ISLAM AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA

History of an Emancipatory Community

SEAN HANRETTA

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HISTORY OF AN EMANCIPATORY COMMUNITY

Exploring the history and religious community of a group of Muslim Sufi mystics who came largely from socially marginal backgrounds in colonial French West Africa, this study shows the relationship between religious, social, and economic change in the region. It highlights the role that intellectuals – including not only elite men, but also women, slaves, and the poor – played in shaping social and cultural change and illuminates the specific religious ideas on which Muslims drew and the political contexts that gave their efforts meaning. In contrast to depictions that emphasize the importance of international networks and anti-modern reaction in twentieth-century Islamic reform, this book claims that, in West Africa, such movements were driven by local forces and constituted only the most recent round in a set of centuries-old debates about the best way for pious people to confront social injustice. It argues that traditional historical methods prevent an appreciation of Muslim intellectual history in Africa by misunderstanding the nature of information gathering during colonial rule and misconstruing the relationship between documents and oral history.

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Islam and Social Change in French West Africa

HISTORY OF AN EMANCIPATORY COMMUNITY

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Contents

Part Two: ''I Will Prove to You That What I Say Is True'':
Knowledge and Colonial Rule

Part Three: ''What Did He Give You?'': Interpretation

List of maps and figures

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Note on orthographic conventions

I have used Anglicized versions of the names of former French colonies (e.g., Upper Volta, Senegal) except in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, which is the official, untranslatable name of the modern state. Other geographic names have been standardized to accord with current spellings, with the exception of Kaédi (rather than Kayhaydi or other variants). For the transcription of Arabic words I have adopted a modified version of the system used in *Sudanic Africa*, dropping diacritics from consonants but keeping those for vowels. For other West African languages I have tended to adopt the most recent transcription conventions but have simplified spellings for typographical ease (eg. ''ng'' for the Mande ''ŋ'', ''ny'' for ''ɲ'', ''b'' for the Pulaar-Fulfulde ''ɓ''). With a few exceptions (eg. Sn: *modini*, Ar: *hadâyâ*), nouns from Arabic and West African languages are pluralized as if they were regular English nouns. Since most proper nouns used are best known in their French forms, I have so written them, unless there is no standard French spelling, in which case I simply transliterated. Ethnonyms have not been pluralized. I have standardized the spelling of the name of the ''Tal'' family so as to make obvious the connections among its various members. I have preferred Hamallah over Hamahu'llah because that is the way he is best known to Mande-language speakers. Although Yacouba Sylla himself is best known to his community as Yaxuuba (only rarely as Yaᶜqûb), he and his community have always used ''Yacouba'' in communicating with outsiders. Spelling in quotations has been left unchanged. All translations are my own, except where otherwise indicated.

Abbreviations used in references

AHR:	*American Historical Review*
ANCI:	Archives Nationales de la République de la Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan
ANM:	Archives Nationales de la République du Mali, Koulouba
ANMt:	Archives Nationales de la République Islamique de la Mauritanie, Nouakchott
ANS:	Archives Nationales de la République du Sénégal, Dakar
BCEHS-AOF:	*Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historique et Scientifique sur l'Afrique Occidentale Française*
BSOAS:	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BTLC:	Bureau Technique de Liaison et de Coordination
CAOM:	Archives Nationales de la France: Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence
CEA:	*Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*
CHEAM:	Centre des hautes études d'administration musulmane
CSSH:	*Comparative Studies in Society and History*
EI²:	*Encyclopaedia of Islam.* 2d ed. Leiden, 1960–2002
FOCYS:	Fondation Cheick Yacouba Sylla
HIA:	*The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels. Athens, OH, 2000
IJAHS:	*International Journal of African Historical Studies*
ISSS:	*Islam et sociétés au sud du Sahara*
JAH:	*Journal of African History*
JOAOF:	*Journal officiel de l'Afrique Occidentale Française*
JOCI:	*Journal officiel de la Côte d'Ivoire*
MAMMP:	Yale Malian Arabic Manuscript Microfilming Project
SA:	*Sudanic Africa*
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

Introduction

THE CENTRAL EVENTS IN THIS STORY TOOK PLACE IN THE RIVER-side town of Kaédi in the French colony of Mauritania on February 15, 1930. That morning, two men, Mamadou Sadio and Dieydi Diagana, prayed together in a mosque in the neighborhood of Gattaga. Both members of the town's Soninke ethnic minority, Mamadou Sadio was the son of one of Kaédi's Islamic scholars, and Dieydi Diagana was the French-appointed *chef de village* for Gattaga, Kaédi's Soninke enclave. This day, in the middle of the holy month of Ramadan, was supposed to have been a day of reconciliation, for the two men had been on opposite sides of a conflict that had unsettled Kaédi for months and were praying together to demonstrate their commitment to peaceful coexistence.

The conflict had begun the previous August 1929, when a young man named Yacouba Sylla arrived in town and began preaching a message of religious and social reform that took Gattaga by storm. A Sufi teacher, Yacouba Sylla had incurred the hostility of the local representatives of the French Empire and the disdain of Kaédi's elite by calling for radical changes in social and religious practice and by claiming authority out of proportion to his age and his rather minimal formal education. He claimed instead to derive his authority from a controversial holy man named Ahmad Hamallah, from Nioro in Mali, who at the time was being detained by the French administration. Despite local opposition, Yacouba Sylla quickly gathered a large following from among Kaédi's minority Soninke population. Yacouba's supporters came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some were merchants; a few were important scholars; many were slaves or former slaves; others belonged to stigmatized occupational castes; some were merely poor. In December of 1929, the French deported Yacouba from Kaédi and then, in January, placed him in detention in Sassandra, in the colony of Côte d'Ivoire. In his absence, his followers continued to spread his ideas, and the religious revival became more intense. By January 1930, it involved over 600 people who had come into frequent and increasingly violent conflict with other residents of the town. Largely on the receiving end of much of the violence, Yacouba's followers were attacked in the town's streets and saw their homes burned and their shops looted.

All this, however, was supposed to have been settled by the meeting in Gattaga's main mosque on the morning of February 15, 1930. Yet just hours later, apparently under the leadership of Mamadou Sadio who claimed to be acting in Yacouba's name, the revivalists staged a large demonstration, winding their way past their opponents' homes and shops and past the French administrative buildings. Though it is not clear exactly what happened during the course of that day, by the end of it nineteen men and three women, all followers of Yacouba Sylla, had been killed, shot by the town's guards. Several more died from their injuries over the next few days, while over 100 people were rounded up and arrested, sentenced to prison or detention, and exiled to the far corners of the French Empire in West Africa.[1]

In the years that followed, Yacouba Sylla and his followers experienced a dramatic reversal of fortune. Despite the deaths and detentions, the group stayed in contact over the next several years, writing to one another from various prisons and assuring their families left behind that they would soon be together again. In the late 1930s, the administration gradually released the "Yacoubists"[2] and was surprised when most of them decided to gather in Côte d'Ivoire rather than return to Mauritania. Yacouba himself moved to the Ivoirian town of Gagnoa in 1939, established a center for Sufi devotional practices (called a *zâwiya*), and turned his attention to commerce and plantation agriculture. Gathering his followers around him to form a new community, they established a series of successful plantations and a transport company. By the 1940s, Yacouba was well known throughout much of West Africa as both a successful merchant and an important religious teacher. Relations between his followers and those of other religious leaders with ties to Hamallah in Nioro were rarely smooth, but he attracted the attention of the great intellectual, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, and became friends with the politician Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and the latter relationship brought him

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1   Arrêté 225, Gouv. -Gén. AOF (Carde), 27 January 1930, pub. *JOAOF*, February 15, 1930. See also Gouv. -Gén. AOF (Carde) to Min. Col., Rapport #133AP/2, 13 Avril 1930 and Arrêté 807, Gouv. -Gén. AOF 11 Avril 1930 (CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6 dossier 3). "Liste de Yacoubists décédés à Gattaga: 15-2-1930," (ANMt E2-34). A copy of this last file and others from Nouakchott were graciously provided to me by Professor Adama Gnokane of the Université de Nouakchott, to whom I am deeply indebted.

2   The name of the community created by Yacouba Sylla is a very contentious issue among his followers because of the implications it has for relations with other followers of Hamallah. See Boukary Savadogo, "La communauté 'Yacouba Sylla' et ses rapports avec la Tijâniyya hamawiyya," in *La Tijâniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris, 2000), pp. 271–280. I have avoided using the term "Yacoubism," but since even those who emphatically reject the uniqueness of Yacouba's religious teachings accept that his followers' social organization was unprecedented, I have used the term "Yacoubists" to designate those who consider themselves to be members of the community of disciples of Shaykh Hamallah organized and led by Yacouba Sylla.

into political life as a symbol for African entrepreneurialism and the drive for self-rule. An ally of Houphouët-Boigny's Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) and the pro-independence Union Soudanaise-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain in Mali, Yacouba Sylla was an important, if unobtrusive, figure in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Yacouba passed away on August 11, 1988, leaving behind him an influential community but little private wealth. Yacouba's followers had shunned all personal property, sharing all possessions in common and maintaining a tight solidarity. His sons inherited leadership of the community, playing significant political and religious roles in Mali and Côte d'Ivoire in the first decade of independence and remaining well-known figures throughout the region and among Francophone African Muslims in the diaspora.

Fascinating in its own right, the history of Yacouba Sylla and his followers provides a unique glimpse inside some of the most poorly understood dynamics of West African societies. Though hardly representative, the experiences of the Yacoubists refract the twentieth century in new and useful ways. French administrators had sought to systematically manage the practice of Islam in their African possessions in order to bring it into alignment with their vision of modernity and make it serve as a bulwark for the state's authority. At the same time, officials' half-hearted efforts to eliminate slavery, their inconsistent projects to channel labor into cash cropping, and the arbitrary exercise of power by poorly trained and underfunded administrators brought about dramatic and unexpected changes in the ways communities were organized and the ways individuals understood their position in society. West African Muslims were neither passive witnesses to these changes nor purely reactive. They drew creatively on centuries of Islamic thought and social experimentation to craft new identities and communities out of, among other things, the changes brought by the French. Administrators and colonial politicians spoke of freedom, development, and modernization in alien and often hollow terms; but the followers of Yacouba Sylla gave new meaning to these ideas, making them central themes in a mystical Sufi practice that looked little like the enlightenment-based liberal republicanism governors hoped to create or like the reformist Islam promoted by modernizers elsewhere. The Yacoubists used the memory of the suffering of the symbolic father whom they called ''Ba Yaaxuba,'' ''Father Yacouba,'' to fold the dominant ideologies of the century into a redemptive, cosmic narrative in which they themselves helped fulfill a social revolution set in motion by the Prophet Muhammad himself.

This book attempts to trace the origins and development of the ''Yacoubist community'' through the period of French colonial rule and up to the present. It is also an intellectual history of leaders and followers in the community that strives to illustrate the internal architecture of their thinking, its

relevance for broad moral and theoretical questions, and the social and political uses to which it was put. I argue that the social and ideational roots of the revival launched by Yacouba Sylla in 1929, as well as of the new kind of society he helped establish in the late 1930s, can be traced back several centuries before his birth. The book illustrates the way the Yacoubists drew connections among phenomena that had their own histories stretching from the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the Sufi networks established by Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti in the eighteenth century, to the violent reform movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to the intellectual crisis precipitated by imperial conquest. The results suggest new ways of looking at the place of women and gender in Islamic history in West Africa, at the changes in labor regimes and local political patronage in the early twentieth century, at the new forms of religious practice that emerge along with the personalization and commoditization of spiritual authority, and at the complex circuits through which discourses like modernization and development traveled in becoming the common currency of postcolonial African political culture.

IMPLICIT KNOWLEDGE AND THE COLONIAL EPISODE

In the late 1960s, the eminent scholar and leader of the "Ibadan" school of African history, J.F. Ade Ajayi, advised historians to remember that colonialism was merely "an episode" in the African past, albeit an important and traumatic one. Ajayi feared that the seductive pull of Europe's interpretive vision and of the colonial archive as an empirical resource would drown out histories centered on "African" voices and worldviews.[3] For many good reasons, Ajayi's enjoinder and the nationalist historiographic moment of which it was a part hold little sway among current European and North American scholars of Africa. Like colonial analysts before them, nationalist historians tended to evaluate African cultures by comparing them to European ones. They deployed a series of interpretive dichotomies – between collaboration and resistance, between local and "world" religions, between capitalist and precapitalist economies, and so on – that made Ajayi's distinction between Europe-centered histories and Africa-centered ones a distinction of essence and substance. They tended to downplay the impact of colonial transformations of political economy and ignored the way nationalist projects and their elite leaders had come to be saturated with colonialist ideologies.

In the face of these problems, a very different approach has come to dominate since the 1980s. Colonial rule is now seen as a tentative, halting

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3   Jacob F. Ade Ajayi, "Colonialism: An Episode in African History," reprinted in *Tradition and Change in Africa: The Essays of J. F. Ade Ajayi*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton, NJ, 2000), pp. 165–74.

experiment, whose subjects were able to play a decisive role by facilitating certain courses of action while blocking or raising the relative costs of others. What was thought of as the precolonial past has been revealed as, in great measure, the product of an imagination shared by colonial observers and African elites, and reference to its explanatory value is seen as romantic at best, essentialist at worst. Instead, today's historians describe the interplay between colonial "projects" and African "responses" in ways that account for, and indeed relish, moments where African initiatives "disturbed" or "changed the trajectory" of European undertakings. Under the rubric of an "imperial turn," such work has had a salutary effect on European history, helping displace its own narratives of self-contained nations and autonomous colonial metropoles. In terms of African historiography, it has directed attention to the vibrancy and "modernity" of recent African societies and assimilated recognition of the impact of European rule without endorsing the self-representations of colonialists or their apologists.[4]

Steven Feierman has, however, noted that histories that are always cautious to frame African agency within the constraints and discourses of domination – and indeed, which deem it the height of agency to "displace" or "appropriate" those constraints and discourses – can reinforce the false universalism according to which only stories that employ explanatory contexts grounded in knowledge implicitly understood to be shared by the historian and her or his audience can be articulated in professionally acceptable languages. Historical objects depend on the other histories readers are assumed to know and those that a particular study is taken to inform. Dividing up the African twentieth century into stories that reflect the fate of European concepts, beliefs, or practices – like labor, commoditization, or citizenship – generates histories that have meaning only in their "shared relationship" to such concepts, reinforcing the coherence of European knowledge and the fragmentation of all others.[5] The very act of referring to the continent in the early twentieth century as "colonial Africa" makes it clear that one must know

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4 For the African cases, good introductions are Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994), pp. 1516–1545; Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, UK, 1996); and Gregory Mann, "Locating Colonial Histories: Between France and West Africa," *AHR* 110:2 (2005). In a comparative context, see Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Princeton, 1994); Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997); Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, A Reader* (Manchester, 2000); and Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005).

5 This is the powerful argument of Steven Feierman, "Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, 1999), p. 185.

something about colonialism (and thus about Europe) to understand it, while the concrete knowledge about Africa mobilized by "imperial turn" histories of Europe is comparatively thin. Knowledge of, say, French history has applicability and meaning in many locations outside the metropole, while knowledge of "local" African history is taken to gain meaning only by being connected to "broader" circuits. Regional or even continental interactions are overlooked in favor of localized studies where the interplay of appropriation and displacement can become a major part of the story, or "translocal" studies where appropriation and displacement *are* the story. Integration in African history – indeed, the meaning of the field as a whole – only comes through the colonial rubric.

One reason for this is that Africa as such has proven largely unsatisfactory as an alternative framework for historical analysis. Partially this is because the continent's size and diversity mean that the ground that it provides for narratives is typically thin; partially it is because "Africa" as a category owes so much to Europe itself that the idea that it can provide an alternative locus of explanation is probably illusory.[6] The choice between treating African history as part of a fully integrated, universally intelligible world history and separating it out completely, relegating it to the timeless past of the "other," is, however, a false one, one that ultimately serves to justify the neglect of contextualizing knowledge that could build on stories centered outside the metropole. It is a duality that has particularly pernicious consequences for African intellectual history, which can be nothing other than the history of derivative discourses, and for the history of Muslim peoples in Africa, whose long-term trajectories, insofar as they are considered at all, are attached like an appendage to the Middle East. For that reason, this book adopts instead a regional approach, taking the loosely bounded area of the "Western Sudan" – roughly from the Senegal River Valley in the west to the bend of the Niger River in the east, from the desert in the north to the southernmost extent of Mande-speaking traders – as its setting, not in the sense of a culture zone that offers ready-made explanations or bounded repertoires, but as a privileged space for the interconnection and accumulation of stories.

Although the new colonial and imperial histories have generally paid little attention to questions of Islamic reform or Muslim social change, the most innovative works on Islam in twentieth-century West Africa have been broadly consonant with such approaches. They have emphasized the ways the socioeconomic and political dispensations ushered in by European rule spurred the development of new forms of religious authority and new

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6 V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN, 1988); Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, 1997), ch. 4. That "Europe" is equally tendentious a category has, of course, been one of the greatest incentives for turning instead to "empire."

religious institutions.[7] Even those historians who work across the colonial divide tend to privilege the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, seeing in them a profound rupture in which older, dead-end forms of Islamic authority and organization were replaced, in a kind of a "shakeout," by modern ones better adapted to the new conditions of European liberalism and capitalist development.[8]

The same basic pattern is apparent in large-scale studies of socioeconomic change in the twentieth century, particularly in those that focus on the question of "free labor." Abandoning older debates about whether precolonial African labor was "overexploited" or "underutilized," or over the conditions for the emergence of a modern working class, more recent approaches have lingered over the complex, heterogeneous patterns that emerged in the twentieth century. They have highlighted the colonial use of forced labor and coercive military recruitment, which they present as an "intermediary" stage between premodern labor regimes and true labor markets. Attention is given to the political, social, and legal institutions that enabled the functioning of these hybrid forms of political economy, which in turn appear as effectively *sui generis*.[9] Yet there has been little investigation into the meanings of work within African societies, so powerful is the implicit teleology of the inexorable progression toward liberal capitalism.[10]

Decades ago, Sara Berry suggested that the development of a satisfactory interpretation of the transformation of African economies during the colonial period would be best served by recognizing that economic values are the "outcome of historical interaction between practices and concepts of production" with

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7 On the personalization of religious authority, see the contributions to Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson, eds., *Le temps des marabouts: itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v.* 1880–1960 (Paris, 1997); and Benjamin F. Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor, 2005). For new institutions, see those as well as the essays in Robinson and Triaud, *La Tijaniyya*; David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania,* 1880–1920 (Athens, OH, 2000); and Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in A West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN, 2001). Brenner's earlier work generally took its frame of reference from local religious traditions rather than from French colonial policy, but *Controlling Knowledge* bears traces of the imperial turn in its focus on European conquest as marking a fundamental epistemic rupture in Islamic discourse. The most important works of the older, philological school of Islamic studies are exceptions to this trend, but they generally take very little notice of the colonial state or questions of social and political authority at all.

8 This is the basic thesis that David Robinson has put forth across a number of publications during the last several years. See the most mature expression of it, in Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*.

9 This is the overarching argument of the major work of one of the founders of the new colonial history, Frederick Cooper, although it is also a perspective shared by many historians of slavery. See Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*. See also Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan,* 1895–1912 (Portsmouth, 2005).

10 For an exception that proves the rule, see Johannes Fabian, "Kazi: Conceptualizations of Labor in a Charismatic Movement among Swahili-speaking Workers," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 13:50 (1973), 293–325.

"modes of understanding" conceived of as "objects of accumulation" (and, presumably, production).[11] However, historians have generally avoided investigating these "variable ideas" as part of any kind of intellectual tradition, with its own tensions and dynamics, and have rather presented them either as elements of an ideology crafted to provide legitimating cover for coexisting social relations or as an abstract "culture" whose logic can be charted and then properly inserted into standard economic models. As a result, social historians have limited the power of their insights, reducing local capitalist transformations to deviations from Western paths of development and accounting for such deviations by implicit reference either to a local or regional essence or to a global structural imbalance. In Berry's groundbreaking *Fathers Work for their Sons*, for example, non-Western economic ways of assigning "value" became, together with colonial rule, explanations for the unproductive nature of African forms of accumulation, for the lack of "effective management" of the means of production, for the persistence of exploitation, the growth of a powerful but factionalized state, and the lack of both proletarian solidarity or any kind of alternative way to organize resistance to class structures.[12]

The same problems beset approaches that take their cue from literary theory, particularly as inflected through postcolonial theory. Brent Hayes Edwards, for example, has drawn attention to W.E.B. DuBois's marvelous phrase that since "with nearly every great European empire to-day walks its dark colonial shadow," one can "read the riddle of Europe . . . as a matter of colonial shadows."[13] Important figures in one of the most dramatic episodes in French Islamic policy in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1920s and 1930s, emblems of the success of France's encouragement of small-scale agricultural capitalism in the 1930s and 1940s, and influential power brokers during the transition from colony to postcolony in the 1950s and 1960s, the history of the community of Yacouba Sylla can indeed stand as a kind of shadow to the history of the French endeavor in West Africa. But whereas Edwards sees a historiography perched in these shadows – indeed a history so dim as to be virtually invisible – as a way of turning from "oppositions and binaries" to the "layers" produced by tracing the adversarial networks of resistance to colonial rule, such negation simply reproduces the invisibility into which colonialism and its representations have cast African history. Tellingly, Edwards claims that such dissonant voices can only be found "within the institution, within the archive," and, following Gayatri Spivak, that their articulation comes only "at the limit point where 'history is

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[11] Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yorùbá Community* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 61–62.

[12] Ibid., pp. 11–14, 81–83.

[13] Quoted in Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Shadow of Shadows," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11:1 (2003), p. 41.

narrativized into logic.''' Such assertions simply reproduce the colonial fantasy that its archives were total and its power ubiquitous, along with the colonial paranoia that this power was everywhere subject to challenge. Spivak's assumption that there is only one way that history can be ''narrativized into logic'' and that this is the point where metropolitan systems of explanation attempt to organize subaltern consciousness, simply reproduces the formalist desire that narratives and explanatory logic be mutually determining.[14]

Even those who acknowledge the heterogeneity and limitations of colonial rule reify the period itself, taking for granted its status as a distinctive and total experience in which administrative discourses and visions seeped into every facet of social life.[15] Particularly powerful imaginings of coloniality have, for instance, organized their analyses not in terms of projects, displacements, and appropriations, but rather in terms of the ''entanglements'' that emerged as African systems of meaning and order were (often violently) taken apart and woven into new, syncretic structures. Such a method lends itself to multifaceted depictions of social change that avoid positing ''European'' and ''local'' knowledge or practices as distinct spheres. The analysis that results is, however, fundamentally synchronic; exploring the processes by which colonial knots came to be tied in the first place is eschewed in favor of ''tracing'' entangled objects and logics back and forth from one register to another. Change, insofar as it is present at all, is either attributed abstractly to conquest or to subsequent structural adjustments within the relationships among people and things. By shifting the scale to ''micropolitics'' and iterated daily practices, such studies fail to account for the purported necessary relationship between entanglement and coloniality in the first place. The narrower its temporal biography becomes, the more colonialism ironically turns into a setting detached from any specific set of actors but one that completely accounts for the actions that take place on its stage.[16] Recent calls by

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14 Ibid., p. 42. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ''Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,'' in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York, 1988), p. 207.

15 As with the works of Cooper cited above, or of Jean and John Comaroff, Gaurav Desai, etc.

16 Nancy Rose Hunt's *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, 1999) is the most sophisticated example of this approach, and both its title and organization reflect its commitment to describing the assemblages of microprocesses that made up the colonial situation. To trace one subsequent genealogy, Lynn M. Thomas brought the metaphor of entanglement from the works of Nicholas Thomas, Carolyn Hamilton, and Achille Mbembe into her *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley, 2003), which in turn provided a key conceptual tool for Julie Livingston's *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington, 2005). The impression that these studies are themselves isomorphic with ''snapshots'' of the large-scale processes described by Gramscians may reflect their shared debt to Steven Feierman's work, especially ''Struggles for Control: The Social Roots of Health and Healing in Modern Africa,'' *African Studies Review* 28:2–3 (1985), 73–147; and *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, 1990).

historians like Frederick Cooper to adopt this method as a way of looking at a tightly bounded colonial period without ideological "stances"[17] are, in this sense, simply the displacement of the depoliticizing approaches to the post-colonial period circulated a decade ago that viewed a whole series of specific state institutions in Africa through the lens of various generalized "conditions" or systems.[18] Both ultimately sustain little investigation into processes that take place outside what is assumed to be the proper domain of apparently self-evident periods.

Ongoing modifications in the theory and practice of the new colonial histories have uncovered ever more complex and subtle forms of African agency, and more intricate entanglements between various places in Africa and the rest of the world. But Feierman's insight reveals that the contextualism that would assert the inextricability of European presence from twentieth-century processes, so that both metropole and colony are seen as constituted by a shared imperial moment (or, increasingly, a global moment), is in fact highly arbitrary. At issue is not the connectedness of sets of events – it is probably a truism that virtually any two events can be connected if we trace linkages assiduously enough – but rather the insistence with which certain connections are foregrounded as necessary for making sense of phenomena.[19] Some scholars have responded by pointing to the ways the changes brought by colonial rule were limited by the persistence of African institutions.[20] Yet the solution is not to be found either in minimizing the impact of colonialism on African societies, or romanticizing African "agency" to the point that, as Mahmoud Mamdani has warned, "modern imperialism is – should I say celebrated? – as the outcome of an African initiative."[21] Without a doubt, colonial rule was a process in which elements of what social scientists might consider agency were appropriated from many individuals, and the ability of most social groups to participate fully in shaping and directing public institutions was foreclosed. But what this suggests is that the concept of agency itself is part of the problem.[22] What remains invisible is the possibility of African inventions in social technology, political rhetoric, and self-fashioning

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17 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, esp. introduction.

18 Such as Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Bloomington, 1999).

19 Comp. Christopher Pinney, "Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?" in *Materiality (Politics, History and Culture)*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, 2005), pp. 256–272.

20 Thomas Spear, "Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *JAH* 44 (2003), 3–27; Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

21 Mahmoud Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Colonialism* (Princeton, 1996), p. 10.

22 See Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37:1 (2003), 113–124.

that took place during the ''colonial era'' but which owed little to colonial
institutions, discourses, or projects. It is in this sense that the dynamism of
Ajayi's metaphor of the ''episode'' remains useful.

A key part of the argument of this book has to do with the materials available
for reconstructing the past. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with this matter from the
perspective of the sociology and politics of information, but the more tradi-
tional matter of sources also needs addressing. The materials for this study were
gathered from archives in France, Senegal, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire, and in a
series of formal interviews, informal conversations, and observations made
during stays in West Africa in 1998 and 2001; the oral sources bear considerable
weight in my analysis. From the outset, I was aware that the persecution they
had experienced at the hands of French authorities as well as by other Muslims
made many of Yacouba Sylla's followers reticent to discuss aspects of their
activities, particularly with regard to beliefs or practices that had been used
to justify such persecution. But because of personal connections I had made
with members of the community in 1998, I had hoped I would have their
cooperation, and to a great extent I did. Leading members of the community
agreed that our distinct ways of thinking carefully about the history of Yacouba
and his followers were not utterly incompatible; but the political aspects of oral
research nonetheless intervened at every turn. No mythic ''rapport'' can dis-
solve mutual recognition of the importance and dangers of controlling knowl-
edge, and the Yacoubist community is very aware and protective of its past.[23]

Certain members of the community have founded an organization, the Fon-
dation Cheikh Yacouba Sylla (FOCYS), intended among other things to act as
the official representative of the community and to control the reproduction
of its history. Though the right of the FOCYS to speak on behalf of the
community as a whole is far from uncontested, its members had significant
influence with community leaders and so I chose to try to operate from
within the channels it established even while pursuing my own lines of
inquiry. Yet this help came with a price. After spending months trying to
secure authorization to interview members in Gagnoa, I acceded to a request
by the FOCYS that I provide a tentative list of the questions I wanted to ask
and the persons I wanted to interview, so that they could make sure that all
the ''necessary'' people would be present when I was admitted to the com-
pound. Realizing that this could also be used to control my access to persons

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23 For an informative, and occasionally provocative, discussion of how the sociology of knowledge in
one set of West African cultures poses important challenges to conventional social scientific or
humanistic methodologies, see the special issue of *Mande Studies* on ''Secrets and Lies in the
Mande World'' (2000).

with sensitive or variant information, I hesitated, and then relented, imagining this as simply a way to get my foot in the door. The surprise came a few days later when, summoned to a meeting, I was presented with the "answers" to all my questions; the FOCYS had canvassed the elders of the community, posing the questions I had provided, and synthesizing the replies into a single, unindividuated, "official" response. Having been trained in a kind of historical analysis in which the all-important factor was the variance within representations of the past, this result, which effectively elided any differentiation and provided no obvious way of engaging in serious source criticism, seemed to be a catastrophe and utterly useless.

In fact it was a catastrophe, but a productive one. Though I was never able to collect a "critical mass" of divergent traditions that could lead to detailed reconstruction, I did eventually acquire three different sets of representation of the past: highly structured, self-reflective responses from the FOCYS; the same from Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, who had remained aloof from that organization; and more informal accounts gleaned from months of constant interaction and discussion with rank-and-file members of the community. It was this last set that exercised the most influence over my thinking, and which is hardest to represent here. I have not lingered over these encounters in the text for fear of reproducing the self-centered narrative that I believe tempts most writers on colonial or postcolonial Africa. They are reflected instead in the ways I have translated back and forth between my own languages, concerns, and arguments and those of the formal sources I quote. For many members of the community, historical and contemporary events alike had (at least) two distinct types of reality: a surface meaning, corresponding to the Sufi idea of the *zâhir* level of scriptural interpretation, and a hidden, secret meaning, corresponding to the *bâtin*, or esoteric interpretation. Despite being intellectually aware of this fact, I was unprepared to encounter it so vigorously in lived experience. I was taken by surprise, for example, to find that a man with whom I had become good friends was himself considered an important relic of Yacouba's spiritual power, having been mysteriously kidnapped and then freed under dramatic, symbolically meaningful circumstances at a young age. I was similarly unprepared to be confronted by other friends, including bankers and pharmacists, who provocatively asked me how I intended to write a history of God.

Perhaps the incidents that were most unsettling of my methodological preconceptions were the occasions on which it was explained that my research had been fully anticipated, not because I had written to the community a year in advance to try to arrange my access, but because Yacouba himself had prophesied my coming some twenty years before, in terms that I had to admit were fairly precise. Though on one hand I saw this as an attempt to disarm the threat that I posed by "reinscribing" my actions into a narrative in which the community set the terms of engagement and in which their beliefs could be

seen as the driving force, it was also a profound, uncanny reminder that everything that was going on around me, including my own behavior and words, registered on these double levels of *zâhir* and *bâtin*. After a point, I realized this was not really so different from how I myself viewed my interactions with the community. Friendly conversations, shared experiences, lengthy formal interviews, and (occasionally) proffered texts were all grist for my interpretive mill as I sifted and scrutinized everything for underlying patterns. If my own theoretical and historiographic matrices had led me to anticipate what I found in my investigations, was it not fair that members of the community performed the same intellectual operation on me?

It is not very useful to try to separate out the factual, rhetorical, and formal elements of such interactions. Partly this is because of the stakes involved. But just as importantly it is because it is the entire performance that has interpretive value. Treating all sources – and not just oral ones – as essentially performances, ways of constantly enacting an engagement between inherited repertoires of meanings and very real situations, reflects the way intellectual practices both constitute a weak structure and take their meaning from it. Representations of the past can be profitably analyzed as clusters of symbols deployed to achieve various purposes, not the least of which are rendering the world and human actions meaningful and making those meanings understood by others. Looking at behavior pragmatically but not reductively thus provides a way of linking the rhetorical aspects of discourses with the social and material conditions in which they emerge.

The stories Yacoubists told themselves and others about what was happening to them drew creatively on stories about earlier West African Muslims to form a new set of collective and individual identities. They also reveal a vast gap between their versions of the past and the dominant representations of colonial Africa that were available to contextualize the movement. When placed alongside a critique of the way stories are aggregated according to the implicit knowledge they assume, my interviews provided an opportunity to interrogate some of these broader narratives and to rethink how historians interpret the connections among phenomena at different scales of analysis. When the biographies and self-imaginings of Yacouba's followers are taken as a whole, *they* fragment histories of empire *around them*. Picturing the social changes that accompanied French occupation through the lens of a centuries-old, ongoing process of Sufism-inspired religious reform, Yacouba Sylla's followers generally did a better job of assimilating and accounting for colonial rule than coloniality does of accounting for their experiences. The same is true for most popular commentaries on the community. Yacouba Sylla has a reputation throughout francophone West Africa as a powerful Muslim leader, an occultist, and a shrewd, stereotypically "Soninke" business man; one of Mali's prominent Wassoulou singers, Sali Sidibe has written a celebratory song about him

highlighting these traits that, while hardly an objective history, integrates the locally meaningful contexts of such stereotypes within a very public language.[24] But it is not obvious how to handle history that fragments the interpretive frameworks that connect it to other stories, or how to tell a story in which something like an "Islamic tradition" matters without either reifying it – making it static and normative – or anthropomorphizing it, making it another way to evacuate African agency. Using popular stereotypes is even harder.

My approach to these problems is indebted to the work of the critics Kenneth Burke and Walter Benjamin who, in the 1920s and 1930s, proposed two distinct yet related alternatives to the techniques of historicism. Burke argued that, for better or worse, historians produce meaning through dramatic devices, staging action within a broader scene whose meaning emerges dialectically with the events taking place within it. Burke's approach dissolves persistent puzzles about the relationship between structure and agency by conceiving of action as the ratio of scene to actor in any particular description of events. Rather than being a property of social scientific modeling (where abstract agency may remain a concern, but one far divorced from the realities of historical methods), it is thought of as a property of experience described. Similarly, Burke's dramatism loosens the process of contextualization by which historians make sense out of the past without abandoning it entirely. While the dramatic structure of a historical narrative does imply an attitude toward the significance of phenomena and the mechanisms of change, in actual narrative practice a wide range of relations among actor, agent, scene, and action are possible. Settings do not specify action any more than action has meaning outside the scene of its taking place; neither relation is determining or even necessarily consonant.[25] Allowing for greater flexibility in the relationship between scenes and acts, and conceptualizing a category of actor distinct from agent (and thus "agency"), preserves the relative autonomy of internestled, articulated stories while still allowing us to give them new meaning by changing the ways we combine those stories.

Walter Benjamin's heterodox Marxism critiqued historicism from a different vantage. Benjamin drew attention to the points of departure in historical narratives, asserting that it was impossible to justify a particular temporal frame by reference to any empirical criteria. Origins were, rather, moments that took a jump or leap out of context and that therefore could not be explained as part of the stream of time that bound them teleologically to that

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24 Sali Sidibe, "Yacouba Sylla," *Divas of Mali*, Shanachie, SHA-CD-64078.

25 Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (2nd ed. Boston, 1961); *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, 1969); *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York, 1955); and *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Boston, 1961). There is a key difference here from the ideas of Hayden White, who drew heavily on Burke but who favored a high degree of structural correspondence on all levels, from rhetorical structure to narrative arc to political valence.

which came before and after. By denying this, naïve historicism failed to observe the ways the sources that reached historians had been mediated at every intervening moment by the technologies of control that generated, preserved, and transformed knowledge.[26] Though Benjamin's thought has entered historical practice through the simplified cliché that scholars should "brush sources against the grain," what Benjamin meant by this was something very different than the "reading between the lines" that it has been taken to enjoin. Benjamin insisted that the past be apprehended as a "dialectical image," a rupture in context and continuity in which the meaning of the past and the present were put simultaneously at stake.

Taken together, Benjamin's and Burke's ideas suggest that the constant displacement of African knowledge from histories of "colonialism" is deeply connected to how scholars use broader narratives to interpret or contextualize sources. Depicting colonial policy as a set of shifting structures and African "agency" as something meaningful in the specific setting of imperial rule is only one possible staging among many, but it has become overwhelmingly dominant. Most of the reasons for doing so are those of professional convenience and reflect the circuits through which historians' own knowledge must travel to be given value. Thus even microspecializations within the field have their own "natural" stagings, which, when applied in such a way as to produce a high degree of conformity between scene and act, generate almost boilerplate colonial histories. If the privileged topic is Islam, Yacouba and his followers can be fitted into broader stories about French suppression of unruly Muslim organizations, of Shaykh Hamallah's rejection of accommodation with colonial rulers, or of the increasing personalization of religious authority in the face of expanding commodity exchange, wage labor, and state patronage of charismatic Sufi leaders.[27] In relation to the political or economic history of Côte d'Ivoire, Yacouba appears either as an important transporter who contributed to the displacement of the precolonial *ancien régime* by an adaptive bourgeoisie, as a possible French "collaborator," as a

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26 Esp. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," (trans. Harry Zohn) in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 389–400; "The Philosophy of History of the Late Romantics and the Historical School," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926 (Cambridge, MA, 1999); and *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York, 1994).

27 For explicit attempts to locate the Yacoubists in these depictions, see J.C. Froelich, *Les musulmans d'Afrique noire* (Paris, 1962), pp. 137, 240; Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: a Sufi Order in the Modern World* (New York, 1965), p. 152; Pierre Alexandre, "A West African Islamic Movement: Hamallism in French West Africa," in *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, ed. R. Rotberg and Ali Mazrui (New York, 1970), pp. 503, 507–508; ʿAbd Allah ʿAbd al-Raziq Ibrahim, *Adwāʾ ʿalā al-turuq al-sūfīya fī al-qārra al-afrīqiya* (Cairo, 1990), pp. 124–126; Boukary Savadogo, "Confréries et pouvoirs. La Tijaniyya Hamawiyya en Afrique occidentale (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger): 1909–1965" (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Provence, 1998), pp. 327–365.

major contributor to the modernization of the colony, or as a key figure in the rise to power of the PDCI.[28] For social historians, themes like the "legal-status abolition"[29] of slavery, the weakening of social control in the face of expanding economic opportunities, the emergence of new networks of patronage, entrepreneurialism, and accumulation, or the rise of African "intermediaries" responsible for brokering these changes, all provide ways of illustrating how the Yacoubists displaced colonial intentions without ever really being able to escape them.[30] Those pieces of the Yacoubist story that have appeared in print have each seen in the community a manifestation of one of the broader "trends" held to characterize the colonial period.[31] It is relatively easy to construct all of these narratives. They are well-supported by the official, documentary sources, which come largely from surveillance files, intelligence reports, and captured correspondence that were assembled and preserved by the French colonial administration. The standard narratives of twentieth-century West African history on which these stories rely are very robust and they can do a lot of interpretive work.

The few private documents of the community and my interviews with them generate different stories, but they too depend on their own assumed protocols of interpretation and elide moments of origin and rupture just as incessantly.

28 For example, Pierre Kipré, *Villes de la Côte d'Ivoire, 1893–1940,* vol. 2, *Economie et société urbaine* (Abidjan, 1985); Barbara Caroline Lewis, "The Transporters' Association of the Ivory Coast: Ethnicity, Occupational Specialization, and National Integration" (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1970); Aristide Zolberg, *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast*, rev. ed. (Princeton, 1969); and Jean-Pierre Dozon, *La société bété: Histoires d'une «ethnie» de Côte d'Ivoire* (Bondy, 1985), p. 344. For the broad trajectory from *ancien régime* to bourgeoisie, see John Rapley, *Ivoirien Capitalism: African Entrepreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire* (Boulder, 1993), though Rapley's study ignores not just Yacouba, but Gagnoa and the entire Muslim population of the colony as well.

29 Paul Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge, UK, 1993).

30 Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1988); Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*; James F. Searing, *"God Alone Is King"*: *Islam and Emancipation in Senegal, the Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Portsmouth, NH, 2002); Trevor Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Toward Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Athens, OH, 2004); Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, 2006).

31 This is even true of the two published works by historians within the community: Fondation Cheikh Yacouba Sylla [FOCYS], *Cheikh Yacouba Sylla ou le sens d'un combat* (Abidjan, 2002); and Cheick Chikouna Cissé, "La confrérie Hamalliste face à l'administration coloniale française: Le cas de Cheick Yacouba Sylla (1929–1960)," in *Mali-France: Regards sur une historie partagée*, ed. GEMDEV/Université du Mali (Paris, 2005), pp. 55–76. The first is a revised version of a manuscript that was given to me in 2001; many of the revisions reflect the outcome of conversations I had with Maître Cheickna Sylla, head of the FOCYS. Appearing just as the present book was being completed, Ahmadou Yacouba Sylla *À l'ombre d'un soufi* (Abidjan, 2006), also codified many of the conversations I had with its author, as well as including reprints of many of Ahmadou Sylla's recent newspaper editorials. It stands as in implicit response to the FOCYS volume.

They have no greater a priori claim on the truth than do "official" documents, nor do they reflect some sort of authentic, unitary African voice. Thus it cannot simply be a matter of choosing the setting adopted by hagiographic traditions and contrasting it to well-known "professional" settings. This illustrates the crucial difference between historical writing and other kinds of texts. Unlike the narratives to which Burke's ideas are typically applied – theater and literature, in particular – the individual pieces that make up historical narratives are often themselves self-contained narratives. As a result, the stories that historians produce are inseparable from the way they read the narratives they find. Moving away from an approach to African history that takes the colonial period as a natural field of analysis is thus facilitated by adopting an approach to sources that can give them meaning with only a weak reliance on context. Charles Tilly has recently proposed a form of social science that reimagines it as a narrative process. Social science, for Tilly, should involve constructing stories that recontextualize, and thereby transcend accounts of human action that depend on lived experience. What Tilly calls "standard stories" – "sequential, explanatory accounts of self-motivated human action" – are, he argues, limited by their "methodological individualism," by their reliance on intuitive causal explanations that are well-suited to human scales of experience but which conflict with causal forces that can be seen to operate when the scale is broadened (or narrowed, as in psychology). By contrast, "disciplinary stories" are, for Tilly, "superior stories" insofar as they are "fuller, more adequate," and he defines "adequate" in terms of criteria of correspondence to empirical reality, like "valid" and "accurate," and rhetorical criteria like "effective" and "explicit."[32]

For historians, however, the only reality to which our "disciplinary stories" can correspond is that of the very sources that provide our "standard stories." Except that the stories and observations that make up the "data" of historical studies (this one included) rarely meet Tilly's definition of a "standard story." Neither archival nor oral sources rely on an instinctive methodological individualism; instead each reflects a whole range of quasi-disciplinary rules of evidence, privileged causal mechanisms, and rules for relating practice to knowledge that give their stories rhetorical force. Nor do meanings inhere in our sources autonomously; the kinds of narratives that can be generated from them emerge out of their dialogic engagement with the rules of historical practice. In the case of the community of Yacouba Sylla, the stories imbedded in the colonial archive invariably naturalize the role of the state in bringing about various transformations in the beliefs and practices of Yacouba and his followers, while members of the community construct identities for themselves and one another through the elaboration of a religiously meaningful history and the institutionalization of that history through

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32 Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Lanham, MD, 2002), pp. xiii, xiv, 26.

its ceremonial reiteration. None of these presents anything like a coherent world view that can itself be pinned to a particular scale, nor do they depended on a sense of interiority or particularism, but rather aspire to universal – or even cosmic – perspectives. Indeed the opposition that Tilly draws between "relational realism," "the doctrine that transactions, interactions, social ties, and conversations constitute the central stuff of social life," and "phenomenological individualism," "the doctrine that individual consciousness is the primary or exclusive site of social life" ignores the possibilities that consciousness itself may be relational and that any number of vantages may exist that allow observers to trace "flows of communication, patron-client chains. . .. conversational connections and power relations from the small scale to the large and back."[33]

It is misleading, then, to treat such sources as raw materials that can be mined to create new, more desirable stories by analyzing individual bits of data for bias and plausibility. But historians can produce more critical, useful narratives by recognizing the way their own stories intersect, rather than transcend, the stories implicit in their sources. Since the effectiveness of rhetoric itself depends on a particular context, a particular set of rules about persuasion and interpretation that themselves change with time and place, it is better to distinguish among competing stories on the basis of the implicit knowledge they privilege rather than their positivistic "superiority." The influence of social theory on historians of Africa has, however, made widespread the idea that there must be a high degree of correspondence between arguments made about historical process and the meanings seen in individual sources. As a result, those who seek to challenge imperial depictions of Africa dedicate their efforts to reading the rhetoric of empire back against itself and imagine that this strategy of reading is itself a political intervention, while those who rely on oral sources move toward a de-theorization of methodologies in favor of less "interventionist" styles in which Africans are allowed to "speak for themselves." Even more sophisticated approaches to oral materials often see them as a form of discourse whose factuality is largely irrelevant; they shed light rather on forms of "historical consciousness" and the "constitutive power" of memory.[34] In both cases, such strategies do more to ground the scholar's interpretive authority – paradoxically so for those who claim merely to act as amanuenses – than they do to build connections between competing representations of the African past. For surely written sources also constitute forms of historical discourse and their "errors, inventions, and myths" can lead us "through and beyond facts to their

33 Ibid., pp. 71–72.
34 See, for example, Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, 2001). There, of course, remain many historians who are committed to careful, explicit, and reflexive use of oral materials in intersection with documents, White, Miescher, and Cohen among them.

[contested] meanings"[35] as effectively as oral ones. To deny the existence of a space where these sources can, despite the different epistemologies and institutional structures that may have generated them, be brought together in historical reconstruction is, in fact, to reproduce the inferiority of oral material as a repository of information about the past.

This book therefore traces two Benjaminian ruptures, creating an internestled set of retrospectives as it shows the ways the leaders and rank-and-file members of the Yacoubist community reimagined their own past as a salvific narrative, and as it seizes hold of those reimaginings to call into question ways of conceptualizing the colonial period in West Africa. The recursive structure of the book reflects a compromise between the need to convey the basic story of the followers of Yacouba Sylla efficiently and the need to show these dialectical apprehensions in action. Following the suggestions of theorists like Talal Assad, David W. Cohen, and Tilly himself, it highlights the ways that the repertoires of ideas, practices, and narrative and argumentative topoi on which actors drew formed a kind of weak structure, one that, in the words of William H. Sewell, Jr., is best understood as "a system of symbols possessing a real but thin coherence that is continually put at risk in practice and therefore subject to transformation."[36] In this book, I refer to such a weak structure as a "tradition," not in the sense of something that is unchanging or static, but rather as something that, through struggle, goes through continual transformation as it is transmitted – tradition in the sense of Benjamin's words that "every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it."[37] Allowing such traditions to

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35 Alessandro Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event," in *Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, 1990), p. 2.

36 William H. Sewell, Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, p. 52; Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago, 2006); Talal Asad, "Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions: Interview with Saba Mahmood," *Stanford Humanities Review* 5:1 (1997); Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W.C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*," *History of Religions* 40 (2001), 205–222. Sewell's "weak structure," with its echoes of Walter Benjamin's "weak messianic power" is preferable to Tilly's Burkian "loosely scripted acts of contention" with its sense of an invisible author. David W. Cohen rescued the concept of "oral tradition" from reification and obsession with origin, but his image of traditions as basically moments in the ongoing process whereby people "produce and maintain histories" though deep engagement with social change, subject to the efforts of experts to "continuously assemble" useful knowledge, applies just as well to other kinds of sources. David William Cohen, *Toward a Reconstructed Past: Historical Texts from Busoga, Uganda* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 12–17.

37 Benjamin, "Concept of History," p. 391. The starting point for my own thinking here was actually Jan Vansina's attempt to rehabilitate tradition in *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, 1990), pp. 257–260, though my position is, I think, closer to David William Cohen's. See also Mark Salber Phillips' provocative question: "What Is Tradition When It Is Not 'Invented'? A Historiographical Introduction," in *Questions of Tradition*, ed. Phillips and Gordon Schochet (Toronto, 2004), pp. 3–29.

provide the context for our largest scale of description emphasizes African innovations, rather than African responses, without reducing those innovations to anything inherently ''African.'' This in turn allows us to return colonial rule to the status of an ''episode'' in a longer history without reproducing any of the nationalist or racial assumptions that originally accompanied that formulation. Indeed, it is one of the arguments of this book that the case of the Yacoubists can change how we think about colonial rule in general by suggesting a way of broadening the temporal scale of analysis that leaves the colonial state as decentered at the macroscopic level – the scale where stories are connected to one another and to scholarly repertoires – as it is at the microscopic level, the scale where sources are read.

Such an approach can provoke a rethinking of spatial scale as well. The extension or dispersion of the Yacoubist community from Mauritania through Mali and into Côte d'Ivoire and the constant interaction between leaders and followers often from different communities of origin provide a vivid demonstration of the intellectual, cultural, and social connectedness of elites and nonelites alike across a wide stretch of West Africa. This is a feature of the region often elided in depictions of the colonial era, which typically focus on either individual colonies, on centers of state power, or on rural areas that are assumed to be preserves of precolonial culture but which, in their very boundedness, really reflect colonial assumptions about African localism. As a result, more than one scholar has seen the transethnic, transnational character of religious activity in the twentieth century as a new phenomenon, a response to ''the new political and social surface occupied by the colonial state,''[38] rather than recognizing it as a new configuration of a long-standing pattern of cultural and intellectual circulation.

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[38] Constant Hamès, ''Cheikh Hamallah ou qu'est-ce qu'une confrérie islamique (*tariqa*)?'' *Archives des Sciences sociales des religions* 55 (1983), p. 75. I am more ambivalent about the far more sophisticated formulation of Benjamin Soares and Robert Launay. Soares and Launay suggest that what was new about the colonial space was not its extent, but the degree of personalization it facilitated, with the state (and capital) routing various forms of identity formation away from older circuits of ethnically determined religiosity, so that the bundling of religion to other particularized identities broke down, and Muslims organized themselves into a qualitatively new ''Islamic sphere.'' Though this is a profound improvement over arguments that simply see the colonial state as catapulting the ''religious estate'' over the ''political estate,'' it tends to overestimate the particularization of religious identity in ''precolonial'' periods (especially in places like the Sokoto Caliphate or the Dina) and the capacity for socially autonomous ways of ''being Muslim'' in public in the more recent past. It also fails to account for the emergence of the category of ''the religious'' which seems to have simply been awaiting its liberation from narrower ways of belonging. Robert Launay and Benjamin F. Soares, ''The Formation of an 'Islamic Sphere' in French Colonial West Africa,'' *Economy and Society* 28 (1999), 497–519. See also, Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy*, esp. ch. 8.

Perhaps most importantly, the present study also seeks to offer insights into connections among processes at even smaller distinctions of scale. The small size of the community – no more than eleven or so thousand faithful at its peak[39] – allows for the exploration of religious, social, economic, political, familial, interpersonal, and even psychological dynamics with a level of detail that highlights problems of epistemology and causality on a level smaller than that of "phenomenological individualism." This kind of microhistory is uncommon in studies of African Islam, primarily because of a lack of adequate sources, but also because assumptions about the nature of leadership and religious cultures tend to separate out the intellectual content of religious movements from the forms of authority, affiliation, or organization that they exemplify.

Indeed, it is always tempting to depict leading as an essentially intellectual activity and following as a social one. The tendency in much recent work on West African Islamic institutions to provide capsule, uncritical biographies of individual leaders alongside somewhat faceless overviews of subbranches of particular Sufi orders reinforces this conceptual division of labor. Using the stories told by Yacoubists and French colonial observers to refract one another allows us instead to highlight moments where Yacouba's followers may have forced particular ideas or strategies upon him or reinterpreted his actions or words in their own ways, and moments where Yacouba himself was confronted by pragmatic constraints to which he was forced to respond.

The unique properties of the microhistorical scale derive from its protocols of explanation, in which understandings from "higher orders of abstraction" are "read for clues" that can help refine highly particularized interpretations, resulting ultimately in a displacement of established narratives.[40] Because elite Africans served as major interlocutors for European administrators, the colonial archives reflect the perspectives of influential "orthodox" and pro-French religious leaders as much as they do the imagination of French officials. These sources therefore tend to naturalize the accommodation of Muslim elites to French rule.[41] By shedding light on an Islamic movement that was viewed by many as heterodox or "heteroprax" but which nonetheless became influential in regional politics, the study of the Yacoubists reveals a counternarrative, of neither protonationalist resistance nor pragmatic

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39 This was the figure Yacouba Sylla's son, Ahmadou Sylla gave to Boukary Savadogo in 1994. Savadogo, "Confréries et pouvoirs. La Tijaniyya Hamawiyya en Afrique occidentale (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger): 1909-1965" (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Provence, 1998), p. 332. Estimates I received from community members varied, and reflected great uncertainty, but were generally lower.

40 T.C. McCaskie's *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village,* 1850–1950 (London, 2000), pp. 19–23. My thinking on this matter has benefited greatly from McCaskie's work.

41 See, for example, Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation.*

accommodation, but of the reassertion of religious tutelary authority over social and political norms.

STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

The book is organized into three parts. Part 1 lays out the basic narrative history of the Yacoubist community. Chapter 1 introduces the long-term, "precolonial" trajectory that will be used to weakly contextualize what follows, focusing particularly on the role of Islamic mysticism or Sufism and various forms of social inequality that together constituted the retrospective origin for the actions of Yacouba Sylla and his followers. New approaches to religious reform that began in West Africa in the eighteenth century both transformed and ramified older traditions, diversifying the vocabularies available for discussing appropriate standards of religious comportment and appropriate attitudes toward political authority. They did not, however, do so in coherent or conclusive ways; they left in their wake a diverse range of opinions on each of these questions with no emerging consensus. The early colonial period made a new source of political authority available to the various parties in these debates, one that was far more powerful than any they had previously seen in its material resources, if also weaker because more susceptible to manipulation. The collapse of long-standing, dense network of economic specialization and cooperation in the Middle Senegal Valley, and the rise of ethnic competition, religious tension, and new forms of inequality set the immediate stage for Yacouba Sylla's reforms. Chapters 2 and 3 provide an account of the Yacoubist movement, French and elite Muslim responses to it, the community's dramatic shifts in fortune in the 1930s and 1940s, its involvement in Ivoirian politics in the 1950s and 1960s, and the challenges it faced during the upheavals in the Ivoirian state in the 1990s and 2000s. They raise some of the problems of explanation and interpretation that will be taken up in subsequent chapters, particularly the way the circumstances of colonial rule shaped what can be known about the community, and the ways their current position in Côte d'Ivoire affects the significance of their past.

The chapters in Part 2 examine the evidence deployed in setting out the narrative in the previous part. Not exercises in source criticism designed to reveal the biases or limitations of evidence in order to generate a more objective story, they rather approach documents and oral accounts as what Feierman has called "socially composed knowledge" in order to begin to imagine the twentieth century in Africa outside of the strong contexts of colonial studies. They argue that reading strategies that approach the question of sources too abstractly – attributing a uniform "colonial" agenda to administrative documents, or hearing in traditions an authentic subaltern "voice" – assume particular configurations of the relationship between knowledge and

power that it should be the task of history to investigate. The chapters thus examine individual pieces of knowledge about Yacouba and his followers as situated rhetorical interventions, structured by relations of dominance and the politics of knowledge but with limits to that structuration resulting from formal properties of discourse and the fragmented nature of authority.

In the case of written colonial sources, Chapter 4 explores the ways administrative assumptions about the nature of both Islam and African society, along with the anxieties of administrators about their authority, contributed to the emergence of a phantasmal representation of Yacouba Sylla and his followers. At the same time, however, it illustrates how African elites manipulated French interpretations and sources of information for their own purposes, grounding administrators' anxieties in specific historical circumstances. Taking issue with a common – I would say clichéd – way of using Benjamin's ideas to construct a methodology of historical reading, it points out that there is no coherent grain against which – or, in Ann Stoler's inversion, along which – we can read, at least not in the sense of providing us with an algorithm for reading sources in a "liberating" or "counterhegemonic" or "agency-restoring" way.[42] Drawing on a less deadened Benjaminian concept, that of the ghost, it argues that while reading strategies that concern themselves with the "voice" or structuring principles of sources consequently posit a coherent "author" (the state, empire, the West, and so on, all with their "gaze" or "projects") that must either be understood or worked around, the realities of the production of colonial information were far more complex and chaotic. The colonial archive is full of presences of various sorts, and many of the voices preserved in it are disembodied – unnamed, unseen – ones. Chapter 5 argues that the major themes of the Yacoubist community's history as represented in the oral traditions and memories of its current members reflect a process of sedimentation in which the outcomes of successive attempts by community leaders to manage representational crises accumulated to form a heterogeneous-but-purposive master narrative. The past was made meaningful by subordinating and coordinating all significant events into a sacred narrative of salvific suffering whose central figure was Yacouba Sylla himself, who, having received a profound-if-mysterious spiritual gift, was able to transcend persecution and build a new community of faithful disciples. His success became a sign not only of God's grace but also of "African dignity" and thus demonstrated the centrality of faith in general and Islam in particular to the anticolonial struggle.

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42 Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cape Town, 2002), pp. 82–101; Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, and Graeme Reid, "Introduction" in *Refiguring the Archive*, pp. 7–17.

Part 3 uses the insights of Part 2 to offer an interpretation of the signifi-cance of the Yacoubist community to twentieth-century West African history. Noting the way that both colonial and community archives depend on an implicit ''Yacouba-centrism'' – the tendency to ascribe all causality to Yacouba himself (or, through him, to Hamallah) – the four chapters in this part explore paths around this central trope, each taking up a particular theme. While all descriptions of the community, internal and external, have emphasized its patriarchal nature, the revival that gave birth to it seems to have been dominated by women. Chapter 6 explores a series of possible explanations for this fact, looking at the use of marriage gifts, attitudes toward wealth and property, and the ritual powers and prohibitions associated with specific female religious figures, to argue that Yacouba Sylla's female followers exercised a substantial influence on his teachings, an influence that has largely been suppressed. Chapters 7 and 8 look at the organization of work within the community and at interpretations of the group's material and political suc-cesses. Yacoubist leaders described unremunerated work in a communal religious community not as reflective of an intermediary stage between pre-modern labor regimes and the development of true markets but as a necessary component of the submission owed to God and one's spiritual guide. Seeing work as a form of gift giving, the community inscribed its material success and its relations with other Muslims within a theology of God's self-disclosure, enabling members to describe their organization as both ''true socialism'' and a completely otherworldly spiritual project. For members who came from marginal social backgrounds as slaves or members of occupational ''castes'' this generated new ways of asserting their formal, public status as full persons, something that was difficult to accomplish through purely economic means. In the community's relations with other West African Sufis, their particular approach to gift giving is shown to have subtly reinforced more general reformulations of religious hierarchy and norms of practice. Finally, chapter 9 explores the ways that, as they moved into positions of political influence, Yacouba Sylla and his followers argued for an understanding of democratization and development that defined both ideas in terms of the community's own mystical history. As a way of making sense of their own past and defending their place in an increasingly tense Côte d'Ivoire, these efforts achieved their most explicit articulation in a powerful story about Yacouba Sylla's refusal of a gift from Ivoirian president Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

In the end, the story of Yacouba Sylla and his followers provides an oppor-tunity to reimagine the significance of *longue durée* African history in the twentieth century and to resist the dominant focus on colonial institutions, projects, and discourses. It also contributes to reimagining Islamic history more broadly. In contrast to depictions that emphasize the importance of

international ''networks'' and antimodern reaction in twentieth-century Islamic reform, their case illustrates that in West Africa many such reforms drew on local knowledge and constituted only the most recent round in a set of centuries-old debates about the best way for religious leaders to confront social injustice. In the context of the increasingly xenophobic political climate of Côte d'Ivoire and the increasing hysteria in the depiction of the beliefs and social practices of Muslims in West Africa and elsewhere, their ability to help us recognize the vitality of African Islamic intellectual traditions and their contribution to contemporary life is as important as the rethinking of historical practice that they occasion.

PART ONE

"THE SUFFERING OF OUR FATHER":
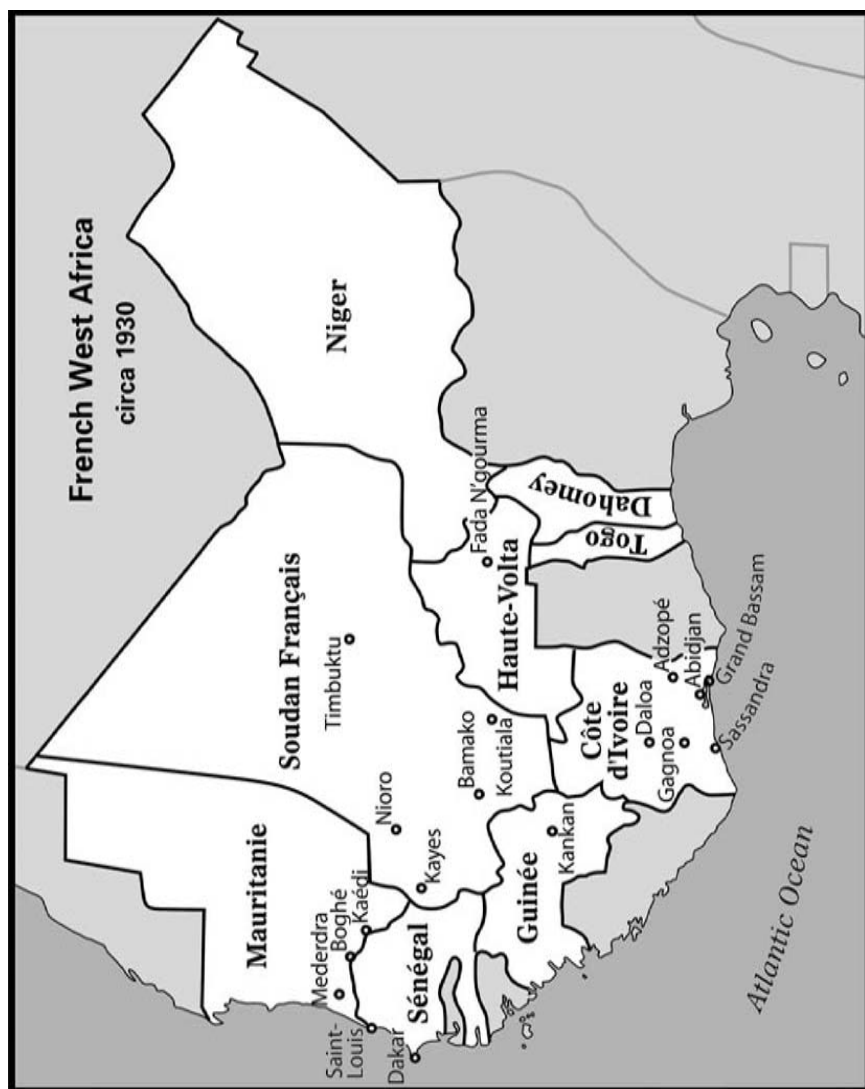### STORY AND CONTEXT

1

Sufism and Status in the Western Sudan

THIS CHAPTER IS UNAVOIDABLY TELEOLOGICAL. ITS PREMISE IS that it is possible to explain the actions of Yacouba Sylla, his followers, and his opponents by contextualizing them within long-term intellectual and social trajectories that were both specific to the Western Sudan and part of a broader Islamic "tradition." The explanatory success of this contextualization does not demonstrate that such a tradition existed as an autonomous force that could channel behavior and representations in predetermined directions. Rather, it suggests that Yacouba Sylla and his followers drew on patterns they saw in the past as if they constituted a coherent repertoire of creative solutions to problems and precedents to legitimate certain courses of action. Socially composed and situationally invoked in practice, these patterns are here presented synthetically to make them analytically meaningful.[1]

This "Western Sudanic" tradition, which incorporated elements of the regional past as far back as the twelfth century and as recent as the 1920s, had four basic features.[2] First, Muslim religious specialists organized themselves into a self-consciously distinct "Islamic sphere," characterized by hierarchical relationships between teachers and disciples, constituted by the circulation of and commentary on knowledge pertaining to moral, ethical, and cosmological principles, and reproduced through the transmission of this knowledge in transformative, initiatic stages. Second, these religious institutions were imbedded in a set of notional hierarchies, including the subordination of slave labor and the exclusion of artisans from political authority, with knowledge playing an important role in the legitimation and maintenance of these social distinctions. Third, Muslim

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[1] The fact that knowledge, including knowledge of the past, may be compositional and not merely additive has important implications for historical writing. Steven Feierman, "On Socially Composed Knowledge: Reconstructing a Shambaa Royal Ritual," in *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania*, ed. Gregory H. Maddox and James L. Giblin (Athens, OH, 2005), pp. 14–32.

[2] For an overview of the early period, see John Ralph Willis, "The Western Sudan from the Moroccan Invasion (1591) to the Death of al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (1811)," in *History of West Africa, Volume One*, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (3d ed.) (New York, 1985), pp. 531–576.

French West Africa
circa 1930

Niger

Soudan Français

Mauritanie

Sénégal

Haute-Volta

Fada N'gourma

Togo
Dahomey

Côte
d'Ivoire

Guinée

Timbuktu

Nioro

Kayes

Bamako
Koutiala

Kankan

Daloa
Gagnoa

Adzopé
Abidjan

Grand Bassam

Sassandra

Mederdra
Boghé
Kaédi

Saint-
Louis

Dakar

Atlantic Ocean

30

scholars struggled to subject the key institutions of social inequality, especially enslavement and slaveholding, to religious regulation.[3] Finally, Muslim scholars were divided between those who reserved the right to exercise a moral tutelage over rulers but refrained from interfering directly in politics themselves, and those with a more "statist" orientation. The more politically overt approach gradually came to the fore as the region underwent rapid social change at the end of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, and the entire order was thrown into crisis by European conquest at the end of the 1800s.

Each element of this tradition had roots in the empirical past without being coterminous with a positivist history of the Western Sudan. The connections Yacoubists and others saw among elements of this tradition might not have been apparent to those living in that past, nor were they necessarily causal or structural ones. In particular, the Yacoubist imagination approached Sufism and servitude as two sides of the same coin – as two very different kinds of submission to authority and negation of the self – and, by seizing on this underlying similarity, they used each to undo the other. They turned their suffering at the hands of the French into a rejection of temporal politics and a rebuke of their Muslim rivals who had cooperated with the imperial infidels in suppressing them. Above all, they presented their material success as the sign that they had been elected by God to return to the classical role of spiritual leaders, exercising moral authority over the social order and thus enlarging and making real the *dâr al-Islâm* on earth.

The efforts of the Yacoubist leadership to act within this tradition were thus hardly conservative; they rather constituted a bold intervention into ongoing transformations in intellectual, material, and social life. Where the leaders of the Yacoubist community and their opponents alike argued that

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3 *Pace* other analysts, I think it is meaningful to speak of an Islamic sphere for centuries before colonial rule. Muslim identity in the precolonial period may have been imbricated with other particular identities such as ethnicity or lineage, but those who professed this identity maintained and reproduced it through explicitly translocal discourses and practices. Moreover the decoupling of particularist identities from Muslim ones in the last 100 years has, I would suggest, been overestimated. Cf. Robert Launay and Benjamin F. Soares, "The Formation of an 'Islamic sphere' in French colonial West Africa', *Economy and Society* 28:4 (1999), 497–519. On knowledge and hierarchy, see Roderick J. McIntosh, *The Peoples of the Middle Niger: The Island of Gold* (London, 1998); Susan Keech McIntosh, "Pathways to Complexity: An African Perspective," in *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa*, ed. Susan Keech McIntosh (Cambridge, UK, 1999), pp. 1–30; Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in A West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN, 2001). On early West Sudanic writing on slavery, John O. Hunwick and Fatima Harrak, eds. and trans., *Mi'raj al- Su'ud: Ahmad Baba's Replies on Slavery* (Publications de l'Institut des Études Africaines. Textes et documents, 7) (Rabat, 2000); and John O. Hunwick, "Ahmad Bâbâ on Slavery," *SA* 11 (2000), pp. 131–139. See also Ibn Fadh Allah al-Umari, in *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins (Cambridge, UK, 1981), pp. 269–273.

specific features of the past were their proper antecedents and gave them moral authority in the present, the facts presented here show only that a broad set of past institutions and discourses mattered when taken collectively. This chapter thus moves first outward from the central Yacoubist concerns to explore both the alternatives available to them and the tensions among streams of the tradition with different social or political valences. It then moves inward, localizing those debates and tensions in the particular settings from which the Yacoubist community emerged.

THE WESTERN SUDANIC TRADITION

It is a truism that being Muslim has always meant different things to different people. During the long period leading up to the nineteenth century in West Africa, for most people being Muslim simply meant investing Islamic phenomena with both meaning and power. For a small number, Islam was constitutive of personal and collective identity, and being Muslim facilitated the emergence of a new distinct domain of spiritual power and social organization. Most West African languages developed terms for "professional" Muslims, those for whom the religion provided an economic identity, a philosophy, and a moral code. Professional Muslims earned their authority by providing services (prayers, amulets, literacy, or legal and moral advice) to their neighbors, guests, and rulers, and used it to produce and defend certain hierarchical institutions and to call others into question. Muslim specialists often encountered difficulties using this authority, however. In keeping with the pluralist pattern of the societies within which they lived, professional Muslims' ritual powers generally remained sharply distinct from those of other specialists.[4] Yet much of the content of their knowledge was structured around claims to universal applicability, and much of the philosophical and spiritual attractiveness of the religion derived from this breadth of vision.[5] This tension between specialization and universality manifested itself in two

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4 It is often difficult to separate out evidence indicating that such detachment was actually the case from evidence of anxious claims that it should be the case. Nonetheless, the normative force behind such a separation was strong and persistent. See for example, P.F. de Moraes Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali: Epigraphy, Chronicles, and Songhay-Tuareg History* (Fontes Historiae Africanae, New Series: Sources of African History) (Oxford, 2004), cxxxvi; Muhammad al-Saᶜdi, *Ta'rikh al-Sudan* (ed. and trans. John O. Hunwick) in *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 25–26, 99ff. Though the distinction between "religious" and "secular" is less useful, John O. Hunwick's essay "Secular Power and Religious Authority in Muslim Society: The Case of Songhay," *JAH* 37:2 (1996), 175–194, also emphasizes the power of this normative difference. See also n18 infra.

5 Indeed, part of the attractiveness of Islamic legal codes and contractual procedures to non-Muslims was probably their claim to uniformity across space and time.

distinct ways: in the development or adoption of self-consciously esoteric and initiatic approaches to Islam that recoded its content to match the social basis of Muslims' authority, and in the elaboration of strategies whereby those who did feel a need to shape society in accordance with Islamic moral codes could urge reform without appearing threatening to rulers or to pluralism in general. For much of the long period between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries these two strategies, what we can call the esoteric and the hortatory,[6] were harmonized in the image of the holy man, a person who held moral authority over kings and princes even as he (and occasionally she) led his disciples in pursuit of otherworldly transcendence. But the underlying tensions between the strategies of exclusion and incorporation remained, coming to the surface whenever the balance between the ideological or social forces favoring either specialization or universalism shifted.

Sufism was one of the earliest forms of Islamic devotion in the region and an important source of religious power for holy men. One of the oldest pieces of writing in West Africa, and perhaps the oldest direct source on Islam in Africa, is an eleventh-century inscription with instructions for Qur'anic recitations used in Sufi mystical practices.[7] But Sufi practices themselves were quite varied. The form that would become most common in the Western Sudan consisted of a set of rituals and devotional techniques linked to personal affiliations among believers. Together these were taken to define a path or way (*tarîqa*) by which the devotee could aspire to an experience of God's simultaneous immanence in the world (*tashbîh*) and radical transcendence of it (*tanzîh*).[8] The institutionalization of such practices tended to proceed dialectically. A Sufi master (*shaykh*, often pejoratively called a "marabout" by the French) was a teacher, responsible for transmitting the rituals and devotions

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6 I prefer this to other ways of describing the fundamental division within West African Islamic thought, particularly the division of the ʿ*ulama*' into quietist and activist camps. The use of "esoteric" here is adapted from Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*. However, Brenner sees this structure as being more totalizing than I do (he refers to it as an episteme in the Foucauldian sense).

7 Moraes Farias, *Arabic Inscriptions*, inscription 105. For general overviews of the adoption of Islam by West Africans, or of the general role of Sufism in West African Islam, see the somewhat dated works of Spencer J. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971) and *The History of Islam in West Africa* (London, 1962); John Ralph Willis, "Introduction: Reflections on the Diffusion of Islam in West Africa," in *Studies in West African Islamic History*, vol. 1, *The Cultivators of Islam*, ed. Willis (London, 1979); and Nehemia Levtzion, "Islam and the Bilad al-Sudan to 1800," in *HIA*, pp. 63–91.

8 Helpful guides to Sufi terminology include William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabî's Cosmology* (Albany, 1998); Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabî's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, 1989); Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn al-ʿArabî*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge, 1993); Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, 1998); Louis Brenner, "Sufism in Africa," in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York, 2000), pp. 324–349. See also Knut S. Vikør, "Sufi Brotherhoods in Africa," in *HIA*, pp. 442–443.

in the form of a special set of prayers (*wird*) to his disciples (*murîd*s) while helping them distinguish between true and false insights. Some Sufis described figures who had perfected such techniques and to whom God had unveiled his Being (*wujûd*) as experiencing a closeness to God (*wilâya*, also "guardianship") that was marked by the possession of grace (*baraka*) and miraculous powers (*karâmât*) used for the benefit of those around him. The relationship between the *shaykh* and the *murîd* was itself characterized by its own form of *wilâya*, so that the *shaykh* functioned as a kind of conduit for God's overflowing Being, transmitted to the *murîd* in the form of a light originating in the Prophet Muhammad (*nûr* [=light] *muhammadi*). The abstractness of this effusion of *baraka* opened up the possibility of its being detached from any specific setting and of its inhering in social relationships where the personal *murîd-shaykh* connection was informal, partially routinized or even entirely absent.[9]

This abstractability was, however, restricted in that the *shaykh*'s authority over the *murîd* was often as much a result of his personal embodiment of normative values and piety as of the ontological role he played in cosmology or any purely functional role he played in society. Although the *shaykh*'s *baraka* often manifested itself in healing or the redistribution of wealth, these "admiranda" aspects of Sufi sainthood were most powerful when accompanied by "imitanda" aspects that emphasized the *shaykh*'s personal piety and exemplary character. The most respected master (*walî allâh*, lit. friend or deputy of God) was someone who "affirm[ed] the values of society by transcending them, not just in measuring up to them as [did] the ordinary believer."[10] Sufi leaders, like holy persons in many religious traditions, were deeply embedded in their societies' most intimate structures, not just as patrons but as symbols of an order that united the material and spiritual worlds. As Peter Brown has noted of the Christian holy man, in addition to his success in the "hard business" of daily life and, especially, the business of "catering for the day-to-day needs of his locality," it was by "allowing his person to be charged with the normal hopes and fears of his fellow men, that the holy man gained the power in society that enabled him to carry off the occasional *coup de théâtre*." The miraculous and the spectacular "illustrate the prestige that the holy man had already gained, they do not explain it."[11]

In many cases this meant that the bonds that linked the *murîd* to the *shaykh* were most powerful when most personal. The most important social manifestation of the *tarîqa* was usually the *silsila,* or chain of transmission, which could refer simultaneously to the transmission of the technique of the *wird*

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9 See, for example, the important Tijani text, ᶜAli Harazim ibn al-ᶜArabi Baradah *Jawâhir al-maᶜânî wa bulugh al-amânî fî fayd sîdî Abî ʿl-ᶜAbbâs al-Tijânî* (Beirut, 1997).

10 Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. 155.

11 Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 105–106.

and to the transmission of *baraka*. As such chains became more and more complex, taking in internestled layers of *shaykhs* and *murîds*, the bonds of solidarity that resulted could coalesce into spiritual communities. Centered on retreats (*zâwiya*s) dedicated to prayer and companionship, these communities in turn often took on temporal significance, using their internal solidarity to help organize trading networks and allowing *shaykh*s to develop political significance.[12]

Running parallel to the forms of prestige and value generated through Sufi practices was the system of specialized expertise in Islamic exoteric knowledge. For scholars, authority came from formal training in the Islamic sciences (ᶜ*ulûm*), usually validated by possession of a license (*ijâza*) to teach a given text, issued by a similarly certified teacher. Scholars and scholarly families typically played important social roles, even in communities with fairly small numbers of Muslims, because of their frequent commercial connections and their ability to act as judges, counselors, mediators, and officiants at important ceremonies. Many of these families also produced important Sufi practitioners, so that the two forms of authority shaded in and out of one another. The prominent eighteenth-century Sufi leader, the revered Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti al-Kabir (1729–1811), is perhaps the best example. Considered by many the preeminent renewer of the faith (*mujaddid*) in West Africa during the Islamic thirteenth century (1785–1882), Sidi al-Mukhtar was also a successful merchant and a skillful mediator. Renowned for his asceticism (*zuhd*), he kept his own personal material life separate from the immense wealth he controlled in his family responsibilities. A tireless preacher, Sidi al-Mukhtar popularized the use of a standardized recitation (*dhikr*) in prayer along with the technique of spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) as an aid to decision making. Aware of the material conditions for spiritual activity and maintaining a pious community, he used his *zâwiya*s as trading posts and labor recruitment centers. He emphasized the dangers that disunion and strife posed to the Muslim community and was pragmatic about the need to interact with powerful and sometimes impious political leaders in the rough-and-tumble world of the northern half of the Western Sudan.[13]

Alongside Sidi al-Mukhtar, two other legendary figures defined other configurations of the relationship between specialization and universalism.

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[12] R.S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke. "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," *Der Islam* 70 (1993), pp. 74–81. My evolutionary tone here is purely to simplify the illustration of the institutions' structures and is not intended to suggest any actual historical development.

[13] See E. Ann McDougall, "The Economics of Islam in the Southern Sahara: The Rise of the Kunta Clan," *Asian and African Studies* 20 (1986), 52–57; ᶜAbd al-Aziz Batran, "The Qadiriyya-Mukhtaryya Brotherhood in West Africa: The Concept of *tasawwuf* in the Writings of Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (1729–1811)," *Transafrican Journal of History* 4 (1974), 42–62; and Louis Brenner's synthesis of Batran's other writings, "Concepts of *Tarîqa* in West Africa: the Case of the Qadiriyya," in *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*, ed. Donal Cruise O'Brien and Christian Coulon (Oxford, 1988), pp. 33–52.

Among merchants operating in the savanna and forest regions, followers of the fifteenth-century Soninke educator al-Hajj Salim Suwari cultivated a broad pragmatism that embraced pluralism wholeheartedly. Eager to protect their interests without aggravating non-Muslim elites, they rejected violent or confrontational struggles to transform either morals or political systems, but were willing to affiliate themselves closely with individual political patrons, even those who might make use of them in military struggles.[14] A more universalist option was exemplified by Muhammad al-Maghili al-Tilimsani (1430s?–1503), a Maghribi jurist who exercised great influence in the Middle Niger and Gao regions, as well as in the Hausa states. Al-Maghîlî argued against peaceful coexistence or alliance with non-Muslims and denounced many of the practices of Western and Central Sudanic scholars as either prohibited innovations or superstitious borrowings from local religions. He urged the politicians he advised to use their authority to hold Muslims to higher moral standards and he shied away from neither confrontation nor violence.[15]

Despite their differences, all three figures shared an awareness of the possibilities for corruption if religious leaders became too entangled with politics, and a sense that whatever tutelary authority Muslims had vis-à-vis non-Muslim or nominally Muslim elites was best exercised through preaching. Even al-Maghili does not seem to have directly advocated using the state to reform the practices of nonelites; his sharpest invectives were rather reserved for "venal" scholars and putatively Muslim kings. Until it came under strain in the eighteenth century and shattered in the nineteenth, this consensus established the mechanisms by which religious leaders could act as the "conscience" of their societies – and especially of their kings – while setting precise limits on their influence.[16]

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[14] Suwarians are often referred to as "clerical pacifists" or as "apolitical," though neither label fits. For one group of Suwari's followers in the Western Sudan, see Lamin O. Sanneh, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: a Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia* (Lanham, MD, 1989), pp. 16–35, esp. pp. 23–26. On the Suwarian subtradition in the southern forest zones of West Africa, see Robert Launay, *Beyond the Stream Islam and Society in a West African Town* (Berkeley, 1992); Ivor Wilks, "The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest," in *HIA*, pp. 93–115; and Wilks, "'Mallams Do Not Fight with the Heathen,' A Note on Suwarian Attitudes to Jihad," *Ghana Studies* 5 (2002), 215–230. Muhammad Sani Umar divides the West African Islamic tradition as a whole into Suwarian and Maghilian tendencies; but this neglects the important middle ground staked out by the Kunta. Muhammad S. Umar, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule* (Leiden, 2006), p. 161.

[15] John O. Hunwick, Sharî'a in *Songhay: the Replies of Al-Maghîlî to the Questions of Askia al-Hâjj Muhammad* (Oxford, 1985).

[16] Such aloofness from power can be traced in the West African–Maghribian ecumene at least as far back as al-Ghazali in the eleventh century among Sufis, and even further back among jurists. Ken Garden, "Al-Ghazali's Contested Revival: 'Ihya' 'ulum al-din' and Its Critics in Khorasan and the Maghrib (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Spain)," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 2005). See also the cases of *qâdî* Habib and Muhammad Fodigi in al-Sa'di, *Ta'rikh al-Sudan,* pp. 25–26, 99.

One of the social problems that most deeply concerned Muslim leaders of all orientations was the violation of laws governing slavery. It is difficult, however, to reconstruct the social meaning of these anxieties because the nature and range of slaveholding across this broad area and period remains poorly understood. Much energy has been spent debating on what is lost and gained in subsuming local and regional forms of servitude into the global category of ''slavery.'' There were ''slaves'' in Africa who worked as skilled artisans, miners, plantation workers, small farmers, concubines, soldiers, military or political officials, as household servants or merchants, as well as slaves who served as subjects of ritual sacrifice. Slaves generally held some sort of marked status, usually, though not always, a stigmatized one. Sometimes slaves formed a visible, self-contained class; sometimes they were simply incorporated as dependent fictional kin into free families, gradually securing a place in the lineages of their hosts over the course of generations. Nonetheless, most forms of slavery incorporated a degree of dependency on nonslaves, and this dependency was most pronounced for laboring slaves.

Other kinds of structural inequality further complicated the social order in the Western Sudan, the most notable of which were the so-called occupational castes or ''endogamous ranked specialist groups'' (in Soninke, *nyaxamala*, sing., *nyaxamalo*, plur.; *nyamakala* in southern Mande languages).[17] These institutions each had their own historical trajectory, though most dated back at least to the large-scale state centralizations of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By this time, a widespread pattern of intense social stratification had developed in the region based on the subordination of slave labor and the exclusion of artisans from political authority, both legitimated by reference to a strictly pluralistic

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17 The idea of caste in Africa has not been subject to the same kind of historicizing scrutiny as in South Asian studies (e.g., Nicholas B. Dirks, ''Castes of Mind,'' *Representations* 37 [1992], 56–78). Anthropologists have expressed anxiety about translating institutions like the *nyamakalaw* with a term originating in Indology, and have debated whether castes were really subordinate; but such efforts have yet to occasion any sustained historical analysis of the question. For an overview, see Patrick R. McNaughton, *The Mande Blacksmiths* (Bloomington, 1993) and David C. Conrad and Barbara E. Frank, eds., *Status and Identity in West Africa:* Nyamakalaw *of Mande* (Bloomington, 1995). For a partial exception, but one which has little to say about questions of representation, see Tal Tamari, *Les castes de l'Afrique occidentale: Artisans et musiciens endogames* (Nanterre, 1997), pp. 10–14. See also Tamari, ''The Development of Caste Systems in West Africa,'' *JAH* 32 (1991), 221–250; and Tamari, ''Linguistic Evidence for the History of West African 'Castes,''' in *Status and Identity,* pp. 61–85; and George Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society and Trade in West Africa, 1000–1630* (Boulder, 1993), pp. 39–47, 73–77. Mamadou Diawara has given the most thorough examination of the history of a particular set of castes, those found in the Soninke state of Jaara: Diawara, *La graine de la parole: dimension sociale et politique des traditions orales du royaume de Jaara (Mali) du XVème au milieu du XIXème siècle* (Stuttgart, 1990).

cosmology. This may in turn have been a relatively recent manifestation of an even older and broader tradition of heterarchy in which society was seen to be made up of interconnected but ontologically distinct spheres, each with its own elite and its own set of esoteric knowledge. Within the complex relations among these groups, laboring slaves occupied the bottom rung of society; not just marginal but truly subordinate, they were without any distinctive sphere of autonomous spiritual power or specialized knowledge. Artisans, by contrast, were usually excluded from political authority but compensated by being able to mobilize useful or even threatening forms of spiritual power (often seen as the source of their craftwork), which they monopolized and kept secret.[18]

However, there were important gaps between the symbolic value assigned to these forms of dependency and the material conditions of inequality. Often the most prestigious category, that of the noncasted and nonslave "nobles," was the most populous, and so no real power or status vis-à-vis the political or economic elite was entailed by possession of such an identity. When centralized states arose within caste-bearing societies, state institutions generally articulated with the caste hierarchy by creating forms of identity that cut across all three levels, linking individual families directly with the political leadership while maintaining their differentiation from other corporate groups.[19] Furthermore, while slaves and casted persons together comprised the subaltern categories in relation to which nobility was defined, they were radically distinct from one another, as evidenced by the near-universal injunction against enslaving casted persons.[20] In political economic terms, the importance of castes was largely ideological and that of slaves mostly material; slaves could constitute a large percentage of a particular community – up to 50 percent during the immediate precolonial period, by some calculations – but members of castes were always a small minority.

Muslim scholars in the region clearly understood some of these institutions and practices as falling under the purview of Islamic jurisprudential

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[18] The clearest argument for a thirteenth-century origin for castes is Tamari, "Caste Systems," and Tamari, *Les castes*. For the "deep past" argument about spiritual heterarchy, see Roderick J. McIntosh, *Middle Niger*; and Susan Keech McIntosh, "Pathways to Complexity." For critiques of the notion that castes are a long-standing form of dependency, see Conrad and Frank, *Status and Identity*, and McNaughton, *Blacksmiths*, who tend to emphasize compensatory powers and the diversity of *nyamakalaw* and to minimize inequality in Mande societies in general.

[19] By, for example, elaborating a "double" of each caste, so that there were "royal" nobles and "other" nobles, "royal" metalworkers and "regular" metalworkers, and so on. Diawara, *Graine de la parole*, pp. 33–50.

[20] Claude Meillassoux, "État et conditions des esclaves à Gumbu (Mali) au xixe siècle," in *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale*, ed. Meillassoux (Paris, 1975), pp. 222–223; Tamari, "Caste Systems," p. 224.

discourse (*fiqh*) on slavery.[21] Muslim scholars tended to make a fundamental distinction between the act of enslavement and the institution of slaveholding, and they inherited and adapted distinct codes that were intended to regulate each. The Islamic legal texts used in West Africa forbade the enslavement of Muslims, specified the acceptable treatment of slaves, particularly as it pertained to their education and the physical conditions in which they lived and worked, and set prohibitions on separating members of a family from one another. Muslim scholars often expressed outrage when political leaders, foreign merchants, and sometimes their own colleagues flouted these regulations. Slaveholding itself, however, was virtually never called into question as long as it conformed to these ideals. In fact, slavery was often recognized as an important prerequisite for a pious society, providing scholars of various expertise with the free time necessary to pursue study. For their part, institutions like the *nyaxamalo* do not seem to have been the subject of serious discussion by West African scholars at any time.

Structurally, Muslimness intersected slavery and caste in complex ways. Within Muslim communities most slaves were kept at arm's length from full religious training while artisans' secret ritual knowledge was often considered part of a spiritual system radically distinct from Islamic ritual knowledge.[22] In some areas, the very terminology of caste was linked to the legacy of Islamization, as the titles of most noncasted, nonslave persons (*horon* among the Manding, *hoore* among the Soninke) derived from the Arabic word for "free" (*hurr*).[23] However, it would be misleading to see Islam as a monopoly of the nobility, for Muslim identity itself often functioned as a kind of pseudocaste, such as with the *modinu* (religious scholars) in many Soninke communities. This was particularly the case where religious learning was monopolized by particular families and where the political and warrior classes defined themselves by transgressing the norms of Muslims who, in turn, were typed as "pacifists."

