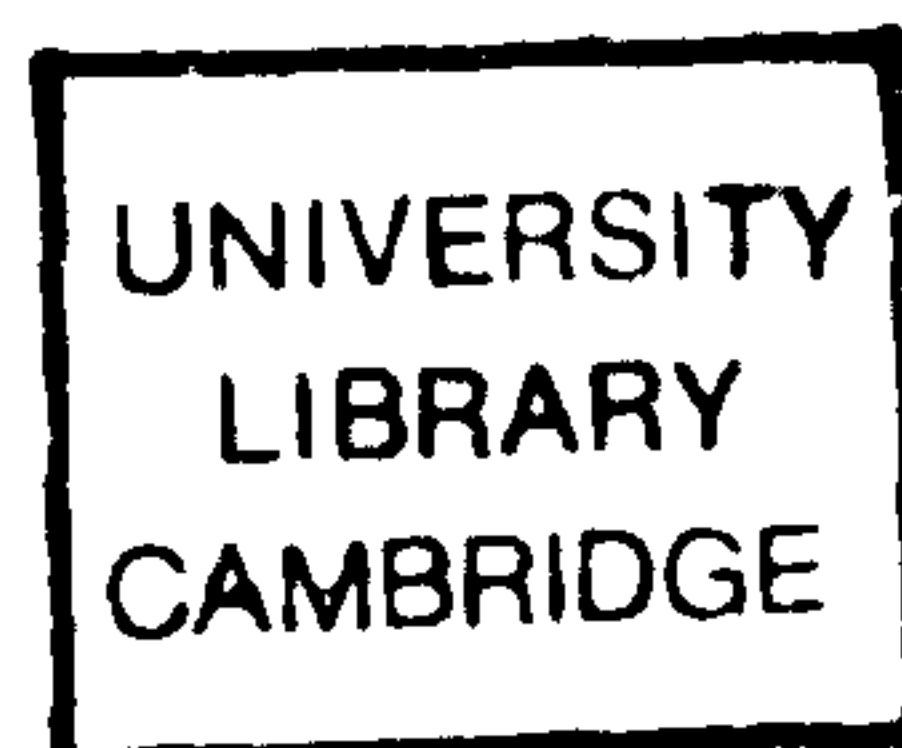


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Diverse styles of
Islamic Reform among
The Songhay of
Eastern Mali.

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DISSERTATION SUMMARY

Diverse Styles of Islamic Reform among the Songhay of Eastern Mali.

The general aim of the dissertation is to contribute to an understanding of Islamic reform in West Africa. To this end fieldwork was conducted among the Songhay of eastern Mali, a people who experienced a sudden rise in the popularity of Islamic reform in the early 1970's which divided many communities along religious lines. The term 'Wahhabiyya', often used to describe a trend in religious reform in West Africa which is inspired largely by the Saudi Arabian model of puritan Islam, is accepted by most members of this Songhay movement.

In the region of Gao, in which this locally-based Wahhabi movement emerged, the situation is one in which Islamic reform among the village population is more 'radical' and uncompromising than among town dwellers. The central concerns of the dissertation are to compare the social backgrounds and religious orientations of 'moderates' and 'radicals' and, in particular, to account for the strong appeal of Islamic reform among the villagers.

In order to assess the impact of religious reform attention is paid throughout the dissertation to the social and religious life of the non-reformist population. In tracing the background of the topic it was necessary to explore the history of the Songhay with specific reference to the introduction of Islam and its place in the 'traditional' religious complex as well as changes in the family, the economy and the political structure which have occurred since the advent of French colonization. These issues are set within a general comparison of the reformist and traditionalist communities which includes consideration of the way Islam is observed, the place of leadership and organization, and the way Islamic education is implemented.

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PREFACE

Fieldwork for this study was undertaken in Mali from June, 1984 to April, 1985. The major part of financial support was provided by a Grant-in-Aid from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and by an IODE War Memorial Scholarship. Other grants were provided by St. John's College, Cambridge, the Wyse Fund of Trinity College, Cambridge and the Richards Fund of the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge. I am very grateful for the support given from all these sources. St. John's College should also be mentioned as having supported a five-month stay in Paris, from January to May, 1987, for the purpose of conducting library research for this thesis. Another source of funding which was perhaps the most strategically important came from my wife's parents, Douglas and Beverly Bankson, who were there to fill the gap in several moments of crisis.

The first information on the development of the Wahhabiyya in Gao came from Tiebélé Dramé and Khadidia Bocoum of Paris. Their friends and relatives in Mali were instrumental in providing support and hospitality during the early phase of fieldwork. In Paris I benefitted greatly from discussions with Claude Meillassoux, Jean-Louis Triaud, Emmanuel Terray and Jean-Loup Amselle. M. Amselle, in particular, has been a source of information on Islamic reform in Bamako and our conversations were a good way to correct or confirm various ideas. The opportunity given me by Emmanuel Terray to present

some of my information to the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales also helped solidify some of my thoughts.

Early in my fieldwork I was provided with introductions to people in Gao who were important for the study by Mahmud Zouber of the Centre Ahmad Baba in Timbuktu. It is to him that I owe an effective entrée into Gao society and an early start to the information-gathering process. One of my greatest debts is to those many people in Gao who were willing to provide information and discuss what were sometimes sensitive issues. I was, in fact, refused only one interview and that was fortunately of only minor importance.

To the Bocoum Family of Gao I am grateful for their astonishing generosity.

In Cambridge I was encouraged and sagely advised by Martin Hinds, Jack Goody, my supervisor for the pre-fieldwork year, and Ernest Gellner, my supervisor both during and after fieldwork. Prof. Gellner was remarkably conscientious in his replies to my letters from the field and in providing judicious commentary on the dissertation as it progressed. At the School of Oriental and African Studies in London I had the opportunity to present some of my information and ideas in the seminar series 'Islam in Africa' chaired by Louis Brenner. Donal Cruise O'Brien read the penultimate draft of the dissertation and provided valuable comments. Drs. Brenner and O'Brien were helpful in other ways, as in suggesting relevant reading material, throughout the course of this project.

My final word of thanks is to my wife Barbro who has always been a source of support and encouragement, not to mention an astute critic of my written work.

This dissertation is my own work and is not the outcome of work done in collaboration. It is less than 90,000 words. The occasional use of material from my M. Phil. thesis is indicated in footnotes.

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NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

There is, as far as I know, no English grammar of the Songhay language, and there are wide variations in French systems of orthography. I have, therefore, tried to present Songhay words in an English phonetic transcription as consistently as possible. The only sound in Songhay that I have transcribed which requires a special diacritical mark is 'ē' which is pronounced similar to, but more emphatically than, the 'e' in 'red'.

In Arabic I have used a standard system of transliteration, with \bar{g} representing ج and ḥ , ṭ , ṣ , and ḍ representing ح , ط , ص , and ض respectively (ظ does not appear in the text). The English plural is used for all foreign words (eg. *shaikhs*, *alfas*, *zongos*) to avoid confusion between word forms that are often very different. I have not used diacritical marks in proper names or place names.

I. INTRODUCTION

Islamic reform consistently upholds the claims of a final revelation and a last prophet. It has no place for radical innovation. Religious reform, with remarkable uniformity, involves an attempt to return to an earlier, 'pure' version of the faith. Those who claim a new interpretation of the truth or who express doubt as to the finality of the scriptural message are considered enemies of the religion. Islamic reform, even in the form of radical, enthusiastic uprisings, turns for its inspiration to the golden age of Islam, the time of the prophet and his companions, for guidance in life, for a code of behaviour that can be scrupulously followed with little margin for error or neglect.

The Wahhabiyya is one of many Muslim reform movements which have as their goal the renewal of an earlier, uncorrupted version of Islam. In the Arab world, particularly Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, there are many contemporary movements whose shared aim is the full implementation of the *sunna*, the behavioural rules and guidelines recorded in the Quran and the traditions of the prophet (*ḥadīth*). The Takfir wa-Hijra (literally, atonement and migration), a major terrorist group of the 1970's, the Ikhwan al-Muslimi (Muslim Bretheren), and the Salafiyya (based on the root word *salaf*, meaning forefather or ancestor) are but a few of the reform movements which differ in their methods but which all seek the renewal of a faith which is perceived to have been corrupted

by those inspired by a western model of modernity.¹

However, in spite of a general similarity in terms of the goals of reform, and perhaps in approaches to such things as jurisprudence and eschatology, there is a range of possibilities in terms of the social settings of various reform movements, in terms of the social conditions which may encourage or hinder their development. In contrast to the wider relationships between state politics and religious reform, the social settings of such movements remain little explored and therefore provide the anthropologist or sociologist with a wide arena for research.

The word 'Wahhabiyya' comes from the Hanbali theologian and religious reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-87), a native of Najd in the eastern Arab Peninsula. The core of 'Abd al-Wahhab's teaching is the simple idea that the true Islam had been that of the first generation of Muslims, the prophet and his immediate successors, and that subsequent innovations had led to a neglect of the essence of Islam: the worship of a single, all-powerful deity. Any other god than God is to be rejected. The worship and veneration of idols and pious men must be avoided; even the will to perform such worship constitutes a wrongful act of devotion, a misapplication of that which is due to God alone (*shirk*).²

For many reformers inspired by the teachings of 'Abd al-Wahhab the use of the word 'Wahhabiyya' is in itself a

1. Cf. Sivan, 1985.

2. Hourani, 1983: 37.

contradiction of their religious principles. 'Wahhabism' seeks to purge the religion of the influence of mediators between man and God. Man's role is that of believer and expounder of the faith. The elevation of men to any higher status, such as that of a 'saint', is considered inadmissible. Thus an adherent of Islamic reform might consider the word 'Wahhabiyya' a contradiction of one of his fundamental tenets since it implies an elevation of 'Abd al-Wahhab to an unacceptably high position. The veneration of any man is an act which brings with it the risk of inadmissible sanctification. The members of reform movements inspired by 'Abd al-Wahhab themselves prefer the terms *ahl al-Sunna*, people of the *sunna* or, in the case of the West African reformers described here, *anṣār al-Sunna*, helpers of the *sunna*. In the region of the Niger bend where research for this study took place, however, popular usage has faded the pejorative implications of the word 'Wahhabiyya'. I have used the word 'Wahhabiyya' in reference to the reformist community because it has become part of the current usage and many adherents of this trend in Islamic reform have accepted it as an appropriate way of describing the source of their religious principles.

In the late 18th century the reformist teacher 'Abd al-Wahhab joined forces with the princely warrior Ibn Sa'ud to rally the Bedouin into a powerful force that conquered much of the Arab Peninsula. It was the dynamic of 'Abd al-Wahhab's simple puritan teachings and Ibn Sa'ud's strong military leadership that gave this first Wahhabi conquest the strength it

needed to succeed.³

The Ottoman empire eventually dismantled this first Saudi empire but after several successes and reversals the royal house of Sa'ud, still inspired by the teachings of 'Abd al-Wahhab, came to secure a stable position of power in Saudi Arabia. This more definitive conquest which preceded the formation of the contemporary state was undertaken in the early part of this century by Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud with the aid of the Ikhwan, a fanatical group of settled Bedouin which rigorously adhered to Wahhabi doctrine. The members of the Ikhwan earnestly believed that they would attain paradise through death in battle. With such strong religious conviction they set aside the traditional codes of Bedouin warfare, which minimized the toll on life, and unleashed furious attacks against those whom they considered infidels, attacks which terrorized their opponents and eventually led to ibn Sa'ud's victory over Sherif Hussein in the Hijaz. After this successful conquest Ibn Sa'ud's warriors had to be subdued to prevent them from ignoring new national boundaries in their raids against 'infidels' and ultimately from turning against their patrons in power.⁴ In a more subdued form the teachings of 'Abd al-Wahhab remain a strong ingredient in contemporary Saudi Arabia.

With Saudi Arabia as the guardian of the Muslim place of pilgrimage, Islamic reform gained an important advantage in its promotion of change. In West Africa, as in other parts

3. Cf. Philby, 1930.

4. Cf. Habib, 1978.

of the Muslim world, we find the prestige of the Saudi state and the mechanism of travel and study in Mecca and Medina important ingredients in the spread of reformist ideas; important enough, at any rate, for the term 'Wahhabiyya' and many of its associated teachings to be accepted by reformers in the hinterland of Islam.

Wahhabism first developed as a movement in French West Africa during the 1940's and 50's. This development is discussed by Kaba in *The Wahhabiyya*.⁵ Kaba places special emphasis on the political influence of Islamic reform in pre-independence politics. He points to two main sources of influence in the formation of the West African Wahhabiyya: the pilgrimage to Mecca and the return of African students from Al-Azhar University in Cairo where they had been influenced by the teachings of a minority of reformist scholars. It was the return of these half-dozen students from Al-Azhar in particular which provided the Wahhabiyya in Bamako with leadership and direction. Leaders of the Subbanu al-Muslimi (Muslim Youth) movement in Bamako consciously tried to avoid a hierarchical or authoritarian organization, but their association would have been ineffective without the guidance and organizational abilities of its educated leadership. Kaba stresses the place of the Wahhabiyya in opposing colonial rule and the cultural influences of the west. Thus his work is of particular interest to historians and political scientists. He gives us little sense, however, of the social

5. Kaba, 1974. Cardaire, 1954 and Chailley, 1959 cover some of the same material from the point of view of the French administration.

basis of the Wahhabi movement's appeal in West Africa.

More light is shed on the problem of the social origins of Wahhabism in Bamako by Amselle in *Négociants de la Savanne*,⁶ a study of Kooroko traders in Mali and the northern Ivory Coast. Early in the colonial period the Kooroko were a caste or sub-group of blacksmiths and griots in Fulani society, but with the political stability brought about by colonial rule they became successful as traders between the Savannah and the forest regions of the coast, their specialty being the trade in kola nuts. The rise in the financial status of the Kooroko was accompanied by a strong adherence to Islamic reform. Wahhabism became, for many Kooroko traders, an important part of their new social position. Lacking an avenue for social mobility in traditional West African society, the Kooroko turned to reformist Islam as the accompaniment to their material prosperity.

Trading groups, of which the Kooroko were one of the most important, were central to the development of the Wahhab-iyya in West Africa, particularly in Bamako which was strategically situated as a trading centre. Since independence, however, the appeal of Wahhabism has increasingly spread to other social groups including students and petty officials. This consolidation of popularity is evidenced by a rapid increase in reformist mosques and madrasas, especially in urban centres.

Also within the past decade there has been an increase in radicalization, such as in Bamako where a splinter group

6. Amselle, 1977.

of young reformers, calling themselves '*La Renaissance de l'Islam*', is taking an aggressive stand against those whom they consider non-Muslim. Their opponents include the more moderate Wahhabis whom the radicals insist are too compromising in their approach to religious change. Evidence of recent radicalism comes in the form of an open letter entitled '*Notre appel à la jeunesse Islamique du monde entier*', of which the following is an extract:

Jeunes musulmans du monde entier apprêtez-vous pour la defense de l'Islam contre ceux qui veulent transformer ou égorger la religion musulmane, que ceux-ci sachent qu'un sabre est apparu pour les égorger. Les ennemis de l'Islam doivent savoir qu'ils sont dans un piège certain et qui va les détruire et ils n'auront pas d'échappatoire.

Ceux qui se vantent en se faisant passer pour champions de l'Islam alors qu'ils ne sont même pas dans l'Islam, sont désormais connus. Tous musulmans qui ne se conforme pas à la Sunna du Prophète MOUHAMED (Paix et salut sur lui), suit le diable de Satan. ⁷

The post-independence period has also seen the expansion of Wahhabism into the countryside. Within the past several decades the Wahhabiyya has found a place in a number of agricultural villages including those of the Bambara and the Dogon, the latter being especially considered (particularly by promoters of tourism) to be stalwart defenders of animism. In the Gao region Islamic reform among the Songhay, the movement which we examine here, has both an urban and a rural appeal. It is not a unified movement. Most urban reformers, while

7. I am grateful to Jean-Loup Amselle for providing me with a copy of this document. More information on recent trends in Bamako can be found in Amselle, 1986. The original of this letter is in French.

stressing the need for change, are tolerant in their approach to non-reformist Muslims. Radicalism occurs primarily in the villages where those who do not belong to the reformist camp are considered infidels (*kafir*).

Such rural reform movements have not developed exclusively in the recent past. The *Kabbe* movement among the settled Fulani of Futa Jallon and Upper Volta in the 19th and 20th centuries aimed to 'purify' and 'simplify' the teachings of Islam and to make them more accessible to non-literate Muslims. '*Kabbe*' is the Fulfulde equivalent of the Arabic word '*aqida*', meaning 'article of faith', the article in question being the *tawhīd* or doctrine of the unity of God. This doctrine in the *Kabbe* movement became the platform of sectarian division in which, for example, only 'true believers' were qualified to slaughter animals.⁸

Many similar examples of rural Islamic reform, however, are recent, a fact which suggests that the social factors stimulating rural Islamization have become more widespread and forceful of late. In northern Nigeria, for example, a rigorous interpretation of Islam is gaining acceptance among almost all social groups, but some of the most radical reformers are the *tafsīr mu'allims* of Hausaland.⁹ These are itinerant clerics who use the Quran as a basis for 'preaching' Islam, for interpreting the meaning of the text to those who are not literate in order to encourage a greater commitment to the faith. The full implications of the development of

8. Brenner, 1984: 84.

9. Jamal Abun-Nasr, personal communication, 1986.

this radical movement have yet to be understood--official secrecy and distortions of events have made complete analysis impossible--but an uprising led by a *tafsīr mu'allim* in December, 1980 which resulted in the loss of many lives, points to the possible consequences of radical Islamization and resistance to it by a non-reformist community and by the state.

In Senegal an agricultural Muslim community of the Tijani order shows a similar stress on scriptural piety and a rigorous application of Muslim practices.¹⁰ The region of Madina Gunas is the contemporary setting of a reform movement among the Malinke and Fulani which strictly implements the *sunna* in every detail of daily life, the slightest transgression being severely punished. Leadership is centralized, with the founder of the movement, Cerno Muhammad Sayid, acting not only in a religious capacity but also exercising considerable influence upon local administrative authorities. In spite of a nominal adherence to the Tijaniyya order there is a surprising similarity between this movement and the anti-Sufi Wahhabiyya of the Songhay, with its scrupulous application of Muslim practices, its differentiation from the non-reformist community through such things as dress and prayer times, and its centralized network of village leadership.

If we combine these two examples, from opposite sides of West Africa, with the observation that Wahhabism has very recently been accepted in a number of traditionally 'animist' societies, the Bambara, the Dogon and the Songhay, we must

10. Wane, 1974.

conclude that the Islamization of village societies is no longer an infrequent occurrence.

This trend towards the ruralization of reform has not previously been isolated as a problem and in choosing to study a rural group with radical leanings I hope to bring more attention to Islamic reform as a factor in social change in rural West Africa.

There are special problems inherent in the close study of a 'community of conversion'--a religious community which, especially in its inception, recruits only those who have undergone a religious 'conversion'. This is true for the reform movement in Gao where we find that the older generation of Wahhabis, the shakers and movers of the movement, have undergone a change of religious values and belong to the group by virtue of a new commitment to Islam.

To some extent almost all societies are initially closed to the ethnographer's probings and only later accept him as a part of the local geography. In the community of conversion, however, there persists an unbridgeable gap between the 'true believers' and the 'infidels'; and unless the ethnographer wishes to feign adherence to beliefs he does not truly hold, he remains outside the group. I was partially accepted among the Wahhabis because of being perceived as a potential convert. But there is a limit to the patience of members of a group which believe themselves to have access to the

religious truth toward those who do not have a similar enthusiasm, however sympathetic they may be. The status of 'potential convert', therefore, had its limits and one hurdle in conducting field research was to make the most of this position before a greater commitment was demanded.

A particularly difficult situation in conducting field research which arose from my position as a non-convert studying a closed religious community was a reluctance on the part of the radical Wahhabiyya's central leadership to permit access to the villages whose inhabitants acknowledged their authority. This began as a suggestion on their part that I confine my enquiry to the capital of the rural movement, Dar al-Salam, that research in other villages would not be as useful to me. I ignored this suggestion and made several trips to both the reformist and the traditional quarters of Berra, Bagoundje and Magnadawe.¹¹ When I began making arrangements for trips to more distant villages the reformist leadership became more adamant and barred me from visiting any reformist community other than Dar al-Salam. Their opposition to my plans can be explained by a concern that in the villages I would find that religious practice was in some respects inconsistent with belief and that by welcoming me to Dar al-Salam they could control the kind of information I received and display the reformist community at its best.

It was important not to accept the invitation to stay for the duration of my field research in Dar al-Salam. This village has the status of 'capital' of the rural reform movement,

11. See map, p. 117.

a position which is associated with greater control on the part of the leadership and with a more effective insulation from non-reformist villages and from the town. Staying in Dar al-Salam would have greatly limited the quality of the information I obtained since in this village my mobility and contact with the laity of the movement were restricted. It would also have led to a one-sided understanding of religious conflict. Wahhabism in Gao is accompanied by social tensions and conflicts which are important to consider for a picture of the social bases of reform to emerge. It was therefore necessary to avoid showing a bias in favour of either Wahhabis or traditionalists. To become a nominal member of any one group would have closed down the flow of information from its rival; any outward show of sympathy towards one faction or the other would have been interpreted by some as a defection. It was surprising in reality how effective this balance was in obtaining information. Each group was anxious to show the truth of its own position and the aberrance of its rivals'.

Even in visits to Dar al-Salam, moreover, obstacles were encountered--such as unexplained delays in receiving replies to letters written to arrange trips and other delays because suitable guides were supposedly not available--and I was limited to three visits totalling two weeks duration. The reformist leadership, it appeared, was seeking a full commitment on my part to their religious programme and some leaders were opposed to my visits to Dar al-Salam because of my unwillingness to remain there on a permanent

basis.

These problems in gaining access to radical Wahhabi villages would probably have prevented me from obtaining a complete picture of the movement were it not for the possibility of contacting members of the reformist community on a daily basis in Gao-city. This contact took place at a lodge they had set up to accommodate members of the movement who needed to stay in the town, usually to do business in the market or occasionally to attend meetings of the leadership which were held there because of its central location in relation to the surrounding villages. Regular, informal visits to this lodge were a vitally important source of news and information from the villages and a direct way to learn about the beliefs and practices of the reformists. Here I was accepted without reserve and was able to talk with members of the Wahhabiyya who came to the town from many of the reformist villages. It was here, too, that I occasionally met with Seydu Idrissa, the spiritual head of the village reform movement. I was especially welcomed to pose questions to him concerning the 'correct' practice of the religion and was also able to observe such things as his style of preaching and worship as well as the behaviour of others towards him. In this respect the lodge in Gao was an important supplement to observations made in Dar al-Salam. I was also able to note the daily activities of the laity and in setting up residence close to the lodge I could occasionally receive visits from members of the movement away from the scrutiny of village leaders.

By centring my research in Gao it was possible to discover the differences between the moderate and radical Wahhabis and to pose the questions that arose from these differences. Leaders of the moderate Wahhabiyya were not only able to provide information on their own activities and beliefs but were also acquainted with important figures in the radical Wahhabiyya, having collaborated with them before community divisions took place. Moderate reformers who acted as executive members of the Association Malien pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam were also able to furnish information on the political ambitions and activities of the leaders of the radical movement.

With this combination of difficulties and opportunities in conducting field research it was not advisable to attempt to gather detailed information on a particular village or community. Rather, I have tried to make a virtue of necessity in presenting a wider picture, a broad consideration of the origins of the Wahhabiyya and its effects on traditional Songhay society.

These limitations aside, there remains something to be gained from attempting to study a reformist community from an anthropological perspective. There has been, first of all, a tendency in the ethnographic literature on agricultural societies in West Africa to minimize the presence of Islam in favour of the 'original' animist religions and systems of cosmology. The study of an Islamic reform movement in a rural setting redresses this ethnographic imbalance, showing not only how Islam has progressed in rural Africa, but also how its presence has been underestimated or ignored by earlier

researchers.

Secondly, in the literature which starts from a wider perspective, historians and other specialists in African Islam have usually stressed the importance of nomadic societies and the urban environment as settings which favour religious universalism, the countryside being considered unfavourable to the genesis of a 'purified' faith. In the not too distant past this was essentially true but the case presented here of radical reform in the countryside is an exception to this pattern of Islamization; it therefore gives us the opportunity to consider how rural participation in Islamic reform developed as well as to evaluate some theoretical approaches to the development of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa.

I will now elaborate these two points in trying to outline some of the previous scholarship to which the present research relates.

1) To those familiar with the ethnographic material on the Songhay a study of Islamic reform, as practiced by them, may come as a surprise since past research has focused overwhelmingly upon their animist or semi-Islamic practices. Islam, while not completely ignored, is glossed over in the ethnography. Only in tracing the history of the empires of the 16th and 17th centuries does the literature on the Songhay convey an impression of the firm presence of Islam.

The Songhay are not the only social group in French West Africa whose religion has been presented in a misleading fashion, whose religion has been 'mystified'. Two other societies among which Islamic reform has recently developed, the Dogon

and the Bambara, have been central to the development of French ethnography and have been presented in a way that makes the contemporary appearance of reformed Islam an astonishing social transformation. The neglect of the wider religious context in which Islam has for centuries had a central place, among the Songhay as among other social groups, can be linked to the objectives and methods of fieldwork conducted among 'animist' societies which may be unfamiliar to those steeped in the traditions of British social anthropology and which may be usefully summarized here.

In France during the late 1920's and early 30's the first efforts toward the implementation of formal anthropological fieldwork were under way, motivated by several important factors. The professional or academic reason stemmed from the poverty of field information collected by amateurs, usually colonial officials, missionaries or explorers. Durkheim, for example, was the victim of a division of labour between the ethnographic collector and the savant (how different his theories of primitive classification would have been if he had conducted his own fieldwork among the Australian Aborigines!) It was this situation that Mauss, Levy-Bruhl and Rivet tried to remedy in establishing, in 1925, the Institut d'Ethnologie, an institution whose central goal was, in Rivet's words: "de donner aux futurs maîtres de l'ethnologie l'occasion de compléter leur apprentissage théorique par une initiation pratique qui serait pour eux aussi décisive que l'est l'épreuve du feu pour le soldat." ⁸

8. Cited in Jamin, 1984: 21.

Field expeditions were also encouraged by popular sentiment. Such a sentiment was clearly evident in the inauguration of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition of 1931. Organized by the Institut d'Ethnologie and the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, the Dakar-Djibouti expedition was the first and most ambitious project in the history of professional French ethnography. The very title given the expedition, 'mission Dakar-Djibouti', gives some idea of its scope: to explore the geographic, linguistic and ethnographic background of sub-Saharan Africa from coast to coast. Most of the funding for the expedition came from the French government, but a significant, and for us a more interesting, contribution was also made by Alfonso Brown, a world bantam weight boxing champion of Panamanian origin who organized and fought in a boxing gala, the proceeds of which were given to the Dakar-Djibouti expedition. As Jamin⁹ points out, this was a symbolic act which brings into relief the popular appeal of this and similar projects: the idea of 'roots' had taken form. Al Brown gave the proceeds of his boxing spectacle so that the world of his ancestors would be better known, so that his black friends would be better respected.¹⁰ On the eve of the gala, Marcel Griaule, the scientific and administrative director of the expedition expressed the popular objective of the mission in an article in *Paris Soir*: "rendre possible entre les peuples coloniaux et les peuples colonisés grâce à une connaissance meilleure des mentalités de ces derniers, une collaboration plus féconde, s'exercant sur un plan moins brutal en même

9. Jamin, 1984: 8.

10. *ibid.*

temps que plus rationnel." 11

Besides paying lip service to the expedition's potential contribution to harmonious colonization, it seems that it was above all the anti-racist mission of bringing to light the complexity and elegance of 'primitive' thought that led Griaule to initiate and direct the expedition and later to spend the rest of his professional life studying the Dogon, a society early noted by explorers and administrators as possessing a rich religion and mythology. The Dogon, for Griaule, represented a misunderstood people, unjustly labelled 'savage', an opinion which, he writes, "est partagée par certains Noirs musulmans qui, intellectuellement, ne sont pas mieux outillés que les Blancs pour apprécier ceux de leurs frères fidèles aux traditions ancestrales. Seuls, les fonctionnaires qui ont assumé la lourde tâche d'administrer ces hommes ont appris à leur aimer."¹²

Behind Griaule's great love for the Dogon, especially for their colourful rituals and myths, lies what has been perhaps the most important and most understandable motivation behind African ethnographic research: the awareness that the ancestral traditions were fast disappearing under the pressures of colonial rule. Dieterlen, for example, mentions in the preface to her famous study of Bambara religion the sad and oft-noted fact that "nous avons devant nous le dernier état de cette religion..." 13

11. In Jamin, 1984: 9-10.

12. Griaule, 1939: 18.

13. Dieterlen, 1951: xvi.

Ethnographic research on the Songhay, as for other societies in French West Africa, became an effort to record for posterity the customs and practices that were so fragile in the face of colonial rule. Rouch, in *La religion et la magie Songhay*,¹⁴ while acknowledging the strength of Islam in certain regions, sees it as essentially complementing the animist religion. He leaves aside discussion of the place of clerics, Quranic education and the Muslim brotherhoods in Songhay society and contents himself with scattered references to Islamic influence in the traditional religious complex.

Boulnois and Hama in *l'Empire de Gao*¹⁵ pay even less attention to Islam among the Songhay. Their goal appears to be to uncover that which is most ancient in the history and customs of the Songhay, to glimpse the unadulterated culture before, it is implied, the clues to the past are lost.

With this concern over the disintegration of 'ancestral' societies in mind, it is significant that the first expeditions conducted in French West Africa were associated with museums, especially the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero (which in 1937 became the Musée de l'Homme). The Dakar-Djibouti expedition, in its mission to preserve ancient customs for posterity, was marked by a strong emphasis on collection. Over 3,000 objects were collected during the course of the project, including puppets, masks and dancing headdresses, sculptures, boxes, stools, musical instruments, etc; 3,000 photographs and 1,600 meters of film were taken; altogether 70 cases, representing

14. Rouch, 1960.

15. Boulnois and Hama, 1954.

more than 5 tonnes of material were returned to the Musée d'Ethnologie du Trocadéro.¹⁶ The relevance of this drive to collect material objects lies in the relationship between this activity and 'non-material' ethnography. The enquiry into African mentality became not only anchored to *things*--take, for example Griaule's *Masques Dogon* which principally explores the symbolic significance of these captivating objects--but exploration into purely mental constructions such as myths took on the air of a collection for presentation to the public. The inevitable preference for beautiful or interesting objects (this in spite of Revet's and Rivière's injunction that "l'objet devait moins plaire que renseigner"¹⁷) was paralleled by a preference for descriptions of colourful social behaviour and systems of thought.

Returning to the ethnography of the Songhay, we see that even today this trend is not altogether absent. In a recent book, *Guérisseurs et magiciens du Sahel*,¹⁸ Gibbal discusses with unconcealed regret the disappearance of some aspects of the traditional Songhay religion. The heading he gives to this discussion is '*Les cultes Songhay face à l'Islam*'. Here Islam is not simply ignored (consciously or otherwise), it has become the enemy--just as wind and sand are the enemies of the archaeologist--the agent responsible for the erosion of traditional culture.

Islam is excluded from the subject matter ostensibly because it is not part of the archaic essence of the local faith. Islam is not picturesque and is not fragile; as a

16. Griaule, 1932.

17. In Jamin, 1984: 60.

18. Gibbal, 1984.

world religion it can be studied in other contexts and is therefore not so rewarding a phenomenon as the archaic pagan cults with all their local colour and exuberance. Islam for the ethnographer is like granite for the prospector; it is grey and ubiquitous.

Thus we find that the orientations and methods of ethnography undertaken among 'ancestral' societies in French West Africa, especially that of the colonial period, resulted in a selectivity of material which acted in favour of what was perceived to be ancient, timeless, indicative of a highly developed indigenous culture and against the full consideration of Islam, a 'foreign' intrusion.

We do have some idea, however, of how far this selectivity has kept us from appreciating the diverse cultural influences operating in West Africa at the turn of the century. Marty,¹⁹ in his exhaustive survey of the extent of allegiance to Islam and the level of learning accompanying it in French West Africa undertaken under the auspices of the newly established colonial government, gives us an idea of the strength of Islam in rural societies not long before the arrival of the first ethnographic expeditions.

The Dogon, while very strongly attached to their traditional religion, had earlier undergone forced conversion in several villages under pressure from the neighbouring Islamic strongholds of Macina and Bandiagara. Having returned to their animist practices after French 'pacification', the Dogon in some areas were being faced with peaceful efforts at

19. Marty, 1920.

proselytization, with minimal results, it is true, but nevertheless a process that has rapidly accelerated during the course of this century.²⁰

The Bambara, considered another bastion of paganism, principally because of their resistance to the *jihād* of al-Hadj Umar Tall, had long demonstrated a receptivity to Islam-- in some areas more than in others. The Bambara of Issa ber are described by Marty as having submitted to Fulani domination and converted to Islam, though their faith was at the time 'luke-warm' and not without some vestiges of traditional practices.²¹

Among the Songhay, as we shall see, the presence of Islam is far more clear since the histories of the Mali and Songhay empires are testimony to its development for over nine centuries. We thus find that those investigating the Songhay religion consistently sidestep the Gao area and concentrate their research on the region downstream from Ansongo or southwest in Hombori where traditional practices remain more intact.

In taking Islamic reform as my subject matter I too will be guilty of stressing one aspect of Songhay religion, but this is an aspect which is found most clearly in a group of specific villagers whose inhabitants distinguish themselves from their 'non-Muslim' neighbours. In considering this group of reformers I hope to balance the ethnographic picture of the Songhay and to at least partially account for the fact that this picture is rapidly changing in the direction of

20. Marty, 1920:

21. Ibid:

greater Islamization.

2) We might also be led to doubt the probability of Islamic reform in the African rural setting because of the ideas expressed in works with a wider scope, which try to encompass a broad spectrum of Islam and the social order in sub-Saharan Africa. Most writers with this ambition have concluded, and not without some justification, that the Muslim faith in West Africa flourishes principally in towns and amongst nomadic tribes, while agricultural societies either resist Islam completely or adopt it only superficially, giving equal or greater attention to 'traditional' practices. Islam is thus often seen as being more static and less fully entrenched in the village setting.

Gouilly²² gives us just such a general overview of West African Islam--though he unforgiveably overlooks its urban growth--based largely on race and environment. '*Les Noirs*' (a term which seems to be used more as a social than a racial category, referring to sedentary rural inhabitants) are seen to be endowed with a spontaneous character: jovial, indolent, without ambition, etc. Islam does not spread easily among them because they are too closely attached to the routines and necessities of agricultural labour. Nomadism, on the other hand, suits both in social temperament and environment the original conditions of the development of Islam in the Arab Peninsula.

22. Gouilly, 1952.

Froelich gives a somewhat similar view of the problem based upon the attachment of the African mentality to animist beliefs. Islam is easily introduced into the animist setting because of "sa souplesse et... la facilité d'adaptation dont il fait preuve à l'égard des moeurs et de la mentalité négro-africaine." ²³ But in adapting to the animist setting the unity of the faith is destroyed.

l'Islam a été contaminé par les croyances anciennes qu'il a tolérées et avec lesquelles il a composé; il a vu ses principes juridiques altérés par la persistance des coutumes pré-islamiques et par le désir, conscient ou non, des populations noires de ne pas laisser étouffer leur éthique par un droit qui n'a pas été conçu pour elles; enfin, il n'a pas pu imposer, sauf d'une façon superficielle, la culture et la civilisation orientale. ²⁴

Trimingham gives us an explicit and more stimulating formulation of the same generalization:

Islam spreads easily among townspeople. It is a civilization and cannot establish itself solidly without a strong foundation of urban life...Islam, therefore, makes immediate appeal to the urban mind, individualistic and wide-visioned, yet limited by the interests of market and workshop. Islam also appeals to the nomad mind. It has no hierarchic priestly system, its method of worship is simple and free, and it makes no far-reaching demands for change of outlook and mode of life. In other words it is a layman's religion...On the other hand, its

23. Froelich, 1962: 102.

24. Ibid.

appeal to the rural mind whose centripetal outlook turns essentially upon the tending of life, crops, livestock, and children, is correspondingly weak. The farmer's religion harmonizes exactly with the interests of his daily life. Islam has no natural substitute for this integrated structure and is only adopted voluntarily after a religious vacuum has been created.²⁵

Trimingham's observation is sound, at least for the long period from the first development of Islam to the early part of this century, but his explanation of it is lacking, having ultimate recourse, like Gouilly and Froelich, to the nebulous relationship between 'mind' and environment.

Towns, as centres of commerce, learning and administration, as points of contact between people of widely varying origins, have certainly been centres of gravity in the development of Islam. The historical record also gives the Moorish, Fulani and Tuareg tribesmen a prominent place in the 19th century revivals of Islam while the Islamization of village dwellers was correspondingly weak. It is not useful, however, to seek an explanation for this cultural distribution of Islam in differences between the 'urban mind', the 'nomad mind' and the 'rural mind'. The use of the word 'mind' here presumably refers to a relationship between man and his environment in a very general sense. There is, however, no convincing reason why the seasonal rhythms of tending crops, livestock and children should be a barrier to Muslim expansion and an encouragement to the preservation of animist cults.

25. Trimingham, 1959: 25.

What is the origin and nature of the 'vacuum' necessary for the development of Islam among sedentary peoples? It is not as profitable to link a religious 'vacuum' to a crisis in the 'rural mind' as it is to consider the social conditions that lie behind religious change. If we approach Islamic expansion and puritan reform as phenomena that are introduced and sustained by social arrangements we must look for a 'social vacuum'--for pressures and crises that encourage or accompany changes in the social order--rather than an exclusively religious or ideological one.

The social conditions behind the development of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa are considered more fully by Lewis,²⁶ and in doing so he is led to question the viability of a distinction between politically centralized and decentralized societies in terms of their acceptance or rejection of Islam. Lewis acknowledges that in West Africa "the history of Muslim penetration and expansion is, by and large, the story of the action and attitude toward Islam assumed by the rulers of the centralized or relatively centralized states."²⁷ There is at the same time "a marked lack of response to Muslim influence evinced by uncentralized agricultural tribes in the interior of Guinea and the Ivory Coast."²⁸ However, taking a wider range of examples--the Muslim Somali, the Muslim Galla and a number of Islamized yet decentralized peoples in Eritria and the eastern Sudan--we are forced to conclude that "...the distinction between centralized and uncentralized traditional political systems

26. Lewis, 1966.

27. Ibid, p. 32.

28. Ibid, p. 33.

is not one which is crucial for the diffusion of Islam." 29

Lewis considers, through comparison between a wide range of African societies and institutions, the compatibility between Islam and 'traditional' social systems in order to explain, not whether Islam will or will not be influential in particular societies, but rather in what directions Islam will evolve once it has gained a foothold. This element of compatibility is examined in terms of the relation between Islam and tribal politics, between Islamic law and customary law and between Islam and traditional belief and ritual.

Taking Islam and tribal politics as an example, Lewis concludes that selected features of Islam are readily assimilated in tribal societies lacking any single font of political authority for it serves to buttress "traditional sentiments of ethnic exclusiveness and superiority."³⁰ Such societies often emphasize the outward aspects of Islam, the 'five pillars', while rejecting the minutiae of Islamic law. It is in state societies, on the other hand, where the detailed prescriptions and proscriptions of the Shari'a are more often acceptable and in such conditions "as the process of Islamization gathers force and momentum there should develop a selective bias toward the application of the more formally legalistic elements of Muslim Law."³¹

Lewis describes a process of Islamization in which tribes-

29. Lewis, 1966: 33.

30. Ibid: 34.

31. Ibid: 34-35.

men and state societies are the main carriers of Islam but the possibility of fervent belief among agricultural peoples is never excluded. There is in his analysis of the social conditions which effect the direction of Muslim expansion more room than we find in most other analyses to accomodate the development of puritan Islamic reform in a rural agricultural setting. The changes introduced by colonial governments and the independent nation states have a central place in Lewis' overview of African Islam, thereby giving more weight to the argument that modern African Islam is in a process of change, of adaptation to the imposition of western ideas, technology and institutions. ³²

It is under the impact of such changes that a 'puritan' interpretation of Islam, once more common in states or cities and in the simplified religion of the tribal brotherhoods, has recently developed in rural African society. Given the historical predominance of reform in urban centres and among nomadic groups, the problem which lies behind the present investigation is, briefly, to determine why radical Islamic reform has developed in an agricultural society which, until recently, has been portrayed as having a vital system of animist worship and only a peripheral adherence to Islam, while an urban reform group in the same region has expressed a more moderate approach to religious change. Although Songhay Islam has developed into radical reform only within the past several decades, it is important to ask in addition

32. This aspect of Lewis' argument is discussed more fully below: p. 72.

what factors have enabled the movement to survive in the face of opposition from the majority of the Songhay population and restrictions imposed by the Malian government.

II. THE SETTING

The Wahhabiyya in Gao, besides being part of an international movement, at least in terms of the communication of religious ideas, has both an urban and a rural appeal and is set within economic and political systems that must be considered, together with the specifically religious issues, in order for a complete picture of the social forces affecting the reform movement to be presented. Before one can fully understand the advent of Wahhabism in the Songhay milieu, therefore, it is first necessary to examine the wider physical and social geography in which the reform movement emerged.

In outlining the rural and urban setting of the Gao region, ecological marginality and isolation stand out as features which must have a bearing on any explanation of the local reform movement. As we shall see in more detail below, Wahhabism in the rural surrounds of Gao developed most quickly, and in a rigid 'radical' direction, during the period corresponding with the 1973-74 drought and, less dramatically, during the preceding years of poor harvest. It is possible that this is an historical coincidence but we are nevertheless left with the suggestion that drought and its consequent hardship had some place in the acceptance of reform. How, more precisely, might this have occurred?

Barkun,¹ if we follow the general direction of the arguments in his analysis of disaster and millenarian movements,

1. Barkun, 1974.

would suggest that rural life during extreme hardship suffers an acceleration of the disintegration of old values, that the 'collective stress experience' enhances suggestibility, that in response to this situation religious extremism consolidates community solidarity and facilitates the break with the past. This view which gives disaster² a very important place in a wide range of religious and totalitarian movements, fails to take into account both the importance of social responses to the 'stress experience' and their wide variations. It describes 'irrational' religious behaviour as a social-psychological insanity without explaining in any detail the actual sociological bases of the religious response to 'disaster'.

The view to be taken in this study is that economic marginality may be relevant for the account of Islamic reform in two ways: firstly, environmental disaster was used by reformists (and by more Islamized traditionalists) as a reason for abandoning the worship of local deities, showing them to be ineffectual in assuring prosperity. Drought was probably not a direct reason for the development of reformism. Similar hardship had occurred before and during colonialism without a corresponding 'purification' of Islam. Rather, drought was used by reformists as a proof of God's omnipotence, as a reinforcement of their religious convictions.

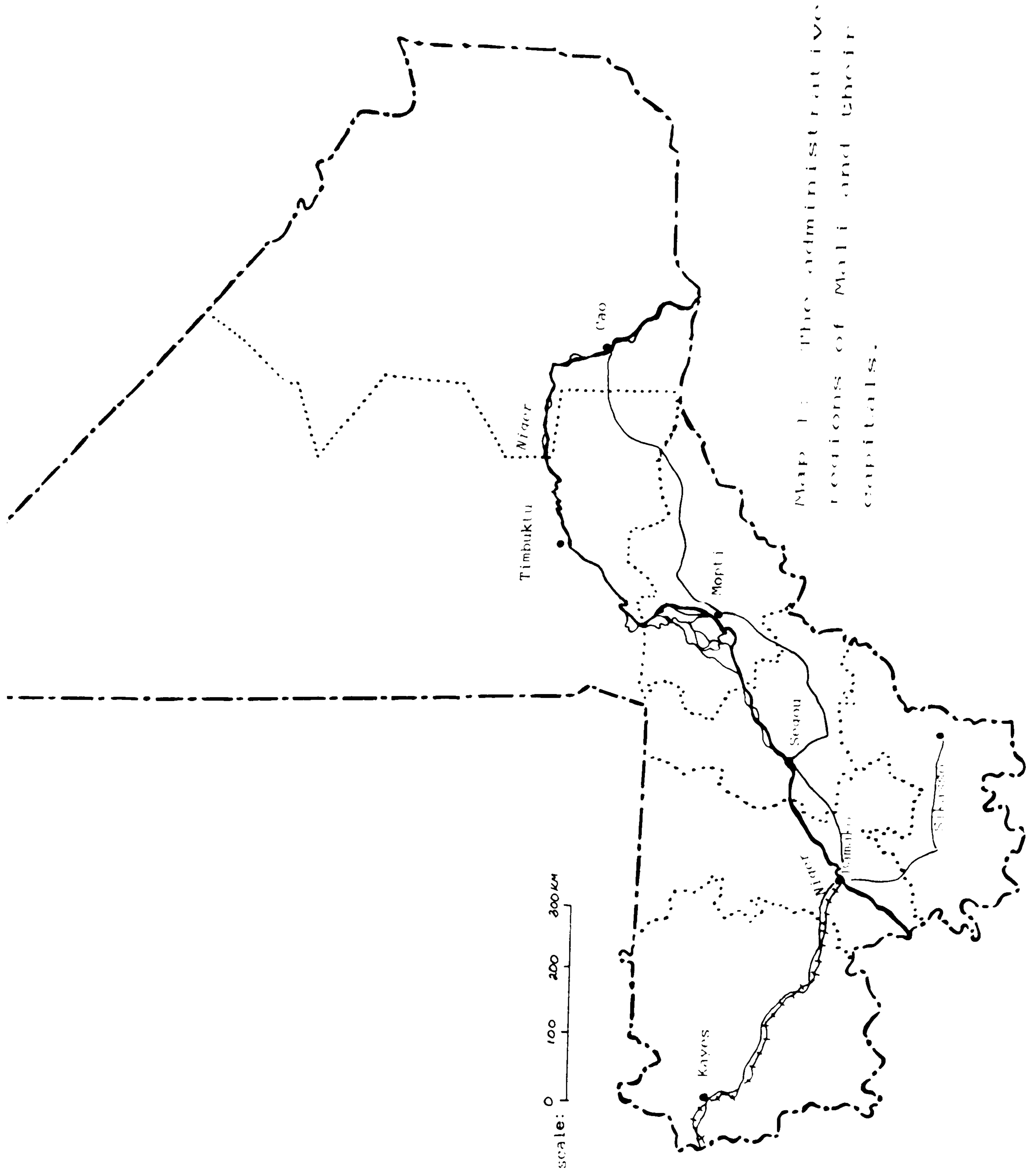
2. In order to accommodate the wide variety of settings in which millenarian movements can occur, Barkun is forced to adopt an extremely vague definition of 'disaster': "a severe, relatively sudden, and frequently unexpected disruption of normal structural arrangements within a social system or subsystem resulting from a force 'natural' or 'social', 'internal' to a system or 'external' to it over which the system has no firm 'control'" (Sjoberg cited in Barkun, 1974: 51).

Secondly, economic hardship was part of a situation in which Islamic reform could act as a social network of support in ameliorating the effects of this crisis. It is important to consider the drought in so far as it enhanced the organizational appeal of the Wahhabiyya.

A similar justification could be made for underlining the significance of geographical and political isolation. Gao's distance from trade centres and the administrative capital and the difficulties of transport to the region combine with ecological marginality to create a situation marked by a lack of local integration into national politics. This absence of integration is associated with the development of political dissatisfaction which lacks an effective outlet in practical action. In describing these elements of isolation the way is prepared for later discussion of the political implications of the reform movement.

The rural setting.

Gao and its surrounding villages are situated on the eastern portion of the Niger bend on one of the northernmost latitudes of the Sahel in which agriculture is possible (16° 16'). The fertile ribbon of the Niger River is the source of livelihood for most of the sedentary peoples in the area. Having its source in the hills of Futa Jallon, the Niger feeds the basin of the Mopti region before running into a single channel south of Timbuktu, which reaches just



Map 13. The administrative regions of Mali and their capitals.

below the Sahara, then turns south, eventually reaching the coast in Nigeria.

Agriculture is mainly limited to the soils of the Niger floodplain. The river in the Gao area is surrounded by plains of sub-desert steppe which, in ordinary circumstances, are suitable for livestock. Here, when rains are plentiful, there are abundant pastures which make cattle raising the principal economic activity. Further north, towards the desert, cattle cannot survive and the nomads are limited to camels and goats.

The combination of environments suitable for sedentary agriculture and transhumance has greatly affected the region's history and has contributed to its ethnic diversity. The population is roughly 50 per-cent sedentary and 50 per-cent nomadic or semi-nomadic.³ The main ethnic groups in the countryside are: Tuareg (including the Bella), Moors, Fulani, and Songhay.

The Tuareg are the largest nomadic group in the Gao area, inhabiting both the arid regions north of the Niger bend and the Gourma--the region in the bend's interior. They are primarily cattle herders, but in the Saharan wasteland they become camel nomads. In social structure they are loosely grouped into federations of tribes under a nominal

3. A survey done by the colonial administration in March, 1956 for the population of the *cercle* of Gao shows the following: Songhay and Armahs, 44.2 %; Tuaregs and Bellas, 40.4 %; Moors, 8.5 %; Fulani, 5.0 %; other, 1.5 %; Europeans, 0.3 % (office of the Commandant de Cercle, Gao).

chief (*amenoka*). A class system divides the tribes into groups of nobles (*imoshar*), pastoralist vassals (*imghād*) and clerical clans (*ineslemen*, meaning 'Muslim') as well as artisan castes. The *ineslemen* are similar in their way of life to other Tuareg except that their status has traditionally been one of social inferiors and they do not bear arms.⁴ The Bella were formerly a slave caste of the Tuareg. Their 'manumission' under French colonial rule in the 1930's was accompanied by a great deal of confusion and conflict about livestock ownership. Today they are independent herders.

