Competing Assertions of Muslim Masculinity in Contemporary Mali

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Abstract

This article counters the ‘female bias’ of scholarship on Islam and gender in Africa by exploring competing understandings of ideal masculinity and what it means to be a respectable Muslim in urban Mali. Special attention is paid to competing constructions of Muslim masculinity that inform the project of Islamic moral and political reform that has gained currency in southern and northern Mali in recent decades. The article scrutinizes the double idiom of reform and conservation articulated by leading spokesmen of Islamic renewal in different parts of Mali and their varying ways of incorporating transnational Islamic intellectual influences. While living conditions in the urban south and north of the country grant young men unequal chances for economic success and political influence, they all face a situation in which education generates and reproduces structural inequality, granting uneven chances for employment, social maturity, and respectability. It is because of their shared dilemmas that many young men support moral and political reform that allows them to gain respectability as a man and ‘proper’ Muslim. By considering the political aspirations, social grievances, and constructions of masculinity articulated by different categories of young men, the article demonstrates the heterogeneity and entanglements of the visions and measures promoted under the heading of political and moral Islamic renewal in Mali.

Keywords

masculinity – gender relations – Islam – Mali – Africa
Introduction

Since their military interventions in northern Mali in 2012, Muslim militant groups, which now operate in the northeastern region of Kidal and in the central Maasina region, have claimed to establish a politico-moral order modeled on the ‘Islamic state’ under the Prophet Muhammad. The measures implemented by these militants in the name of ‘the sharia’ revealed a concern with limiting women's physical mobility and economic and decision-making powers, and hence bespoke militants’ efforts to strengthen a patriarchal gender order and a particular ideal of Muslim masculinity. The sharia measures imposed by militant groups such as Ansar Dine du Nord in Kidal are the culminating point of a steadily budding idiom of Islamic renewal that has marked Malian public and domestic life in recent decades (Schulz 2016). This idiom of renewal, in its close intertwining with a discourse on a traditional ‘Islamic’ gender order that needs to be liberated from distorting ‘occidental values’, shows marked parallels to Islamic reform discourses elsewhere (e.g., Mahmood 2005; Masquelier 2009; Deeb 2006; Janson 2013).

Throughout the urban south, particularly in towns where the influence of established families of religious experts has been limited historically, Muslim organizations have capitalized on the political opening of the early 1990s to call for a reordering of public and domestic life in line with Islamic precepts (Schulz 2012a). The growing political weight of these activists shows in their capacity to mobilize opposition to legal reform, for instance the family draft law (Schulz 2003) and, more recently, in their public endorsement of politicians whose policies they approve of. A notable example is the organization Mouvement Sabati 2012, founded by Moussa Boubacar Bah during the last presidential elections to ‘mobilize voters in support of politicians ready to preserve our cultural and religious values’. While critics dismissed his initiative as an attempt on the part of a younger generation of intellectuals to ‘endear’ themselves to the incumbent President ibk, Bah has stressed his intention to ‘raise awareness’ (conscientiser) among Malian citizens, and to publicly express concern about policies that undermine gender hierarchies and cultural values in the name of an international human rights regime. In March 2015, Bah declared opposition to an affirmative action draft law intended to facilitate women’s appointments to leading political and administrative posts. Bah’s interventions have received mixed support from other Muslim activists, yet most of them side with Bah’s effort to maintain male authority and prerogatives while claiming to protect women’s dignity and traditional roles as mothers and spouses.

This article takes the growing political significance of Islam in Mali, as a blueprint for moral and political order, as a starting place to examine two sets
of questions. We first take up the preoccupation of armed Muslim groups with gender relations and ideologies to examine what constructions of masculinity and proper Muslim identity are articulated by these militants, as well as by Muslim activist groups in Mali’s urban south. Whereas the majority of publications on gender-specific dimensions of Islamic reform movements have tackled questions of gender roles and hierarchies by focusing on women and on how religious idioms affect their position and realm of maneuver (e.g., Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2006; Masquelier 2009; Schulz 2012a), we adopt a male-centered perspective on the regulation of gender relations. Our objective is to understand the gender-specific dimensions of political Islam in Mali with regard to first, the social basis of the diverse initiatives that form part of Islamic moral renewal, and second, to the political and social aspirations of these initiatives, paying particular attention to the specific agendas and gender ideology articulated by men as men.

We insist on understanding constructions of Muslim masculinity in contemporary Mali not only in relation to female identities and regulation of gender relations, but also as a reflection of intergenerational dynamics and tensions, and of the actual making of intergenerational relations (Schulz 2012a; Janson 2013). Here we take up the argument that under current neoliberal economic conditions, age and generation generate a significant fault line between men (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2001, 2006; Durham 2000; Weiss 2004, 2009; Honwana and de Boeck 2005; Masquelier 2005). We stress significant discrepancies between men and argue that their competing constructions of masculinity show importantly in their diverging understandings of what it means to be a Muslim man (see Connell 2005 [1995]; Talbot and Quayle 2010). By positing the existence of competing constructions of masculinity, we seek to complement the conventional female bias of gender studies, and also to balance the tendency in New Men’s studies to privilege men’s common dilemmas over differences between them (e.g., Seidler 2004). Discrepancies among men in Mali reveal not only differences in educational pedigree and political position, but also various adaptations of transnational masculinity discourses (see Morell 1998; Miescher 2005; Wario 2012).

Our second objective is to consider how different educational trajectories generate systematic inequalities among young men, and inform their respective masculinity constructions and political aspirations. With our focus on school education as a vector of social and political differentiation, we complement scholarship on Islamic education and schooling politics in Sahelian West Africa. Historically informed studies of educational reform show that institutions of religious learning were gradually brought under the control of the state and, in this process, underwent significant diversification (e.g., Brenner and
Sanankoua 1992; Brenner 2001; Villalon et al. 2012). This scholarship centers attention on the tensions between, on one side, a state that seeks to capture and control Islamic education and, on the other side, reform-minded Muslim intellectuals and parents who straddle the conflicting demands of religious devotion and of securing their children’s future professional success. What the literature does not address, however, are the effects of the existing, differentiated educational system on young men’s professional and political aspirations, and on their understandings of what it means to be a man. By addressing these questions, we draw attention to the key role that education, along with age and location within the Malian nation-state (understood in a territorial sense and as a continuously produced position of politico-economic marginality), plays in creating distinct life trajectories for men and in informing their perspectives on ideal masculinity and proper gender relations. We also examine to what extent gender economies in different regions of the nation-state and related constructions of masculinity intertwine and influence each other. We start our argument by sketching out historical interactions between reform-minded Muslims and the state against which contemporary constructions of masculinity and of proper Muslimhood are to be understood.

The Political Strengthening of Islam since 2012

Mali’s current political instability was prompted by the toppling of former President Amadou Toumani Touré on March 22, 2012, after an eight-month period of protracted political and military insecurity in Mali’s northern territories. Those who engineered the coup d’état, a group of young officers, were incensed about the president’s lenient treatment of transnational, partly Al Qaida-related, networks of smuggling, hostage taking, and politically and religiously motivated insurgency, as well as by the president’s refusal to lend stronger technical support and training to the Malian military in their fight against armed rebel groups. Several Muslim militant organizations in the north, the Ansar Dine du Nord, M属JAO,⁶ and M属A,⁷ quickly capitalized on the power vacuum created by President Touré’s ousting. Opposed to these groups at times was the secularist-minded militant group M属NA,⁸ which called for an independent Tuareg nation of Asawad.

