‘CHARISMA AND BROTHERHOOD’ REVISITED: MASS-MEDIATED FORMS OF SPIRITUALITY IN URBAN MALI

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ABSTRACT

The case study of the Muslim movement Ansar Dine and its charismatic leader Sharif Haidara illustrates that the debate on, and public significance of, Islam has been shifting in recent years and how broadcast media played into this process. Haidara’s extensive use of (mostly aural) media allows him to combine traditional elements of religious authority with new credentials. His public prominence and success suggests that broadcasting contributes to the rationalization of religious genres in a double sense. The dissemination of religious knowledge on broadcast media works through the standardization of genres and styles of religious argument. It contributes to a process of objectification in the course of which ‘religion’ becomes the object of individual scrutiny and identity construction. But this does not indicate a shift towards a more rational character of religious debate. Haidara’s persuasiveness resides to a major extent in his capacity to captivate listeners’ aesthetic sensibilities. Popular reception of Haidara’s teachings evidences the significance of religious debate in secular state politics. It illustrates some ways in which consumption of religious broadcasts contributes to a partial re-sacralization of everyday experience.

Prelude: Publicizing Muslim Identity

In the summer of 1998, during a bumpy bus trip to San, a town located between the rivers Bani and Niger in southern Mali, my curiosity was attracted by a couple sitting in front of me.¹ The husband wore a dressy baseball cap on which was written, in green letters against a white backdrop, ‘Sharif Haidara, who speaks the undeniable truth, you are our spiritual leader’. His wife had covered her head not only with a turban (the required headdress for a married woman) but also with a scarf tightly wrapped around her face and shoulders. Imprinted on the scarf were a series of portraits of a man with a headscarf and glasses. One portrait showed him with a broad, confidence-inspiring smile; on another, he waved to an audience. The name ‘Ansar Dine’²
decorated one corner. Another corner stated (in French), ‘Our spiritual leader, Sharif Haidara, thanks to you I am a good Muslim.’

Soon after our departure, the husband took out an audio-cassette from his pocket and put it into a cassette recorder placed between him and his wife. As soon as he had switched on the recorder, Sharif Haidara’s mesmerizing voice, set at high volume, pierced our ears and competed with the ear-splitting Zairian highlife music courteously provided by the bus driver. After ten minutes, a man sitting a couple of rows behind me approached my neighbor and told him in French (as it turned out, he was from Niger) that he should turn off the recorder because ‘this is religion, this is not something people want to listen to when they travel’. My neighbor made a gesture indicating that he did not understand. Finally, after another neighbor had volunteered to translate the request into Bamana, the lingua franca of southern Mali, my neighbor retorted (in Bamana), ‘Hey, could you mind your own business? We have democracy right now, everybody can listen to whatever he pleases.’ After some further discussion, however, he agreed to listen to his spiritual leader’s speech at a lower volume.

More than this episode and the ironical twist that a dress item designed exclusively for women used the male form, ‘musulman’, in a supposed statement by the wearer, made me ponder the significance of these headdresses. That I would be traveling in the company of two members of Ansar Dine, a relatively recent and successful Muslim movement in urban Mali, seemed a remarkable coincidence. After all, the reason for my trip was to contact the movement’s local branch in San. At that time, one of the few things I knew about the group’s ‘spiritual leader’ Sharif Haidara was that, since his first public appearance in the mid-1980s, he had managed to disseminate his audio- and video-taped sermons to a rapidly growing constituency of ‘rightful believers.’ Whereas his followers (mostly from the urban lower middle classes) hailed him as their spiritual leader who ‘put an end to all this politicking’, he was (and still is) perceived by many governmental officials and representatives of the Muslim establishment as a fundamentalist threat to Mali’s secular constitution; despite the fact that Haidara vehemently opposes the agenda of the intégristes that is, the Muslims who since 1991 have called for the establishment of the shari’a. I found my co-voyagers’ headgear intriguing for other reasons. Certainly, there was nothing surprising about the implicit argument that Haidara made people rightful believers. After all, Sufi practice in West Africa emphasizes the importance of mediators between individual believers and the Divine. Yet the ways in which my travel companions used dress as a medium to
make their Muslim identity public had a strikingly new ring. They addressed a public to which they themselves did not belong. Because, as it turned out in a quick interchange with a fellow passenger from Niger, neither of them spoke French and the husband could barely read (the woman not at all). The fact that the couple addressed a French-reading public audience reveals the novel spirit of their movement: it speaks to a public that includes Arabic-, Bamana- and French-speaking communities and the public nature of its declaration is crucial to its message. Also, Ansar Dine devotees couch their claims to unrestricted public devotional practice in terms of a relatively recent civil rights discourse.7

The following discussion centers on Sharif Haidara and his movement Ansar Dine. Haidara’s overwhelming success, I argue, illustrates a recent and significant shift in the nature of public debate in Mali, and of the role of religion and religious authority in it. His success also sheds light on social dynamics that result from the interplay between new media technologies, identity politics, and religion as a normative resource. Two concerns guide my exploration of the reasons for Sharif Haidara’s popularity as a spiritual leader. One is to understand the relationship between the fashioning of religious authority and new technologies of mediation. Charismatic authority has a long-standing tradition in West African Sufi Islam (e.g. Cruise O’Brien and Coulon 1988; Robinson and Triaud 1997). Yet we have to take into consideration that Sharif Haidara makes extensive use of new, mostly ‘small media’ (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994). While these small media include audio-tapes, local radio broadcasts and a variety of posters, stickers and dress items, the focus of my exploration will be on the aural media Haidara employs. What happens to charisma when it not only ‘comes to town’ (Cruise O’Brien 1988) but is mediated and re-presented by audio-recordings and radio technology? Broadcast technology is not a neutral means of communication but molds the message it conveys. How do aural media affect the nature of the charisma they mediate? Do they reinforce certain qualities while downplaying others? Does mass-mediated religious experience affect conceptions of spirituality and religious subjectivity, and if so, how?