The Moors, another nomadic group, are a minority in the Gao area, but they warrant consideration because of their importance in the development of Islam in the Sudan, particularly in the 19th century. Most of them belong to the Kunta tribe, the origins of which are in the western Sahara. The Ḥassaniyya dialect of Arabic is spoken by most Moors, but they are not socially homogeneous, having various combinations of Berber, Arab and Negro ancestry; and, like the Tuareg, they have a complex, hierarchical social organization. At the top is the noble, warrior class of relatively pure Arabs. The *zwaya* clerical tribes are tributary to Arab classes, tending herds for them but remaining nevertheless aristocratic groups. Lower in the hierarchy are the *zanaja*, or Berber tributaries who traditionally paid the Arabs 'feudal' dues.⁵

The Kunta were a key group in the introduction of the

4. Trimingham, 1959: 11. Also see Norris, 1975.
5. Trimingham, 1959: 135-36.

Qadiriyya brotherhood (*ṭariqa*) in 16th century West Africa through the efforts of Sidi 'Umar al-Baka'i (d. 1553). They also had a central place in the revivals of the Qadiriyya in West Africa during the late 18th and early 19th centuries and developed a high level of jurisprudential scholarship. The revivals of the brotherhood were largely inspired by the Kunta jurists Sidi al-Mukhtar (d. 1811) and Shaikh Sidiyya al-Kabir (d.1868). With their close links with the Berber and Arab traditions of North Africa, Kunta jurists are largely responsible for the dominance of Maghribi influence throughout West Africa.⁶

The Fulani are composed of diverse groups which share a common language. The majority of Fulani are sedentary agriculturalists, while the remainder are lighter-skinned pastoralists. The major settlement of Fulani in the Gao area is found between Gao and Ansongo, in a group of villages called Gabero. The inhabitants probably came to the region at the time of Usman dan Fodio's *jihād*, or 'holy war', as a spin-off from the central area of conflict which lay to the southeast. As Trimingham points out, the association between holy war and Fulani settlement has happened elsewhere.

The day comes when a Negro Pulo cleric proclaims a *jihād*. They rise, overwhelm the pagans and found a state...As a result of this reversal of fortune the leaders of the *jihād* become an aristocracy, and the conquered Negroes fall into various social strata. Settled Fulbe become negroid and acquire new social attitudes and economic values centred on agriculture, though continuing to manifest ethno-religious pride.⁷

6. Cf. Stewart, 1973.

7. Trimingham, 1959: 12.

In the Gabero area, clerical families and traders belong to the nobility, while former slaves and tributary groups comprise the larger body of agriculturalists and herders.

The Songhay are a sedentary people who occupy the Niger River area from Jenne to northern Nigeria. Approximately 100 km south of Gao, the Songhay culture changes, both in language and in customs, into a sub-group known as the Zerma. In northern Nigeria and Dahomey the Dendi form another sub-group.

Although fully integrated into the Malian state, Songhay villages in the Gao area are politically and economically largely independent from one another. As will be seen in more detail below, chiefs are the most important village leaders. They are often members of the Armah nobility, a social class that claims descent from the Moroccan invaders of the Songhay empire in the 16th century. They exercise power as local representatives of the state, particularly the Ministère de l'Intérieur. Chiefs are elected on the basis of the support given to them by village elders who represent the political alignments of village families. The candidate for the chiefdom who has the support of elders representing the majority of adult village members is successful in the elections. Candidates are usually chosen from amongst those men who can trace their descent from a previous chief or important village leader, although the candidature is officially open. Thus, the chief usually represents the conservative element in Songhay society. His

obligations as intermediary between the village and the state includes settlement of land disputes, the maintenance of census information, and tax collection.⁸ The Songhay Muslim cleric, or *alfa*, does not usually hold an important political place in the village. He is above all the teacher of rote Quranic learning, a manufacturer of amulets, a ritual functionary, and occasionally a settler of domestic disputes.⁹

In years of plentiful rain, the economy of the Songhay centres upon the staple crops of millet and sorghum and is sometimes supplemented by rice and vegetable gardens. Fishing and animal husbandry are also significant productive activities in most villages.

The agricultural system¹⁰ is regulated by two major seasonal cycles: the alternation of the dry season and the rainy season as well as the rising and falling of the river. Rains usually begin in June, reach their peak in July and taper off in August. From October to February (during a 'cool' season) the river rises, and from March to April the river recedes.

When the first rains come, sorghum is planted on the higher ground that is first exposed by the lowering of the river, and millet and sorghum are planted on land not reached by the river. The main agricultural season usually ends

8. See below, pp. 179-184

9. See below, pp. 80-85

10. Olivier de Sardan, 1969: 14-24 provides an account of the agricultural system of the Wogo of Niger. In terms of labour organization and the level of productivity, however, the Wogo are not a typical Songhay group.

at the beginning of the cool season with the harvest of millet.

Drought has devastated this system of millet monoculture and has increased reliance on the otherwise supplementary crops of rice and vegetables. Rice is usually planted as the river recedes on the same land which earlier produced the sorghum crop. It requires a high river level for the sustained period of irrigation necessary for the crop to mature. In 1984-85 the water level was abnormally low and little rice was planted. Of that, most was cut down, un-matured, for animal fodder.

In villages located near the market towns of Bourem, Gao and Ansongo, gardens are both a minor source of income and a supplement to an otherwise undiversified diet. Most garden vegetables, such as carrots and lettuce, probably came from the French, while other products, such as hot peppers, a widely used spice, were in use much longer and came from North Africa. Women traditionally participate more in gardening than in other agricultural labour, and the selling of vegetables in the markets is the exclusive occupation of women. The usual items planted are lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, and melons. Gardens are most frequently planted near the high water mark of the river and are manually irrigated when water is easily obtainable.

Prior to colonization a socially exclusive Songhay group, the Sorko, lived mainly by hunting hippopotami, crocodiles, and aligators. Their exclusiveness was not based

solely on economic activity; they lived separately from other Songhay villages and held a special reputation as magicians, being considered specialists in ritual communication with Dongo, the god of thunder and lightning. Irresponsible hunting by Europeans undermined the economic foundation of the Sorko; the hunting of hippopotami has been outlawed ever since a ban by the French administration. Most Sorko have since become agriculturalists.¹¹ The Sorko are sometimes referred to as 'fishermen', but only occasionally would they harpoon fish. Today fishing is not a specialized activity among the Songhay; and a variety of methods, such as lines, nets and traps, are used in most river villages.

Cattle are important in many villages as a source of milk, meat and income. Sometimes they are loaned to Fulani herdsmen to maintain. More commonly they are herded by older children during the rainy season when pasture is available and are kept in village compounds or in larger herds near the village in the dry season when grasses must be cut and brought to them.

The traditional productive system of the Songhay in the Gao region is extremely fragile. Large hydraulic systems do not exist. Subsistence depends ultimately upon the success or failure of the millet crop and this in turn depends upon the extent and regularity of the rains.

11. Rouch, 1954: 23.

Climactic disaster is therefore an ever-present possibility. Famines, both local and widespread, have been a common occurrence and a major source of mortality. The Sudan in general has undergone an irregular pattern of feast and famine which can be summarized as follows:

1880-1890:	drought
1881-1900:	high rainfall
1901-1910:	uneven rainfall
1911-1914:	severe drought
1915-1927:	regional high rainfall
1928-1930:	drought
1931-1939:	regional high rainfall
1940-1943:	drought
1944-1960:	high rainfall
1961-1967:	uneven rainfall
1968-1975:	severe drought
1976-1982:	uneven rainfall
1983-1986:	severe drought. ¹²

Before the colonial era the response to drought was retrenchment in the villages and an exploitation of whatever resources were available. With the peace established by submission to the colonial powers, migration became a more common alternative strategy for men. The first major wave of migration to the coastal towns took place during the drought of 1911-14.¹³ Younger men have, since the beginning of the colonial era, migrated to the coastal towns in pursuit of prestige and adventure. In times of hardship these voyages became more of an economic necessity.¹⁴

12. Based on Gallais, 1977: 227.

13. Sidikou, 1977: 153.

14. Migration is discussed further below, pp.103-112 and 206-211

The past two decades in the region of Gao, as in the rest of the Sahel, have been characterized by uneven rainfall and drought. The occurrence of two major droughts within ten years suggests that the Sahel is undergoing an unprecedented environmental deterioration.

Besides the grim toll on human and animal life, one of the most dramatic consequences of the lack of rain is the frequency with which 'black' storms sweep in from the desert. These storms, which bring no rain, completely block out daylight for 15 to 30 minutes; then, as the fine dust clears, the sky turns red, then orange and finally the pale yellow of a normal dusty wind. These dense sand storms are rare, occurring only in times of severe drought. One or two such storms occurred in 1974, but in 1984 there were five. The first storm in the rainy season of 1984 brought with it a wave of near panic, both in the villages and in Gao, but after the second or third time people were less fearful and young men sometimes affected an unconcern and could be seen standing casually outside in the orange haze as the storm dispersed.

In the villages, two successive years of little rain in 1983-85 meant the complete failure of cereal crops upon which they depended for subsistence. For the Songhay who did not migrate, this meant a heavy reliance on food aid brought north from Bamako and the coastal cities. Most livestock were butchered or sold and an effort was made in most areas close to the river to plant vegetables during the short growing season. Even with these efforts there were many

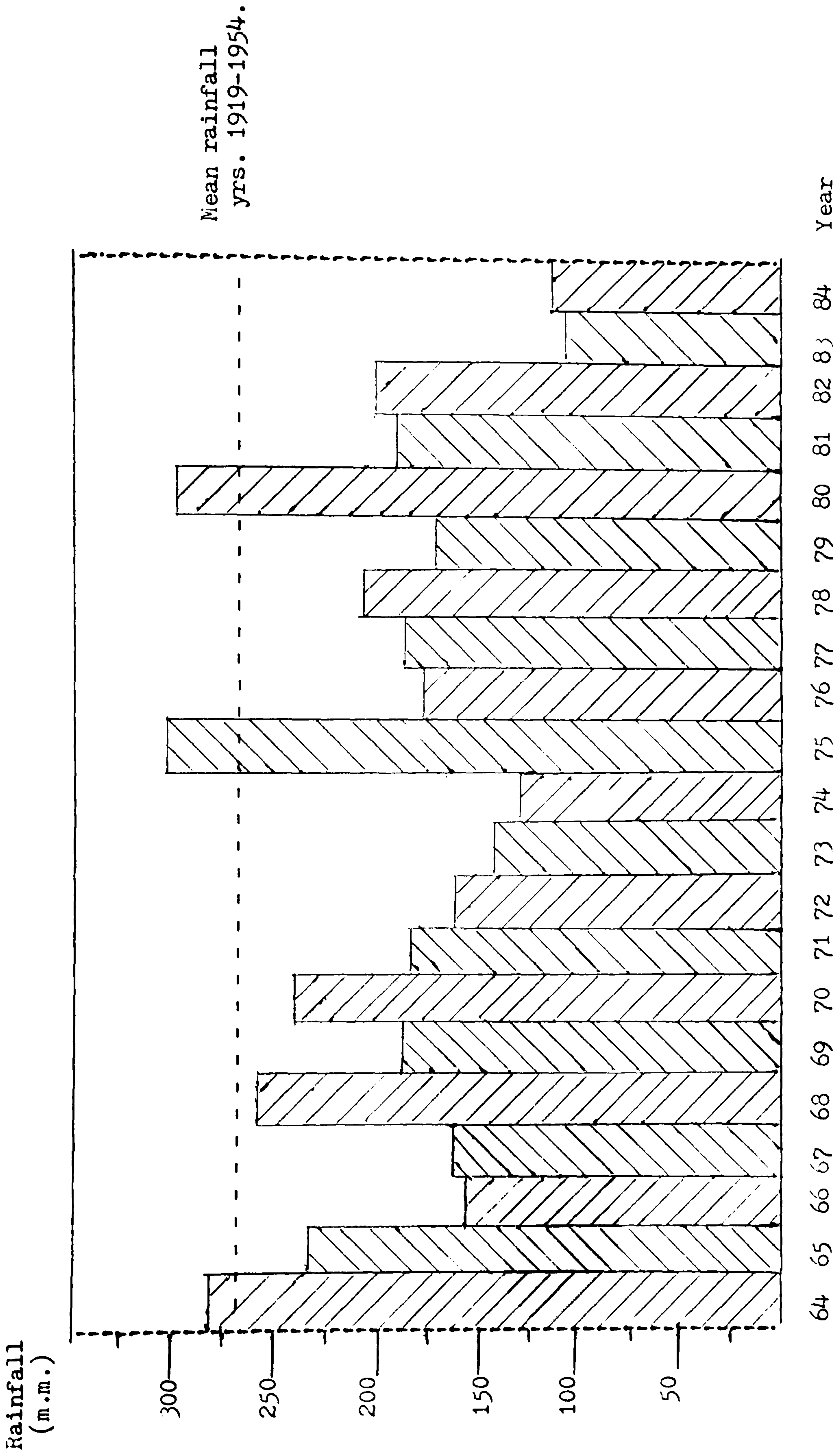


Figure 1. Mean annual rainfall, Gao meteorological station (1964-1984).

deaths from hunger and sickness as the dry season progressed, especially among infants, young children and the elderly.

The villages surrounding Gao are linked to the urban economy in a number of ways, linkages which have increased in importance with recent droughts. Produce can be sold in the markets for cash which can then eventually buy such necessities as agricultural implements, utensils and grain. Crafts, using readily available materials, are another source of cash. Village women weave large straw mats and fans for which there is a great demand. Many of the mats found in the Gao markets are made by Wahhabi village women and are sold by the men. Due to the restrictions imposed on Wahhabi women in terms of labour outside the home, one of their only ways of contributing to the family income comes from working on such crafts.

One of the mainstays of both the rural and urban economies has been the livestock trade. Before the drought in the early 1970's, which decimated the region's herds with at least 80% mortality, cattle were sold in Gao's livestock market and trucked to the coastal countries, especially Nigeria and Ghana, where environmental conditions prevent livestock production. With drought and trade restrictions imposed by the Nigerian government, the price of cattle fell dramatically; a cow selling for 150,000 francs CFA in pre-drought times later sold for 5,000 to 7,000 CFA.

In 1983-85 the nomadic groups established large camps on the outskirts of Gao where they have been dependent upon

emergency aid. While transportation has improved with the construction of a new 'drought road' from Mopti to Gao, many trucks carrying emergency aid were unable to cross the river at the small ferry south of Gao and were forced to take the circuitous and hazardous route along the northern part of the Niger bend. The food aid reaching the camps and many of the drought stricken villages was insufficient and mortality in the refugee population was high.

Another important feature of Gao's countryside is its political marginality. The nomadic groups, fiercely proud of their ethnicity and their sherifian ancestry, consider themselves superior to the black administrators from the south who came to dominate them through a set of historical circumstances that they do not fully acknowledge. In 1963 the Malian government tried to settle the nomads in villages, an action that sparked a revolt amongst the Tuareg of the *Adrar des Iforas*, the desert region north of Gao. Troops were sent from Bamako to suppress the revolt and order was restored only when the Tuareg found that they could escape across the Algerian border, well into the inhospitable desert.¹⁵ Mali's present government, which took power in 1968, has had less trouble with the nomads, largely because the drought has limited their mobility and strength. This government has been accused of profiting from the drought situation to bring the nomads under political control by limiting the distribution of international aid which had been given for

¹⁵. de Lusignan, 1969: 245.

their benefit.¹⁶

The Songhay, a sedentary and unwarlike people, are more easily controlled by the state, but to some extent they share the mistrust shown by the nomads and do not always place their sympathies with the state leadership from the south. Domination is perhaps the best word to describe the mechanism for establishing political stability in the Gao region.

It is only through comparison with other regions of Mali that the political and economic positions of Gao can be appreciated. In order to illustrate the specific place of the northern regions, Gao and Timbuktu, in relation to the rest of Mali, I will summarize the state administrative structure of the country.

On the national level Mali is poor, with international trade limited by its landlocked position in the Sahel. Foreign policy is opportunistic, with France, the United States, China, the USSR and, more significantly from our point of view, Saudi Arabia, being the more important states contributing to Mali's 'development'. Saudi petrodollars, while not a mainstay of the Malian economy, have been accompanied by diplomatic and cultural ties between donor and beneficiary.

At the same time as it depends upon apparently incompatible sources of aid, the Malian government struggles to maintain its independence and integrity. Its close allies have had little opportunity to determine Mali's political

16. Decraene, 1980: 85.

structure or policies. The Marxist-Leninist inspired regime led by Modibo Keita, Mali's first independent government which came to power in 1960, was anxious to lead the country into complete independence, not just political independence, from the wealthy 'colonial' powers. This regime was controlled by a highly centralized one-party system with power concentrated at the top, in the hands of the president and his cabinet. This government's economic policies, such as the creation of the Malian franc and its separation from the French franc zone, were the main source of political instability which led to the military coup in 1968. Serious economic difficulties led, in 1967, to a 50 % devaluation of the Malian franc in response to a national debt of seven billion Malian francs. Despite French and other international financial intervention, an economic and political malaise had made the government unstable.¹⁷

The government, led by Moussa Traore, which took power in 1968, remains in place. In 1974, after six years of military rule, a new constitution was implemented which re-established a one-party system but which forbade participation in the government of any former members of the previous regime; and in spite of reforms to the one-party system, such as the creation of the Union Democratique du Peuple Malien (UDPM) in 1979, power remains largely in the hands of the military. The administrative structure, dominated by the military, with its hierarchy of regional governors,

17. Decraene, 1980: 71.

commandants de cercle, and local chiefs, is, in practical terms, the most important decision-making body.

This administrative structure is organized in the form of a national division into seven administrative regions:¹⁸

1. Kayes, 2. Bamako, 3. Sikasso, 4. Segou, 5. Mopti, 6. Timbuktu, and 7. Gao (see map, p. 33). Each of these regions has at its head a governor who is concerned with its economic and administrative functions. The regions are subdivided into *cercles* (administered by a *commandant de cercle*), *arrondissements* and, the smallest political units, villages. Nomadic populations, in place of *arrondissements* and villages, are structured into tribes and *fractions*.

When we consider the land mass of the seven regions as well as their population distribution we see that the norther regions, Gao and Timbuktu, are possessed of vast territories with low population density (see table 1, p.49). These two regions are alone in Mali in administering large tracts of desert wasteland.

This large proportion of non-arable land is reflected in the measured volume of agricultural production for the staple food crops, millet, sorghum and rice (table 2, p.49). These production figures show that, although nomadic groups bear the brunt of climactic disaster, agriculture is also badly affected by poor rain and even in good years remains marginal. The near-equal balance in the northern regions

18. On 12 July, 1977 a government ordonnance reorganized the administrative division of Mali by splitting the immense region of Gao into two parts, giving Timbuktu the status of the 6th region (adding to it the *cercle* of Niafunké which until then belonged to the 5th region). The new 7th region, Gao, consists of the *cercles* of Ansongo, Bourem, Gao, Kidal and Menaka (A. Marty, 1985: 107).

Region	Surface Area		Population	
	Km ²	%	no. of inhabitants	%
Kayes	119,813	9.7	738,202	14.4
Bamako	90,100	7.3	958,767	18.8
Sikasso	76,480	6.2	948,513	18.6
Segou	56,127	4.5	842,827	16.5
Mopti	88,752	7.1	1012,780	19.8
Gao	808,920	65.2	606,667	11.9

Table 1. Surface area and population of administrative regions.

(source: Marty, 1985: 86, after DRPS, Gao: *Annuaire statistique*, 1974, 1975 and 1977, p. 30.)

Region	Millet and Sorghum			Rice		
	1966-67	1971-72	1972-73	1966-67	1971-72	1972-73
Sikasso	138,864	220,000	160,000	23,650	12,500	15,000
Bamako	194,724	180,500	160,000	15,209	5,500	1,410
Segou	118,887	139,000	104,000	68,996	40,000	--
Kayes	89,120	41,000	11,000	5,546	630	300
Mopti	139,968	195,000	81,000	24,694	115,500	9,000
Gao	57,800	20,000	--	20,355	11,100	--

Table 2. Production in tonnes by region in Mali.

(Source: Callais, 1977, after *Rapport deinitif de l'enquete agricole 1966-67*. Republique du Mali. Service de la Statistique.)

between nomadic and sedentary populations is accompanied by an economic division between reliance upon livestock and reliance upon agriculture. In the face of environmental disaster nomadism is most drastically effected--high livestock mortality dramatically diminishes economic viability.¹⁹ Agricultural production, however, shares much of this economic marginality since, even in the best of years, production of staple crops barely meets the needs of the village population. It is because of this agricultural poverty that the regions of Gao and Timbuktu have been exempted from taxes imposed by the state company Office du Produits Agricoles du Mali (OPAM), a fact which in itself testifies to the extreme indigence of the northern regions.²⁰

The urban setting.

Gao was largely built under French rule and the results of European expertise are wide streets constructed on a grid pattern similar to many modern towns. These sandy streets are often flanked on either side by crumbling walls and flat-roofed houses which deteriorate and need repair after every season's rain. Gao has none of Timbuktu's ancient, narrow, labyrinthine streets and corridors and it therefore has less appeal to the tourist, less 'mystery'.

Timbuktu has been fabled, not solely for its place as a centre of Muslim learning--cities equally and more developed

19. 90% of those lodged in emergency centres in Gao in 1973 and 74 were nomads (Marty, 1985: 107)

20. Ibid: 305

in terms of Islamic culture are found in North Africa-- but rather for the fact that this place of learning is located in such an isolated and inhospitable region. Gao is far less noted for its Islamic scholarship, though it is considered by those further on the margins of Islam as a stronghold of the faith. However, it shares with Timbuktu a desert or semi-desert setting and a similar position of physical isolation. As an entrepôt between North Africa and the West African Savanna, Gao is situated at a distance from the administrative centres of both regions.

Geographical isolation seems to have had some effect upon Gao's cultural makeup, acting, at least to some extent, as a barrier to the penetration of 'westernism'. The inhabitants of Gao, for example, prefer by an overwhelming majority traditional to western dress, the latter being status-enhancing only for young men. It is still frowned upon for women to appear in the streets wearing 'short', western-style clothes in place of the traditional 'bou-bou' or the wrap-around skirt.

In spite of this general conservatism, elements of western culture have a wide appeal. Football has a remarkable popularity and games on the town's large sports field are attended by enthusiastic crowds. The town's cinema, when functioning, usually shows karate films or Indian romance films, while for wealthy families video machines are operated by gas-powered generators. Radios and cassette players proliferate. 'Youth culture' has found a definite place in Gao

despite the town's economic and political marginality; and it is this trend in the contemporary urban society that the Wahhabis in the countryside find especially offensive.

Gao has undergone a very rapid rate of growth over the past decades, largely because of economic deprivation in the countryside. In the early 1960's the population was roughly 10,000. In 1980 a government census showed a population of 37,000.²¹ This has since increased by an influx of about 15,000 refugees.

This growth in population has occurred at the same time as many of the municipal services have declined. Electricity over the past decade has gradually become irregular until, in 1984, it was available only to administrative buildings. Garbage was rarely collected and lay in ever-growing piles beside some of the wider secondary streets where it was browsed through by children and goats.

Gao-city's population is mainly Songhay, but, as elsewhere in West Africa, all ethnic groups of the countryside are found in increasing numbers in the urban environment. In Gao there are 'foreign' populations of Arabs from Algeria as well as Bambara and other groups from the south. The Arabs are mainly independent entrepreneurs who use Gao as a base for trade between Algeria and cities of the savannah region to the south. This Arab minority is a possible channel for cultural influence from North Africa. Such influence,

21. Information provided by the *Mairie* of Gao.

however, is lessened by the fact that the Arabs keep their contact with the black population to a minimum.

Though the volume of trade in Gao appears to be comparatively light (an accurate measure is impossible due to the extent of black marketeering) its position on the northern frontier of black Africa gives it a great deal of economic diversity. Trade links exist with Algeria through the trans-Saharan route, with the coastal countries, and with the capital city, Bamako. In trans-Saharan trade, the principal activities are exporting sheep and importing dates. The southern coastal cities, being the avenue for commodities from all over the world, are sources for trade in numerous luxury goods manufactured in the west as well as canned food and grain. With the near completion of the road linking Gao with Mopti and Bamako, trade has begun to increase in this direction. A journey which once required four days to a week of hard driving can now be made in two days with less risk of damage to vehicles and their contents. When the river is high passenger boats travel from Bamako to Gao, a journey taking about two weeks. These boats also carry cargo, especially fruit, and every year in October the arrival of the first boat is anxiously awaited.

The most profitable trade activities are undertaken by wealthy traders who can afford to buy both commodities in bulk and the trucks to transport them in. Many goods are also transported in bulk by SOMIEX, the government co-operative. The original supply of goods in the town provides for a large number of secondary traders: shopkeepers for whom

buying and selling in small quantities is a major source of income, 'tabliers' who sell cheap goods such as cigarettes, dates, sugar, powdered milk, etc. in their own neighbourhoods, as well as petty traders in the markets who deal in almost every small item available. In spite of busy markets and the visibility of independent trade, avenues for wealth in Gao are very limited. Most of those active in the markets are supplementing the family income and the genuine '*grand commerçant*' is a rarity.

Another source of livelihood in the urban setting is derived from employment in Mali's vast public sector, the city being the capital of a large administrative region. Public sector employment provides a measure of security, often not so much from the salary, which is small and often arrives irregularly, as from the opportunity of gaining 'extra' money from clients who are in a hurry or need special favours. Not every job provides such opportunities. Teaching is a less desirable occupation in this respect while the jobs most in demand are those in the customs office. Isolation and difficult living conditions make Gao an undesirable place to work and some civil servants from the southern towns who are in disfavour with the central administration are sent to the region as a form of semi-exile.

Physical removal from administrative and cultural centres, difficulty of transport, economic marginality punctuated by upheavals of environmental and economic disaster, all contribute to Gao's situation of political inferiority in comparison with other administrative regions of Mali. This

marginality is expressed both in the minimal revenue the region brings to the government (it is exempt from agricultural taxes) and in the minimal services the state provides for the region. It is in this general setting that religious reform developed an organizational structure in which opposition to the state was an important ingredient, even though such opposition was often thinly disguised as an advancement of religious principles.

Another important aspect of the organization of the rural Wahhabiyya was the development of a more effective response to environmental marginality and disaster than that available in the traditional village structure. A more productive organization of labour, a greater willingness to experiment with agricultural techniques and a more solid village-based system of mutual aid and cooperation are some of the significant features of the village reform movement that are to be described in more detail below.

III. THE TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The development of Islam among the Songhay has occurred in the midst of an animist religion which has had a great capacity, at least until recently, to absorb elements of Islamic worship while maintaining the essentials of animist belief. In the past the ability of the Songhay to combine universalist Islam with animist practices led to a 'syncretist' religious complex, but more recently this syncretism has proven unequal to the challenge of scripturalist reform.

The history which I deal with here is not intended to be exhaustive but rather includes only the background necessary for a more complete understanding and appraisal of the contemporary situation.

The Islamization of the Songhay.

According to oral tradition, the area now occupied by the Songhay was once inhabited by two main groups: the 'masters of the soil' and the 'masters of the water'. The first Songhay inhabitants of the Niger were the Sorko who probably originated from Chad.¹ They began their settlement at Kukiya, then located near the rapids of Labbezanga, supplanting the original 'masters of the water'. At roughly the same period and in the same general region, another Songhay group, the Gow hunters, supplanted the 'masters of the soil'.

1. Rouch, 1954: 3-9; Hunwick, 1966: 124.

Around the 7th century A.D. a Berber, Za Alyomen, assumed control of the chiefdom of this early settlement after, it is said, having killed a river monster which terrorized the Songhay. A migration followed in which the Songhay came to occupy the shores of the river as far as Mopti where they found Bozo fishermen already in place. Gao was founded during the course of this gradual migration.²

By the 10th century, Gao had become an important meeting point of the salt trade from the west and the trans-Saharan trade route from the northeast. The Songhay dynasty in Kukiya moved to Gao in 1009. By this time Islam had been adopted by the rulers of the emerging 'Songhay empire'.³

In the 13th century, Gao was annexed by the empire of Mali, but this lasted only a decade before a Songhay prince, Ali Kolon, revolted and established himself as the king of the Songhay or 'Sonni'.⁴ This marked the beginning of the Sonni dynasty. The most important ruler of this dynasty, Sonni Ali, took power in 1464. In keeping with the dominant tendency among the rulers of the Sudanic empires, Sonni Ali was nominally a Muslim. Islamic historians, however, have remembered him as a cruel king who made enemies of the Muslim leaders and who practiced black arts and sorcery.

2. Cf. Rouch, 1953.

3. Hiskett, 1984: 33.

4. *ibid.*

His adoption of Islam seems to have been superficial for, as Hunwick writes,

his prayers would have been *batil* by the standard of any Muslim jurist--he often said all five daily prayers at one time in the early hours of the following morning, sitting in the *tashahhud* posture and inclining his body forward to indicate the *ruku'* and *sujud* and contenting himself merely with repeating the name of the prayer he was intending to pray instead of reciting the *Fatiha* and other suras.⁵

Before his death (probably by drowning) Sonni Ali extended the Songhay empire in the west to include Timbuktu and Jenne and southeast to include the original Songhay settlement at the rapids of Labbezanga. Upon his death a civil war broke out which was resolved in favour of Muhammad Ture, one of Sonni Ali's generals. Muhammad Ture took the title of 'Askia', thereby becoming the founder of the Askia dynasty. Askia Muhammad was a more fervent Muslim than Sonni Ali and under his leadership Islam developed a greater respectability than it had possessed previously. From 1495 to 1497 Askia Muhammad made the pilgrimage to Mecca, during the course of which he was given the title 'Caliph of the Sudan'. With his authority and prestige thus firmly established he consolidated and extended the boundaries of the empire from Segou to Air. He led a *jihād* against the Mossi, a major opponent of the Sudanic states. He is also known to have consulted two outstanding intellectuals of his day, al-Maghili from North Africa and al-Suyuti from Egypt, as to the best way to govern his state in accordance with the

5. Hunwick, 1966: 130.

laws of Islam.⁶ Al-Maghili, besides encouraging the development of a more 'orthodox' observance of Islam, appears to have introduced, or at least promoted, the idea of the '*muj-addid*', the 'renewer' whom God sends once in every century to prepare the way for the Mahdi and the Final Judgement.⁷ A parallel idea finds expression in the *Tarikh al-Fattash* with its description of the virtuous Khalif: "il trouvera la religion étiente, et il sera comme l'étincelle de braise qui tombe sur l'herbe sèche. Dieu lui donnera la victoire sur tous les paiens et les hérétiques..."⁸ It was this ideal to which Askia Muhammad seems to have aspired.

In spite of this apparently more sincere practice of Islam among the leadership of the Songhay empire, however, the indigenous religious system, centred upon the propitiation of jinn, sacrifice to ancestors and spirit possession, remained dominant in the countryside. As Hunwick writes, "Islam had little popular support and remained largely an alien religion of foreign and élite groups, though this is not to ignore the Islamic elements, which may already by this time have become thoroughly integrated into Songhay religion itself."⁹

After approximately twenty years of rule, Askia Muhammad became blind and his sons vied to take over power. In 1529

6. Kati, 1913: 15.

7. Hiskett, 1984: 36.

8. Kati, 1913: 19.

9. Hunwick, 1966: 142.

his son Mussa deposed him and exiled him to an island in the Niger. He died in 1538. Askia Muhammad had many sons and his deposition was followed by over 50 years of instability. The Songhay empire was still, however, the strongest state in the Sudan when the Moroccans invaded in 1591.

The Moroccan Sultan, Maulay Ahmad, styled himself as the *Khalīf*, the supreme ruler of Islam. Besides seeking personal power in his invasion of the Sudan, he was also after gold, not only for his personal projects, but also to finance resistance to the Christian invasion of Spain. The Moroccans took over Jenne, Timbuktu and Gao, but failed to maintain stability in the annexed territory. The Songhay empire became essentially a Moroccan province with a puppet Askia as administrator. Moroccan interest in the Songhay colony waned as it appeared less wealthy than had been presumed. As the territory became more autonomous, rivalries between the Askia princes led to a parcelling of power and the establishment of numerous petty states. Throughout the former empire power was eventually taken by chiefs who only casually adhered to Islam. This led to a decline in learning, especially in Timbuktu which was renowned for its Islamic scholarship. The Moroccan *shurafā'* replaced the more scholarly *'ulamā* and with them came a more popular version of Islam based on magic, divination and miracles.¹⁰

Although this made Islam less scholarly, it probably

10. Hiskett, 1984: 155.

contributed to its spread and to the adoption of Islam in 'animist' societies, as occurred among the rural Songhay. On the other hand, as Hunwick points out, the Moroccan invaders destroyed the remaining religious and political equilibrium of the Songhay empire and with them Islam became associated with a "tyranical alien ruling group."¹¹

The Moroccan invasion had three major effects upon the Songhay social order which have a bearing on the contemporary situation. First, the invaders, especially in the Gao area, integrated into Songhay society and their descendants, the Armah (a corruption of 'Ruma', the term given to the Moroccan musketeers) often assumed local power, forming an elite. In Timbuktu the Armah retained a more separate identity, while to the east they eventually became less distinguishable from the rest of the Songhay population.¹² Today most Songhay of the Gao area can assert some identity with the Moroccan invaders, but leading village families, especially the families of chiefs, make the claim of Armah descent more forcefully.

The Spanish mercenaries who formed the bulk of the original invading forces were only 'luke-warm' Muslims, and their descendants were, on the whole, even less devout. Marty says of the Armah of Timbuktu that, "les gens les

11. Hunwick, 1966: 142.

12. Saad (1983: 171) writes that "at Gao all the inhabitants claimed a Ruma identity by the nineteenth century." This is misleading. Citing Barth in a footnote he comes closer to the truth: "There was a tendency for many Songhai along the Niger east of Timbuktu to be identified as Ruma." (1983: 289 ff.).

appellent les francs païens. Ils ne pratiquent généralement pas le salam, n'ont aucune instruction religieuse, et s'entendent en fait de culte islamique à quelques manifestations extérieures et rares."¹³

Secondly, the invasion increased social and religious differences among the Songhay as a whole. In very general terms, the Songhay of the north, particularly near the towns of Timbuktu and Gao, have been more influenced by Muslim penetration than those in the south.¹⁴ This situation came about originally as a result of resistance to Moroccan rule which was undertaken by the more independent populations of the south.

Finally, the political fragmentation left the Songhay open to invasions from the Tuareg, which continued until colonial rule, and, in the south, from the Fulani at the time of Usman dan Fodio's *jihād*. The Armah failed to provide a unified and permanent leadership, and the regular plundering by nomadic tribes further exacerbated political and religious differentiation. Thus, in the Gao region and the rest of the north, while adherence to Islam is generally greater, the particular elements of Islamic or pagan worship that became part of the religious complex have varied from one village to the next. In the south, on the other hand, where opposition to Tuareg and Fulani invasion was more unified, the religious system has been more uniform and the variations

13. Marty, 1928: 7.

14. Rouch, 1960: 16.

from village to village less apparent.¹⁵

The Fulani invasion was important for additional reasons. The Fulani eventually established a small number of settlements in the Gabero area between Gao and Ansongo. These formed a small enclave in which Islamic learning was stronger than in the surrounding Songhay villages. As we shall see, the impact of this enclave upon the Songhay religion was probably minimal, but much later, in the 1940's and 50's, a number of Songhay clerics went there for their initial training.

In a less direct way, the *jihād* of the nineteenth century which had its nucleus in northern Nigeria, as well as other *jihāds* of the same period, provided an indirect source of inspiration for some reformists in the twentieth century. While the call to the sword in more recent times has, because of modern political conditions, been impracticable, the startling success of some of the *jihāds* enhanced the prestige of Islamic learning as well as the puritan model of worship and reform.

It should be stressed that puritan Islamic reform, of essentially the same nature as contemporary Wahhabism, has been an ever-present possibility and a frequently recurring phenomenon in the history of West African Islam. The occurrence of reform movements is closely associated with fluctuating levels of Islamic learning; the direct historical

15. Rouch, 1960: 16.

connection between reform movements, often tenuous or non-existent, is of secondary importance.

Movements of pilgrims, raiders and traders were all significant in the spread of Islamic learning in West Africa, but of these, the influence of traders was the most important. Muslims established a trading monopoly in which the production of 'passports' and the exchange of letters made it possible only for co-religionists to travel great distances with valuable goods in their possession. This trade network was responsible for the establishment of Muslim communities throughout the Sudan, the larger of which could maintain contact with the more important Islamic centres in North Africa and the Middle East. Gao was one such trading depot. The significance of this contact between trading towns and religious centres in the mainstream of Islamic learning was that Muslim scholarship was capable of revival, through the education of Muslim clerics from the Sudan in these centres and their return to their places of origin where they would preach the 'true' way of Islam. This potential often lead to revivals in Islamic learning, even if comparative isolation eventually lead to 'backsliding'.¹⁶

The Sufi brotherhoods, particularly in the 19th century, were often a strong presence in the trading communities and were also responsible for the creation, particularly in North Africa, of Muslim centres known as *zāwiyas*, or lodges. The brotherhoods began to be influential in

16. Goody, 1968: 200. Also cited in Niezen, 1983.

the post-classical period (after the 12th century, A.D.) when the faith had found a secure place in social groups which demanded a less rigid form of clericalism than that expounded by the 'orthodox' 'ulamā and encouraged a more popular form of religious organization which gave religious specialists an important place in 'backward' communities.

The Qadiriyya, one of the oldest and largest brotherhoods, was founded by the Baghdad jurist 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilani (d. 1166). Soon after its establishment in the 12th century, it was introduced to Morocco by a disciple of al-Jilani, Abu Midyan al-Ghawth (d. 1198),¹⁷ and, along with other brotherhoods, came to dominate the religious life of North Africa. The Kunta became the first custodians of the Qadiriyya in West Africa, spreading adherence to the order, and at the same time strengthening adherence to Islam, through much of sub-Saharan West Africa. This dissemination of the Qadiriyya was continued in the *jihād* of Usman dan Fodio and the foundation of the Sokoto empire.

The Tijaniyya, founded in Fez by Ahmad al-Tijani in the 18th and early 19th centuries, has become one of the most dynamic and popular brotherhoods in contemporary West Africa. It owes much of its success in West Africa to al-Hajj 'Umar Tall who claimed to be the leader (*Khalīfa*) of the brotherhood and waged a *jihād* against the Bambara of Segou and the Muslim empire of Macina.¹⁸ Umar Tall kept close

17. Abun-Nasr, 1965: 2.

18. See, for example, Abun-Nasr, 1965; Martin, 1976; Robinson, 1985.

ties with Muhammad Bello, the *Khalīf* of the Sokoto empire and through this association it became accepted by many Hausa as well as the ruling Fulani elite in northern Nigeria.

The nature of the interaction between Muslim centres and rural societies has led to a mutual process of cultural modification. In the case of the Songhay this interaction occurred primarily between the town as a bastion of Islamic learning and a vessel into which the 'pure' Islam of the northern centres could potentially be received, and the mainly animistic or, at most, 'mixed Islamic' countryside of sedentary villages. Gao, Timbuktu and Jenne were Muslim towns situated in regions occupied by the Songhay. The element of Islam most easily accepted by the animistic society has been 'Islamic magic' while, in the opposite direction, the effect on the Muslim centres in this relationship has been the incorporation or retention of 'traditional' elements of religion which resulted in a divergence from the 'true' Islam, or possibly even apostasy.

With regard to literacy, a symptom of this regression has been the increasing value of the written word for its magical qualities: "the art of writing, if it is not lost completely, becomes an esoteric possession of a clique which is feared rather than respected. A Qur'an may become regarded as a sacred object in its own right, no longer read but worshipped and perhaps... only exposed to public view once in a year." ¹⁹

19. Wilks, 1968: 192-93.

Islamic reform in West Africa has usually been a response to regression and the assimilation of 'pagan' elements in the Muslim community. It is a counteraction to 'backsliding' through a renewal of knowledge of Islam as it was practiced in the 'golden age' of the prophet, his companions and his immediate successors.

Prior to colonialism, then, a situation prevailed in West Africa in which a small minority of people who could read and write at a basic level in Arabic were scattered thinly in the rural population, in which literacy and Muslim 'orthodoxy' were precarious and subject to relapses into 'paganism' and 'idolatry' but in which the existence of predominantly Muslim towns and communities with connections with centres of Islamic learning in North Africa and the Middle East sometimes allowed for a reinvigouration or renewal of the faith. Amongst the Songhay the most important of such renewals occurred under the impetus of Askia Muhammad who was inspired by his contact with the jurist al-Maghili and his travel to Mecca. Askia Muhammad's purification of Islam did not last long after his death. Later Askias, such as Askia Dawud (reg. 1549-83) may have supported the *'ulamā* but did so with 'bribery' to secure a place in paradise. On sending a hundred slaves to al-'Agib, the Qadi of Timbuktu, Askia Dawud is reported to have said: "Tell him to buy my portion of paradise from God; he will be my intermediary with God to obtain this."²⁰

20. Kati, cited in Hunwick, 1964: 141.

This process of regression and renewal is similar to that described by Gellner when he points to the fact that tribal societies cannot accommodate or use the learned scribes of orthodox Islam and so turn to other anchorages for religion, such as holy lineages or ritual and devotional enthusiasm. There is, he suggests, within almost all Muslim societies, a permanent tension and opposition between two basic styles of religious life, and an oscillation between them through the processes of reform and regression: on the one hand the style which emphasizes the puritanical, unitarian, individualist and scriptural ideal of a single deity which has disclosed its final message in a Revelation; on the other hand the version of the faith which incorporates a religious hierarchy, which institutionalizes intermediaries between man and God into the social structure where they play a key role as unifying agents in segmentary tribal societies and which adapts Muslim practices and beliefs to the pagan setting.²¹

The potential for Islamic reform was therefore widespread and frequently realized in West Africa. The Songhay were not conspicuous participants in reform largely because there was no reliable process through which Islamic learning could penetrate to the villages. The Songhay, as will be seen, did not have a strong adherence to the Sufi brotherhoods and therefore lacked access to puritan Islam through the network of lodges and their connections with centres of

21. Gellner, 1981: 159. Also see Niezen, 1983.

learning. The administrative centres of the Songhay empire were largely seen as oppressive and the impact on the countryside of the renewal adopted by the king and the royal power structure was blunted by the division and tension between the Muslim elite groups and the ruled who remained largely animist. It was not until late in the colonial era that Islam became a rallying point for political opposition and a 'return to the sources' of Muslim knowledge became distinctly possible, perhaps even inevitable.

French attitudes toward Islam in the early stages of colonization, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, lacked consistency. On the one hand there was a republican influence in French culture which led many to look tolerantly upon Islam. Bonaparte, as Hiskett reminds us, was captivated by Islam during the occupation of Egypt and many Muslims thought him ready to convert.²² The intellectual heirs of the revolution, "having no religious beliefs of their own... did not judge non-Christian religions by comparing them unfavourably with Christianity."²³

On the other hand, we find the more familiar orientation of the French middle class and the Catholic Church which tended toward greater hostility--the rhetoric of the period, in reference to Islam, seasoned generously with words like 'idolatry', 'barbarism', and 'fanaticism'.

22. Hiskett, 1984: 211.

23. *ibid.*

In the field, both of these attitudes found expression, but the colonial authorities in French West Africa tended to be pragmatic, dealing with Islam in terms of its usefulness for, or hindrance of, French goals. Individual clerics, or groups of clerics, therefore, came to be evaluated according to their degree of 'co-operation' with or 'opposition' to the colonial presence. Such evaluations were often infused with a fear of armed opposition to colonial rule under the banner of Islam.

The effects upon Islam of colonial rule in French West Africa were relatively uniform throughout the occupied territories. It reduced the quality of Islamic learning by proscribing the activities of many prominent clerics and by limiting the effectiveness and importance of Islamic centres of learning. At the same time, however, it stimulated an increase in the number of Muslim adherents, mainly by improving avenues of travel, migration and inter-ethnic contact and by placing Islam in the role of a 'religion of resistance'.

When the French authorities were working to 'pacify' the colony they were often compelled to deal respectfully with Muslim leaders. Arabic was adopted as the official language of correspondence with African rulers because Arabic scribes were more widely available than French ones.²⁴ When, in 1911, it was decreed that all official correspondence, including judgements in the native courts, was to

²⁴. Brenner, 1984: 36-37.

be in French, the only official position the Muslim literati could acquire in the colonial order had been eliminated.²⁵ Under colonial rule the level of Islamic learning went into decline. In Guinea, Johnson finds that a contraction of Quranic education was most apparent at the major Islamic centres.²⁶ Timbuktu had gone into decline before colonization, especially in the 19th century, with the reduction of trans-Saharan trade; and the weakening of its nobility, including its Muslim scholars, continued, perhaps accelerated, under French rule.²⁷ Whether or not the economic decline of the towns in the Sahel dependent upon trade with North Africa made its first impact before or during French rule, the colonial occupation was marked by a restructuring of the economy in favour of coastal trade, one of the consequences of which was that the Muslim ruling elite was either no longer in power or was not able to support religious schools, and many Muslim clerics found it necessary to abandon their studies and support themselves in other ways.²⁸

At the same time that the quality of Islamic learning declined, the numbers of adherents to Islam greatly increased under colonial rule. French policy was often, especially during the earlier phase of colonization, concerned with the potential threat of Islam, but local French officials were not prevented from reaching a practical understanding

25. Brenner, 1984: 37.

26. Johnson, 1975: 226.

27. cf. Saad, 1983: 168.

28. cf. Brenner, 1984: 37.

with their Muslim subjects which led ultimately to a toleration of the expansion of Islam.²⁹ This expansion was not simply due to the most obvious factor, that Christianity was associated with colonial oppression and Islam thus had the appeal of a religion of resistance, especially for those already living in a partly Islamized milieu. It has also been the case, as Lewis points out, that Islam was always most successful in times of social change, economic expansion and ethnic interaction.

Increased travel and trading activities, migrant labour and movement, the development of administrative and commercial towns, all these played a vital part in throwing together Muslims and non-Muslims of different origin and ethnic groups in circumstances in which co-religionists displayed an impressive solidarity despite their differences of origin.³⁰

These kinds of factors were important for the Songhay among whom migration had an important place in the strengthening of adherence to Islam.³¹

Another unintended consequence of colonial rule was increased contact of sub-Saharan Muslims with their Middle Eastern counterparts, largely through an improved infrastructure of transportation and communication. In pre-colonial times the pilgrimage involved a lengthy and hazardous journey, usually undertaken on foot. Many pilgrims perished or established settlements in Chad or the Sudan, never to return

29. cf. Lewis, 1966: 78-79.

30. *ibid*: 81.

31. See below, pp. 103-112.

to their places of birth; and even those that did arrive at their destination and return, having undergone lengthy studies in the Middle East, often did little to change the practice of Islam in their places of birth. With the construction of roads and, later, the possibility of air travel, the pilgrimage became a much simpler undertaking and reformist ideas from the Middle East began to exercise more of an influence in West Africa. It was especially in the later phase of colonization and since independence that pilgrim traffic increased and gave more 'ordinary' worshippers, those who were not specialists in Islamic learning, a taste of 'pure' Islam and inclined a wider spectrum of the Muslim community in the direction of reform.

Traditional Songhay religion.

The animist or 'non-Islamic' religion of the Songhay is composed of a diverse array of beliefs and practices, only the most important of which can be summarized here.

Even the most 'primitive' or seemingly pristine elements of Songhay religion are interwoven with nine centuries or more of contact with Islam. This influence is perhaps most apparent in the realm of metaphysics. God (*irkoi*, meaning 'our Master') is the creator of the world, is all-powerful, and is beyond the reach of man--a remote *deus absconditus*. He is without form and is commonly believed to reside in the seventh sky above the world.³² There is no survival of

³² Rouch. 1954: 60.

any 'pre-Islamic' worship of God.³³ The seventh sky is populated with the souls of men and is overseen by angels (*maleka*). Satan and demons (*Iblis* and *seytan*) are fallen angels who have become agents of evil.

Jinn (*zin*) were the first inhabitants of the world. When men were created the jinn became invisible but continued to live in specific locations: rocks, trees, termite mounds, etc. The worship of jinn is local and is addressed to the 'masters of the soil' or the 'masters of the water'--the first occupants of the Niger who made pacts with the new Songhay inhabitants to cede their terrestrial domain in exchange for religious recognition. The 'priesthood' of jinn worship, which has only minimal social significance, is hereditary. The ritual of the cult of jinn consists of sacrifices. An animal is sacrificed at a particular time of year. The 'priest' recites a formula in unintelligible archaic language which is said to renew the alliance between men and jinn for the coming year and which will protect the village from misfortune.

Another local cult centres upon ancestor worship. The worshipped ancestor is usually considered to have been the founder or first occupant of a village or, less frequently, a particularly influential and revered forefather. Often the cults of ancestors are confounded with those of the jinn since they are similar in many respects.³⁴ The

33. Boulnois and Hama, 1954: 14.

34. Rouch, 1954: 61.

'priest' is usually the head of an extended family which traces its descent from the ancestor. In the month preceding the rainy season, he makes a sacrifice at the altar of the ancestor. This is often the ancestor's burial place,³⁵ but it is also frequently a natural location similar to those associated with jinn. The priest addresses the ancestor, asking his protection, not only for the family but for the entire village or community.

Important traditional families (chiefs, Sorko fishermen, magicians) often have private ancestral cults. These protect only the family of the priest rather than a wider community. When these ancestors are especially sated with sacrificial blood and prayers they are said to manifest themselves in the altar. The place of worship then becomes endowed with a more autonomous spiritual quality which may become an aid to magical practices.³⁶

It is worth stressing that the worship of jinn and ancestors is socially limited. While the cults often have a perceived importance in helping to ensure plentiful harvests and the over-all prosperity of the community, the 'priests' of these cults do not gain a very high status through the religious office and the spiritual entities themselves only have an effect on a particular family or local community.³⁷

An element of the animist religion that has a much greater significance is the spirit possession dance or cult

35. Rouch, 1954: 61.

36. *ibid.*

37. Rouch, 1960: 177.

of the *holle*. The *holle* have become, to the detriment of other spiritual beings in the animist religion, the true masters of the earth and the world of men. They are believed to have vanquished the jinn and to have mastery over them so that the jinn, and to some extent the ancestor, can be considered 'local representatives' of the *holle*.³⁸

The *holle* were created similar to men but are invisible, immortal and can travel instantly from one location to another. They were created, according to Songhay legend, from among the forty original children of Adam and Eve. When God commanded Adam and Eve to bring him their children, they tried to conceal twenty of their favourites in a cave. God witnessed this and as a punishment placed a barrier between Adam and Eve and their twenty children by endowing the latter with special powers and making them invisible. The world of the *holle* is almost identical to human reality and the behaviour and lives of the *holle* are fundamentally similar to those of men.³⁹

As opposed to the worship of jinn and ancestors, the possession dance involves most of the adult members of the animist community. Most villagers belong to the 'congregation' of the dances. The dancers are recruited by the spirits themselves by means of spontaneous possession. The souls of the dancers are believed to temporarily vacate their bodies, making them the 'horses' which the *holle* 'mount'

38. Rouch, 1960: 22.

39. Boulnois and Hama, 1954: 75.

to communicate with the world of men. The dancers are trained and initiated by *zima* priests who also organize the ceremonies. The *zima* attain their status solely through religious and social merit. The '*femmes tranquilles*'⁴⁰ are women who help in the organization of ceremonies and who assist dancers through their crises of possession. Musicians play 'violins' and calabashes during the ceremony and also recite ritual songs. Sorko priest-'fishermen' are traditional specialists in using the *holey* to contact Dongo, the god of thunder and lightning who controls rain.

