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Closer than Your Jugular Vein:
Muslim Intellectuals in a Malian Village, 1900 to the 1960s

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ABSTRACT

Closer than Your Jugular Vein: Muslim Intellectuals in a Malian Village, 1900 to the 1960s

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In Muslim West Africa, food-producing villages also produced literate scholars. This study examines how such unlikely intellectuals acquired and gave meaning to Islamic knowledge through one village's experience from 1900 to the 1960s. Unlike the colonial sources underlying conventional approaches to West African Islam, libraries and oral sources from Ruumde do not define Islam in relationship to the colonial state. Ruumde's sources uncover meanings of Islamic intellectual culture, closer to ordinary Muslims' lives. The biography of a modest village scholar reveals his individual path to competence as a legal reader, and community standing as an imam and legal debater. It also exposes how Islamic texts shaped community discussions about such intimate issues as gender relations and how such concerns shaped, in turn, the meanings that village intellectuals attached to the law. Histories of Ruumde's family units chart the social distribution of Islamic knowledge. Though one family claimed special status as the "neighborhood" of "Scholars," the general rule was not lineage specialization, but diversified investment of family labor resources. All families, including the "Scholars," had to engage in subsistence agriculture. Almost every family also invested labor in scholarship. Islamic esoteric sources help explain why ordinary families determined that textual skills were too valuable to be left to specialist lineages. Memories of an esoteric working-group active in the 1930s and 1940s, and textual toolkits from village libraries reveal that Islamic secret knowledge was powerful because it put solutions to ordinary rural problems within the reach of ordinary people. The final section of the thesis explores how intellectuals in Ruumde and nearby communities defined

slavery and a process of emancipation that accelerated in the late 1950s and 1960s. Many masters identified the most offensive aspects of increasing slave autonomy not in loss of control over labor, but in “revolts” against Islamic legal distinctions between slave and “free.” Slaves, likewise, defined emancipation in Islamic terms, using new social leverage to enter into their masters’ intellectual tradition and assert new scholarly identities. State actions initiated emancipation, but village intellectuals determined its deepest meanings. Rural commoners had the power to produce Islamic knowledge and bind its significance closely to their own lives.

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GLOSSARY

almaami (Fulfulde) – Fulfulde rendering of the Arabic *imām*. The office signified both religious and political authority at the local level in nineteenth-century central Mali. Subsequently, the *almaami* became a strictly religious designation and local political responsibilities were transferred to a separate office of the *amiiri*.

amiiri (Fulfulde) – Chief.

‘aqīqa (Arabic) – Naming ceremony for week-old babies.

arōe yirrayōe (Fulfulde) – Warrior-chiefs who ruled central Malian Fulōe communities prior to the establishment of Seeku Aamadu’s *Diina*.

arrondissement (French) – Postcolonial administrative division in Mali. The term replaced the colonial term *canton*.

canton (French) – Colonial administrative division, which grouped together multiple villages under the authority of an indigenous chief who reported to a French commandant at the *cercle* level.

cercle (French) – Colonial administrative division at a higher level of organization than the *canton*.

de’eende (Fulfulde) – Neighborhood or lineage group.

dimaajo (Fulfulde) – Term for slave, especially one who has been born into his or her masters’ household, rather than entering it as a result of purchase or capture. It is more polite than the alternative term: *maccuḍo*. (Plural – *rimayōe*.)

dimo (Fulfulde) – A “noble,” i.e. member of a social group defined in opposition to both slaves and caste artisans. (Plural – *rimōe*.)

Diina (Fulfulde) – The Islamic state that Seeku Aamadu established in nineteenth-century central Mali.

duḍal (Fulfulde) – Qur’anic school.

fā’ida (Arabic) – A “benefit.” In Gimbalan texts, the term has usually meant a beneficial esoteric technique, though it could mean other sorts of beneficial knowledge, such as a useful piece of legal information. (Plural -- *fawā’id*.)

faqīh (Arabic) – Jurist.

fiqh (Arabic) – The discipline of Islamic law.

gargasaajo (Fulfulde) – Casted leather-worker.

gariibu (Fulfulde) – Beginning Qur’anic school pupil.

gur’aananke (Fulfulde) – Scholar specializing in the Qur’anic text.

habādabaza – Acrostic used to summarize principles of Islamic inheritance law.

hadīth (Arabic) – Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings and doings.

‘ibādāt (Arabic) – Ritual matters within the field of Islamic law.

ilmunke (Fulfulde) – Scholar specializing in advanced knowledge beyond mastery of the technical aspects of the Qur’anic text.

kaffāra (Arabic) – The most exacting form of penance required of those who violate the fast during Ramadan. The *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī specifies three ways to perform it. The preferred method is (1.) feeding sixty poor people, but (2.) manumitting a healthy slave or (3.) fasting two consecutive months is also acceptable.

khutba (Arabic) – Feast-day sermon.

koreeji (Fulfulde) – Nuclear family unit comprising one’s spouse and children.

lasraarinke (Fulfulde) – Specialist in Islamic secret knowledge.

maccuḍo (Fulfulde) – A slave. Literally, the term refers to a first-generation slave brought to a household through capture or purchase. When a speaker wishes to emphasize slave-status, he or she may apply it also to later-generation slaves instead of using the more polite term *dimaajo*.

mu‘āmalāt (Arabic) – Social matters within the field of Islamic law.

mobbo (Fulfulde) – Scholar, or teacher. A shortened form of *moodibo*.

moodibo (Fulfulde) – Scholar. (Plural – *moodibaaŋe*.)

muqaddam (Arabic) – A Sufi leader authorized to initiate new members.

njaatigi (Fulfulde) – Host.

neenyo (Fulfulde) – Member of an endogamous caste defined by artisanal labor. (Plural – *neeŋe*.)

pulaaku (Fulfulde) – Members of the community of Fulfulde-speakers, including all its various social divisions.

pullo boḍeejo (Fulfulde) – A “red Pullo,” i.e. an unlettered herder.

qibla (Arabic) – Direction that a Muslim should face during prayer.

rajaz (Arabic) – Poetic form characterized by rhyming between the final words of the two hemistiches of each line.

riyāl (Arabic) – Arabic word that Gimbala writers used to translate the Fulfulde term *mbuuḍu*. It meant a unit of five French francs.

saare (Fulfulde) – Cultivators’ district of a village.

seekuujo (Fulfulde) – Sufi spiritual master.

sirri (Fulfulde) – Secret, or esoteric, knowledge.

sūra (Arabic) – One of 114 chapters which make up the text of the Qur’an.

suudu baaba (Fulfulde) – A “father-house,” i.e. a patrilineal descent group.

taaliibo (Fulfulde) – Advanced student.

tafsīr (Arabic) – Qur’anic exegesis.

umm al-walad (Arabic) – Slave women who has been impregnated by her master and who therefore gains certain rights according to Islamic law.

walī (Arabic) – Muslim “saint,” or “friend of God.”

wuro (Fulfulde) – Herders’ district of a village.

zakāt (Arabic) – Alms, or tithing, prescribed in Islamic law. It was also the name which canton chiefs gave to taxes that they collected. For pre-colonial chiefs, *zakāt* was the primary tax that they collected. For colonial-era canton chiefs, it was a secondary, illicit tax that they collected for themselves in addition to the revenues that they collected for the colonial state.

To my parents and Eka

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

**ISLAM AND COLONIALISM IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA, GIMBALA, AND
RUUMDE SUUDUUBE**

One aspect of the French empire in West Africa was a set of policies, attitudes, and methods for producing knowledge about Islam. French concerns about Islam produced a varied body of documentation, from the broadly-gauged surveys of specialists on Islam to the local reports of minor officials working in areas such as Gimballa, a rural region in central Mali. These sources offer a view of colonial-era Islamic culture which is important and useful, but insufficient and even potentially misleading. The ways in which the colonial vantage point is insufficient and misleading are especially clear when viewed from Gimballa.

French colonial records have been a key source for postcolonial scholars of West African Islam. The considerable advantages of these sources – their accessibility, the compatibility of their content with the analytical methods of secular historical and social science scholarship, and the special insight they offer into the actions of the colonial state – are counterbalanced by one obvious disadvantage. Because French sources were produced for the colonial project, the information they provide on West African Islam understands it primarily in terms of that project. Reliance on French sources has been one reason why postcolonial scholars too have studied colonial-era Islamic culture primarily with colonialism as their analytic starting-point. The first section of this introductory chapter examines Paul Marty's influential work to explore how colonial concerns generally shaped the production of knowledge about Islam in French West

Africa. The second section follows how colonial concerns and the sources they produced have continued to structure the approach of postcolonial scholars to West African Islam. This postcolonial body of literature contains much subtle, important scholarship, but the legacy of colonial scholarship has made for a generally weak treatment of grassroots rural Islam.

The rest of the chapter shifts focus to the local context of Gimbala. Section three follows the development of Gimbala Islamic policy from the beginning of French rule there in 1893 to the early 1920s. At first, local administrators sought to apply a broader colonial model of Islam to local realities. When they did not find what they expected, they developed an Islamic policy of non-intervention, which was sensible enough given the nature of Gimbala Islamic culture. They also produced a seriously inaccurate descriptive account of local Islam. Report-writers argued that Islam had little real significance in local life, an attitude most pithily expressed in a phrase repeated by several of them: “The Muslim question is not posed here.”

The tens of thousands of Islamic documentary images to which I gained access during fieldwork with Gimbala private library owners belie this statement. Colonial-era Gimbala posed a wide range of Islamic questions. That these questions were very rarely about how Muslims should relate to the colonial state excuses the colonialists for having ignored them and explains why they misconstrued the significance of Islam in local life. At the same time, it points to the need for a new approach to colonial-era Islam in West Africa, one less tied to the concerns of producers of French sources and more open to a wider range of West African Muslim concerns.

Section four of this introduction outlines the new approach which I will pursue in this thesis. This approach involves a shift in sources. Locally-produced knowledge about Islam uncovers what colonial ways of producing knowledge systemically obscure. My approach also

involves a spatial shift. Colonial observers looked for Islam in the space between the colonial state and its Muslim subjects or in Islamic social spaces which they considered to have the greatest potential interest to their colonial project. I will examine it in much smaller spaces: the space between a modest rural reader and a text, the space of an ordinary food-producing village, the space within food-producing families, and the space between rural masters and slaves as this relationship changed over the course of the twentieth century. All of these modest rural spaces were intellectual spaces. Rural intellectuals directed their Islamic questions at these intimate spaces close to their lives, rather than at the space between them and the state. Turning our attention to these spaces and the knowledge produced in them reveals new levels of the significance of Islam in West African historical experience.

French Colonial Knowledge about West African Islam

The most important French colonial scholar of West African Islam was Paul Marty. Born in Algeria in 1882, Marty spent his entire career as an interpreter and expert on Islam attached to the colonial military and administrative apparatus. Between 1912 and 1921, he was stationed in Dakar, heading the Services des affaires musulmanes for French West Africa from its establishment in 1913.¹ Based on a combination of personal research and the collected observations of colonial officials from throughout the federation, Marty published an astounding amount between 1915 and 1931, including thick compendia covering Islam in seven of the federation's eight subdivisions. His work on the French Sudan, *Etudes sur l'Islam et les tribus*

¹ Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 104-6.

du Soudan, was a four-volume set published between 1918 and 1920. Marty's scholarship both exemplified and helped to organize French colonial consensus about West African Islam. Three points about his views should be highlighted here: (1) his explicit commitment to studying Islam as an aspect of colonizer-colonized relations; (2) his concept of "Islam noir"; and (3) his emphasis on Islamic hierarchy. These three aspects of Marty's thinking also characterized French colonial thinking more broadly and have, moreover, largely defined the agenda of postcolonial scholarship on colonial-era West African Islam.

The content of Marty's works was mainly descriptive, though he never hid the fact that his underlying concern was Islam as a colonial administrative problem. His descriptions displayed an impressive comprehensiveness in their region-by-region lists of Muslim personalities followed by summaries of local Islamic customs and institutions. His straightforward descriptive style and his comprehensiveness resulted from both his method of compiling information from the reports of local colonial officials and his goal of producing books which could serve as useful, accessible handbooks for the same class of officials. Unsurprisingly, his descriptive accounts of Muslim individuals often explicitly highlighted their attitude to the French. He peppered his writing throughout with policy suggestions and comments about the implications of Islamic cultural phenomena for French rule.

But the influence of Marty's colonial vantage point on his scholarship was deeper than a simple injection of colonial commentary on an otherwise neutral descriptive text. The colonial vantage point fundamentally shaped his perception of the basic nature of West African Islam. The most obvious way in which it did so was in his commitment to the concept of "Islam noir." Marty was among the most important theorists of the widely-held French colonial idea that African Islam was fundamentally different from the Arab Islam of North Africa and the Middle

East and that this religious difference was based on an inherent racial difference. Black Islam was superficial, syncretistic, unsophisticated, and less fully Islamic than its Arab counterpart. Marty's region-by-region summaries of Islamic customs and institutions often have the flavor of scorecards, rating how far short local practice fell of the assumed Islamic norm and how much it mixed in of supposedly pre-Islamic African culture.

Most postcolonial critiques of colonial attitudes toward Islam in French West Africa have focused on this distorted representation and its relationship to the colonial project. Far from an empirical scientific finding, "Islam noir" embodied colonial hopes that African Islam would be a less threatening variant than what the French felt they faced in other parts of their empire. It was also a political instrument, which informed and justified a wide range of colonial policies, including attempts to shore up animism, to limit Arabic language study, and to cordon off West African Muslims from "external" influence, but also to selectively engage Muslim leaders.² The rank racism of "Islam noir" and the obvious way it related to broad colonial strategies and policies have made it the target of many postcolonial critiques. It is indeed a key example of how colonialists misconstrued Islam in French West Africa and of the close connection between such bad scholarship and colonial political practice.

Postcolonial critiques have concentrated far less on the connection between colonial political practice and the emphasis in Marty's and other colonial scholarship on identifying hierarchy in West African Islam. Marty's long lists of Muslim notables, his scrupulous attention to estimating their prestige and influence, to scoring their erudition, and to recording Sufi

² See Harrison, *France and Islam*, especially chapters 6, 7, and 9. On colonial efforts to limit Arabic language study, see Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001). For an account of the form such policies took in the 1950s, see Jean-Louis Triaud, "Le crépuscule des 'Affaires musulmanes' en AOF, 1950-1956," in *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880-1960*, ed. David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris : Karthala, 1997), 493-519.

affiliations and ranks, reveal how closely colonialists associated Islam with particular forms of hierarchy: above all, vertically-structured Sufi orders constructed around obedience to a charismatic shaykh.³ Such leaders understandably attracted colonial attention. The French feared their potential for organizing revolt and, by the same token, dreamed of harnessing their potential as intermediaries. Yet as with “Islam noir,” colonial political concerns led to bad scholarship on the question of Islam and hierarchy. The French confused what was significant for them (potentially effective rebels or intermediaries) with what was significant within West African Islamic culture.

One of the best examples of this confusion is Paul Marty’s condescending characterization of Islamic culture in Fittuga, the largest canton of Gimbala: “There is, moreover, in all of the villages of Fitouka, a dust-cloud of mini-clerics (*maraboutaillons*), little schoolmasters, without influence and without prestige.”⁴ Such scholars may not have had the influence to mobilize large-scale resistance to or collaboration with the colonial regime. (At any rate, they never tried it in Fittuga.) But this dissertation will demonstrate the profound influence that village scholars, students, and the knowledge which circulated in their “little” schools had on Gimbala history. Like Marty, cercle administrators were dismissive of Gimbala Islam. Some of their disparaging remarks were of the stock variety rooted in the notion of “Islam noir.” But

³ The centrality of this theme can be traced back to the French colonial experience in Algeria. Depont and Coppolani’s 1897 *Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes*, one of the earliest colonially-commissioned works on Islam of broad scope, shows the centrality of Sufi hierarchy in colonial thinking about Islam. Coppolani’s short, but influential later career in French West Africa was an early way in which Algerian administrative experience also shaped French ideas about West African Islam. See Harrison for scholars who questioned the applicability of the Algerian brotherhood model to West African Islam. See him also for most of the same scholars’ unquestioned emphasis on the centrality of key “marabouts” to West African Islam. Harrison implies that this difference is significant. I argue that the fundamental continuity, the continued focus on leaders and hierarchy, was far more significant.

⁴ Paul Marty, *Etudes sur l’Islam et les tribus du Soudan*, Tome II, *La région de Tombouctou (Islam songaï) ; Djenné, le Macina et dépendances (Islam peul)* (Paris: Editions Ernest Leroux, 1920), 196.

what really rendered Gimbala Islam contemptible and virtually invisible to these colonial observers was their failure to find in it the forms of hierarchy which they associated with Islam. Reconsiderations of “Islam noir” in the context of French “divide and rule” policies at the level of the federation of French West Africa and beyond reveal one key way in which political considerations produced distorted knowledge about Islam. The view from Gimbala reveals that the colonial equation of Islam with particular forms of hierarchy was another misunderstanding of West African Islam, one also rooted in the close connection between scholarship and the colonial project.

Postcolonial Scholarship on Colonial-Era Islam

Postcolonial scholarship on colonial-era West African Islam remains largely defined by the terms of colonial scholarship: Islam noir, hierarchy, and an underlying concentration on colonizer-colonized relations. One segment of the literature has consciously limited itself to French policy and representations of Islam. Christopher Harrison’s *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* is the best book-length example of this orientation. It is also the best and most complete deconstruction of Islam noir.⁵ The focus on French policy and representations has the advantage of being a manageable problem with defined, accessible sources. But it also has a glaring incompleteness, because the French were not representing and making policy about inanimate objects, but a living culture. Responding to this deficiency, the dominant model of

⁵ Rejection of Islam noir as faulty science skewed by racist assumptions, colonial wishful thinking, and a political strategy of “divide and rule” is now commonplace. Rejection of Islam noir has also taken the form of scholarship which seeks to demonstrate the orthodoxy of African Islam or integrate African practice with a notion of global or standard practice. Though postcolonial scholars have largely rejected the assumptions of Islam noir, the premise behind Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, eds, *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997), for example, shows it still has some traction.

colonial-era Islam examines the interaction between French colonial and West African Muslim actors. Different scholars have approached the problem in different ways, some testing and expanding the boundaries of the problem. Collectively they have produced a rich, nuanced picture. For the most part though, postcolonial scholars have kept French concerns about relations between the colonial project and colonized Islam at the center of the picture. Unlike their general rejection of Islam noir, postcolonial scholars have also retained colonial emphasis on hierarchy and leaders. As a result, they have left the essential question of grassroots rural Islam at the margins of the story.

The focus on colonial policy and representations has an understandable appeal for scholars interested in colonial-era Islam. The linear story of about twenty basic works⁶ from Le Chatellier to Gouilly and a countable number of files in the archives of Dakar and Aix presents a clear and manageable historical problem. This is not to say it is a simple problem. Though scholars agree that the First World War period and the scholarship of Paul Marty mark the emergence of a durable working consensus, Robinson's critique of O'Brien introduces nuance into our picture of late nineteenth-century French policy and Triaud points out a counter-intuitive turn in the 1950s.⁷ Reconciling their own secular republican identity and Christian heritage with the quest for legitimacy among Muslim subjects was experienced by the French as one of the most disarming conundrums of their empire.⁸ The focus on French policy and representations

⁶ This tally is from Jean-Louis Triaud, "L'Islam sous le régime colonial," in *L'Afrique occidentale au temps des français (colonisateur et colonisés, c. 1860-1960)*, ed. C. Coquery-Vidrovitch (Paris : Editions la Découverte, 1992), 151.

⁷ David Robinson, "French 'Islamic' Policy and Practice in Nineteenth-century Senegal," *Journal of African History* 29 (1988): 415-435. Triaud, "Le crépuscule."

⁸ The pat solution of Islam noir provided a way for French administrators to work through this conundrum in West Africa, but never really resolved the underlying contradictions. For an overview of the conundrum in other French colonial possessions, see Jacques Frémeaux, *La France et l'Islam depuis 1789* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).

has appealed to scholars not only for the confined nature of the problem, the accessibility of the relevant sources, the story's nuanced turns, and its fundamental contradictions, but also because French policy and representations are the clearest new elements which the colonial era introduced to the story of West African Islam.

That studying these phenomena alone is inadequate for bringing that story into the colonial era is, however, equally clear. Harrison acknowledges the fact, recognizing that his study "invites a complementary one of Islamic attitudes and policies towards France." He begs off from the task, pleading insufficient expertise.⁹ Yet the way in which his narrative is continually drawn into incidents driven by Muslim actors¹⁰ shows the near impossibility of achieving such a neat compartmentalization in practice. West African Muslims inevitably creep back into active roles in the story because, despite the reality of French power, they were never passive subjects of a colonial discourse, but historical agents with their own interests, wills, and portions of power.

For this reason, the dominant approach in postcolonial scholarship has been not to bracket off "Islamic attitudes and policies" from French colonial ones, but to study the relationship between them. Like postcolonial scholarship on African history more generally, some of this work has focused on identifying resisters and collaborators. Traoré's study of Shaykh Hamallah of Nioro as a resister clearly belongs to this category.¹¹ Coulon's more

⁹ Harrison, *France and Islam*, 2.

¹⁰ See his discussion of incidents involving Futa Jallon, Dahomey, and Sheikh Hamallah.

¹¹ Alioune Traoré, *Islam et colonisation en Afrique : Cheikh Hamahoullah, homme de foi et résistant* (Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1983). For refutations of this interpretation of Hamallah's career, see Amadou Hampaté Ba, *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar, le sage de Bandiagara* (Paris : Editions du seuil, 1980) and Benjamin Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005). Traoré's work is circumspect in its use of evidence and too thoughtful to be reduced to a simple caricature of nationalist historiography. But comparison of the above accounts of Hamallah's career does raise good questions about the resistance/collaboration model and, more generally, about the study of Islam through

broadly-gauged study of Senegalese Islam also identifies Muslim resistance and “collaboration.”¹² More recent scholarship has eschewed the resistance/collaboration model, searching for more nuanced accounts under the heading of “accommodation.” The new terminology has indeed produced some subtle readings in the individual character portraits of Robinson and Triaud’s edited volume and in the more sustained, comprehensive treatment of Robinson’s *Paths of Accommodation*.¹³ But the fundamental continuity between the “accommodation” and “resistance/collaboration” models is more significant than any differences. Both define the story of colonial-era Islam in terms of the relationships between the colonial administration and Muslim leaders.

Perhaps the most dramatic statement of the power of French colonialism to shape West African Islam has been the common notion in the postcolonial literature that the French were themselves key agents of Islamization. The thesis began in the colonial era in the form of complaints from missionaries and, later, in the weightier objections of colonial administrators. Postcolonial scholars picked up the theme early on. In a 1967 article, O’Brien summarizes the colonial complaints, integrating them as evidence for his own argument along the same lines. He cites Faidherbe’s favorable attitude toward Muslims, evolutionary models which ranked Muslims

the lens of colonial politics. Also of relevance on this point is the spiritual model developed in Brenner’s study of Ba’s Hamallist sage: Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal* (London: Hurst, 1984).

¹² Christian Coulon, *Le marabout et le prince : Islam et pouvoir au Sénégal* (Paris : A. Pedone, 1981). One reference to “collaboration” is on p. 158. Coulon’s preferred terminology is “the exchange of services,” which does not have the same connotations invoked in Robinson and Triaud’s critiques of the resistance/collaboration model.

¹³ David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud, eds., *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880-1960* (Paris : Karthala, 1997). David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000). For two examples of subtle character portraits in the former, one based on a new reading of French colonial sources, the other on Arabic sources, see Sylvianne Garcia, “Al-Hajj Seydou Nourou Tall, ‘grand marabout’ tijani: L’histoire d’une carrière (v. 1880-1980),” 247-275 and Dedoud Ould Abdallah, “Guerre Sainte ou sédition blâmable: un débat entre sheikh Sa’d Bu et son frère sheikh Ma al-Ainin,” 119-153.

higher than non-Muslim Africans, and French administrative use of Arabic writing, Muslim law, and Muslim intermediaries as factors which gave “considerable impulsion to the spread of Islam” during the early colonial nineteenth century.¹⁴

Stated in O’Brien’s terms the thesis is implausible, but the notion that colonialism favored conversion to Islam has also produced more sensible theories of indirect colonial influence. At about the same time as O’Brien wrote, Klein advanced a different model in which the French acted as Islamizers. In Klein’s history of Senegal’s Serer kingdoms, French actions which came directly under the heading of Islamic policy play a much smaller role than the general colonial undermining of Serer state and society, which led indirectly, but decisively to Islamization.¹⁵ In a much more recent work, Soares also highlights colonialism’s indirect contribution to Islamization. He argues that movements of people due to new economic opportunities or involvement in colonial military and educational institutions created a new social space in which mass Islamization could occur on an unprecedented scale.¹⁶ These models of indirect causality open up the question of colonialism’s impact on Islam beyond the study of direct French policies on Islam or how these policies interacted with those of Muslim leaders.

Brenner’s *Controlling Knowledge* pushes the boundaries of the question in a still more imaginative way. A study of Islamic education in Mali, the book includes considerable discussion of colonial Islamic policy and Muslim reactions to it. It differs from most works in this genre by pointing repeatedly to the impotence of colonial policy. Despite repeated attempts,

¹⁴ D. B. Cruise O’Brien, “Towards an ‘Islamic Policy’ in French West Africa,” *Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 304.

¹⁵ Martin Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal: Sine-Saloum 1847-1914* (Edinburgh, 1968).

¹⁶ Benjamin Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 66-67. See also Robert Launay and Benjamin Soares, “The Formation of an ‘Islamic sphere’ in French Colonial West Africa,” *Economy and Society* 28, no. 4 (1999): 497-519.

the French failed to impose their model of Islamic education on their Muslim subjects. And they were constantly beset with doubts that their interventions were having the opposite of the intended effect, furthering models of Islam and Islamic knowledge which the French considered dangerous. Ironies flow from the opposite direction too, for the *médersa* founders who clashed with colonial authorities were, at the same time, creating institutions profoundly shaped by principles of colonial pedagogy. One of the *médersa* directors who expressed his anti-French sentiments most frankly also acknowledged most explicitly the influence on his career of French pedagogy and his own (brief) experience in a colonial school.¹⁷ Brenner's central argument is that the development of *médersas* during the colonial period represents the emergence of a new relationship between Malian Muslims and Islamic knowledge, which differed markedly from the dominant pre-colonial "esoteric episteme." The new "rationalist episteme" was not a direct product of colonial Islamic policy, but rather an unintended consequence of new colonial structures of schooling and political economy. Brenner's investigation of colonialism's relationship to West African Islam moves the problem beyond the standard battles and bargains transpiring between colonial officials and Muslim leaders to a deeper level of epistemological change.

Yet the evolutions in the field have not involved including grassroots rural Islam in the story in any meaningful way. Under the heading of "accommodation," Robinson produces sensitive readings of the varied paths by which Muslim leaders accepted and capitalized on French rule. But despite another vocabulary switch from Weberian "charisma" to Bourdieu's "symbolic capital," his basic model of relations between Muslim elites and commoners remains a

¹⁷ Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001). The director in question is Saada Oumar Toure, see pp. 74-81. The *médersa*, from the Arabic *madrassa*, is a form of modernized Islamic school.

mystified obedience. His narrative remains a tale of marabouts and princes, with the role of follower the only one reserved for the majority of Muslims.¹⁸ Brenner gives a more active role to common Muslims, particularly a group of young, entrepreneurial (largely postcolonial) founders of *médersas*. But like the *médersas* and the new rationalist forms of Islamic knowledge connected to them, these active commoners have been overwhelmingly urban. Brenner links their spirit of activism to egalitarian tendencies which, he argues, distinguish the rationalist episteme from an esoteric tradition founded squarely on hierarchy. Because of the dominance of esotericism in colonial-era rural life, Brenner's model of grassroots activism has few implications for rural Islamic history. *Controlling Knowledge* actually marginalizes rural Islam more fundamentally than other postcolonial scholarship with its depiction of a withering esoteric episteme, still present but no longer providing personnel for substantive roles in production or politics.¹⁹ In contrast, Soares shows a still vibrant colonial and postcolonial esotericism, which is capable of change and of fending off reformist critique. Yet he too makes hierarchy and charisma the pillars of esotericism and casts commoner adherents of esoteric Islam as followers and consumers who rarely understand much about what they consume.²⁰

Underlying this marginalization of grassroots rural Islam is the significant degree of continuity between the paradigms of colonial and postcolonial scholars. Postcolonial scholars

¹⁸ Robinson, *Paths*. Coulon, *Le marabout et le prince*.

¹⁹ Brenner, *Controlling*, 17. Brenner uses Gramscian terms, casting *médersa* scholars and graduates as “organic intellectuals” and relegating other, esoteric Muslim scholars and students to the position of “traditional intellectuals” without continued relevance to conditions of colonial and postcolonial political economy. This account of esotericism seems odd from the author of two of the most sensitive works on the subject: see *West African Sufi* and Louis Brenner, *Réflexions sur le savoir islamique en Afrique de l'Ouest* (Bordeaux: Centre d'Etude d'Afrique Noire, University of Bordeaux I, 1985). Then again, *Réflexions* is focused on demonstrating esotericism's intellectual complexity and coherence as one defensible conception of Islam, not its historical dynamism. *West African Sufi* is a brilliant, sympathetic study of a colonial-era esoteric scholar, but its “spiritual” thesis actually fits quite well with *Controlling Knowledge*'s picture of an episteme sapped of social significance.

²⁰ Soares, *The Prayer Economy*, chapter five; on the limited knowledge of consumers, see p. 145.

have rejected the racism of Islam noir and deconstructed its political role in the colonial project. They have produced more complex and certainly more disinterested accounts of the interaction between Muslims and the colonial order. Yet by giving this relationship the defining role in the story of colonial-era West African Islam, they have obscured other, key elements of that story. Perhaps most decisively, they have left in place colonial equations of West African Islam – at least in its mainstream, esoteric tradition – with particular forms of hierarchy, adopting a logic which dismisses the knowledge and historical influence of all but a handful of West African Muslims.

It is worth noting some of the dissatisfaction that there has been with this approach, particularly because of how this exercise reveals the connection between the nature of accessible sources and the way that the story has been told. Triaud shows particular awareness that something is missing. In the introduction to *Le temps des marabouts*, he remarks on the importance of understanding marabouts' relations with their followers (the latter's opinions, the pressure which they could apply to the former, and the disagreements which resulted), but sets aside the problem due to lack of sources.²¹ The work will instead focus on getting beyond French Islamic policy to examine the strategies and attitudes of Muslim elites, but even here he identifies the relative lack of sources as a major obstacle.²² Triaud's own contribution to this volume deals, in fact, with French Islamic policy. But here and in a similar piece elsewhere, he combines careful, close readings of colonial sources with frankness about their limitations, remarking, for example, that we learn "more about colonial representations ... than about the

²¹ Jean-Louis Triaud, "Introduction," in *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880-1960*, ed. David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris : Karthala, 1997), 28.

²² Triaud, "Introduction," 12.

reality on the ground.”²³ Klein’s history of Siin and Saalum concludes by attributing the “final victory” to “a small army of humble and unarmed marabouts.”²⁴ But we learn far less (in fact, almost nothing) about these actors in the rest of the book than about the colonial administrators, missionaries, kings, and Muslim resistance leaders who feature in colonial sources.

Searing’s history of Kajoor and Bawol stands out in the field for his efforts to move beyond colonial sources and the vantage point of colonizer-colonized relations. The result is an imaginative thesis which links the rise of Murid Islam to the pre-colonial expansion of peanut farming, the decline of aristocratic control over slaves, and the formation of new agricultural communities. Yet while he effectively critiques many colonial representations of Murid Islam, Searing affirms the core notion of hierarchy. Though peasant and ex-slave initiative is evident in the moves to form new communities, their role in Islam is as followers.²⁵ This conception of grassroots rural Islam is inadequate. It betrays a blind-spot, which originated in French colonial ways of knowing West African Islam and which continues to limit postcolonial scholarship.

Local Colonial Administration and Islam in Gimbala

The blind-spot comes out with particular clarity when one examines how officials applied colonial ways of knowing Islam to local realities in Gimbala. Local administrators differed from specialists on Islam such as Paul Marty in terms of the geographic scope of their missions, their expertise on Islamic matters, and the place of such matters within their overall responsibilities.

²³ Triaud, “L’Islam sous le régime colonial,” 155. For similar expressions of doubts elsewhere, see “L’Islam sous le régime colonial,” 153 and Triaud, “Le crépuscule,” 518.

²⁴ Klein, *Islam and Imperialism*, 219.

²⁵ James Searing, *“God Alone is King”: Islam and Emancipation in Senegal* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

Yet the two categories of colonial officials perceived Islam with much the same eye. They were both most fundamentally concerned with how Islam related to the colonial problem of how to rule. They both approached the subject with racist preconceptions, though these did not have the same policy implications in the local Gimbala context that they had in the larger context of the federation as a whole. They also both approached it expecting particular forms of hierarchy. Here the implications were also different, because local administrators simply did not find the Islamic hierarchy for which they were looking. They dutifully applied the template of colonial “Muslim questions,” but came up with little of interest. As a result they determined that Islam was unimportant in Gimbala, extending the judgment from the problem of colonial rule or politics to a general evaluation of the superficiality of local Islam.

The first administrative center from which the French observed Gimbala was Bandiagara. Because Gimbala was more than one hundred kilometers away, officials in Bandiagara could never watch the region closely. Their comments about Gimbala concentrated on the difficulties they encountered in collecting taxes from what they evaluated as the cercle’s richest agricultural zone.

The remarks which they made about Islam focused on other, more centrally-located parts of the cercle. Therefore, reports from Bandiagara do not offer a direct appraisal of Gimbala Islam, but they do show the early development of colonial methods of observing and interacting with Islam in central Mali. The scattered comments in reports from 1895 show French interest in establishing Islamic legitimacy in the cercle. The administrator esteemed that the festival at the end of Ramadan was a useful opportunity to show their main indigenous collaborator Aguibou Tall’s authority over the cercle’s marabouts as well as French respect for marabouts’ goods, families, and religion. He noted with relief that some disciples (*talibe*) of their main adversary

Amadou Tall had returned from their religiously-inspired exile (*hijra*). He commented on the functioning of judicial procedures presided over by a qadi and overseen by the marabouts of Bandiagara. He mentioned collaboration with a marabout to whom the French had allowed control over five villages, though he accused this Muslim ally of having abused these good relations to pillage a nearby market town.²⁶ The main event in 1896 was the emergence of an anti-colonial “prophet” whose preparations for “holy war” worried the French in March, but fizzled out by April.²⁷ The most important point to note about the early remarks of officials in Bandiagara is their narrow focus on rebellion, collaboration, and a handful of presumed leaders. The haphazard nature of the reporting and the rather unspectacular nature of the incidents involved give the impression of an immature, relatively insignificant Islamic policy in the cercle’s initial years.

A few years later, some signs suggested that observation of Islam was becoming more regularized and somewhat broader. By 1902, a space designated for information on “Muslim sects” or “Muslim questions” became a feature of regular political reports. In most cases, officials wrote that there was “nothing special” or “nothing to signal” about these questions. But they continued to add occasional observations about Muslim notables’ attitudes towards the administration and about how qadis acquitted their functions. They introduced surveillance of returning pilgrims and prepared to undertake a systematic survey of Muslim schooling.²⁸ (Gimbalan notables, qadis, and pilgrims were not mentioned in the Bandiagara reports and

²⁶ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1895.

²⁷ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1896. This incident had some minor repercussions in Gimbala, not because the rebel scholar attracted Gimbalan adherents, but because a major canton chief used the possibility of instability as a pretext to withhold tax monies.

²⁸ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1902 and 1903.

Gimbalan schools were almost certainly among those which, because of “the distance of some cantons,” were not included in this count.)

In 1903, a European resident was stationed in the Gimbalan market village of Saraféré to try to improve the region’s record of tax payment. In 1905, another administrative re-shuffling removed the residence of Saraféré from Bandiagara’s jurisdiction, adding it to territory from Sumpi cercle to form the new cercle of Issa-Ber. The new cercle straddled the Niger River and included, on its right bank, most of the area traditionally known as Gimbala. Cercle headquarters were in Niafouké, on the left bank of the Niger and, therefore, just outside of Gimbala proper. But commandants in Niafouké were clearly in much better position to become knowledgeable about the region than their predecessors in Bandiagara had been. From being the most remote segment of a very large cercle, Gimbala became the richer, more populous half of a much smaller one.

New eyes in Niafouké and Saraféré began to apply the colonial template for observing Islam specifically to Gimbala. For the first time, officials sought to identify Gimbalan Muslim leaders, monitor possibilities there for Islamic rebellion or cooperation, and assess local Islamic practice on the more fundamental level foreshadowed in Bandiagara’s attempts to survey Qur’anic education. In outlining this colonial picture of Gimbalan Islam, I will follow what I see as a logical progression from the search for leaders, resistance, and collaboration to a contemptuous general appraisal of local Islamic culture. It will be clear that the logical progression was not a neatly chronological one. Both aspects of the picture appeared from the first substantive account in 1903, with later accounts serving mainly to confirm, fill out, and solidify the initial impression.

By April 1903, the new resident in Saraféré, J. Joguet, began to submit monthly reports which included a space allotted for “Muslim questions.” One of his first remarks was that marabouts did not seem to have much influence. Following standard colonial practice, he nevertheless tried to identify key Muslim leaders. He noted that the chief of the residence’s largest canton, Fittouka, belonged to an important religious family. He recorded that the most competent and venerated scholar was Modibo Amma, the qadi of Fittouka who also fulfilled the functions of qadi for the residence in Saraféré. He noted with some approval the level of learning of the other provincial qadis and some unidentified Kunta scholars living in the area.²⁹

Joguet’s successors in Saraféré and Niafouké continued the search for individuals with Islamic influence. In 1904, the new resident filed a report on a returning pilgrim, Eladji Moulaye.³⁰ In 1905, a special report on Muslim affairs in the new cercle of Issa-Ber identified Alfa Taibou and Sidi Mokhtar Kas as Gimbala’s best-known scholars.³¹ The latter’s death the following year prompted an appreciative obituary by the cercle commandant. Annual reports from 1906 to 1908 singled out Alfa Taibou for special mention as the leading scholar in the area.³² In 1907, the commandant sketched the portrait of Kunta scholar Baba Ahmet who was visiting the cercle. A vocal marabout, who preached in the market of Niafouké, appeared in a report in 1909. The same person attracted attention the following year for similar outspokenness

²⁹ ANM (FA), 1E 23, June 1903 (report from Saraféré residence).

³⁰ ANM (FA), 1E 23, March 1904 (report from Saraféré residence).

³¹ ANM (FA), 4E 52, 1905.

³² ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1906-1908. The 1906 and 1907 reports were both signed by Commandant Descemet. The 1908 report’s section on Muslim questions, written by former Saraféré resident J. Joguet now brought back as the commandant of Niafouké, is simply a verbatim copy of the account from 1907.

in the market of Saraféré, this time identified more specifically as the son of an ex-qadi from Ngorkou.³³

In every case, French interest in these individuals grew out of the effort to detect opportunities for collaboration or threats of rebellion. Modibo Amma's importance was as a participant in the judicial institutions of the new colonial center. Eladji Moulaye's status as a pilgrim made him suspect according to French conceptions of Islamic leadership, but the resident ended up satisfied that he was harmless, writing: "He does not at all seem to want to profit from his influence and the considerable respect he enjoys to create opposition to our authority."³⁴ The 1905 report on Muslim affairs underscores Sidi Mokhtar Kas and Alfa Taibou's lack of interest in "political propaganda." Sidi Mokhtar's obituary the following year expresses respect for his great learning and piety, notes his considerable renown even outside the cercle, and deals, of course, with the political concerns such a character sketch raised according to colonial conceptions of Islam. Though the scholar had no sustained relationship with French authorities, he did not seem hostile, having remained independent, but tranquil and uninvolved in political questions since the colonial conquest.³⁵ Alfa Taibou, still alive, was also portrayed as unthreatening and basically favorable to the French. Despite his great learning and influence, he seemed "incapable of provoking a movement of fanaticism" in 1906. In 1907, the commandant remembered with appreciation that he used to help on delicate judicial questions and that he

³³ ANM (FA), 1E 43, April 1909 and November 1910. The 1909 report says the marabout came from Fittouka canton, not Ngorkou, but the content of the 1910 report refers almost certainly to the same individual. Paul Marty provides the further identification of the individual as Hamadou Al-Kali, son of Al-Kali Monson, who was canton chief of Ngorkou from 1895 to his death in 1904. See Marty, *Etudes*, 198.

³⁴ ANM (FA), 1E 23, March 1904 (report from Saraféré residence).

³⁵ ANM (FA), 1E 43, October 1906.

never used his influence to combat French authority.³⁶ In both reports, it was regretted that Alfa Taibou was too old and lived too far away from Niafounké to participate in the native tribunal.

Largely because the local leaders they focused on, from Modibo Amma to Alfa Taibou, seemed so cooperative, French officials determined that Muslim threats were more likely to come from outside the cercle. The administration instituted a policy of monitoring outside marabouts and seeking to “protect the population from their propaganda.”³⁷ It was especially worried about the Kunta descendants of Ahmad al-Bakkā’ī (Sidi Bécaye) who passed through the cercle each year on their way south to the latter’s tomb. These were the concerns which led the administration to monitor Baba Ahmet’s short visit in 1907 closely and even to seize some of the alms which he raised in the cercle. Yet the investigation turned up no indication of any anti-colonial agenda in the scholar’s rather standard gift-collecting tour.³⁸

Only one figure actually expressed anti-French sentiments in the name of Islam: the ex-qadi’s son from Ngorkou. The rhetoric won him a spot in a couple of monthly reports. Commandant Rocaché did not take him very seriously however. He dismissed him as weak-minded, giving him a warning in 1909 and a fifteen-day jail term in 1910 under the charge that he had refused to be counted in the census or pay taxes. In his annual report at the end of 1910, Rocaché makes no mention of the incident, writing moreover: “There are no Muslim questions in the cercle.”³⁹

³⁶ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Reports 1906 and 1907.

³⁷ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1906.

³⁸ ANM (FA), 1E 43, September and October 1907, and January 1908.

³⁹ ANM (FA), 1E 43, April 1909, November and Annual Report 1910.

Administrators in Saraféré and Niafouké gathered information on Muslim scholars because of broader colonial assumptions that such figures could be dangerous adversaries or useful collaborators. In practice, the local administration met no serious opposition from Gimbalan scholars. Officials noted with appreciation the generally cooperative attitude of the leaders they singled out, but they formed no major partnerships with them. Resident Joguet's initial assessment in 1903 held up over time: marabouts seemed to have little influence in Gimbala. The local administration identified leaders and kept them under pro forma surveillance because colonial assumptions about Islam required such measures. But it handled the problem of how to rule without significant reference to them.

Connected to the search for Muslim leaders was a deeper search for centralized Islamic social organization, especially in the form of Sufi brotherhoods. Already in 1903, Joguet provided a cursory map of Qadiri and Tijani affiliations.⁴⁰ In 1905, when the governor requested a special report on "Muslim questions" in Issa Ber, he clarified this as meaning above all the "associations" and "congregations" existing in the new cercle. Commandant Brévié responded that the Qadiri and Tijani brotherhoods split the population between them, estimating that there were between 16,000 to 18,000 Qadiris and 25,000 to 28,000 Tijanis.⁴¹ Yet the report argued that the brotherhoods completely lacked organization, goals, or means of action. It claimed that members joined out of mere conformism and had no idea of the political importance of brotherhoods in the "superior Islamism" of the Maghreb. As additional proof of the lack of Islamic organization, it cited the state of "almost complete abandon" in which Gimbalan Muslims left the two best-known marabouts: Alfa Taibou and Sidi Mokhtar Kas. The

⁴⁰ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1903 (report from Saraféré).

⁴¹ ANM (FA), 4E 52, 1905. Compare these estimations of brotherhood membership with 1906 census figures, which reported a total cercle population of 114,461. See ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report, 1906.

commandant held up a template developed in Algeria and found that it did not match the realities of Islamic practice in Gimbala.⁴²

His successors continued to investigate standard colonial concerns about Sufi organization and continued to find Gimbala Islam unimpressive according to those standards. The 1906 annual report acknowledged the presence of the Qadiri and Tijani brotherhoods, but argued that these were not “grouped into associations.” It revised Brévié’s membership estimates down, while confirming his sense of the nominal character of Sufi affiliation. The number of “brothers” was low and almost all of them stopped at “the first degree of religious hierarchy, the ‘hal’.”⁴³ The 1907 annual report echoed this judgment, adding that the brotherhoods in Issa Ber had no relation to central *zāwiyas* outside of the region. It identified for each brotherhood a local *muqaddam* (i.e. a leader authorized to initiate new members). The Tijani *muqaddam* was Nouhou Ibrahima Cissé of Saraféré, described as learned, but poor and without influence. The Qadiri *muqaddam* was Alfa Taibou.⁴⁴ As we have seen, French officials singled him out as the kind of influential religious leader which they expected Islamic culture to produce. Yet this portrait was strongly qualified by characterizations of him as apolitical and neglected by the rank-and-file Muslims who, according to French models of Islam, should have been followers of such a leader.

Already by 1910, local officials started to lose interest in seriously investigating Gimbala Sufism or even Muslim leaders. The 1910 report contained none of the Sufi terminology – *ikhwān*, *hāl*, central *zāwiyas*, or *muqaddams* – of earlier reports. Its one reference

⁴² See footnote 3 above about Depont and Coppolani’s work on Algerian Islam and the influence especially of the latter in the development of colonial ideas about Islam in French West Africa.

⁴³ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1906. The term in the report which I have translated as “brothers” is “khouans,” a rendering of the Arabic “ikhwān.”

⁴⁴ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1907.

to Sufism was that local Islam presented no possibility of “effervescence.” A 1911 special report on Muslim questions made no reference to Sufi brotherhoods and stated that “no influential or dangerous marabout” existed in the cercle. A 1920 report observed that the *muqaddams* who used to be in Gimbala had died without being replaced. Administrators still assured their superiors that they were sending political agents out to the various cantons of the cercle to investigate Islam and scholars, but they no longer bothered to provide portraits of individual “leaders.” The 1920 report noted contemptuously that the area had nothing but “little foot” marabouts.⁴⁵

The search for Muslim leaders and centralized Islamic social organization based on Sufism ended with the realization that the model turned up little of interest in Gimbala. Gimbala Islam appeared to be decentralized, to have no dominant leaders, and to be incapable of organizing significant resistance against or collaboration with colonial rule. As a result, colonial Islamic policy in Gimbala was essentially one of non-interference. And, provided we understand the assessment in the restricted sense of implications for colonial rule, the French were right that there were no Muslim questions in Gimbala.

Where French officials erred was in extending the assessment beyond this restricted sense to a general appraisal of Gimbala Islamic culture. From the first accounts in 1903, Resident Joguet recognized that the entire area was Muslim. He noted that schools were very numerous, with a school-master or public scribe existing in all but the smallest villages. But he thought that most of these marabouts read the Qur’an without understanding Arabic. The activities of most marabouts were limited to teaching the Qur’an to their pupils and writing charms (“gris-gris”)

⁴⁵ ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1910, 1911, and 1920.

requested from them. Some key elements of a critique of Gimbala Islam were present in these initial accounts, but Joguet did not express the open contempt which characterized later reports.⁴⁶

By 1906, the contempt was full-blown. Commandant Descemet expressed the sentiment partly in racial terms. He transposed the distinction between Africans and Arabs from the theory of “Islam noir” to the local Gimbala context as supposed differences between groups defined as “négritiens” and those defined as semitic, especially the Fulani. While acknowledging that all local groups were Muslim, he argued that degrees of faith varied according to race. He showed no compunction about judging in broad strokes the inner states of the people he administered. The Negroes did the external rituals of Islam, but “without much conviction.” The Fulani affected excessive piety and seemed at first glance to be convinced Muslims, but their Islam was hardly orthodox, “deformed by superstitions and the practice of sorcery.” The negative appraisal also clearly related to the question of hierarchy and leadership. After dismissing the significance of local Sufi brotherhoods, Descemet wrote that “real believers and learned scholars” were rare, but there were numerous marabouts. He was unsparing in his contempt for these marabouts who neither matched his profile of Muslim leaders nor fit into a respectable Sufi hierarchy: “Despite their ignorance and their sometimes unedifying lives, [they] know how to win the natives’ confidence and abuse their naïveté by selling miraculous amulets.”⁴⁷

Descemet’s 1907 annual report sounded many of the same themes, adding greater attention to Muslim education. It maintained the racial theme: négritiens and semites all did the five daily prayers, but the Bambaras did so with an “undisguised lack of concern.” With the

⁴⁶ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1903.

⁴⁷ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1906.

same arrogance, it assumed the right to define orthodoxy and superstition, to discern widespread indifference to Islam at the deeper level beyond external display, and to criticize Gimbalans for not going on pilgrimage enough or for refraining from the fast due to age, sickness, or fatigue. With the same disdain for scholars who did not conform to colonial expectations about Muslim leadership or membership in centralized Sufi hierarchies, the report claimed that the cercle's numerous "Modibabés" (Fulfulde: *moodibaaɓe*) had "no value or influence." Their main job was to make and sell "miraculous amulets." Their title as scholars meant only that they knew "more or less how to read and write Arabic." The 1907 report offered the first detailed survey of Muslim education in the cercle, giving a canton-by-canton count of 99 total schools with 915 pupils (most of them in right-bank, Gimbalan cantons). Even if these figures do not reflect an undercount,⁴⁸ they show an impressively broad distribution of schools. Nonetheless, the report disparaged local pedagogy, criticizing its emphasis on memory, claiming that widespread student frustration led most to quit early, and arguing that only five schools offered instruction in the meaning of the Qur'an.⁴⁹

As the search for stereotyped Muslim leaders and brotherhoods subsided in local administrative reports, the stereotype of Gimbalan Islam as superficial (and uniformly so, despite its racial permutations) became a staple. The 1910 annual report compressed the stereotype into tight shorthand: Bambara Islam was "stripped of all mystical spirit"; Fulani Islam was limp. The 1911 report on Muslim questions expanded it into the central thesis of an exposition of several

⁴⁸ The numbers matched up well with a 1905 estimate of 1000 students. However, there are many reasons to believe that the figure was too low, among them are: the immaturity of the census-taking mechanism at the time; the undercounting of livestock which the French themselves acknowledged; the "Fulani mistrust" which affected the undercounting of livestock and which could easily have affected the census on Islamic education, in which Fulfulde-speakers were leading participants; the considerable mobility of students in the local Islamic system; and the suspiciously low figures for some cantons, e.g. 1 school and 10 pupils for Ngorkou, a canton of about 62 villages, including several known for Islamic scholarship.

⁴⁹ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1907.

pages. It added “Rimaïbé” (“ex-captives”) to the other two stock categories, confidently parsing the various reasons why none of these groups were good Muslims. A few reports showed more restraint. A 1917 report which said that Muslim questions were non-existent added the qualifier: “from a political point of view.” But the fuller accounts of Gimbala Islam, such as those of 1920, simply reiterated and amplified the old stereotypes. Blacks have no real conviction. Fulani are superstitious. Marabouts are mostly ignorant and exploit popular credulity to sell miraculous amulets. Real believers are few. Being a Muslim only means performing prayers more or less sincerely. The 1920 annual report also offered new statistics for Muslim education: 26 schools with 133 pupils. The huge drop from the 1907 figures may have partly reflected the effects of a serious famine in 1914. There had also been a decline in administrators’ interest in really investigating local Islam.⁵⁰

The fundamental thesis of colonial accounts of Gimbala Islam was that it was unimportant. As a general evaluation of local Islamic culture, the account was wrong. Colonial reports nevertheless contained valid observations. It was true that Gimbala Islam was decentralized, had no dominant leaders, and never became an ideology for organizing serious opposition or accommodation to colonial rule. At the same time, as the French acknowledged, it also produced numerous scholars. And these scholars did focus on the educational⁵¹ and esoteric activities noted (and disparaged) by colonial observers. A reading of these colonial accounts

⁵⁰ ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1910, 1911, 1917, and 1920. On the famine, see ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1914-1915. Early investigation of the famine noted a dramatic decrease in Gimbala’s population due to the famine. See the September 1915 report, however, for the claim that new census results actually showed an increase of population despite the famine. Given the conflicting claims, it is difficult to quantify to what extent the drop in the statistics on Islamic education can be attributed to the famine, though it seems unlikely that it could explain the entire decrease.

⁵¹ It is worth adding that colonial officials’ accounts of two of the few scholars whom they respected, Sidi Mokhtar Kas and Alfa Taibou, also noted these scholars’ emphasis on teaching relatively small groups of students. The officials took note of the activity as further evidence of the scholars’ innocuousness. Clearly, it also was evidence of the significance of education in local Islamic culture. See ANM (FA), 4E 52, 1905.

against the grain of their negative value judgments actually gives a useful outline of what was a thriving grassroots Islamic culture. Colonial administrators missed this, of course, seeing only “mini-clerics” with no influence and little true belief, who wasted their time running schools which imparted no real knowledge and sold silly amulets to fools.

These officials were wrong when they argued that Gimbala practice of Islam was superficial. They were even wrong when they argued that Muslim questions were non-existent from a political point of view. Grassroots Islam, with its scholars, educational system, and esoteric tradition, played a key role in multiple levels of Gimbala politics. The notable exception was the level of political relations between colonizers and the colonized. Colonial officials were right that Gimbala Islam was unimportant only in one restricted sense: it had no major implications for their basic problem of how to rule. This evaluation was the only one with real policy significance. So, despite all of the ways in which the French misunderstood Gimbala Islam, the policy of apathy and non-interference which they developed ended up being sensible enough.

The elements of truth in colonial assessments of Gimbala Islam and the ways these assessments led to reasonable policy make them a complicated, potentially misleading source for students of Islamic history. The application of colonial models to Gimbala yielded a fundamental, valid insight: the relative lack of hierarchy in local Islamic culture. The same sources which offer this insight repeatedly equated this lack of hierarchy with insignificance. Allowing such colonial sources to set the research agenda for the study of colonial-era West African Islam would lead to the dismissal of places such as Gimbala. Indigenous Gimbala sources, however, reveal that Islamic culture was a central, defining element of local historical experience, even while they confirm the colonial insight that local Islamic culture lacked

hierarchy. Turning to these sources yields the insight that Islamic culture in West Africa could be both decentralized and strong, suggesting a new line of research better equipped to explore grassroots rural Islam.

Grassroots Islamic Spaces

At the same time that colonial observers were producing sources about Gimbalan Islam, Gimbalan Muslims pursued their own documentary projects. No centralized body directed these documentary projects. They were not the preserve of a small elite. Modest individuals from ordinary food-producing families strove to acquire and use Islamic knowledge. In the process, they created libraries and left them to their heirs, some of whom added further to family textual resources. Each family library resulted from the hard work and commitment of a small group of individuals. Cumulatively, such efforts created a literate Islamic tradition which, though headless, was broad, deep, and critically important to Gimbalan life and history. Such efforts transformed Gimbalan's modest rural spaces into intellectual spaces.

A few basic statistics suggest the breadth of Gimbalan's Islamic intellectual tradition. During my field research, I gained access to about thirty private family libraries and over thirty thousand documentary images from fourteen villages. These figures represent a small fraction of the (mainly Arabic) manuscripts preserved in Gimbalan libraries and, because many documents have been damaged or lost, an even smaller fraction of what Gimbalans originally collected and produced.

My research results in one village reinforce this impression of the wide distribution of significant, grassroots manuscript collections in Gimbalan. I gained access to nine libraries in

Ruumde Suuduu6e and one whose recent origins trace back to it, amounting to a total of more than ten thousand documentary images. Ruumde is exceptional for the great openness which its library owners have shown my research. Yet in most ways, it is and was a typical Gimbalan village. Life in Ruumde centered on subsistence food production and family survival. The rich literate culture which the same community sustained shows that, incongruous though it may appear, knowledge production was also a typical feature of such villages.

Most of this dissertation examines the historical experience of Muslim intellectuals within this one village. Ruumde's families, its cattle-herders' district (*wuro*), and the cultivators' district (*saare*) where its slave population lived were, admittedly, very small social spaces. Yet, in the decentralized Islamic culture which characterized regions such as Gimbala, such spaces were the most critical nodes of intellectual production. Intimate spaces close to the lives of rural commoners set the most important meanings which Islam had for them.

Ruumde Suuduu6e should be taken as a fairly representative node of Gimbalan Islamic culture. As in most villages in Gimbala and throughout the West African Sahel, life in Ruumde centered on food production and family survival. Like other Gimbalans, the people of Ruumde planted three staple crops and herded three kinds of livestock. Millet cultivation depended solely on the June-to-September rainy season, common throughout the Sahel. The flooding of the Inland Niger Delta created zones suitable for rice and sorghum.⁵² The interaction between the flood and Gimbala's particular topography made the region favorable for the herding of cattle, sheep, and goats. Receding flood waters left fertile expanses of grass (especially those known as

⁵² For an excellent contemporary account of colonial-era Gimbalan agriculture, see Yvon Vincent, "Pasteurs, paysans, et pecheurs du Guimballa (Partie Centrale de l'Erg du Bara)," in *Nomades et paysans d'Afrique noire occidentale*, Pierre Galloy, Yvon Vincent, and Maurice Forget (Nancy, France: L'institut de géographie de la Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines de l'Université de Nancy, 1963), 36-157.

burgu or *gammbaraawo*), where cattle and sheep found daily pasture. Elevated dunes unreached by the yearly floods favored the growth of trees, which provided the preferred food of goats.

This account of Gimbala economic conditions warrants some chronological precision. Severe drying trends since 1973 have affected all of these food-producing activities, reducing millet yields, making rice cultivation increasingly dependent on mechanized irrigation, eliminating sorghum in most Gimbala villages, and turning grass into a scarce commodity, which is tended privately and sold. In the period from the 1870s or 1880s when Ruumde was founded to the early 1970s, the Gimbala ecology supported the generally more robust economy outlined above. Early colonial evaluations ranked it as the richest part of Bandiagara cercle and then as the richer half of Issa Ber. Yet one should not exaggerate this image of wealth, which was solely based on food production and related by-products such as animal skins. With time the French learned that years of relative prosperity, during which Gimbala could export some surplus goods, were often followed by lean times, during which they could not even feed themselves.

The name Ruumde Suuduuŋe reflects clearly the agricultural preoccupations of the village from the time of its founding in the 1870s or 1880s. In Gimbala Fulfulde, *ruumde* means “to spend the rainy season (in a place).” One association of this name was, of course, rain, on which depended all of the food-producing activities of the village, but especially millet cultivation. The name also referred to the seasonal migrations of the semi-pastoral Fulŋe herders who established the settlement. As a place for members of the Suuduuŋe “father-house” to spend the rainy season, Ruumde was the site to which they returned annually to farm and from which many of them migrated at other times of the year, according to their animals’ needs.

French colonial sources, which refer to the village as “Roundé,” suggest an alternative etymology, one which locals who currently say “Ruumde” do not reject. The Fulfulde word *ruunde* means “island.” This name calls attention to the settlement’s location on a high dune which, prior to the dramatic drying trends affecting the region since 1973, would have been encircled by flood waters for much of the year. This image implies all of the food-producing associations of the Gimbalan flood listed above: the rice and sorghum crops which Ruumde’s inhabitants cultivated on different levels of inundated land, the *burgu* pastures for cattle and sheep left by the receding flood, and the trees where goats fed on land above the inundated zone. The possible etymologies of Ruumde’s name show that Gimbalan ecology and the food-producing activities it supported were at the center of how inhabitants conceived of the village.

Colonial records confirm this picture of a modest food-producing village, even though Ruumde was the seat of a cantonal administrative unit within Bandiagara and later Issa Ber cercles. In fact, it was one of the few cantons which survived periods of colonial administrative consolidation in the early 1910s and in 1930.⁵³ But it was the smallest of these cantons. Throughout the colonial period, its chief administered only two to four other villages. Though they never acted on the sentiment, French commandants repeatedly asked themselves why such a small canton, whose chiefs had such limited resources and influence, should be spared from incorporation into larger chieftaincies. Judging from colonial censuses, the highest population which Ruumde itself reached was 853 in 1941. The canton which it led had 467 inhabitants in the first census of 1903 and peaked at just below two thousand in 1941.⁵⁴

⁵³ See chapter VII below.

⁵⁴ ANM (FA), 1E 23, September 1903 (report from Saraféré). ANM (FR), 1E 35, Tour Report, May 1941.

French observers give no reason to imagine that colonial Ruumde stood out as a special center of Islamic learning. Some reports designed to assess the ability of a given canton chief to command noted his or his father's status as a marabout, but this type of remark was certainly nothing unusual in the region.⁵⁵ The 1907 report on Islamic education recorded unimpressive figures for Ruumde: one Qur'anic school with eight pupils.⁵⁶ As we have seen, Paul Marty was highly dismissive of the level of Islamic learning in Issa Ber cercle. Yet because his methodology focused on producing detailed lists, he still provided the names of scholars (for whom he generally had very little respect) from a significant number of villages. Even with this low standard, he made no mention of scholarly activity in Ruumde.

Local memories differ, since much scholarly activity did take place in Ruumde, but they confirm that the inhabitants of the village were not unusually learned by local standards. Ruumde was known for greater learning than some villages. Other villages clearly surpassed it. Ruumde certainly never became a village in which the scholarly profession took the place of food production as the primary means of making a living. Though the level of literate intellectual activity to which Ruumde's libraries attest differs markedly from conventional views of rural West African life, the evidence suggests that it was actually not at all exceptional.

In villages such as Ruumde, the fundamental focus on subsistence-level food production did not prevent a literate intellectual culture from flourishing. Ruumde's numerous libraries contain a mix of classic texts from a wide range of Islamic disciplines, shorter treatises and esoteric techniques, and letters, legal judgments, and other social historical documents. These grassroots sources present methodological challenges. In comparison with French colonial

⁵⁵ ANM (FR), 2E 52, Canton de Roundé (Niafouké), 1909-1950.

⁵⁶ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1907.

reports, it is more difficult to convert them into narrative histories. Yet, with careful attention and in combination with memories about the intellectuals who produced them, they can yield very rich alternative narratives about grassroots engagement with Islamic education, the discipline of law, and esoteric knowledge. Grassroots sources offer a very different account of the social distribution and social significance of Islamic knowledge as well as new ways to integrate Islamic knowledge into accounts of social historical changes, such as the process of slave emancipation.

Part one of this thesis explores the meaning of Islamic knowledge within the colonial-era *wuro* of Ruumde Suuduuḃe. Literally, the *wuro* was the “herders’ district” of the village. Spatially, it occupied the western half of the village. Conceptually, it separated Ruumde’s non-slave population of “nobles” (*rimḃe*) and a few “casted artisans” (*ḡeeḃe*) from the slave population that inhabited the village’s other half, its *saare*, or “cultivators’ district.” During the colonial period, Ruumde’s non-slave population also used the term *wuro* to signify how they imagined the scope of their village community as a whole. Though this vision symbolically tied the community to the occupation of herding, the people of the *wuro* performed various forms of labor. They herded and farmed; a few families did artisanal work; and individuals in most families undertook Islamic intellectual labor.

One of these intellectual laborers was Hammadu Usman Umaru. On Wednesday, January 3, 1900, Hammadu was a young student who had just finished copying a core textbook in the local legal curriculum. In his colophon, he noted that year (correctly) as the seventh year of “Christian” rule in central Mali (what he called “the land of Maasina”). However, the document betrays no interest in the question of how to relate to the colonial regime. On the back of the colophon, Hammadu wrote himself a charm which encapsulated the meaning that the text

had for him. The charm was a declaration of his personal educational and intellectual ambitions: “A benefit for the one who writes this [pictogram] on the back of his book: he will be able to handle all of its legal issues and all of its letters, if God, the Exalted, so wills.”⁵⁷

Chapter II of this thesis examines the notes which Hammadu added to this 1900 textbook and another one that he copied in 1907. These notes allow us to reconstruct how one individual rural reader thought through what he read and developed competence in legal issues and linguistic matters (“letters”) over time. Hammadu’s notes were not the most extensive in the textbooks of Ruumde’s and other Gimbalan villages’ libraries;⁵⁸ they do not represent the unique achievements of a tiny elite. The trajectory that Hammadu traveled from 1900 to 1907 represents instead the labors typical of a large group of modest rural individuals who strove to become educated, literate intellectuals. The competence as a reader and legal thinker that Hammadu cultivated in the open spaces of his textbooks was modest, ordinary, and widespread. Precisely because of these qualities, his accomplishments belie dismissive colonial accounts of Gimbalan education.

Chapter III uses Hammadu’s biography to explore a different aspect of Gimbalan Islamic culture. It follows Hammadu’s career beyond 1907, moving beyond the private spaces of his textbooks – the intellectual space between one rural reader and his texts – to the public intellectual space of his village community. After 1907, Hammadu won recognition as a mature

⁵⁷ Library: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduu6e (hereafter UHU), File 4, Images 4852-4855. The hijri date from the document is Wednesday, 1 Ramadan 1317.

⁵⁸ For one example from Ruumde, see Guuri Num Haalidu’s family library. It contains a manuscript copy of the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, in which a certain ‘Abd Allah scribbled detailed notes about inheritance law. Combining citations from classic commentaries, complex hypothetical cases (*masā’il*), and teachings “from the mouth of [local scholar] Alfa ‘Abd Allah,” the note-taking ‘Abd Allah clearly thought deeply about inheritance law. See Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduu6e, File 4, Images 4448-4510.

scholar within Ruumde. He was appointed to the formal office of the village imamate.⁵⁹ Over time, he also created a reputation for success in informal village legal debates. Both of these roles involved bringing legal idioms out from the marginal spaces of Islamic texts into the public, spoken space of the village community. Fragmentary textual sources from Hammadu's library and village memories about his career fit together to form a picture of how one rural intellectual spoke within this space.

Hammadu's specific story illuminates the general ways in which Islamic law fit within village life. Village intellectuals such as Hammadu did not explore the potential of law to formulate anything worth calling an "Islamic response" to colonialism. They defined the meaning of law in terms of much smaller, but for them highly significant spaces. Hammadu's career shows how Islamic law could shape, for example, discussions about how men and women should behave toward each other and how each group should behave to enact gendered identities. Hammadu's career also demonstrates that rural scholars' legal thinking did not lead to one simple end-point on issues such as gender. Village intellectuals engaged actively with the discipline of law. Individual thinkers formulated their own legal interpretations, so village intellectuals often differed amongst themselves. Through their active engagement with text, their interpretive work, and their debates, they made Islamic law a meaningful part of ordinary rural life. Hammadu's career shows the intimate, everyday importance that Islamic legal knowledge took on at the village level.

Chapters IV and V move beyond Hammadu's individual career to chart the distribution of Islamic knowledge within the social spaces marked off by the kinship groupings of Ruumde's *wuro*. Chapter IV explores family histories of Islamic learning within Hammadu Usman

⁵⁹ The office consisted of two titles: the imam of the *wuro* and the imam of Ruumde as a whole.

Umaru's lineage group, known as the Arkaseeḃe. Hammadu was the son of a "red Pullo," i.e. an unlettered herder. His immediate family and his wider lineage displayed a consistent pattern of mixing agricultural and pastoral labor with intellectual work. Chapter V traces the histories of two families which, unlike the Arkaseeḃe, claimed specialized relationships to Islamic knowledge. Despite these claims, the histories of the Moodibaaḃe (or "Scholars") lineage group and the Yirrayḃe lineage (whose label connoted a non-scholarly identity) confirm the pattern of Islamic knowledge distribution which Hammadu's lineage exemplified.

