

The ‘*Ulamā*’ Forerunners of the *Hijra* and Teachers in the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina

Shaykh Alfā Hāshim al-Fūtī (c. 1866–1931): A Genius for Survival

Shaykh Alfā Hāshim al-Fūtī was a nephew of Shaykh Ḥāj ‘Umar Tall al-Fūtī and the *muftī* and adviser of Aḥmadu Shehu, who was the son and successor of Shaykh ‘Umar.¹ When the French conquered Aḥmadu Shehu’s empire (which stretched from Kayes in the West to Arbinta, east of Mali), Alfā Hāshim emigrated with Aḥmadu Shehu and his partisans to northern Nigeria. They joined the armies of the Sultan of Kano in their resistance against the English. When Lord Lugard and his forces defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Burmi² (1903), Alfā Hāshim and others migrated to Sudan and the Hijaz.³

Alfā Hāshim became a teacher at the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina and at the Madrasat al-‘Ulūm al-Shar‘iyya. He was, at the same time, the *muqaddam* of the Tijānī *ṭarīqa* in Medina and the figure that linked the Tijānī from West Africa with those from the Mashriq, Arabia, and East Africa. Under the rule of the Hashemites, he was responsible for the black Africans (*takārira*)

1 Aḥmadu Shehu was the son of Shehu ‘Umar and Saturu. Saturu’s father was Sultan Muḥammad Bello, who was the son and successor of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio.

2 On the different reactions of the Muslims of northern Nigeria to British colonization, see Umar, *Islam and Colonialism*, especially ch. 2 “Responses to the Challenges of British Military Superiority,” in which the author analyzes these different responses in the form of different arguments: Arguments for Hijra; Arguments for Submission; Arguments for Surrender; Arguments for Armed Confrontation, etc., pp. 64–103.

3 For the emigration of Alfā Hāshim and the whole history of the emigration of Aḥmadu Shaykh ‘Umar and his partisans, see Robinson, “Umarian Emigration”; David Robinson, “Between Hashimi and Agibu,” in *La Tijānīyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l’Afrique*, ed. J.L. Triaud and D. Robinson (Paris: Karthala, 2000), pp. 101–123; Rüdiger Seesemann, “Alfa Hashim,” in *ET³* (forthcoming); Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiz al-Tijānī al-Miṣrī, “Tarjamat Mawlānā ash-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshim,” in *Tarīq al-ḥaqq*, 31 (3–4), (1981), pp. 40–5; Majdhūb Mudaththir al-Ḥajjāz, “Nubdhatun yasira min tārikh shaykhinā l-‘Allāma Muḥammad al-Hāshim b. Aḥmad b. Sa’d al-Fūtī,” foreword to Alfā Hāshim al-Fūtī, *Imtā’ al-ahdāq wa-l-nufūs bi-muṭāla’at ahkām awrāq al-fulūs* (Khartoum, 1351/1933), p. 23; al-Naqar, *Pilgrimage Tradition*, pp. 21, 89.

in the Hijaz. Later, Alfā Hāshim was reconciled with the English,⁴ who used him against the Mahdiyya in Sudan (the English even sent him to Sudan to preach against the Mahdiyya propaganda). In 1349/1931, he was nominated by King 'Abd al-'Azīz to be a member of the first (and not yet official) Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā' of Saudi Arabia, but he died before taking his post.

Though we know about the emigration of Shaykh Alfā Hāshim from West Africa to Medina, especially based on what the shaykh himself wrote on the subject (*Hijratu Aḥmadu*, a document from which D. Robinson and others based their work on Alfā Hāshim), we know almost nothing about his life in the Hijaz. This is the episode that I tried to research more closely. Among the documents I collected in Medina on Alfā Hāshim, the most interesting in this regard was what Muḥammad Ḥusayn Zaydān, a prominent Saudi who had been his student,⁵ wrote about Shaykh Alfā Hāshim's life in Medina. He was among the first Saudi journalists to use modern media—both written and audiovisual—in the country. In his autobiographical notes⁶ we can learn a great deal about the life of Shaykh Alfā Hāshim in Medina. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Zaydān was indeed one of his students at the Mosque of the Prophet and at the Madrasat al-'Ulūm al-Shar'iyya.

