

1 A history of Muslim presence in Asante

Introduction

Muslims have been present in the region from the very beginnings of the consolidation of political power here¹ – first by the Asante, who coalesced into the *Asanteman*² at the turn of the eighteenth century, followed by British colonialists, and then the Ghanaian nation state after independence. Predominantly migrant traders or labourers, Muslims integrated as *shɔshɔ* (strangers) into the local context. As such, they were largely ‘free to do our own’, as my interlocutors put it, but this freedom shifted with historical changes. The following is a history of Muslim presence in Asante, but this community, its historical trajectory, and the Islamic conceptions, practices, and imaginaries found within it are far from confined to this context. What was first a community of a few Dioula from the north-west changed significantly under colonial rule. The number of immigrant Muslims increased substantially as new traders arrived from the north-east, mainly Hausa and Fulani. They moved into the region after the collapse of the *Asanteman* and founded the wards that have become known as *zongos* (it is not by accident that their name derives from Hausa). However, they did not invent Islam anew but integrated the previous Muslim communities with their

¹ The historiographies of Muslim presence in Asante commonly examine only the *Asanteman* and come to an end with the fall of this empire in 1874 (Bravmann and Silverman 1987; Owusu-Ansah 1987; 1991; 1996; 2003; Silverman and Owusu-Ansah 1989; Wilks 1961b; 1966; 1968; 1971; 1989 [1975]; 2000). See Yunus Dumbe (2011; 2013), Ousman Kobo (2009; 2012), and Nathan Samwini (2006) for more recent historical developments.

² *Asa nti* translates as ‘because of the war’. *Asante* designates a group of people, a dominion, language, history, ‘culture’, and ‘tradition’. It is as shifting and complex a designation as English, Nuer, or German. Its boundaries are fuzzy; its ‘chiefs’ (*ahenfoɔ*) are recognised and partially integrated by the state, but they have no territorial sovereignty. ‘Ashanti Region’ refers to a political, territorial, and administrative area in the Ghanaian state with state boundaries, a regional government, and political representatives. Asante partly overlaps with (and partly outreaches) the Ashanti Region, and its coherence is anything but settled.

religious conceptions, practices, and imaginaries, including the manufacture of amulets or funeral prayers, into their emerging community. Hence, Islam in the zongos predates the actual formation of these wards.

Furthermore, there never existed such a thing as a ‘zongo Islam’: in these wards, various Islamic groups were struggling for, maintaining, or loosening religious hegemony – that is, intellectual, moral, and cultural leadership (cf. Gramsci 2000 [1988]: 194, 249) in Islamic matters. The once prevalent ‘Suwarian tradition’, which apparently shaped Islam in the region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wilks 1968; 2000; 2011; Wilks, Hunwick, and Sey 2003)³ and has left traces across West Africa (Sanneh 1997: 37, 214; Ware 2014: 87–90), is no longer a major Islamic tradition today. In the late nineteenth century, the Sufi *ṭarīqa* (path) of the Qadiriyya, an Islamic order with roots in thirteenth-century Baghdad (Robinson 2004: 18–20; Stewart 1976: 90–1; Vikor 2000: 443–9), emerged as an ascendant Sufi order in Asante. This group’s early twentieth-century competitors and successors, the Tijaniyya, another Sufi *ṭarīqa*, trace their roots to an Algerian Islamic scholar who founded the order in the late eighteenth century in Morocco (Abun-Nasr 1965). Tracing their major influences to the contemporary Arabian Peninsula and Egypt, the Sunna emerged in the zongos during the 1970s as Islamic reformers (Dumbe 2013; Kobo 2009; 2012). The divergent Islamic conceptions, practices, and imaginaries in the zongos cannot be considered without reference to this history. Nonetheless, the historical trajectory of Muslim presence in Asante is anything but teleological: that is, it is neither oriented towards nor explainable by its actual outcome (Castoriadis 1975: 21–82, esp. 81–2; Cooper 2000), nor is it linear. This is a history ‘with many twists and turns’ (to borrow this apt phrase from John Hanson (2017: 3)), variegated demarcations, and multiple entanglements, not a straight course. As different groups and actors have been vying for and, at times, holding religious hegemony among their fellow Muslims, these have left divergent traces in current Islamic notions, practices, and imaginaries. The complex diversity of Islam in the zongos derives from and is part of this history, in and out of which Islam emerges as both contested and a common ground.

The following is thus *a* history of Muslim presence in Asante, as I trace the major historical developments and try to come to terms with the varied teleologies implied in the narrations of my interlocutors. Writing this history, I draw on several sources. The archival records I refer to are stored in the Public Records and Archives Administration Department

³ For a concise summary of Wilks’ writings on this tradition see Robinson (2004: 55–8).

(PRAAD) of the Ashanti Region in Kumase. In addition to these records, I draw on secondary literature and reports in the Ghanaian media. I treat these sources as complementary to what provided me with the basic outline of this chapter, its periodisation, and the historical trajectory it follows: the oral histories of the people of the zongo. I have tried to stick closely to the main themes and periodisation of their ‘communicative memory’ (Assmann 2005 [1992]). Furthermore, I point out where their narrations diverge and how this relates to the historically evolved positionality of the narrators. Methodologically, I draw on ‘Writing histories of contemporary Africa’,⁴ in which Stephen Ellis suggests that the so-called *radio trottoir* (pavement radio) and its oral histories are a prime source for writing social histories (Ellis 2002: 21). This *radio* and the histories conveyed by it are ‘the product of a social attempt to organize reality’ (Ellis 2002: 22). The people narrate their histories, agree, argue, or debate, and thereby form a ‘communicative memory’ that is contained within their conversations, addresses, sermons, myths, and remembrances. These do not add up to a single, unanimous account, nor do they necessarily share the same ‘facts’. A central aspect of these oral histories is that their narrators participate in ‘the constant struggle to determine what is fact and what it means’ (Ellis 2002: 24). The histories narrated by my interlocutors diverge in what they present or acknowledge as factual events, how they account for these, and what they consider to be central. Accordingly, I have collected several versions of apparently similar events and crosschecked the narrations with each other and the available sources, not to establish what ‘really happened’ but to grasp the senses my interlocutors made of these events.

Dealing with these oral histories, I face several limitations. The first problematic emerged during fieldwork: in the zongos, the narration of history is a prerogative of the local authorities. It is by narrating history that one lays claim to or legitimises the current state of affairs, which is why this narration is, at times, ardently contested.⁵ As a result, ‘ordinary’ Muslims frequently claimed to lack any knowledge of the history of Islam in Asante and referred me to Islamic scholars. The following is therefore largely founded on histories narrated by male Islamic scholars. Another problematic is the (precise) dating of those events that were commonly classified as *akye* (‘that is long ago’). The dating that I propose therefore

⁴ I take this from Terje Østebø’s implementation of Ellis’s programme in his history of Salafism in Ethiopia (Østebø 2012).

⁵ This applies not only to ‘oral’ histories but also to ‘official’ state histories, as argued by Frederick Cooper (2002: 15) or as depicted by the German *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s.

derives from secondary literature and is oriented towards benchmark dates in the history of the region. Another problematic is the possibility of crosschecking. One limitation was set by the claims of my Tijaniyya interlocutors to narrate only their own historical trajectory. When I enquired about events or developments among the Sunna, they referred me to Sunna *malams*. Similarly, my Sunna interlocutors referred me to Tijaniyya *malams* for Tijaniyya history. The details of historical developments and contestations among the Tijaniyya are thus derived from narrations of Tijaniyya interlocutors, while those of Sunna history come from Sunna interlocutors. Furthermore, history and its narration are a contested matter within these groups as well. The Tijaniyya are divided into the *Cisseyfoɔ* (the followers of Cissé) and the *Jallofoɔ* (the followers of Jallo), and the adherents of these wings evaluate the same events or persons and their impact on their history differently. The Sunna are also swayed by different trends, stressing or downplaying the same events or individuals in disparate ways. As implied in the quote from Ellis, they struggle over what historical events consist of and actually mean. A last methodological problem in writing this history from oral sources is the range of this oral history and the impacts that its narrations have had on it: hegemonic discourses impose their order and labels on the histories they relate (Foucault 1966). The Tijaniyya emerged as hegemonic in the mid-twentieth century, and this has left deep traces in their communicative history. My interlocutors, Tijaniyya and Sunna alike, frequently glossed the Islamic conceptions, practices, and imaginaries of their ancestors as ‘Tijaniyya’. Developments and trajectories that occurred before the emergence of this hegemony were narrated as myths or stories (*nsem*) and not as history (*abakɔsem*). Furthermore, numerous Islamic conceptions, practices, and imaginaries that were apparently present before the establishment of this group were subsumed under ‘Tijaniyya’, despite members of this order having integrated previous Islamic tenets and practices into theirs. Thus, in the oral history of Islam narrated in the zongos, the more than 200 years of Muslim presence before the Tijaniyya were frequently glossed over as ‘Tijaniyya’. In the sections of this chapter that deal with pre-Tijaniyya history, I therefore rely on archival sources and secondary literature rather than on the rudimentary glimpses of this history contained in the narrations of my interlocutors.

I begin this history with the *Asanteman* (c.1700–1874), although Muslim presence in the region likely predates the consolidation of this dominion. Muslims found in the *Asanteman* largely stemmed from the north-western Mande areas in the Sahel and lived as traders in close contact with the ‘traditional’ rulers. This began to change in the

nineteenth century when Muslim traders from the north-east moved into the region and when the Asante were conquered by British colonisers. The foundation of zongos in the region occurred during the colonial period (1874–1957). Along with the consolidation of the zongos in the 1920s came the emergence of the Tijaniyya. Over the course of one generation, the Tijaniyya gained Islamic hegemony in these wards and supplanted the formerly predominant Qadiriyya. They acquired hegemony in the years that led to Ghana's independence, in the wake of which the people of the zongo became national 'aliens'. What was previously kept under the lid of colonial rule, which considered all Africans as colonial subjects, now emerged as a central issue in the forming of the Ghanaian nation state (1957–today): the question of national identity and citizenship. The resulting shakiness of the (legal) status of the people of the zongo, together with the xenophobia they faced, found its apex in the expulsion of them in their hundreds of thousands in the early 1970s. The gain in momentum of the reformist Sunna and their contestations of the Tijaniyya fall within this period. These developments and the (re)actions of the Tijaniyya are described in the last section of this chapter.

The 'northern factor': Muslim presence in the *Asanteman*, c.1700–1874

The *Asanteman* emerged as a political unit in around 1700 when several groups coalesced against the Denkyira (McCaskie 2007a), who had been dominant up to then. Until 1874, when they were defeated militarily by British troops, the Asante held and expanded political power in the region.⁶ Muslims from the northern regions had been present within the *Asanteman* from its very beginnings, and their impact on this *oman* and its rulers, with whom they closely interacted, has aptly been designated by Ivor Wilks as the 'northern factor' (1961a; 1961b) in the region's history. In the *Asanteman*, Muslims acted as scribes and counsellors, diplomats, traders and soldiers, diviners and healers, or 'slaves'.⁷

⁶ The *Asanteman* is among the most thoroughly researched dominions on the continent. Thanks to the works of Ivor Wilks (1961a; 1961b; 1989 [1975]; 1993; Wilks, Levtzion, and Haight 1986; Akyeampong et al. 2003), Tom McCaskie (1995; 2000; 2015), Meyer Fortes (1948; 1970), Kofi Busia (1951), Robert Rattray (1923; 1927; 1929), Gérard Pescheux (2003), and others, we have an extensive record of its historical trajectory. The final divestiture of the *Asanteman* occurred in 1901, when British colonial occupiers crushed a mutiny led by the now legendary Yaa Asantewaa (McCaskie 2007b).

