The Walking Qur'an

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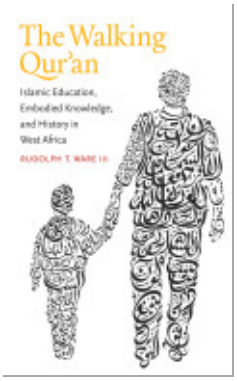

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INTRODUCTION

ISLAM, THE QUR'AN SCHOOL, AND THE AFRICANS

Emulate the blacks, for among them are three lords of the people of Paradise: Luqmān the Sage, the Negus, and Bilāl the Muezzin.
—Saying attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad

The Qur'an School

Believing Muslims hold that more than fourteen hundred years ago, a chain of recitation was initiated in a cave on Mt. Ḥirā', just outside of Mecca. The Angel Gabriel (Jibrīl) began reciting the Word of God to a man who had been chosen to bear the burden of prophethood. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdullah heard the command to recite and obeyed. He listened intently to the words that followed and repeated them faithfully as he had heard them. He taught this recitation (Qur'ān) first to his wife, Khadīja, and then to a close circle of people whose hearts were touched by the reading and submitted (*islām*) themselves to the service of the One God. Central to that service was the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), which soon became the principal way of giving the faith concrete form. This act engaged not only the tongue, the heart, and the intellect but the limbs as well. Muḥammad learned the movements by copying Jibrīl, who sometimes appeared to him in human form.[1] He passed this prayer on to those who had submitted to God (Muslims) by reenacting the motions and reciting the words. Nearly a millennium and a half later, small children in West Africa are forged into new living links in this chain of recitation every day. Many suffer hunger, thirst, and corporal punishment to make their fragile young bodies into worthy vessels for God's verbatim speech. They then mimic their teachers, bending and prostrating those bodies to reproduce the movements of the angel who Muslims believe taught humanity the Word of God and the most perfect form of worship.

This book explores one of the institutions most responsible for the transmission of the Qur'an and its embodiment in lived practice—the Qur'an school. In Qur'an schools, children memorize and recite the Holy Book of Islam and learn to read and write the Arabic script. They are also introduced to the basic precepts and practices of the religion. Formal schools of this kind

A Qurʾan school in Dakar, Senegal, from an early twentieth-century French postcard.

may date to the time of Islam's second caliph, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–44), who is sometimes credited with instituting the school's traditional weekend, which begins on Wednesday after the noon prayer and ends after the noon congregational prayer on Friday. Other reports suggest that children (like adults) memorized verses of the Qurʾan during the lifetime of the Prophet himself (570–632) perhaps with the aid of inscriptions on wooden tablets (*alwāḥ*) and the wide flat shoulder blades of camels and cattle.[2] It is not clear when the Qurʾan school first came to sub-Saharan West Africa, though it likely arrived with the early Muslims who crossed the Sahara in the eighth century. Qurʾan schooling has played a foundational role in building the Muslim societies of the African West for at least a thousand years. Nevertheless, it has been little studied and is often fundamentally misunderstood.

When they have drawn attention at all, West African Qurʾan schools have often been maligned. In the past century and a half Muslims and non-Muslims alike have increasingly found fault with them. Qurʾan teachers rarely explain the meaning of verses to children, focusing instead on recitation and memorization, and leading many observers to conclude that such schools are pedagogically backward. In most of these schools, however, instruction has extended beyond the rote memorization of Qurʾan. Practical

instruction in prayer, ablution, and the other daily elements of the faith has figured prominently. And though reading comprehension was almost never emphasized, developing literacy skills was. Students learn to read and write the Arabic script, even though the vocabulary of Qur'anic Arabic is foreign to them (as it is even for native speakers of Arabic). Some discursive teaching also takes place in Qur'an schools, though usually outside of formal hours of study. The Book has long been the sole object of formal study, with other kinds of teaching inscribed in the margins, so to speak.

Educational methods throughout the Muslim world have changed much over the past 150 years. In spite of (or perhaps because of) its antiquity, many societies have abandoned this style of learning and teaching the Qur'an. Secular education and new kinds of Islamic schools have come to prominence. Many—both within and without Islam—have come to look at Qur'an schools across a vast epistemological divide. They are separated less by *what* they think than by *how* they think. Seen from that distance they often appear strange, controversial, even *nonsensical*. A seemingly narrow focus on memorization is only the beginning; one finds in the schools of the African West a whole range of practices that depart from the modern educational ethos: Qur'an verses are absorbed into the body through osmosis; personal service, gifts, and veneration are lavished on teachers. Children are often subject to corporal punishment, and some work or beg for alms to contribute to their maintenance. These practices have led many to conclude that the schools are at best retrograde and at worst sites of child endangerment and abuse. The way that they "know" seems not to be "knowing" at all, and the way they teach seems literally to make no sense. This book seeks to make sense of Qur'an schooling and the philosophy of knowledge it represents and reproduces.

Understanding traditional Qur'an schooling on its own terms should hold inherent value. There are, after all, few more fundamental questions in religious studies than how the core scripture of a religion is learned and taught.[3] But this book is more than an institutional history of Qur'an schools in a particular time and place. One of its major premises is that Qur'an schooling can also serve as a window onto an Islamic way of knowing. After all, much can be learned about what people believe knowledge *is* by paying close attention to how they attempt to transmit it to one another.

Bodies of Islamic Scholarship

The major argument of this book is that classical Qur'an schooling and its contemporary manifestations in West Africa are based on what were once

broadly held Islamic ideals about educating the whole of a human being rather than the narrow transmission of discursive knowledge. Islamic knowledge is embodied knowledge. In these pages, I focus on the human body and the ways Muslims have used it to archive, transmit, decode, and actualize religious knowledge. Islamic studies has always been interested in *bodies of knowledge*, but the ones under consideration here are not only texts, libraries, and archives but also the physical forms of human beings.

Anthropologists and some historians have recently written much about "the body," but little of this literature thinks with—or thinks through—Islamic conceptions of it. In scholarly studies of Islam, *the text* still hangs over *the body* like a veil, hiding its role in shaping Islam. This is beginning to change; a recent special edition of a prominent French Islamic studies journal focused on the "the body and the sacred" in the Near East and featured a number of valuable contributions, not least a pathbreaking conceptual essay by Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen.[4] But even in this volume, none of the essays uses embodiment as a paradigm to understand *Islamic scholarship* in Africa or elsewhere. I use "scholarship" here to refer to the closely related phenomena of schooling and scholarly production. There are notable exceptions to this pattern of inattention: anthropologist Corrine Fortier has written a handful of extraordinary articles on knowledge transmission and the body in Mauritania.[5] Louis Brenner alluded to embodiment in captivating early works but moved toward the concept of an "esoteric episteme" to characterize knowledge in precolonial Islamic Africa.[6] And finally, Michael Lambek's work on the Comoros offered stunning explorations of Islamic knowledge and corporeality but tended to compare "the objectified textual knowledge characteristic of Islam . . . with the embodied knowledge of spirit possession."[7]

GENDER, POSSESSION, AND THE BODY

A number of recent studies have expanded such discussions of the body in Muslim societies by employing a gendered analysis of spirit possession cults (*zār*, *bori*, *holey*).[8] There is much to commend in such studies. They have opened up predominantly female spheres of social and ritual authority, given voice to women, and recovered precious histories of female resistance. What is problematic, however, is that they, too, construct a conceptual divide between textual Islam and corporeal spiritism. More troubling still is that most of these works carry powerful subtexts of African resistance to supposedly alien Islamic cultural intrusions, resulting in an inordinate focus on syncretism.[9] Robert Launay has cogently traced this focus on syncretism to

Africanist anthropology's unspoken discomfort with Islam as breaching the "authenticity" of its subjects.[10] *The field has been constructed as though one cannot be authentically African and authentically Muslim at the same time.*

This viewpoint is a problem, especially in overwhelmingly Muslim African societies where such cults are often largely derived from practices of jinn propitiation in the broader Islamic tradition.[11] The existence and characteristics of jinn are, after all, discussed quite prominently in the Qur'an. Practitioners and anthropologists alike are often unaware of the deep Islamic roots and classical textual precedents for some kinds of interactions with jinn. They usually have become part of recent struggles over authority, gender, and authenticity and come to be marked as "African" even when they came from Arabia centuries ago. Some things that look (to insiders and outsiders alike) like feminine forms of African animist beliefs were described in detail in texts written by medieval Arab men.[12] In other cases, specific spirits—or, less commonly, whole systems of ordering interactions with them—can be clearly identified with pre-Islamic African ritual practices but no longer belong to any coherent religious system. In this context, formal syncretism, which presupposes two distinct religions in interaction, is unhelpful.[13] Moreover, glossing such practices as "religion" in the first place does not quite fit. They are frequently better understood as forms of healing or practical reason.[14]

All of this has profound implications for how we understand embodiment in African Muslim societies. The composite picture looks like this:

Islam = Arab, masculine, public, textual, disembodied
Spirit possession = African, feminine, private, oral, embodied

In this catalog of Cartesian dichotomies laid atop each other, Islam is the realm of the mind (masculine, rational, and Semitic), while spirit possession is the realm of the body (feminine, emotional, and African). A handful of scholars have lamented the way this emergent cliché—African women's Islam—has overshadowed the struggles and achievements of women such as the nineteenth-century African scholar Nana Asma'u and others who have asserted their piety and religious authority through learning, teaching, and producing Islamic scholarship.[15] This volume highlights the achievements of a handful of such female scholars in Senegambia but also argues that ordinary Qur'an schooling—long available to most girls in West Africa—was designed to produce specific sorts of bodily sensibilities toward Islamic scholarship, some of them universal, others explicitly gendered.

