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CONVERSION TO ISLAM: MILITARY RECRUITMENT AND GENERATIONAL CONFLICT IN A SEREER-SAFÈN VILLAGE (BANDIA), 1920–38*

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ABSTRACT: The Sereer-Safèn are a minority population in a predominantly Wolof and Muslim region. During the colonial period the Safèn were ruled by Wolof chiefs, who treated them as a conquered population. Until the First World War, Safèn resistance was based on preserving a separate religious and ethnic identity, symbolized by the village shrine and matrilineal descent. Conversion to Islam had its roots in the crisis created by military recruitment. When the Safèn were forced to give soldiers to the French, 'maternal uncles' used their authority over their 'nephews' to recruit soldiers. Today this act is remembered as a 'betrayal' that called into question the legitimacy of the matrilineal system of labor and inheritance. Conversion to Islam has been studied by focusing on long-term Islamization rather than the moment of conversion. Oral testimony from converts emphasizes changes in behavior, funeral rites, inheritance and patterns of labor and power in the village community.

KEY WORDS: Senegal, conversion, Islam, First World War, military recruitment.

CONVERSION to world religions such as Islam and Christianity has long been recognized as one of the major historical developments of the colonial period.[1] Studies of conversion to Islam are relatively rare, perhaps because there are no written records comparable to those left behind by European missionaries. The literature on Islam has tended to focus on the process of Islamization, rather than the moment of conversion, as in the heated debate between Robin Horton and Humphrey J. Fisher in the 1970s.[2] This article focuses on the Sereer-Safèn, a small-scale society with a long history of resistance to Islam and Wolof domination, which were often identified in

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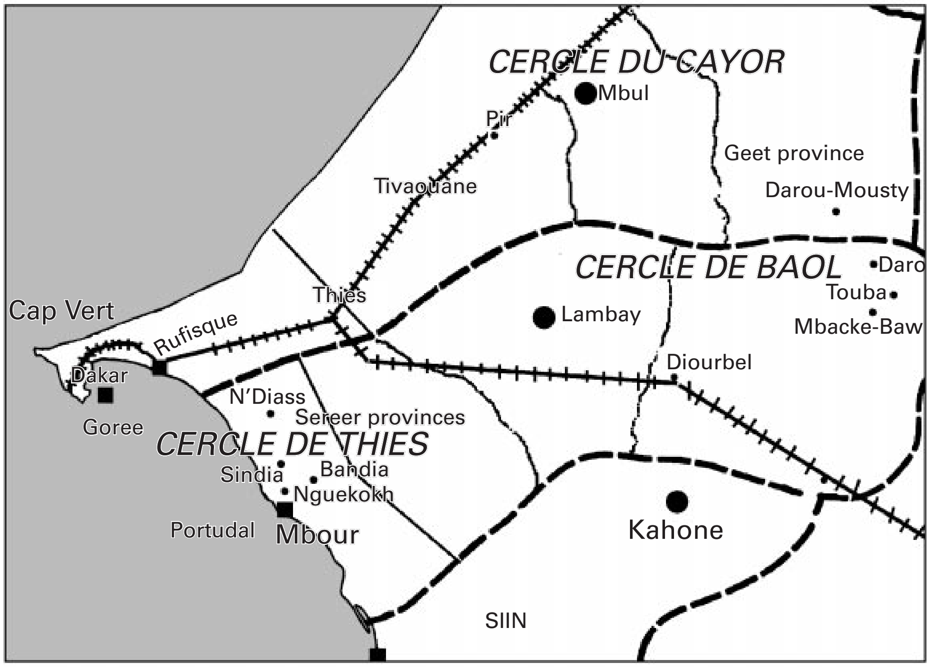
[1] For recent studies of conversion to Christianity, from a global perspective, see Robert W. Hefner, 'Introduction: world building and the rationality of conversion', in R. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley, 1993), 3–43. The emphasis on 'rationality' demonstrates the influence of Robin Horton, discussed below.

[2] Horton's and Fisher's view are discussed below. For a general presentation of the Islamization model, see Nehemia Levtzion, 'Toward a comparative study of Islamization', in N. Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam* (New York, 1979), 1–23, and N. Levtzion, 'Patterns of Islamization in West Africa', in *ibid.* 207–16.


CERCLE DU CAYOR
Mbul
Pir
Geet province
Darou-Mousty
Tivaouâne
CERCLE DE BAOL
Daro
Touba
Mbacke-Baw
Thiès
Cap Vert
Rufisque
Lambay
Diourbel
Dakar
N'Diass
Sereer provinces
Goree
CERCLE DE THIES
Sindia
Bandia
Nguekokh
Portudal
Mbour
Kahone
SIIN

Map 1. Sereer-Safèn in colonial Senegal, 1912.

Safèn representations of the past. In a previous study,[3] I examined how the Safèn maintained an 'ethnic boundary' that insured their continuing independence from the Wolof. Although the contrast between 'traditional religion' and Islam was one only aspect of the boundary, which also included language, the absence of slavery and 'caste', measures of self-defense, and matriliny, religion was crucial because in the absence of a 'state' almost all Safèn leadership was conceived of in religious terms.

Conversion to Islam was linked to the disintegration of crucial aspects of the historical 'ethnic boundary' between Safèn and Wolof in the aftermath of military recruitment during the First World War. Giving up soldiers to Wolof chiefs and the French violated the fundamental purpose of the ethnic boundary that had been justified for centuries as a way to prevent the Wolof from attacking and enslaving the Safèn. The discussion of military recruitment presented here underlines the strong resistance offered by small-scale non-Muslim societies like the Safèn and analyzes why military recruitment precipitated the crisis that undermined matrilineal succession and led to conversion in the 1920s and 1930s.

Most of my evidence about conversion comes from interviews conducted in the important Safèn village cluster of Bandia in 1995. Interview materials were particularly important because they allow a focus on change and the moment of conversion as perceived by converts. My analysis also emphasizes the important changes in labor regimes and inheritance that were brought about by the refusal of nephews to work for their uncles. In one generation, the large matrilineal property holdings in cattle, used in bridewealth transactions and for funeral sacrifices, were dissolved and replaced by new associations, such as the Muslim cooperative formed by the age-set of young men (*morom*) who made up the first converts. By focusing on the moment of conversion my interpretation departs significantly from the 'Islamization' model, which examines stages in religious change that can be read from the historical record over the long term.

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[3] James F. Searing, '"No kings, no lords, no slaves": ethnicity and religion among the Sereer-Safèn of western Bawol, 1700–1914', *Journal of African History*, 43 (2002), 407–30.

SEREER MINORITIES UNDER COLONIAL RULE, 1890–1914

The Safèn were conquered by Wolof chiefs in the 1890s, ending a long period of independence during which the Safèn had been able to defend themselves by transforming the sandstone ridges they inhabited into natural citadels. Interactions between Wolof and Sereer were limited by the incompatibility of their social orders. The crucial aspects of this 'ethnic boundary' were the contrasts between Islam and traditional religion on the one hand, and patrilineal and matrilineal descent and inheritance on the other.[4] After the conquest, the Safèn experienced colonial rule as a period of Wolof domination. Wolof chiefs constructed a fortified camp on the outskirts of the village. They recruited Sereer young men to work large fields that they appropriated for their own use. Safèn informants were harshly critical of this political regime, which subjected them to demands for bribes, forced labor and tribute for their Wolof overlords, in addition to the taxes demanded by the French. Colonialism also brought important economic changes. Bandia was a market center, with several Arab and urban Wolof merchants, an open air *secco* where the peanut crop was purchased and a local cooperative (*société de prévoyance*) that lent seed grain to peasant farmers.[5] However, in the period before the First World War, colonial rule did little to erode the stark oppositions between Wolof and Sereer.