My second concern is to understand the conditions for the rise of charismatic or populist religious movements in a situation in which the nation state serves less than before as a reference point for constructions of community and belonging, and has lost much of its normative force in defining the common good (e.g. Appadurai 1990a; Meyer and Geschiere 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). The opening up of
political life in Mali since 1991 has created opportunities for new forms of articulation between societal institutions and those of the state. The new space for maneuver is invaded by a broad range of actors in their ‘pursuit of [new] certainty’ (cf. James 1995). Many present their political aspirations as a search for an alternative moral order and as a call for a return to authentic religious practice. I propose to rethink these new social spaces and dynamics in terms of a structural transformation of the public arena. My approach both draws on and departs from Habermas’s concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1962). I follow his focus on the ideological and institutional foundations of public discourse and view the public in Mali as an arena in which various actors struggle over competing definitions of the normative foundations of the political community. Yet in contrast to Habermas’s view of the inherently rational character of public argument, I explore, rather than assume, the procedural rules and normative foundations of public debate. My interest in the significance of religion to public controversy also runs against the grain of Habermas’s assumption that modern politics are characterized by a secular public sphere and thus by the withdrawal of religion to the private realm. I propose to look at the present public prominence of religious activism in Mali as part of, not as a contradiction to, the politics of a secular state. I am particularly interested in the role that Islam, as a language of authority and a source for the definition of the common good, plays in current identity politics.

**Political openings, existential closures, new forms of sociality**

Since 1991, the year in which president Moussa Traoré was overthrown, Mali has witnessed the emergence of a variety of Muslim groups and activists who use mass media to assert and propagate an explicit Islamic position in public debates. Thus, Sharif Haidara’s group *Ansar Dine* is by far the most popular Muslim movement, but his call for a moral renewal is no isolated phenomenon. Many Muslim activists engage first and foremost in controversy among themselves; they address, as they claim, matters of the common good. These matters include religious and ritual issues and sometimes touch on governmental policy. Some controversies involve ferocious and often personalized attacks on individual clerics. They are made public in printed matter or in sermons that are broadcast on audio-tapes and local and national radio stations. The ways in which the matters are publicly discussed illustrate the possibilities and limitations of social action that emerged at the intersection between state institutions and society since 1991.
The Muslim activists stand for a range of groups and actors who lay claim to the new spaces for political activity and couch their aspirations in the international idiom of civil society, democracy and popular participation. But the confrontations between Muslim groups and NGOs reveal more than a struggle over public presence and civil rights. Their call for political participation can be seen as an attempt to insert themselves into an expanding field of novel income-generating opportunities. At least, this is how many Western-oriented intellectuals interpret the public prominence of Muslim activists: as an attempt to benefit from the new possibilities of entrepreneurship created by international donor support for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other initiatives. As a journalist friend put it in 1998, when he heard about my interest in the recent upsurge of Muslim activism, ‘Why do you look for faith where there is only economic interest?’ Although I believe this harsh judgment to be mistaken in its stark division between religion and economics, it certainly captures some conditions that are conducive to the current upsurge of Muslim identity politics. The associations and networks created by Muslim activists offer badly needed opportunities to make some additional money in a situation of poverty, if not utter destitution, of a growing segment of the urban population.

A closer look at the Muslim networks reveals that they do not correspond in their form and pragmatic logic to the institutional and normative foundations of the Enlightenment model of civil society. Urban-based Muslim neighborhood associations (sometimes styled after NGOs funded by Western donor organizations) are run according to a rationality in which considerations about clients and redistribution intermingle with the logic of the market. In contrast, networks tying rural groups to urban Muslim activists in Mali are mostly based on trust, mutual obligation and patronage. These networks are therefore not instances of primordial social organization. They are being reconfigured in response to recent changes in the political and social landscape. They illustrate the impossibility of drawing a clear dividing line between the state and civil society because actors who employ the rhetoric of a ‘civil society against the state’ appropriate some state resources (also see Lemarchand 1992; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

Muslim women’s neighborhood associations are an example of this new, mixed form of mobilization that combines grassroots initiatives modeled on Western NGOs with conventional modes of social gathering. Their leaders, very often older women who occupied leading positions in the administration and government under the former president, Moussa Traoré, play an influential role in neighborhood politics. Many
of them nurture cliental relations to members of the current economic and political elites. Most group members, on the other hand, remain excluded from these networks. To them, the neighborhood groups offer opportunities for mutual support, shared spiritual experience and ritual practice, and learning (see below).13

**Islam’s new ‘public face’**

The greater prominence of Muslim activism in the public arena had started already under President Traoré when Islam adopted a new ‘face’ through the proliferation of mosques and medersas (Triaud 1988; Brenner 1993b).14 But public Islam has acquired new momentum through the recent diversification of the media landscape and its products and the concomitant expansion of media consumption. The controversy among Muslim activists and clerics illustrates that these changes are played out in renewed struggles over public representation.

Since 1991, when free associational life and freedom of expression were acknowledged as civic rights, the landscape of private radio stations and independent press has diversified at a breathtaking speed. In 1999, there existed—at least nominally—more than 80 local radio stations, most of which were located in towns in the southern triangle of Mali (Schulz 2000). Local radio stations are all the more important because they offer the only alternative to the national language entertainment provided by national television. The reception of the latter is restricted to urban areas, except for a few pockets around the capital, Bamako.15

Local radio stations constitute some of the most important sites for public controversy, not only between different Muslim interest groups but among a broad variety of representatives of the new associational life in Mali. The outlook of local radio programming has changed considerably since the early days of their existence. Most local radio stations were initially conceived (and funded as such by international organizations and individual sponsors) as a forum for controversial debate and critical opinion making, and this in spite of their different statutes.16 Because broad segments of the urban population did not appreciate the initial critical political radio programming, most of these information programs have been abandoned (Schulz 2000). Most current broadcasts mix entertainment with debate on topics that address the everyday concerns of urban more than rural listeners.17 The topics are presented in the form of talk radio shows that combine discussions in the local vernacular with music.18 This mixture makes talk radio highly popular
among young people, in particular men, who before the liberalization of the media market preferred to listen to music and news programs on international radio stations. Because of their participatory and interactive formula, talk radio programs capture the moral imagination of listeners.\textsuperscript{19} The new, morally evaluating public they create and address illustrates that new forms of sociality emerge in and around practices of broadcast consumption (Schulz 1999, 2002; also see Barber 1997).

The wider circulation of this mix of entertainment and information transforms previous attitudes towards the relation between knowledge and individual responsibility. In particular illiterate people who were formerly excluded from domains of knowledge relevant to politics because they could not read popular press publications now emphasize their own responsibility in the management of knowledge. They feel that they ‘need to build our own opinion’\textsuperscript{20} and that local radio stations help them to do so.