On the life of Alfā Hāshim in Medina, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Zaydān reported on how this 'ālim transmitted Islamic knowledge and interacted with other 'ulamā', including those from the same region as himself, such as Ibn Māyābā,⁷ who is especially well-known for his polemic against the Tijānī *ṭarīqa*. Ibn Māyābā left Mauritania in the early twentieth century when the French invaded this country. Because he did not want to live under the domination of non-Muslims, he undertook the *hijra* by way of North Africa to Mecca and Medina in the company of other people, including his brother Lhabīb b.

4 In 1919, Shaykh Alfā Hāshim issued a manifesto in which he definitively rejected the pretensions of the Mahdiyya (Mahdism) and advised the faithful to support the British and King Hussein of the Hijaz, see Tomlinson and Lethem, *History of Islamic Propaganda in Nigeria*, pp. 16–17; see also Awad al-Sid al-Karsani, "The Establishment of Neo-Mahdism in the Western Sudan, 1920–1936," *African Affairs* 86, no. 344 (July 1987), p. 402.

5 He was born and brought up in Medina, but his parents came from Upper Egypt (Sa'īd).

6 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Zaydān, *Dhikrayāt al-'uhūd al-thalātha* (Jedda, 1408/1988), vol. 1, p. 35 and esp. pp. 47–49, where he tells the story of a time (1342/1923) during which he passed an oral examination before the well-known 'ulamā' of Medina, which included Alfā Hāshim, al-Khiḍr b. Māyāba al-Jakanī, and Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib Ishāq al-Anṣārī (all from West Africa).

7 Muḥammad al-Khiḍr b. Māyāba, *Mushtahā l-khārif al-jānī fi radd zalaqāt al-Tijānī l-jānī* (The realization of the aspirations of the megalomaniac criminal or refuting the errors of the criminal al-Tijānī) (Jerusalem, 1344/1925, repr. Jordan, 1985).

Māyābā.⁸ This brother stayed in Mecca, where he became a famous *‘ālim* (especially in the science of *ḥadīths*, like many *‘ulamā’* from West Africa) in the Ḥaram in Mecca. When ‘Abd al-‘Azīz conquered the Hijaz in 1925–26, Lhabīb, being very close to the Ashrāf, moved to Cairo, where he became a teacher at al-Azhar. His brother, Muḥammad, who was the Mālikī *muftī* in Medina, went to settle in Jordan, where he and his sons came to occupy important state positions (his son was a long-time ambassador of Jordan in Saudi Arabia during the reign of kings Sa‘ūd and Faiṣal). Although he was an opponent of the Tijānī *ṭarīqa* (and probably of the Sufism of the *ṭuruq*), Muḥammad b. Māyābā was not pro-Wahhābiyya.

Shaykh Alfā Hāshim could have followed the Ashrāf as Ibn Māyābā did and fled to Jordan, as he was very close to them. He also could have gone to Sudan, then under British administration, since he had made peace with them. But he preferred to stay in Medina, which was conquered by the Wahhābiyya forces of King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Again, he accommodated himself to the new situation. Although he did not adhere to the Wahhābiyya doctrine, the new *amīr* of Medina, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh, esteemed and respected him because he was the representative of the West Africans in the Hijaz. According to Shaykh ‘Umar Ḥasan Fallāta⁹ (the only *‘ālim* of West African origin teaching in the Prophet’s Mosque), Shaykh Alfā Hāshim was appointed a member of the first Hay‘at Kibār al-‘Ulamā’ (Council of the Higher *‘ulamā’*), at the time still an unofficial institution. When I asked him whether Shaykh Alfā Hāshim had remained a Tijānī, he said no.¹⁰ Then he added, “What we are sure about is that he rejected many of the Tijānī doctrines. He did that before Shaykh ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, the new chief of the *quḍāt* [Muslims judges] in the Hijaz and the western province at the time.” Indeed, the Moroccan Salafī Shaykh Taqī l-Dīn al-Hilālī writes in his autobiography¹¹

8 Muḥammad Ḥabīballāh b. ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad Māyāba al-Jakanī (1295–1363/1878–1943). Among those who studied under him in Mecca were Shaykh Ḥasan Muḥammad al-Mshāt and Shaykh Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī (the famous author and calligrapher (*khattāt*) of Mecca). He is the author of the well-known and detailed *Tārīkh Makka* (History of Mecca) and *Muṣḥaf makka* (Qur’ān of Mecca), which he wrote by hand; see ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Mu‘allimī, *A’lām al-makkiyyīn min al-qarn al-tāsi’ ilā l-qarn al-rābi’ ‘ashar al-hijrī* (Mecca: Mu‘assasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1420/2000), vol. 1, pp. 574–575.

