BEYOND TIMBUKTU

An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa

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In loving memory of my grandfather,
Shaykh al-Islam Al-Hajj Ibrahim Niasse

Contents

> It was simply not possible for most of the Arabs to be descendants of Muhammad, the Quraysh or early companions, and it was even less likely that Persian, Turkish, Berber, Swahili, or Mandinka would have genealogical ties to the Hijaz. But that was not the point. Those who made the claims and who had quality of personal command, learning, or military leadership to reinforce the claims, came to be believed and their descendants in turn drew upon these genealogical credentials to build their career.[93]

Indeed, the belief in such claims produced powerful social effects. The legitimacy of shurafa is largely based on the assumption that their sharifian origin gives them supernatural powers to harm their adversaries, to cure the sick, to predict the future, and to bestow good luck and happiness on those who venerate them. This has made such claims pervasive in the Bilad al-Sudan.

The early twentieth-century debate on race relations between Arabs and blacks in countries such as the prepartition Republic of Sudan and Mauritania suggests radical otherness between the two "racial groups." In these two countries, so-called Arabs are accused of having continued the centuries-old practices of enslaving and oppressing so-called black people. Even if the demands for social justice and social emancipation for subordinate groups are well founded, they should not blind us to the fact that neither in the past nor in the present have these groups been separated by a color line of any kind. On the contrary, they have maintained sustained interactions at various levels.

Ibadi Berbers, post-Almoravid Sanhaja, Zawaya, Djula, Fulbe, and Wolof have above all been the main teachers and messengers of Islam. The Islamic archive available in the libraries and private collections bears testimony to their intellectual contributions. They taught classical Maliki texts and abridged some of them to make them more easily understood to their students. They issued juridical verdicts to arbitrate trade disputes. They mastered talismanic knowledge, which they could use to heal various diseases, bring luck, and provide protection against real and presumed enemies. The Mauritanian proverb at the beginning of the chapter, which states that masters of talismanic knowledge are either the Kunta Zawaya clans or the Fulbe (*al-hikmatu kuntiyyatun aw futiyyatun*), shows how two of these groups contributed to the creation of precolonial Islamic epistemologies. I will further highlight their contribution to the production of Islamic knowledge in Chapters 4 and 5 when I look at the historical core curriculum and analyze some of the main debates documented by the Islamic archive.

Chapter 4

Curriculum and Knowledge Transmission

> Before, only God existed. When he wanted other beings to come to existence, he manifested himself in himself. From the being that was his manifestation, God created the Muhammadan Reality. From the Muhammadan Reality, God created the sea. From the sea, God created foam. The sea cannot be quiet, because it was created from a living being and reflects the manifestation of God . . . Of all creatures, the sea is the one that resembles God most in richness, wideness, and generosity. In the sea, we find fish and jewels; boats can circulate without harming the sea in any way. From foam, God created earth. From earth, he created Adam and Eve. That is why Shaykh Ibrahim said that "only God existed before anything else exists, and even now that other beings seem to exist, in fact, only God exists." If you return each person to his parents, and their parents to their parents, ultimately you will go back to Adam and Eve. If you return Adam and Eve to the earth, the earth to the sea, the sea to Muhammadan Reality, Muhammadan Reality to God, then you realize that nothing else exists except God. If you ask a human being to show you himself, he would show you a part of his body but will not show you himself. The truth is that God is present in all human beings regardless of their awareness or lack thereof. Proximity is a veil. When something is too close to you, you cannot see it. The Prophet said: "I originate from the light of God; human beings originate from my light."
>
> —*Shaykh Hadi Niasse*[1]

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD is known as the messenger of God to the Arabs. But for Sufis in the Akbarian tradition, the Prophet was created as light (*nur*)[2] and a reality (*haqiqa*)[3] before any being. The notion of Muhammadan Reality put forward by Sufis is important for an understanding of devotional Sufi poetry learned and taught to the students of higher Islamic studies and through lectures to the masses.[4] The above abstract could have been taken from a Sufi treatise in Arabic, but it was delivered in Wolof to a public of devotees.

Attenders took no notes, but many would be able to transmit this cosmology in any language to larger audiences. Scholars used texts, but most knowledge transmission was oral. Many scholars were learned in Arabic, but most of their commentary was conducted in African languages. The oral and the written, African languages and Arabic, were two faces of the same coin in this system of knowledge transmission.

From the secondary literature as well as in the autobiographies of West African Muslim scholars, we get a good idea of the texts that circulated most in the precolonial Bilad al-Sudan.[5] Bruce Hall and Charles Stewart must be credited for the first serious effort to develop a rigorous methodology toward identifying the historic core curriculum in the larger West African Sahel. On the strength of an online database containing more than twenty-one thousand West African Islamic manuscripts preserved in collections of manuscripts in the west and central Sudan and focusing on the period from roughly 1625 to 1925, they identify six disciplines: Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, Jurisprudence, Arabic language, theology, and Sufism. Drawing on that literature and especially on Stewart and Hall, this chapter attempts to identify what subjects/texts were taught and how. It identifies the following as central in Islamic education: the Qur'an and related sciences; legal studies; hadith, sira, and devotional poetry; theology; Sufism; Arabic language; talismanic sciences; and, last but not least, African language lexicology. In the sections that follow, I will discuss these subjects as well as the most widely circulating texts in written and oral form in Muslim West Africa.

The Qur'an and Related Sciences

Prominent among subjects studied in West Africa was the Qur'an and derived sciences such as memorization (*hifz*), exegesis (*tafsir*), and the art of its psalmody (*tajwid*). Arabic has always been used as the language for the most important Islamic rituals, including the five daily prayers, the Friday congregational prayer, and the annual festivals celebrating the end of the month of Ramadan (*'id al-fitr*) and commemorating Abraham's commitment to sacrifice his son (*'id al-adha*). With the notable exception of early Kemalist Turkey, where attempts failed to replace Arabic with Turkish as the liturgical language for the call to prayer, nowhere in the Muslim world has any language except Arabic ever been used for canonical prayer (*salat*)—different from supplication (*du'a*), which can be said in any language. Regardless of language and nationality, Muslims must commit at least some parts of the Qur'an to memory.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims are able to recite from memory some *surats* of the Qur'an, and being able to commit the entire Qur'an to memory (*hifz*) has remained a feat and a claim to authority throughout history.

Huffaz (those who have memorized the entire Qur'an) are highly venerated in Muslim societies. Various virtues are attributed to ensuring that one's child commits the Qur'an to memory. These include the belief that the parents of a *hafiz* (pl. huffaz) will be rewarded in the hereafter and redeemed for the fact that their child had memorized the Qur'an. The embodiment of the word of God is also believed to bless the hafiz, so that learning any science would be made easy by the blessing of the word of God. Debates about the centrality of memorizing the Qur'an are held in web forums and blogs visited by millions of Muslims worldwide; the following saying of the Prophet Muhammad, transmitted by a narrator named Hakim, is an example in this ongoing conversation:

> Whoever reads the Quran, memorizes it, and acts upon it, on the Day of Judgment he will be clad (by angels) with a crown of light, its light is like the sunlight and his parents will be clad with two garments better than the whole world and whatever it contains. So they would amazingly ask: "What action did we do to deserve this?" They will be told: "Because your son memorized the Quran."[6]

The art of the psalmody of the Qur'an (*tajwid*) is another important Qur'anic science. From the Arabic verb *jawwada* meaning "to embellish or to beautify," the substantive *tajwid* does not appear in the Qur'an, but a word of similar meaning, *tartil,* does (Qur'an LXXIII, 4) and was interpreted by the fourth caliph, 'Ali b. Abi Talib, to mean "an excellent rendering of the consonant sounds and knowledge of the pauses."[7] Tajwid deals essentially with the skills of oral recitation. As an act of performance, it has become an important dimension of piety because of the sacredness of the word of God.[8] Teachers carefully ensure that pupils do not mispronounce God's word. This is particularly true for non-Arabic speakers who may find it difficult to pronounce some Arabic consonants. An eloquent illustration in a West African context is found in the celebrated autobiography of Senegalese novelist Cheikh Hamidou Kane, where the author narrates the rigor of Qur'anic studies and the physical punishment that the master made him endure whenever he mispronounced the word of God.

