes sur L'islam et les tribus du Soudan appeared in volume 37 of the 1918-9 edition of the RMM, and the other three volumes appeared shortly afterwards in a separate collection. Les Brackna, a study of the other main political grouping in southern Mauritania to complement his earlier work on the Trarza was published in volume 42 of the RMM in 1920. In 1921 he wrote a study of Islam in Niger which was not published until 1930-1 ('L'Islam et les tribus dans la Colonie du Niger (ex-Zinder)' Revue des Etudes Islamiques vols.

4 & 5 1931). 1922 and 1925 saw the publication respectively of his work on the Ivory Coast and Dahomey. In addition there were a number of other minor articles of lesser importance. With such a large corpus of writing it is not easy to generalise beyond certain basic statements. All the studies are essentially administrative and follow broadly similar layouts - an introduction to the history of the region and description of the main Muslim personalities followed by an analysis of the importance of Islam in the social, political and economic life of the indigenous population. All the studies are very specific either to one area or to one ethnic group, but between them they cover all the territories of AOF. Despite the variety of subjects it is still possible to identify certain key themes in Marty's description of Islam. We have already been introduced to these themes in Marty's account of the Mourides and we shall now attempt a more systematic analysis of them covering the whole of Marty's work on Islam in West Africa.

Marty's belief that the Mourides were a Muslim heresy was one which he extended to most other West African Muslims. In an article written in 1914 on the subject

of the role of amulets in Senegalese society he declared, 'Here in West Africa Islam is not so much an adaption of persons and of characters but rather a deformation of doctrines'. (1) This judgement was not, however, rigorously applied to all Muslims in AOF. For example, Marty argued that the Muslim Mande population of the Ivory Coast were 'strictly orthodox as far as the rites are concerned, more orthodox even than in North Africa'. The Mande, he said, did not practise saint worship and prayed directly to God. (2) An exception was also made for the Moors who were regarded as extremely orthodox Muslims and very accomplished scholars to boot: 'One must not forget that in the Trarza we find ourselves in the presence of intelligent and well-educated people who resemble Europeans on many points'. (3) The Muslim communities of Timbuktu, Djenné and Niore - all traditional centres of Islamic scholarship - were similarly respected by Marty who made no attempt to deny their orthodoxy or, indeed,

(1) Marty 'Les Amulettes musulmanes au Sénégal' RMM 1914, 28 p. 319.

(2) Côte d'Ivoire p.455

(3) Trarza p. 309.

their relations with the wider Islamic world. (1)  
 Marty also acknowledged the scholarship and  
 knowledge of Islamic doctrine of El Hajj Malick Sy  
 'the most educated marabout in Senegal'. (2)

But such recognitions were exceptions. Writing on  
 the subject of Cheikh Bu Kunta, an unscrupulous  
 and uneducated marabout who exploited his family  
 origins to earn his living near Tivaouane in Senegal,  
 Marty declared that, 'The Moorish-Arabic mentality  
 of Bou Kounta and the experience of a life spanning  
 three quarters of a century caused him to see in the  
 Blacks nothing more than birds good for eating. (3)  
 Although the paternalist Marty did not approve of  
 Bu Kunta's attitude to the blacks he nonetheless  
 shared the belief in the low intellect of the black  
 races. This was, as we have seen, very clear in  
 Marty's attitudes to education, and was also  
 reflected in his belief in the fundamentally different  
 nature of 'African Islam' as opposed to 'Arab Islam'.

- (1) Soudan vol. II passim, Soudan vol. IV p. 210
- (2) ANS 4 E 6 'Le Goupement tidiani d'Al Hadj Malick Sy'  
 (1915) reprinted in L'islam en Mauretanie et  
 Sénégal Paris, 1916.
- (3) Mauretanie et Sénégal pp. 413-42. Quote is from  
 p. 441.

In May 1915 Marty was asked to give his opinion on the wisdom of distributing in AOF a pamphlet prepared by the British giving an account of the rupture of relations with Turkey. He considered that,

Our Black countries are scarcely Islamised and are not in the least up to date with the current events in the Orient. Since the beginning of the war our policy has been to maintain the Blacks in this happy state of mind and we have abstained from all communications that might change this state of affairs.

Marty agreed, however, to give copies of the document to 'a few Black marabouts and a larger number of Moorish marabouts'. (1) An example cited by Marty of the lack of interest and concern shown by African Muslims for the events in the Middle East was taken from the Muslim soldiers from the Muslim community of the Ivory Coast. Marty reported that Muslims from the colony who had fought in the name of France against the Ottomans had no opinions on pan-Islamism and on their return to the Ivory Coast no-one was interested in the fact that they had been fighting against other Muslims. (2)

(1) ANS 19 G 4 Marty 'Note pour m. le chef du cabinet' 11.5.1915.

(2) Côte d'Ivoire p. 444-45

Marty continued Ponty's crusade against the use of Arabic in the administration. At the end of 1918 the Lt.-Governor of Senegal decided to include compulsory oral and a written examination in Arabic for all interpreters. Marty considered this to be,

An affront to the Muslim policy inaugurated in 1908 by M. Ponty and methodically followed since then by all the Governor-Generals. It is a clear backward step which, moreover, is in keeping with the tradition of the Senegalese administration which since Faidherbe has practised a constant policy of Islamophilia and which has endeavoured to arabise and Islamise populations which were almost all still fetishist in 1850. The Governor-General has eliminated Arabic, the vehicle of Islam, from all official institutions in AOF. To reinstate it officially and obligatorily in the interpreters' exam is to work towards Islamising in a short space of time the corps of Senegalese interpreters and to transform them into marabouts who will be much more loyal to local pontiffs than to the order of the administrator. It would also result in eliminating numbers of young fetishist, Christian or religious independent young Senegalese who have not learned, and who have no need to learn, Arabic and the principles of the Muslim faith. It would obviously favour Arabic to the detriment of French, and the marabout to the detriment of the schoolteacher. (1)

(1) ANS 13 G 26 (17) Marty 'Note' 28.4.1919.

Marty was in this case particularly strident in his criticism and uncharacteristically melodramatic in his warnings - but the use of Arabic was, like the use of Sidi Khalil something he felt strongly about. He often returned to the idea of transcribing local languages into the latin alphabet. It is interesting to see Marty's views on the pro-Islamic tendencies of the Senegalese administration as these views seem to fly in the face of fact. As Marty himself had so well described, the conversion of the Wolof to Islam was caused by a process much more complicated than the simple use of Muslim intermediaries by the French. It might also be said that neither Cor nor Guy, two recent Lt.-Governors of Senegal, were noted for their love of Islam. Still the belief that the French were themselves mostly responsible for the development of Islam in Senegal was a strong one, another stereotype that proved itself to be a hardy perennial.

The reason why Marty felt that 'African Islam' was fundamentally different from 'Arabic Islam' was that Marty - like Clozel and Delafosse - believed that the indigenous pre-Islamic customs and traditions were a more powerful influence than the doctrines contained in the Qur'an, Hadith etc. As we have seen French

knowledge of indigenous customs derived principally from studies commissioned for legal purposes, that is studies that were intended to provide French administrators with a corpus of customary law that was more suitable than either the Code Napoleon or the Sharia. At least a third of each of Marty's books was devoted to the question of customary laws and the influence of Islam upon them (and vice versa). Marty argued that,

Pure Muslim law has never governed the Senegalese communities. They have always retained their judicial customs, which are more or less coloured by Islam, sometimes only very slightly. So it is not to the Koran or to the law of Islamic authors that one should refer in order to judge questions of civil law concerning our Islamised subjects. Notably for marriage one should not hasten to say that a union is 'natural' (i.e. rather than legitimate) because the couple has not appeared before a Cadi or because no marabout has recited a prayer. We should not demand these formalities because we would then ourselves be encouraging the Islamisation of the natives which, to say the least, is pointless. I believe that a union is legitimate if it has satisfied all the requirements of customary law: the consent of the parents or guardians of the woman, the consent of the woman or, at least, a de facto acceptance, payment of dowry and the usual presents, publicity and celebration of the union. The Senegalese natives, whatever society they belong to, ask no more than that,

and only a very small number request the good offices of the marabout. (1)

In his study of the region of Kayes Marty stated that the population of 75,000 comprised one third fetishists, one third lapsed Muslims and one third 'Islamised ... in the sense that one understands it in West Africa, that is to say coloured by Islam but above all anxious to pass themselves off as Muslims.(2) Marty's comments on the Islam of the Bozo - a group of fishermen and boatmen on the Niger near Mopti - are revealing:

In African Islam so superficial as it is the Bozo seem to hold the record, but despite everything one cannot really laugh because their faith, although unenlightened, seems nonetheless to be strong and active. They also suffer from the need to believe and seem to be tending towards a more complete Islam. It is hardly necessary to add that the influence of Islam in their judicial institutions as well as in their social customs is almost nil. They are well able in their minds to amalgamate belief in the new religion and respect for all their former beliefs - tana, magic practices, witchcraft, supernatural therapy etc. - which are similar to Bambara customs. (3)

(1) ANS M 241 Marty 'L'influence de l'islam dans le droit coutumier des peuples sénégalais' (1915)

(2) Soudan vol. IV p.1.

(3) Soudan vol. II p.221.

In these two quotes we can see examples of Marty's cynical attitude to Islamic conversion. Africans became Muslims out of snobbery, 'to pass themselves off as Muslims' or because 'they suffer from a need to believe'. Another reason for conversion which Marty offered with reference to traders was one of sheer practicality. For example, in the Ivory Coast Islam was confined mainly to the Muslim dyula (traders) who, said Marty, prospered handsomely under the umbrella of the pax gallica. Wherever the dyula went they did not neglect to say their prayers for,

This simple yet grandiose religion practised by almost all the Blacks coming from the North, apart from its intrinsically seductive qualities, established itself as a veritable necessity, as an obligatory passport for native fetishists desirous in their turn of trading with the cities of the Soudan which have been described to them in marvellous terms. These fetishists leaving for the north, therefore make their salaam but without great conviction, motivated by more or less the same reasons as those which decide a traveller [in Europe] to become a member of a 'touring club'. (1)

Although there is an acknowledged connection between long distance trade and Islam, Marty's dry humour -

(1) Côte d'Ivoire p.94.

one of his strengths as a writer - nonetheless betrays a superior and dismissive attitude towards African Islam.

So, if as Marty said, it was scarcely worth repeating that in most cases African Islam was heavily influenced by pre-Islamic customs and traditions, what then in Marty's eyes were the relative merits of Islam and animism? The answer is not entirely clear. An interesting insight into Marty's overall view of religion in general in Africa can be gleaned from some handwritten notes made by M. Deherain, keeper of the library of the Institut de France and secretary of the Journal des Savants, who had a long conversation with Marty about religion in Africa some time in 1921. Unfortunately the notes are barely legible but it seems that Marty likened Islam to a wolf and fetishism to a lamb. Although the notes do not explicitly ascribe the role of shepherd to the Christian missions, the implication is nonetheless there for it was suggested that they represented the best chance of keeping the lamb safe from the wolf.<sup>(1)</sup> Marty certainly believed that the

(1) IF Deharain 5629 'Notes' July 1921.

animist societies require some sort of protection from Islam. The only restriction that Marty believed necessary for Muslim Qur'anic teachers, for example, was that they should not be allowed to teach in animist areas. In his study of Islam in Bambara country he cited the incident which took place in July 1914 in the village of Sokolo when a Bambara Muslim called Salifu Traore attacked and wounded three gardes de cercle and then ran about the streets shouting 'La illa ill' Allah'. He was soon arrested and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment but he died shortly afterwards in Bamako jail. Marty commented that 'It is a curious example taken from many others of the nefarious results which Islamic preaching produces amongst its Bambara neophytes'. (1) The severity of the sentence suggests that the authorities agreed about the seriousness of the crime which was twofold; not only attacking the guards but also preaching Islam amongst the Bambara. In an essay on Islam in Casamance Marty again emphasised the importance of keeping Muslims away from the animists.

(1) Soudan vol IV p.183.

In the aspect of our Muslim policy in West Africa which concerns the fetishist peoples there is an extremely delicate role to play. It is necessary that we safeguard this interesting and prolific diola people, great growers of rice and industrious workers ... from all Islamic influence. With the Sereres, whom they greatly resemble, they constitute two ethnic unities, the only two of importance who are left to us in Senegal on whom we can count to carry our civilising effort. (1)

Marty had been very impressed with the success of the Liberian Christian prophet, William Harris, in the Ivory Coast. In an area, the Gulf of Guinea, which he described as 'the paradise of magic' (2) Marty was astounded at the success of Harris in converting the animists to Christianity and at the same time encouraging them to work more and to drink less alcohol. (3) Harrism was, he said,

An almost unbelievable religious fact which has upturned all the ideas which

(1) Mauretanie & Sénégal p.467

(2) Côte d'Ivoire p.7

(3) See Marty on coastal Agni '... forts intelligents, mais paresseux au dela de tout ce qu'on peut imaginer, dans un pays prodigieusement riche elles n'ont qu'un besoin, l'alcool' Côte d'Ivoire p.1.

we had about the primitive and rustic Black societies of the coast and which along with our occupation will be the most considerable political and social event in ten centuries of history past, present and future of the Ivory Coast. (1)

However, the war interrupted the Harris experience, and the authorities, worried by 'a multitude of imitators [of Harris], a scattering of little prophets of Yessas (Jesus) and sons of God, who show much less tact and disinterest than their master or model', 'invited' Harris to leave the colony. (2) Harris' success was thought to be surprising because it was widely believed that the sedentary forest dwellers were incapable of conceptualising a single and unique God. In his study on Dahomey Marty extended the lesson of the Ivory Coast experience to the Fon and Yoruba, two animist ethnic groups with a strong social structure who were both nonetheless according to Marty 'on the threshold of a religious crisis' and before long were likely to convert, depending on mission activity and government policy, either to Islam or to Christianity. Marty warned that, 'One must underline strongly the fact that

(1) Ibid p.13

(2) ANS 5 G 62 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Admin Cercle Lagunes 12.4.1914, Lt.-Gov. I. Coast to cercles 16.12.1914, Marty Côte d'Ivoire pp.16-18.

here, as elsewhere, our confessional neutrality is a great advantage to Islamic proselytism'. (1)  
 Taken together with other evidence such as the wolf and lamb analogies this last warning about the dangers of religious neutrality would seem to suggest that Marty was more in favour of mission activity than were either Arnaud or Ponty.

However, it would be an oversimplification to argue that Marty held to a simple and dogmatic belief in the inherent wickedness of Islam and the innocence and perfectibility of animism. For, like all his contemporaries, Marty was struck by the superiority of Islamic over animist society. The same Diola population whom he had lauded for their industry and willingness to associate themselves with the French civilising mission were also described as having retained along with the other animist groups of Basse-Casamance 'the most extremely barbarous customs' and he proceeded to catalogue an impressive list of vices which were compounded by the fact that 'No commandement exists, neither great nor medium ... This scattering of authority makes administration almost impossible'.

(1) Marty Etudes sur l'islam au Dahomey Paris, 1926, p.30

It was for these reasons said Marty that the French had in the past preferred to make use of the minority Muslim Mandinka community as chiefs and intermediaries. (1)

In the Ivory Coast Marty spoke of the way in which Qur'anic education improved indigenous society:

However rudimentary the education given by marabouts may be, however absurd its methods often are ... it still nonetheless represents a sort of development of the brain, an obligation for the native spirit to rid itself of its congenital torpor and laziness, an attempt at intellectual labour. It gives a rudiment of general knowledge which enables the Black to a certain extent to rise above his milieu, teaching him to glimpse and conceive a mentality which is different from their own and, since it is Arabic different from ours as well, it is true, but one which is certainly superior to the ambiance in which they vegetate. Finally, through desire to go to Paradise and through fear of going to Hell and respect of God it inculcates them with a primitive, but healthy and realistic morality. It has become a commonplace to affirm that Islam constitutes a certain progress in the primitive mentality of the Blacks. There is no doubt about it. (2)

Marty also argued that women were better off in Islamic society than in an animist one. In the

(1) Mauretanie & Sénégal pp. 467-68

(2) Côte d'Ivoire p. 273.

region of Djenne and Macina Marty wrote that ,

The situation of women is certainly better amongst the islamised population of the Niger valley than amongst the fetishist societies. Islam gives her a certain personality, thanks to which she can acquire, possess and sell [material goods] ... to a certain extent govern her own life and, above all else, she may pray. The fetishist woman, similar to the woman of pagan antiquity, takes no part in religion ... and if she is reasonably free physically to come and go as she pleases she is not by any means her own mistress. (1)

Although Marty admitted that some Muslims obstructed the physical liberty of women by imposing the veil, the preference for the Islamic mode is nonetheless clear. In view of the fact that the position of women in society was regarded by some contemporaries as the touch-stone of civilisation such a belief contained a more general comment on the relative merits of animist and Islamic societies than just the specific issue of the position of women in society might suggest.

The final theme running through Marty's books that we shall consider concerns the importance attached to personalities in his studies. As a brief glance at any of his published work will quickly show a large

(1) Soudan vol. II p.293.

proportion is taken up with lists and character sketches of the main Muslim figures. The biographical bias of Marty's work is justified by at least two considerations. The first applies more particularly to the nomadic and semi-nomadic people of the Saharan fringes. As we saw in the study of Coppolani's attempt to win over the clerical tribes of Mauritania, personal diplomacy was, in the absence of a strong military commitment, one of the few tools of conquest available to the French. This was true also of French relations with other societies similar to the Moors and to whose conquest the French were at best only reluctantly committed. Diplomacy was complicated by, amongst other things, the intense factionalism that characterised many of the societies involved. Much of Marty's work on these societies is simply concerned with suggesting possible chiefs. In the case of the Trarza where it should be remembered that the French protégé Emir Ahmet Salum had had no successor following his assassination in 1905, Marty argued that since 1910, when the Emirate had been restored, French rule and French policy had been to create,

... a protectorate regime, a sort of very tight tutelage. We wanted to free the local authorities of the worries

of the internal administration of the tribes ... We aimed at getting the Moors to administer the Moors, but à la française, that is to say with precision and without deprecation. (1)

Marty attempted also to provide guidelines to help French administrators through 'the maquis of Muslim law' (2) and to warn them of,

The astuteness and perfidy of the Moor, and especially of certain maraboutic tribes. ... An administrator who arrives from Black Africa and who has never had to deal with such intrigue is far from being able to imagine such a state of mind and ends up by allowing himself to be duped by this structure of apparent simplicity and the honeyed and well-turned speeches of the Moors. Let us not forget that the Moors are white. (3)

What were the qualities that Marty emphasised as being the hallmarks of a good chief? Marty respected birth and for this reason tolerated the laziness of Eli Mahmud, the chief of the Mechdouf, whose main interest in life it seemed was in drinking calabashes of tea and milk in his tent. (4) But it was clear, nonetheless, that Marty's preferences

(1) Trarza p.289

(2) Ibid p.308

(3) Soudan vol. III p.263

(4) Ibid p.148

lay with Mokhtar ould Mohammed Mahmud, the second of Eli Mahmud's brothers. He was, said Marty

A fine man, cunning and energetic. He has always shown proof of a certain independence and even in the beginning of an undisguised hostility towards us. He is certainly the most intelligent and also perhaps the most warlike of the family ... His personality should hold our attention, and I would be inclined to see him as the best of the candidates for the Emirate from our point of view.(1)

Elsewhere Marty again made it clear that he did not necessarily hold someone's past against them. Thus the chief of the Labat tribe in Brackna who as a young man had fought an intermittent campaign against the French before finally submitting in 1909 was described as an excellent chief:

This young and intelligent bandit of yesteryear understood that he had to come closer to the French in order to restore his tribe. So he came to live at Aleg at the beginning of 1912 and for a few months attended lessons at school. Then ... he studied for a year in the 'medersa' of St Louis and for four years in Boutilimit. Today he speaks and writes French reasonably well. He is an excellent chief who bears himself well. (2)

(1) Ibid pp.150-51

(2) Brackna pp.121-22

Another chief of whom Marty warmly approved was Salah ould Rachid Abd el Oualibouh, a marabout chief of the warrior Awlad Nacer. Marty said that he was one of the most influential Moorish chiefs of the western Sahel: 'He is an intelligent man, learned and very sympathetic. As Cadi of the Oulad Nacer he exercises a great authority over these querulous namads. Many strangers come to obtain judgements and fetwa from him. His tent is a little nomadic zawiya where thirty-odd men and young people improve themselves in higher learning.(1)

Other chiefs were criticised for a variety of shortcomings: Cheikh Mohammed Djeddou of the Jouman tribe was described as being 'more stupid than his camels' (2), Torad ould Cheikh Hadrami, Mohammed Fadel's grand-son and nominal chief of the Ahel Taleb Mokhtar, was suspected for having made too noisy a denunciation of Ma el Ainin and el Hiba, his uncle and cousin respectively, and for scorning 'le menu peuple' (3). Cheikh Fall, a former porter at the masonic lodge in St Louis who had risen from

(1) Soudan vol. III pp.444-45

(2) Ibid p.270

(3) Ibid pp.253-54

humble origins was sacked from his administrative post for corruption.(1)

The second justification for paying so much attention to biographical detail was that Marty believed African Islam to be governed by personalities. In Senegal he said that,

To be a Muslim is to obey the orders of one's marabout and to earn through one's gifts and devotion a share in the merits of the saintly man. The study of the Islamised world is thus almost uniquely a study of maraboutic personalities.(2)

The idea of studying personalities was not, of course, a new one. After all Roume's 1906 circular was specifically intended to create a register of marabouts, but it was Marty and the added urgency of war that translated administrative intentions into reality. In doing so not only did he contribute hugely to the official understanding of 'Islam Noir' but he identified a broader range of Muslim allies than hitherto the French had considered using. Marty was enthusiastic about the results of the close collaboration with Cheikh Sidia:

(1) Brackna p.140

(2) Mauretanie & Sénégal p.206

Such a complete accord between the French authority and one of the representatives of Moorish Islam ... represents one of the most brilliant aspects of the French government in West Africa for Cheikh Sidia is not afraid of compromising himself at our sides. Nothing could better illustrate the leading principle of this policy: the channelling and utilisation of Islam in Muslim country [Marty's emphasis]. This utilisation involves nothing more than amicable collaboration. (1)

The 'amicable collaboration' between the French and Cheikh Sidia had, of course, existed for some time and it was until the First World War a fairly unique relationship. However, in the course of the war it lost much of its uniqueness. El Hajj Malick Sy became one of Marty's favourite Senegalese marabouts. Marty wrote that,

In this country where one has to be wary of tidjianisme which through its Omarien and Toucouleur branch has only ever showed itself as one of our most irreducible enemies, one is pleasantly surprised to see that this ouloff branch, under the inspiration of its chief has nothing but sympathetic sentiments and acts of devotion towards us. (2)

El Hajj Malick Sy's pro-French sentiments preceded Marty's arrival in the colony, but it was Marty who

(1) Ibid p.105

(2) Mauretanie & Sénégal p.400

did most to publicise them. The case of Ahmadu Bamba was particularly striking; although he remained under surveillance throughout the war, the French were prepared to make use of him for recruitment to an extent that would have been inconceivable beforehand. Marty was also prepared to criticise former attitudes to particular Muslim personalities, and the most obvious of such cases was his criticism of the French treatment of the Wali of Goumba and the Jakhanke community in Touba.

His willingness to recognise the pro-French tendencies of many marabouts and to criticise past actions were an important corrective to the wilder theories of a militantly xenophobic Islam. Fuelled by resentment of Lebanese and Moroccan traders (not all of whom were Muslims!) some sections of the European community in West Africa were still obsessed by the Muslim threat. An article in the AOF-Echo - a newspaper owned by Conakry traders - declared in October 1916 that,

All the Muslims of our colonies are entirely hostile to all 'europeanisation' ... Certain of their books, besides the Coran, speak of Europeans ... with the greatest scorn 'dogs and sons of dogs, pork eaters, uncircumcised, etc. ... ' whose race should be destroyed. (1)

(1) ANS 19 G 2 'Politique et colonisation: l'influence musulman' AOF-Echo 24.10.1916.

Such attitudes died hard and it is doubtful that any amount of scholarship would have succeeded in reducing them to extinction. The newspaper article is cited as a reminder that attitudes towards Islam remained heterogeneous. Whilst the focus of this thesis is on shifting trends of perception one should not ignore the constancy of a number of gut prejudices in relation to Islam.

Marty could not hope to destroy such prejudices but he did make it less likely that senior administrators would share them. It is not possible to know how widely read his work was. In April 1917 Ernest Leroux, who published all of his major studies, offered the Governor-General 167 copies of L'Islam au Sénégal for 1,500 francs. I have found no record that this offer was ever taken up, but it is interesting to note that three months later the Governor-General, Van Vollenhoven, suggested to the Governor of Senegal that each cercle should have two copies of the book. (1) As Van Vollenhoven recognised, Marty's studies were excellent guides for administrators who possessed little knowledge of

(1) ANS 13 G 67 Leroux to Gov.-Gen. AOF 2.4.1917, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Sen. July 1917.

Islam. They were written clearly and simply. Although there is at least one reference to Durkheim - in L'Islam en Côte d'Ivoire, the most theoretical of all his studies (1) - Marty did not on the whole indulge in intellectual speculation in the way that Clozel was prone to do. His studies were empirical, based on personal observation, conversation with Muslims and French experts and on a selective use of local monographs. He would also send local administrators a series of very specific questions concerning aspects of Muslim life and culture in their cercles. For example, the commandant de cercle of Odienne in the Ivory Coast was asked nine questions about local Muslim culture. A measure of the preciseness of the questions can be gauged from the fact that of the nine questions four related to hairstyles, beards, moustaches and tatoos. (2) Marty's general conclusions and his message were likewise clear and simple: Islam in Africa should not be assimilated to Arab Islam for it was strongly coloured by the indigenous pre-Islamic culture and traditions of the various ethnic groups.

(1) Côte d'Ivoire p.400

(2) ANS 5 G 64 hand-written questionnaire, cercle of Odienne n.d.

The French should not encourage Islam through the use of Arabic or Qur'anic law, and animist communities should be offered some sort of protection from Muslim intrusion. Within Muslim areas, where the French had nothing serious to fear from Islam, the French task was principally of forging alliances with Muslim leaders. Marty was clearly not a particularly original scholar but he was much more thorough than any of his predecessors had been, and therein lies his strength and value, not only for his contemporaries but also for subsequent generations of scholars of Islam in Africa.

#### The Tuareg revolts of 1916 -17

In West Africa the years 1914-18 are normally associated with more momentous events than the development of French scholarship on Islam. And rightly so. It is no longer the case that, 'Few aspects of West Africa's colonial history have received such scant attention in relation to its importance as the impact of the First World War on

French West Africa. (1) The war is now generally recognised as a turning point in West African history. (2) In all some 200,000 troops from AOF were recruited throughout the war, and it is estimated that of the pre-1918 recruits the casualty rate was about 30%. This was perhaps not so much as to be a major demographic blow to West African societies but it is clear that some groups suffered disproportionately as recruitment was concentrated along the Niger axis amongst Mandinka people. (3) The African soldiers were used on a number of fronts: in West Africa itself in the joint Anglo-French campaigns in Togoland (August 1914) and in Kamerun (August 1914 - February 1916),

- (1) M. Crowder 'The First World War' in J.F. Ajayi & M. Crowder (eds) History of West Africa vol. II London, 1971 p. 484.
- (2) See 'World War I and Africa' a special issue of JAH 1978 xix (1)
- (3) M. Michel 'Le Concours de l'AOF à la France pendant la première guerre mondiale' Thèse de Doctorat, Paris 1979 ch. 19 gives a detailed breakdown of recruitment statistics.

British African troops were also used in the East African campaign, but the bulk of French West African troops - the Tirailleurs Sénégalais - were used on the Western Front in Europe.

One of the indicators of the hardships created by the war is the number of revolts against the French, the most serious revolts taking place in Upper Volta (November 1915-July 1916), Dahomey (1916-17) and in Niger (1916-17). In addition many Africans voted with their feet - as many as 61,500 men were reckoned to have migrated to neighbouring British colonies in order to escape recruitment, the indigénat and prestation, the last two of which were used more vigorously than ever in order to coerce Africans into increased production for the French war effort.<sup>(1)</sup> The political effects of Blaise Diagne's role as 'Commissaire of the Republic for the Recruitment of Troops in West Africa' are well known. It was a role which led Van Vollenhoven to resign and which disgusted, amongst others, Delafosse, but which nonetheless ensured that

(1) Crowder 'First World War' p.606

politics in the Four Communes would survive and indeed prosper in a way that few Frenchmen could have foreseen and even fewer wished. (1) Clearly these were momentous years, and we will return to some of the wider consequences of the African experience of war in Europe later in the thesis. But to conclude this section on the war years we will take a closer look at the revolts of 1916-17 in Niger.

Soon after war brokeout in Europe the administration in Dakar was remarkably sanguine about the possible consequences of the war on the stability and tranquility of the West African colonies. However, there was one colony, the 'Territoire Militaire du Niger', where the French were less complacent. Ponty admitted to the Colonial Minister in November 1914 that the 'most vulnerable country is the military territory of Niger. It is there that we may fear fanatics preaching against us. (2)

(1) G. Wesley Johnson The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal Stanford, 1971

(2) ANS 19 G 2 Gov.-Gen. ACF to Min. Col. Nov. 1914.

The reasons for this belief are not hard to understand. As the fact that it was still under military command suggested, the colony was still a long way from being under full French control. The traditional economy had been severely disrupted by the colonial intervention and by the insecurity of the trans-Saharan trade routes, the years 1911-13 were ones of serious drought culminating in the very serious famine of 1913-14; (1) and finally, the proximity of the colony to the conflict between the Sanusiyya and the Italians in Cyrenaica and southern Tripolitania was another crucial element in the colony's political and economic position.