⁷ The history of Muslim presence in the *Asanteman* is described and discussed in McCaskie (1995), Owusu-Ansah (1987; 1991; 1996; 2003), Robinson (2004: 124–38), Silverman and Owusu-Ansah (1989), Wilks (1961a; 1961b; 1962; 1963; 1971; 1989 [1975]; 2000), and Wilks, Levtzion, and Haight (1986).

When I asked about the history of Islam in the region, the people of Kokote Zongo referred me to Malam Hussain, who narrated the following origin myth about the Muslim presence in Asante:

In the beginnings of the *Asanteman*, roughly 300 years ago, the *Asantehene* was waging war against the Kwahu. He had just recently won independence from Denkyira; his reign was young and his 'kingdom' small. As this was an opponent of equal size and forces, the outcome was far from certain. Therefore, the *Asantehene* searched for spiritual assistance to assure victory for him and his troops. To find out who could provide the desired support, he devised a test for the 'spiritual men' who came to offer their services. He let his servants wall a black cow into a chamber and then called for these men one by one. To check their 'spiritual powers', he had them deploy their spiritual techniques to divine the contents of the chamber. Many of the 'traditional' *bosomfoɔ* and *ɔkɔmfɔɔ* (priests possessed by or serving deities or spirits) failed their divination and were sacrificed to the gods. Then, Nkramo Seifi Hamidu, a Muslim scholar from Wenchi (a town to the north), divined that there was a white cow with a black tail sealed inside the chamber. The *Asantehene* wanted to sacrifice him to the gods as well, as his divination was quite close but only partially right. However, Seifi Hamidu convinced him to have his servants open the chamber, and his divination proved right as they found a white cow with a black tail inside. The *Asantehene* was thereby convinced of his great spiritual powers and made him his first spiritual guide and help. He gave him land and wives to settle close to his palace, and he had him pray to Allah and manufacture *aduro* (cures) and *lāyā* (charms, amulets) to grant his troops victory in the upcoming battle. By the grace of Seifi Hamidu's spiritual support, the Asante achieved a great victory against the Kwahu, which laid a cornerstone for their reign in the region, which was to last for the next 300 years. Since then, Muslim scholars have been in close contact with the *Asantehene*, praying every Friday for him and the *Asanteman*, manufacturing *aduro* or *lāyā*, and providing spiritual services in any matter. This is how Muslims have established themselves as indispensable in the region, where they have been present from the very beginning of the *Asanteman*.

Hussain was not alone in relating this myth; several Tijaniyya and *nkramo malams*⁸ provided me with slightly different versions, the central elements remaining stable. This myth is loaded with significances, and I suggest two perspectives with which to approach it.

The first seeks to ascertain who tells such histories and why. This myth contains a specific outlook on Islam, its practices, and scholars that is not shared equally by all people of the zongo. In fact, many elements of this myth, including divination and the manufacture of charms, are highly

⁸ The Sunna, who designate diviners as 'misguided' or *kāfir*, do not accept this myth as a history of Muslim origins in Asante.

contested. Like any narration, this one not only contains certain ideas but is also narrated as an argument in ongoing Islamic discourses. Several *malams* used this myth to root themselves and their practices in the history of Muslim presence in the region. Other *malams*, especially the Sunna, who ardently campaign against these practices, cited it only to indicate how lost their ancestors were and what kind of objectionable practices they were engaged in. Hussain is well aware of this. After relating this myth, he pointed out that other *malams* would tell me different things, and that I had done well to come to him to get 'the true'. These myths are also value statements, as they contain claims on how things have been, are, and should be. For example, the statement that a *malam* succeeded where the 'traditional' priests had failed is a judgement on their respective spiritual powers, and it clearly differentiates between those who are 'traditional' and others who are Muslim.

This myth contains several historical facts that are corroborated in the literature, and, in turn, it corroborates details in the literature. Muslims have been present in the region at least from the late seventeenth century. But, as remarked by Nehemia Levtzion, this was more a spread of Muslims than of Islam, and conversion rates among the Asante remained insignificant (Levtzion 1968: xxv). These Muslims came from the north as captives of war, Islamic scholars, or traders under the tutelage of the Asante royals (Owusu-Ansah 1991; Wilks 1989 [1975]). Their communities could be quite large, but they were kept in check by local rulers, and their interactions with the locals, especially intermarriages, were quite limited. Hence, the Muslim communities in the *Asanteman* were more or less on their own and were involved in neither proselytisation nor political affairs.⁹ Accordingly, they have not assimilated into the Asante (or the other way round). Wilks has described this stance of Muslims' non-involvement in local affairs and their refraining from proselytisation as 'Suwarian tradition' (cf. Launay 2004 [1992]: 78–81; Loimeier 2013: 105–7; Sanneh 1997: 214; Wilks 1968: 177–81; 2000: 96–8; 2011; Wilks, Hunwick, and Sey 2003). This tradition goes back to al-Hajj Salim Suwari, a Soninke, who lived in the Sahel in the sixteenth century.¹⁰ As the name of this scholar ranks prominently in numerous *silsila* (initiation lines) that Wilks and his assistants have collected in the region, his seems to have been the prominent teaching among Muslims in the *Asanteman*.

⁹ There is a 'traditional' prohibition on 'chiefs' (*ahenfɔɔ*) being circumcised (Busia 1951).

¹⁰ Lamin Sanneh dates his life to the thirteenth century (Sanneh 1997: 37). There is a dearth of research on this scholar and his tenets.

Islamic scholars held a central position in these communities. The designation for Muslims in Asante Twi, '*nkramo*', derives from the Mande *karamɔgɔ* (teacher, scholar).¹¹ These scholars not only acted as teachers, religious specialists, and (moral) authorities within their groups; their works and advice were also requested by the Asante, especially by the rulers, for whom they worked as scribes and diplomats.¹² Sometimes, they were close to the *ahenfoɔ* ('chiefs'), having a say in their politics; at other times, they were supplanted by other influence groups (McCaskie 1995; Wilks 1966; 1989 [1975]). Furthermore, the *malams* manufactured *aduro* as healing or a remedy for any kind of affliction. Their knowledge and prayers were frequently requested by Muslims and Asante alike, and they were renowned locally for their 'spiritual powers' (Owusu-Ansah 1991; 2000; Rattray 1927: 20–1; Wilks 2000). However, the Muslim communities in the *Asanteman* did not consist solely of scholars; a large proportion were traders and their aides. They brought in salt, cattle, and slaves from the northern regions, sending back gold and kola nuts (Lovejoy 1980; Wilks 1961a; 1961b). These itinerant traders came to sell their goods and to buy others in the local markets, many of which had been founded by them, before they returned to their regions of origin. A major trading route went from the *Asanteman* to the north-west, passing through Wa.

As Wilks has noted, the Wangara or Dioula (Mande for trader) 'defy easy identification' (Wilks 2000: 93; cf. Goody 1964; Launay and Miran 2000). Today, this designation has attained ethnic connotations as the Wangara or Dioula are perceived and present themselves as an ethnic group, but originally they were far from homogeneous. They included people from various origins; some of them came from as far as Timbuktu, while others were from north-western Côte d'Ivoire.¹³ The traits that marked them as a group included their common language (Mande), their shared religion (Islam), and the fact that they intermarried freely (as Muslims). As a group, the Wangara emerged from their history as itinerant traders; their trading networks connected the Sahara desert to the western tip of Africa and the forests of Asante. The Wangara are thus as much a 'product' of their long-distance trade as the group conducting it.

¹¹ Sheikh Nazeer offered me another etymology of *nkramo*. According to him, the Asante recognised the purity of the *okra* (soul) of Muslims and wanted to congratulate them. The Asante Twi expression for 'Congratulations!' is '*Mo!*' – hence the term of address '*Nkramo!*' ('Congratulations to your soul!').

¹² The earliest written sources produced in the *Asanteman* were in Arabic (Wilks 1962; Wilks, Hunwick, and Sey 2003; Wilks, Levtzion, and Haight 1986); only later did travellers, diplomats, and traders compose reports in European languages.

¹³ PRAAD: ARG 1/12/36 and the ancestors of several interlocutors in Kokote Zongo.

These traders were among the first Muslims in Asante, and their religious conceptions, practices, and imaginaries have left traces in those found in the zongos today. Yet, they were not the only Muslims in the *Asanteman*. There is a numerically larger group that has nonetheless been obliterated in oral histories: 'slaves' and captives of war who were gathered in separate settlements and who produced foodstuffs or raw materials (especially gold) for the Asante royals. They were ascribed the social status of *akua* or *ɔɔnko* (slave) and placed under the control of the local 'chiefs' (McCaskie 1995: 95–101; Wilks 1993). This group of people has left barely any trace, as they were largely illiterate and as there was – and continues to be – a strong taboo on speaking about one's social status or origins as a 'slave' in Asante (Agyekum 2010: 122–3; Schildkrout 1970: 253–4). Nevertheless, their religious imaginaries and practices must have flown into local traditions and histories of Islam as well.

Unfortunately, we have only very limited knowledge about the doctrinal or theological differences and debates that occupied Muslims in the *Asanteman*. Muslim presence in the *Asanteman* was neither stable nor unchanging, and Asante was not a stable unit either. Considerable parts of the Muslim communities were 'on the move', travelling back and forth between Asante and their regions of origin, and new people and ideas were constantly arriving. But we know very little of the history of these communities, and the first major break in this history that we are currently aware of is the displacement of the Wangara as the predominant group by incoming Hausa during the nineteenth century.

In the early nineteenth century, Usman dan Fodio and his followers waged what has become known as the 'Fulani war' in what is now northern Nigeria (Loimeier 2013: 116–19; Robinson 2000: 137–9; 2004: 139–52). From 1804 to 1808, they fought for the rule of the Hausa states and established the Sokoto Caliphate, which was to endure until its divestiture by the British in 1903. Dan Fodio and his successors enforced 'shari'a law', which resulted in a growing abstinence from alcohol among the populace.¹⁴ This culminated in a steep rise in the demand for kola, a small nut that grows on trees in the tropical rainforests and is commonly used as a stimulant 'social drug' or as a gift at social events, especially marriages. The nut is broken into small pieces, chewed, and the saliva dissolves a small amount of the stimulant/narcotic substances, whose effects are comparable to coffee, khat, or other 'social drugs' (Abaka 2005: 6). As the Sokoto Caliphate was located in the

¹⁴ This is not to say that these were drunkards, but millet beer (*giyā*) seems to have been quite common in the region (Loimeier 2013: 99).