9 Interviews with Shaykh (Dr.) ‘Umar Ḥasan Fallāta in Medina (14, 15, and 16 March 2008).

10 Interviews with Shaykh (Dr.) ‘Umar Ḥasan Fallāta in Medina (5 April 2008).

11 Taqī l-Dīn al-Hilālī, *al-Da‘wat ilā Allāh fī aqtār mukhtalifa* (Medina: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1391/1971).

that in the 1920s Shaykh 'Abdallāh b. Ḥasan (chief of the judges in the Hijaz and the western province) sent him, together with the Egyptian Salafi Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Razzāq Ḥamza (member of the Egyptian Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya), to Medina, among other things to monitor the teaching in the Prophet's Mosque and to prevent the non-Salafi 'ulamā' from continuing to teach there. Shaykh al-Hilālī writes that he managed to induce Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib al-Anṣārī¹² (a Tuareg 'ālim, also from the Kel es Suq group) to renounce his affiliation to the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* and to embrace the Salafiyya doctrine. He wanted to do the same with Shaykh Alfā Hāshim, that is to say, to push him to renounce his affiliation with the Tijānī *ṭarīqa*, but in vain. Shaykh Alfā Hāshim, with the support of the *amīr* of Medina, was able to escape the "plot" that al-Hilālī had launched. Ultimately, the *amīr* of Medina, exasperated by the Salafi zeal of al-Hilālī, returned him to Mecca and Shaykh Alfā Hāshim was able to end his days in peace.

In his teaching function at the Mosque of the Prophet, Alfā Hāshim was succeeded by his student Shaykh Sa'īd b. Ṣiddīq (born in 1310/1892 in Gabero¹³ in northern Mali and died in 1353/1934 in Medina). Shaykh Sa'īd b. Ṣiddīq married the daughter of Alfā Hāshim. He continued his teaching in the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. When the Sa'ūd family assumed power in the Hijaz, they confirmed him as teacher in the Prophet's Mosque after the Ashrāf dismissed him because they considered him to be in favor of Wahhābiyya doctrine. This conversion story of Shaykh Sa'īd to Wahhābism may have been constructed retrospectively to justify his favorable position during the regime of King 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Sa'ūd. Regardless of the veracity of the story, it confirms that even before the conquest of the Hijaz by the Wahhābiyya in 1926, the Wahhābiyya doctrine had support among the 'ulamā' of the Hijaz. Besides his function as teacher at the Prophet's Mosque, Shaykh Sa'īd b. Ṣiddīq was named a member of the first Hay'at al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa al-naḥy 'an al-munkar¹⁴ (lit.: Office for the commanding of good and forbidding of evil) in Medina.

12 He is also the uncle and adoptive father of 'Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, the founder of the Saudi magazine *al-Manhal*. For his biography, see Aḥmad Amīn Ṣāliḥ Murshid, *Ṭayyibat wa-dhikriyyāt al-aḥibba* (Medina and Jeddah, Sharikat al-Madīna al-Munawwara li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1416/1995), vol. 1, p. 66.

13 A commune in the Cercle of Gao, in southeastern Mali. Villages of the commune of Gabero along the south coast of the Niger River include Marga, Traoré, Banikane, Borno, Zinda, Kardjimé, Koissa, Dongomé, Boya, and Gaina; along the north coast of the Niger River: Haoussa-Foulane, Gouthine, Gargouna, Todjel-Gargouna, and Todjel-Gabero.

14 Often known solely by the name Hay'a.

Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Maḥmūd al-Madanī (Ag Maḥmūd Abdullahi): The “Intransigent” Salafi Missionary