As we have seen in the history of the French conquest of Mauritania and Chad the 'Saharan confines', as they were called, posed enormous problems to the French. The harshness of the

(1) F. Fugelstad 'Les Révoltes des Touareg du Niger (1916-17)' CEA 1973 p.85 E. Bernus 'Touaregs nigériens. Unité culturelle et diversité régionale d'un peuple pasteur Paris, 1981 p.100

climate and the terrain were compounded, in French eyes at least, by the fierce and warlike character of the people who lived there. In this respect the reputation of the Tuareg, the principle nomadic group in Niger, was similar to that of the Moors and the Arabs. The social structure of Tuareg society was broadly similar to that of other sahelian nomadic peoples. The Tuareg are essentially a linguistic group - the Kel Tamasheg, but Tamasheg, a Berber language, has often made way for Hausa as the lingua franca of the area. Tuareg society is divided into free men - ilellan - and slaves - iklan. The freemen have a number of castes headed by a warrior aristocracy - imashagan - with a subordinate clerical caste, the ineslemen. These are followed by other subordinate castes including vassals and tributaries (imghad), artisans (inadan) and mixed blood (iboghollitan). Our earlier warnings against belief in an over-rigid classification and distinction between warrior and clerical castes in Moorish society applies equally to the Tuareg. Norris has shown that 'Sahelian societies do not operate a wholly static class structure whereby ineslemen cannot assume the role

of imashagan. (1) It has been said, however, that social change within Tuareg society is very slow. (2) The Tuareg are divided into confederations of small, and generally endogamous, social units known as tiusatin (sing. tawsit) grouped together in an ettobal (an ettobal is a war-drum). The number and complexity of the various confederations and their sub-divisions are such that only the major ones can be mentioned here.

One of the earliest French accounts of Tuareg society was given by H. Duveyrier who travelled extensively (as a Christian but under the pseudonym of Sid-Saad ben Doufiry!) amongst the Tuareg of the northern Sahara between 1859 and 1861. He reported that

In their relations with the French, the Tuareg have up until now shown themselves to be very docile ... No European traveller

- (1) H. Norris Shinguiti Folk Literature and Song Oxford, 1968; The Tuaregs - Their Islamic Legacy and its Diffusion in the Sahel Waminster, 1975; Bernus Touaregs nigeriens all contain good descriptions of Tuareg social organisation.
- (2) J. Nicolaisen 'The Historical Change of Tuareg Social Organisation' Ethnos 1973 pp.271-99

who has explored the interior of Africa has ever been the victim of an act of brutality or fanaticism either on Tuareg territory or at the hands of a targui. This fact answers all the calumnies concerning their character which their enemies, the Arabs, have propagated. (1)

However, this image of Tuareg attitudes to Europeans was destroyed by the death of Flatters in 1881 for which Duveyrier was held partly responsible for having given the impression that Europeans could travel safely amongst the Tuareg. Duveyrier himself committed suicide in the face of public criticism. (2) However, his name was defended by Lt. Hourst who led a successful mission to the Niger in 1896. In his account of the mission he argued that the Tuaregs did not deserve their terrible reputation and he paid tribute to their qualities of courage and endurance and to the high esteem with which women were regarded in Tuareg society. He blamed all Tuareg violence to Europeans on one particularly fierce confederation, the Hoggar. (3) In 1911 Capt. Aymard in a Randaesque account of the enervating and moralising

(1) H. Duveyrier Les Touareg du Nord Paris, 1864 p.453 and see also his account, published posthumously, Journal de route: Sahara algérien et tunisien Paris, 1905.

(2) According to Lt. Hourst in La Mission Hourst Paris, 1898 p.253.

(3) Ibid ch.5.

qualities of the privations of the desert fringes argued that, 'For all their faults the Tuareg are more sympathetic than their neighbours, the Moors and Arabs'. Amongst their faults he noted the habit of force-feeding rich girls in order to make them fat, fatness being considered a mark of beauty.<sup>(1)</sup> (All French accounts of Tuareg society dwelt at some length on the size of Tuareg women.) Aymard's account was (yet another) manifesto for the creation of a unified French empire in north west Africa and he was concerned to highlight the importance of French policy towards the Tuareg.

However, as was evident from the handling of the Djerma and Zinder 'conspiracies' official commitment to further expansion in the region was at best half-hearted. When the Italians decided to abandon the Fezzan to the Sanusiyya in January 1915 the French decided that it was no longer worth the cost and risk of maintaining small and isolated military garrisons in the desert. (2)

(1) Capt. Aymard Les Touareg Paris, 1911

(2) Fuglestad 'Les Révoltes' p.88

Political leadership of the Tuareg was highly fragmented, and their response to the French presence was, from the start, extremely divided. The western Oulliminden under the chiefship of the amenokal Madidu attempted to ally with the French. (Madidu, for example, had promised to protect Lt Hourst.) Likewise in the east the Kel Owey confederation which was concerned about the caravan trade to Hausaland was also prepared to accept the French. On the other hand, the Imuzzuruq led by Musa, the Sultan of Damergu, were hostile and following their chief's death in 1900, emigrated to Kanem rather than submit to the French. Bernus suggests that the Tuareg living in closest contact with sedentary societies were the ones who made the greatest attempt to resist the French because they were made to feel the reality of French domination much more acutely than were the more isolated and purely nomadic confederations. (1) However, in 1915 the combination of reduced French forces in the colony as a result of commitments in Europe and the success of the Sanusiyya against

(1) Bernus Touaregs nigériens p.99

the Italians could be said to have widened the range of options open to the Tuareg leadership vis-a-vis the French. Although the Tuareg were not noted for particularly strong religious fervour the possibility of an alliance with the Sanusiyya became a very reasonable option.

Such then was the rough background of the situation in Niger at the start of the First World War. In the account which follows of the Tuareg revolts of 1916-17 no claim is made to add substantial new evidence to an episode in West African history which has already attracted a remarkably high amount of scholarly attention. (1) My concern is simply

- (1) In addition to works already cited of Bernus, Fugelstad and Norris see A. Salifou 'Les Français, Fihoun et les Kounta, 1902-16' Journal de la Société des Africanistes 1973 pp. 173-95; 'Kaoussan ou la révolte senoussiste' Etudes Nigériennes 33, 1974; A. Bourgeot 'Les Echanges transahariens, la senusiyya et les revoltes twareg de 1916-17' CEA 1978 pp. 159-85. Interpretations of the revolt vary from Salifou's emphasis on the nationalist aspects of the revolt through to Fugelstad's stress on the conjunctural factors of economic and political crisis and his view that the revolts are more accurately seen as part of the final stages of the decline of the nomadic lifestyle rather than as the first stirrings of an infant Nigerien nationalism.

to describe the way in which contemporary French observers understood the revolt.

There were two distinct and independent poles of revolt. The first was in the west of the colony and was associated with Firhoun, the amenokal of the Oulliminden. Firhoun was chief of the Kel Ataram which formed part of the Oulliminden confederation and following Madidu's example he, too, had submitted to the French early in 1903. In September and October 1914 he led a relatively minor and unsuccessful revolt but was soon arrested and imprisoned. (1) In February 1916 he escaped from prison at a time when the authorities in Niger were worried by Tuareg unrest in the cercle of Dori and by reports of a worsening situation in the region of Timbuktu. Digue, the interim Lt.-Governor of Haut-Senegal et Niger did not see how the French, with their shortage of troops, could 'intervene effectively'. (2) It is not entirely clear what Firhoun's particular grievance against the French was. Later accounts suggested that he was inherently anti-French and had long been hatching a scheme

(1) Bernus Touaregs Nigeriens pp.87-90

(2) SHAT AOF Soudan IX/lb Digue to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.2.1916.

against them. According to these accounts his escape from prison was effected by seducing his jailers with his charm. However, at the time of his escape there was a bitter correspondence between Digue and Major Cauvin, the military commander of Timbuktu, concerning the accusation that Firhoun had been mistreated by his captors. Cauvin rejected these accusations, but his counter claim that at his trial in 1914 Firhoun had been the victim of false witnesses was an interesting one. Both accounts suggest that Firhoun had strong personal grievances against the French. (1) Having escaped Firhoun gathered his old followers and moved into the relatively prosperous region of Filingue. Here he came up against a detachment of tirailleurs led by Capt. Loyer who routed Firhoun's forces at a battle in Anderanboukane on 13th May. The Tuareg casualties numbered several hundred, including women and children. Sixty-six of the dead were decapitated and their heads were sent for public display in a nearby town. Fifteen Tuareg captured on a patrol a few days later were

(1) See Dr Richer Les Oulliminden Paris, 1924 pp.198,273 for accounts of Firhoun's charm. Cauvin and Digue's correspondence is in SHAT AOF Soudan IX/lb.

publicly executed, and a month later Firhoun, himself, was killed. The Tirailleurs lost two men. (1) Clearly Digue's doubts about the French ability to 'intervene effectively' were misplaced with respect to the revolt of the Oulliminden. The wholesale slaughter of Firhoun's followers and the acts of summary justice were sufficient to put the Oulliminden revolt to an early and bloody end.

The second pole of the revolt was located in the north-eastern region of Aïr and on the town of Agades in particular. This was an area close to Borku and Tibesti where the Sanusiyya had become increasingly active. In March 1916 the commandant de cercle of Agades received warnings of German and Turkish activity in Tripoli, but the warning was a general one designed as a spur to vigilance rather than direct action. (2) More specific warnings came in June when the Agades commandant was told,

- (1) SHAT AOF Soudan IX/lb Capt. Loyer 'Rapport d'ensemble sur les operations de repression contre les Oulliminden de Firhoun' 20.6.1916
- (2) SHAT AOF Niger III/3e Mourin to Commt. cercle Agades 29.3.1916.

The tribes of the west of your cercle are in constant relations with the Senoussists of Fezzan, notably with Kaossen, a dissident since 1903 who is affiliated to the Senoussia ... It is of the utmost importance that the Senoussist virus which has spread with such force in Tripolitania, Borkou, Tibesti and the desert region of Chad and Upper Egypt does not come and infect our possessions in AOF ... The Touaregs are generally affiliated to the Quadria brotherhood and until now they have had weak links with the Tripolitanians and have remained not very fanatical Muslims. It is important to preserve these happy and natural dispositions.

The preservation of the Tuaregs from the Senoussi virus was to be effected by rigorous control of all movements in Air and by reminding untrustworthy tribesmen of the fate of Firhoun and the Oulliminden. (1) Kaossen, to whom specific reference was made, belonged to the Imezzureq who had emigrated to Kanem to escape French domination at the start of the century. Between 1908 and 1912 he had moved from one Chadian state to another but was not well received by any of the leaders and he eventually submitted to the French in Wadai in October 1912. However, the following year he moved to the Fezzan where he was in close touch with the Sanusiyya whom he was said

(1) SHAT AOF Niger III/3e Mourin to commt. cercle Agades 22.6.1916.

to have joined in 1909. Early in 1916 Djanet fell to the Sanusiyya leaving the way open for Kaossen to move south to Air and Agades. (1)

At this juncture Kaossen attempted to win the support of other Tuareg in Air. The Kel Dennek, part of the Oulliminden confederation who had not been involved in the earlier revolt were divided: the ineslemen tribes on the whole were prepared to support Kaossen but the imashagan were not. The role of the Kel es Suq, one of the most important of all Tuareg ineslemen tribes, renowned for their scholarship throughout Tuareg society (2) was mysterious. One of their chiefs, Mohammed Ahmed, was said by Marty to have played a part in all the rebellions between 1880 and 1917 and that he provided the 'religious cement' for the Tuareg action in Firhoun's rebellion in 1916. (3) Cauvin believed that the Kel es Suq and Mohammed Ahmed were

- (1) Salifou 'Kaoussan ' pp. 55-58; Bernus Touaregs nigériens pp.99-101
- (2) Norris The Tuaregs pp.23-29
- (3) Marty & Mangeot 'Les Touareg de la boucle du Niger' BCEHSACF 1918 pp.435-39

'the main causes of the state of spirit amongst the nomads. ... They are cunning and astute men, and although poorly educated their speeches and tricks greatly impress their listeners.' Cauvin recommended a definitive victory backed up by unequivocal punishment as the only way of 'pacifying' the Tuareg once and for all. He was backed up in this argument by Angoulvant who regretted that, 'Since our occupation of Tombouctou we have never pushed the repression of insurrection to the limit. In a word we have never conquered Tuareg country.' Both Cauvin and Angoulvant agreed that religion was a minor element in the Tuareg unrest. (1) However, Norris argues that a Kel es Suq faction had actually attempted to dissuade Firhoun from rebelling against the French. (2) There is no doubt, however, that the most important of Kaossen's allies was Tegama, the Sultan of Agades, with whom Kaossen is said to have been in correspondence since 1913. (3)

(1) ANSOM AP 1418 Cauvin to Lt.-Gov. HSN 8.9.1916; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. HSN 26.10.1916.

(2) Norris The Tuaregs p.163

(3) Salifou 'Kaoussan.' p.58

As late as November 1916 the French authorities in Agades although aware of the widespread spirit of unrest were nonetheless almost wholly ignorant of either Kaossen's strength or his intentions. Agades, the main garrison for the second company of tirailleurs was not well defenced. Its commandant, Capt. Sabatié, reported that his predecessor had been lulled into a false sense of security by Tegama and had done nothing to build up its defences - armaments, money and food were all stored outside the blockhouse. On the 1st November, the day on which Sabatié took over command, the second company of tirailleurs was scattered in six groups throughout the Air massif. Only 35 tirailleurs were left in Agades itself. By early December Satatié realised that the situation was serious and attempted to recall some of his men. By the 13th December the garrison strength was up to nearer 100 men. The following day Kaossen, allied with Tegama, laid siege to Agades. (1)

- (1) SHAT AOF Niger IV/1 'Rapport du Capt. Sabatié ... sur le siege du 13.12.1916 & 3.3.1917';  
SHAT AOF Niger IV/2 'Rapport du Lt.-Col. Mourin' 8.3.1917.

Reports of the siege reached the authorities in Dakar at the same time as the news that an entire section of meharists from the second company had been wiped out in an ambush whilst escorting the azalai to Bilma. General Guillet urged Clozel, recently returned to Dakar, to seek the British authority's permission to send reinforcement troops and armaments via Kano and also, if necessary, to appeal for the help of British troops stationed near to Zinder. On Christmas day a state of siege was declared in Niger. Clozel agreed to approach Lugard who himself declared a state of emergency in Northern Nigeria early in January. He also agreed to send a company of cavalry and infantry to help the French who had already gone to the extent of recalling an entire battalion of tirailleurs from Europe. It was also decided to reorganise the administrative structure for the entire Saharan region which was temporarily united under the command of General Laperrine. (1) Eventually sufficient forces - and

- (1) ANS 1 D 218 Gen. Guillet (Commt. sup. des troupes en AOF) to Gov.-Gen. AOF 23.12.1916; Capt. de Jonquières 'Rapport sur les événements d'Agadez et sur la révolte touareg' 14.7.1917; ANSOM AP 1418 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 22.9.1917; ANS 1 D 208 'Décision interministerielle relative à la constitution d'un commandement temporaire du territoire saharien' 12.1.1917. On British role see J. Osuntokun 'The response of the British colonial government in Nigeria to the Islamic insurgency in the French Sudan and the Sahara during World War One' Bull. IFAN (B) 1974 pp. 14-24.

and goat-skins to carry water - were assembled for a relief column to be sent from Zinder in February 1917. (1) The following month after 80 days of siege Agades was finally relieved by the column led by Colonel Mourin. At the same time various other forces were sent out to defeat other centres of Tuareg resistance and annihilate the forces of Tegama and Kaossen. A decisive defeat was inflicted on Kaossen as early as July but, ominously for the Tuareg, the military were intent this time on 'going to the limit': 'Nomads respect only the force of arms and only obey us as long as they feel we are stronger than they are. This principle should never be lost from sight.'(2) The French forces were helped by the Hoggar Tuareg under the command of Musa ag Amastane who had been signalled as a possible ally in June 1916. (3)

- (1) SHAT AOF Niger IV/2 'Rapport Mourin' 8.3.1917.
- (2) SHAT AOF Niger IV/1 'Rapport d'ensemble du Commt. Berger sur la colonne de Tombouctou à Agades et de l'Air, Jan.-Aout 1917'. This file contains several other military reports of the 'mopping up' operations.
- (3) SHAT AOF Niger III/3e Mourin to Commt. cercle Agades 22.6.1916.

After the revolt the commander of the section in which the Hoggar had been temporarily incorporated recommended that Musa, 'a proven partisan of peace, the head of the French party and a man whose superior qualities are uncontested by all Tuareg', should be backed by the French against other Tuareg chiefs and for a while Musa was, indeed, a favourite of the French military command. (1) The French continued to pursue Kaossen and Tegama; Kaossen fled to Fezzan in mid-1918 and died there the following year, Tegama was captured in May 1919 and, according to the official account, 'committed suicide'. However, the 'pacification' of the Air massif continued until 1931. (2) The failure of

- (1) SHAT AOF Niger V/1 'Rapport du Capt. Deponnier, commt. le groupe mobile du Hoggar sur la conduite de Moussa ag Amastane' 20.10.1917. See also ANSOM AP 1418 Col. Lefèbvre 'Rapport ... sur la situation politique du Territoire militaire du Niger' 6.8.1918 '... Le chef Hoggar s'est montré digne de la confiance que lui a donné m. le Gen. commt. sup. des Oasis sahariens.'
- (2) ANSOM AP 1418 'Rapport sur les opérations menées par les troupes de l'AOF contre Kaossen' 14.6.1918, unsigned; SHAT AOF Niger IV/1 'Rapport du Lt.-Col. Lefèbvre au sujet de l'opération qui a mené à la prise de Tegama' 10.7.1919; Fugelstad 'Les Revoltes' pp. 114-20; Norris The Tuaregs pp. 166-67

the revolt, described by some as the last desperate attempt of a warrior aristocracy to preserve its traditional way of life (1) , was disastrous for everybody who lived in the region, and as many as 30,000 Tuareg are believed to have fled to Kano and Katsina. (2)

That the revolt was a major one with serious implications for colonisers and colonised alike, there can be no doubt. It obviously shook both the French and the British. It is interesting to know what they thought caused the revolt. From the first reports of Firhoun's revolt it seems clear that the initial reaction of the French was to blame the unrest on the lack of French soldiers in the region and as a reaction against French recruitment. In October 1916 Angoulvant argued that,

In the Tuareg uprising ... the religious question plays an entirely secondary role and for the most part of the time plays no role at all. It is the decrease in our numbers which giving rise to a belief in our weakness has caused the Tuaregs to shake off our yoke which they have only accepted against their will. (3)

- (1) Bernus Touaregs nigériens p.105; Fugelstad 'Les Révoltes' p.120
- (2) Norris The Tuaregs p.167
- (3) ANSOM AP 1418 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. HSN 26.10.1916 and see similar arguments in Cauvin to Lt.-Gov. HSN 8.9.1916.

The correspondence between Mourin and Cauvin following Firhoun's escape reveals an awareness of the personal factors involved. Capt. Sabatié, in command of the post of Agades at the time of the siege was extremely critical of his predecessor for having added to France's manpower problems by insouciance and for having allowed himself to be lulled into a false sense of security. So although religion, in the shape of the Sanusiyya, was recognised as having played a part in the Tuareg revolts, initial reactions were more inclined to look for immediate short term causes than to blame the revolts on larger, international and impersonal forces. The only long term cause that was allowed at this stage was related to a belief in the innate warlike and anarchic character of the Tuareg. (1)

- (1) cf. Dr Richer on Oulliminden revolt in Dori, December 1915; '... Les causes de la revolte? On crut, sur le moment, pouvoir les rattacher à des considerations purement locales, en vue de la guerre, un premier recrutement de tirailleurs avait été fait en Juillet dans le cercle de Dori parmi les peuples noirs, un second recrutement était commencé sur la fleuve. ... On pensa d'abord que ce recrutement dont les Touareg se croyaient à tort menacés directement, était la principale raison de la révolte.' Les Oulliminden p.273. See also Laizé 'L'Islam dans le Territoire militaire du Niger' BCEHSACF 1919 for his view on 'La race conquérante des Toubbous ... au fanatisme puissant.'

This contrasts very sharply with French reactions to unrest in Zinder in 1906 when at the first hint of trouble the local administration immediately leapt to the conclusion that they were the victims of a vast and sinister conspiracy.

Conspiracy - which undoubtedly did exist to a certain extent in the 1916-17 revolts - could not, however, be kept out of the reckoning for long. Once Kaossen's revolt had been squashed Lt.-Col. Lefebvre, a veteran of the 1906 Zinder 'conspiracy', gave dramatic warnings of the danger represented not just by the Sanusiyya but by Muslims generally:

The marabout is our principle enemy in the Military Territory. He exploits the prestige gained from his pseudo-knowledge to lead against our authority a silent campaign which is all the more dangerous as he has taken care not to show his hostility openly. (1)

However, the most explicit conspiracy argument came several years later in a book written by Dr Richer who argued that 'world-wide Austro-German activity' lay behind the Tuareg revolt. (2) But in view of the fact that the revolts were themselves so serious and

(1) ANSOM AP 591/18 'Rapport politique, 3eme Trimestre, Territoire militaire du Niger' 1919.

(2) Richer Oulliminden pp. 261, 273

that they actually took place at a time when France was at war with Germany the accusations of conspiracy and German involvement were remarkably mild. Whether this was because everybody took it for granted that the 'Bosch' were behind it all cannot be said, but it seems unlikely.

It would be tempting to argue that the more down to earth attitudes of Marty and the growing influence of ethnologists in administrative practice were in part responsible for the general consensus that the revolts were a local manifestation of Tuareg grievances rather than part of a more generalised and well-orchestrated conspiracy of German or Islamic fanaticism. But there can be no firm evidence of such a causal link. Marty's own explanation of the revolts was an interesting one which remains influential to this day. He argued that there was a combination of 'profound causes which alienated us from the nomads of the Niger bend and which predisposed them ... to seize all opportunities to revolt' and of incidental causes. Amongst the first group he placed French destruction of the political hegemony of the Tuareg in the region and the suppression of slavery. The incidental causes related to the problems posed by the war in Europe

and rumours that the French intended to abandon their colonies. (1) However, later in his study of the Tuareg Marty devoted a lengthy passage to the responsibility of the clerical Kel es Suq for having encouraged others to revolt. He argued that,

Religion is not in the minds of the tribes one of the real causes of the insurrection. Were the Touaregs fetishist, their attitudes towards us would still be the same, as religion has nothing to do with the reasons why they find our domination so objectionable.

But he went on to say that although religion could be discounted as a cause of the revolt the same could not be said of the role of the marabout. The marabouts, he said, impressed the Tuareg with their ability to perform - or at least to promise - miracles. The reputation of the marabout might spread beyond his own tribe and then, Marty said, 'He appears as the political link which joins the different tribes, and sometimes he is even their leader. For nomadic society, which is essentially anarchic in

(1) Mangeot & Marty 'L'Islam dans la boucle du Niger' p.278.

character, [he represents] a possibility of cohesion, if only temporary, which should worry us and needs to be closely watched.' He concluded that French policy in the future should lie in encouraging purely 'Tuareg' qualities through such means as the creation of nomadic schools and that finally,

It is not from their imrad that one should try and detach the Touareg but rather from their marabouts who exploit their simple and superstitious nature and supply them with explanations and commentaries which are always hostile towards us and which ... encourage suspicion and hatred. (1)

This analysis of the causes of the revolt was reinforced in the 1940s and 1950s by the monographs written by the students at CHEAM on the subject of the Tuareg. In these monographs there is a consensus that French policy had consistently favoured the clerical against the warrior tribes. One quoted a 1909 circular from Gao stating that 'It is the clergy who will help the Third Estate against the Nobility.' (2) The result of this

(1) Ibid pp.433-35, 469

(2) P. Bataillon 'L'Islam et l'organisation politique des Touaregs du Niger' CHEAM (R) 937, 1946.

preference for the 'progressive' ineslemen tribes was, according to the CHEAM consensus, a transformation of Tuareg society:

Whilst the former society was doted with a very strong framework, in perfect harmony with its environment, drawing its strength from the political and economic laws and needs, the present society dating from 1900 is a magma in which inassimilable and untransformable maraboutic elements gravitate. (1)

In this Sahelian magma the most important maraboutic influence was that of the Kel es Suq. In Dori they were said to have succeeded in transorming 'the luke-warm Muslim Touareg' into fanatics and thus to have caused the revolt in 1916. (2)

A more recent exponent of this argument has been Finn Fugelstad who states that 'The maraboutics (sic) lacked the sense of duty and social obligation which are the characteristics of a 'functional' nobility, such as the former targui nobility ... The tuaregs underwent a 'fanaticisation' on the religious level as the marabouts exploited religious sentiments

(1) M. Nicholas 'L'Islam et les confréries en pays tuareg nigerien' CHEAM - Questions Sahariennes 1009, 1946.

(2) Capt. Bourgeot 'Les Toureg de l'Oudalan' CHEAM 120 (2664) 1957.

for socio-political purposes.' (1) However, the Marty-CHEAM-Fugelstad argument is not entirely convincing. For whilst it is true that the 1916-17 revolts cannot be explained without reference to the political, social and economic changes in Tuareg society resulting from the colonial intervention it is by no means clear that the most important of these changes was a notional preference (expressed, for example, in the 1909 Gao circular) to deal with the ineslemen rather than the imashagan. A far more serious blow to the warrior aristocracy was dealt by the disruption of the Transsaharan trade from which the Tuareg chiefs derived most of their wealth through exaction of protection money, passage rights and pillage. It is curious also that Marty et al have chosen to minimise the role of the Sanusiyya whose importance in Kaossen's revolt, at least, would appear to have been considerable and of much greater consequence than that of the Kel es Suq. (2) Lastly, the idea of a 'functional' aristocracy imbued with a strong sense of social duty seems to be an over-idealised

(1) Fugelstad 'Les Révoltes' p.93

(2) Bernus, Gourgeot, Norris & Salifou all insist on the importance of the role of the Sanusiyya.

and romantic view of pre-colonial Tuareg society and reflects a sentimentality towards a bygone age, evocative of noble warriors, which French administrators and contemporary social scientists are liable, for their separate reasons, to be unduly nostalgic.

The nostalgia of French administrators, many of whom had a military background, is of particular relevance to this thesis. As in Mauritania there was in Niger a strong reaction against the supposedly pro-Islamic tendencies of the first generation of colonisers and in favour of the warrior aristocracy. The reasons for this reaction are manifold: partly early hopes of a grand Islamic policy à la Coppolani raised expectations too high, partly it reflects a preference to deal with soldiers and partly, too it reveals the very high degree of anxiety - amongst civilians and military alike - that the French were actually encouraging Islam by their actions. This was an anxiety shared by Marty and this should be borne in mind when reading Marty's account of the Tuareg revolts. (Furthermore, Marty's account was co-written with one of the great colonial military heroes, Col. Mangeot, a 'Saharan' soldier who had led the meharist section which occupied Walata for the first time in 1912.) Finally, it should be stressed that

changes in chiefship amongst the Tuareg is a complex issue which requires further research before the fears of the French administration that they had unwittingly engineered the usurpation of Tuareg leadership by the marabouts can be proven to be based on reality.

Other changes, however, besides those that were taking place within Tuareg society resulted from the experience of the first few decades of colonial rule and of the particular pressures and tensions which the First World War brought to bear on that system. The world which Delafosse, Clozel and Marty had documented in such detail, and it must be said with such affection, was changing. The final section of this thesis will deal with the French response to the changing circumstances of the inter-war years.

PART THREE: 1920-1940: THE FRENCH STAKE IN  
ISLAM NOIR

J'ai eu à administrer au cours de ma carrière des tribus algériennes et des peuplades noires, Je dois reconnaître que j'ai rencontré beaucoup plus de gens compréhensifs chez les noirs que chez les berbères. Les nigériens acceptent, l'africain du nord refuse.

R. Randau and F. Abdelkader  
Les Compagnons du jardin  
(1933)

## Introduction

Advertisements appearing in the monthly journal l'Afrique française remained virtually unchanged in the first twenty years of the journal's existence: champagne with corks for tropical climates, special tents and pills to cure constipation (and worse) were all constant features of the curious epoch of French colonialism in the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, by the early 1920s the tents and pills had made way for banks, theodolites and drawing boards. (The champagne, however, survived.) This change clearly reflected the increasing popularity of the idea of La mise en valeur des colonies associated particularly with the post-war Minister of Colonies, Albert Sarraut. The use of colonial soldiers during the First War had indicated the economic potential of the colonies, and the financial ruin and social hardship which France experienced immediately after the war gave added urgency to the need to exploit the economic potential of her overseas empire. The war had helped France both to understand and to define her

colonial mission - and the itinerant adventurer with his tents and pills was transformed as a result into the rather more permanent figure of draughtsman and engineer planning the rational exploitation of Africa's wealth. (1)

During the 1920s the development of new and improved transport systems helped to integrate the colonies to the metropole. Airplanes flew between Dakar and Algiers at least as early as 1920 and in 1927 there was the first direct crossing by air between Africa and South America. Air travel reduced not just the isolation of empire but also the risks and hazards of tropical climates: in June 1922 an administrator bitten by a rabid dog in Bamako was flown in less than twelve hours to Dakar for hospital treatment. (2)

- (1) On the war see special edition of JAH 'World War I and Africa' especially R. Rathbone's 'Introduction' and C. Andrew & A.S. Kanya Forstner 'France Africa and the First World War' JAH XIX (1) 1978; M. Michel Le concours. On hope and mise en valeur see R. Girardet L'Idée coloniale en France Paris, 1971; C.R. Ageron France coloniale ou parti colonial? Paris, 1978; BCAF passim.
- (2) 'L'Age de l'air en Afrique' BCAF Oct-Dec 1922, see also BCAF Oct 1927.