In the months following the coup d’état, the different groups moved southward from their home bases in Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu, swiftly occupying the towns of Menaka, Douentza, and Sevaré near Mopti. The invasion of Mali’s northern territories by French and ECOWAS troops, sided by Malian military and with the logistical support of the UN (Initiative Minusma), put a stop to
their military expansion in January 2013. Yet although the cities of Gao and Timbuktu were ‘reconquered’, suicide attacks and other forms of political violence remain the order of the day in these towns. Growing factionalism among different militant groups and the exclusion from the Algiers peace negotiation of the group Ansar Dine du Nord, led by Iyad Ag Aghaly, a long-term figure of armed opposition to the Malian state, further minimized prospects for sustainable peace in the country’s northern territories. The region Kidal in the far north remains an area out of bounds for state security forces; it is effectively controlled by Ansar Dine du Nord. Insecurity has expanded to the central region (Maasina, north of Mopti), to border areas with a weak presence of state security forces, and also to the capital Bamako, where sites frequented by expatriates have become targets of deadly attacks.

Islamic Renewal in Mali, Past and Present

Recent efforts by armed Muslim groups in Mali’s north to build a theocratic order did not come out of the blue. They reveal a widening concern with politico-moral renewal that, capitalizing on political reforms since the early 1990s, has shaped public life throughout the country. Rearticulating aspirations that date as far back as the 1940s, various Muslim groups and leaders publicly called for a reordering of civic life and domestic relations according to Islamic precepts (Schulz 2012a). Particularly in the urban south, women have capitalized on Muslim activist structures of mobilization to assume prominent roles as speakers and supporters of the movement (Schulz 2012a). Organizations and leaders who partake in the renewal movement disagree over the extent to which ‘Islam’ should provide the basis for moral and political reform, yet they all call for a gender order that would safeguard male prerogatives and patriarchal family authority and contain women’s influence and decision-making powers. Their objectives echo those by which Muslim militants in northern and central Mali justify their implementation of sharia measures (Schulz 2016).

Still, a main difference between the political agenda of armed Muslim groups in the north and that of Muslim activists elsewhere in the country resides in how, in their effort to build a new politico-moral order, they position themselves vis-à-vis the state. Armed Muslim groups who intervene in northern and central Mali bypass state institutions and frame their opposition as an Islamic resistance to a government of nonbelievers. They take up a long-standing discourse of opposition to a nation-state governed by ‘southerners’ such as Presidents Keita (1960-1968) and Traoré (1968-1991). In contrast, most Muslim activists who intervene at the national level in Bamako and other southern
towns seek to rely on state institutions, which often puts them into competition with each other over who might legitimately represent ‘Malian Muslims’. These discrepancies in the political agenda of Muslim militants and activists arise from their differential treatment by the colonial and postcolonial state.

Since the eleventh century an Arabophone culture of Islamic religious erudition had connected towns of the Sahara and Sahel to the wider world. In contrast, further to the south Muslims remained a minority among various local religious traditions until the 1940s, when Islam started to become the dominant religion among French colonial subjects (e.g., Peterson 2011). Education became a site of struggle between reform-minded Muslim leaders and the colonial state. Since the 1940s Muslim returnees from Egypt and the hejaz sought to counter the new colonial order and to purify conventional religious practices from what they considered unlawful innovations (bidʿa). Their reforms extended Islamic education to less-privileged groups, and facilitated the integration of Western school subjects and pedagogy into conventional Muslim knowledge transmission. The long-term effects of these reforms were palpable in the mushrooming of female educational initiatives since the late 1980s, and in the efforts by Muslim intellectuals to have reformed Islamic education officially recognized. Yet by lending selective support to Muslim leaders the colonial administration also fostered disagreement among them over questions of religious observance and the contents and formats of Muslim schooling (Brenner 2001; Villalon et al. 2012). Religious leaders backed by French colonial administration were challenged by a younger generation of Muslim men who understood themselves as Ahl Sunnah (‘people of the Sunnah’) and propagated a stricter application of Islamic precepts (cf. Triaud 1986; Brenner 1993; also see Kaba 2000). Colonial policy fostered competition not only among Muslim intellectuals and leaders, but also between them and those who graduated from colonial schools. Because of the uneven integration of southern and northern populations into colonial missionary school education, the first generation of African intellectuals and administrative cadres came almost exclusively from the country’s southern triangle.

Competition between Muslim factions continued under the first two governments of independent Mali. Partly as a result of these confrontations, the political leverage of Muslim interest groups remained limited under the first president, Modibo Keita (1960–1968), who in continuity with French colonial laicité excluded Muslim schooling from the state educational sector. This offered graduates from state and religious schools very unequal chances for employment and political influence (Brenner 2001, ch.7; see Diarrah 1986; Schulz 2001, ch.1). The years of Traoré’s presidency (1968–1991) witnessed the mushrooming of a heterogeneous field of religious schools that, nominally
integrated into the educational sector in 1968 (Brenner 2001), enjoyed great popularity among parents skeptical of secular subjects and of values associated with Western schooling (see Villalon et al. 2012).

Conflicts between different Muslim interest groups intensified in the late 1970s when a younger generation of Muslim entrepreneurs received funds from transnational daʿwa efforts under the tutelage of Saudi Arabia to expand the local infrastructure of Islamic education and welfare (Brenner 1993; Otayek 1993). To unite and co-opt the quarrelling Muslim factions, President Traoré created a Muslim representational structure (AMUP1) in 1985 and granted Muslims special privileges, such as extended broadcasting times on national radio and television. The introduction of multiparty democracy and civil liberties after President Traoré’s ouster in 1991 fostered Muslim activism and public expression (Schulz 2006, 2012a). Since then further integration of reformed Islamic schools into the state educational system nominally granted graduates from both school types equal chances for employment, yet de facto a gap persists between graduates’ respective employment opportunities.

The growing political weight of Muslim activists shows in, among other things, the creation under former President Alpha Konaré in 2001 of a new Muslim representational structure, the Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali. President Konaré thereby sought to sidestep the enormous influence of AMUP1 leaders. Yet paradoxically, his politics of selective favouritism strengthened the influence of Muslims represented in the HCIM. This showed in the HCIM’s mobilization of popular opposition to a draft family law. Submitted for legislation in 2001, the draft law was substantially revised in response to the pressure mounted by the HCIM (Schulz 2003, 2012a, ch.1). It was finally signed into law in 2009, by Konaré’s successor, President Amadou Toumani Touré (2002-2012). In post-2012 coup d’état politics, key figures of the Islamic renewal movement have further expanded their influence, in spite of tensions between the HCIM and the AMUP1, and between the president of HCIM, Mahmadoun Dicko and its vice-president, Chérif Haidara, who commands his own sprawling constituency of followers, the Ansar Dine (see below). This growing influence was manifested in the founding of a Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2013.

In the country’s northern territories Islamic renewal developed through a different dynamic. Since the mid-1980s a younger generation of Muslim intellectuals entered into competition with established clans of religious specialists, notably the Kel Essuk of Timbuktu and Gao. Many of them were of inferior social origin and had been trained at institutions of religious learning in the Maghreb. They framed their sense of socioeconomic exclusion and political marginality within the Malian nation-state as an opposition to a ‘foreign’ government of ‘unbelievers’. Claims of Muslim orthopraxy and of a
Muslim-cum-Tuareg identity served these groups of society in claiming a uniform northern identity in which internal social status differences and regional variation in livelihoods mattered less than an—allegedly uniform—practice of the discursive tradition of Islam. Since then northern populations have witnessed a gradual popularizing of Islam as a community-building idiom. This idiom fueled a politicized religious identity that, since the mid-2000s, has inspired efforts to build a theocratic state by force. As we argue further below, while many Muslim activists in the urban south rhetorically distance themselves from northern Muslim militancy they have also drawn strength and inspiration from them, thus rendering obsolete neat regional demarcations. There are also significant parallels in the constructions of proper gender relations and of ideal masculinity by Muslim activists and armed militants, parallels that hint at their common dilemmas in achieving social maturity as men.

