From "Part I: The Historical Context," chapter 2, "French Domination and the Challenge to Islam," 32–47.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss only one aspect of this complex, evolving situation: the confrontation of Tijani Sufism with French Islamic policy between the two world wars. The major French goal with respect to Islam was the maintenance of political stability. The deposition of Agibu marked the demise of the Umarian political kingdom; the French next went to work on the religious kingdom, a much more difficult task because the objective of attack was very elusive. Muslim leaders were to be found all over the Soudan, and they acted virtually independently of one another. Unlike state systems, the decapitation of religious organizations, like Sufi orders, did not necessarily result in their demise. So the French conducted surveys and compiled dossiers on religious leaders; all those who refused openly to declare their loyalty to France were considered suspect and were carefully watched. Muslims were consequently placed on the defensive; but even so, Muslim activity during this period was not simply a series of reactions to French initiatives. Islam, and the Tijaniyya order, possessed an internal dynamic of their own which was not susceptible to alteration by actions against individual Muslims. Tijani leadership evolved through a process which was very difficult to understand from the outside, especially for non-Muslims, and impossible to control without suppressing freedom of religious practice, something the French were loath to do even if they had been capable of it. The French were therefore caught in the ambivalent position of trying to control Islamic political influence while not suppressing religion. For their part, the Muslims found themselves living under non-Muslim rule, precisely the situation against which al-Hajj Umar's *jihād* had been fought. Rather than expanding to meet the imperatives of its theocratic ideology, Islam was now apparently in retreat as a political force. The battle-lines became drawn in such a way that many extremists interpreted cooperation or collaboration with the French as disloyalty to Islam, and they asserted that the "pure" practice of Islam could be achieved only in complete isolation from French contact.

The tensions of this situation focused on the issue of leadership. The turn of the century found many Tijanis anticipating the appearance in West Africa of a saintly leader who would take up the mantle of

spiritual authority which had been bequeathed by al-Hajj Umar. For a growing number of Tijanis in the 1920s and 1930s, this position was ascribed to Shaykh Hamallah of Nioro. But many Umarians, especially members of the Taal family, refused to accept the claims made on behalf of Hamallah; their protestations were supported by the French, who became increasingly fearful of Hamallah's burgeoning influence. The French tried to appoint their own Tijani leaders by giving their administrative "blessings" to certain selected individuals who were willing to act as their agents in smoothing over nascent conflicts. Their difficulty with Hamallah was that he refused to have anything whatsoever to do with them or their administration.

The nature and impact of the French presence

Between the two world wars French authority became relatively well established in the western Soudan. Visible social and political changes were set in motion to which administrators pointed with pride. Nonetheless, the French did not consider their position secure, and they remained especially sensitive to any activities among Africans which might evolve into an organized opposition to their policies or their presence. In very broad terms, French policy was aimed at maintaining Africans in small social and political units to inhibit the development of any broad-based solidarity. Islam was of particular concern because it was recognised as one indigenous institution which had the potential to unite large numbers of Africans against foreign domination. The French were firmly convinced that gradua1ly, over a long period, their own institutions would take root in Africa and, through the strength of their inherent superiority, undermine any lingering African resistance. A good example of this attitude was educational policy; rather early, a French educational system was introduced with the idea of producing future generations of Africans who would be prepared not only to operate the newly emergent westernized economy and administration, but who, more important still, would also be imbued with French culture and therefore understanding of and even sympathy towards French colonial aims. Such was the faith of some French administrators in the power of education. Today this view may seem vain and even romantic, especially since the eventual nationalist movements toward independence in Africa were generated by these same educated Africans. Nor should one believe that the French relied solely on such "soft" policies; control was everywhere maintained by a relatively harsh administration. The "soft" formulations were propagated for

public consumption; but on the ground few Africans escaped the more bitter aspects of French domination.

Agibu is a case in point; when he had outlived his usefulness to them, the French had no qualms about treating him high-handedly, even if publicly he was always referred to as a "loyal subject of France." But they would never have been able to occupy the Western Soudan without people like Agibu, Africans who for one reason or another had thrown in their lot with the Europeans. In Bandiagara itself there were never more than a handful of Frenchmen—military officers and, later, colonial administrators—whose major task was to ensure that the cadres of African chiefs, clerks and soldiers enforced official policy. Relatively few Frenchmen ever learned any African language well enough to communicate directly with the peoples they governed. In any case, new postings were so frequent, and the different languages so numerous, that reliance on African interpreters was essential. French colonial authority was therefore represented in Masina, as elsewhere in the Western Soudan, by a tiny group of Frenchmen and a large number of Africans on whom the French depended not only for manpower but also for their information about and communication with the people at large. Frenchmen living in these conditions were isolated and certainly must have felt insecure. For the most part administrators could not gain direct knowledge of what was going on around them because of the language barrier, and even when they could, local quarrels and rivalries appeared to them extremely petty. After all, the French felt they were building an empire and extending the benefits of French civilisation to less fortunate peoples. Local disputes not only hindered the progress of these grand projects but, more important, they could lead to outbursts which might threaten the lives of Europeans. Consequently a vast network of informers and spies was developed to keep close watch on every person of the least prominence who might be able to exercise influence on other Africans. Files were maintained on such persons, providing biographical information and assessing their loyalty to France. Movement was carefully controlled; even Agibu was not allowed to leave Bandiagara without permission. The slightest hint of unrest was quickly crushed, and possible local troublemarkers [*sic*] were transferred to other colonies.

