
Polyvalent, Transnational Religious Authority: The Tijaniyya Sufi Order and Al-Azhar University

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The Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya, a Sufi Muslim community in West Africa, has a longstanding relationship with Al-Azhar University in Egypt; since the 1980s, many of the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya's most prominent younger leaders have been graduates of Al-Azhar. This article explores what this relationship has meant for constructions of religious authority within the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya, examining how Al-Azhar graduates view their experiences of educational pluralism. The article discusses two countries where the community is well represented: Senegal and Nigeria. Drawing on interviews with Al-Azhar graduates, the article shows that polyvalent authority—in this case, the combination of hereditary authority, classical Islamic studies, and formal university degrees—requires ongoing renegotiation. Using the case of the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya and Al-Azhar, the article argues that polyvalent authority is a key product of transnational religious encounters. The Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya's experience sheds light on how other religious communities may be managing change, especially through the interlinked processes of credentialization and institutionalization.

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TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS are increasingly constitutive of religious life today. And perhaps encounters between different communities have long been crucial to religion. One well-known definition posits that “religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (Tweed 2008, 54). The mechanisms by which such “crossings” occur have yet to be fully elucidated, however. Discussing the “globalization” of individual traditions can be enlightening (e.g., Olupona and Rey 2008; Srinivas 2010), but the “globalization” framework has trouble describing changes that occur when the West is not a central actor—for example, encounters between Muslim-majority communities, as discussed in this paper.

Building on Thomas Csordas’ observation that some religions cross boundaries because of their “portable practices” and “transposable messages” (Csordas 2009, 4–5), this article proposes a third feature of religion that crosses boundaries: *polyvalent authority*. Authority cannot be reduced to either practice or message. It is “a relationship of power” that involves efforts to regulate practices and messages (Asad 1986, 15). For authorities, such relationships involve not just their audiences, but also other authorities and religious institutions (Brinton 2016, 5–6). Given the relational nature of power, religious authorities seek sources of legitimation. Important sources include heredity, election, specialized knowledge, and what Ninian Smart calls “mastery of the inner life” (Smart 1996, 99). Religious authority hardly ever rests on just one source, and so in a sense all authority is polyvalent and multi-faceted.

This article is concerned with polyvalent authority that blends local and extra-local sources of legitimation. Transnational encounters can change the structure of religious authority by adding new sources of legitimation as well as by changing the balance among different sources. The article considers a form of polyvalent authority with increasing salience in the Muslim world: the incorporation of university credentials, often acquired abroad, into older templates of authority. The article focuses not on how audiences react to this authority, but on how its bearers manage it; in other words, the article considers how bearers of educational pluralism understand their own credentials and the meaning of those credentials for their communities.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, incorporating university credentials into the construction of religious authority has often posed challenges. For communities experiencing rapid generational shifts, does the younger generation’s acquisition of formal credentials imply that the older generation’s models of knowledge are outmoded or deficient?

Facing this question, polyvalent authorities seek strategies that honor and integrate the different sources of their authority. Otherwise, they risk trampling on their communities' pasts and on a key source of their own legitimation.

CASE STUDY: THE TIJANIYYA-IBRAHIMIYYA OF SENEGAL AND NIGERIA

To better understand polyvalent authority and the challenges that it generates for leaders, this article examines a prominent Muslim community in West Africa: the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya of Ibrahim Niassé (1900–1975), which is a part of the Tijaniyya order, one of the most influential Sufi orders in Africa and the African diaspora. The Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya has a special relationship with Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt—one of the oldest and most respected institutions of higher Islamic learning in the Sunni Muslim world. By the 1980s, many of the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya's younger leaders held degrees from Al-Azhar. This relationship draws on centuries of contact between West African Muslims and al-Azhar, including a stay there by Ibrahim Niassé's father 'Abd Allāh (1845–1922). Yet the postcolonial manifestations of such relationships are more formalized and systematic than their colonial and precolonial antecedents. Building on important work by Zachary Wright concerning Senegal (Wright 2012; 2015), this article highlights al-Azhar graduates within the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya and their role in pedagogical and institutional change in the community.

The Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya is not the only Muslim community to cultivate a relationship with an institution of higher learning in the Middle East; Al-Azhar in particular is a hub for Muslim scholars from various nations, for example, Indonesia (Abaza 1993). Yet the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya represents an important case study of such relationships, because that community has “attempted to position itself not simply as a Sufi revivalist movement, but as the means to actualizing Muslim identity in the contemporary world” (Wright 2015, 4). Al-Azhar plays a strong role in that project; the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya's Al-Azhar graduates are at the forefront of efforts to balance continuity and change in the Muslim world today.

To understand the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya's relationship with Al-Azhar, it is important to discard stereotypes about African and Arab Muslims. For those holding such stereotypes, African Muslims are inherently “peaceful,” “moderate,” and “syncretistic,” whereas Arab Muslims are predisposed to “harshness” and “rigidity.” Building on such stereotypes, the international

media and Western think tanks widely depict Islamic universities, particularly those in the Arab world, as hubs for radicalizing Africans (e.g., Solomon 2016). According to such commentators, “uncompromising ideologies imported from the Middle East” prepare the ground for jihadist violence in Africa (Trofimov 2016). Echoing colonial discourses regarding alleged Arab “fanaticism” and “propaganda” (Tomlinson and Lethem 1927), twenty-first-century commentary frequently implies that contact between African Muslims and their Arab co-religionists inevitably radicalizes the former.

In West Africa, much scholarly literature echoes that perspective. Such literature depicts “*arabisants*”—Arabophones, whether trained abroad or at home—as a frustrated counter-elite (Otayek 1993; Abdoulaye 2002). This literature presumes that *arabisants* overwhelmingly oppose secularism (i.e., they are political Islamists) and Sufism (i.e., they are “Salafis,” “Wahhabis,” “fundamentalists,” etc.). This view of *arabisants* presupposes a binary opposition between them and “traditional” Muslim elites, who are presumed to be locally educated and whose familiarity with classical Arabic is assumed to be limited.

This literature as well as the media portrayals mentioned above often make little distinction regarding where Arabophones have studied in the Middle East: although Saudi Arabia is seen as the preeminent hub for “radicalization,” other destinations are treated as similarly threatening. Such literature also gives the impression that there is little variation in West Africa—or elsewhere in the world—in terms of how Arabophones fit into the religious and political fields of their home countries.

Even within the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya, there is variation in the reception of Al-Azhar degrees. By comparing two countries where the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya is present—Senegal and Nigeria—this article suggests that polyvalent authority is subject to ongoing renegotiation due to its inherent tensions. Moreover, the meanings of foreign credentials are conditioned by local factors. This study is informed by fieldwork in two cities that are hubs for the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya: a total of six months in Kano, Nigeria over 2010 to 2012, involving semistructured interviews with Tijani leaders and visits to important Tijani institutions as well as broader contact with the Tijaniyya, one of the foremost Muslim communities in the city; and a short visit to Kaolack, Senegal in July 2015 as well as a key interview in Senegal’s capital Dakar during the same fieldwork trip.

The fieldwork, combined with textual sources, permits a comparison of al-Azhar graduates in the two countries. In Senegal, where Sufi orders dominate religious life and play a respected role in national and local politics, most Al-Azhar graduates frame their experiences and careers in

strongly positive terms, although Senegalese Sufis and Al-Azhar graduates do face significant criticism and opposition from some quarters. In Muslim-majority northern Nigeria, where Sufi orders face considerable competition and where national and local politics are highly turbulent, Al-Azhar graduates have a more conflicted view of what the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya gained, and lost, in its relationship with Al-Azhar.

ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES AND TRANSNATIONAL, POLYVALENT AUTHORITY

Within the Muslim world, extra-local legitimation is not new. The journey for knowledge is foundational to Islam. The value Islam places on such travel is encapsulated not just in the Prophet Muhammad's famous statement "seek knowledge, even if you have to go as far as China" but also in the account of his own miraculous "night journey" to Jerusalem and the heavens. Throughout premodern Islamic history, the pilgrimage to Mecca and a tradition of peripatetic learning encouraged Muslim scholars to range far beyond their homes. Yet in the twentieth century, two trends altered the form and character of such travel.

The first trend was new political divisions within the Muslim world. Colonialism introduced new boundaries, restrictions, and mechanisms of surveillance and control. In West Africa, British and French colonial authorities were deeply nervous about and suspicious of Muslims who attempted to travel to Al-Azhar and other centers of learning in the Arab world (Hunwick 1996). Even as railways and airplanes allowed large numbers of West African Muslims to make the pilgrimage or to study in Arab lands, colonial officials imposed new requirements for travel authorization and documents. The cumulative effect of such restrictions and surveillance was what one Nigerian Muslim intellectual called an "iron curtain" between West Africa and the Arab world (Abubakar 1972, 471–72). West African Muslims returning from Egypt or Arabia often experienced harassment by colonial officials and organized opposition from local Muslim scholars (Kaba 1974).

When formal political decolonization began in the 1940s, restrictions and surveillance changed form. Pilgrims continued to need government-sanctioned travel documents. Pilgrims increasingly found themselves part of formal quota systems (imposed by their home governments as well as by Saudi Arabia). Scholars often needed travel documents and formal permission. Moreover, during colonialism and decolonization something of the former civilizational unity of the Muslim world was lost,

as Muslims were increasingly asked to identify as members of nations (Hodgson 1974, 411).

The second trend was the rise of universities. Key Islamic universities were founded during the twentieth century, such as the Islamic University of Medina, founded in 1961 in Saudi Arabia; others were overhauled, including Al-Azhar. The expansion of higher education reshaped the construction of contemporary Muslim religious authority. Over the course of the twentieth century, Muslim religious specialists increasingly sought university degrees as paths to knowledge and markers of prestige. Many of the twentieth century's most famous Muslim scholars obtained doctorates, especially from Al-Azhar. Examples include Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), probably the most famous living Sunni scholar and a voice associated strongly with the Muslim Brotherhood; and Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti (1929–2013), a neo-traditionalist Muslim scholar in Syria.

The classical “journey in search of knowledge” has been encased in a new, double formality: the formalities of state-regulated travel and the formalities of university education. These trends do not mean that university education has completely supplanted classical models of knowledge transmission. Such models include Qur'an schools (Ware 2014), mosque study circles (*halaqāt*), and the “authorization” (*ijāza*) that a teacher might bestow upon a qualified pupil—all models based around tutorial instruction and person-to-person transmission of knowledge. The push toward formalization and credentialization, however, does drive an increasing, and increasingly self-conscious, trend toward polyvalence in the construction of religious authority. Many Muslim scholars today present themselves as “*al-shaykh al-duktur* (Dr. Shaykh).” This construction confers a “double legitimacy”: “While the title of shaykh places them in the long-term history of Islam and adorns them with a religious aura, that of *duktur* anchors them in their epoch and grants them the status of highly trained expert” (Mouline 2014, 192).

In the postcolonial world, different Islamic universities have acquired, or have deepened, their associations with particular points of view. For example, Al-Azhar is associated with a defense of Sunni traditionalism (especially the four established legal schools and the Ash'ari theological school) and with openness toward Islamic philosophy and Sufism. In contrast, the Islamic University of Medina is strongly associated with Salafism (including Salafism's literalist and anti-Ash'ari theology) and anti-Sufism. In this atmosphere, certain religious communities have cultivated relationships with institutions that meet their needs and comport with their values. Those institutions, meanwhile, have undertaken global outreach in search of sympathetic students (Bano and Sakurai 2015; Farquhar 2016).

THE TIJANIYYA AND AL-AZHAR: ORIGINS OF A STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

The Tijaniyya is a Sufi order founded in North Africa in the late eighteenth century. Its founder Aḥmad al-Tijānī (1735–1815) made bold claims to spiritual distinction (Abun-Nasr 1965). Al-Tijānī said that his spiritual authority derived directly from the Prophet, who had come to him in a waking vision, a status that North African Sufis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rarely claimed. He asserted that the Tijaniyya superseded all other orders and described himself as the “Seal of the Saints”—an ultimate Sufi adept—in a way that paralleled or at least complemented the Prophet’s status as the “Seal of the Prophets.” During the nineteenth century, the order spread into West Africa, including present-day Senegal and Nigeria (Triaud and Robinson 2005).

The Tijaniyya-Ibrahmiyya of the Senegalese shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (1900–1975) is one of the most influential communities within the Tijaniyya. In 1929, Niasse, the son of a major Sufi scholar, staked his own claim to spiritual distinction. Recalling al-Tijānī’s prediction that a spiritual flood would burst into the world at a time of crisis, Niasse proclaimed himself *Ṣāhib al-Fayḍa* (Possessor of the Flood). In the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya’s cosmology, there is a flood that swept from God to the Prophet, then to al-Tijānī, and then through Niasse to humanity (Brigaglia 2001, 46). “The concept of *fayḍa* ...came to personify the community,” which saw the flood of people joining their community as a confirmation of Niasse’s spiritual status (Wright n.d., “The Concept of the Spiritual Flood (*fayḍa*) in Tijani Doctrine”). The Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya, it should be noted, does not consider itself separate from the larger Tijaniyya order; the phrase “Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya” is an exonym for referring to Niasse’s community, rather than a descriptor used by that community.

The Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya’s other distinguishing concept is *tarbiya*, or the spiritual training through which disciples access the flood. Building on earlier precedents and litanies within the Tijaniyya, Niasse advanced a system of *tarbiya* that was meant to allow large numbers of people to pass rapidly through defined stages of spiritual stations. Niasse offered this *tarbiya* “in line with the very essence of *fayḍa* and with Niasse’s mission as its bringer” (Seesemann 2011, 109). The epicenter of the new *fayḍa*-centered community became Medina Baye, a neighborhood in the Senegalese city of Kaolack.

Niasse attracted followings from Mali to Sudan. His international connections grew with relatively little interference from French colonial authorities, who were often more concerned with Muslim leaders’ politics than with the religious content of their careers, worldviews, and

relationships (Seesemann and Soares 2009, 104–7). As more and more Muslims gravitated toward Niasse, he became a new focal point for much of the Tijaniyya, and he made Medina Baye an important, transnational center of Tijani activities.

Niasse's influence was decisive in northern Nigeria. He attracted a rising circle of Tijani scholars, the Salgawa. Niasse made contacts with northern Nigerians first in Mecca in the mid-1930s, and then in visits to Nigeria, which evoked parallel visits of Nigerians to Kaolack, beginning in 1945 (Seesemann 2011, 188–90; Paden 1973, 106). Niasse was keen to have local allies in northern Nigeria and favored scholars with a reformist bent, while the Salgawa needed an outside leader who was not already embroiled in local politics (Anwar 1989, 59). In the 1960s, when Niasse began systematically sending his sons to Al-Azhar, the Salgawa followed suit. In so doing, they became part of a coordinated strategy within the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya to equip a younger generation with Al-Azhar credentials.

