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Sufism, Healing Rituals and Spirits in the Muslim World

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Chapter Eleven

DREAMING IN THE PRACTICE OF AFRICAN MARABOUTS IN PARIS

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Introduction[1]

The marabouts who constitute the subject of my research come from West Africa and are Muslims. It was in the 1960s that they began to emigrate to France. In West Africa they assume different roles: lawyers, teachers of the Qur'an, regulators of conflicts; they also celebrate births, marriages and deaths. They are also diviners, and provide people with predictions, advice or guidance, and amulets for all sorts of problems (work, love, residence permits etc.). In Paris, most of them assume only the role of diviner and healer (in a broad sense of the term) for many reasons which are particular to the Parisian context.[2] Attracting clients from all origins, they became a serious challenge to French diviners, reviewing and enriching the interpretations of illness and misfortune and the ways of healing; nonetheless they strove to maintain a subtle balance between exoticism and these practices, already well known in France before their arrival.

One of the practices marabouts use for healing is dreaming. Much has been written about the mainstream teachings of Islam regarding dreams and their interpretation (von Grünebaum 1967; Fahd 1987; Lory 2003, 2007). However, it is striking that none of this literature has dealt in any explicit way with Muslim social practices of dreaming. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some insights into this issue by describing several ways of dreaming used by marabouts in order to solve their clients' problems. It is divided in two parts: the first deals with current practices observed in Paris and in

Senegal; the second focuses on a case study, the examination of the special experience of a marabout whose biography I am currently writing.

Current practices of listikhar

As with shamanistic societies, the Islamic world places great value on dreams, and dreaming is an important component of Muslim people's everyday lives. Talking about one's dreams, guessing what they mean, and drawing knowledge, advice or warnings from them, are very common experiences. Just one example: during my fieldwork, Khadi, a young Malian student, told me that she saw in her dream a large white bird flying towards her, which she interpreted as a sign that something good would happen to her. But apart from such spontaneous experiences, dreams can also be induced through special prayers. Strictly speaking, what people are looking for is decision making via divine inspiration: this dawns upon the individual through dreams, especially in the last part of the night. Many websites explain how to perform this special prayer. It is well known that many religious young people now seek divine guidance through dreams before making any major decision, especially on questions of marriage. Two points should be borne in mind. First, that in Muslim societies, the power of dreams is widely acknowledged: they may predict the future, they may help to shape social behaviour, they may solve one's difficulties. Second, that, to some extent, everyone is able to draw lessons from their dreams.

However, if a person has a particular problem they cannot solve alone, they may seek the intervention of a specialist. They might also take this course if a dream remains unclear or predicts undesirable things. For example, a woman went to a marabout because she was frightened by her dream, which showed her sister in a very dangerous situation. It certainly meant something was threatening the sister, but the dreamer did not know whether it was an accident or an illness or some other unpleasant event. She asked the marabout to clarify this and to protect her sister. In such cases, it is up to the specialist to reveal the truth of the client's dream and to act, together with the client's cooperation, in order to avoid any gloomy predictions. For this, the marabout chooses between numerous techniques of divination. Although it may be replaced by more rapid techniques like geomancy or cowrie-shell divination, particularly in urban contexts,[3] one of the most frequently used methods, in West Africa as well as in Paris, is what marabouts call *listikhar* (Arabic *istikhara*). This corresponds roughly to the prayer that was outlined previously, which ordinary people can use to make a decision through divine inspiration, but which marabouts are presumed to hold in more elaborate and

powerful versions. So, one can see that ordinary practices have similarities to those of specialists. The difference lies in the involvement with the esoteric sciences and the scale of the operations, rather than in the nature of the practice. A second observation is that claiming authority as a specialist can be a way of making a living as diviner and healer while using one's domestic religious knowledge. This occurs particularly in urban contexts.

When marabouts are aware of the problem or the request of their clients, they often need to 'look', which means engaging in this esoteric *listikhar* night consultation. They might also need this to verify if the client is sincere, or even to protect the marabout's own life. In West Africa, *listikhar* may also be used to solve more collective difficulties. For example, as Lamine O. Sanneh notes, the Jakhanke – a group of Islamic clerics of Senegambia – were known to perform *listikhar* for *jihad* war leaders in the nineteenth century; they helped them by predicting the outcome of a fight or advising them on precautions to take (Sanneh 1979: 193–4). This author also states that 'the Jakhanke have used prayer, including *al-istikharâh*, as part of the process of community renewal (*tajdîd*), particularly in the area of undertaking new ventures and founding new centres' (Sanneh 1979: 197).

