

Jihad
of the Pen

Jihad of the Pen

The Sufi Literature of West Africa

Rudolph Ware
Zachary Wright
Amir Syed

The American University in Cairo Press
Cairo New York

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction: The Sufi Scholarship of Islamic West Africa <i>Zachary Wright</i>	1
Part 1: Shaykh ‘Uthman bin Fudī <i>Rudolph Ware and Muhammad Shareef</i>	25
1 Introduction	27
2 <i>The Roots of the Religion (Kitāb usul al-dīn)</i>	31
3 <i>The Sciences of Behavior (‘Uḥm al-mu‘amalat)</i>	35
4 <i>The Book of Distinction (Kitāb al-tayfrīq)</i>	55
Part 2: Shaykh ‘Umar al-Fudī Tal <i>Amir Syed</i>	65
5 Introduction	67
6 “A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students” (<i>Tadhkirat al-muḥāsibīn wa jalāl al-talībīn</i>)	69
7 <i>The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed (al-Rimāh hizb al-raḥīm ‘ala nuḥūr hizb al-rāqīm)</i>	89
8 <i>The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak (Sajfāt al-sa‘ada li-ahl du‘f wa l-raqada)</i>	115
Part 3: Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbakké <i>Rudolph Ware</i>	125
9 Introduction	127
10 “The Valiant One” (<i>al-Sindīd</i>)	131

Copyright © 2018 by
The American University in Cairo Press
113 Shara Kaar el Aini, Cairo, Egypt
200 Park Avenue, Suite 1700, New York, NY 10166
www.aucpress.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Dar el Kutub No. 11389/17
ISBN 978 977 416 863 5

Dar el Kutub Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Ware, Rudolph, Zachary Wright, and Amir Syed
Jihad of the Pen: The Sufi Literature of West Africa / Rudolph Ware, Zachary Wright, and Amir
Syed.—Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2018.

1. Islam—Africa—History
2. Muslims—Africa—History
I. Ware, Rudolph (fr. auth)
II. Wright, Zachary (auth)
III. Syed, Amir (fr. auth)
297.096

1 2 3 4 5 22 21 20 19 18
Designed by Adam al-Shehry
Printed in the United States of America

11	<i>Pathways of Paradise (Masalik al-jinan)</i>	137
12	"Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor" (<i>Mawarith al-rafi' fi mada'ih al-shafi'</i>)	149
Part 4: Shaykh Ibrahim bin 'Abdallah Niasse		
<i>Zachary Wright</i>		
13	Introduction	167
14	"The Spirit of Etiquette" (<i>Ruh al-adab</i>)	169
15	<i>The Removal of Confusion (Kashf al-ithas)</i>	183
16	"The Jeweled Letters" (<i>Gawahir al-rasa'il</i>)	203
17	Poetry for the Prophet (from <i>Dawamin al-sih</i>)	215

Conclusion: The Prophet, the Qur'an, and Islamic Ethics

Rudolph Ware

223

Notes

259

Bibliography

293

Index

303

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the many scholars, both Muslim 'ulama' and Western academics, who have made accessible the Islamic scholarly tradition of West Africa to a wider readership. They are too many to name here, but this work would not have been possible without their efforts.

For previous source-work on Shehu 'Uthman bin Fudi, we are grateful for the efforts of Meryn Hiskett, Murray Last, and John Hunwick. We also acknowledge the direct assistance of 'Aisha Bewley and Muhammad Shareef in preparing the section on Ibn Fudi.

For prior work on the writings of al-Hajj 'Umar Tal, we acknowledge the work of Bernd Radtke, John Hunwick, Said Boushina, and Mihlar Holland. We also thank Kamal Husayni for making available to us unpublished drafts of Holland's translations of sections of the *Rimlah*. We are grateful to Imam Fode Dramé and Sillah Dramneh for offering translation advice on difficult passages from al-Hajj 'Umar's writing.

Earlier work with the writings of Serin Toubā Ahmadu Barba deserving mention includes that of Cheikh Babou, Bachir Mbacké, and Sara Cantara. For the writings of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, we are thankful for the previous translation and analytical work of Shaykh Hasan Cissé, Ousmane Kane, Rüdiger Seesemann, and Fakhriddin Owaisi. The explanations provided by Imam Cheikh Tijani Cissé in various interviews were also indispensable in fully understanding the writing of Shaykh Ibrahim.

For useful feedback with this manuscript at various stages, we thank Robert Launay, Brannon Ingram, Rebecca Sherelks, Oluadarimi Ogunnaike, Mauro Nobili, and Matthew Schurrann. We are also grateful to our anonymous reviewers for their useful comments, and to Tarek Ghanem, Lucy

Hanna, and the entire staff at AUUC Press for believing in this project from the start and seeing it through.

We thank all of our families for putting up with yet another writing project. *Wa akhir da'awa'ina imna l-hamd li-Lah, rabb al-'alamin.*

Introduction

The Sufi Scholarship of Islamic West Africa

Zachary Wright

The study of Islam in Africa still pays too little attention to the words of scholars. With some notable exceptions, the story of African Sufism in particular is often told from the colonial archive or from ethnographic observations. Certainly, the writings of scholars are not the only paths to knowledge about African Sufi movements, but ignoring the contents of the vast scholarly corpus that has given such movements their unique vitality is a problem. In this historiography, great shaykhs are often *seen*—depicted as mystics, spiritual trainers, and charismatic figures—but seldom heard. The near absence of their authorial voices leaves a void at what should be the heart of an intellectual history. This volume, building on a new generation of research that continues to explore the rich Arabic source material of Islamic Africa, aims not just to give voice to this Islamic scholarship in Africa, but to pass it the microphone.

Ongoing work to catalogue the rich textual tradition of Islamic Africa is important to document the breadth of intellectual production, but some have tended to fetishize the presence of manuscripts over the content of those manuscripts.¹ For Sufism in Africa, the content of these writings acquires heightened significance. For many, Sufism remains representative of an oral, emotive religious identity against which the more scholarly textual production was recorded. Discussing global Islamic movements in sub-Saharan Africa, one academic wrote:

A second type of pan-Islamic network which has been [and still is] influential [in Africa] is that created by the Sufi 'congregations' (*tariqas*), that stress spiritual rather than intellectual knowledge, a feature that has enabled them to become mass movements—in a sense the 'churches' of Islam.²

Besides racialized assumptions about the inherent emotional disposition of black African Muslims, such unfortunate perceptions depend on ignoring the vibrant intellectual exchange of African Sufi scholars, most of which was written in flawless classical Arabic prose or poetry. This volume collects some of the key sources relating to Sufism in Africa, and forces researchers to consider Sufi scholars at the center of Islamic intellectual history in West Africa.

