

In Search of Tunga

Prosperity, Almighty God, and Lives in Motion in a Malian Provincial Town

A volume in the African Perspectives series

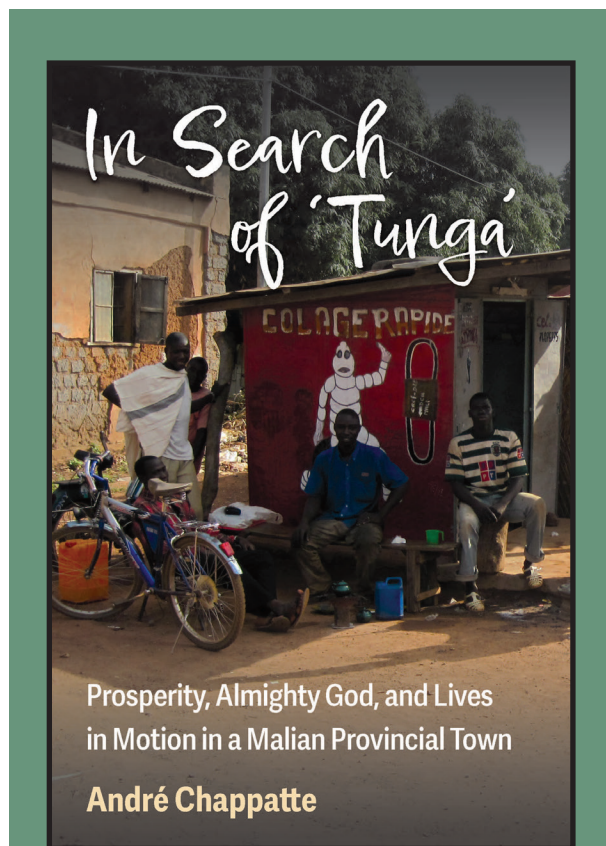
This volume on Muslim life focuses on young male migrants of rural origin who move to build better lives in Bougouni, a provincial town in southwest Mali. Describing themselves as “simply Muslims” and “adventurers,” these migrants aim to be both prosperous and good Muslims. Drawing upon eighteen months of fieldwork, author André Chappatte explores their sense of prosperity and piety in what they call “tunga” (adventure), a customary search for money and more dating from the colonial period.

In the context of the current global war on terrorism, most studies of Muslim life have focused on the politics of piety of reformist movements, their leaders, and members. By contrast, *In Search of “Tunga”* takes a perspective from below. It opens piety up to “simply Muslims,” although the religious elites have always claimed authority and legitimacy over piety. Is piety an exclusive field of experiences for those who claim to strive for it? What does piety involve for the majority of Muslims, the non-elite and unaffiliated Muslims? This monograph “democratizes” piety by documenting its practice as going beyond sharply defined religious affiliations and Islamic scholarship and as both alive and normative, existential and prescriptive. As opposed to studies that build on the classic historical connections between the Maghreb and the Sahel, the southbound migration from the Sahel documented in this book stresses the overlooked historical connections between the southern shores of the Sahara and the lands south of those shores. It demonstrates how the Malian savanna, this former buffer-zone between ancient Mande kingdoms and thereafter remote area of French Sudan, is increasingly becoming central in today’s Sahel contexts of desiccation and insecurity.

“*In Search of ‘Tunga’* has much to offer contemporary African Studies, and Africanist Anthropology more specifically, for its emphasis on emergent forms of urban culture and economy; the Anthropology of Islam, and Religious Studies more broadly, for its ethnographic focus on nondenominational Islamic practice and expressions of piety among “simply Muslims”; and Mande Studies, particularly current scholarship on Malian culture and society, by emphasizing a location of culture, Bougouni, this is frequently overshadowed by larger urban milieus.”

—Ryan Skinner, The Ohio State University

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