In Search of Recognition: Young Men’s Strategies of ‘Building a Future’

Daily conversations among young men in southern and northern Mali point to two related preoccupations. They spend much of their social time together debating their material and social impasse and how to escape it in order to ‘build a future’ (Bamanakan, sini nyésigi, Tamasheq awadim huskey). Also, time and again, young men stress the crucial relevance of social recognition, that is, of the need to ‘find consideration’ (Bamanakan, djati, Tamasheq, anhidj id timhar) and of ‘being respected’ (Bamanakan, bonya, Tamasheq, atwisimhar, anhidj id semhar, tumast nawadim atiwasamharen) as a man. Young men thus articulate an ideal of manhood that, in its spotlighting of respectability and social standing, reveals distinctively local understandings of futurity and future making (see Weiss 2002, 2004; Meiu 2013, ch. 1).

We take up the centrality of notions of gaining consideration, being respected, and building a future to first identify the conditions and constraints that mold young men’s possibilities of gaining respectability and recognition; and secondly, to distinguish between different categories of young men according to their respective opportunities to build a future. We start from the assumption that structural constraints and opportunities that impinge on young men inspire particular visions of masculinity, and also influence their choices in reference to Islamic values and rules in delineating what it means to be a ‘true man’ (Bamanakan, cè yerèyèrè, Tamasheq, ahalis wan tidit). Young men everywhere in Mali face a dilemma that binds them together with male youth elsewhere on the continent in a ‘counter-nation’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 24).
Limited job opportunities and related structural constraints resulting from neoliberal economic reform put them in a paradoxical situation characterized on one side by the lack of opportunities to achieve male seniority status, and on the other side by the social expectations and pressures they face (Schulz 2002, 2012b; see also Masquelier 2005; Brisset-Foucault 2011, ch. 7). However, it is also possible to discern differences between the opportunities and political positions open to young men in the urban south as opposed to those available to young men in Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu.

The goal of reaching social maturity creates distinct challenges and dilemmas for young men and young women (Schulz 2002, 2012b). Young women seek full seniority status by proving their capacity to conceive children, if unavoidably out of wedlock. For young men, seniority status depends on the ability to provide for wife, children, and senior family members, yet see few possibilities to actually do so. The lack of income opportunities and employment in the formal economy puts serious constraints on their chances to get married and build an independent homestead, and hence reach a position of relative economic and social autonomy and decision-making power (see Honwana and de Boeck 2005; Masquelier 2005). This seriously limits their chances of gaining a reputation (literally ‘name’, Bamanakan, tògò; Tamasseq, tila m isim, tila in mosli) and of being respected by attracting followers and friends and conceiving children who would contribute to one’s affluence.

Thus, similar to other countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (see Mbembe 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001), young men constitute a generation in-the-waiting in a double sense. Whether they received a school or high-school diploma without much guarantee of further employment because of their lack of connections, or whether they face unemployment because they never finished school, young men wait to gain seniority status, and for the state to generate the institutional conditions that would enable them to do so.

This impasse is further exacerbated by senior men’s disapproving remarks about their ‘idleness’ and unwillingness to find an income on behalf of the family, thus presenting young men’s helplessness in the face of serious structural constraints as a matter of personal choice and moral deficiency (see Masquelier 2005). The derogatory term kamalenba (from kamalen, ‘young man’, ba ‘big’), which conjures images of an untamed youth that engages in illicit sexual liaisons, captures seniors’ tendency to lay the fault for the crisis of social reproduction at the feet of a youth gone astray (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Ngwane 2001; Weiss 2004).

The young men’s impasse is compounded by shifts in the material and moral economy of gender relations that, as a result of structural adjustment and school education, show in married women’s greater financial responsibilities.
and spaces for maneuver. These developments are a mixed blessing since women find themselves in the paradoxical situation of being obliged to at once make decisions on their own and maintain the appearance of spousal submissiveness vis-à-vis husband and in-laws. For their part, young men know that they can achieve senior status only through marriage; they are aware of their dependency on their future wives’ financial contributions to the family income yet they dread the struggles that result from it. Similar to senior men, young men respond to this situation by denouncing even faint signs of female economic or intellectual autonomy as indications of their moral indecency and sexual looseness (Schulz 2012a, ch.3).

In spite of the shared structural and social constraints faced by all young men, significant discrepancies exist between them with regard to their opportunities to build a future under adverse conditions. In particular, access to and type of education create different career options for them, and transpire in young men’s fundamentally distinct sociopolitical positioning. These structural inequalities are formative for three different categories of young men in Mali’s urban south.

Young men with a school or university degree have received the most scholarly attention because of their decisive role in prompting the toppling of President Traoré’s single-party rule (e.g. Siméant 2014).12 Faced with scarce employment opportunities, educated young men see few options to build a future. Some graduates from universities and professional schools seek to endear themselves to those who made it into the inner circles of power, or else capitalize on the new employment opportunities created by political decentralization since the mid-1990s (Schulz forthcoming). Others seek to find employment in the NGO and development sector. However, there are many others who have been unable to secure a respectable future and whose disillusionment with their economic and political marginality is a breeding ground for social and political unrest (Schulz 2002). Some of these men, for want of lucrative income opportunities in the state or private sector, join networks of religious patronage that, as the institutional foundation of Islamic renewal, have been thriving in urban Mali since the 1980s. There they join forces with what constitutes a second category of young men, those with little education or who graduated from Islamic schools.

The educational background of the latter forecloses their employment in the state administration and the corporate business sector. Left out from the new vectors to wealth and power established under multiparty democracy, they feel that the Islamic renewal movement has greater credibility because it offers them, through religio-economic networks, opportunities to ‘rely on themselves’ (k’iyèrè jò) and gain respectability and education. This is illustrated
by the group Ansar Dine, founded and led by the charismatic Muslim preacher Chérif Haidara (Schulz 2006, 2012a, ch. 6 and 7, 2015). Ansar Dine offers religious schooling; mobilizes followers outside of state institutions; and simultaneously facilitates interactions, even alliances, with state officials and institutions.

A third category of young men are those who graduated from an institution of religious learning prior to their university degree or who stress their identity as ‘Muslim students’ to distinguish themselves from other students and to highlight their intention to align public order and personal life with Islamic regulations. ‘Muslim’ students’ formal degree puts them on equal par with other students, yet they have de facto fewer chances for employment in the formal sector where fluency in French is a basic requirement. Still, compared to the second category of lowly educated young men, ‘Muslim’ students are in a privileged position.

Divisions between regular and ‘Muslim’ university graduates can be traced at least to the early 1990s, when the majority of pupils and high-school students joined the student organization AEEM (Association des Élèves et Étudiants du Mali) with its close ties to members of the democracy movement that ousted President Traoré from political office. The numerically and politically weaker counterpart of this organization, the Muslim students’ association UJUMA (Union des Jeunes Musulmans du Mali), was less successful in establishing ties to the new political elite. However, today, twenty years later, with the strengthening of Muslim activist groups after the 2012 coup d’état and the formal political status granted to them through the HCIM, Muslims who straddle the paradigms of Western and reformed Islamic education view new opportunities to at once make a living and gain political influence. In contrast to the older generation of Muslim activists represented largely by the AMUPI (and also in contrast to Muslim militants in the north), ‘Muslim’ university graduates seek influence through political office and the institutions and procedures of the state, for instance by effecting (or blocking, see below) legislative reform.

