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Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara and the Islamic Movement Ansar Dine

A Popular Malian Reformism in Search of Autonomy

The purpose of this text is to analyze the Malian Islamic movement known as Ansar Dine (“Ançar Dine” in official occurrence, from the Arabic *ansar-al-din*, literally “those who help religion”), a popular and at the same time controversial movement that constitutes one of the main areas of social change in Mali. Ansar Dine was founded by Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara, an exceptional character who has transformed the religious sphere and the modalities of the public expression of Islam in Mali, and the movement is attracting an increasing number of followers and sympathizers, both in Mali and in neighboring countries. However, although Haidara and his charismatic brand of proselytism have been the subject of partial researches in the English speaking world (Davis 2002; Schulz 2003 and 2007; Soares 2005 and 2006), and have fueled numerous press articles in Mali and neighboring countries, no substantial analysis has yet been undertaken into the rise of this major figure in Malian public life, or into the nature of his iconoclastic movement.

This relative absence of research into the form of organization and the methods and doctrinal characteristics adopted by Ansar Dine is all the more surprising because the movement is perceived (and called upon) as the major platform for social criticism vis-à-vis the State and the establishment, and also as the main Islamic alternative to the dynamics of what I will call “reformed Sunnism.”¹ There are to date 146 officially recognized national and international, local or transnational associations and organizations (Thiriôt 2010), that all contribute to the heterogeneous nature of Malian Islam. Mali is characterized by a low level of recruitment by the brotherhoods—unlike neighboring Senegal—and by the presence of thousand-year-old “holy cities” (Holder 2012) such as Timbuktu and Jenne, that are a reminder the long history of Sufi Islam in the national area. Yet although Islam has existed in the country for a very long time, contemporary

1. I prefer to talk about “reformed Sunnism” here, rather than “Wahhabism”, in reference to the various tendencies that aligned themselves with the neo-Hanbalite reform undertaken by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the eighteenth century, and which broke away from Malikism practiced by most of the Muslims in West Africa.

Mali is notable for the phenomenon of mass re-Islamization—the figures put forward, excluding any denominational statistics, vary between 90 and 95% of the population—which, assuming it is relatively recent, confirms that from the geopolitical standpoint, the Republic of Mali, founder of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), is predominantly an Islamic country.

Although this dynamic² and heterogeneous Islamic world is still mainly Sunni and belongs traditionally to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, since the mid-1990s a new social, spiritual, and even civilizing competition has been emerging from within it, temporarily sidelining the religious lineages, the saints, and other marabouts, or holy men who are the main constituents of the “clerical class” (Triaud 1985) in Mali. There are two main opposing tendencies that fall into the category of “reformist”; on the one hand, followers of a literalist form of Islam at the center of the neo-Hanbalite reform, and on the other, those who claim to represent a popular form of Islam through an African cultural understanding of Maliki Islam, of which Ansar Dine is the prime mover, alongside more recent so-called Sufi movements, such as that of Cheick Soufi Bilal (Soares 2007 and 2010) or that of Soufi Adama (Soares 2007; Bourdarias 2008).

This competition, which has stirred up the current Islamic climate in Mali by sparking off debates beyond the religious sphere,³ has assumed the form of a doctrinal battle that had already been evident in the course of ritual practices for some time. It also, however, takes on an aspect of a historic and personal confrontation represented by two prominent figures in Malian Islam today: Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara, the Maliki “spiritual guide” of Ansar Dine, and Mahmoud Dicko, imam at the reformed Sunni mosque at Badalabougou, and former secretary-general of the Malian Association for Unity and the Progress of Islam (AMUPI), set up by the government in 1980 to control religious activity in the country (Sanankoua 1991).

Although sociologically Haidara’s Islam is positioned alongside the silent, the illiterate, and those who exist on the margins of society, since Imam Mahmoud Dicko’s election as the head of the High Islamic Council of Mali (HCIM) in January 2008 and the campaign he led against the revision of the new family code in August 2009 (Soares 2009; Thiriôt 2010), the popularity stakes have turned in favor of Sunnite reformism (Anonymous 2009; Meunier 2010). Apart from the “natural” legitimacy of those who refer to an Islam reputed to draw inspiration from the *salafi* and the holy sites of Saudi Arabia, as well as the control of the HCIM, and the benefits of the financial manna

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2. In 1988, there were more than two hundred mosques in Bamako, compared with seventy-seven in 1966, and forty-one in 1960 (Sanankoua 1991, 127); some calculate the number of mosques to date to be around one thousand (Barry 2004, 27)
 3. These debates mainly take place on commercial radio and are then broadcasted on cheap and accessible formats such as cassette tapes, video CDs, and so on. They tackle all the major social problems: road safety, fifty years of independence, female circumcision, the legal status of women, the death penalty, education and youth employment, emigration, and so forth (Holder 2009; Thiriôt 2010).

provided by the Gulf states, the reformist Sunnis' focus on mosques, madrasas, media associations, and spiritual centers constitutes a powerful tool for spreading their message.⁴

Although the influence of the reformist Sunnis in Mali is enormous, the Ansar Dine association represents an alternative to the Salafite hegemony, and from this point of view, it is relevant to attempt to understand the nature of this movement, and, primarily, the personality of its leader. Indeed, the question arises as to how and why Haidara, who for a long time was viewed by the establishment both as a troublemaker with little religious education (Schulz 2007, 41) and as a populist agitator and “sect” (sic) leader with political ambitions, managed to become secretary of religious affairs at HCIM in 2000 (he is at present its second vice-president) and secretary for religious activities and preaching at the Malian League of Imams and Islamic Scholars (LIMAMA). Haidara and his Ansar Dine movement appear to become a key feature of the Islamic sphere in Mali, to the point where the political authority has begun to see it, if not as an alternative to the reformist Sunni element, then at least as a means of redressing the balance and potentially allowing some room to maneuver.

Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara: A Statement of Identity as a Religious Itinerary

The genesis of the Ansar Dine, which according to its Internet site now has “more than one hundred thousand members, in twenty-four countries, thirty sections, 169 subsections and nine hundred committees,”⁵ is closely linked to the movement’s “spiritual guide” (*dînè nyemògò*),⁶ Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara. I will, therefore, firstly begin by presenting the most important elements in the biography of this Islamic leader,⁷ who first emerged in the

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4. Imam Mahmoud Dicko would have been at the head of twenty or so Islamic associations either jointly or in succession; see Baxter (2002).
 5. This information was taken from Ansar Dine’s new Internet site: <http://ousmanehaidara.com> accessed October 4, 2010. The site replaced the now-closed first site <http://www.ancardine-haidara.com>, accessed in June 2006.
 6. The vernacular terms in this text are in Bamanan or Bambara language; they have been transcribed into a simplified phonetic alphabet: *e* = *é* (ay); *è* = *è* or *ê* (eh); *ò* = open o as in “got;” voiceless palatal plosive *c* = as in “check-list;” palatal nasal *ny* like the *ñ* in *mañana*; velar nasal *ng* = as in “camping.”
 7. The biographical information concerning Haidara comes from a combination of three sources: 1. An interview in Bamanan at Haidara’s home in Bamako July 9, 2008; 2. A press interview by Kassim Traoré in *Bamako Hebdo* March 13, 2010, entitled “Le Prêcher Chérif Ousmane Madani; La légitime défense n’est pas interdite en Islam”; 3. A booklet in the Nko language *Qui est Haidara?*, an official biography published in 2007 by three of Haidara’s followers; the main author Oumar Traoré, in collaboration with Mahamoudou Sankaré and Aboubakar Touré. I am indebted to Soumaïlla Camara, who has a master’s in anthropology from Bamako University, for help in decoding this booklet.

mid-1970s, and by retracing the path during which he built himself up to become a prominent new figure in Malian Islam. Secondly, I will go on to examine the characteristics of his doctrinal position, which, in breaking with traditional norms, reveals a certain number of original traits.

Haidara, or the Beginning of a Vocation

The only son of Mamadou Madani and Assitan Traoré, Haidara was born in 1955 in Tamani, a village about seventy kilometers south from Segou, reputed to have been founded in the late nineteenth century by the jihadist warrior Al-Hajj ‘Umar al-Futi (Robinson 1988). From 1962 to 1964, he remained at the Koranic school in Tamani, led by a certain Bakari Famanta, while still attending the French school. In 1964, Haidara’s father, a member of the Tijaniyya, obtained authorization for his son to be withdrawn from this school, and entered him into the Saada Oumar Touré madrasa in Segou.

Louis Brenner (1991b, 73–74) points out that this madrasa, set up in 1946, was actually the first to have been opened by a Malian (as well as the one in Kayes). In keeping with the dynamics characterized by the reformist Sunnis in Mali (Hams 1980; Amselle 1985; Triaud 1986; Brenner 1991a), Touré was inspired by this reformist movement to set up a *tijani* madrasa, which is up to now one of the most famous centers of Islamic education in the country. By reconciling social modernity with a renewed form of *tijani* pedagogy, Saada Oumar Touré’s school offered not only a doctrinal alternative to the reformist Sunni madrasa, but represented a challenge to the colonial authorities, who were continually imposing restrictions upon him. It appears that this “third way” represented by the Segou madrasa made a profound impression on the future leader of Ansar Dine. Gradually he emerged as the main opposition to the reformist Sunnis, while at the same time, until recent years at least, maintaining his distance from a succession of Malian political regimes.

After six years, around 1970, Haidara left Saada Oumar Touré’s madrasa, as his father wanted him to further his education alongside his friend Bamama Worofana, a Koranic master who taught in the village of Fasonko, near Segou. According to Haidara, this new teacher was of an inferior level compared to Touré, to the extent that, according to Haidara, he hardly spoke Arabic, although he accepts that this teacher did pass on other guiding principles. Haidara stayed at Fasonko for four years until his father’s death in 1974, when he returned to his family in Tamani, thus bringing his religious education to a close at the age of nineteen. In 1976, he travelled to Ivory Coast, in particular to Daoukro and Bonkani, where he began his “preaching” (*wajuli*). In 1978, he returned to Tamani for a year, then left again for Abidjan, where he set up as a “preacher” (*wajulikèla*) and “marabout” (*mòri*). Around 1981, he returned to Mali for good and devoted himself to preaching in Tamani and Mopti. However, in 1983,

following some serious differences of opinion with Karamogo Lassana,⁸ a famous preacher also officiating in Mopti, the administrative authorities announced that they were suspending Haidara's religious activities.