When musicians, dancers, '*femmes tranquilles*', *zima* priests and congregation are assembled, the dance begins. The *zima* exhort the dancers to keep up the pace of their movements. After several hours one of the dancers will exhibit signs of being possessed: usually he (or she) will stop, fall on the ground, shout and tremble. After several convulsions the 'horse' of the *holle* becomes calm, usually with the aid of the '*femmes tranquilles*'. The dancer is then dressed in the traditional costume of the *holle* who has possessed him. The officiating *zima*, or another priest, interrogates the *holle*. The spirits reply, often for a half-hour, about the affairs of the village or the needs and wishes of the spirits who oversee it. The voice of the *holle* eventually changes, becoming more spasmodic and distant. The dancer then falls to the ground trembling.

40. Rouch's term (cf. 1954 and 1960). I am not aware of an indigenous word, nor does Rouch provide us with one.

He is helped to his feet by the '*femmes tranquilles*', the *holle* having left and been replaced by the normal spirit of the dancer.⁴¹

Possession dances take place weekly in Gao-city, usually every Sunday at the compounds of *zima* priests. In the villages where the dance is still practiced ceremonies take place before the rainy season, at the end of harvest, in the middle of the dry season, on the occasion of the sickness or death of a village member and at the time of the initiation of a new dancer--on average every two weeks to a month.

From the mid-1920's to the 1940's the *holle* cult became the medium of an 'enthusiastic' response to the colonial presence through the development of a new 'race' of spirits, the *hauka*.⁴² These spirits were modeled on the administrative and military hierarchy of the French and, in Ghana where the *hauka* developed among migrants, English colonial powers. When this cult flourished, dancers were no longer possessed by the descendants of Adam and Eve's invisible children, nor by the *holle* Dongo, the spirit of thunder; they were possessed by such spirits as the '*Minis-de-ger*' (*Ministre de la guerre*) or the '*Komandan*' (*commandant*). Like the *holle* dance as a whole, the cult of *hauka* spirits was very diffuse, lacking a strong leadership to channel social unrest into effective action. The cult of *hauka* spirits spread throughout Songhay society in response to the helplessness of the indigenous population in the face of colonial rule. Thus, in common with other 'religions of the oppressed',

41. More complete descriptions of the dance are found in Rouch, 1954 and 1960.

42. Cf. Rouch, 1960: 73-74 and Olivier de Sardan, 1980: 280-85.

it sometimes used the themes that express, or perhaps compensate for, a situation marked by pessimism and powerlessness: the imminent departure of the whites, the ineffectiveness of their weapons (guns will shoot water instead of bullets), the victory of the faithful. The cult of *hauka* spirits, therefore, thrived on colonial oppression. As this oppression waned, the *hauka* were assimilated into the pantheon of *holle* spirits, an incorporation which brought about the end of the *hauka* as an 'enthusiastic' religious movement.

In addition to the worship of jinn, ancestors and *holle* spirits, magic has an important place in Songhay society. Most men who may be considered 'priests' of the various cults also practice magic. This usually involves controlling or mastering spiritual beings with the aid of magical substances (special bark, herbs, etc.) and oral recitation. These practices are considered dangerous and are rarely completely mastered. The *sohantye* are the most formidable magicians. They claim descent from Sonni Ali and believe their magical powers to be inherited from him. The powers of the *sohantye* are inherited matrilaterally or 'from the mother's milk'. These magicians are very small in number⁴³ and are limited to areas where traditional practices are widely observed, such as Hombori--a Songhay enclave northeast of Mopti--and probably some villages in Niger. Despite their small number, however, the *sohantye* have a very high reputation. In Ghana, Rouch reports, they supplanted the

43. Rouch (1954) estimates that only about 20 *sohantye* families exist.

Ashanti 'medicine men', taking from them most of their clients.⁴⁴

In contrast to this specialized, high prestige magic are practices which are more accessible and widespread. One such practice, used to bring rain, involves tying a child to a tombstone and leaving him (or her) alone overnight. The tears of the child are associated with rain.

The traditional Songhay cleric, or '*alfa*',⁴⁵ is very often involved with magical practices which are similar to those elements of 'Islamic magic' found almost anywhere in Muslim Africa. The most common practice is the writing of amulets, or *gri-gris*, which consist of Quranic verses sewn into a pouch which is worn around the neck or on the arms. Most commonly they protect the wearer from illness, but they have a wide variety of other uses such as by prostitutes as contraceptives or by students for success in examinations.

The cleric is the village member most commonly recognizable for his duties in teaching the Quran, that is to say, in taking village students as far as they are able or willing to go in memorizing the sacred book by rote. When the student succeeds in reciting the first quarter of the Quran his parents present a small gift to the *alfa*. It could be, according to their means, a small sum of money, a chicken or a cake made from millet flour. A similar gift is usually made when

44. Rouch, 1954: 62.

45. An adaptation of the Arabic word *al-Fakih*, 'jurist'. The term *alfa* is applied by the Songhay to anyone who is literate in Arabic. Cf. Olivier de Sardan, 1982.

the student memorizes half, three-quarters and the totality of the Quran. The cleric does not earn his livelihood from such 'payments' but more commonly from the labour students provide working in his fields and gardens. Students engaged in memorizing the Quran, therefore, spend the major part of the day working in the master's fields with recitation taking place in the morning and evening.

Village Islam among the Songhay is associated with a comparatively loose adherence to the Muslim brotherhoods, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. Loysance, writing of adherence to the brotherhoods among the Songhay of the central subdivision of Niamey in the 1950's, notes that "l'immense majorité d'entre eux n'est affilié à aucune confrérie et souvent l'habitant ne comprend même pas la question qui lui est posée à ce sujet; beaucoup répondent simplement "c'est l'affaire de Dieu.""⁴⁶ In Gao where there is both stronger adherence to Islam in general and greater influence from the nomadic groups with strong loyalty to the Qadiriyya or the Tijaniyya, we should expect a greater awareness of the Islam of the brotherhoods among the village population, but this is not to say that the brotherhoods are a potent force in village life. On the contrary, it is usually the case that those who call themselves members of the Sufi orders cannot explain why they perform their prayer in the way required by their adherence to the brotherhood.⁴⁷ They are, as

46. Loysance, 19 : 42.

47. This is generally the case in spite of local exceptions such as the Hamaliyya movement in the village of Wani. See below, pp. 90-97.

Loysance observes, often satisfied to remark: Le marabout près duquel j'étais m'a appris cette formule. C'est lui qui m'a enseigné à réciter ainsi mon chapelet."⁴⁸

Traditional Songhay clerics, unlike many of their counterparts among the neighbouring Fulani, Tuareg and Kunta groups, have minimal reputations for learning, piety or holiness. In general, their influence is limited to the village in which they live, work and teach. Although there are some who excel, even these have rarely, if ever, achieved the status and renown of, for example, a *sohantye* magician or a famous Tuareg 'saint'.

Nominal adherence to the brotherhoods and a low level of religious scholarship are key ingredients in the composition of the traditional religion of the Songhay of the Gao region, a composition, however, which has changed with the introduction of reformist Islam. It is likely that this loose adherence to the brotherhoods and low level of learning are important elements of the social conditions in which reformist Islam could develop a following. This conclusion is reinforced by a brief comparison between the religious and cultural settings of Gao and Timbuktu.

It will have been remarked that Timbuktu shares with Gao the economic deprivation as well as geographical and political isolation common to most towns on the northern frontier of the Sahel. Timbuktu is also noteworthy for its position as a religious centre, for its remarkable history

48. Loysance, n.d. : 42.

of Islamic cultural achievement, especially in the 15th and 16th centuries, followed by the Moroccan occupation, political fragmentation and decline. Yet Timbuktu, perhaps more than any other region in Mali, is untouched by the contemporary movement toward Islamic 'purification'. The town of Diré, southwest of Timbuktu, has a small community of Muslims who model themselves after the Wahhabi ideal, but their approach to religious change is tolerant and has not been accompanied by an effort to 'convert' other Muslims to their form of worship. Consequently, their appearance on the scene has not been associated with any significant controversy.⁴⁹

The strong position of the brotherhoods in Timbuktu is the most likely factor behind this weak adherence to the anti-Sufi Wahhabiyya. The political and economic decline of Timbuktu after the Moroccan occupation was associated with cultural stagnation, yet the Islamic brotherhoods remained a vital part of the religious setting. In the periods of political fragmentation during the 18th and 19th centuries, religious scholars and holy men played an important role as arbiters between opposing factions within nomadic tribes. These factions were often in competition for political influence and for the economic benefit they derived from the extortion or pillage of merchants who continued to deal in goods that followed the trans-Saharan trade route. The intervention of Muslim notables, the 'Shurfa', the Imams, the Qadi and the more accomplished and respected pilgrims, contributed

49. Personal communication, Mahmud Zouber, 31 July, 1984.

to the continuation of a strong Islamic tradition, though one that had fallen far from its former level of accomplishment.⁵⁰

One of the most important developments during the period of political fragmentation was the drawing away of Islamic scholarship from the town into the tribes of the periphery.⁵¹ Sidi al-Mukhtar and Sidiyya al-Kabir of the Kunta are examples of Islamic scholars and reformers from this period of political decentralization who achieved a high level of jurisprudential scholarship from within a tribal society, a society in which the Qadiriyya had (and continues to have) a central place as a religious and social institution. The influence of the North African, particularly Moroccan, Islamic tradition upon these scholars was especially strong. Their promotion of this tradition is a reason for the contemporary strength of Maghribi influence in Timbuktu and its environs.

The strength of adherence to the Sufi orders in Timbuktu is a barrier to the development of Wahhabism. This is not simply because the reform movement is strongly opposed to the beliefs and practices particular to the brotherhoods and would therefore meet with strong resistance from established religious notables, but also because the brotherhoods are associated with religious structures that are strongly integrated into the social systems of both urban and rural society. The place of clerics as mediators between conflicting

50. Cf Saad, 1984.

51. Abitbol, 1982: 'preface'.

tribal groups is an example of such religious-social integration. It is true that such conditions might prevail less in Songhay village society but the strength of the brotherhoods nevertheless constitutes an important factor in the resistance to the Wahhabiyya or similar anti-Sufi styles of reform in the Timbuktu region.

The level of Islamic scholarship in Timbuktu is another factor in the resistance to Wahhabi reform. Dupuis-Yakouba,⁵² writing in 1921, observes that there are many inhabitants in Timbuktu with a minimal literacy in Arabic but that there are only a few clerics who continue to teach grammar, theology, law, etc. and few among them who have attained a high level of instruction. A similar situation is found today with the difference that the increased availability of study abroad may have improved the highest levels of Islamic scholarship. Government support of Timbuktu's Islamic heritage, for example in the Centre Ahmad Baba and in the Lycée Franco-Arabe (in which students can pursue a baccalaureate in bilingual French-Arabic education), is also partially responsible for a higher level of Islamic learning than that evident among the Muslim clerics of Gao. Wahhabi reformers in Timbuktu would therefore not have the advantage of being able to display a superior jurisprudential knowledge to their traditional counterparts. In the region of Gao, however, such superiority was a key element in the process of 'conversion' to Islamic reform.

52. Dupuis-Yakouba, 1921: 180-181.

* * *

Until the advent of Wahhabism, Islam in the Gao region enjoyed a relatively peaceful co-existence with the belief in ancestral spirits, jinn and *holle*. Many villagers adhered, and some continue to adhere, to both belief systems. The *holle* dance, in the few places where it still takes place, is attended, even participated in, by those who believe themselves to be Muslims. Rouch summarizes the place of 'syncretism' in Songhay religion when he writes: "l'Islam apparaît moins, au Songhay, comme la religion dominante que comme un élément essentiel d'un complexe religieux...auquel il s'est, plus ou moins profondément, amalgamé."⁵³

In the Gao region today the dominant religious complex is the opposite from that which Rouch describes. While taking into account local variations, it can be stated that in Gao, even in most traditional villages, Islam is of greater importance than any form of animist worship. Where the animist religion survives it is deeply penetrated by Islam. The prevailing approach to religion, even by those who still maintain animist practices, places Islam in the forefront. The *holle* spirits themselves are believed not to prevent adherence to Islam; and often the worship of *holle* spirits, even for adherents of the cult, is secondary: "il faut suivre la voie de Dieu et satisfaire les demandes de génies."⁵⁴

In the Gao area the non-Islamic elements of religion

53. Rouch, 1960: 17.

54. Gibbal, 1984: 157.

are easily noted, and even relatively 'orthodox' Muslims still often admit to the efficacy of magic or the mystery and power of the *holle*,⁵⁵ but animist practices appear to be on the decline. Many villagers, not just Wahhabis, are accepting the tenets of Islamic reform. The puritan faith has, at least in principle, gained a wide currency. The *holle* ceremony is no longer practiced where *zima* priests had once been strong. In several of the villages surrounding Gao the *holle* cult had disappeared in the 1940's or 50's with the death of the last influential priests. Amulets are no longer worn by many who once depended on them. This decline, by no means total, has gone hand in hand with the development of Wahhabism and the increased prestige of the all-powerful God.

In Bagoundge, a large village about 5 km south of Gao, for example, the impact of the Wahhabiyya has been especially strong; and even those who remain 'traditionalist' have abandoned most of the animist practices. "When the Wahhabis came," a villager explained,

they taught us that we must believe in nothing except God. The *alfa* cannot help man. The tree [jinn] cannot help man. Only God.

Famine has been a major factor in weakening the prestige of the traditional religion. Localized deprivation, common in an area where rain can fall heavily in one area and not in another, could at one time be attributed to the spiteful-

55. Greenberg (1946: 68) notes that the Hausa Mallams who condemn the *bori* cult still believe in its effectiveness in curing: "The person recovers", one Mallam said, "but God does not like it that way."

ness of *jinn*, but for everyone in the Gao area there is no doubting the idea that the recent drought, unlike anything they had ever experienced, is an act of God. Part of this conviction, again expressed by a villager of Bagoundje, arises from the fact that traditional magic has been of no effect in ending the drought:

We consulted the tree [jinn], we consulted the *holle*, we consulted the *alfa* [all without success]. We know that God is unique.

With the failure of traditional methods to bring prosperity, it became clear to many that God must be appeased. This declining trust in the value of traditional methods occurred at a time when reformers were preaching a return to 'pure' Islam and the dangers of 'polytheism'.

Despite this discrediting of traditional 'magic', drought does not in itself explain the weakening of traditional Islam. Widespread famine had taken place before without greatly changing customary religious practices. Perhaps the greatest challenge to traditional Islam came, and continues to come, from the vigorous and regular penetration of reformist Islam and, in another direction, the impact of western education which draws young people away from the traditional milieu and scorns the 'superstitions' of the village people. Reformist Islam, which reacts against both traditionalism and westernization, is emerging the victor in contemporary Songhay society.

IV. PRECURSORS OF THE GAO WAHHABIYYA

The precursors of the Wahhabi movement which began in Gao in the early 1970's were of two kinds. One was a small, ecstatic Sufi movement which made use of an elaborate *dhikr*, or group recitation, and which venerated its leader as a 'saint'. The other started when Songhay of the same general area began to accept the ideals of a puritan, scripturalist interpretation of Islam which aimed at purging the religion of the mediation of saints and of the reliance on miracles and magic for prosperity and security. This puritan trend was promoted by pilgrims who had studied in the Middle East and by Songhay migrants in Ghana who were integrated into fully Islamized urban communities.

The Wahhabism which later developed in the villages of the Gao region incorporated the general orientation and goals of the scripturalist trend but at the same time, as will be seen, it possessed some elements of Sufi reform, such as a veneration of its leadership and an emphasis on communal worship. Both the saint oriented and the puritan precursors of Wahhabism brought from outside the traditional ambience a 'new' form of Islam that unified the community of believers and set it apart from the surrounding groups. This element of 'uniqueness' was the common denominator of several strategies of reform which the Songhay developed in response to oppression and social disunity.

The Songhay mahdi (1949).

Two manifestations of Islamic reform in its enthusiastic form, expressed singly or in combination, are derived from the concepts of *jihād* and *mahdī*. A participant in the *jihād*, or holy war, has been regarded as a reformer, or *mujaddati*, in the sense that he opposed the 'backsliding' of the ruling classes.¹ Such reform has also been expressed in opposition to perceived pagan abuses, as in the Fulani *jihāds* of the 19th century. The leaders of the *jihād* have usually been regarded as being orthodox Muslims and the legitimation of reform has been conceived in terms of a return to an earlier form of the 'true' Islam. This formulation of the concept of *jihād* is probably the most widely current because the successful *jihāds* fit this description. Some *jihād* leaders largely owed their success to an identification with 'orthodoxy' and to the fact that their opponents were a corrupt, disintegrating ruling class or a militarily assailable pagan or semi-Islamic society.

The abortive *jihād* to be described here had none of these qualities. It was undertaken by a group of Hamallists who held unusual beliefs--in spite of their own assertion of orthodoxy--and was directed, suicidally, against the much stronger French military. Movements termed '*jihāds*' by historians were almost all in some ways 'successful', even to the point where significant historical impact has

1. Paden, 1973: 70-71.

become a necessary definitive feature of the *jihād*. Despite its marginality and lack of success, however, the '*jihād*' of the Songhay was motivated by the same Muslim principles as the more historically significant holy wars of, for example, 19th century West Africa.

The classic formulation of the concept of the *mahdī* comes from Ibn Khaldun's 13th century 'sociological' treatise, the *Muqaddimah*:

It has been well known (and generally accepted) by all Muslims in every epoch that at the end of time a man from the family (of the prophet) will without fail make his appearance, one who will strengthen the religion and make justice triumph. The Muslims will follow him, and he will gain dominion of the Muslim realm. He will be called the Mahdi. Following him, the Antichrist will appear together with all the subsequent signs of the Hour...²

The concepts of *jihād* and *mahdī* were disseminated in West Africa largely through the medium of the Sufi brotherhoods. An important source of 'ecstatic' religious practices which made use of these concepts was the Tijaniyya brotherhood. The Tijaniyya clearly represents an enthusiastic expression of Islam with its emphasis on the miracles of holy men, the power of amulets, visions, and group recitation (*dhikr*). These 'ecstatic' features of Islam are perhaps more strongly represented in the Tijaniyya than in the Qadiriyya, especially the group recitation which, in Sokoto at least, was a distinguishing characteristic of the Tijaniyya: "Unlike the Tijaniyya, the Qadiriyya as found in Sokoto

2. Ibn Khaldun, 1967: 156.

tends to be individualistic and does not practice group recitations. Thus there is less community of feeling demonstrated among Qadiris."³

The Hamallīyya, which emerged from the Tijaniyya in West Africa in the 1930's, became, for a short time, a medium of the expression of the 'ecstatic' trend in Islam among the Songhay. A definitive history of the Hamallist movement in French West Africa, from which the mahdist Songhay uprising emerged, has not yet been written, largely because much relevant material in the Bamako archives remains inaccessible to researchers. Nevertheless, a general outline of the movement can be derived from existing published sources.⁴

Hamallism did not initially develop as a unified expression of Islam. Its exponents included both the saintly, introverted Cerno Bokar of Bandiagara⁵ and the radical mahdist leader of the Songhay '*jihād*', Musa Aminu. Elements that are common in descriptions of the movement, however, are the emphasis on the holiness of the founder, Sheikh Hamallah, and the attribution to him of miracles as well as an importance given to the 'correct' version of the Tijani *wird*, or recitation after prayer.

In describing the origins of Hamallism, Hampate Bâ, himself a Hamallist, uses the 'miraculous' hagiographic style. He describes the search of Muhammad al-Akhdar, a North

3. Last, 1967: 216.

4. Cf., for example, Abun-Nasr, 1965; Alexandre, 1970; Bâ, 1980; and Brenner, 1984.

5. Cf. Bâ, 1980 and Brenner, 1984.

African Sherif, for a leader to promote a reform of the Tijaniyya brotherhood. His search ends in Nyoro, south of Mauritania, when he sees the young Sheikh Hamallah and asks:

--Qui est le père de ce fils de noir?

--Ce n'est pas un noir répondit Sidi Abdallâh: c'est un Cherif, un descendant du Prophète. C'est le Chérif Hamallâh, fils de Sidna Omar...

Cheikh Muhammad Lakhdar garda un moment le silence. Puis il dit:

--Son pied est placé très haut par rapport à la terre.

Tous ceux qui étaient présent renchérent: Ce n'est pas étonnant. De tout temps, il a émerveillé les gens. Il a même fait des miracles, sans l'avoir recherché et sans en tirer vanité.⁶

Sheikh Hamallah eventually gained a wide following and became the leader of a Tijani reform group whose central doctrinal difference from the mainstream African Tijaniyya was the recitation of a rosary with eleven prayers instead of twelve. Thus they became known by the French as the '*onze grains*'.

This difference between the Hamallists and the main body of the Tijaniyya was the cause of a great deal of hostility between the two groups. Hamallah himself was a retiring figure who did not wish to become involved in any controversy either with rival brotherhoods or with the French. His followers were often more defensive, having received frequent harassment from their main rivals, the Tenwajib, a Moorish tribe in the Nyoro area which supported the 'orthodox' Tijaniyya. In August, 1940 the commandant of Nyoro

6. Bâ, 1980: 66.

was informed that a Hamallist band, led by three of Sheikh Hamallah's sons, had attacked the main Tenwajib camp, massacring more than 400 people. Thirty-three leaders of this attack (including Hamallah's sons) were secretly executed by the French, and 600 others were imprisoned. Hamallah, despite his innocence in the affair, was deported, first to Algeria, then to Vals-les Bains in France where he died in 1943.⁷

Rather than eliminate the Hamallist problem, the French suppression scattered leaders and followers of the movement throughout West Africa. This opened the door to a wide range of doctrinal interpretations and, as Alexandre describes, eruptions of messianic enthusiasm:

The executions and Hamallah's deportation had been carried out with the utmost discretion: the families refused to mourn the dead and instead spread the rumour that they had fled to Syria or Mecca and would eventually come back with the Shaykh as a Mahdi... in the *sahil* the Hamallists were adopting queer and spectacularly unorthodox practices: shouting prayers instead of chanting them, tattooing their cheeks with the shaikh's cattle marks, later on organizing orgiastic sessions with group fornication and sodomy.⁸

This kind of radical enthusiasm began to wane after 1946, possibly because it lacked centralization or because French power and oppressiveness had changed with a new constitution. The mahdist uprising among the Songhay in 1949 was one of the last outbursts of messianism in this phase in the history

7. Alexandre, 1970: 505-6.

8. *ibid.*

of the Hamallist movement.

Monteil, in *l' Islam noir*, provides a glimpse into the personal history of the Songhay uprising's leader, Musa Aminu which I have supplemented with oral accounts gathered in Gao. He claimed descent from the prophet Muhammad and styled himself Sheikh Musa ibn Muhammad al-Amin. He was born around 1906 in the village of Wani, south of Bourem. In true Songhay fashion, he traveled to Ghana in 1919. His Quranic studies were mainly undertaken in Dori, a town now in Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), before he traveled to Nyoro in 1940 to be initiated into the reform movement of Sheikh Hamallah. This was only shortly before the massacre of the Tenwajib and Hamallah's subsequent exile. The year of Musa's return to his natal village of Wani is uncertain, but he probably left Nyoro at a time when the French were still actively hostile toward the movement, within a few years of Hamallah's exile, staying first at Dori before moving to Wani. Upon his return to Wani he gained a wide reputation as a man of learning and holiness. His claim of descent from the prophet was widely believed and some also thought he was the successor of Sheikh Hamallah to the leadership of the brotherhood.

In the presence of a loyal following and in the glow of admiration he must have received in his home village, combined with continued harassment from the French, Musa Aminu developed a heroic self image which culminated in visions of himself as the *mahdī*. A number of his followers

also had visions of him as a saviour. His record of these dreams and visions was found by the French in his home after his death. Excerpts from this record were translated by Captain saint-Gratien and later published in Monteil's *l'Islam noir*, of which the following are examples:

J'ai vu the Cheikh Hamallah, et il m'a dit, "Tu es le Mahdi Muhammad, n'en doute point!"

J'ai vu le prophète assis dans son temple, entouré d'une foule ennombrable. Je courus de lui saluer. Il se leva, me donna la main, m'embrasser et me sourit, puis il me suspendit un sabre à l'épaule. Il me fit alors asseoir sur un estrade et m'ordonna de lancer la guerre sainte [*jihād*].

Une Voix, venue de Dieux, me réjouit en citant ce verset: "les derniers des malfaisants seront exterminés." Dieu soit loué!⁹

In 1949 the visions of Musa Aminu as the *mahdī* seemed to have led to a feeling amongst his followers that they were invulnerable and could defeat the French in a *jihād*. The administration in Gao was warned by a French supervisor of road construction near Wani that the Muslims there were acting strangely. A French officer who was sent to investigate the situation was wounded. This was an unexpected turn of events but, seeing that retaliation from the French was inevitable, Musa Aminu mounted a white horse and began to prepare an attack. A force from the French garrison in Gao was quickly organized and sent to Wani to quell the uprising. Eight of the rebels were killed. Musa Aminu himself was seriously wounded and died the following day after having been transported to Gao. Numerous arrests

9. Monteil, 1964: 296.

were made of Muslims in the surrounding area suspected of complicity. Hamallism was so thoroughly suppressed in the Gao region at the time of the mahdist uprising that today it appears to have few, if any, adherents.

Early reformers: Abdullahi ag Mahmud and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ifriqi.

At the same time as the enthusiastic expression of Hamallism had found a place among the Songhay of the Gao region, the first representatives from West Africa of a very different kind of Islamic reform had begun to influence the practice of the faith. Two of the early West African puritan reformers, Abdullahi ag Mahmud and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ifriqi, originated from the Gao area.

Kaba¹⁰ gives Abdullahi ag Mahmud the status of an early pioneer of Wahhabism in West Africa who paved the way for the later activity of the Association of Young Muslims (*Subbanu al-Muslimin*) in Bamako. Ag Mahmud does not, however, seem to have made much contact with reformists elsewhere and the ties between his efforts and those of the Bamako Wahhabis were probably very indirect.

Abdullahi ag Mahmud belonged to a Gao-based Tuareg group, the Kel es-Souk. A report by Governor Beyries¹¹ states that he accompanied his father on pilgrimage to Mecca where

10. Kaba, 1974.

11. Cited in Kaba, 1974: 70.

he is said to have stayed for 30 years (probably an exaggerated claim). He would have been very young at the time and it is also possible that his father married in the Middle East and that ag Mahmud was born there. In Saudi Arabia he was given a thorough Islamic education and he accepted many of the tenets that later became identified with West African Wahhabism. He returned to Gao in 1938 with the aim of preaching the reformed faith.

His reforms were directed against many of the practices associated with the sufi orders. He was opposed to the invocation of the prophets or the 'saints' in prayer, the manufacture or use of amulets, and the attributing to 'marabouts' of holiness which gives them the status of intermediaries between ordinary worshippers and God. He encouraged Muslim clerics to work rather than live from the trade of amulets; he recommended that the four successors to the prophet be followed only when their judgements accord with passages in the Quran and he recommended individual interpretation of the Quran (*ijtihād*) in the case of someone who had done serious studies in philosophy (*luḡa*, literally 'language').¹²

Abdullahi ag Mahmud is remembered, not so much for his ideas as for the patience and commitment with which he taught them. There is no evidence that he attempted to open a Quranic school, probably because of limitations placed

12. Beyries, cited in Kaba, 1974: 30.

on Islamic teaching by the colonial authorities. He taught the new doctrine principally by his own example, by reading and explaining the Quran and by leading his audiences to discover for themselves the problems inherent with traditional practices and systems of Muslim leadership.¹³

The limited gains he made in promoting reform seem to have been among groups who adhered to the Qadiriyya brotherhood. His influence extended to Timbuktu where some members of the Kunta tribe accepted many of his ideas. This tribe had followed the Qadiriyya order for centuries and already tended towards a more puritan practice of the faith.¹⁴

Through oral testimony from a number of ag Mahmud's admirers I am able to evaluate more precisely the impact of his teaching. The area where he concentrated most of his effort was between Gao and Markoy (in Burkina Faso) where he practiced trade. In this area the Fulani of Gabero were receptive to his teachings but they, too, were loyal to the Qadiriyya brotherhood and remained so despite ag Mahmud's promotion of reform. Among his own tribe, the Kel es-Souk, which adhered to the Tijaniyya, he had little success, and one of his principal detractors was its leader, Sheikh Hamada. There is no sign that Songhay of the villages were very receptive to ag Mahmud's reforms. The Songhay have always preferred their own Muslim clerics, however

13. Kaba, 1974: 31.

14. Cf. Stewart, 1973.

inferior in learning they may be to those of neighbouring groups. But his ideas must have circulated to some extent and may have indirectly cleared the way for later reform.

Abdullahi ag Mahmud died in 1952. In the period following his death he was not succeeded in his campaign for reform by anyone in the Gao area. In Markoy, however, a relative of his, Agoda ibn Baza, having returned from pilgrimage, continued the effort for reform. He does not appear to have progressed much further than his predecessor before his death in the late 1950's.

Triaud, in an unpublished paper, "'Abd al-Rahman l'Afri-cain (1909-1957) Pionnier et Precursor du Wahhabisme au Mali", describes the career and influence of an early Wahhabi, 'Abd al-Rahmal al-Ifriqi. We are not told whether his ethnic background was Songhay or Fulani, but it was probably the former. He was born in the village of Fafa, near Ansongo, in 1908 or 1909. As a boy he was sent to French school; the colonial authorities having demanded his attendance against the will of his parents. He did well in school and upon completion of his studies began work as a teacher, and later was employed in the meteorological service. In spite of a stable career in the civil service, he gave up his job and went on pilgrimage to Mecca.¹⁵ After completing the pilgrimage ritual he went to Medina where he began his

15. The date of this decision is unknown. Cf. Triaud, 1983.

education in Islamic studies. He eventually became a pupil at the Dar al-Hadith, a school oriented specifically towards adults, especially Africans, who have insufficient knowledge of Arabic for more advanced study programmes. During this early period of Islamic study he came under the influence of Wahhabi ideas. He went on to attain a position of teacher (*mudarris*) in the Dar al-Hadith and was used by the director of the school as an interpreter. The Second World War caused the temporary closure of the school and 'Abd al-Rahman was assigned to teach in Yanbu' al-Nakhl, an oasis north of Mecca, as a missionary in the service of the Saudi state. In 1945 he returned to teach at the Dar al-Hadith, largely because of requests that he do so by the students there. His reputation subsequently grew and in 1952 he was given a position in Riyadh in the Ma'had Al-Ilmi (Institute of Knowledge), a school of advanced Islamic learning. He died of an unspecified illness in 1957 in Beirut, having been sent there for hospitalization.

'Abd al-Rahman did not leave behind a significant body of work, but he did write a number of short essays destined for wide distribution which give us a glimpse into his ideas and the way in which he may have been influential. The most important of these was entitled *Kitāb al-Anwār al-Rahmaniyya li-hidāyati al-Firqa al-Tijaniyya* (Book of the Merciful Light to Show the Way Concerning the Tijaniyya). This book, printed in brochure form and distributed to pilgrims, denounces the Tijaniyya as well as other Sufi orders.

In West Africa, the Tijaniyya and Wahhabiyya are adversaries and 'Abd al-Rahman's pamphlet is part of this conflict. That which comes especially under attack is the perceived exorbitant claims of the Tijanis who assert that membership in the brotherhood is a guarantee of salvation. Such claims are described by 'Abd al-Rahman as unacceptable innovation (*bid'a*).

Another work by 'Abd al-Rahman, *Jawāban li-Ifrīqīyyin* (Reply to an African), is a simple outline of the main judicial schools (*mathhab*) in Islam for use by the (African) layman. This brochure gives a brief history of the four main judicial schools and ends with a summary of the Wahhabi position, that is, an avoidance of any excessive deference to the positions of the 'four imams': Abu Hanifa, Malik ibn Anas, Shafi'i, and ibn Hanbal.

The final work brought to our attention by Triaud is *Tawdīh al-Hajj wa-l-'Umra* (Explanation of the Pilgrimage and the 'Umra). This is simply a guide for use by pilgrims in Mecca. Its significance lies in the indication it gives of a close relationship between 'Abd al-Rahman and pilgrims from West Africa. As Triaud says, "des qu'un Africain arrivait à Medine, 'Abd al-Rahman s'en occupait."¹⁶ It is probable that he paid particular attention to those originating from his natal area, Ansongo, and that he made an indirect contribution to the later development of Wahhabism in this region through his teaching and writing in Medina.

16. Triaud, 1983: 10.

Migration and Islamization in Ghana.

Seasonal movement of men to southern towns, particularly those in present-day Ghana, has been an essential feature of Songhay Islamization, especially since the Second World War. This migration has been undertaken for a number of reasons. Forced labour and conscription in French West Africa led many Songhay to seek temporary refuge in the comparatively liberal territories under English rule.¹⁷ Economically, the movement is encouraged by the long period of non-productivity in the region of the Sahel during the dry season. Migratory employment has also been a source of support after poor harvests.

There is thus what can be described as a 'dual economy' among the Songhay in which young men, after the harvest, travel south to engage in farm labour and more exclusively urban occupations such as petty trade and work as 'latrine boys' or porters. Work as porters, or *kaya-kaya*, in the markets and busy streets of Kumasi and Accra has been almost completely monopolized by Songhay from the Gao region. Migrants usually return home after seven or eight months at the beginning of the agricultural season.

For young men the migration has also been a source of adventure and prestige; it is undertaken in order to become a 'man'. Often it has been the prestige-seeking

17. Olivier de Sardan, 1984: 176.

rather than the economic motivation that lies behind the decision to migrate. Rouch indicates this in a description of a returned 'Gold Coastier':

Tous les parents et amis se groupent devant la case de laquelle émerge le Gold Coastier dans ses plus beaux atours. Les griots chantent ses louanges et reçoivent le de l'argent. On ouvre les baggages, en grande pompe, et la distribution commence. Toute la journée le Gold Coastier est le roi de son village.¹⁸

In the cities of Ghana, particularly Kumasi and Accra, the immigrant populations, of wide ranging origins (Yoruba, Mossi, Hausa, etc.), live in large, ethnically heterogenous neighbourhoods known as *zongos* (a Hausa word meaning 'stranger community'). In an urban milieu where animism and Christianity are the majority religions, Islam became the principal means by which immigrants found an identity within the *zongos*.

Songhay adherence to Islam in the *zongos* was largely a defense against submergence into the 'alien' cultures of the coastal peoples. The animist practices of the Asante were dreaded. Many migrants believed that human sacrifices were still being practiced and that they, as strangers with few ties to the dominant local society, would be the first victims of blood rituals.¹⁹ Besides the perceived threat from local culture, the predominance of Christian education in schools presented a more tangible threat to the migrants

18. Rouch, 1956: 79.

19. *ibid*: 166.

of the loss of their identity. Most Songhay, as with other migrant groups, thought of themselves as Muslims and, even though Songhay children were very few in number in the *zongo* communities, the pervasive influence of Christianity invited not submission and integration but defense and a solidification of Islam.

Although its adherents were a small minority of the total population of the Ghanaian cities, Islam in the *zongo* communities had a dynamic of its own. The Hausa, though not always pious Muslims, were important in providing a model of scriptural observance which was largely incorporated in the immigrant communities.²⁰ The pilgrimage and other forms of contact with Middle Eastern centres of learning were sources of prestige for more affluent migrants.

Rouch has remarked that in the 1950's the Islamization of Songhay migrants had become common: "Le migrant, parti souvent animiste, rentre, au but de quelques années musulman."²¹ The 'Juke-warm' Muslim often became, in the Ghanaian *zongos*, a more committed believer. Daily prayers were performed with care, the Friday prayer united almost the entire community and the Muslim festivals took place in large gatherings.²²

Contact with Muslim centres was not the most significant aspect of Islam in the 'stranger communities' in Ghana. The Muslim societies of the Sahel also placed great value on

20. Schildkrout, 1976: 90.

21. Rouch, 1960 b: 376.

22. Rouch, 1956: 172.

the pilgrimage, on study in Islamic centres and on visits from learned Arabs. The importance of the *zongos* lies in the fact that they were closed Muslim communities, the members of which perceived themselves as defending their faith and their culture in an alien environment.

The Songhay migrants, while fully participating in the inter-ethnic Muslim observance, were not on the whole as fully integrated into the *zongo* communities as most other groups because of the relatively short and irregular periods of time spent by them in Ghana; but this gave them a large degree of ethnic solidarity. In the 1940's the Songhay migrants, especially those in Kumasi, demonstrated a unity which was to prove an aid in their trade activities. Songhay petty traders, for example, were the only 'strangers' able to break a monopoly of the Asanti 'mammies' in the central market by largely taking control of the yam trade. In 1949 the Kumasi Town Council tried to control this incursion by removing 35 'Gao' (i.e. Songhay) traders from the central market. This resulted in a great deal of tension between the Songhay and the Asanti. The Songhay were also resentful of the involvement of Hausa leaders in the action of the Town Council. The dispute culminated in a series of violent incidents in 1949 and it was not until 1951 when a dozen stands were returned to the 'Gao' that peace was re-established.²³

In the 1950's the *zongo* communities became actively

23. Schildkrout, 1974.

involved in national politics. This increased involvement was introduced in 1953 with the foundation of the Moslem Association Party (MAP) which became the major alternative to the Convention People's Party (CPP) in pre-independence politics. Of the two parties the MAP was the more conservative, representing the interests of 'chiefs' and traditional authorities. The MAP derived much of its support from the *zongo* communities. Most ethnic groups, in the wake of this politicization, became divided along party lines. Both parties had significant support from young men called 'action troopers' who, as Schildkrout puts it, "were willing to take to the streets to fight party battles with intense religious fervor." 24

The Songhay were no exception to this division. Itinerant migrants who tended to be less integrated into *zongo* political and religious organizations generally supported the CPP. More settled Songhay migrants, however, who had greater adherence to Islam, tended to support the MAP. The political division of the Songhay followed the division between Muslim and non-Muslim or nominally Muslim migrants. Short-term migrants, while generally becoming more Islamized through their experience in the *zongos*, were not fully integrated in the religious and political organizations. Longer-term migrants who often engaged in comparatively more lucrative economic activities or who had positions as Muslim

24. Schildkrout, 1974: 120.

clerics, had a greater commitment to Islam and were more receptive to the example of scriptural piety which was the ideal in the *zongo* communities. These migrants were to become committed to puritan Islamic reform by the end of the 1960's.

The CPP came to power with independence in 1958 and the MAP was officially disbanded. A number of MAP leaders were jailed or left the country and it was not until the coup in 1966 that many of these leaders returned to their former positions.

In the Gao area the effects of returned migrants upon the practice of Islam was, in the 1940's, 50's and 60's, relatively mild. While those who left to work in Ghana for less than a year at a time may have brought back a receptiveness to the ideas of Islamic reform, they did not themselves generate an enthusiastic wave of commitment to a puritan expression of the faith. The 'hard core' of Songhay 'Wahhabis', therefore, remained largely isolated from Gao and its environs. It was not until the Ghanaian government's expulsion of many settled migrants in 1969 and '70 that these committed reformists returned to Gao and Wahhabism began to develop there in earnest.

Nevertheless, the Islamization of Songhay migrants in the *zongos*, especially since the Second World War, was a significant prelude to the development of Wahhabism in the Sahel. The experience of living in largely insular Muslim communities almost certainly prepared the way for

the establishment of the Wahhabiyya in Gao, even if it did not 'convert' all temporary migrants to a scripturalist interpretation of the faith.

In the 1940's and 50's in the Gao region there were two currents of religious reform. Each had a different origin and took on an entirely different expression of the Islamic religion. Hamallism was brought to Gao from the original nucleus of Sheikh Hamalla's devotees in Nyoro. It was, under Musa Aminu's leadership, enthusiastic and millenarian. Sheikh Musa legitimated his position of leadership through a claim of descent from the prophet--by establishing himself as a 'saint'.

Abdullahi ag Mahmud and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ifriqi were teachers and 'missionaries' rather than 'saints'. Their leadership was based upon literacy and a comprehensive understanding of the Quran and other texts rather than upon descent, miracles or visions. A similar scripturalist trend was also developing among the immigrant communities in Ghana. At roughly the same time that Musa Aminu's visionary maldism arose in Wani, the Songhay in other areas were beginning to accept a more scripturalist manner of reform.

The 'ecstatic' reform of Musa Aminu, in essence, took the model of Islam as practiced by the brotherhoods and exaggerated it. Rather than content themselves with a 'saint', a venerated holy man, the Songhay followed a saviour and practiced a devotional excess that is common to messianic

movements. The 'pedantic' mode of reform, exemplified by Abdullahi ag Mahmud and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ifriqi, modeled itself more on the scripturalism of the puritan reformer who stresses a return to 'pure' Islam and bases this return on an understanding and implementation of the original sources of religious inspiration.

In spite of their almost overwhelming differences, the 'ecstatic' and 'pedantic' modes of reform among the Songhay had some general characteristics in common. Both were 'new' to the Songhay. The veneration of saints was not new, but the Hamallist expression of this tendency was original enough to distinguish it from all other groups or movements. Similarly, Wahhabism had been in existence for several centuries and had influenced Usman dan Fodio and other *jihād* leaders of the 19th century, but its dissemination was only just beginning to gain new momentum and few of the tribal or ethnic groups neighbouring the Songhay in Gao had been significantly changed by it.

Thus, another similarity between the two expressions of reform is that they could, in a limited sense, be called 'unique' to the Songhay. Neither Hamallism nor Wahhabism had a place in the Islam of the Kunta, Tuareg or Fulani. In the Ghanaian context this relationship between reform and ethnic solidarity took the form of an integration into the *zongo* communities. Both kinds of reform, therefore, were suited for a solidification of the ethnic boundary. By setting themselves apart in this way, particularly from their former nomadic oppressors, the Songhay could call

upon religious reform as an affirmation of equality, or even superiority.

Abdullahi ag Mahmud is significant, when considered together with the later development of Wahhabism in Gao, principally for the fact that neither he nor his teachings appealed immediately to the Songhay. Several decades after his death, however, Songhay clerics preaching much the same message were far more successful. In the interim there were two developments that are worth stressing: 1) an increase in Islamic learning among a number of Songhay clerics which gave the message of reform more of an ethnic appeal; and 2) a drive toward western education and 'modernization' on the part of the new nation state which weakened adherence to traditional values but which failed to provide a viable alternative moral order.

V. MODERATES AND RADICALS

In this chapter I elaborate on the distinction between two groups of Wahhabis: moderates and radicals. This is intended as an outline of some general themes, such as the rivalry between religious factions and the centralization of radical Wahhabi villages, which are dealt with in more detail in later chapters. In introducing these groups I focus upon the leadership since the leaders provide a model of attitudes and behaviour for others to imitate and because a summary of their social backgrounds provides a basis for understanding the development of the Wahhabiyya in Gao which is treated below.

Introduction.

The ordinary townspeople of Gao are aware of the existence of Wahhabism in their city and of the fact that it is a recent phenomenon, but often this is the full extent of their knowledge of the matter. They identify a Wahhabi by his manner of dress: a white brimless cap, a head scarf instead of a turban, a full length shirt (*chemise Arabe*) instead of the traditional '*boubou*', and sometimes a Middle Eastern-style cape. Of the ideas of Wahhabis, however, they often know little. That which is most clear to them is the fact that Wahhabi ideas are not the same as everybody else's and that, in the common view, they tend toward an

'unnecessary' rigour in their practice of Islam. Some are defensive and see this rigour as an attack on cherished traditional beliefs and practices, and in this respect the outward sign of religious differentiation--the crossed arms in prayer of the Wahhabis as opposed to the arms held at the side--is sometimes a strong factor in generating ill-feeling and religious rivalry.

Wahhabism in the Gao area, however, is not unified into a single community of believers. In general they are divided into what may be called 'moderates' and 'radicals'.

The moderate Wahhabis generally maintain the attitude that there are reforms to be made in the practice of Islam but that nothing is to be gained by forcing change too strongly. The essential thing is for the Wahhabiyya to provide an example of the correct practice of the faith which others, 'God willing', will follow. Some moderates stress the unity of the community of Islam and, while admitting to differences in practices and knowledge, will deny or try to minimize the existence of dissention between believers.

The radicals generally maintain the attitude that they have discovered the Truth. In their view, others, including many who believe themselves to be Muslims, have been offered access to this Truth but have refused it and are therefore 'infidels' (*kāfir*) or 'polytheists' (*mushrik*). Their main complaint with the moderate Wahhabis is that the latter have compromised with those who are more obviously 'infidels' and, therefore, share in the general trend of the non-observance

of Islam. Thus, for the radical Wahhabis, the moderates are *murtadd* ('apostates'). Secondly, the radicals point to details of Muslim practice that the moderates are said to do incorrectly, such as the failure to seclude their wives and to have them 'properly' dressed outside the home.¹ The radicals, therefore, in their observance of the Truth, place more demands upon the worshipper in the practice of Islam.

The radicals, who call their organization of villages the *Jama'a Anṣār al-Sunna* (Community of the Helpers of the Sunna), reinforce the distinction between themselves and the moderates within the sphere of social behaviour and religious practice. They will not, for example, eat meat from animals slaughtered by other Muslims in the Gao area, including moderate Wahhabis. They consider the slaughter to have been done by a non-Muslim and therefore the meat is forbidden (*ḥarām*) to them. They also distinguish themselves by their greetings. Most Muslims, including moderate Wahhabis, greet one another with '*al-Salāmu alaīkum*', 'peace be upon you'. Radical Wahhabis always greet one another with the much lengthier formula: '*al-Sālamu alaīkum wa-l-Raḥmat Allah wa barakatuhu wa maḡfiratuhu*', 'peace be upon you and the mercy of God and His blessing and His forgiveness'. It was explained to me several times by radical Wahhabis that 'anyone who does not use this greeting is a *mushrik*. Some moderate Wahhabis consider this an unacceptable innovation (*bid'a*) since the word '*maḡfiratu*' has rarely

1. See below, pp. 214-222.

been used in a Muslim greeting, even in the lengthy prefaces of letters.

Another difference between the moderate and radical Wahhabis is in their spatial distribution. The moderates, on the whole, are to be found in the towns. Of the three towns, Bourem, Gao and Ansongo, the latter two have the largest Wahhabi communities. I cannot accurately estimate the number of adherents in Bourem or Ansongo, but the number of Wahhabi men in Gao is not much more than 300; if their wives and children are included in this estimate (even though they are not always identifiable as Wahhabis) the number comes to approximately 1000. There are a number of exceptions to this urban orientation, for a number of villages have small moderate communities. Forgho, for example, is a large village between Gao and Bourem which has a number of Wahhabis who do not belong to the radical group. It seems to be a trend that the few villages with moderate Wahhabi communities also have radical communities which oppose them.

The radicals shun the town, associating it with 'un-Islamic' influences. Only one radical Wahhabi, a clerk in the Mayor's office, lives permanently in Gao. Several others live in the town on a part-time basis, but in each case keep their wives and children in the villages. In general, only those who are fully steeped in Islamic learning or advanced in age are considered able to withstand the

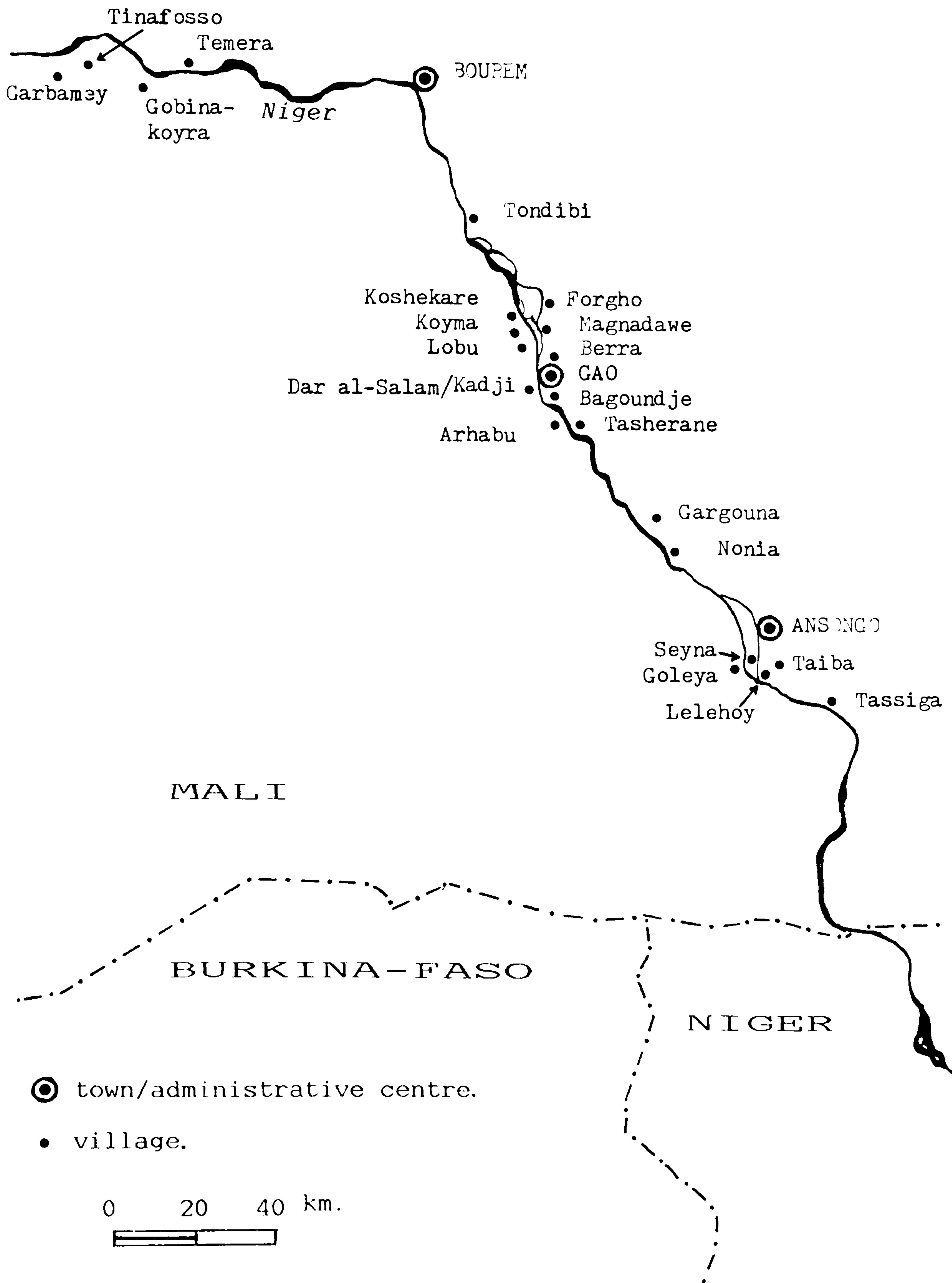
corrupting influence of the town.²

Within the village context, the radicals remain aloof from their non-Wahhabi (and moderate Wahhabi) neighbours and, wherever possible, have established separate villages and communities (see map, p. 117). The population of radical Wahhabi villages varies from those with three or four families to large villages with 500 or more inhabitants. The total population of radicals in the Gao area is, at a rough estimate, 4,000.