[21] My argument here relies heavily on Humphrey J. Fisher, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa* (New York, 2001); Lamin Sanneh, *The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism* (Boulder, 1997), esp. ch. 3; Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, UK, 1998); John Ralph Willis, "Jihad and the Ideology of Enslavement," in *Islam and the Ideology of Enslavement* ed. Willis (London, 1985), pp. 16–26; and Nehemia Levtzion, "Slavery and Islamization in Africa," in *Ideology of Enslavement*, pp. 182–198.

[22] This was particularly the case with metalworkers. However, in communities with very large Muslim populations these restrictions often broke down and linkages emerged among the various spheres of ritual specialization. Metalworkers/potters who were typically the custodians of circumcision and excision knowledge could take over Islamic circumcision, while leatherworkers could manufacture amulet cases or book bindings.

[23] This was not quite the case in Soninke Jaara, where, Diawara argues, *nyaxamalo* (casted persons) were integrated into the *hooro* (free) group, along with the *tunkanlenmu* (nobility). *Graine de la parole,* pp. 35–47.

Religious debates on the nature and practice of slavery both reproduced and occasionally challenged the social meanings of being Muslim. Timbuktu scholars, particularly the group around Abu 'l-ʿAbbas Ahmad "Baba" al-Tinbukti (1556–1627), took the lead in disseminating the arguments of Maghribi and Middle Eastern jurists on slavery, shaping them into a pointed defense of West African Muslims' immunity from enslavement.[24] But even in societies with Muslim rulers or large Muslim populations these arguments often went unheeded. Scholars complained that the economic importance of slaveholding and the self-interest with which an owner's determination of a potential slave's religious status was made resulted in frequent deviation from the letter of the law.

This is not to suggest that West African Muslims failed to apply a timeless, reified Islamic standard to their practice of slavery. Indeed, the practical meaning of both slavery and Islamic law shifted frequently. Argument over the *sharîʿa* position on slavery and ways to reform of the institution was a central feature of intellectual activity at the time. As important slaveholders, Muslim scholars often set examples in the ways they treated their own slaves and through dramatic acts of manumission. Yet the impact of scholars' opinions was limited by practical and political considerations, such as the effective subordination of scholarly lineages to the warrior elites who were responsible for most acts of enslavement; educational or linguistic limitations resulting from restricted resources; the difficulty of mapping Arabic terminology onto the vocabularies drawn from various local social categories of dependency; and the sometimes subtle practical distinctions between slaves and free dependent persons.[25]

The peaking of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and then its abrupt abolition in the nineteenth brought major changes to the foundations of the Western Sudanic tradition. The trade itself dramatically increased the numbers of persons held as slaves in the region and made slavery increasingly central to local political economies. Ironically, the ending of the trans-Atlantic slave trade only brought a further increase in slaveholding within many parts of West Africa. As prices for slaves fell in response to the declining Atlantic market and as slave labor proved an efficient way to produce the goods that European merchants sought in place of the now-forbidden human commodity,

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24 On Ahmad Baba, see John O. Hunwick, "A New Source for the Biography of Ahmad Baba al-Tinbukti (1556–1627)," *BSOAS* 27:3 (1964), 568–593.

25 See, as one example, the passage in the *Diary of Hamman Yaji* where the Emir of Madagali referred to the "*khums* [one-fifth] rule" for calculating booty as allotting him one-half of the spoils of a raid. Quoted in Fisher, *Slavery*, p. 49.

slaves became cheaper, more readily available, and more profitable than ever before.[26]

 Slave-raiding juntas emerged to feed trans-Atlantic trade and local markets, usually led by warriors and hereditary nobles with fewer incentives than ever to bring either enslavement or their own authority into alignment with religious norms. In response to these and other provocations, champions of Islamic reform increasingly took it upon themselves to demand the enforcement of religious norms and to hold the politically powerful accountable for the morality of their actions. Many of these reformers ultimately demanded the creation of explicitly Islamic states guided, if not governed, by the learned and some eventually took up arms in struggle (*jihâd*) to defend their followers against hostile states and to overthrow existing regimes. These *jihâd*s drew on both the esoteric and hortatory impulses in earlier Islamic practice, relying on a sense of separateness as well as a commitment to universalism, but in a way that overcame long-standing inhibitions about the corrupting effects of politics on spiritual authority.[27]

 Jihâd leaders were inspired in part by al-Maghili's open attacks on religious pluralism and political compromise as well as by concrete reform movements that had crossed over into military ventures, including distant memories of the eleventh-century Almoravid movement and more recent failed attempts at reform in Senegambia. But the proximate causes seem to have been the social and economic disorder occasioned by the slave trade and abolition. The expansion of slaveholding and enslavement weakened popular support for "noble" rulers. At the same time, the cost of military assaults on such elites dropped dramatically as Muslim merchants gained access to weapons from European slave traders and, later, brokers of "legitimate" commerce. Reform

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26 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, UK, 1983), chs. 7–9. This remains something of a controversial assertion for Africa as a whole, but at least for the Senegambian and Western Sudan regions it seems to have gained general acceptance. Boubacar Barry, *La Senégambie du XVe au XIXe siècle: Traite négrière, Islam et conquête coloniale* (Paris, 1988). For a similar argument in the Hausa zone, see Paul Lovejoy, "Islam, Slavery, and Political Transformation in West Africa: Constraints on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," *Outre-Mers* 89: 336–337 (2002), 247–282. On the ending of the slave trade, see A. Adu Boahen, *Britain, The Sahara and the Western Sudan,. 1788–1861* (Oxford, 1964); and Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade* (London, 1975).

27 See the overviews of these conflicts in Walter Rodney, "*Jihad* and Social Revolution in Futa Jalon in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4 (1968), 269–284; Mervyn Hiskett, "The Nineteenth-Century Jihads in West Africa," in *The Cambridge History of Africa,* vol. 5, *From c.1790 to c.1870*, ed. John E. Flint (Cambridge, UK, 1976), pp. 125–169; Murray Last, "Reform in West Africa: *jihâd* Movements of the Nineteenth Century," in *History of West Africa, Volume Two*, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (2d ed.) (London, 1987), pp. 1–47; ʿAbd al-Aziz Batran, "The Nineteenth-Century Islamic Revolutions in West Africa," in *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 6, *Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s*, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 536–554; and David Robinson, "Revolutions in the Western Sudan," in *HIA*, pp. 131–152.

movements set up states in the Futa Toro region of the Senegal Valley in 1776, in the Central Sudan (northern Nigeria) in 1804, and in the Masina region of the Middle Niger Valley after 1818. In each case, many of the fears of earlier reformists were realized as social betterment quickly succumbed to the pragmatic needs of governance, particularly the necessity of incorporating military specialists into the state. But successive states tended to use the compromises of earlier reformists merely as justification for ever more radical programs.

The effects of these new political formations on the Islamic discourse on inequality were varied. Though these movements all made rehabilitating the *sharî‘a* central to their mission, the strict application of Maliki law to the question of slavery – in its regulation of enslavement and stipulations for the treatment of slaves – would have produced massive social and economic changes that reformers had neither the ability nor most probably the inclination to manage. At the same time, however, one of the central projects of reformers was to address the abuses of power by previous rulers, which often included their inability or unwillingness to protect Muslims from enslavement. Mobilizing the resentments of those who had previously been marginalized was an important political strategy and moral priority for *jihâd* leaders, and they thus offered at least a potential vehicle for voicing the interests of slaves and casted peoples.

Social radicalism seems to have been particularly popular among rural herders in Hausaland and the Middle Niger Valley, where increased trade with Europe had brought fewer benefits than it had to the urban sedentary elite. Rural scholars and their followers frequently saw the established rulers and Muslim intellectuals of the cities – themselves often the product of earlier reform drives – as the principal opponents of reform, opening a space for very radical interpretations of both social and religious authority.[28] One prominent reformist scholar seems to have argued against the permanent enslavement even of non-Muslim enemies of the *jihâd* and at one point to have considered a slave rebellion a justifiable response to the ‘‘tyranny’’ of poor reformist leadership.[29] In another case, a reformist leader sent out a call for slaves and casted persons to come to his aid. Many joined at least in part, it

28 Last, ‘‘Reform,’’ 15; David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 71–77, 81–89.

29 Ibrahim Muhammad Jumare, ‘‘The Ideology of Slavery in the Context of Islam and the Sokoto Jihad’’ (Seminar Paper, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria, [1989]), p. 8. See also, Humphrey John Fisher, ‘‘A Muslim William Wilberforce? The Sokoto Jihâd as Anti-Slavery Crusade: An Enquiry into Historical Causes,’’ in *De la traite à l’esclavage: actes du Colloque international sur la traite des Noirs, Nantes 1985*, ed. Serge Daget (Nantes, 1988) (vol. 2): pp. 537–555; and Lovejoy, ‘‘Islam, Slavery, and Political Transformation.’’ The ‘‘revolutionary’’ sentiments of many religious leaders involved in the Satiru revolts of Nigeria in 1906 might be seen as harkening back to these early examples. Paul E. Lovejoy and J.S. Hogendorn, ‘‘Revolutionary Mahdism and Resistance to Colonial Rule in the Sokoto Caliphate, 1905–6,’’ *JAH* 31:2 (1990), 217–244.

seems, because they believed (erroneously, it turned out) that the conflict was a social revolution in which they could win their freedom and the abolition of caste distinctions.[30]

But this was as socially radical as reforms would get in the nineteenth century, and other *jihâd* leaders took up very conservative positions in matters of social hierarchy and helped suppress slave and peasant revolts.[31] As often as not, the material foundations of reformist movements relied on the subordination of marginal classes rather than their liberation. One key movement, led by al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal in the second half of the century, has been compared to a classical warrior state in which the cyclical capture and sale of prisoners provided for the sustenance of soldiers and the operation of the state.[32] Specific groups of marginal persons might have found an advantage in participating in the factional politics surrounding individual *jihâd*s, and rhetorical commitments to the ideal of the equality of all Muslims may have helped smooth over internal differences in status so long as reform was gaining momentum and generating wealth. But the choice of military conflict as the means to further reform imposed real limits on the types of social grievances to which they could give voice, even if the more pious or idealistic among them had grander plans. Overall, the most important legacy of militant reform was merely to sharpen the distinction between enslavable ''infidels'' and immune Muslims, and the number of

30 Amadou Hampâté Bâ and Jacques Daget, *L'Empire Peul du Macina (1818–1853)* (Paris, 1962), pp. 40, 66–68; William Allen Brown, ''The Caliphate of Hamdullahi, ca. 1818–1864: A Study in African History and Tradition'' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1969), pp. 116, 125–127, 131, 188–189n52, 216n31. Brown reports the opinion of the Mukhtari Kunta *shaykh*s of Timbuktu that the willingness of the Masinanke scholars to subvert traditional social categories during the *jihâd* resulted from their ''starkly literal'' reading of a ''narrow range of texts and traditions,'' leading them to ''reform too fully and too forcefully practices and styles of life which were, in fact, tolerated in Islam – if not approved or recommended'' (131). The Hubbu movement in the Futa Jallon also illustrates how volatile the mixture of social and religious change was and how close the dominant order came to being directly challenged in the nineteenth century. Roger Botte, ''Revolte, pouvoir, religion: Les Hubbu du Futa-Jalon (Guinée),'' *Journal of African History* 29 (1988), 391–413, esp. 406; Boubacar Barry, ''Crise politique et importance des révoltes populaires au Fouta-Djalon au XIXe siècle,'' *Africa Zamani (Afrika Zamani)* 8–9 (1978), 51–61; and Ismaïl Barry, ''Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de la Guinée: les Hubbu du Fitaba et les almami du Fouta'' (D.E.S., Kankan, 1971).
31 Robinson, *Holy War*, pp. 114–125.
32 Richard Roberts, ''Production and Reproduction of Warrior States: The Segu Bambara and Segu Tukolor,'' *IJAHS* 13 (1980), 389–419. This interpretation is consistent with Roberts' view that ''state formation in the era of the slave trade'' in general was dependent on warfare, and that warfare was usually linked to both slave raiding and *jihâd*. It may be that Roberts has overestimated the chaos of the pre-ʿUmarian period, but the trajectory of the various *jihâd* states seems to bear out his interpretation of the mechanisms of state authority. Richard Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants and Slaves: The State and Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford, 1987), pp. 19–20.

slaves in the Muslim areas of West Africa was at least as high after the *jihâd* as it had been before.[33]

The political experiments of reformists came to an abrupt end with the onset of colonialism, but debate and social reconfiguration pressed on. When Europeans took possession of the Western Sudan at the end of the nineteenth century, they echoed Muslim reformists in justifying their militancy by promising to reform the social order. They emphasized in particular the evils of African slavery and contrasted it to their own supposed commitment to abolition, free labor, and equality before the law. The reality was much less noble. In Senegambia and the Niger Valley, French opposition to slavery was notoriously fickle, opportunistic, and superficial. Colonial officials generally sought to appease metropolitan advocates for emancipation while maintaining the status quo locally. Two durable sleights of hand were used to deflect antislavery pressure. The first was the distinction in 1855 between *citoyens*, bound by French law, and *sujets*, under French control but able to own slaves. The second was the gradually emerging idea of a difference between slavery and servitude and the declaration that the latter was not only too deeply embedded in African "culture" to be displaced, but also essentially consensual. Together these helped shield a whole range of practices, even as the rhetoric of emancipation escalated from the December 1905 declaration that slavery was formally abolished throughout West Africa, through the League of Nations' "Slavery Convention" in 1926.[34]

Nonetheless, some things did change in the practice and legitimation of slavery in West Africa during the early decades of the colonial period. Despite administrators' serious ambivalence about emancipation, metropolitan expectations slowly blocked the use of state power to enforce slaveholders' claims, first for the return of fugitive slaves and then for a broader range of requests. At the same time, the more serious efforts of the administration to halt the internal slave trade limited new supplies, causing a crisis in the reproduction of slavery. In the absence of effective coercive force and in the presence of a gradual shift in the comparative value of their labor, slaves took matters into their own hands, fleeing from their masters outright or, more

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33 Nehemia Levtzion, "Bilad al-Sudan," *HIA*, p. 81; Batran, "Islamic Revolutions," p. 553. Martin Klein's overview of the relationship between the nineteenth-century reform movements and the institutional survival of slavery also emphasizes these limitations, though Klein isolates the question of slavery from that of caste in a way that may underestimate the social radicalism of some *mujâhidûn*. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, pp. 42–52.

34 François Renault, *L'Abolition de l'esclavage au Sénégal* (Paris, 1972) and *Libération d'esclaves et nouvelle servitude* (Abidjan, 1976). See also the overviews in Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, pp. 27–32; and James Searing, *"God Alone Is King": Islam and Emancipation in Senegal, the Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Portsmouth, NH, 2002), pp. 63–65. A summary of official statements is given in Y. Saint-Martin, *Les Rapports de situation politique (1874–1891)* (Dakar, 1966), pp. 143–159.

frequently, pressuring them for more favorable terms of servitude. Though many ties of dependence and forms of social stigma that had been attached to slavery remained, the basic institution of slavery succumbed to the twin forces of colonial neglect and slave initiative.[35]

In its place, at the confluence of the administrative legalese designed to minimize social change and the efforts of ex-slaves to seize new opportunities emerged fresh forms of inequality. In Saint-Louis, where metropolitan oversight was greatest, the most important was the *tutelle* (adoption) system in which young children (mainly girls) were liberated and then treated as de facto slaves until (if they were lucky) maturity. A more common practice outside the capital was the *rachat* (ransoming) system, in which households purchased individuals from traders on the condition that they be treated as "servants" rather than as slaves.[36] Treaties signed in 1890 and 1892 guaranteed *sujets* "the right to redeem slaves from foreigners in countries where they continue to be sold; because it is preferable that slaves coming from far and barbarous countries be brought into the houses of those who will treat them as servants, rather than being sold to those who will treat them as slaves."[37]

THE MIDDLE SENEGAL VALLEY: COLONIAL INTERVENTION AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF AUTHORITY

The density of social change may have increased with European conquest, but the density of evidence of change certainly did. We can therefore add greater

35 Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, "The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan," *JAH* 21 (1980), 375–394; Roberts, "The End of Slavery in the French Soudan, 1905–1914," in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (Madison, 1988), pp. 282–307; Klein, "Slavery and Emancipation in French West Africa," in *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia*, ed. Klein (Madison, 1993), pp. 171–196; and Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*. This is paralleled, in most aspects, by the decline of slavery in Northern Nigeria, except that Caliphate officials and the British were better able to "capture" ex-slaves and route them into the new peasant class. Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*.

36 We should not, however, consider *corvée* labor or military conscription as among these new "intermediary" forms of servitude, *pace* Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Indigenous African Slavery," in *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies*, ed. Michael Craton (Toronto, 1979), p. 52; and Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, UK, 1996). Though from an evolutionary perspective, whether Marxian or liberal, these may indeed appear to have been "way stations" in the development of mobile wage labor, from the perspective of the development of social and cultural institutions they were not the outcome of the negotiations over the terms of dependency that ensued from formal abolition but rather a new practice imposed from without. Clearly, however, there were relationships between these various forms of "unfree" labor that cut across French and African registers. The process of "peasantization" in Northern Nigeria discussed by Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn is one of these. See Chapter 7 infra.

37 "Convention du 12 décembre 1892," reprinted in Saint-Martin, *Rapports*, p. 157n1.

specificity to our depiction of the evolving Western Sudanic tradition from the 1890s on. Though Yacouba Sylla himself was born in Nioro, it was in the Middle Senegal Valley that his revival took hold and it was from there that most of his followers came. The Middle Senegal Valley – known as the Futa Toro – is a narrow strip of land along either side of the Senegal River, extending roughly from the town of Dagana in the west to Bakel in the east. For centuries, the region's distinctive feature has been the double yield provided by a rain-fed harvest in October and a flood-recession harvest in February or March. As long as flexible labor inputs were available, the evenly spaced surplus typically supported substantial populations. This was not geography's only gift to the valley, whose proximity to the gum arabic–producing acacia trees of the western desert made it an important trading frontier between the desert and the Sahel and whose river connection with Saint-Louis gave it access to the markets of the French settlements and the Atlantic economy beyond.

 Political and economic activity in the Futa tended to be organized along lineage and ethnolinguistic specialties with a high degree of interdependence. Politically the region was dominated by ''Tukulor''[38] clans who held

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38 The ethnonym ''Tukulor'' is even more problematic than most. Before its association with the ʿUmarian *jihâd* the term designated a descendent of the ancient people of Takrur. Despite the term's peculiar appropriations by the French and its historical role in legitimating racial or elitist distinctions among Halpulaaren (lit. ''speakers of Pulaar''), I employ it to designate the largely sedentary Fulfulde-Pulaar–speaking population of the Middle Senegal Valley, as distinct from semipastoral Fulfulde-Pulaar speakers and the various Soninke and Hassaniya speakers. The sedentary/pastoral distinction was never absolute and figured more prominently in the colonial imagination than in local ones, but alternative terms all have more serious problems: ''Fulbe'' is best confined to the pastoral Halpulaaren. ''Halpulaaren'' itself elides the conscious distinction that was made between the Tukulor and the Fulbe, and its complete reduction of identity to language is problematic (e.g., the Soninke of Kaédi, most of whom spoke Pulaar fluently, were not considered Halpulaaren). ''Futanke,'' the most common term the Tukulor used to describe themselves, is an ideological synecdoche of another sort – it elides the existence of non-Halpulaaren in the Futa. However permeable ethnic boundaries may have been before conquest, distinctions were made locally between Soninke and Halpulaaren and it is these distinctions, looking back from 1929, that are most salient for this study. In the context of Kaédi, Tukulor includes the *torodbe* (lit. ''beggars'', sing. *torodo*) scholarly lineages, the *ceddo* (sing. *sebbe*) lineages of assimilated outsiders, and the *subalbe* fishing lineages, as well as the various other ''castes'' and Fulfulde-Pulaar–speaking slaves and ex-slaves. The *torodbe* scholars were probably multiethnic in origin, drawing in Wolof, Fulfulde-Pulaar, Serer, and Soninke speakers, all of whom eventually became Halpulaaren because of the dominance of Halpulaaren scholars in the group. Philip Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, 1965), pp. 18–19; Yaya Wane, *Les Toucouleur du Fouta Tooro (Sénégal): Stratification sociale et structure familiale* (Dakar, 1969); Umar al-Naqar, ''Takruur, the History of a Name,'' *JAH* 10 (1969), 365–74; Constance Hilliard, ''*Al-Majmūʿ al-nafīs*: Perspectives on the Origins of the Muslim Torodbe of Senegal from the Writings of Shaykh Musa Kamara,'' *ISSS* 11 (1997), 175–186.

military and commercial alliances with "*bidân*"[39] warrior (*hassâni*) and scholarly (*zwâya*) clans that were based in the Brakna region of the Sahara. From about the 1770s until its capture by the Saint-Louisian commander Alfred Dodds in 1890, the valley was under the formal jurisdiction of the Islamic reformist state known as the Almamiyat of Futa Toro. In theory, the Almamiyat was governed directly by a religious scholar (the Almamy),[40] but by the nineteenth century the Almamiyat had lost its initial reformist energy and had become a weak confederacy run by an oligarchy of allied scholarly and noble lineages. The authority of the Almamiyat weakened even further over the course of the mid-nineteenth century as French forces encroached from Saint-Louis and the mass exodus (*fergo*) of followers of reformist preacher al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal drained population, disrupted the economy, and undermined the Almamiyat's religious legitimacy. In this period of crisis, a member of the powerful Kan family from the Bosseya district, Abdul Bokar Kan, broke with the reigning Almamy, declared his allegiance to a rival candidate, and led a campaign of resistance to the French based out of the eastern-most provinces of the Futa.[41] French forces finally overcame Abdul Bokar in 1891, ushering in formal colonial control of the region.

Kaédi, the center of Yacouba Sylla's revival, was somewhat atypical within the Futa Toro. A merchant town at the confluence of the Senegal

39 The term "*bidân*" has become a kind of ethnonym for Hassaniya speakers, in place of the undesirable term "Moors," even though *bidân* is a caste synecdoche (only the *hassâni* [warrior] and *zwâya* [clerical] clans could usually call themselves *bidân*) and increasingly a quasiracial assertion (as "whites" can be distinguished from "black" *ʿabîd* [slaves] and *haratîn*s [freed slaves]). Since the lack of a true ethnonym accurately reflects the social order in Mauritania, and the use of *bidân* to signal "white" in a cultural (elitist) sense predates its more recent bio-racialization, I use the terms "*bidân*," "slaves," and "*haratîn*s" to indicate the three major groups of Hassaniya speakers around the turn of the century.

40 Except where a specific citation is given, the following discussion of the political and economic history of the Middle Senegal Valley has been synthesized from Mouhamed Moustapha Kane, "A History of Fuuta Tooro, 1890s–1920s: Senegal under Colonial Rule. The Protectorate" (Ph.D. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1987); David Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics: Abdul Bokar Kan and Futa Toro, 1853–1891* (Oxford, UK, 1975); Cmdt. Coup, "Monographie du Cercle de Gorgol," 1908, 138pp, typescript (ANS 1G-331); Wane, *Toucouleur*; Olivier Leservoisier, "Histoire du peuplement et rapports fonciers à Kaédi de l'époque des Farba à la conquête coloniale (xvᵉ-xixᵉ siècle)," *ISSS* 7 (1993), 111–139; Olivier Leservoisier, "L'évolution foncière de la rive droite du fleuve Sénégal sous la colonisation (Mauritanie)," *CEH* 34-1-3 (1994), 55–84; Olivier Leservoisier, *La question foncière en Mauritanie: terres et pouvoirs dans la région du Gorgol* (Paris, 1994); and James L.A. Webb, *Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel, 1600–1850* (Madison, 1995). Comparison with the Upper Senegal Valley has also been helpful, esp. Andrew F. Clark, *From Frontier to Backwater: Economy and Society in the Upper Senegal Valley (West Africa), 1850–1920* (Lanham, MD, 1999) and Adrian Adams, *A Claim to Land by the River: A Household in Senegal, 1720–1994* (Oxford, 1996).

41 On Kan, see Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics*, chs. 3–8.

and Gorgol Rivers, Kaédi had been part of the Bosseya province of the Almamiyat. In addition to Tukulor and *bidân* families, Kaédi also had a substantial Soninke population, the western-most outpost of a long Soninke archipelago that stretched from the Middle Niger through the Upper Senegal. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, *bidân*, Soninke, Tukulor, Wolof, and French merchants all used Kaédi to exchange and store goods. *Bidân* traders primarily brought gum from the acacia bushes of the desert and purchased slaves and grain, as well as some ivory, imported and local textiles, copper, iron, and livestock. The Soninke of Kaédi grew grain for local consumption and export, manufactured textiles, and managed the local slave trade.

Kaédi's Tukulor scholarly (*torodbe*) lineages provided electors for the Almamiyat, including the holders of two hereditary titles – the Cerno Molle, drawn from the Ly family, and the Eliman Rindiaw, drawn from the Atch family – as well as members of the Kan family. The Cerno Molle had been the Almamy's official representative in Kaédi and was often the town's judge (*qâdî*); but in practice the Cerno Molle was subordinate to the head of a nonscholarly lineage, the Farmbaal, part of the Mbaal clan, which based its status on having been the first to settle the town.[42] In return for their support, the Almamiyat delegated to Tukulor *torodbe* the right to collect taxes and land rents, particularly over the coveted *walo* lands. Other Tukulor were involved in farming and certain lineages also fished. Kaédi and its hinterland also had a substantial Fulbe herding population that provided livestock for the town and desert traders. Throughout the valley, groups of Hassaniya-speaking freed slaves (*haratîn*) cultivated grain along the right bank, usually directed by *bidân zwâya* clans and organized according to religious affiliation. Elite Tukulor families acted as the official hosts and brokers for most of the desert traders who brought their gum into town every dry season. Small-scale gum exchanges took place in local merchants' homes where Wolof representatives of Saint-Louisian firms purchased gum from *bidân* via Tukulor intermediaries. These merchants consolidated the gum, stored it, and shipped it downstream when prices were high. They also bought grain and cattle and sold manufactured goods, especially imported textiles used as currency (called ''guinées'') and, at least until the mid-nineteenth century, guns.[43]

During his rebellion and campaigns against the French, Abdul Bokar Kan had made use of Kaédi's location on the north bank of the Senegal to protect

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42 Leservoisier, ''Kaédi,'' pp. 113, 118–119; Coup, '' Monographie,'' p. 12; Paul Marty, *Etudes sur l'Islam au Sénégal*, vol. i, *Les Personnes* (Paris, 1917), p. 107.

43 Coup, ''Monographie,'' pp. 12, 101–105; Webb, *Desert Frontier*, pp. 119–120.

his troops and facilitate communication with *bidân* allies in the desert. Recognizing its strategic and commercial significance, the French also focused on Kaédi in their campaigns, establishing a port during their brief control of the town in 1883 and a fort after definitively capturing it in 1890. From 1890 until 1904, Kaédi was administered as part of Senegal and served as *chef lieu* of the *cercle* of the same name. In 1904, the Senegal River became the effective northern boundary of the colony, cutting Kaédi off from most of the valley's other major towns. Kaédi was transferred to the *cercle* of Gorgol in the Mauritanian Protectorate, which became the Civil Territory of Mauritania the following year.

Economically, the Futa Toro's fortunes had begun to decline even before conquest. During the nineteenth century, Saint-Louisian merchants dependent on the gum trade for their livelihood had experienced unfavorable terms of trade vis-à-vis Futa merchants who were integrated into a more diversified economy and had a range of export options.[44] After 1890, however, international markets and the purchasing power of the French state became the major determinants of the prices of local commodities. French currency gradually circulated more widely than *guinées* and ultimately replaced them. In response to the shift in monetization, young men began migrating – some seasonally, some permanently – to the peanut zone of Senegal where they could work for French currency. Those who stayed in Kaédi turned increasingly to cotton cultivation and to producing grain for Saint-Louis and other French outposts.

The right bank of the Senegal did experience a short-lived boom following the French campaigns in the desert from 1900 to 1905, aimed at ''pacifying'' *bidân* communities. Military occupation of Mauritania brought an end to the frequent raids that had harassed Tukulor and Soninke alike and new settlers flowed into Mauritania for several years. But this was not enough to overcome the fact that the economic center of gravity was definitively shifting elsewhere. Nonagricultural sources of income fared particularly poorly between 1891 and 1929. A sharp drop in gum prices nearly killed off that trade,[45] while seemingly endless outbreaks of cattle diseases wrecked havoc on the pastoral population, causing many Fulbe to abandon their herds and take up permanent residence in the *cercle*'s towns and villages. A series of unusually severe droughts, plant blights, and epidemics took their toll, as did military recruitment which fell hardest on the right bank and particularly hard on the Tukulor and Soninke populations. When construction began in 1907 on a rail line to connect Kayes,

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44 Webb, *Desert Frontier*, pp. 113–114.
45 Gum prices fell in Boghe from 5–7F to 3.5–4F per kilogram during 1929 alone. Rapp. agricole ann., Mauritanie, 1929 (ANS 2G-29 v. 47).

western terminus of the Niger Railway, directly to Dakar, the effective end of the Senegal River as a transport corridor was nigh.[46]

These changes in turn affected the organization of labor throughout the Senegal Valley in complex and contradictory ways that were made even more incoherent by abrupt shifts in colonial policy on slaveholding. Eager to dismantle the political institutions of the Almamiyat, French officials confiscated and freed large numbers of slaves held by the Tukulor elite. Military recruitment in the early years of World War One provided masters with ways to rid themselves of excess slaves and, for some slaves, an opportunity to escape their masters (though many preferred to flee rather than face induction and those who did serve rarely saw much change in their status on returning home).[47] But most of the changes in slaveholding came either through economic pressures or from the gradual steps taken by administrators to remove the legal structures underpinning the institution.

In the Wolof areas to the west, cash cropping facilitated an expansion in small-hold agriculture in which many families assimilated ex-slaves as dependent laborers. These new options increased slaves' willingness to abandon their masters, and slaveholding quickly broke down. In the Upper Senegal Valley, however, it was economic and environmental decline that weakened slavery. Masters often freed their slaves in times of dearth to avoid obligations to feed them or pay taxes on them, and French bans on slave trading made it difficult to replace them once conditions improved. In general, masters preferred to sell slaves, but the legal risks of trading encouraged them to sell to long-distance traders who would take their merchandise far from the eyes of local administrators. Other families pawned children to lessen their subsistence burden, shifting dependent clients around within the social hierarchy. At the same time, the massive disruptions experienced by *bidân* groups during the first decade of colonial rule led to extensive slave raiding, mostly of women and children. Kaédi itself had seen a thriving slave trade until 1890, brokered by Soninke merchants who moved captives from the east (where other Soninke merchants gathered them in the wake of the conquests of ᶜUmar Tal) and the south (captives of Samori Toure) into the desert or along the river.[48]

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46 The Thiès-Kayes link opened in 1923, but a line to Conakry bypassed the Senegal Valley as early as 1911. See also Kane, "Fuuta Tooro," pp. 484–489, and for analogous processes in the upper valley, Clark, *Frontier to Backwater*, ch. 6.

47 Coup, "Monographie," p. 11; Andrew F. Clark, "Environmental Decline and Ecological Response in the Upper Senegal Valley, West Africa, from the Late Nineteenth Century to World War I," *JAH* 36 (1995), pp. 208–217; Kane, "Fuuta Tooro," pp. 133–150, 460–479; Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The* Tirailleurs Sénégalais *in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, 1991), pp. 8–12, 27.

48 James F. Searing, *Islam and Emancipation*, ch 6; Leservoisier, *Terres et pouvoirs*, p. 107.

Local memory holds that slavery collapsed in 1891 with French capture of the city and the subsequent shifts in political and social power. Many Soninke slaves did take advantage of the situation to flee, but those who were on their way to partial autonomy and establishing their own households tended to stay. Yet many slaves continued to be traded in Kaédi through the 1890s and conditions of servitude and clientage persisted up to and after the formal declaration of abolition in 1905. Those who stayed were integrated as clients into the households of wealthier, free Soninke, but there are no records indicating how their labor was organized or exactly what obligations they owed to their former masters.[49] In the desert, slaves were still used to harvest gum, but many of the slaves that *bidân* traders brought to Kaédi were women and children who had been recently acquired in raids with the explicit purpose of selling them or having them "ransomed." Administrators had been appointing *hassâni* leaders as *chefs d'escales* along the river for decades in order to help police trade routes and minimize such raids, but the *bidân* chiefs were not generally successful. Though most of these slaves were apparently sold into the groundnut zones, some managed to remain in Kaédi with *patentes de liberté*, documents that officially declared their freedom but which in practice restricted their movements unless evidence of serious maltreatment could be provided. The overall size of this trade at Kaédi was significant enough that a local *hassâni* chief, Moktar ould Ahmed, wrote to the French in 1901 asking them to suppress it because it was draining off all his labor force and threatening the annual harvest.[50]

Unlike the groundnut areas of Senegal, where economic opportunities made it possible to absorb considerable surplus labor, the Gorgol region of Mauritania was not a particularly attractive destination for freed or fleeing slaves from other parts of the Western Sudan. Still, some did arrive in Kaédi during these first few decades, willingly or otherwise. The administration in Kaédi formally manumitted around twenty-five per year in 1894 and 1895. These were mostly people seized from traders caught along the river, presumably moving slaves from the Upper Senegal Valley or French Soudan and from *bidân* camps north of the port.[51] If, as James Searing has argued, the illicit movement of slaves through the region had largely trickled out by 1895, these would have represented the last of the sizeable emancipations in

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49 On the persistence of the trade, Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, p. 100. On conditions, Ousmane Camara, *Figures de servitude: les petites servantes à Kaédi* (Strasbourg, 1995), p. 5.

50 On *hassâni* leaders see Kane, "Fuuta Tooro," p. 150. On *patentes* and Moktar ould Ahmed, see Cmdt. de cer. Kaédi (Déane) to Dir. Affaires Indigènes, Saint-Louis, May 28, 1901 (ANS 11D1-0792).

51 Searing, *Islam, and Emancipation*, p. 154.

Kaédi. However, it appears that a certain number of slaves continued to be sold under cover of the *rachat* system. In 1899 Commandant Clément claimed that Kaédi was still a major slave-trading post where *bidân* sold their war captives to ''Dioulas,'' mainly from Kajoor. Although this was legal as long as the merchants declared that they were ransoming slaves rather than purchasing them, the commandant believed that certain merchants were buying them in such quantities that they ''could not but be trading them.''[52]

From 1900 to 1903, the administration and the local *qâdî* heard several cases concerning the alleged mistreatment of slaves by Soninke elite and the resale of slaves by wealthy Tukulor. In this same period, nearly fifty *patentes de liberté* were issued each year by the local commandant. Many of these were for slaves ransomed by prosperous families, some Tukulor but mostly Soninke, where they were kept as servants.[53] Possession of a *patente* did little to protect a servant's rights. Runaways holding a *patente* who were found in neighboring *cercles* were only freed if they could provide evidence of maltreatment; otherwise they were returned to their masters in Kaédi.[54] A number of former slaves began arriving in Kaédi after 1903 when the French established a *village de liberté* (a settlement where ''freed'' slaves were typically subjected to forced labor) there for ''Bambara'' slaves, and by 1908 there were a number of Bambara *anciens captifs* (former slaves) settled in the neighborhood of Kaédi-N'Diambour and farming nearby fields. It is difficult to know what it meant to call these slaves Bambara; it is possible they were among the slaves seized from the ''Kaartanke'' Fulbe whom the French expelled from Nioro in 1891–1893, or from those held by local wealth Soninke. More likely they had been ''liberated'' fairly recently, probably from slave traders operating out of Kaarta or Ségou.[55] Some of these later fled Kaédi for the French Soudan in 1911 ''as a result of 'continuous uneasiness experienced within the Toucouleur and Soninke environment.' '' Other ex-slaves coming from the Niger or the Upper Senegal valleys, passing through the Middle Senegal on their way to the prosperous areas of western Senegal, became trapped in the region's *villages de liberté*, forced into *corvée* labor or the military.[56]

52 Cmdt. de cer. Kaédi (Clément) to Dir. Affaires Indigènes, Saint-Louis, 30 Dec 1899 (ANS 11D1-0792).

53 Journal du cercle de Kaédi, 1900–1903, *passim* (ANS 11D1-0801).

54 Cmdt. de cer.. Kaédi (Déane) to Dir. Aff. Indg., St. Louis, May 13, 1901 (ANS 11D1-0792).

55 Journal du cercle de Kaëdi, 1900–1903, Sept 1, 1903; Denise Bouche, *Les Villages de liberté en Afrique noire française: 1887–1990* (Paris, 1968), pp. 116, 268; Coup, ''Monographie,'' p. 6. Small numbers of de facto slaves were gradually added to the local population throughout the colonial period. As late as the 1980s, Tukulor in Gattaga maintained links with rural Fulbe villages in the Brakna and went there to obtain young female servants, known as *korgel*. Camara, *Figures de servitude*, pp. 16–17.

56 Rapport politique, Gorgol, 1911, in Kane, ''Fuuta Tooro,'' pp. 478–479.

Taken together, these changes in the regional economy and labor regime profoundly affected social relations, and many in the Futa Toro in general and Kaédi in particular responded by calling into question existing norms, particularly regarding gender and age. Early in the century Soninke men in their twenties and thirties from regions just upstream from Kaédi began migrating to the groundnut plantations to the south and west.[57] For some women, particularly those recently or about-to-be married, men's migration provided an important source of income and social prestige. Women could often take advantage of men's absence to switch from farming ''women's'' crops to the family's main subsistence or cash crops, thereby gaining greater control over household income. The trade-off was less time to work on their own personal fields and thus less private income.[58] By contrast, girls or young women who had been ransomed out of slavery and into servanthood in wealthy households, along with unmarried free women and married women whose husbands sent back insufficient remittances, were all likely to see their labor more easily appropriated by men.

Household heads often complained to administrators that labor migration and new sources of wealth had caused them to lose control over young men and had disrupted gender norms.[59] Perceived divorce rates rose during the period, and most observers blamed migration: women supposedly preferred to divorce husbands who had left them for more than one year or who failed to send back sufficient money. Other reasons cited for divorce reflected long-standing sources of tension, such as disputes over dowries, or the failures of polygamous husbands to respect the obligation of equal rotation among all wives; but these too appeared to observers to be increasing in frequency. In at least one instance, the decline in patriarchal authority was attributed not to economic change but to the new moral code brought by French laws. East of the Futa in Guidimaxa, Soninke men complained that adultery had become much more common since French conquest, which they attributed to the fact that the administration had

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57 François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens, OH, 1997), p. 113; J.H. Saint-Père, *Les Sarakollé du Guidimakha* (Paris, 1925), pp. 51–52.

58 The ''Peanut Boom'' song, ''*Tiga sandan sege*,'' popular among Soninke women in the Nioro and Nara regions of French Soudan in the mid-1920s, celebrated the exploits of young men who had earned great wealth in Senegal and encouraged suitors or husbands to migrate. See Philippe David, quoted in Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants*, pp.170–171, 198–199.

59 Searing, *Islam and Emancipation*, pp.176–184, 203–213; Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants*, pp. 176–178; Kane, ''Fuuta Tooro,'' pp. 480–481. It is possible that elders exaggerated their plight out of fear of what the general trend would eventually bring. Yet it is unlikely that the combined effects of migration and the renegotiation of master–slave relations failed to reduce male elders' immediate authority.

abolished "capital punishment" for the offense and replaced it with "light prison sentences."[60]

Another strategy for responding to these rapid social changes was the mobilization of ethnic identity. Self-conscious notions of Tukulor-ness and Soninke-ness had predated French influence in the area, and moments of hostility had not been uncommon during the nineteenth century, often provoked by Halpulaar political and religious hegemony.[61] The reformist movement of al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal had yoked an avowedly universalistic ideology of religious authority to de facto Tukulor hegemony, provoking reactions that combined ethnic and religious defensiveness but which also saw cross-ethnic alliances based on religious ideals or personal gain.[62] These identities almost certainly did not have the salience or rigidity they would take on during the colonial era. French officials assumed Kaédi's ethnic groups were primordial identities,[63] and failed to appreciate the role their own presence played in increasing their salience. Though there was no French conspiracy to ethnicize the community, numerous intentional manipulations of local rivalries fed ethnic sentiments, while economic changes ruptured the dense network of specializations, alliances, and cooperation that had previously limited polarization.[64]

Ethnic conflict first emerged around the rich, recession-fed lands used for the Futa's distinctive second harvest. Such land had always posed certain problems for the social organization of farming. It was never easy to predict which areas would be covered in any particular year, and flood waters tended to erase the traces of the past year's plots. Resolving the inevitable disputes over land rights was thus central to maintaining peace and productivity. During the twentieth century, pressures on recession-watered lands increased

60 Eric Pollet and Grace Winter, *La Société Soninké (Dyahunu, Mali)* (Brussels, 1971), p. 128; Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants*, pp. 176–177; Saint-Père, *Sarakollés*, pp. 144–146, 151–153. There is no evidence adultery had ever been a capital crime, but this was hardly a check on its significance as an "imagined" or "invented" tradition.

61 Most historians have become skeptical of accounts that attribute the rise of ethnic identities exclusively to colonial manipulation. See Thomas Spear, "Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *JAH*, 44 (2003), 3–27.

62 Such as the rebellion in Kaarta in 1856 or the *jihâd* of Muhammad Lamine in the 1880s. David Robinson, *Umar Tal*, pp. 186–190, 351–362; Barry, *La Sénégambie*, p. 306; Humphrey Fisher, "The Early Life and Pilgrimage of al-Hâjj Muhammad al-Amîn the Soninke (d. 1887)," *JAH* 11 (1970), 51–69. For a discussion of the explicitly nonethnic rhetoric of the ʿUmarian *jihâd*, see John H. Hanson, "Islam, Ethnicity and Fulbe-Mande Relations in the Era of Umar Tal's *jihad*," in *Peuls et Mandingues: Dialectique des constructions identitaires*, ed. Mirjan de Bruijn and Han van Dijk (Leiden, 1997), pp. 85–97.

63 E.g. "Rapp. trimestriel du cercle [de Kaédi] concernant les affaires politiques, judiciaires et administratives, 1ᵉ trim. 1901" (ANS 11D1-0792).

64 This and the next three paragraphs draw heavily on Olivier Leservoisier, "Kaédi"; "Evolution foncière"; and *Terres et pouvoirs*; and Cédric Jourde, "Dramas of Ethnic Elites' Accommodation: The Authoritarian Restoration in Mauritania," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 2002).

as droughts made rain-fed harvests less reliable and as crops came to be relied on to replace lost income from trade. Famines themselves were rarely a fear, but fluctuations in yield and price put considerable stress on the mechanisms that resolved conflicts over the recession fields. Arbitrators drawn from the most respected and educated sedentary families increasingly depended on political maneuvering to back up their opinions.

Most of the institutions for resolving such disputes dated to the founding of the Almamiyat. Land rights had been central to political authority under the Almamys and were the main underpinning of social hierarchy. In 1899, 95 percent of the population did not own the land it worked; as a result, the most successful strategies for most people had been to pursue patrons rather than land.[65] When the first waves of Tukulor immigrants had taken up residence in Kaédi in the eighteenth century, they established a procedure whereby successive newcomers were accepted into the town by a designated host. Host families insured their guests' protection and provided them with land for cultivation in exchange for gifts and labor obligations.[66] Soninke immigrants had been blocked from entering Kaédi until the 1880s, when the Cerno Molle received permission to act as their official host and to create a Soninke enclave known as Gattaga, about one kilometer from the main Tukulor neighborhood of Toulde. The reasons for this change in policy and the terms of the arrangement with the Cerno Molle are unclear and remained controversial through the early colonial years. The Soninke settlers may have taken advantage of the ʿUmarian wars to expand their slave-trading activities, securing enough wealth to make them attractive clients.[67] French researchers believed that permission to enter Kaédi had been granted by the Almamy himself for participation in the military campaigns of the 1880s. The ideological implications of having been granted land directly from the Almamy differed greatly from those deriving from sponsorship by his local representative, the Cerno Molle, but since the Almamys rarely exercised real control over Bosseya, the political implications were basically the same: the Cerno Molle collected rents on the land the Soninke of Gattaga farmed, either in his own name or as the representative of the Almamy, and acted as their patron in land disputes.[68]

As soon as they had completed conquest, French officials began mediating access to land, shifting patronage ties away from older elites and toward the state and its representatives. In an effort to disrupt the organizational structure of the Futa Toro Almamiyat and divert the province's wealth away from

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65 Kane, "Fuuta Tooro," pp. 130–132.
66 Leservoisier, "Kaédi," p. 117.
67 Ibid., p. 120.
68 Coup, "Monographie," pp. 7, 12. Leservoisier's oral sources (apparently Halpulaaren) explicitly denied any land grant was ever made by an Almamy of Futa Toro. Leservoisier, "Kaédi," p. 122.

potential rebels, the French treaty of 1891 removed the province of Bosseya from the Almamiyat and placed it under the direct control of the then Cerno Molle Bokar, one of the only Tukulor elites not to have fled Kaédi to ally with Abdul Bokar Kan.[69] Cerno Molle Bokar had been allied to Soninke families under the leadership of Biri Diagana, and both quickly profited from the situation. The administration gave a considerable amount of land and cattle seized from Tukulor families to the Cerno Molle and to the town's Soninke population.[70] But subsequent reports of systematic abuses of authority by Cerno Molle Bokar (and Cerno Molle Mamadu who succeeded him in 1895) compelled the French to reduce the authority and income of ''chiefs'' in regard to land tenure and direct levies and to provide them instead with salaries from tax revenue. The direct beneficiaries were the Soninke of Gattaga who received direct control over a large portion of the land they had cultivated as the Cerno Molle's clients. Declaring lands that had belonged to the Almamiyat as *bayti* or treasury lands to be the property of the French state by virtue of conquest, the administration made these lands exempt from rents. It also provided additional lands closer to the residential areas of Kaédi to increase farmers' productivity.[71]

The early twentieth century saw a considerable increase in Kaédi's population,[72] and as the only major town on the Mauritanian side of the Senegal River it became the focus of early development projects in the colony.[73] As early as 1899, French officials had observed that the soil in and around Kaédi would be ideal for large-scale cotton cultivation and began advocating the widespread development of the crop. Officials pressured local farmers to convert some of their fields to cotton and sell the raw material east to Guidimaxa, where large-scale textile production was developing. During the 1910s and 1920s, these efforts were also accompanied by attempts to encourage groundnut and rice cultivation, the former for long-distance

69 Coup, ''Monographie,'' pp. 11–12, 15–17.

70 Ibid., pp. 7–9; Kane, ''Fuuta Tooro,'' pp. 106–107.

71 Vidal, *Rapport sur la tenure des terres indigenes au Fouta Sénégalais* ([Dakar], 1924), p. 62. Leservoisier gives a slightly different interpretation of these events: Leservoisier, ''Kaédi,'' pp. 123–124, 128. See also Kane, ''Fuuta Tooro,'' pp. 106–133. Some Soninke, along with others, also benefited from the creation of further ''French *bayti*'' in 1903. Vidal, *Rapport*, pp. 61–71.

72 Though the data is unclear for the early part of the century, Gattaga alone housed nearly 2,000 people by 1930, making the official estimate of 3,300 for the entire city in 1939 – cited in Tidiane Koïta, *Le nomade à Kaédi (Mauritanie): L'intégration urbaine en question* (Louvaine-la-Neuve, 1995), pp. 27, 37–39 – likely an undercount. Cmdt. Quegneaux, ''Recensement des Tidjanis, village de Gataga, 23 Mars 1930,'' (ANMt E2-34).

73 Until 1912, the French school in Kaédi (founded in 1892) was the only one in Mauritania outside of Saint-Louis, and in 1928 a *société de prévoyance* was planned and began functioning the following year. Denise Bouche, ''L'enseignement dans les territoires français de l'Afrique occidentale de 1817 à 1920: Mission civilisatrice ou formation d'une élite?'' (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris I, 1974; reprod. Univ. Lille III, 1975), p. 691; Rapp. pol. ann. et resumé, Mauritanie, 1928 (ANS 2G-28 v. 10).

export on the model of Senegal, the latter as a "more efficient" way of providing food for the region. From the outset, the colony's government intended to make the river territories support the drier north in food stuffs where self-sufficiency was thought to be unobtainable. Encouraging extensive agriculture also had a social objective: settling *haratîn*s on farm land was expected to smooth the transition from slavery and undermine the "predations" of the *bidân*.[74]

None of these projects ever had much success in terms of generating substantial revenue,[75] but the political, legal, and financial resources that accompanied them had significant effects on social relations. Land disputes began to take place directly between Soninke and Tukulor farmers, becoming a significant source of tension. Many conflicts reflected disagreement over the fundamental principles of land rights, which had only been made more complex by French interventions. The French claimed to base their rulings on a combination of the *sharî'a* and selected "customary" rights; land claims could thus be made on the basis of original occupation of a plot, on the labor expended in first clearing it, on continuous and recent occupation of it, on an established pattern of collecting rents on it, or on an official grant of land from a political authority. Inhabitants of the town mobilized these claims in asymmetrical patterns, so that recognition of the rights of recent occupants or of those who cleared the fields tended to favor Soninke and *haratîn* farmers while recognition of original occupant or rent rights tended to favor Tukulor and *bidân* landlords. But in the final

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74 Rapps. économiques trimestriels, Mauritanie, 1ᵉ trim. 1929 (ANS 2G-29 v. 3) and 3ᵉ trim. 1930 (ANS 2G-30 v. 44); Rapp. pol. ann., Mauritanie, 1929 (ANS 2G-29 v. 9); Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Lieut.-Gouv. Maur., °385 AP/E, May 6, 1938 (CAOM 14Miom 2170 [9G-32]).

75 At the end of the decade, raw cotton only traded for 1.5–1.75F/kg, while finished textiles fetched around 3F/kg; since Kaédi had long had a thriving small-scale textile industry, families preferred to keep whatever they harvested for domestic production or independent sale. They only planted as much cotton as they could profitably use and rejected attempts to convert the rest of their fields away from millet. They may have also sought thereby to limit their dependence on the price of cotton, keeping a reserve of millet for subsistence in case of crisis. Cotton also strained other resources: it could only be sustainably cultivated on *walo* (recession-watered) lands as *jeri* (rain-watered) lands were rapidly stripped of nutrients by the crop. Farmers thus had to either endanger their lands ecologically or increase the stresses on politically contentious *walo* areas. Rice and peanut harvests also remained "mediocre" as late as 1929, and efforts to encourage peanut planting were soon abandoned entirely. Resistance to these *mise-en-valeur* projects was also linked to the reluctance to adopt French currency; most preferred to use *guinées*, whose value was more sensitive to local conditions. Bulletin commercial et agricole mensuel, Kaédi (Sénégal), Jan. 1899 (ANS 2G-1 v. 44); Rapports économiques trimestriels, Mauritanie, 1ᵉ and 2ᵉ trim. 1929 (ANS 2G-29 v. 3); and Rapp. agricole ann., Mauritanie, 1929. For the ecology of cotton, see Allen Isaacman and Richard Roberts, "Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa*, eds. Isaacman and Roberts (Portsmouth, NH, 1995), pp. 1–39.

analysis the French used their authority fairly arbitrarily to redistribute land from "obstructionists" to allies.[76]

Not all such disputes were unambiguous "ethnic rivalries." Some did break down cleanly along the lines that divided Gattaga and Toulde, including one conflict between a group of Soninke and the Kayhaydi Tukulor clan that lasted nearly thirty years. But many reflected the strategies of various powerful families to manipulate competing and overlapping systems of authority in their favor. At least some Soninke elites seem to have profited by siding with Tukulor families in Toulde against poorer Soninke in quarrels over the payment of land rents, while other disputes pitted Soninke against *hassâni* and *zwâya* clans, or the residents of Gattaga and Toulde together against neighboring villages or pastoralists. Nevertheless, direct competition between groups self-consciously identifying in ethnic terms clearly became a feature of the political landscape.[77] Political and judicial offices in particular became objects of group competition. In 1901, Biri Diagana, chief of Gattaga and leader of the Soninke community since the French arrival, lodged a complaint against Besse Amadou, chief of Toulde, claiming that the latter, along with many other Tukulor of Toulde, had been systematically stealing slaves and objects of value from various residents of Gattaga. He characterized the Tukulor elite as a virtual band of thieves and saboteurs pillaging their Soninke neighbors. The French-recognized "cadi supérieur" of Kaédi, Alpha Mamudu, refused to hear the case, apparently despite the fact that clear evidence implicated Amadou in many of the thefts. The local administrator stepped in, overriding the *qâdî*, and imprisoned Amadou for eleven days. In deciding to intervene and bypass the *qâdî*, the *commandant* stated explicitly that Diagana should be given preferential treatment because of the help he had provided at the time of conquest.[78]

By the 1920s, then, ethnic identity itself had become enshrined as the primary language for making claims on the state. While this initially favored Kaédi's Soninke minority, it came to work against them in the long run. French pro-Soninke bias subsided as conquest-era alliances declined in importance with the institutionalization of colonial control. The demographic dominance of the Tukulor population and their links to the surrounding

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76 Thomas K. Park, Tidiane Ngaido, Mamadou Baro and Glenn Rogers, "Land Tenure and Development in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania: Fuuta Tooro and the Gorgol Region" (Tucson and Madison, 1988).

77 Many of these disputes are discussed with considerable detail in Journal du cercle de Kaëdi, 1900–1903. See also Vidal, *Rapport*, pp. 61–62; and Leservoisier, "Kaédi," p. 128.

78 Rapp. trimestriel, cercle de Kaédi, 1ᵉ trim. 1901 (ANS 2G-1 v. 44); see also Rapport mensuel, Kaédi, Feb. 1901 (ANS 2G-1 v. 44); and Journal du cercle de Kaëdi, March 6, 1901.

Fulbe pastoralists made it difficult to keep them marginalized for long, and the Soninke community that had rejoiced at being liberated from their patron, the Cerno Molle, and at being able to hold land in their own rights, now found that the loss of the Cerno Molle's protection had less desirable long-term consequences. Without their host, his clients lost the ability to keep Gattaga as a Soninke enclave, and by 1930 they had a sizeable Tukulor minority in their midst.[79] Soninke retained control of the *chef de village* for Gattaga, but the neighborhood's leadership increasingly had to take into account the interests of the non-Soninke in their midst. By contrast, Toulde remained exclusively Pulaar, and as memories of Tukulor resistance faded, leaders like Besse Amadou acquired substantial authority within the town as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS

Each of the major lines of social change discussed in this chapter would either figure explicitly in Yacouba's early preaching or quickly become a focus of the religious renewal he inspired. The tight control over land by the town's elite, the close relationship of land with political power, and the inability or unwillingness of the administration to take the legacy of slavery seriously, all placed increasing stress on the poor and socially stigmatized Soninke who would rally to Yacouba's calls. The intellectual tools that had been developed by Muslim intellectuals and culture workers over the preceding centuries seemed at first to lend themselves more easily to reinforcing the social consequences of French conquest than to assuaging them. Control over access to religious education became a key way to defend de facto slavery, and orthopraxy and orthodoxy became signs of social prestige. Anxieties over gender and age norms encouraged older men to make use of their most powerful weapons, control over the legal discourse on marriage and divorce. But some of the contradictions within the Western Sudanic tradition that had first emerged during the tumultuous reforms of the nineteenth century would appear in the twentieth century to provide some with a blueprint for change.

79 In 1900, the Cerno Molle and his family were the only non-Soninke in Gattaga; by 1930, an administrative census listed 342 Tukulor and an additional 213 "divers" (probably Fulbe, *bidân* and the clients and slaves of the Tukulor), compared to 1274 Soninke. On the situation in 1900, see Leservoisier, "Kaédi," p. 120; on 1930, see Quegneaux, "Recensement des Tidjanis." Marty, however, claimed that at least two important Tukulor scholars, Tidiani Tierno and Abdoulaye Maréga, were living in Gattaga, both with apparently deep roots in the neighborhood. These may or may not have been linked to Cerno Molle, and it is worth noting that "Marega" is one of the classic Soninke names of Kaédi. Marty, *Islam au Sénégal* (vol. 1), p. 107.

Making a Revival: Yacouba Sylla and His Followers

WHEN COLONIAL OCCUPATION BEGAN, THE UNDERLYING POLITICAL logic of the *jihâd*s, according to which the state was perceived as a legitimate vehicle for the furthering of religious objectives, became simultaneously more and less compelling. On the one hand, many Muslim leaders, recognizing the overwhelming power of the colonial state, "accommodated" European administrators who agreed to grant them limited control over their communities as part of the creation of efficient and cheap systems of governance. Such figures effectively adapted the statism of the *jihâd* era to new conditions. In a celebrated shift, ʿUmar Tal had been one of the most radical of the *jihâd* leaders; his grandson, Seydou Nourou Tal, was one of France's greatest Muslim intermediaries.[1] On the other hand, the claims of European states to be "Muslim powers" and to legitimate their rule in Islamic terms struck many as transparently false.[2] In principle, the esoteric nature of Sufi authority provided one way for dissidents to undermine religious elites who, they believed, had compromised their integrity by engaging in political activity of a particularly corrupting sort. But this critical position had difficulty taking hold during the early years of colonial rule. The resources the colonial state provided to scholars willing to cooperate allowed accommodationists to strengthen their religious credentials. Privileged treatment of various kinds made it easier to obtain scholarly training and to attract followers who then could be presented as signs of spiritual grace and blessing. Dissidents thus often appeared as "antinomian" regardless of their specific religious teachings.[3]

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1 David Robinson sees this phenomenon a bit differently, however. For him, accommodation was a return to the pre-*jihâd* tradition of tolerance and pragmatism. David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens, OH, 2000).

2 Muhammad Sani Umar has outlined this situation in the Central Sudan, but it was also frequently the case further west. *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule* (Leiden, 2006), esp. ch. 4.

3 Because official observers accepted this rhetoric implicitly, these voices have been virtually silenced in the administrative records. See Chapter 4.

Gorgol River

Kilometer

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Gattaga

Toulde

Senegal River

Administrative
District

Kaédi
circa 1930
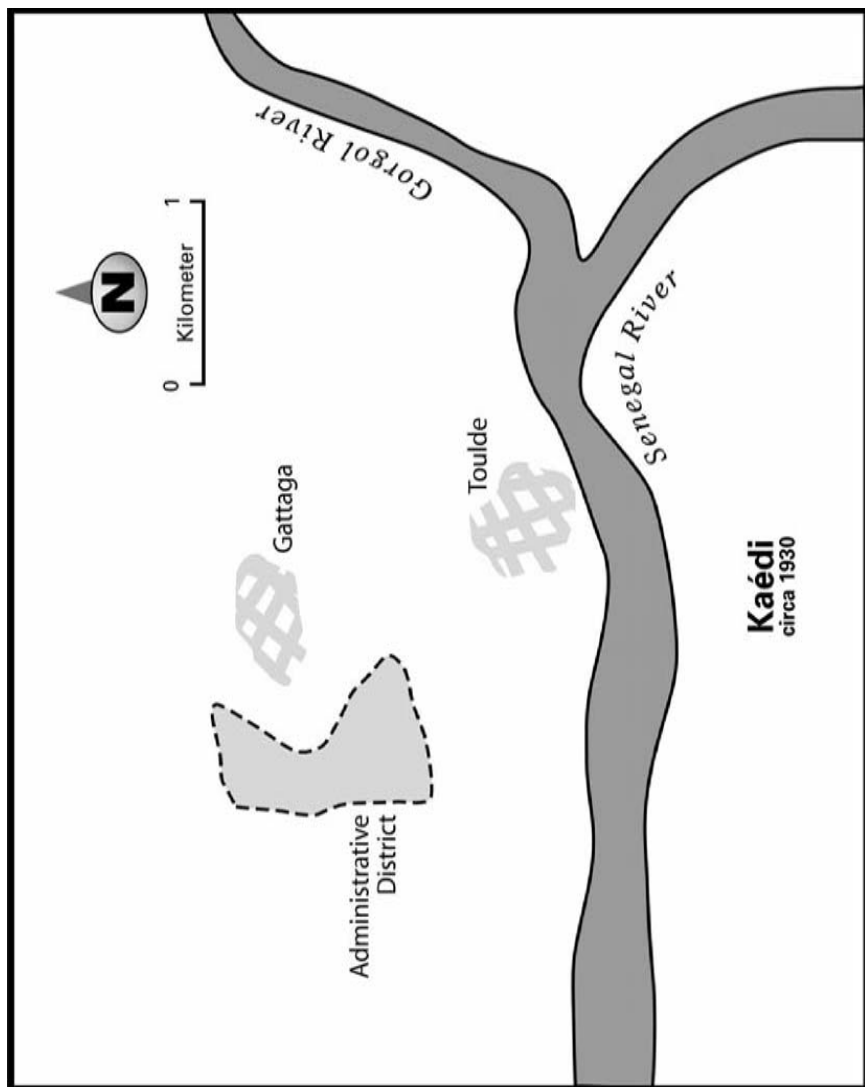
In essence, colonial rule tightened the links between the social organization of Sufi affiliations and the political use of spiritual authority, and raised the intellectual and political stakes of any dissent, however quietistic. From 1900 on, Kaédi was caught up in what would become one of the most important and divisive religious movements of the twentieth century, the "eleven-bead" Tijani reform. This reform both extended and transformed the contradictions that had emerged within the Islamic reform movements of the previous century and in turn generated spiritual technology that would prove useful in confronting the social contradictions that had emerged during the early years of French rule.

KAÉDI, NIORO, AND THE LIGHT OF A NEW REFORM

Some figures did gain enough of a following to allow their aloofness from authority to have social and political significance. One of these was Ahmad Hamahu'llah, better known as Shaykh Hamallah. Hamallah was born in the town of Nioro du Sahel, whose name derived from the Arabic *nûr*, light, and which had been an outpost of Islamic scholarship in the Western Sudan for generations. His father a *sharîf* an merchant, his mother a Bamana-speaking Fulbe from Wassoulou, little in Hamallah's background made him a likely candidate to become an influential *shaykh*.[4] But by the 1930s he would be seen as one of the "archenemies" of French rule. Hamallah received an education in Islamic fundamentals in the Hodh in Mauritania – the location of one of the most popular training schools of the period – and soon showed signs of considerable spiritual precocity. At a young age he became the disciple of an Algerian *shaykh* in the Tijani Sufi order, Sidi Muhammad ibn ʿAbdullah, known to most West African Tijanis as Shaykh al-Akhdar. A holder of the rank of *muqaddam,* Shaykh al-Akhdar was authorized to initiate others into the Tijani *tarîqa.* The

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4 The standard reference on Hamallah, relying largely on archival materials from Mauritania and France, is Alioune Traoré, *Islam et colonisation en Afrique: Cheikh Hamahoullah, homme de foi et résistant* (Paris, 1983). Three recent studies that draw heavily on oral history collected in and around Nioro and on archives in Senegal, Mali, and France are Seïdina Oumar Dicko, *Hamallah: le protégé de Dieu* (Bamako, 1999); Benjamin F. Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor, 2005); and Amadou Ba, *Histoire du Sahel occidental malien: des origines à nos jours* (Bamako, 1989). Two useful studies that see Hamallah through the eyes of one of his most celebrated students are Amadou Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar: Le Sage de Bandiagara* (Paris, 1980), and Brenner, *West African Sufi*. One important work has explored the heritage of Hamallah throughout the former AOF: Boukary Sava-dogo, "Confréries et pouvoirs. La Tijaniyya Hamawiyya en Afrique occidentale (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger): 1909–1965" (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Provence, 1998).

hagiographic tradition[5] claims that al-Akhdar was the deputy of another Algerian Tijani, Sidi al-Tahir Butiba, a close companion of the order's founder, Ahmad al-Tijani, and the head of the Tijaniyya at Tlemcen. Shaykh al-Tahir was to have sent al-Akhdar to reform the practices of sub-Saharan Tijanis and to find a *walî* who could revivify the faith, lead the Tijaniyya communities in the region, and perhaps even act as the *qutb al-zamân*, the Sufi ontological pole of the age. The most contentious element of al-Akhdar's teaching quickly became his claim that a particular element of the Tijani *wazîfa* (the daily obligation of the *wird*) known as *jawharat al-kamâl*, the "Pearl of Perfection," should be recited eleven times rather than the usual twelve.[6] Because of the strung prayer beads that West African Sufis used to keep track of *dhikr* recitations, those who practiced the recitation of *jawharat al-kamâl* eleven times became known to the French as the *onze grains* or "eleven-bead" Tijanis, while those who retained the twelve recitations – largely led by members of the Tal family and their associates – became known as "twelve-bead" Tijanis.

Initiation into the Tijaniyya through al-Akhdar bypassed both the ʿUmarian and Hâfizi branches of the local *silsila*s, so that eleven-bead *murîd*s became independent of the Tal family and other Tijani leaders. While for most Sufis it was common to seek out multiple initiations so that one could be linked through two or more *silsila*s at once, the difference in ritual practice between the eleven- and twelve-beads made it difficult to affiliate with *shaykh*s on both sides of the divide.[7] As a result, this difference in practice quickly added social and political significance to its fundamentally esoteric meaning. According to Hamawi tradition, in 1900 (or 1901) al-Akhdar recognized Hamallah as the *qutb* and asked Hamallah to renew his *wird* for him, in effect becoming the young

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5   Louis Brenner has suggested many reasons to be skeptical of the veracity of the portion of the tradition that deals with Shaykh al-Akhdar. The internal oral traditions do display a certain amount of uniformity in their treatment of al-Akhdar, though this may be a fairly late development. Brenner, *West African Sufi: the Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 48–50. Could the *shaykh*'s unusual name indicate that he is a *khidr* figure? In any case, the widespread acceptance of the story among Hamawi Tijanis demonstrates its rhetorical power.

6   The disputes between those who held to the twelve iterations and those who favored eleven have generated a mountain of writing, including both partisan and descriptive works, that is impossible to survey here. For recent overviews, see the works cited in n4, and Vincent Joly, "La réconciliation de Nioro (septembre 1937): Un tournant dans la politique musulmane au Soudan français?" in *Le temps des marabouts: itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880–1960*, ed. David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris, 1997), pp. 361–372. To my knowledge, no one has followed up on the oral tradition reported by Humphrey Fisher that when Mamadu Lamine Drame attacked Bakel in 1886 he preached an eleven-bead reform of the Tijani *dhikr*. This is almost certainly an anachronism, but if it is not, it would have important implications for the study of the Hamawiyya. Fisher, "The Early Life and Pilgrimage of Al-Hajj Muhammad Al-Amin the Soninke (d. 1887)," *JAH* 11:1 (1970), 58.

7   Though Ahmadou Hampâté Bâ famously did so in the 1950s, this was only after much of the controversy surrounding Hamallah had died down.

man's *murîd*. When al-Akhdar died in Nioro (sometime between 1906 and 1909), Hamallah became the clear inheritor of his authority and the leader of the nascent eleven-bead Tijani community.[8]

 In one sense, Hamallah simply became another Sufi *shaykh*, leading his own approach to the Tijani *tarîqa*, often called the Tijaniyya Hamawiyya, and relying on well-worn forms of authority. At the same time, however, Hamallah's spiritual biography subtly called into question some of the fundamental features of Sufi hierarchy itself. First, while neither al-Akhdar nor Hamallah seem to have said so explicitly, their call to reform a central feature of Tijani practice implied that other high-ranking Tijanis were in error. Second, the fact that Hamallah's own guide and initiator in the eleven-bead branch, Shaykh al-Akhdar, subsequently became his *murîd* inverted the standard master–disciple relationship. Third, stories about Hamallah told by his followers frequently suggested he had received his authority directly from the Prophet, placing him on a higher plane than other Tijani *shaykh*s and giving his authority an independent wellspring. Finally, Hamallah's spiritual precocity was virtually unprecedented; he had risen to full control over the eleven-bead Tijani *tarîqa* while he was still in his early twenties, contravening the age norms of society as a whole and religious communities in particular.[9] In practice, however, Shaykh Hamallah placed great emphasis on Tijani hierarchy and on his subordination to its founder.[10] As a result, Hamallah's hagiography can be read as an ambivalent commentary on the standard Sufi relationship.

8 See, for example, Dicko, *Hamallah*, pp. 66–70; for a discussion of the various *silsila*s and their prestige, see Brenner, *West African Sufi*, pp. 43–45; and on the general context in Nioro see Soares, *Prayer Economy*, chs. 2–4.

9 For Hamallah's early hagiography, see Benjamin F. Soares, ''The Spiritual Economy of Nioro du Sahel: Islamic Discourses and Practices in a Malian Religious Center'' (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1997), pp. 113–136; Dicko, *Hamallah*, pp. 66–79; Ba, *Histoire du Sahel*, pp. 200–205; and Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, ''Les perles et le soufre: Une polémique mauritanienne autour de la Tijâniyya (1830–1935),'' in *La Tijâniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris, 2000), pp. 125–163. Demonstrations of spiritual or intellectual powers at a young age were not uncommon elements of Sufi biographies, but such biographies also tended to follow a standard plot which derived much of its appeal from the tension between the young age at which a saint began to show signs of a special affinity with God and the long wait before such an individual was invested with the socially meaningful title of *walî*. It may be that such inversions of normative age roles had become easier in the post-*jihâd* era, for Murray Last has suggested that the acceptance of ''raw force as [an] instrument of mystical power'' during the *jihâd* campaigns of Sokoto weakend the monopoly of older scholars over spiritual prestige. Murray Last, ''Charisma and Medicine in Northern Nigeria,'' in *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*, ed. Donal B. Cruise O'Brien and Christian Coulon (Oxford, 1988), p.194.

10 For example, Letter from Shaikh Hamahullah of Nioro to Teirno Bokar Salif Tall, given by Baba Thimbely to Louis Brenner, Bandiagara, October 1977, MAMMP reel 9 (Wisconsin reel 13). On his humility see also Ba, *Sahel*, p. 210; on his respect for the *silsila*, Ould Cheikh, ''Perles et soufre,'' pp. 150–151.

Some of these contradictions had deep roots. Ahmad Tijani himself had claimed to have received his *wird* from Muhammad in a waking vision. Such claims were not unprecedented, but the central role which they played in the Tijaniyya's early history and doctrine raised their profile. Tijani claimed to have direct knowledge of the Prophet *bi lâ wâsita* – "with no intermediary."[11] He gave the *zâwiya* an even more central position in both the spiritual and social life of the Sufi *murîd*, making the Tijani Way as much a community as a network of seekers after enlightenment. He centralized the *silsila*s of local *shaykh*s and *murîd*s, made membership in a *zâwiya* an explicit requirement of Sufi practice, and insisted that affiliation with the Tijaniyya be exclusive of any other *tarîqa*s. He argued that the Tijani *silsila* provided the most legitimate connection with Muhammad and the *nûr muhammadi*, and his followers claimed for him the position of the seal of sainthood (*khâtim al-awliyâ'*), a notion analogous to the Prophet Muhammad's position as the seal of prophecy and carrying with it similar connotations of culmination and finality.[12]

Once the door to such claims had been opened, it was hard to close it again; assertions of independent revelation and exalted saintliness became recurring features of the Tijaniyya in general.[13] ʿUmar Tal, for example, allocated to himself some of those attributes that Tijani claimed to have received on Muhammad's direct authority, such as the right to exercise independent judgment (*ijtihad*) in legal matters.[14] ʿUmar rejected a pluralistic approach to the relationship among *tarîqa*s and Muslims more generally, relying on jurists and political theorists to justify military attacks on other Sufis, asserting his own considerable *wilâya*, and arguing for dramatic

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11 R.S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke. "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered." *Der Islam* 70 (1993), p. 67, 70. See also Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: a Sufi Order in the Modern World* (New York, 1965), p. 38. For the use of *wâsita* in Ibn al-ʿArabi's teachings, see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabî's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, 1989), p. 293. Spencer J. Trimingham noted this claim in *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), p. 107, but overgeneralized it to include all so-called "neo-Sufi" orders.

12 The best overview of the Tijaniyya remains Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya*. For a West African perspective on some of these questions, the essays in Triaud and Robinson, eds., *La Tijaniyya*, are quite useful.

13 In this, then, I would disagree with Roman Loimeier's argument that differences between the various Sufi *tarîqa*s are ones of personality and network, as opposed to ones of philosophical and theological substance. Loimeier is certainly right to insist, however, that such differences cannot meaningfully be discussed as ones between "tradition" and "modernity." Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston, IL, 1997).

14 Radtke, "*Ijtihâd* and Neo-Sufism," *Asiatische Studien* 48 [1994], pp. 917–918; Radtke "*Ibrîz*iana: Themes and Sources of a Seminal Sufi Work," *SA* 7 (1996), p. 125; Omar Jah, "Al-hajj ʿUmar al-Fûtî's Philosophy of *jihâd* and its Sufi Basis" (Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University, 1973), p. 16; and Abun-Nasr, *Tijaniyya*, p. 37.

reforms in society.[15] In debates with scholars he and the intellectuals in his entourage developed Tijani's ideas into ambitious claims about his own spiritual and political authority.[16] ᶜUmar's arguments made use of various interpreters of Ibn ᶜArabi to argue that as the representative of Tijani he was a sinless soul (*maᶜsûm*), the seal of the saints (*khâtim al-awliyâʾ*) and the hidden pole (*al-qutb al-maktûm*) of the age, and therefore had the sole right to interpret the *sharîᶜa* for his followers. Two of his followers, ᶜUmar al-Hawsi and Yirkoy Talfi (Mukhtar b. Wadiᶜat Allah) also drew on Ibn ᶜArabi in maintaining that ᶜUmar was "the final isthmus" (*barzakh*), implying that he mediated any blessings other *shaykh*s received from Muhammad and was the guarantor of their ability to pass those blessings onto their followers. Taken together, these claims sought to establish ᶜUmar as the legal as well as spiritual leader of all the Muslims of West Africa who were following the only true *tarîqa*. While other *shaykh*s certainly took notice of ᶜUmar's military prowess, it is hard to say how seriously they took his intellectual posturing. The *Qâdiri shaykh* Ahmad al-Bakka'i, a member of the Kunta family, made no effort to hide his disdain for ᶜUmar Tal and his scholar-advisors, and he dismissed ᶜUmar's supernatural pretensions out of hand.[17]

But ᶜUmar Tal's legacy was to loom large over the Western Sudan, and it was his Tijaniyya, rather than al-Bakka'i's Qâdiriyya, that would dominate the twentieth century; within it ᶜUmar's ideas and rhetoric lived on. Shaykh Hamallah provided a conduit for some of the more radical of the Tijaniyya's themes while detaching them from ᶜUmar Tal's reliance on state authority as the privileged vehicle for social change. Though the most important of his inner circle of students were all nobles, and although women remained fairly marginal to the main rituals and devotions, some of Hamallah's most visible followers were slaves, ex-slaves, and

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15 For example, "Al-takfir fi zâhir hukm al-sharᶜ lâ yatlub an yakûn al-kufr maqtuᶜan bihi bal yatlub ma yadill ᶜalâ al-kufr wa law zannan..." See ᶜUmar b. Saᶜid, *Bayân mâ waqaᶜa*, ed. Sidi Mohamed Mahibou and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris, 1983), Arabic 23 recto – 24 recto (quote at 23r), French trans. by Mahibou and Triaud, pp. 125–127. Comp. Qur'an 8:73. The importance in the *Bayân* of words closely associated with *walî* (*muwâlât* and *awliyâ*) may be reason to rethink Triaud's claim that the text is entirely devoid of Sufi connotations. ᶜUmar also relied heavily on the works of Usuman dan Fodio, occasionally interpreting them in ways that seemed to invert their apparent meaning. See, for example, *Bayân*, Arabic 11 verso, French 97. See also Jah, "Philosophy of *jihâd*," pp. 25–38, 123, 146–148.

16 The most important discussions of ᶜUmar Tal's thought in relation to other Sufi intellectuals are Jah, "Philosophy of *jihâd*," and Abdelkader Zebadia, "The Career and Correspondence of Ahmad al-Bakkáy of Timbuktu: An Historical Study of His Political and Religious Rôle from 1847 to 1866" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1974).

17 Zebadia, "Ahmad al-Bakkây," p. 484, 489, 493, 495.

members of occupational castes, earning him the scorn of more conservative rivals. Since, as in many *zâwiya*s, Hamallah's students engaged in collective labor to support the center,[18] the community brought together by the *shaykh* was at least temporarily leveling.

Rüdiger Seesemann has identified many of the same themes in the hagiographies of Shaykh Ibrâhîm Niasse, indicating just how deeply embedded they were in the Tijani tradition. After the death of al-Hajj Malik Sy in 1922, Niasse gradually became the most important twelve-bead Tijani spiritual leader in West Africa. Like Hamallah, he was spiritually precocious, claimed an exalted position vis-à-vis other Tijani *shaykh*s (his more eschatological than ontological), and had great *muqaddam*s declare themselves his disciples. He also embodied the kind of social radicalism that Yacouba and others would attribute to Hamallah. Reportedly the descendant of blacksmiths – one of the most important of the occupational castes – Niasse nonetheless acquired such tremendous spiritual prestige that he transcended social hierarchy.[19]

But it was Hamallah's break with the willingness of most Tijani *shaykh*s to work with politicians that would be most momentous. In particular, Hamallah was openly reluctant to defer to the authority which ʿUmar Tal's descendants had acquired vis-à-vis the French administration.[20] In return the ʿUmarians led a campaign of sabotage against him, using their relationships with officials to influence French opinion of the Shaykh. Murtada Tal, one of ʿUmar's sons and the French-approved head of the Tijani community in Kaarta-Kingi, collaborated with an important local scholarly group, the Soninke-speaking Kaba Jaxite family, to have al-Akhdar expelled from Nioro in 1906. Opposition to Hamallah himself was somewhat slower to develop, or at least took longer to influence French opinion: as late as 1920, Paul Marty, director of Muslim Affairs, considered Hamallah an admirable spiritual leader and above suspicion of political intrigue. Yet by the mid-1920s, the Tal and Kaba Jaxite families, together with their associated *bidân* allies and local clients, had become vocally opposed to the

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[18] Even those of Hamallah's disciples who were nobles tended to be selected (or self-selected) without regard to prevailing politics. Dicko, *Hamallah*, pp. 70, 74–75; Brenner, *West African Sufi*, p. 57; Traoré, *Islam et colonisation*, p. 64.

[19] Rüdiger Seesemann, "The *Shurafâ'* and the 'Blacksmith': The Role of the Idaw ʿAlî of Mauritania in the Career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrâhîm Niasse (1900–1975)," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden, 2004), pp. 72–98.

[20] Even when Hamallah relented to pressures brought to bear by the French and their agent, Seydou Nourou Tal, he did so in a way that dramatized his abstention from worldly matters, e.g., Hamahullah to Teirno Bokar Salif Tall, [1937], op. cit.

Hamawiyya throughout the region and helped to provoke Hamallah's arrest in 1925.[21]

Other Muslim leaders responded positively to Hamallah's claims. His disciples included Cerno Bokar Salif Tal, the great *shaykh* of Bandiagara, whose own student, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, would push ecumenicalism and toleration even further.[22] Scholars in Nioro with Suwarian affiliations were quick to give their support to Hamallah, presumably seeing in him someone capable of restoring both the mercantile vitality of the region as well as someone who was acceptably close to their own model of pragmatic tolerance.[23] Not all of Hamallah's followers were quietist. Certain *hassâni bidân* followers were involved in altercations with other Muslims at Nioro in the 1920s, in clashes in the desert in 1938 and again in 1940, and in violent incidents after Hamallah's death.[24] Yet Hamallah took pains to disassociate himself from the excesses of such followers.[25]

Kaédi played an important though often unacknowledged role in the eleven-bead reform. Before traveling to Nioro and meeting Hamallah, Shaykh al-Akhdar stopped in Kaédi around 1900. Until this point, Sufis in the Bosseya area had been divided between the Kunta branch of the Qâdiri *tarîqa* – popular among Hassaniya-speakers – and the Hâfizi and ʿUmarian branches of the Tijaniyya, which were widespread among Halpulaaren and Soninke. Al-Akhdar reinitiated a number of local Tijanis with instructions to repeat the *jawharat al-kamâl* eleven times only, and these Tijanis became known as "*sapoi-go.*" He also named between four and six *muqaddam*s, including Fodie Abdoulaye Diagana, Fodie Shaykhu Diagana, Fodie Muhammad Yussuf Diagana, and Fodie Abubakar bin Lamb Doucoure, and possibly also Fodie Issakha and Fodie Abdullai Amar. For reasons that remain unclear, but which were probably connected to merchant and political

21 Constant Hamès, "Le premier exile de Shaikh Hamallah et la mémoire hamalliste (Nioro-Mederdra, 1925)," in *Temps des marabouts*, pp. 337–360; Paul Marty, *Etudes sur l'Islam et les tribus du Soudan,* vol. iv, *La région de Kayes – le pays Bambara – le Sahel de Nioro* (Paris, 1920), pp. 218–222. Not all members of the Kaba Jaxite family opposed Hamallah, but those who did used their influence to support Sharif Muhammad Moctar, destined to be one of Hamallah's most powerful opponents. Soares, "Spiritual Economy," pp. 110–112, 115–118; Ba, *Sahel,* pp. 207, 212, 214–217; Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement,* pp. 82–83.

22 The most important sources here are Hampâté Bâ's own writings, and three works by Louis Brenner: *West African Sufi*; "Becoming Muslim in Soudan français," in *Temps des marabouts*, pp. 467–492; and "Amadou Hampâté Bâ: Tijânî francophone," in *La Tijâniyya*, pp. 289–326.

23 For the early affiliation of the Jakhanke with Hamallah, see Soares, "Spiritual Economy," p. 118. However, little work has been done on the Jakhanke of Kaarta-Kingi, and thus the context for their decision remains speculative.

24 Ibid., pp. 132–134.

25 See the letter reprinted in Dicko, *Hamallah*, p. 123. Note, however, that there are significant discrepancies between the text of this letter and the French translation given on pp. 124–125.

networks, affiliation with the eleven-bead movement was almost exclusively restricted to Soninke speakers, ultimately giving further impetus to ethnic divisions in the town.[26]

Though Kaédi's eleven-bead *muqaddam*s had been appointed at least a year before al-Akhdar initiated Hamallah himself and named him his successor, most, but not all, of the *sapoi-go* seem to have accepted Hamallah's leadership by 1909. Affiliation with Hamallah brought with it unexpected consequences. As French fears about the Hamawiyya grew over the course of the 1920s, local Tukulor religious leaders increasingly presented themselves as the defenders of orthodoxy and the social status quo. Those among the Soninke population who had rejected al-Akhdar's and Hamallah's teachings tended to ally with Tukulor elites. For example, the powerful Diagana family was divided between those linked to the three Diagana eleven-bead *muqaddam*s initiated by al-Akhdar and those who remained twelve-beads and who tended to control the neighborhood's religious and political institutions.[27] However, more was at stake than simply local politics. The ᶜUmarian Tijani leadership was strongly opposed to the eleven-bead movement on profoundly religious and ideological grounds, for it seemed to them that eleven-bead Tijanis based their practices on their own, unqualified readings

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[26] The evidence on the exact chronology is conflicting. See Hanretta, "Constructing a Religious Community in French West Africa: The Hamawi Sufis of Yacouba Sylla" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 2003), p. 176n37. The main sources are ltr. Mohammed Mokhtar, Muqaddam Tijani, Cadi de Boghé, 1930 (ANMt E2-32); Roger Lafeuille, "Le Tidjanisme onze grains ou Hamallisme," CHEAM °1189 (1947), p. 4; Capitaine Jean d'Arbaumont, "La confrérie des Tidjania," CHEAM °1411 (1941), pp. 18–19; oral sources and a report by a cmdt. de cer. for Kayes in 1943 cited by Traoré (*Islam et colonisation*, p. 50); and Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Charbonnier), "Compte-rendu, °1099C," Sept 5, 1929 (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 2). The Hâfizi Tijanis traced their *silsila* through Muhammad al-Hafiz via Mawlud b. Muhammad Fal o. Baba of the Idaw ᶜAli; they were associated in Kaédi with Thierno Ousman Bâ. A majority of the Tijanis in Kaédi were ᶜUmarians. Marty, *Etudes sur l'Islam et les tribus maures: Les Brakna* (Paris, 1921), p. 298; A. Dedoud ould Abdellah, "Le «passage au sud»: Muhammad al-Hafiz et son héritage," in *La Tijâniyya*, pp. 69–100; Adama Gnokane, "La diffusion du Hamallisme au Gorgol et son extension dans les cercles voisins: 1906–1945" (Mémoire de fin d'études, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Nouakchott, 1980), p. 27. The names of the first four *muqaddam*s are accepted by Traoré, *Hamahoullah*, 49; Diko, *Hamallah*, pp. 71–72; and Gnokane, "Gorgol," pp. 29–30. Gnokane adds Abdullai Amar, whom he claims was al-Akhdar's host in Kaédi, while Maître Cheickna Sylla adds Fodie Issakha, who was an early follower of Yacouba Sylla (Interview, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001). Amadou Ba seems to have taken Fodie Muhammad Yussuf to be two different individuals, Muhammad Yussuf and Fodie Yussuf (Ba, *Histoire du Sahel*, 204). In addition to Fodie Issakha, Fodie Abdoulaye Diagana and Fodie Muhammad Yussuf Diagana were early followers of Yacouba. Cheikh Chikouna Cissé, "Cheikh Yacouba Sylla et le Hamallisme en Côte d'Ivoire," (Mémoire de DEA, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, 2000), p. 14; and interview with BaThierno Marega, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001.

[27] At least four successive *chefs de village* were drawn from branches of the Diagana, and during the 1920s the Imam of Gattaga was the twelve-bead Alpha Sokhona Diagana, a student of Muhammad Moctar, an avid opponent of Shaykh Hamallah in Nioro. Rapp. pol., Gorgol, July 12, 1923 (ANMt E2–32).

of the key biography of Ahmad al-Tijani, *Jawâhir al-maʿânî*, rather than following the teachings of reputable *shaykh*s who had received *ijâza*s to transmit the text's knowledge.[28]

Tension between eleven- and twelve-bead Tijanis turned into conflicts in the years right after World War One, when a Hamawi preacher named Moulay Omar Ndandio (a Halpulaar scholar linked to one of the leading Tukulor families of Toulde) encouraged the eleven-beads to stop attending the Friday mosque. This resulted in a crisis that seems to have been quieted only by the intervention of Hamallah himself. Relations were strained again in 1922 when the death of Pamara Diagana, Biri Diagana's son and *chef de village* for Gattaga, provoked a succession dispute, with eleven- and twelve-bead Soninke backing different candidates. The administration finally forced both sides to accept a compromise candidate who had family connections to each party. More divisive was the arrival in 1924 of a Hamawi preacher from Bamako named Moulay Idriss who claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (a *sharîf*). Idriss's arrival coincided with an ongoing dispute between eleven- and twelve-bead Soninke over the proper burial rites for a prominent member of the community, and Idriss's presence apparently accelerated the polarization. The resulting conflict only ended when the French expelled him from the town. Compromises also had to be brokered over the Imamate, with the Imam being drawn from the twelve-bead party and the adjunct Imam from among the *sapoi-go*. The colonial administration found itself drawn into each of these cases and, despite formal French policy to remain neutral in "confessional" matters, officials consistently interceded discretely but decisively in favor of the twelve-beads.[29]

In the years immediately before Yacouba's revival in 1929, Kaédi became even more directly involved in the disputes over Shaykh Hamallah. In 1926, following his arrest the previous year after violent clashes involving his

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[28] This was the argument set forth by Al-Hajj Malik Sy in the late 1910s in *Ifham al-munkir al-jani ʿala tariqat sayyidina wa wasilatina ila rabbina Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Tijani* (unpublished MS), cited in Saïd Bousbina, "Un siècle de savoir islamique en Afrique de l'ouest (1820–1920): Analyse et commentaire de la litterature de la confrérie Tijaniyya à travers les oeuvres d'al-Hajj ʿUmar, ʿUbayda ben Anbuja, Yirkoy Talfi et al-Hajj Malik Sy" (Thèse de Doctorat du 3ème cycle, Université Paris I, 1996) (microfiche: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, Lille), pp. 330–332. For more on this argument, see Chapters 4 and 5.

