

Maraboutic Practices in Senegal:
Political Opportunities of Female Marabouts

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
1.1. Choice of topic	2
1.2. Research question and the most important sources	3
1.3. Research methodology, theoretical framework and limitations	4
1.4. The structure of the paper	6
2. Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal	7
2.1. Introducing the four Sufi Brotherhoods	7
2.2. The structure of the Sufi Brotherhoods	9
2.3. The role of the Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal	10
3. Women in Senegal and in the Brotherhoods	15
3.1. The situation of women in Senegal	15
3.2. Women in Sufi Brotherhoods	16
4. Marabouts	19
4.1. The description of marabouts and the Baye Falls	19
4.2. The influence of marabouts	21
4.3. Female marabouts	24
5. Interviews	30
5.1. Description of the circumstances of the interviews	30
5.2. Interview with a female marabout	30
5.3. Interview with three Senegalese people	32
6. Conclusion	35
References	38
Appendix	50

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Female marabout, Zeyda Moussoukoro Mbaye with her followers in 2018 (Source: Bobst, 2018)	27
Figure 2: Female marabout, Zeyda Moussoukoro Mbaye with her followers in 2020 (Source: Bobst, 2020)	27
Figure 3: The Structure and the influence of the Brotherhoods (Source: Made by the author)	28
Figure 4: The origin of the political influence of marabouts (Source: Made by the author) ...	34

Az alábbi munka a BA képzés keretében megírt, és intézményi TDK-konferencián bemutatott, az intézményi TDK-konferencia idején még meg nem védett szakdolgozat.

1. Introduction

1.1. Choice of topic

Senegal is considered a model for the coexistence of religion and democracy. Mostly the French civil law inspired the current legal system of the West African country, although the influence of Islamic law is also noticeable. This duality, with few exceptions, ensures constitutional democracy and long-standing good governance. (Vohito-Anyanwu, 2020) On the one hand, the constitution promotes secularism, but Islamic values are considered part of the national identity. The characteristics mentioned above, complemented by religious tolerance, Sufi traditions, and social diversity, strengthen the belief that Senegal is an exceptional case for stability in the West African region. (World Faiths Development Dialogue, 2016)

The number of women in political positions, especially in lower parliamentary seats, is high. Given the situation in 2017, Senegalese women held almost 42% of the total seats in the National Assembly, ahead of Norway, France and New Zealand. (Palmieri, van der Leest, 2018). This tendency is partly due to the quota system, introduced by the Law on Parity (2010) and the Electoral Law completed with the L.145 Article in 2012. Candidate lists of political parties are required to consist of both male and female nominees equally. If this criterion is not met, the candidate list should not be admitted. (JORS, 2012). The amendment to the Electoral Law reiterated the decree formulated in the Parity Law. (JORS, 2010)

A significant percentage of the population (90%) is part of the four Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal, namely the Tijaniyya, Muridiyya, Qadiriyya and Layen(iyya). The influence of these groups on the political environment in the country is outstanding (André, Demonsant, 2012; Creevey, 1980). The key figures of Sufi Islam in a West African and Senegalese context are the so-called marabouts (both men and females can possess the title¹), who generally perform esoteric activities during scholarly teaching and leading actions. (Gemmeke, 2011) The majority of the literature focuses on the period after and under the presidency of Abdoulaye Wade (2000–2012) due to the fact that the marabouts experienced special attention from the President. In return, some of them also provided help to President Wade. Thus, the period examined in the thesis is determined by the beginning of his presidency and extends to the present day.

¹ The thesis indicates the distinction in the following way: marabout refers to male individuals and female marabouts to women.

The aforementioned characteristics formed the unique political, religious, and social conditions of Senegal. These characteristics gave the basis for the decision to choose Senegal as the topic of the thesis. Other incentive components were the underrepresentation of scientific literature in a Hungarian context and a global context of female marabouts, which prompted a more in-depth analysis of the question.

1.2. Research question and the most important sources

The context of Senegal, Sufi Brotherhoods, marabouts, and the representation of women in the above-mentioned spheres helped to formulate the research question of the thesis.

Do female maraboutic practices in the Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal influence the political power of women?

The claim is that, especially from 2000 until the present day, the Sufi Brotherhoods and the position marabout enabled women to participate in politics or gain more political power.

Since the paper is based on a wide variety of sources, the next part displays the preeminent ones. The paper of Codou Bop, titled *Roles and the Position of Women in Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal*, is considered an outstanding and unique source with numerous citations. (Bop, 2005) Bop describes the role of women in Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal along with the spheres of women as religious, economic, and political actors in different positions such as *bakaras*, the relationship of women with knowledge, the ideal Muslim women, and the chances of women taking political power. The analysis has served as the basis for the thesis since the beginning of the research period.

The supervisor of the thesis, Kinga Dévényi, in her Hungarian work entitled *A tídzsáni rend szerepe a Marokkó és Szenegál közötti kapcsolatokban* explores the role of the Tijaniyya Brotherhood in the bilateral relations of Morocco and Senegal. (Dévényi, 2022) The analysis also contains valuable information about the marabouts. The conclusions drawn serve as a basis for the presentation of the Brotherhoods.

The work of Ildikó Szilasi: *A szenegáli muridizmus és a Baye Fallok* focuses on the Mouride Brotherhood and their holy city, Touba. (Szilasi, 2013) Furthermore, on the Baye fall branch and its female equivalent, the Yaye Fall. Since one of the interviewees is a Baye Fall, the context helps to substantiate what was said in the interview scientifically.

Amber Gemmeke displays that Islamic esoteric knowledge is not only possessed by men. However, they endure a higher representation than their female counterparts. In addition, the paper introduces two female marabouts in Dakar and other outstanding examples of female marabouts from the past. *The Marabout Women in Dakar: Creating Authority in Islamic Knowledge* enables the thesis to introduce the present and the former female marabouts, which can be used as expressive examples. (Gemmeke, 2009)

1.3. Research methodology, theoretical framework and limitations

The complexity of the research question involves a wide variety of methodologies. Owing to the fact that, female Muslim Senegalese stand in the focus, an approach is needed which is centred around this specific group of people. At first glance, the Feminist theory seemed like an adequate theoretical framework, given that the analysis deals with women and their political possibilities. However, not sufficient based on the specific local and broader African context. Thus, the Feminist theory is narrowed down to the concept of African-Islamic Womanism.

The ideological framework of African-Islamic Womanism is based on two papers. The first one is the analysis of Shirin Edwin, titled *We Belong Here, Too: Accommodating African Muslim Feminism in African Feminist Theory via Zaynab Alkali's the Virtuous Woman and the Cobwebs and Other Stories*. The second work is *Introduction: En-gendering Islamic Authority in West Africa* by Britta Frede and Joseph Hill. (Edwin, 2006; Frede, Hill, 2014)

The former argues that the application of African feminism is crucial. In this manner, it is avoided that African citizens are treated as a homogenised mass of religion, race, ethnicity, and class. Islamic feminism focuses on the Islamic way of life, aligned with the Quran, in terms of the economic, political, social, familial and professional spheres. Lastly, the third component is womanism; African feminist thinkers tend to oppose American-European feminism and instead promote a holistic view of the need of women and put a heavier emphasis on the role of men in the struggle for equality. (Edwin, 2006)

The latter examines the areas where the research on Islamic authority in West Africa should be reviewed, such as the marginalisation of women, the necessity of hierarchy between genders, and the roles of women. When discussing gender-related questions, especially in West African Islamic situations, prominent religious spheres should be considered in addition to everyday

places and cases. For instance, the role of women in teaching Islamic thought. (Ferde, Hill, 2014)

The second sphere of the thesis is the connection between religion and politics. In particular, between Islam and the political tradition in Senegal. Political theology conventionally examines the religious institutions, beliefs, actors, and practices involved in politics. (Verdeja, 2013) However, Islamic political theology differentiates itself from the general approach of political theology and takes into account the distinctiveness of Islam from Christianity. (Moosa, 2014) Although a solely political dimension was not present in original Islamic thought, the need to implement the political aspect into the theory resulted in the formation of Islamic political theology. The need to specifically differentiate between Christian and Islamic political theology originates from the core dilemma that arises from the problem that the concept itself is debated. Thus, it is implied that there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of political theology. Not only do political scholars conduct research on the topic, but also religious scholars and theologians. The different approaches arise from the distinct viewpoint of the two sides and vary depending on how restrictive or extensive they are. In addition, most of the concepts are linked to a greater or lesser extent, either to the Christian or the Jewish environment but, most of all, to Western societies. (Bostani, 2021, Newman, 2021)

Apart from analysing the sources about Senegal, the Brotherhoods and marabouts, the thesis includes three structured and one semi-structured interview. The responses of the interviewees, particularly the answers of the female marabout, broaden the scope of the research and support the finding with their examples and experiences.

During the research, the following limitations emerged that affected either the quality of the findings or the outcome of the research question. Due to the lack of Hungarian scientific literature on West Africa and especially Senegal, these cannot be considered in the analysis. The ratio of the foreign-language sources, predominantly English, is significantly higher; this margins the possibility of displaying the Hungarian scholarly work on the topic. However, to a certain extent, the situation of African women is covered. Thus, this restriction does not undermine the merits of the findings.

