

# 1 'Life Is a Test, the Hereafter Is the Best'

The presence of Umar,<sup>1</sup> a zealous Gambian Muslim in his early thirties, filled my host's living room with a pious atmosphere. When my host offered him a seat on the couch, Umar declined, claiming that he – following the Prophet Muhammad's example – preferred to sit on the floor. He also declined the bottle of Fanta soft drink my host offered him, saying that he preferred drinking water. As the Prophet was believed to do, he drank from the cup of water in three sips. Taking a quick glance at the television featuring a Chinese fighting film, Umar shook his turbaned head and asked my host to switch off the set so that he could pray. Before he left – leaving my host with a sense of failure at not being able to live up to the ideals of Islam – Umar gave me advice in the form of a word game, while looking at the ground since a man is not allowed to look into the eyes of a woman to whom he is not married:

Life is a test  
*Akhira* (the hereafter) is the best  
 Let's leave the rest  
 And do our best

Like his modest attitude, his dignified movements, and his serene appearance, these words are emblematic of the Tablighi Jama'at (Urdu for 'organisation for proselytisation'),<sup>2</sup> the Islamic missionary movement<sup>3</sup> of which Umar sees himself as part and which he embodies in his actions.

Umar migrated to the United States in search of work a couple of years ago and, although he is employed, considers his main occupation to be

<sup>1</sup> To protect the privacy of my interlocutors, I use pseudonyms. Names of prominent religious figures in the Gambia have not been changed, because they are public figures.  
<sup>2</sup> *Tabligh* refers to the conveyance of divine guidance. Another word for *tabligh* is *da'wa*: 'invitation' or 'call to Islam'. Like *tabligh*, *da'wa* has the connotation of the awakening or uplifting of 'lax' or 'heterodox' Muslims (T. Janson 2001: 5) and therefore the two concepts are often used interchangeably. *Jama'at* means 'assembly'. The Jama'at's founder, Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas, interpreted 'Tablighi Jama'at' as the 'movement of faith' (Khan 1999: 64).  
<sup>3</sup> Given the diversity of Tablighi views and practices worldwide, the term 'movement' is not entirely satisfactory. As discussed by Azmi (2000: 239), Tablighis often see the Jama'at as a pan-Islamic institution rather than as a separate movement. Nevertheless, many of my interlocutors referred to the Tablighi Jama'at as a single movement.

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propagating the Tablighi Jama'at's message of greater religious devotion and observance. He has converted several Americans to Islam<sup>4</sup> and functions as a figurehead for the diasporic Gambian Tablighi community, which is proud that instead of an Arab a fellow African is prominent in demonstrating what Islamic piety involves. Every year, Umar spends his holidays in the Gambia, where he reports to the Gambian Tablighis on the developments of the Jama'at in the Western world. Thus Umar symbolises the translocal links of the movement, which originated in India and spread from there to numerous countries all over the world. Over the last decade, the Gambia has grown into a centre of Tablighi activities in West Africa: a mainly youthful audience of up to a thousand is drawn to its weekly programme (*ijtima'*) in the Tablighi Jama'at's mosque or *Markaz* (literally meaning 'Centre') in the city of Serrekunda.<sup>5</sup> During the annual gathering in 2006, 5,000 people – including Tablighis from Mauritania, Pakistan, and even France – assembled in the *Markaz*.

This monograph deals with the sweeping emergence of the Tablighi Jama'at in the Gambia and its impact on Muslims like Umar. It tries to find out how a movement that originated in South Asia could appeal to the local Gambian population, youth and women in particular, to the extent that they are willing to abandon their youthful pursuits and transgress generational and gender boundaries for a life devoted to God. In recent years, groups of itinerant young Tablighi men carrying their sleeping bags and cooking utensils on their backs<sup>6</sup> and Tablighi women covered from head to foot in black veils have become a more common sight on the streets of Gambian cities and larger towns. Although the Gambia has a 95 per cent Muslim population, this development came as a surprise to many 'mainstream' Muslims. They term the Tablighi Jama'at a 'new religion' – often referred to as '*Mashala* Islam' (*Mashala* is the local designation for Tablighis; it is derived from the Arabic *ma sha' Allah*, 'what God wishes', since Gambian Tablighis often utter this Arabic expression)<sup>7</sup> – and feel challenged by the Tablighis' efforts to change the long-established local Islamic practice. While mainstream Gambian Muslims argue that 'we're following the ancestors' traditions', Tablighis, by contrast, strongly oppose this kind of 'traditionalism'. As is

<sup>4</sup> Although the Tablighi Jama'at's aim is to transform Muslims into 'better believers', in the case of Muslim-minority societies Tablighis sometimes set out to convert non-Muslims to Islam.