The fact that the moderate reformist community is centred in the town while the radicals are anchored to village life is reflected in the modes of livelihood practiced by the male members of the two communities. To present this difference with as much precision as possible a census was taken of the occupation of students' fathers in the following schools: 1) the two madrasas established by leaders of the moderate Wahhabiyya; 2) a large traditional Quran school in Gao; and 3) the 'radical' madrasa in Dar al-Salam.

It should be stressed that the census is not entirely representative of the occupations of Gao's reformists because a child can formally be enrolled regardless of the religious tendencies of his or her parents. It is likely, therefore, that in this part of the sample the information on fathers' occupation shows us the social background of those sympathetic to a 'comprehensive' knowledge of Arabic without

2. I was told that nine years of Islamic study are required before a young man brought up in the village environment can travel to Gao. This injunction seems to be applied with some consistency only in the Wahhabi capital, Dar al-Salam. Fitness to travel to the town, it appears, is determined by the village imam.



Map 2. Villages with radical Wahhabi settlements.

occupational ² category	moderate madrasas		Traditional Quran school		Dar al-Salam madrasa	
	no. of students	%	no.	%	no.	%
civil servant	47	25.00	16	21.92	---	---
artisan	43	22.87	25	34.25	---	---
trade	31	16.49	8	10.96	---	---
transport	18	9.57	15	20.53	---	---
religious functionary	7	3.72	1	1.37	---	---
farmer	42	22.34	8	10.96	186	100

Table 3: Occupations of students' fathers.

necessarily identifying completely with the reform movement. The traditional Quran school is representative of the traditionalist community since it would not attract members of the reform movement, this kind of school being a vehicle for the style of religious learning to which the reformers are opposed.

In Dar al-Salam a different problem was faced, namely that students were instructed by the leadership to indicate 'peasant' (*fatah*). This is significant in that even those whose fathers are in the southern cities earning a temporary

2. Some of these categories may require examples: 1) civil servants: all salaried government workers--clerks, military personnel, teachers, etc.; 2) artisans: masons, carpenters, boat builders, etc.; 3) trade: those who sell in the market, shop owners, minor traders and, rarely, long-distance traders; 4) transport: drivers and mechanics; 5) religious functionary: clerics and teachers in madrasas.

livelihood from trade or salaried labour are considered the sons of 'farmers'. The radical Wahhabiyya clearly places great value upon the modes of livelihood associated with village life.

Returning to the urban madrasas we see a more or less even distribution of civil servants, artisans and farmers with slightly fewer traders and the lowest percentage found in the more specific categories of 'transport' and 'religious functionary'. The high percentage of farmers requires explanation. In the second moderate madrasa sampled the head instructor was from Forgho, one of the villages in which the moderate reform movement has a significant following. Some parents who are sympathetic to the moderate reform movement, or who simply wish their children to receive better instruction in Arabic than that available in traditional Quran schools, send their children to the town, usually lodging with relatives, to attend the madrasa.

Another surprise in the results of the census is the fact that 'civil servant' is the most common occupational category among the fathers of children in Gao's madrasas, a result which contrasts with the traditional Quran school where 'artisan' is the most common category. This is surprising since in the West African context government employees have been those most exposed to western education and western values. Kaba³ describes the Islamic reform movement in Bamako during the 1940's and 50's as being opposed by those sectors

3. Kaba, 1974.

of society with French education, particularly government employees. Their involvement in, or sympathy with, Islamic reform in Gao is evidence of dissatisfaction with the results of their education, of their employment, and an attraction to their Islamic heritage, seen, perhaps, as being the 'true' tradition of Africa. In the context of the moderate reform movement this Islamic tradition becomes more adaptable to the wider experience of those exposed to western influence than traditional Islam with its emphasis on 'Islamic magic' and the veneration of holy men, the human carriers of sacred power. The stress on literacy, on an 'understanding' of the sacred text and on simple obedience of divine prescriptions and proscriptions makes the reformed faith more compatible with scientific knowledge, technology and bureaucratic order.

A less obvious difference between the two groups of reformists lies in the nature of their leadership. The leadership of the moderates is more diffuse than that of the radicals. A number of men share the leadership responsibilities and no one individual seems to take a preeminent position. The authority of these leaders, moreover, is usually based upon their position in the 'nobility' or their position as wealthy traders rather than upon any specific talents.

In contrast to the moderates, the leadership of the radicals is focused upon one man, Seydu Idrissa, who may be considered the 'founder' of their local expression of Islamic reform. This reinforces the closed nature of the movement since it is implicitly understood that a 'good Muslim' is one who acknowledges the leadership of Seydu

Idrissa, the head (*ra'īs*) of the radical Wahhabiyya. He defines the political boundary between 'we' and 'they', even if his influence in remote Wahhabi villages is negligible. He is the ultimate authority on matters pertaining to religious practice and acts as a focus for collective unity. He is said to have a modest family background, his parents being 'simple village folk', and this makes him ideally suited to his place as the leader of a rural movement. Other radical leaders have sometimes come from families with members in leading village positions, such as chiefs and clerics, but 'charisma' in the sense of the term used by Weber, meaning "specific gifts of the body and spirit...believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody"³ is more applicable to the leadership of the radicals than to that of the moderates. Both the moderate and the radical leadership, however, are to some extent based upon 'traditional' authority, upon the "piety for what actually, allegedly or presumably has always existed."⁴

The use of Weber's 'ideal types' of charismatic and traditional authority clarifies, but at the same time exaggerates, a difference between the two groups of reformists which is actually more subtle. The radical leader, unlike a more typical possessor of charisma, does not perform 'miracles' to legitimate his authority, and will usually deny

3. Weber (Gerth and Mills, trans.) 1948: 245.

4. *ibid*: 296.

that there is any difference in terms of piety or 'holiness' between himself and any other ardent believer. He is admired by his followers, not because he is a 'saint' and can perform superhuman feats, but because he has struggled and suffered in following the *sunna*, in implementing the commands of God as interpreted from the Quran and the 'traditions'. The radical leader, therefore, derives his position largely from his religious knowledge and from his example of steadfastness in putting that knowledge into practice. For the radicals, the 'supernatural gift of the spirit' is derived from the scriptures; the Quran is the principal carrier of sacred power which is then passed on to those who have access to it through literacy. This is also partially the case with the moderates, but in the urban environment literacy and Islamic learning are associated with a 'tradition' and, at the same time, the strength of national political power, and the greater integration of the moderate leadership within it, curtails the possibility of expressing defiance.

The difference between the moderate and radical leadership is clarified by considering biographical summaries of some of the more important Wahhabi leaders.

The moderate leadership.

a) Muhammad al-Tahir is currently the 'master' of the madrasa Sabil Al-Islam wa Dawatu Illaihi (The Way of Islam and the Preaching of God). He was born in Boya, a Fulani village

between Gao and Ansongo. His family boasts of a number of prominent clerics, among them Hafiz Muhammad who gained a reputation for resistance to the French presence during the 1930's and 40's. His father was also part of this Fulani 'maraboutic' tradition. Al-Tahir began his Quranic studies at an early age, first learning the Quran by rote, then learning to write it from memory, eventually being able to pick out the meaning of certain passages as a foundation for a more comprehensive knowledge of Arabic.

As a young man he continued his Islamic studies in Benghazi, Libya, which was a centre of the Sanusi brotherhood.⁵ It was in Libya in the 1950's that he first became exposed to reformist ideas, primarily through the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and 'Abd al-Wahhab. He later traveled to Niger, Burkina Faso and Ghana before concentrating his missionary effort on his native region of Gao.

In spite of his avowed adherence to Wahhabism, Muhammad al-Tahir remains faithful to many features of the maraboutic tradition. He has not, for example, abandoned the large turban of the traditional literati; he still gives benedictions and blessings during prayer--things that are not practiced by most other wahhabis.

b) 'Umar Muhammad, more commonly known as Sirki Maiga, is sometimes referred to as a '*chef de file*' of the moderate

5. Under Italian colonial rule the Shaikh of the lodge at Benghazi was regarded as the ambassador of the head of the brotherhood to the Governor of Cyreniaca. Cf. Evans-Pritchard, 1949: 45.

Wahhabiyya in Gao. He does not, however, have an advanced religious education and his position is more that of a spokesman than a religious leader. He has contributed to the strength of the movement in Gao largely through his wealth which was earned in trade. His education was French rather than Islamic and he began by working as a clerk in a store run by the colonial government. Not long after independence in 1960 he had saved a sufficient sum of money to become an independent trader. His main activity was in the cattle trade between Gao and northern Ghana.

In the early 1970's he attended a religious meeting organized by Wahhabis (among them Muhammad al-Tahir) and subsequently 'converted' to Wahhabism. He changed his name from Sirki Maiga to 'Umar Muhammad as part of this official conversion with the explanation that he had not previously been a Muslim. Since his conversion he has used much of his wealth for the development of the Wahhabiyya, converting his home into a mosque, financing the construction of a madrasa and providing poorer Wahhabis with the means to go on pilgrimage to Mecca.

c) Yusufi Yehia is the imam of the moderate Wahhabi mosque in Gao's second quarter established by 'Umar Muhammad and is master of the Medersa Islamique al-Mahdi Askia. His father was the imam of the mosque of Djoulabougou, the central mosque in Gao, and Yusufi Yehia received his early religious education from him. When his father died, Yehia replaced him for a short time as imam, but left soon after to continue

his religious studies abroad, first to Niamey, the capital of Niger, where he studied under the tutelage of al-Habib ibn Abdullah, another Wahhabi originating from Gao. He then went to Saudi Arabia where he stayed for several years. He accepted the religious principles of Wahhabism and upon his return to Gao worked to put these into practice, collaborating primarily with 'Umar Muhammad. In the early 1970's his home became a meeting place for the newly emerging Wahhabi community, and Friday prayers were held there before the completion of the mosque funded by 'Umar Muhammad.

Although he holds a respectable position in the wahhabi community, he is sometimes criticized by other Wahhabis for liberalism in his style of life. He is said to smoke cigarettes, to chat freely with women and to be too much concerned with clothes and jewellery. He does, in fact, wear a 'boubou' and an expensive gold ring rather than anything that would identify him as a Wahhabi. He is also criticized for limited knowledge of Islam and for a lack of conscientiousness in the running of his madrasa. His position as leader of the Wahhabi community, therefore, does not appear to be derived from any personal qualities or gifts but is rather associated with his deceased father's position as a leader in the traditional Muslim community.

The radical leadership.

a) Seydu Idrissa, or Abu 'Amra Sa'id ibn Idris as he officially calls himself, is the leader of the radical wahhabiyya. He

was born in Kadji, a large village with about 800 inhabitants located 7 km downstream from Gao on the opposite shore. In this region, as in much of rural Africa, dates of birth are not registered or recorded, but by most estimates he is believed to have been born in the mid-1930's. His relatives did not hold any political or religious office but rather were ordinary villagers who lived mainly from their work on the land. Aside, perhaps, from learning the rudiments of prayer at an early age, he did not begin his Quranic studies until he was in his late teens or early 20's. Advanced Islamic education was not available in Kadji and since the labour of adolescents and young men has always been important in the Songhay agricultural economy, independent travel, for Seydu Idrissa and others, was not possible before adulthood.

His search for Islamic learning took him first to the Gabero region between Gao and Ansongo where he began to memorize the Quran under the tutelage of a Fulani marabout, 'Abd al-Wahid.

Seydu Idrissa's next teacher, Alfa Larabu ('the Arab'), another Fulani, was the first to exercise a significant influence on him. Alfa Larabu had studied in Mauritania and later in Kano and Sokoto in northern Nigeria, before establishing himself with a following of disciples in Nayni, a village in Niger. Alfa Larabu, following the traditions of Qadiri reform which were, and remain, important in the areas where he studied, practiced a simplified version of

Islam. He was, nevertheless, very much a part of the maraboutic tradition. He had a wide reputation for his ability to heal the sick and to bring rain, even though he opposed the manufacture and use of 'gri-gris' as well as other practices involving 'Islamic magic'. He imparted to his students a more comprehensive knowledge of Arabic rather than the typical rote learning of the Quran of traditional Islamic education. Alfa Larabu also maintained a farmer's enthusiasm for work in the soil. During the growing season he is said to have spent much of his time with his followers in the fields. Seydu Idrissa later expressed much the same enthusiasm with his own work on the land and with his frequently voiced opinion that a man who doesn't work in such a manner would soon be begging from family and friends or corrupted by salaried work in the city.

Seydu Idrissa studied with Alfa Larabu for about three years before he moved on to another marabout in Niger, Alfa Hassan Lata. Hassan Lata had also studied in Kano and Sokoto and was also a 'puritan' adherent of the Qadiriyya order. After Hassan Lata's early studies in Nigeria he is said to have traveled to the Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan and India before finally returning to his natal village of Lata some twenty years after his departure--a voyage which could well be exaggerated by his admirers. Whether or not his travels were as extensive as reported, he seems to have been able to impart to his students, including Seydu Idrissa, a knowledge gained from experience of intellectual trends throughout the Islamic world.

When Seydu Idrissa left the following of Hassan Lata after two years he had completed his religious training as a *talibe* and was sufficiently instructed to become a 'marabout' himself. In the early 1960's he went to Ghana and eventually established himself as a trader, traveling between Kumasi and Tamale with imported clothes as his main article of trade. He improved his knowledge of the Hausa language, which he had earlier been exposed to during his study in Niger, through his dealings with Hausa traders. At the same time he built up a following of disciples, mainly Songhay migrant workers, and established a reputation as a pious and learned Muslim.

It was during his stay in the *zongos* of Kumasi and Tamale that Seydu Idrissa became committed to Wahhabi reform. In 1967 or '68 the Songhay community in Kumasi constructed a mosque and Seydu Idrissa was elected as its imam. He held this position for only a short time before the Ghanaian government, on 19 November, 1969, announced that it would deport immigrants without valid residence permits from 2 December of the same year. Seydu Idrissa, when he returned to his natal village of Kadji, was one of over 200,000 'aliens' who left Ghana by June, 1970.⁶

At this point Seydu Idrissa's career is tied to the development of the Wahhabiyya in the Gao region in the early 1970's. The narrative of his career from this point onwards

6. Cf. Adomako-Sarfoh, 1974: 138.

is treated in the next chapter.

b) Al-Hajj Ali Joma, an adjutant to Seydu Idrissa in the beginning of the Wahhabiyya in Gao, was born around 1925 in the village of Jamkoi, south of Bourem. His uncle was the chief of the village and Ali Joma's family held a respected position in the community. He began his Quranic studies, based on traditional rote learning, in his village with a local *alfa*. As a young man he traveled to Macina, the former seat of a 19th century Fulani empire, to continue his Islamic education. He later went on pilgrimage and studied for several years in Saudi Arabia. During this time he became exposed to Wahhabi ideas. After leaving Saudi Arabia in the 1960's he went to Ghana where he met Seydu Idrissa and began his involvement with the Wahhabiyya.

c) Sadu 'Abd al-Rahman, another adjutant to Seydu Idrissa, was born around 1943 in Wani. This village was the site of the mahdist uprising led by Musa Aminu in 1949. 'Abd al-Rahman's family was forcibly moved from Wani to Watagouna. He began his Quranic studies under the tutelage of his father. Later, like Ali Joma, he went for several years to Macina to further his knowledge of Islam. In 1967 he traveled to Ghana where he began teaching the Quran to beginning students and, at the same time, studying under the tutelage of other Muslim clerics, among them Seydu Idrissa. It was during this period that he came under the influence of Wahhabi reform and became an ardent supporter of Seydu Idrissa.

* * *

At the time that the radical Wahhabi leaders first returned to their natal villages after their studies, the rural Songhay 'maraboutic' tradition was relatively weak. A much stronger tradition was to be found among the nomads for whom the exclusive bearers of religious authority and sanctity (*baraka*) were tribal holy men whose prestige was often very high. The Wahhabis opposed this system of saintly intervention and also worked to reduce what prestige remained to the traditional Songhay cleric. Their campaign in the villages introduced a new dimension to Songhay Islam: the standard of learning increased and the field of interaction between Muslims widened from the local community to a network of villages.

The moderate leaders were generally part of a stronger Islamic tradition than that found in the traditional village milieu. Muhammad al-Tahir follows the tradition of Fulani *mallams* and can be said to have almost inherited his position as a reformer from this background. Yusufi Yehia, through his family background, belongs to a tradition of urban 'clericalism' which gave him a strong claim to leadership in the moderate Wahhabi community.

VI. THE GROWTH OF THE GAO WAHHABIYYA

The opposition between moderates and radicals was not always present in the Gao Wahhabiyya. In the first few years of its development there was cooperation between the urban and the rural reformists, while the Wahhabis of the villages in some instances lived peacefully with their traditional neighbours. This initial tolerance, however, was short lived and the divisions between religious groups that we find today emerged in an atmosphere of tension and violence.

The ultimate source of these conflicts lies in the communication of religious ideas, and I begin by summarizing the routes by which reformist ideas found their way into Songhay society.

Origins.

Islamic reform, marked by an emphasis on the Quran and *ḥadīth* as primary sources of religious knowledge, is not restricted to Wahhabism but rather has been an essential feature of contemporary (and medieval) Islamic history in many parts of the world. In tracing the sources of Wahhabism in Gao, therefore, we find a variety of influences, or rather a variety of sources of a similar influence, which have a place in the origins of the reform movement.

One aid to the development of reformist Islam came

From northern Nigeria. Here, British indirect rule in the late 19th century probably altered the political evolution of the Sokoto empire by sheltering it from schism, civil war and predation. This encouraged the consolidation of Islam and gave an impetus to a 'puritan' version of the faith which has continued into the 20th century. The reformed Qadiriyya movement in Kano and Sokoto¹ was a source of learning for Fulani clerics in French West Africa who were then able to establish enclaves of higher Islamic learning in spite of the French authorities' prevailing suspicion and hostility towards the development of Islam. Seydu Idrissa is among the Wahhabis who were educated in this milieu. Also of Nigerian origin were the Hausa *mallams* who may have exercised an influence upon the immigrant Songhay community in Ghana.

Reform movements in North Africa have also, to some extent, had an influence in Gao. Muhammad al-Tahir, the founder of a madrasa in Gao, was trained for several years in the Sanusi centre of Benghazi, Libya in the early 1960's. Post-revolutionary Libya maintains an interest in disseminating Ghadafi's ideas on the primacy of the Quran as a source of moral and political authority, but support from the Libyan government for Wahhabi reform, while it exists, has been minimal.

Gao has a minority population of Algerians as well as a small Algerian consulate because of its position as an administrative and trading town close (in relative terms) to

1. Cf. Paden, 1976.

the Algeria/Mali border; but the Algerian expatriates remain aloof from the black population and there has been little or no influence from the Algerian Islamic movements such as the Ibadis from the central oasis towns or the Muslim Brethren (*Ikhwān al-Muslimī*) from the northern coastal cities.

Probably the most important source of Wahhabi ideas came from those who traveled to Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage, remained there to study and eventually returned to West Africa with a more rigorous approach to Islam. This Middle Eastern influence is an important source of reform throughout West Africa. Islamic institutions like the *Dar al-Hadith* in Medina are especially important in the promotion of Wahhabi ideas. It is the long-term pilgrim who wishes to pursue Islamic studies and, perhaps, become literate in Arabic, that is especially receptive to the simple ideas expressed in Wahhabi brochures and lectures. The religious background of the pilgrim is an important factor affecting the receptivity of reformist ideas. Those with a strong commitment to 'traditional' Islam are less likely to change their religious orientation. A pilgrim, for example, with a background in the Tijaniyya brotherhood with its emphasis on sainthood, miracles and strong, often ethnically or tribally oriented values of community participation in ritual, would likely be less receptive to the reformist campaign in Saudi Arabia than one who was 'unattached' to any Muslim community or already partly committed to the principles of a 'purified' Islam.

The Songhay Wahhabis have been very much part of this 'pilgrimage connection'. Financial constraints, however, especially in recent years, have prevented most village farmers from participating in this source of knowledge and prestige. Trade and employment in the southern coastal cities have been the principal sources of money for the journey to Mecca but such opportunities are now scarce.

Correspondence with other parts of the Muslim world has been a source of ideological reinforcement and, especially for the radicals who remain distant from their Muslim neighbours, a way for the feeling of participating in a wider Islamic community to be developed. Seydu Idrissa maintains occasional contact with a wide range of correspondents, especially in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Lebanon. He cited to me as his most prestigious correspondent 'Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, a *muftī* in Medina who is among the most important members of the '*ulamā* in Saudi Arabia.² Among the radicals of the Gao area, Seydu Idrissa appears to be the only one to engage in such correspondence. In a largely non-literate, isolated community, the receipt of a foreign letter has a strong effect and the prestige attached to this activity makes it a source of legitimation of Seydu Idrissa's authority.

Saudi delegates have also occasionally visited West Africa. Since the change of government in Mali in 1968, a number of visits have been made to major towns such as Gao, Timbuktu, Kayes and Bamako by imams from Mecca and Medina.

2. Baz's status as a high ranking *muftī* in Saudi Arabia is confirmed by Quandt (1981: 94) who mentions him as a former rector of the Medina theological college where he was a major influence on Juhayman bin Muhammad, the leader of the Mecca incident of 1979.

In 1983 a delegation came to Gao from Medina with the intent of investigating the development of Wahhabism and the conflicts between Muslims in the area. The delegation was led by 'Umar Muhammad (not to be confused with the moderate Wahhabi leader), a Fulani who is said to have been born in Mecca and who is the General Secretary of the Islamic university in Medina. Also in the delegation was Hamidu Bukuru, a native of Karibandja, a village in the Gao region, who holds a position in the Dar al-Hadith in Medina. As part of their itinerary they visited the Wahhabi villages of Dar al-Salam and Berra. There are conflicting reports about their findings. The radical Wahhabis indicated that the delegates were thrilled with their Quran school system and had found many similarities with the education system in Saudi Arabia. Whether or not the delegates praised the Wahhabi education system in the glowing terms reported to me, they did encourage the Wahhabis' progress in this direction by donating a large amount of books and pamphlets, among them numerous copies of a condensed version of the teachings of 'Abd al-Wahhab, the *Mubādī al-Islām* (the Manifest in Islam), which is standard fare for Wahhabi students. An official in the government sponsored Association Malien Pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam (AMUPI), on the other hand, said that the delegates had come to elicit promises from the radical Wahhabis to re-unite with the other Muslims in the region but that, having given such a promise, Seydu Idrissa failed to put it into effect. Very

likely there is some element of truth in both accounts.

Influential Muslims from other parts of the world have also been a stimulus to Islamic reform in Ghana. In the *zongo* communities in Ghana there appears to have been some influence from Indian Islamic reform as led by 'Abd al-Hassan Nadvi, the rector of the Islamic Academy of Lucknow. Nadvi is the major agent of transmission of the thought of Maulana Maudoodi, the first Muslim thinker to sweepingly condemn 'western-style' modernity as being incompatible with Islam. Nadvi had a direct influence on Sayyid Qutb, a leading activist of the Muslim Bretheren in Egypt.³ In the 1960's Nadvi was interested in promoting Islamic reform in Ghana, his principal objective being to create a reform effort to counteract the influence of the Ahmadiyya. It is likely that Nadvi had some influence, both financial and ideological, upon the Muslim communities in the *zongos* of Ghana.

Early conflicts (1970-1978).

In tracing the development of the Wahhabiyya in the Gao region I have not had access to written sources such as police reports or other government files but have relied upon oral testimony from participants in, or opponents of, the reform movement for whom the events were significant and relatively easily recalled. The detail that can be derived from written sources is, therefore, sometimes lacking,

3. Sivan, 1985: 23.

and the narratives from which I have worked sometimes had the nature of 'stories' rather than 'histories' but in such cases the 'story', whatever its accuracy, is valuable in indicating the opinions and attitudes of participants in a conflict. By comparing a number of accounts, moreover, the general nature and sequence of events has become clear and the trends in the development of the Wahhabiyya in Gao over a period of 15 years has become more apparent.

In 1968 the political situation in Mali became more favourable for the development of the Wahhabiyya with a change in government involving the ousting of a socialist regime which had discouraged the growth of Islam in the country.

The socialist government led by Modibo Keita was, of the newly-established regimes in the post-colonial period, one of the most Marxist-Leninist oriented. The new Malian state tended towards centralized control in its implementation of 'planned socialism' and in its drive for economic independence and full 'decolonization'.⁴ No political system, in a country with a majority population of Muslims (roughly 70% in Mali), however, could hope for stability by opposing outright the religious traditions. The government's theory of socialism was itself related, in some of the political rhetoric, to the Muslim tradition in which the people have such pride. But it was not Islamic values as such that

4. Grundy, 1964: 175-76.

were constantly emphasized, but rather the values of the party which was conceived as having its roots in the Sudanic Muslim tradition.⁵ Modibo Kieta made this clear in an address to a conference of the Union Soudanaise in 1954: "Le R.D.A., l'Union Soudanaise, est une seconde religion qui trouve sa source dans la religion Musulmane qui veut qu'on aide les pauvres et qu'on défende les faibles."⁶ While not waging open war against Muslim leaders and clerics, the socialist regime jealously monopolized state power and discouraged the development of Islamic organizations which would potentially gain political influence. The disbanding of the Union Culturelle Musulmane, the main organizational body of the Wahhabiyya in Bamako, was a key manouvre in the socialist regime's suppression of Islamic reform.

The regime which took power in 1968, while remaining 'secular', has been more tolerant of the development of Islam, the president, Moussa Traore, making it clear that he is a practicing Muslim. The Union Culturelle Musulmane was re-established in 1968 but disbanded once again in 1971 when the government felt its political monopoly threatened. The creation in 1981 of the government controlled Association Malien pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam (AMUPI) was a compromise which attempted to strike a balance between centralized authority and the development of Islam.

Amselle, conducting research on Wahhabi traders in

5. Hodgkin and Morgenthau, 1964: 225.

6. *ibid.*

Bamako in 1968 witnessed a change in attitude among the Wahhabis which followed the fall of the socialist regime.⁷ Suddenly they were more open and cooperative, feeling free to promote their version of the faith. This change in the relationship between Wahhabis and the central government has also been evidenced in the rapid increase in Wahhabi mosques and schools since the coup.

A year after the change of government in Mali, the Busia government in Ghana deported over 200,000 migrant workers. Among those who returned to Mali were Songhay Wahhabis who had been living more or less permanently in Ghana. It is with this influx of committed reformists in 1969 and 1970 that the Wahhabiyya became solidly implanted in the Gao region and conditions for the conflict between the exponents of reform and the traditionalists were established.

As with the beginnings of Wahhabism in Bamako in the 1950's, a focal point in the early disputes between Wahhabis and traditionalists in Gao was the issue of whether the pious Muslim should pray with his arms at his side, as the traditionalists do, or with his arms folded across his chest, as do the reformists. The furor over this detail of prayer reached a high pitch in the beginning phase of the Wahhabiyya in the early 1970's. The complaint was mainly vocalized by the traditionalists who saw the '*bras croisées*' as an

7. Amselle, 1977: 12.

innovation which was an affront to traditional African Islam. The root cause of this complaint seemed to be that they perceived the change as an attack upon the validity of their own practices and, perhaps, their own identity.

The traditionalists were by far the majority, but they did not form a unified group. Protest against the new trend was vocal, sometimes violent, but also random and disorganized. It was the local identification with Islam that was threatened by the 'crossed arms'--the outward manifestation of change--rather than any specific organized group.

The Wahhabi leaders, representing the opposite side of the conflict, were often those who had been exposed to 'new' religious ideas through travel and study. Many perceived their reformist ideas as a re-affirmation of Islam--in a sense a return to the 'true' tradition--in opposition to pagan beliefs and to the adoption of 'un-Islamic' values and customs. One of the most important 'abuses' to them was the manufacture and use of amulets or 'gri-gris'. To the Wahhabis this represented an appeal to lower spiritual elements for protection in this world rather than the unique God.

These issues began to crystalize when Seydu Idrissa returned to his home village of Kadji from Ghana in 1970. He was initially welcomed as a hero, was recognized as being the most learned man in the village and was elected imam of the village mosque. His election as imam was almost certainly not without its opponents, but at this early stage

Seydu Idrissa seems to have been more conciliatory than he was later to become, allowing his followers, who prayed with crossed arms, to worship together with those who were more reluctant to change.

With relatively easy access to Gao from Kadji, Seydu Idrissa participated in the early efforts of Wahhabis in the town, collaborating with those whom he was later to denounce as 'infidels'. In the village, however, he had an independent following and he seems to have concentrated most of his preaching activity there. His main objective upon returning to Mali seems to have been to preach a 'purified' Islam to those in the villages who were not in touch with the Muslim community in Ghana.

Upon his arrival in Kadji, Seydu Idrissa initiated public meetings and discussions in which he criticized the practices of local clerics and asserted the 'correct' way of practicing Islam. These public attacks on traditional Islam provoked response from local religious leaders, but none were able to match Seydu or his close disciples in learning and literacy, in knowledge of the scriptural authority. As a consequence Seydu gained a devoted following, recruited mainly from amongst those who attended these debates and who were convinced by his arguments, admiring of his knowledge and captivated by his rhetoric.

Seydu Idrissa's success in his home village encouraged him to spread the reformist doctrine to other villages in the Gao region. Those of his devotees who had some Islamic

learning also traveled to other villages to spread Wahhabi reform. One of these 'missionaries' was 'Umar Sadu, also a native of Kadji. He frequently visited Bagoundje, a large village of over 1000 inhabitants about 5 km from Kadji on the opposite shore. Many villagers there initially responded favourably to the drive for reform, and it has since become one of the strongest sources of support for the radical Wahhabiyya. Such spokesmen as 'Umar Sadu appear to have been initially tolerant in their approach, though they still strongly attacked traditional practices which they considered questionable. The following are examples of the messages that such 'missionaries' as 'Umar Sadu delivered as remembered by traditional villagers of Bagoundje who were attracted by the message of reform without, however, formally joining the Wahhabiyya:

They said to the believers that there is no God but Allah; they said to the people that anybody who does not believe in God, if he dies, he dies an infidel (*kāfir*). Whoever believes in spirits of the stone or of the tree, who believes in *alfa* or magicians, who believes in anything but God, if he dies, he dies an infidel.

When they [the Wahhabis] came all that they told us was taken from the Quran. They told us what God has said, what the Prophet said. Anything that was not this we were not to follow. The people were very excited, especially when they heard [the Wahhabis] speak of the Quran and hadith and what God said and what the Prophet said. Every-

body came to hear... They told us that the Quran is the word of God and that the hadith is the word of the Prophet. When they told us this we were no longer masters of ourselves.

It was largely through the message that the Quran is the word of God and that His will can be understood and obeyed for greater prosperity that the reform movement gained an enthusiastic rural following.

Stimulated by the success of their missionary effort in the villages, Seydu Idrissa and his closest disciple, Sadu 'Abd al-Rahman, formed the idea of creating a separate Islamic organization which would recruit villagers in the region of Gao and migrant workers in other cities in West Africa--a Muslim organization, therefore, which was to be anchored to Songhay society, although ethnic exclusiveness was probably not intended. This organization was later to be called the *Jama'a Anṣār al-Sunna* (Community of the Helpers of the Sunna), the title by which the radical Wahhabis identify their movement. They traveled first to Bamako to seek official government approval for their proposed organization. This approval, however, was not forthcoming and they returned to Gao where they tried, also without success, to gain support from local authorities.

Having failed to obtain official support at home they worked, nevertheless, to establish popular support abroad. With the necessary visa documents in their possession, they

traveled to the major cities in Niger, Burkina Faso, Togo, Ghana and the Ivory Coast where there were populations of migrant workers who would be potentially receptive to their proposal of an Islamic organization centred in the region of Gao. Very likely their objective was to use the migration inherent in Songhay society to establish an Islamic missionary effort throughout the southern West African cities. Their only success, however, was in Ghana where Seydu Idrissa had already established a following from his earlier work as a trader and an imam.

Sadu 'Abd al-Rahman was highly vocal in promoting the merits of his teacher. He advanced the claim that Seydu Idrissa was an *'amīr al-mu'minīn'*, 'commander of the faithful', and was the chosen man to lead a renaissance of Islam throughout West Africa. The title *'amīr al-mu'minīn* was first used as a title of respect given to the prophet's successor 'Umar and to the later three Khalifs. It eventually became more diluted in its application. It was commonly used by leaders of dynasties everywhere in the Muslim world; in the west, for example, by the Rostenids, Aghlabids, Zīrids, Hammādids, Umayyads (after 928 A.D.) as well as by some of the petty Spanish kings.⁸ In West Africa it was used in reference to Askia Muhammad⁹ and in the 19th century in addressing the successors of Usman dan Fodio in the Sokoto empire.¹⁰

Many who heard 'Abd al-Rahman's claim believed it to

8. *Encycopaedia of Islam*.

9. Cf. Kati, 1913.

10. Hiskett, 1984: 172.

be synonymous with the title of Khalif and thought that in accepting this title Seydu Idrissa was claiming leadership of the entire Muslim world. It is true that the title of Khalif also became diluted and was used in addressing Muslim leaders, such as Usman dan Fodio, who did not claim leadership over the entire Muslim world, but the term theoretically implies just this, successorship of the prophet, whereas the title of *amīr* implies subordination to a higher Muslim authority such as the Serif of Mecca.¹¹ In accepting the title of *'amīr al-Mu'minīn*, therefore, Seydu Idrissa probably saw himself as the true leader of the reform movement in West Africa with ties to more central authorities in the Muslim world. Since he had not yet achieved such a position, however, his assumption of the title of *'amir* was likely motivated by wishful thinking.

Despite the opposition aroused by 'Abd al-Rahman's claims, the call for a new Islamic organization had immediate appeal to a number of traders and workers in Ghana, and Seydu Idrissa soon gained a strong following. The majority of Wahhabi leaders in Gao, however, did not give Seydu Idrissa support for his organization. A number of Wahhabis in Gao, among them Yusufi Yehia and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Wahid, when informed of Seydu Idrissa's activities, complained that they had not been consulted about his plans. Some received letters from Muslims in Ghana asking whether Seydu Idrissa's leadership of the predominantly Songhay Islamic community was authorized by them. They replied that they had never

¹¹. Hiskett, 1984: 172.

been consulted about an Islamic organization and that Seydu Idrissa's claim that he spoke for the entire Wahhabi community in Gao was false.

The most vocal opposition to Seydu Idrissa's and 'Abd al-Rahman's plans in Ghana came from al-Habib ibn Abdullah, a Songhay Wahhabi who lived during much of his career in Niamey and who presently runs a madrasa in Segou. In essence, al-Habib told his listeners in the *zongos* of Ghana that Seydu Idrissa was leading his followers to disaster. His claims to leadership were said by al-Habib to be outrageous and he could not at the same time realize his goal of Islamization and remain a guest in a non-Islamic state. This denouncement, in addition to the realization that Seydu Idrissa's claim to leadership was not unanimously accepted by the Wahhabi community in Gao, created a division in Ghana between those who accepted his leadership and those who did not.

Almost as soon as this conflict arose in Ghana, Seydu Idrissa returned to Kadji, leaving 'Abd al-Rahman behind for a short time to handle the affairs of the movement. Upon his arrival in Kadji he found that news of the conflict in Ghana had preceeded him and that he had been relieved of his position as village imam.

There were many, however, who were still loyal to him, including his parents and other relatives. Accompanied by them he moved to a plot of his father's land several kilometers from Kadji to establish a seperate community. This

move was perceived as a *hijra*, an emmigration from the land of the unbelievers (*dār al-Kufra*) to the land of the faithful (*dār al-Dīn*). In the Wahhabi religious primer *Mubādī al-Islām* we find the following: "the hijra means departing from the land of the polytheists (*bilād al-Shirk*) to settle with the community of Islam (*bilād al-Islām*); and the hijra is ordained on the Muslim community until the Final Judgement."

When the Wahhabi leaders of Gao received word of this move they were greatly concerned about the potential for further dissention in the Muslim community. They decided that a show of solidarity on their part would best encourage Seydu Idrissa and his followers to re-unify with Kadji. To maximize their show of solidarity and the moral pressure it was to create they invited Muslim leaders from Niger and Burkina Faso, perhaps numbering two dozen, to join them in their appeal. This effort backfired because as the foreign clerics arrived the military authorities started surveillance of them and, fearing arrest, the visitors quickly left the region. It is possible that some were deported.

Meanwhile the governor, Koke Diembele, had been informed of Seydu Idrissa's cession from his village and, after investigating the situation, issued an ultimatum: the Wahhabis were given one week to reintegrate with the Kadji community before the military was to forcibly remove them from their independent village.

During this week of 'grace', 'Umar Muhammad led a delegation of reformist leaders from Gao to plead with Seydu

Idrissa to obey the governor's demands. The moderate Wahhabi community, besides opposing division between Muslims, was concerned with the possibility of government repression in the event that Seydu Idrissa lead his followers into conflict with the authorities. This fear was strongly reinforced by the fact that conflict with the traditionalists in Gao had recently led to a closure of the new Wahhabi mosques. Before the concerns of the Wahhabi community could be expressed, however, Seydu Idrissa proposed that they join forces in fighting the government militarily. If he perceived the move of his followers away from Kadji as a *hijra*, it is also possible that he saw the proposed struggle against the government as a *jihād* in defense of Islam. The delegation discouraged him from pursuing what they felt to be a suicidal venture and, lacking their support while faced with the governor's deadline, he eventually agreed to move his followers back to Kadji.

His followers returned to Kadji but they built a new village beside the original one with a space of about 50 meters between the two. The new village was called, perhaps euphemistically, Dar al-Salam, ' Dwelling of Peace'. This location for Seydu Idrissa's village was a compromise that created a simmering resentment among the remaining villagers of Kadji. The division was seen by them as an attack upon the traditional beliefs and practices which were the foundation of their lives. A more palpable effect was the division of families between members who had joined the ranks of the

reform movement and those who stayed in the old village. In families that did not become Wahhabi *en masse* conflict was an inherent part of religious change with older family members usually disagreeing with younger, newly committed Wahhabis whom they perceived as slandering tradition. The division of Kadji took this conflict a step further. Here, the division of community and family was complete and apparently irrevocable. The religious primer, *Mubādī al-Islām*, was a source of the conviction of radical Wahhabis that in abandoning their unbelieving family members they were following the true way of Islam: "Whoever bears obedience to the prophet and testifies to the unity of God should not cherish those who deny God and his Messenger, even if they are his nearest kin." Children who joined the reform movement thus no longer felt any obligation towards their parents (now *kāfir*) if the latter did not join them in their 'conversion'. This heightened the feeling among the traditionalists that the Wahhabis were taking their reforms too far and were a threat to corporate village life. This perceived threat sometimes led to a violent response. Thus the establishment of Dar al-Salam marked the beginning of a period of conflict which was to continue over several years, culminating in the arrest of Seydu Idrissa and about 40 of his followers in 1974 or '75.

This conflict cannot be fully understood without considering the changes that have taken place in Songhay family structure over the past century. Olivier de Sardan has

reconstructed, largely from oral testimony, the pre-colonial family structure of the Songhay.¹² The head of the family was the eldest male, the patriarch to whom all other family members owed allegiance and respect. Sons would bring to him all their earnings and in return would expect aid, as in arranging for marriage payments, and economic security. Attached to the patriarchal household were often 'slaves', or *horso* who worked in the fields and paid tribute to the noble family. Position and rank in the household hierarchy were based upon age, the young deferring to their elders and inheritance of family land following the principle of primogeniture.

The French did not wish to destroy the patriarchal family structure but rather intended it to flourish as the basis of social stability. This was not to be so. The emancipation of 'slaves' removed a pillar of patriarchal domination in noble families. A permanent solidarity between brothers or even their economic cooperation was no longer a given in the productive system. Economic interdependence was replaced by an individualization of the economy. A diversification of opportunities was one of the main reasons behind this: migration played a decisive role in the weakening of family ties. With departure to the Gold Coast, young men acquired a new economic and social position. They could live by their own work, independent of the extended domestic structure. They could by themselves earn the income necessary

12. Olivier de Sardan, 1984: Chs. V and XII.

for bridewealth and they could even, in times of famine, become an important means of support for their relatives senior in age.¹³

Another factor in the individualization of the economy was the division of land which resulted from colonial conceptions of ownership. The pre-colonial system of inheritance followed the necessity of giving control over the use of family land to the 'patriarch'. Upon the death of the head of the extended family, it was the successor--either a brother or the eldest son--who 'inherited' this responsibility of land management while junior male siblings usually remained to work jointly on the land and to share the benefits of production.

The new relationship of village farmers to the land, introduced by European conceptions of ownership, accelerated the process of individualization and privatization. The family head became less a 'manager' of the land and more an 'owner'; the patriarch "n'est plus un gestionnaire du processus collectif de la production, il est également un "propriétaire.""¹⁴ A more absolute conception of ownership was closely related to the problem of inheritance. Thus, under colonial rule, upon the death of the father, his sons had equal 'right' to access to family land; inheritance was no longer based upon the principle of age. The brothers of the deceased those who might previously have taken over

13. Olivier de Sardan, 1984: 246-47.

14. Ibid: 247.

the family headship, were bypassed in favour of the 'equal' inheritance of his sons. The rule became the division of land between male siblings which led to the parcelling of land and the reduction in size of units of production. This parcelling of land was possible only because a diversification of the economy had given those with smaller plots a basis for subsistence. A change from 'patriarchal' exploitation of land, a system which united several nuclear families into one extended production unit, to 'paternal' exploitation which obeyed only the social rules of immediate patrilineal filiation and favoured the 'nuclear family' as the principal unit of production, weakened ties of cooperation and gave junior male family members a new measure of independence. In many cases the sibling group remained solidary but this interdependence was no longer a necessity.

It was possible for religious reform to provoke family division only in a situation where patriarchal authority was weakened and where the nuclear family, a married couple with their offspring, largely replaced the extended family as the basic social unit of production. Relationships between children and parents, especially mothers, are often strong and affectionate; sibling groups often remain close and are sometimes a unit of economic cooperation. But in many cases ties between children and their parents or between siblings are more 'affective', based upon emotional solidarity, than 'effective', a necessary and dependable social link which provides economic security. In this situation it was possible for religious commitment to override the

values of kinship and community, though not without grief and turmoil. A more individualized economy and social structure was a necessary condition for individualized religious 'conversion'. Whether or not the weakening of kinship ties was a cause of religious reform is a question that I shall reserve for later discussion.

One of the major events that followed the division of Kadji was an extension of family and community division to include other villages where Seydu Idrissa's partisans were living. He seems to have called for the divisions himself, believing that the correct practice of Islam was being hampered by continued daily life in villages where 'mixed' Islam was present. The village divisions took one of three forms: 1) the most common form of division occurred where the Wahhabi community, as in Kadji, moved to a plot of land separate from the main village, owned by one of their members, and established a separate village. The distance between the new Wahhabi community and the traditional village varied from between roughly 50 meters to several kilometers. These new villages were sometimes given Arabic names but remained administratively part of the main village; 2) there were a number of villages where division was resisted by the traditionalists who held local power. In these cases the advocates of reform either left the village for one which had already been divided or, as in Bagoundje, they gradually moved to houses and compounds in one quarter of the village without forming a completely spatially separate

community. In the Wahhabi 'quarters' of such villages the autonomy of the reformist community is jealously guarded and intrusions of non-Wahhabi villagers are not tolerated unless they are on 'official business'; and 3) In Berra official village leaders 'converted' to Wahhabism, or struck a balance between the rival groups, which enabled the Wahhabis to become politically dominant. In this case it was the traditionalist community which moved to establish a separate village from the original settlement.

These divisions affected almost every aspect of village life. The chief's authority was not recognized by the Wahhabis, unless, as was the case only in two or three villages, he belonged to their group. Though it was necessary for them to deal with local authorities, the lives of the Wahhabis were, and remain, governed as far as possible by the laws of Islam as expressed in the Quran and hadith.

Cooperation in terms of communal labour and help for the poor became limited to partisans of the same religious tendency. Prayer was held separately, usually, before the construction of mosques, in the compound of their imam.

As in Kadji, the general aspect of the division of villages which created the most bitterness was the breaking of family ties along religious lines. It was especially the fact that the Wahhabis refused to visit their parents if they did not convert that caused grief. This is made clear by a statement from a traditionalist in Bagoundge:

They told the people...that any brother who did not come [i.e. become a Wahhabi], any mother who did not come...that if anybody fallen sick did not come, even if it was a mother, that they would not visit them, that they would separate from them completely.

Marriages were no longer contracted between the two groups, nor were baptisms, marriages or funerals attended by rival family members. The Wahhabis also established separate burial grounds.

At the same time that villages were dividing, a rupture took place between the radicals, under the leadership of Seydu Idrissa, and the moderate Wahhabis in Gao. When the Gao Wahhabis realized the dangerous course being taken by Seydu Idrissa they made every effort to disassociate themselves from him and his activities.

Despite this attempt at disassociation, the difference between members of the Wahhabi groups was not immediately visible to non-reformists. Most Wahhabis could be distinguished by their manner of dress which made them a target for insults and violence.

Invective was, and remains, one of the ways in which boundaries between religious groups were sharpened. The radical Wahhabis referred to those who did not belong to their group as *kāfir*, 'infidels', or *mushrik*, 'polytheists'; the moderate Wahhabis they referred to as *murtadd*, 'apostates'.

Initially the traditionalists called the Wahhabis '*wahhabantye*', the Songhay equivalent of 'Wahhabi' or 'followers of Wahhab'. This term lost its sting when many Wahhabis began to consider it a more or less accurate assessment of the main source of their religious allegiance. The most biting term of abuse used by the traditionalists was '*alhawarintye*', literally 'those who follow their desires'. This word can be understood in several senses. It is used by the Songhay in reference to the Kharijites ('the leavers'), the strongest example to them of Muslims who 'turned their backs to the religion', who denied the suzerainty of both the prophet's successor 'Ali and his rival Mu'awiya, and who therefore 'left the community of Islam'. Traditional villagers, not understanding the motivations or the beliefs of radical Wahhabis, sometimes explain that they are Kharijites, that they are a splinter group inspired by the original sectarians. In a telescoping of time which is typical of rural peoples who do not live by a linear calendar, some traditionalists believe that the original Kharijites who battled 'Ali, or their immediate descendants, were responsible for spreading reformist ideas to the Wahhabis and causing them to leave their families.

Another sense in which the word *alhawarintye* is understood implies an accusation of sexual promiscuity. 'Those who follow their desires' are those who are unable to control their sexual impulses and therefore need to cloak their abnormal passion in the guise of religious secrecy and closed

communal activities. The often lighthearted scandalmongering of the traditionalists includes stories of wife swapping, adultery, and the licentiousness of 'the Marabout' (Seydu Idrissa) which is appeased only by his choice of the village women who parade naked before him after the Friday prayer, etc. The significance of these stories lies in the fact that they portray the Wahhabis as hypocrites and therefore exonerate the traditionalist community of accusations of improperly practicing Islam.

This kind of invective and abuse is still current, but at a time when hostilities between religious groups was at its height verbal abuse was probably far more common. The frustration and violence between traditionalists and Wahhabis which had resulted from religious disputes and social divisions usually erupted at random. Name calling in the streets of Gao sometimes led to fights with fists and batons. The office of the *commandant de cercle* was often crowded with litigants and bandaged heads and arms became a more common sight in the town. The same sort of violence often erupted in the countryside.

The conflict between religious factions was accentuated by two events which reinforced the traditionalists' belief that the Wahhabis were undermining the foundations of family and religious life. One event led to an accusation by the traditionalists that the Wahhabis of Dar al-Salam had 'kidnapped' married women from another village and married them before divorces had been carried out by their husbands.

Another event involved the disappearance of a sacred stone that was important in the traditional religion in Gao. Outlines of these disputes are as follows:

a) Al-Hajj 'Ali Joma, a prominent member of the radical Wahhabiyya returned from the pilgrimage to find that his uncle had been replaced as chief of Jamkoi during his absence. His uncle's removal may have been related to his adherence to reformist doctrine. His religious stance would have been resented by many villagers who did not hold his views and who perhaps were alienated by this change.

Jamkoi had a large proportion of men who undertook the migration to Ghana, many of whom were there at the time of the dispute over the chieftainship, working to make up for a bad harvest, while their wives and children remained behind in the village. A number of villagers, including the wives of migrants, supported 'Ali Joma and his uncle and were sympathetic to, if not members of, the Wahhabiyya.

'Ali Joma and his uncle, in defiance of the new chief, led as many of Jamkoi's inhabitants as would follow them to the newly established village of Dar al-Salam. Most of those who moved were women, many of whom had husbands in Ghana.

Some traditionalists accused the Wahhabis of abducting the married women by telling them that their husbands would eventually meet them in their new village. It is not likely, however, that they were kept in Dar al-Salam under duress, for some who were later under pressure to leave fought very hard to stay there.

The new arrivals were quickly integrated into the community of Dar al-Salam. They were told words to the effect that they had left the land of the unholy (*dār al-Kūfra*) and had moved to the dwelling of peace (*dār al-Salām*). If they left this new home they would no longer be Muslims. If they died on the way to their previous home they would descend straight to hell; but if they stayed in Dar al-Salam they would be blessed as were the wives of the Companions who left Mecca to accompany the prophet Muhammad on his exodus to Medina.

Many of the women, with or without husbands in Ghana, are said to have married Wahhabi men in Dar al-Salam. The Wahhabis are reported to have justified their marriage to these women, in spite of their failure to wait the three menstrual cycles required in Muslim divorce proceedings, by stating that the husbands of the women were *kāfir* and the marriages were therefore not legal.

Inevitably the men working in Ghana came to hear of the separation of their wives and they accused the Wahhabis of criminal abduction. The *receveur des postes* in Gao was a brother-in-law to several of these women and he lodged a complaint with the police authorities. His sisters-in-law, after much argument with the police, were convinced to return to their husbands. Most men, however, seem to have been unwilling to insist that their wives return to them.

b) Another incident that increased the tensions between

Wahhabis and traditionalists was the disappearance of a sacred stone from the ancient burial ground beside the *tombeau des Askias*. The stone (*tondi kara*) was said to have been carried from Mecca at the time of Askia Muhammad's triumphant pilgrimage. According to one story, the stone was first carried by Abu Mariama, a *gorongobu*, or Songhay master magician. When Mariama could no longer carry the stone it was taken by an elephant which took it the rest of the way to Gao.