[29] Dumas, "Rapp. pol. ann. Mauritanie, 1930 – annexe: Rapport sur l'activité politique des confréries musulmanes pendant l'année 1930," p. 8 (ANS 2G-30 v. 3); Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu, °1099C"; Rapp. pol., 1ᵉ trim. 1922 (ANMt E2-105); and Gnokane, "Gorgol," p. 34. See also Chapter 4, n46. Another figure, Mohamadou Ibn Youssouph, about whom almost nothing is known, also seems to have preached reform among the Soninke Hamawis of Kaédi in the mid-1920s. Ibn Youssouph is claimed by the Yacoubites as a precursor to Yacouba, who strove to reform the morals of the Muslims of Kaédi, but failed. FOCYS, "Cheikh Yacouba Sylla où le sens d'un combat (1906–1988)" (Privately circulated manuscript, Abidjan, 1999), p. 32.

followers, Hamallah arrived in Mederdra, in the Mauritanian region of Trarza, to serve a ten- year prison detention sentence. Mederdra was about a week's journey from Kaédi and many important disciples of Hamallah travelling to visit their *shaykh* began stopping off at Kaédi along the way. It was on one such journey that Yacouba first visited Kaédi, and one of his brothers soon decided to settle there and open up a shop. By this time, *sapoi-go* constituted a slight majority of the Soninke community and the arrival of pilgrims from throughout the region gave them new visibility within the Hamawiyya as a whole. But Kaédi's new role as a pilgrimage stop only increased the inclination of French administrators to attach political significance to the town's religious divisions.[30] Together with the increased salience of Soninke and Tukulor identities that had followed from early colonial policies, and the substantial inequality consequent on the failure to resolve the issue of status surrounding the city's *anciens capitifs*, the divide between eleven- and twelve-bead Tijanis provided residents of Kaédi in the late 1920s with an array of scripts that could amplify any kind of local conflict.

YACOUBA SYLLA

Yacouba Sylla was not a likely candidate to provoke such a conflagration. Yacouba was born in Gadiaga Kadiel, near Nioro, around 1906, into a family that his mother would later claim was the poorest in the area. Yacoubist oral tradition is the only source of information on Yacouba's early life, and the keepers of the formal tradition are eager to emphasize the profound connection between Yacouba and Shaykh Hamallah. Early in his youth, Yacouba and his brothers moved from the house of their father, N'Passakhona Sylla, into Hamallah's compound, and Yacouba spent much of his childhood and adolescence there. From the beginning, Yacouba is to have evinced an unusually strong attachment to his *shaykh*. According to a story told by his son, Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, if Hamallah was not present Yacouba would not pray with the other disciples, but rather would sit in the *zâwiya*, put his blanket

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30 According to Cmdt. Quegneaux, "Recensement des Tidjanis, village de Gataga, 23 Mars 1930" (ANMt E2-34), there were 744 eleven-bead Soninke and 530 twelve-bead Soninke in Gattaga in 1930. In Kaédi as a whole, the eleven beads were decidedly outnumbered, as virtually the entire Tukulor population remained ʿUmarian. It is unclear exactly what criteria the French used for determining an individual's membership in one group or the other, or whether residents of Gattaga themselves saw the eleven and twelve beads as socially coherent camps. Still, the apparent outbreak of conflicts at moments of spiritual and political importance and the quick polarization of the town during the conflicts of 1929 and 1930 suggest that these had indeed become socially meaningful, public identities by the 1920s.

over his head and sleep; when Hamallah arrived, he would immediately awaken and begin to pray.[31]

Yacouba's devotion brought him to Hamallah's attention, and in or around 1926 he was sent on a mission to Touba. There he was to visit the famous Senegalese *shaykh* Amadou Bamba and his followers, known as the Murids, and to observe what was already known throughout the region as an exemplary fusion of Sufi devotion and collective labor. After staying in Touba for perhaps seven months, Yacouba returned to Mederdra and reported back to Hamallah. Though most sources are vague about Yacouba's experiences in Touba, about the exact purpose of the mission, and about what he told Hamallah, the contexts in which the stories are told and the informal commentary of others present at their telling suggest two interpretations. The first, and by far the more popular if also the most "unofficial," implies that Yacouba's stay in Touba was related to a more general mission to provide for the economic security of the Hamawiyya: he visited Amadou Bamba to learn about new ways of organizing labor and of using wealth to protect a religious community from French interference.[32] The other version, which will be analyzed in Chapter 5, has Yacouba telling Hamallah that Amadou Bamba was "among the chosen of God" and that he had found a way to undo the evils of both materialism and colonialism.[33]

Despite the apparent significance of this mission, Yacouba Sylla seems to have had little authority in the wider Hamawiyya at this time. Indeed, one story highlights the disdain certain Hamawi leaders had for Yacouba from very early on and serves to foreshadow the controversy that would surrounding the Kaédi revival. Yacouba's closest companion was a man named N'Paly Kaba, a young, successful merchant and a budding member of the

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[31] Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, Abidjan, April 12, 2001; on his family, see FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 24.

[32] The literature on Mouride history is beyond extensive. See, for an introduction, Donal Connor Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal* (Oxford, 1971); Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide: la confrérie mouride et les paysans du Sénégal* (Paris, 1980); James F. Searing, *"God Alone is King": Islam and Emancipation in Senegal, The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Portsmouth, NH, 2002); and Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadou Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya* (Athens, OH, 2007). Though no one would commit to this story on record, it was in fact the first story I head about Yacouba Sylla, in Bamako in December 1998. It is often repeated by younger members of the community, in their twenties and thirties, and seems to be most popular in Bamako, which also happens to be the *zâwiya* most strongly affiliated with Kayes. The one written reference is Cisse, "Hamallisme en Côte d'Ivoire," p. 11. Cisse gives no source for this report of the visit, though I believe the story to emanate from the branch of the Yacoubist community affiliated with the influential Seydina Oumar "Baba" Cisse in Kayes. The question of the similarities between Yacouba's communities and the Murids will be taken up at greater length in subsequent chapters.

[33] Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001.

Hamawiyya with business ties to Yacouba's brothers. Inspired by Yacouba's religious passion, N'Paly Kaba is said to have given money to one of the Hamawi *muqaddam*s, Bunafu Nimaga, to establish a *zâwiya* in the town of Kayes, in French Soudan. But when Yacouba and N'Paly Kaba passed through Kayes in 1928 Nimaga refused to allow them to enter the *zâwiya*, considering them insufficiently initiated.[34] In fact, the question of Yacouba's degree of initiation into the Tijaniyya is one of the most controversial in the sources, in part because of its importance for interpreting the revival in Kaédi and the subsequent history of the Yacoubist community. According to an oft-told story,[35] in the years when Yacouba was still living in Nioro, and before Hamallah's first exile, he was chosen to be given authorization to recite the Tijani *wird* as confirmation of his dedication to the *tarîqa* and to Hamallah. But Yacouba refused, being unwilling to promise that he would be equally devoted to Hamallah's successor. This was, to say the least, an unusual act. The question of Yacouba's status in the Hamawiyya and the reason for the prominent place of this story in his hagiography will be discussed later, but what is clear is that, by the end of the 1920s, however devoted Yacouba may have been to Hamallah, he was not an influential or senior member of the Hamawiyya in any conventional sense.

The question of Yacouba's relationship with Hamallah during the months immediately preceeding the revival is even more controversial, because for Yacouba's followers it was then that Hamallah transferred to him some of his spiritual power. The key event is to have taken place in 1929, during the feast of *ʿîd al-adha*, locally known as "Tabaski," the highest of Muslim holy days. During the feast Hamallah offered a ram to all his followers, but showed particular favor to Yacouba by feeding him the best pieces of meat, taking them from his own mouth and placing them directly in Yacouba's.[36] According to some, Hamallah also exchanged prayer beads with Yacouba.[37] During the *dhikr* following the feast, Hamallah asked his followers: "to whom am I going to entrust my obligations so that I might dedicate myself to my meditations and my adoration of God?" Yacouba is to have responded that he would take up this material burden, to the considerable agitation of the other faithful present.[38] After this meeting, Yacouba spent several months in retreat

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34 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, June 7, 2001.
35 Which I give here in a composite version developed from Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, June 7, 2001; Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001; Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 21, 2001; and the FOCYS historical committee, Deux Plateaux, May 24, 2001. A version with important differences is given in FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 24.
36 Maître Aliou Cissé, Abidjan, April 18, 2001.
37 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," 31. Aliou "Mama" Sylla, Gagnoa, April 28, 2001.
38 This story was told to me by several members of the community; its fullest version was given by Maître Aliou Cissé, Abidjan, April 18, 2001.

with Shaykh Hamallah in Mederdra, and then returned to Kaédi convinced of his divine mission.

REVIVAL

Yacouba Sylla's stay in Kaédi in 1929 is treated very differently by administrative sources and by the oral tradition. Discussion of the significance of these differences is the principal subject of Part Two of this book. But insofar as the empirical past can be glimpsed, it looks something like this: When Yacouba first arrived in town,[39] he installed himself in Kaédi's central market and launched into a lengthy sermon, not stopping until the noon *zhuhr* prayer. In the official hagiography, this day marked the "*lancement du premier verbe*," the launching of the first message, a process of spiritual and social transformation guided purely by Yacouba's speech. Yacouba preached a reform of Hamawi–Tijani practices, asking the eleven-beads of Gattaga and the neighboring village of Djeol[40] how they could claim to follow Hamallah when their religion was so deficient. He targeted in particular those practices said to have been "contrary to Islam: sorcery, the placing of curses, hypocrisy, demagogy, and the relaxing of morals."[41] Within days of his arrival Yacouba seems to have acquired substantial authority among Hamawis in Kaédi and Djeol. French observers noted skepticism among Kaédi's elite as to both the orthodxy of Yacouba's religious teachings and the morality of the conduct he was encouraging, not to mention its social implications, but no immediate action was taken against him.

Yacouba's reforms focused on four separate issues, all of which clustered around questions of wealth and sexuality. Immediately upon arriving, Yacouba had objected to the revealing attire some Soninke women of the town had taken to wearing and urged the female members of his host family to adopt more modest dress and to burn their old clothing. He gradually extended this advice to the other Hamawis of the town. It is not clear how many of the residents of Kaédi took Yacouba's advice, but the calls for greater modesty do not seem to have engendered any substantial resistance. Yacouba's second initiative was more inflammatory. In August 1929, the Muslims of the Gorgol region celebrated the annual *mawlid al-nabî* feast marking the

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39 Even the date of his arrival is disputed, Gnokane giving the end of May ("Hamallisme au Gorgol") and the community's traditions placing it in June. FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 31; Cisse, "Hamallisme en Côte d'Ivoire," p. 12.

40 Located 18km upstream from Kaédi, Djeol claims an important history as a religious center, but there is some confusion between two villages on either side of the river with the same name. Olivier Leservoisier, "L'évolution foncière de la rive droite du fleuve Sénégal sous la colonisation (Mauritanie)," *CEA* 34-1-3 (1994), p. 63.

41 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 32.

anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. For many in the Western Sudan the *mawlid* was an occasion for repentance and a time to ask forgiveness for infractions committed against neighbors. Yacouba, however, judged these practices superficial and insincere, and urged the Hamawis of Gorgol to use this year's feast to make more detailed confessions of their infractions. Moreover, he called on them to do so publicly, and to ask forgiveness from the community as a whole for their specific sins. Whether at Yacouba's suggestion or by their own initiative, several confessants startled their neighbors with revelations of adulterous affairs. The administration took note of the uproar that followed and began to actively wonder about the social implications of Yacouba Sylla's preaching.

Yacouba's next reform sparked open debate. In a severe critique of what he saw as the excessive dowries (*mahr*) being demanded for marriage by the elders of Kaédi's Soninke families, Yacouba asked the religious leaders of Gattaga to encourage heads of households to seek only token sums for marrying the women of their families. There was considerable resistance from certain quarters and general uncertainty about the legal grounds for such a limitation, but some were apparently elated. According to legend, after Imam Fodie Issakha agreed to Yacouba's request to set a maximum on dowries, forty-one weddings took place in a single evening.[42] In his final, and perhaps most infamous reform, Yacouba called on his followers to cease wearing gold and sell all the gold they owned. Gold jewelry was a prized possession for many Soninke women, but Yacouba considered it a sign of ostentation and the cause of jealousies within the town. While it is impossible to say how much gold was actually sold during Yacouba's stay in Kaédi, stunned administrators reported that the influx of gold onto the market was sufficient to lower the price for four grams from eighty francs to fifty-five francs and that thousands of francs in value were lost in a matter of days.[43] There are claims that the pressure to sell was so great that a few women hid their jewelry rather than part with it or wear it openly.[44]

The administration had been aware of the long-standing tensions between the *sapoi-go* and the majority twelve-bead Tijanis, and the *commandant de cercle* at the time, named Charbonnier, became concerned that Yacouba's activities would exacerbate them. Suspicious that Yacouba was nothing more than an opportunistic ''marabout'' seeking to stir up trouble for his own profit, Charbonnier approached him at the end of August 1929 and asked him to leave the region, threatening to bring him before a

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42 Cheickna Cisse, ''Hamallisme en Côte d'Ivoire,'' p. 13; Gnokane, ''Hamallisme au Gorgol.''
43 Charbonnier, ''Compte-rendu, °1099C,'' p. 4. In the 1970s, Yacouba explained his attitude toward gold as concern with its role in the ''corruption of the day.'' Traoré, *Islam et colonisation*, p. 207.
44 Gnokane, ''Hamallisme au Gorgol,'' p. 57. Gnokane's source for this claim is unclear.

tribunal if he refused. Yacouba Sylla left Kaédi on August 31st, accompanied by N'Paly Kaba. He set out for his family's home in Nioro, where the local administration had already been instructed to prevent his returning to Kaédi.[45]

By this time, however, a religious revival was fully underway in Kaédi, and Yacouba's absence did little to quell it. Charbonnier felt compelled to forbid women of the neighboring village of Djeol from coming to Gattaga, and sent away one member after another of the Sylla family arriving from Soudan. These latter were, he assumed, coming to transmit Yacouba's latest communications to the faithful. Observers had begun to note changes in the behavior of the eleven-bead population that went beyond Yacouba's stated reforms. In September, Charbonnier recorded that in weekly meetings, the revivalists abandoned much of the standard Tijani *dhikr* and exclusively repeated the *haylallah*, "lâ ilâha illâ 'llâh," "there is no god but God." He was also somewhat disturbed to note the increasing visibility of women, dancing, and "ecstatic trances" in these devotional practices. It is difficult to know how much to make of these claims, since those of Yacouba's opponents who sought to brand him as a heretic and rabble-rouser were responsible for much of the descriptions we have of these early days. Some of the claims, such as the emphasis on the "haylallah," are echoed in Yacoubist hagiographies. But those that reflect a departure from widespread Sufi norms tend to be strongly denied. The most important of these is perhaps the claim that Yacouba had attributed the source of his reforms touching on women's dignity and the institution of marriage to a conversation he had with the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima.[46] French officials seized on this suggestion in particular as revealing the heterodox and antinomian nature of the Yacoubist revival, and they laded it with their own particular imaginary meanings and fantasies.[47]

All of this commotion was not welcomed by the Fulbe residents of Toulde or by the Wolof merchants from Saint-Louis stationed in Kaédi. Furthermore, just under half the Soninke in Gattaga were twelve-beads and they, along with a number of Hamawis, remained aloof from the revival. They believed, for apparently good reason, that the foundations of social and political authority itself were being undermined. Not enough is known about the exact identities of the participants in the revival, but retrospective French

45 Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu, °1099C," p. 5; Lieu. Gouv. Mauritania (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Rapport °12C, Mar 18, 1930, p. 6, citing a letter from Quegneaux, October 6, 1929 (CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6 dossier 3).
46 Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu, °1099C," pp. 4–5.
47 Gouv.-Gén. AOF (Carde) to Lieut. Gouvs. (all colonies), "Circulaire 13 Mars 1930, °133AP," pp. 10–11 (CAOM 1 Affpol 2258/3 dossier 1).

investigations and the oral traditions of the Yacoubists themselves provide some suggestive ideas. A count made by the local French *commandant*, in March 1930, of those who had been "followers" of Yacouba in 1929 indicated that out of 350 total adult followers, 225 of them were women. Most, though not all, of these were probably either unmarried, divorced, or acting independently of their husbands. Among both men and women, some were merchants; a few were important scholars; many were slaves or former slaves; others belonged to stigmatized occupational castes; most seem to have been poor.[48] A revival made up of independent women and poor men from nonelite, and even servile or casted, origin and that flouted religious norms and hierarchies would have touched on virtually every fault line in the community.

In the context of perceived weakening of their control over women and younger men in the wake of labor migration, abolition, and colonial overrule, older men had turned increasingly to other important sources of power at their disposal: the cultural capital of religious education and the main family and clan associations responsible for land allocation. Suggestions that religious leaders were neglecting their obligations to keep moral standards high, that exercising the right of the head of a family to set the material conditions for his daughters' marriages was an impious abuse of prerogative, and that inequalities in wealth were undermining the unity of the Muslim community would have been unwelcome virtually anywhere in the region. In Kaédi these ideas threatened to reopen the faults established by the eleven-bead reform and the drastic changes in networks of political patronage and the rules governing land use.

Not surprisingly, then, tensions between the town's leaders and the active participants in the revival turned into open confrontations. The dry season saw numerous minor altercations, particularly with the residents of Toulde, around the local dispensary, the main market, and on paths giving access to the river.[49] Dieydi (Jedde) Diagana, *chef de village* for Gattaga and a key

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48 In the aftermath of the deaths on February 15, 1930, the administration investigated the *condition sociale* of twenty-two of the dead. Of the fifteen for whom status could be determined, all but one were classified as *anciens captifs*. "Liste de Yacoubists décédés à Gattaga: 15-2-1930" (ANMt E2–34). The information in this document is substantiated by other contemporary observations and by the testimony of members of the Yacoubist community itself. It remains, however, a delicate subject among Yacouba's followers. The basic demographics are given in Cmdt. de Cercle de Gorgol (Quegneaux), "Recensement des Tidjanis," Mar 23, 1930. That women were acting independently can be inferred from the fact that most of Yacouba's followers were poor and that his male followers had complained vocally that they lacked sufficient bridewealth to marry; it is thus unlikely that many of the women in the revival were from polygynous households where the husband was a follower. See Chapters 6 and 7 .

49 Gnokane, "Hamallisme au Gorgol," p. 58. The allocation of recession-watered fields was probably the most politically contentious issue in Kaédi. In 1929–1930, after a year of generally poor rains and low harvests, the rain-fed fields were ravaged by locusts, causing the town to rely even more than usual on contentious recession-fed lands.

intermediary for the French, complained to the administrator that his author-
ity over the Hamawis was vanishing. Diagana's growing weakness seems to
have forced Charbonnier to contemplate appointing someone from a neutral,
respected family as *adjoint chef de village* in order to maintain the govern-
ment's control. The situation came to its first true crisis on the night of
September 18, 1929. Mamadou Ciré, whom officials believed was angling to
be accepted as Yacouba's successor, was arrested for provoking a conflict with
Toulde, and the *cercle*'s guards were called in to suppress a clash between the
two parties.[50]

The arrest of Ciré did little to calm the town, and another crisis came just
two weeks later. In an incident that is shrouded in uncertainty, Charbonnier
either attempted to deport one of Yacouba's prominent female followers,
Sirandou Kaba (known within the Yacoubist community as Yewti Kaba),
or sought to help her rejoin her husband, an employee of the colonial admin-
istration who had been posted to Mederdra.[51] Though the young woman's
father seems to have had mixed feelings about her departure, the leadership of
the revival protested what they took to be interference in family politics and
religious freedom. In the conflicts which followed, several of Yacouba's fol-
lowers were arrested and sentenced to prison and stores of weapons were
seized.[52]

By late 1929, the administration considered Yacouba Sylla a serious threat.
In November he was arrested in Nioro for circulating "insulting and seditious
songs against the French Authority" and sentenced to two months in prison
in Koutiala, French Soudan.[53] The Governor of Mauritania, René Chazal,
insisted that "the troubled spirits brought by [Yacouba's] practices, which
destroyed the principles of family and social organization" were responsible
for the deteriorating situation in Kaédi, despite the young man's deportation.
He therefore commissioned Inspecteur Dumas to uncover "some direct links
between these incidents and the actions of Yacoub [*sic*] in order to support
the argument justifying a request for a longer internment." To Chazal's
chagrin, Dumas concluded that such links "did not exist, Yacoub having
departed long before, and having been kept *sous la main de la justice*."[54] Jules

50 Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Rapport °12C, Mar 18, 1930, p.3; Cmdt. de cer.
    Charbonnier, "Rapport du troisième trimestre, 1929," pp. 11–12 (ANMt E2/111).
51 Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Rapport °12C, Mar 18, 1930, pp. 4–6; Rapp. pol.
    ann. Mauritanie, 1929, p.28 (ANS 2G-29 v. 9); Gnokane, "Hamallisme au Gorgol," p. 59.
52 Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Rapport °12C, Mar 18, 1930, p. 5; also FOCYS,
    "Liste des arrestations et des personnes martyrisées," unpublished document, updated May 25,
    2001, in possession of author. The FOCYS document omits the name of Amadi Gata, who left the
    Yacoubist community some years after these events.
53 Rapp. pol. ann., Soudan, 1929 (CAOM 1Affpol 160).
54 Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Rapport °12C, Mar 18, 1930, p. 38 .

Carde, Governor-General of the Federation of French West Africa (AOF) considered imprisoning Yacouba for a longer (unspecified) duration, but hesitated due to the lack of new evidence.[55]

The same ship that was to have taken Sirandou Kaba to her husband carried Charbonnier to a new post, and he was replaced by Commandant Quegneaux. This change in administration only accelerated the conflicts surrounding the religious revival. Charbonnier had been a veteran of Mauritanian administration where he had developed a fairly positive opinion of Hamawis. During his time at Kaédi he had sought to distinguish what he saw as the distasteful practices of the Yacoubists from specific actions that threatened the peace. Quegneaux, by contrast, brought with him less experience with the Hamawiyya, a clear disdain for Kaédi's Soninke and Halpulaar populations and their religious activities, and a somewhat erratic approach to administration.[56] Events gave him little time to acquaint himself with the situation. On the morning of December 27, 1929, an argument between women from the two neighborhoods turned into a full-scale battle in which around 200 men from Toulde armed with cudgels sought out and attacked Hamawis. Quegneaux and his guards stayed out of the fray, content to protect themselves and the administrative district, taking no clear action to end the conflict. Somehow calm was restored by nightfall, and on the morning of December 28th, notables from both parties came to the Commandant claiming to have reconciled their differences. Yet at that very moment, another 200 men from Toulde, this time accompanied by an equal number of women, entered Gattaga, where they proceeded to set fire to houses, break down the doors of Hamawi shops, and reengage their neighbors in street battles. When order was once again restored, about five hours later, fifty-nine young eleven beads had been wounded, along with sixty of their twelve-bead neighbors.[57]

The administration's response to this round violence was peculiar and inconsistent. At first, some 128 Tukulor were arrested and forced to repair the damage done to the homes and shops of Gattaga. Cerno Amadou Mukhtar Sakho, the *qâdî* of the neighboring town of Boghe, a committed twelve-bead Tijani and a well-respected legal scholar who had just returned from Mecca, was brought in to administer an oath of reconciliation to the residents of the two neighborhoods. The government in Saint-Louis disapproved of the ad

55 Ibid., p. 44.
56 Rapp. Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Min. Col., °133 AP/2, Mar 13,1930; Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, °44AP, Apr 28, 1930; Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux) to Lieut. Gouv. Maur., °190, Apr 22, 1930; telg. ltr. Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Min. Col., °13C, Feb 16, 1930 (all CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6 dossier 3). Resid. Méderdra (Charbonnier) to Lieut. Gouv. Maur., Oct 16, 1926 and Nov 16, 1926 (ANMt E2-32).
57 Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Rapport °12C, 18 Mars 1930, pp. 10–11; Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux) to Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal), °190, April 22, 1930, pp. 1–3.

hoc nature of the punishment Quegneaux had meted out and, pending advice
on its legality, pressured the Commandant to bring the leaders of the attack
before a tribunal. Quegneaux, however, prevaricated and tried to block
attempts to impose a heavy fine on Toulde. Mauritanian Governor René
Chazal again dispatched Inspecteur Dumas to investigate, and Dumas and
Quegneaux wrangled over details for two months while generally ignoring the
situation on the ground.[58] At the federal level, the administration moved
more decisively. The lieutenant governors of Soudan and Mauritania were
able to use the latest violence in Kaédi to convince Governor-General Carde
to take further action against Yacouba. On January 24, 1930, he was arrested in
Koutiala – where he was still in detention on the November charges – and
sentenced to eight years internment in Sassandra in Côte d'Ivoire for the
crime of having engaged in activities "of a nature to compromise public
security."[59]

In Kaédi itself tensions remained high through the beginning of the holy
month of Ramadan in February. On the 13th of that month a man named
Mamadou Sadio, who had previously been marginal to the *sapoi-go* commun-
ity but who was the son of an important figure in local Hamawi history,
organized a meeting outside of town. In attendance was one of Yacouba's
brothers, Demba Sylla, who had arrived in town just that day. The two men
led a discussion of the growing rift with their twelve-bead neighbors and Sadio
tried to position himself as the new leader of the revival. In this he seems to
have had the support of Mamadou Ciré, recently released from his imprison-
ment after the agitations of the previous September. Sadio reportedly told the
gathered crowd that Shaykh Hamallah had appeared to him in a dream and
told him that he disapproved of the actions of Yacouba Sylla, that Yacouba was
in error, and that all those eleven-beads who had begun breaking away from
their families to create a new community should immediately return to their
original households. To bolster the authority of this vision, Sadio presented a
letter which he claimed was from Yacouba (but which, he latter confessed, he
himself had dictated to his brother Mamadou Abdoulaye), affirming that he

58 Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux) to Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal), °190, April 22, 1930, pp. 1–3;
   Lieut. Gouv. Maur. to Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol, °155, Apr 12, 1930(CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6 dossier 3);
   Lieut. Gouv. Maur. to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, °44AP, Apr 28, 1930; Chef service judiciaire AOF to
   Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Apr 11, 1930 (CAOM 14Miom 2177 [9G-67]); and Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal)
   to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Rapport °12C, Mar 18, 1930. On Mukhtar Sakho, see Ibrahima-Abou Sall,
   "Cerno Amadou Mukhtar Sakho: Qadi supérieur de Boghe (1905–1934) Futa Toro," in *Temps des
   marabouts*, pp. 221–245; and Chapter 4.
59 *Arrêté 225*, Gouv.-Gén. AOF (Carde), Jan 27, 1930; Gouv.-Gén. AOF (Carde) to Min. Col., Rapport
   °133AP/2, Apr 13, 1930; *Arrêté 807*, Gouv.-Gén. AOF Apr 11, 1930. Ironically, the detention order was
   published in the *JOAOF* on February 15, 1930, a day that would hold great significance for Yacouba
   and his followers, but for a very different reason.

had indeed erred in his teachings and asking his followers to abandon their new practices.

At the Friday prayer the next morning, Dieydi Diagana, the *chef de village* for Gattaga, announced that a general reconciliation and the ending of hostilities had been brokered by Mamadou Sadio, Mamadou Ciré, and Mamadou Soibou, and that Fodie Amadou, one of the most senior of Yacouba's disciples in Kaédi and previously an opponent of reconciliation, had come to him and made a symbolic act of contrition.[60] On Saturday, the fifteenth or sixteenth day of Ramadan, Mamadou Sadio and Dieydi Diagana prayed together in Gattaga's mosque to mark the new peace. But just as in December, new attacks were timed to coincide with this public display of reconciliation. The events that followed that morning are among the most highly contested in the history of Kaédi, and indeed of the Hamawiyya in general; they form the absolute core of Yacoubist spiritual history and are equally important for Yacouba's opponents. Yet no substantive evidence supports any of the major interpretations of the affair. What is beyond serious doubt is that, when the proverbial dust had settled, twenty twelve-beads from Gattaga had been wounded, including Chief Dieydi Diagana whose finger was partially severed by a knife blade. These losses paled, however, next to those in the Hamawi camp: nineteen men and three women had been killed, and twenty-seven more had been injured, of whom eight or nine would eventually die from their wounds. They had been killed neither by their twelve-bead neighbors nor by the many eleven-beads who had remained aloof from the revival. They had been shot by the contingent of armed guards that defended the French administration.[61]

In the hours that followed the shootings, guards arrested and placed in detention between 100 and 110 of Yacouba's followers. Those deemed "insti-gators" received between ten and twenty years' imprisonment and forced labor, while many who were only peripherally involved – or absent from Kaédi entirely – were placed in detention or under house arrest for an average of four years. The places of detention were spread throughout AOF in an effort to disperse the revivalists and prevent the maintenance of a network

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60 Inspecteur des affaires (Dumas) à Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal), "Rapport de 10 Mars 1930," pp. 7–8; Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux) à Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal), tlg.-ltr. º13C, 16 Février 1930 (CAOM lAffpol 2802/6 dossier 3). Fodie Amadou presented himself with a cord tied around his neck. A translation of the forged letter appears in the Mauritanian archives, signed from Koutiala but undated: "I regret that which I have made you do, that is to say, having you abandon the religion of our Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) and the book of God. I have realized that I did not have the right to do this...." (ANMt E2-33).

61 These events are largely agreed upon by all parties to the affair. The specifics here are drawn from Dumas, "Rapport de 10 Mars 1930," pp. 9–16; and Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux) à Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal), º13C.

among them.[62] Based on administration estimates, approximately 625 followers of Yacouba had been living in Gattaga on February 14, 1930. Two days later, fewer than 500 remained alive and free and only twenty-six of those were adult men. The revivalists had been transformed overnight into a group of widows, orphans, and some old men.[63]

CONCLUSIONS

If the story of Yacouba Sylla and his followers stopped on Feburary 15, 1930, its lessons might be clear. The socioeconomic shifts brought to the Middle Senegal Valley by the rise of southern groundnut farming and the withering of slaveholding had put gender, age, and status norms under stress. These stresses were sufficiently exacerbated by colonial interventions in local patronage networks, systems of land tenure, and ethnic institutions to provide both sufficient grounds and opportunity for a social revolt. Yacouba Sylla was merely the catalyst. Seen this way, the revolt clearly failed, suppressed by local elites in cooperation with a French administration that was willing to see connections between religious heterodoxy and social radicalism. But the fact that the twelve-bead majority had mobilized the administration by invoking Yacouba's threat to orthodoxy sanctioned the claims by revivalists that their grievances were moral and spiritual ones. Since these fundamental grievances had hardly been addressed, the revival continued to seem an attractive vehicle, or at least metaphor, for organizing social action. In turn, the violent suppression of the revival and the nearly unanimous opposition to it by the town's elite seemed to confirm that Yacouba's spiritual vision had clear practical, temporal implications. Struggles to confront social injustice could thus be easily narrated as evidence of the revival's continuing effervescence. But neither interpretive impulse could have enabled either participants or detractors to foresee the dramatic turn that Yacouba Sylla's fortunes would soon take.

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62 It was thus that Yacouba's followers found themselves in Natitingou, Farafoye, and Atiwo in Dahomey; in Koudougou, Tinkedougou, and Fada N'Gourma in Upper Volta; in Bougouni and Sikasso in Soudan; in Faranah in Guinea; in Tidjikdja, Divo, Bocanda, Boukourou, Saraféré, Abengourou, and Sassandra in Côte d'Ivoire; and in a number of places in Mauritania, including at least Port-Etienne, Aleg, Moudjeria, and Nouakchott.

63 Gnokane, ''Hamallisme au Gorgol,'' 66. Gnokane's tabulations are apparently based on Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux), ''Recensement des Tidjanis,'' Mar 23, 1930. Lieut. Gouv. Chazal gave even lower figures: 130 adult women, 220 children, and no adult men. It seems likely that this only included Kaédi, where Quegneaux's numbers may have included Djeol. Furthermore, Chazal's report was written sooner after the events themselves, and thus his information may not have been as accurate as Quegneaux's. Rapport, Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, °12C, Mar 18, 1930, p. 32.

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Making a Community: The "Yacoubists" from 1930 to 2001

HAD THE STORY ENDED IN FEBRUARY 1930, YACOUBA SYLLA'S revival would be little more than an important event in one town's history and an example of popular religious effervescence. But through the anachronism that makes all historical understanding possible, the actions taken after 1930 by Yacouba and some of his surviving followers changed the significance of those months in Kaédi. On the one hand, the coming into existence of a coherent, affluent "Yacoubist" community facilitated the codification and creative transmission of an oral tradition about Yacouba and the revival, in turn making research into the memories and experiences of individual "members" of that community possible. This changed drastically what could be "known" about the Yacoubists and their history and thus the significance that could be attached to them. On the other hand, the wealth and influence that the Yacoubists came to enjoy challenged everyone involved in their past – French officials, Tijani leaders, West African politicians, and not the least the Yacoubists themselves – to offer assessments or interpretations of those events. Thus while it is the violence and death of February 15, 1930, that stands as the formative moment in Yacoubist history, it is the subsequent development of a community of believers who take that event as formative that gives their history its shape.

A PRISON COMMUNITY

The administration moved quickly to restore control over Kaédi and to reassert itself as the only legitimate source of authority. The arrest and deportation of Yacouba's followers had left the central part of town firmly in the hands of the twelve-beads of Toulde and those Soninke who had either opposed Yacouba or remained neutral in the conflict. Believing that they needed to act quickly lest these groups see their victory over Yacouba's disciples as a validation of their "vigilantism," the Governor of Mauritania, with the support of the head of the judicial service of AOF, persuaded Governor-General Carde to impose a fine of 10,000F on the residents of Toulde as belated punishment for the anti–*sapoi-go*

Côte d'Ivoire
circa 1938

Main Yacoubist Zawiyas

Minor Zawiyas, Commercial
and Agricultural Centers

Detention Site

Niger

Togo

Volta Blanche

Volta Rouge

Gold
Coast

Volta Noire

Komoé

Abengourou

Adzopé

Grand-
Bassam

Côte
d'Ivoire

Bandama

Sinfra

Oumé

Divo

Abidjan

Gulf of Guinea

Soudan
Français

Sassandra

Daloa

Gagnoa

Kokolopozo

Sassandra

Guinée

Liberia
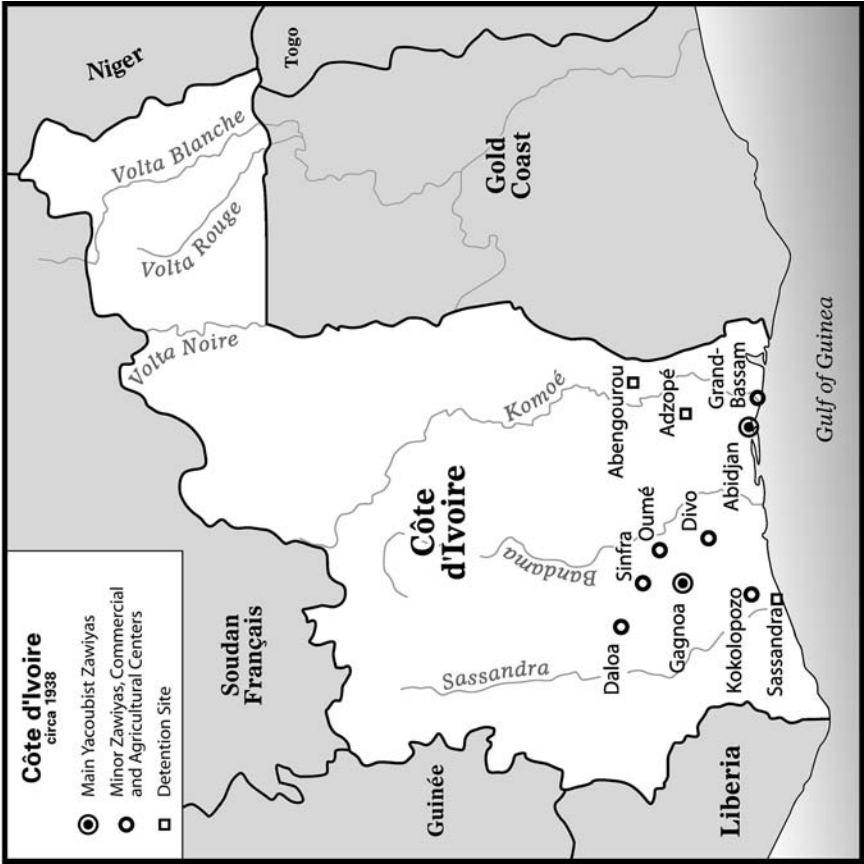
incidents of late December 1929.[1] Officials pointed to the fine as evidence of their ethnicity-blind equanimity: "Though this aggression [of December 1929] was brought about by inadmissible provocations on the part of the 'eleven' – whose attitude has already been sanctioned by the imprisonment of Yacouba Sylla in Côte d'Ivoire – it is important, in applying the proposed sanction to the village of Toulde, to establish our willingness to punish all instigators of disorder, to whichever clan they belong."[2]

Such claims did not, however, alter the fact that Kaédi had become a particularly unpleasant place for Yacouba's remaining followers. Even beyond the memory of the deaths that had taken place there, those left behind found their neighbors hostile and unwilling to accept them as part of the community. When the administration tried to encourage the widows and orphans of the exiled men to return to their former lives, they found that "no honorable twelve-bead family [wanted] to take responsibility for the eleven-bead women and children, even when linked to them by ties of blood." Quegneaux was forced instead to place them under the control and surveillance of the *commissariat de police*. Under these conditions, some forty of Yacouba's followers preferred to publicly become twelve-beads, and many of his female followers ceased to practice Yacouba's teachings openly.[3] Not even other Hamawis provided support: in November 1929, Hamallah himself is to have written a letter "renounc[ing] all those who claim to be associated with him who, like Yacouba Sylla and the people of Kaédi, say they follow him but act contrary to the law of the Prophet and the commandments of the Tijaniyya."[4]

The shootings, arrests, deportations, and denunciations may have stopped the revival in Kaédi, but they did not put an end to preaching and

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1   Though this was considerably lower than the originally proposed fine of 26,000F, it was larger than the 6,000F Quegneaux had apparently convinced the administration to impose before 15 February. At least some of the wrangling over the fine was the result of a power struggle between Lieutenant Governor Chazal and Commandant Quegneaux. See: Gouv.-Gén. AOF, draft *Arrêté*, 1929 (ANMt E2-34); Rapport, Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal) to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, °12C, Mar 18, 1930 (CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6 dossier 3); Lieut. Gouv. Maur. to Cmdt. de cer. (Quegneaux), °155, Apr 12, 1930 (CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6 dossier 3).

2   Lieut. Gouv. Maur. to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, °12C, Mar 18, 1930; Chef de Service Judiciare de l'AOF to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Apr 11, 1930 (CAOM 14 Miom/2177 (9G-67)). *Arrêté gén.* °807, Apr 11, 1930.

3   The suppression of the Yacoubists may have also intimidated eleven-beads who had kept their distance from Yacouba. Lieut. Gouv. Maur. to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, °12C, Mar 18, 1930,p. 33; Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux), Annexe to Rapp. pol. cer. de Gorgol, 2ᵉ trim. 1930 (ANMt E2-105); Rapp. pol. cer. de Gorgol, 3ᵉ trim. 1930 (ANMt E2-100); Rapp. pol. cer. de Gorgol, 4ᵉ trim. 1930 (ANMt E2-100); Rapp. pol. cer. de Gorgol, 1ᵉ trim. 1931 (ANMt E2-31).

4   The original of this letter does not seem to have survived. It is attested in Resident de Méderdra to Lieut. Gouv. Maur., Nov 7, 1929 (ANMt E2-32). The administrator, Romieux, notes that Hamallah made this declaration and signed it at his request. It is unclear whether Yacouba or those close to him were aware of Hamallah's statement.

organizing. In late 1930, Yacouba's followers who remained active slowly began to reorient themselves toward the distant south. In April of that year, Shaykh Hamallah had been transferred from Mederdra in Mauritania to Adzopé in Côte d'Ivoire, where the administration hoped the largely non-Muslim population would be impervious to his ''agitation'' and where his Malian and Mauritanian followers would have a hard time traveling to visit him. But for Yacouba's followers, with both of their *shaykhs* in Côte d'Ivoire and with Kaédi relatively inhospitable, the journey beckoned. Sassandra, Adzopé, and the surrounding cities of southern Côte d'Ivoire quickly saw an influx of those seeking to visit the detained leaders. Among the first to move south were the spouses and families of those who had been exiled to Côte d'Ivoire. The administration itself facilitated these relocations. Officials apparently hoped to further drain Kaédi of its ''subversive'' elements, confident that Côte d'Ivoire would be immune to their agitation and hoping that by separating the key families from one another their religious ''fervor'' would diminish and the movement would dissolve.[5]

Soon after the deportations, however, French intelligence officers intercepted evidence that the Yacoubist ''networks'' had not been dismantled. Yacouba's followers were in frequent postal communication, exchanging news about their conditions and those of their families, collecting information about the locations in which each group was detained, and sharing news of the outside world.[6] Some wrote to Yacouba asking his permission to carry out certain devotional practices, making clear that they still considered him an unambiguous source of spiritual authority. Through this correspondence Yacouba's followers began trying to make sense of what had happened to them. In a letter to Yacouba in November 1931, Yahya Marega assured him that those who had been imprisoned in Faranah, Guinea, remained loyal and that he understood his punishment not as the doing of the French but as an act of God. Marega's letter echoed the teachings of his *shaykh*, who, according to tradition, had impressed upon his followers a sense of their role in a sacred history even before he left Kaédi. Marega also drew an explicit parallel between the community's

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5   See, for example, Rapp. pol. cer. de Gorgol, 3ᵉ trim. 1931 (ANMt E2-31), in which Quegneaux asks that the female relatives of a disciple of Yacouba be granted permission to move to Côte d'Ivoire: ''The distancing of these unhealthy elements [from Kaédi] would be a good policy. The general population was very pleased to see them leave.''

6   For example, Abdoulaye ibn Fodie Mamadou Lamine to Fodie Amadou ibn Fodie Abdoulaye, Mar 22, 1932 [date translated by administrative interpreter], (ANCI X-13-253(9245) 1E-78). Only French translations of these letters have been preserved in the Ivoirian archives. The original Arabic texts are missing. It may be that they are included in the collection of documents possessed by Jean-Louis Triaud; unfortunately I was not allowed to consult those materials.

experience and the acts of the renowned religious reformers of earlier centuries and the Prophet Muhammad himself. "We are," he told Yacouba, "along with our lord Cheikh Ahmed Hamahoullah, emigrants by intention, for it is to this death and this ostracism that we have aspired, God, Master of the Universe, be praised." Amadou Diadie Diom, who translated the now-missing original letter for the Mauritanian administration, indicated that the word Marega had used for "emigrants" was the Arabic word *muhâjirûn,* derived from *hijra*, emigration or withdrawal.[7] For most Muslims *hijra* was an unambiguous reference to the Prophet Muhammad's emigration from Mecca to Medina, the event that marked the birth of the first Muslim community. *Hijra* was a common allusion in nineteenth-century reformist rhetoric as scholars drew on the Prophet's biography for a template for understanding their own persecution by impious elites. The use of *muhâjirûn* suggested that Yacouba's followers were beginning to adopt this model for themselves, that they understood the trial they were undergoing as having deep spiritual significance, and that they had begun to think of themselves as constituting a community, a microcosm of the Muslim *umma* as a whole.

In response, officials tried to restrict the movements of Yacouba's followers, kept closer tabs on visitations, and carefully analyzed all correspondence between Yacouba and Hamallah. Such efforts had little effect. In 1932, as some of Yacouba's followers emerged from prison, administrators grew worried at what seemed a very unexpected attitude among the detainees toward their new residences. Exiling the Yacoubists to distant corners of the Federation, and particularly to Côte d'Ivoire, was intended to isolate them and break their spirit, cleanse them of the revivalist taint so they could be reintegrated into society. But rather than quickly returning to Kaédi and their pre-revival lives, some expressed a desire to stay in their new homes in the south. First, Amadi Gata Kaba, the brother of N'Paly Kaba and father of Sirandou Kaba, attracted the attention of the Governor of Côte d'Ivoire when, a full two months after his release, he had made no efforts to leave. Pressured to return to Mauritania, he claimed that the disruption caused to his business affairs by his imprisonment had left him unable to collect on debts owed him, and that he thus lacked the money to return to Kaédi. By January 1933, he had established himself in the town of Gagnoa and refused to leave. Then in February, Diapaga

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7 In the same letter Marega, who would later become the *chef de communauté* at Kaédi, asked Yacouba for permission "to have a ring made to wear on my finger... [F]or since you defended us at Kaédi, me, I have never sought to disobey your orders." Nov 29 or 30, 1931 (ANCI X-13-253(9245) 1E-78). Rings bearing the words *tilmidh shaykh hamah'ullah*, "disciple of Shaykh Hamallah," are currently worn by every member of the community.

Bouna "Abdousalam" Tandia and Kaou N'Badoxo, both working in nearby Divo, informed the local administrator that they too lacked the funds to return with their families to Mauritania, and preferred to stay in Côte d'Ivoire.[8] Perhaps most significantly, by March 1932, some forty *sapoi-go* had managed to join Yacouba in Sassandra, where the *shaykh* remained in close contact with his followers, even receiving shipments of dates from them.[9]

 Administrators initially assumed that Yacouba's followers were merely using Côte d'Ivoire as a staging ground from which to return to Kaédi *en masse* once a larger number had been released.[10] Eager to avoid such a scenario, frustrated officials sought to force these recalcitrant expatriates to return home. But as early as July 1932, the Governor-General of AOF reluctantly told the Governor of Côte d'Ivoire that, in principle, once they had been released from detention Yacouba's followers were free to settle wherever they chose. Yacouba's followers themselves gave very different explanations for their behavior. Some, like Kaba and Tandia, emphasized financial reasons for their desire to stay in Côte d'Ivoire. At least one important member of the community gave a more forward-looking justification for staying. Mamadou Kaba Sylla, one of Yacouba's brothers, wrote to the Governor of Côte d'Ivoire in 1933:

> I ask you to leave me in Côte d'Ivoire. I no longer wish to return to Nioro, my place of birth. Why? I no longer wish to go to Nioro because I have no family there. . . . All of my relatives are in Côte d'Ivoire. I ask you . . . to leave me here, beside my family, so that I might establish a coffee and cacao plantation.[11]

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8 Adm. Indénié to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., July 16, 1932; teleg. ltr. Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Adm. Abengourou, Aug 10, 1932; Adm. Adj. Indénié (Raoul), unaddressed, Aug 20, 1932; Lieut. Gouv. Maur. to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., Feb 16, 1933; Amadi Gata Kaba to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., Jan 28, 1933; Amadi Gata Kaba, unaddressed, Oct 20, 1933; teleg. ltr. Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Adm. Grand-Lahou, Feb 22, 1933; Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Lieut. Gouv. Maur., Feb 22, 1933 (all ANCI X-13-253(9245) 1E-78). Amadi Gata would later leave the community, apparently under unpleasant circumstances. Interestingly, the Yacoubist leadership expressed considerable surprise and confusion at the idea that Amadi Gata had installed himself in Gagnoa in 1933, so it is unclear whether this fact at all influenced Yacouba's subsequent decision to build his *zâwiya* there.
9 Yacouba Sylla to Ahmad Abdoulaye ibn Hamahoullah, Mar 18, 1932 (ANCI X-13-253 [9245] 1E-78). Significantly, in this letter to one of Hamallah's sons, Yacouba speaks of forty *tilamidhs* being in Sassandra, referring apparently without distinction to his own followers and those of Hamallah.
10 Teleg. ltr. Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., July 20, 1932; Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Adm. Indénié, Dec 4, 1933; Deuxième bureau to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., Jan 11, 1933; Descemet, Acting Lieut. Gouv. Maur., to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, [early 1933], °227 AP-CF (all ANCI X-13-253(9245) 1E-78). The same Descemet wrote the original report on Hamallah that had inspired the latter's imprisonment in 1924. See the discussion in Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960* (Cambridge, UK, 1988), pp. 173–174.
11 Kaba Sylla to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., Nov 13, 1933 (ANCI X-13-253(9245) 1E-78).

By 1934, Bouna "Abdousalam" Tandia and Kaou N'Badoxo had themselves established thriving plantations in Divo and were also engaged in petty commerce.[12]

In retrospect, the administration recognized the logic in such decisions. Had the Yacoubists returned to towns like Kaédi or Nioro in the north they would indeed have been outnumbered by their opponents and dependent upon them for their livelihood. Côte d'Ivoire provided a protected base in which to rebuild while remaining in contact with Yacouba. Disturbed by this turn of events, Acting Governor of Soudan Gabriel Descemet concluded:

> It would thus appear that the spiritual cohesion of the Sarakolle [Soninke] disciples of Sharif Hamallah has not been shaken. It would also appear that the calm that reigns over the Yacoubists is due only to the momentary distance of its principle leaders, certain of whom, including Amady Gata Kaba, whose prison sentence has ended, appear to be willing to sacrifice their lives for the Hamallist doctrine.[13]

The administration was thus braced in 1933 for a new "outbreak" of fervor from Yacouba's followers, and seems to have expected it either in Côte d'Ivoire itself or in Kaédi if that "critical mass" of followers ever did decide to return north.

FODIE SYLLA AND THE END OF MILITANCY

In fact a new round of confrontation did begin, but not in the way the administration expected. What most surprised the administration was the location of the new "conflagration." The French had underestimated the appeal of Yacouba's reputation and teachings to disaffected colonial subjects outside the Hamawiyya. For the next crisis came not from a concentrated group of Hamawis, but from a small group of northern migrants and local Fulbe in the town of Koutiala in the eastern part of French Soudan. Koutiala had been the location of Yacouba's brief detention in 1929 after his arrest in Nioro. He was accompanied there by his brother Fodie Sylla, who had been arrested at the same time. When Yacouba was transferred to Sassandra, Fodie stayed behind to finish his two-year sentence. The French had chosen Koutiala because it seemed distant from potential sympathizers, with no Hamawis nearby. But there were many Muslims in the area, and the presence of Yacouba and Fodie in the small town did not go unnoticed. The transfer of Yacouba and Hamallah to Côte d'Ivoire had inspired many Muslim scholars to travel south of the usual paths, and Koutiala proved a useful stopping-over point. Between 1930 and 1931, the

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12 Teleg. ltr. Cmdt. cer. Lahou to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., June 18, 1934 (ANCI IV-48/1(3327)).
13 Descemet to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, [early 1933].

administration noticed more and more religious scholars moving along this axis, exchanging students and letters, helping to maintain links among exiled Hamawis and between them and the north.[14]

Exactly what role the Muslim community of Koutiala played in this network is uncertain, but the town itself was unquestionably a thorn in the administration's side during the early 1930s. Though understaffed, Koutiala was the site of considerable attention between 1932 and 1933, to the regret of many of its inhabitants. *Chantiers* employed forced labor extensively in the area and local officials launched a development project pushing people to produce shea nut butter. Koutiala and its surrounding villages also suffered from regular panzootics and pandemics, including serious outbreaks of bovine pest and trypanosomiasis in 1932 and 1933. Cuts in administrative budgets had forced the Governor to assign the local *commandant de cercle*, named Vendeix, to "double duty" administering the *cercles* of both Koutiala and Sikasso, a vast area distant from the major centers of French control. In August 1932, Vendeix became convinced that a small group from the village of Djébé had been "systematically obstructing . . . the collection of taxes." Since officials refused to credit any kind of political consciousness to rural West Africans it was axiomatic that, absent a serious natural disaster, such tax resistance was "without motive." Vendeix sent a guard and the local *chef de canton* to the village to arrest the troublemakers, and they proceed to lock approximately fifteen men inside two small buildings overnight. By the next day, ten of them had died of asphyxiation, provoking a minor scandal and administrative crisis.[15]

Official reports described the population of the district as, contradictorily, both given to "fatalism" and in an almost permanent state of "mutiny." In this context officials responded quickly when, seven months later, Fodie Sylla and eighteen others were discovered in what the French believed was a plot to massacre the local administration and their African allies. Fodie Sylla had been released from detention in December 1931, after which he traveled around French Soudan, visited Yacouba in Sassandra in Côte d'Ivoire, and eventually returned to Koutiala where he asked to remain. He had then begun teaching and speaking to various Muslims in the area and gathered a small but dedicated following, largely among immigrants from Nioro and Kaédi, but of whom approximately

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14 See the multitude of letters and reports in ANCI IV-48/1(3327), particularly teleg. ltr. Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Adm. Sassandra, Nov 25, 1930; teleg. ltr. Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Adm. Bouaké, Nov 5, 1930; Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Adm. Bassam, Oct 6, 1930; "Renseignements d'ordre politique, cercle de Koutiala, August 10, 1934"; Adm. Bocanda to Adm. N'Zi Comoé, Sept 11, 1934; circular Gouv.-Gén. AOF to all colonies, May 25, 1931; Cmdt. cer. Lahou to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., June 18, 1934.

15 Rapports tournée, Koutiala, 1933 (ANMK 1E-56). Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Ministre des Colonies, Oct 1, 1932; Lieut. Gouv. Soudan to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Oct 7, 1932; Lieut. Gouv. Soudan to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Dec 22, 1932; Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Ministre des Colonies, Apr 4, 1933 (all CAOM 1Affpol 603/7).

eight were from the Koutiala district. This was the group that was accused of plotting with him to murder the local administration.[16]

The actual evidence against Fodie Sylla was largely circumstantial, and at one point the Governor of Soudan expressed concern that any conviction against him and his associates would be overturned on appeal.[17] But the plot that the French believed they had thwarted resonated with the worst fears of an overworked, fragile administration already convinced that the Hamawiyya's very existence posed a deadly threat to them. A local inform-ant had told investigators that Fodie Sylla had been assuring his followers that "the whites no longer mattered . . . they were out of breath." As proof he is to have pointed to "the decline in automobile traffic and the com-mercial stagnation" since 1930. French weapons, he claimed, "were no longer dangerous, their ammunition was of a low quality and perfectly harmless."[18] French response was swift and severe. Nineteen men (five of whom were convicted *in absentia*) were given prison sentences ranging from ten to twenty years, to be followed by equally lengthy periods of detention.[19]

It is hard to say whether the language used by this "informant" accurately reflected Fodie Sylla's ability to capitalize on the loss of French prestige as a result of the Great Depression, or simply the ability of this anonymous individual to accurately read officials' anxieties about such a loss. The Bureau of Muslim Affairs in Paris placed the blame for the incident squarely on the local administration, noting that if the general public had not had reason to be hostile toward the French in the first place, it would have been impossible for such a small number of people to even contemplate such an action. Officials' frustration only grew when four of the five men who had been

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[16] Lieut. Gouv. Soudan to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Dec 2, 1932; Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Ministre des Colonies, °917AP/2, Aug 31, 1934 (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 3); Rapp. pol., Soudan, 1932, and Rapp. pol., Soudan, 1933 (ANMK 1E-1); "Relevé et extrait du régistre d'écrou, cercle du Koutiala, 1933" (ANMK 2M-90).

[17] Descriptions of the charges against Fodie Sylla vary considerably from one report to another. The initial description provided to the Governor-General and thus to the Minister of Colonies claimed that Fodie had been plotting to massacre the entire French and pro-French community in Kou-tiala. Subsequent reports indicated that they had committed "acts of a nature troubling to the internal peace of the colony" (Rapp. pol., Soudan, 1934 [ANMK 1E-1]). The administration asked both Dakar and Paris to give their opinion on how likely the verdict was to be overturned as early as May 1933 (Anonymous letter, A°629, May 2, 1933 [ANMK 1E-89]). Concern over the legitimacy of the conviction delayed Fodie's transfer to Kidal for almost a year. (Anonymous letter, A°93, Jan 19, 1934 [ANMK B-28]). It seems clear that the administration had been eager to find reasons to restrict Fodie's movements even before the evidence of any plot emerged. In 1932 the Governor of Soudan had written that Sylla "continued to be the object of close surveillance, and all useful sanctions will be taken against him, if need be" (Rapp. pol., Soudan, 1932, p. 24).

[18] Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Ministre des Colonies, Aug 31, 1934, p. 3.

[19] "Relevé et extrait du régistre d'écrou, cercle du Koutiala, 1933."

sentenced *in absentia* never materialized, apparently having been protected, either in flight or in hiding, by the local community.[20] If the plot was genuine, then the fact that Fodie had been able to operate in the area for over a year without the French taking notice of his activities (indeed it was apparently only by serendipity that a guard accompanying the Commandant on an inspection "overheard" the plot being discussed) indicates a fair amount of support, or at least studied disinterest on the part of the local population. Furthermore, while little is known about the religious history of this area during these years, it appears that a conflict had been raging in the months before the "plot," in which local members of the Qâdiriyya and some twelve-bead Tijanis had refused to recognize the authority of a local Imam. It is unclear if this crisis had any relationship with Fodie Sylla's preaching, but the Governor did note that it was only after Fodie's arrest that it was possible to mend the rift.[21]

What the administration most feared in Koutiala was not a simple skirmish among competing Muslim "sects" or an isolated anticolonial revolt, but a religious movement that articulated real social grievances. They were thus careful to look for any evidence suggesting a link between Fodie Sylla's actions and the earlier crisis in Djébé. Fodie was reported to have claimed that once the French were chased out, there would no longer be any need to pay the *impôt*, and a report in 1933 had claimed that he had been "campaigning against the *impôt* and the giving of unpaid services [to the administration]." In the *cercle* of Dokuy officials reported that the reputation of "the marabout who prohibits the wearing of jewelry and gold" had spread even among non-Muslim Fulbe, and that the administration was experiencing increasing difficulty in collecting the annual tax.[22] This was enough for those predisposed to make the connection between Fodie's preaching and an incipient large-scale Islamic uprising. As a result Fodie Sylla spent over twenty-five years in prison at Kidal, in northern Soudan, where his relatives maintain he was subjected to torture and perpetual corporal punishment. Even then the administration considered him a threat and asked Hamallah himself to keep Fodie from agitating against the French from prison.[23]

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[20] Rapp. pol., Soudan, 1933, p. 70. Anonymous note, Dec 14, 1934, on letterhead of the Ministre des Colonies, Affaires musulmanes (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3). Rapport politique, Soudan, 3ᵉ trimestre, 1933, p. 2 (ANMK 1E-23).

[21] Rapp. pol., Soudan, 1933, p. 117.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Vincent Joly, "La réconciliation de Nioro (septembre 1937): Un tournant dans la politique musulmane au Soudan français?" in *Le temps des marabouts: itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880–1960*, ed. David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris, 1997), pp. 371–372.

Letters seized when Fodie Sylla was arrested revealed that he had been in correspondence with N'Paly Kaba and with other fellow disciples imprisoned in Mauritania. The existence of a network of communication linking Fodie with other Yacoubists provoked fears that his plot was part of a new round of coordinated uprisings across AOF. Surveillance reports were commissioned to determine the effect of his capture on the rest of the community, and while these turned up no troubling information, high-ranking members of the administration continued to suspect further agitation. Governor Descemet, long hostile to the Hamawiyya, wrote to the Governor-General insisting that the apparent calm of the Yacoubist community was "all a show" and that they could be easily re-excited by further provocation.[24]

The reality was quite different. Hamawis in general and those around Yacouba in particular acted quickly to distance themselves from Fodie Sylla and to project an attitude of cooperation and peacefulness.[25] On May 15, 1933, the *commandant de cercle* of Koutiala received a letter from Yacouba expressing regret for his brother's actions and seeking permission to supervise him personally: "I ask you to send my brother Fodie Sylla here to me. . . You must know that he cannot be anything unless he is next to me. He is mad, he has no spirit. Once he comes here, until his death he will not do anything [to trouble you]."[26] The administration declined the offer, but Yacouba was true to his word. Never again would the Yacoubists confront the administration – outside, that is, of the ballot box.

CONSOLIDATING THE COMMUNITY

Instead, Yacouba Sylla and his followers turned their attention toward breathing life into the community they had imagined into being after 1930. While in prison in Sassandra, Yacouba had already begun to shift his public, visible activities away from preaching and religious reform and toward commerce and market agriculture. In this he mirrored the efforts of those of his followers who had moved to Côte d'Ivoire who had set up plantations in Divo, Gagnoa, and elsewhere. These moves made good economic sense. The early 1930s saw many in French West Africa intensify agricultural production for export in response to falling personal incomes and a renewed commitment on the part of the administration to encourage (and sometimes compel) the planting of coffee and cocoa. As a result, there were ample opportunities to

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24 Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Lieut. Gouv. Maur., Aug 21, 1934 (CAOM 14Miom/2191 (9G-86)).

25 Lieut. Gouv. Soudan to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, Sept 25, 1934 (CAOM 1Affpol/2802/6/4).

26 Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Min. des Col., August 31, 1934, p. 5 (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3). The events of Koutiala receive little attention in the official hagiography of the community and are minimized by its leadership. For a discussion of this, see Chapter 5.

market crops for those who could organize sufficient labor to grow them. Most of the time they did not have to look far. Prices for local goods remained low as taxes grew higher to service the colonial debt, producing some of the highest levels of poverty of the twentieth century. Many young men responded by seeking wages from planters large and small, providing a willing and flexible labor force.[27]

But if market agriculture and petty commerce were going to be the material foundations of the community, the principles of its organization, the nature of authority within it, and above all, its connection to the revivalist movement in Kaédi remained unclear. During the years of imprisonment, some Yacoubist men had made efforts to reassert the gender and age hierarchies that seem to have been suspended during the revival itself. Sharing the assumption made by French officials that the removal of most adult men from Kaédi would lead inexorably to the dispersal of the revival's energy and the dissolution of the ties among followers, Fodie Ahmadou Abdoulaye Diagana, acting on orders from Yacouba that the latter had himself received in a vision, advised the widows of those martyred at Kaédi to marry other Yacoubists *in absentia*. Fodie Diagana insisted that none should marry anyone other than another follower, expressing this in an aphorism that remains popular in the community: "Salimata xawancha ni Salimata, Djeneba xawancha ni Djeneba," "the equal of a Salimata is a Salimata, that of a Djeneba is a Djeneba." The community's official policy on marriage would later stress that the consent of both persons was absolutely necessary and that marriage was ultimately an affair of individuals and the community, not families. Indeed, this was the meaning Yacoubists would latter attach to the reforms of bridewealth in 1929. Yet Fodie Diagana not only advised widows to marry other members, he selected the most suitable partners for them, making these matches from his prison in distant Aleg, in northern Mauritania. Yet Yacoubist leaders would insist that there was no contradition here, for Fodie Diagana's choices were made with the assistance of visions that were always perfectly consonant with the wishes of those concerned, "so that his 'advice' was followed by the faithful as if it were an instruction."[28]

In 1934, N'Paly Kaba was released from prison and returned to Kaédi. His first priority was to bring the community in Kaédi back under the protection of the Yacoubist leadership, which meant back under the

27 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "The Colonial Economy of the Former French, Belgian and Portuguese Zones, 1914–1935," in *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 7, *Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880–1935*, ed. A. Adu Boahen (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 351–381; John Rapley, *Ivoirien Capitalism: African Entrepreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire* (Boulder, 1993), pp. 4–5, ch. 2.
28 FOCYS, letter to author, June 3, 2001; Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 21, 2001; Descemet to Gouv.-Gén. AOF [early 1933]. All quotes are from the FOCYS document.

control of male elders. Hagiographic sources maintain that upon his return N'Paly Kaba was summoned by the *commandant* and warned to avoid any further agitation. Kaba is to have reassured him, responding: "I am the father of all those orphaned here." Yacouba himself echoed this paternalist language, naming N'Paly Kaba *chef de famille* for Kaédi, and giving him and Issa (or Soueibou) Diagana responsibility for supervising the Yacoubist followers in the northern-most places of detention, towns as far away as Atar and Nouakchott. In return N'Paly Kaba and his immediate family expressed their subordination to Yacouba by organizing an annual pilgrimage to his compound in Gagnoa.[29]

Integrating the Ivoirian branch of the community with those still in Kaédi to the north allowed Yacouba to link labor and land into a self-contained system. The result was a qualitative increase in the returns on his agricultural projects. Ironically, in doing so Yacouba contributed to the same long-standing pattern of labor migration out of the Middle Senegal Valley and into cash-cropping zones that had contributed to his revival in the first place.[30] In 1936, Yacouba's efforts to organize his entire community into a single labor pool were given a boost by the new approach to governance brought by the leftish Popular Front government in France. Although the Popular Front only stayed in power in the metropole for less than two years, and although its actual accomplishments were minimal, its effect on policy in French West Africa was more lasting. Socialist at home and reformist (but decidedly not anticolonial) abroad, Popular Front administrators adopted a new rhetoric and a new way of justifying administrative authority that would remain in place for over a decade.[31] First of all, the Popular Front years saw a thaw in the administration's relations with the Hamawiyya in general. Rather than an indomitable foe of the civilizing mission, the Hamawiyya began to be seen as merely one part of a larger, rationalized *politique musulmane*. Measures of clemency were extended to many former Muslim "agitators" and ways were sought to mend the rift between eleven-beads and twelve-beads in order to bring Hamawis under more effective control. The most important of these was the dispatching of Seydou Nourou Tal – the grandson of al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal, head of the powerful twelve-bead Tal family, avowed opponent of the

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29 Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 21, 2001.

30 See Chapter 1.

31 Technically the Popular Front dissolved in April 1938; for practical purposes, however, its policies were continued by the socialist government of Edouard Daladier until the rightist take over during the War. A good overview of the Popular Front's colonial policies, but one which focuses almost exclusively on North Africa, is William B. Cohen, "The Colonial Policy of the Popular Front," *French Historical Studies* 7 (1972), 368–393.

Hamawiyya, and the administration's chosen leader of West Africa's Muslim population – to Nioro to "reconcile" with Shaykh Hamallah. What the administration meant by reconciliation was essentially to offer Hamallah and his followers minimal protection in return for their submission to Seydou Nourou and thus their integration into France's hierarchical network of Muslim clients.[32]

The Popular Front's new Islamic strategy also extended to the Yacoubists. Though the new Governor-General, Jules Marcel de Coppet, rejected a proposal to liberate Yacouba Sylla ahead of schedule, some efforts were made to reach out to Yacouba's followers.[33] The prison sentences of some followers had expired in the early and mid-1930s, but many others were still in detention in 1937 when Gaston Mondon, the new Governor of Côte d'Ivoire, issued an *arrêté* conditionally liberating sixty-one. Reversing earlier policy, the administration encouraged them to return to Kaédi *en masse*, where they joined some 340 fellow Yacoubists already in place. To temper any animosity they may have harbored about their years in exile and to encourage them to reassimilate into the local community, the administration in Mauritania authorized the return of some of the land that had been confiscated from these detainees in 1930.[34]

Not surprisingly, the other residents of Kaédi greeted these measures with some hostility, and complained that the returnees were driving up competition and refusing to participate in community religious ceremonies. Nonetheless, the administration seems to have exerted itself to keep the peace, and a general improvement in Kaédi's economy in the late 1930s may have helped calm relations. By May 1940, the *commandant de cercle* witnessed what he felt to be evidence that the rift of 1930 had been decisively healed. When a fire destroyed more than 38 homes in Gattaga, residents of the other neighborhoods voluntarily helped rebuild what had been damaged, despite the *commandant*'s fears that this might conjure up bad memories of the forced labor

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32 The literature on this period is extensive, if somewhat uneven and occasionally contradictory. See in particular: Joly, "La réconciliation de Nioro," pp. 361–372; Sylvianne Garcia, "Al-Hajj Seydou Nourou Tall, «grand marabout» tijani: L'histoire d'une carrière (v.1880-1980)," in *Temps des marabouts*, pp. 260–262; Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: the Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 58; Alphonse Gouilly, *L'Islam dans l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Paris, 1952), pp. 140–141. The Popular Front was always ready to treat the Hamawiyya with a heavy hand when it departed from the role assigned to it in the hierarchy of Muslim politics. See, for example, Brenner, *West African Sufi*, pp. 58–59.

33 Gouv.-Gén. AOF to Min. Colon., °64AP/2, 10 Mar 1937 (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 5).

34 And perhaps also as a gesture of disapproval on the part of the analysts of the *Affaires politiques* in Dakar and the Mauritanian administrators for what they seem to have perceived as the bias shown toward Seydou Nourou Tall and the twelve-bead Tijanis by their colleagues in Soudan. Rapp. pol. ann., cer. du Gorgol, 1939, and Rapp. pol., 3ᵉ trim. 1939 (ANMt E2-100); Bur. Affair. Pol., "Retour des libérés du 15-2-30 (source très bonne)," 1938 (ANMt E2-34).

Quegneaux had used to rebuild Gattaga after the attacks by twelve-beads in December 1929.[35]

These efforts mostly reflected the cooperative attitude of officials in Mauritania and the French Soudan. In Côte d'Ivoire, however, many of the reforms envisioned by the "progressive" new government were blocked or effectively undermined by the French and their allies in the local administration. Nonetheless, some small changes were made. Administrators began to exercise greater control over appointed chiefs (who were thought to be responsible for most abuses of authority), reduced some taxes, made marginal improvements in social services, and mandated slight increases in daily wages for plantation laborers. Though the realities of forced labor were never confronted as such, and coercion was still the norm in recruitment both for administrative projects and private enterprise, the principle of free labor was reiterated and the greatest abuses in "assisted" recruitment were moderated.[36] In addition, the Popular Front brought a new approach to the *mise en valeur* of the colonies, one that would, somewhat ironically, be reinforced by the Vichy regime. Fearing both the social and moral ills of overexploitation, de Coppet sought to make peasant agriculture, organized along "traditional" lines, the economic foundation of the Federation, and to restrict wage labor to a small, "proletarianized" class while encouraging the "natural" evolution of village-based societies. Hoping to create a conservative class of small farmers and larger landowners, what it called "la colonisation indigène," the new administration promoted local development through "improved transport, the organization of cooperatives, and other forms of assistance." Arguing that "native" forms of labor recruitment would be less "disruptive" of the "natural" African economy than the exploitation wrought by French settlers, it provided incentives to local residents to establish their own cash-crop farms.[37]

For most workers, the practical effect of all this was fairly limited. French planters used the threat of a bad harvest in 1937 to extract concessions from the administration. They demanded more vigorous recruitment, and – complaining about rising competition from African planters – refused to raise wages. In response, Governor Mondon, with tacit

35 Rapp. pol. ann., cer. du Gorgol, 1939; Rapp. pol., 3ᵉ trim. 1939; Bulletin de renseignements, May 1940, °129 AP (Mauritania); handwritten attachment, titled "Cercle du Gorgol depuis 1919-1920, travaillé par le Hamalisme"; and Extrait du rapp. pol., Mauritanie, 1941, Cercle du Gorgol (ANS 9G-43 v. 17).

36 Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, UK, 1996), pp. 75–88; Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 33–37; A.I. Asiwaju, "Migrations as Revolt: The Example of the Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta before 1945," *JAH* 17 (1976), 593.

37 Cooper, *Decolonization*, 75.

permission from de Coppet, contrived to recruit labor for planters in order to ensure the harvest.[38] But for entrepreneurs like Yacouba and his followers, the new attitude of the administration toward "indigenous development" provided opportunities to organize their own mechanisms of labor recruitment in harmony with official ideology. The *commandant* for the crucial plantation region of Daloa wrote in his quarterly report: "the native is becoming rich. In 1939 he sold over 4,500,000 Francs in products through official markets, and this economic well-being has made the recruitment of labor for the plantations rather difficult." Yacouba's followers participated actively in this boom, and their enterprises expanded continually through the mid- and late 1930s.

Yacouba Sylla himself was finally released from detention in 1938 and the administration quickly moved to make sure he was willing to accept his place in the new dispensation. In late 1939 or early 1940, Seydou Nourou Tal visited Yacouba and secured the latter's pledge of loyalty and, presumably, submission. Yacouba chose at first to remain in Sassandra, working on a banana and cacao plantation he had set up at nearby Kokolopozo in 1936. But he soon made plans to move to Gagnoa, receiving permission to purchase a large plot of land there in June 1938, and arranging to have a house built there by August 1939. At the end of that year, with the Kokolopozo plantation turning a profit, he moved definitively to Gagnoa and began expanding his activities there.

Though specific employment records for this period are not available, Yacoubist traditions indicate that the organization of Yacouba's workforce in these early years looked much as it would in later decades: a mixture of unpaid labor from among his followers and wage labor recruited locally. Members rotated through various jobs so as to avoid the emergence of any inequality in effort or experience. Profits from community enterprises were shared among all members, disbursed from the top down; private property was forbidden, even among the highest-ranking members. The same logic governed social relations. Since no property was held in private, the exchange of dowry or bridewealth was meaningless; as a result, what had been a critique of high dowries in Kaédi in 1930 was now generalized into a new kind of marriage completely without exchange. Since few outsiders were willing to accept the radical disjuncture with kinship networks that marriage into the community would entail, the boundary around the Yacoubists became sharply defined. With its low costs, reliability, and responsiveness, this system proved highly efficient and the local administration embraced its results, if not the details of its methods, eagerly. The

38 Ibid., pp. 77–80.

year after Yacouba moved to Gagnoa, the Governor of Côte d'Ivoire called him "the most important indigenous trader of the region," and described him as "very rich, he owns a building in Gagnoa that cost him around 300,000F, has coffee and banana plantations and, before the war, owned six working trucks."[39]

Thus by the beginning of World War Two, in a confluence of the administration's objectives and attitudes toward both Muslims and development with the apparently new approach of Yacouba and his followers to the organization of their communities, the branches in Gagnoa and Kaédi had become thriving religious and commercial centers that were at least somewhat protected by the colonial government. As it had in 1929, however, the high profile of the Yacoubists provoked the suspicions of some administrators and the hostility of some local rivals. However, this time Yacouba's followers had their considerable wealth and the sympathies of a development-obsessed colonial regime to protect them.

<div align="center">RETURN TO ACTIVISM</div>

The one major issue that remained unresolved for the Yacoubists in the late 1930s was the precise nature of their relationship with the rest of the Tijaniyya-Hamawiyya. During the early years of their residence in Côte d'Ivoire, the Yacoubists had maintained their contacts with the rest of the Hamawiyya, and despite his supposed written disavowal of Yacouba, Shaykh Hamallah himself seemed to value his connections to his imprisoned student. Isolated

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39 On Yacouba and Seydou Nourou, see Rapp. pol. ann., C.d'I., 1939, pp. 149–150 (ANS 2G-39 v. 3); Cmdt. de cer. Sassandra (Colombani), 10 Feb 1940; Chef Subdiv. Gagnoa (Teyrical), 10 Feb 1940 (ANS 19G-43 v. 108); Yacouba Sylla to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, 14 June 1943; and Rapport Commiss. de Police Rortais, 18 June 1943, p. 4 (the last two reprinted in "Annexe n°18" of Boukary Savadogo, "Confréries et pouvoirs. La Tijaniyya Hamawiyya en Afrique occidentale (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger): 1909-1965," [Thèse de doctorat, Université de Provence, 1998], pp. 604–617). (Savadogo found these documents in the Archives Nationales de la Côte d'Ivoire, but unfortunately does not give a precise citation. I was unable to locate the documents during my research in Abidjan, and was told by the archivists that they were no longer available). On his release from detention and relocation see Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1939, p. 148 (ANS 2G-39 v. 3); *JOCI*, 15 September 1939, p. 863; Pierre Kipré, *Villes de la Côte d'Ivoire, 1893-1940*, vol. 2, *Economie et société urbaine* (Abidjan, 1985), p. 181. Kipré's claims about the date of Yacouba's move appear to be based on materials housed in the Ivoirian archives; I have been unable to determine his exact sources or locate equivalent documents in the archives. FOCYS gives the date for Yacouba's move to Gagnoa as 14 July 1939, but the annual report, written in late 1939 or early 1940, makes no mention of a relocation. Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, 21 May 2001. Finances within the community were organized and integrated regionally. A report from Gorgol in 1938 indicated that Yacouba had asked his disciples in Mauritania to provide half the money necessary to purchase a coffee plantation in Côte d'Ivoire (ANMt E2-105). For the community's position at the start of the war, see Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1940, p. 50 (ANS 2G-40 v. 4).

from other Tijanis, Hamallah had been accompanied by only three of his disciples; otherwise the nearest Hamawis were in Sassandra with Yacouba and in a few other nearby towns where Yacoubists were detained. Contacts were established between Sassandra and Adzopé no later than 1931 when a group of Yacouba's followers visited Hamallah and received prayer beads from him to distribute among the faithful. Hamallah also apparently requested that Yacouba send him an assistant; one of Yacouba's brothers acted as Hamallah's messenger during his detention, and two other relatives accompanied Hamallah to Nioro after his release in 1934.[40]

These interactions worried local administrators, but even more surprising to them was the sudden emergence of an independent Hamawi *zâwiya* in Adzopé around Hamallah. In a process that deserves closer study, this small town that had housed only a tiny number of Muslim merchants before Hamallah's arrival in 1930, developed an important religious enclave within a year. The *zâwiya* was founded by one of Adzopé's merchants together with an immigrant from French Soudan, but was mostly frequented by a large group of Mossi immigrants who had converted and attached themselves to the Shaykh. This *zâwiya* still operates in its original location, in a neighborhood made up predominantly of Mossi Hamawis.[41]

Despite these connections, old questions about Yacouba's status within the Hamawiyya remained unsettled. Most of the evidence concerning internal relations within the order is apocryphal,[42] but it is clear that the Yacoubists were eager to assert their fidelity to the Shaykh and equally clear that the way they did so caused as many problems as it resolved. A letter intercepted by French intelligence illustrates the difficulty of their position. Writing in 1932 to ''Fodie Amadou Abdoulaye'' (presumably Fodie Abdoulaye Diagana), Yacouba stated plainly:

> We have no relation of friendship with anyone who doubts our doctrine; we do not even have need of God, nor of his Prophet, nor of any other creature, men, devils, whites, blacks, Arabs or others. We have need of none but our *shaykh* [Hamallah]. If it is God who is the creator, I know nothing of that. For me, it is our *shaykh* who is the Creator; for it is he who educates and improves who is, for me, the Creator. If a God exists, it is our *shaykh* who is my God. If a creator exists, it is our *shaykh* who is my creator. If there exists an educator, it is our *shaykh* who taught me the right path. . . . I swear in the

40 On Hamallah's companions, see Jean-Louis Triaud, ''Lignes de force de la pénétration islamique en Côte d'Ivoire,'' *Revue des études islamiques* 42:1 (1974), p. 154. On links between Sassandra and Adzopé, see Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I. to Cmdt. de cer. Grand-Lahou, 30 May 1931 (ANCI IV-48/1 [3327]); interview with Fatimata Koïta, Adzopé, 27 May 2001.

41 BaHodie Sylla, Adzopé, 27 May 2001.

42 See Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion.

name of our *shaykh* that if someone other than a disciple of our *shaykh* opens this letter, he will have dealings with me in the present life before the afterlife. We have no secret to tell each other than that we love our *shaykh* Hamallah, and even if it is God who opens this letter, he will have to deal with me.[43]

Though clearly revealing an intense devotion to Hamallah, this kind of language provoked considerable anxiety and even hostility from other Hamawis. By seeming to overemphasize their personal attachment to Hamallah, Yacouba and his followers opened themselves to accusations of *shirk*, considering others to share in God's divinity. This was a damning criticism; if Yacouba's followers were unorthodox Muslims, could they truly be Hamawis?[44]

A subtext of this debate was the way Yacouba's rhetoric seemed to imply that the link he and his followers enjoyed with Hamallah was more intense than for other Hamawis, and thus that they should be considered disciples of a different kind. Yacouba's actions only intensified this impression. In 1939, Yacouba made a present of a new Ford Mercury to Hamallah, an extravagant gift at the time, intended to reflect the intensity of Yacouba's devotion. Hamallah's acceptance of the gift was understood to reflect his acceptance of Yacouba's submission to him, and to acknowledge that a hidden, return gift of spiritual blessing had been made. But the gift's ostentatious nature left Yacouba open to accusations of grandstanding at best, and at worst of trying to purchase a position of influence within the *tarîqa*.[45]

The onset of World War Two brought circumstances that rendered such subtleties moot, at least for a while. In August 1940, fighting broke out in the desert of northern Soudan between lineages allied with Hamallah's son, Baba ould Hamahoullah, and Tinwajiyu *zwâya bidân* clans associated with one of Hamallah's rivals, Shaykh Muhammad Fa ould Shaykh. Known as the "Nioro-Assaba Affair," this fighting provoked a swift response from a

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43 Rapp. pol. ann. Maur., 1932, p. 149. The translation bears records of tampering, calling into question the reliability of the administrative source. For example, what is ostensibly a French translation of an original Arabic document makes a distinction between "Creator" when referring to Hamallah and "creator" in the passages referring to the idea in the abstract, a change in capitalization that is not possible in Arabic and that may have been inserted in an effort to portray the idea as idolatrous. Nonetheless, an important member of the community confirmed the general authenticity of this document.

44 Cheikh Tahirou Doucouré, Dakar, 23 and 26 February 2001. I interpret Doucouré's activities as an attempt to establish a firm, neo-orthodox foundation for the Hamawiyya by claiming for it the traditional features of a West African *tarîqa*. His actions thus reflect both a struggle for power within the Hamawiyya and a tactic in the wider struggle to defend Sufism.

45 This was certainly how the French viewed the situation. See Rapport Rortais. The full spiritual subtext of this gift will be discussed in Chapter 6. The Yacoubist version comes from Aliou "Mama" Sylla and Fodie Doukoure, Gagnoa, Apr 28, 2001; Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 21, 2001; Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, July 6, 2001.

nervous, pro-Vichy administration and occasioned a new round of severe repression of Hamawis throughout the Federation. In 1941, the administration dispersed all Hamawis in Nioro to the *cercles* of their birth and executed over thirty men involved in the affair, including two of Hamallah's sons. In 1942, the neighborhood of Tichit-Kunda in Nioro, location of the principal Hamawi *zâwiya*, was "cleansed" and the *zâwiya* destroyed. Hamallah himself was deported, first to Algeria and then to France where he died of pneumonia in 1943. Further scrutiny and selective repression confronted Hamawis after additional altercations in Kaya, Bouaké, and Adzopé in 1943, and tensions continued until one final conflict in Ouati, near Gao, in Soudan in 1949.[46]

During this period, Yacouba played a delicate balancing game between remaining loyal to his *shaykh* and *tarîqa* and protecting his position within the new economic and political order. The community engaged the administration more explicitly in an effort to convince French officials that it posed them no threat. In Kaédi, the insularity that the community had maintained since 1929 began to break down, and in 1941 Yacouba's followers attended prayers at the Friday mosque for the first time since the revival.[47] The community made even more dramatic efforts to protect itself from administrative harassment the following year. The increasingly fragile pro-Vichy administration leaned on its intermediaries to reiterate their support, and Seydou Nourou Tal himself spent much of the war giving speeches across the Federation, lending his religious authority to the cause of the Pétain administration.[48] On November 11, 1942, two days after Governor-General Boisson reiterated the Federation's support for Vichy in the face of the Allied invasion of North Africa, N'Paly Kaba followed Seydou Nourou's lead, making a public declaration after the Friday (*jumuᶜa*) prayer exhorting the townspeople to remain loyal to France. Even Yacouba apparently felt compelled to express his allegiance to the regime. In

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46 Various studies have been published on Nioro-Assaba and its aftermath. See the important facsimiles of documents appended to Savadogo, "Tijaniyya Hamawiyya," pp. 538–581; as well as Benjamin F. Soares, "The Spiritual Economy of Nioro du Sahel: Islamic Discourses and Practices in a Malian Religious Center" (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1997), p. 147; Colonel Joseph Rocaboy, "Le cas hamalliste: Les événements de Nioro-Assaba (août 1940)," in *Nomades et commandants: Administration et sociétés nomades dans l'ancienne AOF*, ed. Edmond Bernus et al. (Paris, 1993), pp. 41–48; Vincent Joly, "L'administration du Soudan français et les événements de «Nioro-Assaba» (août 1940)," in *Nomades et commandants*, pp. 49–60. See also Rapp. pol. mensuel, Côte d'Ivoire, March 1943 (ANS 2G-43 v. 99) and various documents in CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 10 and dossier 16. For good overview of Dakar-level politics during Vichy, see William I. Hitchcock, "Pierre Boisson, French West Africa, and the Postwar Epuration: A Case from the Aix Files," *French Historical Studies* 24.2 (2001), 305–341.

47 Bulletins de renseignements, cercles du sud, Mauritanie, July, August, September, 1941 (ANS 9G-31 v. 17).

48 Garcia, "Seydou Nourou Tall," pp. 255–256. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of Seydou Nourou and the Hamawiyya.

1942, he donated 1,500F from the proceeds of sales of dried bananas to the Légion française des combattants de la Côte d'Ivoire, a quasifascist and resolutely pro-Vichy organization that collected nearly 300,000F from Gagnoa's planters that year for prisoners of war held in Germany.[49]

The following year, 1943, was particularly chaotic for French West Africa, as the Federation's governors swung slowly from Pétain to de Gaulle, as partisans struggled for control of local resources, and as the groundwork was laid for the conservative reformism of the Brazzaville Conference. Côte d'Ivoire, a bastion of Pétainist sympathy among conservative settlers, retained a pro-Vichy governor, Georges Pierre Rey, until August 1943, even while the federal government in Dakar was in the hands of a strong but pragmatic Gaullist, Pierre Cournarie. In this atmosphere, propaganda and conspiracy theories flourished and no one, not administrators, *colons*, *évolués*, or the general population, had a clear sense of where power lay.[50] Amidst this insecurity, rumors reached Governor Rey that Yacouba was employing poorly treated slave labor on his plantation in Gagnoa, and using sorcery and physical force to control his workers. The rumors triggered an inspection of Yacouba's compound in Gagnoa by the local *commissaire de police*, who found the charges unsubstantiated. The investigating official, Rortais, discovered that Yacouba had been extending credit and perhaps making cash payments to a local veterinarian in exchange for lenient inspections of the cattle intended for his butcher shops. When the veterinarian demanded more money and Yacouba refused, he drafted a letter accusing Yacouba of abuses, forged the signatures of many of Yacouba's relatives and employees, and sent it to the Commandant de Cercle in Nioro and the Governor of Soudan in Koulouba; they in turn contacted the Governor of Côte d'Ivoire.[51]

Despite being prompted by a forgery, Rortais's report presented a detailed analysis of Yacouba's community in Gagnoa, and provides considerable insight into his personal modus opperandi, the possible paths for accumulation opened up by the colonial administration's approach to economic development, and the idealistic and instrumental grounds for potential alliances between administration officials and African entrepreneurs. Yacouba's success was in part enabled by close personal relationships he cultivated with several of the *commandants* in Sassandra during his

49 Bulletin de renseignements, cercles du sud, Mauritanie, November, 1942 (ANS 9G-31 v. 17). Teleg. ltr., M. Beaumont, Chef (Sassandra-Soubré) de la Légion française des combattants de la Côte d'Ivoire to Lieut. Gouv. C.d'I., nd.; see also *La Côte d'Ivoire française*, °651, April 20, 1942, p. 2 (ANCI XV-4-6(5355)). See also Nancy Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (Athens, OH, 1992), pp. 130–131, 164; Hitchcock, "Pierre Boisson," pp. 322–323.

50 Nancy Lawler, "Reform and repression under the Free French: economic and political transformation in the Côte d'Ivoire, 1942–1945," *Africa* 60 (1990), 88–110; Chafer, *End of Empire*, pp. 41–50.

