

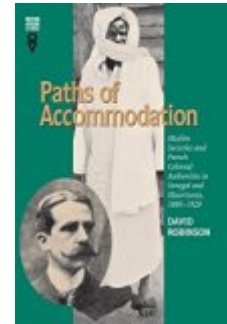
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Robinson. *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000. xvi + 361 pp. \$65.00 (cloth) ISBN 0-8214-1353-8; \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1354-8.

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*Paths of Accommodation* is about the exercise of power in a colonial context. It is about how France's secular Third Republic came to define itself as a "Muslim power" in order to rule its Muslim subjects without constant recourse to force, patronizing a variety of Islamic institutions in the process, and it is about how conquered Muslim populations, through their own institutions, came to accommodate themselves to being ruled by non-Muslims. These "paths of accommodation" required, on all parts, the patient construction of new conceptual frameworks, based on an accumulation of knowledge and experiences, whereby the "other" became an accepted, albeit unequal, partner. In recounting this process, David Robinson explores a number of key themes: the relationship between knowledge and power, the importance of agency and identity construction, and capital accumulation (including the accumulation of social and symbolic capital).

Ultimately, Robinson delves into fundamental questions about power and colonialism; was "consent" achieved in the colonial context, and if so, how? Is "civil society" still an operative concept there? The cadre of this study is the "Senegalo-Mauritanian" zone—the immediate hinterland of colonial Saint Louis, the Senegal River and the areas directly linked to it through trade, diplomacy, and religion—during the period from about 1880 to 1920. This framework cuts across the more usual subdivisions of space (Senegambia, the Sahara) and time (pre-colonial, colonial), yet in reading through the author's line of argumentation, one has to agree with his choice; the historical processes being explored are best understood within this unconventional cadre.

The sources used belong to three distinct historiographies: the epic genre of the pre-colonial regimes (both traditional and Islamic), the technocratic and bureaucratic (archival) march of colonial conquest and administration, and the hagiographic rise of the Sufi orders—still a living tradition today. Robinson makes clear that these sources are not "passive" documents. They were produced by the very same interests and institutions whose paths of accommodation are being related. They are thus part of the story. Nowhere is this clearer than in the works of the French colonial Orientalists: Alfred Le Chatelier, Robert Arnaud, Xavier Coppolani, and Paul Marty, who not only studied (and published on) the Muslim societies under French control but helped draft policy towards them as well. For those who conduct research on Islam in West Africa today, and for whom the publications of these early authors constitute something of a foundation, Robinson's is indeed a timely reminder of the close relationship between knowledge and power.

Robinson's paths to accommodation originate in Saint Louis, where the French colonial administration shared political space with republican civic institutions representing diverse Metis and Wolof merchant interests, hybrid French and Islamically educated translators and agents, and Muslim qadis and religious scholars. The result was the emergence of Saint Louis as a Muslim place, where Muslims could practice freely and run their own institutions under French rule. Saint Louis then served as a model of how French rule could be beneficial to Muslims in the rest of the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone.

Robinson then turns to the hinterland. As colonial rule was progressively implemented, and as the old po-

litical elites were discredited, co-opted and/or eliminated, new social actors, the founding shaykhs of Sufi orders, eventually came to an accommodation with French rule. For the Umarian Tijaniyya, this accommodation was consolidated sometime after 1920 (with Saydu Nuru Tall) and is therefore dealt with only in its initial stages by Robinson. For the Qadiriyya, the accommodation developed simultaneously with the “pacification” of Mauritania (1902-09), first with Saad Buh and then with Sidiyya Baba. The Mauritania that emerged from this experience was characterized by a minimal French military administration backed up by the strong loyalty of the two Qadiri networks and all the economic, social, and symbolic capital they had accumulated in the process. The most lucrative part of these Qadiri networks lay not in Mauritania itself but across the river, in Senegal.

In Senegal’s Peanut Basin, the accommodation of Malik Sy (Tijaniyya of Tivaouane) and of Amadu Bamba Mbacke (Muridiyya) was consolidated by 1912, just in time for the “pacification” of Morocco and the coming war against the Ottomans. In 1912 the Tijani shaykh Malik Sy wrote a missive, published by the French authorities in Morocco a year later, in which he clearly endorsed French rule as “good for our religion” (p. 205). During World War I, both Malik Sy and the great shaykhs of the Muridiyya actively recruited their followers for the French army. Senegalese Muslims (or at least those recruited by the Sufi orders) could thus fight under the French flag as loyal subjects of a “Muslim power,” including against the Ottomans in the Dardanelles (p. 224).

While the direct endorsement of French rule by Saad Buh, Sidiyya Baba, and Malik Sy appears clearly in the archival record and in published primary sources, the case of Amadu Bamba is more complex. The Murids of Senegal have always prided themselves on the uncompromising attitude of their shaykh towards colonial rule. It would seem from Robinson’s research that this claim is substantiated. In 1910, while still under house arrest in Theyene, Amadu Bamba did write a letter to his followers warning them against resisting French rule, and reminding them that the French government “has not opposed the profession of faith but on the contrary has been friendly towards Muslims and encouraged them to practice” (p. 222). While marking a milestone along the path to accommodation, it is clear from the context of this missive that its author, a ward of the colonial government, was simply buying a little more space; transferred to Diourbel, closer to his home, Amadu Bamba was still under house arrest when he died in 1927. True accommodation between the Muridiyya and the French authori-

ties was the work of certain of Amadu Bamba’s powerful “lieutenants”: brothers, sons, and disciples, rather than that of the founding shaykh himself. This is in keeping with Bamba’s spiritual disposition. Having successfully delegated political, economic, and administrative tasks to his closest confidants during his years in confinement, Amadu Bamba was “free” to pursue his teaching (p. 237).