> That day, Thierno had beaten him again. And yet Samba Diallo knew his sacred verse . . . It was only that he had made a slip of the tongue. Thierno had jumped up as if he had stepped on one of the white-hot paving stones of the gehenna promised to evil-doers. He had seized Samba Diallo by the

fleshy part of his thigh and, between his thumb and index finger, had given him a long hard pinch. The child had gasped with pain and begun to shake all over. Threatened by sobs which were strangling him in the chest and throat, he had had the strength to master his suffering; in a weak voice, broken and stammering, but he had repeated the verse from the holy Book which he had spoken badly in the first place.[9]

The right pronunciation was important, because mispronouncing might result in distorting the word of God, which Muslims—and particularly schoolmasters—believed is a great sin. In many supplications closing the recitation of the entire Qur'an, known as *khatm,* reciters ask forgiveness for any possible mispronunciation of Qur'an, such as wrongly geminating a consonant or elongating a vowel or pausing where no pause is allowed. Stewart and Hall showed that several copies of various tajwid manuals are found in collections of manuscripts of the region and have been cited as part of the curriculum studied by Abdullahi Dan Fodio and Al-Bartili,[10] including the *Al-durar al-lawami'* (The Shining Pearls) by Ibn al-Barri (d. 1330), the poem "Hirz al-amani wa wajh al-tahani" (Preserving Aspirations and Purpose of Congratulating) by al-Shatibi (d. 1194), and the *Muqaddima* (Introduction) by Ibn al-Jazari (d. 1429). Tajwid is particularly important in the Bilad al-Sudan, where speakers of some African languages might find it difficult to pronounce Arabic consonants that do not exist in their mother tongue. For example, Pulaar-speaking people typically rendered the consonant *q* as *g;* Wolof speakers tended to pronounce as *s* consonants such as *dh, d,* and *z;* and Hausa speakers tended to pronounce *f* as *h* or *p.*

A second important subfield of Qur'anic studies is exegesis (*tafsir*). The exegesis of the Qur'an has become an established field in Islamic sciences, not least because the Qur'an is not entirely understandable even to native speakers of Arabic. In that respect, Qur'an 3–6 states that some of its verses are entirely clear (*muhkamat*), while others are ambiguous (*mutashabihat*). The *Jami 'al-bayan 'an ta'wil ayat al-Qur'an* (Compiler of Evidence in the Exegesis of the Qur'an), completed in the tenth century by Abu Ja'far al-Tabari (d. 311/923), was a landmark in the formation of the field in the classical period. To arbitrate between rival meanings of the Qur'an in the process of exegesis, Tabari's work makes extensive use of the traditions of the Prophet and relies on grammatical analysis.[11] Although his work was known in the region, it was not used nearly as much as the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (Exegesis of the Two Jalals), authored by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 864/1459) and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505). This text has been used for the study of tafsir in the region for

centuries and still is. Al-Suyuti was among the most reputed Egyptian scholars of his time and was very well known in West Africa for several reasons. First, when Askya Muhammad Ture the Great (1443–1538), emperor of Songhay, celebrated in the Timbuktu chronicles for promoting Islam and supporting Timbuktu scholars, stopped in Egypt on his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1496, he met Al-Suyuti in Cairo. Al-Suyuti introduced him to the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil, who invested Askya Muhammad with the title of Caliph of the Sudan (Black People).[12]

Second, West African Muslims performing the pilgrimage to Mecca typically spent time in Egypt to study with Egyptian ulama. Many of the contemporaries of Al-Suyuti studied with him, including grandparents of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di, the author of the *Tarikh al-Sudan.*[13] It was these pilgrims/students who introduced the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* and other works of Al-Suyuti to the Bilad al-Sudan.

Third, Timbuktu scholars also consulted Al-Suyuti on two important issues: the use of amulets and coexistence with non-Muslims. On both issues, he showed some flexibility—allowing the use of amulets and some form of association with non-Muslims. His advice was favored by Timbuktu scholars over that of 'Abd al-Karim Al-Maghili, an Algerian scholar who was prone to preach jihad against infidels and whose thought would be more influential among later generations of Sudani scholars,[14] particularly the jihadists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the nineteenth century on, the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* was often taught in combination with another derived text written by Ahmad Al-Sawi (d. 1825), a leading Maliki scholar in colonial India.[15] Typically published in the margins of the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn,* it is titled *Hashiyat al-Sawi 'ala tafsir al-Jalalayn* (The Commentary by Al-Sawi on the Margins of the Exegesis of the Two Jalals).

Mauritanian scholar Muhammad Yadali al-Daymani, also known as Al-Wali Al-Yadali al-Daymani, produced another important work on Qur'anic exegesis. Titled *Al-dhahabl al-Ibriz ila kitab Allah al-'aziz* (The Pure Gold in [Interpreting] the Noble Book of God), it is found in many collections of manuscripts,[16] suggesting its wide use, particularly among Muslim communities in Senegambia that maintained close ties with Mauritanian scholars. In addition to texts produced by native Arabic-speaking scholars, there are also important contributions to the exegetical literature by Sudani scholars—not just in Arabic, but also in African languages. In Senegambia, shaykhs taught exegesis throughout the year to a limited circle of students. In addition, they offered

daily exegesis sessions to larger groups of Muslims in African languages and managed to cover the entire Qur'an during the month of Ramadan. The exegesis of earlier generations of scholars has been lost due to poor conservation, but echoes of their methodology can be found in the exegetical work of subsequent generations whose scholarly production has been recorded and published in hard copy and electronic media. To cite just one example, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (d. 1975) belongs to a renowned family of Senegambian clerics; he learned exegesis with his father, who, in turn, was taught by his father. Unlike that of his father and grandfather, Shaykh Niasse's exegesis sessions were transcribed and published after his death. During the month of Ramadan in particular, Shaykh Niasse typically gave two sessions of exegesis. The first, entirely in classical Arabic, was for his most erudite disciples, who included many Arabic-speaking scholars from Mauritania who spent the month of Ramadan in his *zawiya* of Madina Kaolack. The second consisted of reading only the Qur'anic verse in Arabic but delivering an intertextual commentary in Wolof to the larger audience of Wolof-speaking people. Both exegeses were recorded in the 1950s and published recently. The Arabic-only exegesis was transcribed and edited in six volumes by a Mauritanian disciple,[17] whereas the Arabic-to-Wolof exegesis was published in electronic form, initially in sixty cassettes with one as introduction.[18] Since a few Sudani shaykhs had disciples from a wide variety of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, whom they taught, we can reasonably assume that some also held oral sessions of exegesis in classical Arabic and African languages that were never recorded. Thus, it was not just the Arabs who taught the Sudani—Sudani shaykhs also taught both blacks and native Arabic speakers.

As noted by the entry *tafsir* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* different exegetes "have different concerns and goals, and this is reflected in the relative weight they put upon elements such as history, grammar, semantics, law, theology, or folklore. All commentators are concerned with the process of analyzing the text in light of the 'external world,' however that be defined for the individual author, with the aim of resolving any apparent conflict and making the text 'clear.'" This leads to the discussion of different methods in the teaching of Qur'anic exegesis in Senegambia. Exegesis can be taught as a discipline of its own. In this case, it consists of reading and commenting one after the other on all verses of the Qur'an, starting from those of the opening surah of the Qur'an, known as the Fatiha, through those of the second surah (the Cow) and all the way to the last verse of Qur'an 114, known as surah of "Mankind." Qur'anic

exegesis can also be taught in other contexts with different goals. Sufi shaykhs may introduce their own disciples to subtleties typically not found in general exegetical texts destined for the wider public. The Sufi methodology in Qur'anic exegesis, for example, rests on the assumption that the Qur'an has an apparent and a hidden meaning, as demonstrated in the following interpretation of Qur'an 83: 14–15 by Senegalese Sufi shaykh, Ibrahim Niasse, in a lecture on the importance of following the Sufi path to spiritual fulfillment.