<sup>5</sup> Although not the capital, Serrekunda is the largest city of the Gambia, and its economic centre.

<sup>6</sup> Believing that the Prophet Muhammad advocated self-help, Tablighis are reluctant to impose on others during their missionary tours and therefore they sleep in mosques and cook for themselves.

<sup>7</sup> *Ma sha' Allah!* is an exclamation that Muslims often use when they are excited or surprised.

common in reformist discourse, Tablighis invoke the distinction of *aadoo* (custom or tradition) versus *dinoo* (religion), portraying the former as a threatening cultural counterforce to the 'true' religion of Islam (see Chapter 2). The Tablighi task for the reform of Islam as it is practised in Gambian society thus lies in separating religious practice from local traditions, in keeping Islam free of *bid'a* or unlawful innovation. According to the Tablighis whom I interviewed, Muslims cannot justify their actions by simply referring to customary practices. Consequently, they no longer take their Muslim identity for granted but strive to develop themselves as believers in a self-conscious fashion. This was illustrated by Umar when he told me, 'Initially, I was not a practising Muslim, but when I joined the Jama'at I started questioning myself whether my activities were in line with the *Summa* (prophetic traditions).' By means of five biographical narratives, this book documents how Gambian Tablighis strive to forge new formations of Muslim identity, and how these identities contest older ones, constructed by the established Muslim elders.

The Tablighi Jama'at has its origins in the reformist tradition that emerged in India in the mid-nineteenth century. Its founder, Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas, believed that Muslims had abandoned the correct path of Islam. Hence, he stressed that they should go back to their faith, which alone would move God to grant them success in this world and the hereafter. To make Muslims 'true believers', Mawlana Ilyas insisted that it was the duty not just of a few learned scholars (*'ulama*) but of all Muslims to carry out *tabligh*, that is, missionary work aimed at the moral transformation of Muslims. Missionary tours by lay preachers became the hallmark of the Tablighi Jama'at, established officially by Ilyas in 1927 in the Indian capital of Delhi. The central feature of the Tablighi Jama'at is *khuruj*, or a missionary tour which consists of a *jama'at* – or travelling party<sup>8</sup> – of about ten men, sometimes accompanied by their wives, who travel to proselytise either for three, fifteen, or forty days, or for four months. Undertaking *khuruj* occasions a radical break with everyday life. This break, Mawlana Ilyas believed, would transform the missionary as well as his audience. The Tablighi Jama'at's *khuruj* resulted in the globalisation of the movement. Over the years, the Jama'at has expanded from its Indian headquarters into what is perhaps the largest Islamic movement of contemporary times. It has established a presence in about 150 countries throughout the world and its annual conferences (*ijtima'as*) in Pakistan and Bangladesh have grown into the second-largest religious congregation of the Muslim world after the pilgrimage to Mecca (Ahmad 1995: 165; Sikand 2002: xi, 177). Furthermore, the

<sup>8</sup> Each group going out on a missionary tour is called *jama'at*. This term signifies that the travelling *jama'ats* are a micro-representation of the Tablighi Jama'at as a whole. By means of a small 'j' and italics, I distinguish a travelling *jama'at* from the Tablighi Jama'at.

*Faza'il-e-a'mal* ('The Merits of Practice') – the Tablighi Jama'at's Islamic manual – is the most widely read book in the Muslim world after the Qur'an, with some believers even claiming that it takes the place of the Qur'an itself (Sikand 2002: 73 n5, 107). Yet, in spite of its worldwide influence on the lives of 70 to 80 million Muslims, Africanist scholars have paid little attention to the spread of the movement in sub-Saharan Africa.