Haidara, the Exemplary Symbol of a Warrior Hero

Haidara then went to his older half brother Yacouba in Bamako, so that he might intervene and have the suspension lifted. This mediation appears to have been successful as the suspension was lifted a year later. However, it was not long before Haidara would continue his preaching in Bamako, as his brother had invited him to preach at night in the Lafiabougou N'Gabakoro mosque during Ramadan in June 1984. Because of the reception he was given there, he was then asked to go and preach in the former Railda Square, which separates Oulofobougou-Bolibana and Dravéla.⁹ Another very popular preacher from Segou, Abdul Aziz Djiré, also preached there, and it appears that Haidara was inspired by his methods of preaching in public (Davis 2002, 130, 132).

From 1984 until 1989, Haidara lived successively in various parts of Bamako: Quinzambougou, Medina Coura, and Ngolonina, which is next to Bozola, the historic center of Bamako, where the great marabout families of Niaré and Touré had been settled since the mid-nineteenth century (Marty 1920a, 65–72). However, with the growing success of the young Haidara's iconoclastic sermons, the AMUPI office in Bamako, dominated by the reformist Sunnis, demanded that he be suspended once again and this was granted at the end of 1989. Haidara explains quite frankly the reasons behind this suspension, and considers that the kind of reprisals to which he was subject at that time have retrospectively endowed him with a form of historical, if not heroic, legitimacy. Unlike the Mopti suspension, where the main reproach against him was related to his criticism of the authorities and the establishment, his suspension in Bamako was more to do with two doctrinal issues, revealing at the same

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8. Lassana Kané, known as Karamogo Lassana, was the son of Mamadi Kané from Segou, who moved to Koulikoro around 1900 (Marty 1920b, 61). He was well known for his knowledge of the *hadith* and was one of the great *tijani* teachers at the end of the 1950s. Mainly based in Mopti and Kayes, he was very active in the US-RDA, preached in favor of Modibo Keita, and died in 1981 or 1982. The enthusiasm he aroused in the crowd, especially women, was because of his knowledge, but also because of his voice, which exuded such charm that in the 1970s he was known as "James Brown," in reference to the magnetic sensuality of the hit "Sex Machine," (information provided to me personally by Professor Bagayogo from ISFRA in Bamako, February 14, 2011).
 9. Old Railda Square was on what is now the Boulevard de l'Indépendance. More a patch of waste ground than a square, it was a place where children played football, and where concerts and dances were held; it was big enough for preachers to gather crowds of followers (based on private information provided by Professor Bagayogo, see above).

time that the preacher's career was moving from simple opposition to the social order to a critique of the legitimacy of the knowledge that supposedly justified that order.

The first point of reproach was based on a position that Haidara would later substantiate with the phrase: "Prayer is not Islam!" (*sali tè silamèya ye*). Apart from exposing himself to the consequences of scandal, and the risk of apostasy, Haidara was really questioning existing Islamic practices by criticizing the notion of being "Muslim by birth" (*silamèden*). In his opinion, if prayer is one of the pillars of Islam and an obligation for every Muslim, it is not enough to exonerate one from living according to the Koran and *shariah*. Haidara considers that to be a true Muslim it is necessary to consciously reaffirm a commitment to the message of the Prophet, to undergo a sort of confirmation in the Christian sense of the term, which would be enacted by a series of six "promises" (*lay-iduw*) introduced through a *bayah*, a pledge, to which I will return later in this article. The second point, which is perhaps not as controversial from the doctrinal point of view, relates to Haidara's attack on the Sunni tradition by stating that 'Isa (Jesus) is dead and will not return at the "day of judgment" (*Qiyamah*) to help the Mahdi. Haidara was accused of *bid'a* by the AMUPI, and in 1989 he found himself once again banned from preaching by the public authorities—a decision not entirely unconnected with Pope John-Paul II's visit to Mali, which was due to take place in January 1990.

As Haidara himself points out, whether it is a question of criticizing those who pray as a way of conforming socially, or whether it is a matter of stating categorically that 'Isa is dead, the important issue is to make people understand that "something new is happening in our sermons with regard to Islam,"¹⁰ namely that something unprecedented had been introduced both in the Islam as preached by Haidara and in the form of his sermons (Davis 2002, 131). His emphasis on this new dimension (*kura*) is largely because from that time onwards he claimed to be a reformer who intended to revive popular religious practices. More than incomprehension, Haidara was met with rejection, particularly on the part of the reformist Sunnis, as well as the imams, the religious lineages, and lastly the public authorities, which largely explains the reason for these suspensions.

A Game of Names and Titles

Whatever the nature of his claims as a reformer, and apart from his opposition to the Sunni reforms, Haidara does appear as a somewhat irrepressible phenomenon in the largely co-opted world of the Malian religious elite. From his first appearance in Railda Square, not only was his level of religious knowledge

10. Interview with Haidara on July 9, 2008.

brought into question, but also his origins, which were judged to be somewhat obscure, and the doubtful title of *Chérif* attributed to this unknown giver of sermons. The expression of identity in the title of “Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara” that he uses nowadays is the provisional and impermanent result of a self-making that Haidara himself is continually revising, and which is worthy of some brief consideration.

Although in principle it may seem acceptable for a Malian called Haidara to take the title of *Chérif* (a descendant of Muhammad), in this particular case, it is a tutelary name that Haidara may have inherited from one Chérif Moussa, a family ancestor to whom he pays homage every year by visiting his grave at Djedabougou Wéré, near Tamani. Worse rumors claim that the name Haidara was given to the family as the Islamic equivalent of that of Traoré, thus reducing it to a common “Marka” identity relating to a community historically known as Muslim traders with links to mediaeval Mali. Of course, for their part, Haidara’s supporters defend his claims to *Chérif* origins. Some attribute this to the lineage of Sidi Ibrahim Haidara, better known as Nyaro Karamogo, one of those modest “*hommes de religion*” (Triaud 1985, 273) who preached in rural areas in the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹ The official version, according to Ansar Dine, reveals that the Tamani *Chérifs* are of Iraqi origin, and in the Malian phase of their journey passed through Jenne (or Dia) and underwent a test of their holiness—plunging their hands in boiling oil to retrieve the king’s ring—before settling in Tamani some two hundred years ago to practice as religious teachers. This official version also points out that, whereas it is possible to bear the name Haidara without being a *Chérif*, particularly for those who claim to be descended from ‘Ali, but not through his sons Hasan and Husayn, the inverse is not possible. Hence for the leader of Ansar Dine, the use of the name and title *Chérif* and Haidara is a means of stating his legitimate claim as a *Chérif* in spite of protests to the contrary.

More crucial perhaps is the fact that in the Arab world “even if a man is not born a *Chérif*, it is possible to become one” (Rhani 2009, 32), as long as he has the *baraka*, the blessing that distinguishes him as the holy person, or more especially as the *wali*, “the friend (or helper) of God.” Rhani also points out that “since they could not all claim to originate from the *Chorfa* or *Chérifs*, the saints and their descendants tried every possible means of getting themselves included in the lineage of the Prophet, either by obtaining a decree from the sultan to validate such a connection, or by the Prophet himself appearing in a dream to bear witness and certify the truth of the affiliation” (Rhani 2009, 32). In Haidara’s case, the political authorities obviously did not issue any such

11. Ibrahima Haidara was famous for having converted many farmers in the Sansanding region during the 1920s and 1930s, and for having fought against the colonial authority delegated to Mademba Sy, the king of Sansanding appointed by Archinard after the conquest of Sudan. His opposition to colonial power resulted in him being sent to prison several times, and he was even deported to the Ivory Coast; see Marty (1920b, 183–184) and Manley (1997, 324–334).

decree. The legitimacy of his status of *Chérif* is therefore to be sought on the side of divine grace and the validation of his iconoclastic religious trajectory by the people.

Haidara, the Absolute Chérif

While Haidara's critics can provide no tangible proof against his use of the title *Chérif*, rumor (*mògòkan*) still abounds that in the prestigious identity of Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara, the preacher can only truly claim Madani, the name of his father. A recent press article, besides being overindulgent and authoritative,¹² points out that in his own village Haidara was called Chérif Bazoumana, after the name of a former muezzin at the mosque in Tamani. It was only when he joined the Segu madrasa that Haidara's teacher Saada Oumar Touré told him that Bazoumana was the Bamanan pronunciation of Ba Ousmane, "old Ousmane." So although neither Chérif, nor Haidara, nor entirely Ousmane, the man who will become the most famous preacher in Mali, who the media dub the "Malian Murid" or "the red Imam" (Serge Daniel of Radio France Inter), the man whose supporters call both *Bani* (the Descendant),¹³ *Wulibali* (the Indisputable), or *Nyemògò*, (the Guide), is first and foremost a "self-made man," all the more successful in recruiting supporters because he is the embodiment of success in the eyes of all those who have inherited nothing. However, with one sweeping gesture of the hand, Haidara dismisses these doubts surrounding his identity and that question his religious authority: "As everyone is going on about the name Haidara," he told a journalist during an interview, "I would prefer to be called Coulibaly, so that I can carry on my work better. A man should glory in the deeds he performs, not live off the name of his parents. As Coulibaly, I will feel at ease" (Traoré 2007).

This response is full of impertinence in the sense that the name Coulibaly is one of the most common names in Mali, rather like Smith or Jones, and is particularly used in the *sanankuya* or "joking relationships." Haidara's reply is above all a swipe at the religious aristocracies who pride themselves on being the guarantors of an Islam that is established and validated in the name of a tradition and a heritage that Haidara considers of little value. In his view, the message of the Prophet is as much about deeds performed here on earth as it is about making sure of salvation in the afterlife. In taking on this intraworldly position, Haidara is taking responsibility for his own self-constructed identity,

12. Kassim Traoré, "Zihara 2007 et Aid el Fitr à Tamani: plus de 15000 fidèles originaires de 33 pays mobilisés par Haidara," article in *Bamako Hebdo*, October 19, 2007.