My analysis focuses on the ways in which the colonial situation was shaped by pre-existing attitudes held by Wolof chiefs and Sereer communities, who viewed the new order through the lens of the ethnic boundary. Wolof chiefs tried to impose a political system modeled on the treatment of subordinate Sereer populations in Bawol. The Safèn had no choice about their subordinate position to the Wolof, but they tried to minimize their contacts and dealings with Wolof chiefs. The French were often forced into a position of refereeing Sereer–Wolof interactions, often by placing limits on the 'abuses' of Wolof chiefs. French policies toward small-scale societies and ethnic minorities had little impact on the overall patterns of interaction, for reasons that will emerge from the analysis.

The attitudes of Wolof chiefs toward Sereer populations that came under their authority was rooted in centuries old conflicts that were defined partly in religious terms. The Wolof were Muslims, with monarchy, caste and slavery. These core Wolof institutions were opposed by the Safèn, who defined their society by its rejection of these distinctions and status groups. The Wolof viewed the Sereer as 'savages', a society without any laws. This attitude appears frequently in correspondence between Wolof chiefs and French officials. One of the first French allies, the king Majoojo, who ruled Kajoor with French support in the 1860s, complained that the French had prevented him from 'punishing' his enemies and reported his plan to punish the Sereer, whom he described as 'black savages who are our subjects'. 'They no longer obey me', he lamented, 'instead of welcoming my envoys they beat them up and chase them out of their country'.[6]

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[4] I have taken the concept of ethnic boundaries from Frederik Barth, 'Introduction', in F. Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston, 1969), 9–38. For a full discussion, Searing, 'No kings, no lords, no slaves'.

[5] Searing, 'No kings, no lords, no slaves', which discusses the conquest and Sereer perceptions of Wolof rule.

After 1890, large Sereer populations came under the rule of Wolof kings and aristocrats who made deals with the French during the conquest. The French were often appalled by the behavior of their Wolof allies, as can be seen in reports of abuses committed by Tanor N'Gogne, the Wolof king placed on the throne of Bawol in 1890. A French administrator named Donis detailed the exploitation of the Sereer by Tanor's retainers and condemned the 'corruption' and 'extortion' common in the administration of justice. These problems were particularly noticeable in Sereer provinces because Wolof chiefs regarded the Sereer as a source of plunder.[7]

Donis reported that Tanor had confiscated all horses owned by the Sereer, because their 'race' was unworthy. Sereer villages were forced to lavishly support Tanor and his retainers when they visited a region. Tanor and his officials imposed heavy fines for minor infractions and lived at the expense of the population while the money was collected. Tanor's officials investigated every childbirth to see if they could impose fines for out of wedlock birth or adultery. Harsh treatment of the Sereer was given a fig leaf of legitimacy by Tanor's commitment to Islam.[8] Under French pressure, the king punished the worst abuses of Wolof rule over the Sereer. For example, in 1892 soldiers employed by the Bar Diack, a province chief, stole seven sheep from a Sereer. When he complained, they seized him, bound him, and hung him upside down from a tree. When fellow Sereer from the village of N'Diemane tried to rescue him, they were shot down in cold blood, leaving four dead and three seriously wounded. Tanor removed Moumar N'Doumbé from office despite the steadfast denials of the Bar Diack and his retainers.[9]

The experience of the Safèn in the colonial period was similar to that of a much larger Sereer population ruled over by Wolof chiefs in the *cercles* of Thiès and Diourbel (Bawol). In addition to the 41,000 Sereer in the 'autonomous' region in Thiès,[10] French authorities estimated the Sereer population in Bawol at 67,471 in 1911, out of a total of 183,000.[11] Almost without exception, these populations were ruled over by Wolof chiefs. In fact, the Sereer cantons became a 'dumping ground' of sorts for Wolof chiefs who could not be placed anywhere else. If the representative of a powerful Wolof family was fired for 'corruption', his best hope was for reassignment to a Sereer region. After Mbakhane Diop was dismissed as superior chief of West Bawol for corruption, he was reappointed as chief of Mbayar-Nianing in Thiès, where he ruled over the Safèn. Mbakhane Diop was replaced in the same position by one of his brothers, Samba Laobé Diop. In similar fashion another prominent chief, Salmon Fall, received his 'second chance' in Mbayar (Bawol), which was predominantly Sereer,[12] after being removed from office for corruption. Ironically, Wolof chiefs who were appointed to positions of command over the Sereer were given a license to steal, hardly a harsh punishment for acts of corruption.

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Dakar (ANS), 2 D 7-2, Corres. 1894, Rapport de tournée de G. Donis, 13 May 1894.

[8] ANS 2 D 7-2, Rapport de tournée de G. Donis, 5 Mar. 1894.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] The 'autonomous' region was formed from territories inhabited by the North-West Sereer, a group of closely related small-scale societies inhabiting the Thiès escarpment and Njass massif: Searing, 'No kings, no lords, no slaves'.

[11] ANS 2 D 7-6, chemise 3, Enquête sur l'autorité de la justice penale, la proprieté, et la justice civile chez les indigènes du cercle du Baol (Tribu des Sérères), Leon Dupuy, Diourbel, 7 Apr. 1911.

In theory, the Safèn should have benefited from certain French policies designed to address the situations of ethnic minorities dominated by larger, more centralized groups. Instead, most French administrators echoed the attitude of Wolof chiefs. As late as 1911, French reports described the Safèn as 'unintelligent, drunken, ferocious and refusing all discipline'.[13] As a result, the Safèn did not benefit from French colonial policies that were intended to address the situation created by the conquest. In 1909, Governor-general Ponty announced a new policy, *la politique des races*, whose central purpose was to introduce concerns with 'ethnicity' into the colonial administration. The situation that Ponty wanted to put an end to aptly describes the situation of the Safèn and other conquered minorities. Ponty argued that the French had formed pragmatic alliances with aristocratic classes and maintained a territorial organization based on 'preexisting local principalities', which gave too much power to aristocratic chiefs.

> It centralizes in the hands of a single person the powers of all the small community chiefs, places an obligatory intermediary between the *commandant de cercle* and the [village] chiefs, and places the latter at the mercy of an individual foreign to the country. [This person is] foreign even to the ethnic groups [races] he administers… and a traditional enemy of some of them.[14]

Ponty's new policy was supposed to remedy this situation 'by suppressing the tyranny of one ethnic group over another ethnic group', winning for the French the sympathy of 'collectivities that will gain their independence through us'.[15] This policy remained a dead letter for the Safèn. In part this is because the French saw the Safèn through the eyes of Wolof chiefs. But it also resulted from the non-cooperative attitude of the Safèn, who expressed pride in the fact that no one had ever served as a chief. French policies had no impact if the communities they were meant to benefit never complained to French officials.[16]

Under Ponty's successor Clozel, Ponty's policies were debated and adapted. The Sereer were singled out as an exception to the application of the policy. In general, Clozel argued that chiefs were to be chosen in accordance with local customs after consultation with the population. Secondly, no 'new men' were to be appointed as chiefs in recompense for services rendered to the French. In a circular addressed to Lieutenant-governor Antonetti, Clozel spelled out these principles to justify the rejection of a candidacy proposed by the commandant at Thiès, who wished to appoint an interpreter to succeed another chief.

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[12] For a discussion of the careers of these chiefs in Bawol, see James F. Searing, '*God Alone is King*' *: Islam and Emancipation in Senegal : The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Portsmouth NH, 2001), ch. 4.

[13] ANS 2 D 13-7, Cercle de Thiès, Correspondance, 2 Aug. 1911.