Specialized lineages – the "learned families" of hierarchically-minded studies of West African Islam – did not control Islamic knowledge in places such as Ruumde. Most families within the *wuro* produced some learned people. Lineage boundaries did not mark off educational or intellectual divisions. Such divisions fell within each family unit, rather than separating "learned families" from others. Family units (and also many individuals) divided up their labor time, investing resources in producing both food and knowledge. As a result, no one group built up a monopoly on Islamic knowledge impressive enough to attract the attention of colonial observers searching for religious hierarchies. Yet, Islamic knowledge was no less significant to rural people. It was precisely because Islamic knowledge was important to their lives that nearly all families in the *wuro* devoted some of their labor resources to direct engagement with it. Though colonial observers interpreted it as a sign of weakness, the decentralized distribution of Islamic knowledge actually reflected its direct significance to ordinary people.

Chapter VI examines one substantive intellectual reason why Islamic knowledge had this direct significance to ordinary rural people. Colonial observers interpreted the "miraculous amulets" of Gimbala's scholars as proof of their lack of "value" and "influence." They evaluated

grassroots esotericism negatively as a form of “superstition” separating “Islam noir” from mainstream Islam. Library sources and memories from Ruumde advance a very different interpretation. People in spaces such as Ruumde’s colonial-era *wuro* valued Islamic esotericism highly. They tied its influence, importance, and legitimacy, in part, to conceptions of a universal Islam which transcended their local experience. At the same time, they also valued it because it put solutions to ordinary rural problems within their reach. The esotericism of the “mini-clerics,” which colonial observers disparaged, was powerful precisely because it lacked the hierarchical structure that colonial models equated with real Islam.

While colonial writers saw grassroots esotericism as a marker of “superstition” and lack of “orthodoxy,” Gimbalan intellectuals read the law as assuming the universal legitimacy of Islamic secrets. For Gimbalans, the *Risāla*,⁶⁰ far from challenging esotericism, takes it for granted, both in chapters explicitly devoted to charms and dream-interpretation and in its general attention to prayer formulas envisioning various objectives. Library contents show that Gimbalans imported secret texts from the same authoritative Middle Eastern and North African sources of their main legal textbooks. Hammadu Usman Umaru’s charm on the back of his 1900 textbook shows concretely how rural scholars did not perceive any contradiction between law and esotericism. For them, esotericism was a fundamental part of mainstream Islam, not a deviation from it.

At the same time, local conditions shaped esoteric knowledge in critical ways. Esotericism drew its power from its deep connections both to local social and ecological conditions and to the rest of the Islamic sciences, which, through grassroots commitment to

⁶⁰ The *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī was a key text in the Gimbalan curriculum for the study of Islamic law. See fn. 58 above. See also chapter II, 85-92 below.

education, also became a key part of local experience. The notions of efficacy which underlay Gimbalan Islamic secrets drew inspiration from multiple aspects of rural experience, perceiving power in local plants (named in Fulfulde), animals, household objects, locations inside settlements or out in the bush, but also in features of rural educational experience such as writing, text, slate, paper, and ink. Many secrets aimed at goals reflecting highly practical rural concerns, safeguarding agricultural fields and ensuring adequate rain, protecting domestic animals from harm and protecting people from being harmed by wild or domestic animals, and procuring wives and ensuring their fertility. Mastery of such secrets promised family success, which ensured that families, despite or rather because of their precarious lives, invested scarce energies in acquiring Islamic knowledge. At the same time, spiritual and intellectual values derived from the practice of Islamic education also clearly shaped the concerns of rural people. Other secrets aimed at entrance to heaven, God's forgiveness for sins, the acquisition of general knowledge or comprehension (*fahm*), or the ability to memorize the Qur'an quickly.

Secrets provide excellent windows into rural people's concerns, the means they considered effective in addressing those concerns, and the ways in which they conceived of Islamic knowledge and its relationship to their lives. The evidence from Ruumde's libraries challenges accounts of esotericism which define it as fundamentally hierarchical.⁶¹ On the contrary, the means identified as effective in Ruumde's secrets, whether items in the bush or the basic skills afforded by local Islamic education, were widely available to rural people. The wide distribution of secret texts shows that esotericism was a highly decentralized form of knowledge to which many modest individuals and families claimed a share. The range of concerns to which esoteric techniques offered solutions and the ways in which individuals such as Hammadu

⁶¹ See e.g. Brenner, *Controlling* and Soares, *The Prayer Economy*.

Usman tailored esotericism to their specific needs illustrate the high value which Gimbans placed on esoteric knowledge and the deep influence it had on their lives. Though colonial observers conceived of “value” and “influence” through models of Islam developed out of their colonial project, sources from Ruumde’s *wuro* remind us that West African Muslims conceived of Islam’s significance in terms of their own projects, which often had nothing to do with relating to the colonial state. The modest spaces of the *wuro* offer an alternative model of the social distribution and significance of Islamic knowledge in colonial-era West Africa.

Part two of this thesis uses this alternative model developed in the *wuro* to explore the significance of Islamic knowledge in the history of Ruumde’s *saare* and other social spaces for slaves. Islamic intellectual tradition shaped considerably the historical process of slave emancipation in Ruumde and other Gimbans villages. Chapter VII examines how colonial and postcolonial governance shaped the timeline of master-slave relations and how masters employed Islamic ideas to underwrite slavery and protest emancipation. Chapter VIII recounts how slaves managed to acquire access to Islamic knowledge, and how they used it to create new scholarly selves and re-shape their communities.

Slaves began to gain greater control over their lives and labor in the colonial era, profiting from cracks in local slavery opened by legal abolition, closing of public slave markets, and slave participation in colonial educational and military institutions. Yet because of French interest in bolstering the authority of hereditary canton chiefs who respected the property rights of other nobles, rural masters maintained much *de facto* control over slaves until decolonizing Mali eliminated canton chiefship in 1958. It was no coincidence that large-scale investment of slave children in sustained Islamic education and adult slaves’ ability to win recognition as scholars both started also in the years surrounding Mali’s independence. Previously,

participation in Islamic education was largely restricted to nobles. Masters likened slaves to animals. They used slaves' physical labor and sent them to meet colonial demands for school enrollment and military conscription to free up their own children for Islamic study. When slaves could make their own decisions, they sought to enter their masters' system of Islamic education. Allay Aamadu, the first slave scholar in Ruumde, patiently collected knowledge at the margins of the village's educational structures in the 1940s. By 1959, he had set up his own educational institution: the school that provided the first generation of Ruumde slave children with the sustained Islamic education, which he and his generation of aspiring slave scholars had been denied. Colonial evaluations of Gimbala Islam cannot explain the importance which Islamic knowledge took on for slaves during the era of decolonization and emancipation. The significance of Muslim questions to ordinary rural life, which colonial observers systematically missed, defined newly-autonomous slaves' quests for the individual dignity of textual mastery, the social status to speak with public authority, and esoteric power tied to family success. Though colonial-era patterns of knowledge distribution largely barred slaves, the decentralized nature of those patterns helps explain how slaves ultimately found ways to cross the barrier.

Gimbala also turned the fundamental question of the legitimacy of emancipation into a Muslim question. Masters rejected the secular postcolonial state's authority to impose emancipation. They appealed to Islamic legal texts to insist that God recognized the legitimacy of slavery, that only God's principles of manumission legitimately eliminated slave status, and that legal distinctions between free and slave still applied to slaves illegitimately freed by the state. Gimbala Islamic culture and the content of legal texts shaped how masters experienced slave emancipation, setting the points of greatest sensitivity and conflict and defining the meaning of revolt. In the masters' narratives of emancipation I collected, the most brazen slave

“revolt” was not their refusal to work for owners (bitter as this loss was), but rather their quotidian revolts against sacred laws governing such issues as marriage, inheritance, and prayer. The boldest Gimbalan slave scholar sought to articulate, in turn, an Islamic justification for slave emancipation. His effort recognized that, though the state had considerable power, its reach into some key areas of grassroots social experience was tenuous at best. Grassroots Islamic culture defined access to forms of dignity, status, esoteric power, and legitimacy, which were key to rural life. The first generation of Gimbalan slave scholars made use of the decentralized nature of local Islamic tradition to democratize it further. They participated in Islamic tradition as they re-shaped it both by learning to pose their masters’ Muslim questions and by formulating new ones of their own.

Conclusion

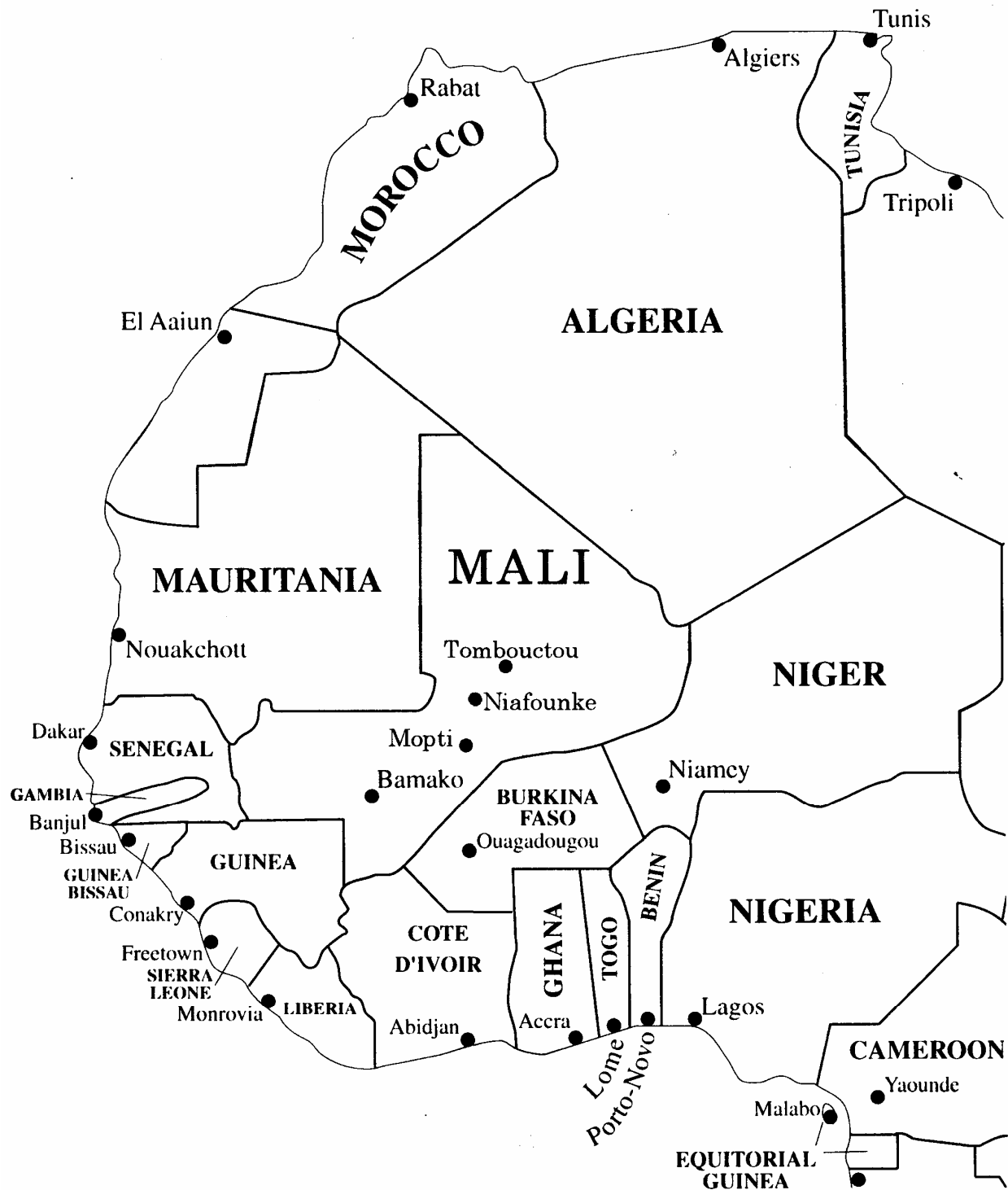
French colonial models of Islam associated lack of hierarchy with weakness and lack of influence. The leading colonial theorist of West African Islam, Paul Marty, made the search for hierarchy one of the hallmarks of his scholarly method. As noted above, when he applied this template to Gimbalan Islam, he saw a “dust-cloud of mini-clerics, little schoolmasters, without influence and without prestige.” Local administrators in Niafouké and Saraféré, better placed than Marty for sustained empirical observation, produced more detailed accounts about the lack of hierarchy in Gimbalan Islam, its focus on educational and esoteric practice, and its limited implications for colonial rule. Seeing Islam through the same prism as Marty, they interpreted these features as implying also that Gimbalans’ commitment to Islam was superficial, that Islam

was not important to Gimbalan life. As they saw it, “Muslim questions” were “not posed” in Gimbala.

That these evaluations functioned well enough as guides for colonial policy does not make them good guides for historical scholarship. Postcolonial studies of colonial-era West African Islam have deconstructed the racism of colonial sources and provided subtler, more disinterested accounts of the colonial state’s leading Muslim interlocutors. But because of continuing dependence on colonial sources, many postcolonial scholars have framed their questions in much the same terms as their colonial predecessors, leaving the colonizer-colonized relationship and the search for hierarchy at the core of their research agenda.

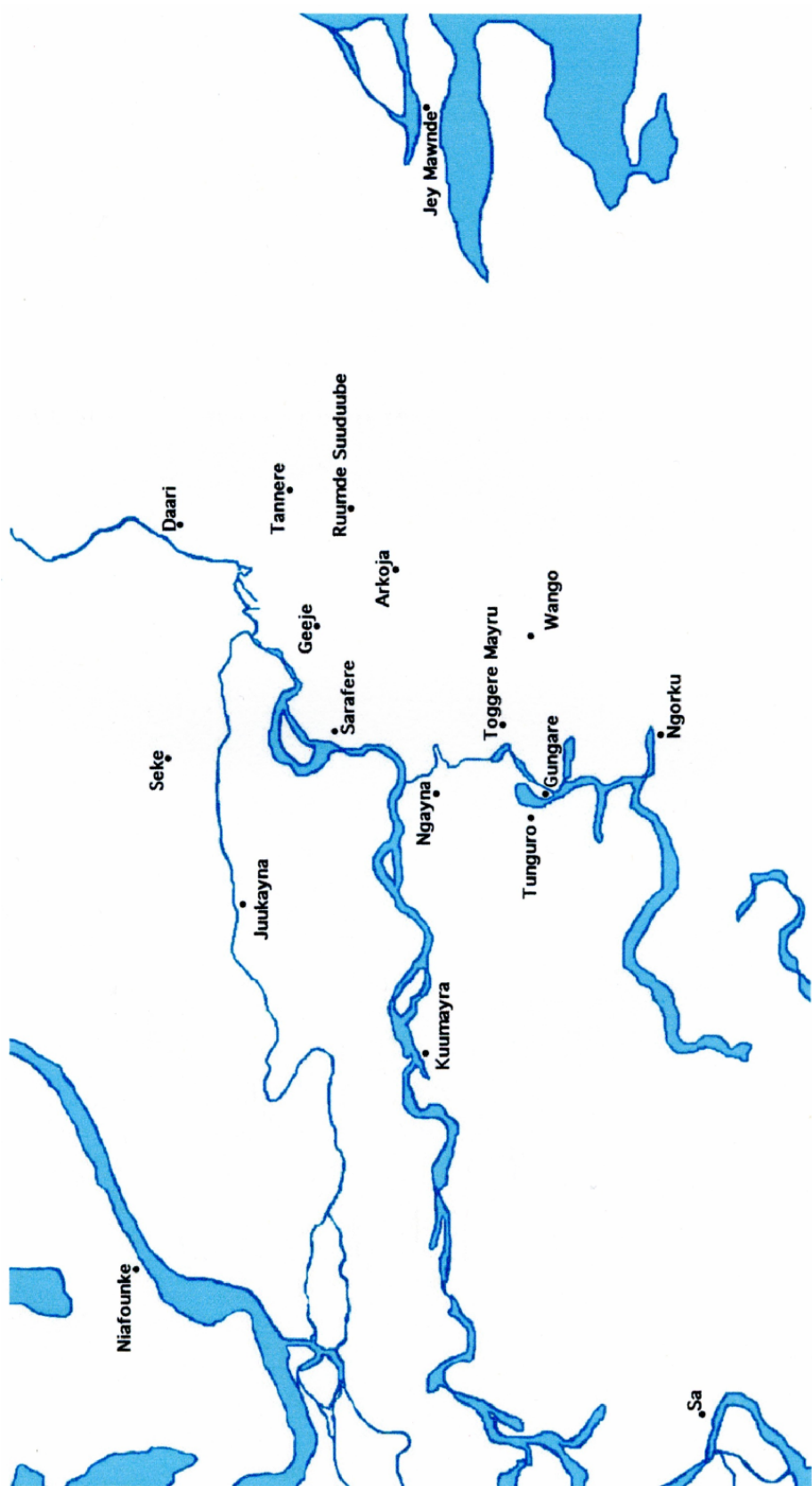
Gimbalan scholars and students framed their questions about Islam in very different terms. The startling disjuncture between colonial conclusions that there were no Muslim questions in Gimbala and the records of questions in the thousands of historical Islamic documents, which research in even one modest Gimbalan village yields, suggests that attempting to see local Islamic culture from the vantage point of new sources will produce a remarkably different picture. Scholars such as Hammadu Usman did not devote much energy to developing “Islamic attitudes and policies” toward the French. They formulated very little worth calling a response to colonialism. They were thinking about questions which they considered more important. Hammadu Usman noted the existence of colonialism in 1900, but his true anxieties were clearly about matters of greater immediacy to his life. The next five chapters of this dissertation examine the extensive library sources left by the inhabitants of Ruumde’s *wuro* to delve more deeply into the intellectual content of Gimbalan Islamic tradition and to chart the social distribution of Islamic knowledge. The modest spaces of the *wuro* reveal better than any colonial reports how literate culture related to and became embedded in ordinary rural life.

From the perspective of the empire-builders, scholars such as Hammadu Usman were insignificant specks of dust. But by no means were they or the forms of knowledge they strived to acquire without influence or prestige in their own society. The two chapters of part two build up from my micro-history of Ruumde's intellectual life to show the profound influence of decentralized Islamic culture on a broader historical power shift. Gimbala's literate Islamic culture had key implications for how slaves and masters responded to increasing slave autonomy and emancipation. Colonial sources overlook this aspect of that story completely. Other sources allow us to see important areas of Islamic tradition and rural experience in West Africa, areas where dominant colonial and postcolonial models remain largely blind.



Map 1. Niafounké in national and regional context. *Modified from:* St. Catharines [computer file]. (no date). St. Catharines, Ontario: Brock University Map Library. Available: Brock University Map Library Controlled Access

<http://www.brocku.ca/maplibrary/images/stcathv8.jpg>. (Accessed May 7, 2008.)



Map 2. Gimbalan villages in relation to Niafounké.

PART ONE: WURO

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY OF A VILLAGE LEGAL SCHOLAR I:

HAMMADU USMAN UMARU’S LEGAL STUDIES, 1900-1907

There exist in the cercle numerous “Modibabés,” decorated with the title because they know more or less how to read and write Arabic.

Commandant Descemet, “Report on the Situation of the Cercle of Issa Ber during the year 1907”

A benefit for the one who writes this [pictogram] on the back of his book: he will be able to handle all of its legal issues and all of its letters, if God, the Exalted, so wills.

Hammadu Usman Umaru, on the back of the colophon page of his copy of *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, dated 1 Ramadan 1317 AH/ January 3, 1900

Hammadu Usman Umaru and Commandant Descemet were contemporaries, who, for a few years in the first decade of the twentieth century, lived not far from each other. As the French colonial commandant of Issa Ber cercle from early 1906 to early 1908, Descemet resided in the town of Niafouké. Hammadu Usman’s village, Ruumde Suuduuŋe (known to the commandant as Roundé-Gourma), was within Descemet’s jurisdiction, some forty-five kilometers east of Niafouké. The commandant’s tours would have periodically brought him closer to Ruumde, if not to the village itself. Hammadu Usman’s stays in the villages of Seke in 1900 and Anjam in 1907 show at least two instances when he, in turn, traveled closer to Niafouké.

Both Hammadu and the commandant left sources useful for the reconstruction of Gimbalan book culture at specific times in the first decade of the twentieth century. These sources belong to very distinct genres, but each can be said to advance a thesis about Gimbalan book culture. Given the markedly different backgrounds of the two men, it is not surprising that their pictures of the same phenomenon at the same historical moment in essentially the same place also differed markedly. Hammadu's records reveal a rich layer of grassroots intellectual life, which colonial observers of rural Islam, such as the commandant, typically missed.

Hammadu's Thesis

On Wednesday, 1 Ramadan 1317 AH/ January 3 1900, Hammadu Usman Umaru finished writing his copy of Ibn 'Asim's *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. It was, he noted, year seven of Christian rule.⁶² On 8 Rabī' al-Akhar 1325 AH/ ca. May 21 1907, year fifteen of Christian rule, he completed his copy of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī's *Risāla*.⁶³ Hammadu added marginal notes as he thought through passages in the two legal textbooks. He added separate, more extended

⁶² UHU, File 4, Image 4852. Hammadu Usman specified that this year was year seven of Christian rule in the land of Maasina. By this term he meant all of the Fulfulde-speaking of what is now central Mali, including Gimbala. He did not mean only the intense, relatively flat flood zone south of Lake Debo which is Maasina proper and which does not include Gimbala. Maasina proper is southwest of Gimbala. Though both were seasonal flood zones, Maasina is ecologically distinct from Gimbala, because of the latter's numerous dunes, which would become islands during a healthy flood season.

⁶³ UHU, File 4, Image 4691. This exact date is harder to confirm with certainty. Hammadu Usman stated that 8 Rabī' al-Akhar 1325 was a Saturday. Converting this *hijrī* date to a Gregorian one yields Tuesday May 21, 1907. One or two-day deviations in *hijrī* dates are quite common since the reckoning of new Islamic months depends on actual lunar sightings, which can be subjective and vary in different parts of the Islamic world. During my field research in Gimbala, there were several disputes between villages about when to begin the fast of Ramadan due to different opinions about the sighting of the first sliver of the new moon. A three-day deviation, such as the one suggested in this case, cannot be ruled out, but it is unlikely that the generally more conservative methods employed in villages such as Ruumde would have led to a moon-sighting three days before the Islamic world standard. Another possibility is that Hammadu Usman meant to write 18 Rabī' al-Akhar, which yields the Gregorian date of Friday May 31, 1907. That Hammadu Usman and associates saw the moon and started the month a day after the Islamic world standard would be highly plausible. The likely range of Gregorian dates for the completion of his *Risāla* is between Saturday May 18 and Saturday June 1, 1907.

notes on the backs of each text's colophon and title pages, as well as on separate leafs which he apparently tucked between the two texts. He kept the whole package in a leather-bound file, which eventually also held a seminal work from the discipline of *lughā* (i.e. language, or literature), a famous esoteric work, writings about the stars as providing the basis for a solar calendar and as marking off auspicious and inauspicious times, and his head-tax and cattle-tax receipts.

I read this file as an argument about Gimbalan book culture, in particular about legal study and legal thinking in this rural context. I read the charm, which Hammadu wrote for himself on the back of his *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, as a thesis statement. "A benefit for the one who writes this [pictogram] on the back of his book: he will be able to handle all of its legal issues and all of its letters, if God, the Exalted, so wills." Rural intellectuals in Gimballa in the first decade of the twentieth century read books earnestly. They strove to master their technical linguistic aspects (their "letters") and to understand the abstract, complex issues tied to the key discipline of Islamic law. Hammadu Usman's file preserves a very modest intellectual history: an individual rural thinker's engagement with text and legal concepts in the years surrounding 1900 and 1907. Unassuming though it is, this story is precisely the kind of history through which literacy and Islamic legal ideas became central, not marginal, parts of social experience in villages such as Ruumde.

Descemet's Thesis

In year seven of "Christian" rule, the date of Hammadu's charm (which I have called his thesis), the French still governed Gimballa from the cercle of Bandiagara. Hammadu's Ruumde

was a small, distant village, which did not register in colonial records. There are no colonial records on intellectual life in Ruumde at that early date and next to none on any other places in Gimbala. By 1325 AH, which Hammadu called at the end of his *Risāla* year fifteen of “Christian” rule, the French had set up a resident in Saraféré and, then, a commandant in the new cercle of Issa Ber, based in Niafounké. They had begun to observe local Islamic culture more systematically. The conditions had emerged for a French colonial account of Gimbala book culture.

Commandant Descemet’s 1907 annual report provides this account.⁶⁴ Its survey of Islamic education was the most substantial which Issa Ber cercle would ever produce. Descemet’s picture of Gimbala’s relationships with books differs considerably from the picture suggested in Hammadu Usman’s file. First of all, the two sources are of markedly different genres. The commandant’s report uses quantitative and qualitative methods to attempt a comprehensive description of the local tradition of learning. In contrast, Hammadu Usman did not write with the purpose of assessing the local tradition of learning. He wrote as part of the process of seeking knowledge within it. He would probably have considered much of the information in Descemet’s report as either obvious or beside the point. For the purpose of reconstructing a history of Gimbala book culture, however, the types of information which Descemet considered important (and Hammadu Usman apparently did not) do make his report a useful baseline account.

The second difference between the sources which Descemet and Hammadu produced is the picture each presents of the depth of Gimbala engagement with books. Though Hammadu did not write for the purpose of assessing local intellectual tradition, what he did write does

⁶⁴ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1907.

suggest an assessment – a thesis about how people in villages such as Ruumde read in ca. 1900-1907. The commandant's thesis was very different. How did people in villages such as Ruumde read in 1325 AH/ 1907? According to Descemet, they read the suras of the Qur'an "without understanding them." They read their standard textbooks only at the level of "word for word" translations from Arabic to local language. An "insignificant" number of them moved beyond that level of reading. The commandant's report records the obvious presence of an educational system focused on books in Ruumde and Gimbala in 1325 AH, while also confidently arguing why that fact did not imply the real existence of a serious book culture.

Descemet's Report: Contents and Critiques

As a source on Gimbala book culture in the first decade of the twentieth century, Descemet's report is a mixed bag. On the one hand, with its statistical accounting of Issa Ber's Islamic schools and brief description of their pedagogy, it is the richest record of its genre. No other colonial writer of the period produced this kind of a general overview. Local writers generally did not consider these types of information to be worthy of recording. So Descemet's assessment of Gimbala education at the specific historical moment of 1907 performs a valuable historiographic function. It is the most concise contemporary proof of widespread Gimbala engagement with books during that period. On the other hand, ironically, Descemet's report is one of the strongest indictments of Gimbala book culture. I propose Hammadu Usman's file, with its specific, dateable, more or less contemporary contents, as my primary response to Descemet's charge. Yet, because the two sources do not have parity in genre, I offer first, in this

section, a re-evaluation of the educational tradition, which the commandant critiqued, at a more general level.

Descemet presented his statistical conclusions about Islamic schooling in Issa Ber with full confidence in their scientific precision. He counted exactly 99 schools in the cercle and 915 pupils. In an attached table, he charted the distribution of these figures in eighteen cantons. Ruumde's reading culture makes a brief appearance here as a minor statistic: one school with eight pupils. The table also differentiated the students by gender. Schools in five of the eighteen cantons had female students. (According to the survey, Ruumde's school had none.) Fifty of the 915 total pupils were girls.

Descemet does not explain the methodology behind these statistics. Yet they do bear the marks of a genuine counting effort, not a mere estimation. They were probably collected as an ancillary activity during the census-taking tours, which were a primary preoccupation of the cercle's staff in those early years. Therefore, they offer a minimum baseline figure of schools and their enrollment. Yet the general weaknesses of the census during that period and the difficulties of counting what could be a very informal, highly mobile form of education suggest that these numbers probably do not reflect a full count.⁶⁵

The commandant's qualitative description of local pedagogical method can also be taken as a baseline account. Most of its elements correspond to what is generally known about traditional Islamic education in central Mali and other parts of West Africa. It confirms the presence in 1907 Gimbala of the kind of book-based educational system, which other sources

⁶⁵ For a fuller discussion of this issue, see fn. 48.

(such as the recently-published memoirs of a Gimbalan born in the 1920s,⁶⁶ my conversations with Gimbalan participants in the system, and my personal participation in Islamic education in Gimbala between 2001 and 2005) testify to for later periods. Descemet described the initial phase of schooling in 1907 Issa Ber in the following terms:

The child, first equipped with a slate which contains the letters of the alphabet, then with the same letters accompanied by orthographic signs and vowels, learns to read through repeated exercises of pronunciation and spelling. When he possesses these initial notions, he moves on to a ... task, where memory alone intervenes and which consists of reading and learning by heart ... the suras of the Qur'an, starting with the shortest which end the book [and continuing] to the longest located at the head of the volume.

Descemet also sketched the outlines of an intermediate stage of education, focused on such disciplines as “the Arabic language, the first principles of Qur’anic theology and Muslim law.” During this stage, “one has the pupil cover, this time translating them to him word for word and starting with the easiest, a series of books.” Descemet then listed the seven books that he considered to be the most widespread, a syllabus which included one book of theology, three on law, and three on grammar. Finally, the commandant identified a third level of education, during which the adult student “takes up the genesis of the revelation, the in-depth study of the Qur’an, of religion, and of Muslim law.” Cited thus, the survey provides evidence of the existence of a culture of the book in Gimbala and outlines some of its key features.

Yet Descemet argued that this book-based educational system did not amount to a book culture of real significance. He disparaged local “pedagogical method, if one can call it that.” He criticized its focus on memory, which led students to “learn” suras “without understanding them.” He argued that this pedagogy discourages “almost all of the pupils.” Since the pupils

⁶⁶ Almamy Maliki Yattara and Bernard Salvaing, *Almamy*, vol. 1, *Une jeunesse sur les rives du fleuve Niger* (Brinon-sur-Sauldre, Grandvaux Editions, 2000); Almamy Maliki Yattara, Bernard Salvaing, *Almamy*, vol. 2, *L’âge d’homme d’un lettré malien* (Brinon-sur-Sauldre, Grandvaux Editions, 2003).

are, moreover, “impatient to engage in more profitable forms of work, they hasten to quit school as soon as they know a few verses, enough to contribute to assuring them of eternal happiness.” In addition to claiming widespread student apathy, Descemet concluded that teachers in this system are generally incompetent. “Most of the teachers are incapable of giving [pupils] a more complete instruction,” (i.e. going beyond memorization of a few Qur’anic verses). Only “some rare young people destined for the functions of the marabout” continue their studies on to the second, intermediate stage, which, after all, only exposed them to “word for word” translations of “the easiest” books. Only “after long years of work” do an “insignificant” number of students “push ... their studies” to the third, advanced stage. Only five of the 99 school-teachers are capable of teaching at this level. With all of these statements, Descemet sought to ensure that the statistics which he collected were not mistakenly interpreted as implying widespread engagement with book learning. Even if one did take those full numbers seriously, however, he stressed that “the 915 pupils of the maraboutic schools represent barely one-thirtieth of the total number of children and adolescents.” Even where he admitted that “numerous ‘Modibabés’”⁶⁷ existed “in the cercle,” he disparaged their level of educational achievement, stating that they only “know, more or less, how to read and write Arabic.”

“Without Understanding.” At the core of Descemet’s critique, there are two simple charges.

The first of these may be reduced to the simple words “without understanding.” Like many other critics of mainstream Islamic education in West Africa,⁶⁸ Descemet considered Qur’an pupils’

⁶⁷ From the Fulfulde word *moodibaaɓe*, which is derived from the Arabic word *mu’addib*, meaning “man of letters” or “scholar.”

⁶⁸ Modernizers and reformers of many stripes – colonial, secular nationalist, and Islamic – have lodged essentially the same complaint. For an example of a Muslim reformer’s attack on traditional pedagogy, see the discussion of

task of memorizing a text written in a language which they did not know to be an utter waste of time. For the commandant and other likeminded critics, the most important missing element in this pedagogy was instruction in the meanings of the Arabic words of the text, i.e. the translation of the Arabic text into local language. The critics interpreted the absence of this pedagogical step as clear proof that pupils read the Qur'an "without understanding." This common sense proof relies, however, on a rather restricted conception of "understanding." Participants in traditional education viewed the matter differently. Re-evaluating the tradition with their perspectives in mind reveals the multiple forms of understanding, which their pedagogical method imparted.

Beginning pupils in Gimbala focused considerable energy on rote memorization of a text written in a language, which they did not speak. Why did their teachers studiously avoid translating that text into languages, which they did speak? The solution to this enigma lies in the conception which practitioners of traditional education held of the Qur'an as a book. For them, the Qur'an was undoubtedly the most important of books, which largely explains why it was the first book in the curriculum. Yet they also viewed the Qur'an as the most difficult of books, which largely explains why the emphasis in this phase of education was not on textual analysis. Critics of the system viewed the exercise of memorizing words without being able to define them as futile. In contrast, participants in the traditional system considered it even more futile (and potentially even harmful) to give the youngest pupils the impression that they understood a text, whose contents were far too complex for them to grasp at this stage.⁶⁹

Saada Oumar Touré in Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), esp. 74-81.

⁶⁹ Yattara, *Almamy*, vol. 2, 302-305.

Though they avoided translation, teachers did aim at developing many other forms of understanding in beginning pupils. First, teachers taught their pupils to understand the correlation between graphic symbols and articulated sounds. They imparted this level of understanding with a systematic pedagogy. This methodology included the pupil's work with his or her slate, which Descemet described, and a set of Fulfulde names for Arabic letters, such as “*sīn nyiiye*” (the *sīn* of teeth), referring to the resemblance of the two half-circles of the *sīn* to two front teeth. This vernacular terminology demonstrates the conscious effort of educators to develop in their pupils an abstract consciousness of the processes of reading and writing. Admittedly, this level of reading and writing was a very basic one, but clearly it was also a form of understanding with fundamental importance for a pupil's academic development.

Virtually no Qur'anic school pupils acquired only this alphabetic form of understanding of the text. Descemet emphasized the number of pupils who left their studies early. Indeed, some pupils only acquired a few *hizbs* (sixtieth portions of the Qur'an) and others only acquired some short *suras* which did not add up to even the first *hizb*. Yet even these pupils acquired levels of understanding from the experience. They understood the correlation between the Qur'anic text and access to paradise, or in Descemet's own (probably ironic) words “eternal happiness.” Gimbalans more commonly describe the benefits of shorter educational careers as giving the pupil enough *suras* “to pray with,” since Islamic law specified moments during the ritual procedure of prayer where the Muslim should recite precisely such short *suras*. In this way, early Qur'anic education anticipated early legal education, teaching the pupil part of what he or she needed to know in order to perform prayers correctly.

Descemet downplayed the fact that, despite some early-leavers, traditional pedagogy produced numerous pupils who memorized the entire Qur'an, an astounding feat from the

perspective of modern secular education. Some pupils repeated the process of memorizing the entire Qur'an several times. Even these successful students were not in a position to study systematically the translated meanings of the words and phrases of the Qur'an (what Descemet called "the in-depth study of the Qur'an" and what participants in traditional education would have called the discipline of *tafsīr*, or Qur'anic exegesis). Participants in traditional education viewed the formal study of *tafsīr* as only possible after mastery of the basic skills of reading and writing, the entire Qur'an at the level of its fixed textual mechanics, and, minimally, the main books of the disciplines of Arabic literature, grammar, and law.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, even while pupils were in the introductory educational stage formally devoted to Qur'anic memorization, they were often exposed to *tafsīr*. Learned scholars routinely gave public lectures on the subject, particularly during the month of Ramadan. Depending on how much of the Qur'anic text he had internalized as sounds and images, a pupil could catch much of the significance of such lectures, though no one would confuse this degree of exposure to *tafsīr* with real study of the discipline.

During the stage of their education formally devoted to Qur'anic memorization, pupils also developed an esoteric understanding of the Qur'anic text. Pupils often learned what a passage meant in terms of the specific practical goals it could accomplish, even without being able to translate the meaning of its Arabic words into their native language. Pupils who pursued extended study of the text, memorizing the entire Qur'an or many of its *hizbs*, had the potential to learn more of its secrets. But even the shortest *suras* (the same ones which early-leavers "prayed with") contained potent secret benefits.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Interview: Usman Aba, Niafounké, 2005.

⁷¹ See chapter VI for a fuller discussion of this issue.

Finally, the emphasis on memory also imparted a certain attitude toward the Qur'an, one of whose primary features was considerable reverence. Through memory-based pedagogy, pupils came to understand the proper emotional orientation due the Qur'an, in particular, and, in a more general sense, books, writing, and learning. Participants in traditional pedagogy considered this form of understanding (this emotional orientation toward book-based education) to be far more important for beginning pupils to acquire than the ability to translate Arabic into local language, upon which the system's critics fixated.

“Word for Word.” Descemet's second fundamental charge can be reduced to the phrase “word for word,” which he used to describe the method of translation employed in intermediate pedagogy. The commandant's account of intermediate pedagogy contains elements which are confirmed by other sources on Gimbala Islamic education from more recent periods. Law has generally been the first discipline which students work on after completing the memorization of the Qur'an one or several times. And very literal translations, of the type Descemet disparaged, have been a key part of legal pedagogy. Yet Descemet's two basic charges are in contradiction. Intermediate pedagogy's systematic attention to “word for word” translation fills in precisely the missing step in beginning pedagogy, whose absence Descemet invoked to contend that pupils read the Qur'an “without understanding.” A deeper flaw in the commandant's critique of intermediate pedagogy is that it wrongly suggests that “word for word” translation was the primary level at which local readers engaged with books.

As Descemet noted, the study of books in disciplines such as law generally included considerable emphasis on literal translations of Arabic text into local language. Memorization and the use of study-slates remained a part of pedagogy at this stage, which was as methodical,

painstaking, and patient as the first, Qur'anic stage. Teachers led students through Arabic portions of text written on their slates by stopping after each word or two to translate orally into Fulfulde. To some extent, Descemet actually understated the literalness of such translations, which were not just “word for word,” but word by word. (In legal training which I received in Gimbala, translations were sometimes so literal that they did not even respect fundamental rules of Fulfulde syntax.) On the other hand, the commandant missed the active role, which students took in the exercise. He gives the impression that students merely listened to their teachers' translations. In reality, students were systematically trained to reproduce those translations. At the end of each lesson, students showed mastery of the lesson by performing the same operation as their teachers. Before cleaning their study-slates for the next lesson, they had to demonstrate the ability both to read its Arabic text and to provide oral translations into Fulfulde after each word or two.

In other words, translation-based legal pedagogy systematically developed students' ability to read with precisely the level of understanding, which Descemet viewed as the crucial missing element that discredited beginning Qur'anic pedagogy. The contradiction between Descemet's two basic charges weakens both. (It is additionally worth noting that legal pedagogy, by methodically developing the skill of translating Islamic terminology, also gave students tools for returning to memorized passages of the Qur'an to seek this form of understanding.)

A more fundamental weakness in the commandant's account of legal pedagogy is that “word for word” translation was by no means the only level at which local readers engaged with legal books. Descemet acknowledged the potential for more serious engagement in his mention of a third, more “in-depth” level of study of some subjects, including the law. But he dismissed

it in the same breath as “insignificant,” undertaken by a tiny number of students. Though belonging to a very different genre, Hammadu Usman’s writings in the years surrounding 1900 and 1907 articulate a pointed challenge to the commandant’s survey on this question of how seriously Gimbalans read the law. His file provides concrete, contemporary evidence that the commandant missed much about how the intellectuals in his jurisdiction engaged with books.

Hammadu’s File

I have been able to read over Hammadu Usman’s shoulder thanks to his youngest and only surviving son, Usman Hammadu Usman. Over the course of several visits to Ruumde Suuduuḡe, Usman gave me access to eleven leather-bound files from his library. I numbered these files in the order in which Usman made them available to me. Several of the files contain materials, which are demonstrably connected to Hammadu Usman. Most of the library’s contents were in his possession while he was alive, reflecting in a less direct way the intellectual resources at his disposal. The file which I labeled File 4 is almost entirely attributable to him. It reveals most clearly Hammadu’s mind in action, particularly with regard to his legal reading and thinking.

Hammadu’s file is an attractive entry-point into grassroots legal thought for several reasons, but not because his documents contain the richest examples of Gimbalan legal commentary. Indeed, Hammadu’s marginal notes in his *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and *Risāla* were more limited than the average for Gimbalan manuscript copies of such texts. I chose to begin with Hammadu’s papers because, more than most Gimbalan manuscripts, they tell the concrete story of an identifiable individual thinker at identifiable historical moments. The fact that Hammadu’s

notes were less fully developed than those in many other Gimbala manuscripts is in one respect an extra, unintended benefit. His writings do not reflect the heights attained by Descemet's putative "insignificant" number of advanced scholars. Rather, they are representative of a widespread grassroots engagement with books. While Descemet's overview lists the reasons why grassroots reading was superficial, Hammadu's story documents modestly, but insistently, that it was earnest and thoughtful.

Hammadu Usman did not write his intellectual history as a linear report or narrative, but I have collected its fragments into one. My telling begins in 1900 with his *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and the various notes which he wrote in its margins as he read and thought about it. The tale continues to 1907 with another legal textbook, Hammadu's copy of the *Risāla* and the notes he added to it. As it should in a linear narrative, our point A leads to point B, whose fuller, more ambitious notes represent the fruition of Hammadu's earlier, more timid intellectual strivings.

In addition to legal textbooks and their marginal notes, Hammadu's file contains a number of separate notes, which Hammadu jotted down on the backs of colophon and title pages, and on separate leaves tucked between the textbooks. The marginal notes record how Hammadu carefully followed his textbooks' contents, how the contents of particular passages set him off on his own trains of thought. The separate notes preserve instances where Hammadu set a more independent intellectual agenda. For my telling, I follow only the leads on the backs of his two colophons, the endnotes of his *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and *Risāla*. These endnotes track Hammadu's intellectual development from 1900 to 1907 at a more general, reflective level, during moments when he looked not at the meaning of a specific narrow passage, but at the meaning of the completion of entire textbooks, each constituting a major statement on Islamic law.

Hammadu's intellectual history is a modest one. He wrote no major treatises and left little evidence of big, creative ideas. Rather his story is composed of arcane and fragmentary notes, preserved only in his rural family archives. Without piecing together stories such as his, however, the only concrete contemporary voice on Gimbala book culture during this period would be Commandant Descemet's. Though they are harder to hear, modest voices such as Hammadu Usman's can tell us more about rural intellectual life in Muslim West Africa than the louder testimonies preserved in colonial archives.

Hammadu's *Tuhfat al-hukkām*: 1317 AH/ 1900

In 1900, Hammadu completed his *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. On the reverse side of its dated colophon, he declared his intention to master its "letters" and "legal issues." The marginal notes, which he added in the body of the text, show that he did not intend to achieve this mastery by pictograms alone.

The *Tuhfat al-hukkām* ("Gift for the Judges") is a text from the Mālikī school of Islamic law. Its author was Ibn 'Asim, a scholar from Islamic Spain who lived between 1359 and 1426.⁷² A substantial work of 1698 verses, *Tuhfat al-hukkām* deals only with *mu'āmalāt* (legal issues surrounding social relations such as contracts, sales, and civil suits), bypassing the field of *'ibādāt*, or ritual law. Though Descemet did not include it on his reading list for Issa Ber, it was a standard part of the legal curriculum in Hammadu Usman's Gimbala and throughout the broader intellectual world of West African legal scholarship. In a Gimbala legal syllabus of ten

⁷² Ibn 'Aṣīm al-Mālikī al-Gharnāṭī, *Al-'Asimiyya ou Tuh'fat al-h'ukūkām fī nukat al-'uqūd wa'l-ah'kām*: « *Le Présent fait aux Juges touchant les points délicats des Contrats et des Jugements* », Léon Bercher, édité, traduit et annoté (Alger : Institut d'Etudes Orientales, 1958), v.

to twelve core texts, it fit in between more advanced works such as the *Mukhtasar* of Khalīl b. Ishāq and beginning texts focused largely on prayer ritual by such authors as al-Akhdarī and al-Qurtubī, two of the three legal books which made Descemet's list. The mere fact that Hammadu read the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* suggests a higher level of engagement with legal textual tradition than the commandant allowed the numerous *moodibaaʿe* of his cercle.

Through Hammadu's marginal notes, we can address the more important question of how he read his *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. Though they were concise and modest to the extreme, a careful reading of Hammadu's notes reveals what a careful reader he was – how he picked apart linguistic nuance, followed the complicated logic holding together extended passages on legal issues, and engaged with a broader tradition of legal thought beyond the book he was reading. Below, I examine first various examples of Hammadu's linguistic skill and how he used it to clarify the text's linguistic ambiguities. Secondly, I explore how he used his competence as a reader to seek precise understanding of the text's legal issues. Hammadu's favorite mental operation in this reading of *Tuhfat al-hukkām*'s legal provisions seems to have been to seek out the precise contextual meaning of the word “absolutely.” I analyze the eight instances where Hammadu applied this simple, yet revealing mental operation. Most of Hammadu's marginal notes in his 1900 textbook were very modest intellectual acts: a judicious word or short phrase meant to clear up a specific textual ambiguity. From the hindsight of the richer notes in his 1907 textbook, they appear cautious, perhaps not yet fully confident. Nonetheless they reveal the earlier Hammadu Usman to have been a very sensitive reader, who had already achieved a level of competence not accounted for in Descemet's survey.

Linguistic Skill. Hammadu Usman inserted the text's first marginal note above its first verse:

"Praise God who issues judgments and upon whom judgments are not issued, He is Sublime and High." In Hammadu's estimation, written upside-down above the first half of this line, "these [words show] the skill of the introduction," containing "that which indicates the intention" of the author "in the first statement."⁷³ Crafting a good opening was an important part of Islamic authorship. Many authors took advantage of the formulaic opening praise to God to foreshadow the contents of their work by highlighting attributes of God, which were pertinent to the issues at hand. Hammadu Usman's note shows appreciation for Ibn 'Asim's stylistic choice to open a work intended to help judges practice their profession with a reference to God's ultimate judicial authority. The note is an example of the understanding of the text's "letters," which Hammadu sought.

A second note exemplifies the extreme conciseness with which Hammadu demonstrated his own linguistic skill. In one line of the "Section on the [Plaintiff's] Contention and the [Defendant's] Response," Ibn 'Asim achieves the rhyme between his two hemistiches⁷⁴ by pairing "*yujib*" (in the phrase "did not respond") with "*yajib*" ("is necessary"). Following standard practice in Arabic orthography, Hammadu Usman did not write the short vowels, which alone distinguish these words' written forms. In order to eliminate the resulting linguistic ambiguity, he wrote "from *al-jawāb* (the response)" just above the first occurrence of "*y.j.b*," identifying it as a form of the verb "to respond," not the verb "to be necessary."⁷⁵

In the same section, Hammadu Usman glossed two Arabic words with Fulfulde equivalents. This exercise reflects the pedagogy of translation, which Commandant Descemet

⁷³ UHU, File 4, Image 4701.

⁷⁴ The primary condition of the *rajaz* poetic genre is the rhyme between the two hemistiches of each verse.

⁷⁵ UHU, File 4, Image 4707.

described in his 1907 report. It also shows that such translation was not always as straightforward and rudimentary as Descemet suggested. The Arabic words *adbata* and *inhisār* refer to expansive semantic fields, which Hammadu's Fulfulde glosses *maandinde* and *faddaade* cut down to significantly less ambiguous dimensions. *Adbata* has multiple connotations, including: "to have under control," "to master or tackle resolutely," "to seize or confiscate," "to grab or apprehend [an accused criminal]," "to define precisely," or "to record or register."⁷⁶ These various possible meanings could lead to confusion, especially since the section does treat sanctions for defendants who refuse to answer charges leveled against them. Hammadu Usman's note – the word *maandinde*, meaning "to make a mark" or "to assign a meaning" – helps remove the ambiguity for the Fulfulde-speaking reader. What the passage seeks to highlight is the importance of precise, written records for major, complex cases.

Rather than use Fulfulde, Hammadu usually worked through the occasionally unclear Arabic of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* with clearer Arabic. He selected synonyms which, he felt, conveyed the meaning of the passage more precisely, for example, glossing *kitāb* (book) with *wathīqa* (written document) and *ūlī al-waraq* (owners of silver [money]) with *ahl al-waraq* (the people [who use] silver [money]).⁷⁷ He took care to specify the unclear referents of pronouns.⁷⁸ He cut through a rather dense passage about preferential treatment in sales with the simple phrase: "a gift in the form of a sale."⁷⁹ More poetically, he located *dawām al-abad* (the fixity of eternity) of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*'s opening prayer for Prophet Muhammad in "the movement of

⁷⁶ I have consulted the following dictionaries: Edward William Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon*, Part 5 (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 1765; J. M. Cowan, ed., *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithaca, NY: Spoken Languages Services, Inc., 1976), 534; and Muhammad Khayr Abū Harb, ed., *al-Mu'jam al-madrasī* (Damascus: The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Syria, 1985), 618-619.

⁷⁷ UHU, File 4, Images 4825 and 4843.

⁷⁸ UHU, File 4, Images 4825 and 4844.

⁷⁹ UHU, File 4, Image 4828.

the stars.”⁸⁰ Most of the notes we have discussed so far, however, are admittedly rather mundane – careful, technical analysis of linguistic minutiae, rather than big, creative ideas. As such, they demonstrate that mastery of the text’s “letters” to which Hammadu Usman aspired. This technical textual competence offers a crisp response to Commandant Descemet’s sarcasm about “Modibabés” who only “know, more or less, how to read and write Arabic.”

The Precision of Legal Issues: *Mutlaq*^{an}. Hammadu Usman’s other goal in reading the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* was mastery of its “legal issues” (*masā’il*). Technical, linguistic mastery of the text was a pleasure and a goal in itself, but it was also a means to the end of understanding a body of legal knowledge, which Hammadu and the society in which he lived viewed as supremely important. The mental operations, which Hammadu applied to understand the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*’s legal issues, were mostly rather simple and very short. His *Tuhfat al-hukkām* has none of the extended marginal comments typical of other legal textbooks held in Gimbala libraries, including, as we shall see, Hammadu’s copy of the *Risāla*. Despite their extreme conciseness however, Hammadu Usman’s notes in the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* testify elegantly to his attentiveness as a reader, his understanding of the abstract conditions governing diverse legal rulings, and his awareness of a wider critical tradition surrounding the text.

I will limit my remarks to a single mental operation, the one which Hammadu applied most commonly to the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*: namely, the modification of the word *mutlaq*^{an} (“absolutely”). Hammadu commented on the significance of *mutlaq*^{an} with regards to eight separate legal issues. In each case, his comment followed the same basic format: defining the implications of *mutlaq*^{an} in terms of two diametrically opposed, hypothetical conditions, neither

⁸⁰ UHU, File 4, Image 4701.

of which would affect the legal principle in question. In each case also, the contextual meaning of *mutlaq*^{an} differed and Hammadu Usman took care to highlight the nuance.

In four cases, Hammadu’s notes clarified the contextual meaning of “absolutely” through careful reading of the larger passage surrounding the word. In a chapter on lease agreements, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* stipulates that things such as bees and doves can absolutely not be included in what a lessee has a right to enjoy on a leased property. Hammadu’s explanation of “absolutely” as meaning that this ruling applies whether the bees and doves are “of great value or not” relates the ruling to the provision on the previous line that small quantities of unripe fruits may be included in a lease agreement so long as the fruits ripen before the expiration of the lease.⁸¹ In a section on short-term sharecropping contracts, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* discusses legal conditions governing a situation in which a sharecropper begins work mid-season, thus benefiting from someone else’s labor already performed on the field. The *Tuhfat al-hukkām* states that the contract cannot require the sharecropper to work the field a second year up to the point where he started the first year, but that “selling” the portion of labor already performed to a sharecropper who starts in mid-season “is permissible absolutely.” Hammadu Usman glossed this “absolutely” as meaning that such a sale could be “hastened or postponed.”⁸² This interpretation relates the word to the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*’s next line, according to which, even if such a sale has not taken place before the worker has cultivated, he may be charged the value of labor completed in the field before he began.

Hammadu’s comment, in a section on real estate, which understands “absolutely” as meaning “with regards to real estate or movable property,” similarly demonstrates his ability to

⁸¹ UHU, File 4, Image 4793.

⁸² UHU, File 4, Image 4802.

follow the logic of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*'s rather densely-written, elliptical legal arguments.⁸³

In its section on rape, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* stipulates that when a woman brings a charge of rape against a man immediately after the alleged incident she “absolutely” cannot be charged with adultery. Hammadu’s interpretation of this “absolutely” as meaning “whether she is pregnant or not” understands the verse in terms of another verse six lines above.⁸⁴ While other readers might be content to understand the word “absolutely” as simply adding extra emphasis or as a convenient device for achieving a rhyme between hemistiches, Hammadu Usman consistently pushed beyond that, insisting on greater precision. Short though they are, his notes on “absolutely” reveal much about his flexible alert mind, which was attentive to the shifting, contextual meanings of a single word and to the logical connections holding together larger passages.

The four other cases suggest that Hammadu Usman also brought awareness of a wider critical tradition beyond the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* to his reading of the text. In a section on disagreements between someone who pawns an item and the creditor who accepts the pawned item to guarantee a debt, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* contends that, if the statement of the one who pawned the item is supported by circumstantial evidence, this statement should be accepted “absolutely.” Hammadu’s interpretation of this “absolutely” as meaning “whether the one who pawned” the item was the “one who brought the accusation or not” relates to nothing in the text of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* itself. He identified this reading as coming from an outside source, either a commentary on the work or another legal textbook which treats the same issue.⁸⁵

⁸³ UHU, File 4, Image 4763.

⁸⁴ UHU, File 4, Image 4837.

⁸⁵ UHU, File 4, Image 4724. Unfortunately, the faintness of this part of the note and its position at the slightly-worn edge of the page make it difficult to identify this cited work.

In two cases, Hammadu's notes define "absolutely" in relation to two pairs of opposing conditions, one pair which shows awareness of a logical connection to another part of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*'s text and another pair which extends beyond the work. In a chapter on endowments, gifts, and charity, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* states that, when someone sells an endowed property, the sale is to be rescinded "absolutely." Hammadu's comment that this ruling applies whether the seller "knew that [the property] was an endowment or not" highlights the connection between this ruling and a provision which follows it that if the seller acted with knowledge he is, in addition, criminally liable. Conversely, Hammadu's interpretation of this "absolutely" as also meaning that the sale is void "whether the seller was in need or not" is not related to another passage within the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* itself.⁸⁶ In a section on possession as a way of acquiring property, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* stipulates that a man who has sexual intercourse with a slave woman acquires ownership of her "absolutely," when her master knows about the relation. Hammadu read this "absolutely" as implying that the ruling is valid whether the master "is near or far," a consideration which three verses of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, located nine to eleven lines before the verse on slave women, discuss with regard to other types of property acquired through possession. In contrast, Hammadu's other comment – that the ruling is valid whether the slave woman "is high-priced or low-priced" – does not refer to another passage in the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*.⁸⁷ These interpretations, which go beyond the textual contents of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* itself, may have come from an uncited written source, an oral teaching which Hammadu received, or his own reflections about the relevant considerations underlying the use of the term "absolutely" in these contexts.

⁸⁶ UHU, File 4, Image 4807.

⁸⁷ UHU, File 4, Image 4813.

In a section on bequests, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* examines disputes between the minor child of a deceased man and his other heirs about whether specific parts of his property should be included in the general inheritance (and governed by its rules) or considered to have been set aside by the father as support for the child, for which he did not plan to seek reimbursement. As in all of the issues cited above, the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*'s reasoning on this question is complicated, outlining multiple hypothetical conditions which could have bearing on such cases. The primary distinction which the text makes is between money, which usually should not be included in the general inheritance, and goods, which should be included, even when they belong to the child, if they are in the father's possession at the time of his death. The *Tuhfat al-hukkām* adds that, with regards to this legal problem, "animals are like goods absolutely." Hammadu Usman's note interprets this "absolutely" as meaning whether the animals "have reason or not" – i.e. whether the "animals" are human slaves or non-human.⁸⁸ No nearby passage in the *Tuhfat al-hukkām* implies this reading. The fact that Léon Bercher, in his 1958 translation of *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, offered the same interpretation in a footnote about this verse suggests that it came from the wider critical tradition surrounding the text, with which both Bercher and Hammadu Usman were familiar, but which neither cited consistently.⁸⁹ In Hammadu's mind, this interpretation may also have been linked with a distant section title in the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, which he copied without comment: "The Section on the Sale of Slaves and Other Animals."⁹⁰ Attentive reading of the laconic notes Hammadu added to his *Tuhfat al-hukkām* reveals much about the kind of reader and legal thinker he was in 1900.

⁸⁸ UHU, File 4, Image 4825.

⁸⁹ Ibn 'Açim al-Mâlikî al-Gharnâtî, *Al-‘Asimiyya*, 405, fn. 1008.

⁹⁰ UHU, File 4, Image 4768.

Hammadu's *Risāla*: 1325 AH/ 1907

In 1907, Hammadu Usman completed his *Risāla*. Like his *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, Hammadu's *Risāla* is not as fully annotated as many other Gimbala copies of the text. The notes which he did add, however, suggest his development as a legal reader and thinker. They are much longer than his notes in the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, drawing out extended, complex typologies. They reveal a fuller engagement with the broader tradition of Islamic legal thought. I will limit my remarks to the three most extensive notes and the evidence they present of Hammadu's growing mastery of complex legal issues.

In contrast to the extremely concise notes of Hammadu's *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, these three notes were much fuller legal arguments. Each was capable of standing alone, even though it clearly related to nearby contents of the *Risāla*. Two of these notes present extended legal typologies: (1) "The twelve [categories of people] who eat during Ramadan, but do not perform *kaffāra* penance" and (2) "Six cases when selling an *umm al-walad*" (a slave woman impregnated by her master) "is permissible." The other note offers a lengthy discussion of how joint ownership of livestock affects calculations of *zakāt* (alms). The notes reflect various ways in which Hammadu, on the one hand, read and made sense of sections of the *Risāla* and, on the other, brought to the text a tradition of legal thought which went beyond it.

Al-Khalītayni. Hammadu's commentary on *zakāt* calculations for herds which mix different owners' livestock contains two parts.⁹¹ The first part is an introduction, which glosses the *Risāla*'s phrase "each of two associates in a mixed [herd]" (*kull al-khalītayni*) as "each partner,"

⁹¹ UHU, File 4, Image 4571.

then compares the terms “partner” (*sharīk*) and “associate in a mixed [herd]” (*khalīt*).

Regrettably, the nuances of this comparison are lost, because Hammadu’s definition of “partner” is cut off at the edge of the worn page. His definition of *khalīt* is “one who does not set apart his share.” The introduction goes on to state that a valid “mixed [herd] has preconditions; if they are fulfilled, the two [associates are counted] as one; if not, each one has a [separate] judgment [regarding *zakāt*].” The second part of the marginal note is a quote Hammadu selected from the *Mukhtasar* of Khalīl, a more advanced Mālikī legal text, which was, like the *Risāla*, a staple of the Muslim West African curriculum.

Hammadu added this note because he felt that the text of the *Risāla* alone provides insufficient guidance on the issue in question. Seeking clarification, he approached the term *khalīt* from four different angles: an (approximate) synonym, a sentence-length definition, a statement of its legal consequence, and an examination of its legal preconditions. The original passage in the *Risāla* makes no mention of the term *sharīk*; it takes the basic definition of *khalīt* for granted. The passage implies the legal consequence of a mixed herd (namely, that associates make one *zakāt* payment together), but does not state it as clearly and succinctly as Hammadu’s note. Hammadu’s selection of the quotation from the *Mukhtasar* was a thoughtful one. The quote both clarified information in the *Risāla* and gave important additional information, neglected in the *Risāla*, about the legal preconditions defining a mixed herd. The *Mukhtasar*’s stipulations that the mixed herd arise from a legitimate “intention” and a spirit of “friendship” relate to the *Risāla*’s concern that a mixed herd formed out of “fear of paying alms” would be illegitimate. The *Mukhtasar* states that the associates must be “free Muslims” and make common use of herding essentials, such as “pasture, water, overnight shelter, a herder [appointed] with both of their permission, and studs” – nuances passed over in the *Risāla*. By

selecting this quote from the *Mukhtasar*, Hammadu suggested the breadth of his legal reading and demonstrated his grasp of the relations between passages of various legal texts. In his own introduction to the note, he showed his increased confidence as a reader and legal thinker.

Umm al-walad Sales. Hammadu's comment about the sale of an *umm al-walad*⁹² (a slave woman impregnated by her master) gives further evidence of his wide legal reading, and his growing mastery of legal writing ("letters") and issues (*masā'il*). The note quotes Ibn Farhūn's *Durrat al-ghawāss fi muhādarat al-khawāss*, an important Mālikī text, but not nearly as commonly studied in West Africa as the *Mukhtasar*, or *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and the *Risāla*. The brief introduction to the note subtly displays Hammadu's technical competence as a writer. Hammadu modified Ibn Farhūn's lead-in to the issue by deftly combining two sentences from the latter's question-and-answer format into a single statement: "Selling an *umm al-walad* is permissible in six cases (*masā'il*)."⁹² The rest of the note simply quotes the *Durrat al-ghawāss*. Nonetheless, the note demonstrates clearly that Hammadu was an informed, critical reader.

Hammadu Usman and other Gimbala intellectuals deeply revered core legal texts, such as the *Risāla*, but they did not set them up on a pedestal out of the reach of criticism. By inserting into the margins of his *Risāla* this quote, which detailed the six cases in which "selling an *umm al-walad* is permissible," Hammadu directly contradicted the adjoining text, which stated the exact opposite: "selling [an *umm al-walad*] is not permissible." This challenge was a very learned one. It turned to a relatively obscure text, because more common texts did not address this question as fully or as clearly. Hammadu astutely perceived in this passage a nuanced challenge to his textbook. The *Risāla* presents a legal principle, which is generally

⁹² UHU, File 4, Image 4622.

valid, but, Hammadu suggested, potentially misleading because the *Risāla* does not specify the extenuating circumstances that can abrogate it. By the time Hammadu added this note to his 1907 *Risāla*, he had read widely enough to read critically.

Varieties of Penance for Violating Ramadan. Hammadu's comment on a complex legal issue related to fasting⁹³ also aims for detail, nuance, and, at the same time, clarity. He began by stating the problem in the following terms: "There are twelve [types of people] who eat during Ramadan, [but] no *kaffāra* penance is required of them."⁹⁴ He then categorized these twelve categories of people, according to the various combinations of two lesser forms of penance, to which each is subject. Six types of people should make up the day by fasting on a later date, but should not feed the needy the equivalent of one *mudd*. Two types of people should both make up the day and feed the needy. Three types of people are not required to do either. And one category of people should feed, but not make up the fast on a later day.

This note relates to the text of the *Risāla* differently than the previous two. It is not a gloss on a contained phrase or passage. The note brings together information dispersed across multiple pages of the text. It then organizes this information under the rubric of a question, which the more wide-ranging *Risāla* addresses only haphazardly. In this regard, the function of the note is to present existing information in a more accessible format. Yet it does not only organize information contained within the *Risāla*. The *Risāla* does not comment on whether five of Hammadu's twelve categories should perform penance through making up days or providing a

⁹³ UHU, File 4, Image 4558.

⁹⁴ *Kaffāra* is the most exacting form of penance required of those who violate the fast during Ramadan. The *Risāla* specifies three ways to perform it. The preferred method is (1.) feeding sixty poor people, but (2.) manumitting a healthy slave or (3.) fasting two consecutive months is also acceptable.

mudd of food to the poor. Hammadu's note, in turn, neglects at least one category mentioned in the *Risāla* as required to make up a missed day, but not to perform *kaffāra* penance: those who simply forget to fast. As for the seven categories which the *Risāla* and Hammadu's note share, the two sources often express the rulings differently. The note explains whether each category should or should not perform each of the two kinds of lesser penance. In contrast, the *Risāla* is often silent about one of the forms of penance. The note offers one clear-cut ruling for each question raised. It states, for example, that a pregnant woman does not provide a *mudd* of food to the poor. In contrast, the *Risāla* acknowledges both this opinion and a contrasting one, according to which she should feed the poor. In examining the legal issues raised by this section of the *Risāla*, Hammadu's note not only re-organizes existing information in the text, but also goes significantly beyond it.

Where does the note come from, if not primarily from the contents of the *Risāla*? Hammadu did not cite any secondary source. The note is not a passage from the primary works in the standard local curriculum.⁹⁵ As a detailed typology of exceptions to a generally-valid legal principle, it recalls Ibn Farhūn's *Durrat al-ghawāss*. Yet it is not from that work either. This question of origins is a very murky one. I have not been able to identify a specific secondary source.

On the other hand, I have found evidence that Hammadu did draw the text from some source circulating in (at least) Gimbalan learned circles. Another local intellectual preserved approximately the same note in a library from the nearby village of Geeje, six kilometers west of Ruumde. This other list of twelve categories of people, "who eat during Ramadan, [but] are not

⁹⁵ I have checked the following texts: al-Akhdarī, al-Qurtubī, Ibn 'Ashir, al-'Ashmāwī, *al-Muqaddima*, *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, *Irshād al-sālik*, and *al-Mukhtasar*.

required to perform *kaffāra* penance,” appears in a very different context from Hammadu’s *Risāla*. It comes at the end of a short work on the twenty-three conditions for the Tijānī Sufi path. While it mentions fasting in a list of commanded acts which are part of the eighth condition of the path,⁹⁶ this work addresses none of the legal nuances surrounding the issue of fasting. Furthermore, the writer of the text did not insert the list of those who eat during Ramadan next to the mention of fasting in the Tijānī work. Rather, he wrote it after completing the entire Tijānī work, on the open space left on the latter’s last page. He was interested in each of the two texts as separate statements. Here, essentially the same list related to fasting, which Hammadu wrote in the margins of his *Risāla*, stood alone.

The examples of this list from Hammadu’s *Risāla* and the Geeje library share essentially the same structure and content, but differ on several points of syntax and spelling. Both lists begin by stating the same question about twelve reasons for which people may not fast, without being liable to perform the greater penance, known as *kaffāra*. Both lists continue with a set of hypothetical combinations of the two lesser types of penance, which such people may be expected to perform, depending on their varied reasons for not fasting. Both lists then cite the same six categories which should make up missed days, but not feed the poor; the same two groups which should both make up missed days and feed the poor; the same three categories which should do neither; and the same category which should feed the poor, but not make up missed days. The differences between the two examples of the list include: an agreement error in the opening statement of the Geeje list and a more elegant use of a conjunctive particle in Hammadu’s opening statement; different ways of presenting the hypothetical combinations of the two lesser types of penance; different sequences for the six types of people who should make

⁹⁶ Library: Alamy Geeje, Geeje, File 1, Image 3661.

up missed days, but not feed the poor; a significant spelling error by Hammadu of *muta'attish* (languishing in thirst);⁹⁷ and a minor spelling error of the last word in the Geeje document.

None of these differences were matters of substance, but they were nonetheless significant. The fact that the differences were not substantive suggests that Hammadu and the writer of the Geeje list both grasped the meaningful content of whatever their common source was. The fact that they differed on so many points of style (the list above is not exhaustive) suggests that they did not copy the list from some common textual source. While the ultimate source of the list may have been textual, Hammadu and the Geeje writer likely encountered it in the form of an oral teaching, which circulated in Gimbala and probably beyond. Their lists represent how two minds tried to render a teaching, whose substance each had grasped (and which each quite possibly heard originally in Fulfulde), into written Arabic form.

In Hammadu's case, he rendered this oral teaching into written form in the margins of a related passage of his 1907 *Risāla*. By selecting this discourse, he suggested that it both organized information contained in the *Risāla* in a more useful, accessible manner and added useful information not contained in the text. He demonstrated, as in the other two notes, his taste for legal nuance, complex typologies, and exceptions to general rules. He also demonstrated his ability to draw on eclectic sources to explore such nuances.