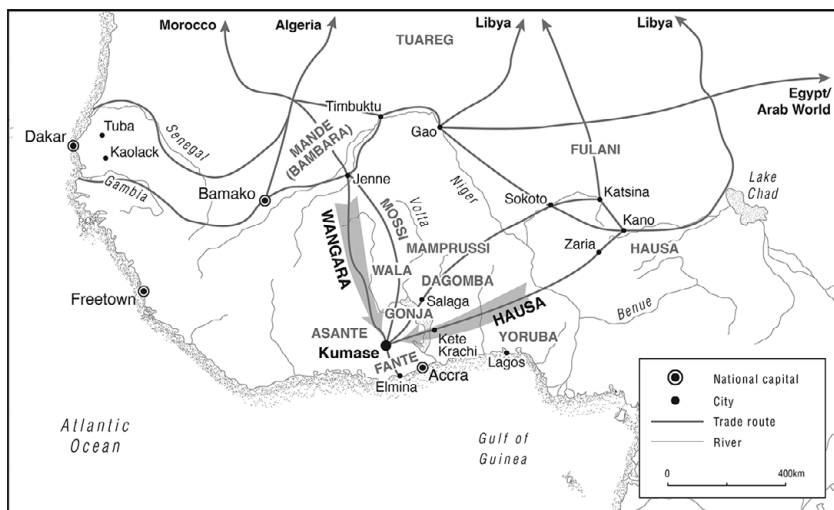


Figure 2 *Asante and long-distance trade.*

Source: Based on Lapidus (1988: 403)

savannah, kola could not be produced locally, and so Hausa traders built vast trading networks to the forests of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana, where the supply of kola could meet their demands (Abaka 2003; 2005; Arhin 1979; Cohen 1966; Lovejoy 1980; Wilks 1962).

The Asante monopolised the harvest of and trade in this cash crop (Abaka 2005; Lovejoy 1980: 17), and many Asante planted kola trees to generate additional income besides their subsistence farming (Abaka 2005). Within the *Asanteman*, kola was collected by local rulers and transported to the northern borders, where it was sold to traders from the Sahel (Abaka 2005; Lovejoy 1980). This led to the emergence of several *zangō* (caravan trading place) markets on the northern borders. The towns of Yendi, Kete Krachi, and Salaga thus evolved into 'ports of trade' (Polanyi 1963; cf. Curtin 1984) where the number of Muslims far surpassed the local population (Abaka 2005; Arhin 1979; Lovejoy 1980). Salaga, which emerged as a major market in the nineteenth century, was populated by more than 40,000 people and visited by hundreds of traders per day (Abaka 2005: 79–80; Lovejoy 1980: 113).¹⁵

¹⁵ Arhin reports similar figures for Atebubu and Kintampo, the regional market centres in the early twentieth century (1971b: 71); Schildkrout gives comparable figures for Kumase (1970: 255).

These trading caravans were social microcosms on the move and could contain several thousand people (Lovejoy 1980: 101–6). Through their size and number, they fundamentally changed the Muslim presence in Asante and led to a reorientation of foreign trade in the *Asanteman*. The Hausa emerged as the largest and most well-funded group, but they remained one group among others. They gained predominance in the zongos, their language became the lingua franca of this trade and its networks, and their Islamic scholars became the main religious authorities (Lovejoy 1980: 39–42; Winchester 1976: 21). The arrival of these Hausa caravans thus also changed Islam in Asante. The Qadiriyya was the predominant order in these networks during the nineteenth century: the major Islamic scholars aligned themselves with this order (Hanson and al-Munir Gibrill 2016; Kobo 2009: 506; Levtzion 1986: 13–14; Mumuni 2002: 143). However, their influence merely trickled into Asante, as these traders and Islamic scholars were not free to move into the *Asanteman*.

To the south, where European traders and colonisers had settled on the coast since the early fifteenth century, the British and their allies waged several wars against the Asante. In 1874, foreign troops entered and destroyed Kumase, the capital of the *Asanteman*, for the first time in Asante's history. The Asante failed to recover from this resounding defeat. Internal dissent and rivalries further weakened the already waning rule of the *Asantehene*, and the *Asanteman* was conquered and occupied by the British in 1896. The colonisers abolished Asante rule and forced Prempeh I, the *Asantehene*, into exile, from which he was to return in 1926. Yet, on the ground, the situation was far more complex than the word 'abolish' suggests, and the turbulent events of the period are open to speculation. A history of the colonial occupation of Asante is yet to be written (McCaskie 1986a; Wilks 1996),¹⁶ but the collapse of the *Asanteman* surely resulted in the loss of Asante sovereignty and territoriality, ending the closure of the northern borders and the monopolisation of trade. This led to a 'kola rush' as the traders moved to the sources of supply, and, within a short period of time, they founded zongos all over Asante.

Unfortunately, we know very little about Islam during that period. There is no study of this history, and my interlocutors either lacked any deeper knowledge of the then current teachings or labelled them erroneously as 'Tijaniyya'. The main Islamic scholars at the time affiliated themselves with the Qadiriyya and the Qadiriyya *wird* (litany) was in

¹⁶ For a nascent history of colonial Asante, see Berry (2001), Konadu (2019), McCaskie (2000), and Tashjian and Allman (2000).

wide use (Hanson and al-Munir Gibrill 2016; Kobo 2009: 506; Rouch 1956: 145; Stewart 1965: 17, 33), but our knowledge about the Qadiriyya presence and influence in the region during the early twentieth century remains limited. According to Charles Stewart, many of the leading *malams* who taught in the main *makarantā* (Qur'an schools) and led others in prayer at that time were affiliated to this order – certainly through their lines of initiation (*silsila*) – and spread its *wird*. Accordingly, the Qadiriyya must have been influential on lived Islam in the zongos at that time, although it seems that only a minority of Muslims were explicitly members or adhered to their tenets and practices (Stewart 1965). Meanwhile, the Tijaniyya were also gaining a foothold in the zongos and they coexisted with the Qadiriyya for quite a while before they eventually outgrew them in popularity and supplanted them in the early 1950s.¹⁷

Muslim presence under colonial rule and towards independence, 1874–1957

The colonial period saw the foundation of zongos in Asante over the span of one generation after the breakdown of the *Asanteman*. The Hausa were not the sole group, as people from across the Sahel and the northern savannahs moved to Asante seeking out sources of livelihood. The Wangara remained present but were outnumbered; Mossi from Upper Volta (part of French Sudan, which became Burkina Faso after independence), Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprussi, and Wala from the northern territories, Zabarama and Kotokoli from Togo or Benin, and Fulani from the Sahel were other major groups to settle in the zongos. From the time of their establishment, these were multi-ethnic and multilingual wards.¹⁸ However, the main direction of trade and its major means were controlled by the Hausa, who emerged as the predominant group in the early twentieth century although they remained a minority numerically (Winchester 1976: 21).

The colonial institutions considered and governed the people of the zongo as colonial subjects. In the archival sources, they are classified as 'Muhammadans' involved in long-distance trade and attempting to bypass colonial control and taxes. Furthermore, these communities were considered apart from the Asante as they adhered to their own traditions

¹⁷ Thanks to Charles Stewart for clarifying this in a personal communication.

¹⁸ In the 1970s, Brian Winchester counted more than 20 different ethnic headmen in the zongos of Kumase (Winchester 1976: 37). In my census of Kokote Zongo, people identified as members of 19 ethnic groups.

and values. Common formulations in colonial correspondence include ‘the Muhamadu native custom’ and ‘the Muslim community observes certain laws and customs peculiar to a minority group’.¹⁹

Under colonial rule, the numbers of migrants into Asante increased significantly (Kobo 2009: 507; 2012: 71–2; Rouch 1956: 24–6). People from the northern territories moved in to trade or to work in local mines and on farms during the dry season. These were predominantly young men who did not come to stay; at least originally, they came to earn enough for a dowry, or preferably a little more, and then returned north (Hill 1966; Peil 1971; 1974; Rouch 1956: 103; 1961). This was also the original plan of Maigida, a Mossi from Burkina Faso, who is now in his late eighties and a respected elder of Kokote Zongo:

Maigida made his first trip to Asante in the late 1930s, helping one of his uncles in the kola trade. They did the entire journey from Burkina Faso on foot with their cattle, donkeys, and some porters carrying goods on their heads. This was a walk of roughly six weeks. They headed for Offinso, sold their cattle and cloth, reinvested the profits in kola, and returned to Burkina. Depending on the length of the prize negotiations, the supply of the desired quality of kola, and the duration of the loading, their stays in Offinso could last several weeks. Thus, they took this journey about two or three times a year.

When he reached adulthood, Maigida decided to stay in Offinso and to seek employment as a farm worker for the Asante. He had several employers who hired him for weeding or harvesting and thereby gained a little money. After two years of this kind of work, he deemed his funds sufficient for his dowry and the establishment of a household in his town of origin. He bought as much kola as he could transport and returned to Burkina, where he got married. However, things did not turn out as expected, and he could not establish himself and his household in his community. Therefore, he returned to Offinso where he established himself as a *maigidā* (‘houseowner’ or ‘landlord’ – a middleman in the long-distance trade) and settled down once and for all. He spent the major part of his life in Offinso as a middleman in the kola trade, the activity from which he got his name, and working as a watchman at the local college. Although he never rose to the status of *maigidā titive* (main middleman), he lived quite well from his work and achieved a certain wealth, which allowed him to cater (temporarily) for three wives and several children. Today, he is a widely respected elder (*ɔpaanin*) in Kokote Zongo, although his fortunes have diminished as much as the number of his wives – only one of whom remains. His children have mostly left Offinso, and he makes a living as a scrap dealer and with a little trade in kola.

Just as there is an academic void regarding the history of Asante under colonial rule, so too is the history of Muslim presence in the region under

¹⁹ Both quotations come from letters of colonial secretaries in Ashanti to the administration in Accra, the first dating from 26 February 1932 (PRAAD: ARG 1/1/150), the second from 31 May 1951 (PRAAD: ARG 1/30/2/48).

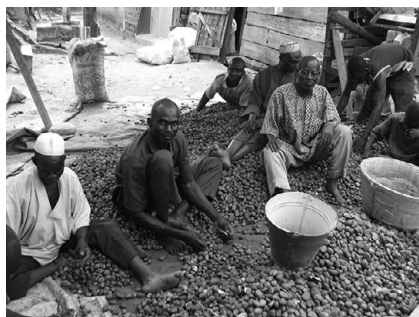


Figure 3 *Processing kola in Kokote Zongo, 2011.*

colonialism still to be written. It is quite astonishing how small the corpus of sources on Muslim communities in Asante under colonial rule in the local archives is. It seems as though the colonial institutions did not devise any specific policies aimed at Muslims in the region, despite considering them a disparate group (cf. Hiskett 1980: 136–7; Kobo 2012: 74, 88, 92). They repeatedly tried to establish customs or a ‘kola tax’ at the major trading ports, but the sources are full of complaints about the traders’ ‘illicit’ smuggling activities and the futile attempts to control the trade.²⁰ The traders dodged the tax collectors by changing their routes or by turning to the sea (Abaka 2005; Goody 1964: 207; Lovejoy 1980).²¹ Although the colonial institutions apparently failed to gain control of these trading networks, their attempts to do so had consequences.

The case of Malam Sallow, who acted as Kumase’s *sarkīn zongo* (‘chief’ of the zongo) from 1919 until his deportation to Nigeria in 1932, sheds some light on how the colonial institutions attempted to place the zongos under their (in)direct rule. There is some documentation of this case, and Brian Winchester (1976: 49–52) and Enid Schildkrout (1978: 198–205) also describe the quarrels relating to him.²²

Sallow was unanimously²³ elected as *sarkīn zongo* of Kumase on 1 October 1919 by the ‘ethnic headmen’ of the zongo to succeed his predecessor, Malam Osman.

