

Jihad of the Pen

The Sufi Literature of West Africa

Rudolph Ware
Zachary Wright
Amir Syed



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction: The Sufi Scholarship of Islamic West Africa <i>Zachary Wright</i>	1
Part 1: Shaykh ‘Uthman bin Fudī <i>Rudolph Ware and Muhammad Shareef</i>	25
1 Introduction	27
2 <i>The Roots of the Religion (K̄tab usul al-din)</i>	31
3 <i>The Sciences of Behavior (‘Ulum al-mu‘amala)</i>	35
4 <i>The Book of Distinction (K̄tab al-tafrīqa)</i>	55
Part 2: Shaykh ‘Umar al-Futī Tal <i>Amīr Syed</i>	65
5 Introduction	67
6 “A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students” <i>(Tadhkirat al-mustarshidin wa falah al-talibin)</i>	69
7 <i>The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed (al-Rimah hizb al-rahim ‘ala nuhur hizb al-rajīm)</i>	89
8 <i>The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak (Safinat al-sa‘ada li-ahl du‘f wa-l-najada)</i>	115
Part 3: Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké <i>Rudolph Ware</i>	125
9 Introduction	127
10 “The Valiant One” (<i>al-Sindid</i>)	131

11	<i>Pathways of Paradise (Masalik al-Jinan)</i>	137
12	“Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor” <i>(Mawahib al-nafti‘ fi mada’ih al-shafti‘)</i>	149
Part 4: Shaykh Ibrahim bin ‘Abdallah Niasse		165
	<i>Zachary Wright</i>	
13	Introduction	167
14	“The Spirit of Etiquette” <i>(Ruh al-adab)</i>	169
15	<i>The Removal of Confusion (Kashif al-ilbas)</i>	183
16	“The Jeweled Letters” <i>(Jawahir al-rasa’il)</i>	203
17	Poetry for the Prophet (from <i>Dawawin al-sitt</i>)	215
Conclusion: The Prophet, the Qur’an, and Islamic Ethics		223
	<i>Rudolph Ware</i>	
Notes		259
Bibliography		293
Index		303

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Introduction

The Sufi Scholarship of Islamic West Africa

Zachary Wright

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

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

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

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

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

Four Saintly Biographies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Common Themes and Connections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Islamic Law in West Africa

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Philosophy and Metaphysics

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

Academic reference to African Muslim philosophy is still in its early stages. But already Souleymane Bachir Diagne has argued that the Arabic textual tradition of Sudanic Africa demonstrates “a new philosophy of time” and “a philosophy of becoming, a thought of time as creative movement.”⁷⁰ Oludamini Ogunnaike asserted that philosophy as a discipline, especially through the experience of colonialism, has increasingly internalized a Eurocentric bias that overlooks the more expansive definitions of ancient philosophy capable of considering the philosophical contributions of African Muslims.⁷¹ Elsewhere, building on Diagne’s work to outline a number of texts that could be read as African Muslim philosophy,⁷² Ogunnaike insisted that “African intellectual traditions should not be treated as mere *objects* of inquiry to be learned about . . . but should be approached as *subjects* of study to be learned or learned from.”⁷³ The interjection of African Muslim metaphysics into contemporary university philosophy curricula thus depends on the retrieval of source materials that would force further consideration.

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

Evidence of metaphysical inquiry sometimes emerged more publicly with intellectuals who did not bear the same weight of community organization and instruction. Coincidentally, two prominent examples of African Muslim philosophy actually come from the communities of ‘Uthman bin Fudi and Ibrahim Niasse. ‘Abd al-Qadir bin al-Mustafa (known as Dan Tafa, d. 1864) was the son of Shaykh ‘Uthman’s eldest daughter Khadija.⁷⁴ Among his numerous writings are a number of “philosophical” texts,⁷⁵ including a treatise on visionary knowledge that provides intriguing insight on the human soul:

As for the state of sleep, the soul (*ruh*) continues to abide in its skeletal abode even when its gaze is raised to [look into] the angelic world (*al-‘alam al-malakuti*). With this, it procures understandings that otherwise would not be. This is because the accomplished soul does not see except through the spiritual gaze (*al-nazar al-ruhani*). You will realize this when you have come to know that the human soul is not lodged in the body, for it has not separated from its original spiritual center. If it were to be separated, it would be annihilated, just as this physical body would be destroyed were it to depart from its center and nature. The soul is received in this skeleton by virtue of its regard (*nazar*) towards the body, and the custom of spirits is to dwell in the place of their gaze. So by the soul’s gaze towards the body it comes to dwell therein, but it is not fixed in the body. This is a wondrous matter indeed! The intellect cannot understand this from its own perception. By God, it is only perceived through unambiguous unveiling (*kashf*) or righteous faith.⁷⁶

Dan Tafa thus explains a difficult conundrum concerning the connection of the human soul to the body. Many theorists, such as the Syrian ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731), postulated that the soul left the body during sleep to perceive the unseen world and then return with insight.⁷⁷ But if such were the case, how could the sleeping body remain alive without the presence of the soul–spirit in it? Dan Tafa suggests that the “accomplished soul” in fact extends far beyond the body and remains connected with the unseen (*al-ghayb*), and that sleep allows such a soul to gaze into the unseen without having to actually leave the body.

Such a concept invokes a conception of the human soul’s magnificent breadth that permitted its knowledge (*ma‘rifat*) of God. Probably Dan Tafa would have been familiar with this notion, cogently expressed in the Tijaniyya’s primary source book, *Jawahir al-ma‘ani*, circulating in the Sokoto Caliphate by the time of Muhammad Bello’s reign (1817–37).⁷⁸ According to Ahmad al-Tijani, “God created the soul (*ruh*) 980,000 years in length, and the same in width. And He left it a long time in His nurturing care, caressing it in the tenderness of His kindness, graciousness, and manifest love for it.”⁷⁹ African Muslim scholars, in dialogue with each other, thus developed a compelling metaphysical understanding of the human soul’s reality that both infused the physical body and extended to the unseen world without being limited to either location.

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

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

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

Women Scholars of West Africa

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Structure of the Book

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

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

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

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

Part 1

Shaykh ‘Uthman bin Fudi

Rudolph Ware and Muhammad Shareef

1

Introduction

Shaykh ‘Uthman bin Muhammad bin ‘Uthman bin Salih (1754–1817) was the founder of the Sokoto Empire, the largest and most populous precolonial state in nineteenth-century sub-Saharan Africa.¹ It ultimately spanned much of modern Nigeria, Niger, and Chad, encompassing several million people within it.² Although Shehu ‘Uthman was famously known as Dan Fodio in Hausa, among his Fula-speaking compatriots he was called Bi Fudi; among his many Arab and Tuareg students, he was known as Ibn Fuduye’.³ The shehu was well trained in all the core disciplines of the Islamic religious sciences, and ultimately authored works that touched upon almost all fields as well—ranging from law to political theory to Sufism.

Dan Fodio is remembered by historians mainly as a state builder, and his achievements have been well chronicled by historians in European languages. However, little is mentioned of the spiritual development of the shehu over the forty-three years of his social reform of West Africa. Especially in his Fula-language poetry (not translated here), he engaged in self-reflection on the development of his spiritual ideas and his own spiritual transformations. And in lucid classical Arabic texts, too, he wrote extensively, though perhaps not as personally, about the spiritual path. In the end, his social—and ultimately political—appeal was based on his standing as a scholar and as a Sufi, and so we seek to recover his voice in these domains.

Numerous studies have traced the history of the Sokoto state, but far fewer have outlined its connection with the intellectual and spiritual journey of the shehu himself. Roughly, Dan Fodio’s social and spiritual reform can be divided into two distinct periods: the jihad of the tongue and pen (1774–1804), and the struggle of the sword (1804–17).

The first period began with Dan Fodio's public preaching and writing about ethical, spiritual, and social renewal (*tajdid*) in and around his clerical community of origin, Degel, in the hinterland of the Hausa state of Gobir. During this period, he composed Arabic prose, as well as Hausa and Fulfude verse, on the core precepts of the religion, and the sciences of ethical and spiritual purification.

Gobir was among a number of ethnically mixed, but predominantly Hausa, city-states in what is now northern Nigeria. Dan Fodio's critiques of moral and political corruption in the region were regarded with increasing discomfort in the 1780s and 1790s, with tensions escalating around the turn of the century. The sheer size of the shehu's community also must have begun to threaten the Hausa authorities, who responded with periodic skirmishes against his followers. This hot-and-cold war continued until 1804 when, responding to the enslavement of three hundred Qur'an reciters from his community, the shehu broke off relations with the sultan of Gobir. He had a vision wherein the Prophet handed him the Sword of Truth, and he was given explicit permission to take up arms. This began a political movement that led to the creation of Sokoto.⁴ He migrated from his learning center in Degel to a settlement called Gudu on Thursday, the 12th of *Dhu-l-Qa'da* 1218 (February 23, 1804).⁵ From 1804 to 1812, the shehu led his community in military campaigns against the seven Hausa states. By 1812, he had encompassed and reorganized all of them, establishing a new capital at Sokoto. He divided the new territory and appointed *amirs* over 23 emirates, with their judges, chiefs of police, inspectors of markets, and other civil servants. Throughout this period, the shehu continued to teach the fundamentals of Islam and compose original works on the science of Sufism; however, the key intellectual concerns of the shehu during this period between 1804 and 1812 were largely political, focusing on consolidating the sovereignty of the new state. To this end, the shehu composed scholarly texts clarifying the rules and boundaries of government, the responsibilities of the ruler and the ruled, and the establishment of justice.

From 1812 until his death in 1817, he gradually withdrew from political life, prioritizing a return to spiritual pursuits. The shehu did compose works in order to criticize injustices of the officials of Sokoto, but he focused more intently on Arabic and 'ajami works on the Prophet, Sufism, and Islamic eschatology—particularly, the appearance of the awaited *Mahdi*, and other signs of the End of Time. One of the most important works of the shehu, which he composed during this final period, was a work that is considered

to be akin to a last will and testament to his community. In fact, he called it *al-Wasiya* (The Testament), composing this work in his own hand (rather than dictating to a scribe) only days before his death.

In it, the shehu encouraged his followers to distance themselves from secular government and authority by removing the love of leadership and rank from their hearts. He advised those involved in government to place authority in their *hands but not in their hearts*. He also warned about the corruption that would engulf those who held positions of authority in the End of Time. *The Testament* was his final reminder that government and authority were not an end in itself, but a means to more lofty and transcendent ends. The shehu said,

I, Uthman, am not a king or a ruler, nor am I the son of kings and tyrannical rulers. I hope that I am among the *Imams* who answered the call of God . . . [that] I am only a leader of his people who guides them towards what is virtuous in their affairs, inviting them to the religion of God; seeking thereby His forgiveness, His mercy, and desiring therein His pleasure (*Ridwan*). . . . We are about that mission, without being kings and rulers who practice oppression and injustice. And whoever follows me in that [mission] is from me. And whoever does not, is not!¹⁶

Here, the shehu sums up his mission of reform. It was not jihad, although he did take up arms in defense of his community. Nor was it government and authority, although he ultimately came to see political sovereignty as necessary in order to effect social change. The key goal of the shehu was to call humanity to God through the cultivation of moral excellence. All of the Hausa and Fulfulde poetry that he composed, along with more than a hundred works in Arabic, testified to this singular goal. Like the Prophet Muhammad (whose biography he mirrored in uncanny ways), the shehu passed away at the age of sixty-three.

All three of his books presented in this volume were authored in the earliest stage of his career, between 1774 and 1787. The first two, *The Roots of the Religion* and *The Sciences of Behavior*, are pioneering translations by 'Aisha Abdarrahan Bewley.⁷ The third work, *The Book of Distinction*, has been translated by Muhammad Shareef.⁸

2

The Roots of the Religion (Kitab usul al-din)

The Roots of the Religion is a short text designed to be taught rather than merely read. It was composed when the shehu was in the earliest phase of his teaching (between 1774 and 1780) in his early twenties. It was written in response to a demand for a clear, teachable text that would familiarize ordinary Muslims with the basics of the Islamic creed (*‘aqida*) and theology. This latter discipline, while often glossed as *kalam* in other parts of the Muslim world, is known in West Africa (and in Dan Fodio’s writing) almost exclusively as *tawhid*—the science of the Oneness of God.

Like many works in the Islamic classical tradition, it is meant to serve as the basis for an oral teaching between a master and his or her disciples. Each of its concise lines opens onto fundamental questions of theology. Short texts like the *Kitab usul al-din* would almost always be committed to memory by seekers. Students would ask questions of their masters in oral teaching sessions (*majlis*, *majalis*) and consummate scholars, like the shehu himself, would bring the text to life. In this volume, the *Roots of the Religion* might also serve to introduce modern readers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, to the basic elements of the faith as they were—and still are—taught by classically trained African scholars.

In the name of God, the Merciful One, the Endless Giver of Mercy.
May God bless our Master Muhammad and his family and companions
and grant them perfect peace.

Says the slave, the poor man in need of the mercy of his Lord,
Uthman bin Muhammad bin Uthman known as Dan Fodio, may God
cover him with mercy. Amin.

Praise is for God, Lord of all the worlds, and blessings and peace
on the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace.

This definition, the roots of the religion, will be of use, if God wills, to whoever looks to it for support. I say—and success is by God—that the whole universe from the Throne to the spread carpet of the earth is contingent (*hadith*) and its Maker is God—may He be exalted! His existence is necessary (*wajib al-wujud*)—from before endless time (*qadim*), no beginning to Him, going on for ever (*baq*), no end to Him. He is not affected by contingencies (*mukhalif li-l-hawadith*). He has no body (*jism*) and no attributes of body. He has no direction (*jihat*) and no place (*makan*). He is as He was in pre-existence before the universe, wealthy beyond dependence (*ghaniyy*) on place (*mahal*) or designation (*mukhas-sas*). He is One (*wahid*) in His Essence and in His Attributes and in His Actions. He is Powerful (*qadir*) through Power, transforms through will, He Knows (*‘alim*) through knowledge, He lives through life, He Hears through hearing, sees through sight, and speaks through speech. He has complete freedom in acting and leaving undone. Divine Perfection is all necessary (*wajib*) to Him and deficiency, the opposite of Divine Perfection, is entirely impossible (*mustahil*) for Him.

All His Messengers from Adam to Muhammad—may God bless him and grant him peace—are truthful (*sadigun*) and trustworthy (*umana’*) and they conveyed what they were commanded to convey to the creation. All human perfection is necessarily theirs and all human imperfections are impossible for them. Permitted to them are eating (*akl*), drinking (*shurb*), marriage (*nikah*), buying (*bay’a*) and selling (*shara’*), and illness (*marad*) which does not lead to imperfection.

The angels are all preserved from wrong-action (*ma’sumun*). They do not disobey God in anything He commands and they carry out all that they are commanded to do. They are of light (*nuraniyun*), neither male nor female. They do not eat and they do not drink.

The Books from Heaven (*al-kutub al-samawiya*) are all true and real (*haqq wa sidq*). Death at its appointed time is true. The questioning by Munkar and Nakir of the inhabitants of the graves and other than them is true.¹ The punishment of the grave is true. The ease of the grave is true. The Day of Rising is true. The awakening of the dead (*ba’th al-amwat*) on that day is true. The gathering of the people (*jam’ al-nas*) in one place on that day is true. The giving of the books (*‘ita’ al-kutub*) is true. The weighing of deeds (*wazn al-‘amal*) is true. The reckoning (*hisab*) is true. The narrow bridge (*sirat*) is true. Drinking from *Kawthar* is true.² The Fire (*nar*) is true. The endlessness of the Fire with

its people (*dawam al-nar ma' ahlihi*) is true. The Garden (*janna*) is true. The endlessness of the Garden with its people (*dawam al-janna ma' ahlihi*) is true. The vision (*ru'yat*) of Him by the believers in the Afterlife—may He be exalted—is true. Everything that Muhammad—may God bless him and grant him peace—came with is true.

These are the roots of the Religion. God—may He be exalted—has confirmed them all, those concerning divinity (*ilahiyat*), prophecy (*nabawiyyat*) and the after-world (*sam'iyat*), in the Vast Qur'an. All who are obligated (*mukallaf*) must believe in them just as they came to us. The belief of the common people in all these roots becomes, in the case of the elite, knowledge. This is because of the difficulty the common people have in understanding proofs. As it was said by 'Izz al-Din, Sultan of the scholars, in *The Foundations of the Sciences* and the *Islam of the People*: “for that reason the Messenger of God—may God bless him and grant him peace—did not make those who became Muslims delve in these things. Instead he would make them firm since it was known that they would be separated from him. This was the way with the right-guided *khalifs*, and the guided scholars still establish them in this way.”

As for those who are among the people of inner sight (*ahl al-basira*), they must reflect on these roots in order to abandon blind following (*taqlid*) and become convinced with the eye of the heart. This is in order that the religion of the people of inner sight should be based on clear vision, particularly for the one who reaches the station of calling others to Him. He said—may He be exalted—“*Say: This is my way. I call to God with inner sight. I and whoever follows me*” (Q 12:108). Here ends the definition of the roots of the religion. Oh God, give us success in following the sunna of Your Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. Oh God, bless our Master Muhammad and the family of our Master Muhammad and grant them peace.

3

The Sciences of Behavior (*‘Ulum al-mu‘amala*)

The Sciences of Behavior was written sometime between 1780 and 1785, in a period when the shehu and his growing circle of disciples were developing more elaborate and detailed teaching on the practical elements of the faith and how to pair them with the cultivation of excellent character. While *The Sciences of Behavior* by Dan Fodio is clearly not a commentary on Ghazali’s *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*, the latter work is one of the principal sources that Dan Fodio engages in writing on ethical comportment.

The shehu’s text is organized according to the structure of the famous Hadith of Gabriel, wherein the Prophet Muhammad and many of his most illustrious disciples are visited by what appears to be a stranger who asks about *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith), and *ihsan* (spiritual excellence). Sitting knee to knee with this stranger, the Prophet answers his questions, and the companions are astonished that having questioned him, the man had the nerve to confirm his answers by saying, “you have spoken truth.” When the stranger left, the Prophet revealed to his companions that the visitor was none other than the Angel Gabriel himself, transmitter of the Qur’an. The report contains a concise summary of the basics of practice (*islam*) and belief (*iman*), and it is often used to structure teaching on the contents of the religion. Sufis often focus on the Prophet’s definition of *ihsan*: “it is to worship God as though you see Him, for if you do not see Him, know that He sees you.” Here we have reproduced only the section on *Ihsan*, since the sections on *Iman* are similar to the contents of the *Kūtab usul al-dīn*, while the sections on *Islam* enter into minute details about daily worshipping activities.

Ihsan: The science of *tasawwuf* (Sufism)

Every responsible person must learn enough of this science to enable him to acquire praiseworthy qualities and to keep him from blameworthy qualities.

The purification of the heart from the whisperings of Shaytan

This is achieved by four things: The first is to seek refuge with God from shaytan, and to reject the thought which occurs. The second is to remember God with the heart and the tongue. The third is to reflect on the proofs of the people of the sunna. These are not mentioned by the philosophers or the *Muʿtazalis*. The fourth is to question one who knows the sunna.

The purification of the heart from conceit (ʿujb)

Conceit is one of the blameworthy qualities which it is forbidden to have. God Most High said, “Do not praise yourselves. He has more knowledge of the one who guards himself out of fear” (Q 53:32).

Much harm arises out of conceit. Conceit leads to pride, forgetting wrong actions, presumption about acts of worship (*ibada*), forgetting the blessing of God, self-deception, feeling safe from the anger of God, believing that you have a station with God, and self-justification by action, concept, and knowledge. These and things like them are part of the harm which results from conceit.

As far as its reality is concerned, you should know that without a doubt, conceit is due to an attribute of perfection. A man may have one of two states in his self-perfection of knowledge and *ibada*.

One state is that he is fearful that what he has obtained will vanish, be uprooted, and stripped away from him. This person is not conceited. The other state is that he is not fearful that it will vanish. He is happy about it because it is a blessing from God, not because it is related to himself. He also is not conceited. There is, however, a third state which is conceit. This is that he does not fear for what he has. He is happy with it, sure of it. His joy in it is because it is a perfection and a blessing, not because it is a gift from God Most High. His joy in it is because it is his attribute and it is attributed to him. His joy is not because it is related to God since it comes from Him. Conceit is presumption about blessing, relying on it, and forgetting its relationship to the Giver of blessing. This makes clear the reality of conceit.

As far as its cure is concerned, know that the cure for every fault is its opposite. The fault of conceit lies in pure ignorance. Its cure is recognition and knowledge which is in direct opposition to that ignorance. A man's conceit is in two categories: one category is in whatever he can exercise his own choice in—like the prayer, fasting, *zakat*, *hajj*, *sadaqa*, raiding, and improving his character. Conceit in this category is more prevalent. There is also a category in which he has no choice—like beauty, power, and lineage.

Sometimes he is conceited in both of these categories because he possesses these things and is their place of manifestation. This is pure ignorance because the place is subservient and cannot be part of bringing-into-existence. How then can he be conceited about something which is not his? On the other hand, he may be conceited because the *‘ibada* has been obtained by his own power which is in-time. This is also pure ignorance. He must then consider his power and all the causes by which he has it. He acts as if it belonged to him. However, it is all God’s blessing to him and he has no inherent right to it. He ought to be delighted about the generosity of God Most High since He showered Him with what he did not deserve and bestowed it on him, preferring him above others without any prior reason or any device on his part. The truth is that you, your movements, and all of your attributes are part of God’s creation and invention. You did not act when you acted, and you did not pray when you prayed, and “*you did not throw when you threw. Allah threw*” (Q 17:82). Therefore, the worshipper’s conceit about his *‘ibada* has no meaning. It is the same with the beautiful person’s conceit about his beauty, and the conceit of the wealthy man about his riches and liberality. You suppose that the action is achieved by your own power, but where does your power come from? Action is only possible by your existence and by the existence of your knowledge, will, power, and the rest of the causes of your actions. All that is from God, not from you because He is the One who created power and then gave power to the will, set causes in motion, distributed obstacles, and facilitated action. One of the marvels is that you can be conceited about yourself, and yet you do not wonder at the generosity of God. You should be constantly concerned about yourself and your opinion because He is not impressed by opinion unless there is evidence for it, and it is conclusively contained in the Book of God or in the sunna of God’s Messenger, or by an intellectual proof. This makes clear the cure of conceit.

The purification of the heart from pride (kibr)

Pride is one of the blameworthy qualities and it is forbidden to have it. God Most High said, “*I will turn away from My signs those who are arrogant in the earth without right*” (Q 7:146).

As far as its reality is concerned, you should know that pride is divided into inward and outward pride. Inward pride is a quality within the self, and outward pride is action which appears through the limbs. The name pride (*kibr*) is more appropriate for the inward quality. As for action, it is the result of that quality, and you must know that the quality of pride demands action. When

it appears on the limbs, it is called arrogance (*takabbur*), and when it does not manifest itself, it is called pride (*kibr*). Its root is the quality in the self which is satisfaction and confidence at seeing the self above anyone towards whom he is overbearing. Mere self-exaltation does not make someone arrogant. He might well exalt himself while seeing that another person is greater than him or his equal. In this case, he is not overbearing toward him. It is not enough merely to disdain others. In spite of his disdain, a person might see himself as more despicable and therefore, he would not be considered arrogant. If someone sees the other as his equal, he is not considered arrogant. He must see that he has a rank and someone else has a rank, and then see his rank as above the other's rank. When he exalts his own value in relationship to someone else, he despises the one below him and puts himself above the other's company and confidence. If it is very extreme, he may spurn the other's service and not consider him worthy to stand in his presence. If it is less extreme, he may reject his basic equality, and put himself above this other in assemblies, wait for him to begin the greeting, think that it is unlikely that he will be able to fulfil his demands and be amazed at him. If he objects, the proud man scorns to answer him. If he warns him, he refuses to accept it. If he answers him back, he is angry. When the proud man teaches, he is not courteous to his students. He looks down upon them and rebuffs them. He is very condescending toward them and exploits them. He looks at the common people as if he were looking at asses. He thinks that they are ignorant and despicable.

There are many actions which come from the quality of pride. They are too many to be numbered. This is the reality of pride.

The harm it does is immense. The “‘ulama” [community of Islamic scholars] can help you but little against it, let alone the common people. How could its harm be other than great when it comes between a man and all the qualities of the believers? Those qualities are the doors of the Garden. Pride locks all those doors because it is impossible for him to want for the believers what he wants for himself while there is anything of self-importance in him. It is impossible for him to have humility—and humility is the beginning of the qualities of those who guard themselves out of fear of God—while there is any self-importance in him. It is impossible for him to remain truthful while there is self-importance in him. It is impossible for him to abandon envy while there is self-importance in him. It is impossible for him to abandon anger while there is self-importance in him. It is impossible for him to contain rancour while there is self-importance in him. It is impossible for him to offer friendly good counsel while there is self-importance in him. It is impossible

for him to accept good counsel while there is self-importance in him. He is not safe from the contempt and slander of others while there is self-importance. There is no praiseworthy quality but that he is incapable of it from the fear that his self-importance will slip away from him.

As far as its cure is concerned, there are two parts: the knowledge-cure and the action-cure. The remedy can only be effected by joining the two of them. The knowledge-cure is to know and recognize yourself and to know and recognize your Lord. That will be enough to remove your pride. Whoever knows and recognizes his own self as it should be known and recognized, knows that it is not worthy of greatness, and that true greatness and pride are only for God. As for gnosis of his Lord and His glory, it is too lengthy a subject for us to discuss here, and it is the goal of the knowledge of unveiling.

Self-recognition is also a lengthy subject. However, we will mention what will help you towards humility and submissiveness. It is enough for you to recognize one verse (*aya*) of the Book of God. The knowledge of the first and the last is in the Qur’an for whoever has his inner eye open. God Most High said, *“Perish man! How thankless he is! Of what did He create him? Of a sperm-drop. He created him, and determined him, and then made the way easy for him. Then He makes him die, buries him, and then, when He wills, raises him”* (Q 80:17–22).

This verse points to the beginning of man’s creation, his end, and his middle. Let a man look at that if he desires to understand its meaning.

As for the beginning of man, he was “a thing unremembered.” He was concealed in non-existence. Non-existence has no beginning. What is lower and meaner than obliteration and non-existence? He was in non-existence. Then God created him from the basest of things, and then from the most unclean thing. He created him from earth and then from a sperm-drop, then a blood-clot, then a lump of flesh. Then He made the flesh bones, and then clothed the bones in flesh. This was the beginning of his existence and then he became a thing remembered. He was a thing unremembered by reason of having the lowest of qualities and attributes since at his beginning, he was not created perfect. He was created inanimate, dead. He neither heard, saw, felt, moved, spoke, touched, perceived, or knew. He began by his death before his life, by weakness before strength, by ignorance before knowledge, by blindness before sight, by deafness before hearing, by dumbness before speech, by misguidance before guidance, by poverty before wealth, and by incapacity before capacity.

This is the meaning of His word, *“From what did He create him? And determined him”* (Q 80:18), and the meaning of His word, *“Has there come upon man*

a period of time when he was a thing unremembered? We created him of a sperm-drop, a mingling, trying him. We made him hearing, seeing. We guided him upon the way, whether he is thankful or unthankful" (Q 76:1–3).

He created him like that at the beginning. Then He was gracious to him and said, *"We made the way easy for him."* This indicates what He wills for him during the period from life to death. Similarly, He said, *"of a sperm-drop, a mingling, trying him. We made him hearing, seeing. We guided him on the way"* (Q 76:2–3). The meaning here is that he gave him life after he was inanimate and dead, first from the earth, and then from a sperm-drop. He gave him hearing after he was deaf and He gave him sight after he lacked sight. He gave him strength after weakness and knowledge after ignorance. He created his limbs for him with all they contain of marvels and signs after he lacked them. He enriched him after poverty, made him full after hunger, clothed him after nakedness, and guided him after misguidance. Look how He directed him and formed him. Look at how He made the way easy for him. Look at man's overstepping and at how thankless he is. Look at man's ignorance and how he shows it.

God Most High said, *"Part of His sign is that He created you from earth"* (Q 30:20). He created man from humble earth and unclean sperm after pure non-existence so that he would recognize the baseness of his essence and thereby recognize himself. He perfected the sperm-drop for him so that he would recognize his Lord by it and know His immensity and majesty by it, and that He is the only one worthy of true greatness and pride. For that reason, He described him and said, *"Have We not given him two eyes and a tongue and two lips, and guided him on the two roads?"* (Q 90:8–10).

He first acquainted him with his baseness and said, *"Was he not a sperm-drop extracted?"* (Q 75:37). Then he was a blood-clot. Then He mentioned His favor and said, *"He created and fashioned and made a pair from it, male and female"* (Q 75:38–39), in order to perpetuate his existence by reproduction as his existence was acquired in the beginning by original formation. When you begin in this manner and your states are like this, how can you have arrogance, pride, glory, and conceit? Properly speaking, man is the lowest of the low and the weakest of the weak. Indeed, even if He had perfected him, delegated His command to him and made his existence go on by his own choice, he would still dare to be insolent and would forget his beginning and his end. However, during your existence, He has given illnesses power over you, whether you like it or not, and whether you are content or enraged. You become hungry and thirsty without being able to do anything about it. You

do not possess any power to bring either harm or benefit. You want to know something but you remain ignorant of it. You want to remember something and yet you forget it. You want to not forget something and yet you do forget it. You want to direct your heart to what concerns it and yet you are caught up in the valleys of whisperings and thoughts. You own neither your heart nor yourself. You desire something while your destruction may be in it, and you detest something while your life may be in it. You find some foods delicious when they destroy and kill you, and you find remedies repugnant when they help you and save you. You are not safe for a moment, day or night. Your sight, knowledge, and power may be stripped away, your limbs may become semi-paralysed, your intellect may be stolen away, your *ruh* may be snatched away, and all that you love in this world may be taken from you. You are hard-pressed, abased. If you are left alone, you go on. If you are snatched away, you are annihilated. A mere slave. A chattel. You have no power over yourself or anyone else. What can be more abased? If you recognize yourself, how can you think yourself worthy of pride? If it were not for your ignorance—and this is your immediate state—you would reflect on it. Your end is death. It is indicated by His word, “*Then He makes him die and buries him. Then, when He wills, He raises him*” (Q 80: 21–22). The meaning here is that your *ruh*, hearing, sight, knowledge, power, senses, perception, and movement are all stripped away. You revert to the inanimate as you were in the first place. Only the shape of your limbs remains. Your form has neither senses nor movement. Then you are placed in the earth and your limbs decay. You become absent after you existed. You become as if you were not, as you were at first for a long period of time.

Then a man wishes that he could remain like that. How excellent it would be if he were left as dust! However, after a long time, He brings him back to life to subject him to a severe trial. He comes out of his grave after his separated parts are joined together, and he steps out to the terrors of the Rising. He is told, “Come quickly to the Reckoning and prepare for the Outcome!” His heart stops in fear and panic when he is faced with the terror of these words even before his pages are spread out and he sees his shameful actions in them. This is the end of his affair. It is the meaning of His word, “*Then when He wishes, He raises him*” (Q 80:22).

How can anyone whose state this is be arrogant? A moment of freedom from grief is better than arrogance. He has shown the beginning and the middle of his condition. If his end had appeared to him—and we seek refuge from God—perhaps he would have chosen to be a dog or a pig in order

to become dust with the animals rather than a hearing, speaking man, and meet with punishment (if he deserves the Fire). When he is in the presence of God then even the pig is nobler than him since it reverts to dust and it is spared from the Reckoning and the punishment. Someone with this state at the Rising can only hope for pardon, and he cannot be at all certain about it. How then can he be arrogant? How can he see himself as anything to which excellence is attached? This is the knowledge-cure.

As far as the action-cure is concerned, it is to humble yourself to people in a constrained unnatural manner until it becomes natural for you.

The purification of the heart from false hope (amal)

False hope is one of the blameworthy qualities which it is forbidden to have. God Most High said, “*Leave them eating and enjoying themselves. False hope diverts them from the outrage which they do*” (Q 15:3).

Its reality is that your life-energy is directed to the moment, and you let things slide.

Its cure is to know that throughout your life, false hope will prevent you from hastening to repentance (*tawba*). You say, “I will yet turn in tawba. There are still many days ahead.” It also prevents you from hastening to obedience. You say, “I will act later. I still have many days left.” That continues to harden your heart because you do not remember death and the grave.

The purification of the heart from anger (ghadab) without grounds

Anger is one of the blameworthy qualities which it is forbidden to have. God Most High said, “*When He put rage into the hearts of those who reject*” (Q 48:26). The rage of the *Jahiliya* (Age of rash ignorance, before Islam) was from anger without grounds. He praised the *believers* since He bestowed some of the *sakina* (tranquillity) on them.

The reality of anger is the boiling of the blood of the heart to seek revenge. If a man is angry at someone below him, the blood expands and rises to his face and makes it red. If he is angry with someone above him, the blood contracts from his outer skin to his heart, and it becomes sorrow. For that reason, he becomes pale. If he is uncertain, the blood is between contraction and expansion.

There are three degrees of anger: Insufficient (*tafrit*); Excessive (*ifrat*); and Moderate (*i'tidal*). Insufficient anger is blameworthy because you are not angry enough to protest in defense of that which is sacred (*haram*); with respect to your wife or mother, for example, or if you should have no jealous

protectionism at all. Jealousy was created as a protection for man. Part of this failing is to be silent when you see objectionable actions. Part of it is also to be incapable of self-discipline, since self-discipline is made effective by bringing anger to bear on the appetite, even to the extent of being angry at yourself when it inclines to base appetites. Lack of anger is therefore blameworthy.

Excessive anger is also blameworthy. It is to be overcome by anger so that cool water goes out of the management of the intellect and the religion (*din*), and you no longer have insight, consideration, reflection, or choice. Whenever the fire of anger is intense, it will blind the one who is angry, and it will make you deaf to every warning. It may increase until anger invades the roots of the senses to the extent that you cannot even see with your eye. The entire world may become dark for you. Indeed, the fire of anger may become so intense that it burns up the moisture which gives life to the heart. The angry person then dies of rage.

Among the outward effects of excessive anger are: Change of colour, intense shaking in the extremities, confused speech, foam appearing at the corners of the mouth, redness, and an ugly mien. This is the effect of anger on the body.

As far as its effects on the tongue are concerned, it is that you speak with insulting language, obscenity, and ugly words which rational people are ashamed to use. Someone who utters them in anger is ashamed of them after his anger has abated. These are the effects of excessive anger on the tongue.

Its effect on the limbs is that you strike, tear, kill, and wound if you are in a position to do so, without any consideration. If the object of your anger flies from you, your own anger turns against you yourself, so you tear your own garments and slap your own face. You may hit your hand on the ground and completely go beyond the overwhelmed drunkard. You may fall down quickly and not be able to run or stand up through the intensity of your anger. It may come upon you like a fainting spell. You may hit animals and smash a bowl to the ground, and act like a madman. You verbally abuse the beast and speak to it, saying, "How long can I endure this from you?" as if you were addressing a rational being. These are the effects of excessive anger on the limbs.

Its effect on the heart is resentment, envy, concealing evil, resolving to divulge secrets, and other ugly things. This is the effect of excessive anger on the heart.

Praiseworthy anger is in moderation. It is the anger which waits for the indication of the intellect and the religion. It arises when it is praised by the shari'a, and it stops when it is criticized by the shari'a. It is the middle way

which the Messenger of God—may God bless him and grant him peace—described when he said, “The best of affairs is their middle.”

Whoever has insufficient anger must treat himself until his anger becomes stronger. Whoever lets his anger go to excess must treat himself until both of them return to the middle way between the two extremes. That is the Straight Path.

The cure of anger consists of six things: The first is to reflect on the virtues of restraining rancour, and to desire the reward for doing that. The second is to frighten yourself with the punishment of God, saying “The power of God over me is greater than my power over this man. If I carry out my anger against him, then what security will I have against the anger of God on the Day of Rising?” The third is to reflect and make yourself fear the results of anger in this world if you have no fear of the next world. The fourth is to reflect on the ugliness of your form when you are angry. Then you will remember someone else’s form during his anger. Reflect as well on how much you resemble the mad dog when you abandon self-restraint, and how much you resemble the saints (*awliya*) when you abandon your anger. The fifth is to reflect on the cause which summons you to revenge. It must be the words of shaytan to you, “This is incapacity and humiliation for you in the eyes of people.” You must reflect since you are more insignificant with God, the angels, and the Prophets. Why then are you concerned with people? The sixth is to know that your anger arises from your amazement at something which is acting in conformity with the will of God. It is almost as if God’s anger with you is greater than your own anger.

This ends the knowledge-cure.

As far as the action-cure is concerned, it is to say when you are angry, “I seek refuge with God from the accursed shaytan.” If you are standing, then sit down. If you are sitting, then lie down, and make the lesser or the full ablution (*wudu* or *ghusl*).

The purification of the heart from envy (hasad)

Envy is one of the blameworthy qualities which it is forbidden to have. God Most High said, “*Do they then envy people for what God has given them?*” (Q 4:54).

As for its reality, you should know that there is only envy for a blessing. When God bestows a blessing on your brother, it can lead to one of two states in you. One is that you hate that blessing and want it to leave him. This state is called envy. The definition of envy is hating blessing and wanting it to depart from the one who has received it. The second state is that you do not want it to leave him and do not dislike the fact that it exists and

remains with him, but you desire the like of it for yourself. This is called thinking someone enviable. Envy is anger at the fact that God prefers some of His slaves over others.

There are four levels of envy: The first is to want the blessing to leave him. If that happens, you do not want it to return to him. This is the very limit of malice. The second is to want the blessing to leave him in the same way that you desire a fine house, a beautiful woman, or a lofty, wide sufi lodge (*zawiyya*) which someone else has obtained and which you want for yourself. Your aim is not to remove that blessing. You hate the absence of the blessing, not that it has been bestowed on someone else. The third is not to desire the blessing itself, but to desire its like for yourself. If you cannot have its like, you want it to leave the person who has it so that the contrast between you will not be apparent. The fourth is to desire its like for yourself. If you do not obtain it, you do not desire that it depart from the person who has it. This last level is excused if it is about this world, and it is recommended if it is about the religion.

As far as the remedy of envy is concerned, you should know that envy is one of the serious sicknesses of the heart. The sickness of the heart can only be treated by knowledge and action. Useful knowledge concerning the sickness of envy is to really recognize that envy is harmful to you, both in your religion and in this world. There is no harm for one who is envied, either in this world or in his religion. Rather, he profits by it both in this world and in his religion. When you recognize this with your inner eye—that you are only an enemy to yourself and a friend to your enemy—then you will inevitably part company with envy.

As for its being harmful to you in the religion, this is because by envy, you are angry about the decree of God Most High and you hate His blessing which He has apportioned to His slaves, and His justice which He establishes in His Kingdom and which is hidden in His wisdom. You reject that. This is an offence which strikes at the core of *tawhid* and an obstruction in the path of iman. That in itself is enough of a crime against the religion. You act dishonestly toward one of the believers (*mu'minin*). You abandon his good counsel and you part company with the *awliya'* of God and the Prophets since they desire good for the slaves of God. You form a partnership with the Devil (Iblis) and all the enemies of faith (*kafirun*) since they desire that the believers experience afflictions and they *desire* that blessings depart. These are malicious things in the heart. They eat up the good actions of the heart like fire consumes firewood, and obliterate them as the night obliterates the day.

As for its being a harm in this world for you, this is because you are pained and punished by your envy. You are always full of grief and sorrow

since God does not cease to pour out blessings on your adversaries. Therefore, you are constantly being punished by every blessing you see, and you are pained by every affliction which is turned away from them. You are constantly full of sorrow. Your breast is constricted in the manner you desire for your enemies and which your enemies desire for you. You wanted severe trial for your enemies, but now you immediately come to severe trial and sorrow yourself. Blessing does not leave the envied person because of your envy. Even if you did not believe in the Rising and the Reckoning, it would still show a lack of astuteness on your part. If you are at all intelligent, you should be on your guard against envy because of the pain and evil it contains and its lack of benefit. How much more should it be when you know that envy is the cause of intense punishment in the next world. How astonishing is a man of intellect who exposes himself to the wrath of God without obtaining any profit at all from it. Indeed, it carries harm and pain which he must endure. His world is destroyed without any gain or benefit.

As for its not having any harm for the envied, one either in his *religion* or this world, it is obvious that blessing will not leave him because of someone else's envy. God decreed it as good fortune and blessing, so it must last until the time which God decreed for it. There is no way to repel it. Everything is decreed with Him and every term has a book.

The one who is envied profits by it both in his religion and in this world. It is clear that his profit in the religion is that he is wronged by you, especially if you publicize your envy by speech and action, by slander and calumny of him, and by destroying his veil and mentioning his bad qualities. It is a gift which you present to him, i.e. by that, you give him your good deeds and so you will meet him bankrupt on the Day of Rising. You will be deprived of blessing then as you were deprived of blessing in this world. It is as if you wished to remove blessing from him while the blessings which God bestows on you continue as He gives you success in good deeds. You give these to him and increase him with blessing upon blessing while you multiply misery for yourself.

As for his profit in this world, the most important of the desires of created beings is grief and sorrow for their enemies. No punishment can be greater than that which you experience from the pain of envy. The goal of your enemies is to have blessing while you are sunk in sorrow and loss. You have done to yourself what they desire to do to you. Because of that, your enemy does not desire your death. He desires to prolong your life in the punishment of envy. This is the knowledge-cure.

As far as the action-cure is concerned, you must make yourself do the opposite of what envy calls you to. If it makes you arrogant, you must humble yourself. If it provokes you to withhold blessing, you must make yourself increase blessing. This is the action-cure.

As for what is necessary in order to prevent envy in the heart when someone irritates you, you should know that if you want blessing to leave him and you direct your tongue against him, then you are an envier. By your envy, you commit an act of rebellion. If you want the blessing to leave him while you restrain yourself outwardly in every way, but you do not dislike your state, then you are also envious and you commit an act of rebellion. This is because envy is an attribute of the heart, not an attribute of action. If you dislike this state by insight, and you restrain your outward actions as well, you have then done what is necessary.

The purification of the heart from showing-off (riya')

Showing-off is one of the blameworthy qualities which it is forbidden to have. God Most High said, "*Woe to those who pray and are heedless of their prayers, to those who show off and withhold*" (Q 107:4–7).

As far as its reality is concerned, you should know that showing-off (*riya'*) is derived from seeing (*ru'ya*). Its root is to seek reputation in people's hearts. You desire to make them see good qualities in you, and by that, to obtain high rank in their hearts. You can seek high rank by all actions. However, the name "showing-off" specifically refers to seeking high rank in people's hearts through acts of *'ibada*. The definition of showing-off then, is the obtaining of people's own desires through obedience to God, the Majestic, the Mighty.

Showing-off is of five types: The first is showing-off with the body. That is by outward emaciation so that people will imagine that you are intense in your striving. By emaciation, you also want to indicate scarcity of good. The second is showing-off by dress and appearance. That is by dishevelled hair, tattered garments, bowing the head while walking, leaving the mark of prostration on the face, rolling up your garment, and not cleaning it.

The third is showing-off by words. That is to make remembrance (*dhikr*) apparent in other people's presence, and to command the good and forbid the objectionable in full view of created beings. It is to manifest anger at objectionable things in the presence of created beings, and to move the lips with *dhikr* in full view of other people. It is also to raise the voice, indicating that it is from sorrow and fear.

The fourth type of showing-off is by action. That is like someone who prays and shows off by standing for a long time, by doing *ruku'* and prostration for a long time, by not turning aside, by keeping still and silent, and by keeping the feet and the palms level. It is the same with fighting in the way of God, the *hajj*, and *sadaqa*.

The fifth is showing-off by associating with people. For instance, a man will mention the Shaykhs often in order to show that he has met many Shaykhs and profited from them. He says, "All the Shaykhs I have met," and "I met so-and-so," and "I went about in the land and served the Shaykhs." He talks about everything that has happened to him.

This, and all that preceded is blameworthy since by it, you seek high rank and reputation in people's hearts.

As for the cure of it, you should know that showing-off is man's nature when he is a child. You can only manage to tame it by intense effort.

There are two stations in its cure: The first is to pluck it out by its roots. These are love of the pleasure of being praised, flight from the pain of criticism, and greed for what other people have. The second is to repel it immediately whenever it comes to mind.

The remedy is to know that showing-off is harmful and corrupts the heart. It prevents success and prevents position with God Most High. It brings punishment and disgrace to the extent that when you are in front of people, there will be shouts of, "You shameless liar! You two-faced deceiver! Why weren't you ashamed when you sold obedience to God Most High for God's hatred out of desire for the world and love of high rank among people? You sought their pleasure in exchange for the wrath of God, and you sought nearness to them in exchange for distance from God."

If you reflect on this shame, you have no alternative but to turn away from showing-off together with turning your attention in this world to dispelling your concern for consideration in the hearts of others. Pleasing people is a goal which you will never attain. If you seek to please them in exchange for the wrath of God, God will be angry with you.

The cure for the greed for what others have is that God Most High is the One who subjects the hearts to withholding or giving. If you bring the bliss of the next world to your heart, you think very little of anything connected to creation. You direct your heart to God. By acts of unveiling, things are opened to you which increase you in intimacy with God—glory be to Him!—and alienate you from creation. This is the knowledge-cure.

As far as the action-cure is concerned, it is to make yourself conceal your acts of *ibada* until your heart is content with the knowledge of God Most High.

The action-cure for the second station is to repel any of it that appears, repelling it through dislike of it.

Turning away with regret from all acts of rebellion (tawba)

Tawba is one of the praiseworthy attributes which you must acquire. God Most High said, “*Turn in tawba to God altogether, oh believers so you might prosper*” (Q 24:31).

Its reality is freeing the heart from wrong actions which you have done out of desire to exalt God, the Mighty, the Majestic, and to flee from His wrath. This is not the result of worldly desire, nor is it out of fear of people, out of seeking praise and renown, or out of weakness.

That which will help you in it consists of three parts: The first is to remember the end of ugly wrong actions. The second is to remember the intensity of God's punishment. The third is to remember the weakness of your body. When you persevere in remembering these three, good counsel will move you to repentance (*tawba*), God willing.

You should know that in general, wrong actions are of three types: One of them is to abandon your obligations to God Most High—prayer, fasting, *zakat*, *kaffara* (reparation), or anything else of that nature. You fulfil whatever you can of them. The second are wrong actions between you and God—glory be to Him! Like drinking wine, playing wood-wind pipes, consuming usury, and things like that. You regret those actions and keep it in your heart never again to repeat it. The third are wrong actions between you and the slaves of God. They are more difficult, and fall into various categories. The wrong action may be concerned with property, the self, reputation, respect, or the religion. You make reparation lawful for all you can of these things which were mentioned. If you cannot, you turn to God with humility and sincerity so that He may be pleased with you on the Day of Rising.

Zuhd (doing-without) in this world

Zuhd is one of the praiseworthy qualities which you must acquire. God Most High said, “*Do not extend your eyes to what We have given pairs of them to enjoy, the flower of this life*” (Q 20:131).

Know that there are two types of doing-without: one is a doing-without which is decreed for you, and the other is a doing-without which is not

decreed for you. The one which is decreed for you has three things: The first is to abandon seeking what is lost of this world. The second is to part from what you have of it. The third is to abandon will and choice.

The doing-without which is not decreed for you is coolness in the heart towards this world. What will help you in it is to remember the harm of this world. The decisive word is that this world is the enemy of God while you are His lover. If you love someone, you hate his enemy. If you say, “What is the rule of doing-without in this world? Is it obligatory or supererogatory?” Know that doing without the *haram* is obligatory, and doing without the *halal* is supererogatory. If you say, “We must have a certain amount of this world in order to maintain our strength and proper condition, so how can we do without it?” Know that doing-without concerns the superfluous since your proper condition and strength has no need of this superfluity. The goal is strength and vigour. The goal is not only food, drink, and pleasure.

Taqwa (safeguarding out of fear) of God, the Mighty

Taqwa is one of the praiseworthy qualities which you must acquire. God Most High said, “Whoever obeys God and His Messenger and fears God and guards himself out of fear of Him, those, they are the successful” (Q 24:52).

Its reality is freeing the heart from the wrong actions which you have done in the past. It has four stages: The first is safeguarding yourself from idol-worship. The second is safeguarding yourself from acts of rebellion. The third is safeguarding yourself from innovation. The fourth means to avoid the superfluous.

What will help you in it is to guard these five limbs which are the roots. They are: the eye, the ear, the tongue, the heart, and the belly. You should be careful of them and guard them from whatever you fear will harm you in your *religion*—acts of rebellion, the *haram*, superfluity, and extravagance on the *halal*. When you attain to safeguarding these limbs, the hope is that it will give you all the support you need.

Tawakkul (trust and reliance) in God Most High

Tawakkul is one of the praiseworthy qualities which you must acquire. God Most High says, “Whoever relies on God, He is enough for him” (Q 65:3).

Its reality is the heart’s confidence, calm, and the realization that the sustaining of your physical structure is only by God, the Majestic, the Mighty. It is not by anyone other than God, and it is not by any of the debris of this world or by any one cause.

What will help you in it is to remember that God Most High guarantees provision, and that His knowledge and power are perfect, and that He is disconnected from creation and far removed from forgetfulness and from incapacity.

Entrusting the affair to God

Entrusting the affair to God is one of the praiseworthy qualities which you must acquire. God Most High says, “*I have entrusted my affair to God*” (Q 40:44).

Its reality is your desire for God to preserve you from all that has danger in it and against which you have no security.

What will help you in it is to remember the danger of all affairs, and the possibility of your destruction and corruption. In all of that, you must remember your own incapacity to guard yourself against the blows of danger.

Contentment (rida) with the decree of God, the Mighty, the Majestic

Contentment with God’s decree is one of the praiseworthy qualities which you must acquire. God Most High said, “*No affliction occurs except by the permission of God. Whoever believes in God, his heart is guided*” (Q 64:11).

Its reality is to abandon anger and to remember that what God decrees is better and more suitable. He does not need to justify its rightness or wrongness. This is one of its conditions. If you say, “Evil is not by the decree of God Most High, so how can anyone be content with it?” Know that evil is the result of the decree. It is not the decree itself, and you do not have to be content with it. In fact, it is inconceivable for you to be content with the result of the decree except when it conforms to the shari‘a. You must be content with the decree itself, and the decree of evil does not come from evil.

What will help you in it is that when you are angry, you remember the wrath of God—glory be to Him and may He be exalted!—and you remember that He rewards whoever is content with His decree.

Fear and hope (khawf and raja’)

Fear and hope are among the praiseworthy qualities which you must acquire. God Most High said, “*They hope for His mercy and fear His punishment*” (Q 17:57).

The reality of fear is a trembling which is generated in the heart by remembering objectionable things which you have done. It comes to you through thoughts and it is not under your control. You can do things to prepare the way for it. These are four: The first is to remember past wrong actions. The second is to remember the severity of God’s punishment. The

third is to remember your own weakness. The fourth is to remember the power of God Most High over you. He exerts His power over you when He wills and how He wills.

What will help you in it is to remember how He seizes and strips away—glory be to Him and may He be exalted!—as He did in the case of Iblis and Ba'lam. You should also remember His words, glory be to Him! *“Do you suppose that We created you without purpose?”* (Q 23:115) and *“Does man suppose he is to be left aimless?”* (Q 75:36) and other verses like those, which are meant to provoke fear.

As for the definition of hope, it is the joy of the heart when it recognizes the overflowing favor of God—glory be to Him and may He be exalted!—and the vastness of His mercy. It also comes to you through thoughts, and is not under your control. You can do things to prepare the way for it. These are four: The first is to remember God's past favor to you given without intermediary or intercessor. The second is to remember the generosity of the reward He has promised you without you having done anything to deserve it. The third is to remember the abundance of His blessings in respect of your *religion* at the present moment without you deserving it or asking for it. The fourth is to remember the vastness of His mercy, may He be exalted!

What will help you in it is to remember how He has pardoned—glory be to Him!—as He did in the case of the sorcerers of Pharaoh and the People of the Cave, and to remember His actions—glory be to Him!—in the verses of the Qur'an which provoke desire. God Most High says, *“He is the One who accepts repentance from His slaves and pardons evil deeds”* (Q 42:25), and He said, *“Who will forgive wrong actions except God?”* (Q 3:135), and He said, *“Do not despair of the mercy of God. God forgives wrong actions altogether. He is the forgiving, the Merciful”* (Q 39:53), and the verses like those which provoke desire.

Oh God! Oh FORGIVING! Oh Merciful! Forgive us all of our wrong actions by the *baraka* of Our Master Muhammad, may God bless Him and grant Him peace.

Here ends what we intended to write about the sciences of behaviour which consists of Tawhid, Fiqh, and Tasawwuf. It has been accomplished by the help of God, and His help is excellent.

Oh God! Bless Our Master Muhammad, the opener of what was locked, and the seal of what went before, the helper of the Truth by the Truth, and the guide of Your Straight Path, and on his family to the extent of his proper worth and immense value.

It ends with praise of God and His
good help, and with blessings and peace
on the Master of the Messengers, Muhammad,
and upon his family and all his Companions,
and peace be upon the Messengers.

4

The Book of Distinction (Kitab al-tafriqa)

The text is called: *al-Tafriqa bayn ‘ilm al-tasawwuf alladhi li-l-takhalluq wa bayn ‘ilm al-tasawwuf alladhi li-l-tahaqquq wa madakhil Iblis* (The Distinction Between the Science of Tasawwuf for Character Transformation and the Science of Tasawwuf for Divine Realization and the Incursions of Iblis into the Souls). The style of writing indicates that the text was composed between 1780 and 1787. Its content suggests that it was likely written after *The Sciences of Behavior*.

The *Book of Distinction* is divided into three sections: 1) On the Science of Tasawwuf for the Transformation of Character; 2) On the Science of Tasawwuf for Divine Realization; and 3) On the Incursions of Iblis Into the Soul of Humanity.

In his *Fath al-Basa’ir*, the shehu said, “The first division is related to the reformation of character (*al-takhalluq*) and it is the abandonment (*at-takhalli*) of every blameworthy trait from the heart—like conceit (*‘ujb*), pride (*kibr*), unjust anger (*ghadab bi-l-batil*), envy (*hasad*), greed (*bukhl*), showing-off (*riya’*), the love of rank (*hubb al-jah*), the love of wealth (*hubb al-mal*) in order to boast, false hope (*amal*), and having an evil opinion of the Muslims (*isa’at al-dhann*). It also includes the endowment (*at-tahalli*) of the heart with every praiseworthy characteristic—like repentance (*tawba*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), fearful awareness (*taqwa*), patience (*sabr*), doing without (*zuhd*), reliance (*tawakkul*), leaving matters over to God (*tafiwid*), contentment (*rida*), fear (*khawf*), and hope (*raja’*).”

In the section on *Ihsan*, in *The Sciences of Behavior*, Dan Fodio writes at much greater length about the removal of blameworthy traits than he does about the acquisition of praiseworthy characteristics (*akhlaq*). This is in keeping with a broader principle of spiritual training intimated above—*takhliya*

(removing the negative) before *tahliya* (inculcation of the positive). In other formulations a third term is added and the progression becomes *takhalli*, *tahalli*, *tajalli*. *Tajalli*, of course, is the typical term for divine manifestation or unveiling, and indeed this stage of divine realization is the shehu's subject below immediately after he completes his descriptions of emptying the heart of bad character and filling it with good.

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, may God bless our master Muhammad, his family and Companions and grant them peace.

Says the slave aware of his sins yet hopeful in every condition of the bounty of his Lord, Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn Uthman, Fulani by lineage,¹ al-Ash'ari² by doctrine and Maliki³ by school of thought.

All praises are due to God the Wise King, the All Knowing Opener, the Exalted, the Mighty whose decision is never repelled, whose conclusion is never ended and whose divine gifts are never prevented. I praise Him recognizing my inability to accurately praise Him, and I thank Him as a means of drawing near His excellence and support. I send blessings upon our master Muhammad, his Generous Prophet, his family and Companions.

To continue: this is the book called:

'The Distinction Between the Science of Tasawwuf for Character Transformation and the Science of Tasawwuf for Divine Realization & the Incursions of Ibless into the Souls.'

As for the science of *tasawwuf* for character transformation, it is the science based upon the Path crystallized by the Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali,⁴ Imam al-Muhasibi,⁵ and others who followed upon that. It is not required to try and take all of its knowledge, nor should they restrict themselves to simply knowing this science without acting in accordance with it. As for the science of *tasawwuf* for divine realization, it comprises of direct experiential gnosis (*ma'arif*) and spiritual states (*ahwal*); and these are matters which are designated specifically for the spiritually elite (*khassa li-l-makhsusin*).

The Correlation of the Science of Tasawwuf

Realize, then, that the nobility of any science is based upon the nobility of what it is connected to (*muta'allaqatihi*). The connection of the science of *tasawwuf* is with the most noble of connections, since it initially guides in its beginning to fear of God (*khashiyat Allah*), it guides in its middle to correct

behavior with Him (*mu'amalatih*), and in its end to direct experiential gnosis of Him (*ma'rifatih*) and being completely devoted to Him (*inqita' ilayhi*). It is for this reason that Abu l-Qasim al-Junayd, may God Most High be merciful to him, said: "If I knew that God possessed a knowledge underneath the canopies of the heavens more noble than this knowledge which we discuss with our companions, I would have run to it." The teachings of the reality of *tasawwuf* has been gathered into about two thousand principles, each of them returning back to the single principle of sincerity of attention (*sidq't-tawajjuh*) to God in accordance with what pleases Him.

The Objective of Tasawwuf and Its Advantage

Realize that the real objective (*maqsad*) of *tasawwuf* and its advantage (*fawa'idih*) is to devote the heart singularly (*ifrad al-qalb*) to God glory be to Him. Realize, then that when God Most High says: "He is not content that His servants be in disbelief" (Q 39:7), makes it indispensable to verify true faith (*tahqiq al-iman*) by means of the foundations (*usul*). When God Most High says: "...and if you show gratitude, He will be content with you" (Q 39:7), makes it indispensable to verify that by which gratitude is known, which is behaving in accordance with outward jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This is known because it comprises the teachings regarding the outward station of Islam; for your outward actions cannot be valid except by means of acting in accordance with jurisprudence. There is no *tasawwuf* without jurisprudence, since the outward legal judgments of God cannot be known except by means of jurisprudence. Furthermore, there can be no jurisprudence without *tasawwuf*, since there can be no precepts with jurisprudence unaccompanied with sincerity of attention. Consequently, both jurisprudence and *tasawwuf* cannot be realized except with genuine belief (*iman*), since they cannot be valid devoid of it. It is for this reason it is said: "Whoever acts according to *tasawwuf* and does not act in accordance with jurisprudence, has become a heretic (*tazanddaq*). Whoever acts in accordance with jurisprudence and does not act in accordance with *tasawwuf*, has become a sinner. However, whoever gathers the two together, has had spiritual realization."

Ahmad Zarruq⁶ said in explanation of that: "This is because the central theme (*midar*) around which *tasawwuf* revolves is devoting oneself exclusively to the Divine Unity (*ifrad al-tawhid*) and behaving in accordance with its judgments. This requires you divesting yourself from your own actions (*tajrid 'an 'amalin*); which is the teachings of rectification of the soul and the Hereafter. When it is from direction of the judgment of *tasawwuf* it requires being

absolutely certain about the legal judgment; and acting with it leading to the following of inward interpolation free of the kind of whims which induce a person to abandon the truth, and God knows best.”

The Relationship of Tasawwuf to the Religion

Realize, then that the relationship of *tasawwuf* to the religion is like the relationship of the human spirit (*ruh*) to the corporeal body, because it is the station of spiritual excellence (*maqam al-ihsan*). Abu-l-Jala',⁷ may God be merciful to him once said: “Whoever encounters the Absolute Being with the Divine reality and creation with the Divine reality, then he is a heretic. Whoever encounters the Absolute Being with the Divine law and creation with the Divine law, then he is a Sunni. Whoever encounters the Absolute Being with the Divine reality and creation with the Divine law, then he is a Sufi.” Ahmad Zarruq said in explanation of the above: “The sufi is more special (*akhassa*) than the sunni. This is because the sunni is described as one free from heretical innovation (*tajarrid 'an al-bid'a*); while the sufi is described based upon his relationship to spiritual perfection; since adherence to the sunna is a precondition of the sufi, both in knowledge and behavior.”

The Legal Consideration of the Jurist is More General Than the Spiritual Consideration of the Sufi

Realize, then that the legal considerations of the jurist (*nadhr al-faqih*) are more general and comprehensive than the spiritual considerations of the sufi. It is for this reason that it is valid for the jurist to object (*inkar*) to some of the teachings of the sufi, but it is not valid for the sufi to object to the legal rulings of the jurist. It is further incumbent to verify *tasawwuf* with jurisprudence, but it is not necessary to verify jurisprudence with *tasawwuf* with regard to legal judgments, although it is with regard to leaving a lawful action. The science of *tasawwuf* is necessary for the transformation of character, and should be transmitted to everyone.

The Science of Tasawwuf for Divine Realization

As for the science of *tasawwuf* for divine realization (*'ilm al-tasawwuf li-l-tahaqquq*), this science is confined (*yuqsiru*) to the spiritual disciples (*muridin*) and the gnostics (*'arifin*); although the guides of this Path differ regarding transmitting it to other than its people. The Imam of the cadre of the Sufis, Abu l-Qasim al-Junayd⁸ said: “This science should be transmitted to its People and other than its people.” The majority of the scholars do not

avoid connecting this science to other than its people, however it is incumbent to answer a questioner based upon the capacity of his question; as al-Suhrawardi⁹ narrated.

