

**Al-Ḥājj ʿUmar Tāl and the Realm of the Written: Mastery, Mobility and Islamic Authority  
in 19<sup>th</sup> Century West Africa**

by

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## Dedication

To my parents, Safiulla and Fazalunissa, for bringing me here;  
And to Shafia, Neha, and Lina, for continuing to enrich me

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## Abstract

In 1864, al-ḥajj ‘Umar Tāl, one of the most important nineteenth century West African Muslim scholars and political figures disappeared in a cave in Mali. This study attempts to reconstitute crucial aspects of his life through an analysis of his body of work. While previous scholarship only emphasized his political accomplishments, including his *jīhad*, I argue it is important to approach Tāl as an intellectual and examine his life as it unfolded within the context of the nineteenth century.

By rooting my analysis on Arabic documents, including letters, poems and a legal treatise, I produce a narrative *from within* that focuses on the possibilities, contradictions, and ambiguities of this one life. By centering this study on Tāl’s own words, I recover a crucial indigenous voice from the past. My narrative examines Tāl’s mastery over the Islamic religious sciences, his extraordinary mobility in the pursuit of learning, and ultimately the claims that he made through the knowledge that he possessed. By interpreting Tāl’s scholarly production over time, I demonstrate that his life is a rare interpretive prism to investigate pertinent questions about Islamic practice, authority and politics in precolonial West Africa.

This precolonial past is significant because in the twentieth century long standing Islamic knowledge practices underwent an epistemological shift. The emergence of new forms of schooling, standardized curricula and an emphasis on reading, also transformed the historic roles of Muslim scholars. No longer the sole interpreters and transmitters of religious doctrine and practice, the majority of Muslims scholars became experts within the framework of emerging

nation-states. While these changes have drawn considerable scholarly analysis, the precolonial past continues to remain understudied.

## Introduction

It is perhaps rare that a performance of devotional poetry should serve as a part of a prelude to the declaration of war. But in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Niger Bend region of West Africa, likely in dry season of 1861, al-ḥājj ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd Fūtī Tāl sent a diplomatic envoy to the ruler of Masina, Aḥmad III, with a written copy of a poem. Along with a messenger outlining his demands, Tāl dispatched his best horsemen and a group of praise singers to his court. While the praise singers sang numerous verses from this poem, his horsemen performed several acrobatic feats with their guns intended to show their skills. The two had been jostling for control of the Middle Niger valley for the previous three years. Their attempts to negotiate a settlement had failed. Tāl wanted, once and for all, to demand that the ruler of Masina submit to his authority. In the midst of this display of power and poetry, the messenger, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, grabbed Aḥmad III, by his beard, and said “what prevented you from obeying the commands of Shaykh ‘Umar...you will now witness what will happen to you.”<sup>1</sup>

This dramatic moment captures the central concern of this study. A devotional text, in this case a three thousand-line poem in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad, is doing multivalent work for one of the most accomplished scholars of the nineteenth century. Sending *Safīnat al-sa‘āda li-ahl ḍu‘uf wa-l-najāda* [*The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak*], in written and embodied form to a political rival simultaneously enacted al-ḥājj ‘Umar Tāl’s scholarly, spiritual,

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<sup>1</sup> Muntaga Tāl, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur fi Sīra al-Ḥājj ‘Umar* (*Les Perles Rares sur la Vie d’El Hadji Omar*), (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2005), 402-403.

and political authority. The sheer difficulty of composing this poem signified Tāl's mastery over the Islamic religious sciences, including Arabic poetry. Through praising the Prophet Muḥammad, Tāl sought to demonstrate and prove his claims of having attained closeness to him. When Tāl used this poem in a later conflict, it also became linked to his emerging political authority. This study examines the ways in which Tāl's textual practice, and scholarship were constitutive of his authority—an authority that functioned in many registers, and shifted over time.

In outlining the connection between authority and textual practice, this study is also a historical ethnography.<sup>2</sup> While my study focuses on this single individual, I also analyze the insights that the life of this one scholar, and the multiple transformations he underwent, reveal about the nineteenth century in Western Africa. In this regard, I explore broader themes related to Islamic knowledge practices, writing practices, and the role of a Muslim scholar in mediating and articulating the Islamic intellectual tradition, through his words and actions, within the specific time he lived. In the most general sense, this is a story that explores the relationship between mastery, mobility and Islamic authority.

## **A Nineteenth Century Muslim Scholar**

Before explaining the broader details of this study, including how it differs from previous scholarship, it is perhaps best to first situate al-ḥājj 'Umar Tāl by outlining some of the key aspects of his life. Tāl was born in Halwar, Futa Toro, at the border of what are present-day Senegal and

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<sup>2</sup> I use "historical ethnography" similarly to what Eickelman has called a "Social biography." In his conceptualization, biography is a means to understand wider social and political realities. He uses a social biography to understand the shifting role of Islamic education and the changing relationships to knowledge in 20th century Morocco through the life of one an important rural judge Hajj 'Abd ar-Rahman Mansuri, see; Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*, (Princeton University Press, 1992).

Mauritania, in 1797.<sup>3</sup> This was a region that had an early settled Muslim population, and a long tradition of Islamic scholarship. It had also witnessed widespread social and political disintegration, after the collapse of the Futa Toro revolution in the late eighteenth century. One of the main outcomes of the revolution was that, for the first time, Muslim scholars took positions of political power in the region. But the ethos of Islamic religious practice, mores, and ethics that had inspired the revolution, disappeared within two generations from the ruling elites.<sup>4</sup> Tāl, and his family, who lived in this world remained distant from the centers of political and economic power. In what was typical for Muslim agriculturalists, they continued to tend to their fields, as well as cultivated Islamic religious knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis that his parents placed on Islamic learning played a crucial role in the young Tāl's life.<sup>6</sup> He would go on to master many of the Islamic religious sciences, including *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *'ilm al-ḥadīth* (the sciences of hadīth), and *tafsīr* (qur'anic exegesis), in Futa Toro, but perhaps also in Mauritania.<sup>7</sup> At some point, before 1820, he left Futa Toro and travelled to other parts of West Africa to continue his studies. This peripatetic quest for knowledge was an

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<sup>3</sup> Scholars provide several possible dates for when Tāl was born, including 1795 and 1798. I use 1797 for the year of Tāl's birth in this study following Muntaga Tāl's convention in his most recent and substantial biography of al-ḥājj 'Umar Tāl. For a discussion of the different dates for the year of Tāl's birth see; Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur*, 34-37.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter One of this study.

<sup>5</sup> One of Jeremy Berndt's main arguments is that in the twentieth century food producers also produced erudite scholars. I would argue that this was not a phenomena restricted to only the twentieth century. Instead throughout West African history, many erudite scholars came from agrarian families in the previous centuries, see; Jeremy Berndt "Closer than your jugular vein: Muslim intellectuals in a Malian Village, 1900-1960" PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2008. For a discussion on rural and urban Islam in the history of West Africa see; Nehemia Levtzion and Humphrey J. Fisher, editors, *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur*, 27-29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-40.

important aspect of Islamic education. It brought scholars and students from distant lands together, and underscored a vibrant network of learning and exchange in the region.<sup>8</sup>

Tāl's extraordinary mobility took him to Futa Jallon (Guinea), Sokoto (northern Nigeria), and Masina (Mali). Like Futa Toro, these were all polities that had also undergone radical transformations. Sometimes conceptualized as the West African "Jihād" states, they came into existence through the efforts of Muslim scholars who took political action and control.<sup>9</sup> These states were also important centers of learning, and scholarly production. Before Tāl had even reached the age of thirty, he had traversed thousands of miles, a feat that was uncommon in the early nineteenth century. His mobility enabled him to build an impressive network of social relationships over a wide geographic area in West Africa.

One specific outcome of his travels was that he met 'Abd al-Karīm al-Nāqil, who initiated him into the nascent Tijānī Sufī *ṭarīqa* (order), in Futa Jallon.<sup>10</sup> This Sufi brotherhood traced its origins to Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815), who had established a center in Fez, Morocco. The order became quite influential and important in North Africa. It also became important in present-day Mauritania during the founder's lifetime, through the work of one his students, Muḥammad al-Ḥāfīz (d. 1830). Al-Ḥāfīz belonged to the Idaw 'Alī, an established and important scholarly family in the region. It is through Mawlud Fal, a student of Muḥammad al-Ḥāfīz, that Tāl's teacher, al-Nāqil, had been granted an authorization to transmit and initiate disciples to the Tijāniyya in Sub-Saharan West Africa.

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion on peripatetic practices see; Ivor Wilks "The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest" in *The History of Islam in Africa*, Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels, eds. (Ohio University Press, 2000), 93-116. See also below on my discussion of clerical communities and the transmission of Islamic knowledge in West Africa.

<sup>9</sup> See my discussion of Jihād in West Africa below.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the Tijāniyya, particularly in Africa see; Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson, eds, *La Tijāniyya: Une Confrérie Musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Edited by (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

With al-Nāqil, Tāl decided to perform the ḥajj, in Mecca. His teacher, however, died before they embarked. Even as he grieved the loss of his teacher, however, Tāl's intentions remained firm. He acquired resources from family members in Futa Toro, and also tapped into the relationships he had created over the previous years. He made the perilous journey across the Sahara and arrived in the Ḥijāz in 1827. While his intention was to fulfill the final pillar of Islamic religious practice, he also met another Tijānī *shaykh*, Muḥammad al-Ghālī, who was a direct student of al-Tijānī. He took al-Ghālī as a guide. After three years of instruction, he appointed Tāl as a *khalīfa* (deputy) of the Tijāniyya.

Tāl's previous teacher, al-Nāqil, was only a *muqaddam* (representative) of the order with limited authorization. In contrast, Tāl had become among the highest officials in the order. He was authorized to spread its teachings, and initiate disciples, without restrictions. Though *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) has long played an important role in the religious lives of West Africans, it is unclear what the specific role that organized Sufi brotherhoods played prior to the twentieth century. It is clear, however, that through Tāl's efforts the Tijāniyya became fundamental to the religious lives of millions of West African Muslims.

Within a few short years after his return from the ḥajj in 1830, Tāl became one of the most significant religious figures in West Africa. As a scholar with some repute and a Tijānī *shaykh*, he began to establish a community with numerous disciples and followers. It is also from this position of religious authority that he began to critique established political authority, as well as attempted to reform the religious practices of West African Muslims. These actions brought him numerous enemies. While the reciprocal relationship that he had maintained with different Muslim rulers afforded him protection, through his criticism he established himself as an alternative site of power. When he could no longer continue his teachings and program of moral reform, he decided

to move away from established Muslim authority. Consequently, he moved to a non-Muslim territory, and established a new community in Dingiray, in Tamba (present-day Senegal).

It is in Dingiray that he combined his religious and spiritual authority, with his new and emerging political role as the head of an independent collectivity. Without recourse to the protection of any established Muslim ruler, he began to stockpile weapons and fortify his new settlement as a means to protect his community. When the king of Tamba, Yimba, who had earlier invited him to settle on his territory, attacked him in 1852, the Tījānī *shaykh* took up arms and retaliated. Though he was justified in taking up arms to defend his community, he soon become embroiled in regional affairs.

For the next twelve years, in what has come to be known as Tāl's *jihād*, he raised an army through his wide network of students and sympathizers throughout West Africa. He launched several campaigns in eastern Senegambia, as well as in the Middle Niger valley. As a consequence of his actions, he battled against the French, who in the 1850s had started to assert more influence in the region; he conquered the powerful Bambara kingdoms of Karta and Segou. Then he prepared to mobilize his army against the Muslim polity of Masina, in 1862. Though he successfully conquered its capital, Ḥamdullāhi, his reign was short lived. In the face of increasing revolts against his heavy-handed rule, he died rather unceremoniously in cave in the foothills of Mali, in 1864.

This brief biography highlights the numerous transformations that Tāl underwent, along with the significant shifts in his authority, over the course of his life. In this study, I attempt to highlight and investigate these different layers and aspects of Tāl's life, through a careful engagement with his own voluminous Arabic writing. I attempt to place his own words at the center of how he understood his actions within the nineteenth century, and demonstrate how these

words constituted the different forms of authority that he performed. By focusing on Tāl's own scholarly production, my work differs significantly from the approaches previous scholars have used to study him. More specifically, scholars have generally understood him as a political figure, who used his spiritual authority to mobilize tens of thousands of people. While I address the importance of the political and spiritual dimensions of his life, I also suggest that it is important to focus on him as a scholar, or an intellectual, and address how religious, spiritual, and political authority became imbricated within the same person.

I now turn to an overview of the scholarly literature on Tāl, in order to discuss the normative frameworks that scholars have used to understand his life. Typically, scholars have focused on his *jihād* in order to conceptualize him as a state builder, or focused on his spiritual authority through the lens of charisma. In both approaches, it is his political authority that has drawn considerable scholarly attention. By interrogating these normative approaches to Tāl, I also explore some of the larger problems in the broader literature on the study of Islam in Africa, within which these approaches are rooted. In this regard, I highlight the importance of the traditional roles of Muslim clerics as pacifists and investigate the eighteenth and twentieth century *jihād* movements in juxtaposition to this normative stance. I also explain the problem with understanding charisma as only a political tool at the expense of understanding the broader social and intellectual roles of Sufi *shaykhs*. In demonstrating the significant gaps in this literature, I explain my own approach to Tāl as a scholar, and detail the importance of Arabic source material for the study of Islam in African history. Specifically, I indicate several alternative lines of inquiry and questions that can be posed on Tāl's life, as a means to better understand the role of Muslim scholars, Islamic knowledge practices, and authority in the nineteenth century.

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### **Political Authority, *Jihād* and Clerical Communities**

Scholars have generally emphasized the political dimensions of Tāl's life as a state builder, and more specifically focused extensively on his *jihād*. Relying exclusively on French colonial sources, early scholars reproduced many of the anxieties that French officials had about Tāl's growing influence in West Africa.<sup>11</sup> Tāl's political and military movement had alarmed the French, at a time when they desired to expand their own commercial and territorial interests in the region. Consequently, these early scholars categorized him as a Muslim fanatic, whose religious convictions set him on a course to both covert non-Muslims and to spread the Tijāniyya by force. Moreover, his actions in West Africa were motivated by his alleged desire to become a powerful merchant and ruler. These early scholars conceptualized his polity as the "Tukolor Empire," which was assumed to be a counterweight and threat to France's own emerging empire in the region.

A different set of scholars began to reassess Tāl's legacy and critiqued many of the broader conclusions of this literature. One of the earliest full length monographs on this important nineteenth century figure was Ferdinand Dumont's *L'Anti Sultan*.<sup>12</sup> In Dumont's conceptualization, Tāl was a reformer and a counterweight to traditional political authority. He was an "anti-sultan" who wanted to build a new polity based on his moral convictions. This comprehensive work took into consideration different aspects of Tāl's life, and synthesized a number of French sources, as well as some of Tāl's own work in translation. Through a reading of

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<sup>11</sup> For instance see; Alfred Le Chatelier, *L'Islam en Afrique Occidentale*, (Paris: Seinheil, 1899), Vincent Monteil, *L'islam noir*, (Paris: 1964), and B.O. Oloruntimehin, *The Segu Tukolor Empire*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Fernand Dumont, *L'anti-Sultan ou Al-Hajj Omar Tal du Fouta, Combattant de la Foi (1794 1864)* (Nouvelles Editions Africaines: Dakar-Abidjan, 1979).

primary source material, Dumont attempted to understand the religious and political motivations for his *jihād*, and the reasons for why he allegedly wanted to convert “pagans.”

A few years after Dumont’s work, David Robinson published *The Holy War of ‘Umar Tal*.<sup>13</sup> Though Robinson provides a broad reading of Tāl’s life, as the title of this work suggests, his main focus was to explain the origins and consequences of Tāl’s *jihād*. He utilized a number of chronicles, French sources, and oral historical interviews to document Tāl’s interaction with different social and political groups in West Africa. Further, he outlined the lives of many of Tāl’s important followers, investigated why Tāl was able to recruit soldiers so effectively, and provided crucial details on many of his campaigns. This social history has remained one of the single most important works on Tāl’s political career.

A more recent work that pushes Robinson’s insights further is Madina Ly-Tall’s *Un Islam Militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe Siècle*.<sup>14</sup> While the work is not as expansive as *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, Ly-Tall reinterpreted and analyzed Tāl’s relationship with the French as anti-colonial resistance. Incorporating a wealth of oral historical interviews, and documentary evidence, she attempted to understand him through his primary role as a religious figure. Further, she used his religious ideas as an interpretive lens, to explain his social actions, as well the beginnings of his *jihād*. The work provides crucial historical details on many of the polities that Tāl interacted with, and documents the history of many of his followers. One of the key strengths of the work is to demonstrate the complex relationships that West Africans held with the changing French presence in the region, and how Tāl’s movement found success because of the growing resentment and frustration against this presence.

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<sup>13</sup> David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Madina Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe Siècle: La Tijaniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyu contre les Pouvoirs traditionnels et la Puissance coloniale*, (Paris, L’Harmattan, 1991).

Taken together, these different scholars have provided crucial insights on Tāl. Specifically, they have offered different interpretative frameworks to understand his military actions, and in the process documented important campaigns of his movement, his social and political relationships, and motivations for why he and others took up arms. Yet the central focus of all of these works was on understanding and analyzing his *jihād*.

The emphasis on *jihād* is not entirely unwarranted. Tāl's movement was one example of what was a much broader trend in eighteenth and nineteenth century West Africa. Numerous Muslim scholars, mainly Fulbe or Fulani speakers, took up arms for a host of different religious, political and economic ends.<sup>15</sup> Partly in reaction to the consequences of the Transatlantic slave trade, as well as increasing European encroachment on regional affairs, these Muslim scholars wrestled political power from temporal rulers, and established their own putative Islamic theocracies.<sup>16</sup>

Yet despite the significance of these movements, scholars have normally understood them in quite basic terms, at the expense of understanding the complex social and political contexts within which these movements emerged. More importantly, the analytic frameworks that scholars have employed to study these movements, including Tāl's, reify specific assumptions about the relationship between Islam, violence and *jihad*, which have their roots in colonial historiography. Particularly, French colonialists conceptualized Muslim scholars as dangerous. They emphasized the alleged *jihād*ist tendencies of such scholars, who they feared would mobilize local populations

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, see; H.F.C. Smith, "A Neglected Theme of West African History: The Islamic Revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (December 1961), 169-185, Murray D. Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, (New York: 1967), David Robinson, "Revolutions in the Western Sudan" in *The History of Islam in Africa*, Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels, eds. (Ohio University Press, 2000), 131-152 and Michael Gomez, *Pragmatism in the Age of Jihad: The precolonial State of Bundu*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002). For a timeline of these various *jihād* movements see; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Jihād in West Africa During the Age of Revolutions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the effects of the Transatlantic slave trade on these movements see; Rudolph T. Ware, "Slavery and Abolition in Islamic Africa: The Long Nineteenth Century, 1776-1905" in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 4, forthcoming, 2016.

against colonial rule.<sup>17</sup> In criticizing the overemphasis of *jihād* in studies on Islam in Africa, Soares argues “I would like to emphasize that by focusing on jihad and relying upon rather mechanical models of reform the historiography has tended to create the illusion of a teleology. In other words, Muslims somehow seem programmed to fight jihad as they put Islamic doctrine – apparently assumed to be relatively timeless and unchanging – into practice.”<sup>18</sup> The implication of Soares’ critique is not that the *jihād* movements are unimportant, but instead they are not the *only* worthy topics when it comes to the study of Islam in West Africa. Part of the problem is that these movements are studied as a given, since it is assumed that *jihād* is intrinsic to Islamic practice. Therefore, the base assumption is that Muslim scholars, like Tāl, by definition, would later become *jihādists*.

This model and approach to *jihād* in West Africa obscures the historically contingent aspects of Tāl’s life, as well as misinterprets the role of Muslim clerics over the *longue durée* in the region. In emphasizing Tal’s *jihād*, and focusing extensively on his political career, the important intellectual and social dynamics of his life remain unstudied. In addition, his large corpus of scholarship, the influence it had in West Africa, and the specific forms of authority that he wielded remain ignored. Though he did take up arms later in his life, he had also belonged to the normative traditions and practices of Islam in West Africa. In this regard, the primary role of Muslim scholars was to teach and transmit Islamic knowledge through peaceful means. It is worth looking at this broader history, as a way to contextualize and understand Tāl as a scholar first, who then also happened to engage in *jihād*.

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<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Soares, “The Historiography of Islam in West Africa: An Anthropologist’s view” in *The Journal of African History*, vol. 55:1 (March 2014), 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

While commercial networks played an important role in connecting sub-Saharan West Africa to the wider world of Islam, traders themselves played marginal roles in the spread of the faith in the region. Rather than merchants, it was the work of indigenous clerics, those trained in the Islamic religious sciences, that became central to a sprawling network of teaching, learning, and religious practice. Put differently, mercantile connections created the necessary pathways and underpinnings that allowed religious specialists to traverse great distances, and provided them material means to execute their vocation. Through the use of ink, preaching and their examples, these specialists became durable exponents of the faith, while forging new Muslim communities throughout West Africa. Religious scholars transmitted the exoteric, and the esoteric dimensions of Islam, as well as played key social roles as healers, diviners, and mediators.

The specific evolution of a clerisy in West Africa requires some explanation. In West Africa, social organization was traditionally based on a tripartite classification between freeborn, caste groups and slaves.<sup>19</sup> Caste groups were endogamous occupational specialists. They were often involved in “metalworking, music-making and entertainment, leatherworking and woodworking.”<sup>20</sup> With the emergence of Islam in West Africa over a thousand years ago, Muslim religious specialists were also incorporated within this wider social logic. At the same time, however, the international nature of Islamic learning and the emphasis on travel gave many clerical groups “an elasticity and regional scope that other categories generally lacked.”<sup>21</sup> Thus while Muslim clerics were considered occupational specialists, through travel, teaching, and

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<sup>19</sup> Tal Tamari, “The Development of Caste Systems in West Africa” in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 32 no.2 (1991), 226. See also; Tal Tamari, “De l’apparition et de l’expansion des groupes de spécialistes endogames en Afrique: essai d’explication” in *Métallurgie du fer et Sociétés africaines: Bilans et nouveaux paradigmes dans la recherche anthropologique et archéologique*, edited by Caroline Robion-Brunner and Bruno Martinelli (Hadrian Books, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 83.

intermarriage they created much wider geographic intellectual and social networks than other ethnically based caste groups.

There are numerous Arabic accounts that highlight the emergence of clerical communities in West Africa.<sup>22</sup> One account comes from the Cordoban geographer, Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakri (d. 1094), who provided us with an example of one of the earliest Muslim communities. In 1068, he published an expansive geographic work, with a section dedicated to West Africa “based on information he gathered from merchants and other visitor to the lands of the Sudan beyond the Sahara.”<sup>23</sup> In reference to Ghana, nearly four hundred years old by the time al-Bakri had written his work, he explained that the city of Ghana consisted of two different towns. He then wrote that “one of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims, is large and possesses twelve mosques, in one of which they assemble for the Friday prayer. There are salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars.”<sup>24</sup> Separate from this town was where the king and other inhabitants, who were not Muslim, lived. This spatial segregation that al-Bakri noted was in line with the occupational specialization of Muslim clerical communities. Consequently they lived in distinct quarters away from their non-Muslim neighbors, non-Muslim religious specialists, as well as ruling elites.<sup>25</sup>

Although Muslim clerics maintained spatial and religious autonomy from other groups, they still entered reciprocal relationships with ruling elites. With respect to Ghana, al-Bakri also explained “in the king’s town, and not far from his court of justice, is a mosque where Muslims

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<sup>22</sup> Two important works have reproduced much of this source material, see: J.F.P. Hopkins and Nehemia Levtzion, editors, *Corpus of early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), and Nehemia Levtzion and Jay Spaulding, *Medieval West Africa: Views from Arab Scholars and Merchants* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Levtzion and Spaulding, *Medieval West Africa*, 9

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>25</sup> Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 78.

who arrive at his court pray.”<sup>26</sup> He further noted that, perhaps because of their literacy, “the king’s interpreters, the official in charge of his treasury and the majority of his ministers are Muslims.”<sup>27</sup> The point was that Muslims played important roles at the court, while balancing their independence from the court through spatially segregating their community. Further, in describing the king’s town in Ghana, al-Bakri also wrote that there were “domed buildings and groves and thickets where the sorcerers of these people, men in charge of the religious cult, live. In them too are their idols and the tombs of their kings.”<sup>28</sup> Here, al-Bakri was describing that in the king’s town there were non-Muslim religious specialists as well as temples. His description highlights that the Muslims in Ghana created mutually beneficial relationships with political elites, who also continued to maintain their own religious practices.

This was a “pacifist” tradition that underscored an authentic African expression of Islam, and was, in contrast to the assumptions about the *jihād* movements, the normative avenue for the spread of Islam throughout the region prior to colonial rule.<sup>29</sup> Writing about the medieval kingdom of Mali, which replaced Ghana, and where normative clerical practices became firmly rooted, Sanneh notes that clerics did not impose Islam on non-Muslims. This was a “soft” Islam, which was built on pragmatic concerns that ensured the reproduction of the clerical class and their important social roles as teachers. Moreover, he argues “this Islam did not ignore or seek to eradicate jihad; it merely characterized it as a harmful exception.”<sup>30</sup> While this potentiality existed, Muslim clerics did not find reason to engage in *jihād*. Instead, like in the case of Ghana, they withdrew from centers of political authority. Though they aided political elites, and used their

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<sup>26</sup> Levtzion and Spaulding, *Medieval West Africa*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> In a wide ranging work, Lamin Sanneh has analyzed this pacifist tradition of Islam, and argued against the normative frameworks that paint Islam as either “syncretic” or highlight “jihād” in studies on Islam in Africa. See; Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad*, 6.

literacy in order to benefit the state, they did not wield political, or more specifically, worldly authority themselves.

The pattern that al-Bakri documented in Ghana became the norm. Muslim clerics built communities on the basis of political neutrality, and maintained spatial segregation from others. In documenting the history of several such Muslim communities, Sanneh argues “Muslim religious leaders created these centers in areas with easy access to towns and trading routes but without the religious leaders turning into traders; the centers were similarly separated from the larger Muslim community.” Muslim clerics within these communities also created specific pacts with temporal rulers, in order to insure their independence. The normal terms of such pacts, Sanneh explains, was that “rulers would not enter the centers except on a prearranged schedule and for the purpose of undertaking religious exercises. The clerics abjured political office for themselves and required rulers to recognize this clerical neutrality.”<sup>31</sup> Since they were not a threat to the political establishment, this aided Muslim clerics to create wide scholarly networks that cut across different polities, as well as aided in their mobility.<sup>32</sup>

The widespread adoption of the pacifist tradition of Muslim clerics, first witnessed in Ghana and Mali, throughout West Africa owes its roots to the Jakhanke scholarly tradition. This tradition traces its origins to the fifteenth century scholar, al-Ḥājj Sālim Suware, who was “associated with the important early Western Sudanese Muslim centre of Jagha (Diakha)—Jagha-Ba, ‘big Jagha’” in the Middle Niger Valley.<sup>33</sup> It is not clear whether any of al-Ḥājj Sālim’s writings survive, but many of his students transmitted his teachings and his legacy remains

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ivor Wilks, “The Transmission of Islamic Learning in the Western Sudan” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, edited by Jack Goody (Cambridge University Press, 1968), 178. There is some disagreement with this date. See Lamin O. Sanneh, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia* (London: University Press of America, 1989), 16-18. For a more recent discussion on Ḥājj Sālim Suware see; Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad*, 80-83.

preserved in oral histories and numerous hagiographies. In Wilks' view it was al-Ḥājj Sālim's "tendency to reject *Jihad*, battle as an instrument of social and political change" and "the ideal of withdrawal from secular political change," that allowed scholars of the Suwarian tradition to not only expand outside of major Muslim centers, but also coexist peacefully with non-Muslims.<sup>34</sup> In essence the doctrinal aspects of the Suwarian tradition allowed Muslim minority populations to migrate into new lands and thrive. Further, the Jakhanke emphasis on Islamic education ensured the preservation of the Muslim community, and the transmission of knowledge in these regions. In relation to al-Ḥājj Sālim, Wilks argues that "over a large part of West Africa the institutional framework within which teaching has been organized seems largely his work."<sup>35</sup> The point is that the specific pacifist tradition that emerged from the Jakhanke outlines the normative stance of Muslim clerics towards political authority, as well as highlights their primary function as teachers.

The narrow scholarly focus on *jihād* as something that is timeless and intrinsic to the practices of Muslims in West Africa obscures this older scholarly tradition. More importantly it silences the fact that all the leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth century *jihād* movements had initially belonged to this older tradition. With regards to Tāl, he had maintained political neutrality for almost two decades after he returned from the pilgrimage. Further, during this period, he spent his time teaching, initiating disciples into the Tijāniyya, and writing numerous works.

The question that needs to be posed in relation to Tāl, and other leaders of the West African *jihād* movements is that if the pacifist tradition was normative, then what political, social and economic transformations caused some Muslim clerics to take up arms and breach this tradition? One possible answer that still requires investigations is that all of these leaders emerged from rural areas, and did not have strong ties to established Muslim clerical communities or centers of

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<sup>34</sup> Wilks, *The Transmission of Islamic Learning in Western Sudan*, 179.

<sup>35</sup> Wilks, *The Transmission of Islamic Learning in Western Sudan*, 179.

political power.<sup>36</sup> Consequently they were outsiders to established political and religious authority, and were armed with a particular understanding of religious reform sought to enact their ideas. Whatever the precise reasons were for this breach, scholars have also not examined the implication and consequences of these movements for the knowledge practices of West African Muslims. For the first time in West African history, these figures brought together different conceptions of authority, which were previously considered separate. Like in the case of Tāl, this constituted a new formation of a Muslim scholar who both wielded religious authority, and political authority simultaneously. It is ultimately the teleological understanding of *jihād* that has prevented scholars of West Africa from probing this new formation, and explaining how it affected the older pacifist tradition, which did not disappear altogether.

### **Charisma, Sufism and Spiritual Authority**

Rooted in the *jihād* narrative is also another broad approach to Tāl, where scholars tried to understand his wide appeal through a simplified understanding of his spiritual authority, or relied on a vague and obscure understanding of charisma.<sup>37</sup> One example of this approach is John Ralph Willis' *In the Path of Allah: The Passion of al-Hajj 'Umar*.<sup>38</sup> In this work, Willis attempted to frame Tāl as a mystic whose historical actions were modelled on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. In this regard, Tāl's *jihād* was simply a manifestation of his charisma, and his actions were an enactment of what he understood as a divine plan. Willis sought to critically analyze some of Tāl's own work and to interpret his movement in relation to them. Though there

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<sup>36</sup> Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> One of the earliest works that attempted to understand the connection between Tāl's spiritual authority and his *jihād* was Omar Jah's dissertation, see; Omar Jah, "Sufism and Nineteenth Century Jihad Movements in West Africa: A Case Study of Al-Hājj 'Umar al-Fūtī's philosophy of *jihād* and its Sufi Basis" Phd dissertation (McGill University, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> John Ralph Willis, *In the Path of Allah: The Passion of Al-Hajj 'Umar, an Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam* (London: Frank Cass, 1989).

are some important historical insights in this work, Willis replaced serious academic analysis for Orientalists tropes of Islamic mysticism and an *essentialized* version of the Prophet's life.<sup>39</sup>

The explanatory power of charisma also played an important role in John Hanson's *Migration, Jihad, and Muslim Authority in West Africa*.<sup>40</sup> While the work focuses extensively on Niuro, Mali, especially after Tāl's death, he dedicated a chapter to analyze Tāl's authority, and his ability to recruit thousands of followers in Futa Toro. He argued "many scholars use charisma to refer to any leader who appears to forge strong emotional ties to his followers." In Hanson's conceptualization Tāl was a Sufi *shaykh*, who created such emotional ties with his follower, and therefore "had charisma."<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, he followed closely with Weber's understanding of charisma as revolutionary when it challenged the status quo, and by definition was unstable and temporary. On the other hand, he modified Weber's understanding by emphasizing that the relationship that Tāl's followers created with him were based on material interests. Under this modified Weberian definition, Tāl's political authority was tied not just to his charisma, but also to his ability to fulfill the alleged material interests of his followers as a Sufi *shaykh*. This relationship then became the basis of his *jihād* movement.

This approach to Tāl shares in a body of literature where the notion of charisma is understood as political power and is subsequently linked with Sufism and Sufi *shaykhs*. This relationship is perhaps best exemplified in a edited volume entitled *Charisma and Brotherhood*

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<sup>39</sup> For a critique of this work see; John Hunwick, rev. "In the Path of Allah: The Passion of al-Hajj Umar. An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam by John Ralph Willis" in International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Nov., 1991), pp. 672-676.

<sup>40</sup> John H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

*in African Islam*.<sup>42</sup> The editors, Donal B. Cruise O'Brien and Christian Coulon, argue that "Sufism or Islamic mysticism is required for the production of this Muslim charisma: one might indeed see Sufism as providing an Islamic handbook to the production of charisma."<sup>43</sup> Following Weber they consider that charisma and charismatic authority are rooted in social crisis.<sup>44</sup> Consequently it is the Sufi brotherhoods, which underscore charisma, in the face of social crisis that produce charismatic leaders. These leaders then play the essential role as power brokers and a counterweight to the political establishment.

This specific understanding of charisma and its relationship to Sufism owes its genealogies to colonial historiography and the language that colonialists used to define Sufi *shaykhs*. This is clear in the commonly used term "marabouts." A corruption of the Arabic *murābiṭ*, in the French colonial imagination, "marabout became a label for village imams, Qur'ān teachers, amulet makers, and local as well as regional saints."<sup>45</sup> It subsequently came to denote backwardness, superstitions, and the exploitation of the masses. The notion of the marabout also became conflated with politics. In this case, Seesemann argues that "many simply take for granted the fact that these leaders wield political influence, as if such influence were an intrinsic feature of maraboutism."<sup>46</sup> At bottom, the basic assumption is that Sufi *shaykhs* have charisma, and by definition, this is always tied to political gain. Moreover, since it was assumed that the masses did not know any differently they were susceptible to the ruses of such charismatic leaders.

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<sup>42</sup> Donal B. Cruise O'Brien and Christian Coulon, eds, *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam* (Clarendon Press, 1988). Despite the title, some of the contributors did not use charisma in their articles, and there was never a consensus among the various contributors on what this terms meant and how to apply it usefully to the study of Sufism.

<sup>43</sup> Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niassé and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

This instrumentalist usage of charisma as a means of political gain obscures the complex role of Sufism and Sufi *shaykhs* in the history of West Africa. If we are to continue to use the term charisma, then a more expansive understanding beyond the political is required. One approach has been to reconceptualize the concept of charisma as *baraka*. Though the two terms are not synonymous, *baraka* is thought to capture a wider set of social dynamics, and meanings. Further, unlike charisma, *baraka* has a much longer genealogy within Sufism itself. In explaining this term, Babou in his study of the Muridiyya defines *baraka* as “power that emanates from God, which He confers as He wishes but often on uncommonly pious people, on the family of the Prophet Muhammad, and on his words enshrined in the Quran.”<sup>47</sup> While any person can have *baraka*, Babou also argues that it is normally reserved for the pious. Further, *baraka* can carry over to the words of the Qur’an, and other material objects, as well as to the dead. In this conceptualization *baraka* as a specific form of power carries a much broader meaning than the relationship between charisma and political authority.

Another approach is to maintain the word charisma, but shift its meaning. In this regard, Soares explains that it is important to unhinge charisma from an emphasis on social crisis. Instead he argues that it is important to look carefully at “how individual Muslims might be distinguished by way of unusual characteristics or attributes, the rise of exceptional Muslim religious specialists, and their sometimes quite varied careers.”<sup>48</sup> In Soares’ conceptualization charisma is tied to secret, or esoteric knowledge. Though the access of such knowledge is traditionally the domain of Sufism, one of Soares’ important insights is to place this idea in the broader cultural context of West Africa. In this regard, charisma is not simply the exclusive site

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<sup>47</sup> Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Ohio University Press 2007), 8.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 33.

for Sufi *shaykhs*, nor is it tied exclusively to Muslims.<sup>49</sup> Instead the specific relationships between access to secret knowledge and power are shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims over a broad geographic region.

Soares' focus on claims to esoteric knowledge and its relationship to power, and Babou's helpful elaboration on *baraka* move the discussion away from a simplistic understanding of charisma as political power in discussion on Sufism in West Africa. We are, however, still left with a problem. Since the focus on political power has dominated scholarly discussions of Sufism, this has led to serious misunderstandings of the specific relationships that West Africans make with Sufism and Sufi *shaykhs*. In other words, rarely have scholars penetrated beyond a superficial understanding of Sufism, to explore more carefully the intellectual, doctrinal, spiritual and experiential aspects of the discipline. Further complicating matters is anthropological studies which have often conflated Sufism with popular Islam, as scholars attempted to look for "authentic" lived Islamic practice.<sup>50</sup> This was in opposition to textual and intellectual traditions that sustained and supported these practices.<sup>51</sup> In other words, scholars have not appreciated the linkages between practice and intellectual ideas, including texts, as well as how the work of Sufi *shaykhs* was rooted within their historical and social contexts.

The dichotomy between "popular religion" of the masses and the religion of the Sufi *shaykhs* as separate entities obscures more than it reveals. In arguing against the conceptualization between the "little" or popular religion and the "great" the religion of the intellectuals, Seesemann notes that these are products of academic inquiry rather than the social and cultural realities of Muslim societies. He argues for a more holistic approach to these categories of understanding in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>50</sup> For instance; Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) and Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>51</sup> Seesemann, *The Divine Flood*, 9.

order to explain how they intersect, and mutually reinforce one another. By viewing the interlinkages between the “little” and the “great”, Seesemann argues, “Sufism becomes an arena in which complex social and spiritual relationships play out on a variety of interconnected levels, each of which becomes subject to value judgments oscillating between notions of great and little.”<sup>52</sup> The significant point is that Sufi *shaykhs* are not independent from their historical and social contexts, and their relationship to the masses is relational. For this reason, Seesemann argues “the attempt to conceive of the sphere of the virtuosi as distinct from the world of the masses would amount to separating the two sides of the same coin.”<sup>53</sup>

The implication of this discussion is that charismatic authority or saintly authority is public, social and relational.<sup>54</sup> Though charisma can have a political manifestation, an insistence on this definition is narrow and limited. Saintly authority (*wilāya*) has a much broader set of intersections, and believers tend to view such authority in quite different terms than what the majority of scholarship on Sufism in West Africa concludes. Cornell, in his path-breaking work on sainthood in Moroccan Sufism, has argued for a much broader understanding of the function of the saint. He first explains that sainthood was a social phenomenon as much as it was tied to discourse and doctrine. These two elements went hand in hand. Sainthood required an audience to authenticate it, thus the idea that someone could have saintly authority meant that it had to be public, and experienced by others to be authenticated. He then argues “the saint was also a master of the knowable—a person who could mediate between different symbolic universes, whether they be urban—rural, esoteric—exoteric, literate—illiterate, Sufi—non-Sufi, or juridical—popular.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (University of Texas Press, 1998), 273.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The important point here is that the saint's authority is based on knowing, and the ability to work in multiple domains at the same time. This ability to across modalities, and the knowledge that a saint possessed was intrinsically tied to power.

While power and knowledge went hand in hand, this was not a unidirectional process. While saints use their knowledge for a variety of purposes, the specific relationships that they created with followers, and the demands of their followers mattered. The masses were conscious actors with different desires and interests, and it was important for the saint to fulfill those desires, or at the very least speak to them. For this reason Seesemann also argues “we thus have to conceive of the transmission of knowledge not in terms of simple transfer or as a one-way flow of ideas, but as an interactive communicative processes.”<sup>56</sup> In this conceptualization a Sufi *shaykh* belongs to many different fields of relations that are not simply based on political concerns.

It is for this reason that applying a vague notion of charisma to Tāl and equating this to a function of his desire for political authority is clearly limiting. As a consequence, scholars have ignored the broader social and intellectual roles Tāl played in nineteenth century West Africa. For example, scholars have not investigated how Tāl took a relatively unknown and marginal Sufi brotherhood in Sub-Saharan West Africa, and transformed it into one of the most powerful and important. Moreover, scholars have not looked at the specific ways that he constructed his authority as a Tijānī *khalīfa*. In other words, we do not know what role the claims he made about secret knowledge, the numerous dreams that he narrated, and his ideas on Sufi doctrine and practice played in how he constructed his spiritual authority.

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<sup>56</sup> Seesemann, *The Divine Flood*, 20.

## **The Scholar and his Scholarship: A New Approach to Tāl**

While previous scholarship has enhanced our understanding of Tāl, this literature also has significant shortcomings. In order to pose new questions, and investigate other dimensions of Tāl's life, it is important to move away from simply viewing him as only a political power broker and a Sufi *shaykh*. Though these aspects are crucial to any understanding of this pivotal nineteenth century figure, the specific way that scholars have categorized Tāl, however, does not adequately capture the multiple layers and complexities of his life. For this reason, I argue that is important to view Tāl as a scholar or an intellectual, and focus carefully on his scholarly production, which has remained underutilized in previous studies of him.

I conceptualize Tāl as a scholar by borrowing from Steve Feierman's usage of the term "intellectual." In his usage, this term comes to define those individuals who "engage in socially recognized, directive, educative, or expressive activities."<sup>57</sup> Intellectuals in this definition play an important role as educators, and crucially their positions are socially mediated. In other words, while their intellectual practice and production matter, it is important to also recognize that "they are defined by their place within an ensemble of social relations."<sup>58</sup> In this regard, Muslim scholars, as I have discussed, are socially recognized, as scholars, because of their training and their ability to mediate Islamic knowledge to others. Their mastery over the Islamic religious sciences, their *baraka*, and their roles as healers, set them apart from ordinary believers. Yet their production and intellectual activities speak to the broader context within which ordinary believers live. It is

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<sup>57</sup> Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

ultimately from this socially constituted position, and dialogical relationship with other believers that defines how the knowledge that scholars possess translates into power.

Framing Tāl as a scholar, or an intellectual, does not foreclose the possibility to engage with his spiritual and political authority. Instead, my conceptualization ties these different dimensions of his life to his religious authority. Following Hunwick, I conceptualize religious authority to be “an assumed authority to guide and order people’s social life – and to varying extents economic and political – lives in accordance with an interpretation of what the holders of such authority claim to be divine authority, which overrides authority established by ‘secular’ powers.”<sup>59</sup> This authority was rooted in Tāl’s mastery over the Islamic religious sciences, and was partly demonstrated through his scholarship.

Tāl’s deep erudition and scholarship provide a strong counterexample to the idea that sub-Saharan West Africans practice an exotic, unlettered and isolated version of Islam spread.<sup>60</sup> In recent years, finer grained scholarship has challenged these ideas to engage more critically with Muslim communities in African history. Using a variety of methodologies and sources scholars have provided insights into contemporary Muslim politics, revival movements, and shifting relationships to Islamic practice and knowledge.<sup>61</sup> They have highlighted the important role of religious specialists, the function of Qur’an schools in shaping religious sensibilities, and

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<sup>59</sup> Hunwick, “Secular Power and Religious Authority in Muslim Society: The Case of Songhay” in *Journal of African History*, vol. 37 (1996), 176.

<sup>60</sup> One example is: David Wasterlund and Eva Evers Rosander, eds. *African Islam and Islam in Africa* (Ohio University Press: 1998). In the parlance of French colonialists this version of Islam was depicted as “*islam noir*” or “Black Islam.” For a discussion on this term see; Jean-Louis Triaud, “Giving a Name to Islam South of the Sahara: An Adventure in Taxonomy” in *The Journal of African History*, vol. 55 no.1 (2014), 3-15.

<sup>61</sup> See for instance; Robert Launay, *Beyond the Stream: Islam & Society in a West African Town* (University of California Press, 1992), Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for Removal and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Brill, 2003), Adeline Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), and Ousman Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islam Reforms* (Brill, 2012).

transformations in contemporary Sufi communities.<sup>62</sup> This scholarship has also provided us with detailed historical narratives of West African Muslim intellectuals, like Amadu Bamba, and Ibrahim Niase.<sup>63</sup> Despite this growing body of scholarly work, much remains obscure about the philosophy of Islamic learning prior to the twentieth century. It is important to begin to produce such scholarly analysis of nineteenth century figures and their historical worlds. A turn to Tāl, and his life provides offers a corrective to this historical lacuna.

Framing Tāl as a scholar is also important because in the twentieth century long established Islamic knowledge practices underwent an “epistemic shift.”<sup>64</sup> Competing alongside older ways of knowing, textbooks, classrooms, and standardized examinations became important in the transmission, classification and authentication of Islamic knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Changing sensibilities and relationships to texts created new interpretive frameworks.<sup>66</sup> They altered the social and intellectual roles of Muslim scholars.<sup>67</sup> Though modern Islamic practices and methods of learning have drawn considerable scholarly attention, we know very little about older Islamic knowledge practices and their enduring presence.<sup>68</sup> This produces a serious distortion in contemporary scholarship, as far more is written on the new ways of knowing than on the ways they are supposed

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<sup>62</sup> Lamin O. Sanneh, *The Jakhanké Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia*, (London: University Press of America, 1989), Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy*, and Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad*.

<sup>63</sup> Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, Seesemann, *The Divine Flood*, Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niase* (Brill, 2015).

<sup>64</sup> Louis Brenner, *Controlling knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*, (Indiana University Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>65</sup> Dale F. Eickelman. *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976) and Indira Falk Gesink. *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam*, (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2010).

<sup>66</sup> Brinkley Messick. *The Calligraphic States: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Samira Haj. *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Muhammad Qasim Zaman. *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, (Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>68</sup> Robert H. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (eds). *Schooling Islam: The culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, (Princeton University, 2007), and Robert Launay, editor, *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

to have replaced. Thus an investigation into Tāl's life provides insights into the function and role of Muslim scholars prior to colonial rule in West Africa.

While new and emerging methodological concerns have produced important scholarship on the practice of Islam and the lives of Muslims in West Africa in the colonial and postcolonial periods, only a few scholars have utilized Arabic manuscript sources. This is despite the fact that numerous catalogues, including the five volume series *Arabic Literature of Africa*, initially edited by John Hunwick, demonstrate the wealth of Arabic source material available for the study of the political, economic and religious history of West Africa.<sup>69</sup> This scholarly reluctance is partly the consequence of an older assumption that African societies did not produce written documents.<sup>70</sup> This assumption continues to influence the sources scholars use in the study of Islam in Africa. While these sources remain understudied, a few scholars, such as Bruce Hall and Ghislaine Lydon have used Arabic source material to produce innovative and exciting work on the history of race in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as on commercial brokers in the trans-Saharan trade.<sup>71</sup> These works also demonstrate that Arabic sources are crucial for a reconstruction of the pre-colonial past in West Africa.

My own study is rooted in this new wave of scholarship that captures African “voices” through analyzing Arabic documents. Unlike previous works, in this study I construct a narrative on Tāl through a careful engagement with his own words and scholarly production. I move away from the “empty homogenous time” of history, and take Tāl's “enchanted” world for granted.<sup>72</sup> In

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<sup>69</sup> I would like to thank Professor Mauro Nobili of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for helping me articulate this point.

<sup>70</sup> Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa*, ix.

<sup>71</sup> So for instance; Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks and Cross-Cultural exchange in Nineteenth Century Africa*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1900*, (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-Colonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49, 89.

other words, I frame and analyze Tāl's social actions based on the ideas, and religious symbols that made them meaningful within his nineteenth century context. This does not foreclose the possibility of interpretation and analysis (and debate), but it is to acknowledge that an analysis must keep the integrity of the social world(s) of historical actors intact. By paying close attention to the "logics," I tell a story from Tāl's *perspective* as it unfolded in the nineteenth century.<sup>73</sup> Specifically, I argue that Tāl is an interpretive lens to understand the connection between Islamic knowledge practices and authority in the nineteenth century. My analysis also describes how a Muslim scholar through his mastery over the Islamic religious sciences mediated the broader Islamic tradition to a growing number of students and sympathizers.

Besides a select reading of Tāl's own writing, which I explain in greater detail in the chapter summary below, in this study I use several chronicles, letters, and other biographical sources. I have also used French colonial sources, as well secondary literature on Tāl for historical details and contextual information. This latter material includes a recent biography, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-durur fī sīra al-Ḥājj 'Umar* [*Rare Pearls on the Life of al-Ḥājj 'Umar*]. The work was written by one of Tāl's great grandsons, Muntaga Tāl. It is an indispensable source that reproduces several family traditions, biographical details, and oral historical narratives on Tāl's life.

The majority of the archival material that I use for this study comes from a library that had once belonged to Tāl. This library had been in the possession of Aḥmad al-Kabīr, Tāl's son and successor, who ruled from Segou Mali. But in 1890, Louis Archinard, the French colonial official most responsible for France's military conquest of West Africa, confiscated it. He then had it sent

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<sup>73</sup> William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 227.

to Paris, where it has remained as part of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, for over a hundred years.<sup>74</sup>

This library itself is now known as the Bibliothèque ‘Umarienne de Ségou. It contains over four thousand Arabic manuscripts, preserving much of the written intellectual tradition of both West Africa and the Middle East. Many of these manuscripts are on the introductory and advanced subjects of the Islamic religious sciences. Their existence highlights the importance that West Africans placed on Islamic learning and the acquisition of Islamic knowledge. The library also contains the corpus of Tāl’s works, as well numerous other chronicles, notes, and letters. The wealth of source material in this library demonstrates that textual practices imbricated the lives of nineteenth century Muslims. While in this study, I do not claim to represent the wealth of source material in this archive, the following pages highlight the type of historical inquiry and possibilities for investigation that an analysis of a small sample of the manuscript material in this library make possible.

## **Outline and Chapter Summary**

This study consists of six chapters and a short conclusion. I have structured each chapter around one or more pieces of Tāl’s own writing. I have arranged the narrative chronologically. It follows Tāl through key moments of his life, from his birth in 1797, to his death in 1864. I have also arranged the source material chronologically, except for chapter two. In this chapter, I use a later work in order to provide insights into an earlier period of Tāl’s life. In addition, throughout this study, I comment on Islamic knowledge practices, the relationship of writing and various forms of Tāl authority, and document the multiple roles of a scholar living in the nineteenth century

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<sup>74</sup> Nouredine Ghali and Sidi Mohamed Mahibou, *Inventaire de la Bibliothèque ‘Umarienne de Ségou*, (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1985).

In chapter 1, I explore the connection between mobility and Islamic knowledge transmission. Though we know very little about Tāl's early life, I posit that through travel he was able to master numerous Islamic religious sciences, at a time when Futa Toro was undergoing social and political transformation. Mobility was important because in the nineteenth century, knowledge was considered authentic only when it was orally transmitted through personalized chains of transmission. In this epistemology of knowledge transmission, texts mattered, but only within the logic of the broader verbal and non-verbal relationships between masters and disciples.