The second limitation originates from the reduced foreign skills of the researcher. Although the postcolonial efforts of some Senegalese to introduce the extensive use of the Wolof language, French remains the language of education and documentation in the country. (O'Brien, 1998) Due to this fact, a considerable amount of scientific research is done in French. Despite the

complication mentioned above, a wide variety of sources are available in English, or the translated version of those documents is accessible.

The third and last regard comes from the fact that collecting respective information and data about female marabouts in Senegal from Hungary is a challenge. Not to mention that the geographical and language barriers reduce the chances of contacting or interviewing a Senegalese female marabout. As part of a later study, fieldwork with a series of interviews on the topic would broaden the scope of the research.

1.4. The structure of the paper

The thesis consists of six main segments, including the introduction and the conclusion. Evidently, the introduction indicates the choice of topic, the research question and the most important sources, the methodology and limitations, and the structure of the paper are discussed.

The central part is divided into four parts. The first one, the Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal, introduces the four main groups, the structure, and roles of the Brotherhoods. What is described here provides a reasonable basis for further analysis because, without the knowledge of these, the dynamics between the state and politicians and marabouts cannot be understood. The following section describes the situation of women in Senegal and their role within the Brotherhood, which also serves as a basis for discussing a later section, namely female marabouts.

As the thesis focuses on the marabouts, the next part provides a description of the marabouts. It is not only concentrated on the political roles they possess, but also on their initial fulfilments as transmitting religious knowledge. The same analysis is done on the decisive role of female marabouts in several examples. Before the conclusion, the responses of the interviews are evaluated and the research question is answered.

2. Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal

2.1. Introducing the four Sufi Brotherhoods

Although the meaning of the term Sufism is often debated and exposed to controversies, interpreting Sufism as Islamic Mysticism is applicable in the West African context. (Seesemann, 2010) Thus, the term is explicable as people attempting to believe in Islam while knowing the mysteries of the world. (Bilqies, 2014) In other words, souls possess a connection to the non-material world. This spirituality is transmitted through several channels. On the one hand, through devoutness towards saints. On the other hand, through texts and the joint approach to study them collectively. (Heck, 2007)

Sufism has been present in Senegal since Islam arrived in the country. The Muslim Brotherhoods were established on the basis of mysticism and worshipping saints. Thus, it can be said that Sufism in Senegal has a Brotherhood-based character. Furthermore, individuals are only considered Muslims by some other believers when they are connected to a Brotherhood. (Dieye, 2020, Bop, 2005) Thus, 90% of the people of Senegal who profess to be Muslim are members of one of the four Brotherhoods in Senegal. (André, Demonsant, 2012) The Sufi Brotherhoods enable the citizens to appertain to a social network. Thus, for many associates, the affiliation to the Brotherhood is a central feature of their identity. (Villalón, 2015)

The role of Sufism is presented in cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. The political and economic dimensions will be discussed later. The cultural dimension materialises in Islamic education, teaching, and learning the Arabic language. Sufism propagates values and social and moral functions such as tolerance, solidarity, and action. (Dieye, 2020) One particular example of tolerance is the Senegalese Sufism and Christianity working together. In Popenguine, the sacral places were built with the help of both communities. In Fadiouth, a church destroyed by the hurricane was rebuilt with the help of Muslims, who financially contributed to the restoration. A joint cemetery serves as a place of ultimate tranquillity for both believers in Zinguinchor and Fadiouth. (Stepan, 2012)

The Muridiyya Brotherhood was founded in 1883 by Cheick Amadou Bamba (1853–1927), who established Touba, where he was buried and which became the holy city of the Brotherhood. The importance of the town is revealed in the fact that in sub-Saharan Africa, the largest mosque is located here in Senegal. (Golub, Hansen-Lewis, 2012; Riccio, 2004). The

Brotherhood achieved an exceptional level of political and economic power in Senegal. (Luttmer, 2008)

Between 2010 and 2018, Sheikh El Moukhtar Mbacké was the most influential public figure, before whom even the president kneeled. Furthermore, the dominance of the Muridiyya Brotherhood in the private sector is significant. The high ownership of companies such as Touba Oli, the transport company called 'le Muridiyya', the gasoline station known as the Touba-Gaz gas station, and the chain of petrol stations display the economic influence. (Jansen, 2008)

To the Tijaniyya Brotherhood, by and large, 8–9 million Senegalese belong, who, contrary to the members of the Muridiyya (who are popular among the rural cities), are mainly present in the cities. Consequently, Tijaniyya developed into a significant actor in the urban middle classes and the political elite. Thus, it could be argued that while the Muridiyya Brotherhood is more prominent in the economic fields, the Tijaniyya Brotherhood is more active in the spheres of bureaucracy, education, and the state. (Dévényi, 2022) The most significant 'house' of the Tijaniyya Brotherhood in Senegal is the Sy, who act in accordance with that they are the legitimate heirs of the first Senegalese head of the Brotherhood, El-Hajj Malik Sy (1853–1922)². (Diallo, 2011)

The Qadiriyya is the oldest Brotherhood among the four since Abdul Qadir Gilani founded it in the 12th century in Iraq, where it remained a local Brotherhood in the capital, Baghdad. (Trimingham, 1971) Outside Iraq, however, it is widespread in North Africa, the Balkans, and Southeast Asia. In Senegal, the proportion of its followers reaches 10% of the population, the vast majority of whom are situated in the northern part of Senegal. (Piranio, 2019) The father of Amadou Bamba (founder of the Muridiyya Brotherhood) raised and educated his son in the Qadiriyya Brotherhood with maraboutic traditions since Maam Mor Anta Saly Mbacke was a marabout in the order. Although the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya orders were present in Senegal for a long time, Amadou Bamba was motivated to fund the Muridiyya order due to certain features. The lack of encouragement from the leaders of the Brotherhoods for common economic activity and the lack of geographical separation from the other orders were the two main reasons. (Robinson, 1991, Cochrane, 2021)

The smallest Brotherhood is called Layen(iyya) and was founded in 1888 by a fisherman named Libasse Thiaw. Many Muslims outside of Senegal regard them as heretics. The reason for that

² Also spelt as El Hadji Malick Sy.

is that they reckon that the son of the founder is an incarnation of Jesus Christ. Thus, apart from the existing religious tolerance in the country, they celebrate Christmas and biblical stories are included in their religious practices besides the Quran. The group members can be found prominently in the capital, Dakar, among the Lebu ethnic group. (Volk, 2017)

2.2. The structure of the Sufi Brotherhoods

The structure of the Sufi Brotherhood is considered sophisticated and potent, since it enables the Brotherhood to distinguish itself from the current several Muslim states and the popular Islamist movements in non-Muslim states. (al-Anani, 2016) Moreover, the build-up contributes to the successes of the Sufi Brotherhoods, namely the ability to expand their significant social network and maintain their influential role in economic and social contexts.

Throughout the time that the structure of the Brotherhoods evolved, they emerged into an organisation characterised by adaptability and elasticity. Internal and external factors formed the Brotherhoods that today reflect the responsiveness to these challenges.

One of the critical elements is the hierarchal structure, which operationalises the administration and affiliates of the different branches and divisions. However, this hierarchy is only characterised by the vertical axis and the second by the horizontal axis, which aims to facilitate the different organisational bodies of the Brotherhoods.

As an example, to demonstrate the structure and the organisation of the Sufi Brotherhood³, the Muridiyya Brotherhood was chosen, as the only one founded in Senegal. The person who represents the unity of the Muridiyya takes the position of the Caliph-general. The foremost leader decides on the substantial issues regarding the Brotherhood. These core questions are connected to religious or social questions. Hierarchically, the following status is the caliphs, who execute the solidarity of the Brotherhood on an operational level. (Mbacke, 2016, Fomunyam, 2014)

Below the caliphs, the marabout takes place considering that two separate sections are devoted only to marabouts; in this segment, this position is only mentioned to display the hierarchy.

³ Fig. 3. summarises and demonstrates the power relations and the hierarchical system of the Sufi Brotherhood.

Nevertheless, a detailed description of marabouts will be given in the chapters: 'Marabouts in the Sufi Brotherhoods' and 'Female marabouts'.

Talibés, i.e., disciples or followers, are required to live and learn under the guidance of the marabout. The relationship between them is considered the core of the structure of the Brotherhood. (Fomunyam, 2014; Ayers, 2008)

2.3. The role of the Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal

Linda Beck, in her work, *Brokering Democracy in Africa: The Rise of Clientelist Democracy in Senegal*, describes the West African country as a clientelist democracy. (Beck, 2008) Political clientelism is considered a system wherein, in exchange for political support, the actors of politics provide excludable benefits. (Poteete, 2018) These systems conventionally share standard features such as the existence of hierarchy and dyadic relationships. (Hicken, 2011) Clientelist democracy, on the other hand, is viewed as a democratic regime where the foundation for the mobilisation of political will and liability is the clientelist relationship. (Beck, 2008)

In addition, the so-called patron-client relationship, which is closely connected to clientelism, is a pattern that is widely prevalent in the African context. (Bratton, 1997) In light of the thesis topic, the period between 2000 and 2012 is consequential, since clientelism in Senegal gained strength in this decade. (Dahou, Foucher, 2009) In the introductory part of the thesis, an example was brought up regarding Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade and the clientelist practice between Sufi Brotherhoods and marabouts. Thus, in the following, this phenomenon will be discussed.

