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Muslim Women in Burkina Faso since the 1970s: Toward Recognition as Figures of Religious Authority?

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Abstract

This paper examines how visibility and legitimacy have been defined and achieved by Muslim women who have contributed to the development of Islam in Burkina Faso since the 1970s. We undertake a transversal study of the trajectories of women belonging to different cohorts of Arabic- and French-educated Muslims. In doing so, we highlight identity markers closely associated with key moments in their lives (activism through associations or personal initiatives, religious studies, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and media activities). Through the lens of performativity, we show how women have progressively gained visibility within the Muslim community. And although figures of religious authority remain uniformly male, women are increasingly able to claim legitimacy thanks to their flexible approach.

Keywords

Islam – Burkina Faso – Women – Preacher – Media – Hajj – Madrasa

Manuscript Text

Over the last two decades, Burkina Faso has actively contributed to the vitality of Islam in West Africa through the proliferation of urban mosques and

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madrasas, as well as the creation of new Islamic associations.[1] Sufi brotherhoods, which have deep historical roots,[2] are adapting to the changing religious landscape, including the rise of a new generation of so-called religious entrepreneurs. These "hybrid" Muslim brotherhoods are closer to reformist Islam, less devoted to mysticism, and more involved in the social and political life of the country.[3] Although Sufi Islam remains dominant in Burkina Faso, the country has also witnessed the growth of Wahhabism[4] in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.[5] Since the early 1990s, Burkinabe Muslims have adopted new strategies to gain recognition and legitimacy within the country's

1 Frédérick Madore, *La construction d'une sphère publique musulmane en Afrique de l'Ouest* (Québec/Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval/Hermann, 2016).

2 Felice Dassetto, Pierre-Joseph Laurent, and Tasséré Ouédragogo, *Un islam confrérique au Burkina Faso. Actualité et mémoire d'une branche de la Tijâniyya* (Paris: Karthala, 2012); Assimi Kouanda, "La Hamawiyya et les changements toponymiques au Burkina," in *La Tijâniyya : une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 249–267; Boukary Savadogo, "L'islam confrérique au Burkina Faso. La Tidjaniyya hamawiyya au Moogo central," *Islam et société au sud du Sahara*, no. 10 (1996), 7–23.

3 Mara Vitale, "Trajectoires d'évolution de l'islam au Burkina Faso," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 206–207, no. 2 (2012), 367–387; "Économie morale, islam et pouvoir charismatique au Burkina Faso," *Afrique contemporaine* 231, no. 3 (2009), 229–243.

4 This term is derived from the name of the eighteenth-century Arab theologian Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. It was initially used by French colonial administrators, who saw Wahhabism as the main source of inspiration for emerging West-African reformers. The movement's followers have never accepted the label, sometimes preferring to call themselves *salafi*, in reference to the *salaf*, the pious and glorious 'predecessors' and ancestors of the faith. But they more often use the term 'Sunnis', from the Arabic expression *Ahl al-Sunna* or 'community of the people of the Sunnah.' When describing themselves as 'Sunnis', some 'Salafist' or 'Wahhabi' Muslims seek to exclude non-Salafist Sunnis, including followers of the Sufi tradition. By contrast, non-Wahhabi Muslims have come to define themselves in opposition to the label, to which they give a pejorative connotation. In Burkina Faso, Salafists chose to call themselves 'Sunnis' (*Sunnites* in French).

5 Maud Saint-Lary, "Du wahhabisme aux réformismes génériques : renouveau islamique et brouillage des identités musulmanes à Ouagadougou," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 206–207, no. 2 (2012), 449–470; Ousman M. Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); "The Development of Wahhabi Reforms in Ghana and Burkina Faso, 1960–1990: Elective Affinities between Western-Educated Muslims and Islamic Scholars," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 3 (2009), 502–532; Issa Cissé, "Le wahhabisme au Burkina Faso : dynamique interne d'un mouvement islamique réformiste," *Cahiers du CERLESHS* XXIV, no. 33 (2009), 1–33; Maïmouna Koné-Dao, "Implantation et influence du wahhâbisme au Burkina Faso de 1963 à 2002," in *L'islam politique au sud du Sahara : identités, discours et enjeux*, ed. Muriel Gomez-Perez (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 449–459; Bakary

public sphere, including the creation of Islamic radio stations[6] and the use of various media to spread the religious message.[7] Muslim women are also making important contributions to the vitality of Islam in Burkina Faso, as they have elsewhere in West Africa.

Some authors have stressed how women are staking claims to spaces previously controlled by men, including the use of mosques as places of spirituality, education, and socialization.[8] Some women have played important roles within Sufi communities and established themselves as influential religious leaders and spiritual guides.[9] Others have gained autonomy and expanded

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Traoré, "Islam et politique à Bobo-Dioulasso de 1940 à 2002," in *L'islam politique au sud du Sahara : identités, discours et enjeux*, ed. Muriel Gomez-Perez (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 417–447.

6 Muriel Gomez-Perez and Frédérick Madore, "Prêcheurs(ses) musulman(e)s et stratégies de communication au Burkina Faso depuis 1990. Des processus différentiés de conversion interne," *Théologiques* 21, no. 2 (2013), 121–157; Mathias Savadogo and Muriel Gomez-Perez, "La médiatisation des prêches et ses enjeux. Regards croisés sur la situation à Abidjan et à Ouagadougou," *Ethnographiques.org*, no. 22 (2011), www.ethnographiques.org/2011/Savadogo,Gomez-Perez; Fabienne Samson, "La guerre des ondes comme mode de prosélytisme. La Ahmadiyya et les médias au Burkina Faso," *Ethnographiques.org*, no. 22 (2011), www.ethnographiques.org/2011/Samson#nh10.

7 Frédérick Madore, "Islam, médias, mise en place du Sénat et article 37 de la Constitution : changement de paradigme au Burkina Faso (1991–2014)?," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 50, no. 1 (2016), 7–27.

8 Cleo Cantone, *Making and Remaking Mosques in Senegal* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); "The Shifting Space of Senegalese Mosques," in *New Perspectives on Islam in Senegal: Conversion, Migration, Wealth, Power, and Femininity*, ed. Mamadou Diouf and Mara A. Leichtman (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 51–69; Muriel Gomez-Perez, "Autour de mosquées à Ouagadougou et à Dakar: lieux de sociabilité et reconfiguration des communautés musulmanes," in *Lieux de sociabilité urbaine en Afrique*, ed. Laurent Fourchard, Odile Goerg, and Muriel Gomez-Perez (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 405–433.

9 Joseph Hill, "Picturing Islamic Authority: Gender Metaphors and Sufi Leadership in Senegal," *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014), 275–315; "'All Women are Guides': Sufi Leadership and Womanhood among Taalibe Baay in Senegal," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 4 (2010), 375–412; Britta Frede, "Following in the Steps of 'Ā'isha: Ḥassāniyya-Speaking Tijānī Women as Spiritual Guides (*Muqaddamāt*) and Teaching Islamic Scholars (*Limrābuṭāt*) in Mauritania," *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014), 225–273; Ousseina D. Alidou, "Rethinking Marginality and Agency in Postcolonial Niger: A Social Biography of a Sufi Woman Scholar," in *Gender and Islam in Africa: Rights, Sexuality, and Law*, ed. Margot Badran (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 41–68; Amber B. Gemmeke, "Marabout Women in Dakar: Creating Authority in Islamic Knowledge," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 79, no. 1 (2009), 128–147; Beth A. Buggenhagen, "Beyond Brotherhood: Gender, Religious Authority, and the Global Circuits of Senegalese Muridiyya," in *New Perspectives on Islam in Senegal: Conversion, Migration, Wealth, Power, and Femininity*, ed. Mamadou Diouf and Mara A. Leichtman (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 189–210;

their sphere of influence through the activities of *dahiras* and neighborhood associations that focus directly on women.[10] Other scholars have focused on preparing profiles of Muslim women to illustrate how they combine strong piety with trajectories that reflect the interaction of modernity, local cultural traditions, and Islam.[11] Finally, several studies have analyzed the active

Codou Bop, "Roles and the Position of Women in Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 4 (2005), 1099–1119; Alaine S. Hutson, "African Sufi Women and Ritual Change," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004), 61–73; "The Development of Women's Authority in the Kano Tijaniyya, 1894–1963," *Africa Today* 46, no. 3/4 (1999), 43–64; Odile Reveyrand-Coulon, "Les énoncés féminins de l'islam," in *Religion et modernité politique en Afrique noire : Dieu pour tous et chacun pour soi*, ed. Jean-François Bayart (Paris: Karthala, 1993), 63–99; Balaraba B. M. Sule and Priscilla E. Starratt, "Islamic Leadership Positions for Women in Contemporary Kano Society," in *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Catherine M. Coles and Beverly Mack (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 29–49; Christian Coulon and Odile Reveyrand-Coulon, *L'islam au feminin : Sokhna magat Diop cheikh de la confrérie mouride* (Centre d'étude d'Afrique noire, Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux, 1990).