[14] ANS 13 G 72 (16), Circulaire sur la politique indigène, 22 Sept. 1909. [15] *Ibid.*

[16] These observations are based on common attitudes expressed by informants in interviews.

> The designation of his successor should be made in conformity with local traditions and after consultation with the notables, who by virtue of custom and their social position have the right to make such a decision. I am absolutely opposed to the practice of giving territorial commands, positions as interpreters, qadis or members of native courts in compensation for private services [to the commandant], however spectacular.[17]

Whenever possible this meant the designation of a chief 'with a historic right to rule'.[18] The only exception Clozel allowed was the retention of chiefs whose appointment violated tradition, but whose service records were good after many years of service. Clozel cited the example of Abdel Kader, the superior chief of the Sereer provinces (Thiès), who was a Wolof and a Muslim but whose appointment dated back to the 1890s. Abdel Kader was the successor of 'Sanor', who conquered the region for the French. Although the Sereer despised him, the French decided that his 'effectiveness' as an administrator took precedence over policy. Beyond the loyalty and good 'service' rendered by Wolof chiefs, the French regarded populations like the Safèn as too small and too unruly to enjoy privileges extended to other groups.

Safèn informants in Bandia had a more positive attitude toward the colonial economy than to the state. Their attitudes were shaped by the way export agriculture put wealth into the hands of men, despite the fact that women and children devoted more time laboring on the crop than men did.[19] The proceeds of cash cropping were divided unequally between old men and young men, with elders (maternal uncles) gathering the lion's share while their nephews received much less. Young bachelors worked for their uncles from circumcision until marriage, with time allotted for them to earn wealth for themselves. Cultural patterns encouraged young men to work hard, with the ultimate goal of achieving independence. The division of the workday and the workweek provided young men with opportunities to work for themselves.

These divisions predated cash crop farming and Islam, as can be seen from an examination of Sereer 'customs' with regard to the labor of young men. In Sereer households children who had been circumcised were regarded as adults, with the dependent status of *surga*. They worked for the household head four half-days a week, and were free to work for themselves on Mondays, Thursdays and in the afternoons.[20] Monday is a day of rest in most Sereer regions, a day when no agricultural work is permitted, a sacred day like Friday in the Muslim calendar. Millet cultivation is forbidden on Thursday, but other crops, such as peanuts, can be farmed.[21] By giving *surga* Thursdays off, they were encouraged to farm peanuts. Sereer religious beliefs dictated a serious atmosphere of work in the rainy season. Drumming and other festive activities were forbidden. No one could wear red, which was a 'sacred' color.[22] These taboos were enforced because it was feared that inappropriate behavior might cause the rains and crops to fail. This work ethic was not based on Islam, but on spirit religion and peasant values.

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[17] ANS 2 D 9-8, Correspondance 1916, Gouverneur-général Clozel à Antonetti, 29 Apr. 1916.

[18] *Ibid.* This phrase appears regularly in Clozel's correspondence dealing with the appointment of native chiefs.

[19] Searing, '*God Alone is King*', ch. 6, for a discussion of the gender division of labor in peanut farming. Most female labor time was spent processing the crop rather than in farming.

My informants' memories single out an important aspect of peasant cash crop agriculture. The sale of peanuts was not simply a way to acquire European imports, but was crucial to the maintenance and reproduction of peasant households. Some of the money earned was reinvested in the peasant economy by purchasing small stock and cattle. For young dependent males, cash crop earnings were crucial to saving money for bridewealth. Income from peanuts, reinvested in cattle and stock, became the main source of the wealth that allowed young men to strive for social independence. Marriage was the first step towards the respected status of household head. Cash cropping played an integral role in the reproduction of the peasant household and in the achievement of status in rural society.

Although the period before the First World War brought important changes to the political and economic order, they did not overturn the cultural oppositions that governed Wolof–Sereer interactions. The Sereer sullenly submitted to Wolof chiefs, but Safèn elders still gathered at the village shrine, which contained the protecting ancestral spirits of the village. Safèn informants stressed the fact that their shrine was never destroyed and that no Wolof chief ever spent the night in the village.[23] The economic changes associated with cash-crop cultivation may have made it easier for young men to accumulate wealth and marry at an earlier age. But they also increased the income of elders who controlled the cattle herds that embodied the accumulated wealth of a matrilineage or one of its segments. The political and economic changes associated with colonial rule may have laid the groundwork for conversion, but they were insufficient, in and of themselves, to provoke the crisis that followed military recruitment in the First World War.

MILITARY RECRUITMENT

In Wolof and Sereer communities the recruitment of soldiers in the First World War is the focal point of memories about French colonial rule. During my fieldwork, military recruitment was the one issue that was raised by Sereer informants before I asked any questions about the topic. The First

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[20] L. Aujas, 'Les Sérères du Sénégal: mœurs et coutumes de driot privé', *Bulletin du comité des études historiques et scientifiques sur l'Afrique occidentale française*, 14 (1931), 307.

[21] Field notes, Bandia, 14 July 1995. Based on tour of fields and discussion with various farmers about work schedules.

[22] *Ibid*.

[23] Interview, Malik Pouye, Babacar Ndione, 19 July 1995, for the most detailed version of this story, which I heard from several informants.

World War itself is remembered as the time when the French 'demanded soldiers' (Wolof, *lajj nanu soldaar*). For village communities, giving young men to the French was the quintessential symbol of colonial domination: no one wanted to comply, but there was no choice.

Nevertheless, local responses to recruitment differed from one community to the next, depending on ethnic identity, religious affiliation and the administrative history of different districts. In the larger perspective of French West Africa and the colony of Senegal as a whole, the Wolof and the Sereer contributed more recruits than other African groups, largely because they were more integrated into the colonial networks of commerce and administration.[24] However, this generalization must be qualified by the recognition that there were populations within the Wolof kingdoms who stood apart from the dominant social order in 1914. Wolof compliance with the demands of recruitment reflected the power of the Wolof chiefs over the populations they commanded. When that power was contested, as it was by minority populations like the Sereer, serious questions arose about the ability of the chiefs to deliver their quota of men to the French military authorities. In the end, most overt acts of resistance were confined to ethnic minorities like the Sereer and the Fulbe. Wolof resistance to recruitment was expressed in different ways. Wolof communities sent 'foreigners' (largely migrant farmers) and slaves to the front. Compliance with recruitment by the Murids came after an intensive debate within the order and French concessions that allowed the Murids to bypass the canton chiefs in the presentation of recruits.

The general pattern of recruitment in the Wolof states with large Sereer populations can be examined for the *cercle* of Bawol in 1917. Some 240 recruits were drafted in a drive that began in February. The recruits were chosen from about 500 young men presented to French military inspectors by the canton chiefs, who had been given quotas based on the population in their districts. The data from Bawol is summarized in Table 1, which shows the number of men recruited in each canton. Recruits were identified by 'race', because the French military placed great emphasis on the connection between ethnicity and military capacity.[25]

The statistics of recruitment in Bawol show that the Sereer, who represented about 38 per cent of the population, contributed only 34 out of 240 recruits, or slightly less than 15 per cent of the recruits. The Wolof, who contributed 127 out of 240 recruits, supplied the largest number of recruits. The proportion of Wolof soldiers was nearly identical to their importance in the population as a whole (55 per cent).[26] However, this global analysis of recruitment underestimates Sereer resistance to recruitment. In West Bawol there was a clear Sereer majority. As late as 1955 the Sereer made up 63 per cent of the population, the Wolof about 35 per cent. Other groups were statistically insignificant, except for the Bambara, who formed 1 per cent of

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[24] This is one of the main arguments in Joe H. Lunn, *Memoires of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth NH, 2000).