13. This diminutive represents to some extent his religious motto, *yaa bani haasimu*, "the descendant of the Banu Hashim," the Hashemite clan descended from Muhammad's great grandfather, Hashim ibn Abd al-Manaf, the members of which are traditionally *Chérifs* of Mecca.

even when it might be ambiguous. This is very much the reasoning behind the effort he has made since 2006 to firmly establish his official biography using a written and multilingual strategy that indicates a desire to go beyond the audio-visual methods that had characterized his form of popular proselytism.

Accordingly, in 2009, when his Mawlid sermon was broadcast, he replaced the name *Chérif* by the title *Aseid* on the sleeve of his video CDs, thus revealing that he considered the *Chérif* in his name to be a title. He then became “Aseid Ousmane Madani Haidara,” then “Aseid Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara.” While this new title was not without its ambiguities, since some of his followers took it to mean simply *sheik*, the use of this term, borrowed from the Persian title *as-Sayyid*, a near equivalent to the Arabic *Sharif*, was nevertheless an insolent riposte to those who had already protested against his use of the title *Chérif*. This is not only because it would mean that he is descended from the *Chérifs* of Mecca, but also because this latest biographical innovation was an implicit reference to the Iranian, or even the Shiite, world.¹⁴ Finally, this new title *Aseid* was merely restating the religious legitimacy that Haidara believes that he obtains solely from his followers. These include first, the supporters of his movement, “those belonging to Ansar Dine,” (*ansaardinuw*), then also those more numerous who maintain that he is telling the “truth,” (*tiyèn*), referred to as “those who listen to Haidara,” (*haydara lamènbaaw*).

In the same vein, Haidara’s criticism of those who “inherit” their status is also a way of questioning the legitimacy of the way *baraka* is transmitted, and of the holy status of the “friend of God” (*waliju*, from the Arabic *wali*). This does not, however, prevent Haidara from permitting his followers to call him sheik, and from looking kindly upon those who praise him, if not for his miracles (*kabako*, from the Arabic *karama*), at least because he is “one who has a destiny” (*nankama*). In fact, unlike the religious aristocracy and the sheiks in the ancient brotherhoods, Haidara does not claim to have any inherited *baraka*, but a *baraka* transmitted directly from the Prophet, who can also endorse his title of *Chérif* and his path to spiritual success. Equally, in his official biography he does not seek to follow the example of Cheick Soufi Bilal (Maïga n.d., 44–45) and establish a list of miracles. The name *Bani* makes him not only *Chérif*, but also a descendant of the *Chérifs* of Mecca. In taking this literally Haidara puts himself forward as a sort of saint without miracles, or rather as a man whose life in the image of the Prophet of Islam is a miracle in itself because it is “transforming society” (*ka yéléma naa ti sigida kono*). His official praise singer Nouhoum Dembélé popularized the “re-Islamization” work carried

14. Just as, in 2005, he organized a public sermon for “*ashura*,” the tenth day of Muharram—even though it is a Sunni occasion—and had thousands of badges made with a picture of him posing with Ayatollah Khomeiny. Haidara’s relationship with the Iranian Islamic center in Bamako was well known, and he was careful to regularly invite Malian Shiite personalities to his public appearances. This gave his detractors cause to suspect that Haidara was receiving considerable financial support from Iran, where he had been invited on one occasion.

out by Haidara in a song called “*Folikan*” (“Salutation”),¹⁵ which he adapted in 2004 from the eponymous song by the Super Biton de Ségou¹⁶ Regional Orchestra composed in 1988 in honor of the former president Moussa Traoré. As the official praise and a true panegyric to Haidara the “re-Islamizer,” this song presents him as the man who “took the Koran and gave it to the Muslims.” The song also became the “anthem of Ansar Dine International.”¹⁷

Henceforth this historical enemy of the reformist Sunnis emerges as a reformer who constantly questions the legitimacy of the marabout lineage and other living saints, and as a re-Islamizer who reveals true Islam. Endeavoring to counter his followers’ attempts to present him as a saint—and yet without entirely discouraging them—Haidara tries to portray his religious path as the very model of a holy life in the image of the life of the Prophet Muhammad. However, Haidara’s self-production as a major figure in Malian Islam is also based on the formation in parallel of Ansar Dine, a movement based on the Muhammadan Epic that took shape between 1984 and 1989.

Ansar Dine: Between a Muhammadan Epic and a Civilian Association

When he went to preach in Railda Square in 1984, Haidara seems to have been well received, to the extent that he ousted the famous preacher Abdul Aziz Djiré, who had preached there before. It is said that at the end of 1984 and the beginning of 1985,¹⁸ the two masters threw themselves into a public display of verbal jousting, in which Haidara argued that the use of hair adornments was frowned upon by Islam, not only because they drew attention to themselves in an indecent manner that aroused male desires, but also because such adornments stopped women from performing the ablutions to their face and hair as required by Islam. Abdul Aziz Djiré replied that it was impossible to forbid everything, and argued the point that hair adornments made no difference to the ritual ablutions. In spite of this, it was Haidara’s moralizing rhetoric that won the debate, to the extent that a group of six women appealed to him to continue his preaching, and in return offered to help him “because of God and his Prophet” (Traoré 2007, 14).

15. See this text in Traoré (2007, 21–22).

16. Biton Coulibaly was the founder of the state of Segou. Regarding the success of the Super Biton de Ségou, see Florent Mazzoleni (2008, 43–45).

17. The expression is used by O. S. Traoré (2008, 18) in the French translation of Haidara’s biography.

18. My thanks go to Pierre Prud’homme, doctoral candidate in anthropology at the Université de Provence, who passed on this anecdote by an ORTM journalist whom he had met at the *ziyara* in Tamani, November 2010.

Haidara, “the Women’s Marabout” ... in Imitation of the Prophet

This is the point where Haidara’s Muhammadan journey really begins, and his biographer provides the introduction to it by explaining that

the women who promised to help Haidara did so as far as they possibly could. This was the beginning of God’s help. Everything that God wants to improve, he makes sure that it is carried out by women and children. So it was for the Prophet. When he was sent, it was a woman who helped him at first with her fortune and her good character. This woman was called Kadidiatou. This is how God made his words into deeds.

(Traoré 2007, 25)

The main characteristic of Haidara’s movement, and subsequently all the movements founded during the 2000s by young preachers dubbed “the Haidara juniors,” is that they not only speak essentially about women, their behavior, their dress, or the necessity of marriage, but that they are mainly financed and supported by women. Hence the nickname “the women’s marabout” (*musow ka mòri*), as Haidara was soon dubbed by his detractors.¹⁹ From the social point of view, women are thereby promoting the agents who moralize on their own account, while building themselves up as the chosen audience of a religious spectacle that they themselves have helped to produce. This comes at the cost of having to wear a loose veil, in the case of women of a certain age, and a fixed veil for young women, whereas the reformist Sunnis require the full veil to be worn. In so doing however, they are able to break away to a certain extent from the authority of fathers and husbands, who cannot forbid them from following their preacher. By physically attending these sermons, the women are emancipating themselves and emerging as players in the most legitimate form of public activity in Mali: Islam.

The Muhammadan model still pertains, since the promise by these six women to support the work of their preacher gave rise to the first mention of the *bayah*,²⁰ from Verse 12 of Sura 60, *Al-Mumtahina*, “She That Is to Be Examined.” This pledge by female believers to the Prophet is known in the Koran as the “First Oath of Allegiance” at Aqaba, made in 621 by twelve Ansari from Yathrib (Medina), five of whom were among the first six men to have embraced Islam in Mecca the previous year. This question of *bayah* will be the subject of further detailed examination, but it is interesting to note here that Haidara should retrospectively identify the origins of his movement with such a pledge. The first six women to commit themselves to Haidara, thus forming

19. In spite of the jibes implying that Haidara’s religious activity is of little consequence and even suspect in relation to the female gender, Haidara in fact belongs to a long tradition of charismatic preachers, whose success can be measured by the levels of female infatuation; as shown by the example of the two preachers opposed by Haidara, Karamogo Lassana and Abdul Aziz Djiré, with whom the competition was also based on the idea of virile jousting and the seduction of the female audience.

20. Pierre Prud’homme. See note 18.

a link with the archetypal woman, Khadija, the Prophet's first wife and the first woman to embrace Islam, are thus introduced in relation to the six first Ansari converts, while the biographer later reintroduces the support given by the six men to the preacher (Traoré 2007, 15), thus bringing the narrative in line with the Aqaba pledge.