The Pivot Around Which the Teachings of the Sufis Revolve

Realize, then that the pivot around which the teachings of the Sufis revolve are upon four sections (*atraf*). The first section is inward exhortation (*tadhkir batin*) by means of the innate praiseworthy characteristics (*bi akhlaq mahmuda*) and cleansing it (*tat-hirihi*) from blameworthy attributes (*awsaf madhmuma*). The second section is purification of actions (*tasfiyat al-'amal*) and making sound of the spiritual states (*tas-hih al-ahwal*) by the refinement of the inward (*tazkiyat al-batin*) with its innate praiseworthy characteristics and cleansing it from blameworthy attributes. The third section is the verification of spiritual states (*tahqiq al-ahwal*) and the verification of social behavior (*mu'amala*). The fourth section is direct experiential gnosis of God (*ma'arif*) and visionary sciences (*'ulum ilhamiya*).

The Keys of the Key of the Science of Tasawwuf

As for the keys of the key (*mifatih al-miftah*) in the science of *tasawwuf*, they are four. The first is making sound the spiritual covenant (*tas-hih al-'aqd*), along with acting in accordance with worship devoid of tediousness (*mimal*) and rejected inconsistencies (*iqtar makhal*). For, whoever acts by what he knows, God will make him inherit knowledge that he did not previously know. The second is sincerity of yearning (*sidq al-raghba*) for God Most High and sincerity of resorting (*al-hja'*) to Him. For, there can be no spiritual opening (*al-fath*) without taking reliance upon some causative factor (*i'timad 'ala sabab*). The third is anticipating and yearning for the divine realities behind all affairs (*tashawwuf li-haqa'iq al-umur*) and having thorough comprehension of the descent of spiritual states (*tafatun li-mawarid al-ahwal*), until rarely even a follicle of hair will fall from the person without him having deep comprehension of it with the proficiency of his intelligence (*judat qarihatih*). The fourth is what Abu Abdullah¹⁰ indicated by his words: "I advise you with advice that no one knows except one who acts upon it and experiences it (*man 'amila wa jarraha*); and that no one is ignorant of it except the one heedless and then spiritually veiled (*man ghafila fa hujiba*). It is that you not take this science by way of heretical innovation (*al-bid'a*) and arrogance (*takabbur*).” He then said: "Do not make anyone from the people of the outward as proof or evidence against (*hujjatan 'ala*) the people of the inward.” Ahmad Zarruq said

in explanation of that: “On the contrary, their concern is to make the people of the outward evidence for them, since every matter of the inward which is free of outward evidence is false and invalid (*batil*).” Then realize that the science of *tasawwuf* is corroborated (*ma’adiyan*) with the Book and the Sunna.

The Incursions of Iblis

As for the incursions (*madakhil*) of Iblis, for knowledge of this is an obligation (*wajiba*), since Satan is an enemy of humanity (*aduwwa al-insan*). Realize that the noblest of what is in humanity is the heart; and Satan desires to corrupt it. For this reason, it is an individual obligation (*wajuban ‘ayniyyan*) upon every responsible person (*mukallaf*) to protect his heart (*himayat qalbihi*) from the corrupting influence of Satan. However, a person cannot attain this except through awareness of the incursions of Satan. For, an obligation which cannot be attained except by something makes that something also obligatory (*wa ma yatawassalu ila al-wajibi illa bihi wajibun*). Thus, it is incumbent to know the incursions of Satan into the human heart. These entrances of Satan are the attributes of the servant which are innumerable.

Among the most immense of them are envy (*hasad*) and covetousness (*hirs*). For, whenever the servant is covetous for something, his avariciousness makes him blind and deaf. It is the illumination of the inner-vision (*nur al-basira*), which discloses to you the multiple entrances of Satan into the heart. Once covetousness and envy cloud a person, they cannot have insight; and as a result Satan finds an entrance to make an incursion into their heart.

Among the most immense of them also are rage (*ghadab*) and corrupt passions (*shahwa*). By means of rage and anger the reason becomes weakened, resulting in Satan playing with his anger the way a child plays with a ball. Further, beware of sitting in the company of women who are not kin to you. For, Satan is the one who sends her to you and he is the one who sends you to her.

Among the most immense of them also is love of the beauties of this world’s life (*hubb zinat al-dunya*). For, when Satan sees this in a person, he opens to him all the things of amusement, which cut him off from God, His signs, His messenger and His Sunna. What Satan beautifies for him from this world’s life continues to afflict him until death comes to him while he is in a state of deficiency and heedlessness.

Among the most immense of them is having love for eating and drinking (*mahabbat al-akl wa-l-sharab*). For, once the servant becomes satiated, even from lawful good things (*wa-law min halal tayyib*), it strengthens and reinforces the

corrupt passions (*yūqawwi al-shahwat*), which are the weapons of Satan.

Among the most immense of them also is greed (*tanʿu*), for when it overcomes the heart, Satan continues to seduce him through the embellishment and pretentiousness (*tazīn wa tasannuʿ*) for that which he craves, by all kinds of showing-off and posturing (*riyaʾ wa talbis*) until that which he craves for becomes a deity to him. He will continuously think about imagined possibilities and fancies (*khiyal ʿt-tawadiʾ wa ʿt-tahabbubi*). By means of these imaginations he tries to attain everything that pleases him, even when it incurs the Divine anger of God, such as his fawning over the thing he craves for until it induces him to commit that which is forbidden.

Among them is impulsiveness (*ʿajila*) because evil inexorably enters upon the heart of the person who is impulsive from a direction that he is unawares. Unlike the one who is circumspect, for his prudence attains for him inner insight into that thing. If hurrying (*istiʿjal*) is necessary, then by God, let it be for what is immediately obligatory (*wājib fawrin*). In that case, being circumspect and cautious has no place.

Among the most immense among them is wealth which is in addition to what is required and for strength. For, this is the place of residence (*mastaqarra*) of Satan. The one who does not have this kind of wealth, his heart is free. For example, when a human discovers he has one hundred gold coins, there materializes in his heart more than ten different desires, where every single desire requires one hundred gold coins in order to attain it; when before he discovered the one hundred, he was inwardly rich.

Among them are stinginess (*bukhl*) and fear of poverty (*khawf al-faqr*), which prevents a person (*yamnaʿu*) from giving charity (*tasaddaq*) and expending (*infraq*) his wealth in directions of spiritual good (*wujuh al-khayr*). Satan commands him to hold back from spending (*imsak*) and to be closed-fisted (*taqtir*). Sufyan once said: "Satan has no weapon like the fear of poverty." Among them are fanaticism for particular schools of thought (*taʿassab li-l-madhahib*) and ideological whims (*ahwaʾ*), as well as having hatred (*hiqd*) for ideological antagonists (*khusum*) and looking on them with the eye of disdain (*bi ʿayn al-ihtiqar*). This is what will eventually destroy the sincere worshippers and the scholars, not to speak of others. For when a person becomes preoccupied with maligning the people and mentioning their shortcomings (*dhikri naqaʾisihim*) is from what is said is of low nature. Therefore, incumbent upon you is the correction of your inward and outward (*tustlih batinaka wa dhahirka*) and do not be preoccupied with others, except in what the law holds you responsible (*kallafak al-sharʿ*) to command the good

and forbid evil.

Among them is burdening the common people (*hamal al-‘awam*) with reflecting (*tafkir*) into the Divine Essence of God, and His Divine Attributes in what is in excess to what is necessary (*zada ‘ala al-darura*) from the science of the foundations of the religion (*‘ilm usul al-din*), which their intellects are unable to grasp.

Among them is having an evil opinion (*su’ al-dhann*) of the Muslims. God Most High says: “Avoid most suspicion” (Q 49:12). For, whoever judges another person with evil, based solely on suspicion, Satan induces him to show disdain towards that person (*ihitiqarihi*), to fail to establish his due rights (*‘idami al-qiyam bi huquqihi*), to procrastinate in showing respect (*tawani fi ikramihi*), and to extend his tongue in violating his honor (*italat al-lisan fi ‘irdihi*). All of these qualities are among the destructive characteristics. He, may God bless him and grant him peace, once said to two men who saw him speaking to his wife Safiya: “She is the mother of you two!” He then said: “Satan flows through the son of Adam like the flowing of his blood. I feared that he would cast into your two hearts some evil.” Therefore, he, upon him be peace, showed his compassion for them; and protected them and his Umma.

He behaved with them according to the path of precaution (*tariq al-ihiti-raz*) against making false accusations (*tahama*), in order that a pious scholar not be over indulgent regarding his circumstances, as an estimation of himself that others only have a good opinion of him. He would do this being amazed with himself. This is an immense error, since the most pious of the people are those who have the most fearful awareness of God; and are aware that their actions, no doubt, are deficient.

Therefore take precaution from the false accusations of enemies and evil people, because, by nature, they only suspect all people of evil. So each person you see who has an evil opinion of the people, seeking to manifest their faults, then know that that comes from the filth of his inward state and the evils of his inner conscious. For, the believer seeks excuses for others due to the health of his breast, while the hypocrite seeks after faults due to the filth of his inward state.

These are just some of the incursions of the Satan Iblis, into the hearts. In them are admonitions against the remainder. In summation, there does not exist in the Adamic creature any blameworthy attribute except that it is one of the weapons of Satan. By means of these weapons, he is assisted in leading mankind astray. Therefore, return to God so that, by means of His mercy, He can redeem you from Satan’s plot and schemes. Take hold of His

remembrance as a companion (*samiran*) or remembrance of the Hereafter as an assistant (*ma'inan*); for whoever is persistent in that God will protect him, God willing, from the remainder of the destructive attributes (*muhlikat*).

Realize, then that of all of these destructive traits, their actions stem from evil character (*su' al-khalq*), while abandoning them springs from excellent character (*husn al-khuluq*). Excellent character, itself, derives from moderation of the strength of reason (*i'tidal quwwat al-'aql*), restraint of anger (*i'tidal al-ghadab*) and self-control of desires (*i'tidal al-shahwa*).

The gathering of all of these traits of temperance is the sign of the attributes of excellent character in a person. For this, such a person is described with much modesty (*kathir al-haya'*), causing little harm to others (*qalil al-adha*), much uprightness (*kathir al-salah*), truthfulness of tongue (*suduq al-lisan*), few words of this worldly life (*qalil kalam al-dunya*), many good deeds (*kathir al-'amal*), few errors (*qalil al-zallil*) and few extravagances (*qalil al-fudul*). Then such a person is described as: virtuous in achievement (*birr wusul*), dignified in patience (*wuqur sabur*), content in gratitude (*radiy shakur*), tolerant in friendship (*halim rafiq*), principled in brotherhood (*'aff shaqiq*); who does not curse, defame or envy; optimistic (*hishash*) and jovial (*bishash*); who loves God, hates for the sake of God, is content and angry for the sake of God. These are the attributes from a person who has good character.

We ask God to make us successful in verifying in ourselves character transformation, by the rank of the master of the first and last. O God make us guided in this world, the recipients of mercy in the Hereafter, grateful for Your blessings, acting in accordance with Your obedience, fleeing from disobedience, concealed from hardships, safe from tribulation, joyful at death, well established in the graves, protected at the resurrection, sanctioned to cross the Sirat, brought before the Prophet's basin, married to the *hur al-'uyun*, and gazing upon Your Generous Face. Be merciful to us O Most Merciful of the merciful. All praises are due to God, the Lord of the worlds, and may His blessings and peace be upon the Generous Prophet and Messenger, may God bless him and grant him Peace.

Part 2

Shaykh ‘Umar al-Futi Tal

Amir Syed

5

Introduction

Al-Hajj ‘Umar ibn Sa‘id Futi Tal was, without doubt, one of nineteenth-century West Africa’s most important Muslim scholars, Sufi shaykhs, and military and political leaders. He was born in Halwar, Futa Toro, at the border of what are present-day Senegal and Mauritania, in 1797.¹ The emphasis that his parents placed on Islamic learning played a crucial role in the young Tal’s life.² He would go on to master many of the Islamic religious sciences, including *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *‘ilm al-hadith* (the sciences of *hadith*), and *tafsir* (Qur’anic exegesis), in Futa Toro, but perhaps also in Mauritania.³ In the early 1820s, he left Futa Toro and traveled to other parts of West Africa to continue his studies. Before he had even reached the age of thirty, he had traversed thousands of miles and built an impressive network of social relationships over a wide geographic area in West Africa.

He then made the perilous journey across the Sahara and arrived in Arabia in 1827, in order to perform the *hajj*. While his intention was to fulfill the final pillar of Islamic religious practice, he also met the Tijani shaykh, Muhammad al-Ghali, who was a direct student of Ahmad al-Tijani. He took al-Ghali as his spiritual guide, and after three years of tutelage al-Ghali appointed Tal as a *khalifa* (deputy) of the Tijaniyya.

Within a few short years of his return from the *hajj* in 1830, Tal became one of the most significant religious figures in West Africa. As a scholar with some repute and a Tijani shaykh, he began to establish a community of numerous disciples and followers. He also penned several important works, including responses to questions, legal opinions, poems, and other treatises.⁴ From 1852, until his death in 1864, Tal engaged in a jihad against regional powers, including the French.

In this section, I provide a representative sample of Tal's scholarly production from different points of his life. The first work that I have translated is a long acrostic poem, "A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students." He completed this poem in 1829 after he had finished his tutelage under al-Ghali, and before he had returned to West Africa. The second sample consists of two chapters from arguably Tal's most famous and important scholarly work, *The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed*. Completed in 1845/6, the work deals with a range of topics on Sufism, including discussions on Tijani doctrine and practice, Islamic law, and biographical details on Ahmad al-Tijani's life. Tal produced this work after he had become an established scholar and a Sufi guide to tens of thousands of disciples. In the final example, I provide a complete translation of a single ode from *The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak*, which Tal completed in 1852. The work highlights Tal's turn to penning poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. It demonstrates his mastery over the Arabic language, and his desire to publicize his devotion and love for the Prophet. It is also the last work that he composed before war came to define his community. Only a few short months after completing the poem, Yimba, the king of Tamba, attacked him, and this event precipitated the beginning of his jihad.

6

“A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students”

(*Tadhkirat al-mustarshidin wa falah al-talibin*)

This poem is one of two “Reminders” that al-Hajj ‘Umar Futi Tal wrote during his lifetime.¹ It is possibly his earliest work.² In the introduction to the poem, he explained he began composing it during his travel to Mecca in 1826. He then revised the poem and completed a new edition of it in Medina in 1829.

As the title suggests, the poem was meant as a reminder for seekers and students who desired to attain closeness to God. Though Tal did not draw explicitly from the corpus of Sufism as he did in his later works, in this poem he still demonstrated the importance of inculcating certain ethical and moral standards rooted in the broader Islamic religious tradition. In this respect, as in the work of generations of previous Muslim reformers and revivalists, Tal emphasized several topics including the moral danger of becoming too attached to the world, the importance of performing religious practices, filial piety, and attaining God consciousness.

Though his message was arguably similar to that of other scholars, the manner in which he decided to present this message was different. Tal constructed his poem based on verses nine, ten, and eleven of the sixty-third chapter of the Qur’an, which juxtapose worldly distractions with the fleeting nature of life. The poem was Tal’s interpretation of these verses, as well as his commentary on them. It underscores not only his command of the primary and secondary sources of the Islamic scholarly tradition but also brings into view his immense command of the Arabic language, poetry and prosody. Moreover, his use of the *rajaz* meter, and its short verses, meant that it was likely to be easily memorized, transmitted, and taught.³ In producing my translation, I have relied heavily on a published critical Arabic edition of the poem.⁴ In most cases, I have followed Tal’s Arabic composition as

closely as possible. However, there are also several instances where I have opted to keep the sense of the original lines rather than provide a literal translation. I have also kept annotations and notes to a minimum, as my primary concern has been to render the poem in a clear and unencumbered style. I have rendered each line of the poem as couplets. The poem itself includes a short introduction by Tal, followed by 205 poetic lines. Each line begins with one letter from the verses of the Qur'an on which the poem is based.

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. Peace and blessings on our master Muhammad, and on his family and companions.

Praise God, for sending the Messenger, as a glad tidings, but also as a warner. He made it binding on him to remind creation. God says:

*And remind. By reminding the believers there is benefit. And I have not created either the Jinn or human beings except to worship me. I do not want provision from them, nor do I need them to give me sustenance. Indeed it is God who is the Provider, the possessor of strength, The Firm.*⁵

Peace and blessing on the one who was sent to command good and forbid evil. Muhammad, our leader and master, to whom all of creation will submit on the Day of Gathering (*fi al-mahshar*).

My brother, may God have mercy on you. When I looked intently and focused diligently on the verses of the Book of God, 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 distract 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 (Q 63:9–11).

My soul inspired me to arrange these verses of the Qur'an independently. I took each letter from the words in these verses, whether they are apparent or implied in writing, like *al-alif al-mahdhufa*, and arranged them to

begin each new line of poetry. I indicated each of these letters [drawn from the Qur’anic verses] with red ink. The final letter of the last word of the verse completes the poem.

I first composed the poem during our journey to the House of God (*bayt al-allah*). When we arrived in Mecca, the noble, we completed our devotions and our pilgrimage (*hajj*), praise be to God. Then we set out for Medina, the illuminated, in order to visit the best of creation (*afdal al-bariya*) in his place of rest, peace and blessing be upon 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 original lines untouched, I also enhanced and revised the first composition, as well as added to its length. Previously I had only arranged the poem until [the words] “be among the righteous.”

In composing this poem, I have not intended to demonstrate my ability in prosody (*al-‘arud*), grammar (*al-nahu*), morphology (*al-tasrif*), vocabulary (*al-ma‘ani*), eloquence (*al-bayan*), rhetoric (*al-badi‘a*), or anything else. Rather [I have composed this poem] to benefit those believers who are 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 within it. I have named it “A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students.” I drafted and edited it in his mosque, peace and blessing be upon him, in the honored garden (*al-rawda*), between the pulpit (*minbar*) of the Messenger of God and his tomb. [When I completed it] I was facing in the direction of his face (*wajhihi*), on the fifth day, in the morning of the month of *shawwal*, in 1244 of the Hegira (*al-hijra*).

The humble Futi of Kedawi,
the son of Sa‘id, ‘Umar proclaims:

Praise God, unique in His kingdom,
Anyone who denies this is a nonbeliever.

Our God, an everlasting praise on the
Messenger, the elevated, the ennobled.

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 (*li-dar al-da'im*).

Reflect on this: everything you think
You see is only ephemeral and delusion.

Only seek benefit in the world, for now and later.⁶
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 (*rab al-khalq wa al-niran*).

You will not find safety in glory (*jah*), lineage (*qiraba*),
nor courage (*shaja'a*), or warfare (*hiraba*).

On the Day of Judgment (*al-qiyama*),
You will see how bitterly people will regret.

When every soul is paired with its likeness,⁷
They will deeply regret their disobedience.

An immense, but useless regret.
Repent before the One will no longer listen.

Do not be fooled by what you think you
Know about the mercy of the Most Merciful.

Certainly our Lord is the possessor of Forgiveness (*dhu al-ghufran*).
But He also possesses retribution (*dhu al-niqma*) and the Fire.

Do not accept the worthless and untruthful
Words of the enemies of God.

God has warned us about the enmity of the
Accursed [Satan] when he tries to delude us.

A skillful and tireless adversary.
This enemy constantly plots to dupe us.

He encourages us to commit sins, while
Whispering “your Lord is forgiving and merciful.”

After refusing to obey the command of his
Lord, he led Adam away from the Garden.⁸

Leave your affairs to your Creator.
He fashioned you, and continues to nourish you.

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 occupy themselves with remembrance (*al-dhikr*)
And worship (*al-'ibada*), 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.

Remembrance is linked to God consciousness (*bi-l-taqwa*).
A refuge and nourishment for one conscious of God (*al-muttaqi*).

Remembrance is similar in manner to other worship.
Follow its beautiful and marvelous order.⁹

It leads to gnosis (*ma'rifa*), guidance (*huda*), assistance (*'awn*),
Success (*falah*). And love and acceptance from the One.

Sainthood (*walaya*), glad tidings (*bushra*), and safety from the
Fire (*najat al-nar*). With piety, entrance into the Garden.

An escape from hardship. Provision and
Ease from an unknown and unexpected source.

An eternal pardon. An enormous
Reward, and an attainment of the goal.

Brothers, continuously work for God.
Keep away from anything other than Him.

Acquire knowledge before you act.
There is no benefit in action without knowledge.

The best are those who learn,
Then act according to what they know.

A 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 (*ma'rifa*). Do not be other than these.
Profit, and remain with those who have knowledge.

To obtain your goal, follow the commandment
Of the Knower of your secrets (*'alim sirrikum*).

We ask that He continue to provide for us,
So we may continue to obey His commands.

Remembrance of God is the highest form of sainthood;
It underscores both its beginning, as well as its end.

Turn away from all else besides Him.
Direct your attention to the Most Merciful.

Strengthen our hearts. You! O Merciful,
Gracious, the Forgiver and Assister.

You dignify whomever you wish,
You humiliate whomever you wish.¹⁰

If you really knew about
The serpents, scorpions and abyss of Hell,

You would flee from your sins,
Without haste, and become obedient.

Nothing is greater than seeking guidance
And the pleasure of the Most Merciful.

Be vigilant in remembering and worshipping your Lord.
Do not allow your wealth to distract you.

Children are a blessing from God's generosity.
They should not distract you from the Guide.

His gifts require constant remembrance (*dhikr*).¹¹
Realize that He is the Giver. None other than Him.

The possessor of an intellect, unceasingly,
Performs worship, without any protest.

But 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 (*dha al-niyyan*).

Realize that wealth and children have no
Benefit if they keep you from devotion.

The possessors of intellects only desire that
Which helps them perform their devotion.

The One commanded us to remember,
Frequently, without much publicity.

Those who are constantly remembering their
Lord occupy the station of the Rememberers (*al-dhakirin*).

It is why the Messenger desired us to engage in
Remembrance often. So remember your Lord!

Self-respect, nobility, divine pleasure (*al-ridwan*),
And profit all emerge from obedience.

Unceasing loss, poverty and humiliation
Are the consequences of disobedience.

Our Lord has forbidden anyone who covets
Accumulation from acquiring certainty (*al-yaqin*).

The ignorant mix the licit with the illicit,
And thereby make their abode in the Fire.

The One has forbidden accumulation, because
It leads to unceasing punishment and loss.¹²

Realize that even if you accumulate wealth lawfully,
There is a risk you will be held accountable.

All that will pass is already determined, but you do not know
If you are destined for happiness or sadness in eternity.

This is what those who have reached perfection (*al-kamal*),
And their ultimate goal, fear the most.

You live in fear, not knowing whether your
Answers in the grave will be correct.

And about the pages (*saha'if*) of your deeds:
Will you hold them with your right or left hand?¹³

You do not know whether God will judge
You through a discussion and a reprimand.

The bankrupt is full of disappointment.
Repay your debts before you are embarrassed.

You have no knowledge of whether you
Will cross over the bridge (*al-sirat*) quickly or slowly.¹⁴

When your actions are weighed, you do not
Know if they will be heavy with good deeds.

Our Lord is Benevolent. But you have no
Certainty that the Merciful will increase you.¹⁵

Where will you seek safety from perdition, before
You can enter the garden of the Benevolent?

We ask Him for assistance, guidance, protection,
And to cover our sins in both abodes.

Spend your wealth for God, before the
Accursed enemy makes you have regrets.

To the wealthy who refuse to spend, realize that
Others will take your property after you die.

Nothing can compare to the regrets of a miser (*al-mumsik*),
After missing the opportunity to spend [in the way of God].

The wealth of a person has no real value,
Unless its benefits continue after death.

Similarly, the Prophet of God said,
“About what you ate and the clothes you wore.”

Everything you invest in for your future,
Only has value if it benefits you with God.

Everything you leave behind becomes an
Inheritance for your children and family.

What an extreme loss! When only others
Benefit from the wealth you leave behind.

Is a person intelligent, if he enriches others
While impoverishing himself to destruction?

Fulfill the rights of God (*huquq Allah*) with
Your wealth before the arrival of death.

Listen intently! The Recompenser (*al-dayyan*) bestows
Wealth and commands us to spend in charity.

Adorning yourself with wealth will only
Increase the blackening (*suwad*) of your heart.

Paucity of wealth is not an excuse. A person
Should spend according to his ability.

Remember how God praised the Prophet’s companions
In *surat al-hashar*, for acting on their inspiration.

He says “they prefer it over themselves.”
Read the verse until “those who are successful.”¹⁶

The miser is emphatically condemned
When God says “you will never obtain...”¹⁷

The miser has no blessing from the Most Merciful,
And only punishment and tribulation.

Fear God! A person who realizes God
Is a sufficient provider can never be a miser.

The Creator of tribulation has prohibited
Increase [in blessings] for the arrogant and oppressive.

God has said “And why do you not (spend)...” until the end of
The verse. Be a scholar (*‘alim*) or a worker (*‘amil*).¹⁸

Strive to do good deeds. So that you
May enjoy a happy life after you die.

Success and happiness rest with our Lord;
Not by following our desires or the devil (*shaytan*).

Reject the world of peril. Leave your passions aside,
So you may gain success from perdition.

The permanent success of a person is
Rooted in killing desires forever.

Those of you who are unaware,
I urge you to repent sincerely to your Lord.

Wake up, before the arrival of death.
So that you may acquire safety before the end.

Rectify where you have fallen short in your
Obligations, before you meet your Lord.

You should know that a person will be made to
Account for the smallest (*al-naqir*) of things.

You cannot dedicate yourselves to God,
If you have greed and excessive desire.

Did laziness keep you from fulfilling your
Obligations, before the arrival of death?

Heed my words! The remembrance of God
Is better than everything else you can do.

Through remembrance, a person becomes a saint.
The forgetful remain lost in amusement.

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.

Do not seek to ennoble yourselves by
Your lineage, when piety only matters.

Whoever cleanses their heart of faults,
And avoids sins, lives righteously.

Take account of yourselves, before you
Will be made to, on that Day of punishment (*yawm al-'uquba*).

The accumulation of sins in the heart can
Prevent the sinner from seeking repentance.

By showing mercy to creation, you will
Acquire a great rank with the Most High.

God has forbidden us from mocking the needy.
This constitutes bad manners.

Servants of God, protect yourselves
And your dependents from the Fire.¹⁹

Listen intently. God and his Messenger
Commanded the scholars to teach people.

Do not let people remain ignorant, without
Performing their devotions to the Benevolent.

Listen carefully. Seek humility. Abandon your
Affections and desire for recognition.

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
Show kindness to the weak and fragile.

People imitate their friends. Look closely
At the companions of those who are guided.

You are deluded. Days and months pass by,
While you remain in heedlessness.

Do not keep planning and deciding for
Your future. God is the possessor of our destiny.

Glory and honor are for those who submit to
God and obey His commandments.

The noblest servants repent sincerely and
Never turn away from the Ever-Relenting.

You should attach your inner and outer
wishes only to Him, and no one else.

If you witness sins, flee from where they are
Being committed. Do not come near them.

He is honored on the day he meets God (*yawm al-liqa'*).
Honored is the slave who only worships and calls Him.

The reward is Paradise. You will find
Sweet plants, the Houri (*hurr*), palaces and contentment.²⁰

For the person in Paradise there is no
Grief or sadness, nor concern or loss.

Everything contained in the Garden
Will be at his disposal, without any doubt.

For all of eternity, the elevated servant
Gazes at the Lord of creation.

O successful servant! Take all that you desire,
Without limit. You have reached the end (*al-muntaha*).

He can take whatever he intends and desires.
Things that most servants will never acquire.

Obtaining what the ears have never heard,
Nor what the hearts and eyes have ever seen.²¹

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 (*al-nafs*) and the devil.

His habits are those of animals. He indulges by
Over-eating and drinking, and remains promiscuous.

His intimate friend is an opulent man,
Who lives a blameworthy, sinful, life.

He thinks that the unceasing pursuit of wealth
Will give him dignity and rank with God.

Ignorance has led him to despise the [religious] leaders (*sadat*)
And the intimate friends of God (*ahal allah*).

Pursuing the world (*dunya*) to his misfortune,
He does not gain benefit from the purified (*al-safwa*).

His distractions keep him from showing
Unceasing honor to the people of guidance.

A person who loves the people of God and
Provides service to them is never disappointed.

We ask that God bless us with loving His
people, in the manner most befitting.

My brother, realize that a person has
nothing of worth except his good deeds.

A person never carries the burden of the
Sins that his relatives have committed.²²

Perform your genuflection (*ruku'a*) and prostration (*sujud*)
With humility, concentration, and in their proper order.

Our Lord commanded us to perform
Prayer following explicit rules.

For this reason complete it properly,
With all its conditions, without shortcomings.

At the time of death, will you be like the
Hypocrite (*munafiq*) who prayed for amusement?

Pecking at prayer like the pecking of a cock (*al-dik*).²³
Only acquiring the wrath of the Owner.

This is akin to the story of the man who
Presents a dead bondswoman (*jariya*) to the king.

When you begin your prayer, begin it as though
You are someone who is about to meet death.

Do not let your mind wander. Your prayer is only
Valid if you perform it with concentration.

Voluntary prayers have a known virtue.
By performing them, all sins are forgiven.

Fast, during the day, in the month of
Ramadan (*shahr siyam*), and spend your nights in prayer.

Purify (*zakka*) your wealth when it becomes
Incumbent. Do so without shortcoming.²⁴

The sorrow of the person who refuses to
Give alms (*al-zakat*) is manifestly clear in this world.

The Messenger of the Lord of the worlds
Warned us about hoarding wealth.

Praise the owner of beauty and perfection.
Success lies in obeying the Majestic.

Refusing to pay alms leads only to loss,
The serpents and infernal fire of Hell (*nar ma' al-jahim*).

Hoarding wealth only leads to perdition,
Rebuke, curse and an immense loss.

Neglecting the rights of God should frighten
All those who possess an intellect.

Acts of charity expiate sins and bring
The fulfillment of all your wishes.

A voluntary fast carries many virtues already
Mentioned in the Qur'an and *Sunna*.²⁵

Travel by foot or on an animal to the
Pilgrimage, to the house of the Majestic.

As mentioned in the Qur'an, God has made this
Obligatory on anyone who is able without difficulty.²⁶

As for *jihad*, understand that it is a
Communal obligation (*fard kifayat*) and a great affair.²⁷

There should be no signs of laziness in *jihad*.
Struggle valiantly against an enemy.

Know that the Merciful gives glad tidings
And excuses those engaged in *jihad*.

They will say “if we had realized the virtues
Of *jihad*, we would have participated!”

God has proclaimed that he has bought
Ours souls and our wealth from us.²⁸

The greatest prize is Paradise. For whoever
Struggles against the nonbelievers.

God compensates. While the master over creation [Muhammad]
Is the middleman, between the servants and the Loving (*al-Wadud*).

If you cannot participate, supply the army
With provision. You will be among the righteous.

The martyr is already forgiven, even before
He encounters the Most High and Exalted.

The earth is prohibited from biting, gnawing
And swallowing the flesh of the martyrs.

He keeps them living in perpetual
Enjoyment, in whichever manner He pleases.

He bestows them with a crown of honor,
And protects them from fear and anxiety.

If you wonder whether they will intercede
For us, my answer is “yes, without any doubt.”

Each of them will intercede for seventy-two
Of their intimate friends and family members.

God grants them permission to obtain all of
Their wishes, without taking them to account.

The hypocrite constantly fears death,
long before its eventual arrival.

Unsuccessfully, he thinks he will find
Safety by keeping away from battle.

He falsely thinks that his actions will have
An effect on how long he will live.

Fleeing from battle incurs the wrath,
Curse, and punishment of God.

Certainly participating in *jihad* with sincerity
brings a great reward from the Guide.

It is not appropriate for one to abstain
From *jihad* unless there is a valid excuse.

God the Most High has made encouraging good
And forbidding wrong an obligation.

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 who spread falsehood.

Diminishing the worth of their souls, they
Sell them away, and never profit in return.

They survive on carrion, whose putrid
Stench is apparent to those with faith.

We conclude with peace and blessings on
The one announced as the last prophet.

*The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against
the Throats of the Party of the Accursed
(al-Rimah hizb al-rahim ‘ala nuhur hizb al-rajim)*

Al-Hajj ‘Umar Tal completed his *magnum opus*, *The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed*, in 1845/6. He then began to teach it to a growing number of disciples and students throughout West Africa.¹ The work consists of fifty-five chapters, as well as an introduction and conclusion. Highlighting his deep erudition, Tal utilized a large body of source material in order to discuss several topics within the broader discipline of Sufism.² This work is also one of the earliest sustained discussions on Tijani practice and doctrine. Though it is one of the most important works written by a West African Muslim scholar, it remains understudied in academic literature. Two decades ago, John Hunwick described the work as a “*hard lump in the stomach—massive and undigested*.”³

Here, I present two full chapters, Chapters 20 and 21, from the work that deal with issues related to mystical unveilings, miracles, and the purpose of the Sufi path. These chapters provide a gist of the topics covered in this work, and highlight its general structure. For the most part, Tal quotes extensively from other works, while providing commentary and an elaboration of a few key points. In preparing my translation, I have used a printed edition of the text.⁴ I have also relied on an unpublished partial English translation of this work by the late Muhtar Holland.⁵

Chapter 20. Warning against Seeking Spiritual Unveilings (*kashufat*)

This is a warning against seeking mystical unveilings (*al-kashufat al-kawniyat*) and visible miracles (*al-karamat al-‘ayaniyat*): our Way (*tariqa*) is based on gratitude and love. The people [who belong to this Way] are not occupied with desiring matters that do not directly help them give their full attention to God. We do

not incline towards mystical unveilings and miracles, since they become a source of love and attention [for this world]. We consider these matters as strange, and therefore give them no import. If we come to rely on them, we would allow Satan to delude us and lead us astray. He will make manifest falsehoods in order to enchant us in the manner that has happened to so many that have relied on such manifestations previously. Satan has gone astray and has promised to take others astray with him. He has led himself to destruction, and leads others to destruction too. We seek refuge in God from perdition.

When God wishes to grant someone illumination (*fath*), by his Grace, He does so often without an individual's awareness, and by which he attains success in both abodes. May God make us among them by His grace. Amin.

I reaffirm that by God alone is success, for He is the guide to the Straight Path.

It is stated in *al-Wasaya al-Qudsiyya* [The Sacred Counsels] that it is necessary for the aspirant who engages in the remembrance of God (*dhikr*) to be truthful and be free in his aspirations from attachments to creation.⁶ [The aspirant should also avoid] inclining towards objects of desire and taste. Such inclinations are longings, which belong to the false objects of worship. From among [these objects of worship] are desiring mystical unveilings and visible miracles, since they are useless [in one's quest] and contain no benefit. [The truthful aspirant] seeks the Truth (*al-Haqq*) alone and keeps his quest unblemished from mixing with the passions of his lower self (*nafs*).

In summary, inclinations towards mystical unveilings and visible miracles stem from the passions and desires of the self. Thus when a person intentionally seeks them, and focuses his remembrance on only [acquiring] them, then such a person is explicitly counted among the deluded. Yet even if a person is drawn to [mystical unveilings and visible miracles] without intent, then there still remains the danger that this person will become enticed by them. The great Shaykhs (*al-kibar*) have said: "Suppose the wayfarer enters a garden, and the birds in the trees of that garden say in their language 'Peace be upon you, O saint of God!' If he does not realize that this is a ruse, he will become deluded by it." Further, all the guides detest [the fact] that their disciples incline to acquire mystical unveilings and visible miracles, and categorically state that "they are [considered] the menstruation of men."

It was reported to Abu Yazid: "Someone walked to Mecca in one night."⁷ He replied, "Satan travels in an hour from the east to the west with the curse

of God on him.” It was reported to him: “Someone walked on water.” He relied, “The birds fly in the air and the fish swim in the water.” Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allah said: “The noblest miracle (*karamat*) is that you rectify a blameworthy trait from among your characteristics.”⁸ Further, Zayn al-Din al-Khawafi said in his *al-Wasaya*: “Do not enter spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) seeking mystical unveilings or visible miracles. Whoever enters spiritual retreat with this hope, and does not observe the condition of sincerity (*al-ikhlas*), Satan will pounce on him, toy with him, make fun of him, and cause him to see false things in the form of truth.” He also said:

One of our companions from Khurasan entered spiritual retreat without permission, and without observing the conditions of maintaining a specific time. So Satan came to him in the form of al-Khidr⁹ and said to him, “Do you want to attain the knowledge of divine sciences (*al-‘ulum al-laduniya*)?” He responded, “Yes,” since he was inclined to speak freely about matters related to gnosis (*al-ma‘arif*). So he said, “Open your mouth.” He opened his mouth, and Satan spat into his mouth (*bizaga fi fih*). After that, he wrote a book containing chapters on gnosis. When he left [his spiritual retreat] in order to meet me, he presented what he had written, and also narrated this story. I responded, “O miserable one (*miskin*), that was Satan who came to you in the form of al-Khidr. He played with you, keeping you occupied from worshipping God and remembering Him. Go and wash [away the ink from] the book and repent to God for what you have done.”

While Satan often comes in the form of the righteous, he is unable to take the form of the Messenger of God, as the latter is reported to have said, “Whoever sees me in a dream has really seen me, for Satan cannot imitate my form.” He also does not take the form of the [true] Shaykh. This is because the Shaykh is a successor of the Messenger of God, who received permission to be a guide from his Shaykh, who had been entrusted by his Shaykh and so forth, back to the presence of the Messenger of God.

[The wayfarer should know that] Satan often comes in the form of tyrannical jurists (*al-jabbarin al-mutafaqqaha*) who claim knowledge of jurisprudence, heretical innovators (*al-mubtadi‘in*), ugly beardless youth (*al-amrad al-kariha*), the wearers of top hats (*as-hab al-qalanus*), who are between the ages of six or seven to thirteen or fifteen, and in the form of deluders. He sometimes takes the form of a black dog, and a wolf, which is illuminated dingy red and white,

but also in shades between red and white. The white color is not pure, so the wolf comes quickly into view and then disappears. He also comes in forms different than these, as it is known to those who are cautious and seek refuge in God—those who are sincere in their devotion and truthful in their actions. Each of these appearances is made apparent to them by the Truth, by the means of their Shaykh. The Shaykh exposes Satan to them, including his mannerism, his interference, how he deceives and misguides when he is present or even in his absence, after he establishes a relationship with a person.

He also narrated that while he was in Nurabad, Khurasan, practicing spiritual retreat:

I saw him come to me in the form of al-Khidr. After speaking to him for a while, I said: “I wish to hear from you a *hadith* that you heard directly from the Messenger of God, like the Shaykh, the pillar of our way and religion, ‘Ala’ al-Dawla (sanctified be his innermost being), heard from you.”¹⁰ On hearing this, he suddenly began to change. Then said: “The Messenger of God said ‘if you see a man confounded in his opinion, then his loss is complete.’” He stood up and then fled, and in the meantime he had changed his appearance from al-Khidr to a sly thief. Though I tried to catch him, I was not able to.

He said the purpose of this long narration is to give caution and warning, so that a devoted wayfarer does not, as a consequence of seeing things and wanting to investigate them fall into the web of Satan (*shabakat al-Shaytan*). This is also meant to deter the wayfarer from entering spiritual retreat without the permission of the Shaykh. Some of the guides say: “Whoever does not have a Shaykh, then his Shaykh is Satan.”

He also said:

I saw Satan once obstruct the path of a person who had claimed to call to guidance, to the point that he became [one of] his closest agents. He insured that he increased in misguidance and corruption in the mask of guidance. [The aspirant should know that] in contrast [to seeing things], [the noble characteristics are] truth, sincerity, and being content with performing virtues, and constant vigilance of the evils of the lower self. [They also include] acknowledging shortcomings and one’s distance from the ranks of the perfected ones, as well as having a good

opinion of God, including not having haste in arriving to the goal, to calm the lower self to bear isolation from common people and villains, refraining from despising anyone who believes in God and His Messenger, tempering expectations, and having awareness of the sudden arrival of death. These characteristics are from among the matters that tame Satan, and prevent him from causing harm to those actions that benefit faith. They also repel him from obstructing the path of the wayfarer from ascending to the peak of divine knowledge (*durwat al-ʿirfan*). We ask God to fulfill our highest aspirations.

If you understand [this discussion], then you should realize that the Ahmadiya, Muhammadiya, Ibrahimiya, Hanifiya, Tijaniyya way is simply based on gratitude (*shukr*) and love (*mahabba*). Its forms of discipline (*al-riyadiya*) are meant to link the hearts to the Truth. Its necessary requirements include, the absolute adherence to His door, to turn to God in moments of movement and rest, and to steer clear from being negligent in moments of being present [with the Divine]. They also include, to worship God with sincerity in accordance with what constitutes proper worship, free from expectations, with an acknowledgment of weakness and shortcomings, and failures to accord divinity (*rububiya*) its rightful due. The certainty of all that has been mentioned must also become firmly established in the heart even with the passing of time.

When one among those on the spiritual path was seeking the station of repentance and forgiveness from his sins, he suddenly acquired a clear illumination (*al-fath al-mubin*). This is because such wayfarers attain illumination quite suddenly, without their expectation for it. As a consequence, such an illumination arrives from divine bestowal (*rabbaniya*). None attains it except the steadfastly convinced, the beloved knower, who is not captivated by mystical unveilings and visible miracles. [The latter point is important because] if in the case his thought wanders to mystical unveilings and visible miracles, and he thinks he has attained them through his own skill, his foot will descend into the depths of destruction, and he will be completely unaware of that. He will go astray, and then lead others astray, in the manner that has happened to many of the misguided misguiders. Those who travel on the path and practice spiritual retreat without an authorized teacher, or at the hands of an unqualified teacher, who does not even have basic authorization for spiritual guidance, fail to understand the goal of spiritual training (*tarbiya*). The goal of spiritual training according to the *Ibrīz* of Ahmad ibn Mubarak is:¹¹

To purify the self (*al-dhat*) and cleanse it from its frivolous inclinations, until it is strong enough to carry the secret (*al-sirr*). Yet this cannot be possible without first the removal of darkness from the self, and the severance of its false attachments from its ultimate goal. At times, however, severing it from falsehood will require purification from the origin of its creation, in which case it will be God who will cleanse it without any intermediary.

This was the state of the first three generations [of Islam], which are also the best. The people in each of these generations were linked to Truth [wherever they found it]. If they slept, they slept with it, and when they awoke, they woke up with it. When they moved, they moved with it. So that if God were to open someone's sight and he looked intently at their inner states he would find their intellects, with few exceptions, linked to God and His Messenger, searching for a way to arrive at their contentment. For that reason, benefit accrued in them, and their essences captured the light of Truth. Knowledge also became firmly established with them, and this became apparent since they arrived at the rank of independent judgement (*ijtihad*). Spiritual disciplining (*tarbiya*) in this era was not required, since a teacher simply transmitted his secret to his disciple, the possessor of his secret. That disciple then simply inherited his teacher's light. He spoke in his ear and then the disciple gained enlightenment (*fath*). This was the result of the cleanliness of their essences (*al-dhawāt*) and the purity of their intellects (*al-uqul*).

The [role] of severing the essences from darkness was invested in the position of the Shaykh after this blessed age. [This was] after intentions became corrupted, and intellects became entangled with the ephemeral world, seeking ways to placate desires. The Shaykh, who is the possessor of insight, must instruct his disciple, his inheritor, to learn to know himself—to look at himself so that he finds that his own intellect is attached to falsehood and base desires. He must recognize that his essence follows his intellect, and his limbs are in concert with moments which are not praiseworthy to the point where his intellect, which has mastery over them [his limbs] links them to falsehood and not to truth. When he [the Shakyh] finds him in this condition he prescribes him to practice spiritual retreat, remembrance of God, and to reduce his consumption of food. The practice of spiritual retreat severs him from vanities, which are qualities of those who are counted among

the dead. Frequent remembrance removes false speech, vain talk, and nonsense, which rest on the tongue. By reducing the consumption of food the fever over the brain (*al-bukhar alladhi fi al-dimagh*) decreases, as do lustful desires, so that his intellect returns back to connect with God. When the disciple arrives at this state of cleanliness and purity, his essence is straightened to bear the burden of the secret. This is the goal of the Shaykhs, which is accomplished through spiritual disciplining and the prescription of spiritual seclusion.

The circumstances of this matter remained in that state, until truth got mixed with falsehood and light with darkness. Now people of falsehood train those who come to them by instructing them with practicing spiritual seclusion and transmit to them names of God with a corrupt intention, in contradiction to the Truth. They also prescribe incantations and required performances that become in essence a flight from God and act as temptations.

If you were to say:

It is quite apparent to us that the seeking of mystical unveilings and visible miracles is blameworthy, constitutes misguidance and leads to destruction, and that the path of your Shaykh is the path of gratitude (*shukr*). As a consequence, God has, from His bounty, protected his people from the falsehood through which Satan misguides. In respect of this point, we wish that you could speak more about this topic, as well as clarify the difference between the path of gratitude, which is the basis of your path, and the path of struggle (*al-mujahada*). [It is clear that] the scope of the former concerns gratitude, the pleasure of the Benefactor without hardship and trouble, while the scope of the latter concerns disciplining, fatigue, hardship, sleeplessness, hunger, and so on. Which one of these two paths is better? Further, are they both premised on the importance of spiritual disciplining? Did your Shaykh only instruct with the practice of gratitude after attaining closeness and arriving at the goal, or during the journey? Or did he command the practice of gratitude and delight in God the Most High from the beginning, at the moment of initiation? As for these two paths, is it possible for a single person to journey on both of them simultaneously, or is it only possible to benefit from one of them in exclusion of the other?

In response [to these questions] I would first say that God the Most High is the guide by His favor to the Straight Path. It has been reported by Shaykh Ahmad ibn al-Mubarak in the *Ibrīz* from the Shaykh, the Pole (*al-qutb*), ‘Abdul ‘Aziz ibn Mas‘ud al-Dabbagh:

That the path of gratitude is the original [path]. It is the path which the hearts of the prophets and the purified ones (*al-asfiya'*) from among the companions and others belong to. It is based on worshipping God with absolute sincerity in servitude and detachment from all expectations. It is further based on acknowledging weakness, shortcoming, and the inability to give divinity its rightful due, and the constancy of that in the heart in the passing of time. When He recognizes the truthfulness of that, He rewards them with that which His generosity makes incumbent. This includes the opening (*al-fath*) of intimate knowledge of Him and inclining towards the secrets of belief (*asrar al-iman*) in Him. When the people of spiritual disciplining (*ahl al-riyada*) heard what the people on the path of gratitude attained from the opening in knowing Him and their inclination to subtleties of belief in Him, this became their quest and desire. They began to seek it through fasting and prayer, abandoning sleep, and the constant practice of spiritual retreat, until they attained what they attained. The migration (*al-hijra*) on the path of gratitude is from its very foundation toward God and His Messenger and not for the purposes of acquiring illumination (*fath*) and witnessing unveilings. The migration on the path of spiritual disciplining, on the other hand, is based on attaining illumination and the attainment of ranks (*al-maratib*). The journey of the former is that of the hearts (*al-qulub*) while the journey of the latter is the journey of the bodies (*al-abdan*).

Illumination in the former comes suddenly without the expectation of attaining it. The servant is in the station of seeking repentance and forgiveness for his sins when he gains a clear illumination (*al-fath al-mubin*). Both of these paths are correct, but the path of gratitude is better and purer. They are both in agreement on the necessity of spiritual disciplining, except the first emphasizes the disciplining of the hearts, in order to connect it to the Truth, the strict attachment to His door, and to turn one's attention to God whether one is in motion or in rest. The path of gratitude also emphasizes vigilance during instances of forgetfulness between times of presence. In summary, spiritual disciplining is meant to attach the heart to God, and to establish constancy

in that, even if outwardly a person is not adorned with great acts of worship. For this reason, the practitioners of this path will fast, but also break their [voluntary] fasts, spend the night in prayer, but also sometimes sleep. They also spend time with their spouses, have intimate relations with them, and do other things in accordance with the Sacred Law, that the path of disciplining of the bodies shuns.

Elsewhere ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Dabbagh said:

The migration of the path of struggle is based on attaining illumination and the attainment of rank. After [the travellers on this path] attain illumination, some of them maintain their initial intention, and therefore their hearts become preoccupied with things they witnessed in other realms. They become pleased with what they see from mystical unveilings, like walking on water, or walking great distances with one step, and they come to see this as the ultimate goal. [Unfortunately], such a person is among those who are far from God from the beginning of his quest to the end. His actions are from those who are considered among the losers, whose actions have led them astray in the world, even though they consider what they are doing as praiseworthy. Then there are others who change their intentions after attaining illumination. God takes such a person by his hand, because of His mercy, attaches his heart to the Truth, and makes him turn away from everything other than Him. In this state, after he has attained illumination, he then begins journeying on the path of gratitude.

Given these differences, it should now be clear how great the distance between the two paths, and the two pursuits is! He continues on:

In summary, the journey of the first is that of the hearts, whereas the latter is that of the bodies. The intention in the first is pure, whereas in the latter the intention is flawed. Illumination in the first happens suddenly without the servant having any desire for it, since it emerges from the Divine. In contrast, illumination in the latter is the result of meticulous planning and reliance on other means. As has already been stated, it leads to two different outcomes. Further, illumination in the former is not attained by anyone except that they are a believer, a gnostic, a lover, and intimate with God. This is in complete contrast to the

latter. For you have heard that the Christian monks and Jewish rabbis have spiritual exercises that allow them to arrive at matters that are captivating. As for combining the two paths, it is possible that a person who [inwardly] attaches his heart to God in all his moments and states, at the same time outwardly remains in a state of strenuous effort and constant disciplining. And of course, God knows best. . . .

The gist of the previous discussion is best indicated by the words of our Shaykh [Ahmad al-Tijani], which is documented in *Jawahir al-ma'ani* [The Jewel of the Meaning].¹² He is reported to have said:

And the second thing I advise you with is to abstain from forbidden food, drink, clothing and dwellings. Then he explained what is indispensable after [accomplishing this], which is also the beginning and end of all things. That is to attach the heart to God and race to Him, while abandoning everything else, whether in general or particular. If the servant is able to direct his heart to God in every aspect and every state by observing the movements of the heart, this is the ultimate goal. He also said “it is obligatory on the seeker in reality to enter the evening and the morning, with the passing of the night and the day, without having a desire for two things. The first is that he chooses God over all others in existence, and because of Him he is not in need of anything from them. He disdains their regard, and remains steadfast in not choosing other than Him. God must be the starting point, and end point of his quest, as well as its beginning and end, and the opening and conclusion. He must be immersed in all aspects of this quest so that there is not a single moment where he does not strive to Him, since a desire or longing for other than Him is an aspect of blameworthy frivolity.

The second is that the intention of the wayfarer is to God, free from the influence of others. He completely attaches his innermost secret to Him, as well as his soul, his intellect, his self, his heart, inwardly and outwardly, until the point that not an atom within him is in opposition to God. He will be in complete conformity with His wish, stripped away from all of his intentions, preferences, plans, favors, desires, and selfish interests. He will be in complete compliance in all of that for God, having nothing in that from himself, by himself and with himself. And all of that in complete surrender to God, for His Sake (*ajlihi*), and His will (*iradatihi*) and His face (*li-wajhihi*). He will be in obedience to the reality of divinity

in order by which he will gain something for himself from Him. He must not select this because he desires to fulfill a wish, but only in absolute submission to the divinity of his Lord, not seeking blessings so that perhaps he does not gain His rebuke. In addition, he holds a good opinion of Him in what are the perfection of His praiseworthy qualities.”

The essence of what has preceded is indicated by some of what the master over existence and the knower of witnessing, our leader and master, Muhammad, dictated to a companion of the Shaykh, who was in a state of wakefulness and not asleep, so that he could deliver the message to the Shaykh. He said:

The Prophet said: “tell him,” meaning the Shaykh, “here is an analysis of worship, which is divided into four parts. The first part is to withdraw from the world and to devote oneself to God, in all one’s actions with complete sincerity to God. What he intends or desires with devotion is to magnify, glorify Him, and praise and sanctify Him, in the manner that is best befitting to Him. He does not intend to gain anything from his worship, while at the same time he also considers his worship as inadequate. In this way, his actions will ascend to God and enter the open door, and he will become preoccupied in transformations in the manner we stated at the beginning. The saying of the most High: ‘Those who believe and perform righteous deeds must also continue to become evident.’¹³ The people of righteous deeds are those who do not seek anything from their deeds, whether this amounts to benefit or profit. They also do not ask of anything from their worship except assistance and perfect mercy, by which they also seek the after-life.” Tell him: “The best request, when one of them asks, is that he asks for pardon and well being. And if he intends in his withdrawal and his devotion to arrive at a station or seek knowledge or a secret, his deeds will rise until they reach a locked door. They will stay there awaiting the door to be opened. They wait for their owner [of the deeds] to return saying ‘my worship is only for God, without expectation for anything.’ If he is inspired to say this, his deeds return and enter the open door. But if he does not say what has been mentioned, his deeds will return scattered like the scattering of the wind in the air. They will roam, until they come to rest, turning against him, damaged,” to the point where the Prophet said: “Tell my beloved al-Tijani that the meaning of all of

this is in the magnificent Qur'an." Tell him: "That this Book will make it clear to you in what I have commanded you to do." Tell him: "Not to aspire for anything else, and struggle greedily for things." Tell him: "This postpones illumination. The aspirations that people intend to attain through their efforts delays illumination. Strive to perfect your worship while also opposing your lower self." Tell him also: "It hinders illumination," and he repeated this three times.

God gives success by His grace to the straight path and to Him is the return and end.

Chapter 21. Warning from Becoming Preoccupied with Extraordinary Occurrences (*bi-l-waqa'i'*)

This is a warning against becoming preoccupied with extraordinary occurrences (*bi-l-waqa'i'*), and from depending on them and longing for their occurrence. Be informed that the wayfarer who does not see anything [from unveilings] or does not contemplate extraordinary occurrences (*wa la yara fi al-waqi'a*) is not less [in rank] than the person who does. In fact, the former is actually superior to the latter.

I reaffirm that by God alone is success, for He is the guide to the Straight Path.

Know that this chapter is a branch of the previous chapter. Our only purpose in pursuing [this topic further] is to dispel the delusion of the ignorant and negligent from the [truthful] seekers by providing explicit proof of the lowliness of the one who sees and contemplates extraordinary occurrences from the one who does not see them. It is also to establish the superiority of those who do not see and contemplate extraordinary occurrences, by the very fact that the falseness of such claims can cause a proponent of them to die as a nonbeliever unless he repents. The person who relies on what he experiences and becomes captivated [by it], and stands with it, becomes severed from attaining the goal in essence (*al-maqsud bi-l-dhat*).

Imam Shaykh Abu-l-Qasim al-Qushayri says in his *Risala*:¹⁴

When the wayfarer engages in constant remembrance (*dhikr*), as well as engages in the practice of spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) and he discovers in

his spiritual retreat that which he does not perceive in his heart, either in a state of sleep or of wakefulness, or in a state between sleep and wakefulness, from either speech that he hears or a meaning (*ma'na*) he witnesses, that he normally would otherwise not have, it is paramount that he does not become occupied with it, nor become captivated by it, or wait for its occurrence again. Preoccupation with [such existential phenomena] will ultimately lead the wayfarer away from the Truth (*al-Haqq*), purity be upon Him.

When he witnesses such occurrences it is necessary for him to describe what he experienced to his Shaykh, so that he can direct his heart on how to free itself from that. It is obligatory on his Shaykh to guard his secret, and to conceal his experience from others, and to belittle [the experience] in front of him. For certainly all of this is a test, and to become captivated by that test is delusion. So the seeker should be wary of that and of noticing it, and to make his aspiration (*himmatahu*) higher than that. . . .

According to Zayn al-Din al-Khawafi in his *al-Wasaya al-Qudsiyya*, the danger that comes to the wayfarer in presenting his experiences of extraordinary occurrences to someone other than his Shaykh is much greater than can be counted. The person who cannot contain himself from concealing extraordinary occurrences, will not be able to conceal spiritual miracles (*al-karamat*). If he becomes obsessed to seek their appearance, it will lead him to stop his progress. Ultimately this will lead him to fall short of the goal, and not reach the height of gnosis (*ma'arif*) of the great saints. [On this point], some of the scholars have said: "The liberated chest is the grave of secrets (*Sudur al-ahrrar qubur al-asrar*)."¹⁵

One of the Sufis saw the Messenger of God either during an unveiling or during his sleep. He asked him about Sufism (*al-tasawwuf*) after he had acquired different types of knowledge (*anwa' min al-ta'rifat*) that the Sufis often speak about. The Messenger of God responds to him: "Sufism is disavowing claims and concealing subtle meanings (*al-ma'ani*)."

Whenever a Shaykh publicizes the spiritual experiences of his disciple to others, when this is not directly related to educating and training, he is guilty of veiling his disciple with vanities. Since the first reaction of the disciple should be to reject what he saw during his spiritual experience. This is because the majority of such spiritual happenings are from fantasies, which the neophytes on the path are trained with. It is not as though the person who does

not see or contemplates about extraordinary occurrences is less[er] in rank to the one who sees and contemplates them. In fact, the former is actually better than the latter. Those who are weak in certainty, when they experience [such occurrences], their certainty increases. As for someone who is already strong and perfected, he does not become distracted by such occurrences. Such a person already has certainty about the afterlife, as God and His messenger have explained it; especially in how Paradise and its blessings, and the Fire with its raging inferno, are described, and the Reckoning for some, and the absence of it for some, and the weighing and counting of deeds, and the rest of the remaining events and terrors [that human beings will undergo]. Even if those matters were not disclosed, they would be witnessed on the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-ba'th wa-l-nushur*). If he is inspired with something which is in contradiction to what is described [by God and the Prophet] because of the seduction of Satan, the light of faith (*al-iman*) will fade away from him. For where lies the benefit in this inspiration and where lies the harm? A person should only wish to climb the summit of gnosis and arrive to witness the beauty of the Owner and Beneficent (*jamal al-malik al-minan*).

As for the affairs of this worldly life, the disclosure of the states of people distracts the innermost being (*sirr*) of the seeker with ephemeral events and occurrences. When his mind becomes captivated by extraordinary events, how can he prepare for the appearance of the Eternal Light (*al-nur al-qadim*)?

In explaining this verse “God has not assigned two hearts to one body” (Q 33:4), the Shaykh [Ahmad al-Tijani], may God sanctify his innermost being, said: “What is the difference between knowing the states of a person because of them informing you about them, and you coming to know a phenomenon through an unveiling, which allows you to know the state of that phenomenon? What would you attain for your journey? And how would this benefit you in the path to know Truth? They say ‘someone saw the Throne of God (*al-‘arsh*) and saw a body, the greatest of bodies, which was also the highest, the purest, which still amounts to a phenomenon seeing a phenomenon.’” He, may God sanctify his innermost being, and may He reward him with the finest reward for his concern for us, used to fill us with absolute aversion to becoming captivated by mystical unveilings and visible miracles. When one of us attained something by piercing into the unseen world (*shay’ min al-khawariq*), he used to weep out of fear that would enthrall us and become buried into the lower self, unknown, without being perceived by the heart. So he would, may God sanctify his innermost being, comfort us by saying: “Why do you worry? When you are not attentive to such phenomenon, they

will do you no harm.” The point of this long discussion is to indicate that the wayfarer—the one who loves [God], the one who engages in remembrance, and who is filled with yearning—must only pay attention to freeing himself from the realm of shackles (*‘awalim al-taqyid*) and enter the realm of freedom (*‘awalim al-illaq*), in preparation to become among the party of the Noble (*al-karim*), the Creator (*al-khalīq*).

The author of the *Ibrīz* [Ahmad ibn Mubarak] asked his Shaykh [al-Dabbagh], may God be content with the both of them:

How do we understand what has been mentioned from Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, and Galenus [Galen], and from others among the wise men and nonbelieving philosophers concerning the celestial world? For example, like their statements on the stars, their trajectory, and the spheres of their orbits, as well as their assertions that the moon is in the first sphere, that Mercury is in the second, that Venus is in the third, that the Sun is in the fourth, that Mars is in the fifth, that Jupiter is in the sixth, and Saturn is in the seventh, and other judgements of theirs on astronomical observations and matters related to modulations of the celestial spheres. Where does this knowledge come to them from, when it is from pure mystery (*ghayb*) and cannot be perceived by the senses, or supported by evidence or speculation? More importantly, they also do not base their information on revelation from God to some of His prophets. Further, what is narrated by our Prophet about Enoch [Idris] suggests that there is no account that contradicts what we mentioned, since their relationship to our master Enoch is very remote. Persistence in [tracing such a relationship] is a road fraught with difficulty. Any information from one of them about this relationship also leads to no conclusion. [How do we classify their knowledge] when one of the informants is among the philosophers, and therefore he is considered a nonbeliever? Normally [the validity] of his information is not accepted, unless such a person is deemed honest. If it is a different person, then their state of belief or unbelief remains unknown.

His Shaykh responded to him:

God created truth and light, and made a group of people adhere to them. Likewise he created darkness and falsehood and a group of people belong to them. On the one hand, the people of falsehood (*ahl al-zalam*)

became acquainted with all the knowledge and practices associated with darkness. On the other hand, the people of truth (*ahl al-haqq*) became acquainted with all the knowledge and practices associated with it. Truth means believing in God and affirming His divinity (*rububiyatihi*), with absolute certainty that He can create and choose as He pleases. In addition, believing in the prophets, the angels, and all else that earns the pleasure of the Most High. Falsehood is not believing in God, and [engaging in] everything that severs a person from God, including the world (*dunya*), with all of the ephemeral matters and transient events that exist within it. It is a sufficient proof that the Prophet cursed it [the world] when he said: “The world and everything contained within it is cursed, except the remembrance of God and what He chooses to protect.” Truth is a light from the lights of God which the people of truth drink, to the point where their essences glitter with the lights of knowledge (*anwar al-ma‘arif*). While the people of falsehood drink from the falsehood of darkness until it clouds (*tasawwad*) their intellects, and blinds their insight and vision from the truth, while also making them deaf from hearing it. To put it even more clearly, it [truth] is not a matter their intellects contemplate, nor can their minds even comprehend it. For them, Truth occupies a place of nonexistence, and remains completely unheard of. Their unawareness of Truth is like the unawareness of those who possess intellects about something that is truly nonexistent in the manner described earlier. For this reason, the people of falsehood are bestowed with witnessing this world, the sky and earth, but do not witness within them anything except transitory matters associated with celestial bodies and their forms, like what they mention about the rules of the stars “that so and so star is in so and so sphere” and when “the star, named such and such, becomes such and such when it joins it.”