The question of secularism, the relationship of the state to the Sufi orders, has been a relevant issue since the independence of the country. Leopold Senghor, the founding president of Senegal, and Prime Minister Mamadou Dia disagreed on the place of religion in society. The former argued that the so-called 'laïcité bien-comprise'⁴ would be the ideal solution. This phenomenon means that the spheres of state and religion are separated. However, if the nation can develop from the presence of the Sufi orders in the public sphere, they are welcomed. The

⁴ The term 'laïcité bien-comprise' is used in the book edited by Mamadou Diouf, named 'Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal'. Here, French secularism, the so-called laïcité, is compared to Senegalese secularism, which differs since, in France, the states had to fight Catholicism for a long time before they could disengage from it. On the other hand, the Senegalese state was from a different standpoint from the formation of the state. (Diouf, 2013)

latter, Mamadou Dia, favoured the French inheritance, where religious groups would be marginalised. (Aidi, 2020)

The system in which Senegalese politics operates and is dominated by the Sufi brotherhoods and the state was first described by Cruise O'Brien as the Senegalese social contract. The scholar reviewed his findings based on the changing environment of the country. (O'Brien, 1971, 2003) Other scholars contributed other ideas, such as Beck, as mentioned earlier, by adding clientelist democracy. (Oya, 2006) So did Alfred Stepan in his analysis of *Sufis and Secularists in Senegal in Comparative Perspective*. (Stepan, 2012)

The basis of the functioning of the state and religion is described as 'twin tolerance'. The essence of the term is based on the fact that both the state and religion must provide a certain level of tolerance for each other to have a political system that can be called democratic. Religious institutions should not be able to possess privileges granted by the constitution. The reason for this is that, in this way, they cannot decree from democratically elected officials. The state should allow religious groups and individuals to promote their beliefs in society and to sponsor political movements, but only until it does not violate democracy.

Examples of 'twin tolerance' are the grand *magal* of the Muridiyya Brotherhood and the *gamu* of the Tijaniyya Brotherhood.⁵ The government does not exclude Christian traditions from the country. Therefore, in addition to the two Sufi events mentioned above, government officials are participating and providing the necessary financial, medical, logistic, and technical support for the Catholic pilgrimage to Popenguine. The grand *magal* is discussed in detail later. Nevertheless, at this point, it is worth mentioning that during the pilgrimage, leading secular figures such as ministers and nearly half of the cabinet also present themselves in Touba. (Stepan, 2012)

As stated earlier, the Sufi Brotherhoods, most notably the Tijaniyya and the Muridiyya, gained significant power recently since their spread in Senegal. In terms of the thesis, political influence is the most essential; however, it cannot be discussed and evaluated without the original causes of their influencing capability.

The religious authority of the Sufi Brotherhoods initially came from their spiritual authority and power structures originating from precolonial times. In times of colonial wars, the Senegalese leaders secured the support of the marabouts by embracing Islam. This tendency

⁵ Both *magal* and the *gamu* refer to pilgrimages. (Stepan, 2012)

resulted, after the disappearance of precolonial rules, the religious leaders were left alone, and they were the only ones who were able to provide moral identity to the people. As a natural process, the emerging power of religious figures was raised to the throne of kings. (Gierczynski-Bocandé, 2007)

Since, in a sense, the regional community is more valuable for the West African population than the national boundaries, based on mutual respect, the ideas and the Sufi arrangements were able to transcend to most of the countries in the region. A great leap forward in gaining power within the context of Sufi Brotherhoods was the possibilities provided by the economic relations. In Senegal, the Brotherhoods first engaged in the agricultural sector. Later, this involvement enabled them to expand to other sectors, such as industry and commerce. In other words, the liquid assets from the urban remittances made it possible for the marabouts to have a more improved rural holding. (Jansen, 2008).

Following the development regarding the status and position of the Brotherhoods, they made it possible for charismatic individuals to rise, creating powerful 'religious families'. For instance, the Mbacké within the Muridiyya, the Tall within the Tijaniyya. (Gifford, 2016) Material prosperity tends to overshadow spiritual fulfilment and prioritise the initial educational mission. (Jansen, 2008) Thus, it is not surprising that eventually the members of the Brotherhoods turned towards politics, or politicians discerned their potential in them.

An example of a more exclusive relationship between members of the Sufi Brotherhood and politicians is the case of President Abdoulaye Wade. In 2000 with the presidency of Wade, a new chapter emerged in Senegalese politics due to the fact that the President claimed to be a member of the Muridiyya Brotherhood. Previous presidents aimed to disengage the Brotherhoods from their politics. It is debated whether Wade encountered closer ties to the Brotherhood before his presidency in the 1960s. Nevertheless, the question emerges when discussing Wade: was he first part of the Muridiyya order and then a president, or did he put his place of the function above his identity and represent himself first as a president and then a part of the Brotherhood? (Babou, 2016, Galvan, 2001)

During the presidency of Wade, spectacular gestures were made toward the Muridiyya leadership. As a decisive move, the President identified the unique role of the city of Touba and started to handle the symbolic city as a preelection destination. After major developments, the government appeared at the ribbon-cutting ceremonies. (Koter, 2022) The town received a fund in 2007 for a modernisation program of up to 152 million euros. (Jeune Afrique, 2010) With

the privileges provided to the religious leaders, the so-called 'Senegalese social contact' was broken, which was aimed to sustain the balance between the 'temporal and spiritual power holders'. These privileges include the leaders receiving cash benefits, funding, and diplomatic passports. (Fowler, 2015)

Naturally, the government faced criticism from other Muslim communities, who resented the decline of secularism. (Beck, 2011) Moreover, the other significant Brotherhoods likewise opposed the direct favouritism of the Muridiyya, whose members tend to refrain from endorsing politicians openly. (BTI, 2020) The most controversial act of President Wade was bowing before the Caliph-general of the order in Touba on election day. (Villalón, 2011) Critical voices emerged within the Muridiyya among the members who feared the possibility of corruption within their circles and their order. Even religious leaders, notably the younger marabouts, became exposed to the dangers of losing their legitimacy. (Babou, 2016) These doubts and problems raise the question of how the population and the constitution perceive secularism in the country.

The term 'twin tolerance' was introduced at the beginning of the chapter. From this example of President Wade, it is visible that the concept was abused, and the framework of the 'social contact' faded away. Clientelism and the patron-client relationship replaced the conditions indicated above. Penda Mbow, in *Senegal: The Return of Personalism* (Mbow, 2008), apart from describing the details of the Presidency of Abdoulaye Wade, formulates the following conclusion. Although democracy has always been supported by the Sufi movements in the West African country, it was no longer possible to decide under President Wade whether the role of the Sufi Brotherhood could be described as a religious or socio-political entity. (Mbow, 2008)

An instance of this is the work of religious networks and organizations that motivate citizens to participate in politics. (Diallo, Kelly, 2016) In addition, the central leaders of Sufism, the Caliph-generals, was able to facilitate dialogue between the state and the Muslim population in case of a political crisis. (Camara, 2014)

Another intriguing aspect of Sufi leaders involved with power-related matters is the question of the role of the Brotherhoods in the development of Senegal. (Hill, 2017) Religious leaders have been involved in improving social welfare in the country. Although it is worth mentioning that most of the intercession was only on an informal level. One example is the redistribution of money offered to the less well-off layer of the population. Recently, NGOs were founded with the aim of socioeconomic development combined with religious aspects.

As a final example, the role of the Sufi Brotherhoods in education is worth highlighting. The leaders of the Brotherhood assembled the discipline of learning. (Cochrane, 2009) In rural *daaras*, their primary focus is religious study and communal agricultural work. The role of many *daaras* in sustainable agriculture in harsh rural conditions is emerging. Two examples of these are the Ndem and Mbakke Kajoor *daaras*.

In many cases, those who work there interpret the work as a religious task, but it is also possible that it appears only as an occupation related to agriculture. It implies that the aspiration to revitalize the environment also attracts non-Muslims, and citizens with different motives work together under the influence of the Brotherhoods. The significance of *daaras* is that this constitutes the way of living in the Muridiyya manner. Some of them require their participants to wear modest clothing, which is determined by rural norms. (Cochrane, 2021) In their educational activities, *daara* and *dahira* promote a moral worldview that ensures the continuity and cohesion of the Sufi order. (Babou, 2003)

The constitution of Senegal *de jure* bans Islamic political parties. The fourth article states that political parties must meet the requirement not to be biased by ethnicity, religion, geography, and language. However, the so-called 'tariqa-based' political parties seem to be controversial within the public assessment. One side argues that they fulfil all the criteria of being a legal and political party in Senegal. Of course, apart from the possibility of abusing their roles. The other side questions their affiliation to Islam and that they are very often Sufi-based. This feature, in a sense, enables political leaders to be viewed as spiritual guides. (Camara, 2014)

3. Women in Senegal and in the Brotherhoods

3.1. The situation of women in Senegal

Before establishing the role of women in the Sufi Brotherhoods, it is consequential to have an overview of women in Senegal. As the former female Prime Minister (from 2013 until 2014) of the country, Aminata Touré stated in an interview: 'looking at Senegal uncritically and thoughtlessly through the lens of a non-Senegalese person, it is not possible to understand the stance of gender equality in the state. The actual status of women and the degree of empowerment would be misleading.' (Touré, 2018, p.2.)