After situating Tāl within the broader context of nineteenth century Futa Toro, and discussing this Islamic knowledge philosophy, I analyze an advanced Arabic grammar work that he studied and copied as a student. The work, *Al-Farīda*, is the only precise documentary evidence we have on what Tāl studied in his early life. It is also the only example of a work that he copied by his own hand. *Al-Farīda* was originally written in Cairo, Egypt, by the fifteenth century scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfīti (d. 1505). I explain the transmission of this work into West Africa, as well as how it became important for the knowledge practices of the elites of Timbuktu in the sixteenth century.

I conceptualize this work as an “artifact of epistemology.” The manuscript materialized Tāl's experiences within a much broader system of knowledge transmission. In order to demonstrate this point, I analyze his description of how he studied the work in the colophon at the end of the manuscript. Specifically, he noted that he studied the work, over four months, in the presence of his teacher Aḥmad Ḥalimi. The nature of the work also reveals that Tāl had acquired an advanced degree of Islamic learning, even before he left Futa Toro.

Chapter 2 draws on the theme of mobility, and follows Tāl to the Ḥijāz. Though he embarked from West Africa in order to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, he also met Muḥammad

al-Ghālī, a direct student of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. In this chapter, I explore his transition from a scholar who had attained mastery over the exoteric Islamic religious sciences, to a master of the esoteric sciences and an important Sufi *shaykh*. I base my analysis on three chapters from Tāl's *magnum opus*, Al-Rimāḥ, [The Lances], which he completed in 1845, in Futa Jallon. The work remains unstudied, even though it is one of the most important works written by a West African intellectual in the last two centuries. It covers numerous topics on Sufism and Islamic mysticism, as well as one of the earliest works to detail Tijānī doctrine and practice.

In this chapter, I only focus on the autobiographical elements of this work, where Tāl explains his interaction with Muḥammad al-Ghālī, and the transformations he underwent. Though he provided us with few details on his precise experiences, I detail the forms of knowledge that he acquired, and how he constructed his spiritual authority through the claims he made. On the one hand, he highlighted that he had acquired knowledge from both al-Ghālī, as well as al-Tijānī. He also explained how his teacher conferred the title of *khalīfa* (deputy) of the Tijāniyya on him. He supported these claims through an *ijāza* (license) that al-Ghālī wrote from him, which signified and authenticated his rank and the permission he acquired to initiate new disciples into the order. On the other hand, he claimed rare secret knowledge like the *al-ism al-a'zam* (God's greatest name), to explain the spiritual rank that he attained. The chapter highlights, how the verbal, the non-verbal, the written, and the claims to secret knowledge were all embedded in Tāl's authority.

In chapter 3, I analyze two early acrostic poems that Tāl wrote. The first, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn* [A Reminder for the Seekers], he composed shortly after he departed West Africa, and then revised once he arrived in the Ḥijāz. This poem was a handbook that outlined important points of Islamic religious practice, and was meant for students. The second poem, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn* [A Reminder for the Negligent], he wrote while crossing through the Fezzan on his return

back from the pilgrimage. This poem served as Tāl's attempt to mediate in a dispute between two Muslim polities, Bornu and Sokoto. The central concern of the poem was the problem of disputation among Muslims, and the important roles that scholars play as mediators. I carefully explain the structure of these poems, and demonstrate how they incorporated and comment on specific verses of the Qur'an. I highlight that these poems capture Tāl's early message of moral and religious reform. While their message is simple, their complex structure is indicative of Tāl's scholarly acumen and erudition. In other words, through writing such complicated works he was also establishing his authority as a religious figure.

Tāl's mastery over Arabic poetry is a theme that I also explore in chapter 4. In this regard, I analyze his magisterial, three thousand line, poem, *Safīnat al-sa'āda li-ahl du'uf wa-l-najāda* [*The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak*]. The poem was a devotional poem in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad, which Tāl completed in 1852, a few months before he began his *jihād*. Through an analysis of *Safīnat al-sa'āda*, I explain Tāl's creative use of two older poems that were widespread in West Africa—*al-'Ishrīnīyāt—The Twenties*—of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāzāzi (d. 1230), and its *takhmīs* (pentastich) by Abū Bakr ibn Muḥīb.

I situate *Safīnat al-sa'āda* within the broader context of panegyric poetry in Islamic knowledge practices, and explain the importance of praising the Prophet Muḥammad. Then I analyze the key structural aspects of the poem. By looking at how Tāl incorporated these older poems, I explicate the broader context of transmission, and scholarly connections between West Africa and other parts of the Muslim world. But I argue that rather than passive receptors of the Islamic scholarly tradition, *Safīnat al-sa'āda* demonstrates the mastery of West African scholars, and how they contributed to this wider tradition. Through modifying a poem that was already well known, Tāl demonstrated his scholarly prestige. Further, while Tāl was a *khalīfa* of the Tijāniyya,

in the long prose introduction to this poem, he also claimed to be a *khalīfa* of the Prophet. As a consequence, he had the spiritual authority to guide the Muslims of West Africa. In tying his authority to love of the Prophet, *Safīnat al-sa‘āda* was meant to prove this point.

I explore the question of Tāl’s *jihād* in the final two chapters. In chapter 5, I begin by analyzing Tāl’s most explicit statements on the concept of *jihād* in *al-Rimāḥ*. In this chapter fifty-one he explicitly explained the importance of the “greater *jihād*” over the “lesser *jihād*.” In other words, in his conceptualization, the *jihād* against the *nafs*, or soul (also understood as lower-self) was far more important than *jihād* in terms of combat. Using these statements, I reframe Tāl’s *jihād* by looking closely at the historical circumstances that led him to take up arms.

In documenting the shifting circumstances of Tāl and his community, I analyze three different letters that he wrote over a period of eight years. He wrote the first letter to French officials in 1847, when he travelled to Futa Toro, after an absence of nearly twenty years. Though in this letter he mentioned a “pact” he created with the French, I explain that it is misleading to interpret this to mean he was preparing for war with French assistance. At this point he was still a scholar, and given his statements in *al-Rimāḥ*, which he also taught during this trip, it is unlikely he was preparing for war.

He began to take on a greater political role, however, when he moved part of his community to Tamba, a non-Muslim territory east of Futa Jallon, in 1849. He began to stockpile weapons and build fortification around Dingiray, his new settlement, as a means to protect his nascent community. When the king of Tmaba, Yimba, attacked Dingiray in 1852, Tāl decided to retaliate. This is the defining event that precipitated his *jihād*. While he initially took up arms to protect his community, he eventually took on the wider political logic of the region. This meant that he also formed a “warrior state,” where protection and security became intimately tied to conquering and

redistribution. By analyzing two letters—one he sent to the French in 1854, and the other he sent to the Muslim traders of Saint Louis in 1855, I document the changing political role of Tāl once he launched his *jihād* and began to conquer regional polities. I also explain how at the very moment Tāl began his *jihād*, the French had started to also aggressively expand their influence in Senegambia. This led to serious conflict, as Tāl and the French attempted to assert their power.

In chapter 6, I explore the conflict that Tāl had with ruler of the Muslim polity of Masina, Aḥmad III. I place this conflict within the broader context of his ongoing *jihād*, and center my analysis on his final work, *Bayān mā waqa‘a baynanā wa bayna amīr al-Māsina Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad* [*What Happened between the ruler of Masina, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad and us*]. This complex work provides an internal perspective on how Tāl understood this conflict, and more importantly, how he justified his actions in eastern Senegambia and the Middle Niger valley.

The conflict between these two Muslim elites began after Tāl conquered Karta and Bakhunu in eastern Senegambia. His sudden rise to power had put several polities on alert, including Masina. In 1856, Aḥmad III sent his army in order to protect what he considered was his territory. From Tāl’s perspective, Karta and Bakhunu were non-Muslim polities who had maintained hostilities against him, and therefore Aḥmad III had no authority over these territories. Tāl continued this line of argumentation as his army marched into the Middle Niger valley and conquered the powerful Bambara kingdom of Segou, a few years later.

In this chapter I analyze how the *Bayān* captures competing notions of Islamic authority and legitimacy. It highlights how Tāl used legal categories to first frame social reality, and then justified his actions through those categories. Further, in the *Bayān*, Tāl used citations from nearly fifty distinct works to sustain an argument that refuted Aḥmad III’s claim to authority. Thus one of the central arguments of the work is that the ruler of Masina did not have the requisite Islamic

learning to justify both his and arguments. On the other hand, Tāl tied political legitimacy and his political authority through demonstrating his mastery over Islamic knowledge.

## Chapter 1

### Mobility and Embodied Knowledge: The Early Life of ‘Umar Tāl

#### Introduction

On the night before the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, in 1797, ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd Tāl began his life. Numerous hagiographical traditions recount the miracles that mark the day of his birth. In one account, Mukhtār al-Kuntī, a saint (*walī*) and leader of the West African branch of the Qādirī sufi brotherhood, lengthened his prostration during his morning prayer.<sup>75</sup> In conversation with a student after the prayer, he is reported to have stated: “I was informed through divine inspiration that a saint was born on this night in the *bilād al-sudān*. He will find many followers in all the lands that he enters. I am begging God the Most High to not allow him to enter our land. God has heard my prayer.”<sup>76</sup>

This hagiographical account highlights what Tāl’s later disciples and supporters came to believe about his birth. A rival, albeit prominent, Muslim scholar had already foreshadowed Tāl’s greatness and destiny. Like other hagiographical accounts of Muslim saints, however, this narrative is teleological, it casts Tāl’s later accomplishments and aptitudes as innate and simply

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<sup>75</sup> For more on Mukhtār al-Kuntī and the Kunta scholarly networks see: Aziz A. Batran. *The Qadiriyya Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara: The Life and Times of Shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kunti* (Rabat: University of Mohammed V, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Muntaga Tāl, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur fī Sīra al-Hājj ‘Umar (Les Perles Rares sur la Vie d’El Hadji Omar)*, (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2005), 32-33. This account is likely a later attribution to al-Kuntī, since it highlights the conflict between the Qādirī shaykh’s grandson Aḥmad al-Bekkāy and Tāl several decades later. Though Tāl did attempt to conquer Timbuktu, the center of power of the Kunta family, he was not able to do so. Consequently, the implication of this account was that the reason he was unable to take over Timbuktu was because Mukhtār al-Kuntī had made supplication to God to prevent this from happening. For more on this conflict see; chapter 6.

there from the beginning. It glosses over the complex issues of what forms of knowledge and training Tāl received, and the consequences and possibilities this opened for him.

This chapter explores the early life of one of the most important nineteenth century Muslim intellectuals in Western Africa. Tāl was born during a period of great instability in the Senegal River Valley because of the region's historic ties with the Transatlantic slave trade. Despite the incredible violence and turmoil produced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Tāl still received a thorough Islamic education. His later scholarly work underscores his deep erudition and mastery over numerous disciplines of the Islamic religious sciences. This was possible because of the importance of oral and personalized modes of knowledge transmission.<sup>77</sup> Thus teachers, and not texts, became the primary sites of the transmission of knowledge. Further, the relationships created between masters and disciples produced multiple diffuse nodes of transmission that were independent from shifts in regional politics and changing social circumstances. This was an epistemology of Islamic knowledge built on, in the felicitous phrase of historian David Schoenbrun, “long-term histories of durable bundles of knowledge and practice.”<sup>78</sup> While slave trading and the political turmoil in the region certainly disrupted this mode of knowledge transmission, Tāl's early life highlights that it endured, producing erudite scholars that would powerfully shape the political and economic life of Western African and the larger Muslim world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Without ever leaving Futa Toro (northern Senegal), Tāl became proficient in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and Arabic grammar (*nahw*) and poetry (*shī'r*).

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<sup>77</sup> This system of knowledge was fundamentally rooted in a particular orientation to knowing. In this regard, Wright has explained this was a “specific approach to knowledge, an ingrained, practical ‘knowing how’, as opposed to a propositional ‘knowing that.’” See Zachary Valentine Wright, “*Embodied Knowledge in West African Islam: Continuity and Change in the Gnostic Community of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niassé*” PhD dissertation (Northwestern University, 2010), 15. I further discuss this approach to knowledge below.

<sup>78</sup> David Schoenbrun, “Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in the Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa” in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 5 (December 2006), 2.

Since Islamic knowledge could only be acquired from authorized teachers, it became necessary to travel to such teachers in order to receive face-to-face oral instruction. Thus Tāl's early life highlights the fundamental importance of mobility in Islamic learning. Through travel it was possible to climb the ranks of scholarship and erudition for someone who born in a little considered village, to an insignificant agricultural family.<sup>79</sup> Conceptualizing Islamic education in terms of personalized and embodied forms of knowledge transmission provides a critical framework to understand how Tāl developed as an erudite scholar.

I first begin by analyzing Arabic chronicles and French sources to provide a broad sketch of the eighteenth and nineteenth century political contexts of Futa Toro in relation to the Atlantic world. I explain how a new Muslim clerical class, the Torobbe, came into positions of political authority in Futa Toro in the eighteenth century. Like previous Muslim clerics in the region, they ostensibly resisted the enslavement of Muslims, a practice forbidden in Islamic law.<sup>80</sup> After situating Tāl within this broader political context, I build a narrative from oral and family traditions tracing his intellectual genealogy and explain the importance of mobility in his scholarly endeavors.

I then root this discussion in a manuscript copy of an unstudied Arabic grammar work, *al-Farīda*, that Tāl copied by hand as a student in Futa Toro.<sup>81</sup> This work was originally penned by the medieval Egyptian polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d. 1505). The length of the work, ninety-

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<sup>79</sup> My point here is to highlight what Tāl was able to accomplish, considering he did not come from a prominent clerical family. But it is also important to mention that it was not always easy to acquire Islamic knowledge, since caste and class impediments could pose serious challenges.

<sup>80</sup> For more on the relationship between slavery and Islam in Africa see: Rudolph Ware "Slavery in Islamic Africa, 1400-1800" in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, Vol. 3. Edited by David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (Cambridge University Press, 2001), and "Slavery and Abolition in Islamic Africa: The Long Nineteenth-Century, 1776-1905" in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, Vol. 4. Edited by David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>81</sup> The full title of the work is *al-Minaḥ al-ḥamīda 'ala l'qasīda al-farīda*. Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) MS: Fonds Arabe 5719, 1-97b.

seven folios, indicates that this work was not meant for a novice, but for quite an advanced student. It covers all the intricate aspects of Arabic grammar, as well as theoretical and linguistic debates and discussions. Since Tāl had studied this work, it demonstrates that he already had a firm grounding in several other disciplines of the Islamic sciences.<sup>82</sup>

The work is the only material evidence of the precise texts Tāl studied early in his life. I conceptualize this work as an “artifact of epistemology.” I argue that though texts mattered, their production was tied to the relationship between mobility and embodied forms of Islamic learning. Therefore, it is important to understand nineteenth century manuscripts of the basic texts of the Islamic religious sciences within the broader constellation of meanings forged between masters and disciples. By focusing on how *al-Farīda* came into the hands of Tāl more than three centuries after it was produced, I comment on the larger interconnections between West Africa and other Muslim learning centers. The work gives us critical insight into Tāl’s intellectual genealogy, and also highlights that Muslims in Futa Toro were engaging with sophisticated works on Arabic grammar in the nineteenth century.

### **Futa Toro: Anti-slavery Rebellions and the Atlantic World**

Arabic sources highlight that in the sixteenth century Fulbe pastoralists migrated to eastern Futa Toro, and founded the Denyanke dynasty.<sup>83</sup> Ruling through a complex system of Satigi

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<sup>82</sup> I make this observation based on my own research experience in the traditional West African Islamic curriculum. Normally students begin with the memorization of the Qur’an and then move to the basic works on Islamic jurisprudence and Arabic grammar. By the time students reach advanced works, they have already mastered several other disciplines. The advanced nature *al-farīda* suggests it was one of the final works that a student would study in the disciplines associated with the Arabic language. See also: Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart. “The historic ‘Core Curriculum’ and the book market in West Africa,” in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Arabic Literacy, Manuscript Culture, and Intellectual History in Islamic Africa*, Edited by Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>83</sup> Muusa Kamara. *Florilège au jardin de l’histoire des noirs, Zuhūr al-Basātīn: l’aristocratie peule et la révolution des clercs musulmans, vallée du Sénégal*. Edited by Jean Schmitz. Translated by, Saïd Bousbina. (Paris: Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, 1998), 95-97.

(princes), internal rivalry and succession disputes ensured that the dynasty could never consolidate complete control over the region.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Futa Toro was surrounded by other powerful polities; Bundu was on its immediate eastern fringes, to the west and south it bordered the kingdoms of Kajoor and Waloo, and to its north were the *bīḍān* (Ḥasānī Arab) kingdoms of Trarza and Brakna. With the establishment of the French settlement at Saint Louis, in the sixteenth century, the region also became integrated into the Atlantic economy. As a consequence, traditional economic relationships and political alliances began to shift. Futa Toro's powerful neighbors and its own fragile political situation made it vulnerable to attack and raids.<sup>85</sup>

Local rulers exchanged gum, millet, rice and captives for guns, cloth, brandy and other European goods. As African rulers came to depend on these goods, they often also became locked in relationships of debt, and “soon turned to enslaving their own Muslim subjects.”<sup>86</sup> European trade goods carried symbolic power, and in the logic of the Atlantic economy, they became necessary to maintaining power.<sup>87</sup> The immediate consequence for the population of Futa Toro was that the Denyanke Satigi and their *bīḍān* neighbors increased in pillaging and raiding towns, and kidnapping Muslims in order to fight rivals and maintain their power.<sup>88</sup>

As rulers were unable to protect their followers, ordinary Muslims rallied around clerics who, in turn, breached long established norms of political neutrality and took up arms. Historically, Muslim clerical communities remained far from centers of secular power and were considered inviolable spaces.<sup>89</sup> Muslim clerics often maintained reciprocal relationships with political rulers:

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 102-117.

<sup>85</sup> Boubacar Barry, “La guerre des marabouts dans le région du Fleuve Sénégal de 1673 à 1677” in Bulletin de L’institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire, ser. B, 32 (1971), 572.

<sup>86</sup> Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 106.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Barry, “La guerre des marabouts dans le région du Fleuve Sénégal de 1673 à 1677”, 572.

<sup>89</sup> Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 96-99. See also Introduction.

in exchange for services tied to literacy, Islamic healing, and prayers, they often enjoyed the protection of secular leaders and their armies.<sup>90</sup> With the increasing demand for slaves in the Atlantic world, and the power that African rulers could acquire from European goods, the traditional inviolable spaces of Muslim clerical communities were no longer respected. Thus what had once been normative client patron relationships began to fissure throughout West Africa. In extreme cases, clerics began to take up arms—entering, for the first time in centuries, the “political” sphere.

One of the earliest examples of clerical resistance to the enslavement of Muslims in the region was the seventeenth century Tubanaan movement led by Nāṣir al-Dīn in Mauritania.<sup>91</sup> In the words of one French witness, clerics were moved to action because “God does not allow kings to pillage, kill, or enslave their people, that, on the contrary, they should maintain and protect them against their enemies.”<sup>92</sup> Initially directed against the “cutters of the road” or raiders among the Ḥasānī Arabs, by 1673, the movement spread south and put Muslim clerics in position of power throughout the Senegal River Valley.<sup>93</sup>

Though the movement was initially successful in temporarily halting the slave trade, it came to an end with the death of Nāṣir al-Dīn in 1674. It was dealt a decisive blow with the

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For some examples see; John Hunwick “Secular Power and Religious Authority in Muslim Society: The Case of Songhay” in *Journal of African History*, Vol 37, No. 2 (1996), and Lamin Sanneh, *The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism* (Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> Philip Curtin, “Jihad in West Africa: Early Phases and Inter-relations in Mauritania and Senegal” in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1971), 12.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 104. One of the most important primary sources about the movement and its impact in the region come from a report written by a French slave trader named Mareau de Chamboneau who was in the region from 1674 to 1676. Chamboneau was the special agent of the Compagnie du Sénégal. He was responsible for fortifying Saint Louis, and invested in ensuring that the Tubanaan movement was crushed. For a first hand account of the movement see: Carson Ritchie, “Deux texts sur le Sénégal (1673-1677)” in *Bulletin de L’institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire*, 30, No. 1 (1968), 289-353

<sup>93</sup> H.T. Norris, “Znāga Islam during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (1969), 498, and David Robinson, “Islamic Revolution of Futa Toro” in the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1975), 189.

emergence of an alliance between former deposed rulers with European support and weaponry. The French gained the upper hand through revised trade agreements, and integrated the region further into the Atlantic economy. By the latter half of the seventeenth century, the population of Futa Toro became victim to *bīdān* raids from the north, the reemergence of the Denyanke Satigi, and from the west, European encroachments from the Atlantic coast.<sup>94</sup>

In the aftermath of the Tubaanan movement, ties of marriage and scholarly bonds, gave birth to a new clerical group, known as the Torobbe. In this regard, Willis argues “the Torodbe clerisy evolved out of that mass of rootless peoples who perceived in Islam a source of cultural identity. Bound in a new persuasion – linked by a common oppression – they shook the sense of ethnic difference and sought to stimulate a counter trend of a leveling nature.”<sup>95</sup> Similarly Robinson notes, “linked by ties of kinship and religion, educated in the same schools, the *tōrodbe* of the mid-eighteenth century had to develop a specifically Islamic identity over against their nominal protectors and overlords, who were also Fulbe.”<sup>96</sup> With the continuous threat of enslavement, raiding, and chaos, many of these scholarly families came together to resist the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By the eighteenth century the Torobbe would begin to dramatically transform the political landscape of Futa Toro.

Torobbe resistance began in 1770, when a Muslim cleric named Sulayman Baal was returning to Futa Toro, after spending several years in the pursuit of Islamic knowledge in Mauritania.<sup>97</sup> Oral traditions collected by Musa Kamara, an early twentieth century scholar from Futa Toro, places Baal traveling along the Senegal River when he saw a captive in a riverboat

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<sup>94</sup> Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 104.

<sup>95</sup> John Ralph Willis, *In The Path of Allah: The Passion of Al-Hajj 'Umar, An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam*, (London: Frank Cass, 1989), 59.

<sup>96</sup> David Robinson. *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 60.

<sup>97</sup> Kamara. *Florilège au jardin de l'histoire des noir*, 316.

reciting the Qur'an. Baal rushed to the man and queried him to understand how he had become a captive. The man responded that he was traveling through Bakel when the princes in the region kidnapped him and sold him to slave traders on their way to Saint Louis. The fact that a Muslim in bondage could traverse several hundreds of miles, the distance from Bakel to Saint-Louis, with impunity was simply unconscionable to Baal.<sup>98</sup>

The story continues with Baal asking the owners of the boat to “release him! For he is a Muslim and therefore free.”<sup>99</sup> The slave traders, highlighting the reorganization of social relationships simply responded “what you say has no relevance for us. We purchased him fairly from our agent.”<sup>100</sup> Baal, who was accompanied by a physically strong student, Aali Mayram, overpowered the slave traders, and released the Qur'an reciter. After this encounter, and witnessing the continuing problem of the enslavement of Muslims, Baal planted the seeds for a new social movement.

Even though he died shortly after he mobilized against local rulers and his *bīdān* neighbors, his movement carried on. Torobbe dignitaries selected Abdul Qadir Kan as their leader. He had formerly studied with the descendants of Nāṣir al-Dīn in Mauritania as well as in the famed school of Pir in Kajoor.<sup>101</sup> Kan, who was an expert in Islamic jurisprudence, had settled in the eastern fringes of Futa Toro with his students. Highlighting the importance of Islamic learning to his philosophy of leadership, he made all those who swore allegiance to him recite the Qur'an, and two poems in praise of the Prophet in a ceremony in his new capital of Thilogne.<sup>102</sup> Designated as

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 315, 325. For more on this school see; chiefs

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 325. One of the poems was the Takhmīs of the *‘Ishrīnīyāt* of of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāzāzī by Ibn Muḥīb. Tāl himself modified this poem later in life. I discuss this in more detail in chapter 4.

the Almamy (*imam*, leader), Kan continued the Torobbe mission first outlined by Sulayman Baal: to protect the population of Futa Toro from corrupt rulers.

Within twenty years, Kan had negotiated a strict trade treaty with the French, pacified the Deyanke and the powerful Trarza kingdom, and ultimately “abolished the slave trade from his dominions.”<sup>103</sup> With a just leader at the helm, the Muslim population of Futa Toro finally witnessed a reprieve from the threat of enslavement that had plagued the polity for the last two centuries. For as long as the Almamy could maintain power, Futa Toro’s Muslims would not pass through the hands of the French at Saint Louis.

We know, however, that the Almamy was not able to maintain power. At around the time of Tāl’s birth, Kan and his army were marching towards the kingdom of Kajoor. Unlike his predecessor, the new dammel (*king*), Amari Ngone Ndella Kumba Faal refused to submit to Kan’s authority.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps betrayed by his own disciple, the Almamy “found that his enemy had pursued a scorched-earth tactic.”<sup>105</sup> For three days his army found no water as they crossed “the semidesert region of Ferlo between Fuuta and Kajoor.”<sup>106</sup> The conclusion was predetermined: The dammel decisively routed Kan’s army. Capturing many and selling others into slavery, the dammel decided to spare the Almamy’s life and imprisoned him instead.

When the dammel released Kan from prison, he was faced with serious challenges to his power and his authority began to decline precipitously. His former foes, the Denyanke Satigi and *bīdān*, had reorganized and continued to raid and enslave Muslims. The French, with whom he had a trade treaty, also raided and enslaved Muslims from the region. One notable French raid took

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<sup>103</sup> The treaty he signed in 1785 established strict taxes and forbade the sale of slaves from his land. See; David Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics: History Abdul Bokar Kan and Futa Toro, 1853-91*, (Oxford University Press, 1975), 16, and Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 131.

<sup>104</sup> Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 133.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid* 135.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*.

place in 1804, when Governor Blanchot raided Podor, a town near Tāl's family home in Halwar. He is reported to have taken over six hundred captives, and at least three important clerics.<sup>107</sup> More significantly, in response to this attack, nine of Kan's close confidants met to plot his assassination.<sup>108</sup> Enlisting the support of the Bambara, they assassinated Kan in 1806. With the passing of the Almamy, Futa Toro was once again plunged into a political and economic chaos.

### **Embodied Knowledge and Mobility**

It is within this context of political and social disintegration in the early nineteenth century that Tāl began his pursuit of Islamic education. Halwar, Tāl's aforementioned birthplace lies two hundred miles east of the Atlantic Ocean. He lived through many of the transformations in the region after Kan's arrest. Though he was from a Torobbe family, he did not belong to any of the lineages that had seized power after the Almamy's death. Shying away from political power, his parents, who both hailed from scholarly families, emphasized the importance of Islamic learning for all their children.<sup>109</sup>

Tāl left us with few autobiographical details of how he experienced this formative period of his life. His corpus of work clearly speaks to his mastery over numerous Islamic sciences. His deep erudition demonstrates that despite the problems in Futa Toro, Tāl still received a thorough Islamic education. This was possible because of the personalized and embodied nature of Islamic knowledge and the role that the travel of masters and disciples played in transmitting texts and ideas through widespread and diffused scholarly networks. Though details are few, it is clear that Tāl took advantage of his mobility to accumulate Islamic learning.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>108</sup> The names of the assassins are reported in an Arabic chronicle about the Futa Toro Revolution. See: Siré Abbas Soh, "Chronique du Foûta Sénégalais" in *Revue du Monde Musulman*, Vol. 25 (1913), 54-55.

<sup>109</sup> Tāl, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur fī Sīra al-Ḥājjī 'Umar*, 27-29.

The underlying importance of mobility in the intellectual pursuits of Muslims is linked to what Graham has conceptualized as the *isnād* paradigm and *ijāza* system. With reference to the Islamic religious sciences, the *isnād* paradigm is built on the significance of a chain of narration, which “takes the form of a list or ‘chain’ (*silsilah*) of individual transmitters who span the generation from the most recent reporter back to the Prophet or Companions.”<sup>110</sup> The *isnād* paradigm was built on the notion “that truth does not reside in documents, however authentic, ancient, or well-preserved, but in the authentic human beings and their personal connections with one another.”<sup>111</sup> The personalized nature of knowledge transmission also meant that travel itself became constitutive of acquiring knowledge. With specific reference to travel, Graham argues “the journey, or *rihlah*, tradition of personal study with outstanding teachers, wherever they might be, also rendered an intangible service to the continuity of Islamic tradition across the centuries.”<sup>112</sup>

Students who belonged to a chain of narration received an *ijāza* or license. Often written, the *ijāza* granted a student permission to transmit a text or practice that the student had acquired from an authorized teacher. The *ijāza* intimately connected a student to a teacher’s *isnād* and cemented that student’s ties to a particular intellectual genealogy. In a formal written *ijāza* “the teacher granting the certificate typically includes an isnād containing his or her scholarly lineage of teachers back to the Prophet or [sic] Companions, a later venerable shaykh, or the author of a specific book.”<sup>113</sup> Students often traversed great distances to belong to particularly prestigious intellectual genealogies, even going as far as *reading* the same work with multiple different teachers.

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<sup>110</sup> William A. Graham, ‘Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation’ in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIII: 3 (Winter 1993), 502.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 512.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

The *isnād* paradigm and *ijāza* system are a useful framework to understand Tāl's intellectual genealogy. Tāl followed an established model of Islamic education.<sup>114</sup> Like other children in West Africa, he began studying in a traditional village-level Qur'anic school at the age of five.<sup>115</sup> The source materials remain ambiguous on whether this school was in his home village of Halwar, or in a neighboring village. We also do not have any first hand accounts from Tāl about his experiences in this Qur'anic school. Family traditions also do not provide any additional information. But from other primary source material we can get a sense of what Qur'an schools were meant to accomplish during this period.

The Scottish traveler Mungo Park passed through the polity neighboring Futa Toro, Bundu, in 1795, and left us with a brief, but intriguing, account. He wrote,

Religious persecution is not known among them, nor is it necessary; for the system of Mahomet is made to extend itself by means abundantly more efficacious. By establishing small schools in the different towns, where many of the Pagan as well as Mohamedan children are taught to read the Koran, and instructed in the tenets of the Prophet, the Mahomedan priests fix a bias on the minds, and form the character of their young disciples, which no accidents of life can ever afterwards remove or alter. Many of these little schools I visited in my progress through the country, and observed with pleasure the great docility and submissive deportment of the children. With the Mahomedan faith is also introduced the Arabic language.<sup>116</sup>

Putting aside Park's evident ethnocentrism, he clearly observed that the establishment of Qur'an schools by Muslim scholars was fundamental to the spread of Islam in the region. Indeed, Qur'anic schools were often the first institutions established by Muslims in West Africa. These schools were central to the socialization of Muslim children to the tenets of the faith, and it is in these schools that children first acquired skills in Arabic literacy.

In the early 1800s, the American journalist Theodore Dwight Jr. captured the specific method of instruction and pedagogy in West African Qur'an schools. He left us with the following

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<sup>114</sup> For a discussion on the "core curriculum" across West Africa see; Hall and Stewart. *The historic 'Core Curriculum.'*

<sup>115</sup> Tāl, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur fī Sīra al-Hājj 'Umar*, 37-38.

<sup>116</sup> Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior of Africa 1775*, Edited by Kate Ferguson Marsters (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 106.

account of the experience of Lamin Kebe, who attended a Qur'an school in Futa Jallon (Guinea).

He wrote,

his scholars, according to the plan pursued in his education, were seated on the floor, each upon a sheepskin, and with a small boards held upon one knee, rubbed over with a whitish chalk or powder, on which they were made to write with pens made of reeds, and ink which they form with care, of various ingredients. The copy is set by the master by tracing the first words of the Koran with a dry reed, which removes chalk where it touches. The young pupil follows these marks with ink, which is afterwards rubbed over with more chalk. They are called up three at a time to recite to the master, who takes the boards from them, makes them turn their backs to him, and repeat what they were to do the previous day, which they have a decided interest in doing to the best of their recollections; because it is the custom to mark every mistake with the stroke of a stick upon the shoulders.<sup>117</sup>

Kebe's experience offers a detailed visual account of the pedagogy of nineteenth century West African Qur'an schools. Sitting on the floor, students used small wooden boards (*lawḥ*, pl. *alwāḥ*), and reed pens (*qalam*) to trace out verses of the Qur'an. Bit by bit, in the presence of the "master" they would slowly commit the verses they had written to memory. Then, the next day, under threat of "the stroke of a stick" they were required to recollect what they had memorized the previous day. This account reveals the subtle yet profound epistemological implications embedded in the Qur'an school pedagogy.

The focus on memorization, teachers, and bodily comportment are best understood as specific orientation to *knowing*. In a far-reaching work on the history of Qur'an schooling in the history of Western Africa, Rudolph Ware convincingly argues:

What it meant 'to know' in the context of Senegambian Qur'an schooling differed dramatically from what it meant for many contemporary Westerners. Knowing was produced as much by the limbs as by the mind. Imitation of the teacher's gestures and comportment was as much as part of the educative process as the texts that one was required to read. Memorization of texts allowed for a personal possession of the Word in the body, without requiring recourse to a written source external to the self. The people were the books, just as the Prophet was the Walking Qur'an. Islamic knowledge was embodied knowledge.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Theodore Dwight Jr., "Address to the American Lyceum," in Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Garland Publishers, 1984), 4.

<sup>118</sup> Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 49.

Here, Ware provides an antidote to the often misleading characterization of Qur'an schools as either backwards, or bastions of senseless corporeal punishment. He re-frames the discussion about the fundamental difference in conceptions of what it means "to know" with the mind and the body. These schools were the primary sites for inculcating certain aptitudes, discipline and bodily habits that underscored a specific vision of moral comportment that helped students become good Muslims. Building on this foundation of memory and morality also helped students later engage on similar terms with teachers if they pursued further studies in the advanced Islamic sciences.

Viewed in this context, the passing reference in the biographical literature to Tāl's time in a Qur'an school is significant. These schools, ubiquitous throughout West Africa, were the initial sites where writing in Arabic, reverence and rote memorization became first institutionalized in the life of a Muslim child. Thus by first attending a Qur'an school, Tāl was embedded within a particular epistemology of knowledge: one that was predicated on sitting in the presence of teachers, imitation, and memorization. It was also in these sites that young students first engaged with the *isnād* paradigm and *ijāza* system as a form of embodied epistemology.

When Tāl finished memorizing the Qur'an, he returned back to his home village of Halwar. Since his family subsisted through agricultural production, he spent time cultivating the family fields. He also continued to study other works with his brother, Alfa Aḥmad Tāl. Oral accounts suggest that his brother was an accomplished scholar in his own right.<sup>119</sup> Though we do not know the exact texts Tāl studied with his brother, we know that they he revised the entire Qur'an again, leading him to obtain an *ijāza*.<sup>120</sup> This authorization gave Tāl permission to teach the memorization of the Qur'an to others.

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<sup>119</sup> Tāl, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur fī Sīra al-Ḥājj 'Umar*, 38.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Tāl did not end his studies with only the memorization of the Qur'an. He wanted to acquire further training in the Islamic religious sciences. Since he likely did not have access to scholars who could teach him advanced works in Halwar, travel became central to the next chapter of his life. He certainly could have traveled from Futa Toro to other well-established learning centers throughout West Africa and the Sahara. But given that the acquisition of knowledge depended on individual relationships more than institutionalized sites of learning, he set out finding individuals in the region that could teach him.

Tāl traveled from Halwar and began studying with *shaykh* Basamūr al-Amīr bin 'Abdallah. Also known as Lamin Sokho, this scholar was married to Tāl's eldest sister, Fatima, and lived in a small village called Durbūs (Ndorbosse).<sup>121</sup> Having already memorized the Qur'an, Tāl would most likely have started his studies in the rudimentary texts of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the Arabic language (*lugha*). Oral and family traditions, however, give no indication of what works Tāl studied with Sokho, or even how long he stayed at Sokho's residence. It is clear that this marked the beginning of Tāl's journey to cultivate Islamic education through travel.

We do not know what other villages and teachers Tāl encountered after he left Durbūs, but we know that he travelled east, crossing the northern bank of the Senegal river close to Mauritania. In a village named Sīn al-Fālil, he began studying under Aḥmad Ḥalima. Ḥalima was an accomplished scholar. Though we do not know much about him, it is telling that a teacher of his caliber could go unnoticed in the historical record. In other words, he may have been one among hundreds of other scholars in the region, who could teach advanced subjects of the Islamic religious

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 39. *shaykh* Basamūr al-Amīr was the student of another famous teacher, *shaykh* Tafsīr Ḥamād bin Ibrahīm, who was a student of Awlād al-Daymān, the kinsfolk of the descendants of Nāṣir al-Dīn. He was also from the important Sokho lineage and battled alongside Abdul Qadir Kan. See; Robinson, *The holy War*, 68. His teacher may have been Muhand Baba see; Charles Stewart and Sidi Ahmed ould Ahmed Salim, *The Arabic Literature of Africa Volume 5: The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara*, 2 volumes (Brill, 2015), 492.

sciences. Oral accounts highlight that under the guidance of Ḥalima, Tāl completed the Mukhtaṣar of Khalīl—a foundational text in the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence. He also reported to have studied advanced subjects such as, rhetoric (*balāgha*), prosody (*urūd*) and poetry (*shi‘r*).<sup>122</sup> Many of these subjects were meant for advanced students, who had already spent many years in the pursuit of Islamic learning. For this reason, it is safe to argue that Ḥalima was among the last teachers Tāl studied with in Futa Toro, before traveling to other parts of West Africa, as an established scholar himself.

The only explicit piece of evidence from Tāl’s tenure as a student in Sīn al-Fālil is a manuscript copy of a work on Arabic grammar (*naḥw*) and morphology (*ṣarf*), entitled *al-Farīda*. Tāl copied this work by his own hand. The manuscript provides a concrete example of the relationship between Islamic knowledge and mobility, and how texts were embedded within broader relationships between scholars and students. It also highlights the importance of the Arabic language in Islamic scholarly pursuits, and that scholars in Futa Toro were engaging with such works. The next section turns to a careful analysis of this manuscript, and situates Tāl within the broader context of Islamic knowledge transmission in West Africa.

### **Scholarly Interconnections and the Travel of Manuscripts**

The manuscript, consisting of ninety-seven, double-sided folios, is found in Tāl’s personal library—now housed in Paris, France (see Introduction). It is not entirely clear how a work Tāl copied in Futa Toro early in his studies became incorporated into his library, nearly three decades

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<sup>122</sup> Tāl, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur fī Sīra al-Ḥājj ‘Umar*, 39-40. For a catalogue of some of the important titles associated with these disciples in West Africa see: See also: Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart. “The historic ‘Core Curriculum.’”

later, especially given the numerous places that Tāl travelled prior to consolidating power in Segu. It is also difficult to establish the ubiquity of this work in the region and why this particular work was studied, as opposed to other advanced Arabic grammar works.<sup>123</sup>

There is an intriguing note, left by Tāl, on the final page of the manuscript. Like numerous other Arabic manuscripts, the colophon gives biographical details of the copyist, the nature of the work, where it was copied and why. In the first line, Tāl wrote “I have completed the *qasīda*, known as *al-Farīda*, and its commentary *al-Minah al-ḥamīda*, written by the author, the shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, may God continuously have mercy on him.”<sup>124</sup> Sometimes known as the *Alfiyya*—indicating that it consists of a thousand lines of poetry—the work was composed by the famed Egyptian polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī in the late fifteenth century. It is a rhyming poem in the *rajaz* meter that covers all the important and difficult points of Arabic grammar. Like most classical Islamic texts, its short poetic lines indicate that it was crafted with the intention of being memorized.

The author of *al-Farīda*, al-Suyūṭī, had a long and influential political and intellectual relationship with West African clerics and rulers. He is known to have visited the important Saharan city of Sijilmasa, wrote numerous legal opinions (*fatāwā*) for West Africans, and advised at least one important West African ruler, al-Hajj Askia Muḥammad. In his autobiography, al-Suyūṭī detailed that numerous scholars and students from West Africa passed through Cairo and studied with him on their way to the *ḥajj*. For instance he wrote that in 1484, “...the pilgrim caravan of Takrur arrived, and in it were the sultan, the *qadi*, and a group of students. They all came to me, and acquired knowledge and traditions from me...they read with me a number of my

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<sup>123</sup> The work does seem to have had a wide circulation, however, given that there were numerous other commentaries written on it. These were found across these Sahara, especially in Mauritania. See; Stewart and Ould Ahmed Salim, *The Arabic Literature of Africa Volume 5*, 1737.

<sup>124</sup> BnF Fonds Arabe 5719 fol. 97b.

works, and they took with them another collection of my works, more than twenty.”<sup>125</sup> Underscoring again the importance of travel in the pursuit of knowledge, the quotation highlights that West Africans were deeply engaged with the broader Islamic scholarly tradition. In this example, West African scholars and students studied with al-Suyūfī works on jurisprudence, *ḥadīth* transmission, theology, and Qur’anic exegesis. Furthermore, they copied more than twenty of his works, including *al-Farīda*. They then transmitted these works to other students upon their return, spreading these texts throughout West Africa.

In the colophon, Tāl explained that along *al-Farīda*, he also studied a commentary of the work, entitled *al-Minaḥ al-ḥamīda*. In the manner that he presents this information, it appears that the commentary was written by al-Suyūfī, since he does not mention any other author. Though al-Suyūfī did later write a commentary on this work, something that was quite common amongst Muslim scholars, he did not write this particular commentary. Muḥammad Bābā bin Muḥammad al-Amīn (d. 1605/6), an important scholar from Timbuktu, instead wrote *al-Minaḥ al-ḥamīda*. Timbuktu was among the premier centers of Islamic learning in West Africa and had attracted a number of important Muslim scholars.<sup>126</sup> An entry in an eighteenth century biographical dictionary, gives us some insight into this scholar’s life. He was a student of Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Kuray, a teacher at the Sankore Mosque in Timbuktu, and a judge. Having mastered numerous Islamic sciences, he dedicated himself to writing commentaries on difficult works in the Arabic language.<sup>127</sup> Besides *al-Minaḥ al-ḥamīda*, he wrote a commentary on *al-qaṣīda al-khazrajiya*, which is a poem on Arabic prosody, and a commentary on the difficult Arabic work,

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<sup>125</sup> Quoted in E.M. Sartain “Jalal Ad-Din As-Suyuti’s Relations with the People of Takrur” in *Journal of Semitic Studies* (1971), 195. It is, however, not precise which areas of West Africa he was in contact with as the term “Tukrur” in medieval Cairo could signify a number of different locales, see: ‘Umar al-Naqar, “Takrūr: The History of a Name” in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 10, No. 3(1969), 363-374.

<sup>126</sup> Elias N. Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu: The Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables 1400-1900*, (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

*maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*.<sup>128</sup> The example of Bābā highlights that West Africans were not merely passive receptors of works produced in different Muslim lands. Instead, through elaboration and commentary, West African clerics and students of Islam contributed to the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. Often, rather than the original works, it was the commentary that became more important in West African knowledge practices. Consequently, the commentaries of Bābā, including *al-Minaḥ al-ḥamīda*, became the preferred works in the study circles of the elites of Timbuktu and beyond.<sup>129</sup>

Bābā’s lucid and comprehensible prose opens up the dense and opaque poetic lines of al-Suyūfī’s original text. Though the original text (*matn*) and commentary (*sharḥ*) are different works, they are not “physically isolated from each other.”<sup>130</sup> The latter embeds the spaces left open by the former. This spatial and temporal relationship between distinct authors, linked together on paper, is clearly visible from the ink of Tāl’s pen. Having written a line, or a couple of lines of poetry from al-Suyūfī’s original, Tāl wrote out parts of Muḥammad Bābā’s commentary for those specific lines. The commentary is interpretative, and contains definitions and elaboration on certain words that al-Suyūfī used, further grammatical explanations, and often a summary of a grammatical topic. Capturing the *matn/sharḥ* relationship in a single frame, three hundred years after Muḥammad Bābā wrote *al-Minaḥ al-ḥamīda*, Tāl effectively wrote himself into this longer scholarly tradition.

Through travel, students, scholars, and scribes transmitted the work to other parts of West Africa. Several West African manuscript libraries—those in Mauritania, Mali and Nigeria—have copies of both the original and its commentary.<sup>131</sup> Though it is difficult to know how often it was

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<sup>128</sup> Chouki El Hamel, *La Vie Intellectuelle Islamique dans le Sahel Ouest-Africain (XVIe- XIXe siècles)*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002), 281-282.

<sup>129</sup> Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 84.

<sup>130</sup> Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (University of California Press, 1993), 32.

<sup>131</sup> A search for the manuscript in the West African Manuscript Database (<http://www.westafricanmanuscripts.org>) shows several copies in different libraries throughout West Africa.

studied, a generation before Tāl, we have two explicit historical references to the text. For example, one of the most important and erudite scholars of nineteenth century Nigeria, ‘Abdullah dan Fodio, explicitly mentions studying *al-Minah al-ḥamīda* in his own intellectual autobiography.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore al-Bartīlī, the author of an important compendium of Saharan scholars, *Faṭḥ al-shakūr*, explains that a Mauritanian scholar, al-Idaylbī (d. 1783), regularly gave lessons from *al-Farīda*.<sup>133</sup> Al-Bartīlī, who knew the scholar personally, points out that this text was a comprehensive work and was sufficient to teach all the subtle points of Arabic grammar. These two examples, and the fact that Tāl also studied the text, suggest that *al-Farīda*, though perhaps not the most popular advanced Arabic grammar work, was studied, copied, and discussed across a wide geographic area in West Africa and the Sahara.

### **Travel, Embodied Knowledge and the Production of Texts**

Returning to Tāl’s colophon at the end of the manuscript, Tāl explains how long it took him to complete the work, as well as some information that can help us understand how he studied it. He wrote:

By the hand of the weak and humble servant of God, the debased and sinner, the lowest of creation, and the one returning for forgiveness from his Master, the powerful, on Whom he depends, ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd bin ‘Uthmān ibn Mukhtār ibn Samba bin al-Mukhtār. I started this work on Wednesday after fifteen days passed in the month of Jumādā al-awwal, and I finished it on Sunday after eight days had passed in the month of Sha‘bān. On the day I began [this work]āI was in a village named buhur duld and on the day I finished I was in a village named Basīn Fāil in the *majlis* [lesson circle] of our generous teacher Aḥmad Ḥalimi. I ask our Lord to forgive my parents and I, and our teachers and all the believers and Muslims both male and female until the end of time, Amīn.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart. “The historic ‘Core Curriculum,’ 19.

<sup>133</sup> The teacher was named at-talib al-bashir b. al-hajj al-hadi al-Idaylbi (d. 1783). See: El Hamel, *La Vie Intellectuelle Islamique dans le Sahel Ouest-Africain (XVIe- XIXe siècles)*.

<sup>134</sup> BnF Fonds Arabe 5719 fol. 97b.

The note is interesting because Tāl did not employ the title “al-Fūtī” (from Futa Toro), which he used to sign his later works with, after he had become a well established scholar. This again indicates that he studied *al-Farīda* as a young student in Futa Toro. At the end of the note he inscribed a supplication (*du‘ā*), asking for the forgiveness for his parents, his teachers and all other Muslims. Normally a supplication like this would be recited verbally, after a prayer, either individually or in communion. It is not clear if Tāl wanted anyone else to read this note, but by inscribing this supplication, he gave it an existence beyond the verbal, and textualized it for posterity.

This colophon is also important because it is one of the rare references Tāl makes to a teacher. In this case, he mentions Aḥmad Ḥalimi, in order to authenticate that he studied this work with him. Read in this light, the colophon serves as Tāl’s *ijāza*, demonstrating that he had mastery over the work, and also had the authority to transmit it.

The note also gives us details on how Tāl studied the work, and captures once again, the importance of mobility. The work took him close to four months to complete. Tāl mentions that he started the work in a village named Buhur Duld, but finished it in another village, Basīn Falil. It is tempting to suggest that Tāl might have accompanied his teacher Aḥmad Ḥalimi in his travels and for this reason he studied the work in two different locations. Another possibility is that Tāl started the work with another teacher in Buhur Duld and then subsequently moved to Basīn Falil, where he completed the text. But as Tāl does not mention any other teachers, it is likely the entire work was studied with Ḥalimi.

Tāl also mentions that he studied the work in the *majlis* of his teacher. *Majlis*, quite literally, translates into sitting or a lesson circle. It was a more formalized site that expressed the *isnād* paradigm and *ijāza* system. In a *majlis*, teachers taught specific texts, during specific times during

the day. The *majlis* was based on the same principles of personalized knowledge transmission. Whereas a Qur'an school was meant for memorizing the Qur'an, the *majlis* was meant for all the other works of the Islamic religious sciences. The allusion to a *majlis* also suggests that Ḥalimi had others students, who along with Tāl took part in studying *al-Farīda*.

There is no indication, however, exactly how Tāl studied this work. Since he alludes to a *majlis*, it is clear that oral transmission was important. It is possible, as was common at the time, that students gathered around Ḥalimi as he explained specific parts of the text. He would perhaps pause after every explanation to take students' questions, give further examples from other works, and provide his own commentary.<sup>135</sup> It is likely that students in this *majlis* also memorized the original al-Suyūfī lines and reviewed them in their private time after each lesson.<sup>136</sup>

The fact that Tāl copied this work meant that he and other students had access to to a manuscript copy of it. It is more than likely that this original belonged to Ḥalimi, who allowed his students to transcribe their own copies. Perhaps this work was harder to find, and it was worth the effort for a student to copy the work and have it in his or her private library. We know that the production of Tāl's copy was embedded within this larger constellation of teaching and learning in the *majlis*. The manuscript was an artifact of that experience, and was not independent from it. Through travel, students encountered teachers, and studied works that they would otherwise not have access to. By memorizing and copying, they could then transmit the text to students elsewhere.

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<sup>135</sup> I make these observations based on my own ethnographic experience in traditional West African Majlis, as well as oral interviews with students who have engaged with this methodology of learning in both the Gambia and Senegal.

<sup>136</sup> This was a common practice in the *majlis*, see: Brinkley Messick "Genealogies of Reading and the Scholarly Cultures of Islam" in *Cultures of Scholarship*, Edited by S. Humphreys. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

While copying played an important function in making manuscripts available to others, Tāl's copy was meant for himself. His writing and Arabic orthography are quite good, but his manuscript does not look like other manuscripts touched by the hand of an expert copyist. The spacing in the text is not uniform, nor is the size of the writing. There are numerous instances of elisions, and crossed-out words. Tāl frequently uses the margins to transcribe parts of the original text that he initially missed. In some cases, he copied two verses of the poem, before transcribing the commentary for those verses. In other cases, he copied up to five verses (one after another) and then weaved the commentary with lines connected to the corresponding verses. For these reasons, it appears Tāl wrote and copied his manuscript slowly, from time to time, over the four months he studied the work.

The structure of the work, and the colophon give us crucial details about the work, and perhaps how it came into production. Yet the manuscript also has numerous silences that inhibit us from grasping what Tāl thought about this work, and how he understood it. This is because he did not leave any marginal notes or supra-commentary on the text. In other words, the copy he produced matches, in content, other copies of the work, without any additions. Moreover, it is not clear whether he taught this work later in life, or if others made copies from it. But the work was clearly important to him. He made the effort to copy ninety-seven folios and to preserve the manuscript for several decades. This manuscript, and the insights it yields into Tāl's educational practices and relationships, is the only material evidence remaining of the early chapter of Tāl's life—when he was a young student in Futa Toro.