One indicator of these changes is the popularity of religious radio programs and of audio-taped sermons.\textsuperscript{21} In them, preachers explain to listeners what position they should take vis-à-vis various social and political matters. The massive proliferation of religious programs is facilitated by the expansion of television and video culture which is the result of imports of television sets from Southeast Asia. Low-cost, battery-run television sets are now much more widespread than even four years ago. Another process that contributes to the growing emphasis on individual opinion-making is the wide circulation of religious pamphlets produced in the Arab-speaking world. These pamphlets, written in Arabic, French and some national languages, are designed for particular age-groups and gender-specific audiences.\textsuperscript{22} They instruct the reader how to behave as a good Muslim in everyday life. The fact that members of Muslim women’s groups read and discuss these instructions during their meetings (see below) suggests that the manuals affect existing conceptions of womanhood and of personal responsibility for being a good Muslim. In a similar way to the broadcast sermons, the manuals convey a new temporality of redemption because they emphasize that the redeeming quality of a ‘good life’ is put into the hands of individual believers and into the here-and-now.

\textit{Shifting alliances among Muslims and the weakening of traditional religious authority}

Current confrontations between different Muslim factions, in particular between the Muslim activists and representatives of the Sufi
establishment, elaborate a longer-standing tradition of doctrinal dispute expressed in a ‘discourse about ignorance and truth’ (Brenner 2001, chapter 4). They reflect how recent shifts in the social basis of control over religious knowledge led to new relations of power among various Muslim actors and groups. The ‘traditional’ clerics are descendants of families of religious specialists (marabouts in French) that replaced the former elite of experts in Islamic jurisprudence in the early colonial period (Stewart 1997; cf. Triaud 1997). The institutional foundations of religious authority have weakened since the late 1940s, when individual Muslim reformists, inspired by intellectual currents at Al Azhar in Cairo (where they had received their higher education), sought to adapt traditional religious training to the new demands of the colonial social and political environment. At that time, access to religious learning had already become less restricted. A new pedagogy, inspired by French-language schools, transformed conventional forms of learning and transmission, as well as conceptions of Islamic knowledge, and thus undermined the existing social basis of religious authority (e.g. Kaba 1974; Brenner 2001, chapter 3).  

Current confrontations are still presented as disagreements over ritual matters (also see Launay and Soares 1999) but the lines of conflict and alliance are changing. Conflicts between the Sufi establishment and a new generation of ‘Wahhabi’ merchants with close ties to the Arab-speaking world during the colonial period gave way to their (instable) alliances against the arabisants (Otayek 1993) whose higher education facilitated their access to influential positions in the state bureaucracy since the 1970s (Amselle 1985; Brenner 1993a, b, c; Hock 1998).

The erosion of the former basis of authoritative knowledge acquires a novel momentum because it concurs with the proliferation of new media technologies. The spread of small media facilitates, among other factors, the access to religious knowledge and encourages individual interpretation. Interpretation becomes dissociated from former personal chains of transmission of Islamic erudition that legitimated its beholder.

The mushrooming of Muslim women’s associations since the 1980s illustrates that access to religious knowledge is widening and that the modes of transmission are changing. ‘Muslim women’ come together to read, write and recite the Qur’an, to pray, and to learn appropriate ritual conduct. Until the 1980s, relatively few, elite women (generally older women from families of merchants and religious specialists) engaged in this form of religious and ritual learning. Now, the majority of women in the literacy and prayer groups are from the lower classes. This points to a widening access to religious knowledge and to shifts in its mode
of transmission. Even though the Muslim women refer to their activities as ‘traditional’ forms of learning, their new forms and uses of literacy reveal the existence of overlapping, conventional and new paradigms of religious knowledge and learning (see Eickelman 1992: 646).

Some of the women who created a learning circle, the *ton kuntigi*w, make recordings of their own sermons which are then broadcast on local radio stations and/or circulated among their followers. Broadcasting thus plays a role in challenging previous foundations of religious authoritative knowledge. A *ton kuntigi* generally focuses on questions of appropriate attire and ritual conduct and seems simply to reproduce a conservative gender ideology. But a closer scrutiny of the sermons of female leaders reveals that they respond to concerns triggered by recent radical changes in gender relations. The role of mass higher education (in French) in these changes is comparatively minor. By contrast, the growing number of (male) Malians who have graduated from an institution of the Arab-speaking world since the 1980s contributes to a diversification of the national field of ‘contestants’ over authoritative religious interpretation. Access to knowledge on religious and ritual matters is facilitated by the current thriving of vernacular languages. Their public prominence results from the governmental educational and communication policies. Almost all religious genres and debates are broadcast in Bamana, a language spoken primarily in the southern triangle of Mali and promoted as the national *lingua franca* after independence.

Contests over religious authority and the question of an ‘Islamic public sphere’

Haidara’s success, as well as his public collusion with eminent members of the Muslim establishment, demonstrates how various factors of change combine to create fundamentally new conditions for the rise of religious leadership. Haidara comes from an unimportant rural branch of a prestigious religious lineage from the area of Segu in southern Mali. According to his many opponents in the Muslim camp, Haidara received very little training in religious studies. But his rhetorical skills, his extensive use of broadcast technology and ferocious attacks on the Muslim establishment’s ‘hypocritical’ position vis-à-vis politicians has earned him a wide following, in particular among the urban lower classes. With this career choice, Sharif Haidara seems to follow the Haidara family tradition of privileging proselytization over both erudition and a close affiliation with political power (see footnote 29). So far, representatives of the AMUPI have intervened to block Haidara’s access to the national broadcast station. But Haidara successfully employs
video- and audio-taped sermons (many of which are being broadcast on local radio), to reach a constituency of listeners that stretches further into rural areas than do the networks of competing Muslim activists. Haidara therefore counters his exclusion from the state-controlled arena of public communication by creating a parallel sphere of debate. His sermons are far more popular than the audio-recordings made by other preachers.