In reality, the narrative account of the commitment made by these initial followers was set down in the mid-2000s, linking the crucial time span of five years separating the two periods of exclusion from preaching to the five years in the Prophet's life in which the "Muslim sect" grew to nearly a hundred members. According to Haidara himself, it is during this period that his followers expressed the wish to call their movement "those who help Haidara" (*haydara démé bagaw*). He asked instead that they call it "those who help God" (*ala démé bagaw*), with Haidara explaining that "that is how Ansar was created"²¹ as a framework for Islamic reform in Mali that alludes to the support the Prophet Muhammad found in Medina.²²

Ansar Dine, or the Tale of a Popular Hegirian Reform

Ansar Dine is in essence a reformist movement, not so much in terms of its dogma, which remains faithful to Sunnism and Malikism, but rather because it is an association in keeping with the new civil society (Schulz 2003, 160). As leader of Ansar Dine, Haidara borrows both from the Muhammadan model and from the popular image of the brotherhood leader (modesty, truth, piety), while at the same time breaking away from the constraints of an "oath of allegiance" (*bayah* or *mubay'a* in Arabic) to a sheik, as well as from the notions of "spiritual retreats" (*kaluwa*, from the Arabic *khalwa*) and "miracles" (*kabako*). As for the religious knowledge that the leader of such a movement is supposed to possess, Haidara's relative deficiency in this area, which had made him the object of much suspicion on the part of the Islamic elite, is a legitimizing element, since he draws once more on the example of the Prophet Muhammad who, although reputed to be illiterate, reveals a divine message that he could not have formulated based solely on his own learning. Although Haidara is not illiterate, he can only claim to have had a limited education over a period of ten years, and so he does appear in a sense to resemble the Prophet, drawing more on inspiration than knowledge, and as the bearer of the fundamental truth of the divine message. Indeed, it is in this sense that Haidara's reformism is a form

21. Interview with Haidara, July 2008; see note 10.

22. This does not explain the Arab expression *ansar al-din*, transliterated as "Ansar Dine" and it is not clear what Haidara is referring to. He has never publicly referred to the rural movement founded on literalist reformism called Jama'a Ansar al-Sunna, which emerged in the 1970s in the Gao region (Niezen 1990), nor does he claim any allegiance to the Nigerian movement Jamiyyat Ansar ad-Din Najriya (Reichmuth 1996).

of fundamentalism, since he himself refers back to the “pious ancestors” (*salaf sahih* in Arabic), but it is a fundamentalism that is founded on a resolutely populist form of spirituality. Finally, like the Prophet of Islam, Haidara is in conflict with the political and religious authorities of the time,²³ which meant that he was obliged to leave Mopti to settle in Bamako with his Ansars, just as the Prophet had to leave Mecca and go to Medina with his followers.

It was this Hegirian gesture that Ansar Dine would repeat at the end of 1989 when Haidara was once again banned from preaching, and left the center of Bamako to settle in Djanguinèboucou, in the undeveloped neighborhood of Bankoni. At the age of thirty-four Haidara became a property owner for the first time, thus marking the fact that he had settled in one place, enabling him to build a home and a small founding mosque, a key moment that his followers call the “Bankoni Building Site” (*bankoni santie*), and which represents a sort of local Hegira (Bourdarias 2008, 123).

Gradually Haidara acquired adjoining land to accommodate a number of his followers and also house the various structures of the movement, which continued to grow. Although he built the movement’s headquarters in 1992–1993, followed by other small developments, it was mainly from 2004 onwards that the serious development of the area would begin, following a blueprint that revealed where the movement’s priorities lay. Haidara’s building projects included a school complex that was built for teaching primary and secondary levels (2005–2006 with an extension in 2010–2011), the headquarters of Ansar Dine International (2006 with an extension in 2009), an administration building for the Mawlid celebrations (2006–2007), a huge apartment block for Haidara and his family²⁴ (2008), an approved public health center (2008–2009), a guesthouse (2010), a Friday mosque (2010–2011), and so forth. Finally, if any further proof was needed of the importance of this development, the authorities were obliged to pave the main road leading into the neighborhood. Officially, this decision was justified by the existence of the health center, but it was equally due to the importance of the Ansar Dine movement and the affluence of the new neighborhood, especially for the Mawlid celebrations when several tens of thousands of followers flock in from all over Mali and other West-African countries, giving the area all the appearance of an Arab souk.

This imitation of Hegira was clearly a retrospective narrative that attempts to reestablish some order in a venture that for a long time was little short of erratic. However, the notorious “Bankoni Building Site” was not just the end of a Hegirian journey for Haidara, in which the leader and his Ansars set about making a holy city rise up from the heart of Bamako, a city evocative of Medina,

23. As his biographer is keen to point out (Traoré 2007, 26), this conflict would, on another level, make Haidara into a hero of the democratic revolution.

24. According to an undated document bought during Mawlid 2011 and signed by one Karamoko Mamadou, a preacher from Segou, Haidara had five wives; one of whom died and another was divorced, and 24 children, of whom six died.

as Touba was for the Murids in Senegal (Gueye 2002, 84 and after). The development of Bankoni was primarily also the time when the AMSI (Muslim Association for the Support of Islam) was set up (1991) after the fall of Moussa Traoré's dictatorial regime, which meant that Ansar Dine could be officially recognized as an association in the new civil society.²⁵

Ansar Dine: A “Spontaneous” Movement Becomes an International Association

In spite of the fact that Haidara was settled in Bankoni, the association headquarters were initially located in Sikasso, a wealthy metropolis in the southeast of Mali with an important history of resistance against the colonial conquest. Sikasso was a preferable choice over Bamako, where Haidara was supposed to be maintaining a low profile after the National Conference recommendations rejecting the views of religious parties to which the AMUPI sought allegiance at the time.

The location in Sikasso actually had several practical advantages for the association. Firstly, because of the diversity of its religious community, which included Muslims, Christians, and practicing members of “initiation societies” (*jow*), the field was wide open for Ansar Dine to take its place in the region. Furthermore, Sikasso was home to many of Haidara's followers, originally from Segu or Bamako, where they had a certain amount of influence: indeed, much of the material aid that Haidara received during his suspension came from Sikasso. Finally, Sikasso is close to the Ivory Coast, on the road to Bouaké, the main destination for Malian migrants until the crisis in the Ivory Coast in 2002.

Clearly, the geographical position of Sikasso offered not only the advantage of being at a crossroads, with the potential for the movement to make new conversions, but furthermore it was one of the most dynamic economic centers in Mali, as well as a convenient exit point if at any time the Malian authorities were to take repressive measures against Ansar Dine.

Territorial Expansion into a National Association, and Becoming a Spiritual Guide

From 1991 to 1992, the organization of AMSI on a national level was based on the territorial approach of independence party US-RDA (Sudanese

25. These facts are based essentially on four interviews. The first two took place January 1, 2008 and February 22, 2010 with the preacher from the Mopti section of Ansar Dine. The other two were with a former high placed official in ADI on July 13, 2008, and with one of the currently serving officials on February 25, 2011. Their names are not given for obvious reasons of confidentiality.

Union-African Democratic Rally), which entailed designating a committee for a village or a precinct, a subsection for a neighborhood, a section at the district level, a regional office at the regional level (subsequently closed down), and finally a national office in Sikasso presided over by Haidara himself. This use of a pyramidal structure to cover the entire national territory is unprecedented in the Islamic context, apart from the AMUPI, although Ansar Dine had never extended its range beyond the areas where Bambara and Manding are spoken—in other words, beyond Mopti. Even today, although the movement continues to grow in strength and number, it still finds it difficult to gain a foothold in the north and east of Mali, where the Islamic elite speaks Arabic and/or Hassaniya.

During the Association's first congress in 1992, a national executive was elected, headed by a young Malian madrasa teacher named Abdullah Diawara. It was at this meeting that the decision was taken to move the headquarters of AMSI to Bamako since the political situation had become more stable. At the same time, realizing that many Malian followers of the movement had migrated to neighboring countries, particularly Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, the national bureau decided to establish offices in all three countries, with the presidents of all three based within the Malian office. However, towards the end of 1995 and the beginning of 1996, in view of the development of the organization outside Mali, AMSI moved to coordinate all the national offices; in January 2004 this organization resulted in the formation of Ansar Dine International (ADI), composed of three national offices in Mali, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso, each of these becoming a National Ansar Dine (ADN).²⁶

From 1992 onwards, Haidara's role at the core of the movement had begun to be seen of in terms of "spiritual guide." This status was however only confirmed much later on, since in 2001 the procedural rules still only make mention of the title the "Great Preacher" (Davis 2002, 137). In terms of leadership, fault lines rapidly appeared between Haidara and the national office regarding the distinction between the associative structure and its religious leader, which was evidence of the growing influence of non-Malians who defended the idea of separation based on the need, real or not, to "protect" Haidara from the negative aspects of the association. The decision to "get Haidara out" of the bureau was adopted at the second congress (1995–1996); Haidara, as neither president nor member of the bureau, would henceforth only be called on to endorse decisions made by the association, and as moral support. Modifications to the statutes and procedural rules took place in 2002, 2006, and 2009,²⁷ aimed at validating ADI's place within the system and clarifying Haidara's own position. Article 11 of the 2008 statute defines his position as "spiritual and moral guarantor of ADI,"

26. To my knowledge, the only officially registered association in Mali is AMSI.

27. The new ADI statutes and rules accessed on March 1, 2011, can be downloaded from http://ancardineHaidara.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60:Statut&catid=29:the-cms&Itemid=37.

ensuring the “stability of the political orientation of the movement as laid down by the ADI International Conference,” its supreme representative body, to which Haidara is central. Furthermore, according to article 3 of the 2009 rules, although he is external to the decision-making body of ADI, the spiritual leader “has the right of veto and appeal over all the various organs of ADI. He has the ultimate right of decision in any difference of opinion or conflict within ADI.”

Ansar Dine International: A “Federal” Islamic Association

The creation of ADI in 2004 confirmed in reality one of the specific features of this Islamic movement, which was that it evolved with an international and not a transnational perspective, in the sense that it defined itself in relation to nation-states. While this internationalist approach arose empirically from a combination of linguistic geography—the area covered by the Manding language—and economic orientation towards the Ivory Coast, it was nevertheless part of the institutional dynamic of the movement and would play a major role in its future development.

It has already been pointed out that Ansar Dine’s model regarding territorial organization was the US-RDA, led by Modibo Keita, who was the intellectual force behind Malian independence and the republic’s first president until 1968. The pan-African US-RDA defended the principles of socialism applied to the realities of the African situation and was characterized at the time by its attempts to combine federalism with the construction of a nation-state. This is not the place to dwell on the unpleasant aftertaste left by this pan-Africanism and the end of the Mali Federation (1960), but, for Ansar Dine, the US-RDA remains the accepted model for national independence based on regional integration and the African values that the movement itself seeks to promote. While the terms of reference of the US-RDA’s political rhetoric are Islamic, the identity and cultural content is taken up by the Ansar Dine project. The final modification to the statutes in 2008 confirms this federalist approach by defining ADI as an international association under Malian law, integrating “the associations, movements, and foundations allied to Sheik Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara, the Spiritual Guide of the Ansars..., in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (art. 1). In its ultimate aim of supporting the spiritual guide in “teaching and spreading worldwide a true Islam based on the precepts of the Holy Koran and the Sunna” (art. 4), ADI embarked on a thorough international reorganization that is somewhat reminiscent of a state bureaucracy: “The Spiritual Guide; the International Mawlid Conference (CI); the International Council of Presidents (CIP); the International Treasury (TI); the International Control Committee (CIC); the International Whoudouh Committee (CIW); the Executive Secretariat (SE)” (art. 13).

