ABSTRACT

"Africa starts in the Pyrenees:" The Fondo Kati, between al-Andalus and Timbuktu, by Susana Molins Lliteras (University of Cape Town), August 2015

This dissertation—inserting itself into the disciplines of book and archive history—presents a biography of the Fondo Kati archive, one of the many private family libraries that have surfaced in Timbuktu in recent years, and which has positioned itself apart from other libraries due to its claim to a unique historical heritage linked to al-Andalus. Analysing both oral material, but especially the written marginalia found on the manuscripts of the collection—up to now unavailable and unstudied by scholars—this study treats the Fondo Kati itself as a historical subject, examining both its conditions of production as well as how its existence has in turn affected the context in which it finds itself.

The Fondo Kati archive as it currently stands was fashioned according to the vision of its director, Ismael Diadié Haidara. It is built upon two cornerstones: the genealogical project—the claim to uninterrupted "originally" Spanish or Visigothic ancestry for the Kati family—and the project of the marginalia—the archive as a family collection, built by generations of family members, each adding manuscripts and marginalia to the collection. The fundamental imbrication of the oral and the written in the Fondo Kati, represented by the repeated appeal to the genealogy of the Kati family as a source of differentiation and its marginalia as written "evidence," are also the central features of the Fondo Kati that propelled the successful reception and circulation of the collection in present-day Spain.

The dissertation also raises questions around the authenticity of the marginalia, in terms of their dates of production and authorship. It concludes that, ultimately, these concerns in the Fondo Kati are about historical evidence, about providing textual, written proofs of a past, that may or may not have had existed, or existed only in oral family traditions. The Fondo Kati is a perfect example of how knowledge is constructed, of a researcher's intrinsically partial access to the past. In the final instance, the very act of construction of the Kati collection is an active intervention in the production of history.