The economically marginalized wholeheartedly endorse Haidara’s criticism of ‘corrupted karamògòw’ (marabouts in French), in other words clerics who make a living by inserting themselves into the rapidly expanding fee-for-service religious economy in town.30 There are also many (often younger) men, who are discontented with the unfulfilled promises of democratization and therefore endorse Haidara’s implicit criticism of current politics. Others assert that his ‘truthful’ or ‘forceful’ speech reflects that God has conferred special blessings (baraka) upon him. The ‘special (rhetorical) powers’ that people attribute to him are reminiscent of the ‘exceptional powers’ that Weber identified as markers of charisma. In the introduction to the seminal collection of essays on ‘charisma and brotherhood in African Islam’ (1988), Cruise O’Brien and Coulon suggest that Weber’s concept of ‘charisma’ might be useful for exploring the nature of Sufi leadership. Whilst there are commonalities between Weber’s notion of ‘charisma’ and the Islamic notion of baraka, the two concepts are not identical.31 Still charisma, as a qualification for spiritual leadership, has a long-standing tradition in West African Sufi Islam. Haidara illustrates the on-going relevance of ‘exceptional powers’ to religious authority (Weber 1947: 358). He effectively combines qualities identified by Weber as ‘charismatic’ with some traditional credentials of Sufi authority and with innovative assets, especially media technology. But before further discussion of the potentially charismatic nature of his authority, I want to sketch out how people organize their consumption of Haidara’s sermons and what claims he puts forward in them.

Except for special occasions, such as religious holidays or the month of Ramadan, Haidara’s radio programs are broadcast once a week. But in many Ansar Dine households people listen to his tape-recorded sermons during all kinds of activities. For women and girls, the best time for uninterrupted consumption is in the early afternoon and at night, when they ‘have time to relax’. People refer to Haidara’s broadcasts as ‘moral education’. A closer look at their consumption practices reveals that they also use his taped sermons to distract themselves and create an agreeable atmosphere. I witnessed numerous occasions on which a
woman would start playing a tape when she received a visit from a fellow *Ansar Dine* devotee to make her, as she usually put it, ‘feel at ease’. Men and women may listen to the tapes individually or while sitting together and chatting with neighbors, friends and family members. Whenever the latter happens, they regularly interrupt their conversation to discuss a passage or remark they find noteworthy.

Only some of the local radio programs that feature Haidara are live productions. 32 Most of his broadcasts are recordings of public sessions made by male devotees who follow Haidara wherever he goes and who make a living from producing and selling his tapes and other paraphernalia related to Haidara. 33 Some local radio stations charge a fee for broadcasting Haidara’s tapes. Others entertain a cliental relationship to Haidara’s movement; they broadcast his sermons in exchange for special favors and material contributions they received from Haidara or from an influential member of *Ansar Dine*.

Haidara travels extensively in and outside Mali to visit and provide moral assistance to his followers. Wherever he goes in Mali, he draws masses of followers and admirers that outnumber by far the crowd that the former president Alpha Konaré attracted during his visits. 34 Haidara’s sermons are replete with references to individual devotees whom he met on his previous travels. For example, in a tape broadcast on local radio stations in Bamako and Segu, he may respond to a question a woman asked him during a public gathering in Bouaké (Ivory Coast). By way of these connections, the wide circulation of his taped sermons and his mobility, Haidara creates a community of believers that is virtual and material at the same time and spans across wider distances and territorial borders.

Haidara selects the topics of his sermons in response to the requests of listeners who, in letters, telephone calls and direct conversations, ask him to respond to questions relating to everyday life. Many questions concern matters of proper conduct. In his responses, he generally combines ‘citations’ 35 from the Qur’an with anecdotes ‘from the life of the Prophet’ to further illustrate his argument. Haidara’s teachings are based on the implicit claim that Islam provides the source for an alternative normative order. But closer scrutiny of his sermons reveals that the specifically ‘Islamic’ substance of his argument is thin. For example, the code of appropriate female conduct he proclaims does not substantially differ from the conventional gender ideology. 36 Nor are there clear differences between his teachings and those of the Sufi orders whose representatives he criticizes.

It would therefore be misleading to interpret Haidara’s attacks on
prominent clerics as a matter of doctrinal disagreement. Rather, the public confrontations illustrate the struggle over the authoritative use of ‘Islam’, a struggle that is exacerbated by shifts in the social foundations of religious authority. The fact that the strongest opposition to his appearance on national media comes from other Muslim activists reveals some of the strategies of exclusion that structure public debate in Mali. The segmentation of the Muslim discursive field, the influences across purportedly distinct normative fields, make it problematic to assume the existence of a separate ‘Islamic’ public that, as a ‘counter-public’, opposes the official, secular one.

Interlude: religion as a way of life

The ‘democratization’ of the production and reception of sermons (wajuli) and other religious broadcasts transforms popular perceptions of what constitutes a religious genre. In addition, the widening access to individual interpretation concurs with new conceptions of Islam both as a source of individual identity and as a set of prescriptions that a ‘true Muslim’ should take to heart. In the eyes of the new professing believers, Islam becomes objectified as a rational system of rules (see Eickelman 1992). Even though this ‘rationalist episteme’ (Brenner 2001: 301 ff) has a longer history, it acquires a new momentum and form in the current socio-political situation. For instance, the leaders of the Muslim women groups ‘educate’ their followers in broadcast sermons and advise them of how to respond to the exigencies of Islam in their everyday and ritual conduct. Their argumentative rhetoric is based on the sometimes implicit, but most often explicit assumption that the Qur’an has a response to ‘all our concerns, all matters of our life’. In Haidara’s sermons, too, references to the rational nature of the Qur’an loom large. By stressing its prescriptive character, Haidara represents it as a manual for social propriety and personal piety that combines rules of religious observance with recommendations for proper attitudes and manners in mundane matters.

Haidara’s ‘rational’ approach seems to illustrate a process of rationalization of religious knowledge in the sense of its systematization and objectification (Eickelman 2000). Haidara’s repeated stress on the rational character of the Qur’an, the meanings of which can be explored and argued in a systematic fashion, bears close resemblance to Habermas’s notion of critical argument as the procedural norm of the bourgeois public (Habermas 1962). But a closer look at his sermons reveals that the mediatization of religious debate has more contradictory implications.
To illustrate this point, I want to take a closer look at the kind of rationalization that Haidara’s approach to religious knowledge reflects. Although Haidara’s sermons have some resemblance to conventional preaching styles, their form and content bear distinctively personal and novel features. He borrows from the argumentative style of politicians and his rhetoric is strongly inspired by the performance style of professional storytellers. The dialogic form in which he sets up his sermons has all the earmarks of the highly popular talk radio programs that address adolescents and women in town (Schulz 1999a). Many followers emphasize that Haidara’s teachings are important to them because he exhorts them to transcend internal divisions within the Muslim camp. Haidara has repeatedly denounced ‘these Muslims who claim to live Islam yet spend their time attacking each other’. On one tape, when asked to position himself vis-à-vis the Quadiriyya and the Tijaniyya and their leaders, he declared that ritual differences between the different orders did not matter at all. To him, the essential question was whether somebody truly practiced the prescriptions of Islam. However, Haidara’s appeal to move beyond sectarian interests is contradicted by his actual practice of criticizing other religious leaders, even though he never addresses them by name. Even more intriguing is the fact that the gap between his calls for Muslim unity and his confrontational style is not perceived as a contradiction by his devotees. The latter view Haidara’s criticism as an instance of moral education and ‘the undeniable truth’, rather than as an attack.