The other *‘ālim* of the nineteenth century was the Tuareg of the Kel es Suq group, ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. al-Maḥmūd al-Madanī (al-Tessi al-Timbuktī), who arrived in Medina in 1324/1906, when he was just five, with his father Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Timbuktī and other members of the Kel es Suq group. ‘Abdallāh studied first with his father, an *‘ālim* who was considered the initiator of the *hijra* of the people of the Grand Sahara (*al-Ṣaḥrā’ al-kubrā*) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁵ His father died in Medina before ‘Abd al-‘Azīz took power in the Hijaz. After the death of his father, ‘Abdallāh studied with several *‘ulamā’* in the Prophet’s Mosque and in the Madrasat al-‘Ulūm al-Shar‘iyya in Medina. One of the teachers from whom he learned a great deal was Shaykh al-Ṭayyib al-Anṣārī, who also came from the Kel es Suq Tuareg group and had made the *hijra*. After finishing his studies, he began teaching in the same Madrasat al-‘Ulūm al-Shar‘iyya and in the Prophet’s Mosque. In 1343/1924, he was appointed *imām* of the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, a position he shared with Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Zaghībī, a well-known *‘ālim* in Medina at that time. In 1353/1934, he resigned from his position as *imām* at the Mosque of the Prophet and went to India, apparently to deepen his knowledge of the science of *ḥadīths* (*‘ilm al-ḥadīth*). This shows that the West African and North African *‘ulamā’* of the Hijaz were influenced by the Ahl al-Ḥadīth of India and had been in contact with them earlier. These *‘ulamā’*, who are the focus of this book, were all influenced by the Ahl al-Ḥadīth of India.

When ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. al-Maḥmūd al-Madanī arrived in India, he went directly to join the Ahl al-Ḥadīth of Benares (exactly as the Moroccan Shaykh Taqī l-Dīn al-Hilālī did in the same period). In Benares, he learned by following *muḥaddithūn* (*ḥadīth* specialists): Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Mubārakpūrī, the author of *Tuḥfat al-aḥḥwadhī*; Shaykh Shams al-Ḥaqq al-‘Aẓīm Ābādī, the author of *‘Awn al-ma‘būd*; and Shaykh Ḥāfiẓ Zakariyyā l-Kandahlawī, the author of *Awjāz al-masālik*. He spent about a year in India, then returned to Saudi Arabia; he stayed first in Abhā for more than one year, married a woman from Abhā, and became a teacher in the mosque and *madrasa*. He even worked for a few months as a *qāḍī* there. At the same time, he began trading between Abhā and Sanaa in Yemen. According to Shaykh Ḥammād al-Anṣārī, he met with Imām Yaḥyā several times.¹⁶ Throughout his

15 Ḥammād b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī, *Da‘wat al-Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh al-Madanī fī l-ṣaḥrā’ al-kubrā wa-atharuhā* (unpublished), p. 6.

16 Ibid., p. 11.

travels, Shaykh al-Madanī made his living from commerce. His trading activities, which he carried out even when he was in Africa, assured him not only his livelihood but also his independence; he did not depend on the largesse of any political authority to earn his living. Shaykh Ḥammād al-Anṣārī mentions that some former students of Shaykh al-Madanī in Sanaa told him that they asked the Shaykh why he, as a Salafī *‘ālim*, continued to engage in trade and the shaykh answered, “It is exactly because I am an *‘ālim* and know therefore what is allowed and what is forbidden in trade that I am better placed than anyone else to do this work.”¹⁷ Shaykh al-Madanī came back to Medina briefly at the beginning of the year 1357/1938, then returned, some days later, to Mali, his homeland in West Africa. He was the only African *‘ālim* who had been a teacher and, at the same time, *imām* at the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina (if we exclude the Moroccan Taqī l-Dīn al-Hilālī in the 1970s). When he was in Medina, Shaykh al-Madanī worked hard to persuade many people of West African origin (including the Tuaregs) to convert to the Wahhābiyya Salafiyya doctrine. Among them, we should mention his teacher Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib al-Anṣārī, who was then one of the well-known *‘ulamā’* in Medina. Both al-Madanī and Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib al-Anṣārī took part in the *hijra* of 1324/1906, first performed by Tuaregs (after the French colonization), which was led by al-Madanī’s father. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib al-Anṣārī is the one whom the Salafī Shaykh Taqī l-Dīn al-Hilālī had urged to reject the *ṭarīqa* Qādiriyya and embrace Salafism, in particular by using the intermediary of al-Madanī discussed here. In the history of this *hijra* we find numerous illustrations of how much the biography of each of these *‘ulamā’* is linked with and completes the biographies of the others.

