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## Al-Falâh

**Al-Falâh** (Ḥarakat al-Falâh) has been one of the most important movements of Salafī Islam in West Africa since the middle of the twentieth century. It introduced an innovative educational system and founded several modern Franco-Arab schools. It expanded across French West Africa, despite repressive French colonial policies. Although the movement stagnated in Mauritania, it flourished in Senegal. The movement has also experienced serious internal dissent. In both countries, since the 1990s, the movement and some of its members have taken positions vis-à-vis domestic and international political events.

### 1. EARLY HISTORY

The Ḥarakat al-Falâh lil-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya al-Salafiyya (Movement for the Welfare of Islamic Culture and Education in Senegal) known as Al-Falâh was founded in French Sudan by al-Hajj Mahmūd Ba (al-Ḥājj Maḥmūd Bā, d. 1978), born in Diowol, in the Fuuta Tooro region, which straddles the border between Senegal and Mauritania. Trained

by illustrious Haalpulaar (speakers of the Pulaar/Peul language) Qur'ānic masters, as well as Moorish scholars in the Tagant region, he left for Mecca in 1928, where he continued his training with various scholars, including the great shaykh 'Alawī al-'Abbāsī al-Mālikī, expert in law and rhetoric (Kane, 438). In 1938 he served as a guide to Seydou Nourou Tall (d. 1980), a marabout of the Tijāniyya in West Africa, during one of his visits to Medina (the Tijāniyya was founded in Tlemcen in 1195/1781 by the *shaykh* and religious scholar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tijānī, d. 1815, and it became influential in much of North and West Africa and later, to a lesser extent, in Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia).

### 2. EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

Upon al-Hajj Mahmūd Ba's return to West Africa in 1940, his movement developed a modern Islamic education programme, inspired by his experience in the Arabian Peninsula. Although the French administration grew suspicious at the time, it took no repressive measure until 1949. The first El Virabi (or Vorabia) school (for variants of the name, see Brenner, 65), an

innovative institution named after the first school attended by al-Hajj Mahmoud Ba in Mecca (Kane, 442), was founded in Diowol in October 1941 and then replicated in Dakar (Falahiyya School, 1944) and in Kayes, in present-day Mali (1946), where the Qurʾān, Arabic language, science, and physical education were taught through a method revolutionary at the time: students used a blackboard and a wooden dip pen, had a weekly schedule of readings, and quickly learnt how to write, read, and understand Arabic, while staying in school rather than roaming the streets begging. This method quickly received financial support from the community through *zakaat* (*zakāt*, a required almsgiving treated as a tax, which is one of the five pillars of Islam), especially from wealthy traders (Kane, 442–3). Some sixty schools were created before the late 1940s.

### 3. GROWTH OF THE MOVEMENT AND FRENCH OPPOSITION

The Movement became increasingly well known in Senegal, Mauritania, and French Sudan, thanks to its founder preaching an Islam that, the movement claimed, was cleansed of all syncretism. It invited village communities to build central mosques and advised them to travel to Mecca by land. As the son of a Fulani pastoralist clan (*Fulbe jeeri*), a community that was marginalised in this Haalpulaar society religiously dominated by maraboutic families (Tooroobe), al-Hajj Mahmoud Ba managed to Islamise several communities of Pulaar-speaking pastoralists which were little, if at all, Islamised. He was also successful amongst various non-Tooroobe Haalpulaar communities, whose members had generally been denied an advanced Islamic education.

Between 1949 and 1954, the French administration became increasingly hostile to the Movement. Officials charged Ba as a “Wahhabi” agent and threatened to close his schools if he did not agree to repatriate the students he had sent to Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Between 1954 and 1960, he also had to face the wrath of Tijānī marabouts and, especially, the Haalpulaar Tooroodo elite, who detested his call for a political and religious renewal. Following a series of violent incidents in Fuuta Tooro, the French Sudan, and Dakar, al-Hajj Mahmoud Ba went into exile in Cameroon to continue his education mission. He returned to Mauritania in 1962, where he worked in the higher education administration until his death in 1978.

In 1956, a group of former students of al-Hajj Mahmoud Ba and Soninke traders established the Muslim Cultural and Social Movement, a Senegalese section of Al-Falāh, with its headquarters located in Colobane, an underprivileged district of Dakar.

### 4. ESTABLISHMENT IN COLOBANE

Led by Sheikh Ndiaye (1933–2017) between 1968 and 1991, the Movement was rebranded as Al-Falāh for Authentic Islamic Culture and Education in Senegal (Ḥarakat al-Falāḥ lil-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya wa-l-Tarbiya bi-Sinighāl) in August 1975. The Franco-Arab school Imam Mouhammad Boun Saoud in Colobane opened on 24 October 1986 and was officially recognised by the Ministry of Education in 1991. It offers elementary, middle-school, and secondary education. The Islamic Solidarity Hospital was opened on 1 January 2011 adjacent to the school and a Friday mosque. It provides specialised care

(geriatrics, ophthalmology, and medical imagery) and is managed independently from the Movement. Today, the mosque, school, and hospital constitute the only Islamic complex in Dakar.