The second female prime minister⁶ showed the example of polygamy and women in higher positions. Western thinkers tend to perceive polygamous relationships as an oppressive cultural custom against women. If this were the only indicator taken into account when evaluating gender equality in the country, Senegal would be among the nations at the end of the list.

However, as previously stated, a significant number of women are in higher political positions. They are preceding many Western countries, traditionally perceived as a place where gender equality is high. Not only in political spheres, the proportion of women is high, but the institution, which is to a high extent male-dominant, had a female chief. That is, for the position of Chief of Police, a female officer was appointed. (Touré, 2018) Additionally, Major Seynabou Diouf received the UN Female Police Officer of the Year Award in 2019. (UN News, 2019)

However, there are spheres where women are not so fortunate and suffer from discrimination, abuse, and lack of equal pay. According to an interview conducted with Senegalese women, there should be an improvement in healthcare services, education, and violence against women according to their opinions. Senegal is considered an advanced country that provides boys and girls with equal access to primary and secondary schools compared to other states in West Africa. However, there are wage gaps at all positions and all rates are a disadvantage to reaching gender equality on a professional level. (Beck, Bertrand, 2020)

The interviewees highlighted that religion and therefore Islam play a vital role in the life of the country. In addition to being of paramount importance in everyday life, it also determines the position women can occupy in society. However, different Muslim groups present in the

⁶ The first female prime minister was Mame Madior Boye between 2001 to 2002.

country have different views and different attitudes against women, and it is considered crucial to cooperate with different religious leaders from now on.

There are several reasons for this; on the one hand, the institutions valued by society. On the other hand, the establishments also play a significant role in the role of the Senegalese state. Lastly, the interviewees highlighted that the law that aims to achieve gender equality could be seen as a foreshadowing of progress, but its implementation faces hardship most of the time. (Beck, Bertrand, 2020)

In work-related areas, the situation is not so promising; the participation of women in the labour force compared to the total participation of the labour force is below the average of the sub-Saharan African indicator. (Malta, Leyva, 2019)

3.2. Women in Sufi Brotherhoods

The Layen(iyya) Brotherhood stands out from the other three regarding its approach to women. (Gemmeke, 2009) Exceptionally, it encourages women to attend prayers in the mosques. It is generally denied among the Senegalese Muslim population to allow female believers to attend them, especially before their menopause. However, this remarkable exception is combined with laying forceful disciplines for women. For instance, to be married, refrain from the Lebu domain⁷, and be occupied at home. Therefore, the process of emerging female religious leaders, marabouts, or significant figures from members of the Layen(iyya) is relatively unlikely.

When talking about the roles of women in Brotherhoods, it is essential to state some crucial viewpoints. On the one hand, women are still a marginalised group within the Brotherhoods. Thus, several special rules apply to them. On the other hand, the exceptions stand beside the rule with a couple of notable female Muslim leaders and marabouts. Sufi Islam, in particular, allows women to carry out practices such as pilgrimages, i.e., in addition to the Meccan pilgrimage. However, it is worth mentioning that this exception allows women to visit the tomb of Diarra Bousso, who serves as a role model for many female Muslims. (Frede, Hill, 2014)

Mame Fatou Sène, in her work *Education for Girls and (re)Configured Gender Relations*, conducted an interview with an Islamic scholar called Aziz Kébé from Dakar. (Sène, 2016) In

⁷ The term Lebu is used to describe an ethnic group living in the Cap-Vert Peninsula who are specialists in the fishery. The majority of the Layen(iyya) Brotherhood consists of people from the Lebu domain, but it is not exclusive to them. (Keese, 2019)

his opinion, the under-schooling of girls in Senegal was a fault and a failure of the Sufi Brotherhoods. The reason for this, he said, is that the emphasis on schooling and teaching is primarily on educating boys. This phenomenon leads to the perception that men are generally prepared to take on leadership roles during their school years, particularly in the Brotherhoods. Alternatively, they choose the other option: spreading Islamic knowledge by themselves by becoming Muslim teachers or marabouts. (Séne, 2016)

This line of thought harmonises with the concept that lack of Islamic knowledge of women generates a comprehension that the Islamic experiences of women are less Islamic than the experiences of men. Thus, the authority of women is often challenged by gender norms and called into question. (Hill, 2021) The following paragraphs will display the recent opportunities of young Senegalese women regarding their newly opened opportunities for their studies, accordingly within the Brotherhoods.

From the 1950s, the Senegalese, who graduated in Arab countries, brought back with them the ideas of the 'reformist movement'. In contrast to classical Quranic, Sufi-type schools preferred to open new institutions with a different Muslim character. Their number increased rapidly, leading to the democratisation of Islamic education. In schools, students are taught not only about religion, but also about Arabic literature and primary elementary education using didactic tools. The teaching is done by marabouts or other teachers. (Dia, Hugon, 2016, d'Aiglepiere, Bauer, 2016)

The increase in the number of the new institutions, the demand of the state, nongovernmental actors, parents, and students pressured the Muslim leaders to reform their schools. (Newman, 2016) Some of the nonformal institutions remained, such as *daaras*. In Arab-Islamic schools, the ratio of girls is higher. (d'Aiglepiere, Bauer, 2016) Furthermore, some schools operate exclusively with female students. The most impressive is the Mame Diarra *Daara* in Porokhane, which hosts hundreds of girls. (Séne, 2016)

Before displaying further roles women could fill within the Sufi Brotherhood, a few distinctions should be made between the formal and informal influence women can make. First, it is essential to establish that although women cannot possess specific roles, such as Imam or the Caliph of a Brotherhood, their role is crucial. At the same time, the female relatives of the male Caliphs or the Imams, principally their wives or daughters, are prominent social figures. (Séne, 2016)

Although the main occupation of Senegalese women may not directly cause religious change, other activities they carry out or decisions in which they play a decisive role may be of great importance. The aforementioned results in that Senegalese women see themselves as a part of the Sufi Brotherhoods and are willing to adhere to specific groups and formation within the Brotherhood and depend on the hierarchy of the Sufi order. (Creevey, 1996)

One of those formations is the *dahiras*, or religious associations, in which the scope of duties, responsibilities, and interests changed over the decades. The first Muridiyya *dahira* was founded by Cheikh Mbakke, one of the grandsons of Amadou Bamba, in the 1940s. The initial concept of Cheikh Mbakke was to lay the foundation of a sphere where solidarity would be enhanced. Since the urban Muridiyya community was growing significantly, the need for such an organisation was formulated. Thus, local prayer circles were formed that gathered weekly to read the Quran and chant religious verses. (Blanchard, 2019, Babou, 2002)

The emergence of new *dahiras* has made it possible to create spaces centered on gender, geography, and occupations. Later, the Sufi Brotherhoods began to internalise the organisations. (Babou, 2002) Since then, the commencement of collecting funds for marabouts began. The *dahiras* slowly formed into groups that supported women and served as a space for women to converse about their daily lives. (Marks, 2019)

The above-described process did not mean that males would be excluded from the *dahiras*, but several groups were formed that were exclusively available for females. Currently, only male, only female, and mixed-gender *dahiras* can be found, although previously only *dahiras* of the same sex were present. However, most women prefer the female-only version. Females fully commit to the *dahiras* because, by belonging to them, they are perceived as full members of the Brotherhoods. According to the second explanation, women are allowed to manifest themselves spiritually in the public sphere. Moreover, they respect their identity, traditions, and language in this way. Lastly, by contacting a marabout, their problems can also be solved. (Bop, 2005)

4. Marabouts

4.1. The description of marabouts and the Baye Falls

The term marabout comes from the Arabic word *murabit*, used for 'monk-soldiers', originating from *ribat*, an institution used for military-religious purposes. (Gemmeke, 2011, Chabbi, 1995) In western Sahara, they Islamised the Berbers during the 11th and 12th centuries. Nowadays, in West Africa, this term is used for both men and women as an honorific title. People who acquired the unique abilities and pieces of knowledge to be able to conduct the activities of marabouts, as a general principle, ought to be between forty and fifty years old, given that the individuals by that stage of life gained the knowledge to become a marabout. (Balonon-Rosen, 2013)

The marabout serves as a person who provides various services, not only in the Senegalese context but also in a broader West African setting. Activities range from being an Islamic scholar and teaching pupils in Quranic schools to performing esoteric actions. Some examples of their capabilities are prayers and blessings, knowledge about herbalism and curing illnesses, advice or protection based on amulets and spells, and numerology. (UNICEF, 2012; Calvet, 2010)

The popularity and worship of marabouts appear and can be noticed in everyday life. When traveling by bus, the public walls are decorated with the portraits of former and current marabouts. Their media presence is also compelling due to media coverage, in which journalists, television hosts, and other media personalities address the activities and achievements of marabouts. Because marabouts nowadays by choice present themselves on such platforms, their presence is growing even more. The Sufi masters, throughout their religious authority, managed to translate their power into political influence. (Beck, 2008)

