

CONFLICTS OF COLONIALISM

Based around the life of Mademba Sèye, an African born in the colonial town of Saint Louis du Sénégal in 1852, who transformed himself with the help of his French patrons from a telegraph clerk into an African king, this book examines Mademba's life and career to reveal how colonialism in French West Africa was articulated differently at different times and how Mademba survived these changes by periodically reinventing himself. Investigating Mademba's alleged abuses of power and crimes that pitted French colonial indirect rule policy with its foundations in patronage and loyalty against its stated commitment to the rule of law and the civilizing mission, *Conflicts of Colonialism* sheds light on conflicts between different forms of colonialism and the deep ambiguities of the rule of law in colonial societies, which, despite serious challenges to Mademba's rule, allowed him to remain king until his death in 1918.

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CONFLICTS OF COLONIALISM

The Rule of Law, French Soudan, and Faama
Mademba Sèye

RICHARD L. ROBERTS
Stanford University



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PREFACE

I first bumped into Mademba, king of Sinsani, in the Archives Nationales du Mali up on Kouluba Hill overlooking Bamako more than four decades ago. At that time, the national archives were located in a small stone house located on the outer edge of the President's "palace," which was formerly the home of the governor of the French Soudan. When I say that I bumped into Mademba back in the mid-1970s, this was not a physical encounter, since Mademba had been dead for nearly sixty years. Instead, I bumped into Mademba through the rich colonial government papers collected and maintained by a group of extraordinarily dedicated archival staff working on a shoestring budget in a physical setting that was challenging to the preservation of documents. At the time, I did not quite know what to do with my encounter with Mademba.

In the mid-1970s, my original research focused on the economy and political economy of precolonial and early colonial history of the Middle Niger with Sinsani at the center. Sinsani – also referred to as Sansanding in the sources – was a major commercial town situated along the Niger River not far from Segou, which became the capital of the Segou Bambara kingdom. As a commercial town within the orbit of the Segou Bambara kingdom, Sinsani had never had kings and never aspired to expansive political authority. Sinsani had chiefs but delegated wider political overrule to Segou. Thus, finding references to Mademba as *faama* (Bambara: king, ruler) of Sinsani or as the French often referred to it as the *État de Sansanding et Dépendances* struck me as an anomaly. Historians interested in social change are constantly on the lookout for both patterns and ruptures. Anomalies become wake-up calls to pay more attention to patterns in order to detect changes and then to assess whether or not these changes were significant. Mademba entered the historical record through the colonial period, which coincided with the French conquest of the Middle Niger Valley in the late nineteenth century. Who was Mademba and how did he become king over a commercial town that had never had kings before? This was an intriguing question, but it was not one that I was interested in pursuing at the time.

Mademba, it turned out, was an African born in the French colonial town of Saint Louis du Sénégal in 1852, who joined the French colonial civil service as a clerk in the nascent Senegalese Post and Telegraph Department in 1869.

Mademba's career was quite ordinary during the 1870s and would likely have remained ordinary if he had not been posted to the Upper Senegal region in 1879, just as the French military was preparing for its aggressive phase of conquest of the Soudanese interior. Serendipity happens. Mademba was charged with helping to lay the telegraph system that was so essential to military communications. Mademba was both competent and eager to help the French proceed with conquest. French military leaders understood their military prowess but also their vulnerabilities because they did not fully understand local political and cultural landscapes. The French thus relied on Africans, especially Africans whom they could trust and who had proven their loyalties. The French were quick to reward Africans loyal to them and to their cause. Mademba's fortunes in the French colonial system rose along with conquest.

Serendipity also happens in the archives. I kept finding evidence of Mademba as I pursued archival and oral history research in Bamako, Segu, Sinsani, and Dakar, where the excellent Archives Nationales du Sénégal has the records of the government-general of French West Africa, which oversaw the operation of France's widespread West African empire, and in France's national collection of colonial and overseas archives. At some point in my many return research visits to West Africa, I came across a huge file entitled "Affaire Mademba," located in the Dakar archives. The "Affaire Mademba" dossier contains correspondence and evidence relating to the 1899–1900 investigation into Mademba's alleged crimes, misdemeanors, and abuses of power. The "Affaire Mademba" actually contains evidence of three nested investigations into these alleged crimes and the debates about how to proceed with overwhelming but contradictory evidence of Mademba's wrongdoing. I was still unready to pursue deeper research into Mademba, in part because I had other books to write and because I was hesitant to focus on one individual's life. I am much more interested in how ordinary people effect change and how change affects them.

