A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960

The mobilization of local ideas about racial difference has been important in generating – and intensifying – civil wars that have occurred since the end of colonial rule in all of the countries that straddle the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. From Sudan to Mauritania, the racial categories deployed in contemporary conflicts often hearken back to an older history in which blackness could be equated with slavery and nonblackness with predatory and uncivilized banditry. This book traces the development of arguments about race over a period of more than 350 years in one important place along the southern edge of the Sahara Desert: the Niger Bend in northern Mali. Using Arabic documents held in Timbuktu, as well as local colonial sources in French and oral interviews, Bruce S. Hall reconstructs an African intellectual history of race that long predated colonial conquest, and which has continued to orient inter-African relations ever since.

Bruce S. Hall is an assistant professor at Duke University. His work appears in the Journal of North African Studies and the International Journal of African Historical Studies. Professor Hall previously held positions as an assistant professor at the University at Buffalo (SUNY) and as an Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins University.
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A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960

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This book is based on three main types of primary source material. First, I conducted interviews with people in northern Mali, mostly in the Songhay language. Second, I used Arabic documents held at the Institut des Hautes Études et de Recherches Islamique – Ahmed Baba (IHERIAB) in Timbuktu. Third, I carried out research on colonial documents held at the Archives Nationales du Mali in Bamako, the archives of the Ministry of the Interior in Bamako, and in the local administrative offices in Timbuktu and Goundam. My work with Songhay language materials was assisted by Aldiouma Amadou Cissé dit Diadié, who also undertook the difficult task of teaching me the Songhay language. At IHERIAB, I thank Dr. Mohamed Gallah Dicko, Sidi Mohamed ould Youbba, Bouya Haidara, Noury Mohamed Alamine Al-Ansary, Hammay Bania, Ali Koina, San Shirfi Alpha, and Alfadoulou Abdoulahi. I owe a special appreciation to Djibril Doucouré who permitted me to work freely with the collection. At the Archives Nationales du Mali, I thank Dr. Aly Ongoiba, Alyadjidi Almouctar Baby, Lamine Camara, Abdallahi Traoré, Timothé Saye, Adama Diallo, and Siaka Koné for all of their assistance. The Haut Commissaire of the Region of Timbuktu in 2002, Colonel Mahamadou Maïga, opened the doors of local government offices in Timbuktu and
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Note on Orthography

The spelling of all place names follows official conventions in Mali and elsewhere, with the following exceptions: I use Timbuktu instead of Tombouctou, as it is spelled in Mali, Azawad instead of Azaouad, Arawn instead of Araouane, Masina instead of Macina. Otherwise, I use French orthography for place names in Mali, Senegal, and Niger, and Arabic for Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Libya, and Tunisia. Arriving at a consistent system for personal names has been more difficult. In general, I have tried to follow the individual spellings used by the people themselves. In the period before the establishment of colonial rule, I have followed Arabic orthographic conventions; in the colonial period, I have sometimes used French spellings where this is the only source, although not always where there are Arabic sources. For the colonial period, I have used French orthography in most cases even when Arabic sources suggest different spellings. For the pastoralist confederacy and lineage names, I have used a hybrid system to make it easier on the reader, following where possible the past practice of academic writing and contemporary Malian usage while trying to reflect the actual pronunciation as much as possible.

For transliterations of literary Arabic words, I have followed the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. I have avoided the unnecessary use of diacritics in Arabic words and names to the greatest extent possible. I have transliterated spellings using diacritics the first time a term, person, group, or Arabic word is introduced, but these have been dropped in all subsequent invocations. After the first mention, Mahmūd ould Dahmān is subsequently spelled Mahmud ould Dahman, Barābīsh becomes Barabish, and “durūra” becomes “durura.” For words
Note on Orthography

drawn from Hassaniyya Arabic, Tamashek, and Songhay, I have followed the orthographic conventions found in Jeffrey Heath’s work on these language families.¹ For Fulfulde, I have relied on the lexicon of Donald W. Osborn et al.² It should be noted that within these language families, there are significant dialectical differences. I have privileged the versions of Songhay, Tamashek, Hasaniyya Arabic, and Fulfulde spoken in the area around Timbuktu.