Different techniques

I will now focus on four different techniques of *listikhar* that I was able to observe. The first combines writings and prayers and is made up of several related parts. After the initial interview with the client, the marabout waits alone till nightfall, when they write the first word (*bismillah*) of the first verse of the *Fatiha* (first sura of the Qur'an) on a sheet of white paper and shape the last letter into a five-pointed star. In every point of the star, they write the same number, which is determined by the addition of the name of the client to the name of their request (for example: work; in Arabic, *amal*); each letter of both names is converted into a number by following esoteric rules that depend on calculations called *abadjada*. Here begins the most important part of *listikhar*: the marabout recites the verse several times (often 313 times, which has a special meaning in esoteric Muslim practices[4]). Then they request Allah to help them solve their client's problem (he cites his name explicitly). Lying down on their right side, in imitation of the Prophet's position,[5] they slip the written paper under their head. While sleeping, the marabout is supposed to see 'somebody' in their dream that tells them what action to take. If this does not succeed, the marabout repeats their request, and possibly increases the number of prayers.

The second technique observed was that of a marabout of Fula descent. First of all, he cleans himself, wears a clean cloth, and lights candles and a

brazier with auspicious scents, in order to urge the 'angels' to visit him. While many treatises on esoteric Islam correlate angels' names with particular scents (as well as with colours, stones . . .), the marabouts' favoured scent is benzoin; but this man uses any kind of perfume. He does not write anything, but recites several suras that he has chosen. Before lying down in a comfortable position, he invokes the 'name of Allah' that is suitable to his request and 'calls' his client's name followed by their mother's name in order to identify them precisely. The number of prayers and callings increases with the difficulty of the problem to be solved. During his dream, angels (Arabic, *rawhan*) inform the marabout about the cause of the problem and instruct him as to what kinds of 'sacrifices' (Arabic, *sadaqa*)[6] and written amulets or talismans are required to solve it.

The third technique is quite different. On a new piece of fabric, the marabout writes an esoteric, undecipherable formula consisting of Arabic letters and numbers like those one can find abundantly in al-Buni's work (*ob.* 1225, one of the masters of the esoteric Islamic sciences, his work is known widely all over the Muslim world).[7] As in the first example of *listikhar*, he slips this paper under his head while lying down. Before sleeping, the marabout says aloud: 'Angels, take care of X (the client's name)!' and expresses their request. In the dreams, the diviner is supposed to 'see' what was asked for.

And finally, a rapid *listikhar* technique used by some Fula marabouts consists of putting a branch of a special tree, named *doki*,[8] under one's head before sleeping in order to raise a divinatory dream. It is to be noted that *doki* is believed by the Fula to have magic powers. It is especially used for building shelves that receive milk calabashes, which are particularly protected by all kinds of talismans; it is also used in healing.

Discussion

What can be inferred from these different ways of dreaming? Obviously they are all, except the last, totally immersed in Islamic teachings. In fact, the Arabic root of the term *listikhar* (*KH-Y-R*) refers to the placing of a choice in Allah's hands. And according to Pierre Lory's work concerning dreaming in Islamic doctrine, this can help in solving everyday problems as well as in spiritual exercises, in Sufi style. Evidence of the link between these ways of dreaming and Islam can be found in many elements: the prayers (oral or written), in the praises of the Prophet Muhammad; the reference to the angels (Arabic, *maleika* or *rawhan*); the gestures (which imitate the Prophet's position). It lies also in the special writing of Arabic numbers and letters. This knowledge (which is called in Arabic, *ilm al-asrar*, 'science of secrets') is part of the esoteric approach to Islam, which not all Muslims

regard with the same respect that is granted to the *sunna*. It is based on the idea that the world was created with the letters of the Qur'an, and that these letters rule the world and stars. Each letter as well as each sura of the Qur'an is believed to be an 'angel' powerful enough to transform the world and to influence people. This is the reason marabouts use them to answer questions connected to the difficulties of everyday life. One may also note that only men are supposed to be skilled in this kind of science, for reasons of purity. Therefore, despite the numerous religious attacks against marabout practices since the fourteenth century (the major arguments being that there must not exist any mediation between Allah and his creation, that marabouts associate with Allah other mighty spirits – Arabic *shirk* – and that making a living out of predicting the future is prohibited),[9] it appears that *listikhar* is closely tied to Islam.