The predominantly white stone was flat and smooth, approximately one meter long, 60 centimeters wide and 20 centimeters high. Its tapered end was positioned to face east and it was said that if one followed its trajectory one would arrive at the *ka'ba* in Mecca. The stone was considered to have healing powers, to bring fertility and to

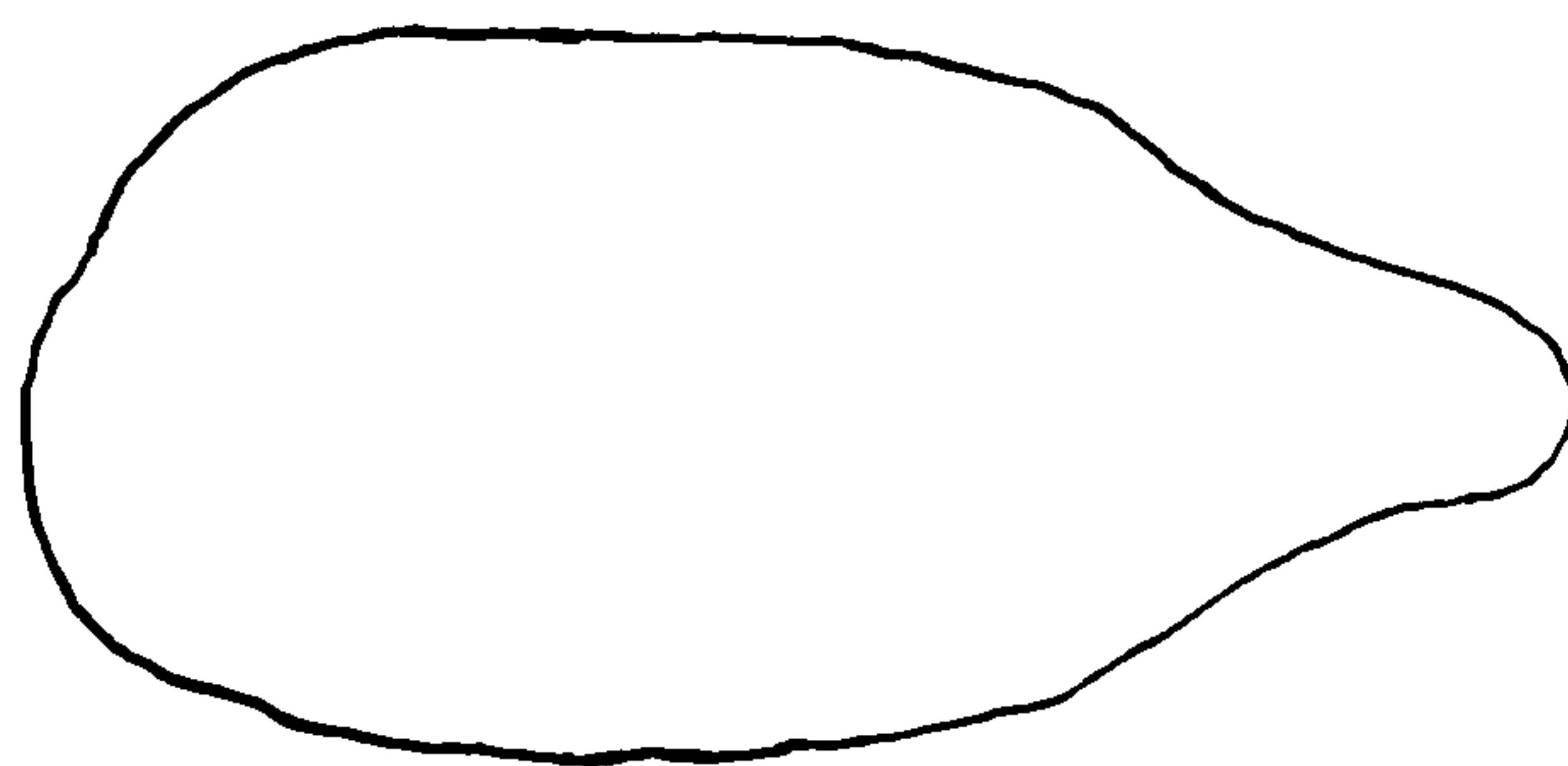


Figure 2. View of stone from above (sketched by Abdu Ture, grandson of the imam of the *Tombeau des Askias*).

bring rain. During the Muslim holidays of Ramadan and the Great Festival passers by would circle the stone three or four times, then take sand from beside the stone and pour

it on their heads in much the same fashion as people once showed submission to the Askias of the Songhay empire as well as to other powerful rulers. This suggests that the stone was used as the equivalent of an ancestral shrine of the Askias, or of Askia Muhammad in particular.

The most popular festival involving the stone took place on the Muslim New Year. This was called the *dadaw bēri*, the 'grandmother' or the festival of the grandmother. A torchlit ceremony was led by the *gorongobu*, a family of magicians and descendants of Abu Mariama, the man said to have carried the stone part of the way from Mecca. Grandmothers made a sacrificial offering at the close of the ceremony for the well being of their grandchildren. In the morning there were visits between family members, and grandparents gave small gifts to their grandchildren. With the disappearance of the stone the New Year's festival lost its traditional ritual focus and became more a part of the 'orthodox' Islamic observance.

The Wahhabis objected to the rituals associated with the stone, as they objected to all practices that involved veneration of spiritual power that did not, as they saw it, come directly from God. It is for this reason that many held them responsible for its disappearance. The stone probably disappeared in 1973, shortly before the Muslim New Year was to be celebrated, though a slightly earlier date is also possible. For many Songhay traditionalists in Gao this disappearance was catastrophic. Even with a

cursory description of the rites associated with the stone based on the memories of participants rather than observation, one can see that it had an important place in the lives of the townspeople. It was a source of reassurance of prosperity in a difficult environment and, perhaps more importantly, it was a focus of the solidification of family ties, particularly the traditional affection shown the grandmother, in the face of urban conditions which were promoting the adoption of western values, individualism and a weakening of ties between generations.

An unfortunate coincidence relating to the stone's disappearance is the fact that the rains in that year were disastrously slight, even less than the inadequate rainfall of the previous four or five years, and the Sahel experienced one of its worst droughts in recorded history. The drought conditions, which affected the lives of every resident in the region of Gao, were blamed by many upon the disappearance of the sacred stone--and the disappearance of the stone was blamed by many on the Wahhabis.

The governor, Koke Diembele, appears to have been reluctant at first to deal harshly with the Wahhabis in spite of the extreme antagonism that had arisen between rival religious groups as a result of their reforms. Elsewhere in the country, with the possible exception of Timbuktu, the Wahhabiyya was becoming an increasingly influential movement. Islam in general was gaining rapidly in popularity,

and the government may have felt any punitive measures against Muslims for religiously oriented activities would have to be considered carefully. In Gao, however, when the radical Wahhabis came to be perceived as a threat to the stability of the region, the military authorities decided to take action.

There are a number of possible reasons behind the decision to crack down on the radical Wahhabiyya, the most obvious of which is that the local authorities began to tire of the almost continual disputes between members of rival religious factions which often involved physical assault. The situation in the entire area in which the reformists were active was becoming more and more difficult to control.

The factor which seems to have been most instrumental in bringing about punitive action was the undermining of state authority at the village level. The chief, being the state representative, was responsible for the settlement of land disputes, maintenance of village census information, and tax collection. The Wahhabis, though not refusing outright to pay taxes, often made it extremely difficult for the chief to perform his official duties. On one occasion the chief of Kadji entered into a violent quarrel with the Wahhabis in Dar al-Salam and was injured in an assault. The incident was immediately reported by the traditionalist villagers in Kadji to the authorities in Gao.

At roughly the same time, in 1974, the Wahhabi community in Bagoundje was attempting to split off from the main village in defiance of the chief's decision which forbade them to

do so. The chief resisted any division of the village and the dispute eventually became a test of his authority.

When the authorities received simultaneous complaints about Wahhabi behaviour in Kadji and Bagoundje they decided to act. In Dar al-Salam Seydu Idrissa and about five of his close followers were arrested. In Bagoundje about 35 Wahhabi men involved in the unauthorized '*décampement*' were taken into custody. All the Wahhabi prisoners were publicly paraded and disciplined in the Place de l'Indépendance, a large field in the administrative quarter of Gao. This was an unprecedented action on the part of local authorities, probably intended as a warning to other reformists to avoid confrontation in their efforts to promote change. Seydu Idrissa is said to have urged his followers, in the course of their punishment, to have courage, saying that they must not despair, that they would surely enter paradise as a reward for their sufferings for the cause of Islam.

Many of those arrested were eventually sentenced to six months in Kidal prison, located at a military outpost in the Sahara desert about 300 km north of Gao. Those who committed acts of violence or played leadership roles were given longer sentences, up to two and a half years. Seydu Idrissa himself was given three years, the longest sentence.

Sadu 'Abd al-Rahman escaped arrest by fleeing into Ghana and, according to one account, later avoided arrest there by moving to Nigeria, then Saudi Arabia. His flight was eventually followed by an open defection from Seydu

Idrissa's organization. Years later, around 1980, he was permitted to return to Mali after promising to make a public apology for his actions.

When Sadu 'Abd al-Rahman lost his position of leadership within the reform movement the gap was filled by al-Hajj 'Ali Joma who acted as leader while Seydu Idrissa served his prison sentence. In this task 'Ali Joma was assisted by an associate from his home village, al-Tahir Munir who is currently a leader of the Wahhabi community in Ghana. 'Ali Joma's years of leadership, in partnership with al-Tahir Munir, seem to have been comparatively stable. This stability was likely due to the effects of government suppression and the fear of further action against the reform movement.

Political involvement and the beginning of reconciliation.

When the prison sentences of the Wahhabis were over their conflict with the traditionalists was much abated but it had not disappeared altogether. One Wahhabi leader in particular, Ali Sadu Mahman, has continued an aggressive opposition to traditional practices. He exercises his influence in his native village of Tondibi in the *cercle* of Bourem which is slightly isolated from the cluster of Wahhabi villages surrounding Gao.

On the whole, however, the trend has been towards a lessening of overt confrontation. Sadu Mahman has probably been acting independently and without encouragement from the radical movement's central leadership. This more concil-

iatory approach to change represents a redirecting of the radical Wahhabiyya from active hostility toward the existing political system to at least partial acceptance of it as a means of achieving their goals.

Political activity on the part of the Wahhabis takes place through the Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien (UDPM). This branch of the government, commonly referred to as the *parti*, was established in 1979 as a means by which the government could formulate and implement cooperative programmes at the village level and as the product of a long-standing promise to 'democratize' the one-party state system. To ensure the acceptance of government programmes, participation in UDPM elections became mandatory. At the local level members of the UDPM do very little and their office brings them almost no political power. Competition over these positions is largely for the status they bring; and for the radical Wahhabis it is actually a matter of importance that their leaders are not full participants in a non-Islamic government, that they do not have to follow orders from an 'infidel'.

The *deputé* for the *cercle* of Gao, a higher level position in the UDPM, is reputed to be a Wahhabi sympathiser, an association that would not have been cultivated by a politician during the early conflicts. He has, it is said, 'one foot on the land and one foot in the water'. His native village of Forgho has supporters of both the moderate Wahhabiyya centred in Gao-city and the radical village-based

organization of Wahhabis as well as traditionalists. The *deputé*, to gain and maintain support, has had to strike a balance between rival religious factions. His main support, however, seems to come from the moderate Wahhabis in Gao and from traditionalists who have become more accepting of religious reform.

The most successful participant in local politics who belongs to the radical Wahhabiyya is Zacharia Ture. Much of the support he is given comes from a wide circle of family members and friendships which he has maintained since his adoption of Wahhabism. His father was the chief of Berra, a village about 3 km north of Gao, and since his father's decease his uncle, Albonkana Ture has held the office. Albonkana is what might be called a half-Wahhabi, having a wife in the Wahhabi section of Berra who remains secluded and a wife in Gao whose household is more liberal. This is probably his way of attempting to bridge the divisions that exist in his village. Zacharia is almost certain to succeed to the office of chief upon his uncle's death. Already he is the *de facto* chief of Berra, making, or being consulted on, all important village decisions.

Besides his village influence, Zacharia was elected *Adjoint Secrétaire* of the UDPM in the *arrondissement central* of Gao in 1979. In 1981 he was elected *Secrétaire Général de la Jeunesse* of the *arrondissement central*, and in 1984 he returned to his position as *Adjoint Secrétaire* of the UDPM. These positions, though relatively minor in terms

of the political influence they bring, are noteworthy considering Zacharia's lack of knowledge of French and his adherence to the Wahhabiyya. He overcame these limitations largely through a forceful personality, a keen wit and a relatively moderate attitude in religious issues despite his adherence to reform and his position as the political leader of the radical Wahhabiyya. Perhaps more importantly he makes it clear that he is a member of the Armah, the Songhay nobility which has traditionally been more involved in politics than the rest of the population. Zacharia identifies with this background and does not, for example, dress as a Wahhabi but wears the traditional 'boubou' and turban which are typical of the nobility. It is likely that many of his political supporters are not aware of his involvement with religious reform.

Zacharia Ture's importance lies especially in his role as mediator between the radical Wahhabiyya and the government and in his efforts to lobby for concessions on the movement's behalf. His position in this regard is solidified by ties of kinship. His only full brother, Algazani Ture, who is not a Wahhabi, works as *adjoint administrative secretaire* to the *commandant de cercle*. It is in the office of the commandant that many grievances involving religious and political conflict are aired.

He also has ties of kinship with the radical Wahhabis (see figure, P. 169). Zacharia's young uncle, Seydu Ali Ture, lives in Dar al-Salam and is married to a daughter of Seydu

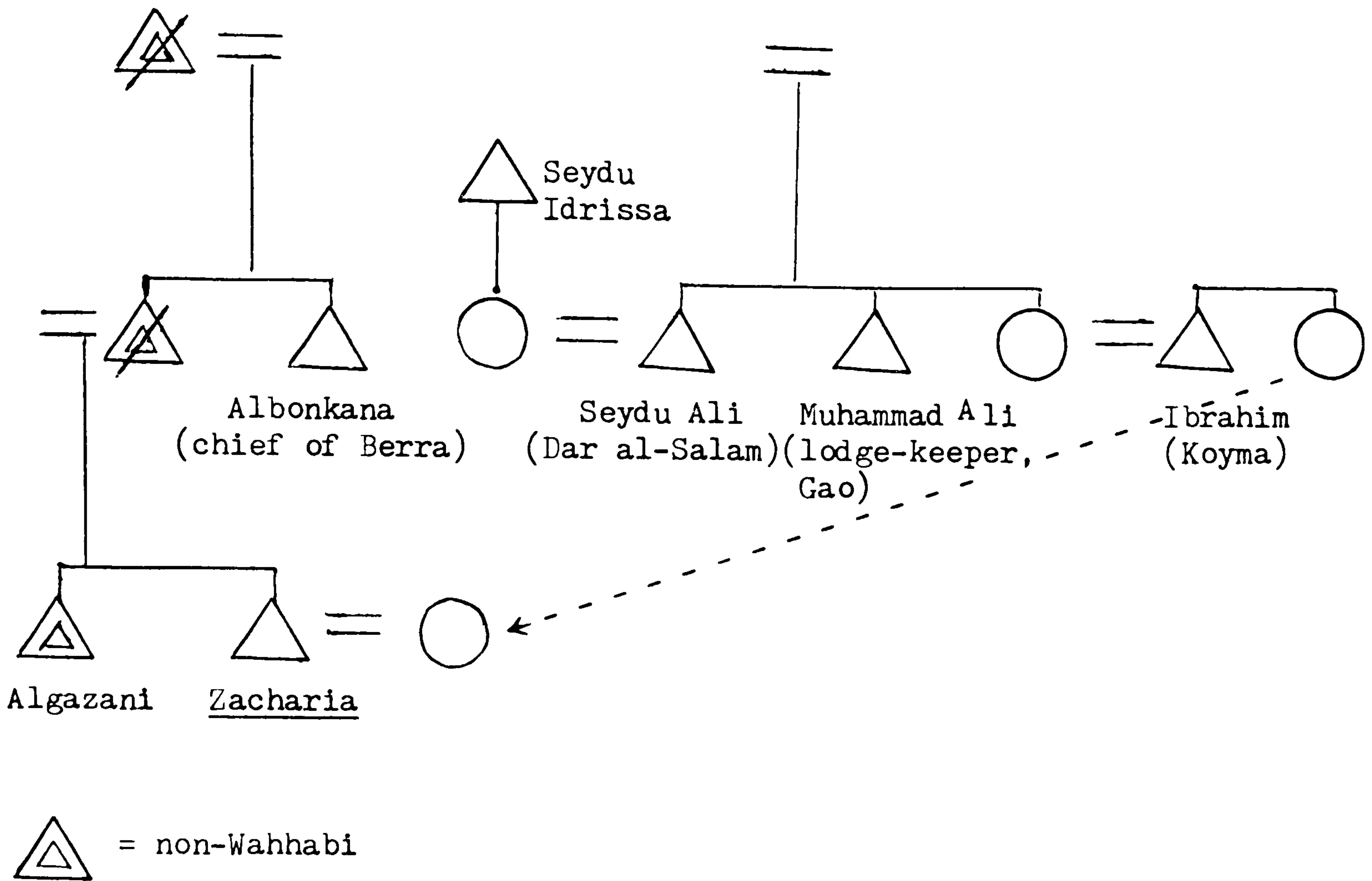


Figure 3.
Some key relationships in the family of Zacharia Ture.

Idrissa. Zacharia has himself married a sister of Ibrahim Ture, a young leader in the Wahhabi settlement of Koyma, located on the opposite shore from Berra. These ties, combined with more distant kinship links with Wahhabis in a number of other villages, helps to place Zacharia in a strong position in the radical Wahhabiyya.

An important example of Zacharia Ture's lobbying efforts concerns the continued attempt on the part of the radical Wahhabis to establish an officially recognized, independent

Islamic organization able to work freely for the promotion of the reformed faith. In November and December of 1984 there were frequent visits on the part of radical Wahhabis, and in particular Zacharia Ture, to the office of the *commandant de cercle*. These visits often involved the promotion of the idea of a recognized Islamic organization for Seydu Idrissa and his followers.

The authorities, however, were strongly opposed to this idea. Islamic organizations, specifically the Union Culturelle Musulmane, which unified Wahhabi groups, had been banned by both post-independence Malian governments. In 1981 the Association Malienne Pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam (AMUPI) was established, largely because the government feared the consequences of an uncontrolled population of reform-oriented Muslims. This organization is tied closely to the government and, like other political organs in the country, operates in a pyramidal structure that is controlled, ultimately, by the central government in Bamako.

Through the AMUPI the government controls the flow of foreign aid for such projects as mosques and madrasas. The association also mediates in religious conflicts without involving the justice system and, in the towns, organizes the celebration of Muslim festivals.

The AMUPI in Gao has been dominated by the Guindo family whose origins are among the Dogon cliff dwellers of the Mopti region. They control much of the import trade market in Gao and are probably the wealthiest and most influential

family in the city. They represent the conservative element in Gao, both in terms of religion and politics. The regional presidency of the AMUPI is held by the head of the family, Muhammad ('baba') Guindo and, until recently, monthly meetings were held in his home. Traditionalist Muslim leaders as well as moderate Wahhabis are represented on the AMUPI's executive committee. The radical Wahhabis have boycotted the association, ostensibly because it is controlled by a 'secular' government.

In 1984 the regional branch of the AMUPI in Gao attempted to resolve the situation of conflict between the radical village Wahhabis and the traditionalists by inviting Seydu Idrissa and Zacharia Ture to join the executive committee of the association. This was a compromise offered to meet half-way their demands for an independent Islamic organization. The invitation was opposed by some members of the AMUPI who, in essence, continued to consider the radical Wahhabiyya as heretical. Nevertheless, in December, 1984, Seydu Idrissa was offered the position of *secrétaire général de la culture*, which involves primarily the organization of public religious meetings, and Zacharia Ture was offered the (perhaps more important) position of *membre des conflits*, which involves the settling of disputes between Muslims, particularly disputes arising from religious differences.

The radical Wahhabis considered these invitations an insult. The consensus seemed to be that their leaders, especially Seydu Idrissa, were more deserving of a post

such as the national leadership of the AMUPI and that, with time and God's will, this is indeed what will be achieved. Seydu Idrissa expressed similar disappointment in a letter to the regional branch of the AMUPI which strongly condemned the association, stating, in effect, that the AMUPI was too closely involved with the non-Islamic government and that its affairs were managed in an authoritarian manner approaching demagoguery. This refusal to participate in the AMUPI indicates not only the single-mindedness with which religious principles are held, but also the continued reluctance within the radical reform movement to participate in what are judged to be compromising political activities.

Seydu Idrissa does not feel the inclination to involve the Wahhabiyya in non-Islamic politics. His ideal remains the establishment of a Muslim community where religion is the law, where there is freedom to follow the rules of Islam to the letter without the interference of secular rulers, and in attaining this goal he wishes to deviate from the ideal, as he perceives it, as little as possible.

The task of political involvement is given to Zacharia Ture who typifies the Songhay man of practical action. He is politically ambitious and his position in the reform movement seems to be an avenue for power that is greater than that derived from his public activities.

These different orientations in the leadership of the radical Wahhabiyya represent not so much a contradiction

as a division of labour that is typical of many Islamic and non-Islamic religious movements. The man of religion guides the movement with his greater insight into the will of the divine, while organization, discipline and action come from his more practically oriented right-hand man.

The activity of the Wahhabis after the release of Seydu Idrissa from prison resembles a process of entrenchment-- a solidification of the territory gained in their earlier assaults on traditional practices. Active aggression in the pursuit of their cause seems to have been less frequent. The isolation of the Wahhabis from their rival villagers and the mediation activities of Zacharia Ture and the AMUPI seem to have generally decreased open conflict. Although the more recent activities of the Wahhabis in their promotion of reform seem to have been more pacific, their basic goal appears to remain the same: the establishment of a large community of believers who base their actions on the word of God as recorded in the Quran and the traditions of the prophet.

It should be noted that reconciliation or an attitude of greater tolerance has also been demonstrated by the state. Events in Bamako arising from the increasing strength of reformist Islam show a great reluctance on the part of the government to be placed in the position of an open adversary of the reformist trend. The Malian state has responded to pressure from reform groups by identifying itself more closely with an Islam that cuts across regional and national disputes, one that presents a simple image of unity through

religious observance.

Pressure from reformists consists essentially of the demand that the state take into its hands the responsibility for control of the moral behaviour of its citizens in accordance with Islamic law and custom.

Nous attendons de tous les intellectuels du pays ensemble de mener un combat ouvert contre les facteurs dégradants qui sont en train de compromettre le devenir de nos enfants: film caraté, théâtre porno, film cowboy, drogues, alcools, adultère, homosexualité, qui sont déjà cause de moralité de notre jeunesse.¹⁵

In taking this call for moral 'purity' further, we find a carefully worded appeal for the formation of an Islamic state:

On sait que l'Etat est une institution qui repose historiquement sur le principe de la séparation. La séparation de l'Etat d'avec l'Eglise, la séparation du pouvoir civil du pouvoir militaire, du pouvoir politique du pouvoir économique. Ces séparations sont les étapes qui ont marqué la formation de l'Etat européen. Et la doctrine libérale de l'Etat est une synthèse de cette évolution. On peut bien se demander si ces éléments doivent nécessairement s'intégrer à la construction de l'Etat Malien. L'histoire nous mettra en garde contre les reproductions passives d'institutions et doctrines qui ont fait leurs preuves dans des contextes socio-historiques fort différent des nôtres.¹⁶

Opposition to this idea of a national moral and legal unity based upon Islam centres upon the social diversity

15. Kady Dramé, in *Jamana*, no. 8, 1985.

16. Ibid.

of the country's inhabitants which have for a long time been part of the socio-cultural background. "C'est méconnaître les réalités historiques de notre pays et de l'Islam que de croire à une uniformisation de toutes les situations socio-culturelles. L'Islam admet le droit à la différence, y compris la non-croyance."¹⁷

Faced with pressure to lead a struggle against 'anti-Islamic' vices on the one hand and to remain tolerant of non-Muslim traditions as well as different traditions within Islam on the other, the Malian government has responded by bringing the organization of Islam as far as possible into state control. One of the first examples of such state control was the formation of the A.M.U.P.I. The disbanding of private Islamic organizations (notably the Union Culturelle Musulmane) was accomplished with the nearly simultaneous establishment of a government organization charged with the 'administration' of Islam: the organization of festivals and public lectures, collection and distribution of alms, etc. More recently state control of Islamic education has been initiated with restrictions on the independent operation of madrasas.¹⁸ By taking traditionally religious institutions into government control, and at the same time providing them with conditional government support, the Malian government presents itself as a guardian of Islam at the same time as it reduces the independent power of reformist communities.

The Malian government has also responded passively

17. Morfindang Traoré. in *Jamana*, no. 4, 1985.

18. See below, Ch. X.

(as we have seen in its reluctance to use force against the radical Wahhabiyya at the height of 'extremism') through reluctance to prosecute reformists who infringe on state authority in their over-zealous attempts to impose a 'purified' Islamic morality. An example of state passivity in the face of reformist excess is evident in the lack of response from police authorities to a Wahhabi 'raid' on the prostitutes of the Bakaribougou quarter in Bamako on May 28, 1985 (during the month of Ramadan) in which women of '*mauvaises moeurs*' were beaten and their homes damaged or destroyed.¹⁹ The most significant feature of this event is not the violence or overzealousness of the reformers but rather the state's lack of response to what was a clear infringement of its monopoly of justice.

Reconciliation between reformists and the state, therefore, has moved in both directions. The radical Wahhabis of Gao have come to see the advantage in at least minimal participation in local politics as well as (after imprisonment) the disadvantages of bringing defiance too far. The state, on the other hand, has little to gain by bringing itself into open conflict with reformists. More than this, the state benefits from reformist excess by deriving from it the justification for bringing religious organization into the domain of state administration. This is at the same time a source of political legitimacy and a means of bringing diverse and often conflicting expressions of Islam into closer state control.

19. *Jamana*, no. 4, 1985.

VII. LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

Frequent reference has already been made to elements of leadership among the Wahhabis. My intention here is to briefly bring some of this material together, and introduce some new information, in a discussion of the place of the radical Wahhabiyya in filling a political niche in the villages where they are influential.

The central theme of this discussion is the erosion of autonomous local political authority and its replacement by a political system in which village leadership is controlled, first by the colonial power and later, more definitively, by the independent nation. The response of the radical Wahhabiyya to political domination is to maximize the authority of the religious leadership as well as the effectiveness of more informal systems of cooperation within the limits of state control. The town offers less room for such independence and we find a correspondingly weaker, more government controlled, leadership among the moderate reformists.

The importance of the imposition of national politics and the decline of local political authority in the development of Islamic reform is brought closer to our attention by Kessler's¹ study of rural Islamic reform in the Malay state of Kelantan. The pre-colonial history of this region is marked by an urban focus to Islam and its associated systems of law and worship. In the 1890's this focus was

1. Kessler, 1978.

strengthened with an expansion of the administrative powers of the Mufti and a closer relationship between autocratic power and religious officialdom. Under colonial domination, however, the Islamic leadership underwent a decline in prestige by 'deflecting' opposition to British rule. A major issue associated with this cooperation with the colonial power was the construction of English schools, an acceptance, therefore, of western systems of administration and other aspects, perhaps less desirable from a Muslim point of view, of the western intellectual and cultural traditions. Other equally significant developments during the colonial and early post-colonial period in Kelantan were: 1) rapid urban growth which placed old settlers and peasant villagers in a position of conflict with the leadership of the town; 2) the removal of central administrative power to Kuala Lumpur, thereby concentrating the benefits of independence on the more developed and largely non-Malay west coast; and 3) the creation in the 1950's of political parties which provided an electoral outlet for local grievances. The period of less than a century from the pre-colonial monarchy to post-colonial party politics in Kelantan was accompanied by a shift in rural Islamic observance from mild acceptance to fervent, though unscholarly, piety.

A similar process is represented by the development of Islamic reform in the village setting of Gao. Having considered the limited participation of the Wahhabiyya in

national politics in an earlier chapter, I will now turn to a discussion of the erosion of local political authority through colonialism and nationalism and the place of the Wahhabi organization in creating and alternative political integrity.

The chieftainship.

With the atomization of the Songhay empire--its political division into autonomous villages or clusters of villages--the Songhay chief, in facing the threat from the Tuareg and Kunta, became a warrior or mediator, sometimes combining these roles, sometimes changing in one direction or the other. In the northern portion of the Niger bend the Songhay villages were more easily overcome and exploited by the nomads, while resistance was concentrated in the region occupied by the Zerma who tended to be more politically unified and capable of defending themselves.²

The authority of the chief in pre-colonial times was based upon several forms of legitimation. Occasionally the chief was a descendant of the first occupants of the soil. The power of the chief in this case was limited since he depended upon the consensus of his subjects for his position of leadership and for acceptance of his decisions.

2. Cf. Olivier de Sardan, 1984: ch. IV.

He was, in essence, an arbitrator, having little recourse to violence.

More commonly in the region north of Ansongo, the chief was a member of the Armah nobility, a leader descended from the Moroccan invaders, with greater means to exploit his subjects. Often this kind of chief depended upon Muslim clerics for advice in a division of labour in which the *alfa* advised and the chief decided. The power of the chief was in any case not extensive, not extending beyond a cluster of four or five villages. Where he was a member of the nobility and received tribute, the act of giving tribute on the part of a subject was more to demonstrate allegiance, to recognize the chief as a source of justice and protection, than to show submission to a despot.³ Even in villages exploited by the nomads the chief retained a great deal of prestige. He usually acted in the best interests of the community, trying to make the most of the situation by negotiating and compromising with the surrounding nomadic groups to minimize the possibility of raids.

A general feature of French colonialism, at least until World War II, was a decline in the status of chiefs within their communities because of their position in the colonial administration. Colonial rule was centralized and tended to lead to a leveling in the leadership structure of societies under French authority. The principal reasons for this are noted by Crowder:

3. Olivier de Sardan, 1984: 106.

The agents for the collection of taxes imposed by the French were the chiefs. They were also responsible for raising forced labour for work on roads, railways and even European plantations and for providing carriers for the administration and for ensuring the forced cultivation of certain cash crops. These new functions were largely responsible for the changeover of the position of the chief from the symbol of the collective unity of his people to the most hated member of that community. The chiefs abused their traditional authority in raising taxes and labour not only for the French but also for themselves. The administration turned a blind eye to this, provided chiefs served their interests loyally. For thus they could continue to pay these agents of the administration a pittance for their services, and be rid of them whenever they were dissatisfied with them on charges of extortion.⁴

While the political position of the chief, between the colonial administration and the village, potentially increased his power by his ability to exploit his subjects while being maintained in his position by the administration, the prestige of the chief often suffered when he abused his power.

When the oppressiveness of the colonial presence abated during the post-war period of independence movements and the drive toward nationalism, the prestige of the chief was somewhat improved, while at the same time his power decreased. Since the chief was the local representative of the central political power his status in the community depended largely upon the degree of perceived oppressiveness of the state.

If we apply this formula to the contemporary Songhay chief we find that he must perform two kinds of function

⁴ Crowder, 1968: 187.

which are sometimes contradictory. On the one hand his duties as representative of the national government (more specifically the Ministère de l'Intérieur) demand that he perform often unpopular duties, such as tax collection, and, in general, act as mediator between the *commandant de cercle* and the village residents. On the other hand, he usually aspires toward a position of respect in the community, towards a role as the symbol of collective unity, which may be difficult to achieve if he is identified too closely with the representatives of national government. This is a classic dilemma of local leaders in peasant communities.

This dilemma is especially acute among the Songhay because their integration into the state is marked by a low degree of political participation at a high level. Integration is achieved more or less by domination, not by the occupation of local leaders in important political positions. Hence the Songhay chief often occupies his position of leadership in a population that has minimal loyalty to the national government.

This situation is largely a consequence of the manner in which the Sahelian nations were created. Little consideration, if any, was given to tribal affiliation or cultural variations from one region to another and the problems that would be posed by cutting across ethnically or culturally homogeneous areas with a national border. In Mali the most important consequence of the allocation of national territory has been the cultural differences between the north and

the south. To a large extent the people of the savannah region of the south are more politically integrated than the nomads of the Sahel who have more cultural affinity with North Africa than with sub-Saharan Africa. The Songhay to some extent share in this political marginality but, being sedentary and settled closer to administrative towns, they are more easily controlled than the desert tribes.

Despite Seydu Idrissa's disclaimer to the effect that he is not interested in involving the Wahhabiyya with politics, this religious reform movement has become a major channel for the expression of rural political dissent. Since the 1970's this dissent has not been expressed in a direct way against the government but rather has taken the form of a maximization of aloofness.

By hiving off from traditional villages the Wahhabis have largely avoided the dilemma of local leadership. The chief, who mediates between the villages and the central government is usually, from the point of view of the Wahhabis, a member of a rival faction. Their own leaders are immune from the risk of contaminating themselves with cooperation with a perceived oppressor. For a radical Wahhabi chief to retain power or for a Wahhabi candidate to be elected, the majority of village members must belong to his religious faction, a situation that prevails in Berra and Lobu. In the few instances where the chief is a Wahhabi he can probably depend upon the cooperation of his village as long as he does not enact centrally directed orders too enthusiastically.

The most he can expect from non-cooperation with the government, such as in denying requests to compromise with the rival religious faction, is the loss of his official political position and his acceptance in the Wahhabi community as a hero.

Radical organization.

Dar al-Salam is the central village in a network of Wahhabi communities that have been built along similar lines. The central building in Dar al-Salam is the mosque. It is also the largest structure, measuring approximately 35 square meters. The centre of the mosque is open to the air, with roofs in the front and back covering the men's and women's prayer areas, each supported by eight thick pillars. The entire structure is made of mud-brick. There is a stairway on one side which leads to the front roof from which the Muezzin calls, but there is no minaret, probably in keeping with the example of the Saudi Arabian Wahhabis who construct their mosques with the greatest simplicity, allowing no minarets or ornaments.⁵ A well is located close to the mosque where water can be drawn for ablutions. The boys' and girls' madrasas are on opposite sides of the mosque, but the latter remains unfinished and the girls and women study in the compound of one of Seydu Idrissa's wives in the eastern part of the village. A key building

⁵. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1929: 1087.

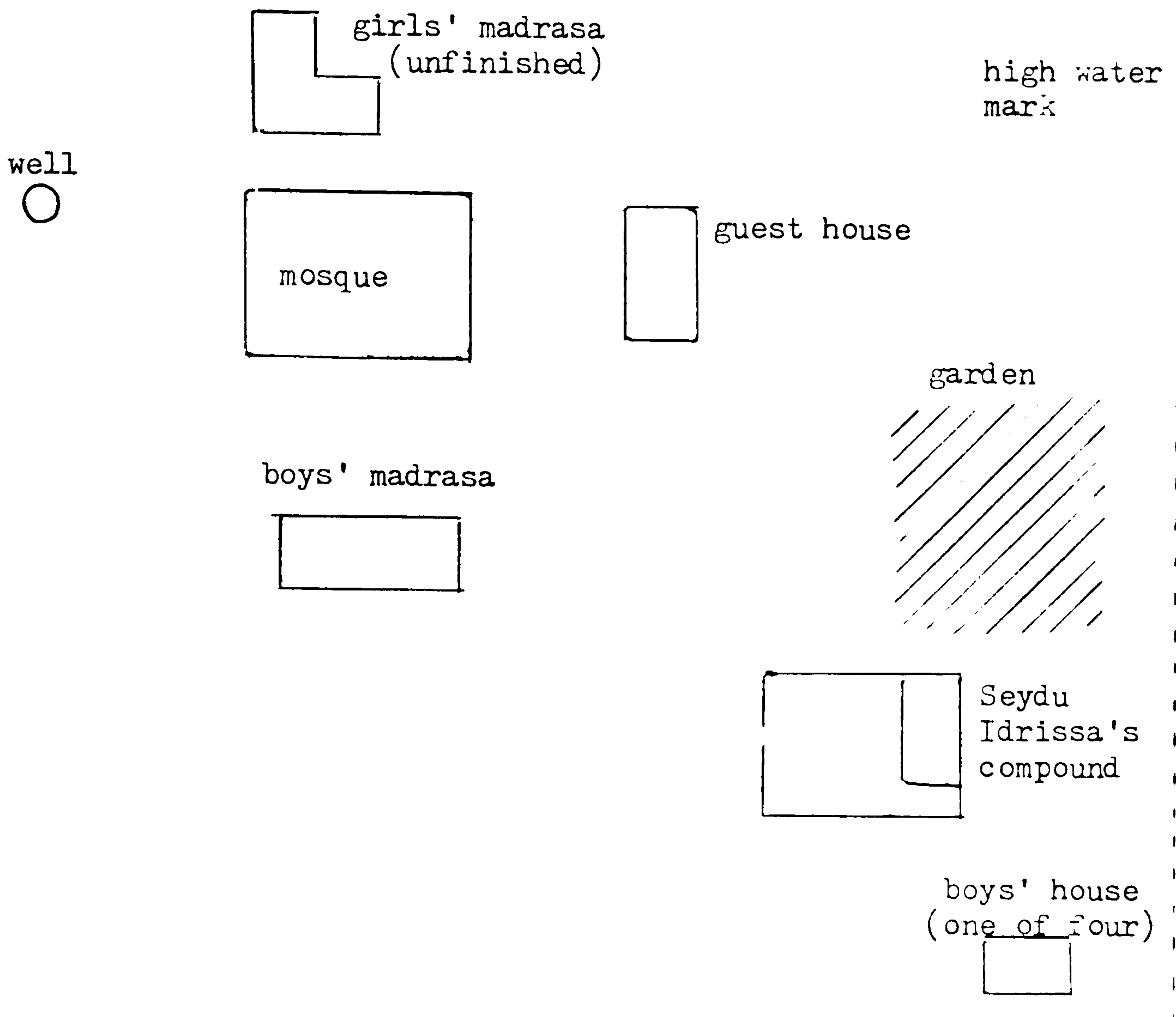


Figure 4. Village centre, Dar al-Salam.

in almost all Wahhabi villages is the guest house where visitors can meet village leaders without having to be welcomed in any particular compound and inconveniencing the household where women must not be seen. The compound of Seydu Idrissa is also centrally located, largely for convenience because of his duties in the mosque and school (he does not have regular dealings with the women's madrasa), but also because living close to the area of worship and study affirms his position as leader of sacred activities, as

a living focus of the religious life of the village.

There is a strong belief among the followers of the radical Wahhabiyya that their villages are sacred, bastions of purity in a world dominated by the impure, places of piety and belief in a realm of impiety and unbelief. This is especially true of the central village of the radical Wahhabis, Dar al-Salam. Here, where Islam is followed with an eye to perfection, the sacred and the pure are seen to be cultivated. The Wahhabi village, it was stressed, is clean in contrast to the town where clothes become dirty in a day. Implicit in this is the watchword of the Christian puritans 'cleanliness is next to godliness'--the realm of the sacred is also the realm of the tidy.

The explicit model for Dar al-Salam was the structure of religious teaching centres in the Middle East, particularly Medina, with their mosques, school buildings, and housing for students and guests. A closer resemblance, however, can be found with the *zāwiyas*, the lodges of the Sufi orders. This is so not only in terms of structure (important Sufi lodges are arranged along similar lines with mosques, schools and guest houses) but also, and more importantly, in terms of the function of the organization of the religious community. The Sufi lodge provides religious instruction, places of prayer as well as lodgings for visiting members. This structure is made possible by a network of contacts between religious leaders, or *muqaddams*, whose *zāwiyas* are united under the central leadership of the brotherhood.

This comparison would probably be strenuously denied by the Wahhabis themselves, to whom Sufism represents a divergence from the true path of Islam. The main differences between Wahhabism and Sufism, however, lie in the theology and ideology of the two and do not fully penetrate to the social functions of the religious organization. Here the Wahhabi leadership, in their role as legal advisors, arbiters, judges, educators, and literate men who direct a social network, are similar to the Sufi *muqaddams* and *marabouts*. Ideally the Wahhabis may wish to lessen their role as intercessors between man and God; practically they have adopted the Sufi-like role of intercessors between man and man. This point shall be elaborated in the discussion of the radical Wahhabi leadership which follows.

Among nomadic tribesmen throughout most of the Muslim world the cleric often has an important position as mediator between tribal units. Islam in this context acts as a general element of social identity and as a buffer between local tribal groups with specific interests. Agriculturalists, on the other hand, with greater economic self-sufficiency, do not have the same social conditions which might give the cleric an important position. Here exploitation on the part of a state or raids and predation from nomads were primary sources of insecurity. To be accepted at the village level Muslim leaders could not remain unbiased; they became part of the local community. By being rooted in this way

the sphere of influence of Muslim clerics in village communities was socially and geographically bounded.

Islamic reform in the village context is associated with an expansion of the sphere of influence of the Muslim cleric. Once a relatively unimportant figure having only tenuous links with the wider Islamic civilization, he becomes, as a spokesman or missionary of reform, the focus of an organized political network oriented towards religious and social change. This network, though bounded by limits on political autonomy imposed by the state, acts as a focal point for the regulation of village life and for the important cooperative ties between villages which share the reformist orientation.

The radical Wahhabiyya is unusual in that all of its members, at least nominally, recognize the religious leadership of one man, Seydu Idrissa. This situation is found among the nomadic tribes loyal to the Sufi tradition but among the Songhay, who have traditionally lacked inter-village cohesiveness and influential leaders, this degree of centralization is new. Central leadership gives the movement a focus and has enabled it to develop an authority structure which gives it greater control over its membership than other Wahhabi groups in West Africa. The ideology of the radical Wahhabiyya resembles puritan Islamic reform movements elsewhere but the organization, ironically, resembles that of their rivals, the brotherhoods.

Seydu Idrissa struck me upon initial acquaintance as a genial man. His round face with full cheeks and his stocky build contributed to an impression of affability and health. But after the initial impression it became easier to perceive the hard edge of a man convinced of the truth and unwilling to let pass any perceived challenge to his vision of reality. When he became serious this conviction showed through in a measured and confident voice and gestures which seemed well adapted to the messages of reform that he often preached concerning the true path of Islam and the iniquity of others.

Much of his authority of manner seems to come from the respect and admiration given him by his followers. His words are listened to with great attention and, in situations that permit, questions are asked with humility and submission to his knowledge. Amongst themselves the children of his Quran school call him '*baba*', father. He seems indeed to be a patriarch to his followers, a man reputed to possess greater knowledge and experience than themselves who guides them through life, teaching them the higher values to which he has greater access. To other followers he is called '*alfa*' or, when speaking French, '*marabout*', both terms referring to Muslim clerics of all kinds, including Sufi holy men. The belief that he has superior knowledge of Islam seems to be a major source of his authority. Some believe that he knows the closest secrets of God, including the time of the Day of Judgement. One especially enthusiastic

devotee, unaware of his heresy, said 'he was sent by God to live and work among us. He is even a prophet'. This is an extreme statement but it does point to a trend, or potential trend, in the radical Wahhabiyya which resembles the near apotheosis of the founders of some of the Sufi brotherhoods.⁶

This extreme example of devotion points to a contradiction between the Wahhabi ideal of equality between believers and what Evans-Pritchard calls "the need for personal contact and tenderness"⁷ in the religion of rural peoples which is often, in the case of Islam, expressed in the cult of the saints. Evans-Pritchard's statement implies that the need for holy men and devotional enthusiasm is spiritual, that it derives from rural man's closeness with the environment, with seasonal cycles and the rhythm of life as lived by the 'simple folk' or, in the case of the urban poor, as an emotional escape from drudgery and misery. But it is perhaps more profitable to consider the role of spiritual intermediaries, the way in which they provide the community with a locally-based social framework which effectively fills a political niche.⁸ Respect for holy men is of fundamental importance to the organizational structure of society; and although Songhay society is not based upon segmentary lineages as is usually the case with tribes dependent upon saints, the radical Wahhabi leadership is important as a channel for local political ambitions and activities as

⁶ For example O'Brien, 1971 on the Mourides.

⁷ Evans-Pritchard, 1949: 1.

⁸ Cf. Gellner, 1969 and 1984: ch. 4.

well as a system of inter-village cooperation.

The independent organizational structure of the radical Wahhabis is situated within closed communities established by the mechanism of the *hijra*. The boundary between 'believers' and 'infidels' is clearly defined. A 'believer' is one who acknowledges the leadership of Seydu Idrissa, who lives in a '*hijra*' village or community and who submits to village rules and the strict practice of Islam which is part of community life. Loyalty to the group is based upon recognition of its leaders and a commitment to reformed Islam which involves a strenuous effort to learn and implement the guidelines of the *sunna*.

Exclusive attachment to the Wahhabi community thus often overrides loyalty to kin. Ties of reciprocity between Wahhabis and their traditionalist family members are dissolved and, while close attachment remain between kin who adhere to the movement, the 'convert' to the radical Wahhabiyya belongs to a group in which all co-religionists can be called 'brother' and 'sister'. Like many other Islamic communities, the radical Wahhabiyya can in this sense be called a 'fraternity'. With this point in mind it is instructive to consider the example of the Saudi Arabian Ikhwan:

As former Bedouin the Ikhwan were most noteworthy for their renunciation of tribal loyalty and even family ties in favour of the bonds of brotherhood. In a desert, tribal society where the family was an individual's security, identity and legitimacy, the renunciation of all this was no light matter. It underscored the degree to which Ibn Sa'ud was

able to substitute the brotherhood of Islam domiciled in the *hijrah* for the protection, security and identity which they surrendered when they left the tribe.⁹

It is important to add that the Ikhwan were generously subsidized by the Saudi state, a position which gave their supra-kin loyalties a great deal of stability and effectiveness. The Gao Wahhabiyya differs from this in being economically marginal. At the same time, however, Songhay family loyalties do not have the same importance as the family and tribal affiliations of the Bedouin. For the Songhay, family division certainly entailed much grief, but the supra-kin loyalties of the radical Wahhabiyya, in spite of the movement's limited resources, are associated with a clear social identity and a maximum degree of security in an unstable environment.

In radical Wahhabi villages the kind of respect given to Seydu Idrissa, which resembles the saint veneration of the brotherhoods, is sometimes also given to the village imam. Literacy in Arabic and the access this gives to the revealed Truth is the most important asset of a Wahhabi religious leader. The imam functions in a community dominated by oral modes of communication where literacy, either in Arabic or French, is a gift possessed by few. This is a community in which, but for a few dilligent students, rote learning of the scriptures prevails; yet an understanding of the scriptural message is the ideal. The imam, then, becomes the intermediary between man and God through his understanding

⁹. Habib, 1979: 32

of the message of the Quran, the final Revelation.

Since the practical application of the scriptural message extends to nearly every aspect of the believer's life, the position of the imam is a very important one. He leads prayer five times daily, reads and explains the Quran and *ḥadīth*, conducts ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, mediates in disputes between villagers and is consulted on any matter pertaining to the correct practice of Islam. His wishes are respected and his advice usually implemented. He is elected above all because of his literacy and religious knowledge.

On the surface there does not appear to be a great deal of manoeuvring to attain the position of imam. But holders of religious authority do seem to take precautions to secure their position. In Bagoundje, for example, the regular imam was away for an extended period in Saudi Arabia and his responsibilities were shared in his absence by two leaders. These may be called the 'hot season imam' and the 'cool season imam' because they alternated their direction of religious affairs in the village in accordance with the climate. The ostensible reason for this was that the 'mosque', being unfinished, was simply an enclosed field and one imam was better able to withstand the summer heat than the other. It appears, however, that such an arrangement would create a balanced but weak leadership during the imam's absence which would diminish the possibility of the emergence of a rival to his position.

There was, in addition to the two substitute imams in

Bagoundje, a third leader who was said to be in charge of more practical matters. He was visible when meetings took place in Gao with Seydu Idrissa. One of his functions was to supervise the implementation of directives from the movement's central leadership and to relay the findings of such meetings to other senior men in the village. Thus, while the imam is usually the most important village leader, there is also room for more 'secular' leaders, those who do not excel in religious knowledge or languages but who nonetheless have a talent for organization and a knowledge of practical affairs. In many cases these are men whose abilities were recognized before their change to Wahhabism or who belonged to families whose members often became village leaders.

In addition to the leadership of older, respected men there are positions or duties of lesser importance given to younger men who may be called 'assistants'. These are sometimes younger men who not only pursue their studies in Arabic and religion, but who also have some experience in the national school system and have some facility, though often very limited, with French. Such men often accompany village leaders on journeys to the town where they act as translators and, when necessary, as bodyguards.

In some villages there is also a demand for young men capable of a great deal of travel to act as messengers. These men seem to be more often literate in Arabic than

French since, among the radicals, inter-village communication is almost invariably in Arabic. A certain pride seems to be taken in the process of sending and receiving written messages. Seydu Idrissa and a small handful of other leaders in the movement are fully literate in Arabic and their written messages are usually clear and correct. The few men who act as messengers from Dar al-Salam are also literate because those receiving the communication may not be fully conversant with Arabic and would require a translation.

Those in charge of running the lodges in Gao and Ansongo, though few in number, also have positions of responsibility. The two lodge keepers in Gao are relatives of Zacharia Ture. An elementary knowledge of French and other local languages such as Tamāshaqq is useful to them in their daily purchases of animals for slaughter and other food items, and in their dealings with visitors to the 'restaurant' who are often neither Wahhabi nor Songhay. The lodge keepers have their families in Dar al-Salam and occasionally take turns visiting them. In this way their wives and children avoid the 'pernicious' influence of the city.

With migration and temporary labour in the coastal towns a significant part of the Songhay strategy for survival, there is a place for Muslim leadership to act within migrant communities. Cohen's study of Hausa migrants in Ibadan¹⁰ shows how adherence to Islam, in this case the Tijaniyya

10. Cohen, 1969.

brotherhood, can maintain ethnic exclusiveness in a predominantly non-Muslim environment and can operate as the basis for a social network that helps adherents to find housing and employment as well as a rallying point for political self-preservation.

Up to date information on Songhay migrants in Ghana came to me only through those who had returned recently to Gao. This was a limited vantage point and the study of Islam among Songhay migrants remains a promising topic of research (political factors permitting).

It can be surmised, however, that the Wahhabiyya operates along similar lines to the Tijaniyya among Hausa migrants in Nigeria. But unlike the Hausa, Songhay migrants have usually been mobile, often staying in the southern towns for one or two years before returning home.

In spite of this predominant transience the radical Wahhabiyya has established Quran schools in Kumasi and Accra. The presence of these schools, which are said to be linked to the radical Wahhabiyya in Gao, points to the continued existence of a thriving Muslim community in the *zongos* of Ghana and to the presence of a religious literati which may act as a focus for community solidarity and cooperation. Seydu Idrissa claims that these schools and the Wahhabi movement in the migrant communities themselves, fall under his leadership, but contact between Dar al-Salam and Ghana appears to be irregular and the schools and communities of Kumasi and Accra likely have a great deal of autonomy.