My interest in Mademba persisted, but with waxing and waning intensity. Mademba made a cameo appearance in my first book that explored the broad changes in the political economy of the Middle Niger Valley because Sinsani remained a central locus of the story. In 1991, I published my preliminary interpretation of the legal case against Mademba in the book I coedited with Kristin Mann on law in colonial Africa. Several years before, Kristin and I discovered our shared interest in legal sources that each of us was using to help make sense of economic and social change. My preliminary interpretation, "The Case Against Faama Mademba Sy and the Ambiguities of Legal Jurisdiction in Early Colonial French Soudan," was neither right nor wrong, it was just preliminary. Nevertheless, it did suggest further avenues to pursue. However, I still was not ready. Instead, Mademba made another cameo appearance in my second book that explored the long history of cotton and

colonial development in French West Africa. In that book, Mademba's appearance surrounded his role as an early adopter of American varieties of cotton so much in demand in French textile mills. After finishing the cotton book, I thought that I could finally begin to make sense of the case against Mademba, but first I had to understand what I meant in the 1991 essay in which I raised the issue of the "ambiguities of legal jurisdiction." I thus embarked on a decade-long effort to make sense of colonial court records for the French Soudan. That third monograph used over 2,000 entry-level civil disputes to help me make sense of how the colonial legal system operated and what court records could actually tell me as a social historian. I did not forget Mademba, who appears on a single page in that book. Writing that book also made me realize that evidence I had for Mademba's legal case was actually not formally brought before a court, as I had assumed in 1991.

While I have been collecting evidence on Mademba for over four decades and drafted bits and pieces of his story, I still faced challenges many of my own making. As a historian of social change, I use evidence of individual lives to illustrate larger trends. I remained uncomfortable dedicating a whole book to the life of one individual. As I note in the Introduction, biography has a long and storied place in the history profession, but most biographies involve a level of intimacy and empathy with the subject that I just did not have. Then, suddenly, my disposition changed in 2016.

I would never have anticipated that Donald J. Trump's political campaign and election as president would have inspired me in any way. Much to my chagrin, Trump effectively became my muse for this book on Mademba. Trump did so precisely because he and Mademba seemed to share so many similar attributes: both were driven by narcissism and insecurities; both were outsiders aided by powerful minority parties; both were consumed with the legitimacy of their authority; both were deeply misogynistic and abused women; both demanded loyalty and were quick to punish what they saw as disloyalty; both demanded adoration and public submission precisely because they had weak legitimacy; both saw conspiracies all around them; and both were subject to unwelcome scrutinies by administrative powers. Actually, the list of similarities runs deeper: both Mademba and Trump faced refugee crises, although Trump's involved immigrants while Mademba faced emigration; both faced numerous accusations of rape and sexual assault; both faced accusations of witness tampering and obstruction of justice; and both challenged the rule of law. In addition, both periodically sought to remake themselves. This book is not about these comparisons, but my addiction to the nightly news provided me with insights into Mademba's behavior that I might not otherwise have noticed, let alone tried to understand.

I am not the first person to write about Mademba. Mademba's son and decorated war hero, Abd-el-Kader Mademba, wrote a hagiographical account of his father's life during the era of nostalgia for both the Great War and the

French Empire in the late 1920s. In 1994, Barbara Lefebvre produced an excellent, but unpublished, Sorbonne (Université Paris I) Master's thesis on Mademba, based on several months of archival research in Mali and France. Abd-el-Kader's book about his father remains, however, the standard account, despite its obvious self-interest. Several of Mademba's children died fighting for France during the Great War and others went on to become high-ranking professional soldiers, leading educators, and prominent businessmen. Among Mademba's grandchildren and great-grandchildren are a former Senegalese ambassador and other prominent dignitaries. Mademba's investment in his children's education and in their commitment to public service is one of his enduring legacies. Precisely because of this legacy, I am certain that this book's critical analysis of Mademba will spark debate. This is as it should be. Just as there are many sides to Mademba, there are also many more sources to tap into in the archives and in oral histories in order to provide fuller and perhaps different interpretations of Mademba. Just as this book on Mademba has clearly been influenced by the contemporary issues dominating the world in which I live, others will certainly find other aspects of Mademba's long and prominent life to write about.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are at least two truisms in all historical research and writing: the first is that all of our work is collaborative; and the second is that precisely because we can never know everything, all of our work is provisional. Robert Merton famously noted in his 1936 discussion of the unintended consequences of public policies that all policies will be flawed because policy makers cannot know everything and thus cannot anticipate all possible consequences. But Merton did not appreciate that the very questions we pose are shaped by structured ways of knowing that limit the questions we ask. Thus, all knowledge is provisional, and all knowledge is shaped by political biases.