[25] Joe Lunn, '"Les races guerrières": racial preconceptions in the French military about West African soldiers during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (1999), 517–36.

[26] On the breakdown of ethnic groups in this time period: ANS 2 D 7-6, Chemise 3, Leon Dupuy, Diourbel, 7 Apr. 1911.

Table 1. *Military recruitment: East and West Bawol, 1917.*

Canton	*Presented*	*Accepted*	*Ethnicity*	*Number*
East				
Diet-Salao	34	19	Wolof	47
N'Dadène	24	12	Toucouleurs	22
N'Goye	40	19	Peulhs	15
M'Bayar	77	38	Sereer	22
Lâ	75	32	Soninke	1
TOTAL	250	120		120
West				
Khombole	53	25	Toucouleurs	14
Thièpe	47	22	Sereer	12
Gueoul	40	14	Wolof	80
Pègue	35	16	Bambara	7
Diack	50	30	Peulhs	7
TOTAL	244	115		120

Source: ANS 2 G 17-31, Report, Feb. 1917, Diourbel.

the population. The Sereer majority was even larger in 1917, but Western Bawol sent only 12 Sereer recruits into the French army in 1917, compared to 80 Wolof, 7 Bambara, 7 Peulhs (Fulbe) and 14 Toucouleurs (Halpulaaren, Futanke). The underrepresentation of the Sereer reflected a political decision by Wolof chiefs. They reacted to the difficulties of recruiting the Sereer by demanding more recruits from Wolof villages and migrant populations. In Western Bawol, Wolof and migrant populations paid the price for local resistance to recruitment: the Soninke, Bambara and 'Toucouleurs' were all migrants.[27]

In interviews the trauma of military recruitment in the First World War was brought up repeatedly, without my asking about it. The Safèn learned about the war from the Wolof canton chiefs, who announced that the 'French demanded soldiers'. The canton chiefs then assigned quotas to each village under their control. There was no escape. The people of Bandia responded first by sending all the 'foreigners' in the village to the canton chiefs. The migrants were mainly 'Bambara'. They farmed and manufactured charcoal for sale in a special quarter of the village, 'Bandia-Bambara'.[28] In hierarchical societies slaves were often the first recruits. In small-scale, egalitarian societies migrants played a similar role. The impressment of 'foreigners' into the French army is noted in French archival sources[29] and was confirmed by my fieldwork in the Safèn community of Bandia.

[27] The status of the group identified as 'Toucouleurs' is most problematic, as some may have been in the region for some time. 'Toucouleurs' is the term used by the French, who followed the Wolof practice of distinguishing between the settled inhabitants of Fuuta Tooro ('Toucouleurs', Futanke) and the nomadic Fulbe ('Peulhs'). For census information on different ethnic groups: *Atlas National du Sénégal* (Paris, 1977), 64.

[28] Interview, Bandia elders, 28 Mar. 1989.

[29] The practice was common and is discussed in Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 42, 80. The data tends to be anecdotal, so there are few estimates of the proportion of recruits obtained in this manner.

The existence of 'Bambara' migrants in Bandia calls for some analysis. Sereer regions attracted migrant farmers from the beginning of the colonial period. An administrator commenting on the difficulty of recruiting wage laborers in the *cercle* of Thiès in 1903 noted that the only possibility came from 'temporary migrants' (*gens de passage*), mainly 'Socé [Wolof term for Mande], Toucouleurs and people from Firdour [the Gambia]'. These groups had not come seeking wage labor, so the most likely explanation of their presence was as migrant farmers.[30] In 1910, another report from the same *cercle* repeated the complaint about the scarcity of laborers and again noted the presence of migrants, described as 'Bambaras, Toucouleurs and Sarakholés (Soninke)'.[31]

All these groups formed part of the stream of migrant farmers known as *nawetaan* (rainy season migrants). Research on military recruitment during the First World War demonstrates that migrancy was well established by 1914. 'Foreigners', almost all of them *nawetaan*, were turned over to the French to substitute for local youths. The 'migrants' noted by colonial officials may have included runaway slaves from the Wolof kingdoms as well as long-distance migrants. The slave trade into Senegal in the early colonial period drew slaves from the same regions that provided long distance migrants, a fact that may have allowed runaway slaves to pass themselves off as migrants.[32] Runaway slaves and migrants who had been welcomed into small-scale communities in the early colonial period, based on a long tradition of absorbing refugees, were suddenly reclassified as 'outsiders' and sent to the front.

When this source of recruits dried up more painful choices had to be made. In the collective memory of Bandia, what followed is explained by noting the power of maternal uncles over their nephews within Safèn society. Nephews inherited from their uncles, but they also worked for them. At the extreme, uncles controlled their nephews. This is what happened during the First World War. Uncles sent their nephews into the French army. Their acts are recalled as a 'betrayal', as an example of tyranny that is underscored by subsequent conversion of the Safèn to Islam. In essence, maternal uncles exercised their 'power' for the last time by sending their nephews to the front.[33] In interviews, there was a consensus about how to depict these events, suggesting that this narrative had unusual importance.[34] Everyone emphasized the way 'uncles' had used and abused their authority over their 'nephews', by sending them to the front. This particular configuration of the recruitment drama was based on the matrilineal system of labor exchanges and inheritance in Safèn communities.[35]

Sereer informants also emphasized the brutal methods used by the canton chiefs, particularly the practice of taking hostages. These abuses were also documented during the war. In 1918, an article in the *Petit Sénégalais* accused Samba Laobé Diop, canton chief of Mbayar-Nianing (where Bandia was located) of placing 'twenty five notables in chains, exposed to the sun' because they refused to give recruits. Samba Laobé was portrayed as a tyrant punishing his enemies and his acts were described as a 'stain' on the name of the French Republic. Why did France purge Senegal of 'barbarous kings' if the chiefs it appointed were even 'more barbarous' than they had been?[36] This article, published by urban activists linked to Blaise Diagne, indicated that the isolation of Safèn districts was breaking down under the pressures created by war.[37] The French administration investigated the charges, which were described as 'exaggerated'. Nevertheless the French confirmed that at least four heads of households had been chained and tied to trees or imprisoned in houses for up to thirty hours for refusing to supply recruits. Excessive 'zeal' in recruitment was viewed with toleration by the French, especially in the Sereer districts of the Petite Côte.[38]

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[30] ANS 1 G 296 (6), Monographie, Cercle de Thiès, 1903.

[31] ANS 1 G 337, Monographie: Thiès, 1910, p. 36.

[32] See James Searing, '*God Alone is King*', ch. 6 and 7 for a more detailed discussion of links between migration and slave emancipation.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] This consensus contrasted with frequent disagreements over other issues. For examples, Searing, 'No kings, no lords, no slaves'.

[35] This particular theme is discussed below. The existing literature does not really explore the different dynamics of recruitment in matrilineal societies. The story is framed as 'insiders' versus 'outsiders' (for slaves and 'strangers'), or as a drama between fathers and sons. See, for example, Lunn, *Memoires of the Maelstrom*, ch. 2.