This system lent itself to intrigues of Byzantine proportions, from which not only the French but also various African parties could benefit. The source of all local authority was the French colonial

administrator, the *commandant de cercle*. He appointed local African chiefs, oversaw the work of the cadres of clerks and interpreters, and employed spies and informers, a1l of whom acquired some degree of delegated authority with its attendant relative wealth and prestige. Chiefships, no matter how minor, were keenly sought after by the more ambitious. Influence upon the French administrator could be exercised through his African subordinates, through his interpreter, and even through his African mistress. The administration was also subject to manipulation; information which passed up and down the colonial chain of command could be and was modified to suit the needs of certain interested parties. It was difficult to know whom to trust and believe, and the French often disputed among themselves as to who among them truly "understood" the Africans. This nether world of colonial administration has been given more attention in fiction than in historical literature, but it nonetheless provided the context in which many a local decision was taken. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations, both accidentally and intentionally perpetrated, were not uncommon. It is not surprising in such conditions that young administrators often arrived at their first postings filled with idealism and enthusiasm, only to depart plagued by cynicism and paranoia, afflictions so common among Europeans in the Soudan that they came to be considered symptoms of a local disease which the French called "*la Soudanité*."

The pressures and strains of the colonial situation may have been more keenly felt by persons in authority like Agibu, or by certain French administrators, but they extended in one form or another to all levels of society in Bandiagara and Masina. Political institutions were not the only ones undergoing change; social, economic and religious relationships were also under considerable stress. Pressure for the emancipation of slaves increased during the first decade of the twentieth century with the ambiguous effect of obliging some people to work in ways they had never done before, while liberating others to employ their own labour for their own benefit. (Of course, having abolished slavery, the French adopted their own policy of forced labour for the execution and maintenance of public works projects.) The impact of emancipation was felt with varying force depending upon specific circumstances, but even if the immediate result was not particularly spectacular, the long-term implications were significant both socially and economically. The French also pursued an aggressive educational policy designed at the primary level to train Africans to read, write and speak French, and at more advanced levels to become

interpreters or to pursue various technical trades. Whereas some families welcomed the opportunity for their children to gain an *entrée* into the new political order, a considerable proportion of Muslims strongly resisted French schooling. By the second decade of the century the fledgling school system was firmly established, especially in larger centres of population, and recruitment was stepped up; many children of resisting parents were placed in school by force. Often, to avoid subjecting their children to foreign or non-Muslim values, families substituted children of servile status for one of their own to fill a school place allotted to them.

The emancipation of slaves and the extension of rudimentary education were tangible evidence of the French "civilising mission" in West Africa, whose progress could be documented by numbers: so many slaves freed, so many youngsters in school. Colonial administrators were not insensitive to the possible ramifications of these innovations. Emancipation was carried out according to local conditions; for example, a compromise was worked out with the pastoral Fulbe of Masina so they could continue to receive a portion of the harvest from their former serfs. With regard to education, some concern was expressed over creating a class of uprooted Africans who were alienated from their own society. But given these kinds of considerations, few Frenchmen seriously doubted the soundness of these policies, which they felt pointed the way to progress and to liberty. African reactions, of course, differed from those of the French and varied considerably among themselves. We have mentioned some of the obvious differences of attitude between former slaves and free men. The freedom and eventual upward mobility of former slaves resulted in some stress in the Soudan, especially among those who had owned large numbers of slaves. And if schools represented opportunity for some, they were seen by others as an attack on African values. This opinion was particularly strong among the religious leadership, who had real cause for concern.

Educational policy was but one aspect of a general attack on the established position of Muslims throughout French West Africa. As we have seen, prevailing conditions at the time of the French conquest compelled French authorities often to treat with Muslim leaders. Not only were Muslims, like Agibu, often placed in positions of authority, but the French adopted Arabic as their official language of correspondence with African rulers since Arabic scribes were more widely available than French ones. By the second decade of the

twentieth century conditions had changed, and the opinion was growing among colonial authorities that the greatest potential threat to France in West Africa was Islam. Policy decisions increasingly took this factor into consideration. In 1909, in promulgating his new "native policy," Governor General William Ponty expressed concern that Muslims should not govern non-Muslims because such situations might encourage the spread of "Muslim clericalism." In 1911 it was decreed that henceforth not only all administrative correspondence but also all judgements of native courts would be written in French. This decision was a serious blow to Islamic education in the Soudan because it eliminated the only official positions Arabists could acquire in the new colonial order. Earlier French policy had been to encourage Arabic education, albeit under their own close direction, in special schools of their own construction (in Dakar, Jenne, and Timbuktu); now such schools lost their practical *raison d'être*. In an official statement on educational policy, Ponty explained the kind of thinking behind these decisions:

> School is the best instrument of progress. . . . Everyone knows that the study of French is the most effective cure one can employ against [religious] fanaticism, and experience teaches us that Muslims who know our language are less imbued with prejudice than those who know only Arabic.

Of course, these decrees did not stop the spread of Islam, which was beginning to gain adherents more rapidly than ever. Islam was the dominant religion in the growing commercial and administrative centers in the Soudan, such as Mopti, Segu and Bandiagara. New arrivals seeking work in these towns came under Islamic influences and often converted. Almost all long distance commerce was controlled by Muslims; as trade expanded, so did Muslim influence. On the other hand, the concern of many Muslims that their fundamental values were threatened by French policies was also justified. The number of Muslims was growing, but the quality of their leadership was in serious decline. Many of the most learned scholars had left the Soudan when Amadu b. Umar fled before the French armies. The economic structure which had supported religious education had been severely shaken with the arrival of the French, and the Muslim ruling classes were either no longer in power or no longer had the means to support religious schools. Many teachers and scholars found it necessary to abandon their studies and seek their livelihoods in other ways. In the new political order the educational path to personal success would no

longer be Muslim schools but French ones, where children were given no religious instruction at all. Rather, they were taught "*morale*," which might best be described as how to be loyal and devoted subjects of France.