Al-Azhar comprises both a mosque and a network of schools. The institution's transformation into a modernized university occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Gesink 2009). Reform efforts culminated with a 1961 reform of al-Azhar decreed by the revolutionary government of President Gamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir (1918–1970, ruled 1954–1970 and better known as Nasser). This reform established new colleges at Al-Azhar for medicine, engineering, agriculture, and other subjects that lie outside the domain of Islamic religious sciences as conventionally understood. The reform weakened the authority of the Shaykh al-Azhar, the institution's senior scholar, as well as the authority of its scholars in general. By effectively nationalizing the institution, Nasser sought to yoke its prestige and its activities to domestic and foreign policy (Crecelius 1966; Skovgaard-Petersen 1997, 182–86). Despite their subordination to the political authorities, Al-Azhar's 'ulamā' continued to intervene in public debates about Islam and politics (Zeghal 1996). The university retains a reputation as the Sunni institution with the deepest and most diverse curriculum of Islamic religious learning.

Nasser positioned Egypt as a revolutionary power in Africa and used Al-Azhar in that effort. Even before the 1961 reform, however, Al-Azhar's 'ulamā' and officials had a rising interest in sub-Saharan Africa. During the 1950s, Al-Azhar sent teachers to the region and established satellite institutes there. The 1961 reform built on those activities by creating new administrative units, three of which were directed outward. The Administration of Research and Publishing oversaw *Majallat al-Azhar* (The Journal of Al-Azhar). The Administration of Da'wa (Calling People

to Islam) and Guidance sent delegations of Al-Azhar teachers overseas. Finally, the Administration of Islamic Delegations welcomed foreign students (Ahmed 2011, 352). Sub-Saharan Africa was one of several areas of focus.

Al-Azhar's outreach to sub-Saharan Africa coincided with Niassé's rising profile in the Arab world. His relationships with Arab leaders extended from Morocco, where prominent descendants of al-Tijānī lived, to Saudi Arabia: in 1962, he was a founding member of the Muslim World League in Mecca (Hunwick and O'Fahey 1995, 280). Niassé's relationship with Al-Azhar blossomed by 1961, when he led a Friday prayer at Al-Azhar mosque. He also became a member of the university's Academy of Islamic Research (Kane 1997, 309). Niassé also had scholarly connections to Egypt, having received "unlimited religious authorizations" (*ijāzāt muṭlaqa*) in exoteric disciplines from several major Egyptian scholars (Wright 2015, 194–95).

Niassé shared several political interests with Nasser, including what Niassé called "the war against Israeli infiltration in Africa" and the desire to liberate the continent's remaining colonies (quoted in Thiam 2002, 37). Niassé and Nasser, however, likely understood their shared goals in different ways: Niassé was "not fully at ease with Arab nationalism as an ideology of Islamic solidarity" (Wright 2015, 277), and he was skeptical about secular government. Yet these differences remained in the background as religious cooperation increased.

Niassé began systematically enrolling his sons at Al-Azhar in March 1961. He arrived with eight of his sons and "presented them" to the Shaykh of Al-Azhar, saying that he wanted them "to drink from the springs of the sciences of religion, language, and law (*li-yanhalū min yanābi' ulūm al-dīn wa-l-luġha wa-l-sharī'a*), to be able to serve Islam in their country after they return to it, and to be a beacon of Islamic guidance (*manār al-hidāya al-islāmiyya*)."² The eight youths, he added, were "the first batch," and a second batch of seven more would soon follow (quoted in Thiam 2002, 41). Niassé sent other sons and young men from his community to other Arab universities such as Al-Qarawiyyīn University in Morocco and Al-Bayḍā' University in Libya, but not in large numbers, and some of them later completed their studies at Al-Azhar.²

Niassé valued the breadth of the education that youths could receive at Al-Azhar. In a letter Niassé wrote to some of his children when they departed for Egypt, he referred to them as an "academic delegation (*al-ba'tha al-'ilmiyya*)" and called Cairo "the capital of knowledge (*āṣimat*

²Abubakar ibn Ahmad Thiam in discussion with author, July 21, 2015 in Kaolack, Senegal; Moustapha Diouf in discussion with author, July 20, 2015 in Kaolack, Senegal.

al-‘ilm.)” He expressed the hope that his children would use their education to become “judges, preachers, writers, and imams” (quoted in Thiam 2002, 43).

Yet Niasse also expressed misgivings about Egyptian society, and he urged his children to remain pious while abroad. Quoting a *ḥadīth* (reported statement) of the Prophet Muhammad, Niasse warned them to keep the right company, for “he who resembles a people is one of them” (quoted in Thiam 2002, 43). He ordered them to observe the broader Islamic principle of “obeying the right and avoiding the wrong,” and warned them about “evil mates (*quranā’ al-sū’*), men and especially women.” He closed by saying, “I hope that you will not choose a path other than the path I have outlined for you, and that my father Al-Ḥajj ‘Abd Allāh outlined for me” (quoted in Thiam 2002, 44–45). Even at the beginning of the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya’s relationship with Al-Azhar, the community’s leader was concerned about the challenges of managing educational pluralism: Niasse wanted his children to immerse themselves in Al-Azhar, but not to lose sight of their genealogy and the responsibilities associated with it. Niasse saw university degrees as crucial credentials for the rising generation, but he did not view the degree as replacing or supplanting moral training, which he still considered the preserve of his own community.

Starting in the 1960s, many Senegalese and Nigerian Tijanis studied at Al-Azhar. One study found that, of an estimated 22,571 international students who graduated from Al-Azhar between 1961 and 2005, nearly one-quarter (24.3%, or 5,447 people) came from Africa (including North Africa). Of the forty-one African countries represented in this total, Egypt’s neighbor Sudan had the highest number of graduates (nearly 40% of the African total, or 2,176 people). Senegal had the second-highest number (12.6% of the African total, or 689 people), and Nigeria had the third-highest (12.4% of the African total, or 673 people) (Sall 2009, 22–24). These figures resemble other estimates that show strong representation for Senegalese and Nigerians at Al-Azhar. For example, of 1,944 total African recipients of special Al-Azhar grants from 1993 to 1994, Nigeria was the most represented with 233 students, and Senegal was second with 168 (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2004, 271–81).³ Not all Nigerian and Senegalese

³There is an apparent discrepancy between the two estimates, given that the average number of annual graduates from 1961 to 2005 (121) in Sall’s estimate is much lower than the number of grant recipients from 1993 to 1994 cited by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. The difference may reflect a low graduation rate, or ‘Abd al-Raḥmān may be drawing on a wider population (i.e., students enrolled in Al-Azhar’s secondary school, etc.) than Sall.

students were Tijanis, but the sons of Tijani shaykhs encountered many of their countrymen, as well as fellow Tijanis, during their time at Al-Azhar.

THE SENEGALESE ARENA: KAOLACK AND AL-AZHAR

Senegal is the most politically stable country in West Africa and has been a competitive democracy since 2000. Senegal is famous for its social contract, which has positioned Sufi shaykhs as key interlocutors between state and society (Villalón 1995). Some scholars believe this arrangement gives Senegalese society a unique degree of religious tolerance (Diouf 2013). The social contract dates to the colonial period, when a generation of Sufi shaykhs who lived from the 1850s to the 1920s—including Ibrahim Niassé's father—helped to transform relations between French colonialists and Senegalese Muslims from armed conflict into mutual “accommodation” (Robinson 2000).

The social contract has continued in the postcolonial era, although moments of conflict have occurred. Ibrahim Niassé himself challenged the secular Senegalese elite on at least three occasions: by forming a short-lived, religiously oriented political party with another young Tijani leader in 1959 (Gray 1998, 73); by defying a state ban against holding public Friday prayers during the 1968 leftist protests; and by criticizing the secularizing content of the 1972 family code.⁴ Overall, however, relations between the Senegalese state and the Sufi orders have been characterized by mutual respect, with Sufi leaders often mediating between state and society.