This is of course not the first collection of Arabic source material relating to West African Islam.³ But it is one of the few to offer multiple writings of African Muslim scholars, side by side with each other. The reader will quickly notice that the seminal Sufi sages of Africa were influenced by a similar intellectual tradition rooted both in global Islamic scholarship and more regional writings. Recurrent names include the likes of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111, Khurasan), Ibn 'Ata'-Allah (d. 1309, Egypt), Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505, Egypt), Muhammad al-Yadafi (d. 1753, Mauritania), and Mukhtar Kuntî (d. 1811, Mali/Mauritania). West African scholars were also interested in similar questions. Notable themes shared by the writers in this volume include the importance of etiquette (*adab*), reflection on education (*tarbiya*), love and emulation of the Prophet Muhammad, the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God, and the acquisition of divine knowledge (*ma'rifat Allah*). While contemporary writers rarely mentioned each other by name, they clearly read each other's works and were inspired by them. This volume allows readers to consider the complementary insights of writers in dialogue with each other, and thus to perceive the broader currents of Islamic intellectual history in Africa.

Four Sainly Biographies

Between them, 'Uthman bin Fudî, 'Umar Tal, Ahmadu Bamba, and Ibrahim Niasse founded the largest Muslim communities in West African history. Together, they command the allegiance of a majority of Muslims in the region to this day—and are at least partly responsible for the continued flourishing of Sufism in Africa when it has sometimes become marginalized elsewhere in the Muslim world. While the full biographies of each are available elsewhere, their writings deserve to be situated in a few words of introduction on their sainly biographies. Certainly, the personality and physical presence (*hiyat*) of the saint, said to transmit knowledge to disciples beyond words and even beyond death,⁴ endow his writing with deeper meaning for students. The personal struggle (*jihad*) of each saint also contextualizes his ideas. These brief sketches thus give focus to the notions of sainly authority that these

scholars articulated and their individual missions that framed their students' understanding of their writings.

'Uthman bin Fudî (1754–1817)⁵ is best known for having established the Sokoto Caliphate that still survives as a political entity in northern Nigeria today. In 1804, the "Shehu" declared the armed struggle that established his polity, mostly in response to Gobir's King Yunfa's forcible enslavement of Muslims.⁶ But Shehu 'Uthman's scholarship extended far beyond writing justifications for holy war, and in fact he never directly participated in combat. His numerous writings cover classical Islamic knowledge disciplines including Islamic law, theology, and Sufism.⁷ His followers came to revere him as the scholarly "renewer" (*mujaaddid*) of the twelfth century after the establishment of Islam, based in part on the shehu's own statement: "We praise God because He has rendered us fit in the time of the renewing of His religion."⁸ He had also clearly developed a reputation for saintliness during his own lifetime, with reports circulating that he could talk to the unseen *jinn*, that he could fly, or that he could traverse vast distances with one step.⁹

The shehu's sainly authority was partly substantiated through visionary encounters with the Prophet Muhammad and past saints such as 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166, Baghdad). In one such vision he received his own set of *hianies* (*wasil*), which he found written on his ribs.¹⁰ In another vision, the Prophet clothed him with a green robe and turban through the intermediary of al-Jilani; the latter named him "Imam of the Saints" and girded him with "the sword of truth to unsheathe against the enemies of God."¹¹ While this vision demonstrated 'Uthman bin Fudî's enduring commitment to the Qadiriya Sufi order, here his authority within its ranks appears second only to that of al-Jilani himself. The shehu's followers have since considered themselves a distinct branch of the Qadiriya, and today are found beyond Nigeria to Sudan and America.

'Umar bin Saïd Futi Tal (1797–1864)¹² likewise achieved fame both through scholarship and armed struggle, as well as his sainly reputation. Unlike the British preservation of the Sokoto Caliphate through indirect rule, the French quickly moved to dismantle the "Umarian Caliphate" following al-Hajj 'Umar's death. But for a brief time, it covered substantial portions of the modern countries of Mali, Senegal, and Guinea, encompassing a land mass as large as Western Europe. 'Umar accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca in the late 1820s, and returned to West Africa as the leading figure of the newly founded Tijaniya Sufi order in the region, having been deputized by Muhammad al-Chali in Mecca, one of the closest students of Ahmad

al-Tijani (d. 1815, Fez). Similar to Shehu 'Uthman, al-Hajj 'Umar's writing demonstrated a wide learning in the disciplines of law, theology, and Sufism. His students certainly considered his saintly authority unrivaled in his time, and flocked to his hand "charged with Baraka."¹³ His miracles included successful prayers for rain and victory in battle, the divine chastisement (drought, plague) of those who stood against him, and resistance to harm in battle despite never carrying a weapon.¹⁴

Al-Hajj 'Umar's own statements concerning his spiritual authority establish him as one of the elite saints of the Tijaniyya, connected directly to the Prophet Muhammad. He declared, "I am in God's service, holding fast to the Sunna of Muhammad . . . and presenting the Prophet's merits to the people. I am one of the heirs of the Prophet, and one of those closest to him."¹⁵ As "heir to the Prophet" (*khalfat al-rasul*), al-Hajj 'Umar's legacy was assured through the continued popularity of the Tijaniyya in West Africa, including in some communities in northern and eastern Senegal, such as Medina Gou-nass, that still perceive him as the unrivaled Tijani shaykh in West Africa.¹⁶ His conflict with the French authorities in the later years of his life has also endowed Sufism with a broader reputation for anti-colonial resistance in the region, something that no doubt contributed to its later spread.

Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké (1855–1927)¹⁷ established the influential "Mouride" community in Senegal, called the *Muridiyya*, or "path of discipline" or "the seeker's path." Together with a new generation of Muslim scholars following France's dismantling of al-Hajj 'Umar's caliphate, Bamba eschewed armed struggle and cultivated an agrarian-based learning community mostly outside the reach of European colonial power. This village quickly developed into a major Islamic regional center, called Touba or *Toba*, meaning blessedness (from the root *ty-b*). *Toba* is mentioned once in the Qur'an (13:29), and in exegesis it is usually identified as a tree in Paradise with roots that extend up into the highest heavens and branches that reach down into each residence in the Garden. Bamba himself became known as *Señi Touba*, "the master (or teacher) of Touba." His primary Sufi affiliation in his early life, like that of 'Uthman bin Fudī, was with the Qadiriya scholars descending from Mukhtar Kuntū—in this case, Shaykh Sidiya of Boutelimit, Mauritania. Also like Shehu 'Uthman, Bamba received prayers directly from the Prophet and did not exclusively identify himself with the Qadiriya.¹⁸ Fearful of his growing influence, the French exiled him to Gabon in 1895; but the seven years that Bamba spent in exile in fact became the occasion for further spiritual attainment. He was reported to have prayed on top of the

sea when the French would not let him pray in their boat.¹⁹ Exile confirmed his most cherished spiritual station, the "servant of God's Messenger" (*khadim al-rasul*), a disposition already articulated in Bamba's earlier poetry: "My time is henceforth exclusively devoted to Muhammad until the ultimate day."²⁰

This idea of service (*khidma*) to the Prophet, reflected in the disciple's service to his master, had important social resonance in Senegal at a time when former slaves and cast out people made increasing demands for inclusion in Muslim scholarly communities. Bamba defined honor in terms of service to Islam, rather than saintly or scholarly lineage: "Whatever nobility one might claim for his ancestors, the truth is that these ancestors originated from water and clay."²¹ Today the Mouride community commands some five million followers in Senegal and among the Senegalese diaspora in the United States and Europe,²² and the annual Maggal celebration in Touba, commemorating Bamba's exile to Gabon, draws millions of devotees.²³