SUFISM AND EMBODIMENT

Beyond the context of spirit possession, embodiment has begun to be pursued in more generative ways. Scott Kugle's recent study, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, asks fundamental questions about embodiment's role in Sufism, Islam's major mystical tradition. This provocative work charges western scholars and "Wahhabi" Muslims with a kind of collusion in defining Islam "as a uniquely 'disembodied' religion."[16] To redress this misrepresentation, he attends to specific limbs of the body—and the body as a whole—in Sufi literature. It is a welcome step, but the book treats corporeality in Islam as though it were associated narrowly with Sufism rather than with Islam (much less Islamic knowledge) more broadly. Another important recent work is Shahzad Bashir's *Sufi Bodies*, which uses medieval literature and art to explore the theme, but it too examines Sufism in isolation. Such recent works build on *Embodying Charisma*, a compilation with an insightful interpretive essay by editors Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu. These pioneering works produce much insight but focus tightly on Sufism, to the point of suggesting that Sufism is the realm of the body in an otherwise textual tradition. None of these authors considers embodiment as a central aspect of Islamic knowledge as a whole or looks at the body as a means of transmitting knowledge.

My approach is distinct. I see Sufism as only one (very important) discipline among others in the curriculum of advanced religious study. From the ninth to the nineteenth centuries, many—probably most—Muslim scholars took this view. I find that Sufism draws its bodily approach to knowledge from the broader Islamic ethic, not the other way around. The relationship between the spiritual guide (*murshid*) and the aspirant (*murīd*) is but one face of a broader master/disciple relationship in Islamic schooling. The bond between the transmitter of the Qurʾan and the receiver is the archetype of all such relationships.[17] Thus, my aim here is not to erase salient distinctions among, for example, Qurʾan schooling, Sufi experiences of gnosis, and spirit possession cults. I want to suggest instead that they are not distinguished but rather united by explicit attention to the body. Distinctions have to be sought in different styles of corporeality and the different meanings they index and produce.

BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE

One final body of scholarship is relevant to further situate my approach to embodiment. Works on memorization and textuality, mimesis and service, and sensibilities toward reading and listening have moved the study of traditional Islamic schooling and scholarship in exciting directions, lacking only a systematic exploration of the unifying framework, the approach to

knowledge, that connects—or even produces—such practices.[18] Attention to an ancient—and once widely shared—Islamic epistemology of embodiment helps to bring together these seemingly disparate threads. We have been missing a basic fact: the human being as a material reality and practices of corporeal remolding are essential for the classical epistemology of Islam to work.[19]

There is one final distinction I wish to make between *The Walking Qur'an* and the works discussed above: this book seeks less to employ theories drawn from academic scholarship to understand Qur'an schooling and more to uncover the *implicit theory of knowledge* in Qur'an schooling and see the past from within it. The resultant story is grounded in all of the conventions of academic history documentation and citation but attempts to see through the looking glass of epistemological history.[20] I am not so much writing an *analysis* of an African and Islamic approach to knowledge as I am writing a *history* through it.

The Walking Qur'an

It is reported that ʿĀ'isha, wife of the Prophet and one of the early Muslim community's most important intellectuals, was asked to describe the character of her deceased husband to a man who had not known Muḥammad in life. No stranger to the arts of rhetoric, she answered the man's question with a question: "Have you recited the Qur'an?" The man affirmed that he had. "Then you know his character," she replied; "his character was the Qur'an."

This hadith is often mentioned in sermons and speeches in contemporary Muslim societies. The manifest meaning is that the Prophet's comportment and behavior matched the revelation he had been chosen to bear. Often uttered in moralizing contexts, this hadith seems to be invoked to enjoin its hearers simply to study the Qur'an and emulate the normative Prophetic example (*sunna*). Beyond this, however, the hadith might be understood as an ontological statement about the Prophet himself. In this reading, the implication is not that the Prophet was merely the vessel for revelation or simply that his character reflected it but that God's Word had filled his inner being to the point that he physically embodied the Word. In a report sometimes cited alongside this one, ʿĀ'isha leaves little doubt that she wishes to evoke this more concrete form of embodying the Book, saying of her late husband, "He was the Qur'an walking on the earth."[21]

Remaking the children of Adam as living exemplars of the Qur'an was the basic aim behind Qur'an schooling. Human forms must be disciplined, shaped, and trained to become appropriate vessels for God's Word. Ap-

proaching Islamic knowledge as embodied—captured in the image of the walking Qurʾan—focuses our attention on all the ways in which knowledge practices in the classical tradition were and are corporeal. Corporeal knowledge practices such as the internalization and recitation of texts, or imitating and serving masters, helped bridge the gap between shaykh and disciple, inscribing Islam onto the bodies and comportment of believers. This kind of embodiment goes beyond the metaphorical meanings of the term in English—as exemplar or practical application—and encompasses meanings closer to incarnation, instantiation, and manifestation.

Human "bodies of knowledge" are made, not born. Islamic learning is brought into the world through concrete practices of corporal discipline, corporeal knowledge transmission, and the deeds of embodied agents. Knowledge in Islam does not abide in texts; it lives in people.[22] From this viewpoint, some of the *non-sense* of the Qurʾan school may make sense after all. If the goal was not so much to impart discursive knowledge as to transform a vile lump of flesh into God's living Word, then remolding the body was essential.[23] Disciplining the limbs and the appetites created certain kinds of bodies and sensibilities. Hunger and thirst, corporal punishment and mimesis, love and service helped inscribe the Book onto the body and being of a child. The usual Arabic noun for one who has memorized the Qurʾan is *hāfiẓ*, which communicates a sense of carrying the Book within the self. The *hāfiẓ* is the guardian, protector, and *keeper* of the word of God. This sense of physical porterage that is implicit in *hifẓ* is explicit in *ḥaml* (carrying), another word used to refer to bearing the Qurʾan in classical texts. Those who internalize the Qurʾan carry and safeguard the Revelation inside their very being.[24] In my research with Senegambian men and women who had memorized the Book in Qurʾan schools, they spoke of it in these terms, often using the Wolof verb *yor* (to hold or possess). They possessed the Qurʾan within themselves, as a kind of inalienable spiritual good.

People who spent years learning the Book in this way frequently tied their educational experience to a propensity for the rigorous and natural practice of Islam. This intimate relationship with the Book facilitated living the religion on a daily basis. This idea elucidates another shade of meaning in embodiment: to embody Islamic knowledge is to actualize it, to make it concrete through deeds. Classical texts typically insist on the inseparability of *ʿilm* (knowledge) and *ʿamal* (deeds, practice, action). Knowledge needs to be materialized in concrete form in the world to be of any value. The goal of Qurʾan schooling is not just to teach the Book but also to fill children with the Word of God, allowing them to embody the Prophetic example.

That one could embody the Book is a notion deeply rooted in the Muslim societies of West Africa. This understanding is properly epistemological rather than ideological and thus is not often explicitly discussed, but subtle traces of it are everywhere. According to the family histories of southwestern Saharan clerical lineages, one famous precolonial female scholar made the equation explicit, saying, "I am the ninth of the nine Books of my family; meaning—and God is best informed of the truth—that she was the ninth, among the people of her family, knowing [by heart] the Qurʾan."[25] And among the famous late-eighteenth-century clerics of the Senegal River Valley was "Ceerno Siise Salamata, who was called Ceerno Siise 'Deereeji.' Deereeji means 'the papers of the Book.'"[26]

Settings, Stakes, and Sources

A major premise of this book is that much of the West African past can be understood as the historical expression of an epistemology—a way of conceiving, composing, and constituting knowledge. The West Africa to which I refer here is a space with rough edges. For Africanist historians, this usually means sub-Saharan Africa, west of Lake Chad and extending to the south to encompass Cameroon. I use it in this sense, though for me, West Africa explicitly includes the southwestern Sahara as well. I attend to this broader West Africa mostly as a way of crafting a regional macrohistory of Islamic learning and embodiment, but the primary historical setting I explore is a smaller subregion within this broader area: Senegambia.

The area roughly bounded by the Senegal and Gambia River Valleys (Senegal, Gambia, and Mauritania as well as parts of Guinea and Mali) shares in a broader regional tradition of Qurʾan schooling that continues to thrive over truly vast areas of the African continent. Throughout West Africa, many (perhaps most) children who learn the Qurʾan still do so seated on the ground, with their legs folded under them in the seated position (*jalsa*) of the ritual prayer. They receive their lessons on wooden tablets (*alwāḥ*) laid across their laps and run their fingers across the boards to help them recall the words. Most rock rhythmically as they recite, using their bodies as a pianist would use a metronome. Teachers or older students inscribe the verses on the children's tablets using reed pens and ink made from charcoal or the soot from cooking pots. Then they watch and listen carefully, frequently brandishing short lashes or canes to remind the learners to pay attention and avoid mistakes in recitation.

The physical material in the Qurʾan school is full of symbolic meaning. The first verses that Muḥammad learned from Jibrīl that day on Mt. Ḥirāʾ

spoke of God teaching humanity "*that which it knew not*" by means of "*the Pen*" (Q 96:1–5). The reed pen of the Qurʾan school stands in for the Pen of Power. The wooden tablets are explicitly likened to the tablets on which Mūsā (Moses) received the commandments that he carried to the children of Israel. And when the lesson is memorized, students often wash the boards and then drink the water, bringing the Word into their bodies as the Qurʾan was poured into Muḥammad, the Walking Qurʾan.

This kind of schooling, which I detail in chapter 1, can be found in strikingly similar forms from Senegal to the Sudan, from Dakar to Darfur, a distance from east to west of three thousand miles.[27] This schooling tradition also extends from the Saharan fringes to the equatorial forests of the Ivory Coast and Cameroon, spanning between five hundred and seven hundred miles north to south. Until the early years of the twentieth century, it was clearly the paradigmatic approach to schooling in Northwest Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), and there are compelling reasons to believe that Egypt, especially southern Egypt, also shared in this approach to schooling.[28] That tradition is not thriving today north of the Sahara; however, for nearly a millennium, Muslim societies on both sides of the desert as well as those within it were part of a single shared space of Islamic learning. I use the term "African West" to evoke this broader ecumen of Islamic learning that once traversed racial and spatial boundaries separating "White Africa" from "Black Africa," boundaries that scholars are now loath to cross.