Senegal's Sufi orders have attracted tremendous scholarly attention, but in much of the literature “the mechanisms of continued adaptation and even expansion of West African clerical traditions in the postcolonial context are passed over, except simplistic observations that such groups remain popular” (Wright 2015, 24–25). Academic treatment of Sufi orders' connections to the Arab world is also sparse. As noted above, scholars often take a narrow view of West African “*arabisants*,” or Muslims who have made Arabic their primary language of expertise. Scholars working on Senegal often depict *arabisants* as a frustrated counter-elite, excluded from political power by secularist elites and marginalized in religious affairs by locally trained, “traditional” Muslim scholars (Fall 1993). These academic discourses echo the views of Senegal's Francophone, governing elite, whose members sometimes publicly dismiss the value of leaving Senegal to study Arabic or Islamic sciences (Sall 2009, 13).

⁴Moustapha Diouf and Moustapha Gueye in discussion with the author, July 21, 2015 in Kaolack, Senegal.

Stereotypes about *arabisants* break down when one considers the substantial number of *arabisants* within Senegal's Sufi orders, including the Tijaniyya. For example, since the 1980s, Niasse's grandsons Hassan Cissé (1945–2008), Tijani Cissé (b. 1955), and Muhammad Mahy Cissé have been three rising leaders with the community. Hassan Cissé earned a BA in Islamic Studies and Arabic Literature from Ain Shams University in Cairo and an MA in English from the University of London. He undertook doctoral studies in Religion at Northwestern University before leaving the program to become imam in Kaolack upon the death of his father (Wright n.d., "Shaykh Hassan Cisse"). Tijani Cissé studied the Qur'an and Islamic sciences under his father and grandfather, and then traveled to Al-Azhar, earning a BA in Arabic in 1977 and a degree in *uṣūl al-dīn* (foundations of religion) in 1981 ("Shaykh Tijani Cisse"). Mahy Cissé received an MA from Al-Azhar. The brothers' educational profiles combine an Islamic studies background (magnified by the hereditary charisma of their grandfather) and university credentials from multiple countries. Many of Niasse's sons, who remain key leaders for the community, have similar profiles.

Certain *arabisants* are even part of the political elite in Senegal. Niasse's son Muhammad al-Amin (b. 1941) attended secondary school in Morocco before obtaining BA and MA degrees in law at Al-Azhar. After his return to Senegal, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, serving in Algeria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia (Hunwick 2003, 302–304). The question here, then, is not whether and how *arabisants* are marginalized in Senegal, but rather how Tijani *arabisants* are negotiating their polyvalent leadership profiles.

How does the community interpret its own experiences? In materials aimed at different publics, polyvalent authority and educational pluralism are celebrated. The biography for Mahy Cissé on an English-language Facebook page maintained by his admirers reads, in part,

A life under the tutelage of family members who would be counted among West Africa's most renowned scholars, combined with the rigorous training of al Azhar University, the world's most prestigious Islamic educational institution, and years of experience as a teacher of a diverse community of students from around the world have provided the Shaykh with a uniquely broad perspective that is especially relevant today. ("Shaykh Mahy Cisse—About")

Here, educational pluralism is explicitly invoked as one of the elements that helps the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya serve a global constituency, including a substantial American following. Cissé's educational pluralism is essentially presented as a kind of equation: the classical tutorial model

of West Africa, plus the training at Al-Azhar, gives Cissé “breadth” and “relevance” for his “diverse community.” Indeed, visiting Cissé’s house in Medina Baye during my fieldwork in 2015, my wife and I encountered Americans and Europeans among the diverse guests joining the shaykh for dinner. Niasse’s strategy of sending young relatives and students to Al-Azhar has clearly borne fruit: his sons and grandsons use their Egyptian credentials as part of their global profiles, and they use their Egyptian experiences to help them relate to different audiences.

In terms of West Africans’ student life in Cairo—a topic that deserves further research—a few brief comments are possible. In 2015, when I interviewed graduates of Al-Azhar in Kaolack, they spoke positively of their time in Cairo and characterized their studies as the fulfillment of Niasse’s vision for the community. One graduate did note that Senegalese students were somewhat isolated at the university; although they studied alongside Egyptian students, “We did not visit their houses and they did not visit our houses.”⁵ Senegalese and Nigerian graduates’ celebration of Al-Azhar’s intellectual richness can sit somewhat uneasily with their recollections of social difficulties they experienced there: some interviewees’ comments alluded, obliquely, to significant experiences of racism and isolation in Egypt. In this context, Mahy Cissé’s statement that “Senegalese are Senegalese wherever they go” could be read in multiple ways.⁶

Within Senegal, Al-Azhar graduates see themselves as having two primary intellectual competitors. One competitor is, or was, Francophone elites. One of Niasse’s sons mentioned that formerly, Senegal’s Francophone elites felt a certain “haughtiness (*takābur*)” toward the mass of Senegalese whose primary intellectual references were Islamic. By sending his sons to Al-Azhar, Niasse had helped to equalize credentials between Francophones and Arabophones.⁷

The more threatening competitors were graduates of Saudi Arabian universities. Several interviewees compared Al-Azhar to Saudi Arabian universities, casting the latter as narrow-minded, anti-Sufi institutions. One graduate, who studied Arabic-French translation at Al-Azhar, mentioned that Al-Azhar’s curriculum was characterized by “openness (*infitāh*),” especially toward different creeds in Islam. No one at Al-Azhar, he continued, encouraged students to call Sufis “unbelievers (*kuffār*)” or “tomb-worshippers (*qubūriyyūn*).”⁸ This comment implicitly condemned

⁵Moustapha Diouf in discussion with the author, July 20, 2015, Kaolack, Senegal.

⁶Mahy Cissé in discussion with the author, July 21, 2015, Kaolack, Senegal.

⁷Mahy Niasse in discussion with the author, July 21, 2015, Kaolack, Senegal.

⁸Moustapha Diouf in discussion with the author, July 20, 2015, Kaolack, Senegal.

institutions such as Saudi Arabia's Islamic University of Medina, where denunciations of Sufism are widespread.

Kaolack's Al-Azhar graduates did not, however, see classical Muslim scholars as competitors, or as backward. In Kaolack, one finds numerous scholars trained locally or in neighboring Mauritania. A sense of reverence for Niasse's generation, and for Niasse specifically, still reigned in the city. Niasse's son Mahy said that there was simply no comparison between his and his father's generation in terms of religious knowledge. As discussed below, similar sentiments were voiced in Nigeria, but in Nigeria the comments were sometimes tinged with a sense of deep loss. In Senegal, where anti-Sufi movements are smaller and less aggressive, the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya balances reverence for past generations with a sense of confidence about the community's trajectory.

Such confidence is most evident in the community's efforts at institutionalization, a process that goes hand in hand with credentialization. Niasse himself transformed his father's classical school into the 'Abd Allāh Niasse Institute in 1961 (Wright 2015, 198–201). The institute, which has employed Egyptian teachers throughout its existence, is another fulcrum of the Kaolack-Azhar connection and is a source of tremendous pride for the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya. Hassan Cissé's generation institutionalized the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya in new ways and on a global scale. Hassan Cissé founded the African American Islamic Institute in 1988. Headquartered in Kaolack, the institute has affiliates throughout West Africa, Europe, North America, and the Caribbean, where it coordinates humanitarian and educational projects (African American Islamic Institute 2008). Cissé's followers have extended this institutionalization through websites like *tijani.org*, which feature English-language biographies of Tijani scholars and explications of Tijani doctrine. Changes in the credentialization of the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya's leaders have paralleled efforts to extend the order into new physical and virtual spaces.

The community's teachers seek to maintain a classical, person-to-person model of knowledge transition through the "learning circle (*majlis*).” Simultaneously, they cultivate a "formal school (*madrassa*)” model of more routinized Islamic learning. Yet managing this plurality can be challenging: "Many scholars in Medina-Baye themselves complain that the learning circles are on the decline," and that standards for giving out classical authorizations to teach (*ijāzas*) are falling (Wright 2015, 206–7).