The problems faced by migrants from the Sahel in the

cities of Ghana are numerous. Busia, in his expulsion of over 200,000 migrants in 1969, introduced a trend, which has lasted to the present, of economic nationalization and xenophobia which places considerable restrictions on the opportunities available to migrant workers. Rapid urban growth has been coupled with economic decline and unemployment to effectively put an end to the opportunities for migrants to become wealthy through economic exploits and adventure in Ghana.

In spite of this decline, Ghana remains a frequent destination for Songhay migrants from the Gao region. Drought and economic marginality in the Sahel as well as the establishment of particular realms of employment, such as work as porters, which are maintained by a network of cooperation based on ethnicity and religion, encourage the continued movement to the south.

A possible response to the limitation of economic opportunities in the south is an increase in the duration of residence in the migrant communities. If a migrant worker has found an activity in the coastal towns by which he can feed himself, he might consider it foolish to sacrifice this opportunity for the uncertain situation prevailing in his home village. It is possible, therefore, that besides the seasonal migrants who leave their villages to pursue any opportunity that is available, then return within the year, there is a core of more permanent migrants who have been successful in finding employment.

Transience continues to be encouraged, however, by the possibility, however remote it may seem, of an abundant harvest in the north and by the difficulties workers face in sending money to their families. Previously it was possible to send postal money orders, but this practice has recently been curtailed by a lack of cash in the post office in Gao which makes such money orders useless in a situation where the cash is needed immediately, not in one or two years. Many migrants return, therefore, out of a sense of responsibility to their families who are left in the villages.

The radical Wahhabiyya is probably important in the coastal towns for its creation of cohesive migrant communities which operate effectively in a situation of limited opportunity and bureaucratic complexity. Such a community would help members with the problems of housing, employment and with going through the bureaucratic procedures required of foreign workers by the Ghanaian government. It may also, on occasion, function as a link between the migrant worker and his family in the north.

Muslim leaders in this context are a source of religious knowledge and a focus of community ritual observance. As the purveyors of religious learning, of the 'correct' way of life, the religious leadership helps to define the boundary of a community whose members are required to function in a social and political environment which they perceive to be, and which may be in reality, essentially hostile.

Religion thus marks a boundary of trust. A co-religionist is also a 'brother', one who is not prone to back-stabbing, often one who can be trusted to help in a difficult situation, especially if asked to do so by a community leader

In traditional Songhay society there is generally no community wide organization of agricultural labour, no wider network than the extended family for the creation of work groups during periods of intense agricultural activity. An exception to this can be found among the Wogo of Niger who have developed a system of work teams called the *bogu*.¹¹ With this system, groups of children, from the age of 12 or 13, meet on a fixed day once or twice a week to work on the fields of one or the other of their fathers. The owner of the field, in return, must bring food to the workers in the fields and is responsible for the preparation of a large communal meal in the evening. A work group formed by children is continued into adulthood as its members become older. This system is exceptional and the Wogo, partly as a consequence of their labour organization, are also unusual in terms of agricultural productivity, with a relatively high income from short cycle rice and cash crops such as tobacco. Among the Songhay of Gao labour cooperation more commonly is organized on a kinship or friendship basis and the goals of production are lower.

¹¹. Olivier de Sardan, 1969: 41.

The radical Wahhabis have implemented a system of labour cooperation which more closely resembles the organization of the Wogo than that of their more immediate traditional neighbours. Tuesdays are set aside for community projects and all able-bodied men and older boys are expected to participate. If a man needs help during the crucial periods of sowing and harvesting he informs a village leader and a work group is organized. In one instance a man in Berra needed help at a time when labour in the village was not available. In this case a work group was sent from Dar al-Salam for a day to perform the necessary task. This example is important because it demonstrates the potential of the rural Wahhabiyya to increase agricultural production and improve the physical living conditions in their villages. Even the Wogo, who are among the most agriculturally productive village dwellers of the Niger river, do not possess a supra-village system of labour cooperation.

The Wahhabis of Dar al-Salam have also shown themselves to be more experimental in their approach to agriculture than most traditional villagers. During the 1984-85 drought year they attempted larger rice crops than most other villagers. Vegetables, for consumption in the village, were planted on a more extensive scale than had ever been done by them before. Small gardens were planted inside many compounds which were tended by women. These were usually irrigated by boys when the women were indoors or absent. Large gardens were also planted outside the village and,

in at least one instance, were irrigated by a gas-powered pump. Men who had never bothered with gardens before became involved and shared information with one another about such things as the correct preparation of the soil and the best amount of irrigation. Gardens were also started for the first time on a larger scale than in other Wahhabi villages but not as extensively as in Dar al-Salam. Gardening activity was limited mainly by the scarcity of seed.

The Wahhabi organization of labour invites comparison with the Mouride brotherhood of Senegal¹² which bases its wealth and overwhelming success in rural areas upon the production of groundnuts. The basic unit of rural organization among the Mourides is the *dara*, originally a Quran school which demanded more agricultural labour from its students than studiousness. The structure of the Quran school early in the history of the brotherhood evolved into the exclusively agricultural *dara* where young devotees, the *tak-der*, sacrificed their vigorous years in extremely difficult conditions in the service of their *shaikh*. When, usually in their thirties, the *tak-der* were released from service by their *shaikh*, they were treated with great deference in their natal villages, particularly by friends and relatives, and were considered to have secured a place in paradise through their sacrifice.

The Wahhabi school in Dar al-Salam is similar to the Mouride *dara*, the large Quran school that is maintained by students' labour, but among the radical Wahhabis there

12. O'Brien, 1971.

is no equivalent of the sacrifice made by the *tak-der* who work in exclusively agricultural *daras*. The Wahhabi system of labour cooperation is oriented towards village prosperity and village leaders do not accrue wealth as do the Mouride *shaikhs*. It should be stressed, however, that the organizational structure of the radical Wahhabis has the potential to be a key element in the development of the subsistence economy of the Songhay, not only because of the development of a supra-village cooperative system, but also because of an attitude which accompanies it of openness to innovation, to change in the agricultural system for the benefit of the community of believers.

This potential, however, has not been fully realized. Drought has been a major obstacle to any form of economic improvement and with the seasonal impracticability of grain crops, the Wahhabis are essentially on the same footing as everyone else in the region: the struggle for survival. The question of the possibility for the more structured Wahhabi system of leadership to improve agricultural productivity will have to be considered in future when, hopefully, environmental conditions will have improved.

Discipline and conformity.

The overt aim of the Wahhabiyya, the aim most frequently expressed by leaders and followers of the movement, is to practice Islam in full accord with the guidelines of the *sunna*. But living within the jurisdiction of a non-Islamic

state, the radical reformists are not permitted to fully implement and enforce Muslim law. The sanctions that they do apply are for minor infractions, usually relating to such things as negligence of religious duties or failure to obey the specific rules of the movement, such as the restrictions on travel.

In Dar al-Salam there is a small building made of the same mud-brick as the other buildings that serves as a 'prison'. Wahhabis acknowledge that corporal punishment may be administered if a blatant infraction of the rules of Islam were to occur. I was not, however, present during any case in which physical punishment was applied. The prison is probably not used for periods longer than several days. Moral pressure is the most important method of correcting undesirable behaviour. Isolation and confinement, coupled with persuasion from village leaders and peers is an effective, if severe, method of behaviour modification in a society that is founded on the values of kinship and community.

Conformity is demanded not only within individual villages but also on a wider scale within the movement as a whole. The inspiration and direction of the movement comes from the centre, Dar al-Salam, and other villages are ideally expected to submit to the dictates of its leadership, especially in religious matters.

The extent to which the radical Wahhabi leadership controls the movement's membership is strictly limited by the Malian state which is ever-ready to secure its monopoly

on politics and power if these are perceived to be threatened. At the same time the state is tolerant. With a majority population of Muslims and with puritan Islam gaining popularity the government is reluctant to use its coercive power against Muslims who, if anything, are too sincere in their practice of the faith. The arrest of radical Wahhabis in 1974 or '75 shows the limit to which the government will tolerate independent leadership. Such a leadership is permitted to function only if it is given a religious gloss, submerging its political ambitions beneath the surface of Islam, and if it does not too strenuously defy state authority. The chief, at the very least, must not feel unsafe in his dealings with the Wahhabis.

Historically the unification of Songhay villages under a central Songhay leader has not been truly achieved since the fall of the Askia dynasty. Political cohesion exists through the state, but this is an imposed unification; it does not meet the ethnic prerequisite for Songhay village cooperation. It is unlikely, however, that a religious movement, even one occupying a minority of villages, could achieve complete unity of purpose and centralized control. Far-flung Wahhabi villages, such as those west of Bourem, receive little contact from the Wahhabi capital and it is unlikely that, despite their adherence to the movement and to the leadership of Seydu Idrissa, they are as strict in their application of Muslim principles as villages closer to the 'nucleus'. Conformity expands outward from the centre

and, as contact with the leadership and intellectual inspiration of the movement grows less solid, the strength of conformity correspondingly declines.

Nevertheless, the movement is founded on a scriptural literature and in so far as a basic literacy in Arabic and a knowledge of Muslim principles can be ensured, the Wahhabiyya would be likely to achieve at least a minimal unity. It is through a careful adherence to the moral guidelines of the Book, therefore, that a certain uniformity of behaviour has been achieved. This consensus depends upon the contents of scriptures being adequately communicated to the non-literate majority within the movement.

One way in which this is accomplished is by sending 'preachers' from Dar al-Salam to other villages at the time of the Friday noon prayer to give readings from the Quran and *ḥadīth*. This ensures that followers are taught the meaning of the scriptures not only from their own imam but also from a perhaps more competent representative of the prestigious capital. This may or may not serve to increase the general awareness of the principles of Islam, but it more certainly increases an acceptance of the leadership from Dar al-Salam. These Friday visits, however, appear to be infrequent and take place almost exclusively within a radius of a morning's journey from the capital.

Dar al-Salam, as the centre of religious leadership and authority, is also the 'supreme court' of the radical reform movement. This is so in the sense that difficult religious questions and disputes between Wahhabis that cannot

be resolved locally, are referred to Seydu Idrissa for resolution. Such cases are dealt with privately. A minor problem of this kind arose in Bagoundje when I wished to tape record a summary from the imam of what he had said in a sermon. The request created some consternation and I was finally told in French that "this is something we have never done before. It cannot be done until we ask the marabout [Seydu Idrissa]."

An important feature of the movement which contributes to its centralization and uniformity of belief is the system of Quranic education. Quran schools exist in a number of villages, most of them close to the capital, but all of these except the central school in Dar al-Salam are for only the first few years of the child's studies. From the third year onwards students go to the capital to continue their religious education. Children living in villages without a Quran school go to Dar al-Salam from the first year. The capital is therefore a centre of education and socialization. In learning the principles of Islam, students are also taught the behaviour expected of them as functioning members of the community and the values of puritan Islam are deeply instilled in them.

Moderate organization.

The structure of the radical Wahhabiyya in Gao contrasts sharply with that of other reform groups in Mali. The Subbanu Association in Bamako, for example, even in the early stages

of its development in the 1950's when the fervour for reform had become high, avoided the implementation of a hierarchical leadership organization. The executive board of the association, commonly referred to as the *bureau*, consisted of a president and his deputy, a secretary general and his deputy, a treasurer, a group of delegates responsible for organization and another group responsible for the propagation of the faith.¹³ The *bureau* operated, in principle, by consensus. The president was an honorary member who presided over meetings and who did not need to have a formal education. In general the presidency was reserved for influential members of the association and was often held by traders of great repute. The president's most important function, as Kaba says, "was to use his influence during critical times and get things done for the association. In other words he served less as a leader than as a public relations man."¹⁴ Other executive members, though their positions sometimes demanded an education, did not possess significant authority over the association's membership. Disciplinary measures were minimal, usually consisting of small fines for minor offences such as unjustified absence from meetings. The most drastic punishment was expulsion from the association, usually applied in the case of behaviour blatantly contrary to Islamic doctrine.¹⁵

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¹³. Kaba, 1974: 141.

¹⁴. *ibid*: 142.

¹⁵. *ibid*: 145.

Like the Subbanu association, the moderate Wahhabis of Gao do not possess an organizational system comparable to that of the radical village movement. The ties uniting reformists in the town are loose. The only leadership positions specific to the moderate Wahhabis are the imamates of several of the town's mosques. The imam has as his central duties the leading of prayers and delivering of sermons.

Many of the organizational functions of the moderate Wahhabiyya in Gao have been taken over by the government controlled Association Malien pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam (AMUPI). The radical Wahhabis have boycotted the AMUPI, wishing instead to create their own Islamic organization.¹⁶ Funds cannot be collected for the progress of the reform movement that have not passed through this association. The AMUPI settles disputes between Muslims and organizes religious lectures, the celebration of Islamic festivals and the reception of foreign religious delegations. The AMUPI possesses a monopoly on these activities which, in the town at least, it rigourously enforces.

Several executive members of the AMUPI, such as 'Umar Muhammad, Yusufi Yehia and Muhammad al-Tahir, are moderate Wahhabis, but the organization is dominated by its non-Wahhabi membership. The regional president, Muhammad Guindo, together with several family members also on the executive committee, seem to control much of the AMUPI's activities and policies at the level of the *région* and the *cercle*.

16. See above, pp. 165-177.

While moderate Wahhabis are well represented on the association, they do not possess an officially recognized autonomous organization for the promotion of their own interests. Their more conciliatory approach to reform and their existence in the town, which leaves them open to close scrutiny by the authorities, greatly limit the degree to which they are capable of autonomous organizational activity. An appropriate model for the organization of the moderate Wahhabis, therefore, is that of the bureaucracy, even though executive members of the AMUPI may be trained for, and accepted into, their positions of leadership on the basis of 'tradition'.

For many villagers, however, the close ties between the AMUPI and the central government are distasteful, and the leaders of the radical Wahhabiyya have avoided participation in this association. They have instead done several things to develop an organization without making it too bureaucratic (and thereby incurring legal reprisal from the government for creating a rival to the AMUPI): 1) they divided villages, usually leaving the ties with the state, through the chieftainship, in the hands of rival villagers; 2) they have increased the influence of Muslim clerics, giving the imams greater authority over the members of the reformist community than that held by the traditional *alfa* in non-reformist villages; and 3) unofficial 'secular' leaders are also given a place in their communities. Such leaders concern themselves with local affairs and compete for local political office when there is a chance for success.

This set of developments is the key to the formation within the radical Wahhabiyya of an informal leadership structure and a system of village organization, both of which are largely independent from the state.

VIII. WOMEN AND WAHHABISM

Traditionalist villagers occasionally suggest that there is a shortage of marriageable women in Wahhabi communities. This suggestion is linked to their accusation that the Wahhabis 'kidnap' women out of desperation to find marriage partners. Why, after all, would women join reformist communities in large numbers where they are kept in strict seclusion and dominated by their husbands? Even if it were stripped of its intent to slander, however, such an assumption would be impossible to verify without an exhaustive survey of Wahhabi settlements. A shortage of marriageable women in the Wahhabi movement, moreover, is not evident on the surface. It must be acknowledged that Islamic reform appeals in some way to both sexes and in order to understand this appeal and the changes that it is bringing about to traditional Songhay society it is important to consider the place of women in the movement, the changes in family relationships involved in their adherence to reform and the degree of religious enthusiasm which lies behind their acceptance of the rules of reformed Islam.

Women are essential to the reform movement's survival and their compliance with rules which are applied specifically to females provides one of the most striking examples of the rigorous way in which the rules of Islam are followed in the radical Wahhabiyya. What motivates these village women to overcome practical disadvantages in implementing

the rules of seclusion? This problem becomes especially compelling when we consider the traditional position of Songhay women, a position which, on the surface at least, gives them far greater independence than those committed to Wahhabism.

Freedom and seclusion.

In traditional Songhay society women enjoy a degree of respect and status that is unusual for an African society. To the western observer this may not be immediately apparent. Songhay women at first seem little more than efficient sources of domestic labour; they are rarely fully integrated into their husbands' families and they have no rights of inheritance.

In the traditional village, however, if a man and a woman meet on a path it is the man who first greets the woman; if two men meet it is the younger who first greets the elder.¹ The spiritual place of women is important in bringing about the respect that is shown them, particularly at a later age once they have had children. Women are said to be more open to being possessed in the *holle* dances and are reputed to be the most formidable magicians.² They usually receive greater affection from their children than do men, even when the children are grown to adulthood. A

1. Prost, 1954: 196.

2. Rouch, 1954: 48.

woman who is said to possess *lakkal* (Ar. 'āqīl)--a concept which refers to an ability to learn, patience, curiosity and honesty--must be respected by her husband. In the words of an old Songhay woman, "[elle] peut demander n'importe quoi à son mari, il lui accordera; même si elle lui dit 'couche-toi je vais t'égorger', car elle-même fait tout ce qu'il veut."³

This is an extreme expression of an ideal of mutual respect between husband and wife. It is, needless to say, an exaggerated statement--a Songhay man would not willingly submit, Isaac like, to a sacrificial altar to satisfy a whim of his wife--but as an exaggeration it expresses clearly a social ideal that women be treated courteously, especially by their husbands.

This is an ideal that, alas, does not always conform to reality. Strong quarrels between spouses are common and divorce is frequent--'*monnai courante*' as one observer has put it.⁴ In spite of the fact that divorce is considered extremely undesirable it is common for men and women to marry several times in their lifetimes. Indeed, the lasting relationship is a rarity. Women are not integrated into their husbands' families upon marriage and, at the same time, they maintain ties with their own kin. Thus, when disputes between husband and wife arise, the woman is usually

3. Bisilliat, 1967: 217.

4. Prost, 1954: 196.

able to return to her family. This is quite possibly a social factor behind the ideal of respect towards women; they must be treated considerately to maintain harmony in the marriage union.

In the villages, traditional Songhay women are not confined to the home. This is, above all, because the sexual division of labour gives them numerous outdoor chores, the most important of which are carrying water, collecting firewood, tending gardens and selling locally produced items in the markets.

In the towns, women whose husbands are wealthy remain more closely tied to the home than village women who participate in a subsistence economy. 'Proper' conduct is associated with the luxury of having servants to do difficult chores. In Gao, when women leave their compounds it is usually in groups of two or three; a woman walking in the streets alone smacks of potential adultery and is disapproved of. The strict rules of Muslim dress and seclusion, however, do not apply. Covering the head with a scarf is required of married women, and 'provocative' western clothes are usually forbidden, but the veil has no place among the requirements of proper conduct. Full seclusion is rarely practiced. Most women feel no hesitation in chatting with neighbours in the streets or walking with friends or relatives to the market.

The strict seclusion of radical women changes some of these traditional values. Outside the home the woman ideally wears full-length dark robes which cover the wrists

and ankles, with a hood that covers the back of the head and shoulders and a thin veil that folds down completely concealing the face. Old women and girls before puberty do not necessarily wear the veil unless they are in the mosque. In Dar al-Salam these rules are especially emphasized, but in other radical villages the veil is more frequently replaced by a large scarf which is draped over the head and brought forward like a monks cowl to hide the face in shadow. In the home when the outer robes are not worn women try to dress attractively, wearing colourful garments, jewelry and makeup if their husbands can afford them.

Even with the 'correct' attire it is considered unseemly for a woman to be outside the home without a specific purpose, especially if alone. When the paths of men and women appear likely to cross, the women will stop or move aside to let the men pass and to avoid a possible encounter. Men who wish to enter a compound which is not their own shout a greeting and wait for a reply so as to give women, if there are any, a chance to conceal themselves. If, in spite of all precautions, a man surprises a woman without her veil, she dives to the ground with her face turned away.

Because of these restrictions Wahhabi women perform a minimum of tasks outside the home. With the exceptional hardship of the drought and the absence of men in some villages, women can be seen wearing their full concealing dress carrying water or wood and tending herds. But in better times these tasks would be taken over by young men or boys. Women in traditional villages tend gardens and sell produce

and spices in the village and town markets; Wahhabi women no longer perform these tasks because of a fear of their exposure to influences outside the home. Produce and spices are consumed locally rather than sold. Men and boys plant and tend gardens on the outskirts of the village, thereby eliminating another female task outside the home.

The tasks left to women are mainly restricted to those performed inside the family compound: sweeping, cleaning, preparing meals, washing pots and dishes, weaving mats and tending to young children. These tasks in themselves are time consuming, but married women are said by their menfolk to have more 'free' time than their husbands who work in the fields, and as a result their studies of the Quran are said to be pursued more dilligently.

These restrictions on radical Wahhabi women are far more wide ranging and strict than those imposed on traditional village women or on moderate Wahhabi women in the town. The wife of a moderate reformist in Gao seems to live in much the same way as her traditional neighbour. Full-length robes and veils are rarely seen in the town. Moderate Wahhabi women, and many traditional women, however, do not have absolute freedom to wander through the streets as they please, but remain close to the home through much of their lives. Wahhabi women in the town are not encouraged to attend Friday noon prayers. This is mainly the prerogative of older women who might be more concerned with the world beyond, free from the encumbrance of children or, perhaps more importantly, free to some extent of the rules that keep them tied to

the home during their childbearing years, however casually these rules are applied in comparison with the radical Wahhabis.

Despite a temptation to do so, it would be incorrect to assume that Wahhabi women oppose seclusion and are forced into it by their husbands in a conspiracy of masculine domination. Veiling and seclusion are often implemented as symbols of prestige and upward mobility. Smith outlines the Hausa classification of marriages into three categories: full purdah, partial wife seclusion and no seclusion at all. Full purdah has high prestige while the absence of seclusion, known as the marriage of the ignorant, is considered lowly.⁵ Although there is no precedent for full seclusion among the Songhay, the practice of partial seclusion is associated with high status. The Armah of Timbuktu, for example, in spite of their nominal adherence to Islam, keep girls before marriage strictly confined to the home where they learn to embroider, weave straw mats and do bead work, while other Songhay girls are not secluded and acquire household techniques as they help their mothers in grinding grain and cooking.⁶ The Songhay, therefore, have also associated seclusion and leisure with high social status.

The social pattern associated with seclusion in the Muslim societies of West and North Africa (and probably elsewhere) is as follows: seclusion is practiced most strictly by townsfolk whose primary source of income comes from trade

5. Smith, 1959: 246.

6. Miner, 1953: 140.

or salaried employment; non-seclusion is mainly found in the villages where women participate in a subsistence economy (and in poorer urban households where the women's contribution to the domestic economy requires work outside the home).

Maher's study of the Berber of the Middle Atlas in Morocco shows that seclusion in villages is limited primarily by the domestic routine. Women, besides caring for children, fetch water in the morning and evening, cook meals, chop wood, tend animals and in some seasons work in fields, weeding and stripping maize cobs. Married women in the town, except descendants of black slaves who occupy an inferior status, do not work outside the home. The domestic routine among the strictly secluded wives of urban households is marked by a slow punctiliousness: "the tendency to spin out each domestic task, performing it with exquisite care, persists throughout the townswoman's lifetime."⁷ Cohen, who describes a similar rural/urban pattern of seclusion among the Kanuri of Northern Nigeria, also attributes the difference to the economic activities of women: "Rural peasants need help on their farms; water must be obtained from wells, often at some distance from the household. Even among the poor of the city, women must go out of the compound for water. Therefore, the poor cannot so easily keep women totally out of participating in overlapping activities and interactive areas in which they contact the man's world."⁸ In societies where seclusion is the social ideal, the most important prerequisite

7. Maher, 1974: 117.

8. Cohen, 1971: 99.

for its implementation is a division of labour which frees women of the necessity to perform chores outside the home.

The seclusion of radical Wahhabi women, therefore, is possible largely because of a re-structuring of the division of labour so that it prevents, in so far as possible, female contact with 'the man's world'. To what extent have men made sacrifices in order to keep their wives in seclusion? For the most part men have taken over tasks outside the home which both men and women previously shared. Only men do business in the markets, whereas before women participated, perhaps more frequently, in this activity. Selling produce and spices in the market, however, a task which is seen to be exclusively female, has been abandoned in favour of local consumption. Men have largely taken over the herding of animals, another task which was previously shared, but women in some villages, probably because of labour shortage, can occasionally be seen performing this task. Only rarely do men perform the traditionally female tasks of carrying water, gathering and carrying firewood or collecting grasses for weaving. Children, usually boys, carry water and wood. Women often collect grass, walking to the outskirts of the village in groups of three or more at dusk when they (and the grass) are less visible.

Children, therefore, are important in maintaining seclusion through their performance of traditionally female tasks outside of village compounds. This may explain, at least in part, why seclusion is maintained more rigourously in Dar al-Salam than in other Wahhabi villages. The importing

of over one hundred boys from other villages to attend the madrasa significantly increases the availability of labour. A few hours are set aside each day for their studies, but besides this boys are largely available to be put to work. In other villages where less labour from children is available (and from whence some of this labour is drained into Dar al-Salam) women more commonly perform chores which take them away from their compounds. Dar al-Salam, the centre of religious inspiration, is better equipped to implement the ideal of seclusion.

In some West African societies in which the full seclusion of women is an ideal, the role of a woman who is married and one who is divorced or widowed can be dramatically different, enabling women to change from seclusion to relative freedom through a change in marital status. Amongst the urban Hausa, whose wives are usually strictly secluded, a divorced woman often becomes a prostitute and can then remarry to become 'respectable' once again.⁹ The Kanuri of northern Nigeria give women a clearly defined position between marriages, called the *zower*. Younger Kanuri women return to their agnatic kin upon divorce to soon be remarried but older women who have had several marriages are given more freedom and are often supported by more than one lover.¹⁰

The radical Wahhabis of the Gao area have no equivalent status for divorced women. Seclusion applies almost equally to married and unmarried women, although girls and older

9. Cf. A. Cohen, 1969 and Smith, 1959.

10. R. Cohen, 1971: 128.

women beyond their childbearing years appear to have more freedom. If a woman were to find living under the strict rules of the Wahhabi community oppressive, however, there is an alternative: she can leave the community to live with non-reformist kin--in Wahhabi terms she can become an apostate (*murtadd*). This is a drastic measure but one which has occasionally been resorted to, especially early in the history of the Gao Wahhabiyya when separate communities were first being established. The older Wahhabi women, those who have 'converted' to the movement, either by acquiescing to a decision taken by their husbands or by marrying into the reformist community, are living under the rules of seclusion by choice. Whether or not the second generation of Wahhabi women, those who were born into the movement, will tolerate the rules of seclusion is a question that can only be answered with the passage of time.

The strict implementation of seclusion amongst the radical Wahhabis has certainly introduced changes to the lifestyle of reformist villages, but it has not entirely overturned the traditional value system. As has been mentioned, it may be associated with the preservation of parental authority. Seclusion increases dependence upon elders in arranging marriages and in regulating any form of contact between the sexes. Men who are away from their homes feel themselves to have a greater assurance of their wives' fidelity. Finally, difficult chores outside the home have become more exclusively relegated to men and children, and some women appear to

have more leisure time than their counterparts in traditional villages.

It may be incorrect to believe that those who subject themselves to the rules of seclusion are completely sacrificing the traditional respect given women in Songhay society. Some degree of sacrifice is certainly entailed, but Wahhabi women appear to have their own leaders and their own ways in which status and influence can be achieved. One of these is through the acquisition of religious knowledge. More important, however, is the status of their husbands. The religious knowledge of women is largely related to the knowledge and status of their husbands who may have taught them or given them the freedom to study. The most influential women in the Wahhabi villages are the female '*alfas*'. In Dar al-Salam this woman is the wife of Seydu Idrissa, while his two other wives are at an advanced level in their studies.

In West Africa it is in general the nobility in Muslim societies that enforces seclusion. Amongst the radical Wahhabis of Gao, however, especially those in Dar al-Salam, seclusion is universalized and men have adjusted the division of labour to accommodate a more strict application of the rules. Women from poorer households, therefore, often share in both the boredom and the status that seclusion involves.

Divorce.

Marital instability appears to be an inherent feature of patrilineal societies in which a wife is not absorbed

into her husband's family or lineage, but remains loyal to her own kin. There are numerous determinants of divorce frequency, which vary in importance in different social contexts, but a wife's attachment to her natal kin appears to be the most important. In such circumstances, as Fallers puts it, "patriliney tends to divide marriage by dividing the loyalties of spouses."¹¹ Lewis shows that among the Somali husbands retain absolute rights over children, a feature that one would expect to stabilize marriage, yet 32 % of marriages end in divorce. He finds that "although the Somali are strongly patrilineal and pay generous bride-wealths, marriage amongst them is unstable. This...is consistent with the strength of patrilineal affiliation which binds a woman more strongly to her own kin than marriage binds her to her husband's kin."¹² Another example can be found in R. Cohen's study of marital instability among the Kanuri of northern Nigeria.¹³ Here, too, it is shown that kinship involvements for both husband and wife tend to weaken the bond between them. In Kanuri society a woman's natal household may be a source of support in the event of incompatibility or an over-demanding husband who goes too far in asserting male dominance. The *zower* is a clear role for divorced women which gives them, especially later in life, a great deal of freedom between marriages. Male dominance in Kanuri society is to some extent balanced by a woman's right to obtain *zower* status which, Cohen suggests, serves to increase a woman's role in decision-making processes.

11. Fallers, 1957: 21.

12. Lewis, 1962:

13. R. Cohen, 1971: 81.

A similar pattern may be found among the Songhay of Gao. Women are not integrated into their husbands' households but rather remain attached to their own families, with especially close ties to the mother and sisters. Rights over children are retained by the husband, but a high incidence of fostering often prevents any exclusiveness of paternal custody and childrens' attachment to their mothers usually remain strong even when parents are divorced.

Divorce follows the simple Muslim pattern with the responsibility for renouncing the marriage ultimately residing with men. Often divorces occur when an older man is interested in obtaining a second wife--an action which is socially tolerated but which is rarely tolerated by wives. In practical terms, then, the dominant marriage pattern among the Songhay can be described as serial monogamy.

There is an apparent contradiction in the values relating to traditional Songhay women. They are not fully integrated into their husbands' families and have few rights over the children they may bear, yet they are ideally treated considerately by their husbands, are the focus of familial affection later in life, and are considered to possess special spiritual powers. This contradiction, however, is only an apparent one, for the special qualities of married women may be a compensation for their social marginality or a counterweight to the power they retain, in fact, to propel events towards the dissolution of marriage because of the ties they maintain with their families.

* * *

The radical Wahhabis are reticent to talk about their families. This is unusual in a society in which kin relationships are valued; it probably stems from the fact that many radical Wahhabis have separated from relatives who did not join the movement and the embarrassment in having kin who are not 'true Muslims' can make this an uncharacteristically taboo subject. I was fortunate enough, however, to obtain some information on marital status in Dar al-Salam. A list was kept by Seydu Idrissa of all those who attend the womens' madrasa which includes all females in the village over the age of 5. It remained for me to go through the list with Seydu Idrissa and a senior Quran school teacher, both of whom knew village affairs well, to find the womens' marital status. This information was considered by Seydu Idrissa to be worth disclosing since he believed it showed the dilligence of women, no matter what their family responsibilities, in pursuing religious knowledge.

The figures for divorced women include only those who are between marriages; they do not indicate the frequency with which divorces and remarriages occur. It is probable that some women divorce and remarry several times in their lives. Nevertheless, it is clear that a high divorce rate occurs in radical Wahhabi communities. With approximately 36 % of women aged 40 through 44 in the divorced status, it appears as though most marriages end in divorce. The percentage is higher for older women because those who are still in their childbearing years are considered more desirable partners and would have greater opportunity of remarriage.

Age	Single	Married	Divorced	% Divorced	Widowed
10-14	23	1	-	- -	-
15-19	15	16	-	-	1
20-24	3	46	3	5.77	-
25-29	2	28	-	-	-
30-34	-	19	3	13.04	1
35-39	-	4	2	28.57	1
40-44	-	6	4	36.36	1
45 +	-	7	3	16.67	8
Total	43	127	15	7.61*	12

* % Divorced of total sample.

Table 4. Marital status of women in Dar al-Salam.

It is impossible, on the basis of this limited data, to arrive at any definite conclusions concerning the patterns of Wahhabi marriage and divorce. The figures can help us, however, to glimpse some of the reality behind the barrier of seclusion. It must be stressed that Dar al-Salam is not a typical village. It is the centre of the radical Wahhabiyya and, as such, it has a greater proportion of men with high status than other villages. Amongst men with high status polygyny is common. The radical Wahhabis have two or three (rarely four) wives more commonly than the traditionalist Songhay population. They stress that it is permitted for men to have up to four wives, that women must accept their position and have no right to create

disorder in the household out of jealousy. However, it seems unlikely that even fully committed Wahhabi women observe this advice. The themes of Seydu Idrissa's address to the village women during the sermon of the *id al-Kabīr* was 'obey your husbands' and 'love your co-wives'. His almost exclusive stress on these topics is in itself an indication of familial disorder. Women may accept living in polygynous households, perhaps attracted by the prestige of living in Dar al-Salam, but such unions are often unstable and divorce at least in part, may drain the village of older women who have relatives elsewhere. The concentration of the female population into lower age groups is also partly explained by a low life expectancy.

The radical Wahhabis, then, share a high divorce rate with the rest of the Songhay population. Traditionalist women remain tied to their natal kin and acceptance of polygynous marriages is rare. Wahhabi women, committed as they are to the tenets of Islam, are more accepting of polygynous unions, initially at least, and it is rivalry with co-wives that often precipitates divorce. Situations in which men who do not have high status attempt to exercise the right to more than one wife may also encourage marital instability. Wahhabi women, because of the rules of seclusion, may be more isolated from their natal kin, but the high rate of divorce suggests that, for many women, family ties can still provide a source of 'refuge' between marriages. In the case of women whose families are in the traditionalist community, divorce may lead to leaving the Wahhabi movement

on a permanent basis.

A note on fostering.

Children in Songhay society are highly valued and even couples that do not have adequate means of support try to produce as many children as possible; in a society situated in an unstable environment and with most families living on the brink of destitution, children can be an effective source of old-age security. Fostering creates ties of reciprocity between members of the extended family. Foster children are equally tied to their foster parents and to their real parents; and where divorce occurs, the mother remains a focus of her childrens' affection and respect.

During one of my visits to Dar al-Salam I was awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of somebody rummaging through my belongings. Was there a thief in the 'dwelling of peace'? I switched on an electric torch in time to see a small boy, no older than three, running out of the room. He had probably burned himself on the ember of a mosquito coil because it was lying smouldering in the sand. The next morning when I asked my Wahhabi hosts about this I was told that the boy was an orphan. There are three orphans in Dar al-Salam, roughly the same age and from different families. They sleep in a hut near the village centre and are fed by the married teachers in the madrasa, but do not belong to any one family and, as my experience with the

'thief' indicates, they are not closely looked after, even though their physical needs are met. Older children who are orphaned would presumably become involved in the madrasa and in this way would be more carefully socialized.

The existence of orphans in a wider social milieu in which fostering is common suggests a weakening of kin ties among some members of the radical Wahhabi community. 'Conversion' leads to a severance of relations with any family member who remains in a traditionalist village. A child born in a radical Wahhabi community would not be fostered to traditionalist kin, even if he were orphaned.

The exclusiveness of the radical Wahhabiyya has in many cases shattered traditional lines of reciprocity, leaving some members without kin support; but the close-knit nature of reformist villages makes extended kin ties largely superfluous. A member of the radical movement knows that in spite of his severance of relations with 'infidel' family members, he can depend upon support from his co-religionists.

IX. THE OBSERVANCE OF ISLAM.

In the Islamic state every aspect of the believer's life is potentially guided by religious principles. In the context of a secular state, as in Mali, the scope for the application of Islamic principles is more limited since law, especially criminal law, is monopolized by the national, non-Islamic judicial system. There is still room, however, for a wide range of ritual and social practices to be guided by Islam; and the Wahhabiyya of Gao has seized every possible opportunity of implementing elements of the religion in their daily lives.

In this chapter I discuss the written sources of their systematic observance of Islam as well as how the written moral code is implemented, with particular reference to Islamic ritual. In doing so I concentrate on the practices of the radical Wahhabiyya with comparisons to practices of the moderates and traditionalists.

Principal written sources of religious knowledge.

The Wahhabis rely almost exclusively upon the Quran and the traditions of the prophet (*ḥadīth*) for religious knowledge. They have tried to go beyond the traditional rote learning of the Quran and a veneration of it exclusive of its meaning to an understanding of the message of the sacred text.

In the traditional cultural context of Gao, which has much in common with the rest of West African Islam, the language of the Quran was taken to have greater sacred power than its actual contents. The predominance of what Goody and Watt have called 'restricted literacy'¹ has meant that while the most essential requirements of Muslim worship may or may not have been implemented, the influence of the Quran in daily life was basically as a powerful magical instrument. The meaning of sacred texts was rarely understood but the words were endowed with a spiritual transcendence which had the power to bring good fortune and ward off evil. This remains the predominant attitude towards the Quran in rural Africa.

One of the main peculiarities of the Wahhabiyya lies in the fact that it is the only contemporary Muslim tendency in the region of Gao to break away from the traditional pattern of Islamic magic and replace it with a veneration as much for the meaning of Arabic texts as for the Book itself. While much of the veneration for the Quran remains, the full implications of its meaning have only recently made an impact on Songhay society; and in the radical Wahhabiyya especially, much of the respect given the Quran in its former use in Islamic magic has continued in the implementation of its messages. Thus the unique feature of the radical Wahhabiyya is the enthusiasm with which literate adherents probe the messages of the Islamic text for the possibility of including 'new' behavioural guidelines in

1. Goody and Watt, 1968.

their daily lives in order to receive spiritual blessing. It is through the acquisition of literacy in a clerical elite that they have been able to attain this new understanding of Islam.

Traditional Islam--the Islam marked by, among other things, holy men and amulets--demonstrates a veneration for the written word per se. The meaning of the text is usually unknown and the sacred value of the written word comes from the Quran itself, perceived as a powerful instrument, dangerous in the wrong hands. Like other magical practices, the manipulation of Quranic passages is used for prosperity in this life, for good health, protection from spirits, success in examinations, ad infinitum. It is most commonly therapeutic, related in some way to physical and emotional well-being.

Reformist Islam to a large extent dispenses with the veneration of the sacred script and turns instead to obedience of the sacred command. Not the word but the meaning of the word has the greatest power. Knowledge is imperative. To obey one must understand the command; it cannot simply be sewn in a pouch and forgotten. The reward for obedience does not always come in the here-and-now but can be deferred and given in paradise.

How do these approaches to the Quran deal with the failure of the religious system to assure prosperity? In 'Islamic magic' the power of the amulet can be annulled by pollution, by contact with urine, menstrual blood, all the perceived corrupting substances of life. If pollution

does not appear a likely cause of failure the holy man can theoretically be blamed, but this occurs very rarely, especially if the holy man is venerated, for he is not the source of sacred power but only the intermediary, the medium by which it is transferred from the Book to the client. More commonly the failure of Islamic magic is simply ignored or denied. In a story told to me of the resistance to French rule there was an incident in which the rebel tribesmen, armed only with swords and spears and pursued doggedly by superior French forces, sent forward directly into the face of the enemy a mounted warrior, wearing amulets said to make him invisible and protect him from bullets. As the warrior approached the French troops opened fire, with predictable results. But my storyteller denied the failure of the amulets. He explained that the warrior had indeed been invisible but the bullets had done nothing to really harm him; rather, he had fatally broken his neck in the fall from his horse. We see from this example that the inefficacy of Islamic magic, in common with all such practices, is easily denied, while only the reinforcing instances, the cases where the sacred script does its job, are admitted as evidence of the sacred power of the Quran.

Reformist Islam has less trouble in explaining misfortune. All that happens, good or bad, comes from God--and His reasons are not to be enquired into. Since prosperity can be deferred until the afterlife the difficulty posed by the pitiable saint and the prosperous sinner is not a

serious one. The radical Wahhabis of Gao sometimes take this a step further, into what can best be described as 'reverse predestination'. A young Wahhabi in Bagoundje who was suspicious of my mission asked not so much about my plans and intentions as about the state of my health, my finances, and the general quality of my life. Upon hearing about some of my difficulties he seemed pleased and explained that mishaps and suffering were good; if God wished to punish me in the afterlife He would provide me in this life with wealth and glory. Suffering was a sign that God was testing my determination and the reward for facing adversity would be in paradise.

For the Wahhabis, therefore, the Quran is important not so much as a sacred object but as a sacred Revelation. This is not to say that it is never venerated as a sacred object by the reformists. On the contrary, they are respectful of a certain power that emanates from the Book itself, and observe carefully the prohibitions concerning its contact with the ground as well as other sources of pollution. They are also respectful of dangers that can result if one studies the Quran alone, without a religious guide. Miner provides the similar example of a Songhay tailor in Timbuktu who went insane because, it was said, he studied passages which were "forbidden for any but Alfa to read..."² The Wahhabis, with their similar injunction, share in the mystification of the scriptures typical of traditional literacy.

2. Miner, 1953: 255.

The emphasis, however, has shifted dramatically from the veneration of the word to the veneration of the command.

This emphasis on command is not restricted to the Quran but completely pervades the approach to life which, especially among the radical Wahhabis, involves a patterning of behaviour in accord with the 'golden age' of Islam. The *ḥadīth*, or traditions of the prophet, also play a part in the lives of the radical Wahhabis that goes beyond the attention paid by most other Muslims. Their approach to these traditions is eclectic, with various collections of *ḥadīth*, such as the *al-Arba'īn* ('The Forty'), a small volume of forty-one *ḥadīth* collected by Yehia ibn Saraf al-Nawi, being the basis of their knowledge. In principle they accept the six standard books of traditions followed by most Muslims.

Ḥadīth accepted as reliable (i.e. traced more reliably to the prophet) are often scrupulously and literally observed by the radical Wahhabis in a way that goes beyond the practice of most other reformists. On one occasion while having tea with a group of about a dozen Wahhabis in Bagoundje, I noticed that on several pillows, made of inexpensive print fabric depicting peacocks standing in a bed of flowers, an alteration had been made to the design. The heads of the peacocks had been effaced; the eyes were carefully stitched over with thread and the rest of the outlines of the heads scribbled over with ink from a ball-point pen. When I asked about this I was told that images of living

beings are evil: they prevent angels from entering one's home and the maker of these images will be asked by God on the Day of Judgement to resurrect them, an obviously impossible feat since God is the only creator. The implication of this seems to be that the imitator of living beings in a certain respect imitates God's role as creator but is not able to endow his creations with a soul. This avoidance of representational art comes from a *ḥadīth*:

'Aisha relates that she bought a cushion on which there were pictures, and when the apostle of God saw them he stood at the door and would not enter. Seeing signs of displeasure in his face she said: 'O apostle of God, I repent unto God and his apostle. What have I done amiss?' He asked, 'What is the meaning of this cushion?' 'I bought it for you to sit and recline on' said she. 'Verily' he answered, 'The makers of these pictures will be severely punished on the day of resurrection, and it will be said to them, "Bring to life the pictures you have made."³

This prohibition is extended by the radical Wahhabis to include the taking of photographs, and the same *ḥadīth* was cited when I was prevented by the radical Wahhabis from using my camera. The ban on representational art is widespread in the Islamic world, but nowhere does it seem more rigidly applied than among Gao's radical Wahhabis in their careful observance of Islam.

The principal source of non-scriptural inspiration for the Wahhabis comes from the work of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787) which usually takes the form of small

3. Guillaume, 1966: 129.

'catechisms' collected by his sons and other followers. The most common source of al-Wahhab's ideas amongst both radical and moderate Wahhabis comes in the form of a condensed pamphlet entitled *Mubādī al-Islām* (The Manifest in Islam). Here we find four fundamentals which are relevant in defining the Wahhabis' approach to Islam:

1. - Knowledge: the recognition of God and His prophet, the recognition of Islam as evidenced by the Quran and hadith.
2. - Acting according to this knowledge.
3. - Propogating this knowledge.
4. - Persistence in the face of adversity or persecution which inevitably comes as a result of spreading the knowledge of Islam.

The most influential predecessors of al-Wahhab were Ahmad ibn Hanbal, founder of the Hanbali judicial school (*mathhab*) and Ahmad ibn Taimiyya, a Hanbali theologian of the 14th century A.D. Ibn Hanbal, for the Wahhabis, is the jurist who most scrupulously follows the traditions of the early Islam of the prophet and his companions. He stresses the superiority of the text over independent reason. The Quran and the traditions are, in Hanbali jurisprudence, the sole sources of religious obligation; nothing beyond this need be obeyed and nothing besides God must be worshipped. Ibn Taimiyya is important, above all, for his popularization of a theology based upon Hanbali law. His emphasis on obedience to God alone, on complete and methodical

submission to His will, are ibn Taimiyya's central themes which are taken up by the Wahhabiyya.⁴

The most essential of God's commands for the Wahhabis is a rejection of the worship of all spiritual beings other than the unique Deity. Islam for the Wahhabis "is above all a rejection of all gods except God, a refusal to allow others to share in that worship which is due to God alone (*shirk*)."⁵

The most important religious principle for the Wahhabis, then, is the supremacy and oneness (*al-Tawḥīd*) of God. To them, whoever invokes a being, living or dead, other than God is an infidel. The believer's conception of God, according to the Wahhabis, must come from God's description of Himself, as contained in the Quran, and believed in implicitly rather than interpreted or considered metaphor. Thus, God is conceived literally as seated on a throne. God exercises His will in determining all events. Nothing happens other than through His will and power. He is the sole source of success and misfortune.

The eschatology of the Wahhabiyya similarly follows a literal interpretation of Islamic scriptures. After death the soul remains in the grave until the Day of Judgement when it is resurrected and all men stand naked and uncircumcized before God and are judged according to their deeds; those deemed worthy of paradise stand on the right hand

4. Cf. Laoust, 1939: 532.

5. Hourani, 1983: 37.

of God while those destined for the fire stand on the left.

Submission to the will of God is considered the basis of commitment to Islam and the means of gaining entrance to paradise. Obedience to God involves carrying out His commands as contained in the Quran and in following the example set by the most pious of believers, the prophet Muhammad. The prophet, however, is considered only a guide, to be admired but not to be worshipped.

All of this finds its reflection in the theology of ibn Hanbal and ibn Taimiyya; but al-Wahhab tends toward an exclusiveness that does not have a place in the Hanbali system. The true believer must avoid those who are not in the Muslim community, even if they be his closest kin. Al-Wahhab also added a number of injunctions that are not found in Hanbali law. Attendance at public prayer is obligatory; smoking is forbidden and may be punished with up to 40 stripes; the mere utterance of the formula 'there is no god but God and Muhammad is His prophet' is not sufficient to make a Muslim--further enquiry must be made into his character.⁶

Furthermore, the Wahhabiyya does not rely upon any one system of Islamic jurisprudence in spite of its close association with Hanbalism. The Saudi state follows Hanbali law but for al-Wahhab, as for many he has inspired, the only written authorities requiring obedience are the Quran and the traditions. Of the four major jurisprudential schools

6. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1929: 1086.

(*mathhab*) of Islam, the Hanbali is favoured by most Wahhabis, but the other three, the Maliki, Salafi and Hanafi, are also considered important in the interpretation of Muslim law. The canonical rites are considered valid only in so far as they do not contradict the Quran and *ḥadīth*. Two other sources of Islamic doctrine, *ijmā'*, or consensus of the community, and *qiyās*, personal interpretation of necessary action through analogy with the teachings and life of the prophet, are rejected, being not derived directly from the Quran and traditions.

The five pillars.

In the traditional observance of Islam among the Songhay of Gao, emphasis is placed upon the social aspects of worship such as the Muslim festivals and such ceremonies as naming and marriage. The Wahhabis, particularly the radicals, on the contrary have simplified the observance of communal rituals and placed greater emphasis on the 'correct' practice of the five pillars:

The profession of faith (shahada): The attitude toward the profession of faith, the witnessed assertion that there is no god but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God, on the part of both radical and moderate Wahhabis, seems to be similar to that of Saudi Arabian Wahhabis who do not content themselves with the *shahada* as a sign of adherence to Islam. They require, in addition, an examination of the religious conduct and character of the believer as a

confirmation of his loyalty to the faith.⁷ Among Gao's radical Wahhabis the willingness of the believer to live in one of their villages is in itself a sign of sincerity because of the completeness with which the adherent's life becomes absorbed into the community and the routines of Muslim worship.

Prayer: In examining the Wahhabi practice of Islam prayer most clearly exemplifies the precision that is demanded in the observance of every aspect of the faith. Perhaps the most significant and striking aspect of the radical Wahhabis performance of prayer is the fact that the men are required to attend the village mosque for all five daily prayers unless they are working in distant fields or traveling. Only rarely do men pray alone.

Each village has a regular muezzin who shouts the call to prayer from the top of the mosque or, in villages where there is no mosque, from a roof or high wall. If men are traveling or working away from the mosque one of them shouts the call to prayer as others perform their ablutions.

The general feeling among radical Wahhabis seems to be that prayer at a mosque or common meeting place has more value than if it were performed elsewhere. This is apparently because prayer in a large group is seen by them to more clearly imitate the example of the original Muslim community of the prophet and his companions. In a number of reformist villages mosques remain half constructed because

7. Khoury, 1983: 160.

of hardship inflicted by the drought, yet prayers are performed within the unfinished walls, even during dust storms and the scorching mid-day temperatures which can reach 50° celcius. Under such conditions prayer becomes a form of collective asceticism.

Wrist watches are set with the greatest precision possible and care is taken to be sure that the muezzin calls at the correct time. Clean water is always drawn from a well, ready for ablutions. Men ideally assemble at the mosque as soon as possible after the call so that women, even though they are veiled and have a separate entrance to the mosque, will not be encountered en route. Men who come early perform two *rak'as*, then sit reciting from the Quran, pronouncing short litanies or simply waiting for the imam's entrance. When the imam arrives all stand and assemble in straight rows, arms folded across the chest, shoulders and toes touching those of one's neighbour. Younger men with some status, messengers, higher-level students, teachers, etc., make sure the rows are straight. They sight, pull some worshippers forward, push others back, until they are satisfied that the row is as near perfect as possible. Then they give a signal that all is ready and the prayer begins.

Recitation from the Quran in prayer is slow, clear and deliberate. During the prayers of morning and evening, which are shorter for most Muslims, lengthy *sūras* from the Quran are recited, so that these prayers are frequently

the longest.

When the prayer is completed the men wait five or ten minutes for the women to leave. Usually there will be fewer than ten women in a large village attending prayer since they are not required to pray in the mosque. While waiting the men often silently pronounce litanies. Unlike the traditionalists and many moderate Wahhabis in Gao who pronounce the same litany after prayer, the radical Wahhabis do not use the rosary but count instead with their fingers. Their explanation is that on the Day of Judgement a rosary can be lost or destroyed, but the hands of those entering paradise will always be resurrected and the faithful will thus be equipped for prayers in the next world.

Pre-adolescent boys who are usually at the primary level in Quran school are not required to attend all prayers in the mosque, though it is not uncommon to see three- or four-year-olds at prayer with their fathers. As they become older, advance in their Quranic studies and take on more responsibilities, boys are required to pray in the mosque with the same diligence as their elders.