51 Rapps. pols. mensuels, Côte d'Ivoire, May, June 1943 (ANS 2G-43 v. 99); and Rapport Rortais.

internment, undoubtedly a testament to the charisma of this young man with no western education who was considered an enemy of the French government. He maintained many of these relationships after relocating to Gagnoa, where he also made new friends in the administration. Officers in both towns encouraged him to pursue petty commerce and cash cropping, advised him on economic strategies and, most importantly, facilitated his use of recruited labor on his plantations. In exchange, Yacouba operated two butcher shops in Sassandra and Gagnoa at a loss in order to provide the administrative and colonial communities with beef. For the supply of cattle, Yacouba relied on his contacts with Fulbe and Soninke cattle herders in Soudan and Upper Volta.[52]

Yacouba's successes also depended on more institutional connections between his commercial activities and the colonial enterprise. Yacouba financed his efforts by borrowing money from the large colonial companies operating in Côte d'Ivoire, such as the Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO), the Société Commerciale de l'Ouest-Africain (SCOA), and the Compagnie Française de Côte d'Ivoire (CFCI). In exchange for these loans, he contracted to purchase coffee, bananas, and other cash crops from small farmers and sell them to his creditors, giving them a virtual monopoly over the export of produce from African-owned farms in the area. Yacouba in turn cemented his ties with local small-plantation owners by extending them credit at favorable rates and selling them manufactured goods he purchased from importers. Rortais's report gives us an indication of how successful Yacouba had been in these activities: his plantations were considered models of efficiency, with healthy, well-fed workers, and he had established a thriving transport company with at least seven trucks and one passenger vehicle by 1943.[53]

Yacouba also gave the administration reason to believe that whatever threat he might have posed as a religious leader was safely in the past. The Commissaire seems to have initially assumed that Yacouba's religious influence would grow alongside his economic influence. But his inquiry not only determined that Yacouba's spiritual authority was restricted to his own compound, it also suggested that Yacouba no longer considered himself to be the same kind of leader he had been before. Though Yacouba understandably refused to answer questions on the specifics of his personal religious practices, he distanced himself from his previous activities and appeared to renounce

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52 Yacouba Sylla to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, June 14, 1943; and Rapport Rortais. Because the lower Ivory Coast lies within the trypanosomiasis belt, cattle do not thrive there.

53 Rapport Rortais. In the late 1930s, the SCOA and the CFAO together accounted for nearly one-third of all registered private capital in AOF. On the colonial companies, see Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, ''L'impact des intérêts coloniaux: SCOA et CFAO dans l'Ouest Africain, 1910-1965,'' *JAH* 16 (1975), 595–621.

some of his earlier teachings. "I believed myself a great *karamoko* [religious teacher]," he told Rortais, "but events proved to me that I was nothing of the sort. . . . If I had not been taught a false Coran, none of this would have happened. Since then I have learned that only one thing counts for God: work. I have worked. . . strenuously even, and I continue to work." In a letter he sent to the Governor General of AOF to protest the accusations brought against him and the subsequent investigation, Yacouba summed up his experience in Côte d'Ivoire with humility and promises of submissiveness, if also with considerable ambiguity and irony:

> I received much advice from many successive Administrators at Sassandra, and I gave in, for I saw my errors in the untiring advice I received from them. I had to pay for my punishment of eight years by begging, asking for alms and charity from various charitable people. . . . [T]hanks to the wisdom of your subalterns, a gift common to all children of France, mother of us all, I decided to dedicate myself exclusively to work and to abandon all the foolishness that I had been so unfortunate as to not even have noticed. Night and day I have worked without respite, with my people, and I succeeded in making a fortune, the fruit of our common efforts.[54]

Making it clear that he felt his obedience and acceptance of French norms stood as a rebuke to those who now suspected him, Yacouba continued:

> A French *sujet*, I have nine children who receive a French education, four of whom are my own, the rest those of my relatives. Following the orders of high-ranking French authorities, work is above all and engenders all. An example that the native has acquired from generous France. It would be incomprehensible, despite all the devotion for France that has guided me through my errors, that I would ask you to forget [my mistakes] as I have forgotten my punishment, replacing it with the good advice I received in exchange.

In the same letter, Yacouba also reminded the Governor of his submission to Seydou Nourou Tal before the war, and of 47,750F he had given to the national relief effort and to the Emprunt Africain pour la France. He also mentioned the names of his patrons in the administration and his friendship with the Moro Naba, "Emperor" of the Mossi.[55]

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54 Yacouba Sylla to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, June 14, 1943, and Rapport Rortais.
55 Yacouba Sylla to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, June 14, 1943. Yacouba's rhetorical efforts to separate loyal, "true" servants of the French ideal (himself included) from treacherous, treasonous local administrators and *colons* show him to have been an early master of the dominant style of political discourse in French West Africa in the late 1940s. Yacouba's "submission" to Seydou Nourou Tal seems to have taken place around the same time as the "Reconciliation of Nioro" between Seydou Nourou and Hamallah in 1937.

So fully did Yacouba give the impression of having left his religious past behind him that he was widely reported to have discussed converting to Catholicism with a local priest. According to Rortais's report, he was only deterred by the Church's strictures against polygamy, a requirement that would have thoroughly undermined the social organization of his community. Whatever the truth of this rumor, it helped assuage the fears of the otherwise skittish wartime government. It also makes clear that at least part of Yacouba's successful "rehabilitation" was due to the fact that he was largely dealing with officials in Côte d'Ivoire who did not share the often paranoid suspicion of Muslim leaders common to administrators in French Soudan or Mauritania.[56]

Once the war ended, it was only the Yacoubists' commercial success that interested the French – that and the growing political clout that came with it. In January 1947, Yacouba placed two requests with the colonial government for permission to purchase property, one for a 6.25-acre lot to build a *zâwiya* in Sassandra, and one for a 1122 m² lot for a coffee refinery in Gagnoa. In August, the Governor of Côte d'Ivoire authorized Yacouba to purchase and operate an electric generator. Yacouba used this generator to provide low-cost electric power to his compound and the surrounding communities for years – a service that did much to endear him to his non-Muslim neighbors. In 1949, Yacouba wrote to the *commandant* in Gorgol expressing his desire to benefit Kaédi by opening a branch of his business there under the management of N'Paly Kaba; disciples (*talibés*) were to be sent from Kaédi to Gagnoa for training as masons or in automotive repair, and then returned to Kaédi.[57]

As far as can be determined, it was on the basis of his commercial success that Yacouba became involved in the political events that dominated public life in Côte d'Ivoire between the end of the war and independence. Sometime before 1946, in one of the important turning points in his life, Yacouba made the acquaintance of the up-and-coming politician Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Until then there had been a few unsubstantiated rumors of Yacouba's involvement in local politics, stretching back to disputes over the Imamate of Gagnoa and the election of a new *chef de quartier* for the "dioula" (merchant) neighborhood there in 1942. But whatever his political activities before 1946, Yacouba's close relationship with Houphouët-Boigny's political party, the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) and its parent, international party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), marked a new departure for the community.[58]

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56 Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1940, p. 50 (ANS 2G-40 v. 4); Rapport Rortais.
57 *JOCI*, Jan 31, 1947, Avis de demandes de concessions, °3188 and °3206, p. 36; *JOCI*, Sept 1, 1947, °3991 T.P.M., p. 284; BTLC, "Note de Renseignements: Le Yacoubisme," Dakar, Oct 1949 (CAOM 1Affpol 2259/3); Yacouba Sylla, Sassandra, to Cmdt. de cer. Kaédi [sic], July 1, 1939 (ANMt E2-34).
58 Rapport Rortais. The details of Yacouba's relationship with Houphouët-Boigny will be dealt with at greater length in Chapter 9.

Houphouët-Boigny had come to regional prominence in September 1944 when he helped found the Syndicat Agricole Africain (SAA), a union of Ivoirian African plantation owners, and used its support to secure election as Côte d'Ivoire's *député* for *sujets* to the French Constituent Assembly in October 1945. The SAA's main support came from the Baoulé areas in the middle of the colony, even though a considerable quantity of coffee and cacao was produced to the southwest, in the forest belt. Yacouba's position as the most important African merchant and planter in one of the most important coffee and cacao regions of the forest zone must have made him an attractive ally for Houphouët-Boigny, and could be the reason the two men first came into contact.[59]

But the best documented connections between the two surround the history of the RDA. The RDA, founded in Bamako in October 1946, was officially a union of regional parties. But in terms of its organization and basic principles, it was "an extension of [Houphouët-Boigny's] PDCI to the superterritorial level." Houphouët-Boigny's power within the RDA derived from the prestige he had gained by sponsoring a successful bill to abolish forced labor in the French Assembly (which came to be known as the "Houphouët-Boigny law") in April 1946. This placed him squarely in the vanguard of French West African politics and gave him a strong voice in the early ideological orientation of the party; this included a close affiliation with the French Communist Party (PCF), which had briefly held the reins of government in the metropole after the war.[60]

In its first two years the PDCI-RDA drew successfully on Houphouët-Boigny's support from the SAA and his popularity as the politician who had ended forced labor. But the fall of the PCF from power in France in 1947 brought an anti-RDA campaign throughout the Federation between 1948 and 1949.[61] The PDCI-RDA responded by intensifying its recruitment of African plantation owners and western-educated civil servants, while simultaneously trying to tap into important sources of wealth and patronage held by the colony's Muslim merchants. In early 1948 the RDA's principal newspaper, *Le Réveil*, propagandized against Lebanese who dominated the warehousing and distribution of African-grown cash crops and engaged in petty commerce. These activities were common

59 Houphouët-Boigny's SAA had its origins in the efforts of postwar administrators' efforts to undermine the political position of the largely pro-Vichy French planters. Aristide R. Zolberg, *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast*, rev. ed., (Princeton, 1969), pp. 66–77; Chafer, *End of Empire*, pp. 4445, 59–63; Ruth Schachter Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford, 1964), p. 174.

60 Affiliation with the PCF, or its rival in the colonies, the SFIO, more closely reflected intercolony rivalries and the alliances of different constituencies and patronage networks than it did ideological differences. See, for example, Frederick Cooper, "'Our Strike': Equality, Anticolonial Politics and the 1947–48 Railway Strike in French West Africa," *JAH* 37 (1996), pp. 97–108; Zolberg, *One-Party Government*, pp. 106–121, 129–131, 135–136.

61 Chafer, *End of Empire*, pp. 104–106.

sources of grievances among the African planters who supported Houphouët-Boigny's SAA and who made up one of the PDCI-RDA's natural constituencies, as well as among local merchants. In the same year, French intelligence reported that the RDA was attracting many Hamawis, principally in Niger but also in the adjacent areas of Upper Volta. Officials believed this was the result of concerted efforts by the Hamawi *zâwiya*s in the area, led by Imam Muhammad Djibril Maiga.[62] But the party's efforts to attract Muslim supporters seems to have been fairly ecumenical, for at the same time the RDA tried to ally with anti-Sufi *salafi* and "Wahhabi" movements in Soudan and Guinea.[63]

Despite these efforts, the RDA suffered a serious defeat in 1949 in Gagnoa, one of the most important plantation districts in Côte d'Ivoire and the base of rival politician Adrien Dignan Bailly. As a result, the following year the PDCI-RDA selected Gagnoa, and particularly the Muslim neighborhood of Dioulabougou, as the site of a major campaign led by Victor Biaka Boda, Senator and Conseiller de la République. Party agents worked to make sure the plantation towns of Daloa, Sassandra, and Gagnoa – all locations of important Yacoubist installations – had many active RDA supporters. Yacouba played a supporting role in the PDCI-RDA's activities during these years – hosting Houphouët-Boigny's Soudanese ally Ouezzin Coulibaly, for example, during his stay in Côte d'Ivoire in 1950 – and the administration considered his *zâwiya*s to be the Ivoirian outposts of the RDA–Hamawi alliance already engineered in Niger and Upper Volta.[64]

In the early 1950s, perhaps sensing, as the administration believed, that the support of the region's Muslims for the RDA was slipping away, the PDCI-RDA redoubled its efforts. The party's newspaper, *Le Démocrate*, explicitly tried to court the colony's Muslim populations, and in April 1950, a party

62 This is disputed by the most thorough study of Maiga's career: Ousman Murzik Kobo, "Promoting the Good and Forbidding the Evil: A Comparative Historical Study of Ahl-as-Sunna Islamic Movments in Ghana and Burkina Faso, 1950–2000," (Ph.D. Thesis, Madison, 2005).

63 Lansine Kaba, *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa* (Evanston, IL, 1974), pp. 169–252; Morgenthau, *Political Parties*, p. 174; Rapports trimestriels sur l'Islam en AOF, 1948, 1949, and 1950 (CAOM 1Affpol 2259/1). The report for the 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ trimesters of 1948 gives the following summary of the administration's theories on Hamawi–RDA connections: "One notes a tendency among the Hamallists to turn toward the leaders of the RDA from whom they await 'help and protection from the attacks of the Administration,'" p. 5.

64 Memos, Service de la Sûreté, 19, 24, and 28 January, 2 and 7 February 1950 (ANS 5G-63 v. 144); Rapps. trimestriels sur l'Islam en AOF, 1948, 1949, and 1950; BTLC, "Note de Renseignements: Le Yacoubisme." The details describing Yacouba's efforts on behalf of the RDA are excised from the version of the document that is conserved in the French National Archives (3ᵉ tri. 1949). Senator Biaka Boda was killed in January 1950, under mysterious circumstances surrounding the administration's attempts to arrest Houphouët-Boigny. PDCI supporters suspected (and continue to suspect) French officials of assassinating him. The French blamed cannibals. Zolberg, *One-Party Government*, p. 135; Devalois Biaka, *La "disparition" du patriote ivoirien Victor Biaka Boda: Plaidoyer pour libérer sa dépouille mortelle* (Paris, 1997).

leader circulated propaganda in Gagnoa claiming that Houphouët-Boigny had the sanction of religious leaders in Mecca. That same year, Shaykh Muhammad Fanta Mady of Kankan revoked his previously expressed support for the RDA, resulting in a loss of members in Soudan and among the Mossi of northern Côte d'Ivoire, among whom Fanta Mady was widely respected. This change in position was a particular threat to the RDA's ability to attract members of the region's Sufi *tarîqa*s, as Mady was a highly visible defender of Sufism against followers of *salafi* or "Wahhabi" teachings, with whom the RDA was beginning to be closely associated. It was at this time that Yacouba, who was one of the most famous Tijanis in the colony, received a higher profile in the party's propaganda. Yacouba's past history of conflict with the administration, which he had downplayed during the late 1930s and the 1940s, became an important asset. A French intelligence officer noted at the time that "few of the influential members hide their support for the RDA, which was able to successfully exploit local disputes in which the detention of the Hamallist leader Yacouba Sylla is presented as a machination of imperialist colonialism."[65]

Houphouët-Boigny spent these years trying to solidify his control over the PDCI-RDA and was active in recruiting the support of important Muslims.[66] Partially to allay French suspicions, and perhaps also to mollify Muslim religious leaders who objected to the French Communist Party's ideological materialism, Houphouët-Boigny engineered the disaffiliation of the RDA from the PCF. Disaffiliation marked the victory of the conservative wing of the RDA in general and of the PDCI-RDA in particular, and brought a shift in strategy. In an effort to put its past as a "protest party" behind it, the PDCI positioned itself to claim it was better able to govern the colony than was the Federation's Dakar-based bureaucracy, and better able to play the game of international diplomacy in the new atmosphere of self-determination.[67]

This pro-French, antiadministration stance deeply threatened local officials, and they responded by trying to weaken the party's position, hoping to enable other, more easily controlled, parties to enter into the brokerage space between the local population and metropolitan government. Refusing

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[65] Rapps. trimestriels sur l'Islam en AOF, 1950 and 1951 (CAOM 1Affpol 2259/1). It is unclear whether the author of this document intended to indicate that this representation was current among members of the Hamawiyya or of the Yacoubist community. On Shaykh Fanta Mady, see Lansiné Kaba, "Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif de Kankan: Le devoir d'obéissance et la colonisation (1923–1955)," in *Temps des marabouts*, pp. 277–297.

[66] See, for example, a famous incident in 1952 when Houphouët-Boigny supported local *bras-croisés* in Bouaké against criticisms by traditionalists, an action widely perceived as an attempt to attract reformist voters (and Dioula voters more generally) for the RDA. Rapps. trimestriels sur l'Islam en AOF, 4ᵉ trim. 1954 and 1ᵉ trim. 1955 (CAOM 1Affpol 2259/1).

[67] Such efforts began even before disaffiliation: Cooper, "'Our Strike,'" pp. 103–118; Zolberg, *One-Party Government*, pp. 133–146; Chafer, *End of Empire*, pp. 16, 61–78.

to believe that the RDA's break with the PCF was sincere (or at least claiming to doubt its sincerity), the administration continued its efforts to disrupt the party's organizing and campaigning for the important elections to the National Assembly in June 1951. Yet at the same time, the administration relied on the efforts of figures like Houphouët-Boigny and Yacouba to resolve local conflicts and to insure order and stability. For example, in early 1950, Yacouba's followers in Kokolopozo helped protect an administrator who was threatened by a local mob. Officials took note not only of the local Yacoubists' intervention on behalf of the official, but also of the more ominous implications of their ability to control the demonstration. Later that year intelligence reports indicated that Yacouba was planning to stand for election on the PDCI-RDA's slate for Gagnoa, a serious threat to the administration's plans for the *cercle* where the strength of the Bété-Dioula alliance party, the Union Républicaine, offered the best hope of fulfilling the overall goal of keeping the PDCI from securing two seats in the Assembly.[68]

FROM HISTORY TO MYTH

In fact, Yacouba did not contest the election on the PDCI's slate in 1951, and he disappeared from the available administrative record at that point. The majority of confidential administrative reports and correspondence from the late 1950s remain sealed, and so while the most important events leading up to decolonization are fairly well known, the archival record sheds little light on the particular role Yacouba Sylla and his followers played in that drama. Instead we move into the realm of myth, both in the sense that our sources now take on a more free-floating relationship to temporality and in the sense that the period from the 1960s to the present has been characterized by the mythification of Yacouba Sylla himself. For the question of the role of Yacouba and his followers in the events of the late 1950s and beyond is wrapped up in the question of what Yacouba means today, and, indeed, of what Côte d'Ivoire itself is and will be.

For the non-Muslim Bété population of Gagnoa, which had strongly resisted the RDA from the mid 1940s, Yacouba was a symbol of Houphouët's party and of "outsider" political and economic dominance in general. It was apparently for this reason that, in the midst of an anti-"Dioula" uprising in

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68 It was also at this time that French agents began to encourage ethnic politics, identifying Mossi migrant workers as potential dissidents from the "Dioula" dominated PDCI and sought to encourage their affiliation with other parties. "Rapps. trimestriels sur l'Islam en AOF, 1950"; Memo, Service de la Sûreté, Feb 2, 1950; Administrateur Mangin, Chef du Bureau des Affaires Musulmanes, "Rapport de mission en Côte d'Ivoire, 10–18 février 1952," (CAOM 14Miom/2126 (5G-47)); Chafer, *End of Empire*, pp. 106–107, 118; Zolberg, *One-Party Government*, pp. 134–139.

1955 a group of Bété descended on Gagnoa with the intent to destroy Yacouba's compound in Dioulabougou.[69] Within the community, rumors and memories ascribe an active and symbolically important role to Yacouba in the emergence of independent West Africa. Little of this can be directly substantiated, aside from the activities of his son, Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, who was elected in 1959 to the Legislative Assembly of the nascent Federation of Mali on the ticket of the RDA-affiliate Union Soudanaise. But this too quickly shades into hearsay, for Yacouba is widely seen as having used his wealth and influence to "purchase" this seat away from the locally-dominant Parti Progressiste Soudanais.

Such contradictions remained salient throughout Côte d'Ivoire's postcolonial heyday into the 1990s. In 1970, for example, a celebration of the tenth anniversary of the independence of Côte d'Ivoire was held in Gagnoa and considerable attention was focused on Yacouba Sylla and his friendship with Houphouët-Boigny. The government newspaper, *Fraternité Matin*, profiled Yacouba and gave him the opportunity to discuss his life, the history of his community, and his relationship with his Bété neighbors. The tone of the interview was triumphant, celebrating Yacouba as an anticolonial pioneer, a champion of interethnic and interconfessional tolerance, and a sterling example of the small-capitalist boom over which Houphouët had presided; but it could not escape the condescension toward Bété people or the conflation of unity with assimilation that were the hallmarks of Houphouët's political rhetoric.[70] The limits of such a stance would be made clear only two months later. In October 1970, a secessionist movement centered in the nearby *canton* of Guébié attacked the police station in Gagnoa and declared the establishment of an independent republic. Brutally repressed by the Ivoirian government (accusations of attempted genocide remain part of the political landscape until today), this uprising became an important symbol for Bété nationalists who saw it as the continuation of a liberation struggle that stretched from early electoral contests between Adrien Dignan Bailly and Houphouët, through the government-backed anti-RDA campaigns of 1948–1950, continuing with the attacks on Dioula neighborhoods and Yacouba's compound in 1955, and another round of violent interparty battles in 1957.[71]

During this period, the Yacoubists strove to codify their history and place it firmly at the foundations of their self-understanding as a community. Yacoubist leaders did so primarily by dramatizing that history and integrating

69 Barbara Caroline Lewis, "The Transporters' Association of the Ivory Coast: Ethnicity, Occupational Specialization, and National Integration" (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1970), pp. 289–290.

70 *Fraternité Matin* (Abidjan), special issue, Aug 7, 1970, pp. vii–viii.

71 For the active memory of these events see, among others, Samba Diarra, *Les faux complots d'Houphouët-Boigny* (Paris, 1997).

it into the practice of religious devotion itself. In the weekly *haidara* (lit. "presence") ceremonies that are still performed today, devotees assembled in the community's *zâwiya*s that had come to serve as both ritual centers and residences. Men and women sat in separate halves of a central room where they drank tea, sang songs in Soninke celebrating the acts of Yacouba and his companions, recited the *haylallah*, and sometimes danced. At various points in the *haidara*, individuals could make speeches of a historical and or didactic nature to the rest of the gathering. During his lifetime Yacouba himself presided over the weekly *haidara* in Gagnoa, though he often chose speakers from among his companions instead of speaking himself. Eyewitnesses to events were considered authoritative bearers of history, as were the possessors of documents, who frequently read from important letters written by Yacouba, Hamallah or those close to them during these ceremonies. Anyone who possessed knowledge, either of the past or of the religious tools to interpret the past, was encouraged to speak, to pass along their wisdom to subsequent generations, even as the community's leadership kept careful control over the source materials from which these narratives were composed.

One consequence of the strong emphasis that was coming to be placed on the uniqueness of the Yacoubist "experience" was that it reopened the question of the relationship between the community and the wider Hamawiyya. In practical terms, that relationship became increasingly tense. After Hamallah's death in 1943, members of his family quickly positioned themselves as the only sanctioned interpreters of his teachings and the chief representatives of his authority. Growing centralism within the *tarîqa* tested the ability and willingness of Yacouba's followers to claim full membership while protecting their distinctive social organization and spiritual style. For a period, however, the affluence and stability of the Yacoubist enclaves in Mauritania provided a much needed source of security for members of the *tarîqa* in Mali. In 1942, the community in Kaédi was able to take in some Hamawis who fled Nioro following the destruction of the principle *zâwiya* there, and N'Paly Kaba hosted an important Hamawi visitor from Nioro in 1945.[72]

But as the leadership of the Hamawiyya regained its strength it could afford to be selective about whose help it sought. In 1958, Muhammad ould Cheick, the third son of Hamallah, rebuilt the main Hamawi *zâwiya* in Nioro which had stood in ruin for seventeen years. Ould Cheick gradually emerged as the de facto leader of the Hamawiyya, and he may have believed that Yacouba was acting much too independently for an obedient disciple. Ould Cheick's autonomy

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[72] Rapport Rortais; "Notice: Reconciliation Hamahoullah - Yacouba Sylla," 1939 (ANMt E2-34); "Notice, renseignements, cercles du sud," March 1942; Bulletin de renseignements, Affairs politiques, °77 APAM, February 1945 (ANS 9G-31 v. 17).

seems to have expanded after the change of government in Mali in 1968 that brought Moussa Traoré to power, and in 1970 Muhammad publicly, though very briefly, "expelled" Yacouba from the Hamawiyya following what was apparently a misunderstanding surrounding expectations of hospitality.[73] The break was short-lived and reconciliation was probably quickened by the fact that Yacouba was on good terms with one of Muhammad's younger brothers, Ebi ould Cheick. Until today, however, many members of the Hamawiyya look askance at the Yacoubist community, while Yacoubist leaders disagree on how much effort to expend on maintaining cordial relations with Nioro.[74]

In 1988, Yacouba Sylla passed away, depriving his community of a key leader as well as its central symbol. Fearing that the ties that held them together would weaken, several community leaders moved to assert their authority, in turn triggering competition over the most valuable of Yacoubist resources, the interpretation of the past. Officially, Cheickna Yacouba Sylla, Yacouba's eldest son, became his *calife*, successor, and thus *chef de communauté* for all the faithful; but several other sons have played important roles. Yacouba Sylla's fifth son, Maître Cheickna Sylla, created the Fondation Cheikh Yacouba Sylla (FOCYS) to try to conserve and manage the community's institutional memory. The FOCYS hold a library of photographs and tape recordings and coordinates an internal oral and documentary history initiative. It has printed small booklets containing précis of its versions of the community's history, and has recently published a hagiographic booklet, *Cheikh Yacouba Sylla ou le sens d'un combat*.[75] Yacouba Sylla's second son, Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, had served as his father's *porte-parole* during Yacouba's lifetime, playing an important role particularly in the 1980s after Yacouba was largely incapacitated by a stroke. He is considered by many to be the custodian of the community's spiritual teachings and its most serious living thinker.

Yacouba Sylla's death came at an inopportune time, as the community soon faced its most serious challenge since the 1930s. As the economic fortunes and political stability of Côte d'Ivoire declined through the 1980s and began to fall apart in the 1990s, particularly after Houphouët-Boigny's death in 1993, old

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73 At the time of the restoration of the *zâwiya* Muhammad's older brother, Ahmad ould Cheick, led the community. See Soares, "Spiritual Economy," pp. 154–155.

74 The story is well known to most members of the community. For the "view from Nioro," and an overview of the centralization campaign of the early 1970s, see Soares, "Spiritual Economy," pp. 156–159; and Seïdina Oumar Dicko, *Hamallah: Le protégé de Dieu* (Bamako, 1999), p. 87. On Hamawi views of the Yacoubists, interview Cheikh Tahirou Doucouré, Dakar, February 23 and 26, 2001; and Soares, *Prayer Economy*, p. 157. For the Yacoubist perspective, see Chapter 7.

75 FOCYS, *Cheikh Yacouba Sylla ou le sens d'un combat* (Abidjan, 2002). I had the opportunity to work with an earlier version of this document, an unpublished, privately circulated manuscript, "Cheikh Yacouba Sylla, ou le sens d'un combat (1906–1988)," composed in 1999. Some important changes were made in this hagiography between its unpublished and published renditions, some of which seem to have been triggered by my own investigations.

contradictions surrounding the relationship between the Yacoubists and the Ivoirian state reemerged, provoking in turn conflicts within the community over how to respond. Political deterioration had come with a rapid acceleration in the political instrumentalization of ethnoreligious identities. Houphouët's rhetoric of cultural nationalism founded on political unity, hospitality, and mutual enrichment – given the ill-fated name of "*ivoirité*" under his successor President Henri Konan Bédié – quickly gave way to fierce rejections of Baoulé supremacy, accusations of antiimmigrant xenophobia, and counter accusations of foreign meddling on the parts of various mobilized groups. Three political parties – Bédié's PDCI; the neoliberal Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR), led by Alassane Dramane Ouattara (popularly known as "ADO") and frequently associated with the interests of the north; and the center-left Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) led by longtime Gagnoa-based dissident and historian Laurent Gbagbo – emerged as the leading conduits for such rhetoric. Political posturing was increasingly accompanied by frequent outbreaks of violence against Burkinabé and other northern immigrants and by a series of heated debates in which certain politicians called into question the ability of *ivoirité* to integrate the country's northern populations.[76] The situation deteriorated further with a coup on December 24, 1999, triggering a new series of elections. On October 6, 2000, the Supreme Court invalidated all RDR and PDCI presidential candidates (including all the Muslim candidates for the office). After the actual election on October 22, violence directed primarily at supporters of Ouattara and the RDR left as many as 100 dead. Violence continued through the next few months, particularly during the days before legislative elections and after various declarations concerning Ouattara's eligibility for high office.

Throughout all this, the leadership of the community reassessed its claims to moral authority in ways that revealed their political agility but also the real limits of the ideology the community had constructed. It was also at this time that I carried out most of my interviews with members of the Yacoubist community, and so this process of reconfiguring moral rhetoric left its mark on the evidence I gathered. By early 2001, the community was loosely grouped around two informal factions. The most powerful group, which interacted with me through FOCYS's president, has distanced itself from the communitarian form of social organization that obtained during Yacouba's life. Rejecting the notion that all property must be owned collectively and that all labor must be directly for the community, Maître Cheickna had turned to

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76 See Pierre Kipré's useful essay, "Les discours politiques de décembre 1999 à l'élection présidentielle d'octobre 2000: thèmes, enjeux et confrontations," in *Côte d'Ivoire, l'année terrible: 1999–2000*, ed. Marc Le Pape and Claudine Vidal (Paris, 2002), pp. 81–121.

philanthropy to express his father's commitment to egalitarianism. He also permitted outsiders to benefit from Yacouba's *baraka* without requiring them to join the community, and he and those around him presented themselves as being able to channel those blessings. He had himself married outside the community and permitted certain others under his charge to do likewise.

Though he was the most active force within the community, Maître Cheickna had been accused by others of having "sundered" the community by overturning its source of internal coherence (its communitarian social order) and its means of differentiation from those outside (its endogamy and the initiatic nature of its religious practice). Some of these looked instead to Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, an autodidact who had been a close associate of Houphouët-Boigny. As the head of the community's principle *zâwiya* in Abidjan (located in the immigrant neighborhood of Treichville) he had the loyal following of a large number of the faithful. Yet he had far fewer resources at his command and it was largely his seniority and spiritual reputation that gave him the authority to challenge Maître Cheickna. In a sense, the three brothers, Cheickna Yacouba, Ahmadou, and Maître Cheickna, each took on one of the three major roles that a *shaykh* like Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti had combined, and which their father had embodied: the mediator and head of extended family, the mystic and spiritual leader, and the source of patronage and redistributed wealth. Internally, then, the crisis of Yacouba's death was a crisis of fragmented inheritance.

Externally the brothers also took divergent paths in what was essentially a crisis of the Ivoirian state. Cheick Ahmadou Sylla attempted to link the community directly to an explicitly Islamic form of quietism and multi-ethnic democracy. In newspaper articles published through the crisis and subsequent war he spoke in the voice of a Sufi sage, urging the capital's inhabitants to mutual understanding and tolerance and confronting xenophobia and religious stereotypes. Maître Cheickna Sylla instead highlighted the community's anticolonial credentials and minimized the centrality of the alliance with Houphouët-Boigny to his father's work. Friction with Gagnoa's Bété population was recast as the product of colonial manipulation, demonstrating the ways Muslims and Christians, northerners and southerners alike had suffered from French depredations and thus could be united in true *ivoirité*.[77]

Both efforts to mobilize Yacouba's legacy sought to preserve the moral authority that derived from not being corrupted by the more sordid aspects

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77 For example, Cheick Ahmadou Yacouba Sylla, "L'Islam n'a pas de candidat," *Le Jour* (Abidjan), Aug 22, 2000; and FOCYS to author, June 3, 2001. See also Chapter 9.

of political competition. Although Ahmadou openly supported the PDCI and Cheickna was associated by many with the RDR, both cultivated an air of independence, allowing Ahmadou to speak publically against violence and allowing Cheickna to serve on the Commission for National Reconciliation put into place following Gbagbo's election. In their efforts to establish their vital role in the country's economic development and democratization, the Yacoubists followed the same strategy that Marie Miran observed among other Sufis in Abidjan: in an era of an increasing public discourse about "modernity," and with anti-Sufi critics and anti-Muslim groups united in their efforts to present Sufis as superstitious or backward, Sufis had to adopt a modernizing posture themselves or risk political obsolescence.[78] At the same time, though, the Yacoubist affirmation of their place in modern Ivoirian society existed in irresolvable tension with a sense of detachment from some aspect of the host society, whether its culture, its religion, its political mechanisms, or its party.

These efforts have in turn brought the community closer to the rest of the Hamawiyya, and together with material success and political influence, have done much to smooth relations between Gagnoa and Nioro. Yet tensions remain: Ahmadou Sylla was one of the first Hamawis to acknowledge Shaykh Hamallah's death in France in 1943, risking the wrath of the Shaykh's family who maintained he had simply gone into occultation. The community as a whole balances respect for Hamallah's sons as the leaders of the community in Nioro with a polite silence about their claims to have inherited the Shaykh's spiritual authority or to act as his delegates.[79]

CONCLUSIONS

In many ways the story of the Hamawi followers of Yacouba Sylla is largely that of the accommodation of a religious movement to conditions that channeled its spiritual and moral energy into social and political initiatives corresponding closely to the broader trajectories of West African history. The tenor of French Islamic policy in the 1920s and 1930s, the changing economic conditions brought by colonial development, the shifting attitudes toward both Muslims and African plantation owners during the Popular Front years, and the changing framework of political activity after the war, all seem to adequately contextualize Yacoubist leaders' major decisions. Its revolutionary reach less consequential than its ameliorative grasp and its successes in maintaining the spiritual bonds among followers and building a community in the

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78 Marie Miran, "La Tijâniyya à Abidjan, entre désuétude et renaissance? L'œuvre moderniste d'El Hâjj Ahmed Tijânî Bâ, cheikh tijânî réformiste en Côte d'Ivoire contemporaine," in *La Tijâniyya*, pp. 439–467.

79 For debates over Hamallah's "occultation," see Soares, *Prayer Economy*, pp. 101–102.

face of severe oppression nonetheless count as one of the more striking organizational successes of the era. The shift in tactics from aggressive, confrontational proselytization to the unobtrusive construction of a religious-commercial network may have been one of the few "paths" to success, but it was hardly foreordained that the Yacoubists would find it. And since paths to failure leave fewer traces, it could be said to have been foreordained that historians would find the Yacoubists precisely because of this conformity.

Yet there are hints of messiness that threaten to subvert this easy summation and that suggest that it fails to exhaust the meanings of its events. Though Yacouba's preaching in Kaédi in 1929 was the proximate cause of the religious "effervescence" among certain eleven-bead Tijanis in Gattaga, the important roles played by other actors and the broader tensions and frustrations caught up in the move for spiritual renewal and reform fit uncomfortably within the narrative. Complicated, localized struggles among the various families of the town, and the goals of several different strong personalities such as Mamadou Sadio, pulled the still-inchoate group of Yacouba's followers in directions that none could have determined. Similarly, it was Yacouba's followers and not the Shaykh himself who first moved into cash cropping, and who themselves had responded in unexpected ways to administrative attempts to manage their movements. Yacouba's unique personal skills played an important role in navigating these difficult years – one can only lament, for example, the lack of sources on his intriguing relationships with Ivoirian administrators – and the Yacoubists also benefitted from no small amout of luck. The fortuitous coincidence of the rise to power of the Popular Front with the expiration of Yacouba's detention sentence allowed him to capitalize on new economic opportunities before the outbreak of war. Even his political engagement in the late 1940s and 1950s was as much the result of the coincidence of his strategic commercial importance with the interests of Houphouët-Boigny's political vehicles as it was a manifestation of a deeper consonance between their moral visions.

But above all such a narrative offers little insight into the motivations or experiences of Yacouba's followers. Though Yacouba and his followers saw themselves as participating explicitly in a process of Islamic reform, their actions appear more as a kind of "new religious movement,"[80] unconnected to any broader intellectual or symbolic context. Yacouba's membership in the Hamawiyya becomes a shorthand for certain administrative assumptions, or a way of categorizing information and guiding decisions, while on a smaller scale the relationship between disciple and master is reduced to the lowest

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[80] For an introduction, see James A. Beckford, ed., *New Religious Movements and Rapid Social Change* (Beverly Hills, 1986).

common denominators of self-aggrandizement on Yacouba's part and self-defense on Hamallah's part – competing interests reconciled ultimately by the material means symbolized by the gift of a new automobile. Nor does there appear to be anything geographically or culturally distinct about them, this despite the important role that specific places like Kaédi and Gagnoa play in the story, and the apparently ethnic nature of the initial revival. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the contemporary Yacoubist community is its steadfast embrace of a kind of ersatz Soninke identity: new members of the community abandon their birth name, adopting instead a typically Soninke name, and religious ceremonies in the community are all carried out in the Soninke language.

The difficulty in addressing these questions is partially one of sources and partially one of the absence of a coherent interpretive framework that is adequate to the task. Opening up the sources requires thinking through French colonial representations of Muslims and Muslim societies as well as a competing set of representations in the traditions of the community itself. These perspectives offer radically different interpretations of the changes experienced by the Yacoubists, different explanations for those changes, and different evaluations of the community's overall significance. In turn, a closer look at certain key moments in the Yacoubist past provides an opportunity to reexamine the role information gathering played in French efforts to systematically manage the practice of Islam in their African possessions in order to bring it into alignment with their vision of modernity and make it serve as a bulwark for the state's authority. It also illuminates twentieth-century Islamic reform in Africa, making visible the way Yacouba and his followers drew creatively on centuries of Islamic thought and social experimentation to craft responses to the rapid changes of the twentieth century, finding ways to take advantage of the resources brought by the French and use them for their own purposes.

PART TWO

"I WILL PROVE TO YOU THAT WHAT I SAY IS TRUE":
KNOWLEDGE AND COLONIAL RULE

4

Ghosts and the Grain of the Archives

MOST OF THE DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE ON THE HISTORY OF Yacouba Sylla and his followers comes from surveillance files, intelligence reports, and captured correspondence that were assembled and preserved by the French colonial administration. These reports and dossiers on which we rely were not, of course, maintained to facilitate objective historical analysis, but rather as the working memory of a process of domination. Much recent theorizing by historians and others has sought to address the paradox that sources that are indispensable for the study of domination and exploitation are themselves marked by the often unconscious strategies that justified and legitimated such actions. Virtually all state archives are, in this sense, "technologies of rule" as well as monuments to those technologies. The archives on the Yacoubists are no different; they owe their general form to the broad strategies of French rule in Africa and to their relations with other instruments of governance, such as the colonial police force and administrative patronage networks.[1]

There are many ways to respond to this problem. Systematic exploration of the rules that governed the production of colonial archives can tell us much about the rules of governing empires and help us identify more readily the gaps and silences within the knowledges of those who governed. To take one striking example, much of what is known about the Yacoubist community during the 1940s comes from the report compiled in 1943 by Commissaire Rortais in response to accusations that Yacouba Sylla was trading in slaves. No other document provides comparable detail about Yacouba's relationship with Shaykh Hamallah, about his attitude toward the administration, or about the political and economic interactions between the community and its neighbors in Gagnoa. At the same time, the text immediately reveals itself

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[1] Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in *Refiguring the Archive* ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cape Town, 2002), pp. 82–101; Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid, "Introduction" in *Refiguring the Archive*, pp. 7–17; and Gaurav Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham, 2001).

to be deeply influenced by French mythologies about Yacouba, about African Islam, and about the colonial project itself. Rortais began his report with a short overview: ''YACOUBA SYLLA, sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment by *Arrêté général* of 27 January 1930, following the bloody incidents created by him in Kaédi (Mauritania) in 1930, was compelled to serve his sentence in the *cercle* of Sassandra. He remained there until 1938.''[2] In this one sentence, Rortais presented the kernel of the official view of Yacouba, linking a characterization of the central events to a clear protagonist and to a justification for the colonial response. The sentence is also plainly false. Rortais claimed that the decision to imprison Yacouba in Sassandra for eight years was made after the conflicts in Kaédi in 1930; but his own chronology indicates that the *arrêté* in question was signed a full nineteen days *before* the outbreak of violence, which was on February 15th. There seems little reason to imagine that Commissaire Rortais was actively dissimulating when he blurred this key point in Yacouba's history. Rather he most likely simply relied on the archives of Côte d'Ivoire, whose official reports all gave the same incorrect sequence of events and implied the same conclusions.[3]

Nonetheless, it would have taken only a moment's reflection to realize the impossibility of the sequence given. Instead, Rortais, like the administrators before him who were his sources, responded to a strong formal pull within the written archive, within the rules of the practice that produced French colonial representations, that made it difficult to imagine Yacouba's history differently. Rather than being a simple error, the inconsistent chronology reflected a deeper truth: The incorrect sequence implied that the administration had imprisoned Yacouba in Sassandra *in response to* the events in Kaédi, that a just punishment had been meted out for a terrible crime – a crime whose ferocity could be confirmed by reading backward from the severity of the punishment. It simply made sense that the most heinous acts of a notorious enemy of the state would have been the cause for his imprisonment. This inconsistency in chronology – which was maintained so consistently in archival reports from the mid-1930s on that it has entered ''mainstream'' historical scholarship as a self-evident truth[4] – reflects

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2   Rapport Commiss. de Police Rortais, June 18, 1943, reprinted in ''Annexe n°18'' of Boukary Savadogo, ''Confréries et pouvoirs. La Tijaniyya Hamawiyya en Afrique occidentale (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger): 1909–1965'' (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Provence, 1998), pp. 604–617.

3   See, for example, Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1940 (ANS 2G-40/4); Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1939 (ANS 2G-39/3). This confusion pervaded the political and intelligence reports on Yacouba right up to independence.

4   Including, for example, the single most comprehensive study of Yacouba Sylla to date, Savadogo, ''Tijaniyya Hamawiyya,'' p. 327. See most recently Benjamin Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor, 2005), p. 97.

the way official sources for the history of Yacouba Sylla and his followers were, at least on their surface, structured by the colonial experience. It was not only that French officials did not ''fully'' understand the phenomena they observed, or that individual authors did not have access to (or chose not to examine) the ''full'' set of documents produced up until the time they wrote; the very process of constructing an archive presupposed a particular object of knowledge that the content of the archives could not avoid reproducing, albeit in many different, inconsistent ways.

Such administrative processes left their ''signatures'' in the archive in multiple ways. The imprint of French prejudices about African Muslims was particularly profound. Writing in different genres and using a range of evidence and styles of argumentation, administrators produced three main kinds of records: normative studies of African Islam relying on ethnic and racial stereotypes; surveillance files to mark deviations from these norms; and reports investigating any event or troubling situation that seemed related to religion. However, these efforts did not respond to anything like a uniform logic for gathering or analyzing colonial intelligence. Official prejudices and assumptions were heterogeneous and contradictory, often sending officials in opposite directions as they sought to interpret events and gather more information about them. Furthermore, the realities of European governance of Africa, with understaffed, underequipped, and undertrained officers trying to render colonies not just self-sufficient but productive for the metropole – what Sara Berry has called ''hegemony on a shoestring'' – resulted in a state that was brutal yet spatially discontinuous. The colonial state could bring its power to bear in a devastating manner at any given point in the empire; but the metropole's ability to administer its territory was illusory at best.[5] This fundamental fragility manifested itself in paranoia about African mobility, agitation, resentment, and ingratitude. Officers continually, often unconsciously, struggled to both confirm and deny those fears by learning more about their subjects. These needs combined with longstanding assumptions about Islam and ''black'' Africans to generate and sustain a phantasmal, incoherent object, *Islam noir*, ''black Islam,'' that in

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5 Sara Berry, *No Condition Is Permanent* (Madison, 1993), pp. 22–42. The use of ''hegemony'' in this context is misleading, however. The state's weakness increased its reliance on performative violence to deter resistance, inhibiting the formation of true hegemonic acceptance of rule. As Jeffrey Herbst concludes, colonial states had little success ''broadcasting'' their legitimacy in the spatially and institutionally homogeneous manner that hegemony implies. Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa* (Princeton, 2000).

turn shaped official responses to events within the Muslim communities of French West Africa.

Nonetheless, such an analysis can be carried too far, with disastrous results for the kinds of history that are written using colonial documents. Readings that facilely equate the ways colonial powers produced knowledge with the ways they governed, collapsing discourses of rule and institutions of rule, make all colonial documents merely testaments to the power and scope of the gaze of the imperial state. In extreme cases, the significance of colonialism to the texts it produced is explicitly posited to be out of proportion to the regime's actual power; in a logic that borders on a fetishization of colonial contact and that echoes old anthropological complaints about the contamination of primitive cultures by exposure to the modern West, the slightest hint of colonial agenda is sufficient to fully saturate a document with disciplining and "othering" powers. From the incontrovertible premise that colonial systems of knowledge sought to invent knowable objects that responded to imperial authority, the groundless conclusion is drawn that such processes of invention were unchecked and unbounded.[6] Such readings attribute nearly absolute presence to the colonial state and its agents in the meanings of the texts they produced; the unitary, intentional author lives on, perhaps uniquely so, in colonial studies. Even where the scope of the colonial state is taken to be limited by what is usually termed subaltern "agency" or "resistance," such limits take the form of the struggles of an author confronted by an unruly subject that refuses to play the role assigned to it.[7]

In fact, the production of colonial knowledge was never simply a closed dialectic between imperial gazes and African objects, the direct result of what Foucault called "the rules of a practice" that enabled statements "both to survive and to undergo regular modification" in a controlled manner.[8] Rather, *Islam noir* counted among its authors African Muslims themselves who participated, albeit asymmetrically, in the creation of their own colonial images. Since most officials lacked either linguistic or ethnographic training and were very small in number compared with the size and dispersion of the population they were meant to govern, most of the information generated about African societies, religions, or politics was in fact

6 Thomas Spear, "Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *JAH* 44 (2003), 3–27; Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

7 E.g. Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (2 vols.) (Chicago, 1991, 1997).

8 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), p. 130.

provided by local informants.[9] Even as administrative officials were organizing their investigations, categorizing their findings, and interpreting their data according to their Orientalist and ethnographic assumptions and in keeping with their desperate need to maintain control, they had to rely on their colonial subjects to supply them both with direct information about events and with the broader vision necessary to contextualize those events.[10] Colonial subjects were often fully aware of the link between official knowledge and decision making, and thus of the relationship between the control of information and the exercise of power. Yacouba Sylla's rivals, both among Muslim elites in the Western Sudan and French *colons* in Côte d'Ivoire, manipulated administrative intelligence to serve their own interests. Though some who provided information were socially marginal or distant observers, administrators frequently turned to local elites who had a vested interest in the outcomes enabled by their cooperation. Just as official biases and institutional structures differed across time and space, so too were the objectives of African informants diverse and changing; but once they made their way, however indirectly, into official reports, they became sedimented within the archive, influencing the future collections and interpretations built upon them.

For those historians for whom the archive remains a means to an end, rather than an object in and of itself, the project of learning how to read these sources is thus considerably more complicated than most recent theories would allow. The archives on Yacouba Sylla possess no coherent grain against which or along which one can read. No handy model of colonial domination or checklist of the principles of hegemony can unlock this archive, allowing us to refigure it to serve our own political or intellectual projects. Rather the archive must be approached as the messy product of multiple, contingent, and shifting forces; it is simultaneously the site of contestations, the custodian of the tools of battle, and the deposit of the ruins upon which subsequent battles were fought.

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9 Nicholas Dirks made this point over a decade ago in the context of South Asia, but did so only to provide yet another example of the "erasure" of the agency of the colonized, rather than with an eye to a technics of archival reading. C.A. Bayly, by contrast, makes almost the opposite argument: that dependence on Indian informants weakened British rule by providing a vehicle for "misinformation" and by separating out the technical information in reports from the organic contexts of its production. The truth, in French West Africa at least, clearly lay somewhere in between. Nicholas Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds. (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 279–313; C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, UK, 1996), esp. chs. 3 and 4.

10 Neil L. Whitehead, "The Historical Anthropology of the Text," *Current Anthropology* 36 (1995), 53–74.

THE GRAIN OF THE ARCHIVES: ISLAM, KNOWLEDGE, AND CONTROL

There is no doubt that French beliefs about Islam, Africans, and the nature of the colonial mission deeply influenced official reactions to Yacouba Sylla and his followers. Yet it is only possible to fully identify the effects of colonial commitments on the archive by tracing the arc of shifting interpretations of the community across the length of French rule. To be sure, colonial prejudices and assumptions were heterogeneous and often fully contradictory. Nonetheless, the ''official mind'' of the administration was additive; reports written from one perspective became part of the colonial database, exercising influence over administrators who may have held radically different views. This process facilitated the recurrence of analytic tropes in their writings, just as the consistency of the overarching practical imperatives of colonial domination resulted in deep consonances across time in the kinds of information that analysts sought to gather.

The most important assumption shared by early observers of the Yacoubists was that religious ''activity'' (as distinct from both normal ''practice'' and historical change) was by definition a political matter. There were, however, two principal schools of thought about the relationship between Islam and West African society and thus about how to determine the political significance of such activity. Influenced by French experiences in Algeria, early specialists on Islam, including Robert Arnaud, Xavier Coppolani, and Paul Marty, considered ''orthodox'' Islam to be a legitimate and effective social force in Africa. Muslim networks, and particularly Sufi *tarîqa*s, could be used as intermediaries provided they were sufficiently ''localized'' (i.e., small enough to keep them from becoming competing regional systems of authority) and ''particularized'' (i.e. ''African'' enough to protect against influences from North Africa or the Middle East). It was this group that wrote ethnically specific sociological studies of ''African Islam.'' Many administrators working in West Africa were suspicious of these ''academic'' models of Islam which they felt had been imported from North Africa without taking into consideration ''local realities.'' This was often a code for a racial understanding of African culture and a belief in the distinctiveness of West African forms of Islam. Administrative faith in ethnic determinism and commitment to a *politique des races* (a kind of divide and rule through the racialization of policies) meant that local officials and analysts relied heavily on ethnic stereotypes and organized their knowledge around them, sanctioning Islamic beliefs when they corresponded to the underlying ''character'' of a given group and the role assigned to it in the imperial project. This approach became most dominant between the 1920s and 1930s when scholars and administrators like Maurice Delafosse and Jules Brévié argued that Islam was an unnatural

religion for most black Africans and that its spread would lead inevitably to social breakdown.[11]

Neither position ever completely dominated colonial discourse. Local administrators refused to accept purely Orientalist definitions of African Islam; but it was too costly and dangerous to attempt to either de-Islamize the Western Sudan or to insulate local communities entirely from the broader Muslim world. Through a working, shifting compromise, Muslim leaders were tolerated and even patronized, but also carefully scrutinized. Officials intervened to a considerable degree in the internal affairs of *tarîqa*s to make sure their activities served French interests on both practical and ideological levels and to suppress those that did not.[12] Such a project required a considerable amount of information of a very specific kind. One of the Algeria specialists, Arnaud, became the director of the nascent Bureau of Muslim Affairs, and in 1905–1906 he instituted the gathering of *fiches de renseignements* on all-important Muslim leaders in French West Africa. The creation of surveillance files on specific *marabouts* reflected and reinforced the belief that *Islam noir* was ultimately a manifestation of religious leaders' instrumental manipulation of their credulous followers. Analysts believed a cataloging of the machinations of the "scholarly class" could, when set alongside broad sociocultural surveys, provide an exhaustive description of the religious condition of Muslim societies.[13] As a result, almost any detail about a specific religious activity that entered the archives did so as a suspect event (suspect *because* it was an event) and was then set against the normalizing studies of *Islam noir* in relation to which it was construed as either a lamentable deviation or a revealing manifestation.

Because of the fundamental tension at the heart of French perceptions of African Islam, analysts had recourse to two distinct interpretive devices when they examined the information gathered through this process. On the one hand, religious orthodoxy could be associated with the status quo and

[11] Robinson calls these the "ethnographic" and "orientalist" approaches. The latter view, for example, dominated the writings of Captain Pierre André. See Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* (Cambridge, UK, 1988), pp. 155–163; and Pierre J. André, *Islam noir: contribution à l'étude des confréries religieuses islamiques en Afrique Occidentale, suivie d'une étude sur l'Islam au Dahomey* (Paris, 1924). The ability of these two seemingly contradictory theories to coexist in the same administration, or indeed in the same mind, may suggest that they be seen as parallel transformations of what Mudimbe has called epistemological ethnocentrism, but here structured around the triads of French republicanism, "pure" (ie. Arab) Islam, and African *Islam noir* rather than a simple dualism. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN, 1988).

[12] Harrison, *France and Islam*, pp. 37–43, 145–150, 155–182.

[13] David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens, OH, 2000), pp. 38–41; Harrison, *France and Islam*, pp. 42–43.

sociopolitical stability and contrasted with the anarchic effects of heterodoxy. Heterodoxy was never therefore simply a form of difference, but a challenge to the social control religious institutions provided and thus to reasonable religion itself. On the other hand, orthodoxy could be identified with an alien, ''Arab'' Islam, and thereby with radicalism and internationalism, in contrast to African tolerance, localism, and pragmatism. Any practice or belief that departed from both international and local norms was thus open to double condemnation – simultaneously fanatical and antinomian. Officials followed both procedures as they gathered information about Yacouba Sylla early in his career and again when they supplemented that information as the situation in Gorgol approached a crisis in 1929 and early 1930. Local *commandants* had noted Yacouba's stays in Kaédi prior to his dramatic activities in 1929, and while the original surveillance notes do not seem to have survived, they likely included the minimal information about Yacouba's age, parentage, ethnicity, education, and *tarîqa* affiliation that made up most such reports.[14] It was only after the *mawlid nabî* celebration of 1929 that administrators began to take note of his specific religious activities. Once he had a following, Yacouba was suddenly transformed from a minor merchant into the ''chief lieutenant'' of Shaykh Hamallah and was thereby inserted into an ongoing debate on the Hamawiyya and its threat to social stability.[15]

French policy in the 1920s and 1930s turned on the distinction between ''good'' and ''bad'' *tarîqa*s, and during this period the ''bad'' *tarîqa* par excellence was the Hamawiyya. Once Yacouba became seen as a ''Hamallist'' preacher, the key objective for administrators was determining the extent to which he and his followers reflected the ''militant'' tendencies of this order. To answer this, they turned to Kaédi's past and discovered the suddenly significant local history of Hamawi and ʿUmarian rivalry.[16] Such a context provided a way to account for both of Yacouba's specific actions – as a fanatical disciple of Hamallah, he could be expected to agitate until confronted with

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14 Cmdt. de cerc. Gorgol (Charbonnier), ''Compte-rendu 5 Septembre 1929, °1099C,'' p.3 (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 2).

15 The conflicts around Hamallah in the 1920s had triggered latent administrative concern about the use of the Tijaniyya to organize anti-French militancy, and Hamallah's rivals had quickly convinced authorities that these conflicts reflected the fundamentally heterodox nature of Hamallah's teachings. The administrative perspective is reflected quite well in Pierre Alexandre, ''A West African Islamic Movement: Hamallism in French West Africa'' in R. Rotberg and Ali Mazrui (eds.) *Protest and Power in Black Africa* (New York, 1970), pp. 497–498. Descemet took the lead in constructing this interpretation of the Hamawiyya (Harrison, *France and Islam*, p. 173), though André had paved the way with information he gathered on Hamallah during his *tournée* of 1923. Rapp. pol. ann., Soudan, 1923 (CAOM 1 Affpol/160).

16 Charbonnier, ''Compte-rendu.'' Hamawi traditions indicate that al-Akhdar made an important earlier trip to Kaédi in the late 1890s; but Charbonnier seems to have been unaware of this visit. See Chapter 3.

force, and for the reception he received among the local population, he tapped into a rich vein of tension between pro- and anti-Hamallah partisans. Adherence to either the eleven- or twelve-bead practice became seen as a socially defining attribute; the political affinities and familial allegiances of Yacouba and his rivals could now be immediately deduced and their relevance for the strategies of colonial rule quickly determined. The link between Yacouba Sylla and Shaykh Hamallah provided a ready-made justification for the violent force used to confront the revival in Kaédi, and in turn justified more severe repression of the Hamawiyya outside Kaédi. Indeed, the year that Yacouba's followers were killed saw a number of incidents interpreted as "provocations" by followers of Hamallah, including an altercation involving a woman near Nioro and a skirmish in the desert. When rumors circulated in Bamako and elsewhere that Hamallah might return to Nioro before the end of his sentence, these mere whispers were enough to trigger an authoritative response: "The authors [of these rumors]," the Governor recounted ominously in his annual report, "have been punished."[17] Part of the seductiveness of this framework was its unfalsifiability. Official records consistently describe the conflicts in Kaédi as being between "eleven-" and "twelve-bead" Tijanis, despite the fact that at least one report suggested some of Yacouba's support had come from women who were affiliated with the twelve-bead branch of the Tijaniyya.[18] For the administration, these women were the exception that proved the rule: they were remarkable because, by following Yacouba they were seen to be crossing a social line separating the "twelve" from the "eleven," and this peculiarity could in turn be attributed to their gender.

But even as the *tarîqa*-centered approach to African Islam led administrators to look to Kaédi's past, other models led them to the ethnographic present. By 1929 the *politique des races* had insinuated itself firmly into administrative discourses and offered an attractive way to explain the apparent intractability of the dispute in Kaédi by reference to cultural and social categories. Hypostatizing ethnonyms and eliding the fluidity, contestation, and ambiguity in identity categories, French scholars and officers associated each group with cultural and political norms. These efforts were both informed and limited by struggles within African communities to determine the most effective scale and mode of interaction with the state, while the forms of identity employed by those subject to colonial control constantly escaped from the reductive definitions imposed by rulers. The asymmetrical nature of these interactions meant that such negotiation or semantic migration often came at a high price,

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[17] Rapp. pol. ann., Soudan, 1930 (CAOM 1Affpol/160).
[18] Gov.-Gén. AOF (Carde) to Lieut. Govs. (all colonies), "Circulaire 13-3-30, °133AP," pp. 10–11 (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 1).

and once invested with state power the analysis became self-fulfilling and the vocabulary of ethnicity limited the forms of analysis which officials and scholars could use to make sense of observed phenomena.[19]

Officials ethnicized the conflicts over Yacouba's revival by equating residency in each of the two African neighborhoods, Gattaga and Toulde, with Soninke and "Tukulor" identities, respectively, and then correlating those ethnic categories with religious attitude. The groundwork for this interpretation had been laid by earlier analyses of altercations in Nioro in 1924 that had involved Hamallah's followers and that observers had framed in terms of an ethnic clash between Soninke and "Moors."[20] From that point on, the French kept a close eye on the Soninke among Hamallah's entourage and Kaédi became seen as a center of Soninke particularism within the Hamawiyya. The French assumed there were tensions between Kaédi and Nioro based on these ethnic distinctions and monitored the movements of Soninke Hamawis between the two towns.[21]

Such analyses both depended on and reinforced the specific position of Soninke identity within broader ethnic classifications. Official discourse described Soninke or "Sarakollés" as merchants and farmers, ruled by weak, elderly chiefs, whom French conquest had liberated from the exactions of their former Fulbe, Bambara, or *bidân* oppressors. Soninke were expected to express appropriate gratitude for the *pax colonica* and its attendant opportunities for collective advancement. If particular Soninke leaders or communities were less than completely accommodating of their new sovereigns, officials could only find it "particularly curious" that "those who have every interest in seeing French domination prolonged here" would display signs of recalcitrance. Faced with anything less than total loyalty, administrators turned to racial explanations: such a lack of appreciation reflected the low intelligence of a "race with a base, deceitful character." In 1885, Mamadu Lamine Drame, a Soninke scholar whom the French had allowed to operate freely since he shared their mistrust of Ahmadu Seku Tal, son of al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal, launched a military and reformist movement in the Upper Senegal Valley. Though fighting the French was probably secondary to his goal of

19 See the overview in Spear, "Limits of Invention"; also Jean-Loup Amselle and Elikia M'Bokolo (eds.), *Au coeur de l'ethnie: ethnies, tribalisme et état en Afrique* (Paris, 1985); Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Gérard Prunier (eds.), *Les ethnies ont une histoire* (Paris, 1989); Jean-Loup Amselle, "Peul, Bambara et Malinké, un système de transformations," in *Logiques Métisses: Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs* (Pairs, 1990), pp. 71–93; Jean Bazin, "A chacun son Bambara," in *Au coeur de l'ethnie*, pp. 87–127; John Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism", in *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, ed. P. Kaarsholm and J. Hultin (Roskilde, 1994), pp.131–150.
20 Rapp. pol. ann., Soudan, 1924 (CAOM 1Affpol 160).
21 E.g., Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu," p. 5.

overthrowing local Halpulaar elites, attacks on French outposts and a tele-graph line led officials to interpret Mamadu Lamine's actions as anticolonial and potentially mahdist. These events may have contributed, however unjusti-fiably, to administrators' sense that Soninke leaders made unreliable inter-mediaries and that their hostility toward Halpulaaren could prove a source of unrest. Indeed, the events of 1885 and 1886 may have begun to bring Halpulaar and administrative stereotypes about Soninke into consonance, with fateful consequences for the Yacoubists.[22] Administrative anxieties thus developed through a dialectic of imagined resentment and ingratitude, bringing both a preoccupation with Soninke ''rebelliousness'' and a constant concern that some Soninke might have reason to believe the French were failing in their duty to protect them from their ''enemies.''[23]

Administrators also worried about the high rates of Soninke participation in labor migration. They feared such activity would have a ''deracinating'' effect, undermining the authority of the patriarchal family and that of local chiefs, and weaken territorially based mechanisms of governance.[24] Spatial mobility also worried those committed to a localist, ethnically particularist

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22 Abdoulaye Bathily, ''Mamadou Lamine Dramé et la résistance anti-impérialiste dans le Haut-Sénégal (1885–1897),'' *Notes africaines* 125 (1970), 20–32; Humphrey Fisher, ''The Early Life and Pilgrimage of Al-Hajj Muhammad Al-Amin the Soninke (d. 1887),'' *JAH* 11:1 (1970), 51–69; Ibrahima Baba Kaké, *Mamadou Lamine: Marabout et résistant soninké* (Paris, 1977); Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, pp. 132–133. Fisher also reports (58) a tradition that tensions between Mamadu Lamine and Ahmadu may have been partly caused by Mamadu Lamine's adoption of an eleven-bead Tijani *wird*. This fascinating but perplexing claim seems unlikely, and in any case it does not appear that the French had heard such stories. What it may suggest, however, is that Fisher's informants had read the crisis of 1929 and 1930 back into the trauma of 1885 in a way that implicitly associated Yacouba's actions with his fellow Soninke ''marabout'', Drame. Support for the ethnic interpretation of the movement may have broken down along the line dividing ''Islam specialists'' and local officials, as accounts drawing on administrative reports seem to have emphasized this analysis while Paul Marty seems to have argued for a more nuanced view (Fisher, 67).

23 See, for example, the evolution of these views across the *rapports politiques* and *rapports de tournées* for Nioro 1891–1900, especially Rapp. mens. Mai 1898; Rapp resumé, oct 1892 - apr 1893; and Rapp. tourné, 1900 (all ANMK FA 1E-60). For the same dynamic further west in Dyahunu, see Eric Pollet and Grace Winter, *La société soninké (Dyahunu, Mali)* (Bruxelles, 1971), pp. 77–78.

24 François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens, OH, 1997) esp. ch. 6; Rapps. pol. et du tournée, Nioro, 1921–1949, esp. 1e trim 1921, 3e trim 1921 (both by Cmdt. de cer. Duranthon), 1e trim 1922, 2e trim 1922 (both by Cmdt. de cer. Blanc), and Lieut. Gov. Soudan (Olivier) to Duranthon, May 9, 1921 (ANMK FR 1E-36); Rapp. pol. ann., Soudan, 1938, p. 94 (CAOM 1Affpol 603/9). On colonial strategies of spatial control, see Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (trans. Mary Harper et. al.) (London, 1993 [1989]), pp. 51–59, 101–103; Florence Bernault, ''De l'Afrique ouverte à l'Afrique fermée: comprendre l'histoire des réclusions continentales,'' in *Enfermement, prison et châtiments en Afrique, du 19e siècle à nos jours*, ed. Bernault (Paris, 1999), pp. 56–62; and on administrative attitudes toward nomadism, see Pierre Boilley, ''Enfermements administratifs, enfermements d'exil: la chaîne des réclusions sahariennes,'' in *Enfermement en Afrique*, pp. 365–385.

vision of African Islam, reflected in a long-standing concern that Soninke communities were fertile ground for "hybrid" heresies caused by "incomplete" Islamization. As late as 1952, intelligence officers in the very Muslim region of Kaarta were still rehearsing an elegy for "traditional" Soninke religious beliefs and wringing their hands over an identity crisis they believed was produced by recent transformations in spirituality: "The Soninke, for example, no longer know quite what they are – Muslims? Something else besides? But respectful, despite everything, of ancient beliefs, of which they have kept vague external manifestations in certain villages . . . not in a consistent manner, but in isolated instances, under certain circumstances."[25]

Commandants Charbonnier and Quegneaux each relied on these typologies in their handling of the 1929 crises. Charbonnier insisted that while Hamallah himself seemed to have no relation with the revival underway in Kaédi, Yacouba Sylla needed to be kept away from the rest of Hamallah's Soninke disciples because they might be susceptible to his destabilizing teachings. Quegneaux openly considered the "Toucoulour" of Toulde more trustworthy than the Soninke of Gattaga and only reluctantly punished them for their aggressions against Yacouba's followers. This ethnic logic peaked in Mauritanian Governor Chazal's 1930 summary of the events: Soninke Muslims were attracted to Yacouba because, he concluded, they were "of a cruder mentality" than their Tukulor neighbors, "and extremely credulous."[26] The fact that Yacouba Sylla was not a native of Kaédi also fed into perceptions of the migrant Soninke agitator, deracinated and capable of infecting others of his kind. Rather than ask themselves what Yacouba's teachings or actions meant within the context of local politics or culture, his origins from outside the region enabled him to function as a *deus ex machina*, aggravating existing tensions and stirring up the population. An influential report by Inspecteur des Affairs Dumas, who played a crucial role in shaping the official response to February 15, 1930, thoroughly embraced such a spatial framework: "the events which followed the quarrels between those affiliated with different rituals, were," he argued, "the result of interference [*immixtion*] by persons foreign to the colony."[27]

Once exiled from Kaédi, the ethnic lens through which administrators analyzed the behavior of the Yacoubists shifted to fit new regional contexts.

25 J. Luciani, "Rapport sur le Kaarta-Soninke," 1952, based on a *tournée* from May 27, to June 11, 1952 (ANMK FA 1D-51).
26 Gov.-Gén. AOF (Carde) to Lieut. Govs. (all colonies), "Circulaire 13-3-30, °133AP," pp .10–11; Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu," p. 5. Also Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Quegneaux) à Lieut. Gov. Maur., °190, 22-4-30; Lieu. Gov. Maur. to Quegneaux, Apr 12, 1930; Lieut. Gov. Maur. to Gov.-Gén. AOF, Mar 18, 1930 (all CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6).
27 Dumas, "Annexe" to "Rapport politique annuel, Mauritanie, 1930" (ANS 2G-30/3).

In southern Côte d'Ivoire, where many of Yacouba's followers ended up after leaving detention, Soninke tended to be subsumed into the category of "Dioula," which itself was a broad category containing the various Malinké groups of the northwest and a local synonym for both Muslim and merchant. In Côte d'Ivoire's ethnic politics, Dioula were contrasted with the Baoulé of the east, the Bété of the southwest, and the Mossi of Upper Volta. The Bété themselves were one of the few clear cases of colonial ethnogenesis. Constructed almost entirely out of whole cloth, Bété identity became tied to two related discourses, one that distinguished the autochthons of the Sassandra River basin from the immigrants the French had begun encouraging to enter the area starting in the 1920s, and one that distinguished ethnic groups by techniques of cultivation, means of organizing labor, and patterns of urban – rural circulation. Both of these discourses placed Bété on one end of a continuum and Baoulé, Dioula, and Mossi "immigrants" on the other. These distinctions in turn quickly became associated with differential success in accumulation and access to political power both locally and regionally, with Bété communities increasingly, and self-consciously, marginalized. By the 1950s, these developing identities intersected with the mobilization strategies and organizational apparatuses of the emerging political parties, becoming more explicitly linked to high-stakes interregional competition in the process.[28]

During the years when Yacouba's followers were settling into communities around Gagnoa, the system of ethnic relations that distinguished them from their Bété neighbors was a recent and still-fluid construction, intimately tied to questions of land use, labor mobilization, and degree of integration into urban society. The categories into which the administration sorted ethnicities, and the affinities that it assumed were natural among these groupings, thus helped determine the role they attributed to Yacouba's community during the 1940s and 1950s. Though the community became increasingly

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[28] Turn-of-the-century French scholars and military administrators projected the term "bété" upon a culturally heterogeneous population that shared only a tendency toward highly localized sociopolitical organization. The idea of a *pays bété* was formulated, and its boundaries sketched out, years before the areas in which the so-called Bété lived had even come under direct French control; thus the category *bété* was created by writers who knew virtually nothing at all about the people whom the label was meant to describe. In fact, the first cohort of civilian administrators expressed considerable doubt about the utility of such an ethnonym. But the idea of a Bété people received a boost when the Sassandra River basin was marked off for French immigrant settlement and for intensive planting of coffee and cacao to replace existing yam and plantain cultivation. Quickly, the presumed coherence of this "natural" economic zone became transferred to those who inhabited it. Jean-Pierre Dozon. "Les Bété: une création coloniale," in *Au coeur de l'ethnie*, pp. 62–80; Deirdre M. Birmingham, "Local Knowledge of Soils: The Case of Contrast in Côte d'Ivoire and its Considerations for Extension" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1996), p. 26.

heterogeneous during these years, as followers from French Soudan, Upper Volta, and several areas within Côte d'Ivoire joined those who had been expelled from Kaédi, administrative reports nonetheless continued to refer to them as "Sarakollés." Yacouba's status as a Dioula naturalized his role in the regional development of commercial agriculture, transportation, and petty commerce, while any suspicions about the heterodoxy of his Islam became irrelevant in this decidedly non-Muslim context. As a result, administrative and police reports thoroughly explored Yacouba's relationships with those politicians or parties with whom Dioula were expected to affiliate, but ignored the possibility of relationships with Bété elites.[29] For the same reason, the surveillance reports that tracked Yacouba's contacts outside his community only recorded visitors from Abidjan, the Dioula towns of Côte d'Ivoire, and other colonies, and assumed the Yacoubists had no significant local networks. Their only reported interactions with "autochthons" – advancing them credit, selling manufactured goods, and purchasing crops – were easily assimilated into the stereotypical behavior of a Dioula merchant. The inevitable social ties that such activities – not to mention Yacouba's use of local labor and his purchasing of land from local residents – must have created are simply invisible in these records.

Ivoirian administrators were generally unaware of the complex debates about Muslim politics that interested their counterparts in the north and the staff of the Bureau of Muslim Affairs. They conceptualized Yacouba Sylla simply as a northerner and a Muslim; they took the lack of large numbers of conversions to Islam as evidence of Yacouba's religious insignificance in the area, and dismissed accusations of sorcery lodged against him (strong evidence that he was indeed seen as having important spiritual powers) as ignorant superstition.[30] But specialists in Islam did not lose sight of Yacouba once he moved south and they continued to interpret his community in the light of intra-*tarîqa* policies. As the relationship between the administration and the Hamawiyya fluctuated from year to year, intelligence officers monitored Yacouba's relationship with Nioro. Whether by luck or skillful control of intelligence, the Yacoubists generally managed to end up on the right side at each turn. When, in 1938, the administration believed that reconciliation with Hamallah had been achieved, Yacouba's followers benefited from the administration's general policy of encouraging collegiality within the Tijaniyya. Then, in 1940, when the "Nioro-Assaba

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[29] Oral sources give as examples fraternal relationships with figures ranging from Dignan Bailly to Laurent Gbagbo. The subsequent ability of the community to remain largely aloof from the violent conflicts that have characterized the insertion of Bété consciousness into the ideology of "Ivoirité" at least partially substantiates these claims. See Chapter 9.

[30] Rapport Rortais.

affair'' initiated a new round of conflicts surrounding Hamallah, Ivoirian officials observed that Yacouba seemed ''to have definitively broken with his past.''[31] Indeed, some had become convinced that Yacouba was so thoroughly pacified that it was no longer meaningful to even consider him a Muslim. As a result, the rumors in 1940 about Yacouba's conversion to Catholicism occasioned little skepticism from administrators.[32] Ironically, the cumulative effect of Ivoirian surveillance of the community was thus to convince the administration that ''Yacoubism'' was not at base a religious movement. No charge of insincerity accompanied the suggestion that his conversion would have relieved the tiresome surveillance to which he was subjected, and this says quite a bit about colonial assumptions about the nature and depth of African religious sentiment generally. Conversion became a purely social signifier: having brought about a rupture with his past life, severing his connections with past associates, it was only natural that Yacouba would demonstrate this distance by changing faiths.

This nonchalance also reflected a profound shift in the French approach to West African Islam, as new concerns about pan-Islamism and nationalist movements replaced fears about mahdist uprisings or concerns about the backwardness of sly, manipulative *marabouts*. This new attitude is visible as early as 1935 when (Acting) Mauritanian Governor Jean Louis Beyries outlined the government's latest policy toward Yacouba's followers in a directive to the *commandant* at Kaédi. The practices of the Yacoubists were ''not new among the Islamic brotherhoods,'' Beyries insisted, and though contrary to ''the Coran and the Sunna, . . . the tolerance of Muslims allows, throughout the world . . . [members to engage in such practices] without fear of losing their status as Muslims.'' The heterodoxy of the Yacoubists thus became a universal and therefore more-or-less irrelevant feature of all Muslim societies. Instead of seeing a correlation between heterodoxy and instability as in the 1920s and early 1930s, the question of whether the administration should ''combat this sect, persecute its members, exercise surveillance over its cultural manifestations, in a word, 'repress them,' or, on the other hand, . . . gain the confidence of its adepts . . . and satisfy ourselves with observing them and directing them'' became purely a question of personality and *realpolitik*. Already concerned with what he believed to be growing pan-Islamic sentiment, and perhaps wary of replicating the administration's earlier experience with Hamallah himself, Beyries opted for the path of engagement and control. ''From experience,'' he noted, violent repression risked ''giving them the

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31 Gov.-Gén. AOF to Lieut. Gov. Maur, °385, May 6, 1938 (CAOM 14Miom 2170 [9G-32]); Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1940, p. 50.

32 Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1940, p.50; and Rapport Rortais.

martyr's palm in the eyes of all Muslims. . . . It is thus a work of tolerance . . . that we must undertake. . . . Your surveillance should be carried out in the liberal spirit which our law imposes."[33]

By the late 1940s, the most pressing issue for colonial observers of Muslim politics in French West Africa was delineating the precise relationship between the Hamawiyya and the emerging, proto-nationalist RDA. In 1948, the administration believed most Hamawis in the Federation were turning toward the RDA for protection from official harassment, though it also suspected many were tricked into joining by being promised exemption from income taxes. Searching for social organizations that might be supporting the RDA's political activity, the French seized quickly upon the vastness of Yacouba's commercial networks and the respect with which they believed he was held within the *tarîqa*. His friendship with Houphouët-Boigny and his support for the PDCI thus appeared to reflect more than personal inclination, and the Yacoubists suddenly seemed to hold great political influence. By 1949, officials feared, somewhat improbably, that Yacouba might have managed to reorganize the entire Hamawiyya around himself, ending the confusion and filling the power vacuum left by the exile of Hamallah in 1941 and the suppressions that followed the Nioro-Assaba affair.[34] The extent to which this concern was totally divorced from reality reflects just how anxious administrators were to find some sort of center to the *tarîqa*, preferably one that connected it in an obvious manner to the RDA.

Though on one level this approach reflected their perennial concern with the ability of Sufi *tarîqa*s to mobilize political support, it also demonstrated the shifting grounds on which the French were willing to assimilate particular *tarîqa*s into the status quo. In the 1920s and 1930s the teachings of Hamallah were considered an archetypal Sufi heresy and Yacouba was to a large extent damned by association with it. But by 1949, the Hamawiyya had itself become part of the colonial Islamic orthodoxy – albeit one with a disturbing tendency to produce outbreaks of radical anti-French activity – as the French now distinguished between "Yacoubisme" and "Hamallisme orthodoxe." The same report which made this distinction claimed that the specific practices of Yacouba's followers "mixed" Islamic and "animist" elements. Yet rather than worry, as Mauritanian Governor Chazal had in 1930 when faced with a similar report, that this might "wound profoundly the conscience of other Muslims" and result in a loss of respect for co-opted leaders, the officer who noted the fact simply seems to have taken it as indicative of Yacouba's cultural

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33 "Modalité de la surveillance à exercer sur les Yacoubistes," Lieut. Gov. Mauritania (Beyries) to Cmdt. de Cer. Gorgol, 1935 (ANMt E2-41).

34 Rapports trimestriels sur l'Islam en AOF, 2°-3° trim. 1948 (CAOM 1Affpol 2259/1). BTLC, "Note de Renseignements: Le Yacoubisme," Dakar, Oct 1949 (CAOM 1 Affpol 2259/3).

legitimacy and thus his potential political authority. The rest of the report, accordingly, confined itself to a geographic survey of Yacouba's *zâwiya*s and commercial activities as a way to establish the size of his constituency.[35]

It was not only deep shifts in French attitudes toward Islam in general or the Hamawiyya in particular that produced the image of a profound change in the community's trajectory. The very immediate interests of individual administrators also changed over these years, and with them the types of information they considered important and the kinds of things they were willing to write in reports to their superiors. In the late 1930s, just as Yacouba's followers were beginning to emerge from detention, Ivoirian administrators began to concern themselves more with managing unruly French settlers and ensuring the flow of labor to African and European planters alike than with maintaining their authority over African elites. Yacouba's questionable religious activities could easily be overlooked by an administration eager to celebrate his contribution to the flourishing African planter economy. Similarly, concern in the 1950s with an RDA – Muslim alliance was, in Côte d'Ivoire, more a complication in the process of choosing a privileged intermediary than it was a sign of the rise of political Islam. From their vantage it was hard to tell whether Yacouba was a threat or an ally. Skillfully able to avoid participation in the most visible excesses of the PDCI's campaigns but yet clearly linked with its highest members, Yacouba's political activities, whatever they may have been, figured in the archives like a kind of specter whose presence was felt but which could not precisely be identified.

Most confidential administrative reports and correspondence from the late 1950s remain sealed today, so it is impossible to say exactly how French officials viewed the community as West Africa slipped out of their formal control. But by the time Yacouba Sylla vanished from the official archive, the ways French officials at various levels of the administrative hierarchy imagined his community had gone through several sets of transformations, all of which reflected changes in official attitudes toward *Islam noir*, toward techniques of control, and toward African politics more broadly. There is little question, then, that attention to the relationship between metropolitan concerns and the archival data about Yacouba Sylla reveals much about the nature of colonial rule in West Africa and about the French imperial project in general. This small volume in what Valentin Mudimbe has called the "colonial library" – the mass of representations of Africa generated through European rule – did serve the interests of its authors and thus can be made to serve the interests of historians who study those authors. The identification of

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35 BTLC, "Note de Renseignements: Le Yacoubisme"; Lieut. Gov. Maur (Chazal) to Gov.-Gén. AOF, Mar 18, 1930 (CAOM 14Miom 2177 [9G-67]).

the imperial imprimatur within this archive would seem to provide a guide for discounting these sources by stripping out their biases and preconceptions, reading them "against the grain" in search of a more authentic, insurgent history of the Yacoubists. But if we attend more closely to the specific descriptions of Yacouba Sylla and his followers, to the content of these representations as opposed to their generic qualities, we find that they bear traces of an additional set of voices that point to contexts of interpretation (and thus techniques of deconstruction) that lie outside the control or even the experiences of the sources' official authors.

GHOSTWRITERS IN THE ARCHIVES: RELIGIOUS COMPETITION AND BORROWED KNOWLEDGE IN THE COLONIAL LIBRARY

No algorithm for reading an archive can aspire to completely exhausting the truths that have left their traces within. But a responsible reading strategy, one that accounts as much as possible for the lines of force present in texts and that follows those lines outward into events, needs to break with established chronologies. For archives do not exist in unidirectional time. The approach pursued here traces three interlocking chronologies: the sequence by which pieces of information and representations came into the possession of French officials; the process by which colonial investigators and analysts, operating retrospectively, used that information to produce interpretations of events and to guide subsequent information gathering; and the narratives that historians have constructed out of these sundry sources to make sense of the historical events the archives claim to document. Moving back and forth between these temporal scales reveals that colonial "ways of knowing" and the effects of colonial rule on religion were highly fractured and very context specific.

To start with a simplification, colonial rule in West Africa created an environment in which certain forms of Islam, certain networks of Muslim leadership, and certain ways of responding to French presence thrived while others foundered. In areas where the state's control of religious institutions was strong, French officials were able to influence, if not direct, this process. In places like Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali, those who succeeded in representing their version of Islam as most compatible with the dictates of colonial rule received in return access to the resources of metropolitan power to use in their competition with other religious leaders for clients and patronage. In other areas, the state's influence was more indirect, altering the local institutions of authority that were available to participants in these debates and creating new ones, but rarely able to make its interventions compatible with programmatic statements of policy.

In no case, however, was the outcome of this competition reducible to the colonial state's vision of what African Islam should look like. In part this

was because the sources of intra-Muslim competition, the terms according to which it was waged and the religious and political questions that leaders saw as at stake in it, all drew on memories of events and debates that predated colonial rule itself. Thus Muslim elites' accommodation of colonial rule was not an endpoint toward which all successful ''paths'' led, but rather one strategy among many. Muslim entrepreneurs were able to take advantage of the dissonances within administrative depictions of Islam to further situation-specific objectives. Accommodation did not take place between ''Muslims'' and a coherent colonial regime, but rather was the result of temporary and often local constellations of power in which religious elites and administrators shared similar goals. As a result, those who had some success in influencing French policy often differed considerably among themselves, both in terms of their strategies for exercising this influence and in terms of what they hoped to secure by making use of the colonial state.[36]

One of the most important resources Muslim elites could seek to control was the production of knowledge about African Islam, knowledge that in turn directed the activities of the colonial state. As the administration accommodated itself to the varying demands of any number of other groups, exercising its domination thus required the formulation of a representation of the colonial situation that was based on a wide variety of ''borrowed knowledges.'' A glimpse into the process by which administrators took possession of the knowledge of others and turned it around to discipline those they dominated is provided by the first 1929 report on Yacouba Sylla by Commandant Charbonnier. Confident in his understanding of Islam after his years of experience in what he considered the more ''sophisticated'' (ie. Arabized) terrain of central Mauritania, and shocked by the unorthodox practices and utterances of Yacouba's followers, Charbonnier's first response to the Yacoubists' reforms was to recommend they read al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal's *Rimâh* and ʿAli Baradah's *Jawâhir al-maʿânî*, ''canonical'' Tijani texts for West Africans, as correctives to their errant ways. The symbiosis between

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36 The classic narrative of accommodation is laid out in David Robinson, ''An Emerging Pattern of Cooperation between Colonial Authorities and Muslim Societies in Senegal and Mauritania,'' in *Le temps des marabouts: itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880–1960*, ed. David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris, 1997), pp. 159–160; and Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*. Murray Last provides an analogue for British Africa in ''The 'Colonial Caliphate' of Northern Nigeria,'' in *Temps des marabouts*, pp. 67–82. More recent work has highlighted the contingent and uneven nature of accommodation and its legacies: Ousman Kobo, ''A Comparative Study of the Rise of Militant Islam in Burkina Faso and Ghana, 1960–90'' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005); Ousman Kobo, '''My Rosary is My Sword:' Sheikh Aboubakar Maiga's Jihad and French Islamic Policies in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), 1920–1946,'' unpublished paper, presented at Stanford University, April 20, 2006.

Charbonnier's paternalistic concern for the Yacoubists' religious purity and his desire to keep them under control was effortless.

But Charbonnier's confidence also reflects the success that an earlier generation of West and North African Muslim scholars had experienced in effectively standardizing African Sufism by presenting scholars like Marty and Coppolani with these and other canonical texts and by providing them with the intellectual history of the texts' production and use necessary to establish their canonicity. Charbonnier, Quegneaux, Dumas, and Chazal all reinscribed the events they witnessed into this older history, reinforcing the interpretive dominance of those elites who had provided the French with their introductory lessons in West African Islam. We might even venture to say, then, that the production of a bounded, "orthodox" Tijaniyya was carried out through an exchange between West African Muslim scholars and French colonial Islamic specialists. The notion of an exchange is important, for just as colonial officials hardly conceived of the process as being manipulated by their "informants," so too were local scholars unable to control its outcome. Colonial interpreters imposed categories of acceptable thought on the beliefs and practices they found, drawing on debates over topics such as the laicism of the French state as well as on the Orientalist scholarship produced through contact with the Middle East, North Africa, and particularly South Asia. This process, which was a function of colonial rule only insofar as the political economy of domination forced the institutions of domination to stock their intellectual armory with weapons borrowed from particular strata of those they administered, worked itself out on a smaller scale (temporal and spatial) at almost every turn. Seen from below, the colonial state was simply the most powerful resource social elites had ever had at their disposal to maintain their position of hegemony – provided only that they could navigate the complex machinery, deeply ambiguous in its long-term effects, that set the state in motion.

In the case of Yacouba, the religious elites of Futa Toro quickly and skillfully moved to depict him as a heretic, no doubt well aware of how the French would interpret such claims. The first official reports on Yacouba that reached the governor in Saint-Louis reveal in spite of themselves that administrators' understandings were based in very large part on evidence provided by those hostile to Yacouba, particularly the ʿUmarian leadership in Toulde.[37] Yet these elites could not transmit information autonomously. Their ability to

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37 Note for example, the language used in Charbonnier's influential first missive: "Yacouba Sylla has, among other things, *been accused* of having given himself over to mystical practices [emphasis added]." This sentence marked the transition from the first part of the report, which provided an overview of the history of Kaédi and the Hamawiyya and details Yacouba's observed activities, to a more speculative discussion of his teachings and beliefs and the religious practices of his followers. Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu," p. 3ff.

publicly sustain this representation depended on their ability to mobilize popular images of scandalous behavior, and so the rhetoric had to meet local conditions of verisimilitude. Charbonnier's informants directed his attention to those practices that most threatened the social order – Yacouba Sylla's attacks on wealth and luxury, his reform of bridewealth, his religious enfranchisement of women and slaves, and so on – and by emphasizing their heterodoxy made them speak simultaneously to French concerns for stability and local religious leaders' interests in orthopraxis. Each of Yacouba's prominent reforms was presented in such a way as to emphasize its potential danger. His emphasis on public confession and contrition was attributed to an excessive concern with immanent death. He was reported to be teaching that "[since] death may arrive at any instant... those who have committed the sin of adultery should publicly liberate their conscience, obtaining forgiveness in this world in order to appear in a state of grace in the next." Charbonnier's sources started the rumor that Yacouba's agents had bought much of the gold that his female followers had sold at depressed prices, and they also spread the story that his teachings had come from a conversation with the Prophet's daughter Fatima in a dream.[38] Some of these tropes were transparent to the French, reflecting a commitment to social control that they shared with their subalterns; others were largely opaque to the overlords (perhaps making them seem more authentic) while carrying precise significance for their local audience.