> When an aspirant seeks from an able shaykh guidance to reach the Almighty God, the shaykh will ask him first to perform the remembrance of the Almighty God until he reaches the presence of the Almighty God when he became extinguished in his essence. Unless the aspirant is extinguished in the essence of the Almighty God, his faith is not perfected. As long as the veil persists, the slave of God experiences punishment of some sort. The Almighty God said, "verily, from (the Light of) their Lord, that Day, will they be veiled. Further, they will enter the Fire of Hell." Qur'an 83: 14–15[19]

A literalist interpretation of these two verses in most texts of Qur'anic exegesis identifies "the veiled ones" as infidels who, because they did not accept the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, will be separated from the sight of God by hellfire on the Day of Judgment. This understanding is based on the repertoire of the apparent *zahir*. It exists simultaneously with another understanding revealed in the commentary of Shaykh Niasse, which belongs to the repertoire of *batin* (the hidden). The veil refers, in Sufi parlance, to the lack of experience of the unicity of God. Those who do not have that experience of extinction in the essence of God, regardless of their religion (Muslims or not Muslims), are veiled *mahjub* and cannot access the ultimate truth (*haqiqa*). Living in such a state, Shaykh Ibrahim argues, is tantamount to experiencing punishment like infidels in hellfire. Joseph Hill rightly argues that "the discursive dualism of *zahir* and *batin* does not reflect two coherent realms, forces, and principles but instead a kind of pragmatic and spiritual pluralism. These terms are invoked in particular when truth claims collide . . . These paradoxes and multiple truths must not be understood as linguistic tricks or as conundrums to be solved, but rather as approaches to facilitating multiple imperatives and mutually irreducible repertoires of epistemic and practical principles."[20] Sufi-inspired exegesis of the Qur'an introduced by Shaykh Niasse has had wide appeal in sub-Saharan Africa. In Northern Nigeria, tafsir used to be practiced by a few families that specialized in that field, until the first part of the twentieth century. Starting in the second part of the century, Tijani scholars affiliated with

Shaykh Niasse created vast networks of scholars who introduced Sufi exegesis of the Qur'an and offered it to large audiences of disciples.[21]

Legal Studies

The notion of Shari'a, as historically theorized and practiced in precolonial Muslim societies, is very different from the modern understanding of law.[22] Modern law is produced and implemented by state institutions and applies to all citizens. In contrast, the state had virtually no involvement in the elaboration, interpretation, or implementation of Islamic Shari'a, simply because the state as we know it now did not exist in the Islamic world, or for that matter in any part of the world during the formative period of the Shari'a. Where states existed, they might have appointed judges and defined their areas of jurisdiction. But the law itself was produced by jurisconsults in the precolonial times, in the form of juridical opinions through which jurisconsults answered queries emanating either from judges or private individuals. In their verdicts, jurisconsults stated what, in a specific context, was in conformity with the teachings of the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. A central feature of the Shari'a is legal pluralism. Even within the same school of law (*madhhab*), a variety of opinions may coexist on the same legal issue. In addition, the juridical verdicts given by jurisconsults (*mufti*) were not binding to individuals or judges, although they were often followed. The absence of impersonal law to be implemented on all individuals created great flexibility. The judge (*qadi*) enjoyed considerable autonomy to adjudicate disputes on a case-by-case basis.

We have seen that the study of law was at the heart of medieval learning in the Muslim world. The reason is that Shari'a provides guidance on all aspects of life, from rituals (such as purification, prayer, fasting, performing pilgrimage) to commercial transactions, family law (marriage, divorce, child custody), criminal law, and law governing the administration of state or the conduct of war. Understandably, the study of law was central to the medieval curriculum everywhere in the Muslim world. As one of the oldest branches of learning, Islamic Shari'a grew to become a complex field subdivided into many subfields and including the study of sources (known as *usul al-fiqh*), schools (*madhahib*), didactic texts, legal maxims (*qawa'id*), and legal cases/opinions (*fatawa* and *nawazil*).[23]

In quantity, legal documents found in the Bilad al-Sudan significantly dwarf manuscripts dealing with other disciplines. As part of the western Islamic

world (*al-gharb al-islami*), historically including Andalusia and large parts of North Africa,[24] West Africa had been governed by Maliki jurisprudence since the rise of the Almoravids. It was only in the late twentieth century that rival schools of law (such as the Hanbali school, followed by Wahhabis[25] or Shiites) started to make inroads.

Beginners were taught elementary didactic Maliki texts, whereas the foundational texts and other advanced manuals were used for advanced juridical training. The most used didactic *fiqh* texts in West Africa are the *Mukhtasar fi-l-'ibada* (Abridged Treatise on Worship) by Abdarrahman al-Akhdari (d. 1585) and the *Muqaddima* (Introduction) by the sixteenth-century scholar 'Abd al-Bari al-Rifa'i al-'Ishmawi. Typically, they are referred to, respectively, by the names of their authors—i.e., *Al-Akhdari* and *Al-'Ishmawi*. Copies are found in many collections, and they are available in Islamic schools in the whole West African region still today.

For advanced legal studies, students were taught foundational texts dating from the formative period of the Maliki jurisprudence, such as the *Muwatta* (The Well-Trodden Path), written by the founder of the School Malik b. Anas. Copies of the *Muwatta* are found in most library collections. The Timbuktu scholar Ahmad Baba mentions it as one book that he studied with Bagayogo Wangari in the sixteenth century.[26] We also know that the *Muwatta* has, for centuries, been one of the three key texts used in the training of the Jakhanke clerics. A second important foundational text of Maliki jurisprudence in the Sahel was the *Mudawwana* of Sahnun (d. 864). Although less used, the *Mudawwana* was complementary to the *Muwatta*.[27] In addition to these foundational texts, later-generation manuals of jurisprudence were also taught in the Bilad al-Sudan. These include the *Risala* (Epistle) by Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani (d. 966); the *Mukhtasar* (Concise Treatise) of Khalil b. Ishaq (d. 1374), a text so dense that it was typically taught with the aid of a commentary;[28] the *Tuhfat al-Hukkam* (A Gift for the Judges) by Ibn 'Asim (d. 1427); and the *Irshad al-Salik ila Ashraf al-Masalik 'ala Madhhab Imam Malik* (Guiding the Aspirant in the Most Noble Paths of the School of Imam Malik) by 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Askar al-Baghdadi (d. 1332).

A last category of advanced legal texts with which Sudani scholars might have been familiar is the compilation of legal cases/opinions (*fatawa/nawazil*). For centuries, the most comprehensive such text in the Islamic west was the *Mi'yar* (Standard) of Al-Wansharisi (d. 1508), which is a large compilation of legal opinions produced between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries. Only

two copies of the *Mi'yar* are found in the Mauritanian collections. Stewart and Hall conclude that it might not have been used often. Ahmed Baba states that he read the entire *Mi'yar*. Likewise, Uthman Dan Fodio, making the case for the obligation to emigrate from the land of infidels, backs his claim by appealing to the *Mi'yar*, among other sources.[29] This suggests that the *Mi'yar*, as an advanced text, was taught in the Bilad al-Sudan, and zealous students would have known with whom to study it.