A good illustration of the division between ‘Muslim’ students and other students, but also of the intergenerational and education-related fissures that structure the field of Muslim activism, is the group Mouvement Sabati and its president, Moussa Boubacar Bah. As a former activist of the Muslim student association UJUMA, Bah represents the above-mentioned bifurcation of career options taken by university graduates. In contrast to members of the students association UEEMA who meanwhile entered party politics, M. Boubacar Bah does not occupy a formal political position. Yet his university (law) degree earned him a post in an international NGO and facilitated ties to politicians. His position thus contrasts to, on one side, that occupied by older Muslim
leaders (represented by the amupi), and, on the other side, to the one taken by lowly educated members of religious patronage networks.

At work here are different trajectories of ‘building a future’ that contrast with those of young men in the urban north and that, as we argue further below, inform distinct understandings of what it means to be a real man and a proper Muslim.

‘Building a Future’ under Adverse Conditions: Young Men in Kidal

Many young men in and around the northern towns of Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal, and Menaka share the fate of male youth outlined above for the urban south. While they differ from each other with regard to their prospects for political influence and material well-being (see below), they all perceive their life situation as a situation of ‘waiting’. They wait for opportunities to become economically independent from their fathers, set up a homestead on their own, and display signs of social achievement and wealth that will attract followers and friends. Marriage, the crucial step for adult status, requires enormous amounts of money for the bridewealth, presents for the future in-laws, and consumer goods to convince the in-laws of a man’s financial autonomy. With the exception of a few men whose fathers can afford these matrimony-related costs, it is especially the prohibitive rates of bridewealth payments that foreclose young men’s prospects for social adulthood. For their part, young women, well aware of young men’s modest chances to gain regular employment, are hesitant to enter into marriage without the prospect of a secure future.

Similar to urban youth in the south, unemployed young men frame their dilemma as having been ‘left out’, as a youth and vis-à-vis an older generation of men. Yet their social exclusion is further compounded by mechanisms that are a direct function of their unequal access to political and economic resources of the central state. Their comments express anger about a state that, for decades, has responded to the claim by northern populations of their share of national wealth by treating them with disdain, bloody repression, and persecution. Much of young men’s frustration also relates to sociopolitical exclusions within the north. Especially young men with low educational background or from the lower strata of society are bitter that they did not reap the benefits of the infrastructural and financial investments brought to the region after the late 1990s, and express their resentment of local political elites.

The distinct sociopolitical constellations among ethnic and social status groups in the areas of Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal, and Menaka explain why
populations there responded so differently to the theocratic order of 2012 (Olivier de Sardan 2012). As we argue, variations in local responses also reflected highly unequal opportunities open to different categories of young men. In other words, differences in constructions of proper Muslimhood and masculinity need to be understood in the light of these discrepancies among young men. We outline these discrepancies by taking as an example young men in Kidal, which to date forms the principal stronghold of Muslim militancy.

Similar to southern Mali, the type and extent of schooling generate systematic inequalities among men with regard to their chances for a steady income, economic independence, and full seniority status. Specific to the situation in the north is that the options available to young men are constrained to a greater extent by these individuals’ social origins. In this situation, the import of Western schooling as a vector toward politico-economic power is all the greater because it allows one to counter, though not transcend, established sociopolitical hierarchies. Western schooling and professional training constitute the silver bullet to achieving material security, social status, and political influence. Additionally, access to transnational Muslim intellectual influences and networks and commercial opportunities, which have gained in strength over the past 20 years, constitute parallel vectors of success. Education, social status distinction, and transnational connections thus intertwine as mechanisms of social differentiation that significantly affect young men’s options to build what they refer to as a ‘tranquil future’. To highlight the broader political implications of these differentiation processes, we now discuss how they are embedded in long-standing reconfigurations of regional political fields.

The majority of the population of Kidal belong to the Kel Adagh, a Tuareg subgroup or ‘confederation’ organized around first, the principle of racialized social status hierarchy, and second, the basic political and social unit, the clan or tewsit (sing.; pl. tewsiten). Recurrent bouts of state repression of Tuareg revolts and forced exile in the 1960s and 1990s, the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, and the forceful sedentarization of ‘white’ Kel Adagh masters undermined the previously hegemonic position of this social status group. Democratization and decentralization reforms, the invigoration of translocal ties of commerce, and drug dealing since the 1990s reinforced these reconfigurations of the political field (Lecocq et al. 2013; Harmon 2014).

Western school education affords socially inferior status groups greater chances for employment in political and administrative institutions that multiplied with administrative decentralization, and also in a sprawling NGO and development sector. There are Kel Adagh educated in Western schools, who in their function as NGO coordinators, state officials, or teachers have privileged
access to state resources and international donor agencies. Since the ending of the civil war of the early 1990s, they have acted as powerful brokers between these donors, the Malian government, and the leaders of their clans. They are accordingly called ‘the new chiefs’ or the Kel Bazin, ‘people who wear bazin’, the pricey fabric of high-prestige clothes (see Schulz 2007), or else Kel Bamako, ‘people in contact with [people from] Bamako’. The name Kel Bazin in particular implies that education has paved the way for regular employment and economic and political success. Considerable competition exists between the ‘new chiefs’ whose influence is rooted in formal political office and employment, and those who owe their power to illegal trans-border smuggling and other activities in the shadowy margins of the state, yet also benefit from informal ties to politicians and state officials and to a transnational network of drug dealing, ransoming, and Muslim militancy invigorated by al-Qaida-related structures since the early 2000s.

Different categories of young men can be identified according to their distinctive insertion into these shifting politico-economic fields. The first category of young men are those whose Western school education grants them the formal credentials for employment in the state administration and NGO job sector, and renders relative the importance of their social origins. A second category comprises men from the rural hinterlands of Kidal who attended institutions of Islamic education or who lack formal school education altogether. While some of them struggle to make a living from menial labor, others, nicknamed Les Fraudeurs (‘smugglers’) or mossul (the Arabic equivalent to the Tamasheq term for ‘chef’, amenolokal), make cross-border trade and smuggling their source of income, or resort to violent means to counter the public order imposed by state security forces (see Scheele 2012).

A third category of male youth, labeled ishumar (from the French chômeur, ‘unemployed’), is comprised of young men who, after their parents’ forced exile in the 1980s and 1990s, grew up in Libya or Algeria. While some ishumar hold degrees from institutions of higher Islamic learning, others, employed in Gaddafi’s army, returned to Mali only after his demise in 2011. These exiles enjoyed a position of relative social recognition and material well-being while living abroad, yet now face narrow chances for ‘becoming someone’ (dekelle awadim) through formal employment. The ishumars’ frustration about having ‘no future’ (Tamasheq, asibuyin n iba n tidjawt n alikaman) is certainly one reason why they, along with the fraudeurs and mossul, have joined the ranks of the Muslim militant group Ansar Dine du Nord, whose leaders mainly come from dominant Kel Adagh families. In contrast, most young men with a Western school education opposed the Islamist project in 2012 and left Kidal for Algeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso.
The real-time relevance of our categorical distinction shows in young men’s choice of friends and in their daily conversations at their ‘grin’ (see Schulz 2002), where they meet to drink tea, listen to local radio, and discuss their personal life and events in town. Here they cultivate social ties that allow them to access and circulate information about the few available jobs in the state administration and the NGO sector (see also Masquelier 2013), or about possibilities to make a fast buck in the transborder smuggling economy. Their daily socializing also opens a space in which to express resentment about other young men’s greater economic chances and moral disposition, thus engaging in a mutual stereotyping discourse that expresses particular ideals of masculinity (see below).