An example of a diverse media presence is the AMINA magazine, which offers content in Africa and a European context. For instance, Mr Ary advertises himself as a person who can solve love and family issues problems. (Szilasi, 2010) During the author was searching on social media and other platforms for female marabouts to interview, a wide variety of marabouts were advertising themselves on these sites. Most of them displayed a picture of themselves, a tool for their activities or something they sacrificed. Nevertheless, most importantly they posted, their phone number so that clients could reach them on Whatsapp. The most faithful and

devotional servants of the marabouts are the so-called Baye⁸ Falls. Both women and men can attain this position. Thus, the female version is called Yaye⁹ Fall. Fall is a reference to Sheikh Ibrahima Fall (ca 1858–1930), one of the first disciples of Amadou Bamba, who founded the Muridiyya Brotherhood.. The devotion of Cheikh Ibrahima Fall to his leader, Amadou Bamba, can be described as slave-like since he entirely dedicated himself to his master by performing any physical work for him. Today Baye Falls follow the way of living of Sheikh Ibrahima Fall, serving their marabout voluntarily, but with the possibility of accepting material goods in exchange. Their dreadlocks and colourful clothes make them easily recognisable. (Savishinsky, 1994; Szilasi, 2013)

Moreover, the devotion to marabouts is still present in our days. However, the degree of dedication can differ according to the Baye Falls. Some of them fully occupy themselves with serving the needs of the marabouts. Thus, exclude the possibility of having another job or even a family. In contrast, those who only lend a helping hand in their free time are able to have an occupation and a household. For the latter, their chances of being of assistance to their marabouts abroad are not limited. Their transnational character, which consists of their religious practices and shared beliefs, connects them worldwide. (Szilasi, 2014; Glover, 2007)

These shared principles, based on the views of Mbaye, a Baye Fall member of the Layen(iyya) Brotherhood, are helping, loving, and sharing. During the interview, he highlighted that the most outstanding merit is assistance. (Pásztor-Mbaye, 2022)

Moreover, Mbaye also represents the transnational characteristics of the Baye Falls. First and foremost, he was raised and schooled in Senegal and spent his early adolescence there. After working in the National Theatre of Senegal, he decided to expand his career paths as a singer, a dancer, and a dance teacher. Then he committed himself to move first to Hungary, then to Switzerland. Supplementary to his perception of dancing and music as a therapeutic and healing activity, he attaches importance to the mutual values that unite the Baye Falls in their lives. Not only by assisting, but also by the importance of the hard work promoted by Amadou Bamba.

He further elaborated on the topic of the upbringing of Baye Falls by explaining the role of God in their lives. In addition, he also referred to the tendency that they would be taught throughout their lives that they could not commit any wrongdoing. He mentioned killing as an example. (Pásztor-Mbaye, 2022)

⁸ Baye means father in Wolof.

⁹ Yaye means mother in Wolof

4.2. The influence of marabouts

The significant influence of marabouts will be displayed in the following example recorded by Emma Carroll. (Carroll, 2015) Traditionally marabouts fulfil the position of an advice-giver in cases, for instance, a woman having hardships finding a husband when she reaches a certain age. The marabout, in this matter, may give the woman guidance on possible steps and opportunities. A marabout could bless the child or protect them from evil spirits (*raabs*). The latter is done by selling talismans dedicated to spiriting away the *raabs*. (Balonon-Rosen, 2013, Carroll, 2015)

The example is as follows: A Senegalese man lost his phone, in despair he decided to ask advice from the marabout to help him find the culprit. To solve the problem, the marabout asked the man to list all the people who had visited his house. The number of possible committers was 27 from which he listed family members, friends, the laundry lady and the maid. The marabout chose the latter, who was confronted with the decision. The maid denied the accusation, and the man decided not to fire the lady, since he handled the verdict of the marabout with scepticism.

This attitude is typical among younger Senegalese people, who tend to be more sceptical towards marabouts. At the end of the story, the man still fired the maid because the woman started to spread rumours about the accusation of her stealing from the man. In any case, this story demonstrates that marabouts have a significant influence on the society of Senegal. Even though their actions are met with scepticism. (Carroll, 2015)

As stated earlier, marabouts are responsible for teaching and patronising children in Quranic schools, also known as *daaras*. However, the course of proceedings in some cases is highly debated and opposed. The *talibés* are exposed to slavery, child labour, and forms of abuse by their de facto guardian. In several urban *daaras*, marabouts require children to beg on the street to cover their education needs. However, a small amount of what they collect is to their benefit. They are often compelled to suffer from hunger. Additionally, their basic needs are not met, such as shelter and healthcare.

If *talibés* do not meet their daily quota, which consists of bringing money or rice and sugar, it is likely that their marabout will physically abuse them. Due to the prioritisation of begging over Quranic learning, marabouts compel children to perform activities that fall under the form

of child labour, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). (Chehami, 2016, ILO 2021, Human Rights Watch, 2010)

The power of marabouts can also be seen here, since the authorities in such cases would choose to avoid going against the religious leaders. The Senegalese government, recognising the issue, started an initiative aimed at regulating *daaras* between 2010 and 2012. Senegal is part of the major treaties at the international and regional levels. For instance, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Talibés should steer clear of begging on the streets and being abused by their marabouts. (Human Rights Watch, 2010)

In light of the thesis, a deeper look into the dynamics between marabouts and the Senegalese government is needed in the question of abolishing child begging. First, it is essential to establish that although marabouts do not directly participate in decision-making, they still play a significant role in maintaining the stability and viability of particular politicians and the government. In some cases, the number of followers can grow so tremendously that their support and contribution to a specific candidate might influence the proportions of the votes on the competitors.

From a different point of view, for marabouts, it is favourable to be preferred by the system that would preserve their roles. In other words, they are interested in maintaining and perpetuating the status quo. Thus, the structures from which these groups benefit will remain in place until an actor dares to change the problematic practices. However, it is improbable that those who will seek transformation will benefit from the socioeconomic priorities. (Zoumanigui, 2016)

It is also vital to understand the point of view of parents who send their children to a marabout. They act in this way, hoping their child will receive decent Quranic teaching. Hence, in the future, they could become holy persons. Correspondingly, some marabouts are also perceived as sacred people. One child who has to beg for the marabouts, called Omar, was asked by Lilla Schumicky. The boy said that his consolation is that according to his marabout, he can wish for something that will be fulfilled if he meets certain conditions. This criterion is to donate enough money to the biggest marabout in the holy city of Senegal, Touba. (Schumicky, 2008)

In order to better understand the role and positions of marabouts, their redistributive function ought to be highlighted. The following will be done by examining the grand *magal*, the festive activity of the most influential Brotherhood in Senegal, the Muridiyya. Every year hundreds of thousands, or in certain years millions of people make a pilgrimage to the holy city of the Sufi

order, to the tomb of Amadou Bamba. In recent years, the number of pilgrims was around four to five million. Believers are welcomed from Senegal and surrounding countries and from outside the continent.

The grand *magal* creates an opportunity for the members of the Brotherhood to consult with their marabouts in Touba. Moreover, other activities are held, such as conferences and debates between representatives of the Sufi communities. (Sokhna, Goumballa, 2020, Coulon, 1999) During the event, marabouts host and feed millions of people, the costs of the feasts are covered by the contribution of their disciples. (Szilasi, 2014)

Abdu, a Senegalese man from the Muridiyya Brotherhood, contributed with his experience regarding this topic. For the question on when he will go to a marabout, he first answered the grand *magal*. The reason for this is that he is currently in the United Kingdom, so he makes a pilgrimage to the town of Touba and consults with his marabout, or as he described: 'the Doctor of faith whose role is to advise the Sunnah and the recommendations of the word of Allah (Koran)'. Other than that, he speaks to the marabout two to three times a month on the phone. (Pásztor-Abdu, 2022)

One last element that tones the judgment of marabouts is the differences between them based on their perspective on traditional Sufi tenets. According to Kate Kingsbury, two different generations of marabouts emerged in Senegal. (Kingsbury, 2018) To one of the groups belong the marabouts, who behave in accordance with their primary function, i.e., as the scholars of Islam. This includes dedicating time to occupying themselves with the Quran, fluency in Arabic, and practising *dhikr*, i.e., the ritual of the remembrance (of God)¹⁰.

The other generation devotes more time to politics and business and does not wear traditional attire. These marabouts have a tendency to apply to the needs of the youth. Their discourse often revolves around modern Muslim phenomena. The paper states that many Senegalese people might not sympathise with the new wave of marabouts but will be more critical of the corrupt politicians. This attitude might be due to the different power relationships of politicians and religious leaders. (Kingsbury, 2018)

The above-mentioned aligns with the opinion of Mbaye and Abdu. The former highlighted the difference between the two generations. He said that there are 'good and bad marabouts', but

¹⁰ Dhikr is superior to any other kind of worship, considering that the Quran prescribes it every moment. Whereas, for instance, fasting or the pilgrimage has its given time. (Mohamed, 2013) As it is stated in the Quran: 'I am God. There is no deity save Me: so worship Me alone, and say your prayers in My remembrance.' (The Quran 20:14)

the real marabouts, according to him, can be found predominantly in villages nowadays. Their activity consists of respecting God and teaching how to read the Quran. Politicians or the government often approach those involved in politics, and they recognise that the high number of students behind them could contribute to winning the elections. He added that in some instances, they share money.

When it comes to judging this relationship between politics and religion, he explained that the marabouts who accept these requests 'are on their way'. Concerning politicians, all he added was that the help of a religious leader was a way for them to gain political power.

Abdu explained that Islam does not exclude marabouts from being affiliated with politics. He then brought up the example that, thanks to politics, Islam extended to Andalusia as well. Notably to present-day Spain, Portugal, and part of France from 711 to 1485.¹¹ On the other hand, he pointed out that corruption has become an integral part of Senegalese politics. All these harmful factors are contrary to the Muslim philosophy¹² and the Sunnah.