## **Conclusion**

Tāl's early life in Futa Toro remains one of the least studied aspects of his intellectual career. Apart from a few references in oral traditions and biographical works, we know virtually

nothing about what he studied, and with whom. Despite the brevity of primary source material, in this chapter, I argued Tāl was able to master numerous Islamic sciences because of the embodied and personalized nature of the transmission of Islamic knowledge in the nineteenth century. This was an enduring epistemology, predicated on the idea that knowledge resided with scholars, and could only be acquired through the face-to-face and oral interaction between masters and disciples. Consequently, despite the extreme political and social turmoil in Futa Toro during Tāl’s early life, his extraordinary mobility connected him with authorized teachers in different parts of the region.

Though intellectual and religious texts mattered, I argued that their production and transmission had to be understood within broader relationships forged between masters and disciples in Islamic learning. In order to highlight this point, and further explain Tāl’s own intellectual genealogy, I analyzed a grammar work, *al-Farīda*, that Tāl copied while he was a student in Futa Toro. I first located how a work that was composed in the fifteenth century in Cairo was also important to the knowledge practices of Muslims in nineteenth century Western Africa. The work demonstrates that West African Muslim were engaging with sophisticated works of Arabic grammar, not just in perceived “centers” of learning, like Timbuktu, but also in Futa Toro and further a field.

By analyzing the colophon at the end of the manuscript, I explained that Tāl slowly and progressively copied the work while he studied the text in the *majlis* of his teacher, Aḥmad Ḥalimi. I argued that this work was an “artifact of epistemology.” It both captured the longer history of the transmission and circulation of Islamic texts in West Africa, and also highlights how the production of texts was tied to the relationship between mobility and embodied forms of Islamic knowledge.

## Chapter 2

### ʿUmar Tāl’s Ḥajj and the Seal of Sainthood

#### Introduction

The *ḥajj* marks the fifth and final pillar of Islam. It is a pilgrimage, where men and women of sound mind and body perform rituals enshrined centuries earlier.<sup>137</sup> For most of its history, pilgrims travelled on well-trodden paths, on foot or by animal, to the house that Abraham built, to a practice that Muḥammad instituted. Marked by several rites in and around Mecca, it is probably best known by the *tawāf*, when pilgrims circumambulate the *kaʿba*—the black cube that centers the directionality (*qibla*) of Muslim prayer. Though performed collectively, the *ḥajj* holds its own meanings, memories and experiences for each pilgrim. Repeated every year at the same time and place, it is to this personal and collective event that ʿUmar Tāl desired to go.<sup>138</sup>

With an entourage, including two wives and his brother, ʿAlī, he departed from Bornu in the early months of 1826.<sup>139</sup> En route to the pilgrimage, in the Fezzan, the vast expanse of Libyan

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<sup>137</sup> For an overview of the *ḥajj* see: F. E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>138</sup> Every year pilgrims perform the *ḥajj* from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of *dhū al-ḥijja*— the final month of the Islamic calendar.

<sup>139</sup> The Scottish explorer Hugh Clapperton mentioned meeting a ʿHadji Omar’ in 1826, when both men were in Sokoto (Nigeria). See: Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: The Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London: John Murray, 1829), 202-203. If it was ʿUmar Tāl that he met, then the implication was that Tāl already performed the *ḥajj* and had returned to West Africa. This date, however, is wrong. If Clapperton met Tāl in 1826, it was before he embarked for the Ḥijāz. I have used 1826 as the date he travelled to the *ḥajj* because Tāl explicitly stated that he remained with his teacher Muhammad Ghali for three years in Mecca and Medina. Tāl’s acrostic poem “*Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn ‘an qubḥ ikhtilāf al-mu’minīn*” [*A Reminder for the Negligent on the Ugliness of Dispute Among Believers*] was completed in the Fezzan when he was returning from the pilgrimage in 1829. The work is available in several manuscript copies, BNF fonds Arabe: 5532: 123b-133a, 5609: 19a-34b, 5647: 44a-54b. It is also available in print, with annotation and French translation, Claudine Gerresh-Dekais “*Tadhkirat al-Ghafilin*,

desert, he heard that one of Aḥmad Tijānī’s close disciples, Muḥammad al-Ghālī, had migrated to the Ḥijāz.<sup>140</sup> al-Ghālī had been instructed to spread the Tijāniyya to the eastern Muslim lands and take care of the nascent Tijānī community in the region.<sup>141</sup> Longing to meet al-Ghālī once he arrived in Mecca, Tāl wrote “[God] allowed me to meet him in Mecca after ‘*asr* by the *maqām al-Ibrāhīm*.”<sup>142</sup> Near the *Ka’ba*, the *maqām al-Ibrāhīm* (station of Abraham) is a large rock that Muslims believe the Prophet Abraham stood on as he built the House of God.<sup>143</sup> Marked by two footprints, it remains a particularly important site to offer prayers. It is in this sacred site of pastness, in his present, after the third daily prayer (‘*asr*), that his future began.

Though acknowledged as a turning point in Tāl’s life, scholars have yet to carefully analyze his *ḥajj*, shifts in his personhood at the hands of al-Ghālī, and the forms of authority that he cultivated as a consequence.<sup>144</sup> During Tāl’s own lifetime, many of his detractors cited that the main reason he had such a large following in West Africa was because he had performed the *ḥajj*. For instance, Bou el Mogdad, a Wolof from Saint Louis who helped design French colonial policy on Islam, wrote in reference to Tāl,

he was only an unknown inhabitant of Alwar...[he] profited from the bit of Arabic he knew to undertake the pilgrimage; it was this journey which allowed him subsequently to play such an

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ou un aspect pacifique peu connu de la vie d’Al-Hajj ‘Umar” *Bulletin de l’Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire, Science humaine*, 39, séries B, no. 4 (1977): 890-930. I discuss this work in greater detail in the next chapter. For more on Tāl’s travel to the Ḥijāz see; Tāl, Muntaga, *Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur fī Sīra al-Ḥājj ‘Umar (Les Perles Rares sur la Vie d’El Hadji Omar)* (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2005), 58-64.

<sup>140</sup> Moussa Kamara, trans. Amar Samb “La vie d’El-Hadji Omar” *Bulletin de l’Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire, Science humaine*, 2, séries B, no. 2 (1970), 380-391.

<sup>141</sup> Virtually everything we know about Muḥammad al-Ghālī comes to us from the writing of ‘Umar Tāl, and some oral traditions. Systematic research on the early history of the Tijāniyya as well as research in Moroccan archival and oral sources may reveal more insight into the man who shaped Tāl’s future.

<sup>142</sup> Umar Tāl, *Rimāḥ ḥizb al-raḥīm ‘ala nuḥūr ḥizb al-raḥīm* [The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed] (Beirut: Dar el-fikir, 2012), ch. 28, 356.

<sup>143</sup> F. E. Peters, *The Hajj*, 6-9. This site and its explicit links to Abraham are mentioned in the Qur’an twice, 2:125 and 3:97.

<sup>144</sup> Both Robinson and Willis suggest that Tāl’s pilgrimage played an important role his later career. They explain some of what transpired during the *ḥajj* and also quote from his work. However, they do not provide any in-depth analysis of why his time in the Ḥijāz was so important. They do not also explain his spiritual transformations and the forms of authority that he cultivated. See: David Robinson. *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and John Ralph Willis, *In The Path of Allah: The Passion of Al-Hajj ‘Umar, An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam*, (London: Frank Cass, 1989).

important role. During his travels he perfected his Arabic, became learned in the Koran, and read a large number of good books. Having thus become the most learned of all his compatriots he was able on his return to set up as a Master and to interpret the Koran in his own way. If some noted marabout [scholar] raises an objection he always silences him by saying, 'You have not seen what I have seen; I have visited the cradle of Islam for myself and read books unknown on the banks of Senegal.' Sensible people who did not believe in Al-Hajj were overwhelmed by the dominant position which his own merits gave him; they were dragged along by the crowd of ignorant people who regarded him as a demi-god.'<sup>145</sup>

Despite the evident bias in Bou el Mogdad's statement, and his factual errors—Tāl had a mastery over the Arabic language and was quite an accomplished scholar before he embarked for the Ḥijāz—there is a kernel of truth. For West Africans, the *hajj* was a difficult and a rare undertaking.<sup>146</sup> Few Muslims had the fortitude and access to the tremendous human and material capital that it required. Having performed the *hajj*, three times, certainly endowed Tāl with prestige and honor when he returned back to West Africa.

But the *hajj* was only one important aspect of the three years he spent in the Ḥijāz.<sup>147</sup> Even more significant than the pilgrimage itself was perhaps what was epiphenomenal to it—his encounter with al-Ghālī. Having first taken the Tijāniyya at the hands of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Nāqil in West Africa, under the watchful eyes of al-Ghālī, Tāl was reinitiated in to the order. In less than three years, he made the transition from an ordinary, albeit brilliant Muslim scholar, to becoming among the Tijāniyya's elites. Through spiritual training, and rites of passage, impossible for the uninitiated to know, al-Ghālī appointed him a *khalīfa* (deputy/successor) of the Tijāniyya. In the company of al-Ghālī, he also claimed to have acquired rare secret knowledge, including the *al-ism*

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<sup>145</sup> John D. Hargreaves, ed. *France and West Africa: An Anthology of Historical Documents* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 148-149.

<sup>146</sup> The best overview on the history of West Africans and the *hajj* is 'Umar Al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa: An Historical Study with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1972). See also: J. S. Birks, *Across the Savannas to Mecca: the Overland Pilgrimage Route From West Africa* (London: C. Hurst, 1978).

<sup>147</sup> Family traditions and later accounts highlight that Tāl also spent time in Cairo, Jerusalem and Damascus. Though he does not mention this in his own writings, one of the most telling stories enshrined in later poetry is that he debated with all the great scholars of Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Establishing his intellectual prowess and erudition, he is reported to have defeated all of these scholars, and regardless of the difficulty, he left no questions unanswered. For this and other reports of his travel outside of the Ḥijāz see: Tāl, *Al-Jawāhir*, 65-88.

*al-a‘zam* (God’s greatest name), as well as inherited the knowledge of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. He returned to West Africa not only as a *ḥājjī* or “*al-hajj*,” but also as a Tijānī *shaykh*—invested with enormous authority and spiritual knowledge. His role in establishing the Tijāniyya and building a community of disciples would transform how West Africans would come to view organized Sufi brotherhoods. The spread of the Tijāniyya would come to also have a lasting impact on the practice of Islam in the region more broadly.

In this chapter, I piece together a narrative on Tāl’s intersubjective relationship with al-Ghālī, and examine aspects of what constituted his authority as a Tijānī *shaykh*.<sup>148</sup> I frame my analysis on Tāl’s magnum opus—*Al-Rimāḥ*, one of the most widely read Arabic works by any West African scholar.<sup>149</sup> Ignored by both Africanists and Islamicists, nearly two decades ago, John Hunwick described the work as a “*hard lump in the stomach – massive and undigested.*”<sup>150</sup> Highlighting Tāl’s deep erudition, the fifty-five chapters of the work engage with numerous debates and discussions within the broader history of Sufism, and provide some of the earliest insights on Tijani doctrine. The book remains one of the most important, but understudied, works of Islamic intellectual history.

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<sup>148</sup> Following Groark, here I use “intersubjective” not simply as a form of “reading of minds” but define it as a culturally contingent relationship between two human beings that also takes into consideration non-verbal and embodied modes of knowledge transmission see: Kevin P. Groark “Toward a cultural phenomenology of intersubjectivity: The extended relational field of the Tzotzil Maya of highland Chiapas, Mexico” *Language & Communication*, 33, no. 2 (July 2013), 278-291.

<sup>149</sup> Cited earlier in footnote 6. The work was completed in 1844/45. In this chapter I mostly rely on a recent published edition of this work, but I have also consulted a manuscript copy, BNF fonds Arabe 5730: 1-202, in preparing my translation of key passages below. I have cited the printed edition only. Since there are numerous published editions of the work, and page numbers do not correlate from one edition to another, I have also included the chapter number in my citations.

<sup>150</sup> John Hunwick “Sufism and the Study of Islam in West Africa: The Case of Al-Hajj ‘Umar” *Der Islam*, 71, (1994), 309-310.

By rooting my analysis on three chapters of this work, I discuss what I view as the multiple registers of Tāl’s spiritual authority.<sup>151</sup> Though Tāl wrote the work fifteen years after he returned to West Africa, it is the only primary source that provides insights into his experiences in the Ḥijāz.<sup>152</sup> By first examining his encounter with al-Ghālī, I explain the spiritual transformations he underwent. I then explore the non-verbal and verbal aspects that were tied to his authority, as well as an *ijāza* (license) that al-Ghālī wrote for him in 1829. Finally, I end by analyzing Tāl’s claim to have acquired the greatest name of God, and explain how this was linked to his conceptualization of his own spiritual rank.

### **An Encounter**

Between the thousands of bodies of standing and prostrate believers, Tāl spotted al-Ghālī at the *maqām al-Ibrāhīm*. Though we have no information about how this meeting was organized—whether it was by chance or prearranged-- it was significant. Reminiscing of this first encounter with al-Ghālī, Tāl wrote, “we spoke for a while and he was extremely happy with me.”<sup>153</sup> He, however, did not elaborate on what he spoke to his future teacher about. Instead, he made it a point to explain to his audience, “I was honored when he recognized the [characteristic of] *ṣidq* in me.”<sup>154</sup> Literally truthfulness (or sometimes sincerity), *ṣidq* has been an important concept in the earliest discussions of Sufism. For instance, one of the founding figures of Sufism, Saḥl al-Tustārī (d. 896) “mentioned truthfulness among the five principal pillars of Sufism alongside generosity, resoluteness, fear of God, modesty, and scrupulousness in food.”<sup>155</sup> Similarly, a few centuries later,

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<sup>151</sup> I extensively analyze chapters 28-30, which provide some of the only autobiographical information on Tāl’s three years in the Ḥijāz. Though I root my analysis on these chapters, I also explain, cite and make reference to other parts of the *Rimāḥ*.

<sup>152</sup> The issue is that by the time he wrote the *Rimāḥ*, he was already a well established Sufi *shaykh* with numerous disciples. Thus his narrative of his time in the Hijaz also reflected his new position.

<sup>153</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 28, 356.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>155</sup> Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 308.

the great Andalusian saint, ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) counted truthfulness among “his list of the nine principal conditions of the mystical path together with hunger, vigil, silence, retreat, trust in God, patience, determination, and certainty.”<sup>156</sup> Different early Sufi masters identified *ṣidq* as one of the core attributes for any aspirant of the Way.<sup>157</sup> The fact that al-Ghālī had identified and recognized this attribute in Tāl was significant. In Tāl’s account it was the central reason that made it possible for al-Ghālī to accept him as a disciple.

During this initial encounter, Tāl also recounted that an exchange occurred between the two of them. He wrote, al-Ghālī “gave me a copy of *jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*, which I still have with me today, so that I could read it.”<sup>158</sup> Written by ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm Barāda, this work remains the most authoritative source on the life, practices and teachings of Aḥmad al-Tijānī.<sup>159</sup> It is not clear what details Tāl knew about Tijānī’s life and teachings prior to meeting al-Ghālī. Acquiring *jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*, however, gave him access to intimate details of the founder’s life, important aspects of his

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Indeed, Tāl was also well aware of the larger discussions in Sufism and the importance that Sufi masters placed on *ṣidq*. He titled chapter 16 of the *Rimāḥ* as “Informing them that the first characteristic a disciple should attain is *ṣidq*.” This rather long chapter examines the different definitions of *ṣidq*, and explains the importance of *ṣidq* in actions and intentions. He details this concept using Qur’anic verses, Prophetic narrations (*ḥadīth*), and the writings of several Sufi masters. At bottom, whereas other Sufis included *ṣidq* among a constellation of different attributes a student should possess, for Tāl this was the paramount and primary principle for any aspirant of the Way.

<sup>158</sup> Tāl, *Rimāḥ*, ch. 28, 356. There are three complete copies of the work in ‘Umar Tāl’s library. See: BNF fonds Arabe 5434: 1-164, 5481: 1-154, 5564:1a-182b. Further analysis might possibly tell us if one of these manuscripts was actually the one given to him by Ghālī in Mecca. We know from this account that Tāl had this early copy of this work at least until 1845.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm Barāda was a close disciple of Ahmad Tijani who died before his master. He wrote *jawāhir al-ma‘ānī* during his master’s lifetime, and also read the entirety of the book to him in 1802. See; Jamil M. Abu-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 148. The full title of the work in translation is “The Jewel of the Meaning and Fulfillment of Desire Concerning the Outpouring of my Master Abū al-‘Abbās al-Tijānī.” The meaning of “outpouring” (*fayḍ*) refers to a central concept that describes the spiritual station of Aḥmad al-Tijānī and is fundamental to what adherents have come to believe what of Tijani’s spiritual abilities and relationship to other saints. For a discussion of this concept and its importance for the Tijāniyya, especially for the movement of the later West Africa Tijānī, Ibrāhīm Niassé see; Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niassé and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

doctrine and several litanies and prayers.<sup>160</sup> On the one hand, Tāl came to know al-Tijānī intimately through the example of al-Ghālī and the stories that he narrated about him. On the other hand, he came to know the founder of the Tijāniyya through a textualized account. It was this dialogical relationship between text and person, between *jawāhir al-ma‘ānī* and al-Ghālī, that mediated Tāl’s early relationship with al-Tijani and his spiritual path.

Additionally, it is likely that was among the first West African scholars to read *jawāhir al-ma‘ānī* given the small number of Tijānīs in Sub-Saharan West Africa in the early 1820s. Consequently, on his return, Tāl also became one of the first scholars to transmit the text in the region. Evidence for this interpretation is found in the work of a Christian missionary named Charles Reichardt. While compiling his grammar of the Fula language in the 1870s, Reichardt chanced upon a manuscript that had been translated from Arabic to Fula on Tāl’s life. Reichardt’s translation of this text describes that once Tāl returned to West Africa in 1830 he spent five years in Sokoto with its ruler Mohammed Bello.<sup>161</sup> The account then states that Tāl brought a book named *jawahir al-ma‘ani* back with him, and soon after “Muhammad Bello made his scribe copy the book.”<sup>162</sup>

After acquiring *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī* and making a favorable impression on al-Ghālī, Tāl stayed with his new teacher in Mecca until they completed their devotions and rituals. Then he explained, “I traveled with him to Medina...we arrived on the first of *muḥarram*, and I stayed with him that year.”<sup>163</sup> Having completed the *ḥajj*, he now began to turn his attention to his spiritual

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<sup>160</sup> Tāl quotes extensively from this work in the *Rimāḥ*, and also devotes the second half of the work to explain Tijani doctrine. The *Rimāḥ* and *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī* are almost always published together as a single volume. Together they constitute perhaps the most authoritative works on Tijānī practice and doctrine.

<sup>161</sup> Muhammad Bello was the son of the founder of the Sokoto Empire, Uthman dan Fodio. Both father and son were accomplished Islamic scholars, and had an intellectual and political impact on Tāl. See footnote 43.

<sup>162</sup> Charles Augustus L. Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language*, (London: Church Missionary House, 1876), 288.

<sup>163</sup> If we assume that he met Ghali at the beginning to the *hajj*, this would mean he spent at least 20 days with his teacher before arriving in Medina.

training. Significantly, Tāl makes it explicit that this training began in the city of the Prophet, Medina, on the first day of the first month of the Islamic calendar, *muḥarram*. Though it is in Mecca where he met his teacher, it is in the proximity to the Prophet that marked the beginnings of his spiritual transformation.<sup>164</sup>

This transformation first began as a result of the particular intersubjective relationship Tāl established with al-Ghālī. Once in Medina, he explained, “I submitted myself and my wealth to him. I took him as a guide, and I remained in his service for about three years.”<sup>165</sup> The importance of finding a teacher and submitting to him (or her) has long remained the hallmark of a particular orientation to Islamic knowledge.<sup>166</sup> For instance, in his study on Islamic knowledge practice in medieval Damascus, Michael Chamberlain provides us with some important insights on this orientation to knowledge. Even with the rise of institutions of learning, he argues that “knowledge continued to be transmitted as it had been before—within lineages and groups of scholars tied together by bonds of love and service.”<sup>167</sup> The relationship between master and disciple was fundamentally reciprocal and built on mutual obligation and love. Chamberlain notes that most cultivated elites in Damascus “spent some time in the service of a great shaykh, and considered

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<sup>164</sup> Tāl mentions his physical proximity to the Prophet several times in the *Rimāḥ* during key moments of his spiritual transformation. Certainly encountering the Prophet both in dreams and in a waking state are essential aspects of the Tijāniyya see; Zachary Valentine Wright, “Embodied Knowledge in West African Islam: Continuity and Change in the Gnostic Community of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niassé” Phd dissertation (Northwestern University, 2010), 71-78. But the Prophet’s agency even after his death has long remained an important aspect of Muslim belief and thought and is not simply restricted to the Tijāniyya. In this respect, Tāl draws on numerous earlier scholars to reinforce this point in chapter 30 of the *Rimāḥ*.

<sup>165</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 28, 356.

<sup>166</sup> Framed as a particular epistemology of knowledge transmission, I introduced the importance of personal bonds and master/disciple relationships in chapter 1 of this study. This was the case for all branches of Islamic sciences in the pre-modern period, including *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *ḥadīth* (prophetic narration), *tafsir* (Qu’ranic exegesis). The science of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) was a particularly marked site for this broader epistemology. See Wright, *Embodied Knowledge in West African Islam* and Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History In West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>167</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90.

themselves to have life-long obligations to him.”<sup>168</sup> Since teachers provided beneficial religious knowledge (and in the case of *taṣawwuf*, how to build an unmediated relationship with God quite literally) it was incumbent on students to honor them.<sup>169</sup> In submitting to al-Ghālī, by placing his wealth and himself at his service (*khidma*), Tāl was performing actions that had long historical precedents, and were also obligatory on him.<sup>170</sup>

## On Transformations

Under the tutelage of al-Ghālī, Tāl transitioned from the liminality of a Sufi disciple to becoming a Sufi *shaykh* with considerable knowledge and authority.<sup>171</sup> Though he had initially traveled thousands of miles for the pilgrimage, it is the spiritual transformations he underwent in the holy cities of Islam that had a lasting impact on his future. Yet Tāl never produced any explicit autobiographical work, and therefore few details about the three years he spent in the company of al-Ghālī exist. For this reason, it is difficult to discern specific aspects of his daily life in the Ḥijāz, who else he might have met, and the specific practices al-Ghālī made him perform and how he experienced them. Instead Tāl’s descriptions in the *Rimāḥ* provide subtle insights into how his

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>169</sup> See below on *ma‘rifā*.

<sup>170</sup> For a discussion on *khidma* see; Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Ohio University Press 2007), 90-95. Another way to conceptualize the importance of service, mutual obligations, and deference between masters and disciples is through the notion of *adab*. Though this Arabic word carries many meanings, such as manners, education and cultivation, it highlights the particular modes of behavior that students must exhibit towards teachers, and vice versa in the process of acquiring Islamic knowledge. See; Ira M. Lapidus, “Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of *Adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam,” in Barbara D. Metcalf ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>171</sup> I use “liminality” here to gesture to the state of transition when a Sufi aspirant goes from being a disciple without any authority to becoming a Sufi *shaykh* vested with authority. The shifts and transformation from one state to the other occur within a liminal space that are embedded with rituals, rites and practices. For discussions on liminality See; Arnold van Gennep, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee *The rites of passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) and Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage” *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967). For an alternative take on Turner’s theory with specific reference to transmission of knowledge and memory, see; Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

relationship with al-Ghālī materialized the authority and knowledge he came to possess. Analyzing some of these examples within the broader context of Sufī ideas and practices helps to explain the shifts in his personhood.

In one telling passage in the *Rimāḥ*, near the end of his sojourn, Tāl reflected on his relationship with al-Ghālī. Explicitly narrating the implications and spiritual consequences of this relationship, he wrote:

I spent a long time in the company of Sīdī Muḥammad al-Ghālī. By His pure grace, God instilled love in his heart for me so that I ended up acquiring all the contents of his heart and his inner core. I captured his heart inwardly and outwardly. He chose me as a companion and cast everyone else aside. He took me as a servant and a liaison [to others] and I became his intimate friend and a disciple. I set aside all the branches of sciences that I had been memorizing and recording, and stripped myself of the knowledge and facts that I had collected and acquired...In spite of this, whenever I requested anything from him with regard to the secrets of the Spiritual Path, he would scold me to be repentant of this request, until God prepared me and assisted me to obtain what I was eager to acquire.<sup>172</sup>

As I have already mentioned, when Tāl arrived in Medina during his first year of tutelage, he submitted himself and his wealth to his teacher. Over the span of three years, over numerous moments, their relationship changed and evolved. While Tāl remained in service to al-Ghālī, he also mentions that he became his friend and companion. The time the two men spent together brought familiarity and intimacy, to the point, as Tāl makes it quite explicit, al-Ghālī favored him over everyone else.

One of the key and defining aspects of this relationship was that al-Ghālī came to love Tāl. Love (*maḥabba*) has long been an important concept in Islamic thought, and is a cornerstone of Sufism.<sup>173</sup> Rather than a physical or carnal desire, love is a state of being that compels the believer to draw nearer to the divine, or those who can direct the aspirant towards the One. Though within the context of master/disciple relationships it was obligatory on Tāl to honor and love his teacher,

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<sup>172</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 29, 358.

<sup>173</sup> Wright, *Embodied Knowledge in West African Islam*, 66. For a comprehensive discussion of this concept in Islam see; William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature And the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

the example highlights that love could also be reciprocal and agentive. Marking a new stage in their relationship, the fact that al-Ghālī too loved him made it possible for a particular type of transmission to take place.

The consequence of al-Ghālī's love for Tāl was that the latter acquired “all the contents” and “captured” the former's heart. Here the usage of heart (*qalb*) is important, since in this example Tāl was not referring to the physical heart. Instead he was using a technical term that refers to the spiritual heart—an inner eye of perception that transcends the physical and becomes the repository for spiritual knowledge.<sup>174</sup> In the context of Sufism, it is the primary vessel through which a Sufi aspirant can attain gnosis (*ma'rifa*)—the direct, unmediated knowledge of God.<sup>175</sup> Through this example Tāl decisively states that he inherited and acquired all the spiritual knowledge, secrets, and gnosis that his teacher possessed.

One of the preconditions, according to Tāl, for this specific instance of transmission was that he had to divest himself from all the knowledge and categories of understanding he had previously acquired. By unknowing, Tāl could come to really know. By placing himself in the hands of an expert spiritual guide, he allowed al-Ghālī to refashion him—to fill his *qalb* with new knowledge. This is an example of what Wright has called a form of “embodied gnosis.”<sup>176</sup> This intersubjective relationship between master and disciple was not simply a relationship of minds. Here it is quite clear that the knowledge that Tāl received was embodied and transmitted from one spiritual heart to another, through the “bodily presence” of his teacher.<sup>177</sup> Highlighting the

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<sup>174</sup> Wright, *Embodied Knowledge in West African Islam*, 68-69.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 14. See also John Renard, *Knowledge of God In Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

<sup>176</sup> Though Wright uses “embodied gnosis” in specific reference to a later Tijani community, it also captures the experience that Tāl is describing above. See; Wright, *Embodied Knowledge in West African Islam*, 62-78.

<sup>177</sup> Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse* (Brill, 2015), 17-20.

possibilities of the body as a site of perception, this new knowledge and awareness would redefine Tāl as a spiritual guide.

Primarily because Sufism is predicated on experiential knowledge, it is not entirely clear what the content of this knowledge was. Tāl's matter-of-fact description of this transmission also leaves one to wonder how he experienced these moments of transition. Though the experiential aspects of Sufi knowledge are difficult to render into words, many Sufis wrote quite freely about their experience of illumination (*fath*) and transformation, when that knowledge became materialized in them. Highlighting God's favor on them, they wanted to publicize the human potential for gnosis, while also legitimizing and authenticating the knowledge they claimed to possess. This dual purpose of publicizing Sufi experience is evident in the work of two different spiritual guides, 'Abd al-Azīz Dabbāgh (d. 1717) and 'Uthmān dan Fodio (d. 1817).

Unlike most spiritual guides, Dabbāgh did not have any formal training in the Islamic religious sciences and was also unlettered. Much of what we know about his teachings and practices come from his student, Aḥmad Lamati, enshrined in his work *Kitāb al-ibrīz*. After reciting a long daily litany (*wird*) praising the Prophet Muḥammad (*salawāt*) for a period of time, al-Dabbāgh began to witness the beginnings of illumination.<sup>178</sup> One day at the behest of his wife he went to buy some olive oil in the market, and as left his home he began to feel a sudden shudder.

Then in a long and detailed description he narrated,

I experienced great trembling and my flesh began to feel very numb and prickly. I went on walking while this was happening... The state intensified and my breast began beating so hard that my collarbone struck against my beard. I exclaimed: 'This is death, without any doubt!' Then something came forth from my body that resembled steam from a vessel for preparing couscous. My body began to grow tall until it became taller than any tall man. Things began to reveal themselves to me and they appeared as if they were right in front of me. I saw all the towns and cities and small villages. I saw everything that's on this land. I saw the Christian woman breast-feeding her son and he was in her arms. I saw all the seas and I saw all the seven earths and all the beasts of burden and the creatures

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<sup>178</sup> Ahmad ibn al-Mubārak Sijilmāsī, trans. John O'Kane Bernd Radtke *Pure Gold From the Words of Sayyidī Abd Al-Azīz Al-Dabbāgh (Al-Dhabab Al-Ibrīz Min Kalām Sayyidī Abd Al-Azīz Al-Dabbāgh)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 129-130.

found on them. I saw the sky and it was as if I was above it looking at what it contains. Then behold, there was a great light like sudden lightning that came from every direction... An extreme cold from it came over me so that I thought I'd died. I quickly lay down face first... And when I lay down I perceived that my body was all eyes. My eye saw, my head saw, my leg saw, and all my limbs saw...<sup>179</sup>

Transcending the confines of matter, the example highlights the possibilities of perception for an aspirant who comes into contact with the divine. In al-Dabbāgh's narrative this experience was temporary, and it confirmed that he had attained gnosis. Thereafter, as the rest of the work highlights he gained a penetrating insight into the Islamic religious sciences, as well as deep spiritual knowledge.

Nearly a hundred years later, quite a different scholar wrote of having similar experiences. Unlike al-Dabbāgh, however, Shaykh 'Uthmān dan Fodio had mastered numerous Islamic sciences from an early age, and belonged to the Qādirī Sufi brotherhood.<sup>180</sup> He was also an accomplished military and political leader, who founded the Sokoto confederation, and the father of Muḥammad Bello, Tāl's friend and companion.<sup>181</sup> Vividly explaining an earlier mystical experience, he wrote,

when I reached thirty-six years of age, God removed the veil from my sight, and the dullness from my hearing and my smell, and thickness from my taste, and the cramp from my two hands, and the restraint from my two feet, and the heaviness from my body... I could pick up what was far away with my two hands while I was sitting in my place; and I could travel on my two feet [a distance] that a fleet horse could not cover in the space of years. That was a favour from God that He gives to whom He will. And I knew my body, limb by limb, bone by bone, sinew by sinew, muscle by muscle, hair by hair, each one by its rank, and what was entrusted to it. Then I found written upon my fifth rib, on the right side, by the Pen of Power, "Praise be to God, Lord of the Created Worlds ten times; and "O God, bless our Lord Muḥammad, and the Family of Muḥammad, and given them peace" ten times; and "I beg forgiveness from the Glorious God" ten times; and I marveled greatly at that.<sup>182</sup>

Like al-Dabbāgh, this example highlights the alteration of sense perception and the transition from the ordinary to the extra-ordinary. These temporary moments of unveiling played an important role in a Sufi *shaykh*'s persona and claims to knowledge. Indeed 'Uthmān dan Fodio would have

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>180</sup> For a biographical sketch of 'Uthman dan Fodio and the Sokoto empire see; Murray Last *The Sokoto Caliphate* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967) and Mervyn Hiskett *The Sword of Truth: the Life And Times of the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>181</sup> For more on Tāl's relationships with Bello see; chapter 1 and chapter 3.

<sup>182</sup> Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth*, 64-65.

several other such experiences and each would bring him important insights and new knowledge. Partly because of such experiences he became an accomplished spiritual guide and one of the most important West African Muslim intellectuals.

Both al-Dabbāgh and ‘Uthmān an Fodio had an enormous impact on Tāl’s intellectual ideas and approaches to Sufism. He quoted both of these figures extensively, and knew about their experiences of dramatic transformation.<sup>183</sup> Yet although he drew inspiration from those Sufi masters that preceded him, he remained silent about his own experiences, in at least his writing. In other words, he did not publicize such moments of transformation as a way to build his authority and claim authenticity as a Sufi *shaykh*. One possible explanation is that he was wary of aspirants seeking and publicizing such unveilings.<sup>184</sup> For instance, without denying the possibility of bold mystical experiences, Tāl was quite emphatic to explain that such experiences were epiphenomenal to the real goals and intentions of Sufism. As a teacher and a spiritual guide he was concerned that the desire for visionary experiences and unveilings could mislead students and distract them from God. In order to legitimize the spiritual knowledge he acquired from al-Ghālī and his attainment of gnosis, Tāl built his authority through much subtler means.

### **Materiality: Between the Verbal and Written**

While Tāl was in Medina with al-Ghālī, the latter had an encounter with Ahmad al-Tijani.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> In the *Rimāh*, Tāl draws nearly 66 direct quotations from *kitāb al-ibrīz*, and al-Dabbāgh’s ideas are fundamental to many of his discussions. See Bernd Radtke “Sources on the Study of the Kitāb Rimāh Hizb al-Rahim of al-Hajj ‘Umar” *Sudanic Africa*, Vol. 6 (1995), 111. Tāl’s library contains dozens of manuscripts of dan Fodio’s work, see; Noureddine Ghali, and Sidi Mohamed Mahibou, *Inventaire de la Bibliothèque ‘Umarienne de Ségou* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1985), 379.

<sup>184</sup> He dedicates chapters 20 and 21 of the *Rimāh* to warn students against seeking disclosures from the unseen world, or desire to have visionary encounters. For Tāl having such experiences did not determine someone’s spiritual state. He suggests that aspirants who do not have such experiences are often at a higher spiritual state than those that do.

<sup>185</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, ch. 28, 357. In this narrative it is not clear whether this was in a dream, or a waking vision. In the broader epistemology of Islamic knowledge practice, dreams and visionary encounters played important roles. For an overview of dreams and visions in Islam see; Özgen Felek and Alexander Knysh, *Dreams And Visions In Islamic Societies*. (Albany: State University of New York, 2012). In chapter 29 of the *Rimāh*, Tāl also narrates a number of dreams, and provides a discussion on the nature of dreams, and their epistemological and evidentiary function. He

Al-Tijani is reported to have said to al-Ghālī , “I have given shaykh ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd everything that he requires for this Path—from its remembrances (*adhkār*) and secrets (*asrār*) and your duty is only to transmit them to him.”<sup>186</sup> There are no contextual clues in Tāl’s statement that would make it possible to locate exactly when this happened. Therefore, it is not clear whether al-Ghālī saw al-Tijani during Tāl’s first year in Medina, or later on, closer to the end of his sojourn. The implication of this encounter, however, is quite clear. Though al-Ghālī was Tāl’s teacher, and the one most responsible for training him, everything that Tāl acquired was through the agency and authority of al-Tijānī. More explicitly, Tāl would later write “you could say everything that I acquired was directly from Aḥmad al-Tijānī himself.”<sup>187</sup>

In explaining what happened after al-Ghālī complied with what al-Tijani had instructed him to do, Tāl wrote

after we had prayed *‘isha* in the mosque of the Prophet, he took me by my hand until we stood facing the noble grave of the Messenger of God. He explained to me what the Shaykh had commanded him, and he transmitted to me what our leader had entrusted him to transmit. He did this in front of the generous Prophet, so that he could witness that he had indeed transmitted and completed what his son [al-Tijānī] had commanded him.<sup>188</sup>

Like the earlier example when Tāl first arrived in Medina, he was explicit about the time and place of when this transmission occurred. In this case, at night, after the evening prayer (*‘isha*), both men stood near, and faced the grave of the Prophet Muhammad. Tāl had also previously explained that because of al-Ghālī’s love for him, he acquired the contents of his spiritual heart. Unlike the

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summarizes this discussion with a quotation from Ali Khawass, the teacher of one the most important medieval Egyptian Muslim scholars, ‘Abdul Wahāb Sharani (d. 1565). Khawass is reported to have said “no one makes light of what he sees in the state of sleep, except the ignorant, because everything the believer sees consists of God’s revelation on the tongue of the angel of inspiration. Since he is incapable of bearing the burdens of revelation in the state of wakefulness, and of hearing it directly from the angel, it comes to him in the state of sleep, which is the common ground, because the general rule is that it relates to spirituality not the physical body. It is a known fact that the spirits are akin to the angels, and the angel is capable of hearing the speech of the Lord of Truth without any intermediary” quoted in Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, ch. 29, 363.

<sup>186</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, ch. 28, 357.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

former episode, in this instance it was al-Ghālī who acted to initiate the transmission at the behest of al-Tijānī. Consisting of remembrances and secrets of the Path, this transmission also took place with the Prophet as a witness.<sup>189</sup> The significance of this in the broader scheme of how Tāl built his authority was that though al-Tijānī had sanctioned his knowledge, it was also with the approval of the Prophet, while in his physical presence.

At a later time in Medina, during another moment, the transmission and “embodied gnosis” Tāl had previously described became the precursors to his formal authorization. He wrote that al-Ghālī told him in plain words, “I am a *khalīfa* [deputy] from among the *khulafā*’ [deputies] of the Shaykh...and not among the *muqaddimīn* [representatives].”<sup>190</sup> In Tāl’s narrative the precise word that al-Ghālī used “*mushafaha*” [explicitly orally/verbally] is important. Rather than simply a word that is describing action, it is performing action.<sup>191</sup> Akin to “you are now” in the verbal pronouncement “you are now husband and wife,” there is an explicit social and material effect. Indexing the reality of “*khalīfa*” in the social world of Tāl and his audience, “*mushafaha*” confers a transition from not being, into becoming. Though Tāl had acquired spiritual knowledge and secrets this was not enough to make him a *khalīfa*. He was made a *khalīfa* through the elocution of al-Ghālī, someone who was vested with the power and authority to confer this rank on someone else.

In the hierarchical organization of a Sufi Order like the Tijāniyya, the distinction between a *muqaddam* [representative] and a *khalīfa* [deputy] mattered. Each one of these ranks was explicitly linked to different sets of permissions, access and authority. The *muqaddam* could

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<sup>189</sup> Tāl again is gesturing to the key idea that the Prophet is alive in his grave and is agentive, see footnote 29.

<sup>190</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, ch. 29, 358.

<sup>191</sup> For some examples of the performative uses of language see; J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), Michael Silverstein, "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description," in *Meaning and Anthropology*, edited by Basso and Selby, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) and Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

initiate a specific number of disciples and was authorized to transmit general litanies, and in rare occasions some of the special prayers of the order.<sup>192</sup> However, one was appointed a *muqaddam* for a limited amount of time, and he or she was always “under the authority of another [higher ranking] *shaykh*.”<sup>193</sup> Despite the limitations on a *muqaddam*, theoretically only few were appointed, and it was an honored rank within the Order.<sup>194</sup>

In contrast, the *khalīfa* was on an entirely different footing. As a deputy of an authorized shaykh, the *khalīfa* had authority to transmit everything he or she had acquired, including special prayers, litanies, spiritual knowledge, and other secrets and practices.<sup>195</sup> All the representatives and the disciples belonging to the Path were also subjects of any designated *khalīfa*. One important aspect of this rank that Tāl also mentions is that all the deputies of the Tijāniyya were equal to one another in rights, rank and station.<sup>196</sup> Since there were no other Tijānī deputies in sub-Saharan Africa, as a *khalīfa*, Tāl would take charge of this office on his return. At the same time, by explaining that all deputies were equal, he too was equating himself with any other deputy, including Tijānī’s own students spread throughout North Africa and the Sahara.

Tāl also took the discussion of *khalīfa* beyond the specific context of the order, to highlight its significance in Islamic thought and practice more generally. He cites several verses of the Qur’an to explain that the concept of *khalīfa* is an old and established principle, since “some people are ranked higher than others.”<sup>197</sup> Quoting from another scholar he notes “prophets and saints always leave behind deputies from among their companions and people.”<sup>198</sup> These deputies continue to carry out the mission and established practices of those on whose behalf they act. One

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<sup>192</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, ch. 29, 358.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> In chapter 47 of the *al-Rimāh*, Tāl goes into much greater detail of why.

<sup>195</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, ch. 29, 358.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 360.

of the key examples he cites is that “Abū Bakr [the second Caliph] stood in the Prophet’s place [after he passed away].”<sup>199</sup> He continues with “I am someone, praise be to God, who stands with him.”<sup>200</sup> There is some ambiguity in this statement, whether the “him” refers to the Prophet or Abū Bakr. In either case, since al-Tijānī is reported to have established his Path at the behest of the Prophet and he is considered the “seal of Muhammadan sainthood”, Tāl’s rank as a *khalīfa* has further implication. By being the deputy of Tijānī, he was by extension also claiming to be a deputy of the Prophet himself.<sup>201</sup>

While Tāl became a *khalīfa* first through al-Ghālī’s speech, he would later receive a formal written *ijāza* (license). Re-emphasizing his rank, the *ijāza* documents what al-Ghālī had transmitted to him, and what specific prayers, litanies and practices he was authorized to transmit to others.<sup>202</sup> Since it was written, it was also portable, reproducible and public. It was meant to authenticate the claims he made in the three years that he spent with al-Ghālī. It materialized and represented through ink, pen, and paper, the moments he spent with al-Ghālī, and some of what he acquired as a consequence of his pilgrimage.

I Tāl received his *ijāza* from al-Ghālī in Mecca in 1829.<sup>203</sup> Before commenting on the actual substance of the document, he wrote, “[al-Ghālī] gave me permission to do all that a *khalīfa* does, and he dictated to me an *ijāza* that I wrote down.”<sup>204</sup> The important aspect of the *ijāza* was

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> In the *Rimāḥ* Tāl narrates a *ḥadīth* where the Prophet was reported to have said “the best of rulers are those that go to the scholars. The worst of the scholars are those that go to the rulers. The scholars are the entrusted by the Messengers over the servants of God as long as they do not mix with rulers. If they do that they have betrayed the Messengers, and so I warn them against this” quoted in Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 29, 308. Tāl uses this *ḥadīth* to explain that he never betrayed the Messengers as he has always kept away from rulers. Further in this chapter Tāl narrates several dreams he reported to have of the Prophet to highlight his closeness to him. See also chapter 4.

<sup>202</sup> The entire *ijāza* is quoted in Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 28, 357. However, I have not been able to locate an independent copy in the BnF collection.

<sup>203</sup> According to the *Rimāḥ*, he received the *ijāza* on Monday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of *dhu al-hijja*, in 1829. This was certainly after he performed the *hajj*. Tāl seems to have departed for West Africa a few days later, and Ghālī also passed away around this time.

<sup>204</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 28, 307.

that it was not al-Ghālī who wrote it. Rather al-Ghālī dictated all the contents of the document. Here there was a dialogical and temporal relationship between the verbal and the written. Tāl’s authorizations first came from the mouth of al-Ghālī, and only then did his pen inscribe on paper what he was authorized to do as a *khalīfa*.

After the customary invocation of God and asking for blessings on the Prophet Muḥammad, the first several lines of the *ijāza* read,

the poor servant, Muḥammad al-Ghālī Abū Ṭālib Tijānī Ḥasanī, seeking pardon and generosity from God, and seeking His pleasure in both worlds says ‘I certainly took ‘Umar bin Sa‘īd bin ‘Uthmān... as beloved to me in both worlds, and he is thus also the beloved of God and His messenger in both worlds. I give him permission for the common *wird* [litany] for our Tijāniyya, Muḥamadiyya, Ibrāhīmiyya, Ḥanafīyya Path. I have given him permission for the *Ṣalāt al-fātiḥa li-ma ughlika* [The prayer of opening for what was closed], with the intention to employ it in whatever internal or external situation he sees fit. I have given him permission to recite the *fātiḥa* [the first chapter of the Qur’an] in whichever manner he chooses. I give him permission to transmit the common litany for our Path to whomever seeks it from all the Muslims, whether they be men or women, young or old, obedient or disobedient, free or bonded... I give him permission to appoint sixteen representatives, who in turn can appoint four more representatives provided they observe the known conditions... I give him permission to transmit the *adhkār* [remembrances] of our master... and everything in *jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*.<sup>205</sup>

The example cited above clearly highlights the formulaic nature of an *ijāza*. Beginning with the author of the *ijāza* it makes explicit the recipient of the license, and what his or her authorization consists of. In this example the license references the prayers and litanies Tāl had authorization to transmit, as well the specific manner in which he could use them. For instance, citing both the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥa li-ma ughlika* and the *fātiḥa*, al-Ghālī authorized him to use them “in whatever internal or external situation he sees fit” and in “whichever manner he chooses.”<sup>206</sup> He also authorized him to use anything he found in *jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*, as well as specific litanies and remembrances of Tijānī himself.<sup>207</sup> Moreover based on specific conditions of the Path, he could

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. There are several other litanies and prayers that the *ijāza* specifies that Tāl received from al-Ghālī and had permission to transmit to others, which I have not included in my translation.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. Tāl discusses the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥa* and numerous other Tijānī litanies and prayers in chapters 39-42 of the *Rimāh*. For an accessible overview and explanation of Tijāni litanies and prayers see; Appendix II of Ibrahim Niasse, trans. Zachary Wright, Muhtar Holland and Abdullahi El-Okene *The Removal of Confusion Concerning the Flood of the Saintly Seal Ahmad al-Tijani* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010).

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

appoint sixteen representatives, who in turn could appoint four others as representatives. Perhaps one of the most telling and significant aspects of the *ijāza* is that Tāl was permitted to transmit the common litany to disciples from all walks of life. The freedom and authority to initiate disciples regardless of gender, age, caste, or status—whether free or enslaved, would prove to have important implications in the make up of his congregation later on.<sup>208</sup>

When al-Ghālī finished listing the permissions he had granted Tāl, he stopped dictating and took over the document. Then with his own hand he wrote,

the composer of these words is Muḥammad al-Ghālī... All the lines on this page are from our dictation, written down by his [Tāl's] hand. I give him a complete and unrestricted authorization for everything contained in these preceding lines. May God benefit him with that, and give us provision through blessings in this world and the next. May God allow us to die on the oath to our Shaykh, with his love and contentment. Peace and blessings on Muḥammad, on his family, and on his companions.<sup>209</sup>

Nearly three years before, Tāl submitted himself and his wealth to al-Ghālī. Over numerous verbal and non-verbal exchanges, al-Ghālī had fashioned him into a *khalīfa* of the order. Then perhaps in silence, he sealed, through inscription, much of what he had given his beloved student. Authorized with a “complete and unrestricted authorization”—Tāl was permitted to do with his knowledge what he pleased, without any restriction.

### **Secret Knowledge and the *al-ism al-a‘zam***

Only part of Tāl’s authority was built through documenting his interaction with al-Ghālī, as well as publicizing his written *ijāza*. Another aspect of his authority was built through his claim to secret knowledge. Tāl dedicated chapter thirty of the *Rimāḥ* to explain that he knew the *al-ism al-a‘zam* (God’s greatest name). Though hidden from regular believers, Tāl explained that it is only revealed to the elect of the elect among the saints. Citing a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, where he

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<sup>208</sup> For instance see; Robinson, *The Holy War*, 115.

<sup>209</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 28, 307.

explicitly mentioned “*al-ism al-a ‘zam*,” Tāl situated his discussion within the broader Islamic scholarly tradition on this name.<sup>210</sup> By explaining the significance of this name, he also provided rare insight into what he conceptualized as his own spiritual rank. Though he acknowledged that all the deputies of the Tijāniyya were equal, there were still degrees to gnosis, and some knew more secrets than others—including himself.

In the beginning of the chapter, in a rather unambiguous statement he quite clearly explained that he had knowledge of *al-ism al-a ‘zam*. He wrote,

God the Most High blessed me with knowledge of His greatest name, so that I might highlight His blessings and confirm the existence of this name, among the people of realization...[The name] is hidden and it is not revealed to anyone by God except that they are chosen out of love or selected with consideration in pre-eternity.<sup>211</sup>

In writing this chapter and publicizing his knowledge, Tāl first confirmed the existence of this name. By explaining that it was only out of God’s love or selection that one ultimately ever acquired this name, he also demonstrated God’s favor and blessing on him. He further emphasized the significance of this name by quoting al-Tijānī, who said “know that no action can compare with the reward of *al-ism al-a ‘zam* ,”<sup>212</sup> Though perhaps an embellishment, this clearly expresses the idea that the *al-ism al-a ‘zam* was in a category of its own in comparison to other acts of worship.

To index his own spiritual station and rank, he quoted again from al-Tijani who detailed the exclusiveness of the name. Tijani is reported to have said “only the rare and unique ever acquire this name...among the Prophets and *aqtāb* [poles]. Few others beside them acquire it. If they do, they are usually from among the *siddiqīn* (truthful), and perhaps some of the saints who have not

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<sup>210</sup> Narrated by Aisha, the Prophet is reported to have said “O Aisha do you know that God showed me the Greatest Name, that if asked by it, He responds?” I have only quoted the relevant part of this *ḥadīth*. The full *ḥadīth* is quoted in Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 30, 366.

<sup>211</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 30, 363.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

reached this station.”<sup>213</sup> This significance is quite apparent. By implication through claiming knowledge of the *al-ism al-a ‘zam*, Tāl had included himself among the supreme saints of his time.

Tāl documented how he came to know the name. From the *Rimāh* we learn, “some of the gnostics say that perceiving or acquiring the *al-ism al-a ‘zam* can only come from someone who knows [it]...or by a prophet, or a saint, an angel or through a dream.”<sup>214</sup> Though knowledge of this name could come through any of these different channels, Tāl claimed to have acquired the name from all of them. He had a vision of an angel, and also dreamt that the Prophet taught it to him.<sup>215</sup> Further he also explained that this name was among the numerous secrets that he had acquired from al-Ghālī. He reported that al-Ghālī transmitted it to him on two different occasions—once in the mosque of the Prophet in Medina, and another time in Mecca.<sup>216</sup> Additionally, in another telling dream, al-Tijānī is reported to have sent a man to him. In the dream Tāl told the man, “‘the *al-ism al-a ‘zam* has overcome me’ the man responded ‘yes’... then mentioned something that cannot be written on pages.”<sup>217</sup> The epistemological significance of this dream is important. It highlighted that though writing was important, it could also be fundamentally dangerous. In this example, the *al-ism al-a ‘zam* was like other forms of secret and initiatic knowledge. It could only be acquired through personal transmission, divine inspiration, or through dreams and visions. In other words it was not meant to be written, inscribed and materialized in text, and consequently acquired through reading.