Diop (1994: 153) claims that the Tablighi Jama'at is active from Senegal to Zambia, but, apart from a small number of studies focusing on South Africa (Moosa 2000; Vahed 2003; McDonald 2006) and Uganda (Chande 2000: 355–8), almost nothing is published about the movement elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. An explanation for this indifference is that this region is frequently, but unjustly, seen as the 'periphery' of the Muslim world, in terms of both geography and religious influence.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the recurrent idea of an 'African Islam', reflecting the Sufi bias typical of scholarship on Islam in West Africa,<sup>10</sup> hampers a better understanding of the emergence of Islamic reformist movements of which the Tablighi Jama'at is one prominent example (Seesemann 2006; Otaeyek and Soares 2007). The idea that there is a specifically 'African Islam' (referred to as *Islam noir*, literally 'black Islam', by French colonial authorities, see Marty 1917; Monteil 1980), which differs fundamentally from 'Arab' Islam, formed the basis of French policy with regard to Islam from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards.<sup>11</sup> Although the concept of *Islam noir* has been severely criticised (Launay and Soares 1999; Brenner 2000; Triaud 2000), there is still a tendency to depict Islam as practised in West Africa as less 'orthodox' than that practised in the Arab Middle East. For example, Westerlund and Rosander (1997) describe 'African Islam' as more flexible and adaptable than what they portray as 'Islam in Africa', thereby evoking the French tradition of *Islam noir*. Once again, as Seesemann (2006: 232–3) notes, the Sufi orders emerge as a prototype of localised Islam, whereas 'Islam in Africa' appears in an Arab garb, depicted as universalistic, legalistic, scripturalistic, and puritanical (Rosander 1997: 1–5).

To redress the balance, I focus on the Gambia, a country for which – in contrast to neighbouring Senegal – we have little knowledge of

<sup>9</sup> North Africa, by contrast, is considered to be directly linked to the alleged centre of the Islamic world, that is, the Arab Middle East, and a few studies pay attention to the Tablighi Jama'at in Morocco (Tozy 1999, 2000; Faust 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Sufism (in Arabic *tasawwuf*) refers to the mystical tradition in Islam characterised by esoteric practices, special litanies of prayer, and techniques of invoking God's names as ways of approaching Him.

<sup>11</sup> This conception tallied with the ideas of the British colonial administrators, who also considered 'African Islam' less pure, less literate, and more magical than so-called 'Arab Islam'.

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Islamisation processes.<sup>12</sup> Since the mid-1990s the Gambia has, despite its small size,<sup>13</sup> become a booming Tablighi centre. A leading figure in the organisation of the Gambian branch of the Jama'at explained to me: 'The Gambia is number one in terms of Tablighi activities in Africa. The effort (*tabligh*) started here much earlier than in Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. From the Gambia, it spread to other countries.' Adherents from other West African countries, such as Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mauritania, and Mali, regularly assemble in the Gambian city of Serrekunda to exchange ideas on the proper Tablighi method. Lecocq and Schrijver (2007: 149), for example, write that during the late 1990s, Malian Tablighis who intended to go on a forty-day *khuruj* were sent to the Gambia for training.

The Gambia's heritage from British colonial rule, which ended in 1965, is one factor that has helped facilitate the spread of the Tablighi ideology, which was disseminated by South Asian missionaries who preached in English, the national language of the Gambia. The appearance of South Asian Tablighi missionaries coincided with the recent political Islamic resurgence in the Gambia (see Chapter 2). Captain Yahya Jammeh assumed power in 1994 and invoked Islam to enhance his political legitimacy (Darboe 2007). This provided fresh scope for the creation of a public discourse on Islam in the Gambia. As a result, an increasing number of Gambians (and young people in particular) seemed to be receptive to a new interpretation of their faith. Thus, conditions in the Gambia provided fertile soil for the Tablighi Jama'at to take root (see Chapter 3).

This ethnography of an African branch of the Tablighi Jama'at explores how a transnational Islamic movement is appropriated in a local setting. Unlike in South Asia, in the Gambia the Jama'at has grown into a youth movement. A survey conducted in South Africa, by contrast, indicates that middle-aged persons are the age group for whom the movement holds most appeal (Moosa 2000: 212). An explanation for this greater appeal to older people is that they have more time, and probably also more money, than young people to invest in *tabligh*. In the Gambia, however, the Jama'at particularly attracts lower-middle-class Mandinka youth between the ages of roughly fifteen and thirty-five.<sup>14</sup> It seems that these youths have adopted the movement to carve out a space for

<sup>12</sup> Although the Gambia is enclosed by Senegal, a country that often features in studies on Islam in West Africa (Diouf and Leichtman 2009), the two countries experienced such different colonial policies and Islamic histories that they can hardly be compared.

<sup>13</sup> With its total land area of approximately 11,000 square kilometres and a population of less than 1.6 million inhabitants, the Gambia is mainland Africa's smallest state.