A close reading of Hammadu's notes shows, against Descemet, that ordinary Gimbala intellectuals were, themselves, quite capable of reading closely. Hammadu's engagement with

⁹⁷ Hammadu wrote this word as m.'t.s, whose most likely vowelization is *ma'tis*, or "nose." The Geeje document's *muta'attish* gives the much more likely reading of "languishing in thirst." The most significant difference between the two spellings is Hammadu's use of the letter *sīn*, instead of *shīn*. Errors between the two letters are extremely common in this Fulfulde-speaking milieu. Fulfulde does not have the sound "sh" and most pupils learn to read both letters as "s" during their study of Qur'anic passages written on their slates. Some local intellectuals have recognized this problem and written lengthy treatises stressing the importance of the differences between such letters as *sīn* and *shīn*.

his textbooks went significantly beyond memorizing “without understanding” or “translating word for word,” the levels of reading which Descemet’s report highlighted. Hammadu’s engagement with his 1907 *Risāla* also surpassed the level at which he himself had read his 1900 *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. He no longer contented himself with chipping away at the edges of legal issues. He tackled them head on and comprehensively, identifying and filling in lacunae with a mixture of his own prose, authoritative secondary sources, and typologies which he probably encountered in oral settings.

With his notes in his 1907 *Risāla*, Hammadu had achieved considerable progress toward the mastery of legal issues, to which he aspired on the back of his 1900 *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. The contents of those notes help flesh out what Hammadu’s aspiration to be able to handle legal issues meant for him. It did not mean composing original treatises or proposing bold new theories of Islamic law. But it also clearly meant a considerably higher level of competence than simply memorizing legal books or translating them word for word. It meant perceiving the complexities of legal issues, the multiple considerations and contingencies which could alter considerably the answers to legal questions. Mastering *masā’il* meant mastering core legal books, to be sure, but it also meant knowing when to push beyond them and even when to correct their errors, however buried in nuance these might be. It meant looking at the same issue from the perspectives of multiple sources, leveraging some against the others to achieve a fuller understanding. The sources which Hammadu produced provide an excellent counterpoint to the commandant’s much lower estimation of Gimbalan readers’ aspirations and achievements.

Hammadu's Endnotes

So far, we have examined only notes which Hammadu Usman wrote in the margins of his two textbooks. These notes vary in their expansiveness from Hammadu's highly condensed jottings in his 1900 *Tuhfat al-hukkām* to his fuller comments in his 1907 *Risāla*. They also vary in terms of how closely they stick to the textual passages next to which Hammadu inserted them. Some of them bring in significant extra materials from beyond the texts. One even directly challenges a legal principle as stated in the text.

Despite these variations, all of these marginal notes relate to nearby passages within the textbooks. The notes all show Hammadu thinking, but within a context set by the textbooks, by authorial choices made in fourteenth/fifteenth-century Islamic Spain and tenth-century North Africa. It was following the train of thought of the texts that launched Hammadu's various trains of thought, whether these were as short as a single word or long enough to wrap around three sides of a page, whether they were strictly linguistic or boldly skeptical, whether the issues in the text reminded Hammadu of passages in other books or of teachings which he received orally. Hammadu's two legal textbooks provide the framework for all the evidence of his thought, so far examined.

Hammadu's file contains other notes that he wrote, which do not comment on passages of *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and the *Risāla*. When Hammadu copied his textbooks, he used both sides of most sheets of paper, but he did not write text from either book on the reverse side of its title page or its colophon page. He left these spaces open for separate, additional notes. He wrote other freestanding notes on separate leaves of similar paper, which I found tucked between his two textbooks.

These notes were related to *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and the *Risāla*, but in a significantly different way than marginal notes are. They show Hammadu's thinking process in a less structured context, displaying more clearly some of his independent intellectual interests. These notes were primarily, but not exclusively, concerned with legal issues. Their eclecticism reveals something new and charming about Hammadu's personality. Yet it would be a mistake to overstate the independence of these thoughts, to point to them as evidence of unbridled creativity. Bold innovation was not among Hammadu's intellectual goals. These thoughts are not glosses in the margins of discrete passages, but they were built on the foundation of Hammadu's legal education as a whole. I focus on Hammadu's endnotes to his two textbooks, which best reflect both his relationship with the body of knowledge symbolized by the book as a complete unit and how that relationship evolved from 1900 to 1907.

The Completion of *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. Hammadu wrote the first of his endnotes on or soon after 1 Ramadan 1317 AH/ January 3, 1900. He added one note next to *Tuhfat al-hukkām*'s colophon and three others on the reverse side of the leaf.⁹⁸ None of these notes addressed any specific legal issue or displayed the typical markings of the genre of legal discourse, but they reveal much about Hammadu's interests and his general conception of the book. Three of the four remarks were *fā'idās* ("benefits"). The first of these (the note next to the colophon) offers a formula to be "read upon completion of a book." Hammadu did not specify the benefit, which would follow from this recitation, whose text is a general plea for God's protection. Perhaps, the logic underlying this idea was that one who completes the copying of a revered religious book is entitled to make a special petition for divine protection. Certainly, Hammadu's invocation of

⁹⁸ UHU, File 4, Images 4853 and 4854.

this “benefit” defined the completion of his book as a pious act, linked to the religious mood the supplicant adopts when he turns to God for help.

The second *fā’ida* identified its “benefit” more specifically: “A benefit: one who writes this [string of letters] on the back of a book will never enter water, God willing.” Ruumde was located in a flood zone, whose water was not only a major source of agricultural fertility, but also a primary natural danger.⁹⁹ This “benefit” reflects Hammadu’s concern with this natural danger. It also shows that he linked books (and the literate competence to write a particular string of letters) to the ability to control this danger. In the note on this page, which is not a *fā’ida*, Hammadu listed “seven or eight” “animals which menstruate.” An eccentric group, mostly composed of mammals, but also including “big, or old, dung beetles,” the comment is not the non sequitur, which it appears at first to be. It shows Hammadu’s exploration of a different way in which literacy could be a tool for managing the rural natural environment in which he lived.

We have already discussed the third *fā’ida* several times, “A benefit for the one who writes this [pictogram] on the back of his book: he will be able to handle all of its legal issues and all of its letters, if God, the Exalted, so wills.” Below and to the left, Hammadu drew the pictogram, which was a square with Arabic letters written inside and around it. In this charm, Hammadu reflected upon the legal textbook which he had just finished copying and succinctly expressed his intellectual goals. He aimed at comprehensive linguistic and juristic competence. The note also clearly shows that Hammadu did not consider textual and legal study to be in conflict with esoteric forms of Islamic knowledge. He saw secret power as a resource which could help him achieve his goal of becoming a competent reader and jurist.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of Gimbalan anxieties about water, see Gibbal’s ethnography of a water-spirit cult in the region. Jean-Marie Gibbal, *Genii of the River Niger*, trans. Beth G. Raps (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

The endnotes of Hammadu's *Tuhfat al-hukkām* provide a window on his intellectual interests and his conception of the significance of the book at this moment in early 1900. Clearly, his conception of books, even legal books, was deeply imbued with an esoteric sensibility. While his marginal notes in *Tuhfat al-hukkām* focus on very close readings of textual nuance, his *fā'idās* at the end place the work in a much broader theological and interdisciplinary context. For Hammadu, his *Tuhfat al-hukkām* was the culmination of his labor, the manifestation of the pious act of writing down a revered text, and therefore a special occasion to seek God's blessings. It was a source of esoteric power to deal with worldly problems, such as the dangers of the annual flood. Esoteric power from other sources was, in turn, an aid for approaching its complex, intimidating linguistic and juridical contents. Hammadu valued mastery of books both at the technical level displayed in his marginal notes and at a broader level where legal and esoteric forms of knowledge intermingled within a single religiously-grounded epistemology.

The *Risāla*'s Endnote. The notes at the end of Hammadu's *Risāla*¹⁰⁰ offer comparable insight into his ideas about these issues in early to mid-1907. Hammadu remained convinced that legal books were connected, not in contradiction, with esoteric forms of power, which extended beyond the book to the wider world. Next to his *Risāla*'s colophon, he wrote the same charm for protection from water, which he had written on the back of his *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. He did not repeat either of the other two *fā'idās*. Instead, on the reverse side of the colophon page, he wrote an extended note, which, like the marginal notes in his *Risāla*, showed his growing confidence in his ability to handle legal questions.

¹⁰⁰ UHU, File 4, Images 4691-4694.

The note was a very succinct (yet impressively comprehensive) guide to a central and very thorny problem in Islamic law: the principles of inheritance. Islamic law assigns various fixed shares to different categories of heirs, defined by their relationship to the deceased. Mastering these fixed shares and the principles governing how to reconcile the various potential claims on an estate was a common theoretical and practical challenge for Muslim jurists. The first part of Hammadu's note explains four operations of arithmetic, useful for reconciling various combinations of fractions:

Inheritance has four parts: *tabāyun*, *tawāfuq*, *tadākhul*, and *tamāthul*. The way to work with *tabāyun* is to multiply the whole with the whole, e.g. two with three, three with four, or three with eight. The way to work with *tawāfuq* is to multiply what is left when you reduce one by their common factor with the entirety of the other, e.g. four with six, six with eight, or two with six. The way to work with *tadākhul* is to be satisfied with the large number and dispense with the small one, e.g. two with six, six with three, and two with four. The way to work with *tamāthul* is to drop one of the two because of the equality [of the two terms], e.g. two with two, three with three, or six with six.

Hammadu's inclusion of the combination of "two with six" (i.e. two heirs, one entitled to $\frac{1}{2}$ and the other to a sixth) both under *tawāfuq* and *tadākhul* was an error. (It belongs only under *tadākhul*.) But otherwise, this paragraph is an accurate, very accessible guide to this aspect of the problem.

The second part of the note addresses another aspect of the problem: how to remember which heirs are entitled to which fractional shares. Here, Hammadu wrote the acrostic *habādabaza*. Each of the six Arabic letters in this acrostic has a widely-known numeric value. In notes adjacent to each of the letters, Hammadu specified these values, explained that each number corresponded to the number of heirs due a particular fractional share, and listed the relevant heirs. The letters followed a sequence of shares, which started with a half, a fourth, and

a eighth and ended with two-thirds, one third, and one sixth. Thus, anyone who knew the numeric values of the letters could easily remember that five kinds of heirs were due a half, two were due a fourth, one was due an eighth, and so on. The written note allowed Hammadu or any other reader to reference easily the identity of these heirs. For example, under the letter *hā'*, one would find that the five heirs entitled to a half were: the deceased's daughter, his/her son's daughter, a full sister, a half-sister through the father, and a husband. To handle all of the many contingencies related to combinations of inheritance shares, a jurist would require more knowledge than Hammadu presented here. (One potential problem suggested in the above is that, in any given estate, there are obviously just two halves to share out, while there are five potential categories of claimants.) Still, the note provides a very straightforward introduction to some of the fundamental principles of inheritance law.

Unlike the notes at the end of Hammadu's *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, this endnote relates to some specific contents of the text and belongs, like the text, to the genre of legal discourse. The *habādabaza* portion of the endnote addresses many of the issues which the *Risāla* treats in chapter 39, the chapter on mandatory inheritance shares (*farā'id*). The *Risāla* organizes this information according to the various categories of possible heirs. First, it lists ten categories of men and seven categories of women who inherit mandatory shares. Then, it provides a series of accounts of each of these types of heirs, with often quite detailed discussions of the various contingencies affecting their shares. The *Risāla*'s first account of this kind describes the share of a surviving husband. It clarifies a confusing aspect of Hammadu's *habādabaza*, the fact that the husband is listed both under the *hā'* (as receiving a half portion) and above the *bā'* (as receiving a quarter). Unlike the *habādabaza*, the *Risāla* explains the contingencies determining which of these two possible shares a surviving husband should receive. If his wife left no son or grandson

through a son, the husband receives half; if she did leave a son or a son's son, the husband receives a quarter. The *Risāla* and the *habādabaza* use markedly different principles of organization to cover most of the same questions. The *Risāla* generally treats these questions more comprehensively, though the *habādabaza* covers an impressive amount considering its extreme conciseness. (It is half a folio, compared with the ten folios of 13-14 lines each used for Hammadu's copy of chapter 39 of the *Risāla*.)¹⁰¹ The *habādabaza* is a condensation of chapter 39's material, a useful mnemonic device for a reader struggling to master the many details of the *Risāla*'s exposition.

In contrast, chapter 39 does not deal with the principles of arithmetic, which Hammadu wrote about on the other half of his endnote on inheritance. Like the *habādabaza*, this note was designed to provide a concise guide to handling basic questions about inheritance shares. Yet it added new knowledge to what the reader of chapter 39 would learn from the *Risāla*, rather than simply facilitating mastery of what was already there.

The relationship between chapter 39 and Hammadu's endnote on inheritance shares some features with the connection between his marginal notes and the passages of his *Risāla*, which they gloss. In both cases, Hammadu sought different angles on the questions raised in the *Risāla*. He clarified, re-organized, and added to the *Risāla*'s answers to these questions. His methodology revealed a conception of legal knowledge with two primary characteristics. First, legal knowledge was a large (but more or less finite) body of traditional questions, defined in revered core texts, such as the *Risāla*. But, second, the best way to approach this body of questions was to achieve a measure of critical distance from such texts, to come at the same questions armed with multiple readings.

¹⁰¹ UHU, File 4, Images 4652-4661.

Hammadu's endnote on inheritance also bore a different relationship to his *Risāla*, one analogous to how his endnote focused on *fā'idās* related to his *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. It was not a train of thought triggered by Hammadu's reading of a specific word (e.g. *al-khalīṭaynī*), of a specific sentence (e.g. "selling [an *umm al-walad*] is not permissible"), or even of a longer passage (such as that about forms of penance for those who refrain from the fast). Hammadu wrote about inheritance after completing his copy of the entire work. Viewed in its different context, the endnote should be read as reflecting a more independent intellectual interest of Hammadu's; it can be read further as a statement about how Hammadu viewed the significance of the book, which he had just completed, as well as the significance of books and legal study, more generally.

Viewed in comparison with his statements at the end of his *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, the inheritance endnote reflects Hammadu's development between 1900 and 1907. He had certainly not abandoned his conception of legal books as having both an exoteric dimension and esoteric implications. (He hoped, once again, to harness the power of a core religious book to deal with his hydrophobia.) Yet, he had realized the juristic ambition, which his other *fā'ida* of 1900 expressed in esoteric terms. In place of a pictogram for acquiring the ability to read well, handle "letters" and "legal issues," he used the terms of legal discourse to demonstrate that he had now acquired the ability to take the many complex aspects of a legal question, look at them from multiple angles, and boil them down into a succinct guide. While Hammadu was certainly an earnest reader when he copied *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, he had developed, by 1907, a noticeably higher level of legal competence and confidence.

Conclusion

This exploration of the history of Gimbala book culture builds off of two parallel histories from 1900 to 1907. Between 1900 and 1907, the young French colonial state increased its administrative presence in Gimbala. In the process, it developed institutional means and a methodology for observing local culture and religion. It would be a mistake to overstate the extent of that administrative presence or the effectiveness of colonial methods for observing Gimbala culture. Colonial observation of Gimbala book culture reached its rather unimpressive apex with Commandant Descemet's 1907 report. The report's quantitative and qualitative overview of local Islamic education stands out as the only contemporary record in this genre. Yet its characterization of Issa Ber's numerous *moodibaaŋe* grossly underestimates their intellectual aspirations and achievements.

Beneath the radar of colonial observation, Hammadu Usman Umaru of Ruumde Suuduŋe pursued a parallel cultural agenda from 1900 to 1907. While the colonial state developed its methodology for observing Islam, he developed his methodology for reading Islamic books. He defined his aspirations in a charm in 1900. He aimed at comprehensive linguistic and juristic competence, no more and no less. He worked to develop his command over legal "letters" and "issues," chipping away at them word by word in his 1900 *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and taking them on whole cloth in his *Risāla* of seven years later. Hammadu did not aspire to bold intellectual innovation, but he did exercise creativity within the bounds of traditional questions and the critical tradition, on which he drew to address them. He sought technical mastery of his textbooks, to pin down and render precise their meanings at the level of words, sentences, and passages. Yet he also learned when to circumvent his textbooks in pursuit

of a fuller understanding of a legal issue. By 1907, he knew that textbooks could be wrong. His endnote on inheritance shows that he had learned how to cut the biggest, thorniest legal questions down to manageable size.

Hammadu's intellectual history may appear arcane. His intellectual influence was restricted to the circle of his personal relationships. Except for this chapter, his intellectual production has never traveled much beyond his family archives. Yet it was through stories such as Hammadu's – the patient, diligent accumulation of competence in legal reading – that books and Islamic legal ideas became central to Gimbalan life. The region's numerous *moodibaaŋe* did pass through the phases of memorization and word for word translation, which Descemet equated with local pedagogy. But very many of them also traveled the intellectual trajectory which Hammadu diligently pursued from 1900 to 1907. They did so both before and after him, their individual exertions repeatedly and cumulatively renewing the place of books and legal concepts in rural society.

The issues Hammadu thought about may seem abstract. Reading and thinking about texts were indeed abstract exercises, which allowed those who participated in them to transcend to some extent the activities of forming and feeding families, which largely defined their rural existence. Hammadu may never have known anyone who leased out his bees or sold an *umm al-walad*. He obviously found satisfaction in analyzing these issues' nuances abstractly.

On the other hand, many Islamic legal ideas had implications of concrete importance in Gimbalan social life. Hammadu certainly would have helped divide up inheritance. Every year, people in his society would have wanted to know how to repent for missed days in Ramadan, how much *zakāt* to pay on their herds, and so on. Ibn Farhūn's nuances about *umm al-walad* sales may have been an obscure issue in Hammadu's society, but slavery in general certainly was

not. Slavery was a major feature of Gimbala life. Like many other villages in the region, Hammadu's Ruumde was divided into two main sections: one for Fulɓe and one for slaves. Reflecting back on the notes I have examined in this chapter as mental exercises, it is remarkable how often Hammadu's textbooks and the critical tradition he brought to them led him to think about slavery. By applying his critical intelligence to these traditional questions (even when he contradicted the conventional textbook wisdom about a point of nuance), he internalized their basic assumptions about slaves. The legion of rural readers, who traversed the same intellectual path through the chapters of legal textbooks and the tradition of reading them closely and critically, internalized the same basic assumptions. Gimbala's widespread culture of the book contributed to the formation of widespread notions about social questions. Later chapters will consider these broader implications of Gimbala book culture more fully. Here it is enough to set Hammadu Usman Umaru's story against the findings of Descemet's limited survey, and to appreciate the earnest grassroots intellectual realm suggested in the modest contours of his scholastic path.

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHY OF A VILLAGE LEGAL SCHOLAR II:

HAMMADU USMAN UMARU AS A COMMUNITY SCHOLAR, CA. 1907 TO CA. 1950

Hammadu Usman Umaru's intellectual relationship with legal text from 1900 to 1907 prepared him for a social role as a community legal scholar from ca. 1907 to his death around 1950. Hammadu's activities during this phase of his life left a durable legacy in the oral historical consensus, which formed around the meaning of his career. Individuals from different sections of the community constructed a common memory of his profile as a community scholar, an imam and a speaker of legal truth. Becoming the village imam marked the beginning of the mature phase of Hammadu's scholarly career. Hammadu's appointment, which probably took place between 1907 and 1914, sparked a revealing debate within his community about the nature of scholarly authority, in which textual credentials and community membership ultimately trumped the principle of lineage prestige. Scholars such as Hammadu did not constitute a class apart. They emerged from and remained integrated within agrarian rural communities. Examining Hammadu's mature career in his formal position as imam and as an informal legal authority shows how such modest scholars spoke to their communities and brought text into ordinary rural social life.

Like chapter II's close reading of Hammadu's textbooks, this broader reading of the social significance of his life is a counterpoint to colonial representations. A member of a humble family and a humble community, Hammadu was a typical speck in Paul Marty's "dust-

cloud of mini-clerics,” who, Marty confidently claimed, were “without value or influence.”

In the late 1910s when Marty compiled his survey of Islam and lists of scholars in Issa Ber cercle, Hammadu was a young imam, settling in to his role as a community scholar. Marty completely overlooked him, along with the type of values and social influence, which his life exemplified. Hammadu’s engagement with text did not prepare him for direct influence over issues of value to colonial officials. It did however prepare him to speak with the ritual and social authority of Islamic legal text within his community.

Like other ordinary rural scholars who strove for the competence to speak this idiom, Hammadu influenced the ritual and social practices of those around him and helped define the meaning of the values they held. His influence was quotidian and local, but significant within its sphere, which included the status of women within colonial-era Ruumde. Hammadu did not seek to overturn patriarchy within the village, but his voice did help make it a rule-bound patriarchy based on careful reading of text. Like anyone, Hammadu read text from his own point of view and social position. As we have seen, he also read texts critically. But he treated text as less a tool for pursuing other values and social agendas than a value in itself, or at least a way to access the supreme value of religious truth. His social agenda was to bring written texts into the spoken life of the community and the intimate corners of everyday experience. Lest this portrait appear idealized, note that Hammadu’s ability to deliver on his claims to speak for text was indeed also a means to claw his way to social authority and respect within a contentious, sometimes even hostile community.

Methodology

Unlike chapter II, this chapter is methodologically eclectic. Hammadu's writings in 1900 and 1907 re-appear, but in a more restricted role. Hammadu's library and other libraries contain many relevant, though often fragmentary, clues about his communal life. But the memories of other community members – statements of consensus about Hammadu's basic persona, narratives of events in his life, and descriptions of family and community background – are indispensable complements to these documentary leads. Hammadu's significance as a community scholar comes into focus only through attentively pursuing the back-and-forth between written and oral sources.

This methodology mirrors his life. Between 1900 and 1907, Hammadu developed textual competence, which, in the next phase of his life, he translated into the social authority to speak within and to his community. But this movement from text to speech was not unilinear. Hammadu's authority to speak depended always on his claim to speak in the name of text. An individual, unique, but also representative community legal scholar, Hammadu exemplifies how learned individuals related to rural communities under the nose of colonial observers who rated them as meaningless as dust. Where colonial sources throw us off the scent, the combination of local written and oral evidence allows us to pick it up.

“Truth-Owner”: An Oral Historical Consensus

Six people provided me with useful accounts about Hammadu Usman. Five of them were old enough to remember him personally. Each of them had a different position in the

community, a different relationship to Hammadu, and consequently different vested interests in his memory. Corresponding differences of tone, emphasis, and substantive detail also cropped up in the stories, which each of these authors told. Yet the similarities between their tales are equally significant. All of my interviewees agreed on Hammadu's essential persona. He was a scholar and very learned. He was a long-serving imam and an authority on law, whose juristic opinions always proved right when tested against competing views. Only one interviewee referred to him as a "truth-owner" (*jom goonga*), but the term evokes what all felt about his memory.

It is noteworthy that even those who said that they could not recall specific anecdotes about Hammadu's role in juristic debates confirmed the same portrait of his persona. Even Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, who turned most discussions of Hammadu Usman into occasions to speak about the scholarly accomplishments of his own relatives, admitted that he was "a great scholar"¹⁰² and that, "as for knowledge, you would say there was no one like him among the Suuduu6e."¹⁰³ Aamadu Adu called him "a learned man and a truth-owner."¹⁰⁴ Layya Mbiiga identified him as "a great scholar,"¹⁰⁵ who had a lot of understanding,¹⁰⁶ and Umaru Usu Yatara named him among the community's leading scholars during the colonial period.¹⁰⁷ Hammadu Usman's son, Usman Hammadu Usman, was generally shy about describing his father's accomplishments, but he stated without bravado that his "father was the one who coincided with European rule and had studied books." The general definition of the scholar

¹⁰² Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 1/13/2007.

¹⁰³ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 2/25/2007.

¹⁰⁴ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

¹⁰⁵ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 7/13/2005.

¹⁰⁶ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 3/15/2007.

¹⁰⁷ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 8/26/2005.

(*moodibo*), which Usman offered just before this statement about his own father, reflected both general ideals in his society and the specific scholarly model which his father exemplified. “One who studied the Qur’an and studied books, whose quality of ‘being lost’ has gone away, who understands his religion, is asked questions and says [the answer] – that is a *moodibo*.”¹⁰⁸ Usman’s unassuming phrase *lamndaa haali* (“was asked, spoke”) neatly completes the line from intellectual engagement with text to the specific social activity of competently answering legal questions – the trajectory also of his father’s life.

Another social activity which scholars performed was teaching. On this point also, the independent testimonies of multiple interviewees confirm a common picture of Hammadu Usman. “I did not know him to have a school (*duḍal*),” said Aamadu Adu, just before underlining that he was nonetheless “a learned man and a truth-owner.”¹⁰⁹ Asked again, he added: “I did not hear that” Hammadu Usman had a school, “nor did I see it.” Layya Mbiiga and Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman’s comments followed the same pattern. In separate interviews, each indicated that he did not know Hammadu Usman to have had a school, but went on to highlight that Hammadu was however a noted scholar. Layya Mbiiga added also that he was the imam.¹¹⁰ Hammadu Aamadu stressed his primacy in juristic debates.¹¹¹

Usman Hammadu Usman’s recollection differed to some extent. “My father was a teacher ... of law,¹¹²” he stated. But he did not claim that Hammadu Usman had many students.

¹⁰⁸ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 8/26/2005.

¹⁰⁹ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 1/13/2007.

¹¹⁰ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 1/13/2007.

¹¹¹ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 1/13/2007.

¹¹² Fulfulde: *figihi*, from the Arabic: *fiqh*.

“The only person” he “found who was studying knowledge¹¹³ with” his father was “Hammadu Konsa,” who had “died a long time ago.”¹¹⁴ The name by which Usman knew this student indicates that he came from the distant village of Konsa (ca. 90 km south of Ruumde). Hammadu Usman oversaw some of his son’s education, but the other young people of Ruumde studied elsewhere. The biggest school in the village was Alfa Kodda Iisa’s; Aamadu Adu’s teacher Num Allay Aamadu also attracted many local students.¹¹⁵ Usman Hammadu’s recollection of his father’s teaching adds a dimension to our portrait of Hammadu Usman, but it does not contradict the essence of the others’ testimony. Hammadu played several scholarly social roles in his community, but not all of them. His contribution to teaching the young members of the community, who were coming of age at the end of his life, was minimal.

My five sources who personally remembered Hammadu Usman belong to much the same generation. Born in the 1920s or early 1930s, their accounts of the scholar reflect, in part, personal experience at a particular moment in time. They were boys or, at least, not full adults at the end of Hammadu’s life and many of them emphasized their personal observation of his old age. With the partial exception of Usman Hammadu, they agreed that Hammadu did not have a significant school when they were conscious enough to be aware of his activities. But they were equivocal about whether he might have been a more active teacher earlier in his life. Aamadu Adu’s most vivid memories of village life are from a period of about four years in the late thirties and early forties, during which he studied in Ruumde with a younger teacher named Num Allay. At that time, he offered, people of Hammadu Usman’s age “had indeed ceased teaching.”

¹¹³ Fulfulde: *ilmu*, from the Arabic: *‘ilm*. Usman’s use of this term leaves it ambiguous as to whether Hammadu Konsa was Hammadu Usman’s only student or his only advanced student.

¹¹⁴ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 8/26/2005.

¹¹⁵ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

“When I came into the hands of my *mobbo*,¹¹⁶ people such as the imam had become extremely old.”¹¹⁷ Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman also linked the two propositions. “I did not find” Hammadu Usman “with a school. ... I found he had become an old man.”¹¹⁸ Many of my interviewees remembered Hammadu as they personally “found” him.¹¹⁹

Yet the accounts even of those who directly observed Hammadu Usman do not reflect individual experience alone. Growing up, my interviewees learned about the aged scholar from what other people said, either in statements made directly to them or in conversations which they overheard. Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman’s relatives, such as his uncle Jampullo Aduraaman, shaped markedly his perceptions of Hammadu Usman. Aamadu Adu cited his *mobbo* as a seminal influence. Layya Mbiiga, an uneducated slave, heard the talk which circulated in Ruumde’s slave neighborhood. He was also proud when he met people from nearby villages, who would comment appreciatively on Ruumde’s scholars when they learned that he was from there. Usman Hammadu, his father’s youngest son, probably learned much about the man from his older brothers, such as Buubakar, Hamma, and Num Hammadu, the “best man” at Usman’s wedding, which took place after Hammadu Usman’s death.¹²⁰ Umaru Usu Yataru, a casted “leather-worker”¹²¹ (*gargasaajo*) and community history expert, learned about Hammadu with special emphasis on the genealogical context to his life, the domain in which the *gargasaajo*’s

¹¹⁶ Abbreviated form of *moodibo*, i.e. “scholar,” or in this case “teacher” or “master.”

¹¹⁷ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 4/1/2007.

¹¹⁸ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 2/25/2007.

¹¹⁹ The Fulfulde source word is *tawde*, which means not to find a lost object, but rather to find a person or situation at a specific time.

¹²⁰ UHU, File 11, Image 5330.

¹²¹ I place “leather-worker” in quotes because I do not know whether Umaru Usu ever actually worked leather. The greater significance of the occupational designation for our purposes is the special role which it conferred to praise, insult, and beg based on inherited rights to invoke historical knowledge.

relatives were particularly knowledgeable and interested. Despite their varied provenance, these conversations about the man at the end of his life and after it would have overlapped in the small community.

Through such overlapping conversations, a basic consensus about Hammadu Usman emerged. The consensus portrait does not yield an event-history of Hammadu's life. The fundamental question shaping this source was not "What happened?" in the narrow, literal sense of event-history, but rather: Who was Hammadu? What did his life mean? The answer, which those who posed these questions settled on, had some features of the "cliché," which Jan Vansina identifies as a hallmark of oral traditional discourse and a key to decoding the historical significance embedded in such discourse.¹²² Their answer did not have the fantastic quality, which rendered many of Vansina's clichés memorable. But it had the banality, which characterizes both the cliché in its common-language sense and also, paradoxically, fantastic oral historical clichés worn down by frequent use. The answer was that Hammadu Usman had been a scholar. Everyone agreed on that and underlined it with the whole gamut of emphatics, which the Gimbale dialect of Fulfulde offers. They rendered that label precise by picking apart the roles of the scholar and sorting out those he performed from those he did not. He read text well and knew a lot. (His 1900 and 1907 textbooks offer documentary support to this social memory.) He did not run a significant school. (This negative statement reinforces the credibility of the positive ones.) He was asked about questions of religious law and he would say the answer (*lamndaa haali*). He owned the "truth" in the kind of juristic debates, which, though of no value to colonial observers, mattered deeply to his community. The community's consensus

¹²² Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 139-142.

about his memory recorded a “truth” about Hammadu Usman’s life and about the social meaning of Islamic knowledge in colonial-era Ruumde.

Becoming Imam: An Event-History

Local memories did also preserve event-histories about Hammadu Usman. One crucial event in Hammadu’s career was his appointment as imam. Several of my sources remembered Hammadu as an aged imam, who, they heard, had already served a long time in the position. None of them was old enough to remember his appointment personally, nor could they date the event with precision. But their testimonies about the stories which they had heard combined with local and colonial documentary evidence indicate that it was probably between 1907 and 1914. One meaning of the event was Hammadu’s coming-of-age as a scholar with a measure of communal authority – the beginning of the phase of his life, which created the consensus profile discussed above. Additional significance was encoded in the memory of disagreements within the community about his candidacy. This debate reflected the competing models about who could speak as a scholar, which co-existed in early twentieth-century Ruumde. Hammadu’s appointment recorded the strength of a model which recognized scholars as emerging within the community, rather than forming a separate class distinct from it.

Coming-of-Age: A Chronology. Dating Hammadu Usman’s appointment as imam requires the combination of oral, colonial, and local written sources. One key chronological reference point was the institution of the chiefship. Layya Mbiiga recalled that Hammadu Usman’s “imamate

coincided with the reign of Dawda Siidi.”¹²³ Layya, one of my oldest interviewees, remembered this chief well. Towards the end of Dawda’s life in the 1930s, the young Layya served as his *sofaajo*, a term for “slave-soldier” which had more literal military significance during the pre-colonial era. For Layya, being a *sofaajo* seemed to mean, above all, serving as a traveling companion for the chief. When Dawda had business with the colonial administration, Layya would accompany him for the 45-km trip to cercle headquarters in Niafounké. Layya and other community members concur that Dawda Siidi was a long-serving chief, who died before the painfully memorable “year of the locusts” (1941/42).

The chiefship was a reference point in colonial records, too. Colonial writers kept no known records about the imamate or Hammadu Usman, specifically. But they did preserve a picture of Dawda Siidi’s reign, complementing local sources with a more precise attention to dates. According to contemporary French records, Dawda was installed as chief twice. He first became chief in 1914, after the death of the chief, whom colonial officials knew as “Amadou Amidi Bouya.” A year later, Dawda was unseated in favor of “Amadou Birahima Boudya,” the paternal cousin of the previous chief. In 1917, the French attributed this quick end to Dawda’s first term to the complaints of “the notables of Roundé Soudoubé,” who charged him with causing them unspecified “irritations” (*tracasseries*). The notables preferred “Amadou Birahima Boudya” for the reasons which lost him the favor of the French: “his qualities of a perfect good-for-nothing,” who was “incapable of any act of initiative or authority.” The French report of 1917 claimed that “Daouda Cissé” was already the real “managing head” of the community. In 1918, “Amadou Birahima” himself recommended that Dawda Siidi replace him. In 1919, he did,

¹²³ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

beginning a second term as chief, which lasted until his death sometime not long before September 12, 1938.¹²⁴

Dawda Siidi's reign was long and memorable for my interviewees, many of whom recalled this chief as the first they knew personally. They associated Hammadu Usman's imamate with his reign. Hamma Layya, the son of Layya Mbiiga, had heard that the imam and Dawda belonged to the same age-group.¹²⁵ But Hammadu Usman's appointment seems to have preceded the chief's. Several older interviewees, including his son Usman, listed him as the village's first imam, while they could name village chiefs who preceded Dawda.¹²⁶ This definition of "first" clearly meant after the death of Haamidi Bujja, a pre-colonial figure, who had served as both chief and imam. Even so, our sources suggest that Hammadu Usman served as imam not only throughout Dawda's reign, but also before it.

Hamma Layya, who was born in the 1950s and did not remember Hammadu Usman personally, gave the fullest account of the scholar's installation as imam. Chiming in after his father Layya Mbiiga connected Hammadu's imamate to the reign of Dawda Siidi, Hamma Layya added that it also preceded Dawda's chiefship. "During Aadu Haydu's reign, they made him the imam." Aadu Haydu "ruled the village and made Hammadu Usman imam."¹²⁷ Aadu Haydu was none other than Aamadu Haamidi Bujja, known to French officials as "Amadou Amidi Bouya." Unfortunately, French records do not provide the tight chronology for his reign that they do for Dawda's. From 1893 when Ruumde was incorporated into the colonial cercle of Bandiagara to 1909, French officials did not write down the names of any of the village's chiefs. From 1903 to

¹²⁴ ANM (FR) 2E52.

¹²⁵ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

¹²⁶ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

¹²⁷ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

1908, they provided only sparse notes on tax and census-related matters. In 1909, they opened a file on chiefs of cantons, such as the small one which Ruumde headed. From this file, we know that Aadu Haydu ruled Ruumde from at least 1909 until his death in 1914.

Hamma Layya's narrative does not specify at which point during his rule Aadu Haydu chose Hammadu Usman as imam, but it does give some useful clues. The other leading candidate for the position was a scholar from Tannere, a nearby village which had been abandoned during the tumultuous pre-colonial era of Futanke rule and then re-constituted in the early colonial period. This memory is one piece of evidence that Hammadu's imamate began after 1893.

Hamma Layya's statement that Hammadu was a young man (*suka jokolle*) at the time of his appointment is another clue. Even so, he probably would have been too young to be named in the 1890s. We do not have any record of Hammadu's birth-date, but his younger brother Iisa Usman and younger sister Ummu Usman show up on colonial census records preserved in the family library. The records date to 1941, so the estimations of Iisa and Ummu's birth-dates as 1883 and 1886, respectively, should be taken with a grain of salt.¹²⁸ Still, the dating of the birth of Ummu's first child to 1903 yields a plausible interval for the typical female life-cycle, as does the dating of Iisa's first child to 1921 for the male life-cycle. The two birth-dates match the birth order of Usman Umaru's children cited in oral accounts.¹²⁹ Usman Umaru's first son Hammadu was probably born a few years before Iisa, ca. 1880. The Fulfulde term *suka jokolle* suggests a young man, probably unmarried, whose age could range anywhere from late adolescence to his early thirties. The correlation of this term with clues from census forms and oral testimony about

¹²⁸ UHU, File 2, Images 1326-1329.

¹²⁹ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 2005.

Hammadu's siblings reinforces the plausibility of Aadu Haydu's death-date in 1914 as an upper threshold and supports pushing the lower threshold beyond 1893.

Other clues in Hamma Layya's narrative invite correlation with Arabic textual materials in Hammadu's library. Unlike Usman Hammadu, Hamma Layya related that Hammadu Usman was not the first imam after the functions of chief and imam split following Haamidi Bujja's death. When Hammadu's predecessor Bokar Haawa died, the village "decided to search for people who could become their imam. It happened that Hammadu Usman was here" in Ruumde, "a young man with knowledge." Aadu Haydu justified his support for Hammadu, in part, by stating: "He understands what he has read."¹³⁰ Viewed in tandem with the documentary evidence examined in chapter II, Hamma Layya's narration suggests that this moment occurred after 1907 when Hammadu Usman would have returned to Ruumde with "knowledge" obtained during study-trips to the nearby villages of Seke (where he signed his 1900 *Tuhfat al-hukkam*) and Anjam (where he signed his 1907 *Risāla*). The command over text, which he demonstrated in his 1907 *Risāla*, could very well have earned him the modest, but sincere admiration expressed by Chief Aadu, who was a scholar himself and the son of a renowned scholar. Hammadu left further circumstantial evidence that he became imam around 1907 on the reverse side of his *Risāla*'s title page. The formula, which he cribbed there, would have helped him perform one of his most important new functions as imam: the "tying" of marriages (*haḓḓinde dewgal*).¹³¹ It is likely that he wrote it both not long after his appointment and while his *Risāla* manuscript was still fresh in his hands. Correspondences between oral and written sources suggest that Hammadu became Ruumde's imam between 1907 and 1914. The event marked his

¹³⁰ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

¹³¹ UHU, File 4, Image 4483.

transition from a young man, who understood what he read (the intellectual trajectory he had traveled from 1900 to 1907), to a more mature scholar with community responsibilities.

Lineage and Scholarship: A Debate. The event also created a memory of community debate.

Hammadu's candidacy for imam was contested. Opponents objected to his non-scholarly family background. This linkage of the imamate to lineage prestige reflected one model of scholarly authority, which existed in early twentieth-century Ruumde. Yet this model was neither the only one nor, Hammadu's ultimate appointment proved, the strongest. Another model defined scholarly authority as technical competence, which individuals could acquire regardless of family occupational history; lineage was significant to the role of a community scholar because it established community membership, not scholarly standing. The event of Hammadu's appointment created a memory, through which we can examine competing models of scholarly authority and their relative strengths.

In Hamma Layya's telling, unnamed opponents of Hammadu's candidacy "said they would not make him imam. He is the son of a red Pullo."¹³² The designation "red Pullo" (*pullo bodeejo*) had a very specific, double connotation in this context. It referred positively to noble Fulɓe who exemplified the group's values and occupational identity as herders. It connoted negatively those Fulɓe who did not acquire sufficient Islamic knowledge to represent the group's intellectual values. The opponents of the herder's son "said they would go bring back a scholar from Tannere," a nearby village inhabited, like Ruumde, by members of the Suuduuɓe clan. In contrast with Hammadu Usman, "Demmba Num Kaaw" belonged to "a big house of scholars (*moodibaaɓe*)."

¹³² Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, 3/15/2007.

Chief Aadu Haydu had personal reasons to buy into the opponents' linkage of scholarly authority and the imamate to lineage prestige. Aadu, or Aamadu, was the son of Haamidi Bujja, also known as Alfa Haydu, the first chief of the new village of Ruumde Suuduuḡe at its founding in the late nineteenth century and a legendary scholar. Haamidi Bujja's surviving correspondence demonstrates that his scholarly attainments were not mere legend. One letter is a heartfelt plea to an "older brother" to lend him his copy of a commentary on the advanced legal textbook, the *Mukhtasar* of Khalīl.

I heard that you have *al-Safar al-akhyar min sharh al-mukhtasar* by 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Zarqānī ... from the chapter on rents (*bāb al-ijāra*) to the end. I have copied [this book from the manuscript of another] brother ... up to the point where I almost finished it. I had two chapters left, bequests (*al-wasiyya*) and inheritance (*al-mawārith*), when he took it away from me, leaving me dismayed and what I had copied deficient. I want you to lend me the remaining portion so I can complete it, for the sake of the Islamic brotherhood, old friendship, and good opinion, which are between me and you. The remaining portion starts at the end of the chapter on clientage (*al-walā*'), where [the author] says: "The clientage relationship returns to the manumitter of [the slave]" May God bring to fruition our hopes and yours, and make fine our ending and yours. Peace.¹³³

Chief Aadu's father was no "red Pullo." He was an accomplished scholar who wrote eloquently, maintained "fraternal" ties with other scholars, applied himself patiently to the mastery of legal textbooks, and cared passionately about the acquisition of textual knowledge. He bequeathed to his lineage not only chiefly legitimacy, but also scholarly prestige.

Haamidi Bujja's letter also subtly illustrates the currency which the linkage between scholarship and lineage prestige had among the Suuduuḡe in his time, a generation prior to the debate over Hammadu Usman's accession to the imamate. Haamidi names the scholar, who had prematurely asked for his book back, as "Uthmān Fūdī, the son of our father, the jurist Ahmad

¹³³ Library: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe (hereafter HAA), File 7, Images 1024-1025.

b. Abī Bakr.” He addressed his letter to “Muhammad al-Sanūsī, the son of our deceased father, who is too famous to need to have his dear name expressed.” In speaking of the scholarly colleagues on whose “good opinion” he depended for access to books, Haamidi expressed his good opinion for them partly by showing respect for the scholarly prestige of their lineages.

Hammadu Usman’s appointment suggests an alternative local model of scholarly authority and the imamate, which in this case trumped lineage prestige. Aadu Haydu had good reasons to share his father’s respect for the principle of lineage prestige, but he expressed his better reasons for supporting Hammadu Usman’s candidacy in his rejoinder to the young scholar’s opponents. “If it comes down to a choice between” Hammadu Usman and Demmba Num Kaaw, “a son of Usman Hurguru is whom I trust more.” Like his adversaries, the chief appealed to lineage, but he sidelined the question of lineage occupational history, focusing instead on the lineage’s history of trustworthy behavior and location within the community. Unlike Demmba Num Kaaw, Hammadu Usman belonged to the community of Ruumde. “He is the one I know more,” added the chief. “He understands what he has read. He is not capricious. If I am the one to choose, I would make him the imam.”¹³⁴

To become imam, Hammadu did not need to be the son of a scholar so famous that it would be superfluous to mention his name. Aadu Haydu argued that it was enough that he was the son of a trusted member of the community, known to the community himself, and known to have a suitable personality. To become a jurist (*faqīh*), he did not need to be the son of a jurist like Haamidi Bujja’s “brother,” ‘Uthmān Fūdī. He needed to study law (*fiqh*) and understand what he read. Technical devotion to text superseded inherited family reputation. The heart of Aadu’s father’s letter was the emotional attachment to the technical process of acquiring textual

¹³⁴ Interview: Hama Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 3/15/2007.

competence. Respect paid to lineage was a secondary consideration. Aadu's selection of Hammadu Usman as imam showed that he knew the difference between the core and peripheral markings of a scholar. Hammadu had a modest family background, but his serious attachment to the process of acquiring textual competence granted him a more important kinship for scholars, entitling him to the "Islamic brotherhood" and "good opinion" which prevailed, a generation earlier, among Haamidi Bujja and his "brothers." Lineage did not make one a scholar. Study did. Lineage made one a member of the community. Though he was not from a learned family, Hammadu's learning as an individual and his family's history within the community enabled him to assume his role as a community scholar.

Speaking as Imam

The imamate authorized Hammadu to speak one scholarly idiom to his community. Hearing how he spoke as imam presents a formidable methodological challenge. Few documents refer directly to his imamate. Those that do indicate the general prestige, which the office conferred, and the broad conception of scholarly knowledge, which Hammadu had while he held the office. They tell us very little about how he held his office, about how he spoke as imam.

The main component of the imam's idiom was a defined set of public rituals. As imam, Hammadu performed repetitive, quotidian ritual actions, such as leading daily prayers or overseeing naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. These functions were central to community life, but also highly forgettable. They gave rise to few enduring, written or oral narratives.

Nevertheless, close attention to some of Hammadu's non-narrative jottings can bring out his ritual voice as imam. He borrowed most of his words from core Islamic texts, which defined the imamate within the rather circumscribed structures of ritual law (*al-'ibādāt*). His role as imam largely involved faithfully transposing this set of written texts to the public, spoken realm. Hammadu's copies of these texts display how he developed this restrained and formulaic voice, but they also reveal how he subtly added individual accents and even social claims. Hammadu's wedding benediction quietly expresses a significant position on local gender relations. His funeral supplication note documents the muted creativity, with which a village imam could craft his ritual speech.

The heart of the imam's idiom was formulaic speech tied to ritual law, but the rituals could give rise to other kinds of public talk. In addition to detailing the ritual functions of the office, textual treatments dealt with one other legal question: the pre-requisites for serving as imam. Hammadu left both written and oral traces of the significance which this question had for him. His written note displays his interest in its theoretical complexities. An oral narrative dramatizes the social stakes it could have. Most of what the imam was authorized to say was rather unremarkable ritual, but when his authority itself came under attack Hammadu lashed out, mixing hostile words with erudition. Nuanced niceties in the marginalia of legal textbooks could fan the flames of heated community arguments. The imamate was, at once, a textual practice and a public oral practice. The imam spoke primarily on circumscribed topics and in muted tones within textually-authorized parameters. But the authority to speak for ritual law to the community could also spark harsher, less scripted public talk.

“The Imam of Rūmde, Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān b. ‘Umar.” The few written documents

which refer to Hammadu Usman as imam offer two pieces of information. Some give a general impression of the prestige which his office gave him. Another one shows that he continued to develop broad scholarly competence while he served as imam. They reveal little about how he served as imam or the specific scholarly voice of the office.

In Gimbala, it is impolite to call an imam by his real name. Immediately after the appointment of an imam, Gimbalans address the office-holder by his title, *Almaami*. This mark of respect is due even to young men, as Hammadu was at the time of his appointment.¹³⁵ A series of tax documents in the papers of the descendents of Chief Dawda Siidi show that Hammadu was accorded this respect. While referring to all other taxpayers by name, they refer to him only as “the imam of Rūmde.”¹³⁶ Though the documents do not mention his name, the imam in question was clearly Hammadu Usman, since the same documents refer to his eventual successor separately by name, “Alfa Nūh Khālīd.”¹³⁷ In the tax receipt which Hammadu kept for himself, he called himself by name: “Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān.”¹³⁸ But the office that he held defined his public identity and marked it with a degree of formality.¹³⁹

Hammadu’s title also appears on the colophon page of one of the books in his library. “Yūsuf b. Abū [sic] Bakr b. Alfa ‘Umar” completed the writing of the manuscript, signing his name as such, while noting that “the owner of this book is the imam of Rūmde, Muhammad b.

¹³⁵ I witnessed this practice in the summer of 2004, when a very young friend with a mischievous sense of humor transformed instantly from the familiar diminutive “Sam Musel” to the august “Almaami Aaya,” the imam of the village of Hoore Aaya.

¹³⁶ Library: Amiiri Ruumde, Ruumde Suuduu6e, File 1, Images 7787, 7811, and 7829.

¹³⁷ Library: Amiiri Ruumde, Ruumde Suuduu6e, File 1, Images 7788 and 7829.

¹³⁸ UHU, File 4, Images 4513-4514. The exact match in the amount of cattle-tax paid in this and the chief’s records provides further evidence that Hammadu Usman was the imam in question.

¹³⁹ Contrast this formality with the familiarity expressed before his appointment by both sides of the debate, where they identified him as “a son of a red Pullo” or “a son of Usman Hurguru.”

‘Uthmān b. ‘Umar.’”¹⁴⁰ Hammadu himself seems to have begun the copying of the text, writing over one hundred and twenty folios in his distinctive handwriting. An abrupt shift of handwriting on image 5090 marks where he turned the job over to Yūsuf for the last approximately fifty folios.

The book was a collection of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, known locally as the *Sitta* (“The Six”) for the six poets whose work it included. Hammadu’s acquisition of the text after his appointment as imam shows his continued intellectual curiosity. The detailed notes which he added in the margins of the poems of Imru’u al-Qays, the first and most famous of the poets, show that he was still a methodical reader and a dedicated Arabic linguist. Pre-Islamic poetry, such as that of Imru’u al-Qays, celebrated values, which Hammadu’s Islamic education would have taught him to reject. Yet it also contained a rich Arabic lexicography, which the same education taught him to admire deeply and to regard as a crucial aid for the study of Islamic texts, especially the Qur’an.¹⁴¹ Hammadu’s *Sitta* demonstrates that, after becoming imam, he continued to pursue the mastery of “letters,” which he had declared as his goal in his charm of 1900. The manuscript suggests that “the imam of Rūmde, Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān b. ‘Umar,” conceived of scholarship in broad interdisciplinary terms and continued to broaden his own knowledge. It does not tell us how he conceived of his specific scholarly role as imam.

Ritual Speech. Hammadu acquired his conception of his role as imam largely from his legal textbooks. These texts delimited the role of the imam primarily to the realm of ritual law (*al-*

¹⁴⁰ UHU, File 11, Image 5034.

¹⁴¹ The same file where I found Hammadu’s legal textbooks also contained a section of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī copied in handwriting markedly similar to that used in the legal books and the first hand in the imam’s *Sitta*; this other key text in the local curriculum of *lughā*, or language, offers further evidence of Hammadu’s sustained interest in the discipline.

‘ibādāt). As such, his 1900 copy of the *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, which dealt exclusively with the legal framework for social behavior (*al-mu‘āmalāt*), taught him less about the imamate than his 1907 manuscript of the *Risāla*, which dealt with both legal realms. Theory shaped practice. Hammadu led his community in many of the kinds of prayers, outlined theoretically in the *Risāla*. Another feature of the imam’s ritual practice was to preside over life-cycle rituals for his co-villagers. A wedding supplication note on the back of Hammadu’s *Risāla* and a funeral supplication note on the margins of a relevant page preserve his words from two such ritual occasions. Hammadu’s ritual voice was a formulaic one, which borrowed heavily from the words of classic text. Yet even within this circumscribed genre, he found room to make his voice his own.

It was an authoritative voice in its time, but a very soft one with respect to the historical sources it produced. We will need to strain our ears to hear it, for Hammadu’s ritual speech as imam was too routine and ordinary to create durable narratives in either written or oral form. To hear such faint historical voices we will need to learn how to listen to unorthodox sources. Hammadu’s non-narrative written notes allow us to reconstruct not only how he read and thought through text, but also how he sounded when he spoke publicly to his village. His voice as village imam is one worth hearing, at once widely representative and yet individual. Listening carefully we can hear both the general tones of Paul Marty’s “dust-cloud” and the specific words of one of its specks. We can hear both discursive techniques, which village imams shared, and the echoes of a social debate, which divided them.

The *Risāla* was one important, common reference point on the imamate. Chapter 11 of the work concentrates specifically on the imamate. It deals primarily with the imam’s defining function in leading prayer. Other chapters in the work also include discussions of the imam’s

ritual functions. These varied tasks include leading specialized kinds of prayers (e.g. on Friday or feast-days, in a situation of fear, or to request rain), leaning on a bow or staff during the Friday sermon, being the first to perform the sacrifice on *ʿīd al-adhā*, and not participating in the prayer for a person whom the imam has himself ordered to be executed in accordance with a *hadd* punishment.¹⁴²

In practice, Hammadu may not have carried out all of these theoretical functions of the imamate. There is no evidence that Hammadu ever ordered an execution. He may not have delivered Friday sermons, since the small village of Ruumde did not fulfill the pre-conditions for holding Friday communal prayer, as locally interpreted. He did lead everyday prayers in the mosque and feast-day prayers. When he did, he brought a specific set of Islamic texts into community practice. He rendered textual precepts as fixed movements of his body and as fixed Arabic textual formulas uttered through his mouth.¹⁴³ The imam's job made alphabetic text seen as movement, felt in the body, heard as speech, and experienced as a public performance.

Gimbalan village imams such as Hammadu also made text oral and public through their role in life-cycle rituals. Hammadu would have led naming ceremonies for week-old village babies (Arabic: *ʿaqīqa*; Fulfulde: *lamru*). One of his notes in the *Risāla* shows him working out the kinds of sacrificial animals which are licit for such occasions.¹⁴⁴ He would have certified

¹⁴² This last topic indicates the overlap between ritual and social law. The *Risāla* acknowledges that the imam could play a role beyond the ritual realm. Yet even this passage prioritizes the ritual issue of the prayer. The *Risāla* considers the possibility that an imam may be involved in applying a *hadd* punishment in order to explore its legal consequences for the imam's primary role in leading rituals, such as the prayer for the dead.

¹⁴³ These textual formulas included both the (generally shorter) Qur'anic suras, from which the worshipper should choose at defined stages of the prayer ritual, and formulas specific to other stages, such as the *takbīr*, the *qunūt*, and the *salām*.

¹⁴⁴ UHU, File 4, Image 4585. Hammadu seems to have written another note related to naming ceremonies on the reverse side of the title page of another of his legal textbooks: al-ʿAbqārī's commentary on the introductory text of al-Akhdarī. The ink is slightly worn at the critical place on the document, but it appears to be a "benefit for a naming ceremony" (*ʿaqīqa*). The six-line ritual formula which Hammadu wrote after this title includes the instruction to recite it at "the time of the dawn's rising," the same moment of the day when naming ceremonies took

marriage contracts, “tying marriages” as the Fulfulde idiom (*haŋŋinde dewgal*) expresses it.

He would have played a role in funeral rites, such as the ritual washing of the corpse and leading the funeral prayer. As in basic prayers, the speech appropriate to these life-cycle rituals was formulaic. But it was less fixed. It left more room for the individual authorial voice of the imam and could be expressed in the vernacular.

Hammadu’s authorial voice emerges in the benediction which he used when he presided over wedding rituals. As the village imam freshly-appointed by Chief Aadu Haydu, Hammadu would have been called upon to “tie marriages.” On these occasions, he would have met with male representatives from both the groom’s and the bride’s sides. He would have made sure that they had agreed upon a sum for the bride-wealth payment and that the groom’s side had paid it. Then he would have recited a formula making the marriage official. It was probably around the time when he assumed his position as imam that Hammadu reached for the empty folio on the back of the title page of his freshly-copied *Risāla*. On that folio, he wrote in Arabic the marriage formula, which he would have said in Fulfulde:

Praise God who made marriage licit and the spilling of blood illicit, who created the human-being from liquid and appointed for him kinship and the payment of bridal money. Your Lord is powerful. I testify to you, the angels of God and the Muslims present here, that so-and-so son of so-and-so wanted to marry so-and-so daughter of so-and-so. We married her to him with her permission and the permission of her family. Her bridal dower is known. [It has been] obtained publicly or declared with good intentions. O God, establish between the two of them harmony, happiness, a wide prosperity, and healthy offspring with the protection of the Master of the first people and the last, Muhammad, God’s blessings and peace be upon him.¹⁴⁵

place. The instruction also to recite the formula “ten times” suggests that it was not merely an imam’s invocation, but also an esoteric technique to achieve beneficial results, perhaps protection for the new-born child. For a fuller discussion of esoteric knowledge in Ruumde, see chapter VI below. For Hammadu Usman Umaru’s secret techniques for child welfare and reproductive health, see chapter VI, 251. For this “benefit for a naming ceremony,” see UHU, File 8, Image 6724.

¹⁴⁵ UHU, File 4, Image 4483.

The “so-and-so” blanks to be filled in reveal that the document gave Hammadu a template for repeated use. The template was not Hammadu’s alone, as another copy of a very similar text in another village library confirms. Hammadu borrowed his words from core Islamic text and shared them with other village imams, who performed the same function in similar ways. But comparison of the two texts reveals not only consensus, but also the contours of a debate about marriage and gender relations.

Hammadu’s wedding benediction circulated in Gimbalan learned circles in both written and oral forms. In ca. 1940, when Hammadu Usman was an aging imam, Num Allay Aamadu of Ruumde was a young scholar and Qur’an school teacher. Like Hammadu, he underwent a period of legal training, most notably with Ali Alfa Saydu of the village of Ngorku (22 kilometers southwest of Ruumde). Like Hammadu, he ultimately became Ruumde’s imam. Also like Hammadu, Num Allay wrote for himself a formula for “tying” marriages, which set aside spaces to fill in the names for the groom and bride involved in a given ceremony.¹⁴⁶ Hammadu and Num’s versions used most of the same words. They are similar enough to establish that both drew on a common source text and that both mastered its essential meaning and basic format. With their variant additions and spelling errors, they are different enough to suggest that each scholar may have each acquired the formula as a circulating oral text.¹⁴⁷ The primary performance setting for the oral text was the marriage ritual. Num likely wrote his document when he became imam in the 1960s. Its content may reflect, in part, Num’s attempt to write down in Arabic what he had heard Hammadu say at the weddings, which Num would have

¹⁴⁶ Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 1, Image 2915.

¹⁴⁷ See chapter II for a similar interpretation of variant copies of a legal note about people who eat during Ramadan without being held responsible for the greater penance (*kaffāra*).

attended in his youth in the Ruumde of the 1930s and 1940s. The two texts represent a level of consensus among village imams about the appropriate ritual words for weddings.

They also subtly record the fault-lines of a social debate. In his wedding formula, Hammadu affirmed a particular conception of the institution of marriage. His role was ritual, but marriage had clear social stakes and it was a key issue in the realm of social law (*al-mu'āmalāt*). The formula grounded marriage in God's transcendent authority. It defined legitimate marriage in terms of the Islamic legal concept of *mahr*, the bride-wealth payment, which the groom's family made to the bride's and which set in place a financial penalty for her family to discourage her from leaving him. It assigned the initiative for marriages to the male party, the "son of so-and-so" who "wanted to marry" the "daughter of so-and-so." The formula clearly expressed a patriarchal view of marriage. At the same time, it insisted on a rule-bound patriarchy. The bride herself was entitled to "her dower" (Arabic: *sadāquhā*), which had to be publicly "known" and either "obtained" or "declared with good intention" by the time of the union. The Arabic term used in the formula may have referred to the Fulfulde concept of *safande*, a dower which gave the bride some financial independence from her husband – resources which she could dispose of as she saw fit within her marriage and which she would retain in case of divorce. The formula also explicitly predicated the validity of the marriage on the bride's consent: "her permission" as well as "the permission of her family." Built with the borrowed words of ritual consensus, Hammadu's wedding benediction made a statement on gender relations.

Hammadu's text by itself gives no indication of controversy, but comparison and some context reveal its significance as one side within a local debate. Num Allay's version of the wedding formula was identical to Hammadu's in all substantial aspects of form and content,

except two. Num omitted precisely the section of text which referred to the bride's dower and her consent.

The *safande* is a standard, taken-for-granted feature of Gimbala marriage. Num's omission did signal that *safande* was a low priority for him; one may speculate how this nuance affected negotiations over the amount of dower to be paid. But the omission probably did not remove it from the weddings, over which Num presided.

Num's failure to mention bridal consent would have had greater social significance, because this issue has been a point of greater controversy in Gimbala society. Male friends of mine in the village of Ngayna (18 km from Ruumde) narrated the history of this issue in connection with the practice of *sinye* (from the French *signer*), or registering a marriage with civil authorities. *Sinye* began in Ngayna after independence, they explained, introducing me to the chuckling old man who had been the first in the village to register his marriage at the arrondissement government office in Sarafere.¹⁴⁸ The effect of *sinye*, they explained further with regret, was to make it harder for a young woman's male kin to compel her to marry the man they chose for her. Fortunately in their view, it was still possible in 2005 to contract marriages with the sanction of religious authorities alone. By avoiding *sinye*, male custodians could avoid that critical and dangerous moment when the civil official would pose questions to the bride, reminding her of her civil rights. The oral history of *sinye* described a debate over bridal consent, which pitted postcolonial civil authorities against proponents of customary religious marriage.

¹⁴⁸ The only civil marriage document which I have recovered in Ruumde likewise dates to the postcolonial 1960s. On August 7, 1963, the head of the arrondissement of Sarafere certified the celebration of the marriage of Hammadu Usman's son Usman Hammadu ("Ousmane Hamadoun") and Iidi Iisa ("Idy Issa") at the town hall. UHU, File 11, Image 5330.

The discrepancy between Hammadu and Num's versions of the wedding formula gives this debate a deeper history and draws its fault-lines differently. The debate did not begin with *sinYE* in the 1960s and the postcolonial state's increasing intrusions in rural social life, as my friends in Ngayna argued. Moreover, it had not always been a debate strictly between civil and religious forms of marriage. Bridal consent was an issue within rural society from at least the early twentieth century. It was an issue on which religious authorities disagreed amongst themselves.

Hammadu Usman's wedding benediction both conformed to the conventions of ritual speech and, at the same time, made a distinct social statement. The imamate furnished its occupants with a circumscribed vocabulary for describing marriage, but it left space for variant readings. Hammadu's formula upheld bridal consent as one important feature of the rule-bound patriarchy, which defined his conception of marriage. His position as imam and his command over appropriate text authorized him to bring this social idea into wedding ritual and public discourse in the village.

Imams also officiated at the end of life. They authored funeral formulas like they authored wedding ones, molding classic Islamic text into their own public speech. Hammadu did not write a freestanding text like his wedding formula about what he said at funerals. Fortunately, we can follow the tracks left by Num Allay's funeral supplication through to the unassuming, but tell-tale clue for recovering Hammadu's voice as well. The funeral formulas have vaguer social stakes than the wedding ones, but the literary processes behind them have greater resolution. Num and Hammadu each crafted a distinct funeral supplication by adopting and adapting passages from authoritative legal texts.

Num Allay wrote his funeral supplication right above his version of the wedding formula. He almost certainly drew the beginning of this supplication from an identical passage in the *Risāla*. The *Risāla* provides the contextual meaning of this supplication, which Num took for granted and did not write. According to the *Risāla*, an imam should lead a funeral prayer by standing at a defined location relative to the deceased. The format of this prayer must include four *takbīrs* and a concluding *salām*.¹⁴⁹ It may also include an additional *du‘ā* (supplication) between the *takbīrs* and the *salām*. The *Risāla* states that the content of this supplication is “not defined” and may take a “wide” variety of forms. Then it offers one of the preferred formulas. The first six lines of Num’s supplication came from the beginning of this formula. But at the phrase “O God, he is your slave, the son of your [male] slave, and the son of your slave woman,” Num left the *Risāla*’s model. Instead he grafted on another valid formula, the funeral supplication of the Prophetic companion Abū Hurayra, which Num may have known from a *hadīth* quoted in Mālik’s *Muwatta’*. Abū Hurayra’s supplication begins with the same phrase as the last one which Num drew from the *Risāla*’s formula. This phrase created a natural link between the two passages, helping to make Num’s combination an integrated, satisfying whole. Choosing from classical textual materials, Num authored his own speech.

Hammadu Usman followed a similar literary process, although it is harder to find. Hammadu did not leave a separate note with his preferred formula for the funeral supplication, as he did for his marriage benediction and Num Allay did for both occasions. He did copy the *Risāla*, including, of course, the section on the funeral prayer. And he subtly indicated that he read that section with interest. In the middle of the *Risāla*’s proposed formula for the funeral

¹⁴⁹ A *takbīr* is the recitation of the phrase “Allahu akbar.” It is generally performed at the point of standing for prayer, and just before bowing (*rukū’*), prostration (*sujūd*), and sitting up from the prostration. A *salām* is the recitation of the phrase “al-salāmu ‘alaykum” at the end of the prayer.

supplication, he inserted an additional invocation of his own choosing: “O God, if You know that he was a Muslim and died a Muslim, forgive him and have mercy on him; and if You know that he was a *kāfir* and died a *kāfir*, then I disavow him.”¹⁵⁰ These phrases fit seamlessly into the style of the *Risāla*’s supplication. Even though Hammadu’s addition starts in the margin, one might suspect that he mistakenly thought the phrases belonged to the original text if Hammadu had not put three dots before and after them. It was a deliberate insertion. Hammadu took advantage of the wide, undefined parameters of the funeral supplication to stamp it with something of his own personality and ideas.

The extra lines which Hammadu added to his *Risāla* show him drafting the funeral supplications, which were part of his public office. He consciously chose to pronounce some specific words in public. One may speculate that he intended to convey a specific social message to his listeners. It would be interesting to know whether Hammadu thought some of the co-villagers whom he buried were secret *kāfirs*, but there is no evidence that he did. Another speculative, but less literal reading would be that Hammadu added the tough words to make funerals a time to inspire his listeners to become better Muslims by infusing the emotions surrounding death with specific anxieties about doctrine and the after-life. Perhaps his hostile tone reflected the mutual hostility, which some oral accounts indicate to have existed between him and some other villagers.

The social significance, which Hammadu aimed at in his funeral supplication, is less clear than the literary methodology, which he employed to create it. Like Num Allay, Hammadu played his role as imam at village rituals surrounding death partly by uttering the appropriate speech of the funeral supplication. This genre was “wide” and “not defined” compared to the

¹⁵⁰ UHU, File 4, Image 4552.

fixed formulas of the standard prayer ritual, but the textual corpus furnished the primary materials and set practical boundaries. Both imams crafted their formulas by combining authoritative texts (such as passages from the *Risāla* or *hadīth*) with a measure of their personal authorial voices. The literary methodology was a deliberate one. Whether or not we can decipher the underlying reason, Hammadu Usman deliberately chose to make death an occasion to talk about unbelief.

Looking at Hammadu's manuscript pages, we have strained our ears to hear the imam's ritual voice. We can find orality in written clues because the village imam's role was a point of interaction between written text and oral speech, between private papers and public performance. Text furnished the primary materials and delimited the general parameters of the imam's ritual voice. But even formulaic speech could admit varied accents. Through formulaic speech, an imam could express both consensus and individual views on intimate matters, such as death or the terms of marriage.

Fighting Words. Ritual speech was formulaic, but the imam's ritual role could spark harsher words and hotter emotions. Public squabbling over the imam's authority was more memorable than ritual formulas, so it created memories and oral narratives. One feast-day sermon in Hammadu's Ruumde led to a village debate about his authority. The solemn script of the *khutba* yielded to a nasty improvised spat. The oral narrative of this incident reveals another way in which Hammadu spoke as imam. It also reveals another way in which the imamate was a meeting point for text and orality. Classic textual treatments define the imamate in terms of two main issues: the imam's ritual roles and the conditions governing his suitability for the office. A marginal note which Hammadu wrote on the latter issue illuminates the full meaning of his angry

public words. Reading analytically and speaking with authority were intertwined village social practices.

Hammadu learned much about the imamate from the *Risāla*. He also learned from another legal textbook, Ibn ‘Ashir’s *al-Murshid al-mu‘īn*, notably its passage on the qualifications for the imamate. Gimbalan students tended to read Ibn ‘Ashir toward the beginning of the phase of their education devoted to legal books. The work concentrates only on ritual law. It is shorter and more introductory than the *Risāla*. Ibn ‘Ashir aimed to treat the essential issues of Mālikī ritual law in a brief, accessible format. He made it easy to remember by writing in the *rajaz* poetic style. He gives a concise summary of the “conditions for being imam” in a mere one and a half lines. The imam must be “male and legally capable.” He must “accomplish the basic elements and know the rules” of the prayer ritual. He must not be “corrupt or unable to pronounce” Arabic. Hammadu learned from this passage and pushed beyond it.