It is unclear how polyvalent authority will evolve in rising generations. From Kaolack, the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya does not seem to be sending young men to Al-Azhar in the same numbers or with the same consistency as in the 1970s and 1980s. Some Al-Azhar graduates send their own

sons to Senegalese universities. This change likely reflects the decreasing availability of scholarship money, whether from Al-Azhar or from the Egyptian and Senegalese governments. The rising attraction of American and European doctorates, meanwhile, may mean that the next iteration of “*al-shaykh al-duktūr*” is an Arabophone, classically trained scholar with Western academic training. Such credentials, however, have a different kind of complementarity and interaction than do classical West African training and Al-Azhar degrees.

To close this section, it is worth mentioning a prominent Senegalese Al-Azhar graduate whose outlook, in comparison with those of Tijani elites in Kaolack, has often been much more critical of the status quo. Sidy Lamine Niassé (b. 1950) is a nephew, rather than a son, of Ibrahim Niassé. His branch of the family was somewhat sidelined by Ibrahim Niassé’s rise to prominence in the 1930s and after. Sidy Lamine, who studied at al-Azhar’s Faculty of Law and Islamic Jurisprudence from 1975 to 1979, faced controversy in his early career, including imprisonment, because of his own Islamist views and because of the even more strident views of one of his brothers (Niassé 2003, 40).

In 1984, Sidy Lamine founded *Walfadjri* (“By the Dawn,” a reference to Qur’an 89:1), a newspaper that has since grown into a media conglomerate. In his view, working in the press was a fulfillment of his qualifications as an *arabisant* who could challenge Senegal’s Francophone elite:

My life and my work have consisted of stigmatizing this Eurocentric vision that [Senegal’s first president, Leopold Senghor] wanted to impose on Senegal and the Senegalese. I wanted to show that Islam and the eminent civilization that it created had their place in Senegal. To best promote it, armed with my formation in the Arabic language and my Islamic culture, I engaged in the key field of the system, one of the fundamental pillars of the society: that of communication. (Niassé 2003, 31–32)

Unlike his relatives in Kaolack, Sidy Lamine continues to view the Francophone elite as a major competitor. Also in contrast to those in Kaolack, Sidy Lamine has been critical of the ruling authorities and of the social contract between Sufi shaykhs and politicians, an arrangement that he believes placed some shaykhs in “a feudal posture” vis-à-vis their followers (Niassé 2003, 27). Rejecting that model of authority, Sidy Lamine aligned himself with reformist and Islamist currents, although his newspaper gradually lost its Islamist character over time, becoming more like the mainstream Senegalese press (Soares 2016, 272).

His leadership profile remains a polyvalent one. In publications since the late 1990s, his intellectual approach has been “rationalist and

modernist” in dealing with controversial religious questions (Soares 2016, 274). At the same time, he invokes his heredity and his classical Islamic learning: Beginning in the mid-1990s, Sidy Lamine used his status as an *arabisant*, and his influence in the Senegalese press, to promote a wider awareness of his father’s classical Arabic writings (Kane 2005, 219–20).

In my interview with him,⁹ Sidy Lamine evoked a lingering sense that the Senegalese *arabisant* is destined to feel out of place both in the Arab world, where he or she is not entirely welcome, and in Senegal, where he or she cannot be neatly reabsorbed into existing models of religious authority. This feeling is, of course, what some Western scholars have described in the case of other, marginalized *arabisants* in West Africa. Educational pluralism can fail, including in social and professional terms: if the graduate’s community rejects him or her, or if the society can make no productive use of the graduate’s knowledge, then the result is not polyvalent authority but marginalization, or, sometimes, reinvention. Yet Sidy Lamine is not a down-and-out, would-be counter-elite, and it is striking to hear a highly successful businessman, who frequently rubs shoulders with the country’s highest elites, evoke a sense of alienation. Although the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya has found a way to downplay the challenges of plurality in Kaolack, Sidy Lamine’s version of polyvalent authority is more openly idiosyncratic and combative.

THE NIGERIAN ARENA: KANO AND AL-AZHAR¹⁰

Nigeria has a much more turbulent religious and political arena than does Senegal. After undergoing six successful military takeovers during the postcolonial period, it returned to a civilian multi-party democracy in 1999, but civilian rule coincided with and perhaps fueled new internal conflicts. Since the 1980s, Nigeria has witnessed periodic instances of mass religious violence, sometimes between Christians and Muslims and sometimes within the Muslim community.

In Muslim-majority northern Nigeria, the postcolonial period has witnessed growing conflicts, violent and nonviolent, over which interpretation of Islam is correct. Some of these conflicts center on the question of whether Sufism is orthodox or not. Sufis have maintained prestige and even dominance in many parts of the north. Yet anti-Sufi

⁹August 4, 2015 in Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁰This section is based partly on discussions between the author and the following individuals: Baba Uba Ibrahim, December 1, 2011 and December 8, 2011; Kabiru Uba Ibrahim, December 9, 2011; Bashir Tijāni ‘Uthmān, December 13, 2011; and Lawi ‘Atiq, January 25, 2012. All discussions took place in Kano, Nigeria.

movements—both the formal organization Jamā‘at Izālat al-Bid‘a wa-Iqāmat al-Sunna (The Society for the Removal of Blameworthy Innovation and Establishment of the Prophetic Model, commonly known as Izala) and looser networks of anti-Sufi preachers (Loimeier 1997; Kane 2003; Ben Amara 2011; Thurston 2016)—have challenged Sufism’s formerly near-hegemonic position among Muslim scholars and the region’s elites.

Anti-Sufis have harshly criticized the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya, placing the order’s Nigerian Al-Azhar graduates in a more defensive posture than their peers in Senegal. As they manage their polyvalent leadership profiles, Nigerian Tijanis have employed some of the same strategies as their Senegalese brethren—particularly by institutionalizing the Tijaniyya in new ways—but they have also voiced a stronger sense of loss regarding the past. The institutionalization of the Tijaniyya, of course, reflects multiple stimuli and not merely young leaders’ training at al-Azhar, but this institutionalization has opened new ways for the young leaders to make use of that training.

As noted above, the original core of the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya in northern Nigeria was made up of the scholar-traders in the Salgawa network. These figures included three men whose sons are discussed below: Abū Bakr ‘Atīq (1909–1974), Tijāni ‘Uthmān (1916–1970), and Uba Ringim (1919–1999). When Niasse encouraged his Nigerian supporters to send their sons to Al-Azhar, Ringim, a wealthy merchant, became a prime mover in this trend. Ringim sponsored not only the studies of his nephews (and adopted sons) Kabiru and Baba Uba Ibrahim, but also several sons of Abū Bakr ‘Atīq, members of the royal family in Kano, and other young relatives of Tijani leaders. Kabiru Uba Ibrahim stated that his uncle chose Al-Azhar because of the breadth of its teaching and the quality of its teachers and because “their creed is a correct creed (*‘adīqatuhum ‘aqīda salīma*).”¹¹ To Nigerian Tijani shaykhs, Al-Azhar offered a Sufi-tolerant environment where their sons could study a range of Islamic sciences.

If the educational quality of Al-Azhar was one attraction for the older generation, the desire to produce specific kinds of leaders was another; the older generation strove to reshape the bases of Tijani authority. Uba Ringim, who had no children of his own, long held the intention of starting an Islamic institute. He communicated this intention to his nephews (who became his adopted sons) Kabiru and Baba Uba Ringim. After their return from Al-Azhar in 1991, they set to work making Ringim’s vision a reality, first by starting a school and then, following Ringim’s death in

¹¹In discussion with the author, December 9, 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

1999, opening the Mai Masallaci Foundation (see below). In Kano as in Kaolack, credentialization and institutionalization proceeded in tandem.

