

2008

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Camara, M. S. (2008). Benediction and Malediction in Fulani Culture: Exploring an Afro-Muslim Perception of the Socio-Spiritual Dimensions of Success and Failure. *Indigenous Nations Journal*, 6(1). Retrieved from <https://commons.erau.edu/db-security-studies/21>

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Benediction and Malediction in Fulani Culture: Exploring an Afro-Muslim Perception of the Socio-Spiritual Dimensions of Success and Failure

Mohamed Camara

Introduction

This article is a discussion of the Fulani belief in *barki* (benediction) and *kuddi* (malediction) in an attempt to show how it informs this deeply religious West African society's perception of success and failure and how, in turn, this perception affects the society's understandings of the political and economic challenges in Africa. Because the Fulani are an Afro-Muslim society, the article is also a discussion of the convergence of indigenous African traditions and Islamic ones as observed in the socio-religious beliefs of the Fulani of Guinea.

The underlying philosophical premise of this study is twofold. First, because the lives of individuals and the progress of collectivities are often judged according to the ways in which they formulate and apply certain normative values to the dialectical trilogy of need, expectation, and action, the meaning of life and progress is not limited to the material and the objective. It also includes the spiritual and the subjective. Second, just as the arts, government, education, and the law are human creations, so too is religion. That the creation of religion is influenced by the inner and mostly unexplained workings of the universe is indisputable, but religion as a set of beliefs

and practices and an institution destined to serve a conventional purpose is neither natural nor supernatural. It is but one of the key components of a society's worldview that helps explain the society's way of life and concept of history. Hence, whether the tenets of any religion are objective and rational is ultimately of little if any relevance, since religion is a dogma validated only by faith.

What is of great relevance, however, is that a meaningful distinction between faith, fatalism, fiction and fantasy, which the human mind, arguably, laboriously ponders while seeking the shores of rationality and objectivity, requires some understanding of the interrelation of materiality and spirituality. It is in this realm of human cognition that the key should be sought to a number of puzzles pertaining to the collective behavior of a given society vis-à-vis particular challenges of life. Pascal Boyer summarizes the idea when he writes, "The explanation for religious beliefs and behaviors is to be found in the way all human minds work."¹

In studying socio-religious beliefs philosophers pay close attention to the ways in which such beliefs help to solve problems of daily life. By the same token, they consider how, to this effect, spiritual values inform the understanding of the moral responsibilities of the individual and the collectivity toward one another, as well as the codified behavior of both of these entities toward the natural and the divine. Hamilton A. R. Gibb puts this in perspective when, paraphrasing the Bible (Hebrews 11:1), he indicates, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."² Religious dogma and faith are, however, formulated to serve a broad range of purposes in life, some theological, some more utilitarian. This is what Gibb further explains by pointing out that because religious "Formulation" does not mean exclusively theological definition in terms of an organized system, it is important, from the outset, "to draw a distinction between the verbal expression of religious feeling or intuition and its formal rationalization in logical or philosophical terms..."³

This is to say, in methodological terms, that a sound study of any system of socio-religious beliefs should begin with an alert observation of such beliefs through the lenses of the society that lives by them, and that only then can a rational analysis lead to an objective understanding of the forms and content of the system, and the purpose it is designed to serve in life.

Even though the Fulani are historically responsible for the introduction of Islam in their current Guinean homeland of Futa Jallon, their spiritual values, like those of most Muslims of Sub-Saharan Africa, are embedded in a complex imbrication of African traditions and Islamic precepts. Hence a multilevel belief in benediction and malediction affects the Fulani self-confidence when they reflect on the current political and economic crisis of Guinea.

Numerous historical studies have identified Futa Toro, in northern Senegal, as the region from which the Fulani migrated and dispersed into their different current settlements, yet the origin of this traditionally nomadic community is still subject to controversy. The controversy stems in part from a Fulani self-perception, which, to numerous scholars, could at best be described as an unintended distortion of history. In fact, in the same Fulani traditions and writings supporting the historical evidence

that the community's mixed cultural heritage is a result of centuries of pastoral migrations along the Sahelian belt of Africa during which the Fulani mixed with various racial, ethnic, and religious groups, one finds a propensity to playing down the *jahiliyya* or pre-Islamic era of Fulani history. An example of this is the contempt with which the eighteenth-century proselytizing conquerors of Futa Jallon distanced themselves from the non-Muslim and non-pastoral Fulani, who had preceded them from the Mande into the region and to whom they referred as *Fulbhe Buruure* (Bush Fulani) or *Pulli* (pagan Fulani).

Furthermore, some clans have actually gone as far as to proclaim themselves *Sherifs*, (supposed descendants of the Prophet Muhammad). According to an account by Tyerno Aliyu Bhubhandian reported by his son Tyerno Abdurrahman Bah, the former Minister of Islamic Affairs of Guinea, the ancestors of the Fulani of Futa Jallon originated from the land of Misra. From Misra they followed their cattle to the pastures of Suudanu Misra. Bah goes on to suggest that the Fulani first encountered Islam in Maasina (located in modern-day Mali) through the troops of Amr sent by Caliph Umar to expand the new religion westward. Having converted the ruler of Maasina and most of his entourage, Amr returned to Arabia leaving behind a certain Ugh'bata ibn Yaasiri who later married a daughter of the ruler of Maasina. They begot four sons: Ruuribu, the ancestor of the Futanian *Uururbhe* (the Bah and Balde clan); Wanee, the ancestor of the *Ferobbhe* (the Sow clan); Bodhewal, the ancestor of the *Dyallubhe* (the Dyallo clan), and Daatu, the ancestor of the *Dayeebhe* (Barry clan).⁴

A few points deserve particular attention in this account. First, it is unclear whether "Misra" refers to Egypt known in Arabic as Misr or to the northwestern Libyan town of Misratah also pronounced Misurata. However, based on the history of the Islamicization of North and West Africa and documented patterns of trade between the two areas one is inclined to favor the latter. "Sudaanu Misra" then refers more likely to Western Sudan (West Africa) than Eastern Sudan (South of Egypt). Second, there is no historical evidence to indicate that Amr ever reached West Africa and that Maasina was Islamicized in Caliph Umar's time (635-644). In fact, Africanists-Islamologists like John O. Hunwick suggest that the earliest exposure of the Middle Niger region to Islam dates to the late 700s (second century of the Islamic Era).⁵ This casts a legitimate doubt upon the contention that Ruuribu, Wanee, Bodhewal, and Daatu were of Arab descent. Incidentally, the Fulani are not the only Islamicized people in West Africa to claim Arab origins.

In any case, in terms of socio-spiritual representation, religious syncretism should not pose a major analytical problem in this case because, as John Mbiti notes, "When Africans are converted to other religions, they often mix their traditional religion with the one to which they are converted. In this way they think and feel that they are not losing something valuable, but are gaining something from both religious systems."⁶ The Fulani are no exception.

In fact, this phenomenon of cultural assimilation has markedly influenced Islam in different ways around the world, which makes it practically impossible to speak of some universal purity of Islam. In Arabia itself, pre-Islamic traditions and beliefs were

adapted to the nascent and fast growing religion of Islam. To be sure, the very belief in *baraka* originated from old Arabian religion which, in Gibb's opinion, "might be summed up as the endeavor to find and to use the most powerful conveyors of *baraka* against the ever-present malevolence of evil spirits."⁷

Throughout history, cultures have developed beliefs in benediction as divine reward, as well as in malediction as divine punishment. The *Futanke* or *Pullo* (plural *Fulbhe*),⁸ as the Fulani call themselves, firmly believe that the lawful acquisition of wealth and the decent enjoyment of sustained prosperity is the physical manifestation of the metaphysical process of divine compensation for selfless services rendered to others. Conversely, chronic misfortune is believed to be the outcome of a wasteful existence, a sign of retribution from God for intolerable misdeeds.