Ibrahim bin 'Abdallah Niasse (1900–1975)²⁴ laid claim to the "spiritual flood" (*fyuda*) foretold by Ahmad al-Tijani as bringing people into Islam and the Tijaniyya "group upon group." For Niasse, Muslim and Tijani religiosity was intimately connected to direct experiential knowledge of God, *ma'yifat Allah*. He promised disciples the immediate acquisition of this most cherished Sufi aspiration. He wrote in verse in 1946, "Whoever seeks me with purpose attains the knowledge of God, the Eternal Sustainer; the elders the same as the youth, since the beloved [Prophet], the sanctuary has come close."²⁵ The desire for direct knowledge of God had a wide appeal throughout West Africa and beyond. After World War II, Niasse traveled frequently to Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Egypt, Sudan, and elsewhere initiating new aspirants and converting thousands to Islam. His "community of the flood" (*gama'at al-fyuda*) eventually claimed 60 million followers, perhaps constituting the largest twentieth-century Muslim revivalist movement anywhere in the world. In the Middle East, he became known as the leader (*za'im*) of all West African Muslims and the region's "Shaykh al-Islam." Like the other saints in this volume, his followers reported numerous miracles of their shaykh, such as keeping an airplane flying despite its having its petrol tank maliciously emptied in a plot to kill him, or being in more than one place at a time.²⁶

With his mission to revive and actualize the original teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, Shaykh Ibrahim considered himself the special "trustee" (*wakil*) of al-Tijani as the "Seal of the Saints." Although he consciously avoided founding his own Sufi path or even distinctive branch of the Tijaniyya, his own claim of paradigmatic sainthood (*qubaniyya*) is perhaps

the most unambiguous in West African history, if not the history of Sufism more broadly. "The might of the servant is the might of [his] King," NiASSE wrote in verse, "So the universe has been subdued at the hand of a black servant."²⁷ He declared further, "None of the saintly poles (*aqtab*) before me have obtained the like of this servant, from the flood of celestial ascension. I thank my Lord that my secret remains fertile, and the least of my followers will obtain annihilation [in God]."²⁸ Except in rare cases, he did not broadcast his visionary experience, although he did indicate that "the [the Prophet] is never absent from me, for all time whether on land or sea,"²⁹ further claiming, "Whoever would compete with me in love and yearning for the Prophet has aspired to that which is impossible and prohibited."³⁰ These were certainly extraordinary expressions of paradigmatic sainthood. But there is no doubt that disciples of Ibn Fudi, Tal, and Bamba also saw themselves as part of a community of unrivaled saintly authority un beholden to Arab or other external religious sanction.

Common Themes and Connections

These four saints represent four successive generations in which affiliation to a Sufi order became an integral component of most Muslim identities in West Africa. Certainly, each responded to different historical circumstances—particularly in relation to European colonial conquest. But their teachings collectively achieved a common goal: the further inscription and spread of Islamic learning despite the various historical challenges of enslavement, revolution, colonial occupation, and postcolonial balkanization. Each scholar considered here adapted his understanding of the Prophet Muhammad's example to his own environment. Mervyn Hiskett's description of 'Uthman bin Fudi's mission thus also speaks to that of Tal, Bamba, and NiASSE:

The Shehu, like other impassioned Muslim mystics, strove to conduct his life in imitation of the Prophet Muhammad. For his followers, this created a deeply significant parallel, in which the apparent repetition of the Prophetic pattern became the visible proof of divine intervention on their behalf; and of God's will that they should succeed in their struggle to establish Islam in Hausaland.³¹

The emulation of the Prophet's example (*Summa*) thus included some sort of withdrawal from the perceived corruption of the society at large, and the founding of a distinct community from which to better change that society.

Following the *Summa* also meant the internal cultivation of an intense love for the Prophet Muhammad, which marked these communities. Here, the words of al-Hajj 'Umar speak to this sense of intimacy with the Prophet that became a common theme in West African Sufism:

God, from His bounty, endowed me with the love for His Prophet. [From an early age] I was confounded with love for him, a love permeating my interior and exterior; something which I both hid and manifested in my soul, my flesh, my blood, my bones, my veins, my skin, my tongue, my hair, my limbs, and every single part making up my being. And I praise God on account of this.³²

Love for the Prophet was thus a transformative experience. West African Sufi scholars were not only exemplars of the Prophet Muhammad's external example; their followers also perceived them as embodying the Prophet's actual spiritual presence. "If this beloved [Prophet] is hidden from you," Ibrahim NiASSE wrote, "verily he dwells in my heart."³³ A common literary theme in the communities under discussion was thus most obviously the love for the Prophet Muhammad. While this took many forms, praise poetry for the Prophet filled thousands of pages—particularly from the pens of Ahmadu Bamba and Ibrahim NiASSE. Not all of this poetry was in Arabic. Musa Ka, the most famed poet of the Muridiyya, justified the use of Wolof to express praise for the Prophet as follows:

Let me say this to those who say that writing in Wolof is not appropriate; rhyming in Wolof or in the noble Arabic language, or in any other, is the same. Any language you use to praise the Prophet of God will then reveal its innermost value.³⁴

Love for the Prophet thus transformed languages as it transformed people. Muhammad was perceived as the enduring presence that eternally renders praise to God.

He is a secret that pervades all being
He is distinguished with might and glory
He is the sun, except his light never sets
He is the quenching rain that falls always.³⁵

Niase, like Bamba and others before him, thus insisted that his own spiritual attainment came only through love and praise of the Prophet:

This is from the love of the Messenger and his secret.
By my enumeration of his praise, I came to bear the standard.
This servant's *akhir* is the love of Muhammad
And my treasure is my praise for him.³⁶

These scholars were, of course, heirs to a rich poetical tradition in West Africa, and there is evidence that they recognized that collectively they were part of something special. 'Umar Tal's complex versified incorporation and explanation of earlier poetry within his magisterial *Sajfata al-sa'ada* were clearly a statement on the "mastery of West African scholars, and how they contributed to this wider [poetical] tradition."³⁷ For Niase, poetry and love for the Prophet were something special by which black African Muslims had demonstrated their scholarly authority in Islam: "Black folk (*sudan*) have gained authority by [their] love of our Prophet. And most white people have been humiliated in [their] offense [of him]."³⁸ Whatever the competing claims of saintly authority, such claims were based on a profound sense of connection to the Prophet. Sufi communities in West Africa were thus mutually recognizable, even if their followers sometimes disputed with each other.

A further enduring theme in West African Sufism was the notion that Sufism was part of a larger process of (Islamic) religious development. The scholars in this volume consistently reference the notion that the worshipper must progress through stations (*maqamat*) of understanding. The relevant scriptural source for this idea is the oft-cited Prophetic narration (*hadith*) concerning the stations of *al-islam* (submission), *al-iman* (faith), and *al-ihsan* (excellence). Since the primarily Muslim audience that the shaykhs were addressing would have been familiar with this *hadith*, it deserves partial citation in case the reference is lost on an English-speaking audience. Here, 'Umar bin al-Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam, gives the narration:

One day while we were sitting with the Messenger of God, there appeared before us a man dressed in extremely white clothes and with very black hair. No traces of journeying were visible on him, and none of us knew him. He sat down close by the Prophet, rested his knee against his knees, and said, "O Muhammad! Inform me about Islam."³⁹

The Messenger of God said, "Islam is that you should testify that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad is His Messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms-tax, fast during Ramadan, and perform Hajj to Mecca if you are able to do so."