To a certain extent, this reorganization marks the end of the Malian organizational tropism, and perhaps offsets the charismatic element with institutional

reforms considered to be more “modernist” (sic), under which ADI followed on from an NGO called the Mouvement Ansar Dine (MAD), founded in 1994. Henceforth ADI would control the whole system, with a president from the Ivory Coast being elected during Mawlid in 2011. As for the ADN, even though they are relatively autonomous from the organizational point of view, any specific actions must necessarily conform to the statutes and rules of the ADI.

However international ADI might be, it is not merely an impersonal organization. By taking full advantage of the ease of movement within the economic areas governed by the CDEAO and the UEMOA,²⁸ ADI has managed to reinforce the idea that it is part of a community of men and women who all see themselves as Ansars. It is indeed remarkable to note the emergence of what could be called a “people” with a growing desire to belong to an organization in which the specific historical features of the ADN are retained, the statutes of ADI serve as a federal constitution, and in which, as Davis remarks (2002, 140–141), the membership card is considered valid as proof of identity.

By way of its cultural and territorial coherence, ADI has revived a sort of synthesis between territorial federalism and community federalism, which is not unlike the US-RDA approach, but which should now be seen as an ongoing process of *ummah* in West Africa. Nonetheless, the future of this *ummah* will depend on how the various religious orientations are controlled, which is as much a strategic as an economic problem: from this point of view, the presence of the Whoudouh or Woudouhou, (from the Arabic *hudu*, meaning, direction), an unofficial association residing within the movement, appears to be a problem for ADI.

The Whoudouh, or the Right Direction for Ansar Dine

Created in 1992, to cover any eventual disbanding of the AMSI the Whoudouh was seen as the agency that defined the movement’s doctrinal orientation, hence its name “the right direction.” The principal role of Whoudouh, consisting of over a thousand preachers and structured across the three ADN, was to control the activities of Ansar Dine by having an input into all broadcast material, with the exception of performances by praise singers close to Ansar Dine who, as artists, were not (yet) subject to strict control. The Whoudouh was therefore in charge of training preachers and granting them an “approved qualification.” Since 2004, preachers have been summoned to Bamako for a “training seminar for preachers,” which takes place during the week of the Mawlid celebrations.

28. The CDEAO (the Economic Community of West African States) was formed in 1975, bringing together eight countries in the CFA franc zone, as well as Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. As for the UEMOA, (the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa), created in 1994, it consists of Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

The Whoudouh also sets out instructions governing sermons, the Suras to be put forward, and their commentaries, which must refer to both the Sacred (*qudsi*) and the Authentic (*sahi*) Hadith in order to avoid any possible criticism. Finally, it also devises the educational manuals, or “Ansar lessons” (*ansar walanda*) for the pupils in the movement’s madrasas. As ADI has expanded its bureaucratic structure, the Whoudouh has become the instrument by which Haidara is able to maintain both doctrinal and financial control of ADI, since the members of Whoudouh are by definition statutory representatives (*lasigiden*) of his tutelage (Davis 2002, 157).

The autonomy enjoyed by the Whoudouh is not without its problems. Indeed, some highly placed executives in the movement deem that the preachers are parasites drawing on their spiritual affiliation with Haidara for their own financial gain and the advancement of their career. In 2008, the autonomy of Whoudouh was reevaluated and the subscriptions paid by the preachers to finance their association were stopped. The revised procedural rule of March 10, 2009, confirmed this with the creation of an International Whoudouh Committee (CIW) incorporated within ADI. A number of articles within this ruling clarify the nature of this control over preachers by stipulating that preachers must have been “active members” of ADI for at least two years (article 26), must comply with the decisions made by the CIP (International Presidents Council) which guides the ADI (article 27), “be subject to the authority of the national body to which they originally belonged,” and “work under the direction of advisors charged with religious matters” within ADI (article 28).

While these amendments are indicative of a power dynamic in which ADI has the upper hand over the charismatic element, it is also evidence of the bureaucratization of the movement and of the doctrinal aspect of its governance. But beyond that, the main issue behind the ADI regaining control of the Whoudouh concerns a very real taboo within the movement: the development of the movement and anticipation of a post-Haidara era. The question arose recently at the international assembly (February 19, 2011) and the response of the new president of ADI was scathing: “As far as replacing the master by one of his sons is concerned, I never want to hear anyone speak of this again! This decision belongs only to the master himself who is free to be replaced by one of his sons at the moment he will have chosen!” [Cette décision ne revient qu’au maître lui-même qui est libre de se faire remplacer par l’un de ses fils au moment qu’il aura choisi ! »] The organization of the movement is in fact going through a crucial period. The choice is between developing the bureaucratic structure, and transforming the movement into something more akin to a brotherhood. Based on whichever option is chosen, Haidara too will have to reevaluate how he should pass on his guidance, as defined by the statutes, that is, to one of his sons (article 12), while ADI will have to decide between the transnational structure following the brotherhood model (*qadiri or tijani*), or the federal structure, inspired by the more political nation-state model formerly adopted by the US-RDA.

Funding the Religion: Subscriptions, Blessings, and Plans for an Islamic Bank

It is said that one of the characteristics of Ansar Dine is that it is self-financing (Davis 2002, 142), an aspect on which the movement claims some superiority in comparison with the reformist Sunnis, who are known to be funded by the Gulf states, and chiefly Saudi Arabia. Of course, this does not mean that Haidara cannot receive personal gifts and donations, whether from followers or individuals with connections to other Muslim nations—particularly Libya or Iran—or also from the Malian state through the intermediary of the president or his wife. In any event, from an external viewpoint, these funds are almost impossible to calculate, and even more so since Haidara reinvests a proportion of these funds towards financing the infrastructure of the movement and various companies linked to its proselytizing activities. He also makes private donations to sections of the Ansar movement that request help.

In theory, the official finances of Ansar Dine are highly regulated; the resources are fixed by article 14 of the 2008 statutes and the accounts are checked by the International Control Committee (CIC) which “must present an annual report to the international conference during every Mawlid” (article 24). The movement’s prime source of revenue is an annual subscription called the “annual expense” (*san musaka*), which costs one thousand CFA francs per month for each member, or twelve thousand CFA francs per year received by each section, the total sum of which is then sent to ADI. Then there is a “monthly payment” (*kalo sara*) of five hundred CFA francs per member, of which two hundred CFA francs are sent to the ADN headquarters, while the remaining three hundred CFA francs are retained by the section to finance local preaching campaigns, maintain the section office, and financially support those in need. According to ADI officials, a survey in 2009–2010 found that only 50% of some seventy thousand members paid their annual and monthly subscriptions, a contribution that adds up to an estimated total of between 620 and 630 million CFA francs.

Apart from these subscriptions, there are other assets that come from two types of activity. These are funds that come either from economic activity, or from personal donations, and refer to a particularly esteemed form of moral economy called respectively “working for God” (*ka baara ke ala kama*)²⁹ and “giving for God” (*ka di ala kama*). The amounts raised through this system of subscriptions, work, and donations are the subject of a blessing (*dubabu*, from the Arabic *du’a*—personal prayer or supplication) pronounced in public by

29. These are collective projects or economic activities organized by the different sections: cultivation and harvest, sanitation work, laying concrete, brick making, transporting sand, and so on. These activities raise substantial amounts of money and are public confirmation of the fact that Ansar Dine is capable of “working for God” and therefore for the common good. It is not unusual for people unaffiliated with Ansar Dine to take part.

Haidara himself during Mawlid. This blessing is considered to be the high point of the ceremony, as it involves the conversion into *baraji* (for the afterlife) and *baraka* (for life here on earth). In spite of the variable nature of these resources, the global amount reaches at least four hundred million CFA francs per year, which in addition to the 620 or 630 million raised by subscription, makes a total of around one billion CFA francs per annum.³⁰

For the purposes of this study, this estimated budget was validated by calculating the expenses incurred by ADI in 2009–2010, which were in the order of 1.5 billion CFA francs per year and spread between religious ceremonies, building work, and the running costs of the organization. A marginal proportion of the remaining five hundred million comes perhaps from donations made by mutual agreement, while another small percentage might come from ADI activities such as the commercialization of their products, recordings of sermons and the sale of other by-products, the Chérifla travel agency dealing with the *hajj*, and so forth. However, the bulk of these five hundred million CFA francs comes from savings made in previous years. The sum was set aside specifically to overcome the difficulties of obtaining property loans carrying prohibitive annual interest rates of between 13% and 18%, which are the main obstacle to the financial independence of a movement as it struggles to move beyond such self-financing.

The internationalization of the movement, the number of followers, and its bureaucratization all show that ADI has reached a critical mass, even as its officials consider that traditional resources are now insufficient in order to maintain the movement's dynamic. The Ivory Coast ADN initiated the creation of national microfinance structures called "Ansar Finances": the Ivory Coast branch (AFCI) was created in 2007–2008, and Ansar Finances Mali (AFM) was set up in 2010.³¹ These organizations combine the third-world philosophy of the Grameen Bank, anti-globalization, and Islamic charitable activity, offering microcredit to members and sections of the association at preferential rates in accordance with the principles of *shariah* law.

ADI's ambitions do not stop here, though, for in reality Ansar Finances was conceived as a precursor to an Islamic bank, which is considered the only way of developing the movement. This development includes building projects in Bankoni and surrounding areas; the expansion of the network of schools and secondary schools, with plans for an Islamic university; the perpetuation and professionalization of the movement through its employment system; and finally, an increased capacity for social recruitment. The executive themselves admit that the system of subscriptions and donations has reached its limits, and the objective is henceforth to gain financial independence with access to the international money markets, where credit rates are obviously better than those offered by the banks.