²⁰ PRAAD: ARG 1/12/7, ARG 1/12/23, ARG 1/12/30, ARG 1/12/36, ARG 1/12/49.

²¹ PRAAD: ARG 1/12/7, ARG 1/12/30, ARG 1/12/49.

²² PRAAD: ARG 1/1/150, ARG 1/2/29/13, ARG 2/30/1, ARG 3/1/10, ARG 3/2/58.

²³ Al-Hajj Abdul Karim, Kokote Zongo’s *Walahene*, pointed out that a *sarkī* is supposed to be voted for unanimously; anything else would weaken his position and bring shame on his subjects, as they would prove unable to build a consensus. The competition for the office takes place before the election.

During his reign, the colonial institutions established the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance, which granted the local 'chiefs' certain judicial rights in their (assumed) communities and created a new institution, the Kumase Zongo Court, over which they had Malam Sallow presiding. Sallow and his councillors arbitrated in cases of cattle and land dispute as well as on charges involving witchcraft. This court had judicial rights over the people of the zongo only and was not accepted by the Asante rulers. Nor was Malam Sallow accepted as 'chief' by the *Kumasehene* (the former *Asantehene*, Prempeh I, who had returned from the Seychelles in 1926), as this title and position were a prerogative of the Asante. While Malam Sallow seems to have had the support of the British and a large following among the Hausa, members of other ethnic groups in the zongo did not acknowledge him as *sarkī*. This held especially for the 'Lagos' or Yoruba people, who wanted to establish their *sarkī*, Sulley Lagos, as paramount ruler in the zongo. This resulted in several quarrels between these camps in the 1920s,²⁴ which were brought to a standstill in 1929 through the expulsion of Sulley to Nigeria, as ordered by Malam Sallow. However, these clashes and the levies Sallow tried to raise from his subjects made him quite unpopular among the people of Kumase's zongos. In 1932, Malam Sallow crossed a line by ordering the flogging of the Yoruba imam who had refused to rise from the floor to greet him – a sign of respect, which, according to the imam, was to be rendered to Allah only and not to fellow humans.²⁵ The people of the zongo widely refused this order, as they considered it outrageous. Several 'headmen' from the zongo opposed it and asked the colonial institutions for Sallow's deportation to Nigeria. This resulted in further clashes, which prompted the colonial institutions to deport Sallow to Lagos by the end of the year. That put an end to the clashes that had been so harsh and brutal that up to the early 1950s the people of the zongo were opposed to Sallow's return to Kumase.²⁶ Nevertheless, the ethnically based quarrels, which still mark the politics of the zongos today, continued.

Throughout these events, the colonial institutions constituted a 'higher' violence and finally intervened through the deportation of Sallow, but this was not a decision taken by them. I will quote an administrative letter from 26 September 1904, which concerns colonial involvement in 'chieftaincy affairs'. This dates from much earlier in the twentieth century, but the basic stance does not seem to have changed much. According to the Colonial Secretary's letter, in 'chieftaincy matters ... the interference of the British Representative [was to be] limited to the confirmation or non-confirmation of the action of the people'.²⁷ Colonial rule changed the political context significantly, as it abolished the *Asanteman* and created a

²⁴ Similar confrontations over 'chieftaincy' between different ethnic groups in zongos at that time were reported from Sunyani, Obuasi, and Mampong (PRAAD: ARG 3/2/77).

²⁵ Nowadays, the Sunna in particular are frequently accused of denying elders respect by not bowing when they greet them; they counter this with the declaration that such a gesture is exclusively reserved for God.

²⁶ PRAAD: ARG 3/2/58, ARG 6/2/68. ²⁷ PRAAD: ARG 1/2/4/1.

political void in which the zongos could emerge, but its impacts on local processes seem to have been indirect and reactive (Rouch 1956: 52).²⁸

The colonial institutions made another major attempt to gain control of the zongos through the Muhammadan Marriage Ordinance (Hanretta 2018; Hiskett 1976). According to this ordinance, only 'priests' in possession of a 'licence to a Muhammadan priest'²⁹ were officially allowed to conduct Muslim marriages. These 'licences' were priced at one pound and sold to those able to prove that they were Muslim scholars by signature of an ethnic 'headman'. Yet again, this attempt proved futile. In 1944, the records state that 'registration is not in vogue', and in 1951 only seven marriages were recorded by the colonial administration for the whole year, while roughly 40–50 were assumed to take place in Kumase's zongos every month.³⁰ Again, the zongos and their inhabitants seem to have eluded the attempts of the colonial institutions to place them under formal rule and administration.

Within the zongos, people got involved in the developing national politics and formed political associations (Winchester 1976). In 1932, some Muslims founded the Gold Coast Muslim Association in Accra, which adopted as its main objectives the welfare, education, and social security of Muslims (Ahmed-Rufai 2002: 108). This originally apolitical organisation turned into the Muslim Association Party (MAP) in 1951 (Ahmed-Rufai 2002: 108; Allman 1991: 1–2; Hanretta 2011: 189–90; Winchester 1976: 55). As a party, the MAP attempted to represent Muslim interests and to rally Ghana's Muslims under its banner. However, from its very beginnings, the MAP was and remained 'a distinctly southern, urban phenomenon, rooted in the stranger communities or zongos' (Allman 1991: 3). Neither in the northern territories nor among other Muslims did they meet with success (Ahmed-Rufai 2002: 108; Allman 1991: 15; Hanretta 2011: 190). Like the National Liberation Movement (NLM), which strove to consolidate and represent Asante interests in the political arena, the MAP took an oppositional stance towards Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP), which became the main political union in the struggle for independence (Allman 1991: 2, 4; Kobo 2009: 520; Rouch 1956: 163–4; Schildkrout 1974b: 118–19). In the 1954 elections, the MAP suffered a severe defeat (Hanretta 2011: 193), and, after independence in 1957, Nkrumah banned religious, ethnic, and regional parties in order to oust his political

²⁸ This is, at most, a hypothesis; rather, it is an impression I got from reading the archival sources. My case studies are not a history of zongos during colonial times, nor a research programme.

²⁹ PRAAD: ARG 1/30/2/45, ARG 1/30/2/48. ³⁰ PRAAD: ARG 1/30/2/48.

adversaries and to consolidate the emerging nation. The leaders of the MAP were expelled, which dealt a severe blow to their organisation (Allman 1991: 10, 21; Schildkrout 1974b: 119) and gave more than a hint of the emerging state's future dealings with its 'aliens'. What remained of the MAP merged with other oppositional associations into the United Party in 1958 (Allman 1991: 21). The MAP's attempt – and failure – to devise Muslim politics in Ghana has been the only such attempt so far. Since independence, Ghana has experienced various changes and crises, but it has not seen sectarian politics again.³¹ This history bears witness to two facts. One is the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the Muslim community in Ghana (Hanretta 2011: 218–19).³² The other is that Muslims in Ghana did and do not refrain from involvement in local or national politics; this is a quite different attitude from the 'Suwarian tradition' adhered to during the *Asanteman*. Muslims in Ghana were not and are not apolitical per se. Today, they are enrolled in the major political parties, representing Muslim as well as other interests (Kobo 2010; Ryan 1996: 319).

The emergence of the Tijaniyya as the hegemonic Islamic group, 1900s–1970s

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Muslim presence in Asante underwent major changes. There was a steep rise in numbers, and the Tijaniyya emerged as the major Islamic group during the 1920s. Originally, these were itinerant scholars who competed with the Qadiriyya and attempted to reform local Islamic imaginaries, conceptions, and practices. The quarrels between scholars of these orders lasted several decades until 1952, when Ibrahim Niasse visited Kumase. The repercussions of this event marked the final displacement of the Qadiriyya by the Tijaniyya as the predominant Islamic group in the zongos; the Tijaniyya were to hold Islamic hegemony there for the next 20 years.

Ibrahim Niasse (1900–75) was born in the early twentieth century in Senegal. He was the son of a prominent Tijaniyya sheikh, al-Hajj Abdallah al-Niyasi, from whom he received his early Islamic education (Hiskett 1980: 101; Seesemann 2009; 2011; Triaud 2000). In his early thirties, he claimed to be the *ghawth al-a'zam* (saviour of the age) and began to propagate his tenets. In 1932, he moved to the outskirts of

³¹ Kobo argues that this has helped shape the establishment of Islamic schools and Islamic reform in the country as former political actors injected themselves into this sector (Kobo 2009; 2012).

³² This does not hold for a shared interest in Islamic education. The Islamic Education Unit forms part of Ghana's educational administration and develops an Islamic curriculum (Owusu-Ansah, Iddrisu, and Sey 2013).

Kaolack, established a *madrasa* and *zāwiya* (Sufi lodge), and gathered his adherents to form the *jamā'at al-fayḍa* (Congregation of the Flood of Grace).³³ In the 1940s and 1950s, Niasse undertook several journeys in the subcontinent to spread his teachings and his *fayḍa* and gained a large number of followers all over West Africa (Hill 2007: 7; Hiskett 1980: 100–1; Seesemann 2011). In present-day Ghana, his portrait is found all over the zongos as paintings on walls, stickers on cars, or amulets. Many local Tijaniyya venerate him as *wali* (someone close to or favoured by Allah) and refer to him as the founder of their order.³⁴

To write a history of the Tijaniyya in Asante, I draw on interviews with some of their major scholars in Kumase.³⁵ Today, the Tijaniyya in Kumase are divided into two wings, and the history of the Tijaniyya in Ghana is a contested issue. Although the members of these wings do not narrate disparate histories, the central protagonists differ in their versions. The *Cisseyyo* (the people of Hassan Cissé, the successor of Niasse in Kaolack) tend to neglect the role of Maikano Jallo, stressing the 'Big Six' instead; the *Jallofo* (the people of Jallo) tend to do the opposite. A book on the history of the 'Big Six' written by Abdul Wadud, the leader of the *Cisseyyo*, was widely welcomed by the *Cisseyyo*, while the *Jallofo* objected to it for omitting Maikano Jallo. The resulting disagreements prompted Abdul Wadud not to reprint it.³⁶ The narration of this history is heavily contested, as it is ingrained in and legitimises the current state of affairs, and so the competing wings narrate it differently.

Nonetheless, they agree that the Tijaniyya emerged in Asante during the early twentieth century. These were mainly itinerant scholars from northern Nigeria, and the first local *malam* to become a Tijaniyya was Sheikh Umar (or Haruna) Karki (mid-nineteenth century–1934) from Salaga.³⁷ Sheikh Wali Ullah stated that Sheikh Umar was originally a

³³ See Brigaglia (2000) for a detailed discussion of the multi-layered meanings of this term.

³⁴ The latter is true of Tijaniyya 'laypersons'; the *malams* refer to him as a reformer, not founder, of the *ṭarīqa*.

³⁵ See the Appendix for an overview of the prominent Tijaniyya *malams* in twentieth-century Kumase. Sheikh Abdul Wadud and Sheikh Wali Ullah were the main authorities I interviewed on the history of the Tijaniyya in Asante. Other Tijaniyya interlocutors were Sheikh Haruna, Malam Tahir, and Malam Yunus. Abdul Karim organised these interviews, and our conversations helped me to assess and correlate their content.