Lastly, he quoted a famous sentence from Cheikh Amadou Bamba: 'Un marabout qui s'associe aux politiciens, c'est comme une mouche qui se pose sur des excréments'. The quotation loosely translates to: 'A marabout who associates with the politician is like a fly that lands on excrement'. This saying demonstrates the viewpoint of how the first generation of religious leaders saw the role of marabouts and their relationship with politics. (Pásztor-Mbaye, 2022, Pásztor-Abdu, 2022)

4.3. Female marabouts

Despite the fact that marabouts can be both women and men, the esoteric Islamic field in Senegal is male-dominated. In contrast to the continually growing media presence of male marabouts, females who fill the same position receive less attention in the media and scientific literature. However, female relatives of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood are surrounded by great respect.

A couple of famous female marabouts from the past will be provided as examples in the following section. Sokhna Magat Diop (ca 1917–2003), whose fame was due to her family

¹¹ Spain and Portugal were under Muslim rule from 711 until 1492, until the fall of Granada. (Kennedy, 1996) In the Southern part of France, Muslims were present from 711 until 750 (Versteegh, 1990)

¹² Here philosophy does not refer to the philosophy of science but to a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour.

connections, was an influential religious leader of the Muridiyya Brotherhood. As the oldest daughter of Serigne Abdoulaye Yakhine Diop, she succeeded her father as the caliph of the order and enjoyed full authority until her death. In other respects, her first marriage was to Cheikh Ibrahima Fall (the establisher of the Baye Fall movement), and after his death, she married a younger brother of Amadou Bamba¹³.

Sokhna Magat Diop had the opportunity to appoint imams, perform ritual prayers, and organise yearly pilgrimages and other ceremonies. In addition, she was able to communicate with spirits and treat the mental and physical problems of her followers. As a marabout, she provided amulets and potions. (Gemmeke, 2009; Gemmeke, 2012; Lake, 1997)

Sokhna Maïmouna Mbacké (1925–1999), a member of the Muridiyya Brotherhood, a direct relative of the founder, is respected as a saint. Apart from having male and female disciples, she made great efforts to celebrate *laylat al-qadr* during Ramadan¹⁴. In 1952 she received the approval of the Caliph-general. Later, this holiday became registered in the Muridiyya Calendar. (Abdullah, 2010, Mourides TV HD, 2019) Hadjia Saïda Oumoulkhairy Ibrahim Niasse (b. 1941), a female marabout currently living in Niger, also gained fame due to family ties, but this time to the Tijaniyya Brotherhood. Among the goals of Hadjia Oumoulkhairy is to provide Franco-Arab education to girls and women with the help of NGOs and the government. In addition, other issues related to women, such as improving and expanding maternal and child healthcare, and to improve the skills of women in income-generating fields, are also important. (Gemmeke, 2009)

The most famous female marabout is probably the mother of the founder of the Muridiyya Brotherhood, Diarra Bousso (1833–1866). Her popularity reached a point where her worship evolved into a cult, and her tomb is a pilgrimage destination for annual vagabondry. It is one of the reasons that the cult of Diarra Bousso and motherhood is flourishing today. She is glorified as a bounteous and selfless female. (Rosander, 2015) The special reverence for her is also for the reason that many fables were born about her character, which could be best described as humble-hearted. Furthermore, the majority of Senegalese consider devoted religiosity to be exemplary. (Szilasi, 2014) According to Allen Roberts and Mary Roberts, the various paintings,

¹³ Founder of the Brotherhood.

¹⁴ The Night of Decree, i.e. the night during which, according to Islamic belief, the Quran was sent down from Heaven and when its first verses were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. (Plessner, 1995) 'We sent it [Quran] down on the Night of Destiny. And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; on that night, the angels and the Spirit come down by the permission of their Lord with His decrees for all matters; it is all peace till the break of dawn.' (The Quran 97)

art pieces, and glassworks that portray Mame Diarra Bousso can serve as a mirror of the women of the Muridiyya Brotherhood. Since she serves as the ideal woman for women of Senegal. (Roberts, Roberts, 2002)

After the most critical historical female marabout figures, the next part will focus on contemporary examples. Hill in *Wrapping Authority Women: Islamic Leaders in a Sufi Movement in Dakar, Senegal* portrays more than seven women referred to as *muqaddamas*. (Hill, 2018) The reason for the different terminology is based on two factors. Firstly, to the term marabout, a pejorative connotation is linked. Second, these women self-apply the phrase used in the Tijaniyya Brotherhood, as the vast majority of the discussed females belong to that group.

A shared characteristic of the *muqaddamas* is that they are able to form a numbersome circle of disciples; some of them even formed more than one. Similarly, in the case of male marabouts, the disciples raise money for their master and the contributions are used to cultivate their community. Some *muqaddamas* entirely devote their time to fulfilling their role as spiritual leaders; others pursue a career besides. (Hill, 2018)

Christian Bobst, a photographer, captured several pictures of Zeyda Moussoukoro Mbaye while praying with her disciples and receiving her followers (around 600 people). She is not only a spiritual leader but also an entrepreneur with nearly 60 employees. As a member of the Tijaniyya Brotherhood, she also refers to herself as a *muqaddama*. (Bobst, 2018, 2020) Her power and popularity lie, among others, in her gender. According to one of his male disciples, he feels more connected to her merely because she is a woman. Apart from being a spiritual leader, Zeyda Moussoukoro Mbaye is a member of the Kaolack Chamber of Commerce and the founder of an international network dedicated to businesswomen. (Koeckritz, 2020)



Figure 1: Female marabout, Zeyda Moussoukoro Mbaye with her followers in 2018 (Source: Bobst, 2018)



Figure 2: Female marabout, Zeyda Moussoukoro Mbaye with her followers in 2020 (Source: Bobst, 2020)

Ndeye Meissa Ndiaye and Coumba Keita are both marabouts with a large base of clients, even from Europe and the United States of America. The former performs divination besides 'working' with potions and amulets. The family of Ndeye Meissa Ndiaye is influential in Dokhoba since her sister is a marabout there and her brother is a caliph. Although she does not

live with them, the marabout was able to build a momentous transnational client base. Owing to many followers, the Caliph-general of the Layen(iyya) Brotherhood gifted a piece of land to her. The latter performs dream interpretation and holds prayer sessions. (Gemmeke, 2009)

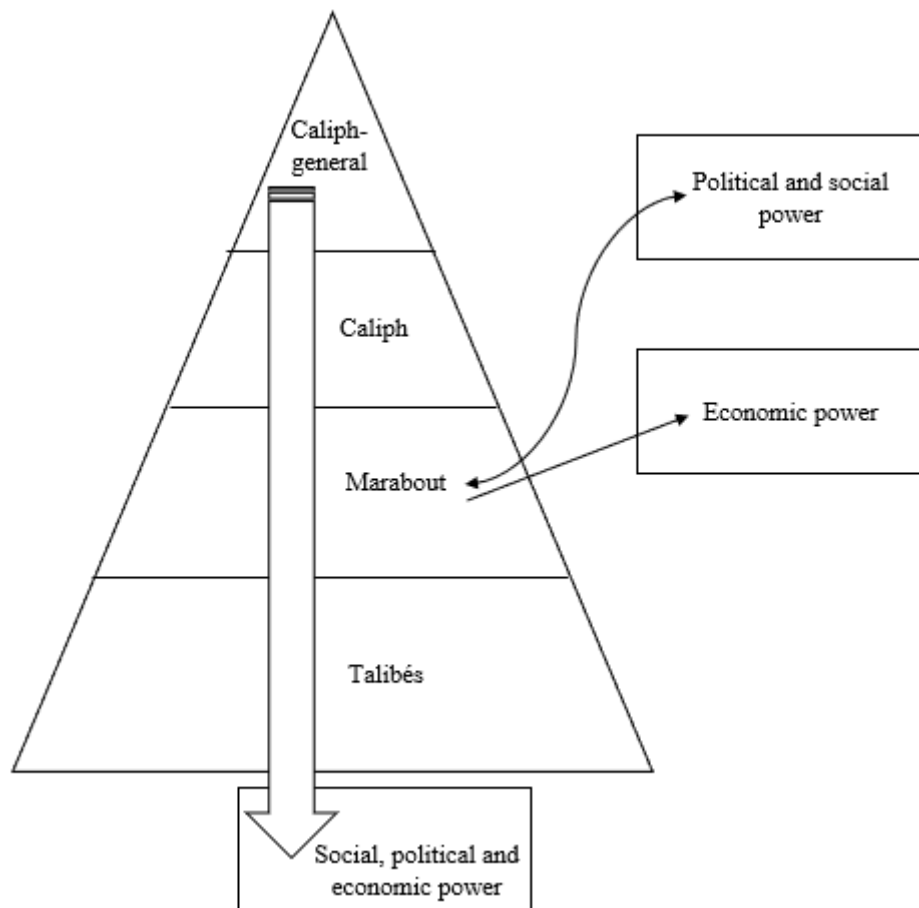


Figure 3: The Structure and the influence of the Brotherhoods (Source: Made by the author)

The figure serves as a summary of the previous sections. First, it can be seen how the actors in each position within the Brotherhood relate to each other. As already mentioned, the structure is characterized by a hierarchical system. Furthermore, the social, economic and social influences and relationships of the Brotherhoods are also visible.