<sup>14</sup> The Mandinka are the largest ethnic group in the Gambia. For an overview of the Gambia's ethnic groups, see Sonko-Godwin (1988) and Hughes and Perfect (2006: 10–24).

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themselves in Gambian society in the absence of alternative means of reaching social maturity and a fulfilling life. With the crisis of the Gambian state, secondary education no longer guarantees access to higher education or well-paid employment (see also Lindhardt 2010: 247–8). At a time when a school diploma is no longer considered sufficient to secure upward social and economic movement with the promise of a more successful life, young Gambians have found in the Jama'at ways to make Islam compatible with newly emerging configurations of progress, morality, personhood, and interpersonal relationships. In addition to structure and purpose, the movement offers them emotional attachment and a sense of belonging outside traditional village and family structures. For many Gambian youths, the Jama'at represents a community of like-minded peers who strive for a fulfilling spiritual life rather than a life of material reward, and interact on an equal basis, independent of their class, age, gender, and background. As a university student aptly remarked, 'a university degree is the highest degree one can get, but we don't have trust in it. Therefore we engage in *tabligh*, in order to reclaim our lost identity. We derive comfort from our religion.' This is just one of many narratives indicating that Gambian youth have found in the Jama'at a new form of identification and support.

In addition to its appeal to youth, another local feature of the Tablighi Jama'at in the Gambia is its popularity among women. Metcalf, a specialist on the South Asian Jama'at, argues that the Tablighi Jama'at presents itself with a 'wholly masculine face' (2000: 44):

[In this] quietist movement of internal spiritual renewal, it is men who go from door to door in college hostels, men who approach other Muslim men to invite them to pray in airports, men who can be seen travelling in small groups by bus or train in Indian cities as part of their monthly or yearly sacrifice of time for proselytisation or *Da'wa*. It is men one sees in sub-continental cities, dressed in simple white loose pants, long shirt, and cap, modest bedding on their back, disappearing into a mosque where they will spend the night.

According to Metcalf, the little that has been written on the subject gives the impression that women 'barely exist' in the movement (see also Sikand 1999, 2002). The perception that *tabligh* is a male activity in South Asia contrasts sharply with the case of the Gambia, where women are actively involved in *tabligh* and set out on missionary tours or *masturat* frequently, with the aim of instructing other women in how to integrate Islam into their personal lives (see Chapters 6 and 7).<sup>15</sup>

In their outgoing behaviour, Gambian Tablighi women differ not only from their South Asian counterparts but also from women in other

<sup>15</sup> Whereas *khuruj* refers to a tour in which only men are involved, *masturat* is the term for a tour in which couples participate.

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*da'wa* ('call to Islam') movements. A theme that comes to the fore in Brink and Mencher's (1997) volume on women's encounters with 'fundamentalisms'<sup>16</sup> in different cultures and religious traditions is a sustained attention to women's religious education. As the different contributions to their volume show, female study groups like those organised by the Tablighi Jama'at (*ta'lim*) also take place in other contexts. But whereas the pattern of women being instructed to organise their daily conduct in accord with fundamentalist principles and virtuous behaviour seems to be common, female missionaries taking to the streets to disseminate their faith certainly is not. In South Asia the term *da'iya* (literally, 'female bearer of *da'wa*') has the connotation of 'teacher' rather than missionary.<sup>17</sup> In the Gambian setting, however, the pedagogical and missionary roles of Tablighi women are closely related.

The greater mobility of Gambian Tablighi women points to an apparent contradiction in the vast literature on gender and Islam. 'Fundamentalist' or reformist Islam is usually described as a loss for women, who are confined to the domestic sphere and seen as primary embodiments of piety and propriety (but see Mahmood 2005; Schulz 2008a, 2011, 2012; Masquelier 2009a). Although Gambian Tablighi women have indeed lost traditional entitlements, especially in the ritual domain that has always been the prerogative of women (Brand 2001; Janson 2002; Masquelier 2009a), they have also gained access to new socio-religious space. The Jama'at in the Gambia demands that women undertake long-distance missionary tours (*masturat*) and deliver public speeches (*bayan*) on proper Muslim womanhood. While Tablighi women are taking to the streets, their husbands stay at home to perform household chores and take care of the children. To provide their wives with more time to engage in *tabligh*, Tablighi men see it as their religious duty to share the domestic workload, although this is generally considered 'women's work' in Gambian society. *Tabligh* thus results in new roles not only for women, who are now involved in *masturat* and as such visible and audible in the public sphere, but also for men, who are expected to undertake a range of domestic activities. Remarkably, what Gambian Tablighis