West African Muslims were not deprived of the choice as to how they might respond to these changes. One must remember that the perceptions of individuals about the source of their difficulties, or indeed their good fortune, varied widely according to local circumstances. The French were not always and everywhere seen as a problematical factor in everyday life. On the other hand, it would be difficult to find an example of an African, no matter how "collaborationist" he might appear, whose interests could be interpreted as completely at one with those of the French. The question most before the Muslim community was not how to expel the non-Muslim usurpers, but how Islam could survive and grow within the conditions now prevalent. Isolated instances of outright opposition to French authority occurred, but the basic pattern for Muslim leaders was acceptance of French sovereignty as a political fact. Public attitudes then ranged from open collaboration to neutrality. True neutrality was possible only through an anonymity bordering on invisibility. The French took great pains to observe the activities of marabouts and other Muslim leaders; any indication that a marabout enjoyed an influence beyond a few close friends or students led to increased surveillance which might lead to formal enquiries. Faced with the possibility of an administrative action against them, those marabouts who did not wish to be seen as collaborators adopted a position which might be called militant neutrality. They made no public utterance at all about the French, thus implying that secular politics was completely outside their concern, but given the particular context, this attitude might have profound political implications. Shaykh Hamallah had tried unsuccessfully to pursue such a policy; and the events which surrounded Cerno Bokar's relationship with Hamallah were laced with spies, informers and "collaborators." But the loyalties of persons involved in such affairs were never clear-cut. Seedu Nuuru Taal of Senegal, a traditionally educated grandson of al-Hajj Umar, acted on behalf of the French in the conviction that his interventions were in the best interests of Islam and, especially in the case of Cerno Bokar and the Hamalliyya, in the interests of the Tijaniyya order as he wished it to be constituted. By contrast, Amadou Hampaté Bâ received a French education and worked for most of his adult life for the French administration. He was drawn into the Hamalliyya movement through

his long and intimate contact with Cerno Bokar; however he was not averse to providing information to his French superiors (and colleagues) about the Hamallists, because he felt that by so doing he was aiding that movement.

If the French presence divided Muslim leadership within itself about how to relate to their new sovereigns, the changing social and economic conditions brought new pressures to bear upon the marabouts from the people they were ostensibly leading. In the broadest terms, traditional Muslim leaders would come under increasing pressure to adapt their religious practices to respond to a shifting constituency. Of course, the basic elements of Islam, such as the five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and so forth, are not seen to be subject to change. But religious practice in West Africa was deeply imbued with Sufi interpretations, as well as with popular belief in the extraordinary powers of some holy men, of the efficacy of supererogatory prayers, and of the value of talismans and charms.

The most direct challenge to this form of Islamic practice and belief was to come from the fundamentalist and anti-Sufi *Wahhabi* movement of Saudi Arabia, which became firmly rooted in Soudan only after the Second World War. But the pattern of communications which ultimately brought this movement to West Africa began much earlier in the century. More people began to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca; the subsequent increased contact with the outside world introduced more and more Muslims to alternative forms of Islamic social organization and of religious interpretations and expression. The situation was a dynamic one which required astute leaders who could direct the way through the transformations taking place. The French-educated Muslim who worked in the community of Europeans would necessarily view his religion differently than if he had never left the confines of his own village. But at the same time that French education could cause one deeply to question Islam, and even if not consciously then by sheer neglect to abandon it, European educational methods also brought a challenge to Muslim teachers. The adoption in the Qur'anic schools of Western teaching methods as well as curricula was initiated due to the catalyst of the new colonial situation.

The Tijaniyya Sufi order in West Africa

The reformist Muslim response to the changing situation in West Africa emerged in full force after the Second World War. Reformism was

based on fundamentalist Muslim principles which had evolved in the Middle East; it was therefore in many ways an imported response to the European challenge designed to transform traditional West African forms of Islamic practice and to strengthen Islam in general. But before the Second World War, the Muslim movement which caused greatest concern within the French administration in the Soudan was that which formed around Shaykh Hamallah, a Tijani leader in Nioro. In order to understand the origins and growth of Hamallism, we must first examine the structure and history of the Tijaniyya Sufi order in West Africa, an exploration which takes us far away from the immediate political concerns of the French colonial authorities. But perhaps the jarring juxtaposition of subject-matter which the present discussion requires is illustrative of the nature of the cultural confrontation which was taking place in West Africa at the time.

The literature of Sufism describes the ultimate Sufi experience as a union with God, or an annihilation in God, a concept which can perhaps be better understood if viewed from its broader Muslim perspective. "*Islām*" means submission, and the Islamic religion demands submission to God through adherence to His law as revealed in the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad. Sufis can be seen as Muslims who seek to acquire a personal and subjective experience of their relationship to God and thereby understand more deeply their submission to Him. This rather inclusive view of Sufism is in no way designed to obscure the fact that Sufism in its particular forms of expression includes a vast and diverse range of religious practices. Even so, the various Sufi orders which grew up were distinguished from one another not by any differences in the ultimate goal of their mystical practices, but in the methods for reaching this goal. These methods constituted a kind of religious rule which was set out by the founder of an order and which was based upon his personal experience of spiritual search. The Arabic word for Sufi order is *tarīqa*, meaning "path" or "way;" the orders were usually named after their founders, so that the Tijaniyya order might also be described as the Sufi way, or the religious rule, of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani. The founder (as well as subsequent leaders) of a Sufi order, particularly in the western reaches of the Muslim world, was called *shaykh*, and he was usually considered to have acquired saintly attributes. The Arabic word *walī* is often translated as "saint," although the term "friend of God" perhaps better communicates the connotations which underly the Muslim concept. The *walī* is one who is considered close to God; through his own efforts he has traversed the highest stages of spiritual development. His

profound spiritual understanding has been "opened" by God and his state of being has been transformed onto one of the highest spiritual planes. His perception transcends that of ordinary mortals, and he is considered to be in touch with extraordinary spiritual powers. One of the most salient features of West African Islam was the desire of Muslims to be associated with persons felt to have achieved these levels of saintliness.

Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani lived in North Africa in the latter eighteenth century. He was considered a *walī* by his followers, and the order which he founded was based on his authority as a spiritual leader. However, al-Tijani was unusual in that he claimed that his "way" was unique and consequently superior to all others. The historical spread of the Sufi orders up to this period had been rather organic in nature; all founders traced their spiritual heritage back to the Prophet Muhammad through a chain of *shuyūkh* beginning with their own Sufi master, then to his master, and so on. A graphic representation of these collected spiritual hierarchies would resemble a triangle with the Prophet Muhammad at the apex and the historically most recent *shuyūkh* at the base. Al-Tijani broke with this pattern. Although he had been affiliated with several orders, as was then common practice, at a certain stage in his spiritual development he claimed to have had a vision of the Prophet, not in a dream but while he was awake. The Prophet told him that he should leave all the other "ways" he had pursued and that he himself would be al-Tijani's direct intermediary to God. The Prophet also instructed him on all the prayers and recitations he should pursue. In this way, all the spiritual methods of the Tijaniyya way are claimed to have originated directly from the Prophet Muhammad, and all the usual chains of authority via other *shuyūkh* were eliminated. As a result of these visions and of the instructions given him by the Prophet, al-Tijani considered himself to have been selected for a special role in the history of Sufism. He came to view his position in relation to Sufism as analogous to that of Muhammad with respect to monotheism. Just as Muhammad was considered the seal of the Prophets, or the last Prophet whom God would send to mankind, and his religion, Islam, was considered superior to all other religions, so al-Tijani claimed to be the seal of the saints, and his way superior to all others. Adherence to the Tijaniyya way, it was claimed, virtually guaranteed attainment of paradise, and withdrawal from the order ensured damnation. Adherents were also prohibited from belonging to any other orders, nor could they visit the *shuyūkh* of other orders, thus stamping the Tijaniyya with a further air of exclusivity.

These claims brought a hail of criticism down upon the Tijaniyya from both Sufis and non-Sufis alike. The Sufis have been more or less continually under attack throughout their long history from more legalistically minded Muslims who have questioned their interpretations of the Qur'an and *hadīth*, and occasionally declared their practices to be unlawful or even heretical. But the Tijaniyya also elicited criticism from Sufi leaders because of Ahmad al-Tijani's unusual claims. When, during the nineteenth century, al-Hajj Umar was endeavoring to extend the Tijaniyya way in West Africa, he encountered the full force of these criticisms. His major work, the *Rimāh*, was written in response to these attacks. The book is a polemic on behalf of Sufism in general and the Tijaniyya order in particular. In it Umar defends belief in the saints and encourages association with them. He castigates those who deny or even question the elevated role of these "friends of God" who, he claims, are not only superior spiritual leaders but also qualified interpreters of the law, preferable to the "legalists" whose ability and effectiveness are limited by their literal compliance to a particular interpretation of the written word. The saints (*awliyā'*), however, search for the truth wherever it leads them. Mere association with the *awliyā'* is preferable to avoiding them, but better yet, according to Umar, every "intelligent person" should embark upon the quest which will bring him closer to God, because although God "opens" very few seekers, this level of spiritual attainment is possible for all Muslims. Umar's arguments are constructed in conformity with general Sufi concepts and rely for support on standard Sufi texts. Therefore when he turns his attention to the defense of Tijani doctrine, he points out that many Sufis have claimed to see the Prophet Muhammad in visions. He quotes one author as saying, "Everything has its distinguishing sign, and the sign of [spiritual] attainment by the worshipper is seeing the Prophet while awake." Having established that visions of the Prophet are accepted among Sufis, the rest of the argument falls into place. The Prophet can appear to whomever he wishes and direct a person as he wishes. Consequently, if one accepts the basic Sufi premises of the argument, there is no logical rejoinder to al-Tijani's claims. (One could, of course, question his veracity.)

The Tijaniyya order was spread in West Africa during the nineteenth century largely though the activities of al-Hajj Umar. His efforts at proselytization fall into three broad categories. First was his attempt on returning from his pilgrimage to attract new adherents to the order

in the Muslim centres of Borno, Sokoto, Masina and Futa Jallon. During this phase Umar directed his efforts primarily toward the more scholarly Soudanic community in order to form a group of Tijanis capable not only of attracting other followers, but also of defending the doctrines of the order against its detractors. The second aspect of his proselytization was in the influence of his many writings in which, as we have seen, he developed his own presentation of the new Sufi order. The third aspect was the influence of his *jihād* during which large numbers of people, directly affected by Umar's growing power, joined the Tijaniyya. The organization which grew up during Umar's *jihād* was as much political as spiritual. Each administrative centre in the new state (Dinguiray, Nioro, Segu, Bandiagara) was also a spiritual centre from where the leading *muqaddamūn* appointed under Umar's authority directed the spiritual affairs of the order. During these years of rapid expansion, the Tijaniyya therefore became associated with the social and political structure of a nascent Islamic state led largely by Futanke.

The fact that the Tijaniyya under Umar had spread in the wake of a *jihād* had considerable impact on the subsequent history of the order in West Africa. The spiritual essence of Tijani Sufism with which Umar had been endowed during his pilgrimage became increasingly obscured by the activities of warfare and the demands of political policy. Having begun with the *jihād* itself, this process of spiritual deterioration continued after Umar's death during the years of internecine strife among the various surviving leaders of his state, and if anything it intensified with the establishment of French colonial rule. The French conquest robbed the Tijaniyya of many of its leaders, who fled eastward to escape the invaders. Those who stayed behind were confused, not only as to how best to respond to the French presence, but as to what they should be most careful to defend: their social and political status, their personal spiritual authority or the religion of Islam in general. All of these were under attack, and there were strong differences of opinion about how best to respond. As we have seen, some resisted the invaders, others collaborated with them, and still others attempted in effect to ignore the entire situation, at least in the strict political sense. Cerno Bokar fell into this last category. He was neither uninterested in nor unaffected by the pressures and activities of life around him, but his primary concerns were religious and not political. A number of Cerno's discourses reflect his despair with the contemporary state of affairs, especially the condition of religious life. It was no doubt because of his extreme a-political stance that some of

his followers considered him the true spiritual heir to al-Hajj Umar's teachings. Here was a man who was, in a way, untouched by the worldly accretions brought into the Tijaniyya through the course of the *jihād*.

