

The copyright of this thesis rests with the University of Cape Town. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

7/6

**The Tijaniyya *Tariqa* in Cape Town:  
The “Normalization” of Race Relations in South Africa**

Susana Molins Lliteras / MLNLLI001

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of  
the degree of Master of Philosophy in African Studies

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2005

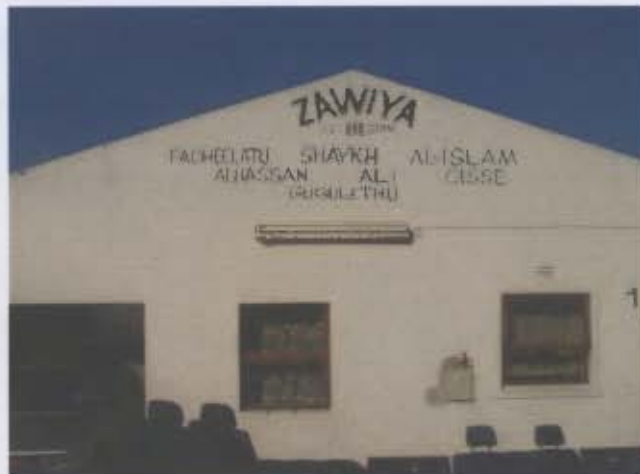
This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 27/05/2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**The Tijaniyya Tariqa in Cape Town:  
The “Normalization” of Race Relations in South Africa**

- 1. INTRODUCTION
- 2. THE TARIQA AND ITS ORIGIN
- 3. OVERVIEW OF THE TARIQA
- 4. THE TARIQA IN SOUTH AFRICA
- 5. OVERVIEW OF ISLAM IN SOUTH AFRICA
- 6. THE TARIQA IN CAPE TOWN



Susana Molins Eliteras / MLNLLI001

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- 1. ABSTRACT**
- 2. INTRODUCTION**
- 3. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**
- 4. OVERVIEW OF THE TIJANIYYA**
- 5. THE TIJANIYYA ABROAD**
- 6. OVERVIEW OF ISLAM IN SOUTH AFRICA**
- 7. THE TIJANIYYA IN CAPE TOWN**
- 8. CONCLUSIONS**
- 9. WORKS CITED**
- 10. APPENDIX 'A': PHOTOGRAPHS**

## 1. ABSTRACT

“The Tijaniyya *Tariqa* in Cape Town: “Normalization” of Race Relations in South Africa” focuses on the spread to South Africa of the Tijaniyya order (*tariqa*) prominent in West Africa. Theoretically, the study aims to work within the bounds of the social sciences, while at the same time problematizing some of its assumptions. After the examination of the theoretical and methodological framework of the paper, the study turns to a historical overview of the Tijaniyya *tariqa*, from its foundation in Algeria, to its spread to West Africa, and finally to its characteristics in twentieth century Senegal. The paper then takes a look at the spread of the *tariqa* outside its ‘natural’ borders of North and West Africa, in particular to France and the United States. At this point, the study jumps to an overview of the history of Islam in South Africa, in order to place the spread of the Tijaniyya to this country in its appropriate religious and social context.

Next, the paper focuses on the particular experience of the Tijaniyya *tariqa* in Cape Town, located within the larger historical and social context of the *tariqa* and Islam in South Africa. Through a series of interviews and visits to the Tijani *zawiya*, the researcher is able to describe the experiences of the Tijanis in Cape Town, including those of its Shuyukh, and Senegalese, ‘Malay’ and ‘black’ South African disciples. In particular, the research examines the different reasons for which Tijanis joined the *tariqa*, what the Tijaniyya means to them, which are its most essential teachings, and the issue of race relations within the *tariqa*.

In conclusion, the study finds that the spiritual dimension of the Tijaniyya in the lives of its adepts, as well as its role as a propagator of Islam are much more significant characteristics of the *tariqa* than any external political or economic factors. At the same

time, the Tijaniyya *tariqa* has a “normalizing” effect on the issues of race relations and identity, so important in South Africa today. Finally, the Tijaniyya *tariqa* in Cape Town offers the unique opportunity to combat racism and prejudice and bring people of all backgrounds together through spirituality.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The Arabic term *tariqa* (pl. *turuq*), means a method, or Way that a Muslim may follow to reach a personal spiritual experience. The term also denotes the organizational framework that may be set up to transmit and practice this method (Vikor 441). Analogously with similar forms of organization in Christianity, Western scholars who study them also call *turuq* Sufi brotherhoods, orders or confraternities. The central core of the Way is the *wird*, or prayer ritual that is transmitted from teacher (*Shaykh*, pl. *Shuyūkh*) to disciple (*murīd*, pl. *muridīn*) through a chain of transmission (*silsila*) extending from the founder, and back beyond him to the Prophet, to the present day. The transmission is preceded by the initiation of the disciple by the master, and their relationship is characterized by the strict obedience of the former to the latter. The disciple is said to be in the hands of the master “as a cadaver in the hands of a mortician” (Kane 4). The *wird* forms part of a spiritual ritual, or *dhikr*, that is performed daily and at regular gatherings of the members of the Way (Vikor 441-42). According to Sufi tradition, the *Shuyūkh* (also known as *marabouts* in West African Islam<sup>1</sup>) are closer to God and are thus able to lead their disciples on the same path they have traveled, through the purification of the latter’s souls. The masters are also able to interpret the ‘hidden’ or ‘inner’ meanings of sacred texts and may, moreover, have extraordinary powers. They have thus become the ‘mediators’ between God and the believers throughout the Muslim world, which has led to a ‘cult’ of saints in Sufi Islam (Kane 3).

At the same time, more than just religious fraternities, the brotherhoods have often been vital economic, political and social organizations that perform many social functions. The *turuq* are organized around a lodge, or *zawiya* (pl. *zawaya*), which is a

center of religious practice and learning, where disciples in search of spiritual realization may seek initiation. It may also serve as the site of a holy shrine, and provide shelter for refugees and housing for both disciples and masters (Kane 4). Nevertheless, although the *turuq*, as organizational frameworks, may sometimes assume functions beyond those of practicing the Sufi Way, these are extraneous to their existence and not of its essence or that of the spiritual experience of the method (Vikor 441). It is precisely for this reason that it is possible, and necessary, to look beyond the social and political epiphenomena and focus on how a particular *tariqa* sees and defines itself (Vikor 441).

Sufism as the source of inspiration for a religious tradition and for social organization has attracted abundant research. The literature has been authored by both ‘orientalists’, who have studied and translated works of Sufi masters for Western audiences, and social scientists who have analyzed the social, economic and political aspects of the *turuq* (Kane 3). Most research on Sufi Islam in West Africa has focused on the “attempt of economic, political and cultural entrepreneurs to strategically use Sufi Islam to acquire social capital, which can then be transformed into economic capital” (Kane 10). According Ousman Kane though, this represents only a small part of the picture: “When confronted with existential uncertainties, people appeal to Sufi Islam, which then plays an even greater role in touching their lives” (10). Similarly, according to Knut Vikor, the main characteristics of the African *turuq* have been the spreading of Islam, and the deepening of the practice of ordinary Muslims through emphasis on personal piety and exemplary behavior. In the final analysis, “this effect is probably of greater import than its external functions as a focus for political combat and jihad” (Vikor 468). At the same time, anthropologists of religion have argued that Sufi brotherhoods

---

<sup>1</sup> *Marabout* is a French colonial corruption of *murabit*, meaning a religious person.

embody a religiosity well adapted to tribal and rural societies which have no place in an urban, modernized context (Kane 16). Nevertheless, because they have fulfilled expectations through the centuries, and continue to do so, West African brotherhoods have successfully established themselves as a dominant form of religiosity and social organization, meeting the needs of all levels of society. The fact that the *marabouts* offer the necessary guidance to those in search of spiritual realization is a major appealing factor in Sufi Islam. At the same time, Sufi brotherhoods also provide security and shelter for their members, thereby increasing the capacity of West African *turuq* to reproduce themselves in Africa, in the West, and elsewhere (Kane 17). Thus, it would seem that a function of the Sufi *turuq* in Africa has been to “internationalize the Islam of Africa, by bringing the existing local leaders into contact with networks that span the continents and in which geographic and ethnic background is of minor importance” (Vikor 468).

The Tijaniyya *tariqa* is one of the largest and strongest *turuq* in West Africa; it has also spread well beyond its ‘natural’ borders. Sometimes surrounded by controversy, or arousing passionate debate among Muslims and non-Muslims, Sufis as well as academics, the Tijaniyya continues to attract followers around the world. It is within the framework outlined above that I will examine the Tijaniyya *tariqa* in Cape Town, where it is a very recent phenomenon that has not been studied before. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the *tariqa*’s impact in Cape Town, the research will be contextualized by a brief outline of the history of the Tijaniyya as well as an overview of the recent history of Islam in South Africa.

### 3. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

All academic research is necessarily circumscribed by certain theoretical principles and methodological practices and traditions. Because of this, my own research must, on one hand, adhere to certain norms and conditions. On the other hand, however, the door is always left open for new interpretations and ways of approach. While deliberately aiming to fulfill the conditions of dispassionate academic research, I would also like to problematize some of its theoretical and methodological tenets. What follows is a summary of the theoretical and methodological points of departure that guided my research and which can be distinguished throughout this particular study of the Tijaniyya *tariqa* and in the formulation of my conclusions.

Like all religious communities, Muslim communities are, using Benedict Anderson's term, 'imagined': "They are created—and knowable—through the vision, faith, and practices of their adherents. Faith is accepted and sustained through symbol and metaphor, the very stuff of imagination which not only enlarges adherents' perceptions but reorders them so that the validity and rationality of religious faith and practice seem only natural" (Eickelman and Piscatori 4). Yet at the same time, the sense of community that derives from faith and practice is necessarily interpreted and shaped in different ways according to time, place and society. Religious communities change over time; their boundaries are shifted by, and in turn shift, the political, economic and social contexts in which they find themselves.

An important question that arises when studying religious communities is the point of departure of the analysis. History and the social sciences have in the past placed 'Europe' and 'Western thought' in the center, just as 'the colonized' has been constructed

according to the terms of the colonizer's own self-image. Today, deconstructionism and postcolonial studies are attempting to problematize the 'sovereign self' of Europe, "showing the extent to which Europe's other has been a narcissistic self-image through which it has constituted itself while never allowing it to achieve a perfect fit" (Young 17). The equation of knowledge in general with Western thought involves the kinds of assumptions that are being interrogated; deconstruction involves the decentralization and decolonization of European thought "insofar as it is 'incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other', and to the extent that its philosophical tradition makes 'common cause with oppression and with totalitarianism of the same'" (Young 18). While what is being deconstructed is the concept, the authority and assumed primacy of the category of 'the West', deconstruction in itself does not bring another knowledge to bear: "it does not offer a *critique* by positioning itself outside 'the West', but rather uses its own alterity and duplicity in order to effect its deconstruction" (Young 19).

Similarly, postcolonial studies do not attempt to deny the 'European heritage' imbedded in the social sciences: "postcolonial scholarship is committed, almost by definition, to engaging the universals ... that were forged in eighteenth-century Europe and that underlie the human sciences" (Chakrabarty 5). Rather, the task of such studies involves what has been called 'provincializing Europe' by Dipesh Chakrabarty: "European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought—which is now everybody's heritage and which affect us all—may be renewed from and for the margins" (Chakrabarty 16). The challenge of postcolonial thought is to "think beyond

historicism”, in other words, “to do this is not to reject reason but to see it as one among many ways of being in the world” (Chakrabarty 249). In this way, the aim of my study is to explore the Tijaniyya *tariqa* within the framework of the social sciences, but at the same time, to think beyond established formal categories.

Methodologically, my field research is based on numerous visits to the Cape Town Tijani *zawiya* in Guguletu, encompassing a period of about six months, from November 2003 to May 2004, during which I observed and participated in the practices of the Tijanis in the *zawiya*. At the same time, I conducted a number of semi-formal interviews (about fifteen) with different members of the community, and had countless casual conversations with Tijanis while enjoying their company and activities. These ‘interviews’ and conversations were conducted mostly in English, a few in French, and one required the mediation of an interpreter. This could be termed the ‘ethnographic’ part of my research, and as such, was guided by the following theoretical principles and methodological practices and concerns.

Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives. First, there is the ‘participation-observation’ aspect of the research and then the production of written accounts of that process or experience (Emerson 1). On the one hand, the researcher is ‘immersed’ in the study group, and is thus in no way a neutral, detached observer, outside and independent of what is observed. Rather, the ethnographer engages with the lives and concerns of those studied and consequently the research produced will reflect that interaction. As a result, “the task of the ethnographer is not to determine “the truth” but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in other’s lives” (Emerson 3). Furthermore, the researcher’s presence in a setting

inevitably has implications and consequences for what is taking place, and thus must in itself be taken as a source of learning and observation. My own position as a researcher talking about my 'subjects' is a multi-layered one. On the one hand, I am speaking from the institutional platform of the university, using the tools of the social sciences to conduct my research; as such, I am located in a diametrically different discourse from that of my 'subjects'. On the other hand, I am also speaking as a Muslim and a member of a *tariqa*, and as such, I inhabit the same religious discourse, with local variations, as my Tijani 'subjects'. Therefore, the multiplicity of my positions poses both advantages and concerns: I can move between worlds, so to speak, but at the same time I am bound by certain rules and conventions. What is important here is to acknowledge these ambiguities, and to examine them when drawing conclusions.

Yet again, the process itself of writing descriptive accounts of experiences and observations is not merely a matter of accurately capturing an observed reality. In fact, there is no one 'natural' or 'correct' way to write about what one observes; rather "because descriptions involve issues of perception and interpretation, different descriptions of 'the same' situation and events are possible" (Emerson 5). A researcher taking fieldnotes is 'inscribing' social life and social discourse; in choosing what to write down, the ethnographer determines some things to be 'significant' while ignoring others. This choice is "both intuitive, reflecting the ethnographer's changing sense of what might possibly be made interesting or important to future readers, and empathetic, reflecting the ethnographer's sense of what is interesting or important to the people he is observing" (Emerson 11). At the same time, the actual act of writing also constructs meaning and knowledge: "'Reflexivity' involves the recognition that an account of reality does not

simply mirror reality but rather creates or constitutes as real in the first place whatever it describes” (Emerson 213). The reflexive lens, when applied to myself as a researcher, helps me see and appreciate how my own renderings of others’ worlds are not and can never be descriptions from outside those worlds. Rather, “they are informed by and constructed in and through relationships with those under study” (Emerson 216).

While what is observed and ultimately treated as ‘data’ or ‘findings’ is inseparable from the observational process, the researcher should aim at being “committed to uncovering and depicting indigenous meanings. The object of participation is ultimately to get close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities *mean to them*” (Emerson 12). Although there is no easy way for me to achieve this, and in a certain sense, it is not entirely possible to reproduce or even communicate other peoples concerns and meanings, these aims must nevertheless remain clear to me while conducting my research. Through the dual role of participant-researcher, my goal is that the “ethnography should provide a vehicle through which the voices of the field, can, in their own distinctive ways, speak; and at the same time, the ethnography should also speak the language of the readers, addressing their issues, theories, and concerns” (Emerson 212-13).

#### 4. OVERVIEW OF THE TIJANIYYA

The Tijaniyya *tariqa* appeared at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the *Maghreb*, as part of the “third expansion” of Islam in Africa (Triaud 9). This period of religious renewal and reform in the Islamic world is characterized by the emergence of figures and structures that had as a common basis a strong educational, missionary, militant and spiritual impetus as well as a special reverence for the Prophet of Islam. The Tijaniyya *tariqa* is a good example of this resurgence in the milieu of the brotherhoods, which despite certain appearances, showed more signs of continuity with earlier movements of Islamic resurgence than of complete rupture with the past (Levtzion and Voll 8-10).

The Tijaniyya was founded by Ahmad al-Tijani (1737-1815), who was born in ‘Ayn Madi in the Sahara in southern Algeria. He memorized the Qur’an by the age of seven and received a traditional education in the Islamic Sciences in Fez, where he also met different Sufi *Shuyūkh*. He was initiated into various Sufi orders, notably the Khalwatiyya during his stay in Egypt on his way to Mecca and Medina. In 1781 or 1782, while in a prolonged period of seclusion (*khalwa*) in the Sahara Desert, al-Tijani had a vision of the Prophet during a wakeful state, and was initiated into the ‘new way’ and taught the Tijani *wird* by the Prophet himself (Triaud 11). He was given the title of *Al Khatim al-Wilāyat*, or The Seal of Sainthood, and told to “Keep this *tariqah* without retiring from the world, nor ceasing to interact with people until you reach the spiritual station that is promised to you, maintaining your state without any undue mortification nor cultural efforts” (*Handbook* 11). From this mode of initiation developed the ‘exclusivism’ of the brotherhood, which considered itself the epitome of all Sufi orders, and demanded that its followers abandon all previous affiliations. Al-Tijani traveled

through the Sahara, the Sudan and Tunisia setting up new *zawaya* until his forced exile to Fez in 1799, due to the hostilities from the Ottoman authorities in his native Algeria. He spent his last years teaching until his death in 1815, when he was buried in Fez and his tomb became a reputed center of pilgrimage (Triaud 11).

The new *tariqa* was soon taken across the Sahara by Muhammad al-Hafiz, a learned man from the influential Mauritanian tribe of the Idaw 'Ali (*Handbook* 13). Al-Hafiz met Ahmad al-Tijani in 1789 while returning from pilgrimage and, before his death in 1830, brought his whole tribe into the *tariqa*. However, the most important propagator of the Tijaniyya south of the Sahara was al-Hajj 'Umar Tall, the great Fulani<sup>2</sup> *jihadist* of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Vikor 451). Known for his intelligence and learning, al-Hajj 'Umar went on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1826-30, where he became a disciple of Muhammad al-Ghali, a direct disciple of Ahmad al-Tijani, and was made *khalifa* (representative authority) of the order for West Africa (Abun-Nasr 108). After returning from pilgrimage, al-Hajj 'Umar spent eight years in the Islamic court of Sokoto, helping Muhammad Bello in his fight against his enemies and marrying his daughter. This stay was decisive in his later trajectory, when after returning to his homeland of Futa Toro and establishing a Tijani center of learning, al-Hajj 'Umar launched his *jihad* in 1852, which spread through present-day Guinea, Senegal and Mali (Robinson 2000: 140-43). He conquered what was then known by the French as the Western Sudan, ordering its 'pagan' inhabitants to convert to Islam, while at the same time spreading the Tijani Way amongst those who were already Muslim (Triaud 11). This brought him into conflict with other Muslim leaders who belonged to the Qadiriyya brotherhood, as well as with

the French colonial authorities. The French were concerned about al-Hajj ‘Umar’s message to the Muslims of Saint Louis commanding them to start a ‘holy war’ against the Christians as well as the impact his power could have on their trade interests along the Senegal River. Thus, it was a combination of forces, those of the French with the Muslim kings of Segou and Massina and ‘pagans’ of the area, that succeeded in defeating al-Hajj ‘Umar, forcing his mysterious death or disappearance near Degembere in 1864. The conflicting reports about his death and the fact that his body was never found led to the creation of a powerful legend surrounding this figure that outlived his time (Abun-Nasr 141). David Robinson (1985) sees the Umarian movement as standing “squarely between the time of creating and justifying *Dar al-Islam* in the savannah and the time of defending it against European invasion” (375). However, in addition to his *jihad*, al-Hajj ‘Umar was also a leading scholar and is considered the second most important Shaykh of the *tariqa* after its founder; in fact, “few if any Islamic thinkers of West Africa has had greater impact on the outside world” (Vikor 452) as al-Hajj ‘Umar.

In the twentieth century, the history of the Tijaniyya can be characterized by its division into several major branches. We shall concentrate on West Africa and Senegal in particular, where the confluence of *tariqa* matters with the political interests of the colonial regime become apparent. Al-Hajj Sayyidi Nuru Tall (1879-1980), a grandson of al-Hajj ‘Umar, was appointed *grand marabout* of the Western Sudan (AOF) by the French, with whom he maintained close ties (Vikor 453). He had numerous disciples and was very influential among the populations of the Senegal Valley and towns such as

---

<sup>2</sup> The Fulani, or Fulbe, are one of the many ethnic groups of West Africa. They were pastoralists and spoke Fulfulde (also known as Peul by the French), and shared a strong ethnic identity based on their long Islamic history of *jihad*.

Dakar and Saint Louis, and played a significant role in Senegalese political life from the colonial period until his death (Diouf 7).

Al-Hajj Malik Sy (1855-1922) was the Tokolor<sup>3</sup> founder of the principal branch of the *tariqa* in Senegal, which spread mainly among the Wolof<sup>4</sup> (Vikor 454). He was first a wandering *marabout*, but after his pilgrimage to Mecca, he settled in Saint Louis and then in Tivaouane where he established his *zawiya*. This town has become the religious center of this particular branch, characterized by a strong intellectual and didactic orientation. Al-Hajj Malik launched a vast program of proselytism and religious education, appointing *marabout* teachers at the commercial stops along the developing railway in the country and the city (Diouf 7). After his death, his son 'Abd al-Bakr (Abdabacar) Sy (1890-1957) succeeded him with the blessing of the French colonial administration, and took the title of *Khalifa* General of the order. He was opposed by his two younger brothers, and their opposition took a political turn at the end of World War II, when the *Khalifa* supported Léopold Sédar Senghor, while his brothers supported his rival, Lamine Guéye (Diouf 7). 'Abd al-'Aziz Sy (1905-1997) succeeded his brother in 1957 as *Khalifa* General, and was known for his great erudition and political compromise. He also had to confront the insurrection of his brother's children, one of whom, Shaykh Ahmed Tidiane Sy (1920- ), became one of the principal figures of politico-religious life in Senegal. He founded a movement of young Muslims, the *Moustarchidin wal Moustarchidati*, a radical Islamic organization that opposed the ruling party in the 1990s and was involved in social unrest in 1994. Thus, the Sy branch of the

---

<sup>3</sup> The Tokolor constitute another ethnic group in Senegambia originating around the regions of Futa Toro and Futa Jallon. Also Fulfulde speaking, they shared similar customs of the Fulbe, but were sedentary.

<sup>4</sup> The Wolof are yet another ethnic group in the region who trace their Islamic heritage back to the Almoravids but who nevertheless retained many other traditional practices.

Tijaniyya has been marked by internal crises provoked by struggles for power and antagonistic political positioning of the *marabouts* (Diouf 7); nevertheless, the branch and the family recognize each other as belonging to the same spiritual structure.

Another important and controversial figure was Ahmad Hamahu'llah (Shaykh Hamallah) (v. 1882-1943), of Nioro in northwestern Mali. He was initiated into the *tariqa* by a North African from the Tlemecen branch of the Maghribian Tijaniyya (Vikor 453). Shaykh Hamallah's reputation of saintliness spread rapidly and his branch gained many followers. He defied the authority of the 'Umarian family by his alternative initiation and by his particular reading of the ritual (the recitation of the prayer *jawharat al-kamâl* eleven times instead of twelve, giving the Hamallists the common name of 'eleven grains'), thus creating tension with representatives from other Tijani branches (Triaud 13). At the same time, Shaykh Hamallah came into conflict with the French because of his abstention from public political and official gatherings, and was thus exiled first to Mauritania, then to Côte d'Ivoire, and finally to France, where he died in 1943. Exile only served to strengthen his branch, which dominated the upper Niger and spread rapidly to Burkina and Central Africa (Vikor 454)<sup>5</sup>.

Another major branch of the Tijaniyya is the Niassene branch based in Kaolack. The founder of this branch was 'Abd Allah (Abdoulaye) Niassé (1845-1922), but the principal figure to mould its character was his son al-Hajj Ibrahim Niassé (1900-1975). An erudite and charismatic leader, al-Hajj Ibrahim succeeded in establishing his branch in Gambia and northern Nigeria, where it has become the dominant *tariqa* (Vikor 454).