In many ways it must have seemed that the colonies were about to embark on a glorious new era of economic development.

However, other changes had to be taken into consideration. The First World War had been fought by the Allies in a spirit of mutual distrust and it was only their shared hostility to Germany which prevented the alliance from breaking up. Once Germany had been defeated it took several years before the need to restore financial stability and to rebuild the European economies brought the Allies into a semblance of agreement. In the meantime they fell apart over the shareout of the spoils of victory with Anglo-French squabbles over the division of the Ottoman empire and a much more serious disagreement between the French, British and Americans over German reparations. France, which had suffered in the war more than any of the Allies, claimed huge reparations from Germany. 'L'Allemagne paiera' was the single answer of all walks of Frenchmen to their country's economic problems. As it became obvious through the series of conferences held in the early 1920s to determine the extent and nature of German reparations that Germany would not and could

not pay for all of the damage sustained by France during the war, an accusing finger was pointed by French nationalists, led by Poincaré, at an Anglo-Saxon conspiracy against France. (1) One of the effects of these tensions was to heighten French sensitivity to international criticism but particularly American criticism of French colonial practices. For example, an article in L'Afrique française in 1930 attacked countries without colonies (i.e. the United States) and who were unaware of the 'psychological or material realities of the native populations' but who used the League of Nations to criticise colonial powers. (2)

- (1) See Andrew & Kanya Forstner France Overseas chs. 8 & 9; P. Bertrand La Fin d'un Monde Paris, 1973 pp. 131-78; C.S. Maier Recasting Bourgeois Europe Princeton, 1975, ch.4 'The politics of reparation'; A. Tynbee Survey of International Events 1920-3 London, 1924.
- (2) A. Lebrun 'La France coloniale devant le monde' BCAF April 1930 pp. 159-62; see also M. Lakroum Le travail inégal: paysans et salariés devant la crise des années 30 Paris, 1983 pp. 23-27 on French suspicions of International Labour Office.

Suspicion of Anglo-Saxon intrigue was, however, greatly exceeded by fear of Bolshevism. The Russian October Revolution had introduced a new factor into the political calculations of Western Europe. The success of the Bolshevik Revolution caused European governments to fear for their ability to preserve the status quo not only in Europe but also in the colonies. Although Marxist theory towards pre-capitalist societies was somewhat unclear, nonetheless the beliefs in the internationalism of the revolution and in the notion that imperialism represented the highest form of capitalism were sufficiently strong for the Bolshevik government to make a muddled offer of support to the peoples of Africa and Asia. The Second Congress of the Comintern in July 1920 discussed the issues of nationalism and colonialism and was attended by delegates from India, Turkey, Persia, China and Korea. At the instigation of the Turkish delegates the commission charged with considering the colonial question specifically insisted on the need to pursue the struggle against pan-Islamism. However, later the same year the First Congress of Peoples of the East which met in Baku decided to make a greater appeal to the tradition of Islam and declared a

Jihad  against capitalism. Another development in 1920 which signalled the Bolshevik interest in the 'Orient' was the foundation of an Institute of Oriental Studies which along with the Communist University of Toilers of the East and the Scientific Society of Russian Orientalists (both founded in 1921) was intended to train people for political activity in Asia. (1) Thus within three years of coming to power the Bolshevik regime was actively courting the support of its neighbours who were ruled by colonial powers.

The possibility of an alliance between the Bolsheviks and the Muslim subjects of colonial powers was made all the more real by the growing force of nationalism throughout the British and French colonies.

Nationalism was, of course, by no means a post-war invention but it is clear that the war had altered the position of the colonial nations in the world sphere and that the political experience gained by African and Asian soldiers combined with the spirit of Wilsonian rhetoric had contributed to an increase

(1) E.H. Carr The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-23 vol. III Hammondsworth, 1966 pp. 253-71.

in nationalist activity throughout the world. The rise of nationalism in India, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco is well documented and does not need to be described here. It came as no surprise to either French or British governments that increasing nationalist demands were made. Successive French governments recognised France's need to repay her colonial populations for the sacrifices made during the war. Millerand, elected as Prime Minister in the autumn of 1920 stated that:

Our Algeria, our countries of the Protectorate and our colonies whose admirable growth attests to the genius and tenacity of republican men of state have paid fully and in all kinds their debt to the metropole. The metropole will in its turn recognise what she owes them and will associate them ever more closely in her political and moral life.(1)

Colonialists who spent much of their life physically isolated from the metropole had always been sensitive to domestic criticism of their activity. Whereas before the war such criticism had been largely (but

(1) BCAF Sept.-Oct. 1920, p.261.

not exclusively) based on the cost of imperial expansion, after the war criticism of colonialism acquired a sharper political edge as socialist and communist intellectuals, artists and politicians championed the cause of African nationalists. In 1921 René Maran, a West Indian and former French colonial administrator, was awarded France's most prestigious literary prize - Le prix Goncourt - for his novel, Bataouala. The novel is set in a French colony in central Africa and is heavily critical of the violence involved in the 'civilising mission' of colonialism. In his preface Maran cited a Hindu poet's view of 'civilisation': 'You build your Kingdom on corpses. Whatever you may wish, whatever you will do, you will die away in untruth (tu te meurs dans le mensonge)'. In the course of the novel Maran turns traditional African 'vices' into 'virtues' and accuses whites amongst other things of hypocrisy, prudery and impotence. Today the novel may strike the reader as merely an exotic catalogue of sensationalist and racist cliches but in 1921 it represented a sharp departure from mainstream colonial novels. The award of the Prix Goncourt outraged the editorial committee of L'Afrique française who cited Maran as an alarming example of what could

happen if education for colonial populations was not restricted to French, elementary science and artisanal training. Any more advanced education would not, they said, create French citizens but:

...vainglorious, déclassés and rootless peoples who lose their native qualities and acquire only the vices of their educators. It is through this system that we have created such people as René Maran and that one fine day a novel appears like Bataouala which is very mediocre from a literary point of view, infantile in conception and unjust and pernicious in its tendencies. It needed only a handful of idiotic littérateurs who know of Africa nothing more than the jazz band and negro art to recommend to everybody this work as the finest French novel of the year. (1)

However, Maran was not to remain out of favour with the colonial establishment for long. In 1934 his novel Le Livre de la Brousse, which in many ways was very similar to Bataoula (2) was given a very different review in L'Afrique française. The

(1) BCAF Jan 1922, p.43

(2) It tells the story of Kossi's passage through a violent life which ends in a violent death, as, escaping from a horde of cannibals, the hero jumps into the jaws of a hungry crocodile.

reviewer, Robert Delavignette, who had been taught by Delafosse and who was the rising star of the French colonial administration, wrote enthusiastically that the book was a 'masterpiece' and that the central character, Kossi, was the most realistic portrait of a pre-colonial African that had ever been made. (1) That Maran was accepted into the colonial establishment reflects the influence which men such as Delafosse had on developing what may be called the colonial consciousness of the twenties and thirties. The creation of an Institute of Ethnology in the Sorbonne in 1927 and the creation in London of the International African Institute, with its journal Africa, were measures of both the increasing sophistication of Europeans' perception of Africa and of the realisation by colonial powers of the need to show greater method in their colonial administration. Yet 'Science' and the 'Practical Man' - to borrow again the characters of the Malinowski/Mitchell debate in the pages of Africa in 1929 (2) - sometimes proved

(1) BCAF Jun 1934, p.353

(2) See above p. 9 See also Talal Asad (ed) Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter London, 1973 especially Asad's 'Introduction' and Wendy James 'The Anthropologist as Reluctant Imperialist' pp. 41-70.

unhappy bedfellows, despite the fact that 'Science' wooed the 'Practical Man' with tales of her cost effectiveness!

The need to exploit the economic potential of the colonies had long been the principal justification for the expenditure on the colonial army. Reading general accounts of the colonial era in West Africa it is easy to gain the impression that the role of the army had come to an end by the 1920s but whilst it is obviously true that the era of grand colonial conquest belonged to the late nineteenth century it should not be imagined that the 1920s saw no military action. Neither Morocco nor Mauritania were finally 'pacified' until the mid-1930s. (1) The colonies, even in years so close in memory to the European battlefields of the Great War, were still an arena in which military glory could be gained and paraded: in 1921 two colonial soldiers - Lyautey and Gallieni - were promoted to the rank of maréchal, and the fact that Gallieni's promotion was posthumous does not detract from the fact that of the seven Frenchmen ever to be made maréchal four

(1) Morocco in 1934, Mauritania in 1935.

were colonials. (1) The close identity between the colonies and the military remained strong.

This brief and impressionistic survey of some of the main themes that run through the two decades that we shall cover in the last three chapters of this thesis serves to indicate the complexities and paradoxes of the interwar years. Many of the themes are old ones: the need to exploit the economic potential of the colonies, resentment of international conspiracies, fears of nationalist movements, the increasing sophistication of European knowledge of Africa and the eternal presence of soldiers are all very familiar. However, they were almost all given a new twist: economic development was to be undertaken not so much in the brave new world of technological development but in the climate of economic retrenchment associated with the Depression (2) conspiracy was not the conspiracy of exotic sultans but of former comrades-in-arms,

(1) BCAF June, 1920

(2) On timing of French investment in Africa see C. Coquery-Vidrovitch (ed) 'L'Afrique et la crise de 1930 (1924-38) Actes du Colloque Paris, Université VII, 9-10 Avril 1976 in RFHOM LXIII, (232-3) 1976.

nationalism was made much more frightening after the October Revolution and although Europeans were coming to know more about Africa, Africa itself was changing. (1)

- (1) The paradoxes of colonialism in the interwar period are most eloquently and suggestively stated in J. Berque Le Maghrib entre deux guerres Paris, 1962 (trans. French North Africa London, 1967).

## CHAPTER EIGHT: ATTITUDES TO ISLAM AFTER THE WAR

As far as French attitudes towards Islam were concerned there was one major thread of continuity with the pre-war situation, at least in the years immediately following the war: Paul Marty remained in Dakar until 1921. At one stage it seemed as though he was to be posted to Lebanon, but this project was abandoned at the last minute. On learning of this change of plan Marty wrote, 'I am delighted and am packing my cases with joy to return to my dear Moors and blacks in A.O.F.' (1) One of the people with whom Marty had become acquainted in the course of his research into West African Islam was the colourful figure of Cheikh Ibra Fall. In October 1921 Cheikh Ibra Fall

(1) ANSOM AP 1418 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 15.10.19; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 21.10.1919; Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 29.10.1919; Marty to Directeur de L'Afrique (rue Oudinot ) 22.10.1919.

came to Dakar to profess both his and his master Serigne Ahmadu Bamba's continued loyalty to the mère patrie and to show their respect to the new Governor-General, Merlin. He had been meaning to do this for a long time, but he explained that,

My visit has always been delayed on account of the fact that that noble phalange of good old Africans who brought us up in the love of France and who guided us in our dealings with our white and enlightened chiefs have now almost all disappeared and have made way for unscrupulous politicians in whom we can have no confidence. (1)

Whilst Cheikh Ibra Fall's regrets about the passing of the era of 'good old Africans' should be taken with a pinch of salt, it was certainly true nonetheless that the key personalities in France's Islamic strategy were all approaching the end of their lives: El Hajj Malick Sy died in 1922, Cheikh Sidia in 1924 and Ahmadu Bamba in 1927. As a result of these deaths the French administration was forced to look for new intermediaries to act on their behalf. In the last two chapters we shall see

(1) ANS 17 G 239 (180) Ch. Ibra Fall to Gov.-Gen. AOF 21.10.1921. I owe this reference to Jim Searing (Princeton).

how the gaps were filled. But 'the passing of the good old Africans' can be taken to mean more than the demise of a few personalities for it suggests also the changing political climate of emergent mass politics in Senegal.

Delafosse, another link with the pre-war past, was acutely aware of the need to accommodate these changes. In the last year of the war he wrote a series of articles in Dépêche Coloniale in which he argued that Africans needed to be given more authority:

After all the natives of Africa did not ask us to come. Since we have come, sometimes in spite of them and always without at least consulting them, and since we are going to stay it is important that in front of the people who observe us and who compete with us and in front of posterity who will judge us, that we should be able to justify our presence here and to show that in coming here we had other interests than in filling our pockets and then leaving. (1)

Angoulvant, who did not often see eye to eye with Delafosse, agreed that the war had created an entirely new situation and that it had upset the comfortable

(1) ANSCM AP 170/3 M. Delafosse 'De la participation des Indigènes de l'ACF à l'administration locale' Dépêche Coloniale 3/5/9/11/16.4.1918.

predictions in the gradual evolution of African society. Angoulvant argued that the French would have to be more careful to recruit colonial administrative personnel equipped to meet the new situation. (1) However, whilst some improvements continued to be made in the training of administrators in Paris, hopes of either a much larger or a much more suitably qualified administration fell foul of economic recession. (2)

The intellectual response to the general sense of the need for change was to reaffirm the underlying thesis of the earlier work of Clozel, Delafosse and Marty that the French should base their administration on ethnic and religious particularism. It is particularly interesting to follow Delafosse's development in these years. Delafosse's criticisms of colonial policies and practices became increasingly explicit. In 1921 he wrote that:

(1) ANSOM AP 170/3 Gov.-Gen. ACF to Min. Col. 16.5.1918.

(2) See W. B. Cohen Rulers of Empire, ch. 6 'Era of lost opportunities.'

In no case can I see as the motive for our colonial expansion in Africa the real and reasoned desire to contribute to the happiness of the populations whom we went to subjugate. That is only an excuse that we can give ourselves after the event, it was never our design. In effect we feel the need to excuse or at least to justify acts which ... on our part have consisted of dispossessing peoples of their independence for the profit of our country. (1)

This level of soul-searching does not appear to have spread throughout the colonial establishment and should be seen in the context of the immediate aftermath of the war. (2) However, even if the rue Oudinot did not change overnight into a ministry of

- (1) M. Delafosse 'Sur l'orientation nouvelle de la politique indigène' RCBCAF June 1921 p. 146.
- (2) Delafosse's proposals for reform and the willingness of the colonial establishment to listen have been dismissed by Marc Michel as constituting 'seulement un moment privilégié consécutif à la guerre et à la prise de conscience d'une Afrique nouvelle.' Marc Michel 'Un programme réformiste en 1919: Delafosse et "la politique indigène" en AOF' CEA, 1975 pp. 313-27.

repentant imperialists, an evolution in the way in which African society was regarded was nonetheless underway. For central to Delafosse's argument was his conviction, expressed before the war in Haut-Sénégal et Niger, that African civilisation deserved respect and that this had to be the starting point for any successful 'native policy'. This assertion was to be repeated in various guises and in several different contexts throughout the interwar years: it was an argument which was attractive both to radicals, anxious to emphasise the value of African culture, and to conservatives, fearful of what might replace the traditional virtues of 'primitive' society.<sup>(1)</sup>

- (1) See Camille Guy's enthusiastic review of an exhibition of African art in Marseilles in 1925 '... Nous ferons mieux connaitre au public ces indigènes dont on ne soupçonne guerre ni l'intelligence ni la faculté d'adaptation ni les sentiments de belles choses. De leur côté ils apporteront à nos artistes et à nos artisans une note nouvelle, une autre forme de vision, et de tout cela résulteront sans doute d'harmonieuses combinaisons, une alliance insoupçonnée de formes et de couleurs par lesquelles la genie français et l'idéal artistique des noirs seront profondément modifiés ...' BCAF May 1925 pp. 226-7; on the political level see H. Labouret 'La politique indigène en Afrique' BCAF June 1930-April 1931; J. Brévié Circulaires sur la politique et l'administration indigènes en AOF Gorée, 1932. These are discussed in Ailsa Auchnie's Ph.D. thesis 'The commandement indigène in Senegal, 1919-47' London 1983 passim.

By African society Delafosse meant not only pre-colonial but also, in many cases, pre-Islamic society. The argument that animism constituted a much more systematic and sophisticated mode of belief than was usually credited had, of course, been advanced before the war, and in a sense it is as much the timing as the content of the post-war rehearsal of this argument that is of interest. Delafosse argued that official statistics over-estimated the number of Muslims in AOF and that 'negroes' were inherently hostile towards Islam for three main reasons; firstly, he suggested that 'The collectivism of Blacks naturally estranges them from Islam. The Black's notion of hierarchy turns Islam when it does manage to introduce itself into a religion that is good for the great and noble, but not for the mass of proletarians'; secondly he argued that Africans who were primarily agriculturalists could not accept and could not afford the time to study a religion which did not include the earth, sky, rain, rivers and other natural elements in its cosmology; and, finally, that animism was a deeprooted religion which in its accent on ancestor worship corresponded entirely to the needs of Africans. (1)

(1) M. Delafosse 'L'animisme nègre et sa résistance à l'islamisation en Afrique occidentale' RMM 1922 pp. 143-60.

Delafosse explained any recent conversion to Islam in terms of French preference for Muslim intermediaries. (1) He admitted that he was worried by the possible effects of conversion to Islam both on indigenous society and on French rule in Africa. (2)

Delafosse summed up his misgivings about Islam in his preface to the curiously titled book of Jules Brévié, Director of the Department of Political

(1) Ibid pp. 139-41.

(2) 'Bien que professant pour l'islamisme un respect que mérite ... cette religion, je ne puis concevoir qu'il réponde à l'ideal normal des sociétés noires, et je suis obligé de réfléchir aux difficultés qui pourraient résulter pour les puissances européennes de l'extension à l'ensemble de l'Afrique noire d'une religion qui, quoique derivant des mêmes sources que la notre, en est trop éloignée historiquement pour ne pas être une rivale' Delafosse 'L'orientation nouvelle' p.151.

and Administrative Affairs in Dakar, L'Islamisme  
contre "Naturisme" au Soudan français: Essai de  
Psychologie politique coloniale (Paris, 1923). (1)

Delafosse explained that:

It is not at all my intention, nor that of M. Brévié to organise a new crusade against Islam for which on the contrary both I and he have great sympathy. We merely believe that the lessons of the past and of the present have shown us that the muslim civilisation meets neither the aspirations nor the needs of black societies, and that these societies possess a civilisation of their own which suits them better than any other because it is the logical product of their normal evolution and that it is as much in their interest as it is in our own to let this indigenous civilisation continue and achieve its development in the direction given to it by nature and determined by circumstances. (2)

- (1) 'Naturisme' was used by Durkheim to refer to religions based on nature as opposed to 'animism' based on spirits - although he admitted that in practise both types of religion existed side by side, see E. Durkheim Les formes elementaires de la vie religieuse Paris, 1912 p. 68. Brévié intended 'naturism' to be descriptive of a period in time in the development of society. For him 'naturism' is 'Cette enfance des sociétés qui va de l'époque où l'homme vivait isolé dans la brousse à celle où se constituent les premiers groupements; famille patriarcale et matriarcale, clan, tribu etc.- ce que nous appellerons 'naturisme'. Brévié L'Islamisme p.6.
- (2) Delafosse preface to Brévié L'Islamisme p.ix.

This heavily deterministic view of African religious practice suggests that to the innate humanism which characterised the three volumes of Haut-Sénégal et Niger Delafosse had added a large dose of Durkheimian sociology.

This latter influence is even more apparent in the main text of Brévié with its long passages from Levy-Bruhl's Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures (Paris, 1910). Brévié's first chapters outlined his belief in the universality of his 'naturalist' model of religious belief and civil administrative structure amongst primitive peoples of the world, past and present:

Primitive collectivities ... all appear to be conceived on the same model and to obey a superior command. Within the great human orchestra they seem to play a part to which it is forbidden for them to add the slightest original note. The impulse of this collective determinism is so strong that they seem devoid of personality. (1)

Brévié's 'great human orchestra' follows a Hobbesian conductor:

(1) Brévié L'Islamisme pp. 38-9

The history of societies is no more in sum than the struggle of the social instinct which tends to draw men together against the egoistic and anarchic tendency of the individual. When man has understood the advantages that the collectivity can bring to his preservation and well-being he accepts his participation without either recrimination or regret. (1)

This stage is the 'naturalist' system of social organisation which Brévié defined as:

A collection of prescriptions and prohibitions born of collective and generally mystic representations by which the social instinct reacts against the egoism of the individual and obliges him to cooperate in the development of the collectivity. (2)

Brévié then went on to describe Soudanese Islam. He deplored the confusion, which he said dated back to Faïdherbe, of Islam north and south of the Sahara and denied the applicability of the Algerian model to the Soudan. In the Soudan Islam had had great difficulty in overcoming what he called the 'impermeability of religion based on national and

(1) Ibid p.110

(2) Ibid p.iii. cf. Durkheim's description of religion as an expression of a collective social morality. See Anthony Giddens Durkheim Glasgow, 1978 ch. 5 'Religion and the Theory of Knowledge'.

ethnic character'. What success it had had, he claimed, was solely due to conquest. (1)

Whatever the reason for it, Brévié had some dramatic words about the effects of conversion to Islam on the individual African:

The infantile gaiety, the exuberance and the joie de vivre which are the hallmark of the fetishist give way to a profound sadness, an overwhelming seriousness, a lack of sexual appetite ... The eye is dull, the brain empty, the gestures become mechanical and the body moves only as if in a hypnotic sleep broken only by painful awakenings when in the course of the repeated prostrations the head ... strikes the ground over violently. (2)

We have spoken of the physical and moral tribulations of the new convert and we have found part of the cause in the sadness, and perhaps, the disappointment which he experiences in substituting for his own dear beliefs a religion in which his native sensibility cannot be satisfied. But this explains only his despondency and his profound exhaustion, not the access of anger and the sudden movements which reveal the desire in his troubled soul to execute some action pleasing to God and thus acquire the right to the celestial delights. It is these new morbid manifestations which complete the diagnosis of individual fanaticism. The subject then assumes disgust for his previous life and avoids his fellows with whom contact is for him

(1) Brévié L'Islamisme pp. 125,146

(2) Ibid p. 181.

odious and sometimes painful. He walks, bent under the weight of a nagging obsession, his fevered fingers telling his beads. As if chewing in his sleep he constantly mouths his prayer La illah ill'Allah which he repeats at first with a stubborn wish and then mechanically in the torpor of his vacant brain ... (1)

Brévié then listed the five pillars of the faith and various Muslim institutions such as the Sufi orders and Qur'anic schools. None were portrayed in a particularly flattering manner.

The third part of Brévié's book covered French policies towards 'Naturism' and Islam. Brévié made it clear that he considered that Islam had thrown down the gauntlet to the French - 'West Africa is a closed field in which the Arab civilisation is challenging French influence for the moral conquest of some twelve million naturists'. (2) After a false start in an Islamic policy which was based on the Algerian experience, the French led by Clozel had embarked, Brévié noted approvingly, on a more sensible course which emphasised the importance of secular education given in African languages. The purpose of such education was 'to reveal to this powerful, but dumb,

(1) Ibid p. 184

(2) Ibid p. 293

people of Africa their own strength and to give them the means of expressing their own thought'. (1) Factory work was also suggested as an important part of the curriculum as a means of inculcating Africans with work discipline (2) - a measure, perhaps, of how flexible the notion of specific ethnic education could be!

L'Islamisme contre 'naturisme' is a curious book on several counts and deserves to be taken seriously not the least because Delafosse wrote the preface and Brévié was to become the longest serving and most influential of the interwar Governor-Generals. Brévié clearly belongs to the 'bookish' tradition of Governor-Generals in AOF (3) and it is clear from reading this book that he was a man of considerable learning. However, the really striking feature of the book is the deterministic theories used to explain 'naturist' society. Clozel had argued that 'animism' deserved respect but he had done so on the basis of close observations of societies in the

(1) Ibid p. 304

(2) Ibid p. 307

(3) A nice example of this aspect of his character is his circular on the importance of the upkeep of libraries in each cercle '... Il faut rappeler qu'il n'y a pas désaccord entre l'action la plus immédiate et la culture la plus en plus profonde, que c'est un devoir de développer en soi une rigueur intellectuelle ...  
ANS 17 G 335 Gov.-Gen. AOF to colonies 28.8.1931.

Ivory Coast. Brévié's account of 'naturism' was also based on the first-hand observations of both the author and his fellow administrators, but these are all tied into the sweeping generalisations of Levy Bruhl about the pre-logical thought of 'primitive' societies. Levy Bruhl, whose work was published in the journal Annales Sociologiques that had been founded by Durkheim, based his theories on a wide and somewhat indiscriminate range of accounts of 'primitive' life throughout the world, though chiefly from Australia and South Africa.(1)

'Naturism' is portrayed as a powerful and entirely systematic mode of belief - and as such it should be treated by us with suspicion. (2) Brévié's account of Islam is more straightforward, founded as it seems to be on a profound dislike of the religion. No reference is made to Marty, and instead Brévié quotes extensively from the local reports on Islam commissioned in 1911. Quite apart from the fact that these reports were already ten years out of date,

(1) Durkheim also based his theories on religion on the work of British and American anthropologists in Australia and Polynesia.

(2) See Vincent Monteil's ironic comments on Griaule's cosmology of the Dogon for a good example of applied scepticism L'Islam Noir (3rd edn) Paris, 1980 p.30.

it should be remembered that the standard was very variable and they cannot be taken as a reliable source. However, what is perhaps more interesting to note is that having described 'naturism' as the natural religion of the Soudanese Africans who are 'impervious' to all other religions Brévié went on to talk of the challenge thrown down by Arabic civilisation for control of West African souls. If what Brévié had written about 'naturism' was true then the Arabic challenge should not have been a serious one. Yet clearly Brévié was not entirely convinced by his own arguments. Here again we come back to the element of uncertainty that characterised so much of French writing on Islam in West Africa in the early twentieth century. In 1923 Islam seemed to the French to be as much as ever the joker in the pack.

Delafosse, I believe, was more concerned about Islam at this time than he had ever been since his flirtation with Lavigerie. In his preface to Brévié's book he stated that 'Amongst African Blacks islamisation is synonymous with social breakdown'. (1) This was

(1) Delafosse preface to Brévié L'Islamisme p. xi.

the most serious accusation that Delafosse could level against Islam and represents something of a shift from his earlier position in which Islam's place in African society was seen as less disruptive. It was serious on two counts. Firstly, there can be no doubting Delafosse's intense personal commitment to the idea of indigenous African civilisations. His commitment was a form of what might be dubbed radical paternalism, and it is interesting to see the important part he played in the 'Ligue de la Défense de la Race Nègre', an organisation founded in 1927 which drew on studies of African art and history to affirm the existence of African civilisation as an alternative to the model of French civilisation. Although the 'Ligue' was a metropolitan and mainly white organisation, it was to be of importance in shaping the distinctive cultural nationalism of francophone Africa in the 1940s and 1950s. (1) Thus, in Delafosse's personal terms, if Islam was a destructive agent in these

(1) See J.S. Spiegler 'Aspects of Nationalist thought amongst French-speaking West Africans, 1919-39' Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1968, ch. 6 esp. pp. 144-52.

African civilisations, then that was a very serious criticism indeed. Secondly, and more generally, one did not have to be as sincere an admirer of African civilisation as Delafosse was in order to have regrets about its breakdown. For the preservation of the old order - whatever that was - was widely regarded as the best safeguard against nationalist political disorder. Delafosse was very concerned about the development of pan-africanism and he wrote angrily about American policy in Liberia which he believed encouraged it. (1) He also admitted to being concerned by pan-islamism which, he said, was something that had never worried him unduly before. However, he believed that it should now be taken seriously because of 'The new situation throughout the Muslim world created as a result of European, but above all English policy in the Orient. This has encouraged amongst mahometans of all races and nationalities a complex sentiment in which nationalism... predominates over the purely religious idea'. (2)

(1) M. Delafosse 'Les points sombres de l'horizon en Afrique occidentale' BCAF June 1922 pp. 279-83.  
(The French were very suspicious generally of British ambitions in the Middle East and of its relations with the Cherif of Mecca.

(2) Ibid p. 278.

It should be remembered that across the Sahara in Morocco similar arguments about the 'foreignness' of Islam were being advanced in respect of the Berbers. From 1914 until the early 1930s French policy in Morocco was based largely on the premise that the Berbers should be isolated as much as possible from Arab Muslim influences and that the French should take care not to encourage Islam by instituting a legal educational system based on Islam. More attention was to be paid instead to the preservation of indigenous Berber laws and traditions. Paul Marty, during his time in Morocco, was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of this 'politique berbère' which culminated disastrously in the Berber dâhir of 1931. (1) Delafosse's arguments should then be taken in the context of their day for it was the spectre of nationalism more than anything else which seems to have caused his views on Islam to have become so hostile.

(1) See C.R. Ageron Politiques coloniales au Maghreb Paris, 1972, Part II, ch. 2 'La politique berbère du Protectorat marocain de 1913 à 1934'.

### The Porto-Novo incidents of 1923

Apart from the Four Communes of Senegal the colony in AOF where political life was most advanced and where fears of nationalism seemed most justified was Dahomey, and in particular Porto-Novo on the coast close to the Nigerian border.