10 Marie Nathalie LeBlanc, "Piety, Moral Agency, and Leadership: Dynamics Around the Feminization of Islamic Authority in Côte d'Ivoire," *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014), 167–198; "Nouveaux regards sur la vie des jeunes musulmanes en Côte d'Ivoire : dynamiques de sociabilité chez les jeunes arabisantes au tournant du XXIe siècle," in *Lieux de sociabilité urbaine en Afrique*, ed. Laurent Fourchard, Odile Goerg, and Muriel Gomez-Perez (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 435–459; Erin Augis, "Aïcha's Sounith Hair Salon: Friendship, Profit, and Resistance in Dakar," *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014), 199–224; "Religion, Religiousness, and Narrative: Decoding Women's Practices in Senegalese Islamic Reform," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 3 (2012), 429–441; Adeline Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Dorothea E. Schulz, "(Re)Turning to Proper Muslim Practice: Islamic Moral Renewal and Women's Conflicting Assertions of Sunni Identity in Urban Mali," *Africa Today* 54, no. 4 (2008), 20–43; "Women's Associations, Mass Media, and Morals in Urban Mali," *ISIM Newsletter*, no. 6 (2000), 27; Ousseina D. Alidou, *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Penda Mbow, "Les femmes, l'Islam et les associations religieuses au Sénégal," in *Transforming Female Identities, Women's Organizational Forms in West Africa*, ed. Eva Evers Rosander (Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, 1997), 148–163; Eva Evers Rosander, "Le *dahira* de Mam Diarra Bousso à Mbacké. Analyse d'une association religieuse de femmes sénégalaises," in *Transforming Female Identities, Women's Organizational Forms in West Africa*, ed. Eva Evers Rosander (Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, 1997), 160–174.

11 Muriel Gomez-Perez and Selly Ba, "Les prédicatrices au Sénégal : de la visibilité à la légitimité religieuse et sociale (des années 1980 à nos jours)," in *État, Sociétés et Islam au Sénégal. Un air de nouveau temps?*, ed. Abdourahmane Seck, *et al.* (Paris: Karthala, 2015), 175–203; Elisha P. Renne, ed. *Veiling in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Dorothea E. Schulz, *Muslims and New Media in West Africa: Pathways to*

participation of women in local associations as well as in public and national debates about secularism, the family code, and women's rights within Islam.[12]

However, Islamic brotherhoods, associations, and movements have largely been studied without reference to gender. As a result, Muslim women in Burkina Faso hold a marginal place at best in the academic literature on Islam in West Africa. One exception is the work of Saint-Lary, whose work has focused on women educated in French-language institutions. By adopting a form of "Islamic feminism", these women have begun to reinterpret religious

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God (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); "Remaking Society from Within: Extraversion and the Social Forms of Female Muslim Activism in Urban Mali," in *Development and Politics from Below, Exploring Religious Spaces in the African State*, ed. Barbara Bompani and Frahm-Arp Maria (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), 74–96; Erin Augis, "Jambaar or Jumbax-out? How Sunnite Women Negotiate Power and Belief in Orthodox Islamic Femininity," in *New Perspectives on Islam in Senegal: Conversion, Migration, Wealth, Power, and Femininity*, ed. Mamadou Diouf and Mara A. Leichtman (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 211–233; "Dakar's Sunnite Women: The Politics of Person," in *L'Islam politique au sud du Sahara: identités, discours et enjeux*, ed. Muriel Gomez-Perez (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 309–326; Marloes Janson, "Renegotiating Gender: Changing Moral Practice in the 'Tablighi Jama'at' in The Gambia," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 28 (2008), 9–36; Marie Nathalie LeBlanc, "*Imaniya* and Young Muslim Women in Côte d'Ivoire," *Anthropologica* 49, no. 1 (2007), 35–50; Muhammad Sani Umar, "Mass Islamic Education and Emergence of Female "Ulama" in Northern Nigeria: Background, Trends, and Consequences," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott Steven Reese (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 99–120.

12 Denise Brégand, "Affirmations féminines islamiques dans les villes du Sud Bénin," in *L'Afrique des générations : entre tensions et négociations*, ed. Muriel Gomez-Perez and Marie Nathalie LeBlanc (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 73–119; Nadine Sieveking, "Negotiating Women's Rights from Multiple Perspectives: The Campaign for the Reform of the Family Law in Senegal," in *Negotiating Development in Muslim Societies. Gendered Spaces and Translocal Connections*, ed. Gudrun Lachenmann and Petra Dannecker (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 145–170; "'We Don't Want Equality; We Want to be Given Our Rights': Muslim Women Negotiating Global Development Concepts in Senegal," *Africa Spectrum* 42, no. 1 (2007), 29–48; Rosa De Jorio, "Between Dialogue and Contestation: Gender, Islam, and the Challenges of a Malian Public Sphere," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 1 (2009), 95–111; Ousseina D. Alidou and Hassana Alidou, "Women, Religion and the Discourses of Legal Ideology in Niger Republic," *Africa Today* 54, no. 3 (2008), 21–36; Fatou Sow, "Les femmes, l'État et le sacré," in *L'islam politique au sud du Sahara : identités, discours et enjeux*, ed. Muriel Gomez-Perez (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 283–307; Dorothea E. Schulz, "Political Factions, Ideological Fictions: The Controversy over Family Law Reform in Democratic Mali," *Islamic Law and Society* 10, no. 1 (2003), 132–164; Lucy Creevey, "Islam, Women and the Role of the State in Senegal," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 3 (1996), 268–307.

texts through the lens of gender equality and in opposition to male-centred interpretations of Islam.[13] Another study has analyzed the degree of autonomy of action enjoyed by Arabic-educated women, its ongoing evolution, and its limits. Indeed, some of these women have reinforced normative religious discourses on the role and status of women, while others have participated in the recodification of social norms.[14]

Keeping all of these elements in mind, this article examines how visibility and legitimacy have been defined and achieved by Muslim women who have contributed to the development of Islam in Burkina Faso since the 1970s. Thus, we have undertaken a transversal study of the trajectories of women belonging to different cohorts of Arabic- and French-educated Muslims.[15] Our analysis highlights identity markers closely associated with key moments in the lives of these women: activism through associations or personal initiatives, religious studies, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and media activities. In the case of Muslim men, this list would also include religious studies abroad, but very few women have had that opportunity. These identity markers have profoundly shaped the religious experience of Muslim women and account for their ability to adapt to a changing religious landscape, as well as to their changing status within the Muslim community. Participating in the activities of associations, pursuing Islamic studies (in local madrasas or abroad), and making and helping organize the pilgrimage have all helped women establish religious legitimacy while earning them more visibility and recognition in broader, mixed-gender Muslim contexts. More recently, the presence of women in the Islamic media has further confirmed their increased visibility. Indeed, some women have pursued activism while successfully articulating significant religious knowledge and exercising religious leadership. However, figures of legitimate religious authority remain uniformly male. So while women have been playing an increasingly central role in defining the Muslim community and contributing to its vitality, men remain at the forefront of the Islamic revival in Burkina Faso. As a result, Burkinabe Muslim women have been absent from public debates on Islamic doctrine and orthodoxy. Furthermore, Muslim women's religious practice and

13 Maud Saint-Lary, "Quand le droit des femmes se dit à la mosquée : ethnographie des voies islamiques d'émancipation au Burkina Faso," *Autrepart* 61, no. 2 (2012), 137–155.