---

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the spiritual aspect of this branch as well as the internal conflicts within the Tijaniyya, refer to the following book on one of Shaykh Hamallah's spiritual followers and a great Shaykh on his own right from the 'Umarian family: Amadou Hampaté Bâ. *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar, le sage de Bandiagara*. Collection Points Sagesse. Paris: Du Seuil, 1980.

He became known for his opposition to the ruling political party as well as for challenging some tenets of the Maliki<sup>6</sup> *madhhab*. The Niassene branch is also distinguished by its 'modernist' leanings towards the education of women and the founding of schools, and its desire for instruction, both initiatic and educational (Triaud 13). Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé claimed to be the 'possessor of the spiritual flood' (*sahib al-fayda*) predicted by Ahmad al-Tijani, under whose direction many people would join the Tijaniyya (Seesemann 404). Another peculiarity of his teachings was the emphasis on *tarbiya* (education). Under the close supervision of the Shaykh, the 'education' of the disciple was undertaken in stages, through the recital of numerous formulas, with the ultimate aim of *ma'rifa* (spiritual knowledge) and the purification of the soul. Although these practices were common in the Tijaniyya, Shaykh Ibrahim opened them for the common disciples who were now able to participate in the mystical experiences previously reserved for a select few (Seesemann 405-06). The great success of his branch can be seen in its expansion beyond Senegal, particularly in the United States and France, and more recently in many other countries (Diouf 8).

Thierno Amadou Seydou Ba founded Medina Gounass in 1935, thus establishing another branch of the Tijaniyya *tariqa*. Located in eastern Senegal, its inhabitants are mainly of Tokolor and Fulbe origin. Medina Gounass soon became a 'religious isolate', when contacts with the French colonial state and, after 1960, independent Senegal, were limited to the paying of taxes and the commercialization of cash crops. Thierno Amadou stressed the importance of *Shari'a*, the fight against *bid'a* (innovations), ascetism and isolation from outside forces. Nevertheless, after his death, succession battles split the

---

cohesion of the branch when a section of the community left Medina Gounass and the police intervened in their internal affairs (Van Hoven 25). These events changed the position of the community vis-à-vis the national state; today, state officials court Ahmed Tijan Ba, the son and successor of the founder, and visit Medina Gounass during its annual celebrations. However, the community is still strong with approximately 14,000 inhabitants. No official state structures have been established in the village, and Ahmed Tijan Ba still deals with all religious and secular matters. The village is still a major center of traditional learning, attracting students from neighboring communities and abroad. Furthermore, although agriculture forms the most important source of income for the community, commercial activities are expanding rapidly, especially abroad, thus securing a steady flow of income to the disciples and their leaders. Many followers have emigrated to America and Europe, and the trend continues, thus reinforcing the financial independence of Medina Gounass from the state (Van Hoven 25).

As is common to African *turuq*, the centrality of piety in the works of the Tijani Shuyukh, “shows the importance that the orders and their leaders placed on disseminating an ideal of behavior, rather than on engaging in competitive disputation with rival scholars” (Vikor 464). Most of the authors wrote in Arabic but many also wrote poetry in local languages, which widened the basis for their teachings. The most important works of the order are the *Jawahir al-Ma’ani* composed around 1798 by Harazim Barrada, one of the main disciples of Ahmad al-Tijani. It appeared as the authorized version of the teachings of the founder of the order; Ahmad al-Tijani claimed that the

---

<sup>6</sup> Malikism is one of the four *madhaib* or schools of Sunni Islam that is prevalent in the *Maghreb* and in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Prophet himself said to be the author of the book<sup>7</sup>. Al-Hajj ‘Umar’s major work on the order, the *Rimāh hizb al-Rahīm*, is generally printed together with the order’s ‘source book’; these two books contain short biographies of the founder and also explain in detail the teachings of the Tijaniyya as well as their practices.

Nevertheless, unlike other *turuq*, the Tijaniyya has been described as an ‘exceptional’ Way (Triaud 13). This stems from Ahmad al-Tijani’s claim to the title of *Qutub al-Aqtāb* (the Pole of Poles), the head of the spiritual hierarchy of Sufism, as well as the title of *Khatām al-Wilāya al-Muhammadiyah* (The Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood), given to him during a wakeful vision of the Prophet (Aboun-Nasr 28). Similarly, the proximity in the *silsila* between the Prophet and the founder of the Tijaniyya constitutes another ‘exceptional feature’ of the order. At the same time, the vision of the Prophet ‘during a wakeful state’, makes Ahmad al-Tijani the direct spokesperson of the Prophet, and the Tijaniyya *tariqa* a brotherhood ordered by the Prophet himself (Triaud 14-15). In the eyes of Tijani followers, the superiority of the founder of the Tijaniyya and of their Way is vindicated in the exclusive ascription of the title of “The Seal of Sainthood” to Ahmad al-Tijani. Moreover, the promises of salvation, of protection on the Day of Judgment, and of a ‘reserved place’ close to the Almighty offer absolute security to loyal practicing Tijanis (Triaud 15). The ‘exclusivity’ of the Tijaniyya can, however, be questioned, since these titles and prerogatives have been claimed before by other Sufis and *turuq*; nevertheless, the vehement adherence to these beliefs by Tijani Muslims has led to their acquiring a number of enemies and staunch attackers to this day.

---

<sup>7</sup> This is one of the many controversial claims surrounding the Tijaniyya, and the book itself also arose passionate debate in the Islamic community over its authenticity.

## 5. THE TIJANIYYA ABROAD

The history of the Tijaniyya *tariqa* outside of its 'natural' boundaries of North and West Africa, particularly in the 'West', is intimately intertwined with the history of African migration or immigration to Europe and beyond. Migrations are far from being a new phenomenon in Islamic countries south of the Sahara. In particular, long distance trade was a principal factor in the expansion of Islam in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. In addition, according to Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, travel for religious purposes, such as the pilgrimage or *hajj*, pious visits or *ziyara* to tombs of saints, traveling in quest of religious knowledge (*rihla*), and migration or *hijra*, following the example of the Prophet, have always been common in the Islamic world. However, after the drought and economic crisis of the 1970's and the structural adjustments of the 1980's, there was an increase in migration as well as a tendency for migrants to settle in their host countries. The United States and Europe are favorite destinations for this migration, and thousands of West Africans manage to enter these regions on a regular basis (Kane 14). In many cases, migrants survive thanks to solidarity networks that assist the newly arrived in finding work and getting socially oriented. For West African migrants, Sufi brotherhoods such as the Tijaniyya have many such networks.

The anthropology of migration has acquired a central role in contemporary ethnographies as well as in theoretical debates (Riccio 583). Migrants now tend to live their lives simultaneously in different nation-states, being both 'here' and 'there', crossing both geographic and political boundaries. 'Transnationalism' is the term commonly used to contextualize such migrants' cultural, economic, political and social experience. For many West Africans, transnational migration means engaging in

economic transactions (including trade) across international boundaries, and over considerable distance, spending much of their time away from their place of origin, but returning there at fairly frequent intervals with the overall goal of creating an economic, social and spiritual life for themselves and their families in their home country (Riccio 584). Religious organization is very important in maintaining transnational identity, in providing transmigrants with ideological and spiritual points of reference, and in aiding the development of networks: “people move within a complex web of symbolic meanings and personal connections and try to make a life from it” (Riccio 595).

The modern history of black African immigration to France began after World War I, when former African soldiers were allowed to work on merchant ships; during World War II nearly 10% of French troops were Africans (Manning 135). From 1960, African immigration to France increased with colonial independence, thanks to a multilateral agreement between France and the African states, which allowed members of the Franco-African Commonwealth (including Mali, Mauritania and Senegal) to move without restriction to France. During this period African migration was usually temporary, but after 1974 when immigration to France was suspended, black Africans began to settle there for good (Diop 1996: 76-78). West Africans in France became an important part of the menial work force, and gradually moved into industrial production (Manning 157).

*Foyers*, or “dormitory-like homes” provided sleeping accommodation and common facilities for non-French males, usually low or unskilled, away from their homelands and isolated from their families (Diop 1996: 75). Usually big apartment buildings with a common room, these *foyers* house many of the African Muslims in

France. Within these 'islands of workers', replicas of village life in West Africa emerge. *Foyers* are usually divided along ethnic lines, which replicate the social and religious life of their occupants' homelands. For example, Tukolor followers of the Tijaniyya *tariqa* gather in their special prayer room to perform their *wird* and continue to follow all the same rituals and practices as if they were still in Senegal (Diop 1996: 89).

The Tijanis in France began to organize themselves during the 1980's. There was a tendency for members to group themselves according to ethnic lines, as well as according to the branch of the *tariqa* they belonged to (Diop 1994: 13). For example, the Fulani or Peuls from Senegal, Mauritania and Mali formed a structure called Lawool Tijaniyya, directed by a *muqaddam* (representative, pl. *muqaddamin*) from the *silsila* of Thierno Mohammed Sayid. It is both a religious and ethnic group, whose members meet every Friday and on weekends for prayers and to discuss matters, from family problems, to the education of children. The Soninke from the Niger Valley belong either to the organization of Shaykh Hamallah or to a group called *Da'watul Islam* (Diop 1994: 13).

Massive African immigration to the United States, on the other hand, is a more recent phenomenon due to the longer distance between the continents. Nevertheless, in the last decades, thousands of West Africans have entered the country. Sufi brotherhoods play a major role, with networks that help with the immigration and integration of Senegalese migrants in the United States (Kane 14). The African American Islamic Institute is a Tijani network of the Niassene branch based in New York. It was founded by Shaykh Hassan Cissé, who has been preaching to African Americans for more than twenty-five years. African Americans who convert to Islam and enter the Tijaniyya can go to Senegal to pursue Qur'anic studies in his schools, and African- American children

with discipline problems are sent to Senegal to study and absorb Islamic social values. Shaykh Hassan gets visitor or immigration visas as well as scholarship funding for his followers from the American authorities and private organizations that recognize the value of his work (Kane 14). At the same time, Senegalese Tijanis who migrate to the United States through the order's networks are taken care of by the *zawiya* in the city where they settle. In New York, the Niassene *zawiya* in the Bronx is located in a three-story building. The basement is a large room used for the observance of the five daily prayers and the collective recitation of Tijani litanies. It is also used for the teaching of Arabic and other religious subjects, usually to the children of the West African and African American members of the Tijaniyya. The first and second floors are reserved for those who visit the *zawiya*, with lounges, rooms, kitchens and lavatories. Any member of the Tijaniyya can benefit from the *zawiya*'s hospitality, and its maintenance is assured through contributions in accordance with a member's income (Kane 15).

## 6. OVERVIEW OF ISLAM IN SOUTH AFRICA

The history of Islam in South Africa is as long as that of Christianity, European settlement and colonialism in the region. Groups of Muslims from different regions arrived during different periods in the history of the country, but “Islamic practices, institutions, aspirations, and values were not simply a loosely held collage of African, Indian, and Southeast Asian influences. The latter are no doubt present, but they have become as South African as the soccer or rugby played in all parts of the country. Muslims established religious communities in the varying circumstances of South African history” (Tayob 4).

Muslims are a small minority in South Africa, numbering 654,064, which comprised just 1.46 percent of South Africa’s population in 2001. Nevertheless, these figures do not reflect “the qualitative experience of being Muslim in South Africa. Residential concentration of Indian and colored Muslims in racially segregated urban areas has meant that many of them live in proximity to mosques and madrasahs, and have a strong sense of being Muslim” (Vahed and Jeppie 252-53). Furthermore, the strong presence of Muslims in public institutions since 1994, far out of proportion to their numbers, makes the Muslim presence in South Africa keenly felt. For example, these include past and present Members of Parliament (MPs) like Kader Asmal, Valli Moosa, Dullah Omar, and Naledi Pandor as well as current Western Cape Premier, Ebrahim Rassool (Vahed and Jeppie 277).