As explained ahead, the Fulani distinguish two levels of benediction, namely earthly blessing called *barki*, and celestial salvation called *baraaji*. They also distinguish two levels of malediction, namely earthly curse or *kuddi*, and sin or *junuubi/junuub*. Although both ultimately emanate from God, *barki* and *kuddi* may be transmitted to individuals through fellow humans (parents, spiritual guides, holy persons) and materialize essentially in worldly life whereas *baraaji* and *junuubi* are distributed directly by God and revealed only on Judgment Day. Hence, Fulani ethics emphasize the individual's fidelity to God and responsiveness to society on one level, and on society's accountability to God and responsibility toward the individual on another.

How does this collective worldview reflect the Fulani perception of the relation between the positive and the negative; between the objective and the subjective; between the physical and the metaphysical; between the temporal and the spiritual; and, finally, between the universal and the particular, as parameters of life? More specifically, how does this worldview conceptualize the rapport between destiny and free will; between morality and family life; between the legitimacy of authority and loyalty to authority? Such are some of the central questions addressed in the following pages.

***Barki* and Its Variables**

Fulani spirituality is ingrained in the recognition of a metaphysical interrelation between worldly life and heavenly life with the former being but a preparation for the latter. This belief is eloquently expressed in Futa Jallon through the saying, "*Barki ko ndyoobha aduna dhabbhirhun baraadyi, ndyoobha laakara,*" which translates, "Earthly blessing is pregnant with celestial salvation." This proverb epitomizes worldly life as a meteoric appearance during which humans are given the opportunity to physically exist and procreate, to spiritually grow and mature, and to ultimately enter the sublime cosmic dimension of eternity where all beings connect or reconnect to one another and to their Creator. By presenting worldly welfare as a transitional momentum toward heavenly salvation, this apparently simple expression of African sagacity philosophy leads our contemplative imagination deep into the corridors of life and through the undomesticated labyrinths of death and life after death. Since

worldly life and death is but a preparation for sublime celestial existence, the line between the physical and the metaphysical is drawn not in full but in dots for the mortal soul to fill. This belief is often expressed in the adage, "*Barki bhuraa dyuutugol baldhe, kono kuddi bhuraa mayde tuubaali,*" which can be translated as "Just as longevity is high blessing, death before total repentance is incurable malediction." According to this, only a righteous life is worth leading and the longer a sinful life the more dreadful its aftermath, unless total and timely repentance intervenes. This recalls John Dewey's philosophical formulation, "Function and status in meeting conditions are a different matter from bare existence."⁹

The term *barki* is the Fulani rendering of the Arabic *baraka* whose meaning is the subject of a heated debate. As Gibb has observed, the noun *baraka* is never employed in singular in the *Qur'an*, which "is particularly enlightening," for the exclusive use of the plural implies that "God Himself is the sole and direct source of all *barakat*."¹⁰ The author insists on the equally enlightening frequent use of the term's cognates: "*tabaraka* in glorifying God; the active *baraka* to express God's conferring *baraka* upon persons and things; and the participle *mubarak* to describe persons or things upon whom God has conferred *baraka* or the power to confer *baraka*."¹¹

From this discursive pattern, *baraka* may be defined as benediction or eternal salvation ultimately obtained from God as an indication of His mercy upon a deserving individual, group, nation or matter. In these general terms, *baraka* may be sought and obtained through prayer, sacrifice, self-atonement, and through rightful guidance from God's chosen servants often known as holy persons. In the Islamic faith, there are classical ways of seeking *baraka*. These are to be performed in conjunction with the five pillars of the faith: *shahada* or profession of faith; *salat* or prayer; *sawm* or Ramadan fasting; *zakkat* or almsgiving; *hajj* or pilgrimage.

The other classical ways are believed, particularly in the Sufi tradition, to lead to a higher degree of blessing, including the power to successfully bless others. Those ways consist generally of ascetic practices and austere behaviors characteristic of the way of the Sufi.¹² These mystics are believed to have attained a state of total commitment to the four-sequence spiritual journey through which the profane duality between the human soul and God is eliminated. The four sequences of this spiritual journey are the move for *Allah*, the move toward *Allah*, the move into *Allah*, and the move with *Allah*.

Like most West African Muslims, the Fulani are Sunni by orthopraxy generally influenced by Qadiriya and Tijaniya. This is to say that they have integrated into their African traditions a heterogeneous body of Islamic beliefs and practices particularly relevant to the present discussion. According to sages consulted upon the matter over the years, *barki* is an empowering spiritual force (i.e. energy) that flows along the invisible umbilical cords connecting individuals and entities within and across the internal boundaries of life.

Four scenarios are offered to the Fulani *barki*-seeker, with parents, extended family, and spiritual guides being the primary *barki* dispensers. Firstly, a typical *Pullo* is expected to be a legitimate child of wedded parents. In fact, because the polygamous

husband's intimacy with his wives is to be in strict accordance with a weekly schedule a child conceived in violation of this schedule is considered illegitimate and a child born out of wedlock is innately "cursed." To begin with, the *jombajjo* (bride) is expected to be virgin at the time of marriage consummation. A ceremony called *kumpital* ("unveiling") is held on the fourth day of marriage (consummation having taken place on the third night) to celebrate the honorable ending of virginity. Thence the groom's family and allies augment voluntarily the dowry to be presented to the bride's family during a subsequent ceremony known as *dhowtitere* ("accompanying" or "escorting") when the bride is taken to her proud family for a short visit (a week or two).¹³ Thus, through her virginity the bride not only honors her family and allies, but she also exemplifies a fundamental Afro-Muslim precept, which stipulates that as a girl, she has obeyed God's Command of purity and chastity. Virginity being a state of purity and innocence, it is believed to represent an untamed spiritual fulfillment.

By entering her conjugal life in this honorable manner, the *pullo* mother-to-be sows the seeds for a successful progeny often compared in Fulani spirituality to a plant in paradise. However, the fact that only female virginity is stressed in this scenario denotes the bias that often underlies gender relations in this patriarchal society.

Secondly, the husband of such an honorable bride must seek *barki* from his in-laws, thereupon compensating the "loss" of their daughter henceforth transplanted into a new family and, by the same token, rewarding them for the proper upbringing of a woman now prepared to procreate with him. This makes the typical relation between Fulani in-laws a highly formal protocol of respect and service in which the son-in-law is regarded as a perpetual debtor.

Thirdly, in return, the bride must fully integrate her new family by remaining faithful and obedient to her husband and by observing the same formal protocol with his parents who, in turn, treat her once and at the same time as a daughter and an *esiraawo* (in-law) with love and protection.

Fourthly, although such a balanced family structure is believed to represent a natural source of blessing for the offspring, the latter is expected to endeavor to seek *barki* from both parents as well as from specific relatives. Two such relatives, the paternal aunt (father's sister) and the maternal uncle (mother's brother) are of particular importance in this scenario. In the Fulani socio-religious beliefs, the paternal aunt is a sacred individual from whom blessing is hard to earn and curse easy to contract. The reason for this is perhaps the delicate sentiments of defiant affection and protective jealousy that links siblings of opposite genders growing up in the family.