Actually, Islamic teachings reflect the importance of dreaming. In the Qur'an and in the hadith, one can read numerous stories of dreams that had a major influence on both Muslim history and doctrine.[10] Toufic Fahd states that all divinatory sciences (astrology, numerology . . .) have been severely attacked by Muslim theologians, philosophers and jurists, who all consider them as illicit (*haram*), except for physiognomy and dreaming. Many treatises on dream interpretation have been written since the seventh century. Besides Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (1641–1731), the most famous author is Ibn Sirin (*ob*. 728), whose work remains one of the most valuable references on dreams in the Muslim tradition. One can buy different versions of his work in all Muslim bookshops (see Ibn Sirin 1992), including those in Senegal. Following Djibril Samb, Arabo-Islamic keys to dreams have in all likelihood accompanied the penetration of Islam into Senegambia from the very beginning (Samb 1998: 70). On some websites, one can enter a word corresponding to a vision in a dream and receive different possible meanings taken from an 'Islamic dictionary of dreams' directly inspired by Ibn Sirin's work. This is a quite mechanical version of a very popular activity in the Muslim world. In a recent issue of *al-Ahram* (2006), a widely read newspaper in Muslim countries, an article notes that '. . .dream interpretations have become a fixture of Arab satellite television. Some decipher dreams through the Freudian model, others eschew the father of psychoanalysis and focus on religious explanations'. The article goes on to describe the special programme on dreams available on an Egypt-based satellite channel: viewers can phone in to be enlightened by a popular dream interpreter, who interprets dreams by means of the Qur'an. Dreaming is indeed integrated into the *ilm* (Islamic teaching) and is traditionally considered as 1 of the 46 parts of the prophecy. But in its attempt to separate from other cultures with a rich tradition of dreaming and dreams interpretation, Islam developed a particular classification of dreams. There are many versions, but it commonly distinguishes

between three types: first, the true dreams that come from Allah. These are the dreams of the Prophets and of the righteous people who follow them. They may also come to other people, but only to the true believers who are in accordance with the *sunna*. The second type is inspired by devils. In these dreams, which are rather nightmares, the individual is suffering or may hear angels telling them to do something forbidden. Such dreams are considered untrustworthy by nature. The third type, which is in fact the most common, comes from within the individual (*nafs*) and his desire. These are mostly remembrances of what happened in real life, or images of what the dreamer wishes would happen. They are considered to be virtually worthless and even meaningless. Unsurprisingly, as many authors note, Muslim thought is interested in the first category of dreams only, and considers the other types as irrelevant to Muslim life. So one can clearly conclude that Islam has attempted to regulate and to channel dreaming practices.

Returning now to marabout practices, I highlight some elements that show that 'sociological' Islam is much more complex than its theological construction.

1) I have noted that while dreaming some marabouts lie on their right side, in the Prophet's position, while other practitioners do not observe this recommendation. This diversity of gestures is a reminder that this religious custom is an Islamic reinterpretation of ancient traditions of dreaming, in particular the Greek incubation (see Meier 1967); moreover, the general influence of the Greek science of dreams on the Islamic teachings is well known. Thus, whether these gestures are considered today to go back to the Greek period or not, we can suggest that something of these ancient practices, not totally encompassed by Islam, remains; in the same way, Islam itself can be overlaid by other cultures. Just one example: one of the marabouts I worked with always used to make his dreaming experiences in the forest.
2) Another point to highlight is how varied the ways of making *listikhar* are. The first example that I gave deals explicitly with Allah's inspiration. In the third, the marabout orders the angels directly to grant his wishes. We have here two completely opposite attitudes towards the requested power: submission in the first case, domination in the second. The fourth technique of *listikhar* that I described is quite different: here Allah and the angels seem to be less powerful than nature (one recalls the branch of *doki*). The use of the forest (above) strongly suggests that nature may be an alternative or complementary powerful world for some marabouts. It should be recalled that in marabout thought nature is by no means a pleasant and smiling world, as in the representations of heaven's gardens.