Lawi 'Atīq suggested an additional motive: fathers may have sent their sons to Al-Azhar to encourage the sons to develop humility. In Nigeria, he said, the disciples of major shaykhs “exalt” (*yu'azzimūna*) the shaykhs' sons. Had Uba Ringim left them in Nigeria, he continued, such aggrandizement might have led them to claim a lofty religious status for themselves, “and neither benefit the people, nor study.” But in Egypt, he said, “we found that we were nothing...you might find yourself running behind the bus.”¹² Lawi 'Atīq and Kabiru Uba Ibrahim both credited Ringim and Niasse with possessing far-reaching visions of producing leaders who would have both the formal credentials necessary to start new institutions and the humility required to guide the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya in a period of rapid change. Finally, 'Atīq said, Egypt offered the opportunity to meet people from a wide variety of places and backgrounds. The new basis of Tijani authority stressed fluency on the world stage and fluency within the increasingly complicated institutional environments in Nigeria and abroad, a fluency that informed the Tijaniyya's efforts to compete with their anti-Sufi rivals in the education sector and elsewhere.

The Nigerians' academic experiences at Al-Azhar were largely positive, and they received constant encouragement and support from Ringim, who rented a furnished apartment for them. Toward the end of their time in Egypt they brought their families to Cairo, which made life easier. Their wives mostly stayed at home, but twice a week a teacher would give the women lessons on Arabic and Islamic Studies. Every year, Ringim brought them home for two months.

The Nigerians did experience racism. Egyptians, Kabiru Uba Ibrahim said, “love foreigners (*yuḥibbūna al-ajānib*),” but he also encountered “strange behaviors (*taṣarrufāt gharība*).” Some Egyptians would laugh if he wore the *babban riga*, a traditional northern Nigerian robe, and would grab it and play with it. Others joked that Africans “live in the jungles,” or eat monkeys. Sometimes when he rode the bus, an Egyptian might order him to stand so that he could sit. Egyptians would sometimes repeat the well-known proverb, “Egypt is the mother of the world (*Maṣr hiya umm al-dunya*),” but would add that “Africans (*Afāriqa*)” came to Egypt to get knowledge, because there were no universities in Africa. Some Egyptians described themselves as rich and Nigerians as poor, or said that Nigerians just came to Egypt to enjoy themselves. Not all Egyptians held such ideas, though, and racism did not disrupt the Nigerians' studies.¹³

¹²In discussion with the author, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

¹³In discussion with the author, December 9, 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

Being in Egypt allowed Kabiru Uba Ibrahim to meet major shaykhs and learn things that are only taught at Al-Azhar, he said. This helped him in his teaching back in Nigeria, and taught him “styles of preaching (*asalib al da’wa*).” The faculty’s interest in teaching encouraged his own pedagogical interests, and he was impressed by his professors’ ability to write their own textbooks—in Nigeria, he said, most teachers simply buy textbooks in the market. During their time in Cairo, Kabiru Uba Ibrahim said, anti-Sufi influences were minimal. He even heard of a time when Al-Azhar turned away a shipment of books from Saudi Arabia. His brother Baba stressed the fit between Al-Azhar and Sufism. He pointed out that Islam came to Nigeria primarily by means of Sufism, including from Egypt. He said there are few Tijanis in Egypt, but that there are many Sufis and that intra-Sufi cooperation is strong.

As in Senegal, northern Nigerian Al-Azhar graduates perceive graduates of Saudi Arabian universities as major competitors. The Nigerian graduates see these rivals as bigoted and intellectually narrow. “Wahhābis,” Kabiru Uba Ibrahim stated (referring to the literalist, anti-Sufi movement that is dominant in Saudi Arabia), resist the kind of openness that is taught at Al-Azhar. They are only interested in fields such as creed, *ḥadīth*, and the biography of the Prophet.¹⁴ Lawi ‘Atīq, similarly, criticized some Saudi-educated scholars’ tendency to study one subject overseas, such as *ḥadīth*, and then to present themselves as comprehensive experts of Islamic sciences upon their return. Studying in Saudi Arabia can narrow people’s thinking, Baba Uba Ibrahim said, whereas at Al-Azhar a foreign student will study philosophy and other creeds. What he studied in Al-Azhar, he added, would be “forbidden (*ḥarām*)” in Saudi Arabia. In his view, graduates of Egyptian institutions do not oppose people’s creeds or cause “conflict (Hausa: *rigima*),” whereas graduates returning from Saudi Arabia will try to change people’s practices, which begets conflict.¹⁵

The following individual profiles trace the trajectories of several Nigerian Al-Azhar graduates. I highlight educational polyvalency in their lives, examine institutions they have built, and explore their attitudes toward generational change within the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya of Kano. A notable feature of several new Tijani institutions is the way in which they offer “generic Islam” (Soares 2005) alongside the memorialization of Tijani leaders. For example, Tijani-run “Islamiyya” schools in Kano are implicated in both the state-generated educational framework (the state government of Kano sets their curricula and has the power to inspect the

¹⁴In discussion with the author, December 9, 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

¹⁵In discussion with the author, December 1, 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

schools) and the fee-based, diploma-oriented educational marketplace. This kind of compromise—offering a relatively generic, non-Sufi education as a means of extending the order’s influence—is a powerful example of the challenges involved in negotiating polyvalent authority.

*Bashīr Tijānī ‘Uthmān (b. 1956)*¹⁶

Bashīr Tijānī ‘Uthmān was born in Kano. As a child, he attended a classical Qur’an school and an Islamiyya primary school. He studied jurisprudence and other Islamic sciences with his father and other teachers. From 1971 to 1974, he studied in Kaolack, and then in 1974 he went to Cairo. He completed junior and senior secondary school there, and then from 1979 to 1983 he studied for a BA in Arabic at Al-Azhar. One of his uncles sponsored his initial studies at Al-Azhar, and once there he obtained a scholarship.

In December 2011, I visited him at Shaykh Tijānī Usman Islamic College in Kano. This junior and senior secondary school opened in 2003. The college is a massive, three-story, white building whose classrooms surround a central courtyard. There are three departments: Islamic Studies, English, and Science. The academic staff prepares students for examinations administered by the West African Examinations Council and the Nigerian Examinations Council, which most Nigerian universities require applicants to take. Like other Islamiyya schools in Kano that combine Islamic education with instruction in English and science, the college uses a curriculum designed by the government of Kano State. The college, both in curriculum and goals, is implicated within the institutional matrices of the Nigerian state. As of 2011, the college had about 1,400 students and sixty-four teachers in addition to nonacademic staff. The classrooms contain chalkboards and rows of desks; girls and boys study together in the same classrooms, though they sit on separate sides of the room, grouped by gender. After we finished touring the classrooms, we visited the science lab, a one-room annex that had at least a dozen small lab stations.

‘Uthmān’s evident pride in the college did not involve any denigration of the classical system of Islamic education in northern Nigeria. Each generation, he told me, undertakes “renewal (*tajdīd*).” But classical schools still have a major role, he said, and the children who come to his college after studying in classical schools are superior to their peers in religious

¹⁶This section is based on a discussion between the author and Bashīr Tijānī ‘Uthmān, December 13, 2011, Kano.

knowledge and stronger in their command of Arabic. The college itself represents a form of educational pluralism for children who attend it.

On a separate visit, I met the shaykh at the home of his late father. Another scholar was offering a lesson to a group of adult men seated on the floor, commenting on a text, evoking the living tradition of classical Islamic instruction in the region. If the college memorializes the shaykh's father in one way and seeks to offer students pious preparation for an economic regime that demands formal credentials, the late Tijānī 'Uthmān's home is another kind of living memorial. Among a thickening web of institutional arrangements, with growing government involvement in education and with new pressures to make knowledge transmission relevant to the demands of universities and formal employment, polyvalency has come to characterize religious leadership and religious education in Kano. The "new" does not replace the "old." Rather, both are transformed through their interactions with one another. Similarly, the profile of a Tijani shaykh has become more complex. Bashīr Tijānī 'Uthmān offers an array of religious educational services to students and negotiates multiple institutional settings.