Yet contrary to the rhetoric of difference, Western-educated men share many concerns with uneducated or religiously trained men, particularly with regard to the shifting moral and material economy of gender relations that, over the past decades, has granted married women greater responsibility yet also spaces for maneuvering. Young men from both camps strive to maintain the conventional gender order based on patriarchal family authority and men’s role as breadwinners. They feel highly ambivalent toward girls’ advanced education, fearing that this will detract from their ultimate role as mothers and wives. They frequently assert that regardless of a woman’s educational degree, a woman should respect and submit to her husband’s and in-laws directives.

Therefore, as we argue below, in spite of appearances, particularly their rhetoric of opposing the conservative agenda of Muslim militants, Western-educated men share much of what Muslim militants declare as an alignment of the traditional gender order with Islamic prescripts.

In Search of Respectability: Competing Constructions of Muslim Masculinity

Earlier in the article we mentioned that the aspiration to win consideration forms a master trope by which different categories of young men reflect on and structure their endeavor to achieve seniority status. In what constructions of masculinity do young men’s efforts to be respected manifest themselves? What role do assertions of proper Muslimhood play in their masculinity constructions? What, in their eyes, does it mean to be a proper Muslim man?

Following Wario’s exploration of masculinity constructions at the interface of local and transnational Islamic reformist thought we examine what local adaptations of transnational Islamic intellectual influences and idioms on proper female and male conduct are currently articulated in northern and
southern Mali. These adaptations show first, in conflicting understandings of proper gender relations and of how to control women; and second, in othering discourses on proper Muslimhood by which different categories of young men set themselves apart from each other. The resulting constructions of masculinity selectively integrate transnational influences, and also entail a commentary on transnational consumer goods and on whether and in what forms these goods should be adopted into local religious and everyday life (see Weiss 2009).

In the case of Kidal, we take the differential responses by young men to the sharia regulations as a starting place to explore how they reassess masculinity ideals and notions of proper Muslimhood at the interface of local conventions and transnational intellectual influences and networks of religious activism.

**Asserting Muslim Masculinity in Kidal**

At first glance, the sharia measures imposed by militant Muslim groups reveal a preoccupation with regulating gender relations and hence with an ideal of Muslim masculinity defined as a matter of controlling women. For instance, among the regulations set by Ansar Dine du Nord in Kidal was a ‘proper’ Islamic dress code for men and women, the spatial separation of men and women in domestic and public settings, and a ban on mixing of unrelated men and women. All these measures appeared to strengthen a gender order that, following the social and political upheavals of the last decades, had lost its validity. The vision of a society in moral disarray transpired in the motto ‘Let’s clean up our house’ (*Ani chichdidj ghornagh*), which referred to the house as the symbol of domestic order. Thus, Ansar Dine combined an idiom of religious reform with a stress on patriarchal authority, defining a man’s proper Muslim identity by his ability to control women in public and domestic settings. The same understanding of Muslim masculinity showed in the restrictive ‘proper’ Islamic dress codes for both sexes, prescribing full body coverage for women outside the courtyard and their seclusion within the domestic sphere, and in the heavy punishments inflicted for transgressions of the ban on gender mixing.²⁷

However, while these regulations reflect men’s apprehensions about a gender order out of control, other measures highlighted young men’s efforts to secure a place in adult male society by affecting relations among men. The Muslim masculinity ideal supported by these young men entailed as much a discourse about gender antagonism as it addressed inner- and intergenerational tensions among men (see Masquelier 2005; Wario 2012). Thus, the sharia
measures owe much of their popularity among uneducated youth to the fact that they address their diverse resentments and fears of failure: vis-à-vis men with greater employment chances and seniors, vis-à-vis rebellious women, and vis-à-vis the central state and its politics of exclusion.

For instance, a particularly popular sharia measure was the capping of the bride price at the symbolic sum of 15,000 to 20,000 FCFA (between 30 and 40 US$), which curtailed parents’ ability to refuse marriage offers for their daughters. The popularity of the measure is reflected in the skyrocketing number of so-called ‘jihadi marriages’ by Tuareg exiles in Niger and Burkina Faso who returned to Mali to procure themselves a wife. Malick Ag Mossa, a man of about thirty years, succinctly summarized how the ‘jihadi marriage’ measure affected relations between juniors and elders.28

Before, the girls could be divided into two categories. There were the really beautiful ones, who were out of bounds for the majority. . . . These were girls whom only the smugglers and the new NGO chiefs could afford. Imagine! In exchange for these girls, one needs to give a villa, a car, and four to seven millions for the bride price. And later, after marriage, you needed even more money to secure her. The second category was girls for everyone. These girls could be married . . . by whoever had a minimum to live on. . . . These girls were not extraordinary at all. With the Islamists, the distinction between the two categories of girls faltered. Under the sharia rule, one girl equalled the other because the bride price was now capped at 20,000 FCFA, without any chance for the girl and her parents to decline a request.

MALICK AG MOSSA

Malick’s statement reveals an honor discourse centered on young men’s aspirations to blend into the gerontocratic order, and to gain recognition among peers and superior standing over financially and politically less fortunate men.

Similar views on Muslim masculinity were expressed by young men who justified their endorsement of measures that leveled male status hierarchies. Prominent examples are the ban on heavy spending during naming and wedding ceremonies and the obligatory zakat payment, which allowed the traf-fiqueurs to distribute the spoils of their illicit activities (see Roitman 2004, ch.4). Both measures effectively addressed men’s search for respect in a society riven by inequalities based on status difference, economic standing, age, and economic and political marginalization.29 The masculinity discourse through which young men justified their support of both measures highlighted religious
virtue, proper practice, and eschatological concerns. As Mohamed Irgimit, a man of about 24 years from Kidal, put it,

Under the jihadis, naming ceremonies were moved to the mosques. That was the end of costly gatherings. . . . [People felt relieved] because they no longer spent money on food, sheep, or goats to avoid other people's backstairs gossip. [Before, if you could not afford a costly ceremony] . . . they would deride you. . . until the newborn child had grown up and heard them say such things. The same happened to people who were unable to feed people during weddings. From now on, you could be a respected family father and a good, observant Muslim.

MOHAMED IRGIMIT

Earlier in the article we suggested that because Western-educated men and their political opponents face similar dilemmas with regard to a shifting gender order, their masculinity ideal does not differ substantially from that of Muslim militants when it comes to women's decision-making power and role within the family. Still, differences exist with regard to the relative significance each group of young men attributes to Islam as a set of authoritative rules about everyday conduct, and as a source of moral agency.

Young men express their opposing views on ideal Muslim manhood by commenting on each other's dress. That is, supporters of Ansar Dine as well as young men who opposed the new theocratic order articulated an othering discourse that identified sartorial practices as indicators of male honor, religious propriety, and moral rectitude. They expressed their views on male Muslimhood by defining it in terms of proper male-female interaction, ritual conduct, and one's attachment to ethnic tradition.

The male apparel prescribed by Muslim militants consists of pants covering the legs halfway down the shinbone and an ankle-length, loosely cut jallabia. This low-priced dress was to replace the jeans and-T-shirts that are popular among Western educated young men and mark material success and a cosmopolitan orientation. Called by its critics 'the dress of people with short trousers' (issulsa ta Kel tekarbayt) or simply 'jihadi dress', it blurs socioeconomic differences among men, between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' of Kidal's male population, and thus levels relations between men of different ages, educational background, and chances to 'build a future'.