The major problem facing West African Tijanis at the turn of the century was the absence of widely accepted spiritual leadership. The order itself was growing rapidly; people flocked to it (and to others as well, such as the Muridiyya in Senegal) in their search for religious protection against the turmoil and confusion of the times. Shaykh al-Tijani himself had proclaimed a rather pessimistic view of his own epoch, suggesting that it was no longer possible, as it had been in the early days of Islam, for man to avoid sin. But although trapped in this inescapable cycle of decline, al-Tijani offered an absolute guarantee of salvation for all those who joined his order, a guarantee which came from the Prophet himself. This promise of salvation had strong appeal for many Muslims and operated as an important theme throughout the history of the order. But the teachings of the order also emphasized the need for a *shaykh* from whom the adherents must receive guidance and direction as well as spiritual sustenance. Although Tijani literature described the qualities that a *shaykh* should possess, no formal institutions of selection and entitlement existed. Of course, the founder of the order, al-Tijani himself, was considered by all Tijanis to be its most elevated spiritual authority, but as the order grew it split into various factions, each claiming its own special relationship to him. The vast majority of West African Tijanis in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were linked to the founder through al-Hajj Umar, although this was not the only line. Umar himself had first become a Tijani through a *muqaddam* of a Mauritanian branch of the order, and by the turn of the century various other North African lines of initiation had been brought to West Africa by travelling *muqaddamūn*. But Umar's position was special; he claimed to have been named the *khalīfa*, or successor, of the founder for all West Africa. He was authorized to appoint sixteen *muqaddamūn*, each of whom was subsequently authorized to appoint four others. Through this original group of spiritual guides (in fact, he only appointed ten) al-Hajj Umar's line of the Tijaniyya order was spread in West Africa. The authority by which the lesser *muqaddamūn* of this group appointed others is not clearly spelled out in the literature, but the order continued to expand and numerous additional *muqaddamūn* were appointed.

[. . .]

Shaykh Hamallah

Shaykh Hamallah emerged to prominence in the context of this search for spiritual leadership. Given different historical conditions, the movement which formed in his name would probably never have given rise to the political turmoil which surrounded it. But his attraction as a holy man was such that he became a catalyst for the release of the numerous social and political (not to mention, religious) tensions present in the western Soudan between the two world wars.

Two important contributions to the historiography of this movement have recently appeared, a doctoral thesis written at the University of Dakar by Alioune Traoré and a revised version by Amadou Hampaté Bâ of his biography of Cerno Bokar. Both these studies are sympathetic to Hamallah, representing as they do something of an inside view. However, they differ markedly from one another in emphasis, Hampaté Bâ's account relying mostly on oral evidence, and Traoré's largely on archival documentation, although he, too, conducted extensive interviews. Hampaté Bâ contends that most of the difficulties which surrounded Hamallah and his followers were the result of relatively minor personal jealousies and animosities blown out of all proportion by Hamallah's enemies and detractors. Traoré places the blame for Hamallah's misfortunes more squarely on the French administration, and he gently chides Bâ and Cardaire for not going further in 1957 in accusing "the tenants of the colonial system of partiality" in this affair. But neither Hampaté Bâ in his recent book nor Traoré in his well-researched thesis reveal all that they know or suspect about the tangled politics which underlay the Hamallist affair, because even today the issue has not been drained of its emotionality. As a result of this fact, and as a barrier to more exhaustive research into the subject, the Hamallist files in the National Archives of Mali are still closed to the public.

The French sources which are available tend to be openly hostile to the Hamallists, and even when they are not they are almost always out of touch with African views of events. Only very rarely was the gulf which separated Frenchmen from Africans ever effectively bridged, especially on an issue as volatile as the Hamalliyya. Not all attitudes were as extreme as those expressed in the following quotation, but it is a fair example of the flavour of French opinion about the origins of the

Hamalliyya movement in particular and of similar movements in general:

> . . . departing from an orthodox foundation, the appearance of an enlightened mystic, ecstatic visions, a new revelation emanating from the Prophet or from the Angel Gabriel from which arises a new Way which immediately discovers its field of activity in a frustrated mystical population eager for miracles and always receptive to the madnesses into which the Shaykh would drag them. Possessing only the faintest colouring of Islam, practically illiterate and backward, this population is therefore incapable of judging the point at which this new Way resolutely embraces the most complete heresy.

The emotional and pejorative language of this passage reveals the depths which misunderstanding and contempt could reach. Of course, in the Soudan of the period there were frustrated and gullible people for whom Hamallah had great appeal, but he attracted many other kinds of people as well: for example Muslim scholars, French-educated Africans, and level-headed merchants. Only in rare instances were the French able to grasp the nature of West African Islam and the internal dynamics of the Sufi brotherhoods. They saw Hamallah's movement as a threat, not only because of his broadbased support, but also because he would not openly defer to French authority.

The growth of Hamallah's movement and of opposition to him is complex and can be discussed here only in broad outline. The "Hamallists" became distinguished from other West African Tijanis for two fundamental reasons: first, they recited the *jawharat al-kamāl*, a prayer in the *wazīfa* (part of the Tijani litany of prayers; see Appendix II), eleven times rather than twelve times (which was the common Umarian and Moroccan practice), and secondly, they venerated Hamallah as a *shaykh* and a *walī*, and some persons even claimed he was a *khalīfa*, or direct successor to Shaykh al-Tijani, and a *qutb*, one who had attained the highest level of Sufi sainthood. In no other ways did Hamallists differ from other Tijanis on religious matters. These distinctive Hamallist characteristics also represent two of the very few facts about the movement on which all observers agree, which means that almost every other aspect of its origin and development are open to widely divergent interpretation. We are indebted to Hampaté Bâ and Traoré for their presentation of a generally accepted Hamallist view of the origins of the movement, but their evidence for this early period is

based exclusively on oral material. Not one contemporary Hamallist written document has been produced which could substantiate the course of events as presented by the oral accounts. French documents can only corroborate certain external events; they say nothing about the thinking of either Tijanis or Hamallists. And the oral accounts themselves are not free of contradictions and anomalies.

From "Part I: The Historical Context," chapter 2, "French Domination and the Challenge to Islam," 50–2.