<sup>16</sup> After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the term 'fundamentalism' became popular in the West as a designation for certain Muslim groups that articulate political goals (Westerlund 1997). It is, however, a loaded term because it has a Christian connotation. Irrespective of the difficulties attending the cross-cultural employment of a term with a particular Christian origin and history (Caplan 1987: 4), my main concern is that 'fundamentalism' has become defiled to the point where it stands for religious extremism and 'terrorism'. Whereas 'fundamentalist' is not a designation Gambian Muslims use when speaking of themselves, 'reformist' (derived from *tajdid*, the Arabic term for reform) is sporadically used as a self-designating concept in the Gambia, referring to a believer who aims at purging Islam from unlawful innovations (*bid'a*) by returning to the purported origins of Islam.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Mahmood (2001: 218) translates *da'iya* as 'woman teacher'.



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consider proper religious practice thus assumes a reformulation of gender roles and relations.

Although Tablighis are proliferating in the Gambia, especially among the young and women, they still form a relatively small group. One of the leading figures within the organisation of the Gambian branch of the Jama'at estimated that Tablighis constitute only 1 per cent of the entire Gambian population of about 1.6 million inhabitants, but the absence of membership records makes it difficult to calculate exactly. According to my interlocutors, it is, however, not 'quantity' but 'quality' that matters. Several Tablighis told me that it would not be surprising if, when the Jama'at grows bigger, it were to clash with a Gambian government that 'doesn't like massive organisations'. Although the relationship between the Jama'at and the government is still friendly (several members of the Supreme Islamic Council confided to me that they were impressed by the Jama'at's success in attracting youth), the NIA (National Intelligence Agency) keeps an eye on Tablighi activities, fearing that the movement may incite youths to 'terrorist' acts (see Chapter 9). Despite its relatively small size, the Jama'at has succeeded in bringing about a religious transformation in Gambian society, especially in the celebration of the life-cycle rituals associated with Islam, like naming ceremonies, weddings, circumcisions, and funerals. The significance of this transformation should not be underestimated, for it challenges deeply ingrained patterns of ritual practice, social status, personal belief, and interpersonal relationships (see Chapter 5).

Overall, Gambian Tablighi men and women are tapping into a worldwide movement that enables them to feel part of the *umma*, or global community of Muslims. At the same time, they negotiate the terms of their Tablighi identity by localising the practices, views, and signs adopted from a South Asian setting. This study illuminates the specific ethnographic context of the Tablighi Jama'at in the Gambia, as well as larger concerns about the impact of reformist Islam on local Islamic practices, the renegotiation of Muslim identity by youth, the boundaries of Muslim female virtue, and the authorisation of Islamic knowledge.

### The Anthropology of Islam

My analysis of new formations of Muslim identity forged by Gambian Tablighi young men and women is situated within the anthropology of Islam and the rising scholarly interest in African youth and reformist Muslim women. A major concern in the anthropological study of Islam has been how to document the diversity within Muslim communities without violating the religion's universal features (Geertz 1968; El-Zein 1977; Eickelman 1982; Abu-Lughod 1989; Bowen 1993; Donnan and Stokes 2002; Lindholm 2002). Or, in the words of Launay (2004: 5),



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'how can the very diverse – if not diverging – religious beliefs and practices of Muslims be comprehended within a single idea of "Islam"?' The contrasting and competing Islamic discourses and practices in West Africa are often studied in terms of a distinction between a Sufi and a reformist tradition (Soares 2005: 9–10).<sup>18</sup>

In the so-called Sufi understanding of Islam, Muslims treat certain charismatic persons – living or deceased religious leaders, saints or marabouts<sup>19</sup> – as intermediaries between ordinary believers and God. Such charismatic religious leaders, their descendants, and their followers are organised into Sufi orders (*tariqa*), which have become one of the main organisational forms for the practice of Islam in several parts of West Africa (*ibid.*). Adherence to a Sufi order is expressed through the *wird* – a special litany of prayer – as well as by engagement in Sufi practices, including the consultation of religious specialists for divination, healing, and the request of amulets (typically, Qur'anic verses written on slips of paper folded and wrapped in leather, carried on the body), pilgrimages to Sufi shrines, and the performance of *gammus* (festivals commemorating the birth of the Prophet or a saint). Largely because of the prominent position that Sufi orders occupy in the religious-political landscape in West Africa, especially in Senegal, they have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention (see, for example, Cruise O'Brien and Coulon 1988; Villalón 1995; Mbacké 2005; Samson 2005).