As for the tomb of the Prophet and the light that extends from it to the dome of the intermediary realm (*al-barzakh*), the essences of the saints, those who have knowledge of God (*al-‘arifin bi-l-lah*), the souls of the believers who dwell in the courtyards of the tombs, the memorizers of the Qur’an (*huffaz*), the noble scribes, the angels that follow each other around us, as well as all the other secrets from Truth which are connected to God, which He has placed on the earth, they are not endowed with knowledge of these matters, nor can their intellects ever comprehend them. This is because God has saturated them with darkness and has completely severed them from acquiring knowledge of

Him. Consequently, the people of darkness do not witness anything from the secrets of the Truth, which he has placed in the sky, nor do they witness the angels or their glorification, nor do they witness the Garden, the Pen (*al-qalm*), the Tablet (*al-lawh*), nor the light of the letters drawn from the Pen. They also do not recognize the Truth, who fashioned them. In summary, the Truth veils Himself from them, and from everything that is connected and leads to Him. In addition, and in contrast, He has bestowed onto them things that are harmful to them and do not bring any benefit.

As for the people of truth they obtain an opening (*fath*)—in both the first instance, as well as the second instance—with everything that has already been mentioned about the people of darkness about their knowledge of this world, the sky and the earth. A person who experiences the first instance of the opening witnesses the seven earths and all that they contain, as well as the seven heavens and all that they contain. He also witnesses the actions and deeds of the servants in their homes and palaces (*qusurihim*). He does not, however, witness this with his eyesight, but instead by his insight (*basiratihi*), which is neither veiled by an obstruction, nor is blocked by a barrier. They also witness all future events that will occur in a specific month and a specific year. With respect to this type of opening, the people of darkness can be on an equal footing (*hadd al-sawa'*). Consequently, mystical unveiling (*al-kashf*) is considered the lowest rank of sainthood, since it can be found among the people of truth, but also among the people of falsehood. The person endowed with this type of opening has no guarantee that he will not distance himself from the people of truth, and attach himself to the people of falsehood, thereby abandoning his station and overstepping his bounds.

As for the opening in the second instance, it amounts to witnessing the secrets of the Truth, which are veiled from the people of darkness. He witnesses the saints, who have intimate knowledge of God speaking with each other across distances in the same manner that people sitting face to face speak. He also witnesses the souls of the believers around their graves, the noble scribes, the angels, the intermediary realm and the souls of the dead within it. He witnesses the grave of the Prophet and the column of light that extends from it to the dome of the intermediary realm. If he obtains the witnessing of the essence of the Prophet, while in a waking state, he also obtains safety from the ruse of Satan, because of his connection to the mercy of God, which is indeed

our Master and our Prophet, Muhammad. By virtue of this connection with the noble essence (*al-dhat al-sharifa*), he also comes to acquire intimate knowledge of the Truth and the witnessing of His primordial essence (*dhatuhu al-azaliya*). This is because he finds the noble essence disappearing into the Truth, enraptured by love in witnessing Him. The saint continues [journeying] to the Truth because of the blessing of the noble essence, and thereby slowly mounts the stations of intimate knowledge, until he stays witnessing (*taqa'a lahu al-mushahadat*), and acquires the secrets of intimate knowledge, and the lights of love.

This second degree of opening clarifies the differences between the people of truth and the people of falsehood. As for the first type of opening, they [the people of truth] treat it as though it is only attainable by the people of darkness, since they acquire the ability to witness transitory events and have the ability to change them. Consequently, you will see a person of falsehood (*al-mubtal*) walking over water, or flying through the air, or acquiring sustenance from the unseen (*al-ghayb*), even though he does not believe in God. The reason is that God created light, and from it He created angels and made them helpers of the people of truth, by means of good fortune (*al-tawfiq*), right direction, and supernatural accomplishments (*kharq al-'awa'id*). Likewise, He created darkness and from it devils and appointed them helpers of the people of falsehood, by means of persuasion, an increase in loss, and the ability to have control over supernatural accomplishments.

He also said:

Related to this topic is also the story of the Jew who was with Ibrahim al-Khawwas on a ship.¹⁶ They became acquainted and friendly with each other during their travel. The Jew said to him: "If you are really truthful in your religion then here is the sea. Walk on it, and I will do the same." When the Jew began to walk on water, Ibrahim al-Khawwas said: "I will not let a Jew get the better of me." So he jumped from the ship onto the water, where God assisted him to walk alongside the Jew. Then they returned from the sea and the Jew said to Ibrahim: "I wish to be companions during our journey." Ibrahim responded: "I would like that very much."

Then the Jew said: "But I have certain conditions. The first is that you cannot enter any mosques, nor any churches, because I do not like

them. Second, we will not pass through any cities, in case people talk about the companionship of a Muslim with a Jew. Instead, we will journey through the desert and empty places. Finally, we will not take any provision with us.” Ibrahim responded: “I agree with these terms.” They set out to the barren desert and journeyed for three days without eating anything. In the meantime, while they were sitting, a dog approached the Jew. In its mouth it had three loaves of bread. The dog dropped them in front of him and left. Ibrahim said: “He did not present them to me, so that we could eat them together, and therefore I remained hungry. Then a handsome young man, with a beautiful face, and a fragrant smell, came to me holding food in his hand, the likes of which had never been seen before. He placed it in front of me and left. I presented it to the Jew so that he could share it with me, but he refused. So I ate it by myself.” Then the Jew said: “O Ibrahim! Our religion and your religion are both on the truth. Both of them guide to the right direction, and they bear fruit. Except that your religion is more refined, more beautiful and better, so if it is agreeable to you, I would like to enter it.” He said: “Then he embraced Islam and became one of our companions who was truly devoted to Sufism.” This is how the story is narrated by Abu Nu‘aym in his *al-Hilyat* on the biography of Ibrahim al-Khawwas.¹⁷

Ahmad ibn al-Mubarak said:

I asked our Shaykh about this narrative. He responded: “The land of their father [Abraham] has become vacant. The devils deceive them and they think that their worship bears fruit!” Then he mentioned the previous discussion pertaining to the state of the people of truth, and the people of falsehood. One has no need to look for any other explanation beyond it, and God knows best.

Then he [al-Dabbagh] said:

As for the origin of the sciences of the philosophers and their judgments on the celestial sphere and similar matters, it is like a man who lived during the time of our master Abraham the Intimate Friend (*Ibrahim al-khalil*), and believed in him. He began to hear from him [Abraham] matters concerning illumination (*fath*) from the dominion (*malakut*) of the heavens and the earth. He continued in this practice

until he attained illumination himself. But he remained stationary, only witnessing the wonders of the world, until he severed his connection from the Truth. As a consequence he suffered (*khasira*) in this world and the hereafter. He was elated by what he witnessed in the celestial sphere and began discussing the location of stars and assigning rules for them. He ultimately turned away from the religion of Abraham, and only those that God has willed His disappointment on began to follow him, until this knowledge reached the blameworthy philosophers.” Then he said: “God’s anger increased on that man because he guided people in a direction away from God. Whoever guides away from God is by their very nature also someone who cuts people off from God. The benefit of messengership (*al-risala*) and prophethood (*al-nabuwwa*) is based on a singular characteristic. This characteristic is guidance to God and to establish a close relationship with Him. Now suppose if we were to present an absurd hypothesis about a person bestowed with the position of messengership or prophethood. Imagine that person began to guide people away from God, cut them off completely from the Truth, and instead called them to create an intimate relationship with himself. This person would be comparable in characteristic to the person described above. The reason why we mention this absurd and exaggerated hypothesis is to emphatically deter people from guiding people away from God.”

Then he said:

We used to walk over the bridge of the iron gate (*qantarat bab al-hadid*), which was one of the gates of Persia (*fars*) that God protected out of His generosity. He asked: “What is the benefit of that?” I said: “We walk over it in order to have safety from the perils that lie underneath it, and so that the people who walk over it can get to their destination on the earth.” He said: “So if this benefit was removed, then it would certainly lead to harm for people?” I said: “Yes, of course.” He said: “This is similar to the prophets, the messengers, the angels drawn near to God (*al-muqarrabun*), and the rest of the righteous servants of God. Their benefit is simply to guide people to God and [help them] create an intimate relationship with Him. If their purpose for this benefit is removed, then they become comparable to the example of the bridge above. And of course, God knows best!”

Then he said:

When the perfected ones (*al-kamilin*) from the people of truth are asked about matters pertaining to the future, they say very little about them. This is because such matters are from the first instance of witnessing, and they have already moved onto witnessing truth after it. They recognize the falsehood in it, and subsequently detest it. Therefore, they also detest talking about matters pertaining to this. This is ultimately because the ephemeral world and the events that happen within it are hated by God, and so they also hate whatever the Truth hates. They also cannot speak of these matters without descending from their station, in the same manner that someone would descend from Pleiades (*al-thurayya*) to the earth. Each degree of such events [is] akin to a degree of illumination (*darajat fath*) of the people of darkness. Also they, may God be content and pleased with them, do not witness except with lights linked to the Truth (*anwar al-Haqq*). Time and its consequences become eliminated in the [presence of the] light of Truth (*nur al-Haqq*), and therefore [from this vantage point] there is no past, present, or future. At most the saint [who is in this station] knows by the light of the Truth that an event will certainly occur for so and so person. As for the fact that it will occur on a particular day, this information cannot be obtained except by descending into the signification of time and its consequences. Without a doubt this is considered to be darkness by their estimation in relation to the light of the Truth.

The example of the person who does this is like the sun when it descends from the sky to the earth, its light is reflected on [a] mirror to make itself apparent for it to be viewed. I said: "The Truth has knowledge of what will happen and the consequences of it. He has knowledge of the past, the present and the future. It is necessary for the saint that sees with His light to know what happened to those before him who descended to a degree of darkness." He said: "That is the case because He encompasses everything with His knowledge, and the Lord is powerful while the servant is weak. The knowledge of the servant is limited. In summary, it is not possible to compare the knowledge of the servant with that of his Lord. Alluding to this [point], our master al-Khidr said to our master Moses: 'My knowledge and your knowledge are not comparable to the knowledge of God, except that they are like the comparison of the sparrow in its nest with the ocean.'"

He also said:

The saint may sometimes speak about something pertaining to an event that will take place in the future, for he can experience them by descending below from his rank. This is not considered a sin. It does, however, represent a lowering of aspiration (*qusur himma*) and coming down from a higher station. It is a proper mode of conduct so long as it aligns with the intentions and goals of the Prophet. This must also be done with the acknowledgement that the case of the Prophet was not like this, nor was it with most of the perfected ones among the saints. They only rarely speak about such phenomena in accordance with the decree of destiny and the control exerted over them, in whichever manner He pleases, since they witness the manifestations of the Truth.

Then I [Ahmad ibn Mubarak] added:

Related to this topic is also the potential harm that comes from knowing the saints and mixing with them. With respect to knowing them, some people fail to discern between illumination of the people of darkness in comparison to illumination of the people of truth. They consider that both of these groups of people increase in their knowledge through unveilings, and that when they complete the disciplining of their paths, they attain complete supernatural abilities. If anyone demonstrates supernatural abilities, they consider that this confirms the title of sainthood. Thus one group of people is convinced that sainthood is conferred on those who experience mystical unveilings (*al-kushufat*) and believe this to be the ultimate goal. While another group is convinced that sainthood is based on uprightness outwardly, and the constant practice of fasting and prayer. Even though the inward state of that person is empty of the Truth and inclines towards others besides Him.

If the servant is blessed by God to be in the company of a perfected saint, it is possible that what he seeks from that saint is quite the opposite to what should be sought. What should be sought is that the saint helps the servant come to know his Lord, and warn him about what severs this relationship—the ephemeral world and inclining to its ornaments. If the servant only seeks from the saint the satisfaction of his needs, day after day, year after year, and does not ask about his

Lord, nor about how to come to know Him, he will incur the anger of the saint, who will also begin to loathe him. He is only safe from the calamity that will befall him [for these actions] because of the saint. This [risk of destruction] is for several reasons. First, he loves the saint not for the sake of God, and so his relationship with the saint is compromised from the onset. Love that is distorted only leads to patent loss. Moreover because of the whispering and presence of devils, the light of God cannot ever descend on this type of love. Secondly, the saint sees him attached to the ephemeral world, trapped in the center of separation, and so he wishes to rescue him from that, but the servant only wants him to increase him in that. Thirdly, when the saint assists him in the satisfaction of some of his desires, and also discloses to him some esoteric secrets (*al-kushufat*), a cover overcomes the wretched (*al-miskin*) servant, until he thinks that this is what he is meant to seek from the saint. Yet all of this is misguidance and a grave act (*wabal*).

I also heard our Shaykh [al-Dabbagh] saying:

The example of the saint is like the man who works as a potter. He works with his hands and moves his limbs. This man possesses treasures that people need, like food and other things. Although he possesses these treasures, his heart rejects them and gives them no importance, since he has no interest in them. He only likes to speak about pottery and his craft. In other words, in speaking with someone about anything else, he becomes full of anger, to the point that a person discussing these matters with him fears harm will befall him. So if two men come to him, understanding his position and his dislike for speaking about things other than pottery, while they also desire something from the treasures he possesses, the clever and successful among them will be the one to speak to him about pottery. He will ask him about his craft and his work, and continue speaking about such matters until he acquires the love and affection of this person. So then if he asks, after doing this, about something from that treasure, the potter will give it to him without any harm befalling him. The unsuccessful among them is the one who comes to this man and immediately tries to obtain something from that treasure and only speaks to him about it. Now if he survives being hit over the head with a clay pot by the potter, he will be lucky, and his profit will only be having survived and nothing else.

The example of this potter is like the saint, who does not have a craft nor any occupation except intimate knowledge of the Truth and what leads to Him. He does not like to speak about anything except this, and does not socialize except for that. There is no arrival except it is with him, nor any possibility of closeness except that it is through him. Whoever realizes this point will accrue profit in this world and the next. The person who understands something different than this will ultimately gain the opposite.

Then he [al-Dabbagh] said:¹⁸

As for the first type of illumination, the people of darkness share in it with the people of truth, although their intentions are different. The intention of the people of darkness turns them away from His door and creates a barrier from His way, since His anger is upon them. God severs them from Him and attaches their hearts to other than Him. He envelops them with existential phenomena as a tribulation and a persuasion so that they think they have attained something.

I [‘Umar Tal] am including here several verses that speak to the matter of saintly miracles:

Some of the elite see the existence of miracles
As true evidence of the obtainment of spiritual stations . . .
Miracles are nothing but a hindrance, (accidentally) encountered
Among true (Sufi) people of (divine) action and (pure) intention
Such extraordinary occurrences should not be sought
So be warned of (God’s) test in being enfolded by miracles.

There are also the verses:

Guard the knowledge for which you are responsible
Do not substitute anything else for God
Hiding miracles is obligatory on the actualized saints
So do not be led astray
Their appearance among the Messengers was obligatory
For thus did divine inspiration descend.

This is understood by the fact that the saint calls to God the Exalted with a true, confirmed law, laid out before him by the Prophets. But a Prophet calls to God the Exalted by a law that is strange [to his audience]: what he comes with has not been presented before to the people of his time. He requires the manifestation of miracles (*mu'jizat*) as evidence of the truthfulness of what he brings. For more information on this matter, consult the book, *The Lifting of Inundation*.¹⁹

God gives success by His grace to the straight path and to Him is the return and end.

8

*The Vessel of Happiness and
Assistance for the Weak
(Safinat al-sa'ada li-ahl du'f wa-l-najada)*

In 1852, al-Hajj 'Umar Tal completed his finest literary work, *The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak*. Having established himself as a renowned scholar, who had recently completed his magnum opus, *al-Rimah*, he turned his attention to penning a praise of the Prophet Muhammad. Prophetic praise poetry (*madih al-nabawi*) has long played an important role in the devotional and scholarly practices of Muslim societies, and West Africa was no different. Many West African scholars, including those covered in this volume, devoted much of their efforts to penning such poetry.

The Vessel of Happiness powerfully captures the raw emotion, devotion, and love that Tal felt for the Prophet. It contains over three thousand lines of sheer literary talent, owing to his immense Arabic vocabulary and knowledge of Arabic poetics. The poem consists of twenty-nine separate but interlinked odes, of roughly equal length. The last letter of the verses of each ode rhymes with one specific letter of the Arabic alphabet. In other words, there are twenty-eight odes corresponding to each letter of the alphabet, as well as an additional ode corresponding to the combined letters *lam* and *alif* (la).

While the length of the poem and its literary quality are noteworthy, it is what lies beyond the surface of this work that is truly impressive. Tal did not compose an entirely new poem from scratch. Rather, he incorporated two other existing and famous praise poems into his own composition. The first poem, commonly known as *al-Ishrinīyat* ('The Twenties'), was written by an Andalusian scholar named 'Abd al-Rahman al-Fazazi (d. 1230). It was later rendered into a *takhmīs* (pentastich) by Abu Bakr ibn Muhib.¹ This version of the poem remains quite widespread throughout West Africa.² Tal had studied the poem as a child in Futa Toro, and considered it one of the

greatest examples of praise poetry. Consequently, he decided to produce a *ta'shir* (decastich) of the original, *al-Ishriniyat*. In this manner, *The Vessel of Happiness* breathed new life into these older poems while also becoming part of their intellectual history in the region.³

In Tal's rendition, he kept certain aspects of Ibn Muhib's rhyming scheme, but he did not reproduce any of his lines. Instead he added four completely new lines to every single line of al-Fazazi's original poem. The relationship between Tal's additional lines and the original poem are clear if we examine the first stanza of the first ode of the poem. I have placed the original lines in italics:

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

From the Supreme on the praised, peace and blessings
 Guard of creation. He is most radiant,
 Like the full moon! An emblazoned object,
 Brilliantly shining. Dignity, most perfected.
*The Prophet, who dwells in the Garden's summit.*⁴

In producing my translation, I have relied on a printed critical edition of one of the few complete Arabic manuscripts that remain of *The Vessel of Happiness*.⁵ Here, I present a complete translation of the first ode of the poem, which rhymes with the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, *alif*. I have rendered my translation in five half-line stanzas. I have not produced a literal translation of Tal's verses; instead, I have opted to capture their meaning and intent. Further, I have placed a syllable count of my own rendering. The majority of the verses that I present here are either ten or eleven syllables long.

The Letter Alif⁶ (Harf Alif)

Creator of the best of creation, praise!
 For sending from us, one lifted to the Throne.⁷
 How great, the rank of one who dwells so lofty?
Most deserving of God's praise and glory.
 The beloved, through whom God gives and guards.

From the Supreme on the praised, peace and blessings.
Guard of creation. He is most radiant,
Like the full moon! An emblazoned object,
Brilliantly shining. Dignity, most perfected.

10 *The Prophet, who dwells in the Garden's summit.*

A lasting guidance, removes the wicked,
Leads the intelligent, destroys the arrogant.
Pruner of thorns, confidant of creation,
The most deserving of God's praise and glory.
His intercession is protection on that Day.

Detesting transgressors rife on the earth,
He fled to his Master and was thereby raised.
Taba,⁸ abode of Truth, expelled the foolish.
Loftiest in speech, magnificent in worth,

20 *The Prophet, who dwells in the Garden's summit.*

A person, whose very birth was a blessing.
Leader of creation, praised from the beginning.
Destroyer of duality, expends benefit.
The most deserving of God's praise and honor.
Shows his intercession on that Day of dread.⁹

The proof, the caller, and the easy path.
Unblemished, a guide with the best qualities.
Unhasty, calm and patient with enemies.
Experienced, worthy to guide God's servants,
30 Valiant and daring against any warrior.

He is the shade, the broad path, and a spring—
For all creation. Unwavering from Truth,
Steadfast, boldly guiding, undistracted.
Never lost, expert of cures, well mannered.
The beloved, who knows the secrets of hearts.

God! Adam's progeny, yet the first Prophet.¹⁰
A savior and support for all creation.

Both gentle and firm for their salvation.

Leads the messengers, from beginning to end

40 When Adam was still between water and clay.

Certainly he surpassed all in quality,

Distinction, victory, by serving the Truth.

His gifts made them yearn for his charity.

Through kindness and effort rectified people.

*The beautiful dhikr begins and ends on him.*¹¹

Surely the transgressors understood his signs.

The trees and the rocks greeted him and bowed.

For him, praise and honor they openly showed.

From the signs of the messengers they were ahead.

50 Shining forth from the light of the beloved.

The wild beasts of *hira* and *thawr* spoke to him.¹²

The bird protected him, the spider wove a web,

Covering the cave, like it was vacant.¹³

From among all the signs of the messengers,

The most brilliant are those from our Messenger.

The light and jewel that adorns creation.

The fortress, at home or away, with safety.

Managing his companions, most eloquent.

The most amazing ornament created.

60 For him is praise, through him is protection.

He is the ladder to God, the mirror

Reflecting our Lord, and an immense light.

His companions' praise, gloriously bright.

Remember and praise him! Gifts from the Most High.

To him open praise, his intercession hidden.

The caller, industriously calling

All of creation, in all its states, to Truth.

The light that expels the humiliators.

After a thousand proofs, could there be doubt?

70 From the wicked, he leads and protects the Truth.

He leads all creation resolutely
To the Merciful, the unique Majesty.
The chosen one, the guide of creation.
Is there doubt? After the light of the message,
Preceded by praise recited forever.

An essence of love for men and women.
His distinction above creation, lofty.
Free from all except the Truth, his majesty.
Great in matter and intellect, his brightness.
80 Light, never diminished by dirt or harshness.

In this life and next, a worthy leader.
Free from all creation and uniquely ranked.
Loving him is success, an ample yield.
The purifier of hearts and intentions.
Illusion and doubt never distractions.

Indeed, the guide and the defender of Truth.
Peak of guidance, the stubborn submitted.
A clear proof, the transgressors expelled.
The unjust removed, intelligible Truth.
90 Keeper of people, a time of elation.

Speech, sweeter than honey, aromatic.
The deceitful heard without comprehension.
And the joyful chief began to lament.
The sign of guidance after it had faded.
He saved creation, all were ecstatic.

Religion and its support, superior.
By the five pillars creation beautified.¹⁴
On Truth and piety, when he called.
Human and Finn obeyed him willingly.
100 His daring companions appear valiantly.

A unique spirit near the Unique One.
 A nation whose rank, unquantifiable.
 Richness and poverty through obedience.
 It responded to him when he called it.
*Precedence and favor to the first group.*¹⁵

Indeed, a small group managed all the tribes.
 A great nation given great qualities.
 Wonderful is the one who supports the guide,
Who acknowledged his many signs and proofs.
 110 Path of calling, its companions, abundant.

Defined by turning from all that perishes.
 To face the Effacer of low qualities.
 Through Him, overpowering the condemned.
 Humiliating them, with lances and (good) manners.
By it, the clear morning and the well paved path.

His Master made him the chosen, the leader.
 He became honorable through His mercy.
 Muhammad, picked from birth to eternity.
The Merciful guarded his birth and upbringing.
 120 He remains a light, pure and luminous.

Desired light, existing before creation.
 Muhammad, a spring of guidance to God.
 Ahmad, who never made partners with God.¹⁶
 Source of beginning and end, sanctify him!
 Constantly disavowed those against Truth.

Those ignorant, it is an old covenant.¹⁷
 The prophets must help and support him,
 And believe when someone like him appears.
Reflect on creation, you will know him.
 130 Unblemished, the unique leader gives blessings.

Managing God's creation; human, Jinn,
 Angels, and also the rest of existence.

The root, abandons all the dissenters.
Reflect on creation, find certitude.
Like Ahmad, none will ever be created.

To the beloved, remembrance and sunna.¹⁸
For opposers, a warner, trial and distress.
Brings glad tidings and blessings to lovers.
He saves creation, an abundant rain cloud.

140 Shades creation, returning repeatedly.

His nature, to save creation, to give gifts.
The light of the worlds, an ornament.
Since the spread of darkness, oppression, disgrace,
A shield through whom God protects. A constant rain
That quenches thirst, provides abundant shade.

The guided and guider, before the air was.
Guide of all guides, whether living or fallen.
Never wavering, the peak of creation.
Wake up through him from misguidance and desire.

150 Intellect not lost, the blessing not delayed.

Sanctified before creation, never alone.
Seeking Him, the one who split the kernel.
From revelation, reaching the intention.
Responding and fulfilling their wishes.
Nonexistent medicine, sudden success.

Leader, paragon of intellectuals.
The savior, the cover and protection.
The paramount chief, without blemish.
Freeing creation from misguidance and loss.

160 Dispensing truth, with mercy, charitable,

Safety and success, guidance and leadership.
Wrongdoers surrendered, followers succeeded.
The giver, blessed. The beggar, attainted.
Though lost by idolatry and oppression,

By a light that leads, saved and protected.

Defeating his opponents from the outset.

The noble origin of God's creation.

The great leader annihilates all evil.

Humbled polytheists, trampled their necks.

170 Their souls, never calm, always in awe of him.

In the protection of the Merciful,

Who saved him from every surprise.

With that, and bravery from his Master.

Humiliating the people of falsehood,

Whose wary hearts remained in fear of him.

Praise the chosen one in essence and body.

Be excessive and repeat that constantly!

And say, like I have said, in the cusp of love,

I love him, with yearning, expecting reward.

180 Perhaps there, I will be in his close presence.

Lord! Make love for him an achievement of mine.

My loss! If I don't vanish into him.

I would die, out of love, without hardship.

I love him out of yearning and closeness.

And perhaps there, I will drink from his pool.¹⁹

Praise God, for the favor He bestowed on me,

To prostrate on the place, he set his foot.

Before my journey, I wished closeness to him,

To kiss the place where he stepped with his shoes.

190 I was his neighbor. And God gives and protects.

I wish I met those in his entourage.

I ask now to just grasp the hem of his robe.

And to inherit like a descendent would,²⁰

To quench my thirst from the overflowing rain.

Quench it, by him through whom I became thirsty.

The chosen one. His medicine is unique.
When they come with an ailment, he cleans their hearts.
By him, success. Fire engulfs transgressors.
Love for him, security on the Last Day.

200 Joyful blessings from him are enough for me.

There is no equal to the beloved one,
Since God made none other as distinguished.
No punishment, for the servant that loved him.
I seek refuge from his Lord on the Last Day.
It is enough. He is a place of refuge.

Praise God, when I was made to drink his love,
He brought me close to him in deeds and action.
Attaining the opening, the pure water,
Hope for my soul that it will reach the Prophet.

210 Given to the boy, hidden in the unseen.

I am in love. Enraptured, burning passion,
For a master that has no equal at all.
Closer to him, the love becomes emblazing,
Passion blocks the chest, and I say “glad tidings.”
While being healed, the boy complains of illness.

Part 3

Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké

Rudolph Ware

9

Introduction

Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké, *Khādim al-Rasul* (the servant of the Messenger), is one of history's most prolific writers of Arabic and among the most prodigious poets of all time.¹ Scholars have cataloged over 200 distinct books of poetry by Bamba, and this certainly underestimates his productivity.² As with many Muslim scholars, some of his works simply have not survived, and in fact in his later years Bamba himself revised (and even destroyed) a number of his earliest works. Of those surviving cataloged works, some are collections of as many as 200 poems, and some of those poems contain up to 5,000 lines!

Within the Muridiyya, his writings are the proof of his sainthood in the same way that the Qur'an was the proof of Muhammad's Prophethood. If the Qur'an was Muhammad's primary miracle, then Bamba's "seven tons" of writings were his own. Recitations of Bamba's odes (*Qasa'id* in Arabic or *Xasida*, as they are called in Wolof) are best understood as the beating heart of pietistic and devotional activity in the Muridiyya.

French colonial discourse on *Islam Noir*, Black Islam, caricatured "the Mourides" as an anti-intellectual African Sufi order. Recent monographs have complicated this unflattering portrait, recovering an image of Ahmadu Bamba as a mystic, spiritual trainer, and charismatic figure. But he was above all a scholar and a Sufi poet; his personal devotional practice centered on his *writing*, which was, in his own estimation, his most significant achievement and the core of his personal service to the Prophet.

Bamba's poems are critical to the Murid tradition because, unlike the other authors surveyed here, he wrote almost exclusively in verse. As a teenager, Bamba studied Arabic meter and rhyme with Majaxaté Kala, the chief judge for the last precolonial Senegalese ruler, Lat Dior Diop. Kala was a

renowned poetry teacher and the author of *Mubayyin al-Ishkal*, a widely studied technical work on Arabic meter in nineteenth-century Senegambia.³

Bamba penned his first surviving poem when he was only a teenager, sometime shortly after the death of his mother Maryam—Jaratullahi—Buso in the mid-1860s. That poem, “The Valiant One”—*Sindidi*, as it is usually called—is still among the most widely recited and appreciated of Bamba’s poems. Fittingly, it is the first poem rendered here, representing his work as an early student of the Islamic religious sciences. I have rendered it in rhymed verse with a very direct and literal translation, since the poem is intended largely as a rhymed supplication for the believing people: Bamba himself, and, especially, his recently departed and dear mother, Jaratullahi (God’s neighbor).

The next piece translated here is from the second phase of Bamba’s intellectual life. After completing advanced studies in law, theology, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and a number of other disciplines, Bamba began teaching these in the school run by his father, Momar Anta Saly. The latter was also a longtime judge for Lat Dior Diop, and so Bamba was quite often the main teacher at their family school—here, he put his poetic gift to work versifying the lengthy prose treatises studied in these different disciplines, rendering them into clear and concise rhymes so that students could easily memorize them. As time went on, these pieces became much more than mere versifications of original works by authors like Sanusi, Ghazali, al-Kunti, or others. They became Bamba’s own distinct synthesis of the subject matter presented in rhyme form, such as was the case with Bamba’s major didactic work on Sufism, *Masalik al-ḥinan* (The Pathways of Paradise). Bamba began writing it shortly after the passing of Momar Anta Saly in 1882/83, and it begins with a prayer for his departed father’s soul, just as *Sindidi* ended with a prayer for his departed mother.

The last piece considered here represents the final and most productive stage of Bamba’s intellectual life. Because he formally expressed his desire to bring joy to the Messenger of God with his rhymes, I have translated one of Bamba’s most famous post-exile poems, *Mawahib al-nafi‘ fi mada’ih al-shafi‘*, in verse with a translation that seeks to echo the harmony and spirit of the original rather than mere correlation between words. The poem begins with an ode to joy after Bamba’s return from seven years and nine months of exile. The shaykh was famously deported and imprisoned in Gabon by the French colonial regime from 1895 until 1902, his triumphant return from exile marking his ascent as a charismatic figure in Senegambia. Upon his

return, he famously told his disciples to throw his previous writings into the sea. He did not mean this literally; rather, he was signaling a shift in the meaning and purpose of his writing. For the last twenty-five years of his life, Bamba wrote—almost exclusively—panegyric praise poetry dedicated to the Prophet. For the Servant of the Messenger, writing love poems for the pleasure of the final Prophet was the noblest jihad of the pen.

10

“The Valiant One” (*al-Sindid*)

S*indidi* is clearly a poem that Bamba wrote before his exile and it is, in all likelihood, his earliest surviving Qasida. It was composed sometime shortly after the death of his mother, the scholar and saint Maryam Buso (d. 1866). Bamba was between 11 and 13 years old when she passed, and was a student of the sciences at that time; the exact date of the composition of the poem is unclear, but it was certainly finished during his teenage years. The poem begins with a call to God in the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the prophets of Christianity and Judaism, and the Noble Angels and honored Books (1–13). Once the call to God has been made in the name of these illustrious entities, its substance is developed. Bamba offers a stirring prayer of protection against harm in this life and the next (14–41), and ends with a prayer for the soul of his mother before closing with blessings on the Prophet. I have translated it word for word, in verse, by occasionally changing the sequence of invocations in a verse in order to allow for greater rhythm and internal rhyme. I have left “Allah” untranslated so as to capture the final rhyme of the original.

- 1 O Allah, by the Chosen! Allah, by the Valiant!
 By Your friend Abraham, O Allah!
- 2 By Your confidant Moses, by Salih and Khidr,
 by Shwaib and Ishmael, Allah!
- 3 By Solomon and by Noah, Jonah and Elijah,
 Zacharia and John, O Allah!

- 4 By Aaron and Joshua, Elias, Adam, and David
 by Isaiah, and Jesus, and Lot
- 5 By Joseph and Isaac, and all of Your Prophets
 and Blessed Apostles, Allah!
- 6 By all of the Angels, and those chief among them
 by Gabriel and Michael, Allah!
- 7 And by the horn blower, and by the soul taker,
 Israfil and 'Azra'il, O Allah!
- 8 And by the companions, the saints and the sages,
 the ink of the scholars, Allah!
- 9 By Abu Bakr Siddiq, 'Umar al-Faruq,
 by Usman and Ali, O Allah!
- 10 By Malik the favored, by Shafi'i and Ahmad,
 by Abu Hanifa, Allah!
- 11 By the Safeguarded Tablet, and by the Pen,
 by the Throne and the Footstool, Allah!
- 12 And by the Qur'an, by the Torah and Psalms,
 by Jesus' Gospel, Allah!
- 13 Prayers and Peace on our Prophet, and on his spouses,
 and all his companions, Allah!
- 14 Lord drape us in wellness, and fulfill our hopes
 in both the abodes, O Allah!
- 15 Please open up wide, the gates of Your goodness
 for all of the righteous, Allah!
- 16 Set us on the way. Guide us not astray.
 Keep the devils away, O Allah!

- 17 Fulfill our ambitions, and our aspirations!
Give us all we desire, Allah!
- 18 Smooth out strife and strain. Ease the hardship and pain.
In Your name we pray, O Allah!
- 19 Grant good health and long life! Please guide us aright!
Bless us with success, O Allah!
- 20 Defeat all of our foes, and shield us from those,
who would do us harm, O Allah!
- 21 Grant us immunity, from this age of calamity,
and all deadly things, O Allah!
- 22 From plague and infirmity, heartache and tragedy,
convulsions and want, O Allah!
- 23 From lack and disdain, from loss, need, and shame
from thirst and starvation, Allah!
- 24 Pestilence and unrest—fatigue, fire, and flood
from tempest and theft, O Allah!
- 25 From heat and from cold, from pillage and woe,
error, lameness, and sorrow, Allah!
- 26 From vermin and vice—from lapse, libel, and lies—
deformation and sin, O Allah!
- 27 From misery and from malice, leprosy and disease,
from illness and madness, Allah!
- 28 From the horrors of this life, and those of the last,
when all is unmasked, O Allah!
- 29 Through Your will alone, mounted on the Throne,
Your Decree rules all things, O Allah!

- 30 Please grant me a heart humble, full of devotion,
and useful wisdom, Allah!
- 31 Accept my repentance. Lift up my station,
And make my spouse righteous, Allah!
- 32 And be my charm against evil, and against envy,
of eye or of tongue, O Allah!
- 33 From the evil of witchcraft, from men and from jinn,
and all venomous things, O Allah!
- 34 You are my safe haven. Please give me shelter,
in the here and hereafter, Allah!
- 35 Don't grow weary of me, if you did I would die,
when I call please reply, O Allah!
- 36 Keep my tongue and my heart, remembering You,
when death comes to call, O Allah!
- 37 Fill my heart with conviction, so rather than fearing,
I long for our meeting, Allah!
- 38 Make death restful and joyful, free of all evil,
constraint, and distress, O Allah!
- 39 Safeguard my body when the spirit departs me.
Spare me harm in the grave, O Allah!
- 40 Be my aid and companion when my body is buried,
and I'm all alone, O Allah!
- 41 And please don't inter me, with things that I dread,
instead shield me from fright, O Allah!
- 42 Please deliver me! Save all of the Muslims!
And deliver my mother, Allah!

- 43 Forgive and treat her with kindness, and veil all our vices,
the day of the Crisis, Allah!
- 44 Treat her with impunity, and grant us your pity.
You're all that we have, O Allah!
- 45 In the Barzakh and grave, please be our aid.
Spare us dread and distress, O Allah!
- 46 Test her no more, than she can sustain.
Let her hopes not be in vain, O Allah!
- 47 Quench her thirst and ours, with the fount of Kawthar,
from the best of creation, Allah!
- 48 Who guided by righteousness, vanquished the faithless,
Aid to all who revere You, Allah!
- 49 Muhammad the chosen, guide to Your endless garden,
on the day of the Torment, Allah!
- 50 Always and forever, prayers and peace upon Him,
and all who fear Judgment Allah!

Pathways of Paradise (Masalik al-Jinan)

Pathways of Paradise has been described by one scholar of the Muridiyya as Bamba's doctoral thesis on Sufism.¹ He began it in the early 1880s and it was finished—in all likelihood—before 1886–87, when he was around thirty years old. The book is reminiscent of some of his earlier didactic texts, like *The Path of Satisfying the Disciples in Questions of Etiquette (Nahj Qad al-Haj)*² or *Gifts from the Holy One (Mawahib al-Quddus)*, which began as versified summaries and commentaries on texts that Bamba taught in his father's school. *Masalik*, however, also displays a more mature, independent authorial voice.

While it is no mere versification nor a simple commentary, it is important to keep in mind that the commentary (*sharh*), ought not be thought of as derivative or unoriginal. When an author writes a commentary on a particular text, what are they doing? They are first and foremost attempting to represent their own understanding of the text. This is usually rooted in transmitting many of the accompanying arguments, explanations, and clarifications that they received when learning the text in question with one or more teachers. Detailed commentaries are also opportunities for scholars to bring other works to bear on the question raised in the principal text. The citations and cross-references, especially for scholars who have often memorized many of the works that they study, begin to fly rapidly at this stage.

Unique, original works grow out of fertile intellectual grounding in the reading, writing, and teaching of commentaries. However, the etiquette of many scholars leads them to deny their own originality, representing all that they do as simple transmission of the tradition in a spirit of pious homage to earlier scholars. In *Pathways*, Bamba consistently points readers back to a previous work, *The Seal of Sufism*, by a Saharan scholar, Muhammad al-Yadali al-Daymani (1685–1752). This Shadhili scholar—and, indeed, the

Shadhiliya more broadly—has been largely overlooked by scholars of Sufism in West Africa.³ However, even a cursory examination of *The Seal of Sufism* alongside *Pathways of Paradise* reveals that while the structure and sequence of topics borrows heavily from Yadali, the analysis in Bamba's work makes it a thoughtful synthesis of the principles and practices of Sufism.

What I have translated here of *Masalik* are only succinct passages—brief excerpts—from a lengthy work. They were selected to provide a window onto Bamba's philosophy of Sufism as well as his exposition of the core practical elements of Sufism (fasting, litanies, *dhikr*, and others). The last section here, on created things, focuses on the four principal enemies of spiritual progress—the *nafs*, *shaytan*, *hawa*, and *dunya*—which, in Bamba's oral teaching, became a mnemonic device comprising the first letters of each noun: *na-sh-ha-du*. *Nashhadu*, meaning 'we bear witness' thus became a single word recalling Bamba's teachings on how to overcome obstacles on the path as he described them in *Masalik* and a number of other works.

This translation of portions of *Pathways* is rendered literally (though not always word for word) in prose, rather than in verse.

Introduction

(Verses 1–54)

I, Ahmad Mbacké, son of my shaikh, pray the Eternal Lord to place him in the highest heavens with all the sincere Muslims and all those who have achieved sincerity, Amen!⁴

Praise is for God, who demands from us sincerity in deed and respect for good conduct (*adab*), He who looks upon the hearts and their secrets, not that which is apparent. And blessings and peace upon He who will intercede for us in the Hereafter, He who is adorned with the virtues of rectitude and free of all imperiling vice, Muhammad, who shields us from sorrow, as well as upon his family, companions, and community (*umma*).

May whoever endures against Satan, the ego (*nafs*), and the passions (*hawa*) reach the Garden! And may whoever cleanses his spirit of vice (*'ayib*) gain His light and pleasure! And may whoever does not rely on created things be granted a return to God, the Real.

Know then, that the theology of oneness (*tawhid*) is divided into two sorts; there are two onenesses. The first is [merely] spoken, while the second is experienced (*'araf*) undeniable, and unmistakable. The first is common and general, the second uncommon and specialized. Regarding the common variety we have already versified the work of al-Sanusi, the great-grandson of

our Holy Lord's Messenger, God's peace, blessings, and pleasure upon him in greater measure than all the creatures in the Earth!⁵

But concerning the specialized sort, it will be the subject of this work. The ancestors have spilled much ink on this topic, and their books are full of secrets. Those like our shaykh al-Ghazali, the renovator, and the eminent Ibn 'Ata'-Allah (al-Iskandari 1259–1310). And like our enlightened shaykh Sidi Mukhtar al-Kunti, the pole and succor of creation.⁶ Such as our shaykh and his caliph, Muhammad [al-Kunti] supported in truth by the Lord of creation. Such as our shaykh the exegete of the Qur'an, Muhammad [al-Yadali] (1685–1752) pride of the Daymani, and others amongst the great shaykhs, may God gather us with them on the Day of Resurrection.

However their books, due to their great length, have been forsaken in this generation. So relying on the Best of Aids, I have elected to take up in verse the work of al-Yadali.⁷ In bringing together the collected writings of the ancients it is indeed, *The Seal of Sufism*.⁸

Thus I have composed a book of remedies for hearts that have been blemished by the passions, verses to fulfill the spiritual state of the beginners and the experienced alike provided they are free of envy. For the envious will neither profit from the benefits of a contemporary nor follow him. Nothing would please such people more than learning of his sudden death. May God protect us from the envious, the hateful, and the ingrates.

In this work I have revived the insights of the sciences to awaken the slumbering and give life to what the people have left as dead letter, hoping to gain the loftiest rewards for me and my elder brother al-Yadali. May all who set eyes on it, leaf through it, or read it remember us in their supplications. May whoever casts a glance upon it offer the servant's best prayers on our behalf. For prayers surely bring great rewards, benefiting the dead in their graves as well as the living.

I have entitled this book, *Pathways of Paradise*. In versifying the prose of al-Daymani, I have set to rhyme all that he mentioned in the *Seal of Sufism* and I have also drawn from his work *The Pure Gold* to complement and enhance it.⁹ I have also chosen on occasion to supplement these with references from other works such as *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (by Ghazali) and the *The Shield of the Aspirant* by our gracious shaykh (Sidi Mukhtar al-Kunti). Whenever I write "he said" without further specification, know that I am quoting the celebrated Ghazali, but with respect to other authors among the noble shaykhs I shall cite them by name. Whenever you see the phrase "I say," know that I am drawing inferences from their writings.

Thus everything in this book is authentic (*sahih*). Follow it with confidence! Do not turn away from it due to my lack of renown in this era, nor turn down its benefits because I am from among the blacks. The most honored servant with God is, without a doubt, the most reverent.¹⁰ And blackness of body signals neither weakness of mind nor lack of understanding. O wise one, do not abandon my verses, thinking that I do not practice what I preach. Do not give away God's favors by preferring only the ancients, as this breeds ignorance. For it happens that a man of a recent era knows secrets unknown to the ancients. "A shower may precede a deluge, but the advantage is with the deluge." You who doubt my verses, don't forget the hadith: "My community is like the rain."¹¹

(Verses 80–95)

According to the scholars ('ulama'), knowledge is divided into two sorts: exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*). Exoteric knowledge improves one's actions while esoteric knowledge heightens the spiritual states (*ahwal*). The first is known by the name of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), while the second is called Sufism (*tasawwuf*). Jurisprudence comes before Sufism as an obligation, for whoever neglects the first perishes in this world according to the judgment of the scholars. But whoever neglects the second will perish in the next world according to the Judgment of His Majesty. It is therefore incumbent upon the servant to bring them both together in order to obtain reward.

Whoever practices jurisprudence without Sufism is a degenerate, and lowest of the low. As for the one who does the opposite, he is a dishonorable heretic. But whoever combines jurisprudence with Sufism provides an excellent example to follow! This ruling comes from Imam Malik, may the mercy and pleasure of al-Malik (The Sovereign) be upon him.¹²

Know then, that knowledge and action (*'ilm wa 'amal*) lead the way to [eternal] happiness, so struggle earnestly in both, to refine all flaws and impurities (*tasfiya min kul 'ifatin wa fi al-tanqiya*).¹³ And hold fast to truthfulness and sincerity (*sidq wa ikhlas*) in order to develop your capacities and follow the sunna of the Choice one (*al-Mukhtar*), may the peace and blessings of the Creator (*al-Bari'*) be upon him and his family and companions and all who walk in their footsteps and follow where they lead!

Fasting

(Verses 224–66)

As for fasting, it is indeed among the best means of seeking God's pleasure

and bounty. For among the gates of the Garden there is one open only to those who fast, so strive earnestly! Malik, our Imam, would fast three days out of each month. For him this meant that thanks to God's multiplication of our good deeds, it was as if he fasted all the time.¹⁴ It is also beneficial to fast the following seven days of the year:

The 8th and 10th of Dhu-l-Hijja

The 27th of Rajab

The 3rd and 10th of Muharram

The 25th of Dhu-l-Qi'da

The 15th of Shaban

Whoever fasts these days shall have all that he desires. It is reported from the Pure Chosen Prophet (*nabi al-Mustafa*)—upon him the blessing of the One who guided and chose him—that the benefits of fasting these days cannot be counted. Endeavor to earn them! It is also considered beneficial to fast the whole month of Rajab, the first month [Muharram], the nine first days of Dhu-l-Hijja, and the whole month of Shaban, the eighth month.

But [the scholars] are unanimous in affirming the superiority of the day of 'Ashura, tenth day of the Muharram—along with its ninth day—for the rewards for them are greater. Fast them both your whole life long! Certain of its traditions were established by The Lord of Creation (*Sayyid al-An'am*), may the blessings of the Absolute (*al-Samad*) be upon him along with his family, companions, and all the rightly guided.

These include: the fast, the prayer, visits between relatives, bathing, alms, trimming the fingernails, applying *kuhl* (eye cosmetics), visiting the sick, *ziyara* (pious visits) to a scholar, and caressing the head of a Muslim orphan. *Surat al-ikhlas* should be recited 1000 times and a lavish and delectable meal should be prepared for one's family. It is reported that a bath on this day can keep away illness and that *kuhl*, applied on this day, can prevent blindness. As for lavishing a feast upon our kinfolk, it will only increase our provisions with permission of the Protecting Patron (*al-Wali*).

According to the knowledgeable, 'Ashura has special unique qualities: It was this day that our Lord accepted the repentance of the father of humankind, Adam, the first prophet. On this day, it is reported that Noah's Ark came to rest on Mount Judi, the sea parted for Moses, and Jesus was born. It is the day that Pharaoh was drowned, and the day that Jonah came forth from the belly of the fish with his repentance accepted by the

Magnanimous Forbearer (*al-Halim*). Likewise did Joseph emerge from the well and Abraham, the Friend of God, was saved from the fire kindled to incinerate him. Idris was raised to the Most High, as was God's Reverent Spirit, Jesus. On this day the Sacred House is dressed in its mantle, and on this day David was forgiven by God for any of his deeds—Peace and blessings upon all of them together!

Know that fasting is more than merely abstaining from food and drink; do not fool yourself! O How many there are who fast along with the people, but gain nothing from it but hunger. Fasting must engage all the limbs and organs, each of which must abstain from whatever might diminish the fast. Refrain from looking at forbidden things, from walking in their direction, from listening to them when they are said, or from speaking of them yourself. Turn away evil thoughts just as you turn away from food and drink. Do not stuff yourself before dawn, nor at sunset, for this diminishes your reward. Whoever fills his belly with food, floods it with drink, and sleeps deeply, behaves like an animal and thus loses much benefit, even risking perdition.

Some eat like cattle in *iftar* or *suhur*¹⁵ until their stomachs are encumbered and their hearts inhibited. Hampered from remembrance of God, they believe they have fasted but will gain nothing from it on the Day of Rising. May God preserve us from delusion and from all that brings us harm.

Litanies (*awrad*)

(Verses 267–85, 292–97)

If you are unaware of the significance of a litany (*wird*), know that its objective is momentous. Its role in the practice of the virtuous places it among the preeminent acts of piety. Its definition, according to the knowledgeable, is “an act of worship regularly performed at a given time.” The etymology is from *wurud*, which means to seek out a source of water or dig a well. Each litany invariably guides the aspirant to the Divine Presence (*Hadratillahi*), whether it be from ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Ahmad al-Tijani, or any other of the axial poles (*aqtab*) for they are all absolutely right. All call their aspirants with uprightness to obedience to the Lord of the Throne wherever they may be. So do not mock nor criticize any of them. Ever.

A *wird* can have its origin either in Revelation or in inspiration—the Lord of Peace grants these to whosoever He wills—Revelation for Prophets and inspiration for saints. They are based on the Revealed Book wherein they are dispersed, and in verified transmissions.

Each saint is forever tethered to one of the Messengers sent by the Real, the Unique. And whatever miracles might be manifested by a prophet can manifest as marvels for a saint.¹⁶ For the latter is heir of the former. The Prophets are the proofs of God for creation and the saints the confirmation of His truthfulness, His religion, and His authenticity. The Prophets of the Most High are safeguarded (*'usimu*), His saints, protected and honored. They are all defended by the Merciful as the knowers of God (*'arifin*) affirm. However, the safeguarding of the Prophets is necessary (*wajib*) unlike that of the saints.

The benefits of a *wird* are mocked only by the foolish or the envious, motivated by hatred and antipathy. How can one disdain a perpetual remembrance of God carried out consistently and continuously? Whoever was never taught conduct by a shaykh will face hardship, for without a rightly-guided shaykh, Satan will become his shaykh guiding him to perdition. So if laziness keeps you from practicing a litany, do not disparage them maliciously. If you are unable to go draw water from the well, (at least) don't keep others from drinking!

Remembrance (*dhikr*)

(Verses 299–316)

As for consistent *dhikr*, it is the greatest of all actions an aspirant can undertake. I say this openly without the slightest concern for the detractors. For whoever thinks otherwise, my response is: “do not argue with the People of the Book!” (Q 29:46) I say that whosoever abandons remembrance of God for remembrance of other than Him, has drowned. For how can they be forgetful or oblivious to the conscientious remembrance of the One who created and fashioned them? (*Dhikr*) is indeed a sign of *wilaya* [alliance with God, or sainthood] and abandoning it is the utmost error. May God make us among those who mention His names and contemplate them at all times!

A dispute arose among the guides (*mashayikh*) about whether to make *dhikr* quietly or aloud, with some preferring to make it quietly to avoid ostentation and encourage contemplative remembrance. Some have preferred instead to make it aloud so that others will hear and join in, for in such a case they would gain in one deed the reward of two, by having encouraged another in it. Each has its place in the remembrance of the Lord of Humanity, but none had yet found the middle path between them in the following words: “whoever fears ostentation, let him recite silently with gentleness because preserving the deed from danger requires meeting this

condition. As for one who does not fear ostentation due to their surety and purity, let them recite aloud to encourage others.” Such was the opinion of our shaykh, Mukhtar (al-Kunti), may the Creator be pleased with him.

Contemplative Reflection (*fikr*)

(Verses 409–13)

As for *fikr*, it is among the most precious of all things. [Ghazali] says in his *Ihya*—take note—indeed the finest fruit of the religion in this world is access to *maʿrifā* and intimacy (*uns*) with God acquired through remembering and knowing Him. *Intimacy* is acquired through persistent recollection (*dhikr*), while *knowing* is achieved through contemplation (*fikr*). It is related that an hour of contemplative reflection is better than a year of obedient worship.

(Verses 424–35)

ʿAbdullah ibn Abi Jamra al-Andalusi (d. 1276/77),¹⁷ stallion of the religion (*fahl al-din*)—may God be eternally pleased with him—affirmed that *fikr*, in its proper time, is the finest activity for those with faith. For we acquire knowledge (*ʿilm*) definitively only through contemplation with a comprehending mind (*bi fikrin bi dhihnin yaqilu*). It is generally agreed, dear brothers, that *faith* too is confirmed through it. Confirmed faith following from *fikr* is unlike intuitive faith (*al-iman bi dihatan*). The former is ideal; so be mindful! It is related that [a moment of *fikr*] is better than eons of worship from all of creation.

It is narrated that a contemplative person will realize strength of conviction; the Real will become apparent to them, and they will achieve certainty, purity, and stability. The force of your faith is only as great as the depth of your *fikr*.

So linger gazing into the mirror of secluded contemplation at any time. The Real will become evident to you my friend, for it was this (*fikr*) that brought God’s friend, Abraham, his certainty.¹⁸

(Verses 442–43, 450)

The best objects of contemplative reflection for a worshipper—it is transmitted—are the heavens and the earth. After that reflect on your bounties, for this increases you in love for the Benefactor (*al-Munʿim*). Gain knowledge, then reflect abundantly on the creation and its creatures, but not upon the Creator.¹⁹

Giving Charity and the Ties of the Womb

(Verses 460–72)

As for charity and pious spending (*infaq*), they bring together all that is good, as does whatever brings benefit—at any time—to the Muslims and blood relatives (*silat al-rahim*). It is said that on the Day of Reckoning when the narrow path will be extended over the hellfire and creatures fret in sorrow and anguish, a Herald will call, “Where are the people of service (*khidma*) to the Muslims?” They will respond, “here we are!” and will be immediately entered into the Garden without trial or tribulation (*bi ghayr mihna wa ghayr fitna*). Therefore serve them seeking the Face of God without complaint or complacency. Conceal from people all that might displease them, and reveal to them only goodness. Whoever comes to you seeking aid, give plentifully if you have the means. And do not hoard wealth out of fear of poverty, for it is He—Glorious and Exalted—who provided you with wealth. He will give it back to you if you spend it abundantly seeking His Face.

Reading the Qur’an and Related Matters

(*Tilawa wa ma yat’allaga biha*)

(Verses 528–35)

As for the excellences of the Qur’an, Yadali offers a suggestion: “whoever longs for nearness to his Lord should recite the Qur’an and never neglect it.” I would add: whoever seeks the *Pleasure* (*ridwan*) of the Merciful, let them be steadfast *meditating* on the Qur’an!²⁰

Whether it be three *hizb* (sections of Qur’an of equal length, traditional division of Qur’an is into sixty such sections) each day that you are not traveling, attach yourself to the recitation of this Book! Do not abandon it, as do some students of the religious sciences. Some so-called Sufis claim that what they have is greater than it, but this is a false argument and a lie. Iblis has deceived them. Stay close to [the Book] for it is the source of all knowledge in this world.

On Sufism

(Verses 624–36)

I say that this contemporary generation ignores the science of Sufism and thus neglects its great benefits. Lackluster generation, they are unaware that it is a trail (*sabila*) leading to the Divine Presence, unaware that it is the best of arms on the Day of Disillusionment when the terrors arrive! They are unaware that it is the best of sciences [that] youths can spend their lives acquiring and propagating, unaware that it promotes uprightness and protects them from

blameworthiness. Some of them, in their diseased hearts, hold an unappeasable, insatiable hatred for it. Some decry it as exorbitance or exaggeration in the religion. Others disparage it out of sheer weariness, laziness, and lustfulness.

Some point to the Sufis and say: “there are the lost extremists of our religion,” though it is they who are lost. Some behave as though their ears are stuffed and they cannot hear the call. Some criticize Sufism intently, turning away from books written on the subject. They are unaware of the guidance therein for creation, and the evident benefits. But know that the sun has not disappeared from the sky, simply because the blind cannot find it with the eye!

(Verses 643–661)

How can one deny real and beneficial sciences encompassing the secrets of the people of good, which contain the qualities of the prophets, the righteous, and the saints? Whoever persists in such criticism and denial and dies without repenting of it risks dying and returning to face the justice of the Originator bathed in major sin without even being aware of it, so wake up! Indeed our shaykh [Muhammad al-Kunti], the wise caliph, mentioned this in *Jannat al-Murid*, so read it. May the pleasure (*ridwan*) of God the Originator be upon him, the righteous reformers, and all the elect (*akhyar*)!

Let us turn then, to the term *tasawwuf* and its origin, which is highly contested. Between *sufa*, *saffa*, *suf*, and *safw*, there are partisans of each.²¹ Still others have put forward other ideas, grounded, in their view, in sound arguments. There are more than a thousand such views, but there is no reason to list them all here. The real *sufi* is a scholar who truly puts knowledge into action without transgression. To become such, one must be pure of faults, with a heart full of good thoughts.

Created Things

(Verses 662–77)

Hawa—Caprice

Know—and may God preserve us from peril and guide us in the path of salvation—that turning towards created things, following them, or concerning yourself with their affairs needlessly is an obstacle from drawing near to God. Caprice (*hawa*) and the accursed Satan are among these created things, and you must stand against them to remain upright. Your caprice must be mastered and guided by your intellect—not the other way around, for this brings God’s wrath. The believer is guided by reason, not caprice, to the Mercy of His Lord.

Shaytan

As for the Accursed One, we seek refuge in God from him and any other blameworthy transgressor. Satan is a warrior who will attack and engage in battle at any time; intransigent, he knows no rest. Each time you fell him, he rises again, more determined and dangerous than before. He has nothing else to do other than fight, relentlessly, against every worshipper, driving them to neglect pious deeds. If, courageously, you resist and seem to accomplish a pious deed, he pushes you to do it hastily and incompletely, thus covering it with blemishes. If you resist this, he pushes you to ostentation. If you oppose him still, with determination and scrupulousness he pushes you towards pride and thinking highly of yourself until you succumb to his attacks.

So be vigilant, ready to fight valiantly at all times. Never forget, in this combat, to arm yourself with remembrance of our Lord. [Satan] will whisper, but with *dhikr* you will remain sanctified (*muqadisa*). Seek refuge in your generous Lord; you will be sheltered from Satan's terrible scheming. The Shaytan is only a dog set upon you by your Master; don't be a fool, call out to the Master!

Verses (685–94)

Self: Ego–Soul (*nafs*)

Among [the created enemies] is your *nafs*, and this is the most dangerous of them all. Never give in to its desires, my friend, never gratify it; treat it with strictness and suspicion. Indeed the honor of a person is in measure with the woes and pains they inflict on their *nafs*. Be wise; struggle against your ego (*nafs*) by carrying out God's command and raising His Word high. Make your own continuous reckoning of your soul, and God will lighten His on the Day of Reckoning. Remind yourself of death at all times, and be always vigilant and wary of your *nafs*, like a person in the presence of a hungry lion. Such a person would be terrified at all times that the slightest lapse would put them at the lion's mercy. It is this kind of vigilance and care regarding the *nafs* that is of benefit to a person, for it keeps them running back to their Lord for help.

(Verses 695–722)

Worldliness (*dunya*)

Among [the enemies] is this lowly, worthless world, which is detestable in the eyes of a person of faith. Purify your worship by washing your hands of it, and detaching your heart from it. True asceticism is to not desire the world with your *heart* for the sake of the Eternal. Feel neither joy nor pain for

the gain or loss of any worldly thing. Lust for the things of this world is the cause—or at least the basis—of all moral peril, but people are unaware.

Dunya is the source of all evils, which is why the people of moral probity (*warʿa*) flee from it.

Haram—Whatever is forbidden in it leads to expulsion, retribution, wrath, and veiling from the Merciful.

Shubha—Whatever is doubtful leads to reproach at the Resurrection as well as darkness, disputation, and denunciation.²²

Halal—Even acquiring whatever is permitted in order to flaunt or hoard it leads to reckoning and reprisal.

Acquisition out of desire leads—undeniably—to interrogation and imprisonment (in the afterlife). Acquire what is *halal* only for safekeeping, to vouchsafe it to the people, to withdraw in safety from them, and to safeguard the religion; therein is the best reward.²³

Sufficiency is better than both wealth and poverty. But know that a person with gratitude in wealth surpasses one who has patience in poverty.

When you take your meals, be like a person forced—by infirmity or necessity—to eat a corpse. Be a traveling stranger, imprisoned in this world, and do not lament its tragedies and tribulations.²⁴ Al-Yadali reminds us that all its *troubles*: poverty and malady, calamities and catastrophes—and all its *tragedies*: like deprivation, distress, and difficulty are a blessing from the Lord of Majesty unto His servant. For whoever misses out on them lives in this world inclining to it. Imagining it a garden, they dwell therein disdaining their meeting with God, and endlessly despising death. Adversity sends us rushing obediently back to our Majestic Lord.

The best of states, for the believing servant, is humility and being compelled to return to the Eternal. For he will see no power, support, purpose, or worth except in the Compassionate, the Singular and be (in this world) as a wanderer lost alone in the desert or drowning in the sea.

The worst of states is for someone to think themselves—or another human being—powerful based on their knowledge, condition, or deeds. The humiliation of sin and misfortune is better than a sense of power based on rectitude or virtue.

12

“Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor” (*Mawahib al-nafi’ fi mada’ih al-shafi’*)

Upon returning from exile, Bamba wrote praise poetry almost exclusively. In the time leading up to his exile, he had profound visionary experiences that affirmed and deepened his close relationship of love for—and service to—the Prophet. This poem, likely written between 1903 and 1906, is an expression of that love. Murids maintain that listening to, reciting, or even looking at this poem can help bring about a good outcome in any affair. It comprises 166 verses, or 165 if you count the first line, which is often recited twice as an invocation of God rather than as part of the poem as such. In fact, 165 is the numerological value of the formula, *la ilaha illa Allah*.¹

From verses 1 to 4, Bamba speaks of God in the third person before turning to address God directly from verses 5 to 32. Beginning in verse 26, he starts to speak of the Prophet to God, before turning to address the Prophet directly with praises from verses 33 to 67. From 68 to 135, he praises the Prophet in the third person (with the exception of verses 93–94, which are in the second person) for the benefit of any who will listen. In verse 106, he alludes to the Prophet absolving his community from battle. Their doctrine of non-violence is absolutely central to Murid identity. And it is rooted in Bamba’s visionary experience in Touba in 1895 before being sent into exile. During that encounter, he saw the Prophet with his companions who fought at the famous Battle of Badr in the second year of the *hijra* (624) and asked how he could join their illustrious company. He was told that the time for spilling blood was over, but that if he wished to be raised into their company he would have to go and face his enemies in his time as the people of Badr had faced theirs, but without spilling blood.