30. This figure is confirmed by Haidara himself in an article by Osman Coulibaly (2011).

31. See the article announcing this hastily named "bank" project by Modibo Fofana (2010).

While these plans for financial reforms indicate that ADI does consider itself as an organization concerned about its economic independence, it would be wrong to lose sight of the fact that it is Haidara and his preachers who are the main generators of wealth, which could be seen as both an asset and a weak point for ADI and its move towards bureaucratization. From this point of view, apart from financial autonomy, the creation of an Islamic bank would allow ADI to escape from, or at least provide a counterbalance to, the charismatic system that ensures the large part of its revenue, with Haidara and his preachers demonstrating a tried and tested form of religious entrepreneurship.

Haidara: Managing a Religious Association Centered on the People

Apart from Haidara's personality, his apparent ability to continually reinvent himself, his desire to reform Islamic practices, and the institutionalization of his movement, the leader of Ansar Dine has known how to call upon and adapt the proselytizing techniques which enabled him to further his religious path. In this respect, it could be seen as a real achievement in "management" based on a popular approach consisting of three convergent strategies: the use of national languages, media coverage, and events, resulting in the establishment of the practical aspect of his reformism, the *bayah*.

Preaching in Mali: The National-Languages Strategy

From the mid-1970s onwards, Haidara's approach has been characterized by the techniques used in his sermons, and above all the methods used to spread his teachings. Dorothea Schulz (2003) has made a careful analysis of the media techniques in Haidara's sermons, in which he favors the use of vernacular languages. He was not the first to use these languages, though, as there has been a long tradition of itinerant preachers in the Sahel region. Furthermore, Haidara drew much inspiration from other Malian preachers such as Karamoko Lassana in Mopti and Abdul Aziz Djiré in Segou and Bamako. However, Haidara stands out because of his decision to preach in what are known as the "national languages," an approach he justifies in his official biography. Claiming that Islam should be integrated into the West African culture, he asks the following question: "We learn the meaning of the Koran in other languages. But why do we agree not to pray to Allah in other languages?" (Traoré 2007, 16).

This is not the place to enter into the details about the polemic raised by Haidara in suggesting the possibility of praying in a national vernacular language, thus questioning the sanctity of liturgical Arabic, an argument he rejects by claiming that he had been misunderstood. There is no need to dwell on the fact that Haidara's biographer is a militant in the Nko movement, and that he is

therefore defending a major feature of “scriptural prophetism” (Amselle 2001, 112) surrounding the Africanization of the world view. It is a perspective that Haidara and ADI have adopted, judging by the slogan in the Nko language on the banner welcoming the followers to Mawlid in 2011: “The master welcomes everyone who has come here. All Ansars should try to learn the Nko language.”³² While it may be true that Nko is to some extent linked to the movement’s federal ideal, Haidara pays particular attention to the vernacular tongues—which do not include Nko—firstly because they represent a form of identity, and secondly because they are the most appropriate media for a public that is for the most part illiterate. Finally, if Haidara calls for the use of national languages, it is because he believes that Malian Muslims should be able to understand their religion. Haidara himself preaches in his mother tongue, Bamanankan, which is the common language in Mali, and in its various forms in the subregion. By his mastery of the language, his well-known stentorian voice, incomparable rhetoric that combines authority (*barika*), clarity (*kene kan*), and humor (*yeleko*), and the way he plays on the popular idea according to which the Bamananw tell the “whole truth” (*tiyèn jalan*), Haidara’s sermons call on every follower to consider him- or herself as a true participant in Islam as a universal religion, and not as a religion centered on the Arab world as portrayed by the Sunnis and Salafis. Haidara’s sermons offer followers the possibility of understanding the complexities of the world in their own language, and therefore to understand their religion by applying their own cultural codes, notably the narrative techniques of the griots and the Segu *imaginaire*—the latter is paradoxically “pagan” with regard to the *bamananya* (Colleyn 2004)—not only breaking away from Arabic, but also from the French-speaking political and administrative elite.

However, what distinguishes Haidara from the other Malian preachers who use national languages is the strategy he uses to broadcast his sermons. While he is a “religious entrepreneur,” he is first and foremost an indefatigable “religious worker” who has built up an intensive program of activity throughout his 35-year career. For this study I have managed to collect some (not all) of the audio cassettes containing 280 of the sermons preached by Haidara in Mali and the Ivory Coast between 1982 and 2011, an average of nine to ten per year, in spite of his two suspensions. Obviously, an imam preaches every Friday in the mosque, but Haidara’s proselytizing takes place outside the mosque, an itinerant Islam that addresses communities that are scattered or not socially established. Because his sermons are not part of a national or international approach, their tone is not the same as the Friday sermon in the mosque. Furthermore, they always contain a political dimension and a social critique that no mosque would dare to voice.

32. Transcription and translation to French by Soumaïlla Camara [back-translated from the French].

Spreading the Message: Popular Media Coverage

For a long time Haidara found it impossible to gain access to audiovisual media, whether national radio, FM radio, or television. Before 1991, the authorities opposed any intervention by Haidara on national radio, even the religious programs that at the time were controlled by AMUPI. In spite of the emergence of new commercial and community radio from 1991 onwards, the democratic regime of Alpha Oumar Konaré continued to keep a close eye on Haidara. The first broadcast in which he took part was on July 1, 1994. It was broadcast by Radio Kayira from its station at Koutiala, and was approved by the director of the national network Oumar Mariko, currently secretary-general of the SADI (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence) party. Although the authorities disapproved of the initiative and even took repressive measures against the radio station, they nevertheless allowed Haidara to broadcast on the radio from 1996 onwards, in particular on Radio Djékafo, Radio Patriote, Radio Benkan, Radio Kayira, Radio Liberté, and even Radio Bamakan, the first free radio founded by Alpha Oumar Konaré in 1991.

Since 2008, Ansar Dine has had its own FM radio station, broadcasting on 92.9 mhz. Based in the Bamako suburb of Kalaban Koro, it is called “The Citizen’s Voice” (La Voix du Citoyen), although most people in Bamako call it *Radio Citoyen*. The main content is religious, but the radio station is still “commercial,” in the sense that it has sponsors and advertising contracts, alternating between variety programs and religious programs that have a “partner slot” open to any preacher with the appropriate financial means. While Haidara’s programs on FM radio are broadcast in the national language, Ansar Dine also has a French-language Internet site through which *Radio Citoyen* is able to broadcast on the Internet. A Facebook page in French devoted to Haidara was set up in 2010.³³

This strategy of media coverage via FM radio and the Internet, in Bamanankan when in spoken form, and in French when written, expanded with a new project aimed at obtaining a license to set up a television station enabling Ansar Dine to “serve faithful Muslims better.”³⁴ However, very early on in his career, even before he was able to access radio, create his own station, and eventually a television station, Haidara opted for the principle of popular media coverage, which from this point of view makes him the precursor of this strategy in Mali. By recording his sermons on cheap and accessible formats such as analogue audiocassettes and more recently video CDs, Haidara broke new ground and moved away from the traditional itinerant form of preaching, giving him access to a new way of promoting the cause of Islam in Mali (Schulz 2003 and 2007).

33. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Cheik-cherif-Ousmane-madani-Haidara/112837645422817?v=wall>.

34. Extract from the article by Ben Dao, March 8, 2010.

This adventure into the world of media began in 1977. Haidara was in the Ivory Coast when he recorded what was probably his first cassette, of which I managed to obtain a copy. Unlike most of the cassettes recorded from around 1982 at religious ceremonies, debates, or from the radio, this first cassette is unusual in that it was produced without an audience in “studio mode,” with just three participants, the preacher Haidara (*wajulikèla*), a Koranic reader (*kuranè kolaminèna*), and a rhythmic accompanist (*naaminèna*). Haidara has made no mention of this prototype, nor has he spoken of the technical and financial constraints that he must have encountered in order to get the original tape copied. In fact, Haidara rarely talks about these early recordings, in spite of the popular impact of the cassettes on his reputation. Since he has become one of the major figures in Malian Islam, he has been held in such high esteem that in public religious meetings he has to speak after everyone else so that he will not be contradicted. Haidara has asked that these old cassettes not be broadcast anymore, since they contain statements that are often aggressive in nature and sometimes questionable, especially with regard to the current standpoint of Ansar Dine.

On the other hand, Haidara explains quite readily how in the 1970s he discovered a tape made by an Egyptian preacher, the Salafi sheik, ‘Abd al-Hamid Kishk,³⁵ who at the time was in the Ivory Coast and literally changed the course of his future career. It was not until 1985 (or perhaps even 1987 when he went to Mecca for the first time) that Haidara met Kishk, a charismatic figure who drew huge crowds at his Friday prayers in Cairo (Kapel 1984), and whose sermons, recorded onto cassettes and broadcast from the early 1970s onwards, would reach Arab-speaking Muslims all over the world (Eickelman 1999, 36).

Haidara drew great inspiration from Kishk, both in terms of the scenographic presentation and the effect of his sermons. He tried to adopt Kishk’s technique of using popular humor, which meant that at times his sermons pushed the boundaries, and were also interactive and entertaining (Kreil 2010). But Kishk’s influence comes mainly through the technique of recording sermons onto cassettes, which Haidara adopted long before their meeting in Cairo. Although it is thought by some that Haidara’s loquacity has much to do with his meeting with Abdul Aziz Djiré who has already been mentioned here, the influence of Abd al-Hamid Kishk is nonetheless undeniable; when Haidara’s second wife Hadjaratou Tounkara gave birth to their first son in the early 2000, he named him Abdul Hamid Keshky³⁶ as a mark of his respect and admiration for the Egyptian orator.

The true benefits of what might be called “the Kishk method” and the use of “small media” (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994) as part of Haidara’s media-coverage strategy were really felt in 1988. It was then that

35. See the biographical sketch of Sheik Kishk by Joel Gordon (2004).

36. He had already given the name to the second child of his divorced wife, Fatoumata Traoré (information provided by Karamoko Mamadou). See note 24.

