Although driven initially by squarely political motives, the era of democratization in Africa that began in the early 1990s had a significant impact on religious organization and on religious authority in the region. Most immediately, it permitted (and indeed encouraged) a new and highly visible emergence of religion into the public sphere. This phenomenon in turn produced intense and still unresolved debates about how this could or should be reconciled with officially secular states (états laïcs). Subsequent debates in national public spheres then had another widespread effect: a substantive “democratization” of religion in the sense of a proliferation of new voices claiming the right to speak in the name of religion, often challenging established authorities. Islamist jihadi groups, however, were in no way part of those dynamics at the national level. The opportunistic entry by such groups into the regional religious landscape following the political collapse of Mali in 2012, however, seems to have had as yet unsettled effects on these religious dynamics. This presentation will attempt to identify some of the impact of the religious aspects of the Malian crisis on religious debates in the region, focusing perhaps on the heightened discourse distinguishing “Arab” from “Black African” Islam, and on the related jockeying for authority between “Francophone” and “Arabophone” intellectuals in the region.