14 Muriel Gomez-Perez, "Women's Islamic Activism in Burkina Faso: Toward Renegotiated Social Norms?," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 50, no. 1 (2016), 45–63.

15 French-educated Muslims ("francisants" in French) are those who studied in Burkina Faso's secular public schools. Arabic-educated Muslims or Arabists ("arabisants" in French) are those who studied in Qur'anic schools or madrasas in Sub-Saharan Africa or the Arab Countries.

their community activities have been closely monitored by imams and other male authority figures who possess formal Islamic religious training.

For the purposes of this article, we employ "performativity as an organizing concept for understanding how authority is exercised, recognized, reconfigured, and challenged in relation to gender and Islam."[16] The concept helps reveal how "actors cite, recontextualize, and reconfigure norms of gender, authority, and Islam to introduce subtly different variations of [...] socially accepted performances of authority."[17] More broadly, even if Muslim women have not yet emerged as figures of religious authority, performativity helps understand how they have become increasingly active, visible, and legitimate participants in the Muslim community, highlighting the strategies they use to participate alongside men while retaining a degree of autonomy. In the context of changes in *daʿwa* (Islamic preaching), Islamic education, the hajj, and the media, Muslim women have shown a significant degree of flexibility. Thus, we seek to move beyond the reductive assumption that women always play a marginal role in relation to Islam, despite the persistence of patriarchal attitudes that make it difficult for women to engage in public speaking and contribute to the submission of wives to their husbands' authority.[18]

This article is based on a synthesis of empirical research conducted in July 2009, April 2010, July–August 2011, October-November 2011, May 2013, and Spring 2015 in Ouagadougou, where the country's main Islamic associations have their headquarters. In particular, this research included semi-structured interviews with members of different cohorts of female preachers and activists. We also draw on the national media and the Islamic press to contextualize religious and political events. The article begins by examining how, since the 1970s, women have become more deeply involved in Islamic activism through various individual and collective initiatives. As women have claimed a more active role alongside men, the latter have increasingly recognized the importance of including women in *daʿwa*. A second section highlights the role played by some leading male Sufi figures and the modernization of the country's madrasas, which has provided women with better access to both basic and

16 Britta Frede and Joseph Hill, "Introduction: En-gendering Islamic Authority in West Africa," *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014): 131.

17 *Ibid.*, 148–49.

18 Anne Attané, "Quand la circulation de l'argent façonne les relations conjugales. L'exemple de milieux urbains au Burkina Faso," *Autrepart* 49, no. 1 (2009), 155–171; Monique Ilboudo, *Droit de cité : être femmes au Burkina Faso* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-Ménage, 2006); Marc Pilon and Kokou Vignikin, *Ménages et familles en Afrique subsaharienne* (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2006).

more advanced religious knowledge. The article concludes by discussing new ways in which some Muslim women have been able to gain legitimacy and visibility by organizing the hajj and participating in the media.

1 *Women's Islamic Activism and New Conceptions of* Daʿwa

During the first decades following independence, women held a marginal place within the main national Islamic associations of Burkina Faso. Although the leaders of these organizations had been encouraging more active participation by women since the 1970s, the situation did not really begin change until the end of the 1980s, when men began to reconsider the involvement of women in *daʿwa*. In parallel, left to their own devices, some women emerged as pioneering figures of Islamic activism in the 1970s. Since the end of the 1980s, female leaders have been mobilizing volunteers to create their own associations, a trend reflected in the proliferation of Muslim women's groups in the 1990s.

a) From Invisibility to Increased Recognition: Men's Views on Female Involvement in *Daʿwa* (1970–1990)

In the 1960s and 1970s, few women were involved in Islamic movements and even fewer participated in the country's national Muslim associations. Men consistently monopolized positions of leadership and authority. In cases where associations had separate men's and women's sections, the women's section always fell under the authority of the men's section. This situation was similar to the dynamic between youth and their elders during the same period.[19] At the 1972 congress of the Communauté Musulmane du Burkina Faso's (CMBF) [Muslim Community of Burkina Faso],[20] a call was made to improve women's religious education. In order to encourage their active participation, the delegates created a committee of Muslim women within the organization: "our women must come together, regardless of their origins and social conditions, to seek ways of improving their religious training; they should address

19 Madore, *La construction d'une sphère publique*, 80–91; René Otayek, "L'islam et la révolution au Burkina Faso : mobilisation politique et reconstruction identitaire," *Social Compass* 43, no. 2 (1996): 236–37.

20 Created in 1962 under the name of Communauté Musulmane de Haute-Volta (CMHV) [Muslim Community of Upper Volta], it was originally intended to represent all Muslims in the country. Before the creation of the Fédération des Associations Islamique du Burkina (FAIB) [Federation of Islamic Associations of Burkina] in 2005, the CMBF was generally regarded as the most broadly representative Muslim organization in Burkina Faso.

the problems of the modern world [...] in order to find solutions; they must ensure the education of their children [...]."[21]

Despite this commitment, women's activism remained limited. Twenty years later, the situation has not really changed, and the same challenges remain. Thus, at the eighth congress of the CMBF, held in January 1993, delegates recommended using all available means to ensure the promotion of Islam to women, including the coordination of women's associations by the CMBF.[22] On this occasion, Toumani Triandé, President of the CMBF, stated that he wanted to "arrange everything, from the smallest mosque to national organizations, to ensure that Muslim women assert themselves." In his view, women had a "key role" to play in the development of the country.[23]

It is important to recognize that this discourse was developing in a context where men were increasingly aware of women's public activism. Men therefore had every reason to include women in efforts to increase the visibility of Islam. Indeed, since the end of the 1980s and the early of the 1990s, Muslim men have re-evaluated the role of women in the Muslim community, in light of how women have actively practiced *daʿwa* through their involvement in associations. This is especially true of French-educated Muslims active in the Association des Élèves et Étudiants Musulmans du Burkina (AEEMB) [Association of Muslim Pupils and Students of Burkina Faso] and the Centre d'Études, de Recherches et de Formation Islamiques (CERFI) [Center for Islamic Study, Research, and Training].[24] These organizations were the first to implement substantial changes. In February 1992, an "Islamic Week" organized by the AEEMB and the Centre de Formation Islamique (CFI) [Islamic Training Centre] included activities specifically aimed at women. For example, a session entitled "Women in Islam" focused on women's rights in Islam.[25] In the same vein, Tiego Tiemtoré, President of the AEEMB between 1990 and 1992, published a lengthy opinion piece in the newspaper *Le Pays* in September 1992,

21 "Plus d'un million de musulmans voltaïques se regroupent pour défendre leurs intérêts," *Carrefour africain*, April 8, 1972.

22 "8e Assemblée générale de la Communauté Musulmane du Burkina: El Hadj Toumani Triandé reconduit à la tête d'un bureau de 74 membres," *Sidwaya*, February 2, 1993.

23 "Entretien: 'Du travail bien fait dans la sérénité et sans passion' analyse M. Toumani Triandé, de la Communauté musulmane du Burkina," *Sidwaya*, February 3, 1993.

24 These two closely-related associations represent French-speaking Muslim intellectuals in Burkina Faso. The AEEMB, created in 1985, is very active among students. The CERFI, created in 1989, is in some ways an extension of the AEEMB: when students enter the labour market, they leave the AEEMB and can become members of the CERFI.