To further complicate the production of knowledge is the fact that all of our research builds on the work of those who have laid the foundations for the research we conduct. We depend on the memories of our informants, whose work is not only to remember but to recount and reorder their memories and traditions in ways that are meaningful to them. We depend equally on the women and men who wrote things down, those who collected them, and those who organized them into forms that are retrievable. Not everything is remembered or written down or even kept. Everyone forgets and all of us discard paper and notes that we no longer need without usually thinking about others who might want to work with those discarded or forgotten things. Thus, the universe of potential things to study is immense but never stable: this universe constantly expands and contracts. So, what we know and how we know it are central to the tasks of thinking, learning, and producing history.

Archival research is a core part of our discipline. What we read in the archives is part of the constructed and curated collection of past records that fit the visions both of those who wrote reports, memos, orders, letters, and all sorts of written forms and those who have organized and helped to make legible the collections of evidence from the past. Both sets of visions deeply shape what we find, what we read, what order we read them in, and what sense we make of the evidence we find. Silences form a huge hole in any body of archival sources we use. Oral sources do not merely fill these holes; instead, our oral informants curate their own versions of the past. They are in many ways our historian colleagues. But silences abound in the oral records as well. Each body of evidence about the past is deeply shaped by structures of power

in no small part because knowledge is power and controlling knowledge contributes to power. That said, this project on Mademba has benefitted from the willingness of my elderly informants to share their interpretations of the past with me and from the tireless work of archivists and staff in the Archives Nationales du Mali, Archives Nationales du Sénégal, the Archives Nationales de France d'Outre-Mer, the Archives Nationales République de France at Franc-Bourgeois, and the Service Historique de la Défense at Vincennes. In addition to appreciating the work of archivists who organize raw material into legible categories, I also appreciate the work of the archives' staff who bring us the cartons of raw material, but who also reshelving and preserve the archives. In Mali, I want to acknowledge the former director, Ali Onguiba, and especially Timothée Saye, who has provided sustained assistance on my many projects over the years. In Senegal, I especially want to thank both the former director, Saliou M'Baye, and the current director, Mme. Fatoumata Cissé Diarra, for their commitments to the production of knowledge and to their hard work in making the archives in Dakar one of the premier collections in Africa. In Dakar, I am especially grateful to Cheikhou Oumar Tall, with whom I have collaborated now for several years on projects relating to African colonial employees, of whom Mademba was one.

I owe a special debt to Babacar Fall, whose encouragement of this project goes back to when we were both fellows at Stanford Humanities Center. Mademba is an outgrowth of our efforts to promote and sustain collaboration between the Faculté des Sciences et Technologies de l'Éducation et de la Formation (FASTEF), the Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (UCAD), the Archives Nationales du Sénégal, and Stanford University. Our initial and ongoing collaboration focused on the huge but rarely used archival collection of African colonial employees of the French colonial state and especially of the government-general of l'Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF). All along the way, Babacar provided inspiration and encouragement to all of us involved in the project and to me especially. Indeed, Babacar early in this project suggested that the shift in Mademba's patronym from Sèye to Sy was a sign of a much larger change in how Mademba presented himself. Babacar has also devoted his tireless energy to building the Institut d'Études Avancées de Saint Louis du Sénégal and serving as its inaugural director. I want to acknowledge the work of Phil Schwartzberg, who produced the maps included in this book from the bits and pieces of colonial era maps. Charles Becker played an essential role in the preparation and publication of the French version of this book. All of the translations from French to English in this book and all of the errors contained in them are my own.