It is conceived as ambiguous, hence potentially dangerous: the winds, the sun, the plants may be sometimes beneficial, sometimes harmful or nefarious; this contradictory, unpredictable power is the agent of all actions in the world. Therefore its appropriation and beneficial use can be experienced only by initiated and well-protected practitioners.

3) One important issue cannot be overlooked: besides Allah, marabouts invoke other beings' help before dreaming. Who exactly are these invisible beings, mighty enough to provide someone with help, advice and solutions to anxieties . . .? Marabouts generally use very allusive terms, like 'a person', or 'someone'; this euphemistic vocabulary is employed in order to avoid speaking about a highly dangerous invisible world. It designates a large group of beings that are supposed to exist between Allah and humans. Although some scholars have attempted to describe this invisible world as a hierarchical one (see for example Zempleni 1968), I believe that in a marabout mind, terms like 'angel', '*jinn*', 'spirit', '*rahwan*' and '*maleika*' are quite synonymous. As noted previously, the main feature of all these beings is that they are dangerous. For this reason, marabouts have to perform many rituals before invoking them, in order to persuade them to answer their requests. According to the Qur'an and the *sunna*, *jinns* are highly ambiguous: some of them are said to be Muslims, others not; all of them are able to take on any physical form they like (animals, whirlwinds, humans, noise . . .), and they are considered one of the origins of evil. The best way to seek refuge from the *jinns* is to pray to Allah. But marabouts are seen as able to collaborate with *jinns*. Having a nightmare is to marabouts the signal of a failure in this partnership and a serious warning to become stronger. Some of them mix invocations to Allah, to some of the well-known angels (like Jibril or Asrafil) and to the *jinns*. Some diviners are even closely related to particular *jinns*, which they appeal to in any circumstance and whom they consider their relatives – namely their wives. Marabouts are also believed to act on the partner *jinn* of the client; this *jinn*, which everyone has, is often viewed as the double of a person, and to be their most vulnerable aspect. The conclusion that arises is that the dreamer's inspiration depends upon a very composite world. It mixes Allah with an invisible group of powerful beings that are not clearly defined in Islamic teachings, and who give rise to all sorts of discussions, even from a religious perspective. In some marabout practices, it doesn't appear obvious whether *jinns* belong to a transcendent or an immanent world. Nature, as it appears in the forms that *jinns* may take, is not so distant or distinct a force. It may itself cause illness or misfortune. As we have seen, some marabouts pay special attention to the power of nature. My central contention is that it is not so easy to discriminate, let alone establish a hierarchical distinction,

between what would belong to 'the recognised, dominant religious tradition of the Muslim clergy who claim godly and angelic inspiration' (Dilley 1992: 77) and what would belong to the less institutionalised tradition of diviners inspired by a more composite spirit world.

4) The last element to be introduced concerns the flexibility of marabout practices. Many other versions of *listikhar* could have been described.[11] As with healing, each marabout holds his own recipes for dreaming. The salient notion here is that of secrecy (Arabic, *sirr*). Reputation and power are tied to the possession of secret knowledge, which assures this power, and, in some cases, is the very condition of it. For this reason, clients seek out practitioners willing to employ a secret on their behalf, in the same way that marabouts themselves seek out people presumed to have the most powerful secrets in order to reinforce and enrich their own knowledge and power. Elsewhere (Kuczynski 2000), I have analysed different modes of transfer of marabout knowledge, either following a hierarchical model or circulating among peers. What I want to emphasise here is that, to some extent, both ways are propitious for individual constructions or inventions. For reasons related to power, marabouts would hardly ever use a secret in the way it was revealed to them (sometimes sold, or exchanged for money or another secret). Furthermore, given that in most cases part of the revealed secret remains hidden by its transferring owner, on acquiring it the marabout must accommodate, reinterpret, complete and integrate it in the mould of their own knowledge. There are numerous processes involved in this personal appropriation of knowledge, not discussed here. But one should note that this is a very dynamic situation in which the personal expertise of each marabout is paramount.