The rapid growth of the Tijaniyya throughout West Africa during the colonial period was intimately associated with the development of these North African relationships, and the pattern can be discerned throughout the region. One of the best examples is the branch of the order developed by Shaykh Ibrahim Nyass of Senegal, who gained adherents throughout West Africa. In 1937 he was appointed *khalīfa* of the order by Shaykh Ahmad Sukayrij in Fez. The Tijaniyya in Kano, upon which Nyass was able to draft his movement, was based on a series of Moroccan initiations.

Al-Akhdar's activities seem to fall within this pattern of spreading North African influence, but he was also in competition with the majority of North African *muqaddamūn* in that he was an advocate of the "eleven beads," apparently the only one in West Africa at the time. He certainly preached the superiority of this practice, and even chided local Tijanis, claiming that they had gone astray in reciting the *jawharat al-kāmal* twelve times. This was more than a subtle criticism of al-Hajj Umar and led to conflicts disturbing enough to have al-Akhdar deported to Dakar for a brief period. Al-Akhdar thus planted the seeds of dissension in Nioro which were to grow into a bitter rivalry between the "elevens" and the "twelves," although the dispute itself did not reach maturity until some years later. Even when Marty wrote (his *Soudan* was published in 1920), he did not seem to consider the issue of *jawharat al-kāmal* to be particularly volatile. He judged Hamallah as potentially the most powerful Muslim leader in Nioro, but not to be a trouble-maker; he described him as reserved with the French but not an opponent. As for the political intrigues which by then had begun to surface among some of his followers, Marty explicitly absolved Hamallah of any part in them.

The question of "twelve beads/eleven beads" is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Hamalliyya movement for an outsider to understand. How could such a seemingly minor doctrinal point become a major issue of contention? It will be recalled that Shaykh al-Tijani received the litany of his order direct from the Prophet Muhammad in a vision. According to *Jawāhir al-Ma'ānī*, the *jawharat al-kāmal* should be recited as a part of the *wazīfa* eleven times, but late in his life al-Tijani added a twelfth recitation. Umar prescribed twelve recitations in the *Rimāh*, and twelve certainly became the most widespread practice in the order. Why this modification was made has never been clearly explained, but one would suspect it resulted from a vision. In West Africa a popular explanation is that on one occasion Shaykh al-Tijani arrived late for the recitation of the *wazīfa* when those present had already recited the *jawharat al-kāmal* eleven times. The prayer was repeated once more in the presence of al-Tijani who did not object and therefore, it was argued, tacitly approved the twelve recitations. This account is denied in North Africa; indeed, it would be surprising if a revealed litany of this sort could have been modified by such accidental means. Today most Tijanis, including many Hamallists, would argue that either eleven or twelve recitations is acceptable. Hampaté Bâ takes this view and offers an esoteric, numerological explanation of the relative appropriateness of eleven or twelve recitations; he even has Shaykh Hamallah himself saying: "Once again, I declare that the 'twelve' is not an error." Traoré, on the other hand, adheres more firmly to a strict Hamallist line; for him the modification of the original revelation of eleven recitations was a deviation, although his view fails to accept any possibility of change within the litany, even for acceptable esoteric reasons, such as subsequent visions.

Today in West Africa the specific issue of "eleven beads/twelve beads" evokes relatively little emotion; and it seems never to have done so in North Africa. Indeed, the volatility of the question appears to have been directly related to the expansion of Hamallah's movement and its resultant political significance. Many Hamallists proclaimed the "eleven" as a symbol of their superiority and as a badge of their identity; their enemies employed the term as an epithet against those who, they claimed, had betrayed the spiritual teachings of al-Hajj Umar. Although the doctrinal aspects of this issue were debated by Tijani scholars, the sometimes violent mutual recriminations between rival groups which occurred in West Africa in the 1930s and 1940s

seem a reflection less of fundamental religious difference than of the current social and political tensions.

From "Part II: The Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar," chapter 4, "Cerno Bokar as Student and Teacher," 98–101.

The teacher and his school

Cerno Bokar began teaching in about 1908, apparently after considerable hesitation. We do not know the reasons for his uncertainty; perhaps he was struggling with the implications of his mother's advice that one must first be capable of caring for oneself before presuming to care for another. Perhaps he was considering the pursuit of a metier other than teaching. Some years earlier, he had spent about a year in Bobo Dioulasso (Upper Volta) working as a tailor and embroiderer, at which he was particularly skilled. In any case, by about 1908 he was teaching Qur'anic studies to a few young children in his compound. The school grew slowly over the years and by the early 1930s was a flourishing institution offering instruction in the full breadth of the Muslim curriculum. Estimates of the numbers of students in attendance are widely divergent. Hampaté Bâ states that at the height of its activities in the mid 1930s the school boasted almost 200. This number seems exaggerated, but we do not know what categories of "student" might be included in it. On the other hand, French official estimates were always very low, and we do not know how they were obtained. Three archival references to Cerno Bokar's school appear during the period 1921–4 estimating between fourteen and seventeen students in attendance. There are no references for the 1930s until the Hamalliyya crisis when no figures were given. If we consider as "students" all those persons who looked to Cerno Bokar as a "teacher," in the broadest sense of these terms, then something like Hampaté Bâ's estimate is probably more accurate.

The activities of Cerno Bokar's compound were somewhat broader than what a Western reader might understand by the term "school." Instruction was offered in all levels of study from introductory Qur'an to advanced Sufi studies. Cerno directed the advanced studies himself, while elementary work was delegated to a younger man, Momadu Taalel, a relative whom Cerno raised as a kind of adoptive son. They were the only two instructors. The teaching schedule itself was ordered into specific "class" times for morning and evening instruction with

time off from Wednesday to Friday afternoons. However, the goals of
any actual course of study tended to be dependent upon the interests
and motivations of the individual student, and for the youngsters,
upon the demands of his or her family. Certain benchmarks of
accomplishment were formally recognised, such as the memorizing of
a section of the Qur'an, or the completion of a particular book, but
these were of course individual achievements. One did not proceed
even through the early years of school by grade or class. The "student
body" tended to be fluid, with individuals entering and leaving the
school at different times of the year. This high turnover occurred
without much impact on the continuity of study since the nature of the
instruction was largely tutorial.