When al-Madanī returned to Africa in 1357/1938, he taught in mosques and schools and disputed with the Sufi *shuyūkh* (sing. *shaykh*) of the Gao and Tillaberi region (a border region between Mali and Niger) in an effort to promote Wahhābiyya *da‘wa* in Mali and Niger. He also encouraged the people to emigrate to the Hijaz. A colonial report of 1949 on the Gao region identifies al-Madanī as a “Saoudite” who was inciting people to emigrate (make a *hijra*) to Saudi Arabia by taking the occasion of the *hajj*.¹⁸ And this report confirms the information reported by Shaykh Ḥammād, that Shaykh al-Madanī urged people to make the *hijra* to Mecca and Medina. Shaykh al-Madanī had been engaged in trade (as he did on the Arabian Peninsula) and simultaneously spread the *da‘wa* Wahhābiyya in Mali, Niger, northern Nigeria, and

17 Ibid.

18 A.N.M. (Archives nationales du Mali), 1-E- 17 I FR, Gao, Rapport de tournée, 1er trimestre, 1949, cited by Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, p. 146.

Ghana. When he arrived in West Africa, he moved to Tessi in Mali on the west bank of the Niger River, very close to the border with Niger and Burkina Faso. According to Mūsā Shaddād, his relatives of the Kel es Suq were the first people to accept the doctrine preached by Shaykh al-Madanī; they were followed by the *‘ulamā’*, and the allied tribes, such as the Imghad and Imdadghen.¹⁹ Lansiné Kaba wrote that al-Ḥāj Abdullahi (i.e., al-Madanī) even managed to convert to his Wahhābiyya doctrine the people of Timbuktu, who were, like most people there, members of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*. Similarly, some *‘ulamā’* of the Kunta family (who were the spiritual leaders of the Qādiriyya) followed Shaykh al-Madanī. Kaba wrote that the moderation of Shaykh al-Madanī’s discourse helped him to spread, albeit gradually, the Wahhābiyya doctrine in the region. According to Kaba, the spread of the Wahhābiyya did not cause a violent reaction from other Muslims or from the colonial administration because it spread slowly over time. This would seem to contradict what was reported by Shaykh Ḥammād al-Anṣārī about what he called the “intransigence” of Shaykh al-Madanī, which he states was the reason why al-Madanī’s *da‘wa* was not very successful. Yet as the first to spread the Wahhābiyya *da‘wa* in the region of the great bend of the Niger toward Nigeria and Ghana, al-Madanī “deserves to be considered the *forerunner* of the Wahhābī movement” in this region.²⁰ Al-Madanī died in 1951.

Thanks to Shaykh al-Madanī’s efforts, Gao (in Mali) and its region were a starting point for the spread of Wahhabism; in the 1950s, through the efforts of al-Ḥāj Shaykh Tiekodo Kamagaté, Bouake, Ivory Coast became the second outpost of the spread of Wahhabism. Shaykh Tiekodo Kamagaté returned to Bouake in 1944 after performing the *ḥajj* and remaining in Mecca and Medina for five years to study. Unlike his predecessor Shaykh al-Madanī, Shaykh Tiekodo Kamagaté was uncompromising and tended to polarize communities. This certainly helped spread the Wahhābiyya *da‘wa*, but it also created fierce opponents.²¹ The following two facts are worth recalling.

Like his predecessor Shaykh al-Madanī, Shaykh Tiekodo Kamagaté was both an *‘ālim* and a trader. This way of life was consistent with the tradition of Prophet Muḥammad, who was a trader, and it also allowed him to live independently without compromising with the political authorities, in this case the French. Interestingly, Shaykh Tiekodo Kamagaté was placed under house arrest by the

19 Mūsā Shaddād, *Awwal ḥaraka salafīyya fī junūb al-ṣaḥrā’*, p. 2 [copy of a manuscript provided to me by the author in Gao (Mali)].

20 Lansiné Kaba, *The Wahhabīyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 30–32.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 34–45.

French, at the initiative of the traditional anti-Wahhābiyya 'ulamā', who were his opponents. The anti-Wahhābiyya 'ulamā' saw Shaykh Tiekodo Kamagaté as a threat to their authority in society. And to get rid of him, they denounced him to the French colonial administration as anti-French and an opponent of the colonial state. The first French-speaking elite who began to fight for independence sought the support of Shaykh Tiekodo Kamagaté and of the young people around him. This strengthened the idea that the Wahhābīs were fighting against the colonial presence. They were, of course, against colonization, but this struggle was secondary for them. Their first priority was the spread of the Wahhābiyya doctrine in the region. Ultimately, the more the colonial administration opposed them (at the instigation of the traditional 'ulamā'), the more radical their position against colonization became.