Hammadu did not write his copy of Ibn ‘Ashir, nor did he sign his name to it. We know it was his because he added to its margins a few notes in his identifiable handwriting. His note next to the short passage on qualifications for the imamate pushed the question much further than Ibn ‘Ashir. He wondered how someone praying behind an unqualified imam should act. Many legal works stress the danger of improper ritual leadership. An incompetent imam can invalidate the prayers of all the worshippers assembled with him. Hammadu pushed beyond that position, too, turning for guidance to a more advanced legal text from beyond the standard Gimbalan syllabus. He cited a passage from a commentary called *Sharh al-ta’dhīb*, which imagined the situation of “a man who knows something about his imam, which disqualifies [the imam] from his status.” The passage spells out the process through which this worshipper could “follow the [unqualified] imam’s example” and “imitate [the imam’s] lowering and his raising” in

accordance with the prayer ritual, while ensuring both that “his prayer is valid” and that “the credit, which the community aimed at by their meeting for the adornment of Islam, is [also] produced.”¹⁵¹

In this note, Hammadu displayed the thoughtfulness and command of abstract legal issues, which also characterize the notes in his 1907 *Risāla*. He learned about the imamate from core textbooks, such as Ibn ‘Ashir and the *Risāla*. Yet he often read them for the issues they raised, rather than for definitive answers. For fuller understanding, he looked beyond textbooks to the more nuanced answers of less widely-read works.

Memories of an incident in Hammadu’s life reveal that the question of the “conditions for being imam” held more than merely theoretical interest for him. Hammadu had become old and unpopular, so one feast-day the community asked another scholar to deliver the official sermon. Texts on ritual law defined the sermon as one of the responsibilities of the imamate. The decision was a personal slight, which fueled a heated exchange after the ritual. Hammadu’s angry lecture to his co-villagers about the imamate contained clear echoes of his textual notes on the legal qualifications for the office.

My oral sources remembered Hammadu Usman as a very old man in the 1940s. His old age and infirmity seem to have contributed to growing hostility towards him within Ruumde. “He was going to pass away [so long] that they started to hate him a lot, to the point where they kept saying: ‘Our imam is not going to die.’”¹⁵² My interviewee did not explicitly name any of

¹⁵¹ UHU, File 7, Image 6338.

¹⁵² Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

his enemies, suggesting rather that the sentiment was general within the herders' half of town, the *wuro*. "Then it happened when he became old that the *wuro*, the *wuro* really hated him."¹⁵³

A feast-day sermon (*khutba*), probably for the breaking of the fast of Ramadan, brought this hatred out into the open. "One feast-day," the people of the *wuro* "told Alfa Num Haalidu to read the sermon for them."¹⁵⁴ By this time, Hammadu had become infirm to the point that, "when the call to prayer went out from the mosque 'Allahu akbar,'" he himself sometimes told "Alfa Num Haalidu to go before him and lead the prayer." Even so, the community's move to strip Hammadu of one of the imamate's high-profile ritual functions was a deliberate insult. Due to anger or infirmity, Hammadu's "hand was even trembling." His enemies, however, had miscalculated. "When Alfa Num Haalidu picked up the pages of the sermon, he was not able to read it. Alfa Num Haalidu, that is. He found that the writing of" Hammadu Usman's copy of "the sermon was all upside-down. For anyone other than" Hammadu Usman "to read it was not easy."¹⁵⁵ The failure gave Hammadu the opportunity to re-assert his ritual authority. "Then he picked it up and read it." Ritual speech became a battleground first for an attack on Hammadu's authority as imam and then for his counter-attack.

Then, with the ritual complete, the public discourse left the formal script and abandoned its niceties. The verbal battle became more straightforward and nasty. "Then they told him,

¹⁵³ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

¹⁵⁴ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

¹⁵⁵ This *khutba* manuscript may have been the one still in the family library. See UHU, File 8, Images 6536-6550. The writing in this manuscript is not "upside-down," but it is not a very clear hand. It does not at all resemble Hammadu Usman's characteristically very legible handwriting. It is possible that Hammadu had become so infirm that his handwriting changed dramatically. This may be the meaning of Layya Mbiiga's observation that his hand was trembling.

Hammadu Usman, if Alfa Num Haalidu had read the sermon today, you Hammadu Usman, your imamate would have ended for Ruumde.” Hammadu responded with even greater venom.

By God, my imamate, it is not you who made me have it. I made myself have it, because today, if I am not the imam, my prayers would not be valid – that on which I pray, all of it. [That is] because all of you are not scholars. I have more knowledge than you. I am superior to you. If I left the imamate today, who could be the imam for me? Someone who can be the imam for me? There is not anyone [here who can for me], nor for you. I will stay the imam from now until the Lord wills it.

To defend his authority as imam, Hammadu returned mean-spirited personal attack for personal attack.

This way of speaking as imam differed markedly from the voice of routine ritual, but both ways of speaking were grounded in text. Hammadu’s public words echoed his private notes on the qualifications for the imamate. Both forms of discourse show his concern with the problem of an unqualified imam. As a theoretical problem, Hammadu sought ways to side-step the ritual harm such a person might cause. Under practical attack, he turned a more conventional approach to that ritual danger into the crux of his defense. Only he could make the community’s prayers valid. Moreover, he claimed that only by serving as imam himself could his own prayers be valid. Invoking this personal ritual danger, he justified continuing in his community role against the community’s wishes. We can hear the meaning of Hammadu’s speech more fully when we listen to its resonances with his written texts.

We can also read the meaning of his private notes better by imagining his subjective experience of the public, oral practice of the imamate. Alfa Num Haalidu’s difficulty reading the sermon suggests additional resonances with Hammadu’s folio. It recalls the precept in the body of Ibn ‘Ashir that an imam must not be “unable to pronounce” Arabic. In fact, Alfa Num’s own library presents ample evidence of scholarship. Hammadu’s taunt to his co-villagers that “all of

you are not scholars” did not objectively represent their knowledge. It represented his subjective worries. His note in the margins of Ibn ‘Ashir may, likewise, reflect his subjective worries about Alfa Num. Old and infirm, he sometimes delegated the imam’s function of leading prayers to someone whose qualifications he doubted. If he frequently thought that Alfa Num failed to fulfill Ibn ‘Ashir’s conditions, Hammadu would have read this passage with concern. The excerpt from *Sharh al-ta’dhīb* would have offered a nuanced theoretical solution to this practical problem. It would have appealed not only generally to Hammadu’s critical intellect, but also to his specific subjective fears. Hammadu’s speech as imam contained the sounds of text and his writing about the imamate bore the imprint of oral experience.

Hammadu’s voice as village imam had two different tones. The dominant tone was his ritual voice. The imamate authorized him to speak for the texts which defined the central ritual laws of the community. These ritual actions were highly significant, but also, paradoxically, highly forgettable. The repetitive, quotidian acts of leading daily prayers and overseeing life-cycle rites rarely inspired storytellers or sparked gossip. We can nonetheless hear Hammadu’s ritual speech in his written notes on wedding and funeral supplications. This speech was formulaic. Most of its words represented widespread consensus. Yet it also left space for muted creativity. The other tone of voice was angrier, prouder, and less scripted. Storytellers recounted how emotionally Hammadu spoke to defend his formalized ritual authority. His written note on the proper qualifications for an imam was a submerged part of this tale. The nuanced, refined mental world of his marginalia and the passionate, contentious oral world of his community made up a single world of Hammadu’s subjective experience.

Each of his two tones of voice reveals both elements of consensus and the fault-lines of debate within Hammadu's community. Social stakes stirred under the surface of ritual. Ideas about patriarchy and a woman's right to a say in her marriage bubbled up below variant formulas for wedding benedictions. Community division and personal spite boiled over out of a feast-day sermon. Hammadu's speech as imam is compelling because it makes the quotidian experience of his modest community audible and the quotidian significance of text legible.

Speaking in Legal Debates

Hammadu also spoke to his community as a scholar when he participated in legal debates. This scholarly idiom differed from the speech appropriate to the imamate. The imamate was the most formal religious position in colonial-era Ruumde, but its jurisdiction was circumscribed to a limited set of ritual roles. The imam did not have any special authority to issue legal opinions. As such, it is unsurprising that other members of the community often disputed Hammadu's legal opinions. Hammadu's formal authority as imam had little to do with his consistent record of overcoming such challenges. The authority to express legal opinions was not a formal office in Hammadu's Ruumde. Any scholar could claim it. Hammadu claimed it with particular success, besting his opponents because of his superior knowledge of legal texts.

A village imam was supposed to be learned. Legal texts stipulated as much in sections on "the conditions for being imam." Aadu Haydu underscored it when he recommended Hammadu Usman for the imamate as someone who "understands what he has read." Once appointed though, it was the office of the imamate, which authorized its holder to enact specific texts of ritual law in front of the community. In principle, it was not the imam's superior

knowledge of those ritual texts. Hammadu's superior knowledge of the feast-day sermon helped him to right the wrong of being passed over for the task, but the fundamental reason that Hammadu should have read that sermon was simply that he was the imam. A village imam had to know the ritual texts for which he was responsible. But it was the office, not the knowledge, which gave that responsibility to a particular individual, rather than any other.

A legal debater, in contrast, drew his authority directly from the texts which related to the question at hand. The role of legal debater was open to anyone who claimed to know the relevant texts. Victory in a debate went to whoever showed his position to match the true position of the texts. Such victories were fleeting. Each debate stood alone. Each new debate required fresh consideration of germane texts. Past winners had to prove themselves in each new contest. They acquired no lasting, personal authority. Each time they spoke, legal debaters borrowed anew an authority which belonged to text, not personally to them.

More ephemeral than the imamate, a legal debater's authority was nonetheless of wider significance. The imam's voice spilled beyond ritual only occasionally. The debater's idiom encompassed all matters of social and ritual law. Naturally, not all of these issues arose in all settings. Hammadu spoke in debates about everyday social issues within his village, rather than, for example, the legal implications of colonial rule or other macro-political issues. To some extent, the issues he addressed were too banal to create strong memories. More people remembered that he always won his debates than the questions which animated them. Even when interviewees did remember the issues at stake, the central point of their narratives was that Hammadu Usman knew text better than others and displayed that knowledge publicly. Much of the significance of legal debate was as a field of social combat within the community. Hammadu was a successful combatant, who left each battle with an enhanced reputation and a group of

publicly embarrassed rivals. Legal debate was also significant for bringing a wide range of legal texts relevant to the community's issues into community life. As a particularly successful debater, Hammadu performed this public intellectual task, making the fruits of his personal intellectual labors available to people around him. Narratives of Hammadu's debates had two protagonists: the scholar himself and the textual laws which, through his exploits, took their rightful place within village experience.

The contents of the debates had a supporting role in the narratives, but we can nonetheless learn much from them. The wedding formula which Hammadu used as imam hints at his commitment to a particular conception of gender relations. The evidence of how he spoke in legal disputes confirms this orientation toward upholding the rules which made patriarchy legitimate by limiting it. Hammadu unfortunately did not leave written records of specific cases, with which he dealt. He did write a note, which, though it referenced no litigants, had obvious practical interest. This note shows how Hammadu thought through the competing claims in a divorce case. He invoked text, of course, looking, as he did so often, beyond the beaten path of the standard Gimbalan syllabus. He also referred to his own voice, starting the phrase after his textual citation with *qultu*, or "I said." We can learn about Hammadu's legal voice from this note, even though we cannot know for sure that he said this phrase about a specific case. We cannot know to whom he said it, or what they said to spark it or respond to it. Oral sources preserve better the contours of the debates. They show Hammadu's consistent interest in questions of gender. Hammadu consistently fell on the side of debates, which accorded relatively more rights to women.

He would not have seen himself as a women's rights activist, of course. The rights which he attributed to women fell within the framework of an underlying patriarchal order. He saw

himself as a local legal expert, whose task was to bring textual truth to bear on cases which arose in his community. By speaking this scholarly idiom though, Hammadu did contribute to shaping social relations. He articulated rules which mitigated patriarchy. By listening to how Hammadu spoke this idiom, we can learn about social relations in colonial-era Ruumde, particularly the relations between men and women. We can learn what it was like to speak as a local legal expert to a rural community. We find another key meeting-point for text, speech, and rural social experience.

Reputation. Prevailing in a legal debate did not confer a formal office or create an enduring form of personal authority. The fundamental authority stayed with the texts, from which the debater drew his success. The debater borrowed their authority. By doing so well, he could create a personal reputation. The most durable result of Hammadu's participation in legal debates was the reputation, which he created for winning them.

Aamadu Adu encapsulated this reputation in the phrase *jom goonga*, or "truth-owner." Usman Hammadu cast it in non-confrontational terms as *lamndaa haali*, "was asked [about a legal matter], spoke [the answer]." Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Layya Mbiiga, and Hamma Layya Mbiiga spoke instead of disputes and victories. "He had a lot of [understanding]," said Hamma. "When there was a disagreement in Ruumde or Tannere, whatever point he indicated, that was where he would gain his victory." Later in the same interview, Hamma's father Layya re-iterated: "He got into a lot of disputes ... then he would come out victorious. There was no limit to them."¹⁵⁶ Hammadu Aamadu related that "every scholar with whom he had a difference

¹⁵⁶ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga and Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

of opinion ... would” ultimately “find that” Hammadu Usman “had been right.”¹⁵⁷ On a later occasion, Hammadu Aamadu admitted: “I cannot remember a single legal case, except that I know he disputed here” in Ruumde “a matter of prayer.”¹⁵⁸ Hammadu Aamadu remembered the reputation with more certainty than the substance. Hammadu Usman’s prowess in legal disputes was more memorable than the contents of the issues at stake.

Another general memory about Hammadu’s legal disputes was a location. Both Hammadu Aduraaman and Layya Mbiiga associated Hammadu Usman’s victories with Korem, a village ca. 30 km southeast of Ruumde. Hammadu Aduraaman offered: “Every scholar with whom he had a difference of opinion, if he went back to Korem, he would find that” Hammadu Usman “had been right.”¹⁵⁹ “To ask about” the matter of prayer, which Hammadu Usman disputed with other scholars in Ruumde “they went to Korem.” In general, Hammadu “would just write. He would just give it to the disputants and get his own person to go with them. Then they gave it to the scholar of Korem.”¹⁶⁰ Layya Mbiiga confirmed the detail: “He got into a lot of disputes, in which he would go to Korem and then come out victorious. There was no limit to them.”¹⁶¹ Memories of Hammadu’s habitual victories were encoded in the place name Korem.

Without questioning Hammadu’s sincerity, it is fair to suppose that he engaged in legal debates partly with the goal of creating this reputation. He habitually corresponded with, sent his dependants to, or traveled himself to Korem partly for the impression, which he knew this association would create within his community. This link was vertical. Others were horizontal.

¹⁵⁷ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007.

¹⁵⁸ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2/25/2007.

¹⁵⁹ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007.

¹⁶⁰ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2/25/2007.

¹⁶¹ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

“When Tannere had an internal dispute, they would come here to see him. When he was in a dispute, he would go to Tannere.”¹⁶² The habitual and noticeable qualities of the behavior were critical. Through them, Hammadu earned a reputation as a legal expert, which was useful to him during his life and memorable enough to outlast it.

A Text: A Divorcee and Her Property. The reputation was not just stagecraft, of course. It rested on Hammadu’s actual expert knowledge of legal texts. In chapter II, we examined his legal thought through marginal and end notes in his textbooks. In this chapter, we have looked at how he thought about the question of the conditions for being an imam, as a link between the textual practice of writing a marginal note and his public experience at the end of his life as a physically ailing, unpopular imam. Textual practice was a storehouse, from which community scholars would take what they needed for their public performances. At the same time, textual practice also appeared on stage itself. In public legal debates, Hammadu “would just write” his opinion and send it along with his opponents for arbitration. Unfortunately, Hammadu did not leave any document in his library, which unambiguously represents what he wrote on such occasions. However, he did leave a document which suggests some of the textual features of his voice in legal debates. And, subtly, within the considerable constraints of its genre, this document suggests how Hammadu spoke out for the Islamic legal rights of women.

The paragraph, which Hammadu wrote on the reverse of the cover page of his copy of *Tuhfat al-hukkām*, does not explicitly refer to an incident of public legal debate in his community. It does not name any individuals whom the ruling would affect. It does not name rival debaters. It begins with an extended quote from the *‘Utbiyya*, a ninth-century text from

¹⁶² Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

Islamic Spain. The only differences of opinion, which it cites, are between the classical Mālikī legal authorities, Mālik b. Anas himself and Ibn al-Qāsim. The paragraph aims to express a legal truth which transcends time, rather than reference a specific event in Hammadu's community.

Yet the document does deal with a legal question, which had practical relevance in Hammadu's community. Hammadu must have felt the resonances with his own milieu as he quoted from the *'Utbiyya* at length:

The case of a man who married a woman who had a little property: While she was with the husband, he was working with the property. He was herding the property and giving it drink. He was guarding it and looking for it when it went astray. He took care of it fondly to the point that the property became plentiful in the hands of the husband. Then the husband divorced her and that which had been between them became monstrous. So the woman wanted to separate her property [from him, but] the husband refused. He said: "Give me [the profit which] I made from this property."
[The legal question is:] Is he entitled to anything or not?
Mālik said: He gets half.
Ibn al-Qāsim said: He gets a third.
The most widespread opinion is that he gets half.
The end [of the quote] from *al-'Utbiyya*.¹⁶³

The equation of property with livestock and the description of the rhythms of gendered pastoral labor would have struck Hammadu as especially familiar. Despite its distant provenance, the *'Utbiyya*'s narrative of a marriage and a divorce could have come right from Gimbala society.

The text deliberately puts the validity of these provisions of Islamic social law outside of time, but the document also hints at a specifically applied interest. Hammadu copied the passage on a separate folio, not as a marginal note to a textbook section which he had been reading. In contrast to his *habādabaza*,¹⁶⁴ the passage does not summarize a complex body of regulations

¹⁶³ UHU, File 4, Image 4700.

¹⁶⁴ See chapter II, 100-102 above.

relevant to a wide range of potential cases. It examines the more specific circumstances of two individuals. Hammadu did not indicate whether he had two individuals from his community in mind. But he did have something of his own to add. After finishing the quote, he wrote: “I said: Likewise [is the case of] a woman who acquires [new property while she is] under her husband’s custody. She gets half of that property. The end.” This explicit reference to his own voice is telling, especially because it is very rare in Hammadu’s writings. Hammadu identified himself as the speaker as a last resort. He would likely have preferred to find a classic legal text dealing with the precise case of the woman who acquires new property (*al-muktasiba*). Because he could not find one, he had to apply analogical reasoning to a related text. Hammadu enjoyed imagining hypothetical situations, but the form of his argument makes it unlikely that this issue was merely hypothetical. Hammadu started with an authoritative text in order to arrive at a solution to the practical problem of a specific *muktasiba* whose husband was divorcing her. He ended by speaking in his own voice because he faced an actual case, which the authoritative texts that he knew had not anticipated.

The genre of the document makes it difficult to guess the discursive context surrounding this case. Perhaps the case reached Hammadu in the manner described in his son Usman’s phrase *lamndaa haalii* (“was asked, spoke”). One or both of the parties to the divorce may have approached Hammadu to ask him to clarify the legal ramifications of the situation. According to this non-confrontational model, no other scholars would have expressed different opinions. The interested parties would have bowed to Hammadu’s superior knowledge, accepting his ruling as legitimate and binding. Hammadu may have written the document either as part of the process of pondering the problem or as a record of the ultimate results. He may have wanted to record these results because of their intrinsic interest or in case the issue arose again later.

It is just as easy to imagine that the case unfolded as one of those more contentious legal debates, which Hammadu developed a reputation for winning. The document was not addressed to an arbiter. Since it was on the reverse of the title page to his textbook, Hammadu clearly intended that at least this copy of it stay in his own library. Yet, the text does display the elements of what would have been an effective argument to write and submit to arbiters such as those at Korem. Reading the document backwards from an imagined public, oral incident through its concluding “I said” phrase to its citation of a lengthy passage from a classic legal text provides a plausible explanation of its form.

A written narrative describing such a dispute and its participants would be very helpful for our purposes, but Hammadu did not need to write this information down in order to prepare an effective positive paper in a legal debate. Imagining the document as such a position paper helps explain the unusual form of Hammadu’s “I said” phrase. Hammadu’s acknowledgement that this statement was a personal legal opinion would have been most useful in a discursive context, where an arbiter needed to evaluate Hammadu’s position in comparison with another opinion or other opinions. Hammadu did not need to write about these rival opinions, because this information would emerge naturally in the course of oral discussions. Similarly he did not need to describe the specific circumstances of the case. But supposing that there was such a case offers the best explanation for the slight difference between the legal circumstances described in Hammadu’s personal statement and those described in the passage, which he cited from a classic text.

This passage would have been the most important element for writing an effective position paper in a legal debate. A frustrating trait of this genre for anyone attempting to reconstruct local history is that truly authoritative text should come from outside contemporary

local historical context. What Hammadu Usman most needed to write about was what Hamma Layya called the “point ... where he would gain his victory.” In each legal dispute, that “point” would be a discrete legal text, overlooked, misread, or unknown by his rivals, which had the authority to prove that Hammadu’s position “had been right.” The *‘Utbiyya* was a relatively obscure text, which Hammadu’s rivals may well have overlooked or simply not known. At the same time, it was undoubtedly authoritative. Because of its central importance to the efficacy of his argument, Hammadu began with the classic citation and built his document around it. His statement of personal legal opinion only had validity because Hammadu positioned it as a logical result of the authoritative text.

Generic literary form privileged timeless textual authority over contemporary context, but the narrow gap between Hammadu’s choice of citation and his personal statement suggested the oral context behind his written note. Reading backwards from the typical form of a community legal debate to the actual form of Hammadu’s document about a female property-owner undergoing a divorce offers the most plausible explanation of the meaning of the document. Many of Hammadu’s notes were marginal glosses on classic text. This document should be read as a textual gloss on a social event. The components of that social event were a divorce, property acquired by the ex-wife during the marriage, and a dispute about ownership of that property referred to local scholars.

Though we have only one source expressing one voice in that scholarly debate, this source contains echoes of a dialogue. It would be useful to discover, in one of Ruumde’s other libraries, a rival opinion addressing this case of divorce and female property-ownership. I have not done so. Yet echoes of a dialogue are contained within Hammadu’s document, within a shift in emphasis between his authoritative *‘Utbiyya* excerpt and his own statement. The excerpt

defines the legal question with the ex-husband as the point of reference: “Is he entitled to anything or not?” It then reproduces a debate about fractions among luminaries of the Mālikī legal school. It concludes by affirming the opinion which gives a larger share to the male party. Hammadu cites this text approvingly. Yet it would be a misreading of his document to place him on the side of a debate affirming men’s property rights over their wives. Hammadu’s personal statement subtly shifts the point of reference to the female party. He makes the “woman who acquires” the subject of his definition of the legal question. He emphasizes her right to a share of the disputed property rather than her ex-husband’s. Though Hammadu does not explicitly say so, the way that he structured his legal statement strongly suggests that he wrote it to support her claims to property rather than her ex-husband’s. One can regret the silences of this form of written discourse and the amount of speculation necessary to wring local historical insight from this particular type of stone. Yet only attentiveness to such scraps makes reconstructing the social significance of Islamic legal discourse at the grassroots level possible.

Memories: A Widow and a School-Girl. Oral discourse about village legal disputes also has its silences. It is a truism, but still worth pointing out, that my interviewees remembered what was memorable about Hammadu’s disputes and forgot what was not. As noted above, what was most memorable was the reputation Hammadu developed for beating juristic rivals. The substantive issues involved in debates were generally more forgettable. When they were not forgotten, they entered narratives in secondary roles, leaving center stage to the timeless authority of religious law, the tussle among persons to represent that authority at concrete moments in this contingent world, and the narrative climax of Hammadu’s ultimate victories over his rivals. No oral telling

of Hammadu's disputes records the substance of his legal reasoning with the same level of faithfulness or detail as even his very short textual statement about the divorcee's property.

Yet the oral accounts which do identify substantive issues speak precisely where this textual statement is least explicit. Oral accounts locate Hammadu's legal reasoning within a range of opinion. The two fullest oral narratives about Hammadu's legal debates both involved questions about the participation of women in public social life. In both debates, Hammadu interpreted Islamic law as leaving social space open to women in cases where his rivals argued that the same law restricted them.

The first debate was about how a widow should behave after her husband's death. On the one hand, the debate involved a general principle of Islamic law – the *'idda*, a waiting period applied to widows and divorcees after the end of their marriages. On the other, it involved a specific individual woman and whether she needed to stay confined in her house after her husband's death or not. "In the year when a man died [in Ruumde] survived by his wife, they said that the woman should stay [in her house] (*joodoto*) from the time the man died up until now."¹⁶⁵ When Hammadu Usman heard about the statement of these unnamed speakers secondhand, he asked for confirmation in a way which revealed his doubts: "That is what was said, huh?" He then went to ask them personally about their legal opinion. When they responded, he called their position "an evil lie." He opened up a legal debate, staking a personal claim that he could more faithfully represent religious truth and a substantive claim that religious truth was opposed to the confinement of this woman.

¹⁶⁵ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007. The reference, later on in the narrative, to the specific period of four months and ten days confirms that this was a debate about the application of the *'idda*.

The oral narrative which I collected about this incident offers few substantive details about the reasoning of either side, but it does dramatize the terms of authoritative legal debate. After Hammadu called the confinement of the woman a lie, the narrative turns the unnamed issuers of the legal opinion into a single (also unnamed) person, who says “that he heard it from his teacher (*mobbo*),” the imam of the nearby village of Jey Mawnde (25 km east of Ruumde). Hammadu then stated confidently that “the imam of Jey would not say that.” He and “the imam of Jey Mawnde had studied together.” Hammadu said that “he knows what” the imam of Jey “studied.” He “kept saying that he is certain that” the imam of Jey “did not say that” to his opponent in the debate. “You are the one who said it.” “At that moment, he had his little slave-girl Sutura carry his books on her head and went all the way to Jey Mawnde.” When he arrived in Jey, the imam greeted Hammadu with the scholarly honorifics “*alfa moodibo*.” Hammadu then briefly explained the case and the legal opinion, which his opponent had ascribed to the imam of Jey. The imam of Jey declared that his student had “lied about me,” indicating his agreement instead with Hammadu’s position. The narrative emphasizes the dramatic elements of authority in the debate: the oral teachings of scholarly persons, the contents of study and the experience of studying together, the books on Sutura’s head, one scholar’s respect for a colleague, and a teacher’s disavowal of his student’s mistakes. The driving force behind the story is to mobilize these signs of authority to demonstrate Hammadu’s ultimate victory in this debate and illustrate Hammadu’s persona as a consistently successful legal debater. It also worth noting that the effect of Hammadu’s victory in this case would have been to authorize a particular widow to return to normal participation in the social life of their village community.

The second debate was about how a young woman should behave during her menstrual period. This question arose after the debate over the confinement of the widow. It took place in

the 1940s when Hammadu's son Usman Hammadu had himself advanced to the study of some legal books and when Hammadu had become too infirm to leave the village on trips such as that he had taken with his slave-girl Sutura to Jey Mawnde.¹⁶⁶ At this time, there was a scholar teaching in Ruumde, whose students included girls. One day, one of these students, "a girl, saw filth, menstrual blood" and did not go to school. "Somebody asked her: 'What stopped you from coming to study?' The girl said she is not studying now. 'So-and-so told me that when a woman sees what women see she should not study.'" At this point, Usman Hammadu asked who told the girl that. "All the students and scholars there said it was true: If a woman sees impurity, she should not study." Usman sought further clarification: "They should not study or was it said that they should not touch the Book and pray?" The group of students and scholars specified that they meant "precisely that they should not study." With the positions defined clearly, Usman adopted a more confrontational tone. He told them that "he did not hear that from his father. ... He went home, still yelling." Once home, he conferred with his father, Hammadu Usman. He explained the matter to Hammadu and referenced the passage in the legal textbook of Ibn 'Ashir, which he felt proved that: "a girl can study; a girl who has a ritual impurity and is menstruating is forbidden to fast, but she can study the Qur'an; that is, she can study with her tongue; she should not pray or fast, but she can study." Hammadu Usman agreed strongly with his son's position, telling him: "You are clearly right (*goongoto*)."¹⁶⁷ In this debate also, Hammadu Usman took the position which allowed woman relatively more room for participation in village social life.

¹⁶⁶ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

¹⁶⁷ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

After his son had explained the matter to him, Hammadu took over the debate, playing out the typical drama over juristic authority. “He went to the mosque” to perform his functions as imam. “They prayed the sunset prayer.” Then, “he called one scholar ... named Aadu Usan Belko, who was a scholar in Ruumde then.” Hammadu Usman dramatized this scholar’s authority with his declaration that: “Other than Aadu Usan Belko, there is no scholar in Ruumde.” He then asked his colleague: “If a woman is menstruating, can she study the Qur’an or not?” Aadu replied simply: “She can study, *mobbo*.” The next act of the drama was to expose and embarrass the rival jurists. “Who are the ones who said it?” Hammadu asked his son. Usman named them. “Where did they see that?” Hammadu asked rhetorically, continuing with the observation that “if a person has not studied, he will lie. What [Usman] said, it is the truth.”¹⁶⁸ He asked Aadu Usan Belko once more for confirmation and received it. Like the case of the widow, the school-girl’s menstruation became the occasion for a drama of male juristic authority. The memory of the incident narrated the signs of this type of authority: Usman’s careful attention to the nuances of the legal opinion presented, his recollection of the line from Ibn ‘Ashir, Hammadu’s staging of the meeting at the mosque, his conferral with a respected colleague, his disparagement of his rivals’ level of learning, and the repeated references to “truth.”

These oral narratives of village legal debates were highly gendered in two key ways. The form of the narratives emphasized that legal debate was a field of masculine combat. Gimbalans have often perceived scholarship in muscular terms. One common term for a great scholar was *kalhaaldi mobbo*, attaching the word “scholar” to the word for a bull chosen to mate with the herd of cows, i.e. a “stud.” (Separated from “scholar,” *kalhaaldi* can also be extended from its

¹⁶⁸ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

core meaning within animal husbandry to refer to a large, physically-imposing man.) Layya Mbiiga's description of how Hammadu Usman would habitually "come out victorious" in legal disputes used the same word (*liɔude*) that Gimbalans use to describe when a man "beats" another physically in a fist-fight. The debates in Ruumde over the widow and the school-girl's circumstances did not descend into fist-fights, but they did involve "yelling," strong words, and public humiliation. They became contests among the village's men over a type of masculine prestige inflected with the terms of Islamic legal knowledge.

The substance of the debates was also clearly gendered. Both debates were about women. Moreover, they were about issues which were both specifically female and highly intimate. The *'idda* waiting-period applies only to women; its underlying purpose is to ensure that paternity can be unambiguously established. Whatever the precise nature of the difference of opinion between Hammadu and his opponents, just below the surface of the legal talk was this particular woman's sexuality, which became a matter for public discussion in the months following her experience of her spouse's death. The school-girl's menstruation was self-evidently intimate. In each narrative, the lone woman's voice quickly becomes drowned out by a swarm of male voices. The widow says nothing intelligible in the remembered tale. The school-girl defers to male authority (she stopped studying because "so-and-so told" her) and speaks in muted euphemisms ("when a woman sees what women see"), which suggest culturally-appropriate embarrassment about intimate aspects of her life that the men around her discuss in direct, loud, and equally culturally-appropriate fashion.

Male control over public discussions about these intimate issues of individual women's lives certainly made these village legal debates patriarchal. Yet the patriarchy was not simple. It was not a monolithic patriarchy since the debates defined a range of legal positions with

considerably different implications for the women involved. The terms of Islamic legal debate privileged nuanced positions, which in both these cases meant that the sounder opinions stressed the limits of patriarchal restrictions on women. Hammadu's conversation with the imam of Jey reveals that the latter's student has misunderstood the '*idda*' as more restrictive than it really is. Usman Hammadu impresses (and imitates) his father by distinguishing carefully the restrictions which do apply to a woman during her menses from those which the insufficiently learned add out of ignorance. Public legal discussion about women's issues were occasions when men sought to acquire (and prevent other men from acquiring) a masculine identity for prowess in debates. In the two cases in which Hammadu was involved, the effects of this patriarchal jostling on the women in question were concrete examples of the mitigation of patriarchy: a widow's ability to move more freely and a school-girl's ability to return to her studies.

Conclusion

From his appointment as imam sometime between 1907 and 1914 to his death in ca. 1950, Hammadu Usman Umaru was a public intellectual in the village of Ruumde. His role as a public intellectual was to bring relevant religious texts into public, largely oral community practices. Hammadu was therefore a meeting-point between textual and oral discourse. Methodologically, it is possible to reconstruct the meaning of his career by following the back-and-forth between the textual and oral fragments which it left behind. In different ways and to different degrees, his activities as an imam and an informal legal expert were both circumscribed by the fact that these forms of personal authority depended on the claim to represent faithfully

the “true” underlying authority of text. At the same time, in both these public intellectual roles, Hammadu Usman, the “truth-owner,” spoke in his own individual voice even as he spoke for text. He brought authoritative texts to community life, defining the meanings of those texts and influencing the contours of community life.

The gendered contours of social life in Ruumde echo throughout the textual and oral fragments left by Hammadu’s Muslim intellectual career. In his appointment as a young imam, after his feast-day sermon at the end of his life, and during the legal debates he contested repeatedly in the intervening period, Hammadu’s claim to the role of a community scholar was the scene of habitual public bickering among Ruumde’s men. Hammadu’s habitual victories in these disputes diminished his opponents and conferred on him a scholarly identity that was specifically masculine, self-consciously aggressive, and almost muscular. (He “beat” them with legal reasoning as a man could “beat” another with his fists.)

The anecdotes of Hammadu’s career feature men as the most active part of the supporting cast, but women creep into interesting roles as well, both in the remembered tales and the textual fragments. We cannot hear the precise words with which they did so, but the fill-in-the-blank women, whose marriages Hammadu “tied” from the back side of his 1907 *Risāla* to the end of his life, would have given, each of them, her consent to the union. Hammadu spoke for the divorcee and her property, probably against other male would-be jurists along with her husband. But she probably sought out Hammadu’s help and she became the subject, not the object, of his personal juristic statement. Before the ugliness of divorce (if we permit ourselves the liberty of projecting the “monstrousness” of the hypothetical divorce in the *‘Utbiyya* onto this specific divorce in early twentieth-century Ruumde), she earned property on her own within the marriage. She was the subject of Hammadu’s sentence and, as the *muktasiba* (“female earner”),

she had previous experience as an active, not a passive, participle. She worked to earn and wanted to keep what she had earned just as the fill-in-the-blank brides wanted to marry (or at least had good enough reasons to give public, personal consent to their unions).

We know less about what the widow wanted to do, but we do know that Hammadu argued that she need not stay confined at home and won the argument. What she chose after that did not make it into a narrative structure which fore-grounded masculine legal combat, but she had a choice. The school-girl, likewise, seems too shy to stake out a position. Some males told her not to study; then others asked her why she wasn't. She did not say whether she herself wanted to study or not. She talked evasively about her body, while they described its functions unabashed and descended into a shouting match. Still, she was a student. And, while she could not touch the Book with her hands in her current condition (all the men agreed on this point), she could recite it and study it with her tongue (the men who took this stance ultimately silenced those who had tried to stop her). After the end of her period, she would return to doing both. The fragments of Hammadu's career simultaneously uncover and mute the voices of these women of Ruumde. This muting and uncovering reflect the subtle contours of a village patriarchy, which textual rules as well as processes of social debate and individual interpretation could simultaneously reinforce and delimit.

The influence of Hammadu Usman and the types of knowledge which defined his career was not of the sort which Paul Marty and other colonial officials/scholars valued and recorded. It was not macro-political or centralizing. It was everyday and intimate. It was as everyday as the prayer ritual, as intimate as a bride's wedding day, as intimate as washing and burying a corpse. It was as quotidian as an annual feast-day script and as intimate as the private fear of a religious man that his prayers might be invalid. It was as quotidian as a slightly younger

generation's impatience with a declining, cantankerous old man and as intimate as the rage of an old pillar of the community at the fools who have passed him over for a public honor which is his due. It was as everyday as divorce and quibbling over property. It was as intimate as the death of a husband and the voices of a widow's male neighbors swarming in to tell her what to do. It was as intimate as a young woman's menses and her shyness in front of young men discussing it in front of her. Levels of the influence of Islamic knowledge on ordinary West African Muslims and its value to them, which colonial observers (understandably) ignored, find an alternative register in these sorts of episodes and in the lives of modest individuals such as Hammadu Usman Umaru. Careers such as his illuminate for us an Islamic culture that was popular, oral, *and* highly textual – that was highly influential and highly valued within its sphere.

CHAPTER IV

FAMILY HISTORIES OF LEARNING I: THE ARKASEEBE

The role of scholar was accessible not just to the sons of scholars, but also to the sons of “red Fulɓe” herders. In Ruumde and other Gimbala communities, Islamic learning and the ordinary rhythms of rural life, such as subsistence food production, were deeply interconnected. Learning imparted respect, but scholars did not form a distinct class separate from rural society. Colonial and postcolonial models which assume hierarchy, centralization, and the pre-eminence of “learned families” or lineage charisma are not suited for capturing the social realities of Islamic knowledge in places such as Gimbala. The tale of Hammadu Usman’s accession to the imamate encapsulates much about an alternative local model, which more effectively describes how learned individuals related to rural communities. The event also conjures up a broader history of family units. This bigger canvas allows for a fuller sketch of the distribution of learning within local society.

“A Son of Usman Hurguru”: Family Histories and Grassroots Scholars

By calling Hammadu “a son of Usman Hurguru,” Aadu Haydu would have evoked for his listeners at least two levels of family history. As “a son of Usman,” Hammadu belonged to a nuclear family. The Fulfulde term *koreeji* described a parent’s relationship to a nuclear household, grouping together one’s spouse and children. The name “Hurguru” located

Hammadu within a larger family unit, the *de'eende* (“neighborhood”) of the Arkaseeḫe.

Aadu’s simple phrase summoned up shared communal memories about both the household of Hammadu’s father and the deeper history of their “neighborhood.” Like his adversaries, the chief highlighted the significance of family history. Yet, partly by substituting “Usman Hurguru” for “a red Pullo” in his characterization of Hammadu’s role as “son,” Aadu insisted that the significance of family history was not to determine occupational identity or scholarly authority.

The event of Hammadu’s appointment between ca. 1907 and 1914 took a snapshot of the configuration of knowledge within his society. The broader history of the nuclear and “neighborhood” family units to which Hammadu belonged – which unfolded over a period of time extending considerably beyond the moment of debate – plotted a wider map, within which Hammadu’s accession to the imamate is one telling coordinate. Usman’s nuclear household unveiled one topography of the distribution of Islamic knowledge in local society. Hammadu and his *koreeji* mapped another. Despite differences between the lay of the land in these two cases, both situated scholarly activity and agricultural labor within the same variegated familial terrain. At a larger scale, Hammadu’s “neighborhood,” the Arkaseeḫe, displayed the same fundamental geography. Rural families produced, at the same time, both food and thought.

Koreeji: Usman’s Sons, Hammadu’s Sons

The *koreeji* family unit was a fundamental structure of Hammadu’s society. The parent-child relationship played a key role in organizing respect, responsibility, and identity, as well as labor. Usman, “a red Pullo,” and Hammadu, a scholar, likely integrated education into their

sons' work-schedules to varying degrees, but each man's nuclear household combined food-production with study.

The term *koreeji* is not exactly synonymous with “nuclear family.” Only adults have *koreeji*, a word which either a man or a woman may use to designate his spouse(s) and children or her husband and children. Having *koreeji* defined adulthood and adult responsibility in Usman and Hammadu's society. Being among someone's *koreeji* clearly marked the identity of the child, too. Standard Gimbala naming practice emphasized the relationship of child to father by giving a father's first name to his child as a second name. For this reason, Hammadu is remembered as Hammadu Usman. He showed that he conceived of himself in the same terms when he signed his textbooks with the Arabic form of his name: “Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān b. ‘Umar.” The debate over Hammadu's candidacy for the imamate also showed how the relationship of child to father marked the child's identity. Both parties to the dispute stressed Hammadu's identity as “son.”

Usman Umaru's *koreeji* included four sons and three daughters. Umaru Usu Yatara, a casted specialist in history and genealogy, named them. “Hammadu Usman, Iisa Usman, Num, [and] Bura” were the sons; “Dikere, Ummu, [and] Gabdo” were the daughters.¹⁶⁹ Upon reaching adulthood (which was earlier for the women than the men), the sons and daughters became husbands and fathers or wives and mothers. In other words, each acquired his or her own *koreeji* and assumed adult responsibility. Iisa, Bura, and Ummu left colonial census forms from the 1930s and 1940s, which listed their *koreeji*. “Issa Ousman” had one wife and six children in 1941.¹⁷⁰ Bura, or “Brahima Ousmane,” had a wife and three kids in the mid-1930s.¹⁷¹ “Oumou

¹⁶⁹ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 2005.

¹⁷⁰ UHU, File 2, Images 1326-1327.

Ousman,” the head of her household and probably a widow, lived with two (probably unmarried) adult daughters in 1941.¹⁷² Hammadu Usman did not leave behind a census form, but oral accounts attribute to him at least four sons.

Usman’s *koreeji* family unit offers one useful picture of the social distribution of Islamic knowledge. Usman Umaru was not learned. Hammadu’s opponents underlined this point with the partially pejorative label: “red Pullo.” The same label expressed a certain admiration for the characteristics of a real herder, representing a Fulɓe value-system which both complemented and served as a foil for the society’s Islamic and intellectual values. None of Hammadu’s siblings established a reputation for learning either. His brothers worked in subsistence food production, cultivating fields in the bush around the village and looking after herds which spent much of the year grazing and drinking in the same bush. Within this nuclear family, young Hammadu pursued a sustained Islamic education and developed into a respected adult scholar, demonstrating that Islamic knowledge in his society was not the preserve of specialist families. A family unit mainly focused on the agricultural economy could also produce a scholar.

Likewise, scholars also combined study and food production in their individual lives. Even though he was learned, Hammadu engaged in the agricultural economy, too. An undated note in his library recorded his status as a household-head (a man responsible for his *koreeji*) and the owner of a herd: “Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān gave the chief of Rūmde thirty-nine *riyāl* and one *tamma* for the tax of people”¹⁷³ and “he gave two *riyāl* for the tax of cattle.”¹⁷⁴ A file held by Dawda Siidi’s descendants contains several village tax records from the colonial era, including

¹⁷¹ UHU, File 2, Images 1322-1323.

¹⁷² UHU, File 2, Images 1328-1329.

¹⁷³ UHU, File 4, Image 4513. The Arabic word *riyāl* probably meant “five francs,” a translation of the Fulfulde singular *mbuuɗu*. The word *tamma* indicated a one-franc coin.

¹⁷⁴ UHU, File 4, Image 4514.

nicely-preserved cattle-tax rolls. The first name on the cattle-tax list was “Almaami Rumde” (i.e. “the imam of Ruumde”).¹⁷⁵ In a common local sign of respect for the imamate, the tax rolls mention only the imam’s title and not his name. Yet, it is clear that Hammadu Usman was “Almaami Rumde” at this time, because the same list mentions separately the name of Alfa Num Haalidu, Hammadu’s successor as imam. As further evidence, the imam’s cattle-tax burden matched exactly that of the receipt, which Hammadu Usman kept: two *riyāl*. The second name on the cattle-tax rolls, “Ibrahim Usu,” was quite possibly Bura Usman, the younger brother of the imam. Ibrahim paid four *riyāl* in two separate installments of two *riyāl* each. Like his non-scholarly brothers, Hammadu Usman managed a herd.

The twenty-eight household-heads whose cattle-tax payments were registered on this list had varying levels of learning, but all participated in the pastoral economy. Scholars such as Hammadu Usman probably expended a smaller proportion of their time on actually accompanying herds out for daily pasture or seasonal transhumance. Scholarship was also a form of labor, which required time. But when a scholar’s cattle returned in the evening or at the end of the farming season, they entered his compound, provided milk for his household, and slept near him just like any other herd.

The cattle-tax rolls also indicate that scholars such as Hammadu Usman did not necessarily have greater wealth than their neighbors. If individual tax burden can be taken to reflect herd size, Hammadu had the same number of cattle as exactly half of the taxpayers on the rolls. Eleven of the twenty-eight owned more than twice as many cattle. In contrast to many models of Muslim scholarship in West Africa, scholars such as Hammadu did not have disproportionate access to material resources. Rural scholars commanded respect, but they did

¹⁷⁵ Library: Amiiri Ruumde, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 7829.

not form a class apart. Most learned individuals shared the material conditions, relationship to livestock and land, and many of the work rhythms of their non-learned neighbors and kin. Communities such as Ruumde did not view Islamic knowledge as a rare import, which one could only obtain from a larger-than-life central leader. Like milk or millet, learning was a local product, integrated into the life of the community and the individual lives of one's neighbors and kin.

Table 1. Cattle-tax rolls from colonial-era Ruumde Suuduuḡe.

Cattle-tax rate (in <i>riyāl</i>)	Taxpayers at rate	Total tax paid at rate
1	1	1
2	14	28
3	1	3
4	1	4
5	4	20
6	2	12
7	1	7
7.5	3	22.5
8	1	8
Avg. tax per payer = 3.77	Total taxpayers = 28	Total cattle-tax = 105.5

Usman Hammadu also preserved a memory of his father Hammadu Usman's herds – a somewhat bitter one. After mentioning his father's student Hammadu Konsa, Usman transitioned first to his father's connections with the nearby village of Seke (where Hammadu

completed copying his 1900 *Tuhfat al-hukkām*). “More people would come” to visit than to study under Hammadu Usman, “people from Seke. They would come here because it seems that he studied there. In Seke, they are the” family of “imams and chiefs.” Then he made a revealing segue to his own childhood:

I think he was named Umaru, except [you should know] that I heard nothing from [Hammadu Usman] about his teachers, because at that time I had a lot of work. There were both goats and cows. It was only when I got bigger that he told me to go off to study. Then I made my first slate reach its destination.¹⁷⁶

Hammadu’s herds were important enough to his domestic economy that he designated the labor of his own *koreeji* for their upkeep, even though, to young Usman’s frustration, pastoral labor interfered with both the son’s formal education and his informal integration into his father’s scholarly networks.

Usman’s childhood reveals another important dimension of the integration of intellectual pursuits and agricultural livelihood in his and Hammadu Usman’s social world. The individual life-cycle often took a zigzag shape, alternating between periods of study and periods of labor devoted to food production and family survival.¹⁷⁷ Usman spoke about his older brothers and turned the discussion again to the repeated interruptions in his own education:

I had an older brother who memorized the whole Qur’an. He was named Buubakar. ... He went to study all the way to Gomu, he and another [brother] called Hamma. Me, I was here herding. In the first year of the locusts, I was drinking hot water. That is when I advanced beyond the Qur’an to start studying books. I stole away and went to [the village of] Aka. I found Mobbo Adu there. ... There, my older brother found me and brought me back to take care of my father. After that, [my father] did not leave here until he died. I came back studying books.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

¹⁷⁷ For an extended meditation on this theme, see the memoir of Almamy Maliki Yattara, a Gimbalan who was born slightly before Usman Hammadu: Yattara and Salvaing, *Almamy*, volume 1, *Une jeunesse*.

¹⁷⁸ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

After completing his first scholastic milestone (making his “first slate reach its destination,” – i.e. finishing the study of the Qur’anic text one time from back to front), Usman apparently returned to pastoralism. His jealousy towards his mobile, student brothers was compounded by the bitter sensual memories of famine. After the locust-year (1941/1942), Hammadu Usman’s household economy would have recovered. Young Usman probably seized on this opportunity to remove his labor from the household and “steal” another period of study, choosing his *mobbo* (teacher) for himself. This period of study, too, was cut short sooner than Usman would have liked. His older brother, perhaps transitioning to the role of the household’s head, judged that their ailing father’s condition meant the family needed Usman’s labor again. Still, the period of study was long enough for Usman to reach another milestone. He “came back studying books,” probably introductory legal textbooks, such as al-Akhdarī, al-Qurtubī, and Ibn ‘Ashir.¹⁷⁹ The exigencies of rural family survival often impeded the accumulation of Islamic knowledge, but persistent students found ways to balance their society’s agricultural and intellectual values.

From the outsider’s perspective of co-villager Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, the balance achieved by Hammadu Usman’s *koreeji* seemed a happy one. Hammadu Usman “was learned. His children became learned. That is what I know.”¹⁸⁰ As we shall see later in more detail, Hammadu Aamadu’s family fit better the conventional profile of a “learned family.” He was good-natured about not having been a more successful student himself, but apparently also disappointed. This personal history probably colored his view of Hammadu Usman’s *koreeji* to some extent, but the assessment certainly was not completely off the mark. Buubakar Hammadu

¹⁷⁹ For Usman Hammadu’s use of Ibn ‘Ashir in a village legal debate, see chapter III, 155-156 above. For a partial copy of Ibn ‘Ashir which Usman Hammadu wrote for himself, see UHU, File 8, Images 6712-6723. For the colophon of a copy of al-Akhdarī’s work, see UHU, File 8, Image 6515.

¹⁸⁰ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007.

“memorized the whole Qur’an.” Num Hammadu studied and left copies of *qasīda* poems and a legal prose work in the family library.¹⁸¹ On his 1963 marriage certificate, Usman Hammadu and his witness, older brother “Nouhoum Hamadoun,” were both identified as “Qur’an pupil[s].”¹⁸² (This designation contrasted with that of the bride’s witness, “a herder” named “Amadou Issa,” who was also the groom’s cousin, a son of Hammadu Usman’s brother Iisa.) As a young man, Hammadu Usman had studied in Seke and Anjam. At the end of his life, his sons undertook analogous trips. As Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman argued, Hammadu Usman had clearly had some success in promoting a learned household.

From Usman’s perspective, the map of Islamic knowledge in Hammadu’s nuclear family looked more nuanced. Buubakar had indeed memorized the whole Qur’an, but he “did not even study one book. He became a *nassoowo*,”¹⁸³ someone who had admirable command over the surface elements of the Qur’anic text, but little knowledge beyond that. Usman was proud of his own scholastic accomplishments, but clearly also frustrated with the constraints which had kept him from achieving more. Usman’s marriage certificate gives a snapshot of his level of learning at a pivotal moment of transition to adulthood. Filed in the nearby village of Sarafere, the occupational designation on the certificate reflected a combination of his own sense of self and the level of learning, which his local reputation allowed him to plausibly claim. The document’s French phrase “élève coranique” may have translated either the very self-effacing Fulfulde word *gariibu*¹⁸⁴ or the more dignified *taaliibo*.¹⁸⁵ It clearly did not translate *moodibo* or *mobbo*.

¹⁸¹ For colophons of these texts, see UHU File 7, Image 6389; File 8, Image 6837; and File 11, Image 5032.

¹⁸² UHU, File 11, Image 5330.

¹⁸³ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuᓎe, 8/26/2005.

¹⁸⁴ This term connoted a young pupil who lives by begging.

¹⁸⁵ This term meant a more advanced student or disciple.

Usman and Num Hammadu did not claim the rank of scholars. Neither they nor any of their brothers matched their father's reputation for learning. The experience of Usman Umaru's *koreeji* shows how a learned individual could emerge within a nuclear household, most of whose members were not learned. The experience of Hammadu Usman's household reveals the variations in learning, which could occur within a nuclear family even when a father did try to give all his sons educational opportunities. Usman Hammadu's experience suggests that one factor contributing to this result was the fact that even households with strong intellectual aspirations also had to assign labor time to the subsistence food production, on which family survival depended. Hammadu's household differed from his father's, but each demonstrates ways in which individual households combined study and agricultural labor.

. Partly from his personal family experience, Usman Hammadu developed a model of the historical relationship between family and Islamic knowledge, which differs markedly from the conventional "learned family" model of West African Islam. With the concept of *majjere* ("getting or being lost"), which he repeatedly set in opposition to the condition of having knowledge, Usman displayed the strong moral value that he placed on knowledge – a value which made the interruptions to his studies such unpleasant memories.

A learned person could come from [a scholarly father] and someone who did not study could come from him. It was like it is now. Some become "red Fulɓe." People study, people get lost. When [a parent] raises his child and puts him in studying, he will become learned. If he does not study though, he will get lost. ... [A scholar] might not marry, let alone have a child. If he marries and has a child, he will put what he fathered in studying. This also sometimes does not happen.¹⁸⁶

For Usman, most families were messy mixtures of the learned and the lost. Though we may not share his moral characterization of people who focused exclusively on the agricultural economy,

¹⁸⁶ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, 8/26/2005.

Usman's model of the ubiquitous, but fragile place of Islamic knowledge within rural families dependent on this economy is a useful one. He formed this model partly from reflecting on his own scholarly father at the end of his life in the 1940s, as well as on his own educational fortunes at the time and those of his father's other sons. He reflected also on the experiences of other nuclear households, which he had observed since his childhood up to the time of our interview ("like it is now"). Additionally, he looked backward before his birth to what he knew about his father's accomplishments in the context of what he had heard about the household, which his grandfather led. Finally, as will become clear, he thought about a deeper family history, which went beyond the nuclear unit called *koreeji* to a broader concept of family.

De'eende: Hurguru and the Arkaseeḡe

Another fundamental familial unit in Hammadu Usman's society was the *de'eende*, or "neighborhood." When Aadu Haydu defined Hammadu as "a son of Usman Hurguru," the name "Hurguru" would have evoked for his listeners Hammadu's membership in the Arkaseeḡe *de'eende*. Both "Hurguru" and the Arkaseeḡe are fuzzy historical markers. The *de'eende* is a genealogical claim, but one which my interviewees sometimes found difficult to trace and about which they presented conflicting information. It functions no less effectively to foster a sense of shared history and of family, on a larger scale than the *koreeji* unit. In Hammadu's time, several distinct branches of Arkaseeḡe lived in Ruumde. The story of this larger family unit offers another useful portrait of the social distribution of Islamic knowledge in Hammadu's community.

The Fulfulde term *de'eende* often has some of the spatial content which we associate with the term “neighborhood.” In Suuduuŋe and other Gimbala Fulŋe usage, it frequently corresponds to a group occupying a particular section of a village. Yet its primary content is not geographical, but genealogical. The Arkaseeŋe neighborhood, for example, is located not only in a section of Ruumde, but in such Gimbala Suuduuŋe villages as Tannere, Nyeeeku, Garhonndu, and Wonko, as well as the more distant villages of Doogo, Saareyaamu, and Wuro Ngiya. These scattered households of Arkaseeŋe do not always find it easy to trace their genealogical relationships, but one recurrent common denominator is “Hurguru.”

The name “Hurguru” came up frequently when I asked about Arkaseeŋe genealogy. Umaru Usu Yatara, a genealogist by caste, gave the most internally consistent and satisfying account. He placed the Arkaseeŋe within the context of the origins of the Gimbala Suuduuŋe as a whole. After a dispute in their original village of Wuro Ngiya, a faction of Suuduuŋe embarked on a migration which ultimately brought them to Gimbala. Arŋo Usman led the group, whose defining organizational feature was its twenty-seven neighborhoods (*de'eele*). More than once, Umaru Usu launched a narrative with this numeric trigger. “Twenty-seven neighborhoods left Wuro Ngiya,” he started in one interview.¹⁸⁷ “Umaru Hammadu was ... the head of the Arkaseeŋe neighborhood.” When asked to list all the neighborhood heads later in the same interview, he named the Arkaseeŋe leader as “Umaru Hurguru.” Since “Hurguru” was not a real proper name, but rather a colorful nickname meaning “Floppy-Ear,” the two different forms of the founding head of the neighborhood present no contradiction. Umaru Usu’s tale has the form of a good origin myth, offering a concrete, critical historical moment and an individual (with a memorable name) as anchors for the Gimbala Arkaseeŋe’s claims to common descent.

¹⁸⁷ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 8/26/2005.

“Hurguru” served as an anchor in other accounts of Arkaseeḡe genealogy, which aimed less at ultimate origins than at specific meeting points between particular lineages. Usman Hammadu recounted a recent anecdote about genealogy:

Recently one of our youths went to Doogo. Someone asked him where he was from. He told him: “Ruumde Suuduuḡe.” [The other person] said: “We have a relative called Umaru Hurguru. ... Is there anyone left from his lineage?” Our youth told him: “He is my very own ancestor.”¹⁸⁸

The Arkaseejo¹⁸⁹ in Doogo was a scholar, so he wrote down how he understood his relationship to Umaru Hurguru. The youth from Ruumde, Usman Hammadu’s nephew, brought it back for him. Usman was skeptical. “I did not understand it.” “The way he said it did not convince me.” He expressed also general skepticism about the possibility of tracing such lineages. “Umaru Hurguru is very far off. My ancestor is also called Umaru. Mamman Umaru Hurguru, Usman Umaru Hurguru, and Mamman Hammadi are all the same [group]. Bura Ngadare’s people and Almordu Umaru all have the same descent. But there is no certainty about this.” Then, he pinpointed the methodological source of his suspicion: “It is not written.” Still, Usman’s doubts were selective. “We are the grandchildren of Umaru Hammadu,” he declared with confidence, “going all the way back to Kanaara Walka and Njolliri Walka and such. They are very far off. It is far off, but people familiar with them know that they are one father-house. ... The Arkaseeḡe are all one father-house.” Despite his skepticism about drawing clear lines to points of common descent in the deep past of the “neighborhood,” Usman accepted the fundamental principle that the Arkaseeḡe constituted a single group based on common descent. Umaru Hurguru, or Umaru Hammadu, anchored this principle, lending legitimacy to general claims to kinship even where long-lost relatives presented inconsistent lineage details.

¹⁸⁸ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

¹⁸⁹ Arkaseejo is the singular of Arkaseeḡe.

When Umaru Usu Yatara strayed from the founding myth of the Gimbalan Suuduuḡe, his comments on Arkaseeḡe genealogy also became less categorical. On one occasion, he explained the origin of the nickname “Hurguru.” “Umaru Hurguru, his cross-cousins gave him that name because his ears were so big they would flop around. He left [the name] Umaru Aamadu.”¹⁹⁰ Umaru Usu then riffed briefly on Arkaseeḡe genealogy both within and outside of Ruumde. The Arkaseeḡe “father-house is in Saareyaamu,” a village ca. 45 km north of Ruumde. Someone told Umaru Usu that the branch there “was coming out of Nuḡ Saawi Allay Aduraaman Buubu Nguyndi.” Umaru Usu replied to him: “You have not gone far from each other. ... Umaru Hurguru Aamadu Aduraaman Buubu Nguyndi is where I put [their lineages] together.” As a specialist in orally-transmitted genealogies, Umaru Usu Yatara felt more comfortable drawing new lineages between distant relatives than Usman Hammadu. Yet the end of his phrase – “where I put [their lineages] together” – suggests that he, too, recognized the speculative nature of the exercise.

Yatara also offered a more recent lineage of Umaru Hurguru’s descendants, which was located within Ruumde. “Jal’s group comes out of Almordu Umaru, who fathered Hammadu Aadu, who fathered Jal.” (“Jal” was a recently-deceased community member, roughly of Usman Hammadu’s generation; he left a son Usman Jal, a middle-aged man when I met him in Ruumde in 2005.) On another occasion, he brought up the same line and connected it to Usman

¹⁹⁰ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005. The relationship between cross-cousins (*denḡiraabe*), i.e. father’s sister’s or mother’s brother’s children, is the prototypical “joking-relationship” in Gimbal and many other areas of the Western Sahel. Though other, larger-scale groups engage and have historically engaged in reciprocal joking which comes under the same heading, the term for “joking-relationship” in Fulfulde, *denḡiraaku*, highlights the especially deep roots of socially-structured teasing among cross-cousins, ostensibly the first kind of joking-relationship to emerge. This etymology for “joking-relationship” is not confined to Fulfulde. The Bamana word for “joking-relationship,” *sinankuya*, is also an abstract noun formed from the word for “cross-cousin,” *sinankun*. The most literal translation for both *denḡiraaku* and *sinankuya* would be “cross-cousin-ness.” Cross-cousins were encouraged to ridicule each other mercilessly without taking offense. With their apt characterization of his ears, Umaru’s cross-cousins created a joke which became an important kinship marker and historical signifier.

Hammadu's branch. "Usman Jal is descended from Umaru Hurguru. ... His father [Jal] and [Usman Hammadu] are full paternal cousins and cross-cousins. That is Usman Umaru and Fatuma Umaru. [Fatuma] was the mother of Hammadu Aadu. [Usman Umaru] was the ancestor of [Usman Hammadu]." ¹⁹¹ Usman Hammadu discussed this linkage, too. "We are Arkaseeḡe, we and Jal's group. Almordu Umaru fathered Jal's ... father. Usman Umaru fathered my father." ¹⁹² The confusing part of these accounts is whether the meeting point is through paternal or maternal lines. Umaru Usu Yatara states that it was both, which is a distinct possibility in a society where marriage patterns often aimed at maximizing cross-cutting ties to bind an extended family group together. But adding the various statements together suggests that Usman Umaru had a brother named Almordu Umaru and a sister named Fatuma Umaru, who had a child Hammadu Aadu together – perhaps not an impossible union, but one as shocking to Gimbalan sensibilities as to ours!

Arkaseeḡe genealogy should be viewed less as a consistent, comprehensive system than as a disjointed set of mnemonics, each of which was preserved because it performed a specific social task. Umaru Hurguru was one of these mnemonics. The funny visual image of floppy ears, which it called to mind, made it memorable – a key ingredient of oral historical power. Hurguru anchored claims to common descent with distant relatives in, for example, Doogo or Saareyaamu as well as among Arkaseeḡe branches within Ruumde. It linked the Arkaseeḡe with the founding myth of the Gimbalan Suuduuḡe, defining in the process their place within that group and their relationship to the other twenty-six "neighborhoods." For Aadu Haydu's listeners, Hurguru anchored Hammadu Usman, then a young untested candidate for the imamate,

¹⁹¹ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/25/2005.

¹⁹² Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

in a deep familial and communal past. Hurguru was one reason to “trust” Hammadu, the chief implied, and a key basis for the community to “know” who he was.¹⁹³

Another common mnemonic form in Arkaseeḡe genealogy is the sibling pair, listed in simple, but formulaic fashion, usually without conjunction. Usman Hammadu introduced himself: “Usman Hammadu Usman. My fathers were: Hammadu Usman, Iisa Usman. Almordu Umaru, Usman Umaru. Y’eyya Nu, Sammba Nu.”¹⁹⁴ Through each of these pairs of brothers, he linked himself to someone he knew. “The group of Hamma Allay Ngadare descend from Y’eyya Nu. I descend from Hammadu Sammba Nu.” The pair of Almordu and Usman Umaru linked him to Jal’s group. Hammadu Usman was his own literal father; “Iisa Usman fathered Maamuudu Iisa.” He wandered to further linkages, each rooted in another sibling pair or triplet. The Arkaseeḡe “father-house is in Garhonndu,” a nearby Suuduuḡe village seven kilometers north of Ruumde. “That is Ngadaare Banannde Tokara Baaba Hunnday Hammadi. Hunnday Hammadi, Mamman Hammadi. My [ancestor] is Usman Umaru Mamman Hammadi.” “Booka Seyni is descended from Umahaani Walka. Kanare Walka, Njolliri Walka, and Umahaani Walka. ... Umaru Gomalel is descended from Kanare Walka. We are just Suuduuḡe Arkaseeḡe.” Short and punctuated by the repetition of the common father’s name, sibling pairs were easy to remember. Sometimes, as with his kinsman in Garhonndu, Usman Hammadu would try to draw out the whole length of a lineage. But the sibling pair was the key bit to

¹⁹³ In Hamma Layya’s narration, Chief Aadu names “Usman Hurguru.” My other interviewees consistently attributed the floppy-ears to “Umaru Hurguru.” The best interpretation for this discrepancy is not that it was an error on the chief’s or Hamma Layya’s part. Many factors muddy the waters of the superficially simple Gimbalan naming system, whose basic principle is to add to an individual’s first name a sequential list of his or her direct patrilineal ancestors. Haamidi Bujja’s second name was apparently his father’s nickname. He signed his letters as “Hāmidi, son of Muhammad, who was known as Bujja.” But he is remembered only as Haamidi Bujja; as early as 1909, the French adopted this abbreviated appellation for him when they referred to Aadu Haydu as “Amadou Amidi Bouya.” The meaning of “Usman” in the story about Chief Aadu was to link Hammadu Usman to his actual father; the meaning of “Hurguru” was to link him to his extended family, the Arkaseeḡe *de’eende*.

¹⁹⁴ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 5/2005.

remember, exactly enough information to evoke the tie. The pair was only worth remembering when there was a tie worth evoking.¹⁹⁵

The ties that bound the Arkaseeɓe did not form a perfectly consistent system, but they bound them nonetheless. The Arkaseeɓe and “people familiar with them” might struggle to produce neat lines of descent or a comprehensive family tree, but they knew just the same that they were “all one father-house.” They remembered just enough to anchor relationships which mattered to them. As such, the Arkaseeɓe family tree has gaps, where, for example, no important tie justified remembering a given sibling pair. By the same token, the tree could produce apparent contradictions due to an excess of ancestors or siblings, where these have served as handy reminders of useful relationships. These missing or oddly-tangled branches frustrate the historical empiricist. The lack of “certainty” bothered Usman Hammadu for one, but he shrugged it off for being “very far off.” Indeed, the measure of historical fog around the family unit has been one factor allowing the Arkaseeɓe “neighborhood” to work as a social fact in (and beyond) Ruumde. Its inconsistencies notwithstanding, it works in the Ruumde of the early twenty-first century, which I know, and it worked in the Ruumde of the early twentieth century, which Hammadu Usman knew. Chief Aadu’s choice of the word “Hurguru” is one echo of the significance which the *de’eende* had in the Ruumde of Hammadu’s time.

At least three branches of Arkaseeɓe lived in Hammadu Usman’s Ruumde. One of these branches was Hammadu Usman’s, the *koreeji* of Usman Umaru. We have already examined this branch and the place of Islamic knowledge within it in some detail. Another branch was “Jal’s

¹⁹⁵ Usman Hammadu was very conscious of the processes through which Suuduuɓe lineage groups evolved over time. The ways in which lineage members renewed or neglected familial ties continually reshaped their conceptions of those ties. “Suuduuɓe are all the same,” he said. “There are some who are far apart and lose contact. There are some who frequent each other and take wives from each other. When marriage takes place, they get closer to each other. When [the practice of forming marriage alliances] ends definitively, then a distant relationship starts.” Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, 8/26/2005.

group,” which in Hammadu Usman’s day would have been associated with the generation of Jal’s father, Hammadu Aadu. This group was closely related to Hammadu Usman’s, but far enough to give rise to some genealogical confusion by the early twenty-first century. Was the bedrock sibling pair the brothers “Almordu Umaru, Usman Umaru” or the brother-sister combo “Usman Umaru and Fatuma Umaru”? If the answer was both, was this incest or was there some more complicated explanation? Usman Hammadu was sure of the kinship tie, but acknowledged the confusion: The other Arkaseeḡe “and Almordu Umaru all have the same descent. But there is no certainty about this.” The third branch of Ruumde’s Arkaseeḡe was more distantly related. The main representatives of this branch in Hammadu’s approximate generation were Dayru Allay and Maadu Allay, the sons of Allay Hammadu, known as Allay Jaayeeru. Allay Jaayeeru was a late nineteenth-century figure, who established a reputation as a scholar and composer of religious songs. His descendants in Ruumde kept up this tradition of religious song. Their subgroup within the Arkaseeḡe *de’eende* became identified as the Jaareeḡe, meaning: singers for the Prophet. The experience of this extended familial unit, the Arkaseeḡe of Ruumde, maps the social distribution of Islamic knowledge at another, higher scale, offering a broader view than maps of individual *koreeji* units.