Since one's father and aunt are bound by this complex emotional relation, one is believed to be more vulnerable to its consequences. The same goes for one's maternal uncle. In this case, however, the Fulani beliefs push the matter even further to infer that the uncle is so sacred only he shall respond to one's call for intercession on Judgment Day. It must be noted, nevertheless, that one's father and mother are most sacred (alive or dead), and when the Fulani praises his or her "*mawbhe*" (elder or ancestors) he or she puts forward his or her parents to whom the rest of the extended

family and dead ancestors are implicitly added. Hence the prayer of gratification: “*Mi yettii Allah e mawbhe an bhen e esiraabhe an bhen e karamoko an,*” that is, “I praise God, my elders, my in-laws, and my *Qur’anic* teacher.”

The *Qur’anic* teacher or *karamoko*, the only non-family member praised here, constitutes in fact an exceptional figure in the life of the Afro-Muslim Fulani in that by teaching his pupils God’s Message he “gives” them the key to heaven. This is so despite the fact that traditional *Qur’anic* learning in this society consisted largely in mechanical recitation of *suras* (chapters of the *Qur’an*) without sure knowledge of their meaning. Only a minority of disciples attained the level of *firo* (translation) and *finduturu* (exegetical study) of the Holy Book. In any case, although new media have made these traditional methods obsolete by opening more efficient learning avenues, the Fulani *taliba* (from the Arabic *talib* for student) still feels that he or she owes the *karamoko* a great deal of gratitude. Having learned God’s message from the enlightened *karamoko*, the *taliba* or *karanden*¹⁴ is expected to honor his *dudhal* (school), and to seek *barki* by rendering services to this “holy” man and his family.

This spiritual channel of blessing adds a very important dimension to one’s social network since the *karamoko* is more often than not an outsider. In fact, Fulani families are accustomed to sending children away for the sake of seeking knowledge and endurance under the authoritative care of a trustworthy *Qur’anic* master. They also share this custom with other Western African Muslim societies, as Senegalese writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane describes in his classic novel *Ambiguous Adventure*.¹⁵ According to Kane, in such societies the daily routine of a *talib* includes long tours of door-to-door begging. The money and foodstuff collected from this tradition of *ngiri yalla*¹⁶ is used to supplement existing resources and take care of the large pupil population gravitating around the *Qur’anic* master.

As a central component of Fulani socio-religious beliefs, *barki* entails several notions whose relevance in life is to be contemplated at two levels. The first of these notions is *baraaji*, short for *barakaaji*. Though the plural of *baraka/barki*, this concept does not symbolize a mere summation of unitary *barakas*. Instead, it refers to a universal essence of *barki* whose potency transpires from the gratitude of any being served wholeheartedly and selflessly. Thus, rescuing an endangered animal, protecting vulnerable strangers, nurturing a tree or caring for an orphan, a widow, an indigent, a handicapped or an elderly is as *baraaji*-generating as building a Mosque.

Baraaji comes outright from God and sanctions righteousness. Righteousness may include services rendered with sincerity and humility (i.e. not followed by vain publicity). By virtue of this “veil of silence” the Fulani tradition prohibits gossip on gifts given or bragging about services rendered. Indeed, by not gossiping on such gifts or bragging about such services, the benefactor avoids vanity (a sinful behavior) and respects the dignity of the beneficent (a matter dear to Fulani and Muslims in general). Therefore, *Baraaji* may be described as sublime benediction or salvation sought and obtained through simple yet consistent goodness of heart and purity of soul proper to God-centered individuals.

This raises the cardinal question of the nature of a Muslim's proper sentiment toward God. Ought it to be love and/or fear? To Muslims the *Qur'an* represents God's final message to a humanity which had previously received and violated Scriptures, namely the Torah (*Tawrat*) and the Bible (*Injil*). As such, its language is one formulated in no uncertain terms, which has caused non-Muslim readers to suggest that the language of the *Qur'an* is that of an angry God. It has also caused some to argue that unlike Judaism and Christianity, Islam emphasizes fear over love of God. I would suggest that such interpretations are misleading, because even though in His command *Allah* stresses harsh punishment for unrepentant sinners, He does mercifully provide practical guidance for effective repentance. In fact, Muslim *muftis*, that is, authoritative scholars, sustain that *Allah* made Islam simpler and more practical than humans realize. Thus, to the Fulani, another *baraaji*-generating behavior is *munyaal* which, depending on the context, can be translated as patience, tolerance, self-control, or spiritual grace. As such, *munyaal* is believed to foster unconditional generosity in the strictest sense, for generosity is salvational only when not intentionally attached to worldly self-serving purposes. In other words, the benefactor must also be benevolent. This silent recognition between benefactor and beneficent is essential to the acquisition of *baraaji*.

The second variable of *barki* in the Fulani beliefs is *arsike*, a concept identified with individual luck in life. As such, luck is contingent on the manifestation of the individual's inner energy which is unconsciously projected by the biological being, but purposefully heightened through cosmic radiation, and connected to surrounding energies yet to be fully comprehended. This is central to African ontology according to which everything in nature is endowed with natural and supernatural forces. Placide Tempels discusses this belief in his study of Bantu ontology in which, "Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force."¹⁷ Tempels goes on to indicate that by reason of primogeniture, natural and supernatural forces flow from God to the ancestors (dead and living), at which level they are "superior forces." From this point the forces become "inferior forces" and translate into animal, plant, and mineral forces, which "exist only, and by the will of God, to increase the vital forces of men while they are on earth."¹⁸

A misunderstanding of this belief coupled with European "condescension about things African," to use Jay Van Hook's terms, has caused Western scholars and Christian missionaries to imply that Africans worship ancestors and objects.¹⁹ One can safely object that Africans worship neither ancestors nor objects. Instead, like most known religious communities, they worship a supreme being (supernatural) through natural beings which they perceive as a universal and compact cosmic medium believed to have the ability to transmit their prayers to the "higher power" too mighty to be reached directly. Therefore, ancestors and objects are but physical intermediaries through which prayers are addressed to God. They are also material channels through which divine blessing is conferred upon humans. In other words, just as Christians worship God through Jesus Christ, Mary, the Disciples (spiritual ancestors), and the Cross (object), Africans, too, worship the same unknown and unknowable supreme being through known or knowable intermediaries the existence and functioning of

which are often independent of human conscience. Africans see in nature the book of life written by the Creator. Philosophers and ethnographers classify this belief as naturism or naturalism. What correlation may exist between African naturalism, Native American beliefs in the 'supernaturality' of mother Earth and modern-day American spiritual environmentalism is open to debate.

At any rate, an *arsikaadho* (lucky person) is one who does not necessarily need hard work to obtain what he or she desires. Luck in this case is a para-natural essence of life, which makes the *arsikaadho* lucky but not necessarily blessed, in which case the *arsikaadho* seldom enjoys lasting happiness. What then happens to the fortune obtained by luck? It generally benefits blessed acquaintances. This is what the Fulani mean by "*ko arsikkadho dhabbhanta barkindho*," which translates, "the lucky accumulates fortunes for the blessed to enjoy." From this perspective, *arsike* functions as a sub-multiple to *barki* and is practically irrelevant to *baraaji*.

The last variable of *barki* in this order is *du'aa* or *du'aaw*, which may be defined as a circumstantial blessing. Thus comprehended, this particular variable consists actually of a special prayer often conducted in the form of a public ritual expressing spiritual gratitude toward a specific benefactor. The recipient of this blessing is often an individual or a group in need of an immediate answer from God to improve an existing situation, to prevent the occurrence of some danger or to reverse one in progress (relative to work, family, health, wealth or power).