The nicknames by which supporters of Ansar Dine and the Western-educated derogatorily commented on each other's appearance illuminate their reasoning. Western-educated intellectuals call their opponents 'people with shorts/short pants' (Kel Culotte) or 'people with beards' (issulsa ta Kel...
Supporters of Ansar Dine, on the other hand, call their adversaries *Kel Bazin*, referring to the costly, high-prestige outfit worn by government and NGO employees on festive occasions. Ansar Dine supporters also denounce their opponents’ preference for jeans and shirts as a sign of aping a consumer culture that, representative of ‘the Occident’ or of wealthy people in Bamako, broke with local behavioral standards.

Patently, supporters and opponents of the theocratic order attack one other by questioning each other’s moral disposition, honor, and dignity. Allegations about ‘other’ men’s undignified dress are infused with an emasculating discourse on their purported loss in virility and intellectual rigor. The nickname *Kel Culotte* evokes the image of a man with, literally, his pants down. Alluding to the danger of bodily exposure, the term posits nakedness as the ultimate sign of loss of male honor. Other labels, such as those referring to the beard trimming stipulated by Muslim militants, insinuate that its ‘unkempt’ form signals a man’s backward intellectual orientation. Likewise, *Kel Bazin* reprimands Western-educated intellectuals for their self-indulgence and lack of Islamic erudition.

Finally, young men’s running commentary on dress reveals a tendency to claim their own attachment to local culture and ethnic tradition by expressing critical distance to items considered alien to local understandings of decency. Men who adopt the jihadi dress argue that this dress signals a return to ‘authentic’ (*alassal*, literally ‘original’, ‘customary’) Tuareg dress, an assertion that merges Muslim and Tuareg ethnic identity. Western-educated men, for their part, derogatorily refer to the *jallabia* imposed by Ansar Dine as ‘the *jallabia* of the Arabs’, thus downplaying that this dress has long-standing local roots in contrast to the imported jeans and T-Shirts. Yet Muslim militants’ portrayal of *jallabia* as ‘authentic’ Muslim Tuareg attire is also reductive. It omits the fact that the *jallabia* they promote is cheaper and shorter than its historical predecessor, which they justify by its conformity with the *sunna* and its greater practicality for the ritual ablutions. Also, whereas the *jallabia* worn by Kel Adagh youth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was made of locally produced blue fabric, the new *jallabia* promoted by Muslim militants is imported from Arab countries or styled after the everyday male apparel of the Maghreb. Thus while Muslim militants frame the new *jallabia* as a symbol of a genuinely local Tuareg Muslim identity, the dress indexes an understanding of Muslim masculinity that is informed by a transnational repertoire of proper religious practice and identity.

Western-educated men refer to their festive apparel, loosely cut garments made of *bazin*, as claiming a dignified identity as Tuareg and proper Muslims. What this depiction leaves out is that this outfit is affordable only to men from a
privileged background, those with a higher educational degree, and those who owe their economic success to their—formal or clandestine—connections to state officials. In response to Muslim militants’ assertion of religious and moral exclusivity, Western-educated men argue that their school education is the condition, not the negation, of an identity as proper Muslims. As they imply, Western schooling granted them the right to full seniority status because it fostered a cosmopolitan orientation and a self-reflexivity that made them at once good, observing Muslims and citizens of a secular, modern state, and, for the few lucky ones, paved the way to formal employment. Thus while Muslim militants define male honor and decency in religious and ethnic terms, Western-educated men make Western education the basis for a code of honor that reflects their attitude as modern, open-minded Muslims and Tuaregs. Paradoxically, all these claims reveal the extent to which young men’s assertions of a locally rooted Muslim identity are enabled by transnational influences and connections.

Claiming ‘Consideration’ in a Field of Competing Educational Credentials

Masculinity constructions in Bamako and other southern towns differ from those articulated in Kidal insofar as they reveal the greater availability and variety of options to gain social maturity and political influence. Here again young men’s diverse masculinity constructions show first, in arguments about the need to regulate women’s behavior, and second, in efforts to present oneself as morally superior and intellectually more enlightened than other men. Notably, in spite of Muslim activists’ shared rhetoric of moral renewal, significant differences exist among them with regard to how they conceive of the relevance of Islamic prescripts for individual conduct and public order. These differences reflect divergent educational trajectories and different adaptations of transnational Islamic intellectual trends and of the politico-moral project of northern Muslim militant groups.

Western-educated young men consider themselves political opponents of Muslim activists whose efforts to reform public order and domestic life they deride as a backlash to modern society. Here stereotyping plays an important role in defining one’s position. Secularist-minded university students disparage members of the Muslim student organization as kogélentigîw (literally ‘people who turn all matters into a difficult affair’, ‘people who consider all matters difficult and serious’) and thereby insinuate their opponents’ inflexibility of
mind, strictness, moral righteousness, and lack of humor. They present themselves as men of the world and proponents of a liberal social order and personal autonomy. For their part, Muslim students refer to secular-minded youth as ‘those who refuse to see the right path’ (babangacèw, mògòmuritilew), similarly claiming the right view on questions of political modernity and moral agency. In this fashion both groups of young men relegate each other to opposed moral and intellectual universes.

Yet on closer inspection, the actual positions formulated by Western-educated, secular-minded critics of young Muslim activists reveal significant commonalities in their responses to the new spaces for action and decision making available to women as a consequence of their greater financial responsibilities and educational reform. Insofar as they define ideal masculinity in relation to women, secularist-minded young men differ in degree rather than in substance from that of their Muslim opponents. For young men from both camps, being a proper man means having unlimited control over women and juniors. Although many Western-educated young men endorse female education and feel that women should contribute to the family income, they are adamant about a woman’s continued submission to her husband’s directives. In this respect secular-minded young men tend to agree with their Muslim opponents even if they conceive of themselves as more open-minded than the latter, whose ‘backward’ attitude they decry.

The principal difference between the gender ideology articulated by young supporters of Islamic renewal on one side and by their secularist-minded opponents on the other resides in how they justify their convictions. Whereas Muslim activists ground their masculinity ideal in what they describe as the ‘original’ teachings of Islam, their secularist-minded critics consider their efforts as working toward a modern social order that respects ‘age-old cultural traditions’. Men from both camps rhetorically distance themselves from one another through a stereotyping discourse that, similar to young men’s labeling practices in Kidal, targets other men’s ritual and sartorial practices as indications of moral disposition and religiosity.

So far we have discussed differences between the masculinity constructions of secularist-minded young men and those who call for a reform of public and domestic order in accordance with Islamic prescripts. Yet as the second introductory vignette illustrated, an important fault line also runs through the field of contemporary Islamic renewal, one that requires scrutiny for a better understanding of the instable, ambiguous role of Islam in present-day Malian politics. Examining the conflicted relations among Muslim activists also warrants insight into competing adoptions of a transnational idiom of Islamic renewal.
in local fields of religious practice and authority, and into the role of Western schooling in both fostering and transcending these discrepant visions.

On one side of the fault line are male youth with little or purely religious education who, in want of a steady income, enter religious patronage networks such as Ansar Dine. On the other side are Muslim intellectuals who capitalize on their Western educational credentials to access state institutions and officials in their pursuit of Islamic reform. The two groups of Muslim activists differ less in their understandings of male respectability than in their visions of how to realize it in contemporary society. The differences between their diverse articulations of a transnational Islamic idiom and of the understandings of male Muslim identity that accompany them have become more prominent in the last four years as a result of the growing weight of Muslim militancy in Mali's northern and central regions.