STAKES AND SOURCES

This study is an interdisciplinary inquiry into the epistemology and history of Senegambian Qurʾan schooling written by a historian of Africa. I argue that a focus on the body was characteristic of the approach to Islamic knowledge in this region, and I link this to a more ambitious claim, one that no single study could definitively *prove*. I argue that while specific materials and techniques of instruction may have differed in other parts of the Muslim world, this embodied approach to knowledge was once paradigmatic throughout the Muslim world.

This book results from more than a decade of historical research and has been strongly shaped by engagements with anthropological approaches to Africa and Islam, on the one hand, and the textualist tradition of Islamic studies, on the other. The book began with eighteen months of field research in Senegal in 2001–2 that included significant oral and archival components. The archival research was conducted primarily at the National Archives of Senegal as well as in collections at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire

(IFAN). The former offered a wealth of documentation on Islamic education of various sorts, while the latter provided a number of valuable sources, but none more important than the Cahiers William Ponty, take-home examination notebooks containing essays written by students at the École Normale William Ponty in the 1930s and early 1940s.[29] The Ponty collection includes more than a dozen autobiographical accounts of personal experiences written by former students in the Qur'an schools. The essays range between twenty and one hundred pages in length and total more than five hundred pages of firsthand accounts of life in Senegambian Qur'an schools in the late 1920s and 1930s.[30] An unexpected but priceless find, the Cahiers offer a rare resource for understanding the practical mechanics, social history, and struggles over the meanings of Qur'an schooling in colonial French West Africa during the interwar period.

Much of that initial research was focused on oral history. In 2001–2 I conducted formal interviews with more than forty former Qur'an school students (listed in the bibliography).[31] I conducted those interviews without an interpreter or an assistant. All were in Wolof, except for three interviews with interlocutors who were more comfortable in French. Two interviews took place in Dakar, while the rest were conducted in Tivaouane and Touba, either within the city limits or in their immediate hinterlands. Both are major centers of spiritual authority in Senegal's two largest Sufi orders, the Tijāniyya and the Murīdiyya, respectively. My interlocutors spoke of experiences of Islamic education in the Wolof heartlands from the 1930s until 2002, though most had begun their Qur'an studies between 1950 and 1970.

I supplemented these sources with other kinds of first-person accounts of life inside the schools in the colonial and postcolonial periods, including transcribed field notes from French social scientists as well as published and unpublished autobiographical narratives. I also considered a handful of fictional sources, especially biographical and autobiographical novels, on Islamic schooling. Like the oral history interviews and take-home exam essays, these accounts were useful for understanding representations of Qur'an schooling. Unlike these other sources, they are not necessarily meant to represent things that actually happened. But sometimes—especially in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's extraordinary novel, *Ambiguous Adventure*—they conveyed *truths* deeper than mere *facts*.

After that initial historical research on Senegal in the twentieth century, I expanded my approach over the ensuing decade. I began putting my materials in dialogue with a range of classical and medieval textual sources on Islamic education as well as new French and British archival sources, trav-

elers' accounts, and other sources on the deeper past and on a broader West Africa. At the same time, I also began to take a more explicitly anthropological approach to my topic. Hours of informal discussions about Islamic education with friends, colleagues, and neighbors had informed my early publications, but over the years, participant observation in Senegalese Muslim social and intellectual life has become increasingly central to many of the arguments in this book.

In a sense this was perhaps inevitable: I am a practicing African American Muslim; I have spoken fluent French since 1996 and Wolof since 1999; and I have lived, researched, and raised my children in Senegambia for extended periods of time. I do not claim to be a practicing ethnographer. My graduate training was primarily in African history, though I received formal training in the literature and methods of anthropology. But in this work I do occasionally make claims based on my direct observations and personal experiences either during my intensive research in 2001–2 or in fifteen additional months of research trips to Fuuta Tooro, Kaolack, Banjul, Dakar, and elsewhere during shorter trips to Senegal, Mauritania, and Gambia in 1996, 1999, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2013.

Sayings, Hadith, and Sunna

Each chapter of this book begins with an epigraph containing a *saying* attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad. Though this book centers on embodiment, I do not ignore the power of discourse. For Muslims, the Prophet was not only the Walking Qur'an but a walking exegesis (*tafsīr*).[32] His normative example (*sunna*)—comprised of both his deeds and his words—explained the Book and how to live it. So it is fitting to use sayings attributed to him as a source of insight and as a way of summarizing crucial points, and they are used this way in much Muslim life and scholarship. For many (perhaps most) modern Muslims, "sunna" refers exclusively to the normative example of the Prophet. But many West African intellectuals continue to use the more expansive notion of sunna that obtained in early Islam; they also take the *ʿamal* (deeds) of the Prophet's companions as a guide to living Islam. A new kind of scripturalism, usually associated with Salafism and Wahhabism (but also Orientalism), appears to trust the *salaf* (forebears) as little more than reporters. Though some reformists have taken their name (*salafī*), few have taken their practice as a normative source for living Islam, even though they knew the Prophet much more intimately than later generations and could model themselves on his example.

My experience with West African scholars and my historian's training have

made me wary of this kind of scripturalism. It usually narrows discussion of Islamic values to texts and validates reformist claims to "true Islam."[33] This can be seen even at the level of names. *Salafī* is arguably used less frequently by scripturalists than it once was. Now, many often claim only to be Sunni, as if they are the only followers of the sunna. This usage defies that word's history, since it conventionally came to refer to followers of the four Sunni legal schools (*madhāhib*). New "Sunnis" usually rigidly oppose the classical legal schools. Despite their suspicion of the *madhāhib*, these "Sunnis" often either implicitly or explicitly associate themselves with the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, ostensibly because it was a formative legal influence on Muḥammad b. ʿAbdul-Wahhāb, the founder of Wahhabism. Some, however, seem to admire it because they describe it as more strict and, in a puzzling leap of fundamentalist logic, therefore more orthodox.

Some Salafis now call themselves *Ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa*, People of the Sunna and the Community, appropriating the term used in early Islam to distinguish the Sunni community from Shiites and others. Some "People of the Sunna" literally refer to themselves as *Ahl al-ḥadīth*, People of Hadith, even though the two are radically different things. Hadith is only a single—albeit very important—source for knowing the sunna. Reformists usually access hadith only in the form of texts reduced to writing, as opposed to oral transmissions from teachers with accompanying explanations and demonstrations. Many early Muslim scholars did not accept hadith transmitted only in writing as authoritative at all. Person-to-person transmission was required. In written form, hadith is an impoverished and incomplete source of knowledge of sunna. The latter is best understood as an abstract concept, not knowable in its entirety. Hadith reports, conversely, are—at least in principle—finite and knowable. Many Muslims today (and some in the past) treat hadith as scripture, but they are best understood as historical traces of normative practice that can also be known through chains of embodied transmission. In chapter 1, I return to the important implications of this distinction for understanding classical ways of knowing in Islam.

"EMULATE THE BLACKS"

This chapter's Prophetic dictum is "Emulate the blacks, for among them are three lords of the people of Paradise, Luqmān the Sage, the Negus [Emperor of Abyssinia], and Bilāl the Muezzin." The first layer of meaning I wish to evoke here is simple. If the Prophet characterized black people as exemplars of knowledge, justice, and piety in Islam, then it is about time for Western scholarship to do so as well. More precisely, I mean to suggest that

Islamic and African studies need to take African Muslims seriously as bearers and interpreters of forms of Islamic knowledge and embodied practice with powerful claims to scriptural authority and Prophetic precedent.

West Africa has drawn relatively little attention from scholars interested in the history of Islamic knowledge. Scholarly studies of Islam here—as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa—turn on binary oppositions of syncretism and orthodoxy: "African Islam" or "Islam in Africa."[34] The former consists of a complex including Sufism, divination, spirit possession, and talismanic uses of the Qurʾan. Though controversial to some observers, all of these practices are ancient in Islam and are present in every Muslim society in the world. "Islam in Africa," conversely, is often synonymous with Salafi, Wahhabi, and Islamist influences. It consists of "reform," which entails the promotion of modernized schooling, literalist approaches to texts, Arab cultural mores, and a distrust of all forms of esotericism. Western scholars and many modern Muslims often uncritically accord Islamic orthodoxy and textual legitimacy to these "reformists," who, paradoxically given their reverence for scripture, have often opposed traditional Qurʾan schooling.

Since the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of Muslims and non-Muslims have come to portray the Qurʾan school and its epistemology as backward. In itself this is misleading but not surprising: modernist discourse often disparages "traditional" thought in such terms. The epistemology explored in this book, I maintain, did seek to create agents of change, and it achieved this goal through a focus on reproducing the Word of God in living human beings. Though much attention was paid to fidelity, pedigree, and authority, the goal of what I call the "classical" approach to Islamic education was always dynamic. The careful, painstaking, and even tedious transmission of the Qurʾan as a line of recitation and interpretation was not intended simply to preserve the text and its integrity—any written copy would have done this. It was designed instead to inculcate Islamic sensibilities in human beings, to instill the character of the Qurʾan within living agents. It sought to cultivate embodied human beings who would be able to draw on their intimate knowledge of the Qurʾan and its intrinsic power as God's verbatim speech to shape and reshape the world around them in the face of any contingency. *The Walking Qurʾan is not only the Qurʾan embodied but also the Qurʾan in action.*

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, text-minded scholars—particularly Salafi intellectuals, colonial administrators, and even many academic scholars of Islam—have caricatured this traditional approach. They have represented it as obscurantist, superstitious, and intellectually stulti-

fying. Many observers saw the supposed decline of Islamic civilization and the ascent of the West as rooted in the failure of old-fashioned Islamic education. They suggested—implicitly or explicitly—that to reach (or regain) the heights of progress, Muslims ought to reform or discard their ways of learning and teaching in favor of others. These new pedagogies and the epistemology that girds them swept across the Muslim world, transforming knowledge practices. Most of this change in Muslim ways of knowing occurred only in the past century. This book will not explicitly focus much on those changes; countless studies already do so. Proponents of these Islamic novelties receive far more attention than the traditional Islam they strenuously claim to replace. This book aspires to redress that imbalance.