Malays and Indians<sup>8</sup> make up the bulk of South Africa’s Muslim population, although these groups are by no means homogeneous. Besides ethnicity and race, there

---

<sup>8</sup> The terms used in this paper are problematic and contested. Nevertheless, following Vahed and Jeppie (2005), I adhere to the terms used in the 2001 Census: “The categorization of South Africans according to

are many other differences among Muslims in the country, including class, education and language. History is another differentiator among Muslims in South Africa. 'Malay' refers to the colored Muslims who trace their ancestors to slaves and political prisoners from South and Southeast Asia, but that also mixed with others such as Mozambicans, Arabs, and Khoisan: "Adhikari (1989) has shown that 'Malay' identity was open and embraced individuals from diverse cultural and racial categories" (Vahed and Jeppie 255). On the other hand, the majority of 'Indians' arrived in South Africa between 1860 and 1911, either as indentured workers or traders: "aside from the obvious differences of class, traders and indentured migrants were divided by religious tradition, caste, language, ethnicity and culture" (Vahed Jeppie 260).

However black Africans constitute the fastest growing Muslim population in the country, increasing from 3.5 to 11.42 percent in 10 years; they numbered 74,048 in the 2001 Census. However, their institutions are not easily visible being fewer in number and less economically successful than those of the Malay and Indian Muslims; they are also still marginalized from Muslim community life (Sitoto 2002: 44). The arrival of freed slaves from Zanzibar in 1873 laid the foundation of black African Islam in Natal. Over the years, economic migrants and refugees from other African countries with a Muslim population also arrived in South Africa: Malawians, Mozambicans and political exiles from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi and Rwanda have all augmented the black African Muslim population of the country (Vahed and Jeppie 263).

---

race is a legal and social fact, even in post-apartheid South Africa ... these categories are in continuous use in everyday life, whether one is applying for a job, an identity document ... for this reason, the authors have, in most cases, not placed the terms in inverted comas" (Note 1, 281). Thus, 'Malay', a strongly contested term, refers to 'coloured' Muslims; 'Indian' to Muslims whose ancestors arrived from South Asia over a century ago; and 'black African' is used to describe those whose mother tongue is a language indigenous to Africa. In the end, I regard all categories as South African.

The 1970's and 80's saw an unprecedented number of black South Africans entering Islam through 'conversion', specifically "African youth who undertook a conscious journey into Islam" (Sitoto 2002: 44). Mosques in most townships became centers of anti-apartheid political activity and safe-havens for those evading security forces (Fakude 48). Students went into exile in Malawi and Mozambique, where they came into contact with Islam. Organizations like the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) became active in the townships and translated the Qur'an into local languages (Vahed and Jeppie 263). Today, one can find mosques in many African townships, from Soweto to Langa, and all major language groups in South Africa have representation in this 'emerging' Muslim sector. The tensions between the 'established' and 'emerging' Muslim communities are numerous. For example, 'emerging' Muslims complain of "racism, exploitation ... [and] the unfair distribution of Zakaat"<sup>9</sup> (Fakude 48), while Islam is often seen as an Indian, exploitative, religion because of its close association with wealthy traders. On the other hand, research of these 'emerging' communities is insufficient. Nevertheless, a few studies are available, and are described below in order to give some understanding of indigenous black Muslims in South Africa.

From the 1950's, due to the influx of indigenous black South Africans from the Eastern into the Western Cape, *da'wa* (proselytizing) activities among the Muslims of the Cape increased. Muhammad Haron studied the development from 1952 to 1984 of *da'wa* groups and organizations in the townships of Langa, Guguletu and Nyanga ("Langunya" area) in the greater Cape Town area. By 1980, there were an estimated 1000 African Muslims in the Western Cape which formed one-eighth of the total African Muslim

---

<sup>9</sup> *Zakaat* is one of the five pillars of Islam defined as the obligatory annual tax to be distributed among the poor.

population in South Africa (Haron 4). This number could be attributed to the activities of several *da'wa* groups in the region as well as the work of some prominent individuals. The Islamic Publication Bureau published Islamic literature in English as well as Xhosa, and Imam Abdullah Haron, one of its main protagonists, was well known for his activities and 'conversions' amongst blacks in the townships in the early 1960's. Al-Jihād and Al-Jami'a mosque were two organizations known for their *da'wa* activities in the 1970's, but they suffered from credibility issues and organizational differences (Haron 5-6). Al-Jihad established a paramilitary sub-group, "The Young Elephants of Islam", which was popular among the youth but received much criticism from the broader community (Abrahams 36).

The 1980's witnessed a blossoming period and many active *da'wa* organizations were born, including Al-Hidaya Da'wah Movement, the South African National Zakah Fund, the Qibla Mass Movement and the Mustad'afin Foundation. These organizations established some mosques and *madaris* in the townships, provided financial assistance to black Muslims and gave Dawood Lobi, a black Muslim, a full time position as an Imam, a position he also used to spread Islam in the townships (Haron 7-9). The main problems facing the *da'wa* movements were mostly internal—lack of unity, inability to speak Xhosa and ignorance of African cultures—but also included, crucially, the political situation of the time, namely apartheid, which prevented them from legally entering the townships and promoting Islam. Nevertheless, these movements planted the seeds for the growth and spread of Islam amongst black South Africans in the townships of the Cape.

The late 1980's also became a period of consolidation and construction of 'independent' black Muslim communities in the Cape, with the setting up of structures in

the townships such as the Jihad Centre in Guguletu and the formation of organizations such as the Langa Muslim Movement. This impetus continued with the formation of a local umbrella body by the youth of the townships in 1993, the *Ikhwanul-Muslimeen*, which included representatives from all township areas (Masakhane 50). At the same time, two black South African Muslims were accepted into Medina University, thus raising the quality of teaching and the strength of the leadership in the townships. Finally, in 1997, the *Ikhwanul-Muslimeen* changed its name to Masakhane Muslim Community (M.M.C.). Masakhane means 'building one another' in Xhosa, and its goals are to "unite Muslim individuals and communities in the Townships, provide coherent leadership, mature arbitration and qualified education to African Muslims" (Masakhane 51). In a general meeting of black Muslim leadership in Guguletu in 1999, the M.M.C. was confirmed as the sole representative and umbrella organization for Muslims in the townships. Since that time, the M.M.C. has reached "major milestones" in the townships, such as the organization by black Muslims of the first major Islamic function in a township, the foundation of a successful women's collective combining Islamic studies with life skills and empowerment training, and the launch of a teachers' training course to provide *madrassa* teachers for the township communities (Masakhane 51).

At the same time, the lead in recent black 'conversion' to Islam, in Cape Town at least, has been overwhelmingly taken by women. In her article, Rebekah Lee suggests that for black South African women the initial desire to explore Islam came from "the profound sense of disillusionment with the Christian church" (Lee 53), particularly from a material point of view. Islam makes no financial demands; it gives rather than takes. There is, however, a shadow side to this, in that the usual distribution of food alongside

Islamic teachings can lead to financial dependency on the part of some ‘converts’, who ‘enter’ into Islam solely for financial reasons, and thus jeopardize their spiritual independence: “Thus it appears that the generosity of Muslim propagators are both an asset and a detriment to increasing the number of African Muslims—it is often the means by which Africans first choose to expose themselves to any Muslim teachings and then move on to a deeper understanding, while for some it is the only reason to follow the faith” (Lee 54). Another incentive for black women to explore Islam is the familiarity of the religion; “shifting to Islam represents a return to already rehearsed rituals and ideologies existing in Xhosa tradition” (Lee 54). Islamic practices such as burial rituals, circumcision and animal slaughtering resonate strongly with their ancestral tradition as even more so do those governing gender relations; the *hijab* (headscarf) and the separation of the sexes are very similar to Xhosa practice. In addition, black South African Muslim women stated that the respect accorded to women in Islam was one of its main attractions, as was the sense of safety they felt. Thus, “there is a sense that converts actually returned to something they have always known, suggesting that Islam became the embodiment of a nostalgic Xhosa past that is no longer viable in a chaotic modern world” (Lee 55). Lee concludes that black women’s understanding of their own conversions and lives in Islam reflects a ‘translation’ of Islam into existing cultural beliefs and practices, rather than a fundamental adoption of new spiritual and social symbols.

Township Islam in the Transvaal during the 1980’s was studied by Abdulkader Tayob through the experience of the Mabuluka Township outside Brits. It was characterized by the economic dependence of the township *madrasa* and mosque on the

Indian community who was responsible for their foundation. At the same time, black South African Muslims were reluctant to identify themselves with an 'Indian' religion, by adopting an 'Islamic' or 'Indian' mode of dress for example, for fear of marginalization from their own black African community. Depending on the situation in which the black Muslims found themselves, this dynamic created tension between the adoption and rejection of Indian cultural practices (Tayob 97). In this context, a group like the Murabitun<sup>10</sup>, that rejects 'Indian' and 'Malay' identities in favor of an African Muslim identity represented by Malikism, was able to thrive in the township for a period. The Murabitun attracted a wider interest in the township as they engaged in active proselytism. However, the Murabitun were eventually expelled from the mosque due to complaints from some Mabuluka residents who did not agree with some of their controversial goals and who saw that the material aid from the Indian community had dwindled since their arrival on the scene. However, the Indian-African dynamics were not the only problem facing the new community of Muslims in Mabuluka. Since most of the Muslims of the township were not part of the Tswana "tribal" network of Brits, they were also marginalized by the tribal management structures of apartheid. Thus, Islam became a symbol of a new identity and sense of belonging for the Muslims of the township, while "the ambiguity and contradiction of Islam in the political landscape of South Africa penetrated Muslim institutions deeply" (Tayob 98).

Shahid Vawda studied Muslims in the townships of Kwamashu-Ntuzuma-Inanda around Durban in 1992. He established that there were between 1000 and 2500 black

---

<sup>10</sup> The Murabitun movement is a world-wide Islamic renewal movement led by Scottish-born Shaykh Abdul Qadr As-Sufi and now based in South Africa. Their controversial aims of the re-establishment of the Caliphate and of the adoption of a *dirham* based economy has raised much controversy and criticism from the wider Muslim community.

Muslims in these townships during the period of his research (Vawda 48). A pivotal figure in the emergence of sustained proselytizing and the spreading of Islam in the townships was Shaykh Abbas Phiri; a Malawian who had come to South Africa in the 1940's to work on the coalmines. He retired in the early 1970's, taking up *da'wa* work fulltime. Several factors made Shaykh Abbas the first successful agent of the initial conversion process to Islam: he had no western formal education, only *madrassa* education from Malawi; he married a local South African and settled in the township of Inanda; and he was able to gain the support of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), whose financial support allowed him to devote himself fully to proselytizing (Vawda 50). Shaykh Abbas' approach to *da'wa* was to first inform the local chiefs and councilors of his intention and to obtain their permission for his work; he then engaged in charity/welfare work distributing food and clothing with the help of the MYM, while getting to know people and talking about Islam; finally, he taught and trained at his *madrassa* those he had converted. In this way, he "laid the basis for converting people to Islam as a systematic practical way of life, and not just as nominal followers of a religion" (Vawda 51). Although other organizations were actively involved in proselytizing, they did not enjoy Shaykh Abbas' success, since they did not follow up with a Muslim education and were seen as outsiders imposing an 'Indian' Islam. This last point was crucial to many who converted to Islam, since their reasons for embracing Islam often included the non-racial, non-nationalistic basis of Islam. Vawda characterized other reasons for conversion as personal, theological, disillusionment with Christianity, political and the pan-Africanist element of Islam (57). Islam was experienced as a practical way of life, as a confrontation with and resistance to the

Calvinist Christianity of apartheid and as a uniting force with the rest of Africa.

Nevertheless, many Muslim organizations in the township were financially dependent on the well-established Indian Muslim organizations, and the black Muslims complained of racism and inconstancy in their financial help on the part of Indian Muslims (Vawda 60-61). Vawda emphatically states that it seems that black South Africans prefer to 'convert' themselves, and that how one is engaged in inviting people to join Islam and the relationship between Indian and African Muslims is crucial to the success of the 'conversion'.