The unifying message Haidara proposes fits the newly emerging ‘marketplace of ideas’ and its neo-liberal ideology. The illocutionary force of his rhetoric is another reason for the attraction Haidara exerts on his listeners. In his emotionally charged interventions, Haidara evokes a ‘community of sentiment’ (Appadurai 1990b), in other words, a collectivity united by feelings of common belonging and by shared ethics. His repeated references to the mass-mediated nature of his engagement with his followers marks this performative space off from more anonymous or mundane settings of media consumption.

The prominence of programs of religious education, the importance that listeners attribute to them as guidelines for an ethically superior life-style, suggest that these programs become a central part of everyday consumption and entertainment. Their growing importance to quotidian life reflects a process in which practices of consumption become more important to notions of identity and the self (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002). 39 This expansion of consumerism is propelled by media technologies and market structures and mediated through consumer
images and articles. A side-effect of the expanding consumer market is that political and social issues ‘go public’ (Lee 1993) where they are discussed as matters of individual or collective morality and acquire an iconic function in identity politics. Local radio stations and cassettes make it possible to take a position vis-à-vis a broader range of everyday concerns. They also put an increasing pressure on rivaling interest groups to compete for a public acknowledgement of their ‘rightful’ position.

One consequence of the marketplace of ideas that electronic and decentralized media facilitate is that religious genres converge, in form and social significance, with other forms of popular culture. Haidara’s success and the widespread circulation of his sermons are indicative of this process in which religion, in the form of religious genres, becomes popularized (in the two meanings of the term). Certainly, religious genres derive part of their popularity and legitimacy from the assertion of consumers and producers that they bear a higher moral value because they ‘edify’ people. But, as a result of the increasing mediatization of everyday experience, ‘religious education’ entertains people as much during their pursuit of daily activities as do talk shows, information programs or music broadcasts.

The commodification of religion goes hand in hand with a shift in conceptions of religiosity and religious subjectivity. Faith becomes part and parcel of a modern identity that has to be publicly displayed and professed. This novel conception of faith reflects that Muslim identity is undergoing a radical change in Mali. In urban areas, the former significance of Muslim identity in indicating an ethnic affiliation or occupational identity (Launay 1992) has become less important. Muslim identity now is a conviction that has to be defended against contending viewpoints, in a public arena in which competing groups struggle for recognition. One of the most important means to display one’s identity as a rightful believer is a ‘decent’ code of conduct and dress. In addition, as with recent trends in the Middle East, public claims to (and contestations of) Islamic identity center on notions of female ‘propriety’ and virtue (e.g. Olson 1985; Göle 1997).

Variations on a theme: charismatic leadership revisited

So far, I have argued that broadcast mediated sermons in Mali facilitate the emergence of a new, rationalist episteme. At the same time, they create new opportunities for the use of emotionally compelling means in the assertion of authority. Hence authority is acquired on grounds
other than rational argument. Small media contribute to and diversify a marketplace of ideas that owes its existence, among other developments, to the recent opening up of political life. In it, religion becomes one of a range of normative resources and symbols on which competing actors draw to advertise their aspirations.

I now turn to the particular credentials that form the basis of Haidara’s religious authority. Following Weber, who emphasizes that authority should be understood in relational terms, I propose to focus on the relationship that devotees establish with their leader (see Dekmejian and Wyszomirski 1972). I am also interested in how a particular media technology affects the spiritual leadership that Ansar Dine followers confer on Haidara. Weber’s notion of charismatic leadership is useful in understanding how authority is being mediated and established in the process of consuming religious broadcasts. I therefore focus on the consumption of audio-recordings and radio broadcasts to understand the kind of relationship that emerges during these activities.

Whenever I asked members of Ansar Dine or even more distant admirers of Haidara why they held him in such high esteem, they highlighted two personal qualities: his ‘humbleness’ and that he spoke ‘the undeniable truth’. To them, the fact that Haidara never claimed the role of a spiritual leader proved his modesty. (What they did not mention was that Haidara never rejects this role either when his devotees attribute it to him.) Some of the personal qualities for which Haidara is praised by his followers, such as his piety, devotion, erudition and oratorical skills, correspond to the qualifications of religious leadership in West African Sufi Islam. But he never accomplished certain requirements that constitute important steps in the conventional career of a spiritual leader (muqadam) or ‘friend of God’ (wali) such as the practice of spiritual retreat (khalwa) or the performance of miracles (Triaud 1988a). He does not refer to dreams or visions as experiences that motivated his call for a moral renewal of society. Even more importantly, he does not trace back his intellectual genealogy to a chain of transmission and spiritual initiation as this is conventionally done in West African Sufi Islam (Brenner 1985, chapter 2; 1988). Nor does he proclaim new and particular ritual prescriptions that distinguish him from other Sufi orders. Quite to the contrary: Haidara’s explicit argument against the relevance of any ritual specificities shows that he denounces any claim to exclusivity on the part of any Sufi order. Most of his followers and admirers were unable to tell me to which brotherhood Haidara belonged. Their attitude is revealing not because it shows their ignorance in religious matters, but because it reflects their dislike of
(what they would declare to be an unfortunate) religious factionalism. It also points to their relative indifference towards doctrinal and ritual disagreements among different Sufi brotherhoods.

Haidara’s teachings derive much of their attraction from his assertion of the rational and arguable nature of the Qur’an, the view of Islam as a system of rules and the emphasis on the suitability of Islamic prescriptions to everyday life. The democratizing, anti-hierarchical bent of his philosophy appeals to a broad constituency of middle- and lower-middle-class consumers. Curiously, his marked emphasis on the possibility and necessity of a believer’s unmediated communication with the Divine runs against the grain of Sufi doctrine based on the belief in the special powers and beneficial effects of religious intermediaries. His claim also contrasts with the relations he entertains with his followers, relations that are clearly shaped by the conventions of a Sufi master-disciple relationship.