Women are neither required nor encouraged to pray in the mosque except for attendance at the midday Friday sermon. Usually, when the men are gone for their lengthy prayer, women from neighbouring compounds gather together, perform prayers rapidly (in turns so that someone will be able to watch young children) and then spend a brief period socializing. Their visits are mentally timed so that they can

return to their compounds shortly before the men return, but sometimes they are late and have to scatter as the men signal their approach. Some women, however, seem to pray at the mosque regularly. In Dar al-Salam these are the wives of Seydu Idrissa and of other village leaders who have an interest in maintaining a position of religious leadership among the women of the village.

It is not at all uncommon to see those men who are crippled or ill make a special effort to attend prayer in the mosque. That which motivates them to endure this hardship seems to be the belief that communal prayer, conducted in accordance with the requirements of Islam, brings the benefit of both spiritual and physical healing.

The radical Wahhabis are critical of the way those who do not belong to their movement perform their prayers. They point out that many of their moderate and traditionalist rivals, even when water is available, perform their ablutions with sand as was permitted by the prophet only in the event of extreme water scarcity. Even this many do perfunctorily as a simple ritual gesture. They are also critical of the haste with which others perform prayer, their lack of punctuality and the fact that they are often conducted alone or in small groups in the streets or inside household compounds rather than in a mosque. Moderate Wahhabis and traditionalists pray in large gatherings in their mosques only on the occasion of the Friday prayer or during the celebration of Muslim festivals.

The radical Wahhabis have rarely prayed in mosques other than their own since they divided their villages along religious lines. They consider other imams *kāfir*, infidels, and praying with them is seen to involve a tacit acceptance of their 'incorrect' practices. One exception to this prohibition of non-Wahhabi mosques was made during a visit from an imam from Mecca to the *Tombeau des Askias* in 1984. For several Wahhabi leaders this was memorable not so much because of the relaxation of their usual ritual seclusion or the prestige attached to the visiting imam but because they had their shoes stolen from the mosque entrance while praying inside--an incident which only served to reinforce their negative attitude toward traditionalist Muslims in Gao.

The prohibition against praying in non-Wahhabi mosques and the requirement that worshippers pray and travel in groups has made it necessary to accommodate those who travel to the markets of Gao and Ansongo in lodges. In some respect the lodges of the radical Wahhabis are similar in function to the *zāwīya's* of the Sufi brotherhoods, except that urban lodges of the Wahhabis are not residences of scholars and do not house Quranic schools. The Wahhabi lodge in Gao is a large two-storey house containing a small central court where animals are kept prior to slaughter, and several second-floor rooms for lodging visitors from outside town. In the front of the lodge facing the street are several shelters made of locally-woven straw mats and hides which serve as a 'restaurant'. Here, inexpensive meat and rice dishes

are prepared, often for non-Wahhabi clients. Prices are kept low as an example to other Muslims of their piety and unselfishness. At the side of the lodge there is another straw shelter which serves as a meeting place and a 'mosque'. Prayers are conducted here, each time led by the most learned man present. There seems to be a greater tolerance of traditionalists in the town itself, for these prayers are sometimes attended by non-Wahhabis who are perhaps sympathetic to reformist beliefs or attracted to their style of prayer. The lodge and its mosque, however, were not principally established as centres of recruitment but were meant to house radical Wahhabis who come in to town on some necessary business, usually to sell or buy in the market. It is also a meeting place for Wahhabi leaders from Gao's surrounding villages who would arouse suspicion by descending upon one particular village but who are less noticeable in the town.

The strict enforcement of group prayer among men is a major factor contributing to the unity and continuity of the radical Wahhabiyya. It is the principal means by which the individual is submerged in the group. The prohibition against praying alone quite simply prevents the believer from *being* alone, from thinking about and questioning the courses of action which the group is following, and from being exposed to other interpretations of belief which might lead him to soften his attitude and change his allegiance back to the traditional community. Leaving the Wahhabi group would have to be an act of open defiance in the face

of one's peers.

Alms (zakāt): Among the traditionalists in Gao and the surrounding villages the giving of the religious tax is informal, taking the form more of voluntary alms (*ṣadāq*) rather than a calculated percentage of the believer's income. Some who can afford to give a religious donation do so to a trusted religious leader. The Guindo family which heads the AMUPI in Gao is often given alms for distribution to the poor. The AMUPI is also the organization which receives and distributes the *zakāt* of the moderate Wahhabis in Gao. In the traditional Muslim villages the *zakāt* is sometimes given to the chief or imam for distribution and, as in Gao, at other times is given directly to the poor. Again, the amount of the contribution depends largely upon the individual conscience of the donor and is not a fixed percentage.

The month of Ramadan is usually the time when alms are given, but during Fridays throughout the year beggars crowd around the shops of some wealthy merchants who make a regular practice of giving on the holy day.

Radical Wahhabis who have an income which supercedes their daily living requirements give the *zakāt* during Ramadan. They give to their own village imam rather than to non-Wahhabis. The amount of income from the *zakāt* which goes to the central leadership in Dar al-Salam appears to be minor. The radical Wahhabiyya remains poor and with conditions recently worsening the religious tax has made only

a minimal contribution to alleviating a desperate situation. The Wahhabis' primary concern during the recent drought has been their own physical survival. The unfinished girls' madrasa in Dar al-Salam and half-completed mosques in other villages are evidence of this poverty. Such a situation, however, is (hopefully) exceptional. It is important to note that the ideology and the leadership organization exist in the radical Wahhabiyya for an efficient distribution of alms. The only ingredient missing is an economic surplus.

Fasting: Everywhere in the Muslim world the fast during the lunar month of Ramadan is an integral part of the faith. In Gao where heat as well as shortages of food often make fasting during daylight hours an extreme hardship, the fast is nonetheless undertaken willingly by most believers, even by many who are only nominally Muslim and not otherwise conscientious in their observance of Islam. The Wahhabis, therefore, cannot be distinguished clearly from the rest of the Muslim community by a strict observance of the fast. The hardship of the fast is regarded by almost all Muslims as a test of character and endurance. Through the required abstinence an individual is seen to be better able to resist other temptations. Fasting is also considered physically beneficial. For young men who are healthy it is above all a challenge, a means to demonstrate one's strength and piety. For the Songhay especially, this kind of challenge has a great attraction, for as Rouch observes, "sur le plan individuel, la fierté se retrouve dans un vanité à toutes épreuves:

de même que les Songhay se sentent supérieurs aux autres Noirs, le Songhay doit être lui-même supérieur à ses compagnons."⁸

Pilgrimage: Considering the overwhelming poverty throughout the Sahel--which has worsened during the droughts of the past decades--and the fact that most radical Wahhabis are subsistence farmers, it would be surprising that any manage to afford the journey to Mecca. Few, in fact, do. Those who have made the trip usually have saved money from work in the coastal towns of West Africa.

For all Muslims the pilgrimage to Mecca is an important part of the requirements of the faith. The moderate Wahhabis in Gao-city tend, however, to be wealthier, usually through local trade activity, and seem to have made the pilgrimage more often. Traditionalists appear to go on the pilgrimage less often, once again largely because of poverty; and many of those who do travel to Mecca return with an allegiance to Wahhabism.

With few exceptions, such as the imam from Bagoundje who was in Mecca at the time that fieldwork was being done for this study, the leaders of the radical Wahhabiyya, including Seydu Idrissa, his close disciples in Dar al-Salam, and Zacharia Ture, have not made the pilgrimage. This is explained by the difficulties involved in earning and saving under the harsh rural conditions of the Sahel and by the fact that those who are more apt to acquire the means for the journey are prevented, by the nature of their roles

8. Rouch, 1954: 51.

as community leaders or teachers, from finding the opportunity for travel. In 19th century West Africa similar constraints were placed upon Usman dan Fodio of northern Nigeria and Sidiyya al-Kabir of Mauritania who did not, despite their important positions as leaders of reform, make the pilgrimage.

The Muslim festivals.

The moderate and radical Wahhabis have a similar approach to the celebration of Islamic festivals: they have reduced celebration to the bare essentials of Muslim practice. The joie de vivre typical of African Islam, which consists especially of dancing and singing, is dispensed with. Only the holidays of *'id al-Fitr* (breaking of the fast of Ramadan) and *'id al-Kabīr* (the Great Festival) are ritually observed by the Wahhabis. The minor festivals, the birth and naming of the prophet and the Muslim New Year, which are given varying degrees of attention in different parts of the Muslim world, are not celebrated collectively.

The radical Wahhabis often differentiate themselves from neighbouring Muslims in their observance of Muslim festivals by sighting the moon, which marks the dates of the festivals, on different days. For most Muslims in Mali the sighting of the new moon, which marks the beginning of the month of Ramadan as well as the ten days that precede the Great Festival, is announced on national radio. The

radical Wahhabis deride this system, saying that the moon-sighter is unreliable. Speaking of this radio announcement a prominent man in Dar al-Salam said darkly: "the Muslims in Bamako are either blind or they are liars; we have seen the moon for ourselves."

To their Muslim neighbours this rejection is akin to heresy. Sighting the new moon on a different day from the radio announcement which all others follow means that the radical Wahhabis follow a slightly advanced or belated lunar calendar and celebrate the major festivals on different days from their neighbours. The reciprocity that can occur, which would potentially heal the rift between divided villages is bypassed. Hostility is even exacerbated.

Among the traditionalists of Gao-city in recent years increasing importance has been attached to celebrating the birth, and a week later, the naming of the prophet. On both days prominent men of the town's religious community gather in groups of 15 or 20 to chant the praises of the prophet throughout the early evening. At the same time, in different parts of the town, there are drums and dancing. Women wear their finest clothes and jewelry, their hair especially coiffed and braided for the occasion. Many women wear western accoutrements for beauty such as lipstick, high-heeled shoes with which they struggle in the sand, and even, for the intellectual look, eyeglasses without lenses. In spite of this, the celebration of the birth of the prophet is an affirmation of the Muslim tradition.

Some residents of Gao speculate, probably with some accuracy, that the importance given this occasion has been imported from Timbuktu where it has been a more integral part of the religious practice.

The Wahhabis uniformly ignore this festival saying that it was not practiced by Muhammad himself and is therefore not worthy of imitation. Their austerity in this respect is similar to that of Rabi'a al-'Alawiyya of Basra, a Muslim mystic of the 8th century A.D. who, when asked what she thought of the celebration of a feast day, is said to have replied: "you displayed a love of luxury and soft living and thereby you brought humiliation upon the Muslims."⁹ Some Wahhabis contend that the veneration of the prophet, as expressed in the celebration of his birth and naming, elevates him to a divine level which is tantamount to polytheism (*shirk*). Those who celebrate the *milād al-Nabī*, according to one radical Wahhabi, are *kāfir* who read the Quran without understanding it or following what it says. The radical Wahhabis are especially critical of the appearance of women in public without being dressed according to strict Islamic practice. The public display which takes place during the festival has reinforced their opinion of Gao as an African Babylon.

The celebration of the Muslim New year is similarly a source of controversy. The Wahhabis do not give this event any great significance. It marks the anniversary of the *hijra*, the emmigration of the prophet and his followers

9. Smith, 1928: 22.

from Mecca to Medina, but this does not make it an occasion for any special ritual. For many traditionalists, however, it is more than just the beginning of another lunar year; it is also a time when protection can be sought from ancestors or jinn, and even at one time, as we have seen, from the spirits of ancient kings at the site of the sacred stone at the *Tombeau des Askias*. The Wahhabis, needless to say, oppose such practices and are especially in disagreement with collective animist rituals such as the cult of the *holle*.

Rites of passage.

It could be argued that Wahhabism in Songhay society is a strong disintegrative factor in the traditional milieu. It is true that many traditionalists lament the decline of religious practices such as the *holle* cult and ancestor worship which is largely due to the advent of 'puritan' Islam, and that most ritual practices in Islamic festivals have been pared down to their bare essentials, with emotional outpourings of grief or joy eliminated, in Wahhabi ritual.

It can be demonstrated, however, that the simplification of the rites of passage is 'adaptive' to the present economic situation of the Songhay. Drought and famine in the Sahel, coupled with a decrease in opportunities in southern cities, has made traditional ritual celebrations, with all the associated efforts and expenses, extremely burdensome. The

simplification of these rituals, which began to take place of necessity in the traditional milieu, was given official religious sanction by the Wahhabis who reduced the required expense and made the essential social processes of initiation, marriage and burial more 'efficient'. This 'streamlining' of ritual is probably not an explicit factor in attracting new adherents to reform, but it is a feature of the Wahhabiyya which demonstrates an adjustment to an altered environment and in some respects an affirmation or reinforcement of tradition rather than a denial of it.

Naming: Naming takes place seven days after birth. In the traditional naming ceremony griots play music or are simply in attendance for 'gifts'. Family and neighbours are invited and there is often dancing. Generally an *alfa* chooses the name, either from the Quran or, in less Islamized areas, from a day, month or particular event associated in some way with the birth. Often the name given by the *alfa* is kept secret and is called the *ma bēri*, 'big name', while a *ma kayna*, 'small name', is used commonly. After the naming, a goat or sheep is slaughtered and distributed to neighbours. At this point dancing and festivities begin.

Among the Wahhabis the name given by the *alfa*, usually the village imam, is selected from the Quran and is not kept secret. A goat is usually slaughtered and special dishes prepared but there is no music or dancing and therefore no 'gifts' are necessary for musicians or griots.

Circumcision: In the circumcision ceremony of the Songhay

the general trend during the past century has been the decline of collective ceremonies associated with age-grade membership and their replacement with more individualized, 'de-ritualized' circumcision. The collective circumcision, the *bangu bēri*, ('big circumcision') was, according to Boulnois and Hama writing in 1954, "de plus en plus abandonnée, parce que cette fête du village coûte maintenant trop chère à la communauté"¹⁰

While this may have been so in the eastern part of the Niger bend, the Songhay of Timbuktu practiced the circumcision ceremony on a grand scale with approximately 150 boys participating in a single ceremony, the costs of which were borne by a wealthy Arma, Kunta or a prominent cleric.¹¹

In traditional villages circumcision ceremonies take place during the hot season when there is no agricultural labour and when wounds are less likely to become infected. Boys are circumcised between the ages of five and twelve, the most common age being around seven. Children who remain uncircumcised at the age of twelve are ridiculed. The performance of the operation is not confined to members of any one specialized group; the duty is given to anyone with the necessary skills, often a minor magician or a butcher. Children eat lightly for several days preceding the operation, usually consuming only light porridge of millet or rice. The operation is performed with the boys sitting on a rock or an upside-down mortar. The foreskin is immediately disposed of in a ditch which is dug for the purpose. The opera-

10. Boulnois and Hama, 1954: 164.

11. Miner, 1953: 158.

tion is followed by a period of isolation lasting fourteen or forty days in which the initiates are given knowledge which is required of those who wish to have the status of 'adult'. At the end of this period the neophyte is told his secret name (*ma bēri*). The children are lavishly fed during this time of isolation, especially during the three days immediately after the operation, and if they are dissatisfied with the food they have the right to ridicule their elders for negligence or stinginess.

The Wahhabis do not practice many elements of circumcision which make it a 'rite of passage' in the traditional society. The most significant indication of this de-ritualization of circumcision is the reduction in the age at which circumcision takes place to between one and seven years; the upper age limit is thus seven rather than twelve years. In radical Wahhabi villages, children are called to be circumcised every three or four years, but the 'ceremony' is bereft of its status as a marker of a transition in social position toward greater participation in the community. Special knowledge, such as a secret name, is inapplicable to an infant that has just been weaned. This is a change which points to an elimination of the use of magic and the communication of magical knowledge in circumcision. A point of continuity with the more ritualized circumcision, however, is the fact that after the operation children are given rich food, high in protein, ostensibly to compensate for the loss of blood and, emotionally, to compensate for the

trauma of the operation. Although a number of children may be operated on in a single occasion this is more for the sake of convenience than for the sake of ritual. After the operation children remain in their own homes and do not undergo a period of collective isolation and instruction comparable to the traditional circumcision ceremony.

In its pure form the traditional circumcision ceremony marks the introduction of the child into an age-grade organization. Such organizations seem to have been most developed in Timbuktu where the *koterey*-- which included all men or boys of one town quarter who were circumcised together or in successive ceremonies so that they were roughly the same age--had chiefs, judges, messengers and courts to which disputes concerning *koterey* matters could be referred.¹²

Elsewhere among the Songhay children of the same age do not appear to be organized in structured institutions but rather associate in small groups of boys or girls aged eight to fourteen years who share a common house while remaining under the supervision of an older child or a young adult. Among the radical Wahhabis comparable semi-independent groups of children can be found in Dar al-Salam where children attending the Quran school from a common village share a 'house'. Wahhabi children, however, do not develop ties of loyalty established with initiation ceremonies.

Marriage. The system of marriage of the Songhay largely follows an Islamic pattern. Polygyny is permitted (though rarely tolerated by women) and men are limited to a maximum

12. Miner, 1953: 165-67.

of four wives. From the male point of view almost any unmarried woman is an acceptable partner, and marriage prohibitions extend only to those within the immediate family: sisters, daughters, mothers, grandmothers and aunts. Traditionally arrangements for marriage, especially a first marriage, have been made by the parents of the prospective spouses, and parental preference is of great weight in the selection of marriage partners. Arrangements for marriage were sometimes made when the future partners were still children, but these engagements were kept secret.¹³ Men usually marry for the first time around the age of 18 and women at 15, though in the Wahhabi village of Dar al-Salam one girl aged eleven was married, apparently not an uncommon practice.

In many traditional weddings the gift to the bride from the groom or his family is a central feature of the marriage alliance. Among the Songhay villagers the bride-wealth may consist of one or two head of cattle, some clothing and jewelry. The gift is not very large by comparison, with, say, many nomadic groups, but it is still a considerable expense and for most young men wishing to marry for the first time the bridewealth is difficult to obtain, even with family support, since social requirements in terms of the value of gifts has diminished little since drought conditions and economic deprivation became critical in the early 1970's.

Often the bridewealth was earned by the young man during work and travel in the coastal cities. This has generally

¹³. Rouch, 1954: 37.

weakened the dependence of young men upon their elders since they no longer relied on 'loans' or gifts from their parents or other relatives in order to contract a marriage. The relative economic independence of young Songhay men has lessened the reciprocity between generations and has been responsible for a weakening of family solidarity. Migration created a 'vicious cycle' of independence from the age principal of social status: economic individualism weakened paternal authority while the decline of the patriarchal family led many young men to rebel and seek their own means of livelihood. Bridewealth, therefore, has become largely the responsibility of the man wishing to marry, often even in first marriages which formerly would have been largely or entirely taken care of by the household head.

In spite of this independence on the part of many young men, the family is usually involved in the arrangement of a first marriage for both a man and a woman. There is some evidence that this is changing with the popularization of romantic love and, especially in the urban environment, new opportunities for independent courtship, but individualism is not complete and parental consent in a first marriage remains crucial.

In the traditional Songhay wedding the ceremony is arranged once both parties are in agreement and the bride-wealth has been paid by intermediaries of the prospective husband. An initial phase of the wedding, in which the groom and his friends simulate an attempt to kidnap the

future wife, takes place at noon. The assault is made with a great deal of noise and bravado while the parents of the girl oppose their entry into the house (a striking symbol of resistance to the girl's loss of virginity). In the afternoon of the same day, after the evening prayer, friends and invited guests arrive at the bride's home and are shown the gifts from her future partner. The *fātaḥa* is recited and the couple is wished a happy future. At night the wife is brought to the husband's home and they remain together in relative isolation for seven days before guests return to celebrate with food and dancing. Virginity in a girl is prized in a first marriage (though perhaps decreasingly common) and matrons of the village traditionally inspect her bedclothes for stains. If these are not in evidence the bride is ridiculed with such comments as: *horober dyara*, 'virgin of the big vagina' or *ize keyna wey bēri*, 'little child old woman'.¹⁴

The Wahhabis, following Muslim guidelines for marriage, avoid the complexities associated with the traditional ceremony as well as the difficulties involved with amassing a bridewealth. The size and content of the gift to the bride depends upon agreement between the prospective couple. It can be as simple as a goat or a piece of jewelry. The father of the prospective bride is usually the first to be consulted about the proposed match. The prospective

14. Rouch, 1954: 57.

husband appears to have some freedom to select his wife but his parents are still involved in marriage arrangements if they belong to the Wahhabi community; if not, an older relative or friend often becomes involved in the arrangements. The strict seclusion of women in radical villages usually increases parental involvement in marriages because it all but eliminates opportunities for independent courtship. Whatever the way in which a man comes into contact with an eligible woman, whether through his father, or the bride's father, he has probably seen very little of her in the village and in some cases may never have seen her at all before marriage arrangements are initiated. If the suitor is taken seriously he is allowed to meet the girl privately, with her face revealed. The suitor and the potential bride must ultimately approve of one another before formal arrangements are made.

Once the match is agreed to, the prospective husband and wife each choose a representative to act as mediator and two witnesses to the marriage. When the gift is presented to the bride and a brief ceremony is completed by the imam, the wedding is concluded. A sheep or goat may be slaughtered and a special meal prepared. After this the couple live together as husband and wife. There is no celebration comparable to that of the traditional Songhay wedding.

The strict seclusion of women, especially of younger women, and their constant use of the veil or a concealing scarf outside the home act to retain some traditional values and customs with regard to marriage. Marriage patterns

in Wahhabi villages support the contention that Islamic reform represents a return to tradition (though a modified one) rather than a destruction of it. Simplification of bridewealth requirements and festivities are an adaptation to the increased poverty brought about by the drought while seclusion upholds the traditional values of virginity and parental authority in marriage.

Funerals: Even in Songhay villages where many pagan elements of the religious life remain, such as the *holle* cult and ancestor worship, the dead are interred following Muslim practices since Islam is considered by many to be the religion of the beyond.¹⁵ The body is washed by an *alfa* and wrapped in a white burial cloth and a straw mat. Women display their grief openly but do not accompany the corpse during burial. Men carry the body on a stretcher and stop before a mosque to pray before completing the burial. The body is placed in its grave with the head facing east towards Mecca. For seven days relatives and friends gather around the house of the deceased. Widows generally do not remarry for five months and 15 days, though the length of this time may vary.¹⁶ Cemeteries in most areas are not the focus of any special attention except in the case of some noble families. In Gao-city there is a separate cemetery for the nobility where family members of the deceased sometimes make special prayers. In some traditional villages there

15. Rouch, 1954: 57.

16. *ibid.*

are local ancestor cults which are addressed to the first occupant of the soil or to a particularly influential distant ancestor but no special attention is paid to the graves of those whose memory remains closely with the living.

Such practices as those associated with the ancestor cults are no longer widespread in the vicinity of Gao. The Wahhabis are opposed to the veneration of ancestors which is seen as a manifestation of 'polytheism'. To them, as to most 'orthodox' Muslims, death is a state of limbo, the grave a brief stopping place before the great re-awakening on the Day of Judgement. The emphasis on perfection in the details of Muslim worship is above all a preparation for paradise and a liberation from a world of suffering.

X. EDUCATION

Puritan reform movements, marked by an emphasis on scriptural sources as a blueprint for social and individual behaviour, require at least some degree of literacy among the laity in order to develop and endure. In one way or another the attributing to words of sacred power independent of their meaning must be overcome. Reformist leaders have attempted to bring the divine message closer to their followers in a number of ways. Most puritan reform movements develop an increase in organized preaching activity. This on its own does not go very far towards demystification of sacred texts. Even though its contents may be better understood, the Book still holds much of its aura of mystery. The literate man of religion, moreover, retains an elevated social position by virtue of his command over language and the written word. The ideal to which most puritan religions aspire--the equality of believers--becomes unattainable in practice. In the Wahhabiyya some of this reverence for those literate in the sacred language is evident, especially among the uneducated.

The return to scriptural sources in Christian and Muslim reform movements is almost always accompanied by a drive toward literacy and the education of the laity. The ideals of egalitarianism and individual responsibility for moral action are usually seen to be best served when every believer has direct access to the sacred revelation.

The most successful approaches to education in religious

reform movements have been those that began with translation of the scriptures into vernacular languages in social contexts where lay literacy had, at least to some extent, been developed and where texts were available through high-volume printing methods. The Reformation in Europe may be considered the most historically significant period in which scriptural translation was a key factor in motivating religious reform amongst the laity. William Tyndall, the first translator of an English bible after the invention of the press, was inspired by the words of Erasmus who said of his own Greek testament, "I would wish that the husbandman may sing parts of them at his plough."¹ In the same period, Luther's translations into German fed an enormous demand amongst a laity that was not skilled in scriptural or classical languages.² Biblical translation was thus an integral part of the puritan reform movements in Europe which were directed against both the corruption and incompetence of the clergy and the magically oriented excesses of a large portion of the laity.³

In Islam the Ahmadiyya is a movement which, in West Africa, directs itself against such 'abuses' of the Quran as its use in the production and sale of amulets. The Ahmadis

1. Greenslade, 1963: 142.

2. *ibid*: 104. Sayce (in Greenslade) discusses some of the implications of the decision by the council of Trent to prohibit translation and uphold the authenticity of the vulgate in France. The penetration of scriptural translations into German and English can therefore be contrasted to the shallow effect of French translations which lacked uniformity. Also see Eisentein, 1968: 7-29.

3. Thomas, 1971, provides a discussion of magic (including scriptural magic) similar to 'Islamic magic', in Europe and its decline with religious reform.

were the first Muslims in West Africa to consider as a priority the translation of the Quran into numerous languages and were the first to establish permanent schools combining religious and secular study.⁴

It is important to note, however, that within Islam in general the Ahmadi example is an exception. Islam has historically placed a much greater emphasis than has Christianity on the scriptures remaining in an original sacred language. Translations of the Quran simply do not carry the same sacred value as the direct words of God in the original Arabic.

Arabic is therefore the medium of religious education. If the meaning of the text is to be penetrated the worshipper must acquire a knowledge of the classical language. The Wahhabis in West Africa have uniformly directed much of their efforts for reform into Arabic education.

The Wahhabiyya centred in Bamako has, ever since the establishment of the first Subbanu school in 1949, continued to establish centres of religious education. The Institut Islamique in Bamako has 1500 students, of which 300 are girls, and employs 25 teachers. Also recently established in Bamako are the Institut Islamique Narou Joliba and the Institut Kaled ben Abdul Aziz.⁵ Government documents indicate a similar development of formal Islamic centres in the larger towns throughout the country.⁶ In Segou, for example, al-Hajj Sa'ad Umar Toure has established a large madrasa with an enrollment of several hundred pupils. Although he is not

4. Fisher, 1963.

5. Amselle, forthcoming.

6. Government of Mali, 1983-84.

a Wahhabi, his objective of Arabic comprehension and literacy and his modeling of the school on western teaching methods is shared with many of the Wahhabi reformists.⁷

Without this drive towards religious awareness through Arabic education the objectives of Islamic reform would become lost. When the scriptural text is not understood by many ordinary believers, religious specialists become mediators between man and God, despite any injunctions to the contrary. The radical reform movement in Gao is faced with this problem, especially because a large portion of its adherents are illiterate. The leadership's effort to promote Arabic education are very determined but the demands of village life prevent many followers from reaching the level of religious knowledge they might desire. The leadership is therefore an important source of religious knowledge and an important focus for religion in village life.

Traditional Quranic education.

Revivals of Islamic learning before the advent of Wahhabism in West Africa have most often been stimulated and controlled by the Sufi brotherhoods, more specifically, by the specialized groups of clerics or the particular families which occupied positions of leadership in the brotherhoods. In general, it has been classes of learned specialists which contributed the most to Islamic learning. Although

7. Brenner, 1982.

access to such groups of learned men was often nominally 'open', the predominant trend was towards a restriction of advanced knowledge to particular social groups such as families or lineages. Some examples from the Sahel are the Kunta of Mauritania who, in the 19th century, restricted higher Islamic learning to boys of noble birth;⁸ the Tuareg among whom the *ineslemen* (meaning Muslims) form a distinct lineage dominated by holy men who have an important place in the wider social network for their role as mediators between rival lineages;⁹ and the Fulani of Nigeria whose *marakatun ilmi*, or schools of higher learning, tended to be restricted to noble families. Hiskett found that the well-reputed school of Babban Malami in Kano city had preserved its original style of teaching since its establishment during Usman dan Fodio's reform movement and that the position of teacher was inherited by descendants of the school's original scholars.¹⁰

In West Africa the 'apprentice' of Islamic learning often attended schools run by scholars who were famous for their knowledge of particular works on law, exegesis and other subjects. Advanced learning, which usually was undertaken when the Quran was fully memorized, "involved the reading aloud of classical texts and the delivery of a standard commentary. Students were required to learn both the original work and the commentary, and in certain cases the

8. Stewart, 1973: 29.

9. Trimingham, 1959: 11.

10. Hiskett, 1973: 34.

chain of authorities from the first narrator or commentator down to the pupil's own teacher."¹¹

This higher level of Islamic learning was undertaken only by those whose goal was to become a religious specialist. A much more popular and widespread form of education has been the traditional Quran school. In Gao, as everywhere in Muslim Africa, there are numerous schools of this kind, most with only five to ten students, some with more than thirty. The goal of these schools is usually to provide essential religious training which consists of rote learning of *sūras* of the Quran. Few parents of children in these schools aim to have their children continue to advanced levels of Islamic scholarship. In any case, few teachers are qualified to provide knowledge beyond scriptural memorization. Usually they begin teaching when friends or relatives request that their children begin training with them because of their perceived knowledge. Many children attend such schools (usually located in the teacher's compound or beside the street) early in the morning before attending the state French school, and again in the afternoon before sunset.

Lessons in traditional Quran schools are begun with the letters of the alphabet being written on a smooth board by the teacher or an advanced student. This is repeated by the novice until the alphabet is memorized, then it is washed off and replaced with the *fātaḥa*, the opening *sūra* of the Quran, and after that, other *sūras* which are gradually

11. Hiskett, 1960: 118.

increased in length until, in seven to ten years for the dedicated pupil, the entire Quran is memorized.

In the traditional Songhay villages surrounding Gao, the Quran schools are essentially the same. Children usually study the Quran with a local *alfa*. Village *alfas* are not formally 'paid' for their teaching activities but the children work in their gardens and do other household chores for them; there are also 'gifts' provided by parents when a child reaches particular levels of competence.

Few traditional Songhay clerics have a comprehensive knowledge of Arabic or have a reputation which extends beyond their particular village or group of villages. Those who have recently become leaders in the Wahhabi movement often studied with Fulani *mallams* in the Gabero region or in Niger who had special reputations for learning. This indicates that a strong tradition of Islamic scholarship was lacking among the Songhay before the development of Wahhabism except in strong urban centres of learning such as Timbuktu and Jenne.

In contrast to the 'closed' system of traditional higher learning or the limited intellectual scope of the elementary Quran schools, the modern trend in Islamic education is toward large schools which are 'open' in their system of recruitment and which offer, at the same time, 'advanced' religious knowledge. Thus they appeal especially to people in social groups who, though adhering to Islam, were to some extent excluded from the status-enhancing process of higher Islamic learning.

Colonial and post-colonial French education.

The French colonial administration had an inconsistent attitude toward Islam, but in many regions of West Africa it seems clear that the effect of their presence was a reduction in the quality of Islamic education through a hostility towards 'uncooperative' Muslim leaders. Such leaders were often qualified teachers and clerics and the proscription of their activities led to a reduction in the numbers and influence of the best Muslim scholars and institutions. Later, with the rise of African nationalism and independence movements, Quran schools languished and Quranic education lost its place as a major social responsibility and criterion of social mobility while western education advanced with its potential rewards in the drive towards modernization.¹²

Over the past two decades, however, the socio-political rewards of western education have been seen by many to be unattainable and a return to Quranic education, both in the form of small, informal schools and larger, better organized 'madrasas', has been evident.¹³ Quranic education in madrasas run by the Wahhabiyya owe their success largely to the decline in influence of the traditional clerical groups and the subsequent failure of western education to bring about a new and successful social and economic order.

The French colonial administration in West Africa did not establish schools in every corner of their territory,

12. Kaba, 1976.

13. Government of Mali, 1983-84.

but the effects of their educational system were nevertheless strongly felt. Colonial education in French West Africa was consistent with the general aim of promoting western values. The central goal of education was to make the schools a medium for the transmission of French culture and 'civilization'. Secondly, they were meant to "train local auxiliaries, clerks, telephonists and so on, and to train skilled artisans." ¹⁴ The model for this enterprise was naturally the educational system of France. As Hiskett says, "the French set up a number of excellent schools, but their curriculums were almost entirely in French. In them pupils were given a French literary and scientific education that differed little from that given to children in France, but Arabic and other subjects on the Islamic curriculum were almost entirely neglected." ¹⁵ This was especially so after an educational reform in 1946 which reduced the adaptation of colonial schools to local conditions with the introduction of metropolitan classical curricula which aimed at assimilating students into French culture. The European orientation of education in French West Africa was so extreme that one of the phrases recited by black students was, "nos ancestres les Gauloises étaient blonds." ¹⁶

Seeing the advantages of French education, political and even religious leaders sent their children to school, thus creating a demand for the expansion of the system.

14. Hiskett, 1984: 293.

15. *ibid.*

16. Jansen, 1979: 51.

As Kaba points out, however, "colonial education had an extremely high level of dropouts unwanted in the European sectors and distainful of their traditions."¹⁷ A general consequence of the operation of this educational system through the decades of French occupation was the creation of a society divided between a French speaking elite, largely or wholly assimilated into European culture, and a more disadvantaged, traditionally oriented sector of society that was largely Muslim.

When the first independent government took power in Mali, an educational policy was introduced which had much the same effect as that implemented by the French. This socialist government, inspired by the ideal of an '*education de qualité et des masses*', began a programme of educational reform intended, together with an economic five-year plan, to bring about agricultural modernization and prosperity. Recruitment on a massive scale took many students away from Quran schools and into government schools which were established throughout the country, even in some remote villages. By 1965 over 600 new 'schools' had been opened. With time, however, teaching standards lowered while examination requirements remained the same and many students failed. Because of this a great many youths had up to 12 years of education but could neither continue their studies nor find work. This was, and remains, a generation which has not found

17. Kaba, 1974: 155

a secure position in the modern world and which has also largely lost touch with its traditional background.

The second post-independence government, which came to power in 1968, inherited and maintained an infrastructure of schools and teachers as well as the problems of unemployment and cultural disorientation. This regime has attempted to solve the problems created by widespread education with French curriculum through the introduction of 'ruralization', the goal of which is the social, cultural and economic integration of students into both traditional society and the modern world. This is attempted through the introduction of curriculums, such as agricultural techniques and simple economics, that are seen as being more compatible with the rural backgrounds of many students. In some schools and villages literacy in local languages, which are transcribed in the latin alphabet, has also been introduced. Teaching and academic standards, however, are still low and French remains the official language of the administration and of education.

In spite of the effort to change school curriculum to make it more compatible with the cultural backgrounds of rural students (an effort which is far from complete), national education aims to teach skills, principally literacy in French, which are not essential to a subsistence economy and which presuppose involvement with or in the national economy and administration. Even with more rural content in school curriculum, formal education in villages has difficulty in orienting itself to the village economy and to

the basic skills required in rural life as efficiently as informal training, that is, education by 'doing', by contributing in a practical way to family or village prosperity.

Attitudes in the villages to French language schools are ambivalent. There is, in some parents, a reluctance to introduce their children to what is often perceived to be an alien culture and language. This attitude has its parallel in the opinion of a Berber villager in Morocco, also faced with his children's participation in French language education, who exclaimed, "education in the skills of another culture unfits peasants for their future roles!"¹⁸

The French language bureaucracy, however, is there to stay and some villagers are aware of the advantages to be had in educating children in the skills required to deal with the administration. Some also hope to have their children go farther, to become (if they dare aspire) a *petit fonctionnaire*.

There are serious disadvantages to this ambition. Village schools only take students through the *premier cycle*, the first six years of their education; to continue to a level sufficient for employment in the administration the student must continue his studies in the town. Accomodation would have to be found, usually with kin. Children who continue their *second cycle* studies in the town can almost be guaranteed to acquire values that are alien to village culture. They cannot, however, be guaranteed a salaried

18. Maher, 1974: 77.

position when their studies are completed. Despite efforts to make the French language and elements of European culture compatible with rural life in Mali, the availability of opportunities remains inconsistent with the effort expended on the creation of a national French-speaking culture.

The Malian government remains plagued with the problems that began to arise with the early expansion of French education in 1946. Many young people have been given the opportunity of education but relatively few from the countryside have achieved their higher ambitions. After spending years pursuing their education, many students are not able to find a place in the new society, while at the same time they have to some extent been drawn away from their traditional culture.

In this situation a puritan, individualistic variation of Islam has been able to absorb those who are alienated both from village life and from westernized African culture. Reformist Islam has been able to assimilate those who had become socially marginalized through education and economic change, while at the same time making use of western methods of teaching and organization. Colonna points out that in Algeria the development of Islamic reform in the 1920's and 30's was closely associated with the colonial mission to educate and 'civilize'. The reformists counteracted the danger of assimilation with a network of Islamic schools and cultural centres which resembled those of the French system.¹⁹ The French maxim '*civiliser sans déclasser*',

19. Colonna, 1975: 33-34. Also see Merad, 1967.

which pointed to an objective early in the colonial education effort in Algeria and later in West Africa, was never to be realized. Rather, it was reformist Islam that more successfully promoted 'civilization', which involved increased Arabic literacy and the ideals of social progress, without completely overturning the traditional social order.

Wahhabi education in Gao.

Wahhabism in Gao shows a similar orientation towards education to that of the Islamic reform movements in West Africa as a whole, even though the Gao movement's direct contact with the southern towns of Mali where the first Wahhabi madrasas were established has been minimal. Like the first madrasas established in Kankan and Bamako by the Subbanu movement in the 1950's, the more recently established schools in the Gao region try to provide a systematic and comprehensive knowledge of Arabic and Islam using similar methods of education to those used in state schools. The stress placed on modern methods varies, as do the standards reached by students, but by training children in this way the masters of these schools try to avoid the negative effects of both western culture and restricted literacy.

Throughout the regions of West Africa in which Islamic reform has flourished educational objectives have not been met with consistent success. Standards vary greatly between institutions claiming to be madrasas. Often they are estab-

lished under the initiative of religious communities or villages desirous of giving a religious education to their children with little or no control over the quality of instruction. In some instances clerics who open such establishments are reputed to seek a livelihood not only from enrollment fees, but also from the supplementary income earned by students from work, begging or even theft. The Wahhabi madrasas in Gao do not appear to have been guilty of such excesses, although all of them probably have lower standards than the better organized schools in the southern towns of Mali.

The moderate Wahhabis have established two madrasas: the Sabil al-Islam wa Dawatu Illaihi with about 85 students and the Medersa Islamique al-Mahdi Askia which has roughly 230 students.

The Sabil al-Islam school was established around 1976. It was converted from a large traditional home, typical of the Sahelian urban style, with mid-brick walls and window flaps and doors made from the metal of barrels, flattened and welded to a secure frame. There are five small makeshift classrooms, each with its own blackboard. Students sit on benches or empty, battered tins of ghi butter. Boys and girls share the same classrooms but the girls are nominally separated and sit at the back.

The school is beset by financial difficulty. It was once financed by the Islamic academy in Benghazi, Libya, but such funding is illegal and payments were irregular. Much now depends upon donations administered by the AMUPI. Registration of a pupil at this school does not necessarily

cost anything if parents are poor but a small amount, usually around 1000 francs CFA is normally given.

Since there is little money to hire teaching assistants, or *moniteurs*, discipline and teaching standards are a problem in this school. Besides the part-time help of two *moniteurs*, the master (*Mudarris*) is often the only one present to take charge. Students in their fifth year are usually available to direct the lower level classes, but the younger students are often left to themselves until chaos prevails, at which time their noise brings a sharp reprimand and temporary order. When classes are set independently in motion, the master often sits in a narrow foyer between the first and second year classes where he can greet visitors, drink China green tea, and at the same time keep his ears open to the conduct of the beginners' classes. Discipline takes the form of harsh scoldings as well as cuffs and knuckle-rappings on the head. The children seem to be largely impervious to this rough treatment. When younger children cry or need comforting, however, they are usually treated with indulgence.

In the first, second and third years much study time seems to be devoted to the recitation of the Arabic alphabet and simple *sūras* of the Quran. The selection to be recited is written on the blackboard. One child from the class, or an instructor, points to a letter, word or short sentence, reading it aloud; then the rest of the class repeats 'in unison' (the result is closer to a cacophany).

Classes are usually from 9:00 until noon and in the afternoon from 3:00 to 5:00. The daily schedule is followed

fairly precisely with a bell being sounded to mark the beginning and end of classes.

The curriculum of the school is more varied than the exclusive emphasis on the Quran which is characteristic of traditional Quranic education. The Quran, however, is given a great deal of attention. Children learn the recitation of easy *sūras* starting from the first year as soon as they have learned something of the Arabic alphabet. Passages of increasing difficulty are learned as the student progresses into higher 'grades'. In the second year, the meaning of Arabic words are introduced, as are the methods of Islamic worship such as ablutions and prayer. Much the same programme is continued into the third year. Towards the end of the third year and into the fourth year, the curriculum is more varied with the introduction of the elementary principles of the traditions (*ḥadīth*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), commentary on the Quran (*tafsīr*), simple maths (*ḥasāb*) and both Islamic and West African history (*ṭariq*) as well as a study of the teachings of 'Abd al-Wahhab. In the most advanced class, the fifth year, these topics are supplemented by dictation drills from spoken Arabic (*imlā'*).

The Medersa Islamique al-Mahdi Askia was also established in the mid-1970's. Increase in enrollment led to the opening of a new building in 1983 located in the outskirts of Gao where land is readily available. The approximately 50 students in the beginning year remain in the older building in Gao's 2nd quarter. The main financing for both school

buildings came from 'Umar Muhammad, a wealthy trader who 'converted' to reformed Islam in the early '70's.

In this school, too, parents pay little for students' enrollment and many of the expenses of the school's operation come from funds administered by the AMUPI. It seems, however, that this school has greater support from more wealthy reformists, such as 'Umar Muhammad. Evidence of this support can be found in the school's new building and a staff of one *moniteur* per class. Most of these *moniteurs* are 'graduates' of the school who were unable to find any other work.

Classes ideally start at 8:00 a.m. and continue to 12:00 with a half-hour recess at 10:00. After the mid-day resting time classes continue from 3:00 to 5:00. Because the school is several kilometers from town, many of the teachers and students arrive late. On one particular day, the first teachers arrived at 8:30 and the last finally came at 11:00 while one was absent without notice.

In the first years students learn the Arabic alphabet and recitation of simple passages from the Quran. In the second year students already begin study of the teachings of 'Abd al-Wahhab as well as elementary jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the traditions (*ḥadīth*) and maths (*ḥasāb*). In the third year grammar (*nahaw*), Islamic history (*ṭariq*) and commentary (*tafsīr*) are added. This curriculum is continued into the fourth year. In the fifth and sixth years composition (*inshā*) and conversation (*muḥādath*) in Arabic are included. It is unlikely that the schedule in which all the curriculum for each year is included is strictly followed. Some subjects

are likely sacrificed because of lack of time.

As in the madrasa Sabil al-Islam, this school has a discipline problem. Absenteeism and tardiness of instructors often leave children unsupervised. The youth of the *moniteurs* who conduct most of the classes makes it difficult for them to command the respect of the students. Children sometimes make a game out of seeing what they can get away with before being punished and instructors seem unused to being consistent in their application of discipline.

The Madrasa Dar al-Salam al-Qur'an wa-l-Hadith (Dar al-Salam school of the Quran and Hadith), run by the radical Wahhabis in Dar al-Salam, represents a departure from the two madrasas in Gao and from other madrasas in West Africa. It is, first of all, the central school of a wider educational network. In other villages there are small 'schools' where children begin with the basics of their religious education such as the alphabet and recitation of simple passages from the Quran. These schools operate along similar lines to the pattern of traditional Quranic education. Usually after one or two years of learning in their home villages, students move to Dar al-Salam to continue their training. Children who come to Dar al-Salam from villages where there is no primary level school often begin their first year of studies in the 'capital', though some are probably trained informally in their home villages and enter the madrasa at a higher level.

Another feature that makes the school in Dar al-Salam

different from most other madrasas is the degree to which children are integrated into a 'school community'. Students who come from other villages temporarily lose contact with their families. In this 'boarding school' system, control over the children's habits and values is easier than in an urban environment where the teachings of Islam vie with Western influences. In one of my visits to Dar al-Salam I tried to find out by means of a census the children's villages of origin. Seydu Idrissa asked that everyone write Dar al-Salam as their village, explaining that when children study there it is their only home, that they have no village and no family other than the school community. The school at Dar al-Salam has as one of its goals the complete integration of each pupil into an educational and religious community.

Complete integration, however, is stressful for many children and some identity with the home village remains. Along the high water mark of the Niger there is a row of small 'houses' spaced far apart with no wall or fence to divide them or to give privacy, in which children from the same villages (those with primary Quran schools) live while pursuing their studies at Dar al-Salam. Each one-room, dirt floored building houses between 15 and 20 students. Children who come from villages without primary Quran schools eat and sleep in the compound of Seydu Idrissa.

Finally, unlike most urban madrasas, the rural school in Dar al-Salam emphasizes the virtue of work on the land. Cultivation of the earth is seen as the only way to perfect

one's knowledge of Islam. This is largely a reaction against urban life and the career orientations of many people with French education. The village reformists have more in common with traditional Quran schools in this respect than with other Wahhabi groups.

With children integrated into the school community and with their daily routines regulated around the ideals of the Wahhabi movement, discipline is not as much a problem in Dar al-Salam as it is in Gao's madrasas. Children are taught obedience and deference to their elders. They are rarely seen at play. They seem to relax only when they are away from adult censorship, such as during the brief moments when they are on their way to perform a chore (drawing water, working in fields, etc.) or on their way back from its completion. Football, the most popular recreation of boys in Gao, is forbidden, being considered representative of non-Islamic culture.

Not every child in a radical Wahhabi village (except Dar al-Salam) necessarily pursues a religious education. In Berra, for example, the Wahhabi faction took over the main part of the village, including its government school. Some enrollment in the state primary school is demanded and a large portion of the village's children pursue a French education rather than attend the madrasa. There is a certain amount of give and take between the two systems. Each year in September a number of children are 'recruited' for the village madrasa. In October the government recruitment takes place. If a child is already committed to attend

the madrasa, he is usually allowed to do so. Most children who go to Dar al-Salam, therefore, have never studied French. If students in the government school fail, however, they often take up Quranic studies, and some students profess to having failed purposefully so as to study in the madrasa.

Parents pay for children to attend the school in Dar al-Salam with enough grain to feed the child for three months of the 8 month school year. Students work in fields and village gardens to provide the rest of their support. The labour of children in almost any village community is very important and the additional burden of supplying three months' provision places a restriction on many parents' ability to finance their child's religious education, despite their usually earnest desire to do so. That 150 boys attended the school in Dar al-Salam during a severe drought year says much for the esteem in which it is held.

The labour of students is very important in village life. The daily routine revolves as much or more around chores--working in fields and gardens, carrying water, collecting firewood, feeding and herding livestock, etc--as around the schedule of the school. Students provide much of their own maintenance by their work in village gardens and fields. The plots they work on are often owned by Seydu Idrissa or by teachers in the school; the largest gardens just outside the village are owned by Seydu Idrissa. Students are largely responsible for tilling the soil and irrigating, though Seydu Idrissa and the teachers occasionally throw themselves enthusiastically into such work.

Students also help in the preparation of meals. Since the domestic routine is kept carefully hidden, it was difficult to observe exactly how the children from outside villages are fed, but students could often be seen heating their own breakfast and pounding grain--tasks that Songhay males are rarely seen to do except, perhaps, in the anonymity of the coastal towns during migration. It appears that a number of women in Dar al-Salam have the extra duty of preparing meals for the children. This task does not seem to be burdensome since they are helped in the pounding of grain and the duty is shared by a number of households.

The school in Dar al-Salam is a long, rectangular building made of mud-brick, with doors and window-flaps of corrugated iron. It has three large rooms partitioned by half-walls to separate it into nine classes (sing. *faṣal*). Blackboards, which only barely seem to serve the purpose, are made of tar smoothed over the walls. Students sit in rows of mats on the ground.

From June to October the school is closed, as are government schools and other madrasas, and most children from outside villages return home where they can help during the busy agricultural season. Some older students, however, remain in Dar al-Salam to continue their studies. Besides this long vacation only the Muslim festivals of *id al-fitr* and *id al-Kabīr* interrupt the weekly school schedule.

Study in the school takes place in the morning when the routines of the early prayer, breakfast and the reading by the imam (Seydu Idrissa) are completed. There is no

school on Tuesdays, which are spent working on community projects, or on Fridays, the Muslim sabbath.

There is no set time for classes to begin. When all is ready the word spreads quickly and the children assemble at the school. This usually takes place between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. Formal study in the school is normally completed for the day by noon. Often there are chores to be done before the mid-day meal. There may be a rest period and then, if the day is not excessively hot (and sometimes even if it is), there are more chores throughout the afternoon. After the evening prayer and the final meal of the day some children recite and memorize the Quran by the light of kerosene lanterns. Their voices can be heard late into the night, sometimes until the small hours of the morning. Often the older children who wake before dawn for the early morning prayer in the mosque are so exhausted they cannot raise themselves from the ground when performing their *sajda*, or prostration. When this happens they are shaken awake by someone nearby.

In the school curriculum, great attention seems to be paid to the correct recitation of the Quran. Advanced students are able to recite almost any *sūra* without looking at the text, even though they rarely do so without the book being open to the correct page. Starting in the third year, recitation is supplemented by other Islamic topics such as the traditions (*ḥadīth*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the Arabic language, including counting and simple mathematics. At this stage students also begin study of the teachings

of 'Abd al-Wahhab.

The education of women is an important part of the rural Wahhabi educational system. In the Gao region, informal Quranic schools for women can probably be found in any radical Wahhabi village where a qualified female teacher is available. In this respect the radical Wahhabiyya differs in practice from Gao-city's reformist community where adult women appear satisfied with a minimal knowledge of Islam and do not attend the madrasas.

The womens' school in Dar al-Salam is attended by females of all ages. Classes are conducted in the compound of one of Seydu Idrissa's wives, located in the western edge of the village. Tall screens made of sticks tied together have been built around the entrance to prevent anyone from 'accidentally' peering in. In the central part of the village a more formal building for womens' studies was begun but it was abandoned when labour and resources were exhausted by the drought, leaving the walls only waist-high.

In organization, the womens' madrasa is modeled on the boys' school, having nine levels. Almost half the students in the highest level also teach in the other classes. Some of these more accomplished women are wives of men who are literate in Arabic and have a prominent place in the community. The leader of the school,--known by those who speak French as the '*marabout des femmes*'--is a wife of Seydu Idrissa.