Politics, Ideology, and Epistemology

Confrontations between Salafis and more traditionally inclined Muslims are often analyzed as political—struggles over power, authority, and access to material resources. They are also frequently studied as ideological quarrels. In such studies, intellectual and doctrinal disputes lie at the heart of debates over the correct content of Muslim identity and Islamic practice. Power and ideology are certainly at play in all such conflicts, but they may not explain them as well as we think. Inasmuch as this study attends to reformism at all, I analyze such clashes as primarily epistemological in nature—rooted in basic, usually unarticulated, differences in how such groups define what it means to know.[35]

Attending to epistemology as a root cause of conflict highlights the importance of schooling, and attention to modern Muslim schools immediately reveals how closely they are based on European models. Curiously, in spite of the novelty and extrinsic origins of such schools, many scholars now see these schools' approaches to knowledge as emerging from pristine Islamic sources in the distant past; they light the road to the true religion of the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (righteous forebears). But how meaning is made in contemporary Salafism, Wahhabism, and Islamism owes as much to Enlightenment rationalism as to the scholarly tradition of Islam. Proclaiming Islamic purity is essential to their ideologies, but their understandings of what knowledge *is* are plainly hybrid constructs, born of colonial encounter. Much contemporary Islamic discourse, however interested in classical texts, conceives, constitutes, and transmits knowledge in ways that differ radically from those known by earlier Muslim intellectuals.

Contemporary Salafis, Wahhabis, and Islamists often espouse a confrontational and oppositional stance vis-à-vis the West, but Western rationalisms

and positivisms are inscribed at every level of their approaches to knowledge. Cheikh Hamidou Kane's exquisite novel on the colonial clash between occidental modernity and the traditions of Muslim Africans had a poetic way of expressing this. The protagonist in *Ambiguous Adventure*, Samba Diallo, is a former Qur'an school student who leaves the old ways of knowing, goes to a state school, and finally pursues advanced studies at a European university. The new knowledge changes him irrevocably, and he cannot go back to the old ways. He loves the West, but the West does not love him. He becomes embittered, and in one of the novel's most memorable passages, Diallo says, "The most poisonous hatreds are those which are born out of old loves."[36]

ISLAM INSTRUMENTALIZED?

In many parts of the Muslim world, modern state schools were the first wave of a sea change that slowly washed away the classical style of Qur'an schooling. Islamic education was incorporated into the bureaucratic structures of ambitiously intrusive modern states.[37] In Gregory Starrett's *Putting Islam to Work*, both the title and the key analytical term—"functionalization"—capture the ways in which institutions of Islamic education in Egypt were instrumentalized over the course of the twentieth century: "The importation to Egypt of European-style mass schooling . . . took place in part through the appropriation of indigenous Qur'anic schools for public use. This is where we can see how the process of functionalization, first aimed at the physical institutions in which formal religious socialization occurred, began to transform people's ideas about the subject matter itself."[38] In most such schools—and in the private schools that mirrored them—Islam became one subject among many, an objectified, depersonalized topic of study. Post-Enlightenment ideas about education and knowledge transmission dramatically altered the face of Islamic schooling in many parts of the Muslim world. This was most dramatically the case in many of the predominantly Arab countries, places often presumed by a sort of racial alchemy to preserve the essence of Islam.

For a variety of reasons that I explore mainly in chapters 4 and 5, Qur'an schooling was never functionalized in quite this way in francophone West Africa. This is but one of the reasons that West Africa continues to preserve the original form of Qur'an schooling and its attendant corporeal dispositions toward knowledge. Other reasons are rooted in deeper pasts. Chapter 2 shows that in many ways, Qur'an schooling was the key public symbol of Muslim identity in West Africa from at least the fourteenth century. Moreover, the specific social and (a)political position of the West African clerisy

(which developed by about 1000) made their embodying of Islam particularly salient. The fact that clerical communities were seen as safe havens during the Atlantic era (explored in chapter 3) reinforced their societal import. In short, the roots of Senegambian attachments to Qur'an schooling run deep. Though it has faced many challenges since the 1850s, Qur'an schooling has survived into the twenty-first century as the basic institution of religious socialization for millions of West African children. In the pages of this book, I explore and historicize an argument that was expressed to me in dozens of ways during my research in Senegambia: We in West Africa have held on to something worth keeping, something that many in the Muslim world have abandoned, the classical Qur'an school.[39]

Invisible Muslims

This book seeks to engage with and foster dialogue between two main interdisciplinary audiences: Islamic and African studies. For demographic reasons alone, such a dialogue should be an urgent matter, yet the study of Islamic religious culture in Africa is strangely marginal to both fields. Africa's population is, by conservative estimates, well over 40 percent Muslim, and some observers maintain that Africa is likely the only continent with a Muslim majority. According to recent figures published by the Pew Research Center, at least 27 percent of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims live in Africa, and, contrary to what one might imagine, far more of these people live south of the desert than north of it. Roughly one-tenth of the world's Muslims (164 million) live in North Africa, while more than one-sixth of the world's Muslim population (273 million) lives south of the Sahara. The proportion of sub-Saharan Muslims is expected to grow dramatically in the next twenty years, both in comparison to the non-Muslim population of Africa and as a percentage of the global Muslim population. "Black Africa"—as it is still sometimes called—already has more Muslims than does Pakistan or Indonesia, the countries that currently have the world's largest Muslim populations.[40]

Because of the close association between Arabs and Islam, casual observers may not be aware that there are far more sub-Saharan African Muslims than Arabs, who make up a relatively small proportion of the population of the Muslim world. For example, Sudan has as many Muslims as do Syria, Jordan, and Palestine combined. Defining Arabs geographically, there are just over 60 million Muslims living in Arabia proper; in contrast, Nigeria alone has at least 75 million Muslims. In fact, Nigeria is probably home to more Muslims than Iran, and Ethiopia has at least as many Muslims as Iraq does.[41]

Islam in Africa, ca. 2010. Countries are shaded if they meet 5%, 20%, or 50% thresholds in either Pew Research's published study of the global Muslim population or the CIA World Factbook for 2013.

In Nigeria, Muslims are probably a slight majority—and certainly a plurality—in a population that includes many Christians and a smaller number of practitioners of traditional African religions. Similarly, in Ethiopia, Muslims are (at the very least) a large minority in a religiously diverse population. But these 273 million African Muslims are not always—or even usually—islands of Islam in seas of religious pluralism. Muslims comprise more than 98 percent of the population in such widely separated countries as Niger and Somalia, narrowly outpacing both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (each with 97 percent) in this regard. Senegal has a higher percentage of Muslims (96 percent) than either Egypt or Syria (95 percent and 93 percent, respectively).

Examples could be multiplied. Even cursory attention to the magnitude of the Muslim presence in Africa is revealing, indicating that those of us inter-

ested in Islam ought to be paying more attention to sub-Saharan Africa than we usually do. If one were to walk from Africa's westernmost point in Senegal to its easternmost point in Somalia, one would cut across a swath of predominantly—almost entirely—Muslim societies that have been part of the global community of Islam for roughly one thousand years. Going down the East African coast, African Muslims have lived on the coasts and offshore islands of Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique for at least twelve centuries.[42] From these ancient centers of Muslim civilization in sub-Saharan Africa, the religion has spread—especially in the past two centuries—implanting significant Muslim minority populations in virtually every nation on the continent.

ISLAM NOIR

Those of us interested in Islam ignore Africa at our own risk, and vice versa. By reason of their sheer demographic weight, African Muslims need to figure more prominently in both African and Islamic studies. But beyond the mere numbers, Islamicists can learn lessons from the particular forms of Muslim thought and practice found in Africa. This perspective has gained little ground as a consequence of the ways in which Islamic religious culture in Africa has been understood. Again, the study of sub-Saharan African Muslims has usually been framed either as "Islam in Africa," a narrative in which Islam is an alien, external force, or as "African Islam," which posits that Islamic practices in "Black African" societies are by definition exotic and heterodox.

Historians of Africa as well as other parts of the Muslim world will hear echoes of colonial racial assumptions in this discourse. Many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century colonial authorities and "Orientalists" (often one and the same) thought of Islam as the property and proper expression of the Arab genius. Paul Marty, director of the Office of Muslim Affairs in early-twentieth-century French West Africa, exemplified both the tendency to conflate administrative and intellectual functions and the habit of equating race with religion. In the francophone world, he was the individual most responsible for shaping the governance of African Muslims and their academic representation. He was not kind to non-Arabs: "As Islam distances itself from its cradle it becomes increasingly deformed. Islamic confessions, be they Malaysian or Chinese, Berber or Negro, are no more than vulgar forgeries of the religion and state of the sublime Qur'an."[43] Serving from 1912 to 1921 as the director of the Office of Muslim Affairs, he published no fewer than twenty-five hundred pages of studies, casting a long shadow

of racialized analysis over the field.[44] In less than a decade, Marty worked his way through all of French West Africa documenting Islam Noir, a recently arrived, second-rate, poorly understood, syncretistic, and therefore nonthreatening brand of Islam.