³⁶ The original 30 published copies sold out at the launch and it was not reprinted. I could not obtain a copy; even Abdul Wadud claimed to no longer be in possession of his book.

³⁷ Abdulai Iddrisu names him as Umar (Iddrisu 2005: 55). Dumble presents him as Umar Kreke and states that he was the spiritual head of the Gold Coast Muslims (Dumble 2013: 26, 29–30, 32). Both report the story of his conversion during the hajj, and this is corroborated by Stewart (1965: 34–5) and John Hanson and Muhammad al-Munir Gibrill (2016).

Qadiriyya, but during his hajj, he met a grandson of Ahmad Tijani who initiated him into the *ṭarīqa at-Tijaniyya* and made him a *muqaddam* (a guide, or someone who initiates others into the Tijaniyya). After his return to Salaga, he founded a *makarantā* and occasionally ventured to Kumase to spread his teachings there. In 1894, a civil war left Salaga devastated and he had to resettle in Kete Krachi, where he lived and taught for the rest of his life. He was the first local *malam* to propagate the Tijaniyya in the region, but he did not settle down or build a *makarantā* in Kumase. Malam Babali did so in 1907³⁸ and was thus the first Tijaniyya *muqaddam* to settle in Asante; before that, he was also working as an itinerant scholar. Babali was a Tijaniyya by birth and well versed in the *ṭarīqa*'s tenets and practices. His *makarantā* became a renowned centre for Islamic learning, and his *mawlid* (celebration of the birthday of the prophet) attracted many people from the zongos, assuring him a growing number of adherents. His main rival was Malam Abdullahi Tano,³⁹ a Qadiriyya, who led the *jum'a* at Kumase's Central Mosque and ran his own *makarantā*. They remained rivals throughout their lives, in open competition, but in the late 1940s the odds started to shift in favour of the Tijaniyya.

In 1946, Sheikh Hadi Mawlud Fall from Mauritania, a disciple of Muhammad al-Hafiz,⁴⁰ visited Kumase to preach on behalf of the Tijaniyya. Malam Babali hosted him, and his sermons attracted a significant crowd. Another major Tijaniyya scholar, Sheikh Omar from Fes,⁴¹ came to town in 1948 and again attracted many people. The two visitors contributed to the increasing reputation of the Tijaniyya, thanks to their sermons and the miracles they are claimed to have worked. They also sparked rumours about a 'black sheikh' in Senegal by the name of Ibrahim Niasse. Ibrahim Niasse first arrived in Ghana in 1946, stopping only in Takoradi and Tema on his way to Nigeria. Consequently, the rumours gained traction and people grew eager to meet this famous sheikh. In 1948, a delegation left Kumase for Kaolack to participate in the *mawlid* and to invite Niasse to bless the town with his visit. In December 1951, Niasse made it to Kumase, where he spent a few days before moving on to Yendi. This was his first and only visit to the town (though not to Ghana) and marked the beginnings of Tijaniyya hegemony in the zongos. By this time, Malam Babali was already dead, or at the

³⁸ Babali is also mentioned in Stewart (1965: 36) and Dumble (2013: 33).

³⁹ This scholar is mentioned in Kobo (2012: 216n, 225, 228–9).

⁴⁰ On this scholar, see Frede (2011: 87–91) and Stewart (1965: 13).

⁴¹ This scholar was presumably Sidi Benamor from Algeria (Seesemann and Soares 2009). Thanks to Benjamin Soares for drawing my attention to this.

end of his life, and Niasse was hosted by some young and aspiring *malams* who were to become Kumase's Tijaniyya 'Big Six'.⁴²

Abdul Wadud related the most detailed account of Niasse's sojourn in Kumase. Despite his version of Tijaniyya history in the region being quite sympathetic to Maikano Jallo, the *Jallofoɔ* commonly criticised him for downplaying their 'spiritual leader'. Nonetheless, Abdul Wadud is widely acknowledged as an authority on this history, as he is not only a son of one of the 'Big Six' but also a pupil of Maikano Jallo. In substance, I found his narration corroborated by other versions. Therefore, I retell it in detail as an authoritative account:

Niasse arrived by train in Kumase on a Thursday afternoon during Ramadan in December 1951.⁴³ Rumours about his coming had spread in town and attracted a massive crowd of several thousand people to the station, eager to see the sheikh and get his blessings. The station was so crowded that one could neither leave nor enter it. The crowd chanted songs of prayer and praises and grew enthusiastic at Niasse's arrival, who could not have left the station if it was not for his prayers. Once he had greeted and blessed the crowd, he opened his hands towards the sky, said a short prayer, and raised his gaze upwards. On the spot, dark clouds assembled in the hitherto clear sky and poured their rain on the crowd, which quickly dispersed, giving way to Niasse and his entourage.

The days before this visit, the people of the zongo had been busy weeding a large area not far from the palace of the *Asantehene* where Niasse was supposed to lead the prayers and to preach during his stay. On Friday, a large crowd assembled to offer the *jum'a* behind Niasse who blessed the place by this very prayer. Even the non-Muslims became aware of his spiritual presence, which prompted the *Asantehene* to give the Muslim community this piece of land for the construction of a mosque. Thus, Kumase's Central Mosque was founded and blessed by Niasse.

The third miracle Niasse worked during his stay was to cure a poisonous snakebite. A woman, who had helped in the weeding, had been bitten by a snake and lay there sick and dying. When Niasse heard of this, he instructed his host, Baba Makaranta, to attend to her and to recite certain *āyāt* (verses) over the bite to neutralise the poison. Thanks to this, the woman recovered and could participate in the *jum'a* on the same day.

From Kumase, Niasse continued his journey to Yendi. Upon his arrival there, he pointed his right index finger to the sky and proclaimed *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* (There is no god except God), and every living being in town, from the smallest insect to the oldest human being, replied to his call, stating *Lā ilāha illā Allāh*. On

⁴² The original 'Big Six' were the six politicians who led Ghana into independence; the Tijaniyya 'Big Six' are barely known outside the zongos.

⁴³ This cannot be correct as Ramadan was during June in 1951, and other interlocutors stated that Niasse visited Kumase on the eve of the New Year. Only Abdul Wadud located his visit during Ramadan, probably trying to add to its *baraka*, as Ramadan is a month of blessings for Muslims in Ghana.

that day, 4,000 people embraced the religion of Islam, which is the largest single conversion known in the history of this religion in Ghana.⁴⁴ These are some of the wonders Niasse worked during his stay. Truly, this was a man of God.

In this history, Niasse is presented as a *wali* and as being imbued with divine *baraka* (divine presence, blessings), which enabled him to do miraculous things. This narration also bears witness to his visit to Kumase, which marked the beginnings of Tijaniyya hegemony. Henceforth, his hosts and companions were regarded as major Islamic authorities and addressed on any religious matter. The Qadiriyya scholars and their tenets fell into oblivion.⁴⁵

These scholars were to become the Tijaniyya 'Big Six'.⁴⁶ In some narrations, all of them were presented as students of Malam Babali; in others, some were trained by Babali and others by Malam Abdullahi Tano. However, after Niasse's visit, they are all presented as Tijaniyya. The six scholars were:

1. Sheikh Muhammadu Kyiroma, who, from 2 January 1952 until his death on 1 August 1968, acted as Kumase's 'chief imam',⁴⁷ in which role he succeeded Malam Tano, and as one 'head' of the *Imamiyya makarantā*;
2. Sheikh al-Hajj Baba Makaranta, the only one who was not a *malam*; he was a quite successful businessman and acted as host to Niasse and as financier of the Tijaniyya;
3. Sheikh al-Hajj Haruna, the other 'head' of the *Imamiyya makarantā*;
4. Sheikh Ahmed Baba al-Wa'iz,⁴⁸ Niasse's spokesman and interpreter during his visit and 'head' of the *Wataniyya makarantā*;
5. Sheikh al-Hajj Alhassan Nasserudeen, who ran his own *makarantā*; and
6. Sheikh al-Hajj Abubakar Garba Hakim, Kyiroma's *nā'ib* (deputy imam) and 'head' of the *Hakimiyya makarantā*.

The first three were brothers, stemming from the same Hausa-Fulani house and family. Nasserudeen was a Dagomba, and the other two were Hausa. From their beginnings, the Tijaniyya were thus not confined to any kin or ethnic group. Apart from Baba Makaranta, these *malams* ran

⁴⁴ Ousman Kobo gives a detailed account of this (Kobo 2012: 162–6).

⁴⁵ When I asked about the Qadiriyya, no one claimed to know of them or their whereabouts. Nowadays, there is no mosque or *makarantā* in Kumase associated with this order, nor did I meet any Qadiriyya scholars or laypeople.

⁴⁶ They are mentioned only by Stewart (1965: 43–6), who presents them as leading *malams* in Kumase.

⁴⁷ PRAAD: ARG 2/2/123, ARG 6/2/28.

⁴⁸ Mervyn Hiskett quotes and discusses one of his writings (Hiskett 1980: 115–16).

their own *makarantā* where they spread their tenets and practices, further solidifying their religious hegemony in the zongos. Haruna and Kyiroma presided over the *Imamiyya*, Garba Hakim over the *Hakimiyya*, Nasserudeen over the *Nasserudeen makarantā*, and Baba al-Wa'iz over the *Wataniyya*. According to Abdul Wadud, who was trained at the *Imamiyya makarantā* of his father, the majority of Ghana's current imams received their training from these schools.⁴⁹ These *makarantā* were the major institutions of Islamic learning in Asante from the 1950s to the 1970s, the two decades that marked the height of Tijaniyya hegemony in the zongos.

However, even during these years, the Tijaniyya were not the prevalent Muslim denomination. At its very height, 30–40 per cent of Ghanaian Muslims are assumed to have been explicit adherents or initiated members of the *ṭarīqa* (Hiskett 1980: 109–15; Stewart 1965: iiii), while the others were mainly 'just' *nkramo*. However, the majority of the local imams and *malams* were initiated into the *ṭarīqa* and they taught and practised its tenets, which were thus quite popular among local Muslims, whose huge repertoire of Tijaniyya praise songs bears witness to this fact (Hiskett 1980: 112–14; Viola 2003). The Tijaniyya were therefore highly influential on local imaginaries, conceptions, and practices of Islam, but they did not create them *ex nihilo*, nor were they the only Islamic group. Their rise entailed neither a replacement nor a reformulation of many local Islamic tenets and practices, such as funeral prayers or the manufacture of Islamic amulets. Several Tijaniyya interlocutors stressed that these practices derive from what they called 'traditional Islam' and were already present when the Tijaniyya emerged as hegemonic. In the process, they took over those practices that did not go against their tenets or the *Sunna*, but they were not their originators. Nor did the Tijaniyya form an organisation, as these were *malams* who cooperated and concurred on many fronts, not a unified movement. The Tijaniyya thus contributed to and reshaped the Islamic landscape, but they neither carved it anew nor altered it entirely.