25 "Semaine islamique de L'AEEMB et du CFI: démontrer une foi inébranlable en l'islam," *Sidwaya*, February 27, 1992.

in which he sought to explain the real status of women in Islam "beyond inherited prejudices and taboos". According to Tiemtoré, far from excluding women, "Islam grants [them] the highest status"; "They participate as much as men in social development. [...] Nothing in Islamic texts says that women cannot participate in socio-economic development."[26]

A seminar for imams and preachers organized in October 1993 in Ouagadougou focused on improving women's knowledge and their role in society. The importance of women in Islam was among the leading issues discussed at multiple conference sessions. Meanwhile, large numbers of women have participated in seminars and other activities. Hadja Oumou Koulsoum, a well-known female preacher already recognized as a pioneer of women's Islamic activism, spoke at one such event.[27] Her participation shows how, as early as the 1970s, in addition to men's growing awareness of the need to involve women in proselytism, some women were already actively playing a supporting role within Islam alongside men.

b) A Quest for Visibility and Legitimacy: Individual Experiences and the Proliferation of Muslim Women's Associations

Burkinabe women's involvement in *daʿwa* is not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced back to the 1970s, when pioneering women appear to have pursued individual initiatives without any formal ties to Muslim associations. However, their activities generally complemented men's Islamic activism rather than competing with it. Koulsoum, considered to be the first female preacher in Burkina Faso when she began her activities in 1971, was one of the women who rose to prominence during the decade. Initially educated by her father, an important marabout, she went on to study under several different well-known religious leaders who taught her to read and understand Arabic. She began to preach in 1971, and subsequent Arabic-educated female preachers consider Koulsoum their elder and see her as a role model.[28]

French-educated Muslim women began to emerge a few years later. At the end of the 1980s, a small group of them came together to learn the basic principles of their religion. When public servants Gomina Fatoumata and Boly Ramata began recruiting their friends, the group consisted of only five or six people. In 1987 and 1988, they gathered informally at the Gounghin Mosque for courses on Islam usually given by Sayouba Belem and Ibrahim Barra, two male

26 "Point de vue: Islam et femme," *Le Pays*, September 29, 1992.

27 "Islam: 100 Imams et prédicateurs dans le combat pour le développement," *Sidwaya*, October 8, 1993; "Religion: imams et prêcheurs à l'écoute," *Le Pays*, October 12, 1993.

28 Gomez-Perez, "Women's Islamic activism in Burkina Faso."

representatives of the AEEMB. When their numbers increased, they created the Organisation des Femmes Musulmanes du Burkina (OFMB) [Organization of Muslim Women of Burkina Faso], an informal association[29] that later became the women's section of the CERFI.[30]

This group of women proved to be a particularly dynamic force within the CERFI. Along with summer camps, training sessions, conferences, and seminars, they organized the first edition of the Journées internationales de la femme musulmane [International Muslim Women's Days] in February 1993. The theme of this event was "Islam and the role of women in economic and social development". It attracted Muslims from all over the country as well as other from neighboring countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Togo. The first of its kind in Burkina Faso, the event drew significant attention from political and religious authorities. A Prime Ministerial envoy, the Grand Imam of Ouagadougou, and the President of the CMBF all attended the opening and closing ceremonies.[31] Subsequent editions were held in March 1995[32] and March 1998.[33]

The huge success of this event fostered the creation of other women's Islamic groups, including several new associations created by former members of the CERFI.[34] For example, in 1993, Aminata Sawadogo became President of the newly-created women's section of Ittihad Islami. A few years later, in September 1996, the Association des Femmes Islamiques du Burkina (AFIB) [Association of Islamic Women of Burkina Faso], held its constituent assembly.[35] The first congress of the Communauté des Femmes

29 Focus group with pioneers from the women's section of the CERFI, June 18, 2015.

30 "A la découverte de l'histoire méconnue du CERFI," *Le CERFIste*, January, 2010; "La cellule féminine: sur les traces du passé ou sur l'éclair qui pointe à l'horizon?," *Le CERFIste*, January, 2010.

31 "Journées de la femme musulmane: 'Islam et rôle de la femme dans le développement économique et social'," *Sidwaya*, February 8, 1993; "Journées de la femme musulmane: l'Islam face à l'émancipation féminine," *Le Pays*, February 8, 1993.

32 "CERFI: garantir un meilleur avenir à la jeune fille musulmane," *L'Observateur Paalga*, March 20, 1995; "Journée de la femme musulmane: l'islam édifie la femme," *Sidwaya*, March 21, 1995; "Deuxièmes journées de la femme musulmane: l'éducation de la jeune fille musulmane en question," *L'Appel*, no 03, May–June, 1995.

33 "CERFI: hisser la femme au même diapason que les hommes," *Sidwaya*, March 10, 1998; "Troisièmes journées de la femme musulmane: on s'est préoccupé du planning familial et des MST/SIDA," *L'Appel*, no 20, March–April, 1998.

34 Interview with Boly Ramata, June 25, 2015.

35 "Religion: l'Association des femmes islamiques du Burkina est née," *Sidwaya*, September 23, 1996; "Congrès AFIB: rehausser la dignité de la femme islamique," *L'Observateur Paalga*,

Musulmanes du Burkina Faso (CFM) [Muslim Women's Community of Burkina Faso] was convened in May 1998, with meetings on the theme "the role of Muslim women in society".[36] According to an individual active in the CERFI at that time, several of the women who left to join other associations wanted to better reach out to other kinds of women, including less-educated or illiterate women who only spoke national languages like Mooré. Women from from lower socio-economic groups were largely excluded from the activities of the CERFI, which were conducted in French and mainly attracted French-educated women from the middle and upper classes.[37]

Alongside other local organizations, these newly-created Muslim associations for both French- and Arabic-educated women—the women's section of the CERFI, Ittihad Islami, the AFIB, and the CFM—established a more sustainable and broad-based path to changing women's religious status. Muslim associations in Ouagadougou offered opportunities for grass-roots mobilization, opening up spaces where Muslim women could exercise moral leadership outside the reach of male-centered religious authority. These groups were intended to provide women with opportunities to learn the basics of religion, such as how to pray and memorizing the Qur'an in Arabic. Educating women on what the sacred texts say about the status and role of women was therefore a key consideration for all these organizations. Indeed, they encouraged the active participation of women in a wide range of related activities, including preaching, debates, public lectures, and Arabic literacy classes. They also engaged in some socio-economic activities, while progressively raising previously taboo subjects like gender relations, early and forced marriage, HIV, family planning, birth spacing, and female genital mutilation. By addressing these issues both publicly and privately, the French- and Arabic-educated women leading these organizations have engaged in a subtle reconfiguration of social and gender norms. They have expressed a will to change attitudes even if they tend to reinforce rather conformist normative religious discourses on the role and status of women.[38]

In 2000–2001, women from a variety of groups—including the Association Islamique de la Tidjaniyya (AIT) [Tidjaniyya Islamic Association], the AFIB,

September 24, 1996; "AFIB: après le bureau national, un bureau provincial," *L'Observateur Paalga*, December 24–25, 1996.

36 "1er congrès des femmes musulmanes: les hommes leur ont été solidaires," *L'Observateur Paalga*, May 5, 1998; "1er congrès des femmes musulmanes: quel rôle dans la société?," *Sidwaya*, May 7, 1998.

37 Interview with Maïmouna Koné-Dao, June 11, 2015.

38 Gomez-Perez, "Women's Islamic activism in Burkina Faso."

the women's section of the CERFI, and the AEEMB—tried to create a federation of Muslim women in Burkina Faso. However, the project was unsuccessful due to disagreements.[39] Still, by that time, Muslim women's associations and the presence of women in Muslim national associations had become commonplace in the country. These activities provided proof that Muslim women were capable of organizing themselves, and they were gaining more legitimacy and autonomy as a result. Meanwhile, outside of associations, many Muslim women were taking advantage of new opportunities for Islamic education.