Since the mid-eighteenth century the town of Porto-Novo had been an important Yoruba slaving post both during the era of the Oyo empire and after its decline. It accommodated itself well to the move to legitimate trade in the early nineteenth century with its economy now based on palm oil. Competition between British and French merchants for this trade on the Bight of Benin led to increasing European involvement in local politics and rivalries along the coast. Various treaties were signed with local chiefs but it was not until the Anglo-French treaties of 1889 and 1890 that the spheres of influence were finally delimited. The 1890s were dominated firstly by the French military campaign against Behanzin, King of Abomey, and then by French exploration and subjugation of the interior. In an administrative reorganisation of the colony in 1896

the old kingdoms, including Porto-Novo, were classed as 'protectorates' and retained their traditional chiefs.

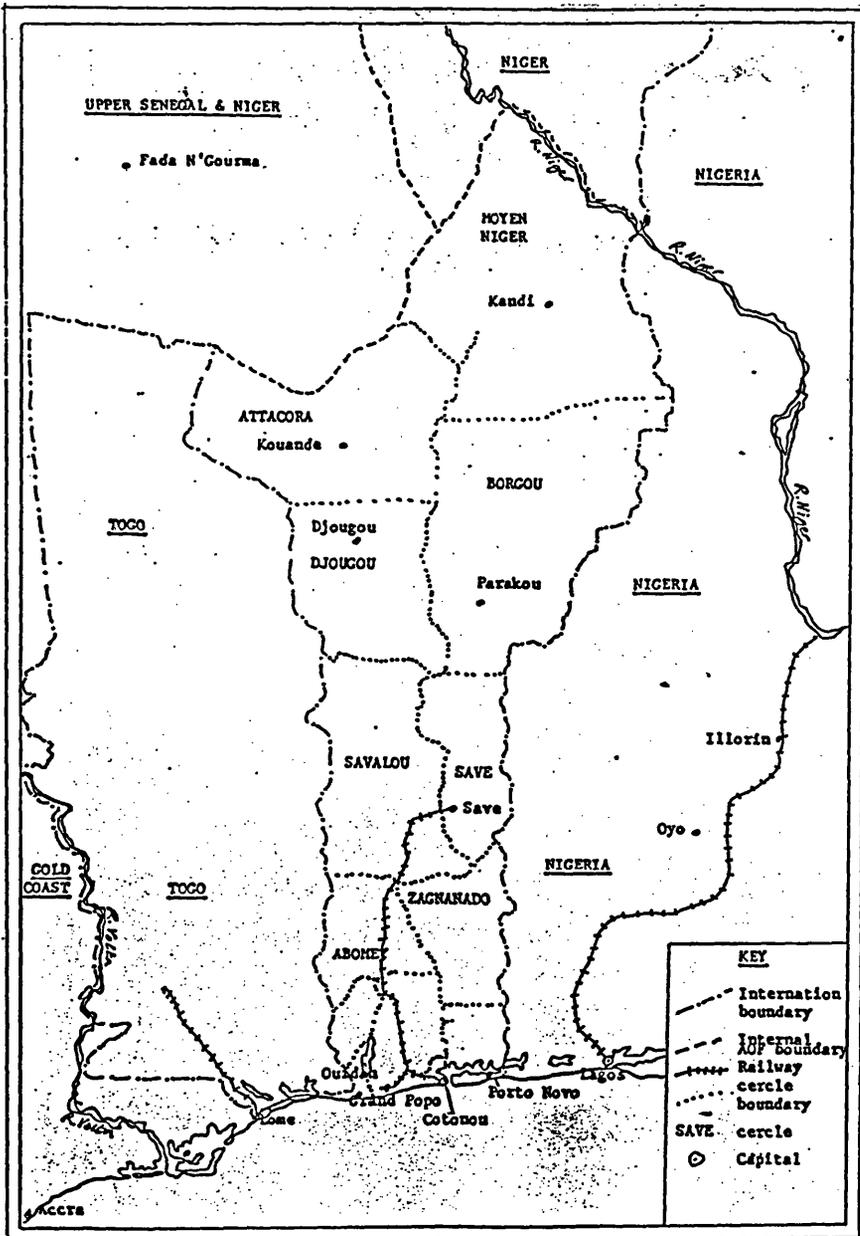
The two main ethnic groups in Porto-Novo - the Fon and Yoruba - were almost entirely animist but there were also Christian and Muslim communities. Mission activity in Dahomey was remarkably cosmopolitan: French, British and German missions, catholic and protestant, were all active in the late nineteenth century. In addition Dahomey's links, through the slave trade, with Brazil had led to the establishment of a Brazilian community made up initially of traders but later predominantly of 'creoles' - a group which included freed slaves. The 'creoles' followed several different religious beliefs. Many of the freed slaves had reverted to traditional beliefs but there were also substantial numbers of Christians and Muslims amongst them. One of the oddities of Porto-Novo was that many of its leading Muslim families still bore the Catholic Brazilian names of their former owners. There was also a small indigenous Muslim community. The final point to note in this brief introduction to the history of Porto-Novo is that the royal house was divided into

two rival branches, Dé Hakpan and Dé Mésé, and succession was supposed to alternate between the two branches. (1)

From this brief survey it can be seen that the potential for political intrigue in Porto-Novo was enormous: a divided royal house ruling in a notional protectorate close to the border of a foreign colony and presiding over an urban community comprising a relatively large number of mission-educated creoles and freed slaves, but which also included indigenous animists, christians (catholic and protestant) and Muslims were all ingredients calculated to ensure that political life in Porto-Novo was never dull!

- (1) This account is based on R. Cornevin La République populaire du Benin Paris, 1981 pp. 273-410; P. Marty Etudes sur l'Islam au Dahomey Paris, 1926 pp. 15-19; P. Lovejoy Transformations in African Slavery Cambridge, 1983 p. 80; D. Ross 'Dahomey' in M. Crowder (ed) West African Resistance: the military response to colonial occupation London, 1971 pp. 144-69; J.M. Ballard 'The Porto-Novo Incidents of 1923: Politics in the Colonial era' Univ. of Ife Journal of African Studies 2 (i) 1965.

Administrative map of Dahomey



In 1908 King Toffa from the Messé branch of the royal house died but the Hakpan candidate, Sohingbé, was not made king as the French suspected him of intriguing with the neighbouring British. (1) Instead, Toffa's son, Adjikji, became king and Sohingbé moved across the border to Nigeria. The following year the imam of the principal mosque in Porto-Novo, el Hajj Moutarou, died. The mosque had been built in c.1885 and even before its completion there had been disputes about who should be imam as both the creole and the indigenous Muslims, led respectively by Paraiso and Monteirou, had their own favoured candidates. El Hajj Moutarou who had been elected imam in 1899, however, had managed to reconcile both camps and his death, following so soon after the controversy surrounding the royal succession, was a blow to political stability in the kingdom. Moutarou was replaced by a creole candidate, Bissirou. However, in 1913 both Bissirou and the king, Adjikji, died. Sohingbé's name was again put forward and again it was looked over in favour of another of Toffa's sons, Agoba.

(1) This paragraph is based on Marty Dahomey pp. 53-83.

Trouble ensued and Sohingbé was arrested only to be released shortly afterwards. Another creole was chosen as imam but he appears to have at least attempted to keep a balance between the two communities - so much so that he was accused by the creole Muslims of being anti-creole. In addition to the disputes over the royal succession and the choice of imam there was a third quarrel concerning the construction of a new mosque after the French decided to demolish the old mosque in 1910, partly because of complaints about the noise of the muezzin from some nearby European trading houses but also because it was part of their plans for the reconstruction of Porto-Novo's European quarter. The French donated 5,000 francs towards the construction of a new mosque and another creole Muslim, Gonzalo Lopez, was put in charge of the fund-raising in order to complete the building but by November 1912 after being accused of embezzlement, the Lopez-Paraiso group ran out of money. The indigenous Muslims, the Monteirou group, took over control, but they were hardly any more successful and their money ran out after only six weeks. The Lopez-Paraiso partnership took over again but by

July 1914 their money had again run out before the minarets were built or the walls plastered. Such then was the situation in Porto-Novo at the start of the war.

During the war Paraiso identified himself very strongly with the French and was duly awarded the Légion d'Honneur in 1919. (1) The Monteirou group, on the other hand, were equivocal in their loyalty to France. They accused Paraiso of being a lax Muslim and made much of the fact that he had allowed his son to become a catholic. In August 1916 over one hundred Monteirou Muslims staged a demonstration in Porto-Novo in which they waved British flags. Marty considered that although the demonstration was not 'subversive' it was nonetheless in 'bad taste'. (2)

The French were much weakened in Dahomey during the war and the local elites were able to enjoy considerable power. In 1917 a Senegalese creole lawyer, Germain Crespin, who had family ties with

(1) ANS 8 G 51 (23) 'Note du Lt.-Gov. Dahomey' 17.1.1920

(2) Marty Dahomey P. 61.

Blaise Diagne, succeeded on behalf of a Dahomean pressure group, led by a local plantation owner Toualou Quenum, in getting the Governor of the colony, Charles Noufflard, sacked. (1) One of the people involved in this campaign was Louis Hunkanrin, a Dahomean who had been educated in St Louis and who had worked as a teacher in Ouidah for three years before he was sacked in 1910. For two years he campaigned to get his job back, but in vain and he ended up serving a year's prison sentence in Dakar on a charge of theft. On his release he worked with Blaise Diagne before returning to Dahomey where he founded a local branch of the 'Ligue des Droits des Hommes' and wrote newspaper articles before being forced to flee across the border to Nigeria. In 1918 he was back in Dahomey where Blaise Diagne persuaded him to join the army in Dakar, and the following year, again through the offices of Diagne he was posted to Paris. (2) At some stage during the war a branch of the North African 'Comité franco-musulman' was founded in Dahomey and although little appears to be

(1) Ballard 'Porto-Novvo incidents'

(2) On Hunkanrin see Spiegler 'Aspects of Nationalist Thought', ch. 2 and Ballard op cit pp. 64-8.

known about the Dahomean group it appears to have had good connections with France for in October 1919 the Minister of Colonies was questioned by a Dr. Doizy the deputé for the Ardennes concerning the 'Comité's' accusations of colonial abuses in Dahomey. The Comité accused the local administration, in general, of brutal recruitment practices during the war and the Governor Fourn and one of his officers, in particular, of speculation on the Porto-Novo market, by requisitioning food which they subsequently resold at inflated prices. Fourn was asked about these accusations and denied them all categorically. He added that he was surprised to note that the accusations and complaints came from a Muslim group as he had expected the Muslims to be thoroughly pleased by his gesture the previous year of awarding Paraiso the Légion d'Honneur. If this latter protestation was an innocent one it reveals a remarkable ignorance of the state of Muslim politics in his colony. (1)

In June 1920 the imam of the mosque died. Immediately both groups resumed their campaigns on behalf of their

(1) ANS 8 G 51 (23) Doizy to Min.Col. 21.10.1919, Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.11.1919, 'Note du Lt. Gov. Dahomey' 17.1.1920.

candidates and in July the king announced that the Paraiso candidate, Lawani, had been chosen. A few months later the French decided to shut down construction of the mosque which had been restarted after the war but since then animosity between the two groups had grown ever more bitter. (1) At the same time Marty was sent to investigate and he arrived early the following year. Marty met all the leaders and reported pessimistically that 'Five long days of palavers permit me to conclude that there is total stalemate and no solution'. However, he noted that as long as the mosque remained unfinished the problem was lessened as both groups simply held Friday prayers in a mosque of their choice. Marty, therefore, suggested that the best solution would be to allow both groups to build their own mosques as this arrangement had appeared to work well in settling differences between different Muslim groups in Lagos. Marty noted that the Paraiso group was not very numerous and that the lifestyle of its members was not typical of most African Muslims. The leaders of

(1) Marty Dahomey p. 74.

the Mouteirou group, on the other hand, he said were 'incontestably in the African tradition and ambiance' and the fact that their candidate for imam, Alfa Sarakou, was illiterate did not prevent him from being both pious and venerated. Marty, nonetheless, regretted the fact that the only French connections of this group were with 'indigenophile Associations in Paris'. (1)

The situation seems to have remained much the same throughout 1921 and 1922. Governor Fourn reported gloomily to Dakar in April 1922 that:

In Porto-Novo the two Muslim parties - one full of devotion to the French cause and the other aiming to entangle the whole of the Muslim church (sic) with the sincere but imprudent support of the Comité Franco-Musulman - are continuing their internecine struggle. The apparent reasons for the struggle are religious ones such as the nomination of the new imam and the condition of attendance at the principal mosque, but fundamentally the struggles are intended to support certain elements of disorder. (2)

- (1) ANS 8 G 51 (23) Marty to Lt. Gov. Dahomey 7.2.1921.
- (2) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Lt. Gov. Dahomey to Gov.-Gen. ACF 8.4.1922.

In May 1921 Hunkanrin had returned to Dahomey, once again as a prisoner of the French. In Paris he had forfeited Diagne's patronage by making immediate contacts with anarchist and left-wing circles. In 1920 he was court-martialled for having absconded temporarily from the army and was sentenced to a three year prison sentence. However his imprisonment did not prevent him from maintaining his contacts with like-minded friends in Paris and Dahomey. (1)

Early in 1923 the government announced its intention to increase the capitation tax in Porto-Novo, and immediately there were demonstrations. On the 12th February groups claiming to represent the 'Ligue des Droits des Hommes' and the 'Comité Franco-Musulman' made a public protest in Porto-Novo and on the following day there were calls for strikes. On the 18th the police were sent in to break up a meeting, but the arrest of the leaders provoked a further and much larger demonstration in which the

(1) See Spiegler 'Aspects of nationalist thought' & Ballard 'The Porto-Novo incidents'.

demonstrators besieged the town hall. Fourn decided to use the army to free the town hall and at the same time requested more troops from Dakar and permission to declare a state of siege. Governor-General Merlin agreed to send more troops but was reluctant to declare a state of siege for fear of adverse reactions in France. Fourn replied that the situation was getting worse all the time and explained that he did not believe that the ostensible pretext for the demonstrations, the tax increases, was the real reason for the revolt. 'In reality', he wrote 'the agitations are due to the actions of subversive milieux whose propaganda is being followed by the Colonial Ministry'. Three days later, suitably impressed with the urgency of the situation Merlin gave in to Fourn's request and on the 26th February he declared a state of siege. (1)

In the rue Oudinot, however, Sarraut was far from happy about the measures taken and thought that Fourn's description of the agitators was much too vague. Merlin informed Sarraut that although the

(1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Lt.-Gov. Dahomey to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.2.1923, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Dahomey 23.2.1923, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Dahomey 26.2.1923.

dock-workers in Cotonou had now gone on strike, the situation was under control. Extra troops from Togo had been sent for and he expected these to be in Porto-Novo in ten days. The reinforcements had been called for on the basis of the principle that 'the show of imposing force makes it unnecessary to use force'. Merlin agreed with Fourn's diagnosis of the troubles and dismissed claims that tax increases and hardships caused by recruitment were responsible. Rather, he wrote, the real reasons lay firstly in the succession dispute and Sohingbe's continuing scheming and secondly, and 'more deeply', in the fact that since 1892 the population of Porto-Novo had been treated with 'excessive sweetness and have never had to accept the firm discipline which follows a conquest'. Until they were forced to realise that the French had the means to enforce obedience their 'undisciplined and rebellious character' made unrest more or less inevitable. (1) Early in March the local Administrative Affairs inspector reinforced Merlin's comments and added that both local and international trouble-makers were at work. Amongst the indigenous agitators he singled out the Mouteirou group of Muslims:

(1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 28.2.1923, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 1.3.1923.

The Muslims seem to form an elite in the country. Consequently their number has increased greatly and many attach themselves to the Muslim Party for no other reason than to distinguish themselves from the crowd ... These newcomers have not wasted any time in founding a veritable political party. Finding the first generation Muslims too subservient to the French authority they took the first opportunity to separate from them. The Muslims of Porto-Novo are today divided into two groups - the old Muslims, reasonable men, concerned about their religion and respectful of the established order - and the young Muslims, restless, rebellious and more preoccupied with political action which they hope will lead to the acquisition of material advantages, than they are with religious beliefs.

The inspector also claimed that the Dahomean section of the 'Comité Franco-Musulman' had been founded with neither the permission of the local authorities nor with the blessing of the North African secretary of the Comité. The rebellious elements had all exploited, he said, the visit to Porto-Novo of a delegate of the Conseil Supérieur des Colonies to stage demonstrations in order to embarrass the government. (1)

(1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) M. L'Inspecteur des Affaires administratives de cercles du Bas-Dahomey 'Mémoire introductif d'enquête sur les incidents de Porto-Novo en Février-Mars' 7.3.1923.

By this stage Sarraut was satisfied that the unrest was serious and that international agitators were involved for he had received evidence from Nigeria of the international connections and activities of communists in the Hunkanrin affair. (1) At the beginning of the year the Colonial Ministry had circulated a note with details of Bolshevist propaganda in the colonies. Izvestia of the 22nd November 1921 had carried an article stating that:

The most violent blow to the international bourgeoisie will be delivered when a liberation movement ignites among the blacks of whom a tenth live in America. Such a movement will not only affect capitalist America it will also reach England and France in Africa, where we have to propagate Bolshevism through the channel of American negroes. (2)

And, indeed, it was not long before the Porto-Novo incidents were splashed across the headlines of the French communist party paper, L'Humanité. Early in March the 'Comité Franco-Musulman' had sent a telegram to Carpot, an influential creole lawyer

- (1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 7.3.1923.
- (2) ANS 19 G 22\* 'Extrait d'une note de renseignement du Ministère du 23.1.1923 sur la propagande bolchevique aux colonies'.

in Dakar, denouncing police brutality against demonstrators protesting against tax increases. The text of the telegram was published a month later in L'Humanité which commented:

Here are the beauties of French civilisation in Dahomey, in a colony whose population is distinguished by its great faculty for assimilation! And, moreover, everywhere else its the same story. The working class of the metropole must struggle to relieve the oppression and the misery with which these unfortunate people have to struggle. Only Communism will assure the emancipation of blacks, just as much slaves of capital as workers of the white race. (1)

However, by the time this exhortation was being read by French workers in the working-class suburbs of Paris the struggle in Porto-Novo was already over. The troops from Togo arrived in Cotonou on the 11th March and a combined administrative and military action, first in the town of Porto-Novo and then in the other subdivisions of the cercle had led to an immediate payment of the capitation tax. Fourteen men considered as the principal agitators were in prison awaiting trial, and, in addition, Fourn requested permission to intern

(1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Comité d'action franco-musulman d'Afrique du Nord to Carpot, avocat à Dakar 2.3.1923; L'Humanité 9.4.1923.

Sohingbe and Hunkanrin. (1) In the course of April the agitators were all sentenced to varying lengths of imprisonment in Mauritania, Niger and Soudan. Fourn related the details of how through a system of different postal addresses Hunkanrin and his comrades had kept in touch with communists in Paris and concluded that it was el Hajj Mouterirou who had played the leading role: 'Even though it is impossible to give material proofs of his participation in recent events, his previous conduct, his state of mind and his close connections with the principal agitators all point to him as one of their best confederates.' In June the interim Governor-General, Olivier, suggested imposing a collective fine on the entire population of Porto-Novo, and the following month the state of siege was lifted. (2)

- (1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Lt.-Gov. Dahomey to Gov.-Gen. AOF 14.3.1923, same to same 25.3.1923.
- (2) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Lt.-Gov. Dahomey to Gov.-Gen. AOF 11.4.1923, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 14.2.1923, Lt.-Gov. Dahomey to Gov.-Gen. AOF 21.4.1923, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Dahomey 23.4.1923, same to same 28.4.1923, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 27.5.1923, Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Dahomey 22.6.1923; arrêté 23.7.1923 lifted state of siege.

A week after the article in L'Humanité Delafosse gave his reaction to the Porto-Novo incidents in an article in Dépêche Coloniale. He argued that the unrest could be explained firstly by the proximity of Porto-Novo to Lagos where a spirit of unrest was 'constantly fuelled by the excitations of a few chestnut-coloured (i.e. of mixed race) lawyers' and where the impression of the existence of autonomous native states caused 'brains, exalted by a hasty education, to form notions of independence too vague to be healthy' and secondly (and this disturbed Delafosse greatly) by the activities of so-called philanthropic organisations in France who went out of their way to discover abuses in the colonial system: 'The wind which will unleash the tempest in Africa often blows from the metropole. It is a very small wind, I know, because the great majority of the native population is imbued with a solid good sense ... But all the same one should not forget that little streams sometimes create great rivers'. (1) It is an interesting comment on the nature of francophone nationalism that Delafosse, here mixing metaphors in a virulent denunciation

(1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) M. Delafosse 'Considérations sur les causes lointaines de certaines manifestations de mécontentement de la part d'indigènes' Dépêche Coloniale 16.4.1923.

of nationalism, should nonetheless have been a major influence in the development of nationalist thought in francophone Africa.

Amongst all the correspondence between Cotonou and Dakar there came an instruction from the Governor-General on the 5th April to ask Capt. André, who had just been appointed as the Governor-General's chief adviser on Islamic affairs, to make a study of Islam in Dahomey. (1) Five days later the report was on its way to Dakar - a sign that Marty's successor was to be another fast and industrious worker. In reality, however, Marty and André had little in common. It is not at all clear from the archives exactly when André appeared in Dakar and the first sign of his presence in West Africa was a report to the Governor-General dated the 5th January on 'The present tendencies of Islam and practical measures for keeping Islamic propaganda under surveillance'. (2) His qualifications for writing this report were questionable for although he had published several studies on Cilicia and on the Berbers the only evidence that he knew anything

(1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Dahomey 5.4.1923.

(2) In ANS 19 G 5\*

about Islam in West Africa comes from a few pages in his two volume study of L'Islam et les races (Paris, 1922) - which was a survey of contemporary Islam throughout the world in which he demonstrated that all the upheavals in the Islamic world stemmed from the difficulties for settled societies of adopting the laws of Islam which had been created by and for nomads. His few pages on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa (1) appears to have been based on two books only - O. Meynier's L'Afrique noire (Paris, 1911) and Delafosse's Les Noirs de l'Afrique (Paris, 1922). In both L'Islam et les races and in his report it is clear that André's interest lay more in attempting to understand and document the broad sweeps of history rather than the minutiae of Islamic practices and institutions in West Africa.

André argued in his report in January that events throughout the world since 1913 showed that Islam in itself was incapable of uniting Muslims against European powers. Nevertheless, and this was a familiar caveat, exterior forces could exploit Islam

(1) P. J. André L'Islam et les races vol. II, pp.160-7.

to the disadvantage of the colonial powers. André regretted the impact of President Wilson's Fourteen Points but he singled out the Russians as the major disruptive influence in the world:

The Russians, who come from a country which is much more asiatic than European, have adopted the old German ambitions, but with much surer methods, as a result both of their personal intimacy with the oriental soul and of the presence amongst them of educated and astute Muslims such as the Turco-Mongols ... At the instigation of Berlin the men of Moscow are attempting to cause difficulties all over the world for both the British and the French.

In keeping with his country's interest in the Levant André went on to argue that as long as France held Syria, a barrier between East and West, then AOF was reasonably safe. However, the situation was complicated in West Africa by the influence of Garveyism which, he claimed, the British in their anxiety to recruit African regiments with which to replace untrustworthy Hindus in India, were making little or no effort to stop. Both 'xenophobic Islam' and Garveyism had to be closely watched for both were 'possible means of political emancipation or resistance for Blacks against European supremacy'. André concluded by urging the French authorities in West Africa both to continue with the studies undertaken by Marty and to create what he called

'listening posts' at strategic places in AOF so that the administration should never be caught by a surprise attack from Islam - or any other anti-European force. A final consideration which André suggested was to vulgarise existing scientific studies of Islam and produce a handbook for all types of government agent. (1)

By now the themes of this report should seem familiar enough. Islam, such as it existed, was not a threat but care needed to be taken to prevent third parties from disturbing the present tranquility of relations between the French administration and their Muslim subjects. André also more than hinted that the administration would do well to employ him as an additional safeguard against Islamic unrest - yet another instance of how career-building and colonial policy-making were inextricably linked. André was duly rewarded, and in March an 'Intelligence and Muslim Affairs Department' with André in charge, was attached to the Federal Political Affairs Office in Dakar. (2) Quite how this department differed

(1) ANS 19 G 5\* Capt. P.J. André 'Rapport à M. le Gov.-Gen. de L'AOF ...' 5.1.1923.

(2) 'Arrêté instituant à la Direction des Affaires politiques et administratives un service de Renseignement et des Affaires musulmans' JOAOF 15.3.1923 pp. 241.2.

from the Service des Affaires Musulmanes is difficult to say. Its brief was contained in Articles II and III of the arrêté and was almost identical to that of its predecessor instituted in 1913 and reconfirmed as recently as July 1920.(1) It is interesting to note also that the 'reorganisation' of the Service des Affaires Musulmanes coincided with a similarly obscure 'reorganisation' of the department which bore the same name in the Ministry of Colonies in Paris. In 1920 the ministerial Service des Affaires Musulmanes was the subject of a minor administrative reshuffle. In February 1923 its director was granted an annual supplement of 12,000 francs to his regular salary, a sign, perhaps, of the importance attached to the job. (2)

Eleven days after the arrêté 'creating' the Service des Affaires Musulmanes in Dakar had been signed André reported to the Governor-General on the activities of the 'Service' in the first quarter of 1923. This long report rehearsed many of the points that André had made in January and included strongly-worded and

(1) 'Arrêté constituant les services du Gov.-Gen.'  
JOAOF 1.7.1920 p.391.

(2) 'Arrêté ministériel réorganisant le service special des Affaires musulmans' 1.8.1920 JOAOF 1920 p. 541; 'Arrêté accordant un supplement annuel au chef du service des Affaires musulmans au Ministère des Colonies' JOAOF 1923 p.150.

even longer attack on the work of the 'germano-bolsheviks'. It was to counter such forces that the 'Service' had been created and André reported that since it had been inaugurated the 'Service' had investigated the Arab press received in AOF, British recruitment, Garveyism and pan-Islamism. André said that he was not unduly worried by signs of a revival of mahdism across the border in Sokoto at the tomb of 'the great Toucouleur conqueror Othman Fodie' for like his predecessor Arnaud, André adopted a fatalistic attitude towards mahdism 'the endemic sickness of Islam, the boil which can burst anywhere at any time.' Later in the same report he argued that the prevalence of mahdism in AOF was a sign that Africans could lay as good claim as any others to be true Muslims. It is interesting to note André's ignorance of the ethnic origin of Usuman dan Fodio, one of the key figures in the development of Islam in West Africa, and this ignorance was typical of the cavalier attitude to detail which characterised much of his writing on Islam. André's preoccupation was rather with the world forces that had come into play since the war: 'The problem is a world one and in Black Africa a drama is being enacted which is the same one that is being played out in the Ruhr and in the Orient'. The Service des Affaires Musulmanes,

with its staff of a typist, an interpreter, an arabic writer and André himself all crammed into one office of the Direction des Affaires Politiques et Administratives, was a part of this world drama and its modest role, said André citing the decidedly unglamorous words of Gallieni, was 'to know which dog has urinated in which corner'. (1)

One of the first scenes of the world drama which André was called upon to investigate was, of course, the Porto-Novo affair. It will be recalled that André produced his report on the events in less than five days and in view of the speed with which the report was produced it is not surprising that André's analysis added little to the facts that were already known. Bearing in mind André's interest in world-wide trends it is equally not surprising that he focussed on the international aspects of the Porto-Novo incidents:

It would not be exaggerated to hypothesise after studying the events of Porto-Novo that the propaganda which is delivered from Moscow via Paris and Ankara could well have completed the circle in Lower Dahomey. We have just witnessed the Communists at work and from an Islamic point of view the following incident should be reported:

(1) ANS 19 G 26\* André 'Rapport à M. le Gov.-Gen. ...' 26.3.1923.

thirteen kilometres east of Porto-Novo on the British frontier is the customs post of Meridjonou. The French brigadier there has reported that the native customs officer who has now moved to Ouidah pronounced the following prophecies: 'The whites won't be commanding you much longer, arm yourselves, be patient and await the order that will come from Mecca.

André concluded:

Muslims tend to create a worldwide Islamic milieu and to form states within states. This accounts for the complexity of the Dahomean problem for besides the local rivalries ... the situation is such that any dissident movement allies itself to worldwide movements. We already have communism and pan-Islamism and now we have Africanism. Such questions go beyond Dahomey and even AOF. Local measures can be taken but they cannot prevent the continuation of outside propaganda. General decisions must be taken in the metropole to develop the sort of policies which are necessary to deal with the trouble that has arisen throughout the world as a result of the Great War. (1)

It should be recognised that international forces were, of course, at play in Porto-Novo. The 'Comité Franco-Musulman', for example, showed itself able to mobilise political opinion in France, and to

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* André 'Rapport à M. le Gov.-Gen. ...' 10.4.1923.

this extent André and other commentators were quite right to argue that the world was changing. However, it is impossible to avoid the conclusions that 'Germano-Bolshevism', or whatever one chose to call the new world force, was also an excellent scapegoat, and it is particularly remarkable in the case of Dahomey how local causes of unrest were apparently never investigated although initially Sarraut, the Minister of Colonies, had thought that these were the main reasons for the unrest. (1)

In this tendency to prefer analyses of local unrest which laid the blame on international trouble-makers André and the other administrators involved in the Porto-Novo incidents were following a well-worn tradition that, of course, continues to this day. A more interesting aspect of the Porto-Novo events was the way in which the Muslim community was divided so rigidly in French minds into two distinct camps: one, moderate and pro-French, the other fanatical and anti-French. That the Muslim community of Porto-Novo was divided and that it had been divided for a considerable period of time there seems little doubt. But what were originally

(1) ANS 8 G 52 (23) Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF  
28.2.1923.

fluid divisions and alliances had been frozen by French decisions consistently to support one group against the other. Given the complexity of Porto-Novoian politics as a whole and the wider political options available in Porto-Novo as a result of its proximity to the Nigerian border it is not surprising that the Mouteirou group acted in the way it did, for the French left them little choice. In the past internal rivalries in Porto-Novo appeared to have been resolved, however anarchically, by the alternating kingship but this mechanism was destroyed in the early colonial period when the dé Hakpan line was repeatedly overlooked in favour of the dé Mésé candidates. Marty understood the nature of local politics better than most and his tolerance of the apparent pro-British tendencies of the Mouteirou group and his prescription of a policy of 'live and let live' as the only one likely to ensure a minimum of peace in what he admitted was a particularly intense rivalry are further signs of the maturity of his judgement and of his understanding of West African politics. It is a maturity and understanding that very clearly was not shared by André nor indeed by many others of his contemporaries. As we shall see in the next chapter the characteristic political calculation made by the

French in their dealings with Islam was one of extreme simplicity: Muslims were either pro-French or they were not.