All of this suggests that although people generally refer to Haidara as their spiritual leader, they do so on grounds that differ in part from the ones on which religious authority in West African Sufi Islam has been based conventionally. One could thus see him as a populist leader who owes his chances for attracting a following to the use of media technology, in other words to the ability to disseminate his message to a wider constituency. But such an interpretation implies a technocratic and reductive view of media as constituting merely a means of communication. Instead, we should consider it as a medium that shapes the message it conveys. The second quality to which Haidara’s admirers refer, the ‘undeniable truth’ he speaks, suggests another, more qualified interpretation of the effects of media technology on the success of a religious leader. There is, I want to show, something particular to aural media that lends credibility to what Haidara says by highlighting certain charismatic qualities of his voice.

Listeners’ spontaneous engagement with Haidara’s sermons reveals that, while listening to him, they endow him with the attributes of a charismatic leader. Consuming his ‘forceful speech’ creates a new space for spiritual experience. A number of men who are not members of Ansar Dine, yet speak highly of Haidara, pointed out that the initial incentive to acquaint themselves with Haidara’s teachings was the experience of hearing his voice, which immediately struck them as so compelling that they ‘felt that he spoke the truth’. They and Haidara’s followers emphasized the great disparity between Haidara’s speech that ‘forces people to accept the truth’ and that of other preachers who ‘just speak’ but do not motivate people to change their attitudes.
According to listeners, hearing Haidara’s speech ‘purifies’ their hearts. Some even asserted that it cleanses their homes from ‘evil spirits’. Most of their casual, unprompted reactions reveal that they establish an emotionally charged relationship with Haidara in the act of listening. They tend to attribute to Haidara’s voice the capacity to move and transform, not only the heart of individual believers who are in search of the truth but, as they put it, the ‘feelings of everyone who is ready to listen and to act accordingly’. Listeners’ emphasis on the performative quality of Haidara’s voice resonates forcefully with Hirschkind’s argument that the mediatization of sermons in Egypt contributed to a fundamental restructuring of notions of individual agency and religious authority. While before agency was located ‘more in God and the disciplined ears and hearts of listeners’, the weight of responsibility has now shifted to the speaker and his capacity to ‘convince’ his listeners of the truthfulness of his speech (Hirschkind 2001). At the same time, the importance that Haidara’s devotees attribute to his forceful speech stands in a curious tension with their emphasis on their own responsibility as believers.

Spontaneous comments center on the compelling force of Haidara’s voice that makes his ‘spiritual presence’ felt among his listeners. To them, the exceptional quality of his voice proves that ‘God bestowed baraka (blessings) on him’. Some listeners even describe their listening experience as one of spiritual empowerment. This sense of exceptionality is reinforced by some practices related to the consumption of Haidara’s sermons. For example, as soon as the broadcasting of Haidara’s sermons on local radio starts, women tend to take the posture required in the physical presence of their leader. Some of them even alter their speech mode, speaking at a low voice and in a deferential fashion. In some households, whenever women and girls listen to Haidara’s broadcasts, they place the tape recorder at a specific spot in or in front of the house. This place is very often decorated with posters that depict Haidara and his family, and with a range of memorabilia that commemorate important steps in his career. Female devotees, by carrying out their household chores next to the tape-recorder, thus turn the consumption of his sermons into a specially and spatially marked activity. In other words, the act of listening to his speech (at least occasionally) creates a new space for the experience of spirituality and of the extraordinary.

Haidara’s popularity thus sheds light on a paradoxical process. The widespread consumption of his sermons reflects that religious genres become part of everyday consumer culture and simultaneously take on the properties of other entertainment genres. At the same time, listening
to the sermons offers listeners the opportunity to carve out spaces for spiritual experience in everyday settings. Haidara's broadcast charisma ‘invades’ spaces of the mundane and gives them a new touch. Therefore, contrary to a basic tenet of modernization theory that holds that mass media and commercial culture lead to the profanization and secularization of the everyday, broadcasting may allow for a ‘re-sacralizing’ of some ‘secular’ domains.

The spiritual experience generated in the act of consumption certainly differs in form and nature from experiences of the divine in conventional, clearly demarcated settings of religious practice. ‘Mass-mediated spirituality’ results from a convergence of technological change and shifts in the political economy; these include a spread of media technologies that are conducive to the mediation of charismatic leadership, a greater importance of consumption practices to individual and collective identities and an increasing influence of ideologies and images of global consumer culture. As a result of the centrality of consumption to one’s identity, spirituality becomes an object of consumption; its public nature that is, its potential for being publicly displayed, forms part of its value. Individual spirituality, generated through broadcast consumption and the adoption of a dress code, becomes central to identity constructions and to the justification of the greater role Muslim individuals or groups want to assume in public life.

Reprise: consuming spirituality

It is now time to return to my initial question as to the prerequisites for a successful Islamic charismatic movement in contemporary Mali. Brenner, in his discussion of the conditions for a career of sainthood in the French Sudan of the early 20th century, observes that visionary powers and exemplary conduct alone are not sufficient to qualify somebody as a charismatic leader. Apart from personal ambition, it is the specific social and political context that motivates people to endorse a leader’s call for renewal and thus to make his endeavor a success (Brenner 1985: 42-43). Weber’s argument that charismatic movements are most likely to arise in times of identity crisis and insecurity seems to apply to the present situation in urban Mali: a situation characterized by the economic deprivation of large segments of the urban population, a lack of political legitimacy and a strong sense of moral perplexity. Haidara’s attraction resides in the kind of solution he proposes. In the absence of the political and economic conditions for making a decent living, his focus on ethical self-improvement is
compelling. Still, the general sense of dislocation and crisis in Mali is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the rise of charismatic authority. Haidara’s oratorical skills are crucial to his success story, too. However, one might wonder how attractive and effectual his teachings would have been without his use of audio-recordings, the proliferation of local radio stations and the concomitant expansion of consumer culture. What renders his teachings so agreeable, then, is not just that they respond to a general sense of social and moral dislocation. Haidara’s message fits a relatively recent ideology of consumerism and market choice, and a shift in the nature of identity politics, that renders the public performance of one’s identity central to the kind of claims somebody makes.