Attendance appears to be informal, with women gathering at the closed compound where classes are held when they

have a break from domestic chores. While the reformist ideal may be the universal access to knowledge, the reality is that women study the Quran in much the same way as is done in traditional Quran schools, with an emphasis on rote learning. There is little or no teaching of topics such as exegesis or jurisprudence and women do not attain literacy in Arabic. Learning to pronounce the Quran is seen as sufficient for women, though they are also instructed in the behaviour expected of them which will, so it is said, help them to follow the rules of Islam to please their husbands and properly bring up their children. Women are often considered to be superior in Quranic recitation to their husbands. The explanation given is that they have more time at home in which to study than do their husbands who work hard outside the home. Whether or not this is true I am unable to determine.

The extent to which rote learning of the Quran and the importance of students' labour in Dar al-Salam have affected the level of literacy in the school is evident in a test of Arabic literacy conducted in the three boys' madrasas described above--that of the radical Wahhabis in Dar al-Salam and the two schools run by the moderates in Gao.

The test consisted of six selections of written Arabic, each of which was accompanied by three questions intended to determine the student's comprehension of the text. The selections were of varying levels of difficulty and consisted of two main styles: classical and modern.²⁰ In presenting scores, the levels of difficulty are numbered as follows:

²⁰ Scribner and Cole use a similar test of literacy but theirs does not distinguish between the classical and modern vocabularies (1981).

1) elementary; 2) intermediate; and 3) advanced. The selections of Arabic text included in the test were:

Classical

- 1) A passage from an Egyptian religious primer.
- 2) *Sūra* 98 of the Quran.
- 3) A selection from the *Muqaddimah* by ibn Khaldun.

Modern

- 1) A passage from a Jordanian elementary school primer.
- 2) A selection from the Cairo newspaper, *al-Ahrām*.
- 3) A selection from the story *al-Ayam* by Ta Hussain.

Each student in the three schools, except those in the beginner's classes one and two where none were literate, was given a copy of the test as well as paper on which to write answers. Students were allowed as much time as they needed to complete the test and were instructed to consider each passage and to answer all the questions that they could. Before starting, test materials and writing implements were handed out and the procedure to be followed was explained until every student appeared to understand. Further explanations about the procedure were available at any time. Monitors helped in administering the test.

The reliability of the results was compromised by a lack of constant supervision. Students who finished before most others could not be required to wait and, in their excitement over the proceedings, could not be kept quiet. Towards the end of the test at the Medersa Islamique the students who were still writing had to be gathered into one room and 'sentries' placed at the door and windows to

Madrassa Sabil al-Islam (Gao)

Year of class	No. of pupils	Mean age	Classical			Modern		
			1	2	3	1	2	3
3	13	7.67	56.33	20.67	-	35.67	-	-
4	6	10.00	77.67	-	-	27.67	-	-
5	11	12.57	60.67	18.67	18.67	36.33	9.00	15.00

Madrassa Islamique (Gao)

Year of class	No. of pupils	Mean age	Classical			Modern		
			1	2	3	1	2	3
3	24	13.36	47.33	.57	-	23.67	1.33	-
4	24	13.87	39.00	2.67	-	8.33	2.67	-
5	8	13.43	46.00	8.33	-	41.67	-	-
6	7	15.14	76.33	-	-	62.00	.19	-

Madrassa al-Qur'an wa-l-Hadith (Dar al-Salam)

Year of class	No. of pupils	Mean age	Classical			Modern		
			1	2	3	1	2	3
3	24	9.75	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	34	11.32	24.67	-	-	.49	-	-
5	36	12.81	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	36	17.34	24.00	19.33	3.67	12.00	6.33	2.67
7	18	15.89	81.33	31.33	3.67	31.33	5.67	10.17
8	15	17.33	73.33	40.00	17.67	55.67	40.00	13.33
9	10	20.20	96.67	76.67	30.00	96.67	86.67	40.00

Table 5. Results of the test of Arabic literacy.
(scores are presented as the percentage of the class average)

keep those who had finished from running and jumping in and out of the classroom. The boys from the fourth year in the madrasa Sabil al-Islam made use of a side door to flee before the test was administered. Only the more demure girls in the class remained. In Dar al-Salam, on the other hand, students were generally more disciplined and problems of noise and wild excitement were not experienced. Instead, the problem was that the school's leaders restricted outside supervision of their students as they wrote, and the incidence of (well behaved) copying and sharing of information thus seems to have been higher than in the other schools. This restriction on reliability gave the school in Dar al-Salam an advantage over the other schools, but it was an advantage that did not give them a higher comparative result.

The school showing the best results was the madrasa Sabil al-Islam. Here a minimal level of literacy was achieved in the third year and remained more or less the same for the fourth and fifth year students. This leveling off at a low level is possibly due to the addition of curriculum in more advanced classes and a correspondingly decreased emphasis on learning Arabic. The higher scores in comparison with the other schools may be due to smaller classes and a more direct participation of the school's master in the teaching process at the beginning level.

In the Medersa Islamique al-Mahdi Askia, a similar leveling off occurs at the third year with a very slight improvement in the fifth year. The gain made by sixth year students is likely due to the fact that this is the only

class taught by the master of the school, a more qualified teacher than the *moniteurs*.

The school in Dar al-Salam showed the lowest scores for the years in which a comparison is possible with the other schools. This may at first appear unusual considering the better discipline and the seriousness with which literacy and religious knowledge are taken. For the village students, however, the advantage of this seriousness is cancelled out by the difficulty of living conditions, the early emphasis on rote learning and, most importantly, the comparatively short time each day given to formal lessons in the school. Literacy does not truly begin until the sixth year, the beginning of the 'second cycle' in which a knowledge of the Arabic language becomes more important.

It is interesting to note that in all three madrasas the scores for passages in classical Arabic are generally higher than those in modern Arabic. The exceptions are the 8th and 9th year classes in Dar al-Salam where the scores are about even. This suggests that students first attain comprehension in classical Arabic or with writings that have a specific, religiously-oriented vocabulary. Only later do they learn other language styles, such as newspaper articles, as they absorb the wider vocabulary that comes with advanced study.

In spite of the difficulties involved in administering the test it is safe to conclude that students in Dar al-Salam acquire literacy much later than in the other schools, but a higher level of literacy could ultimately be achieved because of the availability of more advanced studies--nine

years as opposed to five or six. In the long term, therefore, the school in Dar al-Salam may have more 'graduates' that are literate in Arabic than the other madrasas.

The school in Dar al-Salam, however, does not have a large number of 'graduates'. It has taken most of the time since its establishment to train the students and teachers who are now 'advanced' in their knowledge. No former students of the school have, as of yet, continued their studies abroad. Assuming, rather generously, that fifty students or former students of the school are able to understand much of the religious literature that they come across, it is safe to say that only a small minority of the movement's followers have any comprehensive knowledge of Arabic.

Older men with literate skills in Arabic are therefore the main channel through which religious knowledge is disseminated. They hold the key to salvation through their access to the moral precepts and sacred commands of Islam. In this respect they hold a similar position to the *'ulamā* in other parts of the Muslim world. That which is unusual in the context of the radical Wahhabis of Gao is the fact that the formation of this literate elite is both recent and sudden. Religious knowledge had at no other time penetrated as deeply into the social life of the villages. Seydu Idrissa is seen as the ultimate source of this new understanding. It is principally for this reason that, in a time of crisis when Islamic rigour had become a vehicle for salvation, the ideal of equality was contradicted and the leader was capable of being perceived as a 'prophet'.

The government response to Islamic education.

Most madrasas are, at least to some extent, influenced by western methods of education, but at the same time many reformist teachers are opposed to the national school system, associating it with secularization and the acceptance of non-Islamic values. There is, in Mali, a tension between the more radical exponents of Arabic education, who see themselves as upholding a reformed Muslim 'tradition', and the government which sees itself as preparing the way for modernization and 'national salvation'. Formal education has proven to be a powerful tool of socialization and the struggle for control of education is often part of a wider struggle for control of cultural transmission and national identity.

It has been impossible for the Malian government to ignore the rising demand for Islamic education during the past several decades, both in traditional Quran schools and in madrasas of varying standards. To some extent there has been a positive official response to this demand, as in the creation of the Lycée Franco-Arabe in Timbuctu. The traditional Quran schools and madrasas, however, have increased in number dramatically over the last several decades, largely out of range of government supervision or control. This has occurred principally because of a widespread realization that government education does not necessarily lead to paid employment while at the same time it potentially threatens the survival of traditional culture. The recrudescence

of Islamic education in all its forms represents a strengthening of what are perceived to be traditional values.

This increase in the popularity of Quran schools and madrasas is a problem for the government for several reasons. In a recently released document entitled *Medersa au Mali*, officials in the Inspection de l'Education Fondamental complain that the increased enrollment in Islamic schools poses a threat to government education because it takes away students from the public system and at the same time decreases general education standards. As one official put it, the popularity of Islamic schools "a tendance a faire de l'obscur-entisme un system."²¹

Another concern on the part of the government is that the madrasas, if left out of official control, can become tools of foreign influence in an international drive to expand puritan Islam. The Inspecteur de l'Education Fondamental in Bourem, who has probably had first-hand experience with Gao-Style Wahhabism, favours the traditional marabout over the master of a madrasa:

Si le marabout est un bon musulman qui mène un combat solitaire dans le seul but de répandre la lecture du Coran, le maître de la medersa est, lui, affilié a une secte expansioniste fortement structurée dont les actions débordent largement les limites de notre pays. Le programme de la medersa laisse aisement devenir le but de son action.²²

The Malian government seems to have begun to show serious

²¹. Government of Mali, 1983-84: 10.

²². *ibid.*

interest in the problem of Islamic education in the late 1970's. In 1981 the Ministère de l'Intérieur carried out a census of Quran schools throughout the country and in April, 1982 the Conseil des Ministres decided to place the administration of madrasas in the hands of the Ministère de l'Education Nationale. At the same time it decided to place madrasas under the same regulations and control as the '*écoles laïques*'. Thus, in order to be defined as a madrasa and to receive official permission to operate, Islamic schools were required to make an application and to meet government standards, the most important new requirement being the introduction of French as a language of instruction which was to be given equal standing to Arabic.

In 1983 this policy was accepted by the Commission Restreinte, an advisory council under the direction of the Ministère de l'Education Nationale. The stated goal of this commission was to educate "musulmans éclairés, des citoyens à part, entier en un mot, des producteurs et non des masses aveuglement et dangereusement fanatisées, exploitables et surecroît."²³ This commission aimed to avoid the exclusive emphasis on Arabic in madrasas which it viewed as preventing the economic, social and cultural integration of students into the nation. This integration, it was thought, could be largely achieved with the equal participation of French and Arabic in the madrasas. The method proposed to accomplish this was a legal separation of madrasas and Quran schools and an official recognition only of madrasas

23. Government of Mali, 1983-84: 54.

that meet government criteria.

The census conducted by the Ministère de l'Intérieur in 1981 showed that four madrasas were operating in the region of Gao. This probably included only the most visible schools in Gao, Bourem and Ansongo, while schools in the villages were overlooked. A survey implemented by the Ministère de l'Education Nationale in 1983, after the implementation of new legislation, showed no madrasas for the region of Gao. In essence, the madrasas of 1981 were legislated out of existence during the subsequent two years, becoming 'Quran schools' instead.

The administrative control of madrasas represents the government's intention to promote a national identity based on a common language, French, and to control foreign involvement in the education process. Thus, even madrasas that did not receive official recognition were pressured to introduce French instruction to their curriculums. At least one school in Gao made an attempt to do so, but due to a limited budget and disputes between the French and Arabic instructors, the experiment did not last, and official recognition was not forthcoming. As this example shows, the tension between the goals of the government and those of many Muslim reformists has no indication of being resolved in the near future.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this work I called into question the way in which a number of authors have dealt with, or neglected to deal with, Islam in the rural setting of French West Africa. Griaule, the founder of a tradition in French ethnography, stressed the richness and eloquence of the cosmology and ritual of the Dogon while leaving us uninformed as to the wider social and cultural networks in which they were situated. Dieterlen, in her studies of the Bambara, and Rouch, in his studies of the Songhay, have equally underestimated the actual and potential strength of Islam in the village context.

Such an underestimation of Islam is also evident in most of the more general analyses of 'black' Islam. Here we often find, in one form or another, a distinction between the religion of agriculturalists and that of nomads and city dwellers. The former, it is assumed, have less attachment to monotheistic religion because of the nature of their economy and its effect upon their outlook on life, their 'mentality', their 'mind'.

In presenting the Gao Wahhabiyya in the context of this literature I intended to show both that the Islamization of African 'peasants' has been undervalued and that in recent decades in some areas it has undergone change in the direction of 'simplification' and 'purification'. I will once more take up this discussion with the evaluation of

a more recent debate between Robin Horton and Humphrey Fisher concerning the nature of, and mechanisms behind, African 'conversion'. The material presented on the Gao Wahhabiyya is particularly applicable to this debate since the central issue is the primacy of indigenous religions and cosmologies in the process of conversion to the world religions, Islam and Christianity, in the African setting. The exposition and critique of this debate will then provide the background for a summary of the directions which religious change has taken and the forces behind this change in the different expressions of reform that we find in the Gao region.

Horton, presenting what he calls the 'intellectualist theory of conversion' begins by outlining the pre-conversion cosmology or, in his words, the 'typical traditional cosmology'. The essential feature of this system of thought, which he claims is basic to nearly all pre-Islamic and pre-Christian African religions, is a two-tiered arrangement of 'unobservables' (again Horton's term): lesser spirits, the focus of religious thought and ritual activity, are seen to be concerned with the welfare of the local community and its environment, while the supreme being, a vague and abstract entity, controls the world as a whole, including its lesser spirits, but is far more uncontrollable and unapproachable through ritual techniques than local deities.

In trying to demonstrate the minimal place of Islam and Christianity in conversion to monotheism--their place

as 'catalysts' rather than primary factors--Horton asks us to imagine a situation in which the traditional cosmology becomes deprived of its microcosmic underpinning of the local community and becomes overwhelmed by the modern forces of international commerce and the nation state *without* the simultaneous presence of Islam or Christianity. Horton's response to this exercise is to claim that even without missionary influence, African religions would be led to a monotheistic cosmology under the impact of an expansion of the social environment:

As more and more people become involved in social life beyond the confines of their various micro-cosms, they begin to evolve a moral code for the governance of this wider life. Since the supreme being is already defined as the arbiter of everything that transcends the boundaries of the microcism, he is seen as underpinning this universalist moral code.¹

Horton is careful to add that cosmological change is rarely immediate and total but is more commonly a matter of shifts in emphasis from the worship of lesser spirits to the worship of the supreme being. The individual who participates in this process of religious change can be placed on a continuum between traditional cosmology and universalist monotheism, his position on this continuum depending largely upon the degree of his exposure to a wide, 'impersonal' social environment.

1. Horton, 1971: 102.

...there is [sic] an infinite number of potential positions between traditional religious life and the full-blooded monolatric cult of a morally concerned supreme being. The particular position taken up by the individual will depend largely to the degree to which, in his own personal life, the boundaries of the microcosm have ceased to confine him. Thus if he continues to live in his own local community, engaged in an occupation such as farming, the greater part of his religious life is still likely to be taken up by the cult of the lesser spirits...If he continues to live in his own community, but engages in a 'modern' occupation like keeping a hardware store which is more highly integrated with the economy of the macrocosm, the cult of the spirits will be a little less important to him, and the cult of the supreme being a little more important. Finally if he goes to work outside his own community, as well as engaging in a 'modern' occupation, the cult of the lesser spirits is likely to be overshadowed by that of the supreme being.²

Horton's central point, then, is that Christianity and Islam have acted only as catalysts in the development of monotheistic religion in Africa. Their acceptance "is due as much to the development of the traditional cosmology in response to *other* factors of the modern situation as it is to the activities of the missionaries."³

Fisher⁴ responds to Horton's thesis with the central criticism that it does not account for the important results of Africa's response to Islam. Fisher holds that in the case of Islam a momentum has been established, through Muslim missionary effort, which goes beyond the mere adaptation of indigenous conceptions of a supreme deity. In presenting this idea Fisher postulates a three-stage schema of the development of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa: 1) The Quarantine stage occurred where small groups of Muslims, usually traders,

2. Horton, 1971: 103.

3. Ibid. Horton's emphasis.

4. Fisher, 1973.

professed monotheism in areas dominated by pagan religions, with neither conceptual system significantly influencing the other. 2) 'Mixing' describes the stage in which monolatric ideas diffuse from the original carriers and become at least partially accepted by the pagan population, but with many traditional customs maintained in the process.

3) Reform occurs where a small group of holy men attempt to convert the 'mixers' to a 'pure' version of the faith.

For Fisher the most decisive religious change--that which defies explanation by Hortons intellectualist theory--is the reformist movement from weak adherence to marked sincerity and religious piety. In describing this general movement he accepts the term 'Juggernaut', a compelling and unstoppable force that drives the faithful to extremes of religious fanaticism. ⁷

Horton presents a defense of his original thesis with a more detailed consideration of Islam.⁸ He too posits a three-fold schema, the first two stages of which he describes as patterns of Islamization rather than historical periods.

1) Non-militant Islam: The first Muslims in West Africa were travellers from the Maghreb who were primarily concerned with trans-Saharan trade rather than proselytization. Thus the Islam they implanted was essentially non-militant. In this stage subsistence farmers were the least influenced by Islam (they remained bound to the microcosm) while, in varying degrees which depend upon experience in the 'macro-cosmic' social environment, greater commitment was manifested

7. Fisher, 1985.

8. Horton, 1975.

by the rulers of state capitals, members of the commercial communities of various states, Fulani pastoralists and Islamic scholars and holy men. 2) Militant Islam: In the *jihāds* and other reform movements of the 17th 18th and 19th centuries a prominent role was nearly always taken by merchants and pastoralists who, according to Horton, were exposed to a wider environment which induced them to adhere more firmly to the worship of a unique deity. The *jihād* leaders were all committed to an international order in opposition to the parochial tendencies of the traditional leadership. 3) Modern times: In the colonial and post-colonial period an acceleration of the progress of Islam is evident. This is a response to colonial rule and its sequels which replaced numerous relatively small political bodies with centralized units. In a key phrase which summarizes the African response to recent social change Horton writes: "It was predictable that they would move toward a rich elaboration of the doctrine of the supreme being who underpinned the macrocosm into which they were being thrown." ⁹

Let us now consider this debate in the light of the example of the Songhay Wahhabiyya. If we follow the pattern of Horton's use of historical and ethnographic material in our own consideration of the Songhay we would not be led to expect the situation described in this study: a radical movement among Muslim villagers with moderation being the key feature of their urban counterparts. We would

⁹. Horton, 1975: 393.

rather expect the reverse: radical, 'enthusiastic' town dwellers promoting a 'legalistic' Islam and moderate or 'luke-warm' villagers who practice a non-scholarly blend of Islamic and ancestral customs. Looking more closely at the rural milieu we see communities principally concerned with economic and social activities within the 'microcosm' with wider experience being derived from links with the nearby town, from participation in the wider political processes and, most importantly, from the migration of men to coastal cities. The majority of Songhay villagers, however, especially women, have not gone far beyond the confines of the village, at least not far enough to be in accord with the intellectualist theory of conversion.

Where has the theory gone wrong? It is, firstly, psychologistic, describing the *individual* as placing himself on a continuum between traditional cosmology and monotheism in accordance with the degree of his exposure to a wider social world. It is important, however, to recognise that conversion can take place in situations in which social groups retain some measure of coherency. In the Songhay villages political alliances were the clearest example of social units that encouraged, or opposed, collective conversion. Village leaders--imams, chiefs and male members of traditionally influential families, were often brought under pressure to make a clear stand for or against the 'purification' of the religion. Their own family members and allies were thus mutually involved in a leader's decision to support one camp or the other.

Direct exposure to a wider environment was not a necessary condition of 'conversion' in the village setting. Those who had greater contact with reformist ideas through temporary migration or pilgrimage, once committed to proselytization, were able to influence those more bound to the local community. The rapid acceleration of Islamic reformism in the villages did not, however, result in a smooth transition from one system of cosmology to another. The social pressures demanding religious conformity are greater in the rural than in the urban environment so that the introduction of an alternative religious or conceptual system led to conflicting allegiances, heated controversy and community division.

Secondly, Horton is correct to isolate 'modern times'--the period of colonialism and post-independence governments--as an important historical phase in the development of the monotheistic religions in Africa, separable from the preceding current of events above all by the development of large political units; but the social dislocation resulting from this change is under-emphasized in favour of the expansion of social horizons afforded by rapid communication, transport, trade, the growth of cities, etc. Considering more carefully, as we have done, some of the local effects of political centralization--the removal of political and economic autonomy--we see that village communities are themselves being altered by modern conditions. It is not simply that the rural folk are being thrown into the 'macrocosm'; the 'macrocosm' is also throwing itself onto the rural folk.

It is important to underscore the impact of colonial and post-colonial politics in effacing the autonomy of local leadership and in imposing an economic system which encouraged migration to cities together with the simultaneous division of family property and the reduction in the authority of elder males. The changes resulting from modern political and economic conditions have created a situation in which the reformist message could not only be more easily communicated to Songhay villagers, but could also be anchored to a social organization which facilitated cooperation within and between communities and encouraged semi-independent political activities which challenged the national government.

A final observation applies equally to Horton's and Fisher's approach to conversion. Fisher is, I believe, largely correct in stressing the independent momentum of monotheistic religions, particularly in the contemporary situation. He places his emphasis, (perhaps too much emphasis) on ideological influences--the appreciation of Islamic or Christian civilizations as superior, more powerful--in accounting for the dissolution of traditional religions. But when we come to consider the appeal or impact of 'civilizations' on rural African communities why take for granted the unwavering continuity of a religious cosmology? We should also stress the impact of secularism, an important ingredient in the European 'cosmology'.

Weber has argued that protestant Christianity, with its stress on the impenetrable supreme being, was an essential part of the conceptual and ethical structures of modern

society in the early development of capitalism; but this association between religion and economy was not permanent and we see very little evidence of scriptural piety in the political and economic operation of European society. Horton appears to invert Weber's argument by stressing the importance of modern political and economic structures in the development of monotheism. He does so, however, without recognizing that contemporary western society is no longer inextricably bound with a religious cosmology and can be considered an agent of secularism in Africa perhaps more than an agent of monotheism. It is not at all clear that those exposed to 'modern times', of which the imposition of European values and technology is a central feature, would inevitably elaborate the doctrine of the supreme being to 'fit' with this experience. This observation compels us to consider the place of secularism in the religious evolution of sub-Saharan Africa.

Before outlining an alternative model of the directions of religious change in the rural African setting I shall summarize some of the features of 'modern times' that have not been adequately developed in the Horton-Fisher debate.

The Songhay, like other societies in which animism has been a central ingredient in the religious complex, have undergone a process of cultural modification which began with the impact of French colonialism and which far outstrips, both in pace and in scope, the influence of the 'egalitarian' colonialism, so to speak, of pre-colonial Islam.

At the most basic level it should be stressed that Islam is no longer the sole 'civilization' modifying the cultural landscape. As everywhere in the 'Third World', westernism has become a major force acting directly upon the values and practices of Songhay society. Teachers and other government workers as well as the advanced students or *évolués* who have been given higher education either in Africa or in Europe, are most often imbued with western values and goals in life.

In the villages, however, the cultural impact of the west is not as strong as one might at first assume. The Songhay have a remarkable capacity for social adaptation and some have been given dramatic introductions to the western lifestyle which little altered their outlook on life upon return to their home villages. During the Second World War, for example, Songhay men were sometimes recruited to fight on French soil and then returned home. The French they learned was eventually forgotten and only bitter memories remained of the experience. (An old veteran of this sort once asked me if the Germans were still a menace in Europe.) Today much of this resilience remains in the villages but European culture has made greater inroads through education in the French language. Many children especially those who pursue *second cycle* studies in the town, are influenced through their education by aspects of 'popular culture' such as music, dress and, as some members of the older generation will point out, sexual

liberalism.

Besides the influence of western 'culture', the nature of Islamic penetration has changed in the 20th century. Improved transportation and communication have greatly increased the availability of contact with Muslim centres of higher learning. To study in Medina or simply to perform the pilgrimage is no longer as ambitious or risky an undertaking as in the days when pilgrims travelled by foot. Visits from Arab delegates to West Africa are also common and, for those travelling to Bamako, the embassies of Middle Eastern countries are another source of news and views from the Arab world. But it is the corpus of Africans who have been to the Middle East and been inspired by its religious culture which has had the greatest impact upon local culture, just as westernized Africans are more effective than Europeans themselves in transmitting westernism. Schools such as the Dar al-Hadith in Medina were instrumental in providing African pilgrims with the grounding in Arabic and religious knowledge required to establish missionary efforts in their native regions. Among the Songhay, such students and pilgrims were also influential in the migrant communities in Ghana.

The impact of western culture as well as a reinvigorated influence from the Middle East have combined to create a complex range of cultural fields in contemporary Songhay society. To simplify the web of cultural influences we can isolate their most extreme expressions, the 'pure

types', to use Weber's term, which may be called 'mixed Islam', 'westernism' and 'reformed Islam'.

1) *Mixed Islam*: refers to the local traditional religious complex which combines animist practices, the worship of *jinn*, ancestors, *holle* spirits, etc., with a 'corrupted' (from the reformists' point of view) form of Islam based on 'Islamic magic' (for example, sand divination or amulets using passages from the Quran) and 'maraboutism'.

2) *Westernism*: is the term given to the values and attitudes of Africans strongly influenced by western culture. Most of these are government employees or students whose education has given them a skeptical attitude toward local 'superstitions' and a distant or 'neglectful' attitude to monotheistic religion. Those who are politically involved might be described as 'secular nationalists' who see redemption in terms of concrete policies and actions on the part of national and local government rather than in terms of religious participation and sacred laws.

3) *Reformed Islam*: can be described as the reform movement which seeks to put into practice the rules and guidelines of the Quran and *ḥadīth*, which seeks, in short, to restore the 'golden age' of Islam. It is, therefore, a part of the cultural field which is based upon a limited sacred literature (if one excludes exegesis and other commentaries).

Few Songhay, in fact, follow with great consistency any one of these cultural patterns. Most, in the Gao area

at least, fall somewhere between two such patterns and only very rarely combine influences from all three sources. There are, therefore, continua or ranges of variation between the extreme poles of cultural expression. Change, ranging in speed and profundity from minor shifts in outlook to full 'conversions', occurs among individuals and groups along these continua, the main directions of which can be outlined diagrammatically as follows:

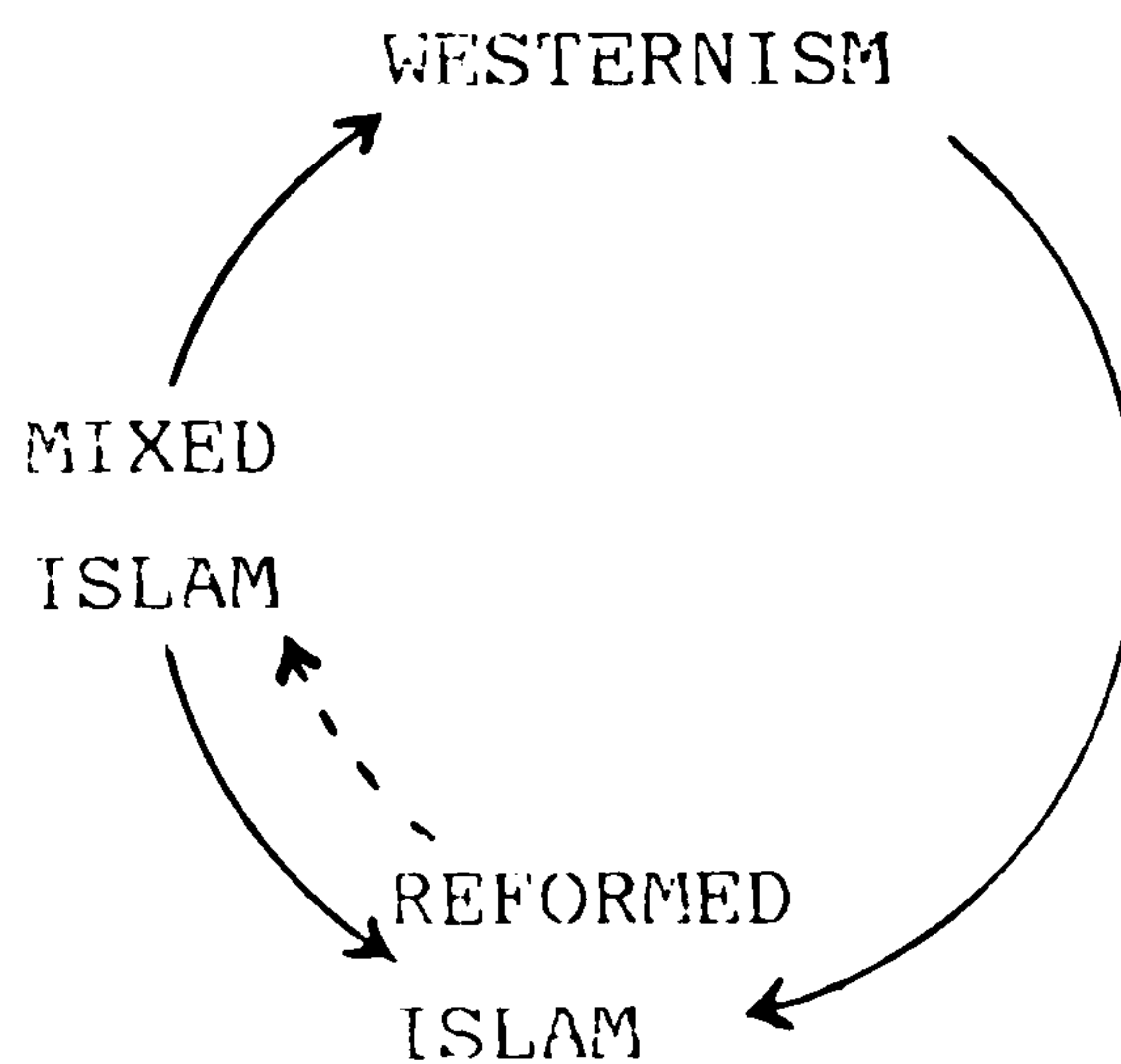


Figure 5. Directions of cultural change.

A) *Mixed Islam to westernism*: Social change in this direction occurs principally through western education but is made more permanent by economic and political opportunities for which this education is required. Western culture and education *per se* would have very little social impact

if they were not associated with employment in the public sector or, at a higher level, with political power. Exposure to western values through education does not necessarily lead to full-blown 'europeanization' but the impact of written culture, combined with the possibility that it may bring economic prosperity and social influence, often make life in a village or a traditionally oriented urban community, to one exposed to such 'higher' ideals, seem 'backward'. It is difficult to recover the values of an oral culture once the goals associated with western culture have been accepted. The frequently mentioned 'loss of self', 'disenchantment', 'anomie', 'alienation', and so on, of those who are educated but without employment stems from their having accepted many of the values and aspirations of the western educated elite without being able to realize them.

B) *Westernism to reformed Islam*: Many personal histories of influential, and not so influential, Muslim reformers shows them to have once been strongly influenced by western culture, having worked during the colonial period in some capacity for the French administration or, after independence, having worked as petty officials, or sometimes just aspiring to be petty officials. For those living 'between two cultures', whose expectations and aspirations are not met, whose experience on the margins of western civilization is marked by a prevailing 'loss of identity', a solution is often found in adherence to Islam. Unlike Christianity

(which has made virtually no progress in the Gao area), Islam has the appeal of being perceived as an important part of African life and traditions. Unlike local belief systems based upon a 'syncretist' religion, Islam can be seen as being progressive. To be a Muslim one does not need to put aside the experience of living in a literate civilization. The attitude of many reformers who oppose the 'superstitious' practices of Sufism and paganism is one in which Islam is perceived to be able to implement and account for western science and technology--indeed the Quran is often seen as having anticipated many such discoveries and inventions--without adopting western secularism or the beliefs of Christianity. Puritan Islamic reform which strives to imitate the model of the early faith may be one of the only ways for Muslims to cope with changes introduced by western society while retaining religious integrity. Western education, as much as compromise with 'pagan' practices but in a different way, brings about inevitable deviations from the orthodox model of Muslim practice. It introduces many concepts which those interpreting Muslim law according to 'the letter' find unacceptable. The reformed faith, on the other hand, offers a more precise model by which new ideas and practices can be accepted or rejected, by which the ideals of social progress through improved living conditions can be implemented without any perceived sacrifice of religious or cultural integrity.

C) *Mixed Islam to reformed Islam (and back)*: It is the problem of a movement from a 'syncretist' religious complex to a

unitarian, scriptural approach to Islam among the Songhay with which this paper is centrally concerned. This change has occurred in two directions. Some young members of the reformist community had been given a French language education. In a few cases they had spent twelve years in government schools but had been unable to find work. Here they arrived at their commitment to Islamic reform by initially moving in the direction of westernization, then by undergoing a change in values which led to acceptance of reformed Islam.

Most of those in the villages who 'converted' to the Wahhabiyya, however, had been brought up in a social context in which 'mixed Islam' was prevalent. The laity of the radical reform movement is for the most part illiterate and accustomed only to following the seasonal cycles of a subsistence economy or, for those exposed to urban life through migrant labour, to traditional occupations such as petty trade and various forms of manual labour which do not lead to much exposure to western culture.

For most Wahhabis 'conversion' is too strong a word to describe their change in religious orientation. Formal conversion for those given Muslim names is unnecessary. The Wahhabis themselves perceive change as being from laxity and ignorance to rigour and enlightenment. They see themselves as having always been Muslims, albeit misguided ones earlier in life, even though, in the case of the radicals, their rivals whose approach to religion is of the same degree of misguidedness are referred to as 'infidels'.

The fact that reform is seen as occurring within a wider

Muslim tradition makes it possible for those who are disaffected with the Wahhabiyya to justify moving back into the traditionalist community. Those who left the reform movement often decided (with a few reservations) that the old way was not such a bad way after all. Their religious outlook had changed several times without any feeling that they had denied faith or tradition. Many who were initially swept up in the enthusiasm for reform later moved away from the radical Wahhabiyya when they saw the full implications of family and community division, and in the process moved back toward the 'mixed Islam' they had once observed. The return to 'syncretism', however, is usually only partial. Many who are not open advocates of Islamic reform remain influenced by it in their practice of the faith.

While individuals and families sometimes left the Wahhabiyya, especially at the time of crisis when communities first divided, the movement as a whole has resisted any dilution of its religious principles or any overall movement back toward 'syncretism'. More political participation is evident but this is a change in strategy rather than in belief or in the conviction with which belief is held. 'Routinization' of charisma, Weber has pointed out, occurs principally during the first significant change of leadership in a movement, usually through the problem of succession posed by the death of the charismatic leader.¹⁰ The radical Wahhabiyya has not yet reached this stage in the evolution of social movements. Seydu Idrissa, venerated for his uncompromising approach to religion and

¹⁰. Cf. Weber, 1978: 246-254 and Bendix, 1977: 305-306.

for the suffering he endured in pursuing his convictions, is still the principal guiding hand of the movement. Change, possibly in the form of a reintegration of communities or at least improved relations between them, is waiting in the wings with leaders like Zacharia Ture.

There are practical reasons for the continuation of inflexibility and intolerance in the radical Wahhabiyya. Perhaps the most obvious is the set of rules which fully integrates the follower into the religious community. The requirement for men to pray in the mosque when in the village, the prohibition on praying alone when travelling or working away from the village, and the restrictions stemming from the seclusion of women all serve to keep the believer tied closely to the community and to prevent any manifestations of doubt from emerging without an immediate counteraction.

Religious education, less dramatically, acts to maintain the ideals of the movement. Literacy and education, features of almost all scripturally based reform movements, are often overlooked by scholars in favour of such gripping phenomena as messianic enthusiasm and violence. But it is crucial to consider the attitude toward scriptures and the ways in which literacy is developed in order to understand the means by which a prophetic message is transmitted and maintained. Given the fact that Islam among the Songhay, as among almost all West African societies, was traditionally orally transmitted, through memorization rather than comprehension, the task of promoting reform was a formidable one. Seydu Idrissa's campaign for religious education was begun by organizing a group of

'missionaries' who travelled to the villages to preach in the Songhay language. Schools were soon started and the small but expanding group of men who became literate in Arabic formed an important group of village leaders and 'assistants'. Even though the goal of widespread literacy in Arabic has not yet been achieved, the presence of a literate minority is vital for the transmission of the sacred message and for the maintenance of a high level of enthusiasm for the ideals of reform.

That which I have outlined so far is the cultural background of the reform movement, the systems of beliefs and values acting in Songhay society, their appeal in different sectors of the population and the directions in which changes in outlook between these cultural systems took place. This does not give us a complete explanation of the social origins of Islamic reform. How can we explain the fact that the missionary effort was successful among the Songhay, that the reformist message did not simply fall upon the deaf ears of a people content to continue in their traditional practices but rather was taken up and responded to by several thousand villagers who formed a surprisingly unified movement? The social conditions in which Wahhabism was accepted were not new when the reform movement began but stem largely from the economic and political effects of French colonialism which have continued without any significant change of direction through the period of independence.

The breakdown of the extended family--the weakening of patriarchal domination and of the rigid system of ranking

based on the order of birth--was associated with economic diversification which gave junior family members the possibility to attain positions of relative independence. But when using words such as 'dissolution' or 'disintegration' to describe the evolution of family relationships it is easy to convey the impression of an atomized society, of rampant individualism and of uniform rivalry and antagonism between kin. The fact is that kinship remains a fundamentally important force in Songhay society. Sibling groups often remain close-knit, feelings toward the mother often remain affectionate and feelings toward the father marked by respect. Such bonds that remain, however, cannot be counted on, being based as much on personal rapport and affection as upon social imperatives.

Wahhabism to a large extent replaces the support and imperatives of the family with those of the religious community. This is especially true of the radicals. Deference and obedience to one's elders are inherent features of many social relationships; help in times of crisis, or even during the normal course of events as in sowing and harvesting, is often provided by the reformist community through appeal to its leadership. Such features and functions, which once had a more secure place in the patriarchally dominated family unit, are now part of the appeal of reformist Islam.

Migration played a dual role in the development of the Wahhabiyya among the Songhay. Firstly, it was the key to the development of economic independence which released many young men from ties with their elders. Migration was, therefore, closely associated with the weakening of the family

structure centred upon the patriarch. Secondly, at a time when migration had become an established economic pattern, Islam developed as the basis of community identity in a setting where the immigrant workers were largely without family support and were living in an urban environment which they perceived to be fundamentally hostile. The experience of living in closed religious communities in the *zongos* of Ghana was an important prelude to the development of Wahhabism in Gao, not only in giving many Songhay men the sense of a new commitment to Islam, but also in giving them the experience of being insulated from the surrounding animist and Christian influence, in developing a boundary between the 'believers' and the 'infidels' which we see repeated in a different context in Gao.

Some of the most important benefits of membership in the Wahhabiyya are derived from the fact that reformist communities exist in both the northern villages, the sources of migration, and in the southern cities, the destinations of migrants. Links between the two sets of religious communities are informal, occurring more through the movement of migrants themselves than through involvement from the leadership. The fact remains, however, that these communities share a common commitment to reformed Islam and a common system of rules in the organization of their followers. A member of the reform movement who travels to Ghana is given access to a support structure which can help him in practical matters, such as visas, lodging and employment, and which provides an emotional umbrella, a protection from the shock and disequilibrium that arises

from being a 'stranger' in the urban environment.

Political change during the past century is another factor which has contributed to the organizational appeal of the Wahhabiyya. In pre-colonial times the chief, though not always loved, was at least respected. With the elimination from power by the French authorities of 'undesireable' leaders and the participation of those who remained as mediators between the villages and the administration, the chief became more commonly despised. The adjudicating role of chiefs decreased as most decision-making power was taken out of their hands but, with the colonial power structure behind them their opportunities for exercising tyranny increased. With independence the chief essentially became a petty official acting as a liason between the *commandant de cercle* and the village. Marginalization, which many Songhay are acutely aware of, is a product of political centralization, beginning with colonial rule and culminating in the independent nation, a development which deprived many groups of effective local leadership. This situation was one in which Islamic reform could promote a popular village leadership, one that was capable of being perceived as oriented toward local interests in opposition to domination by rulers from the south.

The weakening of family ties, migration, political marginalization, these are key ingredients in the transformation of Songhay society in which the traditional religious complex shifted its spiritual emphasis in many villages in the direction of a puritan, scripturally-based version of Islam. There is a temptation to add to these factors the impact of environ-

mental disaster. Is it more than mere coincidence that the Wahhabiyya made rapid progress at a time when the people of the Sahel were suffering from the effects of drought and famine? The drought does seem to have decreased adherence to traditional religious practices and created a more widespread acceptance of the all-powerful God as a mover of events. In the case of the Wahhabiyya, however, we should not place too much emphasis on environmental disaster as a 'cause' of the reform movement. Drought had occurred at other times in Songhay history without bringing with it any similar social response. Today, moreover, continuing harsh conditions have kept the movement from becoming economically prosperous and from implementing many of the leadership's plans to change living conditions in the villages.

Given the environmental and social conditions in which religious reform in Gao emerged some readers might find it surprising that we do not find a greater emphasis on millenarian eschatology. Did not Musa Aminu in the late 1940's declare himself to be the *mahdī* and announce the imminent arrival of the Day of Judgement? If drought and its consequent suffering are seen as a punishment or a trial from God why is this not considered a Sign that God is about to punish the 'infidels' and bring the believers to a final victory? In truth, this kind of belief may have been present at the beginning of the radical movement when Seydu Idrissa considered an armed revolt, but ultimately this course of action was seen as untenable. Realism prevailed over inspired suicide.

In this element of realism we find a basic similarity

with the Mouride brotherhood of Senegal. O'Brien, in his analysis of the Mourides, finds that the religious organization was instrumental in effecting adjustment to the changes brought about by the introduction during colonial rule of cash crop agriculture into peasant society. The Mouride brotherhood, with its emphasis on the submission of followers to a *shaikh*, provided economic security in times of hardship, largely through a revitalization of the agricultural economy.

The brotherhood responded to the needs of the followers in rejecting either violent revolt or fantasy withdrawal, and in turning to more positive tasks--providing the organization which made it possible to act more effectively within the economic and political framework of French colonial rule. Psychological reassurance was indeed offered by Mouride beliefs (the promise of paradise, in particular), but the decisive appeal seems¹¹ to have been organizational rather than doctrinal.

In the case of Songhay Wahhabism, the marginality brought about by state formation and the insecurities of long distance migration are the main factors to which the religious organization responds. In addition, the Wahhabiyya, like the Mouride brotherhood, may provide a measure of security in the face of drought, famine and disease--a greater measure of security, at least, than that provided solely by individual households or by state and international relief programmes. Here too the decisive appeal of religious reform is organizational.

There is a certain irony in the fact that despite the strong ideological opposition between the reformists and the

¹¹O'Brien, 1971: 289.

brotherhoods there is a basic similarity between them which arises from the need for leadership and organization in transmitting and maintaining the religious message. In areas where the Sufi brotherhoods are strong they have sometimes served as carriers of puritan Islam, principally because they possessed the leadership structure necessary for the development and dissemination of scripturalist reform. Among the Songhay, a strongly anti-Sufi movement has come to resemble its 'enemy' through the development of a centralized leadership and through many of the functions of its organization.

In submerging the follower in an organization which defines itself largely through deference to a central leadership, the radical reform movement risks contradicting the ideal of salvation through individual merit. The structure of leadership in the Wahhabiyya must, on the surface at least, appear consistent with religious belief. The prohibition on worshipping beings other than God applies especially to the worship of men, yet it is common for followers to venerate reformist leaders. The attempt to prevent this contradiction from arising is made by stressing the greater knowledge of the men at the top. Their wisdom is derived through access to the Book and obedience to them is therefore justified. In the Mouride case, as in most other Sufi brotherhoods, the *shaikh* is a two-way mediator between man and God. He can give blessings through a transference of sacred power, or *baraka*, and he can give promises of salvation. In the Wahhabi case, doctrinally at least, the *alfa* is only a mediator between the will of God and the action of man. The literate guide is the bearer

of sacred knowledge but the key to salvation is embodied in the word, not in the man. Paradise is not guaranteed. It is up to the believer to use this sacred knowledge, to obey the divine command.

In considering the moderate style of reform found principally in the urban setting it would be overstating the case to suggest that a dramatic shift had taken place from 'syncretism' to reformed Islam. The degree of religious change required in this context was less than that which the radicals demanded of themselves. In the case of the moderate Wahhabiyya an educated clerisy was better established than in the villages before the reform movement began. Wahhabism fit into a pre-existing religious structure and comparatively few changes in outlook or orientation to life were demanded of the follower. Style of dress and method of prayer--the outward signs of religious adherence--are the most important definitive features of a moderate reformist. Associated with a more relaxed approach to change is a decentralized system of organization characterized more by ties of friendship and loyalty than by ties of deference or obedience.

The most advertised difference between the moderate and radical Wahhabis is in their approach to religious change. The radicals are inflexible, uncompromising, proud to distinguish themselves, the 'true believers' from those who are less careful or punctilious in their observance of the faith. Moderates point out the need for change, especially in such outward aspects of the religion as the style of prayer (which is no

longer the subject of great controversy) or the wearing of amulets, but they are usually careful to emphasize the universality of Islam. The moderates, then, stress the unity of the faith; the radical stress the need for perfection in order to be included in it.

In the urban context reformed Islam is not, strictly speaking, a religion of the oppressed. Traders and shopkeepers are most commonly adherents of reform but we also find craftsmen (carpenters, masons, etc.) and minor civil servants. For these people Islam has the appeal of being a world religion with a greater emphasis on the international community of believers and on a more universalized salvation than that found in the inward-turning animist cults or the more exclusive radicals.

Largely owing to contrasts in the social, particularly economic, backgrounds of the moderate and radical reformists, we find further dissimilarity in the structure and functions of their systems of organization. The urban moderates are only loosely tied together in a religious community. Members occupy different places on a status hierarchy but this is not linked to a general structure of command and obedience. The most essential social links are based upon loyalty and friendship between those who often must cooperate or trust one another in their commercial endeavors. This is in contrast to the structuring of radical Wahhabis into a federation of villages which acknowledges both a central leadership and, in spite of the ideal of equality between believers in the spiritual sense, a ranking of members within individual communities.

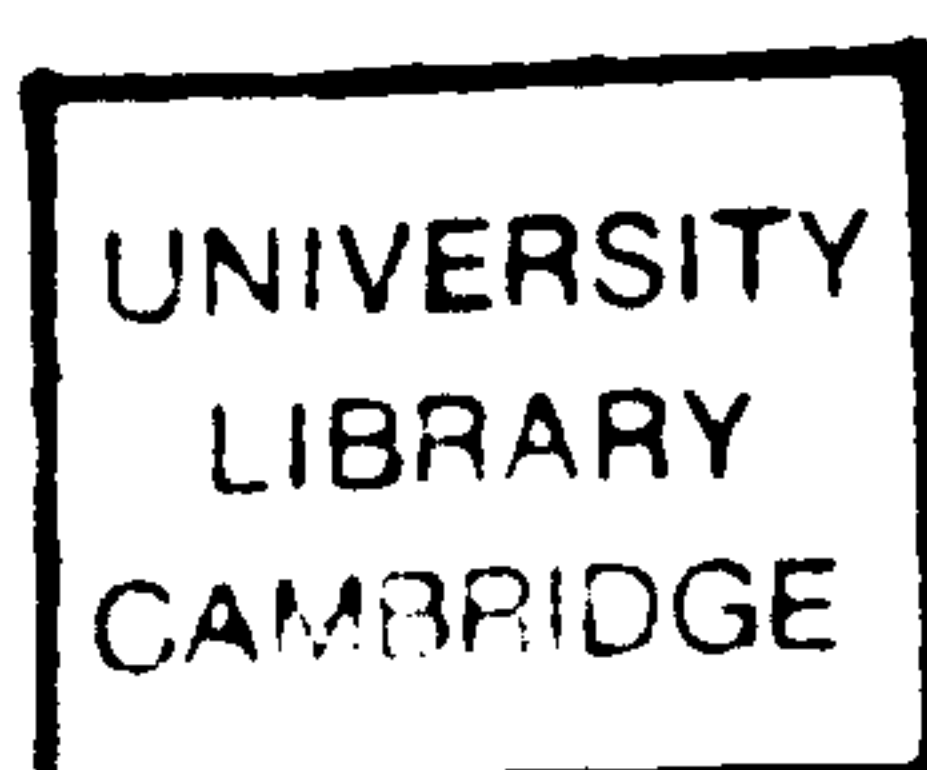
A difference between the moderate and radical styles of reform which has the greatest implications for the future is in their relationship with the state. The moderates have sought a *modus vivendi* with the national government through agreement to participate in the state controlled Association Malien pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam. Such participation is seen as a compromise, not what the moderate reformists might want (which is an independent organization) but an improvement over the situation in which all Muslim associations are banned.

The radicals refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of a religious association controlled by a 'secular' government. Their ambition is to promote unitarian Islam, not through cooperation with 'non-Muslims', but through the independent propagation of their ideals. Political participation for the radicals is more a channel for defiance than for integration into the state.

The government, for its part, seeks to make uniform state control over Islamic associations, which it has accomplished in the AMUPI, and over religious education, which it is trying to do through restrictions on private schools. It is in the latter objective that there is the greatest potential for change in the status of Gao's reformists. It is a striking fact that all Muslim reformists in the Gao region have resisted the government's efforts to control Islamic education in madrasas. Even the moderates look upon government control as a threat, as leading to potential compromise with their religious principles. Elsewhere in Mali, however, we find a greater acceptance

of a diversified curriculum, which usually includes teaching of the French language, the most important requirement for official recognition of religious schools. This is principally because many reformists elsewhere in the country have perceived the practical advantages of a diversified education. Knowledge of Arabic and Islam alone does not provide security in a system in which urban employment increasingly requires other skills. In Gao, on the other hand, religious education is precisely what is demanded. The persistence of religious conservatism in private education is associated with political marginality and resistance on the part of religious groups to participate in the state system.

If the Malian government decides to assert control over Gao's madrasas the reformists will face a vital decision: acquiescence or defiance. The outcome of this situation of potential conflict between the state and the reformists will probably be a process of mutual modification. The state, in making government control of education easier to swallow, will provide the sugar coating of compromise in other areas of Muslim interest, for example, in a closer identification of the state with Islam and a greater tolerance of the reformist's activities in their campaign for religious change. The reformists, on the other hand, perceiving this tolerance, might be less likely to isolate the state as a target for civil disobedience or political opposition. A probable outcome of state control of Islamic education would be a de-radicalization of the radical Wahhabiyya and a more uniform national distribution of scriptural Islam.



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