Muslim activists with little or purely religious education maintain that patriarchal authority over women can be best ensured through corporeal punishment and by marrying off girls early rather than schooling them. The ways in which they justify the virtues of female docility and male control illustrate that, similarly to what has been observed in other Muslim and Christian settings, their views are primarily informed by conventional rather than religiously endorsed gender norms (see Carton and Morrell 2012; Wario 2012). These Muslim activists frequently refer to a transnational community of reform-minded Muslims, yet their actual appropriations of Salafi-Sunni inspired doctrine and regulations of gender relations is very selective. They mainly stress proper female conduct in ritual and mundane settings. Their dogged insistence on 'Islamic traditions' is motivated by their realization that the conventional model of manhood, defined through sexual procreation, uncontested biological fatherhood, patriarchal family authority, and full material responsibility, can no longer be realized (Schulz 2012a, ch.2). This view of manhood, one that merges conventional gender norms with Islamic rules (silameya saria), is also supported by senior members of the AMUPI, the Muslim organization that dominated the field of Muslim activism until it was sidelined by the Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali. 33

A more-rigorous adoption of a transnational Islamic reform discourse is promulgated by Muslim activists with a Western education degree such as Moussa Boubacar Bah, the president of Mouvement Sabati,34 and by some former members of the AMUPI steering committee such as Mahamadoun Dicko who, since the creation of the Haut Conseil Islamique in 2001, has emerged as its most influential spokesmen. As mentioned in the introduction, these activists vocally reject political and legislative measures aiming at improving women's decision-making powers both in the family and the political domain. Since
President Konaré’s government initiated the reform of the Personal Status Law (*Code de Mariage et de Famille*) in 1999, they have framed their opposition to legal and political change as a matter of protecting women’s dignity and of ‘rectifying’ a political order that, as a legacy of French *laïcité*, undermines age-old religious and cultural values.

The eager appropriation of a Sunni-Salafi inspired reform idiom by Western-educated Muslim activists such as the president of *Mouvement Sabati* shows in their call for a return to a more-rigorous gender order. Yet contrary to their appeal to universal standards of Muslim propriety, they propose peculiarly local solutions to people’s concerns about the restructuring of urban economies (Schulz 2008, 2012, ch.4). Their local version of Islamic reform rests on a gender ideology that ‘wavers between’ (Wario 2012) on one side a patriarchal preoccupation with controlling women, their appearance, movement, and demeanor, and on the other side a stress on women’s key role in spearheading moral renewal. They demand women’s compliance with a strict dress and behavioral code modeled on their role as mothers and docile spouses, a role that safeguards male patriarchal prerogatives, yet they simultaneously insist on women’s advanced education to prepare them for their role as guardians of tradition and morality and for their greater financial responsibilities.

The implicit construction of the ideal Muslim man is evident: his openness to the world and enlightened attitude show in his endorsement of women’s education and work outside the family, yet he simultaneously remains firmly rooted in Malian traditions and maintains exclusive control over domestic and public life. With their selective endorsement of certain universalizing principles of gender equity, Western-educated Muslim activists articulate a masculinity ideal that differs from the one championed by Muslim activists of the older generation (represented in Amupi), and by young men without a Western education degree who tend to favor a less-restrictive behavioral and sartorial code for women yet resist the idea of female schooling and higher education.

Since 2012 Muslim activists represented by the *Haut Conseil Islamique* have benefitted from the political strength of Muslim militant groups in northern and central Mali. An emergent Islamic consensus (see Brown 2011) has been pulling supporters of conservative masculinity ideals into one shared sphere of activism that renders obsolete any strict regional distinction. Irrespective of their location, masculinity constructions by different groups of Muslims need to be understood in their mutual influence and their borrowing from transnational reformist thought. Muslim armed groups may have limited sway over the northern and central regions, yet the repercussions of the gender order they imposed have been momentous. They have emboldened activists who
call for an Islamic politico-moral order in the national public, and who have been granted greater political representation by Keita’s government that, destabilized by allegations of corruption and Muslim militant attacks, is eager to avoid further polarization.

Competing over Chances to ‘Build a Future’

We have argued that disagreements among Muslim activists who intervene in the national public over how to achieve male respectability under current conditions of adversity reveal significant rifts within the landscape of Muslim activism. As a function of the systematic inequalities that exist among male supporters of Islamic renewal with regard to their chances for Western education, regular employment, and appointment to governmental and administrative posts, young Muslim activists position themselves in diverging ways vis-à-vis institutions and representatives of the state and an older generation of religious leaders and specialists. These structural inequalities and men’s different educational credentials and competing claims to religious and politico-moral authority show in the high level of disagreement and distrust that characterizes relations between different groups of Muslim activists and that fuels mutual allegations and stereotypes.

A good illustration of this dynamic of disagreement and distrust is the controversial reception of the Mouvement Sabati that, as mentioned earlier, made national headlines in 2014 and 2015 for its blunt rejection of the affirmative action plan. The apprehensions voiced by its president, M. Boubacar Bah, and his attempts to reassert a patriarchal gender order resonates with concerns articulated widely within the Islamic renewal movement. Western-educated Muslim intellectuals seek to stem the tide of political and social reform that, subsidized by international donor money (Schulz 2003), facilitated the rise of educated women to high-ranking governmental positions. For their part, less-educated male Muslim activists feel apprehensive about the shifts in domestic economies and power relations (Schulz 2012a, ch.3) that have endowed women with little or no education with greater economic responsibility yet also decision-making powers.

However, although there is a clear fit between the concerns addressed by the Mouvement Sabati 2012 and those of other supporters and organizations of Islamic moral renewal, the Mouvement has been very controversially received among them. In private conversations in 2013 and 2015, several leading members of AMUPI portrayed Bah as an overly ambitious ‘young upstart’. As they saw it, Bah’s endorsement of presidential candidate Ibrahim Boubacar
Keita was primarily meant as an attempt to obligate him to pave Bah’s way to a political career. Bah did not entirely dispel these allegations. In a personal conversation in July 2015, he maintained that his group’s principal rationale was to ‘build a lobby’ for politicians who ‘agreed on maintaining fundamental traditional values of Malian society encapsulated within Islam’. He also dismissed the opposition of AMUPI members to his rejection of the affirmative action plan as a sign of their anti-intellectualism and lack of political vision.

This statement as well as Bah’s public assertion of the role of ‘patriotic citizens’ for members of Mouvement Sabati reveal an effort to create distance from, and if possible bypass, an older generation of Muslim opinion leaders who, until the creation of the HCIM, had formed the only Muslim representational structure and in this function enjoyed privileged access to the state. This suggests that the reasons for the controversial reception of Mouvement Sabati among Muslim activists reside less in their divergent views on Muslim masculinity and more in the different constituencies represented by Muslim activist organizations. The mutual allegations that inform relations between the AMUPI on one side and the Movement Sabati and HCIM on the other hint at differences in social composition, educational background, age, and authority sources among Muslim activists, differences that render the field of Islamic renewal in the urban south as complex and unclear as in the northern and central regions. Yet in spite of this diversity of positions and credentials, there is a clear tendency among Muslim activists and armed Muslim militants to bundle their efforts and agree, at least at the rhetorical level, on the reassertion of male respectability and authority by restricting women’s space for maneuvering.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was twofold. We sought to shed light on the heterogeneous social support basis of the movement of Islamic moral and political reform that has gained currency in Mali in recent decades and that culminated in recent efforts to implement the sharia in northern and central Mali. Second, we argued that attention to the masculinity constructions that inform Islamic renewal in Mali warrants nuanced understanding of the political weight that Islam has gained in Mali in recent decades. To this end, we studied the intertwining of an idiom of Islamic moral renewal with the political aspirations, social grievances, and constructions of masculinity put forward by different categories of men. We particularly considered the diverse understandings of male responsibilities and prerogatives over women and of how Islamic precepts should inform female conduct. Mutual stereotyping discourses by
different groups of men illustrate their diverse self-understandings as Muslim men. The competing masculinity ideals unfold at the interface of conventional gender ideologies and transnational Islamic reformist thought. An important insight generated from this perspective is the heterogeneity of visions and measures promoted under the heading of Islamic renewal in Mali.