Andre left Dahomey in April and crossed the border to Nigeria where he intended to investigate the way in which the British organised their intelligence service. He was not put off by acting Governor Cameron's assertion that the British had no such organisation; the British, he reported, employed a number of different officials varying from Residents to Touring Officers disguised as members of scientific and ethnological missions, to maintain an intelligence service that was 'infinitely supple'. André's visit coincided with increasing British concern about Mahdism in the North. Palmer, the Resident of Borno had discovered the existence of a Mahdist plot and had arrested a certain Mallam who was said to be in correspondence with Abdu Rahman, the son of the Sudanese Mahdi. A police tour of the region was sufficient to restore calm, and André was pleased to note that 'This time the English have acted the part of policeman in our favour'. (1)

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* André 'Rapport à M. le Gov.-Gen. ...' 29.4.1923 & 8.5.1923.

André's mission continued back into AOF through Niger and Upper Volta. In Niger André reported that there was widespread expectation that the Mahdi would come three months after the close of Ramadan. The local Tijani and Qadiriyya were on the best of terms and equally enthusiastic about the imminent coming of the Mahdi. André went on to explain:

Let us note that in the east of AOF the Tidjania chiefs are the descendants of one of our strongest enemies, the peuhl Cheikh Oumar and that they have taken refuge in Nigeria, and that the Qadriya chiefs are equally the inheritors of the great peuhl conqueror Othman dan Fodie and have been dispossessed of their paternal empire by the English and the French. It is therefore not in the least surprising that these inheritors of ancient bitterness are disposed to listen to bad and xenophobic advice. (1)

Although on this occasion André managed to get Usuman dan Fodio's ethnic origins correct he failed with the Tukolor el Hajj Umar Tall, here wrongly described as a Fulbe. But quite apart from such points of detail André's comments reveal an exceptional ignorance of basic facts of West African

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* André 'Rapport à M. le Gov.-Gen. ... sur les musulmans à la colonie du Niger' 26.5.1923.

history. Whilst it was true that al Hajj Umar Tall's mid-nineteenth century empire was destroyed by the colonial intervention the same could not be said of the Sokoto caliphate of Usman dan Fodio of which the basic administrative structure was preserved rather than destroyed by the British authorities. The loyalty of the northern Emirs of northern Nigeria to the colonial authority has already been noted in the context of the Satiru revolt of 1906 and the situation was essentially the same in 1923. However, such matters were of no concern to André for by now he was hard on the trail of the Mahdi. On his way from Niamey to Bamako in June André summarised the situation:

The descendants of the Qadria Mahdi of Omdurman is trying to reorganise the active and xenophobic party of his fathers. The British authorities have uncovered this attempt but the would-be Mahdi has tried and is still trying to win to his cause the descendants of the great conquering families of West Africa who have been dispossessed of their power by the English and the French. (1)

In Bobo Dioulasso in Upper Volta André claimed that Martin, the local commandant de cercle, had reported

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* André 'Rapport à M. le Gov-Gen. ...'  
16.6.1923.

that Islamic agitation was one of the factors which, along with exposure to xenophobic propaganda in Europe, explained the restlessness of the 7,000 anciens tirailleurs in the colony and which had resulted in massive exoduses to the Gold Coast. However, on reading this account of his conversation Martin was surprised to see these views imputed to him. He wrote to the Lt.-Governor of the colony to complain that he had been misrepresented. Martin's version was that he had said that animism was a much more powerful influence than Islam amongst the anciens tirailleurs, of whom in any case there were only 4,000 and not 7,000 as André had claimed. Furthermore, Martin had made no reference to massive exoduses to the Gold Coast but instead had told André of more limited movements to the Ivory Coast. (1) If Martin is to be believed then these were major distortions on André's part and constitute a severe indictment of André's professional credibility. However, we have only Martin's word against André's and perhaps one should not attempt to make too much of the discrepancy between the two stories. André left Upper Volta with his usual recommendations for

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* Admin. Martin to Lt. Gov. Haute-Volta 21.7.1923.

organising an intelligence service and claimed (again how plausibly one cannot tell) that all the commandants de cercle were in favour of writing a monthly intelligence bulletin. (1)

Following André's warnings about the likelihood of the appearance of a Mahdi the Governor of Niger instructed one of the colony's administrators, M. Chatelain, to make an investigation. Chatelain spent several weeks in Nigeria and Niger trying to find further evidence of preparations for a Mahdist revolt. He reported that 'Neither the local commandants with whom I have been in touch nor the native chiefs who I have asked to make declarations, nor the English authorities in Katsina and Kano nor even myself have unearthed the slightest evidence of preparation for a revolt or the least symptom of unrest ... In all the regions through which I have travelled ... the population are absolutely calm.' Nor was Chatelain impressed with the accuracy of André's account of British attitudes towards Islam. He did not believe that 'the English authorities attach a special importance to Islamic affairs'.

(1) ANS 19 23\* André 'Rapport à M. le Gov.-Gen. ...' 15.6.1923.

Chatelain found no evidence of any military preparations in either Katsina or Kano to counter a Mahdist revolt and explained the reason for the British calmness:

It must be said that the large protectorates shelter the English from many surprises. The Emirs of the Muslim provinces would doubtless think twice before following commands given by anybody from the Orient ... As for the possibility of a popular movement prepared without the knowledge of the sultans, it is unimagineable as through the actions of the twin police forces of the English authorities and the Emirs ... the slightest beginning of agitation would immediately be surprised, and without doubt repressed.(1)

Chatelain was able to back up his arguments with a much more thorough and detailed knowledge of local personalities than André had been capable of doing. He showed that the Omarien section of Sokoto led by Maradi, the grandson of el Hajj Umar and nephew of the Emir of Sokoto, had no interest in rebelling against either the British or the French, whatever these powers

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* Chatelain, chargé du service de Renseignement au Niger 'Rapport à M. Le Lt.-Gov. Niger' 22.8.1923. In fairness to André it should be said though that many of the British, but especially Palmer, were worried by Mahdism at this time, see Letham & Tomlinson files in Rhodes House.

might have done to his forefathers.

Meanwhile André was coming to the end of his six month mission throughout AOF and Nigeria. André concluded that apart from Mauritania (which he had not visited) AOF had lost its former 'creative faculty' in the matters of Islam and that now the main foyers of Islam were in British territories. The British, he said, were very worried by 'Qadirisme ... the brotherhood of the great toucouleur conqueror Othman dan Fodie' and had placed three companies of the Nigeria Regiment on stand-by to deal with any problems. André's thoroughly confusing discussion of the Tijaniyya moved rapidly to a survey of the 'Khelouatia' in Asia Minor and the Sudanese Sayeed Abd el Rahman el Mahdi. André urged particular vigilance in the ports of Dahomey, Gold Coast and Nigeria and hoped that the British and French would continue their willingness to co-operate 'against the common enemies of the Orient'.

- (1) ANSOM AP 591/15 'Rapport en fin de mission du Capt. P.J. André' 25.9.1923.

However, the Governor-General's confidence in André's ability was severely shaken by Chatelain's report on the situation in Nigeria and Niger. He sent a copy of the report to Paris along with a note of the conclusions he had drawn up:

Capt. André, whose competence I do not deny, envisages Muslim affairs under a rather special light. He has a tendency to consider the different manifestations of the Islamic doctrine in profoundly Muslim countries and then extend and generalise the effects that these might have. He seems to lose sight of the fact that in this part of Black Africa the religious question is not the same as in countries which for a long time have been entirely ruled by coranic law ... I would like to add that Capt. André appears to deny our administration any competence in these matters and I have had to disabuse him of this belief. We have very well informed administrators who have been familiar with Islam for a long time and who ... follow with vigilance the evolution of our subjects, their tendencies and their aspirations and who draw appropriate, practical and sensible conclusions from their judicious observations. (1)

The Minister of Colonies agreed that Chatelain was the more reliable judge of Islamic matters in AOF and that his report 'reduced to their just proportions incidents which Capt. André in his imperfect understanding of Islam in AOF has unconsciously exaggerated'.

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 18.10.1923.

However, the Minister warned that in the future the administration could not be so confident that Muslims in West Africa would be untouched by developments in the Arab world as in an era of better communications and improved educational standards contact within the Muslim community was bound to increase. (1)

All in all André did not emerge very favourably from his six month mission as he seems to have managed not only to discredit himself intellectually but also to have antagonised a large number of colonial administrators. His name disappears from the archives around this time but the reason for this was probably not so much that he had been retired in disgrace but rather that he was preparing his notes for a book that he published the following year, L'Islam noir: contribution à l'étude des confréries religieuses islamiques en Afrique occidentale Paris (1923). That he was not entirely out of favour is suggested by the fact that Governor-General Carde agreed to write the preface for the book. The book itself rehearsed all the arguments that André had

(1) ANS 19 G 23\* Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.11.1923.

made during his mission (and, incidentally, repeated his confusion about Usuman dan Fodio who appeared as a Fulbe on page 22 and as a Tukolor on page 23).

André's most important argument concerned the growing internationalisation of Islam:

Muslim questions, like most other political and economic questions of the present time, cannot be followed within the narrow framework of a colony, nor even a group of colonies. The growing importance of communications, increasing frequency of travel and the development of education are all abolishing the old frontiers. (1)

These were opinions which accorded well with the Minister of Colony's opinions expressed in his letter to Carde who, it seems from his preface to André's book, was also of a like mind. André's actual description of Islam Noir was divided into discussions of the various Sufi orders. The chapters were short and unremarkable with the exception of the chapter devoted to the Ahmadiyya, an order which originated from Pakistan and which had just started to gain a foothold in West Africa. (2) With fifteen pages

(1) André L'Islam noir p. 58

(2) see H. J. Fisher Ahmadiyyah: a study of contemporary Islam on the West African Coast Oxford, 1963.

it was the longest chapter in the book even though by any account the order itself was probably the least typical form of Islam in West Africa. It was of interest to André, however, because having arrived on the West African coast with Indian traders it epitomised the new internationalism of Islam. It was a brotherhood of the sea-routes par excellence, and André believed it was a sign of things to come. Furthermore, the order's origins in the Indian sub-continent gave André an excuse to introduce Gandhi, Indian nationalism and the Non-Cooperation Movement into his discussion of African Islam. (1)

- (1) The AOF administration was itself interested in Indian nationalism. See ANSOM AP 518/19 Gov.-Gen. p.i. AOF to Min. Col. 10.8.1922 enclosing a copy of a Hindu newspaper which had been intercepted but which no-one in Dakar was capable of translating. The Gov.-Gen. was worried by the fact that 'the name of the agitator Gandhi' appeared several times in the paper which suggested that it was 'an Indian nationalist pamphlet'. Min. Col. replied (n.d.) that the paper was merely a commercial Sunday supplement of a local Indian paper and that it was entirely apolitical.

With the publication of L'Islam noir André ended his brief encounter with West African Islam. His departure from West Africa seems as mysterious as his arrival but it appears that he went on to have a successful military career, rising to the rank of General. It is interesting to see in 1952 that he was still publishing works on global studies of Islam in a changing world. (1) His failure to come to grips with West African Islam does not seem to have done his career any harm at all.

- (1) Gen. P.J. André & Gen. J. Buhrer  
Ce que devient l'Islam devant le  
monde moderne Paris, 1952.  
I have been unable to trace André's  
records in the military archives at  
Vincennes.

## CHAPTER NINE: THE FRENCH STAKE IN ISLAM

André does not appear to have had any successor as advisor on Islamic affairs to the Governor-General until 1943 when Henri Martin, the first of a succession of CHEAM graduates was appointed to the newly created 'Bureau des Affaires Musulmanes' in Dakar. (1) Indeed, on the whole the French administration in Dakar during the 'twenties and 'thirties saw less cause for alarm in Islam than they had done in previous eras. The same could not be said of the Colonial Ministry in Paris which watched events in the Middle East with considerable apprehension. The optimism of Paris' hopes for an alliance with Turkey soon gave way to traditional fears about nationalism. In October 1924 the Colonial Minister wrote to the Governor-General, Carde, in Dakar with a warning about nationalism in the Middle East:

(1) ANS 19 G 1\* has details of various appointments. Martin's colleagues included Lt. Riehl, Capt. Rocaboy, Lt. Aune, Commt. Borricand, Destaing and Michelangeli.

The Muslim world such as it has appeared throughout the centuries with its rigid fanaticism, its theocratic basis, its explosion of Mahdism, its cult of saints and the influence of religious congregations seems to be wanting henceforward to evolve towards new destinies under the impulsion of a superficially secular ruling class.

The leaders of the neo-nationalism have perfected the theory of pan-Islamism. They have used it to give a sense of direction to the vaguely formulated wishes for a renaissance in Islam as a reaction against western domination.

He reminded Carde that the first ever meeting of Muslim delegates from all over the world was to take place in March to discuss the Caliphate. He noted that although 'the conservatism of our African subjects keeps them outside the neo-Muslim movement' nonetheless the French could not be confident that this would always be true and he urged Carde to organise a central intelligence service. Carde copied the Minister's letter to the colonies of AOF, all of whom replied that there was no cause for alarm but promised to make immediate enquiries.<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) ANS 19 G 26\* Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 17.10.24; Gov.-Gen. AOF to colonies 10.11.24; Lt. Gov. Senegal to Gov.-Gen. AOF 20.11.24; Lt. Gov. Soudan to Gov.-Gen. AOF 25.11.24; Lt. Gov. Guinee to Gov.-Gen. AOF 4.12.24; Lt. Gov. Cote d'Ivoire to Gov.-Gen. AOF 8.12.24; Lt. Gov. H. Volta to Gov.-Gen. AOF 5.12.24; Lt. Gov. Niger to Gov.-Gen. AOF 14.1.25.

Nonetheless Carde insisted again on the importance of keeping influential marabouts and Arab traders under surveillance. (1) In February 1925 the Colonial Minister asked Carde whether or not AOF should send official delegates to take part in the elections for a new Caliph but Carde replied, predictably, that there was no point in this suggestion as Muslims in AOF were not interested in the election. However, Muslims were free to go privately if they so wished. (2) This sort of correspondence between Paris, Dakar and the colonies of AOF falls into a common pattern, and for all the talk of 'neo-nationalist' and 'neo-Islam' it was really no different to the correspondence during the war about the wisdom of sending African delegates to the Interministerial Commission on Muslim Affairs. (3)

(1) ANS 19 G 22 Gov-Gen. AOF to colonies 13.1.25

(2) ANS 19 G.22 Gov-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. Feb 25.

(3) See above chapter 7.

Although fears of nationalism were genuine and, as the Porto-Novo incidents and André's career demonstrate, a source of considerable anxiety to the French administration in Dakar, one should not exaggerate. For throughout the years covered in this thesis fears about the development of Islam in the Middle East were always counterbalanced by the belief in the innate docility of Africans. Indeed, so confident were the French in the loyalty of African Muslims that the tirailleurs sénégalais were specifically recommended as the best troops to use in other Muslim countries. A report dated January 1923 stated that:

As a result of their numbers and their bravery the Blacks constitute for France an admirable reserve of men who should be used without limit, without restrictions and without reservation. The Algero-Tunisians and the Moroccans being Muslims must always be treated with caution ... The use of Blacks is for us a means of gaining respect in the Muslim world by the show of disciplined and loyal force ... The Senegalese [are not fanatics] ... and are the best elements for use in any colonial expedition to Muslim countries. (1)

- (1) IF Terrier 5917 'Rapport présenté par le Gen. Aubert au comité consultatif de défense des colonies sur la propagande musulmane dans les troupes indigènes' Jan. 1923.

However, by the late 'twenties the French had progressed from complacency towards an active realisation that they had acquired a considerable stake in Islam in AOF, a stake which was both economic and political and which was so important that it had to be carefully protected. It is difficult to precisely date the realisation of the existence of this community of interest between the French and the Sufi brotherhoods (for that was where the French stake was invested) but it became most obvious at the deaths of such people as el Hajj Malick Sy, Cheikh Sidia and Amadu Bamba. For their deaths gave the French the chance to try and fragment their respective followings and divide the various Sufi orders into their component parts. However, the reverse of this policy was followed and the 'twenties and 'thirties witnessed instead an unprecedented degree of French intervention in the internal affairs of the Sufi orders in order to maintain a strong and unified command. This chapter is concerned with French relations with the Mourides and Tijaniyya in an attempt to show how exactly the French went about protecting their stake in Islam.

The doubts held by the French at the start of the war about Muslim loyalty were, as we have seen, soon dispelled. Attitudes towards the Mourides in particular were transformed, and the 1920s saw the start of the symbiotic relationship between the state and the Mouride brotherhood that has survived by and large to this day. The 'Rapport politique' for Senegal in 1925 noted that the deference of all the religious leaders towards the state continued and commented on Cheikh Amadu Bamba's request for permission to build a mosque in Touba:

Monsieur, the Administrator of Baol ... has pointed out that this construction project ... will help to attract and to fix a large number of natives in the region of Touba whose commerce and agriculture is just beginning to grow but whose population is insufficient. As a result of their work habits which are encouraged in the talibes by the Mouride cheikhs [these natives] will contribute to the economic development of this part of Diourbel. (1)

Permission to build the mosque was duly given at the end of April 1926. Around this time Amadu Bamba

(1) ANSOM AP 598/2 'Rapport politique' Sénégal: 1926.

contributed 500,000 francs to a fund designed to help stabilise the French franc. This was a huge amount of money for an individual African and amounted to a quarter of what the whole of the Senegalese colony had been asked (but refused) to donate as a 'voluntary contribution'. (1)

The economic potential of the Mourides was by now far too tempting for the French. The 'Rapport politique' of 1926 acknowledged Bamba's contribution of 500,000 francs and continued:

Although it is possible to regret the fact that we have allowed this Mouride power to establish itself because it might one day be a source of difficulties, it must be admitted that from an economic view the action of the Mourides has contributed enormously to the so marked development of agricultural production in the region of Baol. This beneficial action is clearly a serious counterbalance to the possibility of future difficulties. (2)

- (1) In June 1926 the 'conseil colonial' debated the suggestion that Senegal should make this contribution but rejected it partly because it was felt that Senegalese individuals such as Amadu Bamba had already made substantial contributions. See ANS 4 E 17 (135) 'procès-verbal de la séance du Conseil Colonial' 12.6.26. I owe this reference to Jim Searing (Princeton).
- (2) ANS 19 G 1\* 'Extrait du Rapport politique, Sénégal: 1926',

By this time it was clear that Amadu Bamba did not have long to live and that there would be several possible contenders for his successor. The French believed that they had to decide between a policy of encouraging divisions within the brotherhood and of choosing a successor of whose loyalty they could be confident and who could be expected to maintain 'all the members of the brotherhood in the strictest discipline towards our authority'. (1)

They chose the second policy, and Amadu Bamba's eldest son, Mamadou Moustapha M'Backe, became the Khalife of the Mourides. The French backed him heavily against challenges to his leadership. With over one hundred files on Mouride marabouts in a special Mouride dossier (2) the French were particularly well-informed about the brotherhood and felt very confident about intervening in its political struggles. In his annual report for 1928 the Lt.-Governor of Senegal stressed the importance of this fact and contrasted it with the lack of knowledge and understanding of the animist societies of Senegal:

(1) Ibid

(2) See ANS 4 E 3 for these files.

The influence of the chiefs of the Mouride sect is characterised by the fact that it is exercised in the open and in accordance with the representatives of the Administration. The same is not true of the fetishists about whom we know nothing at all - neither about their rites and customs nor about their chiefs - for with a few rare exceptions the fetish priest has nothing in common with the village or canton chief. And it is because we have never been able to identify the true leaders of men and thus penetrate the mysteries of the different sects that in Casamance we have never touched the soul of the Diolas, Floups and Balantes who are as foreign to us now as they were when we first met them. (1)

Although the Mourides were probably the closest observed of all the various groupings in AOF, the same contrast between French knowledge of Muslim societies and ignorance of animist societies applied elsewhere. It was a contrast that applied in the days of Faidherbe and it is interesting to see it being restated here as late as 1928.

The most serious challenge to Mamadou Moustapha M'Backe's leadership came from Cheikh Anta. Cheikh Anta had been discounted by the French as a possible successor to Amadu Bamba because it was felt that he was too much of a modern

(1) ANSOM AP 598/3 'Rapport politique' Sénégal: 1928.

businessman to be trusted. Relations between Anta and the French worsened in the late 'twenties. By July 1929 opposition to Cheikh Anta was a clearly-stated policy: Governor-General Carde whilst on leave in Paris heard that the commandant de cercle of Diourbel had given permission to Cheikh Anta to keep a piece of land which he had seized illegally. Carde wrote to his interim that he would be furious if this story was true - 'I have a policy and nobody ... has the right not to follow it exactly. I forbid anybody to grant Cheikh Anta who is my avowed enemy a concession of land which he intends to use for speculation.' The Lt.-Governor of Senegal immediately instigated an investigation into the behaviour of the commandant of Diourbel from which it emerged that the commandant, faithful to Carde's policy, was doing all in his power to obstruct Cheikh Anta. He believed that the stories that had reached Carde had been spread by Cheikh Anta himself in order to discredit the new administration. Cheikh Anta was reported to be attempting to extricate himself from an obligation to pay 1.2 million francs towards the construction of the new mosque in Touba. (1) In February 1930 he was

(1) ANS 13 G 12 (17) Carde 'Note pour m. le Gov.-Gen. p.i. AOF' 23.7.29.

arrested and imprisoned for infringing emigration regulations on a recent trip to Gambia (1) and he was kept under surveillance outside Senegal for the next three years. In July 1932 a M. Cruel, a school-teacher in Aix-en-Provence and whose link with Cheikh Anta is not clear in the sources, approached the Minister of Colonies asking for Cheikh Anta's release. The authorities in Dakar were, however, adamant in their opposition to such a move. The Service de Sûreté in Dakar discovered that Cruel's action was merely the first part in an orchestrated campaign (by unnamed anti-colonial pressure groups) in France and in Senegal and alerted the Governor of Senegal who took steps to ensure that circulars and petitions on behalf of Cheikh Anta in the metropole did not reach the colonies. (2) In July 1933 the administration in Dakar still insisted that Cheikh Anta should not be allowed to return to Senegal. Groundnut prices had fallen sharply between 1931 and 1932 and this had resulted in a drastic cutback in production so that exports standing at 450,000 tonnes in

(1) ANS 13 G 12 (17) 'Rapport sur l'incident de Diourbel: Affaire Cheikh Anta M'Backe' 14.2.30; see also ANSOM AP 598/3 'Rapport politique' Sénégal: 1930.

(2) ANS 21 G 48 (17) 'Note au sujet de l'affaire Cheikh Anta' April 1933.

1931 had sunk to 190,000 in 1932. The administration, acutely aware of Senegal's total dependence on groundnuts, were anxious to increase production to nearer 500,000 tonnes and in order to do this, in the face of understandable peasant scepticism about the point of growing groundnuts at all, the administration was dependent on the co-operation of the Mouride leadership. To allow Cheikh Anta back to Senegal would risk alienating Mamadou Moustapha 'whose help' it was noted in July 1933 'is assured and which in the present circumstances is indispensable'. (1)

Another component in the complex relationships between Mamadou M'Backe, his uncle Cheikh Anta and the state was the political allegiance of the two Mouride protagonists. The Khalife backed, and was in turn backed by, Blaise Diagne whose arch rival, Galandou Diouf, had close links with Cheikh Anta. The release of Cheikh Anta did not come until Galandou Diouf was elected as Deputy for Senegal. The intrigue, corruption and

(1) ANS 13 G 12 (17) 'Note' 28.7.1933.

vigour of Senegalese political life - which makes it read like an episode of Trollope in the tropics - has been fully chronicled by others (1) and little can be added to this story here. In 1939 Mamadou Moustapha M'Backe patched up his quarrel with Cheikh Anta. A special celebration was organised in Darou Mousty to which the Khalife travelled in a convoy of four cars. Cheikh Anta, for his part, travelled in a car that had been sold to him by Galandou Diouf for 45,000 francs (2) - another small illustration of the interplay between politics, religion and commerce that has made Senegal a favoured hunting ground for political scientists!

It was not just the politicians who were attracted to the Mourides' money. In 1926 the funds available for the construction of the new mosque in Touba ran to several million francs. (3) However, within months much of this money had found its way

(1) Notably Donal Cruise O'Brien The Mourides of Senegal Oxford, 1971 Saints and Politicians Cambridge, 1975 and Christian Coulon Le Marabout et le Prince Paris, 1982.

(2) ANS 21 G 143 (108) 'Renseignements' 27.2.1939.

(3) ANS 19 G 1\* 'Extrait du Rapport politique' Sénégal: 1926.

into other people's pockets, principally those of M. Tallerie, the administrator of Thies who had been charged with supervising the financing of the mosque. According to Balla M'Backe's bank statements 916,529 francs were paid into Tallerie's account between the end of August 1926 and the beginning of February 1927. M. Brumauld, another French official received 153,500 francs and on Tallerie's instructions Galandou Diouf was paid 70,000 francs. (1) The embezzlement was soon discovered, and the subsequent investigation showed that Tallerie had been tempted as a result of the illness of his wife in Senegal. He had intended to make a quick fortune out of the Mourides and then to return to France with his wife. Brumauld claimed that he had been tricked by Tallerie who had said that the authorities had approved all the payments. (2) This incident was another illustration of the extent to which the Mourides had imposed themselves on the Senegalese political scene.

(1) The bank statements are filed in ANS 13 G 12 (17)

(2) ANS 13 G 12 (17) M. Spitz, 'Directeur du Cabinet du Gov.-Gen. AOF', to Gov. -Gen. AOF 24.7.27; Brumauld to Tallerie 25.7.27.

The relationships which tied them to their peasant constituency, to the Senegalese urban elite and to the colonial state were now of such complexity that French perceptions of the tariqa had increasingly little to do with religion. In January 1930 the commandant de cercle of Baol noted approvingly that since Amadu Bamba's death 'the general spirit of the sect is becoming less mystical, less fanatical and the sect is slowly but surely developing into a mutual aid religious association with economic aims'. As far as the French were concerned the commandant argued that the tariqa was 'a considerable economic force which the Administration should use to spread new forms of cultivation and to develop the southern part of Djolloff and the north of Sine-Saloum'. (1) The French countenanced what has been described as 'le grand rush Mouride' to new lands in the interior. (2) The expansion of Mouride cultivation (concentrated mainly in the two periods 1934-7 and 1942-5) brought them into conflict with the Fulbe who lived in the areas claimed by the Mourides, and fights were common. Although the

(1) ANS 4 E 3\* 'Note' commt. cercle Baol 20.1.30.

(2) Lt Nekkach 'Le Mouridisme depuis 1912' (typescript) St Louis, 1952 to be found in IFAN Monteil 1. This is a very useful study.

administration deplored, and sometimes punished the violence, no action was taken to prevent the displacement of the Fulbe. For example, in June 1936 a fight occurred between Mourides and Fulbe over some land which the Fulbe were cultivating. The Mourides were held responsible for causing the violence, their action was immediately disowned by Mamadou Moustapha M'Backe and their local leader was imprisoned for two months. However, their legal right to cultivate the land was upheld. (1)

Some doubts were raised about the degree of French support for and reliance upon the Mourides, but even dissenters agreed that in practice the French had little choice. (2) On the whole the administration was confident that its close relationship with the Mouride leadership was sufficient to ensure that French interests would not be overlooked. A CHEAM monograph, written in

(1) ANS 13 G 19 (17) Lt. Gov. p.i. Senegal to Gov.-Gen. AOF 20.7.1936.

(2) See, for example, Jean de Belvert 'L'Exode d'une race' Outre-Mer 1937, pp. 331-8. De Belvert admitted that the rights of the Fulbe would have to be overlooked in the interests of following 'a realistic and unsentimental policy' in Senegal.

1948 but based on the author's experiences in Senegal between 1936 and 1938, suggests that some of the administrators also believed in certain positive virtues of the brotherhood. Capt. Chansard recalled that:

One felt that there existed among the Mourides a solid organisation, which was accepted by all, a well-defined hierarchy and obedience to orders given by both religious and administrative chiefs, and an ardour for labour which one seldom came across elsewhere. In the villages the Mouride "squares" were distinguished by their cleanliness, their prettiness even, with their yards and borders swept and tidy, their well-maintained and carefully cultivated fields.