Many of the most serious incidents of resistance to recruitment occurred among the minority Sereer population in Bawol. At the beginning of the war, in September 1914, thirty to forty Sereer attacked the compound of the canton chief, Alioune Sylla, after he had sent his retainers on a manhunt in the bush to capture young men who had fled military recruitment. The rebels freed four recruits who were being held in the chief's compound. In the battle one Sereer was killed and several others were seriously wounded.[39] When the French conducted an inquiry they discovered that Alioune Sylla was extremely unpopular and that there was organized resistance to this rule among the Sereer. The leader of the rebellion was the *saltigi* (war chief and diviner), who was in charge of the young men. The rebellion was part of a larger effort to discredit Alioune Sylla and to force him from office. Other acts of resistance were more peaceful, but equally organized. The Sereer village of Gohé in Bawol systematically refused to give recruits for two years. The elders reported that the young men refused to cooperate and would leave the region if they were forced into the army. Finally, on 5 April 1916, the French surrounded the village with troops and took twenty young men to the recruitment commission in Diourbel. Seven were declared fit for service.[40]

The resistance of Sereer minorities to military recruitment was particularly intense, because giving up soldiers to the Wolof and the French called to mind giving up slaves. Resistance to the slave trade was the central purpose of the historical ethnic boundary between Wolof and Safèn.[41] The indignation of informants describing how uncles sent their nephews to the front apparently derives its force from this unstated premise. These acts contributed to the wave of conversion among young Sereer males.

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[36] Article in *Le Petit Sénégalais*, 7 Apr. 1918.

[37] From the article itself, it is impossible to deduce how the information entered urban, political networks. However, this late in the war, a Safèn military recruit seems most likely. Military training camps were located in Dakar, Saint-Louis, Thiès and Rufisque. On the camps, see Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom*, 95.

[38] ANS 2 D 13-20, pièce 15, Cercle de Thiès, Apr. 1918.

[39] This incident, described in records as the 'Alioune Sylla affair', began on 21 Sept. 1914. See ANS 13 G 72 (32), Telegram, Lt. Gov. to Gov. Gen., 21 Sept. 1914. The inquiry into the affair is documented in ANS 2 D 7-10, Chemise 9, Report of Commandant to Lt. Gov., 28 May 1918.

[40] ANS 2 G 16-36, Cercle de Diourbel, Apr. 1916.

[41] This is the central argument in Searing, 'No kings, no lords, no slaves'.

MODELS OF CONVERSION

Discussions of conversion to Islam are still influenced by the debate between Robin Horton and Humphrey J. Fisher in the 1970s and 1980s.[42] Their interpretations of conversion placed radically different emphases on issues of causation and agency. Horton located the impetus for change in the social structure, arguing that conversion resulted from changes to the 'social microcosm'. Fisher, by contrast, objected to Horton's neglect of the human agents who brought the message of God and revelation, whether these were Christian missionaries or Muslim religious scholars. He also objected to Horton's lack of attention to the content of revealed religion in his discussion of African Christianity and Islam, which owed more to the evolution of the 'basic cosmology' than to the 'revelations' embodied in the Quran and the Bible.

Robin Horton's discussion of conversion emphasized the transformation from within of what he describes as the 'basic' African cosmology. This cosmology had a two-tier structure, 'the first tier being that of the lesser spirits and the second that of the supreme being'.[43] In the basic cosmology the lesser spirits 'underpin events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its environment' while the supreme being 'underpins events and processes in the macrocosm – i.e. in the world as a whole'.[44] As a result societies whose life was centered on the microcosm of village society focused on the lesser spirits and conceived of the supreme being as remote. Conversion was brought about by historical changes which tended to dissolve the boundaries of the microcosm, whether long-distance trade, migration or conquest. When such developments occurred, attention tended to shift to the macrocosm.

Horton's model suggested a framework for interpreting the massive conversion to Islam and Christianity in the colonial period. Colonial conquest, the development of the market economy, labor migration and other historical developments dissolved the social boundaries of the microcosm and Africans turned to the supreme being and the macrocosm. Muslim and Christian teachings were received as messages or revelations about the supreme being, so Horton could see conversion as the transformation of the basic cosmology from within. The advantage of his perspective was that it offered an explanation for the tendency for African religious beliefs and practices to reassert themselves in the context of Christianity or Islam. If conversion was a transformation of the basic African cosmology from within, then the 'mixing' of beliefs was to be expected.

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[42] Robin Horton, 'On the rationality of conversion, Part I', *Africa*, 45 (1975), 219. See also Robin Horton, 'On the rationality of conversion, Part II', *Africa*, 45 (1975), 373–99, and Robin Horton, 'African conversion', *Africa*, 41 (1971). Humphrey J. Fisher, 'Conversion reconsidered: some historical aspects of religious conversion in black Africa', *Africa*, 43 (1973), 27–40, and Humphrey J. Fisher, 'The juggernaut's apologia: conversion to Islam in black Africa', *Africa*, 55 (1985), 153–73.

[43] Horton, 'On the rationality of conversion, Part I', 219.

[44] *Ibid.*

Horton's critics objected most strenuously to his suggestion that conversion to world religions reflected changes already 'in the air' anyway, because they reflected underlying social transformations. Horton's most persistent critic was Humphrey J. Fisher, a historian specializing in the history of Islam in West Africa. Fisher objected to Horton's reliance on theory, in that everything depended on the acceptance of his model. But he also objected to the fact that the content of world religions and their revelations were downplayed, as was the agency of the missionaries, whether European or Muslim. Fisher developed his own model of conversion, which was based on his reading of Islamic texts and Islamic history. He described a series of stages in conversion: quarantine, mixing and reform. Quarantine describes the stage in which outsiders representing a world religion take up residence in a region and quarantine themselves off from the 'infidels' in the interest of preserving orthodoxy. Gradually, 'mixing' begins when members of the host community turn to the Muslim strangers for services of some kind (prayers, healing, protective amulets), not at first out of conviction, but more out of religious opportunism. During the mixing phase the model of Islam is observed, its experts are consulted and aspects of its message are absorbed. Conversion occurs gradually. The final stage, reform, occurs when there is an attempt to reform society in the image of Islam.[45]

There are clear differences between these views of conversion. In Horton, the key agency is given to changes in society that dissolve microcosmic boundaries and lead to a search for new religious explanations of the world. For Fisher, agency lies with the devout representatives of world religion, who bring a model and a message that attracts converts. There are also similarities in how both authors arrange religions in a hierarchy. For Horton, religion is an intellectual system that explains, predicts and/or controls the world. These, he suggests, can be conceived of as a hierarchy. Small-scale isolated societies focus on the lesser spirits. In societies in greater contact with the wider world, one might expect a proliferation of deities (provoked by contact and absorption of various cults), followed by a turn to monolatry. World religions reflect a further rationalization and expansion of this evolving, intellectual model of the world. The skepticism of an Oxford don, reinforced by a scientific world-view, is the final stage. Fisher, named the 'devout opposition' by Horton, is a believer, so he gives agency to revelation. He accepts the superiority of Islam. He ends his discussion by stressing 'the ineradicable tenacity of the local religious heritage' and the inevitable conclusion, holy war, declared by local reformers who see it as the 'only solution' to the persistence of disbelief.[46]

These models suggest some ways of understanding the opposition between Sereer religion and Wolof Islam. Horton's emphasis on the contrast between microcosm and macrocosm is suggestive. Sereer society was small in scale and fought to maintain its independence. Sereer religion was centered on the village shrine or social microcosm. Real conversion only occurred after conquest, economic change and the trauma of military recruitment during the First World War: events that tended to break down the social microcosm. There was little evidence of Fisher's notion of mixing, at least for the period prior to conversion. Religion was bundled with other issues, including 'caste', slavery and monarchy. Sereer resistance to Islam was compounded by hostility toward the threat of Wolof conquest.

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[45] Fisher, 'Conversion reconsidered', and Fisher, 'The juggernaut's apologia'.

[46] Fisher, 'The juggernaut's apologia', 170.