Usman Hammadu’s account of the origins of study within the *de’eende* offers a barebones historical framework for examining this experience. “The origin of the Arkaseeḡe ... is that they are red Fulḡe. Now they have studied. Whoever has studied is a scholar. Whoever has not is a red Pullo. We started to study with Mamman Hammadi. Since then until today, some study and some do not.”¹⁹⁶ According to Usman Hammadu’s conception of genealogy Mamman Hammadi was the grandfather of “Usman Umaru Mamman Hammadi,” and thus the

¹⁹⁶ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 5/2005.

great-grandfather of our protagonist, Hammadu Usman.¹⁹⁷ I have found no written confirmation of this family oral tradition that Mamman Hammadi was learned. I have no particular reason to either doubt or accept Usman's historical claim that study among the Arkaseeɓe began with him. But the true significance of the origin myth is the model of knowledge and family social organization, which Usman hangs on it. His vision of the *de'eende* as a mixture of scholars and red Fulɓe herders, of those who study and those who do not, strongly resembles his portrait of the learned and the lost, who co-inhabit almost every nuclear household. Whatever the literal truth of the origin claim, this vision of the *de'eende* does indeed reflect the historical experience of Ruumde's Arkaseeɓe.

Oral sources link the Arkaseeɓe branches of Hammadu Usman and Hammadu Aadu at Mamman Hammadi's son Umaru. Written sources provide evidence which both confirms the historical closeness between the two branches and establishes that the two men were contemporaries. The fact that Hammadu Aadu's colonial census cards ended up in the library, which Usman Hammadu and his brothers inherited from their father, records a historical tie between the two branches. The contents of the cards offer some basic information about Hammadu Aadu's life and nuclear family. One census card preserves a moment between 1932 and 1936, when "Amadoun Amadou" (or "Muhammad b. Ahmad" as the Arabic footnote had it) was a taxable household head with a wife and four children. The form does not include Hammadu Aadu's age or birthdate. It does date his children's births between 1926 and 1932.¹⁹⁸ A second census card from 1941 notes that he had a fifth child in 1936 and estimates his wife's

¹⁹⁷ Mamman Hammadi, incidentally, also formed a sibling pair with Hunnday Hammadi, which helped Usman Hammadu remember his relationship to the Arkaseeɓe of the village of Garhonndu.

¹⁹⁸ UHU, File 2, Images 1336-1337.

birthdate as 1901 or 1902.¹⁹⁹ He was therefore from the approximate generation of Hammadu Usman and his younger brother Iisa Usman, whose census form reported his wife's birthdate as 1904 and his oldest surviving child's as 1921.²⁰⁰ Hammadu Aadu seems to have died younger than either of them, since the May 21, 1941 card lists his fourteen-year-old son Aamadu Hammadu as the new household head.²⁰¹ Hammadu Usman and Hammadu Aadu lived in Ruumde at the same time, got married and had children at approximately the same time, and led two closely-related branches of their *de'eende*.

The distribution of knowledge within these two Arkasee6e branches from one generation before to one generation after the two Hammadus fits well within Usman Hammadu's framework. In the sibling pair "Almordu Umaru, Usman Umaru," Usman was a red Pullo herder, but Almordu was a scholar. Usman Jal showed me an old Qur'an manuscript, which he and Umaru Usu Yatara attributed to Almordu Umaru. The manuscript contains some explanatory notes and marginal lines of poetry,²⁰² but unfortunately the colophon, which might have verified the attribution, is lost. Usman Jal explained to me that the other books from his branch of the family had become part of the library which his uncle Usman Hammadu now holds (another legacy of the close connection between these two Arkasee6e branches earlier in the twentieth century).²⁰³ In the next generation, it was of course Hammadu Usman, the son of a red

¹⁹⁹ UHU, File 2, Images 1324-1325.

²⁰⁰ UHU, File 2, Images 1326-1327.

²⁰¹ The chiefly family's Arabic tax records present further evidence that Hammadu Aadu and Hammadu Usman were contemporaries. One tax document lists a "Muhammad Ahmad" about twenty taxpayers before an "Imām Rūmde," who was clearly Hammadu Usman. (See Library: Amiiri Ruumde, Ruumde Suuduu6e, File 1, Images 7787-7788.) Another set which noted the payment of an "Ahmad Hammadu" may reflect Hammadu Aadu's death and his son Aamadu's assumption of the duties of household head. (See Library: Amiiri Ruumde, Ruumde Suuduu6e, File 1, Image 7856.)

²⁰² See, e.g., Library: Usman Jal, File 1, Images 2333, 2336, and 2389.

²⁰³ Interview: Usman Jal, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 2005. Usman Hammadu's library contains some possible references to Almordu Umaru. Hammadu Aadu's name suggests that his father Almordu may have also gone by Aadu or

Pullo herder, not Hammadu Aadu, the son of a scholar, who became the leading scholar among the two branches. As we have seen, Hammadu Usman's sons all acquired some learning, but none of them matched his reputation. The leading scholar of their generation among the descendants of Umaru Mamman Hammadi was Alhaji Maamuudu Koola, also known as Samba Hammadu, from the house of Hammadu Aadu's son Jal.²⁰⁴ Like his classificatory uncle Hammadu Usman, Alhaji Maamuudu became the village imam, serving in the postcolonial period for a reputed seventeen years until his death in the 1980s.²⁰⁵

As with the smaller *koreeji* family units of Usman Umaru and Hammadu Usman, the experience of three generations of the extended family of Mamman Hammadi's descendants through his son Umaru reveals a scattered distribution of Islamic knowledge. As Usman Hammadu narrated, "since [Mamman Hammadi] until today, some [of his descendants] study and some do not." Like nuclear families, extended families were mixtures of the learned and the lost. As he put it on another occasion, "some of us are scholars. Others are herders. Mamman Hammadi was where scholarship started. From then until now, [scholarship] comes in and goes out." Scholarly achievement would come into one branch of the extended family and go out to another branch in the space of a single generation.

Aamadu. UHU, File 7, Image 5958, the colophon page of a heavily-annotated work of *takhmīs* poetry, identified the owner of the manuscript as "Ahmad b. Umar b. B.lā Mahaman." If we render this name in Fulfulde as Aamadu Umaru Mamman, the owner may have been the Almordu Umaru Mamman Hammadi of village oral tradition. UHU, File 8, Image 6708 seems to have the same name as the owner of a short work on theology by al-Sanūsī. The name is partially crossed out, making it harder to read. After acquiring a text originally owned by someone else, Gimbalans often crossed out the names on its colophon page to prevent future claims by those more closely related to the original owner. It is possible that someone from Hammadu Usman's branch of the family crossed out this name to prevent the potential claims of direct descendants of Almordu Umaru and Hammadu Aadu, such as Usman Jal.

²⁰⁴ Interviews: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 3/15/2007 and 7/13/2005.

²⁰⁵ One instance when Alhaji Maamuudu Koola played a role as a community scholar was when he served as one of five witnesses to the composition of a document, which divided the inheritance of Ibrahim b. Bookar Maasi. The document is preserved in the library of another family, which has produced some twentieth-century village imams. See Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduu6e, File 1, Images 3003-3004.

The Jaareeḃe sub-group of the Arkaseeḃe adds another layer of extended family to the picture. In Hammadu Usman's Ruumde, the senior Jaareeḃe were Dayru Allay and Maadu Allay. The two may have been slightly older than Hammadu Usman. The younger brother, Maadu, had the second of his surviving sons, Num Maadu, in ca. 1912.²⁰⁶ Dayru was still having children at least until ca. 1917, when his daughter Faatuma Dayru was born.²⁰⁷ His older children, such as Allay Dayru, were probably born considerably earlier. By the mid-1930s, Maadu Allay had died. His oldest son "Ahmadou Mahmoudou" (aka "Afo Mahmūd Abd Allah" in Arabic) became the head of a household of three taxable young bachelors.²⁰⁸ Perhaps this was the year when the chief's records show Afo Maadu paying five *riyāl* in tax. His paternal uncle Dayru Allay, whose household was probably larger, made a payment of fifteen *riyāl* one line above. Dayru paid another four on the other side of the document, a few lines below the twenty-five *riyāl* contribution of his Arkaseejo kinsman, the imam Hammadu Usman. Num Maadu was married and had his first child in ca. 1940,²⁰⁹ when many of my informants remembered Hammadu Usman as a very old man. So Dayru and Maadu Allay, Afo and Num Maadu were all adult contemporaries of Hammadu Usman. Dayru and Maadu were probably a half-step more senior than him; Afo and Num were a half-generation or more below him. They distinguished themselves from Hammadu Usman as Jaareeḃe. Along with Hammadu Usman and Hammadu Aadu, they distinguished themselves from other inhabitants of the village as Arkaseeḃe.

According to Usman Hammadu, the link between the Jaareeḃe and the other Arkaseeḃe went back to the brothers Allay Hammadu and Mamman Hammadu. "They are descended from

²⁰⁶ This date comes from a voter's registration card from 1957. See Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḃe, File 1, Image 0789.

²⁰⁷ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḃe, File 1, Image 0791.

²⁰⁸ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḃe, File 1, Image 0810.

²⁰⁹ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḃe, File 1, Image 0819.

Allay Hammadu. We are descended from Mamman Hammadu.”²¹⁰ If Mamman Hammadu may be identified with Mamman Hammadi, then we return to the starting-point of Usman Hammadu’s narration of study within the *de’eende*. This sibling pair is possible, but only if Mamman was an early son of Hammadi/Hammadu and Allay a much later one. Mamman Hammadi was Hammadu Usman’s great-grandfather. In contrast, Allay Hammadu, also known as Allay Jaayeeru, was the father of Hammadu’s contemporaries Dayru and Maadu Allay. Allay Jaayeeru made a name for himself in about the 1870s after locking horns with (and then earning the respect of) the regional political and military leader Tijjaani Aamadu. Hammadu Usman’s father Usman Umaru began fathering children in about the 1880s, so Allay may have been closer to the generation of Usman’s father Umaru Mamman. In Gimbala, it is not unusual for an aged man and his adult son to father children at approximately the same time. Such a situation may explain how Hammadi/Hammadu’s great-great-grandsons (Hammadu Usman and Hammadu Aadu) and his grandsons (Dayru and Maadu Allay) lived together as adult contemporaries. What matters for us was that these contemporaries identified as an extended family linked by common descent.

Allay Jaayeeru founded the Jareeḡe sub-group of the Arkaseeḡe through his prominence as a scholar. As Umaru Usu Yatara reported, “Allay Jaayeeru ... was a real scholar” at the time of the communal crisis around the 1870s, which resulted from the activities of the Futanke warlord Tijjaani Aamadu.²¹¹ He made his name by engaging in one distinct scholarly activity: the composition of religious songs in the vernacular Fulfulde. His descendants in Ruumde, including Dayru Allay, Maadu Allay, Afo Maadu, and Num Maadu, kept up this tradition,

²¹⁰ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

²¹¹ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

preserving Allay Jaayeeru's songs and composing some of their own. As a result, Usman Hammadu explained, they became known as the "Jaareeḃe, that is, composers of songs for the Prophet."²¹² This scholarly activity came to define their family identity, so the Jaareeḃe provide a useful case study of the concept of the "scholarly family" in local Muslim society.

The first generation of Jaareeḃe experience consists of the legendary accounts of Allay Jaayeeru's scholarly accomplishments. The defining moment of Jaayeeru's career was his confrontation with Tijjaani Aamadu. Most of Jaayeeru's songs dealt with strictly religious themes, particularly the praise of the Prophet Muhammad. But during the Futanke era (1862-1893), he also sang about the most influential ruler of this period, Tijjaani Aamadu. As Umaru Usu Yatara narrated, Tijjaani heard about the song and "sent him a message to come. He went to answer Tijjaani." Tijjaani "told him to say to him what he sang about him." Jaayeeru bravely related his blistering critique of Futanke rule directly to Tijjaani: "Here there is no religion. Here there is no truth. Here gifts are small. Shame does not exist. There is no *walī* of God among the Futanke. They are *muqaddams* of devils." Because this frankness represented Gimbalaan consensus about the meaning of the Futanke conquest of the previous Diina of Seeku Aamadu, it contributed considerably to Jaayeeru's reputation, but it also put him in jeopardy at Tijjaani's court. He preserved himself by deftly appealing to the ruler's vanity: "The [reason] that the Fulḃe hate you" is that "they envy you. You have been given ... all of the power." "The last of *pulaaku*²¹³ to have authority²¹⁴ will be the shaykh, Tijjaani Aamadu." Jaayeeru managed to

²¹² Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḃe, 2005.

²¹³ I.e., the members of the community of Fulfulde-speakers.

²¹⁴ The term used is *diina* from the Arabic *dīn*, or "religion." In local parlance, *diina* also referred to political authority and the state, especially of Seeku Aamadu.

withhold moral approval from Tijjaani's locally unpopular regime, while satisfying the ruler's desire for recognition of his power.

Muusa Num, a great-grandson of Jaayeeru, narrated the same event, stressing the monetary reward that the scholar received from Tijjaani. Jaayeeru told Tijjaani "that his state would govern." "When he was leaving," Tijjaani "gave him a lot of cowries."²¹⁵ This success further enhanced Jaayeeru's reputation. The hindsight of social memory helped create his reputation as a saint, or *walī*, a status whose markers often included the ability to predict the future. "All that he sang about ended up being true." "That is why he is said to be a *walī*."²¹⁶ Muusa Num confirmed the oral historical consensus that Jaayeeru had been a "*walī*," adding that where Jaayeeru was buried became a shrine and a destination for pious visits. Another sign of Jaayeeru's spiritual status was that "weeds would not sprout" above his burial site.²¹⁷ Jaayeeru became recognized as an extraordinary scholar, remembered for speaking the truth to rulers while avoiding the potentially dangerous consequences of this bravery and for speaking the truth about the future in a way which distinguished him as having special spiritual insight.

Allay Jaayeeru transmitted some of this scholarly legacy to his children. As Muusa Num related, "Dayru was learned. Maadu was learned. And everyone who grew up in the house would sing, because whoever hears people singing will sing."²¹⁸ The Jaareeŋe's songs were the primary marker of their scholarly identity. Over four generations, they created and transmitted orally a distinctive body of original songs. According to Muusa Num, the "songs of our house are not written. They were only composed in one's head." "Allay Jaayeeru composed most of

²¹⁵ Interview: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 8/27/2005.

²¹⁶ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 2005.

²¹⁷ Interview: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 8/27/2005.

²¹⁸ Interview: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 8/27/2005.

the songs, [but his] children also composed some.” Muusa Num’s father, Num Maadu, “composed some” songs too. Hamma Aadu was an older paternal cousin of Muusa Num, possibly the son of Afo Maadu, whose name on his colonial census card “Ahmadou” could be shortened to “Aadu.” Muusa knew Hamma better than his own father and learned more from him about the family’s historical experience. “Hamma Aadu became learned ultimately [and] himself composed religious songs.” He “composed his song in his head.” Other fourth-generation members of the family did not compose, but did learn and sing the songs. Muusa related: “My older brother knew my father. He could do [the songs] better. Me too, I can do some of them.” Muusa could describe some of Jaayeeru’s songs, including one about a companion of the Prophet named Mu’āz, one about a male donkey on which Jaayeeru had reputedly performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, and one for the Prophet in which Jaayeeru described himself modestly. “This little idiot of a student is climbing what he cannot. Saying he will undertake it, he rushes forward. He who is not capable of the discipline of Prophetic praise and has not read hadith will have trouble chanting for Muhammad.” But Muusa did not know the history of the songs well enough to differentiate them all by composer. Singing and composing became ordinary family practices. The songs combined into a corpus of family religious expression.

Another form which the scholarly legacy of the Jaareeŋe took is the small library which Muusa Num inherited from his father Num Maadu. One leaf in the collection suggests that some family songs were written, perhaps an exception to the general rule observed by Muusa. The Fulfulde-language text praises the Prophet and describes his religious role: “Bring us to

repentance, O truthful one Ahmad.”²¹⁹ It also narrates the contents of Muhammad’s preaching, addressing them to a contemporary Fulfulde-speaking audience: “When the Lord told us ‘Go study children of Adam,’ he meant you (pl.)/ Separate yourselves from Satan. They answered you [Muhammad] ‘Yes.’”²²⁰ The library also shows evidence of family legal study, including fragments of a manuscript *Risāla* and a complete copy of al-Qurtubī.²²¹ Its contents suggest further the family’s interest in esotericism, including one supplication signed by “Abū Bakr b. Mahmūd b. Abd Allah b. Ahmadu.”²²² “Abū Bakr” was Afo and Num Maadu’s younger brother Buukari Maadu Allay Hammadu.²²³ Continuing Jaayeeru’s tradition of religious song and also engaging with literate forms of Islamic knowledge, Allay Hammadu’s descendants built on the reputation established by the renowned scholarly founder of their lineage. As signified in the name Jaareeḡe, they created a family identity tied to Islamic knowledge.

Yet the Jaareeḡe were not an elite family of scholarly specialists. The family name signified a form of Islamic knowledge, but the family’s practice, like that of their Arkaseeḡe kinsmen, was to combine scholarship with agricultural labor. Like his kinsman Hammadu Usman, Dayru Allay kept a herd of cattle, for which he paid seven and a half *riyāls* in tax to the chief.²²⁴ A letter from the 1930s suggests that Afo Maadu had been herding near the village of Saare Demmba (33 km south of Ruumde) when he met his premature death. Chief Dawda Siidi

²¹⁹ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 0857. Ahmad is a common alternative name for the Prophet Muhammad.

²²⁰ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 0857.

²²¹ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 0879-0882 and 0792-0801. The *Risāla*’s colophon page is missing. Al-Qurtubī’s colophon unfortunately does not identify the manuscript’s owner.

²²² Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 0802. “Ahmadu” is close enough to be read as Hammadu, as in Allay Hammadu. Conceptions of Jaareeḡe descent have not changed from the time Buukari wrote this supplication to the time of my early twenty-first century interviews.

²²³ He was the third brother, “Boucari,” listed on the census card, on which “Ahmadou Mahmoudou” was named as household head. See Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 0810.

²²⁴ Library: Amiiri Ruumde, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 7829.

wrote to the chief of Saare Demmba about how to handle Afo's property, which likely consisted primarily of his livestock. "I heard [news about] a man from my people called Afo Mahmūd. God decreed his time [while he was] in your pasturelands. Then his property came to you. Turn his property over to the bearer of this letter, Nūh Mahmūd," i.e. Num Maadu. "The two of them are brothers."²²⁵ Num Maadu's 1957 voting card identified his occupation as a herder.²²⁶ Muusa Num, who has earned his livelihood primarily from his livestock, was proud that "most of" the Jaareeŋe of Ruumde "were learned." But he also mentioned descendants of Allay Jaayeeru settled in other villages, who "all tend to be red Fulŋe."²²⁷

Like other Gimbalan families, the Jaareeŋe engaged directly with both Islamic scholarship and the agricultural economy. Like their contemporary Arkaseeŋe kinsmen in Hammadu Usman and Hammadu Aadu's branches, Dayru and Maadu Allay's families produced both knowledge and food. Jaareeŋe experience was defined by both singing for the Prophet and the property which they took to pasture.

Conclusion

The Arkaseeŋe lineage group of Ruumde Suuduuŋe did not fit the profile of the "learned family" that many observers have seen as the key unit of religious knowledge production in Muslim West Africa. Family histories of the Arkaseeŋe suggest an alternative model of the relationship between Islamic learning and family units. Many rural Muslim families pursued strategies much like that of the Arkaseeŋe and their branches. They engaged directly both in

²²⁵ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 1, Images 0852-0853.

²²⁶ Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 1, Image 0789.

²²⁷ Interview: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 8/27/2005.

food production and in knowledge production. This pattern of investing labor time meant that Islamic knowledge became a widespread, but also tenuous part of rural families' histories. In most families, as Usman Hammadu put it, some people studied and others "got lost." The Jaareeŋe sub-branch of the Arkaseeŋe acquired a lineage label which asserted religious specialization. The fact that it too combined scholarly with agricultural labor – the learned with "the lost" – underscores the fundamental significance of this alternative model for telling family histories of learning in Muslim West Africa. The next chapter explores further the gap between discourses of lineage specialization and practices of incorporating learning into ordinary food-producing rural families.

CHAPTER V

FAMILY HISTORIES OF LEARNING II

**THE YIRRAYBE AND THE MOODIBAABE: THE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF
LINEAGE SPECIALIZATION**

Chapter IV examines a single *de'eende* kinship group and its component *koreeji* families. The Suuduuḡe clan of Gimbala was composed of twenty-seven such *de'eende* groups, according to the schema of genealogical expert Umaru Usu Yatara. Not all of those “neighborhoods” were represented in Ruumde Suuduuḡe. Those that were created a social fact, which even those with less comprehensive knowledge of genealogy than Umaru Usu recognized as a defining feature of the village. The story of the Arkaseeḡe offers one model of how family and lineage groups pursued Islamic learning. This chapter tests the applicability of that model to the village as a whole through the stories of two other “neighborhoods.”

Though each *de'eende* had its own particular story of integrating scholarship with subsistence food production, the story of the Arkaseeḡe did reflect a general pattern. Each *de'eende* produced both scholars and agricultural laborers (the learned and the lost of Usman Hammadu’s moralizing model). Individuals earned identities based on a relative assessment of where they focused their energies, but occupational labels did not translate into a strictly specialized division of labor. Scholars also worked fields and managed herds, while those classified as farmers or herders often had some experience of Islamic education.

Similarly, *de'eende* labels did not translate into a lineage-based system of labor specialization. The *de'eende* name typically defined a group through the idea of a common ancestor, conferred the group with membership in the larger group of Suuduuŋe migrants from Wuro Ngiya, and often marked off a spatial “neighborhood” within the village of Ruumde. “Neighborhood” labels seldom marked occupational or educational difference.

Among the twenty-seven Suuduuŋe neighborhoods, there were two exceptions to this rule. The Yirrayŋe *de'eende* label classified its members as “Warrior-Chiefs.” The label also connoted a tradition of opposition to Islamic practice and scholarship. Discursively, the Yirrayŋe were a non-scholarly, and even “anti-scholarly,” lineage. In contrast, the Moodibaaŋe *de'eende* was defined as a lineage of “Scholars.” On the surface, these discourses of lineage specialization present a challenge to my characterization of Islamic knowledge as available to a wide range of rural commoners. They seem to support the standard model of Islamic knowledge in West Africa as the preserve of a limited number of “learned families.” Just below the surface, however, these two discursive exceptions prove the practical rule of widely-distributed access to Islamic knowledge. In practice, Ruumde’s Yirrayŋe “anti-scholars” produced scholars. Ruumde’s Moodibaaŋe could boast a unique lineage label, but could not lay claim to unique scholarly pre-eminence, in practice. Like Ruumde’s other family and lineage groups, both of these purportedly specialized “neighborhoods” pursued generalist strategies, investing resources and labor time in both study and food production.

Arōe Yirrayōe: Learning in the Neighborhood of Warrior-Chiefs

The name of the Yirrayōe *de'eende* defined its members in occupational terms as “warrior-chiefs.” The term *yirrayōe* (s. *girraajo*) and the accompanying label *arōe* (s. *arōo*) were also one side of a binary opposing “warrior-chiefs” to “scholars,” or even “warrior-chiefs” to “Muslims.” Despite this definition of family identity as non-scholars, the Yirrayōe neighborhood, like other Suuduuōe neighborhoods in Ruumde, produced scholars as well as non-scholars. The career of Num Allay Aamadu, in particular, demonstrates that a discourse which separated roles by family could co-exist with a practice in which each family integrated both scholarly and non-scholarly roles.

The words *yirrayōe* and *arōe* get their semantic content from memories of a major political transition in the history of central Fulfulde-speaking Mali. In ca. 1818, Seeku Aamadu led a jihad which replaced the rule of *arōe* chiefs with an Islamic state, known as the *Diina*. The *Diina*’s narratives framed this transition as the triumph of religion over the “pre-Islamic” ignorance (*jaahiliyya*) of the *arōe*.²²⁸ The same binary defines local memories of political transition among the Gimbalan Suuduuōe. Umaru Usu Yatara singled out the pre-*Diina* *arōo* of the Suuduuōe as the only member of the clan who did not pray.²²⁹ Several village narrators characterized Seeku Aamadu’s appointment of a new Suuduuōe chief as not only a political, but also a religious transition. Seeku Aamadu unseated the *arōo* and gave power to a learned Suuduujo from a different family. Moreover, he eliminated the title *arōo*, investing the new

²²⁸ The very name for the state, the *Diina*, derives from the Arabic word for religion, *dīn*. The *Diina*’s leaders identified the Fulōe *arōe* with the Meccan opponents of the Prophet Muhammad and the age of *jāhiliyya* (Fulfulde: *jaahiliyya*), or “pre-Islamic” ignorance.

²²⁹ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuōe, 5/2005. The most common term for “Muslim” in Fulfulde is *juulōo*, literally “one who has prayed.” Therefore the meaning of this memory of the *arōo* is to set him up discursively as the opposite of the Muslim.

chief with the title *almaami* (imam), an act which deliberately fused the roles of political and religious leadership into a single office.²³⁰ The historical transition stripped the *de'eende* designation *arōe yirrayōe* of its occupational meaning. The “neighborhood” no longer produced chiefs, nor did it coordinate military activities. However, the *de'eende* family grouping continued to identify as Yirrayōe. The name carried the positive connotation of historical political and military strength. It also negatively connoted the status of non-scholars and even non-Muslims.²³¹ If any kin-group in Ruumde was marked off as a non-scholarly lineage, it was the Yirrayōe.

Despite this discursive reality, in practice the colonial-era Yirrayōe produced scholars. The career of Num Allay Aamadu Dansuru suffices to demonstrate the gap between discourse and practice. Num's father, Allay Aamadu, is remembered as a hard-working farmer, who did not study.²³² Like the somewhat older Hammadu Usman Umaru, the imam of Ruumde during Num's childhood and young adulthood, Num overcame the limited educational background of his father to create a successful career as a scholar within his community.²³³ In addition, he overcame community expectations tied to his lineage identity. When Hamma Layya stated that Num was the first in his house to study, he glossed the remark with the cliché: “an *arōo* does not study.”²³⁴ In 2007, Hamma stated this cliché as if it were an axiom valid for all times. On one level, it did indeed continue to express a certain social truth, which could hold up against the

²³⁰ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuōe, 5/2005.

²³¹ This pairing of positive and negative connotations is parallel to the meanings attached to the term “red Pullo” (pl. red Fulōe). On the term “red Pullo,” see chapter III, 120.

²³² Interview: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuōe, 5/2005.

²³³ For Hammadu Usman's family background, see chapter III, 120-123 and chapter IV.

²³⁴ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuōe, 3/15/2007. This cliché is reminiscent of another, yet more common one about another Gimbalan identity group. I have often heard from Gimbalans, especially those of slave background themselves, that “a slave cannot study.”

empirical disproof of Num's career.²³⁵ However, as Hamma acknowledged in the same breath, Num Allay had proven that even families classified ideologically as "non-scholarly" could produce scholars. Against community expectations, he earned a reputation as a hard-working Qur'an-school pupil, became a popular teacher in his own school, undertook adult studies of legal texts, built up a respectable scholarly library, and ultimately became village imam. The tension between his identity in the Yirrayōe *de'eende* and his pursuit of Islamic knowledge was a theme in his life, but a relatively minor one. Clearly, membership in a lineage classified as non-scholarly did not prevent him from acquiring knowledge and winning public acceptance of claims to scholarly status.

Num Allay was a meticulous, dedicated student of the Qur'an. He told his own student Aamadu Adu that he had studied the Qur'anic text in the schools of eleven different teachers before starting a school of his own in the late 1930s. Num narrated this phase of his career with self-deprecation and humor. "In every Qur'an school, he found that he had the worst mind." He linked his intellectual difficulties to his lineage identity as a Girraajo, but noted that his family background may also have given him a compensating trait. "On the other hand, in none of the schools did he find anyone who worked harder than he did." Aamadu Adu remembered telling his teacher "that it helped him that he was a Girraajo 'Dikko'."²³⁶ Aamadu reasoned that expectations based on Num's lineage identity as a "non-scholar" led him to take the task of memorization more seriously.²³⁷

²³⁵ In addition to Num's career, there was the empirical disproof of his brother Abulwafa Allay and his two sons, Hamma and Dahibu, both of whom, like Num, ultimately became village imams. Dahibu Num Allay is the current imam of Ruumde as of 2008.

²³⁶ "Dikko" is a surname, or "praise-name," which indicates membership in a "warrior," *girraajo* lineage.

²³⁷ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

Num's first school was in the neighboring Suuduuŋe village of Tannere. His final Qur'an-school teacher was a scholar named Allay Kurba from the more distant, non-Suuduuŋe village of Kurba. When Num arrived at Allay Kurba's school, he already had good command of the Qur'anic text. But Allay helped him acquire critical additional skills and confidence, which enabled Num to launch his own successful school. Num's positive feelings about Allay's role in this transition coalesced into a memorable story that he told his own pupils.

Num said to Aamadu Adu that "when he came to Allay Kurba's [school], he had no doubts about any of the sixty *hizbs*" of the Qur'an, "but the whole community doubted that he would leave his slate in [Allay's] hands," (i.e. definitively complete his Qur'an studies there). At that time, "he was not called a *mobbo*." What Num meant by not having any doubts about the *hizbs* was that he had memorized their oral form completely, could recite them without error, and could read any Qur'anic passage which a teacher might write for him. The critical new skill that would allow him to "leave his slate" and be "called a *mobbo*" was the ability to write the Qur'an for himself. "All sixty *hizbs* were in his head, but he did not see how to write them, even a little [of] them, for himself."²³⁸

Num spent about one month with Allay before the teacher gave him a memorable evaluation. During that month, "every night was one of study. He would pass the night studying. Allay liked him very much." The teacher liked Num for his dedication and his perfect command of the oral text. Allay called Num over one day, referring to him with his clan name: "Num Suuduujo." Then he praised him: "Not even Baa Botto could identify a broken place in your text for you! There is no need to talk about other people." The allusion to Baa Botto, a

²³⁸ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

central Malian Pullo scholar famed for his mastery of the Qur'anic text,²³⁹ made for an unforgettable compliment. Allay's assessment also alluded to those who doubted Num's level of accomplishment. The teacher emphatically dismissed the doubts of those "other people" with the comparison to Baa Botto.

At the same time, Allay identified Num's area of weakness. "You are blocked in writing though." And he proposed to Num a method for overcoming this weakness. "Be patient with me a little. Write for my little children. If you start to write for them from 'bi-rabbi'l-nāsi' to 'minja',²⁴⁰ of the Qur'an, you will see your luck appear." Allay's program for teaching Num to write followed the painstaking, gradual style which Num preferred. Num became Allay's assistant. He would write each passage over and over for a group of beginning pupils until "he had seized it." Ultimately, he had "seized" (i.e. fully mastered) the writing of the whole Qur'an. Allay Kurba "would keep saying 'Alfa Num, write for me such and such a place.' Whenever he wrote, it would be the case that that was how it should be written."²⁴¹ This gradual, meticulous mastery of Qur'anic writing constituted Num's "luck," allowing him to leave his Qur'anic slate behind and become a *mobbo* teaching his own pupils in his own school.

After completing his studies in Kurba, Num Allay returned to his home village to establish his own Qur'an school in the late 1930s. Despite the community's perception of him as a member of the "non-scholarly" Yirrayōe kin-group, Num's technical command of the Qur'an

²³⁹ Folktales about Baa Botto narrate a transition from a hardworking, rather dense Qur'an pupil to an unsurpassed master of textual detail. This story has clear parallels with Aamadu Adu's narration of Num Allay's career.

²⁴⁰ The phrase "bi-rabbi'l-nāsi" refers to the first line of the last sura of the Qur'an (*sūrat al-nās*). After the *fātiha*, this sura was the first which Qur'an-school pupils studied. The phrase "minja" is, likewise, a shorthand to mark a particular place in the Qur'anic text. Most such markers are the first phrases of suras or hizbs. This one ("minja") appears not to be. It may come from "min al-jinn," the first words of the last line of *sūrat al-nās*. If such is the case, Allay Kurba began by encouraging Num Allay to write only the six short lines of this beginning sura.

²⁴¹ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 4/1/2007.

as both an oral and written text won community acceptance of his individual scholarly status.

He became one of three popular Qur'an-school teachers of his generation in Ruumde.²⁴²

In the early 1940s, Num took his pupils from Ruumde to the village of Dorku. He continued to train them in the Qur'an as he sought to improve his own level of scholarship through studies of legal texts with an accomplished scholar and village imam named Ali Alfa Saydu.²⁴³ He remained a specialist in the Qur'anic text (Fulfulde: *gur'aananke*). Aamadu Adu praised him in this field of knowledge, stating that, "in terms of memorizing, I have not seen anyone better than him." But Aamadu admitted that Num "was not a specialist in more advanced knowledge," (Fulfulde: *ilmunke*, from the Arabic: *'ilm*, meaning "knowledge").²⁴⁴ As Aamadu expressed it, "he did taste some knowledge" of this sort. He acquired enough of it to return to Ruumde with an enhanced reputation as a scholar. He also studied some law in Ruumde with his co-villager Num Haalidu.

Over the course of his career, Num Allay compiled a scholarly library which preserves some of the technical content underlying this reputation. Unsurprisingly, he kept a copy of the Qur'an. He also wrote for himself a lengthy book which provided a set of mnemonic devices to help memorizers of the Qur'an.²⁴⁵ This text documents that dedication to technical mastery of

²⁴² The teacher with the largest school (*duḍal*) was Alfa Kodda Iisa. The third successful Qur'an-school teacher was Aamadu Alhajji. Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 4/1/2007.

²⁴³ Ali Alfa Saydu's marginal notes in his copy of the Mukhtasar of Khalil demonstrate his considerable mastery of this relatively advanced legal textbook. See Library: Almaami Dorku, Dorku, File 2, Image 9083 for the colophon identifying 'Alī b. Sa'īd as its writer.

²⁴⁴ Gimbalan Fulfulde-speakers also often contrast Qur'an-specialists (*gur'aanankooḃe*) with "book-specialists" (s: *defṭankooḃe*), meaning those who focused their studies on books other than the Qur'an. The terms *ilmunke* and *defṭanke* are roughly synonymous. Although they do draw this contrast, Gimbalan Fulfulde-speakers do, of course, consider the Qur'an as both the most important book and the most important source of knowledge. The meaning of these terms is to mark a scholar's passage beyond the initial stage of Qur'anic studies to other books and other sources of knowledge.

²⁴⁵ Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḃe, File 1, Images 2780-2872. 2780 is the basmala; 2866 is the colophon, which identifies Num Allay as the owner of the text.

the Qur’anic text, to which oral sources also attest. Num’s library also documents his interest in the discipline of law. He wrote himself a copy of the introductory legal text known as *al-‘Ashmāwiyya*.²⁴⁶ (He probably transcribed his copy by looking at a copy which Num Haalidu wrote. The fact that the latter manuscript remains in the library which Num Allay left to his sons gives documentary support to the teacher-student relationship between the two Nums.)²⁴⁷ In addition, he collected the legal texts of Ibn ‘Ashir and al-Qurtubī,²⁴⁸ suggesting a sustained interest in law, but one that focused on the fundamental textbooks of ritual law (*al-‘ibādāt*). On the other hand, he also wrote for himself a short text on a rather obscure issue of social law (*al-mu‘āmalāt*): the problem of the inheritance rights of hermaphrodites.²⁴⁹ He copied a mid-sized, regionally-produced commentary on inheritance questions in the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī.²⁵⁰ His younger brother Abulwafa Allay copied for Num a regionally-produced guidebook to proper pronunciation of the Arabic letter *shīn*, which Fulfulde-speakers often mispronounce as “s.”²⁵¹ Num’s interest in delving into technical detail was focused on the Qur’anic text, but extended also to some issues of law and Arabic linguistics.

²⁴⁶ For the colophon of this text, see Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 3043.

²⁴⁷ For the colophon of Num Haalidu’s *al-‘Ashmāwiyya*, see Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Image 7126.

²⁴⁸ See, e.g. Library Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 3019 and 3011.

²⁴⁹ Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 2987-2990.

²⁵⁰ The work is entitled: *Sharh farā’id al-Risāla al-Qayrawāniyya*. Its author is Mālik b. Muhammad al-Māsinī (i.e. from the Maasina region of central Mali). Al-Māsinī attributes the substance of his composition to the oral explanations of his teacher Hamād b. ‘Abd Allah. Among the features of the work is the characteristic central Malian taste for acrostics. Rather than represent these pictorially however, the work outlines them in an expository narrative. For portions of the *Sharh farā’id* in Num Allay’s hand, see Library, Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 3141-3167. For portions of a manuscript copy in a different hand that may have been the model from which Num copied, see Library, Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 3086-3122.

²⁵¹ For the colophon which identifies Abulwafa as the writer and Num as the owner, see Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 2779.

Num's scholarly profile positioned him to be named village imam in the mid-to-late 1960s. The modest command of a few fundamental fields of knowledge displayed in his library prepared him for the post. In chapter IV, we saw how a previous imam, Hammadu Usman Umaru, read Ibn 'Ashir's legal textbook on the question of qualifications for the imamate. Num Allay also collected and read this text (though, unlike Hammadu, he did not leave specific evidence that his reading was particularly probing). One of Hammadu Usman's great concerns when he read this passage seems to have been the criterion that an imam must master correct Arabic pronunciation. The pronunciation guide that Num had his brother write for him demonstrates his efforts to meet this condition.

Num's library also preserves echoes of the community ritual roles that he performed as imam and how he performed them. In chapter III, we compared Num's authorship of ritual speech for the imam's roles in officiating at funerals and weddings with Hammadu Usman's. We should recall here particularly the funeral invocation, which suggests Num's awareness of textual passages from the *Risāla* and the *Muwatta'* of Mālik as well as his ability to splice and combine them into a coherent, satisfying whole.²⁵² On the top of one leaf preserved in his library, Num jotted down four lines of *rajaz* poetry, which outline errors that imams should avoid while leading the prayer ritual.²⁵³ The form of the document suggests Num's deliberate attention to the issue.

Like Hammadu Usman Umaru, Num Allay played other community roles as a scholar beyond the ritual roles of the imamate. We have already discussed his activities as a teacher. Members of the community often called upon him as a witness to legal transactions and writer of

²⁵² See chapter III, 134; Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 2915.

²⁵³ Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 2873.

legal documents, particularly pertaining to issues of inheritance.²⁵⁴ These documents do not describe Num's role in applying the often complex arithmetic involved in Islamic inheritance determinations, but his collection of theoretical texts on inheritance suggests that he probably did play such a role. Another note in Num's library shows him recording and bearing witness to the size of the goat herds of two parties.²⁵⁵ His command of literacy and reputation as a scholar led the community to entrust him with the safeguarding of various forms of rural property. The community did not remember him as an overpowering legal debater in the model of Hammadu Usman. As his greatest supporter Aamadu Adu admitted, "he was not an *ilmunke*." But the knowledge which he had "tasted" – particularly the specialized knowledge of inheritance principles – authorized him to carry out some specific social tasks designated for scholars.

Community recognition as a scholar by no means ruled out conflicts about public claims to scholarly authority. These conflicts could unfold around the full gamut of scholarly roles from legal debater to Qur'an-school teacher, but acrimony surrounding the imamate reveals the most about Num Allay's sense of himself as a scholar. As we saw in chapter III, Hammadu Usman's imamate became the subject of debate both at the time of his appointment in his youth and when he had become physically infirm soon before his death. Num Allay would have been aware of and possibly present for the latter event: Hammadu's feast-day showdown with his eventual successor Num Haalidu.

Num Allay was yet more certainly involved in another conflict about succession to Ruumde's imamate after the death of Num Haalidu in ca. 1960. This conflict pitted a new chief, Umaru Haamidi, against his brother Bura, who sought the imamate. The new chief preferred a

²⁵⁴ See Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 2931-2932, 3003-3004, and 2978.

²⁵⁵ Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Image 2903.

maternal half-brother of Num Allay named Umaru Hammadu Ba. As a pretext against Bura's candidacy, the chief pointed out his limp, claiming that the law forbade a person with a physical defect from assuming the imamate. The conflict was protracted and divided the community. Ultimately, the parties sent the legal question about the limp for arbitration outside the village. The arbiter ruled in favor of Bura. Umaru Hammadu Ba withdrew his candidacy, telling the chief that he did not want to be a part of the latter's campaign against his brother.²⁵⁶

Num Allay wrote and left in his library a legal note that addresses the question of which physical defects disqualify a candidate for the imamate. The ruling displays the precise definitions and nuanced qualifiers typically prized in its genre. While candidates with cut-off or withered hands or legs are indeed unsuitable, "the imamate of one who limps is permissible provided that the limp is minor, to the extent that his leaning on the lame leg does not cause him to stop standing. But if another [candidate] can be found, that is preferable."²⁵⁷

Characteristically, the text concentrates on establishing legal authority, citing core Mālikī law books,²⁵⁸ retaining a neutral tone, and avoiding mention of any specific case. Yet it almost certainly emerged from the dispute over the imamate in ca. 1960. The document echoes and complements orally-circulated community memories of this dispute. It suggests Num Allay's position in that dispute that the alternate candidate, his half-brother Umaru Hammadu, would be the preferable imam, but that Bura Haamidi's limp was not an absolute disqualifier. Perhaps, Num's relatively neutral position explains why, when Bura Haamidi left the imamate to assume

²⁵⁶ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

²⁵⁷ Library: Dahibu Num Allay, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 3001-3002.

²⁵⁸ These were "*Jawāhir al-iklīl*" and "*Durr al-thamīn*." *Jawāhir al-iklīl* is a well-known commentary on the *Mukhtasar* of Khalīl b. Ishāq. "*Durr al-thamīn*" is probably a misspelling for *al-Durr al-thāmin*. The reference here is probably to a commentary by that name on Ibn 'Ashir's *al-Murshid al-mu'in*.

the chiefship after Umaru Haamidi's death some years later, he did not oppose Num's appointment to the imamate.

No oral anecdotes or written fragments give clear evidence of specific opposition to Num Allay's imamate, but Aamadu Adu remembers that the office was occasionally a source of frustration for him. Aamadu related: "Our teacher [Num Allay] lived until he died. When he would get angry, he would say: 'Just as a person puts on his shirt, so he will take it off. As for us, we are Yirrayōe Arōe. In the end, I will abdicate. We will throw it off.' Until he died, he would say that."²⁵⁹ When Num was angry about the way the community treated him as imam, he often contemplated abdicating. These thoughts in moments of irritation gave rise to yet more interesting reflections on the relationship between his status as a scholar and his *de'eende* lineage identity. These reflections rested on a metaphor based on the Fulfulde word *ḡortaade*, which can mean either "to undress or take off (clothes)" or "to abdicate (the chiefship or, in this case, the imamate)." Num likened his scholarly role as imam to a shirt that he had put on, but which at any time he could take off to reveal an authentic, original self as a classificatory "warrior-chief" and "non-scholar." Even at the end of his life, Num Allay felt a tension between his scholarly career and his lineage identity.

The important point for us, however, is that this social discourse imposed no practical boundaries on Num's pursuit of a full scholarly life consisting of the various phases, forms of technical expertise, and public social roles outlined above. Aamadu Adu's comment just after narrating his teacher's reflections on being a Girraajo scholar underscores the lesson: "Even so, he mastered the Qur'an to the point that he was overflowing!" Each Suuduuōe *de'eende* could

²⁵⁹ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 4/1/2007.

and did produce scholars, even the one whose identity implied the matter-of-fact cliché: “an *arɔo* does not study.”

Moodibaaɓe: Agriculture in the Neighborhood of the Scholars

Among the twenty-seven Suuduuɓe “neighborhoods,” one was singled out in its name as the *de’eende* of “Scholars,” the Moodibaaɓe. It is not surprising that – like the other Suuduuɓe “neighborhoods” represented in Ruumde – this *de’eende* produced scholars. We have already encountered Num Haalidu and, to a lesser extent, Jampullo Aduraaman, two key scholars from two different branches of Ruumde’s Moodibaaɓe *de’eende*, who were approximate contemporaries of Hammadu Usman Umaru.²⁶⁰ We will discuss their scholarly achievements in the field of Islamic esotericism in the next chapter. What is important to note here, however, is not the scholarship of the “scholars’ neighborhood,” but the fact that – like other Suuduuɓe “neighborhoods in Ruumde – it combined the production of knowledge with direct engagement in subsistence food production. Social discourse about the Moodibaaɓe lineage defined it as a “learned family.” In practice though, this designation meant neither monopoly control over knowledge production nor exclusive occupational specialization in it.

Origins of a Suuduuɓe “Scholars” Neighborhood. The designation as “scholars” distinguished the Moodibaaɓe from other Suuduuɓe “neighborhoods.” Narratives about the origins of their membership in the broader Gimbalan Suuduuɓe clan also set them apart. My interviewees all agreed that they had joined the Gimbalan Suuduuɓe from Timbuktu after the migration of the

²⁶⁰ See chapter III, 113, 139-140.

other neighborhoods from Wuro Ngiya. Umaru Usu Yatara attempted to reconcile this remembered migration from Timbuktu with the concept of Gimbalan Suuduuḡe group identity as rooted in the shared experience of migration from Wuro Ngiya. He claimed that the Moodibaaḡe *de'eende* had, in fact, left Wuro Ngiya with the other “neighborhoods.” It had subsequently separated from the clan to live in Timbuktu. Therefore, its ultimate migration from Timbuktu was not an integration of outsiders into the group, but rather a re-integration of a segment which had been temporarily separated from the group.²⁶¹

Other interviewees rejected this version. They defined the Suuduuḡe in terms of common patrilineal descent as a “father-house” (*suudu baaba*). At the same time, they enlarged the notion of group membership beyond the confines of descent. “Father-house” logic held that those who belonged to the same patrilineal descent group ought to live together in a community governed by norms of mutual assistance. Members of father-houses comfortably reversed this logic, reasoning that those who lived together in a community ought to belong to the same notional “father-house.” As Usman Hammadu related, Moodibaaḡe such as Num Haalidu’s branch became Suuduuḡe through long-term co-habitation and intermarriage.²⁶² He and other narrators, including Moodibaaḡe themselves, recognized the Moodibaaḡe as legitimate Suuduuḡe, while remembering their non-Suuduuḡe (and possibly even non-Fulḡe) origins.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Interview: Umaru Usu Yatara, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

²⁶² Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

²⁶³ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007. Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007; 3/15/2007. Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006. Layya Mbiiga recounted a trip of some *de'eende* members to Timbuktu, where they found and re-established contact with some distant relatives from their real father-house. Layya recalled that these distant relatives were “Aaraaḡe,” a clan of Songhay-speakers who claim descent from the 16th/17th-century Moroccan invaders of the Songhay Empire and who identify themselves with the praise-name “Tuure.” Aamadu Adu narrated some *de'eende* members’ visits to Songhay-speaking relatives from Timbuktu, who were living in Mopti.

Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman narrated his *de'eende*'s integration into the Suuduuḡe as the result of a summons by Seeku Aamadu, ruler of the regional state, the *Diina*, from 1818 to 1845. He claimed that Seeku Aamadu identified 333 scholars from Timbuktu, then gradually winnowed this group down to three scholars, whom he summoned to his capital, Hamdallahi. At Hamdallahi, the three scholars encountered the Suuduuḡe and agreed to accompany them to settle among them in their area of Gimbala. Hammadu Aamadu's story offers an explanation for the internal segmentation within the Moodibaaḡe. The three scholars remained interconnected as the Moodibaaḡe *de'eende* of the Suuduuḡe, but each founded his own distinct branch.²⁶⁴ Hammadu's version also places strong emphasis on the high-status scholarly origins of his lineage, linking his *de'eende* to a highly-selective vetting process and the high-status Islamic ruler Seeku Aamadu in addition to the high-status scholarly center of Timbuktu. Other narrators simply stated that the Moodibaaḡe were scholar-migrants who joined the Suuduuḡe from Timbuktu.

Despite their outsider origins, all three branches of the Moodibaaḡe played important parts in Suuduuḡe history. One branch led the Suuduuḡe faction which fled across the Niger River during the Futanke ruler Tijjaani Aamadu's campaigns in the 1870s. This branch returned in the early colonial period to become the chiefs of Ruumde's neighbor, the village of Tannere, and the colonial canton of Narhawa. The other two branches of Moodibaaḡe played central roles in the other Suuduuḡe faction. This second faction chose to stay in Gimbala and, ultimately, seek accommodation with Tijjaani. Haalidu Num, the father of Num Haalidu, settled in the area that became Ruumde's bush even before its first chief, Haamidi Bujja, came there to settle. He joined with a group of Suuduuḡe slaves who were living in a portion of the bush called

²⁶⁴ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007 and 2005.

Bolonngo, east of the eventual village site. Shortly thereafter, Haamidi Bujja reached agreement with Tijjaani to leave the village of Wango, where his faction of Suuduuŋe had taken refuge, and re-settle this group just south of the old Suuduuŋe center of Tannere in what became Ruumde Suuduuŋe. Ultimately, he persuaded a number of Suuduuŋe nobles and casted people to settle Ruumde's *wuro*, while also re-locating the slaves at Bolonngo in a new *saare* adjacent to the *wuro*. Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman claimed, however, that his grandfather Aduraaman Jampullo (the father of Jampullo Aduraaman) was the only one who accompanied Haamidi Bujja when the *wuro* was first established. The considerable amount of Haamidi Bujja's correspondence preserved in this Moodibaaŋe branch's library provides documentary evidence of a close relationship between the two men. So, although narratives of the *de'eende*'s origins identify the Moodibaaŋe as late-comers, the leaders of two branches, Haalidu Num and Aduraaman Jampullo, were among the first-comers to the new Suuduuŋe community founded at Ruumde in the 1870s or 1880s. Both men founded households which became fully integrated into the new village community.

Just as the Moodibaaŋe joined the Suuduuŋe as scholars, they continued to pursue learning and play scholarly roles among their adopted "father-house." The community recognized Haalidu Num as a scholar. His correspondence refers to him with the scholarly honorific "Alfa" and to his father Num with the same title.²⁶⁵ Aduraaman Jampullo was also learned. Several of the sons of each studied. Num Haalidu and Jampullo Aduraaman earned the reputations for the highest-level of scholarship in each branch. Both men brought their knowledge of Islamic secrets into community life in ways which we will examine in the next chapter. Num served the community as imam in the 1950s. His brother Aamadu Haalidu served

²⁶⁵ See Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 3, Images 3354, 3402, and 3810.

as the imam of the *saare* at approximately the same time. Both households amassed substantial scholarly libraries.

At the same time, the two households were fully integrated into the community's life, including its emphasis on food production. After describing how his lineage joined the Suuduuḡe as scholars, Hammadu Aamadu noted that “fields for farming and study, those were the jobs” of the early Moodibaaḡe migrants among the Suuduuḡe.²⁶⁶ Later, in colonial-era Ruumde, Hammadu's branch of the *de'eende*, the descendants of Aduraaman Jampullo, continued to combine agricultural with intellectual work. The activities of Aduraaman's sons Jampullo and Aamadu, and of his grandson Hammadu Aamadu, illustrate the pattern.

Aduraaman Jampullo's Household. Jampullo Aduraaman was a rough contemporary of Hammadu Usman Umaru, who died as a blind old man just a few years earlier than the latter, probably in the late 1940s. He was the leading scholar in Aduraaman Jampullo's branch of Moodibaaḡe in mid-colonial Ruumde. “Study” (understood as referring to the broad range of scholarly activities) was indeed one of Jampullo's “jobs,” including in the narrow, economic sense of that word. Both Aamadu Adu and Layya Mbiiga remembered him as a scholar who received a notable amount of gifts for his services (*jom keḡal*), even after he had gone blind.²⁶⁷ His kinsman Hammadu Aamadu repeatedly emphasized his success and prominence as a scholar. On the other hand, Hammadu also stressed that his uncle focused considerable energy on working in his fields. Furthermore, Hammadu affirmed, “the whole house loved work in the fields. ... No one liked fields as much as they did. Not just millet, not just rice, not just sorghum

²⁶⁶ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007.

²⁶⁷ Interviews: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006; Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007.

– they would work them all.” He then launched into a detailed description of the locations of the fields that “belonged to our fathers”: including a millet field on the path to Tannere, a sorghum field near Ruumde’s border with Alsunnduga, and a rice field next to the riverbank and some fig trees west of the village.²⁶⁸ Jampullo sought and acquired knowledge and recognition as a scholar. At the same time, he engaged directly in the subsistence grain production at the core of Ruumde’s economic life.

Jampullo’s younger brother Aamadu Aduraaman did not attain a scholarly reputation on Jampullo’s level. One interviewee called Jampullo “a real scholar.” About Aamadu Aduraaman, he said: “I did not know him to be a scholar, but I knew he was the child of someone important, who had a big household.”²⁶⁹ Not all members of the “neighborhood” of “scholars” acquired recognition as scholars. Scholarly status derived from personal achievement rather than lineage labels or the importance of one’s father.

Though he did not ultimately win recognition as a scholar, Aamadu Aduraaman did undertake some studies in his childhood. The story of how he began his studies in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century reveals a pattern of successive periods of agricultural labor and of study similar to that described by Usman Hammadu Usman about his childhood a generation later.²⁷⁰ Jampullo had been studying with a teacher in a relatively distant region of northern Mali, which Gimbalans refer to as “Saahel.” During one visit back home to Ruumde, “he found” his younger brother Aamadu “herding his goats” on the plain between Ruumde and the village of Arkoja known as Sirow. “A jackal entered, made them flee, made them scatter,

²⁶⁸ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2/25/2007.

²⁶⁹ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

²⁷⁰ See chapter IV, 167-172.

and ate them. The older brother ... grabbed his hand and took him to the Saahel” to study.²⁷¹

Though he was a member of the scholars’ *de’eende*, Aamadu spent much of his childhood performing pastoral labor. His opportunity for a period of study came only after chance misfortune deprived him of his goat herd.

Like his father, Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman combined some study with agricultural labor as a child. He remembered an outsider-scholar who settled in the village, served as imam of the *saare* in the 1930s, and taught him his first letters. He reminisced about a scholarly relative in Tannere, with whom he lived during much of the 1940s and from whom he acquired some scholarly papers. At the same time, he also remembered performing agricultural tasks, such as milking for his neighbors.²⁷² Unlike Usman Hammadu Usman, he did not explicitly blame the limits of his scholarly achievement on time spent on food production. Yet, despite the scholarly identity of his lineage and the sizeable family library that he inherited, Hammadu Aamadu did not gain a personal reputation for scholarship.

Usman Hammadu’s model of study within his “neighborhood” – that the Arkaseeḡe would study, then “get lost” – applied also to Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman’s *de’eende* even though it was defined as “scholarly.” Some members of the lineage achieved scholarly success, but others did not. Like the Suuduuḡe “neighborhoods” which did not claim distinctively scholarly identities, Hammadu Aamadu’s Moodibaaḡe invested some family labor time in study and scholarship and some in food production. Family memories of study and scholarship were spatially tied to areas of the bush and the family agricultural labor performed there. The Sirow plain was where Aamadu Aduraaman lost a goat herd and transitioned to a period of study. The

²⁷¹ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007.

²⁷² Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2/25/2007.

rice-field next to the riverbank and some fig trees, which Hammadu Aamadu listed among his fathers' farm-plots, was where Jampullo Aduraaman would convene esoteric scholarly meetings in the 1930s and 1940s. The household which Aduraaman Jampullo founded in the village of Ruumde had a distinct label as a "learned family." Yet, in practice, this family integrated learning with food production much like any other family in the rural community.

Haalidu Num's Household. To some extent, the other Moodibaaŋe household in Ruumde had a different experience than Aduraaman's branch. Each branch settled in the new village of Ruumde under different circumstances, built homes and claimed fields in different locations, and responded differently to opportunities for small-scale trade. As noted above, Aduraaman Jampullo accompanied the first chief, Haamidi Bujja, when he founded the village's *wuro*. Haalidu arrived even slightly earlier, settling among some Suuduuŋe slaves east of the eventual village site. When Haamidi Bujja re-settled the slaves in a new *saare* adjacent to the new *wuro*, Haalidu stayed among them. He was a "noble" and therefore did not belong to the *saare*, but he resided in it and left his house there to his sons. In contrast, Aduraaman and his sons built their home in the *wuro*. The two branches conceived of themselves as one genealogical "neighborhood" (*de'eende*).²⁷³ But, unlike other *de'eele* in Ruumde, they did not form a geographical neighborhood. The farm-plots of the two branches were also geographically dispersed. While Aduraaman's household had its primary fields west of the village, Haalidu's branch kept its main fields to the east by its old homestead in Bolonngo. In addition, Haalidu's

²⁷³ Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman did not know exactly how the two branches met in a common ancestor in Timbuktu, but he "heard from [his] fathers that they were relatives." This consciousness of common descent created a sense of solidarity between the two branches. The generation of Aduraaman's sons, Jampullo and Aamadu (i.e. Hammadu's "fathers"), and Haalidu's sons, led by Num Haalidu, "did not leave each other ... until their deaths." Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 1/13/2007.

branch pursued a somewhat different household economy. While Aduraaman's branch engaged only in scholarship and food production, Haalidu and two of his sons also conducted some trade.

Despite the differences, Haalidu's household conformed to the same basic pattern. Their commercial activities offered them an extra source of income. Yet the scale of their involvement in trade was modest. It supplemented, rather than replaced, their reliance on direct engagement in food production. Trade was an additional element of the household's generalist occupational strategy. Like Aduraaman's household, Haalidu's branch combined occupational pursuits much like other families that did not carry the lineage label of "scholars." They formed another "Moodibaaŋe" household that did produce scholars, but that also planted and herded.

My interviewees remembered Haalidu Num as a scholar. He arrived in Ruumde as a scholar and contributed the benefits of his Islamic knowledge to the young village community.²⁷⁴ The correspondence that Haalidu left in his family library indicates his learning in the title "Alfa." Yet their contents offer more information about his household economy than about his scholarship. Haalidu's commercial activities involved successes and setbacks. Overall, they reveal a modest prosperity, a level of capital that separated Haalidu from mere subsistence. Haalidu was not, however, a full-time merchant who could dispense with direct involvement in subsistence agriculture. Like the rest of the village, his well-being remained tied to the food-producing potential of the bush.

Two letters document Haalidu's involvement in trade. The goods involved seem to have been of rather small quantity, but varied in kind. They included salt, other foodstuffs, black cloaks, donkeys, a billy-goat, and probably bulls and snuff. Haalidu's involvement in trade

²⁷⁴ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 1/13/2007.

probably pre-dated French conquest and continued on afterwards.²⁷⁵ It connected him with markets both to the north (where he maintained contacts with relatives) and as far south as Segou (nearly 400 kilometers southwest of Ruumde).²⁷⁶ He relied on relatives as commercial agents, including one of his wives and one of his maternal nephews.

The letter from Haalidu's nephew brought news of a series of trading mishaps. First, the nephew turned a profit on the sale of salt. Then, his "food situation became difficult," which forced him to "eat" from the revenue. After noticing that merchants were having success with a trade in donkeys, he bought three of his own. He did not have the same good fortune. One of his trade donkeys died between purchase and sale, a second fetched about half its purchase price, and the third only covered its cost. The nephew called his foray into the donkey trade a "catastrophe." He switched to the food trade, quickly buying and re-selling a very small quantity (two *saawals*, or approximately ten kilograms). Then he lost his nerve. He "became scared [of losing] what remained in [his] hands" and returned to Sarafere, about twelve kilometers from Ruumde and the closest significant market town. Probably also scared of Haalidu's reaction, he stopped in Sarafere, sending in the hands of a certain Alfa Baaba his explanatory letter along with some money and two black cloaks, whose value totaled less than half his initial capital. He downplayed what may have been his own bad judgment by stating that: "God did not grant me wealth." He tried to cushion the blow of Haalidu's disappointing return by characterizing it as "that with which God has provisioned you."²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Some of his correspondence refers to cowrie-shells as the currency of trade. Other letters mention *riyāl*, or French francs.

²⁷⁶ Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Images 3773-75.

²⁷⁷ Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Images 3773-3775.

Haalidu's documentary records do not allow us to reconstruct his complete economic portrait, but they do offer a general impression. His involvement in trade clearly involved setbacks, such as the one that his sheepish nephew described. But the general impression that Haalidu's records leave is of modest prosperity. A document from his youth attests to property valued at between 300,000 and 500,000 cowries. In the 1880s or 1890s when an associate located his missing slave in Bandiagara, he seems not to have hesitated in sending the full price of the slave to recover him from a new owner. He sent a quantity of snuff valued at 250,000 cowries and even voluntarily added 10,000 extra cowries as a courtesy.²⁷⁸ Probably at a difficult time before harvest, he loaned a certain Buubakar Mam fifty *saawals*, or approximately 250 kilograms, of grain.²⁷⁹ This amount would have fed a typical family for about one month. Haalidu's commercial activities meant he had an amount of capital that separated him from mere subsistence.

On the other hand, Haalidu lived in a food-producing community, not a market town. While some of his letters were commercial, his correspondence also underlines how Haalidu identified his personal well-being with the general well-being of his village community.²⁸⁰ Like

²⁷⁸ Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Images 3822-3823.

²⁷⁹ Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Image 3820.

²⁸⁰ In an early colonial-era letter addressed to a more senior scholar in nearby Tannere, he excused himself for not being able to visit personally: "Worldly matters became difficult for me." "Such is this world," he continued, downplaying the importance of his material worries. "This world should not become our biggest concern." He was vague about the nature of these "worldly matters," but he indicated either that they were affecting Ruumde as a whole or, perhaps, that the welfare of the community was more important than his personal problems. "The village is fine," he wrote. Then he added "Praise God," which could often be a cultural code indicating that difficulties remained. Yet the situation was improving: "The news about which we have to tell you has not increased, except for the good." Haalidu deliberately avoided describing the problem in writing, but it was known widely enough in Ruumde that the letter bearer and at least one companion could explain it orally: "The one who comes to you, they can tell you the story." The letter names two delivery men. Neither is easy to identify, but neither would have been a close kinsman. (The praise-name of the first, "Jal" or "Jallo," is particularly strong evidence of this interpretation.) The "we" who have the "news" to tell suggests a collective problem or, at least, a collective approach to dealing with it. Haalidu identified his well-being with his village more than with his part-time commercial pursuits. See Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Image 3355.

his neighbors, Haalidu kept livestock and fields. It was probably from his own fields that he produced the surplus with which he helped Buubakar Mam in his time of need. Unlike grain merchants, Haalidu loaned from his stores to hungry neighbors, rather than hoarding food to sell it at high pre-harvest prices. His trading supplemented his income, but, like his neighbors' households, his household economy depended on food production. Haalidu combined both small-scale agriculture and petty commercial activities with the pursuit of knowledge and status as a scholar.

Haalidu's sons' activities display a similar mix. Haalidu died some time after 1920 and probably no later than the early 1930s.²⁸¹ He left four sons. Num, Allay, and Buubakar Haalidu all had the same mother. Num was born in ca. 1893; Allay in ca. 1908; and Buubakar in ca. 1915.²⁸² Their half-brother, Haalidu's son Aamadu, was born in ca. 1895.²⁸³ The brothers acquired varied levels of learning. Num's career provided the most justification for the family's classification as part of the "Scholars" *de'eende*. Yet, as individuals and as a family unit, they pursued a mix of scholarship and agriculture, which conformed to, rather than departed from the norm for Ruumde's "neighborhood" families.

Three of Haalidu's sons pursued learning at least enough to create memories in the community that they had studied. In contrast, the fourth, Allay Haalidu, was remembered for not

²⁸¹ For a wedding announcement addressed to Haalidu and dated 20 Safar 1339 (November 1, 1920), see Library Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Images 3728-3733. My interviewees Layya Mbiiga (1/13/2007) and Aamadu Adu, who were born in the 1920s, stated that Haalidu was no longer alive during their childhood, suggesting that he must have died by at least the early 1930s.

²⁸² These dates derive from a colonial census document from 1941 retained in the family library. See Library Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 4, Images, 4742 and 4745.

²⁸³ This date comes from a colonial census document from 1948. See Library Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 7, 9907-9908. The date is confirmed in a postcolonial document from July 25, 1961, which uses the same old colonial form. See Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 7, Images 9912-13.

having studied.²⁸⁴ Allay's activities included some petty trading²⁸⁵ and engagement in agriculture. His 1951 voting card identified his profession as "farmer."²⁸⁶ Though Allay Haalidu belonged to a family classified as scholars, he did not himself undertake significant studies.

Haalidu's other three sons achieved varied levels of learning. Two of the three ultimately became imams. Aamadu became imam of the *saare*, the half of the village that slaves inhabited. Num assumed the more prestigious position of imam of the *wuro*, which was also considered the imamate of the village as a whole. The community recognized Aamadu as a scholar, but not to the same degree that it recognized his slightly older half-brother. Correspondingly, he was remembered for spending more of his time than Num in non-scholarly occupational pursuits. "Alfa Num Haalidu, it was study that [he] pursued. The imam of the *saare* traded though." Aamadu's engagement in trade was not at a high level. It was primarily the low intensity, part-time form of commerce which Gimbalan Fulfulde-speakers described as "going to sell while doing shopping."²⁸⁷ Aamadu did trade enough, however, to distinguish him from Num, who did not trade. Aamadu also devoted more energy to farming than Num. Aamadu Haalidu combined study, petty commerce, and agriculture, achieving modest, but noticeable amounts of success in each.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Interviews: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007; and Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2007.

²⁸⁵ Layya Mbiiga and Hamma Layya Mbiiga described the low intensity, part-time form of trade in which both Allay and Aamadu Haalidu were involved as "going to sell ... while doing shopping." Interview: Layya Mbiiga and Hammadu Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

²⁸⁶ Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 4, Image 4617.

²⁸⁷ Interview: Layya Mbiiga and Hamma Layya, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

²⁸⁸ After telling an anecdote about Aamadu's experience one day at market, Layya Mbiiga summed up Aamadu's career as follows: "He studied too. He ended up becoming the imam of the *saare*. He would farm too." Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

Among Haalidu's sons, Num put the greatest emphasis on scholarship, but he too engaged in food production. Layya Mbiiga explained that occupational designation was a matter of degree: "Alfa Num Haalidu would farm, but not the same as [Aamadu] Haalidu. For, two things came to you. Farming came to you. But now, whatever is the stronger [tendency], that is what you emphasize. That is the reason that, as for Alfa Num, studying was the stronger [tendency] for him."²⁸⁹ Scholarship was a bigger part of Num's life than for any of his brothers, but even he did not specialize in it exclusively. Remembering Num as a "scholar" rather than a "farmer" reflected the relative weight that he had put on intellectual rather than agricultural activities, but nonetheless he was directly involved in both of the "two things." His 1951 voting card actually reversed the emphasis, recording his occupation as "herder."²⁹⁰ This document was registered at approximately the same time that Num became the village imam, i.e. when he was at or near the height of his reputation as a scholar. Rather than contradicting the emphasis on his scholarly identity in the oral record and in other texts in Num's library, the voting card reinforces the overall sense which sources on Num's career give. Scholars such as Num were not a category of specialists separate from the rest of the rural economy. They were fully integrated into rural life and directly involved in its food-producing economy.

Likewise, families such as Num's were not specialized "learned families." Despite its discourse about lineage-based specialization as "Scholars," the family pursued a generalist practical strategy, manifested in the range of life-experiences of Num, Aamadu, and Allay Haalidu. In practice, both branches of the "Scholars" neighborhood produced scholars, agriculturalists, and many individuals who, to varying degrees, were both. Their neighborhood

²⁸⁹ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

²⁹⁰ Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 4, Image 4616.

story had a distinct title. Its ultimately quite ordinary plotline gives away the gap between discourse and practice.

A Sweet Honeycomb for Num Haalidu: Praise Rhetoric and the Realities of a Village Scholar

The Moodibaaŋe *de'eende* label was a discourse about lineage specialization and scholarly pre-eminence. Num's family library contains a short, original text which amplifies and fleshes out this rhetoric of pre-eminence. The text offers praise primarily for Num Haalidu as an individual. Its anonymous author connects Num to a comfortable material condition at odds with the economic portrait given above for Num and other rural scholars. The author also makes hierarchical claims about Num's intellectual and spiritual status. He situates this account of Num's individual prestige within a lofty statement about the broader prestige of his family, "the purest genealogy from among the great." Like the Moodibaaŋe *de'eende* label, this text about Num's scholarly pre-eminence and lineage prestige reveals a gap between scholarly discourse and practice.