This is not, however, to say that the motives of Yacouba's opponents, or even the techniques they employed, were purely opportunistic or cynical. They may have sincerely believed that Yacouba's preaching posed a threat to the moral order of a society whose legitimate guardians they considered themselves to be. Nonetheless, their success in convincing nearly every administrator involved is evidence of their essential consonance with the concerns of the colonial state. Since Yacouba's teachings were not merely a deviant form of Islam but one that had troubling social implications, officials could sidestep the long-standing injunction against interfering in purely religious questions and take immediate action. As Carde himself put it: "In strictly confessional matters, our neutrality remains obligatory, but it was not possible to remain indifferent to the tremors [Yacouba's teachings have] brought to the cellular structure of families or to the social repercussions they unleashed."[39]

The implications of this rhetorical success were profound, in both the short and long runs. Administrators allowed the coincidences between their models of Sufi behavior and the information provided by their local contacts to convince them that they had penetrated into the heart of the matter, and

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38 Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Charbonnier), "Compte-rendu," p. 4.
39 Rapp. pol. ann., Mauritania, 1929, p. 28 (ANS 2G-29 v. 9).

that the standard tools for social control that were at their disposal could be effectively used to combat the revival. After only six months in Kaédi, Quegneaux claimed to have achieved perfect insight into the mentality of the "Yacoubists," which he summed up in a single phrase: "absolute negation of any authority other than that of their Cheikhs."[40] More quotable yet was Carde's formulation that Yacouba preached "the absolute independence of the child within the family and of the individual within society"– a phrase that would become the watch word of analyses of Yacouba for decades, a cliché that foreclosed further investigation or thought.[41]

While it is not possible to determine the exact identity of Charbonnier's and Quegneaux's informants, the social and religious context for the construction of rumors about Yacouba suggests the involvement of persons at multiple levels of the ʿUmarian Tijani hierarchy. French responses to Yacouba seriously weakened the regional position of the Hamawiyya in the short run and strengthened the ʿUmarians. French persecution of the Yacoubists was relentless from 1929 to 1934, and at every turn the intervention of ʿUmarian informants seems to have been decisive. But the linkage between the institutions of accommodation and the production of the colonial archive ran much deeper. One of the preeminent opponents of the eleven-bead reform had been al-Hajj Malik Sy. Malik Sy was a twelve-bead scholar who had played an important early role in shaping France's *politique musulmane* and was instrumental in "rehabilitating" the Tijaniyya after France's troubled relationship with al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal and the *tarîqa*'s Moroccan foyers. Malik Sy helped define the "orthodox" Tijaniyya's symbols of authenticity in his classic late-1910s work, *Ifhâm al-munkir al-jânî*. In it, he criticized leading eleven-bead Tijanis for following their own readings of *Jawâhir al-maʿânî* rather than the teachings of the reputable ʿUmarian *shaykh*s who had received formal *ijâza*s to transmit the text. Dismissing the injunction to eleven recitations in *Jawâhir al-maʿânî* as having been superseded, Sy noted that, since it was impossible for a *walî* to lead a follower into error through his practice, the example of Ahmad al-Tijani guaranteed the appropriateness of twelve recitations. Sy's argument rested on the principle that the Hamawiyya undermined the authority of the accepted hierarchy of Tijani *shaykh*s and thus was ipso facto invalid. It was a rhetorical strategy that corresponded perfectly with the French administration's desire to bring about a convergence between a culturally authentic Islamic orthodoxy and its networks of patronage and brokerage. Equating orthopraxis with recognition of

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40 Quegneaux, Cmdt. de Cer. Gorgol to Lieut. Gov. Maur., °190,Apr 22, 1930.

41 Abun-Nasr, for example, repeats it in his own fashion: "Shaikh Yaʿqub . . . advocated the abolition of the system of captives, and that children should not obey their parents nor wives their husbands." Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: a Sufi Order in the Modern World* (New York, 1965), p. 156.

its leadership of the *tarîqa* thus quickly emerged as a favorite ʿUmarian argument.[42] ʿUmarian leaders in Nioro used this logic to undermine the eleven-bead leadership in their area and in urging Hamallah's arrest and exile in 1925.[43]

The most important member of the ʿUmarian network living in Kaédi at the time of Yacouba's arrival was al-Hajj Amadu Tijani Woon. Born in 1874 in Segou, his father had been a *torodbe* (Pulaar-speaking scholar) from western Futa Toro who had followed al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal and then Ahmad al-Kabir east during the *jihâd* campaigns. Tijani Woon, himself a great nephew of al-Hajj ʿUmar, was a scholar and a student of Cerno Amadou Mukhtar Sakho, a leading ʿUmarian in twentieth-century Futa Toro. Known to the French as early as 1908, Woon was an extremely successful merchant who maintained close contacts with all the major factions in town. He corresponded with an uncle who lived in Mecca, and was renowned for a strict orthodoxy that verged on overbearing moralizing. He was the de facto host for most traveling scholars passing through Kaédi, and was apparently in contact with Malik Sy in Tivaouane. According to a French surveillance report, Tijani Woon had established a reputation as a *marabout* and a generous benefactor of the town's poor as early as 1913.[44] Woon had also been involved with the early controversies surrounding Shaykh Hamallah; in 1919 he wrote a letter to Hamallah asking if

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42 Al-Hajj Malik Sy, *Ifham al-munkir al-jani ʿala tarîqat sayyidina wa wasilatina ila rabbina Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Tijani* (unpublished MS), cited in Saïd Bousbina, "Un siècle de savoir islamique en Afrique de l'ouest (1820–1920): Analyse et commentaire de la litterature de la confrérie Tijaniyya à travers les oeuvres d'al-Hajj ʿUmar, ʿUbayda ben Anbuja, Yirkoy Talfi et al-Hajj Malik Sy" (Thèse de Doctorat du 3ème cycle, Université Paris I, 1996) (microfiche: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, Lille), pp. 330–332. See also Bousbina, "Al-Hajj Malik Sy, Sa chaîne spirituelle dans la Tijaniyya et sa position à l'égard de la présence française au Sénégal," in *Temps des Marabouts*, pp. 181–198. Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: the Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 54; and Alexandre, "Hamallism," p. 503, each suggest that Sy may have actually served to shelter Hamallah from French hostility by strengthening the position of pro-Tijani voices in the administration and mediating among the various factions of the *tarîqa*, and that his death in 1922 opened the way for "a more strident anti-Hamallist faction" among the Tijaniyya to spur the French into action against the Shaykh. However, the close connections between Sy and the later leaders of the anti-Hamawi movement, along with Sy's early anti-Hamawi polemics suggest that Sy's role was less mollifying than Brenner and Alexandre suggest, and that the reasons for the sudden increase in hostility organized by ʿUmarian scholars should be sought in the signs that Hamallah's religious dissent was beginning to have sociopolitical ramifications.

43 *Paul Marty, Etudes sur l'Islam et les tribus du Soudan*, vol. iv, *La région de Kayes–le pays Bambara–le Sahel de Nioro* (Paris, 1920), pp. 218–222. See also Chapter 2, n21.

44 Fiches de renseignements - Marabouts de Gorgol, Kiffa, 1911–1913 (ANS 9G-42). The same report notes that Woon was the preferred intermediary of those who wanted to send money through Kaédi; this may have referred to the extension of credit by Saint-Louisian merchants to local Kaédiens. An abbreviated version of this report later turned up in Marty's description of "Amadou Tidjane" in *Islam au Sénégal*, pp. 106–107. See also Ibrahima-Abou Sall, "Cerno Amadou Mukhtar Sakho: Qadi supérieur de Boghe (1905–1934) Futa Toro," in *Temps des marabouts*, p. 232, 240; and Mouhamed Moustapha Kane, "A History of Fuuta Tooro, 1890s–1920s: Senegal under Colonial Rule. The Protectorate" (Ph.D. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1987), pp. 352–353.

Moulay Omar Ndandio operated with his blessing or was simply a free agent, and in 1924 he engineered Sharif Moulay Idriss's expulsion from the town.[45]

Yet Tijani Woon's significance in Kaédi and to the French exceeded his own personal status or even his clear influence in local religious affairs. Through the 1920s, "Tukulor" twelve-beads, Wolof-speaking French citizens from Saint-Louis, and certain members of the Soninke eleven-bead elite had gained valuable privileges from cooperation with the French, especially on the questions of land use, labor, and trade. Al-Hajj Tijani Woon was generally accepted as the key figure in the alliance that held these elites together, and it was this group of "town fathers" who provided the very first substantial information about Yacouba's teachings to enter the colonial archive. On August 28, 1929, leading members of the community in Kaédi wrote to the Governor of Mauritania in Saint-Louis accusing Yacouba of causing trouble in the town. They justified writing directly to the Governor by claiming that Commandant Charbonnier was protecting Yacouba's followers and concealing information about them from his superiors. The details and tone of this letter would influence subsequent official reports for decades to come:

> 1. [Yacouba] has prevented the inhabitants from praying at the Grand Mosque. 2. He has prevented a daughter or a son from speaking with their mother. 3. He has authorized the inhabitants to burn their clothing – that is to say European cloths. Just a day ago one of them slapped the *chef de village*, who was only carrying out orders of the Commandant. In all this the Commandant said nothing. . . . We beg you, Monsieur le Gouverneur, if you do not come to our aid, this is a story that will become serious and bad. . . . If you too have nothing to say, we will write to the Governor General.

The letter concluded with a warning that while the twelve-beads were completely unarmed and defenseless, the eleven-beads were stockpiling guns.

The letter certainly had an effect – Governor Chazal quickly wrote to Charbonnier asking him to report on the situation.[46] Though the names of the individual authors of this letter are unknown, given Woon's leading

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45 Hamallah sent a characteristically ambiguous reply regarding Ndandio's role in leading the *sapoi-go* out of the main mosque: the only things that could be asked of a Muslim, he wrote, were *wâjib* (obligatory actions according to *sharicʿa*), *sunna* (the custom of the Prophet), and *mandûb* (recommended actions according to *sharicʿa*). This was probably a way of prevaricating, arguing that Hamawis could not be prevented from using the main mosque, but neither could they be compelled to use it. See also Chapter 2. Coup, "Monographie du Cercle de Gorgol, 1908," p. 106 (ANS 1G-331); Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu," p. 1; Rapp. pol. Gorgol, 4ᵉ trim. 1924 (ANMt E2-105); and the brief mention of Woon and Cerno Amadou Sakho in Traoré, *Islam et colonisation*, p. 138.

46 "Les Musulmans de Kaédi (Mauritanie)" to Lieut. Gov. Mauritania, Aug 28, 1929 (ANMt E2-34); Rapport, Lieut. Gov. Mauritania (Chazal), to Gov.-Gén. AOF, °12C, Mar 18, 1930, p. 2 (CAOM 1 Affpol 2802/6). Charbonnier seems to have already sent a report, but it passed Chazal's letter in the post.

position in the twelve-bead community, his literacy skills, his connections with Saint-Louis, and his noted opposition to the Hamawiyya, it seems unlikely that he was not involved. He certainly shared its sentiments: in March 1930, Inspecteur Dumas noted that Woon, along with six other important merchants who all represented French companies in Kaédi, had been very hostile toward Yacouba and his followers, and were quite pleased with the violent response of the administration to the disturbances.[47]

Another prominent Futanke ʿUmarian, Tijani Woon's teacher Cerno Amadou Mukhtar Sakho, played an even clearer role in the drama surrounding the Yacoubist revival. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the Ségou-born Cerno Amadou presided over what Ibrahima-Abou Sall has called "the most important umarian *foyer* of the entire Senegal valley." An accomplished scholar and teacher who had taken some of his training at Nioro, he was in close communication with Woon and another important former student: the "grand marabout" Seydou Nourou Tal. Cerno Amadou had come to the attention of Military Governor Xavier Coppolani before the latter's assassination in 1905, and was soon thereafter named to the position of Islamic judge, or *qâdî*. Skillful at mediating conflicts, he quickly became respected for his judgment and integrity in the surrounding area. The local administration capitalized on Cerno Amadou's influence and his openly proFrench sentiments, calling on him to help maintain order and shape public opinion. In his capacity as the head of a Qur'anic school in Boghe, Cerno Amadou used his authority to encourage other Muslims to send their children to unpopular French schools and emphasized the compatibility of French and Qur'anic education. Sometime between 1926 and 1928, Seydou Nourou Tal even arranged for his old teacher to meet the Governor-General of French West Africa in Dakar, most likely to facilitate Cerno Amadou's departure for the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1929.[48]

After the fighting between Gattaga and Toulde in late December, Commandant Quegneaux requested that Cerno Amadou be sent to Kaédi to determine the appropriate *sharîʿa* response to the events of December 27th and December 28th. Kaédi had its own French-appointed *qâdî* at the time, but Quegneaux presumably hoped Cerno Amadou's prestige could strengthen the government's status as mediator; he may also have been eager to involve someone he thought to be more distant from the local politics surrounding the events. Upon arriving in Kaédi, Cerno Amadou extracted

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47 Rapport, Administrateur Dumas (Inspecteur des affaires) to Lieut. Gov. Maur., 10 March 1930, p.3 (CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6).

48 Sall, "Cerno Amadou," pp. 221–245; Paul Marty, *Etudes sur l'Islam et les tribus maures: Les Brakna* (Paris, 1921), pp. 297–299; unsigned, handwritten letter, c.1926–1928, in the dossier "Police: Renseignements - Islam, Pan-négrisme – affaires locales, 1920–1938" (ANS 21G-127 v. 108).

from both parties a solemn pledge (*nadhr*) to set aside their grievances and reconcile, and he apparently supported Quegneaux in his opposition to the severity of the initial fines imposed on the residents of Toulde.[49] After the incidents of February 1930, Cerno Amadou was again called upon to issue an official scholarly opinion on the events. Then, as before, the administration ignored the fact that Kaédi technically fell outside Cerno Amadou's official jurisdiction (which they themselves had established) and relied instead on his regional prestige. Basing his decision on his interpretation of a Maliki *mukhtasar* (breviary) by the Cairene scholar Khalil b. Ishaq, Cerno Amadou declared the eleven-beads who had participated in the uprising to be "rebels." This declaration provided a religious sanction for the suppression of the revival and probably helped convince Governor Chazal that the Yacoubist teachings constituted a flagrant heresy.[50] It reportedly also provided support for the claims of Kaédi's twelve-bead Tijanis that the killing of Yacouba's followers was divine retribution for the violation of their January vows.[51]

Once Yacouba and many of his followers were in prison, another important ⁢Umarian took up the task of keeping administrative fears about him well-stoked. Cerno Amadou's student and close friend, Seydou Nourou Tal, was the most important of France's Muslim intermediaries and the most vociferous opponent of Hamallah and Hamawis throughout the 1930s. He was also a close companion of al-Hajj Malik Sy.[52] His most decisive intervention in French handling of the Yacoubists came during the incidents surrounding Fodie Sylla's "plot" in Koutiala in 1933. As noted in Chapter 3, the evidence that officials used to prove that Fodie was plotting to massacre the local administration was highly circumstantial in nature. The conclusions

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49 Commandant de Cercle (Gorgol) to Lieutenant Gouverneur-Mauritanie, °190, Apr 22, 1930. The administrative reports suggest Cerno Amadou administered the *nadhr* and verified that the penalties imposed met *shariʿa* guidelines; Adama Gnokane claims that he also presided over the tribunal which investigated the events and imposed the relatively light *amend* on the residents of Toulde. "La diffusion du Hamallisme au Gorgol et son extension dans les cercles voisins: 1906–1945" (Mémoire de fin d'études, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Nouakchott, 1980), p. 60.

50 Rapport, Administrateur Dumas (Inspecteur des affaires) to Lieut. Gov. Maur., Mar 10, 1930, p. 6.

51 Gnokane reports this, presumably on the basis of oral testimony. Gnokane, "Diffusion," p. 63.

52 Oumar Kane and Sekene Mody Cissoko, "A Year Ago a Great African Figure, Thierno Seydou Nourou Tall Disappeared," (trans. Abdoulaye Diagne), *Afrique histoire* (Indianapolis) 1 (1982), pp. 35–36; Sylvianne Garcia, "Al-Hajj Seydou Nourou Tall, «grand marabout» tijani: L'histoire d'une carrière (v.1880–1980)," in *Le temps des marabouts*, pp. 259–263; Vincent Joly, "La réconciliation de Nioro (septembre 1937): Un tournant dans la politique musulmane au Soudan français?" in *Le temps des marabouts*, pp. 366, 368–370; and Brenner, *West African Sufi*, chs 2, 5, and 6. On the crises within the Tal leadership that eventually led it to seek out this mediating position, see Robinson, "Between Hashimi and Agibu: the Umarian Tijâniyya in the Early Colonial Period," in *La Tijâniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris, 2000), pp. 101–124.

that officials drew concerning the scale of the purported massacre and its implications closely reflected preexisting fears about the security of French rule in the area and the ability of Muslim leaders to channel that discontent into revolt. But the administration did not arrive at these particular conclusions about Fodie Sylla unaided. In July 1933, while the investigation into the plot was underway and while the administration still harbored fears that Fodie's actions evinced widespread sympathies for Yacouba and possibly presaged a large-scale disturbance, Seydou Nourou Tal arrived to lend credibility to these fears. During a visit to Koutiala he provided Commandant de cercle Maurel with documentation on Fodie Sylla and the Hamawiyya that hinted at a broader, deeper conspiracy. The letter that Maurel subsequently sent to the Governor of Soudan reveals the subtle ways in which Seydou Nourou Tal both shaped colonial rule and served as its instrument:

> The notes that [Seydou Nourou Tal] was eager for me to read and which my colleagues have returned to him confirm my apprehensions as to the diffusion of Hamallism. I hope that the return to orthodoxy that he [Tal] has obtained from those with whom he has spoken proves durable. The occasion of his latest visit has permitted me to give once again to this eloquent Muslim the good recommendation [*satisfecit*] that he deserves. The speeches he has made in the *cercle* of Koutiala were exactly what they needed to be to dissipate the fears given birth by the mad team of Fodé SYLLA, which came very close to succeeding. ... He spoke with his audience about the legitimacy of the *impôt*, of military service and of prestations ... in short, of scrupulously following the advice of an administration concerned with the interests of a population that it wants to see happy and with its needs met.
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> But, on my request, he particularly stressed the duty which the heads of family owe to the administration and upon which the social order depends. These [heads of family] were warned, as was appropriate, against the schemes of religious and political agitators, and were reminded with every opportunity of the duty of every honest man, the almost religious duty, to report any enemy of society to the legitimate authorities.[53]

Eleven months later, in June 1934, the *commandant* for Koutiala again wrote to the Governor of French Soudan, arguing that Fodie's actions revealed the disquieting popularity of Hamallah's teachings among the Fulbe of the region between Koutiala and Bobo-Dioulasso. Explaining the grounds for this fear, he noted "my opinion is founded on the information gathered in the course of the preliminary examination of the [Fodie Sylla] affair, information confirmed by the documents which Tierno Seydou Nourou Tall brought during his last trip to Koutiala, and which he spontaneously placed

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53 Cmdt. de cer. Koutiala (Maurel) to Lieut. Gov. Soudan, July 16, 1933 (ANS 19G-43 v. 108).

before my eyes.''[54] The *commandant*'s conclusions on this second matter, which the Governor relayed to the Governor-General in Dakar, again reveal the intersection of ethnic, religious, and localist discourses, and the role of African elites in breathing life into all of these constructs:

> The rallying of [Fodie Sylla's] people awakened in the spirit of the sedentaries the memory of the interferences of Peulhes [Fulbe] in the distant past, which were for them a source of worry. Worry confirmed by the weakness with which Fode[*sic*] Sylla's actions were repressed at the time of his first sentencing by the Tribunal of First Degree. The truth is, the [sedentary] Miniankas believed, falsely of course – but appearances strengthened this belief – that for the first time they lacked the habitual protection of the ''White man'' in the face of Hamallist activity that, precisely, presented itself as invincible.[55]

No other case reveals so clearly the power that privileged Muslim interlocutors had in shaping not just the practical orientation of French colonial policy but the very facts that the French thought they knew about their subjects and the ways they interpreted those facts. The colonial archive was a weapon the ʿUmarians wielded with consummate skill in their battle to dominate the Tijaniyya in West Africa.

In the long run, however, ʿUmarian strategies had contradictory results. Rather than eliminating the Yacoubist movement, they only succeeded in displacing it to the southernmost reaches of French West Africa, where the ʿUmarians themselves had little sway over the local administration. Once the Yacoubists were well established in Côte d'Ivoire, only Seydou Nourou Tal himself had a sufficiently long arm to try to move against them. Seydou Nourou divided his time in the mid-1930s between promoting French development initiatives and bringing the Hamawiyya under administrative control. He made at least six tours of Côte d'Ivoire drumming up support for labor migration to the coffee and cacao plantations of the colony.[56] During a visit in late 1939 and early 1940, the regional administrator asked Seydou Nourou to attempt to resolve ''a politically very delicate question, which he

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54 Cmdt. de cer. Koutiala to Lieut. Gov. Soudan, °16C, June 14, 1934, quoted in Rapp. Lieut. Gov. Soudan to Gov.-Gén. AOF, °A207, Sept 25, 1934 (CAOM 1Affpol 2802/6 dossier 4).

55 Ibid.

56 Adm.-Maire Abidjan, Aug 18, 1933; Adm. Cer. Ouorodougou, Aug 25, 1933; Cmdt. de cer. Baoulé, Aug 31, 1933; Adm. Bobo-Dioulasso, Sept 3, 1933; Adm. Cer. Sassandra, n.d. [Oct or Nov 1933] and Apr 1, 1934; Gov.-Gén. AOF (Brévié), Nov 29, 1934 and Feb 23, 1935; Chef Subdiv. Gagnoa, Apr 1, 1936 (all ANS 19G-43 v. 108). Somewhat ironically, he seems to have expended considerable energy during these visits urging, at French behest, local Muslims to lower the bridewealth necessary for marriage, apparently because high bridewealth prices were discouraging marriages and disrupting the balance of authority between patrons and clients. See also Cmdt. de cer. Dioubel (Sénégal), Mar 25, 1934; Cmdt. de cer. Kindia (Guinée), July 13, 1934, etc.

alone could see through to success.'' Though details do not seem to have survived, Commissaire Rortais was later to note that it was at this time that Seydou Nourou Tal confirmed Yacouba's submission to Hamallah and therefore ensured that he was bound by Hamallah's recent submission to Seydou Nourou himself. Yacouba made it clear that he understood Seydou Nourou's influence; in a letter written in 1943 to protest the investigation of his compound, Yacouba noted that ''the *grand marabout* Seydou Nourou Tal is certain of my loyalty to France….''[57] For the most part, however, Seydou Nourou was out of his depth this far south among largely non-Muslim populations, and could not hope to compete with other local sources of information.[58] The energy of the ʿUmarian elites as a group was directed increasingly toward new rivals, as the threats from the eleven-beads paled in the face of challenges from within the Tijaniyya, such as the followers of Ibrâhîm Niasse, and from outside it, especially from the Murids in Senegambia.[59]

As a result, the tone of the archive on Yacouba shifted dramatically in the 1940s as new ghostwriters began to leave their marks. This time, however, the effects were much less direct. Yacouba's commercial activities in southern Côte d'Ivoire in the 1940s and 1950s made him a rival of French settlers, one of whom tried to trigger an investigation of the Yacoubists. Writing in late 1954, the anonymous *colon* gave this opinion of Yacouba's character: ''He is an intelligent man, sharp, cunning, who has been able, thanks to the number of gifts he receives (an absolutely inexhaustible mine, it must not be forgotten), to amass a considerable fortune.'' The writer then outlined Yacouba's business activities, including his commercial agencies, his transport

57 Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1939, pp. 149–150. Cmdt. de cer. Sassandra (Colombani), Feb 10, 1940; Chef Subdiv. Gagnoa (Teyrical), Feb 10, 1940 (both ANS 19G-43 v. 108). Yacouba Sylla to Gov.-Gén. AOF, June 14, 1943, reprinted in ''Annexe n°18'' of Savadogo, ''Tijaniyya Hamawiyya,'' pp. 604–617; and Rapport Rortais.
58 At the same time, however, the ability of someone with Seydou Nourou Tal's prestige to influence the opinion of administrators in southern colonies should not be underestimated. Ivoirian administrators felt out of their depth when dealing with Muslim populations and attributed fantastic accomplishments to Seydou Nourou. One official credited him with convincing several leading Hamawis to abandon their *shaykh* and become Qâdiris (Rapp. pol. ann., Côte d'Ivoire, 1938, p. 228 [ANS 2G-38 v. 28])! It is utterly implausible that a leading Tijani would have urged anyone to become a Qâdiri, or that anyone would have complied. Nor, of course, would Seydou Nourou have had the authority to induct anyone into the Qâdiriyya. On Seydou Nourou's authority in Nioro, Soares, *Prayer Economy*, ch. 4; on his broader influence, see Amadou Hampâté Bâ, *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar: Le Sage de Bandiagara* (Paris, 1980).
59 Rüdiger Seesemann, ''The *Shurafâ'* and the 'Blacksmith': The Role of the Idaw ʿAlî of Mauritania in the Career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrâhîm Niasse (1900–1975),'' in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden, 2004), pp. 72–98; and Leonardo Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick* (Cambridge, UK, 1995).

company, and his seven plantations. Yacouba ran four movie theaters (in Gagnoa, Sinfra, Divo, and Oumé) and a traveling projector and produced short "publicity films" for his enterprises that he projected as trailers at his theaters. These could, the writer suggested, be used to bypass government censors and disseminate Islamic propaganda. The author lamented that Yacouba was responsible for the electrification of Gagnoa, and expressed concern about the administration's use of his transport networks to carry the post between Gagnoa, Abidjan, and Sassandra. He claimed that Yacouba paid the workers on his plantations in food and clothing rather than in money (a violation of labor laws), and that Yacouba had been stockpiling weapons. Finally, employing a classic technique used by French settlers to denounce African competitors, the author made vague references to rumors of slavery and slave trading. The letter was phrased as an "alert" to colonial intelligence by someone with "inside knowledge," and ended with an appeal to the administration to move quickly to limit Yacouba's power before it was too late.[60]

On one level, much of the information within the complaint was rather flattering and is corroborated by other sources. Yacouba was indeed an unacknowledged pioneer in the history of African film, producing trailers advertising the benefits of working on his farms and projecting them at the chain of theaters he owned.[61] His transport businesses and philanthropy are well documented. At the same time, these very accomplishments shaded imperceptibly into fears about Yacouba's power. Concerns about Africans' labor recruitment practices and the threat that an African community capable of self-government, and perhaps even of self-defense, posed to the colonial regime and to white supremacy made such praise double-edged. Many of these same concerns had been raised in an investigation carried out by the Bureau Technique de Liaison et de Coordination (BTLC) in 1949 that had taken note of Yacouba's transport company, his electric generator, and the workshops and automotive garages in Gagnoa; it also mentioned his "trafficking in gold, and maybe in slaves."[62]

60 Anonymous, no date [c. Nov 1954], in file: "Hamallisme (&Yacoubisme): 1949–1954" (CAOM 1Affpol 2259/3). The author is likely to have been from Gagnoa, given the detail of his knowledge about Yacouba, and was probably a planter. He also mentions rumors of freemasonry, which may have been intended to trigger suspicions about the role of such secret societies in organizing anti-French political activity.

61 Members of the Yacoubist community date the opening of the cinema in Gagnoa to 1950 or 1951. No one was able to recall when the production of publicity trailers began, but the practice itself was acknowledged to be an early one. Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 21, 2001. Souleymane Goro, a former employee on Yacouba's Gagnoa plantations, stressed the importance of the cinemas in Yacouba's efforts to recruit workers (Dakar, March 5, 2001).

62 BTLC, "Note de Renseignements: Le Yacoubisme."

Indeed, French planters in Gagnoa, the most important settler town in the colony, had been sounding alarms about the threat posed by African entrepreneurs since the mid-1930s. They worked to undermine labor reforms and wage increases and often succeeded in forcing the administration to support (and covertly assist in) vigorous recruitment for their farms.[63] But by the 1950s such pleas fell on deaf ears. The administration had embraced, at least in theory, the African rural entrepreneur as the central agent in the latest phase of its *mission civilisatrice* and was not likely to be provoked into suppressing (or even scrutinizing) the Yacoubists simply on the basis of claims of unfair competition. The writer of the anonymous denunciation in 1954 seems to have realized this, ending his message by sighing that Yacouba ''cultivates very good relationships with the administration in order to avoid suspicion,'' and acknowledging that his letter would most likely be met with little response.

Officers were, however, susceptible to other kinds of suggestion. For Yacouba Sylla was not just any successful African entrepreneur; he was a successful entrepreneur linked to a widespread and troublesome religious network. Intelligence agencies were thus constantly on the lookout for damning information about the Yacoubists. A BTLC report of 1949 had noted that Yacouba had around him men ''of a very modern bearing'' and that while this could be a sign of potential ''évolué'' status, it could also be an indication that Yacouba had something to hide and the capacity to hide it.[64] Ivoirian planters did not, however, know enough about Islam or colonial policy to effectively play on such fears, and even if they had, Ivoirian officers were not the right audience. This may be the reason why when, in 1943, Gagnoa's veterinary inspector sought revenge against Yacouba, he sent his letter accusing Yacouba of sorcery to French Soudan and not to the Governor of Côte d'Ivoire.[65] In many ways, then, the shift in the pattern of knowledge production occasioned by Yacouba's move to Côte d'Ivoire was inseparable from his rising fortunes.

MYTHS OF YACOUBA, MYTHS OF EMPIRE

But the cumulative effect of interventions in the archive by Seydou Nourou Tal and others could not be erased. Rumors of scandalous behavior in Kaédi that were ''fed'' to Charbonnier and Quegneaux by Yacouba's rivals in Toulde have become enshrined in such reference works as Jamil

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63 For example, Pierre Diot, Gagnoa, to Min. Col., June 17, 1938 (CAOM 1Affpol 568/26). See also Cooper, *Decolonization*, pp. 77–80, and Chapter 3, supra.
64 BTLC, ''Note de Renseignements: Le Yacoubisme.''
65 See Chapter 3, n51.

Abun-Nasr's *Tijaniyya* as "proof" of the sexual debauchery of the Yacoubists. The "evidence" that Seydou Nourou Tal provided to the Commandant of Koutiala provided the foundations on which contemporary scholars have built the myth that Yacouba Sylla was "the most dangerous disciple" of Shaykh Hamallah.[66] Failure to recognize that much of what passes for solid information about Islam in the French colonial archives is in fact the legacy of a propaganda war between competing religious leaders has caused historians to misjudge not only the institutional history of twentieth-century Muslim elites but also the impact of colonial rule itself.

Perhaps the most far-reaching effect of the colonial archive is the way it encourages a reading of events that locates decisive agency within the state itself, facilitating myths about the French Empire as much as about the empire's objects of knowledge. In archival texts, interventions by the colonial administration into the lives of the Yacoubists seem to have always had a profound effect, even if not necessarily the one desired by officials themselves. The actions of the *commandants* of Kaédi between 1929 and 1930 kept the revivalists from transforming the relations of power in the town and ended the lives of many of them, but they also ensured that many of the leaders of the community would survive to pursue more conservative strategies of self-betterment. Changing economic conditions brought by colonial rule and shifts in development policies created the environment in which the Yacoubists thrived as merchants, planters, and transporters while remaining relatively immune from the deprecations of French settlers. Exiling Yacouba to Côte d'Ivoire insulated him and his followers from both their most powerful religious rivals and those administrators who were most anxious about him and most susceptible to manipulation from below. Not least, the opening up of the political system after 1945, followed by the efforts of the administration to suppress the most radical members of the RDA, drew Yacouba and Houphouët-Boigny inexorably together, providing the Yacoubists with yet another layer of insulation from religious opposition and a high profile that guaranteed that their story would remain of interest. This is what the archive tells us.

By providing evidence for the causal import of the state, the state's archives facilitate readings of the past that naturalize its power. This property reflects the shared belief of those who sought to make use of the machinery of the state – French and African alike – in the value of that machinery. These deep consonances may, in turn, help explain why the narrative arc suggested by the

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66 See, for example, Joly, "Réconciliation," p. 364, who provides the quotation. However, Joly is alone in somewhat inexplicably attributing the activities in Koutiala to Yacouba Sylla rather than to Fodie Sylla.

colonial archives has been repeated so frequently and so uncritically by later historians.[67] Indeed, traditional methods of historical analysis make it very difficult to do otherwise. As colonial officials drew on their own experiences and listened carefully to their allies, both actions served to maintain coherence between the meaning given individual events and the meanings that those close to the state detected in the broader sweep of history. For subsequent analysts, this coherence has meant that the modalities of the state's presence in society all seem to adequately contextualize, and thus render intelligible, the actions of the state's subjects. The fact that administrative views of Yacouba resonated with their views of African society more generally – first in the Western Sudan and later in Côte d'Ivoire – has for many historians confirmed that the latter provides the appropriate context in which to interpret the former.

In particular, the conformity between setting and actor assumed by most historical methods facilitates the reproduction of two key assumptions embedded in the structure of the archives. First, the surveillance files used to organize information about the Yacoubists, combined with anxieties about demagoguery and opposition on the part of the "twelve-beads" to Yacouba as a person, affirmed the intelligibility of a "Yacouba-centric" analysis of the reform and later of the community as a whole. Second, the abrupt shift in tone between reports produced by administrators with Islamicist training in collaboration with Muslim elites and those written by officials working in the forest zones of AOF in response to denunciations made by French settlers and non-Muslim Ivoirians, results in a sharp chiaroscuro between the early, "religious" period of the community and its later "commercial" phase. This makes it difficult to present the years of exile and the move to the south as anything other than a real discontinuity in the community's development. At the same time, however, because all the sources on the early period share a debunking attitude

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67 E.g., Pierre Kipré, *Villes de la Côte d'Ivoire, 1893–1940, tome II: Economie et société urbaine* (Abidjan, 1985); Vincent Joly, "La réconciliation de Nioro (septembre 1937): Un tournant dans la politique musulmane au Soudan français?" in *Le temps des marabouts*, pp. 361–372; J.C. Froelich, *Les musulmans d'Afrique noire* (Paris, 1962). Froelich, for example, fills his text with erudite discussions of different types of Islam and their cultural affinity (or lack thereof) with various African peoples. On this basis he slots Yacouba carefully into a narrative that Chazal would have recognized immediately. Yacouba, Froelich tells us (136), announced the "end of the world" in 1930, forced people to abandon their fields, declared all slaves freed (in which Froelich simply elides the fact of formal, legal abolition) and ultimately called for "the infidels to be exterminated". "Thrice the Yacoubists made an honorable amend," he notes, with mock-mystical emphasis on the triple iteration, "but thrice their faith reawakened, and the administration was forced to disperse them to put an end to the incidents." Since he is moved to such grandeur by the events of February 1930, Froelich's claim, with no cited evidence, that in Koutiala, in 1933, Fodie Sylla intended to proclaim himself the Mahdi when he attacked the local administrative compound comes as no surprise.

toward the movement, the latter period's apparent pragmatic materialism takes on new meaning as the economic successes at the end of Yacouba's career are read back into the goals of his initial project. Since the state emerges as the agent of this transformation, it can in effect claim responsibility for making the community what it truly was to begin with – a social movement – shearing it of its unnecessary (and inflammatory) religious trappings. The difference between describing a phenomenon and creating it – crucial to any "critical" reading of sources – collapses. By explaining away the initial provocation that had mobilized the state in the first place, this discourse enables the fantasy of a return to balance and stasis, the successful functioning of an organic institution that absorbs and then erases any disturbances.

Though these sources confirm the state's power, to consider the state the *origin* of these representations would be to affirm the monopoly on agency that the archives seek to assign to it. The role of African ghostwriters in shaping the archive makes this clear. Yet it would also be imprecise to locate the origins of these stories or narrative arcs in the minds of any of Yacouba's individual rivals, or to infer from the fact that Africans used administrative information gathering to shape the actions of the colonial state that Africans therefore played an "active" role in the colonial encounter. Unfortunately this has been the usual conclusion whenever "traces" of African authorship are identified in any colonial text.[68] Archives are "monuments to particular configurations of power"[69] only in the most abstract sense, and a particular configuration of power does not imply a similar distribution of agency. The notion of agency is simply too blunt an instrument to separate out the different presences in the archive and the different modes of authorship through which archival sources were composed. Nor is it any more helpful to imagine a transactional, "imperial space" that aggregates the relations of power that obtained among all these various actors. To be sure, the knowledge-producing practices of colonial rulers and African elites were consistently imbricated with the practices of governance that constituted imperial rule. But to locate these representations in such a space is to ignore the important role of the textual practices of historians in enabling the coherence of these narratives. If there is an imperial space in which these representations of the Yacoubists can be placed and where they illuminate not just Yacouba and his followers but the apparatus of the state itself, it is a space that is carefully assembled not by empires but by historians. To assume that consistency in the ways the state comes to name its objects implies the existence of a consistently applicable

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68 See Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*; Dirks, "Native Informants"; Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, 1992) and *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991).
69 Hamilton, et al., "Introduction," in *Refiguring the Archive*, p. 9.

hermeneutics for reading the state's archive only confirms the imperial system's claims to be the source and destination of all intelligibility.

A clear indication of this is the fact that stories about the Yacoubists that were very similar to those presented thus far also circulated *outside* the archives, unknown to colonial analysts and without contributing to either the construction of knowledge about Yacouba Sylla or the construction of the colonial interpretive apparatus itself. In the mid 1970s, Marie-Thérèse Abela de la Rivière recorded stories from Soninke migrants living and working in France. Some of these stories discussed Yacouba Sylla and the Yacoubists, and Abela de la Rivière used them to present a composite "folkloric" image of the Yacoubist community.[70] As with the stories that can be constructed out of the archives, the picture these migrants painted is notable for its focus on Yacouba Sylla himself and for its debunking of Yacoubist religious beliefs by comparing them ironically to the community's wealth. Eliding any difficulties in the relationship between Yacouba and Hamallah, they presented Yacouba as an elite, respected *shaykh*, and held up his commercial activities in Côte d'Ivoire as a model for other Soninke. One group spoke about this at length, providing a version of Yacouba's preaching in Kaédi that repeats many of the accusations made by his Ivoirian rivals, but here inverting their meaning to make them a sign of cunningness and business acumen:

> We were told that Yacouba Silla, speaking to the women who came to see him, preached an indifference for worldly goods and advised them to give up the gold jewelry they wore, and told one of them: 'I will prove to you that what I say is true: give me the gold pendants that you are wearing in your ears.' He wrapped them in paper and told the woman: 'Go, place this gold in such-and-such a place. Tomorrow morning, if your gold is still there, you will know that what I have said is not correct.' The woman, being naive, went and put the jewelry in the place Yacouba had indicated, and he came and took it during the night. The next day, finding that it was no longer there, the woman was persuaded that Yacouba had been right. And in this way Yacouba, being very clever, was able to fool many people and make himself wealthy.[71]

Similar stories circulated among southern Ivoirians. Yacouba's son, Ahmadou Sylla, emphasized that local perceptions of his father were

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70 Marie-Thérèse Abela de la Rivière, "Les Sarakolé et leur emigration vers la France" (Thèse de troisième cycle, Paris, 1977), pp. 118–135. Abela de la Rivière did not record much about the specific circumstances in which her information was gathered, and so it is impossible to detect nuances or differences in perspective among her informants.

71 Ibid., p. 135. We can imagine that the irony of using a story about Yacouba's tricking someone out of their gold through a false proof of the truth of his words in order to convey the "true" meaning of Yacouba's work was not lost on Abela de la Rivière's informant.

influenced by regional stereotypes about Soninke merchants and *marabouts*. He noted that most southern Ivoirians believed Yacouba married "Mami Wata," an archetypal water spirit associated in many parts of Africa with the acquisition of great wealth through questionable means. Such rumors built on widespread beliefs that depicted acquisition, particularly when linked to involvement with European power, as an antisocial activity. One iconic image of Mami Wata as a mermaid, and the belief that she met her devotees underwater, also intersected with rumors reported to Commissaire Rortais by residents in the Gagnoa region that Yacouba was believed to have possessed a tile painted to look like sea waves on which he walked during certain ceremonies.[72] Rortais dismissed such stories as obvious superstitions, but in fact they point to a family resemblance among many of the myths about Yacouba. Indeed, this point of intersection between a set of locally circulating rumors and the content of a colonial report marks a place where knowledge produced by debates among African entrepreneurs slipped into the "colonial library," much to the bafflement of the library's authors and curators.

The similarity of the logics that governed these parallel mythmaking processes demonstrates how permeable the boundary is between the discourses of the dominated and the dominating and between the popular and the scholarly. Yet representations of the Yacoubist movement that failed to intersect the concerns of administrators could be effectively locked out of the archive. To take one example, many West African Muslims distanced themselves from both the French and their Muslim allies not necessarily because of religious or political rivalries but simply because they thought the aggressive policies of these elites were bad for Islam and bad for business. One such group criticized the French for their handling of the Kaédi affair without casting their lot for either Yacouba or the ʿUmarians. In October 1932, a group of *bidân* identifying themselves as "the white residents" of French Soudan wrote to the Minister of Colonies in Paris to complain about administrative corruption. Their long list of allegations included many standard complaints: they accused *commandants* of selling offices, of allowing *chefs indigènes* to abuse their power, of liberating slaves and elevating them above their former masters and thereby dissolving hereditary authority, of misappropriating tax revenues, of marrying off women without the permission of their families, and of compelling Muslims to send their children to French schools where they lost their religion. The letter particularly singled out Commandant (later Governor) Gabriel Descemet, who had

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72 See Henry John Drewal, "Performing the Other: Mami Wata Worship in Africa," *TDR* 32 (1988), 160–185. Rapport Rortais.

helped shape the aggressive anti-Hamawi policy of the 1920s and 1930s, for "administering the *cercle* of Nioro with injustice throughout his stay up until his departure." The authors attacked Governor-General Carde, blaming him for the administration's behavior during the incidents at Kaédi. "His bad influence," they wrote, "extends to Mauritania. It is there that he ordered the *commandant de cercle* of Kaédi to pressure the inhabitants, to such a point that the town is in ruins and the administration is incapable of restoring it." Yet this letter and the views it reflected had little if any effect on the way the French imagined Islamic politics in West Africa. This document, which contrasted so sharply with the other material the administration collected on the subject, was kept separate from all other documentation on Yacouba and Kaédi, "lost" in a mismarked file, and was never referred to in any official report or discussion.[73]

Navigating among these gaps and unexpected crossovers requires sharp departures from standard historical practice. A narrative history of the Yacoubists does not reflect a "biased" version of the truth from which French perceptions can be subtracted. Rather it is fundamentally incoherent because it is overdetermined, comprised of elements owing their genesis to multiple registers and signifying differently in each of them. Relying as we must upon information generated out of complex local systems of meaning, and confronting our own needs to impose a coherent, meaningful narrative upon this body of information, there is no way to escape the process of myth making in history. The challenge is to find ways of using these sources to produce myths that are both more empirically responsive and more politically responsible. Deconstructive readings of archives can always be performed to reveal the *aporiae* within, such as in Commandant Rortais's temporal loop according to which Yacouba Sylla was arrested in response to events that took place after his arrest. But the more profound disjunctures that signal, however indistinctly, the presence of other authors only become visible when placed in the context of long-term religious competition among West African Muslims. It is also possible to refigure these materials further, to open them up to narratives centered neither on the scope of colonial authority nor on the efforts of Muslim elites to define and police social and religious orthodoxy. Doing so depends on an archive that can denaturalize even these deconstructed readings. In the case of the Yacoubists, this means the hagiographies, traditions, and oral histories of the community,

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73 Trans. of unsigned ltr., dated 13 Jumadi al-akhir 1351, Oct 14, 1932 (CAOM 1Affpol 1415, dossier 16: Situation sur les confins Mauritaniens, 1933). Though the fact that they highlighted Descemet's injustices may indicate that the authors were Hamawis, their rather neutral comments on Kaédi do not seem to suggest support for either Yacouba or his opponents, but rather simply frustration that the French allowed the conflict to so damage the town.

which are just as heterogeneous and tendentious as the colonial archive, but which reflect different strategies of knowledge production. None of these archives can "complete" the others; the complete archive is a Borgesian paradox, a fantasy of total control. But archives can supplement one another, empowering historians to choose their own privileged context of interpretation, rather than allowing the legacies of colonial rule to choose it for them.

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History in the Zâwiya: Redemptive Traditions

OUTSIDE OBSERVERS HAVE GENERALLY KNOWN YACOUBA SYLLA and his followers either for the violence in Kaédi in 1930 or for their success as merchants in Côte d'Ivoire, and have sought to explain the community with reference to those local contexts. Opponents within the Hamawiyya and the Tijaniyya have viewed the entire trajectory of the community as the inevitable consequence of Yacouba's own personal character flaws, particularly his ambitiousness and lack of formal religious training. The community's Ivoirian neighbors tended to assimilate Yacouba and his followers to the stereotypical categories of the acquisitive, spiritually powerful *marabout* and his devoted, materialistic disciples.[1] When Yacoubists themselves explain their past, they too generally present it as a unified tale. For most, the development of their community represents the culmination of a set of transformations in African social life begun decades – if not centuries – before the advent of the colonial state. In particular, they see in their past the unfolding of a series of spiritual gifts that Shaykh Hamallah imparted to Yacouba Sylla and which he in turn had received from Ahmad al-Tijani and, through Tijani, ultimately from the Prophet Muhammad himself. The most important of these gifts was the community itself, its solidarity, and

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[1] On Ivoirian perceptions of "dyula" and Muslim merchants generally, see Kathryn Green, "Dyoula and Sonongui Roles in the Islamization of Kong," in *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Humphrey J. Fisher (Boulder, 1987), pp. 97–117; Robert Launay, *Traders without Trade: Responses to Change in Two Dyula Communities* (Cambridge, UK, 1982); Launay, "Des infidèles d'un autre type: Les réponses au pouvoir colonial dans une communauté de Côte d'Ivoire," in *Le temps des marabouts: itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880–1960*, ed. David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris, 1997), pp. 415–430. On the general ambiguity or disdain of Ivoirian Muslims toward ethnic classification, see Launay and Marie Miran, "Beyond Mande *Mory*: Islam and Ethnicity in Côte d'Ivoire," *Paideuma* 46 (2000), 63–84; and Marie Nathalie LeBlanc, "Social Change and Identity Among Muslim Youth in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire," *Paideuma* 46 (2000), 85–109. See also Jean-Louis Triaud, "Lignes de force de la pénétration islamique en Côte d'Ivoire," *Revue des études islamiques* 42:1 (1974), 123–160. For Soninke re-appropriations of these stereotypes, especially in regards to the legends about Yacouba Sylla, see Marie-Thérèse Abela de la Rivière, "Les Sarakolé et leur émigration vers la France" (Thèse de troisième cycle, Université de Paris, 1977), pp. 118–135.

success in the face of indignity, suffering, and the inevitable selfish desires of individual members.

This "unity of action" was not, for most Yacoubists, a consequence of applying a reductive framework to limited information. It was a hard-won truth and a vantage that had to be constructed and actively maintained. In April 2001, in my most formal interview with members of the Yacoubist community, I asked one of the oldest of Yacouba Sylla's followers, a man named BaThierno Marega, a question about relations between Nioro and Kaédi before 1929. He declined to answer. "That is not part of our history," he explained, to my surprise. "Our history is that which begins with Shaykh Hamallah and continues with Yacouba Sylla."[2] Not all of Yacouba's followers, past or present, would have agreed that the years in Kaédi before 1929 were not a part of their history; but the thrust of the comment reflected a broader argument that many would have supported. BaThierno's answer reinforced an important theme in Yacoubist hagiography that a sharp break with the past had occurred when Yacouba Sylla arrived in Kaédi on a mission from Hamallah, and also that a kind of atemporal rupture existed between the story of a teacher and his disciple on the one hand and the social context in which they lived on the other.

In telling this story, "their" story, memorializing the relations between Yacouba and Hamallah, their gifts and the transformations they wrought, members of the community accomplished two things. First, by subsuming the history of their persecution at the hands of the French and twelve-bead Tijanis into a sacred narrative of salvific suffering they constructed a personal and social sense of worth and belonging. Second, centering this redemption on a coherent, stable narrative provided a tremendous source of solidarity, linking individual experiences of suffering to a meaningful collective identity. Alongside other techniques that the Yacoubist leadership used to keep centrifugal forces in check – mediating among competing interests, tying the community together through marriage alliances, mandating that all property be held collectively, and laying out a complex division of social labor – telling the story of Yacouba's preaching, of the doomed revival in Kaédi, of the years of suffering followed by rebirth in the forests of Côte d'Ivoire, made and remade the community as an idea. The durability of this idea across time and space does not obscure the substantial differences that existed within the community, both in terms of members' social lives and the meanings they gave to Yacouba's actions. These did not merely reflect different material interests or political strategies; real philosophical differences existed and continue to exist even among the most highly placed and successful of Yacouba's followers. Nonetheless, all shared a deep conviction in the spiritual significance of their own

2   BaThierno Marega, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001.

history and of even the tiniest events within it. It would not be an exaggeration to say that for the followers of Yacouba Sylla, their history became their faith.

As with the materials of the colonial archives, representations of the past provided by members of the Yacoubist community are simultaneously charts of the idioms used by its members to discuss appropriate courses of action or to mediate claims to leadership, as well as the substance over which they and their opponents have struggled. But they are also historical sources. Read with attention both to the forces that push them into particular shapes and to the contingencies and unexpected presences hidden within, these memories of the past can reveal the circumstances that shaped memory in the past. More precisely, it is not memory that we gain access to through oral testimony or hagiographies built on testimony. Though some of the stories I present here are representations of an individual's experience as a witness to an event (or to the event of being told of another event), most are not. They are stories that owe their shape and their ability to be told to the way they either fitted past events into pre-existing interpretations or created new interpretations to make sense of the incomprehensible. Variously inflected rankings of status, plausibility, and frequency determined the circulation of representations and in turn shaped the repertoire of interpretations available to witnesses and narrators of new events. Many elements in the stories thus had to remain meaningful through changing contexts and among an ever more diverse cast of interpreters, and to be seen as compatible with other accepted elements in the representational corpus. As a result, these stories come much closer to what could be called oral traditions, or what Steven Feierman has called "socially composed knowledge," than to oral history as it is normally understood. In turn, this means that Yacoubists' historical knowledge, while most self-consciously presented in formal "texts," is also embedded in a whole series of daily practices including singing, farming, praying, dancing, dressing, cooking, voting, and, not least, speaking.[3]

As a result, the process of putting these stories into conversation with the colonial archive is less about confronting the psychology of memory or its "culturally determined" capacities than about understanding the social uses to which knowledge has been and is put. Doing so requires first attending to the circumstances in which the stories were collected. For the most part this means the situation within the community and in Côte d'Ivoire in general in 2001. At that time Maître Cheickna Sylla, a notary who studied history at the University of Dakar, served as the official liaison between the community and the outside world. Through his Fondation Cheikh Yacouba Sylla (FOCYS) he sought to give

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3 Steven Feierman, "On Socially Composed Knowledge: Reconstructing a Shambaa Royal Ritual," in *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania*, ed. Maddox and Giblin (Athens, OH, 2005), pp. 14–32; and David William Cohen, "The Undefining of Oral Tradition," *Ethnohistory* 36:1 (1989), 9–18.

his version of the community's past the status of an official hagiography and it was through him and the FOCYS that I approached all other senior members, including the *calife*, Cheickna Yacouba Sylla.[4] By contrast, Maître Cheickna's older brother, Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, spoke as an individual, relating a few stories that he had heard from his father directly, but narrating largely from his personal experience and elaborating his own views. A very self-reflective interlocutor, Ahmadou constantly emphasized the positionality of his own testimony, seeking to place it in the context of stories others had told me or highlighting what distinguished his positions from those of others. The interviews I carried out with both figures – along with an important lengthy interview in Gagnoa with the oldest surviving member of the community, performed under the auspices of (though not largely in the presence of) the *calife* – formed the core of what I came to know of the community's historical consciousness. Interviews with others both inside and outside the community stretched along a continuum between the two poles of Maître Cheickna's formalism and Ahmadou's idiosyncratic dialogism. Everyone's speech reflected the highly institutionalized transmission of knowledge characteristic of the community's approach to history. What follows, then, is an attempted history of that transmission.[5]

SYNECDOCHE AND SUFISM: YACOUBA SYLLA, TILMÎDH SHAYKH HAMAHU'LLÂH

We affirm that there is no Yacoubist Way, that which we do is a copy of that which our master Shaykh Hamahoullah did at the *zawiya* in Nioro. If you

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4 Cheickna Yacouba's interactions with me were far less extensive than those of his two younger brothers. He seemed to keep aloof from the struggle between the two, confining himself to the role of mediator.

5 Debates over oral traditions are too well known to merit discussion here. Briefly, there are those who advocate treating formal and functional elements in testimony as noise to be filtered out or triangulated away, such as Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985); David P. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford, 1971); Henige, *Oral Historiography* (New York, 1982); and Yves Person, "La chimère se défend," *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines* no. 61–62, vol. 16 (1976), 405–408; those who see formalism and functionalism as the only accessible features of traditions, such as Ruth H. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford, 1970); Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (London, 1992); and Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge, UK, 1992); those who consider them hollow carriers into which "local meanings and details are inserted," such as Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, 2000), p. 8; and those who see the formal *as* historical, such as Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Power and the Praise Poem: South African Voices in History* (Charlottesville, VA, 1991); and Mamadou Diawara, *La graine de la parole* (Stuttgart, 1990). My own approach is closer to the last of these. The most debunking stances vis-à-vis oral tradition's historical utility typically reflect a lack of interest in the values attached to historical knowledge as such in African societies, or the technologies for its transmission and standardization, which have often been considerable.

want a definition of Yacoubism, here it is: it is the Tijanism of eleven *jawharâtu 'l-kamâl* along with a deep attachment to the person of our Shaykh, who never excluded me from his brotherhood. Up until his departure, he considered me as one of his own.

Shaykh Yacouba Sylla[6]

The earliest events that seem to have given real shape to Yacoubist memories and stories are those relating to Yacouba's relationship with Shaykh Hamallah. Though that relationship was hardly static, and would take on new meanings retrospectively at the time of Hamallah's sons' reassertion of control over the *tarîqa* in the 1960s and 1970s and during the crises at the end of the century, the degree of detail they present for very early events, as well as their foundational status in relation to almost all other knowledge in the community suggests that, for Yacoubist leaders at least, they provided the first loose structure within which subsequent events would come to be interpreted. But as we will see, they likely attained this influence by either assimilating or displacing memories and stories of equal antiquity that foregrounded other "starting points" to the history of the community.

Leaders like Cheick Ahmadou Sylla and Maître Cheickna Sylla shared with the colonial archive the tendency to place Yacouba Sylla himself at the center of the history of "his" community.[7] For French and ᶜUmarian observers, the centrality of Yacouba had reflected their understanding of the community's composition. Yacouba was a demagogic leader with credulous disciples; understanding his motivations and ideas sufficed to explain their behavior. For Yacouba's followers the situation was more complicated. Yacouba could serve as the symbolic representative of the group as a whole only as long as his interests were seen to be shared by all. The synecdoche by which Yacouba's humiliations, sufferings, imprisonment, liberation, affluence, and power came to be shared, literally and spiritually, by his followers depended on a complex set of transformations. Because the expectations of subordination and obligation between a *shaykh* and his student (*tilmîdh* or *murîd*) were reproduced at each level of a chain of instruction, the relationship between

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6   In an interview with Alioune Traoré, May 1974 or June 1975, Gagnoa, cited in Alioune Traoré, *Islam et colonisation en Afrique: Cheikh Hamahoullah, homme de foi et résistant* (Paris, 1983), p.209.

7   This is also the approach of the only academic publications dedicated to the history of the community: Boukary Savadogo's "La communauté «Yacouba Sylla» et ses rapports avec la Tijâniyya hamawiyya," in *La Tijâniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris, 2000), pp. 269–287, whose central section is titled "Yacouba Sylla, figure centrale de la communauté"; and Cheickh Chikouna Cissé, "La confrérie hamalliste face à l'administration coloniale française: le cas de Cheick Yacouba Sylla (1929–1960)," in *Mali-France: Regards sur une histoire partagée*, ed. GEMDEV et Université du Mali (2005), pp. 55–76.

Yacouba Sylla and Shaykh Hamallah could become an analogy for the rela-
tionship between Yacouba and his own (male) followers. The fluidity of
identification between Yacouba and Hamallah, generative of a fertile ambi-
guity as to who was really the head of the Yacoubist community, enabled the
authority of Hamallah to confer legitimacy on the social order that Yacouba
and his inner circle had fashioned and on the doctrines that supported that
order and rendered it meaningful. The practical deployment of such logic,
however, was difficult and strategies for its maintenance shifted as the more
visible ties within the community and the Hamawiyya as a whole themselves
changed.

The very foundation of the analogy – Yacouba Sylla's relationship with
Hamallah – was tendentious. Most versions of the Yacoubist tradition posit
a special closeness between the two men, and these statements are often
taken to be arguments either for the superiority of Yacouba's followers over
other Hamawis or, at the least, for the right to reinterpret Hamallah's
teachings in their own way. Hamallah's departures from the ʿUmarian
jihâdi tradition, his refusal to cooperate unnecessarily with French rule,
his implicit claim to have returned to a purer form of Tijani spiritual
practice with important esoteric resonances, and his persecution by the
twelve-bead Tijanis with their greater secular power, all took on very spe-
cific significance. The Yacoubists also actively repurposed the various rhet-
orical tropes and spiritual figurations that the followers of Ahmad Tijani
and Hamallah had employed in crafting the hagiographies of their *shaykh*s.
These devices had proven successful in establishing the figures' religious
authority even in the face of countervailing institutional or cultural norms.
In particular, Yacouba Sylla's most creative followers seized on the spiritual
authority of Hamallah as an individual to craft an ethos of spiritual disci-
pline based on personal affinity rather than on the careful ordering of Sufi
hierarchies.

Given that acceptance as a *shaykh* in twentieth-century West Africa was
widely associated with being able to act as a wealthy benefactor, it could not
have been easy in 1929 for Yacouba, avowedly poor and powerless, to come
to be considered an analogue of the great Shaykh Hamallah. But Yacouba
would have had difficulties legitimating his status as patron and father
even had he possessed material capital to convert into ties of dependence.
For accepting him as such required challenging norms of age in Sudanic
societies in general and Soninke societies in particular. The photograph
referred to by members of the community as "The Father and His Elders"
(Figure 1),[8] summarizes the problem. Yacouba, obviously younger than the

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8 "Le vieux et ses aînés," also sometimes called "Le père et ses compagnons."

1. Yacouba Sylla (front) and elders of the community (L to R: Mahamadou Kebe, N'Paly Kaba (Jaxite), Moussa Koita, Mahamadou Tandia, Yahya Marega), Gagnoa, 1941. (Courtesy of Ahmadou Yacouba Sylla).

other men, is reading from a book (an interesting conceit in itself, since he is frequently presented in hagiographies as embodying prophetic illiteracy), while his modern, militaristic uniform contrasts sharply with their more "traditional" attire. Lying at their feet, he acknowledges his subordination to these elders even as their position behind him symbolizes their support for his leadership. The image is a powerful attempt to overcome the paradox of "Father Yacouba"'s young age by representing its sublation as a fait accompli. Nonetheless, the actual process by which such a contradiction was perpetually contained could not have been easy.

Though it is never made explicit, the oral tradition exploits Hamallah's own reputation for spiritual precocity as a justification for Yacouba's transgressions of age norms. The hagiographies of Hamallah – himself less than thirty years old when Sidi Muhammad al-Akhdar died and left him the acknowledged leader of the eleven-bead reform movement – had combined stories demonstrating his enlightenment at a young age with allusions to his possession of deep esoteric knowledge. The story of Shaykh al-Akhdar's discovery of Hamallah and his recognition of the young man's great powers, culminating with Hamallah's becoming al-Akhdar's own master, dramatized the means by which one could lay claim to authority that bypassed visible chains of initiation. If the formal hierarchies of the *tarîqa* were statements

about the order that could be identified in God's manifestations in the world, stories about secret transmissions of knowledge and esoteric inversions of status were reminders that God's ways were always less predictable, less susceptible to reason or rationalization than the defenders of institutions might hope.[9]

Yacoubist intellectuals were quite aware of the objections that could be raised to this kind of spiritual claim, and this gave particular urgency to the stories and evidence that proved not only the "special relationship" between the two men but also the ways Yacouba had made use of it. The stories mentioned in Chapter 2, in which Hamallah placed food in Yacouba's mouth or gave him his prayer beads, were intense testimony to this relationship, but also not unusual within Sufi practice. Yet for certain members of the community, these were only outward signs of a more significant transaction that will always remain a secret, an esoteric exchange far removed from the concerns of the baser world and thus inaccessible to analysis. This was a safe approach, for more explicit treatments of that transaction were double-edged swords: they provided richer metaphors in which to ground and sharper argument with which to defend Yacouba's uniqueness, but they also offered prima facie evidence for those who saw nothing in his behavior but deviation:

> When the time came to eat, the Sharif [Hamallah] asked if everyone was present. They all responded in the affirmative because all the dignitaries were there – but the Sharif himself noticed that Yacouba Sylla had not yet come to the feast site; he ordered someone to go look for him. During all this time, Yacouba had been circumambulating the Sharif's house.
>
> When the messenger told Yacouba that the Sharif was waiting for him to start the meal, Yacouba responded that he had not finished what he was doing, adding that he was in the process of performing the Tawaf around the Ka'aba.
>
> The messenger, both stunned and angry, told Yacouba he was going to report Yacouba's words, which he found "crazy," to the Sharif. Three times the messenger went back and forth, and three times Yacouba gave him the same response.
>
> Finally, the Sharif spoke to the gathering, which was outraged by this behavior that they judged unacceptable on the part of a disciple, even more one who was "unlearned" and, moreover, "crazy," and who was making a descendent of the Prophet (S.A.S.) wait. The Sharif said: "But do you not know that there are persons around whom the Ka'aba comes to perform the

9 See the discussion of Hamallah's hagiographies in Chapter 2.

circumambulations? So, you know well that we will have to wait until Yacouba Sylla finishes his work."[10]

Such behavior, as well as less dramatic acts such as Yacouba's refusal to pray in the *zâwiya* unless Hamallah was present, signaled that his attachment was to his *shaykh* as a person and not to the particular community over which the *shaykh* presided or the devotional technique that he transmitted.

Many of the most dramatic stories about Yacouba's relationship with his teacher worked to substantiate Yacouba Sylla's rapid transformation from son of N'Pasakhona Sylla and minor disciple of Hamallah, to Ba Yaaxuba, "father Yacouba," Hamallah's spiritual successor. Soon after Yacouba's arrival in Kaédi, the eleven-bead leadership of Gattaga met to deliberate, uncertain of the legitimacy of the young man's claim to speak on behalf of Hamallah. Who, after all, was a man of only twenty-three years to attempt to lead a reform of the town's religious practices? They decided to dispatch a man named Diapaga Tandia to Mederdra where he was to seek out Hamallah and confirm the authenticity of Yacouba's mission. Arriving in Mederdra just moments after Hamallah had received a vision of the prophet Sulayman, Tandia approached the Shaykh. To his surprise, Hamallah confirmed Yacouba's teachings and sent Diapaga Tandia, whom he now renamed Sulayman Tandia, back to Kaédi.[11]

The Shaykh's affirmation that Yacouba was indeed on a mission for him both endorsed the inversion of the age hierarchy that Yacouba's activities implied and limited it by making that inversion dependent on some hidden source of status that substituted for age. Again, this was a common move in Sufi hagiographies; but where for most *shaykh*s (including Hamallah) the hidden power consisted of widely acknowledged possession of traditionally valued gnosis – Hamallah was said to know God's secret one hundredth name, for example – Yacouba's claims were somewhat more fragile. After all, most versions of Yacouba's arrival in Kaédi pointed to his illiteracy and lack of formal training in the Islamic sciences, and even claimed these as one of the reasons for the initial opposition of the town's scholars to his preaching. Yacouba's inversion depended instead on a mild debunking of gnosis itself

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10 Fondation Cheikh Yacouba Sylla [FOCYS], "Cheikh Yacouba Sylla où le sens d'un combat (1906-1988)" (privately circulated manuscript, Abidjan, 1999), p. 30. This was also among the first stories told to me about Yacouba in Bamako in 1998.

11 BaThierno Marega, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001. This story is, however, disputed by Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, and the rapidity with which events unfolded after Yacouba's arrival in August make such an elaborate sequence unlikely. Cheick Ahmadou instead attributes the support of select *erudites* of Kaédi to the outcome of a spiritual retreat, *khalwa*, which they undertook shortly after his arrival. Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001.

in favor of an even deeper, even more invisible, source of insight. As the FOCYS put it:

> In the Sufi way, which is the way of Shaykh [Yacouba], in a very traditional manner, knowledge [*savoir*] and understanding [*connaissance*] constitute steps toward union with the divine; in certain cases, they can become veritable chains, links that keep [individuals] in slavery and ignorance, and thus in the [state of] not-union with the divine. The manifestation of knowledge and understanding can take many forms: human, material, through events. Prescient understanding and foreknowledge can aid perception or they can blind. God alone is/has [*sic*] the power.[12]

The implication was that the knowledge possessed by the recalcitrant "savants" of Kaédi blinded them to the truth that Yacouba brought, and that only God was fit to judge the quality of Yacouba's understanding and its relationship with his level of spiritual enlightenment.

But if only God knew the truth of the matter, humans could still point to signs of His verdict. The clearest proof of the depth of Yacouba's understanding was the revival itself and the reforms that had given rise to it. The Yacoubist community was eager to stress that these "reforms" were not innovations, or symptoms of a "fundamentalism," but rather "renewals" of the essence of Islamic teachings and a "purification" of the practices of Hamallah's followers. In doing so, they placed Yacouba's actions squarely in the tradition of Sufi-led reform stretching back through the nineteenth century and beyond.[13] The traditions also emphasize that Yacouba took Hamallah as his model in reform. The high level of moral propriety and careful attention to the details of religious practice that they associated with Shaykh Hamallah's teaching in Nioro – including a certain austerity, a high degree of modesty for female members, refraining from the use of tobacco – were taken as precedents for Yacouba's actions. If Yacouba went beyond the example set by Hamallah's other disciples, his hagiographers argued, it was because his calls for reform fulfilled the social message that was implicit in Hamallah's spiritual teachings. They also suggested that the general degeneration of piety among many of the Muslims of Kaédi necessitated a more severe approach than was needed in pious Nioro. In addition to urging the Hamawis of Kaédi to maintain a higher moral standard, many of Yacouba's specific reforms were linked to the creation of a self-conscious community of believers out of the somewhat factious population of Gattaga. His pleas for more explicit confessions of sins during the celebration of the *mawlid al-nabî* are, in the oral tradition, not the cause of dramatic confrontations over scandalous

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12 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 34.
13 BaThierno Marega, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001; FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 32.

revelations of adultery, but rather attempts to instill habits of reconciliation and openness.[14]

Yet when it came time to build a tight community, the same strategies that had helped free Yacouba from the control of Hamawi *muqaddam*s opened up a new set of problems. The attack on the "very traditional" way of legitimating spiritual authority risked undermining popular acceptance of the new status it hoped to facilitate. It also risked opening the floodgates to endless new "fathers" (and "mothers"), threatening Yacouba's exalted position. The community's leadership sought to overcome this problem by linking the metaphorical paternalism of the *murîd-shaykh* relationship to a more social form of paternalism in the community's structure. The basic characteristics of this social organization were in place as early as 1934 when the community in Kaédi was reconstituted following N'Paly Kaba's release from prison. The stories in which N'Paly Kaba claimed to be "the father of all those orphaned" by the violence of 1930, and which the French took as signs of a reconstitution of Hamawi authority were, for the Yacoubists, ways to deflect some of the radicalism of Yacouba's inversions of established modes of legitimation by taking some of the weight off the analogy between Yacouba and Hamallah. Emphasizing the closeness of Yacouba to N'Paly Kaba reminded followers that Yacouba's "first companion" (and therefore a symbol for all of his other followers) was also his deputy at Kaédi, so that the unity of the Kaédi and Gagnoa *zâwiya*s reflected the unity of the community as a whole. Indeed Maître Cheickna's published hagiography, *Le sens d'un combat*, devotes nearly as much space to establishing the story of Yacouba and N'Paly Kaba's friendship as it does to affirming Yacouba's closeness to Hamallah. Moreover, N'Paly Kaba's own links to Hamallah are discussed in detail, establishing not only his credentials as a bona fide Hamawi, but also providing yet one more point of access to Hamallah's *baraka* for members of the community as a whole.[15] By elaborating other links in the chain of transmission, Yacouba's uniqueness receded slightly and the institutionality of the community was foregrounded. It was quite possible, then, to fold stories about Yacouba back into very traditional narratives of Sufi authority. Maître Cheickna Sylla, for instance, has written of Yacouba's construction

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[14] BaThierno Marega, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001. In his interviews with Traoré, Yacouba himself placed the emphasis on the attitude of the penitent: "I merely taught that hypocrisy and adultery were incompatible with Islam, and that, to obtain pardon, the sinner had to feel a deep compunction about his faults." Traoré, *Islam et colonisation*, p. 207.

[15] FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," pp. 26–27. This too was an echo of familiar tropes in which a prominent student's submission to a controversial teacher helped confer legitimacy on the latter. A famous version, with mixed results, came only a few years later when Cerno Bokar Tal took Hamallah as his *shaykh*. See Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: the Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 127–134.

of a "new spiritual way of life" which he refers to as "Yacoubism."[16] Though
he is quick to stress that his "Yacoubism" is a derivative of "Hamallism," by
simply giving a distinct name to the practices that take place in the com-
munity – a name that, by its analogy with Hamallism, implies the existence
of a new *tarîqa*[17] – he has unsettled some who fear such "aggressiveness" will
provoke the Hamawi leadership in Nioro and who also simply feel it reflects
a profound misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Yacouba's true
project.

Such struggles over the past find in it such a powerful resource precisely
because they can contextualize it and interpret it, but not control it. The
official seal of Yacouba's household bears the inscription "Yacouba Sylla,
tilmîdh shaykh hamahu'llah," "Yacouba Sylla, disciple of Shaykh Hamal-
lah." This phrase serves less as a closed summation of the community's
identity than it does as a polyvalent rubric whose meaning can be contested
by members even as it forces them to ground their debates in a common
vocabulary. This vocabulary is highly expressive and therefore quite func-
tional; but its formal properties, the meanings that made the passionate
relationship between teacher and student something radically different
from the logic of patron–client relations, are its irreducible source of value.
These meanings, in turn, depend on a broader social and cultural context.
The Yacouba-centric version of the community's history and its own reli-
ance on an interpretation of the Hamallah–Yacouba relationship that priv-
ileges individual intimacy over institutional hierarchy were particular
manifestations of a broader trend toward personalized religious authority
during the colonial period in the Western Sudan. Personalization itself
both reflected and reinforced the penetration of spiritual relations by the
cash nexus, the displacement of more forceful guarantees of corporate
affiliation by French occupation, and the shift in intellectual production
away from political or social theory and toward devotional texts and ritual
scholasticism.[18] But the core metaphors of discipleship retained meanings
that reached back far before the twentieth century, before these social
changes; indeed for the Yacoubists, they reached all the way back to the

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16 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 2.

17 With echoes of Jamil Abun-Nasr, who seems to have invented the *tarîqa yaᶜqûbiyya*. Jamil
M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: A Sufi Order in the Modern World* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 155–156.
The term "yaᶜqûbiyya" does not appear in any of the sources cited by Abun-Nasr. See also, ᶜAbd
Allah ᶜAbd al-Raziq Ibrahim, *Adwâ' ᶜalâ al-turuq al-sûfîya fî al-qârra al-afrîqiya* (Cairo, 1990), pp.
122–126.

18 See most importantly Robert Launay and Benjamin F. Soares, "The Formation of an 'Islamic
Sphere' in French Colonial West Africa', *Economy and Society* 28:4 (1999), pp. 497–551; and
Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor,
2005), esp. ch. 8.

Prophet himself. In doing so, they provided the Yacoubists with the tools not just to debate about their surroundings, but also to confront and change them.

A COMMUNITY OF SUFFERING

> Once I was afflicted by a pain in my arm. I returned to God through complaint – the return of Job – out of courtesy toward God, so that I would not resist the divine subjugation, as is done by the folk of ignorance of God. In doing so, they claim to be the folk of surrender, of entrusting the affair to God, and of making no protest. Hence they bring together two ignorances.
>
> Ibn al-ᶜArabi[19]

Members of the community uniformly insisted that their earliest years were times of great suffering (Sn: *tooro*), a suffering that the faithful had now transcended but not forgotten. They saw the period of suffering as reaching back before the existence of the community as such, before their parents and grandparents attached themselves to Yacouba, to a time when many of them experienced the degradation of poverty, social marginality, and widespread ignorance. In discussions of suffering, Yacouba's arrival in Kaédi and the commencement of his preaching mission played crucial yet contradictory roles. In some ways, they marked the beginning of the end of deprivation. Several members described Yacouba as having given them, as a people, "everything" – from religion to morals to thrift, rivaling the French in his *mission civilisatrice*. But enlightenment did not alleviate poverty or low social status, and conflicts with neighbors and the French brought further suffering in the form of humiliation, persecution, violent attack, death, and dispersal. The killings and arrests of February 15, 1930, were formative events that definitively separated out believes from nonbelievers, those who, in Yacouba's words, were "willing to suffer for *lâ ilâha illâ 'llâh*" from those who were not. As a result, that day formed the matrix through which Yacoubists interpreted most other events in their past, giving earlier forms of suffering new meaning. But tracing references to suffering and delineating the logic of its use reveals that it was a more general sense of deprivation, marginalization, and impoverishment which came to be most important and which was in turn seen as being responsible for the oppression the Yacoubists faced in Kaédi. Indeed the centrality of suffering to the community's sense of self became more pronounced over the years and only intensified as actual suffering gave way to its memory.

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[19] Quoted in William C. Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ᶜArabi's Cosmology (Albany, 1998), p. 121.

It was in the 1930s that members of the community began to define themselves in relation to those who inflicted suffering upon them, and to make of their persecution a badge of their difference from and superiority to these others. The use of suffering and martyrdom as a key element of group distinction is widespread among West African Sufi orders. The Hamawiyya itself has been said to function according to an "economy of martyrdom" by anthropologist Benjamin Soares who sees the *tarîqa*'s combination of mass affiliation and a collective sense of persecution as its key feature, one it shares with, among others, the Murids in Senegal.[20] For such groups, a shared sense of besiegement by hostile forces was important in establishing the limits of community and thus defining the operative range of authority and obligation. To say that they suffered for *lâ ilâha illâ 'llâh* was to say that the Yacoubists suffered for their devotion to Shaykh Hamallah, and that their suffering was ultimately part and parcel of his own. Thus, those elements of the standard Hamawi hagiography that focused on the Shaykh's persecution by the French and his Muslim rivals – his two imprisonments, his death in captivity, the execution of two of his sons and more than thirty of his followers after the incidents of Nioro-Assaba – all became part of the Yacoubist heritage.

But its usefulness in establishing a moral economy among the followers of Yacouba seems to have been generally quite secondary to its importance in creating a sense of self-worth and dignity for individuals who otherwise figured among the invisible of Muslim society. The community's stories argue that Yacouba extended Hamallah's indifference toward social status into a more far-reaching critique of hierarchy itself that, when combined with the idea that the bond between *shaykh* and *murîd* was completely personal and thus asocial, cohered into an ideology of radical equality. Hamallah's suffering took on significance beyond simply that of a conduit for God's grace, and identification with him did more than affirm one's Sufi credentials. Hamallah's role in the community became soteriological as a martyr whose persecution ensured the spiritual elevation of Yacouba's followers.

There is little evidence that any sort of cult of martyrdom had grown up around Yacouba prior to his arrival in Kaédi in 1929, but the poverty of his family up to that point came in later years to stand as foreshadowing of his persecution and as a sign of his otherworldliness. Stories about Yacouba's mother developed the theme of a mystical acceptance of suffering. "Oh Allah," she is to have said, "if there is any happiness that will come after

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20 Benjamin F. Soares, "The Spiritual Economy of Nioro du Sahel: Islamic Discourses and Practices in a Malian Religious Center" (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1997), pp. 170–171; James F. Searing, "*God Alone Is King*": *Islam and Emancipation in Senegal, the Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol,* 1859–1914 (Portsmouth, 2002), ch. 3; Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadou Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal,* 1853–1913 (Athens, OH, 2007), ch. 5.

all these sufferings, I pray you to make them more severe."[21] Cheick Ahmadou interpreted this embrace of suffering by reference to what he explicitly called a "Sufi attitude" toward the physical world: the reconceptualization of pain and deprivation as a spiritual achievement that puts the self in a closer relation to the divine. In its simplest form, such an interpretation allows those who suffer as a result of their marginality and powerlessness to see themselves as agents in their own spiritual struggle. The years following the violence in Kaédi, when many of the adult men in the community were in prison, both extended the experience of suffering and provided the leisure to develop it into a system of meaning. Such effort is clearly visible in the oldest evidence of a self-consciously religious understanding of suffering. In a letter that Yahya Marega sent to Yacouba from detention in 1931, he wrote, "We are happier than ever. I have learned that the French have set the sentence for me, Yaya, at six years. In the name of God, I would have preferred it be made permanent. The Majestic and Independent God alone knows the truth of the matter."[22] The community's tradition holds that Yacouba himself, upon receiving notice of his imprisonment for eight years replied to the sentencing tribunal, "Only eight years? This is the proof that you are not the masters of time. If you had been masters of time, you would have deported me for the duration that God has ordained for me."[23] By shifting agency away from the French and on to God, Yacouba's and Marega's pronouncements emptied colonial authority of any true power, and by asserting his knowledge of this esoteric action Yacouba demonstrated his mastery of the situation vis-à-vis his captors.

Such inversion of agency is a common rhetorical device in Yacoubist traditions. All evidences of defeat or of the conspiring of enemies become signs of Yacouba's significance and centrality within events. Members developed several ritualized behaviors that served to invert the significance of suffering while keeping its memory alive. In a practice that is claimed to date from Yacouba's own example, members of the community greet one another in a unique fashion. Rather than making use of standard Soninke greetings, a member of the community merely says "komaxu" upon meeting a fellow disciple. Members gloss the word itself in two different ways. According to one interpretation, *komaxu* refers to the status of being a slave (komo=slave, axu=state of being),[24] and though it may be a way of managing the

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21 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 21.

22 Marega to Yacouba Sylla, 29 or 30 November 1931 (ANCI X-13-253 [9245] 1E-78).

23 This story is well known within the Yacoubist community. This particular wording is from an interview with Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, Abidjan, April 12, 2001.

24 This interpretation is supported by Mamadou Diawara's ethnographic work on Soninke political knowledge in Jaara. *La graine de la parole: dimension sociale et politique des traditions orales du royaume de Jaara (Mali) du XVème au milieu du XIXème siècle* (Stuttgart: 1990), p. 50.

still-traumatic memory of slavery, its use is said to remind them that they are all "slaves of God." Others claim that *komaxu* is a variant of a word used in funerary rituals, and that it thus symbolizes that all Yacoubists are dead to the material, temporal world.[25] For both folk etymologies, the greeting reproduces the association between suffering and moral authority and binds that association tightly to the community's origins.[26]

Yet the struggle to understand the spiritual value of pain was not only useful in empowering those who suffer; even more important was that such pain was the precondition for receiving the benefits due to one who recognized the origins of suffering in God's majesty. Ahmadou Sylla thus dismissed crude asceticism and insisted that Yacouba's otherworldliness could not be reduced to a simple rejection of the physical world, but rather must include an understanding of God's presence in it. The same, of course, holds true of the ending of suffering which can be seen as a manifestation of God's grace.[27] In this sense, suffering becomes a kind of commodity, possession of which, if properly understood, guarantees future affluence and blessing. Originally composed sometime in the 1930s, a song by the community's most famous poet, Mama Jagana, expressed just this idea and gave it a prominent position within the community's discursive repertoire. In Jagana's "N'Faaba Yaaxuba Dunko" the singer counsels her fellows:

> Disciples of Father Yaaxuba, let us arm ourselves with patience,
> The inheritor of the legacy that was preserved has appeared today...
> The inheritance of which we speak is different from gold,
> The inheritance of which we speak is not silver,
> The inheritance of which we speak, it is suffering [toora].[28]

As collective inheritors of this suffering, Yacouba's followers are also collective guardians of its meaning. In the same song, members "swear by the name of God that we believe in the religious dimension of the imprisonment of our father." Mama Jagana's own knowledge about suffering and its redemptive power cut across the personal and the collective. Her songs have as their dominant theme the drawing of parallels between the experiences

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25 This suggestion intersects with an important, complex discourse within the Yacoubist community on death. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the present work to take up discussion of this matter here.

26 Although from another perspective the high frequency with which the phrase is used may indicate how incompletely it does its work.

27 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001.

28 Translated from Soninke into French in Aliou Kissima Tandia, *Poésie orale Soninké et education traditionnelle* (Dakar, 1999), pp. 174–175, ln 1–2, 5–7. During our conversations FOCYS would not formally endorse any outside collection, transcription, or translation of any of the community's many songs.

of the Prophet, the early Muslims such as Hasan and Husayn, and other prophets like Moses on the one hand, and the experiences of Hamallah, Yacouba, and his followers on the other. Born in Kaédi and living through the period of persecution of the Yacoubists, members of the community report that Jagana's poetic gift was revealed to her over the course of a long, life-threatening illness. Her first song in praise of Yacouba occasioned her immediate recovery.[29]

This particular narrativization of suffering – placing it in a sequence leading directly and purposefully to joy – enabled a connection to one of the most powerful tropes in Islam, emigration or *hijra*. In Chapter 3, I noted the way that describing the movement of Yacoubists from Mauritania to Côte d'Ivoire as a *hijra* allowed them to conceive of themselves as a coherent religious community through analogy with the Muslim *umma*. It also explicitly compared their own suffering to the persecution Muhammad and his followers had experienced in Mecca and during their exile. This understanding of *hijra* had been popular regionally during the nineteenth century when reformists like Usuman dan Fodio had used it to describe the suffering that he and his followers experienced at the hands of Hausa leaders. Dan Fodio's own daughter, Nana Asma'u, had composed poems much like those Mama Jagana would write, comparing the acts of her reformist family to the Prophet and his companions.[30] Part of the enduring value of the allusion was the way it blurred agency: voluntary *hijra* and compulsory *hijra* shaded into one another as actors shifted frames of reference between the individual, the social, and the divine.[31] The liminality of the withdrawal from society that *hijra* symbolized could also produce a strong sense of solidarity. Such experiences, and their controlled representation by community leaders, provided an important tool in the repertoire of what Humphrey J. Fisher, in a nod to James Scott, called "the ritual powers of the structurally weak."[32]

But as with the tropes of age and educational inversion, these ritual powers and the solidarity they produced could also be used to enforce orthodoxy from above. Songs about the sufferings of Yacouba and his followers were part of the core of devotional practice in the weekly Yacoubist *haidara* (lit. "presence") ceremonies in the *zâwiya*s, and most of the songs performed were carefully crafted by Yacouba's brother and the community's chief intellectual, "Ba" Oumarou Sylla. Ba Oumarou's songs combined devotional

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29 Quote at ibid., pp. 176–177, ln 39; on Jagana, ibid., 251–252, 314–316, and informal reports.

30 Uthman b. Fudi, *Bayân wujûb al-hijra ʿalâ al-ʿibâd*, ed. and trans. F. H. El-Masri (Khartoum, 1978). Nana Asma'u, *Collected Works*, ed. and trans. Jean Boyd and Beverly B. Mack (East Lansing, 1997).

31 This idea was first sketched out by Humphrey J. Fisher, "Liminality, *Hijra* and the City," in *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Fisher (Boulder, 1987), pp. 147–171.

32 Ibid. 159.

elements – such as encomiums of Shaykh Hamallah – with interpretive accounts of important historical events such as the martyrdoms in Kaédi or the imprisonment of Yacouba's brother Fodie Sylla. A song attributed to BaOumaru Sylla, Yacouba's older brother, recorded outside Paris by Chérif Ahmed Cissé, emphasized a sense of competition between Hamallah's followers and his enemies, and reflected the recurrent Yacoubist theme of persecution. The singer stressed that "you [Hamallah] alone hold the secret truth. God has authorized you to lead the prayer, Shaykhna, men and devils have accepted this, they say Shaykhna, that we must pray with you, so that God will accept our prayers."[33]

Such efforts at standardizing oral sources of knowledge were accompanied by the use of other technologies of conservation. BaOumarou, for example, is rumored to have written a detailed history of the community in Arabic. Yacouba appointed an early companion, Mahmadou "Ba" Doukoure, as the official educator of the community, whose job it was to develop a standard curriculum and oversee instruction throughout the various *zâwiya*s. Ba Doukoure also taught in the central school in Gagnoa to which all young disciples were sent for a period to be "trained," and was himself an important historian within the community, perhaps second only to BaOumarou. In addition to the work of these luminaries, audio tapes were made of the testimony of "ordinary" members who had witnessed important events or of particularly aged and honored members who had lived through periods unknown to most. BaOumarou himself often recorded his compositions and other stories on cassette and these tapes circulated among members.[34]

Through all these means, the intellectuals in the community organized their vision of the group's past around idioms of leadership and community drawn from West African Sufi sources and from the patriarchal rhetoric of free and noble Soninke lineages, and some thus attributed radical social meaning to Yacouba's reforms.[35] Critiques of high dowries and the "hoarding" of gold

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33 BaOumarou Sylla, recorded by Chérif Ahmed Cissé, printed with Soninke transcription and French translation by Cissé in Seïdina Oumar Dicko, *Hamallah: le protégé de Dieu* (Bamako, 1999), pp. 126–127. Dicko does not indicate when the song was recorded, who sang it, or in what context.

34 The FOCYS library in Nimatala, Deux Plateaux, Abidjan, houses a large number of these cassettes, as well as older "reel-to-reel" magnetic tapes dating to the 1950s. As nearly all of the original members of the community have passed away, some of the youth, under the supervision of the FOCYS, have begun transcribing and translating the songs to preserve them for future generations. Unfortunately, FOCYS considers these materials too sensitive to be made public. I was able to read through many of the Soninke transcriptions and French translations of BaOumaru's songs, but was not allowed to make copies of any or take notes from them.

35 Cheickh Chikouna Cissé, for example, has referred to Yacouba's teachings as a "socialisme pur et dur" (personal communication). Ahmadou Sylla spoke of "socialisme africain," by which he means one that retains an avowedly nondemocratic paternalism.

became efforts to close the great economic gulf that separated those of his followers who were merchants, like the Kaba family, from the many poor families and dependent clients who were beginning to gather under his banner. They also highlighted an antimaterialistic strain within Islamic discourse.[36] Ahmadou Sylla explained the reform of *mahr* by noting that excessive marital payments had created a virtual "market in women" and pointed as precedent to the *hadîth* in which the Prophet Muhammad allowed a poor man to use his knowledge of a few *sura*s of the Qur'an as a dowry when he was unable to pay the customary minimum.[37] Some also extended the egalitarian argument to include the reform of women's clothing, with the thin cloth – here glossed as expensive silks instead of transparent gauze – condemned as "sacrilegious finery" rather than as a provocative indecency. Yacouba's reforms had thus freed people from the constraints that wealth and ascriptive status had imposed on activities that should only be governed by a universally applicable religious law. This mild asceticism also fed back into the theme of suffering, by serving as foreshadowing. BaThierno Marega explained that Yacouba had advised his followers to trade in their gold and fine cloth for money that they could use to feed and clothe those left behind after the anticipated martyrdom.[38]

The combination of Sufi tropes of hierarchy and equality proved to be a particularly effective way of making sense of the social transformation Yacouba's followers underwent as they moved from being members of Kaédi's Soninke Muslim population to being members of this exclusive community. Leaders in both Gagnoa and Abidjan explicitly presented Yacouba's reforms in Kaédi as enabling his followers to take upon themselves the symbols of the dignity of full membership in a community as unqualified adults rather than as marginals or dependent clients. For followers who were the descendants of slaves or members of occupational castes, this was a powerful message. The ability of an individual to achieve this transition was predicated on acceptance of a paradox that was embedded in the synecdochal identification of Yacouba with his followers: those who attached themselves to

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36 Another story about Yacouba's arrival in Kaédi has him opening up the storerooms of his host's shop and giving its entire contents away to anyone who came looking to purchase goods – giving away not only his own possessions but also that which did not belong to him. Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001.

37 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 20,2001. This *hadîth* is usually understood to legitimate a mutually agreed upon lowering of the minimum dowry rather than an Imam-enforced capping of the maximum dowry. E.g. Qur'an 2:236. For Maliki legal precedent, see Khalil ibn Ishaq al-Maliki, *Mukhtasar fî fiqh al-imâm mâlik* (Beirut, 2004), pp. 83–86. The issue is not addressed in the other major Maliki reference used in West Africa: Shaykh Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani, *Al-Risâla al-fiqhiyya* (Beirut, 1997), 196–205.

38 BaThierno Marega, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001.

Yacouba became adults by allowing Yacouba to become their father. Just as Yacouba bore the title "Ba Yaaxuba," his followers typically referred to themselves as *allah lemou* (Soninke for "children of God"). In informal conversation, Yacouba himself was frequently depicted as a manifestation of the divine, so that being a child of their *shaykh* easily became a way to substantiate being a child of God. Dependent upon a patron who was himself superhuman and superadult, members transcended the normal status of a dependant.[39] In a similar vein, official hagiography gave all of the important personages who attached themselves to Yacouba in the early years of his career the honorifics "Ma" (mother) and "Ba" (father), and the "*zâwiya*" of Nimatala in Deux Plateaux, Abidjan,[40] contained a photographic memorial to a veritable pantheon of Ma's and Ba's, with at least one of whom nearly every member of the community can claim kinship.