Robinson’s work is based on a Gramscian conception of power and constitutes a welcome renewal of the existing literature on the politics of the rise of Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal. The works of Lucy Behrman,[1] Cheikh Tidiane Sy,[2] Donal Cruise O’Brien,[3] Christian Coulon,[4] and Jean Copans[5] (collectively, the second founding corpus of the field) all reflect the material determinism current in political science in the late 1960s, while Magassouba’s deliberately provocative essay[6] is closer to journalism than to social scientific analysis. For Robinson, the most politically significant forms of capital accumulated in the process described were social and symbolic, rather than merely economic. Yet capital accumulation in the classical sense did occur as well, resulting in the deep enmeshment of the brotherhoods in most key sectors of the colonial economy: peanut cultivation, wholesaling, retailing, real-estate, etc. This economic clout was soon to find political expression in the colony’s republican institutions.

The fact that the works of Sy, Cruise O’Brien, Coulon, and Copans, which deal mainly or exclusively with the Muridiyya, are published and widely available has meant that the Muridiyya is too often wrongly singled out as the “capitalist” brotherhood[7]. Robinson’s study clearly demonstrates the participation of all the Senegalo-Mauritanian brotherhoods in establishing the colonial economy, first along the Senegal River (with Saad Buh and Sidiyya Baba), and then in the Peanut Basin (with the Tijaniyya and the Muridiyya). In this context, Robinson also deals briefly with the Bu Kunta Qadiri group of Ndiassane (affiliated to Saad Buh), who operated peanut estates, recruited many disciples among railway workers, and then invested heavily in urban real-estate during the period under study (pp. 88, 200).

Robinson’s unconventional cadre, which straddles national borders as well as the pre-colonial/colonial divide, is also a welcome innovation. While conducting initial research on the Sufi orders in 1988, I remember asking a history professor at the University of Dakar (who happened to be Murid himself) about Amadu Bamba’s exile to the Sidiyya zawiyya in Mauritania—at the very moment that country was being conquered. I was perplexed

by the apparent paradox of this Sufi lodge being used as place of incarceration by the colonial regime. The response of my interlocutor was “Il n’y a rien a dire” (There is nothing to tell). The great chasm which has opened between the historiographies of Senegal and Mauritania since independence has obviously hindered understanding of fundamental processes.

*Paths of Accommodation* is not an exhaustive review of every case. Some interesting paths are not explored, for instance the very successful accommodation of Seydina Limamu Laye[8] after his release from prison in 1887, and the failed attempt to accommodate the Jakhanke of Futa Jallon[9] (though not strictly speaking part of the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone) which, like that of Amadu Bamba, involved a period of exile to Mauritania (1911-17).

Considerable space is devoted to political processes in Saint Louis (less to the other three “communes”). Robinson’s rendering of the complex interplay between the colonial administration, its civil servants, the French firms and their representatives, Metis entrepreneurs, Wolof citizens, each with their various religious and charitable institutions (Christian and Muslim), and each with their specific up-country interests, is a departure from Wesley Johnson’s rather more formal narrative[10] of power passing from the Metis to the Blacks.

Finally, while reading *Paths of Accommodation*, informed readers may muse over the irony of the situation today, a century later, as France’s secular Fifth Republic, in order to better manage its Muslim citizens, attempts to define itself as “compatible” with Islam. This process, too, has involved entertaining relations with a variety of Muslim institutions: mosques, day-care centers, private “Sunday” schools, etc., as well as the creation of a new “Conseil francais du culte musulman,” which, under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior, is to help administer the “Islam of France.”[11] This process might signify another instance of the colonies “coming home to roost” in the metropole.

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#### Notes

[1]. Lucy Behrman, *Muslim Brotherhoods and Politics in Senegal*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1970.

[2]. Cheikh Tidiane Sy, *La Confrerie senegalaise des Mourides: un essai sur l’islam au Senegal*, Presence africaine, Paris, 1969.

[3]. Donal B. Cruise O’Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, and *Saints and Politicians: Essays in the Organization of a Senegalese Peasant Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

[4]. Christian Coulon, *Le Marabout et le prince: islam et pouvoir au Senegal*, Pedonne, Paris, 1981.

[5]. Jean Copans, *Les Marabouts de l’arachide*, Le sycomore, Paris, 1980.

[6]. Moriba Magassouba, *L’Islam au Senegal: demain les mollahs?*, Karthala, Paris, 1985.

[7]. Sophie Bava and Danielle Bleitrach, “Les Mourides entre utopie et capitalisme,” in *Le Monde diplomatique*, Nov. 1995, p. 21.

[8]. Cecile Laborde, *La Confrerie layenne et les Lebou du Senegal: islam et culture traditionnelle en Afrique*, Institut d’etudes politiques de Bordeaux, Universite Montesquieu, Bordeaux, 1995.

[9]. Lamin Sanneh, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia*, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1989.

[10]. G. Wesley Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes*, Stanford University Press, 1971.

[11]. Nathalie Dolle, “La Republique et ses immigr=s: qui representera les musulmans de France?” in *Le Monde diplomatique*, Jan. 2002, p. 6.

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