Abbreviations used in References

ACG  “Archives,” Cercle de Goundam, Mali
ACT  “Archives,” Cercle de Tombouctou, Mali
AHR  *American Historical Review*
AMI Archives de la Ministère de l’Intérieur, Bamako, Mali.
ANM Archives nationale du Mali
Ar. Arabic
ART Archives, Région de Tombouctou, Mali
b. (Ar.) “son of” (for “ibn/bin”)
BCEHS-AOF *Bulletin du Comité d’études historiques et scientifique de l’A.O.F*
BSOAS *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (SOAS)
CEA *Cabiers d’études africaines*
CJAS *Canadian Journal of African Studies*
CSSH *Comparative Studies in Society and History*
Fr. French
Fu. Fulfulde
HA *History in Africa*
Abbreviations used in References

HAr. Hassaniyya Arabic
IHHERIAB Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques – Ahmed Baba, Timbuktu, Mali
IJAHJS International Journal of African Historical Studies
JAH Journal of African History
JOSF Journal Officiel du Soudan Français
MLG Ulrich Rebstock, Maurische Literaturgeschichte. 3 volumes (Würtzburg: Ergon, 2001).
OCRS Organisation commune des régions sahariennes
PSP Parti Progressiste Soudanais
RBCAS Research Bulletin, Centre of Arabic Documentation, University of Ibadan
SA Sudanic Africa
So. Songhay
Ta. Tamashek
US-RDA Union Soudanaise-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain
Glossary

ʿabīd (sing. ʿabd)  (Ar.) slaves
Adrar mountainous area, often spelled “Adagh;” it refers to the Adrar-n-Ifoghas unless otherwise specified
ʿahd  (Ar.) pact or treaty
amān  (Ar.) granting of mutual security
amenokal  (Ta.) political leader or “chief” of a Tuareg confederacy
Arma Songhay-speaking descendants of Moroccan soldiers; elite group in certain Niger valley towns such as Timbuktu
azalaī  (Fr./HAr.) salt caravan
Azawad desert region north of the Niger Bend (French spelling “Azaouad”)
Barābīš Arabophone warrior-status lineage based north of the Niger Bend
bellah-iklan  (So.) servile “blacks” in Tuareg society
bīdān  (Ar.) “whites”
Bilād al-sūdān  (Ar.) “Land of the Blacks”
borochin  (So.) noble-born people, free people
gaabibi  (So.) servile “blacks”
goum  (Fr./HAr.) camel-mounted military policeman
goumier  (Fr.) camel-mounted military policeman
Gourma right bank of the Niger River
harātīn (sing. ḥartānī)  (Ar.) servile “blacks”
Glossary

harbibi (So.) servile “blacks”
hassàn (HAr.) warrior-status lineage
Haoussa left bank of the Niger River
iderfan (sing. edaraf) (Ta.) freed slaves
Ifoghas a Tuareg clerical-status lineage based in the Adrar-n-Ifoghas
Igawaddaran a Tuareg warrior-status confederation based in the Niger Bend
ighawelan (sing. eghawel) (Ta.) slaves living freely
iklan (sing. akli) (Ta.) male slaves (female slaves: “tiklaten,” sing. “taklitt”)
ilallan (sing. elall) (Ta.) noble-born people, free people
imghad (sing. amghid) (Ta.) tributary groups
imoshagh (sing. amashagh) (Ta.) members of Tuareg warrior-status lineages, sometimes understood more broadly as “nobles” (a dialectical variations of the spelling is “imajagh”)
inesleman (sing. anaslemen) (Ta.) clerical-status lineage
Irreganatan a Tuareg warrior-status lineage based in the Niger Bend
Iwellemmedan a Tuareg warrior-status confederation based in the eastern Niger Bend
Kel Ahaggar a Tuareg warrior-status confederation based in the Hoggar Massif
Kel Ajjer a Tuareg warrior-status confederation based in the Tassili-n-Ajjer
Kel Entsar a Tuareg clerical-status confederation, based in the Niger Bend
Kel Essuk a Tuareg clerical-status lineage based in the Niger Bend
Kel Ewey a Tuareg warrior-status confederation based in the Air Massif
Kel Temulayt a Tuareg warrior-status confederation based in the Niger Bend
Kissou region southwest of Timbuktu
Kunta an Arab clerical-status confederation based in the Niger Bend and Mauritania.
Masina the inland “delta” of the Niger River to the southwest of the Niger Bend
Glossary

Massūfa
a Berberophone group prominent in the medieval Sahel and southern Sahara.

méhariste
(Fr.) desert camel corps under French command.

mustaghraq al-dhimma
(Ar.) “he whose assets are consumed”

Shur Bubba
a seventeenth-century conflict in southwestern Mauritania said to have completed conquest of clerical-status lineages by Arab, warrior-status lineages.

Sorko
Songhay-speaking fishers.

Soudan Français
French colonial territory that gained its independence as the Republic of Mali.

sūdān
(Ar.) “blacks”

Tādmakkat
a medieval town in the Adrar-n-Iforghas.

Takrūr
imprecise term for Sahelian West Africa.

Tengeregif
a Tuareg warrior-status confederation based in the western Niger Bend.

walāya
(Ar.) “saintliness”

zwāyā
(HAr.) clerical-status lineage.