From 136 to 139, Bamba praises the first four caliphs in Islam—in a previous poem, he mentioned that anyone who writes a panegyric for the Prophet but omits the four caliphs has an unfinished poem. Then from 140 to 148, he praises the Prophet's companions, especially those at the Battle of Badr. It is important to remember that Bamba reported having visions of the people of Badr, who encouraged him to face his hardships so that he could join their ranks.

According to his son, 'Abd al-Ahad, Bamba said that he submitted to arrest by the French because he believed firmly that this was the sacrifice required of him to join the people of Badr in their state of continuous proximity to the Prophet. This interpretation is strengthened by verses 149–150, wherein Bamba prays directly to God to preserve him from future imprisonment or oppression, though he has made it clear a number of times in the poem that his gratitude is “free from recrimination.” He accepts that his trials were a favor from God, designed to raise his station.

Verses 151–166 form a series of supplications for Bamba, his family, and all the believers. The last line of the poem mirrors the wording of the first. And there is an epilogue, which echoes the intentions expressed in the prologue to the poem. The overall themes of the poem's concluding section (and the piece as a whole) are thanksgiving to God and prayers and praise for the Prophet—upon him peace and blessings of God Most High.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.
 My Dear Lord and Most Gracious God!
 Blessings on our lord Muhammad, the opener of what was closed,
 The seal of what came before, the champion of Truth by Truth
 and the guide to Your Straight Path.
 And upon His family in due measure with His eminent status.²
 And make this poem a way to Faith, Submission, Perfection, and
 Eternal Happiness.³
 And may it gladden the Messenger of God—Blessings of God
 Most High upon Him, and Peace—
 Wherever one might recite it, write it, or gaze upon it, forevermore.
 Amen! O Lord of the Worlds!
 And make it among those sung by the wide-eyed houris
 and innocent youths in the Paradise promised to the pious.⁴
 And make it among those loved and appreciated by You and by Him
 upon Him Prayers and Peace!

1. By the name of God, bliss grows within me
free of limitation, without limit.⁵
2. Praise the Lord and Master! He swelled my heart,
through imitation of His Prophet.
3. For Him all my thanks without infidelity.
He is my Aid. He set me free.⁶
4. No exile from Him in my intimacy,
And so I speak to Him directly.⁷
5. You're my contentment, of You I praise all.
I count on You, and upon You I call.
6. You who healed me, You who shield me,
from all tyranny and malady that might befall.⁸
7. Drape me with Your robes of honor. Set right my deeds.
Increase my blessings endlessly.⁹
8. You who answer whosoever may call,
Please grant this appeal, and hear this plea!
9. Lord of Beauty, Lord of Majesty,
refine my happiness, You're the best of friends.¹⁰
10. Lord of Oneness, Lord of Existence.
Be generous with me, without any end.
11. Prepare my homecoming, free of shortcoming,
shroud me in mantles of beauty.
12. Strengthen my reading with understanding.
Sweeten my worship with states of rhapsody.
13. You raised my station without migration.
Through me guide my family clear of laments.¹¹

14. Accept my penance; safeguard my surroundings,
my Return, and my intelligence.
15. Rescue me from illusion and self-delusion;
grant me support and victory.
16. You who are Exalted above all partners,
bestow Your favor and perfect me!
17. Your gifts brought me rectitude,
for them my gratitude, free of all recrimination.
18. You're the Provider, and You've sufficed me.
I honor You without exaggeration.
19. For You, my thanks in my abodes.
Yours is the Palace to dwell in eternally.¹²
20. You who clothed me, You who quenched me,
You who sheltered me from despondency,
21. You are my goal, You are my pillar,
illuminating my heart, the Light is Yours.
22. You tore away my faults, took away my doubts,
and cleansed my heart, as with the Pure.
23. You fulfilled my journey, blessed my provisions.
Be good to me, as with the Godly.
24. Best of restorers! Care for me.
As with the Sages, increase my capacities.
25. Grant me uprightness, not blameworthiness.
Grant me charisma, by the Flag's Bearer,
26. By the Lovely, the Faultless and Lofty,
By the Remedy who cures of error.

27. By the Servant, By the Beneficial,
From whence flow miracles to the Saintly.
28. By the Favored, a lion in combat,
Fighting the damned, slaying the enemy.
29. By He whose cohort answered the call,
Dispelling distress with illumination.
30. By He of the battles, dispelling dismay,
Skeptics, cynics, and ostentation.
31. He is the Lucid. He is the Herald,
Bearing Good News. This is His eulogy.
32. So I address Him, devoid of obstruction,
Accusation, or obstinacy:
33. O Best of creations! Yours are the gains.
Yours are the gifts. Hallow these walls.
34. You're my elation, with no illusions.
Refine my devotions. Brighten these halls.
35. Of you I'm speaking, without deviation.
On you I'm leaning, continuously.
36. On the Day of Reward, may our guiding Lord
Give you still more, than you give me.
37. May my Lord reward You, You the most loving,
And most beloved, without deprivation.
38. I'm Your Servant. Wherever I stand,
I won't abandon my quest for requital.
39. You're my protection, from the Deceiver
And from deception, leading to misery.

40. You raised my rank. You reassured me.
By the Everlasting, grant this era to me!¹³
41. You erase tarnish, leaving clarity.
To the King, You're my path of arrival.¹⁴
42. You are the Beautiful. I'm drawn to You.
You are the Messenger without rival.
43. For You my tongue, with my spirit,
Not poetic flattery, but with sincerity.
44. You are the road, by You the Homecoming,
To He who grants the best prosperity.
45. You hid my nudity, rid my anxiety,
granted surety, as with the Greats.
46. O Best in Creation! Without blame, and with pleasure,
to You, my pen I consecrate.
47. Your deeds are beauty. Yours are the virtues.
You are the path, to the Lord of Decrees.
48. In You my Serenity, my way to the Mighty,
free from strife, for eternity.
49. Best of Servants! Gateway to benefits,
light of all lands, my sublime aspiration,
50. You rid me of anguish and of blemish.
Grant me knowledge leading to salvation.
51. You rid me of poverty and kept my secrets,
without deceit or calumny.
52. You cleansed my soul, freed me from my cell,
and lifted my veil of uncertainty.

53. You sheltered me, and my vicinities.
You honed my talents with benevolence.
54. For You my return, among my communities,
saved from hunger and misguidance.
55. Yours are the blessings. I turn toward You,
after my prayers, with eulogies.¹⁵
56. I'm pleased with You. You satisfy me.
Through You I've forgotten my difficulties.
57. For You my praises. Yours is the righteousness.
Success is Yours. Yours is the prize!
58. In Your name I call to all the lands:
Come serve your Maker, Master of the skies!¹⁶
59. In You I erase any transgressions,
seeking in You the greatest bounty.
60. In coming or going, from You never roaming,
to You I pledge my loyalty.
61. You rid me of vice, placing all those around me,
beyond the pall of murk and gloom.
62. Best of effacers! You purged my sins,
and any frivolities, from days of youth.
63. You are my Beloved, You who are loved through me,
with no affront, and faultlessly.
64. You the most heedful, the best of pastors,
best in summoning to the Heavenly,
65. Blessings upon You, and those around You,
from He who threw, when the pebbles flew.¹⁷

66. Upon You peace, along with honor,
from He who glorifies the Elect through You.
67. You who reign supreme among the Chosen,
By You I direct, beneficently
68. Those with intellect, on the Messenger's path,
effacing neglect and mystery.
69. For the intelligent He is resplendent,
erasing error and insolence.
70. This is the obeyed, the valiant and brave,
fearsome to those in disobedience.
71. This favored friend, this close confidant,
most preferred, provided with purity.
72. This is the prestigious, esteemed and prodigious,
illustrious for his charity.
73. A priceless treasure, precious beyond all measure,
Prince is He, among the Prophets.
74. Sun of suns, Prince of Princes,
to the Saints an ally and dearest of intimates.
75. Healer of hearts, the glow of the hearths,
the fullest of moons, shining luminously.
76. Sweet rain to the grateful, lion to the hateful,
or the unfaithful and cowardly.
77. Garden of the guided, fire of the misled,
eminence clear to those who reflect,
78. Eraser of error, bearer of gifts,
for creation a guide without defect.

79. For Him is distinction, and intercession,
primacy for His communities.¹⁸
80. And if one desires knowledge, another fortune,
and a third incites hostilities . . .
81. The one will be guided, the other sufficed,
woe to the third, expelled for his spite!
82. He is guide and guardian, luminous light,
heavenly herald, guiding aright.
83. He of the summons, He of the sight,
is aid and safety, but warns rebels fiercely.
84. Healing afflictions, fulfilling petitions,
He listens closely to every plea.
85. Sanctuary of votaries, and wayfarers,
for the Godly, He lights the darkness.
86. He mends the sundered, the poor, loathed, and wayward.
He is refuge, renown and richness.
87. He is the seen, and the concealed,
close confidant of the Lord of Eternity.
88. For Him the address, and the response,
for Him satisfaction and veracity.¹⁹
89. For Him is piety, For Him elation,
and the hours of the afterlife.
90. To Him I speak, with introspection,
after resolute repentance of all vice.
91. Miracles given to no one before,
nor ever more, such are Your prodigies.

92. Including ridding awful things from the fearful,
who seek recourse and remedies.
93. Best of Creations! You drove tribulations,
off to the errant, granting salvation.
94. You are the Gracious. I am the servant,
endlessly devoted to your veneration.²⁰
95. Praise welled in me, and flowed profitably,
ending disgrace and difficulty.
96. Praise is my profit, my edifice and achievement,
this I declare definitively.
97. But I have failed to reach my goal.
I cannot equal in praise, the Nobles of old.
98. My ink seeps away, my heart in a daze,
the Deputies' guide, I cannot extol.
99. For how can I sing His praises,
when even the Sages lack such ability?
100. So I call all servants to my pillar,
though they need not abandon home or country.
101. O people of land! O people of sea!
Rush to the Pious, the bountiful ocean!
102. He washed away my faults, revealed the concealed,
and cleansed my heart of imperfection.
103. Channel of benefits, slayer of enemies,
He met my needs abundantly.
104. Forging virtues from vices, He mends homes in crisis,
or aftermath of tragedy.

105. What a heart! What a friend! What a mind!
The end of mystery, no need to wonder!
106. He saved the people, absolved us from battle,
the end of exile, no need to wander!²¹
107. Righting wickedness, showing kindness,
He gives joy to all who hope expectantly.
108. He heals the ailing, and the aching
He ends the suffering, leading servants to Safety.
109. Shattering shackles and showering favors,
danger is gone, beneficence has come!
110. Ravage is over and marvels revealed,
the end of ordeals, by the Munificent One!
111. He guides goodness to our residence.
His aid is evident in its resplendency.²²
112. Heaven-sent to seekers of benefit,
Fierce as a lion to treacherous enemies.
113. For Him the feats, for Him the marvels,
for Him the wonders, without limit.²³
114. A gazelle speaks to Him, a lizard salutes Him,
a bird sings praises, as if sentient.
115. A well overflowed without pail or rope!
A tree walked by His leave! God's rain gushed in sheets!
116. A tree stump adored Him, and cried out for Him!
A wolf, turned shepherd, tended the sheep!
117. He gained His glory on the Midnight Journey,
not in fantasy, but in the flesh.

118. Glory to the Lord! Whose Beloved drew near,
 by night, in innocence, at His behest.
119. Once purified, He made the journey,
 bringing joy to the Prophetic Assembly.
120. The Trustworthy traveled, with Trusted Guide,
 on Trusty Steed, to peaks of purity.²⁴
121. It erased uncertainty, showing His beauty
 and magnificence to the Pious.
122. They gave Him precedence, and due reverence,
 raised to eminence among the Flawless.
123. And He is Lord of them. He stands out above them.
 His Ascension sealed His ascendancy.
124. That night He returned, and favors poured forth,
 from the Everlasting, flowing abundantly.
125. For the Good, He returned with provisions,
 but for the wicked, woe and afflictions.
126. He gained perfection, and through election,
 was raised above men of distinction.
127. Favored with majesty, and with beauty,
 from our Lord, the Exalted and Heavenly,
128. Shield of my kin, sentinel of men,
 citadel of women, glory to the Lofty!
129. O How Glorious! O How Gracious!
 Indeed among princes, He is principal.
130. He halts the Deceiver, ends deception,
 accepts devotion, forever mindful.

131. He establishes dwellings, fills them with blessings,
assuring joy for His assemblies.
132. For Him my tributes, after my triumphs,
over my trials, daily and nightly.²⁵
133. Six in prayers, and Six in praises,
devoted to Him, my hours and years.
134. Upon Him Blessings, the Lord did raise Him.
Among the Pious He has no peer.²⁶
135. Upon Him Peace! Reward His greatness!
Among the Sages, proclaim His Excellency!
136. Upon the Venerable, all contentment,
gate of the path, His brother in certainty.²⁷
137. Upon the Vizier, guard of the Decree,
the Herald's sword, the Almighty's pleasure.²⁸
138. On the Vivid and Virtuous, may our Timeless Lord,
Grant His accord, in fullest measure.²⁹
139. On the Near and Dear, the Lion of War,
may He Who Answers grant ascendancy.³⁰
140. Upon the Cohort, who answered the call
in darkest hours, His honor and clemency.
141. In troubled times, they were victor and vanquished,
theirs is dignity, O Such Men!
142. On the day of Humility, the day of Appeals,
May He Who Hears be pleased with them.
143. Founts of good for seekers of gain,
sources of pain for seekers of hostilities,

144. They rose to the occasion, in confrontation,
full of bravery and loyalty.
145. Such gallant knights! Such brave defenders!
Slaying antagonists without cowardice.
146. By their grace I've forgiven, without malice,
by them I've banished the slanderous.
147. Divert my foes, avert all harm,
by the kind listener, who rids of tyranny.
148. I entrust my affairs, to Him my renewer,
and those at Badr, with certainty.³¹
149. So again I pray, please turn away,
those who come to me, bearing their oppression.
150. O Lord of Majesty, Exalted Master,
O Dearest Friend, grant this supplication!
151. Prayers and Peace, on the guard of my hearths,
keeper of my heart, who spoke with the Heavenly.
152. Upon the Messenger, the watchful shepherd,
gateway to He who fulfills the plea . . .
153. Unending Blessing and increasing Peace.
Grant my words and actions Your acceptance.³²
154. Lord of Volition, source of all gain,
sustain my happiness! Grant me abundance!
155. Keep me from evils, strengthen my morals,
by His example, and effortlessly.
156. Bless my sustenance, daily and nightly.
Keep my passing free of antipathy.

157. O Lord of Existence! Please be generous!
Raise my night vigils high aloft.
158. Lavish love upon me! Fulfill my longing,
You whose benefits are without cost.
159. Grant me devotion, save me from illusion,
make my worship a joy for all who see.
160. Please accept my pen. Please approve my words.
Free them from blame and all controversy.
161. Untie my tongue. Enhance my surety.
Refine my purity. Enlighten my spirit.
162. You dispelled the threat. You met my needs.
Shield me from the iniquities of the cynics.
163. Save my dependents from misguidance.
And from the licit, sustain my prosperity.
164. Lord of the Covenant, grant Your Book to me.
Accept my penance. Guard my dignity.
165. O Best of Lords, most nurturing Master,
You soothed my heart and trained my spirit.
166. Prayers and Peace on Him, He fulfilled Your mission,
and grant me salvation, without limit.

O My Dear God! By the Face of God Most High, the Gracious!
Blessings, Peace, and Grace upon our lord and master Muhammad
and His family and companions.

And bring joy to Him with these rhymes
in every hour and every age for all eternity!

Part 4

Shaykh Ibrahim bin ‘Abdallah Niasse
Zachary Wright

13

Introduction

Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse's "Jihad of the Pen" lasted throughout his adult life. His first work was a poem summarizing proper comportment on the Sufi path, "The Spirit of Etiquette" (*Ruh al-adab*), written at the age of twenty. His last writing was another lengthy poem, "The Journey of the Heart through praise of the Chosen Beloved to Presence of the Lord" (*Sayr al-qalb bi madh al-Mustafa al-hibb 'ila hadrat al-rabb*), written in the last years of his life. A good portion of the shaykh's writing was dedicated exclusively to eulogizing the Prophet Muhammad:

All affairs of the creation are from the most eloquent (Prophet)
So my eyes, my chest, my paper, my tongue
My pen, my ink: [all] have I devoted in service to his remembrance
For by his remembrance is my exaltation and ascension.¹

While Shaykh Ibrahim's poetry for the Prophet, especially from his later years, fills volumes, he also wrote several notable poems commemorating the founder of the Tijaniyya Sufi order to which he belonged, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani. Other poetry included versified travelogues that recount Shaykh Ibrahim's various pilgrimages and visits to foreign lands.

The shaykh, of course, also wrote a good deal of prose work. These writings consist of lengthy treatises in defense of Sufism, elaborations on unseen realities, summarized treatments of Arabic grammar for pedagogical purposes, clarifications of legal issues, and numerous sermons and letters to disciples on all sorts of matters. Although separate entries for an author in *The Arabic Literature of Africa* series can be misleading (as many works appear more than once with different titles, or as part

of different collections), Niasse appears to have written more than fifty distinct works.²

This section contains a representative sampling of Shaykh Ibrahim's writing concerning Sufism. We begin with the poem "The Spirit of Etiquette," as this text became fundamental for basic Sufi instruction in the shaykh's community. Next, we have included excerpts from *The Removal of Confusion* (*Kashif al-ilbas*) that speak to the essence of Sufi practice for disciples. This is followed by two important letters that the shaykh meant to be widely distributed among his following: the first explaining the stations of religious progress, and the second concerning sobriety in mysticism. Lastly, we include two examples of the praise poetry for the Prophet Muhammad from the shaykh's magisterial collection, *Dawawin al-sitt*.

“The Spirit of Etiquette” (*Ruh al-adab*)

There is no English equivalent for the Arabic *adab*: it can mean manners, morals, character, behavior, comportment, education, refinement, or etiquette. As a “way of being,” or the inculcation of knowledge and character as disposition and praxis in an individual, some have argued that Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is actually the best approximation to *adab*.¹ The key to understanding *adab* is that it defines exemplary internal *and* external comportment, in relationship to *both* creation and Creator. *Adab* is, of course, the subject of voluminous literature in Islam, and especially within Sufism.² The imam of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse’s community today, Cheikh Tijani Cissé, emphasized its central role in no uncertain terms: “If the aspirant turns away from *adab*, he is sent back from whence he came.”³

Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse wrote the *Ruh al-adab* in 1920 when his father was still alive, at the young age of twenty in Leone, in the Kaolack region of Senegal. The text demonstrates not simply his early mastery of classical Arabic but also his ability to speak authoritatively about the essence of spiritual wayfaring (*suluk*) within Sufism. In many ways, the text is thus a testament to the educational system established by his father, al-Hajj ‘Abdullah (d. 1922), and the integration of Sufism within a rigorous curriculum of Islamic learning. The later following of Shaykh Ibrahim made frequent use of the text, and many instructors used it to prepare students before giving them the direct experiential knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God through initiation (*tarbiya*).⁴

This is the third English translation of the *Ruh al-adab*. It remains indebted to Shaykh Hasan Cissé’s first translation and explanation, completed orally in the 1990s. Several American students recorded these lessons

and later edited them in book form, published in Detroit by ‘Abd al-Hakim Halim in 1998 (second edition 2001), entitled *The Spirit of Good Morals*.⁵ Talut Dawud completed a second translation, unknown to me, around the same time that I was independently working on this one.⁶ When studying the text with Shaykh Hasan Cissé on various visits to Senegal between 1999 and 2003, I obtained permission from the shaykh to rework the translation; “Make it nice [in English],” he said. My long delay in completing the task is partially explained by the fact that his translation was already quite good, and the observation that the transcription and editing work of ‘Abd al-Hakim Halim (no easy task to complete from cassette recordings) was difficult to replicate. Dawud’s work has also done much to streamline the inescapable awkwardness of a non-native English speaker’s rendering of Arabic poetry into English prose. That said, Shaykh Hasan’s original translation has a certain timeless quality, an ability to speak directly to the reader as if he were present in the shaykh’s own learning circle. Dawud’s translation, and my own, remain influenced by Shaykh Hasan’s original in rhythm, tone, and meaning. I am not offering my own translation to supersede these important earlier works, but only as an alternative to be read in dialogue with others for a fuller understanding of Shaykh Ibrahim’s original Arabic poem.

I am including two comparative excerpts of the three translations in order to highlight their slight differences. These selections serve the dual function of neatly summarizing the central themes of the poem. Here (verses 50–51), Niasse lists *adab* as the fourth knowledge incumbent on the spiritual traveler or seeker (*salik*):

Shaykh Hasan Cissé

And the seeking of knowledge of good conduct on you disciple
[is the fourth]

For indeed, it is the door for every disciple
Be God fearing, a man of humility,
You will not by humbleness be in abasement.

Talut Dawud

Then good morals! Good morals, O traveler!
Verily it is the door for every traveler
And be submissive, a man full of humility,
For you will not, by humility be abased

Zachary Wright

And [fourth], O seeker, is surely good conduct (*adab*)
For it is the door for every seeker
Be God-fearing (*khashi'*), a brother (*akh*) of humility
You will not in humility be humiliated

Here is another example of the three translations (verses 33–34), this time concerning the *adab* of supplicating God for one's needs:

Shaykh Hasan Cissé

When you seek a request that is lacking,
The dangers of it He knows and you do not
He deters what is dangerous [from you] out of His tenderness,
therefore do not
Accuse our Lord otherwise you shall be abandoned

Talut Dawud

When you seek some objective which you are then deprived of,
Its harm He knows, while you perceive not
He wards off what will harm [you] as a mercy from Him
Do not question our God or you will be deprived

Zachary Wright

If you ask something and are left without
He knows the harm in it, but you do not.
From His grace (*lutf*), he deters what is harmful;
So level not accusations against our Lord, or you will be forsaken

These examples reveal the methodology of my own translation. I have aimed for a precise rendering of the Arabic, while hoping to preserve some of the rhetorical force of Shaykh Ibrahim's writing. Where an Arabic word permits of multiple translations, I have put the Arabic transliteration in parentheses so that the reader can be aware of my own interpretation. Where the original text requires additional explanation in order to properly understand the meaning, I allude to such explanation in footnotes referencing the original commentary of Shaykh Hasan Cissé, or other relevant texts from Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse. Every translation is an interpretation. I hope this translation is a useful addition in further appreciating Shaykh Ibrahim's seminal poem on *adab*.

Says Ibrahim, the son of al-Hajj ‘Abdullah
our glowing moon

Having started with the name of God and praise,
To God, owner of all might, greatness, and glorification

An advice from me to my brothers:
Adhere to the [Sufi] path of the Tijaniyya.

The way of pure grace and [divine] satisfaction,
Established on the Prophet’s example (*sunna*) and the Qur’an

Persist in the regular litany of this path
By this success is obtained with all certainty (*tahqiq*)

You will not profit in taking this path
Except that you continuously seek righteousness.

Perfecting its prescribed conditions
Exemplifying its honored conduct (*adab*)

Exalting all its people
Particularly the special ones: to them, be obedient

When you begin the litany’s remembrance (*wird*)
Oblige yourself with discipline (*adab*) as much as possible

Refine yourself outwardly and inwardly
With refinement does a man ascend to high stations

Invoke the presence of the shaykh who trained you
And likewise his shaykh without doubt

Maintain concentration and stillness
Also, seclusion helps in drawing near [to God].

Seek for a spiritual trainer (*murabbi*), well informed, of sound advice
Complete in gnosis, a righteous imam

Turn yourself over to him, and do not contrive schemes on your own
Be always like a dead person [bathed by the mortician], and you will
be informed

Do not oppose him, even if there seems a contradiction
Be always a follower.

For the shaykh's mistake is more upright and appropriate,
Than the (opinion of the) aspirant (*murid*), according to the people of
sound reason⁷

Do not turn to other than him in the universe,
And be as if there was no universe

For there is nothing for the aspirant other than this saint [al-Tijani],
Along with the Prophet, and surely his Lord the Most High.

As long as there is other than this in his heart, he will not attain
The knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the Patron Lord, this I say with all certainty.

Be at all times with the Shaykh to gain,
Be tenderly in love to prosper

In proportion to your love for him, will be received
His spiritual assistance (*amdad*): this the [Sufi] people have said

Spend of your acquired and inherited wealth in seeking his satisfaction
And respond promptly to his direction, then you will hold true

And satisfy your shaykh, even if weeping
For surely he guides you to good

Be urgently covetous of your time
Be warned you will be tested with the affliction of loss (*naqs*)

When you see the manifestation of divine beauty (*al-jamal*)
Do not overstep the bounds: be content with the manifestation of
transcendent majesty (*al-jalal*)⁸

For all of this is by the rendering of divine decree
Exalted is He to be blamed for what He does⁹

Do not be anguished when you witness
Harm from the created things, you were created for this [test]

Hurt flows from them so that you do not rely on them
Rather on God is your reliance

When tested with difficulties and afflictions
Be patient: surely felicity and relief will come to you.

For after every night there is day
And after every hardship there is ease

Indeed, after every hardship there is double ease
As related from Ahmad al-'Adnan (the Prophet Muhammad)¹⁰

If you know that, you will be pleased:
In every time, God's decree (*hukm*) remains

If you ask something and are left without
He knows the harm in it, but you do not

From His grace (*lutf*), he deters what is harmful
So level not accusations against our Lord, or you will be forsaken

Were mankind to know the (mercy of the) Merciful
He would meet afflictions a smiling man

Do not seek power (*'izz*) among the creation
Without being empowered by the Sovereign, not ever.

Do not exalt in the favors you are given
Rather exalt in Him who gives, if you are of sound reason

Every favor will perish, except Him who confers favor
For He is that which remains, for all time

Do not despise any Muslim, and mention not
The faults of any man, lest your own faults be exposed

Perhaps one in old tattered garments, covered in dust:
The Lord would fulfill his invocation, as has been narrated¹¹

Do not harm a Muslim, even if harm is wrought
Persistently by his hand, rather be forgiving

My brother, harm not the servants of God
And all in this creation are but the servants of God

You would not be pleased with him who mistreats your [own] servant
Even if he does wrong: fear then your Lord.

Persist in sadness and the thought of death,
Nor forget the questioning of the dead [in the grave]

You must precede [all actions] with learning
Be able to distinguish the divine law

By my life, knowledge is the leader of all action
As transmitted from Taha, the best of Prophets

O seeker: obtain four types of knowledge
First being knowledge (*irfan*) of the Lord Possessor

Second is to know what is involved
In the worship [of God], by this you will actualize [knowledge]¹²

Third is to know the condition of the [lower] soul (*nafs*):
Its treachery, intrigue, and manipulation

The soul has its fault, as does the heart
And the spirit (*ruh*), this without doubt¹³

And [fourth], O seeker, is surely good conduct (*adab*)
For it is the door for every seeker

Be God-fearing, a brother of humility
You will not in humility be humiliated

Knowledge (*‘ilm*), wealth (*ghina*), fertility (*khisb*) [are words that] came
With low vowels established in them

While ignorance (*jahl*), poverty (*faqr*), and sterility (*jadb*) came
With high vowels established in them.¹⁴

These are signs if you reason
Recognize the inspiration

The flood does not settle on the mountains
Nor on trees, disregarding (their heights)

Do not be satisfied with yourself; nor ask
Nor fear other than the Lord: disregard everything except Him

Be not arrogant, my brother, nor jealous
And be not ostentatious; rather to your God straightaway proceed

Pride arises from [having] knowledge, or lineage
Or the group [to which one belongs], or acts of obedience, or possessions

[But] disobedience that brings humiliation is better
Than obedience that results in pride

You will never be free from blemish,
Except by means of a gnostic shaykh, possessed of assistance¹⁵

Hold tightly to the protection of the shaykhs
If you would attain lofty exaltation

The best of shaykhs, in all time, without limit
Is our Imam al-Tijani, endowed with great virtues

The isthmus [*barzakh*]¹⁶ of every gnostic, and their foundation
He is to them the fountainhead and the sun

So the best of all [Sufi] paths by consensus
Is therefore his path without dispute

Impossible it is to combine it with another
Who says such will suffer deprivation in the afterlife

For he has lied, and fabricated falsehoods against Allah the majestic
Indeed I say: this litany (*wird*) is [uniquely] dignified

Adhere to the remembrance of this litany
Then by my life I swear: guided will be your arrival [in the divine presence]

There is [also] “The Orison of Humility” and “The Prayer of Opening”
And “With Allah is Illumination”¹⁷

And other [prayers] collected by the distinguished folk (*al-rijal*)¹⁸
The mature ones of this path, should they confer them

But only in earnestness are their secrets obtained
Not with leisure or by [false] indulgence of the distinguished¹⁹

But rather it is by obligating oneself with what they give
And following their instruction continuously

Prefer not the conversation of peers
To sitting in the presence of your shaykh, O annihilated one!

And there, do not hunger for secrets
The secret is not obtained in public

Cling to him [your shaykh] always
From him you will gain what you seek

Success from him is also by contagious energy
As confirmed by men [of knowledge], so be alert

Who does not attain knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the Merciful [Lord]
His life has been wasted however long he lived

I created the creation [Allah said] to worship Me
“To worship Me” means “To know Me”²⁰

Spare no effort to obtain this gnosis
Then you will see the Merciful’s astonishing proximity

He is manifest in everything, upon everything, and by everything
Before it, and after it, for all time

If you desire increase in faith
Then repent sincerely, and follow it with (the way of) excellence

Do not hate a Muslim, nor get angry
Except at the debasement of the refined sacred law

Adhere to the night prayer²¹ and to a hungry stomach
Eating what is lawful and pure also counts [to increase faith]

Be a good counselor to your brothers, and [mostly] stay silent
Accompany the people of chivalrous virtue among those brought near²²

A man is in the religion of his close associate
If righteous, he too will be righteous even if foolish

Remember the scale (of divine judgment), and the unrolling of
the scrolls²³
And the unending sorrow in hellfire

[Remember also] the beautiful companions (*hurr*) in Paradise
In close proximity [to God], in beautiful dwellings

So persist in wiping away sin
The most effective [method] being the invocation of blessing on this
[religion’s] axial pole²⁴

Also is the [prayer of] seven,²⁵ morning and evening
And assistance [in erasing sin] is found in repeating the [words of the]
call to prayer (*adhan*)

Various remembrances have been brought in this [Sufi] school (*madhhab*)
[Such as] our invocation of blessing on the exaltedly dignified [Prophet]

[And] the “prayer of glorification” (*salat al-tasbih*),²⁶ and glorification [of
God] by itself

[And] contemplation of the Qur’an, caught up in admiration

And two prayer cycles (*rak’a*) in fear [of God]

[And] walking to the mosque covers over mistakes

Also is the perfection of ablution (*wudu’*)

And guiding a blind person, also fulfilling a person’s needs

And reflective counting of the sea’s waves

[And] take every opportunity to shake the hands of Muslims

[Likewise] a person’s filling Ramadan with fasting

And the night prayer, [all] will erase his sin

Perform the greater and less pilgrimages (*hajj* and *‘umra*), and secretly
give charity

From wealth earned lawfully, such is blessed charity indeed

[Also is] teaching a child, and praying in straight rows

All of this is mentioned in the [holy] pages [of the Qur’an]

Here are the defects that harden the heart:

Love of leadership is the worst vice

[Also dangerous to the heart are] mockery, slander, and evil sitting
companions

Indecency, scandalmongering, and a wicked ego-self

So follow not the self’s vain desires

Nor chase after the world: rather restrain yourself

Be like a blanket in the house, and withdraw from everyone

Do not delight in [vain] talks or quarrels

Overlook people's faults
Make every effort to ignore them

Give of [your] wealth in charity for the sake of Allah
Visit the tombs of Muslims without limit

Do not swear oaths unless restricted
To the will [of Allah] if you should so swear

Here ends the brotherly advice
In shortened form, matching today's people

In the year forty-two
After thirteen hundred [after Hijra]²⁷

I name this poem "the spirit of moral conduct"
For what it contains of wisdom and refinement

Pleading forgiveness from those of understanding
Verses uttered by an empowered youth

For a son of twenty-one years
[May such be] an acceptable excuse, perfectly commendable

So may all the believers benefit from this poem
By the blessing of the best of Messengers, O Lord!

And make it purely for the sake of Your noble countenance
O Gracious, Compassionate and Merciful Lord

Be not deluded from memorizing this poem
Only because I am young and from a non-Arab land

For Allah favors whom He wills
And Allah surely wills, and possessed is He of great favor

As has been said by the illustrious servant
Of Taha [Muhammad], Ahmad [Bamba] the Maliki [scholar]:

Black skin cannot be associated
With immature foolishness or deficient understanding

O Lord, by the blessing of the guiding Prophet
Protect us from the evil of enemies

Grant us perfect divine cognizance
And everything we desire, by the best [descendent] of ‘Adnan²⁸

Cover our faults with Your veil of beauty
And vanquish our enemies with Your mighty force

Praise to God who has brought [me] close
[And] facilitated my poem, and an excellent Patron Lord is He

Then prayer and salutations of peace
On the Prophet, the chosen, best of mankind

Upon him and his family and pious companions
So long as every patient one attains [divine] cognizance.

The Removal of Confusion (Kashif al-ilbas)

The *Kashif al-ilbas ‘an faydat al-khatm Abi l-‘Abbas* (The Removal of Confusion concerning the Flood of the Saintly Seal Abu-l-‘Abbas Ahmad al-Tijani) was Shaykh Ibrahim’s central prose text. The shaykh wrote the book in 1931 or 1932, and later added a lengthy appendix in 1935. The work was first published in Morocco in 1937. Its contents primarily serve to justify the constitution of a new Sufi community in a West African Islamic context. Niasse demonstrates his mastery of the inherited scholarly tradition through discussion of numerous citations, and stresses the transmission of gnosis or cognizance (*ma‘rifa*) as the oft-neglected essence of Sufi identity. The selections included here concern the definition of the Sufi path, the explanation of the master–disciple relationship, the experiential knowledge of God, and the notion of paradigmatic sainthood or *qutbaniya*.

I have made two interpretative decisions in compiling this section. The first is to allow selected passages to stand on their own through a liberal interpretation of transitional phrases at the beginning of some selections. As part of a larger text, arguments often build on references in earlier passages. In framing particular arguments as larger points that stand independently, I have made minimal adjustments to the wording to add clarity. The second liberty is to select related excerpts from the larger text and to place them in thematic dialogue with each other. This generally means including sections from the appendix along with the main text. In one case, I have included a citation from a separate text in order to add depth to the discussion. In all cases, such decisions are documented in the footnotes.

For further discussion of the work, see the introduction to its full translation or my analysis of the text, published as a separate article.¹

Sincerity and Gratitude on the Sufi Path

This section contains excerpts from the first chapter of *Removal of Confusion: "On the Reality of Sufism,"* and from the introduction to the appendix, "On Spiritual Training and Saintry Authority."

[Ahmad] Zarruq² said, "Sufism has been defined, described and explained in approximately two thousand ways, all of them related to the importance of genuine dedication to Allah, and each explanation represents one aspect of the science, but Allah knows best."

[Ibn 'Ajiba's] *Iqaz al-himam*³ quoted Abu l-Qasim al-Junayd⁴ to say, "It means that the Real makes you die to yourself and live for Him." He also said, "It means that you exist for the sake of Allah without any other attachment."

It has similarly been said, "It is the entrance into every sublime character trait and the escape from every base characteristic." And it has been said that Sufism is when "noble characteristics appear among distinguished people in a distinguished age." It has also been said, "It means that you do not possess anything, and nothing possesses you." And in another saying, "It means devoting yourself to Allah with what He wants."

One of the Sufis has said, "Sufism is not the wearing of wool and thread-bare garments, rather it is excellent conduct and character." Another has said:

Sufism is not wearing a robe that you patch
And it is not the shedding of tears when the singers sing

It is not crying out, nor dancing, nor musical entertainment
And it is not swooning as if you had become possessed

Sufism is rather your serenity (*tasufi*), without distress
And following the truth of the Qur'an and the religion.

In *Iqaz al-himam*, Ibn 'Ajiba quoted Sidi Zarruq's commentary on the saying of our Imam Malik:⁵ "If someone practices Sufism (*tasawwuf*) without acquiring knowledge of the law (*fiqh*), he has become an infidel (*zindiq*), while he who practices the law without acquiring knowledge of Sufism has become a debauched degenerate (*fasiq*). He who combines the two is on the truth." Sidi Zarruq commented thus:

The infidelity of the first is due to the fact that he professes the doctrine of fatalism (*jabr*), which entails the negation of wisdom and legal

rulings. The moral depravity of the second is due to the fact that his conduct is devoid of genuine dedication that prevents disobedience to Allah, and of the sincere devotion that is required in all actions. The correctness of the third is due to his sincere, steadfast adherence to the Truth. So know this: there is no existence of Sufism except in the Law, and there is no perfection of the Law without Sufism. This you must understand well.

The subject matter (*mawduʿ*) of Sufism is nothing less than the exalted Essence of Allah. The science of Sufism searches a means of knowing Him, either by demonstrable evidence or witnessing with the eyes. The first is for the seekers, and the second for those who have arrived. It has also been said that the subject matter of Sufism is the souls, hearts, and spirits, since it deals with their purification and training. This definition is close to the first, for “he who knows himself knows his Lord.”⁶

The founder (*wadiʿ*) of Sufism is the Prophet, to whom God taught it by means of both revelation (*wahyi*) and inspiration (*ilham*). First, He sent down Gabriel with the sacred law (*shariʿa*), and once it had been firmly established, He next sent down the Reality (*al-haqiqa*). Then, the Prophet favored some of his companions with this [latter] knowledge and not others. The first of those to speak of Sufism thereafter and to manifest its reality was our master ‘Ali, may Allah ennoble his countenance. From him and through the well-known chains of knowledge transmission (*silsila*) found in their books, the Sufis have received this science. The exception is our master, our patron, our Shaykh, and our means of access to our Lord, Abu-l-‘Abbas Ahman bin Muhammad al-Tijani al-Hasani, whom Allah blessed with receiving from the Prophet by word of mouth, without the mediation of any of the shaykhs. Our chain of authority derives from him. . . .

In reference to the legal status (*hukm*) of Sufism, al-Ghazali said: “It is a duty incumbent on every individual Muslim (*fard ‘ayn*), since no one is free from fault or sickness, except the Prophets.” Shadhili⁷ said: “If someone does not become immersed in this science of ours, he will die as one who persists in the major sins, without being aware of his condition.” . . . As for the excellence (*fadila*) of Sufism, it has already been mentioned that its subject matter is nothing less than the exalted divine essence (*dhat*). There is no limit to the excellence of this subject, so the science that pertains to it also has no limit to its excellence. Its first stage deals with the fear (*khashya*) of Allah, its middle stage with proper conduct

(*mu'amala*) with Him, and the last with the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of Him and complete dedication to Him. That is why Abu l-Qasim al-Junayd said, "If we knew that there was a more noble science under heaven to discuss with our companions, surely I would have speedily found it." In his book *Anwar al-qulub fi al-'ilm al-mawhub*, Shaykh al-Saqilli⁸ said, "Anyone who testifies to this science is included among the elite. Anyone who understands it is included among the elite of the elite. Anyone who expounds it and speaks about it is the star that can never be reached, the ocean that can never be drained." Another person has said:

If you see someone who has been opened to believing in this Path, congratulate him. If you see someone who has been illuminated with understanding it, rejoice on his account. If you see someone who has been enabled to speak about it, exalt him. But if you find someone finding fault with it, flee from him as you would flee from the lion, and emigrate from him completely. There is no science that cannot be dispensed with occasionally except the science of Sufism: one cannot do without it for a single moment.

The benefit (*fa'ida*) of practicing Sufism lies in the gilding of the hearts and [the granting] of thorough knowledge of the Unseen. Or we might say: its fruit (*thamara*) is the generosity of the self, the serenity of the breast, and good disposition with every created entity.

Know that this science we mention is not mere wagging of the tongue. Its contents are spiritual experiences (*adhwaq*) and ecstasy (*wijdan*). It cannot be acquired through talking or written texts, but can only be received directly from the people of experience (*ahl al-adhwaq*). It can only be gained through serving (*khidma*) the people of spiritual distinction (*rijal*), and companionship with the perfected ones. By Allah, no one has ever succeeded [on this path] except by companionship with one who has succeeded, and the achievement is from Allah.

Our master, patron and teacher, Sidi Abu-l-Abbas al-Tijani, was once asked about the reality of Sufism. He responded by saying, "Know that Sufism is compliance with Allah's command and avoidance of His prohibition, externally and internally, with regard to what pleases Him, not what pleases you."

Here are the words of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti⁹ in his book *Jan-nat al-murid*, as cited in *al-Jaysh*:¹⁰

It is indisputable that the rectification of hearts can only be achieved with the sciences of spiritual discipline and practice, which are a branch of the science of divine Reality (*'ilm al-haqiqa*). The person who alleges the cessation of this science is suggesting the bankruptcy of the sacred law and the disappearance of its harvest. For the harvest of the sacred law is steadfast righteousness (*istiqama*). The sacred law establishes the formal structure of Islam, while the [science of] divine Reality determines the real meaning of Islam. The sacred law represents the body of Islam, the Reality represents its spirit.

In another instructive passage, Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti said:

Know that the shaykhs have two methods of spiritual training (*tarbiya*). The first one is centered on gratitude (*shukr*) and happiness on account of the Benefactor, without trouble or toil. The second one is centered on spiritual discipline (*riyada*), labor, hardship, sleeplessness, and hunger.

When discussing the virtues of Sidi 'Abd al-'Aziz (al-Dabbagh),¹¹ the author of *al-Dhahab al-ibriz* said:

The path of gratitude (*tariq al-shukr*) is the original way, practiced by the hearts of the Prophets and the bosom friends among their companions. It means to worship Him with sincere devotion and detachment from all worldly interests. The servant acknowledges his incapacity and shortcoming, and his failure to fulfill the right of Divinity. By necessity, this preoccupies his heart at all times. When Allah recognizes truthfulness (*sidq*) in such servants, He grants them favors commensurate with His generosity: spiritual illumination in knowing (*ma'rifa*) Him, and attainment of the secrets of belief (*iman*) in Him, Mighty and Glorious is He.

When the people of spiritual discipline (*riyada*) heard of the illumination (*fath*) achieved by these people, they made such illumination their goal. They pursued it by means of fasting, standing in supererogatory prayer, sleeplessness, and constant seclusion (*khalwa*), until they achieved what they achieved. The emigration (*hijra*) of the first way [gratitude] is only to Allah and His Messenger, not for the sake of spiritual illumination (*fath*) and the attainment of mystical discoveries (*kashifat*). The emigration of the second way [discipline and deprivation] is for the sake of illumination and the attainment of degrees (*maratib*). The journey in the first is

the journey of hearts. The journey in the second is the journey of bodies. Illumination in the first comes as a sudden surprise, for the servant has no expectation of it, contrary to the illumination of the second.

The two paths are both correct, but the path of gratitude is more correct and more sincere. Both practice spiritual exercise, but the exercise of the first is of the hearts. The exertion is in their attachment to Allah the Glorious, their persistent attendance at His door, their turning back to Him in all moments of movement and stillness. The people of the first path remain constantly devoted to this, even if their appearance is not clothed in a great deal of worshipful activities (*'ibada*). For this reason, the master of this path may fast, or break his fast, stay awake [at night] or sleep. He may spend time with women, and perform any other of the duties within the sacred law that conflict with the discipline (*riyada*) of physical bodies.

Our Shaykh Abu-l-'Abbas Sidi Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Tijani used to say:

Gratitude (*shukr*) is the door of Allah, and the closest of doors to Him. That is why Satan sits next to it, for Allah the Most High relates his statement, *I shall lurk in ambush for them on Your straight path*.¹² In this time, whoever does not enter through the door of gratitude does not enter [the divine Presence]. This is because the egos have become thick and rebellious, so they are not restrained by being called to account or argumentation, and they are impervious to discipline (*riyada*). But if they are drowned in rejoicing (*farah*) with the Benefactor, they will absent themselves from this [rebellion], and end their distance [from their Lord].

The Shaykh of Spiritual Instruction

This section contains excerpts from *Removal of Confusion*: the eighth chapter on "Seeking the Shaykh, his character, and the state of discipleship" and the second appendix, "Concerning the Tijani Litanies."

Anyone who recognizes what the divine presence requires of every human being, while observing the states of human nature, will be aware of the necessity of seeking the shaykh of spiritual guidance (*murshid*). . . . Thus Sidi Abu Madyan said, "If someone does not receive his training from those who are well trained, he whom he follows is even more corrupt than the follower." The author of *Lata'if al-minan*¹³ has said:

The only guidance to follow is that of a saint to whom Allah has directed you, and has revealed to you the special quality with which He has endowed him, so the presence of his human nature has disappeared from you in the discovery of this special quality. You will therefore give him free rein, for he will transport you on the path of right guidance. He will make you aware of the frivolities of your lower self, in its hidden depths and its secret caverns. He will guide you to the total concentration on Allah, and teach you to flee from everything apart from Him. He will travel beside you on your road until you arrive in the presence of Allah. He will acquaint you with your personal misconduct and make you aware of Allah's mercy toward you. The recognition of your personal misconduct will help you to escape from it, and cease to justify it in the reliance on your own means. The knowledge of Allah's mercy toward you will help you approach Him, offer thanks to Him, and remain in His presence at all times.

Perhaps you will ask, "Where is there anyone who fits such a description? You have spoken of a person more astonishing than a marvelous mythological bird (*'anqa'*)!" But the knowledge of where such guides are to be found is not necessary for you to know. All that you need is the sincerity in seeking them. If you are utterly sincere, you will surely discover a spiritual guide. As Allah has said in two verses of the Qur'an, *Is it not He who answers the needy when they call unto Him?* (27:62), and, *For if they had been sincerely truthful with Allah, it would be better for them* (47:21). So if you are in dire need of someone who will lead you toward Allah, like a thirsty person in dire need of water or a frightened person in dire need of protection, you will find your goal closer even than your having to ask. If you are in dire need of Allah, like the mother in need of her lost child, you will find the Real near you and ready to answer you. You will find the arrival in the divine Presence easy for you, and the encounter with the Real will be facilitated for you.

The author, may Allah have mercy on him, also speaks of the shaykh as one of Allah's gracious favors and gifts to the aspirant. But this is provided that the aspirant is sincere in his quest, and exerts himself to the full extent of his ability in the effort to follow his master's advice rather than the illusory whims of those without knowledge. At this point [of sincerity], Allah will establish him with the proper conduct in dealing with his shaykh, who will then guide him toward the loftiest degrees and the highest levels of attainment. According to Sidi Abu Madyan:

The shaykh is someone whom your essence (*dhat*) has acknowledged with preference, and whom your innermost being (*sirr*) has acknowledged with reverence. The shaykh refines you with his exemplary character, trains (*addaba*) you by bowing his head in silence, and illuminates your inner being with his radiance. The shaykh is he who gathers you in his presence and preserves you in his absence.

According to the *Lata'if al-minan*:

Your shaykh is not someone from whom you hear; your shaykh is someone from whom you receive. Your shaykh is not someone whose expressions confront you; your shaykh is the one whose signals become secreted within you. Your shaykh is not he who summons you to the door; but he who removes the veil between himself and you. Your shaykh is not the one whose words challenge you; he is the one whose spiritual state uplifts you.

Your shaykh is the one who releases you from the prison of your vain desires, and brings you into the presence of the Lord. Your shaykh is one who never ceases to polish the mirror of your heart, until the lights of your Lord become manifest therein. He will encourage you toward Allah so that you will set off toward Him, and he will be with you until you arrive in His Presence. He will not cease to be by your side until he has cast you between His hands, and thrust you into the light of the divine Presence. Then he will say to you, "Here you are and here is your Lord."

According to the erudite scholar al-Hafiz ibn Hajar,¹⁴ in his *Fatawat*:

Taking from multiple spiritual masters (*mashayikh*) differs in condition depending on whether the person desires blessing (*tabarruk*), or spiritual instruction (*tarbiya*) and traveling along the path (*suluk*). The first takes from whom he wills unless there is something to prevent him from doing so. For the second, this [exclusive] affiliation is appointed for him, according to the school of the sound Sufi people, in order to avoid the prohibited and blameworthy things. May Allah gather us together in the company of such masters! May He not start the disciple except with the shaykh whose state (*hal*) he has been attracted to. Like this, the shaykh will have full dominion over the disciple, so that his ego-self will

vanish in the splendid state of this spiritually realized shaykh. So the shaykh will intervene between the disciple and the passions and desires of the disciple's ego-self. At this point, the disciple must hold tightly to the shaykh's guidance, submitting himself to the entirety of his commands, prohibitions, and prescriptions. He will then become like a corpse in the hands of the funeral washer, turning this way and that as the washer wills.

If the spiritual state of the shaykh does not enrapture him in this manner, the [first type of] disciple may free himself for one more pious among the shaykhs, and one more knowledgeable of the rules of the sacred law and the divine Reality. So he will enter under his direction and prescriptions. This will lead to success in the case of the shaykh of the first description (the *shaykh al-tabarruk*).

As for the shaykh of the second description (the *shaykh al-tarbiya*), it is forbidden for the disciple, according to the Sufi people, to leave him and go to another, even if his lower self (*nafs*) should entice him to think that another shaykh is more complete. In such a case, it is simply the right of his shaykh that exasperates him, for the lower self wants to remove itself from its owner into further error.

The best solution is to choose, from the beginning, the best shaykh: endowed with the most gnosis, knowledge, piety, and righteousness. So after entering under the providential care of such a gnostic (*'arif*), he has no permissible excuse to leave him. Indeed, according to the Sufi people, the shaykh of spiritual training has no license to let an aspirant take from him if he knows that a perfected teacher is already causing him to tread the spiritual path. In this case, the shaykh should command him to return to his teacher, and let him know the right of his teacher, to not let his lower self turn away from him even if it wants to part with him for somebody else. Indeed, this [desire of the *nafs* for separation] is the first evidence of his teacher's perfection and the truth of his path. Many of the souls (*nufus*) for whom failure has been decreed, if they should see a teacher of strong spiritual training, they will have an aversion to him, and heap on him all sorts of calumnies and criticisms of which he is innocent.

The fortunate one will be warned against this course, knowing that the ego-self actually desires nothing but the destruction of its owner (the disciple himself). So he must not obey it in refusing his shaykh, since he recognizes its most insidious condition, trying to rob his good

deeds of their righteousness and his lofty goals of their acceptability by the sacred law. Whoever has the door of correctly interpreting the spiritual masters opened for him, and out of modesty lowers his gaze from their spiritual states, and assigns their affairs to Allah, and devotes his attention to the condition of his self (*nafs*), waging holy war against it to the best of his ability; surely it is hoped that such a person will arrive to his goals and find success in his desires in the shortest amount of time.

As for the one for whom has been opened the door of disapproval of the spiritual masters, of searching into their spiritual states and deeds; is not this a sign of his exclusion and the evilness of his end? Surely there is no success in this, which is why it is said: "Whoever says to his shaykh, 'Why?' will never succeed." In other words, when his shaykh of spiritual seeking (*suluk*) and training (*tarbiya*) has decided on a matter, the aspirant should put himself in his hands like a corpse in the hands of its washer. This is to the point that if the aspirant should have knowledge (*'ulum*), designs (*rusum*), or works (*'ammal*), he should cast them aside and pay no attention to them. The fire of truth (*haqq*) of the gnostic teacher makes manifest the filth in order that you may abandon it. The goodness remains, and the purity of the shaykh's essence and the preciousness of his kind is clarified. The purpose of volition (*irada*) and the appointment of an arbitrator (*tahkim*) and their relationship is that whoever wants to journey to God (*al-suluk ila Allah*) does so at the hand of one of the arrived saints (*al-wasilin*), and God makes it easy for him to know who is the shaykh. The aspirant thereby may obligate his ego-self to obey him, and subject himself to his commands and prohibitions.

The result of this commitment (*irtibat*) differs according to the spiritual master involved. Some of them command the disciple with the remembrance of Allah. Some of them dress him in the Sufi's tattered gown (*khirqā*). Some of them do other things depending on their ways, which are very many indeed, to the extent it has been said that the paths (*turuq*) to God are as many as the breaths of all the created beings.

Seeing God and Spiritual Experience

This section contains four separate excerpts from *Removal of Confusion*. In order they are: 1) the ninth chapter on "The Vision of God;" 2) the fifth appendix, "The Vision of God within the realm of possibility;" 3) the second chapter on "The Excellence of God's remembrance;" and 4) another selection from the fifth appendix on "The Vision of God."

Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti said in *al-Kawakib*: “The Prophets and the saints see Allah before everything, the righteous see Allah in everything, and the believers see Allah after everything.”

That is why Ibn ‘Ata’-Allah¹⁵ said, “If someone looks at the existent phenomena, but does not see Allah before them or after them, the presence of the lights has eluded him. Those to whom He appears before every existent being, they are the ones who learn from Him about His creation. Those to whom He appears in every visible object, they are the ones who annihilate all existents in the experience of witnessing Him. Those to whom He appears after the sight of His creation, they are the ones who learn about Him through the effects of His Power and the perfection of His attributes.”

Imam al-Razi¹⁶ said: “The manifest (*zahir*) and the hidden (*batin*) are two names that have been joined together, and it is not correct to separate them except when applied to Allah the Most High.”

He is the Manifest with regard to His Presence (*wujud*) and Majesty (*majd*). He is the Hidden by virtue of the negation of definition and explanation. The Prophet indicated this in the best possible way when he said: “You are the Manifest, and nothing can obscure You; and You are the Hidden, and nothing can unveil You.”¹⁷

The expressions of the Sufi people differ concerning the vision of Allah. Some express it as not seeing any existence (*wujud*) aside from the Real. Others say it means self-annihilation (*fana*), or others express it as the arrival in the divine Presence (*wusul*). Some say it means divine union (*jam*). In the words of a poet:

Our expressions are diverse, but You have one meaning
And everything points to this Perfection.

In the introduction of *al-Asrar al-‘aqliya fi al-kalimat al-nabawiya* by Abu-l-‘Izz Taqiyy al-Din bin Muzaffar al-Shafi‘i,¹⁸ Abu-l-‘Abbas bin al-Banna’ included the following passage, which I saw in his own handwriting, may Allah have mercy on him:

Among the greatest forms of the remembrance is that which arises from inspiration received from the One who is remembered, magnificent is His remembrance. According to the Sufis, this is the hidden remembrance, made continuously and in secret. As for their saying, “to the point the one making the remembrance masters a state of immersion

beyond the remembrance,” this mastery is neither a state of incarnation (*hulul*) nor of theosophical union (*ittihad*), only a faculty obtained from Him who is Almighty, Wise.

The explanation for this is that the heart becomes, in the presence of the remembrance, empty of the entirety of existence, so that nothing remains in it other than Allah, mighty is His remembrance. The heart thus becomes the house of the Manifest Truth. Allah becomes the tongue with which the servant speaks. If the one possessing such a heart were to strike a blow, He would be the hand with which he strikes. If he hears, He is the hearing with which he hears.¹⁹ The Exalted One being remembered has taken possession of the heart, so He controls it. He has taken possession of the limbs of the body, so He uses them for what is pleasing to Him. He has taken possession of all the attributes of this servant, so he alternates them however He wills for His pleasure.

Ibn al-Zayati said in *Fara'id al-fawa'id*:²⁰

There are two types of sainthood: minor and major. Where the minor type is concerned, it means that the servant devotes himself to his Lord by making a dedicated practice of obedience to Him, abstinence from the causes of His displeasure, compliance with the commandments, avoidance of the prohibitions, striving to control the senses, and endeavouring to regulate the breathing. As for the major type, it means that Allah the Exalted befriends His servant by ridding his heart of everything apart from Himself, and holding him so close to Him that he sees nothing but Allah. If he tried to direct his attention toward anything other than Him, he would find it impossible to do so. It is inconceivable, of course, that he would ever attempt to do so; taking notice of something would cause awareness to be divided, and he has no awareness of anything other than the One who is the object of his quest and ardent yearning. This [state] will be attained by all of those endowed with the major sainthood, if Allah wills. As for those endowed with the minor sainthood, [this state] may be attained by some of them, but not by all. . . .

When commenting on Allah's saying, *Allah! There is no god but He* (Qur'an, 4:87, 20:8, 64:13), the author of *Ruh al-bayan* explained, "This is a sentence in which, grammatically speaking, the predicate belongs to the

subject, which is the Mighty Name [Allah]. The meaning is that only He has the right to be worshipped, none other.”

It has been related that the glorification of the pole of the saintly poles (*qutb al-aqtab*) consists of saying, “O He!” (*ya Hu*), and, “O He who is He!” (*ya man Huwa Hu*), and “O who there is no God but He!” (*ya man la ilaha illa Hu*). When he says this through the spiritual state, he is invested with the capacities of divine disposal.

There are three degrees belonging to the affirmation of divine Oneness (*tawhid*). The first is the tawhid of the beginner on the path, consisting of the realization of, “there is no god but Allah” (*la ilaha illa Allah*). The second is the tawhid of the intermediate aspirant, consisting of realizing, “there is no god but You” (*la ilaha ila Anta*), for he is in a stage of witnessing, so personal address is appropriate. The last is the tawhid of the perfected one, who hears of the Oneness from the One who affirms His Oneness, thus realizing, “there is no god but I” (*la ilaha ila Ana*). This perfected one is in the station of total annihilation, so nothing emerges (from his mouth) on his own behalf. The Shaykh’s son²¹ said in the marginal commentary of the Qur’an, on the Chapter of Sincerity (*Surat al-Ikhlās*):

The word “He” (*Hu*) is an allusion to the station of those drawn near [to the divine Presence], those who have considered the essential nature of things and their realities wherever they are. So they have reached the inevitable conclusion that nothing exists apart from Allah, because the Real is the One whose existence is essential for His own sake. As for anything else, it is a potential existence; so that if it is examined from the perspective of “He,” this potential existence does not in fact exist. These people thus do not consider anything as existing apart from the Real, Glorious is He.

The following is a relevant quotation from Ibn ‘Ajība’s *al-Futuhāt al-ilāhiyya ‘alā sharh al-mabāhith al-asliyya*:²²

This reality of the soul is linked to the holy Presence
It is only the receptacle that restrains it, from this [realization], the
ascension begins.

The “reality of the soul” here refers to the subtle spirit (*ruh*) that permeates the physical bodies containing it. The “Holy Presence” is the eternal,

ancient, subtle and hidden sublimity, which is given expression by the angelic world (*al-‘alam al-jabarut*). This was explained by Ibn al-Farid²³ in his wine-ode (*khamriya*) when he said:

They said to me: describe it for us, for you are informed of its attributes
Of course, for I do have knowledge of its descriptions:

It is the purity of the purest water, but without water
The wind’s subtle grace, but without air

Light without fire, spirit without body
Its beginning preceded all existent beings

It is ancient without shape, present without form
All things began by it, but then because of divine wisdom
It was veiled from whoever lacks understanding.

What emerged from the eternal wine was the [created] objects (*mawdu‘at*) that became unveiled and apparent, which Allah made receptacles carrying meanings. Among these receptacles are the Adamic bodies, for they are the objects of the Lordly secret, which is the spirit (*ruh*). So the spirit is connected to this eternal wine, but it is prevented from rejoining its origin by the receptacle in which Allah put it to reside. The receptacles are dense (*kathif*), while the spirits are light (*latif*).

Whoever allows his denseness to prevail over his lightness—meaning his physical nature over his spiritual nature—he will remain imprisoned by the things surrounding him, limited to the confines of his body. Whoever gives victory to his lightness over his denseness—that is his spiritual nature over his physical nature—his spirit becomes joined to the holy Presence, returning to its origins. Neither the earth nor the heavens, nor even the Throne (*‘arsh*) nor the Footstool (*kursi*), can veil it from its source. Indeed, one of the Sufi people said, “The Throne and Stool are among my armor.” Another said, “If the Throne was in one of the corners of the gnostic’s heart, he would not feel it.”

Likewise, when the Real, Glorious and Exalted is He, manifests in the heart of His believing servant, the servant will see Him with the eye of his heart. He will witness Him with his sight, without incarnation, partialness, connection, or separation. A clear indication of this is provided in the following poem:

My Beloved graciously manifested Himself
What a great honor He has shown me

Making Himself known to me, until I became certain
That I am seeing Him overtly, without illusion

And in every state I see Him continuously
On the mountain of my heart, where He speaks to me

In this embrace, there is no union
And no separation, exalted is He from either of these

How is it possible for the like of me to contain the like of Him?
How can the tiny star be compared to the full moon?

But it happened that I saw Him in the purity of my inner being
There I saw Perfection, too mighty and exalted to be partitioned

Just as the full moon shows its face
In the still pond, although it shines high in the heavens.