Whatever the case, the soliciting party generally chooses a special occasion such as the Friday prayer, 'Eid or similar public services. *Du'aaw* may also be sought from one's parents, *karamoko* or even from a total stranger of a certain spiritual status, depending upon the nature and magnitude of the need or desire of the seeker. Offerings for such prayers may be substantial, up to a cow (money is also occasionally offered), or symbolic, such as milk or cola nuts. While the use of cattle and milk is self-explanatory in this pastoral society (this is discussed ahead), that of cola nuts needs explanation. So, why cola nuts in particular and why fruits in general? The answer is that it is because the Fulani believe in the sacredness of this particular fruit, perhaps due to its scarceness in the Futa Jallon and its ability to ensure mental alertness. In fact, cola nuts are used in a variety of other socio-religious rituals including marriage, baptism, funeral and the like.²⁰ Also, fruits in general are viewed as an exemplification of fertility and a symbol of the self-perpetuation of life itself.

***Kuddi* and Its Variables**

When the Fulani sages say, "*Kuddi helata yhiè, ko pèhèdhèn ndi bonnata*," which translates, "Curse does not break bones, instead it jeopardizes ways and means," they summarize this society's perception of social responsibility and the consequences of negative behavior, for malediction is neither a disease nor an accident. Linguistically, *kuddi*, unlike *barki*, is indigenous to the Fulani language and is believed to derive from the verb *hudhugol* (to curse), itself a sibling of *hudhagol* (the verb to

swear). *Hudhagol* is understood as an act of citing God as witness of one's truthfulness, or evoking the holiness of the *Qur'an* as a testimony to the same.

By raising the stake to this paroxysmal level the person uttering the oath is implicitly condemning himself or herself to serious punishment if knowingly lying. This assumption of self-inflicted punishment through *hudhagol* calls attention to the issues of social ethics and spiritual integrity in this Afro-Muslim culture. Indeed, the appropriate *Pullo* swearing (as opposed to obscene cursing) always equals putting oneself under oath and, as mentioned above, the typical formula refers either to the Holy *Qur'an* or to God Himself, with an implicit acknowledgment of His clemency along with His apocalyptic punishment. Thus the *Futanke* would state, "*mi wondirii kaamilu*," that is, "I swear by the Holy Book" or "*Hakkunde an e Allah*," which translates literally, "between God and me," and contextually, "By God I swear," but not, "I swear to God." But the expressions "*Mi sennii Allah*" (a contraction of "*Mi seedinii Allah*") and "*Allah ko seedee*," both meaning, "God is my witness," are most frequently used by the Fulani *mokoba*.²¹ The terminological precaution taken here by not referring to the *Qur'an* by its name (but by one of its attributes) or swearing *by* but not *to* God corresponds to a moral and spiritual restraint. In other words, the Muslim Fulani resists the temptation of trivializing God and/or His holy message, while still posing them as the ultimate witness of, and testimony to the person's truthfulness.

One may, therefore, suggest that far from being a mere retraction of one's humble person from the Creator's inevitable judgment, such an oath may be envisaged as a validation of one's profound belief in the existence of God and in the indisputable Godliness of the *Qur'an*. From this postulate it is safe to infer that the Afro-Muslim Fulani of Futa Jallon understands *kuddi* as the logical outcome of unacceptable violation of society's ethical standard and that of the spiritual integrity that God has commanded. This is why it is visualized as the redoubtable impact of a converging beam of negative energies with which an individual or a group is bombarded as a punishment for a grave misdeed.

This, however, has no relation with black magic or witchcraft (whatever is meant by such). It is rather the logical and often predictable result of a behavioral pattern forbidden or discouraged by society. It is therefore important to distinguish this concept from that of "evil eye" or malevolent spirit often associated with witchcraft and similar powers. Actually, Muslim Fulani abhor such "pagan" beliefs despite the fact that they too practice traditional libations superficially incorporating *Qur'anic* verses. This synergetic practice generally known in Muslim Francophone Africa as *maraboutisme* exists also in other Muslim societies such the Mande, Wolof, and Hausa.

Kuddi is believed to manifest itself at two levels with varying degrees of destructive effect. At the first level it occurs in the form of an unbearable avalanche of disasters only unleashed by God upon a particular category of people, generally referred to as unbelievers in the *Qur'an*. In *Sura 2* verses 159 and 160 it is said:

Those who hide the proofs and the guidance with which We revealed, after we had made it clear in the Scripture; such are accursed of Allah and accursed of those who have the power to curse: Except such of them –as repent and amend and make manifest (the truth). These it is toward whom I relent. I am the Relenting, the Merciful.²²

This form of malediction, known in Fulani as *halakuye*, may also apply to a given nation as a punishment for an irreversible accumulation of grave sins. This is arguably what is implied in *Sura* 4 verse 52.

They are (men) whom
Allah hath cursed:
And those whom Allah
Hath cursed, thou wilt find,
Have no one to help.

At the lesser level, *kuddi* manifests itself in the form of individual or group phenomenon. As such, *kuddi* is believed to result from a strong sentiment of discontent and deception on the part of one's parents or specific members of the extended family such as a paternal aunt, a maternal uncle or a sister, or else one's *karamoko*. If not cured through sincere apologies sustained by services and *sadaka* (from the Arabic *sadaqa* for sacrifice), this type of malediction is believed to not only haunt the immediate victim for the rest of his or her life, but also to flow along the family lines for generations. This automatic transmission of malediction is metaphorically described in the saying "*ndiyan rewtay ilol*," which means, "water is bound to find its natural path." Such an apprehension is expressive of the myth that once infected with *kuddi*, a family or lineage may bear the burden for generations until a proper measure of self-atonement is applied in earnest.

As a central concept of the Fulani socio-religious beliefs, *kuddi* also has three variables: *junuub*, *hakkee* and *kataa*. *Junuub* is an Islamic notion whose general meaning is sin in the broadest sense. As such, it is believed to be constantly recorded by angels and punishable only after death, unless duly repented and absolved.²³ The belief is that each day a pair of angels follows the individual and records his or her intentions and actions, which are entered in the person's permanent records referred to as *talki ngurndan* or "life talismans." The angels recording evil intentions and deeds sit on the person's left shoulder while those recording good intentions and deeds sit on the right shoulder. Once recapitulated in the *talki ngurndan* these data are converted respectively into *junuub* and *baraaji* (always plural) to be revealed only on Judgment Day, when they are weighed on the scale of good and evil at the sound of the end-of-days-trumpet. *Baraaji* then lead to salvation and *junuub* to damnation. The Fulani call this pivotal time "*nyande guutufal wuttaa*," which means, "when the end-of-days-trumpet sounds," or "*nyande talki firtaa*," which translates, "when talismans are opened." That day, it is believed, all humans will be hanging on

their umbilical cords with each body part compelled to testify independently before *Allah*, the Supreme Judge. One wonders if this relates to the Ancient Egyptian belief in the weighing of the hearts of the dead against a feather to determine those who qualify for the journey to eternal life and those who are doomed to be devoured by monsters.