The long-term success of this substitutive logic was made possible by the eventual provision of material rewards that could "give flesh" to the otherwise purely ideational transcendence of dependency that Yacouba's fatherhood dramatized. But it was also facilitated by inversions of the normative symbols of the cultural capital on which it drew, such as the transformation of suffering into salvation, or *komaxu*'s slavery into belonging. As such inversions became more and more abstract, the suffering that guaranteed transcendence became increasingly notional. Suffering that had initially taken its meaning from violent opposition or the deprivations of detention came to be seen as deriving from being dependent or unvalued in society, a state shared by members who had been from slave or casted lineages as well as those who were merely poor or without religious training. At the limits of abstraction, the analogy to Muhammad and the early Muslim community signaled a claim to a more cosmic significance. Attaining dignity for Yacouba's followers was not only an alleviation of their own particular sufferings but also the actualization of a divine order within society. Ahmadou Sylla emphasized that the central tenet of Shaykh Hamallah's teaching, insofar as it pertained to human relations, was that "there are no marginal men." For the Yacoubists, this vision of equality was simultaneously revolutionary and a restoration of Islam's original intent, a type of reform, *islâh*, and the result of the exercise

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39 The term *allah lemou* has gradually given way to the expression "disciples of Yacouba," and, among some members, "Yacoubists." This may be a sign that the anxiety of dependency is fading. The master narrative of the community that transforms poverty and dependent clientage into a cleansing martyrdom may have been so successful that the memory of the actual material conditions of suffering and marginality has been almost completely sublated. Thus the potential cultural stigma of being "dependent" on Yacouba can be embraced enthusiastically precisely because its restriction to the realm of the spiritual is confidently assumed. Not so, however, the practical difficulties of this dependency, which are continually being "worked out."

40 The nature of this facility, and its status as a *zâwiya*, is a matter of dispute within the community.

of independent judgement, or *ijtihâd*, normally reserved for great *shaykh*s. Neither Yacouba nor Hamallah had been revolutionaries, Ahmadou stressed; rather they were responsible for bringing a revolutionary state into existence, a state that had been created as an ideal by the acts of Muhammad: "It was the Prophet who began a revolution – in his treatment of [freed slave and first muezzin] Bilal."[41] The same rhetoric was used in a *haidara* session to refer to Yacouba's "abolition" of caste distinctions. No castes existed in the community of the Prophet, the eldest disciple present pointed out; Yacouba's actions was simply an effort to emulate the Prophet.[42]

GOD'S WORK: THE ZÂWIYA, THE PLANTATION, AND THE NATION

By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the community's situation had changed dramatically, and these changes brought new urgency to the interpretation of the past. Acquisition of wealth gave reality to the transcendence of suffering promised by Yacouba, but also created the challenge of keeping the memory of deprivation meaningful. New resources increased the stress on existing fault lines within the group and within the Hamawiyya as a whole, but also provided ways to at least attempt to transcend them. Most significantly, Yacoubist leaders came to disagree about how exactly the transcendence of suffering that their leader provided was being manifested on earth and about whether to emphasize a spiritual interpretation of his reforms or to see their mystical and material implications as inseparable. These same debates were still being fought out during the time of my research between 1998 and 2001, when the national crisis in Côte d'Ivoire once again gave them new meaning.

Those leaders of the community who tended to deemphasize the collectivist tendencies within the group's past presented a fairly conservative interpretation of Yacouba's transformations of Sufi precedent. Rather than seeing in it a social revolution, they instead emphasized that his preaching dissolved only the barrier that social origin and caste had placed between an individual and his or her participation in religious activities. Noting that Yacouba had "broached the delicate question of castes and slavery, practices still living at that time," the codified history put out by the FOCYS elaborated by pointing to Yacouba's teaching that "the annihilation of the self [l'homme] in God, in essence the successful return to God, is not possible except through the true and sincere practice of *dhikr*." The implication is that it is the dissolution of

41 Cheick Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001. The reference is to Bilal b. Ribah, an Ethiopian-born slave freed by Abu Bakr.
42 Haidara ceremony, Nimatala, Deux Plateaux, May 4, 2001.

the self in God that eliminates distinctions between believers, not the disso-lution of social difference.[43] For Cheickna Sylla in particular, equality was relegated to the purely philosophical realm where it transformed into the abstract concept of rights, perfectly compatible with material acquisitiveness and thus with material inequality. For Ahmadou Sylla, by contrast, a similar appeal to spiritual transcendence supported the opposite argument. For him, material equality was merely the mundane reflection of a grander spiritual project of which it remained derivative, but it was no less necessary for being preliminary. Material needs were thus subordinated ''dramatisticly'' if not ''logically'' to spiritual ones. This rhetorical polyvalence, what Kenneth Burke has called the ''smuggling back and forth of terms,'' reflected the ability of the metaphors that Yacouba and his followers created to bridge spiritual and temporal realms.[44]

In both understandings of Yacouba's social reforms, the community effec-tively emplotted its history within the narrative of the fulfillment of God's revelation to Muhammad – in Sufi terminology, the transmission of the light of Muhammad (al-nûr al-muhammadî) through the saints (awliyâ') down to individual believers. The benefit from the overflowing (fayd) of blessings through the intercession of the shaykh became an effusion of dignity, and the well-being of the Yacoubist community became part of the working out of a divine spirit in the history of Islam. Though many in the community as well as among the general public pointed to the material success of Gagnoa as proof of the successful playing out of this dialectic, the religious rituals of the community stressed that it was rather the social vitality of the community that represented the fulfillment of Yacouba's divine mission. Theological significance in turn gave members' experiences social meaning, making it possible to think of the alleviation of suffering as a political act. If their predecessors' hardships were a consequence of economic oppression, disen-franchisement, and violence, then their leaders were fighters for the redemp-tion of all peoples experiencing analogous suffering.[45] The keepers of official tradition embedded the story of the group's self-preservation within a cam-paign to restore human dignity through a defense of the freedom to work, to accumulate, and to worship without state harassment. This political inter-pretation likely dates from the nationalist struggles of the 1950s, but became more pronounced as the community's spokespersons found themselves inter-pellated by a secularist and Islamophobic civic discourse in independent Côte d'Ivoire that denied – or at least impeded – the generalizability of Yacoubist suffering.

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43 FOCYS, ''Sens d'un combat,'' p. 33.
44 See Burke, Attitudes toward History, (2nd ed. Boston, 1961).
45 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 5, 2001.

Through all this a fundamental tension persisted between, on the one hand, the moral values derived from the universal significance of Yacoubist suffering, and, on the other hand, the way Yacoubist identity was generated oppositionally through a focus on the role of others in persecuting the community. Two major trajectories are visible in the way the community's stories handled this tension: the increasingly difficult relations between Gagnoa and the Hamawi *zâwiya* in Nioro, and the increasing prominence of Yacouba Sylla in nationalist politics in Côte d'Ivoire. Yacouba's promise at the Tabaski of Mederdra in 1929 to take care of Hamallah's material needs so that the Shaykh could dedicate himself to spiritual pursuits linked Yacouba's economic success to his discipleship.[46] For Tijane Sylla, one of Yacouba Sylla's younger sons and the supervisor of Gagnoa's business and financial transactions, Yacouba's chief contribution to the Hamawiyya was his financial success. There was, of course, the famous gift of a new car to Hamallah in 1939, at a cost of 75,000F, and community records indicate that additional cars had been given over the years. Tijane also cited funds given for the treatment of one of Hamallah's daughters who was gravely ill, and insisted on the important value of the yearly contributions made to Nioro to support the community in general.[47] Implicit in his position was that Yacouba's dedication to the material needs of the Hamawiyya justified, or at least accounted for, the differences between his approach and that of other Hamawis.

Others worked variations on this theme. For Ahmadou Sylla the sign of the spiritual blessing Yacouba received from Hamallah was not his wealth but the cohesion and social vitality of the *zâwiya*s he organized in Gagnoa and elsewhere. When the members of the main Hamawi *zâwiya* in Nioro finish their prayers or *dhikr*, he noted, they all return individually to their homes. In Gagnoa, by contrast, the faithful remain together all day, living as a collective in the sacralized space of the *zâwiya*. It was this unity, this projection of Hamallah's faith into social reality, that he considered to have been Yacouba's contribution.[48] For its part, the FOCYS strongly opposed any interpretation that focused on tensions within the Tijaniyya or the Hamawiyya, or even among Muslims in general. They instead saw the main source of opposition to Yacouba as having been the French administration. Some went so far as to dismiss the significance of the pre-1930 conflicts between Gattaga and Toulde

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46 See Chapter 2, n38.

47 Though he quickly pulled back from aggrandizing either Yacouba or the community and resumed a more common attitude of profound humility, this did not obscure the fact that he considered these gifts to be the most important way in which Yacouba had sought to repay his debt to his *shaykh*. Tijane Sylla, Gagnoa, June 10, 2001. The role of gifts and counter-gifts in the community more generally will be taken up at length in part three.

48 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001.

entirely, including the attack on Yacouba's early followers, so as to shift the
emphasis to the events directly involving the French and their *gardes de
cercle*.[49] This did not reflect any greater esteem for Hamallah's sons or greater
sensitivity to the norms of *tarîqa* organization, but rather the opposite: for the
FOCYS, intra-Hamawi politics were simply a distraction from the more
important question of anticolonial political activism. Yacouba's success as a
merchant and planter was thus a great triumph for African self-reliance and
racial uplift, and an important chapter in Côte d'Ivoire's economic and
political development.

   Both of these positions made use of accounts from Yacouba's early life,
underscoring the way the traditions as a whole were constantly retrodicted
and redacted. The story of Yacouba's purported 1926 meeting with Amadou
Bamba is a good example. The most widespread version of this story inter-
prets it as the moment when Yacouba learned from the Murids how to fuse
Sufi discipline with rural labor mobilization.[50] But Ahmadou Sylla provided a
different version, in which, having spent an earlier period traveling around
much of the Senegal basin, Yacouba presented Hamallah with an analysis of
French colonialism: "Colonialism," he told his *shaykh*, "is an oppressive force
that blocks our understanding of Islam. It creates in each a lust for money and
an inability to understand true morality." "Ah," Hamallah replied, "what you
have seen is true. Go back and discover yet more." Yacouba is then to have set
off on a second set of journeys, this time arriving in Touba. Upon returning,
he once again gave an account of his trip to Hamallah, who asked him what
he had learned of "this Amadou Bamba." "He is," Yacouba answered,
"among the chosen of God."[51]

CONCLUSIONS

The various strands of the oral tradition all place Yacouba at the center of the
development of the community. It was Yacouba's relationship with Hamallah
that brought him into a position of divine grace, his relationship with
N'Play Kaba that symbolized the redistribution of this grace to his own
followers, and his imprisonment that represented the machinations of
the French and the ʿUmarians against the Hamawiyya. His guidance

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49 This is the general sense of versions emanating from FOCYS.
50 See Chapter 2, n32 and n33. The question of the similarities between Yacouba's communities and
the Murids will be taken up at greater length in Chapter 7.
51 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 12, 2001. According to Cheikh Anta Babou, Bamba never
returned to Touba after being exiled to Diourbel in 1912; but the mythic association between that
city and the Murid leader is obviously a useful motif in stories like this one about Yacouba. Babou,
Greater Jihad, p. 181.

brought economic success to the community and a fully realized model of religious solidarity to the Hamawiyya. The contributions of Yacouba's followers are never occluded but they are all given meaning by being woven into a story that ultimately concerns Yacouba Sylla, *tilmîdh shaykh hamah' ullah*.

These traditions, which members of the community recite weekly, in sufficient detail and with sufficient coherence to make it reasonable to consider them the central cultural facts of their lives, and which constitute a series of therapeutic narratives, do not fit neatly into either of the two "types" of hagiographies identified by scholars of religion.[52] Though some elements mirror both classic *vitae admirandae*, lives of wonder and awe, and *vitae imitandae*, exemplary paths to be followed, such categories imply a distancing between the *shaykh* and his *talâmîdh*; they make of his life an external social fact, to be contemplated, or debated, a decidedly past event from which a lesson is to be derived. Instead, for the members of Yacouba Sylla's community, the lives of both Yacouba and Hamallah were open, ongoing stories in which members of the community could individually place themselves, and by playing a role in a larger drama give a greater meaning to their own lives. In a Yacoubist song commemorating the arrest of Hamallah in 1941, for example, the singer constantly collapses the distance between "you," the master, and "us," the disciples, so that what befalls one appears to befall all:

> The best of us were sent to prison,
> singing your name, Shaykhna....
> while our enemies took up the drum....
> They sang out their joy because our master was gone.
> Our enemies took up the drum,
> between the offices and the market because they believed they had won.
> They said that we were dead.
> But may God preserve us, Shaykhna.[53]

Without the shootings, arrests, and deportations of early 1930, the Hamawi community of Yacouba would not have taken anything resembling the shape it did, and quite likely would not have come into existence as a self-contained social entity at all. The suffering and persecution experienced by Yacouba's followers in this early period provided the impetus for the community's cohesiveness in the subsequent decade, and later lent itself to the hermeneutics of martyrdom that offered his disciples an attractive new identity. Yet the

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52 E.g. Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, 1998), p. 155.
53 See n33.

complexities of this identity, both its internal contradictions and the success of its "salvation mechanism," derived from the challenges and opportunities created by the acquisition of considerable wealth by the community beginning in the mid-1930s and accelerating through the 1940s and 1950s. Without this wealth, it is unlikely too that Yacouba's followers would have become important enough for their implicit challenge to the Hamawiyya's hierarchy to have had an impact. As we shall see, it was also this wealth that enabled them to insert themselves into the debate over the nature of legitimate political authority during the 1950s.

The second exile of Shaykh Hamallah in 1941, followed by his death, triggered another major shift in the community's self-representations. The ultimate martyrdom of their Shaykh at the hands of the French helped crystallize the significance of suffering for Yacouba's disciples, and provided a powerful rhetorical device when it became necessary to demonstrate their anticolonial pedigree. At the same time, the death of Hamallah, Yacouba's *shaykh* and master, threatened to disrupt the highly personalized nature of Yacouba's approach to Islamic mysticism, and made the elaboration of an explicit formulation of the structural relationship between Hamallah and Yacouba and between Yacouba and his followers even more useful than it had been before. The subsequent efforts by Hamallah's sons, particularly Muhammad ould Cheick, to consolidate their control over the *tarîqa*, and Gagnoa's mild resistance to this consolidation, pushed the question of Yacouba's community to the front of Hamawi consciousness, providing an important context for revisiting the group's past, both from within and from without.

In the most recent outward-looking reformulations of the community's historical memory, those occasioned by the political unrest that has characterized Côte d'Ivoire since 1999, Hamallah has receded somewhat, to be replaced by a more abstract story about Islam. Hamallah is not a familiar figure to most Ivoirians, and so the Yacoubists are thought of either as sui generis or as generic Muslims. But this has not made their ideas or past any less valuable. In an article published in *Le Jour*, an independent newspaper in Abidjan, on August 22, 2000, Cheick Ahmadou Sylla – a faithful PDCI member and opponent of Alassane Dramane Ouattara ("ADO") – attempted to disrupt what he called the "amalgamation" in popular discourse of "ADO=Dioula=Muslim." On a deeper level, however, the article, titled "Islam Has No Candidate," also sought to explain Islam to the Ivoirian population. After cataloging the historical and current abuses of all religious traditions by demagogues he proceeded, in his own inimitable style, to describe what he took to be the nature of Muslim social identity and its political expression. At the same time, he restated the major themes of the Yacoubist community's historical memory – Sufism, moral reform, and the wisdom of a persecuted

people – and wove them into an argument about the appropriate relationship between religious and political authority:

> The worship [*culte*], I mean to say the culture of solidarity [in Islam], is the magnificence of the relation between the believer and his All-powerful God. ... Muslim solidarity is the exigency of rigor and morality. Samuel Taylor Coleridge speaks of the "inflexible correctness of the man of Islam." We say Sufism and not alchemy. Islam (Submission) consists almost entirely of that esotericism so well incarnated by our well-loved mother Rabia Alhadawiya. At first a slave woman, she was then freed and took up residence in Bassora in the eighth century after a long wandering in the desert. Her conception of the spiritual life allowed for neither fear of hell, nor the reward of heaven, but sought instead a disinterested love of God: "Oh Lord! If it is the fear of hell that pushes me to love you, throw me into hell; if it is the desire for heaven, do not let me enter therein; but if I approach you for you alone, do not hide your eternal beauty from me!" That is our religion.

Lest the political point be missed, he continued (a bit) more explicitly:

> In the same category of ideas, when it comes time to select an imam, any person who declares himself a candidate is ipso facto disqualified. This goes for all other elected positions. The procedure for selection is the choice by consensus of a person on whose intellectual, physical, and moral capabilities (so far as required by the position) all are in agreement. If, therefore, we choose to take part in electoral mechanisms that issue from a civilization and a culture so different from our own that they are in opposition, it is as citizens concerned to maintain laicism and respectful of the unity of our country.[54]

Ahmadou Sylla's younger brother, Maître Cheickna Sylla, mobilized Yacouba's legacy quite differently. With a new, Gagnoa-based president in power and the ascension of the more xenophobic strands of *ivoirité*, the memory of the old hostilities in Gagnoa between the PDCI and various Bété political figures was an unpleasant and even dangerous specter. Cheickna thus subsumed his father's alliance with Houphouët-Boigny into a broader campaign "for the liberation of black Africans."[55] He highlighted Yacouba's claim in 1970 that the French administration had used colonial settlers in Gagnoa to turn the Bété against the RDA and, by extension, him, implying that such

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54 Cheick Ahmadou Yacouba Sylla, "L'Islam n'a pas de candidat," *Le Jour* (Abidjan), August 22, 2000.
55 FOCYS to author, June 3, 2001. In my interview with the historical committee of FOCYS on 24 May 2001 the committee made an even greater attempt to minimize the importance of Houphouët-Boigny in Yacouba's work.

internal conflicts were only a ploy of colonialist or neocolonialist forces.[56] He similarly reinterpreted the initial conflicts around Yacouba's teachings in Kaédi in 1929 and 1930 as an example of colonial divide-and-rule tactics, giving the Yacoubists a long pedigree as African nationalists.[57]

All these versions of the community's history also cast into profound relief the versions drawn from the documentary record. For the historian it is in this that they are most important. None of these sets of sources – the colonial archives, the Yacoubist traditions, the perspectives of Yacouba's detractors – stands in predetermined relation with any other, providing ready-made hegemonic and subaltern "histories." Nor can they simply be aggregated into an objective narrative that exhausts the significance that the Shaykh and his community had for the history of French West Africa. Nonetheless, if one goal of history is to articulate the past as experienced with the past as explained, one way of doing so without recourse to teleology is by reading these narratives and their archives alongside one another and by being attentive to what it is that places the tradition in danger, what, in Walter Benjamin's phrase, "threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it."[58]

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56 *Fraternité Matin*, August 7, 1970, vii.
57 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat", pp. 35–36; Cheickna Sylla, May 21, 2001. In this it also parallels the "nationalist" historiography of Alioune Traoré and others who present the history of the Hama-wiyya in general as an example of French "divide-and-rule" machinations.
58 *Pace* Jean and John Comaroff, it is not possible for the historian to simply assemble her or his "own" archive, or "reconstruct the annals of a cultural imagination." Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, 1992), p. 34. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (trans. Harry Zohn) in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 391.

PART THREE

"what did he give you?": interpretation

6

Lost Origins: Women and Spiritual Equality

> Moodinun ni yaxarin soron ya yi.
> "Marabouts" are female persons.
>   – Soninke adage reported by Mamadou Diawara[1]

The origins of social or religious movements are often elusive. Indeed, the question of origins in general typically leads to a misty terrain where it becomes difficult to determine precisely who did what, exactly which actions were decisive and where one phenomenon shades into another. Walter Benjamin went so far as to assert that while origin was "an entirely historical category," origins could not be "discovered by the examination of actual findings" for they depended rather on the "subsequent development" of events and represented a rupture in that development rather than a smooth process of coming into being.[2] Looked at this way, origins thwart standard methodologies; they are only constituted retrospectively, so contemporaneous sources are generally useful only as unconscious witnesses at best, and posterior sources are overdetermined by the ideological value representations of origins often attain. These problems are compounded greatly when the movement in question is small, so that the "quantum" effects of microhistorical forces amplify the usual uncertainty.[3] Origins may thus be a matter of empirical facts, but they are not the object of positive knowledge.

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[1] Mamadou Diawara, *La graine de la parole: dimension sociale et politique des traditions orales du royaume de Jaara (Mali) du XVème au milieu du XIXème siècle* (Stuttgart: 1990), p. 113. Diawara notes that the saying refers to two widely shared perceptions: that *modinu* provide women with magical services to attract and influence men, and that they are barred from participation in warfare. One might also add the therapies such figures offer for problems of conception, child birth, and illness.

[2] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London, 1977), pp. 45–46.

[3] Pace Jacques Revel, "Microanalyse et construction du social," in *Jeux d'échelles: La microanalyse à l'expérience* (Paris, 1996), p. 19, I would suggest the microscale is privileged in the use of conceptual categories such as origin and agency by virtue of its correspondence to the scale of the human body.

These dangers notwithstanding, venturing into such uncertain realms can bring substantial rewards by offering new perspectives on presumably well-understood events, by forcing an examination of accepted standards of explanation and, not least, by heightening awareness of the operation of our methods. Thinking about the origins of the community of Yacouba Sylla and the role played by various figures in shaping its early history provides an opportunity to reconsider how we handle questions of agency, particularly the attribution of agency in contexts of colonial occupation and under circumstances where major battles raged to define and impose religious orthodoxy and thus to establish a fixed relationship between belief and action. As we have seen, despite the fact that all explanations of the origin and development of the Yacoubist community that rely on available evidence place Yacouba Sylla himself at the middle of the narrative, many of the events in Kaédi in 1929 and 1930 took place outside of Yacouba's obvious control, and some of the most important occurred without his direct involvement. People in Kaédi, such as Mamadou Ciré and Mamadou Sadio clearly attempted to capitalize on the revival and divert it to their own purposes. The complex cast of characters and the countless internal divisions within each family, to say nothing of each neighborhood, belie any simple allocation of responsibility. The same is true for the period after 1930 when followers like Amadi Gata Kaba, Diapaga Tandia, and Kaou N'Badoxo decided to remain in Côte d'Ivoire rather than return to Kaédi, for reasons that seem to have been fairly personal but which had a clear effect on the future direction of the community.

One result of this narrow focus on leadership – a feature common to histories of Islam in West Africa, which often take the shape of capsule biographies of great *shaykh*s, mirroring the hagiographic genres on which they rely for source material – is that histories of religious movements and organizations in West Africa have given little attention to women except as faceless followers, subjects of discourse, or figures of oppression. Depictions of the *shaykh-murîd* relationship as generative of all intellectual and social activity within *tarîqas* exclude the vast majority of Muslim women from positions as agents and elide the way gendered spheres of production and exchange (both material and semiotic) sustain religious communities and practices.[4] The problem is deeper than mere perspective or choice of theoretical framework. The fact that French colonial officials conceptualized West African Islam as centered on Sufi orders and those orders as centered on *shaykh*s converges

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4 See the critique by Beth Anne Buggenhagen in "Profits and Prophets: Gendered and Generational Visions of Wealth and Value in Senegalese Murid Households," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31:4 (2001), 373–401. Even very recent and sophisticated work, such as Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadou Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Sengal, 1853–1913* (Athens, OH, 2007), reflects this tendency.

with the fact that West African men tend to dominate the circulation of oral knowledge about Islamic history (particularly in discussion with "outside" researchers, most of whom are men themselves) to create an archive that makes it virtually impossible to fashion different kinds of narratives.

Over the last sixty years, the face that the Yacoubist community has presented to the outside has been a thoroughly masculine one, dominated by the employees of its transport companies and stores, by its crop brokers and credit lenders, its school children (girls were taught within the community's compounds while boys attended French schools), and its political figures and members of civil society. Starting with the synecdoche by which "Ba Yaaxuba" stood in for the community as a whole, the official discourse has implied that the members who matter, at least from the perspective of action, have been men.

In its earliest days, however, the Yacoubist "movement" was dominated, at least numerically, by women. According to French records, 225 of Yacouba's 350 adult followers were women.[5] During the early 1930s, when Yacouba's followers were making the transition from participants in a religious awakening to members of an organized spiritual community, women were even more predominant. Of the fewer than 500 followers of Yacouba who remained in Kaédi in March 1930, only twenty-six were adult men.[6] Because the privileging of male agency in West African Muslim communities is built not only into our interpretive frameworks but also into our archives, it is not possible to simply weave into a linear narrative an explanation of why it was that these women participated in the movement in the first place, and why they remained affiliated with Yacouba and his imprisoned male followers during the apparently bleak years between 1930 and 1938.

WOMEN AS PARTICIPANTS

In response to questions about the apparent composition of the early community, BaThierno Marega, one of the oldest surviving companions of Yacouba, argued that if women followed Yacouba in greater numbers this

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5 Cmdt. de Cercle de Gorgol (Quegneaux), "Recensement des Tidjanis," Mar 23, 1930 (ANMt E2-34).
6 Adama Gnokane, "La diffusion du Hamallisme au Gorgol et son extension dans les cercles voisins, 1906–1945" (Memoire de Fin d'Etudes, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Nouakchott, 1980), p. 66. Gnokane's tabulations are based on Quegneaux, "Recensement des Tidjanis." Mauritania's Governor, René Chazal, gave even lower figures: 130 adult women, 220 children, and no adult men. It seems likely that this only included Kaédi, where Quegneaux's numbers may have included Djeol. Furthermore, Chazal's report was written sooner after the events themselves, and thus his information may not have been as accurate as Quegneaux's. Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal), to Gouv.-Gén. AOF (Carde), Rapport °12C, Mar 18, 1930, p. 32 (CAOM 1 Affpol 2802/6 dossier 3).

was because they were more sensitive to religious ideas and so quickly recognized his spiritual importance. However, men's contributions were most important because it was men who were arrested and killed, and who sacrificed themselves. [7] The earliest French commentaries on the matter employed similar logic. Administrators had noted with concern that women had taken the lead in the public confessions of adultery during the *mawlid al-nabî* of August 1929, and that in doing so many had created irreparable breaks with their families.[8] Mauritanian Governor René Chazal accounted for such dramatic action by first reaching for stereotypes about the fickleness of Soninke women; but he also offered a more complex explanation: Soninke women were moved by Yacouba's preaching because they were ''more emotive and more sensitive to mystical revelations.''[9]

Both BaThierno's invocation of women's ''sensitivity to ideas'' in general and Chazal's reference to Soninke women's ''sensitivity to mystical revelations'' shared an ''attentiveness'' to women's spirituality, even as they dismissed its broader historical relevance. The differences between their accounts merely reflected the differences in the ways the two men evaluated Yacouba's teachings: BaThierno praised women for recognizing Yacouba's significance while Chazal belittled them for being duped by his charlatanism. It is not hard, however, to free such explanations from these stereotypes and to shed some light on what it meant to some women to be a follower of Yacouba Sylla.

In a groundbreaking study of women's relationships with *tarîqa*s and *walî*s in Morocco, Daisy Hilse Dwyer suggested that women can have a specifically gendered relation to their social setting that allows them to act upon possibilities presented by that setting that are less available to men. Dwyer found that compared to men, women who experienced crises were much more likely to shift their allegiances from a Sufi *tarîqa* or *walî* whose attachment they had ''inherited'' from their father or husband, to one that proffered more effective spiritual aid. Women thus tended to privilege flexibility over stability, while it was harder for men to change affiliation because their religious associations were more thoroughly integrated with lineage identities and other social networks. Men also tended to be more insulated from the kinds of crises that provoked women's search for additional spiritual resources.[10]

7 BaThierno Marega, trans. Maître Cheickna Sylla, with others in attendance, Gagnoa, April 29, 2001. I carried out over twenty formal interviews with Yacouba's followers, but because of constraints imposed by the community's leadership, all but one of my interviews with women were either spontaneous or done through intermediaries.
8 Cmdt. de cer. Gorgol (Charbonnier), ''Compte-rendu, °1099C,'' Sept 5, 1929 (CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 2), p. 4.
9 Rapp. pol. ann., Mauritanie, 1929, p. 28 (ANS 2G-29 v. 9).
10 Daisy Hilse Dwyer, ''Women, Sufism, and Decision-Making in Moroccan Islam,'' in *Women in the Muslim World*, eds. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge, MA, 1978), pp. 585–598.

Women in Kaédi who came from slave or casted backgrounds and who thus likely encountered serious obstacles to establishing their own households and getting access to the material, social, and cultural capital needed to take advantage of the changing economic landscape of the 1920s, may have found hope in the arrival of new, unencumbered sources of spiritual power. Furthermore, if the rigidity of local religious identities had the result of raising the "decision threshold" for women who sought to change the direction of their spiritual orientation, and thus encouraged or necessitated more radical breaks from past behavior once the decision to change had been made, it may account for the apparent "radicalism" of Yacouba's female followers, who were willing to leave their husbands (though not, inferring from the census, their children) behind. For women whose family relations reproduced their dependent status, or for those whose husbands had been absent for an extended period of time in the groundnut zones or in the colonial service, the option that Yacouba's arrival provided to use religious allegiances to dissolve marital ones may have been particularly welcome.

However, women who participated in the revival in Kaédi were a fairly heterogeneous group, including some from affluent families, such as the Kaba family, and these in particular seem to have joined *with* their male relatives, rather than to free themselves from them. Furthermore, since approximately 125 men also participated in the revival, Dwyer's analysis would need to be extended to cover gender more generally, not just women. For those men who were young, unmarried and poor, their positions of dependency may have been sufficiently analogous to that of nonelite women to give them similar incentives to reaffiliate.[11] But this is no more successful in explaining the attraction of wealthy or older men to Yacouba than it is that of well-off women. In addition, the entire explanation relies on assuming that religion's most important effect was to define corporate groups; it therefore leaves unaddressed something that was explicit in the claims of both BaThierno Marega and Governor Chazal: that it was Yacouba's "ideas" or "mystical revelations" that made his revival attractive to women.

The colonial archives are curiously vague about Yacouba's teachings as moral claims; given that so many of those teachings touched on issues directly relevant to women, this has the effect of hollowing out women's agency, making it purely reflexive and corporate, rather than reflective and differentiated. But there is reason to believe it was precisely as a moral reform movement, rather than as a redrawing of group boundaries, that the revival held an attraction for men and women alike. Yacouba's attacks on certain women's clothing

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11 See also J.D.Y. Peel's account of Yoruba conversions to Christianity: "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32:2 (2002), 136–163.

and dance styles, his ban on the wearing of gold, his calls for lowering of marital payments, and his encouraging followers who were from occupational castes or ex-slave lineages to marry others who were from "noble" or "free" families, all centered on the rejection of symbols of marginality that operated by marking someone as a subordinate, "immature" member of society. Yacouba's teachings thus identified pathways by which his followers could assert their right to be accepted as free, adult members of the community regardless of their social background. And adulthood was an explicitly gendered category; Yacouba's reforms and even his own identity were predicated on particular notions of masculinity and femininity that reflected in turn specifically gendered experiences of marginal social status.

In many parts of turn-of-the-century Western Sudan, including Soninke communities, the performance of certain dances and the wearing of revealing clothing were ways of signaling the supposed sexual availability of female slaves to men of noble rank. They contrasted visibly with the disciplined bodily comportment that Islamic reform movements had made a centerpiece of Muslim identity in the mid-1800s.[12] Yacouba Sylla's followers argue that their denunciations of women's dances and clothing were attempts to make the women of the eleven-bead community "respectable," enabling and compelling them to play the role appropriate to an adult woman in an ideal Muslim community.[13] In banning both transparent clothing and "slave" dances, Yacouba was not only furthering a major thrust of religious reform, he was also providing a means by which female ex-slaves could recover their symbolic honor.

In some ways, reforms of dancing and attire served the interests of Yacouba's male followers, who could now not only marry but marry "respectable" Muslim women. The same could be said of Yacouba's ban on gold jewelry. Gold was not just a symbol of wealth and status in society; it had a particular role in gender relations. Married women used the money they earned from their portion of marital payments and from labor on their personal lands to purchase gold. Gold so bought became part of private wealth that their husbands could not appropriate.[14] Yacouba's ban on gold may thus have limited married women's autonomy. Marital payments were complex transactions and in flux regionally at the time, so it is difficult to generalize, but the implications of lowering those payments may have been similar. Since it was easier for men to secure a divorce from their wives than it was for women from their husbands, and since the material consequences of divorce were more advantageous for

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12 Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, UK, 1998), pp. 246–248.

13 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 5, 2001. See also Yacouba's comments to Alioune Traoré, *Islam et colonisation en Afrique: Cheikh Hamahoullah, homme de foi et résistant* (Paris, 1983), p. 207.

14 J.-H. Saint-Père, *Les Sarakollé du Guidimakha* (Paris, 1925), pp. 88–90.

men, woman's control over a portion of marital transactions helped offset these asymmetries. If a man initiated divorce proceedings or if a woman initiated a divorce with cause – cruelty, failure to provide, adultery, and so on – none of the original "gift" needed to be repaid; in theory this served as a disincentive to men's exercise of the right of divorce and guaranteed women's self-sufficiency afterward. Reduction or elimination of marital payments thus brought with them a reduction in women's leverage over their husbands.

This seems to help very little in explaining women's participation in the revival; it instead suggests only disincentives. But this is because we are still interpreting the implications of each reform separately, from the view of immediate self-interest. In fact, Yacouba's reforms involved a complex package of gender transformations whose significance derived from both the entire system of shifts and individual women's specific circumstances. For some, trading one form of dependency for another, less onerous, form would have been incentive enough. Similarly, for women who had seen their lack of "noble" comportment reinforce their social marginality, a shift in their "cultural capital" might have made a real impact on their status. For wealthy women the ban on gold may have provided an opportunity to convert material status into religious and cultural respectability.

MAHR, ADULTHOOD, AND HONOR

The clearest example of how this may have worked is the case of marriage payments, which in actual social practice differed greatly from the purely contractual and economic meanings they had under Islamic law. Early twentieth-century Soninke marital payments typically involved two distinct transactions. The portion which most closely corresponded to what Muslim reformists thought of as an Islamic dower, or *mahr*, was called "hute;" it was required for all marriages, was usually a fairly small sum, and went to the bride herself, but could be paid after the marriage at some future date. Closer to what anthropologists call bridewealth was the *naabure*; generally of much greater value than the *hute*, the *naabure* was set by the bride's family and was payable directly to her father and his brothers. While the value of the *naabure* generally inflated over the course of the century, the *hute* remained fairly fixed. The small relative value of the *hute* and the fact that it was often only paid years after the marriage (if at all) suggests that only the minimum necessary consideration had been given to accommodating the *sharîᶜa*-minded.[15]

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15 Eric Pollet and Grace Winter, *La Société Soninké (Dyahunu, Mali)* (Brussels, 1971), pp. 424–425. Saint-Père, by contrast, suggests that bridewealth went entirely to the bride, but the terminology he uses suggests he may have only been speaking of the *hute*. Saint-Père, *Sarakollé*, p. 103, 108.

The available sources on Yacouba's reforms have been mediated through French vocabulary, collapsing the subtle distinctions between *hute*, *mahr*, and *naabure* into one word, "*dot*" (dowry). It seems unlikely Kaédi's imams would have accepted an elimination of the *hute*; so Yacouba's reform likely targeted the *naabure*, the portion of marital payments from which women gained the least. Male elders, who were the prime beneficiaries of *naabure*, may have had their own reasons for acquiescing. Yacouba's claim that a reduction in bridewealth could both restore the piety of the community and protect the rights of all men and women to contract marriages may have appealed to older men's collective rather than individual interests. There were, in any case, ways for them to present a reduction in bridewealth for their daughters as a pious act, especially if the prospective son-in-law was a religious figure, through a very noble kind of marriage known as *Allangkuye*.[16] On the other hand, Yacouba's pressuring of the imams to establish maximum payments for *all* families would have represented an unprecedented incursion of religious authority into family affairs. Bridewealth did a large amount of social and cultural work that would have made it a practice that certain members of the town would have been reluctant to forgo. The very feature that made it frustrating to poorer men made it attractive to the wealthy: by enabling families to make marriage an agonistic pursuit it facilitated the emergence of hierarchy, status, and dependency.[17]

As important as its political functions, however, are the ways that bridewealth provides opportunities for debate about what can and cannot be exchanged, and about what does and does not constitute a gift. Giving thus has rhetorical aspects and practical uses that exceed its immediate function; to claim that something is a gift is to argue that it differs in *some* way from economic exchange, but exactly what that difference is depends on the intentions of the one doing the arguing. There are expansive social implications attached to the various ways people make claims about what should be sold, what should be given, and what should be kept.[18] The Lévi-Straussian model of society as the "circulation of women," for

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[16] In *Allangkuye*, a woman could marry a religious scholar (*modinu*) and the latter paid only the *hute* and only to her. The bride's father expected to receive compensation in the afterlife in exchange for forgoing the *naabure*. This act was pious in the sense that it was a gift to a religious figure and thus charity, but it also corresponded to recognized Maliki legal stipulations and the teachings of reformists. Pollet and Winter, *Société Soninké*, p. 428.

[17] Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal, and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Economy* (Cambridge, UK, 1981); Maurice Godelier, *La production des grands hommes* (Paris, 1982); Andrew Strathern, *The Rope of Moka: Big Men and Ceremonial Exchange in Mount-Hagen, New Guinea* (Cambridge, UK, 1971); and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, rev. ed., trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston, 1969).

[18] See Godelier's efforts to elaborate a non–Lévi-Straussian structuralism in *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Chicago, 1999); such critiques were made earlier on empirical and practice-theory grounds, and in terms closer to my own, by John L. Comaroff, "Introduction," in *The Meaning of Marriage Payments*, ed. John L. Comaroff (New York, 1980), pp. 1–47.

example, can be taken as one kind of gift ideology (what Lévi-Strauss himself would have called a "native theory"), a way of mobilizing the idea of the gift that serves to naturalize various constructions of gender and property.[19]

In these terms, Yacouba's claim that excessive bridewealth demands had created a market in women was an argument that marriage and marriage prestations had both ceased to be gifts; that is, he redescribed what others were calling gift as a form of market exchange. This went along with a broader denunciation of the inequality market exchange was producing. Such rhetoric linked Yacouba's claim that high bridewealth was morally illegitimate to his more straightforward assertion that society was becoming too unequal. He made this connection explicit in interviews with Alioune Traoré in 1974 and 1975. At that time, Yacouba folded his critiques of bridewealth into a whole set of other demands that included reforms in the practice of circumcision and prohibitions on usury and making business transactions in the *zâwiya*; he presented all of these as attempts to bring his followers' behavior in line with orthodox Islam.[20] At the same time, the rhetoric had clear limitations; it could not overcome the difficultly of translating the disapproval of the pious into legal action, or the ability of the politically powerful who benefited from high bridewealth to appeal to family autonomy. It therefore provided a firm common ground for those opposed to him. But for many women, this broader transformation of the nature of social relations may have been deeply appealing. The ban on gold and the limiting of marital payments would have been most injurious for women who had access to such income in the first place. For those too poor or marginal to marry and collect their own wealth to store as gold, or for those whose *mahr* had been very small to begin with, abandoning this abstract right might have been a small price to pay for the tangible, immediate benefit of increased status and the freedom to establish their own households.

It is also important to avoid the structuralist mistake of equating transfers of bridewealth with weddings themselves. Barbara Cooper has pointed out that, in addition to their functional and rhetorical properties, bridewealth prestations also had a performative aspect, and wedding ceremonies and the various rituals that surrounded them often provided a crucial opportunity for women to establish their "worth" in society, to activate potential social relationships, and to create, reproduce, or challenge hierarchies. They were, in short, important sites of women's action within and upon society.[21] Seen this way, the efforts

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19 See the useful survey in Julia Meryl Ekong, *Bridewealth, Women and Reproduction in Sub-Saharan Africa, a Theoretical Overview* (Bonn, 1992), esp. chs. 1 and 6.

20 Traoré, *Islam et colonisation*, pp. 139–140, 207. None of these other reforms, however, seemed particularly important to my interviewees in 2001.

21 Barbara M. Cooper, "Women's Worth and Wedding Gift Exchange in Maradi, Niger, 1907–89," *JAH* 36 (1995), 121–140.

of male elders in Kaédi to restrict marriages as a way of controlling young men's wealth would have been equally objectionable to young women. Marriage within the Yacoubist community, by contrast, provided women with entrance to an entire symbolic language that was designed to enable them to affirm their worth. All of the signs of free, adult status that were symbolized by such practices as modest vesture and refined dancing could be put forcefully on display through the commitment to the community that marriage within it implied. Not the least of these symbolic practices were the nuptials themselves, which affirmed the ability of bride and groom to constitute themselves as givers, and thus as moral, pious, free persons. For as in the case of the devout *Allangkuye* marriage, the *forgoing* of bridewealth could itself become a gift. Yacoubist leaders stress that in their community marriage was a gift that everyone involved gave simultaneously to everyone else: the bride and groom gave themselves to each other, their families gave them up, and Yacouba gave them all the spiritually meaningful context and security in which to give these gifts. And, a point in which members of the community take great pride, everyone gave their consent. Rather than fleeing family affiliations, then, women who joined Yacouba's community may have been inspired to do so out of a desire to establish new families, ones of their own design.

If this was the case, then it raises the difficult question about where such ideas originated and to what extent Yacouba Sylla can be considered their author. The revival may in fact have provided an opportunity for some women to make an intervention in religious norms, to alter prevailing spiritual practices to better suit their own beliefs. The decision to seize upon Yacouba's expanded definition of confession that so surprised the French, and the choice to foreground the very specific transgression of adultery in these public pronouncements points toward a dangerous but powerful technique for forcing an alteration of the practices of the men in the community. Confession may have been attractive not because of any particular propensity of women toward such displays, but because its corporeality, like that of *dhikr* recitation and changes in attire, forced men into uncomfortable corners where they either had to accede to women's demands, admit their own culpability in irreligious behavior, or denounce the revival as a whole.[22]

These challenges to men's honor suggest that some of the interpretations placed on Yacouba's teachings by the community may have been *ex post facto* attempts to restrict their radical gender implications. One way of doing this was to detach them from any specifically Soninke cultural context that could

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[22] See the analogous links made between embodied signs of piety, confession, and heterodoxy in Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2004).

allow them to be read as particular interventions in a social order rather than as abstract commentaries on Islam. The community's rhetoric takes little note of "customs" like bridewealth and dancing. When, at a *haidara* ceremony in 2001, I noted the way the community's use of Soninke songs and dances memorializing the events of their past had helped them preserve their distinctive culture, the presiding elder quickly corrected me: the Soninke language was only a vehicle for religious teachings, not something important in and of itself; the community was engaged in an act of spiritual, not cultural, conservation.[23]

Indeed, Yacouba manifestly offended Soninke codes of honor in ways that emphasized his followers' low status. For example, though adultery itself may have been widespread, to publicly accuse someone of committing adultery or to publicly confess the same was an admission of sexual weakness at odds with the conduct expected of a "noble."[24] Even in the matter of dancing Yacouba did not so much erase his followers' past as resymbolize it; when he banned the "licentious" old dances he replaced them with the dance "of the Prophet."[25] The most radical of Yacouba's reforms in the eyes of many of his opponents was his opening of *dhikr* ceremonies to the women of Kaédi.[26] In this, Yacouba moved beyond creating new routes to adulthood for his followers and actually altered the meaning of adult womanhood, at least insofar as it touched on religious life. This change was likely felt as a threat to many free men's masculinity, causing Yacouba to be widely denounced as a cause of the very moral degeneracy his followers saw him as fighting. Yet just as poor women may have been little troubled by the ban on gold jewelry, so too a new, expanded role for women may have been a fairly low price for socially marginal men to pay in exchange for their own free-adult masculinity.

This suggests that Yacouba's male followers – and perhaps Yacouba himself – were actually reacting to pressure from female revivalists. Women may have featured so prominently in Yacouba's movement because they were, at least in part, leading it. Some women can even be tentatively identified as possible leaders. Sirandou "Yewti" Kaba, the niece of N'Paly Kaba who was the subject

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23 Haidara, May 4, 2001.
24 Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, p. 247. Even the discussion of adultery made anthropologists Eric Pollet and Grace Winter's interviewees nervous in a way that reveals its links to honor, slavery, and gender: "You must not make us speak of the affairs of women; that [subject] makes us ashamed; it is the slaves whom you should ask about that." They further noted that the houses of casted *nyaxamalo* were frequently used by nobles to commit their indiscretions. Pollet and Winter, *Société Soninké*, pp. 432–433.
25 Though I witnessed this dance in Grand-Bassam, I was not able to videotape it and lacked the expertise to discern how closely it may have resembled the dances associated with low social status in the early twentieth century.
26 E.g. Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu, °1099C," p. 5.

of conflict between the revivalists and Commandant Charbonnier in September and October 1929, is one of these.[27] Yewti Kaba herself figures not at all in the written hagiographies. But those oral accounts that focus on these months consistently frame the story in terms of the struggle of a group of men – N'Paly Kaba, Charbonnier, Yewti's father Amadi Gata, and her husband Ibrahim Galledou – to control the movements of "Amadi Gata's daughter."[28] Other sources, though, are more suggestive. One of Adama Gnokane's informants describes her as having been "an object of veneration of the Yacoubist women."[29] The French documents generally share the male-centered focus of the oral traditions, but also hint that Yewti Kaba's own actions were the cause of some agitation. Governor Chazal relayed an early report that Yewti Kaba's father, Amadi Gata, "had informed [the administration] that the aggressive attitude of his daughter, an adept agitated by the subversive theories of Yacoub Cilla, had obliged him before long to intervene disciplinarily and that in order to avoid such humiliation to his family, he agreed to send her away from Kaédi."[30] If, in fact, Yewti Kaba ran afoul of the administration, Kaédi's elites, and even male revivalists because of her role in stirring up female residents, the complaints that Yacouba was a source of moral disorder may have had less to do with his critiques of bridewealth and social inequality in the abstract than with the very visible actions of his female followers themselves.

THE VISION OF FATIMA

Those of Yacouba's opponents who sought to brand him as a heretic and rabble-rouser were particularly interested in the story according to which Yacouba had attributed the source of his reforms touching on women's dignity and the institution of marriage to a conversation with the Prophet's daughter Fatima.[31] Summarizing the events of 1929 and 1930, Governor-General Carde wrote this claim into what would stand as the official version of Yacouba's teachings for nearly seventy years:

> A young Sarakolé of Nioro, disciple of Chérif Hamallah and *dioula* by
> profession, was able, in the space of a few months, to lead a veritable

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27 See Chapter 2, n51 and n52.
28 BaThierno Marega, April 29, 2001; and FOCYS to author, June 3, 2001 (this letter was the formal codification of the responses of the FOCYS in interviews on May 19, 21, and 24, 2001).
29 The quote is from Gnokane, "Hamallism au Gorgol," p. 59, and presumably is based on the oral testimony of a non-Yacoubist. If, as Gnokane reports, Kaba "completely renounced Yacoubism" sometime before her death in 1975, there may have been good reason for BaThierno Marega and Cheickna Sylla to downplay her personal significance. See also Chapter 2, n52.
30 Rapp. pol. ann., Mauritanie, 1929, p. 29.
31 The earliest reference is Charbonnier, "Compte-rendu, °1099C," p. 4.

upheaval of the religious and social order among the Sarakolés of the region of Kaédi. . . . His doctrine, which rests upon an exchange he is to have had, in a dream, with Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, appears however to be stained with a flagrant heresy; it forbids women from wearing thin clothing, luxurious cloths, transparent veils, and jewels; it requires the public confession of sins, with the goal of self-mortification and purification; it proclaims the absolute independence of the child within the family and of the individual within society. One perceives right away the danger of these anarchic precepts. . . .[32]

The Fatima story has been a staple of commentary on the community ever since.[33]

Those who codified this story refrained from explaining it, as if it provided its own context. To some extent, it did – for them. For Fatima was a fairly well-defined figure in early twentieth-century French Orientalist thought. Through the 1920s and 1930s the canonical work on Fatima was Henri Lammens' *Fatima et les filles de Mahomet*. A critical study with a debunking, even condescending tone, *Fatima* dismissed the historical significance of the Prophet's daughter in early Islam, arguing that her veneration was a later development, orchestrated by Shiʿi political activists and bolstered by naive mysticism. Lammens believed the cult had survived in Sunni Islam because of its usefulness in diverting the high regard most Muslims had for the Prophet's descendants (the *shurafâ'*, all of whom descended from Fatima) away from Fatima's husband ʿAli ibn Abi Talib and their sons Hasan and Husayn, the central figures in Shiʿi challenges to Sunni legitimacy. Lammens also associated Fatima with Islamic patriarchy, arguing that using her as a model of the ideal woman served to reinforce women's subordination. The main features of Fatima's hagiography that Lammens made available to Islamologists – events and symbols that turned around the themes of weddings, poverty, women's clothing, dowries, and bridewealth – may have

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[32] Gouv.-Gén. AOF (Carde) to Lieut. Gouvs. (all colonies), "Circulaire 13 Mars 30, °133AP," pp. 10–11 (CAOM 1 Affpol 2258/3 dossier 1).

[33] The scholars at the Centre des haute études d'administration musulmane (CHEAM) picked the story up from the early administrative reports and it passed into J.C. Froelich's influential *Les musulmans d'Afrique noire* in 1962. The story was introduced into Anglophone scholarship by Jamil M. Abun-Nasr's *The Tijaniyya* which drew on both Froelich and the CHEAM files. Finally, in 1980 Adama Gnokane, the first scholar to return to the original reports, simply repeated the Fatima story, again without comment. In the CHEAM files, see Capitaine Jean d'Arbaumont, "La confrérie des Tidjania," CHEAM °1411 (1941), p. 21; Francis Nicolas, "Une mystique révolutionnaire socialo-religieuse: le Hamallisme ou Hamawisme (d'AOF)," CHEAM °1079 (1943), p. 53; Roger Lafeuille, "Le Tidjanisme onze grains ou Hamallisme," CHEAM °1189 (1947), p. 6; etc. Froelich, *Les musulmans d'Afrique noire* (Paris, 1962), p. 242; Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: a Sufi Order in the Modern World* (New York, 1965), p. 155; Gnokane, "Hamallisme au Gorgol," p. 57.

resonated with the early reports about the specifics of Yacouba's moral reforms.[34]

These symbols aside, the story may have seemed important simply because of its considerable uniqueness; to my knowledge, no other stories of revelatory visions of Fatima have ever appeared in the vast literature on Sufism or Sunni Islam. As such, it helped to identify Yacouba's preaching as part of a discrete religious movement, separate from either the Tijaniyya or various *mahdi*st movements. At a time when reformist impulses had led most Sufi *shaykhs* to claim Muhammad as the source of their authority, the French may have thought that Yacouba's association with Fatima represented a kind of defective, if not heretical, reformism.[35] In any case, the Fatima story served to emphasize the movement's heterodoxy by associating it with Shiᶜism, to symbolize its unusual gender dynamics, and to emphasize the credulity of those who would follow such teachings.

In doing so, it intersected with another line of speculation about Yacouba that also seems to have had its origin in the Fatima story. At the end of the 1930s, Captain J.-L. Montezer's handbook on Islam for incoming colonial officers dismissively reported that Yacouba had decided to embark on his reforms ''following a 'dream','' without mentioning Fatima. Montezer in turn was the direct source for a respected study by Alphonse Gouilly in 1952, who also referred to Yacouba's ''dream.'' Montezer's text also included the phrase ''the absolute independence of the child within the family and of the individual within society,'' lifted verbatim from Carde, and set the foundation for the elaboration of a mythology about sexual deviancy that ran parallel to the Fatima story. A 1941 Centre des hautes études d'administration musulmane (CHEAM) report by Capitaine d'Arbaumont, for example, elaborated Charbonnier's fears about the social implications of Yacouba's acceptance of women at *dhikr* ceremonies into a litany of sexual fantasies about an orgiastic dance that supposedly followed the *dhikr*,

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34 Lammens' description of the patriarchal utility of Fatima reveals much about the approach of turn-of-the century French Islamologists to the question of gender and Islam: ''Pour raffermir la vertu des femmes, les battre, leur refuser des habits, les condamner à la claustration perpétuelle – ainsi le conseillait l'autoritaire calife ᶜOmar... – tous ces remèdes devaient paraître insuffisants.'' These preconceptions parallel the opinions of those who emphasized Yacouba's ''attacks'' on women's revealing clothing in Gattaga, and may help explain the often contradictory claims by colonial analysts that Yacouba's teachings were both severe toward women (by imposing a conservative attire on them) and sexually debauched (by allowing women to participate in the central Sufi rituals). Henri Lammens, *Fâtima et les filles de Mahomet* (Rome, 1912), p. 135.

35 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (2nd ed.) (Chicago, 1979), p. 206; R.S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke. ''Neo-Sufism Reconsidered,'' *Der Islam* 70 (1993), 52–87.

fantasies that were then echoed uncritically in Jamil Abun-Nasr's author-itative monograph.[36]

By the time it reached Abun-Nasr's book, the Fatima story had traveled a great distance from those who first told it to Charbonnier. Where it came from remains a mystery. The uniqueness of the story in the Sufi tradition means there is no evident set of internal traditions that could help us interpret it, or any rich ethnographic text that might ground it in particular local inflections of Islam or in a specific religious discourse. Moreover, the leader-ship of the Yacoubist communities in Gagnoa and Abidjan strongly reject the story of Yacouba's vision of Fatima; so no clarification of what it may have signified can be gained by looking at internal sources.

Nonetheless, even if the story was fabricated by Yacouba's rivals, they had some reason for presenting this particular rumor. The same themes in the Fatima hagiography that might have caught the eye of the French may have also been known to the more educated Muslims in Kaédi, and perhaps to the general public as well. A story in which the Prophet Muhammad rejects Fatima's first suitors – including the future Caliphs ʿUmar and Abu Bakr – when they flaunt their great wealth and instead selects ʿAli despite his poverty, may have resonated with Yacouba's bridewealth reforms and condemnation of luxurious jewelry. Local debates over *mahr* may have reminded people that Muhammad gave Fatima, as her dowry, the power to intercede with God on the part of all Muslims on the day of resurrection – an attribute frequently attributed to Sufi saints. Finally, the "widespread" legend reported by Massignon that Fatima was without *hayd* (menstrual bleeding) or *nifâs* (puerperal bleeding), and thus legally able to pray and fast without any sexually determined interruptions might have been a useful precedent in legitimating the presence of Yacouba's female followers in his *zâwiya* and at *dhikr* recitations.[37] If this was the case, then the distortions and elaborations of the story and of the gendered nature of Yacouba's community that appeared in the works by d'Arbaumont or Abun-Nasr were not inventions in the sense of outright fabrications, bearing no relationship to lived experience, but rather the result of the misleading recontextualization of rhetorical tropes that were first mobilized for very different purposes.

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36 J.-L. Montezer, *L'Afrique et l'Islam* (Dakar, 1939), p. 42; d'Arbaumont, "Confrérie des Tidjania," pp. 20–21; Alphonse Gouilly [Mouradian], *L'Islam dans l'Afrique occidentale française* (Paris, 1952), p. 145; Abun-Nasr, *Tijaniyya*, pp. 155–156; and ʿAbd Allah ʿAbd al-Raziq Ibrahim, *Adwâʾ ʿalâ al-turuq al-sûfîya fî al-qârra al-afrîqiya* (Cairo, 1990), p. 126.

37 Louis Massignon, "La notion du voeu et la devotion musulmane à Fatima," [1956] in *Opera minora: textes recueillis, classés et présentés par Y. Moubarac* (Beirut,1963), p. 580. A link between the Muslim communities of the Middle Senegal and the Fatima traditions of the Shiʿa and Sufis of the Middle East and North Africa might be sought in the ʿAlawite Idrisid traditions in Morocco and in the esteem in which the *shurafâʾ* in general were held throughout the Western Sudan.

If, as we have suggested, Yacouba's early religious revival was predom-inantly a women's affair, and women like Yewti Kaba may have even taken a lead in sustaining and radicalizing the movement, then the story that Yacouba's teachings had been inspired by a vision of Fatima might have been absolutely central to this early history. All the other reforms – of women's clothing, dancing, confessions of adultery, and dowry – may have presented themselves as a solution to women's anxieties (especially those of women who were casted or former slaves) about their worth in society and their control over their religious lives, and this solution may have been symbolized by the image of Fatima herself leading the revival through Yacouba. Unfortunately it is very difficult to say what Fatima may have meant to Yacouba's followers, male or female, in the absence of more concrete evidence. If genuine, her appearance may have been a familiar symbol, with significance evident to people in Kaédi in 1929, or it may have been a unique, contingent act of genius on the part of Yacouba or some other revivalist. But what is clear is that the generally pejorative connotations the story seems to have taken on in the French sources, and then in the derivative literature more broadly, would almost certainly not have obtained among either Yacouba's followers or the informants who first told the story to Charbonnier. She would have been held in high esteem if for no other reason than her close proximity to Muhammad, ʿAli, Hasan, and Husayn, and her status as the mother of all *shurafâ*ʾ.

STRUGGLES FOR CONTROL

During the years after February 1930, when many of the adult men who had participated in the revival were in detention, women in Kaédi were in a position to continue shaping the meaning of the movement. It might be appropriate to see a figure like Mama Jagana, understood in the hagiography as simply a praise singer of Yacouba, as playing such a role. Even the most direct assertions of power, such as the efforts of Fodie Abdoulaye Diagana to maintain group cohesion by performing marriages in absentia between the widows of Kaédi and male followers in detention, may have themselves been prompted by women's actions. Recognizing the weakness of the community at that moment, the administration seems to have sought to take the oppor-tunity to disperse the group once and for all. Commandant Quegneaux encouraged those Soninke families who had remained "untouched" by Yacouba's preaching to adopt the Hamawi women and children left behind. Some of these were estranged from their non-Yacoubist husbands, others were unmarried, widows, or had husbands in exile. Quegneaux assumed they would be eager to incorporate into households, and that their attachment to Yacouba and those in prison would thereby be gradually dissolved. However, much to the administration's concern, the other families in Kaédi, "even

those who were united to the elevens by lines of parentage," refused, saying that the Yacoubist women were "too quarrelsome."[38] It is impossible to say whether the failure of Quegneaux's project had more to do with the prejudices of non-Yacoubists against Yacouba's followers, or with the refusal of Yacouba's female followers to be assimilated into twelve-bead homes, though we might suspect some of both. Those who had responded to Yacouba's preaching and who had participated in various aspects of the revival and confrontations that ensued had, after all, already opted for a rather risky path.[39] The price they paid by holding their ground now? Three or four years in Kaédi surrounded by rivals who feared them and without men to provide for them economically. The rewards? The same. The turning point seems to have come during the years when the community began assembling itself in the mid-1930s. N'Paly Kaba's return to Kaédi in 1934 to bring the community there back under the protection of the Yacoubist leadership may have been intended above all to bring it back under the control of male elders.[40]

But while this effort seems to have been largely successful, erasing the possibly female origin of the community and transforming it into a more traditional Sufi community, some traces of women's influence remain. Male sources from within the community minimize the importance of women among their *shaykh*'s early supporters but they do not ignore them completely. Those women who do appear in the accounts of the early years of the community are mostly wives or mothers of the leading men, such as the long-suffering, extremely pious Mama Hawa Cissé, Yacouba's mother. Occasional references were also made to Nene Kaba, the wife of N'Paly Kaba, serving as "mother" to the community in Kaédi during her husband's exile and detention from 1930 to 1933. Such "domestication" of women's spiritual roles is also apparent in the community's structure. Each member of the community was considered to be under the guardianship of one of Yacouba's wives who acted as what was called a *manu-mara*, an "adopted mother" (sometimes translated as "godmother"), reinforcing the idea that the Shaykh was the spiritual father of everyone in the community.[41] The institution of the *manu-mara* also reinforced the community's complex "open secret" about servile status. In the Soninke communities of Gumbu, female ex-slaves were forced to perform

38 Inspecteur des affaires (Dumas) à Lieut. Gouv. Maur. (Chazal), "Rapport de 10 mars 1930," p. 6 (CAOM lAffpol 2802/6 dossier 3); Chazal, "Rapport °12C," p. 33.

39 We do know that there were in fact some who chose a different route. See Rapp. pol. trimestriel, Gorgol, 4ᵉ trimestre 1930 (ANMt E2-100).

40 I have been influenced here by the brilliant study by Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, *Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya* (Oxford, 1996).

41 This institution was still a vital part of the community during my time in Côte d'Ivoire in 2001. See also FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," pp. 60–61.

hospitality duties for their former masters' children; in doing so they were referred to as a *manu-mara*.[42]

Other, more material changes also hemmed in women's authority. The most important of these may have been the change in marriage practices in which the revival's attacks on bridewealth were generalized into a complete abolition of all marital payments. In some ways, this can be seen as simply a further extension of the earlier attempt to address social inequality and impious behavior in the face of a monetizing, commoditizing society.[43] But marital payments do not just facilitate agonistic stratification; as with other gifts they are also productive of social time and space and can symbolize the notional freedom to enter into alliance with any family that shares the same "currency." The contracting of marriages as pure, prestation-less exchanges thus narrows the scope of possible social interaction. The insistence that nothing be given to the natal families of women who married into the community would have acted as a strong deterrent for intermarriage with any family that did not become a member. Indeed, one of the most important things the community guaranteed its male members was the ability to marry and establish their own families.[44] The difference between lowering marital payments and eliminating them in general may thus have been one of kind rather than degree; the complete lack of *mahr*, itself a direct consequence of the absence of private property in general, rendered moot the standard juridical interventions possible on behalf of a wife in case of divorce and thus served, along with strict endogamy, to make women completely dependent upon intracommunity mediation in the case of any marital problems.

Nonetheless, some of the most unique and, for other Hamawis and Sufis, scandalous features of the Yacoubist community remain the active participation of women in *dhikr* and *haidara* and the openness to the use of Islamic

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42 Claude Meillassoux, "État et conditions des esclaves à Gumbu (Mali) au xixe siècle," in *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale*, ed. Meillassoux (Paris, 1975), p. 239.

43 See, for example, Maria Grosz-Ngate's study of marriages in Sana, Mali. In the context of increasing monetization of bridewealth in the 1980s, Grosz-Ngate observed that demand for commodities "could escalate at will so that women themselves would become commodities, obtainable only by those capable of producing the requisite prestations." In this situation, the desire to "restore" a more sincere, nonagonistic relationship between families was linked to a moral rejection of bridewealth. Maria Grosz-Ngate, "Monetization of Bridewealth and the Abandonment of 'Kin Roads' to Marriage in Sana, Mali," *American Ethnologist* 15 (1988), p. 511.

44 A Bamana laborer who worked in Gagnoa in the 1960s explained that those who came to work for Yacouba were given a choice: they could work for a salary, or they could join the community, be fed, and work for free. The prime advantage of joining the community was that Yacouba provided all the young men in his charge with a wife. Souleymane Goro, Dakar, March 5, 2001. Only since Yacouba's death in 1988 has marriage between a member of the community and someone who remains outside been permitted; marriages in which an outsider is incorporated into the community have apparently always been possible provided the incoming person converts. Ahmadou Sylla, May 3, 2001.

spiritual power to provide therapies of a specifically gendered nature. Though the practice is controversial even within the community and has provided the grounds for denunciations by rival Hamawis, at least some contemporary gatherings of Yacoubist women center around the use of Yacouba's *baraka* or *haidara* to cure problems with fertility or family health.[45] But it is only through a reimagining of the origins of the community – a reading of sources that moves among different archives rather than seeking to read between the lines of any single one – that these practices appear as remnants of an earlier, even more radical era in the story of Yacouba Sylla.

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45 One such gathering took place at a haidara in 2001 in Grand-Bassam on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*). Women sat on a bed where Yacouba Sylla had slept and touched a photograph of Shaykh Hamallah.

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The Spiritual Economy of Emancipation

L'aristocratie religieuse (coopérant avec les notables) annonça au peuple illuminé qu'avec la fin des travaux forcés et l'inauguration du «labeur librement consenti», tous obtiendraient – bing! – *iru turu inè turu*, «une véritable liberté et une citoyenneté entière». . .
– Yambo Ouologuem
Le devoir de violence

If writing the history of women and gender in West Africa is often hampered by methods that cannot adequately confront silences in sources, the same is true for the history of slaves or members of other marginalized social groups. For former slaves both documentary and oral records are particularly problematic. In the absence of formal guarantees of equality, freed people and their descendants often found that the best strategy was to disguise their family history. Martin Klein and others have noted the way this can result in serious misinterpretation when researchers take oral sources too much at face value. But if silence or forgetting are active strategies of self-emancipation, and if the keepers of memory, like the assemblers of archives, guard knowledge that reinforces their power, then it may be that no history of postslavery West Africa is truly possible and that efforts to write it cannot but reinscribe the perspectives of former masters; history itself may become a source of oppression. Other conceptual problems, here traceable to researchers themselves, have also afflicted scholarship on the topic. In large-scale narratives of West African history, the end of slavery appears as a set of fitful, hesitant moves away from a range of forms of unfree labor and toward the gradual appearance of contractual labor governed by markets. Teleologies and anachronisms that support powerful and deep-seated ideological assumptions – most importantly that there is a meaningful category called "labor" – have caused colonial-era forms of production to be defined as "postemancipation" ones, not only in the sense of temporal posteriority but also as a system that can be meaningfully contrasted with "preemancipation" practices. Similarly, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses on slavery are consistently read backward into the precolonial past, so that slavery comes to be defined in terms of its supposed antitheses.

The case of the followers of Yacouba Sylla, however, disturbs these narratives and offers an unlikely hope. Slavery both does and does not loom large in the history of the community. Lists drawn up by the French in 1930 indicated that fifteen out of the twenty-two Yacoubists killed were "*anciens captifs*," former slaves. No other contemporary account mentioned this surprising fact and it does not figure in the public hagiography of the community.[1] At the same time, the Yacoubists have not been totally silent about the place of slaves in their early history. During private interviews community leaders acknowledged the servile origins of many of Yacouba's early followers, but emphasized that they were part of a larger pool of disadvantaged that included the very poor and members of occupational "castes," such as blacksmiths.[2] They were willing to speak about such delicate matters because acknowledging them provided an opportunity to emphasize the accomplishments of Yacouba Sylla himself, the ways he had used his spiritual authority to attack and ultimately overcome the legacy of such inequalities, banning all forms of social hierarchy and therefore creating a more just community and a truer version of Islam.[3] Most important were "his" orchestrations of marriages between the descendants of slaves and free persons and between members of casted families and those from "noble" families. This policy was so successful, members of the community claimed, that few could say whether a given individual's ancestors came from such a background – often including the individual herself or himself. Thus, the Yacoubist discussion of slavery takes place, in a sense, *sous rature*.

By leaving a trace of the past while also highlighting the danger it posed, this rhetorical device provides an opportunity to write a tentative history of that which is usually invisible. Of particular importance is the fact that rather than seeing their movement from servility to entrepreneurial success as the effect of the French *mission civilisatrice* or the atomizing power of capital, Yacoubist leaders presented it as reflecting the liberating impulse of the Islamic faith. This contrasts sharply with a majority of depictions of abolition and "postemancipation" societies in West Africa. Yacoubist discourses also suggest that, in Mande-speaking communities, at least, the transformation of slavery was intertwined with shifts in the broader set of social categories that

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[1] "Liste de Yacoubists décédés à Gattaga: 15-2-1930" (ANMt E2-34). One later account, by Pierre Alexandre, a former colonial official, does mention this fact: Alexandre, "A West African Islamic Movement: Hamallism in French West Africa," in *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, ed. R. Rotberg and Ali Mazrui (New York, 1970), p. 507.

[2] The question of castes arose in numerous contexts, including *haidara* ceremonies and formal and informal conversations. The most direct exchanges on the delicate matter of slavery took place in interviews with Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 19, 2001, and Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, June 7, 2001. Also, letter, Maître Cheickna Sylla to the author, June 3, 2001.

[3] See the similar discussion surrounding Shaykh Ibrâhîm Niasse, Chapter 2, n19.

included castes. The end of slavery was thus, rather than a matter of changing labor relations, a change in ways of claiming to belong and in the forms of production and acquisition legitimated by belonging.

DEFINING SLAVERY AND ABOLITION

It is not at all obvious how to account for the apparent contradiction between French sources that highlight servile origins and the preference of Yacoubist leaders to focus instead on the abolition of castes, and particularly on marriage across caste lines. In general terms, slaves and members of castes differed in the material and social resources available to them, but shared a formal status defined by their distance from full normative personhood. In theory, Islam provided a way to trump these institutions by legitimating claims to status independent of social rank, but Islamic authority was itself distributed unevenly, in ways that often helped reproduce the patterns of difference that sustained social inequality. There is, however, substantial danger of anachronism in the attempt to map these connections and their relative strengths and weaknesses onto the specific possibilities for appropriation they presented to Yacouba and his followers. It is not easy to register the intricate imbrication of spiritual bonds with social bondage without either normalizing their relationship or foreclosing the possibility of change.

The first problem is terminological. Attempts to develop consistent vocabulary for analyzing phenomena can produce the illusion of consistency in the phenomena themselves. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw extensive debates among West African Muslims and Europeans alike about the relationship among slavery, abolition, inequality, and Islam, and these debates had an effect on the terminology used in the discourses and practices of social organization. Representations of African slavery and of Islamic attitudes toward slavery figured prominently in the ideologies used to justify European imperialism in the early colonial period. The abolitionist crusade, fought for religious, capitalist, and imperialist motives,[4] generated a complex iconography about African slavery that represented it inconsistently as either a savage institution justifying European intervention or as a mild yet distasteful one that was so deeply fixed within African and Muslim societies as to be inextricable.[5] Abolitionist, Orientalist, and colonial discourses played

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4 The literature on the antislavery movement in Europe and the US is vast. For an introduction, see David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984); and the essays by Davis, John Ashworth and Thomas L. Haskell in *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley, 1992).
5 E. Ann McDougall, ''Discourse and Distortion: Critical Reflections on Studying the Saharan Slave Trade,'' *Outre-Mers* 89:336–337 (2002), 195–227.

important roles in constructing the ''modern West'' as distinct not only from the non-West but also from its own, slave-trading past. More practically, representations of African slavery as ancient, peculiar, and intertwined with culture proved very convenient. The category of slavery effectively gave Europeans something to abolish without getting involved in the messy business of evaluating or regulating actual forms of power and dependency. As such it facilitated colonial interventions in African politics or social order when that was desired, and provided an easy excuse for inaction whenever a push for real equality would have threatened imperial policy. All of these dynamics influenced the construction of slavery as a terrain of scholarly research and so have a long legacy.[6]

Definitions of slavery that focus either on the forcible extraction of labor from slaves, or on the status of slaves as property epitomized by their alienability, are based largely on western forms of chattel slavery. They take little account either of the actual uses to which slaves were put in Africa or of the fact that neither ''labor'' nor ''property'' can be taken as ahistorical, universal concepts that can automatically distinguish slavery from other types of dependency.[7] At the same time, alternatives that suggest that slavery and debt bondage in Africa were merely products of western fantasies foreclose the possibility of analyzing either African social institutions in their own terms or the interactions between colonial and ''local'' discourses on servitude.[8]

If the problem posed by the analytic category of ''slavery'' is a difficult one, that posed by ''abolition'' is nearly intractable. When European imperialists

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6 For an introduction into the ways the construction of abolition and slavery legitimized the colonial project in Africa, see, for example, Jean and John Comaroff, ''Africa Observed: Discourses of the Imperial Imagination,'' in *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 86–125. Gyan Prakash has argued that the binary opposition between slavery and freedom in British colonial discourse on India, along with the belief in a progressive force in history moving societies from the former to the latter, were in fact ways of disguising two ''historical formulations'' – the post-Enlightenment elaboration of the concept of natural rights and political economy's reification of the commodity – as ''ontological facts.'' The British saw debt bondage as a failure of historical development, but Prakash suggests that it was instead ''a product of discourses that naturalized money and freedom.'' *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor and Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1990). See also Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 242.

7 Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff made this point forcefully and argued for an ''African'' understanding of slavery that saw it as an extreme form of kinship. Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, ''African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality,'' in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Miers and Kopytoff (Madison, 1977), pp. 3–81; and Kopytoff's commentary on Paul E. Lovejoy, ''Indigenous African Slavery,'' in *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies*, ed. Michael Craton (Toronto, 1979), pp. 62–77.

8 Whether or not, for example, the British abolition of slavery in India in 1843 was, as Prakash states, ''largely superficial because the unfreedom that it ended had very little basis in the existing ties of dependence between 'masters' and 'slaves,''' such a claim would not hold for French West Africa. Prakash, *Bonded Histories*, p. 222.

took possession of the Western Sudan at the end of the nineteenth century, they contrasted the evils of African slavery to their own supposed commitment to free labor and equality before the law. Abolitionists claimed that Islam was a redoubtable foe of emancipation and that the antislavery crusade was an ideological war in which West Africa had to be pried free from the decadent Orient.[9] Triumphalist versions of Western imperialism inherited much of this language, assigning "the West" unique responsibility for the moral crusade to eliminate slavery.[10] Though historians have subjected many of these claims to withering scrutiny, the idea that abolition was ultimately a European "project" has had surprising staying power. European conquest is still seen as either initiating or accelerating the transition – albeit with several fitful starts and reversals – to a capitalist labor market, and the valorization of "free labor" as such is taken as an artifact of either liberalism or evangelical Christianity. Whether the product of culture or material conditions, abolition, and total emancipation are taken for granted as fundamentally alien to West African societies into whose vocabularies they could only gradually be "translated."

Revisions of the nineteenth-century framework have instead been content to point out that France's commitment to emancipation in its African colonies was half-hearted at best and that while its policies contributed to the end of the widespread use of slaves in much of the region, they did not thoroughly root out the institution. Even analysts who avoid romanticizing the era of "free labor" that followed abolition, and who are sensitive to the contradictions within the dichotomizing of colonial antislavery and African slavery, focus on the tensions that derived from the incoherences of capitalist ideologies rather than those that were present within African ideologies themselves.[11] The most important contributions have noted that de facto slavery tended to persist except in situations where slaves themselves were able either to flee or to fight for substantial improvements in their living conditions, but have taken slaves' motives for doing so for granted.[12]

As a result, Islam plays a limited role in these representations of abolition. Some, in the tradition of Maxime Rodinson, assign only a neutral or weak

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9 McDougall, "Discourse and Distortion," pp. 195–227.

10 A particularly crude version of this argument, which makes no effort to historicize any of the concepts involved, is Thomas Sowell's "Ending Slavery," *Jewish World Review*, Feb 8, 2005. It would be unfair to single out this article if not for the wide readership it has received and the extent to which it reflects public perceptions.

11 E.g. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); Cooper, Thomas C. Holt and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

12 Richard Roberts, "The End of Slavery in the French Soudan, 1905–1914," in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (Madison 1988), pp. 282–307.

positive ideological force to Islam;[13] others have seen it as obstructionistic or even reactionary, stamped with the vague ideological label "nonliberal."[14] Even scholars more sympathetic to West African Islam have become bogged down in the difficulties of making a case for an Islamic antislavery movement.[15] Rather than exploring the possibility that the absence of successful Islamic critiques of structural inequality in the nineteenth century was a contingent outcome of the interplay between the social conditions enabling militant reform and the strategic choices shaped by reformist rhetoric, scholars have looked to the supposed inherent features of the religion. But to say that the partisans of Islamic reform never formulated an explicit antislavery ideology is not the same as saying that reformism had no impact on subsequent transformations in inequality, or that the Islamic tradition could not be shaped into an ideology of liberation. Just as historical shifts in African forms

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13 Rodinson, of course, saw Christianity and liberalism as no more effective. His evaluation, as with most other Marxian approaches, simply dismisses the question of responsibility for emancipation as a red herring. *Marxisme et monde musulman* (Paris, 1972).

14 Y. Hakan Erdem, for instance, has argued that an acceptance of slavery was so deeply embedded in the *sharīʿa* that it was impossible for an ostensibly Islamic regime to abolish the institution without risking accusations of *bidʿa* (innovation). Ottoman rulers, he notes, managed to regulate slavery only by restricting the slave trade; slaves themselves had to wait until the European colonial dismemberment of the Empire before being emancipated. Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800–1909* (London, 1996). Though Africanists have rarely explored the question with as much sophistication, they have tended to come to similar conclusions. See, for example, Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, 1977): "Islam was at one pole in sanctifying slavery as part of a social order, while Protestantism was at the other extreme, and Catholicism in the middle. Islam, in East Africa and elsewhere, never provided the ideological basis for an abolitionist movement . . ." (26). The same position floats through Paul Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn's *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge, 1993) as an unquestioned assumption. The subtext of Lamin Sanneh's *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA, 1999) is the incompatibility of Islam and antislavery. Islam itself makes only occasional appearances in Sanneh's study but it is everywhere the largely unspoken "other" to Christianity's liberating "antistructure." Sanneh's arch-conservative supporters of slavery are Fulbe elites (126); he implicitly accuses Islam of providing an ideological prop for a vague class of proslavery "chiefs" and for widespread sexual discrimination (136). Sanneh's broader project only becomes explicit for one brief moment in his discussion of Edward Blyden: "Blyden, however, divided the world into West and non-West, and lumped Islam with Africa on one side against the West on the other, rather than seeing Islam as equally implicated in black Africa's subjugation" (233). By contrast, his Christian missionaries are unfailingly "ecumenical," reflexively emancipatory, and surprisingly modernist. This is all of a piece with his earlier (and more explicit) argument that Christianity's inherent "translatability" enabled it to become a more authentically "African" religion than Islam. Sanneh, "Translatability in Islam and in Christianity in Africa: A Thematic Approach," in *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, ed. Thomas D. Blakely et al. (Portsmouth, 1994), pp. 23–45.

15 E.g. Humphrey John Fisher, "A Muslim William Wilberforce? The Sokoto Jihâd as Anti-Slavery Crusade: An Enquiry into Historical Causes," in *De la traite à l'esclavage: actes du Colloque international sur la traite des Noirs, Nantes* 1985, ed. Serge Daget (Nantes, 1988) (vol. 2) pp. 537–555.

of servitude cannot be simply inferred from shifts in colonial policies, neither can the impact of Islamic reform movements on slavery be deduced from the legal texts that reformers brought with them.

The first step in thinking through the meaning of abolition outside these teleologies is to detach it from both European discourses on slavery and the specific forms of nonfree labor that emerged as slaveholding receded. For there were, in fact, many forms of "postslave" identity already at hand with which to make sense of (and thus also constrain) the new opportunities facing former slaves. The specific configuration of these identities depended on the kind of slavery practiced in a given area, the types of ideological tools available to both masters and slaves, and the process by which slaveholding came to be weakened. Specifying all of these for the individual *anciens captifs* who participated in the revival is impossible. The early years of colonial conquest witnessed considerable fluidity in population, and it is quite possible that some of the former slaves living in Kaédi in 1929 had not been there, or even had family there, in the 1880s. But there are some clues to their origins. The administration consistently identified Yacouba's followers as "Soninke residents of Gattaga," making it unlikely though not impossible that many were Halpulaar *korgel* or from the "Bambara" residents of the local *village de liberté*.[16]

The list the administration compiled of the names of the deceased and the traditions of the community about their own ethnic background complicates this picture somewhat. Both suggest Yacouba's following was drawn mostly from Soninke families but also included Halpulaaren and central Mande speakers.[17] Judging by this, the administration's generalizations about the ethnicity of the revivalists are inadequate. The best hypothesis is rather that those of servile background either were mostly descendants of the slaves of early Soninke settlers or had been more recently ransomed by Soninke families, with a small number coming from the *village de liberté* and the town's remaining Pulaar-speaking ex-slaves. French records and Yacoubist traditions also suggest most were young adults of marriageable age (though for men this could include a substantial range). It thus is reasonable to assume that those of Yacouba's followers who had known a servile past would not have done so for any lengthy period, and what formal experiences of slavery

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[16] Furthermore, most of the "Bambara" seem to have fled Kaédi in 1911, ostensibly due to ethnic tensions with the local Soninke and Tukulor, but just as probably from frustration with the forced labor and recruitment to which *village* residents were subjected by the administration.

[17] In the Western Sudan, the link between family name and background was always contingent and often performative. Nonetheless, family names were one salient way of signaling membership in a particular network of alliances. As we have seen, nodes in these networks increasingly came to be identified with ethnicity.

the young children may have had would have been as captives for sale, not as laborers.[18]

But their specific experiences before arriving in Kaédi would have been less important than the roles others expected them to play once they were there. Complex behavioral and social norms accompanied the productive activities in which Soninke and Pulaar slaves were engaged, and these worked to define the category fairly tightly. In the years immediately before and after the Yacoubist movement began, the basic productive duties of Soninke slaves (*kome*) fell into two main categories, domestic and agricultural, along with a few who served as tutors to noble households. These duties also defined the social identities of slaves, serving to distinguish them from one another. In addition, during the periods of active slave trading – which extended well into the colonial era – many slaves were kept only to be resold as commodities. Whatever their specific duties, slaves were almost always intended to help stretch the narrow productive capacities of a household and provide flexibility for the division of labor within the family.[19] Female slaves were supposed to be sexually available to free men (*hooro*), and the offspring of a union between a free man and a slave woman was free, facilitating the reproduction of the free household. Nobles (*tunkanlenmo*) and casted persons (*nyaxamalo*) strove to ensure that slavery remained a self-contained social class; nobles were linked by pacts known as *jongu*, by which they promised not to enslave one another, while *nyaxamalo* were widely held to be immune from enslavement.[20] As with other classic Mande caste systems, the distinctive lineages, comportment, and social roles of *nyaxamalo* were symbolized by

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[18] Although Moktar ould Ahmed's complaint that the trade of slaves to Kaédi was threatening the gum harvest indicates that at least some of these may have come from the stock of slaves kept for agricultural work in the desert oases. Still, few of these could have worked for very long in the gum fields before being sold if they were to have been of marriageable age some thirty or thirty-five years later. See Chapter 1, n50.

[19] Claude Meillassoux's early research, published as "État et conditions des esclaves à Gumbu (Mali) au xixe siècle," in *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale*, ed. Meillassoux (Paris, 1975), pp. 221–251, had a shaping effect on the anthropology of slavery in Africa. Meillassoux's work in Gumbu was complemented by several other ethnographies of Soninke peoples: in Guidimaxa by Saint-Père in the 1920s and by Poulet and Winter in the 1960s; among the Jaara in the 1950s by Gaston Boyer and by Mamadou Diawara in the 1970s and 1980s; and by Emile Blanc's early comparative work. In some sense, then, early soclonial Soninke perceptions of slavery have come to stand in for slavery on a much wider scale, and are well represented in the literature. J.-H. Saint-Père, *Les Sarakollé du Guidimakha* (Paris, 1925); Eric Pollet and Grace Winter, *La Société Soninké (Dyahunu, Mali)* (Brussels, 1971); Gaston Boyer, *Un peuple de l'ouest soudanais: les Diawara* (Dakar, 1953); Mamadou Diawara, *La graine de la parole: dimension sociale et politique des traditions orales du royaume de Jaara (Mali) du XVème au milieu du XIXème siècle* (Stuttgart: 1990); Emile Blanc, "Contribution à l'étude des populations et de l'histoire du Sahel Soudanais," *BCEHS-AOF* 7 (1924), 259–314; and Blanc, "Légendes et croyances soudanaises concernant les mares du Diafounou," *Revue d'ethnographie et des traditions populaires* 47 (1923), 355–366.

[20] Meillassoux, "Esclaves à Gumbu," pp. 222–224; Saint-Père, *Sarakollé*, p.146.

their ineligibility to hold political power. The same was often the case for lineages that specialized in Islamic knowledge and rituals. *Modi* lineages provided the imams for mosques and the teachers for Qur'anic schools, and *modinu* and their wives were responsible for the care of the dead. They also mediated inheritance disputes and conflicts over usufruct claims to land in flood-recession zones, indicating a popular belief in the neutrality of Islamic legal systems.[21]

In areas and periods where a highly stratified political authority was present, the key divide in society was between those with patron–client links to the court and those without. Even within these groups, however, slaves, casted persons, and the *modinu* formed self-contained rungs based on their specialized knowledge and its usefulness either to the state or to nonroyal patrons. Each group in turn was internally differentiated according to the presence or absence of a direct patronage link between a particular family and the ruling authority.[22] Furthermore, a slave's status was partially inflected by the status of his or her master: slaves of the ruling nobility ranked considerably higher than slaves of nonroyal "nobles" (*soninko*), while slaves owned by other slaves ranked lowest of all. A whole secondary vocabulary existed to mark these differences, usually combining a word for "slave" with the word for the master's social rung, and slaves technically belonged to their master's lineage. But such compound identities carried a certain irony, for none of the rights or obligations which normally came with the master's title devolved to the master's slave.

This vocabulary could also be employed in a more metaphorical sense. Though *kome* was most frequently used to define a member of the class of slaves, in the context of the upper ranks of society it could indicate the relationship of clientage that obtained between elite families and the rulers.[23] Similarly,

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21 Tal Tamari, "Linguistic Evidence for the History of West African 'Castes,'" in *Status and Identity in West Africa: Nyamakalaw of Mande* ed. David C. Conrad and Barbara E. Frank (Bloomington, 1995), pp. 67–68; Saint-Père, *Sarakollé* pp. 153, 156–170; Diawara, *Graine de la parole*, pp. 35–47; Pollet and Winter, *Société Soninké*, pp. 215–237. It is possible that some of the responsibilities exercised by *modinu* were of colonial origin. Charles Stewart has persuasively argued that European rule caused religious scholars to lose many of their judicial roles and that their activities thus developed a more devotional focus. Nonetheless, a fairly substantial, if unofficial, number of political responsibilities quickly devolved on local religious leaders as French-appointed chiefs lost much of the legitimacy that had previously enabled them to fulfill these functions. Coup, for example, noted that in Kaédi the Diagraf family, and not the local *qadi* or representative of the Almamy, had been in charge of allocating and partitioning river-recession land before conquest. Charles Stewart, "Colonial Justice and the Spread of Islam in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Le temps des marabouts: itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880–1960*, ed. David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris, 1997), pp. 53–66; Cmdt. Coup, "Monographie du Cercle de Gorgol" (typscript, 1908), p. 77 (ANS 1G-331).

22 Diawara, *Graine de la parole*, pp. 38–60.

23 It should be stressed that such an appellation did not indicate that someone was an "elite" or "royal" slave in the typical sense; royal slaves were also *komo*. The metaphorical usage of *kome* rather named a particular type of obligation among free persons. Ibid., pp. 34–35.

while the term *hoore* generally referred to a freeborn member of society the word could also signify "nobility of character, the capacity to accept one's social rank and to fully accept the obligations thereof." As such, it could even be applied to "well-behaved" slaves, or be withheld to humiliate a free person who was unable to fulfill his or her obligations. As Mamadou Diawara notes, such a flexibility in the language helped reinforce the hegemony of the system of stratification; it was "the most powerful ideological pressure that the slaveholder exercised over his victim," "doubly profiting" nobles by undermining slave solidarity and tying the rest of the population together through cross-cutting signs of prestige.[24] It also reflected the profound entanglement of social status and the language of morality and gender that reinforced "shared" sets of values.

PATHS TO PERSONHOOD

Of particular interest to the question of abolition are the various paths out of slavery built into these norms. According to ethnographic models of Soninke institutions, slaves' official status changed after the first generation; those "born of the house" (*saaridano*) belonged to a separate category from those who had been acquired from outside the family (*liyaano* or *worsonu*), and subsequent generations acquired ever higher status. Though this ostensibly reflected the possibility for gradual assimilation, in practice slaves were forced to leave their children behind when they moved out and male slaves remained dependent on their masters for the bridewealth needed to marry. This contradiction between a social rhetoric of assimilation and a strategic praxis of segregation has been seen by some as yet another tool of cultural hegemony, a way of confusing slaves about the reality of their situation.[25]

This may, however, be an illusion caused by using colonial-era evidence to draw conclusions about earlier forms of slavery. The rigidity of slave categories could well have been the product of an effort by masters to mobilize the social ideologies of genealogy and structural hierarchy *after* slavery itself had already been put into crisis. The massive increase in the number of slaves that occurred at the time of the slave trade may have begun the process of restricting assimilation, which then accelerated with formal abolition.[26] Indeed, sources reflecting more

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24 Ibid., pp. 55–59. Diawara's analysis differs sharply from that of Meillassoux on this point, for Meillassoux insisted that a slave's dependent status made it impossible for him or her to ever conform to the obligations of a *hoore*. "Esclaves à Gumbu," pp. 228–229.