Some of the scholarship was of objectively poor caliber. In an influential report on Qur'an schooling, for example, Marty claimed that the alphabet was taught "in the following order which is classic and invariable, *alif*, *baa*, *taa*, *tha*."[45] In fact this manner of teaching the alphabet, which is an ordering system based on the shapes of the letters, was rarely if ever used in Senegalese schools of the time. Marty seems to have thought this alphabet, used in dictionaries and in his training as an Arabic interpreter, was the only way of learning the Arabic letters. The *abjad*, which is the oldest way of ordering the Arabic alphabet (as well as the other Semitic alphabets), was much more widely known in Senegal. More common still was teaching children the letters of the alphabet in the order in which they were encountered during memorization.[46]

Paul Marty did not know the alphabet, but he quickly gained recognition as an academic authority on Muslim schooling and every other aspect of West African Islam. His ascent was rapid but not smooth. In 1913, the *Revue du Monde Musulman* was urged by no less a figure than William Ponty, the governor-general of French West Africa, to publish Marty's first study, on Senegal's Murīdiyya Sufi order. Marty was a high-ranking official but not a trained scholar. The editors of the journal disavowed some of his findings, especially Marty's conclusion that the Murīdiyya "must be considered a sort of new religion born from Islam."[47] In their foreword, they questioned his scholarly credentials: "This is an administrative report, addressed to the colonial authority. . . . It was thus necessary that M. Marty deal with subjects which, although well known to specialists in Islamology, might be less so to functionaries specializing in other competencies."[48] These early reservations were eventually overcome, however, and Marty's later work was frequently published in the *Revue*. Marty's work appeared during the heyday of European scientific racism, and he overcame his lack of credentials by routinely appealing to the logic of race. He was an artful and humorous racist, shrewdly tapping deeply held stereotypes of black civilizational and intellectual inferiority to make his administrative reports more persuasive. His ideas about the religious deficiencies of African Muslims and his relentless presentation of their biological (or perhaps bodily) predisposition to animism have cast a long shadow over the study of Islam in Africa.

***Àlluwas* by Shaykhuna Mbakke. From right to left, the first board shows the first verses taught to children, *al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening), *al-Ikhlāṣ* (Sincerity), *al-Falaq* (Daybreak), and *al-Nās* (Humanity). The second board shows the *abjad* alphabet, along with a beginning lesson on the vowels needed to recite the Qur'an according to the reading of Warsh (728–813). Photograph by Kaaronica Evans-Ware.**

SYNCRETISM AND ISLAMS

Marty attacked the orthodoxy of black Muslims in ways that were extreme but were hardly isolated. By the time he left French West Africa in 1921, the die was cast. Islam Noir (which I revisit in Chapter 4) had become a matter of administrative and intellectual orthodoxy in francophone circles. Colonial administrators and scholars in British Africa thought and acted along similar lines, and together their racialized framing of African Islam has had

lasting consequences, outlined here by Rüdiger Seesemann: "In the works of French and British 'scholar-administrators' such as Paul Marty and Harold Ingrams, and of later academics, occasionally with a missionary background, such as Vincent Monteil and John Spencer Trimingham, there is an obvious conflation of the categories religion and race. 'African Islam,' or Islam Noir in the French parlance, has since become the common denominator in both academic and nonacademic discourse about Islam in Africa, conveying the image of an essentially syncretistic and superstitious, and in any case adulterated, version of Islam."[49]

In another important corrective, David Robinson has sought to transcend the ideological limits of the Islam in Africa/African Islam dyad with a discussion of the contingent processes through which African societies adopted Islam (the Islamization of Africa) and made it their own (Africanization of Islam). He adds that these processes do not differ from similar processes elsewhere in the Muslim world: "There is *nothing* pejorative about the africanization of Islam. . . . There *is* something pejorative about the way that European and many Mediterranean-based Muslims have perceived 'African Islam' and the africanization of Islam."[50] Robinson productively situates the negotiation of Islamic religious culture in a narrative of adoption and adaptation.[51]

We can all agree that processes of negotiation take place within all Muslim societies between local cultic and cultural legacies and a broader Islamic religious culture. I would, however, amplify his point about the way that Islamic Africa is exoticized and marginalized. For many observers, the following equations seem to be implicitly accepted:

African religious culture + Islam = syncretism
Arab religious culture + Islam = Islam

Robinson's intervention is valuable, but exploring the dynamics of "Africanization" and "Islamization" is still a discussion of syncretism and assimilation. Such framings have subtle spatial and normative assumptions hidden within them and may not take us so far away from imperialist Orientalism after all. They emerge from sturdy old civilizational models of diffusion and reception. When applied to Islam, they tend to carry the implicit (or explicit) notion that the center's claims on normative authority are spatially and structurally immutable.[52] In other words, Arab Muslims are in positions of perpetual tutelage over non-Arabs. From within a framework of syncretism and assimilation, it is difficult for the "periphery" to provide meaningful insights on the "center."

Framed somewhat differently, this is the discourse of islams wherein there are manifold local forms that constitute the organic traditions of Muslim life. These are the sites within which *Islam* (with a capital "I") is negotiated and domesticated.[53] Again, such a discourse allows little room for places beyond the so-called Islamic heartlands to contribute much to *Islam*. At its best, the story of *islams* functions as an antiessentialist and empowering narrative of cultural relativity and contextual specificity, but embedded within it are powerful notions of center and periphery. Stories of *islams* all too often become the story of *Islam* with local color. Africa, India, Indonesia, Malaysia—these are places that receive *Islam* and transmute it into *islams*. They adopt and adapt Islamic religious culture. From within this metanarrative, it is very difficult (perhaps impossible) to claim that a history of Muslim religious culture in West Africa could provide revealing insights about the history of knowledge in *Islam*. Yet a main goal of this book is to do just that; *its core contribution to Islamic studies is to highlight and historicize an embodied approach to knowledge that was once paradigmatic but now thrives in few Muslim societies*. It is ironic—considering the racial and spatial logics at work—that many of these societies are far from Arabia in the African West.

"LOOK AFTER THE BLACKS?"

This brings us back to this introduction's epigraph. Robinson's reference to the pejorative perceptions of Africans held by "Mediterranean-based Muslims" offers an important reminder: white colonialists were not alone in carrying condescending ideas about blacks. The treatment of this hadith in medieval and early modern Arabic-language works on slavery, blackness, or "the curse of Ham" reflects this phenomenon. In some of these writings, the word *ittakhādhū*, which I have translated as "emulate," received quite a different meaning. Some authors argued that what the Prophet meant by this word was "look after" the blacks, a paternalistic gloss also used by a prominent Western scholar to translate this hadith.[54] Zachary Wright, in his exemplary dissertation on the community of West African Sufi Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niass, caught this mistranslation and noted that "Hans Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* contains no such meaning for the verb in question, but rather includes: 'to take on, to assume, to adopt, to imitate, to affect,' etc."[55]

This is just another small reminder that antiblack racism has its own history within Muslim societies. Bernard Lewis's treatment, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, is riddled with problems of poor documentation, blatant Islamophobia, and a naked attempt to draw parallels between the "Occi-

dental" and "Oriental" slave trades. It treats the history of Eastern racism with the clear aim of establishing moral equivalencies with the racism of the West.[56] It also suggests, like many studies, that slavery was an indelible part of Islam. In all these respects, Lewis's work participates in an Orientalist tradition going back to the nineteenth century.[57] Such reactionary efforts are intellectually impoverished and cannot be maintained; they were developed to alleviate European guilt over the Atlantic slave trade, demonize Islam, and justify colonial conquests in Asia and Africa. But no postmodern critique of Orientalism is capable of erasing the objective fact that many Muslims have held Africans in contempt. Nor can any revisionist history erase the fact of extensive slaving and slave trade in the lands of the caliphate. The conquests of the first Muslim century brought people of all colors and national origins into slavery at the hands of Muslims, and Arab ethnic chauvinism reached heights that are hard to fully grasp today.

This book is not the place to treat the problem of "race" and slavery in Islam exhaustively, but unresolved issues of skin color and slavery in Islamic societies have played a major role in assaults on the orthodoxy and intellectual achievements of African Muslims.[58] Many Senegalese Muslims consider Arab racism more virulent than its European cousin, claiming that "white" Mauritians (*bayḍān*) are more likely to use *ʿabd* (slave) to refer to a black person than a French person is to use the word *nègre*. The French term for "Negro" is a precise equivalent for *ʿabd* because it collapses "black" and "slave" into a single term.[59] The Senegalese Muslims with whom I spent time were well aware of the stereotypical perceptions of their supposedly syncretistic religiosity, both among Arab Muslims and among some presumptuously judgmental European and American non-Muslims. I raise these reflections on racialized perceptions of African Muslims only to historicize and transcend them.[60] To that end, I propose three partly rhetorical questions: What possible reason would the Prophet Muḥammad have had to see blacks in a condescending and paternalistic way? What evidence do we have that he did see blacks in this fashion? And finally, if "look after" the blacks was the meaning he wished to convey, then why use a word that usually means "emulate"?

During my research stays in Senegambia, members of the Murīdiyya Sufi order sometimes pointed out that both the Qurʾan and the Prophet Muḥammad were highly critical of Arabs. Within the circles of the Murīdiyya, a particular pride is attached to the idea that the founder of the order, Amadu Bamba Mbakke (d. 1927), was a black man. He did not derive his Sufi legitimacy from the Qādiriyya or the Tijāniyya, the two other major orders in

Senegambia, which are named for a medieval saint from Baghdad and an eighteenth-century North African saint, respectively. Members of the Murīdiyya Sufi order represent Bamba as a proud and cultured man of his people who spoke excellent Wolof but wrote only in Arabic and whose primary commitment was to Islam.

In this respect, as in many others, characterizations of Bamba portray him as a mirror image of the Prophet Muḥammad. I was sometimes reminded that the Prophet, while a cultivated expert in Arab culture, was also an astute and often biting critic.[61] There is no denying that the Book that the Prophet had written on his heart reproached the Arabs for their ignorance and haughtiness. Though his intentions obviously cannot be known across fourteen centuries of history, I doubt that if he did say the words "*ittakhādhū al-sūdān*," he did so with the conceits of pride and conquest that later Arab authors felt when they tried to explain them away. Because it was a central concern of many of my interlocutors (not just Murids) and because it is an important part of repositioning Africans at the center of discourses of Islamic knowledge, I briefly explore some of the relevant context that he may have had in mind if and when he uttered those words.