The anonymous author aptly calls his composition "a sweet honeycomb." The selection below depicts the flattering, hierarchical dreams of modest rural scholars such as Num:

As for that which follows, it is peace like two illuminated moons and greetings like a sweet honeycomb from me to my beloved. [He is] the sweetness of my heart, the cure for my soul, and the clarifier of my case in quarrels. His name is Alfa Nūh Khālīd, a blessing, son of a blessed one. [He is] the noblest of the noble. [His is] the purest genealogy from among the great.

I ask God to give him comfort and luxury not based on pawning. Indeed, pawning leads the owner of the rights [back] to the one who has pawned.

May God give you bounty without that which causes asceticism.

May God give you rank which cannot be belittled.

May God give you knowledge which cannot be opposed.

May God give you stations among the eminent ones
 May God give you a livelihood without reversals and understanding ...
 without dispersal.
 May God give you courage among military men indistinguishable from
 them.
 May God give you knowledge of [true] awareness.
 You are the scholar of it. ... You are a soul which cannot be depleted.
 You share and assist without needing to be assisted or consoled.
 You are a colleague with your perfection. You are complete in your
 rank.²⁹¹

What made this text “sweet” for Num was the elite economic, scholarly, and genealogical status, which it envisioned. The gap between this discourse and a much more egalitarian, contested reality made the textual fantasy even sweeter.

Though the anonymous author makes repeated references to material prosperity, the subtext of the composition evokes a much more insecure reality. The author speaks of “comfort and luxury,” but in the same breath raises the specter of “pawning,” debt, and creditors returning to collect their due. He speaks of “bounty” only to invoke the multiple (significantly, the source word is plural) circumstances that can cause “asceticism”²⁹² or material hardship. His reference to “a livelihood without reversals” echoes the menacing fact that such “reversals” were commonplace. The author expresses all of these references to material prosperity as wishes presented to God, rather than as a description of Num’s actual condition. Ultimately, his tone suggests that Num’s actual condition was characterized by reversals, asceticism, and possibly even pawning more than by bounty and luxury.

²⁹¹ Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduufe, File 1, Images 3036-3037.

²⁹² It is worth noting that the “asceticism” (Arabic: *zuhd*) often has a positive spiritual connotation in Muslim Sufi tradition. This text uses a related term – “things that cause asceticism” (Arabic: *muzahhidāt*) – in a clearly negative sense, even though the text employs other Sufi terms, such as “stations” (*maqāmāt*), according to standard usage. The contrast may reflect the high value placed on material prosperity in an environment where it was rare and often short-lived.

The text affirms its claims about intellectual and spiritual status with more apparent confidence, but the description of Num as “complete in [his] rank” and a “colleague [only] with [his own] perfection” was wishful thinking that did not reflect how most of his community saw him. Num Haalidu did, in fact, have scholarly “colleagues” in Ruumde, who occasionally treated him in less than collegial fashion. Some of them viewed him as far from perfection.

Like the text’s references to material status, its references to intellectual standing often suggest insecurity more than genuine confidence. They invoke the village scholar’s banal anxieties: the fear that one’s level of knowledge will be “opposed,” or attacked; the fear of being “belittled.” We should recall Num Haalidu’s feast-day confrontation with the aging imam Hammadu Usman Umaru. When Num failed to read the sermon, he gave Hammadu the opportunity to declare vindictively that none of the hostile assembly was a scholar, with Num implicitly topping the list of those belittled in this way.²⁹³ Hammadu’s claim to be the only person in the village capable of serving as imam echoes the anonymous author’s depiction of Num. Scholars such as Hammadu and Num aspired to be peerless, but widespread grassroots access to Islamic knowledge emboldened multiple people in a village such as Ruumde to make claims to pre-eminence, while preventing anyone from winning full acceptance for such claims in practice.

Hammadu was not the only person in Ruumde who treated Num as less than “complete in ... rank.” When Hammadu Usman died and Num Haalidu took over the imamate in the 1950s, he may have expected more success in establishing a scholarly “rank” that could not be “belittled.” In part, he realized this ambition. Num’s performance of his role as imam left

²⁹³ See chapter III, 139-140.

Aamadu Adu with the lifelong impression that he was “a full-fledged follower of the Prophetic *sunna*,” (*sunnanke kiɓɓo*).

Yet the anecdote that Aamadu cited to illustrate this impressive status suggests at least as much about Num’s continuing insecurities. If Num Haalidu led the prayer as imam “and looked behind him at the group, any person whom he did not see behind him, he would say” to “that person two things.” First, “if that person ended his life doing that, he would not wash that person [before burial], would not pray for him, and would not go to his burial.” Second, if Num Haalidu himself “died before that person, ... he would not forgive [him]. He and that person would take it for the judgment of the Lord” in the after-life.²⁹⁴ Aamadu Adu interpreted these threats as showing a praiseworthy inflexibility about the religious law based on the Prophet’s path, or *sunna*. They also suggest challenges to Num’s authority as imam. Num tried to leverage one of the imam’s ritual roles (presiding over funeral rites) to shore up his authority over another (leading prayer). Hammadu Usman had worried that following Num (or anyone else in Ruumde) as imam would invalidate his prayers.²⁹⁵ After Hammadu’s death, it is not clear whether others had the same worries, but they did not all pray behind Num frequently enough to assuage his own worries about being “belittled.” Even after he became imam, much of Ruumde did not see Num with the honeyed eyes of the anonymous author.

Aamadu Adu remembered Num’s imamate with respect, but assessed the scholar’s status in the community in measured terms. He attributed Num’s appointment as imam not to scholarly pre-eminence, but to the favor of the village chief, who had formed a marriage alliance with him. “The chief seated the imam. For, I know that [scholars] who were better than him were

²⁹⁴ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 4/1/2007.

²⁹⁵ See chapter III, 140-141.

numerous.” Both before and after Num’s appointment as imam, scholarly authority in Ruumde was decentralized and contested. Dreams of being perfect, peerless, or unopposed were just that.

The scholarly status of the Moodibaaŋe *de’eende* among Ruumde’s neighborhoods was similar. The *de’eende* claimed special status as “Scholars.” Other neighborhoods respected the label, but did not treat the group as “the purest genealogy among the great.” Ruumde’s *wuro* did not accept the principle that any family could monopolize learning. No individual or group in the village could expect its level of knowledge to be immune to contestation, opposition, or even belittlement.

Conclusion

The Yirrayŋe and Moodibaaŋe neighborhoods shed particularly useful light on the relationship between lineage-based social structure and the distribution of knowledge in Ruumde. In one sense, these two groups were anomalies. Unlike other groups, their names carried not merely genealogical or spatial connotations, but also occupational and intellectual ones. From opposite directions, these two *de’eende* labels both argued that scholarly status was a family affair, that knowledge should respect lineage boundaries.

In practice, the relationship between the village’s lineage-based social structure and its pattern of knowledge production was precisely the reverse. No family invested all of its resources in Islamic learning. Even the “Scholars” neighborhood hedged its bets through direct engagement also in food production. Yet most, if not all, families did invest some resources in Islamic learning. Even the “anti-scholarly” neighborhood of “Warrior-Chiefs” produced

recognized scholars. These two neighborhoods, despite their anomalous discourses of lineage specialization, conformed in practice to the norms of other neighborhoods in Ruumde, which produced both food and thought, combined “studying” with “getting lost.” Their stories match the essential features of the story of the Arkaseeñe neighborhood. All three neighborhood stories confirm that Islamic learning was a part of the ordinary experience of rural families.

CHAPTER VI

OPEN SECRETS: ISLAMIC ESOTERICISM AT THE GRASSROOTS

Most studies of Islamic esotericism in West Africa stress hierarchy and differential access to knowledge. The standard definition of the term “esoteric” gives this approach apparently *a priori* support. “Esoteric” has two primary connotations, which seem to have a logical connection: (1) secret knowledge and (2) the restricted number of people who know it. Secrecy has indeed marked the field of knowledge which scholars of West African Islam have called “esotericism.” Indigenous West African labels highlight this fact since they are typically derived from the Arabic term for “secret”: *sirr*. Yet, empirical research in Ruumde brings into question whether restricted access should be taken as equally fundamental. The apparent logical connection between secrecy and restricted access has not been a necessary connection in all historical contexts. In places such as Ruumde, it was not primarily acts of guarding or limiting access to Islamic secrets that rendered them powerful. Islamic secrets got their power from the fact that they put solutions to ordinary rural problems within the reach of ordinary rural people. In places such as Ruumde, Islamic esoteric knowledge was common knowledge.

Benjamin Soares’ *Islam and the Prayer Economy* contains the most recent, most complete statement of the standard model of Islamic esotericism in West Africa. In his historical ethnography of the Malian town of Nioro, Soares argues brilliantly against the conventional wisdom that reformist variants of Islam represent “orthodoxy” and inevitably triumph over less “pure” esoteric traditions. In Nioro, esotericism maintained its authority as the locally

“orthodox” form of Islam throughout the twentieth century. Soares’ account of esoteric authority focuses on the leaders of two centralized Sufi orders, who, through a combination of personal and routinized charisma, dominate the distribution of secret power. A few small-scale esoteric producers make their way into the story, but Soares treats this phenomenon as a marginal one. Big producers dominate his account of Nioro’s “prayer economy,” a spiritual market in which most Muslims function as consumers (who, moreover, understand little about what they consume).²⁹⁶

In twentieth-century Ruumde (and Gimbala, more broadly), esotericism maintained its “orthodox” standing much as it did in Nioro, but the nature of esoteric authority differed radically from Soares’ account. Esoteric authority was not a simple hierarchy of command and obedience, of leaders and followers. Esotericism was not a market in which a few major producers serviced the needs of a mass of ordinary consumers. Esoteric authority in Gimbala was of a fundamentally fragmented sort. Small-scale producers, rather than monopolists, dominated its spiritual markets. The “prayer economy” mirrored the agricultural economy, which aimed at local production for local needs. Soares argues that “ordinary supplicants” understood little about the content of Islamic esotericism.²⁹⁷ In fact, it was precisely the technical content of much secret knowledge that made it accessible to a broad range of ordinary rural people. It was a mass of ordinary technicians, not a few charismatic leaders, who gave esotericism most of its meaning and authority in rural places such as Ruumde.

²⁹⁶ Soares, *The Prayer Economy*, 145.

²⁹⁷ Soares cites ethical reasons for not discussing the content of esotericism. His informants have asked him to keep their “secrets” secret. Honoring this request is undoubtedly his duty as a researcher. Yet, Soares’ insistence that “ordinary supplicants” cared about “form” and knew little about “content” suggests another reason that he does not probe the contents of secrets, a reason that has more to do with methodology than ethics. Content is irrelevant to his hierarchical understanding of the sociology of esoteric knowledge. In contrast, I argue that the esoteric contents of modest rural libraries provide key clues to support a fundamentally different sociology of esotericism.

A Village Working-Group

In the late 1930s and 1940s, some of Ruumde's scholars met periodically to devise esoteric solutions for the community's problems. Memories of their activities show the rural village to be not just a site for food production, but also for the production of powerful Islamic secrets. When trouble arose, the village did not need to seek out regional esoteric authorities, because esoteric authority was highly decentralized and within the reach of village scholars.

The meeting locations for the working-group tied it to the village community, both its bush and its settled space. My interviewee Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, who had been a young man when the group operated, remembered its work spaces vividly. The first site was in the shade of a particular fig tree on the western side of one of the rice-fields of Jampullo Aduraaman, Hammadu's uncle. The second site was in the westernmost of three mud-brick rooms in Jampullo's compound. The esoteric activities of the group marked these spaces as powerful ones. Yet they were also (even primarily) ordinary rural spaces in which Jampullo and his family lived, slept, socialized, and farmed. Esoteric practice was special and yet tied to ordinary space.

The problems which the group addressed focused likewise on the village community. As Hammadu Aamadu put it, the scholars dealt with whatever "trouble was heading for the *wuro*." (The *wuro* was, literally, the herders', or non-slave, section of the village. In the colonial period, the term also defined how non-slave residents of Ruumde envisioned their village community as a whole.) A typical problem was "when the rainy season was hard." The scholars would meet to "make a supplication. They would implore the Lord to make things easy ... and to provide

sustenance,” calling Him: “O Merciful One (*al-rahmān*) Who brings things together.”²⁹⁸

Village esoteric practice addressed the same problems of subsistence and food production that drove other forms of village labor.

The scholars also met to deal with the colonial state, but only regarding state actions which directly affected the village community. The scholars sought esoteric means to protect the *wuro* from colonial seizures, which Hammadu Aamadu called “*nannga-nannga*.” He cited one specific case during the Second World War when a number of Ruumde’s “Fulɓe were conscripted.” The conscripts “ran off. When they ran off, the government (*laamu*) was heading for us.” The scholars met to make “a supplication for the Lord to keep them from the government. And the Lord did indeed keep them from the government.”²⁹⁹

When problems such as lack of rain or colonial conscription troubled the community, village scholars found their own esoteric solutions. They approached “the Lord” directly using their own secret knowledge. Their own secrets had the power to achieve the results they desired, which was confirmed, for example, when “the Lord did indeed keep them from the government.” The mandate of the group was as wide as local needs. “The scholars” would meet “in order to plead with God (*nyaago Allah*) for whatever they needed.”³⁰⁰ In other words, the scholars provided local esoteric means for dealing with whatever local needs arose. Memories of the working-group reflect considerable esoteric self-sufficiency at the village level.

²⁹⁸ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, 2/25/2007.

²⁹⁹ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, 2/25/2007.

³⁰⁰ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, 1/13/2007.

Hierarchical Claims

At the same time, the working-group claimed a level of primacy within the village community. Memories of the group offer a chance to explore the meaning of the hierarchical claims which were a part of the language of esotericism even at the grassroots village level. The group's claim to special levels of secret power was significant, but the limitations of that claim were even more so.

The group's claim to special power drew on acts of separation and restriction, and on notions that different individuals had different levels of access to secret knowledge. The geography of group meetings represented an act of separation. Both the distance from Jampullo's field to the settled village and the walls of Jampullo's mud-brick room functioned to create a separation between participants and non-participants. The process of determining who would participate in meetings included an act of restriction: the act of excluding non-invitees. The core regulars of the group were Jampullo Aduraaman, Hammadu Usman Umaru, and Num Haalidu. All three were elder "noble" males, who had among the most substantial reputations for scholarly achievement in the village. The group built its claim to special power on the notion that these scholars had greater access to secrets than other villagers. This notion was not just a matter of public perception, but can be confirmed in concrete documentary evidence. These scholars left the three largest libraries to which I gained access during my research in Ruumde, and these libraries contained the most developed esoteric toolkits. There was a further claim to differential access to secret knowledge within the group. Jampullo sought a leadership role. Providing the meeting space for group activities was one of several acts through which he advanced this bid and invoked a language of esoteric hierarchy. These acts of separation,

restriction, and claiming differential access were part of what made the esoteric working-group of the 1930s and 1940s prominent enough to be memorable.

Yet, the group was not simply a replication of Soares' hierarchical model of esotericism on a smaller scale. More fundamental to the group's power than acts of restriction and (real or imagined) differential access to knowledge were acts of aggregation. Jampullo sought leadership, but other participants did not wait for his authorization to make use of their own sources of secret knowledge. The group's success depended on combining the separate esoteric toolkits of all participants. The group had core regulars, but, because its basic logic was of aggregation rather than restriction, it often brought in others to its meetings. A fourth scholar, Umaru Haamidi, often joined the group.³⁰¹ On other occasions, the three regulars were joined by "whoever was found with them"³⁰² – that is, any scholars who were at hand and had enough secret knowledge of their own to be able to add to the group's success. The group's strategy was to bring together multiple sources of power rather than to attempt to straightjacket power within a single chain of command.

Although village scholars did attach hierarchical claims to their esoteric practice, decentralization was its more fundamental trait. The group did not control the production of potent secret knowledge. It did not and could not prevent non-invitees from collecting or using secrets. Village scholars who did not participate in group activities constructed toolkits of their own, which gave them their own esoteric means to pursue their own ends. Group regulars generally amassed larger, richer toolkits, but they did so through the same ad hoc individual

³⁰¹ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuᓃe, 2/25/2007. Umaru Haamidi's family left a large library of its own. Unfortunately, Umaru's son loaned these papers to more learned relatives in a fairly distant village, and I have not yet managed to arrange to gain access to them.

³⁰² Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuᓃe, 1/13/2007.

process as other scholars. The group may have provided an additional forum for the exchange of secret knowledge, but each of its members had already built up his secrets through separate sets of relationships and periods of study. The group derived its power to deal with serious community-wide problems by aggregating the separate esoteric trajectories of its participants. The proof of this fact is that their secrets were disaggregated as easily as they were aggregated. Each of the group's regulars maintained his own separate practice, especially for finding esoteric solutions for individual or family-level problems that did not concern the whole village community.

Jampullo Aduraaman

The career of Jampullo Aduraaman offers the best entry-point into these questions of esoteric access and authority. Jampullo spoke about esoteric practice in hierarchical terms. By hosting working-group meetings, he concentrated in his field or his room a level of Islamic secret power unique in his village. He claimed to lead this group and, as we shall see, to surpass its other regular members in the esoteric field. He based these hierarchical claims within the village partly on ties to a Sufi spiritual master (*seekuujo*), who advanced his own broader hierarchical claims through a regional esoteric network. Yet, Jampullo's career also reveals that esoteric power did not merely descend down from master to disciple. It did not depend on regional hierarchies or even informal village working-groups. Jampullo's esoteric power ultimately depended on cumulative individual effort, the interplay between his personal (primarily local) relationships and his accumulation of technical expertise.

Memories about Jampullo place him both within a regional “prayer economy” of a scale similar to that imagined in Soares’ use of the term and within a local “prayer economy.” Within the regional “spiritual market,” Jampullo was a “consumer” and a beneficiary of his master’s secret powers. Yet Jampullo created another esoteric identity, which had more fundamental significance in his daily life. To his neighbors and associates, he was less a disciple in a regional “prayer economy” than a dispenser of secret power in his own local “spiritual market.”

During his youth, Jampullo traveled long distances to the north to study with and acquire the Qadiri Sufi litany (*wird*) from a spiritual master (*seekuujo*), named Seekana Tagayalla. Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, proud of his uncle’s esoteric accomplishment, attributed much of it to this teacher. “The students of Seekana Tagayalla were very bold with prayer-beads,” he related. “They were bold enough for performing mystic retreats (*halwinaade*).” My “father”³⁰³ Jampullo ... was a student of Seekana Tagayalla.”³⁰⁴ In this regional “prayer economy,” Jampullo was a disciple and his master was a locus of esoteric authority.

At the same time, in the parallel local esoteric sphere which was more immediately meaningful to Jampullo and those who remember him, Jampullo was a locus of esoteric power in his own right. Local memories of Jampullo reflect the reputation that he sought to build in his village. He became known locally as a *lasraarinke*, a specialist in secrets.³⁰⁵ He taught esoteric texts to some in the village, and this subject was the only one that he ever taught.³⁰⁶ He also used

³⁰³ In this case, the term “father” means paternal uncle.

³⁰⁴ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 1/13/2007.

³⁰⁵ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

³⁰⁶ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

his knowledge to provide esoteric solutions for the problems of other villagers. Both Aamadu Adu and Layya Mbiiga recalled that he was a scholar who “received much” (*jom keḅal*), which meant that he received considerable gifts in exchange for the esoteric services that he rendered. The label *jom keḅal* referred to Jampullo’s individual activities as an esoteric producer, as opposed both to his role as a disciple of Seekana Tagayalla and to his participation in the working-group. Hammadu Aamadu remembered that Jampullo’s mud-brick room was not only the site for group meetings, but also the site where Jampullo would perform his own individual mystic retreats. While his relationship with his *seekuujo* may have helped make him “bold enough” for these retreats, his own performance of the act in a local space made him a producer of secret power, rather than a mere consumer of the power that others produced.

A letter which Jampullo received and stored in his family library records how a contemporary perceived him during his life. The writer, a certain Muhammad b. Alfa, began his letter with a long list of epithets for the addressee: “To my beloved friend, the delight of my eye, my heart’s fruit, he who surpassed his peers, possessor of knowledge and scholarly manners (*adab*), possessor of grace (*fadl*), ocean of understanding, with the finest spiritual vision (*basīra*): that is, Alfa Jam Pullo ‘Abd al-Rahmān.”³⁰⁷ These epithets expressed two basic ideas. First, Muhammad expressed personal friendship and affection toward Jampullo. Second, he attributed to Jampullo superiority over his peers, linked to his “knowledge and scholarly manners,” and to terms with specifically esoteric resonances, such as *fadl* and *basīra*. Like those who remembered Jampullo as a *lasraarinke*, a *jom keḅal*, or as one who used his room as a site for mystic retreats, Muhammad wrote about Jampullo during his life not as a follower of an esoteric leader, but as a locus of esoteric power. Jampullo was a “possessor of grace” and “spiritual vision,” not an

³⁰⁷ HAA, File 1, Image 0073.

“ordinary supplicant” who sought to receive the benefits of someone else’s grace or spiritual vision.

Muhammad b. Alfa’s letter also sketches a personal relationship that illustrates the social context of Jampullo’s esoteric standing. Muhammad’s reverence for the exalted scholarly level that he assigns to Jampullo constitutes a vertical element of their relationship. Yet, the rest of their relationship was essentially horizontal. The two were relative equals, mutually-affectionate friends. Muhammad’s opening epithets for Jampullo suggest this aspect of their ties. The content of the letter substantiates the impression. The writer referred with deliberate vagueness to a “secret”³⁰⁸ communication that Jampullo had sent to him through his other “beloved friend Baaba,” which involved, in addition, an unnamed man and an unnamed woman. Muhammad closed his letter by saying: “The fact that you sent it to us honored us very, very much. O our beloved friend, we do not find anyone like you at all in terms of love, in terms of trust.” With regard to “knowledge and scholarly manners,” Muhammad praised Jampullo. Yet “honor” could also flow in the other direction. With regard to the particular “secret” subject matter of this letter, Jampullo had requested Muhammad’s help. Though Jampullo was the “possessor of grace” in the relationship, he still needed the assistance of his admiring “friend” in some personal affairs. Muhammad b. Alfa’s familiarity with Jampullo highlights, first, that it was Jampullo’s neighbors and close associates who recognized his special qualities as a scholar. Moreover, even though those who lived around him saw him as extraordinary in his scholarly capabilities, he was otherwise thoroughly enmeshed in their ordinary social life. Jampullo’s neighbors perceived him

³⁰⁸ For Gimbala Fulfulde-speakers, the core resonance of the Arabic word used in the letter for “secret” (*sirr*) was the Islamic discipline of esoteric knowledge. However, the term could be extended into a broader, common language use of the term “secret.” In the letter, the “secret” appears not to involve an Islamic secret technique. The vagueness and tone of “secrecy” surrounding the matter even in this private written communication make it impossible to determine precisely what it involved, but it does seem to have involved relations between a man and a woman, perhaps marriage arrangements or negotiations.

neither as a mere disciple nor as a charismatic “big man.” They viewed him as a locus of esoteric power, who was simultaneously their ordinary neighbor.

A Library of Secrets

Jampullo’s family library provides a record of the technical contents of his esoteric practice. The texts which Jampullo used to make his esoteric practice technically effective flesh out the sociology of secret knowledge suggested in the sources on his interpersonal relations mentioned above. Some of Jampullo’s secret texts tie him to Seekana Tagayalla or other sources of authority from outside his local environment. But most of them show how he focused on producing esoteric solutions to local problems. Some of these local problems were the sort of community-wide problems that the working-group would have addressed in concert. But most of them were individual or family-level problems that Jampullo would have addressed as an individual esoteric technician. The content of the majority of Jampullo’s Islamic secret texts empowered him to become such a technician; they targeted ordinary rural concerns and identified accessible, ordinary means for achieving them. Jampullo’s library of secrets shows concretely how it was possible to be an ordinary villager, who directly faced the same rural problems as his neighbors, and yet become also a locus of secret power.

Some of the esoteric texts in Jampullo’s library connected him to a regional and even global network for the transmission of Islamic secret power. Jampullo’s act of “taking the *wird*” from Seekana Tagayalla signified the formation of a master-disciple relationship with him. The

two copies of the Qadiri *wird* (*al-Salāsīl al-Qādiriyya*)³⁰⁹ found in his library provide a documentary record of this personal vertical relationship. Jampullo's copies of the *wird* also formed a less personal relationship between him and the Qadiriyya, one of the most global of Sufi orders. A number of other long or medium-length texts in his library constituted additional links between Jampullo and a network for the transmission of esoteric knowledge across geographical zones and historical epochs. These texts included: multiple copies of al-Jazūlī's *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*,³¹⁰ *al-Kanz al-a'zam wa-'l-kīmiyā' al-sa'āda*,³¹¹ *Sirrunā al-mughtabit*,³¹² and Ahmad Zarrūq's *Da'wat idhā waqa'at al-wāqī'a*,³¹³ among several others. Each of these texts had its own technical features. *Sirrunā al-mughtabit*, for example, was a guidebook for how to draw up grid-charms based on appropriate Qur'anic passages; *Da'wat idhā waqa'at al-wāqī'a* was a 24-folio text (in the copy in Jampullo's library), which explained how to obtain various spiritual benefits from a single short Qur'anic *sura*. Each of these texts originated outside the local (and even regional West African) context. Their far-flung origins, their identifiable titles and authors, and their relative length made them part of a sort of esoteric curriculum, which was certainly not as formal as the Mālikī legal curriculum, but shared some of its features. Drawing on relatively distant sources of authority such as his *seekuujo* or a textual curriculum that extended to an even broader network was part of the esoteric craft that Jampullo brought to his village.

³⁰⁹ See the title pages on HAA, File 7, Image 1446; and File 8, Image 1551.

³¹⁰ For the title page of one copy, see HAA, File 7, Image 1061.

³¹¹ For the title page, see HAA, File 3, Image 0057.

³¹² For the title page, see HAA, File 6, Image 1972.

³¹³ For the title page, see HAA, File 1, Image 9687.

Yet, the ultimate significance of Jampullo's craft was to use esoteric knowledge to address local problems. Most of the "secrets" in his library were untitled, very short how-to documents, which were directly geared toward resolving such problems. The *wird* and the other long or mid-sized texts in his library depict Jampullo looking outwards from his community and upwards along esoteric chains of authority. His brief how-to texts show, in contrast, that his primary orientation as an esoteric practitioner was toward his local community and ordinary rural social experience.

Some of these short "secrets" were the notes which Jampullo probably brought to working-group meetings in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, a few of the documents in Jampullo's library suggest the working-group's tactics for dealing with intrusions of the colonial state. One manuscript contained a "chapter" (Arabic: *bāb*) of nine lines for "protection from an oppressor." Like most secrets, this "chapter" does not narrate a specific instance of usage. It was meant for repeated re-use and its validity was not supposed to be contingent on time or the particular person making use of it. Nonetheless, it evokes a simple drama, which echoes the problem of the fugitive conscripts that the village esoteric group faced during WWII. The "chapter" describes the situation of a writer of secret texts, who fears for a group of people threatened by an unjust power (*zālim*).

He who writes this passage (*āya*) – you insert into it the name of the oppressor and everyone for whom he is afraid; you insert an arrow in it; you insert it into the head of a black chicken; and you bury it in a house – he and everyone for whom he is afraid will never be oppressed, with God's permission.³¹⁴

³¹⁴ HAA, File 3, Image 9911.

The brevity of this text, its simplified grammar, and the means which it identified all highlight its accessibility to a modest village scholar. It finds its sources of potency in readily-available rural items – a domestic animal, the ordinary space of a house – and in a basic facility with Islamic writing, which was likewise commonly available to rural people. The potent textual passage (*āya*) to be inserted and buried is only three lines long. It is a simple combination of a few particularly well-known Qur’anic phrases, which would be accessible not only to recognized rural scholars, but even to pupils with an elementary degree of exposure to Qur’anic education.³¹⁵

Other secret texts in Jampullo’s library for dealing with “oppressors” or “rulers” (*al-sultān*) display similar accessibility. On the bottom and back side of the same leaf as the aforementioned “chapter,” there is, for good measure, another “chapter for protection from an oppressor.” This “chapter” was even shorter than the first, taking up only six lines. It was also technically simpler, combining acts of washing in a hole and painting on parts of the body with the writing of one of the Qur’an’s shortest suras (and one of the first that a Qur’an school pupil would master).³¹⁶

Another secret in the library was for “the one who wanted the ruler (*al-sultān*) to come.” If he writes a four-line series of Qur’anic names for God and washes his face with this writing, “when the ruler sees him, ... he will respect him and not inform him of anything except good news.”³¹⁷ Like the first “chapter for protection from an oppressor,” this secret echoes the dramatic context of Ruumde’s WWII conscription crisis, when the “government” (the Fulfulde word *laamu* is a probable synonym for the written Arabic *al-sultān*) was heading for the village

³¹⁵ See chapter II, 74.

³¹⁶ HAA, File 3, Images 9911, 9909.

³¹⁷ HAA, File 8, Image 1669.

and the community was concerned about the news of punitive action that it might bring.

Also like that “chapter,” this secret offered a solution to this community problem that was well within the reach of its scholars.

Jampullo may have also brought to the meeting about conscription an eight-line “benefit” (*fā’ida*) “for one who wants for a ruler that which he wills.” The vagueness of this headline suggests that its writer may have had some difficulty articulating his exact intention. Yet the subsequent promise of the “benefit” to make rulers “become like dust” is clear enough, and would have been clearly relevant to the conscription incident or any other colonial seizures with which the working-group dealt. The technique for achieving this metaphoric end was another metaphor: the writing of “the dust letters on a piece of paper.”³¹⁸ The “dust” (*turābī*) letters referred to seven letters associated with the element usually translated into English as “earth” in an esoteric system which assigned each of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet to one of the four ancient elements. The bottom of the manuscript displays a rectangle with these letters written around its edges and an empty space in the middle for the “names” of the “hostile,” or “enemy,” rulers. To become fully effective, the completed text was to be “attached,” i.e. worn on the body, almost certainly encased in a leather pouch. This short secret promised that basic alphabetic competence, knowledge of a very manageable bit of textual lore,³¹⁹ everyday rural materials such as leather, and everyday acts such as dressing one’s body were powerful enough to offer an effective solution. Jampullo established his control over a concrete problem such as

³¹⁸ HAA, File 6, Image 1808.

³¹⁹ This lore was Islamic, though not quite in the same way as Qur’anic passages or names for God. It came from a textual tradition that pre-dated, but also became integrated into Islamic civilization.

the incursions of unjust rulers by accumulating multiple very short, accessible techniques that specifically targeted it.³²⁰

Other documents in Jampullo's library suggest what he may have brought to working-group meetings focused on rain. Like the secrets designed to avoid oppression from rulers, these rainmaking secrets drew on sources of potency that were widely available to rural people. They exploited the potential power of everyday objects such as a "pot lid" or a study "slate," and of universally accessible spaces such as the direction of "the *qibla*" or, simply, "the air." They located power in the basic level of literate competence needed to transcribe manageable bits of Islamic textual lore. It was enough to write a five-word Qur'anic verse about God bestowing rain, a two-line list of shaykhs' names, or a five-line supplication for rain, which invoked the names of four well-known angels and was set inside a square made out of the same angels' names.³²¹ These accessible sources of power produced impressive results, such as "God will send down rain on that [same] day." It was by pulling together and drawing on many such little secret scraps that Jampullo could contribute to the esoteric working-group's efforts to address village problems in the 1930s and 1940s.³²² It was the act of aggregating Jampullo's many discrete techniques and those of his co-participants that made the group powerful.

³²⁰ Even some longer texts in his library amounted to compendia of many very short, discrete techniques strung together. For example, Ahmad Zarrūq's *Da'wat idhā waqa'at al-wāqi'a* contains a three-line passage that Jampullo may also have found useful for working-group meetings aimed at addressing government incursions. The *Da'wa* was, like many secrets, a supplication based on the use of a relatively short sura, which Qur'an pupils mastered in the earlier stages of their educational careers – *surat al-wāqi'a* (56), that begins with the phrase: "*idhā waqa'at al-wāqi'a*." The three-line passage states that "he who recites" the supplication "in the presence of the ruler will leave his presence unharmed." See HAA, File 1, Image 9694.

³²¹ HAA, File 3, Image 0014; File 8, Images 1547 and 1761; File 6, Image 1951.

³²² One of the library's rainmaking secrets had another "charm for [dealing with] one who has oppressed you" immediately underneath it. If the two most commonly remembered kinds of community problems arose at the same time, Jampullo could consult this single folio for approaches to both. The charm for dealing with oppression channeled source materials of a negative sort, appropriate for the goal at hand. For a physical object, it used dog urine; for a space, it called for a trash heap; for writing, it used not a Qur'anic text or sacred names, but a string of boxes and letters which did not form recognizable words. It is worth noting that these source materials, again,

By the same token, Jampullo's secret techniques could be disaggregated, that is, separated from the group's activities. In fact, most of the short secret texts in his library targeted problems at the individual or rural family level, not at the community-wide level that concerned his working-group. To take just one example, only a handful of secret texts related to farming focused on community-wide problems, such as rain. Jampullo's library contained over twenty esoteric techniques for resolving individual or family-level agricultural challenges. Many of these documents instructed the user to "bury" the secret text in a specific field, thereby tying their effectiveness to a single family plot.³²³ One farming charm ended with the phrase: "this is the sustenance of so-and-so son of so-and-so."³²⁴ The formula was meant to be re-used for multiple farmers seeking prosperity, but only for one individual supplicant at a time. Another charm aimed to secure God's maintenance for "your field," or "your crop," (*zar'aka*).³²⁵ The use of the singular possessive pronoun was significant.

The agricultural charms in Jampullo's library empowered the individual farmer to obtain his and his family's sustenance. The possessive pronoun in these techniques was generally singular and so was the subject pronoun of the esoteric actions which they deemed effective. The secret method to have God maintain "your crop" advised that "you dig" a hole up to your elbows; "you recite" a designated text over a mixture of a few grains of your seed and a single specimen of the pest of which you were afraid; "you insert" the mixture in the hole; and "you

attributed power to objects, places, and skills fully within the bounds of what was widely available to rural people. See HAA, File 8, Image 1547.

³²³ HAA, File 2, Image 0628; File 8, Images 1575, 1580, 1658, 1701, and 1727; File 6, Images 1935, 1941, 1942, 1951, and 1954; File 3, Image 9977.

³²⁴ HAA, File 7, Image 1358.

³²⁵ HAA, File 8, Image 1533.

bury” it (or “cover it over”) so forcefully that neither the seed nor the pest can exit.³²⁶ In addition to the charm’s repeated reference to a singular subject, its use of an individual’s body as the measuring stick for the hole emphasized that individual action was effective esoteric action. By making seed that a single family would have stored for its own separate crop the object of esoteric action, the charm delimited its goal as family-level sustenance.

Another short “chapter for agricultural sustenance” identified the effective actor and the desired goal in similar fashion. He who “writes” the designated text and “attaches it to his arm ... will find much blessed food, to the point that he says: ‘Praise God, Lord of the Worlds.’”³²⁷ Again, the secret cast the individual body as the vehicle for esoteric action and personal supplies of food as its aim. At the end of this brief imagined drama, it is the individual who feels gratitude and expresses it to God.

Virtually all of the agricultural charms in Jampullo’s library sought to bring God’s power down to the level of the individuals and family units that farmed and ate in his society. One secret took verses from the short *sūrat al-zilzāl* (*sūra* 99). These verses portray the movements of the earth – most notably, an earthquake (*zilzāl*) – on the Day of Judgment. By inserting between the verses lines describing God turning the attention of the earth “to this field,” the charm re-writes the meaning of this Qur’anic passage from all-encircling Final Judgment to God’s support for a single family’s subsistence.³²⁸

Like his secrets for rain or against unjust rulers, Jampullo’s farming charms drew their effectiveness from widely-available means. They used short accessible pieces of text, common rural objects such as goat or sheep horns, seed, or “four pots,” and ordinary spaces such as a

³²⁶ HAA, File 8, Image 1533.

³²⁷ HAA, File 3, Image 9953.

³²⁸ HAA, File 8, Image 1728.

hole, the middle of a field, or its four cardinal points. Several of them employed vernacular speech in Fulfulde or Songhay and items named in these local languages, such as “a hoe” (Fulfulde *jalo*), “a stick” (Songhay *bundu*), and several specific kinds of trees named in Fulfulde.³²⁹ The farming charms highlight the fact that the accessibility of these secret materials applied, in the first instance, to individual actors. The way in which Jampullo’s working-group exploited them through coordinated group action was a secondary phenomenon, not the condition of their power.

The symbolism of Jampullo’s secrets closely mirrored the physical elements of actual agricultural labor in his society. Secrets advised practitioners to “bury” and dig much as farmers did when they worked. Secrets told the practitioner to handle seed, capture a pest, or employ a hoe. They highlighted the practitioner’s body: for example, the esoteric efficacy of the same “arm” that would perform physical agricultural labor. This symbolic pattern, this slew of related metaphors, aimed to underscore the meaning and reality of one key metaphor: using farming charms was itself a form of farming labor. The practitioner who performed these sorts of esoteric labor was not a “charismatic” or specialist gateway to God for “ordinary supplicants.” He was an ordinary laborer himself, whose scale of production mirrored that of a subsistence farmer with a couple of family plots, a store of seed, an arm, and a hoe.

It is worth recalling here that Jampullo and his family were avid farmers, a branch of the “Scholars” *de’eende* who devoted themselves with equal passion to study and to their fields.³³⁰ The family library’s rich collection of agricultural secrets emerged from the family’s direct interest in its fields. The technical productive power in those secrets helped ensure that the full

³²⁹ HAA, File 8, Image 1580; File 8, Image 1575; File 6, Image 2331.

³³⁰ See chapter V, 208-209.

productive potential of those fields would be realized. This form of study was not a specialist intellectual activity separate from materially-productive labor. Jampullo used it as a means, in itself, of agricultural production. It was figuratively (but with a nearly literal level of reality) an extra “arm” or “hoe.” He applied these extra tools, first, to make his own fields productive.

He also used them in a local “prayer economy,” which extended beyond his own household. He performed small-scale, productive esoteric labor for a trickle of individual “so-and-so son of so-and-sos,” each concerned about his family’s plot of land, seed, and sustenance (or about the other quotidian rural concerns represented in his textual toolkit). Each rewarded Jampullo one-by-one with a commensurate gift. Cumulatively, these gifts created for him the reputation of someone who “received” more than the average village scholar (*jom keōal*). Likewise, it was the cumulative effect of many small, discrete acts of esoteric production and of many short, discrete secret texts that justified his reputation as a local esoteric specialist (*lasraarinke*). Jampullo’s library of secrets, most of which were brief and straightforward, indicates how he built up power piecemeal out of ground-level materials, rather than simply receiving it from higher levels of a chain of command. Esoteric texts in all traditions often have multiple layers of meaning. One key layer of social meaning for these Islamic esoteric texts was that they empowered individuals from ordinary rural communities to tackle their own ordinary problems directly. They enabled Jampullo Aduraaman, a villager who engaged directly with the same rural material conditions as his neighbors, to engage directly also with the production of powerful knowledge.

The same basic conditions which empowered Jampullo also enabled others in Ruumde to accumulate their own sources of esoteric power. This fact was not always to Jampullo's liking. When he read the epithets that Muhammad b. Alfa assigned him, he would have very much recognized his own ambitions for himself. Like his beloved friend, he felt that he "surpassed his peers," at least in terms of the "knowledge and scholarly manners" connected to esotericism. One key way in which he expressed his bid for local esoteric leadership was in a rivalry with Hammadu Usman Umaru. Hammadu was the village's imam and its most proficient legal debater,³³¹ but Jampullo claimed primacy in the esoteric field. The limited success of this claim underscores the fragmented nature of esoteric authority. The relationship between Jampullo and Hammadu was not of leader to follower or master to disciple. They were peers, both of whom could contribute to the working-group's success, because each had worked to build up his own independent esoteric resources.

Jampullo was not satisfied with being recognized as one locus of secret power. He represented himself as *the* locus of secret power in the village. His nephew Hammadu Aamadu remembered a metaphor which Jampullo coined to express this claim: "Two lights cannot give light together. Only when one light goes out, can the other give light."³³² The reference was to Jampullo's rivalry with fellow working-group regular, Hammadu Usman Umaru. Jampullo claimed to be the only "light" in Ruumde during his lifetime. He insisted that the "light" of Hammadu's esoteric prominence could only emerge after his own death.

³³¹ See chapter III.

³³² Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 1/13/2007.

Jampullo's nephew also remembered an anecdote that reveals much about the relationship which his uncle wished to establish with Hammadu Usman. According to the anecdote, Hammadu Usman "sought a name of God"³³³ from ... Jampullo. Jampullo gave him 'ahmun'" and told him how to use it. Heading back home, Hammadu saw a group of people sitting in an alley. "They all stood at his doorway. They said to him: Peace be upon you, Hammadu Usman." Jampullo warned Hammadu Usman "to try hard not to be afraid at all." Then Hammadu looked at the group of people, "going and coming back as a group. How many they were; how big they were; how tall they were!" He felt as if something "grabbed him. He lay down and covered up." The group of people "greeted him until they became tired. He did not respond."³³⁴

The anecdote casts Hammadu Usman as Jampullo's subordinate. Hammadu plays the part of the supplicant or disciple, seeking access to Jampullo's superior esoteric power. Jampullo plays the role of esoteric leader. He agrees to transmit to Hammadu one of his many specific techniques. Significantly, this secret proves too strong for Hammadu's abilities. While Jampullo can master the dangerous qualities of the technique, Hammadu succumbs to fear. The dangerous power of the secret distorts his perceptions of those around him, causes him to lose control over his own body, and renders him (temporarily) unable to speak. This tale is milder than, yet reminiscent of the stories which Soares heard in Nioro about men who became insane as a result of pursuing secret knowledge.³³⁵ For Soares, those stories affirmed Nioro's hierarchical "prayer

³³³ The term "name of God" (Fulfulde: *innde Allah*) refers to the ninety-nine names of God of Islamic tradition as well as to additional "secret" names of God. Both the conventional names and the additional names of God have been a key part of Muslim West African esoteric practice. They have been so central in fact that Muslim West Africans often use the term "names of God" as a metonym for the field of "secret" knowledge as a whole.

³³⁴ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 2/25/2007.

³³⁵ Soares, *The Prayer Economy*, 138.

economy,” restricting access to secret knowledge by drawing a clear boundary between those who can handle its fearsome power and those who cannot. The anecdote of Hammadu, Jampullo, and the name of God aimed, likewise, to affirm an esoteric chain of command and to draw a sharp boundary between the capabilities of the two men.

Hammadu Usman’s library offers a counter-narrative, which indicates the limits of Jampullo’s success in achieving the esoteric primacy that he desired. Hammadu may indeed have occasionally sought to obtain specific secret techniques from his neighbor. Yet he did not depend on Jampullo for his access to secret knowledge. He began compiling his own esoteric toolkit in his youth through his own set of scholarly relationships. The anecdote recalled by Jampullo’s nephew implied that Hammadu needed the other scholar’s authorization to wield esoteric power and that, even with authorization, he could not wield it very well. Just one of Jampullo’s many secrets sent Hammadu into a panic and reduced him to a prostrate mute. Hammadu’s written esoteric resources relate a different story, casting him as a confident producer of his own secret knowledge. Though Jampullo wished it were not so, even the modest confines of Ruumde were spacious enough for multiple scholars to give off mutually-distinguishable “lights” at the same time.

Hammadu Usman’s esoteric toolkit is among the rare ones with identifiable dates. In chapter II, I discussed the contents of four notes which Hammadu added to the final leaf of his copy of *Tuhfat al-hukkām*. Three of the four notes were esoteric “benefits” (*fawā’id*). I observed that these notes demonstrated Hammadu’s deep sense that Islamic law and esotericism were not in contradiction, but were complementary parts of the same religious truth.³³⁶ The notes also demonstrate that Hammadu began his accumulation of useful charms by at least

³³⁶ See chapter II, 97-99.

January 3, 1900, the date he completed his *Tuhfat al-hukkām* and well before his association with Jampullo in the village working-group.

Hammadu's *Tuhfa* charms share key features with the secrets that Jampullo amassed. They were each very short and technically accessible. They drew their efficacy from the ability to recite an invocation of under twenty words, the basic alphabetic skills to write a string of letters or arrange them appropriately in and around a small box, and a commonly-available object (in this case, the completed manuscript of a fundamental legal textbook). They sought to resolve ordinary problems at the individual level. One "benefit" would protect its writer from the dangerous flood-waters of Gimbala ecology. Another would help its writer become a better legal reader. As with Jampullo's farming charms, one has the sense that these "benefits" reflected very personal goals and anxieties for Hammadu Usman at this stage in his life. Islamic secret texts put the means to address them comfortably within his personal reach.

Hammadu's *Tuhfa* charms also document a relationship through which he likely acquired secret techniques. In the colophon of his textbook, Hammadu stated that he wrote it in the village of Say, known as Seke. His son Usman Hammadu remembered that one of Hammadu's most important teachers was from the family of the chiefs and imams of Seke. He also recalled that Hammadu's relationship with this family continued throughout his life.³³⁷ My own research in the family library of the chiefs and imams of Seke has revealed a rich assortment of esoteric texts, some of which Hammadu may have been exposed to during his studies as a young man in Seke or through his ongoing ties to the family afterwards.

One manuscript in the Seke library gives further evidence of this channel of esoteric transmission and suggests that transmission flowed in both directions. The family kept a fifty-

³³⁷ See chapter IV, 168. Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

folio copy of an esoteric text called *Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda*, written in Hammadu Usman's distinctive hand. Its colophon page identifies "its writer" as "Muhammad b. 'Uthmān," who "wrote it for his brother in God, the chief of Say, known as Seke."³³⁸

This chief of Seke probably was not Hammadu's teacher. He would not have called his teacher "brother," but would have used a more respectful kinship metaphor, such as "father" (*wālid*). Hammadu likely prepared this secret text for a son or other junior kinsman of his teacher, perhaps the "Amadou Kamboula," whom a colonial document from 1946 refers to as the 57-year-old chief of "Séké."³³⁹ When Hammadu Usman was a young man in Seke in 1900 studying and copying his *Tuhfa* manuscript, this "Amadou Kamboula" would have been an approximately 11-year-old Qur'an-school pupil. It is not difficult to imagine that the two struck up a life-long friendship and that "Amadou Kamboula" was among the regular visitors from Seke, whom Hammadu's son remembered from his own youth.

Whoever the chief of Seke mentioned in the colophon was, the "brotherhood in God" between the two men would have included the exchange of secret knowledge. The *Kīmiyā'* manuscript (which Hammadu sent to Seke) and the "benefits" Hammadu added to his *Tuhfa* manuscript (which he wrote in Seke) document the fact that he did not depend on Jampullo's leadership for access to secrets. He cultivated his own channels of esoteric transmission.

The *Kīmiyā'* manuscript also demonstrates Hammadu's confidence as an esoteric writer. In his own library, too, he collected long to mid-sized secret texts much like those that Jampullo owned. For example, he wrote for himself a copy of al-Jazūlī's *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*, which he

³³⁸ Library: Almaami Seke, Seke, File 3, Image 9772. For the title page, see Image 9821.

³³⁹ See Niafouké Cercle Archives, Chief list 1946. This "Amadou Kamboula" may have been the chief whom locals called Hammadu Siidi or perhaps his son Hammadu Hammadu Siidi. According to the imam of Seke in 2005, Hammadu Siidi was chief until his death in the late colonial period; Hammadu Hammadu Siidi succeeded him, serving as chief until the transition to Malian independence and some time afterwards. Interview: Almaami Seke, Seke, 4/2005.

stored in the same leather-bound file where he kept his 1900 *Tuhfa* and his 1907 *Risāla*.³⁴⁰

Hammadu was comfortable with the longer texts which circulated throughout broad regional or even global Islamic networks and constituted something like an esoteric curriculum.

As with Jampullo though, it was shorter, more specific texts which marked Hammadu as a technician capable of wielding esoteric power effectively. Some of his discrete esoteric techniques targeted ends at a community-wide level. On the reverse side of the colophon of the Seke *Kīmiyā*' manuscript, Hammadu added a one-page method for handling a situation "when epidemic has struck the people." The text instructed an esoteric technician to "write these names" – a five-line list of God's attributes, which "their old" and "their young" should "wash" with and "drink." The text put within the reach of a single scholar the means to provide protection from epidemic to the population of a whole community.³⁴¹

In his own library, Hammadu kept another note which aimed at dealing with the same problem. On the margins of his copy of al-'Abqari's commentary on the introductory legal text of al-Akhdari, Hammadu added five lines of *rajaz* poetry. The first three lines listed God's attributes, much like the "names" in the epidemic charm on the reverse side of the Seke *Kīmiyā*'. The fourth line stated: "He who says that during a time of epidemic/God will protect him from catastrophe."³⁴² This technique did not specify a way to generalize its protective powers throughout a population. Yet the fact that it was very short, marked by meter and rhyme, and meant to be spoken rather than written would have lent it to quick distribution within a community, so that its "old" and "young" members could take advantage of the promised protection. Hammadu's knowledge of secrets related to epidemics may have been among the

³⁴⁰ For the title page, see UHU, File 4, Image 4862.

³⁴¹ Library: Almaami Seke, Seke, File 3, Image 9771.

³⁴² UHU, File 8, Image 6736.

specific skills that justified his inclusion in working-group meetings designed to address Ruumde's village-wide problems.

As with Jampullo however, most of Hammadu's secret skills targeted not community-level problems, but rather the lower-level concerns of individuals and rural families. He had fewer farming charms than Jampullo, but did have his own techniques for ensuring God's protection from "hunger" or acquiring "new sustenance."³⁴³ The "new sustenance" charm did not specifically mention farming, but it did use the same word for "sustenance" (*al-rizq*) that several of Jampullo's explicitly agricultural secrets employed. Also like some of Jampullo's farming charms, Hammadu's "new sustenance" charm involved attaching writing to the supplicant's "arm." It implied that the production of this kind of secret knowledge could boost the productive potential of an individual's physical labor.

Hammadu had access to a number of secrets aimed at healing physical ailments. Most targeted not community epidemics, but the individual body. He had esoteric treatments for coughing, an injured leg, tooth pain, insomnia, heart pain, diarrhea, and infertility. All depended on the power of commonly available materials, such as short, well-known texts, quotidian rural objects, or accessible spaces. For example, to cure "coughing," the esoteric practitioner should write a seven-word phrase from a short *sūra* (i.e. from the beginning of the Qur'an-school curriculum) repeatedly on a study slate; he should wash it in the milk of a black goat; and then the patient should drink it.³⁴⁴ The diarrhea remedy employed the writing of a Qur'anic passage as well as herbal elements drawn from a tree named in "our language."³⁴⁵ Each of these

³⁴³ UHU, File 7, Image 6319.

³⁴⁴ UHU, File 6, Image 5343.

³⁴⁵ UHU, File 5, Image 5282.

techniques empowered Hammadu to ensure his own physical health and the health of those around him.

This general medical skill was of clear significance not merely for individuals, but also for rural family survival. Hammadu's diarrhea charm made this family social context explicit. The text directed the esoteric practitioner to "wash" the remedy "inside the child" and then to have the child "drink it." His "benefit for if you want a women to become pregnant" prescribed simple instructions for both the male and female partners to make sure that their sexual relations would result in pregnancy, "even if she were barren or old."³⁴⁶ Another "benefit for requesting a child" was yet shorter and simpler.³⁴⁷ Such techniques supported healthy mothers and children to ensure the health of the family as a social unit capable of reproducing itself.

Hammadu also amassed secrets for competition within grassroots social units. One promised esoteric power over the outcome of estate-division. Writing a potent text and attaching it to the family bed would establish a firm claim to the family home: "no one other than you will ever inherit it."³⁴⁸ Another, three-line charm offered the power to prevent someone else from "speaking." It made use of a short bit of potent speech of its own, an ablution-kettle, the three stones used to hold up pots in the rural kitchen (*al-athāfī*), water, fire, as well as "the name of the speech-owner" to be silenced.³⁴⁹ Hammadu may have used this technique to bolster his success in community legal debates or to defend himself from hostile neighbors, such as those who challenged him on that tense feast-day at the end of his life.³⁵⁰ This secret also provides the most

³⁴⁶ UHU, File 8, Image 6622.

³⁴⁷ UHU, File 8, Image 6554.

³⁴⁸ UHU, File 5, Image 5283.

³⁴⁹ UHU, File 5, Image 5031.

³⁵⁰ See chapter III, 139-140.

specific rebuttal to Jampullo's nephew's anecdote. That story claimed that just one of Jampullo's names of God could render Hammadu mute and powerless. This charm claimed to give Hammadu a bit of potent speech with precisely the same power to silence others.

Not all of Hammadu's relations with his neighbors were hostile. Indeed, much like Jampullo, Hammadu had resources and a reputation which led some of his neighbors to seek him out for esoteric help. One (anonymous) neighbor wrote him a brief letter that suggests this type of social relationship. The letter was addressed to "our scholar" (*adībinā*). It spoke of a very intimate, individual problem – the approach of death, expressed in the local euphemism "I am traveling to the best of houses." The writer asked Hammadu for his "supplication" (*al-du'ā*), a term with strong esoteric resonances. He then "greeted you [Hammadu] very much and the people of our *hilla*, all of them."³⁵¹ *Hilla* was the Arabic term for the Fulfulde *wuro*, which meant "herders' neighborhood," or the community of Ruumde's non-slaves. The term locates the letter's writer within Hammadu's village community. He was Hammadu's neighbor and, the warmth of the greeting suggests, also his friend. At the same time, he respected Hammadu's scholarly status and hoped that Hammadu's knowledge of efficacious supplications could help him at a very personal and very troubling moment. The dying man closed his letter with a text combining part of a short Qur'anic *sūra* and another short religious phrase – the sort of text, which ordinary literates throughout Gimbala could access easily and which they knew to be effective means for dealing with the panoply of their personal troubles. Like Jampullo, Hammadu had his own beloved friends, who looked to him both as a neighbor and as a locus of esoteric power.

³⁵¹ UHU, File 8, Image 6544.

Jampullo Aduraaman wished to establish a miniature chain of esoteric command so that only his “light” would illuminate the secret Islamic space of Ruumde. But Jampullo’s “light” – his standing as a local source of secret power – depended on building up individual technical prowess and local relationships rather than assuming a fixed rank in a centralized hierarchy. The same means to build up secret power were also available to other individuals. Jampullo claimed leadership of the esoteric working-group which operated in Ruumde in the 1930s and 1940s. He sought, in particular, to cast his co-participant Hammadu Usman as a subordinate who needed his authorization to wield esoteric power. Hammadu’s library, however, shows that he did not wait for Jampullo’s authorization to amass his own secret resources.

Hammadu began acquiring secret techniques at least by 1900, long before Jampullo became bold enough to assert esoteric primacy. Though he may have sought to acquire some secrets from Jampullo, this relationship was certainly not his first (and probably not his primary) source of secret knowledge. He developed his own independent channels for the transmission of esoteric knowledge, such as his lifelong relationship with a teacher in Seke and that teacher’s family. This relationship had a vertical component: the teacher-student relationship which brought Hammadu to Seke some time before January 1900. It later developed a horizontal component, which Hammadu called a “brother[hood] in God” between him and at least one of his teacher’s junior kinsmen. Hammadu was a recipient of knowledge in this relationship, but he also became a transmitter of it. He traveled to Seke in his youth. Later in life, he hosted visitors from it. Hammadu did not have as many farming charms as Jampullo, but he amassed his own storehouse of secrets useful to himself as well as to those who lived around him and faced

similar circumstances. While Muhammad b. Alfa wrote that Jampullo “surpassed his peers,” others considered Hammadu Usman their *adīb* and looked to him for effective supplications.

The separate practices of Jampullo Aduraaman and Hammadu Usman indicate that Islamic esoteric power was seldom confined to a single “light.” It was not a single chain of authority or a handful of competing centralized hierarchies. It was an unruly multitude of practitioners who constructed a messy web of intersecting relationships, some of which were vertical, though many were essentially horizontal. Islamic esotericism was the power that modest technicians drew from short texts, common objects, and accessible spaces in order to confront modest, everyday problems.

Conclusion: Multiple Esoteric Powers

Even in a modest village such as Ruumde, no single person or group could establish esoteric dominance. Every family library in the village recorded a history of individual scholars compiling their own secret sources of power. In addition to Jampullo Aduraaman and Hammadu Usman, the third working-group regular, Num Haalidu, had access to a rich esoteric toolkit, which would merit separate detailed study. Outside of the working-group, Num Allay Aamadu amassed esoteric texts, while he pursued his interest in developing deep mastery of the Qur’an and a respectable level of legal learning. The library of the Jaareeḡe branch of the Arkaseeḡe *de’eende* likewise displays its members’ efforts to acquire technical control over secrets. One esoteric text in their library was dated to Sunday, June 8, 1919 (Sunday, 9 Ramadan 1337 AH). It described a specific community-wide sacrifice to ward off a collective catastrophe, suggesting that Jaareeḡe of the generation of Dayru and Maadu Allay were involved in village-level esoteric

organization of the type that the “working-group” coordinated later.³⁵² In fact, all of Ruumde’s scholars – and even some whose level of learning would have earned them only the title of “advanced student” (*taaliibo*) – collected and used at least some secret techniques.

The transmission pattern of esoteric knowledge and power was not a straight line. Transmission took place among the scholars of Ruumde. Acts of restriction also took place: for example, when the working-group left some scholars out of its meetings or when Jampullo’s family told the story of the name of God that Hammadu Usman was not strong enough to handle. Everyone had “secrets” which he kept to himself, which he packed up and hid among his own papers. Yet the prayer economy of Ruumde was by no means a command economy. Each scholar developed his own channels of transmission. Hammadu may have sought occasional secrets from Jampullo, but he also acquired them from other sources, such as his ties to the family of chiefs and imams of Seke. Num Haalidu may have picked up some useful techniques from working-group meetings, but he also inherited many esoteric texts that his father Haalidu Num had written.

Num Allay was not a member of the working-group and his father, a non-scholarly farmer, did not leave him a library. He compiled secret knowledge from a variety of teachers. Some of his eleven Qur’an-school teachers would certainly have taught him not only the phonological and alphabetic aspects of the sacred text, but also some of its esoteric potential. Much like Hammadu Usman in Seke, Num Allay likely picked up some secret techniques during his legal studies in Dorku. His teacher, Ali Alfa Saydu, had an impressive library both of legal texts and of esoteric ones; he also had a considerable reputation for his ability to heal madness.³⁵³

³⁵² Library: Muusa Num, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 1, Images 0854-0855.

³⁵³ One person who narrated for me Ali Alfa Saydu’s ability to heal madness was Bura Huseeni of Ngayna.

Some texts in Num Allay's library show his link to Num Haalidu.³⁵⁴ This relationship gave him an indirect link to the village working-group of Jampullo et al. Like Jampullo, Num Allay also selected a *seekuujo*, from whom he took a Sufi litany. His choice was not a distant luminary, but the nearby Alfa Demmba from the neighboring village of Tannere.³⁵⁵

The sum total of these relationships reflects well how esoteric knowledge circulated in Gimbala. The claims of leaders such as spiritual masters (*seekuuḃe*) or the village working-group had importance, but they could never be exclusive. In Num Allay's case, his *seekuujo* was one source of esoteric power, which complemented what he could acquire through Num Haalidu and his many other teachers. Likewise, his indirect link through Num Haalidu to the village working-group was just one channel among many which allowed him to access secret knowledge. A would-be esoteric leader could valuably supplement his disciple's body of secrets. He could not monopolize or limit it. He had much more power to add than to restrict. The fundamental logic of Islamic esotericism in Gimbala assumed a multitude of powers; it was a logic of aggregation, building up, accumulation, and also of fragmentation.

This sociology of esoteric knowledge was closely linked to its technical content. Secret texts generally located power in common objects, plants, animals, and spaces available in the village or its surrounding bush. Secret texts always located power also in a commonly-available level of education. The secrets declared that anyone who could read, write, recite, use educational instruments such as pen, paper, and a study-slate, or handle confidently a few lines

³⁵⁴ One such text was Num Haalidu's copy of the legal text, *al-'Ashmāwiyya*, which Num Allay kept in his library and which has been referenced above. See chapter V, 199. For the colophon of this text, see Library: Dahibu Num Allay, File 3, Image 7126. Another text indicating the relationship between the two Nums was a letter addressed to Num Haalidu in the 1950s when he was village imam. This document also ended up in Num Allay's family library. See Library: Dahibu Num Allay, File 1, Image 2901.

³⁵⁵ Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 4/1/2007. Aamadu Adu remembered being sent to Tannere during his childhood studies in the 1940s in order to manage communication between Num Allay and his *seekuujo* Alfa Demmba.

of text could obtain solutions to quotidian problems. A sympathetic teacher and senior scholar could do much to help an individual develop these skills. An antagonistic senior scholar could do little to prevent an individual from developing these basic skills (and collecting a few secret ways to employ them) with others. As previous chapters have argued, such basic scholarly skills were widespread throughout the *wuro* of Ruumde and similar village settings elsewhere in Gimbala. Decentralized access to basic literacy made also for a decentralized field of esoteric power.

By the same token, the nature of esoteric knowledge helps explain the pattern of the social distribution of learning which we have observed in previous chapters. Rural families and individuals valued Islamic learning in multiple ways. Islamic knowledge offered raw intellectual satisfaction as well as a path to the ritual status of an imam or the honor and influence that came from speaking with the authority of God's law. Yet it was significant that basic Islamic literacy also promised practical, instrumental benefits. The fact that Islamic knowledge offered accessible solutions to ordinary rural family problems provided a major incentive for ordinary rural families to invest labor and other resources in it. There was a reciprocal influence between the social pattern of knowledge distribution and the content of esoteric knowledge, in particular. The wide distribution of Islamic learning among Gimbala families meant that most secret texts aimed at family-level problems. In turn, the fact that most secret texts focused on family-level problems meant that most rural families encouraged some members to acquire personal knowledge. Islamic knowledge was too important to rural life to be left to a specialist class of "learned families." Rural families that focused on food production and healthy reproduction considered these fundamental concerns to be intimately linked to the production of knowledge and the social reproduction of scholars. Family survival necessitated the production of both food

and thought.

PART TWO: SAARE

Introduction: Master-Slave Relations and Grassroots Production of Islamic Knowledge

Part one of this dissertation examined Islamic knowledge through the historical experience of a single village community. Chronologically, it focused on the colonial period, particularly the experiences of a generation of intellectuals who came of age in the early colonial period at the beginning of the twentieth century, who performed mature scholarly roles into the 1930s and 1940s, and whose lives ended toward the end of the colonial period. Thematically, it analyzed a range of Islamic intellectual practices: the study of legal textbooks, the ritual speech of imams, juristic debate, and the ability to wield esoteric power. Sociologically, it located this literate intellectual life in an unexpected place: within the reach of members of ordinary rural families. Scholarly practice tied to text was one commonplace grassroots social practice among others. The social location of textual practice influenced both text and the rest of society. When village intellectuals brought legal authority and esoteric power into their community, they organized community life according to Islamic categories and, on the other hand, organized Islamic knowledge according to rural, grassroots priorities. The experience of colonial-era Ruumde sketches a sociology of West African Islamic knowledge whose fundamental rule was grassroots access rather than centralized hierarchies of control and obedience.

This model of decentralized access illuminates important areas of West African Muslim experience that models which forefront exclusion obscure. Understanding the fundamental significance of decentralized access even offers new ways of making sense of the acts of exclusion which did take place. We have already seen a number of hierarchical claims to special control over Islamic knowledge. Hammadu Usman Umaru spoke the ritual idiom of the imamate with anger and a sense of superiority. "All of you are not scholars," he taunted his co-villagers.

Jampullo Aduraaman phrased his sense of superiority in the idiom of secret knowledge, asserting that his “light” dominated Ruumde’s esoteric sphere. His “beloved friend” cast him as one “who surpassed his peers,” while a like-minded admirer composed an even more sugary “sweet honeycomb” in praise of Num Haalidu as a “colleague” only with his own “perfection.” The lineage label of the “Scholars” *de’eende* was another hierarchical claim about control over Islamic knowledge. However, the examination of broader social context deflates each of these claims. Indeed, the very fact of the multiplicity of these ambitious assertions, advanced by individuals whose lives in most respects resembled those of their ordinary rural neighbors, underscores the reality of widespread access. The claim to be an irreplaceable imam, the sole locus of esoteric power, a scholar whose “rank cannot be belittled,” or a uniquely “learned family” – ultimately these were weapons in a fractious social and intellectual world of ongoing contest among relative equals. Primarily in this indirect sense – and not in the straightforward sense in which many observers have taken it – is the language of hierarchy a worthy guide in the sociology of Islamic knowledge in places such as Ruumde. The hierarchical claims we have encountered so far reflect the power of many to acquire Islamic knowledge rather than the power of any to exclude others from that knowledge.

There were two significant patterns of exclusion in the intellectual world of colonial-era Ruumde, to which, so far, we have only alluded. The legal debate about the educational implications of menstruation discussed in chapter III shows that women and girls did study in the village. Yet much like other forms of labor in the village, Islamic intellectual labor was gendered. No women acquired reputations as full-fledged scholars. Men compiled, owned, and inherited all of the village’s libraries. Women had systematically less access to Islamic knowledge than men.

The second pattern of exclusion separated slaves from the rest of the village's population of "nobles" (*rimōe*) and smaller numbers of "casted artisans" (*ηeeōe*). The latter two groups resided in (or were at least classified with) the *wuro*, the "herders' district." They were divided internally into a variety of family groupings, the genealogical "neighborhoods" known as *de'eele* and the nuclear households of *koreeji*. As we observed in chapters IV and V, knowledge was distributed widely across these family units. Most families produced scholars, investing family work-time in scholarship as well as in labor aimed at subsistence farming. Slaves lived in the *saare*, a "cultivators' district" located just east of the *wuro*. Throughout the colonial period, Ruumde's slaves studied very little. There was no small group of specialists who monopolized knowledge production in the village. The fundamental pattern was decentralized access to knowledge, but this rule had exceptions. In addition to gender, the most significant exception was the barrier between slaves and masters.

The relationship between masters and slaves was also the location of the most fundamental social change in Ruumde and the rest of Gimbala during the twentieth century. Colonial conquest led to some changes in this relationship, but the most rapid change accompanied the transition to Malian independence in the late 1950s and 1960s. Chapter VII examines the nature of these changes and the forces shaping them through state archival sources and local memories. It pans outward from the village of Ruumde to the broader research unit of Gimbala, the same unit where our introduction explored local colonial ways of observing Islam.

At the same time, part two builds on the alternative model for understanding Gimbala Islam that we have developed through close examination of colonial-era Ruumde. Colonial observers determined that Islam was insignificant in Gimbala life. Ruumde's libraries and memories belie this superficial assessment, identifying the "Muslim questions" which were

important to Gimbala, although they were not matters of colonial concern. The historical process of slave emancipation in Gimbala demonstrates the profound social consequences of the region's robust, decentralized Islamic culture. Though colonial models could not have predicted or observed it, Islamic intellectual culture shaped deeply how both masters and slaves responded to increasing slave autonomy. Chapter VII sketches some of the features of how masters developed an Islamic language for resisting the emancipatory policies of the secular state. Chapter VIII shows that, like their masters, slaves saw Islamic intellectual culture as an essential source of dignity, status, and power. In places such as the *saare* of Ruumde, slaves and ex-slaves used their increased autonomy to seize access to Islamic knowledge. They defined the meaning of their autonomy in Islamic terms by asserting new, scholarly identities and the right to speak with the authority of scholarly idioms. The first generation of Gimbala slave scholars worked to overcome one of the region's most formidable intellectual barriers, one of the two exceptions to the general rule of decentralized access to Islamic knowledge. Their stories demonstrate extraordinary perseverance and personal ingenuity. Yet, it was also true that their success in achieving further decentralization of Islamic knowledge to social spaces such as Ruumde's *saare* depended in large part on the already decentralized nature of Islamic knowledge in social spaces such as the colonial-era *wuro* explored in part one.