A similar flexibility pertains to the interpretation of dreams. As mentioned, one can find a myriad of 'keys to dreams' in every Islamic bookshop. But marabouts really do not appreciate this kind of knowledge; they generally place more value on expertise that is orally transmitted. So the same situation as that just described applies, and opens the way to many personal variations and innovations.

Finally, the Islamic teachings themselves consider that the interpretation of dreams is never strictly codified or predetermined, and that it cannot entirely rely on the meaning of a symbol. Many other features have to be taken into account, such as the dreamer's general context, their feelings, the personal, social and psychological problems they face. During my fieldwork among marabouts, I was able to observe the many questions they asked their clients or themselves about their own dreams: were they frightened by

their dream or not? Did they feel cold or warm? What did they smell, what did they hear? etc. All senses (not only vision) are involved in dreaming and in dream interpretation. Marabouts have many verbal and non-verbal exchanges with their clients, and their dream interpretation derives more from the interaction between the marabout and his client than from the mechanical implementation of a learned code. In his book on dreaming among Guajiro shamans, *Les Praticiens du rêve*, Michel Perrin argues that literate societies, where the keys to dreams are put down in books, are much more rigid in this respect than societies with oral traditions, where such keys play a less important role: 'Because literate societies have given a fixed form in writing to the keys to dreams, we attribute to them a rigidity which they do not possess in oral societies' (Perrin 1992: 62).[12] With the above discussion in mind, it is difficult to agree with Perrin's opinion. Quite the opposite. Marabout practices show us that the skills and the personality of the practitioner play a crucial role in dreaming and in interpreting dreams.

I will not attempt to compare shamanism and Islam with regard to dreaming, but I would like to mention some elements in which they echo each other: in the unobtrusive presence of nature that can appear in some versions of *listikhar*; in the intricate invisible world marabouts deal with, a world that seems to exceed a religious-sanctioned framework; and, finally, in the openness to personal creation and the importance of a practitioner's personal experience and expertise.

A case study

This section examines how a particular marabout, Dia, whose biography I am writing, experiences dreaming.

He was born some 75 years ago on the eastern bank of the Senegal River. He is of Fula descent and Fula culture is deeply ingrained in him. His male ancestors have been renowned *silatigi* for generations, in both paternal and maternal lineages. A *silatigi* is a diviner and a healer, and is particularly skilled in pastoral farming matters (Fula people are, in origin, shepherds). But a *silatigi* also knows how to deal with human misfortunes and wishes (such as those concerning relations between men and women, infertility, business, success in all fields, etc.). *Silatigi* are believed to hold secrets regarding the use of plants that originate in their close links with powerful *jinns*. These secrets may be communicated in a dream. Dia's family turned from 'traditional' religion to Islam three or four generations ago. They pray to Allah, and in addition Dia's father has affiliated to the Tijani Sufi order, as has Dia himself. He attaches great importance to the worship of Allah, and this

seems to give guidelines to his practice as a *silatigi*. He defines himself as a Muslim and never works on Friday. But Dia never attended an Islamic school or learned Arabic. Only one of his brothers was taught by a marabout who used to live in Dia's family house for many years; Dia himself learned Muslim prayers with this man. None of the family was introduced to the Islamic science of secrets (*ilm al-asrar*). Thus, when Dia came to France, he ran into marabouts and tried to learn their trade by himself. He acquired secrets of *silatigi* practice from his father, and improved his knowledge with other elder Fula practitioners whom he met in Dakar. Unwilling to become a *silatigi* when he was young – he intended to involve himself in business – he finally began to practise in Dakar, then in Paris. He came to France in 1961, and has worked most of his life here.

I will now focus on Dia's experience of dreaming. He has a thorough knowledge of *listikhar*, thus he does not use the Islamic forms of it. But he is dream-prone and speaks very often about his experiences. From his experience of many months in the French Caribbean, he also likes to practise what is known in France as 'sleeping divination' ('*voyance dormante*'); for example, he used it in order to find a thief. But dreaming is by no means a harmless experience, because of the dangerous link with the invisible world. For this reason, he often feels tired or even ill, and he has to protect himself against the *jinns*' assault. For this purpose, he mostly washes with plant mixtures, but he also invokes Allah's names and those of *jinns* as well as other assistants in a Fula secret language. Although he is not really literate, he has written down a large part of his secret invocations in different languages, including Arabic, in a little notebook. Like most marabouts, he keeps this knowledge away from prying eyes. Once a week he also 'feeds' his assistants by spitting pieces of a white kola nut onto a horn serving as a sort of a portable altar.