However, like the other ninety-nine names of God, some saints and scholars over time meditated on what the *al-ism al-a ‘zam* was and wrote quite freely about it. There are two positions

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

in the broader context of Islamic intellectual history with regards to the *al-ism al-a'zam* . Arguing that all of God's names are great, one group of scholars concluded that there really is no "greatest name."<sup>218</sup> A second group of scholars—the majority—suggested that the "greatest name" exists, but presented twenty-one different opinions about its nature.<sup>219</sup> In one of these opinions, scholars acknowledged the existence of the name, but argued that it is not knowable.<sup>220</sup> This was an opinion that Tāl disagreed with in *al-Rimāh*. For him, not only did the name exist, but it was also knowable, albeit by only a select few. In contrast to this single opinion, he then focused closely on the remaining twenty opinions that were all premised on the knowability of the name.

For the majority of scholars, including the great 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 1166), the *al-ism al-a'zam* was God's personal name, "Allah," with nothing else added to it.<sup>221</sup> Other scholars argued that it was not a single name, but a combination of different letters or words, or even prayers that embedded *al-ism al-a'zam* . For instance this could be the combination of names such as, "al-Rahmān and al-Rahīm" together, or specific verses from the Qu'ran, or even specific prayers on the Prophet.<sup>222</sup> In contrast, one of the foundational figures in Sufism, Abū al-Qāsim Junāyd (d. 910) opined that it was any of God's names, that an aspirant became completely immersed with (*mustaghraq*).<sup>223</sup> In this example, it was not a specific name necessarily, but instead an aspirant came to know *al-ism al-a'zam* through action and by reaching a specific state of being with one of the ninety-nine names of God. Finally some scholars, including "Abdul Azīz al-Dabbāgh, argued that it was the hundredth name derived from the other ninety-nine names of God.<sup>224</sup> Though distinct, it was only knowable through a deep understanding of these other names.

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

For Tāl this older scholarship was a problem. He argued that “too much talk about the existence of something and specifying it, leads to obscuring that thing.”<sup>225</sup> Through his analysis and by citing numerous examples, he wanted to reinforce the idea that this name was in fact veiled and hidden. To highlight this point further, he narrated a story al-Ghālī told him while he was in Medina. The story was about the great female saint, Rābi ‘a al- ‘Adwiyya (d. 801), who went to a jurist to ask for his opinion on a legal question. The jurist responded with “so and so said, so and so said, and so and so said, until he mentioned several different opinions.”<sup>226</sup> Al- ‘Adwiyya responded to him by saying “I asked you in order to benefit from knowledge, but instead you increased me in ignorance and confusion.”<sup>227</sup> By way of analogy, Tāl was critical of the numerous opinions that scholars have put forward about the *al-ism al-a‘zam*, which, like the jurists’ numerous opinions, simply perpetuated confusion. While it is not clear whether Tāl ultimately agreed with any of the opinions that he discussed, he was emphatic that such discussions were not beneficial and only took away from what he perceived as the name’s reality.

The irony of course is that by citing these numerous examples, Tāl was also enhancing the mystery of this name. For obvious reasons, he never explicitly stated what he thought this name was. The secrecy of the name enhanced its power. For this reason, though other scholars had publicized what they thought about it, Tāl maintained its hiddenness, and continuously reinforced that only a select few ever acquire it. Being one of those few, Tāl’s access to this secret knowledge highlighted a qualitative difference in his station with respect to other deputies of the order. Moreover, he was also demonstrating his similarity to al-Tijānī through shared knowledge. Indeed, whereas other saints derived their spiritual knowledge from God’s ninety-nine names, al-Tijānī

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 364

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

was thought to have acquired his “outpourings” through *al-ism al-a‘zam*.<sup>228</sup>

## Conclusion

As a novice Tijānī aspirant Tāl had acquired some of the basic litanies of the order over a period of thirteen months from ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Naqīl in Futa Jallon.<sup>229</sup> In the *Rimāḥ* he cited three different chains of transmission (*asānīd*, sing. *isnād*) that he received from al-Naqīl that connected him back to Aḥmad al-Tijānī.<sup>230</sup> But despite introducing Tāl to the Tijāniyya, we know very little about him. It is clear that master and disciple shared a close bond, since Tāl longed to perform the *ḥajj* with his teacher. He wrote quite explicitly “[God] put love in my heart, and in my master’s heart for the pilgrimage, and to visit the best of creation, our Prophet Muhammad...”<sup>231</sup> But this journey never transpired, as al-Nāqīl passed away before they could depart.<sup>232</sup> Instead leaving one teacher behind, Tāl continued his journey unabated and met a new teacher. Reinitiated by Muḥammad al-Ghālī, he acquired a new *isnād*, and a number of prayers and litanies Nāqīl was not permitted to transmit to him.<sup>233</sup>

From the time he met al-Ghālī at the *maqām al-Ibrāhīm* in 1826, to when he departed Mecca in 1829, there Tāl’s personhood shifted considerably. Through service and love, he inherited and acquired all the spiritual knowledge that his teacher had. Yet he offered few

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<sup>228</sup> Seesemann, *The Divine Flood*, 45. See also footnote 23.

<sup>229</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāḥ*, ch. 28, 355.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 356. This chain connected him through Muḥammad Ghālī to Aḥmad al-Tijānī, to the Prophet. This became his primary chain of initiation. Curiously, however, in the beginning of this chapter, he also gives another long chain of initiation that connects him to Aḥmad al-Tijānī through Muḥammad Ghālī. However, this *isnād* is not for the Tijāniyya, but it is for the khalwatiyya. This was one of the main Sufī brotherhoods that al-Tijānī belonged to before his encounter with the Prophet, and the founding of the Tijāniyya. Considering that the founding of the Tijāniyya abrogated all of the other affiliations that Tijānī had, it is unclear why Tāl documented this affiliation. For a brief discussion on the khalwatiyya see; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 264-271.

autobiographical details about the three years he spent with al-Ghālī. Instead in the *Rimāḥ*, he left subtle hints, highlighting the materialization of the spiritual knowledge he acquired through the authority he gained. Indexing what he accomplished under the tutelage of al-Ghālī, he had become one of the highest ranked officials of the order—a *khalīfa*.

The change of his status from a Sufi disciple to a *shaykh* with considerable authority was mediated through verbal and written means. First, al-Ghālī conferred the status of deputy (*khalīfa*) to Tāl through verbal pronouncement (*mushafaha*). Highlighting the materiality of language, the orally transmitted words from al-Ghālī's mouth enabled Tāl's shift from one socially constituted position into another. After completing the *hajj* for a third time with al-Ghālī, his rank as a deputy was reconfirmed through a written *ijāza*. Dictated to Tāl by al-Ghālī, the materiality of ink on paper outlined what al-Ghālī had transmitted to him, and stipulated what he was allowed to transmit to others. Reproducible and portable, it authenticated Tāl's authority and legitimized his claims of authorization from al-Ghālī.

The *ijāza* was a powerful document, but it was only a representation of Tāl's status and knowledge. It could never truly capture the time he spent serving al-Ghālī, the intimate discussions he had with him, or the many months of spiritual training he underwent. It could also never really, in qualitative terms, demonstrate how the spiritual knowledge he had acquired also marked the degree of his sainthood. To disclose his spiritual station, he claimed to have knowledge of *al-ism al-a'zam*. Hidden and veiled, God's greatest name was only ever acquired by the elect of the elect among the saints. Tāl was blessed to have acquired it from multiple different sources. While the verbal and the written made him a *khalīfa*, this hidden knowledge confirmed his status as one of the most important Sufi guides of his time.

Tāl's decision to perform the *ḥajj* was a significant turning point in his life, and had far reaching implications for the history of Islam in West Africa. Between the two holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, Tāl cemented his future as a Sufi *shaykh* at the hands of al-Ghālī, who transmitted al-Tijānī's authorization to his disciple in the presence of the Prophet. In 1829, Tāl began his journey back home. Within three decades of his return, he had firmly established the Tijāniyya as one of the most important Sufi brotherhoods in the region.

## Chapter 3

### Al-ḥajj ‘Umar Tāl’s Program of Moral and Social Reform through Two Early Acrostic Poems

#### Introduction

In the three years that al-ḥajj ‘Umar Tāl was away from West Africa, he penned two of his earliest works. Both of these works were acrostic poems, that embedded different verses of the Qur’an. He began composing the first poem, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, [*A Reminder for the Seekers*], when he departed to the Hijaz.<sup>234</sup> Once he arrived in Medina, however, he decided to revise and expand on this earlier composition. In explaining the reason for this, he wrote:

I first arranged the poem during our journey to the house of God. When we arrived in Mecca, the noble, we completed our devotions and our *hajj*, praise be to God. Then we set out for Medina, the illuminated, in order to visit the greatest of creation in his place of rest, peace and blessings on him. We arrived in the city of the Messenger, and we visited him, as it is obligatory to do so. Once we completed what we sought to accomplish, my soul compelled me to arrange the poem a second time. Though I left some of the verses in their original form, I changed a lot from the first composition. I also added to the length of the poem.<sup>235</sup>

Having undergone transformations at the hands of Muḥammad al-Ghālī, he decided to rework what he had previously written in the presence of the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad.

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<sup>234</sup> The full title of the work is *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn wa falāḥ al-ṭālibīn* or *A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students*. In this chapter I use an annotated French translation of this work, which also includes a critical edition of the original Arabic poem. My own translations are from the Arabic text provided. See; Claudine Gerresch-Dekkais, “Tadhkirat al-Mustarshidīn wa Falāḥ aṭ-Ṭālibīn, épître d’Al-Ḥajj ‘Umar Tāl: Introduction, édition critique du texte arabe et traduction annotée” in BIFAN, B, 42:3 (1980), 524-533. Her critical edition is based on two manuscript sources. The first is found in Paris: BNF Fonds Arabe 5708 fol. 128a-137b. The second is found in Dakar: IFAN, Fonds Amar Samb, P, Cahier no. 7, 21-34. The critical edition and corresponding Arabic text is found on pages 538-548. In citing these pages through this chapter I have noted them as: Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, and have indicated the pages from the Gerresch-Dekkais critical edition. In citing my translations, I have also indicated the corresponding verses of the poem where necessary.

<sup>235</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 538.

Tāl composed the second poem, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, [*A Reminder for the Negligent*], in the Fezzan, on his return journey to West Africa.<sup>236</sup> He noted that he wrote the entire poem, one hundred and ninety-seven verses long, all while walking.<sup>237</sup> Further the composition was a testament to his memory, since he also explained that in writing the poem he did not consult any other work.<sup>238</sup>

Though these works were written under different circumstances, they both captured Tāl's early moral and ethical concerns. Their composition underlined Tāl's perspectives on the social and moral problems that plagued nineteenth century West Africa. On the one hand, *A Reminder for the Seekers* was meant as a handbook of sorts. Echoing Islamic asceticism, in this work he repeatedly outlined the problem of becoming too attached to the *dunya* (ephemeral world), at the expense of worshipping God. He also emphasized the future. The present was a means to inculcate good conduct, acquire knowledge, and perform religious observances in order to attain salvation. On the other hand, *A Reminder for the Negligent* was an ethical meditation on the problem of disputation and warfare among Muslims. He outlined the obligation that Muslim scholars have with respect to mediation and reconciliation.

Unlike *A Reminder for the Seekers*, this poem was centered on specific historical circumstances, specifically the ongoing conflict between the Muslim polities of Sokoto and Bornu.

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<sup>236</sup> The full title of the work is *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn 'an qubh ikhtilāf al-mu'minīn* or *A Reminder for the Negligent on the Ugliness of Dispute Among Believers*. In this chapter I use an annotated French translation of this work, which also includes a critical edition of the original Arabic poem. My own translations are from the Arabic text provided. See; Caludine Gerresch-Dekkais, "Tadhkirat al-Gāfilīn, ou un aspect pacifique peu connu de la vie d'Al-d'Al-Hajj 'Umar Tāl: Introduction historique, édition critique du texte arabe et traduction annotée" in BIFAN, B, 39:4 (1977) 891-946. Her critical edition is based on four manuscript sources. All four are found in Paris: BNF Fonds Arabe 5532 fol. 123b-133a, 5609 fol. 19a-34b, 5647 fol. 44a-54b, and 6101 fol. 207b-208b. The critical edition and corresponding Arabic text is found on pages 931-945. In citing these pages through this chapter I have noted them as: Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, and have indicated the pages from the Gerresch-Dekkais critical edition. In citing my translations, I have also indicated the corresponding verses of the poem where necessary.

<sup>237</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, 933.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

He addressed the poem to his friend and ruler of the former polity, Muḥammad Bello. While both of these poems were written from a distance, they were rooted in Tāl's own experiences among various Muslim populations throughout West Africa. They are significant because they highlight his earliest ideas on social and religious reform, and the issues he would attempt to address as a scholar once he returned to West Africa.

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of *A Reminder for the Seekers*, and *A Reminder for the Negligent* as a means to outline the intellectual basis of Tal's reform project in his own words. In both works one of the major concept that Tal returned to was the obligation on Muslims to "command right and forbid wrong." This central concept in Islamic thought is quite complex, and in different times scholars have understood its significance and application in various ways.<sup>239</sup> In Tāl's conceptualization, Muslims had abandoned this obligation, and therefore, in his view, ethical and moral problems had become widespread in West Africa. For him, Muslims had to reform their conduct with respect to Islamic principles, respect Islamic knowledge and the learned, and end their disputes and warfare. It was the fundamental responsibility of scholars, like himself, to ensure that the Muslims of West Africa returned to a specific vision of religious practice, and to the worship of God.

While Tāl is better known as a Tijānī *shaykh*, these early works were quite general in their subject matter. Unlike the majority of his later works, they did not focus on explaining Tijānī practice and doctrine, nor do they reference the Tijāniyya. Instead, he elaborated on Islamic

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<sup>239</sup> The most authoritative work on this subject is Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, (Cambridge University Press, 2001). In over seven hundred pages, Cook demonstrates how this foundational moral principle in Islamic thought became the cornerstone of ideas about reform and justice in different Muslim societies. Using a wealth of primary source material, the work fundamentally highlights that while it may appear as a singular command, Muslims of different stripes understood it in multiple different ways, and articulated it as such. An abridged edition of this work, with the same argument is Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam: An Introduction*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

religious concepts by drawing on the Qur'an, the *sunna* of the Prophet, and on the interpretation of other scholars. I am not suggesting, however, that the Tijāniyya was not important in Tāl's early reform project. Indeed he was initiating and training disciples at the very moment he returned back to West Africa.<sup>240</sup> I am suggesting that in his early written work he placed an emphasis on discussing broader issues that concerned West Africans more generally.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, it was only five years after he returned to West Africa, in 1835, that he penned his first significant work on the Tijāniyya.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Robinson notes that while he was crossing the Libyan desert he had already initiated a judge (*qādi*) from Murzuk into the Tijāniyya. He also initiated several other people into the order when he crossed through Bornu. This brought him censure from al-Kanemi. Tāl replied to al-Kanemi's accusation and came to the defense of his new disciples. See; David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 101-102. The *qādi* from Murzuk was a Muḥammad al-Jawhari. He wrote a letter to Tāl in 1835, praising the Tijāniyya and asking Tāl to introduce him to Muḥammad Bello. See; BNF Fonds Arabe fol. 6a-7b. For Tāl's response to al-Kanemi and his explanation and defense of Tijānī practice see; BNF Fonds Arabe fol. 1a-2b. The letter is not dated, but he must have written it prior to 1836. Since by this point, these two Muslims scholars had put their differences aside. Al-Kanemi sent Tāl several gifts and wrote him a friendly letter, while he was in Sokoto in 1836. See; ANS, 15G 79, pièce 82.

<sup>241</sup> There is one other work from this early period that touches on the broader themes of this chapter that I have not analyzed. It is *al-Maqāṣid al-saniyya li-kulli muwaffaq min al-du'āt ilā Allāh min al-rā'ī wa al-ra'iyya*, *The Major Objectives of each Success for the Caller of God from among the Rulers and the Subjects*. Tāl wrote this rather long work in 1835, while he was in Sokoto. The work consists of seven chapters that outline a specific *maqāṣid* or objective that a person calling to God must have. For instance, he dedicated the first *maqāṣid* to explain the importance of having purity of intention, while the third *maqāṣid* explains that the person who calls to God must realize that his or her mission is only based on commanding right, and forbidding wrong. He ends this work with a short epilogue dedicated to some advice drawn from Aḥmad al-Tijānī. I am not aware of any studies on this work, and it remains in manuscript form. There are several copies, for instance; BNF Fonds Arabe 5485, fol. 160-203; 5573 fol. 90b-124b and 128a-145b; 5605, fol. 30a-62a; 5608, fol. 270a-289a.

<sup>242</sup> The first work he penned exclusively on the Tijāniyya is entitled, *Ifādat al-tāfiḥa al-insiyya wa al-jāniyya*, *What Benefits the Community of Humans and Jinns*. In Tāl responded to a single question through a lengthy discussion highlighting Tijānī doctrine. The question was why the order was referred to as *al-aḥmadiyya*, *al-muḥammadiyya*, *al-ibrāhīmīyya* and *al-ḥanīfiyya*. This work remains in manuscript copy see; BNF Fonds Arabe 5669 fol. 17a-23b. He wrote a second work on the Tijāniyya in 1836 entitled, *Suyūf al-sa'īd al-mu'taqid fī ahl Allāh ka al-Tijānī 'ala haqabat al-shaqī al-tarīd al-muntaqid al-jānī*, *The swords of happiness devoted to the people in Service to God, like Tijānī, on the Necks of the Misfortunate, the Sinners, the Cursed and Blameworthy*. This work contains eleven chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The first half of the work is dedicated to explaining the importance of having a *shaykh*, as well as the importance of performing *dhikr* in congregation. The second half highlights the importance of Aḥmad Tijānī and elaborates on his path. This work was a significant contribution to Tijānī doctrine, and represents the first work on this topic by a West African intellectual. It only remains in manuscript copy. See; BNF Fonds Arabe 5401, fol. 1-38; 5651, fol. 406b-439b; 6108, fol. 100b-131b. Tāl incorporated substantial parts of these works later in his *Kitāb al-rimāh*. For a discussion of this work see chapter 2 and 5.

An analysis centered on these works also offers a corrective to the position that Tāl's charisma determined the response in West Africa to his reformist agenda.<sup>243</sup> This is not to deny that his persona, the fact that he was a *al-ḥajj*, a *khalīfa* of the Tijāniyya, and his claims to secret knowledge mattered. I also do not wish to imply that his disciples and sympathizers did not experience his presence in various ways. Instead, my contention is that an overemphasis on Tāl's charisma has come at the expense of an engagement with the intellectual basis of his movement. Consequently, we still do not have the slightest idea of what his ideas of reform were, or what moral and ethical problems he identified in West Africa. In this chapter I bring some of those ideas to light, by framing a narrative that is centered around his own words.

### ***Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*: Structure and Overview**

*Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn* is an acrostic poem constructed on three verses from the sixty-third chapter of the Qur'an. Tāl considered these verses contained the essential message of the Qur'an, which were also relevant for his own time. In the introduction to *A Reminder for the Seekers*, he explained:

I found that the root of all internal and external disobedience, and the pinnacle of all outwardly and inwardly obedience stems from the saying of the Most Majestic and High "O you who believe, do not allow your wealth and your children to divert you from the remembrance of God. And whoever does that, then they are among the losers/ And spend [in the way of God] from what We have provided for you, before death approaches you and you say "My Lord, if only You would delay me for a brief term so I would give charity and be among the righteous"/ But God will never delay a soul when its time has come. And God is well aware of what you do."<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> John H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad, and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 3-4.

<sup>244</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 538. These verses that he quotes are verses 63:9-11 from the Qur'an.

Each line of this poem comments directly on these verses or expands on their meanings through interpretive allusions that Tāl deemed appropriate and relevant for his audience in the nineteenth century.

Underscoring an acrostic poem, Tāl also embeds these verses into *A Reminder for the Seekers*. Each of his lines begin with one letter from the words in these verses. Graphically this means that if a reader only focused on the first letter of each line, and read each line from the top to the bottom, this would ultimately spell out all out these verses. Further, since these verses contain two hundred and five Arabic letters, *A Reminder for the Seekers* also contains an equivalent number of lines.

Rooting his understanding on the verses from this chapter, Tāl's verses describe how the world is defined by shackles that keep people trapped in delusion. According to him, it is only through following true religion and proper religious practice that it is possible to break free from those shackles. In the poem, he alludes to this very point. He writes, "Detaching yourselves from the world will entitle you to obtain everything that God owns/ Abandon this mortal prison that deludes those who have no penetrating insight."<sup>245</sup> Given Tāl's understanding of the world, his poem is meant to "remind" his audience on the moral dangers of becoming too attached to it.

The first several lines of the poem, further expand on this point, as well as introduce its main subjects. Tāl wrote:

My brothers, do good. Do not become occupied with wealth and children/Preoccupation with children and wealth, not the Exalted, brings concern and sadness /The world is delusion and falsehood. Work for the everlasting abode /Reflect on this: everything you think you see is only ephemeral and delusion/ Only seek benefit in the world, for now and then. Not what will bring you reproach/Work for God. Keep away from all that distracts you from remembering Him /You who are deluded by wealth, woe unto you. Repent, and be guided to good action/Wealth and children provide no safety from the Lord of creation and the Fire/Realize, you will not find safety in glory, lineage, neither courage, nor warfare/On the Day of Judgment, you will see how bitterly people will regret.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 544. Verses 111-112.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 539. verses 4-13.

In these verses Tāl does not argue that having children and acquiring wealth are morally wrong, since both are considered to be blessings in Islamic thought.<sup>247</sup> But following the verses of the Qur'an, he explains that a moral issue arises when children and wealth become a distraction from the "Exalted."<sup>248</sup> Drawing on a much broader discourse in Islamic thought, he once again highlights that "the world is delusion and falsehood" and the purpose of one's life is to "work for the everlasting abode." In other words, it is through cultivating good deeds in the present that one comes to actualize a specific future outcome. Thus it is within this understanding, the possibility that children and wealth can become a distraction, that Tāl argues they cannot give one safety from the "Fire." Salvation can only be attained by worshipping God free from distractions.

In addition, Tāl explains that salvation cannot be found in status and social relationships. Perhaps in reference to what he may have witnessed in his travels through West Africa, he wrote "realize, you will not find safety in glory, lineage, neither courage, nor warfare."<sup>249</sup> In the nineteenth century, with widespread warfare and chaos, it is hard not to see how the idea of glory (*jāha*) or courage (*shujā'a*) may have been celebrated as noble. Moreover, like all premodern societies lineage and kinship ties were important in West Africa.

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<sup>247</sup> He repeats this point and explains it in greater detail in several other verses of the poem. For instance, he wrote: Remember your Lord. Do not allow your wealth to distract you from worship/Children are a blessing from God's generosity. They should not distract you from the Guide/His gifts require constant *dhikr*. Realize that none other than Him is the Giver /One endowed with intelligence continually performs worship, without protest/Those concerned only with children and the steady increase of their wealth/Instead of their Lord, incur loss. They have disobeyed the Master of tribulation/Realize that wealth and children have no benefit if they keep you from devotion/The intelligent only desire that which helps them perform their devotion.

See; Ibid., 541. Verses 51-58.

<sup>248</sup> Referring specifically to wealth, elsewhere in the poem he explains this more clearly. He wrote: Woe unto the slave of ornaments, houses, wealth, and everything that will perish/He will remain a prisoner to the vanities of the world, his ego and the devil/ His habits are those of animals. He only eats, drinks and has frequent sexual relations/His most intimate friend is an opulent man, who lives a blameworthy sinful life/He thinks the unceasing pursuit of wealth will give him dignity and rank with God/ Ignorance has led him to despise the leaders and the intimate friends of God/To his misfortune, he does not acquire any benefit from the people of purity. See; Ibid., 545. Verses 145-152.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 539. Verse 12.

On the one hand, Tāl criticizes the social categories and class structure in West Africa. On the other hand, he may also have been, quite specifically, speaking directly to the clerical classes, that at least in Futa Toro, had become hereditary elites.<sup>250</sup> These clerics no longer upheld the importance of Islamic knowledge, but instead used their kinship ties for political gain. On this point, he wrote “Do not seek to ennoble yourselves by your lineage, when piety only matters.”<sup>251</sup> In these lines he called for the construction of a new identity based on a notion of “piety,” that was not tied to local kinship ties. These concepts foreshadow how Tāl would create a new community of believers that would cut across social and ethnic lines in West Africa.

The cornerstones of Tāl’s program of reform was to call people back to the constant remembrance of God (*dhikr*). He explained the importance of *dhikr* and the benefits of engaging in it through several lines. For instance, he wrote:

Keep vigilant in remembering your Lord. For He will assist you against your enemies/Our Lord aids those who assist His religion. This is not a false promise/Those who are occupied with remembrance and worship, acquire extraordinary things/God has stated that the person who engages in remembrance attains fifteen virtues /I mean a person absorbed in remembrance, understanding its conditions and subtleties /*Dhikr* is linked to God consciousness. A refuge and nourishment for those conscious of God/*Dhikr* is similar in manner to other worship. Follow its beautiful and marvelous order/It leads to gnosis, guidance, assistance and success. Love and acceptance from the One/Sainthood, glad tidings, and safety from the Fire. With piety, entrance into the Garden/ An exit from hardship. Provision and ease from an unknown and improbable source/ An eternal pardon. An enormous reward, and an attainment of the goal.<sup>252</sup>

These lines in *A Reminder for the Seekers* provide a basic outline to Tāl’s concept of *dhikr*, which he expands in greater detail in other works. It is also likely that as he taught this work in a *majlis* he would have added additional oral instructions and commentary apart from what he wrote in the poem, including prescribed litanies, or prayers. Nonetheless, it is most appropriate to view this poem as a general framework for Tāl’s moral and ethical ideas. Thus after transmitting the poem,

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<sup>250</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>251</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 539. Verse 13.

<sup>252</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 540. Verses 24-34.

he may have left it to other teachers to specify a program of *dhikr* based on their own experiences and circumstances.

In Tāl's conceptualization, apart from leading to "God consciousness" *dhikr* is also a means of "safety from the Fire." He further explains that, like other forms of worship, such as fasting and prayer, it also has specific conditions. Though he does not elaborate on what those conditions are, he argues that by fulfilling them, one can attain extraordinary things. From among the many benefits that *dhikr* brings, Tāl also highlights that it can lead to gnosis (*ma'rifa*).<sup>253</sup> The idea of attaining experiential knowledge of God has long remained an important aspect of Islamic religious practice, as well as fundamental to Tāl's own teachings.<sup>254</sup>

### **Practical Concerns and Moral Advice**

Through writing *A Reminder for the Seekers*, Tāl established a practical framework by which he could initiate moral reform. The poem provides specific instructions on conduct, social relationships, and attitudes a believing person most strive to inculcate. In Tāl's conceptualization moral reform began with religious education. Underscoring the importance of knowledge in Islam, he wrote:

Acquire knowledge before you act. There is no benefit in action without knowledge/Understand the best are those who learn then act according to what they know/ Realize that the person who knows but refuses to act accordingly is the most debased/ Remain upright. Guard yourself against disobedience, so that you will not have regrets/ Be a scholar or a student. One who sits and listens. Or be the one who loves the possessor/ Of gnosis. Do not be the fifth among them. Profit, and remain with those who have knowledge.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> See; John Renard, translator, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

<sup>254</sup> Tāl provided a much lengthier and robust discussion on *dhikr* in his later, *Kitāb al-rimāh*. Especially in chapters 24-27, 33-5, and 39-42.

<sup>255</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 540-541. Verses 36-41.

These lines contain several important points. First, Tāl argues that knowledge precedes religious action, and worship. In this conceptualization, in order for action to carry benefit, a person must learn how to perform that action properly. Second, he highlights the problem of knowing, but not acting in accordance with that knowledge. A person who falls into this category is the “most debased.”

In this way, Tāl links knowledge’s importance to a specific vision of an upright, moral person. For this reason, Tāl encourages his reader to be a “scholar or a student.” But he is also pragmatic about the possibility of acquiring knowledge. He understood not everyone could be a scholar or a student pursuing religious education in what were mostly agrarian based societies. Consequently, he asserts the value of loving people who have knowledge. In addition, if it was not possible to pursue an education in the Islamic religious sciences in a serious way, it was still possible to learn and profit from knowledge over time.<sup>256</sup> Conversely, he warns one’s reluctance or failure to pursue Islamic knowledge, or, at the very least, to respect it. Since Tāl predicates his program for moral reform on learning, the “fifth” category – someone who neither learns nor teaches– is anathema to this vision of the world.

While learning is an integral aspect of Tāl’s moral vision, he also provides several forms of practical advice for a disciple to follow. For example, he writes:

Show piety to your parents and obey them so that you do not commit injustice/ Do not set your gaze on the prohibited. Guard your tongue from ill speech/Become elevated. Keep away from ostentatiousness, arrogance, jealousy, and hatred/I warn you about the Master of chastisement. Do not eat until you are fully satiated/Having evil thoughts about the servants of God nullifies your good deeds/My brothers, keep away from gossip, as well as slander and spreading lies/The best servants of God are those who shows kindness to the weak and fragile.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Since knowledge was dependent on master/disciple relationships, it was possible to work through “texts” at one’s own pace. A person could study a work over a few months, or even over a few years. They could start a text in one place, and then continue their studies in another place. I explain this system of knowledge transmission in chapter one.

<sup>257</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 544-545. Verses 124-129.

In these lines Tāl provides some instructions of what constitutes moral uprightness. This was rooted in controlling the body and its sites of perception, including the eyes—from gazing “on the prohibited”—and guarding the “tongue from ill speech.” He preaches moderation, especially when it came to eating, and what are considered the diseases of the heart in Islamic religious thought.<sup>258</sup> He also highlights the importance of filial piety, and the social obligation of showing kindness to those in need. These lines in summary highlight the gist of Islamic moral ideas of being in the world, which include guidelines for individual comportment and for one’s interactions with family and society.

When Tāl revised the poem in Medina, he also added several lines. Many of these lines relate to the importance of *jihād*, in terms of warfare.<sup>259</sup> While the introduction of these lines might give us the impression that he had already started to plan his *jihād*, this was not the case.<sup>260</sup> In these lines he was simply highlighting the moral obligations and virtues of *jihād* in general terms based on accepted Islamic religious practice.<sup>261</sup> In this regard he wrote, “As for *jihād*, understand it is a communal obligation [*fard kifaya*] and a great affair.”<sup>262</sup> In legal terms *jihād* was considered a

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<sup>258</sup> There are parallels to what Tāl wrote in these lines and the larger body of Islamic works dealing what are considered “diseases of the heart.” Perhaps the most important of this genre of work are from the tenth century Muslim scholar, Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī. See for instance; Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires: Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Translated by T.J. Winters (Islamic Texts Society, 2007).

<sup>259</sup> Since these lines correspond to the additional lines he added to the poem, my assumption is that they are new. But without access to the original poem, it is difficult to conclusively state that these lines were not there to begin with.

<sup>260</sup> Using these lines as evidence, Gerresch-Dekkais argued, in her introduction to her translation of the poem, that Tāl considered *jihād* as the sixth pillar of Islam. See her translation of Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 525.

<sup>261</sup> Most classical works on Islamic jurisprudence have a chapter on *jihād*. Among the issues that such a chapter outlines is under what circumstances does *jihād* become permissible, and what forms of conduct are acceptable during warfare. An overview of the opinions of several different schools of jurisprudence is found in the work of the important twelfth century Andalusian scholar, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *Bidayāt al-mujtahid*. This text became quite important in both North and West Africa, and continues to be studied. It covers all aspects of Islamic jurisprudence, including *jihād*. For an English translation see; Ibn Rushd, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 2 vol. Translated by Imbran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, (Garnet Publishing, 2000).

<sup>262</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 544-545. Verses 124-129.

communal obligation *farḍ kifāya* as opposed to an obligation placed on every single believing Muslim, or a *farḍ al-‘ayn*.<sup>263</sup>

Further with respect to *jihād*, he wrote, “There should be no signs of laziness in *jihād*. Struggle with energy against the enemy/Know that the Merciful gives glad tidings and excuses those engaged in *jihād* /They will say ‘if we had realized the virtues of *jihād*, we would have participated’”<sup>264</sup> But he also qualifies these verses with “If you cannot participate, supply the army with provision. You will be among the righteous.”<sup>265</sup> In these lines, Tāl provides a general outline of the concept of *jihād*, and exhorts it as an important aspect of Islamic religious practice. Though this may have reflected the social and political realities of nineteenth century West Africa, where warfare was quite common, his discussion was based on normative ideas found in all the major classical works on Islamic law.

At bottom the poem captures Tāl’s understanding of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” In emphasizing this obligation, he wrote:

God the Most High has made it obligatory to forbid the evil and enjoin the good/Woe unto the residents of a land who do not correct the bad conduct of its people/I advise you with the Qur’an and the Sunna, so that you may continue on the right path/Nothing destroys religion more than kings or sinful scholars that spread falsehood/Diminishing the worth of their souls, they sell them away, and never profit in return /They survive on carcasses, whose putrid stench is apparent to those with faith.<sup>266</sup>

As these lines make clear, *A Reminder for the Seekers* was a guidebook to rectify the “bad conduct of people.” Though Tāl considers commanding good and forbidding wrong to be an obligation on all believers, he singles out the important role of scholars. In his view, it was scholars,

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<sup>263</sup> For the difference between these different forms of obligation see; Wael B. Hallaq, *Shari‘a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 325-326.

<sup>264</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 547. Verses 179-181.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. Verse 185.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 548. Verses 199-204.

who were most responsible for reforming society. Thus if scholars did not play the essential role in commanding good and forbidding wrong, then this lead to social problems.

For this reason, he levels a two pronged critique against kings and “corrupt scholars.” Drawing on a much older debate about the problems of temporal authority, he singles out kings for having a hand in destroying religion. Though he does not elaborate on this point, it is perhaps rooted in his experiences in West Africa, which also informed his later critiques of temporal rulers.<sup>267</sup> At the same time, he attacked scholars who were either attached to temporal rulers and legitimized their conduct, or misguided people through their teachings. In both cases, scholars who did not direct people to the right path were those who simply sold away their souls. They ultimately betrayed their important position and status as teachers and guides and as a consequence destroyed the moral teachings of the religion.

In contrast Tāl attempted to uphold what he considered the role of scholars. Part of this role was to remind people about their religious obligations as a means to refashion their moral lives. Specifically, through producing *A Reminder for the Seekers*, he wanted West African Muslims to acquire Islamic religious knowledge and to act more consciously within the guidelines of what he considered to be the most important aspects of the faith. Fundamental to this vision was the significance of remembering God (*dhikr*), as a means of cleaning the heart of its diseases. At the same time, he outlined social obligations, such as being kind to one’s parents, and giving charity to the needy.

This was a practical handbook that covered the essential aspects of Islamic practice. Tāl wanted the verses of his poem to be beneficial to people. In this regard, he writes:

Understand that my intention in writing this poem is not to show my ability in prosody, grammar, morphology, vocabulary, eloquence, rhetoric, or any thing else. My intention is simply to benefit those

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<sup>267</sup> See chapter 4.

believers concerned about rectifying their souls. I hope this poem will be a benefit, by the will of God, for whoever depends on it and works on what is meaningful in it.<sup>268</sup>

Though Tāl acknowledged the complexity and the difficulty of the poem, he claimed that he did not write it to demonstrate his erudition. Instead, he wanted West African Muslims to use it as a guidebook and apply what he outlined in the poem to their lives.

### **A Reminder for the Negligent: Structure, Purpose and Context**

While *A Reminder for the Seekers* captured some of Tāl's perspectives on moral reform, in a general sense, *A Reminder for the Negligent*, was more specific in scope. The central topic of the poem was what he considered to be the problem of disputation among Muslims. He drew particular inspiration from the continuous fighting between two Muslim polities, those of Bornu and Sokoto. He wrote the poem in order to mediate a solution to this conflict. He addressed the poem mainly to the ruler of Sokoto, Muhammad Bello. In the process, he also touched upon a number of issues that he considered relevant in the nineteenth century.

Like *A Reminder for the Seekers*, *A Reminder for the Negligent* is an acrostic poem. In this poem, Tāl incorporated verses nine and ten from the forty-ninth chapter of the Qur'an. These verses are:

If two groups of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them; if one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other, fight the oppressors until they submit to God's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them: God loves those who are even-handed/The believers are brothers, so make peace between your two brothers and be mindful of God, so that you may be given mercy.<sup>269</sup>

Underscoring the central theme of this poem, these verses explain the obligation on believers to “make peace” between other Muslims who are in conflict. They consist of one hundred and ninety-seven letters, and consequently, *A Reminder for the Negligent* also contains an equivalent

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<sup>268</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*, 539.

<sup>269</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, 932.

number of lines.

Unlike *A Reminder for the Seekers*, Tāl provides many more details for the reason of why he wrote *A Reminder for the Negligent*. In addition to a standard introduction, he also included a lengthy prologue. Both the introduction and the prologue are worth analyzing.

Drawing from the verses of the Qur'an quoted above, Tāl writes in the prologue, "Praise be to the One who has forbidden disputation and warfare among the believers, and promised the Fire for whomever insists on this without repenting."<sup>270</sup> Here, he clearly states his view that disputation and warfare among Muslims are forbidden. Yet, this stance is not uncompromising. In the subsequent lines, he acknowledges that social interactions could lead to disagreements, and in a larger scale, to warfare. Tāl writes, "[God] has made it obligatory on those who have virtue to reconcile their brothers when they have a difference."<sup>271</sup> Noting that such a person earns a great reward from God, Tāl places himself at the center of his work since he wrote the work to mediate a solution between Bornu and Sokoto.

Tāl first became aware of the conflict between these two polities during his journey to *hajj*, when circumstances prevented him from traveling via the northerly caravan routes that linked Futa Toro to Southern Morocco. One can suspect that in the 1820s there was trouble in the Sahara as Tāl notes "impediments arose for us."<sup>272</sup> As a consequence he had to travel eastward through West Africa [*bilād al-sudān*] before turning northward to cross the Sahara via Fezzan.<sup>273</sup> As a result, Tāl traveled through Sokoto, where he was welcomed by "its prince, its scholars and some of the elders."<sup>274</sup> While at this early period it is unclear the precise nature of Tāl's relationship with the

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 931.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

court at Sokoto, they must have welcomed him because he was already an accomplished scholar.

It is in Sokoto that he first learned about the conflict between Sokoto and Bornu. Though the conflict was initiated by, ‘Uthman dan Fodio, Bello’s father, it seemed to have waned by the 1820s.<sup>275</sup> However, in the year that Tāl arrived in Sokoto it had flared up again. He explained “we learned that year there was escalating dissension and opposition that was beyond all hideousness.”<sup>276</sup> But Tāl did not find an opportunity to speak to Bello about this conflict, and his continuing role in perpetuating it.

His intention was to make the pilgrimage to the “house of God” as well as visit the grave of the Prophet Muḥammad – “the master of the two realms” – and his companions in Medina.<sup>277</sup> Though he was quite explicit that he had Bello’s ear and respect, he did not want to get entangled in the affairs of Sokoto at the expense of performing the *ḥajj*. While the conflict made Tāl “very sad” he did not “do anything to rectify it.”<sup>278</sup> Yet in retrospect he thought that had he spoken to Bello “he would assist us.”<sup>279</sup> The reason was because he considered Bello to be “a man of God, whose showed us his love and placed his honor upon us.”<sup>280</sup> Tāl was certain to establish that he was on familiar terms with Bello, and this would be an asset in the future. Though he left without reconciling these polities, he decided he would get involved in the future if an opportunity presented itself.

*A Guide for the Negligent* was in essence the fulfillment of this intention. His intervention was spurred by news he received in Fezzan on his return from pilgrimage that the “*fitna* [discord] remained in the same state” between these two polities.<sup>281</sup> Thus he explains in his poem, “when I

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<sup>275</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 75-77.

<sup>276</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, 931.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 932.

heard this, we decided to complete our intended attempt to rectify between them.”<sup>282</sup> Underscoring the power of the written word, Tāl notes that he did not just want to “speak” to Bello about this matter. He thought that writing a poem would carry more weight and have a greater influence. Perhaps because of the nature of writing, and the possibility of copying the poem, it would gain a much larger audience than the spoken word.

In the manner Tāl represented himself, he did not think he was qualified to mediate. He writes that “those who were more qualified than me failed, and thought that reconciliation was impossible.”<sup>283</sup> He argues that these scholars no longer wanted to mediate since this conflict “confounded the intellect.”<sup>284</sup> In spite of the failed attempts of these other scholars, he considered it his moral duty to intervene. He drew inspiration from numerous verses of the Qur’an as well as from the *ḥadīth*. For example, he mentions, “I was inspired by the saying of the Most High ‘He created what you know nothing about.’”<sup>285</sup> Drawing on the broader *ḥadīth* literature he further underscores the possibility of change: “the Prophet said ‘The hearts of the children of Adam are as though they are between two fingers. Like a single heart, He changes them how he pleases.’”<sup>286</sup> Supporting his ideas through the citation of Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīth*, Tāl explains the religious import of reconciliation and the enormous reward that it brings.

The conceptualization of reconciliation as a virtue and an obligation was based on the importance of “commanding good.”<sup>287</sup> Like the previous poem, this was the central concept that also dictated Tāl’s composition and his desire to intervene in the affairs of these polities, and he clearly reiterates this point in the introduction of *A Reminder for the Negligent*. Tāl writes, “know

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Unlike *A Reminder for the Seekers*, in this poem, Tāl goes to great lengths, drawing on verses from the Qur’an, the *ḥadīth*, and the opinion of other scholars to explain why this is an obligation.

that commanding good and forbidding wrong was the central pillar [*al-quṭub al-a'zam*] of the religion.”<sup>288</sup> Futhermore, he states that this was the sole purpose of why “God sent prophets.”<sup>289</sup>

Tāl identifies a direct link between not performing this obligation and the proliferation of chaos and ultimately the destruction of the world. He explains that in his time “the reality of this [obligation] exists but only in name.”<sup>290</sup> Consequently, speaking directly about West Africa, he concludes that hypocrisy had become rampant, God consciousness had disappeared and “people followed their caprices and passions like animals.”<sup>291</sup> It was in attempting to rectifying these moral ills that Tāl defines his own role.

He ends his poem’s introduction by drawing from an anecdote from Islamic history in order to illustrate his role as a scholar in this dispute. The story was about Hārūn al-Rashīd, the Abbasid caliph. The caliph was holding court, when someone entered and said “O commander of the faithful do not not gather with people of bad conduct. Rather accompany the righteous so that they can remind you about good conduct, when you forget.”<sup>292</sup> Using this story, he explained that rulers must keep the company of the righteous, in order to be reminded of the importance of establishing good conduct. As *A Reminder to the Negligent’s* title insinuates, Tāl considered that both Bello and al-Kanemi to be in dereliction of their duty as Muslim rulers. Therefore, it was important for them to take the advice of a scholar who was righteous, like Tāl.

### **Moral advice, Reconciliation, and Moral Authority**

While he was a scholar that was respected in Sokoto, Tāl did not have historic ties with this polity. Consequently, he was also aware of the possibility that his advice would not be

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<sup>288</sup> Tāl, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, 933.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid. 936.

accepted. In this regard, he writes “I will give advice to people because I have been commanded. If they accept it, I have acquired what I intended/And if they refuse, the reward is equivalent to the intention. No blame can be attributed to the advisor.”<sup>293</sup> He was certainly an outsider to the inner workings of Sokoto. Yet he felt it was his moral obligation to give the advice that he outlined in *A Reminder for the Negligent*. In his view, he was following the example of the Prophet, who encouraged Muslims to mediate disputes.<sup>294</sup>

Tāl bases his advice to Bello on the general importance of being kind and showing gentleness to creation. He explains, “Know, and may God guide you, there is a great benefit in glorifying the creation of God and being gentle.”<sup>295</sup> As he expands on this idea, he asks Bello to recognize that all of creation was from the acts of God. Consequently, it was important to respect creation. As he writes, “the truth of this matter on the knower [*‘ārif*], obliges love for creation because of its esteem.”<sup>296</sup> Having outlined the importance of respecting creation, Tāl then directly addressed the problem of conflict and warfare.

The conflict between Bornu and Sokoto impacted the lives of Muslims. In contextualizing this point, Tal first dedicates several verses to outlining the prohibition of fighting against nonbelievers.<sup>297</sup> He then argued “so if this is the right of an individual nonbeliever, then look at the right of the believer by the Most Powerful/The sanctity of the believer is greater than the sanctity of the *ka’ba* with God/ Because destroying the world and the *ka’ba* is less serious than killing a believer unjustly. So be aware.”<sup>298</sup> Here Tāl emphasizes the Qur’anic principle that killing a single soul was equivalent to killing all of humanity.<sup>299</sup> He then proceeds to establish the general

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 937. Verses 25-26.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 936-937. Verses 3-16.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 937. Verse 28.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. Verse 31.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 938. Verses 35-39.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. Verses 40-42.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. Verses 43-45.

prohibition against killing nonbelievers. Subsequently he emphasizes that if it was prohibited to kill nonbelievers, then killing believers was a grave act. In this regard, he explains that even destroying the *ka'ba* was “less serious than killing a believer unjustly.”

In further elucidating the problem of killing Muslims unjustly, he again addresses Bello directly. He writes, “Know that the actions of soldiers become the responsibility of the leader on the Day of Judgment/ If there are thousands killed, it will be the leader who carries the sin for that.”<sup>300</sup> In this way, Tāl demands that Bello consider the gravity his actions. Within this moral framework, it would not be Bello’s soldiers who would carry the burden of killing other Muslims unjustly, as the ruler of Sokoto and the leader of its army, he bears that moral responsibility.

The root cause of spilling blood unjustly was disputation. Tāl writes “we say that the root of everything we have described is the disputation among believers, so know that.”<sup>301</sup> After identifying this root cause, he then gave a warning. Speaking generally, he argues “the ugliness of their differences increase them in punishment. And they are prevented from acquiring mercy that would benefit them.”<sup>302</sup> The remedy that Tāl offers is the option to reconcile. Touching on the central theme of the poem, and his own role he wrote, “Purity and protection for the one who accepts reconciliation in order to stop the spilling of blood/ God has made it obligatory on the believers to reconcile those who are disputing. What a good Guide”<sup>303</sup>

After highlighting the honor one attains for putting an end to bloodshed, Tāl again addresses Bello. Given the previous lines’ argument, he poses a question, “Look my brother, will a lucid

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 940. Verses 84-85.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 941. Verse 97.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 942. Verse 121.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid. Verses. 125-126. The next several lines contextualize this point further, and bear resemblance to the prologue to the poem. Then he further explains the importance of reconciliation. He wrote, “You who seeks success, contentment, and mercy from the the Living and the Merciful/the preserving of the blood of Muslims in the greatest way achieve this? And He knows best/ Quickly profit from this opportunity before the regret of tomorrow in the Day of Judgment/It is time to accept the advice of the one who comes to call for reconciliation/One year of friendship is worth more than a thousand years in discord” see; Ibid. Verses 134-138.

man cut the limbs of his body? He would not do that even if he was drunk.”<sup>304</sup> Through this vivid image, Tāl also alludes to the unity of the believing community, which, in Islamic thought, is seen to comprise a single body. He argues that killing individual believers is akin to severing the limbs of this body. The implication is that even a drunkard would not sever his limbs, so why would a thinking person, a scholar, do this. He was relating to Bello not as a ruler, but as a scholar. He asked him in these lines to reflect on his actions against Bornu, from the perspective of someone who had Islamic knowledge.

Tal summarizes his thoughts in the last lines of the poem. Here, he mentions his reaction upon hearing news of that conflict remained between Bornu and Sokoto while in Fezzan. He wrote “By God, the news we heard in other lands saddened us. Where is the refuge?”<sup>305</sup> He goes on to explain this report in more detail: “The news was that the two scholars dispute about kingdom, power and *dunya*.”<sup>306</sup> In essence, he refers to both Bello and al-Kanemi as scholars who had betrayed their role as scholars in order to acquire more of the ephemeral world. Though both of these rulers were quite powerful, Tāl did not shy away from his perceived obligation to call them to good conduct. Thus, in no uncertain terms, he also admonished both Bello and al-Kanemi.

While much of Tal’s discussion in *A Reminder to the Negligent* is about the problem of spilling blood, he also highlights the problem of indiscriminate and illegal enslavement of Muslim, another issue that was central to nineteenth century warfare in West Africa. After accusing Bello and al-Kanemi of seeking the *dunyā*, Tal wrote “Having fought, spilling blood, and enslaving the free, offending God/The ignorant and oppressors, as well as those in power consider it licit to sell human beings among you/And they say that certainly the two scholars have also permitted this

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 944. Verse 167.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid. Verse 177.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 945. Verse 179.

knowingly.<sup>307</sup> This amounts to the most direct condemnation of slavery in any of Tāl's works. Though he does not discuss the issue further, the illegal enslavement of Muslims forms another focal point of his admonishment of the “two scholars”—Bello and al-Kanemi.

*A Reminder for the Negligent* ends on a similar note to *A Reminder for the Seekers*. In some of the last verses Tāl repeats the problem of venal advisors and scholars:

Do not be deceived by the words of the ignorant and wicked venal ministers/ It is sufficient for you to know that their efforts are directed for the pleasures of the world/Many people make claims to knowledge, but secretly they desire your wealth/to the point that because of their love for wealth, they attach themselves to you at all times/They have no fear of the Majestic when they trick and delude their brothers.<sup>308</sup>

In these lines he again highlights the problem of scholars who claimed to have religious knowledge, but in fact only coveted wealth and the *dunyā*. He argued that such people become close to rulers with their pretensions of knowledge, Yet their only interest is to profit for themselves. They pay little attention to the consequences of their actions when they “trick and delude their brothers.” These lines again underscore what Tāl identified as the moral decay in West Africa. The root cause of this decay was the problem of scholars who did not act according to Islamic knowledge and the principles it underlined. In the course of this criticism, Tāl establishes himself as an alternative voice in contrast to other, corrupt scholars. His interest, in at least how he represented himself in these early works, was to remedy those problems that he identified.

## **Conclusion**

‘Umar Tāl composed two of his earliest and most poignant works even before returning to West Africa after performing the pilgrimage. These works were both acrostic poems that were centered around specific verses of the Qur’an. He composed the first poem, *A Reminder for the*

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid. Verses 179-181.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 945. Verses 189-195.

*Seekers*, on his journey to the Hijaz. After visiting Medina, in the presence of the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad, he decided to revise and expand what he had originally written. The poem commented on verses nine, ten and eleven of the sixty-third chapter of the Qur'an. The verses summarized that it was important for believers to inculcate a state of God consciousness through performing pious acts and following Islamic practice. In centering his poem around these verses, Tāl considered the religious observances of West African Muslims had become lax, and it was indeed important to “remind” these Muslims of their obligations.