25 Diawara for instance distinguishes between the "category" in which a slave was put and the "reality" of his or her treatment, but does not explore the origins of this dissonance. *Graine de la parole*, p. 55, 60. Others have sought refuge in apparently arbitrary terminologies, such as Meillassoux's comment that while slaves' "condition is susceptible to transformation, their state is irreversible and hereditary." Meillassoux, "Esclaves à Gumbu," p. 223, 240.

26 For the local increase in slaveholding, see Boubacar Barry, *La Senégambie du XVe au XIXe siècle: Traite négrière, Islam et conquête coloniale* (Paris, 1988).

directly on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century experiences seem to indicate that such subtly stratified categories were a firm part of the Western Sudan's social structure, and supported widely accepted claims to differential rights for the descendants of slaves.[27] At the same time, the possibility for mobility and assimilation that anthropologists have seen in *saaridanaxu* status may reflect contemporary efforts by ex-slaves themselves to make use of other aspects of lineage politics, such as fictive kinship and intermarriage, to better their situation.[28]

The processes by which former slaves were incorporated into Kaédi's nominally free population remain poorly understood. Soninke and Tukulor ideas about slavery and ex-slave status overlapped, so that various forms of dependency in Kaédi were part of a single interethnic society.[29] Both used highly refined categories of servitude, and masters had at their disposal a wide range of strategies to reproduce their clients' statuses. The Pulaar term *maccube* included both "true" slaves (*halfaabe* or *jiyaabe*) and several gradations of ex-slaves (*sootibe* [ransomed slaves], *daccanaabe Allah* [piously manumitted slaves], and *tajbe boggi* [escaped slaves]). These terms were still functioning long after the official emancipation decrees, indicating the presence of a multitiered subaltern class defined by a social memory of servitude or perhaps by actual servile status.[30]

In the 1910s and 1920s, control over slaves was largely exercised in the same manner as over other members of subordinate groups, that is, though the manipulation of land tenure and land rents and fees. As with political and economic power in general, these patterns of control were challenged by early colonial policies. Certain former slaves defined as Soninke were among those who benefitted from the creation of tax-free "French *bayti*" lands starting in 1896. While this was undoubtedly a boon for those involved, and may have seriously improved their negotiating positions and mobility within society in general, there is little reason to believe that their former masters or "ransomers" were unable to find ways to benefit themselves from these reallotments.[31] Local

27 For example, William Allen Brown, "The Caliphate of Hamdullahi, ca. 1818–1864: A Study in African History and Tradition" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1969), pp. 114–116, 178n13, 179n14–15.

28 Diawara, *Graine de la parole*, p. 56.

29 Both contemporary and more recent observers stressed that the Soninke community in Kaédi was perfectly bilingual, so that public discourse in the town in general took place in Pulaar. Coup, "Gorgol," p. 10; Ousmane Moussa Diagana, *La langue Soninkée: Morphosyntaxe et sens à travers le parler de Kaédi (Mauritanie)* (Paris, 1995), p. 16n1.

30 Ousmane Camara, *Figures de servitude: les petites servantes à Kaédi* (Strasbourg, 1995), p. 4.

31 Vidal, *Rapport sur la tenure des terres indigenes au Fouta Sénégalais* ([Dakar], 1924), p. 62. However, it is unclear whether ex-slaves received *bayti* land during the initial reallotment, or whether land made available during that reorganization later came into their hands. Coup makes it clear that while the French did not legally recognize any rent rights on *bayti* land, it was impossible to suppress them except for those pertaining to chiefs; administrators were instructed to "fermez les yeux sur le cas des particuliers." "Gorgol," pp. 73–74.

understandings stressed the social aspects of slave identity, particularly a slave's lack of "belonging" to a local kin or community group. Slaves were "lost" people, strangers, whose status reproduced the memory of the earlier rupture (violent or economic) with their own communities that had brought them into slavery. The cultural aspects of this outsiderness were maintained by controlling access to education, a practice that remained a central strategy for preventing ex-slaves from gaining autonomy even in the 1980s and 1990s. The social aspects of nonbelonging were reinforced through control over bridewealth and regulation of the reproduction of slave households.[32] These distinctions in turn mapped back onto the growing Tukulor–Soninke dichotomy, which was also structured by a perceived differential in cultural capital and by the economically inflected anxieties of a patron–host community that found its client-guests making use of the colonial state's power to rework accepted patterns of obligation.

In the Soninke region of Guidimaxa, colonial anthropologist Saint-Père recorded a complex terminology for distinguishing among types of freed slaves; slaves who had been voluntarily manumitted by their master, for example, were called *tara*, while those who had been "ransomed" were known as *dubagandi komo*. Nevertheless, all former slaves clearly formed an identifiable social group, as *komo-xasso*, "descendants of slaves" (or *komo-xooro*, "great slaves," in Gumbu), and ex-slaves had distinctive labor obligations. Weaving in Guidimaxa had primarily been the responsibility of male slaves, with each slave taking care of the work for his master's household. Former slaves who were attached to their former masters as "servants" still performed this duty without pay, though they were now also free to sell their services to other families once their domestic obligations had been met. In Gumbu ex-slaves' obligations to their former masters included, for women, acting as *manu-mara* and, for men, serving as emissaries. In areas where slaves had been closely linked to domestic production, ex-slaves were treated as perpetually dependent kin, and were thus not able to control the reproduction of their own households.[33] Viewed from the perspective of the life cycles of ex-slaves and their households, therefore, it could be said that "the denial of the norms of kinship and family" constituted the essence of dependency in the early colonial era.[34]

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32 Camara, *Figures de servitude*, pp. 13–16.

33 Saint-Père, *Sarakollé*, pp. 19–25, 32–51; Meillassoux, "Esclaves à Gumbu," p. 239. By contrast, in Wolof communities where male ex-slaves served as notional *surga*, young unmarried men, they hired themselves out to grateful employers who used them to help raise household production to optimal levels relative to consumption. James Searing, *"God Alone Is King": Islam and Emancipation in Senegal, the Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol,* 1859–1914 (Portsmouth, 2002), pp. 175, 206–213.

34 As Searing argued for Wolof slaves, *Islam and Emancipation*, p. 175. This is not to be confused with the thesis of Orlando Patterson which defined slavery as the *absence* of kinship ties; the point is rather that dependents were kin to whom the idealized image of family membership did not fully apply.

It was from these conceptual foundations, rather than from French euphemisms designed to disguise complicity with slave trading or to soft-pedal forced labor, that new forms of postabolition servitude emerged. To be sure, local discourses and the struggles they described were continually brought into contact with the apparatuses of the colonial state and the administration's own definitions of freedom and slavery. The publicizing of administrative decrees on the slave trade in 1895 triggered an immediate wave of slave desertions throughout the Western Sudan, and these exoduses accelerated after another round of reforming legislation in 1905.[35] In other cases, however, new institutions created by the French were conceptually endogenized through an ironic inversion of their "official" meaning. For example, the *villages de liberté* created in the 1880s to concentrate freed or escaped slaves at strategic points for their forcible use in construction projects and military campaigns were generally known among Africans by the Bamana word *jonburu*; where the French term misleadingly referred to "freedom," the Bamana term included one of the most common words for "slave" (*jon*).[36] Such cynicism was well warranted; slave actions that moved too far ahead of colonial expectations were met with violence, making clear the deadly consequences of mistaking rhetoric for intent.

But taking any of these definitions at face value makes it difficult to explain why in some cases ex-slaves were able to use the colonial presence to dramatically reduce their dependency on their former masters while in other cases ex-slaveholders found ways to fashion new, more durable forms of mastery. Just as Jonathon Glassman has urged us to see in the normative claim of the assimilability of slaves into dominant lineages an ideology that elides processes of conflict, so too "freedom" and "abolition" were terms (among many) that could be used variously by any of the parties engaged in struggling over the terms of their social and economic relationships.[37] Cash cropping provided some ex-slaves with opportunities for mobility that enabled them to escape their background as individuals, a more common strategy then joining communities with collective labor and property systems, such as the Yacoubists or the high-profile Murids. In fact in some cases restrictions on what were considered "honorable" forms of labor prohibited ex-slaveholders from competing effectively with ex-slaves, allowing the latter to become wealthier than their former masters. But even in such extreme cases riches alone were not usually capable of "washing away" memories of slave background; many ex-slaves who achieved

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35 Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, "The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan," *JAH* 21 (1980), 375–394.

36 Denise Bouche, *Les Villages de liberté en Afrique noire française: 1887–1990* (Paris, 1968), p. 158.

37 Jonathon Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," *JAH* 32:2 (1991), 277–312.

considerable wealth still showed profound deference to the freeborn and experienced restrictions on their participation in rituals and access to other forms of "cultural capital."[38]

Religious education in particular was often denied to former slaves, as former masters used their control over religious institutions to shore up their dominance. Muslimness may thus have affected the comparative possibilities for the assimilation of slaves themselves into free households. In, for example, the non-Muslim Bamana states of Kaarta and Segou – large warrior states heavily dependent upon slave labor – households tended to rapidly assimilate slaves, while Muslim Soninke in areas like Gumbu maintained sharp distinctions between the free and the servile, even when both engaged in the same type of work. Inferior status was marked by, among other things, the frequent exclusion of slave children from Qur'anic schools, thereby reserving identification as a full Muslim for the freeborn.[39]

The question of religion can be pushed beyond the logic of "cultural capital," however, for occasional glimpses into the views of slaves themselves suggest that ideas of salvation, moral uprightness, and justice had become deeply if ambiguously intertwined with the social roles attributed to slaves and masters. In 1884, a Protestant missionary named Taylor, stationed outside Saint-Louis, encountered an anonymous slave from Médine who was seeking work to help him acquire the money necessary to ransom himself from his master. When Taylor pointed out that he was in territory where slavery was prohibited and suggested he simply seek a *patente de liberté* declaring his freedom, the slave refused:

> It would be unfair to my master to leave him without having reimbursed what I cost him. In that case, God would put upon me all his past and future sins while he would profit from all my prayers and good deeds. I know that there is nothing my master would like better than for me to do so: for then he would be sure of his heaven and me.... No, no, I will ransom myself or I will die a slave.[40]

38 The question of cultural capital is a tricky one, however, as it can easily lead scholars to assume a kind of "culture of servitude" that penetrated the psyches of slaves from which they found it difficult to break away. Klein comes uncomfortably close to this position when he speaks of "that attitude of submission" which ex-slaves maintained, and when he internalizes the slaveholders' approach to historicity by noting that slaves "had no history except the history involved in their demeaning status" or by claiming that one ex-slave had "forgotten" his clan, without noting what such "forgetting" might really mean. *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, p. 241, 245.

39 Nehemia Levtzion, "Slavery and Islamization in Africa: A Comparative Study," in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. i, *Islam and the Ideology of Enslavement*, ed. John Ralph Willis (London, 1985), pp. 193–198.

40 *L'Oeurvre des Esclaves Fugitifs: 1884–1885* (annual report of the *Village de liberté protestante de Pont de Khor*), ed. Taylor (n.l., n.d.), p. 5, quoted in Bouche, *Villages de liberté*, p. 158.

It is of course possible that this secondhand quotation was fabricated by Taylor to emphasize the importance of Christianization to the abolitionist effort. Yet the logic of the statement is complex enough that I think it would be inappropriate to dismiss it summarily. Assuming that it does in fact reflect an actual response to an opportunity for emancipation, it reveals several things about the functioning of slavery during the early colonial period and about the attitudes of slaves and masters toward it.

First of all, the statement reflects a practical acceptance of the rights of a master over his slaves, and of the alienability of these rights as commodities. The slave's explanation also relied on a kind of "spiritual economy" in which the commodity value of a slave was inscribed in the same register as the recompense for good deeds, prayer, and sins, with ownership of a person extended to include that person's salvation. To cheat in the matter of ransoming was not simply one sin among many; it threatened to disrupt the entire system of moral accountancy. More profoundly, the slave's explanation also hints at a religious critique of slavery. The slave took it for granted that, all other things being equal, his master merited damnation while he himself deserved a place in heaven. The slave's beliefs had thus both conservative and radical potential; they naturalized and personalized the social roles of slave and master while subverting the institution of slavery on a deeper level by equating mastery and slavery with damnation and salvation, respectively.

We can catch a glimpse of how this rhetoric could be turned around by masters. Ousman Camara's study on the conditions of *korgel* (young female domestic servants) in Kaédi notes that children in Futanke families in Kaédi were often threatened with damnation if they failed to pray. By contrast, he noted it was "very unusual to hear remarks of this sort" about *korgel*s, "about whom one even says jokingly *kordo alaa ko wadata juulde*: 'a slave has no need to pray.'... Nor does one hesitate simply to make the *korgel* believe that her heaven depends upon her 'master' (as a remonstrance for work that a master is unhappy with, a master can tell his or her *korgel*: *aljannama koy juudam woni* 'your paradise is within my hands,' which is to say: careful, if you disobey me you will go to hell)." Such a strategy was not at all unique to Muslim slave-holders; Meillassoux has noted a whole range of other religious sanctions, including the swearing of an intimidating oath before a blacksmith, intended to bind the slave to his or her master.[41] The most important tool at former slaveholders' disposal for slowing the course of emancipation was, however, probably lineage ideology, which claimed that a person's status derived from his or her family history. Though lineages were notoriously open to manipulation, fictive kinship had to meet conditions of public verisimilitude that

41 Camara, *Figures de servitude*, p. 12; Meillassoux, "Esclaves à Gumbu," pp. 231–232.

made it difficult for recently freed slaves to construct plausible nonslave genealogies. Or, seen the other way around, only ex-slaveholders could confidently (if often falsely) present slaveless genealogies that reproduced their patronage position with respect to the lineages of their ex-slaves.[42]

In this register, one effect of the gradual delegitimization of formal slavery was deeply ironic: In many cases ex-slave status itself may have been far less subject to gradual assimilation than slave status had been. The strong scrutiny that the abolitionist crusade brought to local systems of servitude may have contributed to a hypostatization of slave categories, so that, among Mande speakers for example, ''freed slave'' became a social type rather than marking a point along a trajectory of exclusion and incorporation. If so, techniques of colonial rule likely facilitated this ossification. For most administrators, the ''local compromises'' that resulted from the transformations in slavery that ensued after formal abolition could be compellingly portrayed (to their own consciences as much as to the antislavery lobby) as sufficiently different from slavery to justify either inaction or intervention to support ex-slaveholders' ''rights.'' Furthermore, colonial discourses themselves contributed to the ''naturalization'' of lineage politics and their codification in colonial law.

In many parts of Senegal in the early twentieth century, the status of ex-slaves was more closely analogous to those of casted persons than that of the former ''true'' slaves. Just as casted persons owed no formal labor to nobles and could not be owned, but could be called on to provide services in exchange for patronage and held lower social status that was carefully marked through lines of descent, so too was this the case with ex-slaves. New forms of dependency essentially reproduced slaves' social status without the labor requirements formal slaves would have owed their masters or the coercion necessary to enforce that extraction. Just as ''noble'' status was often defined through cultural inversions of the properties of occupational castes, so too could the differential cultural capital held by ex-slaves be used to validate the superiority of ''freeborn'' families. This change can perhaps be explained by an observation made by Judith Irvine and picked up by James Searing. The occupational caste system itself may have proved a useful tool for ex-slaveholders who sought ways to extend their control over their ex-slaves by assimilating them into a kind of pseudocaste. One of the most persuasive indications that this kind of

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42 Thinking about the lineage as an ideology (à la Maurice Bloch) that placed restrictions on what kinds of behavior could be considered acceptable but that could also be deployed or resisted in part or whole by either slaves or masters may help us avoid depictions of slavery as a virtually totalitarian institution. Cf. Frederick Cooper, in *Plantation Slavery* and his comment on Lovejoy's ''Indigenous African Slavery,'' pp. 77–84, where he implies that slaveholders themselves unilaterally regulated assimilation in response to a conscious, strategic analysis of the relative danger posed by a permanent, coherent slave class.

transformation had taken place has to do with the calculation of slave descent. While in most regions the child of a free man and a slave woman had been considered to be free – as a way of controlling the reproduction of slave households and women's reproductive capacity – among members of the Wolof ex-slave "pseudocaste" those with "mixed" parentage remained "ex-slaves."[43]

All of these rhetorical fields on which ex-slaves and ex-masters sparred with one another relied heavily on representations of past experience, whether directly, or indirectly in the forms of lineage and caste. Thus by the 1920s, it could be said that "slavery" existed primarily as a memory, not in the abstract sense of something past, or in the personal sense of a feature of individual reminiscence, but as a *social memory*, tied to family histories, lineage politics, networks of dependency, and the institutions which mediated the production of collective representations of the past. Insofar as elites may have succeeded during the transitional phase of colonial rule in constructing "former slave" as a status category analogous to (but more stigmatized than) the occupational castes, this depended on the ability to "preserve" a memory of the institutional form that slavery had taken and of the personal relationships it had structured.[44]

CONCLUSIONS

If this was indeed the case, it helps explain why the language of caste status, more than the language of slave status, figured in Yacoubist representations of the "social revolution" that occurred during the first few years of the community's existence. It would have been very difficult for ex-slaves to put the language of slavery to any constructive use; the idea of ex-slaveness

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43 Searing, *Islam and Emancipation*, pp. 150–151, citing Judith T. Irvine, "Caste and Communication in a Wolof Village" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1973), pp. 100–111, 372–433. I was unable to see Irvine's thesis, but she confirmed Searing's interpretation in personal communication. To be sure, the idea that slaves retained some of the social stigma of their status long after manumission, and that their children inherited this, was common long before colonial rule made any serious dent in the institution and in areas without elaborate caste systems. See, for example, Humphrey J. Fisher, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa* (New York, 2001), pp. 149–150, 194–195. Nonetheless, caste ideologies provided yet one more tool in the struggle to define post-emancipation forms of labor organizing. Furthermore, if this was in fact a relatively new technique for achieving a long-standing goal, we must ask whether the "socially benign" quality that some scholars have attributed to precolonial African slavery really reflects the influence of caste and lineage ideology on the colonial and postcolonial forms of ex-slavery that in turn provided the basis for most ethnographic observations.

44 Searing, *Islam and Emancipation*, pp. 149–150; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, p. 245; Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers, "The End of Slavery in Africa," in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (Madison, 1988), p. 6. It might be useful to examine the role that colonial institutions like the *villages de liberté* played in giving this memory a spatial form, tying land and place to the other signs of ex-slave identity in a way that echoed other geographic representations of historical or social relationships.

was, in fact, the most powerful weapon that could be used against them. A religious reform like Yacouba's, which overthrew the distinctions between freeborn and ex-slaves, would have had difficulty presenting itself directly in such terms. To the extent that the caste structure was more inclusive than the opposition between freepersons and slaves, it was this language that was most deeply linked to the reproduction of all forms of inherited status hierarchy. Overthrowing castes could thus stand for a generalized attack on the social elite, including those who positioned themselves as superior to ex-slaves because they were from free lineages.

Yacoubist claims that in doing so they were responding to the teachings of Islam reflected not any specific ideological role that Islam had played in mediating their experiences of inequality, but to an assemblage of more abstract moral claims that they found in the language and practices of their faith. There was nothing typical or predictable about any of this. West African Muslims differed dramatically in their appraisal of the usefulness of their spiritual tradition in making sense of rapid changes in institutional inequality. The claim of the Yacoubists that their leaders' reforms of slavery and caste were a conscious attempt to put into practice Islamic ideals inherited from the Prophet Muhammad through Shaykh Hamallah stood at one end of a continuum. In the middle was someone like the early twentieth-century Futa jurist Shaykh Musa Kamara, who attributed the abolition of slavery to French initiatives but also developed his own critique of slaveholding grounded in the tradition of West African Islamic scholarship.[45] Manumission had clear meanings for African Muslims, particularly as a pious act, and was an important social practice. Many Muslims – including slaveholders – expressed considerable distaste for the realities of slavery, and thinkers like Kamara built on this aversion in formulating their justifications for banning the institution.[46] At the other

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45 See the excerpt from *Zuhûr al-Basatîn* appended to Constance Hilliard, "Zuhur al-Basatin and Ta'rikh al-Turubbe: Some Legal and Ethical Aspects of Slavery in the Sudan as Seen in the Works of Shaykh Musa Kamara," in *Ideology of Enslavement*, p. 180. It also, however, appears that Shaykh Kamara fully equated French *de jure* abolition with true, *de facto* abolition: "I also say that the French have turned people away from sins with respect to God for that which concerns the rights of slaves as they have manumitted all slaves found in their empires. No one any longer has property rights over another. All are equal in liberty." This may indicate either a greater degree of overlap than has been assumed between French and West African Muslim definitions of slavery and emancipation, or (more likely) a particularly opportunistic interpretation of that overlap by a member of Senegal's established elite.

46 For example, Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 17; Camara, *Figures de servitude*, p. 5; Fisher, *Slavery*, pp. 71–73; and the works by Ahmad Baba translated in *Ideology of Enslavement*. This is a point completely ignored by Igor Kopytoff in his "The Cultural Context of African Abolition," in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 485–503.

end stands a figure such as al-Hajj ᶜUmar of Kete-Krachi, a member of the Hausa diaspora in the Volta region who expressed outrage at British insistence on the legal equality of slaves and scholars.[47]

Such differences no doubt reflected not only the range of intellectual positions that could be grounded in local scholarly precedent, but also the unevenness of social change in the region. They also make it clear that the concept of abolition needs to be rigorously historicized. It is both anachronistic and Eurocentric to assume that abolitionism is a "universally 'natural' reaction to slavery rather than a specific response by Western elites, in given historical circumstances," to particular kinds of slavery, just as it is to imagine all forms of patriarchy to be identically configured and equally repressive.[48] A search for Islamic abolitionism risks merely inverting western triumphalist rhetoric and historical naïveté. At the same time, it is to the Yacoubists' religious beliefs that we must turn if we would seek to explain why, when most ex-slaves felt the best strategy for escaping from the institutions the "free nobility" sought to preserve was to be found in attempting to elide their origins and to seek complete assimilation into a free lineage, those who chose to follow Yacouba took a different path. They chose not to deny the social inferiority of their status, but rather to transform it via the language of caste and then transcend it by transcribing marginality into the language of redemptive suffering. Like the slave who told Taylor he would ransom himself or die trying, they did so through a moral accountancy in which work had as much to do with the hereafter as with economic production.

47 ᶜUmar al-Salghawî, known as al-Hajj ᶜUmar of Kete-Krachi, "Mashraᶜ mâ al-khabar li-wârid wâr-iduhâ bi'l-nazar," Institute of African Studies (Legon) Arabic Manuscript, MS 4. See the analysis and translation and photocopy of original text in Idris Abdul-Razak, "Alhaj Umar of Kete-Krachi: A Muslim Leader a Teacher a Poet and a Social Commentator of Hist Time" (M.Phil. Thesis, Legon, 1996), pp. 95–106, 148–172, 211–221.

48 Ehud Toledano's account of the end of slavery in the Ottoman Empire suggests a way to place abolitionism within a history of the global impact of western discourse. European (primarily British) insistence on treating Ottoman military/elite slaves (the kul/harem system) and domestic slaves as part of the same institution actually delayed the process of abolishing domestic servitude, as Ottoman elites staged a principled defense of kul/harem slavery on humanitarian, social, and religious grounds. Ehud R. Toledano, Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East (Seattle, 1998), pp. 113, 123–134, quote from p. 128. Toledano speaks of the "conversion" of Ottoman intellectuals to abolitionism, suggesting a much more active response than Sanneh's "translation" and does not imply that Muslimness is in any way lost in this transformation. The source of influence, however, remains external.

The Gift of Work: Devotion, Hierarchy, and Labor

Capitalism is a purely cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed. In capitalism, things have a meaning only in their relationship to the cult. . . . [It] is the celebration of a cult *sans rêve et sans merci*. . . . There is no day that is not a feast. . . .

– Walter Benjamin
"Capitalism as Religion"[1]

The history of work in West Africa is obscured by scholarly practices that divide studies of religion as ideational and rhetorical from the analysis of religious "networks" as social institutions of forms of cultural capital, and that, more generally, isolate the history of colonial social change from that of African intellectual traditions.[2] The Yacoubists explicitly understood their religious and economic practices as of a piece. Rather than linking their experiences to stories similar only in their "shared relationship to [some] relevant European category" like "commoditization" or "labor,"[3] and thereby reinforcing the implicit coherence of European knowledges and the fragmentation of all others, the Yacoubists' visions of their own history call into question the very categories of economic activity and individualization that define the colonial era for most scholars. By the late 1930s, when the community had come fully into being both in Côte d'Ivoire and Kaédi, its defining features were the collective organization of work, the sharing of all property, and the successful accumulation of wealth. The Yacoubists located these new forms of wealth and power within the broader salvific narrative in

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1 Trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, 1996), p. 288.
2 Indeed, the cultural history of work in Africa is surprisingly undeveloped in general, particularly given the pride of place occupied by labor history. For an exception, Johannes Fabian, "Kazi: Conceptualizations of Labor in a Charismatic Movement among Swahili-Speaking Workers," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 13 (1973), 293–325. The classic Marxian approach is advanced in, for example, Michel Cartier (ed.) *Le Travail et ses representations* (Paris, 1984).
3 Steven Feierman, "Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, 1999), p. 185.

which they played a decisive role in the eternal process of God's manifestation in history. In particular, work was wrapped up in a dense network of practices and discourses that all turned around gift giving. Work was simply one form of gift among others that members of the community gave to Yacouba and that he gave, transformed, back to them. As people freed from the suffering of dependency and marginality, working on their own behalf both signaled and sustained their changed status. Their labor was thus a double expression of the freedom they had received from Shaykh Hamallah via Yacouba Sylla. Rather than conceptualizing unremunerated, communal work as an intermediary stage between premodern labor regimes and the development of true markets and the forms of political and social organization that went along with them, they saw it as a necessary component of the submission owed to God and to one's spiritual guide.

<div align="center">WORK'S GIFTS</div>

Much ink has been spilled theorizing about gifts,[4] and many scholars have applied one or another of these theories to West African Islamic practices in an attempt to reveal the links between religion and social organization.[5] Such approaches have tremendous value, but their insights depend on analytic categories that assume gifts have stable, universal features that allow them to be identified and discussed in the abstract. Furthermore, most models of gifts are in fact interpretive tools designed to reveal the essentially rational, benefit-maximizing decisions that are assumed to underlie giving. For

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4 It is well beyond the scope of this work to even sketch an overview of this literature. Just to begin: Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don (1): Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," reprinted in Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris, 1966), pp. 143–279; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss," in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, pp. ix–lii; Chris Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London, 1982) and *Savage Money* (London, 1997); Jonathan Parry, "The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the 'Indian Gift,'" *Man* (new series) 21 (1986), 453–473; Arjun Appadurai, "Commodities and the Politics of Value," *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 3–63; David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London, 1988); Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift: Ritual, Prestation, and the Dominant Caste in a North Indian Village* (Chicago, 1988); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1990) and *Raisons pratiques: sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris, 1994); Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago, 1992 [Paris, 1991]) and *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago, 1996); Aafke E. Komter (ed.), *The Gift, an Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Amsterdam, 1996); Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Chicago, 1999); Antoon Vandevelde (ed.), *Gifts and Interests*, ed. Antoon Vandevelde (Leuven, 2000); and Gadi Algazi et al., *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange* (Göttingen, 2003). See also the work of the sociologists grouped around Alain Caillé and the journal *La Revue du MAUSS*.

5 The most sophisticated attempts are Benjamin F. Soares, "The Spiritual Economy of Nioro du Sahel: Islamic Discourses and Practices in a Malian Religious Center" (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1997), pp. 211–248, and Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor, 2005), pp. 153–180.

Yacouba Sylla and his followers, however, gift giving was as much a figure of rhetoric as it was an actual practice. Yacoubists described certain transactions as gifts and not others, and talked about the meanings of gifts in ways that are inseparable from the actual gift exchanges in which they engaged. As many have long recognized, gifts take on meaning in a particular context by standing in contrast to those forms of exchange that are not considered to be gifts.[6] To call a transaction a gift is to make a claim about the relationships among those involved in the exchange, and about the links between identities and transactions more generally.

Models of giving thus provide insights into what those who deploy them think is at stake in the way their relationships with others and with things are represented.[7] The range of ways gifts can be distinguished from not-gifts is as open-ended as the ways these relationships can be described. Gifts can be contrasted with "competitive" economic exchange in ways that stress bonds of obligation, solidarity, and equality and in which gift exchange is seen as non-agonistic. The gift can also be defined by pointing to nongift exchange as involving anonymity and abstraction, or even "freedom." Here the gift becomes a sign of immediacy, a referendum on social boundaries, and a practice that creates asymmetry and patronage or, in more negative terms, dependency and inequality.[8] Or one can talk about gifts by contrasting economic exchange's "rationalism" with giving's "extravagance" or "generosity."[9]

The specific social import of any one of these ways of talking about giving depends then on the contextual significance of any of the other terms linked to gifts and their opposites. When, for instance, Yacouba Sylla attacked the high cost of bridewealth in Kaédi in 1929, he argued that the practice had

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6 Godelier, *Enigma of the Gift*.

7 See the very useful discussion in Gadi Algazi, "Doing Things with Gifts," in *Negotiating the Gift*, pp. 9–27.

8 See, for example, Charles Piot's depiction of Kabre attitudes on gift and market exchanges, "Of Slaves and the Gift: Kabre Sale of Kin during the Era of the Slave Trade," *JAH* 37 (1996), 31–49.

9 It was this aspect of gift exchange that interested Georges Bataille, who saw the gift as a form of excessive and destructive expenditure. Others have sought to capture this same sense in more "positive" terms (though for Bataille excess and destruction had positive aspects), arguing that the gift creates a sense of "abundance" or "plentitude." See, for example, Genevieve Vaughan, "Mothering, Co-muni-cation, and the Gifts of Language," in *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice*, ed. Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Eric Boynton (New York, 2002), pp. 91–113. It is also in this sense that it has become common to contrast gifts with commodities, or to fret about the validity of such a contrast. Such debates are, I think, fairly irrelevant for historians. Historically speaking, the commodity is only one type of "not-gift", one that becomes a useful foil to the gift under very particular socioeconomic conditions. To argue, as Appadurai does, that commodities can in fact be gifts and to present this as a theoretical insight rather than a correction in Marx's definition of the commodity is to make the category mistake of applying a definition of commodity proper to one context (that which can be bought and sold on the market, a feature of the object) to the way the term is used in a separate sphere (that which is bought and sold rather than given, a feature of the transaction). The gift/commodity debate is a clear Wittgensteinian pseudo-problem.

crossed a line where it could no longer be considered a gift and had instead become commoditized. His critique relied on the image of the gift as something that does "social work" by knitting together society through deferred obligations. By banning the exchange of bridewealth among his followers, he made the community itself the only source and destination of brides and grooms, and dissolved competing institutions – family, caste, patron and client – in favor of the religious community.

At the same time, gifts played (and continue to play) an important role in the Western Sudan in maintaining the hierarchical relationships between *murîd*s and *shaykh*s in Sufi *tarîqa*s as well as the less formal relations of respect shown to *walî*s and religious leaders in general.[10] It was this latter version of the gift that became attached to the act of working for Yacouba and his followers. The Yacoubists drew the terms for thinking and talking about this kind of gift from Sufi theology and devotional practice. Ideally, the disciple and the *shaykh* passed gifts back and forth between one another in an echo of the (invisible) circulation of gifts that took place between the *shaykh* and God. Such gifts were above all reminders of the source of all blessings and wealth in life, and of the absolute hierarchical relationship between God and humans. It was because all gifts came ultimately from God that one was obligated to make gifts to others, striving to embody in some imperfect sense this aspect of God. While God's generosity could increase a person's generosity, the circle of gift giving could never be closed; reciprocity in giving could not be achieved or even approached, because God's divinity took part in what Paul Dresch has called an "aesthetics of excess."[11]

Benjamin Soares has pointed out that many West African Muslims distinguished among different kinds of asymmetrical gifts in which *sharî*ᶜ*a* definitions were refracted through local models of religious hierarchy.[12] Most normative treatises on Islamic law distinguish between charitable gifts, *sadaqa* or *hibâ*', and offerings, or *hadîya* (pl. *hadâyâ*). The pure *hibâ*' – which can include alms giving – is described by an eleventh-century jurist as "something to which no condition is attached" while a *hadîya* carries the implication of

10 Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy*; Murray Last, "Charisma and Medicine in Northern Nigeria," in *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*, ed. Donal B. Cruise O'Brien and Christian Coulon (Oxford, 1988), pp. 183–204.

11 Paul Dresch has given us a cogent description of how such gifts are often seen: "wealth... comes vertically, as it were, from God... not from horizontal transactions and interdependence among persons. . . . The circulation anthropologists so often stress [in non-agonistic giving]... is conspicuously absent. Nothing corresponds to the image of a needle weaving to and fro, knitting things together. Nothing obvious corresponds to 'society.'" Dresch, "Mutual Deception: Totality, Exchange, and Islam in the Middle East," in *Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. Wendy James and N.J. Allen (New York, 1998), p. 114, 116.

12 Soares, *Prayer Economy*, pp. 165–167.

incurred obligation on the part of the receiver.[13] But actual thought and practice blurred these distinctions considerably. For Sufis in the tradition of Ibn ʿArabi, the origin of generosity and thus of all gifts was God's act of creation, an ongoing process that was part of the theophany in which God became manifest. The transmission of gifts that have their origin in God's creation could be described with the words *fayyâd* and *fayd*, which meant flooding, overflowing, and superabundance, thus tying the act of giving to God's transcendence. God's generosity exists in abundance (*fayyâd*), or more precisely, "without delimitation."[14] This generosity, epitomized by Prophetic revelation, passed in an overflowing (*fayd*) of *baraka* from *shaykh* to *murîd* that brought the latter profit or benefit.[15]

God's gift of creation was a sign of his absolute superiority and autonomy, and so too the transmission of gifts further down the chain connecting God to each believer established the hierarchy of those who gave over those who received. This could even extend to the alms that a pious person offered to the poor, which was the most common meaning of *sadaqa*. At the same time, however, the superiority of any giver other than God, and indeed the ability to truly give without obligation at all was an illusion even for the highly placed, because generosity was itself merely a reflection of having received a gift from God and would be rewarded in turn by God.[16] In some ways, then, all human gifts were *hadâyâ*, interested giving that sought some sort of return. The distinction between *hadîya* and *sadaqa* was thus not an absolute one, but rather one that depended on the ontological status of *walî*s who played a crucial role in maintaining creation by channeling the theophany into material reality. This corresponds with Soares's observations that in practice there is considerable debate and competition over the grounds on which a specific gift can be called a *hadîya*.

13 *EI²*, "hiba," ii: 343 (F. Rosenthal); *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, "sadaqa," viii: 715 (T.H. Weir and A. Zysow).

14 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabî's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, 1989), p. 287. For the different meaning the same underlying concept took on among twelve-bead Tijanis, see Rüdiger Seesemann, "The *Shurafâ*' and the 'Blacksmith': The Role of the Idaw ʿAlî of Mauritania in the Career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrâhîm Niasse (1900–1975)," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden, 2004), pp. 79–81.

15 See, for example, the opening of the *Jawâhir al-maʿânî*, where the *awliyâ*' are described as those who "min fayd bahrihi yaghtarifûn," those who "ladle out from the overflowing of his [Muhammad's] sea." ʿAlî Harâzim ibn al-ʿArabi Barâdah, *Jawâhir al-maʿânî wa bulûgh al-amânî fi fayd sîdî Abi ʿAbbâs al-Tijânî* (Beirut, 1997), p. 5.

16 Thus Ibn al-ʿArabi's claim that "the effusion (*fayd*) of entified existence falls only upon the objects of God's sight in the state of their nonexistence." Quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 85.

Both kinds of gifts naturally sought to return to God who, through creation and the theophany, was the source of all giving, and creation was sustained by the giving of *sadaqât* in the form of *baraka* (grace) down the chain of transmission from *shaykh* to *murîd*, which in turn enabled the giving of *hadâyâ* back up the chain from *murid* to *shaykh* or *walî*. In the most formal depictions of the Tijaniyya-Hamawiyya, Ahmad al-Tijani stood as *khâtim al-awliyâ'* (the seal and guarantor of all *walî*s), *qutb al-zamân* (the ontological pole of the world), and the *barzakh* (the passage way between the realm of God's pure theophany and its manifestation in material reality).[17] At least one poem celebrating Hamallah and defending him from detractors also attributed to him the characteristics of *barzakh* and *khâtim al-awliyâ'*.[18] This made him a kind of conduit for the divine gift in the form of creation, and the manifestations of this gift as *fayyd* and *sadaqât* moved down the Tijani *silsila* from God to Muhammad to al-Tijani to Yacouba and finally to Yacouba's followers; at the same time, *hadâyâ* moved toward God, in the form of the prayers and monetary gifts that Hamawis offered to their *shaykh*.

This understanding of the gift was a central part of the Sufi esoteric corpus. The gifts that a *murîd* made to his (or sometimes her) *shaykh* were an explicit parallel to the act of following the path toward union with God along which it was the *shaykh*'s duty to guide the *murîd*. To give *hadâyâ* could itself become an act of ascent toward *fanâ'*, the annihilation of self. The fact that gift giving could be both a source of prestige and a means of self-dissipation evoked the paradoxical joining of status and humility that concerned many mystics. Thus there are reports of Sufis who, when giving alms, always positioned their hands below those to whom they gave in an effort to secure the spiritual benefits of giving without falling into its potential trap of pride.[19]

Such bodily precision reminds us that since all gifts were but earthly echoes of the divine gift of creation and all acts of generosity merely manifestations of this supreme generosity, gift giving in either direction was inseparable from religious *practice* as such. Giving was a ritual act and not just a transfer of wealth intended to secure an act of spiritual intercession. As such, it was interdigitated with other bodily practices. Even those outside the esoteric tradition were often unable to escape from the anxieties of status, subordination, usury, and dependence that gift exchange could arouse.[20] Discussions of giving helped reproduce the hierarchical organization of specialized knowledge in Soninke communities. Households frequently gave

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17 See Chapter 2, n16.
18 Benjamin Soares and John Hunwick, "Falkeiana IV: The Shaykh as the Locus of Divine Self-disclosure: A Poem in Praise of Shaykh Hamâhu'llâh," *Sudanic Africa* 7 (1996), 97–112.
19 *EI²*, "sadaqa," viii: 715.
20 Compare Dresch, "Mutual Deception," p.120.

alms (*dyaka*) or a white *boubou* to the poor and cola nuts and milk to Qur'anic students in the name of a deceased. Alms were made to Muslim ritual specialists and teachers (*modi*s) in exchange for their assistance at life-cycle rituals and annual holy days. The daily exchange of labor, food, and learning between Qur'anic students and their teacher and the gifts they made to him at the end of their studies brought most families into networks of religiously meaningful prestations.[21]

Spiritual and social states were put at risk in such exchanges. Gifts to children and religious students (*talibe*s) were made "so that one's ancestors may be saved from the fire and go to paradise." The obligation to give gifts to *modi* families was one of the defining characteristics of a proper noble (*hankananlenmu*) lineage, and this generosity, along with military prowess, legitimated their high political status vis-à-vis the *modini*. The entire class of *hooro*, which included the nobles and *modini*, had in turn an obligation to give to the *nyaxamalo* (occupational castes) and the *komo* (slaves).[22] All these forms of generosity were explicitly uneconomic, their excesses a guarantee of the hierarchical nature of power, whether the power of one set of individuals in society over another or of God over humans in general.[23] At the same time, this way of talking about gifts provided an important tool for holding elites accountable to a moral code that derived from the legitimating power of a widely shared cosmology. Even today, one of

[21] Eric Pollet and Grace Winter, *Société Soninké (Dyahunu, Mali)* (Brussels, 1971), pp. 472–478, 490–493; Aliou Kissima Tandia, *Poésie orale Soninké et education traditionnelle* (Dakar, 1999), p. 212.

[22] Whatever terminology used to identify the top rung of society, most explications of Soninke structuration emphasize this double distinction, political and military, that separates the *modini* from the rulers and the warriors (*tugura gumu*) proper and the centrality of asymmetrical gift giving in maintaining these distinctions and those among free, casted and slave households. See Pollet and Winter, *Société Soninké*, pp. 208–210; J.-H. Saint-Père, *Les Sarakollé du Guidimakha* (Paris, 1925), 19–25; Mamadou Diawara, *La graine de la parole: dimension sociale et politique des traditions orales du royaume de Jaara (Mali) du XVème au milieu du XIXème siècle* (Stuttgart: 1990), pp. 33–39; Boubakar Ly, "L'honneur et les valeurs morales dans les sociétés ouolof et toucouleur du Sénégal," (Thèse de troisième cycle, Paris I, 1966), cited in Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 246n42. Diawara particularly emphasizes the obligatory, excessive aspect of the generosity attached to social hierarchy: "Le patron subvient à tous les besoins matériels de son protégé même s'il doit se ruiner. Le bienfaiteur doit se surpasser et offrir à son client plus de cadeaux qu'il n'en reçoit de lui, car l'aisance du second reflète la prodigalité et la fortune du premier" (39).

[23] Aliou Tandia recounts the Soninke legend in Gaajaga that the responsibility (especially for young women) to feed *talibe*s goes back to an early murder of a *talibe* by a group of women in a particular village, a capital crime the punishment of which the town's *modini*, using their power of grace and intercession with God, transformed into an obligation of perpetual hospitality. Tandia, *Poésie orale*, p. 235. Brenner has noted the cultural connections in the Fulbe societies of the Futa Toro between receiving gifts, Islamic piety, and low political status vis-à-vis the warrior *ceddo* lineages. Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in A West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN, 2001), p. 26.

the most common ways by which one West African *shaykh* (or more typically a *shaykh*'s followers) can try to discredit another is to claim that a particular ''marabout'' abuses the piety of his students by accepting gifts from them in greater quantity than he redistributes. ''Our *shaykh*,'' by contrast, always gives away far more than he receives. To be at the bottom of the chain of *sadaqa* is thus a betrayal of the closeness to God (within the chain of the unfolding of divine emanations) that a *walî* is expected to possess.[24]

The tools, then, for using gifts to make arguments about social and spiritual hierarchy were quite well developed in the Western Sudanic tradition. However, Yacouba Sylla's application of the forms, patterns, and meanings of spiritual gifts to the act of work creatively reshaped this tradition. First, the community's representations of its past played with both the liberating and the entangling properties of giving and receiving to present their relief from suffering through membership in a community and the transformation of their material status through liberation from ascriptive identities as results of the generous gift of grace Shaykh Hamallah made to Yacouba Sylla. As we have seen, the Yacoubist hagiographic traditions encoded the transmission of authority, power, and grace from Hamallah to Yacouba as a series of hidden gifts.[25] By coming to understand work itself as a spiritually efficacious form of mystical transaction, they mobilized Sufi ideas about God's work of creation and the role of the saints in transmitting echoes of His activities in the material world to elaborate an ethic of labor and accumulation consistent with their understanding of the debt Yacouba owed Hamallah in return.

On one level, labor in the Yacoubist *zâwiya*s had a spiritual meaning because it was only through labor that sufficient wealth could be generated to allow participation in the exchange of gifts that ensured the continued flow of Hamallah's grace. Such an idea was not at all unique within Sufi orders in the colonial Western Sudan. Indeed, for members of the Muridiyya of Senegal, the incorporation of work into their spiritual activities famously followed precisely this logic on a scale and with a degree of coordination that were unprecedented.[26] However, the Yacoubists went much further and insisted that work in and of itself was a ritual action even apart from its role in generating religiously useful wealth. Indeed, the community's own hagiographic materials (and those aspects of the community's gift-giving and labor organization that made it into the colonial archive) suggest a unique religious

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[24] This kind of debunking is distinct from the critiques certain reformists make of the giving of gifts to religious persons in general. See for example Soares, *Prayer Economy*, pp. 175–177.

[25] See Chapter 5.

[26] See, for example, Leonardo A. Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick* (Cambridge, UK, 1995), pp. 186–193.

framework in which work was conceptualized as a form of remembrance (another possible translation of *dhikr*), in which God's presence is intensified by re-enacting his efforts at the time of creation through one's own productive efforts. As such, it was a form of *hadîya*, a return gift to God, via one's *shaykh*, that gave thanks to God for existence, while recognizing the irreducible superiority of God's (and the *shaykh*'s) initial gift. In this formulation, it is impossible to distinguish between the material and social wealth of the community that resulted from the labor of its members and that which resulted from Hamallah's initial gift of *baraka* to Yacouba; these are simply two aspects of the same overflowing that had its visible manifestation in affluence and social solidarity.

Hagiographic stories assigned the dawn of this teaching to the period of Yacouba's imprisonment at Sassandra in Côte d'Ivoire. There, Yacouba "launched the second word: the word of work" which completed the "word of religion" that he had launched in Kaédi in 1929. Yacouba began with the selling of charcoal, and then branched out, establishing a boulangerie, creating small garden plots, and eventually encouraging his followers to become merchants.[27] With the wealth generated by this work, he moved to found the community's first "official" plantation in Kokolopozo, known as "Darlimane" ("House of Faith").[28] When Yacouba established what would become his main *zâwiya* in Gagnoa at the end of the 1930s he repeated the pattern there, setting up his transport company; clearing land for cacao, coffee, palm oil, and bananas; building the first in a series of cinemas; and purchasing two large generators all within a few years. For Yacouba, this work was part of the ritual obligations of Islam. Yacouba's followers report him as frequently saying, "work is a divine duty; we are all servants of Allah, and on this earth, all that breathes is in the service of Allah."[29] The origins of this duty were to be sought in God's initial act of creation which human labor remembered. This idea came to be summed up in a credo that was inscribed (in French) on a sign that hung in the Gagnoa *zâwiya*: "Allah s'étant donné la peine de nous créer, il nous est alors obligatoire de travailler en toute bonne foi," literally,

27 Cheickna Sylla, (with Bakari Toure, Aliou Doukoure and Saliou Dembele in attendance), Deux Plateaux, May 19, 2001; FOCYS, "Cheikh Yacouba Sylla où le sens d'un combat (1906–1988)" (Privately circulated manuscript, Abidjan, 1999), p. 44.

28 Compare with the various *daara* or agricultural communities established by the Murids: Darou Marnane, Darou Rahmane, etc. Villalón, *State Power in Senegal*, pp. 118–119; Donal B. Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood* (Oxford, 1971), ch. 7; see also n35 infra.

29 Quoted in FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 44. Only the FOCYS text, the letters I received from its president (Maître Cheickna Sylla), and the interviews I carried out with its historical committee use "Allah" when communicating in French. Soninke and Arabic sources invariably use *allah*, but all other French-language sources, written or oral, use "Dieu."

"God having given himself the trouble of creating us, it is thus obligatory for us to work in all good faith."[30]

Nevertheless, work was more than a simple duty, passively accepted. It was a form of submission that was as much an active seeking after an experience of the divine.[31] Work united the two main meanings of *dhikr*: the repetition of action in devotion and prayerful remembrance of God. As the Fondation Cheikh Yacouba Sylla (FOCYS) put it:

> Work, for the Cheikh, was a form of prayer, of submission to the will of the Creator. . . . If the Cheikh had no respite from praising Allah, he knew how to engage in the remembrance of God; remembering through work, in work, for work. . . . The Cheikh abhorred sloth, the mother of vices, as is said. In fact, he used to say 'Even if it happens that you have no activity to do, go out into the fields to dig holes in the morning that you will fill in during the evening before returning home.' This well illustrates the rank which he gave to work as an integral part of the adoration of ALLAH.[32]

It also well illustrates the degree to which work was inscribed within a register of nonproductive expenditure, aimed not at capital accumulation or even the creation of social ties, but purely as a form of sacrifice, a gift of (and in) excess, directed at one's own spiritual perfection.

The Yacoubists emphasized that they did not see physical labor as a "precondition" of spiritual work, or simply as a recognition of material necessity. One of the Soninke "*qasîdas*"[33] sung at the Yacoubist *haidara* ceremonies expressed the relationship between work and *dhikr*: "*Kiye m'muma Nassara / Uro n'damma du'uye*" – "Spend the day in the work of Europeans [Nassara lit. = Christians], the night in shedding the tears of faith."[34] This division of

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30 This sign is visible in the background of a well-circulated photo of Yacouba in Gagnoa, taken in the 1950s, in which the then still-young man is dressed in "western" business clothes. It is also quoted in FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 57.

31 Many attempts to relate Sufi theology to the social organization of labor in West Africa have stumbled on this point; the writings of Sufi authors can often be mistakenly read as encouraging an extreme submission to one's *shaykh* in such a way as to justify the exploitation of the naive *murîd*. Yet it is clear that the recommended forms of submission are extremely active, often exhaustingly so. For an example of over-emphasis on passivity, see Lucy Behrman, *Muslim Brotherhoods and Politics in Senegal* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), p. 16.

32 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," p. 57.

33 An Arabic poetic genre with strict metrical and organizational rules, Yacoubist leaders used the term *qasîda* to refer to many of the works of Ba Oumarou and other intellectuals. Some of these did in fact conform to the norms of an Arabic *qasîda*, but the most powerful were written in both Arabic and Soninke.

34 There is also, perhaps, a gesture toward *taqiyya* or pious dissimulation here: the visible, daily, *zâhiri* work is the "Nassara" work, work as understood by the Christian masters; the evening, invisible, *bâtini* work is that of mourning and prayer. But it should be emphasized that each time this couplet was recited to me, it was done to emphasize the complementarity of work and prayer, indeed the near equivalence of the two, rather than to suggest a radical disjuncture.

the day was established, according to the hagiography, during a visit N'Paly Kaba made to Yacouba during his detention in Sassandra in 1934. It was at this meeting that Yacouba and N'Paly Kaba announced the decision to establish the two "poles" of the community at Kaédi and Gagnoa. As part of their deliberations, Yacouba and his companions spent each day in hard labor and each night in nearly endless *dhikr* recitations; or, as the hagiography puts it, in "intense religious activities, spiritual and economic."[35]

The distinctiveness of this idea can be illustrated by comparison with the Muridiyya. In one of the best treatments of this much-studied subject, Fatoumata Sow has discussed the relations among three different types of labor for Murids: *kasbou*, or work for economic gain; *amal*, or the putting to active use of mystical knowledge; and *khidma*, or performing service to the community. Sow describes *kasbou*, the form of work closest to that enjoined by Yacouba, as part of the Sufi engagement with the world, a rejection of monasticism, and the way to guarantee material security as a precondition for leading a pious life. She stresses that Murid founder Amadou Bamba always kept this form of work distinct from *amal*, forbidding, for example, his followers to perform any kind of physical labor while praying or reciting *dhikr*.[36] By contrast, Yacouba insisted on the complementarity of these types of effort. For example, women who attended the *haidara*s in the Yacoubist *zâwiya*s were constantly engaged in some form of work, whether, in Murid terms, the *kasbou* of embroidery (which is used within the family and sold in the market), or the *khidma* of preparing tea for the ceremony itself.

The social organization of labor among the Yacoubist *zâwiya*s was also different from that which obtained among Murids. There were some basic similarities, such as the way Amadou Bamba's approach to education self-consciously disrupted caste hierarchies: James Searing noted the way his followers took "pleasure in . . . the 'shocking' paradoxes produced by tailoring a disciple's education to a divination of his character" and reveled in stories in which those "who saw themselves as 'learned' scholars were ordered to work in the fields, while [low status] 'Sereer converts' were

35 FOCYS, "Sens d'un combat," pp. 49–50.

36 Fatoumata Sow, "Les logiques de travail chez les Mourides" (Mémoire de DEA, Université de Paris I, 1998), pp. 17–25. Jean Copans goes too far, I think, and suggests an incompatibility between the Murid reliance on labor and their pretensions to piety; this corresponds to the fundamental duality Copans sees in the order between Amadou Bamba, "the saint, the mystic, the symbol of purity, the possessor of a charismatic power," and Shaykh Ibra Fall (to whom he ascribes the invention of the *daara* work group), "the opposite of Amadou Bamba." Copans implies that this distinction derives from the cultural plurality of the order, with Ibra Fall's materialism reflecting the pragmatic *ceddo* values he brought into the community. Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide: la confrérie mouride et les paysans du Sénégal* (Paris, 1980), p. 87n13.

sometimes sent to the most learned scholars for a formal education."[37] However, the Murids' corporatism contrasts sharply with Yacoubist practice. Since labor was an irreducible part of one's religious training though self-discipline, and since the *shaykh*'s primary obligation was to the spiritual elevation of all his disciples, any division of the faithful into "workers" and "scholars" such as obtained among the Murids would have been unacceptable. Whereas Amadou Bamba assigned particular occupations to his followers based on their innate character, all of Yacouba's followers – his eldest sons included – rotated through each of the jobs required in the *zâwiya*, from working in the fields to staffing the cinema houses, with no distinction made as to the moral qualities of each form of work.[38] Yacouba also provided for the (notionally) equal education of all his followers: all male children were sent to local French schools, while female children were given the same education, but taught in classrooms within the *zâwiya*.[39]

Yacouba's celebration of all forms of work was also closely connected with a radical understanding of the obligations of hospitality and generosity, and with his insistence that humility before God and humans alike was the appropriate posture of the spiritually engaged. His own effort to supply beef to the region of Gagnoa in the 1940s, going so far as to sell it below cost, is understood by his followers as an act of charity – one that had the added benefit of endearing him to the local meat-starved administration. Similarly, the community presents a locally infamous "price war" that took place between Yacouba's transport enterprise and the national Transporters Association in 1966 as an act of altruism. Distraught at the exorbitant prices being charged by members in the Association, Yacouba lowered the rate for passage on his busses to 400CFA, even though this meant operating at a loss. He even offered to transport people for free "as a public service." His competitors, by contrast, understood these same acts as attempts to break the transporters' union and drive them out of business.[40]

This kind of external charity could include collective acts – gifts from Yacouba or the entire community to someone outside it – but it also defined the internal organization of the community. The prohibition on substantial private property, for example, extended even to the highest-ranking members of the community who were particularly responsible for disbursing all

37 James F. Searing, *"God Alone Is King": Islam and Emancipation in Senegal, the Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol,* 1859-1914 (Portsmouth, 2002), p. 239.
38 Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 19, 2001.
39 Since Yacouba's death in 1988, the restrictions placed on women's activities outside the *zâwiya*s have been greatly reduced. Girls now attend outside schools the same as boys.
40 Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 19, 2001. Barbara Caroline Lewis, "The Transporters' Association of the Ivory Coast: Ethnicity, Occupational Specialization, and National Integration" (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1970), pp. 415–421.

wealth. The lack of much opportunity for individual acquisition made displays of individual generosity difficult. Only through the community's age sets, which sometimes took charge of gathering up income before important ceremonies or holidays, could the average member participate in the dramatic imparting of a gift to the community. As a result, the kind of "rivalry in generosity" that typified the social role of gift giving among the Murids, for example, seems to have been relatively absent among Yacouba's followers.[41] Generosity could also be expressed through the rejection of excessive gifts. In one such case Yahya Marega, N'Paly Kaba's deputy at Kaédi, brought 70,000CFA to Gagnoa in 1950 or 1951 as the contribution of all the faithful in Mauritania to the southern "pole." Yacouba kept the sum in a special bag, so as to give the appearance of graciously accepting the gift, and then returned it to Marega with a letter to N'Paly Kaba that the money should be returned to each member in accordance with their contribution, and that if anyone needed more, Kaba himself should make up the difference. Yacouba explained that it "was rather for the master to bring, to give something to the faithful, and not the contrary," a doctrine that his followers understand as having "overturned the custom as established for a very long time."[42] This confirmed the appropriateness of Yacouba's behavior within the "spiritual economy" in which the pious *shaykh* was distinguished from the covetous one by insuring that he gave more than he received; though generosity was a virtue for all, it must ultimately be the *shaykh* who is the font of generosity, the source of excess and overflowing (*fayd*).

Hospitality was most evident, of course, in the treatment of guests. Though all Yacoubists abstained from alcohol, the *zâwiya* in Gagnoa contained a fully stocked bar, so that if a non-Muslim guest – African or European – were to visit, they could be offered a drink. Similarly, though all of Yacouba's followers adhered to the strict Hamawi injunction against using tobacco, Yacouba advised that if someone was offered a cigarette, rather than refuse it ungraciously they should accept it and place it behind the ear. The lesson that one should always be willing to "humbly" provide for one's guests and neighbors, even to the point of contravening the *sharî'a*, was well illustrated by the fact that Yacouba's first butcher shop in Sassandra was set up to provide pork to the local French and African populations. Run by Oumar Toure, this shop was established alongside another that provided *halâl* meat to Muslims.[43]

41 See, for example, Sow, "Logiques de travail," pp. 25–26.
42 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, Abidjan, May 3, 2001; FOCYS letter to author, June 3, 2001.
43 Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 21, 2001.

Yacouba made no distinction between the income of these two shops, nor did he attach any particular stigma to selling pork. Nor did the community's leadership distinguish among different types of *hadâyâ* based on the origins of the money or object given. This contrasted with many West African Sufis who, eager to avoid becoming implicated in *harâm* activities, channeled incoming gifts to particular uses depending on their source.[44] In this sense, then, the *hadâyâ* that circulated in the Yacoubist context were partially "reified," having been abstracted somewhat from their social origins. Yet their abstraction resulted not only from their integration into a capitalist economy but also because they found their meaning in a spiritual economy that placed value in the act of work itself, not in the abstract value that work created.

THE GIFT OF HISTORY

Because the Yacoubist leadership aggressively engages formal historical narratives and evidence, many of the community's most important historical shifts have also been shifts in historical consciousness. The clearest such shifts came in the ways the gifts that circulated between Hamallah and Yacouba gave meaning to the relationship between Yacouba's followers and the Hamawiyya more generally. For the pious, the social cohesion of the Yacoubist community was a moral victory equal to that which Hamallah had achieved in bringing a purified *tarîqa* and the *baraka* of a *qutb al-zamân* within the reach of the Muslims of the Sudan. It was an accomplishment that far surpassed those of the mere keepers of hierarchy and orthodoxy with whom Yacouba's followers repeatedly conflicted. As Yacouba is to have asked rhetorically, "Do you think a *muqaddam* could bring all these people to venerate Hamallah simply by bearing the title of *muqaddam*? Do you think I, as the son of N'Passakhona Sylla, could bring all these people? No, it is because I am also Yacouba the son of Hamallah that these people are here."[45] Yet it was not always enough simply to declare that one's accomplishments had exceeded those of a *muqaddam*. There were real *muqaddam*s around, invested with considerable authority by virtue of their closeness to Hamallah and their

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44 The Hamawi community in Ramatoulaye, for example, determines the use to which a *hadîya* can be put based on the type of activity that generated the gift. Ousman Kobo, personal communication. When I attended a *haidara* in Bassam in 2001, *hadâyâ* that I made to the community were mixed in with those made by all the other households in attendance, and then redistributed out to those in need without consideration of origin. Though I cannot confirm it, I have reason to believe the same was the case with *hadâyâ* I made in Gagnoa, Abidjan and Bamako. See also the distinctions made among the various forms of money ("the money of cattle," "the money of shit," and so on) by Sharon E. Hutchinson's informants in *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War, and the State* (Berkeley, 1996), pp. 83–102.

45 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 5, 2001.

office itself, and they could not simply be ignored. Nor could Yacouba's followers ignore those members of Hamallah's family who, after the great *shaykh*'s final exile in 1941, presented themselves as his successors and sought to extend their authority over the rest of the Hamawiyya.

Yacouba's ability to stand outside the chain linking *shaykh* to *muqaddam* to *murîd* depended on reinterpreting his formal relationship with the Tija-niyya. Yacouba's reported refusal to be formally authorized to recite the Tijani *wird* constituted a radical rejection of Sufi norms; but rather than try to minimize this fact, most hagiographic accounts used the logic of gift giving to highlight the rejection and reimagine its meaning. In the most popular story, Yacouba, having demonstrated great attachment to Hamallah in his youth, was brought before the Hamawi *muqaddam* Demba Nimaga.[46] As the *muqaddam* began listing the conditions Yacouba listened attentively. When Nimaga came to the requirement that the *murîd* love and accept the authority of the *shaykh*, taking him as his master and, according to the tradition, also pledge permanent allegiance to the *shaykh*'s successor, to his family, and to his sons, Yacouba stopped the *muqaddam*, refusing to agree to the condition. The stunned Nimaga and witnesses all asked what it was that he found objectionable. Yacouba answered saying, "you have asked me to accept as my masters Hamallah's sons and those who come after him. I cannot do so, as I do not know for certain that they will not depart from the path that Hamallah has laid out." Incredulous, Nimaga and Yacouba's brother brought him to Hamallah, where he again refused to take the *wird*. "What, then," Hamallah asked him, "do you want, Yacouba?" Yacouba responded that he wanted only that which Hamallah had to give him, that which was destined for him. Hamallah repeated the question, and Yacouba gave the same answer, through three repetitions. Finally, Hamallah assented saying, "If that is truly what you want, I give it to you."[47] Decades later when Nimaga came to visit Yacouba in Gagnoa, he is said to have brought up these events and to have asked Yacouba what precisely it was that Hamallah had given him. Yacouba first pointed to the many disciples that surrounded him, all gathered to work and praise Hamallah at the *zâwiya*. He then asked Nimaga whether he had thought to ask Hamallah at the time what it was the *shaykh* had given him. Nimaga responded that he had not, and Yacouba

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46 Or, in some versions, the same Bunafu Nimaga who was *muqaddam* in Kayes. See Chapter 2, n34 and n35.

47 The version of this story published in the FOCYS's history of the community states merely that Yacouba refused to take the *wird* from an unnamed *muqaddam* and that he "insisted that his direct initiator be the Sharif [Hamallah], who, faced with such a demonstration of faith and love, became filled with a sense of love and great admiration for him; they had many lengthy discussions together, meditating on many subjects." FOCYS, "Sense d'un combat," p. 24. Ahmadou Sylla pushed the story into parody, claiming that Nimaga had demanded that Yacouba swear to obey even Hamallah's dogs.

retorted that he should have done so while Hamallah was still alive for now he would never truly be able to know.[48]

I know of but a single example of an alternate tradition in which Yacouba did in fact take the Tijani *wird* from a Hamawi *muqaddam*. Cheick Chikouna Cissé recorded the testimony of one of Yacouba's cousins who stated that he had taken the *wird* together with Yacouba in 1925.[49] This claim, which is assiduously denied by others in the community, comes from a revealing source. Ba Birama Sylla, aged nearly 100 in 2001, was one of the few living witnesses to the 1920s and the only surviving close relative from Yacouba's generation. As such, his testimony on the earliest years of Yacouba's life might be thought particularly authoritative. Yet Ba Birama's status in the community was ambiguous. Though a member of Yacouba's family and a disciple of Hamallah, Ba Birama was, for many years, a dissident from the community and was absent for many pivotal events in its formation. He only "returned to the fold" in 1947, after the severest persecutions had ended and the Ivoirian community had been fully established.[50] Thus his memory of the events prior to 1929 may, in some sense, be mediated by events other than those that shaped the dominant tradition. This very fact renders his testimony illegitimate for members of the community, yet it is precisely this outsiderness that may provide insight into an earlier moment in the development of the representations of the community's relationship with the Hamawiyya.[51]

It is possible that Ba Birama Sylla's memory was faulty or that he willfully advanced a spurious tradition. Yet if it is the case that the earliest versions of the family's history did not place such stress on Yacouba's not having taken the Tijani *wird* – or if, perhaps, Yacouba took the *wird* privately but disclaimed having done so publicly – then it highlights the

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48 Ahmadou Sylla, Trichville, April 12, 2001. The idea that conserved secrets are the source of all power is a common trope in the Mande world. See the various essays in the special edition of *Mande Studies* on "Secrets and Lies in the Mande World" (2000). In addition, Molly Roth has pointed out that "the secret that enables the wielding of power is [often] attributed . . . to a gift or sign." She further notes that for at least one of her informants "there could be no such thing as controlling the labor and resources of a society without controlling its secrets." "The 'Secret' in Malian Historical Consciousness: Renarrating the West," *Mande Studies* 2 (2000), p. 50, 51n12.

49 Cheikh Chikouna Cissé, "Cheikh Yacouba Sylla et le Hamallisme en Côte d'Ivoire" (Mémoire de DEA, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, 2000), p. 10; and Cheick Chikouna Cissé, "La confrérie hamalliste face à l'administration coloniale française: le cas de Cheick Yacouba Sylla (1929–1960)," in *Mali-France: Regards sur une historie partagée*, ed. GEMDEV et Université du Mali (2005), 61. Though I was able to briefly speak with Ba Birama Sylla, who was nearly 100 at the time, I did not have the opportunity to ask him about this matter. All subsequent efforts to meet with him and to pose this question were blocked.

50 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, June 7, 2001.

51 Members of the community close to the Caliph in Gagnoa dismiss Ba Birama's claim as the product of senility and a faulty memory. Tijane Sylla, Gagnoa, June 10, 2001.

relation between the dominant version and its contexts. Presenting Yacouba as uninitiated accomplished two things. By affirming that Yacouba's link to Hamallah was a personal one, dependent entirely upon what it was that Hamallah had chosen to give to Yacouba, it implicitly freed him from the control of the Hamawiyya as an institution, as opposed to the control of Hamallah as his personal master. At the same time, it reinforced the egalitarian ethos so strongly emphasized by the community's leaders. Just as men and women alike not only entered the *zâwiya* but also performed *dhikr* therein, so too no distinction within the community was made between those who had taken the *wird*, and who were thus formal members of the *tarîqa*, and those who had not. By presenting Yacouba himself as someone "outside" the official corridors of the *tarîqa* who nonetheless claimed to be a student of the Shaykh the story legitimated the presence of all the other members of his community in a Hamawi *zâwiya* and gave specificity to their claim to be Hamawis. The way the dominant story specifically makes pledging obedience to Hamallah's sons the reason for Yacouba's refusal conflicts with most descriptions of Tijani initiation which note no such stipulation.[52] It thus draws attention to the conflicts Yacouba had with the Shaykh's descendants in later years and suggests that they were the reason why the story was more important in the years immediately before Ba Birama's "return" in 1947 than it had been in the late 1920s.

Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, community leaders institutionalized their antiinstitutional interpretation of the Yacouba–Hamallah relationship and made it the foundation of social relations among their followers. Presentations were central to this process. On the one hand, typological gifts consisting of *hadâyâ* and the transfer of *baraka* circulated between Yacouba and his followers. On the other hand, these spiritual gifts, which channeled God's superfluity into the spiritual and material resources that enabled the community to thrive, were accompanied by gifts that were in some sense both the physical manifestation of Shaykh Hamallah's gift of grace to Yacouba, and a return gift as realized in and through the labor of Yacouba and his followers. The ability to exchange the proceeds of labor for the material components of publicly visible gifts was only the most obvious connection between the two sets. For example, the famous present of a new Ford Mercury that Yacouba made to Hamallah in 1939 brilliantly dramatized the significance that both parties attached to the

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52 The condition, as related in al-Hall ʿUmar's *Rimâh*, reads: "One must ceaselessly love the *shaykh* until his death, and one must love the successor (*khalifa*) to the *shaykh* and all that which was close to the *shaykh*, such as his chosen followers and his directives, in the same way that one loved the *shaykh*." Cited and trans. in Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: the Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 195.

reciprocal flow of vertical presentations in the spiritual economy. When Yacouba sent his gift to Nioro, he did not send just one automobile, but two, one named Salam (Peace) and the other Salat (Prayer). He asked Hamallah to keep whichever car he preferred (or both if he so chose) and to send the other one back to Gagnoa with his blessing. According to the Yacoubist account, Hamallah chose Salat; but before sending Salam back to Yacouba, he had his driver take him around Nioro in it, allowing it to be saturated with his presence. A gift (*hadîya*) in the form of the car thus became the cause for a gift (*sadaqa*) in the form of Hamallah's blessing back to Yacouba.[53] The plurality of ties to Hamallah that N'Paly Kaba represented in many community stories was also referenced through a series of gifts. Just as Hamallah had placed food directly into Yacouba's mouth in Mederdra in 1929, he is reported to have done so for N'Paly Kaba in Nioro sometime in the late 1930s. To intensify the blessing that such a gift contained, Kaba and others in his entourage drank the water with which Hamallah washed his hands after the meal. Later in this same visit, the FOCYS hagiography reports, "the Sharif [Hamallah] went to one of his closets filled with presents, gifts offered to him by the faithful, which he presented to N'Paly Kaba; among other things, he had his guest smell some incense, asking him: do you smell that odor? Is it not agreeable?"[54]

As late as the 1970s, the community's approach to Sufi hierarchy remained somewhat fluid and ambivalent. The catalyst for hardening their position may have been an act of historical inquiry. Research Alioune Traoré carried out in the 1970s for his doctoral thesis on the Hamawiyya gave many Tijanis an opportunity to articulate their positions vis-à-vis one another. The Nioro leadership, which was already well along the path to consolidating its control, leaned heavily on the question of hierarchical authority, particularly as embodied in the institution of the *muqaddam*. Traoré was deeply influenced by this perspective, and he made the idiom a central part of his questioning during the interviews he carried out with Yacouba in Gagnoa in 1974 and 1975. By forcing Yacouba to address directly the question of his position in relation to the Nioro leadership, Traoré seems to have provoked something of a crisis in the formation of the community's collective memory.[55] Yacouba responded to Traoré

53 Aliou "Mama" Sylla and Fodie Doukoure, Gagnoa, April 28, 2001; Maître Cheickna Sylla, Deux Plateaux, May 21, 2001; Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, July 6, 2001.

54 FOCYS, "Sense d'un combat," p. 54. The most extravagant tales of N'Paly Kaba's (and Yacouba's) generosity to Hamallah, which appear in Maître Cheickna's hagiography, come close to implying that the gifts between Nioro and Gagnoa were the gifts given among equals. Ahmadou, by contrast, made it clear that Nioro, as the "pole," had a greater obligation of charity to Gagnoa than Gagnoa did to Nioro. But he too stressed the reciprocal gifts given back to Hamallah's sons. Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, Abidjan, May 3, 2001.

55 This hypothesis is supported by the memory, widely shared among the community, of Alioune Traoré's interviews as unpleasant, highly disruptive, and even offensive occasions.

by explicitly claiming an esoteric, nonhierarchical relationship with Hamallah, using the interviews to encourage the belief that he was not a *muqaddam*, not lettered in Arabic, and not trained in the Islamic sciences.[56]

As a whole, the community seems to have fallen in line behind the positions Yacouba articulated. But Ahmadou Sylla and others claimed that Yacouba had engaged in aggressive dissimulation during his interviews with Traoré, both because of suspicion of his motives and because Yacouba was reluctant to make statements that might seem self-aggrandizing or provocative vis-à-vis Nioro. Ahmadou in particular presented a vision of his father's approach to Sufi hierarchy that was both nuanced and audacious. He attributed to Yacouba a belief in the contextuality of the Qur'an and in the principle that Islam must constantly evolve to take into consideration historical realities.[57] Just as the revelations of the Prophet were the product of a particular moment in time, so too, he noted, were the *wilâya* and *baraka* of a Sufi *shaykh*. While Hamallah's intercession on behalf of his followers was preordained, and his grace moved across time from the Prophet Muhammad via Ahmad al-Tijani, this grace was also contingent and bounded. Strikingly, Ahmadou Sylla claimed that Hamallah was in many ways a product of the colonial period. If the French had not persecuted him, if they had not mobilized the ʿUmarian Tijanis to declare him heterodox, there might never have been a separate Hamawi path. To the extent that his sufferings and martyrdom stood as a sign of his spiritual perfection, Hamallah's deepest nature would not have become manifest and he might not have attracted followers like Yacouba. Colonialism thus created Hamallah and made it possible for Yacouba to love him. This did not, of course, in any way detract from God's volition in the matter, nor did Ahmadou ascribe any intentionality to colonial forces. Rather, history had simply provided the necessary medium for the working out of a divine project.[58]

Making Hamallah's intercession historically contingent, tied to both the circumstances of his life and his individual person, provided a more subtle tool for distancing the community from the authority claims of the Nioro leadership. In a characteristically provocative gesture, Ahmadou

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56 There is some hesitation about Yacouba's illiteracy, but most concur that it was their *shaykh*'s brother BaOumarou who was the Arabic scholar, and few raise the question of Yacouba's being a *muqaddam*. The rest of this paragraph is drawn largely from an interview with Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 5, 2001.

57 For example: ''Our father liked to show his ignorance of learned matters as a way of demonstrating humility to his followers. He would ask Yahya Marega [later head of the community in Kaédi] to tell him what the Qur'an said on a given point. Upon hearing the recitation and explication, he always affirmed that what the Qur'an had said was the truth; but then would also point out that the Qur'an was not the only truth.'' Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, June 7, 2001.

58 Ahmadou Sylla, April 12, 2001.

claimed to have told a visiting delegation of *salafîyya*-oriented Ivoirian Muslims that even if the Prophet Muhammad were to appear before him in person, he would still love his father more dearly – not only because of the close personal bond between father and son, but because it was through his father and not through the Prophet that he had come to know God. At the same time, Ahmadou repeated on multiple occasions that he felt uncomfortable speaking much about his father or the community because, in the broad sweep of history, his father always denied he was "anything special."[59] Seeing these claims as founded on a profound historicizing of the process of revelation gives a new meaning to the infamous Yacoubist claim, expressed most directly in Yacouba's letter to Fodie Abdoulaye Diagana, that Hamallah was God.[60] It is also in this light that it becomes clear how a plea like that made by Abdoulaye ibn Fodie Mamadou Lamine – that "the tightness of the rope of subjection that ties us to [Hamallah] be affirmed more than ever"[61] – could contribute to a radical rejection of institutional hierarchy.

Figures with close ties to Nioro have engaged the Yacoubists on these very questions in their efforts to defend what they see as orthodoxy. The influential Hamawi intellectual, Cheikh Tahirou Doucouré, has argued that, by overemphasizing their personal attachment to Hamallah, Yacouba and his followers have failed to recognize Hamallah's own subordination to Ahmad al-Tijani and to the Prophet Muhammad. As a result, Yacouba's followers cannot, they claim, be true Tijanis and therefore not true Hamawis. Status as a Hamawi thus does not follow as a consequence of attachment to Hamallah, but rather from one's position in the chain of transmission that linked Hamallah to Muhammad via al-Tijani.[62] Other non-Yacoubist Hamawis attack Yacouba's followers by implying that his claims to a close relationship with the Shaykh and his reception of esoteric knowledge from him are simply fraudulent. In particular, they emphatically reject stories about Hamallah's spiritual gifts to Yacouba at the Tabaski in Mederdra in 1929. Hamawis in

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59 Ahmadou Sylla, Treichville, April 5, 12, and 20, 2001. Cheick Ahmadou did not recount his visitors' response to his proclamation.

60 See Chapter 3, n43 . Compare Ibn ʿArabi's historicism which was described by the link between the ontological and prophetic roles of a *walî*: the *walî*'s importance as *qutb al-zamân* extended only so far as his prophetic communication of the *nûr muhammadi* engaged a *murîd*. William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-cArabi's Cosmology* (Albany, 1998), p. xxv.

61 Abdoulaye ibn Fodie Mamadou Larnine to Fodie Amadou ibn Fodie Abdoulaye, March 22, 1932 [date apparently translated by administrative interpreter] (ANCI X-13-253(9245) 1E-781).

62 Cheikh Tahirou Doucouré, Dakar, February 23 and 26, 2001.

eastern Mauritania and Mali insist that Hamallah never designated a successor, and that his failure to name Yacouba as a *muqaddam* reveals that, whatever his personal affection for the young man, he never conferred any authority upon him.[63] Cheikh Tahirou Doucouré makes a slightly different argument, noting the widespread belief that Hamallah did in fact designate a successor, naming his son Muhammad ould Cheikh as his inheritor before his second exile. As a duly appointed successor to Hamallah, ould Cheikh alone would then be in a position to validate Yacouba's claims – something he refused to do.[64]

Here again, the Yacoubists have largely been adamant about the correctness of their interpretation. In 2001, I witnessed various lingering signs of Yacoubist–Hamawi differentiation. Certain strands of the hagiographic tradition had reinterpreted the events in Kaédi in 1929 and 1930 to suggest that the revivalists' most serious conflict was not with twelve-bead elites but with older disciples of Hamallah who refused to accept Yacouba's preeminence, many of whom were eleven-beads initiated directly by al-Akhdar and who had only belatedly submitted to Hamallah's guidance.[65] Even recent signs of cooperation between Yacoubists and other Hamawis offered notable signs of tension. In November of 1929 Hamallah is supposed to have written a letter renouncing ''Yacouba Sylla and the people of Kaédi'' and claiming that they had acted ''contrary to the law of the Prophet'' and of the Tijaniyya.[66] This renunciation did not, however, insulate Hamallah from the events of those years and in any case he was, before long, back on good terms with the Yacoubists.[67] In April 1930, Hamallah was moved from Mederdra in Mauritania to the distant town of Adzopé in Côte d'Ivoire in order to isolate him from actual or potential followers. Yet a *zâwiya* sprung up around him in only a short time, and connections quickly emerged between Adzopé and Yacouba's place of detention in Sassandra.[68] The lasting effects of these ties have

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63 Cisse, ''Hamallisme en Côte d'Ivoire,'' p. 12.

64 Cheikh Tahirou Doucouré, Dakar, February 26, 2001.

65 This would, for example, seem to be Alioune Traoré's implication when he wrote of the refusal of ''the *muqaddam*s of Shaykh Lakhdar'' to follow Yacouba. Alioune Traoré, *Islam et colonisation en Afrique: Cheikh Hamahoullah, homme de foi et résistant* (Paris, 1983), p. 139. No one in the community would accept Traoré's claim, nor can I find evidence to support it. Indeed it is widely claimed among the community that all the leading intellectuals of Kaédi's eleven-beads ultimately accepted Yacouba's leadership. But some members occasionally hint that these tensions were not quite so easily resolved.

66 See Chapter 3, n4.

67 See, for example, Rapp. pol. ann, Soudan, 1930 (CAOM 1Affpol 160).

68 See Jean-Louis Triaud, ''Lignes de force de la pénétration islamique en Côte d'Ivoire,'' *Revue des études islamiques* 42:1 (1974), p. 154. On links between Sassandra and Adzopé, see Lieut.-Gouv. Côte d'Ivoire to Adm. Grand-Lahou, May 30, 1931 (ANCI IV-48/1 (3327)); Fatimata Koïta, Adzopé, May 27, 2001.

provided the community with a concrete way to signal their respect for the life and piety of the Shaykh. They have declared themselves the particular custodians of objects and locations associated with important events in Hamallah's life. In the 1950s, Yacouba established his own *zâwiya* and a branch of his cinema business in Adzopé.[69] Soon after installing themselves, Yacouba's followers began the work of restoring the building where Hamallah had been detained, the garden where he had worked cultivating vegetables, and a well he had had dug, from which he carried water to his house and garden daily. The work of maintaining these sites generally fell upon a particular age set within the community, but an annual visit was made to the sites by all those in the city and by others who travel from *zâwiya*s throughout the region for the occasion.

At the time of my visit to Adzopé, Yacouba's followers had little official contact with the original Hamawi *zâwiya* in town, and those Hamawis in turn seemed little interested in the acts of historical preservation in which their Yacoubist confreres were involved. The residents of the Yacoubist *zâwiya* only made official visits to the other Hamawis twice yearly, once at the celebration of the Prophet's birth (*mawlid al-nabî*), and once at the celebration of the Prophet's naming (*ism al-nabî*). Though individual members have the right to visit more frequently, according to their personal preference, no one with whom I spoke actually did so.[70] Occasional asides by Yacouba's followers indicated a certain amount of frustration that the other Hamawis, who live much closer to the site of Hamallah's detention than do those affiliated with Yacouba, took little pride in their *tarîqa*'s history and did not share in the work of commemoration. Though Yacoubists generally ascribe this indifference to unequal financial resources, at least some of the studied neglect the other Hamawis evinced for this project may reflect differences in devotional approach. In their activities in Adzopé, Yacouba's followers foregrounded the Shaykh's sufferings and their remembrances of these sufferings, essentially imposing their own model of suffering and loyalty onto the history of Hamallah in Adzopé, pulling Hamallah's history into their own idiom. Other Hamawis in Adzopé were simply less invested in these particular themes. The Yacoubists' commemorative work thus helped reinforce the claim that they, more than any other members of the Hamawiyya, had remained loyal to the Shaykh during all his travails, and that they more than any others have

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69 No one in the community was able to provide a precise date for the establishment of the Yacoubist *zâwiya* in Adzopé, only that it was built well before independence and after the *zâwiya* in Sinfra, which dates to the early 1940s.

70 As with other non-Yacoubist Hamawi *zâwiya*s, women are not allowed inside the building. This may be part of the reason why visits by the local Yacoubists are relatively rare, occurring only on occasions where refusal to visit might be interpreted as a sign of disrespect or schism.

dedicated themselves to preserving the memory of his pious life. Indeed, Yacouba and his followers have received a certain respect from other Hama-wis for their dedication to the Shaykh and for the suffering they went through in his name.[71] The work then that the Yacoubist community carries out in Adzopé, as well as their labors more generally and the contributions they make through them to the Hamawiyya more broadly, constantly translates their own past into a set of circulating gifts.

<div align="center">CONCLUSIONS</div>

What is perhaps most remarkable about the meanings members of the Yacoubist community attributed to their various works is how little they reflected what might appear to have been the most important questions about labor in the Ivoirian setting in which they emerged. For during the very same period that Yacouba and his followers were elaborating these specifically Sufi ideas about creation, generosity and the flow of God's grace into a distinctive approach to devotion and hierarchy, debates over the nature of African labor practices were setting the stage for a new configuration of political authority in the colony. In the 1940s and 1950s, Houphouët-Boigny was able to capital-ize on the labor organizing and recruitment of African plantation owners like Yacouba Sylla to silence French settler claims about African inefficiency and to position his party, the PDCI, as the only viable source of effective gover-nance within the colony. It was this success, more than any other develop-ment, that determined the shape of Ivoirian politics for the next forty years.

From the outside, the value of African "entrepreneurial capitalism" was, in Frederick Cooper's insightful phrase, that it "provid[ed] the Ivory Coast government with a way out of the ideological bind . . . that African nature was incompatible with wage labor. It showed that the question could be avoided, that agricultural labor could be mobilized in ways that French administrators need not probe."[72] Yet we still know very little about what these successes meant for those who shaped them and thus how it was that they took place. Clearly what Houphouët presented as "free labor" to the settler population, to French administrators, and, even more importantly, to metropolitan and international policy makers who were particularly concerned about eliminat-ing the appearance of coerced or unfree labor had a very different meaning within a community like that of Yacouba's "workers."

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71 See, for example, the comments of Traoré, *Islam et colonisation*, 206. Which is not to say that there are not many in the *tarîqa* who privately feel that this suffering was unnecessary and that Yacouba's followers largely brought it upon themselves.

72 Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, UK, 1996), p. 196.

Yacouba was hardly representative of post-1944 labor recruitment or organizing in Côte d'Ivoire. Yet through his prominence in the political campaigns of the 1940s and 1950s and the centrality of his support for Houphouët-Boigny both in the latter's union of plantation owners (the SAA) and the PDCI, he played a significant role in constructing a patchwork of articulations between capital and the various "hidden" economies that obtained on African farms. And his own economy had an explanatory scope just as universalizing as capitalism itself. By conceptualizing work as a type of spiritual practice, the Yacoubists positioned themselves as both the inheritors and the redeemers of a centuries-old socioreligious tradition that readily subsumed the twentieth century in its entirety. For Yacouba's followers, their material successes only confirmed the liberation from suffering that they had been accorded through the intervention of Shaykh Hamallah's *baraka*. Their own spiritual self-discipline through labor and *dhikr* was enabled by Yacouba's *shaykh*'s originary gift, and their own spiritual giving and commemorative work was ultimately nothing but a constant repayment. Hamallah's gift itself originated higher up the *silsila*, just as their own gifts returned in the end to He who, "*s'étant donné la peine*" to create the world – with the word *peine* evoking (though with an irreducible remainder) self-sacrifice, self-affliction and effort all at once – was the true origin of and model for all work.

The pairing of physical labor and ritual work, each with their somatic and spiritual aspects, had as its symbol the double *dhikr*, itself a returning to God through the remembrance of His name. God's name in turn was a highly condensed form of the act of creation, God's fundamental work, and so the gifts of God were the product of work in the form of theophanic self-disclosure. Material wealth was only the visible trace of this creation, just as the food Hamallah placed in Yacouba's mouth was only the visible trace of the more profound, invisible gifts he gave to him. We should thus recall that the two forms of remembrance were associated with different parts of the day: labor in the day proper, *dhikr* proper at night, and recall that in this division, as codified in the *qasida* couplet, daytime work was Christian, "*Nassara*" labor. For the double spiritual meaning of the work of Yacouba's followers paralleled another doubling, one between the meaning attached to their labor within the *zâwiya* and the meaning it obtained in the colonial (and postcolonial) discourses surrounding the abolition of slavery, the transition to "free labor," and the onset of capitalist transformation of rural West Africa.

The way Yacouba's followers explained their own experiences of emancipation and their own role in the capitalist transformation of Côte d'Ivoire thus raises fundamental questions about the suitability of competing contextual frameworks for understanding twentieth-century West Africa. In particular,

narratives of capitalist transformation, in which colonialism brought with it the creation of labor out of work through the proliferation of wages and the creation of commodities out of goods through the spread of markets, are revealed as both overly Eurocentric and subtly teleological. To be sure, there were important differences in how the community imagined itself in its early years and during its period of later affluence, and it would be pointless to isolate these changes from the broader trajectories of West African history. But the terms in which such generalizations are made determine the ways individual stories of social and religious change can be aggregated and where the privileged contexts of their intelligibility are located. Both ''labor'' and ''commodity'' derive their analytic power from the emphasis they place on the abstraction of activity from social relations and identity and from the evolutionary narratives in which they replace putatively prior, embedded practices. One may claim to reject such implications, but it is not clear what value there then is in using the terms. Can an object whose value changes depending on the identity of the person from whom it is acquired still usefully be considered a commodity? If work is done not to receive its exchange value or to allow someone else to receive it, but rather to participate in the eternal act of theophany, is it still labor? The power of these terms in no way derives from the way they index features of the things they purport to describe, but only from the connections they enable among things and among stories about things. It is through the asymmetrical enabling of connections among stories that the West retains its position of interpretive authority.

The ''black box'' of African capitalism that Houphouët-Boigny and the PDCI offered to the French administration as a way out of the contradictions between the economic rationale of colonial development and the rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice* had within it yet another box that has proven to be as impenetrable to subsequent historians as it was to the colonial gaze. As Steven Feierman reminds us, historical arguments depend upon a whole range of implicit knowledges that an author assumes to be shared with her or his audience. Those narratives that emerge from and circle back into western problematics reinforce the hegemony of the knowledges they imply, while those knowledges that were implicit to many African ''workers'' or ''Muslims'' in the past century reflect narrative conventions unlike those which dominate most historical writing. As a result, both the local contexts of the African past and its underlying dynamics have remained ''hidden from us because our own definition of reason hangs like a veil before our eyes.''[73] For the logics of the International Labor Organization's ''rights discourse,'' of

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73 Feierman, ''Invisible Histories,'' p. 209.

Cooper's "labor question" (in which "work was work and a worker a worker"),[74] or of Marxists' "unproductive accumulation," have little to say about the *alors* that condensed the mysterious obligation of the gift for Yacouba's followers in their *shaykh*'s phrase: "il nous est *alors* obligatoire de travailler. . . ."