His gift of dreaming originated in his childhood. He described how his parents were worried when they heard him screaming; some of his dreams were really threatening. In Fula culture, such a dreaming child is considered gifted for divination. But it is frequently a twofold gift, with a positive and a negative side. The positive is that the child is believed to become a *silatigi* (he is devoted to learning the practice). The negative side is that he may also be attacked by sorcerers called, in Fula language, *soucougnan*, or 'night-travellers', or 'blacks'. These wicked beings appear at night, taking the shape of threatening shadows or half-animal half-human creatures,[13] and are supposed to assault people and change them into sorcerers. These are mainly believed to be real creatures, and are widespread in West African cultures. The child has to be protected, but fighting against *soucougnans* demands special skills which are not within *silatigi*'s competence. Other specialists are thus requested. The protection against *soucougnans* has to be repeated regularly, as they can attack at any time. Dia describes numerous dreams of

threatening *soucougnans* that he has had over the course of his life, leaving him exhausted, suffering and sometimes really ill. What appears in dreams becomes reality. He has had to cure himself and sometimes to request other specialists' help (including physicians). It is noticeable that he dislikes curing people he believes to be harmed by *soucougnans*. One might ask: What relation exists between this kind of dream and Islam? Sometimes it is direct: in one dream it was said to Dia that only Mohammadu Rasulilla could save him (meaning that he should pray to Allah). Fighting against *soucougnan* dreams (which means against *soucougnans*) can take several forms, and belief in this kind of sorcerer coexists with the worship of Allah.

Dia experiences other kinds of dreams. When he came to France in 1961, he did not make a living as a *silatigi*, using his skills only occasionally; he worked as a warehouseman in several factories. Nevertheless, dreaming was significant even in that kind of job. For example, he told me that he found the factory where he was to spend more than ten years thanks to a dream: he 'saw' the area, the street, details of the building, which he then 'recognised' while going round all the firms in a Parisian suburb. In the same way, he was able to 'see' how many clients would come in one day, at what time etc. These premonitory optimistic dreams can also turn into frightening warnings – they also have an obscure side. The most striking example is when Dia deals with talismans that have to be prepared in a cemetery. This kind of work takes place in Africa. He does not touch the body, but he sits at the head of the tomb invoking his *jinns* and other names while making the amulet. Dia explains that when leaving the cemetery he would always dream about somebody's death; and that this dream would quickly turn into reality (he would hear that someone really passed away). It is not actually clear to what extent Dia has to effectively deal with the deceased in the cemetery: Does he invoke them or not? This case deserves further enquiry. But what is suggested here is that dreams announce a dramatic exchange; and that these dreams not only give advice or knowledge for action, to some extent they become reality. It is almost the same situation as when Dia undertook dangerous practices that overstepped those that he was able to use in accordance with his age: then he had terrifying dreams that made him ill and warned him to stop his work. At that time (Dia was in his 20s) his father reinforced the warning of the dreams and advised his son to limit his work to easy questions.

Finally, I analyse a dream that Dia had in his late 30s, which had serious consequences for his whole life. At this time he was living in Paris and, as mentioned earlier, he was confined to petty work. Suddenly, he was assailed by terrible dreams that persisted for more than a month. In these dreams he heard and saw all sorts of animals: cows, birds, bees, camels, hyenas, snakes, locusts, ants, mosquitoes, worms, sheep etc; all of which cried out in his head. He explains that he even saw children, men, in brief, all creatures

on earth, running to him. He adds: all creatures, but no angels. He was afraid of going mad and felt near to death. In order to help him to overcome this serious crisis and painful headaches, a marabout shaved his head. Dia also went to a physician who gave him some medicine: in both cases his condition worsened. A talisman against *soucougnans* seemed to calm his pain. But the most important thing, Dia explains, was what he describes as a real fight: he did not give up, he was not scared of this invading, swarming crowd; he remained firm. Gradually these fearsome dreams vanished. After overcoming this dangerous trial, which he calls an illness, and which left him forever bald, Dia felt stronger and more effective as a diviner. He stopped being a warehouseman – in the meantime, the company which employed him had closed down – and decided to work exclusively as a diviner and a healer. This opened the path towards social recognition and was the beginning of a fairly successful career in Paris.