2 *Islamic Education for Women: New Aspirations and Opportunities*

Expanded opportunities for religious education are another key factor in the emergence of Muslim women leaders in Burkina Faso. Several major Sufi figures have played an important role in encouraging women to learn the basics of Islam. In turn, some Muslim women justify their religious legitimacy by emphasizing the Islamic education they received from well-established religious scholars connected to Sufi brotherhoods. The modernization of madrasas and improved access to religious education for women has also enhanced women's ability to transmit religious practices, as well as their capacity to articulate significant religious knowledge and exercise religious leadership. However, emerging female preachers and religious figures have had to overcome other barriers to religious legitimacy related to a distinction between basic Islamic education and the mastery of advanced Islamic knowledge.

a) The Role of Sufi Leaders in Promoting Women's Education

Sufi sheikhs are influential figures in the Muslim community of Burkina Faso.[40] Some of them, including Sheikh Aboubacar Doukouré and Sheikh Mahamadou Bandé, have become key reference points for female preachers and other Muslim women. These two men have actively promoted basic and intermediate Islamic education for women, including Arabic literacy programs. They regularly attend ceremonies recognizing Muslim women's educational achievements,[41] such as the one held at the Gounghin Mosque

39 "La cellule féminine: sur les traces du passé ou sur l'éclair qui pointe à l'horizon?," *Le CERFISTE*, no 10, January, 2010.

40 Felice Dassetto and Pierre-Joseph Laurent, "Ramatoullaye : une confrérie musulmane en transition," *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques* 37, no. 2 (2006), 51–62; Dassetto, Laurent, and Ouédragogo, *Un islam confrérique au Burkina Faso*; Gomez-Perez, "Autour de mosquées."; Kouanda, "La Hamawiyya."; Savadogo, "L'islam confrérique au Burkina Faso."

41 "Fin d'année scolaire à l'orphelinat de Hamdalaye: les 12 meilleurs pensionnaires ont été primés," *Sidwaya*, August 29, 1995; "Formation islamique: se rappeler la valeur du Coran," *Sidwaya*, April 5, 2001; "Institut islamique Aorèma: une promotion de 60 élèves achèvent

on June 6, 2004, for 23 women who had successfully completed a course on reading the Qur'an.[42] Their presence at such events provides the women with symbolic and moral support, while encourage others to follow their example.

It was Doukouré who endorsed Sawadogo, the female preacher mentioned above, to preside over the women's section of his national Muslim association, Ittihad Islami, which was officially recognized by the state in August 1991. The women's section was created in 1993 and it became operational the following year.[43] Sawadogo, who remains president, has undescored Doukouré's role as a mentor and provider of moral and financial support to women seeking to create associations and to better understand their religion.[44] Meanwhile, the aspirations of female preachers are well aligned with Doukouré's vision for the Muslim community. Indeed, he has cited the importance of "educating women" to explain why the women's section of Ittihad Islami was created.[45] Since 1993, the promotion of female literacy, which helps women fully play their complementary role in society, has been one of the association's main objectives. This vision was reiterated at the end of the Ittihad Islami's first national congress in 1996.[46]

Like Doukouré, Bandé has also played an important role in promoting basic Islamic education for women. Upon his return to Burkina Faso in the mid-1980, after a decade of Islamic studies Egypt and Saudi Arabia, he forged ties with the leaders of the CMBF. He worked to create an organizational structure to unify Muslim women and support their religious development and training, while also fighting against illiteracy. The CFM was initially founded as a branch of the CMBF during the second half of the 1980s, and its first congress was held in May 1998. The organization became the Ligue des Femmes Musulmane de la Communauté Musulmane (LFCMB) [Muslim Community Women's League] in 2001. In 2004, during an AIDS conference, the organization's leaders decided to make a fresh start by becoming a fully independent association. Through his support of the LFCMB, Bandé became personally involved in Islamic education

le Coran," *Le vrai visage de l'islam*, no 17, July 5 to August 5, 2014; Non-participant observation during a ceremony on April 26, 2015.

42 "Femmes musulmanes de Gounghin: la maîtrise du coran au féminin pluriel," *L'Observateur Paalga*, June 8, 2004.

43 Association des femmes musulmanes Ittihiad Islami du Burkina, "Lettre au Président du Faso," *Archives nationales de Ouagadougou* (*7V485*), July 4, 1994.

44 Interview with Aminata Sawadogo, June 10, 2013.

45 Interview with Aboubacar Doukouré, March, 2010.

46 "Congrès national de l'Ittihad Islami: réhausser l'image de l'islam au Burkina," *Sidwaya*, March 1, 1996; "Congrès national de l'Itthiad Islami: appel à l'unité islamique," *Sidwaya*, March 3, 1996.

for women by organizing courses in Arabic, as well as in reading and memorizing the Qur'an.[47] Aïchata Traoré, who has presided over the LFCMB since 1998, has underscored the key role played by Bandé as a mentor, citing him as the reason she decided to become involved with the organization. Indeed, he convinced her to accept the presidency despite a busy schedule related to her work at the Central Bank of West African States.[48]

Independent of the assistance they have received from men, Muslim women and their various associations have been deeply involved in Islamic education. The have organized courses in Arabic and learning the Qur'an that have proved very popular with women of different ages and backgrounds. A growing number of options are available for Muslim women who work in the public service or who attended secular French-language schools. For example, the Ligue burkinabè à la lecture et à la mémorisation du saint Coran (Libulmesco) [Burkinabe League for Reading and Memorizing the Holy Qur'an] offers evening classes for learning the Qur'an and mastering classical Arabic.[49] The women's sections of the CERFI and the AEEMB have also organized evening classes so that French-educated women can learn to read the Qur'an and begin to understand the sacred text.[50]

Some have taken the quest for religious knowledge ever further, inaugurating a new era for Muslim women. For example, Sheikh Ousmane Maïga was among the prominent Sufi religious figures who trained Koulsoum, introduced above as the country's first female preacher.[51] At a ceremony held in June 2004 and attended by the country's foremost Muslim dignitaries, she amazed participants with her mastery of Arabic. Aboubacar Sana, the Grand Imam of the CMBF and an influential national figure, provided the following assessment: "Here among us, there are imams with beards a meter and a half long. But they would be jealous of this woman's knowledge."[52] The growth of women's activism has also been fostered by recent changes in attitudes toward women's access to more advanced Islamic education, as well as the modernization of madrasas.

47 Interview with Abass Nabi and Aïchata Traoré, April 21, 2015.

48 Interview with Aïchata Traoré, June 23, 2015.

49 Maud Saint-Lary, "Le Coran en cours du soir. La formation comme outil de réislamisation des musulmans francophones," *Ethnographiques.org*, no. 22 (2011), www.ethnographiques.org/2011/Saint-Lary.