The man said, "You have spoken truly." We were astonished at this questioning him and telling him that he was right, but he went on to say, "Inform me about faith (*iman*)."

He answered, "It is that you have faith in God and His angels, His books, His messengers, and in the last day, and in predestination, both its good and evil."

He said, "You have spoken truly." Then he said, "Inform me about excellence (*ihsan*)."

He answered, "It is that you should worship God as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, know that He sees you."³⁹

Scholars, in West Africa as well as elsewhere, had long used this *hadith* to speak to the three main disciplines of Islamic religious learning.⁴⁰ The five pillars of Islam were the domain of jurists, those specializing in the understanding of Islamic law (*fiqh*). Faith (*iman*) was the domain of theologians, those specializing in articulating the doctrine (*aqida*) of God's oneness (*tawhid*). Spiritual excellence (*ihsan*) was the domain of those teaching the awareness of God through the purification of the self, the Sufis. The Sufi scholars in this volume saw their science as part of a process of religious development, one that was based on Islamic law and theological orthodoxy and which culminated with worshipping God "as if you see Him."

The four communities considered here held common values and aspirations. They spoke a common language and were clearly in dialogue with each other. Community leaders contemporary with each other also respected each other, visited each other, and exchanged letters. Despite their different Sufi affiliations, 'Umar Tal accompanied 'Uthman bin Fudi's son and successor, Muhammad Bello, on jihad. Tal married Bello's daughter, Maryam, and Bello used his influence to secure introductions for Tal as he traveled. In one letter, Bello implored his fellow Fulani people residing in Futa:

Our brother, 'Umar bin Sa'id, the famous and genuine scholar has reached us. He is a distinguished person, and among the great men. We are truly gratified upon seeing his honorable face, and blessed by virtue of our contact with him . . . in him we found our lost treasure. He has

completely won our hearts and minds. . . . Though we consider his departure from us as equal to death, yet we do not ignore that he has a duty towards you, and that you are in need of him.⁴¹

For his part, 'Umar Tal relates several visionary experiences of his friend Muhammad Bello in his *Kimah*.⁴² He clearly held the Sokoto Jihad in high esteem, and was no doubt inspired toward a greater activist stance by the legacy of Shehu 'Uthman.

There was, likewise, mutual respect between Bamba's Mouride community and Niasse's Tijani following in Senegal. Momar Mbacké and Muhammad Niasse, the father and grandfather of Bamba and Niasse, respectively, were both scholars in the court of Ma Ba Diakhon during his jihad in the Senegambia in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴³ Biram Cissé, the grandfather of Niasse's closest disciple, 'Ali Cissé, was exiled to Gabon with Bamba, and was the only other political prisoner to return to Senegal alive.⁴⁴ Shaykh Ibrahim corresponded regularly with Mbacké Buso, a prominent Mouride scholar related to Bamba's mother. In one letter, Buso referenced a centuries-old teacher-student relationship between the Niasse and Bamba families in order to say,

Concerning the love between us for the sake of God that you mentioned in your letter, know my son that this love is something you have inherited from your ancestors, for that is how it was between our ancestors. I pray that God the most high preserve it for all of our descendants without exception.⁴⁵

Shaykh Ibrahim maintained cordial relations with Bamba's son and *Mulid*, Fallou Mbacké, and Mbacké even named his son after Niasse, nicknamed 'Khalif' (an epithet for Ibrahim).⁴⁶ Such examples are not meant to obscure instances of conflict between Sufi communities in West Africa. But they are nonetheless of value in understanding the enduring intellectual exchange between such communities, and their ability to quickly reconcile differences for common goals.

The Context of Islamic Intellectual Production in West Africa

This volume focuses on texts that have played seminal roles in the constitution of West Africa's largest Muslim communities, but with some apology. These texts are admittedly almost exclusively situated within the discipline of

Sufism. They mostly speak to a form of Sufism that emphasizes the practical inculcation of an ethical disposition. Moreover, they were written by men. Ironically, these same communities can be used to argue against three related misconceptions about Muslim identity in Africa: that African Muslims practice Sufism at the expense of Shari'a law, that the metaphysical language of theoretical Sufism is absent from African Muslim articulations, and that African Muslim women are silent in the Islamic intellectual history of the region. This section considers the broader literary production of West African Islam in order to argue against these stereotypes, and then to situate such observations within the communities under discussion. We hope that successive efforts can build on the outlines provided here to fill the void that this volume is unfortunately, owing to reasons of space, unable to adequately address.

Islamic Law in West Africa

The percentage of West African Arabic literature concerned with jurisprudence and legal studies, based on a representative sampling from Mauritania and the Western Sahara, far exceeds that centered on any other discipline. Roughly 35 percent of all such writings concern Islamic law.⁴⁷ By way of comparison, only 8 percent concerns Sufism. Much of this literature is "derivative" or explanatory of earlier texts, serving to "document the creation of a self-sustaining body of scholarship."⁴⁸ Successive generations of Timbuktu scholars, for example, composed numerous commentaries on Khalil al-Jundi's (d. 1365, Egypt) versified summary (*al-Muhtasar*) of Maliki jurisprudence.⁴⁹ Such foundational texts became a veritable "social-cultural currency" in West Africa that marked intellectual maturity.⁵⁰ Unpacking the complex dialectic between texts, written explanations, and oral teaching in African historical contexts is a challenge that has as yet remained mostly unanswered in academia. While several studies have demonstrated the complexity of African legal understandings in specific contexts,⁵¹ there remains a need for a broader thematic overview that allows formative voices from the region to speak for themselves. There is good evidence, based on secondary sources and a cursory reading of the rich primary materials, that West African legal traditions drew on a nuanced understanding of Maliki jurisprudence to make the shari'a an enduring force for social good in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts.

Many observers continue to misread the multivalent dialogue between Islamic legal understandings and non-Muslim African cultures. Academics often seize upon a few reformist movements and, invariably taking them out of context, make them resonate with their understanding of Islamic law's rigidity

based on a narrow text base. Such approaches silence centuries of broader (and ultimately more interesting) legal debate in Africa, much of it preserved in writing; they take as normative reformist voices that actually departed from or challenged mainstream legal understandings. Many have thus considered the Algerian 'Abd al-Karim al-Maghili's (d. 1505) arrival in the Songhay Empire as formative to the development of Islamic orthodoxy in West Africa.⁵² Al-Maghili supplies the new Sultan Askya Muhammad Touré with several legal rulings justifying the excommunication (*tafrit*) and killing of disobedient Muslims, as well as incitement against non-Muslim communities (in this case, North African Jews present in West Africa). For John Hunwick, such opinions appear to reflect a supposed (Arab) Islamic orthodoxy, obsessed with theological reproach and minority castigation. Shemu Uthman's later use of al-Maghili to justify jihad in Hausaland, according to Hunwick, thus "closely resembles" the justification used by extremist elements of the Muslim Brotherhood to assassinate Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for making peace with Israel.⁵³ The actual context for Dan Fodio's endorsement of armed struggle—namely, as a last resort against the enslavement, plundering, and murder of Islamic scholars (the latter long considered constitutive of Islam's very survival)—disappears behind the alleged normative violence of Islam. Al-Maghili himself was rather marginal to mainstream scholarship in West Africa. Charlotte Blum and Humphrey Fisher observe a "positive chasm" between al-Maghili and the Timbuktu scholarly establishment, and a "total news blackout" surrounding his visit to the sultan of Songhay.⁵⁴ Timbuktu scholars disagreed with al-Maghili over the permissibility of killing (Muslim) Berber allies of Timbuktu, and the prominent Timbuktu judge Mahmud Agit overruled al-Maghili's *fatwa* demanding the expulsion of Jews from Songhay.⁵⁵