As for *hakkee*, it may be defined as a punishment for misdeeds of lesser magnitude committed against a fellow human being or against any other earthly being for that matter. The manifestations of *hakkee* are different from those of *kuddi* in that the consequences of a particular *hakkee* are endured only once and can be cured through sincere apologies supported by the appropriate *sadaka*, whereas *kuddi* can last a lifetime or generations, as explained earlier. Additionally, while *jumuub* are only punished after death, *hakkee* is always purged or cured before death, hence the saying “*hakkee yaadetaake laakara*,” which means, “one never dies with *hakkee*.” The third variable, *kataa* or bad luck is the natural opposite of *arsike* and is believed to be innate. It is rarely curable and may only be tempered through particular *du'aa* and substantial *sadaka* repeated over time according to specific rituals occasionally involving traditional forms of divination.

Sociological Analysis and Philosophical Interpretation

To comprehend the multidimensional implication of this strong attachment to highly metaphysical phenomena such as benediction and malediction is to grasp the sociological environment in which the spirituality of the Fulani of Futa Jallon evolved. First and foremost, as mentioned earlier, one must understand this society as an Afro-Muslim and pastoral society whose trails have crossed those of a number of fellow nomadic and semi-nomadic populations of Central and Western Sudan. They are but a segment of the larger population of Fulani mainly concentrated in Futa Toro (Senegal), Futa Masina (Mali) where their identity has largely survived, but also in Futa Sokoto (Nigeria), Niger and Cameroon where they are more assimilated despite their enduring cultural and social conservatism.

Like most pastoral Fulani, the Fulani of Futa Jallon have maintained a way of life in many regards close to the life cycle of their cattle. Thus, to them cattle are not just a herd of animals, but also a source of life, a sign of wealth, and a mark of social status. Maintaining a large amount of this precious asset is therefore not only a daily occupation, but also a way of perpetuating blessing within one's family and clan. This is perhaps why the nineteenth-century scholar Thierno Mamadou Samba Mombeya argued that the typical *Pullo* does not live with his cattle, he lives for them; he does not lead his cattle, he follows them; he does not like his cattle, he loves them. In fact, in addition to his utilitarian perception of the procreative multiplication of his animals as the growth of material wealth, the *Pullo* views the same phenomenon as a materialization of blessing whose attributes encompass more than material satisfaction. From this man-cattle bond has evolved a distinct spiritual conception of life hardly imaginable for the American rancher in whose exclusively utilitarian perception, the

value of cattle is to be estimated in gallons of milk, pounds of sour cream and meat, leather belts, boots and jackets.

From a rational standpoint, the Fulani interpretation of the workings of benediction corresponds to the mechanism by which life acquires transcendental positivity and salient stimuli through society's dynamic interdependence with the legitimate means by which primordial survival is consciously transformed into incremental progress. The interpretation, though not totally exempt from fatalism, is ingrained in the African philosophy of communal solidarity informed by the dialectical complementarity of natural right and inherent duty, individual prerogative and societal obligation. At the grassroots level, this solidarity consists in younger generations reciprocating in due course the vital care received from older ones, thus fueling the engine of the historical spiral of change and continuity of family values. Anything opposite to this mechanism is perceived as gross anomaly and categorized as malediction or sin.

To be sure, in a society with feeble means and outdated methods of production, strong reliance upon manpower is both pragmatic and vital. Furthermore, communal solidarity is designed to maintain social harmony and moral soundness in society via a balanced rapport between the most sagacious, though physically weak, elements of the community and the most energetic ones in need of guidance. The Fulani summarize this dynamic symbiosis in the saying "*Mi neiriima kettyu, nètoran mangu,*" which means, "I tended to your youth may you tend to my old age." This unwritten social contract between parents and children is a typical African family value, which Westerners accustomed to individualism often misrepresent as a form of social parasitism whereby young achievers are heavily burdened and constantly held back by greedy and unproductive parents and relatives. One would argue that although ill-applied family bond may fit this stereotype, the real foundation of the aforesaid social contract is rather a spirit of human closeness and social togetherness nurtured in the family unit and expounded in the community at large. With this African humanistic spirit of mutual gratification at work, the young are prepared to face the challenges of life in the "human jungle" and, in return, the elderly are guaranteed adequate care and dignified "third age" despite limited material resources.

From the perspective of social philosophy, this theory of communal solidarity articulates the Fulani notion of personhood couched in the African concept of preeminence of society over the individual, for in Africa sociality determines personhood and personality. It is useful to point out, though, that contrary to Eurocentric speculations, African cultures do not exclude the rights and responsibilities of the individual. What they generally exclude is the extreme individualism that has become the norm elsewhere. Anthropologist Colin M. Turnbull contrasts "this 'natural' social order where physical coercion is unnecessary because of the inner, moral coercion that springs from a live sense of social identity and unity" with modern Western society and some Eastern nations that have lost this order to size and technological complexity "which we are pleased to call progress."²⁴

African scholars and traditionalists alike concur on the inextricable interdependence of the individual and society. Senegalese philosopher Alassane

Ndaw explains that here the individual reality is meaningful only as an integral part of the social web: "In Africa society is a paramount existential dimension of the individual by virtue of the fact that the latter belongs to a multitude of structures; family, lineage, village, ethnic group, etc."²⁵ This is to say, "The individual cannot self-comprehend outside of that which determines his existence fundamentally and independently from his particular essence."²⁶ In the same order of thought, Fulani comedian Geeto goes beyond the existentialist nature of this interdependence and stresses its normative value when he exclaims, "Vain creature, you are nothing and nobody until you drop your egotism under the feet of your fellows and join them in the house of brotherhood."²⁷ A Fulani adage concludes, "I came [to this world] in your hands and I shall leave in your hands. You are in me just as I am from you."

From an anthropological perspective, the existentialist and normative aspects of this interconnection are predominant in African cultures primarily because familial biological kinship also corresponds to "a co-operative economic unit" and "serves as a model for wider social relationships, ultimately embracing the whole society."²⁸ Hence, it is safe to argue that, in general, traditional African societies lived by a practical code of democracy enforced by, and reflected in their systems of familial unity, economic communality, political order of communal consensus, and what Turnbull calls "the integrative power of religious belief."

Even in areas that may appear most paradoxical these values prevail. For example, just scratching the surface of a complex structure, one may hastily interpret the behavior expected from the Fulani wife in a "blessed polygamous family" as a justification of the institution of polygamy in a highly patriarchal culture. The argument that a woman's obedience to her husband determines the future success of her offspring could then be viewed as an ideology meant chiefly to serve the purpose of securing acceptance by women of the act of sharing marital affection with a minimal challenge to gender inequality.

At a higher level of consideration, however, the Fulani, and many African societies for that matter, hold the act of polygamy as a test of integrity for the man upon his decision to enter into holy matrimony with two or more women. It is even argued in those societies that the fact that a child bears its father's family name is a daily reminder to the man of his fatherly responsibility toward the child and, by ricochet, of his marital duties toward his child's mother. It is worth noting that the emphasis placed here upon the woman's status as the "child's mother" is not meant to trivialize her natural gift of procreation. On the contrary, it is a social recognition and a moral celebration of the mystic of motherhood at the highest level of human consideration and imagination. After all, as the African adage goes, "with all His might God had to entrust women with the perpetuation of the human race."

Polygamy is also interpreted in Futa Jallon as a solution to a social problem pertaining to the marital dignity of both the Fulani woman and the Fulani man. In fact, whether from the perspective of African tradition or that of Islam, an adult woman ought to be legally and legitimately married and procreate according to God's initial life plan. It is also believed that marriage consecrates manhood and validates a man's

religious virtue. For example, a man without wife (single, divorcee or widower) is considered unfit for the religious duties of muezzin let alone those of imam.