That Haidara owes his success to a certain extent to the ways in which he publicizes his teachings shows that broadcasting contributes to the rationalization of religious genres in a double sense. The dissemination of religious knowledge on broadcast media works through the standardization of religious genres and styles of religious argument. It contributes to a process of objectification in the course of which religion becomes the object of individual scrutiny, deliberation and identity construction (cf. Eickelman 1992, 2000). However, one should be careful not to mistake this objectification of religious knowledge for a shift towards a more rational character of religious debate. The compelling force of Haidara’s rhetoric resides to an important degree in his capacity to captivate listeners’ emotional and aesthetic sensibilities. This successful combination of argumentation with emotional appeal is at variance with Habermas’s view that a critical, argumentative public and one characterized by the performance of appeal constitute two separate phases in the historical transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1962). On the other hand, Haidara’s success story supports Habermas’s argument that the mediatization, and concomitant commodification, of public debate fundamentally alter the conditions for politics, turning them into a matter of persuasion (see Meyer 1994).

The upsurge of Muslim identity politics in the Malian public arena indicates the persistent, if not increasing salience of religious debate in the politics of the secular state. It also contradicts any simplistic interpretation of the current situation in terms of a ‘fundamentalist threat’ challenging secular state politics. The ways in which current identity politics in Mali are played out in religious debate point to a partial re-sacralization of everyday practice and experience. This process has paradoxical effects. As faith is viewed as a matter of individual conviction, the act of expressing religiosity becomes more central to one’s religious
identity. A believer’s religiosity is assessed according to his or her public performance of spirituality. Notions of the spiritual thus become part and parcel of everyday activities. The mediatization of religion renders it more difficult than before to separate domains and practices of the profane from those related to the sacred. In this process, the very notion of sacred is being transformed: as the spiritual is something one strives to experience and to put on display, one’s relationship to the sacred turns into a worldly matter.

NOTES

1. The research on which this article is based (1996-2001, 13 months in total) would not have been possible without the assistance and patience of numerous Ansar Dine devotees. I owe a special gratitude to Madame Diaby Adam Dembele and her husband for their hospitality and readiness to engage in dialogue. Previous versions of the article were presented at the Free University of Berlin (Department of Anthropology) and to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Summer Institute, ‘Muslim Identities and the Public Sphere’, Berlin, July 2001. I thank my colleagues at the Free University and the participants in the Summer Institute (in particular Dale Eickelman and Armando Salvatore) for critical comments and helpful suggestions. I also benefited from conversations with Jean Comaroff, Birgit Meyer and Mohamed N’dou. Mary Ann O’Donnell and Gertrud Huwelmeier carefully read and commented on a previous draft of this paper.

2. From the Arabic term Ansar al-din.

3. ‘Notre guide spirituel, Sharif Haidara, grace à toi je suis un bon musulman’.

4. Haidara’s full name is Sharif Ousmane Madani Haidara.

5. People’s distinction between traditional forms of power exercise (fanga) and modern politics (politiki) dates back to the times of the independence struggle. The notion of ‘politicking’ (that is, the negative connotation of politiki) acquired a new prominence after 1992, when (particularly older) people interpreted multiparty competition as ‘anarchy’, in other words, as an indicator of the weakness of the central state (Schulz 2001, chapter 3).

6. The intégristes play a comparatively minor role, both numerically and in terms of their capacity to attract followers. For the role they played in the years after the introduction of multiparty democracy, see Hock (1998).

7. This ‘civil rights discourse’ emerged in the late 1980s, along with the constitution of an extra-parliamentary opposition to the single-party rule of Moussa Traoré which called for multiparty democracy, free elections, freedom of opinion, and popular participation. From this ‘movement for democracy’ emerged Alpha Oumar Konaré, the first democratically elected president of Mali (since 1992) and his party ADEMA. During his presidency (until 2002), Konaré was confronted with persistent attacks by oppositional parties and associations which couched their often violent attacks on his government in terms of a defense of their basic civic rights (e.g. freedom of expression and popular participation).

8. In my view, the concept of the ‘public’ is more useful than that of ‘civil society’ in accounting for the new social dynamics, even if the former comes with an ideological baggage similar to that of ‘civil society’ (also see Mardin 1995; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). It is also more helpful for understanding the new prominence that ‘Islam’ has recently acquired by reference to its public nature (also see Salvatore 1998).

9. As a number of authors pointed out, Habermas downplayed the importance of religious associational life for the emergence of a bourgeois public in the late 17th and 18th centuries in Western Europe (see Calhoun 1992).
10. The dynamics of the current opening date back to the mid-1980s when the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program forced the state to retreat from domains formerly under tight financial and political control (Anselin 1992).

11. Support by private and public funds from the Arab-speaking world has been provided since the late 1970s. Private funds often financed the provision of infrastructure projects, such as the construction of reformed Qur’anic schools (mederases) and mosques. Another kind of support also takes the form of development aid from Western donor organizations (Brenner 1993a). It is to a growing extent directed towards local initiatives that specialize in services that the state fails to provide (such as the collection and partial reuse of garbage).

12. For example, over the past fifteen years Muslim women’s neighborhood groups have been mushrooming in urban Mali. Their members often make an additional income by providing services to people from the neighborhood. The alms they receive in return serve to support group members in times of crisis (Schulz 1999b; also see Sanankoua 1991).

13. Most members of Muslim women’s neighborhood associations are from the lower classes. They bear an increasing, if not the exclusive, responsibility for their families’ survival. Most of them experienced a failure of support by credit savings associations. To them, Muslim women’s neighborhood groups offer an opportunity for learning, shared spiritual experience, and emotional backing. The groups also offer a sanctioned space of sociality for women whose greater burden of financial responsibility is often not matched by a greater freedom of maneuver.

14. In spite of Mali’s secularist constitution, Moussa Traoré conceded a wide scope to Muslim interest groups. Brenner interprets this privileged treatment and the creation of the national Muslim organization AMUPI (Association Malienne pour l’Unité et le Progrès de l’Islam) in 1980 as an attempt on the part of President Traoré to channel the considerable financial funds flowing in from the Arab world since the late 1970s (1993a, b).

15. National television was introduced in 1983. National radio, conceived primarily as an instrument of the ‘education of the masses’, does not provide the entertainment adolescents in urban Mali want to listen to. The second radio channel of national radio (Chaîne Deux) offers the kind of entertainment in which the urban youth is interested: talk radio programs as well as national and international African music. But the reception of Chaîne Deux is restricted to Bamako and its surrounding areas.

16. Many are commercial radio stations sponsored by business men and political parties. But there are also a number of community radio stations (usually run by NGOs who are supported by Western donor organizations, such as the US-AID).