Muslim presence in the Ghanaian nation state: unsettled integration, 1957–today

Independence lifted the lid on a question that had been silenced by colonial rule: whether to integrate the people of the zongo, most of whom were immigrants, into the emerging nation. For the colonial institutions,

⁴⁹ This is also stated by Kobo (2012: 169, 171, 232).

the people of the zongo were colonial subjects like other Africans; for the emerging nation and its identity politics, the questions of autochthony, belonging, and citizenship took a different turn. This became manifest not only in Nkrumah's banning of religious, regional, or ethnic parties, but also in the state's treatment of national 'aliens'. The fault line of the emerging Ghanaian nation rendered the people of the zongo 'aliens', and they became subject to rampant xenophobia and discrimination.

The Gold Coast colony declared independence from Great Britain and became the nation of Ghana on 6 March 1957. Just like the history of Asante under colonial rule, the history of Asante during and after independence is still to be written (McCaskie 1986b: 3; Wilks 1996).⁵⁰ However, some research on the history of Muslims in the Ghanaian nation state has been conducted, and we can draw on the work of Ousman Kobo (2009; 2010; 2012) and Yunus Dumbe (2013) to sketch a picture of these times. The Ghanaian constitution granted citizenship to those who had a Ghanaian parent or grandparent (Kobo 2010: 74). This excluded many people of the zongo, most of whom were born to foreigners. With independence, the people of the zongos found themselves in the Ghanaian nation, where their status was quite ambiguous. On the one hand, they were considered legal residents; on the other, they remained strangers in their respective surroundings. In the first Ghanaian Republic under Nkrumah, which lasted from 1957 until the military coup in 1966, there were no specific policies on the zongos. As Nkrumah strove for national consolidation and infrastructural modernisation, minority policies were not a major issue. However, growing Ghanaian nationalism resulted in an increasing 'xenophobia toward northerners' (Allman 1991: 17) or 'a growing resentment of foreigners' (Peil 1971: 209). The people of the zongo became 'outsiders' and were singled out as scapegoats for Ghana's woes (Peil 1971: 217; 1974: 373; Schildkrout 1974b: 135; Winchester 1976: 179–81; Kobo 2010: 79).

These developments also had an impact on Islam and religious leadership in the zongos. In the years after independence, the *Asante Nkramo* challenged other Muslims over the right to provide the imam of Kumase's Central Mosque and claimed paramount status in the regional *umma*. This was less a question of theology or religious practice; it was about ethnicity. As the *Asante Nkramo* openly challenged the 'aliens' of the zongos as a whole, these 'aliens' coalesced in opposition to them. The tensions turned into open conflict in 1968 when the *Asante Nkramo*

⁵⁰ '[F]or the twentieth century we do not yet possess even the skeletal social history ... we find ourselves enmeshed in dense thickets of trees where no one as yet has defined the topography of the wood' (McCaskie 1986b: 3, cf. 20n).

claimed priority to designate the successor to Kyiroma, the late imam. Their ethnic claim was strongly resented, and the affair erupted into open conflict and violence (Schildkrout 1974b; Winchester 1976: 65–6).

When Kyiroma died on 1 August 1968, the members of the Ghana Muslim Mission⁵¹ under the leadership of Adam Apiedu designated a certain Nasserudeen as his successor. This met with the refusal of the Muslims of the local zongos, who turned their administrative designation as ‘Muslim Community’ into a (short-lived) organisation and letterhead. The ‘Muslim Community’ declared al-Hajj Adam as successor against Nasserudeen. Festering tensions boiled over into open violence, and the Central Mosque became locked down for several months.

In an official letter of 26 August 1968, the Ghana Muslim Mission demanded that ‘Islamic affairs should be left in the hands of Ghanaians’, as it was ‘high time [that the Hausa] gave “independence” to the indigenous citizens who have embraced the religion and who are now in a better position to manage their own affairs’.⁵² The Brong Ahafo/Ashanti Branch of the Mission used an even harsher tone in an official letter from 27 August 1968, by demanding an end to the ‘tyranny [of] the black imperialism of the Nigerian Hausas in the Islamic Religion in Ghana’. In response to these demands, the leaders of the ‘Muslim Community’ held a press conference in Kumase on 30 August 1968, declaring that ‘the choice of an Imam is based on experience, good character, tolerance and good moral standards’, and that the Ghana Muslim Mission is ‘quite a separate Mission’ who could have ‘their own Imam’. They restated this in an official letter on 7 September 1968, in which they claimed that they represented ‘50,000 ... muslims from various tribes in Ghana and foreign nationals [while the] rebel group are just a little over 3,000’. They claimed to represent the majority of Muslims in the region and therefore should have the imam of Kumase’s Central Mosque coming from their ranks.

This conflict simmered on for several months, with the situation changing only in late 1969 when the Ghanaian president, Kofi Abrefa Busia, started a campaign against national aliens. These developments severely weakened the ‘Muslim Community’ and led to them accepting the ‘Mission’ imam (Schildkrout 1974b: 133).

After the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966, the politics of nationalisation and the ousting of alleged others increased in severity. Although many people of the zongo had received Ghanaian citizenship under Nkrumah, the new politics attempted to deny them these rights and to (re)classify them as aliens. The Ghanaian government’s various ‘Alien Acts’ of the 1960s were part of these developments (Kobo 2010: 74–7; Peil 1971:

⁵¹ This was the main organisational body of the *Asante Nkramo*. PRAAD: file number unknown (a photocopy of the file is in possession of the author).

⁵² PRAAD: file number unknown (a photocopy of the file is in possession of the author).

206). National chauvinism searched for its other and found it in the people of the zongo, who had to face disadvantage and insecurity from the Asante and the national government alike.⁵³ In a speech, Kofi Abrefa Busia labelled the people of the zongo as ‘strangers’ and ‘not a true Ghanaian at all’ (Hanretta 2011: 220). These developments culminated in the ‘Aliens Compliance Order’ of 18 November 1969 and in the mass expulsion of national aliens in 1971 (Kobo 2010; Peil 1971; 1974). Within a short time, many inhabitants of the zongos left the region to avoid expulsion or found themselves expelled by the state. Margaret Peil estimates that 200,000 people – roughly half of the country’s migrant population – were forced to leave Ghana within six months (Peil 1974: 367). Although many of these people had been born in Ghana, they had inherited the ‘alien’ status of their parents (Kobo 2010: 82). These events are well remembered by the people of the zongo today. Many of them possess Ghanaian passports and consider themselves Ghanaian, but they feel insecure about their status in the Ghanaian nation, where they have remained strangers within (Hargreaves 1981: 97–8; Kobo 2010: 83; Pellow and Chazan 1986: 102; Quayson 2014: 203–6; Schildkrout 1970: 269).

The deportations were immediately suspended by General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong after he seized power from Busia in a *coup d’état* in January 1972 (Kobo 2010: 83–4). Acheampong realised the potential support his government could gain from the zongos and strove to establish himself as a protector of the zongos and their Muslim inhabitants, following Nkrumah’s line of cooperation with local imams (Kobo 2010: 84–6). The zongos’ support aided his success in the 1975 referendum to confirm his rule (Kobo 2010: 87). Those succeeding him in the following decades took note of this elective success – especially Jerry John Rawlings, who ruled Ghana from 1981 to 2001 and who had a keen interest in maintaining good relations with the zongos to ensure their inhabitants’ votes (Kobo 2010: 89–90) – and the zongos have been perceived as a voting bloc ever since. Muslim votes can be decisive in the usually close elections between Ghana’s two major parties: the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The former is frequently perceived as a ‘zongo’ or ‘northerner’ party; this is due less to its politics than to its rhetoric and the fact that the NPP is the successor to Busia’s United Party, which was responsible for the mass expulsion in 1971. However, Muslims are enrolled in both

⁵³ PRAAD: ARG 2/1/85 contains several letters of complaint about ‘alien’ traders from Asante merchants; these are quite derogatory in tone and content.

parties, neither of which is widely perceived as or presents itself as Islamic.

The attitude of the Ghanaian state towards Muslims in its territory is thus rather ambivalent. On the one hand, Muslims are in the majority in its northern regions, are Ghanaian citizens, and are desired voters; on the other, they are assumed to be aliens and are often subject to xenophobia. Zongos are frequently designated as places of poverty, filth, violence, and crime. ‘They give birth too much’, ‘they are dirty’, and ‘they are criminals’ – these are some of the prejudices I encountered among the Asante. Frederik Lamote met with similar prejudices towards ‘northerners’ among the people of Techiman, who designated them as ‘barbarians’ and ‘undeveloped’ (Lamote 2012: 151). The internal dynamics and history of these wards are unknown to the Asante.

The emergence of the Sunna and the rise of Maikano Jallo, 1970s–2000s

The 1970s saw massive changes in the Islamic field of the zongos. The turmoil of the mass expulsions of 1971 and their aftermath had left a deeply unsettled and disrupted community. Unfortunately, I have not come across any substantial sources recording the ways in which the people of the zongo experienced these events, and my interlocutors refused to talk about them in detail. Within a few months, about 200,000 people – about half of the zongos’ population – were forced to leave the country, taking their trade and connections with them.⁵⁴ According to some interlocutors, the wealthier traders pre-empted their expulsion and left Ghana before the enforcement of the expulsions, which thus hit an already impaired community. In Kokote Zongo, these events are commonly remembered as ‘*mmere no a, amɔpam kurom*’ (‘the times when they [the Ghanaian state] have expelled the people from town/left the town deserted’). Those who remained found themselves facing rampant xenophobia, in shock, extremely insecure about their status, and with severely disrupted neighbourhoods and trading networks. In retrospect, this marked the beginning of the end of the zongos’ once bustling trade, and, to this day, the people of the zongo deeply mistrust the Ghanaian state due to these events. The deep scars that these have left on the people and their collective memory were apparent

⁵⁴ Those who were expelled or left the zongos before that have left no trace in the local archives and have taken their memories with them. The most striking case is the zongos’ ‘Lagos’ or ‘Yoruba’ communities, which just ‘disappear’ from the archival record and oral histories during these years (cf. Eades 1993).

in the consternated silences after I asked about these events or when someone alluded to them, as well as in the overall refusal to talk about them in detail. Back in the 1970s, the zongo communities were deeply troubled, socio-economically devastated, and socially disrupted. They had to rebuild themselves on shaky ground, and thus the Muslim students who returned from the Arab world, arriving in Ghana as fully fledged but not yet established Islamic scholars, came back to a deeply unsettled community whose former cohesion had experienced a severe disruption and was only slowly beginning to rebuild. The reformists among these returnees, who were to form the Sunna, thus found space to manoeuvre as they drew on previous attempts at Islamic reform in the region to assert their own.

Over the centuries, Muslim scholars in West Africa have been highly mobile, especially the younger ones who had to build a reputation before people started coming to them, enabling them to settle down and to set up structures of teaching and preaching. These itinerant scholars created an 'Islamic sphere' (Launay and Soares 1999) that transgressed ethnic, colonial, national, and other boundaries. As reported by Lansiné Kaba (1974), attempts at an Islamic reform oriented towards or influenced by contemporary teachings in the Arab world have been undertaken by local actors in West Africa at least since the early twentieth century. However, this did not imply a historical break or the emergence of a completely new phenomenon. Muslims in West Africa have always exchanged ideas with Muslims in other regions of the world. Historically, the hajj was the main means of this exchange, although not all travelled that far to gain or to spread Islamic knowledge. The Islamic reform movement in the zongos was preceded by Afa Ajura in Tamale and Adam Apiedu in Kumase, both of whom were active during the first half of the twentieth century. The Sunna emerged in Ghana during the 1940s and campaigned against the Tijaniyya from the outset, but, during the movement's genesis, their influence and adherence were limited to a few cities. This changed in the 1970s, when numerous Muslim scholars returned from their Islamic studies in the Arab world, established *makarantā*, and held public sermons throughout the region (Dumbe 2013; Kobo 2009; 2012; 2015; Samwini 2006).