He wrote the second poem, *A Reminder for the Negligent*, on his return journey to West Africa. While he was crossing the Fezzan, he heard that the Muslim polities of Bornu and Sokoto had continued their conflict. He constructed the poem around verses nine and ten of the forty-ninth chapter of the Qur'an. These verses highlighted the obligation on believers to reconcile other Muslims during times of conflict. Drawing on these verses, Tāl wrote his poem to outline the problems Muslim societies endure because of conflict and the overwhelming burden that rulers carry for shedding Muslim blood. The poem was meant to “remind” both Muhammad Bello and Muhammad al-Kanemi on their obligations, and put aside what he considered their selfish worldly ambitions.

While both of these works were written under different circumstances, and addressed different issues, together they provide the earliest insights into Tāl's moral and ethical concerns. These concerns were rooted in his experiences in West Africa prior to his departure to the Hijaz. In composing *A Reminder for the Seekers* and *A Reminder for the Negligent* from a distance, he highlighted his essential reformist message and the issues that he would attempt to rectify upon his return to his homeland. These including, *inter alia*, spreading Islamic knowledge, emphasizing Islamic ritual practice and notions of piety, and highlighting the importance of abandoning the

world and returning to worshipping God without distractions. He further outlined the problem of venal rulers and corrupt Muslims scholars, the chaos that resulted from discord, the importance of preserving life, and the obligation on believers to mediate disputes. As a whole, these comprise Tāl's meditation on the central Islamic concept of "commanding right and forbidding wrong." They capture his own, self-conscious understanding of the role he would play in West Africa as he attempted to enact his vision for moral reform. They also constitute his scholarly authority and erudition—he was able to express his ideas through composing complex acrostic poems.

## Chapter 4

### Materializing Love through Verse: An Analysis of *Safīnat al-sa'āda* in the life of Umar Tāl

#### Introduction

In 1852, al-Ḥājj Umar Tāl completed the final verses of his magisterial poem *Safīnat al-sa'āda li-ahl ḍu'f wa-l-najāda* [*The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak*].<sup>309</sup> Referring to the Prophet Muḥammad as the “Vessel” the poem is a panegyric within the broader genre of Prophetic praise poetry (*madḥ al-nabawī*). Consisting of more than three thousand lines, in the *tawil* meter, it is as beautiful as it is rigorous. Testifying to Tāl’s mastery over the Arabic language, it contains numerous rare and difficult words, and grammatical and rhetorical constructions.<sup>310</sup> Incorporating the work of two earlier poets, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāzāzī (d. 1230) and Abū Bakr ibn Muhīb (n.d.), the poem alludes to Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīth*, episodes from Islamic history and the Prophet’s life, and autobiographical details. Culminating a life dedicated to Islamic

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\* A version of this chapter was published as: Amir Syed, “Poetics of Praise: Love and Authority in al-Ḥājj Umar Tāl’s *Safīnat al-sa'āda li-ahl ḍu'f wa-l-najāda*” in *Islamic Africa* Vol. 7:2 (2016), 210-238

<sup>309</sup> In this chapter I rely heavily on one of the few complete manuscript copies of this poem. It is located in the BnF, Fonds Arabe, 5485, 1-159. I also rely on a printed and annotated edition of this manuscript: Umar Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa'āda li-ahl ḍu'f wa-l-najāda*, edited and annotated by Muḥammad Bello (Cairo, 1988). I cite only the manuscript in this chapter.

<sup>310</sup> According to Raji’s informant, Shaykh Kabara, in Nigeria “when this work came out it was difficult for many scholars to read without the aid of good dictionaries... chiefly because of the difficult nature of this work, only very few people had copies, and today the work is quite rare.” See; Rasheed Ajani Raji. *The Influence of the 'Ishrīniyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 1982. PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 338.

learning and travel in the pursuit of knowledge, it marks Tāl's final and most significant literary work.

The poem straddled two different moments in Tāl's life. He seems to have started the poem in the early 1840s, in Jegunko, where he had also produced some of his other important works, including the *Rimāh*. The hostility of the ruler of Futa Jallon, Almamy 'Umar Sori, however, forced Tāl to migrate to a neighboring non-Muslim territory and establish a new community in Dingiray in 1849. Three years later, after completing the poem, a dispute with the king of Tamba, Yimba, pulled him and his followers into armed conflict.<sup>311</sup> What began as a small-scale skirmish, led Tāl into a prolonged power struggle against regional political powers, including the French. While he had always been devoted to the ink of his pen, in this new circumstance, he also learned to embrace the power of his sword.

The story of Tāl's *jihād* and the wide scale displacement and migration that resulted from his military action are what he is most remembered for. A decade after the initial conflict in Tamba, he would also go on to establish one of the largest polities in West Africa. This complex history requires careful analysis, and constitutes the discussion of the following two chapters. The caveat of course, however, is that overemphasizing of the sensational details of Tāl's battles drowns out the verses of *Safīnat al-sa'āda*, and blinds us from appreciating and understanding his intellectual accomplishments.

Within the broader literature on the Arabic language and Islam in Africa, *Safīnat al-sa'āda* has been entirely forgotten, ignored, or completely misunderstood. The few scholars who do make reference to the work assume that it unequivocally highlights Tāl's willingness to spread Tijānī

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<sup>311</sup> I look more closely at the multiple dimensions of this conflict in chapter 5.

doctrine through force and his intentions for war.<sup>312</sup> Curiously the poem neither mentions Ahmed Tijānī, nor does it make any reference to combat or war. Indeed the overwhelming scholarly view of Tāl as either a Sufi *shaykh* or a political and military leader has therefore colored any approach to his work. This is even the case when these aspects of his life are not present in his work.

As Tāl states, one of his primary goals in composing *Safīnat al-sa'āda* was to materialize and make public, for both his contemporaries and posterity, that he loved the Prophet. In this regard, he declares quite stunningly, “I love him, peace and blessings of the Most High upon him, with my heart and soul (inwardly and outwardly), in secret and openly, in my spirit and my flesh, in my blood, my bones, my nerves, my skin, my tongue, my hair, and my limbs.”<sup>313</sup> Through ink and paper, then, Tāl attempted to shape how he would be remembered. Part of how he wanted to be remembered was for his deep and embodied love for the Prophet.

In this chapter I offer a reassessment of *Safīnat al-sa'āda* and indicate to some of the poem's larger significance in the context of Tāl's life, including questions about religious and political authority, as well as the broader context of the Arabic language and poetics in West Africa. As an example of one form of writing practice, I explain how *Safīnat al-sa'āda* drew on the prestige and fame of two earlier poetic works and rearticulated this notoriety in a new context. Ultimately, the poem capped an extraordinary intellectual career. It raises fundamental questions of how it mediated Tāl's love for the Prophet and why making this love public connected to his claims to scholarly and political authority.

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<sup>312</sup> In two different works Willis ties the poem to the Tijānniya and to war. With specific reference to the poem's introduction he writes it “constitutes a manifesto for the *jihād*...” see; John Ralph Willis, “The Writings of al-Hājj ‘Umar al-Fūtī and Shaykh Mukhtār b. Wadī‘at Allāh: Literary Themes, Sources and Influences” in *Studies in West African Islamic History: The Cultivators of Islam*, vol. 1, edited by John Ralph Willis (London: Frank Cass, 1979), 186. Elsewhere he describes the poem as “a testament for the Tijani jihad” see; John Ralph Willis, *In the Path of Allah: The Passion of Al-Hajj ‘Umar, an Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), 29.

<sup>313</sup> Introduction to ‘Umar Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa'āda li-ahl du'f wa-l-najāda*, BNF, Fonds Arabe, 5485, fol. 4a-4b.

My intention here is not to present an exhaustive study of the rhetorical, linguistic, or even the performative aspects of the poem. Writing about modern detractors of the *qaṣīda* form, Salma Jayussi argues “we should remember that this is a poetry meant to be read aloud, to be subject to modulations of rhythm and tone, to changes in tempo and gear, to variations in the mode of address.”<sup>314</sup> Though preserved, copied and transmitted through ink and paper, so much of the meaning of *Safīnat al-sa‘āda*, and how it was meant to be experienced is embedded in its performance and recitation. It was never meant for an academic to access it as a “text” in manuscript form in an archive in Paris, nearly a hundred and fifty years after its author had died. Ironically, however, it is through this encounter that the present analysis is made possible. Therefore the limitation of understanding and interpreting this poem as a “text” must be taken into consideration, and other significant aspects of this poem will be left to future scholars to illuminate.

I first begin in broad strokes about the importance of praising the Prophet in Islamic religious practice and explain the roots of poetry as a modality for praise. I then discuss the earlier poems of al-Fāzāzī and Ibn Muḥīb and explore issues of transmission, commentary and the poems’ role in West African knowledge practices. From there I examine exactly how in *Safīnat al-sa‘āda* Tāl modified these earlier poems, and explain why he may have written it. Finally, I analyze how the poem was connected to an alternative form of political and religious affiliation Tāl was espousing, and touch on the specific political climate within which he composed it.

## **Locating the Poetics of Praise**

To contextualize *madīḥ*, or praise poetry in Islamic devotional contexts, I want to briefly touch on the special role of the Prophet in Islamic knowledge practice and theology. In Islamic

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<sup>314</sup> Salma Khadra Jayussi, “The Persistence of the Qasida Form” in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, v.1, edited by Sperl and Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 7.

thought a person is defined as a Muslim by pronouncing the testament of faith, or the *shahāda*—“I bear witness that there is no god but God and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the messenger of God.”<sup>315</sup> Though Islam is built on the radical declaration of the singularity of God (*tawḥīd*), the recognition of Muḥammad as the vessel and site of divine revelation is also central to the faith. In practical terms, Muḥammad is the interpretive prism through which Muslims come to understand the morals, laws and rituals of the religion.<sup>316</sup> His normative practices (*sunna*), though contested and debated, remain fundamental to Islamic practice, and interpretation of the Qur’an.<sup>317</sup>

As the transmitter of God’s verbatim speech, the Qur’an, the Prophet is then also the quintessential exemplar of how to live that speech pragmatically in the world. Given the special rank of the Prophet, Muslims are commanded to praise him and send blessings on him. This is indicated by the Qur’anic verse: “God and His angels bless the Prophet- so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace.”<sup>318</sup> In any gathering, whenever this verse is recited, Muslims respond by reciting a prayer on the Prophet in the form of “O God send your peace and blessing on our master Muḥammad, his family and his companions.”<sup>319</sup> Similarly whenever the

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<sup>315</sup> This is the normal threshold in Islamic thought of what defines a Muslim, though this has often been debated as well, see: Sherman Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s Fayṣal al Tafrīqa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Further the question of whether this testament of faith is the only requirement for one to be considered Muslim becomes significant in Tāl’s own life. Chapter 6 of this study examines the conflict between ‘Umar Tāl and the ruler of Masina, Aḥmad III. Though Aḥmad III was a Muslim, and ruled over a Muslim majority polity, Tāl argued that because of his actions in supporting another non-Muslim polity, he should be considered a non-Muslim. The implication of this declaration in the practice of Islamic Law in his time was that Tāl could justifiably attack him and confiscate his property.

<sup>316</sup> For an excellent overview of Muḥammad as a “prism” see: Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choice of Interpreting the Prophet’s Legacy* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014).

<sup>317</sup> The example of Islamic ritual prayer (*ṣalat*), one of the five pillars of the faith, nicely highlights the role of the Prophetic *sunnah* for interpreting Islamic practice. While the Qur’an instructs Muslims to offer *ṣalat* at five prescribed times during the day, the specific manner of how to perform this ritual is never explained. Putting aside the complex issues of Islamic hermeneutics and source analysis underscores scholarly differences of opinion in Muslim practice, Muslim fundamentally come to know how to perform ritual prayer through emulating the example of the Prophet.

<sup>318</sup> Qur’an 33:56. Here I am using Abdel Haleem’s translation of this verse. See; M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>319</sup> Among the different setting that this verse is typically recited is at the end of communal supplication (*du’a*) after the ritual prayer, at the end of a formal religious talk or even a gathering of remembrance (*dhikr*).

Prophet's name is mentioned, Muslim often respond with the *taṣlīya*, “peace be upon him.”<sup>320</sup> In addition to numerous *aḥādīth*, the implication following this Qur’anic injunction is that from the virtual beginnings of the religion, sending prayers on the Prophet (*ṣalawāt*) has been fundamental to Islamic devotional practice.<sup>321</sup>

The sheer number of litanies, incantations and prayers further highlight how Muslims have understood the command to praise and send blessings on the Prophet. Used for private or public and communal recitation, this genre of work has existed in all Muslim societies since the beginning of Muslim history. The diversity of this work is clearly highlighted by the impressive library of Tāl. For instance, the library contains several copies of the fifteenth century work *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt*, by Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 1465), as well as a long *ṣalawāt* by the nineteenth century Egyptian scholar, Aḥmad Dardīr (d. 1786).<sup>322</sup> These works provide a representative sample of the numerous different *ṣalawāt* the library contains.

One other example, closer to Tāl’s own life, is Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s *jawharat al-kamāl*, or the “pearl of perfection.” Central to Tijānī devotional practice and doctrine, this *ṣalawāt* is embedded in the daily Tijānī *wazīfa*. Differentiating the Tijānniya and establishing its primacy over other Sufī brotherhoods, the Prophet is reported to have transmitted this *ṣalawāt* to Aḥmad

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<sup>320</sup> For an explanation and usage of the *taṣliya* see; Cristina De La Puente, “The Prayer Upon the Prophet Muhammad (Tasliya): A Manifestation of Islamic Religiosity” in *Medieval Encounters*, 5, no. 1, 121-129.

<sup>321</sup> The *ḥadīth* literature emphasizes the merit in praising the Prophet, and the reward for doing so. For some examples see; Qadi ‘Iyad Ibn Musa Al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad Messenger of Allah (Ash-Shifa of Qadi ‘Iyad)*, translated by Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Granada: Madinah Press, 2011), 234-237. Further the name of the Prophet, Muḥammad, means “the praised one.” Drawing on the work of several Muslim scholars who elaborate on the meaning of “Muḥammad” Schimmel argues “the very name Muhammad prefigures all the praise that will be his share and that of his followers in this world and the next. This name has existed from the beginning of time and will forever resound in Paradise.” See; Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 107.

<sup>322</sup> The library contains at least seven copies of *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt*. One particular legible manuscript copy is: BNF, Fonds Arabe, 5619, 1b-70a. Jazūlī had a lasting impact on Sufism in North and West Africa, and his *ṣalawāt* is recited by millions of Muslims throughout the world, see: Vincent J. Cornell, *Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 155-195. The library contains one copy of Aḥmad Dardīr’s *ṣalawāt*: BNF, Fonds Arabe, 5724, 79a-103a.

al-Tijānī in a waking state. In the *wazīfa*, when Tijānīs begin to recite *jawharat al-kamāl*, they spread a white cloth inside of the *dhikr* circle. The white cloth represents the idea that the Prophet becomes present when this *ṣalawāt* is recited. Thus whether this presence is physical, metaphysical or metaphorical, this example nicely captures an instance of the intimacy that Muslims create with Muḥammad through praising him.

The basic principles that run through the genre of *ṣalawāt* also overflowed into poetic verse.<sup>323</sup> The distinction between prayers on the Prophet and praise poetry can become obscure given that this genre of poetry is often also important in formal devotional settings, like the celebration of the Prophet’s birth (*mawlid*).<sup>324</sup> However there are clear structural differences in terms of meter and rhyming pattern, the use of literary devices, and general length adhering to the traditional *qaṣīda*.

Praising the Prophet through poetry was not an invention of later Muslim communities. Grafting older poetic conventions into an Islamic worldview, poets showered elaborate praise on the Prophet during his own lifetime.<sup>325</sup> One important early example is the panegyric, *Bānat al-Su‘ād* or *Su‘ād Has Departed*.<sup>326</sup> Composed by Ka‘b ibn Zuhayr —a descendant of an important pre-Islamic family of poets, the poem was meant to both praise and seek pardon from the

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<sup>323</sup> Here I will only provide some preliminary thoughts. A further investigation between poetics of praise and their connection to *salawat* within Islamic history is quite overdue, and important to any understanding of the development of this genre. One example of a poem used in a formal devotional setting is Muḥammad al-Būṣīrī’s (d. 1298) 13<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece, *Al-Kawākib al-Durriya fī Madḥ Khayr al-Barriya* or the *Glittering Planets in Praise of the Best of Mankind*. The Poem is better known as the “Burda,” and remains one of the most widespread and important praise poems ever written. It is recited in all parts of the Muslim world. See; Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 181.

<sup>324</sup> For an analysis of the *mawlid* in Islamic history see; Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>325</sup> Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 178-180.

<sup>326</sup> This poem remains important to the knowledge practices of West African Muslims, especially the Jakhanke. Apart from its evident devotional use, it is also used in pedagogy. Tāl’s library also contains several copies. A particular legible copy is: BnF, Fonds Arabe 5734, 150a-157a.

Prophet.<sup>327</sup> Though *madīh* was a well defined sub-genre in the pre-Islamic poetic tradition, this poem had a lasting impact specifically on *madīh al-nabawī*.

In her analysis of panegyrics, Suzanne Stetkevych defines “*Su‘ād Has Departed*” as a “ritual of submission and supplication” or a “Supplicatory Ode.”<sup>328</sup> Since the genre of *madīh al-nabawī* was underlined by its performative and transformative powers, she argues this poem “provided a spiritual model for Muslims seeking redemption through the ages.”<sup>329</sup> Through praise poetry, the poet (and by extension later reciters) attempted to create an intimate bond with the Prophet, celebrate their love for him, and seek his intercession for their sins and mistakes. The idea of a “Supplicatory Ode” then meant that these poems did not just have literary value, though language was instrumental to their aesthetics. But instead, they were also a ritual. Like Ka‘b ibn Zuhayr, later poets narrativized their spiritual itineraries of submitting to the Prophet, both literally, and figuratively through profusely praising him.

### **The Metrics of Love**

With the efflorescence of praise poetry in the medieval Islamic world, the story of *Safīnat al-sa‘āda* begins in Cordoba, at the hands of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāzāzī. A gifted poet and an administrative clerk during the reign of the Almohads, al-Fāzāzī became disillusioned by what he saw as the political excesses and religious laxity of the ruling elites.<sup>330</sup> For this reason, he

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<sup>327</sup> Ka‘b had slandered the Prophet through his poetry. When the Prophet placed a bounty on him, he was gripped with fear, and in the cloak of darkness entered the Prophet’s presence and recited this poem. After adhering to all the structural and literary conventions of the pre-Islamic poetic tradition, in the last third of the poem, Ka‘b asked for the Prophet’s pardon and began to praise him. Moved by the poem, the Prophet forgave him and placed his *burda* (mantle) on him. The poem mediated Ka‘b’s conversion to Islam, and is more typically also known as the “Burda.” See; Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 179-180.

<sup>328</sup> Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), xii.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Rasheed Ajani Raji, “The ‘Ishriniyat of Al-Fazazi: An aspect of the Precedence of The Kanem-Borno Empire in Arabic and Islamic Scholarship” in *Annals of Borno*, vol. 6/7, 1989/1990, 5.

admonished the poets of his time who lavished praise on rulers in exchange for gifts and wealth.<sup>331</sup> Instead, through his work and example he highlighted that praising the Prophet was the only worthy occupation for a poet. Biographical sources highlight that he had an immense mastery over the Arabic language, and several commentators argued that his verse was unrivaled.<sup>332</sup>

He was also a jurist and a *muḥaddīth*—someone who transmitted Prophetic traditions. On this latter point, three centuries later, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, the famed Egyptian polymath, quoted al-Fāzāzī’s lines on the importance of *ḥadīth*:

Knowledge of *ḥadīth* is an authoritative  
Source for all knowledge.  
Hold fast to it as special assignment.  
Follow its noble ways and act according to it,  
And you will be acting with knowledge  
Of insight and certainty.<sup>333</sup>

As a *muḥaddīth*, al-Fāzāzī would have been intimate with the Prophet’s life, his biography and the history of the early Muslim community. Many of these details became embedded in his compositions of *madīḥ al-nabawī*.

His poems influenced the verse of his contemporaries, and one poem in particular is quite noteworthy.<sup>334</sup> Between 1203-1204 al-Fāzāzī completed *al-Wasā’il al-mutaqābala* or the “Acceptable Means”. Unlike his other poems, this long, five hundred and eighty line, panegyric work would come to have a lasting impact on the devotional practices of West African Muslims. While considered a single work, it is structured as a collection of twenty-nine odes. Each of the

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Much of what we know about al-Fāzāzī comes from his student and famed linguist al-Ru’ayni, and Al-Fāzāzī’s contemporaries like, Ibn Abbar. See; Raji, *The Influence of the ‘Ishrīnīyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 24-27.

<sup>333</sup> Quoted in Raji, *The Influence of the ‘Ishrīnīyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 27.

<sup>334</sup> al-Fāzāzī’s poems had influence on the verse of the great Ibn Arabi see; Denis E. McAuley, *Ibn ‘Arabi’s Mystical Poetics* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 161-164.

odes consists of twenty lines, and for this reason the poem is more commonly known as the *‘Ishrīnīyāt* or the “Twenties”.

Arranged alphabetically, the twenty-nine odes follow the traditional monorhyme of the *qaṣīda*—each ode rhymes with one Arabic letter.<sup>335</sup> Unusually, however, al-Fāzāzī also begins each of his lines with this specific rhyming letter. For instance, this is clear if we analyze the first verse of the beginning ode:

aḥaqqu ‘ibād allāhi bi-l-majdi wa-l-‘ulā  
nabiyyun lahu a‘lā l-jināni mubawwa’u

The most deserving of God’s praise and glory  
The Prophet whose abode is the peak of the Garden

As the transliteration of this line indicates, the line both begins and ends with the rhyming letter (though they are transliterated and pronounced differently because of a difference in vowels). In both cases they still constitute the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, *alif*, and are rendered as “a” and “u” in the example. al-Fāzāzī employs this scheme for each set of twenty lines that comprise a single ode.

The *‘Ishrīnīyāt* is best characterized as a “Supplicatory Ode,” as described above. Coupled with al-Fāzāzī’s own desire to seek the Prophet’s intercession, in each ode he praises Muḥammad through a specific characteristic of his, a particular theme, or an event in his life. Read independently, each ode is replete with historical information, and important aspects of Islamic theology and cosmology. For instance, in the second ode (the letter *ba*) he emphasizes the difficulties in the *dunyā* (the finite world) and the importance of abandoning it through following the example of the Prophet. In the following ode (the letter *ta*), he explains one the most important

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<sup>335</sup> Though there are only twenty-eight letters in the Arabic alphabet, Al-Fāzāzī also includes an ode rhyming with the combined letters of *lam* and *alif* (lā).

forms of worship a believer can perform is praise of the Prophet. Moreover, in order to highlight the significance of Medina, he dedicates another ode (the letter *sin*) to explain his desire to visit the Prophet at his place of rest. Taken as a whole, the poem is a multivalent praise of the Prophet, with each ode defining and elaborating on one of two specific points.

Though the poem found fame and spread to the eastern Muslim lands, it is through its *takhmīs* by another gifted poet, Abū Bakr ibn Muḥīb that it is better known.<sup>336</sup> From the Arabic word *khamsa* (five), the *takhmīs* form remains the most common way for a different poet to add additional lines to an existing poem. In the case of Ibn Muḥīb, he added three hemistichs to each of Al-Fāzāzī's lines, in order to create a poem with 580 stanzas, each, five half lines in length.<sup>337</sup>

While Ibn Muḥīb may have lived a generation or two immediately after al-Fāzāzī, it is not entirely clear when he encountered the poem.<sup>338</sup> There is almost no biographical information on him, except anecdotal suggestions that he may have been a jurist, and of course, a poet. Making things even more difficult is that we know very little about the cultural and intellectual interconnections between Andalusia, North Africa and West Africa. Given this scholarly lacuna, and current state of research it is difficult to place him, and provide any details of how this work was transmitted across the Sahara.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> In the following discussion I use a printed version of shaykh Muḥammad Gibrima's commentary and explanation of Ibn Muḥīb's *takhmīs*: Muḥammad Gibrima, *Al-Nawāfiḥ al-ʿItrīyya (al-Mukhtaṣar min al-Nafḥat al-Anbarriyya fi Ḥalli al-Fāz al-ʿIshrīnīyāt* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 2003).

Indeed what is referred to as the “ʿIshrīnīyāt” in West Africa is the *takhmīs* of Ibn Muḥīb. The two poems are also never printed separately.

<sup>337</sup> Since the original poem was 580 lines long, Ibn Muḥīb's additional lines made the poem 580 stanzas long.

<sup>338</sup> Raji, *The Influence of the ʿIshrīnīyāt on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 55.

<sup>339</sup> It is of course also entirely plausible that Ibn Muḥīb learned the work in Andalusia, North Africa, or elsewhere and then himself travelled across the Sahara. There is, however, one other alternative theory that requires further research and source analysis. Raji suggests that it was a contemporary of Al-Fāzāzī, the famed poet and scholar from Bornu, Abu Ishaq al-kanimi (d. 1213), who transmitted the poem to West Africa. It is then entirely possible that Ibn Muḥīb was a Saharan scholar who simply wrote a *takhmīs* of it, and was not the originally transmitter. See; Raji, “The ʿIshrīnīyāt of Al-Fazazi: An aspect of the Precedence of The Kanem-Borno Empire in Arabic and Islamic Scholarship,” 2-3.

Ibn Muhīb did, however, leave a short introduction that provides some details on what he thought about al-Fāzāzī, and his own poetic skills. After initially lavishing praise on the poetic expression of the original author, he bemoans the inferiority of his own contribution:

I have disgraced myself to a  
degree that not everyone has attained  
who busies himself with what is not in  
his capacity and who affects that for  
which he can find no help from his own  
knowledge or from the goodness of his nature.<sup>340</sup>

Suggesting that his shortcomings are quite obvious, he later turns to ask if anyone else could produce a composition that could “obliterate the tract of my poor performance.”<sup>341</sup> Acknowledging the uniqueness of his own work, he argues that it would be difficult for any critic to produce a work that is similar.

Alluding again to this imagined critic, he explicitly establishes his own literary prowess and continues:

So go ahead; exert yourself and display  
The best you have in praising  
Your honored Prophet (God bless him and give  
him peace), just as I have spoken  
and exerted myself. And if you are un-  
able to do it, then be grateful to me  
for what I have done, for it is the best  
I can do, and I rely on God to accept it.<sup>342</sup>

The poem represents Ibn Muhīb’s best effort in praising the Prophet. Composing a new work, the additions he makes to al-Fāzāzī’s original poem greatly enhance it. Perfectly matching the meter, rhythm and mood, these additional verses add commentary and further context to the original lines.

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<sup>340</sup> Quoted in Raji, *The Influence of the ‘Ishrīniyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 56.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

In the *takhmīs*, Ibn Muhīb ’s additional verses always precede those of the original poem.

In order to graphically illustrate this point, and explain clearly what Ibn Muhīb’s additional lines accomplish, I turn to the first stanza of the first ode:

khalīlay ūjan bi-l-muḥaṣṣabi wa-nzilā  
wa-lā tabghiyā ‘an ḥayfihi mutahawwalā  
akrim bi-hi maghnan taḥarrāhu manzilā  
*aḥaqqu ‘ibād allāhi bi-l-majdi wa-l-‘ulā*  
*nabiyyun lahu a‘lā l-jināni mubawwa`u*

My two companions stop and dismount at *muḥaṣṣab*  
Do not desire to turn away from his *khayf*  
How great is it to have been chosen as a residence by  
*The most deserving of God’s praise and glory*  
*The Prophet whose abode is the peak of the Garden*

Viewing this stanza in its entirety, the two half-lines I have put in italics belong to Al-Fāzāzī’s original poem. Ibn Muhīb ’s first full line functions as a proper introduction, or *nasīb*, in line with the classical Arabic *qaṣīda* tradition.<sup>343</sup> Here the elegiac *nasīb* highlights the poet’s longing for his two companions to travel and dismount in a location significant to the Prophet’s life, and not veer away from it. The *nasīb* here is meant to catch the attention of the audience, and set the tone of the ode.

The additional lines shift the internal coherence and structure of al-Fāzāzī’s original poem. One of the striking features of most *qaṣīdas* is that the second hemistich is dependent on the first for meaning and clarity.<sup>344</sup> al-Fāzāzī’s original two half lines nicely explain this idea. In the example above the second half-line is dependent on the first for meaning, and therefore can be read as “The Prophet whose abode is the peak of the Garden” is “The most deserving of God’s

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<sup>343</sup> For a detailed discussion of the *nasīb*, and its use in classical Arabic poetry see; Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>344</sup> Jayussi, “The Persistence of the Qasida Form,” 14-15.

praise and glory.” In the *takhmīs* form the balance and relationship of the original lines is altered. While the first full line of Ibn Muhīb’s pentastich functions as the *nasīb*, the next half-line is integrated in meaning and sense with the first half-line of al-Fāzāzī’s original poem. Creating a shift in emphasis, Ibn Muhīb’s “How great is it to have been chosen as a residence by” depends on al-Fāzāzī’s “The most deserving of God’s praise and glory” for context and meaning. Though previously, al-Fāzāzī’s second hemistich was dependent, it now becomes an independent statement. It emphasizes the previous line and concludes the stanza.

In the *takhmīs*, the additional lines flow seamlessly with the meter and intent of the original poem, but there are also a few subtle differences. As I indicated earlier, one of al-Fāzāzī’s conventions is to both begin and end his lines with the rhyming letter of the ode. Ibn Muhīb, however, does not follow this convention. Returning to the transliteration of the example above, it is clear that the stanza itself ends with the rhyming letter—*alif*, but this is only because it ends with al-Fāzāzī’s second half-line. Since al-Fāzāzī’s first half-line has now shifted, no line in the stanza begins with the letter *alif*. Instead, Ibn Muhīb introduces his own pattern that holds true for every stanza of the poem. He takes the last letter of al-Fāzāzī’s first hemistich and rhymes all of his additional lines with this letter in any given stanza. The sheer complexity and difficulty of what Ibn Muhīb attempts to achieve cannot be underestimated. In this particular case, since al-Fāzāzī ends his first hemistich with the combined letter *lam-alif* (*lā*), Ibn Muhīb ends all his additional half-lines also in *lam-alif*.

It is through Ibn Muhīb’s effort that al-Fāzāzī’s poem was preserved, transmitted and became important in West Africa. By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the *takhmīs* had found its way to the scholarly elites of Timbuktu. The *Ta’rīkh al-Sudān* highlights that Abū al-Qāsim al-Tuātī, a noted scholar and Imam of the grand mosque of the city, established reciting a single ode after every

Friday prayer.<sup>345</sup> Reiterating its acceptance in the city, another noteworthy scholar, the polymath and father of the great Aḥmad Bābā, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad, is reported to have also written a commentary on the poem.<sup>346</sup> As scholars continued to teach and students continued to travel, the poem spread to other parts of West Africa, particularly Katsina in northern Nigeria.<sup>347</sup>

The poem continues to play an important role in the social and educational practices of West African Muslims. Describing the *‘Ishrīnīyāt* in Nigeria three decades ago, Rasheed Raji notes

[b]eggars chant it to ensure their daily bread, the traditional learned Muslims...chant it for protection and to assure a clientele, Muslim devotional societies to prevent disintegration, the hunter to prevent his bullet from erring, the ascetics and mystics as a safeguard against Hell-fire, and Muslim market women to attract customers.<sup>348</sup>

The example highlights the wide spectrum of use the poem has found in Nigeria, permeating almost every aspect of social life. In my own experience among the Jakhanke in both Senegal and the Gambia, the poem is recited during celebrations, including the birth of the Prophet, as well as during the night in the month of Ramadan. It is also used as a pedagogical tool for the study of advanced Arabic, poetics, metrics and the biography of the Prophet. Summarizing its importance in knowledge practice, for those students who have never read it, Nigerian scholars often say “you are not yet a learned scholar, because your knowledge of Arabic and Islamic culture is incomplete.”<sup>349</sup>

### **Materializing the Poetics of Love**

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<sup>345</sup> Raji, *The Influence of the ‘Ishrīnīyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 129-130.

<sup>346</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Sa‘dī, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa‘dī’s Ta’rīkh al-Sūdān down to 1613*, translated and edited by John O. Hunwick (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 61.

<sup>347</sup> Raji, *The Influence of the ‘Ishrīnīyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 304-305.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

In Futa Toro, a generation before Tāl’s birth, the poem had already been well established in the knowledge practices of the scholarly elites of the region. When the notables of Futa Toro appointed Abdul Kader Kan as their Almamy, he gathered them in a ceremony. Kan asked everyone in attendance to recite/swear on the Qur’an, the *Dalā’il al-khayrāt* of al-Jazūlī, and the *‘Ishrīnīyāt* of al-Fāzāzī.<sup>350</sup> Explicit empirical evidence that explains when the poem became established in northern Senegal remains unclear, however it is clear that it was remembered and associated with one of the defining moments of Futa’s history.<sup>351</sup>

Within Futa’s Islamic intellectual milieu Tāl encountered the *‘Ishrīnīyāt*. In the introduction to *Safīnat al-sa’āda* he writes “when I was younger and I looked into the poems which praised the Prophet of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāzāzī, and the *takhmīs* of the brother of *baraka* in consonants and vowels Abū Bakr ibn Muḥīb, I was astonished in the strength of their love for the Prophet...”<sup>352</sup> While it is not clear what event sparked his interest in the poem three decades later, the poem had clearly made an impression on him very early on.<sup>353</sup> Given the use of the poem in pedagogy it may have been one of the works that he studied as a young student of Arabic language and poetry. Moreover, it is more than likely that he also experienced the poem through listening to its recitation and engaging in its performative dimensions. Though he was certainly aware of other works of praise, it was ultimately the *‘Ishrīnīyāt* that would become the basis for his greatest poetic accomplishment.

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<sup>350</sup> Muusa Kamara, *Florilège au jardin de l’histoire des noirs, Zuhūr al-Basātīn: l’aristocraties peule et la révolution des clercs musulmans, vallée du Sénégal*, edited by Jean Schmitz and translated by Saïd Bousbina (Paris: Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, 1998), 326.

<sup>351</sup> I look at the early history of Futa Toro and the significance of this event in chapters one and five of this dissertation.

<sup>352</sup> Tal, *Safīnat al-sa’āda*, fol. 4b.

<sup>353</sup> One possible explanation is that Tal had spent several years in Sokoto before he migrated to Futa Jallon. The *‘Ishrīnīyāt* had already become wide spread in Sokoto, and greatly influenced the poetry of both ‘Uthman dan Fodio and his brother Abdullah. See; Raji, *The Influence of the ‘Ishrīnīyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria*, 306-322.

The *Ishrīnīyāt* captures the essence of what it meant to love the Prophet. As the opening epigraph to this chapter indicates, Tāl expresses his love for the Prophet in quite visually stunning language. In Tāl's experience loving the Prophet was fundamentally embodied, and permeated through the very fiber of his being. He found in the expression of the two poets' love for the Prophet something quite moving. In order to materialize and express his own love he turned to writing verse. He explained, "when God wished for me to make apparent my love for him, peace be upon him, he inspired me to begin a commentary on al-Fāzāzī."<sup>354</sup> Like generations of poets before him, he took to the poetic precedent of adding verses to an existing poem in order to make his own original work.

Perhaps heeding Ibn Muḥīb's challenge that one ought to produce a better version of his *takhmīs*, Tāl began what he considered a commentary on al-Fāzāzī's poem. As explored in greater detail in chapter one, the relationship between *sharḥ/matn* or commentary/text was essential in Muslim scholarly practices. Often the *sharḥ* would be the only way the *matn* would come to be transmitted, studied and known. Though the same issues of authorship and authenticity as discussed above are relevant here, there is also one crucial difference. In this example, Tāl, like Ibn Muḥīb before him, used poetic verse, rather than prose, in order to create a new work. The different uses and registers of prose and poetry meant that *Safīnat al-sa'āda* was not simply just a commentary, solely explaining another work. Rather it was both a commentary along with a seamless integration of new poetic lines that allowed Tāl to place his mark on a pre-existing poem.

Given the widespread fame of Ibn Muḥīb's *takhmīs*, even in Tāl's own lifetime, he chose not to write another competing pentastich. Rather he decided to embark on a far more difficult, and ambitious project. He was going to supersede al-Fāzāzī's and Ibn Muḥīb's verses of love,

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<sup>354</sup> Tal, *Safīnat al-sa'āda*, fol. 4b.

through producing a *ta'shir*. In the *ta'shir* form, from *'ashara* (ten), each stanza then became ten hemistichs in length. Therefore, whereas Ibn Muhīb added three hemistichs to each of al-Fāzāzī's lines, Tāl added eight hemistichs. Expanded considerably, the entire poem would become five times longer than al-Fāzāzī's original.

One of the striking aspects of *Safīnat al-sa'ādais* that Tāl does not incorporate any of Ibn Muhīb's lines. Though he came to know al-Fāzāzī's original through its *takhmīs*, and he was inspired by Ibn Muhīb's verses, all of Tāl's additional lines are his own. These additional lines have specific characteristics. In some instances, Tāl's additions replicate a specific line of al-Fāzāzī, with the substitution of one or more words. At other times, they are completely new lines, and only follow al-Fāzāzī in terms of meter, and subject matter.

In order to show the difficulty of Tāl's undertaking and explain how he modified the original poem, I once again turn to the first line of al-Fāzāzī's original. As mentioned in the previous section, al-Fāzāzī's first ode begins with the following two half lines:

The Most deserving of God's praise and glory  
The Prophet whose abode is the peak of the Garden

Rendering these lines into a *ta'shir*, Tāl's first stanza looks like this:

Highest praise, Creator of the best of creation,  
For sending from us, the one lifted to the Throne  
How great, the rank of one who dwells so lofty  
*The Most deserving of God's praise and glory*  
The beloved, through whom God gives and guards

Peace and blessings of the Supreme on the exalted,  
Guardian of creation. Since he is the most radiant,  
Is he not like the full moon? An object emblazoned,  
Shining so brilliantly. Of dignity, most perfected.  
*The Prophet whose abode is the peak of the Garden.*<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Tal, *Safīnat al-sa'āda*, fol. 8b.

What is immediately apparent is that unlike Ibn Muḥīb, Tāl does not begin his rendition with the traditional *nasīb*. In this regard, he follows closely with al-Fāzāzī, and begins the poem with a praise of God for sending the Prophet. Perhaps to differentiate his work from the widespread *takhmīs*, he breaks away from the typical poetic conventions of the *qaṣīda*, and introduces the subject of his work immediately.

What also becomes apparent is that Tāl follows a specific pattern in how he embeds al-Fāzāzī's half lines. Unlike Ibn Maḥāib, who kept al-Fāzāzī's hemistichs together, but altered their position by shifting them within the stanza, Tāl bifurcates them. In the manuscript copy that I am using, this is represented in the form of two pentastichs. I have tried to reproduce this visually in the manner I have presented the translation above. Each pentastich contains a single half-line from al-Fāzāzī (in italics), and both of them together highlight the completion of one line. In the first instance, Tāl adds three half lines to al-Fāzāzī's first hemistich, and then adds one more half line to complete the first pentastich. In the second instance, he adds four half lines and concludes the entire stanza with the second hemistich of al-Fāzāzī's first line. By separating the two aspects of al-Fāzāzī's line each stanza also ends with the rhyme letter. Reading through the example it becomes clear that Tāl's additional lines maintain the sense of the original poet's intent. Conforming to the poem's meter, they highlight Tāl's genius and ability to add nuance and commentary to the original lines.

His additional lines also stamp his authorial voice on the poem, and in many instances he does this quite explicitly. A familiarity with the poem, or even an understanding where al-Fāzāzī's original half-lines fall within a given stanza aid a listener/reader to easily distinguish which lines are Tāl's. But there is also more. In almost every ode, al-Fāzāzī includes autobiographical information usually in the form of one or more lines expressing his desire to travel to Medina or

seeking the Prophet’s intercession. As chapter two highlighted, Tāl’s sojourn to the Ḥijāz was one of the defining aspects of his spiritual transformation. In commenting on these lines, Tāl then places his experiences of Medina and visiting the Prophet into the poem. One example, near the end of the first ode makes this clear:

I praise God, for the favor he bestowed on me,  
 Allowing me to prostrate in the place he set his foot.  
 And before my journey, I wished to connect with him,  
*To kiss the place where he stepped with his shoes.*  
 I became his neighbor, and God alone gives and protects.

I wish I had the chance to meet the people of his entourage  
 The most I can ask for is just to grab the hem of his robe.  
 And for me to be an inheritor having a share of a descendent  
 To quench thirst from the overflow of the abundant rain.  
*Perhaps I will quench my thirst by him through whom I became thirsty.*<sup>356</sup>

In the first pentastich, al-Fāzāzī’s original line is “To kiss the place where he stepped with his shoes.” The four hemistichs that Tāl adds to this line clearly embellish and add commentary to that line. Tāl extends the meaning of this half-line and includes his own narrative of visiting Medina. Similarly in the next pentastich, Tāl expresses his sorrow for not having lived during the time of the Prophet, and only wishes to grasp at some essence of the past. Drawing on Islamic eschatology, like the original poet, he expresses his wish to meet the Prophet after death.

Though Tāl engages explicitly with only the verses of al-Fāzāzī’s original in *Safīnat al-sa‘āda*, it is still possible to identify the subtle ways that Ibn Muḥīb influence his work. Despite omitting Ibn Muḥīb’s verses, Tāl modeled his new composition on the poetic and structural aspects of aforementioned *takhmīs*. The transliteration of the first stanza I quoted above makes this point clear:

li-khāliqi khayri l-khalq ḥamdun lahu l-‘ulā  
 ‘ala b‘athihi fīnā wa-minnā wa-qad ‘alā  
 ‘ala l-‘arshi mā a‘alā sākini l-‘ulā

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<sup>356</sup> Tal, *Safīnat al-sa‘āda*, fol. 13a.

*aḥaqqu 'ibād allāhi bi-l-majdi wa-l-'ulā*  
*ḥabībun bi-hi yu'ṭi l-'ilāhu wa-yaklā'u*

*ṣalātan wa-taslīmu l-'Alī'u 'ulā 'alā*  
*murabbi l-wara al-khindhīdhi idh kāna l-athmalā*  
*alā innahu badrun idhā l-amru ath'alā*  
*atammu l-wara jāhan wa-abharu mash'alā*  
*nabiyyun lahu a'lā l-jināni mubawwa'u*

Just like Ibn Muḥīb, we can see that all of Tāl's hemistiches in this section end in the same letter of the first hemistich of al-Fāzāzī's line. Here, like in the example above, all of his additional hemistiches end in the combined letters *lam-alif* (lā). The one half-line that does not maintain this pattern instead rhymes with the rhyme letter and al-Fāzāzī's second hemistich. In the example this is represented by “u”. In this manner, by engaging the verses of al-Fāzāzī's and the rhyming pattern of Ibn Muḥīb, *Safīnat al-sa'āda* incorporates both works. It is in the intersection between the content of the former, and the form of the latter where Tāl created his new composition.

### **Poetics and Political Authority**

When Tāl completed *Safīnat al-sa'āda* in 1852 it marked nearly four years since he migrated from Jekugno and established a new community in Dingiray. In Jekungo, he had spent several productive years teaching a growing number of disciples and writing some of his most important works. In Dingiray Tāl's community underwent a significant shift. In the previous two chapters, I highlighted the social and political dimension of Tāl's communities and his relationship with temporal rulers. Though he was no stranger to offering advice and influencing regional politics, he was still under the authority of established rulers. In Dingiray, far from any Muslim sovereign, he was able to build his own independent economic, religious and political sphere of influence.<sup>357</sup> As the number of Tāl's followers swelled and his fame and recognition as a scholar

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<sup>357</sup> David Robinson. *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 127-128.

increased, his host, Yimba, the king of Tamba, became anxious and attacked Dingiray.<sup>358</sup> Pulled into combat, *Safīnat al-sa'āda* would prove to be the last thing he wrote in peacetime.

Rather than explain the political context within which he produced the last parts of *Safīnat al-sa'āda*, Tāl muses at great length about an earlier conflict with the ruler of Futa Jallon, Almamy 'Umar. These events of five years earlier were the defining catalyst that forced him to migrate. The numerous pages he devotes to analyzing and explaining them clearly suggest that they made a lasting impression on him.

Given the wide gaps in the historiography of Futa Jallon, it is difficult to piece together what external factors led to the conflict between the two men. At the behest of the then Almamy of Futa Jallon, Bubakar, Tāl left Sokoto in 1840 and founded a new community in Jekungo, not far from the capital Timbo.<sup>359</sup> Tāl had a good relationship with this Almamy and built his new community with relative ease. But the Almamy had many enemies. In 1843, a rival from a political faction found support in his desire to expand slave raiding, and deposed Bubakar.<sup>360</sup> Whether it was Tāl's involvement in the politics of Futa Jallon, or his growing prestige, this new Almamy, 'Umar, became wary of him.

Tāl does not explain the backstory to the conflict, and only begins his narrative with the events of 1847. The previous year, he had returned to Futa Toro, after an absence of nearly twenty years. The short stay proved to be quite fruitful, as he acquired a number of new adherents. Perhaps disgruntled with the political and economic situation in Futa Toto, many of these adherents may have viewed Tāl as offering an alternative to the political deadlock and disenfranchisement in the

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 129-132.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 112-114.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 118.

region.<sup>361</sup> With a large contingent of armed recruits, he planned his return to Futa Jallon, and caught the attention of Almamy ‘Umar.

When Tāl and his entourage attempted to return to Jegunko, the Almamy had his army block him from entering his territory. In the introduction to the poem, Tāl explains that when he was returning to Futa Jallon he had completed making a *ta ‘shir* of the following al-Fāzāzī lines “We aimed for its lands even though it was far from our homes/ And no wilderness could destroy us, and no ocean could drown us.”<sup>362</sup> Though al-Fāzāzī describes his longing for Medina in these lines, in Tāl’s hands they take on a different meaning. Family traditions explain that when Tāl attempted to cross one of the rivers of Futa Jallon, the Almamy’s men tried to drown him.<sup>363</sup> It is not clear if this event occurred later on, or whether it was during his initial return. In either case, al-Fāzāzī’s statement “no ocean could drown us” has come to signify that though the Almamy attempted to drown Tāl, he could not deter his path.<sup>364</sup>

The Almamy eventually allowed Tāl to enter his territory, but the conflict was far from over. With his army unable to physically harm Tāl, the Almamy turned to his scholars. He asked them to enter *khalwa* (seclusion) to meditate on a solution.<sup>365</sup> Family traditions highlight that among their counsels to Futa Jallon’s ruler was to bury two things. The first was a *jadwal* they wrote using the name of God *al-Ṣamad* (the Absolute).<sup>366</sup> The plan was to have Tāl sit in the

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<sup>361</sup> Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa ‘āda*, fol. 4b.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Muntaga Tāl, *al-Jawāhīr wa al-Durur fī Sīra al-Ḥājj ‘Umar (Les Perles Rares sur la Vie d’El Hadji Omar)* (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2005), 188-189.

<sup>364</sup> In transmitting this line Muntaga Tāl uses *nahr* (river), whereas in the manuscript copy that I am using the word is *baḥr* (ocean).

<sup>365</sup> The following story is taken from: Tāl, *al-Jawāhīr wa al-Durur*, 187-188. For the importance of *khalwa* in West African knowledge practices see; Jean Louis-Triaud, “Khalwa and the Career of Sainthood: An interpretive Essay,” in *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*, edited by Donal B. Cruise O’Brien and Christian Coulon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 53-66.

<sup>366</sup> The ability to create a *jadwal* falls under “secret” and initiatory knowledge. Visually it normally looks like a grid, with different Arabic words, letters and numbers. It is written on varying sizes of papers, and each *jadwal* is made for a specific purpose. For more on secret knowledge in Islamic practice see; see: Pierre Lory, “La science des lettres en terre d’Islam” in *La contemplation comme action nécessaire*, Cahiers de l’Université Saint Jean de

location of where it was buried. Drawing on the epistemological understanding that the written can create effects in the world, the *jadwal* was meant to spoil Tāl's affairs. Next in a different location, the Almamy's men buried a live black bull in order to cast a spell on Tāl. By employing his scholars to devise a plan, the Almamy had attempted to manipulate the unseen world to harm Tāl.

Yet Tāl remained impervious to Almamy's attacks. Indexing his spiritual station, Tāl demonstrated his knowledge and protection from the unseen world. The oral narrative relate that he asked one of his servants, named Arsuku, to dig up the *jadwal* and bring it to him. Instead of discarding it, he erased its ink with water and then drank the contents. Showing that it could not affect him, he told them to subsequently release the bull. Finally he told the Almamy's men to explain that his scholars should leave their *khalwa*, before they died from thirst. Realizing that Tāl had actually threatened to destroy them, they said to these scholars "do not follow yourselves over the servant of God 'Umar."<sup>367</sup> The clear message of the narrative is that Tāl was triumphant over any plan the ruler of Futa Jallon had against him.

Describing the hostility of 'Umar Sori towards him, Tāl wrote "the fantasies/delusion of one used to seeking *dunyā* and possessing it merely because of its existence is the greatest delusion..."<sup>368</sup> Admonishing the Almamy for seeking the *dunyā*, and for assuming that Tāl would have similar goals, he further describes him through quoting a few verses of poetry: "The evil actions of a man make his thoughts evil/ And he believes whatever fantasies come with it/He turns away from those that love him for the base words of his enemies/And he comes to doubt the darkness of the night."<sup>369</sup> Suggesting the Almamy's only concern was for the *dunyā*, he underlines

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Jérusalem no. 11, Berg International, 1985, Constant Hamès, "Taktub ou la magie de l'écriture islamique: Textes soninké à usage magique" in *Arabica*, 1987 (34:3), 305-325, David Owusu-Ansah. *Islamic Tālismanic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Asante*, (New York: Lewiston, 1991) and Constant Hamès, ed., *Coran et talismans: textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman* (Paris: Karthala, 2007).

<sup>367</sup> Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur*, 188.

<sup>368</sup> Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa'āda*, fol. 4b.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 5a.

that his evil actions distorted his ability to think clearly. Tāl does not explain what those evil actions were, but from the description he clearly emplots his encounter with the Almamy in moralistic terms.

Further explaining why the Almamy began to mobilize against him, Tāl continues his moral argument and writes:

When this fantasy became fixed and established in his heart, he hated me and turned away from me, and he stood attempting to harm me. However he was not able to, since I am, praise God, someone who has an intellect. Anyone with even a shred of an intellect would not like to lean towards [being] a king of the *dunyā*. As for seeking it [*dunyā*] that is madness, because in *dunyā* [you only find] destruction, suffering, falsehood, and calamity, and in the afterlife, humiliation, weeping, fire, ill fortune...<sup>370</sup>

The “fantasy” that the Almamy was entertaining was that he considered Tāl a political rival, a “king of the *dunyā*.” Refuting this accusation, Tāl suggests that any thinking person would not incline towards the *dunyā* because of the peril that comes with seeking it. Reinforcing this point, and distinguishing other temporal rulers of his time, Tāl explains “I am from the trustworthy scholars, and an inheritor of the prophets. The Messenger of God peace and blessing be upon him, was made to choose between being a prophet—king, or a prophet—servant. He chose to be a prophet—servant. So how can the inheritor love what the inherited detested?”<sup>371</sup> According to Tāl he was following in the footsteps of the Prophet and therefore laid claim to being a humble servant of God with no aspirations for kingship.