50 Gomez-Perez and Madore, "Prêcheurs(ses) musulman(e)s et stratégies," 135–36.

51 Interview with Hadja Oumou Koulsoum, May, 2013.

52 "Femmes musulmanes de Gounghin: la maîtrise du coran au féminin pluriel," *L'Observateur Paalga*, June 8, 2004.

b) The Modernization of Madrasas and the Diversification of Opportunities for Islamic Education in Burkina Faso: Women with Advanced Religious Knowledge

Since Burkina Faso became more open to the Arab World under President Sangoulé Lamizana (1966–1980),[53] a greater diversity of opportunities for religious education have become more accessible to a large number of Muslims in the West-African country. In particular, with the support of the Arab Countries, there have been major changes in Burkina Faso's system of Islamic education: madrasas have been built, equipment and documents have been donated, salaries for madrasa teachers have been provided, and foreign teachers have been recruited.[54] The proliferation of madrasas has also been the result of activism on the part of Islamic associations like the CMBF and the Mouvement Sunnite (MS) [Sunni Mouvement], which have capitalized on their connections to Saudi Arabia in particular.[55] Furthermore, since the 1990s, numerous Islamic associations have founded new madrasas in order to compensate for shortfalls of the public education and healthcare systems.[56] During the first

53 This has manifested itself through the exchange of ambassadors and official travel by Lamizana or his ministers to Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, and Libya. Meetings have led to the signing of various cooperation agreements with Arab countries in the technical, economic, commercial, and cultural fields. "Visite officielle au Liban et en Arabie séoudite de M. Malick Zoromé," *Carrefour africain*, May 7, 1969; "Le Général Lamizana au Caire et à Tripoli," *Carrefour africain*, February 26, 1972; "Les raisons d'un voyage," *Carrefour africain*, March 11, 1972; "Kadhafi à Ouagadougou : le chef de l'État libyen est resté quelques heures," *Carrefour africain*, February 11, 1977; "Le Président Lamizana à Tripoli," *Carrefour africain*, September 28, 1979.

54 Issa Cissé, "Enseignement confessionnel musulman et laïcité au Burkina Faso," in *Islam et sociétés en Afrique subsaharienne à l'épreuve de l'histoire. Un parcours en compagnie de Jean-Louis Triaud*, ed. Odile Goerg and Anna Pondopoulo (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 339–43; "Enseignement confessionnel musulman et laïcité au Burkina Faso," in *L'Afrique des laïcités. État, religion et pouvoirs au sud du Sahara*, ed. Gilles Holder and Moussa Sow (Tombouctou: IRD Éditions, 2014), 128–29.

55 See Cissé, "Le wahhabisme au Burkina Faso."; "Les associations islamiques au Burkina Faso, de la Révolution d'août 1983 à l'avènement de la IVè République," *Cahiers du CERLESHS*, no. 28 (2007), 1–33; Cissé, "Islam et État au Burkina Faso : de 1960 à 1990" (PhD Thesis, Université de Paris VII - Denis Diderot, 1994), 218–36; Koné-Dao, "Implantation et influence."; René Otayek, "L'affirmation élitaire des arabisants au Burkina Faso. Enjeux et contradictions," in *Le radicalisme islamique au sud du Sahara : da'wa, arabisation et critique de l'Occident*, ed. René Otayek (Paris: Karthala, 1993), 229–252.

56 Kathéry Couillard, "Établissements d'enseignement et de santé confessionnels, espace public et *agency* à Ouagadougou (1987–2010)," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 50, no. 1 (2016), 87–104.

decade of the twenty-first century, the number of recognized madrasas continued to grow. According to statistics from the Direction de l'enseignement de base privé [Private Elementary Education Administration], in 2004–2005, there were a total of 199 institutions, compared to 12 in 1984.[57] The country is now home to two Muslim universities, the Centre universitaire polyvalent du Burkina Faso and Université Al Houda,[58] which are attracting larger and larger numbers of students. The MS has also acquired 28,000 m^2 of land in Ouagadougou's Area 28 for the construction of another Islamic university.[59]

The diversification and modernization of the country's madrasas has facilitated access to religious knowledge for women and, in some cases, supported more advanced Islamic studies. Granted, since the 1990s, a certain number of female preachers have been able to briefly pursue studies abroad.[60] However, many of the women who have risen to prominence within their own neighborhoods, as well as the majority of the female preachers heard on the Ridwane pour le Développement radio station, were locally educated in modernized madrasas,[61] including institutions run by the MS. Although this organization had previously been associated with a movement that promoted the isolation of women, the situation changed with the appointment of Mohamed Kindo, a supporter of women's education, as Grand Imam in 2005.[62] These evolving attitudes can be traced to women's increased access to Islamic education since the 1980s, itself a result of changes to educational institutions and the diversification and modernization of the madrasas. These institutions provided women with an opportunity to earn the *certificat*, the *brevet,* and the *baccalauréat*. For example, Zara is one of the most prominent and tenacious preachers affiliated with Ittihad Islami. She has hosted programs on the Al Houda radio station

57 Cissé, "Enseignement confessionnel musulman," 136.

58 "Écoles Franco-Arabes au Burkina : État des lieux et difficultés d'insertion des diplômés," *Lefaso.net*, May 29, 2013.

59 "8e congrès du mouvement sunnite du Burkina : pour une consolidation des acquis," *Le Pays*, April 2, 2013.

60 Gomez-Perez, "Women's Islamic activism in Burkina Faso."; "Female Preachers in Dakar and Ouagadougou: New Religious Educational Strategies?," in *ECAS 2011: 4th European Conference on African Studies* (*African Engagements: On Whose Terms?*) (Uppsala, Sweden 2011).

61 Interview with Souleymane Yanogo, March, 24, 2010,

62 For more details, see Savadogo and Gomez-Perez, "La médiatisation des prêches et ses enjeux. Regards croisés sur la situation à Abidjan et à Ouagadougou"; Gomez-Perez and Madore, "Prêcheurs(ses) musulman(e)s et stratégies." For similarities with the *Yan Izala* movement, see Umar, "Mass Islamic Education and Emergence of Female."; Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival*.

and has given speeches to the women of the MS. This is how she had described her educational itinerary: "I attended the Samandin Madrasa from 1974 to 1977 and then the Central Madrasa from 1977 to 1982. I earned my *brevet* [diploma awarded at the end of the first cycle of secondary studies] from the Aorèma Institute in 1991 and then, in 2000, I earned my Arabic *baccalauréat* [awarded at the end of the second cycle of secondary studies] from the Central Madrasa. After my *brevet* in 1991, I received training from an association: Ittihad Islami."[63]

Studies abroad and in modern madrasas have provided women with an avenue to claiming greater religious legitimacy. Some have managed to become prominent religious figures, recognized by male leaders for their formal expertise and knowledge of Arabic. At first glance, it might appear that these developments have pitted French-educated women against their Arabist counterparts. However, there is not really any direct competition between the two groups. In order to gain respect, Muslim women need to display religious modesty and humility, qualities that are celebrated across different Islamic movements.[64] As a result, the fact that they have completed religious studies abroad is not a particularly effective argument for women to use when positioning themselves in relation to other female figures of religious authority. Moreover, recent institutional changes related to the organization of the hajj and the development of media have facilitated the rise of new female figures within the Muslim community.

3 *Toward New Standards of Religious Legitimacy? The Role of the Hajj and New Media in the Emergence of Female Religious Figures*

As for men, the pilgrimage to Mecca is an important experience for many Muslim women. Since the 1990s, changes in how the hajj is organized in Burkina Faso have helped support the rise of female religious entrepreneurs. Either on their own or as members of associations, activities related to the pilgrimage have given these new Muslim figures opportunities to gain legitimacy, in spite of the fact that Burkinabe men maintain a near-monopoly on the public discussion of religion. In particular, some women has benefited from the democratization of religious knowledge, a process greatly enhanced by new technologies and the growth of Islamic media.