At the time of assemblies the men led by their chiefs presented themselves in an orderly and silent fashion, disciplined, correcte, robust in their appearance and having in no way the appearance of people reduced to servitude, on the contrary they showed a certain pride. They were clean and adequately dressed. The same was not true of the Serers and in certain other villages where there were no Mourides. (1)

These virtues of order and discipline, which recommended themselves so strongly to the intensely hierarchical structure of colonial administration, were the ones that the French had always been looking

(1) Capt. Chansard 'Les Mourides du Sénégal' CHEAM (R) no. 1301, 1948.

for in the Sufi brotherhoods of sub-Saharan Africa. They were the same virtues that Coppolani had argued would make the task of administering Muslim territories so simple but which, as we have seen, in practice often proved illusory. In this respect the history of French relations with the Mourides represented an undoubted success story for an Islamic policy à la Coppolani. But the Mourides were a special case.

French relations with the Tijaniyya, a tariqa whose following, unlike that of the Mourides, was spread throughout West and, of course, North Africa were rather more complex. It will be recalled that the French conflict with al Hajj Umar Tall in the mid-nineteenth century had left the French with a firm belief in the fanatical and militant nature of Tijani doctrine. This was generally contrasted with the tolerant and peaceful nature of the Qadriyya. (1) However, in the early twentieth century the French stereotypes of the Tijaniyya had been substantially revised, mainly because of the excellent relations between the French and

(1) See above chapter 3

el Hajj Malick Sy, the leading Tijani marabout in Senegal. The most dramatic example in the change in Franco-Tijani relations emerged in the interwar years in the person of Seydou Nourou Tall, the grandson of al Hajj 'Umar Tall.

After the French conquest of the Futa Toro the leadership of the Umarian Tijaniyya was divided in its response to the French. Some moved east to Sokoto and beyond in order to escape from the French completely, and others stayed. Of those who stayed some - notably al Hajj 'Umar's son, Aguibu - allied themselves with the colonial power whilst others retreated into a reclusive life of contemplation.<sup>(1)</sup> It was in these years that Seydou Nourou Tall grew up. He received a traditional education studying with Tijani marabouts in Khayes, Boghe and, finally, St Louis.<sup>(2)</sup> In St Louis he established close relations with el Hajj Malick Sy, cementing the relationship by marrying one of Malick Sy's daughters. From an

(1) See Brenner West African Sufi chs 1-2 for a good summary of Tijani reaction to French conquest.

(2) These biographical details taken from O. Kane and S.M. Cissoko 'Une grande figure africaine: Tierno Seydou Nourou Tall' Afrique Histoire (2) April-June, 1981.

early stage it seems that Seydou Nourou Tall followed his father-in-law's example of cultivating friendly relations with the French. However, he does not initially appear to have met with much success. Marty, for example, dismissed him as someone who 'exercises absolutely no influence in Senegal and who tries through his tours and journeys to give his baraka sufficient prestige to allow him to live comfortably'.(1) During the war Seydou Nourou Tall joined the army and returned an officer.

His career did not take off properly until the death of el Hajj Malick Sy in 1922. It was in this year that the French administration began to use him as an ambassador of French civilisation and international trouble-shooter. The transformation of the nonentity described by Marty into one of the most important figures in West Africa was a dramatic one. More research is needed before we can know exactly how this transformation came about. The archival sources, such as they are, are not very helpful. A collection of documents in the Federal archives in Dakar nonetheless provides an interesting testimony

(1) Marty L'Islam en Mauritanie et au Sénégal p.357.

both to the wide-ranging nature of Seydou Nourou Tall's tasks and the extent of French appreciation of his work. In 1938 de Coppet, the Governor-General, arranged for a collection of several hundred letters and reports about Seydou Nourou Tall written by various administrators between 1923 and 1938 to be retyped and bound together in book-form and offered to the grand marabout as a present. Without exception the reports and letters sung the highest praise of this loyal servant of the French. The collection contains letters from all over AOF and even some parts of AEF praising Seydou Nourou Tall for actions which ranged from encouraging cultivation of cash crops and higher standards of personal hygiene to adjudicating in local disputes and urging loyalty to France. The essence of French satisfaction was summed up by the Governor of Mauritania, Brunot, in 1935:

It is moving to think that the grandson of the greatest of our enemies is the greatest of our friends. When I told him that my father, under Faidherbe, had taken part in all the battles against his grandfather his face lit up with joy, doubtless at the thought of the great work that we have achieved in this our common country. (1)

(1) ANS 19 G 43\* 'L'Oeuvre de Seydou Nourou Tall en Afrique française', typescript.

The collection is indeed a remarkable one. The itinerary of Seydou Nourou Tall that it reveals was an exhausting one that must have made him the best travelled man - French or African - in West Africa. The fact that he was frequently sent on missions to non-Muslim countries did not escape criticism.

M. Cau, for example, an administrator in Senegal for ten years drew up some notes for use in training administrators on Islam in Senegal in which he argued that the Dakar authorities had made excessive use of Seydou Nourou Tall and that by sending him to non-Muslim countries they were encouraging the spread of Islam. (1) However, the symbolism of al Hajj 'Umar's grandson appearing as the most enthusiastic of French supporters was understandably too tempting for the French. What Frenchman could have resisted giving as wide publicity as possible to an African who could outdo the French themselves in his awareness of the glory of the civilising mission? On Bastille Day 1939 Seydou Nourou Tall broadcast to the whole of AOF:

(1) M. Cau 'L'Islam au Sénégal' CHEAM (R) no. 949 1945.

Today is the opportunity for we overseas Frenchmen to affirm our attachment to the mother-country which unceasingly introduces more happiness and well-being among its coloured children. The French Republic which has won its liberty and brought it to the rest of the world has liberated ourselves from disease, poverty, servitude and cruel traditions which prevented Black Africa from flourishing ...

My ancestors fought against France and as a child I followed them until the day I realised that France not only came to the native with her hand held out in friendship but that she also knew how to bend over towards him, not to exploit him but to comfort him and make him aware of his dignity as a man, respectful of his legitimate traditions and beliefs ... Whatever the circumstances, France, our country, will find African populations prepared for all eventualities even to the supreme sacrifice. (1)

Seydou Nourou Tall cannot be dismissed as an unthinking stooge of the French. In terms of Islamic doctrine his response to colonial rule was a perfectly acceptable position which had already been taken by many other Muslim leaders in colonised countries. However, it was by no means the only possible response and other Tijani marabouts adopted a different strategy. Of the alternative strategies open to all Muslims the possibility of withdrawing from political

(1) ANS 17 G 260 (108) 'Message radiodiffusé en AOF' 14.7.1939.

life altogether and attempting to restrict contact with the colonising power to a minimum was more common than outright hostility. However, such a strategy was not an easy one to pursue successfully as the career of Cheikh Hamallah, a Tijani marabout from Niore illustrates. Cheikh Hamallah was one of the most controversial figures in West Africa between the wars, and over the years the facts of his life have been obscured behind the slurs and myths of both his detractors and his followers. Recent scholarship has done much, however, to uncover the reality. (1)

Cheikh Hamallah was born in 1886 of a Moorish father and a Fulbe mother. In the course of his education he acquired a reputation for learning and pietism. The environment in which he grew up was a tense one in which the French having successfully destroyed the Umarian hegemony were unable to replace it with

- (1) A. Traore 'Contribution à l'étude de l'Islam: le mouvement Tijanien de cheikh Hama houllah' These de 3<sup>eme</sup> cycle, Dakar, 1975 (now published); L. Brenner West African Sufi pp. 45-59. The following paragraph is based largely on these two sources and also Marty L'Islam et les tribus du Soudan t.IV Paris, 1920. Pt. III 'Le Sahel de Niore'.

a comparable power. The fragmented Tijani leadership was incapable of preventing the recently Islamicised Bambara of the region around Niore from reverting to their traditional religious beliefs. Nevertheless, Niore remained one of the principal Islamic centres of West Africa. Marty described it as 'the boulevard of African Islam in the region of Upper Senegal' and ranked it with Djenné and Timbuktu in terms of the vigour of Islamic life and the influence through the network of Dyula merchants that it had on surrounding areas. (1)

Around the turn of the century an Algerian Tijani marabout called al-Akhdar appeared in Niore. According to the Hamallist versions he had been sent by the caliph of the Tlemcen zawiya in Algeria to identify a successor as caliph who would also be capable of reviving the Tijaniyya south of the Sahara. Cheikh Hamallah, it was claimed, was the person revealed to him through a number of esoteric signs as being the person who had been chosen to lead the Tijaniyya. This version, however, is contested

(1) Marty Soudan IV pp. 210-11. He also wrote: 'Niore est à mon sens le pôle de l'Islam soudanais'.

by other Tijani leaders who do not recognise the validity of al-Akhdar's mission and who consequently reject the claim of Hamallah's followers that Hamallah was the caliph of the Tijaniyya. (1)

What is clear is that al-Akhdar preached a purified form of Tijani doctrine whose most distinctive feature, though scarcely the most important, was the practice of repeating one of the Tijani prayers known as 'The Jewel of Perfection' eleven times instead of the usual twelve. Cheikh Hamallah adopted the practice of repeating the prayer eleven times, and as a result of this all his followers were frequently referred to in the colonial literature as 'Tidjania onze grains' (after the number of prayer beads on the Muslim rosary) as opposed to the supposedly orthodox 'Tidjania douze grains'. The awe with which the authorities were to view the practice of repeating the prayer eleven times was in many respects every bit as superstitious and mysterious as the respect of the West African Muslim for the esoteric sciences of his marabout!

(1) Brenner West African Sufi pp. 47-50 provides the best summary of these versions.

By 1910 Cheikh Hamallah had begun to attract a significant following. At the same time local Tijani leaders became increasingly suspicious and fearful of Hamallah's growing reputation and, in an atmosphere marked by a serious drought in 1913, relations between Hamallah - or more particularly his followers - on the one hand and the old guard of the Tijani leadership on the other, were tense.<sup>(1)</sup> Nonetheless there is little indication that at this stage the French were unduly concerned by Hamallah. Marty's account published in 1920 recognised the importance of Cheikh Hamallah but it did not suggest that he was a danger:

[He] is the most curious figure in Nioro and one of the leading Muslim personalities of the Sahelian-Moorish borders. At the moment he is no more than a bubbling spring but a spring which one can see from the growing force of its current, the virtue which everybody attributes to its waters and the convergence of neighbouring streams, will become a great river. <sup>(2)</sup>

This picturesque metaphor hardly suggests the extreme hostility with which Hamallah was later to be regarded. Marty continued:

(1) Traoré 'Contribution' pp. 18-52

(2) Marty Soudan IV p. 218.

Cheikh Hamallah is above all a mystic and it is upon this that his reputation is based ... His attitude to us is correct but reserved and he only comes to the office of the cercle if he is formally called to do so. It seems that with a bit of skill we could co-opt him very quickly. (1)

Marty noted that his influence was already very great with the Moors of Nioro (not only with the clerical groups but also with Hassanic groups such as the Awlad Nacer) and that he also had some Moorish followers in the region of Kayes and some Soninke followers in villages some way away from Nioro. Marty acknowledged that Hamallah had some powerful local enemies but stressed that he had not got involved in any of the various intrigues caused by this enmity. Finally, Marty was pleased to note that the Moors who were in his obedience were the ones who were 'the most docile to our orders'. (2)

However, not for the first time Marty's balanced and perceptive judgement was ignored and within five years of the publication of Marty's report Hamallah had been transformed in French eyes into a sinister

(1) Ibid p. 220

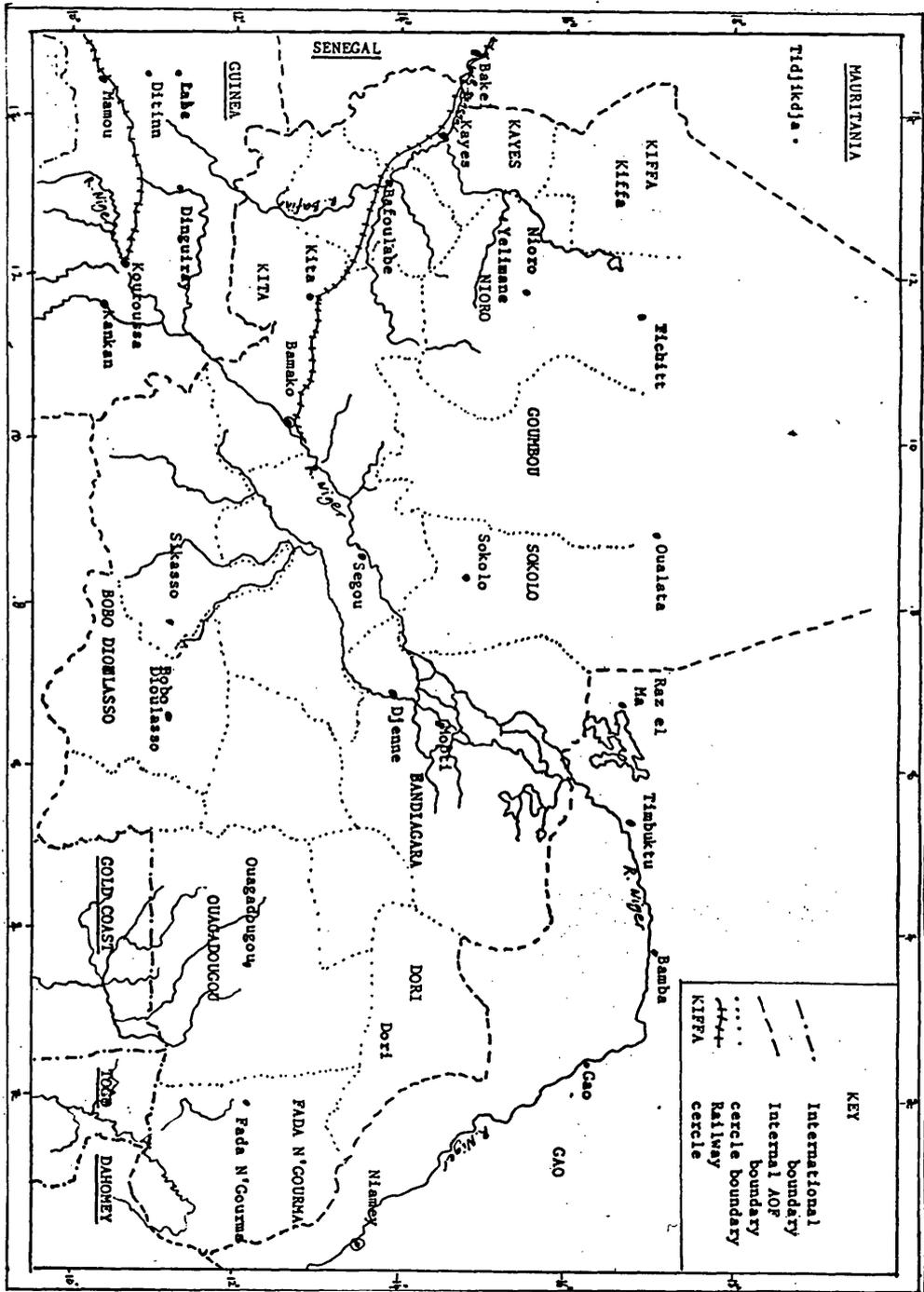
(2) Ibid p. 222

fanatic: the 'bubbling spring water' had been badly poisoned. This transformation can in part be explained by the death of al Hajj Malick Sy in 1922 which removed a moderating influence from the authorities in Dakar. (1) But the major factor appears to have been the accusation that Hamallah was implicated in a series of violent disputes in 1923 and 1924. The violence was investigated by a French administrator, Descemet, and it was his report which more than anything else seems to have sealed Hamallah's fate. It is interesting to note that as late as May 1925 the Governor of Soudan, Brévié, made no mention of Hamallah's supposed role in the violence of the previous two years. In his report to the Governor-General on the state of Islam in the colony Brévié simply noted that,

In Nioro, a marabout, Cherif Hamala, living as an ascetic and distributing almost all of the numerous presents which are given to him as alms, is trying to regroup the Tidjania and is using the eleven bead rosary as the rallying signs. (2)

- (1) Brenner stresses the importance of Malick Sy's death West African Sufi p. 54.
- (2) ANS 19 G 26\* Lt. Gov. Soudan to Gov.-Gen. AOF 11.5.1925.

Administrative map of French Sudan



Yet by the end of the year Hamallah had been arrested and sentenced to ten years exile in Mauritania.

Alioune Traore who has been able to see more of the colonial archival material than anybody else is in no doubt that Descemet's report was the key factor.

The report was a damning one and concluded that although Hamallah was not personally involved in anti-French agitation that he had done nothing to prevent it.

Descemet described Hamallah as 'a sly and hypocritical enemy of the French colonial regime'. (1) The case

has many parallels with the Wali of Goumba: Hamallah like the Wali in his later life attempted to restrict his relations with the French to a minimum and was the victim, as was the Wali, of a campaign of insinuation inspired in part by other Africans but championed by a French administrator, with Descemet playing the part that Mariani had done in the Futa Jallon.

However, it would be a mistake to ascribe Hamallah's punishment entirely to individual caprice, for the international situation must also be taken into account.

(1) Cited in Traore 'Contribution' p. 145.

Hamallah was exiled to Mederdra in Mauritania but the continuation of disturbances associated with Hamallah's followers convinced the authorities that he was still able to exert an anti-French influence. It must be remembered that the French were still engaged in the military conquest of Mauritania and that vast areas in the north of the country were beyond their control. In addition across the Sahara in Morocco they were facing fierce resistance. Towards the end of the 1920s there were growing signs of impatience in the French administration at their lack of progress in Mauritania. In September 1928 Governor-General Carde noted with regret that French policy of trying to win the submission of the northern nomads through peaceful means had failed to achieve anything. This policy was associated in particular with Lt.-Governor Gaden, and Carde claimed that it had outlived its usefulness. He quoted from a recent book written by a French officer in Mauritania - 'Why delude ourselves with the vain hope of leading dissidents to submit voluntarily when they are secure and out of our reach?' (1) Henceforward, Carde urged

(1) Commt. Gillier La Pénétration française en Mauritanie Paris, 1926.

that allies should be made to show positive proof of their loyalty and that enemies should be strictly punished. Gaden and his supporters were ousted in a change of regime in Mauritania and were replaced by hardliners led in St Louis by the Lt.-Governor Chazal and, in command of the army in Adrar, Commandant Dufour who was noted for his 'energetic temperament' - a military euphemism for his thirst for battle. However, Dufour's lack of courtesy to just about everybody earned him hostility in Dakar and Mauritania, and he was soon replaced. (1) One of the most embarrassing incidents to the French, which highlighted their weakness in the area, occurred in 1928 when two French airmen who had had to make a forced landing in the desert were taken hostage by anti-French Moors. The French sent a negotiating team (which included the Emir of Trarza) and were forced to make concessions to their enemies in order to secure the release of the two pilots, Reine and Serre. Carde's worries were twofold: locally in Mauritania he had been forced to admit the weakness of the French position but he could not risk a military expedition for fear of a hostile reaction

(1) ANSCM AP 1415/4 Carde 'Note au sujet de la politique suivie en Mauritanie' 20.9.1928.

in the metropolitan press which by and large agreed with Gaden that the conquest of Mauritania was not worth the loss of French lives - especially civilians like the two pilots. This delicate situation was reflected in the ambiguous nature of Carde's 'Note' on French policy in Mauritania from which we have quoted above, in which although Carde clearly did not approve of Gaden's reluctance to fight he was unable to condone the 'energetic' policy of Dufour. However, what is more directly relevant to the discussion here is that Cheikh Hamallah was included in the list of twenty prisoners whose release was demanded by the Moors in exchange for releasing the two French hostages. (1) This particular demand was not, of course, met by the French, and Hamallah remained their prisoner. This incident is an important reminder of the political context within which French attitudes to Hamallah must be understood. That Hamallah's name was now so explicitly linked to forces resisting the French in Mauritania (and in southern Morocco) was bound to convince the French that they were right to see

(1) ANSQM AP 1415/4 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 25.9.1928. The voluminous correspondence concerning Reine and Serre is in this file.

Hamallah, not as an otherworldly ascetic, but as a dedicated opponent to French colonial rule.(1) It is important to emphasise this aspect as a corrective to the impression in Traoré's account that French hostility to Hamallah was founded on the personal animosities of certain influential French administrators. For the French - not a collection of individuals but rather a colonial power with strategic interests on both sides of the Sahara - had reason to fear Hamallah who was as much the victim of the dictates of imperial strategy as he was of the slurs and innuendoes of individuals, both French and African.

The next major event connected with Hamallah occurred towards the end of 1928 when disturbances and fighting broke out in the region of Kaedi in Mauritania. The central figure in these events appears to have been a Soninke disciple of Hamallah called Yacoub Sylla. Yacoub Sylla was said to have exacerbated already existing divisions within the Tijani community of Kaedi by, amongst other things, ordering women to adopt a Moorish style of dress, to give away their

(1) See ANSOM AP 1054/1 'Rapport de mission dans les territoires du Sud de l'Algérie' 1928. The author had been sent on the mission by Carde to investigate Tijani links across the Sahara and concluded that 'Nothing which happens in Southern Morocco should leave AOF indifferent'.

gold jewelry and to make public confessions of their adultery - all of which led to a great deal of bitterness, not to mention a dramatic fall in the local price for gold. The commandant ordered everybody to follow the 'orthodox' Tijani prayer formula and forbade Yacoub Sylla to return to the area. He further noted that 'The credulity of the Sarakoles is well-known and it is necessary to shelter them from the charlatans of Islam'. (1) However, tension remained high and in December 1929 and February 1930 violence broke out. On the latter occasion the French opened fire on a crowd of Yacoub Sylla's supporters killing between 25 and 80 people. The official report blamed the deaths on the Hamallists who were described as constituting a phenomenon of 'a collective and mystical madness'. (2)

Although it was admitted that no direct blame could be attached to Hamallah himself it was nonetheless decided that he should be sent further away from Mauritania to spend the remaining years of his exile in Adzope in the Ivory Coast. In March 1930 Carde

(1) ANSCM AP 2258/3 Commt. de cercle Charbonnier  
'Compte rendu du cercle de Gorgol, Mauritanie'  
5.9.1929.

(2) Traore 'Contribution' pp. 164-78.

issued a circular note on the subject of the Tijaniyya in AOF. He recalled the division between what he called the xenophobic and anti-French Moroccan branch of the order and a more tolerant Algerian branch. He reminded his administration that it was the Moroccan branch that had spread to the colonies of AOF, and continued:

This historical insight indicates that the Tidjanisme practised in the colonies of the group [i.e. AOF] is impregnated with a xenophobic political character and that, transposed unchanged, the Moroccan doctrine inevitably presents the fanatical and anti-French aspect which characterised the teaching of el Hadj Omar and his son Ahmadou Cheikou.

The loyal attitude of the majority of the leading cheikhs of local Tidjanisme ... naturally reassures us. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that beyond these cheikhs who are personally won over to us, other cheikhs, or even simple moqaddem, may suddenly appear who are more attached to the cause of religion than to our own.

Movements of reformist Tijani (and Carde cited in this context the example of Aly Yoro Diaw in Dagana in 1908) always, he said, attracted the youngest and most troublesome elements of society. 'Cherif Hamallah's success can only be understood in the light of these considerations', and continued:

The question is one of psychological rather than truly doctrinal causes. The action of the reformist marabout was quickly appreciated because it revealed the sectarianism that is latent in the minds of all tidjani and because it offered an opportunity for the surviving disciples of the Toucouleur Prophet to come out of their disenchanted retirement. The significance of his propaganda was above all that it rallied the latent opposition forces of Islam ... The eleven-beaded rosary threatened to become the rallying sign of Muslim xenophobia. (1)

With this warning to all the colonies of AOF Hamallah was firmly implanted in French minds as a dangerous enemy, and henceforward administrators were expected to keep a close look-out for that outward sign of Islamic resistance - the eleven -beaded rosary. The fear expressed in the Carde's circular that Hamallah might be capable of playing the same role that al Hajj Umar had played in the Futa Toro some seventy years ago was particularly significant, for it was the experience of the resistance led by al Hajj Umar which more than anything else coloured subsequent French attitudes towards Islam in the early twentieth century.

(1) ANSOM AP 2258/3 Gov.-Gen. AOF  
circular 3.3.1930.

In 1933 the French claimed to have uncovered a 'veritable conspiracy' centred on Yacoub Sylla's brother, Fode Sylla in the cercle of Koutiala in Soudan. Brévié, the Governor-General reported to Paris that Fode Sylla had proclaimed himself mahdi and had preached that the French would be powerless against Africans in an imminent war. By chance an African garde de cercle overheard a discussion about the war which he reported to the commandant. An enquiry was instituted and in April/May Fode Sylla together with thirteen of his followers were arrested and given prison sentences varying from ten to twenty years. Brévié reported that the plan had been to massacre Europeans on the night of the Tabaski (the feast of al kabir) on 6th April and that in view of the fanaticism involved it was likely that 'the worst and most odious crimes' would have been perpetrated.<sup>(1)</sup> However, the seriousness of this conspiracy and, indeed, of the anti-French nature of the Hamallists in general was not universally accepted. Beyries, a future Governor of Mauritania, argued that,

(1) ANSOM AP 2258/3 Gov.-Gen. AOF  
Min. Col. 31.8.1934. (Emphasis added.)

The "way" of Cherif Hama Allah is no more xenophobic than any other Muslim mystic "way". Circumstances must lend themselves in order to make these "ways" into machines to combat Europeans ... The conspiracy is reduced simply to the speech of some fanatics whose importance has been greatly exaggerated. (1)

Nonetheless, such a view was a minority one.

Meanwhile Hamallah was finishing his sentence in the Ivory Coast. The administrator of the cercle in which he was kept reported in March 1935 that 'Since [Hamallah] arrived in Adzope he has made no conciliatory advance which would allow us to believe that he has modified his sentiments'. Because of this he recommended that Hamallah should be made to serve the full length of his sentence and not be granted any remission - even though he would have been glad to expel from Adzope a person whom he called 'a living example to the native of opposition to the French cause'. Brévié agreed with this judgement and reported to Paris that, like the Bourbon court, in exile Hamallah 'had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing'. (2)

(1) ANSOM AP 2258/3 J. Beyries 'Note' 14.12.34.

(2) ANSOM AP 2258/3 Admin de cercle Agneby to Lt. Gov. Côte d'Ivoire 11.3.1935; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 23.4.1935.

Hamallah returned to Nioro after serving out his full ten-year sentence in January 1936. On his return he adopted the practice of abridging his prayers, an option that was open to Muslims only when they were travelling, felt threatened or were at war. The significance of this act was not lost on either fellow Muslims or on the French administration. Hamallah's presence in Nioro attracted large numbers of visitors who returned to their homes also abridging their prayers. This new development worried the French. In an influential report on the spread of this practice in the region of Adrar, Lt. Long, a French military interpreter in Mauritania, argued that the shortened prayer was of 'exceptional seriousness' and proceeded to spell out for French benefit its significance in Islamic doctrine. Lt. Long warned that the greatest danger to the French lay in localised unrest in which the Hamallists could be expected to gain new martyrs for their cause. He regretted that in Adrar, where at least twenty-five leading Moors had recently returned from visiting Hamallah, the French could not count on any marabouts of sufficient stature to counter Hamallah's influence and he argued that

France's best hope lay in 'buying off' the local chiefs and making them 'prisoners of honour'. (1)

The use of the shortened prayer worried the French greatly. In February 1937 de Coppet, the new Governor General circulated details of Long's report, adding that,

The verses on which the "abbreviators" based themselves must be considered as manifestly bearing the sign of combatant Islam and one is justified in fearing that these people will gradually acquire a somewhat anti-French orientation in the course of the exercise of their religious practices.

De Coppet stressed furthermore that Hammallah was ultimately responsible for all that his followers did:

Even if he does not himself go so far as to indulge in specifically criminal activity that would justify a sanction, he makes use of indirect means, which superficially bear the marks of detachment and disdain but which are carefully thought out and adapted to achieve the required aim. This silent aggression not only may encourage the "differentiated" Tidjaniyans - who are already too inclined towards ecstatic excitation and xenophobic reactions - to show disaffection to the protecting nation but also it bears within itself the seeds of discord and sharp doctrinal quarrels between Muslims themselves.

(1) ANSOM AP 2258/3 Admin de cercle Agneby to Lt. Gov. Côte d'Ivoire 11.3.1935; Gov.-Gen.AOF to Min. Col. 23.4.1935.

All administrators were consequently urged to keep a close watch for the appearance of the abbreviated prayer formula.<sup>(1)</sup> This message was repeated in a further circular issued in September:

The use of exceptional formulas reserved 'in case of alert' is all the more serious because the writings and especially the poetry which are of a xenophobic nature and which are being circulated clandestinely by the followers of 'hammalisme' leave little doubt about the underlying intention of the leader of this religious movement.