Still convinced that Tāl’s main objective was to seek political power, the Almamy tried to sway others in his dominion to shun him.<sup>372</sup> This was even though, as Tāl explains “I was in the service of the beloved and elect of God by writing a praise for the intercessor of the creation of God and the chosen one.”<sup>373</sup> Again Tāl quite emphatically references *Safīnat al-sa’āda* as evidence

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

that his only concern was to be of service to the Prophet by praising him. He further argues that because of the love he expressed for the Prophet through his poetry, “the majority of people of insight and opinion, both young and old, did not accept this from him.”<sup>374</sup> The people of Futa Jallon, according to Tāl, continued to treat him with respect and chose not to obey their ruler.

Though Tāl continued to acquire wide support, his conflict with the Almamy had serious implications. In a world where client/patron relationships mattered, he had lost an important patron. Without the Almamy’s protection it seems that Tāl sought to migrate in order to prevent any harm from befalling his nascent community of followers. Besides the scant oral evidence, it is not clear exactly what other methods the Almamy used to deter people from Tāl. It is clear that Tāl’s community in Jegunkgo remained intact, and he moved freely within Futa Jallon for the next year rather unabated. Perhaps an open military conflict with the Almamy would have stunted his ability to teach. Therefore he chose to maintain peace, build on the relationships he had created in Futa Toro and elsewhere, and keep his growing community secure in a neighboring territory.

### **Poetics of Reciprocal Love and Authority**

Tāl did not take the attacks of the Almamy personally, but instead he claimed he was grateful for having been exposed to this ruler. As this chapter has thus far tried to demonstrate *safina’at al-sa’da* established that he loved the Prophet. In the introduction to the poem, through providing details and analyzing his dispute with the Almamy, Tāl provides details about his dispute with Almamy and uses this narrative to claim that the Prophet loved him too. In Tāl’s conception, the proof of this love was that he underwent trials and difficulties only because he was in the service of the Prophet.

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

Referencing the epistemological and evidentiary role of dreams, Tāl first makes this claim through narrating a dream. He wrote:

I saw in a dream Anas ibn Mālik, while I was in Masina. I said to him, “are you Anas ibn Mālik who narrated *ahādīth* from the Prophet? He responded “yes.” God placed the interpretation of this dream in my heart. [The dream meant] that I had attained closeness to God and his Messenger, and that I was among his inheritors, his servant and the servant of his way. God made apparent to me, both inwardly and outwardly, that the Prophet loves me by his bounty like he loves his children. For this I have more proof and evidence, which I would rather not disclose.<sup>375</sup>

The central figure of the dream, Anas ibn Mālik, is important. According to Islamic sources he lived in the Prophet’s home since a young age, and for this reason he was aware of intimate details of the Prophet’s life.<sup>376</sup> He also lived the longest out of any of the Prophet’s companions, and became one of the most authoritative transmitters of *hadīth*.<sup>377</sup> Whether it is because of Anas ibn Mālik’s closeness and service to the Prophet, or for other reasons Tāl does not disclose, he took this dream to mean that he had become one of the inheritors of the Prophet as well as a servant on his way. The ultimate testament to this was that in Tāl’s words “the Prophet loves me, by his bounty, like he loves his children.”

The conflict with the Almamy helped Tāl reframe the meaning of this dream and lend it credence. Tāl explains this through five separate, but closely related points. Since the Almamy hated him, this resolved something quite important for him. First he explained that “I had an aversion from depending on him, or seeking help from him.”<sup>378</sup> Since Tāl considered Sori an oppressive ruler, he rooted his actions on the Qur’anic verse “And do not incline to those who do wrong, for they will take you to the Fire.”<sup>379</sup> Tāl took the idea of depending on others even further.

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<sup>375</sup> Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa’āda*, fol. 4b.

<sup>376</sup> G. H. A. Juynboll, "Anas b. Mālik," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE. Edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Brill Online, 2015. Reference. 23 August 2015 <[http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/anas-b-malik-COM\\_23088](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/anas-b-malik-COM_23088)> First appeared online: 2011.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa’āda*, fol. 5b.

<sup>379</sup> Quoted in Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa’āda*, fol. 5b.

Drawing and expanding on this first point, Tāl explained the second significance was:

I had an aversion to depending on the creation, and I returned to place my trust only in God. To seek assistance only from Him, to be humble, broken, and subdued for Him, to stand in service for, and seek refuge in Him, to find support in Him, to rely on Him and turn away from anything other than Him. [I became] satisfied with Him managing my affairs, and became rich with what belongs to Him.<sup>380</sup>

By suggesting that he only relied on God and did not seek favors from creation, Tāl was establishing his authority on new principles. Breaking away from the political elites of his time, he was introducing a new criterion for political power and affiliation.

Further crystalizing his stance against temporal rulers and venal scholars Tāl builds his next point around the basis of several related *ḥadīths*. Quoting one of these *ḥadīths* provides the general principle that Tāl attempts to establish. The Prophet is reported to have said:

The best rulers are those who come to the scholars, and the worst scholars are those who visit the rulers. The scholars are the trustees of the messengers over the servants of God as long as they do not mix with kings. If they are seen to do that then they have betrayed the messengers, so I warn you against them, and I ask you to abandon them.<sup>381</sup>

This *ḥadīth* and others like it, establish the precedent of clerical autonomy. As the previous chapters highlighted, Tāl was wary of religious scholars who did not maintain their independence from temporal rulers. The problem of course was that such clerics could lend religious justification to the self-interest of kings over their subjects and neighbors. Specifically with regards to the Almamy, Tāl explains “I was afraid that he would be kind to me, and that kindness would lead me to mix with him. Then I would become one of the venal scholars who betray the Messenger by mixing with kings.”<sup>382</sup> The Almamy clearly did not have these sentiments for Tāl, and therefore in the manner that Tāl sets the argument up, he did not betray the Prophet.

The potential to become tangled in worldly affairs and with venal rulers held personal significance for Tāl. Referencing the *ḥadīth* literature, he claims that the Prophet made it clear to

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<sup>380</sup> Tāl, *Safīnat al-sa'āda*, fol. 5b.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

Tāl that he was from his trustees. The full implication of this was contained in a dream of “one of the *ṣādiqīn* who was in *khalwa*.”<sup>383</sup> Transmitting this information to Tāl in a letter, this *ṣādiq* wrote, “I saw the Prophet and he said to me: ‘al-hajj ‘Umar is my trustee as long as he does not mix with kings or become intertwined with the *dunyā*. But if he mixes with them, or becomes intertwined with it, then he has betrayed me, and I warn against him.’”<sup>384</sup> In this context, Tāl’s interaction with the Almamy became the litmus test of whether he would maintain his independence in order to remain a trustee of the Prophet.

The previous discussion led Tāl to make his fourth point. He writes “I increased in certainty that I am from his [the Prophet’s] inheritors, his trustee over the servants of God, and his vicegerent on earth when I was deterred [from the Almamy] in the same way he [the Prophet] was deterred in the year of *ḥudaybiyyah* ...”<sup>385</sup> Alluding to the significant treaty of *ḥudaybiyyah* where the Prophet negotiated peace with Mecca in lieu of making *ḥajj*, this appears to allude to Tāl’s decision to migrate from Futa Toro. Similar to the Prophet’s decision to negotiate peace with his Meccan opponents, Tāl may have decided to migrate in the interest of peace, even though he would have to uproot his community.

Furthermore, this statement indicates to something subtler. It is clear from the discussion that Tāl claimed to be a trustee of the Prophet, but this is the first instance in his own writing where he claimed to also be his vicegerent. As chapter two highlighted, after inheriting from his *shaykh*, Muḥammad al-Ghālī, he was appointed a *khalīfa* of the Tijānniya. Here by stating that he was the *khalīfa* of the Prophet himself, he was laying claim to a much broader set of authority and

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., fol. 6a.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

leadership. Though he maintained the supremacy of the Tijānī Way, his authority was not limited to Tijānīs only. Rather his authority extended to encompass all the “servants of God.”

In claiming to be an inheritor of the Prophet and his vicegerent it was incumbent on Tāl to follow his example. In summarizing his discussion, this is exactly what he touches on in explaining the fifth point:

I was harmed numerous times in the service of God, but I bore them and was patient in the same manner that he, peace be upon him, was harmed numerous times but bore them and was patient. And my heart did not incite me to desire revenge. Instead I prayed for goodness for him [the Almamy]... He, peace be upon him, said “creation is like the family of God. The dearest among creation are those that benefit his family.” When people attempted to harm the Prophet, he peace be upon him, said “O God forgive my people, for certainty they do not know.” For this reason I did not pray for his destruction. Instead I prayed for his wellbeing, with the absolute certainty that had I wished for harm to befall him, then God would have answered my prayer.<sup>386</sup>

Tāl is certain to tell his readers/audience that he wished Almamy well not because he lacked the ability to destroy him, but rather because he was following the Prophet’s example. Here the portrayal of Tāl as a militant in much of the secondary literature falls flat. As chapter three also highlighted, Tāl often expressed a conciliatory tone and did not ever want to be painted as the aggressor. More to the point, Tāl constructed his authority not on purely on militaristic or political terms, but on religious terms. From his perspective, like the Prophet, his singular mission was to spread Islamic knowledge coupled with the mandate and authority to guide people to God.

In Tāl’s interpretation the hardships that he underwent at the hands of the Almamy were simply a consequence of his faith and his selection as an inheritor of the Prophet. Tāl elaborates on this point by citing several Muslim scholars. The gist of the discussion contained in the *ḥadīth* literature is that the Prophets are the most severely tried, and those who follow them are tried similarly, but less severely. The general principle Tāl elucidates is that a “person is only tested in

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., fol. 6a-b.

the measure of his or her faith.”<sup>387</sup> Consequently, anyone who follows the Prophet in sincere faith would by implication also face hardships.

The challenged that Tāl weathered in Futa Jallon materialized and publicized his faith. For this reason he writes, “if you understand the preceding discussion you would know that God blessed me by exposing me to this king. I realized the injuries I sustained [because of him] were a great and uncountable blessing. It is therefore obligatory on me to give gratitude to the Most High.”<sup>388</sup> He understood any trial he underwent as simply an important aspect of being the Prophet’s vicegerent. Consequently, he writes “it is for this reason that I refused to turn away from finishing this book.”<sup>389</sup> By completing *Safīnat al-sa’āda* then, not only was he proving his service to the Prophet by praising him, he was also making public both his submissiveness and gratitude to God. By extension he was also establishing his own authority and vision for a different political future.

## Conclusion

*Safīnat al-sa’da* was the last significant literary work Tāl composed before war gripped his community for the next decade. Building and drawing on the content, fame and prestige of both the *Ishrīnīyāt* of al-Fāzāzī and its *takhmīs* by Ibn Muhīb, Tāl produced an original composition intended to materialize Tāl’s love for the Prophet through both its written and spoken word.

In the later years of his life, conflict occupied most of Tāl’s energy, but he continued to teach a growing number of disciples. Among the many works he taught, *Safīnat al-sa’āda* seems

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., fol. 6b.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., fol. 8a.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

to have become embedded in the knowledge practices of the nascent ‘Umarian community.<sup>390</sup> Two examples from family traditions highlight its continued importance and the diverse ways the poem was put to use during his life.

Drawing on the healing properties that *madīh al-nabawī* is believed to contain, *Safīnat al-sa‘āda* became a remedy for Tāl when he fell ill. While Tāl was in Medina he saw a vision where his troops contracted the plague.<sup>391</sup> He asked God to have the plague only affect him and not his troops. According to family traditions this prayer was answered later on, when, in the thick of battle, Tāl became ill for a period of three months. His illness reportedly paralyzed him, and he also could not speak. Seeing his condition deteriorate his trusted companion and disciple, Alfa ‘Umar Baila, had praise singers recite a portion of *Safīnat al-sa‘āda*. Hearing the praise of the Prophet, Tāl is reported to have gained his strength, until he was able to sit and address his disciples. Though it is difficult to locate when this event happened, it is not hard to imagine that this poem would be employed for healing purposes.

Tāl also used the poem in his last efforts to negotiate a peace with Aḥmad III, the ruler of Masina. He is reported to have sent Aḥmad III a copy of the poem.<sup>392</sup> In a separate instance family traditions narrate that he also sent praise singers to recite the poem.<sup>393</sup> This report describe that his praise singers followed behind a cavalry contingent that arrived at the court of Aḥmad III. While the praise singers sang from the poem, Tāl’s horsemen performed several acrobatic feats with their guns intended to show their skills and intimidate the army of Masina. Though Tāl’s previous

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<sup>390</sup> Though the poem continues to be important in ‘Umarian communities in West Africa, more systematic research is required to explain exactly how it continues to be used. In my own experience in Futa Toro the different odes of the poem are recited for celebrations. Further the current Imam of Halwar, Mahmood Tall, has spent the last fifteen years completing a commentary on this poem.

<sup>391</sup> The following story is narrated by Muntaga Tāl see; Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur*, 254-265.

<sup>392</sup> Sidi Mohamed Mahibou and Jean-Louis Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé, Bayân mâ waqa‘a d’al-Hagg ‘Umar al-Futi: Plaidoyer pour une guerre sainte en Afrique de L’ouest au XIXe siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 1983), 52.

<sup>393</sup> The following story is narrated by Muntaga Tāl see; Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa al-Durur*, 402-403.

attempts to negotiate with Aḥmad III failed, in this instance he was finally offering him an ultimatum. Since the poem was meant to highlight Tāl's love and proximity to the Prophet, if Aḥmad III continued his resistance even after hearing the poem, then Tāl's clear message was that his army was ready for battle.

The conflict with Aḥmad III was part of a longer history of Tāl's relationship with rulers. The introduction to *Safīnat al-sa'āda* made this quite clear. Writing about his confrontation with the Almamy, Tāl emphasized that 'Umar Sori misunderstood him as a political rival. As a consequence he attempted to harm him. Methodically narrating his own innocence in the face of a temporal ruler, whose only interest was the "*dunyā*," Tāl highlighted that he was a simple scholar. Establishing himself as a scholar apart from the temporal rulers and kings of the time, the introduction to the poem signaled a new vision of affiliation and authority. Read in the context of Tāl's growing community, the poem became a proof of the person who could deliver a different future.

*Safīnat al-sa'āda* highlights one example of the long history of transmission of scholarly works in and out of West Africa that requires further analysis. It shows how one Muslim scholar appropriated, modified and redeployed previous works in a new context. Underscoring an example of the written in pre-colonial knowledge practices, Tāl's poem came to mediate his love for the Prophet and establish him as a new site of affiliation and authority.

## Chapter 5

# Reconceptualizing the *jihād* of ‘Umar Tāl: The Shifting Political Circumstances of Senegambia

### Introduction

In 1859 Louis Léon César Faidherbe, the Governor of Senegal, and most responsible for aggressive early French colonial policy wrote a note explaining the purpose of an expedition in Gemu (Guénou).<sup>394</sup> A small enclave in present-day Mali, Gemu was an important garrison town that al-ḥājj ‘Umar Tāl held since 1855. The expedition marked the culmination of hostilities between the French and Tāl that had started two years earlier. Under Faidherbe’s command, the French mobilized against Gemu to effectively cripple Tāl’s political influence in Senegambia, and assert their own hegemony in the region.

The note succinctly captures French characterization of Tāl that continue to shape how scholars study him. In explaining the purpose of the expedition, and its importance to French interests, Faidherbe wrote:

this is the last and brilliant feat of arms of the defensive war which we support against Alhaji. This dangerous man who as a result of the ideas he acquired in Mecca, the center of resistance to the diffusion of enlightenment and civilization worldwide (that all European powers have allowed to

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<sup>394</sup> The most in-depth study of French expansion into Senegambia under Faidherbe’s rule remains, Leland C. Barrows, “General Faidherbe, the Maurel & Prom Company and French expansion in Senegal”, PhD dissertation (UCLA, 1974). For the summary of the arguments in this dissertation see; Leland C. Barrows “The Merchants and General Faidherbe: Aspects of French expansion in Senegal in the 1850s” in *RFHOM* (1974) and Leland C. Barrows “Faidherbe and Senegal: A Critical Discussion” in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1976), 95-117. For Faidherbe’s own reflections on his actions in Senegambia see: Louis L.C. Faidherebe, *Le Sénégal: La France dans L’Afrique Occidentale* (Paris: 1889).

subsist for far too long) - has proposed to expel us from Senegal. His aim fortunately wanes away from day to day. In the presence of his obstinacy we have only two alternatives: vigorously support this war as we have done up until now in order to prevent these fanatics to continue to commit aggression against us, or give up, by giving them the Senegal. The choice can not be doubtful for anyone.<sup>395</sup>

The official French view constructed by Faidherbe was that Tāl was an “aggressor”, and his followers were “fanatics.” The conclusion was that he was dangerous to French interests and he had to be eliminated. The note gives the misleading impression that the French were a benign power, and the victims to the actions of this single Muslim scholar. Further, Faidherbe draws from a long tradition that assumes an inherent connection between violence with Islam, and that Islam is fundamentally antithetical to Enlightenment values of the nineteenth century.<sup>396</sup> This depiction ignores the complex historical circumstances of why Tāl took up arms, and how he became an enemy to the French.<sup>397</sup>

This chapter places Tāl’s *jihād* in the context of nineteenth century warfare, and analyzes the circumstances that led a scholar who had embraced the pacifist Suwarian tradition to become a significant military and political leader. While Tāl’s *jihād* has received the lion’s share of scholarly analysis, this analysis is based on essentialized understanding of the concept of *jihād* and its relationship to Islamic practice.<sup>398</sup> The concept of *jihād* is not static. As an increasing number of people adopted Islam, they also added their own diverse cultural experiences and histories to

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<sup>395</sup> The note is found in ANS 1D 14: N-23 (1859), Expédition de Guémou contre le Prophète El Hadj Omar.

<sup>396</sup> The best monograph length study on French policy towards Islam in West Africa is Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), especially chapter one for this early period. French attitudes towards Islam also had their roots in shifting relationships to religion more generally, especially Catholicism, in nineteenth century France. See; Jean Louis-Triaud “Islam in Africa under French Colonial Rule” in *The History of Islam in Africa*, edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 169-187.

<sup>397</sup> For a critique of how scholars have approached Tāl see the introduction to this to this study.

<sup>398</sup> Jackson provides a robust analysis of the differing understanding of this concept over time. He notes that it codified an existing state of affairs between the pre-Islamic “tribes” in Arabia. One of his central arguments is that the primary purpose of *jihad* was to attain peace in the pre-modern world which assumed conflict with neighbors. Further, the vast majority of Muslim scholars did not equate *jihād* with converting non-Muslim populations. See; Sherman Jackson, “Jihad between Law, Fact and Orientalism” in *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph, Beyrouth*, 62:1 (2009), 307-324.

the meanings of war. In this respect Fred Donner argues, “one may expect Muslims of various periods to have espoused multiple conceptions of war and diverse opinions on its relationships to statecraft.”<sup>399</sup> This is pertinent to Tāl, because it opens the possibility to look at *jihād* as a complex set of discourses and practices that change because of historical circumstances.

In this chapter, I begin with an analysis of Tāl’s own statement on the concept of *jihād* in his *Al-Rimāḥ*.<sup>400</sup> In this work, he emphasized the importance of the *jihād* against the *nafs* (lower self). Conceptualized as the “greater *jihād*,” Tāl provides a methodical explanation of why this metaphysical and internal *jihād* is superior than engaging in warfare, or the “lesser *jihād*.” He further argued that this *jihād* is an obligation on every believing Muslim. In contrast, he explained, quite explicitly, that the obligation of engaging in war rested in the hands of only a few people, and only for specific reasons. Consequently, that even in 1846, when he completed the *Rimāḥ*, he was not laying the groundwork for a future *jihād* of the sword. Instead, it is important to focus carefully on the historical circumstances that led him to take up arms.

In order to capture the shift between the scholar of the *Rimāḥ*, and the later political and military leader, I frame the remaining chapter around three different letters Tāl wrote. He wrote two letters directly to French officials, one in 1847 and another one in 1854. He then wrote a third letter to the mainly Muslim traders of Saint Louis in 1855. I present these letters chronologically, and contextualize and interpret them to highlight the shifting nature of politics in the mid-nineteenth century in Senegambia. On the one hand, after the 1848 revolutions in France, the French began to assert more political and military influence in Senegambia. On the other hand, in

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<sup>399</sup> Fred Donner, “The Sources of the Islamic Conception of War,” in Kelsay J. and Johnson J.T. (eds.), *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Tradition* (Greenwood Press: New York, 1991), 32.

<sup>400</sup> Tāl dedicated chapter fifty-one to this topic. It is also one of the longest chapters of the work, indicating that he placed some importance on explaining his opinion. I use a printed copy of the Arabic text for the translations I present in this chapter, ‘Umar Tāl, *Al-Rimāḥ ḥizb al-raḥīm ‘alā nuḥūr ḥizb al-raḥīm* [The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed] (Casablanca: Dār al-rashād al-hadīthā, 2007).

1852 Tāl began his *jihād*. These powers converged in eastern Senegambia that eventually led to Faidherbe’s expedition against Gemu.

I argue that Tāl began his *jihād* in response to an attack by the king of Tamba, Yimba, against his community in Dingiray. Tāl had established Dingiray consciously away from centers of Muslim political authority, and took on a much broader political role. Whereas previously, because of his relationship with an established Muslim ruler, first in Sokoto, and then in Futa Jallon, Tāl did not exercise any temporal authority. In Dingiray he combined both his scholarly persona with a new and emerging political persona. Thus when Yimba attacked him, he retaliated in the interest of protecting his community. Once he conquered Tamba, he upset the traditional political landscape in eastern Senegambia. Many of these states were “warrior states” whose political economy was based on plundering, raiding, and tribute.<sup>401</sup> By entering this political landscape, Tāl also took on the military logic of these states and began to conquer other neighboring polities. While his central concern was still to protect his community, the ideological basis and the reason for his *jihād* become blurred. One significant consequence of this blurring was a shift in how he conceptualized the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslim, underscoring the politicization of religious identities in the context of warfare.

### **Tāl’s Conceptualization of *jihād* in the *Rimāh***

In the *Rimāh*, Tāl made his most complete statement on the topic of *jihād*. In one of the longest chapters of the work entitled “On the obligation of every person to struggle (*yajtahid*) in

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<sup>401</sup> In this chapter, I use “warrior states” according to Robert’s conceptualization. He argues “warrior states of precolonial West Africa developed a peculiar spatial character. There was often a core comprising the social and economic heartland. The heartland was composed of either a homogenous population, as in Asante and Kenedugu (Sikasso), or a fairly stable articulation of different ethnic groups, as in Segou and the Sokoto Caliphate. The central core was encircled by a tributary zone with fluctuating boundaries. This zone of incomplete submission required periodic conquest, reinforcing the military expression of state power.” See Richard Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700-1914*, 10.

purifying his soul” he provided a broad understanding of this complex term.<sup>402</sup> While he underlined the relationship between *jihād* and combat, his focus in this chapter was on another aspect of *jihād*, which he considered more important. As the title of the chapter indicates, this was the obligation on each believer to purify his or her soul. The chapter again underscores that until 1846, when Tāl completed this work, his primary role was that of a teacher and spiritual guide, and not that of a political or military leader.

Tāl frames his discussion on the *jihād* of the self around several verses from the Qur’an and a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet. The *ḥadīth* he cites is central to how he categorizes and conceptualizes this concept. He wrote that the Prophet is reported to have said: ‘We returned from the lower *jihād* to the greater *jihād*.’ They said ‘And what is the greater *jihād*, O Prophet of God.’ He replied ‘the *jihād* of the soul and caprices’ or similar to what he [the Prophet] said to this in meaning.”<sup>403</sup> On the basis of this *ḥadīth*, he argued that there are two broad categories of *jihād*: one that is “lower” and one that is “greater.”<sup>404</sup> With respect to the “greater” *jihād*, it is a metaphysical and internal struggle against the self and its base desires, as opposed to the “lower” *jihād*, which is a physical struggle against others. In relation to the obligation of the former he also argues that there is scholarly consensus (*ijmā’*) on the issue, and therefore cannot be disputed.

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<sup>402</sup> The full chapter synopsis found in Radtke’s study of the sources found in the *Rimāh* is: “Informing them that every individual must endeavour to save his soul and must strive earnestly and energetically in the worship of his Lord, being neither diverted nor hindered from so doing by any matter, be it parent or child or homeland or friend or dwelling or kinsman or wealth or any other thing that may hinder him from approaching God and turning his back on whatever is other than Him, even if that leads him to the abandonment of homelands—nay even to the taking of life through *hijra* and *jihād*.” See Bernd Radtke, “Studies on the Sources of the Kitāb Rimāh Hizb al-Rahim of al-Hajj ‘Umar” in *Sudanic Africa*, vol. 6 (1995), 83-84.

<sup>403</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, 636. It is not clear what the source of this *ḥadīth* is, since Tāl does not provide a chain of transmission for it.

<sup>404</sup> Similar to his conceptualization of *jihād*, he also conceptualized *hijra* (migration) in terms of the “lesser” and the “greater”. In relation to the “lesser” he wrote “*hijra* is obligatory during this time for everyone in a land in which there is open disobedience without any concern for it, and there is no possibility to change that, in the same way it is obligatory to migrate from the land of disbelief.” Yet at the same time, he notes that the internal *hijra* is more important. This is the migration of the heart away from what the *nafs* covets, see; Tāl, *Al-Rimāh*, 635.

In explaining the reasons for this, as well as elaborating on the differences between these two forms of *jihād*, he lists a set of ten interrelated points. It is worth noting a few of these points because they provide crucial insights into how he understood this concept. Tāl maintains throughout his discussion that “the *jihād* against the *nafs* and the migration away from its evil inclinations are an obligation (*fard ‘ayn*), while the *jihād* against nonbelievers is a (*fard kiffāya*).”<sup>405</sup> In this example, Tāl draws from a hierarchy of obligation in order to categorize *jihād* in legal terms. More specifically engaging in war against nonbelievers, under specific circumstances, is considered a communal obligation. In other words, as long as a few members of the community engaged in this *jihād*, then that obligation was met. But the *jihād* against the *nafs* is entirely different. Like prayer, fasting, and other obligatory aspects of the faith, removing the *nafs* from “its evil inclinations” must be practiced and performed by every single believing Muslim. Expanding on this point further, Tāl wrote that “the *jihād* against nonbelievers is not obligatory in some years.” This was in contrast to the “*jihād* against the *nafs*,” which was “a manifest obligation on every Muslim man and woman, at every moment.”<sup>406</sup>

The underlying reason for this obligation, in Tāl’s view, is that the *nafs* is an enemy that can prevent a person from attaining salvation. In order to explain what he means he provides an analogy to combat, which given the context of the nineteenth century would be familiar to his audience. Drawing on Islamic conceptualization of martyrdom in warfare, Tāl explains that when you kill a nonbeliever in a legitimate battle you are granted paradise. Conversely, if you are killed

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<sup>405</sup> See chapter three of this study, where he explains the same point in his *Tadhkirat al-Ghāfilīn*.

<sup>406</sup> Tāl expands on this point through several other paragraphs. For instances he wrote: Some of the community obligations (*fard kiffāya*) are even better or more important than jihad against nonbelievers. Those community obligations apply to all Muslims that have reached the age of maturity, free or in bondage, male or female, such as encouraging good and forbidding the wrong. This is an obligation on every individual either male or female, but the jihad against nonbelievers is not an obligation on slaves or women. Also the *jihād* of the *nafs* and migrating away from its base inclinations is better than encouraging the good and forbidding the wrong without a doubt.” Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, 636.

in a legitimate battle then you are a *shahīd* (martyr). Presumably as a *shahīd* a person is also granted paradise, though Tāl remains ambiguous on this point.<sup>407</sup> In Tāl’s conceptualization, the cause and effect of battle or the corresponding reward for engaging in battle are quite clear. In both circumstances there is a great reward—paradise.

Using this metaphor of battle, he outlines why the *nafs* is quite a different enemy. He argues that, like when a person conquers his enemy in battle, a person who conquers his *nafs* also attains a great reward. Conversely, unlike in battle, if the *nafs* overpowers a person, it “establishes control over the spirit.”<sup>408</sup> The consequence of the *nafs* taking control of the spirit is that “nonbelief and disobedience will overpower him, leading to his destruction, and along with it the destruction of his life in the *dunyā* [world], *barzakh* [intermediary realm], and *ākhirā* [afterlife]”<sup>409</sup> Whereas in battle a person is rewarded even if an enemy overpowers and kills them, this is not the case with the *nafs*. As an internal enemy, according to Tāl, if it is not destroyed, it will destroy a person, and prevent them from attaining salvation.

Part of the reason for this difference is based on the fact that one is an internal enemy, while the other is an external enemy. In Tāl’s conceptualization, every single person is capable of dealing with an external enemy, but few people have the ability to deal with their internal enemies. In outlining his seventh point he wrote “every person is capable of waging *jihād* against nonbelievers. But the *jihād* against the *nafs*, and migrating from its destructive inclinations, by declaring war against it through different forms of spiritual disciplining and worship, is not possible except for those who are fortunate and truthful in their love for God.”<sup>410</sup> The reason for this distinction is, as

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<sup>407</sup> In highlighting his eighth point he wrote, “The martyr of the *jihād* against the *nafs*, and *hijra* away from its base inclinations is a complete martyr in the *ākhirā*. However, the majority of the martyrs from the hands of nonbelievers are martyrs in the *dunyā* only and not in the *ākhirā*.” Here he was quite explicit that the majority of people who fight against nonbelievers and die are not necessarily granted paradise. See; Tāl, *Al-Rimāh*, 636

<sup>408</sup> Tāl, *al-Rimāh*, 637.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 636.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

Tāl notes, “when you engage in *jihād* against nonbelievers you are fighting against an other. Those who wage war against their *nafs*, by migrating way from its destructive inclinations, fight against themselves.”<sup>411</sup> The implication here is that *jihād* against the *nafs* is far more difficult, and therefore not everyone is capable of engaging with it.

For Tāl waging *jihād* against nonbelievers was less important in degree than the *jihād* against the *nafs*. In reemphasizing this point, Tāl criticized those who took up arms, in neglect of purifying their souls. He wrote,

a person does not take into consideration the importance of waging war against the *nafs*, even though this is absolutely necessary for every individual to engage with. As a consequence, the masses awaken to fight against nonbelievers. Even though their hearts are sullied with dirt and prohibitions, both big and small. They adorn themselves with actions that resemble the actions of nonbelievers. Some of these actions underline nonbelief, while others take them to a bad ending [die without faith]. We seek refuge with God from this. When they are asked to engage in *jihād* against their *nafs*, and leave its inclinations, they are incapable of even pondering this. Instead they desire to kill anyone who demands them to purify their souls. Yet when they are called to fight against others, they hasten to respond.<sup>412</sup>

Here he is implying that the “masses” are inclined to take up arms even when it is not justified for them to do so. In this case, their actions resemble those of nonbelievers, and as a consequence the very purpose of taking up arms is completely undermined. The allusion to combat in this circumstance does not bring reward, and it is not praiseworthy. Rather it leads to calamity, to nonbelief and a bad ending. In referring to the “masses” again, he also argues that their lust for battle prevents them from even considering the obligation of purifying their souls. They attempt to kill scholars, like Tāl himself, who demand that people purify their souls. Yet when there is an opportunity to fight, they do not hesitate to join that fight.

In focusing on these two different categories of *jihād* there can be no doubt which one of them Tāl found superior. He argued “the martyr of the *jihād* against the *nafs*, the one who migrates from

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 637.

its qualities that keep one away from God is significantly better than the martyr fighting against the nonbeliever.”<sup>413</sup> Tāl provides an abundance of source material to argue this point, which I have not outlined. Instead, my point is that in his own treatment of the concept of *jihād* in the *Rimāḥ*, Tāl did not place much importance on *jihād*, understood as warfare. Quite to the contrary, he argued for the importance of the *jihād* against the *nafs* at a time period when warfare was quite rampant in West Africa. His discussion on *jihād* attempts to quell the overzealous from taking up arms, without justification, and importantly without first addressing the problems within their own souls. To make his argument clearer, that the *jihād* of the *nafs* is superior to *jihād* against nonbelievers, he wrote “if you understand this, then take account of your soul before you are made to account for it. And migrate from its lowly inclinations so that perhaps you will not be a loser. And struggle in the greatest struggle and say in your sacrifice of it [the *nafs*] ‘In the name of God, God is great.’<sup>414</sup>

The opinions that Tāl expressed on the topic of *jihād* in the *Rimāḥ* are significant because not only was this his most important work, but he also taught and transmitted it. After he completed it in 1846, he began to travel through West Africa with the goal to return to Futa Toro after an absence of nearly twenty years. Tāl had already established himself as an important cleric in the region, and from his base in Jegunko in Futa Jallon he attracted numerous students. It is conceivable that he found a large audience waiting for him in all the different locations that he visited. During these visits he recruited numerous disciples, as well as taught and transmitted the *Rimāḥ*.<sup>415</sup> Once he arrived in Futa Toro, he continued to teach his work, and acquire adherents.

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. Here Tāl was drawing a parallel of sacrificing the *nafs* using the same method in Muslim practice of ritual slaughtering of animals.

<sup>415</sup> Ly-Tall notes that Tāl spent several months traveling through Futa Jallon where he initiated several notables into the Tijāniyya. He also had his disciples carry copies of the *Rimāḥ*, which were subsequently copied. See; Madina Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe Siècle: La Tijaniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyyu contre les Pouvoirs traditionnels et la Puissance coloniale* (Paris, L’Harmattan, 1991), 161.

Primary source evidence highlights that it is around these years that Tāl also transmitted the *Rimāh* to Mawlud Fal, who was an important representative of the *Hafiziyya* branch of the Tijāniyya.<sup>416</sup> It is possible that through the hands of Mawlud Fal, the work reached a much broader audience across the Sahara, as well as in North Africa.

### **Futa Toro, the French and an “Alliance”**

Tāl’s main objective in Futa Toro was to teach and spread his vision of moral and social reform. Even though Tāl was absent for several decades, many in Futa Toro knew of his scholarly accomplishments and recognized his religious authority.<sup>417</sup> For this reason, he was welcomed in Futa Toro, and acquired the discipleship of many of the elites in the region.<sup>418</sup>

He also attracted the attention of French colonial officials. Whether the French had knowledge of Tāl prior to his visit remains unclear, but in the year that he spent in Futa Toro, Tāl is reported to have met French officials in Saint Louis, Podor and at the French fort in Bakel.<sup>419</sup> The French had long initiated treaties with Muslim clerics in Futa Toro who they thought could benefit them for commercial and political reasons.<sup>420</sup> This may be one way to interpret why Tāl drew the attention of the French. But, even though Tāl began to acquire a large following, he did not wield significant political power in Futa Toro at this point. Thus the precise reasons of Tāl’s correspondence with the French remains quite elusive.

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<sup>416</sup> A. Dedoud Ould Abdellah, “Le << passage au sud >>: Muhammad al-Hafiz et son heritage” in *La Tijāniyya: Une Confrérie Musulmane à la conquête de l’Afrique*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Edited by Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 93-95.

<sup>417</sup> Already when he was in Sokoto almost ten years earlier he received correspondence from Halwar asking him to return home. BnF Arabe 5693 fol. 4 and BnF Arabe 5681 fol. 4-5.

<sup>418</sup> Ly-Tall gives examples of the elites who gave Tāl allegiance, as well their importance in Futa Toro. See; Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant*, 172-173.

<sup>419</sup> David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 124.

<sup>420</sup> For an analysis of French commercial interest in Senegambia see; Laurence Marfaing, *Evolution du Commerce au Senegal, 1820-1930* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1991).

There is one letter, however, that survives that provides some insight into Tāl's early interaction with the French.<sup>421</sup> He wrote this letter to the commander at the fort in Bakel, who received it in 1847. There are no contextual clues within the letter itself that would help us understand where Tāl wrote it, and how it was transmitted to the French. Given the location of Bakel, in eastern Senegambia, and the date of the letter, he may have written it on his return journey back to Futa Jallon. Consequently, the contents of the letter were a culmination of the previous discussions and correspondence that the Tijānī *shaykh* had maintained with the French.

The letter is written in Arabic, in black ink, on a single off-white sheet of paper. The original letter has come into the archival record accompanied with a French translation, which has some subtle differences in meaning.<sup>422</sup> One of the striking features of the original letter is that it has a small circular impression with Arabic words, representing an official seal. Barely legible, the seal represents Tāl's self-conscious position as the head of collectivity. Without further evidence, it is not clear whether Tāl had been using this seal in Futa Jallon, or if it became a part of his performance of power and authority only after his arrival in Futa Toro.<sup>423</sup> It is from this "official" capacity that Tāl represented himself to the French.

The letter begins with the normative conventions of Arabic letter writing, with the *basmala*.<sup>424</sup> Then after praising the Prophet Muḥammad, Tāl sent greetings to governor Bourdon de Gramont and colonel Caille. In the letter he wrote:

your letter reached me and I understood it completely. I am in friendship with you, and I am at your service. I am guarding and protecting the pact between us, and will expend all my effort to maintain

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<sup>421</sup> This letter is found in ANS 13G 139 pièce 16. It is a letter written in Arabic with a corresponding official French translation. The original letter is not dated, though Robinson suggests that the letter is from June 1847 see; Robinson, *The Holy War*, 124.

<sup>422</sup> My own translation is from the original Arabic letter.

<sup>423</sup> Here I am not suggesting that he was a "king" or "ruler" but instead he was a scholar with numerous students. Therefore, he represented himself as having authority over a large, and diffused, number of disciples. Moreover, work is required to understand how Muslim scholars exercised their authority to outsiders and represented themselves through seals and other insignia.

<sup>424</sup> *Bi-ismi Allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* or "In the name of God the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate."

it. You will learn, if the Master wills, that I am a believer, who is generous and free. If God wills that I return back to you safely, it will become apparent to you that in the way of Muḥammad are people who keep their commitments. You must also be righteous, patient and protect the pact between us during my absence. Even if those who have evil intentions plot against me, before God, by his generosity and bounty, returns me to you.

One thing that stands out in this letter is that at least in the 1840s Tāl expressed no explicit animosity towards the French. This is surprising because Tāl must have had some awareness of the longer history of French trade treaties and involvement in the political affairs of Futa Toro.<sup>425</sup> The letter clearly indicates that there was an agreement between Tāl and the French, a pact that was a result of a longer process of negotiation. Further, he reaffirms his commitment to the French, and what he considered was his duty to safeguard their interests. Reciprocally, Tāl demanded that the French also stand-by what they had agreed to with him.

One possible way to understand Tāl's allusion to a pact is that he had come to Futa Toro to establish a political territory in the upper Senegal River valley with assistance of the French. This view is shared by David Robinson who argues that on two separate meetings with the French, Tāl "announced his intentions to establish a political kingdom in which peace, security, and commerce would reign."<sup>426</sup> Yet the content of the letter itself does not provide us with details of whether these were Tāl's intentions when he referenced a pact.

Instead, evidence for this interpretation comes from a different French colonial source. In 1855 Frédéric Carrère and Paul Holle, two high ranking French officials, published *De la Sénégambie français*.<sup>427</sup> The work was meant to familiarize a readership in the metropole about

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<sup>425</sup> Though he had been away for twenty years, he had spent his formative years in Futa Toro, see; chapter 1. For some examples of French interventions in Senegambia see; Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant*, 162-172.

<sup>426</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 124.

<sup>427</sup> Paul Holle was the commander of the fort of Médine, which would come into direct conflict with Tāl a few years later in 1857, see below.

French colonial interests, events, and happenings in West Africa. They dedicated chapter thirty of the work to a discussion of Tāl.

The date of the work's publication is significant. It was written during a period when the French had become wary of Tāl's swift military conquest in eastern Senegambia.<sup>428</sup> They quite explicitly noted that "if this man accomplishes his projects, he will become a great danger to us."<sup>429</sup> For the French Tāl was "an enemy to destroy" whose only interest was in "converting the infidel."<sup>430</sup> One of the main purposes of the work was to outline the dangers Tāl presented to France's own colonial ambitions, during a time when the French government in Paris was still reluctant to commit the necessary resources to expand its territorial holdings in the region.

The work outlines what has become a common assumption for both French officials and for later scholars. This was that Tāl was not a simple scholar that he portrayed himself to be. Instead he had much grander intentions to wrestle political control away from the elites of Futa Toro. In this regard, Holle recounted being a witness to a meeting Tāl had with governor De Gramont and officer Caille in Bakel in August 1847. According to Holle, Tāl is reported to have said "I am the friend of the whites. I want peace, and I dislike injury. When a Christian pays the customs tax, it is necessary for him to be able to conduct his business with security. When I become Almamy of Futa Toro, you must construct a fort for me. I will discipline the country, and will completely establish amicable relations between us."<sup>431</sup> Based on this meeting, the conclusion that Carrère and Holle draw about Tāl was that "under the mask of religious proselytization, he wished to create a grand empire in Senegambia."<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> See below.

<sup>429</sup> Frédéric Carrère and Paul Holle, *De la Sénégambie français* (Paris, 1855), 207.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid. Though more research is required, my own inclination is that the idea that Tāl's *jihād* was primary meant for converting the "infidel" may be attributed to this single source.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 196-197.

Though this account bears similarities with Tāl’s letter that I have cited above, it still leaves us with many questions. As his letter indicates, Tāl intended to maintain amicable relations with the French, and he also did not have any qualms about being at the service of the French. However, there is no other evidence besides this single French source to suggest that Tāl desired to become the Almamy of Futa Toro. Indeed, what exactly this office meant in the political climate of Futa Toro in the 1840s was quite different from an earlier period. Only a few families wielded power in Futa Toro, and the office of the Almamy was mostly ceremonial.<sup>433</sup> Tāl did not belong to the any of those important families.

More importantly, in 1847 Tāl could not realistically rely on the French to support his alleged political ambitions. It was only in the years following the revolution of 1848, during the French Second Republic, that the government in Paris made a much more concerted effort to subsidize aggressive military expansion in Senegambia.<sup>434</sup> The French certainly had long meddled in local politics and at times unleashed a wave of violence, but they were still not as powerful as they would become a decade later. Consequently, the French were unlikely to construct a fort for Tāl—something they did not do for any other political elite, in 1847.

The purported alliance that Tāl attempted to create with the French may have had nothing to do with a political office. It was quite common for Muslim scholars to create reciprocal relationships with temporal rulers and political elites in West Africa.<sup>435</sup> This was a means for

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<sup>433</sup> David Robinson, Philip Curtin, and James Johnson “A Tentative Chronology of Futa Toro from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries” in *Cahier d’études africaines*, vol. 12, no. 48 (1972), 561, 572-575.

<sup>434</sup> Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant*, 192-199. Moreover, though the French under the admiral Bouët-Willaumez had initiated a plan to exert more authority over Futa Toro, it was only after the 1850s when Faidherbe came to power did the French actualize this plan, see; Barrows, *Faidherbe and Senegal*, 95-99.

<sup>435</sup> It would be wrong to describe these relationships as a form of collaboration, but instead should be understood as forms of “accommodation.” They were built on older precedents that political rulers would protect Muslim clerics, as long as those clerics remained neutral in political affairs. See for instance; Robert Luanay “La Trahison des Clercs? The “Collaboration” of a Suwarian ‘Ālim” in *The Cloth of many Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society, Ghanaian and Islamic in Honor of Ivor Wilks*, edited by, John Hunwick and Nancy Lawler (Northwestern University Press, 1996), 297-318. On the same concept but for a later period in West Africa see; David Robinson,

Muslim scholars to safeguard their interests, and continue their vocation as teachers of the Islamic religious sciences with some semblance of protection. Certainly, Tāl wanted to reform the Muslims of West Africa, and he had spent considerable effort to accomplish this goal. In one telling report Carrère and Holle narrated Tāl's message to the residents of Halwar, his natal village. They wrote that he "told them, you are like infidels, eating and drinking injustice. Your chiefs violate the law of God, and oppress the weak."<sup>436</sup>

Tāl could not stand for what he perceived as a laxity in Islamic practice of the Futanke. But his vision of orthodoxy and moral reform brought him many enemies, as his message became a critique of the established order. He was also quite explicit about this in his letter to the French. He had written "even if those who have evil intentions plot against me." Some elites in Futa Toro wished him harm, even going as far as attempting to assassinate him.<sup>437</sup> Consequently, the "pact" that Tāl referred to in this letter was likely his attempt to acquire French protection in order for him to continue to spread his teachings, as well as initiate disciples into the Tijāniyya, rather unabated. Moreover, since he was also becoming someone of influence in Futa Toro, in order to acquire French protection, he would try to advise the elites of Futa Toro to safeguard French interests. There is little evidence to support, however, that he had come to Futa Toro as Carrère and Holle argued "wishing without a doubt to study and prepare the terrain" for launching his war.<sup>438</sup>

### **Historical Circumstances and the Launching of Tāl's *Jihād***

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*Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920*, (Ohio University Press, 2000).

<sup>436</sup> Carrère and Holle, *De la Sénégambie français*, 194.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-195.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

Tāl's absence from Futa Jallon and his increasing influence in Senegambia brought him enemies. As the previous chapter highlighted, when he returned back to Futa Jallon he came into conflict with its ruler, Almamy 'Umar Sori. Rather than risk an armed conflict with this ruler, Tāl decided instead to move to a different territory. When he decided to relocate his congregation, he did not however, return back to Futa Toro. Instead he maintained his independence from Muslim political authority, by settling in a non-Muslim polity, Tamba, east of Futa Jallon.

The ruler of Tamba, Yimba Sakho, had invited Tāl and offered him a plot of land to settle on.<sup>439</sup> Not much is known about Tamba, except it was strategically located. The polity was nestled between Futa Jallon to its west, the kingdom of Karta to its north, and Segou to its east. Centrally positioned on the Bafing and Tinkisso rivers, most of the trade caravans heading south from Senegal passed through it.<sup>440</sup> Further, this polity was in constant conflict with Futa Jallon, and it is tempting to suggest that Yimba may have tried to fan the flames of this conflict by inviting the Almamy's enemy to his territory.<sup>441</sup> He certainly could gain strategic advantage by exploiting the sentiments of the numerous disciples and sympathizers of Tāl who remained Futa Jallon.

Yimba and Tāl entered a reciprocal relationship of mutual obligation. Whatever his precise reasons were for inviting Tāl, Yimba's actions were based on much older historical precedents in West Africa. It was quite normal for non-Muslim rulers to invite Muslim scholars to settle in their territory as a sign of both good fortune and prestige. Oral accounts document that in negotiating terms with Yimba, Tāl explained to him that he was a Muslim cleric and that his sole interests was to teach his students. The king replied "You pray, I do not. Your *talibés* ask for alms, I do not. We

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<sup>439</sup> Charles Augustus L. Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language* (London: Church Missionary House, 1876), 292-293.

<sup>440</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War*, 126.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128. See also; Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language*, 291-292.

are different, and consequently I see no problems.”<sup>442</sup> By agreeing to move to Tamba, Tāl came under the king’s protection, and for this reason he was obligated to pay a certain amount of gold per year.<sup>443</sup> In this example, at least initially, religion was not a marker of conflict. Religious difference, instead, made it possible for two different communities to come and live together.

One of the most obvious features of Dingiray, the name of Tāl’s new settlement, was that he and his disciples began to heavily fortify it. Despite its relative isolation and natural defenses, Tāl still “surrounded it with a wall, and he constructed watch towers.”<sup>444</sup> It was also in this period that he began to purchase weapons from British and French traders. These actions indicate Tāl’s transition from a scholar who kept his distance from political authority, to a more conscious effort to become a political leader of his community. Away from other Muslim sovereigns, it became Tāl’s responsibility to protect his community.

The fortification of Dingiray, and the increasingly visible number of armed disciples, give the impression that Tāl was preparing for war. But internal sources do not provide evidence to suggest that the sole reason he migrated to Dingiray was for the explicit purpose of going to war. For instance, as the previous chapter highlighted even in *Safīnat al-sa‘āda*, the poem he wrote only three months before attacking Tamba, he made no mention of a conflict with Yimba Sakho. The militarized nature of Dingiray reflected the changing circumstances of Tāl’s community, and his intentions to protect his followers.<sup>445</sup> He had numerous enemies throughout West Africa, and he still was not very far from the border Futa Jallon. Given the context of the political and social disintegration of nineteenth century West Africa, this was a pragmatic acknowledgement of the potentiality of conflict, rather than a declaration to conquer his neighbors.

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<sup>442</sup> Quoted in Robinson, *The Holy War*, 128.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language*, 292.

<sup>445</sup> Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant*, 179.

More importantly, the increasing militarization of Dingiray should not overshadow Tāl's occupation as a religious scholar and a teacher. The second year of his stay in Dingiray was called the "Year of the Wooden Tablet."<sup>446</sup> Paying homage to the wooden tablets or *alwāḥ* (sing. *lawḥ*) that Qur'an school students use in West Africa, the symbolism signifies that Dingiray was a place of religious education. For example, he is reported to have translated and commented on the Qur'an.<sup>447</sup> He is also reported to have transmitted canonical works of *ḥadīth*, including the compilations of al-Bukhārī and of al-Muslim.<sup>448</sup> Moreover, apart from the exoteric sciences, he exhorted his disciples to spiritual discipline in conformity with the "holy principles of the Qur'an and the rites of the Tijānī Sufi brotherhood."<sup>449</sup> Thus, while the fortification of Dingiray are noteworthy, we should not lose sight that these fortification were meant for protection, so that Tāl could carry out his vocation as a teacher of the Islamic religious sciences, with an emphasis on guiding students on the Tijānī way.

It is Tāl's successful proselytization and emphasis on moral reform that ultimately brought him into conflict with Yimba. While it is difficult to quantify the number of disciples Tāl's teaching attracted in Dingiray, among those he attracted were Yimba's own men. According to chronicle sources, "...Jimba, the king of Tamba sent his people to Al Hajji Omaru. When the people whom he sent reached Al Hajji they were converted and did not want to return to him again. Al Hajji sent to inform him, that his people having repented, settled with him at once."<sup>450</sup> Separately oral accounts highlight it was the conversion of the king's griot, Jeli Musa, that underlined the

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<sup>446</sup> B.G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in 19<sup>th</sup> century Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 83.

<sup>447</sup> Mamadou Sissoko, "Chroniques d'El Hadj Oumar et du Cheikh Tidiani" in *Bulletin de l'Enseignement de L'Afrique Occidentale Français*, Vol. 95-7 (1936-1937), 244,

<sup>448</sup> For more on the importance of the *ḥadīth* compilations of al-Bukhārī and al-Muslim see; Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon* (Brill, 2011).

<sup>449</sup> Sissoko, *Chroniques d'El Hadj Oumar*, 244.

<sup>450</sup> Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language*, 292.

beginnings of the conflict. The idea that an important advisor of the king would become a client of a guest that the king himself had invited had political and social repercussions.