Haidara recorded his Mawlid sermon for the first time, as evidence of his intention to transform this rather modest celebration in Bamako (having already gauged its popular potential in 1984) into a public event devoted to promoting his cause.

Broadcasting Sermons: The Public-Event Strategy

The Islam that Haidara preaches is not the Islam of the mosque but of the public square, and it follows a long tradition of preaching as public spectacle. This type of sermon calls for a pre-organized event such as Ramadan or Tabaski in order to justify such a public discourse. However, the mosques are also involved in these two celebrations, and this is why Haidara turns his attention to Mawlid. This event celebrates the birth of the Prophet but it had scarcely been taken up by the mosques, in spite of the fact that it was an important event for the brotherhoods centered on the *zawiya* (Islamic religious schools), such as Tijaniyya Hamawiyya from Nioro or the Qadiriyya from Dilly.

In a previous study (Holder 2009), I examined the local issues surrounding this ceremony, which is unusual in that there is no compulsory element to it. Until the 1990s, with the exception of the northern and eastern regions of Mali, Mawlid was in fact a low-key event only celebrated by a number of pious families. Even in Timbuktu and Jenne, where it had long been celebrated by nocturnal recitations in praise of the Prophet, Mawlid was usually the pretext for celebrations that some would qualify as carnivalesque—perhaps even as *bid'a* (to be avoided) according to reformist Sunnis—since these celebrations ritually transgressed social norms such as relationships of power and gender.

From his base in Bamako, Haidara would transform this ceremony usually identified by its strong links to the north and east of the country into a major annual gathering, an expression of popular piety and national identity dedicated to his own movement. From the early 1990s, Ansar Dine had devised and established the material organization and the scenography of the Mawlid sermon: beneath the glare of neon lighting, the members of the local bureau or section sit behind a row of tables; as a backdrop, hangs the Ansar Dine banner depicting the image of Haidara; a huge rectangular space with neon lights and loudspeakers are at all four corners; at the center of the row of tables is a preacher with a microphone; to his right a Koranic reader recites Suras; referring to the *hadith*, the preacher then makes his comments in the vernacular language; facing the preacher, and with his back to the audience, the rhythmic accompanist phrases each sentence by an emphatic *naam*.

The ceremony usually begins around eight in the evening by broadcasting praise songs to the Prophet (*zikiriw*, from the Arabic *dhikr*), and in honor of the spiritual guide of Ansar Dine; these are either live or, more often, from recordings. Then one or two preachers, with praise singers (*zikiridalaw*) who call themselves “God’s griots” (*ala jeliw*), begin to warm up the audience while

they wait for the main preacher. When Haidara leads a Mawlid, his arrival at around ten o'clock surrounded by an impressive escort of security guards and policemen provokes an indescribable reaction in the crowd: women faint and are quickly removed, while the crowd shouts out Haidara's religious slogan "*yaa bani!*" The audience is composed of mostly everyday people, women and young men who are held transfixed while the orator delivers two or three hours of sermons. These sermons present the fear of judgment in the afterlife along with social criticism aimed at the government, as well as advice on marriage, jokes, ironic comments, and anecdotes about Christians or "pagans" that highlight aspects of the Muslim faith. The audience, for its part, punctuates the dramatic highlights of the sermon with shouts of "*Allah Akbah!*" Meanwhile, throughout the length of the sermon, laughter and sometimes timid rounds of applause can be heard.

As Haidara's Mawlid became more popular, it occupied an increasingly central role in the organization of Ansar Dine, beginning with its financial and economic matters. It is at Mawlid that the subscriptions and donations were pooled together and presented as a sort of *zakat al-Fitr*, a charitable gift to the poor, traditionally collected by the mosques at Ramadan. For Ansar Dine, Mawlid became equally important from the economic point of view, to the extent that in 2001 it was given the status of a congress, and then in 2008 that of international conference. The movement used the gathering to assess the economic and moral health of ADI, to reaffirm its authority, and to fix objectives for the coming year. Finally, under the organization of Ansar Dine, Mawlid soon came to be considered as a sort of national platform for proselytism where the issue at stake is to "convert" the public, in the true and common sense of the term.

Every year, since Mawlid became the main setting for publicizing Haidara's populist reforms, ever greater crowds came to listen to the teachings of the master and his denunciation of the world's injustices. From 1984 until the end of the 1990s Haidara preached in Railda Square, until it was subject to a series of urban developments. Arguing that his sermons attracted thousands of followers, Haidara obtained permission from the authorities to organize his Mawlid on the racetrack at the hippodrome, before eventually moving it to Bamako's Modibo Keita Stadium in 2003 (Soares 2005, 254). Haidara's Mawlid still takes place there today; his sermons fill the stadium with more than thirty-five thousand people,³⁷ and are reminiscent of those staged by TV evangelists.

The choice of the Bamako stadium had much to do with the size of the audience and the fact that there was a shortage of appropriate public spaces

37. According to Ben Dao's article of March 8, 2010, Mawlid 2010 had 38,548 participants. For Mawlid 2011, this figure was exceeded but ended in the death of thirty-six people who were crushed in the melee of February 21. The enquiry is still ongoing, but it seems that the public services bear some responsibility with regard to a vastly insufficient police presence and access to a stadium originally designed to hold twenty-five thousand people.

in a town undergoing unprecedented urban development. However, it is not entirely irrelevant that Mawlid should be held in a stadium named after Modibo Keïta. In fact, by celebrating Mawlid there, Haidara would benefit from the symbolic importance attributed to the place by the hero of national independence, Modibo Keïta. This symbolism is further evoked by the crowd's chanting the song "Mali" at the beginning of each sermon. The song was composed in 1960 by Djeli Bazoumana Cissoko in honor of the new independent republic and was in fact adapted by one of Ansar Dine's praise singers to become the anthem of the ADN in Mali, just as the song "Folikan" is thought of as the anthem of ADI.

In fewer than thirty years, Haidara and Ansar Dine have made Mawlid the center point of this religious movement's particular social doctrine so that it has become something of a "trademark." It soon became widespread, copied by young preachers who do not have the use of a mosque, but also by more traditional Sufi structures such as the brotherhoods and the "holy cities." Although Mawlid was celebrated to a greater or lesser extent before Haidara, it now benefits from massive reinvestment, and in the late 1990s would become a new objective for increasing visibility and recruitment in the world of Maliki Islam, much to the dismay of the reformist Sunnis.

Ansar Dine took advantage of the fact that Mawlid had become an annual event in order to stage the collective announcement of its *bayah*. This was in accordance with one of the ADI objectives stipulated in the 2008 statutes as "to work towards personal and collective perfection of the faithful by awareness and enactment of the *bayah*" (art. 4). The *bayah* takes the form of public oath of commitment and so, at the 2011 Mawlid in Bamako, the *bayah* was pronounced by more than two thousand people on the night of the second sermon dedicated to the naming of the Prophet. By pronouncing the oath, the followers become confirmed Muslims, although not yet Ansars. In fact, while Ansar Dine is known (and criticized) for this use of the *bayah*, it actually requires two different *bayah* relating to two phases of commitment to the cause: the *Bayah al-Islamiyya* and the *Bayah al-Rizwan*.

One Bayah, Two Bayah: Recommitment Before Joining Ansar Dine

The *Bayah al-Islamiyya* is the most well-known and often considered as the only oath that has to be pronounced, but it is also the object of severe criticism by many clerics. *Bayah al-Islamiyya* is an Islamic oath conceived by Ansar Dine as an oath of individual "recommitment" by someone who, although born a Muslim, wants to make a conscious decision to practice as one. An implicit challenge to the authority of the "profession of faith" (*shahada*), and considered by Haidara as relating to conversion, the *Bayah al-Islamiyya* is solemnized by six binding promises: "1) I will associate nothing with Allah. 2) I will never steal. 3) I will not commit adultery. 4) I will never kill my children. 5) I will

never commit any harm by my hands or by my feet. 6) I will never disobey the Sayings of the Prophet.”³⁸

Although Ansar Dine has been criticized for its use of the *bayah*, it is actually a pledge well known to the Sufi, including those in Mali, by which the master and his murids make a reciprocal commitment. The Koranic reference for this brotherhood *bayah* is Verse 10 of Sura 48, *Al-Fath*, “The Victory,” which refers to the “Pledge of the Tree,” sworn to the Prophet under a tree in Hodaybiyya. It is also known *Bayah al-Ridwan*, “Pledge of Allah’s Pleasure.”

Although the pledge is based on the Koran and is practiced by the Sufi brotherhoods of West Africa, the pledge of recommitment required by Ansar Dine is of a different nature, since it does not implicate the believer in relation to a master or a guide, but in relation to Islam as a religion. In this sense, the *bayah* of Ansar Dine is not unlike the very basis of the Sunni reform, which is characterized by the fact that it encourages an unmediated relationship with God and his Prophet. In spite of the similarity, Ansar Dine’s *Bayah al-Islamiyya* is not taken from the “Pledge of the Tree” at Hodaybiyya, but from the “First Oath of Allegiance to Al-Aqaba” mentioned earlier. The source is revealed by Haidara’s official praise singer, Nouhoum Dembélé, in his adaptation of the song “Folikan,” used as the anthem of ADI, which says, “He [Haidara] has revealed the word Bayah [of Sahih] al-Bukhari.”