The activities of the school went far beyond the formal teaching of
Muslim studies. Like most traditional West African religious schools,
Cerno's students paid only minimal fees, if they paid any at all.
However, they compensated their teacher by working for him. They
collected firewood, fetched water and performed other household
chores; more important, they also farmed his land. During the times of
planting and harvesting, instruction was given in temporary shelters
adjacent to the fields. These activities, especially the farming, not only
fed Cerno and his family, but also provided the economic wherewithal
to maintain the school. A number of students actually lived in the
compound; these were often, but not always, students from outside
Bandiagara and were almost completely dependent upon their teacher
for their food. Cerno also had to be prepared to offer hospitality to
visiting scholars or to others who might come to Bandiagara seeking
his counsel. These callers would invariably bring gifts and thereby also
contribute to the economic wellbeing of the school.

The child or young adult in school was therefore not isolated from the
daily demands of life; students participated in household and other
work much as they would do in their own homes. In many ways the
teacher became a kind of substitute parent; the student was expected
to be completely obedient to him, and the extent of dependence of a
student upon a teacher was often extreme, particularly in the case of
the student coming on his own from another town or village, who
would often arrive with nothing more than the clothes on his back; nor
would he even have the assurance that he would be accepted as a
student. Once accepted he would be expected not only to work for his
teacher but to treat him with extreme deference and respect. This
state of dependence, although occasionally exploited by teachers, was

an essential element in the educational formation of children in Muslim schools. It emerged not only from the traditional relationships which prevailed between parent and child, but was reinforced by religious teachings on humility. One was expected to learn how to be humble toward God from being humble towards one's parents, one's teachers and one's elders in general. It was in the relationship between the Sufi *shaykh* and his disciple that these rules of deference were most clearly articulated, but they were reflected in the rules of behaviour for students and children in general.

If the daily demands of life were not eliminated from school, a distinct separation nonetheless existed between the activities inside and outside the confines of Cerno Bokar's compound. This difference resided not only in the nature of the activities themselves, but in the approach and attitude taken toward them. Cerno often alluded to this difference in his discourses, in which he called his compound a *zāwiya*, or Sufi study center. He also referred to it as a "sanctuary of love and charity," as a place to which one comes "hoping to find the tranquility which is lacking in one's heart," and as a centre "for the praising of God." Although only Sufi disciples would have been expected to approach Cerno's compound with some understanding of what was implied in these allusions, every person attending the school of no matter what age was unquestionably affected by the commanding presence of the teacher from whom these kinds of statements proceeded. The young children may have had little direct contact with Cerno; the older students of "books" may have been deeply engaged in their studies, but none of them could have completely escaped the influence of the humble search for religious understanding in which their teacher engaged because it pervaded every aspect of activity in the compound.

Cerno's primary concern was to influence those around him, whether student, disciple, relative or acquaintance, toward undertaking the spiritual search to which he himself had been called. He was not heavy handed or insistent over this, but nor did he miss any opportunity to confront people with their own attitudes and actions. The following story illustrates his exceptional ability at seizing upon chance events to bring fundamental questions to the attention of his students. One day Cerno was speaking to a group of advanced students when a baby sparrow fell from its nest. No one moved to the aid of the squealing bird; for one thing it would have been highly disrespectful to interrupt the teacher. However, after a time Cerno Bokar halted his presentation

and called for the bird to be brought to him. Concluding that it was not injured, he climbed up on a stool to inspect the nest and discovered it had become dislodged. He secured the nest, returned the bird to it and, resuming his place, said to the group:

> I must speak to you of charity, for I am distressed to see that not one of you is adequately possessed of this true kindness of heart. And such a blessing it is! If you had a charitable heart it would have been impossible for you to continue listening to a lesson when this miserable little creature was crying out to you for help and soliciting your pity. But you were not moved by his despair; your heart did not hear his appeal. In truth my friend, the knowledge of one who commits to memory all the theologies of all the religions will be but worthless baggage if he does not have charity in his heart.

The younger students in Cerno's school would not have been expected to face up to the question raised on this occasion, but undoubtedly they would have heard the story.

In addition to the formal training of students, Cerno received in his compound a wide range of persons who came to him for different purposes: adults who were learning his catechism, those Tijani adepts who looked to him as their *muqaddam*, those who were being initiated into the esoteric sciences, and ordinary inhabitants of Bandiagara seeking advice or support. On Thursdays, when no formal classes were held, a group of scholars and teachers generally gathered in his compound for the reading and discussion of various books, usually the major Tijani texts, which were commented upon by Cerno himself. Rather than lectures, these were discussions, and occasionally rather heated ones. The frequenters of Cerno's compound, then, included a wide range of people from all walks of life, from various ethnic groups and with differing interests. Each of them had a personal relationship to Cerno which derived from their particular orientation, as student to teacher, as Tijani adept to *muqaddam*, as disciple to spiritual guide. But these various categories of people were not strictly segregated from one another even if they did not participate in the same activities. Non-scholars might sit in on a Thursday discussion; younger students might be present during an advanced lesson; informality would have been the order of the day. The only exception to this would have been the initiations and transmission of "secrets" which took place in private. This meant that Cerno Bokar's attitudes and

ideas pervaded the atmosphere of the compound and influenced everyone present. Although his discourses may have been directed to more advanced students and to Sufi disciples, they would have been heard by anyone who happened to be present. Their guidance and their encouragement were available to anyone who desired to listen.

From "Part III: The Spiritual Discourses," 151–53.