The Sufi tradition is often studied in relation to a reformist tradition, which is believed to call much of the former into question. Reformists condemn Sufis' 'incorrect' practice of Islam and seek to reform the way Islam is practised locally by modelling themselves on the Arab Middle East. Through trade networks and education, reformist ideas reached West African Muslim communities. Starting in the 1970s, with money coming from the oil countries, an increasing number of Africans have received scholarships to study at universities and colleges in the Arab world. Upon their return to their home countries, they have spread a reformist interpretation of Islam.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> This dichotomy forms an alternative to the earlier bifurcations between modernist versus traditionalist, orthodox versus unorthodox, high versus low, great versus little traditions, and scripturalist versus popular or folk Islam (Redfield 1956; Geertz 1968; Gellner 1981).

<sup>19</sup> Although borrowed from the French colonial lexicon, the term 'marabout' is widespread in Gambian local discourse and has grown into a self-designation. Referring as it does to a wide range of religious specialists, from head of a Sufi order to Islamic healer and Qur'anic teacher, marabout is not a homogeneous category (Soares 2005). I use the concept here in the sense of a religious specialist who is, on account of his or her alleged powers, believed to be able to intercede with God on other Muslims' behalf.

<sup>20</sup> The reforms advocated by these Gambian reformist scholars cannot be understood, however, as purely foreign imports that wiped away locally existing practices (see Chapter 2).

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Although this binary between a Sufi and reformist Islam is challenging, it oversimplifies the fragmented and fluid nature of religious practice in the Muslim world (see, for example, Marsden 2005; Masquelier 2009a; McIntosh 2009; Soares 2010). In the Gambia, for example, the majority of Muslims do not affiliate themselves officially with any of the Sufi orders. Furthermore, since the term 'reformist' is associated with religious 'radicalism', many Gambians do not call themselves reformists either. A second flaw, as we have seen above, is that this analytical model implies a hierarchical structuring of Islam in that Sufism is often believed to be less 'orthodox' than reformism, which is termed a 'purer' form of Islam. A related shortcoming is that the Sufi–reformist dichotomy frequently involves a teleological perspective in which Sufi Islam eventually gives way to a version of 'true', reformist Islam. Fisher (1973, 1985) portrays Islam as a 'juggernaut' that would sweep all other beliefs aside. He proposes a series of stages in the Islamisation process whereby Islam transforms from an accommodating religion mixing Muslim practices with local traditions into a 'pure' form, when the practitioners have fully internalised the message of Islam through education and launch a movement of reform or jihad to purge their society. In a similar line of thinking, Umar (1993) claims that Islam in Nigeria today has to be understood as a historical transformation from Sufism into anti-Sufism or reformism.

The Tablighi Jama'at shows the limitations of conventional understandings of Islam as either Sufi or reformist in orientation. Although the Jama'at originated in a Sufi milieu in India – its Sufi origins, according to some, still visible in the devotional power its founder Ilyas generates – Tablighis fiercely reject Sufi practices, dismissing them as 'superstitious'. Nonetheless, the Tablighi Jama'at has adopted a number of Sufi practices and presented them as Tablighi inventions. As Reetz (2006: 34) points out:

While the Tablighis are propagating a message of puritan, reformist Islam, they have partly preserved and partly developed an internal culture that is laden with Sûfi-inspired rituals. This culture apparently accounts very much for their cohesion. To everyone watching Tablighî meetings and ceremonies, it becomes clear that the workings of the Tablighî Jamâ'at both in their internal and external activities follow repetitive and carefully controlled rules often invoking a spiritual connotation. These set it demonstrably apart from other reformist movements.

A case in point of a Sufi-inspired ritual adopted by the Jama'at is *ziyarah*. This ritual refers to a visit to a Sufi saint's tomb, but is used by Gambian Tablighis in the sense of visiting people for *tabligh*, inviting them to come to the local mosque for prayer. Furthermore, the Jama'at borrowed from the Sufi rituals of *dhikr*, remembrance of God by recalling His names, and *du'a*, prayers for supplication. Finally, as in Sufi circles, pious dreams