De Coppet agreed with the analysis of the Governor of Mauritania which linked the popularity of Hammalism with the aspirations of the poorer and disadvantaged elements of society and with his conclusion that although this made the French more sympathetic to Hamallism that, 'There can be no question of encouraging the movement for to do so would alienate the followers of the old Islam'. For de Coppet who owed his position to the election of the Popular Front government in France the association of the Hamallists with the poorer elements of society placed him in an ideological

(1) ANSOM AP 2258/3 Gov.-Gen. AOF  
circular 27.2.1937.

dilemma. He did not want to be seen to be persecuting a religious movement which might be labelled as 'progressive' in metropolitan circles but neither was he prepared to give the movement total freedom. The dilemma was resolved by distinguishing between the 'justifiable aspirations of the poor' and the selfish political and material motivation of their leaders. The French task then was to intercede to protect the poor from their 'bad shepherds' - language and sentiment that was entirely in keeping with the colonial policy of the Popular Front. The administration were to try and persuade the mainstream Tijani to be more tolerant and understanding of the desires of 'the humble mass of the dispossessed'. The attack on the 'bad shepherds', however, was to be firm and comprehensive, and de Coppet went on to list a number of measures that could be used against Hamallism. On a psychological level, first of all, the aura of ascetic and other-worldly mysticism surrounding Hamallah was to be destroyed by broadcasting stories of how Hamallah had mocked and mistreated elderly marabouts; doubts about the theological soundness of Hamallah's doctrine were to be encouraged (and de Coppet noted with some satisfaction that in 1937 for the first time in

twenty-five years numerous leading Qadiri and 'orthodox' Tijani marabouts had made tours in Mauritania to collect ziara and had all taken the opportunity to preach against Hamallah); and lastly the French could themselves make use of superstition and fear - 'The counter propaganda of the old brotherhoods could even take place at time of drought, local famines, plagues of locust and other calamities when public opinion is alert and anxious to know the hidden reasons for the bad luck that has temporarily hit them'. On the more conventional level of police action de Coppet reminded his administrators that the legislation already existed which would enable them to punish speeches and the sale of books and pamphlets which denigrated the French with prison sentences of up to two years and to punish the more serious crime of conspiracy and organising against the French with prison sentences of up to twenty years. (1)

It seemed for a while as if the 'counter offensive' of the established marabouts was to be successful. In September 1937 Seydou Nourou Tall persuaded Hamallah that he need fear nothing from the French

(1) ANS 17 G 60 (17) Gov.-Gen. AOF  
circular 6.8.1937.

and that, therefore, he should revert to the normal prayer formula. However, this brief reconciliation between the two branches of the Tijaniyya was short-lived and broke down in the tension which quickly resurfaced between Hamallah and his supporters on the one hand and the 'establishment' Tijani on the other. (1) Hamallah was unable to prevent further violence from breaking out in 1938 in the region of Nioro. His eldest son, in particular, was humiliated by a hostile Moorish tribe and resolved to exact his revenge. According to Traore he made clandestine preparations against his enemies swearing his allies to secrecy, even from his father. His efforts culminated in a bloody battle in the village of Mouchgag in 1940. Hamallah protested his innocence of these events and condemned the violence used by the followers of his son. The Vichy authorities were convinced, however, that he was implicated and he was arrested in June 1941 along with several hundred of his followers who were all sent to prison camps in AOF. Inevitably, perhaps, given the way in which Islamic unrest was always regarded as being in part at least caused by enemies of metropolitan

(1) Traore 'Contribution' p. 193-4.

France, it was suspected that a Free French agent, a certain M. Montezer who had arrived in West Africa shortly before the war and who had published a small handbook on Islam, had had a part in the violence. (1) Hamallah himself was deported to Algeria and thence to France where he died of pneumonia in the military hospital of Montluçon in January 1943. (2)

Hamallah was the victim of the narrowness of the French vision of Islam. Throughout the period discussed in this thesis but particularly during the 'twenties and 'thirties the French divided Muslims into two categories: those who actively supported the French and those who did not. This narrowness of vision was compounded by the essentially ahistorical understanding of African society which characterised almost all colonial thinking on colonised societies. The French arrived in West Africa at a specific juncture in the development of West African societies and believed that 'the Africa'

(1) ANS 19 G 7\* Haut Commissaire de l'Afrique française (Boisson) to Commt. supérieur de Troupes en AOF (Barrau) 17.2.1941; Barrau to Boisson 8.3.1941. Montezer's pamphlet was called L'Afrique et l'islam Dakar 1939.

(2) See Traore 'Contribution' pp. 194-216 for details of Hamallah's imprisonment and death.

they had encountered was the product of an unchanging past, a 'primitive' society that had not changed in centuries. Hamallah was forced into this ideological straightjacket: he inevitably revived memories of al Hajj 'Umar and, in the end, the French were never able to believe that he did not cherish exactly the same ambitions as the Tukolor leader. This misconception was encouraged by the representatives of 'le vieil Islam' whom de Coppet was not prepared to alienate. For the authority of the old guard depended to a large extent on the trick which the colonial authorities had played with history. The 'orthodox' Tijani leaders and the ulema of Niore had a vested interest in reminding the authorities that the leopard (i.e. reformist Islam) can never change his spots, and Hamallah paid the price. It is these sorts of factors along with the sort of strategic interests, that we have described above, that must be taken into account if the degree of French hostility to Hamallah is to be properly understood. Even so, the French probably would have been prepared to call off their campaign against Hamallah had he been willing to intervene actively in all areas of life on behalf of the French, but this for his own deeply-held religious convictions he was not

prepared to do. (1) A CHEAM monograph written in 1941 detailed the French reasoning:

Cherif Hamallah is more than an important religious personality, he is also a political force as a result of the enormous influence and obedience which he commands. Therefore, we can at least reproach him for not having used this influence to stop the exactions and brutalities of his disciples, who are generally at the origin of these quarrels: il a laissé faire, voilà pourqoui sa responsabilité est lourde. (2)

The experiences of the relations between the French, the Mourides and the Tijaniyya in the 'twenties and 'thirties show some interesting similarities. (It should be said that some of the following remarks apply equally to the experience of the Muslim communities in Porto Novo).

The first remark to be made is that the French intervened very directly in the internal affairs of the brotherhoods, and this was a policy which contrasted with the pre-war consensus according to which the French should remain aloof as much as possible from internal disputes. The reasons for

- (1) Brenner West African Sufi passim.
- (2) Lt d'Arbaumont (La confrérie des Tidjania en Afrique française' CHEAM no. 1411, 1941 p.24 (my emphasis) cf. Brenner 'Hamallah was punished not for what he did but for what he failed to do' West African Sufi p.54.

this change of policy towards intervention were firstly that after the work of Marty and the continued build-up of files on Muslim individuals the French were much better informed about Muslim politics and, therefore, more confident of their ability to intervene and, secondly, that they now increasingly had vested interests in certain sections of the Muslim community. The most striking example of this vested interest was their economic stake in the Mourides but equally they had a substantial political stake in Seydou Nourou Tall. By the 1920s the French had made very real political and economic investments which they were naturally very anxious to safeguard. Thus when these investments were threatened either directly as in the case of Cheikh Anta or indirectly as in the case of Hamallah the French were obliged to intervene.

The second general remark is that the French were seen now to be anxious to preserve the monolithic structure of the Sufi tariqa in West Africa whereas before the war the conventional wisdom was that French interests were best served by a policy of 'divide and rule' based on encouraging religious and ethnic particularism.

The third and final remark concerns the fossilisation of French relations with the brotherhoods. Before the war relations between the French and the Mourides, for example, were very fluid - so fluid in fact that the French policy shifted from a position of outright hostility to one of cautious support. The same was true to a lesser extent of the Tijaniyya. However, in the 'twenties and 'thirties the French stake in the two brotherhoods was such that not only could the French not challenge the brotherhoods but also that they could not afford to let anyone else challenge them either. There were, in these terms, only two possible positions - either for or against the officially-sponsored leadership. Two factors, however, were able to qualify these rigid divisions and categories: elections and the influence of the metropolitan press. Cheikh Anta would not have been rehabilitated were it not for the fact that the Senegalese voters of the Four Communes elected Galandou Diouf. Likewise all administrators had to keep half an eye open to the possibility of adverse comments in the metropolitan press.

The metropolitan factor was an increasingly important one in the interwar period though its precise importance is not easy to quantify.

There were a number of different pressure groups who took an interest in colonial affairs of which the most significant were the Union Intercoloniale (f. 1921), Ligue de la defense de la race negre (f.1926) and the Ligue contre l'oppression coloniale et l'imperialisme (f.1927, President Albert Einstein). In addition both the Communists (PCF) and the Socialists (SFIO) together with their respective trade union allies were broadly anti-colonialist in their orientation, though the nature of their anti-colonialism requires some comment. Until 1936 the PCF followed the Moscow line in denouncing colonialism itself whereas the SFIO denounced only the abuses of colonialism and not the system. The PCF moved towards the position of the SFIO as it became clear that priority should be given to opposing the rise of fascism in Europe. Individuals, such as André Gide, were sometimes able to bring conditions in the French colonies to the attention of the French public. It is, however, very difficult to gauge the effect of the various types of anti-colonial activity on public opinion. The inter-war years were after all the years in which the 'colonial idea' achieved its greatest popularity with the French, and it would probably be more realistic to emphasise the lack of interest shown by

the political parties in criticising colonialism and in campaigning on behalf of France's colonial subjects. In any case little attention was paid to black Africa in comparison to North Africa and Indo-China. So, in describing the metropolitan factor as it affected West Africa's Muslim population we must recognise the fact that some West Africans were able to get access to politicians and to newspapers but that the avenues for doing so were rather haphazard and that the effectiveness of the various groups and individuals who lobbied on their behalf was very uncertain. (1)

The willingness of the French to intervene in Muslim affairs is a useful corrective to the notion that the interwar years marked a shift towards 'indirect rule' or in French terms a policy of 'association'. Such labels serve little purpose in aiding our understanding of the mechanics of colonial rule and were, in any case, designed chiefly

- (1) For a discussion of the impact of colonialism on metropolitan politics see R. Girardet L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962 Paris 1972 chs. 7-9; C. Liduzu Aux Origines des tiers-mondismes: colonisés et anticolonialistes en France 1919-1939 Paris 1982.

for metropolitan consumption to win support for budget allocations in the Chamber of Deputies or the House of Parliament. In the next chapter we shall discuss another form of interventionism associated with a very particular era in French history, the Popular Front (1936-8).

CHAPTER TEN: DE COPPET AND THE REDISCOVERY  
OF ISLAM

In the previous chapter we saw how the French had developed a very firm and somewhat inflexible idea of the structure of Franco-Islamic relations in West Africa. By the 1930s the French had identified their stake in Islam and were prepared to go to considerable lengths to protect it. Throughout this study we have seen how a consensus had developed regarding the very nature of Islam itself: namely a religion which bore little resemblance to the 'orthodox' model seen in the Arab world but which was much closer to the pre-Islamic 'traditional African' beliefs and which was held together almost solely through the agency of the Sufi brotherhoods. In this final chapter we shall consider more closely the attitudes of the Popular Front Governor-General, de Coppet. We have already noted his attitude towards Hamallah, and this attitude should be kept in mind in this chapter. However, there was another side to de Coppet, and there were signs that he and some of his colleagues no longer accepted all the ideas regarding Islam that had become so dominant in French thinking over the previous

decades. De Coppet was not unfortunately in power for enough time for us to draw very firm conclusions. Furthermore, the declaration of war in Europe in 1939 and the advent of the Vichy regime in Dakar in 1940 heralded such abrupt changes that it is doubly difficult to place de Coppet in his correct context. His attitude to education, however, provides a useful way of comparing him with his predecessors and so it is largely with education that this chapter will be concerned.

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French attentiveness to the needs of the Muslim elite of West Africa was no accident: it belonged to a tradition whose origins go back to the early days of the French presence in Senegal and which emphasised the possible gains to be had from sponsoring an 'official' form of Islam. (1) Such a view stemmed from the realisation that the Islamic presence in Senegal was both permanent and hugely important to the colony's prosperity and security. At times, as we have seen in this study, this fundamental truth

(1) See above chapter 1 for a discussion of the nineteenth century origins of such a policy.

was lost from sight, obscured by a host of misconceptions concerning the nature of West African society and France's status within it.

French attitudes to education serve as a barometer of the reality of their expectations. Throughout the nineteenth century mission education and in the early twentieth century the enthusiasm for secular education both contributed to a hope in some quarters of the French community that traditional African societies could be transformed into something approximating to provincial French society. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century such expectations seemed increasingly unrealistic ,(1) but in the brief period of optimism that followed the end of the First World War there is some evidence that such hopes were being resurrected. In September 1921 the Governor-General reported to the Minister of Colonies:

Primary education is making a great and very conscientious effort to fulfil its dual mission of instruction and education. Those who understand the importance of [primary education] in the metropole will realise how much greater is its significance in countries on the verge of civilisation.

(1) See above chapter 4.

To give natives the habits and taste of the essential rules of hygiene unknown in their ancestral traditions, to strengthen their bodies by physical exercises adapted to the needs of these populations, to sow and cultivate in their souls the principles of human morality, to try and make of these great children men of conscience and will-power, to give them the rudiments of indispensable knowledge and, above all, to teach them to understand and speak French, to infuse them with the taste and the method of work in such a way as to enable the most gifted of them by a progressive selection to raise themselves intellectually and gradually form an elite through whom we can exert our policies on the masses - such in its broad lines is the task which falls to our colonial schoolmasters. When one can see this work at close hand one realises that there is no other task more difficult, more useful, more noble or more thrilling. (1)

The Governor-General continued with the claim that as a result of the success of the colonial schoolmasters the Qur'anic schools were being forced out of business as parents came to recognise the superiority of the education offered by the French. However, the glorification of the role of the schoolmaster should perhaps more realistically be seen as a reflection not so much of the strength of French education in AOF but of its weakness: even on the calculation of the Governor-General the 24,000 pupils attending primary

(1) ANS O 28 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 9.4.1921

schools represented no more than one in fifty of the school-age population. (1)

Official admission that the French could not provide for all of West Africa's educational needs followed less than three years later. Amongst a series of reforms intended to decentralise the education system was a specific provision for the inclusion of Qur'anic education within the French system. Articles 47, 48 and 49 of the Decree of 1st May 1924 gave Lt-Governors of Islamised colonies the authority (providing they had the Governor-General's approval) to establish medersas whose 'essential aim is to establish a point of contact between literate Muslims and our administrators by the training of interpreters, judges and secretaries of native tribunals'. (2)

(1) Ibid

(2) 'Arrêté fixant l'organisation générale de l'enseignement en AOF 1.5.1924 in Textes portant sur la réorganisation de l'enseignement en AOF, Gorée, 1924. See also the circular of the same date printed in this collection: 'L'enseignement primaire supérieur musulman a pour but de canaliser, au profit de la politique française, l'influence exercée par les musulmans lettrés sur leurs coreligionnaires. Il se propose de dissiper les préventions du monde musulman contre notre civilisation. Il développe les études supérieures coraniques tout en donnant des vues justes sur le rôle civilisateur de la France en Afrique'.

In view of some of the misgivings expressed before the war about the benefits of the medersa system it is perhaps not surprising that there was no rush of Lt-Governors eager to take advantage of the new law. Indeed, it was not until 1930 that the first medersa was established as a result of the new law.

Conditions for admission to the Boutilimit medersa, established by Chazals, the Lt-Governor of Mauritania, made it plain that entry was to be limited to the sons of the nobility. (1) Clearly the confusion between the medersa and the École des Fils des Chefs, which had been evident in the early history of the St Louis medersa, had still to be resolved. (2)

The old formula for a medersa of a school which provided education in a vaguely Islamic idiom for sons of chiefs appealed to the authorities. In 1932 Brévié wrote to the Lt-Governor of Soudan urging him to establish an institution along the lines of the Boutilimit medersa that would contribute effectively to the training of the commandement indigène of the Moors and Tuaregs of Soudan. The Lt-Governor obliged with a medersa at Timbedra in the Hodh region. The first year's report explained that the local administrator had been firm with the chiefs in getting them

(1) ANS O 82 'Décision' 27.12.1930; see especially Article 2.

(2) See above chapter 4.

to send their sons to the medersa. The problem of recruitment thus dealt with, the staff were now seeking to teach their young Moorish charges the elementary rules both of hygiene and of football and to get them used as soon as possible to eating from individual plates.(1) The following year it was reported that great care was being taken to provide good food for the pupils so that 'Parents could never cite the mediocrity of the food given to their children as an excuse to refuse to entrust them to us'. Despite this very French consideration recruitment of sons of important chiefs was a problem, and the author of the annual report, M. Assomption the head of the Education Department of the Soudan, was forced to conclude that 'true chiefs were very rare in the Sahel'. He further believed that the senior Moorish teacher, Mohammed Moctar Dicko the brother of the chief of the Awlad Nacer (and 'our only collaborator amongst the Moorish race') was purposely obstructing the French. The Senegalese teacher, Ahmadou Ba, however, was reported to be honest and hard-working. Assomption proposed replacing Mohammed Dicko with the wife of the French

(1) ANS O 92 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Lt.-Gov. Soudan; Lt.-Gov. Soudan to Gov.-Gen. AOF 6.10.1932; 'Arrêté' 12.9.1931; 'Bulletin d'inspection 30.1.1934 - 2.2.1934.'

director of the medersa, Mme. Follenfant. She would, he said, not only be able to supervise catering and laundry but would also be able to provide for the younger boarders 'a point of affection and devotion of which women alone are capable'. (1)

M. Assomption appeared to have applied criteria which were more suited to a provincial French boarding school than to a training school for future chiefs and civil servants in West Africa. His assertion, too, that Mohammed Moctar Dicko was the 'only' Moorish collaborator either betrays an appalling ignorance of France's position in Mauritania and Soudan or, perhaps, it suggests a more general dislike of the non-black indigenous population. Without any further evidence, however, one should reserve judgement on his qualifications to inspect the medersa.

In any case it is clear that other administrators did not share the generally negative view of the medersa

(1) ANS O 92 'Bulletin d'inspection: étude sur la medersa des fils des chefs et notables maures de Timbédra, 20.3.1934 - 12.1.1935' The concern about food was entirely serious and probably justified. In 1939 five pupils were reported to have left the St Louis medersa because of the unusual food, see ANS O 122 Gov. Mauritania to Gov.-Gen. AOF 8.3.1940.

which is suggested in Assomption's report. The Lt-Governor of Soudan considered establishing a similar institution in Bamba, a town some 150 miles east of Timbuktu on the Niger Bend, to cater for the colony's Tuareg population but considered it unlikely that the success of the Timbedra medersa could be repeated because of 'the profound difference which separates Arab and Berber mentalities'. The Tuareg, he said, had no taste for intellectual work and most of them 'have not yet abandoned hope of seeing us leave their country and of resuming their life of pillage and plunder'. Previous attempts, he noted, to recruit Tuareg pupils to French schools had led to 'a dangerous restiveness'. (1)

The creation of a medersa in Atar (Mauritania) in January 1936 suggested that the administration was now convinced that the medersas had a vital role to play in their recruitment and training of a commandement indigène. (2) The issue was very much at the forefront of the administration's thinking in the 1930s. Brévié, as Governor-General, had argued that special attention should be given to the training

(1) ANS O 92 Gov. Soudan to Gov.-Gen. AOF 10.12.1935

(2) ANS O 82 'Décision' 13.1.1936.

of traditional chiefs who should be integrated more fully into the administrative structure. (1) It was not an original argument - Ponty and Carde, for example, had both argued in this way - but it does seem to have been applied with greater conviction and sophistication by Brévié. (2) It is in the context of French policies towards chiefs rather than towards Islam that the medersa programme in the years 1924 to 1936 should be judged.

By 1936, however, there were signs of a shift in emphasis. Article 2 of the 'Decision' creating the Atar medersa, for example, stipulated that the medersa had two functions: firstly, 'to ensure the maintenance of classical Arab culture in Upper Mauritania' and, secondly, 'to train an indigenous elite, educated by contact with us'. (3) The order in which these two functions were listed is instructive in itself but it is the idea that medersas should be servants of Arab culture that deserves special attention. It was one of the first signs that the French believed that

- (1) J. Brévié Circulaires sur la politique et l'administration indigène en AOF Gorée, 1932.
- (2) For a discussion of these issues see A. Auchnie 'The "commandement indigène" in Senegal, 1919-1947' PhD thesis, University of London, 1983.
- (3) ANS O 82 'Décision' 13.1.1936.

the medersa should revert to its pre-colonial role as a centre of Islamic scholarship. Although the Atar medersa was reserved exclusively for sons of chiefs and notables (see Article 3) it made no provision for teaching French. This gap was soon spotted and commented upon by Brévié who wrote to the Governor of Mauritania, de Coppet, urging the inclusion of French in the curriculum. De Coppet replied that neither he nor his Inspector of Native Affairs, Beyries, were in favour of this as they both believed that the overtly 'French' nature of the education provided in previous medersas was the main obstacle to recruitment of pupils. Furthermore, de Coppet argued, French control of the northern reaches of Mauritania was still not completely assured (el Hiba's submission, it should be remembered, had taken place in 1935) and that therefore, the Atar medersa should be used as a way of encouraging the loyalty and confidence of the grands nomades of the north. De Coppet did not rule out the eventual inclusion of French but stressed that this would have to be postponed until France's position was more secure. Brévié agreed to this postponement only on condition that it should be for a maximum of two years after which French was to become obligatory regardless

of any other considerations. (1)

This controversy is evidence of the fact that the received wisdom of men such as Clozel, Delafosse and Brévié regarding Islam, its place in West African society and French attitudes towards it was being abandoned. Just as Clozel and Delafosse could be said to have 'discovered' animism in the Ivory Coast at the turn of the century so too could it be said that de Coppet and Beyries had 'rediscovered' Islam in Mauritania in the 1930s. Islam appears in their writing to be a much grander and more dignified religion than is suggested by Clozel, Delafosse and Brévié. It is a view which seems closer to the nineteenth-century romantics than the sociologically-inspired views of several of the commentators discussed in this study.

In September 1936 de Coppet was promoted to Governor-General and was thus able to encourage his administration to show greater respect towards Islam. Of course respect for the leaders of the principal brotherhoods was nothing new but the originality

(1) ANS O 82 Gov. Mauritania to Gov.-Gen. AOF 24.3.1936; Directeur des Affaires Politiques et Administratives 'Note pour m. l'Inspecteur Général de l'Enseignement' 10.4.1936.

of de Coppet's policy lay in the importance he attached to other senior personalities of the Islamic community - notably the cadis and imams. One of the most characteristic aspects of this policy was expressed in a circular to all the colonies of AOF in February 1937:

On the occasion of tabaski I would ask all cercles to transmit the good wishes of the Governor-General to the whole of the Muslim population and to give them assurances of our favourable attention. Please organise a reception for Muslim notables at your Government houses and expound further on these sentiments. (1)

These instructions were carried out throughout AOF and appear to have created a very favourable impression amongst the Muslim population. The Governor of Senegal, Lefebvre, held a reception for St Louis' Muslim dignitaries who, he reported to de Coppet, had been very appreciative of the gesture: 'It is the first time, I was told, that the administration through an official action has associated itself with the intimate life of Muslim society, and the impression produced was profound.' (2) The imam of the principal

(1) ANS 19 G 1\* Gov.-Gen. AOF circular 15.2.1937. Tabaski is the Wolof name for the Muslim feast, generally known as al kabir, celebrating the start of the new year.

(2) ANS 19 G 1\* Gov. Senegal to Gov.-Gen. AOF 23.2.1937.

mosque of Abidjan wrote personally to de Coppet with words of praise and thanks for the fact that 'For the first time we have recorded such an act from a Governor-General.' (1) De Coppet himself held a reception at his residence for Dakar's Muslim dignitaries at which the imam of the principal mosque of Dakar, al Hajj Moustapha Diop, made a speech of considerable interest:

All the inhabitants of Senegal rejoice in the arrival in their country ... of the Governor, M. de Coppet after the natives have endured suffering, poverty and fatigue. May Allah protect the supreme chief against calamities, may He preserve him against misfortune. Muslims should be content to have in him a Governor whose like cannot be found anywhere in the world. His good policy has been proved by the preparations for our splendid celebration on our very important day. [De Coppet and his advisers] were all in full dress, wearing very expensive clothes to go to the place of prayer and were surrounded by cavalrymen to show publicly ... the honour which they attach to Islam and to those who practise this religion. (2)

The President of the recently-founded Fraternité-Musulmane - a Dakar-based organisation of black Senegalese Muslims which, according to official sources,

(1) ANS 19 G 1\* Imam, Grande Mosquée d'Abidjan to Gov.-Gen. AOF 4.3.1937.

(2) For full text of speech see ANS 19 G 1\*

aimed to restore Islam to its former purity but which was also pro-French and had sided with the authorities against Hamallah (1) - wrote to M. Perrin, député for Nievre to ask him to draw de Coppet's action to the attention of the Colonial Minister, Marius Moutet. (2)

At first sight many of these speeches and letters seem no different from, for example, the effusive declarations of loyalty to France during the First World War, but to see them as no more than this would be to underestimate the impact of de Coppet's gesture. All accounts of Muslim reactions report that Muslims were struck by the novelty of the action. Al Hajj Moustapha Diop's speech also contains veiled criticism of previous administrations implicitly held responsible for the hardships of previous years.

De Coppet followed the official celebrations of tabaski with another gesture of goodwill towards Muslims in the form of a donation of 1,000 francs to the Muslims of St Louis at the time of the mawluḍ festival celebrating the birth of the Prophet. The money was distributed

(1) ANSOM AP 598/4 'Rapport politique' 1937.

(2) ANS 19 G 1\* Président, Fraternité Musulman to Perrin 26.2.1937. It is not clear from these sources why M. Perrin was chosen to receive this letter.

by Seydou Nourou Tall to the chiefs of the five districts of the town and the donation appears to have been gratefully received. (1) In January 1938 Abd el Kader Diagne, a member of the Fraternité Musulmane suggested that de Coppet donate three sheep to the imams of the three principal mosques of Dakar, St Louis and Kaolack in time for the forthcoming tabaski celebration. De Coppet noted in the margin, 'Excellent idea! How much does a first class sheep cost? Send the necessary money, charged to my personal account, to the three imams.' Lefèbvre reported that the price of a good sheep in Kaolack was 125 francs, 200 francs in Dakar and 250 francs in St Louis. De Coppet replied to Abd el Kader Diagne thanking him for the suggestion and explaining that he had arranged for the sheep to be donated. He would not himself be in Dakar during tabaski as he would be on tour in Soudan, but he assured Diagne that he would take part in the celebrations there. (2) The following year neither the interim Governor-General, de Boisson nor the new Governor of Senegal, Ponzio,

- (1) ANS 19 G 143 (108) Cadi, Président Tribunal Musulman de St Louis to Gov.-Gen. AOF.
- (2) ANS 19 G 1\* Abd el Kader Diagne to Gov.-Gen. AOF 19.1.1938; Gov. Senegal to Gov.-Gen. AOF 7.2.1938; Admin. p.i. Dakar and Dep. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 9.2.1938; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Abd el Kader Diagne 21.2.1938.

attended the tabaski celebrations. In 1940, although the Governor-General did not himself attend, the administration was strongly represented at the celebrations at which the Grand Imam prayed for French victory over the impious Germans. French participation in the celebrations ceased under the Vichy regime but in 1944 tabaski was an occasion of great pomp and splendour as the Governor-General rode in procession to the mosque. (1)

There were, of course, sound political arguments for de Coppet's gestures. The French stake in Islam required protection not just from other Muslims (such as Hamallah) but also from politicians (such as Galandou Diouf). It is interesting to note that one of the main motives behind de Coppet's apparently most generous gesture of all - the sponsorship of the construction of a new principal mosque in Dakar - was decided upon partly in order to pre-empt Galandou Diouf. In March 1937 de Coppet wrote to the colonial Minister that Galandou Diouf had suggested the need for a new and larger mosque for Dakar and that he thought it would be an excellent piece of propaganda

(1) ANS 19 G 1\* Admin p.i. Dakar & Dep. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 17.1.1940; 'Note' 21.1.1940; for 1944 celebrations see reports in same file.

if the French government could appear to have spontaneously developed the same idea. De Coppet's argument was approved and in February the following year in a ceremony of great pomp he and Cheikh Alwali Cherif, a grandson of Cheikh Sidia, laid the first stone of the new mosque in a symbolic act of Franco-Muslim solidarity. Most of the speakers at the ceremony were appropriately fulsome in their praise for de Coppet. One exception was Wagane Diouf, a deputy mayor of Dakar who thanked all the initiators of the scheme - including M. Goux the mayor of Dakar and Galandou Diouf. According to intelligence reports of the day's events, 'The evocation of [Goux and Diouf] provoked whispers and protests that were noticed by everybody. The speech was not applauded'.<sup>(1)</sup>

De Coppet clearly thought that the ceremony had been a success and made personal arrangements for an article on it to be published in the metropolitan press. Writing informally to the Director of the 'Agence Economique de l'AOF' in Paris he said:

(1) ANS 19 G 6\* Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 2.3.1937;  
'Renseignements' 20.2.1938.

You know the importance which I attach to Islamic questions and I believe that AOF has not always been given the place it deserves in the Muslim world. In connection with this I want you to know that next year I would like you to present me personally, in my role as Governor-General of AOF, to the Feast of Aïd el Kébir which takes place at the Paris mosque. (1)

De Coppet's gesture was no doubt a sincere one, the wish to outdo Galandou Diouf notwithstanding. Other examples of his keenness that Islam should be respected can be seen in the following examples.

The first concerns the construction of another mosque, this time in Kaolack. In March 1937 el Hajj Ibrahim Niasse wrote to de Coppet requesting help in the construction of a new mosque in Kaolack and suggested specifically that special rates might be charged for the transport of building materials. The head of de Coppet's cabinet noted that 'From a political point of view it would be useful if we could give satisfaction.' However, the Inspector of Public Works, to whom the request was passed, refused on the grounds that a similar request for help in the construction of a church in Bobo Dioulasso

(1) ANS 19 G 6\* Gov.-Gen. AOF to Besson 3.3.1938.

had been turned down. De Coppet was not impressed with this excuse:

One cannot liken the construction of a mosque, which meets the needs of the majority of the population of a Muslim town like Kaolack, with a church destined to be frequented mainly by Europeans and a small number of newly-converted natives.