Imam Essa Al-Seppe (d. 2002) was an important figure in contemporary South African Islam in KwaZulu Natal, "a sophisticated *imam* and an "emerging" scholar" (Sitoto 2002: 43). Still young at the time of his death, he served numerous Muslim organizations and other NGO's and was the coordinator of *da'wa* activities for the Durban based regional offices of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. Tahir Fuzile Sitoto (2002) summarizes the contributions of the late Imam Essa to South African Islam: First, his accentuation of the plight of Muslims in the townships; then, his trying to "see the collapse of the fragmentation of Muslim identity between the binaries of the 'emerging' (or township) and 'established' Muslim communities" (46); and finally, his project for putting Islam 'in-sync' with the socio-cultural experience of black South African Muslims, through building alternative leadership structures and organizations in black Muslim communities for their own self-empowerment.

At the same time, in post-apartheid South Africa, the influx of immigrants from Africa has been unprecedented. It is difficult to give precise figures, but it was estimated that the number of African immigrants in the country increased from 1.5 million in 1989

to anywhere between 5 and 9.5 million in 1996 (Morris and Bouillon 23). A good number of these have come from African Muslim countries like Senegal and Mali or from countries with significant Muslim populations such as Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, and Ivory Coast. In 1998, the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) conducted a survey of 501 migrants from other African countries (countries other than those bordering South Africa) in three provinces—Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. In general, the study found that the majority of migrants of African origin are in South Africa legally, are in the country temporarily to work, visit friends/family or to buy and sell goods, and are relatively well-educated, enterprising people (SAMP 1-6). Most of the Muslim migrants come from West Africa, and the survey found that mostly men come from that region, as they are more mobile than women, but as migration routes become more established, women are expected to come in greater numbers (SAMP 9). The report also found that most of the migrants had at least secondary education (72%) while 22% had tertiary education. In addition, 78% of the sample were employed, two-thirds in the formal sector. Most migrants from West Africa, who started coming to the country in 1995, are visiting South Africa for the first time (SAMP 13-14). Some 90% of those interviewed own a home in their home country and 49% are married to a national from home. The research also found that one in five respondents said they are treated ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’ by South Africans, especially by black South Africans, while almost a quarter of the sample have been ‘assaulted’ and almost half have been robbed, in particular West Africans (SAMP 18-19). The report concluded that immigration is a process of give and take and that South Africa must see itself as part of a larger pan-African group of nations, for, “there are broader social,

economic and cultural linkages that emerge as a result of cross-border movement and South Africa needs to prepare itself for these changes” (SAMP 32).

Of these migrants, the percentage that comes from Francophone Muslim Africa is relatively small, but sociologically significant; their commercial and entrepreneurial activities have given them an importance disproportionate to their numbers. On the whole, Francophone Muslim Africans in South Africa are “representative of a type of immigration which is essentially urban, economically enterprising, relatively qualified and culturally distinguishable” (Morris and Bouillon 33). Most of the Francophone migrants prefer inner-city neighborhoods, which are areas of activity and exchange rather than historically black townships (Morris and Bouillon 34). There is a variety of reasons why these migrants left their home country and consequently diversity in legal status enjoyed by them in South Africa. Most left to pursue their studies or to seek better employment opportunities; South Africa is seen as the ‘land of opportunity’ or as a springboard to Europe or the United States. At the same time, the majority of immigrants try to get a work or study permit (Morris and Bouillon 44-47).

West African Muslim migration started after 1994, and many of these immigrants are informal traders and come from modest households. Some come from rural areas of the Sahel in Senegal or Mali, but are part of well-organized networks of groups like the Mourides<sup>11</sup> or the Tijanis, which allows them to quickly find their feet in South Africa (Morris and Bouillon 51). The Senegalese and Malian Muslim migrants meet regularly and usually set up a center for prayer, meeting and welcoming others. These migrants are

---

<sup>11</sup> The Muridiyya is another West African *tariqa* founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Senegal by Ahmadu Bamba, and which spread mainly among the Wolof. The Mourides have been the focus of much academic research due to their impressive economic strength in Senegal, and more recently, because of their well-

able to gather funds in no time, if required, to organize hospitalization or repatriation of one of their compatriots. They usually live in the city center and share apartments. Many have left their families behind and, through their religious network, obtain their goods to sell from their home country (Morris 52-54). These informal traders are also,

joined by countrymen who have a high level of formal qualifications (some have Honors or Masters degrees) but who, because of the continuing economic crisis, are not able to find jobs ...they come to South Africa believing that they will find a job in the formal sector. Soon there is a realization that this will not happen and in order to survive they become involved in informal trading (Morris 54).

As is apparent from the complex history of Islam in South Africa outlined above and the questions faced by South African Muslims, the issue of 'identity' emerges as one of central importance in South Africa today, and more often than not, it is linked to the question of race. Much debated, it takes different forms in different circles but always comes back to the idea of 'building a nation'. In the context of Islam, "there is a search for a pervasive and all-inclusive Muslim identity in South Africa" (Mathee 53). For example, Auwais Rafeudeen calls for the "forging of an "African" Muslim identity" (57), for an 'Africanisation' of the identity of 'established' South African Muslims, specifically the Malays and Indians. Given the new South African context of democratization, these two groups should "carve out their cultural niche in the country" (58) by being made aware of African history and traditional African culture and embracing such traditional African attitudes and behavior that do not contradict Islamic principles. Just as West and East Africa have a particular 'African Islam', so should South Africans. Although Rafeudeen acknowledges the flaws of taking a simplistic or 'essentialist' view of African identity and the negative impact of trying to impose culture,

---

organized international networks of trade. There are also Mourides in South Africa and Cape Town, but that is a whole new research topic on its own.

he argues that “post-apartheid South Africa has offered us a historical opportunity to root our Muslim identity in African culture ... our focus is on those who find themselves “in limbo” – between the cultures of their parents and grandparents and the new opportunities of identity that have opened in South Africa” (59). According to Rafeaudeen, the major obstacle to such ‘Africanisation’ is racism, and every effort must be made by religious leaders to impress upon the Muslim community the anti-Islamic nature of such prejudice. Furthermore, he offers practical steps to foster the ‘Africanisation’ of Muslim identity, such as the mandatory inclusion of indigenous South African culture and the history of Islam in Africa in Islamic schools and tertiary institutions in the country; the compulsory learning of an indigenous language like Xhosa or Zulu in such institutions, instead of Urdu; and the encouragement of intermarriage between ‘established’ and ‘emerging’ South African Muslims (59).

On the other hand, Tahir Fuzile Sitoto (2003) criticizes the need to ‘forge’ an ‘African Muslim’ identity as a political fad: “the imperative to look for a tag called Muslim or African Muslim is in itself a performance based on the exigencies of the moment” (49). At the same time, he highlights the problems with the ‘invisibility’ of the indigenous black South African Muslim presence in South African Islam and scholarship and the perception of blacks as latecomers into the fold of Islam. In contrast, he seeks “to center the African Muslim more as a voice and presence in South African Islam rather than a passive category fit only to be analyzed and discussed under the theme of conversion” (48). Furthermore, Sitoto states that since the very concept of identity is fluid, there are no neat answers to the question of an ‘African Muslim’ identity, but rather, that this identity entails a complex process of ‘multiple identifications’ (49).

## 7. THE TIJANIYYA IN CAPE TOWN

It was Shaykh Hassan Cissé who formally established the Tijaniyya *tariqa* in Cape Town in the year 2002. Born in Kaolack, Senegal, in 1945, he is the first grandson of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse and the son of Sayyidi Ali Cissé, previous Chief Imam of the Grand Mosque of Medina Kaolack, and of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse's daughter, Sayyidah Fatimatou Zahra Niasse. He received both a traditional Islamic religious education in Senegal and Mauritania and an academic education in Egypt, London and the United States. While he was completing a PhD in Islamic Studies at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, his father died and he returned to Senegal to assume his position as Chief Imam of the Grand Mosque in Medina Kaolack as well as the spiritual responsibilities of one of the main leaders of the Niassene Tijaniyya (Fakie 1). Shaykh Hassan founded The African American Islamic Institute, Inc., an NGO dedicated to humanitarian activities in keeping with the teachings of Islam. The Institute's objectives are to develop capabilities for sustained self-help in the areas of education, agriculture, health care, economic development and cultural exchange through activities that "feed the hungry, care for the sick, teach the illiterate, protect the interests of women and children, pursue knowledge, and foster peace and understanding among mankind" (Fakie 1). Shaykh Hassan has been widely recognized for his active involvement in human rights issues, and is a frequent guest at United Nations Conferences and events. He has also traveled extensively throughout the world, bringing Islam to many individuals, as well as being the spiritual guide of many others, in particular in the United States, where he was formally responsible for introducing the Tijaniyya *tariqa* (Fakie 1). In 2002, Shaykh Hassan attended The World Summit on Sustainable Development held in

Durban, and then came to Cape Town for an official visit and to formally establish the first Tijani *zawiya* in Guguletu. During his visit, hundreds of people, mainly black South Africans from the townships, ‘entered’ Islam, while the Tijanis in Cape Town were brought closer together and spiritually uplifted (Interview 1).

Nevertheless, the first Tijanis arrived in Cape Town some eight years before this, in about 1994, when many Senegalese started migrating to South Africa. They concentrated mainly in downtown Cape Town, where they engaged in informal trading. For example, Abdou, a young Senegalese of about thirty, came to Cape Town in 1998, looking for better work opportunities. His family “has always been Tijani” (Interview 3) and he had taken *bay’a* (initiation) in his early twenties. He explained that, once in Cape Town, belonging to the Tijaniyya became even more important to him, as it gave him a “sense of belonging” and a “family away from family” (Interview 3). He came to Cape Town thanks to some contacts his cousin had there, and found other Senegalese, both Tijanis and non-Tijanis, with whom he shares a flat. He trades in imported goods from Senegal, “anything I can get my hands on” (Interview 3), has a work permit and enjoys South Africa. During one of his early trips back to Senegal, Abdou implored Shaykh Hassan Cissé to visit South Africa and set up a formal *zawiya* in Cape Town, because “we needed the spiritual support, we wouldn’t make it on our own” (Interview 3). He says that for him, the *zawiya* in Guguletu serves as a reminder of the type of life he should be leading, and provides the spiritual and human support he needs to thrive in a foreign country. Although he lives far from Guguletu, he makes an effort to go to the *zawiya* everyday for at least a *salah*, or if possible for the *wazifa* in the evening, and, of course, every Friday and on special occasions. Abdou contributes what he can to the

*zawiya*, for example, driving Shaykh Abubakr and Shaykh Ibrahim around, or bringing food for the meals.

Mousa is another Senegalese Tijani I met, who sells African crafts at Green Market Square. He is in his mid twenties and came to Cape Town in 2000. While he is not as involved in the activities of the *zawiya* as Abdou, he nevertheless considers his Tijani affiliation to be decisive in his life: “it teaches me how to live” (Interview 6). He goes to the *zawiya* on all special occasions such as ‘Eid and during Ramadan, and tries to go on Fridays for *juma ’a*. Since he lives in town, sharing a flat with other Senegalese migrants, he occasionally goes to the *Zawiyatun Nur* in Woodstock, where he mingles with non-Senegalese Tijanis. Mousa says he enjoys this contact, “it is nice to meet different people, different from me I mean, who still share the same spiritual outlook” (Interview 6). Mousa is unmarried, but his goal is to save enough money to return to Senegal, marry there and then maybe return to South Africa or go to Europe for a while.