By converting, Yimba's men became part of a new community and gave their allegiance to a new patron. They explained, "Jimba has been a bad king ever since he came to the kingdom. All the kings of Tamba are bad kings; they never fear God, they kill people for nothing. For this reason everybody is afraid of their town."<sup>451</sup> These new converts found Tāl's message persuasive enough to abandon their former religious and social affiliations. In doing so, they also looked to Tāl as an alternative site of protection. At bottom, the implication was that Tāl's community was growing at the expense of Yimba's power.<sup>452</sup>

It became increasingly clear to Yimba that the only way he could continue to maintain power was by conquering Dingiray and expelling Tāl's community. In September 1852, he sent a contingent of his army to capture Dingiray. This was the eventuality that Tāl and his community had prepared for, and there already was a sense in the community that they had many enemies.<sup>453</sup> It appeared that the superior and battle tested soldiers of Yimba would have an easy fight. But the fortifications of Dingiray proved difficult to penetrate; the men and women of Tāl's community defended their territory valiantly, and routed Yimba's men.<sup>454</sup>

Even though Tāl could justify launching an offensive against Yimba's army on moral and religious grounds, his decision to take up arms was not as clear cut as it seems. His later military exploits have come to overshadow the significance and meanings of this initial conflict. Occupied with how to respond to Yimba's aggression, Tāl is reported to have had a vision of both Aḥmad

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War* 130.

<sup>453</sup> Bnf Fonds Arabe: 5718, fol. 1a, 2b-3a and 4.

<sup>454</sup> Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language*, 294-295. See also; Robinson, *The Holy War*, 131.

al-Tijāni and the Prophet Muḥammad authorizing him to declare war against Tamba.<sup>455</sup> But even after having this vision, Tāl remained hesitant to take up arms. According to a disciple who narrates the story, Tāl explained to him “Allah informed me that I was authorized to undertake the jihad, and He repeated this three times.”<sup>456</sup> It is only after hearing the voice of God authorizing him to take up arms that Tāl decided to attack Tamba.

While the ideological basis of Tāl’s *jihād* was framed around Islamic legal theory, he followed the social and cultural practices of warfare within the specific context of nineteenth century West Africa. For instance, both Muslims and non-Muslims had a shared understanding that it was permissible to enslave enemy combatants, women and children. Further one of the main cultural and social impetus among all warring groups was the possibility of acquiring booty. Consequently, his *jihād* shared common cultural idioms about what was acceptable during warfare and must be viewed through this lens, and not as something distinct or separate.

A shared cultural understanding of the importance of honor and status seem to also have played an important role in how Tāl interacted with Yimba, even as he was fighting against him. After routing a second attack by Yimba’s army against Dingiray, Tāl mobilized his soldiers to conquer Tamba. After a long siege that took place in 1853, Tāl entered the citadel of Tamba and asked Yimba to surrender.<sup>457</sup> Agreeing to surrender, he explained to Tāl that he would come to Dingiray personally and offer his submission. Tāl decided to spare Yimba’s life, and honored this king by not reducing him to a war captive, or humiliating him. He allowed him to come to Tāl under his own free will to offer his submission.

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<sup>455</sup> The full narrative is quoted by Willis in John Ralph Willis, *In the Path of Allah: The Passion of Al-Hajj ‘Umar an Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), 127.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> This date is given by Robinson, see; Robinson, *The Holy War*, 132. Tāl’s interaction with Yimba is recounted in Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language*, 302.

This point is further emphasized in the chronicle sources. Though Yimba agreed to surrender to Tāl, he reneged from his promise and instead attempted to raise another army. In order to accomplish this, he attempted to raid the neighboring kingdom of Minyin. But the king of Minyin, Banjugu caught wind of Yimba's plan and had him killed. Then Banjugu sent his messenger to explain to Tāl what happened. Tāl responded by saying that Banugu had taken Yimba's life unjustly. Tāl could have taken Yimba's life if he had wanted to, "but he did not do it; he left him alone; he returned by his word of honour because he was a king."<sup>458</sup> Tāl warned that the consequences of Banjugu's actions meant that he would have to "take care of his [Yimba's] money, and of his wives, and of every thing he possesses; nothing must spoil in his house."<sup>459</sup> Basically, Tāl argued since Yimba was a king, who was killed unjustly, Banjugu had to take care of his family and possession in order to honor him. Banjugu refused this stipulation and declared war on Tāl. Consequently, Tāl mobilized his armies and conquered Minyin. The point is that even though Yimba was a non-Muslim king, oaths and honor mattered, and Tāl upheld this shared understanding.

In less than a year, Tāl had conquered one of the most powerful kingdoms in the region and occupied a vast expanse of cultivable land. He controlled two waterways, and became central to the caravan trade. But as the new master of these lands he had also inserted himself into regional political relationships. The kings of Tamba are reported to have engaged with continuous warfare with their neighbors.<sup>460</sup> Opportunistic neighbors may have found greater incentive to retaliate against Tamba, at the very moment Tāl was attempting to solidify his control. Thus Tāl's initial offensive strategy may have been pre-emptive in order to continue to maintain his power, rather

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<sup>458</sup> Reichardt, *Grammar of the Fulde Language*, 304.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>460</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War*, 177.

than expand his territorial possessions. Indeed, while scholars conceptualize Tāl's movement as the "*jihād* against paganism," he did not have any interest in converting nonbelievers. Rather, and at least initially, he was interested in pacifying neighboring polities as a means to continue to create protection for his community.<sup>461</sup>

### **An Encounter with the French in Eastern Senegambia**

While Tāl's soldiers were quickly gaining ground in Senegambia, the French were also increasing their sphere of influence in the region. In order to secure more favorable trade relationships, the metropole authorized a series of expenditures to fortify the French military presence in Senegal. This included sending more personnel, constructing new forts, as well as repairing older installations along the Senegal River. Though the French carefully watched Tāl's impressive victories over regional polities, this did not affect their policies, at least initially.<sup>462</sup> But as Tāl and the French began to increasingly acquire the alliances of different political elites, their differing interests in the region would collide.

The first instances of confrontation between the French and Tāl can be traced to the second half of 1854. During this period, Tāl's army had started to mobilize against the kingdom of Galam. A key polity, Galam linked many different ethnic and linguistic groups together, and maintained important commercial links with Bundu.<sup>463</sup> The French had also had commercial interests in Galam dating back to the seventeenth century, linking it to the Atlantic economy. In the nineteenth

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<sup>461</sup> It is also perhaps for this reason that Tāl also did not invest in creating any administrative structure in conquered territories. Typically, he left local elites in power as long as they gave him allegiance.

<sup>462</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War*, 132-133.

<sup>463</sup> See; Aboudalye Bathily, "Imperialism and Colonial Expansion in Senegal in the Nineteenth century, With Particular reference to the economic, social and political developments of the kingdom of Gadiaga (Galam)", PhD Dissertation, Birmingham, Center of West African Studies, 1975. See also; Ibrahima Thiaw "Atlantic Impacts on Inland Senegambia: French Penetration and African Initiatives in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Gajaaga and Bundu (Supper Senegal River)" in J. Cameron Monroe and Akinwumi Ogundiran, eds. *Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa: Archaeological Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 49-77.

century, the French presence at the terminus of the Senegal River was substantial enough that they were able to affect Tāl's campaign against Galam.

In October of 1854, Tāl composed a letter to the commander at Fort Senedubu, which was not far from Galam.<sup>464</sup> Though Tāl maintained correspondence with the French after launching his *jihād*, this is the only Arabic letter that survives. Unlike when he wrote to the French in 1847, his political circumstances had dramatically changed. He was now powerful, with his own large army, and he also controlled vast territory. Moreover, he no longer needed French protection.

The letter is written on off-white colored paper, in black ink.<sup>465</sup> It is meticulously folded, and appears to have been sealed with red wax. It does not however carry an official stamp or seal. Once folded, the back of the letter has a small inscription that reads “from al-ḥājj ‘Umar to Commander Giradot.”<sup>466</sup> This inscription signifies that Tāl was aware of the names of certain French officials in positions of power, and knew how to send messages to those officials. It is not clear, however, how he sent the letter to Commander Giradot.

The letter only consists of eight lines. After the *basmala*, and sending his greetings, Tāl wrote:

This letter is to inform you that I love you. I know that you also love me and my students. Those who love my students are beloved to me. I want to inform you that a trial (*fitna*) has befallen between the people of Galam and me. Except those who are the scholars and the learned among them. I urge you not to give those who flee [to you] protection. Know that the actions of your brothers, who refused to [sell me] arms of war, including guns, powder and bullets, and other weapons, do not affect me. Nothing harms me. Prayers on Muḥammad.

The letter opens with Tāl's declaration of love for the French.<sup>467</sup> The basis of this love was Tāl's assumption that the French loved his students. Though it difficult to determine the context of what

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<sup>464</sup> The French constructed this fort in 1845. It was a small outpost that was strategically located on the Faleme river see; Thiaw, *Atlantic Impacts on Inland Senegambia*, 65.

<sup>465</sup> ANS 13G pièce 94 1854. This includes the Arabic letter as well as an accompanying French translation.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>467</sup> Here I have translated from the Arabic word “love” (*ḥubb*) quite literally. This was simply an expression of affection. It is not clear, however, if Tāl was simply following letter writing conventions in expressing his “love.”

Tāl was referring to, one possible interpretation is that the welfare of his students was an important concern for him. Indeed, as the previous chapters highlighted, Tāl had a wide network of disciples and sympathizers in the region. After launching his *jihād*, it is safe to assume that he acquired more students. Some of these students may have come into contact with the French. This may have been Tāl's attempt to encourage the French to treat his students amicably because of continuing French expansion into the region.

From expressing his love, and implying that the French loved him as well, Tāl quickly shifted the tone of his letter and turned his attention to his conflict with Galam. In the French translation of this letter, attached to the Arabic original, the conflict is described as a *guerre* (war). Yet in the Arabic original, Tāl does not use the Arabic word *ḥarb*, which is normatively translated as war. Instead, he uses the word *fitna* (trial).<sup>468</sup>

Here *fitna* suggests that Tāl perceived his conflict with Galam as a temporary state of confusion, and his intentions were to restore order. In the letter he noted that the scholars and the learned people of Galam were not the ones who were maintaining hostilities against him. Presumably then, it was the ruling elites who were leading the resistance against him.

After alluding to his conflict with Galam, he then expressed his grievances about French actions. He explained to the commander of Fort Senedubu not to give those who fled from the conflict protection and safety. Here he was establishing his authority and sovereignty in the conflict, and demanding that the French not interfere in his affairs. In the logic of nineteenth century warfare, and assuming that Tāl was referring to people who had maintained hostilities

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The reason why I think that he may not have simply following formalities is because he qualifies his statement by suggesting that his love for the French is tied to the French respecting his students.

<sup>468</sup> This word is commonly used by numerous West African scholars. For an analysis of its usage, including in the work of Tāl see; Humphrey J. Fisher, "Text-centered Research: Fitna as a case Study and a way Forward for Guests in the House of African Historiography," *Sudanic Africa*, 5 (1994), 225-260.

against him, they would be considered war captives. With war ravaging local populations, such captives became quite important, especially for agricultural production. The French knew this quite well, and often gave amnesty to their enemies' slaves and captives as strategy.<sup>469</sup> Though Tāl may not been aware about French policy, he was certainly aware of the implications that French actions could have on his own movement.

Tāl also stressed in his letter his anger towards French tradres for refusing to sell him arms. French officials in Saint Louis had placed an embargo preventing the sale of weapons down the Senegal River, because of disturbances that were affecting their interests.<sup>470</sup> In the midst of armed conflict, Tāl's inability to source weapons would certainly have been a blow. Yet he wrote that this did not affect him. This may have been political jostling on Tāl's part to highlight that he did not need the French, or the distinct possibility he had continued to purchase weapons British and Portuguese traders further south. What this dispute ultimately underlined was that the French were not going to come to Tāl's assistance, and the "pact" that Tāl had maintained with the French, several years earlier, was no longer valid.

### **Religion, Conflict and the Appeal to the Traders of Saint Louis**

The frustrations that Tāl felt towards the French finally burst open. On March 11<sup>th</sup> 1855, Tāl composed his most damning letter against what he considered French injustices, under the new Governor Louis Faidherbe. This time, however, he addressed his letter to the "children of Ndar" or the mainly Muslim traders based in Saint Louis.<sup>471</sup> As intermediaries and brokers, these traders

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<sup>469</sup> Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 32.

<sup>470</sup> Barrows, General Faidherbe, 255.

<sup>471</sup> Faidherbe seized this letter, and it is found among his papers in ANFOM Sen. 1 41b, March 11, 1855. I am using a copy reproduced by Hanson and Robinson see; John Hanson and David Robinson, *After the Jihad: The Reign of Ahmad al-Kabīr in the Western Sudan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991). The Arabic original is

played the essential role in linking the various aspects of trade relationships throughout the Senegal River valley.<sup>472</sup> They were one of the most important assets the French had in insuring the success of their own commercial enterprise. By addressing his letter directly to these traders, Tāl attempted to land a decisive blow against the French commercial enterprise in the region, and the Bordeaux merchant houses that dictated much of the trade.

This letter signified an evolution in how Tāl framed his own mission, as well as how he constructed the French. Unlike his previous letters, he no longer expressed his love for the French. More significantly, he began to define the French as “Christians.” By using the label “Christian” he made a case to the traders of Saint Louis, on religious grounds, that their loyalty was first to other Muslims. In this instance, Tāl politicized religious differences to create legitimacy and win sympathy. This was a considerably different approach, and was rooted in his shifting political and social circumstances.

One of the main objectives of this letter, and perhaps why he directed to the traders of Saint Louis, was to assure them that his conflict was not with them. A month earlier, Tāl had orchestrated the raiding and seizure of merchandise from French owned warehouses in Khasso and Gajaga.<sup>473</sup> In referencing those raids, he wrote “we have not destroyed your hope in us but rather increased and strengthened it, because we have not taken what belonged to you, not even a single coin. Instead, we have taken the possessions of the Christians. We have returned to the sons of Ndar

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document 8A on pp. 328. Their English translation with commentary is one pp. 106-111. The cited passages are mainly from Hanson and Robinson’s translation, with a few modifications.

<sup>472</sup> Traders, translators and local elites were important intermediaries for French commercial and political interest in the Senegal River valley. See for instance; Tamba Eadric M’bayo, “African Interpreters, Mediation, and the Production of Knowledge in Colonial Senegal: The Lower and Middle Senegal Vallaey, cs. 1850s to ca. 1920s”, Phd Dissertaton (Michigan State University, 1999).

<sup>473</sup> Alfa Umar Baila, Tāl’s general had raided the commercial depots in Khasso. Robinson estimates that the merchandise that Baila seized and destroyed was “equivalent to 5 per cent of the annual exports and 10 per cent of the annual budget of the colony” see; Robinson, *The Holy War*, 161.

everything that belonged to them.”<sup>474</sup> It is not clear if Tāl wrote this letter in response to complaints he may have received from the merchants of Saint Louis, but he clearly thought it was important to explain that his actions were not directed against them. More importantly, while only a few months earlier he had contacted the French commander at Senedubu, the letter signified that he was no longer interested in communicating with the French directly.

Tāl believed he had good reason to attack French interests. He used the letter to systematically explain and justify those actions. Speaking directly to the traders, he wrote “if you ask the reason for the seizure of the Christian property, it is because they have repeatedly committed injustices [*zalamū*] against us.”<sup>475</sup> By using the Arabic word *zalamū*, Tāl characterized the French as oppressors, who were also acting unlawfully. One of the main contentions that Tāl raises again is the decision of the French to not sell him arms. Specifically, he wrote “among these is the decision not to sell us arms and munitions, because of their ignorance. But in fact we can dispense with them.”<sup>476</sup> The issue for Tāl was not about whether the French were supporting him or not, but something more serious. He might have been aware that the French were not applying the embargo universally. Instead, the French had long been selling weapons to the Bambara, who were in conflict with Tāl.<sup>477</sup>

Tāl also wanted the French to deal with him as a sovereign and not lump him with other polities in the region—his mission was quite different. In this regard, he wrote:

we replied to the envoy of your tyrant [*taghī*], when he came to us at Sirmanna, that if the embargo was in place because of the people of Futa, we should not be considered among the people of Futa. Rather we are different, and we struggle [*nujāhidu*] against the enemies of God. So let him not lump us together with them nor act towards us as he does towards them, lest it be a reason for me to join with them.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Hanson and Robinson, *After the Jihad*, 109 and 328.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War*, 162.

<sup>478</sup> Hanson and Robinson, *After the Jihad*, 109 and 328.

Tāl was clearly distinguishing himself from the people of Futa Toro. He was establishing himself as an alternative and different site of power and affiliation. He was unlike the people of Futa Toro because he was struggling against the “enemies of God.” This blanket statement, also now included the French. He viewed the Governor of Saint Louis as a *taghī* (tyrant). This term was not a “stock epithet used for Christians” but had a particular connotation.<sup>479</sup> This was a person who operated outside any notion of justice or law, and oppressed people. It was a powerful label to deploy to capture what Tāl felt had become the role of the French establishment in eastern Senegambia. At bottom, the French were oppressive, and “Christians” and therefore it was no longer possible, or even religiously warranted, to maintain amicable relationship with them.

Later in the letter, Tāl further points to the fact that the French were acting with impunity, and did not respect him and perhaps by extension other local rulers. He wrote

while I was waiting for his [the Governor’s] envoy, God brought him together with ‘Abd Allah in Bakel, and they had a discussion in which ‘Abd Allah said: “Do you not know that al-hajj, the shaykh has the capacity to destroy you and your dependents and all your trade, blocking the routes, preventing all sales and purchases and destroying your property?” And the tyrant of Ndar replied: “Then let him do it.” ‘Abd Allah exclaimed: “Praise be to God, that I have heard this from your own mouth and not that of another.”<sup>480</sup>

The figure in the narrative, ‘Abd Allāh, was an important trader from Saint Louis, who seemed to have been responsible for negotiated with the French on behalf of Tāl.<sup>481</sup> This was certainly not an idle threat, since in 1854 Tāl was well positioned to execute what ‘Abd Allāh had threatened the Governor with. Moreover, the pivotal response of the governor “then let him do it” was important. In the manner that Tāl framed the letter this demonstrated that he was not the aggressor, but was

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<sup>479</sup> Without further explanation or citations Hanson and Robinson suggest that this was a “stock epithet for a Christian ruler.” See; Hanson and Robinson, *After the Jihad*, 109, footnote 9. In fact, the word designates any ruler that “exceeds his bounds” and becomes oppressive.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 109, footnote 11.

standing up to the arrogance of the governor, the tyrant. It provided crucial justification for why Tāl had attacked French warehouses and seized French merchandise.

The arrogance of the French governor was reflected in another serious point of contention. Like in his letter the year before, Tāl made it clear to the traders of Saint Louis that the French were meddling in his affairs, while also significantly altering the political economy of the region. He wrote, “another reason is that we wrote to the tyrant [the Governor] in Bakel to deliver to us those who were fleeing from us, but he indeed refused. We sent again to inform him that even if he did not return them, we will still be victorious. That message reached him, but he paid no attention and said that it would amount to a sign of weakness.”<sup>482</sup> For several months the French had provided animosity to Tāl’s enemies at two different locations. Like in Senedubu before, the governor at Bakel gave people who were fleeing from him amnesty and safety. Again the central issue was about authority. For the French returning captives back to Tāl “would amount to a sign of weakness.” For Tāl these were his enemies, and the French had no reason to get involved.

Whereas previously he lauded the French for showing his students “love,” Tāl chastised the French for no longer protecting his community of follower from violence. He wrote “another reason is that when we were at Jagili, a young Christian youth attacked us.”<sup>483</sup> The village was close to Gidimakha where Tāl’s soldiers were executing a military operation. By identifying this person as a “Christian youth” he may have been talking about a military officer.<sup>484</sup> Though it is not clear exactly what transpired, it again highlights the frustration that Tāl had with the French. In the previous letter Tāl’s “love” for the French was based on protection. In this incident it was

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 110, 328.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid, 110, footnote 15.

clear that the French were not going to protect his students and followers. Rather they would allow French officers to attack them rather unabated.

The balance of power was clearly shifting. From his own experience, and stories from informants he was well aware of the incredible power that the French possessed. Though he had inflicted economic harm on the French, and had publicly chastised their injustices, he was not prepared to go to war against them. Instead, much of his grievances were about what he considered French interference. What he did want, however, was the French to respect his authority, and the authority of other local elites in the Senegambia. For this reason he wrote, “we will not quit until we receive a plea of peace and submission from your tyrant, for our Lord said: ‘Fight those who believe not in God nor in the last day, nor forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, nor follow the religion of truth, out of those who have been given the book [the Qur’an], until they pay the *jizya* in acknowledgement of superiority, for they are in a state of subjection.’”<sup>485</sup> Tāl was concerned that the increasing French presence would lead to the subjugation of Muslims in the region. Tāl applied this Qur’anic verse to his own context, since Faidherbe quite unilaterally had decided to stop paying the customary tax that the French had traditionally paid to the elites of Futa Toro.<sup>486</sup> This increasing political clout, and the flaunting of traditional agreements, translated as the assertion of French superiority over Muslims.

Tāl was clearly alarmed by witnessing such rapid changes, and the erosion of Muslim authority in Senegambia. Given the context of confrontation and the importance of the traders of Saint Louis for French operations, he gave his clearest warning. He wrote “sons of Ndar, God forbids you to be in relations of friendship with them. He made it clear that whomever becomes their friend becomes a nonbeliever, and one of them, through His saying ‘Take not the Jews and

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 110, 328.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

Christians for friends. They are allies of each other. And whoever amongst you takes them for friends he is indeed one of them.”<sup>487</sup> In this example, he was drawing on particular Qur’anic verses to make a case about religious difference. He decontextualized these verses from their apparent historical meanings, and applied them to his own political circumstances.

Through writing this letter, Tāl seemed to have attempted to accomplish a few things. On the one hand, he had appealed to the traders of Saint Louis through a shared grammar of religion and identification. By casting the French as Christians, he politicized them in a very specific way as oppressors, and warned the traders that it was unjustifiable for Muslims to engage in a relationship of subjugation to a foreign Christian power. The facts on the ground supported Tāl’s arguments. The French had rapidly started to expand their territorial holdings, as well as their military presence. In Tāl’s understanding, there was a real fear that the French would simply take over, and Muslims would no longer be able to exercise power over their own affairs.

### **Confrontation and the Erosion of Tāl’s power in Senegambia**

Tāl’s movement, and particularly his letter of 1855 became a rallying point for Faidherbe to secure military and financial assistance from the French government. He wanted to unilaterally expand French territorial holdings and interests in Senegambia.<sup>488</sup> He also acquired gunboats to patrol the river, and intimidate local elites. He initiated his plan by first fortifying existing French forts along the Senegal River, as well as building new forts in strategic locations.

One of these forts was in Medine, in Khasso, which Tāl had conquered a year earlier.<sup>489</sup> While he had moved the majority of his army east to prepare for an offensive against Karta—the

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War*, 170-171.

<sup>489</sup> For a history of Khasso, as well as Tāl’s presence in this territory see; Sékéné Mody Cissoko, *Le Khasso: Face à l’empire Toucouleur et à la France dans le Haut-Sénégal, 1854-1890*, Paris: éditions l’harmattan, 1988).

powerful, and militarized Bamabra polity, the elites of Khasso who had initially given allegiance to Tāl, defected to the French.<sup>490</sup> Faidherbe's plan was to destroy the linkages between Tāl's different spheres of influence. Specifically, by constructing a fort in Medine, Faidherbe could expand French influence and divide Tāl's influence between Dingiray on one side, and Karta on the other side. From this position, the French could methodically dismantle his territorial holdings, and erode his support among local elites.

Tāl had reason to be worried about the French. The terms that local elites agreed to with Faidherbe put an end to the traditional manner of negotiation and agreements. In this instance, the French could move freely without paying taxes, and they could intervene at any point if there was a threat to their trade.<sup>491</sup> In return, they would protect the local population with their superior weaponry and soldiers. In essence, what this meant in practical terms was that there were no longer any limits to French power. Without any checks to their power, the French could expand their territorial holdings and have influence over local affairs with impunity.

This is what Tāl found when he returned west after his Karta campaign. In the two years that he was away, the French had solidified their control over the area around Khasso, which had once been his stronghold. Its strategic importance in connecting his different spheres of influence, as well as different parts of Senegambia could not be underestimated. Through the work of his generals, he launched a proxy war against the French to reclaim much of the territory he had lost. For the most part he was quite successful. The only pocket of French control that remained was Medine.

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<sup>490</sup> The most important of these elites was Juka Sambala Jallo. He had given Tāl allegiance and but subsequently became disenchanted with his movement. He defected to the French. See; Robinson, *The Holy War*, 168.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

Many of the elites that had betrayed Tāl had found refuge with the French in Medine. Tāl had a choice to either directly confront the French or wait. It is not entirely clear whether Tāl wanted to fight against the French or not, or whether it was some of his disciples that lead the charge and influenced him.<sup>492</sup> Tāl decided to send 15,000 soldiers to conquer Medine on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1857. The date marked the beginning of a state of war between the French and Tāl for the next two years.

The French were greatly outnumbered, and Medine only had a thousand soldiers behind its walls. Yet under the command of Paul Holle, the French were able to repel the advances of Tāl's army. Tāl and his men then "settled down to a siege and blockade which cut off virtually all supplies of food and ammunition for the next two months."<sup>493</sup> The bitter fighting took on religious meaning. I have already explained how Tāl conceptualized the French as a "Christians," but the French too constructed the Tāl and his soldiers in particular ways.

While the siege was going on, the French could hear Tāl and his men on the other side of the fort as they prepared to attack. Preparing for a sure victory, they said "God is great, he is for us. Muhammad is the true Prophet of God, the last to come."<sup>494</sup> On hearing this, Paul Holle was incensed. He decided to assert his own religious identity. Holle placed a sign on the gate of the Fort that allegedly read "Long live Jesus!!! Long live Emperor [Napoleon III]!!! Conquer or die for God and the Emperor!!!"<sup>495</sup> This should not simply be brushed aside, as the French were also actively constructing Islam at this point for their own imperial designs. Tāl became the perfect scapegoat to create fear about the dangers of Islam and the need to control local populations. In

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>495</sup> quoted in *ibid.*

other words, the presence of Tāl and his threats to French interest became a justification for further French intrusion into West Africa.

The siege continued to take its toll, and since the French had already built a strategic network throughout the Senegal River valley, it also became harder for Tāl to acquire recruits.<sup>496</sup> Facing canon fire from the fort and diminishing supplies, Tāl ultimately did not send his men forth for one last push against the fort. In hindsight, this was a strategic mistake because Holle had started to run out of powder, and could no longer realistically defend the fort.<sup>497</sup> The window of opportunity to conquer Medine was lost, and this would ultimately have dramatic consequences.

In July, when the waters began to rise in the Senegal River, Faidherbe arrived with gunboats and hundreds of new soldiers. The superior cannon fire from the boats and fresh men helped break the siege. The internal narratives highlight the mood on this epic turning point, documenting that “the reinforcements of the Christians came in boats of smoke, whereupon the Muslims abandoned [the siege] and returned to the Shaikh. He said to them: “I told you that you could not defeat the cannon.””<sup>498</sup> Tāl was unable to take Medine, and ultimately decided to retreat.

Tāl had never fought the French, and he had never before been defeated in battle. He had lost many men, and morale was very low among those who stayed behind. The problem for Tāl became how to convince people of the ideological merit of his movement after such a devastating loss. He certainly could not afford to continue to fight against the French, while he was dealing with increasing rebellions in the east. He decided to retreat with those who remained loyal to him, to recuperate and acquire more soldiers. He returned to Kunjun and began fortifying his installations in both Tamba and Nioro. He was now on the defensive.

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>498</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

Faidherbe moved swiftly to dismantle Tāl's influence in eastern Senegambia. He first destroyed the important installation of Somsom, close to Bakel. Using land mines and howitzers the French destroyed the structure, and took four hundred women and children prisoners.<sup>499</sup> This left Bokar Sada, the French appointed ruler of Bundu, in total control of this area. Faidherbe subsequently unleashed a wave of violence, and attacked those who opposed the French, even if they were not aligned with Tāl.<sup>500</sup>

The final blow came in October 1859. Faidherbe began attacking Tāl's stronghold in Gidimaka. The battle only lasted six hours, and Gemu was razed. This was of strategic importance, because Gemu could block the trade of gum, as well as anyone trying to escape from Tāl in Karta.<sup>501</sup> In the ensuing battle, 250 people died, and the French sold 1500 people into slavery in Bundu.<sup>502</sup> Eventually, Tāl is reported to have agreed to peace with the French.<sup>503</sup> He acknowledged his diminished political standing in eastern Senegambia, and did not want to continue to fight against the French. He had already opened another front in the east, and had started to march against the powerful Bambara kingdom of Segu.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I constructed a narrative that followed Tāl from his trip to Futa Toro in 1846, to the events in Gemu in 1859. I highlighted Tāl's changing political circumstances within these thirteen years, and his transformation from primarily a scholar, to a military leader, who also continued to train and teach disciples. I argued that instead of conceptualizing his *jihād* as a matter

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 212-213.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Though Tāl does not seem to have met the French, he sent his representatives to sign an agreement. An account of this meeting, and the text of the agreement is found in Yves Saint-Martin, *L'Empire Toucouleur et la France. Un demi-siècle de relations diplomatiques (1864-93)* (Dakar: Université de Dakar, 1967), 91-110.

that was inevitable, I explained it is important to focus closely on the events that led him to take up arms.

I began by first establishing that in his own work, especially in the *Rimāh*, he emphasized the “greater *jihād*.” As primarily a teacher and a spiritual guide, he placed importance on this metaphysical and internal struggle over combat. He also spent considerable time teaching and transmitting this work after he completed it in 1846. Consequently, I argued that there is no explicit evidence to suggest that he was preparing a war of conquest in this early period. More importantly, his emphasis on moral and social reform, and his desire to transmit and teach this work is what brought him to Futa Toro.

While he met with French officials, and he referred specifically to a “pact” in one surviving letter, I explained that this also was not sufficient evidence to argue he wanted to become the Alamy of Futa Toro. Indeed, it is clear that he acquired numerous disciples, and had become quite important in the region. Yet, the office of Alamy was mostly ceremonial. More significantly, the French, in 1847, did not possess the wherewithal or influence that they would later hold, to support Tāl’s alleged ambitions. Tāl’s relationship with the French, I argued, was based on normative reciprocal relationships that Muslim clerics made with temporal authority. In this case, Tāl had many enemies among the elites of Futa Toro, who were also plotting against him. By allying himself with the French, he could continue to teach and recruit disciples under the protection of this external power.

Tāl’s *jihād* had its roots in the moment that he decided to move to Dingiray away from any established Muslim authority. Indeed, this is partly because he wanted to maintain his independence, and build a new community of Tijānī disciples on his own terms. The issue, however, was that he took on a greater political role. Consequently, he began stockpiling weapons

and fortifying Dingiray, in order to protect his emerging community. There is no indication, however, despite the increasing militarization of Dingiray that Tāl was preparing to conduct an offensive military campaign. He only took up arms, after the king of Tamba, Yimba, attacked him. It is at this moment that initiated his *jihād*.

He subsequently entered the landscape of warrior states, and took on their logic. In order to maintain his power, and continue to protect his followers, he had to continuously conquer more territory. At the same time, the political circumstances of the French had also changed after the revolution of 1848. The final two letters that I explored in this chapter highlighted the shifting relationship between Tāl and the French, as the French began to exert more influence in Senegambia. Ultimately this led to conflict, and the erosion of Tāl's military presence and political influence in eastern Senegambia.

## Chapter 6

### Islamic Knowledge and Authority: Territory, Legal Categories and Nonbelief

#### Introduction

In 1821, an obscure Muslim cleric based in Jenné, *Shaykh* Aḥmad Lobbo, established a new capital, Ḥamdullāhi, on the delta of the Niger River.<sup>504</sup> The polity would be known as Masina. Lobbo would claim for himself the title of *amīr al-mu'minīn*, the Commander of the Faithful.<sup>505</sup> This ostensibly Muslim theocracy had a powerful army, and a robust administrative structure. Lobbo would slowly extend Masina's power by conquering neighboring territories. Within a few years, it would become an important polity in the Middle Niger valley. Despite its strength and its dominance in the region, it would face an unlikely enemy from the west. Four decades after its founding, al-ḥājj 'Umar Tāl would put an end to the reign of Ḥamdullāhi.

This chapter explores why Tāl and his army marched into the Middle Niger valley, first to fight against the Bambara, but then also attacked and conquered Masina in 1862. Given his own stance three decades earlier, he was quite vociferous about what he viewed as the problem of discord amongst Muslims in West Africa. On this topic he rebuked Muhammad Bello for continuing his war against Bornu. In his *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, analyzed in chapter three, Tāl

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<sup>504</sup> David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 77-81. For more on Masina see: Amadou H. Ba and Jacques Daget, *L'empire peul du Macina, 1818-1853* (first published Dakar: Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, 1955); William A. Brown, "The Caliphate of Hamdullahi, c.1818-64", Phd Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1969, Marion Johnson, "The Economic Foundations of an Islamic Theocracy: The Case of Masina" in *Journal of African History*, 1976, and Bintou Sanankoua, *Une Empire Peul au XIXe Siècle: La Diina du Maasina* (Paris: Karthala, 1990).

<sup>505</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 80.

presented himself as a mediator to this conflict. He argued that ordinarily the spilling of blood was a violation of Islamic norms, and the spilling of Muslim blood was even worse. In this work, he was uncompromising. He argued that under no circumstances should Muslims fight one another, because nothing good could come out of such conflicts. Yet three decades later, in the midst of a broader war campaign, he engaged in a conflict that took the lives of thousands of Muslims.<sup>506</sup>

In this chapter, I provide a close reading of Tāl's final work, *Bayān mā waqa'a baynanā wa bayna amīr al-Māsina Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad* [*What Happened between the ruler of Masina, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad and us*]. I construct a narrative using Tāl's own words to explain why he considered it justifiable to attack other Muslims.<sup>507</sup> The work is Tāl's account of his conflict with Aḥmad III, the grandson of Lobbo, who had come to power in 1854.

The conflict between these two Muslim elites began in 1856 when Aḥmad III mobilized his army against Tāl. In that year, Tāl had conquered the Bambara polity, Karta, and then had stationed a contingent of his troops in a neighboring territory, Bakhunu. The ruler of Masina argued that this territory was under his jurisdiction, and therefore Tāl's actions were illegitimate. A few years later, in 1859, Tāl marched into the Middle Niger valley to conquer another powerful Bambara kingdom, Segu. Again, Aḥmad III sent his army against Tāl, arguing that the Tijānī *shaykh* had violated Masina's sovereignty over Segu. In both circumstances, Tāl argued that Masina did not have authority over these lands. These were non-Muslim territories that were at war against him. Consequently, he argued that he was justified in waging *jihād* against them.

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<sup>506</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 297.

<sup>507</sup> In this chapter I use one of the few complete copies of this manuscript. It is found in BNF Arabe 5605. I also extensively employ a critical French annotated translation of this manuscript. The BNF manuscript is also reproduced at the end of this work. See; Sidi Mohamed Mahibou and Jean-Louis Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé, Bayān mā waqa'a d'al-Hājj 'Umar al-Fūtī: Plaidoyer pour une guerre sainte en Afrique de L'ouest au XIXe siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 1983). They discuss the title of this work, as well as this manuscript in greater detail on pages 19-21. I have used this French edition for context and notes throughout this chapter. My own translations, however, are from the original Arabic manuscript. In my footnotes, I cite both the manuscript folio as well as the relevant pages in the French translation.

Besides the *Rimāh*, the *Bayān* is one of Tāl's longest works. He completed it in 1861, after conquering Segou, and several months before he mobilized his army against Masina. Though the work can be read as a justification for these later actions, he does not state his intentions to attack Masina anywhere in the text. Instead, he divided the work into three parts to document his correspondence with Aḥmad III, and to provide a rebuttal of many of the arguments that this ruler of Masina made against him.<sup>508</sup>

The *Bayān* captures competing notions of Islamic authority and legitimacy. It highlights how Tāl used legal categories to first frame social reality, and then justified his actions through those categories. In other words, though the political economy of both eastern Senegambia and the Middle Niger valley were complex, legal categories allowed him to order this messiness through his narrative. Though these were heterogeneous and multiethnic territories, Tāl could construct neat binaries between Muslim/non-Muslim, believer/non-believer, legitimate/illegitimate, and then legitimize his actions by producing arguments based on the broader Islamic legal tradition.

One of the defining aspects of the *Bayān* is that even though Tāl wielded enormous political power, he performed his authority through demonstrating his mastery over Islamic knowledge. In the *Bayān*, he used citations from nearly fifty distinct works to sustain an argument that refuted Aḥmad III's claim to authority.<sup>509</sup> On the one hand, he explained that the territories he was fighting against were non-Muslim, and could not come under the authority of an established Muslim polity.

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<sup>508</sup> The work consists of a short prologue, a longer introduction, and two sections. In the first section, Tāl reproduces much of Aḥmad III's correspondence with him, and then offers a rebuttal of his arguments. Section two is an explanation of why Aḥmad III considered it was justifiable for him to attack Tāl. In this section, Tāl documents several of his actions, which he explained took Aḥmad III out of the fold of Islam. One of the significant difficulties with this text is that Tāl wrote it in 1861 after he had conquered Segou. His correspondence with Aḥmad III began in 1856. Yet the narrative Tāl produced collapses distinct historical events, and Aḥmad III's shifting and changing arguments into one long continuum. The text was meant to highlight that Aḥmad III did not have authority. Consequently, the work does not give us crucial insights into context, and why Ahmad III took the actions that he did.

<sup>509</sup> A full list of the works Tāl cited, including description, is found in Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 199-213.

On the other hand, he constructed Aḥmad III as someone who was ignorant. Therefore, although he tried, Tāl claimed that this ruler of Masina could not justify his actions against him by drawing on the Islamic tradition.

In Tāl's conceptualization, Aḥmad III did not have the requisite training to make claims based on Islamic sources. The implication of this was that he could not legitimately claim to have Islamic authority, precisely because he had no mastery over Islamic knowledge. Moreover, because of his specific actions in assisting non-Muslims against him, Tāl further declared that Aḥmad III had abandoned Islam. Through legal maneuvering and narrative, Tāl conceptualized Masina as a non-Muslim polity and then justified mobilizing his army against it.

In this chapter, I have limited my analysis to Tāl's own words in the *Bayān*, and do not take into consideration other perspectives of how his conflict with Masina unfolded, and how others constructed him.<sup>510</sup> My intention is not to provide a robust analysis of Tāl's actions in eastern Senegambia, and the Middle Niger valley. Therefore, I have not interpreted the wealth of primary source material his conflict with Masina generated, both by his followers, but also other Muslim elites that rebuked him.<sup>511</sup> Instead, my intention is to place Tāl's legal discourse in the context of his war against Karta and then Segou. It is meant to provide insight into the connection between Islamic learning, authority and political legitimacy through the lens of this one scholar's writing.

This chapter begins with the initial conflict between Tāl and Aḥmad III around Karta and Bakhunu. While Aḥmad III claimed he had authority over these territory, Tāl argued that these were non-Muslim territories. Therefore, he explained that Aḥmad III did not have authority over

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<sup>510</sup> The conflict between Tāl and Aḥmad III is remembered quite differently in Masina than how Tal presented the events in the Bayan. See; *Mā Jāra baina Amīr al-Mu'minīn Aḥmad wa baina al-ḥājj 'Umar*. A copy of this manuscript can be found in Malian Arabic Manuscript Microfilm Project, Yale University, New Haven Connecticut, Reel 6-5.

<sup>511</sup> See for instance; Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 303-310.

them. I then analyze why he declared war against Segu, and subsequently marched into the Middle Niger valley. Tāl again argued that these were non-Muslim territories, and Aḥmad III did not have authority over them. After examining the reasons for their conflict, I analyze Aḥmad III's arguments as they are reproduced by Tāl in the *Bayān*. Then I investigate how Tāl constructed Aḥmad III as someone who was ignorant. In the process he outlined his own mastery over Islamic knowledge, and tied this to his own authority. Finally, I explain why he declared Aḥmad III was a non-Muslim and subsequently attacked Masina. It is this decision that ultimately cost him his life, two years later.

### **The Meeting of Two Armies**

On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1855, nearly three years after Tāl had conquered Tamba, his army marched into Niuro, the capital of Karta. This signified the end of one of the most powerful Bambara kingdoms in Senegambia. Karta's political economy was built on continuous warfare, and on raiding, pillaging and enslaving people with impunity. Through a complex system of redistribution the Massassi and their army comprised mostly of *tonjon* (royal slaves) maintained power, as long as they continued to acquire wealth and booty from neighboring territories.<sup>512</sup> Consequently, warfare defined the relationship between Karta and the other polities in Senegambia.

Futa Toro had long felt the wrath of Karta's raids, which often led to the enslavement of Muslims.<sup>513</sup> In this regard, Robinson notes, based on oral evidence, that "the mere mention of the Bambara in eastern Futa Toro was enough to make the inhabitants 'flee from their homes and

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<sup>512</sup> The Bambara elites of Karta referred to themselves as Massassi "in honor of Massa, the prince who led their fight from Segu." See John H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad, and Muslim Authority in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 23.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. Karta attacked Futa Toro "1807/1808, 1816-1818, 1831 and 1840" see; Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 120.

fields to the interior, so great was their fear.”<sup>514</sup> The context of Karta’s relationship with Futa Toro meant that when Tāl mobilized against this polity many Futanke were eager to join him on his campaign.<sup>515</sup> Yet while many of those who joined Tāl became his disciples, many more also joined because of their own grievances against Karta. In other words, it would be wrong to assume that all the Futanke who became part of Tāl’s army shared in his reasons for fighting against Karta.

Given the social and political chaos that Karta had created in Senegambia, when Tāl rode into Nioro, he considered this a moment that surrounding polities would celebrate. In the *Bayān* he explained that once he had conquered Karta, he sent letters to Futa Toro, Masina, and to the Sahara.<sup>516</sup> The reason, according to Tāl, was so that these other polities could “share in our joy because of all that God had inflicted on their polytheist enemies.”<sup>517</sup> Though Karta had been a common enemy to all of these polities, Tāl did not receive any responses in support of his victory. He wrongly assumed that these other polities would view his actions in Karta as positive.

He sent these letters in celebration too early, since his control over Karta faced serious challenges. Although he was able to conquer Nioro with little resistance, many of the former Massassi ruling elites in Karta began to resist his military occupation.<sup>518</sup> They would not accept the thousands of migrants that had come with him, as well as the new social and political order that he attempted to establish. One point of bitterness was “the reversal of fortune. In the new order of things the Kulibali would be expelled from their palaces, stripped of rank and wealth, closely

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<sup>514</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 138-139.

<sup>515</sup> Hanson, *Migration, Jihad, and Muslim Authority*, 29.

<sup>516</sup> He refers to the group as “al-biḍān” and therefore it is not clear which Saharan groups he is referring to. See; BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 2b and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 76.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Hanson notes that several elites willingly gave Tāl allegiance, including the “king” of Karta, Mamadi Kanjan. Consequently, he took over Nioro without any bloodshed. See; Hanson, *Migration, Jihad, and Muslim Authority*, 31.

watched, and reduced to the status of neophytes in Islam.”<sup>519</sup> These former ruling elites retreated to the south of Karta and began to organize several rebellions against Tāl’s rule.<sup>520</sup>

He also began to face opposition from groups that had previously offered him submission willingly. The most important among these groups were the Jawara Soninke. The Jawara were the former rulers over Karta, before the arrival of the Massassi.<sup>521</sup> They had maintained their prosperity through farming and trade, but had increasingly become victims to Massassi oppression. Although they were also Muslim, they supported Tāl for political reasons, in order to gain autonomy. Yet while their support was crucial for Tāl’s success in Karta, he dealt with them with a heavy hand.<sup>522</sup> Since his own military campaigns increasingly demanded more resources, he exacted enormous tribute from what the Jawara had acquired fighting against the Massassi. Instead of complying with Tāl, they refused. They then fled east and under a new leader, Karunka, launched raids against cattle and trade caravans heading to Nioro.<sup>523</sup> While Tāl was quelling the Massassi rebellion from the south, he sent a contingent of his army to the east to crush the Jawara rebellion.

After defeating the last pocket of Jawara resistance, he sent a small expeditionary force to Bakhunu under the command of his general Alfa ‘Umar Baila.<sup>524</sup> Tāl wanted to utilize the territory around Bakhunu as a buffer zone for any future rebellions from the east.

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<sup>519</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 186.

<sup>520</sup> Robinson explains that the Bambara fled Nioro and regrouped in the south where there was fertile land and continued to raid from the south. He wrote, “The Massassi, taking advantage of their knowledge of the terrain, the partial dispersion of the Umarians and the element of surprise, launched a revolt in late May, first in the northern and subsequently in the central and southern zones.” See; Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 187-188.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> Also written as, Bagkhunu, Bagunu and Bakunu. This territory was east of Karta. It was also a frontier of Masina. See; Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 43, 215.

It is here that Tāl received a response to the letters he sent earlier, in the guise of the army of Masina. Tāl's sudden rise to power, and his expansion into Bakhunu, had put Aḥmad III on alert. The capital of Masina, Ḥamdullāhi, was nearly four hundred miles away and much of its sphere of influence and trading relationships remained around the Middle Niger valley. Yet Masina had also previously attempted to conquer Bakhunu and continued to maintain strategic and commercial interests in this territory.<sup>525</sup> For this reason, Aḥmad III sent his army to monitor Tāl's actions, and prevent him from expanding further east.

In the *Bayān*, Tāl expressed his surprise in witnessing the army of Aḥmad III so far from Ḥamdullāhi. He sent a messenger to the commander of this army, ‘Abdullāh, asking him to send an envoy to Nioro.<sup>526</sup> ‘Abdullāh, according to Tāl, sent three people, including Aḥmad ibn Sa‘īd. When they arrived in Nioro, Tāl treated them with respect and gave them many gifts.<sup>527</sup> Not knowing what their intentions were, he described them as extremely happy with the hospitality they received in Nioro. At least according to the *Bayān*, at this point, Tāl did not realize that Aḥmad III's army was in Bakhunu because of his actions.

He soon realized this, after the envoy left Nioro. On their return back to Bakhunu, the soldiers of Masina made an alliance with the Jawara, who while weakened, still posed a threat to Tāl. From Tāl's perspective an alliance between the Jawara and Masina would threaten his power in Karta.<sup>528</sup> Though Tāl and Aḥmad III exchanged correspondence in order to mitigate this conflict, there was no compromising on this point. Consequently, he struck first. He sent several contingents of his army to Kassekeri, a territory north of Bakhunu. The army of Masina was now stationed in this

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid. 215.

<sup>526</sup> BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 2b and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 76.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 189.

location. After a long drawn out battle, Tāl was able to defeat the army of Masina.<sup>529</sup> One important point that Tāl notes is that he ensured that the women of Masina, who presumably came along with the army, were treated with respect. They were not taken as captive. Further he made it quite explicit, in contrast to the normative actions during warfare, he gave prisoners and everyone else freedom.<sup>530</sup>

The presence of the army of Masina in Bakhunu in 1856 foreshadowed an impending conflict. By sending his army, Aḥmad III was asserting his power in an area that seemed to have only a tenuous relationship with Ḥamdullāhi. For Tāl these were newly conquered and conquerable lands. In the face of increasing rebellions, he found it justifiable to conquer Bakhunu, and establish his authority.

### **Islamic Authority in Eastern Senegambia**

During the conflict over Bakhunu, Aḥmad III dispatched two letters outlining why he had sent his army. In these letters, he not only claimed authority over this territory, but he also claimed authority over Karta.<sup>531</sup> Tāl received the first letter in Nioro, and then received the second letter in Sabusire, west of Nioro.<sup>532</sup> Both of these letters were similar in tone, except in the first letter the ruler of Masina added a single additional line. In this line, he explicitly stated that the Tijānī *shaykh* could not legitimately remain in Nioro and therefore commanded him to leave.<sup>533</sup> The letters underscored Aḥmad III's unwavering stance that Tāl did not have jurisdiction over Karta and

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<sup>529</sup> BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 3b and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 78.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Aḥmad III sent these letters in either 1855 or 1856. I have not been able to locate them independently from Tāl reproduction in the *Bayān*.

<sup>532</sup> He probably received this second letter while he was preparing his army to confront the French in Medine. See the previous chapter.

<sup>533</sup> BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 6a, and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 84.

Bakhunu. He argued that Tāl was undermining his authority over these territories by illegally occupying them.<sup>534</sup>

Tāl only responded to the first letter by explaining that these territories had come under his protection. He argued that prior to his conquest, this territory had never come under the protection of any legitimate Islamic ruler. Thus the claim that Aḥmad III had authority over this territory was tenuous at best, and was simply based on pretension.<sup>535</sup> Ultimately, Tāl considered his actions against Bakhunu as legally justifiable, because he attacked this territory only in order to put an end to a rebellion.

He further justified his actions by placing the people of Bakhunu into three distinct categories. It is noteworthy that his argument ignored whether Aḥmad III had historical connections with Bakhunu. Instead he based his argument in legal terms. By analyzing and categorizing Bakhunu's population in a specific way, he rationalized that it was not under Islamic authority.<sup>536</sup> The first group that he identified were Bambara who were nonbelievers and polytheists. In his description, the Bambara “worship idols in the place of God.”<sup>537</sup> The second, which he expended a great deal of effort on explaining, were people he identified as *muḥāribūn*. The third group he identified as a population of oppressed Muslims. This group of people were “under the authority of the polytheist Bambara and others.”<sup>538</sup>

Though the term *muḥāribūn* (sing. *muḥārib*) defines a group engaged in warfare, in legal terms, it also carries much broader meaning. The term includes people that act as bandits or highway robbers, or also those that unjustly tax people and make “those things forbidden licit.”<sup>539</sup> The

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 12a, and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 98.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid. 12a, and 99.

*muḥāribūn* are also those people who seize the property of both “Muslims and polytheists unjustly.”<sup>540</sup> In West Africa this term has a long genealogy. Tāl conceptualized and used this term by drawing on the work of the fifteenth century Saharan scholar, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī, as well as the legal works of the elites of Sokoto.<sup>541</sup>

There is a specific reason for this. Though Tāl identified and categorized a group of people in Bakhunu as “polytheists,” the *muḥāribūn* were different. These were people that pronounced the *shahāda* or testament of faith. In theory, this would bring them into the fold of Islam. Yet, by analyzing Tāl’s argument, it will become clear that he did not treat these people as Muslims. Their actions had put them outside of the fold of Islam and therefore he argued that it was justifiable to attack them.<sup>542</sup> What is significant is that the legal categories that Tāl deployed legitimized the precise actions that he took.