Following the lead of text-based orientalist assumptions of Islamic legal orthodoxy, anthropologists of African Muslim societies often relish relating the heretodox practices of African Muslim subjects. Here, for example, is the conclusion of an ethnography examining contemporary practices surrounding death in Mauritania:

Despite the commitment of Mauritanian religious scholars to spread . . . the true values of Islamic law to gradually replace existing traditions, the traditions have obstinately survived . . . one can observe that the religious aspects are interwoven with the social and tribal customs. This explains why the majority of the population seem unaware of the rules governing the status of death.⁵⁶

As proof of such departure from "the true values of Islamic law," the author cites "Wahhabi" texts (by the Saudi cleric Muhammad Albani, for example) prohibiting emotional expression at funerals, or the recitation of the Qur'an over a dead person. This type of ethnography seems little concerned with the complexities of Islamic legal discourse in West Africa, or the fact that local African practices may be reflective of well-argued legal opinions challenging more rigid juristic opinions produced elsewhere. Many of the practices that are supposed to be evidence of the imperiousness of African culture to Islam, such as talismans or the appearance of women in "public" (not to mention reading the Qur'an over the dead), are actually based on "orthodox" interpretations of Islamic law by African scholars. One West African Muslim scholar thus reprimanded Ibn Battuta for protesting against women's presence in learning circles: "The association of women with men is agreeable to us and a part of good conduct, to which no suspicion attaches. They are not like the women of your country."⁵⁷ These disparate examples point to the constitutive place of custom or culture (*urf*) in formulating Islamic law according to traditional jurists.⁵⁸ The assumption that whatever does not appear in a restricted set of textual referents is actually "un-Islamic" seems more of a circular argument shared by modern Islamists and orientalists, rather than the position of mainstream Islamic scholarship.

The challenge in narrating the history of Islamic jurisprudence in Africa is to excavate those legal opinions that defined mainstream orthodoxy for centuries. For example, what were the legal opinions upon which the West African scholar mentioned above argued against Ibn Battuta's assumption of gender norms in Islam? What were the legal methods by which al-Hajj Salim Suwaré, of the seminal Jakhanke clerical lineage, argued against the viability of jihad as a means of conversion to Islam?⁵⁹ How did African jurists justify the ecumenical incorporation of diverse medicinal and esoteric methods for the treating of Muslim patients, or the use of the Qur'an to heal non-Muslims? What did it mean for scholars like Momar Mbacké or Muhammad Niassé to work "in the court" of Ma Ba Dioukhon during the nineteenth-century Senegambian Jihad? What were the legal grounds on which the children of these scholars (Ahmadu Bamba and Abdallah Niassé) gave up that armed struggle? How did scholars conceive of executive authority in communities where a just *imam* or *amir* was absent?⁶⁰ These questions, and others, are the stories of Islamic law in Africa that have only begun to be told by narrators with the requisite training to appreciate the complexities of Islamic legal discourse in Africa.

Questions of Islamic law were never absent in the foundation of West Africa's largest Sufi communities. Dan Fodio's daughter, Nana Asma'u, spread Islamic learning and Sufi practice among Hausa women as a replacement for Bori possession rituals, designated as legally impermissible by her father.⁶¹ Umar Tal vehemently disagreed with Timbuktu scholars on the legality of tobacco smoking,⁶² perhaps meant to signify the ascendant purity of Tal's community over the polluted, venal clerics of the past. Ahmadu Bamba relied on his training in Islamic law to argue against the Wolf of King Lat Dior's enslavement of fellow Muslims in battle,⁶³ no doubt contributing to his appeal among constituencies marginalized by the perceived corruption of royal authorities. The otherwise friendly Senegalese Tijani scholars Malik Sy and Abdallah Niassé had differing opinions of the legality of *zakaat* collected from peanuts, the key cash crop that began to undergird the new Sufi communities as well as the colonial economy in Senegal.⁶⁴ The prospect of Sufi realization no doubt attracted followers to these new communities, but the lives of West African Sufis were no less regulated by Islamic law than those of Muslim purist communities elsewhere.

Beyond the elaborate legal curriculum and different opinions surrounding Islamic law in West Africa, scholars evince significant methodological principles that justify further consideration. In Ibrahim Niassé's argument for folding the arms on the chest in prayer (*qabd*) within the Maliki school, for example, the shaykh submits a tangential justification that offered a nuanced understanding of the ongoing dialogue between Prophetic custom (*Sunnah*) and culture.⁶⁵ Even if some African Malikis understood leaving the hands at the side in prayer (*sadd*), as Sunna they could no doubt perceive that this practice had come to be associated with the sectarian Shi'a (*yaftayn*) school in the minds of most Sunni Muslims outside of Africa. Some non-obligatory practices of the Sunna, Niassé argued, could be abandoned if they later became associated with something other than their original intention. For Niassé, a similar example was men growing long hair: a *Sunnah* of the Prophet that had recently become associated with femininity or uncleanness. The Prophetic *Sunnah* should thus be transmitted in dialogue with local understandings so that an ideological fixation on particular practices did not undermine the ethical assumptions of those practices at their origin.

The unofficial "Mufti of Nigeria," Ibrahim Salih (b. 1939), also a shaykh of the Tijaniyya in the spiritual lineage of Niassé, similarly tempered legal rigidity with a broader understanding of Islamic ethics. During the *hadd* controversy surrounding the implementation of shari'a in several Northern Nigerian

states, Salih wrote a 108-page treatise reminding Muslims that Islamic criminal law was meant to exist in dialogue with social realities, not independent of them.⁶⁶ Salih argued that full implementation of the shari'a depended on a given Muslim constituency's preparedness through education. He castigated "Islamists" for demanding the immediate implementation of Islamic criminal law for excommunicating Muslims who thought differently, and for taking matters violently into their own hands. Salih also criticized politicians who wielded the shari'a for popularity, while failing to appreciate its complexities. Politicians and Islamists, according to Salih, cared more for the cosmetic implementation of rules than for the true purpose of the shari'a: the reformation of people.⁶⁷ According to Gunmar Weimann, Salih's work moves beyond discourses demanding the shari'a's politicization, and "presents an alternative concept of achieving compliance with the rules of Islamic criminal law."⁶⁸

Rather than obscure the weight of Islamic law in Africa, this volume on Sufi literature in West Africa should thus serve to remind readers of the complex and varied legal discourses in African Muslim societies. There is much work to be done in giving voice to these legal debates with more thematic external resonance. As the above examples indicate, Sufi communities are often, perhaps not surprisingly, an important lens through which to view the more contemporary implementation of Islamic law in African Muslim societies.