THE WALKING QURʾAN AND THE AFRICANS

I maintain that when Muḥammad heard the angel Jibrīl speaking to him and listened intently to memorize the following words, the Prophet took them quite seriously: "*O people, indeed We have created you male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed the most honored among you is the most God-conscious. And indeed God is the Knowing, the Cognizant*" (Q 49:13). This verse contains a powerful meditation on equality and the meaning and purpose of human bodily difference. Distinction is caused by remembering God, not by gender, national, or ethnic differences. And if we remember God, we can learn much from one another: our diversity becomes a source of wisdom. Another verse expands on this point, specifically mentioning the diversity of colors in the human family as being a "sign of God," the same way that verses of the Qurʾan themselves are signs (*ayāt*): "*And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors and surely in this there are signs for the learned*" (Q 30:22).

The three persons mentioned in the saying "emulate the blacks" are all among the learned: Luqmān the Sage, the Negus of Abyssinia, and Bilāl the Muezzin. Their stories amplify the point made in these Qurʾan verses. A brief word on each helps contextualize the intended meaning of the say-

ing and helps situate an outlook underlying many African Muslim claims on knowledge. The Revelation Muḥammad carried within him had a thirty-verse chapter, Luqmān. It takes its name from a pre-Islamic African sage whom the Book represents as a model of piety and a teacher of the doctrine of *tawhīd* (God's radical oneness). Strikingly, the sura is about both the endless knowledge of God and the unity of mankind:

> *And if all the earth's trees were pens and the sea its ink, with seven more seas to flood it, the Word of God would not be ended. Truly God is Mighty, Wise.*
> *The creation of all of you and your resurrection are only like that of a single soul. Truly God is the Hearing and the Seeing.* (Q 31:27–28)

Later exegetes would maintain that Luqmān was not a prophet but a sage, in spite of his prominent and auspicious mention in the Book. They would also, perhaps not coincidentally, claim that Luqmān was a slave, though the Qur'an itself makes no such statement.

Muḥammad grew up in an Arabia that knew Africans more as conquerors than as slaves, even if the bulk of later Arabic scholarship often seemed to forget this. As a reminder, one need only recall another verse that the original Walking Qur'an carried inside him. The Chapter of the Elephant (Q 105) makes unambiguous reference to the war elephants that conquering Abyssinian armies rode in southern and western Arabia in the sixth century and before. The African Christian kingdom of Aksum frequently ruled over portions of the Arabian Peninsula, and this sura is usually understood to refer to the final defeat of those Abyssinian conquerors and their expulsion from the Ḥijāz (western Arabia), an event conventionally dated to 570, also recorded as the year of the Prophet's birth. But the Prophet's reference to the Negus was not a general allusion to the power of an African king; it was a specific reference to the grace and piety of a black Christian who saved the early Muslims from possible extinction.

No longer African overlords in Arabia, the Ethiopians nonetheless remained a major power in the Red Sea region. When the Muslim community was threatened with extinction in Mecca, the Prophet Muḥammad appealed to the Negus or Najāshī of Abyssinia for help. The beginning of the Islamic calendar is the *hijra* (migration) to Medina in 622, which allowed the Muslim community to establish itself free from the oppression of the Quraysh, the Prophet's blood kin but bitter enemies of his radical vision of monotheism. It is often forgotten that there were two earlier *hijras* to sub-Saharan Africa. Fearing for the lives of his still very small group of followers, Muḥammad

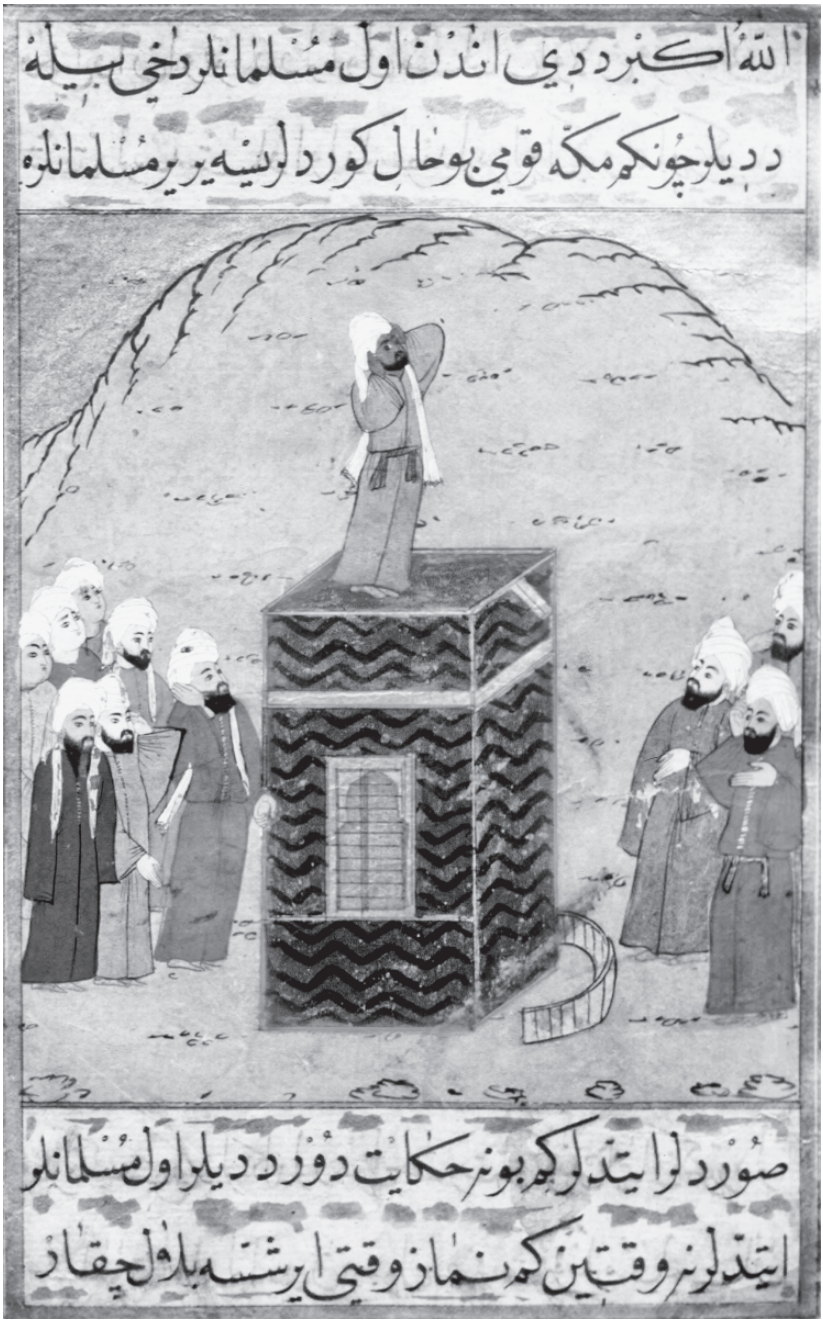
sent at least one hundred of the first Muslims, including ʿUthmān, Islam's third caliph, to seek asylum in the Christian kingdom of Aksum (Abyssinia or Ethiopia) in 615 and 616. Islam reached sub-Saharan Africa literally before Islamic time began.

When the Quraysh came and demanded extradition of these one hundred refugees—certainly a prelude to a massacre and the end of Islam—the Negus refused. In the accounts of the early Muslim historians, the Quraysh then claimed that the new faith slandered Jesus. The Negus asked one of the Muslims to recite what the Qurʾan says of Jesus (ʿĪsā), and the Muslim recited one of the Qurʾan verses referring to ʿĪsā as the "Spirit of God." Muslim historians maintain that this recitation, along with the example of the Muslims, so moved the king of Aksum that he converted to Islam but hid his new faith from his royal court.

Bilāl (580–642), the final black exemplar of justice, wisdom, and piety mentioned in the hadith, has been a particularly cherished figure for West African Muslims. He enters Muslim sacred histories as the slave of a powerful Meccan family that was enraged when he became one of the first people (perhaps the second adult male after Abū Bakr) to accept the new religion of Islam.[62] For this crime, Bilāl was brutally punished—laid out to roast on the hot desert sand with heavy stones on his chest. When his tormentor would come to ask if he would recant, he would only repeatedly moan the word *aḥad* (one). Bilāl's affirmation of *tawhīd* in the face of torture appears to have inspired the Prophet to arrange for Abū Bakr, who would later become the first caliph, to purchase the enslaved man's liberty.

Later, after the Angel Jibrīl had taught the Prophet the gestures of the prayer, the Muslims had to decide how they would call the faithful to congregational worship. Would they call the people with church bells, like the followers of Jesus? Would they be assembled—as if a prelude to the last day—with the sound of a horn, like the followers of Moses? What instrument should the Muslims use? Characteristic of his foundational emphasis on anchoring Islam in the human body as the Qurʾan was anchored in his own, *the Prophet chose the human voice*. Bilāl's strong and beautiful voice is usually cited as the reason he was selected to make the call. Perhaps the Prophet believed that in addition to his beautiful voice, Bilāl's sincere belief in God's oneness, which could not be cowed by a slavemaster, burned with sun or sand, or crushed by heavy stones, made him uniquely qualified for the job.

In 630, Muḥammad returned to Mecca as the victorious commander of the faithful. His party made its way to the Kaʿba, the structure built for the worship of the One God. According to many accounts, Muḥammad watched



Bilāl's victory *adhān*. From the illustrated version of al-Darīr's *Siyer-i Nebi* (History of the Prophet), produced for the Ottoman Sultan Murād III, completed in 1595. Courtesy of Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul, Turkey/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Bilāl climb to the top of the House of God and make the call to prayer. The sound of his voice at that iconic moment echoes through the ages. It has been memorialized in art, literature, and oral performance. After Muḥammad's passing, some maintain that Bilāl only made the call to prayer on very special occasions and that when he did, those who had known the Prophet were moved to tears. This story speaks to a very close association between Muḥammad and Bilāl, for the presence of one called hearts to lament the absence of the other. Is it too much to suggest that the men were close friends who had suffered much together and relied on one another? Perhaps simple friendship and love was the reason that Muḥammad made Bilāl Islam's first muezzin. Did the Prophet have paternalistic contempt in his heart at this moment?