CHAPTER VII

MASTER-SLAVE RELATIONS I: TWO SPEEDS OF CHANGE

Introduction: Two Speeds of Change

The changes which affected master-slave relations in Gimbala in the twentieth century unfolded at two distinct speeds. To be sure, the formally abolitionist power which conquered the region in 1893 instituted some changes. But, conflicted about the issue, it implemented other policies, which put the brakes on anti-slavery measures and shored up local social hierarchy. The colonial period opened up cracks in Gimbala's slave system, but, at the same time, it maintained the bulk of its walls. After an initial, exciting and unsettling opening, the colonial period settled into a measured, very gradual pace of change in master-slave relations. A second timeline of change was quick and abrupt. Decolonization, especially from 1958 to 1960, brought "Mali" national independence and sovereignty. It brought Gimbala a major re-organization of local politics and an even greater jolt to household-level social relations: effective, across-the-board slave emancipation, which was still shocking despite six decades of rule under formally abolitionist law. Islamic issues were critical at both speeds and from both slaves' and masters' perspectives.

Colonial Conquest and Slave Initiative

The imposition of colonial rule created a disruption and an opening for slaves, but local colonial officials soon shifted gears to restoring order and restricting social mobility. Among the first colonial observations about Gimbala (at that time, the distant northernmost portion of Bandiagara cercle) was an account of its brisk slave market in Commandant Destenave's 1894 report on "captivity."³⁵⁶ According to Destenave, dealers in Gimbala's largest market village, Saraféré (ca. 12 km. west of Ruumde), regularly sold 50-60 slaves per day. Among the other major slave markets in Bandiagara cercle were two which sold 10-12 per day and others which sold more at a time, but only on one day per week. The report depicts slave conditions in addition to sales, offering a rather sanguine portrait. Its conclusion substitutes "slavery" in place of the sanitized term "captivity," but argues that this "fundamental institution" of local society should remain untouched during the process of establishing French authority. The French should focus first on ending "the constant war for slaves," which continued in areas just beyond their control. This conservatism, the prevailing mood of on-the-spot officialdom as the French expanded east out of the "four communes" of their Senegalese colony,³⁵⁷ apparently even extended, at first, to the public slave markets. Bandiagara's dealers sold 10-12 slaves per day, a stone's-throw from cercle headquarters.

The public spaces for slavers were soon shut down and new, public channels for slave initiative quickly opened up. On May 3, 1902, Lieutenant de Saint Martin arrived before dawn in Korientze, a market village at the southern edge of Gimbala (ca. 50 km. south of Ruumde).

³⁵⁶ ANM (FA), 1E23, "Report on Captivity in the Territories of Aguibou," August 18, 1894.

³⁵⁷ For the contours of evolving official opinion, see Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

He discovered a lower volume of slave sales than he had feared: only twelve since the beginning of the calendar year. It had become an ancillary trade for Mossi and Jula merchants primarily interested in salt, cattle, iron, kola nuts, cloth, and cowries. Even so, the cercle officials acted swiftly against the level of public slave-trading which continued. The Lieutenant brought the market chief, some guilty merchants, and eight captives to Commandant Daques in Bandiagara. The market chief, who had violated previous orders to stop the trade completely and had even dared to collect commissions on the sales, was imprisoned. The merchants received stiff fines. The captives received liberty certificates and escorts to their home villages in Mossiland.³⁵⁸

When, in 1905, a new cercle was established closer to Gimbala in Niafouké, waves of slaves seized the chance to quit their masters. A purely quantitative record of the cercle's "liberty villages" charts the entrance and exit of dozens of slaves per quarter between 1905 and 1911.³⁵⁹ Some quarterly totals for entrances or exits hit the 150-200 range. The totals for slaves in the limbo state of the "liberty village" hovered between three and five hundred. The slaves left undefined local villages for undefined "home villages," after the transitory processing stage recorded by the new governing power, without which (notwithstanding the prevarications foreshadowed in Destenave's report and given new shape by later officials) the steady slave flight would have been impossible. Perceiving the opportunity presented by the new colonial order, some slaves dared to separate from masters with their feet.

Yet more daring, some (especially women) confronted masters for control over their children. In 1908 and 1910, a grandmother and a mother were killed, and another mother was

³⁵⁸ ANM (FA), 1E23, Letters of May 11 and May 14, 1902.

³⁵⁹ ANM (FA), 1E133, Numeric State of Liberty Villages in Issa-Ber Cercle, 1905-1911.

brutally tortured, after attempts to reclaim children. In 1911, an apparent step-father was murdered in similar circumstances. A husband, whose wife demanded the return of her children, had dared to present the “foulbé” man who held them with a summons to the Niafouké tribunal. These slave initiatives drew the colonial state into disputes within households, which were also disputes about the boundaries between households. The cercle demanded that the native tribunal enforce real penalties for the offending masters (twenty-year prison terms for the murderers) and organized escorts for other slave women looking to reclaim children.³⁶⁰ The very early colonial period put public slave-sellers out of business. The second half of the first decade of the twentieth-century administered a deeper shock, cutting to the heart of Gimbala households as masters saw them. Slaves abandoned their masters’ households in significant volume and some risked death to claim control over their own households and dependents.

Colonial Policy Changes

But, not long after slaves began to seize on these openings, local colonial officials began to evolve policies to narrow them. The first policy change involved land. The same commandant who organized escorts for slave women to re-claim their children fathered a conservative policy on land and, by extension, labor. In March 1909, a month after his installation, Commandant Rocaché judged a land dispute in Garifolo village (ca. 30 km. west of Ruumde) in favor of the “ex-master.” The land belonged to the master, he determined; the slave who habitually cultivated it would have to make the “customary” payment called *murgu* in order

³⁶⁰ ANM, FA, 1E43, Political Reports, 1908, 1910, 1911.

to continue to use it.³⁶¹ In July of the same year, Rocaché convened a broader conference to standardize land “custom” across the cercle. Across the cercle, land belonged to ex-masters. Ex-slaves’ access to land would depend on paying *murgu* and defined amounts of labor to the masters, who owned the land. The effort claimed that slavery was gone (morphed into sharecropping), but also, paradoxically, that social relations had not changed (conference delegates debated, then endorsed a consensus on “custom”).

The second policy development was about administrative structure. The cercle’s evolving alliance with canton chiefs became its fundamental strategy for rule. Bolstering the authority of these chiefs became a far more important colonial priority than the enforcement of anti-slavery laws; indeed, it led rather directly to blocking the enforcement of those laws. Colonial delegation of authority to canton chiefs ultimately enabled Gimbala masters also to maintain considerable authority over their slaves throughout the colonial period.

The Evolution of Colonial Policy on Canton Chiefs

The first commandants in Niafouké virulently opposed canton chiefs, aiming for “direct” administration (especially for tax-collection) through the cercle’s hundreds of village chiefs. Soon, the pendulum shifted. As with land policy, the change started with Rocaché. Commandants began to recognize the limits of their power and sought powerful intermediaries to rule through. They not only restored the status of canton chiefs, but sought to consolidate the system into fewer, larger cantons. As their administrative goals broadened beyond tax collection, they found these powerful allies indispensable and added the bolstering of canton

³⁶¹ ANM, FA, 1E43, Political Reports, 1909.

chiefly authority itself to the top of their expanding checklist of administrative objectives.

Despite considerable ambivalence and some experimentation with alternatives, administrators ultimately settled on a core partnership with a limited number of indigenous canton chiefs, who were allowed considerable latitude in how they managed the affairs of their jurisdictions as long as they met essential colonial needs.

From 1893 to 1902, the French ruled Bandiagara cercle through Aguibou Tall. Aguibou was a son of Seeku Umar Tal and thus a high-ranking member of a family which had ruled large areas of West Africa (including much of central Mali) during the generation prior to colonial conquest. Before 1893, Aguibou did not rule or even reside in Bandiagara. His half-brother Amadou, former ruler of Nioro, moved to take over command of the town in 1891, making there his last effort to muster Futanke resistance to the French advance. Just before the town fell, Amadou left with his followers on a *hijra* east towards Sokoto. The move signaled both his acknowledgement that French rule was inevitable and his refusal to live under the new order. Aguibou was more open to cooperate than his brother, so the French transplanted him from another Futanke center, Dinguiraye in Guinea, and installed him in Bandiagara as “the king of Masina.” During the first phase of their rule, the French hoped that Aguibou’s standing within the Tall family would help maintain political stability and create legitimacy for the new colonial order.

At the northern limits of Aguibou’s “kingdom,” Gimbala presented particular challenges to his authority. Gimbala chiefs were the last to make trips to Bandiagara to show public allegiance to the new king and his colonial backers. They were also the least cooperative when it came to the central administrative goal of tax collection. At first, the chiefs profited from confusion about where the boundary with Timbuktu cercle would be drawn. Timbuktu had set

up a small post in Saraféré and local chiefs tried to play Aguibou and the European stationed there against each other. The post was dismantled in 1895 when the governor of the colony confirmed Bandiagara's jurisdiction over all the area from Fittouka canton south. At about the same time, the administrator in Bandiagara sent Aguibou on a tour of Gimbala to meet with chiefs and demonstrate his authority. The tour revealed how chiefs were using administrative disorganization not only to evade obligations toward Bandiagara, but also to jockey for position and re-draw canton boundaries among themselves.³⁶²

For most of Aguibou's reign, Bandiagara's key administrative task was to confirm and define the authority of canton chiefs under the new system. In 1896, Aguibou had completed a list of new holders of command. The list reflected both the need for some re-shuffling and the desire for continuity, naming some new chiefs but drawing consistently on the families of previous holders of authority. By 1896, Aguibou had also finished letters of authorization for most canton chiefs.³⁶³ The process of sorting out the cantons was not entirely orderly. The cercle needed also to address several disputes over chiefship posts and adjudicate about the murky histories of some canton boundaries.

Over the course of Aguibou's tenure, the cercle's relationships with the cantons became increasingly regularized, but the administrative structure remained unwieldy, especially in remote Gimbala. There, only large, high-profile cantons such as Fittouka, Ngorkou, and Dadjiga made it into cercle reports. A significant number of smaller cantons clearly existed under the radar of French records. Aguibou's Arabic correspondence with the chief of Ngayna (ca. 18 km. west of Ruumde), a village which only collected tax from its own residents and a few households

³⁶² ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1895.

³⁶³ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1896.

of their kinsfolk in nearby villages, shows just one of the many small tax-collecting entities which never showed up in the cercle's official reports.³⁶⁴ The difficulty Bandiagara had in keeping track of so many cantons in a remote section of the large cercle meant that Gimbala's record of tax payment remained unsatisfactory up to 1902.

Meanwhile, administrators in Bandiagara became increasingly unhappy with Aguibou's leadership. His ability to lend legitimacy to the new colonial order had never been very great. He was a newcomer to the region and clearly depended very heavily on French support. What authority he had came from his position within the Tall family and the larger Futanke group it led, but these were considered illegitimate, recent conquerors by many in Gimbala and other parts of Aguibou's "kingdom." The more decisive source of declining French support for Aguibou was that he had already accomplished what they needed from him. He had smoothed the transition to the new order, putting in place stable, if still imperfect, relations between Bandiagara and its cantons. At the end of 1902, they rewarded him by dispensing with him. They established a new "direct administration," retaining the structure of relations between the center and its cantons, but substituting the commandant's central authority for Aguibou's.³⁶⁵

At the same time, the French stationed a European resident at Saraféré, primarily because of Gimbala's especially unsatisfying record of tax payment, but also in line with the new spirit of establishing more direct relations with their subjects. For the first time, the colonial administration compiled comprehensive lists of Gimbala cantons (including Ngaina)³⁶⁶ and prepared reasonably precise censuses of inhabitants and livestock. In 1903 and 1904, the period

³⁶⁴ Library: Saadu Aamadu Siise, Ngayna, uncatalogued.

³⁶⁵ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1902-1903.

³⁶⁶ Here I use the French spelling of "Ngaina" to reflect the French written source of the reference. Elsewhere I use a Fulfulde transcription to indicate an oral or otherwise non-French context.

before it was moved from Bandiagara to Issa Ber cercle, Saraféré residence had between twenty-six and twenty-nine cantons. Canton populations ranged from Fittouka's 8,201 to under 100 inhabitants. About half of the cantons, such as Ngaina, had fewer than 1000. The new residence could keep scrupulous, monthly records of tax payment, target uncooperative chiefs, identify special cases requiring lenience, and, in general, steadily increase control over tax collection.³⁶⁷ The foundation for these gains was the new, closer relationship with Gimbalan canton chiefs.

Paradoxically, this successful cooperation led quickly to French dissatisfaction with canton chiefs, especially after Saraféré residence was attached to a new cercle administered from nearby Niafounké. In addition to better results in tax collection, closer contact with local chiefs and populations meant that colonial officials could keep better track of cases when canton chiefs abused their authority. Tax-related chicanery alarmed them most. Strangely, canton chiefs' success in delivering revenues to the French also seemed to damn them, opening them up to the same pressures which had led to Aguibou's ouster. Improving tax-paying habits tempted administrators to dispense with yet another layer of bureaucracy. The rhetoric of cercle reports from 1905 to 1908 showed consistent and unqualified hostility toward the "tyrannical" canton chiefs. Beginning with the cercle's first monthly report in January 1905, the commandant expressed the objective of eliminating canton chiefship. Because of the authority these chiefs

³⁶⁷ ANM (FA), 1E 23, 1903-1904. In September 1904, the commandant of Bandiagara quantified the gains that Gimbalan had made in tax collection. On January 1, 1903, 25,000 francs of 1902 tax had remained to be paid. On January 1, 1904, 16,000 francs of 1903 tax had been left. But by September 1904, only 6,000 francs were left to be paid in 1904 tax (all of which was paid by the end of December). More precise reports from Saraféré show slightly different numbers and reveal that over 5,000 francs reduced from some cantons' tax burdens were part of the 1904 story. The commandant's argument was nonetheless clearly right. The residence had succeeded in dramatically improving tax collection from Gimbalan cantons.

often had in their cantons however, he advocated patience. During the brief period between 1905 and 1908, the cercle pursued a policy of gradually reducing the power of canton chiefs.

Administrators justified the first moves to suppress canton chiefship in terms of specific cases of abuses of power. The biggest, best documented scandal involved Issa Dionké, the chief of Dodjiga canton. In an initial investigation in April 1905, the cercle administration found that popular allegations of misappropriation of tax monies could not be proven. The monthly report suggested that the population was making false allegations merely to warn the canton chief against future misappropriation. It argued that ethnic rivalries between the Bambara chief and his mainly Fulani detractors played a key role and looked sympathetically for measures which could improve the chief's relations with his subjects. By the summer, the investigation had turned up the fact that canton chiefs (notably Dodjiga's) were still collecting, alongside the colonial head tax, an additional tax under the title of *zakāt* (the Islamic tithe), the entirety of which they kept for themselves. The administration reiterated the policy initiated by Bandiagara and the residence of Saraféré that canton chiefs could not force their subjects to pay *zakāt*. A report in July recounted that Issa Dionké had used the promise of anticipated *zakāt* revenues to acquire a horse. Now he was coming under pressure from the seller, who worried about the cercle's new statement of policy. The report took the chief's predicament as a sign that much of the population was already refusing to pay *zakāt*.³⁶⁸ The incident also reflected the fact that the chief had lost credibility with the administration, which was now interested in undermining his authority.

By October, the commandant had completed an in-depth investigation of the original allegations regarding the colonial tax. These were now "firmly established" and detailed in an

³⁶⁸ ANM (FA), 1E 43, April, June, and July 1905.

itemized table which showed that the chief had misappropriated most of the tax revenues from the seven villages studied, stealing everything from donkeys to lengths of calico cloth to sums of cash and cowries. The report estimated that, in the canton as a whole, the chief had siphoned off six thousand francs worth out of a total tax burden of fifteen thousand. Issa Dionké was promptly revoked, only escaping prison time because his family committed itself to paying back all the misappropriated funds. More significantly, the cercle administration used the opportunity of the scandal to suppress the canton of Dodjiga entirely, downgrading Dodjiga's capital Sa to the rank of a simple village, whose new chief would have no authority over other villages.³⁶⁹

At about the same time, the cercle administration was also targeting the canton chief of Fittouka. Beginning with early reports from Bandiagara cercle, colonial officials had noted dissatisfaction with the Fittouka canton chief's attitude and record of tax collection. Yet the chief always managed to make suitable shows of contrition before incurring real sanctions. Under the closer surveillance of Saraféré residence, he improved his performance on taxes. Yet the cercle administration still objected to his attitude. Closer surveillance of the region allowed it to build up a more substantive case against him. The cercle charged that he appointed sub-chiefs, who committed frequent abuses of power and infringed on the authority of village chiefs. The Fittouka canton chief was not deposed, but in September 1905 he was stripped of his tax-collecting powers and his sub-chiefs were stripped of their authority. Mody Sadio Cissé, for example, was demoted from a sub-chief commanding twenty-six villages to a village chief ruling Endiam-Ouro alone. Allegations that he had misappropriated tax monies while he was a sub-

³⁶⁹ ANM (FA), 1E 43, October 1905.

chief resurfaced in December 1906 and justified a further reduction of his authority.³⁷⁰ In the beginning, the cercle did not seek to reduce canton chiefs' power everywhere, instead using allegations of abuse to pursue the policy only in selected cantons. The scope of these initial moves was nevertheless considerable, since Dodjiga and Fittouka had been the two largest cantons in Gimbala.

The effort to eliminate canton chief mediation from 1905 to 1908 necessitated the search for other intermediaries. French comments about Alfa Taibou from 1905 to 1908 suggest some interest in using Muslim scholars as intermediaries. As seen in the introductory chapter I, this interest did not ultimately translate into concrete policy, but it is worth noting that it corresponded with the period of the greatest dissatisfaction with the mediating role of canton chiefs. The primary policy which the French pursued was to replace canton chief mediation with direct ties with village chiefs. The elimination of Dodjiga canton and the disciplining of the Fittouka canton chief both led to the devolution of tax-collecting authority to the village level. Mody Sadio Cissé lost the right to collect tax even in his village, as the French pushed the logic of their new policy to the point that individual neighborhood heads were to bring taxes directly to the administration. In 1906, the commandant forbade all canton chiefs from collecting taxes from villages in which a proper census had been completed.³⁷¹ From then until mid-1908 when the count for the entire cercle was complete, each census-taking tour signified the further chipping away of canton chief power and extended the zone in which the French were to deal directly with village chiefs. The continual improvement of the tax situation – in terms of the promptness of payment, the size of the sums collected, and the percentage of tax paid in cash –

³⁷⁰ ANM (FA), 1E 43, September 1905 and December 1906.

³⁷¹ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1906. See also ANM (FA), 1E 43, January 1907.

seemed to justify the new administrative arrangement. In 1908, the commandant, celebrating the fact that all tax had for the first time been paid entirely in cash, credited the gains to the village chiefs and to the marginalization of canton chiefs.³⁷²

The next year, however, cercle rhetoric towards the canton chiefs began to shift. Initially, the change might be attributable to the idiosyncrasies of a new commandant. Yet Rocaché's new orientation held up over time, despite several administrators' ambivalence towards the canton chiefs. Administrators still worried that canton chiefs would abuse their power. But they became convinced that the cercle did not have the resources to implement a more direct administration effectively, especially as they realized that the cercle's responsibilities would involve more than tax collection. So, gradually, the cercle reversed course, restoring the powers of canton chiefs over village chiefs, incorporating smaller cantons into a leaner structure of fewer, larger cantons, eventually eliminating the residence in Saraféré, and establishing a council of notables in 1922 which institutionalized the cercle's now almost complete reliance on a few canton chiefs for the administration of Gimbala. This strategy for rule held up until virtually the end of the colonial period.

In 1909, Commandant Rocaché expressed an attitude which differed considerably from that of his predecessors. For them, canton chiefs were tyrants, who had profited from their distance from Bandiagara to build up power they had never enjoyed in the pre-colonial era and whose misuses of power, particularly in tax matters, constituted the primary political problem facing the cercle. For Rocaché, canton chiefs had certainly been guilty of some abuses, but most of the time they had enforced the rights of the population. The suppression of canton chiefs'

³⁷² ANM (FA), 1E 43, Annual Report 1908.

authority, rather than freeing the population from tyranny, had put it “at the mercy of all the local tyrants.”³⁷³

Cercle policy had shifted from an emphasis on tax collection to the problem of settling land disputes. The commandant recognized that the cercle’s limited European staff could not manage the volume of land cases, nor did he think the indigenous tribunal could function effectively. Neither could become sufficiently knowledgeable about local details in the cercle’s approximately 560 villages to make valid decisions and prevent the proliferation of frivolous claims. He therefore chose to make canton chiefs the cornerstone of a new system. A conference of “chiefs and notables” held in July 1909 established a set of norms for deciding land cases. The guidelines were cast as a formal recognition of custom, but in one crucial way they represented a marked departure from previous practice. Formerly, the colonial administrator had handled contentious land cases directly, following, Rocaché said, the pre-colonial practice of “indigenous sovereigns.” Now, the canton chiefs, each equipped with an Arabic copy of the guidelines, would hold the first hearings. Only a limited number of appeals would reach the administrator and, even for these, the precedent set and information presented by the relevant canton chief were meant to play an influential role.³⁷⁴

The new orientation did not immediately restore to canton chiefs the full scope of their former powers, but it initiated a process which eventually made the chiefs even stronger than they had been before the reforms of 1905-1908. At the end of 1910, Rocaché still complained about the lack of indigenous auxiliaries. Despite his favorable attitude toward the canton chiefs, there is no evidence that he gave them back their former role in tax collection. Village chiefs

³⁷³ ANM (FA), 1E 43, June 1909.

³⁷⁴ ANM (FA), 1E 43, June and July 1909.

still seem to have been the primary tax collectors in January 1911 when a group of them asked the commandant for an extension of the deadline for payment. In July 1911, the village chief of Sa was removed from office following another tax scandal there. The incident suggests not only that village chiefs still had tax-collecting authority, but also that the large canton of Dodjiga (of which Sa had been the capital) had not yet been reconstituted.³⁷⁵

In August 1911, Rocaché was replaced. Commandant Logeay immediately criticized his predecessor's administrative methods and misinterpretations of local society, expressing, for example, greater ambivalence toward canton chiefs. In October, he noted that the chief of Farimaké collected all tax in his canton by himself.³⁷⁶ He argued that Farimaké should not differ from other cantons and that entrusting tax collection solely to canton chiefs had always given frustrating results. In the same month however, he also issued a policy statement in which the reinforcement of both canton and village chiefly authority topped the list of objectives. The commandant even made an extensive tour, visiting Saraféré and a number of canton headquarters to underline personally this new administrative goal. The 1911 annual report shows the same kinds of mixed feelings. Here Logeay recognized the central role of canton chiefs in administration. On the same page, though, he spoke of the gradual replacement of canton chiefly authority with village autonomy and bolstered village chiefs, and complained that canton chiefs overstepped their authority in judicial matters.³⁷⁷ In the end, despite the ambivalence, there was no return to the reforms of 1905-1908 and the cercle continued to expand its strategic partnership with canton chiefs.

³⁷⁵ ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1909-1911.

³⁷⁶ ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1911. Farimaké, a large canton of 75 villages, was located outside of Gimbala on the left bank of the Niger. This case shows that the 1906 policy forbidding canton chiefs from collecting tax in villages with completed censuses was probably never fully implemented.

³⁷⁷ ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1911.

A good indication of the continued trend was the consolidation of the cantonal administrative structure. By January 1912, Saraféré residence grouped 244 villages into just eight cantons.³⁷⁸ The other half of the cercle, Niafouké subdivision, probably had ten, joining left-bank cantons to five which had been among Saraféré's cantons in 1903 and 1904. (Among the latter five was a reconstituted Doudjiga canton.) The drop from about twenty-six to about thirteen right-bank cantons reflected the incorporation of smaller cantons into larger ones. The consolidation translated into fewer, stronger canton chiefs.

One important force favoring greater reliance on canton chief mediation was the multiplication of cercle administrative responsibilities. The most important of these before and during the First World War was the military draft, which began in Issa-Ber by at least October 1912. The administration always left the selection of recruits to canton chiefs. A chief's success in meeting army quotas now became the primary measure by which the administration evaluated him. A 1912 report accused the chief of Sa/Doudjiga of selling his influence over the draft, but unlike his predecessors' tax-related transgressions, this alleged abuse of power brought no disciplinary consequences.³⁷⁹ What was important was providing the targeted number of soldiers. People in Ngayna remember that the elimination of the canton's independent status and its incorporation into Ngorkou canton related to problems with the draft. During the short reign of chief Haamidi Buukari, five recruits fled the village. The opponents of the chief in Ngayna used the incident to win his ouster. The administration, in turn, exploited the internal conflict to win the new chief's cooperation in locating the deserters. More fundamentally, it made the village subject to the Ngorkou canton chief, whose firm rule and cooperative attitude the cercle

³⁷⁸ ANM (FA), 1E 43, January 1912.

³⁷⁹ ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1912.

had increasing occasion to admire.³⁸⁰ The hard work of canton chiefs to meet a particularly demanding quota of 1000 soldiers in early 1916 gave the best proof of their value as intermediaries.³⁸¹ In addition to providing soldiers, the cercle was asked to drum up grain and livestock for military rations, deliver forced labor for regional economic development projects, and implement other measures such as livestock vaccination. Colonial officials found that their partnership with a few, strong canton chiefs was the only way they could meet these multiplying administrative demands efficiently.

The deepening of the partnership proceeded even though officials still mistrusted the canton chiefs. A new commandant at the end of 1912 complained that the chiefs cheated the administration. In his annual report however, he argued that the authority of the canton chiefs had to be maintained. The European staff, i.e. the commandant himself and the resident of Saraféré, could not handle all the village chiefs individually. It was better to split up the much smaller number of canton chiefs between the two officials and focus on carefully choosing and watching these intermediaries. Over the next several years, officials grumbled about individual canton chiefs, especially those of Fittouka and Farimaké, but they did not explore any alternatives to the institution of canton chiefship. In 1917, the administration finally deposed the Fittouka canton chief, but it did not weaken the post he had held. It moved the canton's headquarters to Saraféré, named a close ally of the resident as the new canton chief, and actually increased the number of villages Fittouka governed. In Farimaké, the administration responded to a dispute between the canton chief and some canton notables by punishing the latter and

³⁸⁰ Interview: Buukari Saadu, Ngayna, 2005. Interview: Hammadu Saadu, Ngayna, 4/25/2005.

³⁸¹ ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1916.

reinforcing the canton chief's authority. A list of tax revenues delivered by each canton chief shows that the cantons had recovered tax-collecting authority also by 1917.³⁸²

The last time a commandant expressed fundamental doubts about the partnership with canton chiefs was in 1920. He was concerned that the push to consolidate the cantons had complicated, rather than simplified command, by putting too many rival interest groups together into the same administrative units. He proposed a referendum of household heads to determine entirely new canton boundaries, noting with approval that this reform would lead to many more cantons and independent villages. The recommendation got nowhere with his superiors, in part because of observations he made in the same report about the difficulty of monitoring even the limited number of existing canton chiefs. Really controlling even these chiefs would require numerous, trained European staff and the replacement of chiefs as tax-collectors with a professional staff of tax agents who could collect revenues individually. Without these reforms, wrote the administrator, it would be better to keep the current organization of indigenous rule in place. Meanwhile, the cercle's staff actually decreased, since 1920 was the year in which the residence of Saraféré was discontinued.

The commandant understood clearly the consequences of such a thin colonial administration. He remarked with bravado how he dispensed with chiefs who did not fulfill their duties. Yet he advocated accepting as "the natural law of the land" the ways they misused their power over their subjects, the ways in which closeness to chiefs afforded special treatment in regard to the draft, forced labor, school recruitment, and judicial proceedings.³⁸³ Without committing to a better funded, much more direct administration, the cercle would have to rely on

³⁸² ANM (FA), 1E 43, 1912, 1917.

³⁸³ ANM (FA), 1E 43, Second Trimester 1920.

an alliance with a few strong canton chiefs, who would be able to meet administrative demands efficiently, but would otherwise maintain considerable latitude in ruling their subjects. This bargain was further ratified in 1922 when a new council of notables, dominated by the canton chiefs, became the primary institution through which the cercle commandant interacted with the population, especially the population of the former residence of Saraféré.³⁸⁴ Until just before the end of the colonial period, the partnership with the canton chiefs and the reinforcement of their authority remained the cercle's primary strategy for rule.

The Cercle-Canton Alliance and Master-Slave Relations

The cercle-canton alliance developed because local colonial officials increasingly discovered common interests with "traditional" authorities, particularly with regards to control over people and their labor. As mentioned above, the cercle of Issa Ber, by at least October 1912, had begun to participate in the military draft,³⁸⁵ which was becoming one of French West Africa's central administrative goals. Above, we examined how a crisis precipitated by the draft in Ngayna gave the cercle a pretext to suppress this small canton and subordinate it to the large canton of Ngorkou as part of a move to consolidate the system of cantonal administration. Chief Haamidi Buukari's reign was cut short at a reputed seven months because Ngayna's five conscripts, who were understandably unenthusiastic at the prospect of military service, fled the village and because he proved unable or unwilling to recover them. The significance of this story was not confined to the politics of village and canton chiefship. To grasp the full

³⁸⁴ ANM (FR), 2E 85.

³⁸⁵ ANM, FA, Political Reports, 1912.

significance of the story, it is important to note that the conscripts were slaves.³⁸⁶ In 1911, the colonial administration stopped issuing liberty certificates to runaway slaves. After 1911, cercle officials no longer wrote about escorts for slaves who wished to reclaim dependents from former masters. Indeed, after 1911, they no longer wrote about slavery much at all. Oral accounts of Haamidi Buukari and the draft in Ngayna suggest one reason why. Local colonial officials now wished to restrict the movements of potential conscripts as much as masters wanted to restrict those of their slaves. Instead of guaranteeing freedom of movement to fugitive slaves, the administration began punishing local authorities who failed to control them.

Colonial officials recognized that the most efficient way to establish the control over people, labor, and resources, which underlay all of their administrative objectives, was to reinforce and strengthen local hierarchy. While Haamidi's rivals in Ngayna used the crisis of the fugitives to do away with him, the cercle, in turn, exploited this village rivalry to do away with Ngayna's status as a small canton. One of the terms of the new chief's installation was that Ngayna accept the authority of the chief of the growing canton of Ngorkou. This move was just one of many administrative reshufflings, which together reduced the cantons in Issa Ber cercle by half from 1904 to 1912 and nearly by half again from 1912 to 1930. Ngorkou's chief became a favorite of the colonial administration for his ability "to make himself obeyed" and to meet colonial quotas for taxes, conscripts, forced labor, schoolchildren, and war-time livestock.³⁸⁷ In return for their effective cooperation in meeting core colonial goals, canton chiefs, such as Ngorkou's, won a relatively free hand in the internal affairs of their cantons. Even as early as the 1909 land reform, Commandant Rocaché had delegated the adjudication of land claims to canton

³⁸⁶ Interview: Buukari Saadu, Ngayna, 2005. Interview: Hammadu Saadu, Ngayna, 4/25/2005.

³⁸⁷ See ANM (FR), 2E 52, fiche de renseignements chefs de canton (Issa-Ber), canton de Ngorkou, 1909-1955.

chiefs. In practice, most other kinds of disputes also stopped at the canton chief level and colonial officials were loathe to overturn canton chiefly authority in the few cases, where litigants pushed the matter on to Niafounké. Major slave-owners themselves, canton chiefs regularly upheld the rights of other masters. Unlike colonial officials, they did not have to sanitize slavery as “captivity” or re-define it as customary sharecropping. Within their considerable jurisdiction, they spoke and lent their power to a much more straightforward language of masters’ rights over slaves.

Colonial-Era Slave Initiative

The cercle’s alliance with slave-owning canton chiefs held up until virtually the end of the colonial period, but, even so, individual slaves sought out and exploited new cracks in the system of slavery. The cercle’s reliance on traditional authorities to supply people for undesirable occupations such as forced labor, the military, and study in colonial schools meant that most of the bodies which it received, especially from Fulfulde-speaking communities, were slaves. Colonial schooling and soldiering were low-status tasks in Fulfulde-speaking communities, but they were also, of course, new paths to social mobility. Returning soldiers, such as WWII veteran Arsiki Mbaalu from the village of Gungare (ca. 20 km. southwest of Ruumde), were among the most aggressive in asserting rights to, for example, the product of their agricultural labor. Arsiki left his masters’ village for the neighboring village of Tunguro. There, he founded a family, which is still known as one of the most economically successful slave households in the area.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ Interview: Penda, Gungare, 2005.

More generally, other slaves were also gradually gaining more control over their agricultural labor. More accustomed to farming than their Fulɓe masters and more comfortable with it as a social role, slaves produced more than their masters. Though most remained dependent on masters for access to land and continued to pay masters both in grain and labor, many kept an increasing share of their grain and labor to themselves.

One barometer of this transition was the way in which some Muslim scholars began to switch the hosts with whom they stayed during harvest-season tours. Generally speaking, outsiders in a Gimbalaŋ village are expected to maintain a single host whenever they visit it. In “the year of the locusts” (1941/42), however, Chief Aamadu Hammadu of Ngayna advised the scholar Hammadu Yero Umaru of Juukayna, a close associate who had previously stayed with him during each of his annual visits, to seek out a host among the slaves in the *saare*. Aamadu knew that Hammadu Yero had come for grain, so he told the scholar frankly that the *saare* was where the grain was.³⁸⁹ Even a master as powerful as this long-serving village chief now found it difficult simply to commandeer agricultural resources from his slaves. In the same year, Hammadu Yero also switched from Jampullo Aduraaman’s noble, scholarly household in the *wuro* of Ruumde Suuduuɓe to a slave host family in the village’s *saare*.³⁹⁰ He maintained both new hosts until his death ca. 1960. Other local scholars followed a similar pattern, adjusting the housing arrangements for their grain-seeking tours. Their decisions capture reflections of the subtle process in the later colonial period, through which slaves gradually achieved greater control over their agricultural labor and its product. In spite of colonial support for local

³⁸⁹ Interview: Saadu Aamadu, Ngayna, 2005.

³⁹⁰ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, 2005.

hierarchy, slaves took advantage of new conditions to create significant cracks in the slave system.

Masters' *De Facto* Power under Colonialism

At the same time, despite these cracks in the slave system, masters managed to maintain considerable portions of the wall throughout the colonial period. Large public slave markets never returned, but masters continued to sell individual slaves surreptitiously. Some did so even in such cruel ways as to sell off a mother just after giving birth. In the village of Arkoja (ca. 7 km. west of Ruumde) in ca. 1930, masters sold off a new mother to owners in another village, while retaining her new-born infant and his older brother. (The older brother raised the child, who only met his mother well into adulthood.)³⁹¹ Clearly, the cercle escorts of ca. 1910 had not established a lasting, general right for slaves to control their minor kin (or even maintain any ties to them at all). Many slaves continued to live within masters' households and perform work for those households. Even in places such as Ngayna, where most slaves formed separate households in the *saare*, at a respectable distance from their masters, slave girls often spent their childhood years in their masters' compounds, pounding, cooking, and performing other tasks so that noble women did not have to work. Yero Nawma's sister, frail but still lucid in 2005, spent her girlhood in the chiefly family's compound, not her parents'.³⁹² The cercle escorts of ca. 1910 also did not eliminate the violence in master-slave relations, which had prompted Commandant Rocaché to initiate them. In 2005, the imam of Seke (ca. 17 km. northwest of Ruumde) recalled

³⁹¹ Interview: Aama Garaasa, Arkoja, 2005. Interview: Sammba Seeku, Arkoja, 2/2007.

³⁹² Interview: Hammadu Saadu, Ngayna, 4/3/2005.

how, during his boyhood in the 1950s, the village's masters would band together to administer beatings to an individual disobedient slave. Like many others of his generation, he recalled also that, whenever a dispute arose between a master and a slave at that time, the colonial canton chiefs of Fittouga (centered in the village of Saraféré) and Ngorkou would side with their fellow slave-owners.³⁹³ Slaves had made some important gains, in particular in the critical area of agriculture, but it bears repeating that, even in that area, colonial policy post-1909 and canton chiefs alike restricted ownership of the productive bush surrounding a village to its community of ex-masters.

Even when slaves managed to distance themselves from their specific masters, their social status continued to pattern their lives if they stayed within the region. Sana Bundu's masters in Ruumde Suuduuŋe sold him one day to new owners, who took him to a relatively distant village to the north. Already a young man, Sana managed to flee. Brazenly, he returned to settle in Arkoja, a village adjacent to Ruumde, not allowing either sets of his former masters to make any further claims on him.³⁹⁴ However, in order to get access to land in Arkoja, he established a relationship with a non-slave host, who benefited from him in many of the same ways in which masters benefited from their slaves. Later, when he married, his wife's masters also exerted over him a control akin to a typical master-slave relationship. Sana Bundu continued to serve these new virtual masters until his death in the early 1950s. His experience reflects both how colonial-era slaves seized on new opportunities for autonomy and how colonial-era masters managed to restrict the scope of those opportunities. In the long period from colonial land reform in 1909 and the rehabilitation of canton chiefs at approximately the

³⁹³ Interview: Almaami Seke, Seke, 4/2005.

³⁹⁴ Interview: Mayram Sana, Arkoja, 1/2007.

same time to the 1950s, slaves struggled to create changes in their status, but the pace of that change was remarkably slow.

Islamic Distinctions between Slave and “Free”

Probably the more durable walls in the slave system, during this period, were Islamic. Slaves rarely studied in the colonial period. Masters, as a rule, regarded them as animals unfit for Islamic study beyond the minimum required to perform the prayer ritual. Islamic legal categories defined avenues for slave social advancement, which local people considered legitimate. But such avenues as manumission or concubinage applied one-by-one to only a handful of individuals. They were exceptional cases, which upheld the general rule of the legitimacy of slavery and of fundamental legal distinctions between slave and “free” persons.

One such distinction was the key principle that slaves could not inherit and that masters, not kin, inherited from deceased slaves. Many late colonial slaves exploited cracks in the slave system to amass wealth through their agricultural labor, but they were rarely able to pass it on. The rules governing inheritance were among the most developed aspects of Islamic legal study in Gimbala. Masters based their claims to deceased slaves’ property on what they considered clear provisions of the textual corpus of the local Islamic legal curriculum. Because inheritance was such a key issue in local textbooks and local conceptions of Islamic law, scholars often performed the practical task of determining shares. In cases involving slaves, they applied the principles that slaves could not inherit and that their masters inherited from them. When canton chiefs exercised their authority in such matters, they backed the same system. Colonial officials in Niafounké rarely, if ever, intervened in inheritance cases, except when these involved direct

colonial administrative questions, such as how to divide up the three-year-old horse and half-month's salary left by a deceased cercle guard.³⁹⁵

The contours of Islamic law shaped the nature of changes in the social practice of slavery. The relative ambiguity of the local legal curriculum about questions of agricultural labor was one factor enabling slaves to increase gradually their ability to amass wealth from farming. The much greater, more detailed attention which Muslim legal scholars paid to inheritance made it more difficult for slaves to gain the power to pass that wealth on to kin. Gimbala's Islamic culture helped to shore up some walls in the slave system and to determine which walls remained most intact during the period of slow change from ca. 1910 to the 1950s.

Decolonization and State Anti-Slavery Policy

The years from 1958 to 1960 created much more abrupt change in the system of slavery. This period of decolonization led to the creation of the independent Malian state, and to the reorganization of both Gimbala politics and Gimbala households. In 1958, the ascendant political party, Mali's branch of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), issued a circular abolishing canton chiefship.³⁹⁶ The RDA-led government transformed cantons such as Ngorkou and Fittouga into *arrondissements*, replacing the local canton chiefs with centrally-appointed *arrondissement* commandants. The new commandants qualified for their positions by their participation in colonial institutions, such as the military and the school. Because ex-slaves had participated in these institutions to a large, even disproportionate, degree, many of the new

³⁹⁵ ANM, FA, 4D91 "Successions Issa Ber."

³⁹⁶ See Klaus Ernst, *Tradition and Progress in the African Village: The Non-Capitalist Transformation of Rural Communities in Mali*, trans. Salomea Genin, ed. Jurgen Herzog (London: C. Hurst, 1976), 93.

commandants came from slave backgrounds. Even those that did not, such as the first commandant stationed in Saraféré, Aamadu Mayga, a chief's son from Hombori,³⁹⁷ were socialized in institutions, such as the military, the colonial school, and the RDA political party, whose ideologies did not recognize the legitimacy of slavery. Unlike the French cercle commandants or, certainly, the canton chiefs, the new arrondissement commandants were motivated to enforce abolitionist law into the deep countryside.

The new Malian commandants also had the cultural knowledge to communicate the new policy orientation forcefully to locals and to understand the ways in which the system of slavery continued to operate. Masters remember ruefully the meetings which the first Malian commandants called in villages such as Ngayna to announce that slavery no longer existed in any way.³⁹⁸ The commandants and the local masters both knew that slavery had continued to exist in many ways in Gimbala throughout the colonial period. Masters and slaves alike remember the abrupt shift that occurred in the adjudication of local disputes. While canton chiefs had consistently upheld the rights of masters, commandants, to the chagrin of masters and the delight of their slaves, were much more likely to support ex-slaves' claims.

One of the quickest, clearest changes which independent Mali and its commandants produced was in the area of inheritance. Masters and slaves agreed that commandants consistently adjudicated inheritance cases in favor of a deceased ex-slave's kin. Commandants understood the local symbolism of enforcing abolitionist law in this area. They were not arguing to local masters that Islam or Islamic law was illegitimate. But they knew that stressing the state's insistence on the equal legal standing of ex-masters and ex-slaves with regard to this

³⁹⁷ Interview: Bura Huseeni, Ngayna, 4/8/2005.

³⁹⁸ Interview: Almaami Saare, Ngayna, 2005.

sensitive point of Islamic law would make it particularly clear to ex-masters that the Malian state, unlike the colonial one, was serious about ending slave-status. Bura Huseeni, a noble from Ngayna, remembered inheritance as the key symbol that Fittuga's first commandant, Aamadu Mayga, had "removed slavery."³⁹⁹ In the years surrounding 1960, the seriousness of Mali's new local commandants created a second, more rapid pace of change in master-slave relations in Gimbala. Islamic issues (including inheritance, but by no means limited to it) shaped considerably how not only centrally-appointed commandants, but also local masters and slaves approached this noteworthy shift.

Masters' Islamic Language of Protest

My sense of the two speeds of change at which slave emancipation unfolded in Gimbala emerged out of numerous interviews and informal conversations, which I either initiated or overheard over the course of multiple years of fieldwork. Ultimately, this perception led me to adopt a leading question suggested by a friend and occasional research assistant as a conversation-starter: "Did slavery end with independence or did it start to lose strength during the period of European rule?" I felt uneasy about this question, both because it was leading and because I feared that it could invite simplistic responses. Yet, it repeatedly proved to be a very effective conversation-starter. In particular, the response of Saadu Aamadu of Ngayna confirmed its usefulness in eliciting the emotions tied to slave emancipation for those who have lived through it.

³⁹⁹ Interview: Bura Huseeni, Ngayna, 4/8/2005.

Saadu was born in the 1920s and became village chief in 1948. He remained village chief until 1970 and, though he traveled widely till the end of his life, he kept his primary residence in Ngayna until his death on June 1, 2007. In 2005, his reaction to my question was vivid and angry. He did not share the concerns about over-simplification, which kept me uncomfortable with the phrasing of my question.

“The European never told anyone that what belongs to him did not belong to him,” he thundered out. “That happened in front of me. I know what happened. Moodibo said: ‘Everyone is the same. There is no slavery.’” Here, of course, he was talking about Modibo⁴⁰⁰ Keïta, the leading RDA politician of the decolonization period and the president of independent Mali from 1960 to 1968. “But even Moodibo did not say that a slave-woman should cover her hair during prayer. Hammadu Usman Aljuma said that a slave-woman should cover her hair during prayer. Whoever says that the Book says what the Book does not say will see the truth in the Other-World.”⁴⁰¹ Hammadu Usman Aljuma belonged to the generation of Gimbalans born in the 1920s, like Saadu Aamadu. He was a slave from Arkoja village, who became the most prominent slave scholar of his generation. In his response to my question, Saadu was referring to an incident when Hammadu Usman came to preach in the *saare* of Ngayna. This incident occurred in the harvest-season, ca. 1989.⁴⁰²

Saadu’s outburst adds a number of important points to the general account of change, outlined above. First, his categorical rejection of the suggestion that European colonial officials acted to combat slavery confirms that Gimbalans often experienced changes in the institution

⁴⁰⁰ In quoting from Saadu Aamadu’s testimony, I use a transcribed Fulfulde version of this name: Moodibo. Elsewhere, I use the more common French-based spelling of this prominent public figure’s name.

⁴⁰¹ Interview: Saadu Aamadu, Ngayna, 4/9/2005.

⁴⁰² Interview: Buukari Saadu, Ngayna, 2006.

during the colonial period as remarkably slow. For Saadu, they were too slow even to be noticeable, despite his direct personal involvement in political administration in the last decade of colonial rule. He experienced the changes associated with Modibo Keita and the new Malian state of the 1960s as much more abrupt and significant. Yet he suggests that there were other, even more dangerous changes, which continued to unfold decades later.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Malian state created a new opening for Gimbala slaves, but the historical actions of local slaves, such as Hammadu Usman Aljuma, were the greatest threats to masters' values and sense of social hierarchy. Masters, such as Saadu Aamadu, defined their deepest values in Islamic terms. Consequently, the terms of Islamic culture set the most meaningful areas for struggle between masters and slaves. Islamic terms underlay masters' sense of the illegitimacy of the postcolonial state's imposition of emancipation. As local slaves exploited the new political environment to claim increased autonomy, Islamic terms defined the activities which masters saw as most provocative. From the other direction, one of the most notable ways in which slaves exploited the new conditions of the years surrounding Malian independence was to increase their engagement with Islamic forms of knowledge. For the first time, Gimbala slave adults won the authority to speak as scholars and slave children undertook sustained Islamic educational careers. The abrupt shift of the late 1950s and early 1960s moved the stakes between masters and slaves. As the focus of Saadu's anger on an event in ca. 1989 suggests, the shift then initiated a new period of gradual change. This new period of slow change focused on those most durable, Islamic walls in Gimbala's system of slavery, which defined both how masters viewed and mobilized against ongoing slave "revolt" and where slaves looked for dignity, power, and integration within local society.

CHAPTER VIII

MASTER-SLAVE RELATIONS II:

THE FIRST GENERATION OF SLAVE SCHOLARS IN GIMBALA

Introduction: A Pilgrim's Progress

In the mid-1950s, Yero Nawma returned to his home village after three years of absence. Yero had been to Mecca to perform the central pilgrimage rituals of Islam. He had taken the overland route, one momentous day setting off from his home in central Soudan Français, heading straight across the Sahel to the other, British-ruled Sudan, crossing the Red Sea to the holy sites, and then taking the same long route back. Though Yero's community classified such a pilgrimage as one undertaken "by foot," the label did not exclude the use of various means of animal or mechanized transport. Nonetheless, the task was certainly arduous, even by the standards of his hardened rural Sahelian society. The feat was impressive both for the physical difficulty involved in accomplishing it and for the religious values which it actualized.

So, the day when Yero arrived back in the mid-sized,⁴⁰³ Fulfulde-speaking village of Ngayna, he was a changed person. The change was a function both of what he had experienced during his travels and of how his travels affected the community's perceptions of him. He was either barely or not yet thirty. As such, he was a *suka jokolle*. This term was built around the word for child (*suka*), emphasizing the junior status of males at Yero's stage in life. The

⁴⁰³ According to a September 1954 count, Ngayna had 773 inhabitants. ANM (FR), 1E 35, Tour Report.

addition of *jokolle* marked the transition to a boy's teen years and could linger around until one's thirties. The word evoked the time of a male's physical peak, but also the subordination of what was a rather extended adolescence. Though still seen as young, Yero returned from his travels with newfound maturity and a proof of manhood. He was a modest villager, who had accomplished a deed that few of his neighbors had, but that all of them respected. His neighbors knew him as a slave, but now they named him with an honorific. For the rest of his life, Yero Nawma was called Alhaji Yero Nawma or, simply, Alhaji, "the pilgrim." The pilgrim's homecoming meant familiar eyes trained on him in unfamiliar ways.

Soon after the homecoming, these changes were succeeded by another, momentous one. Yero's master called the community together to make a public announcement. Like the pilgrim, Saadu Aamadu was young. They belonged, in fact, to the same age-group (*waalde*), and had some of the sense of camaraderie, which went along with that. Originally, they had even planned to perform the pilgrimage together.

Unlike Yero, Saadu came from a high-status family. He and his family were Fulɓe and "noble" (*rimɓe*), while Yero and his kin were slaves (*maccuɓe* or, more politely, *rimayɓe*). Saadu's compound was in the *wuro*, the herders' district of the village, where "noble" Fulɓe and a few casted artisans lived. Yero lived in the *saare*, the cultivators' district. In other villages in the region of Gimbala, "noble" non-Fulɓe groups inhabited the cultivators' district, speaking either Bamana or Songhay and usually holding the chiefship for the village as a whole. In Ngayna as in Ruumde Suuduuɓe, the people of the *saare* were overwhelmingly slaves, who spoke the language of their Fulɓe masters and reported to a Pullo village chief. After his father Chief Aamadu Hammadu died in 1948, Saadu Aamadu became that chief.⁴⁰⁴ Yero's *saare* was

⁴⁰⁴ Interview: Saadu Aamadu, Ngayna, 8/17/2005.

located a respectful distance of about a hundred meters east of Saadu's *wuro*.⁴⁰⁵ The spatial arrangement reflected and implemented Fulɓe reluctance to emulate the strategies of incorporating slaves into households and families that other ethnic groups, which identified as cultivators rather than herders, found easier to practice. So, despite their generational camaraderie, which made it possible for them to create the fleeting egalitarian moment of a youthful dream, much separated the two young men – both conceptual categories of status and a physical geography, which represented and helped sustain those categories. On top of that, Saadu personally owned Yero.

Soon after the pilgrim's homecoming though, the young chief took steps to diminish the status difference. He announced to the community that Alhaji was no longer a slave. He manumitted his age-mate according to Islamic standards and with pious, Islamic motives. God would reward Alhaji for his pilgrimage. Saadu rewarded Alhaji with manumission. He felt sure that God would reward him in turn. Those were heady times for young Yero, who left for Mecca a slave, returned to Ngayna a pilgrim, and shortly thereafter became "free."

Alhaji Yero's story reflects much about late colonial Gimbala and foreshadows many of the directions of change which developed after independence. In the mid-1950s, the designation "slave" retained considerable meaning in Gimbala social relations. Gimbala communities defined "freedom" largely in Islamic terms. The primary process for becoming "free" was Islamic manumission, which was an individual process. So Alhaji's triumph was his alone. At the same time, it foreshadowed the broader gains, which slaves made collectively just a few years later. In the years surrounding 1960, the postcolonial state enforced abolitionist law effectively into the deep Gimbala countryside. State actions gave Gimbala slaves new social

⁴⁰⁵ Ruumde's *saare*, in contrast, was immediately adjacent to its *wuro*.

leverage, but did not define how they used that leverage. Many used it to gain entrance into their masters' system of Islamic knowledge. The religiously-defined ambitions which prompted Yero to become a pilgrim in the 1950s also inspired him and other slaves of his generation to become the first generation of Gimbalan slave scholars. Alhaji Yero, Allay Aamadu of Ruumde Suuduuḡe, and Hammadu Usman Aljuma of the village of Arkoja took three different paths to scholarship and developed different levels of scholarly competence. Yet the life-stories of all three show the critical interaction between emancipation and Islamic knowledge in Gimbalan history.

Three Life-Stories

For the most part, Gimbalans acquired Islamic knowledge gradually. Learning was a painstaking process, which unfolded over many years.⁴⁰⁶ Though the broader social support of teachers and families was generally very important, ultimately learning depended on the efforts of an individual throughout his (or, much more rarely, her) lifetime. As such, the appropriate context within which to examine the emergence of the first Gimbalan slave scholars is the life-story.

The life-stories of Alhaji Yero Nawma of Ngayna, Allay Aamadu of Ruumde Suuduuḡe, and Hammadu Usman Aljuma of Arkoja reveal how three members of the generation of slaves born in the 1920s strove to acquire Islamic knowledge. These three individuals had differing individual experiences and trajectories, and reached different levels of scholarly achievement. At the same time, they lived in much the same social world. Their efforts reveal much about

⁴⁰⁶ For one "noble" scholar's scholastic trajectory over seven years, see chapter II above.

them as individuals, but also much about the constraints and opportunities of their generation as a whole. To make sense of their stories, the concept of two speeds of change from chapter VII is again useful. All three strove gradually over extended periods of time to acquire knowledge and win recognition as scholars. At the same time, the years around 1960 were critical to each of their careers. Local governmental policy changes did not create slave scholars, but they did create new opportunities upon which aspiring slave intellectuals seized.

A comparison between this first generation of Gimbala slave scholars and the one which has followed it gives further evidence of a relationship between increasing Islamic intellectual activity among slaves and the shift in local governmental policy of the years around 1960. As noted above, the path to Islamic knowledge was painstaking and gradual. Reaching scholarly status as an adult typically required sustained participation in Islamic education from early childhood. But none of our three scholars followed this typical route to become scholars. Each traced out a more idiosyncratic path. It was the next generation of Gimbala slave scholars, such as Hammadu Usman's son Ali Hammadu, who became scholars through the traditional route. They were the first generation of slave children to undertake sustained Islamic education. They began to do so in the years surrounding 1960, at the same time that their elders were cobbling together adult scholarly reputations out of much more idiosyncratic backgrounds. The way in which slaves entered both kinds of generational intellectual activities at the same time – the paradoxical appearance of chicken and egg at the same historical moment – strongly suggests a connection with changes at the governmental policy level. The actions of the state and its commandants transferred new social capital to slaves. The slaves chose to expend much of that capital to gain entrance into local Islamic intellectual culture.

The Pilgrim's Continued Progress

My two main sources on the life of Alhaji Yero Nawma were his brother Saajo Nawma and his manumitter Saadu Aamadu. Saadu's son Buukari Saadu also contributed some details. Unsurprisingly, the narratives differed sharply in tone and content. Despite these differences, the accounts agree on key milestones. They together give the impression of an ex-slave, who had very limited childhood exposure to Islamic education, but who ultimately set himself up in the occupation of a scholar (*moodibo*). The differences in the accounts, in fact, add extra interest to Alhaji's story. They reveal the varied meanings that the kind of intellectual trajectory, which Alhaji pursued, could have for slaves and masters of his generation.

Accounts about Alhaji agree on the basic trajectory of his life. They indicate a birth-date in the 1920s and very little participation in Islamic education as a child. Saadu Aamadu did not think Alhaji's childhood education was worth talking about, while Buukari Saadu confirmed that he had undertaken some study of the Qur'an.⁴⁰⁷ In contrast to Saadu, Saajo Nawma had a very reverent attitude to his brother's accomplishments and character, but he admitted that Alhaji's childhood education was limited. He mentioned a teacher who had taught Qur'an to a few youths in the *saare* at that time, but underscored that Alhaji had not advanced far. Before his pilgrimage, Alhaji's occupation was farming, just like Saajo and their other brothers.⁴⁰⁸ Both Saadu and Saajo remembered Alhaji's defining pilgrimage, though Saajo remembered it as his brother's triumph and Saadu narrated it as the context for his own pious act of manumission.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview: Buukari Saadu, Ngayna, 7/22/2005.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview: Saajo Nawma, Ngayna, 9/9/2005.

After Alhaji's return, he settled back into life in Ngayna and returned to agriculture. Yet the various accounts agree that he also began to seek to acquire Islamic knowledge by frequenting Muslim scholars whenever possible. Saajo's account details this process much more sympathetically, of course. He talked about his brother's seriousness and patience, listing several of the scholars with whom he maintained contact over years. Saadu did not think Alhaji's adult studies were worth talking about either, but he did admit that Alhaji had received an Islamic secret (*innde Allah*, literally "name of God") from Seeku Saala, a scholar with a considerable regional reputation. Buukari Saadu reported that Alhaji began to work as a minor *moodibo* within Ngayna, alongside his continued engagement in agriculture. Such was Alhaji's general situation until ca. 1980, when, with some financial support from a brother who had achieved success within the military, he moved out of Ngayna (and Gimbala), about 145 km south to the market town of Severe. There, he set himself up as a full-time *moodibo*, studying and providing scholarly services for the people of Severe as well as Ngaynankooŋe and other Gimbals, who would pass through the town on their way to the more productive areas of southern Mali or Côte d'Ivoire. He continued devoting his energies to these activities until his death in 2004.

The differences between Saadu Aamadu's and Saajo Nawma's accounts of Alhaji reflect the different ways in which masters and slaves responded to the emergence of the new social category of scholars with slave origins. Saadu was generally reluctant to talk about Alhaji, whom he considered too insignificant to warrant historical examination. However, he clearly did enjoy recounting two colorful details, which contrasted markedly with Saajo Nawma's stories about the same two points in Alhaji's life. When I remarked that Alhaji's overland pilgrimage was an impressive feat, Saadu told me his version of how Alhaji accomplished it. All along his

path, he would seek out groups of Fulɓe, greet them by calling himself their “little slave” (*maccungel*), and beg them for enough to continue the journey.⁴⁰⁹ Without repeating this account, I asked Saajo Nawma whether Alhaji had used wealth amassed through his agricultural activities to undertake the pilgrimage. Saajo stressed that he had not. Alhaji had sold nothing for the trip and taken nothing with him. Alhaji was sustained during his journey through “the gifts of God” (*dokke Allah*). The accounts do not necessarily contradict each other. In fact, they agree that Alhaji did not perform the pilgrimage on the basis of previously accumulated wealth. Yet the difference of emphasis is also clearly significant. Neither Saadu nor Saajo were eyewitnesses of Alhaji’s pilgrimage. Their varied accounts reflect the varied imaginations of masters and slaves as well as the varied reports, which each may have received from a chain ending with eyewitnesses from their respective social classes. Slaves saw such pioneering slave acts of Islamic piety as Alhaji’s pilgrimage as gifts of God; masters looked at them with more ambivalence.

Saadu Aamadu also enjoyed describing an incident which situated Alhaji’s scholarly vocation within Sevaré. Saadu narrated this incident as an eyewitness. Yet Saadu’s imagination structured this story perhaps more than his tale of the little begging pilgrim-slave. After Alhaji’s relocation to Sevaré, Saadu frequently passed through on his way further south to work as a migrant scholar (*moodibo*). Saadu was modest about his own scholastic accomplishments, calling himself, into his seventies, a “student,” or “reader,” (*janngoowo*) and refusing the title of “teacher” (*jannginoowo*). Yet clients sought out his ability to achieve results through Islamic secrets and Saadu took this marketable skill to the more vibrant markets of Bamako and Côte d’Ivoire. Like other migrant workers, he generally left Ngayna not long after the harvest in

⁴⁰⁹ Interview: Saadu Aamadu, Ngayna, 2005.

October and November and generally returned at least by the beginning of the farming season in June. Whenever he passed through Severe, he stopped to see Alhaji. One time, a troubled Alhaji approached him. A turban covered his head and face except for the eyes. When Alhaji was sure that they were alone, he removed the turban. His mouth had moved to one side of his face almost to his ear. “Do you see what the scholars of Severe did to me?” he gurgled helplessly to Saadu. He begged Saadu for help. “That’s easy,” Saadu replied. “But, Alhaji, stay away from the scholars of Severe. Even us, we who grew up in Qur’anic school (*findude e dudal*), even we are afraid of them, let alone someone who grew up beating drums.” Saadu then put his hands on Alhaji’s face and recited an appropriate incantation. Alhaji’s mouth immediately returned to its normal place. Saadu then repeated his instructions to the very relieved and grateful Alhaji that he should stay away from the powerful, dangerous scholars of Severe.⁴¹⁰ With this story, Saadu was also instructing me that Alhaji was not an important enough scholar to warrant my research.

Saajo Nawma narrated Alhaji’s period as a mature scholar with an entirely different tone, but the two accounts offer a consistent portrait. Saajo stressed how friendly, well-liked, and thoughtful his brother had been. While Saadu was dismissive of my interest in Alhaji, Saajo regretted that I had not met Alhaji personally, adding that he had often thought that his brother would have been able to help me with my work because he was intelligent and learned. Saajo was proud that Alhaji had managed to become a genuine scholar. At the same time, he admitted that his brother was not among the most powerful scholars of Severe, confirming the point which Saadu Aamadu made through a less flattering narrative. Yet, though Saadu’s purpose may have been to dissuade me from asking more about Alhaji, his tale of the misplaced mouth vividly

⁴¹⁰ Interview: Saadu Aamadu, Ngayna, 2005.

confirms that Alhaji had managed to insert himself within the world of Severe's scholars.

Alhaji may not have been strong enough to protect himself in that competitive, dangerous world, but even his dismissive ex-master had to admit that he had gained entrance to the competition.

The trajectory of Alhaji's life offers us an entrance to the experience of his generation. Like other slaves of his generation, Alhaji did not "grow up in Qur'anic school," as Saadu Aamadu termed a sustained childhood Islamic education. He studied a little, but even his admiring brother Saajo knew that his childhood schooling fell considerably short of the typical scholarly background. Nevertheless, as a mature adult, he developed into a scholar. Saadu Aamadu evoked the gap between Alhaji's childhood experience and his adult ambitions with the image of "beating drums," the stereotyped activity of slave children of their generation. Yet even Saadu had to admit that Alhaji had somehow bridged that gap from a lowly drum-beating slave-child to a participant in the impressive world of Severe's scholars.

The key factor which allowed Alhaji to bridge this gap was his pilgrimage in the mid-1950s. This act of Islamic piety positioned him better than other slaves of his generation to convert the increased autonomy of the late 1950s and 1960s into developing the skills and credibility to achieve scholarly status. Since slaves of Alhaji's generation could not follow the typical path to scholarship through robust childhood participation in local educational networks, they created idiosyncratic paths. Alhaji's path went overland to Mecca and back.

"The First Scholar in the Saare"

Allay Aamadu followed a very different, but equally idiosyncratic path. He was born in Ruumde Suuduuŋe in ca. 1924, a member of the age-grade (*waalde*) of Suleymaan Dawda, a son

of Chief Dawda Siidi who became village chief himself in 1941.⁴¹¹ Like Ngayna, Ruumde was a Fulfulde-speaking village divided into two main neighborhoods: a *wuro* inhabited by noble Fulɓe and their casted dependents; and a *saare* populated almost entirely by slaves. Allay was a slave child from the *saare*. Saadu Aamadu's distinction between Fulɓe children of his generation who "grew up in Qur'anic school" and slave children who beat drums applied also to Ruumde. Allay did not have the sustained childhood Islamic education that many of his cohort in the *wuro* had. Yet like his contemporary from Ngayna Alhaji Yero, he created his own path to adult scholarly status. He earned the epithet of "the first scholar in the *saare*." He amassed a respectable textual collection, modeled on the libraries of more established scholarly families among the village's noble population. Allay served also as the first teacher in the slave neighborhood, providing a new generation of slave children in Ruumde with the standard Islamic education, which he himself had not enjoyed as a child.

On the surface, Allay Aamadu's path to scholarship was the polar opposite of Alhaji's. Alhaji's path depended on extreme mobility. Restricted, like other slaves, from local educational networks, he circumvented them by traveling to Mecca and building on the religious significance of this act after his return. Later in life, he resorted to mobility again to push his career forward. While at home in Ngayna his work as a scholar could only be a supplement to his main occupation as a farmer, his fresh start in Severe allowed him to become a full-time scholar.

In contrast, Allay Aamadu created his path out of his extremely restricted mobility. My interviewees were reluctant at first to explain what set him apart from other members of his generation of slaves in Ruumde. Eventually, one explained that he was disabled, literally "a

⁴¹¹ ANM, FR, 1E35 Political Reports, Niafounké, 1941; 2E52, Personal Information on Canton Chiefs, Roundé canton, 1939-41. Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, 8/26/2005.

crawler” (*ḡaaroowo*).⁴¹² Allay’s childhood was a time when slaves in Ruumde were gaining increased control over their agricultural labor and its product. Outside scholars switched harvest-time hosts from colleagues and social equals in the *wuro* to slaves in the *saare*. Hammadu Yero Umaru of Juukayna switched from the scholar Jampullo Aduraaman’s household to a slave household in 1941/42, when Allay Aamadu was in his late teens.⁴¹³ Other than Allay Aamadu, Ruumde’s slaves were not interested in study at that time, according to an elderly interviewee from the *wuro*. “All they cared about then was millet.”⁴¹⁴ Allay’s disability disqualified him from agricultural labor, freeing him up to pursue his interest in Islamic knowledge.

Nonetheless, Allay’s childhood studies did not conform to the pattern, which his cohort among the Fulḡe followed. To some extent, his disability ruled that out. The Fulḡe pupils of Ruumde were typically rather mobile. They left the village to study for extended periods of time under scholars from other villages within Gimbala and beyond. Even when they studied under teachers from Ruumde, these teachers spent much of the year traveling with their pupils, living off the charity of hosts in multiple villages. The pupils studied during the day and begged at night as *gariibaaḡe*, a Fulfulde term derived from the Arabic for “stranger.” Because of his disability, Allay Aamadu could not function as a pupil in this sense. But the more fundamental reason that Allay’s studies did not conform to the typical pattern was that he was a slave. If he had not been disabled, he would almost certainly have been in the fields cultivating alongside his age-mates in the *saare*. As in Alhaji Yero’s Ngayna, it was unimaginable in the Ruumde of

⁴¹² Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005. For later, independent confirmation, see Interview: Aamadu Adu, Saraféré, 2006.

⁴¹³ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

⁴¹⁴ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

Allay's youth that a slave child should gain full entrance to the same networks designed for the education of non-slave children.⁴¹⁵

So Allay Aamadu created his own educational path. He began his studies with Alfa Siddi, an outsider who came to Ruumde to serve as imam of the *saare* during Allay's childhood.⁴¹⁶ He studied later with Jampullo Aduraaman in the 1940s, becoming his trusted confidant. As Jampullo's nephew reported, "Even before 1947 had come, [Allay Aamadu] would stop by Jampullo's place. All of the work he needed done, [Allay Aamadu] would do it, because it happened that I was not here."⁴¹⁷

Despite the closeness of this relationship, Allay did not limit himself to a single teacher. He frequented as many scholars as he could, given his restricted mobility. "He would not travel because he was clumsy," recalled one of my interviewees from the masters' class, using the euphemism *mboofa* to describe Allay's disability. "That is the one who will desire it." The interviewee then listed seven scholars in the village, whom Allay would "go see," in addition to the two mentioned above. He cultivated relationships with as many of Ruumde's scholars as he could. "Within the whole *wuro* he would go."⁴¹⁸

In fact, two of Allay's most important teachers, Alfa Siddi and Num Haalidu, resided in the *saare*, not the *wuro*, but the boundary-crossing suggested in my interviewee's statement was

⁴¹⁵ Sammba Usman, a noble from Arkoja, was more open about how Ruumde's nobles restricted their slaves educational opportunities than interviewees in Ruumde itself were. "Beginning with Mali's independence and after, slaves studied a lot. Before that, they would not let slaves study. Would a person accept that his animal know anything? Now one or two (*gooto-gooto*) would cover up to study. They would ask [questions]. They would follow obediently. But that was one-by-one (*gooto-gooto*)."⁴¹⁵ Sammba Usman, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

⁴¹⁶ Interview: Hamma Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/25/2005. Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/25/2005.

⁴¹⁷ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005. 1947 was a memorable year for Hammadu Aamadu since it was the year in which he was drafted for military service.

