

Baye Fall: A Mouride Group of Senegalese Islam

Anthropologic research on the religious life of Baye Fall

Year: 1st

Place of fieldwork: The Republic of Senegal

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- Research background

The Baye Fall is a branch group of the Mouride, part of the Islamic Sufi movement in Senegal. The Mouride movement was founded by Ahmadou Bamba in the end of 19th century, and his most popular and devout disciple, Ibra Fall, later founded the Mouride community of Baye Fall. Ibra Fall worked hard for Ahmadou Bamba and led all of the labor work for the Mouride, often serving meals, collecting money, and working as security for their leader (called “marabout” in West Africa). Baye Fall style their hair in dreadlocks and wear colorful patchwork clothes with rosary beads (“kruth” in Wolof) around their necks. In addition, they neither pray nor fast, a unique departure from other Muslim groups.

Some descriptions of Baye Fall describe them as “bandits” in Senegal, though this likely due to the rise in “false Baye Fall,” in Dakar, who drink alcohol and smoke marijuana. However, true Baye Fall do not drink and smoke.

This study depicts the “real” Baye Fall, based on anthropologic research seeking to understand the Baye Fall group and their Islamic significance in Senegal.

- Research purpose and aim

The aim of this anthropologic research was to observe the religious life of Baye Fall and analyze the social role of their religion in the Muslim community. Focusing on the Baye Fall’s works and other aspects of their lives, I sought to discover what they want to produce for the other Mouride Muslims, even without praying. Moreover, I collected data on the rituals of Baye Fall, such as song-based rituals with many drums and dancing. In addition, I attempted to join the rituals of Baye Fall in order to take photos and movies.

- Results and achievements by fieldwork

My fieldwork was from October 2, 2014, to November 30, 2014, during which time I stayed in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal. I selected the Sandaga market and Cheikh Anta Diop University for the fieldwork sites within Dakar.

In the Sandaga market, some Baye Fall collected money by begging passersby on the street. Through my investigative interviews with them, I discovered that this begging act is called Majal. They perform Majal to buy rice, sugar, and beef cattle for their marabout. Majal was organized from 10 o'clock in the morning to 18 o'clock in the evening every day.

The Zikr (or religious chant) of Baye Fall is also organized in the urban community of Mouride "Dahira" in Sandaga. They form a circle and sing *lā 'ilāha 'illā-llāh* ("There is no god but Allah"). I was present for six Zikr blessings and each took, on average, one hour.

I also conducted fieldwork in other cities outside of Dakar. Interviewees in rural farming sites explained me that "Baye Fall in the village are the *real* Baye Fall." I then examined the differences between the Baye Fall in these rural villages and those who lived in Dakar.

- Implications and impacts on future research

Through this fieldwork, I located appropriate sites for my research, interviewed many Baye Fall, and collected data regarding their rituals. However, there are many things that I could not investigate deeply, such as comprehensive research in the rural villages and Baye Fall's work other than collecting money. I would take participant investigation much deeper in the town and in the villages during future opportunities.



(Photo 1: Baye Fall collecting money in Sandaga market)



(Photo 2: Baye Fall singing in the Dahira in Sandaga market)



(Photo 3: Baye Fall in a village in south of Kebemer, they butchered one beef cattle for the Islamic New Year ceremony (*Tamkharit*))