*Kabiru and Baba Uba Ibrahim and the Mai Masallaci Foundation*¹⁷

Kabiru Uba Ibrahim, the senior of the two brothers, was born in 1963. He finished primary school in 1975 and attended secondary school at Government College Kano from 1975 to 1980. He then attended the School of Preliminary Studies from 1980 to 1982 before studying at Al-Azhar from 1982 to 1991. His time at Al-Azhar included enrollment at the Institute of Islamic Studies from 1982 to 1986 and enrollment in the BA program in Islamic Theology at the University from 1986 to 1991. During his enrollment at Al-Azhar, he left Egypt to study business management at Transworld Tutorial College in Jersey, UK, from 1984 to 1985. After he returned to Kano from Cairo, he started teaching in 1991 at the school connected to his family's Mai Masallaci Foundation. In 1997, he went over to the secondary school as a teacher. He has been Secretary of the Management Committee for the school from 1992 to the present.

Since 2000, when the foundation was launched, he has been the Managing Director. He has pursued extensive postgraduate education, completing an MA in Islamic Studies at Bayero University Kano in 2007, the same year that he obtained a Post Graduate Diploma in Information

¹⁷This section is based on discussions between the author and Baba Uba Ibrahim on December 1, 2011 and December 8, 2011, as well as a discussion between the author and Kabiru Uba Ibrahim on December 9, 2011, all in Kano, Nigeria.

Technology from the Hands On Institute of Information Technology in Kano. In 2010, he earned a Post Graduate Diploma in Education from the National Teachers' Institute in Kaduna, Nigeria. Since 2011, he has also taught at the College of Sharia and Kanun (law) in Ringim, his family town. His brother Baba's educational path has been broadly similar; he too attended Al-Azhar and Bayero University Kano, writing his MA thesis in Islamic Studies (in Arabic) on the history of the Tijaniyya in northern Nigeria.

The Mai Masallaci Foundation began after the death of Uba Ringim in 1999. Baba Uba Ibrahim described their work at the school and the foundation as a continuation of changes that had occurred throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries within the Tijaniyya in Kano. Muhammad Salga, the founder of the Salgawa network, expanded the curriculum of Islamic studies that the Tijaniyya offered. The next generation, that of Tijānī 'Uthmān and Abū Bakr 'Atīq, brought "opening (Hausa: *budewa*).” Ibrāhīm Niasse furthered this process of broadening, encouraging the use of Arabic as a spoken language and the recitation of the Qur'an on the radio. Now the third generation, Baba stated, has carried this process of opening further. Their curriculum includes "modernity (Hausa: *zamani*)" as well as "religion (*addini*)."¹⁸

In December 2011, Baba Uba Ibrahim gave me a tour of the foundation, which had a research center, a library (housing Uba Ringim's extensive collection of Arabic books), an audio-visual center (where they are digitizing cassettes of Ibrāhīm Niasse), a mosque, and a school that goes from primary through senior secondary. They have an extensive collection of photographs and an archive of Uba Ringim's personal effects. These efforts to preserve the legacies of Niasse, Ringim, and other Tijani leaders overlap with web and archival projects that other Tijani disciples are carrying out in the United States, Senegal, and elsewhere. Many Tijani intellectuals of the generation born in the 1960s and 1970s, although they are geographically dispersed, have pursued a common interest in recording and memorializing the order's history.

The foundation represents multiple forms of institutionalization: part educational facility, part community center, part museum, it negotiates changes in the constitution of Tijani leadership without foreclosing the possibility of Tijani leaders offering forms of "generic Islam" to the community at large. Some of these forms of institutionalization are shaped by the state. As of late 2011, they used a curriculum designed, supervised, and enforced by the government. The government certified the school

¹⁸In discussion with the author, December 8, 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

and officials came periodically to inspect the school and ensure use of their curriculum. Students had to pass an ABU-designed test that Kano followed. The government marked the exams, while school administrators certified a student's attendance at the school. Following the government curriculum was necessary to obtain recognition and government funding.

The brothers consider the school and the foundation to be religious projects. They see themselves as following the mission that took them to Egypt. Teaching, Kabiru Uba Ibrahim said, constituted a form of "religious outreach (*da'wa*)."¹⁹ Although some Muslim activists and institutions pursue *da'wa* in the sense of converting non-Muslims to Islam (what Kabiru called "field *da'wa*" or "*da'wa maydāniyya*"), the foundation is concerned with "*da'wa* through teaching (*da'wa min khilāl at tadrīs*)."¹⁹ The brothers did not, however, consider the school an exclusively Tijani institution. Indeed, Baba Uba Ibrahim said that Tijani students maintain their "worship (*ibāda*)" on their own—it is a "personal" matter, whereas school is for "knowledge (Hausa: *ilimi*)."²⁰ Their school teaches general religious knowledge, whereas the Tijani student may seek his own teacher in the traditional system for the purposes of specialized study in Sufism or other religious subjects.

For Bashīr Tijānī 'Uthmān and Kabiru and Baba Uba Ibrahim, building Islamiyya schools and preserving their fathers' legacies stress both memorialization and growth. Memorializing their fathers and patrons, along with Ibrāhīm Niasse, exalts those figures and works to consolidate their legacies. Building new institutions suggests that the past and present have worked together to reconcile change with the long-term visions of the preceding generation. This construction is optimistic, framing ongoing changes, particularly the increasing embeddedness of Tijani institutions in state-devised rules and a concomitant tendency for some Tijani-run schools to provide forms of "generic Islam," as patterns that build on, rather than undermine, earlier shifts. Alongside these constructions of time, however, exist more pessimistic readings of the Tijaniyya Ibrahimiyā's history in Kano.

*Lawi 'Atīq (b. ca. 1962)*²¹

In addition to several informal meetings with Lawi 'Atīq, I recorded a formal interview with him on January 25, 2012. We discussed his studies

¹⁹In discussion with the author, December 9, 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

²⁰In discussion with the author, December 8, 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

²¹This section is based on a discussion between the author and Lawi 'Atīq, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

at Al-Azhar in the context of a larger conversation about religious change in Kano. Were it not for that interview, this article would have a different tone—a more upbeat analysis of the polyvalent roles of young Tijani leaders as spiritual successors to their fathers' charisma and institutionalizers of education within state-devised frameworks. In our final interview, however, 'Atīq critiqued his society and his own generation. From his perspective, Kano has experienced mutually reinforcing declines in social solidarity and religious profundity; spiritual leaders have become less knowledgeable and pious, all while society has become more fragmented and individualistic.

People in many times and places have expressed a sense that their own time is worse than the time that preceded it. I prefer not to reduce 'Atīq's remarks to mere nostalgia, but to analyze the ways they represent a deeply ambivalent reaction to the possibilities he sees available to Sufi leaders in contemporary Nigeria. These possibilities are broadened, certainly, by the presence of new institutions and new credentials. Yet Tijani leaders today are also constrained by the enmeshing of religious authority and political networks, the economic regimes in which religious leaders are implicated, and the difficult choices religious leaders must make.