Thus, the fact that women outnumber men, due to wars, birth rate, and other factors, represents a “more objective” reason for polygamy. Though not all Fulani women of present generations accept the theories and practice of polygamy, during my research a number of them, some highly educated (Western and/or *Qur’anic* education), raised a paradox by asking questions such as this: “Which of the following is the lesser evil: faithful polygamous spouses, unfaithful monogamous ones, unwanted female single-parenthood, or forced lesbianism due to shortage of men?”²⁹ Do men exploit this statistical unbalance and its interpretations here and around the world to perpetuate male domination? Whatever the case, it is strongly held in Fulani traditions that a woman owes to herself the dignity of her marriage and to her family the purity of her womanhood. Because the Fulani woman owes to herself the dignity of her marriage, she is expected to please her husband and respect her *sinaa* or *co-épouses* (the husband’s other wives) as dignified members of the same family.

This is to say that conjugal harmony rests upon a shared responsibility and that the family unit coheres only when each member correctly respects the natural and civil rights of everyone involved, at least as the community understands and codifies such rights. Also, due to this society’s feeble means of production, women are perceived as, among other things, producers of productive forces. Consequently, the more wives a man has the more productive forces he is likely to secure, which also explains the belief that having numerous children constitutes a mark of benediction thus making a childless woman a cursed individual. Such handicap can lead to divorce with diminished hope for remarriage for the woman. Furthermore, a childless elderly woman is occasionally labeled *nyanneejo*, witch or sorceress, that is, and often accused of all sorts of wrongdoings.

It is helpful at this point to address the critical issue of predetermination and free will in Islam and its presence in the Fulani socio-religious beliefs. Is the life of the human being a journey on a predetermined path? Is God solely responsible for the individual’s deeds and misdeeds? In other words, is the individual totally deprived of free will? According to John Renard, “Many Muslims believe that an uncompromising form of predestination is a central tenet of Islamic theology.”³⁰ But the author is also quick to point out that such extremist belief is based on the fact that “Majority opinion among Muslim thinkers has generally emphasized God’s absolute power while paying less attention to what their statements implied about human being.”³¹

In fact, according to Renard, this extremist view was more strongly held in classic creedal formulations elaborated in the second century of the Muslim Era, such as “What hits you could not have missed you, and what missed you could not have hit you.”³² Renard defends his criticism by recalling two sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: “One who denies God’s decree is an unbeliever, but who claims never to have sinned is a liar,” and “Trust God but tie your camel.”³³ Caesar Farah concurs when he suggests:

The path to Allah is open to everyone, even the wrongdoers should they seek to tread it. Allah grants all of His creatures the powers to do good deeds and shun evil. He welcomes the one who seeks Him on his journey to Him even though the underling may commit some mistakes along the way. Man will earn his rewards on the basis of his faith and good deeds because of God's mercy and benevolence. The one who does not occupy himself with good deeds will be left alone. God may not stretch His arm towards him, but at the same time He will not be the one who puts him on the evil path.³⁴

Finally, like Judaism and Christianity, Islam does acknowledge God's merciful bestowal of intelligence, conscience, reason, and free will upon His human creatures whom He judges on the basis of their conscious actions. This corroborates the postulate that a man's intelligence is determined by what he does with what he knows and his conscience is judged through what he knows about what he does.

By Way of Concluding: Guinea, a Blessed Land or a Cursed People?

As a part of Guinea's popular culture, this question was raised in the mid-1970s when the political purge of the regime of the *Parti Démocratique de Guinée* primarily targeted the Fulani elite. The same question resurfaced in the 1990s with the emergence of multiparty politics mostly based on ethnic and regional affiliations. In either case, the question relates to the paradox of potential wealth and actual poverty which characterizes the country's economic life, and seems to call for a religious approach to a rather complex problem of economic, political, social, and historical nature. In this closing section, I examine the problem from this religious point of view which other Guinean socio-cultural entities share to an extent.

Regurgitation of the abundant literature on Guinea's potentialities would be superfluous in the present study. Therefore, selected accounts of such literature are utilized chiefly to support the philosophical analysis in progress. André Lewin, the former French ambassador to Conakry (1975-79) and president of the *Association d'Amitié France-Guinée* seems to do justice to author Muriel Devey in his preface to her book *La Guinée*. "Muriel Devey," Lewin writes, "a specialist of tropical economies & raw materials, rightly recalls the metaphoric appellations attributed to Guinea: 'sixth continent' by herself, veritable 'geological scandal', 'water tower of West Africa' because of her rivers that irrigate fertile lands throughout the region."³⁵ This French diplomat highly knowledgeable of Guinean affairs carries on: "Be it known and be it repeated, for tourists are a rarity there, this country is veritably magnificent. Its landscapes are varied and splendid, its resources are considerable, its inhabitants are of a real beauty, [they are also] the heirs of attaching cultures. Nevertheless, at the end of the twentieth century, few African countries show such paradoxical a contrast between extreme poverty and strong potentials for development."³⁶

Indeed, Guinea is the source of Africa's third longest river, the Niger, from which French and British colonialists named Niger & Nigeria among their numerous territories

irrigated by this “noble gift of Guinea to neighbors” (to borrow the words of Guinea’s first president, Ahmed Sékou Touré). It is also the source of myriad lesser rivers. Water, the natural source of life, blesses this country with abundant fauna and flora, and arable land. Underground, gold, diamonds, bauxite, iron ore and many more minerals congregate. Studies suggest that the reserves of Mount Nimba alone suffice to finance the building of modern roads and bridges, while a hydroelectric dam on the Konkouré River or the Bafing River (though cartographers place the beginning of the Senegal River at the confluence of the Bafing and the Bakoye in Mali, in Guinea the Bafing and the Senegal are believed to be one and the same river) could provide power for the whole of Guinea and neighboring countries.

In a press communiqué issued in support of a national strike organized in June 2006 by Guinea’s main labor unions entrepreneur and political opposition leader El Hadj Mohamed Mansour Kaba of the Dyama party echoes this general assessment as follows:

This is not some landlocked and resourceless Sahel country. On the contrary, it is a country which produces annually over 15 million tons of bauxite; over 350, 000 karats of diamonds; over 20 tons of gold. It is a country with an Atlantic coastal line of over 300 kilometers; with over 700,000 hectares of cultivable land; and with no fewer than 1,200 rivers, including the Niger, the Senegal, the Gambia, and the Mano. It is a country with 1 billion tons of iron ore in the Mount Nimba and even more in the Mount Simandou, and whose capital, Conakry, sits on over 3 billion tons of iron ore!³⁷

In addition, tourism if well organized could bring sizable income, due to Guinea’s picturesque nature, rich culture, and hospitable people. Her coastline (Lower Guinea) gave name to West Africa’s gulf known to European “explorers” as Gulf of Guinea and, sadly, was among the Trans-Atlantic slave trading posts. Because of this unfortunate fact and for other reasons discussed ahead, popular interpretation tends to associate the country’s *faux pas* in history with its name. In fact, according to local traditions, the term Guinea (*Guinée* in French) comes from the word *ginè* which means woman in the Sosso language. This debatable version attributes to a Soso woman the interjection “*Ntan ginè naara*” (“I am just a woman”) uttered to a certain fifteenth-century Portuguese navigator whose question was rather about the name of the land that he had just reached. What does this have to do with *barki* and *kuddi*? The answer to this question could come from a careful consideration of the social symbolism that Fulani socio-religious beliefs often attach to the role and status of women in the history of this country. Such consideration will help to shed light on the stories evoked ahead especially with the reader being mindful of the fact that Fulani popular beliefs and interpretations constitute the basis of the philosophical analysis in progress.