Philosophy and Metaphysics

Metaphysics, the branch of philosophy exploring the nature of ultimate reality, attempts to explain things like cosmology, the human soul or spirit, or bodily resurrection and the afterlife. The classical Muslim theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) argued against the situation of metaphysics within Hellenistic (rational) philosophy, suggesting instead that such matters were better known through divine inspiration to a Prophet or "unveiled" gnostic (*al-tarif al-mukashshaf*).⁶⁹ Even if later Muslim scholars largely endorsed al-Ghazali's epistemological intervention against philosophy (*falshah*), metaphysical writing proliferated throughout the Muslim world, West Africa notwithstanding. If common parlance has come to (or should) recognize philosophy simply as elevated cognition, and metaphysics as the most profound and challenging branch of philosophy, then it is important to admit of a vibrant philosophical tradition in West African Muslim societies. The fact that many such "philosophers" considered themselves Sufis, mystics, or "sages" (*mutama'*) need not obscure the very vibrant presence of philosophy in Islamic Africa.

Academic reference to African Muslim philosophy is still in its early stages. But already Souleymane Baclair Diagne has argued that the Arabic textual tradition of Sudanic Africa demonstrates “a new philosophy of time” and “a philosophy of becoming, a thought of time as creative movement.”⁷⁶ Oludamini Ogunnaike asserted that philosophy as a discipline, especially through the experience of colonialism, has increasingly internalized a Eurocentric bias that overlooks the more expansive definitions of ancient philosophy capable of considering the philosophical contributions of African Muslims.⁷⁷ Elsewhere, building on Diagne’s work to outline a number of texts that could be read as African Muslim philosophy,⁷⁸ Ogunnaike insisted that “African intellectual traditions should not be treated as mere *objects* of inquiry to be learned about . . . but should be approached as *subjects* of study to be learned or learned from.”⁷⁹ The interjection of African Muslim metaphysics into contemporary university philosophy curricula thus depends on the retrieval of source materials that would force further consideration.

While certain of the writers in this volume do address metaphysics, these references are far outweighed by the exigencies of community formation. For example, ‘Umar Tal and Ibrahim Niassé, in writings not translated here, both reference the flow of divine flux (*fiḡd*) through a series of cosmological presences, and the nature of the human spirit/soul (*nub*) as opposed to the soul/ego (*nafs*). But generally, such writings were not formal subjects of learning for students. The main source of metaphysical understanding in the community of Ibrahim Niassé, the *Sirr al-akbar* dictated by Niassé to his closest disciple, ‘Ali Ciissé, was transmitted privately only in manuscript form. A defector from the community, Muhammad al-Maigari, published the work in 1981 as part of an attempt to discredit Niassé’s teachings—in this case, no doubt by linking Niassé to the metaphysical explorations of Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 1240) in the minds of his “Salafi” detractors.

Evidence of metaphysical inquiry sometimes emerged more publicly with intellectuals who did not bear the same weight of community organization and instruction. Coincidentally, two prominent examples of African Muslim philosophy actually come from the communities of ‘Uthman bin Fuḡd and Ibrahim Niassé. ‘Abd al-Qaḡdir bin al-Mustaḡa (known as Dan Tafa, d. 1864) was the son of Shaykh ‘Uthman’s eldest daughter Khadija.⁸⁰ Among his numerous writings are a number of “philosophical” texts,⁸¹ including a treatise on visionary knowledge that provides intriguing insight on the human soul:

As for the state of sleep, the soul (*nub*) continues to abide in its skeletal abode even when its gaze is raised to [look into] the angelic world (*al-‘alam al-malakut*). With this, it procures understandings that otherwise would not be. This is because the accomplished soul does not see except through the spiritual gaze (*al-naẓar al-rūḡani*). You will realize this when you have come to know that the human soul is not lodged in the body for it has not separated from its original spiritual center. If it were to be separated, it would be annihilated, just as this physical body would be destroyed were it to depart from its center and nature. The soul is received in this skeleton by virtue of its regard (*naẓar*) towards the body, and the custom of spirits is to dwell in the place of their gaze. So by the soul’s gaze towards the body it comes to dwell therein, but it is not fixed in the body. This is a wondrous matter indeed! The intellect cannot understand this from its own perception. By God, it is only perceived through unambiguous unveiling (*kashf*) or righteous faith.⁸²

Dan Tafa thus explains a difficult conundrum concerning the connection of the human soul to the body. Many theorists, such as the Syrian ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi (d. 1731), postulated that the soul left the body during sleep to perceive the unseen world and then return with insight.⁸³ But if such were the case, how could the sleeping body remain alive without the presence of the soul—spirit in it? Dan Tafa suggests that the “accomplished soul” in fact extends far beyond the body and remains connected with the unseen (*al-ghayb*), and that sleep allows such a soul to gaze into the unseen without having to actually leave the body.

Such a concept invokes a conception of the human soul’s magnificent breadth that permitted its knowledge (*ma‘rifat*) of God. Probably Dan Tafa would have been familiar with this notion, cogently expressed in the Tijaniyya’s primary source book, *Jawahir al-ma‘ani*, circulating in the Sokoto Caliphate by the time of Muhammad Bello’s reign (1817–37).⁸⁴ According to Ahmad al-Tijani, “God created the soul (*nub*) 980,000 years in length, and the same in width. And He left it a long time in His nurturing care, caressing it in the tenderness of His kindness, graciousness, and manifest love for it.”⁸⁵ African Muslim scholars, in dialogue with each other, thus developed a compelling metaphysical understanding of the human soul’s reality that both infused the physical body and extended to the unseen world without being limited to either location.

Elsewhere, African Muslim scholars expounded on the notion of successive divine manifestations that many have linked to the Emanationist philosophy of Neoplatonism.⁸⁰ While such a discussion is evident from Ibrahim Niassé's work, *Sirr al-akbar*, it is developed further in the Arabic writings of his Fulani student, Hasan Dem (d. 1996, Senegal). In responding to a question about Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani's being called the "renowned isthmus" (*al-barzakh al-ma'fun*), Dem develops a sophisticated understanding of the notion of *barzakh* in relationship to paradigmatic sainthood and the cosmological presences evocative of Emanationist metaphysics:

There are three types of intermediary worlds: the isthmus (*barzakh*) between truthfulness and sainthood (*walayah*), and [then] between axial sainthood (*qubaniyah*) and prophecy: The third is hidden: tongues do not speak of it, pens do not write about it. For this is the soul (*nafs*) of divine manifestation, and the raiment of manifestations; the comprehensive celestial sphere on the carpet of his [al-Tijani's] spirit; the elevated knowledge from the heaven of his secret (*sirr*). [Below that] the manifested divinity (*al-Lahut*) is the universe of his spirit (*nafs*); the angelic presence (*al-Jabarut*) is the world of his intellect (*‘aql*); the heavenly kingdom (*al-Malakut*) is the world of his heart (*qalb*); and the material kingdom (*al-Nasut*) is the world of his self (*nafs*). And here is the place where his two feet are on the neck of every saint from the creation of Adam until the resurrection.⁸¹

In other words, the perfected saint, as the reflection of the Prophet Muhammad as "perfect man" (*al-insan al-kamil*), contains in himself the entirety of the cosmological presences. Not only that, but as *barzakh* his being becomes the means or bridge to traverse between worlds. Hasan Dem, like Ibn al-Arabi who wrote of similar ideas many centuries earlier, may not have considered himself a philosopher or his writings to be philosophy. Certainly, Dem based his understandings on experiential witnessing, not (only) on rational reflection. But there is no doubt that such statements represent complex metaphysical understandings, certainly legible to philosophers and classifiable as higher cognition. Here again, then, a rich tradition of metaphysical inquiry was on display in the Arabic writings of African Muslim scholars.