63 Interview with Zara, July 25, 2009.

64 This is also the case elsewhere in West Africa. See LeBlanc, "*Imaniya* and Young Muslim Women in Côte d'Ivoire"; LeBlanc, "Piety, Moral Agency, and Leadership"; and Schulz, "(Re)Turning to Proper Muslim Practice".

a) The Pilgrimage and the Emergence of Female Religious Entrepreneurs

West African Muslims, including many from Burkina Faso, have long participated in the pilgrimage to Mecca,[65] and the hajj remains an important symbol of commitment to the faith. It is not necessarily the pilgrimage itself that brings religious legitimacy, but rather how pilgrims use the experience to enhance their piety, their devotion to God, and their faithfulness to the teachings and practices of Islam; to increase their status; and to undergo personal transformation.[66] In these ways, the experience of the hajj has helped shape the lives of some Burkinabe women.[67] For example, Hadja Habibou Ouédraogo visited Mecca at the age of 23. Upon her return in 1950, she established "Le Foyer", an institution that trains a new group of girls every two years. In 1997, she claimed to have educated more than 1,000 girls between the ages of 12 and 17, some of whom came from Tangay in Mali.[68]

Sawadogo, who remains president of the women's section of Ittihad Islami, began a career as a preacher after her pilgrimage to Mecca in 1982. She has spoken of the life-changing nature of the experience: "On the Day of Arafat, I had a revelation: I was called to preach. I asked myself how I could preach without knowing the whole of the Qur'an. The women were gathered at Mecca and were chatting. I told myself that I could fill their time by reading from the Qur'an. From deep within, a voice told me to speak, speak [...] this is how I began to preach to women and in the presence of women."[69] Her personal religious experience made the sharing and transmission of knowledge an imperative duty. Fatoumata and Ramata had very similar experiences during the

65 Baz Lecocq, "The Hajj from West Africa from a Global Historical Perspective (19th and 20th Centuries)," *African Diaspora* 5, no. 2 (2012), 187–214.

66 This explains why, during the colonial period, French authorities were careful to exert significant control over the pilgrimage. See Juliette Van Duc, "Le pèlerinage des Voltaïques/Burkinabé aux lieux saints de l'islam, passé-présent. Orientation générale de thèse," *Islam et sociétés au sud du Sahara*, no. 5 (1991), 165–177; "Quelques aperçus relatifs aux pèlerins de la Mecque : le cas des Voltaïques-Burkinabé," *Paideuma*, no. 39 (1993), 135–144; Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

67 Muslim women elsewhere in Africa also use the hajj to negotiate greater religious legitimacy in patriarchal contexts. For the case of Hausa women, see Barbara M. Cooper, "The Strength in the Song: Muslim Personhood, Audible Capital, and Hausa Women's Performance of the Hajj," *Social Text*, no. 60 (1999), 87–109.

68 "Adja Habibou Ouédraogo: 46 ans au service de la jeune fille musulmane", *L'Observateur Paalga*, January 7, 1997.

69 Interview with Hadja Aminata Sawadogo, June 10, 2013.

pilgrimage in 1988. They noticed that the Burkinabe women participating in the hajj were mostly older and largely ignorant of their own religion. Upon their return in Burkina Faso, the two women began looking for a find a way to educate women and promote Islam among the country's youth. Their efforts led to the creation of the OFMB.[70]

In the mid-1990s, the profile of the typical pilgrim began to change and, over the next decade and a half, the number of pilgrims from Burkina Faso participating in the hajj increased significantly. Prior to the turn of the century, there were fewer than 1,000 Burkinabe pilgrims per year, and their number rarely exceeded 1,500 in any single year between 1978 and 2002.[71] Today, several thousand individuals take part each year; the number increased from approximately 2,200 in 2010[72] to 5,500 in 2014.[73] There has also been a significant increase in the number of young pilgrims, both men and women, who return to Mecca multiple times. Whereas for their elders the hajj was considered a singular life event, young people increasingly see the pilgrimage as a trip that can be repeated on a regular basis—for some, annually—and as a journey that can be undertaken early on in their lives.[74]

In particular, Burkinabe women have been participating in the pilgrimage in greater numbers. For a growing number of Muslim women, activism within Islamic organizations responsible for organizing the hajj is a way to claim legitimacy within their community. Following two particularly chaotic years, the state officially withdrew from organizing the pilgrimage in 2008, leaving the work to private travel agencies.[75] From the outset, there were tensions because

70 Focus group with pioneers from the women's section of the CERFI, June 18, 2015.

71 According to numbers compiled by Mahamoudou Oubda, *L'islam au Burkina Faso. Problématique de l'organisation du hadj* (Ouagadougou: Centre africain de diffusion islamique et scientifique, 2003), 68.

72 "518 pèlerins ouvrent le vol vers les lieux saints," *Sidwaya*, November 4, 2010. For these other years, see "Hadj 2011 : 2 915 pèlerins pour l'édition," *Le Pays*, October 23, 2011; "Pèlerinage à la Mecque : plus de 4 300 burkinabè en terre sainte," *Fasozine*, October 24, 2012; "Hadj 2013 : 4 576 musulmans burkinabè en terre sainte," *Lefaso.net*, October 10, 2013

73 "Hadj 2014: 5 500 Burkinabè y prendront part, tout est fin prêt!" *Lefaso.net*, September 6, 2014.

74 This has also been observed in Côte d'Ivoire. See Marie Nathalie LeBlanc, "Hadj et changements identitaires. Les jeunes musulmans d'Abidjan et de Bouaké, en Côte d'Ivoire, dans les années 1990," in *L'islam politique au sud du Sahara. Identités, discours, enjeux*, ed. Muriel Gomez-Perez (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 131–157; "Proclaiming Individual Piety: Pilgrims and Religious Renewal in Côte d'Ivoire," in *Claiming Individuality: The Cultural Politics of Distinction*, ed. Vered Amit and Noel Dyck (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 173–200.

75 "Hadj 2008: Premier test d'une 'privatisation encadrée'," *L'Observateur Paalga*, November 13, 2008.

of the monopoly exercised by one particular agency, the STMB.[76] In 1996, when she was in her 40s, Sara Zongo became the first woman to help organize the hajj, thanks to her profile within the Muslim community. As a representative of Islamic associations that wanted a woman to coordinate travel for other women, and given the increasing number of women who wanted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, Zongo was able to exercise leadership that extended beyond her own gender community. Her involvement raised her profile even more and had a positive impact on the agency where she worked—the OKAZ agency, created in 2009. Indeed, OKAZ experienced significant growth and became responsible for increasingly large numbers of pilgrims—up to 350 in 2013.[77]

Two recent incidents highlight the agency exercised by women in this sector. First of all, in March 2012, there was a protest by a group of pilgrims in Ouagadougou. Seventy-two pilgrims had been unable to make the trip, and the protesters blamed the travel agencies in charge of organizing that year's pilgrimage, as well as the national carrier, Air Burkina. In this context, Hadja Kadidia Tiendrébéogo criticized journalists for not interviewing the pilgrims themselves when reporting on the situation. Furthermore, she suggested that, in the future, licenses should only be granted to travel agencies truly qualified for the work, and not simply those that had the most money; she complained about newly-introduced passport fees of 50,000 FCFA, where previously there had been no such charge; and she expressed disbelief at the involvement of three separate ministries in the organization of the hajj in 2012, when there were only 4,500 pilgrims.[78] Tienbrébéogo later became the founder and president of Voix du Pèlerin [Voice of the Pilgrim], an association that defends the interests of pilgrims.[79] The second development highlighting women's will to organize themselves in relation to the hajj was the creation of the Association d'Entraide des Femmes Musulmanes du Burkina (AEFMB) [Mutual Aid Association of Muslim Women of Burkina Faso]. This organization was established in April 2013 and gained official recognition on June 10 of the same year. One of its objectives is to promote different forms of mutual assistance that support the full participation of its members—mostly women—in the pilgrimage to

76 Interview with Sara Zongo, June 4, 2013.

77 *Ibid*. This type of female entrepreneurship related to the hajj has been observed in other parts of West Africa. For the case of Senegal, see Ferdaous Hardy and Jeanne Semin, "Fissabillilah! Islam au Sénégal et initiatives féminines. Une économie morale du pèlerinage à La Mecque," *Afrique contemporaine* 231, no. 3 (2009), 139–153; Gomez-Perez and Ba, "Les prédicatrices au Sénégal," 194–96.

78 "Hadj 2012: des pèlerins remontés marchent sur le MATDS," *Le Pays*, October 17, 2012.

79 "Candidats au Hadj: comme celle du muezzin, elle monte, 'La Voix du pèlerin'," *L'Observateur Paalga*, June 20, 2013.