Jurisprudence was important for religious life, because devout Muslims wanted to perfect religion and whenever confronted with a precedent would approach jurists to guide them to the right path. Jurisprudence was also important for economic life, because Muslim merchants, particularly in major commercial towns such as Timbuktu, Kano, Shinqit, and Walata, were not just driven by the search for profit. In principle, at least, they wanted to make lawful gain (*kasb al-halal*). As to the issue of slavery, there were rules that governed enslavement and ownership of slaves.[30] Jurists and judges would arbitrate between conflicting claims. Jurisprudence was also important in political life, and some rulers sought advice from leading Muslim scholars on how to deal with important issues related to statecraft.[31]

Hadith, Sira, and Madh

Given the role of the Prophet in the redefinition of the notion of knowledge[32] in Islam, there is no field of knowledge in which his life or actions are not invoked as a source. But some disciplines relate more specifically to him than others. Those that are more closely linked to the Prophet include sciences of tradition (hadith), biographies of the Prophet (*sira*), and devotional poetry (*madh*). After the death of the Prophet and the end of the Revelation, Muslims have searched for sources of guidance. The Prophet's words and deeds (known as the hadith)—as narrated and recorded by his companions, family members, and later generations of Muslims—became the secondary source of authority in Islam after the Qur'an. Since hadiths were reported in a context of competing claims for authority, many were of doubtful credibility. In order to determine which hadith were reliable, scholars of hadith developed a methodology based on two dominant criteria. The first is the authenticity of the chain of transmitters (*isnad*), each mentioning the person from whom they heard the hadith until mentioning the originator. The second criterion is the content (*matn*) of the hadith, which must not contradict any fundamental teaching of

Islam. Based on these two principles, traditionalists classified hadith into four categories: sound (*sahih*), good (*hasan*), weak (*da'if*), and infirm (*saqim*).[33] Six collections of the soundest traditions established themselves among Sunni Muslims as authoritative. The most authoritative among the Sunni are those of al-Bukhari and Muslim (d. 261/875), followed in importance by the collection of Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892), al-Nasa'i (d. 303/915), and Ibn Maja (d. 273/886). Of all the collections of hadith, the most widespread worldwide are those of al-Bukhari and Muslim, which had become authoritative by the tenth century. They are found in most collections of manuscripts and are mentioned by many Sudani as part of their hadith studies. Hadith studies did not just consist of knowing these collections; they consisted also of mastering the methodology known as sciences of hadith (*'ulum al-hadith*). As noted by Robson, the sciences of hadith "cover a wide range of subjects, dealing with classes of traditions and transmitters . . . methods of learning and transmitting traditions, . . . rules about details of writing traditions and methods of making necessary corrections in one's manuscript, even with the ages at which it is appropriate to begin and to stop transmitting."[34]

Devotional poetry praising the Prophet Muhammad (and other Sufi saints) is one of the most common genres found in the intellectual production of the Bilad al-Sudan. This genre appeared in the Muslim world as early as the seventh century with the poem "Banat Su'ad" (Su'ad Has Departed), composed by Ka'b b. Zuhayr.[35] Other well-known classics in panegyric literature include the *'Ishriniyyat* by Al-Fazazi (d. 1230), a collection of poems of twenty verses each. Two other much-recited panegyrics of the Prophet in the Bilad al-Sudan and beyond are the "al-Burda"[36] (Mantle) in Arabic by Al-Busiri, and the "Dala'il al-khayrat"[37] (A Guide to Goodness) by al-Jazuli of (d. 1465). Both poems are believed to have talismanic attributes.

In addition to these classics, Sudani authors have produced a huge number of panegyrics of the Prophet. The Senegalese Sufi saint Shaykh Ahmad Bamba Mbacké (d. 1927), who founded the Muridiyya order, is one of the most prolix of such panegyrists. Nicknamed khadim al-rasul (the Servant of the Prophet), Ahmad Bamba composed thousands of lines of poetry praising the Prophet.[38] These poems (*qasa'id*) are learned and recited by his disciples, the Murids, who have a strong faith in their talismanic properties.[39] Authors of panegyrics of the Prophet have also composed collections of poems praising their hero saints. In praise of Ahmad al-Tijani and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (the founders of the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya, respectively), West African Sufi shaykhs have

produced a huge literature of devotional poetry. Although competing groups denouncing the veneration of the Prophet and Sufi saints made inroads in urban West Africa in the late twentieth century and produced a huge oral and written anti-Sufi literature,[40] their preaching has not diminished in any significant way the appeal of this genre, which rests on the powerful cosmology of the Prophet as a perfect human being (*insan kamil*).

The sira (biography) of the Prophet has also been widely taught. It seems to have been a continuation of an earlier pre-Islamic historical genre known as *Ayyam al-'Arab* (history of the Arabs),[41] which narrates the genealogy and way of life of Arab Bedouins, as well as their values, such as generosity, bravery, and courage. Among the reasons for its emergence and focus on the Prophet Muhammad, the most important was to extol him as a messenger of God, a claim disputed by polytheist Arabs as well as Christians and Jews.[42] Although the Qur'an refutes the notion of the Prophet as miracle worker (insisting that the Qur'an is sufficient proof of his prophetic mission), the dominant wisdom in the Near East that a prophet must perform miracles has influenced sira as a genre. Stories of the military expeditions of the Prophet (known as *Maghazi*), conducted with the help of supernatural agents, form large sections of the sira literature. The sira also provided a context for understanding the nature of the revelation of Qur'anic verses. In that sense, it overlaps with the exegesis of the Qur'an (tafsir) which attempted to reconstruct the chronology of Qur'anic revelation by identifying the reasons for the revelation (*sabab al-nuzul*).[43]

Last but not least, as a source of inspiration and a model of behavior for Muslims, sira literature forms the foundation of Muslim ethics. The famous hadith reported by Malik b. Anas attributes to the Prophet this saying: "I was sent to perfect good character."[44] The most common sira manual taught in West Africa seems to have been *Kitab al-Shifa bi Ta'rif Huquq al-Mustafa* (Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of the Chosen One) by the Andalusian Maliki scholar al-Qadi 'Iyad (d. 1149). Many scholars of the Bilad al-Sudan of the past centuries mention having studied it, and dozens of copies are found among West African collections of manuscripts. It is also one of the three main texts one is required to know in order to graduate as an accomplished scholar among the Djula.[45] Next to the Shifa, the sira text found in most other collections of manuscripts, suggesting its wise use in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is the *Nafh al-Tib fi al-salat 'ala al-nabi al-habib* (The Perfumed Fragrance in the Salutations to the Beloved Prophet), written by the Zawaya scholar Sidi Mukhtar al-Kunti (d. 1811).

The sira genre illustrates eloquently the interactions between oral and written devotional poetry in West Africa. During the festival celebrating the birth of the Prophet, which is organized in all cities and major towns in West Africa and among its Muslim diaspora, Muslim shaykhs spend the night narrating to people biographies of the Prophet Muhammad along the lines of the miraculous sira genre. Here is an illustration of sira oral recitation in the celebration of the *mawlid* (birth of the Prophet) by Tijani members in New York City:

> The Prophet was born in 570 after the birth of the Prophet Isa [Jesus]. When his mother was two months pregnant, his father passed away. His father did not live long. His mother Amina said: "I did not have any idea that I was pregnant. Every night, one prophet came to me [no precision as to whether in dream or reality] and told me, 'Honorable woman, it gives me pleasure to greet you and to announce to you the good news that you have a baby in your belly; no woman has ever held in her stomach a baby like him. This baby is the Lord of all prophets. Whatever God created was derived from him.'" The Prophet's mother would always wonder, "What are they talking about?" because she did not understand the message that the other prophets were trying to convey. She told the story to the Prophet's grandfather, 'Abd al-Mutallib, who recommended that she not tell the story to anybody. She acquiesced. At the month of the delivery, the Prophet Abraham appeared to tell her, "I am pleased to tell you that you will deliver a baby that no woman before you has ever delivered. He will restore a godly order on earth. He will come with the last book that God will reveal. He is the lord of all prophets. After him, no other prophet will be sent." In the first week of the month of giving birth, a group of women appeared to her. Amina narrated that they were gorgeous, as tall as date trees, and shining like light; they were angels, they were *houris* of Paradise. The women introduced themselves. One of them said she was Asiya the wife of the pharoah (who reared the Prophet Moses). Another woman said, "I am Mary, the mother of Prophet 'Isa [Jesus]." The other women were houris of Paradise. The women told Amina, "God has sent us to help you deliver your baby." She responded, "But I don't feel pregnant!"[46] Her clothes were not tight, her body's temperature was not high, she did not have nausea . . . They told her that she was pregnant and that the pregnancy had reached maturity and that she would deliver that day. The women kept her company. At some point, she needed something in another room. While she was going to the other room, her right breast opened up and the Prophet Peace Be Upon Him appeared. The Prophet Peace Be Upon Him was not born like other babies. When babies are born, their heads appear first, but the Prophet jumped and appeared on his feet. He was already bathed, fed, etc., and he prostrated himself and prayed to God.[47]

This miraculous narrative of pregnancy and birth is typical of sira narrated still today in West Africa. It is not unreasonable to assume that it was transmitted as such from generation to generation for centuries. It is quite different from the more sober historical accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, such as that of Ibn Hisham (d. 835), of which only one copy has been found in documents in the West African Islamic manuscript database that Hall and Stewart analyzed.