Women Scholars of West Africa

A study of Muslim women in Burkina Faso made an unsettling observation that is perhaps true throughout West Africa: "Islamic brotherhoods,

associations, and movements have largely been studied without reference to gender. As a result, Muslim women in Burkina Faso hold a marginal place at best in the academic literature on Islam in West Africa."⁸² Several studies have in fact addressed this lack of attention to women in Muslim Africa, and researchers have highlighted the significant contributions of Muslim women scholars and activists mostly since the 1970s.⁸³ But few accounts, with the exception of Jean Boyd and Beverley Mack's work on the nineteenth-century Sokoto princess Nana Asma'u, have given serious consideration to the place of women in earlier centuries of African Islamic intellectual history. Despite the fact that Timbuktu ("Back to the well") may have been founded by a woman, there is as yet no African corollary to the new research on women in pre-modern Muslim societies in the Middle East or India.⁸⁴

Like their counterparts elsewhere in the Muslim world, women have played integral roles in the transmission of Islamic scholarship in West Africa for centuries. It is unlikely in other words, that women have only "begun to affirm their authority in the public sphere" since the 1990s, as a study of Muslim women in the Ivory Coast concludes.⁸⁵ But more research is required to give voice to women's earlier scholarly engagements. This brief overview sketches the contours of women's participation in African Islamic scholarship before reflecting on the voices of women in the intellectual production of the four Sufi communities with which this volume concerns itself.

It is true that female scholarly production is largely absent from the *Arabie Literature of Africa* series, especially in its earlier volumes. But such bibliographical references, along with a few Arabic sources concerned with Muslim women in specific geographical or community contexts, provide important clues to the shape of female Muslim scholarship in Africa. It should of course be observed that most Muslim scholars in Africa did not write, and that much of what they did write was not preserved. Furthermore, women were perhaps less likely to write or preserve their writings than were their male counterparts. With these considerations in mind, the available traces of female Muslim writing in West Africa can be justifiably used to characterize a much larger phenomenon. The following are some notable examples of Muslim women scholars in West Africa.

Khadija bint Muhammad al-‘Aqil al-Daymaniya (d. 1835/6) attracted students outside of her Mauritanian Daymani clan, including notable scholars such as Mukhtar bin Buna al-Jakani and Imam ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Futi ("the Fulani").⁸⁶ This latter student, also known as ‘Abd al-Qadir Kane, established an Islamic state, Futa Toro, in 1776 before dying in jihad defending his new

polity in 1807.⁸⁷ Shaykha Khadija specialized in the science of logic (*mantiq*), and was generally considered “more knowledgeable of whatever discipline than the master of that discipline.”⁸⁸ She authored at least two separate tracts on logic and one on theology, commenting in turn on seminal texts of the West African “core curriculum” such as al-Sanusi’s *Magīda al-sayyida* and al-Akhdari’s *al-Sillan al-manunq fi ‘ilm al-mantiq*.

Faïma bint Muhammad, known as Tur bint al-Tah (d. 1882), was a student of the famous Qadiriya shaykh, Sidiya al-Kabir (d. 1868), the representative of the Kunti-Qadiriya community in Boutelimit, Mauritania. She wrote a number of works, including a versified explanation of monothelist theology (*ta’wīd*), a prose text on the history of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community, a book explaining the merits of the Qur’an, and various collections of poetry. She also wrote letters to address specific questions on Sufism, authored a treatise defending the idea of intercession (*ta’awun*) in Islam, and edited a collection of supplications.⁸⁹

Khadija bint Muhammad al-Shinqitiya (d. 1948), known as *al-Qari’a* (“the strike force”), was one of the more notable scholars of the Tijaniyya Sufi order in the twentieth century. The renowned Nigerian Tijani scholar, Abu Bakr ‘Atiq, met her when she toured Nigeria in 1934 and later attested, “She is the righteous Shaykha, the gnostic saint, the ladle (of knowledge), the one absorbed in the love of the Prophet and the Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani.” ‘Atiq added that Khadija possessed some of the most treasured secret prayers of the Tijaniyya, such as God’s secret “greatest name” (*al-ism al-a‘zam*), the “mysterious treasure” (*al-kanz al-mukhtam*), and the “guarded circle” (*al-hal al-thaq*). Only the most elite of Tijani scholars had permission to use such prayers, and probably for this reason ‘Atiq joined the ranks of Kano scholars in seeking authorization (*taqdim*) in the Tijaniyya from her. She used to meet with the Prophet Muhammad in a waking state. Shaykha Khadija authored several poems in defense of the Tijaniyya, as well as a book defending al-Tijani from detractors, entitled *al-Sayf al-yamani fi l-dhahb Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani* (The Yemeni Sword in Defense of Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani). Originally from Mauritania, she traveled widely throughout Africa and beyond, and died while visiting the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, Saudi Arabia.⁹⁰

Such women left a substantial corpus of writing that remains to be analyzed and translated. But as mentioned above, the singular focus on manuscript production is certainly a misleading marker of Islamic scholarship—especially for women. There were many other notable women scholars who left few writings. Aysh bint Lazuruq, the wife of Mukhtar al-Kunti (d.

1811), taught the most complicated of texts in Maliki jurisprudence, the *Mukhtasar al-Khatib*, to women in the nascent Qadiriya community. Her son remembered her as “no less knowledgeable than my father.”⁹¹ Faïma bint ‘Abdullah al-‘Alawi, the wife of Muhammad al-Hafiz al-Tijani (d. 1830), who first brought the Tijaniyya into Mauritania from Morocco, used to speak to her husband in a waking state after his death, and his students would come to Faïma to pose certain questions to their late teacher through her.⁹² Maryam bint Hayna al-Jakaniya (born 1918) was known as a “mufti and scholar.” Aside from maintaining her own circle of students, she used to serve as a guest lecturer in her sons’ learning circles when they were traveling.⁹³ A survey of female scholarship in Mauritania lists 44 female Muslim scholars,⁹⁴ and a similar overview of women scholars of the Tijaniyya lists 103 scholars—mostly from North and West Africa.⁹⁵ While Mauritania, and Sufi orders such as the Tijaniyya, may have provided contexts particularly conducive to the articulation of female scholarship, similar surveys of scholarly communities elsewhere in West Africa would likely find more similarities than differences. Muslim women have long participated in the transmission of Islamic scholarship in West Africa, but their voices too often remain ignored by external audiences.