17. The rural population in Mali’s southern triangle lives by a combination of agriculture and cattle-herding. In the north, worsening ecological conditions and the effects of the civil war between 1989 and 1995 have forced most of the formerly nomadic populations (who lived primarily by cattle-herding) to adopt a sedentary life.

18. Music programs featuring Malian pop music, and a variety of international African music styles and of Western pop music genres, take up more than 80 per cent of the airtime.

19. The notion of ‘moral imagination’ draws on Casey’s (1976) view of imagining as an autonomous mental act and Castoriadis’s (1975) emphasis on imagination as a practice that is constitutive of social relations and institutions.

20. Discussion with members of a Muslim women’s neighborhood association in Bamako (Badialan 1), August 1998.

21. The number of days on which religious programs are broadcast (i.e. Thursday and Friday) have not been augmented. But over the past six years, the amount of time reserved for religious broadcasting has increased considerably.

22. The pamphlets often serve as learning manuals for adults (particularly women) who meet regularly in neighborhood-based groups to learn to read and write (in Arabic, sometimes also in Bamana).
23. Similar processes occurred throughout French West Africa. For an analysis of how these transnational intellectual, ‘reformist’ influences rearticulated with local social and intellectual processes in Ivory Coast, see Miran (1998) and Le Blanc (1999).

24. Many people in Mali refer to these merchants as ‘Wahhabis’ but, as Brenner points out, this denomination is misleading (they call themselves Ahl al-Sunna or Sunnis). As a label of alterity, it was created in the interaction between colonial administrators and established families of religious specialists. While the former feared the reformers because of their close connections to the Arab world, many traditional religious leaders felt threatened by the success of the reform movement and its doctrinal rejection of Sufism (Brenner 1993b: 60 ff, 2001: 131-139).

25. They refer to themselves as ‘Muslim women’ (silame musow) to distinguish themselves from women who, in their eyes, are not practicing believers.

26. Some participants refer to their leader as peresidan (the ‘Bamanized’ version of the French term présidente).

27. Among these changes is a shift in the division of financial responsibilities between men and women, a shift that has been accelerated by the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programs of the late 1980s and the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s. Men who cannot make a regular salary feel threatened by their loss of control over the younger generation and by the fact that their women bear a heavier responsibility for the survival of their family. These husbands strongly oppose their wives’ attempts to gain greater influence on family decision-making processes.


29. The name ‘Haidara’ indicates (claims to) Sharifian descent. The ancestor of his family, Ibrahima Haidara, received the Tijani wîrd during his imprisonment in Ivory Coast in the 1910s. Returned to Segu, he soon opposed the Segovian Tijani establishment represented by the family of El Hadj Omar Tall (Manley 1997: 324-334). Manley proposes to see him as an example of Triaud’s ‘humble militans’ for whom ‘Islam is in fact more a conduct and a way of life than an erudite knowledge’ (Triaud 1985 quoted in Manley 1997: 333).

30. This economy (in French generally referred to as maraboutage) comprises a vast array of services that often involve technologies of the occult (e.g. Soares 1996). The services range from the fortelling of the future to the fabrication of protective amulets and harmful ‘little works’.

31. Charisma, as a ‘gift of grace’ (Gottesgnadentum, Weber 1947: 360), is attached to a person and generally does not lead to Islamic ‘sainthood’ (waliya). Baraka, a ‘benign force of divine origin’, is usually linked to a line of descent. It therefore can be inherited or transferred from one person to the other. It helps in the working of miracles and is a sign of sainthood (Triaud 1988a: 53-54; Otayek 1988: 93-95).

32. Almost all the live productions are made by local radio stations located in the capital Bamako.

33. These paraphernalia include a variety of commodities for everyday use, such as dress items, posters, stickers, wall decorations. Their commercialization constitutes a veritable shadow economy. The production and sale of items that yield the highest profit is controlled by men. They are traded along an Ansar Dine commercial network that stretches into the neighboring countries, France and the US. Women, too, produce certain articles (especially dress items), which they sell to fellow devotees.

34. President Alpha Toumani Touré followed President Konaré in office in July 2002. The latter had been the first democratically elected president of Mali (since 1992).

35. This is how his followers and admirers refer to his recitation of passages of the Qur’an.

36. In none of Haidara’s recorded lectures or ‘live’ sermons on ‘correct’ female behavior have I found references to specific passages of the Qur’an or Hadith. The code of conduct Haidara sets out is inspired on one side by a Bamana gender ideology that
relegates women to a position of submission to the demands of their in-laws. On the other side, his strong emphasis on the need to submit to the will of their husbands seems to be a response to the challenges of male authority in many urban households.

37. According to Brenner, the ‘rationalist episteme’ gradually replaced the esoteric episteme of religious knowledge in the colonial period, under the influence of the pedagogy and ideological value of French-language schooling and literacy (2001, chapter 6).

38. There is no reference in Haidara’s teachings to *adab* as a concept and set of rules concerning the formation of personal moral character. But I would venture that his representation of the Qur’ an as a set of shared norms of personal cultivation has an affinity with the significance that the concept of and literatures on *adab* place on individual ethical transformation (e.g. Metcalf 1984).

39. To herald consumption as the ‘vanguard of history’ (Miller 1995) risks mistaking the symptoms (and ideology) related to recent shifts in the regime of accumulation for the actual motor of transformation. But it is certainly true that consumption practices have recently become more central to the making of subjectivities (Harvey 1989: 121-200; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 294-299).

40. For a related argument, see Soares (2002), who, in a fascinating historical sketch, links the emergence of a new type of preacher since the late colonial period to the emergence of increasingly standardized forms of expressing Muslim identity (what Soares calls ‘public signs of piety’) in Mali. Soares convincingly shows that Haidara’s success story is not a unique or entirely new phenomenon. But it is important to keep in mind that Haidara’s reliance on broadcast technologies provides him with entirely new possibilities for attracting a following. As I will argue, the specific nature of broadcast mediation adds new dimensions to the relationship between religious leaders and their followers, as well as to listeners’ spiritual experiences.

41. *Wali* is sometimes translated as ‘saint’ in the literature, but the more appropriate term is ‘friend of God’ (Cruise O’Brien and Coulon 1988).

42. As I mentioned, this notion of ‘rationality’ differs from Eickelman’s (1992) view of the objectification and systematization of religious knowledge.

43. As I mentioned before, one reason for this appeal is people’s deep disillusion with politics and with those traditional religious authorities who capitalize on their religious knowledge by providing services adjusted to the concerns of urbanites.

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