Yet, not all returnees adhered to the same teachings, they were not all Wahhabi or Salafi, nor did they all campaign against local 'deviations' or 'syncretism' (Kaba 1974: 51).⁵⁵ In an interview I did with a Sunna

⁵⁵ Both terms are highly problematic (Shaw and Stewart 1994). Deviation suggests that Muslims in Africa somehow or somewhere 'got it wrong' and deviate from an ideal Islam. Syncretism suggests a mixture of 'African' and 'Islamic', which relies on dubious assumptions and considers 'Islam in Africa' as somehow different from 'Islam'.

malam in Kumase, he claimed that every Ghanaian Muslim who had gone to study in the Arab world returned as Sunna: 'How could it be otherwise?' However, I met several Tijaniyya *malams* who had studied in the Arab world, and, while they cherished what they had learned there, they did not return as Sunna. Nonetheless, some – perhaps the majority – of the Ghanaian Muslims who had studied in the Arab world in the 1960s returned as reformists, and it was from this body of returnees and their adherents that the *Ahl us-Sunna wal Jama'ah* emerged. Unfortunately, statistics on these students are unavailable, but the Sunna *malam* stated that the alumni involved with the Sunna totalled a little more than 300 persons.

However, the first Muslim scholars to voice an open critique of the Tijaniyya and their tenets were not returnees but locally trained *malams*. In the 1940s, Afa Ajura preached sermons and opened a Qur'anic school in Tamale. His anger was roused especially by the Tijaniyya *tarbiya* and their proclaimed ability to 'see God', and he campaigned against these (Ibrahim 2002: 102). This resulted in a 'give and take' of sermons that involved several *malams* who openly challenged each other's teachings and preaching (Ibrahim 2002: 96–101; Iddrisu 2009: 23–4; Kobo 2012: 156–71). In the 1960s, Adam Apiedu, an *Asante Nkramo* from Kumase, began to openly criticise the Tijaniyya as well. He singled out the manufacture of amulets and funeral prayers for his criticism; in time, he gained a significant following, albeit predominantly among the *Asante Nkramo* (Kobo 2012: 171–80). But these two remained isolated figures (Iddrisu 2009; Kobo 2012). Afa Ajura remained cut off from other Islamic scholars in Tamale, while Adam Apiedu was marginal in the zongos. Nevertheless, the two voiced influential critiques of the Tijaniyya that were taken up and amplified by the following generation of Sunna *malams*.

My Sunna interlocutors commonly referred to the early 1970s as the time of their establishment. During these years, several of them returned from their Islamic studies in the Arab world and propagated Wahhabi or Salafi tenets in their sermons and through the schools they founded. The most prominent of these scholars is al-Hajj Umar Ibrahim, the present 'national chief imam' of the *Ahl us-Sunna wal Jama'ah*. He returned to Ghana in 1969 after nine years of studies at the Islamic University of Medina and established himself as a *malam* in Nima, Accra's biggest and Ghana's most renowned zongo (Dumbe 2013; Kobo 2009; 2012). He started to preach and teach in a friend's house and attracted the interest of many. Out of these sermons and classes, Ibrahim and his followers formed the Ghana Islamic Research and Reformation Centre, which they legally formalised in 1972. This institution is popularly known as

'Research' among Ghana's Muslims and has a reputation as the country's major centre of Islamic learning among all Muslims in the region.⁵⁶ The school attached to this centre was one of the first Islamic schools in the country to offer a senior education. Thanks to the connections of its founder to the Arab world, it could offer stipends to its students, and this contributed significantly to its attractiveness. It cannot be overemphasised how influential this school was and is within the Ghanaian *umma* (Dumbe 2013: 53–8; Kobo 2012: 213–30). Thanks to their schools and sermons, the Sunna thus gained a prominent voice in Islamic discourses. They not only challenged the Tijaniyya and their tenets; they also fundamentally changed the Islamic field, calling into question several ideas and practices that had been considered Islamic until then.

In Kumase, al-Hajj Abdul Samad emerged as the first local Sunna *malam*.⁵⁷ Originally, Samad had been a Tijaniyya but during his hajj in 1970, he abandoned their teachings and adopted Wahhabi tenets, which he then preached in Kumase. At that time, the majority of Kumase's mosques were under the Tijaniyya, and he was denied entry to them. Thus, he and his followers held evening sermons in front of houses, at lorry stations, or in market places. Several of these events descended into violent clashes, and several *malams* found themselves imprisoned overnight. The clashes were so violent that the police denied Umar Ibrahim entry to Kumase in 1973 to prevent him from preaching there. However, Abdul Samad and his followers continued their campaign and built their own school and mosque in Sabon Zongo, just behind Kumase's Central Mosque. For the Tijaniyya, the sermons of Abdul Samad were not only outrageous because he criticised their tenets; as a former Tijaniyya, he had been initiated into their *'ilm bātīn* (covered knowledge) which he now exposed and ridiculed in his sermons. This met with deep resentment on the part of the Tijaniyya, among whom Samad was considered to be 'arrogant in character and corrupted in his heart', as one Tijaniyya sheikh put it in an interview. Yet, physical attacks did not prevent him and his followers from spreading their tenets. At that time, the remaining 'Big Six' were quite old and inexperienced in holding sermons in defence

⁵⁶ The Tijaniyya also acknowledge the solid foundation in *ẓāhir* (open) Islamic knowledge that this school provides. However, *bātīn* (covered) knowledge could not be learned there but only with the *muqaddam*.

⁵⁷ Abdul Samad is also portrayed by Kobo (2012: 225–6, 230, 232, 298). My depiction of him and of the history of the Sunna in Asante is based on several interviews with Sunna *malams* (Anonymous, Sheikh Ismael Said, Sheikh Abdul Rahim, Sheikh Abdul Mumin) and on the complaints about this *malam* raised by Sheikh Wali Ullah. I also draw on a public speech by Sheikh Umar Ibrahim at the *Ahl us-Sunna* gathering in Wa.

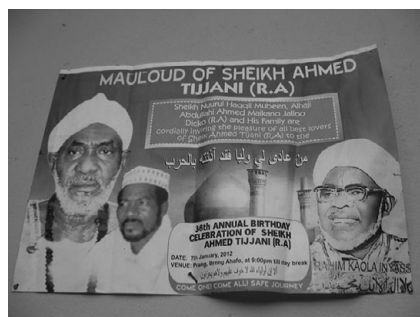


Figure 4 Poster at the mawlid in Prang, 2012. From the left: Maikano Jallo, Abdul Failih, and Ibrahim Niasse.

of their tenets and practices, as they had not been challenged in this way before. Therefore, they called for Maikano Jallo, a Tijjaniyya *malam*, who had earned a certain reputation as an ardent preacher for the cause of the Tijjaniyya thanks to his confrontations with Afa Ajura in Tamale during the 1960s (Dumbe 2013: 44; Ibrahim 2002: 103–7; Kobo 2012: 167–8).

The most famous of these confrontations centred on the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*:

Over the course of the 1960s, the tensions between the Tijjaniyya and the followers of Afa Ajura in Tamale erupted in several clashes and open violence, which resulted in public insecurity and mutual mistrust. To appease the situation and to settle the argument ‘once and for all’, the chief commissioner of police called for the opposing parties to debate their conflict in front of an audience in Tamale’s central park in 1968. Beforehand, the two sides agreed on taking the value and the religious merit of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*,⁵⁸ a major prayer of the Tijjaniyya, as the topic of their debate.

Afa Ajura came with his followers and had his whole library assembled on stage. As he was to start the debate, he stepped forward, greeted the organisers, his opponent, and the crowd, before he posed a challenge to Maikano Jallo. He argued that the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* was a nice prayer, as it praises the prophet and asks for his blessings. However, he denied it any major value among the other Islamic prayers, as it was not to be found in the Qur’an, the *Sunna*, or any other major Islamic book. Therefore, he had brought his whole library to place it at the disposal of his opponent. If Maikano were able to find the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* in one of his books, he would renounce his teachings and preaching and gladly embrace the Tijjaniyya. Then, Maikano stepped forward, greeted the organisers, his

⁵⁸ See the Appendix for the full text and the supplementary material published on the book’s website for the Arabic version and full Qur’anic references available via <https://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/history/african-history/islam-zongo-muslim-lifeworlds-asante-ghana?format=HB>.

opponent, and the crowd in turn, and claimed that he did not need any library to make his point and asked for just a Qur'an. Having fully memorised the Qur'an, he could have quoted it by heart, but he wanted to prove materially that he was quoting only the word of God. He opened the Qur'an, sura 10, *Yūnus*, āya 9, and read: '*Allāhumma ...*' He went on to sura 33, *al-Ahzāb*, āya 56: '*salli Allāhi wa sallim ...*' In this way, he recited the entire *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* piecemeal from the Qur'an, while the crowd started cheering and praising Allah.

My interlocutors generally agreed on this, but they diverged on the question of who had won the debate. The Tijaniyya thanked Allah for this brilliant scholar who had so much insight into the Qur'an and its hidden knowledge that he could recite the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* from it;⁵⁹ the Sunna considered it a disgrace for any Islamic scholar to read the word of God in this way. Thus, both sides claimed that they had emerged victorious. Whoever might have won or lost, the conflicts in Tamale were not settled, and Maikano had to leave the city. Some people cite this as proof of his loss, others as a sign that he was needed elsewhere to uphold the cause of the Tijaniyya – in Kumase.

Sheikh al-Hajj Baba Abdullahi Maikano Jallo (late 1920s–2005) was the most influential Islamic scholar in late twentieth-century Ghana, where he was, and still is, the most renowned face of the Tijaniyya.⁶⁰ His portrait is painted on walls, stuck on cars, or worn as a necklace. Many Tijaniyya refer to him as *wali* and attend to the *mawlid* in his home town, Prang; this *mawlid* is the largest single Islamic event in Ghana every year. In the 1970s, he succeeded the 'Big Six' to 'carry on the light of the Tijaniyya'. A closer look at this figure provides insights not only into the career of a very influential Tijaniyya *malam* but also into how things changed among the Tijaniyya and in the Ghanaian *umma* through the emergence of the Sunna.⁶¹

According to established narration, Maikano Jallo was born in 1928⁶² in Aboasu in the Western Region. His parents were Fulani cattle traders and farmers from Prang, a village a few miles north of Atebubu in the Brong Ahafo Region. His maternal grandfather was a famous Islamic scholar and frequently hosted itinerant scholars in his house. One such visitor was an astronomer from Sokoto. As a gift of gratitude for the hospitality, he looked into the stars and divined that the daughter of his host would give birth to one male child only, and

⁵⁹ Abdul Wadud highlighted that the current narrations ignore the fact that this exercise had previously been accomplished by the Tijaniyya sheikh Hafiz al-Misirri, whose works Maikano has certainly studied.