Interpreting this dream is not easy. It seems to lead to a kind of 'initiation'. Dia was already given an 'initiation' by his father, who allowed him to work as a *silatigi* within the limits of his age. However, speaking of 'initiation' seems somewhat inappropriate in that case, for his father regularly transmitted knowledge and know-how to his gifted son. At the time of his trial, Dia's father had already passed away. So one can consider this dream as a second, more absolute legitimisation (rather than 'initiation') in a new context: Dia is alone, he is about 40 and he lives in Paris. The intervention of nature in this urban context is interesting – nature meaning animals (bush animals as well as domestic ones) and human beings.[14] Bearing in mind what has been explained about the skill of a *silatigi*, and the special links that this practitioner has with nature, it could be argued that overcoming nature in Paris leads to a full legitimisation of *silatigi* practices in this new context – which is not incompatible with all sorts of personal accommodations. It is noticeable, once again, that Dia's dream combines various features dealing with *silatigi* practices as well as with *soucougnans*. Islam does not seem to act in this dream (Dia explains that he did not see angels), unless we understand the shaving of Dia's head as an Islamic ritual purification – which actually failed to cure Dia! In my opinion, however, too much rationalisation here is dangerous and even meaningless. It appears that dreaming is not only a mediation establishing contact with the invisible world, it has in itself curative properties.

Conclusion

As a result of the present study, two observations need to be emphasised: first, as already highlighted, practices are always very mixed, and attempts to

distinguish what belongs to Islam and what to shamanism seem irrelevant. In my opinion, the most salient points to be learned concern flexibility and personal accommodation.

The second observation is about the relevance of the separation of literate and oral societies in our analyses. As I have attempted to demonstrate, this distinction often makes little sense when regarding the world of diviners and healers, in which the personality and the individual experience of the practitioner is always paramount.

Thus, within a Muslim framework, marabouts are nowadays, in Paris as in Senegal, competing with practitioners who repeat the time-worn criticisms of marabouts as 'associationists' and 'innovators'. Aiming to return to a literal interpretation of Islam and pretending to be representatives of a more 'orthodox' Islam, these 'new' specialists promote a version of *listikhar* strictly based on the reciting of prescribed verses and totally excluding the invocation of spirits. Some of them also claim to draw from the medicine of the Prophet's time, and spread healing practices such as *ruqiya*, a way to cure misfortune and illness also exclusively based on prayers. But the different Muslim movements who claim to adhere to the original form of Islam (*tablighis*, *salafis* . . .) do not agree among themselves with the definition that may be given of ritual purism and heavily denigrate each other, much as they do marabout practices.

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3 *Sema* (Arabic: *samâ'*) is literally a '[spiritual] audition'; see the bibliography on sacred dances in Islam in Ambrosio and Zarcone 2004.
4 See other descriptions of this dance with analysis in: And 2003: 181–6; Arnaud-Demir 2002 and 2004; Bozkurt 2008: 45–7; Dinçer 2000; Duygulu 2004; Erseven 1996: 134–6; Markof 1993; Onatça 2007: 74–5.
5 I would like to thank Cafer Yildiz for providing me with material about this dance, especially the texts of the poetry song by his group.
6 The *yeldirme* phase is also a characteristic of the profane dance in Anatolia; see And 2003: 144.
7 See the commentary about this poetry by Arnaud-Demir (2002: 55–6), who points to the identification of the feathers of the crane and the strings of the lute, as the Turkish word *tel* (string) refers to both.
8 '*Jinn sûqghân, bâlâ tâbmâghân khâtûnlargha pîr ûynimiz*'. On contemporary shamanism in Xinjiang see Rakhman 2006: 215–51.
9 Regarding dances executed by shamans in non-Turkic areas, see: Berti 1995.
10 See my chapter in this volume: 'Shamanism in Turkey: bards, "masters of the *jinns*" and healers'.
11 A Qur'anic event, the *miraj* is here reinterpreted by the Bektashi-Alevi tradition which shows the Prophet accompanied by Ali and Salman.
12 See also Birge 1965: 137–8.
13 This dance was also executed by the Association of Young Alevis of the Merdivenköy Tekke and presented at Ascona.