When Muḥammad entered Mecca as a victorious general, he did not enslave his defeated enemies. That so many (though by no means all) Muslim scholars from the subsequent era of conquest accepted aggressive jihad, wholesale enslavement of the prisoners of war (and their dependents), and skin-color prejudice only shows us that they were not immune to the effects of a world awash in slaves and dripping with ethnic chauvinism. The Prophet Muḥammad did not live long enough to walk in such a world, and so I doubt that he had paternalism or condescension on his tongue or in his heart if and when he uttered the words, "Emulate the blacks, for among them are three lords of the people of Paradise."

■ Under the Ummayads, the descendants of the Quraysh, some of Muḥammad's bitterest enemies, the worldly conquests of the Arabs unfolded. By the seventeenth century, blacks were probably a majority of the slaves in the lands of Islam. By the nineteenth, they were nearly the only slaves left, and they were more numerous than ever before. Blackness and slavery, slavery and unbelief were now all collapsed together in unprecedented ways. This development had important implications for Muslim perceptions of the religiosity of blacks: unbelief—or at least religious inferiority—was increasingly read onto black bodies.

The scale of the slave trade from sub-Saharan Africa to the lands of Islam before the sixteenth century has been vastly exaggerated, anachronistically racialized, and callously politicized. But it did happen. Its resultant anti-black racism, in the East as in the West, is a simple fact of life. But it is also a quintessentially modern phenomenon. "As the Atlantic world developed its modern racism through slaving, so too did the Mediterranean world of Islam; indeed, the two are probably best understood together as the growth

of a single racism as an aspect of modernity."[63] In the Muslim world, the enslavement of Africans and its attendant racism reached its nadir in the nineteenth century, just as modern Orientalism—and Islamic reformism as well—were being born. Africans had never been so despised and marginal in the so-called heartlands of Islam.

This study seeks neither to minimize nor sensationalize the slavery and racism practiced by Muslims in the Mediterranean world (and the Indian subcontinent, which received a large volume of the East African slave trade). Rather, it seeks to tell a different story about Africans and Islamic knowledge. A story about Islamic knowledge cannot linger too long on ideas of race, but they so deeply permeate colonial documents, secondary literatures, and the views of contemporary Muslims that any scholarship that ignores this history is doomed to repeat it. Staring Eastern and Western racisms in the face is uncomfortable, but if we refuse to look away, we eventually see beyond the surface and recent centuries of bigotry. A careful look allows us to glimpse a time before such chauvinisms were fixed. Envisioning a time when an African could stand atop the House of God and call the world to Islam helps us to imagine the past on its own terms, not those of a racially divided modern world.

Writing Islamic Knowledge into African History

We must see beyond race and put Africans back at the center of Islamic studies, where they belong, and so, too, must we put Islam at the center of African studies. To be fair, West African Muslims have drawn their fair share of attention, but the inner workings of Islam as a system of religious meaning in their lives has not. Redressing this oversight is imperative, in part because of the huge (and growing) demographic weight of Islamic Africa. Reckoning with the role of religious meaning in the past, present, and future of hundreds of millions of African Muslims requires that we pay attention to their engagements with Islamic knowledge.

The first generations of postcolonial scholars in Islamic West Africa were mainly political scientists and sociologists who tended toward materialist analysis. They did not usually carefully attend to the contents of religious culture. Anthropologists, otherwise central to Africanist research, tended to overlook Islamic Africa altogether. Robert Launay explored the reasons for—and consequences of—this phenomenon in an extraordinary survey of the field, "Invisible Religion?: Anthropology's Avoidance of Islam in Africa." Among his many valuable insights is his attention to the problem of authenticity: "Arguably, there existed a tacit partition of African realities among

academics, with anthropologists appropriating the study of '*authentic*' Africans with genuinely 'traditional' religions while the study of African Muslims, those whose pristine authenticity had apparently been violated, was left to historians if not to 'Orientalists.'"[64]

If historians and "Orientalists" were expected to pick up the slack for reluctant anthropologists, the results have been uneven. In short, the presumption of mutually exclusive African and Islamic authenticities that dogged West African anthropology was by no means absent from historical or Orientalist writing. The Orientalist avoidance of Islamic Africa probably rivaled that of the anthropologists. For historians, conversely, it expressed itself less in an absolute avoidance of Islam and more in a reticence to take on Islam as a system of religious meaning and in a focus on materialist analyses instead. When historians did attend to the contents of religion, they added a temporal dimension to the story of syncretism. This tended to produce a linear narrative of progressive advances in the "orthodoxy" of "African Muslims." Anthropologists focused on Africanized Islam, and historians built a linear narrative of the progress of "Islam in Africa."

This process was supposed to have taken place under constant pressure from the weight of the textual tradition, waves of immigration by Arab Muslims, and particularly in West Africa, the state-building efforts of Muslim clerics who led jihads in the nineteenth century. ʿUthmān b. Fūdī (Usman dan Fodio, d. 1817) and ʿUmar b. Saʿīd al-Fūtī (al-Ḥājj Umar Taal, d. 1864), for example, were studied by historians primarily as state builders. Yet both men taught Qurʾan for much of their lives and produced countless pages of scholarly works before ever becoming involved in politics.[65] Only a fraction of their works have been treated systematically in publication or translated into European languages. If "Orientalism" in Launay's formulation refers to translation, annotation, and textual analysis of the Arabic or *ʿajamī* literary production of West Africans, then the field remains underdeveloped. Moreover, the famous "West African jihads" themselves have been fundamentally misunderstood. In chapter 3, "The Book in Chains," I show that these movements were more a struggle against the Atlantic slave trade and the enslavement of Muslims (especially those who had memorized the Qurʾan) than a fight against syncretism.

The composite macrohistory portrays African engagements with Islamic knowledge as unintellectual, superficial, and syncretistic. The story is rife with colonial tropes. Africans stay faithful to ancestral custom, adopting Islam—represented as an imported, imperialist, and culturally alienating tradition—only superficially. They finally yield to Muslim identity only when

it is brought at the point of the sword or during the twentieth century, when it allows them access to an alternative universalist identity that shields them from European cultural imperialism. The internal moral, historical, and social dynamics that drove African engagements with Islamic knowledge are flattened in the face of this essentially colonialist narrative tinged with hints of African nationalism.

A reassessment of the role of Islamic knowledge in the historiography of Africa is due. The story of Qur'an schooling and epistemology that I tell here aims to spark such a reassessment. It highlights the role of Qur'an schools and Islamic knowledge in building the societies of the African West. No external conquest brought Islam to sub-Saharan Africa. Reed pens and wooden tablets were the preferred weapons of the warriors of the faith. The work of spreading Islam—the subject of chapter 2—was carried out by teachers and scholars who embodied Islamic knowledge and inscribed it onto disparate communities across West Africa. This is story of the Walking Qur'an not only in action but also quite literally in motion.

PRECOLONIAL AFRICA

Approaching this story of schooling and epistemology in the longue durée may help provide a way out of an interpretive morass for African studies more broadly. In the past decade or so, leading Africanists such as Steven Feierman and David Schoenbrun have put forth an urgent call to put *precolonial* African systems of meaning into more fruitful dialogue with the forces of colonial and postcolonial modernity. A focus on colonial questions and imported idioms is producing a general interpretive malaise that this book seeks to help redress.

Feierman, a distinguished anthropologist and historian of East Africa, first began to light the road forward in a watershed 1999 essay, "Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories." He posited that the development of long-term regional historical narratives rooted in Africa was the way out. He stressed, however, that the obstacles to producing such "macrohistories" were daunting at the level of sources, narrative conventions, and especially power relations. He cautioned that creating such regional histories while remaining sensitive to "the global flows of styles, discourses, and practices" was a "paradoxical task" conditioned by a deep structural dilemma: "There are so many local histories that, taken in the aggregate, they dissolve. . . . What is left in the shared memory . . . is the history of forces which affect all localities. . . . The power of ideas about the postcolony, about global flows, leads once again to the erasure of regional specificities, even when

these latter are the focus of intense scholarly attention. *They survive merely as local color.*"[66]

Feierman went on to note that more recent works by "historians and ethnographers of hybridity" had produced "brilliant cultural histories" in African contexts that had the troubling tendency to leave intact Eurocentric metanarratives. The problem he identified was not necessarily at the level of these studies individually; rather, they could not be pulled together as a regional metanarrative. This issue, when paired with the fundamental incommensurability—present both at the level of underlying logics and specific narratives—between African and European givens was erasing African knowledge and epistemology and making it impossible to write *African* history: "The studies of commodities (or of Christian sin) in one place, and then another, and then another can be aggregated only on the basis of their shared relationship to the relevant European category: they cannot be placed within a larger or more general African narrative. What is African inevitably appears in a form which is local and fragmented, *and which has no greater depth than the time of colonial conquest, or the moment just before it*."[67]

Schoenbrun, a specialist in comparative historical linguistics (particularly within the Bantu language family of Central Africa) and a historian of the deep precolonial past, built explicitly on Feierman's framework while accentuating the problems posed by Africanist historiography's increasingly short time depths: "The valuable emphasis on modernity in colonial and postcolonial African studies has profoundly divided precolonial African history from what comes after. But the depth and complexity of African aspirations for moral community and the forms of collective action they inspire . . . exceed the explanatory power of narratives of modernity oriented toward the history of capital, colony, and commerce. Long-term regional histories of *durable bundles of meaning and practice* grounded in Africa address these matters in part by *working across tight spaces of ethnicity and beyond shallow chronologies*."[68]

Schoenbrun emphasized that we need to understand those "durable bundles of meaning and practice" on their own terms and within their precolonial contexts to make their engagements with colonial and postcolonial modernity meaningful. Only exploring them from within their own categories and tracking them over the longue durée could restore the internal coherences—and struggles for control—of African ways of knowing and being.