Even if this was not the case, however, he still argued that he would have been justified in attacking Bakhunu. Drawing on the work of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio, he argued that a territory must be judged according to the religion of its ruler.<sup>543</sup> In the case of Bakhunu, he explained that “the ruler is either clearly a nonbeliever (*kāfir ṣarīḥ*) or a *muḥārib* or between the two of them. He only has pretensions of Islam.”<sup>544</sup> Consequently in relation to Bakhunu, Tāl argued that “it is under this

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī was a 16<sup>th</sup> century Saharan scholar whose legal opinions on *jihād* and unbelief became important in West Africa. His imprint is found on many of Tāl’s arguments in the *Bayān*. For more on al-Maghīlī see; ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz ‘Abd-Allah Batrān, “A Contribution to the Biography of Shaikh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd-al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad Al-Maghīlī, Al-Tilimsānī in JAH, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1973), 381-394 and John Hunwick, “Al Maghīlī and the Jews of Tuwāt: The Demise of a Community” in *Sudia Islamica*, No. 16 (1985), 155-183.

<sup>542</sup> In the *Bayān*, Tāl does not define who he considers as *muḥāribūn*, but it is more than likely it was the Jawara who were rebelling against him. Though they were Muslim, he found it justified to attack them.

<sup>543</sup> The work is entitled *Najm al-Ikhwān*, and is cited by Tāl in BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 12a, and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 98.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 12b and 99.

characteristic [unbelief] that we found this land, and therefore there was no valid reason to deter us from the obligation of *jihād* against its people.”<sup>545</sup>

The legal point he was making was that he was justified in attacking Bakhunu in two senses. On the one hand, the majority of the population were nonbelievers who maintained hostilities against him. They also oppressed a minority Muslim population. On the other hand, even if there were no hostilities, the ruler of Bakhunu was a nonbeliever (either a clear nonbeliever or a *muḥārib*) and therefore in legal terms, Tāl argued that it was a non-Muslim land. By implication it was not under Islamic authority, in contrast to what Aḥmad III claimed.

To further explain the legal basis for his actions, Tāl indicated the obligation to fight against someone who was both unambiguously a nonbeliever, and also maintained hostilities against Muslims. In this respect, he wrote “it is an obligation to fight against him according to the consensus of Muslim scholars.”<sup>546</sup> The basis of this argument, as Tāl cites, is the Qur’anic verse “and fight the polytheists as long as they fight against you.”<sup>547</sup> Citing a difference of opinion among Muslim scholars, Tāl argued that this verse was not only applicable during the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Rather in any circumstance where there were hostilities “the obligation of this command is valid so long as there are polytheists.”<sup>548</sup> In the nineteenth century, from Tāl’s perspective, by definition, polytheism was a marker of hostilities. In other words, by default, Muslims and polytheist were in a “state of war.” As a consequence, this was one reason Tāl argued that he was justified in declaring war.

After outlining the legal obligation to fight nonbelievers, he turned his attention to the *muḥāribūn*. Like in the case of nonbelievers, he argued that “as for the *muḥārib*, the obligation to

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Chapter 9 verse 36 quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>548</sup> The full discussion and the legal proofs he provides for this opinion are found in *ibid.*, 12b and 99-100.

fight against him is also clear.”<sup>549</sup> With reference to Bakhunu, Tāl defined this group as Muslims. But the problem of *ḥirāba*, those actions that define a *muḥārib* [warlord, bandit, rebel], take precedence over religious affiliation. For this reason, he argued “this is certainly the case if he engages in *ḥirāba* [warmongering, banditry, rebellion], even if he is otherwise not a nonbeliever.”<sup>550</sup> Tāl’s point is that unbelief and *ḥirāba* are two distinct states of being. Both of them constitute valid reasons for the declaration of *jihād*. Significantly, in the latter case this was even if, by definition, a person was a Muslim.

This was a controversial position, and therefore Tāl took care to explain the basis of this opinion. He first began with a question. He asked “what is the legal standing of someone who “combines both: he is both a manifest nonbeliever, as well as a *ḥirābi*?”<sup>551</sup> Again, the quotation indicates that these are two separate categories of people. For the sake of argument, Tāl raised a question about how to deal with a person that combines both traits. Predictably, he argued that it was justifiable to fight against someone in this category on two levels. First, he wrote “you fight against such a person for his nonbelief and his actions that underscore nonbelief.”<sup>552</sup> Then you “fight against him because he is a *muḥārib*, who cuts the roads from the Muslims [a reference to a bandit].”<sup>553</sup>

In order to make it clear that his opinion was rooted in the broader Islamic legal tradition, he drew on a range of older works. For instance, he cited from the *Mukhtaṣar al-far‘ī* of Ibn al-Ḥājjib who wrote: “It is unanimous to fight against them.”<sup>554</sup> In the commentary of al-Ughūrī, which itself is a commentary on the *Mukhtaṣar*, he noted “we take from Ibn Shās in his book *al-Jawāhir*

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 12b and 99.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid., 12b and 100.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* This was an important work in the mālikī school of jurisprudence. See Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 207-208.

‘we do not stop *jihād* for fear of the pillaging of brigands, because it is more important to fight against them.’<sup>555</sup> Tāl further cited from al-Ughūrī , who explained “and Ibn Sha‘bān said that highway robbers in spreading fear on the roads are generally more deserving of *jihād* than the nonbelievers of Byzantium because of the dangers that they pose.”<sup>556</sup> There is a separate issue here in how intertextuality functions in the Islamic legal traditions. In this case, Tāl decontextualized the specific time and place within which these rulings were made (for instance against the Byzantine empire), in order to draw the general principle. That principle was that Muslim jurists have already discussed the permissibility to fight against the *muḥāribūn*.

The central point, based on the *Mālikī* school of Islamic jurisprudence, was that it is important, at times even more important, to fight against the *muḥāribūn* over nonbelievers.<sup>557</sup> This returns us back to the initial classification that Tāl deployed in how he understood the population of Bakhunu. In essence, he was justified in fighting against these people on two fronts. On the one hand, he was justified in fighting against the Bambara because they were nonbelievers, and this was a legitimate cause in itself. On the other hand, there was another group of people who were distinct and separate from the Bambara, who he identified as *muḥāribūn*. In the context of Bakhunu, however, he classified them as Muslims. Yet he argued that the general principle still holds whether they were Muslim or not. Fighting them took precedence over fighting nonbelievers.

The implication of his legal reasoning was that it legitimized stripping the protection that Islam would have otherwise afforded a person from the hands of other Muslims. This stance was quite a departure from his opinions in *Tadhkirat al-Ghāfilīn*, where he unambiguously problematized Muslims who declared war against other Muslims. Curiously, the legal reason for Sokoto’s war

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<sup>555</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* Al-Ughūrī was an important sixteenth century jurist of the *Mālikī* school, who lived in Cairo, see; Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 196.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> Tal draws on numerous other works in the *Mālikī* school to support this position.

against Bornu, which Tāl heavily criticized, was the same as the legal reasoning he deployed to justify his actions against Bakhunu.<sup>558</sup> The issue of *ḥirāba* made it possible for Tāl to legally categorize a group of people in a particular way. This was a slippery slope. It opened the door for Tāl to engage with people as though they were nonbelievers, even if they claimed to be Muslims. This is a point I will return to, because it underscores eventually how Tāl categorized Aḥmad III.

In a nutshell, for Tāl, Bakhunu and Karta were non-Muslim lands. In order to prove this, he deployed a complex legal argument. This was premised on the fact that he considered the majority of the population to be nonbelievers, and the ruler was also a nonbeliever. The Muslims who were in this location were of two types. The first group were oppressed Muslims. The second group, Tāl categorized as *muḥāribūn*. As a consequence, it was justifiable, according to him, to fight against them. The implication of his legal discussion was ultimately that Aḥmad III was in the wrong. He did not have authority over this region and therefore his claims had no legitimacy.

### **The Case of Sinsani and Segu**

After the devastating loss at Medine, the scholar turned warrior began planning an attack against the Bambara kingdom of Segu.<sup>559</sup> This warrior state dominated the Middle Niger valley and was much more powerful than Karta. Though Tāl had clearly directed his *jihād* against nonbelievers, who were hostile to him, it is unclear whether he had initially planned to attack Segu. In the late 1830s the Fama of Segu had imprisoned Tāl, but it is unlikely that this event influenced his decision.<sup>560</sup> Moreover, Robinson notes that while he was quelling Jawara resistance, his army

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<sup>558</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 75.

<sup>559</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>560</sup> After Muḥammad Bello died in 1838, Tāl travelled to the Middle Niger valley. He met with Aḥmad Lobbo in Masina. He then passed through Segu on his way to Futa Jallon, where the Fama had him jailed. See; Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 111.

entered Segovian territory. Though he installed a garrison on this territory, he wrote to the Fama, Torokoro Mari, who he maintained cordial relations with. He assured this king that he did not have an interest in Segovian territory.<sup>561</sup>

Torokoro Mari ruled until 1858, after which Tāl's relationship with Segu transformed. Robinson explains "by about 1858 the good relations were over. Bina Ali acceded to power, stoked up the embers of Karunka Jawara's revolt, and put the beleaguered jihādists in Nioro on the defensive. It was to secure Karta's defences once and for all, as well as to achieve the larger goal of a new base on the Middle Niger, that Umar embarked on the Segu campaign in 1859."<sup>562</sup> His decision to attack Segu was based on pragmatic concerns. His position in eastern Senegal had become weakened as the French had mobilized against him. Consequently, with a growing army and numerous dependents, many of whom had migrated to Karta, he needed access to new agricultural land to support this larger community. More importantly, he learned that the rebellions he was facing in Karta were supported by Segu. Segu's actions against him solicited a response. By providing assistance to rebels, Segu had become an enemy state, and therefore a legitimate target of Tāl's *jihād*.

In 1859 Tāl, who had spent the year before heavily recruiting both in Bundu and Futa Toro, began his march east. His superior weapons, including canons that he had seized from the French gave him decisive victories against many of Segu's client states.<sup>563</sup> He then marched into the Segovian heartland. One of the most important battles happened at Woitala on the left bank of the Niger River. With 25,000 soldiers, Tāl defeated 35,000 Segovian soldiers.<sup>564</sup> The victory brought

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>563</sup> For a discussion of how he acquired these canons from the French, and how they gave Tal and his army a strategic advantage see; Yves Saint-Martin, "L'artillerie d'El Hadj Omar et d'Ahmadou" in BIFAN, B (1965).

<sup>564</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 240.

many of the surviving *tonjon* leaders to give allegiance to Tāl. With the majority of his enemy's soldiers either defeated or having defected, Tāl was now within striking distance of the capital, Segou. In just over a year after leaving Nioro, Tāl had taken over the Middle Niger valley.

After his victory in Woitala, Tāl received three subsequent letters from Aḥmad III. He received them in Sinsani (Sansading), further east of Woitala on the northern bank of the Niger River. His army had marched to this location and to his surprise again faced the army of Masina. The immediate context of the letters was that after the loss of Woitala, Ali Munzu, the Fama of Segou, gave his allegiance to Aḥmad III. He had allegedly converted to Islam, and therefore his allegiance brought him under the protection of Masina. Aḥmad III explained this to Tāl by writing “they have converted to Islam and destroyed their idols. They have repented and turned to God, and they have given us their allegiance. I wrote this letter to inform you of this.”<sup>565</sup>

The threat that Tāl now posed had brought these former warring parties into an alliance.<sup>566</sup> Aḥmad III wrote “we heard that you have installed yourself in Sansandi, even though you must be aware that they have given allegiance to us. You also know that they are our subjects.”<sup>567</sup> The main message in these letters was that Segou, and its client states were under the protection of a Muslim polity. Therefore, Tāl had to put down his arms, end his hostilities, and accept that this territory now belonged to Masina. By extension, Aḥmad III also made it quite clear that he had authority over the Middle Niger valley. Like in the case of Bakhunu and Karta, a few years earlier, he demanded that Tāl retreat from what he considered his territory.

Unlike the case of Bakhunu and Karta, however, Aḥmad III framed his argument around two interrelated points. He first cited a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet in the context of a conflict that

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<sup>565</sup> BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 11b, and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 96.

<sup>566</sup> Aḥmad III acknowledged that Masina had a historically rooted conflict with Segou. But he argued that now that Ali Manzu had converted, this no longer was an issue. See; *Ibid.*

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*

he had, where he is reported to have said “I was commanded to fight people until they witnessed that there is no other god except God.”<sup>568</sup> By quoting this *ḥadīth*, Aḥmad III was arguing that in the occasions where the Prophet fought against people, he did so until they accepted Islam, or more precisely were no longer a threat because they had submitted. The general principle that Aḥmad III explained was not whether it was permitted to fight against the Bambara of Segou. Instead, he argued that Tāl could not legitimately maintain hostilities against the Bambara because they had “witnessed that there is no other god except God.”<sup>569</sup>

Adding to the alleged conversion of Ali Munzu, he argued a related point in order to assert his authority in the face of the growing threat of Tāl. With Tāl becoming the dominant political actor in the Middle Niger valley, Aḥmad III explained that Tāl’s conquest in the region was illegitimate. In his fifth letter to Tāl, when Aḥmad III sent his army again—when the two armies were facing each other on the Niger River, he made his boldest statement. He gave Tāl an ultimatum. Tāl had to either give him his allegiance, and therefore submit to his rule, or he would have to fight against him.<sup>570</sup> In Aḥmad III’s conceptualization, he was following precedent in Islamic law. He understood himself as a legitimate ruler of Masina, an Islamic polity, and therefore his authority stretched over all the other polities which also gave him allegiance.

He based this interpretation on two *ḥadīths* attributed to the Prophet, where he explained that it was not possible to have two rulers in a single geographic area.<sup>571</sup> For Aḥmad III, when Tāl’s army marched into the Middle Niger Valley, it signified that he was usurping political authority and was establishing himself as another ruler. As a consequence, Aḥmad III accused Tāl of spreading discord, and demanded he take his fight elsewhere. Since, legally, there could not be

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<sup>568</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 13b and 101.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 13b and 103.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*

two rulers in a single location, and Aḥmad III considered himself to be the legitimate Islamic authority in the Middle Niger valley, by fighting against Tāl, he understood himself to be obeying the Prophet's command.<sup>572</sup>

In response to Aḥmad III's argument that Sansandi was under his authority Tāl explained "our entrance into Sansandi did not provide Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad a valid reason to send his troops against us, or support the polytheists against us, because when we entered it, the ruler was a nonbeliever."<sup>573</sup> Like in his earlier argument about Bakhunu, Tāl once again drew from a host of legal works to establish his claim that the legal definition of a territory is based on the belief of its ruler.<sup>574</sup> The reason why he considered the ruler of Sansandi a nonbeliever was that he claimed to have found idols in this polity and seized them as a proof against what he considered to be Aḥmad III's fabrications. The implication was that as a non-Muslim polity, it therefore could not be under the authority of Ahmad III.

Tāl claimed, however, even if the ruler of Sinsani was a Muslim, this polity would still not be under Aḥmad III's authority. The reason, Tāl argued, was that "neither Aḥmad III himself, nor his envoys, nor his subjects ever entered Sansandi" in order to convert the population.<sup>575</sup> The only contact Aḥmad III had with this polity was in his attempt to conquer it. Tāl argued "Aḥmad III only sent his soldiers to conquer Sansandi, but the population in this city repelled his soldiers and fought back."<sup>576</sup> In other words, this polity had refused Aḥmad III's attempts to conquer it, and therefore he could not legitimately claim authority over it—he did not have control over it.

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 11b and 97.

<sup>574</sup> For instance, he quoted from Bayān wujūb of 'Uthmān dan Fodio. In this work dan Fodio wrote "we judge a land according to its ruler, without any disagreement [among the scholars]. If the ruler is Muslim, then the land is a Muslim land. If the ruler is a nonbeliever then the land is considered a non-Muslim land, and it is obligatory to flee from it," quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 11b-12a and 98.

With specific reference to the capital, Segou, Tāl also employed a similar argument. At the end of the fifth letter, Aḥmad III explained “know that the Bambara have repented and turned to God. They have broken their idols and have constructed mosques, in accordance with what God demands of them. And He only commanded us to fight in order to accomplish this objective, as is well known.”<sup>577</sup> From Aḥmad III’s perspective, the Bambara in Segou were Muslims. He claimed that they had broken their idols, an indication they had abandoned their former religious practice. Further as a sign of their commitment to Islam, they built mosques.

From Tāl’s perspective, Aḥmad III’s characterization of Segou was simply untrue. He argued that this was “because there remains proof to refute what he said.”<sup>578</sup> This proof was that the idols, according to Tāl, that the Bambara had destroyed were still present. They stood as a “proof that made apparent his lie.”<sup>579</sup> This was, however, not the only proof that placed their conversion into doubt. In contrast to the claim of Aḥmad III, Tāl claimed that “there were no mosques.”<sup>580</sup> Moreover, he argued that if the Bambara had indeed converted the onus was on them to end their aggression against Tāl. If they continued to send their soldiers against Tāl, then their actions abrogated the meaning of the *ḥadīth* that Aḥmad III had used to justify his own claims. Ultimately, like in the case of Bakhunu and Karta, Tāl maintained that his actions were justified, and Aḥmad III’s claim to authority did not have any merit.

### **Mastery, Islamic knowledge and Authority**

Tāl’s specific arguments on political authority and legitimacy were based on his mastery over Islamic knowledge. Conversely, Aḥmad’s III’s claims to authority were based on the political status, and territory, he inherited from his father. It is the lack of Aḥmad III’s Islamic knowledge

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 15a and 105.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

that became Tāl's sustained point of attack. By painting Aḥmad III as ignorant in matters of Islamic law and interpretation, Tāl legitimized his actions through his ability to draw on a range of source material. He placed his own opinions and ideas within a framework of established legal discourse, which he argued Aḥmad III could not do. In this context he accused Aḥmad III of misquoting the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, and attacked him for his inability to comprehend basic Islamic concepts and ideas.

In the letters that Aḥmad III sent to Tāl, he argued that he had legitimacy over territory, which Tāl had infringed upon. In his view, Tāl was an outsider, and regardless of what the basis of his conflicts were with these diverse populations, he was not authorized to declare war on them. The reason was that they were under the protection of an established, historic, Islamic polity. For these reasons, Ahmad III labelled Tāl as an aggressor, who was also creating discord among Muslims.

There was no denying that Tāl had disrupted the traditional political economy of the Middle Niger valley. It was also undeniable that he was an outsider—he had no historic ties to the region. Yet he was able to still construct an argument that placed him as a legitimate Islamic ruler, and many people responded to this claim. This legitimacy transcended any local or historic claims to authority in the region. It was based on Tāl's mastery over Islamic knowledge.

Tāl certainly did not consider that Aḥmad III was a legitimate Islamic ruler, and therefore under no circumstances would he give him allegiance. In order to explain this point, he quoted, at length, a letter that Aḥmad al-Bakkāy, the representative of the Kunta family, had sent to Aḥmad III a few years earlier. Like in the case of Tāl, Aḥmad III demanded that al-Bakkāy submit to his authority. Like Tāl, al-Bakkāy was a Muslim scholar. He argued that he could not submit to the authority of someone who was not learned in the Islamic religious sciences, and who he also considered as morally corrupt.

His letter began with a scathing rebuke of Aḥmad III. After receiving Aḥmad III's demand for allegiance, al-Bakkāy wrote "I will not give you allegiance because you do not belong to the community of Muḥammad."<sup>581</sup> The claim al-Bakkāy made, which Tāl also shared, was that Aḥmad III was not in fact a Muslim ruler. Though al-Bakkāy did not explain precisely what defined a Muslim ruler, this categorization was enough to highlight that he could not give Aḥmad III allegiance. In the context of the nineteenth century, this would be akin to giving allegiance, both politically and morally, to a non-Muslim ruler. In this regard, al-Bakkāy himself noted that "it is not permissible for a person who belongs to the community of Muhammad...to submit to a person who is not a part of this community."<sup>582</sup> There was a marked difference between entering into a reciprocal relationship with a non-Muslim ruler, which was customary in West Africa, to offering full submission to that ruler.

After declaring that Aḥmad III was outside of the community of believers, he further highlighted how absurd it would be to give him allegiance. He noted that Masina had no jurisdiction over Timbuktu, the center where the Kunta had established their authority. Further, he explained that he did not give allegiance to more worthy rulers. For instance, he wrote that he did not submit to the authority of "our Master the *sharīf* 'Abd al-Raḥmān nor the Turkish Sultan 'Abd al-Majīd."<sup>583</sup> Here al-Bakkāy posits a binary between rulers in West Africa and those in the broader Islamic world. He did not give allegiance to one of the rulers of Morocco nor to the caliph in Istanbul.

In creating this dichotomy, he then asked with evident racial undertones, how he could accept the authority of a "black [*sūdāni*] Fulani, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad."<sup>584</sup> In following such a person, he

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 14a and 103.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 14a and 104.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

would be “misled and not among those who are guided.”<sup>585</sup> Al-Bakkāy’s reference to Aḥmad III as a both a *sūdānī* and a Fulani rest on historically rooted racial idioms in the Sahara.<sup>586</sup> Later in the letter, he explained that “I would never follow or be under the authority of a non-Arab.”<sup>587</sup> He tied being an *‘ajam* (non-Arab) with being ignorant. The reason for this depiction of non-Arabs, and in this case the Fulani specifically, was that he argued they were easily duped. In this regard, he wrote “if one among them believes that he speaks to God the Most High directly, they do not censor him. If he says the Mahdi is among them, they believe it. If someone says that the twelfth caliph of the Quraysh is among them, they will also believe this.”<sup>588</sup> Given al-Bakkāy’s manifest ethnocentrism it is surprising that Tāl, a “*sūdānī*,” a “Fulani” and a non-Arab himself, quoted so freely from this letter. However he overlooked these racial undertones, in order to demonstrate through the pen of another scholar that Aḥmad III did not have authority. The reason for this lack of authority was his ignorance in matters of religion.

Apart from his racial attitudes, al-Bakkāy also pointed to Aḥmad III’s conduct and moral character, and this was the most important point that Tāl also emphasized. From all the reasons that al-Bakkāy gave for not giving allegiance to Aḥmad III, he highlighted his alleged moral corruption. In this regard, he wrote,

Any evil is better than following you, and every good action becomes evil by following you. You belittle the esteemed, and you befriend the lowly. You alienate the learned [*fiṭṭahā*] and you cherish the foolish [*suffahā*]. You honor children, while you debase the parents. You give preference to the children of prostitutes, while you humiliate the children of virtuous women. So how can I submit to your authority, when your own subjects detest you?<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> See; Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1900*, (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>587</sup> BNF Arabe 5605, fol. 14a, and Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 104. Part of this ethnocentrism is that al-Bakkāy notes Aḥmad III does not have authority over any other group except Fulanis. Moreover, he explains that he can only follow those who he considers to be saints, or savants in the religion like his own father or his grandfather. In was within this hierarchy, both in racial terms, but also in terms of religious learning that Aḥmad III fell short.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid. The idea of the twelfth caliph of the Quraysh was reference to Aḥmad Lobbo, who claimed this title and built his authority through it.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 14b and 105.

The moral failings, according to al-Bakkāy of Aḥmad III were quite clear. From his perspective, his greatest weakness was his inversion of what was considered normative social conduct. In this sense, he distanced himself from virtue and he therefore could not be considered a Muslim ruler.

In quoting this letter at length, Tāl asked the “just reader” to look closely at it. The key points that al-Bakkāy highlights and that Tāl probes through the *Bayān* were that Aḥmad III was not a just ruler. He did not follow the normative conventions of Islamic law. This was for two reasons. One, he only followed his own desires so that he could maintain his power. Secondly, he was not a scholar, and therefore ignorant. Consequently, he could not justify his actions—supporting the Bambara against Tāl—with reference to Islamic law and legal practice.

The entire first part of the *Bayān* is a refutation of the arguments that Aḥmad III’s presented in his letters. To frame his arguments, Aḥmad III quoted extensively from the Qur’an, *ḥadīth* and the interpretation of other Muslim scholars. Yet Tāl argued all of Aḥmad III’s citations worked against him. In other words, Aḥmad III’s ignorance led him to quote from the Islamic religious cannon without really understanding that his quotations were an indictment on his own conduct and actions.

There are several examples in the *Bayān* of how Tāl uses Aḥmad III’s quotations to demonstrate that in actuality they worked against him. Two examples are sufficient to both explain how Aḥmad III employed quotations, and Tāl’s rebuttal of them. In the second letter that Aḥmad III sent to Tāl in Sabusire, Tāl explained that he began the letter with “Praise be to God, who has guided us to true religion and the straight path. He made us followers of the clear religion, and the protectors of His perfect way.”<sup>590</sup> After quoting the opening lines of Aḥmad III’s letter, Tāl

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<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 5b and 83.

ridiculed him. In response to these lines, he wrote “these are favors that he is satiated with, which God has not given to him. These are the longings of the caprice of his own self, that God did not, and will not consent to.”<sup>591</sup> For Tāl the language and expressions in Aḥmad III’s letter did not reflect the reality of his actions. Though Aḥmad III may have thought he was following God’s command, according to Tāl this was simply not true. In this regard Tāl further explained, “the reality of his conduct is that he made licit what God has prohibited, he supports innovation (*bida’*) and he suppresses the *sunna*.”<sup>592</sup> This was Tāl’s proof to demonstrate that Aḥmad III’s actions were significantly different from what he claimed in his letters.

In quoting from this letter again, he explained that Aḥmad III wrote “we seek refuge in Him against any opinion that is misguided, for having vain desires that bring reproach, and for making false claims.”<sup>593</sup> Tāl took these statements of Aḥmad III and juxtaposed them to his actions. Despite these claims Tāl wrote, “yet he allowed his troops to join the polytheists against Muslims, and considered it to permissible to fight them. This is from an opinion that is misguided and is not compatible with faith.”<sup>594</sup> Tāl quoted his own words against him by highlighting that his opinions led him to actions that were against Islamic norms. Indeed, Tāl was not concerned with the larger context of why the ruler of Masina sent his army against him. By using legal categories, he simplified complex social interactions, and then used these categories to construct an argument against Aḥmad III.

In this letter, Aḥmad III also cited the Qur’anic verse “This is My straight path, so follow it.”<sup>595</sup> In response to this quotation, Tāl gave a lengthy explanation. He wrote “This citation stems from

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 6a and 84.

his ignorance. It is an argument he uses because of his satisfaction with himself and his family. But in reality it is a proof against him.”<sup>596</sup> Tāl argued that Aḥmad III considered that he was on the right path because his father and grandfather were scholars. Yet the meaning of the quoted verse, Tāl argued, was a proof against him. In arguing against Aḥmad III’s claims, Tāl wrote “he turned from the path of truth when he permitted spilling the blood of Muslims, while protecting the blood of polytheists. This is abundantly clear.”<sup>597</sup> In the same manner, throughout the *Bayān*, Tāl repeatedly refuted Aḥmad III’s use of the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* to support his claims.

Later in the *Bayān*, Tāl summarized and specified the reason why he considered that his actions were justified, and why Aḥmad III had no legitimacy. He argued without any reservation,

...He is ignorant. He surrounds himself with the ignorant. He takes as his scribe not only someone who is ignorant, but the most ignorant of them. He takes as teachers those who are ignorant. His messengers are also all ignorant. The simple reason for this is that he has attained the peak of ignorance. He can neither exit nor escape from his ignorance. This is apparent in his citations that become a proof against him, and how he misinterprets the Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet. His ignorance is also apparent in how he considers the prohibited, not only permissible, but in his thought and speech something that is obligatory. Look closely at his letters and determine for yourself the truth of what he claims.<sup>598</sup>

The central issue was not only that Aḥmad III was ignorant, but he surrounded himself with the ignorant. This was an indictment against all his advisors and the court of Masina more generally. In juxtaposition, Tāl demonstrated his legal prowess and mastery over the Islamic tradition. Indeed, Tāl’s judicious citations and use of over fifty works in the *Bayān* demonstrated this point. Tāl’s arguments in this work highlighted that mastery over Islamic knowledge was inextricably linked to power, and therefore was also the basis of authority. For this reason, Tāl’s central argument was that his actions in the Middle Niger valley were legitimate because of his mastery over Islamic knowledge.

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

### **Unbelief through Association: The Basis for War with Masina**

Tāl was not satisfied in only demonstrating that Aḥmad III was ignorant and had no legitimacy as a Muslim ruler. Instead, he further declared that Aḥmad III was in fact a non-Muslim. Since he had earlier argued that a territory had to be judged according to the beliefs of its ruler, this had serious implications for how he understood the polity of Masina. If Aḥmad III was a non-Muslim, by extension Masina had to be treated as a non-Muslim polity as well. Furthermore, since Masina maintained hostilities against the Tijānī *shaykh*, it was also a legitimate target for his *jihād*.

Tāl did not categorize Aḥmad III as a non-Muslim strictly because Aḥmad III mobilized his army against him. In this case, he may have conceptualized his conflict against Aḥmad III as a *fitna* (trial). This would have indicated a temporary state of flux because of a legitimate dispute amongst Muslims. Instead, he considered that Aḥmad III had become a non-Muslim because he supported nonbelievers in their fight against him. As the previous sections highlighted, from Aḥmad III's perspective he considered the populations of Bakhunu and Segu as his subjects, and in the latter case, claimed that they had become Muslims. But through a complex set of legal reasoning, Tāl argued against this. From his perspective, the support that the ruler of Masina provided to these other groups was illegitimate and consequently took him out of the fold of Islam.

It is for this reason that the precise argument that Tāl deployed, in order to demonstrate that Aḥmad III did not have authority, was significant. He could then use that argument to pronounce that Aḥmad III had in fact renounced faith through his actions. In summarizing this point Tāl wrote, “since the moment God permitted us to declare *jihād* against His enemies, he [Aḥmad III] found reasons to fight against us, and to create circumstances that would hinder us from carrying out our objectives. For this he attempted to find support or a justification in the *sharī'a* of Muḥammad,

peace and blessings be upon him. But ultimately could not find anything.”<sup>599</sup> Therefore, Tāl noted since he could not find a legal reason for his actions, “we wish to demonstrate to you how Aḥmad in reality had abandoned Islam.”<sup>600</sup>

The question of Aḥmad III’s support for the Bambara and the legal implications it had were rooted in the concept of *muwālā*. Tāl placed great emphasis on this term, and he dedicated the majority of the second half of the *Bayān* to explain its legal ramifications. In a nutshell, the base definition of *muwālā* was solidarity, friendship or support. While the term carries a range of meanings, Tāl’s specific usage was rooted in how al-Maghīlī and ‘Uthmān dan Fodio understood and applied it.<sup>601</sup> Underscoring Tāl’s perspective was the importance of solidarity among believers. He drew on a plethora of Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīth* to explain that this was simply not a formality but an obligation of the religion.<sup>602</sup> Conversely he wrote, “you know well that abandoning the obligation of *muwālā* towards Muslims is a grave sin and a betrayal of the *sharī‘a*.”<sup>603</sup> With precise reference to Aḥmad III his support for the Bambara was inexcusable. He wrote “those who take the polytheists as affiliates, protect them, aid them and sustain them against

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid., 15b and 107.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> For more on al-Maghīlī see; footnote 38. For a discussion of this concept see; Mahibou and Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé*, 38-40. Tāl drew extensively from ‘Uthmān dan Fodio’s *Najm al-Ikhwān*. For more on this work see; *ibid.*, 208.

In the seventh chapter of this work dan Fodio provides an explanation about his war with the kings of Hausa, an explains the concept of *muwālā* with nonbelievers. It must be stated here that by drawing on dan Fodio’s work Tāl was also drawing on his authority in the region. One can surmise that as a scholar of note that the people of Masina revered, Tāl was showing that his opinions were not isolated. He was trying to frame his discussion in relation to Aḥmad III on the basis of how other scholars had dealt with a similar issue.

In this work, dan Fodio classifies *muwālā* with nonbelievers under three different rubrics. The first category highlighted the permissibility to establish relations of *muwālā* with nonbelievers. Here he stipulates this should be on the tongue and not with the heart because of the fear of them. The second category of *muwālā* with non-believers is a sin. To establish *muwālā* with nonbelievers and showing affection towards them with the intention of acquiring some wealth that they possess. The third category of *muwālā* he considers comprises nonbelief. This is to assist them against Muslims or support/protect them in something that is in contrary to the *sharī‘a*. See *ibid.*, 21a-22b and 121-124.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 17a-21b and 108-120.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid. 17b and 112-113.

Muslims is a nonbeliever like them.”<sup>604</sup> Again the question was not whether Aḥmad III had valid reasons to support the Bambara. Instead, by using the concept of *muwālā*, Tāl decontextualized his conflict with Aḥmad III, and only focused on the consequences of his actions.

Tāl did not explicitly express an intention to attack Masina in the *Bayān*. This was perhaps because he led his campaign against Ḥamdullāhi, several months after completing the work. In the intervening months, after Tāl had conquered Segou, Aḥmad III and his advisors changed their rhetoric towards him. They acknowledged that Aḥmad III was in the wrong, and also accepted that he did not have justification for mobilizing his army.<sup>605</sup> While Tāl acknowledged this apology, he also placed further demands on Masina. He is reported to have sent a messenger, Mamadu Cerno Alassa, to the court of Masina. The message was “you have acknowledged your wrong, you must pay reparations for attacks on Muslims and hand over the infidel king; if you refuse, we can submit the case to arbitration.”<sup>606</sup> Tāl’s message was quite clear. He wanted Masina to pay for all the damage it had inflicted by mobilizing its army against him. More importantly, he wanted Aḥmad III to hand over Ali Munzu to him. Though Aḥmad III and his court were moved by Tāl’s messenger, they ultimately rejected his demands.

They were heading to war. The substantial critique levelled against Aḥmad III in the *Bayān* had by now also circulated in Masina.<sup>607</sup> In addition, Tāl had numerous Tijānī disciples in this polity. He also had other disaffected groups who had called upon him to topple Aḥmad III.<sup>608</sup> With wide ranging support within Masina, and his own grievances against Aḥmad III, Tāl mobilized tens of thousands of soldiers to conquer Ḥamdullāhi. After several bloody battles, that saw the

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Quoted in Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 292.

<sup>607</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 294.

<sup>608</sup> Some of these groups had written to him as early as 1858. See; ibid., 287.

majority of Masina's army destroyed, the Fulani scholar from Halwar finally entered the capital on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1862.

Since he declared Masina a non-Muslim territory, Tāl dealt with the former ruling elites, who belonged to the Bari lineage with a heavy hand. He is reported to have executed several chiefs, and deported others.<sup>609</sup> He also confiscated property, and took as captive ex-combatants and prisoners, including Aja, the wife of Aḥmad III.<sup>610</sup> He then aggravated the situation further, when he resisted calls to appoint Balobbo, the uncle of Aḥmad III, as the ruler of Masina. Not only was Balobbo from the Bari, but he was also well respected.<sup>611</sup> Instead Tāl placed his own son, Aḥmad al-Kabīr, as the ruler of this territory.<sup>612</sup> His actions in Ḥamdullāhi lead to animosity among the former elites who had already fled the capital.<sup>613</sup>

The Fulani of Masina decided to revolt against this foreign rule, and what they viewed as injustices. Balobbo led the charge. He elicited the support of the Aḥmad al-Bekkāy.<sup>614</sup> From Timbuktu, al-Bekkāy had watched Tāl's advance into the Middle Niger valley with alarm. He had attempted to mediate a solution to the political crisis in Masina, and wrote Tāl several letters.<sup>615</sup> Tāl, however, rejected his advice, and instead attempted to extract tribute from the Kunta *shaykh*.<sup>616</sup> While the Kunta had disavowed *jihād* and had a long standing tradition of remaining politically neutral, the threat Tāl posed was too great. With the assistance of his nephew, Sidia, al-Bekkāy began coordinating with Balobbo and lead the revolt against Tāl.

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>612</sup> Sanankoua provides a list of several important Masinanke that accompanied Tāl into Ḥamdullāhi. See; Sanankoua, *Une Empire Peul*, 158.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>614</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 304.

<sup>615</sup> For some of this correspondence see; BNF Fonds Arabe 5259 fol. 66-70.

<sup>616</sup> Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 304-305.

After destroying several garrisons, the reconstituted army of Masina, with its Kunta allies finally laid siege to Ḥamdullāhi.<sup>617</sup> For seven months, this army bombarded the fortifications of the capital. When victory was within their reach, Tāl fled the city with a group of a hundred close relatives, disciples and bodyguards.<sup>618</sup> He had instructed his nephew, Tijānī Tāl, to recruit a new army in the hinterland of Masina in order to launch a counter attack. Yet it was too late. Balobbo and Sidia had caught up with the escapees. While most of those who fled surrendered, Tāl attempted to retreat.<sup>619</sup> The end for this intellectual, scholar and warrior came rather unceremoniously. On February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1864 there was an explosion. In the cave of Degembere, Tāl disappeared.

## Conclusion

In 1855, Tāl mobilized his army to conquer Karta. Though in the following year this conflict spilled over into the neighboring territory of Bakhunu, he did not expect to encounter the army of Masina. Karta had long terrorized the polities of Senegambia, including Futa Toro. Thus, in the midst of his *jihād*, Tāl had wide support for his actions, which he also considered legitimate. Aḥmad III, the ruler of Masina, considered that Karta and Bakhunu belonged to him. They were under his authority, and therefore he argued that Tāl's actions were illegitimate. When Tāl subsequently sent his army to conquer Segu, he once again faced the army of Masina. The arguments of Aḥmad III were similar. He had authority over specific territory that Tāl was infringing upon.

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 310.

Tāl refuted Aḥmad III's claims to authority in eastern Senegambia, and the Middle Niger valley. He captured the arguments Aḥmad III presented, and his rebuttal of those arguments in his *Bayān*. He argued that these territories had no historic connection to Masina. More importantly, through complex legal argumentation he explained that these lands were non-Muslim. Since they were hostile to Tāl, he was justified in taking military action against them.

In this chapter, I provided an analysis of the *Bayān* to highlight how Tāl used legal discourse to legitimize his actions. Tāl deconstructed many of the arguments that Aḥmad III presented to demonstrate that he did not in reality have authority. The central issue that he pointed to was Aḥmad III's ignorance. Tāl argued that Aḥmad III did not have a grasp of basic Islamic religious ideas. He also had no expertise in Islamic knowledge. Conversely, Tāl demonstrated his mastery over Islamic knowledge through citations, and intricate legal argumentation based on evidence. He linked his mastery over Islamic knowledge to his authority.

Further, Aḥmad III's ignorance led him to support nonbelievers in order to attain power. Though Ahmad III quoted from the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth* to justify his actions, Tāl continuously maintained that everything he quoted was simply a proof against him. His actions did not correspond to what he attempted to argue. More significantly, his actions—supporting nonbelievers—had serious ramifications. Though Aḥmad III may have had legitimate reasons for his actions, Tāl decontextualized those actions and accused him of unbelief. Through legal discourse, Tāl stripped him from the protection that Islam afforded him in conflicts against other Muslims. This paved the way for why Tāl ultimately considered it justifiable to attack another Muslim polity. In the process, he also found it justifiable to seize Aḥmad III's property, execute the ruling elites of Masina, and take others as captives.

## Conclusion

We do not know what happened during the final moments of al-ḥājj ‘Umar al-Fūtī Tāl’s life. In attempting to escape from his enemies that had pursued him, he entered a cave in Bandiangara, where he had stockpiled weapons and gun powder. And then, there was an explosion. Whether this was from his own doing, or whether it was an accident, we may never know. The consequences of it, however, were clear. His body was vaporized with the soot and smoke of burnt gun powder. But though disembodied, his religious, intellectual and political legacies continued on.

After Tāl’s death, his eldest son, Aḥmad al-Kabīr spent the next two decades quelling rebellions, and fighting rivals, including his brothers. Though Tāl had appointed him as his *khalīfa*, al-Kabīr did not command the authority that his father once held. Unlike his father, al-Kabīr did not manage to demonstrate similar scholarly aptitude or establish his significance as a representative of Tijāniyya. For the entirety of his tenure, his power remained limited to only Segou.

While the story of al-Kabīr remains to be written, what is certain, however, is that a major part of Tāl’s intellectual legacy slipped from his hands. He had been the custodian of his father’s library, which he also continuously added to. This library disappeared from West Africa. The French colonial official, Louis Archinard, seized it, when he conquered Segou in 1890. This library is now known as the Bibliothèque ‘Umarienne de Ségou, and it preserves much of the Islamic intellectual tradition of West Africa and the Middle East. Numbering over four thousand manuscripts, it contains important works on the Islamic religious sciences, but also chronicles,

letters, and notes. It has remained in Paris for over a hundred years, as part of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Ignored and understudied, it forcefully represents the emphasis Tāl placed on Islamic learning, and his position as a scholar.

In this study, I approached Tāl first and foremost as a Muslim scholar. I investigated his life through a select reading of his intellectual production. In this sense, I attempted to tell a story from his perspective, as his life unfolded over the course of the nineteenth century. By centering my analysis on Tāl's own words, and in approaching him as a scholar, my study has departed significantly from previous scholarship on him.

More specifically, relying extensively on external sources, scholars have generally understood him as a political figure, who used his spiritual authority to mobilize tens of thousands of people. I explained some of the significant shortcoming in approaches that only study him as a state builder or a Sufi *shaykh*. Further, I argued that it is important to reinterpret Tāl's *jihād*, away from approaches that inextricably link Islam, *jihād* and violence together. Instead, I explained that it is important to focus closely at the historically contingent aspects of his life in order to analyze why he took up arms. This is even more significant if we take into consideration that traditionally Muslim clerics kept pious distance from temporal rulers. It begs the question, which remains unanswered, as to why several Muslim clerics who espoused this normative stance, ended up taking up arms in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

I also highlighted that in the broader literature on Islam in Africa, Sufi *shaykhs* are primarily understood as political power brokers. I argued that this approach silences the broader intellectual and social roles Sufi *shaykhs* play, and the fact that they normatively did not wield political power in West African history. Connecting Tāl's position as a Sufi *shaykh* to his political power has led to a serious distortion of his life. While I have not explicitly analyzed his role as a

spiritual guide my approach raises several questions that remain unanalyzed. Specifically, we do not know how he fashioned the Tijāniyya into one of the most significant Sufi brotherhoods in the lives of nineteenth century West Africa Muslims. We also do not know the broader intellectual connections that he created with members of other Sufi brotherhoods, including the Tijāniyya, in North Africa and the Sahara. Further, there is yet to be a significant analysis on his ideas on Sufism, especially Tijānī doctrine, which he wrote extensively on, and the precise methods he used to teach and transmit this doctrine.

In outlining some of the shortcoming in previous approaches to Tāl, I do not mean to suggest that his spiritual and political authority were not important. They were. But my point is that they emerged from his mastery over the Islamic religious sciences, and in reference to the Islamic scholarly tradition. Thus they need to be analyzed within the broader context of his scholarly accomplishments and as part of his religious authority.

My approach to Tāl, and my use of Arabic source material demonstrates new ways to understand this pivotal nineteenth century figure, as well as adds to the broader literature on Islam in Africa. In chapters 1 and 2 of this study, I highlighted the importance of mobility in relation to Islamic knowledge practices, and the implications that travel had for Tāl's career as a scholar. In West Africa (and elsewhere), the transmission of Islamic knowledge occurred primarily through oral instruction in face-to-face interactions between masters and disciples. In this system of learning, memory and mimesis also played foundational roles. Starting with the memorization of the Qur'an, students often also went on to memorize basic texts of the Islamic religious sciences. They also imitated the mannerisms and conduct of their teachers, as a means to inculcate habits that were indispensable to the learning process. Through travel scholars and students created broad

networks of transmission that had multiple nodes, which were not only restricted to specific institutionalized sites of learning.

Within this context, Tāl traveled throughout Futa Toro, as well as parts of Mauritania in the pursuit of Islamic knowledge. His mobility allowed him to continue to acquire knowledge, even in the midst of social and political chaos in the region. Although he left few details about the specific works that he studied, and the teachers that he studied with, there is one important clue about his education that remains from this early period.

He studied and copied an advanced grammar work, *al-Farīda*, which was commonly studied in the region. I explained that this work was an “artifact of epistemology” that materialized Tāl’s experiences of learning the work with his teacher, Aḥmad al-Ḥalimi, over a period of four months. The text was embedded within the broader system of oral and personalized form of knowledge transmission, and was not independent from it. In analyzing this work, I also explained that it was written by the Egyptian scholar, al-Suyūfī, who then transmitted it to West Africa. Consequently, the work highlights the wider connections between West Africa and other parts of the Muslim world, and demonstrates that West Africans were deeply engaged with the broader Islamic scholarly tradition.

In order to continue to acquire further training in the Islamic sciences, Tāl left Futa Toro and traveled to other parts of West Africa. Though we do not know what his engagement with Sufism was in Futa Toro, he came into contact with the Tijāniyya. He was initiated into the order by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Nāqīl. After spending nearly thirteen months with al-Nāqīl, Tāl decided to embark for the Ḥijāz, in order to perform the *ḥajj*.

Through his extraordinary mobility he travelled thousands of miles and arrived in Mecca. I explained that while his *ḥajj* was important, his encounter with Muḥammad al-Ghālī was also

significant. It is under al-Ghālī's tutelage that Tāl became a Tijānī *khalīfa* and a Sufi *shaykh* with enormous prestige and power. I analyzed three chapters of the *Rimāh* to explain some of the transformations Tāl underwent, and the precise way he depicted his encounter with al-Ghālī. These chapters highlight one way in which, through writing, Tāl constructed his spiritual authority. Specifically, he claimed that al-Ghālī had selected him to be his closest student, among others, whom he does not mention. This initiated a process whereby Tāl claimed to have captured all of the knowledge that al-Ghālī possessed.

In order to substantiate his claims of election within the Tijānī hierarchy he produced a written *ijāza*. This was a textualized proof of the permission and authority that Tāl had acquired from al-Ghālī. Indeed, Tāl noted that al-Ghālī dictated its contents while he wrote them down. Once he was finished writing, al-Ghālī signed the document. This was a portable proof of the authority that Tāl wielded as a spiritual guide. He further cemented his spiritual authority by claiming to have rare and secret knowledge. In this regard he claimed to have acquired *al-ism al-a'zam* (God's greatest name), a name which is thought to be only reserved for the elect.

While Tāl had undergone numerous transformations, at the hands of al-Ghālī, the Tijāniyya was relatively unknown in sub-Saharan West Africa. Consequently, while Tāl certainly transmitted the teachings of the order and initiated several disciples, he did not write about the order until several years after his return. Instead, he established his scholarly credentials, through demonstrating his deep erudition in the Islamic tradition and his mastery over Arabic poetry.

In Chapter 3, I analyzed two early acrostic poems that he wrote, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn* and *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*. These poems expressed his earliest ideas of moral and ethical reform in West Africa. The first poem was meant as a handbook that outlined a basic moral framework that believing Muslims should follow in order to attain salvation. Tāl addressed his second poem

specifically to Muḥammad Bello, who continued to maintain hostilities with the ruler of Bornu, Muḥammad al-Kānimī. In a nutshell, the work highlighted the problem of disputation among Muslims, and the gravity of taking the lives of innocent Muslims because of conflict. Like the earlier poem, throughout this composition Tāl demonstrated his mastery over the Islamic religious tradition, including difficult theological and legal points, and drew on a wealth of source material.

Both of these works were acrostic poems that incorporated different verses of the Qur'an. The first poem incorporated three verses from the sixty-third chapter of the Qur'an, while the second poem incorporated two verses from the forty-ninth chapter of the Qur'an. Each poem was a sustained commentary, an explanation of these verses. In presenting his ideas in this manner, he was demonstrating his erudition and scholarly aptitude. In other words, while he was a Tijānī *shaykh*, in his first significant set of writing this is not what he drew attention to. Instead he drew attention to his scholarly authority and his ability to produce such difficult works.

The relationship between Tāl's poetic composition and his scholarly authority is a theme that I also explored in the subsequent chapter. In chapter 4, I analyzed Tāl's last major literary work *Safīnat al-sa'āda li-ahl du'f wa-l-najāda* [*The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak*]. The poem was a decastich of the an earlier and important poem of al-Fazāzī. West African were familiar with this poem because of the pentastich of Ibn Muḥīb. Tāl intentionally incorporated this older works in his own composition in order to demonstrate his erudition.

Through writing this poem Tāl was demonstrating his devotion to the Prophet Muḥammad and also established his spiritual authority. He quite explicitly stated in the introduction to the poem that the Prophet loved him, and that he was also his *khalīfa*. The poem was meant to prove this point.

In chapter 5, I examined the transformation of Tāl from a scholar of the normative pacifist tradition in West Africa to someone who wielded political authority. The central point of this chapter was to demonstrate that Tāl's *jihād* was historically contingent. I began by explaining his own statements on the concept of *jihad* in the *al-Rimāh*. In chapter fifty-one he extolled the *jihād* of the *nafs*, which he also considered the “greater *jihād*.” In other words, based on his statements in this work, until 1845, he did not place emphasis on the importance of *jihād* understood as combat.

It is only after he moved to Dingiray that he took on a much broader political role. The defining moment was when Yimba, the king of Tamba, attacked his community in 1852. When he decided to retaliate against Yimba, he also became part of new historical circumstances that fundamentally changed him and his community. While he initially attempted to protect his community, he also became involved in the logic of nineteenth century warfare. Consequently, he took on the pattern of other “warrior states” and continued to expand territory in order to maintain power. I traced the changing circumstances of his movement in the context of increasing French encroachment in the eastern Senegambia. As Tāl's movement progressed and he conquered more territory, he began to also highlight religious differences and use such difference for political ends. The significant point is that he was not following a blueprint for action. The specific historical circumstances he was in changed him in ways he was not fully in control of. By responding to these changing circumstances he took on the wider logic of regional polities and led a warrior state.

Tāl's quest to conquer more territory in order to maintain his power brought him to the Midder Niger valley. In the final chapter, I analyzed *Bayān mā waqa‘a baynanā wa bayna amīr al-Māsina Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad* [*What Happened between the ruler of Masina, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad and us*], which was a narrative explaining his conflict with Masina, and the legal justification for

his actions. Though the work could be read as a justification for his war against Masina, he did not explicitly state those intentions in the Bayān. He highlighted his political legitimacy, and justified his actions through demonstrating his scholarly aptitude. He framed his arguments against Aḥmad III's claims to territory, and painted this Muslim ruler as someone who was ignorant. Indeed Tāl considered the specific arguments that Aḥmad III presented were not valid because he did not have mastery over Islamic knowledge. In contrast, Tāl cited almost fifty different works in order to justify his claims within the broader Islamic tradition. The central conclusion of this chapter was that Tāl's political authority was based on his mastery over the Islamic religious sciences.

It was indeed Tāl's scholarship that legitimized his actions. And it was his scholarship that he used to justify them. His mastery was tied to his mobility. And it was his mobility that opened the necessary pathways for him to acquire Islamic learning. This learning is what ultimately defined his authority, and it worked on multiple different registers and shifted over time, based on his specific historical circumstances.

In this study, I analyzed several of his important works in order to explore how his textual practices reflected this authority. While his political and spiritual authority were important, they were rooted in his scholarly authority, and his mastery over the Islamic religious sciences. By framing Tāl as scholar, and closely analyzing his scholarship, my study has demonstrated the potential questions and possibilities for investigation that a more robust engagement with Arabic source material reveals for the study of Tāl's life. It also highlights the potential new directions the life of this one pivotal nineteenth century individual opens for understanding broader questions in the study of Islam in Africa at the intersection between mastery, mobility and Islamic authority.

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