Theology

Central to Islamic theology is the notion of monotheism, or the "oneness" of God, known in Arabic as *tawhid.* Treatises of theology discuss what believers must know about God, his attributes, the meaning of prophecy, the apostleship of the Prophet Muhammad, and the hereafter. The most studied texts of tawhid in the western Islamic world and beyond are the treaties of the Algerian mystic Abu 'Abdallah Mahammad b. Yusuf b. 'Umar b. Shu'ayb Al-Sanusi (1435–1490). A renowned exponent of the Ash'ari theology, Al-Sanusi produced three treatises of tawhid, taught at the three levels of learning and so titled. The most advanced is titled *Kubra,* followed by the intermediary, *Wusta,* and then the elementary, *Sughra.* These treatises were taught in colleges in the Maghreb as well as in Egypt and Mecca. The elementary one (*Sughra*) is a text about ten pages long, called *Umm al-Barahin* (Mother of Proofs). It is one of the most taught theology texts in the Bilad al-Sudan. Ahmad Baba mentions the *Sughra* as part of the texts he studied with Bagayogo al-Wangari in the late sixteenth century.[48] Scholars from the Bilad al-Sudan have commented on Al-Sunusi's treatises, including in African languages.[49] Several Fulfulde adaptations of Sanusi theological treatises have been taught in West Africa since the seventeenth century. One of them is known as *Kabbe tawhidi,* which is the translation of the Arabic expression "People of Unicity." Taught orally[50] to gradually initiate Fulfulde speakers into Islamic theology, the teachings of the Kabbe commentary were inspired by Sanusi's pedagogical approach to the topic. Fulfulde clerics broke down the theological discussion into three parts, taught at the elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. Subsequently, the seventeenth-century Fulani scholar Muhammad al-Wali b. Abdallah al-Fulani produced a commentary in Arabic of the Kabbe, itself based on the *Sughra.*[51]

Another version of Sanusi's theological treatise in Fulfulde is called *Maddin,* from the Arabic "What Is Religion?" It was taught from the early twentieth century in Mali. Like the Kabbe, its method is gradual, starting with the basic elements of the Islamic creed and the accomplishment of rituals such as purification and prayer, which are accessible to most students. The *Maddin* ends with the study of esoteric sciences such as numerology, important for only the most advanced students. Brenner hypothesized that these formulations of Islamic theology were a means for Muslim clerics to teach Islam to the grassroots and/or the youngest to the Islamic faith in a context where Islam was a minority religion. Through the oral explanation of some fundamentals of the faith, clerics could teach in African languages masses who typically did not attend Islamic schools, which were reserved for the elites.[52] This was notably the case in the nineteenth-century Sokoto Caliphate, during which Fodiawa, as previously mentioned, adopted the same methods. Members of the Yan Taru memorized poems composed by Nana Asma'u in Fulfulde and taught them to other women. This intertextual process of translation and commentary from Arabic to African languages and sometime vice versa mediated by Sudani scholars helped bridge the gap between two epistemological universes and contributed to the production of an Islamic space of meaning in the Bilad al-Sudan.

Sufism

Sufi orders played a decisive role in the Islamization of West Africa, particularly from the eighteenth century on. Most Zawaya and the Fulbe claimed membership in the Sufi orders of the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. As such, their worldviews were deeply influenced by Sufi concepts and shaped by Sufi practices. Sufi influences, therefore, could be found in the study of tafsir as discussed earlier, and of course in the huge corpus of devotional poetry praising and seeking the intercession of the Prophet and other saints. Thus, the practice of Sufism has been central in many facets of the life of the Sudani Muslims, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet not many Sufi manuals were part of what Hall and Stewart called the "historical core curriculum." Hall and Stewart have found very few copies of works of towering figures of Sufism, such as Ibn 'Arabi, in the West African collections of manuscripts that served as the basis of their database. They have hypothesized that West African Sufis probably did not have firsthand knowledge of works of Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabi,[53] but instead were exposed to the thought of Ibn 'Arabi through the works of later Sufi authors. This seems true for Umar Tall, who does not directly cite Ibn 'Arabi in his magnum opus *Rimah Hizb al-Rahim 'ala Nuhur Hizb*

al-Rajim (Spears of the Party of the Merciful Thrown at the Throats of the Party of the Accursed),[54] the second most important treatise of the Tijaniyya tariqa. In fifty-five chapters of varying length, Tall addresses some broader issues of Islamic mysticism and makes the case that the Tijaniyya is superior to and abrogates all others just as Islam abrogates all other religions. Topics covered in his *Kitab al-Rimah* include broader mystical themes such as the relationship between the aspirant and the master, spiritual retreat (*khalwa*), friendship with God (*walaya*), matters concerning Islamic law, and the notion of the Muhammadan path (*tariqa muhammadiyya*),[55] as well as the merits of the Tijaniyya.[56] Umar Tall makes over 600 quotations from 125 different sources dealing predominantly with mysticism (370 citations), but also logic, jurisprudence, theology, exegesis, hadith, *adab,* grammar, and panegyric of the Prophet. Two-thirds of the citations of Sufi sources draw from the works of only three Sufi authors, primarily 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani (d. 1565),[57] who gets the lion's share with 98 citations from fifteen of his books, followed by 'Ali Harazim Barrada,[58] whose *Jawahir al-Ma'ani* is cited 84 times. The third most cited source is the one titled *Al-Ibriz* by Ahmad al-Mubarak al-Lamati (d. 1742).[59] Other influential authors cited by Umar Tall include Ahmad Zarruq[60] (d. 1493) and the Egyptian Ibn 'Ata Allah al-Iskandari (d. 1309).

Arabic Language

The scientific study of Arabic-language literature, including the pre-Islamic poetry genres, became very important in Islamic studies. The most important legacy of pre-Islamic poetry included the *Suspended Poems* (*al-Mu'allaqat*). Composed by famous poets, they told stories of love and separation from the beloved. Found in large numbers in West African manuscript collections,[61] the *Suspended Poems* were committed to memory by all accomplished Islamic scholars as part of their studies and thus helped develop a sound vocabulary in the Arabic language.

Also important was the study of Arabic grammar, morphology, and syntax. At the introductory level, the two key texts studied are the *Al-Ajurrumiyya* by 'Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Sanhaji, known as Ibn Ajurrum (d. 1323), and the *Alifyya* (a poem of one thousand stanzas), which summarizes the most important rules of Arabic syntax and is authored by Jamal-al-din Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Ta'i al-Jayyani, known as Ibn Malik (d. 1273). Commentaries on this latter poem by authors from the Bilad al-Sudan were also used in teaching.