From my perspective, the Horton–Fisher debate was centered on the process of 'Islamization' that could be read from the historical record rather than the 'moment' of conversion. Horton's concern with 'mixed Islam' and Fisher's stages of conversion (quarantine, mixing and reform) reflect a common focus on changes that occurred over centuries. Neither author examines conversion from the point of view of 'converts', which is my concern in this article. Conversion to Islam has otherwise remained a minor topic in the study of modern Africa, particularly when compared to the literature and missionaries and African Christianity.

Recent studies of conversion to Christianity have advanced beyond the dichotomy between structure (Horton's 'basic cosmology') and agency (missionaries) by conceptualizing 'conversion' as a process of cultural mediation and innovation through which African societies came to terms with crucial aspects of the colonial experience. This approach does not give primacy to social change or devout agency, but focuses instead on how African Christians created new understandings forged from the interplay between mission Christianity and their own cultural heritage.[47] However, studies of African conversion to Christianity almost invariably highlight factors that do not necessarily figure in conversion to Islam. Conversion to Christianity often played a central role in a larger 'colonial encounter' that included the appropriation of literacy and new technologies as well as coming to terms with a colonial racial order and division of labor. Conversion to Islam frequently brought literacy in Arabic, but it did not directly address the colonial situation. Literacy in Arabic was perceived by Europeans as encouraging a retrograde form of 'civilization', one frequently associated with hostility to European culture and education. On the other hand Islam did lead converts into a larger social macrocosm, in the more limited sense implied by Horton. Indirectly, it therefore also mediated experiences of dramatic social change and integrated converts into a wider, modern social world.

In the case of the Safèn this meant coming to terms with a Wolof-dominated world, not a French one. The Safèn consistently described the colonial period as a period of Wolof domination. Traditional animosity between the Safèn and the Wolof was one of the main obstacles to conversion. My focus on converts' understandings of conversion leads to a focus on change that is often missing from studies of Islamization that take a version of Fisher's 'juggernaut', essentially a trope for reform and jihad, as their litmus test. The prominent role of jihad and reform in studies of African Islam, where 'purist' attitudes to 'mixing' and 'syncretism' tend to set the tone, has discouraged grassroots studies of conversion among recent converts. These attitudes are reinforced by the patronizing attitude of long-standing Muslims to new converts. Wolof Muslims repeatedly expressed skepticism about the Islam of Sereer converts, referring to stereotypes of

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[47] Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago, 1985), and Paul S. Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth NH, 1995).

'sorcery'. While the village of Bandia clearly fits descriptions of 'mixed' Islam, in ways that I note, converts repeatedly stressed the dramatic changes brought by conversion.

CONVERTS TO CONVERSION

The interviews cited in this essay were conducted in 1995, in a series of individual interviews with important elders in the village.[48] My informants understood that conversion to Islam was a major focus of my research. The interviews were done entirely in Wolof. Nine village elders were interviewed, including three of the four first converts to Islam, the village Imam and elders who were considered to possess important knowledge by virtue of their age and family. The interviews covered 'tradition' (*cosaan* or *aada* in both Wolof and Sereer), conversion to Islam, colonial rule and the cash-crop economy. Conversion to Islam was the aspect of my research that made most sense to my informants.

The village chief and Imam of Bandia drew up a list of elders with 'historical expertise'. The criteria used to select informants included several variables, including the representation of all sections of the village and different points of view on conversion. I interviewed all surviving 'first converts'. Alongside the first converts, the informants included 'later converts', who described the suffering endured by the first Muslims, who were ostracized by other members of the village. Care was taken to ensure that I interviewed elders from all four settlements in the village cluster. Finally, the informants included one elder who represented the matrilineage that controlled the 'village shrine' (*xérém*), who was only nominally a Muslim. The topic of conversion lent itself to historical investigation because it created a readily understood distinction between 'before' and 'after'. Conversion also provided a rationale for discussing 'traditional religion', which otherwise might be treated as secret and off limits.

All of my informants were 'converts', using the Wolof word (*tuub*) to describe their status. They all had taken Muslim first names upon conversion, although two informants preferred to use their Sereer names. Islam did not triumph completely, however. Bandia is a Tijani Muslim village, but it is safe to say that the village contains a minority of nominal Muslims. They represent a group who 'converted' to restore the peace after a period of conflict. The shrine or *xérém* is still intact, even if most of the elders no longer go there. The clearest example of a nominal Muslim belonged to the matrilineage that 'owned' the village shrine. One member of this house officiated at ceremonies conducted at the shrine. This inherited position was referred to as *boroom xérém*, 'owner, master of the shrine' in Wolof, or *saltigi*, 'diviner, war chief' in Sereer. In the past his power was ritual and religious, existing only when elders assembled at the village shrine.

Scholars who utilize the Islamization model of conversion have placed emphasis on the analytical stage of 'mixing' or 'mixed Islam'. In Fisher's writings, this stage is reached when the model of Islam is present in a society, often through the presence of 'strangers' from an orthodox society. Islamic practice begins when the host society solicits the services of these strangers and the lessons of Islam are gradually absorbed. Fisher's schema also echoes the critiques of 'nominal' Muslims by reformers in jihad movements in West Africa. The shift from 'mixing' to 'purified' Islam was a self-conscious policy to root out all compromise with unbelief, frequently in jihad.[49] Fisher's model might suggest that in Bandia conversion led to 'mixed Islam'. However, the data from Bandia does not place great emphasis on an external model of orthodoxy. It also suggests that phenomena akin to 'mixing' emerged from conflict and compromise within the village.

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[48] My thanks go to the village chief of Bandia, the late M. Seck, who helped arrange the interviews. He often guided me on the pathways between 'quarters' of the village to make sure I did not lose my way.

The fact that the *xérém* still stands and is visited by some members reflects the practical compromise that emerged during the period of conversion. In his interview, the Imam of the village stressed that Islam entered the village slowly and peacefully. Peacefully here was explicitly contrasted with 'by war' or 'conquest'. His concern was to emphasize that conversion came from within Safèn society, not as a result of conquest by Wolof or other outsiders.[50] In interviews, committed Muslims spoke most freely about 'traditional religion'. However, there were clear indications that the *xérém* was still active and served as a reference point in village life. The *xérém*, which appears from the outside as a swath of uncut forest, is a 'shrine' or gathering place with various altars and sacred trees, inhabited by spirits and ancestors, but also by snakes and birds, who figure metaphorically in communications and dreams as messengers to heaven and earth. In interviews when informants spoke of the *xérém*, which they did only reluctantly, they often gestured or leaned their heads in the direction of the shrine. When speaking about the shrine in the period before conversion, no one expressed doubt about the efficacy of ceremonies and rituals conducted there. Respect for the shrine was tied up with attitudes toward tradition and ethnicity, which are still powerful influences in Bandia.

The current master of the *xérém* came to his interview dressed as a 'traditionalist', wearing a red hat and a large gold earring, and carrying a ceremonial bow and arrow, with painted markings and a blunted tip. His Muslim name was Ablaye, but he preferred to be called by his Sereer name, Latir. He was the descendant of the last masters of the sacred grove and therefore also its current caretaker. He spoke in brief platitudes about Islam, but he refused to answer any questions about 'custom' (*aada*) or Sereer religion in any detail. On the other hand he spoke freely about colonialism, the war, Wolof chiefs and the peanut economy.[51] During my stay in the village, a group of young men showed me where the village shrine was and walked me around its perimeter. Latir Faye appeared and watched us, to make sure we were not up to any mischief. Traditionalists and Muslims coexist, but not through a generalized practice of mixed Islam. They coexist as the result of a compromise that reintegrated Muslims into the community, perhaps as equals at first, but shortly thereafter as the dominant group.