As a child, 'Atīq studied the Qur'an and Islamic sciences in his father's house and with other scholars in Kano. He attended the Festival Primary School, where he studied English, mathematics, and other subjects, before starting to teach jurisprudence and Sufism to students in his father's house. In 1975, he and his elder brother went to Al-Azhar, where they first entered the Department of Special Studies and then the formal secondary program of the institution, from which he graduated in 1977. He then joined the College of Education in the Department of Arabic Language and graduated with a BA in 1982. In 1984 he completed a higher studies diploma, and in 1986 he obtained a second BA in journalism. At that time, he related, "Praise to Allah, I was the first black African to emerge as the top student in Al-Azhar in the examinations [of that year]."²² His performance led to an opportunity for him and an Egyptian student to complete a joint project on the Egyptian reformer 'Abd Allāh al-Nadīm (1845–1896). Their work earned university recognition as equivalent to doctoral-level scholarship. Following the completion of his studies, 'Atīq remained at Al-Azhar for several years teaching Hausa in the Department of Translation.

Returning to Kano, he was hesitant about deploying his spiritual resources and formal credentials within certain institutional frameworks.

²²In discussion with the author, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

He was offered a teaching position in the Department of Islamic Studies at Bayero University Kano. Uba Ringim, who had sponsored his studies at Azhar, advised him to accept the post. Yet ‘Atīq refused. In part, he said, he felt that the needs of his late father’s disciples took precedence. “He has followers in every corner of Nigeria and had I taken on official work, I would not be able to fulfill the rights of this group that is connected to my father.”²³ Discharging these social obligations requires considerable time; on two informal occasions, I accompanied him to, respectively, a village outside Kano, where he greeted the village imam, and a neighborhood in the city where he offered condolences to a recent widower. He added that the polemics that raged at the university in the 1980s and 1990s between Sufis and their opponents discouraged him from accepting the position, as he preferred to spend his time in other ways.

‘Atīq told me that the decision to send him and other members of his generation to Al-Azhar reflected the foresight of Uba Ringim and Ibrahim Niasse with regard to meeting the changing needs of society. In ‘Atīq’s view, however, those societal changes have negatively affected the leadership of the Tijaniyya in Kano, diminishing their scholarly and spiritual capacities and constraining their social roles. Even though he declined employment that might have erected barriers between him and his father’s community, he perceives shortcomings in his generation’s outreach to those communities.

For example, in terms of intellectual proficiency, he compared his generation unfavorably to the generation of his father:

The difference . . . between our generation and their generation in the level of learning . . . is the difference between the sky and the earth. It is the difference between the sky and the earth. Because there are foundations in the sciences of the Islamic religion. There are foundations that he who wants to truly know Islam must study. It is the core, the core of knowledge. Man must obtain it. Those great ones studied it and understood it . . . in a way that we do not.²⁴

The one area in which his intellectual formation was superior to that of his father’s, he suggested, was in Arabic proficiency. Having been immersed in an environment where Arabic was spoken, he said, “I, perhaps, speak the Arabic language better than my father, for example. But the level of instruction that he attained—I have not attained a tenth of what he attained.”²⁵

²³In discussion with the author, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

²⁴In discussion with the author, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

²⁵In discussion with the author, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

According to ‘Atiq, the weaker grasp of fundamental Islamic knowledge that his generation possesses has paralleled a diminishing of their role as communicators of that knowledge and as pillars of the community. Effective transmission of knowledge, he implied, required social solidarity and generosity. His father, he said, would provide for all the needs of any seeker of knowledge who came from a far-off town.

All that he wanted was to see that person at the time of prayer, to see that he came to pray, that he came to study. That’s what he wanted . . . He gave him food and he gave him—he married him off. He gave him a place to live. And if he fell ill, [my father] gave him treatment. In the end he would say to him, “Praise to God, you have obtained a portion of knowledge. Return to your town to benefit the people there” . . . Thus was their life. So I ask you now, tell me who does that? Have you visited one of the houses of these scholars and seen one of their sons undertaking such a thing?²⁶

Being a social pillar of the community, he added, involved more than just providing for students. It required a total commitment to religious knowledge and the welfare of one’s neighbors. But the exigencies of modern life and an attitudinal shift among religious leaders now prevent them from fulfilling this commitment as before:

[The older generation] devoted themselves to knowledge. But now we do not devote ourselves to knowledge all our lives. For example I, I come out of my house to students. I only stay two or three hours with them. I go looking for a contractor at Government House or some other place and I don’t return until night . . . Maybe myself and my household concern me. But them, the entire neighborhood concerned them. Shaykh Abū Bakr ‘Atiq would know everyone who lived from here to, to the edge of the street. He knew everyone by sight and by name. If he didn’t see you for a day or two he would go to your house, “Where are you, so-and-so?” And I—maybe this neighbor, I don’t know his son.²⁷

Among the exigencies of modern life, the younger ‘Atiq included politics and relations of patronage between shaykhs and politicians. Whereas his father’s teacher Muhammad Salga would appear in front of anyone—even the British colonial authorities and the Emir of Kano—in one of the two simple shirts he owned, today office-seekers give Sufi shaykhs cars and cash, creating linkages that discourage shaykhs from criticizing their

²⁶In discussion with the author, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

²⁷In discussion with the author, January 25, 2012, Kano, Nigeria.

patrons. A generation of ascetics and teachers, 'Atīq suggested, had been replaced by heirs too busy for their communities and too rich to speak the truth.

'Atīq's construction of history has negative implications for the value of the training he received at Al-Azhar. Notably, his view of decline, even as it exalts the preceding generation, suggests that the fathers' vision of sons bearing university credentials and equipped to handle changing conditions has been realized only with considerable loss.

CONCLUSION

When Ibrahim Niasse began sending his sons to Al-Azhar University in 1961, he consciously initiated the pursuit of a new kind of polyvalent leadership for his community. His strategy aimed at producing leaders who could guide the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya in a time of changing expectations regarding institutional arrangements and scholarly credentials. In many ways, the Senegalese and Nigerian graduates of Al-Azhar have fulfilled those expectations, moving the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya into a phase of greater institutionalization and global reach.

The new phase of pluralism has been both additive and transformative. New schools in Kaolack and Kano have extended the community's educational reach and have provided many youth with credentials recognized by the state. Graduates of Al-Azhar have helped to maintain classical models of education as well, allowing for educational pluralism to take root not just transnationally but locally. Meanwhile, new foundations offer structures for formalizing, preserving, and reorganizing the order's past and its bodies of knowledge. In Kano, the Mai Masallaci Foundation's digitization and preservation projects will make Tijani religious thought available to a wider public. Online projects and an institutional presence in the United States also extend the Tijaniyya's reach. Yet some of the new schools downplay Sufism. They educate non-Tijani Muslims, use government curricula, charge fees, and grant diplomas.

Some of the community's Al-Azhar graduates view their own trajectories as signs of progress and expansion for the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya. Some graduates feel that even as something has been gained in producing the scholars of their generation, much has also been lost, particularly the interconnected qualities of social solidarity, scholarly depth, and spiritual integrity. In some sense, these graduates are objectively correct: studying in a formal university setting necessitates a trade-off whereby one spends less time studying in the tutorial, person-to-person model of spiritual and educational transmission that was and is prized in classical

settings. At best, the product of educational pluralism will find his or her different experiences mutually reinforcing and even mutually invigorating, and each form of education will open new perspectives on the others. At worst, from the perspective of the community, the university graduate would lose crucial abilities: patience, humility, and the capacity for memorization and internalization of texts. The question for communities such as the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya will be whether pluralism generates productive syntheses or merely brings unwanted costs.

As the community moves forward, polyvalency will have to be negotiated and renegotiated, particularly given that study at Al-Azhar or in the Arab world generally appears to be getting more difficult. Several factors contribute to that difficulty, including a decline in scholarship funding by West African governments, political turmoil in Egypt and other Arab countries, and a growing shift toward austerity in the Gulf States and elsewhere, which could severely restrict the educational opportunities available to noncitizens. The polyvalency that the community has cultivated, then, appears not so much an endpoint, but rather a strategy that must be continually adjusted to meet new circumstances, including the new tensions that pluralism itself creates.

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