The Dakar-Niger Railway Company was instructed to give reduced rates, and by February 1938 the mosque was finished. El Hajj Oumar Kane, Ibrahim Niasse's representative in Dakar thanked de Coppet for arranging the 50% reduction in freight charges and invited him to the opening ceremony. De Coppet declined the invitation but offered reduced party rates on the railway for any Muslim who wanted to travel from Dakar to the ceremony at which the Governor-General was to be represented by the commandant of Sine-Saloum. (1)

- (1) ANS 19 G 6\* El Hajj Ibrahim Niasse to Gov.-Gen. AOF 27.3.1937; Directeur du Cabinet 'Note' 2-.3.1937; Inspecteur Travaux Publiques 'Note' 3.5.1937; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Inspecteur 12.5.1937; El Hajj Oumar Kane to Gov.-Gen. AOF 18.2.1938; Directeur des Affaires Politiques et Administratives 'Note' 22.2.1938; Gov.-Gen. AOF to El Hajj Oumar Kane 23.2.1938.

The second example was somewhat different, but it also involved el Hajj Oumar Kane. In July 1938 de Coppet received a letter from the Muslim residents of the Ave. El Hadj Malick Sy complaining about the lack of respect shown by the patrons of the Café de la Patrie to their mosque situated next to the café. They claimed that patrons of the café urinated against the wall of the mosque and asked if it would be possible to rent the premises which the café occupied for use as a hostel for Muslims. De Coppet immediately replied to the leader of the Muslims - el Hajj Oumar Kane - that he would order greater respect to be shown to the mosque and would see what he could do about their request to lease the building. At the same time he wrote to the administrator of Dakar with orders to ensure that holy places were respected and requested more information on this particular case. The administrator replied that the whole street had an unpleasant smell as a result of its proximity to a refuse site and that he believed the mosque was relatively respected and that the Muslims were complaining mainly because of the sale of alcohol on the premises. Whatever the truth, no further

action seems to have been taken. (1)

A further insight into de Coppet's concern that Islam should be respected can be gleaned from his scheme to include a medersa in the plans for the new Dakar mosque. (2) The medersa, it was stressed, was to be paid for by the French in order, on the one hand, to guard against begging and unqualified teachers and, on the other hand, to ensure better French control. The education was intended to fulfil at least four functions: (i) to 'purify' Islam noir and 'give new life to its rites'; (ii) to fight against superstition and magic; (iii) within the framework of the Qur'an to improve the condition of women and children; and, (iv) to train 'literate and erudite' teachers. However, there were serious doubts amongst the upper echelons of the educational administration about the wisdom of creating such an institution. The Deputy Inspector argued that those graduates whom the administration could not employ as

- (1) ANS 19 G 6\* Habitants musulmans de l'Ave, el Hajj Malick Sy to Gov.-Gen. AOF 5.7.1938; Gov.-Gen. AOF to El Hajj Oumar Kane 8.7.1938; Gov.-Gen. AOF to Admin. Dakar & Dep. 9.7.1938; Admin. Dakar & Dep. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 2.8.1938.
- (2) ANS O 92 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 13.6.1937.

interpreters and court assessors would probably turn to Qur'anic education as a means of earning their living. He argued that they would be able to do this very successfully as a result of the prestige they would gain from holding a diploma from the medersa. The Inspector feared that a thriving and dynamic system of Qur'anic education would be a very serious challenge to French secular schooling and, consequently, he was far from happy about the proposed medersa. (1)

De Coppet believed that the medersa had a wider role than the training of administrators and interpreters:

A Muslim intellectual foyer will help to maintain West African Islam in its present mood which renders it much more malleable and open to our administrative action than in any other region with a coranic influence.

Specifically he thought that a medersa would help greatly in combatting Hamallism:

(1) ANS O 92 'Rapport à m. le Directeur des Affaires Politiques et Administratives' 10.8.1937.

I believe that the sly dealings of Cherif Hamallah like those of his present followers and those of his possible future imitators, will be much easier to overcome and to neutralise the day when the elite of our Muslim subjects have tangible proof of the sympathy of the colonising nation which will be seen to be as active on behalf of its own religion as it is on behalf of any other religion which does not offend either the principles of public order or our sentiments of humanity.

De Coppet believed that the problem of employment for graduates of the medersa had been exaggerated by the Inspector and he requested permission to make an immediate start on the building.<sup>(1)</sup> The immediate support for the project was not, however, forthcoming, and with de Coppet's departure in 1938 the scheme lost its chief advocate.

In all these cases it is clear that de Coppet had to overcome misgivings and open hostility from senior administrators in order to fulfil his policy of being seen to help Muslims. In case it should be felt that he had transformed the state overnight into a gravy train for Muslims it should be noted that

(1) ANS O 92 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 28.8.1937.

several requests for assistance were refused. (1) Equally it should also be noted that in two of the cases examined above an important Islamic personality was involved, namely Ibrahim Niasse. Niasse was the head of a major branch of the Tijaniyya and although at this stage his influence was not as great as it was to become - he was very soon to be recognised by the North African Tijani as the khalifa of the West African Tijaniyya and had close relations with Muslim leaders in Ghana and Nigeria - nonetheless by 1936/7 he was unquestionably a very important figure, and de Coppet was wise to treat him well.

Relations between de Coppet and Ibrahim Niasse had been greatly improved after, with French assistance, Niasse had made the pilgrimage not just to Mecca but also to various Tijani shrines in North Africa during the hajj of 1937. (2) De Coppet saw Niasse's fulsome

- (1) See correspondence in NAS 19 G 6\* concerning mosques in Medina (Dakar), Dagana and Guinguineau (Sine-Saloum) for examples of refusal of assistance beyond a token donation.
- (2) ANS 4 E 8 See 'Dossier Ibrahim Niasse (1937)' and 'Dossier: Impression de voyage' for French records of Ibrahim Niasse's appreciation.

praise for the French organisation of the hajj as vindication of his policy. He quoted large sections of the letter which Niasse wrote to him on his return from the hajj in a circular to the governors of AOF. Of particular interest in Niasse's letter was a suggestion for a possible reform or modification of Qur'anic education. Niasse wrote:

I regret that too large a proportion of our Muslim population make no effort to understand our moral duties and as a result acquire the skills which would enable us to contribute to the revival of the country. Of these skills the most neglected but also the most important, are those concerned with agriculture.

I would therefore like to see the creation of medersas where the Muslim child will learn the Coran, Muslim duties, to speak and write Arabic and then also a manual skill which will enable him to earn his living. (1)

This was a very significant proposal and one which ran counter to all the earlier beliefs in the hostility of Muslims towards a westernised form of Qur'anic education. It is probably best understood in the context of the changing economic and labour situation in Senegal during the 1930s, a decade which witnessed increased migrant labour together

(1) ANS O 94 Ibrahim Niasse cited in Gov.-Gen. AOF circular 24.5.1937.

with urban growth and unemployment. (1) It can perhaps be seen as Niassé's alternative to Mouride expansion into new uncultivated land.

De Coppet was very sympathetic to the suggestion and asked for comments from the Governors of individual colonies. The response was mixed. The Governors of both Guinea and Ivory Coast were enthusiastic, the Governor of Dahomey thought the suggestion 'irrelevant' to Dahomey's population and Beyries, now the interim Governor of Mauritania thought it - no doubt wisely - 'inappropriate' in view of the Moorish caste system in which artisans occupied the lowest rank. (2) The Governor of Niger,

- (1) See M. Lakroum Le Travail inégal for a full analysis of changing labour patterns.
- (2) See replies from Governors and their interims to Governor-General: Guinea 21.9.1937; I. Coast 21.7.1937; Dahomey 21.10.1937; Mauritania 14.6.1937. Beyries wrote: 'Les hautes classes, que nous avons du ménager pour des raisons politiques et de sécurité, admettraient difficilement dans l'état actuel des choses, que les adolescents d'origine guerrière ou maraboutique instruits dans les medersahs soient astreints à un apprentissage manuel qu'elles jugent dégradant.' It is interesting to note the enthusiasm of the Governor of the Ivory Coast. In reply to de Coppet he spoke at length of the superiority of Islam over animism. See also ANSOM AP 957 'Rapport politique: AOF' 1937 which commented on the conversion of the Mandé and Mossi of Ivory Coast to Islam in this way: '... leur conversion ne les éloigne point de la civilisation française. Ils représentent au contraire les éléments les plus avides du progrès de la population ...'

however, was pleased to note that at last 'something was being done' against 'the state of neglect in which we have left the Muslim schools.' He compared French policy unfavourably with British policy in Nigeria where he particularly admired the recently-created secondary college in Zaria at which teaching was conducted not just in English but also in Hausa. In Niger he said that he and his administration were making an effort to ensure that, with the approval of the marabouts, manual skills and agriculture would be taught to the 4,000 or more children attending the colony's 1,350 Qur'anic schools.(1)

However, there is no evidence of any further action towards a reform of Qur'anic education along the lines proposed by Niasse. Niasse's proposal coincided with another debate concerning the reform of Qur'anic education, but the proposed reforms were of an altogether different nature. In January 1937 de Coppet was sent a major report carried out by M. Kleinschmidt on the condition of Muslim education in Senegal. The report was very critical both of the begging by talibes and of the low level of academic achievement within the schools. It

(1) ANS O 94 Niger to Gov.-Gen. AOF 20.9.1937.

concluded that some system of control to ensure a higher standard of teaching was necessary. The Deputy Inspector of Education was broadly sympathetic. According to the most recent (1933) statistics available he said that in Senegal there were 8,981 Qur'anic schools attended by 65,416 pupils. However, none of the schools visited by the Inspectorate merited, he said, the name of 'school' - 'The teaching which is given there lacks any form of method and creates by its monotony this universal laziness of spirit which the pupils bring with them later to the public school.' However, he was less sure than Kleinschmidt had been that any controls other than a restriction of the hours in which the school could open were possible. (1) Geismar, de Coppet's interim as Governor-General, sent copies of the Kleinschmidt report and the Deputy Inspector's assessment of it to the Governors of Senegal, Niger, Soudan, Guinea, Mauritania and to the Administrator of Dakar and asked for their comments on this 'particularly delicate' question.

(1) ANS O 94 Min. Col. to Gov.-Gen. AOF 8.1.1937; Kleinschmidt 'Les Ecoles coraniques dans les villages indigènes du Sénégal'; Bernadou, Inspecteur Adjoint de l'Enseignement 'Note pour m. le Directeur des Affaires Politiques' 5.2.1937.

He suggested that they also read Marty's earlier report on Qur'anic education in Senegal. When the various Governors had all replied de Coppet reported back in turn to his superiors in Paris. It is perhaps not surprising that he was very firmly against any form of control, an opinion which it seems was shared by all the Governors with the exception of the Governor of Senegal and the Administrator of Dakar. De Coppet argued that Marty's verdict on previous attempts at legislation was still valid and that the French should continue to make an effort to understand Qur'anic education - including such activities as begging - from a Muslim rather than from a European perspective. He quoted the reply of the Governor of Soudan:

Muslim education exists in conditions which do not appear to require any intervention on our part. Its very nature, its aims, the calm in which it is carried out, the paternal action of the schoolmasters and the docility of the pupils - all suggest that the Coranic school still meets certain needs which touch the very heart of native societies. It would be very dangerous in the present state of evolution of our subjects to prejudice the satisfaction of these needs, even if this were done with the best of intentions.

The only exception which de Coppet was prepared to make was to consider stricter control of the hygiene

of Dakar's schools - but he stressed that this too required a sense of pragmatism and an awareness of political priorities. (1)

It is interesting to note that in North Africa, too, the issue of legislation for Qur'anic schools was a very contentious one. The French administration in Morocco introduced a law in December 1937 requiring all Qur'anic schools to obtain official authorisation and to keep a register of pupils and teachers. The following year in Algeria a decree established the principle of inspecting the schools from the point of view of 'Morality, hygiene and salubrity.' Schools found wanting in any of these three virtues could be closed down. However, concerned opinion was sceptical about the wisdom of such legislation. An article in the Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française argued that Muslim complaints about such legislation were to a certain extent justified and that the French should show a greater awareness of the contribution which Qur'anic schools had made towards the promotion of literacy in Algeria.

(1) ANS O 94 Gov.-Gen. AOF to Min. Col. 12.10.1937.

In AOF the Inspector of Education did not think that it was an 'opportune' moment to introduce the Moroccan legislation south of the Sahara. (1)

De Coppet's obvious wish to be seen to be according Islam official respect and his reluctance to transform Qur'anic education into a disguised form of French education should be recognised as an original contribution to the development of French policy towards Islam. Both as Lt-Governor of Mauritania and as Governor-General of AOF de Coppet showed clear signs of departure from the near consensus of the previous twenty-five years according to which the faith of African Muslims was thought to be closer to the precepts of some undefined 'traditional' 'African' cosmology than to the doctrines revealed in the Qur'an and in the hadith. However, the 'novelty' of de Coppet's contribution requires

(1) ANS O 92 Inspecteur Général de l'Enseignement 'Note pour m. le Directeur des Affaires Politiques et Administratives' 7.4.1938. This 'Note' also contains an analysis of the Moroccan legislation. See also Anon 'L'Enseignement élémentaire des indigènes en Algérie et la question des écoles coraniques' BCAF July 1938 pp. 303-8.

qualification. In the previous chapter we saw how his behaviour towards Hamallah belonged very clearly to a tradition of support for the 'establishment' leaders of the brotherhoods, a tradition which goes back to the about-turn in French attitudes to Serigne Ahmadu Bamba in 1912. De Coppet was as anxious to preserve the monolithic structures of the brotherhoods as any of his predecessors had been. Cheikh Seydou Nourou Tall, as can be seen from his exhausting itinerary was one of the leading figures in de Coppet's Islamic strategy, and Ibrahim Niasse was clearly able to make his voice heard in the Presidential Palace.

Another aspect of continuity in de Coppet's administration was the surveillance and censorship of Arabic literature. The Central Intelligence Bureau (Service Central de Sûreté et de Renseignements Généraux) was increasingly active and vigilant. The fact that it surveyed all forms of political activity should not be allowed to hide the fact that a lot of its time was taken up in surveying Arabic literature. The staff of the Bureau increased steadily from 87 in 1933 to 115 in 1938. (1)

(1) ANS 17 G 174 (28) 'Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du Service Central de Sûreté et de Renseignements Généraux' 1938. The statistics above are taken from this report.

In 1936 its officers seized 503 Arabic periodicals and advised that a further 2,040 were 'dubious'; in 1937 these figures were respectively 124 and 1,056 and in 1938, 384 and 4,730. Particular attention was being paid to the Lebanese and Syrians for whom stricter immigration controls were introduced in 1938. The effectiveness of the controls - a larger money payment and extra documentation - can be seen in the dramatic drop in arrivals from the Levant: 1,936 in 1937 to 979 in 1938. In both years over a thousand were deported.

The concern of the authorities probably stemmed more from Arab nationalism than from Islamic unrest: for example, two of the publications banned in 1938 were banned because they carried poems glorifying the Arab revolt in Palestine. However, their sensitivity to this issue was founded as much on the fear that it would encourage non-Arab Muslims to challenge colonial authority as on the restlessness it caused amongst the Levantine population of AOF.

In short, the colonial state during the years of the Popular Front was growing increasingly vigilant over its subjects of whom more than 50,000 by the end of 1938 were the subject of files in the archives of the Intelligence Bureau. In two years alone - 1936 and 1937 - a further 10,000 files were added. (1) Such statistics and the knowledge of de Coppet's attitude to Cheikh Hamallah serve to qualify any temptation to portray de Coppet as simply a benevolent and liberally-minded paternalist. Nonetheless, the fact that de Coppet had conventional responsibilities as the most senior colonial administrator in the Federation to ensure law and order should not blind us to the evidence that he was prepared to go along new and untested paths. Furthermore, although it is clear that the Popular Front government was broadly 'reformist' or 'progressive' in colonial policy - witness the Blum-Violette proposals in Algeria - it seems that the initiative for de Coppet's Muslim policy in AOF came from himself and from the impression of Islam that he had gained in Mauritania.

(1) ANS 17 G 174 (28) 'Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du Service Central de Sûreté et de Renseignements Généraux' 1937.

Something of a paradox, De Coppet would probably have been quite at ease with the later ambiguities and uncertainties of official French thinking that were to become so evident in the concept of the Union française of the 1950s. But such considerations lie beyond the scope of this study.

## CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the years discussed in this thesis Islam featured prominently in French preoccupations. At the turn of the century as the era of overt military conquest drew to a close, French attitudes and policy towards Islam were informed by the experience of the conquest itself, by a number of travel accounts and a much smaller number of scholarly studies on Islam but above all by the knowledge that had been gained over the past seventy years in Algeria. These various influences combined to paint a somewhat confused portrait of Muslims: the fiercest adversaries of the French had been Muslim leaders, but it was with an army comprising large numbers of Muslim soldiers that the forces of al hajj Umar Tall and Samori Ture were defeated; in travel accounts European adventurers (often disguised as Muslims!) had testified both to the generosity and to the cruelty of West African Muslims; the scholars in Algeria had warned of well-organised secret Islamic brotherhoods but south of the Sahara, Le Chatelier,

one of the foremost French experts on Islam, argued that such organisations were the product of French imagination; in Algeria Mgr. Lavigerie emphasised the relationship between Islam and slavery but in West Africa, Louis-Gustave Binger doubted that the unemployed in France were as well looked after as the house slaves of African Muslims. What then in French eyes were the essential characteristics of African Islam? At the turn of the century you paid your money and took your choice.

I have argued that although many of these views persisted throughout the colonial period that nonetheless there was a recognisable evolution of thought, and that this evolution can only be understood by taking into account the cultural and intellectual environment of early twentieth century France as well as by looking closely at the specific circumstances of colonial scholarship and policies in West Africa. Intellectual and political developments are seen to be inextricably linked in the evolution of thought and policy. Three distinct phases are identified in this evolution.

The first phase comprised the years between the military conquest and the start of the First World War.

They were years in which conspiracy theories dominated both French domestic politics and international diplomacy. French understanding of Islam was muddled and veered between on the one hand the views associated with the Algerian school of thought (and Xavier Coppolani in particular) according to which Islam represented a monolithic structure which, if the French could control it, offered the key to cheap and efficient French domination of the whole of north-west Africa to views, on the other hand, which stressed the irrational, unpredictable, fanatical and intrinsically 'untameable' nature of African Islam. When Coppolani was himself killed by a Muslim opponent in 1905 the latter view came to dominate and at a time of widespread millenarian expectations amongst African Muslims the French were particularly fearful of Mahdist activity. In addition, the Muslim leaders - the marabouts - were identified by the French as being the allies of a slave-owning 'feudal' aristocracy which used religion as a pretext for exploiting the rest of society. The image of the marabout was further worsened by its association in the minds of some Frenchmen with that of the metropolitan clergy and at a time when anti-clericalism was one of the strongest political

passions this was a particularly unfortunate association. Seen in these lights Islam presented itself as the major obstacle to the advancement of French 'civilisation' and to the imposition of French rule. When to these views a combination of ethnic and racial stereotypes were added a situation was created in which conflict between some Muslims and the French was almost inevitable. I have suggested that French 'Islamophobia' reached a peak in the years 1909-11 and that the events that took place on the edge of the Futa Jallon in which hundreds of Africans lost their lives was the tragic dénouement of these perceptions of religion and race.

The second part of the thesis describes how during the years 1913 - c.1920 the French came to revise their understanding, not just of Islam but also of African society generally. I argue that the influence of ethnology and later also of Durkheimian sociology led to a radical reappraisal of the relative merits of animism and Islam in West Africa: animism hitherto despised for its 'primitive' and its localised nature, its superstitions and its lack of either a written doctrine or any other easily discernible moral code was now seen by some as a relatively rational and sophisticated system of

universalist beliefs which responded well to the needs of African societies. Islam, by contrast, was seen increasingly as an alien and disruptive force from which animist societies required some protection. These views were associated in particular with François Clozel and Maurice Delafosse, two very senior administrators who took a keen and active interest in ethnology. However, it was the work of a third scholar-administrator, Paul Marty appointed head of the Governor-General's Service des Affaires Musulmanes, which above all contributed to a change in official perceptions of Islam. In his multi-volume study of Islam in AOF Marty described a religion which was distinguished by its wholesale adoption of pre-Islamic African customs. Marty was not in the least hostile to this 'distortion' (as he saw it) of Islamic doctrine: on the contrary, he suggested that African Islam - Islam noir - was a relatively docile, and from the French point of view, harmless religion. He demonstrated how the French could gain from a more tolerant attitude towards its leaders and through his very thorough documentation of personalities, of legal practices and of the history of Islam in West Africa he succeeded in painting a detailed and coherent picture of Islam that has dominated informed European

European perceptions almost until the present day.

The third part of the thesis describes what I have called the French stake in Islam. During the 1920s and 1930s the French developed very strong alliances with certain leaders of the Muslim community on whom the French were reliant for a number of political and economic services. Relationships between the French and Muslim leaders became fossilised and there was little scope for flexibility in the choice of allies. The initiative for the alliances came as much from the Muslims themselves as it did from the French, for the French could offer their allies help and protection against challenges to their leadership from factions within the Muslim community or from the increasingly powerful Senegalese politicians. This pattern of mutual support between the French and Muslim leaders appears to have been as true in coastal Dahomey with its minority Muslim population as it was in the mainly Muslim societies of the Sahel.

In 1956 Capt. Cardaire, in charge of Muslim intelligence in Bamako, complained, 'AOF is not Dakar - when will we understand that? - and Islam in AOF is not Abdullah ould Cheikh Sidiya or Seydou Nourou Tall'. (1)

(1) ANSOM AP 2258/1 Cardaire 'Note' 26.4.1956.

Cardaire was justifiably complaining about the inflexible and highly personalised nature of Franco-Islamic relations and their strong bias towards the needs of the administration in Dakar. Such perceptions, stemming from the evolution of thought described in this thesis, should not be relegated to a secondary status in any analysis of the colonial situation. The very different fates of Tierno Aliou, the blind old wali of Goumba, on one extreme and of Seydou Nourou Tall, the jetsetting grandson of al hajj Umar Tall, on the other, were largely determined by the way in which the French authorities understood Islam. Colonial 'realities' - the burning huts of the missidi in Goumba, the bulging files of the Service des Affaires Musulmanes, the pomp and ceremony of the foundation celebrations for the new mosque in Dakar - all these demand an understanding of the way in which colonial governments thought about the people they ruled.

Appendices: The Ponty circulars on Muslim Policy

Appendix I

Circular to administrators and commandants de cercle  
of Haut-Senegal & Niger on action to be taken against  
itinerant marabouts, 1.7.1906

... As soon as the presence in any part of your cercle of one of these beggar marabouts is brought to your attention, you should not hesitate to have him arrested immediately so that he can be brought to you. You should then interrogate him, and if it is established that under the pretext of religion, he has asked for and obtained presents from the natives, you will charge him with fraud and defer him to the native tribunal of your circonscription. Once he has served his sentence he should be expelled and conducted back ... to his country of origin where he should be brought to the attention of the local authorities. If it is discovered that this person is provoking, or has in the past provoked, disorders, either in this or in a neighbouring colony, you will capture him as soon as possible and send me a report

concerning the means and the object of his preaching along with your own suggestions as to how to prevent him from continuing his preaching in the future. If firstly it cannot be established that this marabout has been responsible for unlawful acts but that nonetheless he possesses no other means of subsistence than begging ... you should please detain him and send me a personal report suggesting what administrative measures you judge suitable.

And in any case, whether the marabout is a peaceable man or if he is considered as a dangerous individual, you should immediately open up a file on him and send it to me: in this document should be included all information about his identity, place of birth, age, antecedents, the brotherhood to which he belongs, his family etc ...

... Of course the measures outlined above are in no way intended to inhibit the free practice of the Muslim religion. (ANS 15 G 103)

## Appendix II

Circular to administrators and commandants de cercle  
of Haut-Sénégal & Niger concerning Qur'anic schools,  
18.4.1907

... Information collected by my administrators leaves me in no doubt about the organising effort currently being undertaken by the Muslim brotherhoods in AOF or about the political and religious role of preachifying marabouts who circulate throughout the country and who appear to carry to the sedentary marabouts instructions from the chiefs of African Islam.

... It is important to be informed not only about the number of coranic schools, which aid the diffusion of religious doctrines and political suggestions and which are disseminated behind our back by the more or less secret agents of the religious orders, but it is also important to know something of the personality of the marabouts who teach in these schools, of their origin, their degree of learning, their means of instruction, of the influence they enjoy in the country and of any relations they may have retained with their former teachers. (ANS J 85)

## Appendix III

Circular to Lt-Governors of colonies of AOF outlining  
the 'Politique des Races', 22.9.1909

[Ponty regretted the fact that in the period of colonial conquest the French had been obliged to impose chiefs on Africans and warned of the dangers if nothing was done to rectify the situation ... ]

... In Many parts of our colonies a veritable social malaise may develop, at first rather vague and difficult to discern but which will become acute and which will be manifested in local complications that may disorient the mass of the population.

This malaise is growing and sometimes assumes proportions of real misunderstanding, when in the zone commanded by a chief there exists both fetishist and Muslim groups. More scrupulous and more familiar with our manner of conceiving the principle of authority ... Muslims quickly manage to acquire political hegemony in a country where fetishists are often in a majority. It happens then that without ourselves gaining any advantage ... we are encouraging the extension of Muslim clericalism. Now, the action of Islam if it is conducted by

ambitious or fanatical chiefs quickly takes on the character of a more or less disguised pressure against all European innovations. (ANS 19 G 1)

#### Appendix IV

Circular to Lt-Governors of colonies of AOF  
concerning the use of Arabic in judicial and  
administrative proceedings, 8.5.1911

... Everything we do in the government and administration of the native races would have, from a political point of view, a single objective: to obtain from our African subjects and proteges an increasingly exact comprehension of the French mentality and of the concept of colonisation which are the honour of the government of the Republic. Now that the occupation of the country has been definitively accomplished, it is certain that conflicts between the natives and ourselves are generally caused by misunderstandings. Now it will not escape your notice that in giving an official character to the use of the Arabic language, a language foreign to the country, we are creating

occasions from which misunderstandings may arise. We even tend to mislead the natives about the principles of our policy with regard to groups who are not themselves Muslim.

Arabic only enters into African countries with Muslim proselytism. For the black it is a sacred language. Even indirectly to oblige those under our jurisdiction to learn it in order to maintain official relations with us comes to the same as encouraging the propaganda of the votaries of Islam. It is not my concern here to examine whether this propaganda is always exercised in a way that corresponds with our interests. In any case we must not appear to take sides in religious questions which can only interest us inasmuch as they assume a political character. Furthermore, most of our clerks cannot speak Arabic and are consequently incapable of exercising control over documents written in this language. ... The few Arabic-speaking natives are most commonly religious persons, marabouts often under surveillance, and people moreover who have sometimes a very mediocre understanding of the language in question. We should not tolerate having to rely on such 'scholars' for the honest communication of our intentions,

orders and the sentences of the tribunals to those whom it may concern.

On the other hand it cannot be denied that the French language, a language that is much easier than Arabic for the native to learn and to pronounce, has made notable progress in West Africa as a result of increased commercial transactions, the extension of the railway network, the increasingly intimate contact between native groups and our administration and the beneficial influence of school. Our language is spreading and, in some regions, it is becoming the common language between blacks of different races. These are tendencies which should be encouraged.

[ Ponty then ordered all judgements, administrative correspondence and native requests to the French administration to be made in French. Exceptions were made for the Muslim Tribunals of Dakar, Kayes, Gorée and Rufisque, but these were also ordered to deliver judgement in French in a circular dated 18.9.1911 ] (ANS M 241)

## Appendix V

Circular to Lt-Governors of colonies of AOF  
concerning the Arabic press in AOF, 15.11.1911

... I have noticed that for some time already, Syrians and Moroccans have been importing abnormal quantities of publications of all kinds printed in the Arabic language and which systematically denigrate all our acts and our highest principles of colonisation. They are also importing vulgar colour engravings representing scenes of Muslim religious life. Newspapers, brochures and various other works are intended for marabouts, talibes, masters of coranic schools, scholars or would-be scholars who sell them on behalf of the Syrian and Moroccan middlemen who take an extortionate cut from this lucrative trade.

Now even though the political situation in the bulk of our West African possessions doesn't present any worrying symptoms from the Islamic point of view, I believe that we should not neglect any opportunity to combat maraboutic activity which is hostile to our influence and to European domination in general and which tends more and more to find its principal

nourishment in publications from abroad. All these periodical journals, works of theology and assorted colour prints whilst often superficially inoffensive ... all tend through an exaltation of the Prophet to favour the development of Islam. Experience shows how fertile is the imagination of the illustrator of the Coran when it comes to winning the conversion of the infidel or rekindling the zeal of the neophyte.

[Ponty requested all customs officers to subject all literature in Arabic to a 'rigorous surveillance' and to destroy anything 'presenting a hostile character or which is simply liable to favour maraboutic action']  
(ANS 19 G 1)

#### Appendix VI

Circular to Lt-Governor of colonies of AOF concerning  
the creation of a register of Muslim preaching,  
26.12.1911

... Maraboutic propaganda is increasingly developing in a sense which if not aggressive is at least clearly unfavourable to our domination. ...

... Maraboutic propaganda - the hypocritical facade behind which are sheltered the selfish hopes of the former privileged groups and the last obstacle in the way of the complete triumph of our civilising work based on the respect of justice and human liberty - will disappear completely when all its activitists, identified and closely watched, are no longer able to pass through the gaps in the vast network which surrounds them throughout the entirety of our West Africa. (ANS 19 G 1)

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5 G - Côte d'Ivoire

7 G - Guinée

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9 G - Mauretanie

11 G - Niger

13 G - Sénégal

15 G - Soudan

17 G - Affaires politiques

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AOF

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Soudan

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