ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE AUTONOMY OF HOLY CITIES IN SENEGAL: TOUBA AND MADINA GOUNASS

Eric Ross
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco

ABSTRACT

Senegal is a unitary, secular republic on the French model. In recent decades it has implemented a number of regionalization and decentralization policies aimed at reducing regional disparities and stimulating economic development. Beyond this rather standard approach to the reform of local administration, Senegal has also pioneered a novel form of autonomous local governance based on religious exceptionalism. Since the 1970s, two holy cities: Touba and Madina Gounass, both seats of powerful Sufi institutions (the Muridiyya and the Tijaniyya-Gounassianké, respectively), have been officially recognized as “autonomous rural communities.” Rather than being administered by elected local representatives under the supervision of state agencies, these two religious cities are administered by local religious authorities (headed by their respective caliphs). While state agencies are not entirely absent from these cities, they intervene in them only in conjunction with the local religious authorities. This presentation will assess how the religious institutions administer the autonomous cities under their jurisdiction, including issues related to modes of planning, service-provisioning, infrastructure-building, financing, and democracy.