The Shaykh Hassan Cissé *zawiya* is housed in a simple, yet beautiful, white brick house located in a central part of Guguletu. While all the houses in the area on its side of the road are of brick, on the other side of the road shacks begin to appear. The first noticeable characteristic of the building is the number of shoes stacked in the entrance. During the period that I visited the *zawiya*, several structural changes took place. The main room was enlarged to make a bigger space for the gatherings. This room, which is decorated very simply with some calligraphy, has a built-in *mihrab* (niche) indicating the *qibla*, or direction in which one must face when praying, i.e. towards Mecca. For the purposes of all ritual activities, the women, rather than occupying a separate room, just keep apart from the men by praying and sitting towards the back of the large room, which

allows them a perfect view of all proceedings and easy hearing of all litanies and talks. For the rest, women and men mingle freely but always with appropriate Islamic decorum. From the main room a passage leads to a small room, on one side, which was modified to accommodate Shaykh Abubakr and his family, and further back, another room with a bathroom, which is used to accommodate guests such as Shaykh Ibrahim. On the other side of the passage is another small room that serves as sleeping quarters for whoever needs it. In the front, next to the entrance, is a small kitchen used to prepare and heat food for all the disciples that stay for supper, especially during Ramadan. Behind the house are taps and a bathroom used as *wudu* (purification ritual) facilities for all disciples.

Shaykh Hassan Cissé's *muqaddam* in South Africa is Shaykh Abubakr Mwumvaneza from Rwanda, who leads the *zawiya* in Guguletu. Now in his fifties, he left his home country as a young man, fleeing political instability. He went to Senegal as a refugee, and it was there that he 'entered' Islam. While studying medicine at university, he sought spiritual guidance and so came to join the Tijaniyya *tariqa*. He was looking for people who "were serious about prayer and a group that does not allow anything to go" (Interview 1). He was taken to Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Sy, from whom he took initiation in 1981. But in spite of learning Arabic and the Tijani Way, he did not find the spiritual teachings and advancement he sought. It was through some Mauritanian disciples that he finally encountered the teachings of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse. In his own words, "I wanted to be taken to the best Tijani, where there is no difference between his teachings and his life" (Interview 1). He found in Shaykh Ibrahim an embodiment of this ideal and so became a devoted disciple of his successor, Shaykh Hassan Cissé, under

whose instruction he remained in Senegal. During that period he also became an ophthalmologist, Head of the Department of Medicine and Vice-Dean of the University in Dakar. In 2001, Shaykh Abubakr, at the behest of Shaykh Hassan, came to South Africa to visit the Tijanis in the country, after which he stayed on to organize Shaykh Hassan's visit in 2002, and so prepared the ground for the *zawiya* in Guguletu. During his visit, Shaykh Hassan realized that the Tijanis living in South Africa needed a permanent guide and 'suggested' that Shaykh Abubakr stay. He did, and renouncing his prestigious job at the University, now lives from the charity of Tijani disciples in a small room adjacent to the *zawiya*. Shaykh Abubakr said that he understood by Shaykh Hassan's suggestion, that 'it would be best for me spiritually to stay in South Africa' (Interview 1) and that he was happy with his decision. He stressed that he was in no way forced to stay, but that "this is how a master-disciple relationship works, without many words, it is understood" (Interview 1). His wife, a fellow Rwandan whom he married because "it is easier if you share the same culture" (Interview 1) also joined the Tijaniyya and they now live together in the *zawiya* with their baby daughter. Although her English is poor, she made it clear that she was also happy to be in South Africa serving the Tijaniyya. Shaykh Abubakr is thus now solely devoted to leading Tijani disciples in South Africa, as well as organizing and coordinating activities of Shaykh Hassan's African American Islamic Institute.

Shaykh Abubakr considers *wilaya* the most important teaching of the Tijaniyya. He defines *wilaya* as the "secret between Allah and you, to properly worship Allah closer to the teachings of the Prophet's Sunna and the Qur'an" (Interview 1). The purpose of *wilaya* is to educate the heart, to make it ready to host Allah. The disciple must reach a

state where he knows his own heart, when “he is certain that Allah is in his heart until Allah commands all his being” (Interview 1). If a disciple achieves this while alive then he has achieved *wilaya*; however, while following the spiritual path, “one must still be a good Muslim on the Shari’a side” (Interview 1). One will come to respect the Shari’a even more “since all are gifts from Allah” (Interview 1). Shaykh Abubakr also emphasized that it is not their role to engage in proselytism for the Tijaniyya: “Shaykh Hassan is Shaykh of Islam, he propagates Islam. During his visit many people became Muslim, but only some Tijanis” (Interview 1). They only talk about the *tariqa* if people ask or come seeking spiritual guidance.

Another guide in the Guguletu *zawiya* was Shaykh Ibrahim, a thirty-year-old Senegalese Shaykh from the Niasse and Cissé families, who spent the month of Ramadan, 2003 in the Tijani *zawiya* in Cape Town. He was sent to recite the entire Qur’an during the *tarawih salah* and to provide spiritual guidance during the Holy Month. Shaykh Ibrahim’s mother is Shaykh Hassan Cissé’s sister and his grandmother, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse’s daughter, while his father comes from Mauritania from a long Tijani lineage. He was born and grew up in Kaolack, where he received a traditional Islamic education. He speaks Wolof and Arabic, but no French, since he never attended secular schools. Shaykh Ibrahim became *hafiz* (memorized the entire Qur’an) at a young age, and was trained in the Islamic Sciences, after which, in his early twenties, he officially joined the Tijaniyya *tariqa* to continue the family tradition. Although this was the path he was expected to take, he says, “there were no conditions and I have no regrets” (Interview 2). When asked about the Tijaniyya, his answers were always complemented with *Ahadith* or Qur’anic verses, and reflected his deep knowledge of Sufi

traditions. Shaykh Ibrahim said that the Tijaniyya “uplifts Muslims from their normal condition” (Interview 2) and that the company of *awliya* (friends of God) is needed to benefit spiritually. He stressed that the most important thing is the quality of the heart, which is what the disciple must work on, although Allah gives to each what He wills. He spoke at length about *tarbiya*, the education of the heart to attain closeness to Allah, which must be given to each person according to his *hal* (condition) and which includes the practice of *khalwa* (Interview 2).

Another point stressed by Shaykh Ibrahim was the importance of the Shaykh for the spiritual advancement of the disciple: “the *murid* needs the help of the Shaykh in every respect, even if he does not go to him often” (Interview 2). He explained that in the same way that the believer cannot access Allah except through the Prophet, so the disciple cannot attain the light of Allah on his own, without the Shaykh: “Allah gives through the Shuyukh and the heart of the *murid* needs to be opened” (Interview 2). In this context, he spoke about Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse as the possessor of *fayda* (spiritual flood), which is the reason, according to him, why most Tijanis around the world are linked to his *silsila*. Although Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse did not want to take other Shuyukh’s disciples, many came to him to renew their *bay’a* and many were given the function of *muqaddam*. According to Shaykh Ibrahim, other families only pass on the *baraka* (blessings) to a few, but Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse was able to give to many. In spite of this, both Shaykh Ibrahim and Shaykh Abubakr agreed that no one was forced to recognize Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse as the center and “that others are still Tijani and we are all brothers” (Interview 2). Similarly, they affirmed that the Tijaniyya has no problems with other *turuq* and that “we are all following the same path” (Interview 2).

During my visits to the *zawiya*, these two men were the most vocal about the specific spiritual teachings of the Tijaniyya *tariqa*; the others I spoke to preferred to refer me to them for these questions and mainly talked about their personal experience in the Tijaniyya. To answer some of my questions, Shaykh Abubakr gave me a copy of the *Handbook: Tariqa Tijaniyya*, compiled by a young “Indian-Malay” Tijani, Altaf Fakie, under the supervision of Shaykh Abubakr himself and Anwar Ahmad Bayat, another representative of Shaykh Hassan Cissé in South Africa. He chuckled as he gave me the booklet, saying that this was compiled for the benefit of South African *muridīn*, since they came from different backgrounds and spoke different languages. Having the basic teachings and practices of the Tijaniyya in a condensed form made it easier to remember for those who did not speak English or read Arabic fluently, and for those who could not manage to come regularly to the *zawiya*. Although he obviously found it different from the traditional oral teachings of the Tijaniyya, he was willing to introduce change where needed for this new and different context. The *Handbook* consists of 55 pages, giving a condensed overview of the Tijaniyya, its founder, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, Shaykh Hassan Cissé, and the rituals of the Way. It is based on the *Daratul-Taj*, written by Shaykh Hassan Cissé and Shaykh Al-Haji Lawal. In the ‘Introduction’ to the *Handbook*, we find a definition of the *tariqa*:

A method of studying and putting into practice Islamic Spiritual Science (Tasawwuf) ... [which] is a regular Science with its set laws and a full scheme of knowledge ... based on definite experiences that can be reproduced ... every person passes through the same stages in their spiritual journey as the Masters before them. Even the humblest learners can at least aspire to develop a sense of the presence of Allah and acquire an increasing control over their passions and desires for things worldly (*Handbook* 1).

The goals of the path are learning to see Allah in everything, or be conscious of Allah at all times; to witness Allah in everything; and to know or experience Allah in everything (*muraqabah, mushahadah, ma'rifah*). Similarly, according to the *Handbook*, the Tijaniyya *tariqa*'s spiritual method is based on three principles, which are listed and supported by Qur'anic verses and *Ahadith*: asking Allah for forgiveness, remembering Allah often with *dhikr*, and offering prayers upon the Prophet. It is made clear that the *tariqa* was granted to Ahmad al-Tijani from the Prophet himself, and the possibility of seeing the Prophet after his death is supported again by *Ahadith*. The introduction concludes, "in the final analysis, we are Muslims looking for the Truth, and wherever we see the Truth, we shall follow" (*Handbook* 4). The next section contains short biographies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, Ibrahim Niasse and Hassan Cissé, with numerous references to their virtues and spiritual accomplishments. Finally, the last part of the *Handbook* is dedicated to the rituals of the Tijaniyya, giving the *wird*, *wazifa*, and *dhikr-ul juma'a* in Arabic, transliterated, with an English translation, and explaining the conditions under which all three must be recited.

Altaf Fakie, the young local Tijani who compiled the *Handbook*, is actively involved in the activities of the *zawiya*. He studied Arabic and Islamic Sciences at local institutions and is still a student. Altaf says he was always drawn to Sufism but when he met Shaykh Hassan Cissé in 2002 he 'knew' that the Tijaniyya was the Way for him (Interview 4). He took *bay'a* and has tried to educate himself extensively through the books of the *tariqa* and with the help of the *muqaddamin* in South Africa. When asked what the Tijaniyya *tariqa* means to him, Altaf replied, "It is simply to rule oneself according to the teachings of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet" (Interview 4).

For him, it was especially important that the Tijaniyya was ‘based exclusively on Qur’an and Sunna’. He is deeply devoted to Shaykh Hassan about whom he wrote, “we are truly blessed to have Shaykh Hassan Ali Cissé as our spiritual guide. May Allah give him long life and give all of us the opportunity to be in his presence, pray behind him, drink from his deep well of knowledge and assist him in his work for Islam” (Fakie 1). He finds justification of Tijaniyya practices in Qur’anic verses, constantly quoting a verse or a *Hadith*. Similarly, he emphatically emphasizes the teachings of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse against those who neglect the observance of religious duties: “[they] have gone out of Islam and the Tariqa and are only following a mirage” (Fakie 2). Contrary to the academic view of the ‘exclusivism’ of the Tijaniyya, Altaf sees other Sufi orders as propagating the same message, “a means amongst others to reach Allah” (Interview 4). The spirit of tolerance is present in all his statements, which he views as being part of Tijani teachings: “although there are many orders, none of them contradict the Qur’an and Sunna of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Anyone can follow any order remembering that the great object of life is Divine Worship (51:56 Q) and eternal happiness in the next world” (Fakie 2).

Hajira is another young Malay Tijani married to Altaf’s brother, also a Tijani. She is studying Communications at university and is actively involved in the Cape Town community radio station 786. She explains that for her, finding the Tijaniyya *tariqa* was a very personal spiritual journey: “I was looking for something to fulfill the spiritual yearning I felt when I came across the teachings of the Tijaniyya ... it was the answer to my *duas* [prayers]” (Interview 5). Although leading a busy life, she always finds time to go to the *zawiya* in Guguletu, “I try to go at least once a week, but I always need to get a

ride from my husband or Altaf, you know, so sometimes it is a bit more difficult”

(Interview 5). She also visits the *Zawiyatun Nur* in Woodstock, which is more easily accessible for her when she is alone.