All work of scholarship is collaborative. All of us build on what other scholars have written and what others have collected. Over the nearly four decades in which I have ever so tentatively collected evidence on Mademba, so many people have provided feedback and suggestions. Some have been nudges

to think more about certain aspects and others have been more robust criticism. But I am deeply appreciative of all who have taken the time to read bits and pieces of this book in its various stages over this long period and especially to those who have engaged in the heroic effort to read through the entire work. Many of my current and former students have had to trudge their way through pieces of this book. Every nudge or deep criticism along the way has helped make this a better book. But it is not a perfect book, precisely because there is still so much that we do not know. I remain in awe of anyone who reads what I write.

Martin Klein and David Robinson saw in a rather inchoate PhD dissertation a sparkle that was to become this book. Mademba had a cameo appearance in that dissertation. Bouboucar Barry encouraged my thinking on this and many of my other history projects. Support for my research on Mademba has come from many sources, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Stanford Humanities Center, the Stanford Center for African Studies, and the office of the dean of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford, all of which provided funding and time to both collect and begin the process of writing. Stanford University, the Stanford History Department, and Stanford's Center for African Studies have supported and sustained my research by providing an intellectual community of fellow scholars and a stream of wonderfully talented graduate students. At Stanford, I want to shout out my appreciation especially to my fellow Africanists Jim Campbell, Joel Cabrita, Gabrielle Hecht, Steven Press, and Sean Hanretta (now at Northwestern), as well as Jim Ferguson, Grant Parker, Joel Samoff, Larry Diamond, Laura Hubbard, and David Abernethy, among so many others. Even further afield, I appreciate the criticism, insights, and ongoing friendship of Kristin Mann, Andreas Eckert, Alessandro Stanziani, Allen Isaacman, Fred Cooper, Bruce Hall, Greg Mann, Bill Worger, Tom Spear, Marie Rodet, Trevor Getz, Kelly Duke Bryant, Owen White, and Tom Bassett. Several of my former students have provided some of the most piercing criticism, but also the most helpful insights and sustained collaboration. Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Burrill, Emily Osborn, Liz Thornberry, Rachel Jean-Baptiste, Thom McClendon, and Jim Mokiber have been fellow travelers in the broader field of African legal history. Rebecca Wall and Wallace Teska have not only engaged with Mademba but have also used some of their precious time in the archives in Mali and Senegal while conducting their own research to keep a look out for additional evidence on Mademba that I missed; and, no doubt, there is much more that we all have missed.

A core component of scholarship lies in the hidden side of the publication process that takes on relatively inchoate arguments and narratives and helps transform them into meaningful and readable scholarship. I want to thank not only the anonymous reviewers for this book, who pushed me in very different

ways to make this a better book, but also Atifa Jiwa and Maria Marsh with whom I have worked for many years on the African Studies Series of Cambridge University Press and who are instrumental in this process of producing scholarship.

Having worked on this project for four decades, it is as if Mademba has become a long-term house guest who was fun to have around for a short visit but whose seemingly unending residence has become challenging. Mademba has shared my household for longer than I could ever have imagined and I could never have managed to encourage him out of the door except for the love and support I have received from Amy, Sam, Sophie, and their families. To them, I owe the greatest thanks.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Association Cotonnière Coloniale
ANM	Archives Nationales du Mali
ANOM	Archives Nationales de France d’Outre-Mer
ANS-AOF	Archives Nationales du Sénégal section l’Afrique Occidentale Française
bull.	bulletin
cmdt. sup.	commandant supérieur
doss. pers.	dossier personnel
gouv.	gouverneur
gouv.-gen.	gouverneur-général
gouv. Sén., p.i.	gouverneur Sénégal, per interim
gouv.-gen.	gouvernement-général
inspecteur-gen.	inspecteur-general
JAH	<i>Journal of African History</i>
JOAOF	<i>Journal officiel de l’Afrique Occidentale française</i>
JOHSN	<i>Journal officiel du Haut-Sénégal-Niger</i>
lt.-col.	lieutenant-colonel
lt.-gouv.	lieutenant-gouverneur
Min. Col.	minister of colonies
Min. Marine	minister of marine (Navy)
nd	no date
np	no place
p.i.	par interim
pol.	politique
PT	postes et télégraphe
rap.	rapport/s
Sén.	Sénégal
Sén. et Dépend.	Sénégal et Dépendances
SHD	Service Historique de la Défense (Vincennes)