Schoenbrun's linking of these "tight spaces of ethnicity" and "shallow chronologies" has profound importance. Colonial and postcolonial histories that do not engage deeper pasts tend to naturalize contemporary identities,

ethnic and otherwise. Even when examined critically, shallow time examinations of belonging are structurally inclined to trace the roots of recent identities instead of opening up the past to earlier configurations of society, polity, and identity. In East Africa, this phenomenon expresses itself in studies that unwittingly reinforce ethnic particularism. In Islamic West Africa, these tight spaces of identity often enclose single Sufi orders, making it difficult to conceive studies that cross the lines of Sufi affiliation.

"African Islam" has become almost coterminous with Sufism in much scholarship, but Sufi orders have "shallow chronologies" in most of Africa; they became powerful forces only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Excellent recent studies that historicize the success of Sufi shaykhs such as Amadu Bamba or Ibrāhīm Niass in attracting massive followings, for example, almost always begin by tracing how such leaders transformed Sufi ideas and practices in unique and attractive ways.[69] But this approach forecloses on the exploration of deep time constitutions of—and transformations in—Muslim identity.[70] The popular response to their models for Sufi society—and even those scholarly models themselves—were rooted as much in long-term patterns of Islamic schooling and regional legacies of clericalism as in the internal contours of a given order or even Sufism as a whole. Making such an argument requires not just regional scope but *more time*.

"Tight spaces" of "race" and their equally shallow chronologies are a more troubling element of the same problem. Recent layered racializations of Saharan and sub-Saharan societies have pulled Islamic West Africa apart. Saharans claiming Berber and/or Arab descent, known today collectively as *bayḍān*, are often seen as quite distinct from *sūdān* (blacks). Whatever conceptions of skin color, genealogy, and belonging were in place in the deeper past were dramatically transformed by successive expansions of Saharan slaving in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Such differences became rigid colonial constructs of "race" and "ethnicity" in the twentieth.[71] Colonial and postcolonial states could surveil, police, and incentivize such identities in unprecedented ways, fixing them as immutable. Historicizing such transformations is only part of the solution to this problem. Another part is to attempt to discern earlier configurations of identity—roads of belonging that have not been much traveled in the more recent past but that were well trod centuries ago and may yet be reopened.[72] The story I tell in this book reaches back to a time before popular Sufi orders, to a time before "race," to tell a story about schooling and knowledge that puts back together recently fractured pasts.

The opportunity is special. If Islam can finally come to be understood as an integral and authentic part of the African historical experience, then Islamic Africa will have a special role to play in the shaping of new macrohistories. Part of the challenge of writing deep time narratives is that in much of Africa, few written sources are capable of elucidating the inner workings of African systems of meaning prior to the colonial period. Evocative outlines of the intellectual worlds within which Africans constructed meaning in the deep past are now possible through historical linguistics, archaeology, spatial studies, oral traditions, and other means, but only in a few cases can these be set against a documentary record in the longue durée.[73] Arabic and *ʿajamī* writings—now extensively cataloged but rarely intensively examined—present a documentary record internal to African societies that can be productively placed in dialogue with these rich interdisciplinary sources of Africanist knowledge.

Historical linguistics can diagram a web of relationships between key concepts and practices over broad spaces and long periods of time, but it cannot offer concrete instantiations in the struggle to control meaning. Oral traditions (or for more recent periods, oral histories) can animate the past within African linguistic, historical, and ontological categories and provide powerful glimpses of meaning. But selected precolonial Arabic-script documentary sources can reveal the practical dynamics and specific discursive utterances that made meaning.[74] They can elucidate the quotidian knowledge practices and specific debates that shaped and reshaped worlds of meaning. The study of Islam in Africa offers an ideal laboratory for the writing of those provisional and flawed—but potentially transformative—macrohistories grounded in Africa.

This book does not and cannot fulfill all of these possibilities, but it can attempt to answer Feierman's call for new macrohistories rooted in Africa and capable of traversing long spans of time. By following this story of Islamic knowledge in West Africa from the deep precolonial past through to the contemporary era, I hope to shed light on processes of epistemological change in African societies where Islam was absent or did not provide the dominant framework for understanding. Through this study of Islamic knowledge transmission, we have a chance to elucidate what it meant "to know" in precolonial Africa in detailed terms and to reexamine with rare detail and precision nineteenth- and twentieth-century transformations in the mechanics and meanings of an African knowledge system. At the same time, this study

also aims to furnish fresh insights on epistemic shifts in Muslim societies far from sub-Saharan Africa.

Structure of this Book

In addition to outlining the contents of this book and developing a preliminary sense of Qur'an schooling and its epistemology, this introduction has sought to move African Muslims in general from the margins of academic inquiry to its center. Both Islamic studies and African studies have been unwitting and unfortunate heirs to ancient and recent legacies of racial and colonial thought. A blind spot developed where Africanist inquiry and Orientalism met, and African Muslims disappeared. This deep time study of their approach to Islamic knowledge brings them back into the picture. I have also used portions of this introduction to discuss, in the context of the book's overall argument about embodied knowledge, the foundational period of Islam and the original *Walking Qur'an*, Muḥammad himself.

Chapter 1, "Education, Embodiment, and Epistemology," is an interdisciplinary exploration of the philosophy of knowledge behind Qur'an schooling. I craft a detailed historical ethnography of the institution in Senegambia in the recent past and use it to open an exploration of how knowledge was conceived and transmitted. The chapter moves on to trace the specific kind of Qur'an schooling found here—and its view of the elements of knowledge—back to the early days of Islam. From there I develop the claim that the literal *incorporation* of texts (including ingesting them) was central to learning and embodying knowledge. Carrying the Book inside and making it manifest through deeds were inexorably linked. Throughout this work, this sort of embodied and actualized Islamic knowledge is crystallized in the image of the Walking Qur'an. Subsequent chapters refract the last thousand years of Senegambian history through its prism.

Chapter 2, "Embodying Islam in West Africa: The Making of a Clerisy, ca. 1000–1770," examines the constitution and transformation of an indigenous West African clerisy over the longue durée. These African teachers and scholars of Islam were the main vectors of Islamization in a subcontinent that was untouched by the conquests of the early centuries of Islam. They developed a distinct model for relations between temporal and religious authorities that allowed them to keep their distance (and preserve their autonomy) from kings. I carry my examination of the moral and political economies of learning and teaching the Qur'an down through the eighteenth century, paying particular attention to how the rise of the Atlantic slave trade caused this model of pious distance from power to break down, as some clerics became

increasingly radical militants. Some things are worth fighting for, and by the seventeenth century, previously quietist men of letters were willing to take up arms against worldly kings who had the temerity to enslave free Muslims and sell them to Christians.

Chapter 3, "The Book in Chains: Slavery and Revolution in Senegambia, 1770–1890," focuses on the problem of the enslavement of *huffāẓ* (keepers) of the Qur'an in Senegambia from the 1770s to the onset of French colonial rule in the 1880s. With clerics understood as embodied exemplars of the Book, such episodes of enslavement were not understood as merely violating Islamic law but rather more deeply felt as desecrations of the Book of God. This chapter documents a century of revolts, rebellions, and even revolutions in Senegambia that were sparked by the enslavement of "the walking Qur'an." The chapter's centerpiece is a dramatic revolutionary movement led by African Muslim clerics and their peasant disciples, who overthrew hereditary slaving kings in 1776, abolished the Atlantic slave trade in the Senegal River Valley, and may even have abolished the institution of slavery in the newly established clerical republic. This chapter is essential reading not just for anyone interested in the history of the Muslim world but also for anyone interested in slavery and abolition in modern history.

Chapter 4, "Bodies of Knowledge: Schooling, Sufism, and Social Change in Colonial Senegal, 1890–1945," expands on these themes of slavery, social justice, and Islamic knowledge as expressed in struggles over access to Qur'an schooling in Senegal from the 1890s to the 1940s, the heyday of French imperialism in West Africa. Former slaves and other marginalized groups used the formal abolition of slavery in the French colonial state to stake claims to dignity through Qur'an schooling. From within the epistemology of embodiment and against regional traditions of bodily stigmas attached to low-status persons, they struggled to remake the substance of their beings through Islamic education.

This effort to remake supposedly "impure" bodies as bodies of knowledge drove a diverse set of previously imperceptible political and educational transformations in colonial Senegal, including the rise of mass Sufi orders and newly emergent patterns of French and Muslim schooling. Even the French regime's basic administrative approach to African Muslims, Islam Noir, was informed by this intense period of changing societal claims on Islamic knowledge. This racialist policy of segregating supposedly syncretistic (and therefore nonthreatening) African Sufis from more "orthodox" (and therefore militant) Arabs produced unforeseeable effects in the knowledge practices of Senegalese Muslims. It is part of the reason the classical ap-

proach to Islamic knowledge not only survived colonial rule in Senegal but thrived within it.

Chapter 5, "Disembodied Knowledge?: 'Reform' and Epistemology in Senegal, 1945–Present," resumes the narrative in the period of decolonization after World War II and follows it through Senegalese independence in 1959 and down to the present. The quarantine of Islam Noir had helped safeguard classical approaches to Islamic knowledge in Senegal from the instrumentalization of Muslim schooling that touched other parts of the Muslim world. New "Arabic schools"—as they are usually called in Senegal—arrived late and have not displaced Qur'an schools. Instead of withering, the latter have thrived, assimilating elements of modern epistemology instead of being assimilated into it. Quotidian struggles over schooling in contemporary Senegal are producing hybrid approaches to knowing that stretch the interpretive capacities of standard oppositional models of Sufism and Salafism, tradition and reform.

In the conclusion, I wrap closing arguments about West African history and competing ways of knowing in Islam around my observation that Qur'an schooling has long been seen as an index of the social and spiritual health of West African Muslim communities. The stubborn relevance of classical ways of learning and teaching Islam in much of Africa and the relative neglect (or invisibility) of such schooling in much of the Arab world are revealing. Those interested in Islamic knowledge, I suggest, should be paying more attention to Africa than we usually do.