The saintly pole, our Shaykh al-Tijani, "Seal of the Saints," was recorded as saying in the *Jawahir al-ma'ani*:

As for the [divine] affiliation mentioned about the spiritually distinguished, surely it is the closest of affiliations. Indeed, the holy Presence is the loftiest purity, which does not accept contamination in any shape or form. If someone enters it, the whole of existence vanishes from him, including his own self, so that nothing remains except sheer Divinity (*uluhiya*). In this spiritual state (*hal*), the servant has no speech, no thought, no illusion, no movement, no rest, no designation (*rasm*), no explanation (*kayf*), no direction (*ayn*), no boundary, and no characteristic (*alam*). If the servant were to speak in this state, he would say, "There is no god but I, glory be to Me! How exalted is My affair!" for he is only speaking on behalf of Allah, Almighty and Glorious is He.

It was in this context that Abu Yazid uttered his pronouncement while his companions were circled around him: "Glory be to Me! How exalted is My affair!" His companions were afraid of speaking to him, for

they knew that he himself was not there. Then, when he recovered from his intoxication, and they were thoroughly convinced of his sobriety, they told him what they had heard from him. He said, “I was not aware of anything of this. Why did you not kill me in that condition? If you had killed me, you would have been warriors in Allah’s way, and I would have died a martyr.” They responded, “But we could not have done that!”

As we have said, the divine Presence is the height of purity. It does not accept any other, or any otherness. When Allah the Exalted manifests Himself to the servant in the perfection of His majesty, He causes him to die to all beings. The servant comprehends no other and no otherness, so this is the utmost extent of purity. When our master the Messenger of Allah reported the vision of his Lord during the Night Journey (*laylat al-isra*), he reported: “I did not see in the vision of my Lord a single part of the creation, so I assumed that everything in the heavens and the earth had passed away.”

This is the meaning of purity and nearness to the Lord. Nearness (*qurb*) means to forget everything other, and all otherness. In the first stage of nearness, all existence is at the farthest distance from the divine Presence. The one from whom Allah has removed the veil of existing things, so that he sees Allah’s nearness with his own eye, is the sole exception. He becomes one of those witnessing Allah, while the rest of humans are distracted from Him. People are distracted from the Creator, Glorious and Exalted is He, because the development of their natural inclinations (*dhawat*) causes them to forget Him. Indeed their natures are only dedicated to pursuing self-interests and avoiding harm, so they become distant from Allah.

According to Ibn ‘Abbas: “That which keeps creatures distracted from Allah the Exalted is nothing but their preoccupation with themselves. If only they would abandon this preoccupation with themselves and distance themselves far from it, all of them would behold Allah with their own eyes.”

Paradigmatic Sainthood (*Qutbaniyya*)

This section contains three excerpts: two from *The Removal of Confusion*, and one from a letter to disciples contained in “The Jeweled Letters” (*Jawahir al-rasa’il*). The first excerpt is from the *Removal*’s seventh chapter, “Warning against Criticizing the Spiritual Elite.” The second excerpt is from the same book’s seventh appendix, “Femininity and Sainthood.” The third excerpt is

from a letter written in response to a disciple's question concerning the paradigmatic or axial saint (*qutb*),²⁴ the height of the hidden hierarchy of saints at any given time.

In reference to the saintly succor (*ghawth*), the greatest shaykh, rare like red sulfur, the most magnificent secret, Ibn al-'Arabi al-Hatimi, said:

Every spiritual station (*maqam*) is a protective shroud (*hijab*) for whoever is below it, because they obtain assistance through it. Every one of the distinguished saints (*rijal*) obtains assistance through someone whose sphere of influence (*da'ira*) is more comprehensive in scope than his own. So the one granting assistance becomes the shroud for the one receiving assistance. All of them receive assistance through the paradigmatic saintly succor (*al-qutb al-ghawth*), for he is the shroud for all of them. He obtains assistance through one of four prophets: Enoch (Idris), Elijah (Ilyas), Jesus ('Isa), or Khidr.²⁵ They in turn receive assistance through the supreme shroud [the Prophet Muhammad], who receives it from the Infinite Divine Presence. The Prophet supports all of his deputies (*nuwwab*), in both the visible and invisible worlds, according to this capacity. In fact, he assists every individual according to that individual's readiness, not according to his own capacity to provide assistance. Indeed, the Prophet is a vast overflowing ocean, with no beginning and no end. If someone allows the eye of his heart to look at the ocean of his effulgence (*fiyḍ*) and the wide diffusion of his sublime assistance—observing how all existents receive from him, with or without intermediaries—his heart will be astounded and his mind bewildered. The saintly pole (*qutb*) is in charge of sixteen worlds comprehensively, this lower world (*dunya*) and the afterlife (*akhira*) each being one of them. He supports all of these worlds and their inhabitants. Our Prophet is the one who furnishes him with this complete assistance, and who gives him the strength to bear this station (*maqam*).

This venerable Imam al-Hatimi, despite the depth of his experience in the sciences of gnosis, was not aware of the hidden presence through which the saintly pole derives support. He mentioned that the pole's support comes from the spirituality (*ruhaniya*) of the prophets. In fact, the saintly savior-pole (*al-qutb al-ghawth*) receives support (from the Prophet) through the ocean of the greatest assistance, that of the hidden pole and well-known Seal of

Muhammadan Sainthood: he being our master, the means of access to our Lord, Shaykh Sidi Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Tijani al-Hasani. May Allah be pleased with him and may He benefit us by him, Amen.

The Shaykh [Ahmad al-Tijani] said:

In every time, the saintly pole has a mandate (*wijha*) for every atom among the existing entities, thus assisting and improving everything in existence, atom by atom. Whenever a worshipper prostrates himself for the sake of Allah, or bows for Him, or stands erect for Him, or remembers Allah, the saintly pole is the one who makes this possible for him (*muqim lahu*). It is through the saintly pole that the spiritual master (*shaykh*) performs his glorification, and it is through him that the worshipper performs his worship, through him that one who prostrates before Allah prostrates. And it is through him that the other design (*wijha*), which cannot be described, is realized.

The essence of the matter is that the saintly pole is to the whole of existence as the spirit (*ruh*) is to the body. The body has no vitality, no sense and no movement without the spirit. All faculties of the physical body, external and internal, are made possible by the living spirit linked to the body. If the spirit departs from the physical body, all of its faculties cease to function, and it becomes a corpse.

The same applies to all the elements in existence, with regard to their relationship to the saintly pole. He is for them like the spirit for the physical body. If his spirituality (*ruhaniya*) departed from them, the whole of existence would pass into extinction. He is the spirit of existence, and the entirety of its properties. He is responsible for their grouping and their separation, their commonality and their particularity, their liberation and their confinement. None of the elements of existence can survive unless the spirituality of the saintly pole exists within them. If the saintly pole's spirituality was removed from them, the whole of existence would cease, becoming a featureless corpse.

This power of his comes from his bearing the burden of the supreme secret, and his traveling in the entirety of its domains. By means of the secret of the Greatest Name, he has come to be steadfast in the presence of Allah, perfectly observing the modes of conduct prescribed by the divine Presence. He perfectly fulfills Allah's rightful dues, whether pertaining to the manifestation of His Names, His Attributes,

or His Essence; and this at all times and in every instant measured by the blink of an eye.

There is no limit to the ways in which our Lord is constantly manifesting Himself in every instant measured by the blink of an eye, through His Names, His Attributes, His Essence, and the revolving of His Affairs. Throughout all of this, the saintly pole remains steadfast in the presence of God, according to each manifestation what it rightfully deserves in terms of proper conduct, duties, and service; in every instant measured by the blink of an eye. Even while God's manifestations keep multiplying endlessly, he fulfills all their rightful dues and treats them each with proper conduct.

There is no one in existence apart from the saintly pole who can bear the burden of all of these manifestations of the Real. And he is engaged in this throughout his life, in every instant measured by the blink of an eye. If all the sincerely truthful (*siddiqin*) stood together in God's presence to fulfill these terms, they would become extinct in less than the blink of an eye. But this is the saintly pole's regular habit.

Allow me to keep my interjection short for fear of revealing the secret. The saintly pole (*qutb*) is a manifestation among the manifestations (*tajalliyat*) of the Real, in whom all other manifestations are gathered. Paradise is among these other manifestations, so it is a manifestation among the manifestations of the saintly pole. Alongside Paradise, there are fifteen other worlds. The saintly pole supports and has power of disposition in all of them. He himself derives support from the hidden seal of saints, which is an ocean without shore, limit or end. And the saintly seal derives support from the Muhammadan reality (*al-haqiqa al-Muhammadiya*), which is behind and above him: also an ocean without shore, limit, or end. And this reality derives support from the Infinite Divine Presence (*hadrat al-ittlaq*), which has no delimitation (*la ayn*), no explanation (*la kayf*), no end, and no measurement. Thus Paradise, in all its forms, its everlasting abodes, and its very perpetuity, is a manifestation among the manifestations of the saintly pole. The Exalted said, *We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains. But they refused the burden in fear. And mankind took up the burden, and surely they are unjust and ignorant* (Q 33:72). And the Exalted said, *O people of Yathrib, there is no lodging (maqam) for you* (Q 33:13).

“The Jeweled Letters” (*Jawahir al-rasa’il*)

The *Jawahir al-rasa’il* provides unique insight into the community of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse.¹ This collection of letters, compiled in the 1960s during the shaykh’s own lifetime and published by a favorite Nigerian disciple, Ahmad Abu-l-Fath bin ‘Ali al-Tijani, contains useful summaries of key teachings. The shaykh responded to all sorts of letters from disciples, from questions about the basics of Islamic practice to questions about Sufi litanies and doctrines.

The most recent publication of the *Jawahir al-rasa’il* consists of three separate volumes: the first of 179 pages, the second of 164 pages, and the third of 80 pages. Roughly a third of the work does not contain letters at all, but rather transcriptions of Friday sermons, speeches in other parts of the world such as Egypt or Nigeria, supplications, and legal rulings (*fatawa*).

Two important letters are included in this section. The first concerns the “stations of the religion” (*maqamat al-din*), and was written in 1931 while the shaykh was resident in the farm outside of Kaolack, Kossi-Baye.² It is essentially an explanation of the nine steps of spiritual wayfaring (*suluk*) earlier referenced by the nineteenth-century Mauritanian Tijani scholar ‘Ubayda bin Muhammad al-Saghir bin Anbuja (d. 1867). The steps of *suluk* are themselves an elaboration of the famous *hadith* in which the Prophet Muhammad explains the three stations of religion as submission (*al-islam*), faith (*al-iman*), and excellence (*al-ihsan*). The Prophet defined *al-ihsan* as meaning “to worship God as if you see Him, for if you see Him not, surely He sees you.”³ Sufis have long interpreted the culmination of the journey to God as *ihsan*, for the ability to “worship God as if you see Him” is an awareness that can only be based in the direct experiential knowledge (*ma’rifah*) of God. Rüdiger Seesemann thus considered this text to be a key explanation of the process of

spiritual training (*tarbiya*) by which Niasse's disciples obtained *ma'rifa*. While disciples may actually have little recourse to this text (or any other) during the process of *tarbiya*, "The Stations of the Religion" is no doubt a seminal source for understanding the concept of spiritual progress within the Tijaniyya, and Sufism more broadly.

The second letter, to which I have given the title "Silence of the Gnostics," is described in the contents of the *Jawahir al-rasa'il* as concerning "the incumbency of not revealing the secrets."⁴ There are many other letters speaking to this theme, demonstrating some tension between the shaykh and overly enthusiastic disciples who may have been tempted to publicize their spiritual experiences. Shaykh Ibrahim composed this letter, also from Kossi-Baye, in the year 1930.

"The Stations of the Religion"

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, and may God's blessing be upon His noble Prophet Muhammad, the best of humanity, and upon his companions, the stars (of guidance).

All praise is due to God, the Peace, the Security, the Beneficent, glory be to Him. He is the King, the Forgiving, the Merciful, the Watchful, the Protector.

Peace be upon [Muhammad] the straight path, the God-conscious one, the pure, the truthful, the sincere, the one molded with tremendous character, the observant, the witness, the source of most perfect gnosis, the servant (*'abd*) and the master (*sayyid*), the one described with the attributes of the Greatest Master. May Allah's complete satisfaction be upon the helper of the Truth by the Truth, the guide to the straight path, and on his people, [may this prayer be] worthy of his merit, and surely his worth is exceedingly great.

I have received your noble letter and greetings of peace, most agreeable beloved and exemplary seeker of [Divine] satisfaction, 'Umar bin Malik, may the Sovereign treat both you and your father with kindness. I received your question concerning the three stations of the Religion (*maqamat al-din*), the abodes that pertain to them, and the reality of these properties. This matter has been discussed with extensive research by the master, the knower of God, 'Ubayda bin Anbuja, in his book *Mizab (al-rahma)*.⁵ But since you did not find what sufficed you therein, here is what has been possible for me to write down of my thoughts:

There is nothing worthy of worship but God (*la ilah*). The stations of the Religion are three: submission (*islam*), faith (*iman*), and excellence (*ihsan*). *Islam*

is the pronouncement of “There is nothing worthy of worship but God.” *Iman* is to have knowledge of “There is nothing worthy of worship but God.” *Ihsan* is the course in accordance with “There is nothing worthy of worship but God.” This means that you pronounce the words of a spiritual state, the speech of God, the noble word; which is the word of repentance, the word of God-consciousness, the word of sincerity, the word of Divine Unity, the good word. This [statement] has three degrees. The first degree is the station of *Islam*, which is undertaking the emulation of the wise statement on this lowest plane of material existence (*hadrat al-nasut*). The second degree, *Iman*, is the knowledge of this statement, and the third degree, *Ihsan*, is the speech of God. Thus the three stations can be explained as all revolving around the statement, “There is nothing worthy of worship but God.”

Repentance

As for the “abodes” (*manazil*), the first abode of Islam is repentance (*tawba*). This means removing oneself from denying blessing. Having gratitude and consideration for every blessing is a means of attaining the satisfaction of the Benefactor, and the opposite of gratitude is disbelief (*kufi*). The Sufi scholars have added that repentance is leaving aside base character traits for sublime character traits. I would add that base character traits for the common people include leaving aside the obligations of the Religion (*fara'id*), and pursuing forbidden things. The baseness of the elite is to leave aside the supererogatory exemplary acts (*fada'il*) while pursuing reprehensible things (*makruhat*). The baseness of the elite of the elite is the turning away from the Divine Presence (*hadrat*), constituting heedlessness.

This form of repentance is the reality of repentance, because real repentance means to kill the lower self (*nafs*), as the Most High said, “*So repent to your Creator, and kill your (lower) selves*” (Q 2:54). [True repentance is when] one does not perceive the repentance, nor perceive anything belonging to it; neither action, nor spiritual station, nor station. This is repentance from repentance: “*Surely God loves the repentant*” (Q 2:222). In other words, [those who repent] from repentance.

Steadfastness

The second [abode of Islam] is steadfastness (*istiqama*), which means traveling (*suluk*) the straight path without deviation from the structure of the path. God, Blessed and Exalted is He, enumerated ten qualities of the straight path in the “Chapter of the Cattle” (*Surat al-An'am*) by His statement:

Say, “Come, I will recite that which your Lord has made a sacred duty on you: that you do not associate anything as a partner with Him, that you be good to your parents; that you do not kill your children because of poverty – it is We who provide for you and them; that you do not approach shameful deeds, whether openly or secretly; and that you do not take human life which God has made sacred, except in the course of legal justice. This He has commanded you, so that you may discern.

Do not come near to the orphan’s property, except to improve it, until he reaches maturity. Give full measure and weight, in justice. We do not burden any soul beyond its capacity. And if you give your word, do justice to it, even though it be (against) a kinsman; and fulfill the covenant of God. This He has commanded you, so that you may remember.

Verily this is My straight path, so follow it. Do not follow other ways, they will sever you from His way (Q 6:151–53).

So the goal of the straight path as designated is action, putting in practice these properties. The first is not associating partners with God; then not taking the life God has made sacred, not killing one’s children fearing poverty, abandoning shameful deeds whether openly or secretly, and so forth. The steadfastness of the common folk is thus fulfilling the rights of the straight path.

For the elite, steadfastness is traveling the straight path, while the Messenger of God, peace and blessings upon him, is with them. So this means annihilation in the Prophet, along with [annihilation in] loving him and his character, thus molding oneself with his character, both openly and secretly. This entails busying oneself with his remembrance, invoking blessings on him, and praying for him in every breath. This is the steadfastness mentioned in the statement of the Most High, “Those who say our Lord is God, and are steadfast, the Angels descend on them, saying, ‘Do not fear nor grieve, but listen to the good tidings of the Paradise promised you’” (Q 41:30).

The steadfastness of the elite is that nothing of the creation persists in you, even if concealed; and what is repulsive (*khabith*) is completely unknown. This steadfastness is more comprehensive than the general steadfastness, since normally affairs fall into a variety of categories: obligatory, preferred, neutral, disliked, and forbidden.

God-consciousness

The third [abode of Islam] is the fear of God (*taqwa*), which means carrying out the commandments and avoiding the prohibitions, openly and secretly, publicly and privately. So complete implementation of the commandments

and complete avoidance of the prohibitions is the fear of the common folk. Among the elite, fear of God is to remember Him, and not to forget Him; to obey Him and not to disobey Him. The Most High said, “*O you who believe, fear God as He should be feared*” (Q 3:102). This refers to the degree of the elite (in God-consciousness), just as the Most High’s statement, “*Fear God as much as you can*” (Q 64:16), refers to the degree of the common folk.

The fear of the elite of the elite is when nothing occurs to the mind except by God, even for a single moment. The gnostic says, “If other than You should occur to my mind, it is a selfish desire afflicting my thought, heedlessly, for which I would be guilty of apostasy (*ridda*).” But this is the spiritual state (*hal*) of the gnostic, and the spiritual station (*maqam*) of the unique and comprehensive saintly pole (*al-qutb al-fard al-jami’*). The poet is here speaking of his spiritual state, but this [permanent] state of mind is not incumbent on the [ordinary] gnostic. This type of fear is alluded to in God’s saying, “*Surely God loves the God-fearing*” (Q 3:76).

Truthfulness

The second station of the Religion is the station of Iman [faith]. Its first abode is truthfulness (*sidq*), which is working righteousness seeking the Countenance of God the Most High. He said:

Righteousness is having faith in God, the Last Day, the Angels, the Scripture, and the Prophets; and to give of your wealth, for love of Him, to your kin, to the needy, to the traveler, to those who ask, and for freeing slaves; and to establish the prayer and to pay the poor-due; and to fulfill the contracts you have made; and to be patient in tribulation, adversity, and time of stress. Such are the truthful ones (Q 2:177).

Such is the truthfulness of the common folk.

The truthfulness of the elite is the truthfulness in the love of God’s Exalted Essential Being (*al-dhat al-‘aliya*). Arrival to the Exalted Essential Being becomes more beloved to him than everything in existence, and God’s Name is more beloved to him than any name, and God’s Speech is more beloved than any other words, and God’s satisfaction is more beloved to him than any other satisfaction, and God’s beloveds (*ahbab*) are more beloved to him than his own beloveds. So this is the truthfulness of the elite, and the Most High said, “*Be among the truthful ones*” (Q 9:119). The person who has attained this station does not attach his mind to the love of anything unless it is the desire of God that he find it. The mind of the truthful person does not

become attached to anything that God does not want to exist for him. “*And that is the bounty of God, which He gives to whom He wills, and God is the possessor of great bounty*” (Q 57:21).

The truthfulness of the elite of the elite is to attest (*tasdiq*) to everything conveyed to the Prophetic Presence from the Divine Presence; whether knowledge, spiritual state, secrets, conduct, rights, or duties. Whoever attains truthfulness to this degree possesses the best form of truthfulness.

Sincerity

The second [abode of faith] is sincerity (*ikhlas*). Sincerity is to act upon the commandments and to forsake the prohibitions for the sake of God’s Noble Countenance, for if you find in yourself any ostentation, concern for reputation, or vanity, you have not attained sincerity. This is the sincerity of the common folk.

The sincerity of the elite is to put the Religion into practice, not for the sake of reward, nor for fear of punishment, nor for attaining to a spiritual station (*maqam*). Rather, you worship God out of yearning [for Him]. Worship (*‘ubudiya*) means that you put the Religion into practice for no other reason than the fact God deserves to be worshipped, and you are a servant for whom nothing else is fitting besides service. So you act for His sake, and you do not perceive yourself deserving anything from Him. You give witness to the blessing, and He gives witness to your good deeds. Indeed, such deeds are from Him to you. He created them, and attributed them to you from His grace and blessing.

The sincerity of the elite of the elite is to banish all otherness in your dealing with the Real (*al-Haqq*), and surely your own self (*nafs*) is among the otherness so banished. Like this you will perceive that all works (*‘amal*) are from God, to God, and by God. You have no entry in them and no exit from them. Know that God loves [such] sincere ones.

Tranquility

The third [abode of faith] is tranquility (*tuma’nina*). Tranquility is the stillness of the heart with God, its sufficiency in God from everything else, and its dwelling with God. Youthful speculations as to what will benefit or harm the self no longer exist in the heart. Rather the soul (*nafs*) has become calm in God’s Hands. The tongue of this spiritual state says, “O God, on You is my reliance”⁶ This is the meaning of tranquility, but it is not possible except for the elite. The tranquility of the elite of the elite consists in their

certain knowledge that there is nothing other than God in existence. The soul of such a person does not rest except in Him, and does not return except to Him, and its address from God is “*O soul in tranquility, return to Your Lord*” (Q 89:27–28).

Awareness

The third station of the Religion is spiritual excellence (*ihsan*). Its first abode is awareness (*muraqaba*), which is the continuous presence with God. The knowledge gained by His acquaintance permeates the entirety of the servant, so that this notion [of Divine proximity] never leaves him. The reality is disclosed to him from behind a subtle veil, so he gains an experiential understanding. The one who arrives to this station may speak words that do not reflect the perfect specification of the spiritually arrived, for he has not fully arrived since the reality is disclosed to him from behind a subtle veil. He takes knowledge by means of understanding and experience, not by direct witnessing. So this is the awareness of the elite before witnessing. The awareness after witnessing is the awareness of the elite of the elite. This awareness is most precious, and is a station among the stations of the spiritually distinguished (*al-rijal*), the result of gnosis.

Witnessing

The second [abode of *ihsan*] is witnessing (*mashahada*), which is the ocular vision of the Real by the Real, without misgiving, doubt, or delusion. This is because nothing remains except the Real, by the Real, in the Real. So long as a single hair of the servant should remain in existence, he will not arrive to this station. Nay, he must pass away from himself, from all otherness and concern for what is other. The tongue of this spiritual state says, “Nothing remains except God, nothing other than Him; so there is no object of arrival, and nothing to be made clear.” Here there is no name and no description, no designation and no delimitation. This vision is without explanation, and it has no differentiation and no union, no direction and no reception, no beginning, no connection and no separation. There is no remembrance, no one performing the remembrance, and no object of remembrance. “*Truth has come and falsehood has perished. Surely falsehood is ever bound to perish*” (Q 17:81).

This degree is the closest of degrees to the spiritual opening (*fath*), and what came before this was not by such opening. Witnessing is the door of gnosis (*ma’rifat*), but it is not gnosis. Every gnostic has been opened, but not every opened one is a gnostic.

Gnosis

The third [abode of *ihsan*] is gnosis (*maʿrifa*), which is when the spirit becomes thoroughly familiar with and fixed in the presence of [Divine] witnessing, with complete annihilation (*fanaʿ*) and subsequent remaining (*baqaʿ*) by God. The gnostic according to the Sufi people is the one who either sees otherness as the Essence (*ʿayn*), or who witnesses the Real in otherness. But the gnostic that I have trained is the one who finds annihilation once in the Divine Essence (*dhat*), and in the Attribute two or three times. So he finds annihilation in the Name once, and bears witness to the existence through the three [Attributed] Realities, bearing witness to the Names by the Name. This is a station that requires stripping the thorn-bush of its leaves and the shredding of internal organs. It is not obtained by sacrifice of wealth and children. The resident of this station is completely awake to God, His wisdom and His rulings. He is content with the manifestation of the decrees of Divine ordainment. He has obtained a perfect contentment with God, so God is contented with him. His soul (*nafs*) is thus worthy of being addressed by the words of the Most High: “*So enter the company of My [honored] servants, and enter My Paradise*” (Q 89:30).

Gnosis is the last station of the Religion while repentance (*tawba*) is the first. Even still, repentance is better than gnosis since [true] repentance is the result of gnosis. This is because the reality of repentance is to be absent from repentance. For this reason Shaykh Tijani, the Seal of Saints, may God be pleased with him, used to say, “I swear by God—other than whom there is no god—I did not reach the station of repentance (*maqam al-tawba*).” He meant, may God be pleased with him, that he had repented from seeing his own repentance, for so long as the servant sees the repentance belonging to himself, he has not reached the station of repentance . . .

The reality of repentance is the repentance from repentance, for “*surely God is He who accepts repentance, the Merciful*” (Q 9:104).

The reality of steadfastness (*istiqama*) is the remaining (*baqaʿ*) after annihilation (*fanaʿ*): “*Verily, God ordains what He wills*” (Q 5:1).

The reality of fear (*taqwa*) is the absence of thought unless it comes from the Divine Mind (*al-khatir*), even for a single moment: “*That is because God is the Real*” (Q 31:30).

The reality of truthfulness (*sidq*) is the singular devotion to God: “*Everything will perish except His Countenance*” (Q 28:88).

The reality of sincerity (*ikhlas*) is that you do not see good deeds proceeding from you, returning to you, or being owned by you. Whatever is in the

heavens and earth is from Him. “*To Him return all affairs*” (Q 42:53). “*His is the sovereignty, to Him belongs all praise*” (Q 64:1).

The reality of tranquility (*tuma’nina*) is that you do not wish for the end of what is, nor the existence of what is not. “*Surely God knows and you do not know*” (Q 16:74). “*He is not asked about what He does*” (Q 21:23).

The reality of awareness (*muraqaba*) is the ceaseless attachment of the heart to God. “*Verily, your Lord is ever watchful*” (Q 89:14). “*And there is no affair in which you are engaged, no portion of the Qur’an which you recite, and no deed that you are doing, except that We are witness over you while you are engaged in it*” (Q 10:61). “*And We know what his soul whispers to him, for We are closer to him than his jugular vein*” (Q 50:16). “*There is no secret council of three except that He is the fourth of them*” (Q 58:7). “*Surely God is the one knowledgeable of what is in the hearts*” (Q 3:154).

The reality of witnessing (*mushahada*) is the vision of the Real with the eyes: “*Everywhere you turn, there is the Countenance of God*” (Q 2:115).

The reality of gnosis (*ma’rifa*) is the direct witnessing of the perfection of the Divine Being (*al-kamal al-dhati*). “*There is nothing like to Him*” (Q 42:11).

The Silence of Gnostics

Praise to God for his perfect revelation, in which open or hidden falsehood cannot enter. It is the strong rope of God, in which there is no error. He sent it down as a mercy to His creation, both previous generations and later ones. He said: *Let there arise from you a community that invites to goodness, enjoining righteousness and forbidding evil. Such are they who are successful* (Q 3:104). *There is no good in much of their secret conferences* (Q 4:114). *Why do not the rabbis and the priests forbid their evil speaking, and their devouring of forbidden things? Evil indeed is their handiwork* (Q 5:63). Prayer and peace upon the Messenger, the guide, the guided, who said, “All Prophets addressed the people according to their understanding.” And he said, “Speak to people with what they understand. Do you want to give lie to God and His Messenger?” May God be pleased with the Seal of Saints, Ahmad al-Tijani, who said, “Whoever extends [knowledge] to the creation without permission is cast out and dispossessed.” We seek refuge with God from hazardous audacity (*jur’a*) with God, and from failing to take His prohibitions seriously.

This is from the poor, incapacitated servant, the ignorant one of God who admits his ignorance and shortcoming in the understanding of God’s exalted essence (*dhat*) due to His might and majesty: Shaykh Ibrahim bin al-Hajj ‘Abdullah al-Tijani. To all the beloved Tijanis wherever they reside, especially those that have smelled the fragrance of divine reality and those of

sound hearts, and may God protect and maintain your hearts. May the peace and the mercy and blessing of God the Most High be upon you.

Be informed with my advice to you and myself. Fear God secretly and openly. Occupy yourself with God, through the rejection of everything aside from Him, in your heart and wherever you turn. Guard the obligations of the Sacred Law (*shari'a*). Do not lose sight of the rights of the Lord, for God disdains the servant neglectful of the rights due to Him, especially the five daily prayers performed with their conditions of timeliness and congregation. Perform the incumbent litanies (*al-awrad al-lazima*) of the Path. I emphasize the “daily office” (*wazifa*),⁷ and its condition of congregation. It is not sufficient to perform the *wazifa* by oneself in a place where there is a congregation, for this is what defines manhood in the Tijaniyya. Whoever does not guard to what is mentioned here is not among the Tijanis. If he is, then he has certainly not smelled the fragrance of divine need (*faqr*) and self-purification (*al-tasawwuf*).

I advise all those who have smelled the special fragrance of divine unity (*ra'ihat al-tawhid al-khass*) to persist in silence. Let them withdraw from gatherings of common folk who gather not for the obedience of God the Exalted. And certainly, they must refrain from talking about divine unity and the secrets among such people. Know that the unveiling of secrets among the veiled is worse in God's presence than committing prohibited acts (*haram*). *You have in the Messenger a beautiful example for all those who desire God and the afterlife* (Q 33:21). And there is the example of your Shaykh al-Tijani after that, for he was the treasury of the secret, as he explained in verse:

The secret with me is in a locked house
Whose key has been lost, and whose door has been boarded up.

The secret is not hidden except by the trustworthy
And the secret among those worthy is put into action (*mabdhu*).

And it is said, “The hearts of the liberated elite (*al-ahrar*) are the graves of secrets.” Indeed, you have an example for that in this insignificant servant writing now. This knowledge was with me for a long time, and no one heard anything from me that would indicate the special knowledge distinguishing me among the entirety of my beloveds and neighbors. That was until the command of God the Exalted arrived, and I praise and thank Him for this.

We are the Malamati masters,⁸ and we are concerned with concealing spiritual stations (*maqamat*) and leaving aside saintly miracles (*karamat*). Whoever has a vocation is occupied in it, and whoever has work is busy with it. We do not make claims to any special merit or particularity. We are not concerned with contravening normality or gaining information by spiritual unveiling, for all of this is but the menstruation of saints (*hayd al-rijal*). Our consideration is for the unveiling of lights, not the unveiling of darkness. Our signs (*ayat*) are in our hearts as the signs of others are on the horizons, for we are the Muhammadan inheritors. The Muhammadan inheritor has his sign in his heart: there his knowledge, state, and spiritual experience find increase with every breath. Such was indicated in the words of the Most High, *We will show them our signs on the horizons and in themselves* (Q 41:53).

Know that I have nothing to do with any enraptured one (*majdhub*) who does not travel the path (*lam yasluk*).⁹ And speaking [about divine realities] without permission is certain destruction demonstrating that the claimant [of such knowledge] is a liar. The one who witnesses the Real One has no words and no indication of his annihilation. And when he witnesses the creation [he only sees that for which he] is responsible according to divine law. Everything aside from these two perceptions is falsehood, even if a person thinks he perceives the hidden world (*al-batin*). What is hidden is not to be made manifest. The poets have said:

The one who discloses the secret confided to him
Will never again be entrusted with secrets so long as he lives.

Any enraptured one that talks will not obtain anything more from me, for I would not assign him with [further] disobedience to God the Exalted.

Let them take warning in the affair of some of them who proceeded beyond you:¹⁰ I prohibited them from speaking after having trained them. But they exceeded the bounds that I set following their own desires. So my spiritual assistance (*madad*) was cut off from them, and they received no benefit from me. All who learned from them were destroyed, for they were possessed of a most enduringly evil state and a most despicable station, externally and internally. The felicitous one takes heed from others. The love of appearance (*zuhur*) prevents appearance.

Praise to God, I am but the servant of the divine presence, and nothing else binds me. I do not desire any reward or appreciation from any of you. My reward is only that you might be for God and with God, without regard

for selfish desires. The expression [of secrets] without permission is naught but the pursuit of lust and the [unleashing of the] viperous ego-selves (*nafs khabitha*). *So repent to your Creator, and kill your ego-selves. That is better for you in the presence of your Creator (Q 2:54).*

I ask God to guide all of our hearts to the most perfect knowledge of Him, and that He take charge of us and you, for surely, He takes charge of the righteous. Peace.

Poetry for the Prophet (from *Dawawin al-sitt*)

Shaykh Ibrahim wrote poetry, mostly in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, throughout his life. His most comprehensive collection has been published as *The Six Divans (al-Dawawin al-sitt)*. This book circulates widely among Niasse's students, and has been republished numerous times.¹ Such poetry, particularly from the *Dawawin*, is ubiquitous within the community—from teaching circles transmitting the memorization, explanation, and recitation of the Shaykh's verses to late-night gatherings of students performing rhythmic recitation of the poetry interspersed with the chanted remembrance of God; to the utterance of select stanzas while the community's current imam, Shaykh Tijani bin 'Ali Cissé, returns from the mosque after praying the dawn prayer. The poetry selections here are taken from the *Dawawin*, and are among those most frequently recited in Medina-Baye Kaolack.

The proliferation of complex Arabic poetry among the non-Arab peoples of West Africa of course raises interesting questions about the reception of Arabic literature in Africa, a conversation that others have previously raised.² For the community of Shaykh Ibrahim, the reception of Arabic poetry is not simply a matter of performance or pietistic representation: it is often indicative of a premium placed on the acquisition of Arabic linguistic skills.³ For those lacking substantive Arabic training, locally produced translations of the *Dawawin* are not entirely absent, especially if oral teaching in Hausa, Fulani, or Wolof is considered. The Nigerian Arabic scholar Khalifa Awwal Baba Tawfiq, from Ilorin, completed a full English translation of the *Dawawin* in 2007.⁴ This translation has often been useful for the renderings here, but I have been forced to depart markedly from this earlier work. Whatever the quality of oral and written translations, the

overall point is nonetheless clear: the vast majority of followers would have at least a basic understanding of their shaykh's Arabic poetry.

Tears into Pearls

The following selection is from *Tāysir al-wusul ila hadrat al-rasul* ("Facilitating the Arrival to the Prophetic Presence").⁵ Taken from the first section, "harf alif," these are the opening lines of the Shaykh's *al-Dawawin al-sitt*.

Enslaved in love, the heart turns away from everything else
Bound in longing for the Prophet, bewildered

I spent an entire night sleepless, singing poetry
In remembrance of him who was pure goodness from beginning to end

So I write [these verses] at night, while my neighbors sleep
And from my eyes tears rain down.

Describing him is like arranging pearls to form words
A pearl perfectly formed: he is the full moon

Muhammad is the key to all illuminations, my master
He is the seal of all Messengers, their end and their predecessor

By him did all Prophets obtain their needs
By him are the cosmological presences adorned, so venerate and exalt him!

[He was] a messenger from the Patron Lord, when Adam did not exist
And he will remain a messenger, forever magnified

His formation was as a treasure of the Real, the One
And from this [treasury] he came to us as a distributor and apportioner

Every Prophet's miracle is the miracle of Muhammad
All affairs [emerge] from him and [return back] to him

Ta Ha, Muhammad: he is the sum of all bounties bestowed by the
throned Lord
And the mercy of the Merciful, so honor him!

Bearer of glad tidings and a warner, equitable in distribution
Generous, noble, open-handed benefactor

The most trustworthy exemplar, the elect of all [divine] messengers
The beloved of God on the Throne, from the beginning to the
end [of time]

The clouds rained from the brightness of his countenance
By him was the night's dark ignorance illuminated

His light enlivened the hearts of all creation, animated their tongues
And he purified and taught them

By God, there is no other like [the Prophet] Ahmad⁶
Ahmad is a unique jewel that can never be reproduced

On him God blessing, then peace
And on his family and honorable companions, ever increasing

If you should ask concerning my beloved and my master—
Surely it is Taha, the beloved of Allah, and none other

Every moment I have disposed in remembrance of him
Invoking blessings and praise; so from him I became illustrious

Who competes with me in ardent love for our Prophet
Has desired a thing impossible and forbidden

Like the one who wanted to catch the moon stretching out his fingers
Or to bring back yesterday today.

Visiting the Beloved

This is “harf mim” from the poem *Manasik ahl al-wadad fi madh khayr al-‘ibad* (“The Hermitage of Lovers in the Praise of the Best of Worshipers”).⁷ The poem was written on one of the shaykh’s later visits to the Prophet’s tomb in Medina, Arabia.

Love of the Hashemite [Prophet] has filled the heart, so I did not sleep
While in Paris, and around me the heedless slept; but mine is not to
blame

All the beauties of existence are eclipsed suddenly
When the loved one appears

Now the lights, the colors, the dancing, the singing
Remind the seers of the confluence of blessing

The palaces of kings, the hunting grounds, the bridges, the flags
Are but a reminder of him in whom prophecy has been sealed

The time [in Paris] did not make me forget the dwelling of goodness
[Medina]
In which every bondsman of the Guardian Lord is like the [common]
servant

And the time did not make me forget the moment of my farewell
To Ahmad, while I overflowed in tears

And the time did not make me forget the prayer niche of Ahmad
Nor his magnificent pulpit, grand beacon of light

And the time did not make me forget the moment when I sat
With the noble Aghwat,⁸ and my thoughts became dazzled

And I entered the Blessed Paradise, though I had not died
This by the favor of my beloved, the loftiest of blessings

I must say [to him], with all shyness and humility
Out of complaint, my heart in pain

O Messenger of Allah! See this inattentive servant burdened with sin
And besides you there is nothing to seek

There has not come a servant like I so full of crimes⁹
To visit your tomb, no matter from what time or community

Those of my generation have matured, but my faults have increased
What calamity! For disobedience and old age to have been combined

And what catastrophic disobedience, remaining protected and covered
in favors
While committing sins, however small

If time were to bear what this servant is carrying
All the vast expanses would have become dark with sin and oppression

O my Lord! Forgive me and guide my heart to love
Him whom You love, the chosen one of all the nations

Him by whom You guide all species of Your creation
Him by whom You raise the flag of Islam and smash the idols

Increase this servant in noble knowledge
Stand him in the presence of Mustafa, so he may greet the chosen one

Greetings to the Messenger, Muhammad
Greetings to Taha, greetings to the confluence of favors

Greetings to he who wiped away deviation, he who spread the
good news
Greetings to the guide, him by whom the water gushes out

Greetings to the Prophet of Light, the most trustworthy
Throughout my life, I have taken the praise of Mustafa as my allotment

Greetings to the [Divinely] guarded one, Ahmad my helper
Greetings to the praised one; while the flames of passion burn bright

Greetings from this lover, filled with shortcomings
Whose deeds do not verify his claim to love the purest one among
all peoples

Greetings from the lover, whose destination has become far
So he started greeting the best of mankind with his pen

Greetings to him from this adoring servant
While flying in the air over Europe

Greetings to him from Paris,
While the players of Marseilles win their victory

On a plane, with Christians all around me
But I am in Medina the radiant, for how many needs I have there!

Peace from Allah, exalted is His Majesty
On Mustafa, who is watching this servant and smiling

The Creator is spreading the good news of my praise poem
And the chosen of creation is pleased with this servant, and has not
blamed him

So despite my offenses, I became one of the favored
The beloved of Allah's Messenger among the retinue of those who
serve him

Like this I arrived at the shortcut to all spiritual stations, flying
To a Presence by which all veils are shattered

By this I lost myself
In the Divine Beauty and Majesty, which renders all else non-existent

By this I became alive for the duration of time itself, eternal remaining
I was liberated from impurities, from evil and sickness

By Him, to Him, in Him, from Him is my disposition of authority
My will is the Will of the Real, and the servant is as the Pen

Sometimes I am at the House of Allah, and sometimes
At the place of Mustafa, the Praiseworthy, and the heart has caught fire

And sometimes I am with the pure companions of Paradise,
and sometimes
I am engrossed with the people; but all has become non-existent

In that place, those who want to benefit me are the same
As those who want to do me harm. I am not afraid nor do I find blame

Praise and Peace on Ahmad the Chosen, from the Presence of his Lord
[A prayer] by which the wrath is averted

Praise and Peace [to him] throughout the ages, thankful I am
For the favors of the Lord: gratitude is due to Him throughout the ages

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
These salutations and poetry are favors to be thankful for

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Accept me, O Chosen One

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Protect me from blindness, sterility, dumbness and weakness

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Protect me from the evil of poverty, ignorance and illusion

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Protect me from the evil of debt, misfortune and depression

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Protect me from the evil of avarice, greed and confusion

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Protect me from the evil of injustice, guile, and false accusations

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
And guard my children, save them from affliction

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Make my city a light for the world

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Grant my companions the blessings for which they aspire

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
So the Fire does not touch those who know and understand me

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
What I want for my religion is well known

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
Here in the Far West I bring life to you, O confluence of blessing

On him the prayer of Allah, then peace
By this prayer I obtain intimacy in the rotting grave

Back to my country, I return repenting to the Creator
Seeking forgiveness of the Lord for what He knows [of my condition]

Upon him and his noble family and companions, blessings and peace
Like the rain, in light drops, and in blinding torrents.

Conclusion

The Prophet, the Qur'an, and Islamic Ethics

Rudolph Ware

Nun.

By the pen, and what they trace.

You are not insane, by your Lord's grace.

And indeed for you, a reward forever

For you are indeed, atop great character.

(Qur'an, Sura al-Qala 68:1–5)

The Prophet Muhammad, bearer of the Qur'an, holds a lofty ontological status in Islam. He is a human being, but his very being is sacred.¹ He is the mediating instrument responsible for transmitting to the world what Muslims believe to be God's verbatim speech.² And as such, he is the source, embodied example, and center of contemplation for Muslim approaches to knowing God.³ For fourteen centuries, the traditional religious sciences (*'ulum al-din*) have grappled with the meaning of this one man's life.⁴ Countless volumes have sought to come to terms with his legacy. Collections of records (*hadith*) about his life and times, his words and deeds, his virtues and miracles are essential to Muslim jurists, theologians, and historians alike.⁵ Scholars have penned countless volumes trying to *know* the Book, the God that sent it, and the man who brought it.⁶ They have poured out their ink—and the letter “*nun*,” which opens the Chapter of The Pen is often likened to an inkwell—trying to understand the man who inscribed God's final revealed Book onto the tablet of history.

Knowing—indeed loving—the Prophet is also the very core of the traditional religious science known as Sufism.⁷ For in envisioning, enacting, and embodying his example (*sunna*), Muslims seek to cultivate *ethical excellence* and draw near to God.⁸ And if *ethics* are at the heart of Sufism—and its

wellsprings, the Qur'an and the *sunna*—then Sufi values are not only meta-physical but also political.⁹

While this essay will not sketch the political history of Sufism in the region, it is important to get a sense of the sheer demographic significance of Sufism in West Africa. Pew Research Center surveys on Muslim identity are one index of this. Sub-Saharan Africa in general—and West Africa in particular—holds the distinction of being the “Sufi-est” place on earth:

Identification with Sufism is highest in sub-Saharan Africa. In 11 of 15 countries surveyed in the region, a quarter or more Muslims say they belong to a Sufi order, including Senegal, where 92% say they belong to a brotherhood. [Outside of sub-Saharan Africa] Only in Bangladesh (26%), Russia (19%), Tajikistan (18%), Pakistan (17%), Malaysia (17%), Albania (13%) and Uzbekistan (11%) do more than one-in-ten Muslims identify with a Sufi brotherhood.

The importance of this is patent. Of countries surveyed by Pew, the top nine countries for Sufi self-identification are all in sub-Saharan West Africa (Senegal 92, Chad 55, Cameroon 48, Niger 47, Liberia 4, Guinea Bissau 40, Ghana 37, Nigeria 37, DR Congo 29). In Senegal, one in ten Muslims *do not* self identify with a *tariqa* whereas in the rest of the world, one in ten Muslims self identify *with* a *tariqa* in only seven countries! West Africa is indeed the promised land of the Sufis.¹⁰

The overwhelming success of Sufism in West Africa is due, in large part, to the efforts of the four scholars under translation in this volume. Over a two-hundred-year span, the ideas of ‘Uthman Dan Fodio, ‘Umar Tal, Ahmadu Bamba, and Ibrahim Niasse made history.¹¹ Their respective oeuvres are, in a real sense, not only soulful journals of their individual spiritual journeys but also windows onto the history of Sufism in West Africa and beyond. Each began his public intellectual life around the age of twenty, gaining notoriety through preaching, teaching, and especially *writing*. In this conclusion, my own “Jihad of the Pen,” I aim to draw the reader’s attention to three interrelated themes: The Prophet, the Qur’an, and Islamic ethics.¹² In doing so, I take an approach informed as much by the traditional religious sciences themselves as by the academic disciplines of religious studies, anthropology, philosophy, and history. The goal is to understand and then employ the internal discourse of these Sufi scholars, especially concerning the relationship between ethics and spirituality.¹³

These visionaries changed the course of material history by struggling (*jihad*) for purity of body and soul, liberty of heart and spirit. To do so, they focused—in their intellectual, devotional, and social practice—on Islamic ethics, morality, and character. They focused, in a word, on *akhlaq*. *Khuluq* (character, characteristic, trait of character) and its plural *akhlaq* are an axial meeting place of the spiritual and societal interests of the Sufi folk. *Khuluq* is a bisecting plane where heavenly and earthly concerns converge, the meeting space of the creation and the command (*khalq* and *amr*).

Character is the core of the Qur'an. In the opening verses of the Chapter of The Pen, which serve as the epigraph for this conclusion, the person of the Prophet and the purpose of the Revelation itself meet in a meditation on *character*. According to reports, when the very first revelation came to this unlettered man in the form of a waking vision proclaiming him as God's Messenger and commanding him to recite the Words of a Lord "who taught by the Pen," he feared that he was possessed or had gone mad. Khadija, the Prophet's first wife and one of the most important intellectuals in the early Muslim community, reassured him, eventually helping to convince him that he had seen an angel, not a devil. The proof, she reasoned, was his character: "God will never disgrace you! By God, you keep ties of kin, you speak the truth, you bear others' burdens, you aid the poor, you are generous to guests, and you help the suffering."¹⁴

'Aisha, who was married to the Prophet after Khadija had passed away, eventually became one of the most important intellectuals in the Sunni community after the Prophet's own passing.¹⁵ She too described the Prophet's character as inseparable from the Revelation itself. When asked about the Prophet's *character* (*khuluq*) by a Muslim who had not known him in life she responded with a question: "Don't you read the Qur'an?" When the man affirmed that he did, her reply left him speechless: "The character of God's Envoy *was* the Qur'an."¹⁶ It is reported that even the Prophet himself identified with the essence of his mission: "Indeed I was sent only to perfect character (*akhlaq*)."¹⁷

This concluding essay, then, is an emic exploration of West African Sufi thought on the essence of the Envoy, the significance of Scripture, and the meaning of morality. These three interconnected themes are the substance of the scholarly struggle in African Sufism, I would argue, because they are the bedrock of Islam itself. Here, I seek to excavate their internal logic and use it to unearth insights for the study of society, religion, and ethics. Because an investigation rooted in the writings of erudite scholars can easily become

more scriptural than sociological, I want to begin by imploring scholars of culture, philosophy, and the social sciences at large not to ignore this volume! My hope is that by carefully thinking along with scholars that transformed the lives of millions of West Africans, together we can uncover understandings that benefit not only scholars of Islam, religion, and intellectual history but humanity as a whole.

Ethics, Sanctity, and Society

For historically related reasons, many modern Islamic movements, as well as the academic discipline of orientalism, have focused on Islam as a rigid system of rules and practices over ethics and principles. Influenced by the stereotypically Semitic legalism that orientalism attributes to Islam, the religion seems to prioritize rituals over morals.¹⁸ Such a depiction can hardly ring true to students of the African Islamic tradition, where Sufi institutions have helped to keep *character* at the heart of the faith.

The outer forms of a religion, like any system of signification and practice—nationalism, capitalism, secular humanism, or the social sciences, for instance—lose all meaning when divorced from their moral core. “If rituals are regarded as more important than ethics,” writes Fallou Ngom, “then religion in its ritual, legal, and cultural expressions cuts off its roots, becoming irrational, immoral, and fundamentally inhuman.” In his fine book on African vernaculars (linguistic, textual, and cultural) in the spread of the Muridiyya Sufi order, Ngom develops a compelling argument about the centrality of *character training* in Ahmadu Bamba’s movement, particularly in a chapter entitled “Ethics over Ritual”:

[He taught] that Islam and the *sunna* are meant to foster model ethical virtues and to empower all human hearts so that they might achieve . . . dual salvation [material success in this life and paradise in the afterlife]. Bamba emphasized the opportunity for dual salvation, the betterment of society, and spiritual illumination, and he believed that ethics [morality] was the prerequisite. He believed that ethical conduct is the optimal spiritual investment and a source of enduring success, and that unethical conduct is a bad spiritual investment and source of enduring failure in this life and the hereafter.¹⁹

Of course, this linking of sainthood with spiritual and social success is not limited to the Muridiyya. In his groundbreaking study, *Divine Flood*,

Rüdiger Seesemann highlights similar themes in the popular poetry of Niasse's movement, the *jama'at al-fayda*: "They put the emphasis on the more tangible consequences of being affiliated with Ibrahim Niasse: the protection from evil, the prospect of eternal bliss, and good fortune in this world and the next."²⁰ So what, then, is the link between sanctity, spirituality, and success in both abodes? The answer is, of course, *character*.

In this volume, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse transmits this classic definition of Sufism: "It is the entrance into every *sublime character trait* and the escape from every base characteristic."²¹ Though it is now usually glossed as "Islamic Mysticism," this *science of character* was a core discipline in Islamic curricula throughout the Muslim world before the twentieth century, and it remains central to Islamic knowledge transmission in Africa. Here, Sufism still plays its historical role in religious study: to complement and complete other knowledges, by cleansing the heart of the knower.

Amity and Alliance

Sufism thus prepares the aspirant to become an agent of social transformation through sanctification and spiritual illumination. The Qur'an itself mediates this preparation. As I noted in a previous work, each place where the Qur'an uses the formula, 'God loves,' followed immediately by a direct object, that object refers to someone who exemplifies excellent traits of character.²² The Qur'an says that God loves: *the just, the pure, the patient, the repentant, the reliant, the reverent, and the excellent* (the people of *ihsan*).

We will return to these seven character traits below; here, I want simply to stress that seen from this standpoint, Sufism is the effort to enter the ranks of God's beloved allies through character training. In his magisterial exegesis of the Qur'an, Shaykh Ibrahim says precisely this: "whoever adorns himself with a trait of character which the Qur'an has praised is among the *awliya*'."²³ *Walaya* (or *wilaya*) is sometimes translated as saintliness, "friendship" with God, or nearness to Him. But these connotations are only part of its Qur'anic denotation: "*alliance*." Properly speaking, the *awliya*' are perhaps best described neither as 'saints' nor 'friends,' but rather as *allies*. In ordinary English usage, allies are, of course, not necessarily equals or partners, but rather are connected in help, aid, and support. The contemporary Jakhanke scholar,²⁴ Imam Fodé Dramé, puts it this way:

The word *waliyy* (ally) is both the name of God Himself and of His ally. An ally is someone who works for you or with you. The one who

works with you is closer and dearer to you than the one who works for you. You may certainly like what the one who works *for* you does, but you may not like him as a person above and beyond what he does.²⁵

Here, Dramé is alluding to the superior station of the one whom God loves because of their character. God may love a deed, like prayer (and accept it) but not necessarily *love* the one who performs it. Character, on the other hand, is something that is beloved of God. The ultimate goal of ethical behavior in Sufism is to become the beloved of God, for what can be better than God's love?

‘Uthman Dan Fodio, in work presented in this volume, helps us to conceive of the place of this discipline of love in the broader Islamic tradition: “the relationship of Sufism to the religion is like the relationship of the spirit to the body, because it is the station of spiritual excellence (*maqam al-ihsan*).”²⁶ The shehu is referring to the well-known Hadith of Gabriel, wherein the Prophet Muhammad and many of his most illustrious disciples are visited by what appears to be a stranger who asks about *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith), and *ihsan* (spiritual excellence).²⁷ Sitting knee to knee with this “stranger,” the Prophet answers his questions, and the companions are astonished that having questioned him, the man would have the nerve to confirm his answers by saying “you have spoken truth.” When the man left, the Prophet revealed to his companions that the stranger was none other than the Angel Gabriel himself, primary transmitter of the Qur’an.

Ihsan and Intention

Sufis often describe *tasawwuf* as the science of *ihsan*, noting mere external submission (*islam*) or even belief (*iman*) leaves religion incomplete according to the Hadith of Gabriel. *Ihsan*, which can also be more simply translated as “goodness,” is required to complete and perfect religious practice. The Prophet’s definition of *ihsan* in that *hadith* designates the objective of the discipline: “worshipping God as if you see Him, for if you don’t see Him, He does see you.”

The science of goodness and spiritual excellence (*ihsan*) is also the science of character, for they are mutually constitutive: excellent conduct is both a cause and symptom of a heart seeking constant awareness of the divine presence in deed (*islam*), thought (*iman*), and intention (*ihsan*). That purity of

intention is all but synonymous with *ikhlas*, sincerity, in the sense that action in this state is undertaken only for God. As Dan Fodio puts it in *The Book of Distinction*: “the real objective and advantage of Sufism is that it devotes the heart singularly to God.”²⁸

Character refinement opens onto spiritual realization as the human being purifies itself through good conduct and sincere faith, returning back to its innate natural disposition (*fitra*).²⁹ In this original state of being molded by God, the Originator (*al-Fatir*), with His own two hands (Q 38:75) and animated by the Holy Spirit the aspirant becomes cognizant of God's presence in everything, including the human vessel itself.³⁰ *So when I have fashioned him and breathed into him from My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate* (Q 15:29, 38:72).

As the body, soul, and heart are returned to that original state in relation to the Spirit, one becomes constantly aware of God's presence—“seeing” Him in everything and at all times. And this is the precious link between the two facets of Sufism sketched in the shehu's *Book of Distinction*: the ethical and the spiritual. At this stage, the definition of *ihsan* becomes clear: worshipping God with scrupulous care “as if you see Him” becomes—as the *hadith* is often glossed in Wolof—worshipping God “while seeing Him.” The Sufis sometimes reduce this to a simple sequential progression in order to facilitate understanding, which in this context could be read as follows: first purification, then beautification, and finally Divine Manifestation.

Seeing God

Seen from within, all the religious sciences of Islam have the same basic subject. They seek to make sense of a massive irruption of Divine knowledge—the Qur'an—from the unseen world into the basic fabric of the material world. This revelatory experience tore open the world's veil of irreality, which was shrouding humanity in darkness, revealing a final message of prophecy for the children of Eve and Adam. What makes Sufism a unique brand of knowledge is that the *knowing* it seeks to capture is divine and direct, experiential and immediate. In this it differs sharply from simple sensory materialism or abstract analytical understanding. In principle, this superior direct knowledge permits better worship of God. A refrain often sung in Wolof to punctuate Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse's Arabic poetry makes this point explicit: *Soo ko xamoo, noo ko jammoo?* “If you don't know Him, how can you worship Him?”

Taste, sight, and experience

In *Pathways of Paradise* (excerpted in this volume) Ahmadu Bamba outlines the difference between exoteric and esoteric knowledge of God: “Unicity (*tawhid*) is divided into two sorts; there are two ‘onenesses.’ The first is spoken, while the second is experienced, undeniable, and unmistakable. The first is common and general, the second uncommon and specialized.” For many Sufis, this unique, uncommon, and unmistakable experiential knowledge has been discussed and mediated in reference to *dhawq*, taste.³¹ This is a conventional Sufi gloss on *maʿrifa* (divine gnosis) because taste is not easily subjected to discursive analysis.

Try describing the taste of a fresh, ripe mango—for example—to someone who has never tasted one, and you will exhaust your analogies, comparisons, and descriptive adjectives without capturing the experience. While the exoteric sciences of religion (especially law and theology) try to explain who God is and what He wants through words—analytical reasoning, analogy, descriptive adjectives—surely none of these *words* are capable of encompassing knowledge of God. Say: “*If the sea were ink for my Lord’s Words, surely the sea would run out before my Lord’s Words, even if We brought its like as reinforcement*” (Q 18:109). *If all the earth’s trees were pens and the sea [ink] with seven more seas to reinforce it, God’s Words would not be depleted* (Q 31:27).

While the scholars translated here certainly wrote extensively, they did not merely deplete their words. As Ibrahim Niasse reminds us, with reference to tasting, “this science we mention is not mere wagging of the tongue. Its contents are tastings (*adhwaq*) and experiences (*wijdan*). It cannot be acquired through talking or written texts, but can only be received directly from the tasters (*ahl al-adhwaq*).”³² The approach of the Sufis is to say: “stop talking about the taste of mangoes and taste a mango!”

If *tasting* is indescribable, *seeing* is undeniable. In this volume—and in West Africa more broadly, I think—the principal framing of spiritual experiences is not in terms of taste, but rather in terms of vision. This focus on vision of the divine is likely rooted—at least in part—in the Hadith of Gabriel, which links *ihsan* with seeing God; however, it is also consistent with a kind of direct and practical West African approach to spirituality. A Wolof expression captures this sensibility nicely: *bët mooy gëm* (“seeing is believing”).

The face of God

Seeing God, it must be acknowledged, is a notion that many modern Muslims might consider absurd or even blasphemous. Yet the scholars in this volume—and, indeed, the West African Sufi tradition as a whole—seldom

disputed the possibility of such vision, only where and how it occurs. The question, "Is it possible to see God?" was once posed directly to a famous and erudite scholar of the Muridiyya Sufi order, Shaykh Sam Mbaye, in the question-and-answer session of a Wolof-language conference in a working-class Dakar suburb in September 1995. His response captures this notion:

Oh yes indeed! Yes. God can be seen. Our Lord can be seen. Our Lord can be seen. Our Lord can be seen! He is seen in different ways. Those fortunate enough to go to the Garden will see Him the last day. . . . The first time they see Him there, they will not recognize Him because He will appear in a form they do not know. When He says to them, "Here I am, I am your Lord," they will ask to be shielded from Him. The second time, He will come in a form recognizable to all. Everyone will prostrate. *The first time, it will only have been the 'arifun billahi (the knowers of God) that recognized Him.*³³

Most Muslim scholars through time have agreed that God will most certainly be seen during the Resurrection. They interpret Qur'anic verses like "*Faces, that day, will be radiant, gazing upon their Lord*" (Q 75:22–23) and *hadith* reports such as "Indeed you will see your Lord as clearly as you see the full moon at night" as affirmations of basic fact.³⁴ Traditional accounts of the Prophet's explanations of this final visionary experience with the divine essence stress that it is a form of satisfaction beyond any of the delights of the Gardens of Eden.

God will say to the people of Paradise: "Are ye well pleased?" And they will say: "How should we not be well pleased, O Lord, inasmuch [as] Thou hast given us that Thou hast not given to any of thy creatures else?" Then He will say: "Shall I not give you better than that?" and they will say: "What thing, O Lord, is better?" and He will say: "I will let down upon you my *Ridwan*."³⁵

Ridwan, God's pleasure, can then be understood as a kind of experiential place where the contented soul can be lost in contemplative gazing upon the divine essence. This is often formally equated with the Face of God (*Wajhullahi*) mentioned by the Qur'an.³⁶

The description here is attributed to 'Abd al-Aziz al-Dabbagh, the seventeenth-century Moroccan Sufi, whose thought has had a clear and profound

impact on the development of Sufism in West Africa through its extensive citation in *The Book of Lances* by al-Hajj ‘Umar Tal:

Direct vision of God—the Mighty and Majestic—for those who possess it is more precious and more pleasant, more lofty and more excellent, than every other delight the mind can imagine. The people of this paradise do not want to leave it to go to any of the other paradises, just as the dwellers in Paradise don’t want to leave it to go into the world. . . . Because beholding God the Sublime contains more pleasure than all the delights in Paradise. It includes what’s in Paradise as well as the addition of something more. Moreover, the pleasure of those who experience it is pleasure of the spirit, whereas the pleasure of those other than the people of this paradise is pleasure of their eternal bodies.³⁷

This, then, is the unimaginable highest form of bliss: a kind of pleasure that exceeds even those that can be enjoyed by undying resurrected bodies in the Gardens of Eden. So the reward for goodness (*ihsan*), worshipping “God as if you see Him,” is that you *will* see Him. To return to the theme of love with which we opened, the result of obtaining God’s *love* through ethical striving in this world is His *pleasure* in this world and the next. *And is the reward for ihsan other than Ihsan?* (Q 55:60).

But for many West African Sufis, this vision of the divine is clearly possible not only in the hereafter, but also in the here and now. The Murid Shaykh Sam Mbaye again helps us delve into the topic of seeing God before death:

Our Lord—Blessed and Exalted is He—unveils himself to his slave proportional to the latter’s rank. You heard me say moments ago that our master Ahmad bin Hanbal [d. 855] reported having seen our Lord in a dream. One can, therefore, see Him in a dream and if you see Him in a dream everything that He tells you is real, and He reveals secrets.³⁸

‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dabbagh again provides useful context; here, he was asked about “seeing God” in everything, not only in dreams:

How can the eternal (*al-Qadim*) be seen in the contingent (*al-hadith*), since God is elevated above indwelling (*hulul*) and union (*ittiḥad*)? . . . He answered: “These are people who because of the power of their knowledge (*irfan*)—God be pleased with them—perceive His actions

in fashioned things and created beings. There is absolutely no created thing that does not contain the actions of God Most High, without indwelling or union.

‘Abd al-Qadir Jaza’iri, who was both the leader of the Algerian resistance to French occupation in the 1830s and the greatest nineteenth-century disciple of Ibn ‘Arabi, broaches this same issue of the presence of the infinite essence manifesting in a finite vessel in his *magnum opus*, *The Book of Waystations (Kitab al-Mawaqif)*:³⁹

Allah is the name of the rank which brings together all of the names relative to the Essence, the attributes, the acts of majesty, beauty, and perfection. . . . He reunites the opposites and in Him, the *Eternal* manifests itself in the form of the *contingent* as said the Messenger, “I saw my Lord in the form of a beardless youth with curly hair, upon his face a veil of gold, upon his feet, sandals.” *But at this degree too the contingent manifests in the form of the Eternal*, as the Messenger also said: “God created Adam in His image” or “in the image of the Merciful,” according to the two narrations.