A number of common themes recur in interviews with converts. These appeared to describe a consensus of sorts among the first generation of converts about how to explain the superiority of Islam. Islam was 'more beautiful' than pre-Islamic custom. It was cleaner, purer, because of dietary laws and the rituals that surrounded prayer. Islam 'educated human beings more' or 'developed them more'. Islamic law created more social harmony. One informant said that in the old days people did what pleased them, whereas now they followed the law.[52] Conflicts between members of the community were less violent than in the past (over land claims or cattle, for example) and settled by discussion more often than combat. In the past, it was honorable to kill someone in a conflict that pitted one family group or village faction against another. Muslims believed that killing was wrong and that a murderer 'went to the fire'. Beliefs changed behavior.[53] Several informants mentioned the prohibitions against the consumption of alcohol, which brought greater social harmony to the village. One informant remembered the excessive consumption of alcohol in times past and said: 'If someone drinks until the heart grows hot and then they insult their father and their mother, that is bad'.[54] The imam of the village explained that when Islam had gained many converts, the Muslims went to the merchants in the village. They were asked to remove the wine and spirits previously sold by the barrel and the bottle from their stores.[55]

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[49] The historical example that underpins the analysis is the jihad in northern Nigeria. See Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usuman dan Fodio* (New York, 1973).

[50] Interview, Babacar Ndione, 14 July 1995.

[51] Interview, Ablaye Faye, 18 July 1995.

Some themes, such as the frequent contrast between Sereer customary funeral rites and Islamic rites, require further analysis. When the imam of the village, Babacar Ndione, was asked how life changed in the village after conversion, he used an extended comparison between traditional funeral ceremonies and Muslim funerals to express the difference. Traditional funerals honored the dead. The dead were interred in a large tomb, described as six square meters in size. The tomb contained a bed and various worldly treasures and was covered over with a house. Tombs were decorated with objects that expressed the character of the person (a woman's tomb with a mortar and pestle, a farmer's tomb with a hoe and machete, a hunter's tomb with a bow and arrow or rifle). The funeral of an important person differed from the funeral of a poor farmer. In a traditional funeral there were two distinct phases. The burial occurred shortly after death, but the funeral celebration was delayed until after the harvest. The funeral celebration was the occasion for remembering the dead through speeches that commented on the individual. It culminated in a large feast and dance that was hosted by the relatives of the deceased. Traditional funerals could be very expensive and they pointed to social differences in status, achievement and wealth. He ended his description of customary funerals by saying, 'They were not beautiful'.[56] By contrast Muslim funerals were simple and egalitarian in spirit. They were the same for everyone. They brought the entire community together, rather than being a burden for one family group. Their beauty came from the rituals of the washing of the corpse, the pure white funeral shroud and above all from the recitation of the Quran and Muslim prayers by the community.

The imam was not the only informant to discuss death and funerals as a way of explaining the meaning of conversion. Nguere Loem, who was one of the first four converts to Islam, also spoke at some length about the contrast between customary and Muslim funerals. His description of the contrast echoed that of the imam, but he also went on to discuss the link between death and inheritance. Funerals were linked in informants' minds to succession and inheritance, because matrilineal inheritance symbolized Sereer custom and directly contrasted with Muslim, patrilineal inheritance. Traditionally, it was the 'nephew' (*jaarbat*) who inherited from his maternal uncle (*nijaay*). Informants always described this custom as 'unfair'. After a man died his nephew arrived and took everything of value. Although informants used a general term meaning wealth or treasure, they were referring to livestock (cattle, goats, donkeys and horses). The wife and the children got nothing. Muslim inheritance was described as more fair to children and wives. Muslims expressed a clear preference for Islamic inheritance, which strengthened the bond between parents and children, especially fathers and sons. The father replaced the uncle, the son the nephew. Wives were also said to be happier with the new arrangement, although I was never able to confirm this in detail.[57]

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[52] Interview, Ibrahima Cisse, 16 July 1995.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Interview, Samba Seck, 17 July 1995.

[55] Interview, Babacar Ndione, 14 July 1995.

[56] Interview, Babacar Ndione, 14 July 1995.

When informants spoke in negative terms about the arrival of the nephew to inherit, their words recalled the even more negative portrait of uncles sending their nephews into the French army during the First World War. In subsequent interviews I pursued this line of inquiry by asking more questions about inheritance and the system of labor in the peasant economy that was linked to it. It was this exploration of the contrast between matrilineal custom and Islam that eventually uncovered a different story about conversion that went beyond generalities about the superiority of Islam. In a nutshell, all of the first converts to Islam were rebellious young men who challenged the authority of their elders. More specifically, they challenged the authority of their maternal uncles.

A REBELLIOUS GENERATION: BANDIA AFTER THE GREAT WAR

Young, unmarried men were the central actors in the drama of conversion in Bandia. They were also the linchpins in the matrilineal system of labor and inheritance. The Sereer household was based on the family unit of husband, wife and children. Wives lived in their husband's household. On the other hand, property in land and livestock was inherited matrilineally. The tension between patrilocal households and matrilineal inheritance was felt most acutely by young men after circumcision. Before circumcision (which I was told happened around 13–15) young boys worked for their fathers. They did so as children, however, without major responsibilities or a field of their own. After circumcision they were young adults, bachelors, and they were expected to work with the goal of preparing for marriage. At this time of their lives they were also expected to transfer their loyalty and ambitions to their matrilineal family.

A number of things could happen at this moment in the life cycle. The maternal uncle might come and take the nephew out of his paternal household. This was considered his right. In this case, the nephew would become a dependant (*surga*) in his uncle's household. He would work for his uncle on his fields five mornings a week. He would be given his own plot of land to work on in the afternoons and on Thursday, when he was free to work for himself. Mondays were also free days, but Mondays were a sacred day, when agricultural work was forbidden. Earnings from an individual's plot belonged to the young man and were destined for bridewealth payments, but the uncle often managed them. In some cases young men could continue to live in their father's household. If they did, they were still expected to send the earnings from their individual plot to the maternal uncle. The maternal uncle invested their earnings in livestock for bridewealth, but the uncle also profited from his nephew's earnings. Informants often referred to this system through brief, proverbial sayings that summed it up: 'The maternal uncle makes his nephews work for him' or 'The nephew inherits from his maternal uncle'.[58]

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[57] I asked permission to interview elderly women, but the 'opportunity' never arose. A female research assistant might be the only way for me to overcome this in future research. I did speak informally with elderly women in daily situations, especially in the compound where I stayed.

Daughters were less affected by this system of labor and inheritance than sons. Daughters usually lived in their father's (and mother's) household until marriage, then they moved into their husband's household. The one area of potential conflict was over bridewealth. Both fathers and maternal uncles received some payments when a young woman married. Informants downplayed the importance of these payments, partly because bridewealth payments have become much more onerous since conversion. Above all they were not connected to the inheritance of real wealth (livestock), as were relations between uncle and nephew.

The figure described by informants simply as the maternal uncle was generally the oldest member of a matrilineage or matrilineal segment. He controlled the herds of cattle and livestock that represented wealth. He was also a potential father-in-law. Marriage to the niece, or maternal uncle's daughter was permitted and was often considered the ideal marriage. (The uncle's wife belonged to a different matrilineage, as did the daughter, so the marriage was exogamous.) When a nephew was a suitor as well as a dependant, he worked even more for his uncle. But it is clear that only a minority of marriages conformed to this pattern, so the real authority of the uncle rested on his control of matrilineal wealth and property.

Conversion to Islam eventually overturned this system of labor and inheritance. By many tokens conversion was also a rebellion against it. Under the colonial system in Bandia young men suffered from the power of their maternal uncles. The story of military recruitment, as it was told to me by the first generation of Muslims, underlined this theme. Uncles sent their nephews to war, but they lost much of their legitimacy in the process. Uncles also sent their nephews to work on the fields cultivated for the Wolof canton chiefs.