Women have played important roles in the formation of the Muslim communities represented by the texts in this volume. The observation that Ahmadu Bamba was particularly “attentive to the education” of his wives and daughters⁹⁶ was certainly also true of ‘Uthman bin Fudi, ‘Umar Tal, and Ibrahim Niasse. The female relatives of these shaykhs, who both formed them and were formed by them, were powerful examples to women students more generally. The mother of ‘Umar Tal, Rughaya bint Mahmud, was known as a “righteous woman” who “fasted continuously.” Among her saintly miracles was that she did not miss a single prayer in giving birth to her son, ‘Umar. Like his mother, ‘Umar was prone to fasting from birth and refused to nurse in the daylight hours during Ramadan.⁹⁷ Jaara Buso, the mother of Ahmadu Bamba, had a reputation for saintliness that “continued to be effective even after her death, when she mystically intervened many times to succor and reassure her son, then under French custody.”⁹⁸ The mother of Ibrahim Niasse, ‘Aisha Niasse, foresaw her son’s saintly trajectory while he was still in the womb, dreaming that the moon fell from the sky into her body.⁹⁹ Later, when her son was struggling to memorize the Qur’an, she procured for him some holy *zamzam* water from Mecca and told him to drink it and ask God to help him.¹⁰⁰

Brief reference to prominent female intellectuals within these Sufi movements points to their importance, and sometimes unapologetic public profiles. Women were central to the Islamic education program that undergirded 'Uthman bin Fudī's Sokoto Caliphate. Muslim women scholars were the front line in the intellectual showdown between Hausa Boni practices and Islamic learning, particularly with regards to medicine and healing.¹⁰¹ Muhammad Bello wrote a book about women in Sufism, called *Kiɓaɓ al-nasīha* (Book of Advice), which Ibn Fudī's daughter, Nana Asma'ū, versified in Hausa at her brother's request.¹⁰² A prolific writer, Nana Asma'ū offered herself as an example for all Muslims:

If anyone asks you who composed this song, say
That it is Nana, daughter of the Shehu, who loves Muhammad
You should firmly resolve, friends, to follow her
And thus you will follow exactly the *Sūma* of Muhammad.¹⁰³

Such writing activities were, of course, secondary to the public teaching positions that women held in the Sokoto Caliphate. Nana Asma'ū in fact trained a "cadre of literate, itinerant women teachers (*gajis*) who disseminated her instructive poetic works among the masses."¹⁰⁴

The daughters of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse were similarly involved in the proliferation of Islamic learning. One of the most prolific scholars has been Rughaya Niasse (b. 1930), three of whose Arabic works have already been translated into English.¹⁰⁵ Sayyid 'Alī Cissé, Shaykh Ibrahim's designated *khaliḥ*, attested to Rughaya's erudition, which is displayed in her book *Tambin al-bint al-muslima* (Motherly Advice for the Muslim Girl): "[The book] selected the lofpest pearls and the most beneficial teachings. This demonstrates that this exceptional lady has herself acquired these noble traits."¹⁰⁶ Shaykh Ibrahim granted his daughter unlimited authorization in the Tijaniyya when she was only twenty-eight, writing, "May God bless anyone who takes knowledge from her, even if it is one single letter." Her father ordered Rughaya to travel in order to teach the Islamic sciences, saying in a letter to her in 1971, "I forbid ignorant and greedy people to travel. As for you, you are authorized! Whenever you set foot shall be a blessed place."¹⁰⁷ A favorite theme of Shaykha Rughaya's writings was the intellectual capabilities of Muslim women. She thus reminded her students of Muslim scholarly exemplars, such as 'Aisha bint Abu Bakr, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, in emphasizing the equality of women and men:

She was an amazing example, for she would teach recitation of the Qur'an and religious knowledge, such that the Prophet—blessings and peace be upon him—would say about her: "Take half of your religion from this young lady." Urwa ibn Zubayr said of her: "I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable of law (*fiqh*), medicine, or poetry than 'Aisha." She transmitted from the Prophet—blessings and peace upon him—more than two thousand hadith. Therefore, do not diminish the importance of emulating these noble women who are our mothers. . . . I am only telling all of this to make you aware that you have equal access to the states of perfection as males do. Islam equalizes men and women, and Allah has obligated the seeking of knowledge upon all Muslims, male and female. So beware of neglecting half of the community (*umma*) of our master Muhammad.¹⁰⁸

Rughaya, like her renowned sisters, Maryam and Fatima, was of course trained directly by their father. Shaykh Ibrahim's eldest daughter, Fatima, the mother of the community's current Imam, Cheikh Tijani Cissé, remembers her father ordering her and other women of the community to leave household chores to come study with him works of history, poetry, and Arabic grammar.¹⁰⁹

Women in the Sufi communities considered here were thus integrally involved in the production of Islamic scholarship. They were students, teachers, and writers. They studied with both men and women, taught both men and women, and their writings were well received by both men and women. We hope that subsequent work can make some of these writings available in a similar format to that of this book, allowing women scholars to speak for themselves in articulating their place within the Islamic intellectual history of Africa.

Structure of the Book

Jihad of the Pen, the Sufi Literature of West Africa attempts to provide a representative sampling of the core ideas of each scholar, as well as the different genres in which they wrote. All were capable writers in classical Arabic, and wrote in both prose and verse. This volume thus includes both prose pieces and poetry. Some of these works were meant as teaching texts, to be memorized and elaborated on in the shaykh's circle of students. Others were written in private, and only published later. Sometimes, writers targeted external audiences: those that doubted or disparaged certain teachings of the community.

But whatever their immediate context, all of the texts included here have become constitutive of the curriculum of students, albeit at various levels of ability, within the communities in question. Even if the students cannot always read Arabic, they are exposed to these texts through the oral translation and explanation of local scholars:

This volume enjoys the contribution of a variety of translators. Such diversity can provide fresh ways of reading similar ideas, but the reader should be aware of stylistic differences between translators that a collection such as this cannot hope to avoid. Some translators preferred the use of English rhyme in the translation of rhyming Arabic poetry, for example, while others relied on rhythm (or simply prose) to communicate the force of the original verse. Otherwise, this volume attempts to remain consistent in the adequate use of footnotes and in providing transliterations of Arabic words where appropriate. We have provided a short introduction to individual texts in order to give an immediate context for its production, as well as to alert the reader to alternative translations available elsewhere.

Finally, we are aware that this volume is not an exhaustive record of the prolific writing of the individual scholars considered here, nor does it include all the notable Sufi scholars of West Africa. With regard to the latter, notable omissions include Muhammad al-Yadali,¹¹⁰ whose works were particularly influential for Ahmadu Bamba and Ibrahim Niassé. There is also Mukhtar Kunté,¹¹¹ whom Niassé also cited liberally and whose Qadiriya legacy influenced Uthman bin Fudi and Ahmadu Bamba. Finally, the Senegalese contemporaries of Bamba—Malik Sy (d. 1922) and Abdallah Niassé (d. 1922), both of the Tijaniyya—wrote important works on spiritual training (*tariqa*) and poetry in praise of the Prophet, and founded saintly communities of their own.¹¹² While not exhaustive, we hope that this work makes a lasting contribution to understanding the intellectual production of West African Sufism.

Part I

Shaykh Uthman bin Fudi
Rudolph Ware and Muhammad Shareef