Mirrors, moons, and metaphysics

The cluster of *hadiths* cited here by Jaza’iri, all of which are well known (if sometimes controversial) in the Islamic scholarly tradition, brings the traits of the divine into human scale and scope. The Qur’an speaks of God fashioning the human being in the finest form, *Surely We have created the human in the best mould* (Q 95:4), and the Prophetic traditions clarify that the human being is somehow cast in the image of God himself. Moreover, it is narrated that the Prophet (and many Muslims since) have seen God manifest in human form in a dream. All this harkens back to the special, intimate relationship of the human being with the divine essence. In other words, while Dabbagh answers that the Eternal can be seen in the contingent by the knowers because God is always there, the presence of the Eternal in the human being goes beyond this—not simply, as I mentioned before, because of the molding with the hands and the breathing of the Spirit—but *because the very physical form of the human being functions in some subtle way as a mirror for the metaphysical form of the divine essence*.

Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse captures this dynamic in elegant poetic form in the *The Removal of Confusion*, translated by Zachary Wright in Part 4 of this volume:

Likewise, when the Real, Glorious and Exalted is He, manifests in the heart of His believing servant, the servant will see Him with the eye of his heart. He will witness Him with his sight, without incarnation, partialness, connection, or separation. A clear indication of this is provided in the following poem:

My Beloved graciously manifested Himself
What a great honor He has shown me

Making Himself known to me, until I became certain
That I am seeing Him overtly, without illusion

And in every state I see Him continuously
On the mountain of my heart, where He speaks to me

In this embrace, there is no union
And no separation, exalted is He from either of these

How is it possible for the like of me to contain the like of Him?
How can the tiny star be compared to the full moon?

But it happened that I saw Him in the purity of my inner being
There I saw Perfection, too mighty and exalted to be partitioned

Just as the full moon shows its face
In the still pond, although it shines high in the heavens.

This recalls the *hadith* mentioned above: “Indeed you will see your Lord, as clearly as you see the full moon at night.” Shaykh Ibrahim’s poetic exposition of divine manifestation makes it clear that it is the *heart* that is capable of this kind of vision of God. But it must first be cleansed of tarnish and finely polished—through character training and *tarbiya*—in order to serve as the “still pond” in which “the full moon shows its face.”

Reflections of the heart

The *heart*. Not the *mind*. In fact, the Qur’an never once refers to the mind as an independently existent entity. The words *dhihn* (mind) and *‘aql* (reason or intellect) never appear as nouns in the Qur’an. Sufi shaykhs are sometimes

referred to as “heart doctors” in that they treat illnesses of the heart. “Heart disease” is, according to the Qur'an itself, a major obstacle to human beings receiving, understanding, and accepting the Prophet's message.⁴⁰

Thus, the problem of Divine manifestation is posed here as a question of the presence of the Eternal in the contingent, the Uncreated in the created, the Metaphysical in the physical. Another way of phrasing this—which highlights the limits of rationality—is in terms of God's absolute transcendence and utter imminence. Such is the terminology usually employed by 'Abd al-Qadir Jaza'iri: “The God that reconciles transcendence (*tanzih*) and immanence (*tashbih*) is He whom the messengers commanded us to know. *Yet reason can recognize no such God. Reason's god is another absolutely transcendent god that accepts no quality of immanence.*”⁴¹

Like Jaza'iri, the authors translated in this volume certainly focus a great deal of attention on the heart, with little attention to the god of modern rationalism, the mind. Human reason, it would seem, may be just another veil to be torn down on the way to the Return. The terms “mind,” “reason,” and intellect appear roughly a dozen times each in this volume, whereas there are more than one hundred references to the heart. This focus mirrors that of the Qur'an itself, which refers to the heart (*qalb*) no less than 132 times; the bosom that contains it (*sadr*) 44 times; and its ardent, burning flame (*fu'ad*) 16 times. As noted above, the Qur'an does not use the noun '*aqil*'; it does, however, use '*aqala*' as a verb. However, the organ responsible for intellection is the heart, not the “mind.”

The Qur'an, visionary experience, and remembrance of God

The Qur'an is at the heart of Sufism, and only the heart can receive the Qur'an. God's Word is overwhelming. “*Had We sent this Qur'an down upon a mountain, you would have seen it fall humbled, rent asunder by fear of God!*” (Q 59:21). Mountains (and also sometimes rocks) are directly likened to hearts in a handful of places in the Qur'an,⁴² and rocks as hearts appear in the guise of metaphors, similes, and analogies throughout the Qur'an. The power that splits the mountain—but can be received in the human heart—is God's verbatim speech. The Word has intrinsic power since God creates *through* speech. *When He decrees a matter He has only to say unto a thing “Be” and it is* (Q 2:117, 3:47, 19:35, and 40:68).⁴³ Therefore, the Qur'an contains the substance of which “reality” itself is composed. There is, however, another kind of divine speech among the sacred traditions of the Muslims. A Hadith Qudsi—or Holy saying—may be best described as a Prophetic paraphrase of divine speech. It

is non-Qur'anic speech uttered by the Prophet in order to capture a divine inspiration. Among the most famous such sayings is the following: "Neither My heavens nor my earth contain Me, but I am contained in the *heart* of my believing servant."

Sufi poetry—especially in West Africa—is best understood as poetic and allegorical commentary on God's Word—especially the Qur'an itself—so it is not surprising to hear echoes of the Qur'anic focus on the heart in the verses of the Sufis, like those quoted above by Shaykh Ibrahim:

And in every state I see Him continuously
on the mountain of my heart, where He speaks to me.

More than simply divine speech, the revelation of the Qur'an is the ultimate visionary experience. Shaykh Ibrahim's lines recall Moses on the Mount receiving The Word, and asking to go from *hearing* God to *seeing* Him. Here again, the image of the *mountain* crumbling before the power of God's self-disclosure returns: *And when Moses arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, "My Lord, show me, that I may gaze upon You." He said, "You shall not see Me, but gaze at the mountain, if it stays in place, then you shall see me." But when his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, the mountain was flattened and Moses fainted* (Q 7:143).

This episode is the subject of extensive commentary by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, who interprets it in the light of the teachings of his spiritual forefather, Ibn 'Arabi, who unequivocally affirmed the possibility of seeing God. "When the Real—Exalted is He—manifested His theophany to the mountain and to Moses, the mountain could not endure it and Moses could not withstand it, for the mountain was flattened and '*Moses fainted*,' bodily and spiritually. . . . But it is certain that Moses—peace be upon him—saw. Otherwise he wouldn't have fainted."⁴⁴

Intimate witness

So, if God has spoken before and been seen by others, what is the nature of the Prophet's distinction? He is the recipient of God's most perfect self-disclosure to His creation. This is not only because the Qur'an is the final book, wherein guidance is detailed, but also because the Prophet has an unmediated encounter with the divine essence, witnessing his Lord, and he is able to withstand it. As Bamba sings in "Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor":

He gained his glory on the midnight journey, not in fantasy but in
the flesh
Glory to the Lord, whose beloved drew near, at night, in innocence
at His behest

Once purified, he made the journey, bringing joy to the Prophetic /
assembly
The trustworthy traveled, with trusted guide, on trusty steed, to
peaks of purity.⁴⁵

This encounter, in which God brings the Prophet near to him (with Gabriel and al-Buraq as guide and steed, respectively, for parts of the journey) is described in *hadith* literature as well as in the Qur'an itself. In the Chapter of The Star, the intimacy of this witnessing is emphasized:⁴⁶ *He approached and descended. And was at a distance of two bow lengths or nearer. And He revealed to His servant, what He revealed* (Q 53:8–10). The term *shahid* is often translated as 'martyr,' but those slain in the path of God are only one kind of witness. The Prophet is God's ultimate witness.

Shaykh Tijani Cissé, grandson of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse and the imam of the latter's mosque in Kaolack, Senegal, commented on this verse in conversation in striking, provocative terms: "It was two lengths, *or less*. And if it was *less*, then only One Essence was there!"⁴⁷ While Cissé was *not doctrinally fusing* the Prophet's essence with that of God, his point was that this was nearness admitting no distance, blurring the line between subject and object.

The heart did not belie what it saw (Q 53:11). The Prophet's perfected heart can withstand what the mountain cannot. He sees without collapsing or looking away. *His gaze did not waver, nor did it transgress. He certainly saw of his Lord's greatest signs* (Q 53:17–8). That unwavering gaze was conditioned by a truthful heart, free of transgression, and capable of receiving the *ayat*—which means signs, but also verses, of the Book.

The Recitation as Remembrance

Dhikr, remembrance of God, puts the aspirant on the path of purification. In principle, any kind of *dhikr*, especially God's names, recited consistently will help to purify and strengthen the heart, but litanies (*awrad*), as Bamba reminds us in *Pathways of Paradise*, "are based on the Revealed Book wherein they are dispersed, and in verified transmissions." *And We have certainly facilitated the*

Qur'an for dhikr, so will any remember? (Q 54:40). And here, perhaps, is the underlying logic of having regular litanies that are rooted in the Qur'anic text: using God's verbatim speech conditions the aspirant to follow the Prophet in his ascent, receiving the signs and drawing near to God. *Has the time not come for the hearts of the believers to be humbled in remembrance of God and what has been revealed of the Truth?* (Q 57:16).

But none of this can be separated from personal striving to achieve uprightness and avoid transgression against one's fellow human beings. In other words, there is no spiritual journey without ethical struggle. Bamba expounds upon all of these themes together in a single passage in *Pathways of Paradise*, quoted here at length:

If you are unaware of the significance of a *wird*, know that its objective is momentous. Its role in the practice of the virtuous places it among the preeminent acts of piety. Its definition, according to the knowledgeable, is "an act of worship regularly performed at a given time." . . . Each litany invariably guides the aspirant to the Divine Presence (*Hadratillahi*), whether it be from 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Ahmad al-Tijani, or any other of the axial poles (*aqtab*) for they are all absolutely right. All call their aspirants with uprightness to obedience to the Lord of the Throne wherever they may be. *So do not mock nor criticize any of them. Ever.*

Who God bless, no man curse. The allies are thus blessed by God who takes a personal interest in their affairs out of His love for their fine traits of *character* which have become inseparable from their very person—mingling, as it were, with their flesh and blood. Thus, Bamba (*So neither mock nor criticize them, ever*) and all the other scholars in this volume unanimously remind us that anyone who opposes God's ally opposes God Himself. A widespread *hadith* collection—that of Yahya al-Nawawi (d. 1277)—contains the following Hadith Qudsi, wherein God warns unequivocally, "*I will indeed declare war on whoever takes my ally as an enemy.*"⁴⁸

Muslim lore is thus replete with references to the terrible fates that befell enemies of the *awliya*'. One of the earliest such stories to be recorded in West Africa concerns the great fifteenth-century polymath Modibo Muhammad al-Kabari, a brilliant dark-skinned African scholar who attracted students from as far away as the Arabian Peninsula to study with him in Timbuktu. He apparently attracted jealousy as well:

This divinely favored shaykh was the locus of many extraordinary manifestations of divine grace. Here is an account of one of them. A certain scholar of Marrakesh gossiped about him, taking liberties with his tongue, even calling him “al-Kafiri” [non-believer]. Now this scholar was a man of far-reaching influence, who was looked on with great favor by men in authority and *shurafa*, to whom he would recite the *Sahih* of Bukhari during Ramadan. God afflicted him with elephantiasis (*judham*).

More important even than this kind of miraculous protection is divine inspiration, which, Bamba reminds us, is ultimately the source for Prophets and saints alike: “A *wird* can have its origin either in Revelation or in inspiration—the Lord of Peace grants these to whosoever He wills—*Revelation* for Prophets and *inspiration* for saints (*awliya*).”

Revelation ends with Muhammad. He is “the opener of what was closed, and the seal of what came before,” as he is described in *salat al-fatih*, the blessing of the opener. We will revisit below this widespread formula for blessing the Prophet; here, I want simply to highlight the fact that his earthly life and death—and especially the period of the Qur'an's revelation (610–632)—*reopened* the period of divine revelation that had ended with Jesus, the penultimate Prophet in Islam, and *sealed* the time of revealed books and revealed law.

Inspiration (*ilham*), on the other hand, is, like God Himself, unending. God manifests Himself and provides instruction to His beloved allies, as He wishes. Imam Fodé Dramé noted this in a 2016 Princeton University lecture. In it, he quotes a Prophetic tradition: “nothing will remain of prophethood except for the glad tidings (*mubashirat*).” When asked “what are the glad tidings?” the Prophet responded: “righteous visions” (*al-ru'ya al-saliha*).⁴⁹ This term, which is often glossed as “true visions” or “the true visions of the righteous,” is also mentioned in a number of Prophetic traditions as comprising 1/46th (and sometimes other fractions) of prophethood itself.⁵⁰

The Qur'an, too, elaborates on this theme of glad tidings reaching righteous believers (not only Prophets), saying of them that angels will descend to them declaring: “*Fear not, grieve not, but receive the glad tidings of the Garden that you are promised. We are your allies in this world and the Hereafter*” (Q 41:30–31).⁵¹ The *awliya'* fear not, neither do they grieve, and as righteous allies of God they have His Heavenly Host as allies, and they garner glad tidings. Among these are gifts of angelic protection, as well as divine guidance in dreams and visions.

The scholarly corpus of the great nineteenth-century Tijani scholar al-Hajj ‘Umar Tal, translated in this volume by Amir Syed, contains numerous accounts of visionary experiences and powerful arguments that need to be taken seriously. His library, which was confiscated from his son and successor when the French colonized what is now Mali, contains over 4,100 manuscripts in all the fields of the Islamic sciences.⁵² Many of them deal with esoteric knowledge in general and visions in particular. In his master work on Sufism, *The Book of Lances*, Tal relates his own dreams and dreams that others had about him, and he develops powerful arguments that unveilings need to be taken seriously as sources of *knowledge*. Here, in a passage from *The Book of Lances* not fully translated in this volume, he transmits a citation from Sha‘rani clarifying his position:

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.⁵³

But such spiritual visions, he warns us, are not ends in themselves. When taken out of proportion, they become distractions on the spiritual path:

Inclining to unveilings and miracles stems from the passions and desires of the *naḥs*. Thus whoever intentionally seeks them—and focuses his remembrance on them—is counted among the deluded. Even if he is inclined towards these things without intention, there still remains the danger of being enticed by them.⁵⁴

If spiritual experiences take precedence over God, then God has been forgotten instead of remembered—and the basic purpose of humanity is *dhikr* (remembrance of God). In a technical sense, *dhikr* almost always means invocations of God or repetition of His names. The names relate to attributes, and the attributes are tied to words that God uses to describe Himself in the Qur’an. However, since the words, the names, and the attributes are

all—in some sense—His Speech, reciting remembrances does not simply have a mental effect, creating reflection upon an idea, but rather they unlock a concealed reality hidden in the power of God's Word itself, allowing that Word to take root as a reality in the heart.

These realities are at least partially related to the Islamic science of letters, *ilm al-huruf*, and Islamic numerology. Each letter of the Arabic alphabet has particular qualities, as a letter, and corresponds as well to a numerical value. What is true of the individual letters is true of the words of which they are composed, and thus of each name as well.⁵⁵ Some numbers also have certain benefits in and of themselves, distinct from their association with particular names. The point in all of this is that the number of recitations in remembrance *matters*. In a gathering of American aspirants, the contemporary Senegalese Tijani shaykh and scholar Mahi Cissé was once questioned about whether it really matters to stick to a prescribed number of litanies: “isn't all *dhikr* good, in any number?” “Of course,” he replied, before likening the numbers of a litany to the teeth of a key. If a locksmith wants to cut a key to open a lock, it must have the correct number of teeth.⁵⁶

While the general nature of this kind of knowledge is often contained in Sufi writings, its operational details are not meant for everyone. Thus, there is a tension and dialectic between the manifest and the hidden, public and private, seen and unseen. In this volume, both 'Umar Tal and Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse quote an aphorism, “The chests of the liberated are the graves of secrets” (*Sudur al-ahrar qubur al-asrar*).

Dhikr, then, is to call upon names that correspond to attributes, words, and secrets that are existent realities encompassed by the divine essence. All this ties back to the Qur'an itself as a particular kind of divine self disclosure—as Imam Fodé Dramé reminds us in the introduction to his book, *The 99 Names of Allah*:

The significance of this commentary on the names of Allah lies in the fact that understanding the meaning of these names is essential to understanding the Qur'an itself. Imam al-Shafi'i, one of the founders of the four schools of Islamic Jurisprudence, is quoted as saying, “Whatever the *umma* [the nation] says is merely a commentary on the tradition of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and whatever the traditions of the Prophet say is merely a commentary on the Qur'an, and whatever the Qur'an says, it is a mere commentary on the excellent names of Allah.” The implication of this statement is that the Qur'an itself is an exegesis of the

names of Allah. Any casual glance at the Qur'an confirms this view, for every page of it contains a number of God's names.⁵⁷

While the names, their meanings, their *talismanic* qualities, and the Qur'an itself are all extremely important, they cannot, by themselves, lead the aspirant to the divine presence. There is a proverb in Wolof, *nit nit ay garabam* ("people are people's medicine"). Because God chose to make the children of Eve His regents in the creation and the keepers of His doors in the afterlife, people need people. His Prophets, according to tradition, number 124,000 souls sent to every branch of the human family with glad tidings and warnings. Of these, 313 Messengers brought a discrete oral teaching or revealed book. And of these, five are distinguished for their resolve: Noah; Abraham; Moses; Jesus; and Muhammad, the final envoy. *And We have not sent you except to all of humanity, bearing glad tidings and warnings. But most of the people do not know* (Q 34:28).

Portraits of the Prophet

If the revelation of the Qur'an is the archetypal rupture in the veil between the unseen and the seen, the epicenter of that irruption was the Prophet himself.⁵⁸ With secrets bursting forth (*inshaqqa*) and the light breaking on the horizon (*infalaqa*), a new age of knowledge dawned. This conception is salient in the very first lines of the *salat al-Mashishiya*, often described as the only surviving text authored by the medieval Moroccan Sufi 'Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish (d. 1227):

O God, blessings on him from whom
The secrets erupted
And the lights irrupted
And in whom realities ascend
And on whom Adam's knowledges descend.

'Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish al-'Alami was one of the principal teachers of Abu Hasan al-Shadhili, and in these two one could argue that a new day dawned in the history of Sufism.⁵⁹ The place of the Prophet in the pietistic practice of West African Sufis could almost be read as an extended commentary on the singular blessing of Ibn Mashish.⁶⁰

Ibn Mashish may never have founded a *tariqa*, but his student did.⁶¹ Al-Shadhili is the eponym of a large and widespread Sufi path, the Shadhiliya.

Beyond his own *tariqa*, he is widely credited by Sufi thinkers with reviving the path of *shukr* (thankfulness or gratitude) and making it prevail over the path of *zuhd* (asceticism).⁶² The former is understood as being a more rapid and less fraught path, in part because it keeps the aspirant from the illusion that they reach God through their deeds rather than because of His Mercy, generosity, and divine favor.

The Shadhiliya is yet to receive its due in the historiography on Islam in West Africa.⁶³ Scholars connected to the Shadhiliya-Nasiriya of Morocco seem to have been of foundational importance in the southwestern Sahara (contemporary Mauritania) as early as the seventeenth century.⁶⁴ One Shadhili scholar in particular, Muhammad al-Yadali (1685–1753), was particularly influential. Al-Yadali penned two extraordinary works, *The Seal of Sufism* and *Pure Gold in the Exegesis of the Book of Almighty God*, which have been widely engaged by the authors studied in this volume.⁶⁵ But most fundamentally, because all its authors take for granted the superiority of the path of thankfulness, Shadhili's influence is hiding in plain sight on almost every page of *Jihad of the Pen*.

The way of *shukr*

In *The Sciences of Behavior*, translated by 'Aisha Bewley in this volume, for example, 'Uthman Dan Fodio warns of the risks of conceit (*'ujb*) in related terms. Here, the danger is one of being deluded by one's own worship:

He acts as if it belonged to him. However, it is all God's blessing to him and he has no inherent right to it. . . . The truth is that you, your movements, and all of your attributes are part of God's creation and invention. You did not act when you acted, and you did not pray when you prayed, and "*you did not throw when you threw. God threw*" (Q 17:82). Therefore, the worshipper's conceit about his worship has no meaning. It is the same with the beautiful person's conceit about his beauty, and the conceit of the wealthy man about his riches and liberality. You suppose that the action is achieved by your own power, but where does your power come from? Action is only possible by your existence and by the existence of your knowledge, will, power, and the rest of the causes of your actions. All that is from God, not from you. . . . He is the One who created power and then gave power to the will, set causes in motion, distributed obstacles, and facilitated action. One of the marvels is that you can be conceited about yourself, and yet you do not wonder at the generosity of God.⁶⁶

In this volume, it is the Tijani authors, ‘Umar Tal and Ibrahim Niasse, who explicitly address gratitude versus self-denial (*shukr* versus *riyada*). Tal—citing, engaging, and elaborating on earlier Sufi thinkers—reminds us, “the journey of the former is that of the hearts (*al-qulub*) while the journey of the latter is the journey of the bodies (*al-abdan*).” Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse quotes the founder of the Tijaniyya himself, Ahmad bin al-Tijani, expanding on the indispensable benefits of the former especially in his day and time: “gratitude is God’s gateway, and the gate nearest to Him. That is why Satan sits next to it. . . . In this age, whoever does not enter through the gate of gratitude does not enter at all.”⁶⁷

The Prophet is, in a manner of speaking, the guardian of the Gate of Gratitude. For what greater object of *appreciation* could there be than the Prophet himself? For this reason, the Sufi way of thankfulness puts the Prophet at the center of spiritual life. Again, this can be found clearly in the blessing of Ibn Mashish: “O God, make the Supreme Veil the life of my spirit, and his spirit the secret of my reality.”

This centrality of the Prophet in spiritual practice is everywhere in this volume, but nowhere is it more apparent than in the Tijaniyya. The Tijani daily office and litanies, as well as their weekly remembrances (*wazifa*, *awrad*, and *dhikr*) are all punctuated by hundreds of blessings of the Prophet, especially using the *salat al-fatih*. The “prayer of the opener” is a widespread supplication used in many Sufi circles, but which is particularly associated with the Tijaniyya due to its ubiquity in Tijani devotions:

O God! Blessings on our master Muhammad
 The opener of what was closed
 The seal of what came before
 Champion of Truth by Truth
 And the guide to Your Straight Path
 And on His family in measure with his eminent status.

Salat al-fatih draws its initial wording from a prayer formula attributed to ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib in a number of early works on *hadith*, *tafsir*, and blessing the Prophet and his family.⁶⁸ ‘Ali, the Prophet’s young cousin and the first male to accept Islam, is extremely significant in Sufi piety. His significance is due in large part to his status as *ahl al-bayt*, part of the Prophet’s household, and indeed a reference to the Prophet’s family closes the blessing. All living descendants of the Prophet are the offspring of ‘Ali’s marriage to the Prophet’s daughter,

Fatima. Fatima is extremely significant in her own right; Sufi thinkers (almost unanimously) recognize her as the first supreme saint in Islam.

If the overall form and meaning of *salat al-fatih* seem to come from 'Ali, the precise formula as it is conventionally used is attributed to an Egyptian Sufi scholar, Muhammad al-Bakri (d. 1585). In one account, al-Bakri finished writing out numerous copies of Jazuli's (d. 1465) *Dala'il Khayrat*, a widely used collection of prayers on the Prophet. The number of copies he had written varies, according to the account, from 70 to 700 to several thousand. After completing this act of devotion, he saw the Prophet in a dream and was informed that a single recitation of *salat al-fatih* earned more blessing than all the handwritten copies of *Dala'il Khayrat*.

Witnessing the Witness

A discussion of the overall history of blessing the Prophet, *tasliya*, is beyond the scope of this essay.⁶⁹ I do, however, wish to tie the persistent practice of blessing the Prophet to visionary experiences. And the best way to do so is to return once again to 'Umar Tal, who warned us against getting lost in visions in Part 2 of this volume by reminding us that the Tijani way "is based on gratitude and love. The people [of it] are not occupied with desiring matters that do not directly help them give their full attention to God."⁷⁰ While recentering us on the way of gratitude and warning against visions as distractions, Tal nonetheless attributes great importance (as we saw above) to visions. *Especially visions of the Prophet*. Even the section headings in his introduction to *The Book of Lances* show this:

This section is concerned with informing the brethren that the *awliya'* behold the Prophet—*God's blessings & peace upon him*—in a state of wakefulness and that he—*God's blessings & peace upon him*—is present at every meeting or place he wishes, with his body and his spirit. He moves freely and travels wherever he will, in the countries of the earth and in the heavenly kingdom, and he is the shape he was in before his death, with no part of him being altered. He is invisible, just as the angels are invisible despite their being alive in their bodies. If God wishes to let a servant behold him, He removes the veil from him in his physical form.⁷¹

Tal cites a number of earlier authorities in order to establish this point directly, beginning with Sha'rani's (d. 1565) *Lawaqih al-anwar al-qudsiyya fi bayan al-'uhud al-Muhammadiyya*, a book on *adab* whose title can be translated

as *Pollinations of Holy Illuminations in Clarification of Muhammadan Conventions*.⁷² The citation here is drawn from Tal's transmission of that text:

If you make frequent practice of sending blessings and peace upon him—God bless him and give him peace—perhaps you will attain to the station of witnessing him. . . . That is the procedure . . . of the shaykhs of the era. None of them ever stops sending prayers upon God's messenger—God bless him and give him peace—to make a frequent practice of it and *cleanse himself of sin*, so that he may commune with him in a state of wakefulness at any moment he wishes.

Sha'rani's reminder—transmitted by Tal—is that one must be striving to remove flaws and impurities in order to see the Prophet, but that this has to be accompanied by copious *tasliya*. Sha'rani mentions specifically the experience of a Tunisian visionary: "Shaykh Ahmad al-Zawawi told me that when he failed to achieve the experience of communion with the Prophet . . . he devoted himself with assiduous perseverance to sending prayers upon the Prophet . . . for one whole year, sending prayers upon him 50,000 times each and every day."

When combined with moral striving, that kind of devotional praxis makes the Prophet an existent reality—a vision of the heart—for the people of *dhikr* and *salawat*. But Zawawi's own words again make it clear that the ethical and the spiritual are inseparable. Here he is explaining a *hadith*, in which the Prophet explains that anyone who sees him in a vision genuinely has seen him because Satan cannot take his form:

By my saying, "Whoever has seen me has seen me truly," I meant my body and my soul properly speaking, because my form only differs in regard to the purity of heart of the seer. So if it is pure and refined, then my form impresses itself in the mirror of his heart according to what is in it of perfection. And if there is a cloud in him, this cloud veils him from me, and the concealment is of this cloud, not me, *because I cannot be concealed. Rather, I continue in my perfection*.⁷³

The Prophet is always right there. You just have to be prepared, morally and spiritually, to see him. *Tasliya* is the key to seeing him, but to paraphrase Imam Fodé Dramé, "it must be accompanied by ethical striving that would make you into someone that the Prophet would want to see."⁷⁴

This state of profound attachment, moreover, need not be diminished by death. Shaykh Musa Kamara—one of the most accomplished polymaths of the early twentieth century, and a historian of the Senegambia region—makes this point explicitly. First, he states that anyone who makes 1,000 *salawat* per day will eventually see the inimitable Prophet, in truth. Then he relates two famous episodes of disinterment: those of the eighteenth-century scholar and anti-slavery revolutionary ‘Abd al-Qadir Kane, and of one of al-Hajj ‘Umar’s sons about a century later. First, an account of the burial, post-reinterment, of Imam ‘Abd al-Qadir, which occurred 37 days after his first burial:

People who attended the ceremony claimed that sweat rolled down his face, that his whole body was supple and damp and as they had found one of his arms and one of his legs bent, they stretched it without difficulty, and that his hair seemed to be oiled and combed. One of the attendees returned to the tomb some days later and reported, “By God, the fragrance of musk wafted from his tomb and perfumed my nostrils!”⁷⁵

Ahmad al-Kabir, son of ‘Umar Tal, had been buried for more than five months when he was disinterred and reburied. Here is Kamara’s description:

Then they took the body out of its tomb to find that it had neither changed nor decomposed. . . . This intact state of the body is a sign of a precious, stunning favor that God can sometimes bestow upon certain saints. Sometimes He deprives others of it in spite of the esteem they enjoy of God Most High.⁷⁶

Kamara preferred not to explain their intact state with reference to them having died as martyrs. *Say not of those slain in the path of God “they are dead.” Rather they are alive, though you do not realize* (Q 2:154). Instead, he attributed the miracle to their abundant *salawat*. For the one who reaches this continuous state of *tasliya* and dies in it:

The Earth will not corrode his body . . . when the affection that one carries for the Prophet attaches itself to the tiniest fibers of the heart of a man, each of his limbs is imbued and each drop of his sweat is saturated, it is as if the Prophet was infused in him, thus the poet affirms:

I am Him that I love and the one I love has become me. We are two souls living in a single body.

If you see Him, you see me. And if you see me, you see us both.

Thus the Earth is forbidden from altering the body of the Prophet and this particular blessing even reaches the one who loves Him.⁷⁷

The explanation here is not martyrdom, but rather the continuous leading to a kind of full embodiment of the Prophet. Perhaps this is what Ibn Mashish meant by making the Prophet “the life of my spirit and his spirit the secret of my reality.”

An excellent example

This loftiest of spiritual stations, that of the final Prophet who comes and goes as he pleases in death and whom the earth cannot consume, is manifested simply in his earthly life as a human being. Say “*I am only a human like you, to whom has been revealed that your god is One God. So whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous deeds and not associate anyone in the worship of his Lord*” (Q 18:110). No matter how lofty his spiritual station, the Qur’an makes it abundantly clear that Muhammad is no object of worship and no partner of God: *It is not for a human that God should give him the Book and judgment and prophethood and then he would say to the people “be worshippers of me instead of God”* (Q 3:79).

So who was Muhammad? The question takes us back to Dan Fodio, who saw the Prophet in a vision during dark days of political turmoil and was girded by him with the Sword of Truth. It takes us back to ‘Umar Tal, whose own jihad of the sword did not seem to mean as much to him as the 3,000-verse acrostic poem, *The Vessel of Happiness*, that serves as the final testament of his love for the Prophet. It takes us back through Ibrahim Niasse, whose tears of love became pearls of praise, to Ahmadu Bamba, who spent the last twenty-five years of his life on a poetic odyssey of devotion to the Messenger. Their answer to the question: ‘Who was Muhammad?’ is the echo of Shadhili and his master, Ibn Mashish, “none of us fully fathom him, whether past or future.”

In their wonder and perplexity with the Prophet as the secret of their reality, the authors in this volume (and the Sufi tradition as a whole) tended to cling to one answer: whatever else he meant to them, Muhammad was the

model to be imitated. Not for spiritual inspiration alone, but also practical emulation. *Truly for you the Messenger has been an excellent example for one whose hope is in God and the Last Day, and remembers God abundantly* (Q 33:21).

All of the scholars in this volume remembered God abundantly and emulated closely that excellent example (*uswa hasana*) in its inner and outer details—and none more than ‘Uthman Dan Fodio. The shehu’s spiritual experiences, his emigration, his defensive jihad all took place along a timeline that closely followed events in the life of the Prophet, and Dan Fodio himself became aware of this pattern when he reached the age of spiritual maturity and wrote about it (using the Arabic script to write his native language as many Africans have):

The attributes of Muhammad cannot be achieved in their entirety; the support which he received, with its scent have I been scented.
He is our *Imam*, we will never go astray, the year I was made a branch
of him;
thus was I made aware of my resemblance to him.⁷⁸

Not everyone can be like the shehu. Having one’s biography intentionally and unintentionally shaped to mirror the life of the Prophet is exceptional. However, all can strive to resemble the Prophet in character, and that is the beginning, middle, and end of Sufism because it keeps the aspirant engaged with the life of the spirit and the life of society at the same time.

This work continues in today’s West African Sufi communities. Shaykh Tijani Cissé, the imam of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse’s mosque in Kaolack, made the Prophet’s character the centerpiece of an international address on *social* cooperation in 2011. His intervention helps us to reconnect the Prophet’s cosmic function with the social function of ethics:

Intelligent folk concur on the excellence of good character, gentleness, and good companionship. . . . Since [the Prophet] was sent to perfect the noble traits of good character and it was his Lord who refined his manners, we find him the best of mankind in manner, the most perfect of character, the most beautiful in keeping company. . . . There is no good character trait except that the Messenger acquired the most bountiful share of it. His companions described the excellence of character in numerous narrations. For example, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib said, “The Messenger of God had the most generous heart of all humanity. He

was the most truthful in speaking among people. He was the gentlest of them in nature, and the most noble in companionship.” His excellent character was clearly manifest in his relations with his companions, for he used to answer the invitation of any who invited him, and he used to accept the gift offered to him and then similarly requite the giver. So he [was] used to unite them, and not divide them.

Here, then, is another link between the science of Sufism and the cultivation of a societal model. By manifesting excellent traits of character, human beings learn to live with one another in unity and love rather than with dissension and bitterness. But character, as we discussed at the beginning of this essay, is understood by the people of *dhikr* as the key to success in both abodes—the here and the hereafter.

Shaykh Tijani Cissé’s exposition highlights the fact that *hadith* literature shows that the Prophet not only modeled character in his deeds but also exhorted people to it with words so that they would understand its central importance. In closing his discussion of the question, Cissé weaves together a number of traditions about the Prophet’s character; these stress the final, spiritual (rather than social) benefits that result from ethics:

The Prophet [peace and blessings upon him] said, “I am the guarantor of a house in the heights of Paradise built for the one who beautifies his character.” And he [peace and blessings upon him] said, “The most beloved of you to me, and the one who will sit closest to me on the Day of Judgment is the one with the best character.” And he [peace and blessings upon him] said, “There is nothing heavier than good character in the weighing of a believer on the Day of Judgment . . .” and in another narration: “The one who possesses good character will attain a rank above the one who prayed and fasted.” [He] [peace and blessings upon him] also said: “The most complete in his faith is the one with the best character, and the best of you is the one who is best to his family.” And in another narration, the wording is “the best of you are those who are best to their womenfolk. It has also been narrated from him [peace and blessings upon him]: “The most *beloved* to God of His servants are the best of them in character.”⁷⁹

In fact, nowhere does the Qur’an clearly and explicitly say that God loves anything other than human beings. Each and every time that the

Qur'an says God loves (*Allah yuhib*) followed immediately by a direct object, that object is a collective noun referring to people with one of seven traits of character:⁸⁰

tawba tahara taqwa ihsan sabr qist tawakkul
repentance purity reverence excellence patience justice reliance

I mentioned above that 'Aisha is reported as saying that the Prophet's character was the Qur'an. In another narration she says, "He was the Qur'an walking upon the earth." This was an ontological statement of the man as the embodiment of the Book, to be sure, but it was uttered in response to a question about the Prophet's *character*. God pronounced His love for these seven traits of character in the Book, just as He pronounced His love for the Prophet's character by bestowing the final Book on him.

The Penultimate Word: The Prophet and the Pen

In an earlier work, I posed a rhetorical question: "if a picture is worth a thousand words, how many words for he who cannot be pictured?"⁸¹ The answer—whether from Dan Fodio; Tal; Niasse; or, here, Bamba—is obvious: "*all of them.*" Most Muslims consider images of the Prophet Muhammad to be formally forbidden by Islamic law.⁸² So the artistic edifice erected to the Seal of Prophets is composed of words, not bricks and mortar. The Portrait of the Prophet is drawn with ink, rather than paint.

Praise welled in me, and flowed profitably, ending disgrace and
 difficulty.

Praise is my profit, my edifice and achievement, this I declare
 definitively.

But I have failed to reach my goal. I cannot equal in praise, the
 Nobles of old.

My ink seeps away, burning heart in a daze, the Deputies' guide, I
 cannot extol.

For how can *I* sing His praises, when even the Sages, lack such ability?
 So I call all servants to my pillar, though they needn't abandon home
 or country.

The image is striking: an inkpot toppled over; the *fu'ad*, the heart's ardent flame, blazing. A legend of the Sufis also plays with the image of the heat boiling over in the heart of the poet who cannot find adequate words to praise the Prophet. Shaykh Hisham Kabbani recounted it in a keynote address for a conference on Islamic poetry at the University of Michigan.⁸³ In the story, a Naqshbandi shaykh is traveling with hundreds of his disciples along the Nile River. When they arise for the morning prayer, they are unable to get water for their ablutions because the Nile is boiling! The shaykh finds a man sitting on the banks of the river with a foot dangling in the waters of the Nile, composing a poem; however, he is trapped between the lines, repeating over and over again, "the sum of their knowledge of him is that he is human." Shaykh Hisham explains: "From the intensity and heat of the love that was in his heart, the river was boiling."⁸⁴ Then the man had a vision; the Prophet came to him and said, "finish the verse," and then gave him the rhyme that freed him: "and he is the best of all of God's creation."⁸⁵

The man, of course, was Muhammad bin Sa'īd al-Busiri (d. 1296), and the poem was the *Qasīdat al-Burda* (The Poem of the Mantle). If the Prophetocentric devotional tradition of West Africa could be described as an extended commentary on the Mashishiya, then the whole panegyric tradition of Islam could be described as a riff on the themes established in Busiri's *Burda*. Chief among them, of course, were undying love for the Prophet and utter bewilderment in trying to grasp his ultimate significance.

All of this returns us to where we began this essay—with a reflection on the ontological and cosmological status of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic thought. And Busiri is the place to start; like the visionary poets in *Jihad of the Pen*, Busiri's persistent praise of the Prophet opened him up to "righteous visions" of the beloved. "The Poem of the Mantle" takes its name from one such vision, described here by Busiri himself:

I was suddenly paralysed [sic] down one side of my body by a stroke. I decided to compose this ode, the Burdah. I hoped that it would be a means unto Allah, by which he would cure me. So I recited it again and again, weeping, praying, and petitioning God. I fell asleep, and in a dream, I saw the Blessed Prophet (peace be upon him). He moved his noble hand across my face, and placed his cloak upon me. When I awoke, I found that I had recovered my health.⁸⁶

It is telling that Dan Fodio, Tal, Bamba, and Niasse all ended their careers largely (or exclusively) writing praise poetry for the Messenger of God. The final chapters in their journals of the soul were dedicated to Muhammad. In this, they were following in Busiri's footsteps, and answering his call:

Put aside what the Christians have claimed of their Prophet
Then pronounce what you wish in praise of Him, and be wise

And attribute to his essence what you wish of nobility
And ascribe to his worth whatever greatness you wish

For indeed the superiority of God's Messenger has
No limit which a speaker can articulate vocally.⁸⁷

Putting aside the sin of assigning Muhammad a share of divinity, they followed Busiri's injunction and sought the best words they could find to explain what the Messenger of God meant to them and to us. And it had to be poetry, for here how could prose ever suffice to express such love? They spilled the last of their ink trying to paint verbal portraits of the Prophet.

But the primordial *Burda* was not the poem written by Busiri but that composed by Ka'b bin Zuhayr, a poet who had been a bitter enemy of the Prophet and Islam in the early years of the religion. His story helps to draw us closer to the conclusion of this essay on the jihad of the pen, the Prophet, the Qur'an, and Islamic ethics. The Prophet's state in Medina was becoming formidable and was in periods of hot and cold war with Mecca. Under wartime conventions, Ka'b's slanderous speech had made his life forfeit.

Ka'b's *Burda* is full of the fear of death. He laments the stories that have been spread about him. He trembles before the might of the Prophet and ponders the fate of those who dare to stand against him.⁸⁸ Like pharaoh, Ka'b submitted when faced with the overwhelming power of God.

The Messenger is—indeed—a light to illuminate
Sword of God—unsheathed—of finest Indian make.

Unlike the pharaoh who tormented Moses, however, Ka'b submitted voluntarily before the Word came due, hoping in—even counting on—the Prophet's mercy:

They say the Messenger of God has threatened me.
But from God's Messenger, one hopes for clemency.

In the end, Ka'b came to the Prophet in disguise before revealing his identity and reciting his poem. It came to be called "The Poem of the Mantle" because the Prophet took the cloak off his back and laid it upon Ka'b. This poem still has special significance among many Muslims precisely because it was uttered directly to the Prophet, who approved of it *personally*. Moreover, with the poetic ode, Ka'b asked for forgiveness of God and the Messenger *in his presence*, and whatever he was bearing of sin and wrongdoing was forgiven. Shaykh Hisham Kabbani has emphasized, both in speeches and in writing, the Prophet's intercessory function in seeking forgiveness *on behalf* of human beings. They must seek forgiveness in the *presence* of the Messenger.

The Fayda Tijaniyya of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse and the arm of the Naqshbandi Sufi order that branches out from Shaykh Nazim Haqqani are likely the world's largest contemporary Sufi movements. The Naqshbaniyya–Haqqaniyya also has a significant following in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. Shaykh Hisham Kabbani has tens of millions of disciples worldwide and many tens of thousands in sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁹ He also helped—as a teenager—facilitate a meeting between Shaykh Nazim and Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse. The two men, according to accounts that they both left, loved one another upon first meeting and cherished the memory. Beyond this, however, an important reason for the Naqshbandi appeal in Africa is that it openly and intently focuses devotional piety on *the person of the Prophet*.

Shaykh Hisham's focus on the presence of the Prophet as the condition for forgiveness helps us to understand Ka'b, and the poetic conventions translated throughout this volume. His conclusion springs from contemplative meditation on a verse of the Qur'an: "*If only they had, when they wronged their souls, come to you and asked God's forgiveness—and the Messenger asked forgiveness for them—they would surely have found God Accepting, Compassionate*" (Q 4:64).⁹⁰ Ka'b's plea establishes the redemptive function of Qasida in the Islamic tradition. The plea made in the Prophet's presence is better (and it can still be made in his presence in dreams and visions) and the one he makes on your behalf is better still, given the esteem and love that God has for him.

While the poems in this volume—and, indeed, in the whole Afro-Islamic poetic tradition—may be inspired more by erasure in the beauty of the Messenger than fear of his majestic traits, they nonetheless preserve this profound desire to repent in the presence of the Messenger. Thus, even consummate

scholars of unimpeachable moral rectitude, like Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, authored lines like these to the Pure Chosen Prophet (*al-nabi al-Mustafa*):

O Messenger of Allah! See this inattentive servant burdened with sin
And besides you there is nothing to seek

There has not come a servant like I so full of crimes
To visit your tomb, no matter from what time or community

Those of my generation have matured, but my faults have increased
What calamity! For disobedience and old age to have been combined

And what catastrophic disobedience, remaining protected and covered
in favors
While committing sins, however small

If the time were to bear what this servant is carrying
All the vast expanses would have become dark with sin and oppression

O my Lord! Forgive me and guide my heart to love
Him whom You love, the chosen one of all the nations

Him by whom You guide all species of Your creation
Him by whom You raise the flag of Islam and smash the idols

Increase this servant in noble knowledge
Stand him in the presence of Mustafa, so he may greet the chosen one.

Poetically hurling your self-scarred soul at the foot of the Prophet—throwing yourself on his mercy—is, cosmically speaking, as good a bet now as it was for Ka'b. While the majestic Prophet—the unsheathed sword praised by Ka'b—is not absent from the Qur'an, his mercy (like that of God) prevails upon his wrath. *There has indeed come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. To him, what you suffer is awful. He cares about you, and is kind and merciful to the believers* (Q 9:128).

This verse stresses the Prophet's deep sympathy for the plight of believing people, who were suffering oppression and fear of death when these verses were revealed. But elsewhere, the Qur'an makes clear that the Prophet has

been sent to all humanity (Q 34:28) and as a universal expression of God's Mercy: *And We have not sent you except as mercy to the worlds* (Q 21:107).

The Ultimate Word: The Pen and the Sword

In today's world, many do not see the Prophet as a mercy. They see in him (perhaps as Ka'b first did) only a sword. Some of these claim Islam as their religion and seek to make themselves into martyrs when what the Qur'an actually calls for is *witnesses*. Contemporary "jihadist" ideologies falsify the past, caricature the Prophet, and mock the Qur'an. They seem to forget that the Book names God as the Merciful, the Compassionate. But the Qur'an also makes it clear that God's mercy is all-encompassing: *My Mercy encompasses all things* (Q 7:156). The name, al-Rahman, the Merciful, is more frequently used than any other as proxy for God's personal name, Allah, in the Qur'an. For these (and other) reasons, classical Islamic theology sometimes refers to "the Merciful" as God's *comprehensive* name (*ism jam'*)—in contradistinction to the name of His Essence (*ism dhat*). The idea, in a manner of speaking, is that God's mercy encompasses even God Himself.

So-called "jihadists" deny with their deeds that the Prophet was a merciful man sent by a merciful God. It is no coincidence that *all* such groups are vehemently anti-Sufi. They condemn virtually all the doctrines and practices outlined in this essay, thoughts and deeds that have made life meaningful for millions of West Africans. Curiously, most so-called "fundamentalists" even condemn the routine recitation of God's names, *dhikr*—like al-Rahman, a staple of many litanies. One wonders whether these "fundamentalists" even read the Qur'an! For it contains stern warnings for those who abandon *dhikr*, thereby forgetting that God is Merciful, and thus becoming merciless devils themselves: *And whoever is blind to remembrance of the Merciful, We appoint for him a devil as a constant companion. And indeed the devils avert them from the path while they think themselves guided* (Q 43:36–37).

Sometimes even scholars in this volume, like 'Uthman Dan Fodio and 'Umar Tal, who felt compelled by circumstances to fight, are portrayed as precursors of "jihadist" ideology. In other works, I discuss some of the historiographical problems with the idea of "jihad" in West Africa.⁹¹ Here I want simply to offer a few closing examples of how the jihad of the soul has predominated over the jihad of the sword in the region.

Shaykh Musa Kamara, one among many West African scholars who were sharply critical of irresponsible violence, once wrote a work (c. 1922) entitled, "Most Lovers of jihad after the Prophets wanted to make names for

themselves and dominion in the land and were not concerned with God's servants who died in jihad." In it, he excoriated what he saw as the excesses of militaristic interpretations of Islam, but he made a specific point of fully absolving 'Umar Tal, whom he believed had never intended to wage war but was forced into defensive combat by belligerent opponents.⁹² Many scholars have made similar interpretations of 'Uthman Dan Fodio's struggle against the rulers of Gobir and the other Hausa city-states.

Scholars like Ahmadu Bamba have made their opposition to political violence more open and direct. The Muridiyya observe a philosophy of total non-violence, believing that the era of spilling blood is over. Bamba's basic position—alluded to in this volume—is that the wars fought by the Prophet were not only defensive (rather than aggressive) but also *expiatory*. They absolved later generations from fighting except to prevent the extinction of the Muslim community. A similar position was held by Cerno Bokar Salif Tal, a grandson of the famous warrior-poet, al-Hajj 'Umar. He once said that the only jihad he knows is the jihad of the soul. As for the jihad of the sword, "it is the mutual killing to which the children of Adam submit one another in the name of God whom they pretend to love very much, but whom they worship poorly by destroying part of His work."⁹³

An Arabic proverb proclaims, "the ink of the scholar is better than the blood of the martyr." Though likely not a *hadith*, the saying was nonetheless widespread in the world of the traditional Islamic sciences. In West Africa, such thinking was foundational, and the pacifism of people like Musa Kamara, Ahmadu Bamba, and Cerno Bokar is rightly seen as a return to the sensibilities of West Africa's first Muslims. The early conquests that spread Arab rule to North Africa did not reach sub-Saharan Africa, where more than one in six of the world's Muslims now reside. Here, scholars spread the faith, demonstrating that indeed, "the pen is mightier than the sword."

So who was Muhammad? While some see in the Prophet only a sword, he can be understood—recalling this chapter's Qur'anic epigraph—as the Pen. Unlettered though he was, he was unquestionably the stylus that inscribed the Book onto this created world. He was the *Qalam* that traced the *Qur'an*. But a doctrine of the Sufis, explored by the scholars in this volume in prose and poetry, is that all of creation was cast from the Muhammadan light.⁹⁴ This doctrine has its evidence, rationale, and proponents; however, according to *hadith* quoted in Tirmidhi's (d. 892) *Tafsir* the Prophet said, "Indeed the first thing created by God was the Pen. God told it to write, so it wrote whatever will be, forever."

In other narrations, there is more detail added. The Pen is commanded to write, and it replies, “what shall I write,” twice before finally writing—upon the third command. In a striking parallel, *hadiths* of the first revelation narrate that the Angel Gabriel embraced the Prophet three times, squeezing him with great force and commanding him to read.⁹⁵ His answer, when literally *pressed* twice into recitation, was “I am not of the readers.” When the angel clutched him a third time, he answered, “What shall I read?” Then came the answer:

*Recite in the name of your Lord who created,
Created man from a clinging clot
Recite! And your Lord is Most Generous
Who taught by the Pen
Taught man what he knew not*
(Q 96: 1–5).

Is it a simple coincidence that the very first revelation, the first words of the Qur’an—the visionary experience that started it all—began with a reference to teaching *by the Pen*? Perhaps the doctrine of the Muhammadan light and the Prophet as Primordial Pen are not so different after all. The instrument that God uses to teach humanity the Qur’an is the Prophet, so in a cosmic sense why should he not also be the primordial created entity, created by al-Rahman, the Merciful God, before humanity itself? *Al-Rahman, taught Qur’an, created man, and taught him eloquence* (Q 55:1–4).

Is it too much to suggest that the Qur’an’s first words are a veiled reference to its final Prophet? If not, then the Pen mentioned in the first revelation and invoked in Chapter 68—accompanied by the image of an inkwell and a portrait of the Prophet’s character—is none other than the Muhammad himself. It is fitting, then, that in Africa and beyond, so many journeys of the soul and jihads of the pen culminated in praise of the Ultimate Pen: Muhammad, Messenger of God—peace be upon him.

Notes

Introduction: The Sufi Scholarship of Islamic West Africa

- 1 See, for example, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Road to Timbuktu” in *Wonders of the African World* (PBS documentary, aired October 1999).
- 2 John Hunwick, “Sub-Saharan Africa and the Wider World of Islam: historical and contemporary perspectives,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26, 3 (1996): 233.
- 3 For a useful overview of notable translations of Arabic source material for West Africa, see Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: an intellectual history of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 24–26.
- 4 For more on this idea, see Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: the Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niasse* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 19.
- 5 For monograph biographies of ‘Uthman bin Fudī, see Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: the life and times of the Shehu Usman dan Fodio* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); Seyni Moumouni, *Vie et œuvre de Cheikh Uthmān Dan Fodio, 1754-1817: de l’islam au soufisme* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008).
- 6 Thomas Hodgkin, “Usman dan Fodio, Fulani Leader,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Usman-dan-Fodio>.
- 7 See the relevant section in John Hunwick, ed., *The Arabic Literature of Africa, volume 2: the Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). For a mostly complete database of these writings in translation, see the website of Muhammad Shareef, “Sankore: Institute of Islamic African Studies International,” <https://siiasi.org/digital-archive/shaykh-uthman-ibn-fuduy/>.
- 8 ‘Uthman bin Fudī, *Wird*; cited in Hiskett, *Sword of Truth*, 122. In the shehu’s claim to renewal, he also likened himself to the Mahdī, or awaited savior of the world: “Verily I did not disbelieve in Mahdism; at these times I have obtained my spiritual powers. Because every epoch has a Mahdī . . .” See Ibn Fudī, quoted 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), 35. (Shareef’s quotations indicate that he saw himself as herald of the Mahdī rather than the Mahdī.)
- 9 Hiskett, *Sword of Truth*, 151.
- 10 Hiskett, *Sword of Truth*, 64–65.
- 11 Hiskett, *Sword of Truth*, 66.

- 12 For monograph biographies of ‘Umar Tal, see Willis, *In the Path of Allah*; 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); Amir Syed, “Al-Hajj ‘Umar Tal and the Realm of the Written: Master, Mobility, and Islamic Authority in 19th Century West Africa” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2017).
- 13 Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 146.
- 14 Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 93, 94–95, 146.
- 15 ‘Umar Tal, *al-Rimah*, cited in Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 153.
- 16 Daouda Sow, “Contribution à l’étude de l’islam en Afrique: la communauté Tijani de Maadina Gunaas” (M.A. thesis, University of Nouakchott, 1986).
- 17 Donal Cruise O’Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: the political and economic organization of an Islamic brotherhood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007); Ahmadou Sylla, *La Doctrine de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba: origines et enseignements* (Paris: Harmattan, 2015); Cheikh Mar Sow, *La Pensée de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba face aux défis africains* (Paris: Harmattan, 2016).
- 18 The Prophet did not specifically command Dan Fodio (‘Uthman’s name in Hausa) or Bamba to abandon previous Sufi affiliations and found a new *tariqa*, unlike the Prophet’s words to Ahmad al-Tijani leading to the founding of the Tijaniyya. Both Dan Fodio and Bamba experienced visions of the Prophet that emphasized the blessedness of the Qadiriya. See Hiskett, *Sword of Truth*, 66; and Babou, *Greater Jihad*, 96. But otherwise Babou’s assertion (96) that the Prophet assured al-Tijani that he would be the last saint to have direct contact with the Prophet is unsubstantiated in Tijani literature itself: in fact, many later saints (including Tijanis themselves) received additional prayers through encounters with the Prophet. In any case, given the existence of a distinct body of litanies and literature for the ‘Uthmaniya and Muridiyya, followers of both Dan Fodio and Bamba—especially of the latter—have justifiably considered their path as a distinct Sufi order from that of the Qadiriya. But the notion that Bamba was the first “black man” to found his own Sufi order is also erroneous (Babou, 97): aside from the ‘Uthmaniya, the *Tariqa Mahmudiyya* had been founded centuries before in the Niger desert. See H.T. Norris, *Sufi Mystics of the Niger Desert: Sīdī Maḥmūd and the Hermits of Aïr* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).
- 19 Musa Ka, *Jazaau Shakuur*, cited in Babou, *Greater Jihad*, 138.
- 20 Bamba, cited in Babou, *Greater Jihad*, 111.
- 21 Bamba, cited in Babou, *Greater Jihad*, 95.
- 22 Babou, *Greater Jihad*, 1.
- 23 Economist and statistician Moubarack Lo of Gaston-Berger University in Saint-Louis, Senegal, gave the attendance at the Maggal of 2015 at 4.12 million, 3.16 million of these being pilgrims and 956,000 being residents of the city of Touba and its immediate hinterland, http://www.pressafrik.com/Les-chiffres-du-Magal-Touba-2015-412-millions-de-personnes-ont-participe-a-cette-edition_a144043.html.

- 24 Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a twentieth-century Sufi revival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*.
- 25 Niasse, "Nafahat al-malik al-ghani," in Niasse, *Majmu' al-rihlat al-Shaykh Ibrahim* (Dakar: Ma'mun Niasse, 1988), 110–11.
- 26 John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 128–29; Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 246.
- 27 Niasse, "Taysir al-wusul," in Niasse, *Dawawin al-sitt* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2012), 10.
- 28 Niasse, "Awthaq al-'ura," in Niasse, *Dawawin al-sitt*, 122. There are many such statements from Niasse's poetry, usually followed by assurances of his own state of spiritual sobriety, that he was speaking with specific divine permission, or that he was not boasting. Here are a few of the more well-known statements: "I ascended the summit of gnosis, passing through all spiritual stations; until I reached the highest presence, and came to possess the flood (*ḥayd*)" (Niasse, "Iksir al-sa'ada," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 48); "My traversing the deserts of gnosis is beyond another's aspiration, so the saintly poles have fallen short in realizing my affair" (Niasse, "Awthaq al-'ura," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 116); "My spiritual illumination was completed in the cradle, and in the unseen, all the elect have been subdued under my authority. Their convergence from the east and west on Mecca has been only to smell of my fragrance" (Niasse, "Manasik ahl al-wadad," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 171).
- 29 Niasse, "Shifa' al-asqam," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 159.
- 30 Niasse, "Taysir al-wusul," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 7–8.
- 31 Hiskett, *Sword of Truth*, 102.
- 32 Tal, *Safinat al-sa'ada*, introduction cited in Syed, "Al-Hajj 'Umar and the Realm of the Written," 114.
- 33 Niasse, "Taysir al-wusul," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 33.
- 34 Musa Ka, as quoted in Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "In Praise of the Tijaniyya," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 171; see also Rudolph Ware, "In Praise of the Intercessor: *Mawāhib al-nāfi' fi madā'ih al-shāfi'* by Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké (1853–1927)," *Islamic Africa* 4, no. 2 (2013): 228–29.
- 35 Niasse, "Iksir al-sa'ada," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 52.
- 36 Niasse, "Awthaq al-'ura," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 122.
- 37 Syed, "Al-Hajj 'Umar and the Realm of the Written," 32.
- 38 Niasse, "Awthaq al-'ura," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 131.
- 39 This *ḥadīth* from *Sahih Muslim* is ubiquitous in the literature concerning Prophetic narrations; it is reproduced, for example, in Imam Yahya Nawawi, *Forty Hadith* (New York: Arabic Virtual Translation Center, 2010), 25–36.
- 40 Sachiko Murata and William Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul, MI: Paragon House: 1994), xxiv–xxxvi.
- 41 Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 105–106.
- 42 Tal, *al-Rimah*, cited in Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant*, 118; Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 96.
- 43 Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 70.

- 44 Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 113.
- 45 Buso to Niasse, cited in Thierno Ka, *École de Pir Saniokhor: Enseignement et Culture Arabo-Islamique au Sénégal du XVIII au XX Siècle* (Dakar, 2002), 252–55. The ancestors in question were Maram Mbacké, who was a student of Samba Thiam, and the latter, whose descendent (Khadija) was the mother of Shaykh Ibrahim's father, 'Abdullah. See Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, xv.
- 46 Wright, *Living Knowledge*, 241.
- 47 Charles Stewart, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, volume 5: the Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1,723. This percentage would no doubt vary slightly between Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, and other West African contexts.
- 48 Stewart, *Arabic Literature, volume 5*, 1,721.
- 49 For examples, see John Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, volume 4: the Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 10–66.
- 50 Matthew Steele, "Law, Commentaries, Education: Reclaiming the Khalil in the Study of Islam," conference paper, *Texts, Knowledge, and Practice: the meaning of scholarship in Muslim Africa* (Harvard University, February 16–18, 2017).
- 51 M.S. Umar, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also the work of John Chesworth and Franz Kogelmann, *Shari'a in Africa Today: Reactions and Responses* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), which concerns Sudan, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania. That volume speaks to the politicization of the shari'a in certain contexts, and references key issues surrounding women in courts and Muslim-Christian relations, but it largely overlooks an analysis of deeper legal discourses around interpretation and methodology. See Caitlyn Bolton's review in *Islamic Africa* 6 (2015): 220–23.
- 52 Such opinions were advanced by John Hunwick, H.T. Norris, Lansiné Kaba, and Michael Gomez. See Charlotte Blum and Humphrey Fisher, "Love for Three Oranges, or, the Askiya's Dilemma: The Askiya, al-Maghili and Timbuktu, c. 1500 A.D.," *Journal of African History* 34, no. 1 (1993): 67.
- 53 John Hunwick, "Sub-Saharan Africa and the Wider World of Islam: historical and contemporary perspectives," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 3 (1996): 233.
- 54 Blum and Fisher, "Askiya's Dilemma," 74.
- 55 Blum and Fisher, "Askiya's Dilemma," 75–79.
- 56 Souadou Lagdaf, "The cult of the dead in Mauritania: between traditions and religious commandments," *Journal of North African Studies* 22, no. 2 (2017): 285.
- 57 N. Levtzion and J. Hopkins, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener, 2006), 285–86.
- 58 Wael Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984): 5.
- 59 For reference to this "Suvarian praxis of co-existence," which argued against the use of armed jihad, see Lamin Sanneh, "Futa Jallon and the Jakhanke Clerical Tradition," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12, no. 1 (1981): 38–64.
- 60 This question was addressed by the scholars of Tuwat, Algeria, in the late eighteenth century. They argued that executive authority devolved to the

- community in the absence of an established government. See Ismail Warscheid, "A West-African approach to Islamic Law? Sahelo-Saharan legal writing in the context of post-classical Mālikism," conference paper, *Texts, Knowledge, and Practice: the meaning of scholarship in Muslim Africa* (Harvard University, February 16–18, 2017).
- 61 Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 36–37.
 - 62 Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 145. For a more detailed discussion of tobacco debates (referred to as a "war of legal opinions," *harb al-fatawa*) between North and West Africa, see Aziz Batran, "Ḥarb fatāwī l-tadkhīn bayn al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn min shamāl wa gharb ifrīqiya," in Aicha Taim, ed. *Fes et l'Afrique: relations économiques, culturelles et spirituelles* (Casablanca: An-Najah al-Jadida, 1996), 183–233.
 - 63 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, FN11, 249.
 - 64 Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 86.
 - 65 Ibrahim Niasse, *Rafʿ al-malam ʿamman rafaʿa wa qabada iqtidaʿan bi-Sayyid al-Anam* (Cairo: al-Mashhad al-Husayni, n.d.), 55–56.
 - 66 Ibrahim bin Muhammad al-Salih, *al-Hudud fi-l-shariʿa* (2000). Book available online at <http://www.alsiyada.org/hudud.html>.
 - 67 Gunnar Weimann, "An Alternative Vision of 'Shariʿa' Application in Northern Nigeria: Ibrahim Salih's 'Hadd Offences in the Shariʿa'," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 2 (2010): 207–13.
 - 68 Weimann, "Alternative Vision," 203.
 - 69 Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, "Marvels of the Heart," in *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, ed. John Renard (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 306.
 - 70 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Toward an intellectual history of West Africa: the meaning of Timbuktu," in *The Meanings of Timbuktu*, eds. Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Diagne (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008), 22.
 - 71 Oludamini Ogunnaike, "African Philosophy Reconsidered: Africa, Religion, Race, and Philosophy," paper presented at the African Studies Association annual conference, Washington, DC, December 2016. I thank Dr. Ogunnaike for providing me a copy of this paper.
 - 72 Oludamini Ogunnaike, "Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate: the Case of Shaykh Dan Tafa," paper presented at conference, *Texts, Knowledge and Practice: the Meaning of Scholarship in Muslim Africa* (Harvard University, February 16–18, 2017). See also Diagne, "Meanings of Timbuktu," 25–26.
 - 73 Ogunnaike, "African Philosophy Reconsidered," 39.
 - 74 For more on Dan Tafa's life and historical context, see Muhammad Shareef, *The Life of Shaykh Dan Tafa* (Houston, TX: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies, n.d.).
 - 75 For Dan Tafa's categorization as a "philosopher," see Oludamini Ogunnaike's paper cited above, "Philosophical Sufism."
 - 76 ʿAbd al-Qadir bin al-Mustafa bin Muhammad al-Tarudi, *al-Muqaddima fi ʿilm al-maraʾi wa l-taʿbir* (Houston, TX: Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies, n.d.) 3.