Notable among them is the *Ihmirar* (Reddening) by Mukhtar b. Buna (d. 1805 or 1806), a Mauritanian scholar. In the study of Arabic morphology, another much-used title is *Lamiyat al-af'al,* also authored by Ibn Malik as a complement to his one-thousand-stanza didactic poem on syntax.[62]

Although the field of lexicology was taught, it is not clear that large encyclopedic dictionaries were available. We have no evidence that the *Lisan al-Arab* (The Arab Tongue) by Ibn Manzur al-Ifriqi (1233–1312) was used. The best-known encyclopedic dictionary in West Africa, according to Stewart and Hall, is the *Qamus al-Muhit* (Comprehensive Dictionary) by Al-Firuzabadi (d. 1415). It is mentioned in the *Tarikh al-Fattash,* attributed to Mahmud Ka'ti. It must also have been known in Hausaland, since Uthman Dan Fodio traveled to Tafadek, north of Agades in the Air Mountains, with his supply of paper to find and make a copy of this dictionary.[63]

Talismanic Sciences

The morning I went to the École Georges Clemenceau for the first time, I (and my brothers and sisters) ate a special meal made of mouton for breakfast. Included in the meal was water collected from the washing of verses of the Qur'an. We were given the same meal every first day of a new academic year. Called *kiis,* it was destined to open our brains and make us intelligent. One verse that appears in such a talismanic recipe is Qur'an 87:6: *Sa nuqri'uka fa la tansa,* "By degrees shall We teach thee to declare (the Message), so thou shalt not forget." We were not the only ones given kiis. At the time of national exams, our house was always full of visitors from families from the lower to the upper class, soliciting petitionary prayers or recipes for their children. Most seekers of the recipes were parents of children who attended Western schools. My mother offered these recipes, which for generations had been transmitted in her scholarly lineage. West African scholars have taught these sciences to their students and their families for centuries. Thus, any attempt to comprehend the curriculum through the sole study of the main texts circulating in region will miss a central subject.

From Al-Bakri's story of the conversion of the King of Mali[64] to the most recent narratives of Islamization, many a history of conversion to Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan has been attributed to the power of Muslim clerics to perform miracles. We have seen that chiefs, including non-Muslim ones, surrounded themselves with Muslim clerics to accomplish many tasks—above all to

produce talismans and charms to protect them and their kingdoms. Those talismans draw both from the Qur'an and from other local magical concepts and practices.[65] During the millennium of slow Islamization of the Bilad al-Sudan, survival and freedom were real challenges to most people, who had to face daily adversities such as disease, drought, slave raiding, and more. In this context, for Islam to survive and flourish, its messengers had to manage more or less successfully the misfortunes and hopes of the people. There was no reputable Muslim cleric who did not receive an initiation into the art of talisman making. Established scholarly families each possess their own book of talismanic recipes (*kunnash* or *mujarabbat* in Arabic). These are transmitted from generation to generation within the same family or from a shaykh to highly esteemed disciples or friends. Possessors of talismanic secrets shared them only with people who paid them a lot of money or who had served them devotedly for years. For this reason, it would be hard to find them in public libraries or collections open to researchers. This points to the fact that some types of knowledge were earned in this context and not open and free as in the world of modern scholarship.

Talismanic sciences in West Africa draw from many sources, including the abundant literature known as *Fada'il al-Qur'an* (Virtues of the Qur'an) or *al-tibb al-nabawi* (Prophetic Medicine), which deals with the health virtues of some food, such as honey and dates, but also the talismanic use of the Holy Qur'an. The most important source for the study of talismanic sciences in West Africa is the *Shams al-Ma'arif wa Lata'if al-'Awarif* (The Book of the Sun of Gnosis and the Subtleties of Elevated Things), attributed to al-Buni (d. around 1225), on which West African Muslims have built to develop their own expertise in the field. Talismanic sciences also draw on the use of plants, minerals, animals, and even, in some extreme cases, human remains. In addition to letters and written texts, talismans may include numbers, usually contained in magic squares. One of the most remarkable achievements of medieval Arab mathematics has been the construction of magic squares, known as *waqf al-'adad* in Arabic. The science of the magic squares, which dates back to the ninth century, consists of arranging a set of numbers in square formation so that the total of each row, column, and diagonal is the same. A very common magic square in Islamic talismanic sciences is known as the magic square of Al-Ghazali (*al-muthallath al-ghazali*), although there is no credible evidence linking it to the famous Muslim thinker Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111). In this case, the total of each column, row, and main diagonal is fifteen:

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

The Mauritanian saying that those who master talismanic knowledge are either Zawaya of the Kunta clan or their Pulaar-speaking neighbors of Fuuta in northern Senegal suggests a strong interest developed by these scholars in the talismanic sciences in general and in the magic squares in particular. Shaykh Sidi Mukhtar al-Kunti is credited with having developed a magic square named after him (*al-muthallath al-kunti*).

African Language Lexicology

Last but not least, Islamic studies contributed to a considerable enrichment of African languages. First of all, it transcribed many of those languages that were not written down prior to the Islamization of their speakers. But Islamic studies did more: it led to a considerable development of the vocabulary of those languages. To understand this process, a parallel can be drawn with the ways in which engineering and other sciences contribute to the creation of new terms to capture new scientific discoveries. Because the educational system was bilingual among Non-Arabic speakers, whatever they learned in Arabic, they had to figure out how to translate into their mother tongue. Thus, an exegesis of the Qur'an in Hausa or a lecture on Sufism in Pulaar entailed the development of technical language in the respective African target language. As a result, Islamic studies, far from eradicating or relegating the African language to a lesser status, in fact did much to enrich and expand those languages. The more learned the scholar in Islamic studies, the more distinctively he could express himself in his native language. We see a particular benefit of this centuries-long development of native languages in recent years in West Africa: emphasis has been put on the promotion of African languages. Journalists, in particular, are required to master African languages and provide a version of all broadcast news not only in European but also African languages. It is interesting that, in the process of searching for an adequate vocabulary to translate complex phenomena into

African languages, journalists rely heavily on the expertise of Arabophone scholars who have been doing this for centuries. Most linguists operating in the modern academy do the same. The acquisition of a refined vocabulary in African languages was, however, not a discipline taught as such. It was woven into the process of transmission of Islamic knowledge by the bilingual nature of the latter.

We see how the Islamization of the Bilad al-Sudan paved the way for the development of a complex educational system that integrated the Bilad al-Sudan into the Islamic epistemological order. Different forms of mobility—such as trade, pilgrimage, and travel in search of knowledge—ensured that the Bilad al-Sudan received a regular supply of some of the most important texts known in the region and the world. Sudani Muslim clerics built on those texts in order to establish a curriculum that varied regionally based on the availability of the teachers and interpreters. The *Tarikh al-Fattash* narrates that Sidi 'Abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi from Hijaz, who visited Timbuktu in the first half of the fourteenth century, acknowledged that scholars of Timbuktu surpassed him in the knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, suggesting that being widely read was a fairly common occurrence there.[66] Yet Sudani scholars were not only consumers of imported literature, but also producers. They authored many commentaries on Maliki texts, proving their full integration in the discursive space of the Islamic west (*al-gharb al-Islami*). We have traces of the involvement of Sudani scholars in major debates among medieval jurists and theologians. Slavery is one such debate in which Sudani scholars such as Makhluf al-Balbali and Ahmad Baba issued authoritative fatwas.[67] Another much more controversial debate is about tobacco, on which Ahmad Baba issued an equally authoritative fatwa.[68] Finally, further evidence of the active participation of Sudani scholars in shaping the Maliki discursive space is the fact that the updated dictionary of Maliki authors by Ahmad Baba included authors from the Bilad al-Sudan.

In addition to the literature just discussed, we can find many tales of travels across the Sahara in both directions. From the beginning of the royal pilgrimages to the twenty-first century, Arab scholars have gone to the Bilad al-Sudan to teach and learn. Sudani scholars have headed in the opposite direction. Some have traveled, studied, and taught in Mecca and Egypt before colonialism. Notable among them is Kashinawi, who taught in Al-Azhar in the eighteenth century. But even after colonialism, this movement continued. As noted in Naqar's study of the pilgrimage tradition in West African, there were Muslims

who left for the Holy Lands because they did not want to live in a land governed by infidels.[69] Chanfi Ahmed has effectively documented that West Africans who settled in Saudi Arabia were actively involved in proselytizing and thus "helped the regime of King Ibn Sa'ud at its beginning in the field of teaching and spreading the Salafi-Wahhabi's Islam both inside and outside Saudi Arabia."[70] Others have not traveled beyond their native homeland but were nonetheless fully integrated into the Islamic epistemological universe to which they contributed and by which they have expanded the knowledge base of the Bilad al-Sudan. Chapter 5 will analyze the Islamic archive with a focus on the main debates addressed in the writings of scholars in the Bilad al-Sudan in the period from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century.