Similarly, Tasneem is another young Malay Tijani, but she is not married to anyone in the *tariqa*. She is still single and studying at the Technikon. In her case, she knew very little about Sufism and was not really looking for a Path, but when she met Shaykh Hassan in 2002 she was “overwhelmed by his presence and wisdom and knew that I had to follow him” (Interview 11). Being alone, in the beginning, it was a bit more difficult for her to go regularly to the *zawiya*, but more recently: “I have made many friends who give me lifts; there is Abdou who lives in town or Hajira and her family” (Interview 11). In particular, she enjoys the *dhikr* and *wazifa* sessions and also “meeting people from all over the world who follow the same Path, it has really opened my eyes” (Interview 11).

Fatima is a middle-aged Xhosa woman living in Guguletu who joined the Tijaniyya last year (2003). She has been a Muslim since 1996, when she ‘entered’ Islam through the *da’wa* activities of the Mustadafin Foundation: “I was very poor, you know, my husband left and I had to take care of my children on my own and couldn’t find a job. They [the Mustadafin] always came with food parcels and talked about Islam so I decided to join because they were kinder than the Church I was in” (Interview 8). But she explains that during those first years her knowledge of Islam was limited and that she did not receive much religious instruction. The Tijaniyya *tariqa*, through their *madrasa* programs, provided her with the practical knowledge that she was looking for: “Here we are taught how to live according to the *dīn* [religion]. They don’t just say here you are

Muslim and finished; there is school, *dhikr*, people to talk to, it's a way of life"

(Interview 8). It is only since joining the Tijaniyya that she has begun to learn basic Arabic, to recite the Qur'an and to openly act as a Muslim. Fatima says that prior to this she did not have the support structure necessary to openly face her Xhosa Christian community as a Muslim, but that now she is "not afraid of what others will say because this is my new family; they take care of me and my children and I am proud to be a Muslim and a Tijani" (Interview 8).

The story of Ismail, a mid-thirties Xhosa man who joined the Tijaniyya during Shaykh Hassan's first visit is quite different from that of Fatima. He has been a Muslim since the age of 22, when he 'entered' Islam through Imam Dawood Lobi of Langa. Although lacking in resources, he made a great effort to receive an Islamic religious education and studied at ICOSA<sup>12</sup>. Ismail then concentrated his efforts on uplifting black South African Muslims and joined the *Ikhwanul-Muslimeen*, known today as the Masakhane Muslim Community (M.M.C.), with whom he is still associated (Interview 9). He became interested in Sufism through his studies and was in contact with some of the local *turuq*, but only finally decided to join the Tijaniyya after he met first Shaykh Abubakr and then Shaykh Hassan Cissé in 2002. Ismail was drawn to both the teachings of the *tariqa* and its African background: "The Tijaniyya offers a means to deepen your Islamic practice in order to overcome yourself and come close to Allah ... the fact that this *tariqa* is widespread in Africa and has African teachers was also appealing to me" (Interview 9). Ismail is now very involved in the activities of the *zawiya* in Guguletu, and although living in Langa, he comes to the *zawiya* daily and is active with teaching in the *madrasa*.

A radically different case of a black South African Tijani is that of Muhammad. He is a young teenager, seventeen years old, who is still in school in Guguletu. After years of 'getting into trouble' he became a Muslim during Shaykh Hassan's second visit in 2003 and entered the Tijaniyya in 2004: "You see, I was hanging with the wrong crowd, doing some drugs and very angry with the world. Then I met some people who told me about Shaykh Hassan's visit. I only went to make fun, but it actually changed my life" (Interview 10). Muhammad explains that the whole experience was overwhelming for him, seeing the black Shaykh and all the people, and hearing him speak: "I don't know, I guess my heart just opened and I didn't look back" (Interview 10). Now he attends *madrassa* after school and spends a lot of time in the *zawiya*, which is like a 'home' to him.

Another *muqaddam* of Shaykh Hassan Cissé in Cape Town is South African Anwar Ahmad Bayat. He studied Islamic Sciences and after searching for a *tariqa*, he ended up in Senegal, where he received initiation (Interview 13). He is based at the Zawiyatun Nur in Woodstock, which was established by Shaykh Hassan during his second visit in 2003. According to Anwar, "this *zawiya* plays a vital role in the integration of new Muslims from the townships with Muslims outside of their areas. This contact is invaluable. Allah (SWT) tells us that we have been created in different tribes and nations so we can get to know one another (49:13)" (Bayat 4). The issue of race and race relations is very important to him, so he is also associated with the NGO Masakhane, where "in the townships of Cape Town, or should we say the African townships, we have been busy at work 'Building a Nation' as affirmed in one of the logos of our NGO" (Bayat 4). Anwar affirms that those at Masakhane and at the *zawiya* in Guguletu are

---

<sup>12</sup> Islamic College of South Africa based in the Gatesville Mosque in Athlone, Cape Town.

committed to teaching the precepts of Islam and its way of life, and that, there, people embrace Islam daily. Thus there are more than 400 new Muslims on the register, involved in activities such as the five daily prayers, *juma'a* and *'Id salah*, daily *dhikr* programs and educational endeavors. According to Bayat, "it is important that people are empowered and educated, so that they can further benefit their families and the larger community. This initiative signifies an integrated approach to meeting Muslims rather than maintaining the status quo" (Bayat 4). Thus, for Anwar, the Tijaniyya *tariqa* offers the perfect platform for the integration of people from different racial and cultural backgrounds, an issue especially important in South Africa today (Interview 13).

For many of the Tijanis I spoke to, the issue of race was quite important, in one way or another. Although for both Shaykh Abubakr and Shaykh Ibrahim, the issue was almost a non-issue: Shaykh Abubakr stated emphatically that "if Islam is well taught then there is no racism" (Interview 1). When asked about interracial relationships among the Tijanis in the Cape Town *zawiya*, he said that "one does not find this problem in this *tariqa*; it is no surprise, because it is all temporary, like in the time of the Prophet with Bilal, the freed slaves, and Salman al-Farsi" (Interview 1). Similarly, Shaykh Ibrahim found the concern with race rather absurd and stated that "the aim of *tasawwuf* is to forget oneself and if you do you will be able to see everyone as same" (Interview 2). He further elaborated by explaining that just as there are different answers to a question, so there are different colors to people but all are really the same.

Nevertheless, for other Tijanis, the issue of race played a more central role. For the black South Africans who embraced Islam, the Tijaniyya *tariqa* was particularly appealing, as Zaytun said, "because we have a black Shaykh and most of the students are

black” (Interview 12). In her case, she entered Islam upon meeting Shaykh Hassan during his visit in 2002, and continued by joining the Tijaniyya after regularly attending the *madrasa* run by the *zawiya*. For someone like Ismail, who was a Muslim long before he came into contact with the Tijaniyya, his experience in the *tariqa* proved to be in marked contrast to what he had encountered elsewhere: “unfortunately, you know, when a black man goes into a mosque in Athlone or somewhere like that, people usually judge him and wonder if he is really a good Muslim. But in the Tijaniyya that issue is not really there, the *tariqa* comes from Africa and as a black person you feel at home there” (Interview 9). Ismail emphasized that intrinsically he had nothing against Malay or Indian Muslims; in fact, he has some good Malay friends, he just “mean[t] to say that racism is there, in the Muslim community, because of the legacy of apartheid and everything” (Interview 9). Ismail also adds that it is important for Africans to have their own strong leadership and not depend solely on the Malay community: “As black Africans, we need to find our pride again and not feel inferior to anyone. There have been black Muslims since the time of the Prophet and we need to embrace our legacy, like the Tijaniyya” (Interview 9). This feeling was prevalent amongst most black South African Tijanis with whom I spoke. In this context, Zaytun added: “I like that people here [in the Tijaniyya] treat me the same, with respect, not like when I go out to other places” (Interview 12). Similarly, Muhammad states that the Tijaniyya gives him a sense of pride about who he is as a black person, “I never knew we had all of this ... a white or colored person following a black teacher; this you must see!” (Interview 10).

The multiracial character of the Tijaniyya was also especially appealing to many Malay and Indian Tijanis with whom I came into contact. Ashraf, a mid-twenties Malay

man working in the building trade who joined the *tariqa* after meeting some Senegalese Tijanis, was particularly vehement. He stated that people in South Africa are too immersed in their little world and never come out of their ethnic circle, and that the Tijaniyya “has given me the opportunity to become involved with black people, they are my family, you know, Shaykh Abubakr is like a father to me” (Interview 7). In fact, Ashraf’s affiliation with the Tijaniyya has brought him into conflict with his own family, who cannot understand why he spends so much time in Guguletu and why he follows a black teacher. Similarly, both Hajira and Tasneem explained that before they joined the Tijaniyya they had very little contact with black people and lived quite isolated lives in their own community: “The Tijaniyya has opened my eyes to black people and to the racism prevalent in our community ... this [the Tijaniyya] is exactly what our country needs” (Interview 5). Tasneem also felt that Malay and Indian Muslims should be proud of being ‘African Muslims’ rather than identifying exclusively with some remote ‘home’ country: “We are all South Africans and therefore we should feel African and identify with Africa and other African Muslims (Interview 11). This view was echoed by Anwar: “Racial tendencies are un-Islamic and ... [we] believe we have to liberate ourselves from our apartheid shackles by identifying ourselves as Africans, rather than Asians and Malays, because we are in fact all African” (Bayat 4).

On the other hand, the Senegalese Tijanis looked at the issue of race in a different light. Most of them have experienced racism or xenophobia in one form or another since they have been in South Africa. Abdou explains that going to a foreign country is never easy; no one really likes you, “white people think we drain the country’s resources and black people think we take their jobs” (Interview 3). Nevertheless, he has seen that the

*tariqa* changes people's attitudes: "Once people meet us and understand the Tijaniyya, the Muslims stop thinking we are all drug dealers and the blacks that we are here to take their work ... we begin to understand and respect each other" (Interview 3). Similarly, Mousa has also had some bad experiences in Cape Town; once he was almost arrested by the police when their building was raided for drugs "just because we were West African they [the police] assumed we had drugs, when they couldn't find anything they let us go but insulted us and never apologized" (Interview 6). Although he is less optimistic about people's ability to change, he agrees that spirituality is the answer: "If you are really interested in getting close to God, like in the Tijaniyya, you will see God in everyone" (Interview 6).

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

This study focuses on a very recent phenomenon in Cape Town, which is the first of its kind in the field of West African *turuq* in the city. Therefore, the conclusions are mainly descriptive and should be seen as preliminary as they may develop in other directions as the Tijaniyya becomes more established in the years to come.

The Tijaniyya *tariqa* has been present in South Africa, particularly in Cape Town, since the end of apartheid in 1994, with the coming of West African migrants, predominantly from Senegal, into the country. Most Muslim immigrants to South Africa that come from West Africa are men, have secondary education and are involved in trade. Francophone immigrants from countries such as Senegal are small in numbers but sociologically significant, since their entrepreneurial activities give them an importance disproportionate to their numbers. They are mainly urban, enterprising and culturally distinguishable, and prefer inner city neighborhoods; some come from rural areas but are supported by networks like the Tijaniyya. The Tijaniyya affiliation is very important to such migrants as it gives them a network of contacts and support, but more importantly, moral and spiritual guidance in a foreign land.

The first Tijani *zawiya* in Cape Town was formally established by Shaykh Hassan Cissé in Guguletu in 2002. He has traveled extensively bringing Islam to many people all over the world, and in Cape Town, during his visit, hundreds of people, mainly black South Africans entered Islam. That year marked a flourishing of the Tijaniyya in Cape Town, as his presence inspired many to join the *tariqa*, and brought Tijanis together through his spiritual guidance and blessings. The Tijani *zawiya* is located in a simple white brick house in Guguletu that serves all the needs of the community, from housing

for their *muqaddam* and guests, to accommodating their *madrasa* and of course, for daily prayers and *dhikr* gatherings. Shaykh Hassan's *muqaddam* in Cape Town, Shaykh Abubakr from Rwanda, a doctor by profession, left a prestigious job in a university in Senegal to dedicate himself entirely to the Tijani disciples in Cape Town. He now lives in the *zawiya* subsisting on the charity of the Tijani disciples, whom he leads on the Way, while also attracting more people to the Tijaniyya with his presence.