By positing the existence of competing constructions of masculinity and of what it means to be a respectable Muslim, we complemented the conventional female bias of gender studies, and simultaneously countered a tendency in New Men’s studies to privilege men’s common dilemmas over differences between them (e.g., Seidler 2004). Whereas several authors have identified age and generation as constitutive of social divisions, our intention was to point to education as another motor of social differentiation. In Mali, different educational trajectories generate fundamentally different opportunities for men to build a future in both a moral and material sense. By stressing the importance of education as a mechanism of creating and reinforcing difference between different categories of men, we departed from the ways education has been often treated in the literature on Islam in West Africa. The educational strategies and career trajectories outlined in this article are gender specific insofar as they are mainly available to young men. Moreover, rather than interpreting educational trajectories simply in terms of a dichotomy between religious as opposed to Western-school education (e.g., Brenner 2001; Villalon et al. 2012), our analysis of the social support basis of sharia rule in northern Mali and also of competition between different groups of politically minded Muslim activists in southern Mali demonstrated that age and access to political support structures play an important role in creating inequalities among men with similar educational backgrounds. Nevertheless, in spite of significant differences, these men’s call for Islamic renewal and political reform demonstrates their joint effort to claim respectability as men and proper Muslims, and to strive for self-realization through an ostentatious control of women.

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Notes

1 Extramarital sexual relations were punished through public flogging and stoning; penalties against theft and road banditry included the cutting off of limbs. Other measures affected women’s space for maneuvering in public and domestic settings. Within courtyards the spatial separation of female and male spheres had to be ensured, and the public presence of women was reduced to a minimum.

2 Interview with Moussa Bah, president of Mouvement Sabati 2012, July 9, 2015.


4 The article draws on research on Islamic moral renewal conducted by Dorothea Schulz since 1998 in the towns San and Segu in southern Mali and in the capital Bamako (altogether
30 months); and on research on Kel Tamasheq narrative constructions of their relations to the central Malia state conducted by Souleymane Diallo since 2009 in Kidal and Niger (altogether twelve months).

We use the term ‘political Islam’ to highlight the idea that Muslim militant groups seek to effect Islamic renewal through a political program of reordering personal and public life. While we agree with Hirschkind’s (2005) cautionary remarks about how the term is often used, in our use ‘political Islam’ does not refer to a uniform or universal set of political measures and religio-moral arguments.

Mouvement pour l’Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest.
Mouvement Islamique de l’Azawad.
Mouvement pour la Libération de l’Azawad.

The HCIM comprises a range of Islamic associations that, created after 1991, are eager to limit the influence of Muslim religious specialists and opinion leaders grouped together in the AMUPI. The HCIM frequently claims a critical distance from the government, but it is important to note that it has received significant financial support from the state under the governments of Konaré and Touré, and under the current president Keita.

The opposition to the central state (‘Mali’) was articulated most strongly by younger men of the Ifoghas clan from Kidal region and by other ‘white Tuareg’ who belonged to the secessionist movement FIA (Front Islamique de l’Azawad) with strong roots in Algeria (Lecocq and Schrijver 2007; Klute 2013).

Some men from the protest generation joined the political elite that came to power with multiparty democracy. Others, less politically adept or fortunate, have in the meantime fathered children, yet have not reached full seniority status because they do not earn a regular income and cannot display signs of social success such as supporting clients and dependents. Many from the next generation of educated young men similarly went empty-handed from the governments of Presidents Touré and Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

Other notable examples are the support groups of religious leaders such as Sufi Bilal and of Karamôgò Bèè Fò (Olivier and Djebbari 2014; see Soares 2010).

Schools run by Ansar Dine are modeled on reformed Islamic schools (Ecole Franco-Arabe, see above) and offer literacy in French and Arabic.

We use the term ‘Muslim’ in quotation marks to stress its labeling function in ‘othering’ students who, in their eyes, are not proper Muslims. These ‘other’ students strongly contest ‘Muslim’ students’ allegation, arguing that they too are proper Muslims.

Tamasheq, ‘asmadu n mutadji n tamudre’.
Tamasheq, ‘oghal e toumast na aWadam a ahouskene’ or ‘a ilkaman dagh warnikes achak’.
The town Menaka is located in the region of Gao, yet the social composition of its population resembles that of Kidal.

Unlike Timbuktu and Gao where the politico-religious order imposed by militant Muslim organizations in 2012 was seen as the order of ‘foreigners’, the population of Kidal and its surroundings associated the sharia rule of the Ansar Dine in Kidal with the dominant Ifoghas clans. Because allegiances and kin obligations prevent Ifoghas from harshly sanctioning cases of noncompliance, resistance to the sharia measures is less marked, even if numerous people resent them.
Tamasheq, ‘ouchryane olag-nen, acharaoute adoutene a ahouskene’.

Scholars translate with the term ‘confederation’ (see Claudot-Hawad 1993) the ettebel, a social unit that Lecocq (2010) defines as a grouping of hierarchically ordered clans that forms a political unit under the leadership of one clan. The political leader of the ettebel is called amenokal (literally ‘the owner of the land’).

In the higher ranks of the social hierarchy are racially ‘white’ Tuareg, who divide into two groups, one composed of the politically dominant, freeborn, or noble warriors (Ifoghas) and one comprising the freeborn vassal groups, the Imghad. At the bottom of the social hierarchy are the former slaves called Iklan.

The transformation of political hierarchies and status differences goes back to colonial economic and educational policy. Throughout southern Mali as well, the decision of freeborn and ‘noble’ families to enroll children of slave or client status instead of their own children contributed to the alteration of sociopolitical hierarchies. It laid the foundations for graduates of inferior social origins to occupy posts in the lower ranks of the colonial administration (cf. Schulz 2001, ch. 2).

Tamasheq, imanokalan wi aynaynen or imanokalan wi dich raynen or imanokalan win am-arad. See note 18 for conventional meanings of the term amenokal. The term is also used by Kel Adagh students in Bamako for a well-established, older generation of Kel Adagh who, thanks to Western schooling and steady employment, act as hosts of students from Kidal.

The Arabic term was initially used by the Kel Adagh to refer to Arabs who engaged in transborder trade (Scheele 2012).

Ansar Dine du Nord is also supported by members of the Algerian GSPC (Groupe Salafiste pour la predication et le Combat) who clandestinely migrated from southern Algeria to Kidal in the early 2000s, and by preachers from Pakistan who, since their arrival in the 1990s, married into local families (see Daniel 2012) and whose teachings appear to be aligned with those of the Tabligh Jama’at.

Strong opposition to these measures and their denouncement as instances of a foreign, ‘radical’ Islam that breaks with local Muslim tradition has come from women of different ages to an important extent.

Interview by Souleymane Diallo, Niamey, October 7, 2012.

For a similar argument with regard to an earlier period see Hureiki (2003, 101).

Interview by Souleymane Diallo, Niamey, September 2012.

The French term culotte may be translated as ‘short pants’ but also refers to male and female underwear.

Many Kel Adagh young men started to wear jeans during their prolonged exile in West African countries and the Maghreb.

As mentioned earlier, the AMUPI initially comprised rival factions of Muslim activists. After 2001 more radically minded intellectuals quit the AMUPI to join the HCIM. The views articulated by AMUPI members on gender relations and proper ritual practice come closer to conventional understandings than what is propagated by the HCIM leadership.

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Interview of M. Bah by Dorothea Schulz on 9 July 2015.