- 77 Yehia Gouda, *Dreams and their Meaning in the Old Arab Tradition* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), 3–4.
- 78 Muhammad Bello's *Raḡʿ al-Ishṭibah* contains lengthy citations from the *Jawahir al-maʿani*. See Willis, *In the Path of Allah*, 103.
- 79 ʿAlī Harazim al-Barada, *Jawahir al-maʿani*, II:128.
- 80 Seesemann, *Divine Flood*, 43.
- 81 Hasan Dem bin Muhammad al-Futi, *Nur al-kamal fi mashhad al-rijal* (Kano: Mahmud Waj, 1974), 20–21.
- 82 Frédéric Madore and Muriel Gomez-Perez, “Muslim Women in Burkina Faso since the 1970s: toward recognition as figures of religious authority?” *Islamic Africa* 7 (2016): 189.
- 83 See, for example, the special issue of *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014) co-edited by Britta Frede and Joseph Hill. For an excellent reference list for the subject, see the compilation of Britta Frede: <http://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/muslim-scholars-africa#women>.
- 84 See, for example, Muhammad Akram Nadwi, *al-Muhaddithat: the women scholars in Islam* (London: Interface Publications, 2007); Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Gavin Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
- 85 Marie LeBlanc, “Piety, Moral Agency, and Leadership: Dynamics around Feminization of Islamic Authority in Côte d’Ivoire,” *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014): 170–71.
- 86 Stewart, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, volume 5, part 1, 451.
- 87 For reference to Kane's period of study among the “awlad Daymani,” see Ka, *École de Pir Saniokhor*, 111. The Daymani were marked by the famous exegete and Shadhili Sufi, Muhammad al-Yadali al-Daymani (d. 1753). See Franck Leconte, “Une exégèse mystique du coran au xviiième siècle dans le sud-ouest de la Mauritanie: al-Dhahab al-ibriz fi tafsir kitab Allah al-ʿaziz de Muḥammad ibn al-Muḥtār al-Yadālī (1685–1753),” thesis, University Aix-en-Provence, 1995.
- 88 Ahmad bin Zarruq, *Mashahir al-ʿalimat wa l-saliḥat min al-nisaʾ al-mawritaniyyat* (Unknown publisher, 2006), 12–13. Bin Zarruq gives the date of Khadija's death as AH 1245 (1830 CE).
- 89 Bin Zarruq, *Mashahir al-ʿalimat*, 16.
- 90 Muhammad al-Radi Kanun, *Nisaʾ tijaniyyat* (Rabat: al-Radi Kanun, date unknown), 44–45.
- 91 Bin Zarruq, *Mashahir al-ʿalimat*, 18.
- 92 Kanun, *Nisaʾ tijaniyyat*, 34.
- 93 Stewart, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, volume 5, 869.
- 94 This according to Britta Frede's analysis of Bin Zarruq's work. See Frede, “Following in the Steps of ʿAisha: Ḥassāniyya-Speaking Tijāni Women as Spiritual Guides and Teaching Islamic Scholars in Mauritania,” *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014): 227.
- 95 Kanun, *Nisaʾ tijaniyyat*. This story was related by the Moroccan Tijani scholar, Muhammad al-Hajaji.
- 96 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 58.

- 97 Kanun, *Nisa' tijaniyyat*, 33.
- 98 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 9. According to Babou, Senegalese culture attests to this role of mothers with the adage: "A child's destiny is determined by his mother's labor." See Babou, 198, EN37.
- 99 Seesemann, *Divine Flood*, 34.
- 100 Cheikh Tijani Cissé, interview with Zachary Wright, Cairo, Egypt, January 2017.
- 101 Mack and Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad*, 36–37.
- 102 Mack and Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad*, 59–60.
- 103 Nana Asma'u, "The Path of Truth" (1842), cited in Mack and Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad*, 82.
- 104 Mack and Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad*, 76.
- 105 Ruqaya bint Ibrahim Niasse, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, trans. Abubakr Ali and Babacar Cissé (New York: Hanee Saafir, 2006); Ruqaya bint Ibrahim Niasse, *Path to the Garden: Foundational Knowledge for Believing Women and Men*, trans. Ahmad Boukar Niang (Atlanta, GA: Fayda Books, 2015), 90–91. Niang's compiled translation includes two separate works by his mother, Ruqaya: "Simplification of Primary Education for African Children" and "Motherly Advice for the Muslim Girl concerning Religious and Worldly Life," both authored in Arabic.
- 106 'Ali Cissé commendation, in Ruqaya Niasse, *Path to the Garden*, 108.
- 107 Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, quoted in Ruqaya Niasse, *Path to the Garden*, 7–8.
- 108 Ruqaya Niasse, *Path to the Garden*, 90–91.
- 109 Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 205–06.
- 110 Leconte, "Une exégèse mystique du coran."
- 111 Aziz Batran, *The Qadiriya brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara: the life and times of Shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (1729-1811)* (Rabat: University Mohammed V, 2001); Mahamane Mahamoudou, "The works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti," in *The Meanings of Timbuktu*, eds. Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Diagne (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008), 213–30.
- 112 Most of the works of 'Abdallah Niasse remain in manuscript form, but the works of Malik Sy have been published and translated into French. See Ravane Mbaye, *Le Grand Savant El Hadji Malick Sy: Pensée et Action* (3 volumes, Beirut: Albouraq, 2003).

Chapter 1: Introduction to Part 1

- 1 For the best introduction to the shehu, his life and ideas in English, see Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: the Life and Times of the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); F.H. al-Misri, ed., *Bayan wujub'l-hijra 'ala'l-'ibaad of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1978); Ibrahim Suleiman, *The African Caliphate* (London: The Diwan Press, 2009); and Muhammad Shareef, ed., *Ihya's-Sunna wa ikhmad'l-bid'a of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio* (Sennar, Sudan: Sankore Institute of Islamic African Studies, 1998).
- 2 Some current research in Mali suggests that scholars may ultimately include the state of Ahmadu Lobbo in Massina as a vassal.

- 3 In all languages, the name simply means ‘son of Fodé,’ his father’s personal name and one of the original Fula terms for someone who memorizes the Qur’an (Arabic, *hafiz*).
- 4 See Abdullahi Dan Fodio, *Tāzīyin a-waraqat*; Muhammad Bello, *Infāq a-maysur fee tarikh bilad ‘t-takrur*; and Gidado ibn Laima, *Rawd’l-janan*, wherein the account is given that the new ruler of Gobir, Bawa Dan Babaari, gave official license to the shehu and his community of five far-reaching social grants: [1] to allow the shehu and his colleagues to invite the people of Gobir to their understanding of Islam; [2] not to prevent anyone from answering their invitation; [3] to respect every Muslim wearing a turban (the mark of the scholars) as well as every woman wearing the veil; [4] to free all political prisoners; and [5] not to burden the subjects with unjust taxes.
- 5 Waziri Junayd, “Dabt’l-multaqatat minna ’l-akhbar ’l-muftaraqat fi ’l-mu’alifat,” unpublished manuscript in the possession of Muhammad Sha-reef, 20.
- 6 ‘Uthman Dan Fodio, *al-Waseeya* (Zaria, Nigeria: Gaskiyya Press, 1967), 4–5.
- 7 Reprinted from *The Handbook on Islam, Iman, and Ihsan* (London: Diwan Press, 1978) with the generous permission of ‘Aisha Abdarrahan Bewley and Diwan Press.
- 8 Founder and director of the Sankore Institute of Islamic African Studies, <https://siiasi.org>.

Chapter 2: The Roots of the Religion (*Kitab usul al-din*)

- 1 These are the names of angels that carry out the interrogation of the souls in the grave according to traditional Islamic eschatology.
- 2 The fountain of Kawthar, mentioned in the Qur’an, chapter 108, is a body of water from which the faithful shall drink on the day of resurrection. The Prophet himself gives the drink from this pool and thus the image of being refreshed by him on that day is a central theme in some of the devotional poetry in this volume.

Chapter 4: The Book of Distinction (*Kitab al-tafriqa*)

- 1 The Fulani were one of the earliest of the African ethnic groups to embrace Islam. They, along with the Malinke Dyula and Jahonke, have been responsible for the spread of Islam throughout the Sahel belt of Africa. The shehu’s Fulani kindred was the Torodbe (or Toronkawa in Hausaland). His house was the Alibawa and his family was the Fodiawa of Hausaland. See “Bashir ibn Ahmad ibn al-Qadi Modibo Abdullahi Bellel, An-Nasab wa’s-Sihr,” unpublished manuscript, Sankore Institute of Islamic African Studies (SIASI) digital archives; Al-Bukhari, Waziri Junayd bin Muhammad, “Dabt’l-multaqatat minna’l-akhbar ’l-muftaraqat fi’l-mu’alifat,” unpublished manuscript, SIASI digital archives; L. Reed, “Notes on Some Fulani Tribes and Customs,” *Africa* 5 (London), no. 4 (1932): 422–54; Mervyn David Waldegrave Jeffreys, “L’origine du nom ‘Fulani’,” *Bulletin de la société des études camerounaises* (Douala) no. 5 (March 1944): 5–23; E.A. Brackenbury, “Notes on the ‘Bororo Fulbe’ or ‘Nomad Cattle Fulani’,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* (London) 23, no. 91, 92 (1924);

- Amadou-Hampâté Bâ, “The Fulbe or Fulani of Mali and Their Culture,” *Abbia* (Yaoundé) 14/15 (1966): 55–90; D.W. Arnott, “Far-Flung Fulani,” *Nigeria* (Lagos) 75 (1962): 15–25; Paul Reisman, *Freedom in Fulani Social Life: An Introspective Ethnography*, foreword by Paul Stoller (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); C. Edward Hopen, *The Pastoral Fulbe Family in Gwandu* (London, Ibadan, Accra: Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, 1958).
- 2 Imam Abu-l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Isma‘il Is-haq ibn Salim al-Ash‘ari (873–935)—the leading defender of the beliefs (*‘aqida*) of the people of the *Sunna* against Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christian impingement upon the theology of the Muslims. He was considered as the *mujaddid* (reformer) of the third century after the *hijra*. See Abu-l-Hasan al-Ash‘ari’s *al-Bana ‘an usul al-diyana* (Maktabat Dar al-Bayan and Maktabat al-Mu‘ayyid, Damascus, 1990), 5–28.
 - 3 Imam Abu ‘Abdullah Malik bin Anas (716–795)—compiler of the earliest collection of prophetic traditions, called *al-Muwatta*. He was known as the “Imam of the Land of Emigration” and was responsible for preserving the legal rulings and behavior of the People of Medina. See: Qadi ‘Iyad ibn Musa’s *Tartib al-madarik wa-taqrib al-masalik*, edited by Muhammad al-Tanji (Rabat: Wuzara al-Awqaf wa’s-Shu’un al-Islamiyya, 1983), vol. 1.
 - 4 Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111)—he was known as the “Proof of Islam” and was responsible for reviving the religious sciences of Islam during his lifetime. He reunited the sciences of jurisprudence with the sciences of spiritual purification. His greatest work was his *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*, for which he was universally declared the *mujaddid* (reformer) of the fifth century after the *hijra*. See Muhammad al-Ghazali’s *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2005), 5.
 - 5 Abu ‘Abdullah al-Harith ibn Asad ibn ‘Abdullah al-Muhasibi (AH 170–243). He was called “*al-muhasibi*” (the one who reckons with himself) because he was well known for reckoning with and disciplining his soul. He was known among the scholars of Baghdad as “*ustadh akthar al-baghdadiyyin*” (the professor of most of the scholars of Baghdad). His most noted work was *Risalat al-Mustarshidin*. See Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 58.
 - 6 Abu-l-‘Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Isa al-Burnusi al-Fasi al-Shadhili, known as Zarruq. He was born on a Thursday, the 18th of *Muharram* AH 846. He composed many illustrious works on the *tawhid*, jurisprudence and *tasawwuf*, which are well known, studied, and cited throughout the Muslim world. He, may Allah be merciful to him, died in the year AH 899 and is buried in the desert town of Misrata. See ‘Ali Fahim Khasim’s *Ahmad Zarruq wa-l-Zarruqiyya*, 3rd edition (Dar al-Midar al-Islamiyya, 2002).
 - 7 Abu ‘Abdullah ibn al-Jala’, Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Jala’ (d. AH 306), a Sufi originally from Baghdad who settled in Syria. He was among the most majestic scholars and ascetics of Damascus who studied with Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi, Dhu al-Nun al-Misri, and Abu ‘Ubayd al-Busra and others. See Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami’s *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khani, 2014), 176–79.

- 8 Abu l-Qasim al-Junayd (d. AH 297), famous as the *Imam al-ta'ifa al-sufiyya* (the leader of cadre of the Sufis) to whom most spiritual chains in the esoteric sciences are traced back. See: Abu-l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*, trans. Alexander Knysh (London: Garnet Publishing, 2007), 430–31; Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami's *Tabaqat al-sufiyyah*, 155–63.
- 9 He was Diya' al-Din Abu-l-Najib 'Abdul Qahir al-Suhrawardi (d. AH 563). He narrated this principle from Imam al-Junayd in his *Kiṭab adab al-muridin* (Ma'had al-Dirasat al-Asyuwyya al-Ifriqiyya, 1977), 2–24.
- 10 Abu 'Abdullah 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn 'Abdullah ibn Malik ibn 'Abbad al-Nafazi al-Rhundi al-Maliki (d. AH 792). He was originally from Rhond, but later settled in the city of Fez. He was a Sufi and Maliki jurist, famous for his commentary upon the *Hikam* of Ibn 'Ata'-Allah. See Yusuf ibn Isma'il al-Nabhani's *Jami' karamat al-awliya'* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2013), 1:253.

Chapter 5: Introduction to Part 2

- 1 Scholars provide several possible dates for when Tal was born, including 1795 and 1798. I am using 1797 for the year of his birth following Muntaga Tal's convention in his most recent and substantial biography of al-Hajj 'Umar Tal. For a discussion of the different dates for the year of Tal's birth, see Muntaga Tal, *al-Jawahir wa al-durur fi sirat al-Hajj 'Umar* (*Les Perles Rares sur la Vie d'El Hadji Omar*) (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2005), 34–37. For a representative sample of scholarly works on Tal, see Fernand Dumont, *L'anti-Sultan ou Al-Hajj Omar Tal du Fouta, Combattant de la Foi (1794–1864)* (Dakar-Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979); 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); David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and 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).
- 2 Tal, *al-Jawahir wa al-durur*, 27–29.
- 3 Tal, *al-Jawahir wa al-durur*, 37–40.
- 4 John Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, volume 4: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 214–23.

Chapter 6: “A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students”

- 1 Tal wrote the second poem, “A Reminder for the Negligent on the Ugliness of Dispute Among Believers” (*Tadhkirat al-ghafilin 'an quhb ikhtilaf al-mu'minin*), on his return journey from the *hajj* in 1830. See Claudine Gerresch-Dekkais, “Tadhkirat al-Gāfilin, ou un aspect pacifique peu connu de la vie d'Al-Hajj 'Umar Tāl: Introduction historique, édition critique du texte arabe et traduction annotée,” in *BIEAN*, B 39, no. 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.
- 2 The poem is also one of the most widespread works of Tal in West Africa. See the West African Manuscript Database: www.westafricanmanuscripts.org.

- 3 D. Frolov, “The Place of Rajaz in the History of Arabic Verse,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 28, no. 3 (October 1997): 245–46.
- 4 See Claudine Gerresch-Dekkais, “Taḍkirat al-mustaršidîn wa falāḥ aṭ-Ṭalībîn, épître d’al-Ḥajj ‘Umar Tāl: Introduction, édition critique du texte arabe et traduction annotée,” in *BIFAN*, B 42, no. 3 (1980), 524–33. 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 538–48.
- 5 Qur’an: 51:55–58. I have based my translations of Qur’anic verses on M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 6 In other words, perform good actions so they will provide benefit in this world, as well as in the afterlife.
- 7 Reference to Qur’an 81:7, and 43:36.
- 8 Reference to Qur’an 2:35–38.
- 9 In other words, *dhikr*, or remembrance of God, has specific rules that must be followed, with respect to the kind of litany, numbers, time, etc., that it involves.
- 10 Reference to Qur’an 3:26.
- 11 Here, *dhikr* means remembrance in the sense of remembering your blessings, and an urge to give thanks to God.
- 12 Reference to Qur’an 102:1.
- 13 Reference to Qur’an 69:18–27.
- 14 The bridge (*al-sirat*) here is a reference to a bridge in Islamic thought that people must cross in order to enter Paradise. For a discussion of this term, see G. Monnot, “Širāt,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs. First published online: 2012. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7065.
- 15 In other words, increase you in His mercy.
- 16 Qur’an: 59:9. Reference to the people of Medina, who in spite of their own hardships were generous to the immigrants from Mecca (*muhajirun*). They were not stingy, and shared everything with them. The verse is: *Those who were already firmly established in their homes [in Medina], and firmly rooted in faith, show love for those who migrated to them for refuge and harbour no desire in their hearts for what has been given to them. They give them preference over themselves, even if they too are poor: those who are saved from their own souls’ greed are truly successful.*
- 17 Qur’an: 3:92. The verse is: *You will never obtain piety until you spend from that which you love. And God is well Knowing of what you spend.*
- 18 Qur’an: 57:10. The verse is: *Why should you not give for God’s cause when God alone will inherit what is in the heavens and earth? Those who gave and fought before the triumph are not like others: they are greater in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards. But God has promised a good reward to all of them: God is fully aware of all that you do.*
- 19 References to Qur’an 66:6.
- 20 The *hurr* have led to a wide range of interpretations, and their precise nature remains a topic of debate. In most interpretations they are thought to be female “beings” who accompany both men and women in Paradise. The

- femininity of the *hurr* has also played a key role in Christian polemics on the sexual and sensual nature of Islam. For an overview of this term, see Andrew Rippin, “Hourī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. First published online: 2016. First print edition: 2016.
- 21 This is a reference to a widely narrated *hadith* that describes Paradise. It is found in many different compilations of *hadith*, and consists of several differing versions. In one version, the Prophet is reported to have said, “God the Exalted and Glorious, said: ‘I have prepared for My pious servants which no eye has [ever] seen, no ear has [ever] heard and no human heart has ever perceived such bounties leaving apart [those bounties] about which Allah has informed you.’” I have cited this *hadith* from http://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/muslim/040_smt.html.
 - 22 Reference to Qur’an 53:38.
 - 23 The allusion to the pecking of a cock refers to praying quickly without concentration, and without being mindful to its various actions.
 - 24 This line and the following line allude to the importance of paying *zakat*, or alms-giving. *Zakat* constitutes the second of the “five pillars” of Islamic religious practice. This form of charity is paid on certain categories of wealth, based on specific criteria, and with specific stipulations. It is meant to help the poor, but, as the verse highlights, through paying *zakat* a person also purifies their wealth. For a discussion of *zakat*, see A. Zysow, “Zakāt,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.
 - 25 The *Sunna* refers to the practices, words, and tacit approvals of the Prophet. After the Qur’an, it constitutes the second most important source for Islamic ritual and legal interpretations. For a discussion of the *Sunna*, see Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2009).
 - 26 Reference to Qur’an 3:97.
 - 27 The reference to *fard kifayyat*, or communal obligation, means that only some members of the Muslim community are obliged to participate in warfare, provided that such a war is legitimate and meets certain legal criteria. For an explanation of different forms of obligation in Islamic law, see Wael B. Hallaq, *Shari‘a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 325–26. For a discussion on the complex term, *jihad*, and on the theory of warfare in Islam, see Fred Donner, “The Sources of the Islamic Conception of War,” in *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Tradition*, ed. J. Kelsay and J.T. Johnson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); and Sherman Jackson, “Jihad between Law, Fact and Orientalism,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph, Beyrouth* 62, no. 1 (2009): 307–24.
 - 28 Reference to Qur’an 9:111.

Chapter 7: The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed

- 1 Madina Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe Siècle: La Tijaniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyya contre les Pouvoirs traditionnels et la Puissance coloniale* (Paris:

- L'Harmattan, 1991), 161. See also A. Dedoud Ould Abdellah, "Le 'passage au sud': Muhammad al-Hafiz et son heritage," in *La Tijaniyya: Une Confrérie Musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, 2nd edition, ed. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 93–95.
- 2 For a discussion of the various sources that Tal used to write this work, as well as a survey of the topics that he covers, see Bernd Radtke, "Sources on the Study of the Kitab Rimah Hizb al-Rahim of al-Hajj 'Umar," *Sudanic Africa* 6 (1995).
 - 3 John Hunwick, "Sufism and the Study of Islam in West Africa: The Case of Al-Hajj 'Umar," *Der Islam* 71 (1994): 309–10.
 - 4 'Umar Tal, *Rimah hizb al-rahim 'ala nuhur hizb al-rajim* (The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed) (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2012).
 - 5 We are grateful to Kamal al-Husayni for commissioning Holland's work many years ago, and for allowing us access to it.
 - 6 The *Risalat al-wasaya al-qudsiyya* was written by the fourteenth-century Persian scholar, Zayn al-Din al-Khawafi (d. 1356). It is a work that provides advice for spiritual aspirants, see Carl Brockelmann, ed. *History of the Arabic Written Tradition*, Volume 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 229.
 - 7 Abu Yazid Bistami was an important ninth-century Muslim scholar of Persian origin. He is a pivotal figure in the development of Sufi thought. See Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 69–72.
 - 8 Sahl al-Tustari was a significant ninth-century Muslim scholar, who was also a pivotal figure in the development of the discipline of Sufism. See Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 83–86.
 - 9 Al-Khidr, "the green one," is the name given to the mystical guide of Moses, mentioned in the eighteenth chapter of the Qur'an (*surat al-kahf*). Muslim tradition considers him—like Prophets Enoch (Idris), Elias (Ilyas), and Jesus ('Isa)—to have been endowed with unnaturally long life; indeed, to be still alive at the present time.
 - 10 'Ala' al-Dawla al-Simnani was an important fourteenth-century scholar and shaykh of the Kubrawi order. For a biography of this figure, see Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of 'Ala' ad-dawla as-Simnani* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).
 - 11 Ahmad ibn al-Mubarak al-Lamati, *Pure Gold From the Words of Sayyidi Abd Al-Aziz Al-Dabbagh (Al-Dhabab Al-Ibriz Min Kalām Sayyidi Abd Al-Aziz Al-Dabbagh)*, trans. John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 129–30. This work documents the teachings and sayings of the significant eighteenth-century Moroccan Sufi saint 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Mas'ud al-Dabbagh. It also is one of the works that Tal extensively cites throughout the *Rimah*.
 - 12 The work was written by 'Ali Harazim Barada, who was a close disciple of Ahmad al-Tijani. Although he died before al-Tijani, he wrote the work, and read it to his master 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.
 - 13 Qur'an 98:7.

- 14 Abu-l-Qasim al-Qushayri was a tenth-century Persian scholar, whose important work, the *Risala*, has had a lasting impact on Sufism. See Abu-l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism: al-Risala al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, trans. and ed. Alexander D. Knysh (London: Garnet Publishing, 2007).
- 15 This is also cited by Niasse in a letter included in this volume. See Part 4, Chapter 16, the letter entitled "Silence of the Gnostics."
- 16 Ibrahim al-Khawwas (d. 904) was a contemporary of Mansur al-Hallaj who resided near Kufa, Iraq. According to narrations included in Hujwayri's *Kashf al-mahjub*, al-Khawwas was prone to wandering the desert as an act of self-renunciation and ultimate dependence on God. Al-Hallaj once reprimanded him for practicing renunciation at the expense of annihilation in God (*fana' fi Llah*). See Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 60–61.
- 17 Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1030) was a prominent Sunni hadith scholar in Persia, whose ten-volume *Hilyat al-awliya'* presents 650 separate biographical entries of renowned Sufis beginning with the four "Rightly Guided Caliphs" following the Prophet Muhammad. See John Renard, ed., *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 80–81.
- 18 Here 'Umar Tal has skipped several paragraphs of the *Ibriz* to arrive at his intended point.
- 19 *Kashf al-ran*. This is probably a reference to the *Kashf al-ran 'an wajh al-bayan fi 'ilm al-zayariya al-harfiya wa-l-'adadiya* authored by Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240, Syria).

Chapter 8: *The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak*

- 1 It is unclear when this figure actually lived, but an educated guess would place him at some point during the fifteenth century. See Rasheed Ajani Raji, "The 'Ishrīniyāt of Al-Fāzāzī: An aspect of the Precedence of the Kanem-Borno Empire in Arabic and Islamic Scholarship," in *Annals of Borno* 6/7 (1989/1990).
- 2 For an analysis of this poem in West Africa, see Rasheed Ajani Raji, "The Influence of the 'Ishrīniyat on Arabic and Islamic Culture in Nigeria." PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1982.
- 3 I discuss how Tal incorporated and modified these two earlier poems extensively in Amir Syed, "Poetics of Praise: Love and Authority in Al-Hajj 'Umar Tal's *Safinat al-sa'ada li-ahl du'uf wa-l-najada*," *Islamic Africa* 7, no. 2 (2016): 210–38.
- 4 The transliteration of these verses indicates that each half-line ends in the letter *alif*, either as "a" or "u":

li-khaliqi khayri l-khalq hamdun lahu l-'ula
 'ala b'athihi fina wa-minna wa-qad 'ala
 'ala l-'arshi ma a'ala sakini l-'ula
ahacqu 'ibad allahi bi-l-majdi wa-l-'ula
 habibun bi-hi yu'ti l-'ilahu wa-yakla'u
 salatan wa-taslimu l-'Ali'u 'ula 'ala
 murabbi l-wara al-khindhidhi idh kana l-athmala

ala innahu badrun idha l-amru ath'ala
 atammu l-wara jahan wa-abharu mash'ala
nabiyyun lahu a'la l-jinani mubawwa'u

- 5 'Umar Tal, *Safinat al-sa'ada li-ahl du'f wa-l-najada*, edited and annotated by Muhammad Bello (Cairo: Shafika Maktabat, 1988). This text is based on one of the few full manuscripts of the poem, located in: BnF, Fonds Arabe, 5485, fol. 1–159.
- 6 I have placed the original al-Fazazi lines in italics. The reader should note that there is one instance where Tal introduces a new stanza without incorporating any of the original lines. I have noted this below.
- 7 Reference to the *isra'* and *mi'raj* of the Prophet, wherein he traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem and then ascended to the Throne of God. See Frederick Colby, "Night Journey (Isra' & Mi'raj)," in *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, 2 vols., ed. C. Fitzpatrick and A. Walker (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014), II:420–25.
- 8 Taba is another name for Medina, which became the nascent Muslim community's capital.
- 9 This set of five half-lines is introduced by Tal without incorporating a half-line from al-Fazazi.
- 10 The idea that although the Prophet is a descendant of Adam, in reality he is the first Prophet, prior to Adam's existence.
- 11 *Dhikr* here is a reference to sending prayers and blessings on the Prophet, or what is known as *salawat*. The *hadith* literature emphasizes the merit of 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)*, 2nd edition, trans. 'Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (Granada: Madinah Press, 2011), 234–37. Further, the name of the Prophet, Muhammad, means "the praised one." Drawing on the work of several Muslim scholars who explained the meaning of "Muhammad," Annemarie Schimmel argues that "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, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 107.
- 12 This is a reference to the Cave of Hira and the Cave of Thawr. Muslims believe that the Prophet first encountered the Angel Gabriel in the Cave of Hira, which also marks the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an. The Cave of Thawr is at the edge of Mecca where the Prophet and his companion, Abu Bakr, spent three nights when they migrated to Medina. See Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1983), 43, 118.
- 13 Another reference to the Cave of Thawr. When the Prophet and Abu Bakr entered the cave, a spider spun a web on its entrance. This was meant to deter their enemies from Mecca who were pursuing them. See footnote above.*
- 14 A reference to the Five Pillars of Islam: the testament of faith; establishing prayer; alms-giving; fasting in the month of Ramadan; and performing the pilgrimage, or the *hajj*.

- 15 A reference to the early Muslim community that accepted the Prophet's message.
- 16 Ahmad, or the most praised, is another name of the Prophet.
- 17 Reference to Qur'an 3:81.
- 18 Remembrance, or *dhikr*, here is a reference to the Qur'an. General verses indicate the Qur'an refers to itself as a "Dhikr," for instance 15:9 or 16:44.
- 19 The reference to "his pool" (*hawdihi*) is a reference to the pool of the Prophet Muhammad, where he awaits his followers on the Day of Judgment. See Andrew Rippon, "Ḥawḍ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, eds. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. First published online: 2016. First print edition: 2016.
- 20 This verse may be alluding to a famous *hadith*, wherein the Prophet is reported to have said: "The scholars are the inheritors of the prophets." For an extensive explanation and interpretation of this *hadith*, see Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, *The Heirs of the Prophets*, trans. Zaid Shakir (Chicago: Starlatch Press, 2001).

Chapter 9: Introduction to Part 3

- 1 For European-language introductions to Bamba and his life, see Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007); Bachir Mbacké, in *Les Bienfaits de l'Eternel, ou la biographie de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké* (translated by Khadim Mbacké, Dakar, unknown publisher, 1995).
- 2 John Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, volume 4: the Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
- 3 See Claudine Gerresch, "Le Livre de Métrique *Mubayyin al-ishkāl* du Cadi Madiakhaté Kala," *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire* 36 (1974): 714–832.

Chapter 11: Pathways of Paradise

- 1 Abdoul Aziz Mbacké, director of Majalis.org, used this turn of phrase in a conference on "Sufi Texts and Contexts" in Dakar in 2011.
- 2 For the *Nahju*—a piece on the etiquette of pursuing religious knowledge, as well as other medium-length works in the traditional religious sciences with original Arabic and French translations, see Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké, *Diwan fi 'ulum al-diniyya*, ed. and trans. Sam Mbaye (Casablanca: Dar el Kitab, 1989).
- 3 There is further discussion of Yadali in the notes below, but for now see Kota Kariya, "Khatima fi al-Tasawwuf: An Arabic Work of a Western Saharan Muslim Intellectual," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 81 (2011): 133–47.
- 4 It is clear from this reference that the work was composed after the passing of Momar Anta Saly in 1882/3. Conventional dating would put it shortly thereafter and connected to Bamba's trip to Mauritania in this period, when he apparently studied some of the works referenced in the book. This verse, it should be mentioned, contains a prayer for all people, of any religion, who succeed in achieving sincerity of worship for God. The repetition of "all who achieved sincerity" following after "the sincere Muslims" makes that clear.

- 5 This is *Mawahib al-quddus*, which began as versified summaries and commentaries on texts that Bamba taught in his father's school. *Mawahib al-quddus fi nazm nashr shaykhina al-Sanusi* (Dakar: Maktabat Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba, n.d.).
- 6 See Aziz Batran, *The Qadiriya brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara: the life and times of Shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (1729-1811)* (Rabat: University Mohammed V, 2001); Mahamane Mahamoudou, "The works of Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti," in *The Meanings of Timbuktu*, eds. Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Diagne (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008), 213–30.
- 7 On Yadali, see the introductory biography in volume I of al-Rajil bin Ahmad Salim Yadali, ed. *al-Dhahab al-ibriz fi tafsir kitab Allah al-'aziz: aqdam tafsir Shinqiti* (Cairo: Markaz Najibawayh lil-Makhtutat wa-Khidmat al-Turath, 2014).
- 8 See the recent seven-volume publication of this, edited by al-Rajil bin Ahmad Salim Yadali.
- 9 al-Rajil bin Ahmad Salim Yadali, ed.
- 10 Qur'an 49:13.
- 11 Bamba does not finish the citation of the *hadith* because it would break the rhyme; the reader is expected to have heard the whole *hadith*: "The parable of my community is like the rain: it is not known which is better, its beginning or its end."
- 12 The famous saying attributed to Malik bin Anas, eponym of the Maliki school of Jurisprudence: "Whoever learns law without Sufism becomes a dissident (*fasiq*), and whoever learns Sufism without law becomes a heretic (*zindiq*), but whoever combines the two has reached truth (*tahaqqaq*)."
- 13 On the concept of *'amal* and the saying of Ahmadu Bamba, *liggey ci jammu Yàlla la bokk* (work is part of worshipping God), see Kota Kariya, "The Murid Order and Its 'Doctrine of Work.'" *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42 (2012): 54–75.
- 14 God is understood to multiply the effect of good deeds by ten and counts evil deeds only as one; a common expression in Wolof to this effect is that it is shameful for a person to allow their "1 by 1s" to outnumber their "10 by 10s."
- 15 The pre-dawn and fast-breaking meals before and after a day of fasting.
- 16 *Mu'ajaza* and *karama* are translated as "miracle" and "marvel" respectively here.
- 17 Author of *Mira'i al-hisan*, an account of seventy of the visions of the Prophet that he had while compiling his commentary on the Sahih of Bukhari, *Bahjat al-nufus* (Sahih Bukhari is the usual title for the collections of authenticated traditions completed by Bukhari). It is unclear which work Bamba is referencing here.
- 18 This is a reference to Q 6:75–79. Where Abraham undertakes secluded contemplation of a star, the moon, and the sun to affirm his certainty that only the Creator of Heaven and Earth was worthy of worship.
- 19 *Fikr* is not to be applied to the essence of God because the infinite cannot be encompassed within the finite, nor can the Necessary be encompassed by the contingent.

20 *Falyuthbitan tadabbur al-Qur'an.*

21 The etymological affinities between the Arabic words for Sufi, purity, wool, the “people of the bench” during the time of the Prophet were discussed more fully by Ahmad Zarruq (d. 1493, Libya), and cited at length in Ibrahim Niasse, *Removal of Confusion*, 19–20. This section is included in the chapter on Niasse later in this volume.

22 *Zulumat, wa khisam, wa malam.*

23 As a provisional precaution, or to bestow it upon people.

24 *Bala wa mihna.*

Chapter 12: “Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor”

1 It is also, incidentally, the value of *kaf-ha-ya-‘ayn-sad*, the letters at the beginning of Sura Maryam (Chapter 19 of the Qur’an).

2 This is *salat al-fatih*. It is also discussed on pp. 52–3, 239 (see also footnotes 17 and 24 for Chapter 14).

3 In the narration of the Hadith of Gabriel, attributed to Abu Hurayra, the order is *Iman, Islam, and Ihsan*. Bamba, who often puts the emphasis on understanding before action, employs this arrangement of the basic elements of Islam, as does Abu Hamid bin Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111) in his *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*. This is in contradistinction to the more common *islam, iman, and ihsan* configuration from most familiar renderings of the Hadith of Gabriel, such as the narration attributed to ‘Umar in the introduction to this volume, where there is an implied progression from the outer to the inner. When *iman* is placed first, the underlying idea is that intentionality and orientation of worship to God precedes meaningful worship.

4 Here, as in verse 89 below, the reference to *houris* is to the innocent companions promised to the inhabitants of Paradise in the Qur’an. It is worth mentioning, since references to *houris* are often subject to sexist interpretations by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, that Bamba, following the Qur’an itself, mentions innocent *males* and *females* in the Gardens. *Wil’danun*, the term translated here means young males. They are made eternal in Q 56:17, and in Q 76:19 their beauty is emphasized: *There will circulate among them youths made eternal. When you see them you would think them scattered pearls*. The exact same wording with the image of beautiful male youths is found in Q 52:24 but with *ghil’manun*, which also means male youths. In other places in the Qur’an, it clearly has the meaning of “boys.” See also Wright’s note on *houris* in footnote 20, in Part 2, Chapter 6.

5 The term translated here as “bliss” is *luha’*, which is not found in Lane’s *Lexicon*. It is derived from *lam-ha-waw*; the root is a form of a Qur’anic noun (occurring in Q 6:32, 6:70, 7:51, 21:17, 29:64, 31:6, 47:36, 57:20, and 62:11) and used to refer to amusement, enjoyment, or distraction—here, its meaning is joy or happiness. To distinguish it from other, more common terms, I have translated it as the existential state of “bliss.”

6 *Minhu fida’i*: From him is my redemption—he redeemed me, he released me. The juxtaposition of this line, about redemption, with the next line alluding

to imprisonment and release makes it clear that Bamba is referring to his deportation and exile to Gabon from 1895 to 1902. However, I think the poem is meant to allude to both spiritual and bodily emancipation granted by God and the Prophet. The enemies that he refers to repeatedly in this poem can obviously be read as the French (and the African chiefs) who conspired to have him arrested without cause and exiled, but he is also clearly referring in places to the four principal enemies discussed in the *Masalik* and many other classical texts: the lower soul, the devil, the passions, and the world. In Arabic these are, respectively, *nafs*, *shaytan*, *hawaa*, and *dunya*, and in the teaching of the Muridiyya they are recalled with the mnemonic device *na-sha-ha-du*: “we bear witness.”

- 7 The term translated here as exile is *ighthirab*.
- 8 I have interpreted these freely for meaning and effect. More literally they would be: “For you my pleasure, for you my honor, for you my dependence, with my urgent plea—you who healed me, you who shielded me, from he who oppressed me, by cleansing me of malady.”
- 9 In verses 6–7, and again in verse 11, Bamba appears to refer to the visionary experiences of the author of the most famous piece of Sufi *madha*, the famed *Qasīdat al-Burda* by Muhammad bin Sa‘id al-Busiri (d. 1296). [See the note in the conclusion of this volume] It is worth noting that before founding the Muridiyya Bamba routinely employed Shadhili ritual litanies (*awrad*) and that the *Burda* was and is widely read in West Africa. For an excellent translation alongside the Arabic original, see Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, *Qasīda Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 2:388–412. For the quotation above, see Syed Mohiuddin Qadri, *Qasīdat al-Burdah: The Poem of the Mantle* (San Francisco: Creative Commons: 2008), 7.
- 10 This is *wālī*, usually meaning patron, rather than *walī*, meaning friend (or saint). These are distinct (though related) names of God and technical terms in Sufism, so eliding them a bit in the sense of ‘protecting friend’ seems to provide both an echo of the original and a rhyme.
- 11 “State” would be a more literal option here instead of “station,” since the former is often used to translate *hal* and the latter often used to translate *maqam*.
- 12 This is a liberal translation of “palaces without exile.” *Jalaa’* comes from the root *jīm-lam-waw*, which usually gives meanings of “make manifest” (*tajalli*—divine manifestation, for example, comes from this root), but it occurs with the meaning of exile in Q 59:3. In some of his writing, Bamba uses this Qur’anic expression to refer to his own exile.
- 13 Verse 39 alludes obliquely to the idea, expressed in a number of *hadīth* reports, that the *shaytan* cannot take the form of the Prophet. This seems directly connected to verse 40, which refers to the visionary experiences that Bamba had of the Prophet in Touba during Ramadan AH 1312 (March 1895) wherein the Prophet assured him that he would be made the *qutb al-zaman*, the pole of the era. ‘Abd al-Ahad Mbacké (1914–89), one of Bamba’s sons and the third caliph in the Muridiyya, gave many accounts of this visionary experience orally and at least one written account, in Arabic in 1979. Moustapha Diakhaté has a French-language account of the visionary experience, *L’exil de Khadimou Rassoul*,

based mainly on Caliph ‘Abd al-Ahad’s account as well as that of Musa Ka. I have not been able to find a copy of this short book in North America, so some of what I present here is based on the author’s, Diakhaté’s, reading of the book in Wolof for a Murid informational website, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I0ZT766m70>.

- 14 The term translated here as path is *suluk*, which has technical connotations of “wayfaring” in the Sufi tradition. The term appears again in a different form in verse 85.
- 15 *Silat*, gifts, is the first part of the line, but the reference is clearly to *salat ‘ala al-nabi*, prayers of peace on the Prophet, and there is a play on words with *silat* and *salat*, so “blessings” is the most appropriate translation for gifts here. Incidentally, there is an error in the Arabic transcription of this line in the Sam Mbaye edition of this text in *Diwan fi amdah khayr al-mursalin*: both words are rendered as *salat*.
- 16 This line is more literally, “Come serve your Master, Maker of the skies”; however, reversing the nouns makes the line work much better in English without violating the basic meaning.
- 17 A reference to Qur’an 8:17.
- 18 It becomes clear throughout the poem that the Prophetic intercession that Bamba is evoking in the title is not only meant to refer to the day of judgment (as it appears to be in this verse) but also to the Prophet’s intervention, by Divine permission, into the life of the saints (*awliya*’).
- 19 This appears to be a reference to the face-to-face conversation between Muhammad and God at the pinnacle of the *mi‘raj*, where the Prophet was brought to within two spans (or less) of the Divine Essence.
- 20 After his visionary experiences with the Prophet (and according to some accounts, these began in 1883 after the death of Bamba’s father Momar Anta Saly), Bamba began referring to himself as the *khadim al-rasul*, the servant of the Messenger. His service, his labor for the Prophet is usually understood by Murids to mean extending the Prophet’s call to Islam; singing His praises; and, especially, writing praise poetry.
- 21 The absolution from jihad is central to Bamba’s overall non-violent thought, and it is rooted in his visionary experience in Touba in 1895 before being sent into exile. During that encounter, he saw the Prophet with his companions who had fought at the famous Battle of Badr in the second year of the *hijra* (624) and asked how he could join their illustrious company. He was told that the time for spilling blood was over, but that if he wished to be raised into their company he would have to go and face his enemies in his time as the people of Badr had faced theirs. According to internal Murid sources, Bamba completed his fast and went to Mbacké-Bari in Jolof, where he was arrested and later deported.
- 22 The word I have translated here as “residence” is literally castles or palaces. It seems clear to me that Bamba is writing of Touba here, the city that he founded and wherein he reported visionary experiences with the Prophet during spiritual retreat in the mosque during the last ten days of Ramadan AH 1312 (March 1895), which presaged his exile. But this line in its literal form is

more generic, and could quite easily be represented as: "He guides goodness to residences, His aid in evidence, and His resplendency."

- 23 For a discussion of the Prophet's miracles in traditional scholarship, see chapter four of 'Iyad Ibn Musa, *Muhammad Messenger of Allah (Ash-Shifa of Qadi 'Iyad)* (translated by 'A'isha Bewley, Cape Town: Madinah Press, 2008), 134–209.
- 24 This is all the same word (the variations on 'trust' are all the same word), *al-Amin*, the verbs and prepositions used make it clear that the first refers to the Prophet, the second to Jibril, and the third to al-Buraq, the creature that carried the Prophet on the *isra'*. The verses from 117 to 126 constitute a pithy poetic account of the Night Journey, alluding to the Prophet Muhammad leading the congregational prayer in a gathering of all the Prophets and returning confirmed in his mission. In Muslim conventional accounts, the form and number of the daily *salat* (ritual prayer) are established during the *mi'raj*, and part of what is recited silently in the seated position in prayer is understood to re-enact the conversation between God and the Prophet on that occasion.
- 25 "Over my trials" is not explicit in the text, but certainly implied, and elaborating on this point allows for alliteration in the English rendition while keeping the rhythm and syllabic structure of the original.
- 26 The first line here makes denotation—the year in *salat 'ala al-nabi* and *madha*—of what is only connotation—six (months) and six (months) in the original. This reading is especially clear, given that the preceding verse speaks of praising by day and by night, so this is just another way of dividing time rhetorically. This is also the reading taken by his son, Bachir Mbacké, in *Les Bienfaits de l'Eternel, ou la biographie de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké* (translated by Khadim Mbacké, Dakar, unknown publisher, 1995). Also, throughout the poem I have translated forms of *taqwa* with forms of Godly and pious, and either would work equally well in English verses in the second line here.
- 27 Honorifics used to refer to Abu Bakr, Islam's first caliph.
- 28 Honorifics referring to 'Umar, the second caliph.
- 29 Honorific referring to 'Uthman, the third caliph.
- 30 Honorifics referring to 'Ali, the fourth Caliph, and the Prophet's cousin.
- 31 The lines from 140 to 148 appear to be a general commendation of the early soldiers of Islam, but it is important to remember that Bamba reported seeing the people of Badr repeatedly during his visionary experiences with the Prophet after Ramadan 1312 (1895 CE). Also, according to his son and caliph, 'Abd al-Ahad Mbacké, Bamba said that he submitted to arrest by the French because he believed firmly that this was the sacrifice required of him to join the people of Badr in their state of continuous proximity to the Prophet. This interpretation is strengthened by verses 149–150, in which Bamba prays directly to God to preserve him from future imprisonment or oppression, though he has made it clear a number of times in the poem that his gratitude is "free from recrimination." He accepts that his trials were a favor from God, designed to raise his station.
- 32 Literally, "my pens and my constructions," this passage could easily be rendered as "writings and buildings."

Chapter 13: Introduction to Part 4

- 1 Niasse, "Taysir al-wusul," in *Dawawin al-sitt*, 11.
- 2 John Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, volume 4: the Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 279–301.

Chapter 14: "The Spirit of Etiquette"

- 1 See Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niasse* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 7–15.
- 2 For example: Barbara Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: the place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); Abdul Ali Hamid, trans., *Moral Teachings of Islam: Prophetic Traditions from al-Adab al-mufrad by Imam al-Bukhari* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
- 3 Cheikh Tijani Cissé, citing Dhu al-Nun al-Misri, in *Knowing Allah, Living Islam*, trans. Zachary Wright (Singapore: Light of Eminence, 2014), 33.
- 4 Shaykh Hasan Cissé, interview with Zachary Wright, Kossi Atlanta, Senegal, June 2003.
- 5 Shaykh Hasan Cissé, *Spirit of Good Morals by Shaykh of Islam Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, translation and commentary* (Detroit, MI: 'Abd al-Hakim Halim, 1998).
- 6 Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, *The Spirit of Good Morals*, trans. Talut Dawud (Atlanta, GA: Fayda Books, 2016).
- 7 According to the Prophet Muhammad, as related by 'Amr bin al-'As (in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 6:919): "If the judge makes an interpretation (*ijtihad*) and gets it right, he will have two rewards. And if he makes an interpretation and gets it wrong, he will have one reward."
- 8 Muslims sometimes distinguish between God's attributes of *jamal*, associated with beauty, grace, or kindness; and *jalal*, associated with justice and exclusive sovereignty. Shaykh Hasan translated *jamal* here as "opulence" and *jalal* as "dispossession," and later on as states of "beauty" and "splendor."
- 9 The verb used here in both lines ("rendering" and "does") is from the word *asda*, to render, perform, confer (a benefit). Thus, the meaning suggests inherent good in the unfolding of God's decree.
- 10 This is a reference to the Qur'an verse, "Surely with hardship there is ease, and indeed with hardship is ease" (94:5–6). According to the Tafsir of Shaykh Ibrahim, the Prophet said, "One hardship will not prevail over two eases." Shaykh Ibrahim explained, "The hardship mentioned twice in the verse is with the definite article (*al-*), so it is the repetition of one hardship. As for the ease mentioned twice, it is indefinite: so each ease is different than the other." Niasse, *Fi riyad al-tafsir li-l-Qur'an al-karim*, 6:337 (Tunis: al-Yamama, 2010).
- 11 As related by Abu Hurayra (in *Sahih Muslim*), the Prophet said, "Many a person with shaggy and dusty hair, dusty and driven away from doors [because of their poverty and shabby clothes] were to swear by God [that something would happen], God will certainly make it happen."
- 12 *Tahqiq*, meaning to "make real," to "come to exemplify," or "to actualize."
- 13 Shaykh Hasan Cissé here lists the states of the soul (*Spirit of Good Morals*, 51–52). The reference to the fault of the spirit is intriguing, but seems to invoke

- Ahmad al-Tijani's words from *Jawahir al-ma'ani* in which God is said to address the human spirit upon its recognition of its own beauty: "I did not create you to desire yourself, but to manifest in you the secret of my Oneness" (II:127).
- 14 In other words: the first set of desirable words are marked by the vowel *kasra*, or the short "i" sound, which is written below the word (thus "low vowels"); while the second set of undesirable words are marked by the vowel *fatḥa*, the short "a" sound, which is written above the word (thus "high vowels").
 - 15 The word *tuwātī* to describe the gnostic shaykh here is difficult to translate. Shaykh Hasan Cissé's translation was "that is constantly consulted." When asked to explain further, Shaykh Tijani Cissé considered Shaykh Hasan's version, and said, "Yes, but it also means that the shaykh consulted is able to help you." Shaykh Tijani Cissé, interview, July 2016, Paris.
 - 16 In other words, the bridge or intermediary world connecting each gnostic to the Prophetic source. Barzakh seems to be used here as a synonym for "spiritual assistance" (*madad*).
 - 17 The three prayers mentioned here are "Hizb al-tatarru'," "Salat al-fatih," and "Allahumma 'alayka fatih." This last is another name for "Allahumma 'alayka mu'awalli."
 - 18 *Al-rijal* (literally "the men") in the context of Sufism means those who have attained victory over their lower selves: thus, the same word (*rijal dhi-l-tariq*) is translated as "the mature ones of this path" in the next line.
 - 19 Shaykh Hasan translates *madarat al-rijal* here as "playing on the intelligence of men." In other words: feigning genuine earnestness with a particular elder only to obtain his secret prayers without the requisite internal purification or genuine manners due to the learned.
 - 20 Shaykh Ibrahim is here referring to the Qur'an verse (51:56), "I have only created the jinn and mankind to worship Me," about which the Prophet's companion, Ibn 'Abbas, said, "To worship Me' means 'To know Me.'" See Niasse, *The Removal of Confusion*, 87.
 - 21 *Qiyam al-layl*, or standing the night (in prayer). This prayer is generally known as *tahajjud*, and according to Shaykh Hasan Cissé consists of twelve extra prayer cycles (*raka'at*) in six sets of two. Shaykh Hasan Cissé, interview with translator, Medina Baye Kaolack, Senegal, February 2003.
 - 22 "Those brought near" (to God) is my translation for *aqarib* here: technically "relatives" as rendered by Shaykh Hasan Cissé. But as his explanation makes clear, "if a close relative is not of good behavior, it is advisable to distance oneself and only follow the ones with faith and good behavior . . . the Prophet said, 'I am the father of every God-fearing person.'" See Cissé, *Spirit of Good Morals*, 79.
 - 23 This is a reference to the Day of Judgment: the weighing of actions on a scale and reading the record of one's deeds.
 - 24 The *salat 'ala hadha al-qutb* is a reference to the "Prayer of Opening" (*salat al-fatih*), an invocation of blessing on the Prophet popularized by the Tijaniyya.
 - 25 The *musaba'at (al-'ashr)*, or "the seven tens," is a prayer in which ten different Qur'an chapters and Prophetic supplications (such as *surat al-fatiha*, *surat al-nas*, *surat al-falaq*, and *surat al-ikhlas*) are recited seven times each. The earliest known

- reference to the prayer can be traced to Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996, Baghdad), who allegedly received it from Khidr, the mystical guide of Moses. According to the *Ḥawāhir al-maʿāni*, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani received the prayer from Mahmud al-Kurdi in Egypt, who also had received the prayer from Khidr.
- 26 This is a specific prayer that the Prophet taught to his companion, ʿAbbas bin ʿAbd al-Muttalib, said to forgive all sins. See Cissé, *Spirit of Good Morals*, 91–92.
- 27 1,342 years after the emigration (Hijra) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina, or 1923.
- 28 In other words, the Prophet Muhammad. ʿAdnan was the descendant of Ismaʿil, and considered the father of the Arabs of west and northern Arabia, as opposed to the Qahtani Arabs of southern Arabia.

Chapter 15: *The Removal of Confusion*

- 1 Zachary Wright, “The Kāshif al-ilbās of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse: analysis of the text,” *Islamic Africa* 1, no. 1 (2010): 109–23.
- 2 Ahmad Zarruq (d. 1493, Libya) was an Egypt-trained scholar who stressed the proper balance between Sufism and the Shariʿa. For more on Zarruq, see Scott Kugle, *Rebel between Spirit and Law: Ahmad Zarruq, Sainthood, and Authority in Islam* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).
- 3 Ahmad Ibn ʿAjiba (d. 1809) was a prominent scholar of the Shadhiliya in Morocco. His *Iqaz al-himam* is one of the best-known commentaries on Ibn ʿAtaʾ-Allah’s (d. 1309, Alexandria) “Book of Aphorisms” (*Kitab al-hikam*). For more on Ibn ʿAjiba, see Jean-Louis Micho and David Streight, trans., *The Autobiography of a Moroccan Sufi: Ahmad ibn ʿAjiba* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999).
- 4 Abu l-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) of Baghdad was “perhaps the most famous of the early Sufis within Islam,” articulating ideas of sobriety in mysticism and the annihilation (*fanaʾ*) of the ego-self in Allah. See Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qurʾan, Miʾraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 21–22.
- 5 Imam Abu ʿAbdullah Malik bin Anas (d. 795) is the eponym for the Maliki school of jurisprudence. He lived in Medina, the city of the Prophet, and authored the *Muwattaʾ*, an early collection of traditions mostly with legal bearing. For more on Imam Malik’s role in the development of Islamic jurisprudence, see Yasin Dutton, *The Origins of Islamic Law: The Qurʾan, the Muwattaʾ and the Madinan Amal* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- 6 A saying sometimes attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, the meaning of which has been considered sound by numerous scholars even if its line of transmission from the Prophet has not been settled. More discussion of this saying, according to Cheikh Tijani Cissé’s footnote in the 2001 Arabic edition, can be found in Imam Sakhawi’s *Maqasid al-hasana*.
- 7 Abu Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258), the renowned Sufi scholar of Moroccan origin who settled in Egypt and became the eponym for the Shadhiliya Sufi order found primarily in North Africa.
- 8 The title translates as “Lights of the hearts in divinely-bestowed knowledge.” The eighteenth-century Moroccan Shaykh Ahmad al-Saqilli (sometimes pronounced Saqli; the 2001 Arabic printing “Maqli” in *Kashif al-ilbas* appears

to be a misprint) resided in Fez, and was an early teacher of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani. He was known as a *qutb* (“axial” saint), and had an initiation into the Khalwatiya through the line of Mustafa al-Bakri. His biography is contained in Muhammad bin Ja‘far bin Idris al-Kattani, *Salwat al-anfas wa muhadithat al-akyas* (Rabat: Dar al-aman, 2014).

- 9 Mukhtar Kunti (d. 1811) lived in the environs of Timbuktu (modern Mali and Mauritania). He revived the Qadiriya Sufi order in West Africa, and Shaykh Ibrahim described him as “the shaykh of shaykhs, the renowned scholar and divine gnostic.”
- 10 *al-Jaysh al-kafil bi akhdh al-thar mimman salla ‘ala al-Tijani sayf al-inkar* by Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Saghir Tashiti (d. 1869, Mauritania), a prominent Tijani scholar tracing his initiation through Shaykh Muhammad al-Hafiz who first brought the Tijaniyya south from Morocco.
- 11 The teachings of the Moroccan Shadhili master, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dabbagh (d. 1717, Fez), were collected in the influential work *al-Dhahab al-ibriz min kalam Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Aziz*, authored by his disciple Ibn Mubarak al-Lamati.
- 12 Qur’an 7:16.
- 13 This is the work of Sha‘rani, the full title of which is: *Lata’if al-minan wa-l-akhlaq*.
- 14 Ibn Hajar al-Haytami al-Makki (d. 1556) was a prominent scholar of Maliki jurisprudence and Sufism who wrote, among other works, *al-Fatawa al-hadithiya*.
- 15 Ibn ‘Ata’-Allah al-Iskandari (d. 1309) was the second successor to Abu Hasan al-Shadhili after Abu ‘Abbas al-Mursi, and the author of several influential works formative for later Sufism—most especially the *Kitab al-hikam*.
- 16 Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210, Herat) was a renowned theologian, philosopher, and scientist. His multi-volume *Tafsir al-kabir* (also known as *Mafatih al-ghayb*) is a comprehensive exegesis of the Qur’an.
- 17 Reported in the hadith collections of Muslim, Ibn Maja, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, and the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal. A literal translation of this *hadith* would read: “You are the Manifest, and nothing is above You; and You are the Hidden, and nothing is below You.” This was among the favorite supplications of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, included after the daily congregational *wazifa* (“office” or service).
- 18 The *al-Asrar al-‘aqliya* is a work of religious principles (*usul*) by the Egyptian Shafi‘i scholar and imam, Taqiyy al-Din al-Maqtarah (d. 1215).
- 19 This is a reference to the well-known sacred tradition (*hadith qudsi*) in which the Prophet relates Allah’s words: “My believing servant continues to draw near Me, through supererogatory acts of worship, until I love him; and when I love him, I become his hearing, his sight, his tongue, his hand, his foot, and his heart; so through Me he hears, through Me he sees, through Me he speaks, through Me he understands, and through Me he strikes.”
- 20 This may be the *Fara’id al-fawa’id fi bayan al-‘aqa’id* (first published in Istanbul, 1804), by Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Amin Istanbuli. The book concerns the basic tenets of Islam.
- 21 I believe this is a reference to Shaykh Ibrahim himself, or perhaps to one of his brothers.

- 22 A translation of this complete work exists under the title, *The Basic Research: Shaykh Ahmad ibn Ajiba*, by Abdalkhabir al-Munawwarah and Haj Abdassabur al-Ustadh (Madinah Press, 1998). Ibn 'Ajiba's book is a commentary on a poem by Ibn al-Banna Saragossa.
- 23 'Umar bin al-Farid (d. 1234, Cairo) is perhaps the most famous Arab Sufi poet, whose best-known work is the *al-Khamriya* ("Wine ode").
- 24 Niasse, *Jawahir al-rasa'il*, I:83.
- 25 Khidr or the "green one" was the guide of Moses mentioned in the Qur'an (18:60–82), sent to teach him special knowledge. He is normally considered a righteous saint (*wali*), not a Prophet. But here Ibn al-'Arabi's accent is on spiritual support from one of four Prophets (Jesus, Enoch, Elias, and Khidr) whom God had endowed with unnaturally long life, and who would remain alive until the end of times.

Chapter 16: "The Jeweled Letters"

- 1 Ibrahim Niasse, *Jawahir al-rasa'il wa-yaliyya ziyadat al-jawahir al-hawi ba'd 'ulum wasilat al-wasa'il*, 3 volumes, ed. Ahmad Abi Fath (Nigeria: Ahmad Abi Fath, n.d.).
- 2 The Arabic version of this letter is found in Niasse, *Jawahir al-rasa'il*, III:50–55.
- 3 See the *hadith* mentioned in the introduction of this book.
- 4 Niasse, *Jawahir al-rasa'il*, I:18–20.
- 5 Further discussion of Ibn Anbuja's discussion of the *Maqamat al-din* can be found in Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a twentieth-century Sufi revival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 87–91.
- 6 This is a reference to important supplication of the Tijaniyya order (see Ahmad al-Tijani, *Ahzab wa awrad*, ed. Muhammad al-Hafiz al-Tijani [Dakar: al-Maktabat al-Islamiyya, unknown date], 139–40) used by Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse for the spiritual training (*tarbiya*) of disciples. For a translation, see Zachary Wright, *Pearls from the Flood* (Atlanta, GA: Fayda Books, 2015), 173–74.
- 7 The Tijaniyya path requires two daily litanies (*wird* and *awrad*) said silently, and one daily *wazifa* to be recited out loud in congregation if possible. These remembrances (*dhikr* or *adhar*) consist of asking forgiveness of God (*istighfar*), asking for God's blessings on the Prophet (*salat 'ala al-nabi*), and declaring the Oneness of God (*tahlil*).
- 8 The Malamatiyya were Sufis who hid their spiritual endowments in the guise of ordinary behavior, sometimes even pretending to be engaged in reprehensible acts.
- 9 The necessary balance between *jadhb* (divine attraction, rapture) and *suluk* (the work of traveling the path) is a recurring theme in the writing of Shaykh Ibrahim. He wrote in verses included in *Kashif al-ilbas*: "O enraptured one: alas for you without the difficulties of the path, you are incomplete; so continue seeking. O seeker: without rapture, you remain veiled; so move and bestir yourself!" See Wright, *Pearls from the Flood*, 154.
- 10 The shaykh is here referring to a group of disciples whom he trained in the early years of his mission, while residing in the rural community of Kossi (a farming village outside of Kaolack). The disciples spread the secrets of spiritual training (*tarbiya*) and gnosis (*ma'rifa*) through incessant public talk. The shaykh warned them

and then “cut them off” when they failed to comply with his command. Cheikh Tijani Cissé, interview with Zachary Wright, Medina-Baye, Senegal, June 2017.