74 Cooper, *Decolonization*, p. 4.

9

"To Never Shed Blood": Yacouba, Houphouët, and Côte d'Ivoire

> Mákkà Jùmán w'ín hàabá kán dí
> Maaro 'Buna
> Màdíinà Jùmán w'ín hàabá kán dí
> 'Sira Dikko 'Buna
> The Mosque of Mecca is in my father's house
> Oh Maaro Buna
> The Mosque of Medina is in my father's house
> Oh Sira Dikko Buna
>   – Soninke *talibe* song, collected in Kaédi[1]

The role of Yacouba Sylla's followers in the intellectual and material evolution of the Ivoirian state poses a challenge to a range of both Eurocentric and "alternative" models of modernization and development. For French officials committed to a single, European modernity, the Yacoubists' religious fervor was ipso facto a sign of the need to modernize them. Current historical practice is not so different. As a movement of former slaves and members of castes, the Yacoubist story could easily become that of the French abolition of slavery and the weakening of social controls in the face of expanding economic opportunities. As members of the rural and small-town poor, their stories can be about the emergence of networks of patronage, entrepreneurialism, and wealth redistribution centered either on the state or on an emerging civil society. Or Yacouba can be seen as an African "intermediary," responsible for brokering these changes, capable perhaps of displacing colonial intentions but not fully able to escape them. Taking Islamic reformism rather than European imperialism as a starting point, Yacouba Sylla's followers might appear to be engaged in an antimodern revolt against the outcome

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[1] Collected and translated into French in Ousmane Moussa Diagana, *Sooninka'ra gànnìnkà-n-sùugú: Chants traditionnels du pays soninké* (Paris, 1990), pp. 228–229.

2. Yacouba Sylla (seated, center), on the occasion of his being appointed a Grand Officier dans l'Ordre National, December 1977. Others present include President Houphouët-Boigny (standing, third from left), and Yacouba's sons, Ahmadou Sylla (seated, left), and Hamallah Sylla (seated, right). (Fraternité Hebdo, 23 December 1977).

of the dialectic encounter between Muslim intellectuals and Western power.[2]

All these approaches imagine Yacouba's followers as targets of modernizing projects, with varying capacities to shape those projects to their own needs. By contrast, the rethinking of development and modernity in Africa generally associated with Jean and John Comaroff provides a way of seeing the Yacoubists as the architects of an ''alternative modernity,'' a mode of appropriating certain of the benefits held out by the colonial project in its guise as *mission civilisatrice* but from within the framework of Muslim institutions and hermeneutics. While West African Sufis, particularly the kind that lead dramatic revivals, have often been seen as the primary defenders of traditionalism against modernizing

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[2] On anti-Sufism and Islamic modernism in Francophone Africa see Jean-Loup Amselle, *Négociants de la savanne* (Paris, 1979); Amselle, ''Le Wahabisme à Bamako (1945–1985),'' *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 19:2 (1985), 345–357; Richard Warms, ''Merchants, Muslims and Wahhâbiyya: The Elaboration of Islamic Identity in Sikasso, Mali,'' *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 26:3 (1992), 485–507; Réné Otayek (ed.), *Le Radicalisme islamique au sud du Sahara* (Paris, 1993). See also Louis Brenner's thesis associating Sufism with an ''esoteric episteme'' that gave way to the rationalism of European and Islamic reformist conceptions of knowledge. Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in A West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN, 2001). On intermediaries, Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, 2006).

anti-Sufi *ahl al-Sunna* reformists, recent research has highlighted the very modern uses to which Sufi practices could be put and their extensive incorporation into the institutions of governance in Muslim Africa.[3]

None of these theoretical frames, however, adequately captures how the Yacoubists understood their own role in West African history. They saw themselves neither as brokers between "western" and "African" values nor as pioneers of cultural hybridity. Indeed they rejected the entire set of assumptions about agency and historical contextualization that underpin both traditional and alternative conceptions of modernity. The intellectuals of the community certainly generated simulacra of civilizing discourses and saw themselves as playing an important role in modernizing and developing their adopted country of Côte d'Ivoire. But they also firmly embraced their status as both objects and subjects of a much greater transformation that produced modernity but was not part of it. In this imagining, Yacoubist intellectuals domesticated questions of progress and development within a spiritual project that transcended politics as such. Their practices and discourses generated a set of translations between Yacouba's actions and the discourse of modernity that was (and is) the currency of international and domestic politics. They thus created a space from which they could exercise moral, tutelary power over what the outside world considered political activity while simultaneously remaining apart from the world, uncorrupted by that which they sought to reform.

In the external narrative, the Yacoubists play the role of Muslim agents of economic development. The idea of "Islamic development" in a Sufi context turns on a series of conversions of forms of capital. Yacouba begins with a quantity of spiritual capital (its origin is taken for granted) and converts it into social capital in the form of followers whose labor enables him to accumulate economic capital. He uses this economic capital for two purposes: to fund certain modernizing initiatives for his own community and for his neighbors in the town of Gagnoa (allowing him to accumulate moral capital in the form of goodwill), and to purchase the patronage of Houphouët-Boigny, which provided him both access to noncapital forms of power (state coercion) and a way to "launder" his wealth through the logics of nationalist anticolonial struggle and African unity (more moral capital). The assumption that it was in fact possible to exchange all these forms of capital against one another like so many currencies is axiomatic in such a narrative, and it grounded French colonial perceptions of religious leaders as well as social scientific discourses on

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3   As a starting point, see Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago, 1993); Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt (eds.), *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate* (Portsmouth, NH, 2002); Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago, 1999); and James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copper Belt* (Berkeley, 1999).

religious communities and the "alternative modernities" paradigm. It is precisely this fungibility that the Yacoubists themselves called into question.

Part of what is at stake is a functional interpretation of Yacoubist success that equates it with pragmatic accommodation. Yacouba's post-1938 activities bore little obvious stamp of any particular religious teaching, and seem instead straightforward attempts to maintain his personal authority and to protect his community's autonomy. Following the paths blazed by contemporaries like Seydou Nourou Tal or the Murids of Senegal, he appears as one who achieved political influence by using locally meaningful discourses like religious reform or spiritual transformation to support projects that were framed in the languages of international political discourse. But compared to the Tal family or the Murids, Yacouba was paradoxically more conspicuous in his participation in political life and more insistent in his claims of aloofness from temporal power. As a Sufi leader in a predominantly non-Muslim country, he imagined his role less as a broker and more as a teacher. Making this role meaningful depended on conceptualizing Sufism itself as the engine of a *mission civilisatrice* that may have had politics as its means but whose goal was very much to change the soul. It also depended on the rather unique environment – religious, economic and political – of southern Côte d'Ivoire.

DEFINING FREE LABOR

Colonial Côte d'Ivoire was a kind of hothouse for theories about African work, many of which were profoundly out of step with the administration's official position of a gradual transition to liberalism. Perhaps the most well-known contrarian position came from Jean Rose, the self-declared leader of the French settlers and president of the Syndicat Agricole de la Côte d'Ivoire (SACI), the plantation owners' union from which Houphouët-Boigny's SAA broke off in protest. A thorn in the side of the administration for decades, Rose asserted that Africans left to their own devices would not work and needed therefore to be compelled by force. However sympathetic some local administrators or even governors might have been to Rose's ideas in private, the entire public thrust of the metropolitan administration, from the Popular Front through Vichy to the 1950s, moved in the opposite direction. *Colons* who could present themselves instead as the champions of consensual, contractual work, and denounced African planters for *their* labor practices were likely to get a better hearing.[4] One way European planters expressed their frustrations with African competitors was by accusing them of practicing "slavery," and they frequently

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4   See Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 83, 190. See also: Syndicat Agricole de la Côte d'Ivoire to Lieut. Gouv. CdI, June 5, 1944, July 17, 1944, et cetera (CAOM 1Affpol 2807/3 dossier 7).

charged the administration with being secretly complicit in nonconsensual labor recruitment – something that had of course long been used in their favor. As we have seen, such charges were leveled against Yacouba himself, whose surprising successes prompted his competitors, French and African alike, to generate conspiratorial explanations for his wealth.[5]

The most powerful rhetorical challenge to official ideas about work came from a planter, Marcel Serves, who exploited what he saw as a contradiction in administrative policies. Seeking to undermine what he felt was the competitive advantage of local clients of the administration – particularly interpreters – who benefited from the extremely low wages and long-term contracts they could secure via "assisted" recruitment, Serves paid his workers a small sum but offered a range of nonwage benefits. In violation of the law, he allowed workers to use his guns for hunting without getting their own permits, hired on short-term workers who were being sought for forced labor elsewhere, and offered his employees "protection" in exchange for their labor. Serves and the administration alike saw this strategy as founded on an "African" model of labor, and officials declared him a serious threat to the entire civilizational project. Reports in 1926 noted that for two years Serves had sought to "constitute an independent village on his plantation," outside the state's authority; most disconcerting was the possibility his enterprise would be successful enough to attract emulators. Nothing, it was felt, would more "completely annihilate" the administration's authority than the growth of "fiefdoms" run by European planters.[6]

Serves's threat was quickly snuffed out through force and legal action, but the theory behind it – that African workers responded best to collective, extracapitalist paternalism rather than to market forces – lived on. The key question for such a theory was not determining the ideal material conditions of free labor but rather deciding who had the power to decide what constituted consensual employment and what kinds of consent Africans were capable of giving. The idea that a European planter could directly appropriate his workers' power of consent was difficult to square with post–First World War interpretations of the *mission civilisatrice*; but, as the SAA itself would later demonstrate, if particular modes of consent could be convincingly portrayed as "authentic," and if they were administered by Africans, they could bypass such contradictions.

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5 See Chapter 3, n51 and Chapter 4, n60.
6 Marcel Serves, Planteur, to Lieut. Gouv. CdI, Oct. 16, 1926 and Oct. 20, 1926; Lieut. Gouv. Côte d'Ivoire to Gouv.-Gén. AOF, March 12, 1927; Cmdt. de cer. Bas-Sassandra to Lieut. Gouv. CdI, Nov 19, 1926 (ANCI iv-40–1 (9222A+B)).

The most important administrative efforts to facilitate and theorize such alternative forms of coercion were carried out by Gaston Mondon, Ivoirian Governor from 1936 to 1938. Mondon, who had a good relationship with French settlers, did his best to undermine the more radical ideas of Popular Front reformists. Forced labor and slavery, he acknowledged, were unacceptable due to the absence of consent in the worker's engagement; but it was not clear exactly *whose* consent had to be present for labor to qualify as free. Most of the workers on southern Ivoirian plantations were migrants from the Mossi territories in the north, where they were officially under the jurisdiction of the ''Emperor of the Mossi,'' the Moro Naba (*Mogho Naaba*) of Ouagadougou. The Moro Naba's role in assisting recruitment gave Mondon an opening to formulate a kind of rationality by proxy and a defense of ''indirect'' forced labor.[7] At a time when the role of chiefs in pressuring laborers to work under unfavorable conditions was being challenged by the metropolitan government, Mondon painted a stark picture of the process by which Mossi workers were ''encouraged'' to migrate: ''The fact cannot be concealed,'' he confessed, ''that, under the circumstances, a single word from the Moro Naba, a simple desire, can be considered an order by the primitive populations that are, we know, completely submissive to him.''[8] But rather than see this as evidence of coercion – indeed, of the virtual impossibility of consent ''under the circumstances'' – Mondon used the willingness of the Moro Naba to send workers as proof of the improved working conditions in southern Côte d'Ivoire. The Moro Naba's consent thus simultaneously served as the effective consent of the worker and disproved allegations of both forced labor and poor working conditions. Furthermore, Mondon presented the Moro Naba as himself having a kind of attenuated agency, but not in the sense of being controlled or manipulated. Rather, the Moro Naba's own rationality simply conformed to an ideal type that had itself originated in a colonial mission defined by its philosophy of work: ''We cannot pass in silence over the fact that colonization – that elevation of the Native by work in the general sense – has found in the person of the Moro Naba, taken into our confidences, a comprehensive auxiliary.''[9] For both Mondon and planters like Serves, then, reforming labor policy was not a matter of refining techniques of recruitment, but rather of formalizing coercive recruitment into a sustainable, defensible paternalism. They only differed in terms of who they imagined sitting at the top of the patriarchy, giving his consent, and looking out for ''his'' workers' best interests: the white planter, or the African ''auxiliary'' of the colonial spirit.

7 Cooper, *Decolonization*, pp. 79–88.
8 Lieut. Gouv. CdI, Mondon, to unknown, 1938, p. 6 (CAOM 1Affpol 2807/3 dossier 4).
9 Ibid., p. 7.

This logic was shared by many African elites, but their own claims to paternal authority were constantly open to challenge on very different grounds. In 1945, the Moro Naba wrote to the Governor complaining about working conditions and recruitment, hinting that pressure to reform was being put on him from below. He reported that those who left to work in southern Côte d'Ivoire "are convinced that they have been sold as slaves by their chiefs, because even the Moro-Naba and Province chiefs propagandize in favor of forced labor at each recruitment. They believe this so fully that satiric songs have been invented about the Chiefs and they are sung in the various campments [sic] at the time of assembly for recruitment and repeated all over the country."[10] It is difficult to say whether the Moro Naba's claims transparently represented the situation or views of migrant workers. They do suggest, however, that the struggle over labor in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1930s and 1940s was not merely one over the abstract concepts with which labor was to be described – a struggle primarily fought out in the upper levels of the administration, in posturing between ministers of colonies, governors general, and lieutenant governors – but rather one over the social meaning of labor, fought out between workers and the local political elites responsible for recruiting them. Though union leaders and politicians like Houphouët-Boigny would increasingly use the language of labor organization, efficiency, and governance in their postwar efforts to establish themselves as the most effective administrators of the colony,[11] workers phrased their critiques of working conditions in terms of the moral failures of their "leaders." In this context, Yacouba Sylla's community, in both the material success of its system of labor organizing and its philosophy of work, provided a powerful bridge between these two struggles and a way to resolve them both. But by insisting that the translatability of "work" into "labor" could only take place by describing both as gifts, the Yacoubist community forces us to rethink the meaning of "articulation" between economies. And by denying the ability of politics to capture the meaning of the struggle to organize work, they entered into a battle over the grounds on which politicians could legitimately claim to be managing and reforming labor.

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10 Moro Naba to Lieut. Gov. CdI., July 23, 1945 (ANS K-149 v. 26), quoted in Cooper, *Decolonization*, p. 192.

11 A sense of just how closed the circle of elites really was can be gained from the administrative reports of the period, which vacillated between seeing Houphouët-Boigny as an agent of the SCOA in its competition with the CFCI and the CFAO, and seeing him as an effective agent of the administration itself. Houphouët-Boigny was never thought of as a representative of any "African" interests other than those of the plantation owners. See the files in ANCI x-55-1413 (1555).

GIVING AND MORAL TUTELAGE

Benjamin Soares has done much to illuminate the networks of material and symbolic patronage that linked West African Muslim religious leaders and political elites in the late-colonial and postcolonial eras. Soares has detailed the increasing commodification and concomitant personalization of religious authority in Nioro across the twentieth century. In Nioro, believers gave gifts to holy men or ''saints,'' and in return, holy men acted as conduits for the divine recompense, or *baraji*, merited by the gifts. Such blessings brought profound benefits of both a visible and invisible nature, and through their distribution as well as the redistribution of gifts themselves, saints bolstered their followings, further increasing their attractiveness. The growth of the cash nexus during and after the colonial period opened up this field of authority to competition by religious entrepreneurs; the range of gifts and givers expanded, pilgrims flocked to Nioro, religious guidance became indexed to wealth, and the competition to give became as intense as the competition to receive. The benefits individual believers derived from this ''prayer economy'' included confirmation of salvation, assistance with personal problems, and victory in political struggles or business ventures. Soares notes that the independent Malian state has relied on Nioro's Muslim specialists, not only to help broadcast its authority outside the capital but also as central figures of the networks of personalized power that constitute public life itself. At the same time, relations between Nioro's saints and Mali's civil servants have frequently involved conflict and competition. As a result, both the benefits Muslim leaders could confer on the state and their ability to extract considerations from political figures have depended on the size of the prayer economy they manage, leading to ever more competition for followers and for patrons.[12] In many ways, Yacouba Sylla and his followers can be seen as playing a similar role in Côte d'Ivoire. There, as with Soares's Nioro saints, their importance clearly rested on a combination of material and symbolic benefits offered to both the state as a whole and individual political figures. In turn, their political visibility became a valuable commodity that individual followers could possess, inheriting their leader's anticolonial cachet and nationalist credentials. As with Soares's protagonists, they were Sufis who found no difficulty navigating political modernization or capitalist exchange.

But the Yacoubists also harked back to a representation of the Muslim leader as aloof from political power, reserving the right to exercise moral tutelage over rulers but refraining from taking direct responsibility for

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12 Benjamin F. Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor, 2005).

statecraft itself. It was that image that they thrust upon Hamallah, and it was in his image that they fashioned their own political project. They brought this moral equation into the heart of their understanding of gift giving. First of all, the Yacoubists placed little value on the accumulation of followers per se; they refrained from direct competition with other Sufi *shaykh*s and accepted few converts from among their non-Muslim neighbors. As a result the community remained very small (only a few thousand people) throughout the colonial and postcolonial eras. Secondly, they surrounded the acts that symbolized the transmission of *baraka* or overflowing abundance (*fayd*) to political and economic elites with qualifiers that attempted to restrict the convertibility of these benefits into fungible forms of capital. The gifts that in Nioro lubricated the prayer economy were, for the Yacoubists, much less functional.

The most important way the Yacoubists exercised moral influence over the Ivoirian state was through their alliance with Houphouët-Boigny. Administrative sources shed little light on the nature of Yacouba's early interactions with Houphouët, and oral sources flatten out their relationship into an abstract political affinity. Some insight, however, is provided indirectly by a series of letters that the West African *savant* and Tijani *murîd* Amadou Hampâté Bâ wrote to his close friend and the then-director of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, Théodore Monod. Revealingly, Hampâté Bâ's observations wrestle directly with the question of the fungibility of spiritual capital. In 1946, Hampâté Bâ left French Soudan for Côte d'Ivoire and during his trip he traveled to Gagnoa to make the acquaintance of Yacouba Sylla.[13] In the course of his stay, Yacouba encouraged him to travel to Yamoussoukro to meet Houphouët-Boigny, who had recently been elected as a deputy to the French constitutive assembly. Hampâté Bâ's letters betray a certain anxiety over his relationship with both Yacouba Sylla and Houphouët-Boigny. One of Hampâté Bâ's motives for the journey south had been to acquire financial patrons, and both Yacouba and Houphouët-Boigny seemed willing candidates. Yet Hampâté Bâ was conflicted about the personal, political, and spiritual implications of accepting the assistance of these two intimidating figures: ''I have to return immediately to Dioro and go on to Sofara. But I am beginning to realize that one does not travel for free. It takes money.

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[13] I am deeply indebted to Professor Louis Brenner who generously provided me with copies of the relevant letters, which Professor Monod had made available to him before the latter's death. Much of the content of these letters that touches on Hampâté Bâ's relationship with Yacouba and Houphouët-Boigny has appeared in Brenner's ''Amadou Hampâté Bâ: Tijânî francophone,'' in *La Tijâniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris, 2000), pp. 289–326, and many points of my analysis are indebted to his sensitive recounting of Hampâté Bâ's spiritual and intellectual development. An overview of Hampâté Bâ's stay in Côte d'Ivoire is given in Muriel Devey, *Hampâté Bâ: L'homme de la tradition* (Dakar, 1993), pp. 96–98.

Yacouba is ready to give it to me. But if he were to do so, what would be my merit before God?" In the end, Hampâté Bâ acquiesced, concluding: "I am open to Yacouba…"[14] At the same time, however, Hampâté Bâ was also looking for spiritual guidance, and his trip south was explicitly a kind of *ziyâra*, a quest to broaden his relationship with the disciples of Shaykh Hamallah, with whom he had become affiliated via Cerno Bokar Tal. Louis Brenner has noted Hampâté Bâ's positive appraisal of Yacouba's piety in the letters he wrote to Monod from Gagnoa and from Houphouët-Boigny's estate in Yamoussoukro.[15] It is clear that Hampâté Bâ considered Yacouba a bona fide spiritual leader, one from whom he could derive real moral benefit. He placed particular stress on Yacouba's status as a disciple of Hamallah and the suffering he had endured at the hands of the French as a result of his allegiance to the Shaykh. Hampâté Bâ seems to have been generally enlivened by his stay in Gagnoa and Yamoussoukro, completing some of his important early writing there. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that he saw both benefits he derived from his journey south, the economic and the spiritual, as linked in multiple ways. Not only did Hampâté Bâ continually refer (not without humor) to the necessity to fulfill material needs in order to enable the fulfillment of spiritual needs, he also made labor and gift giving central to the spiritual insights he saw Yacouba as offering. After disclaiming any particular insight into the political significance of "'Yacoubism,'" he told Monod in an early letter, that he was, "at the moment … able to say what Yacouba is and what Yacoubism is. We will speak of this again. Until then, I will sum up Yacoubism in three words: work–modesty–charity for all."[16]

It may be tempting to dismiss this rhetoric as a form of self-rationalization on the part of Hampâté Bâ, an attempt to salvage his spiritual purity from the indignities of accepting patronage. But Hampâté Bâ seems to have considered Yacouba's generosity and charity to be spiritually authentic, and he also appears to have taken a certain satisfaction in immersing himself in the activity that Houphouët-Boigny assigned to him. At the very least, he clearly took pleasure in the way his doing so shocked other prominent spiritual leaders. At one point, Seydou Nourou Tal – whom Hampâté Bâ blamed (apparently correctly) for attacks on him and his teacher Cerno Bokar in Bandiagara – came to Yamoussoukro where he encountered Hampâté Bâ. "Seydou Nourrou Tall found me here," he informed Monod. "He was going to Abidjan where he was to give another speech. He has never been so surprised. He found me in the middle of a hundred workers, in the process

14 Hampâté Bâ, Gagnoa, to Monod, Aug 1,1946a.
15 Brenner, "Amadou Hampâté Bâ," p. 308.
16 Hampâté Bâ, Gagnoa, to Monod, Aug. 1, 1946a.

of shelling cola nuts."[17] While Hampâté Bâ does not make explicit the reasons for Seydou Nourou's surprise, it seems clear that such work was not considered appropriate for religious figures of his stature. Emboldened by this encounter, he chastised his friend Monod for the latter's "disgust" at Hampâté Bâ's lowly employment. "I am," he insisted, "doing work that I feel to be honest in order to earn enough money, not to put on airs [*faire le superbe*], but to be able to work as I please without having to justify things to some sort of bureau of finances."[18]

The close link between work, charity, and spiritual elevation that Hampâté Bâ observed in Gagnoa and Yamoussoukro and which he contrasted with the standard behavior for elite *shaykh*s, as typified by Seydou Nourou Tal, provides, I would argue, the appropriate context for analyzing the way Yacouba approached his engagement with the material world in general and with Ivoirian politics in particular. Insofar as Houphouët-Boigny's goals appeared compatible with his own, Yacouba was willing to lend him the weight of his reputation and prestige (and purse); but he did so in a way that emphasized the underlying spiritual meaning of the transaction and, thereby, his own moral superiority. The center of gravity of all the rumors and documented facts about Yacouba's friendship with Houphouët is a story that purports to recount the first time Houphouët asked Yacouba for his support and the conditions Yacouba placed on helping him. The story is well known in Abidjan in general, and was repeated to me numerous times by various members of the Yacoubist community. It appeared in print for the first time in a work of reportage on Houphouët by the journalist Siradiou Diallo. According to Diallo's version, which he claims to have received from a "reliable source," when members of the SAA approached Houphouët in 1945 and asked him to stand for election to the French Constituent Assembly, he agreed on the condition that he receive the support of two men: the Moro Naba of Ouagadougou and Yacouba Sylla. The support of the Moro Naba having been secured,[19] Houphouët traveled to Gagnoa, arriving in the middle of the night, and obtained an audience with Yacouba. "Papa," Houphouët is to have said, "my friends have pressed me to declare myself a candidate for the next

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[17] Hampâté Bâ, Yamoussoukro, to Monod, Sept. 30, 1946.

[18] Ibid. Compare the story about a student of Ibrâhîm Niasse named Muhammad b. al-Nahwi who performed difficult manual labor for his *shaykh* even though he came from a noble *bidân* lineage. Rüdiger Seesemann, "The *Shurafâ*" and the 'Blacksmith': The Role of the Idaw ʿAlî of Mauritania in the Career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrâhîm Niasse (1900–1975)," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden, 2004), p. 81.

[19] In fact, the story collapses a complex series of events, including two separate ballots, in which Houphouët was forced to defeat Tenga Ouedraogo, the "Mossi" candidate with strong support in the Haute-Côte districts. See Aristide R. Zolberg, *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast* (rev. ed.) (Princeton, 1969), pp. 69–71.

elections to the French Constituent Assembly. I have thought about it a lot, but I cannot accede to this request unless I have not only your permission, but also your complete support and your prayers.''[20]

Houphouët-Boigny then presented Yacouba with an offering: two small jars filled with gold nuggets. Yacouba accepted Houphouët's request for support, but not this considerable present, telling him:

> I am sorry, but I cannot accept your gift. Keep it, you will have greater need of it than I. As for the rest, I want you to know once and for all that our excellent relationship can be founded neither on gold, nor on silver, nor on any kind of material good. I encourage you to present yourself for the election and my prayers will accompany you. However many opponents confront you, have no fear, you will carry the day. And you will go far, for that is your destiny. Your enemies will not stop you for this is the will of Allah the All-Powerful. The only compensation I want from you is a personal pledge before God. Promise me that no matter what the circumstances, and however high you may be placed one day, that you will never shed human blood.[21]

Granting that the story may be apocryphal, it is of considerable significance for what it tells us as a myth about Yacouba's role in the political culture of postwar Côte d'Ivoire. Read against the cultural texts of Baoulé elites who dominated politics in the country for nearly four decades, its meaning is fairly clear. Gold was a very special substance in the symbolic repertoire of Akan culture and religion. In a famous discussion of Asante political culture, T.C. McCaskie described gold as the fundamental symbol of accumulation conceptualized as a social act that helped constitute ''the fragile defensible space called culture,'' and that expressed the very essence of humanness. The ''assimilated presence'' of wealth, and most sublimely gold, ''was part of the most fundamental equation, the strengthening of culture (the realm of man) against nature (the realm of non-man).'' Insofar as gold also symbolized the systems of political authority and the prerogatives of personal power based on that defense of culture, the gift of gold was an act of patronage that conferred authority and obligation.[22] In a sense then,

20 Siradiou Diallo, *Houphouët-Boigny: le médecin, le planteur et le ministre (1900(?)–1960)* (Paris, 1993), pp. 92–93.

21 Ibid., pp. 93. The most detailed version of this story that I head from a member of the community came in an interview with Cheickna Sylla, Abidjan, March 12, 2001.

22 See T.C. McCaskie, ''Accumulation: Wealth and Belief in Asante History: I: To the Close of the Nineteenth Century,'' *Africa* 53 (1983), 23–43, and ''Accumulation: Wealth and Belief in Asante History: II: The Twentieth Century,'' *Africa* 56 (1986), 3–24. The quotation is from ''Nineteenth Century,'' p. 28.

Houphouët-Boigny's offer of gold to Yacouba was all at once an offer of patronage, an assertion of the kind of political culture Houphouët intended to inaugurate, and a dramatization of his Baoulé-ness. Yacouba's rejection of this gift thus stood as an assertion of his independence from both Houphouët's authority and his civilizational code.

The story takes on a different meaning, however, when read alongside the signs that clustered around Yacouba and his community. We have seen various ways in which gold as substance and symbol was central to Yacouba's moral reforms during his early preaching career, and the way that stories circulating in West Africa and France used rumors about gold to mock Yacouba and his followers.[23] Both within the community and among its critics, then, gold was a corrupting sign that could taint even those who claimed to reject it. Accepting or trading in gold was to become nothing more than a ''marabout;'' it was to partake in the uncontrolled conversion of a *shaykh*'s spiritual power into wealth and influence.[24] Yacouba's rejection of Houphouët-Boigny's gift thus condensed a set of overlapping but divergent meanings. The rejection of gold carried with it echoes of the abolition of dowries, it resonated with claims that labor and accumulation had underlying spiritual meanings, and it was a rejection of the moral rhetoric according to which acquisition represented the triumph of the human over the natural. Refusing this particular gift from Houphouët also served to assert a particular definition of giving – an unequal exchange in which moral authority rested with the giver – and defined other kinds of transactions as false gifts, as forms of corruption. It was with this distinction that Yacouba asserted his independence from the crass realm of political competition. The conditions Yacouba placed on helping Houphouët were similarly overdetermined. Though an obvious plea for Houphouët to act with constraint in his quest for power in general, they also gestured at the practice of human sacrifice, seen by many northerners as a key feature of Akan (or more generally, ''southern'') political authority.[25] Yacouba's rejection of Houphouët's gift and his setting forth of new rules governing

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23 See Chapter 4, nn70 and 71.

24 It was of course gold's similar position as the general equivalent value form that intrigued Marx. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, *The Process of Capitalist Production*, ed. Frederick Engles, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York, 1967).

25 Most Asante did not conceptualize ritual or judicial killings as ''sacrifices,'' with all the connotations of such a term in Judeo-Christian-Muslim contexts. It is not clear that this held for Asante's Muslim communities. The apparent lack of open criticism of the practice could indicate that Kumasi's *malam*s found a more accommodationist solution to the relationship between religious authority and state power. See Clifford Williams, ''Asante: Human Sacrifice or Capital Punishment? An Assessment of the Period 1807–1874,'' *IJAHS* 21 (1988), 433–441, and Ivor Wilks, ''Asante: Human Sacrifice or Capital Punishment? A Rejoinder,'' *IJAHS* 21 (1988), 443–452.

exchange and friendship thus asserted the superiority of one type of culture over another, with the two men standing in as symbols for the north–south cultural divide as a whole.

But that was not all it did. The idea that Islam or any other "modern" religion should come to replace Akan "customs" and the rule of ostentatious acquisition harmonized well with Houphouët-Boigny's own postindependence rhetoric about religion and public culture and proved easy to turn to the President's own ends. In 1961 and 1962, a series of bombings and assassination attempts on Kwame Nkrumah in neighboring Ghana had occasioned that nation's official transformation into a one-party state. Soon afterward, Houphouët denounced a series of similar conspiracies against himself and his administration, and quickly moved to imprison his perceived rivals and clamp down on dissent. This political emergency provided Houphouët with an opportunity to lay out his vision of the role of religion in the state. Rumors spread that witchcraft was at work in these shadowy attacks. Houphouët encouraged this line of thinking and elaborated it into a statement of policy. In a wide-ranging speech made to high-ranking officials, diplomats, and the families of those detained (some of whom had already died in detention), Houphouët explained that many of those who had conspired against him had consulted "marabouts" and made use of "fetishes." Such practices were not, he insisted, to be dismissed casually as superstitious or backward. Instead, they reflected a deep moral crisis in the country:

> Our foreign brothers, notably the westerners, see all problems through their western judgment, with their western reasons. But we are in Africa. It is time that we recognize the motivating forces in certain actions that do not coincide with the forces that motivate action in countries outside black Africa. We all have behind us, from the African archbishop to the lowest Catholic, from the Imam to the smallest believer, from the pastor to the smallest Protestant, nothing but animism and, at most, 2, 3 or 4 generations of Christians or Muslims.

He himself, he noted, was "born into an animist family." But it was not animism or traditionalism itself that was to blame for political obscurantism, cruelty, and instability. For, he insisted, "animism is tolerant... A fetishist never kills in cold blood." The "great evil" was rather "atheism, for formerly the fear of fetishes gripped society, and so there were no thieves." But today, "we have destroyed animism without replacing it with the serious practice of our religions. . . . We go to Mecca hiding the truth; there is no believer if there is no decency [honnêteté]." Fetishism without the coherent social order that had supported animism was nothing other than immoral anarchy. The only possible solution in the modern world was to "place God at the heart of

all our concerns'' so that the malevolent forces of fetishes could be controlled.[26]

This was not quite the role that Yacouba had envisaged for Islam in the new democracy. Rather it reflected the way Houphouët-Boigny – and no doubt others – perceived the fungibility of the moral and spiritual support Yacouba had offered him and the guarantee of civilization he had provided in turn. The Yacoubists did try to reassert control over their *shaykh*'s tutelary authority. According to the Fondation Cheikh Yacouba Sylla's (FOCYS) hagiography, Yacouba attempted to temper the President's repressive measures. He "asked Houphouët-Boigny not to take the lives of those suspected or presumed of being the authors [of plots against him]. The Cheikh reminded him of the advice that he gave him never to spill human blood, man being the most beloved of God's creatures."[27] But Houphouët was a master rhetorician. In the very same speech in which he denounced those who plotted against him, he playfully offered his audience two jokes that echoed (who knows how intentionally?) the rumors about his gift to Yacouba Sylla and the rumors about the origin of Yacouba Sylla's own wealth. In an aside that superficially jarred with the overall message of his performance, Houphouët mocked the acquisitiveness and duplicity of his Baoulé coethnics, to the reported laughter of his audience: "I remember how during the difficult days I was told . . . that the bankrupt chief of Daboukro wanted to sell his gold. The gold that the Baoulés had sold to his ancestors. I immediately went to Dabou to acquire this treasure. How great was my surprise: it was not gold, but copper." Then, in discussing the ways venal "marabouts" had corrupted his closest advisors by predicting futures for them that were in excess of their true destiny, he joked: "If a marabout had predicted for me an outrageous destiny, to become the President of France, or of the UN, or of Africa, I, Houphouet, who knows about fetishism, would not have given him the opportunity to make such predictions for someone else."[28]

Houphouët gave effect to his moral rhetoric in dramatic fashion when, in 1967, his maternal aunt died and he organized a state funeral for her in Yamoussoukro. Using the event as an opportunity to demonstrate how "traditional" beliefs were to be handled at the highest, most visible level of the polity, Houphouët explained that he had cleansed the ritual of all objectionable features, leaving only the minimum necessary to signal the respect a "son" was expected to provide for his "mother." His aunt had "forgone

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26 Transcript in André Boyer, "L'Exposé complet du Président," *Abidjan-Matin*, April 16, 1964, pp. 3, 2. See also Samba Diarra, *Les faux complots d' Houphouët-Boigny* (Paris, 1997); Zolberg, *One-Party*, pp. 352–355.
27 FOCYS, *Cheikh Yacouba Sylla ou le sens d'un combat* (Abidjan, 2002), p. 97.
28 Boyer, "Exposé du Président," pp. 2–3.

her [biological] son's right to inherit from the President," as would have otherwise been the case in a matrilineal family. Furthermore, "there were no human sacrifices at the funeral; the ceremonies were celebrated in broad daylight and in the presence of strangers; [and] the burial was not carried out by family members but by a public undertaker."[29] This funeral sketched the limits of acceptable public religious practice. As with his response to the alleged plots, Houphouët's decision may have been informed by regional political rhetoric: only a year before his aunt's funeral, the coup leaders who overthrew Nkrumah in Ghana had made much of their claim to have found embarrassing evidence of Nkrumah's long-rumored dependence on human sacrifice.[30] But most usefully for the Yacoubist imagination, this "reformed" version of a Baoulé funeral removed most of those features that would have been in conflict with the practices of Ivoirian Muslims. Secrecy and family involvement in the burial were codes for the invocations of the powers of ancestors. Matrilineal inheritance was similarly an unpalatable symbol of Akan distinctiveness, subverting both the *sharîʿa* and Sudanic conceptions of masculinity.[31] By reinventing the "extravagant" funerals that served as an important cultural marker of Bété and Baoulé identities and that stood as one of the most commonly remarked upon dividing lines between the "north" and the "south," Houphouët was able to retain this cultural marker while deflecting criticism that he relied on sorcery to stay in power.

The stories about Houphouët's and Yacouba's gold have, then, been creatively ambiguous, their meanings shifting with the context in which they are told. For those outside the community they helped make the case that the President succeeded in "capturing" the moral assertion Yacouba put forth. The Yacoubists in turn used them to take credit for the eschewing of human sacrifices and the broader moral transformation it symbolized, enabling a vision in which Yacouba is firmly in the vanguard of Houphouët-Boigny's project of "modernizing" the country's political culture. This line of thinking was also present in Yacouba's own reflections on his role in the development of Côte d'Ivoire and on his relationship with the other inhabitants of Gagnoa. In his 1970 interview with *Fraternité Matin*, Yacouba subtly emphasized his claim to have helped civilize "the Bété":

Our community is defined by unity, by faith, by work and by discipline. If the Bété define themselves in relation to me, I define myself in relation to

29 Zolberg, *One-Party*, p. 366.
30 Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa (London, 2004), pp. 90–91.
31 Where male elders typically sought to subvert the *sharîʿa* from the opposite direction by finding ways to arrange for effective male primogeniture or gerontocratic inheritance.

them! Since my definitive establishment here, I have found among the Bété people understanding, tolerance, great fraternity, which has enabled my community and me to live in great harmony with them, conforming to our philosophy.[32]

These last words established the asymmetry that he saw in his relationship with his neighbors: harmonious coexistence and ethnoreligious tolerance were qualities shared by the Yacoubists and the inhabitants of Gagnoa, but it was Yacouba who elevated this ecumenicalism to a philosophical level and enabled it to become a political project.

This gesture was made more explicit later in the same interview, when Yacouba discussed his role in mobilizing local sentiment in favor of independence:

I knew that the Bété people would come to grasp and understand the necessity of Ivoirian unity. Just now I spoke to you of my religious philosophy whose essential theme is unity. When you consider that this religion that we practiced in Côte d'Ivoire embraced Ivoirians, Voltaics, Malians, Senegalese, Mauritanians, to the point that the Ivoirians in [the community] spoke perfect Soninke, which is our original language. That seems to me to be a good definition of African unity.[33]

This suggestion, that the religious philosophy of the community was itself the model on which Ivoirian unity was based, and which utterly conflated unity and assimilation, was more than just self-aggrandizement. In this context, it was nothing less than a claim to coauthorship of the Ivoirian state's modernity.

MORAL GEOGRAPHY

Both Maître Cheickna Sylla and Cheick Ahmadou Sylla presented Yacouba's educational and philanthropic relationship toward the population of Gagnoa in paternalistic terms that explained his world-historical accomplishments in terms of the morality of space and environment. Yacouba had selected Gagnoa as his new home because there was "so much that needed to be done there." He wanted to set an example for those around him: his economic success was a demonstration of self-sufficiency and "race pride"; the cinemas

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32 *Fraternité Matin* (Abidjan), August 7, 1970, p. vii. It is not clear whether these quotes came directly from Yacouba or from his son Ahmadou Sylla, who was already acting as his father's *porte-parole*. The interviewer noted that Ahmadou had been his interlocutor, but he presents the quoted material as coming from Yacouba himself.

33 *Fraternité Matin*, August 7, 1970, p. viii. There is an explicit echo here of Houphouët's policy of "African Unity."

he opened were intended to "inform and educate" the residents of Gagnoa; and the wealth he generated enabled him to "feed, lodge, dress and heal" the children and indigents of the town. Even the transport company that he established was inspired by the plight of "the Bété." Yacouba observed them "moving around" frequently, visiting neighboring villages for commerce or socializing, but noted that they were blocked by the dense forest in which they lived and that they carried their heavy loads themselves. He decided that facilitating their movement would not only help them in the short term, it would also contribute to their becoming more civilized, following the example of the cultures of the mobile Muslims to the north.[34] Although it was not Yacouba but rather followers like Amadi Gata Kaba who had pioneered the move to Gagnoa,[35] the FOCYS's history credits Yacouba with having foretold the move and given it a very precise spiritual meaning. In 1930, the convoy that was escorting him to his detention in Sassandra passed through Gagnoa. There, as in other towns where he had passed as a prisoner, a crowd is said to have gathered to see this dangerous criminal and religious leader. Seeing the onlookers filled with pity at his lowly condition, Yacouba told them: "Do not lament over my fate; it may be that rather than die, I will return here even to Gagnoa and plant a kapok tree in whose shade many of you shall come to be refreshed and restored."[36]

Sometime during the 1940s, a cadre of elderly "saints" – followers of Yacouba from "the first hour" and respected for their piety and age – circumambulated the *zâwiya* in Gagnoa, leaving a lasting impression both on the community and on the local population.[37] As with Yacouba's circumambulation of Hamallah's house in Mederdra, this was the kind of practice that guaranteed controversy. French Islamologists as well as some African scholars considered displacing the ritual circumambulation (*tawâf*) from its "proper" site, the *Ka'ba*, an offence to the sanctity of Mecca and the *hajj*. Worse, it could be considered an extreme form of the Sufi practice of *ziyâra* or visitation, in which the dwellings or more frequently tombs of Sufi *walî*s became sites of pilgrimage. This was often seen as undermining the uniqueness of God by associating a practice intended for God's shrine, the *Ka'ba*, with the shrines of pious humans. In the eyes of *ahl al-sunna*-style reformers these practices verged on the deadly sin of *shirk* (polytheism); for French observers it

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34 FOCYS, *Sens d'un combat*, pp. 67, 90–95. Aliou "Mama" Sylla, Fodie Doukoure, and Tijane Sylla, Gagnoa, April 28, 2001. Cheickna Sylla, March 12, 2001, May 19, 2001, and May 21, 2001.

35 See Chapter 3, n8.

36 FOCYS, *Sens d'un combat*, p. 67; Aliou "Mama" Sylla, Fodie Doukoure, and Tijane Sylla, Gagnoa, April 28, 2001. I was also told this story in many informal conversations with members of the community.

37 Tijane Sylla, Gagnoa, June 10, 2001.

merited the most extreme term of condescension toward "African" Islam: *anthropolâtrie*. Sometimes a displaced *tawâf* was likened to even more extreme forms of heteropraxy, such as the examples J.C. Froelich put forth of a village named Bona where a Qur'an had been installed in a case to which the local population made sacrifices, or the village of Massala where a "fetish" with some sort of Islamic association was kept in a house around which processions were held.[38]

 But the practices of Yacouba and his followers did, in fact, have a long history in Muslim West Africa, deriving not from "pre-Islamic" beliefs but rather from Sufi spiritual methods and the writings of *sharî ᶜa*-minded scholars who were sensitive to the vast distances between West Africa and Mecca and to the high costs and risks of making the trip. West Africans had long been aware of two techniques for accomplishing the *hajj* without physically journeying to Mecca. The first, *mujâwara* – constant contemplation of God and Muhammad (lit. proximity) – achieved a spiritual rather than physical proximity with Mecca, and while it required arduous self-discipline, for those who could achieve it the state was at least as meritorious as the *hajj* itself. The second, *khatwa* – miraculous performance of the *hajj* by instantaneously flying to the *Kaᶜba*, performing the pilgrimage duties and returning (lit. step or skip) – was an ability frequently ascribed to West African *walî*s and *shaykh*s.[39] Such techniques may have become more useful from the seventeenth century on, when performance of the physical *hajj* became uncommon for West Africans. In that century, some jurists in the Western Sudan had adopted the opinion that the political and social chaos of the region (which had been thrown into disorder by the Moroccan conquest of Songhay in 1591) prevented the safe completion of the journey to the Hijaz, and that West Africans were thus exempt, or even legally prohibited, from undertaking the *hajj*. This idea was more or less endorsed by the great Sufi *shaykh* Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti in the eighteenth-century and became a standard interpretation.[40] The rulers of the Sokoto Caliphate briefly overturned this opinion, and Sultan Muhammad Bello even made it an obligation of rulers to facilitate the *hajj*. However, Bello's later treatise on the subject, *Tanbîh al-râqid*, quietly reverted to the earlier position and argued that participation in *jihâd* and recitation of *dhikr* were appropriate substitutes for the arduous *hajj* from West Africa. As his honorific would

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38 J.C. Froelich, *Les musulmans d'Afrique noire* (Paris, 1962), p. 134.

39 ᶜUmar al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa: An Historical Study with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century* (Khartoum, 1972), pp. 59, 62–63n8. Some of Hamallah's own followers seem to have believed he himself performed this feat weekly. Amadou Ba, *Histoire du Sahel occidental malien: des origines à nos jours* (Bamako, 1989), p. 210.

40 al-Naqar, *Pilgrimage Tradition*, pp. 46–49.

suggest, al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal's efforts at reform and proselytization of the Tijaniyya brought renewed interest in the *hajj*, but also increased its association with political pretensions.[41]

Thus, like many other Islamic practices, shifts in attitudes toward the *hajj* fell into a clear pattern. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, scholars embraced a particularly tolerant attitude toward mystical, *bâtini* (esoteric) techniques that provided an alternative to *zâhiri* (exoteric) interpretations of the *sharîʿa* and took into account local circumstances. With the advent of more radical reformism in the nineteenth century, and particularly with the Tijani *jihâd* of al-Hajj ʿUmar Tal, scholars began to put more weight on contact with the Hijaz and to link participation in the *hajj* with claims to political authority. The impact of European conquest was ambiguous; colonial officials sought to discourage or at least carefully regulate contact between West Africa and the Middle East – when officials suspected that the *hajj* accorded opportunities for "pan-Islamic" anticolonial propaganda – but at the same time the consortium of French Islamologists and African Muslim elites who established the guidelines for religious orthodoxy helped make a less nuanced understanding of the centrality of the physical *hajj* dominant within Islam. The material effects of European rule also had an impact, as the improved transportation opportunities that developed in the twentieth century brought an end to the difficult conditions for the journey that had led scholars like Sidi al-Mukhtar to exempt West Africans from the *hajj*.

Thus while the displaced *tawâf* rested on respected, scholarly sources that in turn drew their inspiration from the Islamic mainstream, it also signaled respect for local spiritual power and a rejection of the new orthodoxy that came to dominate the Western Sudan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It likely also reflected a certain anxiety about the distance of West Africa Muslims from the holy places of Mecca and Medina and about the difficulties of acquiring the spiritual prestige or sophisticated knowledge associated with the Hijaz. But we should not confuse a desire to validate local knowledge with a rejection of or resistance to the Islamic heartland. For West African Muslims, including Yacouba and other Sufis, were always eager to demonstrate links with Mecca, Medina, or Cairo and to establish the validity of their thought in global terms. They are better seen, then, as exemplifying a more tolerant and ultimately pluralistic approach to ritual knowledge, one that gave as high a place to locally meaningful and esoteric understandings of Islam as to the more centralized and exoteric ones sanctioned by elites, Hijazi scholars or French "experts."

41 Ibid., pp. 54–61, 118–123, 132–133.

At the same time, however, the "poles" established by Hamallah and Yacouba were not merely "local." They defined, for Yacoubists at least, an absolute spatial orientation, which had direct consequences for spiritual practice. Since the 1970s, the Yacoubists have expanded out of West Africa; though formal *zâwiya*s have not been established, enclaves of the community exist in most other Francophone African countries, in France, the Netherlands, Canada, and the United States. But throughout this expansion Gagnoa has remained the privileged pole, and there is some anxiety over the ability of the community's social power to extend so far. Indeed, even closer to home geography makes a difference. The year before my arrival in Côte d'Ivoire a group of Malian women had objected to the marriage of a woman of noble background (from the Sylla family in fact) to a man from a casted background. The marriage took place, but, Cheickna Sylla confessed, these marriages were always harder in Mali and Mauritania, where Yacouba fought against a deeply ingrained tradition of social hierarchy.[42] Such an apparently shocking departure from the fundamental principles of Yacouba's teachings revealed the diminishing power of those teachings as one moved farther from Gagnoa. An unresolved tension remained, then, between the value of the "north" as the origin of Yacouba's civilizational ideals and his authority (the pole established by Hamallah) and the uniqueness of the "south" as the place where Yacouba had been given the power not just to expand that civilization but to radically transform it. For in the end, Côte d'Ivoire may have been the object of Yacouba's modernizing, but it asserted its own "alternative" to his projects, establishing its definitive importance not just in the Yacoubists' success but in their very survival.

One of the most perceptive historians of Africa has suggested that modernity always appears to the outside observer as an unpredictable, discontinuous "solvent of past histories" and as a Weberian "disenchantment of the world."[43] But it may be more helpful to abandon modernity as an objective fact, whose origins and modalities of appropriation can be debated, and think instead about modernization as a figure of rhetoric that informs a set of strategies, a conceptual tool used by the people in our narratives rather than as something that happens to them. From this vantage point, not all modernizations are predicated on rupture, dissolution, or disenchantment. Yacouba Sylla's followers spoke to one another about economic and political development and addressed themselves to Houphouët-Boigny, the Ivoirian government, and their neighbors using the rhetorical and intellectual

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42 Cheickna Sylla, Abidjan, May 19, 2001.

43 T.C. McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850–1950* (*London,* 2000), p. 116.

repertoire of West African Sufism and not the vocabulary of, for example, free labor or citizenship or the circulation of capital. For them, modernity was a confirmation both of the presentness of the past and of God's firm presence in past and present alike. The Yacoubist vision of modernity emerged not from the West but from the North (of West Africa), and not as a decentering alternative to Western techno-politico-economic transformations, but as its own self-contained, fully centered project. Its displacements were not those it foisted on the colonial metropole, but those forced on it by its own "south." In any case, its place of origin and actualization mattered less than the fact that space itself was nothing more than a means by which God could demonstrate his ability to transcend what appeared to humans as binary oppositions. It was a vision in which modernity mattered, but only as the most recent manifestation of God's grace, channeled via the endlessly repeated transmission of blessings from one Sufi teacher to another.

Conclusions

GIFTS OF THE PAST

Achille Mbembe has insisted that it is impossible to understand the "logics of the disordering [la mise en désordre] of colonialism in Africa" simply by analyzing the structures of colonial rule and then identifying instances of African resistance in relation to them. What is needed instead, he argues, is an examination of acts of "indiscipline and *insubmission*" in all their "misfires," "equivocations," and "slippages," their "very incoherent plurality."[1] In this Mbembe echoes Gayatri Spivak's famous claim that the "colonized subaltern subject" is "irretrievably heterogeneous."[2] But Mbembe also distinguishes the process of identifying "interprétations indigènes" – in the sense of locating the procedures of *insubmission* and the reasons for their plurality within debates over authority, equality, and belonging and the political articulation of those debates – from a "substantivist drifting that seeks to explain everything in reference to a collective mentality, disconnected from contexts, time and agents."[3] Mbembe thus leaves open a possibility that Spivak forecloses: writing a meaningful history of *insubmission*.

To what extent is the history of Yacouba Sylla and his followers one of *insubmission*? Aside from its rough beginnings, the community can be seen from 1934 on as moving in close sympathy with the major trends in West African history, establishing good relations with the colonial state, finding a home in nationalist movements, and surviving the rougher waters of postcolonial Côte d'Ivoire with fewer losses than might have been expected. Only on the ideational level does radicalism seem to have persisted. The thinking of community leaders and the historical content of ritual practice retained a quality of *insubmission* until the end. The semantic and performative aspects

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1 Achille Mbembe, "Domaines de la Nuit et Autorité Onirique dans les Maquis du Sud-Cameroun (1955–1958)," *JAH* 32:1 (1991), 93–97.
2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, 1988), p. 284.
3 Mbembe, "Domaines de la Nuit," p. 98.

of gift giving provided Yacouba Sylla and his followers with a vital rhetorical device in the political articulation of their positions on the nature of religious authority, on the place of hierarchy and inequality within a Muslim society, and on the relationship between the new materialities of the twentieth century and a spiritual understanding of self and community. As ambiguous symbols that enabled translation back and forth between economic, social, and metaphysical registers, gifts were an important tool in the mobilization of the community's history. They allowed the reordering of past events to facilitate intervention in any number of struggles in ways that preserved the overarching, meaning-giving narrative. By conceptualizing the labor of its members as a form of gift giving, the community inscribed its material success and its relations with the Hamawiyya as a whole within a theology of God's self-disclosure, and permitted such a range of interpretation that members could describe their organization as everything from ''true socialism,'' to an ideal form of African unity, to an entirely otherworldly spiritual project. This may not seem all that subversive, in light of the apparently conservative economic and political projects to which these ideas were put. But this discursive *insubmission* has in fact two far-reaching implications.

The first is methodological. The long tradition in western thought of fretting over the impossibility of the pure gift – the combination of pure disinterestedness with a socially sanctioned expectation of reciprocation – is the precise corollary of the paradox of agency, with its inability to reconcile autonomy and constraint. In the context of Yacouba and his followers the potential constraints are both diachronic and synchronic: Whence came the ideas that they wove into their elaborate and ritualized sense of the past? Was this mimicry of French rhetoric about freedom and religious tolerance, or the transformation of something inherited from the past? Such paradoxes are encapsulated in what Jacques Derrida called the ''spectral'' properties of gifts: their continuing ability to do what they should not be capable of doing, to retain a residue of autonomy in a structure of compulsion and an underlying logic of social utility in an act of generosity. Just as Cheick Ahmadou Sylla recognized that his spiritual master, Shaykh Hamallah, was, in many ways, a product of French colonialism, the West African intellectual and social tradition was a gift the past gave to the Yacoubists, an inherited repertoire of ideas, practices, symbols, and social forms that both constrained and empowered them.[4] In the language of the Yacoubists – and of other West African Sufis – this paradox maps onto the fundamental hermeneutic distinction between the *zâhir* and the *bâtin*. For most Sufis the difference between the

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4 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago, 1992).

two levels of reality is an illusion, one that can be resolved by sufficient submersion in the *bâtin*.

But for historians a less dialectical, less reductive solution may be possible. As Pierre Bourdieu famously recognized, it is the fact that the giving and receiving of gifts must unfold over time – like the narrative – that gives them the ability to reconcile these opposites.[5] The act of giving links distinct actions at distinct moments without reducing the relation between them to one of causality. So too the approach to emplotment and contextualization adopted here attempts to reflect the indeterminate influence of repertoires on actions and the mutually constitutive dependency of meaning and context. The solution is not perfect. Narratives create their own intelligibility, their own assumed knowledges, as they progress. This is both their strength and their weakness. They allow us to choose a different starting point, to privilege a different setting, to demonstrate the interpretive utility of a particular slice of the past. But they also naturalize that setting and lock off other possible threads of explanation. Solutions to this problem are illusory. The fragmented, postmodern narrative, changing directions midstream and attempting to give every story its due, forsakes building its own setting and so simply reproduces that of its assumed audience. Its polyphony becomes a technique for total description, inevitably leading back to the metropolitan gaze. Histories inspired by structuralist and poststructuralist ideas about power and representation ironically unfurl an imperial tapestry before the reader, giving both elite and subaltern agencies their due by relating both back to a central explanatory framework and distinctly Eurocentric assumed knowledges.

It seems preferable to acknowledge the arbitrariness and inevitability of our narrational power and to locate it in vantages outside both the new approaches to empire and domination and the teleologies and closed vocabularies of authentic histories, in all their nationalist, confessional, and communitarian varieties. Each minor episode in the story of Yacouba Sylla opens a window onto other frameworks, forcing us to justify our choice of scene. The written sources on Fodie Sylla's activities in Koutiala, for example, provoke questions about the degree of support he received from local residents and about the broader grievances his apparently anticolonial and apocalyptic preaching may have articulated. These in turn conceal other questions that cannot be answered from this vantage, questions about how different groups of people in and around Koutiala perceived Fodie's activities during this period, about how they attempted to make use of his presence, his prestige, and his ideas to accomplish preexisting goals, about the new goals

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5 See Chapter 8, n4.

that became imaginable because of his actions, and so on. Just as the events of Kaédi appeared to many to turn around Yacouba Sylla, obscuring the roles played by other actors, it may be that events that in our story turn around Fodie Sylla had little to do with him for most of those involved. But an explanation involving Fodie, and by extension the Hamawiyya, is inescapable given our narrative framework. Only by approaching the story of Fodie Sylla's "plot" as part of the social history of Koutiala, with its own distinct center, could other dynamics emerge. Similarly, I have under-emphasized the contingency and constructedness of colonial economies and political regimes, which, with a few exceptions, serve as little more than furnishing within many of the story's scenes. I have probably overhistoricized the various individual intellectual artifacts examined, usually limiting my vision of the work they do to the field that connects them to one another, to the detriment of their technical qualities. I have, for example, avoided an analysis of the esthetics of the community's songs and dances, nor have I sought to determine the precise role Yacouba played in the development of African commercial agriculture or passenger and freight transport in Côte d'Ivoire.

To this extent the framing of the present study mimics the organization of the administration's *fiches de renseignement* and the community's hagiographies. But where the colonial and hagiographic stories about Yacouba revealed themselves to be fundamentally incoherent in spite of their efforts at total description, full of the unintended presences of ghostwriters and spiritual visitations, the approach here welcomes such displacements as a way to preserve the contingency of the relationship between action and scene and between agent and actor. The historical stories told and dramatized by the followers of Yacouba Sylla contain a wonderfully rich and maddeningly ambiguous set of representations. They constantly reveal with one word what they try to conceal or transfigure with another. This is most evidently the case with the social background of many of Yacouba's early followers. The more marginal the members of the community, the more Yacouba's transformation of suffering took on the world-historical significance of the divine manifestation of God within creation. Yet at the same time, to be an *ancien captif* was above all to be burdened by *too much history*, a history that was itself the story of an absence – the absence of acknowledged free ancestry. This paradox was itself creative; it displaced the logic of emancipation and liberation even as it made them available to those who could find themselves in the story.

The second benefit derived from an examination of the *insubmission* of Yacoubist thought is properly historiographic. It allows us to glimpse what went into the formation of a religious community, and the relation between such a community and the long sweep of West African history. Yacoubist leaders are particularly proud of the image of their community as a successful,

pluralistic microcosm of modern West African Muslim society. On display in this microcosm were BaOumaru Sylla the poet – easily the equivalent of Shakespeare or Montesquieu, I was told on more than one occasion – Ba Abdoulaye Tandia the great mechanic, Yahya Marega the learned scholar, accountants who could organize double-entry bookkeeping without a western education, and others who had been chiefs, Hamawi *muqaddam*s, profound mystic visionaries, wealthy merchants, tireless laborers, great musicians, and so on. It was as if some deep plenitude principle had been applied to every specialized skill.[6] This conceit reached its fullest incarnation in the figure of Yacouba Sylla himself, *éminence grise* of the Ivoirian state, financial supporter of the Hamawiyya, friend and comrade of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and the civilizing force who brought Muslim, Sudanic culture to the dark, bloody forests of the "pagan south." In this mode, the inclusion of former slaves and casted persons as valued followers – not to mention Bamana, Mossi, *bidân*, Fulbe, and even Bété laborers – became just one more way of fleshing out the Yacoubist panoply, symbolizing Yacouba's impeccable hospitality, overwhelming generosity, and thorough ecumenicalism.

  Such a compositional attitude toward religious solidarity was not simply a wise political or economic strategy; it was a spiritual achievement. The diversity of ethnicities and social categories in the group was the sign of the rightness of its practices. Ahmadou Sylla explicitly presented it as the temporal shadow of the invisible spiritual gifts Yacouba had received from Hamallah. More materially minded members of the family also acknowledged that the thriving of the community as a whole was the sign of Yacouba's grace and his hard work. This compositional logic was put at the service of the community's leaders' commitment to patriarchal authority. As Ahmadou Sylla was fond of repeating (by way of mocking my political provincialism) "this is not a democracy!"[7] Nor was it an "open" society in the sense imagined by those theorists who seek to emphasize hybridity, unboundedness, and the multiplicity of identities. The adoption of Soninke names by all converts into the community and the use of a distinctive dialect of Soninke as both a ritual language and the medium of daily communication served to preserve secrecy

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6 The community still goes to great lengths to diversify its skills, training its children in every available field and aiming for complete self-sufficiency and a well-rounded cosmopolitanism. Compare Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa," *JAH* 36 (1995), 91–120.

7 Although he quickly pointed out that the rejection of democracy within the community was in no way incompatible with its support for the democratization of the country, just as its firm, public attachment to Islam was the very source of its commitment to a secular, lay state. He seems to have attempted to impress the same point on Boukary Savadogo, "Confréries et pouvoirs. La Tijaniyya Hamawiyya en Afrique occidentale (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger): 1909–1965" (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Provence, 1998), p. 332.

and to regulate the community's economic activities; it also ensured that the various knowledges and forms of symbolic and material wealth that the community's members generated could be carefully managed by its leadership. And no matter how multiethnic, ecumenical, or self-consciously modernist Yacouba's followers and their descendants became, Islam and Sufism remained the symbolic touchstones of their public identity.

Yacouba's commitment to inclusiveness (and exclusivity), and his clear genius at surrounding himself with people of talent (including those with esoteric powers and those who responded to such powers and gave them meanings that were unacceptable to those with different understandings of the purpose of reform), were indispensable conditions of the material success that forced other Hamawis to take him seriously. Yet insofar as this very tolerance remained socially scandalous in the Muslim cultures of West Africa, Yacouba could never escape the suspicion that he had "bought" his legitimacy. Thus, while within the community Yacouba is the example par excellence of the *shaykh* who gives more than he receives and who abolishes any hint of *maraboutage*, for other members of the Hamawiyya he is the epitome of a *marabout*. In this sense, the political or even personal question of the relationship of Yacouba to Hamallah encodes the broader question of Yacouba's position within the longer tradition of debates on religious reform. For Yacouba's clearest contribution to the techniques of reform can also be seen as at the center of his troubles within the Hamawiyya: his unique conception of the *zâwiya* as a residential compound and as being open to men and women alike. The community's *zâwiya*s echoed Yacouba's childhood experiences in Nioro where he would sleep in Hamallah's *zâwiya*, ignoring the *dhikr* of the other faithful until his *shaykh* arrived; but they were also a transformation of that remembered space. The idea that devotion to one's *shaykh* could become so normalized a part of social life that it did not transcend other activities but rather encompassed them, and that this level of spiritual refinement was not something reserved for a few rare ascetics, but rather could be the basis for an entire community, with a commitment to equality in *dhikr* that did not stop at the boundary of gender, was at bottom a rejection of the normal practices of *tarîqa*s symbolized by the *zâwiya* as a place for meditation and devotion presided over by an authorized recipient of the order's *wird*.

The most biting critique that could be leveled against Yacouba from within the doctrines of the Tijaniyya, that Yacouba behaved like a *muqaddam* without proper authorization, was one that he simply shrugged off. Such an attitude can be seen as proof that Yacouba was simply a renegade, giving into the superstitions of his followers and appropriating his link to Hamallah as a tool of legitimation, or it can be seen as the exploitation of a possibility inherent in the Tijaniyya itself. For the very techniques that Ahmad al-Tijani developed to legitimate his own *tarîqa* at the expense of more conservative

ties linking him to older *shaykh*s had been put to use once again in the early Hamawi movement to bypass the twelve-bead hegemony in Nioro. These ideas could not easily be put back in the bottle. Revelatory visions, miraculous signs of *baraka*, the inversion of age norms, and persecution by an intolerant political elite were not topoi that could be easily monopolized. Furthermore, Hamallah's refusal to allow the *tarîqa* to become part of the apparatus of colonial rule needed only a slight reformulation to develop into a rejection of the Tijaniyya's own hierarchical, regimented structure. In this light, Yacouba was simply a very creative agent of the reformist impulse, with solid grounds on which to claim descent from Hamallah.

It may also be possible to step outside the narrow story of Yacouba Sylla from this very particular vantage and catch a glimpse of the wider range of reformist creativity in his era, particularly if we turn to paradoxical advantage Nietzsche's well-known observation about historians' "naked admiration for success." For Yacouba and his followers emerged out of an environment that produced a number of heterodox and heteroprax religious movements that have left few records.[8] But it is not just the documentary archive that perpetuates this neglect. It is a problem with all historical narratives that assume a coherent explanation and interpretation across different scales of description. There is no doubt that the French created a class of "marabout" intermediaries – in French Soudan via Seydou Nourou Tal, as much as in the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone where they relied on Malik Sy, Sidiyya Baba, and their successors – patronized *qâdî*s, and sought to codify "Muslim customary law." But colonial rule also made the relationship between orthopraxis and governance more complicated than many Muslim elites would have preferred. It forced a return, in this sense, to pre-*jihâd* strategies where religious leaders had used their wealth, ritual powers, and moral suasion to pressure political elites into behaving appropriately, and it thus provided a space for insurgent movements even as the administration readily lent its authority and force to the defense of the status quo. In this, the Yacoubists' rhetorical strategies have mirrored those of, for example, the Murids: when confronted by a tension between the *zâhiri* appearance of accommodation and a claim to

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8 This process has often been occluded by debates over *ahl al-Sunna* reformers who attacked the "heteroprax" and the "orthodox" alike. When it has been addressed, usually as symptomatic of an acceleration in grassroots Islamization, it has typically been seen as a source of embarrassment for traditional elites, who have sought to eliminate it in order to outflank the "Wahhabis." This was the perspective that gave rise to the counterreform movement whose greatest theorist was Marcel Cardaire and who ascribed the rise of heretical movements to the dissolution of the solidary bonds of precolonial African society by the individualism of modern society and the failure of the colonial administration to support more moderate, indigenous, reformist movements. Marcel Cardaire, "L'Islam et le terroir africain," *Etudes Soudaniennes* (Koulouba) 2 (1954). See particularly the passages on Soninke and the Futa-Kayes belt, pp. 150–151.

bâtini insubmission, emphasize both the importance and the orthodoxy of the latter.[9] It is tempting, for instance, to see Yacouba's reported trip to visit Amadou Bamba in 1926, in which Hamallah sought to learn from his Senegalese colleague, as having as much to do with investigating the nature and results of the latter's entente with the administration as it did with learning about labor mobilization or antimaterialism. If this trip took place as recounted, Yacouba's sublation of economic cooperation into spiritual transcendence may have served to occlude an attempt by Hamallah to cooperate with the French. Indeed, it may be the threat that Yacouba represents to the vital motif of Hamawi martyrdom that makes him so unpalatable to other disciples of the Nioro *shaykh*.[10]

The same problem can be seen with historical analyses of social change. The ability of reformists in the twentieth-century to make radical attacks on norms that had been unassailable in the nineteenth century was largely an unintended consequence of colonial rule. But if de facto emancipation was largely a matter that slaves took into their own hands, where are the traces of the intellectual foundations of slave actions? The Yacoubists' contribution in both matters makes clear the difficulties that faced anyone who swam against the prevailing ideational current. Heteroprax, ''popular'' or mahdist movements were sensationalized in the writings of ethnographers and Orientalists, criminalized by their mode of incorporation into the official reports and archives, and generally rendered marginal and sterile by swift suppression by an alliance of the French and more ''respectable'' Muslims.

The ability of Yacouba's community to provide us with insights into failed movements helps add a largely missing element to our understanding of the Islamic tradition in West Africa. The very fact that French Islamologists, administrators, and local Muslim accommodationists put so much effort (and violence) into enforcing the new orthodoxy indicates that whatever was going on ''below'' was something more than just atavism or ahistorical ''popular Islam.'' Along these lines, it is tempting to see the followers of the great twelve-bead Senegalese Tijani *shaykh* Ibrâhîm Niasse as slightly later and less radical analogues of the Yacoubists. There are many echoes of Yacouba Sylla and Hamallah in Niasse's story. A decade or so after Yacouba's revival in Kaédi, Manna Abba ''Shaykhani'' was accused by senior twelve-bead Tijani *muqaddam*s in central Mauritania of provoking women to leave their families to take part in Ibrâhîm Niasse's ''mystical excesses.'' One of his disciples, Muhammad al-Amîn, came under French scrutiny for supposedly ecstatic and antinomian practices, mostly based on information provided them by Niasse's rivals in the Hâfizi branch of

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9 It is on this rather subtle level that Cheikh Anta Babou's *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadou Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Sengal, 1853–1913* (Athens, OH, 2007), plays an apologetic role.

10 See Chapter 2, nn32 and 33, and Chapter 5, n51. I am indebted to David Robinson for this insight.

the Tijaniyya. Niasse also had his own scandal that echoed one of the key Yacoubist social reforms: When, in 1954, he married a woman who was a *sharîfa* and a member of an elite *bidân* family, some of his detractors dredged up stories suggesting he was the descendant of casted blacksmiths. Rüdiger Seesemann has discovered that while some of Niasse's followers attempted to deny the allegations and others simply ignored them, some turned it into an asset. "Instead of reducing his status," Seesemann notes, "the low descent added to his achievements and made his career even more spectacular." Niasse's own son pointed to his father's supposed background and the fact that he had nonetheless won the support of Mauritanians, notorious for their "disapproving attitude toward black Africans," as "a Divine secret."[11] Though Niasse's own career was quite a successful one, and he achieved that success in the heart of Muslim West Africa, it is perhaps revealing that, like Yacouba, many of his most ardent followers have, in recent decades, come from areas where the Tijaniyya (and in some cases Islam itself) is a more recent arrival.

But everything that was understated, moderated, or disavowed about Niasse was overt and celebrated among the Yacoubists, making their success all the more remarkable. That it was a success achieved by Yacouba's taking to heart the advice the oddly solicitous administrators of Sassandra gave him, that this represented a capitulation to the needs of the Ivoirian cash-crop economy, and that it was a path that could lead to repoliticization because of a consonance of interests with figures like Houphouët-Boigny, only serves to disguise just how unlikely it was that the community could make such a transition. Like the Murids, they carved their *dâr al-Islâm* out of the wilderness, but they also had it given to them. The unintended consequences of French rule that created a new geography for Islam in West Africa, a new space into which someone like Yacouba could be exiled and then find himself far from the pressures exerted by the orthodox guardians of religion and culture. But because the memory of past events became so central to the community's self-conception, and because the recorded thoughts of outside observers are more dense than for many such movements, something of the early reforms that Yacouba's revival embraced has survived.[12]

Here, then, the esoteric secret that is revealed is not the deeper truth behind surface appearance, but that of a past whose future was a dead end. The paths that successfully led from the colonial past to the present were indeed mostly paths of accommodation. The story of Yacouba Sylla allows us to glimpse

[11] Rüdiger Seesemann, "The *Shurafâ'* and the 'Blacksmith': The Role of the Idaw ʿAlî of Mauritania in the Career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrâhîm Niasse (1900–1975)," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden, 2004), pp. 72–98, quotes p. 93.

[12] See Cheikh Anta Babou, "Contesting space, shaping places: making room for the Muridiyya in colonial Senegal, 1912–45," *JAH* 46:3 (2005), 405–426.

those paths that were lost in the wilderness, ones so entangled with the brute realities of colonial overrule that they ceased to lead anywhere. What they reveal is the creative intellectual activity of ex-slaves, casted persons, young women, and others engaged in the process of reinventing their social and cultural lives in the context of a complicated set of negotiations between religious elites, French administrators, and the forces of socioeconomic change. There may be many other such cases; it may only be a question of looking at them in the proper light. The Hamawiyya seems to have served as an important umbrella group for many different insurgencies, many of which moved far from the founding *shaykh*'s own vision and concerns. Hamallah's own considerable reputation for piety and his important commercial ties and local allies gave the *tarîqa* the opportunity to grow and put down roots that were deep enough to survive the colonial era, his own persecution notwithstanding. The conflicts around the Hamawiyya as a whole died out in the last years of French rule and have left few obvious legacies. But many less well-placed or truly "rustic" branches of the Hamawiyya were quickly amputated, losses whose significance cannot be judged through retrospective analysis. It was largely luck that spared Yacouba's community from this fate. Had they not had the ironic good fortune of being exiled far away from the reaches of the Cerno Amadou Sakhos of Kaédi and blessed with sympathetic administrators who knew and cared little about Islam, had they not had a genius for commercial agriculture, transport, and commerce, and had Hamallah not apparently felt strong, genuine affection for Yacouba, the community might have gone the way of groups like the mysterious al-Himal or Ahl Houvra,[13] cut off by the Nioro leadership, scattered to the winds or ground into the dust by the French, ostracized and undermined by the networks of "legitimate" Muslim elites engaged in various efforts of reform and counterreform.[14]

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[13] Apparently antinomian revivalists in the Sahara claiming affiliation with Hamallah and sharply suppressed by the French during World War II. See Rapp. de Lanoue, Chef Sub. Timbédra, Cer. Néma, Nov 4, 1942; Circular Haut Commiss. de l'Afrique Française, Dec 1, 1942; Teleg. ltr. Direction Générale des Affaires Politiques, Administratives et Sociales, Mar 17, 1943 (CAOM 14Miom 2170 (ANS 9G-32) dossier 4). See also Alioune Traoré, *Islam et colonisation en Afrique: Cheikh Hamahoullah, homme de foi et résistant* (Paris, 1983), pp. 191ff.

[14] One perceptive, anonymous French administrator made a similar observation in a report filed in Nioro in 1945. Summing up the previous two decades of anti-Hamawi policy, he argued: Experience has shown that the transfer of natives into the animist regions of a colony in the South of the Federation in punishment for intrigues and preaching dangerous to the public order and safety has almost always resulted in the creation of nuclei around which a certain number of neophytes, adepts quickly initiated into the rudiments of the Hamallist doctrine, and petty devoted propagandists could gather, and it is apparent that the progress of this insidious proselytism has been all the more notable because the attention of the local authorities [in these animist zones] has been less attuned to Muslim questions. (Archives de Nioro, unclassified, Affaires politiques et administratives, Rapport #2740APA22-1945, quoted in Seïdina Oumar Dicko, *Hamallah: Le protégé de Dieu* [Bamako, 1999], p. 113).

The history of Yacouba Sylla and his followers, then, suggests, on the most abstract level, two things. First, that writing a history of *insubmission* depends on having a sufficiently broad range of types of sources and adopting a non-linear mode of narration. It may be that the best way to highlight the possibility of change that emerges from within local or regional dynamics is to chart both the solidities and fissures within traditions, their own open-ended dialectics, in a way that defines not essences or civilizational enclosures, but rather the frameworks of interaction across an infinite number of lines of difference. And second, that *insubmission* could contribute to colonial ordering as much as to disordering. Other insurgent movements of the early twentieth century, rendered largely invisible through suppression, may have similarly combined appeals to the reform or restoration of broadly accepted forms of religious authority with the adoption of any number of newly available avenues for transforming ascribed social roles. The Islamic tradition in West Africa was not infinitely mutable, capable of being turned to any purpose, but it did not need to be. The extensive debates over the relationship between spiritual and political authority, over the meaning of just rule, over the definitions of Muslim and infidel, and over the compatibility of social hierarchy and Islamic universalism that had circulated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided ample inspiration for those, like Yacouba and his followers, who saw reform as having temporal implications that went beyond supporting an elite scholarly class as well as for those who sought to defend hierarchies old and new.

The image of the *shaykh* working for his followers and the overturning of the gender roles that excluded women from the *haidara* and the *zâwiya* echoed the complaints of male elders all over West Africa that "fathers now work for their children,"[15] but it also echoed Hamallah's subversion of the age hierarchies associated with assuming the leadership of a *tarîqa*, which in turn drew on Ahmad Tijani's iconoclastic vision of Muhammad. The new religious vision that Yacouba articulated turned out to be no less compatible with colonial or neocolonial stability than that put forth by the early Muslim architects of French religious policy or Amadou Bamba's Murids. But the fact that his followers used their understanding of reform to fashion a model of community, labor organization, and political culture that was eminently respectable and which merged nicely with the assimilationist nationalism and then bourgeois anticolonialism of Houphouët-Boigny is no indication that it was a distinctively colonial phenomenon. Cheikh Anta Babou's work

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15 Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for their Sons* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 193; see also the elaboration in Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: the Politics of the Belly*, trans. by Mary Harper et al. (London, 1993 [1989]), pp. 107–108.

demonstrates that even the story of the origins of the Muridiyya, well developed as it is, benefits from being looking at from outside the context of empire, moving away from the fixation on the ways the *tarîqa* engaged, resisted or ''contained'' the French.[16]

Such an approach allows us to engage with what Dipesh Chakrabarty, following on Spivak, has called the ''heterogeneous imaginations'' of democratization or emancipation without constantly subsuming that heterogeneity within a narrative of European expansion. To be sure, to do so is to surrender some of the tutelary authority of objective description, for it grants these imaginations a share in the conversation with the normative forms of rational politics that ground the terminology of liberation. It simultaneously renders theory vulnerable to appropriations that ''exceed the grasp'' of political thought derived from these norms. Such risks seem necessary if the normative project is to have any influence at all, and they cannot be preemptively contained by reducing them to a modification of professional practice.[17]

The frequent invocation of Walter Benjamin's work by those who seek to link the practices of historiography to a politics of transformation belies the fact that Benjamin's work was above all about exploding the tyranny of historical approaches that insisted on tightly contextualizing human activity with reference to political or economic domination. Heterodox in his Marxism, Benjamin believed that revolutionary historical practice involved not charting the techniques of control but intervening in those processes that ensured that the past was not safe from that enemy who ''never ceases to be victorious.'' Indeed, it is often overlooked that Benjamin's well-loved injunction that we ''brush history against the grain'' comes from an essay in which he argued for a discontinuous, nonlinear approach to time in which the decisive historical agent was a messianic one – a vision that saw ''every second'' as ''the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter.''[18]

It is perhaps understandable that scholars have refrained from embracing Benjamin's suggestion that success in disrupting hegemonic narratives is dependent upon an openness to models of history that feature not just

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16 Babou, *Greater Jihad*. Contrast James F. Searing, *''God Alone Is King'': Islam and Emancipation in Senegal, the Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914* (Portsmouth, 2002), ch. 3; David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens, OH, 2000), ch. 11; Donal Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood in Senegal* (Oxford, 1971); Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide* (2nd ed.) (Paris, 1988).

17 See the call put forth by Dipesh Chakrabarty, ''Where Is the Now?'' *Critical Inquiry* 30:2 (2004), 458–462.

18 Walter Benjamin, ''On the Concept of History'' (trans. Harry Zohn) in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, *1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 389–400, here pp. 392, 397.

inhuman but invisible agency. Yet some of the most powerful recent attempts to confront existing limits on interpretation have moved in exactly this direction. By "technologizing" and denaturalizing human subjectivity, historians like Timothy Mitchell, Chakrabarty, and Bruno Latour have revealed the problem of agency to be founded on a liberal, Eurocentric notion of the subject.[19] But the costs of such maneuvers are high. Their analytic power is achieved by literally sacrificing the humanity of their actors and, in the case of Chakrabarty, moving beyond critiques of rationalism to a critique of reason itself. The approach suggested here constitutes an assertion that such moves are unnecessary and, from a humanistic perspective, undesirable. For if there is a potential foundation of a loosely bounded humanism with which historical practice can be in deepest sympathy, it is the way that meaning is generated through storytelling and explanation through loose contextualization. As Ranajit Guha recognized over twenty years ago, the contradictions involved in seeing the subaltern as the subjects of their own history cannot be resolved by those who have distanced themselves from "the prose of counter-insurgency only by a declaration of sentiment."[20]

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[19] Such as Mitchell's play on Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Mosquito Speak?" in *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, 2002), pp. 19–53, or Chakrabarty's "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts," in *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 97–114. The most extreme example may be Bruno Latour's actor-network theory; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford, 2005). All can be taken as fulfillments of Foucault's prediction that the era of humanism, of the possibility of a science of "anthropology," was nearing an end. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things an Archaeology of the Human Science*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1971).

[20] Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society* ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi, 1983), p. 42.

Glossary

All terms are from classical Arabic unless otherwise indicated: (Bn) =
Bamana, (Fr) = French, (Has) = Hassaniyya Arabic, (Pl) = Pulaar-Fulfulde,
(Sn) = Soninke , (Wf) = Wolof

Allangkuye (Sn) –	form of marriage in which a woman marries a modi and only the hute is paid
Almamy (Pl) –	titular head of the Almamiyat of Futa Toro
anciens captifs (Fr) –	former slaves
baraka –	divine blessing, spiritual power
barzakh –	lit. isthmus, in Sufi theosophy the link between Being and nonexistence
bâtini –	pertaining to the exoteric meaning of a text
bayt al-mâl –	treasury
bayti –	belonging to the state treasury
bidᶜa, pl. *bidaᶜ* –	innovation, heresy
bidân (Has) –	lit. "whites," members of free Hassani lineages
ceddo (Wf) –	professional soldiers, warrior lineage
dhikr –	Sufi recitation
dikko (Pl) –	Pulaar warriors or warrior lineages in Massina
jula (Bn) –	merchant or trader, sometimes used as an ethnonym, especially in Ivory Coast, where it is often spelled "Dioula" or "Dyula," also sometimes the name given to a southern dialect of Bamana
falen (Bn) –	the reciprocal exchange of marriage partners between families
faqîh, pl. *fuqahâ'* –	jurist, jurisprudent
fayd or fayyâd –	overflowing (of baraka, abundance, et cetera)
fitna –	discord, persecution, civil war
garankata (Sn) –	leatherworkers
guinée (Fr) –	length of (India-made) cloth used as currency in the Middle Senegal Valley

hadîth –	saying or action attributed to the Prophet Muhammad
hadîya, pl. *hadâyâ* –	gift, offering
hajj –	full performance of the duties of the pilgrimage to Mecca
haidara (Sn) –	lit. presence, a Sufi gathering for dhikr recitation
haramân –	lit. the two sanctuaries, Mecca and Medina
haratîn (Has) –	Hassani freed slaves
hassani (Has) –	Hassani warrior lineages
hijra –	emigration, the Prophet's emigration from Mecca to Medina, strategic retreat from persecution
horre, pl. *horro* (Sn) –	freeborn person, lineage
hute (Sn) –	portion of bridewealth paid to the bride
ᶜîd al-adha –	feast of sacrifice, most sacred Muslim holiday (see also Tabaski)
ijtihâd –	individual interpretation (of sharîᶜa)
imam –	leader of prayer in a mosque
islâh –	religious reform
ᶜism –	see *maᶜsûm*
istikhâra –	divination and augury by dream
jawharat al-kamâl –	the Pearl of Perfection, section of the Tijani wird that occasioned the eleven-bead twelve-bead rift
jeri (Pl) –	slightly elevated land watered by rainfall
jihâd –	sanctified struggle
jonburu (Bn) –	lit. slave village, common West African name for French villages de liberté
Kaᶜba –	the holy sanctuary in Mecca
karâmât –	miracles
khalîfa –	successor, deputy of a Sufi tarîqa for a region
khalwa –	spiritual retreat
khâtim al-awliyâ' –	the seal of sainthood
kome, pl. *komo* (Sn) –	slave
korgel (Pl) –	young, female servants/slaves
kufr –	unbelief, religious infidelity
laxaranto (Sn) –	"griots," historical and genealogical raconteurs
mahr –	bridewealth
manu-mara (Sn) –	an adopted mother, often translated in French as Godmother
marmite (Fr) –	cooking pot
maᶜsûm –	a sinless soul
modi, pl. *modini/u* (Sn) –	religious scholar, scholarly lineage

mujaddid –	renewer of religion
muqaddam –	member of a Sufi tarîqa authorized to induct new members and confer the wird
murîd –	disciple
murshid –	guide, Sufi leader
naabure (Sn) –	portion of bridewealth paid to bride's family
navétan (Fr) –	migrant worker
nûr muhammadi –	light/emanation of Muhammad
nyaxamala (Sn) –	member of an occupational caste, casted person
qâdî –	judge
qutb or qutb al-maktûm –	the hidden pole (or qutb al-zamân, the pole of the age)
racheter (Fr) –	lit. to ransom, ransom a slave for use as a servant
rakᶜa, pl. *rakaᶜât* –	genuflection in ritual prayer
sadaqa –	gift, alms
salafi –	neo-traditionalist, restorationist
salâh –	social responsibility
sappoi-go (Pl) –	eleven-bead Tijani, Hamawi
saaridanaxu (Sn) –	the state of being a second (or later) generation slave (saaridane)
sharîᶜa –	Islamic law
sharîf, pl. *shurafâ'* –	descendant of the Prophet Muhammad
shaykh –	Sufi master
shurafâ' –	see sharîf
silsila –	chain of authorities, chain of initiations
soninke, pl. *soninko* (Sn) –	noble
sura –	chapter of the Qur'an
Tabaski (Wf) –	common West African term for ᶜid al-adha
tage, pl. *tago* (Sn) –	blacksmith (f. potter), circumcision/excision specialist
tajdîd –	renewal
takfîr –	declaring another to be an unbeliever
tanzîh –	doctrine of God's transcendence
tarîqa –	Sufi way or path
tasawwuf –	Sufism
tashbîh –	doctrine of God's immanence
tawâf –	circumambulation of the Kaᶜba, one of the duties of hajj
torodbe (Pl) –	Pulaar (Tukulor or Fulbe) scholarly lineages
tunkanlenmo (Sn) –	royals (or nobles)

tutelle (Fr) –	lit. guardianship, adoption of a young slave for domestic service
ʿulamâ' –	the learned, the scholars
village de liberté (Fr) –	lit. freedom village, settlement of ex-slaves used for forced labor
walî –	saint, companion of God
walo (Pl) –	land along river banks irrigated by receding flood-water
wâsita –	intermediary, intercessor
wilâya –	the walî's closeness to God, also authority
wird –	collection of Sufi recitations, formulae
wujûd –	being
zâhiri –	pertaining to the esoteric meaning of a text
zawâya (Has) –	Hassani scholarly lineages
zawiya –	location for Sufi recitations and prayer
ziyâra –	lit. visitation, performance of a pilgrimage to a saint's tomb or other holy place, also journeys of proselytization or travels in search of knowledge or hadâyâ
zuhd –	asceticism

Note on References

Sources for this study were drawn from the following repositories, whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged:

1. ANCI: Archives Nationales de la République de la Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan. Several different forms of classification were in use simultaneously in the Ivoirian archives during my visit in 2001. To retrieve the appropriate documents, codes from these classifications must be provided exactly. Most files come from dossiers filed under the ''new'' system, using two or three ''carton'' codes and a ''dossier'' code (eg. ANCI IV-48/1(3327) or ANCI XV-4-6(5355)). In some cases, codes from the ''old'' system (corresponding to the familiar alpha-numeric French colonial classification) must be appended to the new code (eg. ANCI X-13-253(9245) 1E-78). As the reclassification of the archives is continually underway, it is not possible to predict which encoding system will be in use at any given point in the future.

2. ANMK: Archives Nationales de la République du Mali, Koulouba. All materials are from the *Fonds recents* unless otherwise noted. They have been cited giving the series code and file number (eg. ANMK 1E-56).

3. ANS: Archives Nationales de la République du Sénégal, Dakar. Material from the Senegalese Archives coming from the office of the Gouvernor-Générale (''Fonds AOF'') has been cited in the notes giving the series code, the file number and, where applicable, the *versement* number (eg. ANS 2G-30 v. 44). This corresponds to the retrieval system in place in 2001. Material from the office of the colonial government of Senegal (''Fonds Sénégal'') has been cited analogously (eg. ANS 11D1-0792); no *versement* codes were in use for these files at the time.

4. CAOM: Archives Nationales de la France: Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence. Materials from the Outre-Mer section of the French National Archives has been cited giving the series title, the ''carton'' number, and, when necessary, the ''dossier'' number (eg. CAOM 1Affpol 2258/3 dossier 2). Some materials originally from the

Senegalese Archives were consulted in their microform version in the CAOM archives. They have been cited in the notes according to a double system (eg: CAOM 14Miom 2170 (9G-32)), giving both the number of the microfilm reel in Aix (14Miom 2170) and the location of the document in the Dakar AOF archives (9G-32).

5. ANMt: Archives Nationales de la République Islamique de la Mauritanie, Nouakchott. Copies of some files from ANMt were graciously provided by Professor Adama Gnokane of the Université de Nouakchott, to whom I am deeply indebted. Materials have been cited giving the series and dossier code (eg. ANMt E2-34).

6. Fonds Monod: Letters from Amadou Hampâté Bâ to Theodore Monod. I am grateful to Professor Louis Brenner of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, for providing me with copies of this correspondence.

7. CHEAM: Monographies de Centre des hautes études d'administration musulmane. These materials are housed in the Centre des archives contemporaines, Fontainebleau, and are cited by monograph number.

INTERVIEWS

In addition, the book also draws on a series of interviews carried out across West Africa in 1998 and 2001. These are cited giving the full name of the primary interlocutor, location and date at each reference. In addition, the first citation to each interview also indicates who else was present during the exchange, with two general exceptions: the formal audience I was granted with the *caliphe* Cheickna Yacouba Sylla, at which over a dozen elders were in attendance; and *haidara* ceremonies where as many as 200 people attended.

OTHER UNPUBLISHED AND PUBLISHED SOURCES

All other sources have been referenced with full citation in the body of the book itself. Providing a full table of references would have thus been redundant and made the text prohibitively long.

Index

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