The thick arrows indicate the ability of the Caliph-general to influence. By setting the direction for the entire Brotherhood to follow, the principal leader exercises social, economic, and political power through the hierarchical system and its position. An example of the former is the case of the third Calip-general of the Muridiyya. Abdu Lahad Mbacke (1968–1988) encouraged the Brotherhood to establish domination above the informal sector of the

Senegalese economy. (Babou, 2007) One instance of this is the authorization of the Caliph-general to act as a mediator in the country in the event of a political crisis. (Bop, 2005)

Regarding the marabouts, their position entitles them to manifest power within the structure of the Brotherhood throughout the *talibés*, but they also have an opportunity to influence on their own, as is the case in economic power. In addition, political and social authority is initiated in both ways.

5. Interviews

5.1. Description of the circumstances of the interviews

Firstly, the circumstances of the interview with the female marabout, called Mame Dior Ndiaye will be described. Contacting a female marabout from Hungary is a demanding process due to several factors. The number of female marabouts is significantly lower compared to their male counterparts. Consequently, finding a suitable interviewee is highly challenging. In addition, in several cases, their access to internet services and electricity is restricted. Thus, a contact person was needed who could ask the questions of the female marabout and forward the answers to the author. Notwithstanding, the responses were detailed enough to be concluded in the thesis as a structured interview.

The second interview was conducted with Mbaye, who was introduced to the author through a Hungarian NGO dedicated to Africa. Mbaye answered the questions via phone call since at the time of the interview he was not in Hungary. The format is a semi-structured interview. The significance of the answers lies in the fact that the interviewee is a Baye Fall, so he is closely related to a marabout. In addition, two other people were interviewed in writing. Hence these were structured interviews. The answers of Abdu were notable because he was able to express his viewpoint as a member of the Muridiyya Brotherhood, which in several ways serves as a highlighted example in the analysis. The responses of the female Senegalese person, who did not consent to feature her name in the thesis, contributed to the thesis by serving as an example. Namely, a case where a person is a member of the Brotherhood yet does not use the services of marabouts.

5.2. Interview with a female marabout

Mame Dior Ndiaye is a female marabout located in Rufisque¹⁵, in the proximity of Dakar. Besides being a marabout, she does not have a job; she described being a marabout as her daily activity. On the basis of the number of her clients, she would not have (enough) time to pursue another career. Her clients arrive at her home all day from the morning until the evening. Usually, she deals with 30 to 50 people per day. From 9 am to 5 pm, she is visited every hour

¹⁵ The location allowed the city to become a transport hub due to the nearness to the capital and the position at the end of the Cape Peninsula. Thus, the town is also home to several markets. (Britannica, 2015)

by four to six people who require her help. She usually succeeds in creating a confidential atmosphere with her clients; accordingly, they become her returning guests. The problems she solves are primarily in the areas of job search, love, marriage, and protection from evil spirits and enemies.

She could not recall a specific process of how one can become a female marabout. Notwithstanding, her maternal family knows what it takes for someone to become one. She believes that her innate ability was inherited through dreams, experiences, and revelations. Moreover, she described her ability to anticipate events. Mame Dior Ndiaye uses tree-based amulets in her daily work. For this purpose, different tree parts, such as leaves, roots, and barks, are used. Some marabouts draw Quranic verses during their activities, however, Mame Dior Ndiaye only uses them orally. She described her favourite part of being a marabout as throwing cowries, i.e., practising cowrie-shell divination¹⁶.

Although Mame Dior Ndiaye is affiliated with a Sufi Brotherhood, namely the Tijaniyya, as a marabout, her practices are not done within the framework of the Brotherhood. She characterized her feelings for being a female marabout in a way that the woman in possession of esoteric knowledge is respected and people generally trust her. Additionally, female marabouts usually receive many questions and inquiries.

She sees her influence on the population primarily in that she has a positive effect on her customers, helps them, and thus gains recognition and respect among her clients. She emphasized several times the mutual trust that develops between herself and her guests. This aspect holds great importance regarding the research question. If the female marabouts live up to the expectations of the clients, the advantageous position within the population will continue to grow. In addition, some aspire to enter the circles of the marabouts, wanting to form closer friendships with the female marabouts in her circles. Accordingly, she did not focus on the

¹⁶ Divination can be done by various means, in addition to cowrie shells with water, the Quran, and sand. Genuine clairvoyance aims to predict the future, and hence, according to the saying, the shells will not lie. In Dakar, cowries are the most common form of predicting the destiny of a client, based on the interpretation of the number of shells. Lastly, the location of the devices shows the positive and negative omens for the marabout.

However, some people believe that pursuing such activities should not be tolerated, or even others say that these practices are sinful. One reason for this can be that if a marabout has such a significant influence on their client that she can determine their future, the person might tend to forget God. (Chappatte, 2015) During the interview with Mbaye, he added that a person who believes in God should not practice voodoo or follow any other un-Islamic occupation. (Pásztor-Mbaye, 2022)

For further literature on the topic and about the non-Islamic origin of divination see: Anne Regourd, with the collaboration of A. Julliard, "Le jet de coquillages divinatoire en Islam arabe et en Afrique subsaharienne: première contribution à une étude comparative", *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 11(2000–2002), 2003, 133–149

political side in answering the question. Moreover, she has no *talibés*, meaning the primary source of influence mentioned earlier is not available to Mame Dior Ndiaye.

Compared to other women, who are not marabouts, her opportunities are significantly better. As she worded, marabout women will have more luck, since most of the time the marabouts are occupied with clients. Thus, it is inevitable that the marabouts become more present, seen in the communities. Some female marabouts achieve such recognition and power so they are widely considered famous and popular.

The last question of the interview was centred around the possibilities of female marabouts gaining political authority by being marabouts. Thus, the response of Mame Dior Ndiaye holds high significance since the thesis aims to find an answer to this question. She answered the following: 'Of course, you gain political power because politicians associate with you, and when they win, they solicit you all the time.' Meaning that politicians not only enter into partnerships with male marabouts but also with their female counterparts. In light of the analysis, the term 'all the time' is also relevant. The expression can be interpreted as a continuous connection with political power, not limited to winning elections. It also includes the possibility of building a client system like in the case of some male marabouts. (Pásztor- Female marabout, 2022)

5.3. Interview with three Senegalese people

In the following part, the answers of Mbaye will be discussed. He provided the following response to the question of whether he would turn to a marabout if he had problems. His response was limited to physical health issues and did not cover other areas, such as recommendations related to family or love. In the event of a severe illness, he would automatically seek the help of a doctor.

On the other hand, if the situation is not difficult, he would go to a marabout. Mbaye provided an example of a fever. In order to overcome this sickness, a marabout can prepare a special tea for him. However, he expressed the problem with marabouts prescribing traditional medicine to their clients. The foundation of his concerns lay in the notion that marabouts cannot decide on the exact amount to give their clients.

Mbaye finds no difference between male and female marabouts regarding the previous question. However, his immediate answer to visiting female marabouts was rejective. Later, when he thought about it more, his opinion became more permissive. Then he substantiated his claim

that if they could give him some unique products, he would use the services provided by a female marabout. An example of this is massage oil, which women with esoteric knowledge would produce. He would use the product, for instance, for back pain. Concluding his answer, he added that for female marabouts, having a husband can be a relevant factor that can influence their assessment by the population.

He explained that the reason for him, personally not knowing any female marabouts can be partly a result of the male-female ratio of marabouts in Senegal. According to his knowledge, the percentage is distributed as 80% of them are men and 20% are women. In his view, this ratio may also contribute to the fact that, as he sees, female marabouts have less chance of gaining political power than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, if women marabouts have enough supporters behind them or a large number of students, it cannot be ruled out that they will gain political influence through their followers. (Pásztor-Mbaye, 2022)

At the same time Abdu, the other interviewee, highlighted the difference between visiting a female and a male marabout. If a person visits a marabout woman, they are not allowed to shake her hand. The reason for this is that Islam prohibits a man from physically touching a woman unless she is a family member (grandmother, mother, sister). This attitude appeared in the possibility of being a client of a female marabout.