74. On the pre-colonial curriculum of the Fulbe, see Hiskett, "Material Related to the State of Learning," and A. D. Bivar and Mervyn Hiskett, "The Arabic Literature of Nigeria to 1804: A Provisional Account," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (1962): 104–114; al-Hadi Mabruk al-Dali, *Qaba'il al-Fullan. Dirasa watha'iqiyya* (Tripoli: al-Sharika al-'amma li al-waraq wa al-tiba'a, 2002–2003).
75. R. M. Dilley, *Islamic and Caste Knowledge Practices among Haal Pulaar'en in Senegal: Between Mosque and Termite Mound* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 95.
76. For a comprehensive list of their works, see chapters 2, 3, and 4 of John Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa,* Vol. II, *The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*: "The Fodiawa (1) Shaykh 'Uthman b. Muhammad Fudiye," 52–85; "The Fodiawa (2) 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad Fudiye," 86–113; "The Fodiawa (3) Muhammad Bello," 114–149. For a more detailed analysis of the styles, themes, and contents provided in chapter 5 of Ali Abu Bakr, see *Al-thaqafa al-'arabiyya fi Nigeria,* "al-intaj al-adabi fi al-qarn al-tasi' 'ashar" (The Intellectual Production of the Nineteenth Century), 246–322.
77. Jean Boyd and Murray Last, "The Role of Women as 'Agents Religieux' in Sokoto," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985): 283–300, 286.
78. Boyd and Mack, *Collected works of Nana Asma'u;* Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister, Nana Asma'u, 1793–1865: Teacher, Poet & Islamic Leader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).
79. John Hunwick, "The Arabic Literature of Africa Project," in Jeppie and Diagne, *Meanings of Timbuktu,* 306.
80. M. A. Al-Hajj, "The Writings of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio: A Plea for Dating and Chronology," *Kano Studies* 1, no. 2 (1974–1977): 5–14, 9.
81. Last, "Book in the Sokoto Caliphate," 141; Boyd and Last, "Role of Women as 'Agents Religieux,'" 290.
82. Beverly Mack, "Muslim Women Scholars in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Morocco to Nigeria," in Jeppie and Diagne, eds., *Meanings of Timbuktu,* 165–179, 167; Balaraba B. M. Sule and Priscilla Starratt, "Islamic Leadership Positions for Women," in C. Coles and B. Mack, eds., *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).
83. Beverly Mack, "Muslim Women Scholars," in Jeppie and Diagne, *Meanings of Timbuktu,* 178, n. 22.
84. Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade,* 95–102.
85. David Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics. Abdul Bokar Kan and Futa Toro, 1853–1891* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade,* 102–106.
86. Bintou Sanankoua, *Un empire peul du XIX e siècle: La Diina du Macina* (Paris: Karthala, 1990).
87. See David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). In addition to the excellent study of Robinson, two other biographies that better reflect the Tall family's perspective on Umar Tall are provided by his great granddaughter and his great grandson. The first in the French language is Madina Ly Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l'ouest au XIXe siècle: la Tijaniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyu contre les pourvoirs traditionnels et la puissance coloniale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), and the second, monumental one of more than a thousand pages in Arabic is Muhammad al-Muntaqa Ahmad Tall, *Al-Jawahir wa al-durar fi Sirat al-Shaykh Al-Hajj Umar Tall* (Beirut: Dar al-Buraq, 2005).
88. Titled *Rimah Hizb al-Rahim 'ala Nuhur Hizb al-Rajim* (The Spear of the Merciful against the Throat of the Reviled), this text has still not been translated into a European language. For an analysis of the text, see John Hunwick, "An Introduction to the Tijani Path: Being an Annotated Translation of the Chapter Headings of the Kitab al-Rimah of Al-Hajj 'Umar Tall," *Islam et Societies au Sud du Sahara* 6 (1992): 17–32.
89. Hill, "Divine Knowledge"; Eric Ross, "Marabout Republics Then and Now: Configuring Muslim Towns in Senegal," *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara* 16 (2002): 35–65.
90. Ka, *Ecole de Pir–Saniokhor.*
91. Cheikh Gueye, *Touba: La capital des Mourides* (Paris: Karthala, 2002).
92. Much of our discussion is focused on West Africa. For a discussion of the formation of Shurafa communities in East Africa, see Abdul Hamid M. el-Zein, *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).
93. David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 52–53.

4. Curriculum and Knowledge Transmission

1. See Shaykh Hadi Niasse, "Celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad," a lecture delivered in New York in 2002, and translated from Wolof by the author. A narrative with some similarity by Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse is reported in John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 134–135.
2. Sean O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 175.
3. See Zachary Wright, *On The Path of the Prophet. Shaykh Ahmad Tijani and the Tariqa Muhammadiyya* (Atlanta: The African American Islamic Institute, 2005, 128–133.
4. For an elaborate discussion of Muhammadan reality and its centrality in Tijaniyya Sufism, see Ogunnaike, "Sufism and Ifa," chapter 3.
5. See Bruce Hall and Charles Stewart, "The Historic 'Core Curriculum' and the Book Market in Islamic West Africa," in Krätli and Lydon, eds., *Trans-Saharan*

Book Trade, 109–174. Others who offer a good overview of circulating texts in specific regions of the Sahel include Dedoud Ould Abdallah, *Dawr al-Shanaqita,* 29, which covers Saharan scholarship; Ka, *Ecole de Pir Saniokhor,* which covers Senegambian Islamic scholarship; Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire,* which deals with Islamic scholarship in the Middle Niger; and, finally, Hiskett, "Material Relating to the State of Learning," and Bivar and Hiskett, "The Arabic Literature of Nigeria to 1804," which cover Islamic scholarship in the central Sudan.

6. http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=91087
7. Denny, *Encyclopaedia of Islam II.*
8. Ibid.
9. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 1.
10. Hall and Stewart , "Historic 'Core Curriculum,'" 118.
11. See A. Rippin, "Tafsir," *Encyclopaedia of Islam II.*
12. Levtzion, "Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan to 1800," 70.
13. See Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire,* 51, 59.
14. John Hunwick, "Note on a Late Fifteenth-Century Document concerning al-Takrur," in C. Allen and R. W. Johnson, *African Perspectives: Papers in the History, Politics and Economics of Africa presented to Thomas Hodgkin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 29–30; Levtzion, *Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan to 1800,* 73.
15. Ibrahim Niasse, *Removal of Confusion,* 10, n. 16.
16. See Ousmane Kane, *Handlist of Manuscripts in the Libraries of Shaykh Serigne Mor Mbaye Cissé, al-Hajj Malick Sy & Shaykh Ibraahim Niasse* (London: Al-Furqan, 1997).
17. See Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, *Fi Riyad al-Tafsir li l-Quran al-karim,* six volumes, compiled by Muhammad b. 'Abdallah (Lemden, Mauritania: Muhammad b. Shayh 'Abdallah Publishers, 2010).
18. See Niasse Ibrahim, *Translation and Interpretation of the Holy Quran in Wolof 1950–1960* (New York: Sall Family Publishers, 1998).
19. Ibrahim Niasse, *Jawahir al-Rasa'il,* Being a Collection of Letters Written by the Author, part II (Borno: Abul Fath 'Ali al-Yarawi Publisher, n.d.), 59.
20. Joseph Hill, "Divine Knowledge," 2; Michael Lambek and Andrew Strathern, "Body and Mind in Mind. Body and Mind in Body. Some Anthropological Interventions in a Long Conversation," in *Bodies and Persons. Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Michael Lambek, "Certain Knowledge Contestable Authority: Power and Practice on the Islamic Periphery," *American Ethnologist* 17 (1990): 23–40.
21. Andrea Brigaglia, "Learning, Gnosis and Exegesis: Public Tafsir and Sufi Revival in the City of Kano (Northern Nigeria)," *Die Welt Des Islams* 49, no. 2 (2009): 334–366.
22. This paragraph draws from Wael Hallaq, *Introduction to Islamic Law,* 7–11.