When I asked a small group of informants who were assembled in the imam's house for a final interview what it was like for the first converts, when someone converted in a family that was not yet Muslim, there was a sudden outpouring of memories. The leading spokesman was Malik Pouye, the oldest living man in the village. Those were difficult, painful times for the young men who became Muslims. They were isolated within their own families. They could not eat or drink with family members, because alcohol and unclean foods were served. The heads of households did not suffer, but the young people suffered. The young men could not inherit property from their uncles. No one would offer them their nieces or daughters in marriage. They were insulted: 'You are ruined' (*yakku nga*), 'You are Wolof now' (*Wolof nga*), 'You are a traitor' (*workat nga*).[59] How did the converts cope with these difficulties, I asked? The reply was that they relied on themselves and helped one another. This led to the formation of Muslim work group and mutual aid society that continued in various forms for many years. Some fathers also helped their sons, aiding them in their defiance of their uncles. This closer relationship between fathers and sons went back to the end of the war, when returning veterans would have nothing to do with the uncles who sent them to the front. They looked to their fathers or sons for support. I was also now told clearly for the first time that the first Muslims were veterans. These veterans were often left out of general accounts of conversion because their conversion took place outside of the village and did not have the same impact as the later conversion of young men in the village after the war. One, for example, was a Murid. He did not stay in the village. Because there are now no Murids in the village, he was often forgotten.[60]

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[58] Interview, Ibrahima Cisse, 16 July 1995.

My informants were not eager to dwell on the divisions in the village during the period of the first conversions. They noted that within a short amount of time four major households, including the head of the household, converted completely.[61] Although this early period of tension between Muslims and traditionalists was said to have 'not lasted long' by the current imam, I believe it lasted from around 1920 until 1938. The imam was the youngest of the group of first converts named to me. He said that he converted in 1938, when he was eighteen, and he left the village two years later in 1940 to study Islam at a Tijani *zawiya* (lodge, school) in Yoff.[62] He later went on to study in Tivaouane, where he became the disciple of Ababacar Sy. His conversion is one reason why Muslims remember 1938 as an important year. 1938 was also the year in which the Muslims brought a first imam into the village. He was a Wolof named Amadou Gning. He opened a school and began teaching the young converts. His arrival signaled the first public acknowledgment of the role of Islam in the village. Converts often mentioned the coming of the first imam at the end of their general discussion of conversion. In context, it was clear that 1938 marked an end point of some importance. It signaled the reintegration of Muslims into the community and the beginning of general conversion.

Dating the first conversions to the 1920s is based on a number of factors. The war was often mentioned in conjunction with the first converts. Malik Pouye's father was killed in the war. The Cisse family had a war veteran. Converts often said that conversion 'proceeded slowly'. They mentioned conflicts over inheritance during the first years and the way the Muslim mutual aid society helped members who were ostracized by their families.

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[59] Interview, Malik Pouye, Ibrahima Sène, Ousman Sène, Babacar Ndione, 19 July 1995.

[60] Interview, Ibrahima Cisse, 16 July 1995.

[61] Ndick Cisse and Farba Cisse, who became Moussa Cisse and Ablaye Cisse; Biran Seck, who became Ibrahima Seck and later served as the second imam of the village; Moussa Ndione and Babacar Ndione; the household of Nguere Loem, who became Habib Loem.

[62] Interview, Babacar Ndione, 14 July 1995. He gave me one list of the first converts.

Many elders initially opposed Islam and Muslims wanted to avoid a direct split in the village. Indirect signs of these tensions included the explanation for the choice of a Wolof imam. There was a small Tukolor village nearby, with a Muslim school. Converts often mentioned it as a first local model of Islam. But the Tukolor did not or would not teach the Safèn. The reason, I surmised, was that they had close economic ties with the elders (who owned most of the cattle) and they did not want to take sides. Amadou Gning was Wolof, but he was also a true outsider, coming from the distant region of Waalo. The Safèn joked about their first imam, a Wolof chosen from their arch-enemies. They also talked about their fears that converting to Islam meant becoming Wolof. All of this suggested a relatively prolonged period of transition between the old order and the new, roughly from 1920 to 1940. In the end all of the elders of the village converted (at least nominally) to heal the rifts that had developed in the village.

CONCLUSION

Conversion in Bandia provides some support for both the Horton and Fisher models. When Muslim converts in Bandia spoke about the rain ceremonies or the protection given the village by the *xérém*, which struck down their Wolof enemies, they did not speak as skeptics describing past superstitions. In many cases they made it clear that they affirmed the efficacy of those practices. This was particularly true of their descriptions of rain ceremonies, when the elders of Bandia prayed last and only then did the rains begin to fall. These comments and statements that some of the elders still went to the *xérém* every Thursday (I imagine Latir Faye among this group) made it clear that Sereer religious rituals still live on. When they spoke about the rain ceremonies in Wolof and said that the elders 'prayed to God' for rain, the Supreme God of the Sereer fused with the God of Islam, at least momentarily in speech. Did they experience conversion as an evolution of their previous beliefs? Such a view would certainly fit in with some of the evidence. The Tijani 'mystical secrets' that were brought to the village by Babacar Ndione are perceived as knowledge like that possessed by their ancestors. When I asked questions about the *xérém*, the imam said, 'You are asking about our mystical secrets (*batin*)', the same term he would have used to describe the esoteric meaning of things in Sufi Islam.[63]

On the other hand Fisher would find much evidence of mixing. He would point to the role played by the Tukolor neighbors of the Sereer, who provided them with a model for understanding Islam and what conversion would mean. It is possible that there was considerable interest in aspects of Islam even before conversion, as the Safèn were entirely surrounded by Muslims. Certainly, mixing in Fisher's sense exists in Bandia today. There are many devout Muslims, but the old shrine still stands and some elders still visit the shrine, even though everyone is Muslim today.

However, converts also emphasized change in ways that these models of conversion do not. Conversion was not simply acceptance of Islam or an adjustment in world-view. Conversion radically altered local configurations of power, kinship and inheritance. Converts talked about Islamic law, about the change from matrilineal inheritance to patrilineal inheritance. They talked about how they had abandoned the old burial customs and funeral services and adopted Islamic practice. They talked about outlawing the sale of alcohol in the village. They also presented a portrait of the dramatic changes associated with the time of conversion. Young men rebelled against their elders and helped one another. Young men began to study, gaining access to knowledge that their elders never had. They learned that Islamic learning was the same everywhere, which is one way of contrasting the knowledge of literacy with the secret knowledge of their ancestors.[64] The way in which conversion brought a generation of young men to power was also clear. Although the first Muslims are old men now, the first Sereer imam was still a young man. When Babacar Ndione, the current imam, first took his office he was in his forties. All these changes, occurring as they did in one generation, underlined the fact that conversion brought dramatic change.

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[63] Interview, Malik Pouye, Ibrahima Sène, Ousman Sène, Babacar Ndione, 19 July 1995.

Conversion did mediate the integration of the Safèn into a larger world. After conversion many new things were possible. The Safèn, who had defended their elevated ridges against all comers, now sent out a young man to study among the Wolof. Men and women began to migrate to Dakar in search of work, something that would have been impossible before. As Muslims the Safèn reached out to the larger society of Senegal in a new way. They were not simply submitting to superior force, as in the period of the conquest. Safèn identity was redefined in important ways.

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[64] Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (Berkeley, 1984), presents similar ideas in stories about Cerno Bokar teaching the Dogon, another paradigm of conversion.