⁶⁰ For further information on Maikano Jallo, see Dumbe (2013: 44–50, 114–15), Ibrahim (2002: 103–7), Kobo (2012: 167–8), and Stewart (1965: 35–6). His biography and a summary of his teachings remain to be written.

⁶¹ Interviews and conversations with Abdul Karim, Sheikh Abdul Wadud, Sheikh Wali Ullah, Malam Yunus, Malam Tahir, Malam Usman, and Malam Faruq.

⁶² Abdul Wadud claimed this to be wrong; the precise date is kept secret.

that this child would become a great Islamic scholar. When Maikano's grandfather received news of his daughter giving birth to a boy, he realised that the divination had come true and had her bring the child. He continually prayed and prepared *rubūtū* (Qur'anic liquid) for him, so that from his early years Maikano Jallo was with the word of God, which he incorporated as *rubūtū* and teachings from his grandfather, becoming imbued with *baraka*, which laid the foundation for his steep rise as an Islamic scholar.

Once he had finished his education under his grandfather in the 1940s, he was sent to the most renowned Islamic scholars to further his studies – the 'Big Six' in Kumase. He arrived empty-handed but presented himself as a willing student. The 'Big Six' immediately recognised his *baraka*, wisdom, intelligence, and potential, but also his rather problematic character. Therefore, they were undecided whether they should admit him as a *murīd* (adept). Sheikh Haruna was strongly in his favour, pleaded on his behalf, and gave him food, clothes, and shelter. Maikano studied for several years under the 'Big Six', predominantly under and soon with Sheikh Haruna. In 1948, he accompanied them to Kaolack to participate in the *mawlid* and received Niasse's blessings. Shortly afterwards, Doctor Abdul Razak Tahir from Accra took him on a journey to Cairo. Tahir was a trader who did business in the Arab world, and he took an Islamic student along so his trip would be assured of God's benevolence and *baraka*. This brought Maikano Jallo to the al-Azhar, where he studied Arabic and the Islamic scriptures for two years in the preparatory school. When Tahir's business had been completed and his funds exhausted, they returned to Ghana by land. On the way, Maikano started preaching and teaching where they lodged. Upon his return to Kumase, he was thus not only a well-versed Islamic scholar but also an experienced preacher. However, he did not deem his formation complete and decided to travel to Kaolack again to study the Qur'an under Niasse. Niasse taught him the Qur'an and *tafsīr* (elucidation of the Qur'an) and soon took him on as his favoured student and introduced him to his *sirr* (secrets). He trusted him so much that he let him teach his own children. Maikano returned to Ghana in the 1960s as a *muqaddam* and began to teach and preach on behalf of the Tijaniyya in the northern parts of the country. This resulted in the 'give and take' between him and Afa Ajura in Tamale, but he also became famous in other northern towns. Eventually, he settled down and built his mosque and *makaranā* in Prang in accordance with the 'Big Six', to whom he continually paid his respects. In these years, he gained a reputation as an ardent preacher for the cause of the Tijaniyya.

Therefore, it was Maikano whom the 'Big Six' called for when they came under attack from Abdul Samad and other Sunna in Kumase. They were already old and neither versed in nor willing to get involved in open quarrels with their opponents. Therefore, they asked Maikano Jallo to do this on their behalf. At Maikano's first sermon, which was held in 1972 at Aboabo station (the biggest lorry stop in central Kumase, where the lorries to Kumase's zongos set off), they literally backed him up by sitting behind him. He thereby became the representative of the 'Big Six' and the Tijaniyya in Kumase. In the following years, he held numerous sermons on behalf of the Tijaniyya and against the Sunna, which further contributed to his growing fame.

This is where the troubles among the Tijaniyya began. Maikano's character was somewhat difficult. He was not only a highly gifted scholar; he was also well aware of this, a little arrogant, and easily angered. He frequently transgressed the boundaries of his rank and claimed things that were not his to take but for others to offer him, continually infringing the value of *ahobreasee* (humility). In turn, some of the 'Big Six' resented his steep rise and were envious of him. In the early 1990s, Maikano considered himself an equal to the remaining 'Big Six' and demanded to be seated among them during a *mawlid* in Kumase. This was an unacceptable demand, as this not only questioned their singular status but also went against the principles of how to treat one's teachers, elders, and superiors. Their refusal resulted in the first tensions. Thereafter, Maikano began a *mawlid* of his own in Prang, which rapidly became Ghana's largest Muslim festivity, as it was particularly favoured among the young. This was because Maikano not only allowed but also encouraged them to play music and to dance, declaring this to be *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) as long as they praised Allah and the prophet in their songs. Thus, his *mawlid* became (in)famous for its dancing, which was met with suspicion by the elders of the zongos and raised the ire of other Islamic scholars who considered this haram.

The final breaking point between Maikano and the others was his marriage to a fifth wife (he married nine wives in total). When news of this became known, the people wondered about it and asked their *malams*, who were as offended as they were. Therefore, Sheikh Haruna, Maikano's patron, teacher, and one of the remaining 'Big Six', wrote him a letter, requesting the dissolution of this fifth marriage – an unacceptable union for a purportedly devout Muslim, as the Qur'an permits four wives only (4.3). Maikano grew furious about this and insulted his teacher and senior, refusing to divorce. He argued that he wished to support one of his elder wives out of respect and gratitude. According to his reasoning, this was no longer a proper marriage as she was barren, so he could marry another wife. The other *malams* did not accept this reasoning, but, by this time, Maikano was such a well-known figure that most of Ghana's 'ordinary' Tijaniyya sided with him. Up to his demise in 2005, he stood in open conflict with the successors of the 'Big Six' and other Tijaniyya *malams*, who refused to attend his funeral prayers.

A main theme in this narration is the centrality of sermons (*wa'azī*) in the rise of Maikano Jallo, whose fame was largely built on his preaching. The 'Big Six' have also preached sermons, but these were neither central nor remembered in my collected narrations. Maikano's and the Sunna's sermons significantly changed the Islamic discourse. The former Tijaniyya hegemony was turned into contested tenets, and *wa'azī* were the major means by which this was accomplished, as these are major occasions on which to propagate or justify Islamic tenets and practices. In these, the *malams* put forward, challenge, or defend their readings of the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. Furthermore, the sermons are continued and further debated by the people of the zongos, which motivates Islamic scholars to hold further *wa'azī* in order to have a say in these debates.

Hence *wa'azī* inform the Islamic imaginaries, conceptualisations, and practices of the people of the zongo and the discourses about them.

Maikano Jallo was the first Tijaniyya *malam* to gain prominence thanks to his *wa'azī*. His and the Sunna's *wa'azī* transformed the Islamic field to its core, as established practices were questioned or justified. This development did not obliterate these practices but it did put them on trial, and the debates remain unresolved today. Maikano Jallo rose to fame when the Islamic sphere in Ghana was undergoing a deep transformation – one to which he contributed with his teachings and preaching. The *malams* put forward new and divergent tenets, but the sphere in which they did so, the kind of challenges they posed to each other, and their own standing changed. When formerly hegemonic teachings were contested, the idea – and ideal – of a *malam* was questioned as well. The early 2000s thus saw considerable changes together with concomitant contestations, clashes, and debates, but also rapprochements, the formation of common interests, and unexpected alliances. As in the previous decades, the Islamic field of the zongos was constantly in motion and changing.

Conclusion

The history of Muslim presence in Asante was neither teleological nor linear, nor is its narration. The various strands and disparate narrations of this history have not only resulted in the zongos' changing Islamic field but are a constitutive part of it. Furthermore, throughout the history of Muslim presence in Asante, internal developments and changes were propelled by and interlaced with external ones. The early presence of Muslims from the north is part of the history of the *Asanteman*; the emergence of the Tijaniyya cannot be understood without taking the rise of this order in the West African subcontinent into account; the formation of zongos was driven by the traders' move into the kola-producing regions, and this was enabled by colonial policies; the emergence of the Sunna cannot be considered without taking into account the Ghanaian state and its policies. Thus, what was originally a tiny community of Wangara or Dioula under the tutelage of Asante royals, apparently adhering to the largely uncharted 'Suwarian tradition', underwent severe changes due to the influence of the arriving Hausa, not least a switch from Mande to Hausa as the main lingua franca of trade and Islamic learning. Nonetheless, the common local designation for Muslims has remained a Mande one: *nkramo* (from the Mande '*karamɔgɔ*' – Islamic scholar). Under colonial occupation, the Muslim presence in Asante changed significantly in form and size as traders moved in and founded zongos all over the region. Within these heterogeneous communities,

Islam both served as a common ground and underwent considerable changes. The short-lived predominance of the Qadiriyya, which remains largely unexplored, gave way to the emergent Tijaniyya and their rise to hegemony in the mid-twentieth century. However, the Tijaniyya did not remake Islam according to their own image; they integrated certain established practices and tenets within theirs while they entrenched these as hegemonic. This never passed unchallenged, as local reformers such as Adam Apiedu and Afa Ajura expressed a critical discourse against the Tijaniyya and their practices from early on. However, it was only with the return of Muslim students from the Arab world, shortly after the turmoil of the 1971 mass expulsions, that the Sunna were able to gain a foothold in the zongo communities and openly challenged the Tijaniyya. Throughout the history of Muslim presence in Asante, different groups and actors have been struggling for, gaining, holding, or losing religious hegemony; while some of them have left deep traces in local Islamic practices, conceptions, and imaginaries, others have left only fading memories or no apparent legacy at all. Muslim presence and Islam in the region have been constantly changing.

However, this is a history of Muslim presence in Asante, whose subjects have considered themselves Muslims – *nkramo* – all along. While there have been – and still are – different groups and actors vying for religious hegemony, and while the locally established Islamic practices, conceptions, and imaginaries have certainly changed over time, the people have continued to consider themselves ‘just Muslims’, as in today’s common self-designation. As such, they are well aware of and take part in the ongoing debates, but they strive to pragmatically navigate the contested Islamic field in their daily and not-so-daily lives rather than become exclusive adherents of one of the Islamic groups. This is not only the case for ‘ordinary believers’ but for numerous *malams* who also consider and present themselves as ‘just Muslims’. Thus, the Tijaniyya and the Sunna are prominent and influential Islamic groups in the zongos today, and the contestations between them fuel many of the ongoing debates, but by no means are they the only ones. When I carried out a census in Kokote Zongo, the question about one’s Islamic group was frequently not taken as an either/or; instead, people replied ‘just Muslim’. Furthermore, the Tijaniyya and the Sunna are not homogeneous movements but are marked by internal differences and distinctions. Hence, the history and current state of Muslim presence in Asante cannot be understood as a binary juxtaposition of the two, since many people of the zongo navigate and participate in events and institutions of both. In addition, the Tijaniyya and Sunna not only share many forums and practices but also acknowledge each other and their fellow Muslims

as *nkramo*. Accordingly, the history of Muslim presence and Islam in Asante is a history of continuity and change, of agreement and contestation, of common ground and difference. The irreducible diversity of Islam in the zongos is informed by this history while it also perpetuates it, which, in turn, informs its narrations – the people of the zongo remake their religion in open but not ungrounded debates and interactions, engaging with and remaking their Islamic tradition and history.