Chapter 17: Poetry for the Prophet (from *Dawawin al-sitt*)

- 1 The version relied on here is Ibrahim Niasse, *al-Dawawin al-sitt* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2012).
- 2 Most notably, see Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, *Qaṣīda Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), vol. 2.
- 3 For a study of the linguistic diversity in the Senegalese community of Ibrahim Niasse, see Joseph Hill, “Languages of Islam: Hybrid Genres of Taalibe Baay Oratory in Senegal,” *Islamic Africa* 2, no. 1 (2011): 67–103.
- 4 Khalifa Awwal Baba Tawfiq, *al-Dawawinu'l-sitt: Collection of Eulogy Works* (Ilorin: Khadim Hadratutl Shaykh Publications, 2007).
- 5 Niasse, *al-Dawawin al-sitt*, 7–8.
- 6 According to the Qur'an, Ahmad is another name for Muhammad, and is the name by which his coming was foretold by Jesus, who said, “*O children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of God to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad*” (Q 61:6).
- 7 Niasse, *al-Dawawin al-sitt*, 199–202.
- 8 Aghwat was a bench at the southern end of the Prophet's mosque where the Ahl al-Suffah were said to congregate.
- 9 This reference to sinfulness is part of the genre of Prophetic praise poetry and is meant to accent the author's reliance on divine grace rather than his own works, and his utter humility before the Prophet. Thus the thirteenth-century Shadhili poet al-Busayri wrote in his *Burda al-sharif*, “I have admonished the good, but I have not been upright myself. . . . I have done injustice to the Sunna.” Such words are certainly not confessions of violations of the Islamic sacred law or other such misdeeds.

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

- 1 For an outstanding introduction to the sanctity of the Prophet's *body* in early Islam, see Denis Gril, “Le corps du prophète,” *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 113–14 (2006): 37–57.
- 2 For an annotated scholarly translation of the Qur'an, as well as a number of fine essays to help understand it, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Harper One, 2015).
- 3 For an English language introduction to the role of the Prophet in Islamic devotion, see the classic work by Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).
- 4 For an excellent English translation of the work that most fully captures the vision of the Prophet from within traditional scholarship, see Qadi 'Iyad bin Musa al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad Messenger of Allah: Ash-shifa of Qadi 'Iyad*, trans. 'Aisha Bewley (London: Diwan Press, 2013). Yahsubi (d. 1149) drew together *hadith*, legal scholarship, history, biographical sources, Qur'an exegeses, and other religious sciences into what is likely the most important *interdisciplinary*

- monograph on the Prophet in the world of traditional Islamic scholarship. The full title translates as *The Book of Healing by Recognizing the Rights of the Chosen One*. It is widely attested in West African manuscript libraries.
- 5 For a reference work see Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam H. Walker, eds., *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014), vol. I, which unfortunately lacks substantive attention to sub-Saharan Africa.
 - 6 For an overview of the main works studied in the West African scholarly tradition, see Bruce S. Hall and C.C. Stewart, "The historic 'Core Curriculum,' and the book market in West Africa," in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, eds. Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 109–74. Finally, for a searchable database of some 25,000 manuscripts catalogued by researchers (especially Stewart) in the past three decades, see www.westafricanmanuscripts.org. See also Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: an intellectual history of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016) for a narrative of the intellectual history of Islamic West Africa. For catalogs of manuscripts written by West African authors in Arabic (and some in African languages using the Arabic script), see Brill's online and print reference works, John Hunwick, ed., *The Arabic Literature of Africa*, vols. 1–4 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).
 - 7 For a truly extraordinary monograph on the place of the Prophet in Sufi thought in a European language, see Claude Addas, *La Maison Muhammadienne: Aperçus de la dévotion au Prophète en mystique musulmane* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).
 - 8 For an excellent recent general introduction to Sufism, see Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017) as well as William Chittick, *Sufism a Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: One-world, 2007).
 - 9 For a fine historiographical essay, see Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen and Luca Patrizi, "Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi *adab*," in *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi Adab*, eds. Francesco Chiabotti, Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, and Luca Patrizi (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1–46.
 - 10 From another standpoint, however, by focusing on *tariqa* affiliation as an index for Sufism, Pew is incorporating an interpretive bias common to academic study of Sufism into its data collection. The study of Sufism itself has been over-determined by *tariqa* as an institutional form. Late nineteenth-century orientalism and imperialism were both fixated on the *tariqa*, for related, though distinct, reasons. Yet Sufism as a discipline (*tasawwuf*) unto itself has never been ultimately dependent on the particular institutional form of a *tariqa* for its existence.
 - 11 For sketches of the authors see this volume's general introduction as well as the respective section introductions.
 - 12 For an excellent, though often overlooked, introduction to two of these three themes, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966). There is also a 2002 reprint by the same press.
 - 13 For an excellent exploration of the ideational world of ethics in Sufism outside of sub-Saharan Africa, see Denis Gril, "Adab et éthique dans le soufisme: Quelques constats et interrogations," in *Ethics and Spirituality*, ed. Chiabotti et

- al., 47–62, as well as Francesco Chiabotti, “Éthique et théologie: la pratique de l’adab dans le traité sur les Noms divins d’Abu-l-Qasim ‘Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (al-Taḥbīr fī ‘ilm al-tadhkīr),” in the same volume, 165–197.
- 14 This wording is based on the version in *Sahih Muslim*, Book 1, Hadith 301. See also the slightly different wording in *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 1, Hadith 3. Translations in this essay are all mine, unless otherwise noted. This includes occasional rewording of the translations of citations in this volume from its four principal authors in order to keep the terms of analysis in the essay stable.
- 15 On female scholarship in West Africa, see Ousseina Alidou, *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Niger* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).
- 16 The wording here is also based on the version in *Muslim*, Book 4, Hadith 1623.
- 17 The wording here is based on the *Muwatta* of Malik bin Anas, Book 47.
- 18 See Wael B. Hallaq, “On Orientalism, Self-Consciousness and History,” *Islamic Law and Society* 18 (2011): 387–439. For discussion of legal formalism and ritual over ethics in modern Islam, see Mohammed Benkheira, *Amour de la loi: essai sur la normativité en Islam* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).
- 19 Fallou Ngom, *Muslims Beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of ‘Ajami and the Muridiyya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 70.
- 20 Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a twentieth-century Sufi revival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65.
- 21 P. 184.
- 22 Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*.
- 23 Ibrahim Niasse, *In the Meadows of Tafsir* (Atlanta: Fayda Books, 2014).
- 24 On the Jakhanke, see Ivor Wilks, “The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest,” in *History of Islam in Africa*, eds. Nehemiah Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), 93–116, and his wonderful early piece, “The Transmission of Islamic Learning in the Western Sudan,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 162–197, as well as Lamin Sanneh, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989).
- 25 Fodé Dramé, *The 99 Names of Allah* (Vancouver: Tasleem Publications, 2015), 303.
- 26 P. 58.
- 27 A full version of the *hadith* is presented in the introduction. Pp. 8–9, 35 (see also note 3 from Chapter 12).
- 28 P. 57.
- 29 See Qur’an 30:30 for its use of *fitra* in this way, “So direct your face to the upright religion, the nature upon which He created humanity.” For the use of the term in *hadith* literature, see *Sahih Muslim*, Book 33, 6,426: “No child is born except upon *fitra*.”
- 30 The verse 38:72 is the opening epigraph in Louis Brenner’s excellent seminal essay, “Sufism in Africa,” in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, Expression*, ed. Jacob Olupona (New York: Crossroads, 2001), 324–49.
- 31 See, for example, William Chittick’s *Sufism a Beginner’s Guide*, especially chapters 6 and 7, for multiple references to Sufi understandings of *dhawq*.

- 32 Translated slightly differently here than earlier in this volume in order to highlight the aspect of taste.
- 33 Papa Sall, *Les Grandes Conférences Islamiques de Serigne Sam Mbaye* (Dakar: Imprimerie St. Paul, 1995), 158–59.
- 34 With different wordings depending on the exact text, this appears in Bukhari, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, Book 97, Hadith 63, as well as in Tirmidhi, Book 38, Hadith 2752, Sunan of Dawud, *Kitab al-Sunnah*, Chapter: “The Vision of Allah,” Book 42, Hadith 134.
- 35 Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1983), 97.
- 36 See Q 2:115, 6:52, 18:28, 30:38–39, 55:27, 76:9, 92:20. For a comparative discussion of some exegetes’ discussion of 2:115, see Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi, and Farhana Mayer, eds., *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries: Vol I. On the Nature of the Divine* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67–126, Chapter One: “Seeking the Face of God.”
- 37 Quoted from the English translation of the Ibriz, by O’Kane and Radtke: Ahmad ibn al-Mubarak al-Lamati, *Pure Gold From the Words of Sayyidī Abd Al-Azīz Al-Dabbāgh (Al-Dhabab Al-Ibrīz Min Kalām Sayyidī Abd Al-Azīz Al-Dabbāgh)*, trans. John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 895–97.
- 38 Sall, *Les Grandes Conférences Islamiques*, 159.
- 39 Jaza’iri’s scholarship does not appear to have circulated widely in West Africa, though the works of Ibn ‘Arabi certainly did.
- 40 The Qur’an mentions diseased hearts at least 11 times: Q 2:10, 5:52, 8:49, 9:125, 22:53, 24:50, 33:12, 33:60, 47:20, 47:29, and 74:31.
- 41 ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri, *Kitab al-mawaqif (Le Livre des Haltes)*, 96 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 278.
- 42 See particularly Q 2:74 and 31:16.
- 43 The pronunciation of “Be” and “it is” is also introduced, with slightly different phrasing, in Q 3:59, 6:73, 16:40, 25:7, and 36:82.
- 44 al-Jaza’iri, *Kitab al-mawaqif*, Halt 68, 181–82. Al-Jaza’iri goes on to specify that Moses’ repentance thereafter, which might be cited as contradicting his interpretation, “concerns only his request for a thing that was not permitted to him and which he lacked the strength to withstand.”
- 45 The Midnight Journey is discussed poetically in verses 117–128 of “Gifts of the Benefactor.”
- 46 On “two bows’ lengths or less,” see Chapter Seven of Addas, *La Maison Muhammadienne*, “À la distance de deux arcs ou plus près,” 115–40.
- 47 Personal communication, Dubai, UAE, 10 November 2014: “ñaar walla lu gën tuuti; teyti su gën tuuti, benn jëmma rekk moo fa nekk!”
- 48 Imam Yahya Nawawi, *Forty Hadith* (New York: Arabic Virtual Translation Center, 2010), 25–37.
- 49 The talk, “The Glad Tidings of Dreams,” is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wn824CTIEuQ>
- 50 For detailed scholarly work on dreams in the Islamic tradition see the fine monograph by Pierre Lory, *Le rêve et ses interprétations en Islam* (Paris: Albin

- Michel, 2003) as well as the excellent introduction by Alexander Knysh in essays in Ozgen Felek and Alexander Knysh, eds., *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012).
- 51 On fear and grief, see Dramé, *99 Names of Allah*. For a discussion of these same verses of the Qur'an in this volume, see the discussion of "Steadfastness" in *The Stations of the Religion*, in Part 4.
 - 52 For further discussion of this archive, see Syed, "Al-Hajj 'Umar Tal and the Realm of the Written," 28–29.
 - 53 Sha'rani quoted in Tal, Unpublished Muhtar Holland translation of the *Kitāb al-rimāh*, Chapter 29, 363.
 - 54 P. 90.
 - 55 For a useful and fascinating introductory text on Islamic numerology and divination, see Geert Mommersteeg, *In the City of the Marabouts: Islamic Culture in West Africa*, trans. Diane Webb (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2012). For a developed scholarly discussion, see Pierre Lory, "Verbe Coranique et Magie en Terre d'Islam," *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire* 12 (1993): 173–86.
 - 56 Shaykh Mahi Cissé, Public communication, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 12 April 2012.
 - 57 Dramé, *99 Names of Allah*, 1.
 - 58 A full discussion of arguments about "Prophetocentrism" in recent Sufi movements is beyond the scope of this essay. For useful places to begin an investigation, see Addas, *La Maison Muhammadienne*, 1–31, as well as a very thoughtful presentation of the concept of "the Muhammadan Way," *Tariqah Muhammadiyya*, in Soraya Khodamoradi, "Tariqah Muhammadiyyah as Tariqah Jāmi'ah: Khwajah Mir Dard's Experience Beyond Jamāl and Jalāl." *Islamic Studies* 51, no. 4 (2012): 367–402.
 - 59 For a European-language monograph on Ibn Mashish see Zakia Zouanat, *Ibn Masīsh, maître d'al-Shadhili* (Casablanca: Najah El Jadida, 1998). For the text of this *salat*, analysis, and English translation, see Titus Burckhardt, "The Prayer of Ibn Mashish," *Studies of Comparative Religion* 12, no. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 1978). For an English-language treatment of the relationship between Ibn Mashish and Shadhili, see A.M. Mohamed Mackeen, "The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, no. 4 (1971): 477–86.
 - 60 See Robert Launay, *Beyond the Stream: Islam and Society in a West African Town* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992)—especially the chapter "Sufism Degree Zero"—for an excellent anthropological-perspective view.
 - 61 Indeed, many West African Sufis (especially among the Jakhanke) never even belonged to a *tariqa*.
 - 62 The way of *zuhd* is often associated with Ghazali, who is among the most influential figures in West African Sufi thought. In this volume, *The Sciences of Behavior* by Dan Fodio and the *Pathways of Paradise* by Ahmadu Bamba both engage Ghazali's *magnum opus* extensively.
 - 63 For al-Shadhili's thought rendered in English, see Elmer Douglas, trans., *Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili: Including His Life, Prayers, Letters, and Followers: A Translation of Ibn al-Sabbagh's Durrat al-asrar wa tufat al-abrar* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1993). For an anthology on the *tariqa*, see Eric Geoffroy, ed., *Une voie Soufie dans le monde: la Shādhiliyya* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005).

- 64 For the worldly history of the Nasiriyya, see David Gutelius, "The Path is Easy and the Benefits Large: The Nāṣiriyya, Social Networks, and Economic Change in Morocco, 1640-1830," *Journal of African History* 43, no. 1 (2002): 27-49. For Sufi poetics and intellectual history, see Stefan Reichmuth, "The Praise of a Sufi Master as a Literary Event: Al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī (1631-1691), His *Dāliyya*, and its Commentary," in *Ethics and Spirituality*, ed. Chiabotti et. al. For intellectual and social history, see the forthcoming Princeton University dissertation by Matthew Schumann.
- 65 Yadali's two most important works for the study of Sufism have recently been published in Arabic editions: his Tafsir is in seven volumes: *al-Dhabab al-ibriz fi tafsir kitab Allah al-'aziz: aqdam tafsir Shinqiti* (Cairo: Markaz Najibawayh, 2014); the work on Sufism in *Khatimat al-tasawwuf wa sharhuha* (Rabat: Dar al Qalam, 2011). See also Kota Kariya, "Khatima fi al-Tasawwuf: An Arabic Work of a Western Saharan Muslim Intellectual," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 81 (2011): 133-47 as well as a consideration of Yadali's *historical* writings in Muhammad al-Yadali, *Nasus min al-tarikh al-Muritani* (Carthage, Tunisia: Bayt al-Hikma, 1990). The West African Arabic Manuscript Database contains many entries from Yadali, in almost every field of the traditional sciences: www.westafricanmanuscripts.org.
- 66 P. 37.
- 67 P. 188.
- 68 The source here is the well-known classically and university-trained Naqshbandi scholar, Gibril Fouad Haddad: "The wording of *Salat al-Fatih* is for the most part that of a report from our liegelord 'Alī ibn Abi Talib (Allah ennoble his face) as his own saying narrated by Sa'id bin Mansur in his Sunan, Ibn Faris in his monograph on *Salat* on the Prophet (upon him blessings and peace), al-Tabari, al-Tabarani, al-Ajurri in *al-Shari'a*, and others as stated by al-Haythami in *Majma' al-zawa'id* (10:254), Ibn Hajar in *Fath al-bari* (11:163), Ibn Kathir in his *Tafsir* under verse 33:56. It is often cited in the books of difficult Arabic words such as al-Zamakhshari's *al-Fa'iq*, Ibn Qutayba's *Gharib al-Hadith*, and others." <http://eshaykh.com/sufism/tijaniyyah-and-salat-al-fatih>.
- 69 See, however, Amine Hamidoune, "La pratique de la 'prière sur le prophète' en Islam: Analyses philologique et implications doctrinales," doctoral thesis in Arab, Muslim, and Semitic Studies, Université Aix-Marseille, 2012.
- 70 P. 89.
- 71 *Kitab al-rimāh*, Introduction, Chapter 8, 56.
- 72 For a detailed outline of the subjects of the text in English, see the translation of the chapter headings (421 in all) in Abdul Aziz Suraqah's *Overview of the Contents of Imam Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani's The Fecundating Holy Illuminations in Clarification of the Muhammadan Covenants* (Singapore: Muhammadan Press, 2013).
- 73 See Jonathan G. Katz, *Dream, Sufism & Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad al-Zawāwī* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). The quotation here does not appear in that book but rather is from page 302 of Katz's dissertation, "The vision of the Prophet in fifteenth century North Africa: Muhammad al-Zawāwī's 'Tuhfat al-Nāzir'" (Princeton University, 1990).

- 74 Fodé Dramé, personal communication, October 2015.
- 75 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arabe 5, 474, folios 127a–128b.
- 76 Amar Samb, “La vie d’El-Hadji Omar par Cheikh Moussa Kamara: Traduit et annoté par Amar Samb,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire* 32, no. 2 (1970): 407–408. This is the second part; the first is published in *BIFAN* 32, no. 1 (1970): 44–135.
- 77 Samb, “Vie d’El-Hadji Omar,” 408.
- 78 ‘Uthman dan Fodio, “*Ūmre Tanassabujē*” (The Song of Resemblance), unpublished manuscript, digital format. The private archives of Sultan al-Hajj Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad Tahir of Maiurno, Sudan, f. 1, translated and published with permission of Shaykh Muhammad Shareef.
- 79 Cheikh Tijani ‘Ali Cissé, *Islam the Religion of Peace*, trans. Zachary Wright (Singapore: Light of Eminence, 2013), 37–40.
- 80 For more, see Dramé, 99 *Names*, 301–19.
- 81 Rudolph T. Ware III, “In Praise of the Intercessor,” *Islamic Africa* (2013).
- 82 For alternative perspectives, see Christiane Gruber and Avinoam Shalem, eds., *The Image of the Prophet: Between ideal and ideology* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2014).
- 83 Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, Public Communication, Prophetic Poetics Conference, January 10, 2016, University of Michigan. The full keynote address is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hbvqp4ozELM>.
- 84 Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, January 9, 2016, Tariqa Muhammadiya Mawlid, Hamtramck, Michigan.
- 85 The image of the poet trapped between lines of text is a paraphrase of the rapper Rakim, from the song entitled (fittingly) “I’ve got soul,” Eric B. & Rakim, *Paid in Full*, 1987: “when I’m writing I’m trapped in between the lines, I escape when I finish the rhyme; I’ve got soul.”
- 86 For an excellent translation alongside the Arabic original, see Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, *Qasīda Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 2:388–412. For the quotation above, see Syed Mohiuddin Qadri, *Qasīdat al-Burdah: The Poem of the Mantle* (Creative Commons: San Francisco, 2008), 7.
- 87 This translation is drawn (with “vocally” replacing “by the mouth”) from the excellent short volume by the South African scholar Fakhruddin Owaisi, *Praising the Prophet with Imam al-Busiri’s Qasīdat al-Burdah* (Cape Town: Baye Media, 2011), which has a fine introductory essay on African praise poetry for the Prophet.
- 88 The Arabic, with transliteration and word-for-word English translation from Imam Fodé Dramé, can be found online: http://ebooks.rahnuma.org/religion/Tassawaf/Durood/qasida_burda.pdf.
- 89 For the authoritative internal account of the order’s history, as well as a foreword from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, see Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition* (Fenton, MI: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2004). For one of the most remarkable original Sufi works in the English language, see the same author’s *Angels Unveiled: A Sufi Perspective* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1995).
- 90 Public oral communication by Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, June 18, 2016, “Dhikr that is very heavy in the scale,” Ramadan Lectures, no. 13, Fenton, Michigan.

- 91 See Chapter Three of *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2014) as well as my contribution to David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and David Richardson, eds., "Slavery in Islamic Africa: 1400–1800," *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), vol. IV.
- 92 Musa Kamara, "Condemnation de la guerre sainte" (trans. A. Samb), *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, 38, 1 (1976), 158–199.
- 93 Quoted in Louis Brenner, *West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Salif Tall* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 151.
- 94 On *Nur Muhammadi*, Muhammadan Light, see Addas, *Maison Muhammadienne*, 36–47.
- 95 These are often connected analytically to the Hadith of Gabriel by equating the three embraces with *islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan*.

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Index

- ‘Abd al-Qadir bin al-Mustafa (Dan Tafa) 16–17
- ‘Abd al-Qadir Kane (al-Futi) 19–20, 247–48, 264n87
- Abraham 144, 275n18
- Abu ‘Abdullah ‘Ali ibn Muhammad (d. AH 792) 59, 268n10
- Abu ‘Abdullah ibn al-Jala’ (d. AH 306) 58, 267n7
- Abu ‘Abdullah Malik bin Anas. *See* Malik bin Anas (Abu ‘Abdullah)
- Abu Bakr ibn Muhib 115, 272n1
- Abu-l-‘Abbas bin al-Banna’ 193–94
- Abu l-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) 57, 58, 184, 186, 268n8, 282n4
- Abu Madyan 188, 189–90
- Abu Nu‘aym al-Isfahani (d. 1030) 107, 272n17
- Abu Yazid Bistami 90–91, 197–98, 271n7
- Adam 117, 141, 273n10
- Ahmad Zarruq (d. 1493) 57–58, 59–60, 184–85, 267n6, 282n2
- ‘Aisha bint Abu Bakr 22–23, 251
- ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib 244–45, 249–50
- allies of God 227–28, 238–39
- al-Andalusi, ‘Abdullah ibn Abi Jamra (d. 1276/77) 144, 275n17
- angels 32, 106, 108, 132, 266ch2n1. *See also* Gabriel
- anger: abandonment of and contentment 51; to be avoided 178; as incursion of Satan 60; purification of the heart from 42–44
- Anwar al-qulub* (al-Saqqilli) 186, 282n8
- al-Ash‘ari, Abu-l-Hasan ‘Ali (873–935) 267n2
- ‘Ashura (10th of Muharram) 141–42
- al-Asrar al-‘aqliya* (Taqiyy al-Din) 193–94, 283n18
- ‘Atiq, Abu Bakr 20
- Aysh bint Lazuruq 20–21
- Badr; people of 149–50, 278n21, 279n31
- al-Bakri, Muhammad (d. 1585) 245
- Bamba, Ahmadu (1855–1927) 127–63; biography of 4–5, 21, 127–29, 149–50, 279n31; devotion to Prophet of 248–49; emphasis of on character training 226; “Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor” 149–63, 236–37; and Islamic law training 14; *Pathways of Paradise* 137–48, 237–38; and political violence 257; “The Valiant One” 131–35; visions by 4, 149–50, 153–54, 277n13, 278nn20–21, 279n31
- Barada, ‘Ali Harazim 98–99, 271n12
- barzakh* (intermediary realm) 18, 104, 135, 176, 281n16

- Bello, Muhammad 9–10, 22
 blessing the Prophet: and ethical striving 246; remembrance (*dhikr*) as 118, 273n11; and visions 245–48
 Blum, Charlotte 12
Book of Distinction, The (Dan Fodio) 55–63; correlation of *tasawwuf* 56–57; ethical and spiritual facets of Sufism 229; introduction to 55–56; jurisprudence–*tasawwuf* relationship 57–58; keys of key of *tasawwuf* 59–60; objective of *tasawwuf* 57–58; pivot of *tasawwuf* 59; Satan's incursions 60–63; *tasawwuf* for divine realization 58–59; *tasawwuf*–religion relationship 58
 Bourdieu, Pierre 169
 Buso, Mbacké 10, 262n45
al-Burda (al-Busiri) 151, 252, 277n9
al-Burda (Ka'b bin Zuhayr) 253–54
 al-Busiri, Muhammad bin Sa'id (d. 1296) 151, 252, 277n9
 Buso, Jaara 21
 Buso, Maryam 128, 131
 caprice 146–47
 caves of Thawr and Hira 118, 273nn12–13
 certainty of conviction 76, 93, 102, 144
 character 49–53, 55–56, 63, 227, 228–29, 250. *See also* etiquette; purification of the heart; spiritual excellence (*ihsan*); spiritual training (*tarbiya*)
 charity 77–79, 84, 145, 179, 270n24
 children as blessing and distraction from God 75–76
 Cissé, 'Ali 16, 22
 Cissé, Biram 10
 Cissé, Hasan 169–70, 171
 Cissé, Mahi 241
 Cissé, Tijani bin 'Ali 169, 215, 237, 249–50
 Companions of Prophet 119–20
 conceit 36–37, 243
 contemplation 144, 275n19. *See also* spiritual training (*tarbiya*)
 contentment with God's decree 51. *See also* decree of God
 covetousness 60, 76
 created things 146–47, 174
 al-Dabbagh, 'Abdul 'Aziz: about 271n11, 283n11; on direct vision of God 231–32; on paths of gratitude and struggle 96–97, 187–88; on seeing God in everything 232–33; on types of knowledge 103–106, 107–110, 111–12
 daily offices. *See* litanies and daily offices
Dala'il Khayrat (Jazuli) 245
 Dan Fodio. *See* 'Uthman bin Fudi (Dan Fodio)
 Dan Tafa. *See* 'Abd al-Qadir bin al-Mustafa (Dan Tafa)
Dawawin al-sitt (Niasse). *See* Poetry for the Prophet (Niasse)
 Dawud, Talut 170
 Daymani (*awlad Daymani*) 264n87
 Day of Judgment: fear of 77; Prophet's followers gathered at pool on 122, 274n19; Prophet's intercession on 117; regrets on 72; remembrance of 178
 decree of God 45, 51, 174
 Dem, Hasan (d. 1996) 18
 devils 106, 256. *See also* Satan
dhikr (remembrance). *See* remembrance (*dhikr*)
 Diagne, Souleymane Bachir 16
 divine manifestation. *See under* spiritual experiences
 divine Presence 197–98, 201. *See also* spiritual experiences
 divine speech 235–36
 Dramé, Fodé 227–28, 239, 241–42, 246

- ego. *See* self (*naḡs*)
- emancipation 151, 276n6
- enemies keeping one from God 146–48, 151, 276n6. *See also* Satan; Sufism (*tasawwuf*), core practices of
- entrusting the affair to God 51
- envy 44–47, 60, 139. *See also* jealousy
- ethics, sanctity, and society 249–50
- etiquette 169, 170, 171, 175. *See also* character; “Spirit of Etiquette, The” (Niasse)
- evil 51
- exile 151, 159, 277n12, 278n21
- extraordinary occurrences (*karamat/waqaʿi*): also available to non-believers 98, 106–107, 112; not to be contemplated or shared 100–103, 112; Satan’s deceptions in 102. *See also* miracles; seeing God; seeing God and spiritual experience; spiritual experiences; spiritual experiences, unveilings; visions
- “Facilitating the Arrival to the Prophetic Presence” (Niasse) 216–17
- faith (*iman*): related to contemplation 144; as station of understanding 9, 207–209
- falsehood, meaning of 104
- falsehood and darkness, people of 103–105, 106, 112, 122
- fanaticism 61
- Faraʿid al-fawaʿid* (Ibn al-Zayati) 194, 283n20
- fasting 140–41, 142, 178, 179. *See also* spiritual training (*tarbiya*); spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of
- al-Fatawa al-hadithiya* (Ibn Hajar) 190–91, 283n14
- Fath al-Basāʾir* (Dan Fodio) 55
- Fatima bint ʿAbdullah al-ʿAlawi 21
- Fatima bint Muhammad (Prophet’s daughter) 244–45
- Fatima bint Muhammad (Tut bint al-Tah) (d. 1882) 20
- al-Fazazi, ʿAbd al-Rahman (d. 1230) 115–16
- fear: of Day of Judgment 77; and hope 51–53; *khashya* as first stage of Sufism 185. *See also* fear of God (*taqwa*)
- fear of God (*taqwa*): degrees of 206–207; humility as beginning of 38; linked to remembrance 73; reality of 210; stages of 50. *See also* fear
- Fisher, Humphrey 12
- French colonial authority: Bamba’s exile by 4–5, 21, 128–29, 276n6; Bamba’s submission to 150, 279n31; confiscation of Tal’s library by 240; conflict with Tal 3, 4, 67
- French colonial discourse 127
- Fulani 266ch4n1
- Futa Toro 19–20, 67
- al-Futuhat al-ilahiyya* (Ibn ʿAjiba) 195
- future, knowledge of 109–110
- Gabon 4–5, 21, 128–29, 276n6
- Gabriel 160, 185, 257–58, 273n12, 279n24. *See also* angels
- Gabriel Hadith 8–9, 35, 228, 276n3
- gender norms in West African Islam 13
- al-Ghali, Muhammad 67
- al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad (1058–1111): on contemplation 144; on legal status of Sufism 185; on metaphysics 15; on order of stations of understanding 276n3; and path of struggle 289n62; as renewer 267n4; as source for Bamba 139; as source for Dan Fodio 35
- “Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor” (Bamba) 149–63; commendation for people of Badr 161–62, 279n31; introduction 149–50, 276n1; praise for Prophet

- 156–61, 236–37; praise of God 151–53; prayers for Rightly Guided Caliphs 161; Prophet addressed 153–56; supplication to God 162–63
- gnosis. *See under* spiritual experiences
- gnostics 15, 58–59
- gnostics, silence of 211–14
- Gobir 28, 266n4
- God: addressed in poetry 151–53; as Creator of humankind 39–40; essence of not to be contemplated 144, 275n19; face of 230–33; as the Manifest and the Hidden 193, 283n17; mercy of 256; as multiplier of good deeds 141, 275n14; names of 240–42; nature of 32; oneness of (*tawhid*) 9; as possessor of forgiveness and retribution 72; as protector 151; as source of all actions 37
- God consciousness (*taqwa*). *See* fear of God (*taqwa*)
- God's pleasure: to be sought 75; as experiential place 231–32; and fasting 140–41; and meditating on Qur'an 145; and obedience 76; and path of gratitude 95
- good deeds: benefit of in world and hereafter 72, 269n6; multiplication of 141, 275n14
- gratitude: and sincerity 184–88; wealth and 148
- gratitude, path of. *See under* spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of
- grave, life in 32, 134–35, 175
- greed 61
- Gudu 28
- Hadith Qudsi 235–36
- Halim, 'Abd al-Hakim 170
- hardship 174, 280n10
- hawd* (pool) 122, 274n19
- heart, purification of. *See* purification of the heart
- heart as means to envision God 234–35. *See also* seeing God; spiritual experiences
- Hira, Cave of 118, 273n12
- Hiskett, Mervyn 6
- hope: fear and 51–53; purification from false hope 42
- Houri 82, 150, 178, 269n20, 276n4
- humankind, baseness of 39–42
- humility 38–39, 81, 148, 176, 285n9
- Hunwick, John 12, 89
- 'ibada*. *See* worship (*'ibada*)
- Iblis. *See* Satan
- Ibn 'Abbas 198
- Ibn Anbuja, 'Ubayda 203, 204
- Ibn 'Ajiba, Ahmad (d. 1809) 184, 195, 282n3
- Ibn al-'Arabi al-Hatimi 199–200
- Ibn al-Farid, 'Umar bin 196, 284n23
- Ibn al-Zayati, Ahmad 194, 283n20
- Ibn Battuta 13
- Ibn Hajar al-Haytami al-Makki (d. 1556) 190–91, 283n14
- Ibn Mashish, 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1227) 242–43, 244
- Ibrahim al-Khawwas (d. 904) 106–107, 272n16
- al-Ibriz* (al-Lamati) 93–95, 96–98, 103–112, 187–88, 283n11
- ihsan*. *See* spiritual excellence (*ihsan*)
- illumination. *See under* spiritual experiences
- impulsiveness 146–47
- inner sight, people of 33
- intention 228–29
- intentionality 276n3
- intercession of Prophet 157, 254, 278n18
- intermediary realm (*barzakh*). *See* *barzakh* (intermediary realm)
- Iqaz al-himam* (Ibn 'Ajiba) 184, 282n3
- al-Ishriniyat* (The Twenties) (al-Fazazi) 115–16

- al-Iskandari, Ibn 'Ata'-Allah (1259–1310)
139, 193, 283n15
- Islam: early community of 120; early
generations of 94; five pillars of 119,
274n14
- Islam as station of understanding. *See* sta-
tions of understanding
- Islamic law and Sufism 9, 57–58, 140,
275n12
- Islamic law in West Africa 11–15; com-
plexity of 11–13, 262n60; corpus of
11, 262n47; in foundation of Sufi
communities 14; methodological
principles of 14–15
- isra'* and *mi'raj*. *See* Night Journey and
Ascension
- 'Izz al-Din 33
- Jahiliya* (Age of ignorance before Islam) 42
- al-Jakaniya, Maryam bint Hayna (b. 1918)
21
- Jawahir al-ma'ani* (Barada) 98–99, 197–98,
271n12
- al-Jaysh al-kafil* (Tashiti) 186–87, 283n10
- Jaza'iri, 'Abd al-Qadir 233, 235, 236,
288n39, 288n44
- jealousy 42–43, 176. *See also* envy
- “Jeweled Letters, The” (Niasse) 203–214;
introduction to 203–204; silence of
gnostics 211–14; stations of religion
204–211
- jihadi ideologies, contemporary 12, 256–57
- jiḥād of the pen: in Bamba's life 128–29,
162–63, 278n20; in Dan Fodio's life
27–28; focus of 224–25; in Niasse's
life 167–68
- jiḥād of the soul 256–57
- jiḥād of the sword: as communal obliga-
tion 85, 270n27; in Dan Fodio's life
28; in Muridiyya order 149, 159,
278n21; reward of martyrs 85–86; in
'Umar Tal's life 67, 68
- al-Jilani, 'Abd al-Qadir 3
- al-Jundi, Khalil (d. 1365) 11
- jurisprudence–*tasawwuf* relationship 9,
57–58, 140, 275n12
- Ka, Musa 7
- Kabbani, Hisham 252, 254
- Ka'b bin Zuhayr 253–54
- Kala, Majaxaté 127–28
- Kamara, Musa 247–48, 256–57
- karamat*. *See* extraordinary occurrences
(*karamat/waqa'i'*)
- al-Kawakib* (Mukhtar al-Kunti) 193
- Kawthar* (fountain in Paradise) 32, 135, 266n2
- Khadija bint Muhammad al-'Aqil al-Day-
maniya (d. 1835/6) 19–20, 264n88
- al-Khamriya* (“Wine ode”) (Ibn al-Farid)
196, 284n23
- al-Khidr 91, 92, 109, 199, 271n9, 284n25
- Kitab al-Mawaqif* (Jaza'iri) 233
- knowledge: and actions 74, 140, 175; of
future 109–110; sources of 103–106,
107–108, 240; Sufism as type of
229; types of 140, 175; unveilings as
sources of 240. *See also* seeing God;
seeing God and spiritual experience;
spiritual experiences
- knowledge of God. *See under* spiritual
experiences
- al-Kunti, Muhammad 146
- al-Kunti, Mukhtar (d. 1811): about 283n9;
on ostentation 143–44; on paths of
gratitude and struggle 186–87; on
seeing God 193; as source for Bamba
24, 139; as source for West African
scholars 2
- al-Lamati, Ahmad ibn al-Mubarak: about
al-Ibriz 271n11, 283n11; on harm of
mixing with saints 110–11; on knowl-
edge of philosophers 103; on paths of
gratitude and struggle 93–95, 96–97

- Lances of the Party of the Merciful, The* (Tal)
89–113; attachment of the heart to God 98–100; extraordinary occurrences not to be contemplated or shared 100–103, 112; goal of spiritual training 93–95; introduction to 89; knowledge of and mixing with saints 110–12; knowledge of future 109–110; knowledge sources 103–108; miracles of Prophets and Messengers 113; passions and Satan 90–93; path of gratitude 89–90, 93; path of gratitude versus path of struggle 95–98; spiritual unveilings warned against 89–100, 245–46; unveilings as sources of knowledge 240
- Lata'if al-minan wa-l-akhlaq* (Sha'rani)
188–89, 190
- Lawaqih al-anwar al-qudsiyya* (Sha'rani)
245–46
- litanies and daily offices: admonishment to follow 172–73; of Bamba 277n9; of Dan Fodio 3; and numerology 241; significance of 142–43, 237–38; of Tijaniyya order 177, 212, 244–45, 281n17, 284n7. *See also* prayers (*salat*); worship (*'ibada*)
- Maggal celebration 5, 260n23
- al-Maghili, 'Abd al-Karim 12
- Mahdi, Dan Fodio as herald of 259n8
- Mahmud Aqit 12
- Mahmudiyya Sufi order 260n18
- al-Maigari, Muhammad 16
- Malamatiyya 213, 284n8
- Malik bin Anas (Abu 'Abdullah) (716–795)
140, 141, 184, 267n3, 275n12, 282n5
- Maliki jurisprudence 11. *See also* Malik bin Anas (Abu 'Abdullah)
- Mauritania 12–13, 21
- Mawahib al-quddus* (Bamba) 137, 138–39, 275n5
- Mbacké, 'Abd al-Ahad (1914–89) 150, 277n13
- Mbacké, Ahmadu Bamba. *See* Bamba, Ahmadu (1855–1927)
- Mbacké, Fallou 10
- Mbacké, Momar 10
- Mbaye, Sam 231
- Medina, people of 78, 269n16
- Messenger of God. *See* Muhammad, Prophet
- messengership 108
- Messengers of God: miracles of as evidence of truthfulness 112–13; nature of 32; teachings of 241–42
- metaphysics 233–34
- metaphysics and philosophy 15–18
- miracles: after death 247–48; of Bamba 4–5; to be left aside 213; as hindrance for Sufi 112; of Jaara Buso 21; as necessary for Messengers and Prophets 112–13; noblest of 91; of Prophet Muhammad 118, 159, 273n13; of prophets 143; of Ruqaya bint Mahmud 21; as source of love for this world 89–90; of 'Umar Tal 4. *See also* extraordinary occurrences; spiritual experiences
- miserliness 78–79
- Mizab* (Ibn Anbuja) 204
- Modibo Muhammad al-Kabari 238–39
- Moses 141, 236, 288n44
- Mouride community. *See* Muridiyya Sufi order
- Muhammad, Prophet: as caller 118–20; as center of spiritual life 243–45; emulation of 6–7; as example 248–51; as first Prophet 117–18, 120, 216, 273n10; form of cannot be taken by Satan 91, 105–106, 153, 277n13; as founder of Sufism 185; his knowledge of future 110; as intercessor 157, 254, 278n18; as

- intimate witness of God 236–37; on Judgment Day 122, 274n19; love for 7–8, 119, 122–23; as mercy to humanity 255–56; miracles of 118, 159; Night Journey and Ascension of 116, 157, 159–60, 272n7, 278n19, 279n24; other names for 121, 181, 274n16, 282n28; as path 154; as praised one 118, 273n11; and revelation of Qur'an 242–43; as savior 120–22; social resonance of service to 5; spiritual support from 199–200; status of in Islam 223; superiority of 161; as Ultimate Pen 257–58. *See also* Muhammad, Prophet, in visions; praise poetry; *Sunna* of Prophet; themes and connections in Sufi scholarship
- , in visions: by al-Bakri 245; by Bamba 4, 149, 153–54, 277n13, 278n20, 278n21, 279n31; by Busiri 252; by companion of al-Tijani 99–100; by Dan Fodio 3, 28; instructions on *tariqas* by 260n18; by Khadija al-Shinqitiya 20; by Niasse 6; response to questions on Sufism by 101; as result of blessing him 245–48. *See also* Muhammad, Prophet; themes and connections in Sufi scholarship
- al-Muhasibi, Abu 'Abdullah al-Harith (AH 170–243) 56, 267n5
- al-Mukhtasar* (al-Jundi) 11
- Muridiyya Sufi order: Bamba's poems in 127–28; centrality of character training in 226; founding of 4–5, 260n18; meaning of service to Prophet in 278n20; non-violence in 149, 159, 257, 278n21. *See also* Sufi communities
- al-Nabulusi, 'Abd al-Ghani (d. 1731) 17
- Nana Asma'u 14, 22
- Naqshbaniyya–Haqqaniyya Sufi order 254
- al-Nawawi, Yahya (d. 1277) 238
- Niasse, 'Abdallah (d. 1922) 14, 24, 169, 265n112
- Niasse, 'Aisha 21
- Niasse, Fatima 23
- Niasse, Ibrahim bin 'Abdallah (1900–1975) 167–222; biography of 5–6, 21, 167–68; devotion to Prophet of 248–49; on divine manifestation 233–34; “The Jeweled Letters” (*Jawahir al-rasa'il*) 203–214; legal arguments by 14; metaphysical writings by 16; on path of gratitude 244; Poetry for the Prophet (from *Dawawin al-sitt*) 215–22; *The Removal of Confusion* (*Kashif al-ilbas*) 183–201; repentance in poetry of 255; “The Spirit of Etiquette” (*Ruh al-adab*) 169–81; spiritual attainment of 7, 8, 261n28; on Sufism 230; supplications of 283n17; training of daughters by 22, 23
- Niasse, Muhammad 10
- Niasse, Ruqaya (b. 1930) 22–23, 265n105
- Nigeria 14–15, 28, 266n4
- Night Journey and Ascension 116, 157, 159–60, 237, 273n7, 278n19, 279n24
- night prayer (*tahajjud*) 178, 281n21. *See also* prayers (*salat*); worship (*'ibada*)
- 99 *Names of Allah*, *The* (Dramé) 241–42
- numerology and science of letters 241
- obligations: encouraging good and forbidding wrong 86–87; fulfillment of 79; knowledge of Satan's incursions 60; Sufism as 185
- obligations, communal (*fard kifayat*) 85, 270n27
- obstacles on path to God. *See* enemies keeping one from God

- Ogunnaike, Oludamini 16
- oneness of God (*tawhid*): degrees of affirmation of 195; types of knowledge of God 230
- opening. *See under* spiritual experiences
- oral teaching 31, 69, 215
- orientalism, stereotypes of 226
- ostentation. *See* showing-off
- Paradise: abodes in 152, 277n12; bridge to (*al-sirat*) 77, 269n14; description of 82, 270n21; as manifestation 201; vision of God in 231–32. *See also* Hourī
- passions: as incursion of Satan 60; and seeking spiritual unveilings 90–93, 240
- path, Prophet as 154, 278n14
- path, sincerity and gratitude on 184–88
- Path of Satisfying the Disciples, The* (Bamba) 137
- paths of spiritual training: path of gratitude 89–90; path of gratitude versus path of struggle 95–98, 186–88, 187–88, 243–44; path of struggle 289n62. *See under* spiritual training (*tarbiya*)
- Pathways of Paradise* (Bamba) 137–48; Bamba's introduction to 138–40; charity 145; contemplation 144; created things 146–47; introduction to 137–38, 274n4; knowledge and actions 140–42; litanies 142–43, 237–38; oneness (*tawhid*) 138–39; reciting Qur'an 145; remembrance (*dhikr*) 142–44; self (*nafs*) 147; on Sufism 145–46; types of knowledge 230; worldliness (*dunya*) 147–48
- patience in difficulties 174, 280n10
- pen and sword 256–58. *See also* jihadist ideologies, contemporary; jihad of the pen; jihad of the soul; jihad of the sword
- people of truth and light 103–105, 109
- Pew surveys on Muslim identity 224, 286n11
- philosophers' source of knowledge 103–106, 107–108
- philosophy and metaphysics 15–18
- Poetry for the Prophet (Niasse) 215–22; introduction to 215–16; "Tears into Pearls" 216–17; "Visiting the Beloved" 217–22
- praise poetry 251–56; as commentary on God's Word 236; as final writings of scholars 253; in non-Arabic languages 7; sinfulness as theme in 218–19, 285n9; themes in 32, 266n2, 285n9; tradition of 8, 115, 254–55. *See also* "Gifts of the Benefactor in Praise of the Intercessor" (Bamba); Muhammad, Prophet; Poetry for the Prophet (Niasse); *Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak, The* (Tal)
- "prayer of the opener" (*salat al-fatih*) 244–45
- prayers (*salat*): established during Ascension 279n24; voluntary 178, 281n21, 281nn24–25, 282n26. *See also* litanies and daily offices; worship (*'ibada*)
- pride 37–42
- prophethood 108
- Prophets: deeds of commemorated on 'Ashura 141–42; miracles of as evidence of truthfulness 112–13; in praise poetry 131–32; spiritual support from 199–200
- purification of the heart 36–49; achievement of 187; from conceit 36–37, 243; from defects 179; from envy 44–47; from false hope 42; importance of 80–81; from pride 37–42; from showing-off 47–49; from ungrounded anger 42–44; from whisperings of Satan 36. *See also* character; repentance (*tawba*); spiritual excellence (*ihsan*); spiritual

- training (*tarbiya*)
- Qadiriya Sufi order 3, 260n18
- Qur'an: on abandonment of *dhikr*
 256; and character formation
 227–28, 250–51; and other Books
 in praise poetry 132; reciting of
 145; as remembrance (*dhikr*) 121,
 274n18; and visionary experience
 235–36. *See also* Qur'an recitation as
 remembrance
- Qur'an recitation as remembrance 237–
 42; and divine protection 238–39;
 and names of God from Qur'an
 240–42; and path of purification
 236–39; revelation and inspiration
 239–40. *See also* Qur'an; remem-
 brance (*dhikr*)
- al-Qushayri, Abu-l-Qasim 100–101,
 272n14
- al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din (d. 1210) 193,
 283n16
- reformers of Islam. *See* renewers of Islam
- remembrance (*dhikr*): as blessings on
 Prophet 118, 273n11; hampered by
 overeating 142; hidden remembrance
 193–94, 283n19; importance of
 73–74, 76, 80; and names of God
 240–42; as protection against Satan
 147; Qur'an as 121, 274n18; rules
 of 143–44, 269n9; and sainthood
 75, 80; showing-off in 47–48; as
 sign of sainthood 143; as thankful-
 ness 75, 269n11; in Tijaniyya order
 179; world as distraction from 70,
 71–72. *See also* Qur'an recitation as
 remembrance
- “Reminder for the Seekers, A” (Tal) 69–87;
 children as blessing and distraction
 from God 75–76; Day of Judgment
 72, 77; fasting in *Sunna* of Prophet
 87; fulfillment of obligations 79,
 86–87; God as possessor of forgive-
 ness and retribution 72; introduction
 to 69–71, 268ch6nn1–2; jihad of the
 sword 85–86; knowledge and actions
 74; Paradise 82; purification of the
 heart 80–81; remembrance (*dhikr*)
 73–76, 80; Satan as enemy 73; wealth
 and preoccupation with it 75–76,
 82–83; wealth to be spent for God
 77–79, 84; world as distraction from
 remembrance 70–72; worship 83–84
- Removal of Confusion, The* (Niasse) 183–201;
 introduction to 183; paradigmatic
 sainthood 198–201; seeing God and
 spiritual experience 192–98; shaykh
 of spiritual instruction 188–92; sin-
 cerity and gratitude on the Sufi path
 184–88
- renewers of Islam: al-Ash'ari as 267n2;
 Dan Fodio as 3, 259n8; al-Ghazali as
 267n4
- repentance (*tawba*): to be acquired 49;
 better than gnosis 210; and killing
nafs 205; prevented by false hope 42;
 in Prophet's presence 254–55. *See also*
 purification of the heart; spiritual
 training (*tarbiya*)
- resurrection of dead 32, 41
- Revival of the Sciences of Religion* (al-Ghazali)
 35, 139, 267n4
- Risala* (al-Qushayri) 100–101, 272n14
- Roots of the Religion, The* (Dan Fodio) 31–33
ruh. *See* soul (*ruh*)
- Ruqaya bint Mahmud 21
- sainthood: linked with spiritual and social
 success 226–28; minor and major
 types of 194–95; Niasse's claim to
 5–6; not defined by supernatural
 abilities 110; paradigmatic sainthood
 198–201; and remembrance (*dhikr*)
 74, 75, 80

- saints: potential harm from mixing with 110–12; protected allies of God 227–28, 238–39; tethered to a Messenger 143
- salat al-Mashishiya* (Ibn Mashish) 242
- Salih, Ibrahim (b. 1939) 14–15
- Saly, Momar Anta 128
- al-Saqilli, Ahmad 186, 282n8
- Satan: cannot take Prophet's form 153, 246, 277n13; as enemy 73, 90, 146–47, 188, 244; forms of 91–92; incursions of 60–63; miracles as deceptions of 90–91; misleads one without shaykh 143; purification of the heart from whisperings of 36. *See also* devils; enemies keeping one from God
- scholars as inheritors of Prophet 122, 274n20
- Sciences of Behavior, The* (Dan Fodio) 35–53; conceit 36–37, 243; contentment with God's decree 51; entrusting the affair to God 51; envy 44–47; false hope 42; fear and hope 51–53; fear of God (*taqwa*) 50; introduction to 35; pride 37–42; repentance (*tawba*) 49; risks of conceit 243; self-denial 49–50; showing-off 47–49; trust and reliance in God 50–51; ungrounded anger 42–44; whisperings of Satan 36
- Seal of Sufism, The* (al-Yadali) 137–38
- seclusion. *See* spiritual retreat
- seeing God 229–37; face of God 230–33; mirrors, moons, and metaphysics 233–34; Prophet as intimate witness 236–37; Qur'an, visionary experience, and remembrance of God 235–36; reflections of heart 234–35. *See also* extraordinary occurrences; seeing God and spiritual experience; spiritual experiences
- seeing God and spiritual experience 192–98; different expressions for 193; holy Presence 195–98; remembrance (*dhikr*) 193–94; types of sainthood 194–95; vision of God 193–94. *See also* extraordinary occurrences; seeing God; spiritual experiences
- self (*nafs*) 147, 175, 179, 190–92, 208
- self-denial 49–50, 60, 94–95, 243. *See also* spiritual training (*tarbiya*); spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of
- al-Shadhili, Abu Hasan (d. 1258) 185, 242–43, 282n7
- Shadhiliya Sufi order 137–38, 242–43, 277n9
- Sha'rani, 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1565) 188–89, 190, 240, 245–46
- Shaykhs: choosing one 190–91; mistakes of 173, 280n7; necessity of seeking training from 188–89; obedience to 172–73, 192; role of 94–95, 143, 176, 190; as successors of the Prophet 91
- Shaytan. *See* Satan
- Shield of the Aspirant, The* (al-Kunti) 139
- al-Shinqitiya, Khadija bint Muhammad (d. 1948) 20
- showing-off 47–49, 143–44, 176
- al-Simnani, 'Ala' al-Dawla 92, 271n10
- sincerity 189, 208, 210–11, 228–29
- sincerity and gratitude on path 184–88
- Sirr al-akbar* (Niasse) 16
- Sokoto Caliphate 3, 22, 27, 28, 265n2
- Songhay Empire 12
- soul (*ruh*): connection of to body 16–17; fault in 175, 280n13; reality of 195–96; stripped from body in death 41, 200
- “Spirit of Etiquette, The” (Niasse) 169–81; avoiding harmful things 174–75, 179; following one's shaykh 172–73, 176–77; introduction to 169–71; praying and performing good deeds 177–80; supplicating God 180–81

- spiritual excellence (*ihsan*): in Gabriel Hadith 8–9, 35, 228, 276n3; and intention 228–29; as knowledge of God 203; as station of religion 204–205, 209–211; sunni and sufi compared 58. *See also* character; purification of the heart; *Sciences of Behavior, The* (Dan Fodio); spiritual training (*tarbiya*)
- spiritual experiences: awareness of continuous presence with God 209, 211; divine manifestation 56, 173, 196–97, 277n12; divine Presence 197–98, 201; gnosis 101, 209, 210–11, 230; illumination 90, 93, 100, 109, 110, 112; knowledge of God 17, 74, 173, 177–78, 230; not to be sought 89–90, 240; not to be spoken of 211–14; opening 105–106, 209; witnessing 209, 211. *See also* extraordinary occurrences; gnostics; gnostics, silence of; miracles; seeing God; seeing God and spiritual experience; spiritual experiences, unveilings; spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of; visions
- , unveilings 89–100; attachment of the heart to God 98–100; degrees of unveilings 105–106; goal of spiritual training 93–95; not to be sought 89–90; not to be spoken of 213; path of gratitude 89–90, 93; path of gratitude versus path of struggle 95–98; Satan's deceptions in 90–93, 102; as sources of knowledge 240. *See also* extraordinary occurrences; gnostics; miracles; seeing God; seeing God and spiritual experience; spiritual experiences; visions
- spiritual retreat: benefits of 172; extraordinary occurrences during 100–103; for sake of illumination 187–88; Shaykh's permission for 93, 271n10; sincerity in 91. *See also* spiritual training (*tarbiya*)
- spiritual stations 199, 213–14, 284n10
- spiritual support from Prophets 199–200
- spiritual training (*tarbiya*): contemplation 144, 275n19; fasting 140–41, 142, 178, 179; goal of 93–95; retreat 91, 93, 100–103, 172, 187–88, 271n10; self-denial 49–50, 60, 94–95, 243. *See also* character; purification of the heart; repentance (*tawba*); spiritual excellence (*ihsan*); spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of
- , paths of: gratitude 89–90; gratitude versus struggle 95–98, 186–88, 187–88, 243–44; struggle 289n62. *See also* spiritual training (*tarbiya*)
- stations of religion. *See* stations of understanding
- stations of understanding 204–211; faith and its abodes 207–209; Islam and its abodes 204–207; ordering of 150, 276n3; progression through 8–9; spiritual excellence (*ihsan*) 209–211; and structure of religious teaching 35
- steadfastness on path 205–206, 210
- struggle. *See* jihad of the pen; jihad of the soul; jihad of the sword
- struggle, path of. *See also* spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of
- Sufi communities: Islamic law in 14; relations between 9–10, 262n45. *See also* names of Sufi orders
- Sufi scholarship of West Africa 1–24; caricatures of 127; context of 10–11; Islamic law in West Africa 11–15; misperceptions of 1–2; philosophy and metaphysics in 15–18; sources of 2; by women scholars 18–23. *See also* Sufi scholars of West Africa; themes and connections in Sufi scholarship

- Sufi scholars of West Africa: Ahmadu Bamba 4–5, 14, 21, 127–29; Ahmadu Bamba's writings 131–63; Ibrahim bin 'Abdallah Niasse 5–8, 14, 21–23, 167–68, 261n28; Ibrahim bin 'Abdallah Niasse's writings 16, 169–222; 'Umar al-Futi Tal 3–4, 9, 14, 21, 67–68; 'Umar al-Futi Tal's writings 16, 69–123; 'Uthman bin Fudi 3, 12, 21, 27–29, 259n8, 266ch4n1, 266n3; 'Uthman bin Fudi's writings 31–63. *See also* Sufi scholarship of West Africa; themes and connections in Sufi scholarship
- Sufism (*tasawwuf*): benefits of 145–46, 226–27; connections of 56–57; demographics of in West Africa 224; and divine realization 58–59; and ethics 249–50; and jurisprudence 57–58, 140, 275n12; keys of key of 59–60; meaning of 184–85, 227; objective of 57–58; origins of word *tasawwuf* 146; as part of Islamic religious development 8–9; path of balanced with rapture 213, 284n9; pivot of 59; Prophet's response to questions on 101; and religion 58; Satan's incursions and 60–63; sincerity and gratitude on path of 184–88; and spiritual training 186–87; stages of 185–86
- , core practices of. *See* character; litanies and daily offices; prayers (*salat*); purification of the heart; Qur'an; Qur'an recitation as remembrance; remembrance (*dhikr*); repentance (*tawba*); spiritual training (*tarbiya*); spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of; worship (*ibada*)
- al-Suhrawardi, Diya' al-Din (d. AH 792) 59, 268n9
- Sunna* of Prophet 14, 87, 270n25. *See also* Muhammad, Prophet
- Sy, Malik (d. 1922) 14, 24, 265n112
- Tal, Ahmad al-Kabir 247–48
- Tal, Cerno Bokar Salif 257
- Tal, 'Umar al-Futi (1797–1864) 67–123; biography of 3–4, 9, 21, 67–68, 268ch5n1; devotion to Prophet of 248–49; disagreements of with Timbuktu scholars 14; jihad in life of 256–57; *The Lances of the Party of the Merciful against the Throats of the Party of the Accursed* 89–113; metaphysical writings by 16; "A Reminder for the Seekers and Success for the Students" 69–87; *The Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak* 8, 115–23
- Taqiyy al-Din al-Maqtarah (d. 1215) 193–94, 283n18
- taqwa*. *See* fear of God (*taqwa*)
- tariqa* membership 224, 286n10, 289n61. *See also* names of Sufi orders; Sufi communities
- tasawwuf*. *See* Sufism (*tasawwuf*)
- Tashiti, Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Saghir (d. 1869) 186–87, 283n10
- tasliya*. *See* blessing the Prophet
- tawakkul*. *See* trust and reliance in God
- tawba*. *See* repentance (*tawba*)
- Tawfiq, Khalifa Awwal Baba 215
- tawhid*. *See* oneness of God (*tawhid*)
- Testament, The* (Dan Fodio) 28–29
- Thawr, Cave of 118, 273nn12–13
- "The Hermitage of Lovers in the Praise of the Best of Worshipers" (Niasse) 217–22
- themes and connections in Sufi scholarship 223–58; amity and alliance 227–28; ethics, sanctity, and society 2, 6–10, 226–27; *ihsan* and intention 228–29; introduction 223–26; pen and sword 256–58; portraits of the Prophet 242–51; Qur'an recitation as remembrance

- 237–42; seeing God 229–37. *See also* character; etiquette; Muhammad, Prophet; purification of the heart; remembrance (*dhikr*); spiritual excellence (*ihsan*); spiritual experiences; spiritual training (*tarbiya*); spiritual training (*tarbiya*), paths of
- al-Tijani, Ahmad (d. 1815): advice of to wayfarers 98–99; advice to wayfarers 102–103; chain of authority of 185; on extending knowledge 211; on human soul (*ruh*) 17, 280n13; as isthmus (*barzakh*) 176; on path of gratitude 188, 244; on purity and nearness to God 197–98; on reality of Sufism 186; on revealing secrets 212–14, 284n10; on station of repentance 210; visions by 260n18
- Tijaniyya Sufi order 254; advice to 172–73, 212, 284n7; centrality of Prophet in 244–45; establishment of in West Africa 3–4, 67; founding of 260n18; litanies and daily offices of 177, 212, 244–45, 281n17, 284n7; size of 254. *See also* Sufi communities
- Timbuktu scholars 11, 12, 14
- Touba (*Tuba*) 4, 5, 260n23, 277n13, 278n22
- tranquility 208–209, 211
- trust and reliance in God 50–51
- Truth: and God 109; meaning of 104–105
- truthfulness 210
- al-Tustari, Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allah 91, 271n8
- ‘Umar al-Futi Tal: on path of gratitude 244; on seeking visions 245–46; on visions 240
- ‘Umar bin al-Farid (d. 1234) 196, 284n23
- Umarian Caliphate 3
- ‘Uthman bin Fudi (Dan Fodio) (1754–1817) 27–63; on advantage of Sufism 229; biography of 3, 21, 27–29, 259n8, 266ch4n1, 2661n3; *The Book of Distinction* 55–63; devotion to Prophet of 248–49; and jihad 12, 257; on relationship of Sufism to religion 228; *The Roots of the Religion* 31–33; *The Sciences of Behavior* 35–53, 243
- ‘Uthmaniya Sufi order 32, 260n18
- “Valiant One, The” (Bamba) 131–35
- Vessel of Happiness and Assistance for the Weak, The* (Tal) 115–23; introduction to 115–16, 272n4, 272n6; love for Muhammad 122–23; miracles of Prophet Muhammad 118; Muhammad as first Prophet 117–18, 120; Muhammad as savior 120–22; poetical tradition in 8; Prophet as caller 118–20; Prophet as guide 116–17
- visions: by Bamba 4, 149–50, 153–54, 277n13, 278nn20–21, 279n31; and blessing Prophet 245–48; by Busiri 151, 252, 277n9; by Dan Fodio 3, 28, 248; as glad tidings 239–40; by Khadija al-Shinqitiya 20; by Muhammad al-Bakri 245; by Niasse 6; not to be sought 240, 245–46; Satan cannot take Prophet’s form in 246; by al-Tijani 260n18. *See also* extraordinary occurrences; gnostics; gnostics, silence of; seeing God; seeing God and spiritual experience; spiritual experiences
- al-Wasaya al-Qudsiyya* (Zayn al-Din) 90, 91, 92, 101, 271n6
- wealth: to be spent for God 77–79, 145, 179; preoccupation with 71–72, 75–76; purification of 84, 270n24; slaves of 82–83
- Weimann, Gunnar 15
- West Africa: gender norms in 13; Sufism in 224, 242–43, 249–50, 256–57,

- 286n11, 289n61. *See also* French colonial authority; French colonial discourse; Islamic law in West Africa; Sufi scholarship of West Africa; Sufi scholars of West Africa
- witnessing. *See under* spiritual experiences
- women and gender norms in West Africa 13
- women as temptation 60
- women scholars in West Africa 18–23;
 lack of attention to 18–19; major
 names of 19–21; roles of in Muslim
 communities 21–23, 265n98
- worldliness (*dunya*) 147–48, 179
- worship (*ʿibada*): benefits of 73; conceit
 in 36–37, 243; litanies in 142–43;
 proper performance of 83–84,
- 270n23; showing-off in 47–49. *See also* litanies and daily offices; prayers (*salat*); remembrance (*dhikr*)
- al-Yadali al-Daymani, Muhammad
 (1685–1752): on reciting Qur'an 145;
 as source 24, 137–38, 139, 243; on
 troubles in this world 148
- zakat* 84, 270n24. *See also* charity
- al-Zawawi, Ahmad 246
- Zayn al-Din al-Khawafi (d. 1356) 90, 91,
 92, 101, 271n6