Mecca.[80] Alongside activities focused on the hajj, a renewed sense of religious legitimacy has been developed around female preachers. To a great extent, the influence of these women depends on their public speaking skills, their charisma, and their ability to use the media.

b) Mass Media and the "Democratization" of Religious Knowledge: New Visibility for Muslim Women

Until the mid-1980s, the Muslim community of Burkina Faso had a very limited presence in the press, beyond coverage of major Islamic holidays, the inauguration of mosques, or the deaths of Muslim dignitaries. However, the number of articles about Islam has increased significantly, reflecting the interests of a growing Muslim readership. Since the 1990s, French-speaking imams and preachers have appeared more regularly in the mainstream media. They are occasionally interviewed by journalists on topics such as state secularism, and the wearing of the veil in public schools, and Islamic religious practices.[81]

It is therefore still usually men, often imams, who address women's issues related to Islam in the mainstream media.[82] However, some French-educated women, who are often affiliated with the AEEMB or the CERFI, have managed to gain more visibility. They have expressed themselves on issues such as female genital mutilation, women's education, and the participation of women in the country's socio-economic development. Indeed, the leaders of the women's sections of these two organizations have increasingly seized opportunities to express themselves publicly. For example, women active in the CERFI wrote an article on women's rights in Islam that was published on the popular news website *Lefaso.net* in August 2012.[83] They have also received much more media coverage than before for their educational activities, debates, and seminars.[84]

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80 "L'AEFMB offre 15 billets d'avion pour la Mecque," *Le Pays*, July 29, 2013.

81 Madore, "Islam, médias, mise en place du Sénat," 12.

82 "Femmes, faits et droit: 'L'islam accorde une place importante à la femme', dixit El Hadj Adama Sakandé," *Sidwaya*, July 9, 2000 (Imam Adama Sakandé); "Du port du voile lors des concours," *L'Observateur Paalga*, May 20, 2012 (Imam Ismaël Tiendrébéogo); "Mode vestimentaire chez la femme en Islam: au nom du respect et de la dignité," *Sidwaya*, August 6, 2013 (Imam Nouhoun Bakayogo).

83 "Islam: des droits de la femme reconnus," *lefaso.net*, August 12, 2012.

84 "Une cinquantaine de femmes musulmanes en formation," *Sidwaya*, December 6, 2005; "Les femmes musulmanes planchent sur la paix," *L'Evènement*, November 25, 2007; "Journée des sœurs: le 8 mars sous l'angle religieux," *Faso Actu*, March 10, 2012; "Séminaire des sœurs de L'AEEMB: la question de la foi et de liberté au menu des échanges," *Faso Actu*, December 31, 2012; "Religion: les femmes musulmanes discutent des défis des sociétés actuelles," *lefaso.net* June 2, 2014.

This increased visibility allows them to make their views known on a variety of topics, but it also legitimizes their activities in the eyes of the broader Muslim community.

French-educated women have also become active in the Islamic media. For example, in fall 1998, members of the women's section of the CERFI expressed their indignation in an article on the promotion of condom use in Burkina Faso, published in the Islamic newspaper *L'Appel*.[85] Other women have occasionally contributed to articles published in the French-language weekly *An-Nasr Vendredi*, launched by the AEEMB in January 1997 and still published today. Furthermore, several Arabic-educated female preachers have gained access to the airwaves since the turn of the twenty-first century. Private Islamic radio stations have been established in Ouagadougou, including Al Houda (December 2004) and Ridwâne pour le Développement (March 2010). Thus, although men have retained a near-monopoly over the public discussion of Islam in Islamic media, a few young highly-educated women who are skilled at public speaking have succeeded in entering a space that was previously reserved exclusively for men.[86] Initially, these women were seen as having insufficient knowledge of religious matters, and they were only asked to comment on topics related to women's roles as wives and mothers. At Al Houda, they did so under the strict religious supervision of male Arabists who had returned from studies abroad at the turn of the twenty-first century, and who kept a close eye on the religious content of the radio station.[87]

Since Ridwâne pour le Développement belongs to Sheikh Doukouré, the spiritual guide of Ittihad Islami, those responsible for religious programming at the radio station turned to female members of the association. Meanwhile, Al Houda representatives also tried to recruit female preachers through members of Ittihad Islami. Ultimately, female preachers began to take to the airwaves in May 2013. They are seen as being on the cutting edge of *daʿwa*, and their contributions are considered an asset by station management, especially in discussions on themes such as raising children and women's rights and responsibilities. Recently, one of two programs hosted by women began to be broadcast live in order to make it more interactive and to respond to the growing demand for this kind of program.[88] While men have been conscious

85 "Cris des mères: pluie de capotes sur le Burkina," *L'Appel*, no 23, September-October, 1998.

86 Women have yet to host any shows on TV Al Houda, a private Islamic television station launched in spring 2012.

87 Savadogo and Gomez-Perez, "La médiatisation des prêches et ses enjeux. Regards croisés sur la situation à Abidjan et à Ouagadougou."

88 Interview with Souleymane Yanogo, June 5, 2013.

of the importance of women's contributions to the dynamism of Islam for a relatively long time, women have only just begun to capitalize on opportunities to gain visibility and build a mixed (male and female) audience.

Conclusion

While the still-limited scholarship on Muslim women in Burkina Faso has focused either on French-educated or Arabic-educated women, this article has sought to study these two groups in parallel, in order to better understand their individual and collective contributions to the development of Islam in the country. By highlighting, through the lens of performativity, identity markers closely associated with key moments in these women's trajectories, we have shown some of the complex ways in which they have capitalized on new opportunities to increase their public profile and their legitimacy as Muslims. Like their male counterparts, they have affirmed their Islamic identity through activism within associations, as well as through personal initiatives, religious studies, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and media activities. They have avoided directly challenging male normative religious discourses. Rather, they have displayed creativity and adaptability in reconfiguring social and gender norms. Initially, pioneering women such as Koulsoum and Ramata helped create separate women's association or new spaces for women within existing Islamic organizations. More recent structural changes within the Muslim community have provided women with more stable platforms from which to express themselves. At the same time, men such as Doukouré and Kindo have encouraged structural change within organizations like Ittihad Islami and the MS.

Although Burkinabe women's involvement in *daʿwa* can be traced back as far as the 1970s, it did not become well-structured until the end of the next decade. It gained more visibility in the 1990s and especially in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, in recent decades, men have come to see the importance of working with women to pursue the work of *daʿwa*. However, even before Muslim leaders began showing a real commitment to giving women a larger role inside associations, a small number of Arabic-educated women without ties to existing organizations emerged as public figures during the 1970s. French-educated Muslim women began organizing themselves for the purpose of pursuing Islamic activism at the end of the 1980s. They were instrumental in creating various women's Islamic organizations over the course of the following decade. In addition to activism within Islamic associations, many Muslim women have been able to increase their

personal knowledge of Islam as a way of reinforcing their religious legitimacy. While Sufi religious leaders played an important role in training some women, others were able to take advantage of the ongoing modernization of the country's madrasas and the diversification of opportunities for Islamic education in Burkina Faso. More recently, some women have developed new ways of building their legitimacy within the Muslim community. Changes in how the hajj is organized in Burkina Faso have fostered the emergence of female religious entrepreneurs. Other women have been able to use the media as a platform to share their views on different topics and to attract a larger following among the faithful.

Working alongside men, Muslim women have had to show significant flexibility in the strategies they have adopted to claim religious legitimacy and increase their visibility. Even if they are now playing a more prominent role in the Muslim community of Burkina Faso, none of them have established themselves as authoritative or charismatic leaders, in contrast to women in some neighboring countries. Nevertheless, they are using every opportunity to gain visibility and seek recognition of their religious legitimacy within their community. In the meantime, Burkinabe women remain objects of religious regulation in a context where gender distinctions are enforced by male authority figures. Leveraging their formal expertise and knowledge of Arabic to establish themselves as figures of religious authority therefore remains an ongoing process.