On the nature of man and religion. Cerno Bokar's discourses present a provocative commentary on man and his religion. His views were not dogmatic, but were singularly tolerant and sensitive; the basic religious tenets which he emphasized in his teaching did not differ from those preached by other Muslims in that he placed primary importance on the recognition of "the existence of God and His oneness" (D. 1), which implied the necessity for all men to submit to God and His law. But his interpretations were often at variance with predominant Muslim thought of the time. He saw the world as divided between those who believed in one God, and those who did not, and he was much more concerned to encourage the unity of the believers than to condemn the unbelievers (D. 3). His discourses are laced with pleas for unity and cooperation among believers who, he felt, attested "to the same truth" whether they were Muslims, Jews or Christians (D. 3). This tolerant and at times almost ecumenical attitude was justified by the Muslim doctrine that all the forms of monotheism which preceded Islam were valid. The first of these was the religion of Abraham, of which Islam considers itself a direct descendant. Tolerance of this sort was not universal in West Africa, but nor was it unusual; it was based on the Qur'an itself, and we have seen that the *kabbe* also made explicit reference to the Pentateuch of Moses, the Psalms of David and the Gospels of Jesus, as well as to the Qur'an.

Cerno Bokar was well aware that his views on these matters differed from those of many Muslims around him. But what is most essential for us to grasp in seeking to understand his thought is that he attributed these differences, not to any social, political or intellectual influences to which he or others might have been exposed, but to the level one attains in the development of personal faith. The operative conceptual pattern here is hierarchical and it relates to all aspects of Cerno's thought. We can probe this concept somewhat more deeply in examining Cerno's attitude to the *jihād* of the sword, which he described as "the mutual killing to which the sons of Adam submit in

the name of a God whom they pretend to love very much, but whom they adore poorly by destroying a part of His work." This attitude, like that of religious tolerance, was not unusual in West Africa, despite the far-reaching series *jihāds* which had swept across the region in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries. One could argue from the texts of the discourses themselves that Cerno Bokar had reached his conclusions through his own reasoning about the nature of man. Every human being, he asserts, has been endowed with "a particle of the spirit of God" (D. 1). So how can one be anything but tolerant toward the "vessels," which contain this particle; and how can men ever justify destroying one another in the name of God? Cerno even reinforces this position by quoting the Qur'an to the effect that "there is no compulsion in religion" (D. 1).

Although this kind of logical presentation of Cerno's thought is not without justification, he also says something quite different about how one comes to oppose the waging of *jihād*. Warfare in defence of religion, according to him, is characteristic of a certain group of people, "the common man, the masses, and teachers who are attached to the letter [of the law]" (D. 32). Among Muslims, these are the people who understand their religion as requiring nothing more than a strict and literal conformity to every aspect of the religious law. According to Cerno Bokar, the purpose of the religious law is to limit and contain the behaviour of man, "to deprive the faithful of the excessive liberty contained in the dissoluteness of irreligion" (D. 36). These constraining demands of the law are necessary for all Muslims; everyone must submit to the law. But Cerno Bokar did not believe that the practice of religion was defined solely by the precepts of the law, as do (according to him) most Muslims. Higher, more refined forms of religion exist, and movement between these different "levels" of religious life are determined by the nature and quality of an individual's faith. The faith of the majority of people is such that it can only relate to the specificity of the law and of ritual. This kind of religion is narrow, limiting and "intransigent" in belief, which is why its adherents often resort to war in defence of their beliefs. The second "level" of religious practice includes that minority "who have worked and successfully faced up to the trials . . . of the rigid law which admits no compromise" (D. 32). These people also conform to the law, but they can also see beyond it; their faith is more fluid and flexible, not in the sense that their religious practice differs from that of other Muslims or that they adhere to other doctrines, but in that they can "accept truths from wherever they come" (D. 32). They perceive that

the essence of all monotheistic religions is the same and that all believers worship the same God, and they can accept the outward diversities of religious practice because they are aware that all of them lead to the same goal. Consequently, they are much less likely to resort to warfare on behalf of their religion. The third and highest "level" of faith is that possessed by a tiny élite who are capable of directly contemplating divine Truth; these are the saints of Islam.

These three levels of faith, and their corresponding forms of religious expression, conform to the Sufi doctrine, which Cerno Bokar taught in his *mā 'd-dīn*, that religious practice occurs on three levels, *sharī'a* (the law), *tarīqa* (the way), and *haqīqa* (the Truth). Although we know from his teachings in the *mā 'd-dīn* that Cerno considered a certain amount of religious knowledge an essential pre-requisite for entry into the Sufi way, and although he stated explicitly that the constituent elements of the second "level" of faith "derive from understanding," his comments in the discourses depict faith as a quality (or a material substance) which can be modified not through reasoning but through religious practice, specifically through the recitation of prayers or *adhkār*. Cerno Bokar was not anti-intellectual—we have explored his belief that it was through the intellect that man becomes convinced of his need for religion—and the discourses provide many examples of how the intellect is employed to aid man's search by meditation on the Qur'an or in deciphering the esoteric lessons concealed in manifested existence. But it is only through recitations that faith is transformed, and a more refined quality of faith brings one a new capacity for understanding. This kind of thinking underlies Cerno's belief that not everyone is capable of understanding numerological analyses. Faith and understanding therefore progress together through the hierarchy of religious experience toward the perception and understanding of the 'Truth."

In addition to variations in the quality or "level" of faith, Cerno Bokar also thought that men differ among themselves in the nature of their "carnal souls" [*nafs*]. The carnal soul includes all those functions which man shares with the animals as well as what Cerno called his "psychic states;" this concept of the soul might be very generally compared to the contemporary western concept of personality. Man approaches religion, as indeed he approaches all his activities, through the agency of his carnal soul. Cerno believed that all men are religious, because as descendants of Adam all had been endowed with "a particle of the spirit of God" (D. 1). But because of the wide variations in the nature

of the carnal soul, all men were not receptive to the same kind of religious teaching or preaching, the effectiveness of which depended on a clear understanding on the part of the teacher or spiritual guide of the nature of the soul of the student or disciple. With proper teaching and guidance every person possessed the inherent capacity to progress through the Sufi way toward the "Truth" (D. 18). But most people did not embark on this level of religious search because they were unable to overcome the barriers constructed by their own "carnal souls." Cerno Bokar encouraged all people to pursue their religious search to the extremes of their personal capacities, but he knew that only very few persons would enter the Sufi way.