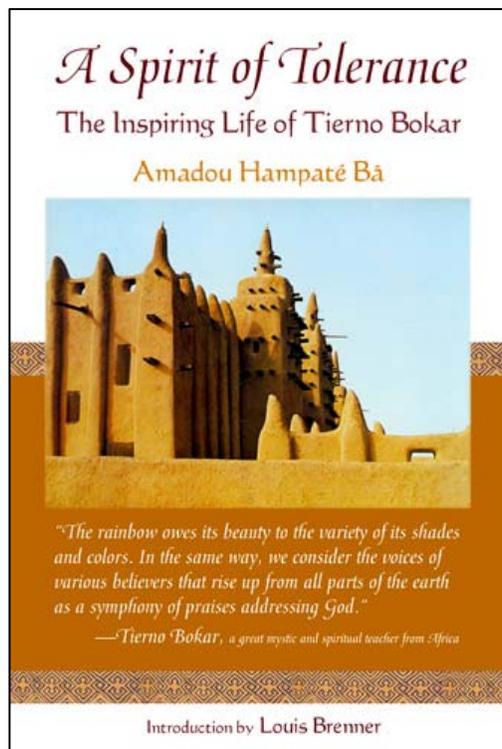


A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar



"The compelling truth of Bokar's life as a spiritual leader is this: he refused the temptations of intolerance and rigid doctrine. Religion was a process, he believed. One did not dictate or exclude; one examined and questioned."

—Margo Jefferson, *The New York Times*

The story of remarkable individuals should belong to the world, as well as to a specific time and place. In a world where religious faiths are often at odds with each other, the story of Tierno Bokar should be shared. Tierno Bokar (1875–1939) was an African mystic and Muslim spiritual teacher of the early twentieth century. This translation of Amadou Hampaté Bâ's book on Bokar introduces him for the first time to the English-reading world.

Tierno Bokar was remarkable for the drama of his life story (which was made into a recent play directed by Peter Brook), as well as for his message of religious tolerance and universal love as essential aspects of all religion. Despite intense persecution by

small-minded zealots, rival clans, and the French colonial authority, Tierno Bokar's personal example and his simple but profound teachings emerged to live on in this book.

What is included in this volume?

- ❖ The first full translation into English of the widely regarded book in French, *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar, le Sage de Bandiagara*, by Amadou Hampaté Bâ.
- ❖ Fatima Jane Casewit, a writer, translator, and educational consultant with long experience of traditional Islamic subjects, including Sufism, translated the book and contributed to the Preface.
- ❖ Louis Brenner, perhaps the most noted living academic authority on the life and teachings of Tierno Bokar, acted as a consultant on the project and wrote the Introduction.
- ❖ The book was edited by Roger Gaetani, co-editor of a recent book on esoteric Islam, *Sufism: Love and Wisdom* (World Wisdom, 2006).
- ❖ Editor's notes to aid in comprehension.
- ❖ An additional Appendix with a new translation of the famous Sufi litany *The Pearl of Perfection*.
- ❖ Complete Biographical Notes on all of the Contributors.
- ❖ An Index.
- ❖ Black-and-white photos of the life and culture of Tierno Bokar.

World Wisdom



What has been said about Tierno Bokar and this book?

“This easy-to-read book tells the story of Tierno Bokar (1875-1939), a devoted Muslim spiritual teacher who lived and died in what is now Mali. He spent his life teaching others about Islam and God, and yet was brought down by his countrymen’s jealousy, tribalism, and deliberate refusal to understand what was really important in a Muslim’s life.”

—*Islamic Horizons*, January/February 2008 issue

“Their [two factions in the Tijani Sufi order] disagreement seems absurd, like all religious disagreements, and it was over whether a certain prayer, *The Pearl of Perfection*, should be said eleven times or twelve times. And for a few decades people lived in harmony, saying the prayer both ways, and then something happened and it became violent.... Tierno was a man who said, ‘This can’t be right. God can’t want us to kill each other over the question of how we worship God. That can’t be right. So I think we should stop killing each other.’ And he found that—as many people who have done something like this found—that this earned him no friends, that the elevens didn’t like him, and the twelves didn’t like him, and the French didn’t like him, and his family didn’t like him. And he died alone in 1939. And he would’ve died unremembered probably except that the great, great French African writer Amadou Hampaté Bâ wrote a book about his life with Tierno Bokar.”

—Gregory Mosher, Columbia Arts Initiative director

“Above all Tierno Bokar taught—and demonstrated by his own openness—tolerance. Religious quarrels were of no interest to him. He had a horror of ostentation. For him there was only one religion open and common to all, crossing the world, in a diversity of forms, but always unique.”

