

## ***Tierno Bokar***

**Gregory Mosher:** The name of the play is *Tierno Bokar*, and Tierno Bokar was a man who was born in the 1880s in Mali. And the play picks up at the turn . . . into the twentieth century in the twenties and thirties when a dispute broke out between two factions in the Tijani sect of the Sufi. And their 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 either way, and then something happened and it became violent. And the elevens started to kill the twelves, and the twelves started to kill the elevens. They were egged on by the French, who were in West Africa at the time, because it served the French's purpose to play the elevens off against the twelves. And 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 1940. 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. He had been a student of his in this very small village called Bandiagara, and he wrote a memoir, one of the many books that Hampaté Bâ wrote, and this is the book that Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne have adapted.