23. Hall and Stewart, "Historic 'Core Curriculum,'" 29–30.
24. Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xxiv.
25. Lansine Kaba, *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971); Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 1997.
26. See John Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire,* 65–67, or Mukhtar b. Yahya al-Wangari, "Shaykh Baghayogho al-Wangari and the Wangari Library in Timbuktu," in Jeppie and Diagne, *Meanings of Timbuktu,* 281–82.
27. Hall and Stewart, "Historic 'Core Curriculum,'" 132.
28. Ibid., 133. The first local commentary on the Mukhtasar was composed by Mahmud B. 'Umar Aqit (1463–1548), who popularized it while teaching in Timbuktu. Stefan Reichmuth, "Islamic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Levtzion and Pouwels, eds., *History of Islam,* 427.
29. See 'Uthman b. Fudi, *Bayan wujub al-hijra,* 48.
30. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of fatwas on slavery.
31. John Hunwick, *Shari'a in Songhay. The Replies of Al-Maghili to the Questions of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); El Hadj Ravane Mbaye, "Un aperçu de l'islam Songhay ou Réponses d'Al-Maghili aux questions posées par Askia el-Hadji Muhammad, empereur de Gao," *Bulletin de l'IFAN,* série B, XXXIV,no. 2, 1972, 237-67.
32. For an elaborate discussion of the paradigm shifts in the understanding of knowledge in medieval Islamic history, see Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1970).
33. J. Robson, "Hadith," *Encyclopaedia of Islam II.*
34. Ibid.
35. This is found in many West African collections. I also found copies of this poem in all Senegalese collections that I catalogued. See Kane, *Handlists of Islamic Manuscripts.*
36. See Sharafu-d-Din, al-Busiri, *Al-Burda.*
37. Muhammad b. Suleyman al-Jazuli, *Dala'il al-khayrat wa shawariq al-anwar fi dhikr al-salat 'ala al-nabi al-mukhtar,* translated as *Guide to Goodness* by Andrey Hassan Rosowsky (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2006).
38. See Ousmane Kane and John Hunwick, "Senegambia III: Writers of the Murid Tariqa," in Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa,* Vol. IV, 396–452; Dumont, *La Pensée religieuse d'Ahmadou Bamba.*
39. See Ousmane Kane, *The Homeland Is the Arena: Religion, Transnationalism, and the Integration of Senegalese Immigrants in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 5.

40. Loimeier, *Islamic Reform;* Kane, *Muslim Modernity;* Kaba, *Wahhabiyya.*
41. W. Raven, "Sira," *Encyclopeadia of Islam II* on whom this paragraph relies.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Malik, Al-Muwatta, "hadith 1614," accessed December 26, 2012, http://www.dailyhadithonline.com/2011/02/01/the-prophet-was-sent-to-perfect-good-character/.
45. See Wilks, "Transmission of Learning," 168.
46. Literally, "nothing happened to me."
47. Niasse, Celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad." Our translation from the Wolof language.
48. See Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire,* 65–67, or Mukhtar b. Yahya al-Wangari, "Shaykh Baghayogho al-Wangari and the Wangari Library in Timbuktu," in Jeppie and Diagne, *Meanings of Timbuktu,* 281–282.
49. Khassim Diakhaté, "Al-Sanusi, un Africain ash'arite au 15ème siècle," *Ethiopiques,* 66–67, 2001, 69–84. Louis Brenner, *Réflexion sur le savoir islamique en Afrique noire* (Bordeaux: Centre d'étude d'Afrique noire, 1985), chapter 3, "Enseignement théologique en fulfulde."
50. Brenner, *Réflexion,* 57.
51. Muhammad al-Wali b. Abdallah al-Fulani, *Al-manhaj al-farid fi ma'rifat 'ilm al-tawhid,* in Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol. IV, 267; Brenner, *Réflexion,* 57.
52. Brenner, *Réflexion,* 62.
53. Hall and Stewart , "Historic 'Core Curriculum,'" 140. The same argument was made earlier by Michel Chodkiewicz, a leading expert on Ibn 'Arabi. See M. Chodkiewicz, "The Diffusion of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* IX (1991): 36–57.
54. Bernd Radtke, "Studies on the Sources of the *Kitab Rimah Hizb al-Rahim* of 'Umar Tall," *Sudanic Africa* 6: 73–113, has compiled all citations. He is the main source of information for this paragraph.
55. Radtke, "Studies on the Sources of the *Kitab Rimah.*"
56. See Said Bousbina, "Les mérites de la Tijaniyya d'après "Rimah" d'Al-Hajj 'Umar," *Islam et sociétés au Sud du Sahara* 3 (1989): 253–260.
57. *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur,* II, 335, S, II, 464.
58. *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur,* S, II, 876.
59. *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur,* II, 462, S II, 704.
60. For more on Zarruq, see Ali Fahmi Kashim, *Zarruq, The Sufi: A Guide in the Way and a Ladder to the Truth, A Biographical and Critical Study of a Mystic from North Africa* (London: Outline Series, 1976); Scott Kugle, *Rebel between Spirit and Law: Ahmad Zarruq: Sainthood and Authority in Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
61. Hall and Stewart , "Historic 'Core Curriculum,'" 123.
62. Ibid., 121.

63. Last, "Book in the Sokoto Caliphate," 143.
64. See "Al-Bakri," in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus,* 82.
65. Ousmane Kane, "Reconciling Islam and Non Islamic Beliefs: Reflection on a Talismanic Textile of the Art Institute of the Chicago," *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara* 2: 137–161.
66. Levtzion, "Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan," 69.
67. See Chapter 5.
68. Aziz Batran, *Tobacco Smoking under Islamic Law: Controversy over Its Introduction* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2003).
69. Al-Naqar, *Pilgrimage Tradition.*
70. Chanfi Ahmed, *West African 'ulamā' and Salafism in Mecca and Medina* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2015), back cover.

5. Shaping an Islamic Space of Meaning: The Discursive Tradition

1. Talal Asad, "The Idea of Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle?* 17, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 24.
2. John Hunwick, "The Arabic Literature of Africa Project," in Jeppie and Diagne, *Meanings of Timbuktu,* 303–310, 314.
3. Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters. Arabic Knowledge Construction* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 92. I thank Professor Mamadou Diouf for drawing my attention to this work.
4. See, for example, Abdullahi Mahadi, "The State and the Economy."
5. Hamidu Bobboye, "Ajami Literature and the Study of the Sokoto Caliphate," in Jeppie and Diagne, eds., *Meanings of Timbuktu,* 123–133, 129.
6. This is a classical definition of politics. See Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When and How?* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958).
7. John Fage, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History," *Journal of African History* X, no. 3 (1969): 393–404.
8. Academic coverage of the subject includes that by Allan Fisher and Humphrey Fisher, *Slavery and Muslim Society in Africa: The Institution in Saharan and Sudanic Africa, and the Trans-Saharan Trade* (London: Hurst, 1970); John Ralph Willis, ed., *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa* (London, England; Totowa, NJ: F. Cass, 1985); James L. A. Webb, *Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel, 1600–1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Hall, *History of Race in Muslim Africa.*
9. Bruce Hall, "Enslaved Paths of Circulation in the Sahara and Sahel. Commercial Networks and Slave Agency between Ghadames (Lybia) and Timbuktu (Mali) in the 19th Century," in Chouki el Hamel and Paul Lovejoy eds., *Confluence of Cultures,* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener, forthcoming). I thank Bruce Hall for granting permission to cite this piece.
10. John Hunwick and Fatima Harrak (annotated and translated by), *Mi'raj al-Su'ud:*