The success of the Tijaniyya in attracting people to Islam as well as to their path can be attributed to several factors. The failures of *da'wa* organizations can be traced to their lack of unity, ignorance of black African cultures, inability to speak a local black language, the lack of follow up Islamic education, and the conflicts with 'established' Muslim communities; and of course in the past, included the many obstacles of apartheid. On the other hand, the Tijaniyya offers an Islamic education in their *madrasa*, providing the practical knowledge and support people need to maintain their faith; the *zawiya* becomes a home to many in difficult social circumstances, making the *tariqa* a way of life; and for many, its black leadership and African background has a strong appeal. Tijanis are not seen as outsiders imposing an 'Indian or Malay Islam' and are not dependent on the 'Indian' or 'Malay' communities for financial support. The Tijaniyya also plays a vital role in integrating black Muslims from the townships with Muslims from other wealthier areas, as well as people from different racial and cultural backgrounds, an issue vitally important in South Africa today. Thus, the *tariqa* practically exemplifies the non-racial, non-nationalistic basis of Islam. Its success points to the importance of building alternative leadership structures in black communities for

their own self-empowerment, and offers Islam as symbol of a new or alternative identity in the townships.

The question of identity in South Africa today is intimately linked to issues of race, and is quite important to many Tijanis. Although according to the Tijani *muqaddamin*, the goal is to see everyone the same independently of race and based only on their spiritual qualities, however, the realities of life in the Cape makes the matter much more complex for many South African Tijanis. For black disciples, the *tariqa* is particularly appealing because of its black African roots and leadership, making them feel at home and giving them a sense of pride as black Muslims with a rich Islamic history, removing any complex of inferiority because of their 'late' entrance into Islam. For 'Malay' and 'Indian' Tijanis, the *tariqa* is also especially appealing because it has brought them into close contact with both black South Africans and blacks from around the continent with whom they had little or no contact before. They consider their local Islamic community too enclosed on itself and say that the Tijaniyya brings them out of their limited ethnic circle, as well as giving them a sense of being African Muslims and not having to identify with a remote ancestral land. In a sense, it liberates them from the legacy of apartheid giving them the opportunity of meeting people from all over the world and of other races in their own country. On the other hand, Senegalese members of the Tijaniyya have experienced xenophobia in one way or another since arriving in South Africa, but feel that both black and colored South African Tijanis open up to them without prejudice; they strongly feel that the *tariqa* changes peoples attitudes through spirituality.

Thus, the Tijaniyya *tariqa* in Cape Town naturally exemplifies the characteristics and complexities of an 'African Muslim' identity. In its very brief history in South Africa, spirituality in the Tijaniyya is an important force that 'normalizes' race relations: it brings people from radically different ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds together; it gives confidence to those who have been historically oppressed; and it opens the doors of Africa to South African Muslims. The Tijaniyya does not impose from the outside an 'African' culture nor does it render black South African Muslims invisible. Instead, the *tariqa* is itself rooted in Africa and offers African leadership as well as the ideal opportunity for Muslims from all backgrounds to come together. Racism and prejudice can only be effectively combated through true understanding and constant interaction. The Tijaniyya *tariqa* in Cape Town uniquely offers this opportunity.

However, in spite of the importance of issues of race and identity, Tijanis in Cape Town stressed that the spiritual aspect of the *tariqa* was the most important characteristic of the Tijaniyya. For most, finding the *tariqa* was a very personal spiritual journey and their main focus and enjoyment is the *dhikr*, as well as receiving an education, both initiatic and Islamic in general. The spiritual method of the Tijaniyya, as described by *The Handbook: Tariqa Tijaniyya*, compiled expressly for South African disciples, like that of many other *turuq*, consists of the *wird* (asking Allah for forgiveness, offering prayers upon the Prophet and reciting the Islamic testimony of Faith) and remembering Allah as often as possible with *dhikr* (the invocation of litanies or one or more Divine Names). The goal is to develop an increasing awareness of the presence of Allah and to slowly gain control over one's passions and desires; the passional ego must disappear in order to let the spiritual Heart prevail. In the words of Cape Town's Tijani leader,

*wilaya*, educating the heart to make it ready to host Allah, is the most important teaching of the Tijaniyya. The Shaykh is also regarded as crucial for the spiritual advancement of the disciple, guiding the *murid* in the path of *tarbiya*, by purifying the soul, but always within the bounds of the *Shari'a*, the orthodox framework of Islam.

In conclusion, as can be seen from this study, Tijanis in Cape Town keep away from controversies and feel that all Tijanis are brothers, independently of their race and origin or particular affiliation with one branch or another of the *tariqa*. They also regard other *turuq* as following a Path among many others to reach the same goal, thus questioning the academic view of the 'exclusivity' of the Tijaniyya. The order in Cape Town shows more signs of continuity with other *turuq* than of rupture with the past; the spirit of tolerance is present in all its manifestations. Similarly, although the history of the Tijaniyya *tariqa* may have been marked by a great *jihad* and political controversies in Senegal, its spread today beyond those borders has little to do with these extraneous factors. Instead, the spiritual dimension of the Way, the importance the order places on disseminating an ideal of behavior and piety, coupled with its bringing Islam to other parts of the world is much more significant. More specifically, when looking at the *tariqa* from the inside, one finds these aspects underlined by Tijanis themselves. One of the Tijaniyya *tariqa*'s main functions has been to bring the Islam of Africa to Cape Town, internationalizing it, and bringing its local leaders into contact with a network of Muslims that come from different ethnic backgrounds. As the Tijanis themselves have remarked, the *tariqa* provides the opportunity for people of different "races" and geographic backgrounds in South Africa to meet and respect each other and to understand

'African Islam'. But more importantly, Tijanis in Cape Town emphasize the appeal of a Way designed to deepen their Islam and purify their hearts to bring them closer to Allah.

## 9. WORKS CITED

- Abrahams, Zainulghoes'n. "The Growth and Spread of Islam in Langa, Nyanga, Guguletu, in Cape Town." B.A. (Honours) Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1981.
- Abun-Nasr, Jamil M. *The Tijaniyya: A Sufi Order in the Modern World*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Bayat, Anwar Ahmad. "African Renaissance." *Muslim Views*. 18.2 (2004): 4.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Diop, Moustapha A. "Les associations islamiques sénégalaises en France." *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*. 8 (1994): 7-15.
- and Laurence Michalak. "'Refuge' and 'Prison': Islam, Ethnicity and the Adaptation of Space in Workers' Housing in France." *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*. Ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996: 74-91.
- Diouf, Mamadou. "Paths of Islam in Senegal." *ISIM Newsletter*. 1 (1998): 7-8.
- Eickelman, Dale F. and James Piscatori. "Social Theory in the Study of Muslim Societies." *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*. Eds. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori. London: Routledge, 1990: 3-25.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

- Fakie, Altaf. "Shaykh Hassan Cisse and the Tariqa Tijaniyya." *The Muslim Tabloid*. 3 (2002): 1-2.
- Fakude, Ebrahim. "Muslims in the Townships of South Africa." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*. 5 (2002): 47-49.
- Handbook: Tariqa Tijaniyya*.
- Haron, Muhammed. "Da'wah Amongst the Africans in the Greater Cape Town Region." *Al-'Ilm: Journal of the Centre for Research in Islamic Studies*. 12 (1992): 1-16.
- Kane, Ousmane. "Sufi Orders and the State in West Africa and the USA." Paper delivered at the conference *Muslim Communities, Globalisation, and Identities*. International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, University of Leiden, 18<sup>th</sup> –21<sup>st</sup> April, 2001.
- Lee, Rebekah. "Understanding African Women's Conversion to Islam: Cape Town in Perspective." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*. 5 (2002): 52-56.
- Levtzion, Nehemia and John O. Voll. *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992 [1987].
- Manning, Patrick. *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1988]1998.
- Masakhane Muslim Community. "Islam in the African Townships of the Cape." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*. 5 (2002): 50-51.
- Mathee, Shahid. "Muslim Identity Constructions in Soweto." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*. 6 (2003): 51-54.
- Morris, Alan and Antoine Bouillon, Eds. *African immigration to South Africa: francophone migrants of the 1990s*. Pretoria: Protea & Ifas, 2001.

Rafaudeen, Auwais. "Towards Forging an "African" Muslim Identity." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*. 5 (2002): 57-59.

Riccio, Bruno. "From 'ethnic group' to 'transnational community'? Senegalese migrants' ambivalent experiences and multiple trajectories." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 27.4 (2001): 583-599.

Robinson, David. "Revolutions in the Western Sudan." *The History of Islam in Africa*. Eds. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels. Cape Town: David Philip, 2000: 131-52.

---. *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Seesemann, Rudiger. "The History of the Tijaniyya and the issue of *tarbiya* in Darfur (Sudan)." *La Tijaniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*. Eds. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson. Paris: Karthala, 2000: 393-437.

Shell, Robert C.-H. "Islam in Southern Africa, 1652-1998." *The History of Islam in Africa*. Eds. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels. Cape Town: David Philip, 2000: 327-48.

Sitoto, Tahir Fuzile. "Engaging *Muslimness* and the Making of African Muslim Identity." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*. 6 (2003): 46-50.

---. "Imam Essa Al-Seppe and "the emerging and unorganised African Muslim sector": A Contextual Analysis." *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*. 5 (2002): 43-46.

- The Southern Africa Migration Project. *The Lives and Times of African Migrants & Immigrants in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Migration Policy Series No. 13, 2000.
- Tayob, Abdulkader. *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999.
- Triaud, Jean-Louis. "La Tijaniyya, une confrerie musulmane pas comme les autres?" *La Tijaniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*. Eds. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson. Paris: Karthala, 2000: 9-17.
- and David Robinson, Eds. *La Tijaniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*. Paris: Karthala, 2000.
- Vahed, Goolam and Shamil Jeppie. "Multiple communities: Muslims in post-apartheid South Africa." *State of the Nation: South Africa 2004-2005*. Eds. John Daniel, Roger Southall and Jessica Lutchman. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2005: 252-86.
- Van Hoven, Ed. "Medina Gounass: The End of a Religious Isolate." *ISIM Newsletter*. 4 (1999): 25.
- Vawda, Shahid. "The Emerging of Islam in an African Township." *Al-'Ilm: Journal of the Centre for Research in Islamic Studies*. 13 (1993): 45-62.
- Vikor, Knut S. "Sufi brotherhoods in Africa." *The History of Islam in Africa*. Eds. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels. Cape Town: David Philip, 2000: 441-476.
- Young, Robert. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.

## Interviews:

1. Shaykh Abubakr Mwumvaneza.  
9 November 2003, 27 November 2003 and 14 April 2004.
2. Shaykh Ibrahim.  
9 November 2003 and 27 November 2003.
3. Abdou.  
13 November 2003.
4. Altaf Fakie.  
13 November 2003 and 20 April 2004.
5. Hajira.  
13 November 2003 and 2 December 2003.
6. Mousa.  
27 November 2003.
7. Ashraf.  
27 November 2003.
8. Fatima.  
2 December 2003.
9. Ismail.  
2 December 2003.
10. Muhammad.  
14 April 2004.
11. Tasneem.  
14 April 2004.
12. Zaytun.  
14 April 2004.
13. Anwar Ahmad Bayat.  
20 April 2004.

11. APPENDIX 'A': PHOTOGRAPHS

A) The Tijaniyya *Zawiya* in Gugulethu



B) Detail of the *Zawiya*



C) Shaykh Abubakr Mwumvaneza in the *zawiya*



D) From left, Anwar Ahmad Bayat, Shaykh Abubakr and Shaykh Ibrahim



E) Shaykh Hassan Cissé



F) The *Zawiya* during Shaykh Hassan's visit in August 2002