⁴¹⁸ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

real. Alfa Siddi and Num Haalidu were not slaves, so they did not truly belong to the *saare* even though they lived there. Allay was able to cultivate relationships with non-slave scholars because of his persistence and, probably, because of their pity. He crawled from one to another, carrying “his study-slate on his head. He’d go and he’d keep going to study. He continued like that until he became an advanced student (*taaliibo*).”⁴¹⁹ Alhaji Yero of Ngayna was able to circumvent the standard trajectory to scholarly status by going to Mecca and back. Allay Aamadu circumvented it by crawling through all of the limited spaces available to him within his village community. The two slaves traveled across very much the same social boundary in two very different ways.

Allay also crafted his adult scholarly persona in a considerably different way than Alhaji Yero did. For Alhaji, the critical factor was again distance: his relocation from his home village to Severe. Even while he was in Ngayna, the scholars he frequented were mainly outsiders from other villages. Allay, in contrast, modeled himself overwhelmingly on the non-slave scholars within Ruumde. He sought to acquire the fields of knowledge, which they considered important, and studied different subjects with different scholars. He built up a respectable library following the example of the family libraries, which those scholars kept. These activities alone, however, probably would not have been enough for Allay to gain recognition as a scholar. The community would have continued to regard him as an advanced student (*taaliibo*) if he had not emulated another part of the model of scholarship in Ruumde. Like several of the non-slave scholars whom he frequented, Allay ultimately became the teacher of a sizeable number of village children.

⁴¹⁹ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduu6e, 8/26/2005.

Allay sought to acquire the same kinds of legal knowledge, which the non-slave scholars in Ruumde prized. According to one informant, “the knowledge of books is what [Allay Aamadu] studied.” By studying “books” (*defte*), Allay distinguished himself from students who merely studied the text of the Qur’an (*gur’aanankooŋe*). The first books which Allay studied were the standard works of the local legal curriculum. “Num Haalidu taught him books such as al-Akhdari’s and the like, and the *Risāla* and the like.”⁴²⁰ He collected these standard works for his library.

He collected also the same sorts of elaborative notes, which local scholars used to push their legal knowledge beyond the level of their textbooks. His mostly-complete manuscript of the *Risāla* was heavily annotated.⁴²¹ It contained such locally popular legal notices as the list of “twelve categories of people who eat during Ramadan, but do not need to perform the greater form of penitence.”⁴²² The imam of Ruumde during Allay’s coming of age, Hammadu Usman Umaru, had written the same note in the margins of the *Risāla*, which he copied for himself in 1907.⁴²³ Also like Hammadu Usman Umaru, Allay Aamadu was interested in techniques for simplifying the complicated rules of inheritance. In his own hand, he wrote a summary of the most important mathematical operations for reconciling competing inheritance claims and an explanation of the acrostic “*habādabaza*,” which resembled those which Hammadu Usman Umaru had included in his 1907 *Risāla*.⁴²⁴ Though he did not achieve Hammadu Usman

⁴²⁰ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 8/26/2005. The works referenced are *Kitāb al-Akhdarī fī l-‘ibādāt* by ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Akhdarī and the *Risāla* by Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī.

⁴²¹ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 4, Images 3933-3991, 4005-4358.

⁴²² Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 4, Image 4136.

⁴²³ UHU, File 4, Image 4558.

⁴²⁴ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 5, Images 5436, 5663-5664. UHU, File 4, Image 4694.

Umaru's acute skills as a legal reader or his public stature as a jurist, Allay Aamadu worked to emulate the models of legal scholarship which he found in his community.

He also sought to acquire esoteric knowledge, the other main field of knowledge central to Ruumde's Islamic intellectual life. He studied Islamic secrets with Jampullo Aduraaman, who hosted the meetings of an informal esoteric working-group in the village in the 1930s and 1940s. As a trusted confidant of Jampullo, he had access to many of his secrets. Jampullo's nephew went so far as to say: "All of the secrets [of Jampullo, Allay Aamadu] had them."⁴²⁵ Comparison of the libraries which the two men left suggests that this statement was an exaggeration. Jampullo's esoteric arsenal was more impressive, but Allay did assemble a varied tool-kit representing the range of secret texts typical in the village. Clearly, he did not accumulate secrets from Jampullo alone. He acquired parts of a text on secret uses of local trees, which had previously been owned by his law teacher, Num Haalidu.⁴²⁶ He probably sought to acquire secrets from most of the nine scholars, whom we know he frequented. Esotericism was part of the craft of each of them.

The types of secrets, which he acquired, mirrored the interests of the scholars of Ruumde from whom he acquired them. Many of these were short how-to guides to rural family success. Allay collected charms for "finding sustenance quickly," for protection against "everything that spoils farming," for protection of cows and sheep, and for protection against wild animals, hunger, and thirst.⁴²⁷ He amassed techniques for attracting the love of a woman, for controlling a woman, and for acquiring one in marriage, as well as for having a child, for protection of "what

⁴²⁵ Interview: Hammadu Aamadu Aduraaman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

⁴²⁶ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 3, Image 3645.

⁴²⁷ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 5, Image 5471; File 3, Image 3657; File 5, Image 5565; File 3, Image 3658; File 5, Image 5531.

is in the belly of a pregnant woman,” and for the protection of a child.⁴²⁸ He wrote ways to gain popularity among all types of people and attract people to visit his house, as well as to cure illnesses of the body (such as urinary problems) and those caused by Satan, *jinn*, or sorcery.⁴²⁹ He was acquiring the powers, which the non-slave villagers of Ruumde had long used to ensure household success.

These intellectual interests were borrowed from the non-slave scholars whom he frequented, but they also reflected the practical interests of his generation of slaves, who were working to establish their own, more autonomous households. (Allay’s ability to collect secrets depended partly on his father’s control over some agricultural resources. Allay told his son Umaru that his own father had bought him one long esoteric text in his collection, the *Dalā’il al-khayrāt*, with a cow, which had just reached reproductive age (*wiige*).⁴³⁰) Gaining the esoteric knowledge of the masters of the villages could be a tool for undermining masters’ control and asserting the power of slaves to run their own households.

Yet, other esoteric texts in Allay Aamadu’s tool-kit mirrored his teachers’ sense of social hierarchy. One charm was for “whoever wanted to own people, to rule them, and [whoever wanted] his speech to be like salt is for food.”⁴³¹ Allay did come to play a leadership role in the *saare*, but this borrowed fantasy fit somewhat incongruously with his social background. The phrase “to own people” (*an yamluka al-nās*) may have implied merely a very high degree of social influence, but it could also have meant literally owning slaves. Other charms referred to slavery more straightforwardly. His secret for gaining popularity among all types of people

⁴²⁸ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 5, Images 5473, 5481, 5482, 5497, 5524, 5560, 5576, and 5527.

⁴²⁹ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 5, Images 5493, 5486, 5421, 5550, and 5560.

⁴³⁰ Interview: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 3/15/2007.

⁴³¹ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 5, Image 5560.

distinguished specifically between “free and slave” people.⁴³² One of his love charms reinforced hierarchical master-slave relations even more clearly, promising to shore up both a woman’s love for her husband and (analogously) a slave’s for his master.⁴³³ Allay even wrote “a benefit for holding a slave: he will never go out of his [i.e. his master’s] hands.”⁴³⁴

It is interesting to imagine how Allay reconciled his own social background with these forms of Islamic knowledge. He would have encountered similar assumptions about fundamental distinctions between free and slave people and about masters’ rights to dominate slaves during his Islamic legal studies of such texts as the *Risāla*. He left little written evidence about how he felt about this issue. Oral sources likewise depict him as very interested in acquiring the authority to speak and act as a scholar (despite his slave background), but not very interested in deploying scholarly idioms to challenge or even address the issue of slavery. He sought the status of a learned person (*jannguɔ*), of an advanced student (*taaliibo*), of a reader of books (*janngoowo defte*), and of someone capable of handling legal issues. He sought the power of Islamic secrets to pursue the gamut of rural goals (including, in addition to the aims listed above, the intellectual goal of “memorizing the Qur’an and [retaining] knowledge”).⁴³⁵ He was more interested in transcribing Ruumde’s prevailing idioms of scholarship faithfully than in challenging the assumptions about slave status, which they included.

Allay also sought the occupation of a teacher. On this subject, his library does leave an intriguing fragment related to the issue of slavery. On one page of Allay’s copy of the *Risāla*, there was an elegant phrase of classical Arabic: “Because knowledge raises the slave (*mamlūk*)

⁴³² Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuɔe, File 5, Image 5493.

⁴³³ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuɔe, File 5, Image 5539.

⁴³⁴ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuɔe, File 5, Image 5469.

⁴³⁵ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuɔe, File 5, Image 5554.

to the status of kings (*mulūk*) and it is the noblest decoration.”⁴³⁶ This marginal note does not appear to be written in Allay’s hand. However, he almost certainly read it. It is difficult to imagine that he did not make the connection between the phrase and his own experience – his lowly background and the dignity which could be gained through knowledge. The phrase was written on the margins of an introductory passage to the textbook which praises the act of teaching religious knowledge to children. Teaching religious knowledge to slave children, in particular, ultimately became Allay’s profession. It is difficult not to speculate that the sentiments of the marginal note (though they were expressed in old and borrowed words written in someone else’s hand) reflected, in some way, how his profession moved him. He must have felt that he was helping to raise the status of the slave children of Ruumde. His work as a teacher also raised his own status, if not to that of a king, then at least to that of a credible scholar.

Both of these changes in slave status occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s. Certainly, neither change took place overnight. The education which prepared Allay Aamadu for the role of teacher proceeded, literally, at crawling pace. Neither change would have been thinkable without the increased control, which slaves were exerting over agricultural labor and resources. Yet the villagers of Ruumde experienced the change as rapid. “In our youth, the *saare* hadn’t studied at all,” said an interviewee from the *wuro* who was slightly younger than Allay Aamadu. “With Umaru Allay’s father [i.e. Allay Aamadu], the whole *saare* studied.”⁴³⁷ In the 1940s, Allay had been a lone oddity. He stuck out both for his misshapen body and his social incongruity as a slave student. The rest of the *saare* was only concerned with agricultural

⁴³⁶ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 4, Image 3970.

⁴³⁷ Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/26/2005.

production. By the late 1950s and 1960s, the children of the *saare* started to study in large numbers.

Unlike Allay Aamadu, who had cobbled together knowledge mostly from individual, informal visits to a long list of accessible scholars, the new generation of slave pupils had a school to attend. To some extent, the generational shift took Allay's generation by surprise. A slave from the age-grade of Allay Aamadu's "younger brothers," Layya Mbiiga, described how his son Hamma, or Hammadi, became one of Allay's pupils: "I have a son Hammadi. [Allay Aamadu] taught him. Hammadi just heard about it. I didn't put him in study. He put himself in [Allay's] place."⁴³⁸ Layya was still focused on the values and opportunities of his generation of slaves. His child was quicker to absorb (to "hear about") the new aspirations, which slaves were developing in the initial period of Malian independence. "In the years of independence, he started studying." The new Malian commandant in Saraféré was calling Gimbalan villagers together to declare his intention to enforce anti-slavery laws actively. He put inheritance practice at the top of his agenda, emphasizing that the state's laws would trump Muslim legal scholars' principles that slaves could not inherit. Ironically perhaps, local slave actors, including children such as Hamma Layya, seized on this jolt to the system of masters' dominance over slaves to seek entrance into their masters' system of Islamic knowledge. Hamma "continued like that," studying. "He didn't quit to the point where he acquired something."⁴³⁹ Hamma and others used the new level of autonomy available to them to seek to create their own autonomous institutions for reproducing the Islamic knowledge transmitted in their masters' system. Whereas Allay had to crawl his way into masters' homes, Hamma Layya's generation of slave children could

⁴³⁸ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/25/2005.

⁴³⁹ Interview: Layya Mbiiga, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 8/25/2005.

receive regularized group instruction at Allay's place within the *saare*. The aspirations and actions of both Allay and children such as Hamma combined to form the new school.

Though Layya Mbiiga admitted to being clueless, other slave parents played a key role in allowing the new institution to flourish. One such parent was a mother, Faatuma Baaba. She made a verbal commitment to the new teacher, which Allay wrote down as a tuition contract. "The issue of what will be given: Faatuma Baaba said that, if her child reads the Qur'an until he finishes it one time, she will give a one-year-old cow. Guuro Sammbaajo Aamadu witnessed this in the month of God, 12 'Id al-Fitr, in the year 1378," (i.e. 12 Shawwāl 1378, or April 21, 1959).⁴⁴⁰ Like the child Hamma Layya, slave mothers such as Faatuma Baaba sensed the new opportunities of the late 1950s. They used these opportunities to invest in Islamic education. Faatuma stipulated that her son's education be sustained. She would not be satisfied with him learning merely a few *sūras* "to pray with" (*ko juulirte*). She insisted that he complete one entire reading of the Qur'an with a single teacher. She recognized that this level of instruction was a considerable undertaking, so she committed to reward Allay with a cow, the agricultural commodity in Ruumde, which had both the greatest monetary and the greatest symbolic value. Despite or because of the limitations placed on their own generation, slave parents of Faatuma's generation wanted their children to participate in serious Islamic education and they were prepared to allocate resources to achieve this goal.

This document also provides a snapshot of Allay Aamadu's efforts to define himself as a scholar in 1959. He maintained his relationships with senior, non-slave scholars in Ruumde. Jampullo Aduraaman was deceased, but he may have provided other scholars with the same sorts of general assistance, which he had given Jampullo (what Jampullo's nephew referred to as "all

⁴⁴⁰ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 9, Image 4978.

of the work [which Jampullo] needed done”). Whether he did or not, his relationships to more senior, non-slave scholars were of an inferior to his superiors. But he was also creating new relationships based on Islamic knowledge, in which he was the superior party. He formed such relationships with slave children, such as Hamma Layya, and with slave parents, such as Faatuma Baaba. Just like Faatuma, he wanted these relationships to be regularized and long-term. He was also eager to earn a practical living from scholarship.

The foundation for his ability to do so was the traditional forms of knowledge, which he continued to seek from the scholars whom he frequented. The tuition contract was written on the reverse side of Allay’s second manuscript copy of the *Risāla*, a copy which he wrote in his own hand. Underneath the “issue of what will be given,” Allay wrote about another “issue” (*mas’ala*). He parsed the twenty-two kinds of dairy products in a way which resembled closely a treatment of the same issue in the margins of a *Risāla* manuscript owned by Num Haalidu, Allay’s law teacher.⁴⁴¹ As he developed into a mature adult scholar, Allay probably helped slaves in the *saare* sort through legal questions such as this one. He surely used his Islamic esoteric toolkit to offer them easier access to “secret” solutions for their practical rural problems. Allay had been struggling to accumulate these forms of knowledge for some time.

Yet the timing of Allay Aamadu’s emergence as a teacher was critical. In 1959 and the “years of independence,” the combined efforts of Allay, slave children, and slave parents achieved a transformation in the social structure of Islamic knowledge in Ruumde. In the 1940s, the path for an aspiring slave intellectual was necessarily idiosyncratic. In 1959 and the years of independence, the slaves of Ruumde worked together to form a new systematized path to Islamic

⁴⁴¹ Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 9, Image 4978. Library: Guuri Num Haalidu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, File 4, Image 4511.

knowledge. It was a single path centered on Allay Aamadu, who “came to teach the children of the whole *saare*. So those whom he taught, they are the only learned people in the *saare*.” This single new institution completely re-drew the intellectual map of Ruumde. “As for today, praise God, there are students (*taalibaaŋe*) in the *saare*.”⁴⁴² Allay Aamadu learned Ruumde’s scholarly idioms in a haphazard way, but he became able to transmit them to his slave community in the clear, fluent manner of a typical local teacher. The careful way in which Allay sought to speak scholarly idioms just as his non-slave role models did masked the educational revolution, which his efforts constituted.

Hammadu Usman Aljuma

Hammadu Usman Aljuma of Arkoja village was a third Gimbalan slave born in the 1920s,⁴⁴³ who won recognition as a scholar in his adulthood. Like our other two examples, he carved out an idiosyncratic path to scholarship. He was earnest from childhood, but his early educational record was spotty. Like them, he acquired textual knowledge more by frequently visiting or being close to scholars than by receiving sustained, regularized instruction from them. Nonetheless, he became the most famous slave scholar of his generation. His regional reputation far outstripped Alhaji Yero’s or Allay Aamadu’s, largely because he adopted much bolder ways of speaking scholarly idioms. He studied text and ultimately taught, but his composition of inspired religious songs and his forceful public preaching made his name. Despite his incomplete Islamic education, Hammadu spoke loudly and confidently. He spoke mostly about

⁴⁴² Interview: Usman Hammadu Usman, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, 8/26/2005.

⁴⁴³ His paternal cousin Sammba Yero dated his birth to the age-group of a member of Arkoja’s chiefly family, who was reputedly born in 1927. Interview: Sammba Yero Aljuma, Arkoja, 2005.

traditional religious themes: praise of the Prophet in his songs; calls to repentance and piety in his preaching. But he also audaciously searched for an Islamic language for condemning slavery and legitimizing the *de facto* emancipation of slaves, which occurred in postcolonial Gimbala.

Like Alhaji Yero and Allay Aamadu, Hammadu Usman did not “grow up in Qur’anic school” (*duḍal*).⁴⁴⁴ But unlike Alhaji Yero, no one accused him of growing up “beating drums.” He never participated in the musical activities associated with slave status in the Arkoja of his youth, the *direere* sessions during which groups of slaves played drums, sang, and danced.⁴⁴⁵ His classificatory “younger sister” Mayram Sana remembered how he acted at the gatherings of slave children in their youth. He did not play, chat, or have girlfriends like the other boys. He simply folded his arms over his wool shirt (*kaasa*) and looked sternly at the other children, earning the nickname of the “old man” (*mawḍo mawḍoojo*). Hammadu Usman did not study or travel to study, she reported, but he was always serious about his religion and also hard-working as a farmer.⁴⁴⁶

Other informants also stressed Mayram’s linkage between religion and agriculture in Hammadu’s early life. He grew up in a successful slave household. His father Usman Aljuma and Usman’s three brothers were among the most hard-working farmers in Arkoja. Since slaves were gaining more control over the product of their agricultural labor at this time, Aljuma’s sons gained a reputation for “having a lot of dinner.” The four brothers were also renowned for their piety. “They greatly feared God, too. ... No prayer was too much for them. The mosque was

⁴⁴⁴ Interview: Bila Albarka, Arkoja, 3/15/2007. Interview: Mayram Sana, Arkoja, 1/2007.

⁴⁴⁵ Interview: Sammba Usman, Arkoja, 2/26/2007. Interview: Mayram Sana, Arkoja, 1/2007.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview: Mayram Sana, Arkoja, 1/2007.

not too much for them.”⁴⁴⁷ They were very interested in Islamic knowledge and in scholars.

Scholars were, in turn, interested in them, largely because of their grain. Many scholars from outside Arkoja chose them for hosts. Usman Aljuma’s masters, in particular, visited the household often. They were scholars from the village of Juukayna. Though Hammadu did not grow up in Qur’anic school, he did grow up in a pious atmosphere, where he was frequently exposed to scholars and Islamic knowledge.

As he became older, Hammadu also occasionally sought out scholars outside the household. Buukari Tuure of Arkoja claimed that Hammadu would sometimes sneak to his house to meet with an outside scholar named Alfa Addu. When Alfa Addu came to visit, Hammadu would stop by Buukari’s house on his way to go weed his field. He would set aside his farming tools, pick up a slate, and follow Alfa Addu’s Qur’anic instruction. After a little while, he would set the slate down and continue on to his field.⁴⁴⁸ In the 1950s, he visited the scholar Hammadu Yero Umaru in Juukayna several times before the latter’s death in ca. 1960. Deyfuru Allay of Arkoja described Hammadu’s return from one of these trips as the time when Hammadu Usman first showed the signs of greatness (*daliili*).⁴⁴⁹ Around the same time, Hammadu Usman began frequenting his contemporary Daaha Bireema, a young scholar of Arkoja and member of the chief’s family, who became, over time, a very learned scholar and, ultimately, chief himself.

Hammadu Usman learned from all of these relationships, but none amounted to a sustained teacher-student relationship. Nonetheless, Hammadu undoubtedly developed into a scholar as an adult. While Alhaji had to leave Ngayna to win recognition as a scholar and Allay

⁴⁴⁷ Interview: Sammba Usman, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

⁴⁴⁸ Interview: Buukari Tuure, Arkoja, 4/1/2007.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview: Deyfuru Allay, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

Aamadu's reputation was limited to the village of Ruumde, Hammadu Usman's claims were accepted widely in Arkoja and considerably beyond it. Like Saadu Aamadu of Ngayna, Daaha Bireema of Arkoja grew up in Qur'an school, was a member of the masters' class of his village, and was the son of a chief, who became chief himself. In addition, Daaha accomplished far more as a scholar than Saadu Aamadu did. He might therefore be expected to have adopted the same scornful attitude which Saadu Aamadu did toward Alhaji Yero's scholarly claims. But Daaha regarded Hammadu Usman's accomplishments as remarkable. When I asked Daaha about his own development as a scholar, he listed a long itinerary of extended studies with various regional teachers. When I asked him about how Hammadu Usman became a scholar, he did not identify any teachers. He attributed Hammadu's achievements to *baawɗe Alla*, "that which God can do."⁴⁵⁰ Hammadu Usman himself left evidence confirming this portrait. In two separate verses of one of his songs, Hammadu made a frank admission about himself: "I did not study."⁴⁵¹ But this idiosyncratic educational background did not prevent him from claiming considerable scholarly authority or from winning widespread acceptance for his claims.

The first way in which Hammadu Usman Aljuma asserted the authority to speak as a scholar was in his composition of vernacular religious songs, which probably began in the 1950s. His contact during this period with Hammadu Yero Umaru of Juukayna accounts for part of his inspiration to begin creating songs. Hammadu Yero, who was at the end of his life in the 1950s, had built his reputation as a scholar on the basis of his Fulfulde-language songs. He attracted students and his family continues to attract students, whose devotional lives center on learning

⁴⁵⁰ Interview: Daaha Bireema, Arkoja, 2005.

⁴⁵¹ Hammadu Usman Aljuma, "Kafaani'llahu min sharri 'adaawatikum," lines 25 and 46. See Library, Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuɓe, File 10, Images 3257-3258.

and singing the corpus of songs, which he left. When Deyfuru Allay remembered Hammadu Usman's return from one visit to Hammadu Yero as the first time that he noticed the signs of greatness (*daliili*) in the young slave, he suggested this linkage. Hammadu Usman began composing songs not long after. Despite his slave background, he was claiming the right to speak the idiom of one of Gimbala's most renowned scholars.

Though he visited and respected Hammadu Yero, Hammadu Usman maintained distance from him. Some people said Hammadu Yero was Hammadu Usman's "spiritual master" (*seekuujo*). More people said that Hammadu Usman had no *seekuujo* or that he never made it clear who his spiritual master was. After Hammadu Yero's death, his cousin and successor Hammadu Hamman Galo often visited Arkoja with his students. When he did, he would always sing Hammadu Usman Aljuma's songs with him and never Hammadu Yero's.⁴⁵² This gesture showed Hammadu Hamman Galo's considerable respect for Hammadu Usman Aljuma. It also showed that Hammadu Usman did not identify himself as a subordinate follower of Hammadu Yero.

At the same time that Hammadu Usman started composing songs, he began to attract some students. Deyfuru Allay reported that his own older brother Hammadu Allay was among Hammadu Usman's first group of students. Hammadu Allay began studying with Hammadu Usman when the latter showed his first signs of greatness (i.e. in the 1950s). Later, Deyfuru also became one of Hammadu Usman's students. He reported that the experience of students centered on Hammadu Usman's songs, much like the experience of Hammadu Yero's students.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Interview: Sammba Seeku, Arkoja, 2/2007.

⁴⁵³ Interview: Deyfuru Allay, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

Hammadu Usman continued to attract students throughout his life from within Arkoja and beyond. Allay Aamadu of Ruumde's son Umaru Allay became one of them. Hammadu Gimmba of Ngayna was another. Hammadu Usman also continued to compose songs in both Fulfulde and Songhay throughout his life. Students such as Hammadu Gimmba brought his songs back to their home villages. Deyfuru Allay described Hammadu Usman's process of composition and moments when he was present for the composition of new portions of songs. The ablest students, such as Umaru Allay, were charged with writing down Hammadu Usman's songs in Arabic script. Hammadu Usman's influence as a teacher grew out of his songs. His activities as a teacher also allowed him to spread the influence of his songs.

The contents of Hammadu's songs generally conformed to what was expected of the genre. Most songs were works of Prophetic praise. At the same time, Hammadu used the genre to express his individual personality and social opinions. He made only oblique references to slavery, as when he praised the Prophet for "respecting everyone, noble people and slaves/ To all of them, he would preach about how to get along."⁴⁵⁴ He composed one entire song attacking greedy, hypocritical imams.⁴⁵⁵ He wrote another, which sheds considerable light on his conception of himself as a preacher.⁴⁵⁶

While none of my interviewees could provide a precise date when Hammadu Usman Aljuma began public preaching, all agreed that it was after he began to compose songs and after

⁴⁵⁴ Hammadu Usman Aljuma, "Subhaana hamiidu," line 38. See Library: Sammba Yero Aljuma, Arkoja, File 1, Image 1050.

⁴⁵⁵ Hammadu Usman Aljuma, "Yaa rabbii yaa samadu." See Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 11, Images 0782-0785.

⁴⁵⁶ Hammadu Usman Aljuma, "Kafaani'llahu min sharri 'adaawatikum." See Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 10, Images 3255-3259.

Mali achieved independence. Hammadu's public preaching was supremely confident and (unlike the approach which he ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad in the line cited above) often confrontational. Much of his preaching consisted of genre-appropriate calls to piety. But Hammadu also used preaching as a means to express his specific perspective on the society in which he lived. Hammadu forcefully rejected the postcolonial state, its local representatives, and symbols of Westernization such as radios, wristwatches, and motorcycles. This rejection contained an irony. Hammadu also preached about slavery, attempting to develop Islamic language to legitimate and extend the emancipation of slaves, which the postcolonial state had imposed on the basis of French-derived law and against mainstream Gimbala interpretations of Islamic law. Hammadu's distinct message about slavery grew out of a lifetime of frustrations about his social status and of dedication to acquiring the authority to speak as a Muslim scholar.

Hammadu Usman was very concerned about slave-status, even in his youth in the 1950s. At that time, he was primarily interested in pursuing the established Islamic procedure to end slave-status. He sought to end his own individual status as a slave by approaching his masters about the possibility of manumission. My interviewees were divided as to whether Hammadu achieved this goal. Some insisted he had been manumitted; others were just as convinced that he had not been; several who knew his life quite well otherwise admitted they were confused on this point. The detailed recollection of one interviewee offers an explanation for this confusion:

When Alfa Hammadu tried to be manumitted then, it was the case that his masters were a younger brother and an older brother [from a distant village]. He went to the older brother. He said that he would not manumit him at all, as for him. The younger brother told him that, if he gave him wealth, he would manumit him. ... The younger brother came here [to Arkoja]. He said that he manumitted him. The older brother also came here. He said that he did not manumit him. The younger brother came all the way to the doorway of the chief. He said that he manumitted him. The older brother also came to the

doorway of the chief. As for him, he did not manumit him. Both of them did it at the doorway of the chief.⁴⁵⁷

Hammadu's efforts to obtain manumission ended inconclusively. For his part, Hammadu decided that "he belonged to whomever he pleased," according to Bila Albarka. "That became what he thought was reasonable." On the strength of this claim, he married a free woman, because the idea of "being manumitted pleased him." But others in Arkoja, even some slaves such as Bila, were not fully convinced. Because they continued to view him as an unmanumitted slave, the results of Hammadu's quest to end his individual slave-status through the standard Islamic route could not have been fully satisfying to him.

This incident took place during the reign of Chief Usman, i.e. before this chief's death in 1958.⁴⁵⁸ It was not Hammadu's only frustration related to his slave status during this period. Like most children of slaves who died during the colonial period, Hammadu did not inherit from his father Usman Aljuma. During his life, Usman Aljuma had been known for assiduous farming and his ample grain stores. When he died, his masters seized the same ample stores. "It was more than one hundred sacks of rice. They took it all till it was cleaned out, except for the skin of the house! They left and he sought to get none of it."⁴⁵⁹ Hammadu did not act to claim this inheritance because he knew he could not. "When the father died, it was the time of the cantons. A slave could not do anything about it."⁴⁶⁰ Hammadu's frustrations in the 1950s were, at least partly, connected to the constraints, which the structure of colonial rule set for slaves.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview: Bila Albarka, Arkoja, 3/15/2007.

⁴⁵⁸ Niafouké Cercle Archives, File entitled "Decisions 1959," Notice on the installation of a new chief, dated 6/13/1958.

⁴⁵⁹ Interview: Deyfuru Allay, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

⁴⁶⁰ Interview: Bila Albarka, Arkoja, 3/15/2007.

After independence, Hammadu and his household used the new legal and administrative leverage at their disposal. Economic incentives and lingering resentment about Usman Aljuma's inheritance combined to lead Hammadu's household to contest the land claims of Usman's masters. "Everything that the father left, the [masters] took it to the last. So a grudge has remained between them until now. That was the reason that it continued to the point that they had a legal case about land," when "later the reign of the commandants of Mali came. That was when independence happened." Usman's masters claimed a field that Hammadu's household was still farming. Hammadu's household refused. The two parties went for state adjudication to Saraféré and "to Niafouké more than ten times." The land remained in Hammadu's household's control because when, during "the reign of the commandants, a master and a slave would fight each other, ... in the law the slave would be said to be right."⁴⁶¹ Bila Albarka was over-simplifying postcolonial procedures for settling land cases, but his basic argument was right.⁴⁶² After seeking to end his slave status through manumission in the 1950s, Hammadu also sought greater economic autonomy for his family by using the new conditions of postcolonial administration to assert control over land, which they had previously farmed as slaves.

Yet Hammadu was not fully satisfied with this means for ending the consequences of slave status either. He wanted to establish his dignity and status in Islamic terms, not the terms of the postcolonial state. In part, he achieved this goal by winning recognition as a scholar. Like Allay Aamadu of Ruumde, he learned to reproduce recognized scholarly idioms skillfully. This

⁴⁶¹ Interview: Bila Albarka, Arkoja, 3/15/2007.

⁴⁶² Sammba Usman also confirmed that Hammadu and his household made aggressive land claims after independence. Interview: Sammba Usman, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

ability to meet genre expectations in itself granted scholarly standing. But Hammadu went beyond that level of scholarly duplication. He turned both the Prophetic praise characteristic of vernacular Islamic songs and the calls to piety characteristic of public preaching into opportunities to make explicit statements about his own status. Hammadu's song "Kafaani'llahu min sharri 'adaawatikum" demonstrates how he used the standard terms of recognized genres to make claims to scholarly authority, which were rather extraordinary, particularly for someone of his social background.

In many ways, "Kafaani'llahu" fits into the most common category of Fulfulde Islamic song: the Prophetic praise genre. Yet it is not a simple account of the Prophet's excellence. Throughout the song, Hammadu boldly claims a personal bond with the Prophet. In line 8, Hammadu views parallels between his tribulations and the Prophet's as proof of the bond between them. "What delighted us was knowing that which came before. He informed us that we are together." In line 11, Hammadu proceeds to equate his own enemies with Muhammad's opponents: "You dared to call a lie the truth, which every morning appears before you/ When Mecca had called the truth a lie, they saw a morning of which they could not tell." In line 20, he makes the link yet more explicit: "I praise my only One, God, also a friend, who filled me with speech/ When he joined me to the Prophet, I became strong to where no one can join." Hammadu even refers to his own limited educational background as a point of similarity with Muhammad. He admits twice in "Kafaani'llahu": "I did not study."⁴⁶³ In line 18, he reminds opponents who try to silence him on this basis: "You do not notice the sayings of the Prophet. He was sent as a messenger and he did not study." Gimbala listeners expected to hear

⁴⁶³ Hammadu Usman Aljuma, "Kafaani'llahu min sharri 'adaawatikum," lines 25 and 46. See Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 10, Images 3257-3258.

Prophetic praise in vernacular religious songs. They did not expect to hear a slave identify with the Prophet and identify his opponents with the enemies of the Prophet.

“Kafaani’llahu” also includes repeated meta-statements about the nature of Hammadu’s “speech” as a scholar. Hammadu built his reputation through the quantity and frequency of his speech. As line 20 of “Kafaani’llahu” states (and as was widely known in Gimbala), Hammadu Usman was “filled ... with speech.” Line 20 also makes an argument about the source of this ability to speak. God granted it to him, as a special favor to “a friend.” Other lines in the song present the same general argument specifically about Hammadu’s speech in his songs. Line 25 suggests that God selected him from “the crowd of souls” to give him as special “blessings” the “verses” of his songs: “I praise the Owner of blessings when He made the crowd of souls disperse/ Then He helped me with verses though I know I have not studied.” Hammadu’s singing is for the Prophet: “I praise the Prophet so that my speech abounds.”⁴⁶⁴ But it establishes not only the Prophet’s greatness but Hammadu Usman’s own: “We sing for the best one abundantly .../ I will explain that no one can speak if the Lord does not will it.”⁴⁶⁵ God willed Hammadu to speak as a singer for the Prophet. In other words, Hammadu’s songs were proof of God’s special favor for him.

“Kafaani’llahu” describes both the contents and the significance also of Hammadu’s speech as a preacher. Lines 33 to 37 present the contents of Hammadu’s preaching as the typical calls to piety of the preacher’s idiom. “I call to the community. .../ I go out for everyone who has not repented.”⁴⁶⁶ “I bring everybody out to be helped. I bring that [person] back [to

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, line 30. See Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 10, Image 3257.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, line 32.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, line 33.

repentance] before he or she dies.”⁴⁶⁷ “I criticize that [person], which increases his agreement to the point that he regrets not praying.”⁴⁶⁸ “I preach to those who come back to the Lord. I get them to know the path of the Lord.”⁴⁶⁹ Calling the community to repentance, to prayer, and to “the path of the Lord” were all uncontroversial terms of the preacher’s idiom. Hammadu was claiming to reproduce this recognized form of scholarly speech faithfully; he was claiming to speak as any other preacher would.

At the same time, he claimed that his preaching gave him special personal authority. Earlier in the song, Hammadu attacks his critics as insincere preachers. Lines 12 to 17 begin with the repeated phrase: “You preach, but you do not trouble ...” In line 12, the people whom preachers should trouble are *heeferōe* (from the Arabic: *kāfir*, or “infidel”), “when they called a lie the truth sent to an honorable person.” Hammadu’s description of his own preaching presents a contrast with this attack on inauthentic preaching. He identifies himself as just such an honorable person (*noone*), who is called a liar, though he has been sent the truth. Lines 33 to 37 present the traditional content of Hammadu’s preaching, but his repeated use of the pronoun “I” is also noteworthy. These lines build up gradually from simply calling the community through the authority to criticize others to an eventual claim “to know the path of the Lord.” Line 42 pushes this claim further. Like many other aspects of his life, Hammadu’s preaching linked him to the Prophet: “Every day I say what I heard that the Prophet would cry out/.” As with his singing, God was the source of Hammadu’s special authority to speak as a preacher: “We are stubborn in doing that until God gives us rest from these works.” Hammadu’s switch to the royal

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, line 34.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, line 35.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, line 37.

we serves only to highlight the very unique and individual claims, which he made about his preaching.

Though “Kafaani’llahu” does not explicitly refer to it, Hammadu’s opponents criticized him for speaking as a scholar, religious singer, and preacher largely because of his lowly social background. In turn, Hammadu’s ability to speak scholarly idioms authoritatively was a way for him if not to end, then at least to reduce significantly the meaning of his slave status. Gimbalans felt uncomfortable treating a learned person as a slave or even using the word “slave” (*maccuḍo*) to talk about someone whom they also called a “scholar.”⁴⁷⁰ Because Hammadu successfully established a scholarly reputation, many Gimbalans were reluctant to think of him in the same terms as they did other slaves. His efforts to gain control over land through postcolonial judicial procedures reduced the meaning of his slave status in a different way, but they lacked Islamic legitimacy. Much like manumission would have if he had achieved it more conclusively, becoming a scholar distanced Hammadu from slave status through authentically Islamic means. Also much like manumission, this method for reducing the meaning of slavery was a solely individual path. Though “Kafaani’llahu” demonstrates his considerable personal satisfaction with composing an autobiography in which he stars as a high-status religious figure, Hammadu was not fully satisfied with this method for reducing the meaning of slavery either.

Hammadu sought to drain slavery not only of its individual meaning for him, but also of its general meaning throughout Gimbalan society. In this way, he resembled the Malian commandants of the 1960s. (It is also worth stating again that his career would probably have been unthinkable without their efforts.) But Hammadu rejected the postcolonial state and

⁴⁷⁰ One person who expressed this view to me was Buukari Saadu. Interview: Buukari Saadu, Ngayna, 4/2005.

tangled frequently with commandants, whom he considered corrupt.⁴⁷¹ Much like conservative masters opposed to French-derived legal abolition, he also denied the legitimacy of *golleeji Tuubaaku*, “the works of the European.” Among his signature teachings were a total rejection of radios and motorcycles; his students knew better than to wear wristwatches in his presence.⁴⁷² (Even conservative scholars from the masters’ class generally found this teaching excessive and eccentric.)

Hammadu searched instead for Islamic language to legitimate slave emancipation. He did not address this theme directly in his songs; it fit poorly in the confines of that genre. He did include it in his preaching by pushing on the accepted borders of that genre. As “Kafaani’llahu” stated, one goal of Hammadu’s preaching was the very uncontroversial one of calling people to prayer. What the song did not mention was Hammadu’s controversial call to slave women to cover their hair during prayer (*soomagol*). On this symbolic ritual point, Hammadu struck one blow at the continued meaning of slave status in Gimbala society. “Kafaani’llahu” also stated that Hammadu preached to call people to piety, under the general labels of “repentance” or “the path of the Lord.” Again, this general goal was a completely uncontroversial part of the preacher’s idiom. But in his preaching, Hammadu transformed the concepts of piety and obedience to God into weapons for a direct assault on the legitimacy of slavery in postcolonial Gimbala society.

For outsiders, the significance of a slave-woman covering her hair during prayer may not be immediately apparent, but it became a highly-charged issue for Gimbala society. Hammadu Usman often came to Ngayna during the harvest-season to preach and to receive gifts of grain.

⁴⁷¹ Interview: Sammba Seeku, Arkoja, 2/2007.

⁴⁷² Interview: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuḡe, 2005.

In ca. 1989, he came and preached to the women of the *saare* that they should cover their hair when they prayed. Many of the women began to do so. News of this ritual act soon reached the masters' class in the *wuro*. One Pullo scholar called Mobbo Koola, the most learned member of Saadu Aamadu's extended family, walked to the *saare*. He preached with emotion to the women that what Hammadu Usman had said was a lie. He explained what he knew from his study of the legal issues addressed in such works as the *Risāla*: Noble women should cover their hair during prayer; slave women should not.⁴⁷³ Daaha Bireema of Arkoja reportedly also traveled to Ngayna's *saare*, walking the fifteen kilometers from his village to make the same point. Some of the women returned to praying uncovered; some continued to follow Hammadu's teaching despite authoritative scholarly warnings to the contrary.

For Ngayna's masters such as Saadu Aamadu, Hammadu's preaching and the women's decisions to cover their hair amounted to a dangerous new phase in the illegitimate emancipation of slaves.⁴⁷⁴ Grudgingly, they had become accustomed to their loss of control over most of the labor of their slaves. They had even come to accept that slaves inherited the wealth of their deceased kin, though masters' knew this wealth (along with the slaves themselves) actually belonged to them. The postcolonial state enforced the abolition of these economic aspects of slavery. The state's law contradicted masters' conceptions of Islamic law. State law was illegitimate, but at least it did not claim to speak with Islamic legitimacy. It overruled God's law by force, but it did not touch God's fundamental legal distinctions between slave and free persons. Hammadu's preaching had no economic consequences, but it offended masters' values more deeply. For masters, saying that slave women should cover up during prayer was

⁴⁷³ Interview: Buukari Saadu, Ngayna, 8/2005.

⁴⁷⁴ See chapter VII, 292.

tantamount to saying that the books of God were not true, or, as Saadu Aamadu put it, to saying that “the Book says what the Book does not say.” This sacrilege led Saadu to classify Hammadu’s teaching as a new historical phase in master-slave relations with the same level of significance as the eras of “European” colonial rule and of President Keita of Mali.

Masters probably also understood that what Hammadu really meant was even more threatening. He meant that the women of the *saare* were no longer slaves, not only in the eyes of the state, but also in the eyes of God. The masters, Hammadu, and the women all seized on the issue of covering hair during prayer because, even after the state’s enforcement of abolitionist law, Islamic idioms defined dignity in Gimbala. For masters, slave women who covered up presented an affront to their dignity, based on class distinctions grounded in the transcendent authority of God and his Books. For precisely the same reason, Hammadu singled out this ritual act. He pointed it out to slave women as the location where they could claim dignity. Since they now knew where to go, many of the women headed straight for it and some of them clung to the dignity of this ritual act even more tightly after the objections of scholars from the masters’ class.

The incident in Ngayna’s *saare* was not the only time that Hammadu Usman preached about covering hair during prayer. It was a general and consistent theme, which came to symbolize the boldness and strangeness of Hammadu’s preaching for many Gimbalaans of all backgrounds. Sammba Usman, a non-slave from Hammadu’s village, remarked that Hammadu also convinced slave women in Arkoja to cover their hair during prayer. “He spoke about it. They covered up too. ... That was the reason that they covered up.” When asked if Hammadu’s message pleased people, Sammba replied: “It did. The people [whom it pleased] were the slaves. For the slave-women of [Hammadu’s] Bugumayra neighborhood all covered up. Not one of

their slave-women refrained from covering up.”⁴⁷⁵ Pressed for his opinion, Sammba said that he did not know if Hammadu’s teaching was wrong, but he repeated several times that many slave women did not cover up elsewhere. Though Sammba did not feel confident enough to debate the scholarly merits of Hammadu’s teaching, the eccentricity of that teaching caught his eye.

It also became a point of confusion for some people who otherwise respected Hammadu tremendously. The elderly slave woman Mayram Sana singled out Hammadu’s teaching on *soomagol* as the only thing which she did not understand about his preaching. She said that she never heard another scholar support the same position, so, though she was not learned herself, she could not accept it as true.⁴⁷⁶ Like the women who stopped covering up in Ngayna’s *saare* and those who Sammba Usman knew did not cover up, Mayram saw herself as a slave. She listened to the majority of scholarly experts on God’s law who said that slave women should not cover their hair in prayer.

Many Gimbalans singled out the issue of *soomagol* as the essence of Hammadu’s preaching about slavery. Yet the essential issue was not whether slave women should cover up or not, but rather whether there continued to be any slave women (or slave men) in Gimbala. The issue of *soomagol* was one key way in which Hammadu drew on Islamic language to argue indirectly that there were not. He also developed a further direct argument. Unlike postcolonial law, he did not contend that slavery was inherently wrong in all circumstances. Deyfuru Allay reported that Hammadu recognized Islamic legal justifications for slavery. “He said: A son of Adam seized, whom raiders seized – that is, seized in accordance with religion – that is slavery.”

⁴⁷⁵ Interview: Sammba Usman, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

⁴⁷⁶ Interview: Mayram Sana, Arkoja, 1/2007.

In the same vein, Hammadu recognized manumission as the primary Islamic path to ending slave status. Yet he also created an Islamic reason for emancipation of Gimbala slaves as a group rather than as individuals. He argued that, in the Gimbala society of his time, “one comes across a noble person who is not a master. Someone called a master might not be a master.” In his time, “noble people, ... all that they have is the name. You are noble, but you steal, you lie, you betray. Well, now you are not a master.”⁴⁷⁷ Hammadu argued that, because the so-called nobles of his time did not obey God sufficiently, they could not command the obedience of slaves.⁴⁷⁸ Sammba Usman made the same point somewhat differently: Hammadu Usman “made [the master-slave relation] collapse, meaning he made it fall. He would say that only a God-fearing person, a Muslim, is the noble person. In his preaching, he would say God does not ask a person what he is.”⁴⁷⁹ Hammadu Usman’s boldest and most creative argument expanded the preaching genre’s traditional concern with piety into an Islamic justification for comprehensive slave emancipation.

Conclusion: Speaking as Scholars

From the generation of slaves born in the 1920s, the first generation of Gimbala slave scholars emerged. In their youth, Alhaji Yero Nawma, Allay Aamadu, and Hammadu Usman had limited access to local Islamic educational networks. None of the three had the sustained childhood education which defined the typical path to scholarly status for their non-slave peers. Nonetheless, each managed to acquire knowledge and ultimately to gain recognition as a scholar.

⁴⁷⁷ Interview: Deyfuru Allay, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview: Sammba Seeku, Arkoja, 2/2007.

⁴⁷⁹ Interview: Sammba Usman, Arkoja, 2/26/2007.

The path of each was different, but all depended on the increased autonomy which Gimbala slaves generally gained as a result of a marked shift in local governmental practice in the years surrounding 1960. The path of each was the cobbled-together solution of a determined individual, but all responded to a similar basic problem: how to bridge the gap between insufficient training and the ability to speak scholarly idioms, which generally came only from that training.

Alhaji, Allay, and Hammadu did not speak as scholars at the same pitch, but the constraints of their social and educational backgrounds marked all of their voices. Alhaji managed to get his voice heard in the competitive world of Sevaré's scholars. Yet the tale of his misplaced mouth is a rather direct metaphor for the limits on his ability to speak with scholarly authority. Allay crawled his way into the typical roles of a scholar in his hometown. Yet his emulation of the model of Ruumde's non-slave scholars was so faithful that he even transcribed their Islamic secrets for controlling slaves. Hammadu spoke with the loudest, most confident voice. While Alhaji's mouth got mangled and Allay always watched his with supreme attention, Hammadu was "filled ... with speech" and he was not afraid to say that God Himself was the One who filled him with it. Yet Hammadu too ran up against the limits of his social and educational background. He had many critics and, when it came down to issues of textual minutiae, they often got the best of him. In his otherwise extremely confident autobiographical song "Kafaani'llahu," he admitted that he had not studied and he implored God for help to overcome his insufficient training: "My Lord, make it easy for me to speak to describe that

which the Books do not contradict.”⁴⁸⁰ Like all of the slave scholars of his generation, his path to scholarship was not easy.

Their success was all the more remarkable for the obstacles they overcame. In a society which defined dignity, status, and esoteric power in Islamic terms, masters fought hardest to maintain what they viewed as the Islamic distinctions between free and slave. In managing to become scholars, Alhaji, Allay, and Hammadu each acquired all three of these goods: dignity, status, and esoteric power. They also made these goods more available to the generation of slaves that followed them. Allay quietly built an institution which provided the sustained Islamic education that he had not enjoyed to (figuratively) “the whole *saare*.” Hammadu inspired those around him with his marks of greatness (*daliili*), taught his devotional songs to his students, and made sure that his son Ali studied in the standard way that he had not. Ali, who was born ca. 1951, studied the Qur’an under his father in the 1950s, but then went on to study other books under Daaha Bireema in the 1960s. Though Daaha respected Hammadu and advised others to follow what was good in Hammadu’s preaching, he pointed out the limits of Hammadu’s education and advised others to be wary of following the slave scholar into mistakes.⁴⁸¹ Yet when I asked Daaha about his students, he mentioned Ali Hammadu first, a slave, he said, who became one of his best students.⁴⁸² Hammadu’s success in developing a credible Islamic justification for the collective emancipation of Gimbala’s slaves was limited by the haphazard educational background characteristic of his, the first generation of Gimbala slave scholars.

⁴⁸⁰ Hammadu Usman Aljuma, “Kafaani’llahu min sharri ‘adaawatikum,” line 49. See Library: Umaru Allay Aamadu, Ruumde Suuduuŋe, File 10, Image 3259.

⁴⁸¹ Interview: Sammba Seeku, Arkoja, 2/2007.

⁴⁸² Interview: Daaha Bireema, Arkoja, 2005.

The second generation of Gimbala slave scholars has had the training, which their fathers' generation lacked. It remains to be seen whether they will have their creativity.

CONCLUSION

AFRICA'S HIDDEN HISTORIES OF ISLAMIC LITERACY

This dissertation has examined only a few small spaces: a single “herders’ district” (*wuro*), the “cultivators’ district” (*saare*) of the same village, and similar localized social spaces for slaves/ex-slaves in a handful of analogous, nearby communities. However, the stories of Gimbala’s village intellectuals point in the direction of a much broader sphere of experience and historical action. Like the case studies of Karin Barber’s edited volume *Africa’s Hidden Histories*, the stories of such figures as Hammadu Usman Umaru, Num Haalidu, Jampullo Aduraaman, Allay Aamadu, and Hammadu Usman Aljuma were not isolated examples of the uses of literacy. They represent a widespread social phenomenon.⁴⁸³

The literate intellectual tradition with which these men interacted depended on local production. Like the dominant mode of material production in their society, their system of knowledge production depended on the labor of individuals and small-scale family units. Yet, because this system was tailored to the capacities of small-scale local producers, Muslim food-producers could replicate similar literate practices throughout the broad stretches of Africa, which they have inhabited. The stories of intellectuals from Ruumde and elsewhere in Gimbala have significance beyond my local research unit, because they suggest ways to recover a type of African voice, which has been widespread and common, but also difficult to access and

⁴⁸³ Karin Barber, ed., *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). See page 3.

neglected. My dissertation is a case study. Like Barber's volume though, its implications could demarcate a field.

My introductory chapter aimed to make room within the field of West African Islam for modest intellectuals from villages such as Ruumde. I held up colonial sources against some basic evidence from their libraries to look for a blind-spot that postcolonial students of this field inherited from their colonial forebears. Much like their colonial forebears, postcolonial scholars have generally approached colonial-era West African Islam as a search for hierarchy and relegated rural commoners to passive roles as followers. This tendency stemmed from two primary facts: (1.) the colonial founders of the field had solid, self-interested political reasons to emphasize Islamic hierarchy and (2.) they produced the sources which were most accessible to the postcolonial scholars who continued the field. These facts of colonial knowledge production and academic lineage have obscured some facts about the object of study: i.e. Muslim West African knowledge production. Many rural commoners were not passive followers in Islamic matters, but were active Muslim intellectuals in their own right. They actively acquired, employed, and produced Islamic knowledge. In the process, they also produced their own archives, creating a source base for re-thinking inherited assumptions and developing alternative models of West African Islam.

My substantive chapters have sought to pursue some of the promise of these archives. They have explored the meanings of individual, often fragmentary documents as well as the larger meanings of these archives, or family libraries, as ensembles. The two largest categories of documents in these libraries reflect village intellectuals' interest in Islamic law and esotericism. These two disciplines have been central to the study of Islam in West Africa and

beyond. Rural library sources invite a reconsideration of the historical meaning of each discipline.

Some observers have seen Islamic law as a quintessentially urban discipline.⁴⁸⁴ Certainly, legal study has been fundamental to urban Islam. But Muslim scholars in such modest rural spaces as Ruumde's *wuro* considered it equally fundamental. Intellectuals such as Hammadu Usman Umaru collected an array of legal textbooks. They were also quite comfortable using more obscure works to bypass or critique those textbooks. Through the village imam's office, they incorporated ritual legal text into local community life. Through informal legal debates, they gave concrete, everyday significance to the textual nuances of a much broader range of legal issues. Islamic law was a complicated and technical discipline. Yet village intellectuals could work to become "able to handle ... its legal issues and ... its letters," as Hammadu put it on the back of one of his early textbooks. Through diligent study and public careers, they brought the challenging discipline of law within the reach of rural commoners and made it important enough to ordinary rural lives to justify the effort.

Academic scholars have also excluded rural commoners from active roles in Islamic esotericism. Building their models out of the claims of the leaders of centralized Sufi orders, they have identified hierarchy as essential to esotericism and differential access to knowledge as the source of secret power.⁴⁸⁵ To be sure, centralized Sufi orders have been a part of the spiritual geography of Muslim West Africa as well as other parts of the Muslim world. But the field of esotericism has been larger than these orders and extends also beyond Sufi practice. Islamic esotericism has encompassed Sufism, but has not been limited to it. Islamic esotericism has also

⁴⁸⁴ For a leading proponent of this view, see Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁴⁸⁵ For example, see Soares, *The Prayer Economy* and Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*.

included the secret power of village intellectuals. The abundance of very short, accessible how-to texts in rural libraries chronicles a very different sociology of Islamic esoteric knowledge. It was not differential access, but rather the relatively open access to secrets that made them powerful and meaningful to village intellectuals. The concerns of this category of intellectuals and of the people with whom they lived shaped considerably the sort of esoteric knowledge which they produced. The life-circumstances of rural commoners defined the contents of a key Islamic textual genre.

The history of Islamic knowledge in spaces such as Ruumde and Gimbala has certainly included discourses of hierarchy, but library and oral sources offer the necessary context to pare down such claims to their proper dimensions. Ruumde included a lineage which held the label of Moodibaaŋe, or “Scholars.” Despite this discourse, the model of the “learned family” does not reflect the social distribution of knowledge in Ruumde. The “Scholars” lineage needed also to engage directly in food production. And Islamic knowledge was too accessible and too important to ordinary rural people to be left exclusively to specialist lineages. In spaces such as Ruumde’s colonial-era *wuro*, lineage borders did not separate the learned from “followers,” clients, or supplicants. Most families were messy mixtures of the learned and “the lost” (one interviewee’s term for those who had not undertaken significant study). Likewise, many individuals diversified their personal activities, combining agricultural with intellectual labor according to a variety of patterns.

The intellectual boundary which separated the colonial-era *wuro* from Ruumde’s *saare*, a social space inhabited by slaves, was more real. An Islamic discourse of hierarchy tied to slavery did have considerable practical impact. Masters made use of Islamic legal distinctions between “free” and slave to shore up a hierarchy of dignity while colonial and, more

dramatically, postcolonial developments eroded some areas of their control over slaves. Yet the boundary that separated “free” spaces where learning flourished from slave spaces where it did not could not hold up over time. The impetus behind increasing slave autonomy was secular state action, but the fundamentally decentralized sociology of rural Islamic knowledge was a key factor which allowed determined slaves to capitalize on newfound autonomy quickly to enter their masters’ system of learning.

When colonial observers applied their models of Islam to Gimbala, they found that Muslim intellectuals had “no value or influence” there. The profound influence of Islamic values on how both Gimbala masters and slaves defined emancipation provides my most compelling evidence against this specific claim and the larger model behind it. It illustrates the potential pay-off of an alternative model, which tracks how rural commoners actively produced Islamic knowledge and demonstrates how they shaped what Islam meant in West Africa.

Karin Barber’s edited volume *Africa’s Hidden Histories* suggests another way to situate the localized intellectual spaces of this dissertation within a broader field. Barber argues that the geographically-dispersed case studies of her volume constitute a single, coherent “field” of “non-elite” literacy, or “tin-trunk literacy.” The considerable similarities between Barber *et al*’s “literati” and Gimbala’s literates supply my very local case study with a far-flung set of historical resonances. At the same time, Gimbala’s form of “tin-trunk literacy” tests the boundaries of Barber’s field. The literate practices of Muslim food-producers extend the project of *Africa’s Hidden Histories*. They contribute to an even more textured sense of the continent’s literate past.

Barber *et al*'s "literati" cut a wide variety of profiles, but she fits them under the purposely vague label of "non-elites." This label has the vice of defining the volume's collection of figures in terms of what they were not, rather than what they were. And yet the label works because many of these figures also defined themselves in relation to elite status. They aspired to and yet fell short of forms of elite status.

On both of these counts, the literates of Ruumde and Gimbala resembled Barber *et al*'s protagonists. Gimbala intellectuals saw literacy as a tool for social mobility. Hammadu Usman Umaru used his textual achievements to transform himself from "the son of a red Pullo (unlettered herder)" to Ruumde's imam and a formidable legal debater. Jampullo Aduraaman claimed to be the only "light" capable of illuminating Ruumde's esoteric field in his time. Num Haalidu kept an anonymous praise poem which assured him a "rank which cannot be belittled" and classed him as a peer only with his own "perfection." Allay Aamadu crawled his way from a crippled slave youth to a scholar and teacher of "the whole *saare*." And Hammadu Usman Aljuma composed songs and sermons in which, although he admitted his slave background and his lack of childhood schooling, he dared to compare his own experience to that of the Prophet Muhammad and to cast himself as a moral authority over the masters' class. Literacy enabled all of these individuals to articulate aspirations to elite status.

Yet, the aspirants characteristically failed to garner full social recognition of the status which they desired. When Hammadu Usman Umaru shouted on a feast-day "All of you are not scholars," the assembled crowd may have held their tongues out of embarrassment at Num Haalidu's failure to read the appropriate ritual text. But the crowd included many who continued to assert the status of scholars and the same power over text that Hammadu claimed. The community did not accept Hammadu's claim to be the only one capable of leading it in prayer

ritual; when Hammadu died a short time later, the community did not hesitate to affirm Num Haalidu as his replacement. Jampullo's claims did not prevent others from collecting and giving off the "light" of their own portions of esoteric power. And Num Haalidu's dreams of "perfection" were clearly just that: honeyed words to cushion the realities of a harshly competitive intellectual environment, in which his (and others') "ranks" were all too open to belittlement. Allay Aamaduu escaped critique only because he assiduously copied the scholarly practices of the masters' class in Ruumde. Behind conformism in intellectual content, he masked the revolutionary acts of using literate knowledge as a slave and transmitting it to other slaves. Hammadu Usman Aljuma's much bolder appropriation of scholarly idioms earned him numerous critics. In his song *Kafaani'llahu*, he cast this criticism as a sign of his authority, a parallel between his own experience and that of the Prophet himself. Many of his listeners interpreted it otherwise: the criticism was the result of Hammadu Usman Aljuma's limited learning, which led him to advance suspect interpretations of text. The very multiplicity of claims to elite status underscored the consistent difficulties that rural scholars met in trying to win acceptance for these claims. The multiplicity of claims to elite status proved that no elite monopolized literate knowledge.

Thus, much like Barber *et al*'s "literati," Gimbala's tended to meet with frustration whenever they set their goals too high. Yet being "non-elite" did not make either set of "literati" powerless. They did have the power to create spheres of meaningful intellectual activity. The fact that these spheres were off the main stage simply highlights their special potential to contribute to messier, richer, more multi-vocal histories of modern Africa.

The similarities between Barber *et al*'s "literati" and Gimbala's extend even to the specific material object of the tin trunk. For Barber, this practical object sums up much that

unites the case studies of her volume. It symbolizes the modest means and social status of the literate people involved. It evokes how their forms of literacy were often intensely personal, relatively obscure, and outside the fully public domain of colonial prominence. Like many of the figures in Barber's volume, Gimbalese literates also favored tin trunks as repositories for their textual collections. The trunks kept their "secrets" safe from competitive neighbors' prying eyes. They tied the meaning and power of literacy to individual and family histories, to "hidden histories" in much the same sense as Barber's volume uses that concept. The tin trunk serves as a material and symbolic meeting-point for the forms of literacy in Barber's volume and the forms of literacy explored in this dissertation. Within the context Barber's field of "tin-trunk literacy," the village intellectuals of this thesis appear as one instance of a much wider phenomenon.

At the same time, Gimbalese literates push at the boundaries of Barber's field of "tin-trunk literacy." Barber defines the scope of that field as Anglophone Africa, which is certainly a large and ambitious research unit. The achievement of the volume is to identify in a series of far-flung, closely-worked case studies an underlying coherence. Barber's introduction connects the dots between non-elite readers and writers from such geographically disparate contexts as the Gold Coast, southwest Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa. She declares herself open to casting the net even wider, noting that further research should explore whether similar patterns of literate practice emerged in Francophone and Lusophone Africa.⁴⁸⁶ With these additions, Barber's field of "tin-trunk literacy" would cover virtually all of colonial Africa.

Broad as it is, this vision is still too restricted. Barber defines the field according to Europhone research units. This orientation is an odd one coming from this inspired student of

⁴⁸⁶ Karin Barber, "Introduction: Hidden Innovators in Africa," in *Africa's Hidden Histories*, ed. Karin Barber, 1-24.

rich, versatile Yorubaphone intellectual worlds. Underlying it is Barber's sense that ultimately the colonial encounter played the critical initial role in generating the possibility even of the marginal, non-elite forms of literacy highlighted in her volume. Her own article examines a Yoruba-language writer who worked in considerable isolation on a highly eccentric literary project. She concludes, convincingly, that even his marginal case would be unthinkable without the institutional context of colonial schooling, the references and generic forms which he encountered during his Anglican schooling as a youth and his adult experiences as a schoolmaster.⁴⁸⁷ For Barber, the "tin trunk" symbolizes literacy at a distance from the colonial center stage, but still fundamentally marked by it.

During the chronological focus of this thesis, Ruumde and Gimbala also were undeniably colonized spaces. It may be helpful to think of these spaces along Barber's continuum measuring colonial documentary bullying, which runs from the extreme South African case through the *kipande* system of colonial Kenya to the lesser, though still considerable nuisances of places such as the Gold Coast. Colonial documentary bullying in Gimbala took on the dimensions of the last case, if not still smaller ones. Establishing this context is important. Yet, I am not indulging in a romantic quest for an untouched cultural tradition when I argue that this continuum of colonizer-colonized relations is not nearly enough to situate the "tin-trunk literacy" of Ruumde and Gimbala. While spaces such as Ruumde were colonized spaces, they were also sites for knowledge production within a literate intellectual tradition which the colonial encounter had not generated.

⁴⁸⁷ Karin Barber, "Writing, Genre, and a Schoolmaster's Inventions in the Yoruba Provinces," in *Africa's Hidden Histories*, ed. Karin Barber, 385-415.

Colonial documentary bullying (or missionizing or teaching or literacy policy-making) did not generate (at whatever remove) the relationships of these non-elite “literati” to text. In 1900 and 1907, Hammadu Usman Umaru noted that these were years seven and fifteen of “Christian” rule. Yet the textbooks which he completed in those years related to his quest to acquire the ability to read and understand legal issues, rather than some attempt to respond to colonialism. The generic form of Islamic legal texts, studied in Gimbala since well before the colonial conquest, set his literary reference points. In the 1930s and 1940s, Ruumde’s esoteric working-group met to deal with community problems, including colonial “seizures” such as military conscription. But the literary techniques which Jampullo Aduraaman and others employed for “protection from oppressive rulers” belonged to an Islamic esoteric genre, which the colonial encounter in no sense generated. The working-group employed this genre to manage community relations with the rainy-season as much as with colonial authorities. A multitude of grassroots intellectuals knew how to use it as an extra arm for farming, assurance of family health and fertility, or a solution for a number of other fundamental rural concerns.

In the late 1950s, the 1960s, and beyond, Gimbala masters and slaves faced increasing slave autonomy. The colonial state initiated this trend (though it also did much to block it); the postcolonial state pushed it forward. Independent Mali’s secular discourse of emancipation surely had colonial and Europhone intellectual roots. Nevertheless, the full meaning of emancipation in Gimbala only emerges through recognition and exploration of the salience of literary genres which were essentially independent of the colonial encounter. Masters such as Saadu Aamadou knew the secular origins of emancipation, whether they thought “the European” was partly to blame or President “Moudibo” Keita, the RDA, and independent Mali had the sole responsibility for saying that “Everyone is the same.” Yet they read the full significance of

emancipation and slave “revolt” (*murtere*) through Islamic textual genres – what “the Book says.” Slaves such as Alhaji Yero Nawma, Allay Aamadu, and Hammadu Usman Aljuma also defined the meaning of autonomy according to Islamic literary genres, which they now seized the opportunity to control and employ with varying degrees of audacity.

“Tin-trunk literacy” was not simply an outgrowth of the colonial processes marked off in such spaces as Anglophone, Francophone, or Lusophone Africa. Muslim food-producers filled tin trunks of their own. Because of its different history, different relationship to colonial experience, and different generic content, grassroots Islamic literacy contributes an additional dimension to Barber’s field.

One of Barber *et al*’s central interests is innovation. The colonial experience did not generate the type of “tin-trunk literacy” which I have studied. The forms of this literacy survived the colonial disruption rather than owing their birth to it. Does that fact place Gimbala “literati” outside of the “efflorescence” of non-elite literacy, which Barber identifies? Was their story less of movement than of continuity? To some extent, it clearly was. At the same time, their form of literacy also generated its own, differing patterns of movement.

Innovation was not Hammadu Usman Umaru’s primary goal in using literacy. He aimed, above all, at competence. As his charm put it, he sought to become “able” or “capable” (*qādir*). Hammadu studiously avoided ostentatious or unadulterated innovation. His creativity was muted. He saw independent thinking as consistent, rather than in contradiction with continuity and fidelity to intellectual tradition. He challenged the authority of a classic textbook with a passage from a more obscure, but also authoritative classic text. He managed to include a defense of a woman’s right to consent to (and, implicitly, reject) marriage within the restricted

genre of the imam's ritual speech. He preferred to lead with authoritative texts such as the ninth-century *'Utbiyya*, but, when the special circumstances of a property-owning divorcee pushed him, he spoke in his own voice: "I said." One could try to locate Hammadu Usman Umaru's positions within a broader narrative of the "modernization" of gender relations in colonial Africa. But there is little evidence to support this interpretation. The literate intellectual tradition in which he operated seems to have been quite capable of generating its own debates about gender, its own patterns of movement and social contest.

In some respects, the case of Hammadu Usman Aljuma of Arkoja differed considerably from that of his namesake in Ruumde. Hammadu Usman Aljuma was willing to speak more boldly, with more awareness of the newness of his ideas and with a less cautious scholarly apparatus. His concern with the status of slaves tied him to a broader history of social changes, which colonialism did much to initiate (even though the colonial state also did much to forestall them).

Yet, like Hammadu Usman Umaru, Hammadu Usman Aljuma deliberately positioned his personal ideas within Islamic intellectual tradition, its genres, and its authoritative reference points. Unlike many of Barber *et al*'s "literati," he rejected "European" innovations (*gollleeji Tuubaaku*). He attacked material symbols of the "European" and of the colonial encounter, such as wristwatches and radios. He did not conceive of literacy as a path to a form of "modernity" that had European or colonial culture as its reference point. The Islamic literacy of his society structured different kinds of paths. Largely because of the power of his society's Islamic genres, Hammadu Usman Aljuma found that the "modern" and "secular" discourses of the postcolonial state offered, at best, an inadequate and incomplete basis for his and other Gimbala slaves' emancipation. Hammadu Usman Aljuma, Alhaji Yero Nawma, and Allay Aamadu created paths

to more complete dignity and autonomy through their idiosyncratic paths to scholarly status.

Other Gimbala slaves of their era used Islamic genres to express claims to dignity through studying in Qur'anic school, financing their children's educations, or undertaking such acts as choosing to cover their hair during prayer. They created social innovations out of inherited genres, speaking old words in new ways.

Barber et al's "field" of "tin-trunk literacy" adds texture to modern African history. It pushes beyond the loudest, most accessible voices to a much broader range of obscure, hidden spaces in which – contrary to commonplace assumptions about "the oral continent" – reading, writing, and active engagement with text thrived. However, the research unit of "Anglophone Africa" (or Francophone or Lusophone) is too narrow. *Africa's Hidden Histories* finds its "literati" at a fascinating distance from the epicenter of colonial documentary projects. It holds colonial projects at a considerable remove, but, in the same stroke, keeps them at the epicenter. By suggesting that the "efflorescence" of literacy among non-elite Africans depended ultimately on the generating force of colonialism, *Africa's Hidden Histories* obscures other histories of non-elite African literacy. As Barber's volume shows, literacy was not the preserve of socially-recognized elites. Yet, neither was it the sole preserve of the new colonial social categories, which dominate the ranks of Barber et al's non-elite "literati." Like colonial clerks, converts, cash-croppers, school-leavers, and migrant workers, Muslim commoners whose material lives focused on subsistence food-production also had meaningful intellectual lives. They built these intellectual lives through engagement with a literate tradition whose key reference points predated the colonial encounter. These "hidden histories" of Muslim food-producers can reveal new dimensions of an African past that was literate, innovative, and broadly intellectual.

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