Women have played important roles in the history of what became successively French Guinea and the Republic of Guinea, but in collective memory their social

status has often remained somewhat inferior to the degree of their actual contribution. In some cases, the more prominent their role the more tarnished their image. Yet, popular interpretations often seem to depend on generational perspectives and factional interests. Regardless, the same popular interpretations maintain that Guinea as a country is condemned to pay the price for injustice committed in the past against women. One of these women was Kumantyo Wali, the daughter of former Mandingo king Janke Wali of Turuban or N'Gaabu (in modern-day Guinea Bissau) and mistakenly represented by local traditionalists as the mother of Alfa Yaya Jallo, chief of the Fulani province of Labé (late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries). As a young girl Kumantyo is said to have been captured in one of the so-called Fulani *jihads* waged against non-Muslims in and around Futa Jallon. This particular war was instigated, fought and practically lost under Almami Umar Barry. The other woman was Nene Jariw, the mother of Bokar Biro Barry, one of Futa's greatest and latest almamis (theocratic rulers). Apart from being queen-mothers, as local chroniclers claim, these women shared the stigma of belonging to an inferior class, according to the Fulani stratification of Futanian society, due to the fact that they were of Mande ancestry.

On this rather flimsy basis, Futanke traditionalists claim, Alfa Yaya and Almami Bokar Biro were opposed to each other by a conspiracy of fellow Fulani notables, which weakened the provincial and federal leaderships of the almamate and ultimately facilitated the French colonial conquest and occupation of Futa Jallon in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries. In reality, the causes of the contradiction between the two chiefs were more complex and had more to do with a general pattern of resistance versus collaboration observed among African rulers toward European colonial conquest. Thus, when French invaders opened the battle of Poredaka (in the modern-day region of Mamou), Almami Bokar Biro warned his Futanke foes: "*Mo yahaali Pooredaaka yahay daaka poore,*" which translates, "those who refuse to fight at Pooredaaka shall camp for rubber extraction" (rubber extraction was later imposed as part of French colonial forced labor known as *indigénat*). Notice the Fulani wording of this warning from a visionary, though segregated king: *Pooredaaka* versus *daaka poore*, and visualize the situation of Futa Jallon hitherto united and then on the brink of self-destruction due in part to disunity over the social origin of its Almami's mother. Bokar Biro's premonitory warning was a call for unity against foreign invasion and occupation, which fell on deaf ears as far as Labé and its allies were concerned. The same predicament had previously forced Bocar Biro into exile, which soon proved to be no more and no less than a tactical retreat on the part of the segregated prince, his "*hijra*" having led to a successful claim of the crown in a bloody confrontation with a half-brother whom his enemies had hastily crowned almami of the Futa confederation, say local traditions.

In a 1993 interview, Amadu Wury Barry³⁸ of the former ruling *Sediyanke* family of Timbo evoked this and other equally controversial relations between Timbo and Labé, two former competing poles of Fulani aristocratic power. According to Barry, jealous princes orchestrated the political animosity to weaken and, ultimately, eliminate these two rulers because of their social background. This act of bigotry against two

innocent women, culminating into high treason against the state, is interpreted as a violation of the principle of political loyalty and spiritual righteousness and a source of inescapable collective malediction. In the early 1990s, perhaps to diffuse the malediction, representatives of Labé and Mamou (the former province of Timbo and capital of the alamate) initiated negotiations for reconciliation. Yet, one wonders if these negotiations achieved anything meaningful, judging by the behavior of many natives of Mamou after the Guinean government made this town the capital of a new *Région Administrative*, thus removing it from the authority of Labé which had served as the capital of the whole of Middle Guinea since independence. (1958).³⁹

Whatever the truth, this pattern of discrimination against female contributors to Guinea's political history reemerged with Sékou Touré. As indicated in *His Master's Voice*,⁴⁰ Guinea's first president carried all his life the caustic stigma of a so-called genealogical illegitimacy believed to have been fabricated by arch-rival and half-brother Ismaël Touré according to whom, when his father Alfa Touré married Aminata Fadiga she was already pregnant with Sékou. The Guinean leader is said to have been afflicted all his life by this unsubstantiated allegation and deeply consternated over the death of his mother, a victim of the darkest side of polygamy, who is said to have died from complicated labor in an ill-equipped dispensary when Sékou was a pre-teen.

Popular rumor contends also that Sékou Touré unleashed an anti-Fulani political purge in the 1970s in part to avenge the memory of his mother who, according to local traditions, died in the hands of a Fulani physician (whose son is said to have died in Touré's Camp Boiro political prison). From this story some emphasize the impact upon Sékou Touré of the insult to his mother and the medical malpractice having caused his mother's untimely death. Others point to the fact that it is through this same woman that President Touré claimed genealogical affiliation to nineteenth-century warrior king Samory Touré whose ruthlessness he was said to have duplicated in his autocratic system of government in part responsible for Guinea's post-colonial crisis.

One last example of the kind is that of Baldet Ousmane, former Minister of Planning, one of the numerous Guineans arrested in the 1970s for alleged conspiracy to overthrow Touré's regime. In a masquerade of trial by the Revolutionary Commission, Baldet and sixty companions of misfortune were sentenced to death. Along with two fellow former ministers and a former police commissioner he was publicly hanged on January 25, 1971. In the atmosphere of mixed feelings that followed in Futa Jallon (Baldet Ousmane was one of the highest ranking Fulani officials in Touré's government at the time of his arrest), rumors from his native region of Tougué interpreted his tragic downfall as a consequence of his alleged lack of gratitude toward his mother. If nothing else, this simplistic explanation is indicative of a predisposition to resorting to religious fatalism in the face of complex problems including, in this particular case, political violation of human rights by the Touré regime.

Evoking these and related considerations, a number of the Fulani whom I interviewed in November and December 1993, expressed serious reserves toward the

name Guinea.⁴¹ In an equally simplistic analogy some went as far as to consider the renaming of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and Dahomey (now Benin) a major factor of these countries' recent national progress (whatever is meant by this). Other interviewees contrast Guinea's political, economic, and social crisis with her natural wealth and conclude by extrapolation that the feminine denomination *Ginè* is that of a blessed land inhabited by a cursed people. One interlocutor speculated, "our elders are also to blame for having often incorrectly formulated their blessing for the country by saying: '*Yo Allah nawru leydi ndin yeeso*' [literally, 'may god move the land forward' for 'God bless the country']." This interlocutor lamented: "Every time I see these long trains transport tons and tons of bauxite from the mines to the ports of Kamsar and Conakry for foreigners to take overseas, I see the country literally move forward, for it is our bauxite-rich earth that is moved away while we the people are left indigent."⁴²

In conclusion, it is useful to address the relationship between metaethics and applied ethics in the Fulani belief in benediction and malediction by examining the question: How does this socio-religious belief influence concretely the ways in which this society deals with the changes and challenges of the modern world? More specifically, does the belief galvanize or hinder the Fulani thrive for individual and collective success? The answer can be articulated as follows.