Without entering into the detail of how the *hadith* are classified, an issue of considerable doctrinal importance, Nouhoum Dembélé’s song tells us that the *Bayah al-Islamiyya* not only has its basis in the Koran, but is also founded on “authentic” *hadith* (*jami’ us-sahih*) also recognized by the Sunni. It refers in fact to *Sahih* of Al-Bukhari, in particular *hadith* 232 known as the “Pledge of Allegiance to Al-Aqaba” from the *Book of Merits of the Ansar*.³⁹ There are many other *hadith* that mention the *bayah*, but it is the pledge to Al-‘Aqaba which is particularly referred to in this case, and, according to the doctrine of Ansar Dine, allows the Muslim believer to consciously recommit to Islam. It is interesting to note that Haidara and Ansar Dine are very careful to point out this scholarly reference, since they are keen to make a distinction from the classic Sufi *bayah*, which is based on the Koran. However, this *Bayah al-Islamiyya* is only one stage in the process of joining the movement. After the recommitment to Islam, the believer must then commit to Ansar Dine, the final phase necessary for acquiring the Ansar identity, which is then solemnized by a pledge known as *Bayah al-Ridwan* in reference this time to the “Pledge of the Tree” of Hodaybiyya.

The ritual of *Bayah al-Ridwan* is rather similar to that of *Bayah al-Islamiyya* but this time the content is in the spirit of the pledge of the brotherhood. Therefore, during Mawlid 2011, which was held in the Ansar Friday mosque

38. Text from the 2005 calendar produced commercially by Ansar Dine.

39. Sahih Al-Bukhari, *Kitab Manaqib al-Ansari* [*Book of Merits of the Ansar*], Chapter “Wufudil Ansari Ilan-Nabiyyi Bi Makkata Wa Baatil Aqabah.”

(still under construction), all the members of the new ADI office made their pledge to Haidara in turn with one hand on the Koran. They all repeated the following phrase: “Allah is my witness; the Koran is my witness; the master is my witness; you Muslims are my witnesses; if I betray the master’s trust, may Allah and the Koran seal my future.” This oath of commitment to Ansar Dine, mediated by Haidara (or a preacher from the Whoudouh if the ritual is taking place within a local section), replaces the central focus on the charismatic power of the leader—especially in this case, where the supreme authorities in Ansar Dine pledge allegiance to Haidara. It highlights the enormity of the problem facing ADI as a bureaucratic organization working for a religious cause, since its own legitimacy, and the recruitment of new members is effectively dependent on an oath of allegiance to the movement’s spiritual guide or his representatives.

Quite apart from the play of religious references around the practice of these two *bayah*, and the fact that from the outside they appear to have all the characteristics of a sect, in that they appear set apart from the global community, these pledges could be considered as an effective recruitment technique for those who wish to experience the constraints of authentic commitment. The suspicion that the movement could be likened to a sect, because of these pledges understood as absolute and fanatical allegiance, is not related to its religious standpoint, which remains within Maliki Sunni tradition, nor to the charismatic presence of Haidara, which is part of a long tradition in the Sahel. In fact, it is connected more with Ansar Dine’s relentless drive for autonomy in several areas: the autonomy of a social way of thinking which claims a worrying “populist rationale” (Laclau 2008); the organizational and financial autonomy of an association as part of international civil society; and autonomy in the definition of the movement as neither strictly a brotherhood nor an association, in which religious commitment implies political engagement. Indeed, as the confusion of these two different registers within the movement appears a priori to go against the grain, it is considered in some quarters as a well and truly sectarian movement at odds with the global order.



In concluding this study, the question arises as to how Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara has become such a key figure on the religious scene in Mali. Why is it that he attracts ordinary and often illiterate people, women, young people without any qualifications, and poverty-stricken farmers, as well as intellectuals, politicians, civil servants, and businessmen? Even though support for Haidara and his brand of proselytism is not unanimous, and although he is thought by some to be using his position and his religious authority for his personal enrichment, he nevertheless represents a low-ranking figure who has gained his independence and now embodies the ideal of the “entrepreneur” (*nyangara*). Haidara is a popular hero with an idea of his own destiny, and he achieved it in spite of difficulties; it is an ideal of personal fulfillment that everyone can relate

to in what has become a closed society. Of course, Haidara is not the only role model, but in Mali he has been invested with a certain authority by advocating the most righteous path, represented by Islam. In doing so, he redefines the values of autonomy, success, and change through the prism of religious commitment, which is realized and organized by means of the Ansar Dine movement.

Whatever Haidara may or may not be is a matter of personal judgment, but ultimately very few people know the true nature of Ansar Dine and in which direction the movement is going. In this study I have put forward the theory of autonomy, primarily the autonomy embodied by the leader himself, who created the movement as a way of achieving it. However, having gathered a crowd of seventy thousand followers around him, Haidara now has to deal with a structural tension that fluctuates between his brand of reformism, one that diverges from the path taken by the Sufis, and a popular representation of spiritual guidance still embodied by the sheik. To some extent, all of Haidara's efforts to be considered as a *chérif* make more sense when seen in the light of this dilemma and how it might be resolved.

If, as some of the *hadith* point out, the sheik among his disciples is like the Prophet in his community, it is therefore possible for a *chérif* to bypass the position of sheik by connecting directly with the Prophet. Furthermore, the *bayah* that the faithful Ansar declares to Haidara is equivalent to the commitment of the murid and his sheik. However, because he is not following a specific path, Haidara represents a sort of “ready-made” sheik, an autonomous model of spiritual guidance such as that claimed by Al-Hajj ‘Umar al-Futi, at the time when his jihad came to an end in Segu (Robinson 1988) and whose religious ideals re-emerge with Haidara, himself from Segu. Since he claims to be descended from the *chérifs* of Mecca, Haidara is under no obligation to align himself with any particular path: “The true *Shayk* is the inheritor of the Prophet, who guides and leads him on the right path,” wrote Al-Hajj ‘Umar: “Having passed through all the stages of initiation under the guidance of another sheik-inheritor (*warith*), whose guarantors can be traced back to the Prophet, the sheik-builder receives divine inspiration and passes it on to his disciples. Such a sheik is not answerable to a school of jurisprudence. He has direct access to the truth, and for his disciples he is a door opening towards God”.⁴⁰

The “sheik-inheritor” who initiated Haidara has not been identified, unless it was perhaps the Prophet himself, as Ansar reformism seems to suggest. Following the example of Al-Hajj ‘Umar al-Futi, Chérif Haidara is considered by his followers, and even beyond, as an axis or pole, (*kutubu*, from the Arab *qutub*) who is the direct intermediary of the Prophet.

It is hard to understand how such spiritual direction could fall to a successor who, according to the ADI statutes, “is always chosen by the family and from the descendants of Sheik Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara” (article 12). This

40. *Al Hajj Umar al Futi, les “Rimah,”* vol.1, chap. 23: 175 (1973), quoted by Madina Ly-Tall (1991, 40).

charismatic autonomy, which caused Haidara to be ostracized by the Islamic world until he finally asserted his authority, also poses a problem for the Ansar Dine movement itself. Although it was anticipated that the formation of AMSI would lead to a certain institutionalization of Islam, the bureaucratization of Ansar Dine and its transformation into the international association ADI have led the movement towards an almost irreconcilable autonomy—a notion of the state which is outside the state. The state model is an important point of reference in Mali, and Ansar Dine has intentionally drawn on this in developing what is clearly a plan for autonomy. While this notion of the state is based on a permanent tension between bureaucratic power and charismatic power, the ritualization of this charismatic power is key in transforming a public organization (whether ideal or not) into a state. It is undoubtedly in this light that ADI's attempts to control the preachers in the movement should be interpreted.

When asked recently by *JournalduMali.com*, “Is management of the public good compatible with Islam?”, Haidara replied: “If politics means working towards the public good,” then he was involved in politics, and would be ready to work alongside a politician who represents the values that he himself defends. However, he points out that he has “no desire to become president of the Republic of Mali” (Fofana 2010). The question, however, becomes: do those at the head of ADI share this view of politics? Do they consider that their future lies in supporting the guidance of Haidara and his inheritors, establishing a new “way” (*tariqa*) set apart from the world of politics, or establishing itself as an autonomous organization that supports a plan for an alternative state? Above all, which way are the Ansars leaning? Is it towards their spiritual guide or towards this federal organization represented by ADI? Is this the unfinished story of ADI one of the Ansars of the republic, or of a Republic of Ansars?

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ABSTRACT

Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara and the Islamic Movement Ansar Dine: A Popular Malian Reformism in Search of Autonomy. In this text I analyze the Islamic Movement Ansar Dine, established in 1991 by Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara, a charismatic figure who has transformed the modalities of expression of Islam in Mali. Ansar Dine is a hybrid organization, which can be placed somewhere between an association in a civil society, a charitable NGO, an intraworldly brotherhood, and a federalist internationalism. With more than seventy thousand members, mainly in Mali, the Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso, Ansar Dine is a critical platform in opposition to the establishment and the principal force challenging the Sunnite reformism commonly labeled as “Whahhabite” reformism. It advocates an “African” reformism and an Islamic confirmation based on a Koranic pledge called *bayah*. Despite increasing tensions between the charismatic and the bureaucratic powers within the organization, Ansar Dine’s aim is for a spiritual, social, economic, and political autonomy based on “populist” reason.”

RÉSUMÉ

Ce texte analyse le mouvement islamique Ançar Dine fondé en 1991 par Chérif Ousmane Madani Haïdara, un personnage charismatique qui a bouleversé les modalités d’expression de l’islam dans l’espace public malien. Ançar Dine est une organisation dont la forme hybride oscille entre association de la société civile, ONG caritative, confrérie intramondaine et internationalisme fédéraliste. Comptant plus de 70 000 membres, essentiellement au Mali, en Côte-d’Ivoire et au Burkina Faso, Ançar Dine est devenue un espace de critiques à l’égard de l’*establishment* et la principale force d’opposition à la réforme sunnite communément appelée « wahhabite ». Il prône un réformisme « africain » et une confirmation islamique fondée sur le serment coranique appelé bay’a. Travaillé par une tension croissante entre le charismatique et le bureaucratique, Ançar Dine vise en final à mettre en place un espace d’autonomie spirituelle, sociale, économique et politique qui se fonde sur une « raison populiste ».

Keywords/*Mots-clés*: Mali, Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara, Ansar Dine, autonomy, popular Islam, Islamic reformism/*Mali, Chérif Ousmane Madani Haïdara, Ançar Dine, autonomie, islam populaire, réformisme islamique.*