The standpoint of Abdu of female marabouts being affiliated with politics is similar to the point of view of Mbaye. There is no hindrance in terms of having the adequate skills to carry out this partnership. He complemented that he considers the position of the marabouts to be acceptable until the political influence of a female or a male marabout meets the needs of the population. (Pásztor-Abdu, 2022)

In her response, the female interviewee explained that although she is a member of the Muridiyya Brotherhood, she does not turn to either female or male marabout to solve her problems. The reason for this is that her religion does not allow her to participate in non-Islamic practices. (Pásztor-Female interviewee, 2022)

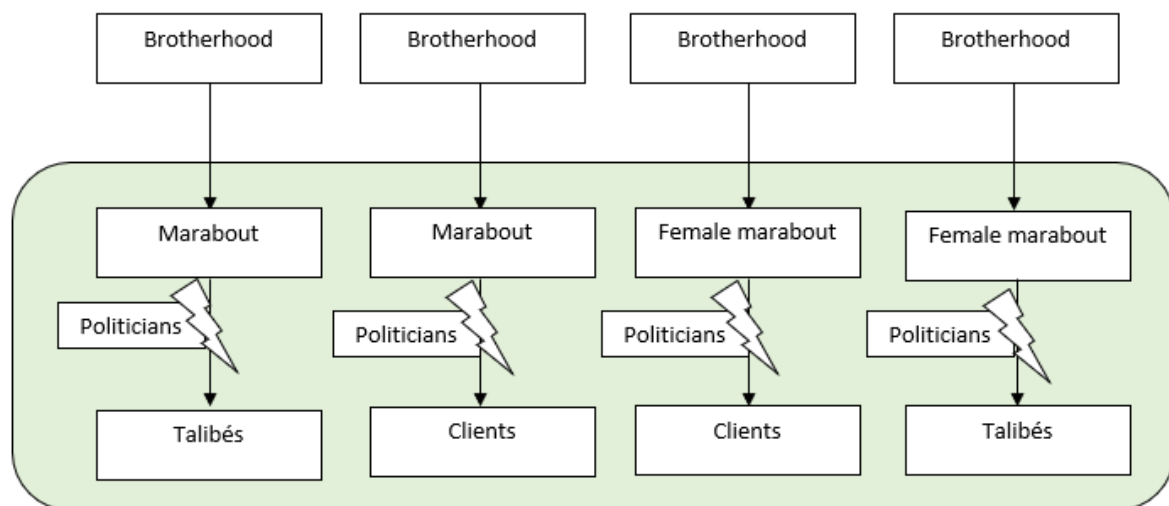


Figure 4: The origin of the political influence of marabouts (Source: Made by the author)

Based on the interviews described above, the figure shows the possible variations in which marabouts perform their activities and with whom they interact in the meantime. The order of the four columns is decisive¹⁷, as it represents the possibilities according to their occurrence based on the analysis and the interviews.

Therefore, the first one displays the case where the marabout teaches *talibés* within the Brotherhood. As already mentioned, politicians contact them because of their large followers. In the case of the second column, politicians are given a reason to reach out to the marabouts due to a large number of clients. The third and fourth columns show the same opportunities for women. The green frame separates the marabouts from the Brotherhoods, thus depicting when they are operating outside the Brotherhoods.

¹⁷ Seen from left to right.

6. Conclusion

The research aimed to find an answer to the question: '*Do female maraboutic practices in the Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal influence the political power of women?*'. To provide a comprehensive background to the answer to the research question, first, the essence of the most considerable parts and segments will be summarised.

The first chapter introduced the four Brotherhoods and demonstrated the characteristics of Sufism in Senegal. It was essential to establish the latter, since the Sufi character encompasses the Senegalese community, and the economic, cultural and political sphere, creating a unique ambience in the country. The Brotherhoods not only form a crucial part of the identities of the people, but also enable them to have an extensive social network, which is indispensable to pursuing a political career.

As Fig. 3 shows – which, among other things, presents the structure of the Brotherhood – the prominent role of the Caliph-general alone is sufficient to gain political influence. Since the state can turn to them and involve them in politics as mediators in case of political problems. It is also worth emphasizing that the Brotherhoods are surrounded by great esteem and attention as leaders because of their place in society.

The last segment of the first chapter further investigated the role of the Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal. Thus, the political and social situation in Senegal, the so-called political clientelism, the clientelist democracy, the patron-client system, the Senegalese social contract, and the not always respected twin tolerance support the favourable environment for cooperation between politicians and marabouts. From another point of view, collaboration creates the process indicated by the listed concepts. Although the constitution *de jure* bans the Islamic political parties, the '*tariqa*-based' parties are present in the country. Since the Brotherhoods interweave everyday life and almost every corner of society to the depicted extent, it would be challenging for a Muslim to create a party that is by no means affiliated with the Brotherhoods.

After seeing this exceptional social situation in Senegal, the position of women in this context is even more intriguing. On the one hand, Senegal overtakes many other West African countries regarding the conditions of women. Especially female representation and women in leading positions. On the other hand, compared to Western standards, the employment circumstances, the proportion of illiteracy, and the pay gap between women and men are not promising.

However, as African Islamic Womenism entails, the country specificities should also be taken into account, such as less visible and less prominent cases.

The *daaras* allow women to receive adequate education and prevent them from falling behind the boys, who have more opportunities in the school system. As already mentioned, the Brotherhoods have a great responsibility in schooling. One way of moving forward is the situation of the education of girls that women should have well-respected positions. Although they may not possess more positions, such as caliph-general, their informal role is more important within the order. With the formation of the *dahiras*, not only are they treated as full members of the Brotherhoods, but with the help of informal circles, their togetherness and spiritual fulfilment are strengthened.

The first two parts of the third chapter describe the influence of marabouts. In light of answering the research question, the role of *talibés* and Baye Falls is the most significant. Both create a large number of disciples, followers, and devoted workers for the marabouts. However, it is also important to point out that there are two generations of marabouts. The ones who occupy themselves with only Islamic teaching are more esteemed for many Senegalese than the group that plays a more significant role in politics and business. It can be said that many Senegalese treat marabouts with criticism, especially those who do divination and prepare amulets and potions.

It can be concluded that the most recognized female marabouts, who gained popularity or around whom even a cult developed, attained their recognition from one of their male relatives, be it their father or husband. On the contrary, the female marabouts who are less popular at the national level but recognized in their circle show great variety concerning their backgrounds and the way they have become a marabout. Some do not deal with anything other than receiving clients, and others are businesswomen or employ *talibés*.

Mame Dior Ndiaye belongs to the female marabouts who deal with clients and help them solve their problems, but she practices, for instance, divination outside of the framework of the Brotherhood. The other three interviewees had different approaches to marabouts and female marabouts. The Senegalese woman believes that these practices are against Islam. Mbaye, on the other hand, would ask for help from a marabout, even a woman, but only on issues that do not affect his health to a great extent. Eventually, Abdu would turn to both female and male marabouts and even regularly seeks help from a male marabout.

The two figures and the last part, during which the conclusions were drawn, have already given a partial answer to the question. But the answer can be more nuanced in the following way. Female maraboutic practices alone do not contribute to the political role of women. The examples show that the circle built around the marabouts, the followers, disciples, and *talibés* is the real political force and the source of social esteem. This political force is better expressed by social influence, which can turn into political power. The other part of the question is whether the political influence occurs within the Sufi Brotherhoods and the following can be answered to this: The experiences show a mixed picture, and there are examples of people working outside and inside the group.

In addition, the claim that 'especially from 2000 until the present day, the Sufi Brotherhoods and the position marabout enabled women to participate in politics or gain more political power', is partly confirmed. As no examples were found of female politicians who were marabouts, the first part did not confirm. On the other hand, the female marabouts, which are not related to any male relatives in position, gained their social and political influence since the presidency of Abdoulaye Wade.

However, the present analysis did not answer the assumption of whether female marabouts would start a political career on their own, based on their significant social influence, and after winning the election, engage in a political career due to their support. In addition, in the case of male marabouts, no activity outside of Brotherhood arose, so this may be a research question in the future. A field trip to Senegal and conducting more interviews with both male and female marabouts would broaden the scope of the research, and other tendencies could be deduced.

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Appendix

Annex 1: Interview questions of the female marabout

General question:

Please tell me about yourself: What is your name and which city do you live in?

Do you consider yourself a marabout?

What was the process of becoming a marabout?

Can you describe your daily work as a marabout?

What is your favourite part of your work as a marabout?

How do you find yourself helping other people?

Do you have talibés?

Questions about being a female marabout:

What does it feel like to be a female marabout?

Please tell me more about your clients!

Questions about Sufi Brotherhoods?

Are you affiliated with any Sufi Brotherhoods?

If so:

Are you a marabout as part of the Sufi Brotherhood?

Could you please tell me which one?

How do you see your work in a Sufi Brotherhood?

Marabouts and politics:

How do you see other marabouts?

What do you think about those who are affiliated with politics?

What is the perception of marabouts who are affiliated with political power?

What chances do you see to influence people?

What would you do if a politician asked you to help them win the election?

Female marabouts and Politics:

How do you see, because you are a marabout, do you have bigger chances to... than other females in your society:

- 1) influence the population
- 2) gain bigger recognition
- 3) gain political power

Annex 2: Interview questions of Mbaye

General question:

Please tell me about yourself!

Questions about Sufi Brotherhoods?

Are you affiliated with any Sufi Brotherhoods?

What is it like to be part of a Sufi Brotherhood? How can I imagine your daily life?

What is it like to be a Baye Fall? How can I imagine your daily life?

What is the difference between Brotherhoods?

Marabouts and politics:

Have you seen marabouts who are affiliated with politics?

What do you think about those who are affiliated with politics?

What is the perception of marabouts who are affiliated with political power?

If you have some kind of problem, would you turn to a marabout for help?

Female marabouts:

Would you go to a female marabout?

Do you think that female marabouts can also gain political power, such as men marabouts?

Annex 3: Interview questions of Abdu and the female Senegalese person

General question:

Please tell me about yourself!

Questions about Sufi Brotherhoods?

Are you affiliated with any Sufi Brotherhoods?

Which one?

What is it like to be part of a Sufi Brotherhood? How can I imagine your daily life?

What is the difference between Brotherhoods?

Questions about marabouts

When will you go to a marabout? What would the marabout do to you?

What do you think about those who are affiliated with politics?

Do you know a marabout woman?

Would you go to a marabout woman? Why?

Do you think that female marabouts can also access political power like male marabouts? Why?