During the 1990s, Al-Falāh, which was headed at the time by a wealthy Soninke businessman, Khalil Abdallah Marega (Khalīl ‘Abdallāh Maregā, d. 2005), undertook an expansion, with the construction of schools, mosques, and wells. The Movement became more business-oriented, and its new leaders took control of its finances, a move severely criticised by many former members, leading to a split. Some members accused Marega of embezzling funds and making real-estate investments for his own benefit and that of his family. These tensions also took on an ethnic dimension, pitting Soninke and Haalpulaar leaders one against the other. The latter left the Colobane headquarters and took control of the Al-Falāh branch of Pikine. Another controversy broke out in 1998, when Marega and the National Executive Office accused one another of taking advantage of the Movement’s lethargy following the 1991 Gulf War, when Saudi Arabia ceased its financial support (Al-Falāh had condemned the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq but also criticised Saudi Arabia for having accepted American soldiers on its soil), to get closer to a radical Saudi organisation, Muntadah al-Islāmī (al-Muntadā al-Islāmī, Islamic Forum). They then organised their own congresses and excluded one another from the Movement. Tensions appear to have eased in the early twenty-first century.

##### 5. IN MAURITANIA

The Movement experienced a long decline after the death of al-Hajj Mahmoud Ba in 1978, undermined as it

was by two types of conflict: first, tensions erupted between supporters of a hereditary succession led by his eldest son, the engineer Mohamed Al Ghali Ba (Muḥammad al-Ghālī Bā, d. 1997 in a car accident) and those in favour of a meritocratic succession through elections. Second, the Movement’s education programme in Arabic was rejected by many amongst the Haalpulaar, Soninke, and Wolof communities, following the Mauritanian government’s policy of Arabisation, which was interpreted as a form of hegemony benefitting the Arabic-speaking Bidhān (Biḍān) Moorish community and the violent exclusion of non-Moorish military and civil servants. In the early twenty-first century, relatives of al-Hajj Mahmoud Ba are active in Tawassoul (Ar., *tawassul*, lit., a means to gain nearness to God, possibly through a spiritual intermediary; TaWaSL is also an acronym for the National Rally for Reform and Development), the only Islamist party in Mauritania and the first opposition party in the Mauritanian National Assembly, following the 2013 and 2018 elections.

##### 6. IN SENEGAL

Al-Falāh has been politically active since the early 1990s. In 1991, Al-Falāh drafted a joint statement with Jamaatou Ibadou Rahmane (Ar., Jamā‘at ‘Ibād al-Raḥmān, community of the servants of the Most Merciful), a Salafi-oriented Islamic association founded in 1978 in Thiès, which offered a virulent critique of state secularism and of the dominance of Ṣūfī brotherhoods in Senegal, and which, after the 1990s, attempted to improve its relationship with the Ṣūfī brotherhoods and develop a relationship with the state. It condemned Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait while calling for the withdrawal

of Western forces from Saudi soil. As a result, the Saudis cut off their financial support of Al-Falāh. Marega then, during the congress of April 2001, proposed a special motion in support of King Fahd (r. 1982–2005). Al-Falāh condemned the publication of caricatures of the Prophet by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on 30 September 2005 and was an active participant in the 2014 “March of solidarity for Palestine” in Dakar. It called for calm and transparent presidential elections in Senegal in 2007, 2012, and 2017. Al-Falāh adopted a resolution at the 2015 Symposium on Islamic Terrorism in Dakar, calling for the Senegalese state to work closely with national, regional, and international actors to develop a counterterrorism strategy and engage more strongly in conflict resolution in West Africa.

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## Farīd, MuḤammad

**MuḤammad Farīd** (1868–1919) was a prominent Egyptian nationalist politician during the early phase of British colonial rule and the second leader of al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī (National Party), which he co-founded with Muṣṭafā Kāmīl (1874–1908) and others as a secret society in 1893 and a formal political party in 1907.

Farīd was born in Cairo into a wealthy landed family. He attended several of the new Western-modelled schools established by the khedivial regime. After graduating from the School of Administration and Languages (Madrasat al-Idāra wa-l-ʿAlsun), he worked as a deputy public prosecutor in the public prosecutor's office (*niyāba*) until his dismissal in 1896 for openly hailing the acquittal of ʿAlī Yūsuf (1863–1913), a prominent journalist who had published a telegram stolen from Lord Kitchener (1850–1916), commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army. Refusing a transfer to the provinces, Farīd resigned and thereafter devoted himself solely to nationalist politics.

Farīd remained a key financial supporter of the Waṭanī secret society that became an official political party in 1907 with the support of Khedive ʿAbbās Ḥilmī II (r. 1892–1914). At this time, a new wave of Egyptian nationalist activity was underway, sparked by the June 1906 Dinshaway incident, in which four peasants were executed and others publicly flogged after an altercation with British soldiers hunting pigeons. Not known for his oratory or charisma, Farīd remained in Muṣṭafā Kāmīl's shadow until Kāmīl's untimely death in 1908. Although a unanimous choice as Kāmīl's replacement as party leader, he never commanded the full loyalty of his associates, and he faced regular challenges to his authority.