Chapter Eleven

1 I am by no means a shamanism specialist. In the course of extensive research on African marabouts in Paris, I am now writing the biography of one of them, whom I met many years ago during previous fieldwork. It was by collecting the words of this man that I realised how complex and varied his professional experience of dreaming was, compared to the position outlined in Islamic doctrine.
2 Owing to the need among Parisians for the services of diviners, it was finally decided in France to accept them with this status rather than consider them as religious figures.
3 *Listikhar* requires that the client visit the marabout twice: the first time to explain their problem and the second to hear the result of the divinatory dream. This twofold visit is believed to irritate impatient clients.
4 313 is considered a powerful number according to many different interpretations (there are 313 known prophets; there were 313 fighters at the famous Battle of Badr; it results from the addition of the numeral values of the letters of the prophet's name, etc.)
5 Imitation of the Prophet is the core of Muslim life; it is believed to be beneficial to spiritual life and a means of salvation.
6 The Arabic word *sadaqa* usually designates charity or alms-giving, which is a necessary part of Islam. West African Muslims use this same word (wolof, *sarakh*; fula, *sadaq*) for ritual offerings or sacrifices donated to Allah or the

jinns through a third party (who may be a poor person) in order to favour fortune. Islam merely tolerates this practice.

7 Concerning the progressive elaboration of Islamic esoteric sciences, see Constant Hamès 2008.

8 Botanical name: *Combretum glutinosum Perr.*

9 The Hanbali Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) was the first to violently denounce marabout practices.

10 Sura 8 describes two of Muhammad's dream experiences in the context of fighting against his opponents: Allah uses dreams to give Muhammad confidence in his final victory. According to the hadith (Bukhârî), the first revelation was given to the Prophet in dreams. I will not go into details here, as Toufic Fahd and Pierre Lory have so ably studied this issue.

11 For other descriptions, see Sanneh 1979: 192; Samb 1998: 196–7; Kuczynski 2002: 181–91.

12 Original version: 'les sociétés à écriture ayant figé leurs clés dans des livres, on leur prête une rigidité qu'elles n'ont pas dans les sociétés de tradition orale'.

13 Following Dia's description.

14 Dia's experience may be compared with that of an old Tukolor weaver described by Dilley: running into a female *jinn* in the bush, he could only utter *la* (beginning of *la ilaha illa'lah*) before he was struck dumb; but as he was not afraid, the female *jinn* appeared to him in a dream and gave him 'much weaving lore' that led to greater skill and ability. Dilley considers that the metaphor of the bush represents 'the origin of weaving and its source of inspiration coming from beyond the social world of men – that is from the *jinn* of the bush. It is the weaver who integrates and transforms these potentially threatening powers of creation into a socially useful activity such as weaving' (Dilley 1992: 78–80).

Chapter Twelve

1 'Les mères des premiers Touaregs appartiennent, dans le récit mythique, à une société déjà existante quand les *Kel essuf* viennent à elles, de sorte qu'on peut parler d'une antériorité de l'ascendance maternelle des anciens Touaregs par rapport à leur ascendance paternelle'. Most Tuareg groups refer to a feminine ancestor; for instance in Ahaggar, it is Tin Hinân, the ancestor of noble tribes. Among their neighbours in Niger, the *kel Ferwen*, they refer to Sabena, Casajus says. Most of the tributary groups of the Ahaggar claim that they also descend from a woman, Takema, the sister or the servant of Tin Hinân. *iklan* slaves too have invented a feminine ancestor for themselves.

2 At the moment this form of traditional medicine is the first resort in the encampments as well as in villages, and it raises the interest and hope of scientists with regard to certain recipes made from plants, which have turned out to be very efficient. There is a real enthusiasm for pharmacology that accompanies biomedicine.