Firstly, there is a disturbing inconsistency between the useful concept of individual-society relationship epitomized in the "one for all and all for one" paradigm on the one hand, and the way in which it is generally applied to the complex workings of daily social interactions beyond the boundaries of the biological family on the other. Secondly and as a result of the preceding, through the belief in benediction and malediction, the Fulani show a propensity to fatalistic representation of success and failure. Thirdly, little attention is paid to long-term success and, as a result, careful planning for a distant future is generally reduced to multiplication through procreation, which by itself is becoming more and more problematic as massive urban exodus imposes new lifestyles and unanticipated restraints. Fourthly, the belief has engendered a generational conflict because of which younger Fulani more directly faced with, say the challenges of immigration in countries of totally different values like the United States and Western Europe, are often forced to make difficult decisions without reliable support from home.

However, the repercussions of the belief in benediction and malediction are not all negative. In fact, when the belief is sustained by a comprehensive approach of the challenges of life, like any similar ethical value, it can well inspire and guide the believer toward true and lasting success. This means redirecting the focus of the belief from satisfying the past to preparing the future. "One for all and all for one" should then mean that the family supports each member toward self-fulfillment instead of hindering him through massive parasite-like dependency, the kind of misinterpretation of African communal solidarity discussed earlier. The Fulani community and most Guineans for that matter are learning this imperative the hard way under the rapidly deteriorating economic conditions of a country that nature had

destined to prosperity. Hence, the question “Guinea, a blessed land or a cursed people?” seems to strike a different chord, especially among the newer generation of the Guinean Diaspora.

Whether this shall result in more positive changes in the general attitude of those who share the belief discussed herein remains to be seen. In the meantime, it is safe to close the discussion with René Descartes’ following analysis.

“[T]he conviction is ... to be held as testifying that the power of judging aright and of distinguishing Truth from Error, which is properly what is called Good Sense or Reason, is by nature equal in all men; and that the diversity of our opinions, consequently, does not arise from some being endowed with a larger share of Reason than others, but solely from this, that we conduct our thoughts along different ways, and do not fix our attention on the same objects. For to be possessed of a vigorous mind is not enough; the prime requisite is rightly to apply it. The greatest minds, as they are capable of the highest excellencies, are open likewise to the greatest aberrations; and those who travel very slowly may yet make far greater progress, provided they keep always to the straight road, than those who, while they run, forsake it.”⁴³

Notes

1. Boyer Pascal. *Religion Explained*. New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. 2.
2. Gibb Hamilton A. R. *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 177.
3. *Id.*, p. 176.
4. Bah, Tyerno Abdurrahmaan. *Gimi Pular*. Conakry: Imprimerie Nationale Patrice Lumumba, 1987, p. 4.
5. Hunwick, John O. *Sharia in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghili to the Questions of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 1985.
6. Mbiti, John S. *Introduction to African Religions* (Second Revised Edition). Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1991, p. 15.
7. Gibb, 1982:180
8. Futanke is a mixture of Fulani and Mandenka meaning the people of Futa. Futa is the generic term by which the Fulani refer to their major settlements and is generally followed by the original name of the locality or by a term denoting a particular geographical feature of the settlement. Examples: Futa Toro (in Senegal), Futa Macina (in Mali), Futa Jallon (in Guinea), and Futa Sokoto (in Nigeria).
9. Dewey, John “The Satisfying and the Valuable,” *Basic Problems of Philosophy* edited by D. J. Bronstein et al., New York: Prentice Hall, inc., 1947, p. 58.
10. Gibb, *Studies on the...*pp. 188-89
11. *Id.*, p. 189.
12. On Sufism see also Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
13. According to local traditions, the practical reason for this stay is to insure the bride’s recovery from the genital trauma resulting from the loss of virginity.
14. Like the word *karanden* for pupil Fulani contains a large number of terms and phrases borrowed from the Mandenka language (and from other languages as well for that matter).
15. Kane, Hamidou. *Ambiguous Adventure*. New York: Walker, 1963.
16. *Ngiri yalla* means “for the love of God” in the Wolof language. It is an expression generally used by beggars in Senegal.

17. Tempels, Placide "Bantu Philosophy," *African Philosophy* edited by P. English and K. M. Kalumba. Upper Saddle: Prentice Hall, 1993, p. 23.
18. *Id.*, p. 26.
19. Van Hook, Jay M. "Universalism and Particularism: African Philosophy or Philosophy of Africa? *African Philosophy*, Volume 12, Number 1, March 1999, pp. 11-19.
20. Cola nuts are also used as routine gifts especially to elderly people most of whom chew them for alertness. Hence the saying, "*ka gorohun ma yaari wo gerehun ma iwrataa dhon*" which translates, "send a cola nut anywhere and trouble shall never come to you from there." Cola nuts have long been a popular commodity in African trade and the Fulani consider wealth acquired from such trade as innately blessed. Blessings for smokers often go: "*Yo Allah tuttine tankoro o wuufine goro*," which means "May God substitute cola for tobacco in your mouth."
21. *Mokoba* comes from the Mandenka term *mooba* which means elder or respectable person.
22. The *Qur'anic* transliteration in this paper is that of M. A. Haleem Eliasii and the translation is that of Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall as they appear in *The Holly Qur'aan*. Lahore: Islamic Propagation Services, 1999.
23. In Fulani this repentance is called "*tuububuyee*" and is traditionally accomplished through *Qur'anic* exegesis sanctioned with the title *Tyerno*, *Tafsir* or *Sayku* (from the Arabic Sheikh), and through the pilgrimage to Mecca.
24. Turnbull, Colin M. *Man in Africa*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1977, p. 204.
25. Ndaw, Alassane. *La pensée africaine*. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983, p. 150.
26. *Id.*, p.150.
27. Geeto Bah, "*Gandal Aduna*," self-produced tape, Conakry, 1988.
28. Turnbull, *Man in Africa*, p. 203.
29. Fatou Diara, former diplomat, former political activist, former businesswoman, personal communication, Conakry, 1993.
30. Renard, John. *Responses to 101 Questions on Islam*. New York: Paulist Press, 1998, p. 41
31. *Id.*, p.42.
32. *Id.*, pp.41-2.
33. *Id.*, p.43.
34. Farah, C. *Islam* (Seventh Edition). New York: Barron's, 2003, pp. 119-120.
35. Devey, Muriel. *La Guinée*. Paris: Khatala, 1997, p. 9.
36. *Id.*, pp. 9-10.
37. "Communiqué de presse du parti Dyama sur la grève générale illimitée lancée par l'Inter Syndicale CNTG-USTG," kababachir.com, June 8, 2006.
38. Amadu Wury Barry, former photographer for the Presidential Press Bureau, former community leader, personal communication, Conakry, 1994.
39. Critics of General Lansana Conté's regime attribute this unilateral redistricting to what they view as a determination on the president's part to divide and weaken the political opposition two of whose major leaders are Fulani, and to bring Mamou into his electoral turf.
40. Camara, Mohamed Saliou. *His Master's Voice: Mass Communication and Single-Party Politics in Guinea under Sékou Touré*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2005, p. 42.
41. Interviews conducted in the heat of the presidential campaign of November and December 1993 during which ethnic animosity resurfaced throughout the country.
42. Thierno Moussa Diallo, tailor and opposition political activist, personal communication, Conakry, 1993. In fact, Guinea is credited with the world's second largest bauxite reserves and is currently the third largest producer of bauxites after Australia and Jamaica. However, observers argue that most of the revenue from this and other exports is lost in payments of foreign debts with the residual going into the personal accounts of government officials and state clients in foreign banks.
43. Descartes, René "Discourse of Method," *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, edited by d. J. Bronstein et al., New York: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1947, p. 194.