—Marie-Hélène Estienne, playwright and screenwriter, including *The Mahabharata*

A theatrical exploration of the power of tolerance

A Spirit of Tolerance was adapted for the stage by Marie-Hélène Estienne and in 2005, renowned director Peter Brook premiered *Tierno Bokar* in the U.S. to much acclaim. The production was chosen by Columbia University to launch their Arts Initiative program in an unprecedented attempt to integrate the arts into the life and culture of a large urban university, as well as the surrounding community. *Tierno Bokar* was used as a catalyst for encouraging students, faculty, and the public to participate in an ongoing dialogue about the social, political, religious, and historical questions raised by Bokar’s life.

“[*Tierno Bokar*] energizes the arts on campus through its excellence and through its subject matter. It clearly creates a contact with an arts group outside the campus, outside of America, and extends it halfway around the world—arguably the greatest theater company in the world. And this whole question of other fields of knowledge is very important.”

—Gregory Mosher, Columbia Arts Initiative director

A Spirit of Tolerance (978-1-933316-47-5, Trim Size: 6”x 9”) has a publication date of February 2008, is 260 pages, and has a retail price of \$19.95.

About the Author



Amadou Hampaté Bâ was born to an aristocratic Fula family in Bandiagara, the largest city in Dogon territory and the ancient capital of the Macina Empire. After his father's death, he was adopted by his mother's second husband, Tidjani Amadou Ali Thiam of the Toucouleur ethnic group. He first met his spiritual leader, Tierno Bokar, while attending the Qur'anic school run by Bokar.

In 1942, he was appointed to the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN, French Institute of Black Africa) in Dakar. At IFAN, he made ethnological surveys and collected traditions. For 15 years he devoted himself to research, which would later lead to the publication of his work *L'Empire peul de Macina* (*The Peul Empire of Macina*). With Mali's independence in 1960, Bâ founded the Institute of Human Sciences in Bamako, and represented his country at the UNESCO general conferences. In 1962, he was elected to UNESCO's executive council, and in 1966 he helped establish a unified system for the transcription of African languages.

His term in the executive council ended in 1970, and he devoted the remaining years of his life to research and writing. Of his books that have been translated into English, the best known is probably his novel, *The Fortunes of Wangrin*.

About the Translator



Fatima Jane Casewit is a writer, translator, and educator who lives in Morocco. She has a background in linguistics and education and completed her undergraduate and graduate work in France and the United Kingdom. After many years of teaching, translating, and working on a rural girls' education project in Morocco, she is now part of the USAID/Morocco education team as an educational consultant. She has translated several books in the traditionalist genre, and contributes essays to leading traditionalist journals.

About the Editor

Roger Gaetani is an editor, educator, and student of world religions who lives in Bloomington, Indiana. He spent a number of years in Morocco and Saudi Arabia as a teacher. While there, and in travels through other countries in Africa and Asia, he gained an appreciation for traditional cultures, thought, and art. He co-edited (with Jean-Louis Michon) the anthology *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*. He has recently directed and produced the DVD *Tradition in the Modern World (Highlights of the 2006 Sacred Web Conference)* for World Wisdom.



About the Author of the Introduction

Louis Brenner is Emeritus Professor of the History of Religion in Africa, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His other publications include *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Society*, *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, and *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal*. Dr. Brenner's work on Bokar and the cultural and political context of his life and times is unsurpassed.

World Wisdom



In the words of Tierno Bokar, an extract from this book:

“You will gain enormously by knowing about the various forms of religion. Believe me, each one of these forms, however strange it may seem to you, contains that which can affirm your own faith. Certainly, faith, like fire, must be maintained by means of an appropriate fuel in order for it to blaze up. Otherwise, it will dim and decrease in intensity and volume and turn into embers and then from embers to coals and from coals to ashes.

“To believe that one’s race or one’s religion is the only possessor of the truth is an error. This could not be. Indeed, in its nature, faith is like air. Like air, it is indispensable for human life and one could not find one man who does not believe truly and sincerely in something. Human nature is such that it is incapable of not believing in something, whether that is God or Satan, power or wealth, or good or bad luck.

“So, when a man believes in God, he is our brother. Treat him as such and do not be like those who have gone astray. Unless one has the certitude of possessing all knowledge in its entirety, it is necessary to guard oneself from denying the truth. Certain truths only seem to be beyond our acceptance because, quite simply, our knowledge has not had access to them.”

